

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

UCEDD (Re)Organization

What is Addressed in this Tip Sheet?

This tip sheet addresses aspects of UCEDD organizational planning and restructuring to help UCEDDs plan and effectively fulfill the core functions specified in the DD Act. It summarizes a virtual roundtable conversation on the topic held on October 12, 2021, and archived [here](#).

The Admin Essentials series brings together UCEDD directors and business managers with content experts to address 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

Running a UCEDD relies on a complex set of business, financial, and operational functions. In doing this work, UCEDD directors may wonder how to optimally structure their centers to fulfill the core functions, delegate responsibility, and secure additional funding. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to UCEDD organization, but roundtable participants agreed that there are considerations that can benefit all centers. While some of these considerations deal explicitly with organizational charts and structure, others are strategies to better position the UCEDD to develop a desired organizational structure or change.

Promising Strategies

The content experts recommend establishing a long-term vision and revisiting it as time passes. Ask yourself where you would like the UCEDD to be in the next 3 to 5 or even 10 years. From there, consider your personal style. No matter how well the UCEDD is run, two directors will approach things differently and thus have different experiences and expectations.

Above all, content experts recommended investing in your leadership team. Trust and strong relationships are essential so that the director can hand things off. Solid leadership teams allow distribution of responsibilities such that the director can serve as a consultant or mentor for certain projects. By delegating, a leader frees their bandwidth for strategic roles and responsibilities. It is important to build leadership capacity for organizational growth and change, particularly for those UCEDDs with either a small leadership team or no leadership team. Strategies to enhance a UCEDD's leadership capacity include considering leadership potential with new hires, expanding leadership responsibilities of existing staff, establishing internal career paths, and providing mentoring for those advancing into those roles.

With all these strategies, the content experts stressed that it is critical to be willing to reevaluate your organizational plans and choices. Sometimes, what seems like a good idea on paper does not work well in practice. If you try something that does not work, acknowledge it, learn from your mistakes, and figure out what to do next.

Center and University Dynamics

One of the most essential considerations for UCEDD reorganization is workplace culture. People have expectations and are used to doing things a certain way. Beyond the culture of the center itself, the content experts urged considering why the hiring agents chose you and brought you in. They have expectations for you and what you will do. Consider these university or departmental politics as you promote any reorganization efforts.

“The UCEDD spends so much time cultivating relationships with people all over the state and in state government, but less so within our very own institution. Wouldn't it be interesting if you saw the university as one of your constituents?”

– Roundtable Participant

One impetus for restructuring initiatives has been a desire to create more points of connections with the broader institution or university. Historically, many UCEDDs have been somewhat isolated from their broader institutional context. As a result, these UCEDDs are working in spaces that lack awareness of the goals and activities of the UCEDD. University or department structures often are not designed for the type of work UCEDDs do, particularly leveraging funds and projects. In closing gaps between the UCEDD and their department or university, discussants shared that a significant part of the work is determining who needs to be part of the conversation.

“The roots of a lot of the change that I made have to do with becoming more of a force and more of a partner within our very own institution.” – Roundtable Participant

Understandably, this work takes time, so patience is essential. One content expert advised that once you have the information or idea, start planting the seed with others: expand your presence, build new relationships, and show the organization’s value. In doing so, roundtable participants recommended being conscious of your language. UCEDD terminology, like “core function,” typically means nothing to people in other departments. Use the language the audience will understand.

Having a defined organizational structure can also be helpful, particularly for defining the boundaries with other departments in cases where “ownership” of the UCEDD is contested. This organizational chart can also illustrate where people sit and their connections to other programs and departments.

“We have a strategy of how we want to be seen and perceived across the institution.” – Roundtable Participant

Using Titles to Advance the Work

Some directors have used titles to their advantage. By thinking about how titles aligned with their vision and how they come across, directors could better position themselves or their staff to do their work. For example, being called an associate director versus a business manager changes the perceptions of deans or other administrators. While it might seem like semantics, it can matter and increase the director’s ability to delegate responsibilities.

Additionally, faculty titles can be important despite being elusive for some UCEDDs. Offering a faculty position can assist with bringing in accomplished professionals. Securing access to these titles may be a slow process of increasing awareness of need, gathering information to inform procedures, and finding the right connections to create the senior-level position. The ability to give faculty titles can make a massive difference for the UCEDD’s development.

Being able to bring in new people more competitively is a way to create a culture of innovation and development for leveraging dollars and grants. Interdisciplinary leaders and their expertise are critical for growing the UCEDD because you cannot run the center solely on academics like psychologists and physicians.

UCEDDs with faculty appointments frequently try to elevate the faculty to demonstrate all the UCEDD can do. However, the limitations of who can be hired as faculty, i.e., those with a terminal degree like an MD or Ph.D., has led to equity issues that UCEDDs are still navigating.

Buying out Time

Multiple roundtable participants recommended buying out time across campus. Buying out percentages of people’s times, whether just 5% or up to 50%, allows greater flexibility and enhances interdisciplinary representation. Numerous UCEDDs buy out time to bring in more talent, skill sets,

and areas of expertise to help leverage funds. One attendee shared that buying out faculty time has been worth the expense as it has improved their UCEDD's diversity and generation of ideas.

Letting other departments buy out your staff's time can also help advance the UCEDD mission and strengthen relationships. For example, one attendee's home department needed someone to develop components of a new undergraduate student medical program. The UCEDD has someone with relevant expertise, so the UCEDD director offered that the department could buy 20% of that person's time. Not having to hire someone new saved money and allowed the department to have someone experienced in the role. It also strengthened connections between the department and the UCEDD, increasing the perceived value of the center. Others echoed that buying out time or allowing UCEDD employees' time to be bought out by other departments improves the UCEDD's reputation and increases collaboration.

Buying percentages of people's time does not come without some challenges. As one call participant shared, people are sometimes nervous about soft money. They are concerned that the UCEDD funding is temporary and thus more uncertain than regular and reliable clinical revenues. While UCEDDs view the core grant as stable, not everyone shares that perception. It is important to share the context and history with people who express these concerns about distributing their time.

Leveraging the Core Grant and Other Grants

The roundtable conversation touched on flexible and creative use of the core grant to grow the UCEDD. Participants talked about the benefits of moving people on and off the core grant to create new positions. Shifting people off the core grant can free funds to hire more people with different, needed skill sets and expertise.

One UCEDD shared their goal that people are at most 50% funded by the core grant but doing so has been a cultural shift for many – long-time staff are not accustomed to contributing to multiple grants and bringing in grant funding. When people start, particularly those working on infrastructure, they are usually put 100% on the core grant. As time goes on, the goal is to shift some of their salary to other projects. People are constantly moved off the core grant to free funds to bring on others.

Some UCEDD Directors minimize their FTE (full time equivalency) on the core grant to free up funds to bring others on. While the director continues to do the necessary grant management work, it is with the minimal required FTE. The freed-up core grant funds allow the UCEDD to bring in new people in important supportive roles and evaluation needs to best leverage funds to encourage development.

This cyclical process can be difficult and slow: applying for new grants to move people off the core grant to hire new people on the core grant and then starting over with applying for more new funding to move them off the core grant. Across the board, centers face difficulties hiring someone straight out for a new capacity.

Federal grants require a higher capacity and more track record than state grants. Buying out people's time is how some UCEDDs help grow and develop the necessary experience and capacity. State contracts are another great way to do this work and collaborate, but UCEDDs have found that state grants often do not provide funding that could go toward necessary infrastructure, like financial management, administration, and dissemination. Federal grants often allow more infrastructure spending, which is critical for fully encouraging growth activities and pilot programs.

“Use the core grant flexibly so that you can grow leaders, people, and programs.” – Roundtable Participant

Timing

Roundtable participants agreed that change typically takes at least 3 to 5 years. As such, it is important to have a vision for the future and to think about how even minor changes contribute to a bigger plan. Careful planning is particularly valuable during a new director transition. Under previous directors, certain expectations or practices may have solidified. The transition can be an opportunity to evaluate opportunities for change, including those that might not have been voiced or considered under previous leadership.

Patience was considered key for both internal and external changes. Rushing changes can backfire. Call participants recommended gathering information and planting a seed for the change. Building a new relationship can be used to show the value of the organization. Looking for opportunities can be a useful strategy for natural change to occur. For example, one director became the diversity champion for the department within the College of Medicine. Doing so meant disability was included as part of the college’s diversity, equity, and inclusion priorities. The role also provided a new way to show the UCEDD’s value and build new relationships.

“Look at your organization and assess its capacity for change. Everywhere is different.” – Roundtable Participant

The five-year grant cycle was widely seen as a window to reimagine center organization and get buy-in from human resources. One center shared that soft funding can be advantageous, as there is more flexibility for how it is used. This can make major changes more defensible to Human Resources and help bring them about.

One roundtable attendee recommended using the application cycle to get new ideas. By volunteering to review applications, the director was able to get fresh, innovative ideas. Seeing the creative and novel ways people were using their money was eye-opening and provided ideas for future innovation.

Relevant Resources

- [Tip Sheet: How and When to Create a Business Manager Role](#)
- [Organizational Chart Library](#)
- [Charting Your Course: A Toolkit for New Directors of UCEDDs](#)

For More Information

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