

UCEDD Tip Sheets



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UCEDD Tipsheets are produced by the Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD) through the UCEDD Resource Center (URC).



UCEDD Grants Management: Needs Assessment for the UCEDD Core Grant

What is Addressed in this Tip Sheet?

The state/Territory needs assessment is a critical first step in preparing the UCEDD 5-year core grant application (also referred to as the strategic plan). This Tip Sheet provides information specific to planning and conducting the needs assessment, and using the resulting data to inform the core grant application.

Why is this Important?

Conducting a high quality assessment of needs in your state/Territory is a required part of the UCEDD's work. It is referenced in federal regulations, and also in the UCEDD funding announcement.

1. Federal Guidance
 - a. 45 CFR 1388.5(c)(2) addressing UCEDD core grant applications, found [online](#).
 - i. "...the Center will...Address the projected goals, and carry out goal-related activities, based on data driven strategic planning..."
2. Funding Opportunity Announcement (2016), found [online](#).
 - a. Section: Content and Form of Application Submission
 - i. Problem Statement: "The need for assistance...must be demonstrated...Any relevant data based on planning studies or needs assessment should be included..."

- ii. Coordinated Activities: “It is expected that the members of the DD Network work together in a strategic manner...”
- b. Section: Review Criteria for Project Relevance & Current Need:
 - i. “Provides a portrait of the State needs and clearly identifies the need for assistance based on relevant and current data, including that collected through planning studies” (4 pts)
 - ii. “Describes how [CAC, DD Network, others] were consulted in development of application” (3 pts)
 - iii. “Shows a direct relationship between the needs identified based on research and/or planning studies...and the goals and goal-related activities in the five-year plan” (3 pts)

How is it Done?

A survey of UCEDD Directors in May, 2016, asked for feedback on five questions related to the needs assessment. Twenty respondents provided information, and survey results are shared here with identifying information removed. For most questions, many responses shared similarities, so duplicate responses are removed; in these cases, responses may be slightly edited to accommodate nuances in similarities. For one question, exact responses are shared and duplications may exist to allow the reader to see the range of processes used by individual UCEDDs.

1. Who do you target (in terms of audience)? (Responses are included without duplication)

- a. People with intellectual/developmental and other disabilities (youth, adult, aging)
- b. Families of people with disabilities, and family organizations
- c. Community Advisory Committee (CAC)
- d. DD sister agencies (protection & advocacy agency, DD Council), state DD agency, state education agency, state VR, early childhood, adult service providers, aging providers, parent groups, advocacy groups)
- e. Organizations serving immigrant groups and racial/ethnic minority communities
- f. People with I/DD, parents/grandparents/siblings, health professionals, educators, advocacy orgs
- g. Public school, early intervention, Head Start, specialized private school teachers and administrators, School Counselors and School Psychologist, Special Education Directors, Health Professionals
- h. Legislators and other policymakers
- i. University Community (administration, faculty, aligned programs, committees)
- j. Organizations/communities with whom we would like to partner in the future
- k. General public

Conducting a high quality assessment of needs in your state/Territory is a required part of the UCEDD’s work.

2. What processes do you use (collection, analysis, interpretation)? (Responses are included by respondent; duplication may exist.)

- a. National data sets (e.g. State of the States, RISP, National Report on Employment Outcomes), State Data (e.g. DD Council state plan, P&A state plan, state census data, waiting list database, public forums, statewide needs assessment survey of stakeholders)
- b. Interviews, conversations, existing (current within the past three years) needs assessment reports
- c. Presentation and discussion at community advisory committee (CAC) meetings, questionnaires, program evaluation findings and internal surveys/focus groups, key informant surveys sent electronically to community partners, review of national and state data, review of reports by state and community partners (e.g., the Arcs), review of published professional literature (e.g. CDC, US Census, national surveys like National Survey of Children with Special Health Care Needs, state health department/human services reports, The Arc, AHRQ reports) ----data gathered above are compiled and examined through the lens of the organizational mission to identify which needs are feasible to address with available resources.
- d. We contract some of our data collection through focus groups to special partners such as self-advocacy and parent groups. We also partner with our sister agencies to collect and share survey data. We sponsor and collect a web-based set of public data on disability for all to share and use. We collect all of this and more and analyze and prepare summaries. We also have small group meetings to ask key stakeholders to help us with interpretation of the data. Our CAC is involved in all steps.
- e. Primary and secondary data collection and analysis using reports, local and national, census data, state data and surveys, DD council needs assessment, data directly collected from our state DD community network
- f. Mostly we use our state needs assessment data that is collected and synthesized by our DD Council on a biannual to triennial timeline. Then we overlay information from ancillary sources to either update the data or compare data with other states or to the nation.
- g. Mixed methods. Online state needs assessment survey, community conversations/focus groups, data from state agencies, CAC review and discussion
- h. Formal survey with analysis by UCEDD program evaluation unit in collaboration with state DD Council
- i. We collect LOTS of data in many ways. We gather relevant state data from available reports or from special data reports that we request. We review state agency/program strategic plans and review for gaps or possible overlap. We do MANY focus groups, individual interviews, and discussions with partners across the state. And we use national data (CDC, AAIDD national goals, ACL, etc.) to put things in a national perspective. Re: Analysis and interpretation, we involve our entire staff in several meetings where we review the information and get their impressions and interpretations. Next we refine the topics and information and present that to colleagues and our CAC. Finally, our core leadership team does a final interpretation to make sure it all makes sense.
- j. We identify the capacity of our current staff, we review extant literature sources, we develop survey and focus groups protocols with input from our CAC, we implement the surveys and focus groups with participation and partnership with our CAC and family and self-advocate organizations.

The needs assessment process [should] paint the most accurate picture of the current needs in the state.

- k. Focus groups, questionnaires, state data (EI indicators, Dept. of Ed PPR, Kids Count, others), data from our own projects
- l. Convening (stakeholder engagement); review of federal partners plans, federal and state agency data reports, informational interviews, review of literature in specific areas of emphasis; review our NIRS data along with a review of accomplishments from previous plan; CAC are involved in review and developing strategies
- m. Focus groups, survey, CAC meetings, key informant interviews. Review and categorization of data. Review of state data on DD. Match with knowledge and expertise of UCEDD. Match with current need based on national and state data as well as current policy initiatives. Build/expand on previous strategic plan.

3. How are your data strategies ultimately connected to the plan? (Responses are included without duplication)

- a. We rank the priorities and do a cross-map of what each of the DD Network entities in the state is doing for each priority.
- b. We will bring together the Design Team and key faculty to review and interpret the data, including prioritization of needs that we can best respond to in our work.
- c. We sort initially based on large goals and funnel into the core functions based on where projects can be seeded or leveraged and where we have or can secure and direct resources.
- d. The findings from the Needs Assessment are used to create the goals, objectives, and activities of the strategic plan for implementing the UCEDD core functions over 5 years.
- e. The results of our steps, collection to interpretation, ultimately lead to a plan that is then cycled back to key stakeholders for final input and comments. We also do annual updates to priorities and needs to keep the plan current with emerging trends and events.
- f. All of our goals are oriented to state and national data. Not all data generate a goal, but all goals are supported by data.
- g. Very closely aligned to what our priorities/activities become, with due consideration of our resources, and areas of expertise within the faculty/center to competently address them
- h. Document needs, create a baseline, use same tools as outcome measures
- i. The data in our collection process may be useful as outcome measures. We use those whenever possible and reasonable, so we don't need to reinvent systems to collect data already available. In some cases we have to develop unique systems to match our plan.

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generate a goal,
but all goals are
supported by data.

4. How are people with disabilities and their families connected at all stages of this work? (Responses are included without duplication)

- a. Integral part of the needs assessment survey as respondents; they assist in the development of the survey through the consumer advisory committee. People with disabilities and families are involved in the interpretation of data through the consumer advisory committee.
- b. The input of people with disabilities and that of their families is sought in the process identified earlier in: discussions, questionnaires, Advisory Committee input. The UCEDD faculty and staff report back to, and acquire additional feedback from, the Advisory Committee on goals and objectives formulated, as well as on developing projects and their status, and UCEDD annual performance on the goals and objectives. Community education activities, conferences, trainings and advocacy events provide opportunities for additional exchange and evaluation

by a broader community of participating people with disabilities and their families. Finally, UCEDD dissemination activities such as websites, listservs, and social media promote connections of the UCEDD with people with disabilities and their families throughout the state.

Build partnerships to collect and analyze data.

- c. Self-advocates and family members are key partners in collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data. They are also part of our dissemination and collection of comments on the interpretation and planning process. We also have a number of staff members who are self-advocates and family members.
- d. Our community advisory committee is directly engaged in multiphase problem identification, contributing to the assessment and sorting the results into dashboard items.
- e. We have over 50% of our staff living as a family member or a person with a disability. We also have a small constituency board of people with disabilities who advise us on the reality of living with a disability in our state. We update them on what we are doing; talk about new activities, proposals, etc.
- f. Used at all stages, utilize your CAC as much as possible, reviewing questions/results, have them as facilitators at the community conversations/focus groups. Ask for assistance in distributing survey. Our plan was designed at UCEDD core staff/program leaders retreat with 2 members of our CAC participating, (family member and our chair/self-advocate), shared with the CAC.
- g. We involve our CAC a LOT!!! They then refer us to families, persons with disabilities, and others who are involved in direct interviews, focus groups, and discussions. For example, we have had the CAC suggest we attend self-advocacy conferences where we have focused discussions with specific individuals on specific topics. Also our CAC helps us organize focus groups.
- h. Our CAC provides input on topics and questions to be included in the needs assessment, and serve as the “test audience.”
- i. We include a chart with CAC recommendations and how recommendations were included in our 5 year plan.
- j. We have a design team for our strategic planning process that is inclusive of individuals with disabilities and families members that will develop the primary question to be addressed by the plan, designs the process to be used, and make final recommendations/decisions.

5. What other suggestions do you have for new UCEDD Directors as they undertake the assessment process? (Responses are included without duplication)

- a. Think broadly.
- b. Review needs assessments, plans and goals of others, including the Developmental Disabilities Council, Protection & Advocacy organization, Vocational Rehabilitation, State Dept. of Health, etc.
- c. Start early, don't try to do everything the first time around, build partnerships to collect and analyze data, make your data for your planning public when you can.
- d. Connect with community organizations that have a related or intersecting interest.
- e. They should know the community very well.
- f. Perhaps the best advice is to focus the assessment process information for the application to paint the most accurate picture of the current needs in their states. It is too easy to throw EVERYTHING into the boat and see what floats or sinks. This doesn't always give you a clear,

PRIORITIZED picture for your Center, and you run the risk of trying to tackle something for which your Center doesn't have the resources.

- g. Use NIRS/PPR requirements as a base while meeting core requirements.
- h. Typical grant process - provide need and baseline data for each goal
- i. Collaborate with other UCEDDs if more than one in your state is on same funding cycle.
- j. The issues of accessibility, the 'digital divide,' and how we tend to "build" our needs assessments with a bias for those we already impact need to be addressed.

When is the Needs Assessment Done?

Two survey respondents identified their preferred timelines for conducting the needs assessment in the context of overall core grant application development.

**Start early!
12-18 months...
before the grant
is due.**

1. Start early!!! We recommend 12-18 months to design and implement multiple approaches and give ample time to conceptualize a new workplan, before the grant is due.
2. Spring is a good time to start looking for data sources, using your staff and audiences. Early Fall is a good time to start writing your goals based on results of the needs assessment, work them in both ways (by core function, and by area of emphasis) and select which direction you will write the proposal (we've done both). Have your draft done by mid-November for a December or January due date for the core grant application.

Where are Relevant Resources?

Additional technical assistance materials are available.

1. UCEDD Grants page of the UCEDD Resource Center (URC) website at www.aucd.org/urc, which includes:
 - a. AIDD guidance documents
 - b. Data sources to inform needs assessment
 - c. Sample applications from the network
 - d. Additional resources for consideration when developing your UCEDD core grant application
 - e. Past UCEDD Funding Opportunity Announcements (FOAs)
 - f. OMB Uniform Guidance / Supercircular information
2. [Recorded webinar](#) discussing the Needs Assessment for the UCEDD Core Grant, addressing relevant federal guidance and a case study of one UCEDD's approach.

For More Information

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