Tasks, Timelines & Tips
(for National Sites)

Project EVOLVE

Late Summer/Early Fall 2003

1. Form a Project EVOLVE Planning Team (Refer to Guidelines..., p. 7). The team’s role will be to utilize the model planning process (Guidelines for Selecting Alternatives to Overreliance on Paraprofessionals) 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.

   Tip: Try to keep the size as close to the recommendation of 8 as possible.

   Tip: A "consumer" can be a student or an adult with a disability.

   Tip: A "critical friend" should NOT be employed by the school.

   Tip: Involvement by the school principal is crucial.

2. Maintain a Master Copy of your Guidelines... manual. You will be asked to hand in completed pages -- this is a main data source for our project.

3. Distribute copies of the Guidelines... manuals to each team member and have each person familiarize themselves with the contents prior to your first meeting.

4. Establish a meeting schedule. You will need to schedule four meetings over a period of one to two months. (Refer to Guidelines..., p. 6). Please email us with your meeting dates.
Meeting #1 (approximately 2 hrs.)  
Meeting #2 (approximately 2 hrs.)  
Meeting #3 (approximately 2 hrs.)  
Meeting #4 (approximately 3 hrs.)

*Tip*: Given the challenges of scheduling meetings. We suggest you establish a meeting schedule in advance. It would be preferable to complete your first four meetings by the end of October. Consider the weeks in November prior to the Thanksgiving school break as a cushion time in case you have to reschedule a meeting or need additional time.

*As stated in the initial application materials you reviewed during the application process, it is important to note that this is not a training or technical assistance project and is not a project about improving training or supports for paraprofessionals. This project views overreliance or inappropriate utilization of paraprofessionals as symptomatic of other challenges facing schools. This project is about exploring and improving schoolwide practices. We will be studying the school’s use of the tool without significant technical support from the project. Our premise is that in order for our planning process to be replicable, it must be clear enough and easy enough for schools to guide their own work without much help from us (other than the research-based tools and processes). We have a very modest budget and have directed a good chunk of it toward providing some funds to schools. Unfortunately, we do not have travel money to visit your sites. That is why we have some sites in Vermont (that we can visit) and those in other states to explore the generalizability of our planning process.

5. Keep the principal at your proposed replication site informed about your activities. Remember, your replication site should be at a different age level than your original site. For example, if your initial site is an Elementary School, then the replication site should be a Middle of High School.

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6. Although not required, the Vermont schools found it helpful to survey their faculty and parents. There are different surveys for teachers, special educators, paraprofessionals (special education only), administrators, and parents of children with disabilities who receive paraprofessional supports, There are not surveys for general education paraprofessionals, professional support staff (e.g. guidance counselors, nurses, librarians, related services providers). If you decide to pursue this route, there are questionnaires available online at:
   http://www.uvm.edu/~cdci/evolve/surveys.html

*Tip*: If you decide to use these surveys you will need to adjust your planning time accordingly. You will need to have the information
collected and tallied prior to your second meeting (Self-Assessment, Step 5). We would appreciate knowing if you decide to do this. In the past we have surveyed only parents whose children were receiving paraprofessional supports (a maximum of 5 parents per special educator). We have also found that the most efficient way to collect these data (with a high response rate) is to distribute, complete, and collect the surveys at a faculty meeting. To get the most valid information, we remind people at the faculty meeting that this is an individual task; we ask them to refrain from discussing the questions or potential responses with their colleagues at the meeting. Also there are always questions of interpretation -- this is unavoidable with a survey. So we ask people to answer based on their own interpretation and leave anything blank they don't feel they can legitimately answer. Please ask people to circle ONLY ONE RESPONSE per question. After the faculty meeting you can distribute questionnaires to those not in attendance and a subset of parents.

7. Have your four Project EVOLVE planning meetings. Once you have completed your four meetings (and have your booklet filled out through page 30) we will ask you to **send us a copy of those pages (pp. 6-30)**.

*Tip:* Always keep your original.

*Tip:* We encourage your to send us pages as they are completed. For example, after your first meeting, send us your "Screening" work (pp. 8-10). During the first year of the project (02-03) it was our practice to communicate with the team's designated liaison on a regular basis. You are always free to contact us with questions or feedback.

*Tip:* When you send us these pages, also include several pieces of blank letterhead stationary from your school. We will use this to prepare a bill for your school to get paid. Unless otherwise specified by you to our project secretary (Mr. Stephen Doll), we will plan for the checks during 03-04 to be made out to the school and sent to the attention of the principal.

8. Once we receive your teams work (*Guidelines...,* pp. 6-30), we will be sending you a brief, two-page survey to be completed, individually, by each of the members of your planning team. Once we have received the surveys from each team member we will process your school's first payment of $1,500 (this is one-half of your 03-04 funding). The second half will be distributed near the end of the school year.

*Tip:* Using your letterhead, we will prepare a bill and submit it through our University accounting system. If your school has not before received a payment from the University of Vermont, you will receive some payment-related paperwork from the University of Vermont. You MUST
follow their directions to fax back to them directly (this deals with federal tax requirements). We encourage you to communicate about this project with your school's business manager. In the past, we have had calls from schools saying that they hadn't been paid. When we traced their concerns we found that the schools had not completed the necessary forms.

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9. Prepare for and/or implement your action plans (pp. 28-30). Depending on what your team decided to do, some of you may be spending part (or much) of the school year in development activities designed to be implemented in 04-05. Others of you may have selected actions that you can implement during 03-04. Of course, you may have some combination of these activities.

10. By the end of May we would ask that you submit "Implementation Notes" to document what your team has been doing to implement your action plans. Upon receipt, we will process your second payment of $1,500.

11. Will be sending you a school demographic survey for your replication site to be completed and returned -- it includes basically the same information you submitted in your application -- except that it is based on the replication school.

12. We would like to be in touch with the replication site principal before the end of the school year so that they can establish their school's Project EVOLVE planning team before the 03-04 school year comes to a close.

2004-05 & 2005-06 School Years

Note: In the 04-05 school year, the initial school will receive an additional $500 in exchange for submitting on IMPACT REPORT (See page 34 of Guidelines... for specific instructions); this will be the last payment to the initial site. We will also be in touch to collect other information (e.g., possibly arrange phone interviews with planning team members). Our intention is to keep the data-reporting burden on you as small as possible while still collecting sufficient information to be useful to the field.

During 04-05 the replication site will receive $1,500 and another $2,000 in 05-06 for following the same pattern of activity as described above for the initial site. Although both the initial sites and replication sites will both receive $3,500 (a total of $7,000 for your district), the distribution of amounts varies because of budget challenges.
People always ask, "How can we use the money we receive?" "Are there any strings attached?" Your school is receiving this funding in exchange for field-testing the Guidelines... and supplying the requested data (i.e., demographic information; completed Guidelines pages 6-34; completion of feedback forms about the process from all planning team members; impact report during the second year; participation in phone interviews). Once you receive the money it is up to your school to decide how to use it. It has been our suggestion that the first use be to defray any expenses that might be associated with the implementation of the project (e.g., paying a paraprofessional to work beyond contracted hours; child care so a parent can participate; refreshments for meetings). Typically, these expenses are minimal, leaving a larger amount to be applied elsewhere. Some might be applied to development activities that are an outgrowth of your actions planning. We encourage the team to talk about how this money will be used -- but the decisions about use are completely internal to your school or system. We put no restrictions on the schools use of the funds they receive.