

The Role of Councils on Developmental Disabilities in Supporting Inclusive Postsecondary Education for Students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

By Siddarth Nagaraj

INTRODUCTION

About Councils on Developmental Disabilities and Postsecondary Education Programs for Students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

Across the U.S., supporters of higher education for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) seek funding, expertise, and support from diverse sources. State Councils on Developmental Disabilities (DD Councils) are highly valuable partners since they offer expertise, guidance, and funding to a wide range of programs that support people with IDD in numerous ways.

In many states, DD Councils have provided technical and financial support for postsecondary education for students with IDD. While they are not the only source of funding or expertise at the state level, DD Councils have federal recognition, access to relevant expertise, and a unique ability to connect, engage, and support stakeholders from across the disability community. Their support can take many forms, including supplementary funding to new programs as well as technical expertise and raising awareness of postsecondary education options. They can also play a critical role in program development.

NATIONAL SURVEY OF DD COUNCILS

In 2020, AUCD and the Think College National Coordinating Center (NCC) conducted a national survey that examined how individual DD Councils were supporting postsecondary education for students with IDD at the state level. As this brief explains, DD Councils in many states deliver diverse forms of support, including direct funding for programs, technical expertise, and support for coalition-building and advocacy.

Think College NCC and AUCD conducted the survey in collaboration with the National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities (NACDD), which conducted outreach to leaders of the DD Councils in all states and territories. Thirty-four DD Councils provided data through the survey. Of those, 17 have funded or otherwise supported postsecondary programs for students with IDD at any point since 2015:

- Alabama, Arizona, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, New Hampshire, North Carolina, North Dakota, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, and Virginia.

These DD Councils have supported postsecondary programs in a range of different ways, including via funding awards, advising program development, and organizing state conferences.

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FUNDING TO DEVELOP NEW OR SUSTAIN EXISTING PROGRAMS

DD Councils have allocated funds for postsecondary education programs in many formats, including pilot grants to support the development of new programs, supplementary funding for federally designated comprehensive transition and postsecondary (CTP) programs, and targeted funding for specific resources or tools within a college curriculum. The table below provides some examples from states in which DD Councils have been notably active.

DD Council	Funding Activity – IPSE Programs Developed or Sustained	Funding Period
Alabama	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided funding to Alabama A&M University to support an PSE program that supports young adults with IDD to gain competitive employment. 	FY 2018-21
Maryland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funded to support the development of the University of Maryland Terps EXCEED program for students with IDD and creation of a new model inclusive higher education hub (UMD CTCL), which also receives technical guidance and coalition-building support from the DD Council (see below). 	FY 2020-21
Georgia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided funds annually to PSE programs at nine state universities and colleges, seven of which are CTPs. 	FY 2018-22
New Hampshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided funding for the University of New Hampshire’s CTP, the UNH-4U program. Its funds have been used to leverage additional funding from the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation, a private entity. • The DD Council also delivered support during the program’s development, and acts as an informal consultant to its leaders. 	FY 2019-22
North Dakota	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided targeted funding to support virtual job coaching for students in the ASTEP program at Minot State University, in collaboration with the North Dakota Center for Persons with Disabilities. • These funds from the DD Council are specifically allocated to address this precise component of the program’s inclusive curriculum. 	FY 2020-21
Tennessee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided direct funding to Union University’s EDGE Program, the first inclusive higher education program in Tennessee to include a residential component. • Prior to 2015, the Tennessee DD Council issued funding awards to three other CTPs – Next Steps at Vanderbilt University, the University of Memphis TigerLIFE Program, and the Lipscomb University IDEAL Program. 	FY 2016

GUIDANCE AND TECHNICAL EXPERTISE ON INCLUSIVE POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

DD Councils also provide critical guidance to universities and colleges across the country that develop and implement postsecondary programs. Since Councils have enormous technical expertise and connections, they are excellent sources of expertise for institutions that are looking to create, sustain and/or improve programs for students with IDD. Some DD Councils which prioritize funding also conduct public engagement projects which inform families and students with IDD about postsecondary education options. At times, Councils leverage their expertise and government credentials to develop guidance for legislatures.

DD Council	Guidance and Technical Expertise Delivered	Funding Period
Delaware	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sponsored statewide information sessions for colleges and universities. Conducted trainings on transition and inclusive higher education for staff and young adults with disabilities. 	FY 2020
Maryland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provided expertise to advocates and universities via the inclusive higher education hub at the University of Maryland (UMD CTCI). Advised the University of Maryland on how to develop and implement a model inclusive higher education program with academic/non-academic courses of study, work-based learning, person-centered planning, and peer mentors, which will begin in Fall 2021 and pursue CTP funding. Advocated for IPSE legislation to the Maryland legislature. 	FY 2020-21
Connecticut	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provided technical assistance with best practices that help state universities create postsecondary education programs. Disseminated general information about transition opportunities to the public via presentations to families and youth with IDD seeking transition options. 	FY 2019-21
Kentucky	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assisted the Kentucky Community and Technical College System to develop a CTP application that incorporates best practices and input from the state disability community, who they have encouraged to take part in coalition-building (see below). 	FY 2019-20
Tennessee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consulted with the state Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (TN DIDD) on plans for grants that will expand inclusive higher education across Tennessee. Delivered public policy guidance and encouraged support for inclusive higher education via state scholarships and increases in vocational rehabilitation funding. Supported creation of promotional media for inclusive higher education programs in Tennessee. 	FY 2016-21

PROMOTING COALITION-BUILDING

DD Councils are also valuable actors in enabling coalition-building among groups with a stake in postsecondary education for students with IDD, including self-advocates, families, students with IDD, and higher education institutions. DD Councils are unique in that they have federal funding and independent organizational ability to promote coalitions via their own strategies, and are required by law to have a membership that is at least 60% individuals with developmental disabilities, parents, guardians, or immediate relatives. This gives them powerful credibility and insight within the disability community as well as an important profile among outside stakeholders. Many DD Councils that fund the development of programs and provide guidance also include coalition-building in their strategic activity to promote sustainability. Additionally, DD Councils that do not provide funding for the development or enhancement of college programs support these efforts by helping to build coalitions via conferences and collaborative trainings.

DD Council	Coalition-Building Support Delivered	Funding Period
Delaware	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funded the Delaware Transition Conference, which has connected self-advocates, families, and higher education professionals. 	FY 2020
Georgia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supported resource-sharing across the Georgia Postsecondary Education Consortium, a group of nine IPSE programs to which the GA DD Council also provides funds (see above). 	FY 2018 - 2022
Maryland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Used its own inclusive higher education hub at the University of Maryland to bring together stakeholders for advocacy, program development, and sharing best practices to support students with IDD. Helped the Maryland Higher Education Collaborative bring together college and university staff to connect and learn about postsecondary education options for individuals with IDD at national conferences on higher education for individuals with IDD. 	FY 2020 - 2021
Kentucky	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council's postsecondary work team has fostered collaboration between the disability community in the state and stakeholders in the Kentucky Community and Technical College System by addressing the former group's recommendations for supporting IPSE needs. 	FY 2019 - 2020

CHALLENGES

While support from DD Councils has made a measurable impact in the field of postsecondary education for students with IDD, there remain barriers to the expansion of DD Councils' involvement. DD Councils face intense pressure to balance support for competing needs within the disability community, and that may mean that some Councils are not able to fund or advise postsecondary initiatives due to the sheer number of competing priorities. Additionally, postsecondary education programs for students with IDD are still rare in many states, which makes them less likely to receive DD Council funds in some places. Even in states where programs are well-established, the higher education institutions which administer them may not be connected closely to their state's DD Councils, so opportunities to partner on program development or funding may be missed from an early stage.

CONCLUSION

Although the presence and nature of postsecondary education programs for students with IDD vary significantly across the country, engaging DD Councils is a powerful strategy for amplifying the profile of programs and accessing new expertise. Councils can deliver support to students, families, and higher education institutions in diverse ways, and involving them closely can help ensure the sustainability of existing programs and improve the quality of students' experiences and preparation for independent living and inclusive employment upon completing programs.

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For a listing of the DD Councils in every state, as well as other information about the work that Councils do, visit the NACDD website: www.nacdd.org/

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