

Announcing Mini-Grants for Vermont Schools!!!

Project evolve

(expanding and validating options for learning through variations in education)

Application Questions & Answers

What is Project evolve?

Project evolve is a four-year model demonstration grant funded by the United States Department of Education (Office of Special Education Programs) and administered by the Center on Disability and Community Inclusion at the University of Vermont. This project is designed to develop, implement, evaluate and disseminate a model for improving services to students with disabilities in general education classes by expanding and validating service delivery alternatives to overreliance on paraprofessionals or the inappropriate use of paraprofessionals.

How many mini-grants will be awarded?

Six mini-grants will be awarded during the first year of the project. Six additional grants will be awarded in the second year of the project.

Who can apply?

During the first year, eligibility for these mini-grants is open only to **public school systems in Vermont**. A second round of mini-grants will be awarded to public school systems in other states, (referred to as *National Sites*) beginning in the second year of the project.

What is the time frame?

The commitment for Vermont award recipients is three school years (02-03, 03-04, 04-05). National site award recipients from states other than Vermont will be involved during the 03-04, 04-05, and 05-06 school years.

How will decisions be made about which schools receive mini-grants?

An Advisory Council consisting of individuals representing a variety of groups (e.g., self-advocates, parents, special educators, principals, superintendents, school boards, advocates) will review the applications along with the Project Director and staff. Based on Advisory Council input the Project Director will make final selections.

How much money will be provided to each of the sites?

<u>School Year</u>	<u>Vermont Sites</u>	<u>National Sites</u>
02-03	\$5,000	not applicable
03-04	\$2,000	\$3,000
04-05	\$2,000	\$2,000
<u>05-06</u>	<u>not applicable</u>	<u>\$2,000</u>
Total per site	\$9,000	\$7,000

* Annual payments made between June and August when work is completed.

What are the primary criteria for selection as a mini-grant award recipient?

1. The school system must establish that they have a commitment to, and engage in practices designed to, **support students with a full range of disabilities in general education classes.**
2. The school must **establish a compelling case that currently they are either overreliant or inappropriately reliant on paraprofessionals** to deliver special education services (e.g., significant increases or trends in use of paraprofessionals in recent years; paraprofessionals as the primary or exclusive mechanism to support students with significant disabilities in general education classrooms; inadequately trained paraprofessionals being asked to play primary instructional or behavior support roles; minimal or insufficient involvement of general and special educators in the instruction of students with disabilities).
3. The school must establish a **high level of commitment to participating** in the project activities (listed below). Schools will be asked to provide assurances that they intend to complete all three years of the project, even if leadership or other key personnel change. Assurances of commitment to participate are designed to minimize attrition. *Given that only six Vermont and six national sites will be funded it is vital that we select only schools that will willingly and fully participate in a timely manner.*

In addition to the three primary criteria, the Advisory Council and Project Staff will consider: (a) geographic distribution within Vermont; (b) size variations, (c) urban, suburban and rural schools; (d) student diversity; (e) any known track record of follow-through on previous collaborations with the *Center on Disability and Community Inclusion*; and (d) whether the school system expressed an earlier interest in participating by writing a letter of support for the grant application.

What are the activities and timelines required of award recipients?

During the First Year (02-03)

1. A special education administrator and a general education administrator (e.g., principal, superintendent) should plan to **attend two, non-consecutive, full-day project meetings** to be held at UVM with the project staff and Advisory Council. At the meetings we will review project activities and share input into the development of a model planning process that will be utilized by the schools. The meetings are scheduled for:
Nov. 20, 2002 (Waterman Bldg., Memorial Lounge, 8 a.m. - 4 p.m.) &
April 16, 2003 (Waterman Bldg., Grace Coolidge Room, 8 a.m. - 4 p.m.)
2. Assist project staff in **collecting baseline information** about the school pertaining to project objectives. This may include project staff conducting interviews with school personnel, classroom observations, and collection of school documents.

3. Provide **feedback on the development of a model planning process** being developed by the project staff.
4. By **April 2003, establish a School-Based Team** (or identify an existing one) whose role it will be to utilize the model planning process (being developed) to self-assess the school's current utilization of paraprofessionals and develop a plan to improve service delivery to students with disabilities in general education classes. This team minimally must consist of a representative from each of the following groups: (1) general education administration, (2) special education administration, (3) special educators, (4) general educators, (5) paraeducators, and (6) parents of children with disabilities. Team size should range in size from 6 to 9 members. *We strongly recommend the inclusion of a middle or high school student with a disability on the planning team.*
5. The entire **School-Based Team should plan to attend a full-day planning meeting** to be held at UVM on **June 4, 2003** at which time they will use the model planning process to develop a school-based plan with the intention of implementation during the coming school year.
6. Respond to **data collection requests about the planning process** (this will be kept to a minimum).

During the Second Year (03-04)

1. **Implement the plan** developed by the *School-Based Team* at a minimum of one designated school and provide **documentation of implementation**.
2. Assist project staff in the collection of **evaluative information** about the implementation of the plan on whatever factors the plan was intended to address (e.g., on personnel, climate, training) and most importantly, on student outcomes.

During the Third Year (04-05)

1. **Replicate the process** of planning, implementation, and evaluation for a minimum of one additional school. This school must serve a different age level than the initial field-test site. For example, if initial implementation was at an elementary school, replication must be at a middle or high school.
2. Assist project staff in the collection of **evaluative information** about the implementation of the plan on whatever factors the plan was intended to address (e.g., on personnel, climate, training) and most importantly, on student outcomes at both the initial and replication sites.

What will the school get in exchange for their participation?

The school will receive:

- access to a model planning process to help the school address challenges pertaining to paraeducator/service delivery issues
- access to the most current information and research on paraeducator and service delivery issues;
- access to the network of other Vermont and National sites involved in similar project activities;
- access to web-based resources pertaining to project objectives;
- an opportunity to improve paraeducator services and capacity within their schools;
- an opportunity to contribute to the growing national database of information on effective paraeducator and service delivery strategies in special education; and
- \$9,000.00 paid to the school district in the three annual installments upon submission of the completed tasks and documentation.

How will the information supplied by our school be used?

Information the school gathers for or supplies to the Project will be:

- used to refine and revise the model planning process;
- used to identify needs and patterns of self-assessment, planning, and implementation pertaining to paraeducators and special education service delivery in inclusive schools; and
- shared on the internet and through written documents (while maintaining the anonymity of the school and all individuals).

Submission deadline: August 30, 2002 or until all six slots are filled with school systems that meet the selection criteria

Notification will occur by September 30, 2002 or within four weeks of application submission, whichever is later.

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