

To support the growth and quality improvement of postsecondary education (PSE) options for students with intellectual disability (ID), many states have developed a statewide alliance that offers a forum for programs in the state and other relevant partners, such as staff from Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), school district transition services, adult community agencies and interested parents and students. State alliances promote sustainability within the field and provide excellent mechanisms for communication among interested stakeholders and support between and among postsecondary programs.

This publication explains the benefits of forming a state alliance and provides lessons learned and tips for starting or expanding state alliances. Sample steps to develop a state alliance and related resources are also shared.

### DEFINING STATE ALLIANCES

State alliances consist of a group of people and/or organizations in a particular state who work together toward a common goal in support of college opportunities for students with ID. At a minimum, an alliance can be a group of representatives from college programs. They can also include representatives from key state agencies, organizations, parents, alumni, and students.

### WHY FORM A STATE ALLIANCE?

There are many benefits that may result from the work of state alliances, including:

- » Obtaining state funding in the form of program support and/or student scholarships
- » Opportunities for people in similar positions or across related organizations to learn from each other by creating a learning community
- » Providing a platform for professional development opportunities
- » Allowing for the pursuit of shared grant opportunities
- » Offering an infrastructure to support the development of new postsecondary education programs for students with ID in that state
- » Providing connections or a process in place to address the impact of state-level policy
- » Connecting state agencies and state-level constituents
- » Creating a state-level data collection system that all programs can participate in, thereby maximizing data on outcomes of PSE for students with ID in that state
- » Sharing the responsibility for educating students, families, and educators about college opportunities for students with ID

### A STATE ALLIANCE MODEL

#### Georgia

The Georgia Inclusive Postsecondary Education Consortium (GAIPSEC) is composed of partnerships between all the college programs for students with ID in the state and the following agencies:

- » The Center for Leadership in Disability (CLD) at Georgia State University
- » Institute on Human Development and Disability at the University of Georgia
- » Georgia Advocacy Office (Georgia's Protection and Advocacy agency)
- » The Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD)
- » State agencies, including the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency, Georgia Department of Education Division for Special Education and Supports, and Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Disabilities.



GAIPSEC has expanded college options for students with ID from one program to nine over the past 13 years. The Center for Leadership in Disability at Georgia State University, a University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disability (UCEDD), is the backbone organization of GAIPSEC. In this role, they work with state partners who share a common agenda, collect data and measure results consistently, and participate in mutually reinforcing activities such as convening meetings and coordinating communication with a collective voice. Each partner within the alliance plays a critical and unique role. For example, the GCDD takes the lead with legislative advocacy; the CLD at Georgia State University provides technical assistance to emerging and interested programs; and the college programs and vocational rehabilitation (VR) provide employment preparation for students, assistive technology support from the Assistive Technology Act Program, and transition planning with the department of education and VR.

### **What has led to GAIPSEC's success?**

The partners and partnerships work well together, and a collective voice has emerged to make change happen. It's important to find the places where partners' missions overlap but also where organizations have distinct areas of strengths or roles in the state to leverage connections. All who are involved, especially students with ID, win when state-level organizations and partners solve problems together to provide continuous support to students through cross-agency collaboration. A collective voice creates consistency and empowers a larger number of supporters. By having one voice, information can be shared quickly and consistently with the state legislature, state agencies, families, and other constituents.

### **Benefits**

Another benefit of a statewide alliance is that different partners have access to different funding sources. As a result, partners can collaborate to bring together a variety of resources to support inclusive postsecondary education options in the state. In Georgia, three different sources of funding were leveraged by utilizing the funds available to

different members of the consortium. The CLD at Georgia State University received Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disability (TPSID) model demonstration project funds from the [US Department of Education](#) from 2015–2020. This funding provided program development and expansion opportunities at seven colleges and universities in Georgia. Vocational Rehabilitation has also been a supporter of students pursuing college in several ways over the last 12 years, such as providing assistance with tuition and other costs associated with attending college. There have also been funding streams that support programs in Georgia through state budget appropriations. Since 2013, a state budget line item has been designated for program development funds as well as student scholarship funds. The funding has grown from \$100,000 a year to \$500,000 with the addition and expansion of programs in Georgia. The GAIPSEC director team meets on a bi-annual basis, before the legislative session and before the state fiscal year begins, to make decisions about the allocations. This group is made up of leadership from the GCDD, CLD, VR, DOE, and the Senate and House budget offices.

### **Collective Impact**

Though many states across the country have state alliances, the ways in which they are organized and led vary greatly. Some alliances are more formal than others. The GAIPSEC is based upon a collective impact model (Kania & Kramer, 2011). Collective impact is a structured, five-tiered approach to creating societal and systems change. This approach starts with a team creating a common vision, establishing shared measurement allowing for continuous improvement, participating in mutually-reinforcing activities, maintaining continuous communication, and having a backbone organization providing support to the overall group.

**Partners can collaborate to bring together a variety of resources to support inclusive postsecondary education options in the state.**

## OTHER STATE ALLIANCE MODELS

There are several different models to state alliances.

- The **Pennsylvania Inclusive Higher Education Consortium** (PIHEC) utilizes a shared leadership model. Rather than having a backbone organization that is the consistent convener or leader, the shared leadership model rotates the clerk [convener/coordinator] on an annual or biennial basis.
- The **Tennessee Inclusive Higher Education Alliance** (Tennessee Alliance) is made up of elected and standing members that meet quarterly and have developed bylaws. The Tennessee Alliance is composed of representatives from state and local agencies, self-advocates and family members, colleges and universities, and business owners in Tennessee.
- In Florida, the state legislature funded and established the **Florida Center for Students with Unique Abilities**, which convenes inclusive higher education programs across the state at least biannually and employs a staff of six.

## ORGANIZATIONS AND AGENCIES THAT MAY BE A PARTNER IN A STATE ALLIANCE

Organization name & website	What they can contribute to the alliance
<a href="#">University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities</a>	Convene people, be the bridge between research and the community, make lives better for individuals with IDD and their families
<a href="#">Developmental disability councils/governor's councils</a>	Bring together a variety of groups, organizations, and agencies to address the needs of people with IDD and their families; lobby the legislature
<a href="#">Protection and advocacy organizations</a>	Work at the state level to protect, empower, and advocate on behalf of individuals with intellectual disabilities
State departments of education	Oversee K-12 education systems, including monitoring and providing resources for transition planning for students with intellectual disabilities
Vocational rehabilitation agencies	Support individuals with disabilities to acquire job skills and find a career
State developmental disability agencies	Support adult services for individuals with intellectual disabilities
State Assistive Technology Act programs	Promote awareness and access to assistive technology for individuals with disabilities within a state
Parent organizations, such as <a href="#">parent information and training centers</a>	Support and provide resources to parents of children with disabilities, including intellectual disabilities
Alumni from programs	Provide first-hand knowledge of how IPSE programs work and the benefits to students with intellectual disabilities
Institutions of higher education/colleges and universities	Share first-hand knowledge about what programs need to operate within the institution

## LESSONS LEARNED FROM STATE ALLIANCES

### Find legislative champions to advise you.

Work with your state developmental disability council to determine policymakers who may have an interest in or personal connection to intellectual disability and education. Work together with partners to create an “ask” or pitch for legislative support and include key legislators in the discussions. Everyone must be on the same page.

### Be prepared to share information and bridge the gaps.

Have information and materials about college opportunities for students with ID to share if and when there are leadership changes within state systems or universities. If an existing contact leaves their position, ask to be connected with new staff if possible. If they do not give you a proper handoff, use your contacts to find out who might be the appropriate future contact.

### Roll with the changes and be part of the solution.

Anticipate and prepare for leadership changes and/or staff turnover. In addition, it can be challenging and confusing when laws and regulations change. Be willing to problem-solve and be a part of the solution. Working together as an alliance is much easier than having numerous systems working separately with the same state constituents. Work smarter, not harder, and always be ready to educate and advocate for IPSE!

**Partners and partnerships work well together, and a collective voice has emerged to make change happen.**

## 10 TIPS to Develop or Expand a State Alliance

1

Contact us! The Think College Network is here to help support state and regional alliance development.

Choose a coordinator/  
backbone organization.

2

3

Invite others to join (see earlier list of potential partners) and identify the leadership structure and team.

Establish a common  
vision for your state.

4

5

Host quarterly or semi-annual meetings with the leadership team.

Provide technical support to those interested in developing a program.

6

7

Host a statewide meeting with all constituents.

Establish a comprehensive communication plan to keep partners connected and informed.

8

9

Create a website and social media presence.

Provide information to students and families.

10

## RESOURCES

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[Developing State Alliances to Speak as One Voice](#)

[Educating, Advocating, and Lobbying: Efforts to Provide Policy Makers with Evidence-Based Policy Information](#)

[State Alliances Affinity Group](#)

[State Legislation Related to Inclusive Postsecondary Education](#)

[What's Happening in Your State?](#)

[Working with State Partners](#)

## REFERENCES

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Kania, J., & Kramer, M. (2011). Collective impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 9(1), 36–41.  
<https://doi.org/10.48558/5900-KN19>

National Council of Nonprofits. (n.d.). *Collective impact*. <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/tools-resources/collective-impact>

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