

UCEDD Tip Sheets

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ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY CENTERS ON DISABILITIES
THE LEADERSHIP, EDUCATION, ADVOCACY & RESEARCH NETWORK



A project of AUCD, in partnership with ACL, to strengthen the network of UCEDDs

Admin Essentials

University - UCEDD Relationships

What is Addressed in this Tip Sheet?

This Tip Sheet addresses relationships between UCEDDs and their universities and administrative homes. It summarizes a virtual roundtable conversation on the topic that was held August 16th, 2021 and is archived [here](#). This tip sheet summarizes the advice and experiences of UCEDDs across the network, and it is important to note that these experiences might not be generalizable to all programs. University context can significantly impact what is achievable.

The Admin Essentials series brings together UCEDD directors and business managers with content experts from the network to address pressing administrative challenges. These virtual roundtables provide an opportunity to share resources, troubleshoot challenges, and brainstorm creative solutions to a broad range of administrative topics

Why is it Important

Operating effectively in the university system requires strong relationships across the university, within the administrative home and across other departments. This need is both a practical consideration to most effectively work but also a legal requirement of the UCEDD core grant. The DD Act requires UCEDDs to “be interdisciplinary education, research and public service units of universities (as defined by the Secretary) or public or not-for-profit

entities associated with universities that engage in core functions.”

The UCEDD Core Grant [funding opportunity announcements \(FOAs\)](#) ask for details about organizational capacity, including the relationship of the UCEDD to the University and its capabilities. For UCEDDs to best conduct the core functions of the DD Act, strong university-UCEDD relationships are essential. The guidance in this tip sheet can help UCEDDs strategically and effectively approach these relationships, both informally and formally through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or other agreement.

How is it Done

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to developing relationships and negotiating agreements. According to our content specialists, every director has their own personal approach and style to these conversations, and it is important to be comfortable with your style.

How do I protect our organization financially? How do I prevent as much risk to our organization, financially, personnel-wise, whatever it is? How do I protect our organization, and then how do I try to keep that protected for the long term?

MOUs and Getting Things on Paper

The content experts agreed that it is important to get things on paper as customary practices may change with turnover in key leadership. In approaching discussions about the agreement, content experts recommended starting with those things that are most urgent and would have the greatest impact on the organization. In general, these agreements should balance broadness, open-endedness, and specificity.

MOUs are as close to a contract you can get in the university environment. And we use those to protect ourselves.

Discussion participants noted that sometimes what ultimately gets put on paper contradicts other administrative processes or commitments of the University. In this situation, content experts recommended approaching these issues carefully and being willing to have conversations to resolve discrepancies.

Relationships

Big “asks” require strong relationships. Rather than going straight to the ask, it is important to build trust through ongoing relationships within the UCEDD, within the department, and across

the university. Attention should be paid to both relationships that are in the hierarchy and across organizational and departmental peers. In building and strengthening these relationships, communicating the value that UCEDDs bring to the university and community is important so that partners can understand the role and impact of UCEDDs. One content specialist emphasized that the UCEDD is an “anomalous” institution in the university, particularly in a medical school. While some UCEDDs are seeing their work become more understood, clarifying the role and contributions is important for expanding and strengthening UCEDD relationships.

Our content experts suggested being cognizant of all the actors involved: who signs off on the MOU, who is involved in the conversations drafting and finalizing the MOU, and who has a role in implementing it. These are often different people, and it is important to understand who you are talking to along the way and what role they have. As directors engage with people less informed about the MOU, the document can serve as a resource to clarify direction and decision making.

I want them to think and imagine this [agreement] is a legacy that has been going on for a long time.

Starting the Discussion

Our content experts recommended starting these conversations six to twelve months prior to the grant reapplication, to assure that these conversations are not rushed. For approaching these conversations, it is helpful to understand the history of the agreement and the negotiation processes. This can better inform your approach and what you ask for.

Participants also mentioned the importance of ensuring relevant parties are aware of the MOU’s existence, prior to these discussions. The MOU should not be a surprise, but a foundational part of the negotiations. Some also framed the MOU as part of the legacy of all that the UCEDD and the University have accomplished.

One content specialist noted that one of the most daunting things to be told going into these conversations is that the University wants to make changes. In these cases, keep an open mind for these conversations.

Leveraging What You Do and Federal Requirements

Our content experts recommended sharing the value that UCEDDs bring to the University and the community. Proactively sharing what the UCEDD does and the UCEDD’s impact, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, allows you to revisit those things in the context of the MOU. Building on that contribution during negotiations helps ground the conversation in shared interests. Being known within the University and being valued by partners as a center that contributes to academic research and service brings some level of protection when approaching these agreements.

Federal requirements can also be a useful jumping off point for negotiations, or a floor for what is needed. Roundtable participants discussed how the federal mandates can be used to prompt or delay conversations. For example, one center used the federal MOU requirement to negotiate a postponement of conversations about how center funds would be taxed. These requirements for

grant compliance have also been used to initiate or resume conversations.

As a floor for the agreement, federal requirements can also limit what UCEDDs can get in the agreement. One UCEDD found that their draft agreement, full of ideas of how the relationship should work, was sent back with only the minimum federal requirements. This setback was, however, seen as a learning experience for how to approach this conversation next time. Every conversation can be a learning experience for better building the University-UCEDD relationship.

Timing and Choosing Your Battles

When discussing agreements, our content experts stressed the importance of understanding what is happening within the larger university context and the urgency of any ask. Big changes in leadership, budget cuts, and current events can affect what you ask for. Sometimes, it is best to not ask for more. For example, some new leadership might not understand the administrative structure of the UCEDD. In that case, more time might have to be spent protecting what you have and explaining the federal requirements, rather than asking for new things.

I see it as a good moment every five years when our UCEDD grant comes up, to restate our commitments. Unless there is some big crisis, I do not see the need to go back and rehash an MOU [...] in the middle of a grant.

Content experts advised carefully identifying priorities, as you will almost definitely not be able to get everything you might like. For selecting these priorities, think about the long-term direction of the UCEDD and how it fits into university goals.

For More Information

- [2021 Report on University-UCEDD Relationships and Agreements](#)

For More Information

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