

Guidance for Technical Assistance Providers on Working with States

What approaches have you (as State Administrators) found effective for doing action planning in your state with cross-agency state-level groups?

- Ensure the necessary players are identified early in the process—it is inevitable that new players will come on board. Start with an executive group and then quickly add players.
- Organize the group to identify a mission and vision and lay out the initial steps.
- Maintain flexibility—state focus can change quickly due to needs of the administration and legislature so bear with states' constraints.
- Plan dates for multiple meetings in advance – it helps to get things on calendars sooner rather than later.
- Explore the possibility of using an existing group that may be already convening for a related purpose.
- Be very clear in purpose/outcome of all meetings so that people feel that the time has been productively spent.
- Recognize the multiplicity of requirements of various agencies and that there is always a need to help partners understand the parameters (constraints, flexibilities) of our respective systems and agencies.
- Keep large-scale surveys to a minimum. Determine if existing survey data will meet your needs. (Note: Some states do not allow their administrators to reply to surveys due to extreme workloads.)
- Create a common lexicon; definitions often do not cross agency lines.
- Identify benefits for all stakeholders so that value is seen early on by all participants—satisfy the "what's in it for me" mentality.
- Develop realistic timelines for accomplishing goals in action plans.
- If important decisions are to be made, be certain that each invited agency representative has sufficient authority to make them.
- Having a "Theory of Action" can help state groups to focus their efforts to maximize leverage (e.g., certification requirements) to mobilize and motivate a response.
- Create a "frame" based on research from national experts to help states adapt to their state situation.
- Try "pilots" in a few states first to help other states have an example. This can help with sustainability.

- Establish working teams face-to-face initially; then take advantage of technology to keep the team connected.
- Provide decision-making tools to help teams see the implications that one decision has on another (example: <http://nccic.org/pubs/goodstart/index.html#4>).
- Provide consistent training in all states initially. You can target state-specific needs as follow-up training.
- Share ideas across states—what worked, lessons learned.
- Highlight best examples in a state—the “home-grown successes.”

What approaches taken by outside projects have you found effective for providing your state with ongoing support for implementing action plans and sustaining positive change?

- Strategic “nagging” is essential. Keep the key contact/team on task with the plan. Email or periodically connect with how the team is proceeding.
- Develop an agenda for all phone calls with on-site contact with clear content to be covered; keep as concise and on-task as possible.
- Provide supports to the team (e.g., take minutes and send to entire team; serve as a facilitator at meetings).
- Take time prior to the start to help staff members of the outside TA project understand the culture of the state as much as possible, exercising caution not to instill bias.
- Eliminate surprises: establish very clear expectations of the state from the start.
- Identify a state liaison within each state to work with project. (May need an agency insider as well if Early Childhood is not located in Department of Education.)
- Be aware of the political climate in the state. Have people at the table with power to make an impact, but also with passion that can help move plans to action.
- Develop a way to connect team members. Use technology to benefit the group. Record meetings, trainings and post on web for all participants to download and watch.
- Accessible and participatory meetings – before, during and after-meeting involvement. Use web-supported technology.
- Shared ownership—have buy-in from all entities so that everyone “owns” the work.
- Ensure that policy gets attached to funding to promote sustainability.