Project Communication and Engagement Primer
Guide to Implementation
Project Communication and Engagement Primer

Guide to Implementation

2016

Revised by:

Julia E. Koppich
J. Koppich and Associates

Cortney Rowland
American Institutes for Research

Doug Fireside
American Institutes for Research

Julia Keleher
Keleher and Associates

Diana Wogan
Education Development Center

Based on the document originally authored by:

Julia E. Koppich
J. Koppich and Associates

Cynthia D. Prince
Vanderbilt University

James W. Guthrie
Vanderbilt University

Patrick J. Schuermann
Vanderbilt University
This product was developed under a contract from the U.S. Department of Education for Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) Technical Assistance, ED-ESE-15-A-0016/0001. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education. No official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education of any product, commodity, service, or enterprise mentioned in this publication is intended or should be inferred. This product is public domain. Authorization to reproduce it in whole or in part is granted.

For more information about the Teacher Incentive Fund's work and its partners, see www.tifcommunity.org.

We would like to thank and acknowledge the TIF grantees whose communication and stakeholder engagement products are featured throughout this document. They are:

- Calcasieu Parish School Board
- Center for Education Innovation (NJ)
- Community Training and Assistance Center, Inc. (CA)
- Denver Public Schools
- District of Columbia Public Schools
- Hillsborough County School District
- Houston Independent School District
- Life School of Dallas
- Maine Department of Education
- Maricopa County Superintendent of Schools
- National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (IA)
- National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (MN)
- New York City Board of Education
- Region 18 Education SVC CTR
- Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey
- School District of Lee County
- Tennessee Department of Education
Table of Contents

1 TIF Primer on Stakeholder Engagement and Communication 1
   Why Focus on Stakeholder Engagement and Communication? 2
   Identifying the Stakeholders 2
   Establishing a Representative TIF Working Committee 3
   Building Broad-Based Support and Buy-In 7
   Putting It All Together: The Comprehensive Communication Plan 9
   Conclusion: Lessons Learned 11

2 TIF Communications and Stakeholder Engagement Tool 12
   1. Stakeholder Identification and Analysis Matrix 13
   2. Communications and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy Guided Checklist 15
   3. Comprehensive Communication Plan 19
   Attachment A. Suggested Communication Products and Processes 21
   Attachment B. Suggested Communication Products and Processes—EXAMPLES 26

3 Example TIF Newsletter Layout 34

4 Developing a Plan to Communicate With the Media About Your TIF Program: A Template 36
   Introduction 36
   Appendix C. Example News Release 39
   Appendix D. Example Op-Ed 43

5 PowerPoint Template 45
The Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) provides competitive grants to states, school districts, charter schools, and charter management organizations to develop and implement structures and strategies designed to improve educator effectiveness and thereby improve student achievement. TIF dollars enable grantees to design multiple ways to incentivize educators to improve their practice through, for example, new pay structures that enable teachers to assume challenging leadership responsibilities and performance evaluation systems tightly linked to professional growth. TIF also has come to focus squarely on developing comprehensive human capital management systems (HCMSs) to attract, support, reward, and retain highly effective teachers and principals at high-need schools.

This primer on stakeholder engagement and communication draws on the experiences of past TIF grantees. The ideas, tips, and suggestions provided here offer current and prospective grantees the basic information they need to shape a comprehensive plan for stakeholder engagement and communication to smooth the way for effective implementation of their TIF grants. For ease of reading and understanding, the primer takes as its starting point the perspective of a school district TIF grantee. Nondistrict TIF grantees can adapt the basic ideas about stakeholder and engagement.

This primer is part of a suite of TIF engagement and communication tools, including a comprehensive management checklist designed around the life cycle of a grant and customizable templates for grantee-specific TIF products, including a slide deck to describe the program, a newsletter, and a tool to support the development of a media plan.

The primary audience for this suite of tools is individuals with responsibility for developing and implementing a grantee’s TIF program. More broadly, the audience encompasses the wider group of stakeholders that necessarily will be part of engagement and communication activities—educators, including superintendents, teachers, district and school administrators, educators’ unions or associations, school board members, public officials, and parents and community members.

The primer begins with a brief discussion of the importance of stakeholder engagement and communication. It then takes up the topics of identifying stakeholders, establishing a representative TIF Working Committee, strategies for building broad-based support and buy-in, and constructing a comprehensive communication plan. The paper concludes with a short set of lessons learned.
Why Focus on Stakeholder Engagement and Communication?

Insufficient engagement of and communication with stakeholders quickly can derail the most thoughtful TIF program. As TIF history has shown, adequate stakeholder involvement in fleshing out the TIF program is necessary to achieving the widespread buy-in requisite to effective and sustainable TIF programs.

While effective stakeholder engagement and communication can be challenging, it is essential. Engagement helps to create buy-in and initial acceptance of the TIF plan and allows different voices and perspectives to be heard and recognized. Communication provides the synergy to broaden buy-in and sustain support for the program.

Experience shows that TIF grantees are more successful when they have designed, implemented, and continuously improved their projects in collaboration with key stakeholders. Districts are more ready to take on complex TIF work when they regularly seek the feedback of educators. Districts that have systems in place for seeking this feedback demonstrate an understanding of the critical role educator voice plays in successful human capital transformation. Common effective practices include initial design teams that bring together teachers and principals; a Working Committee that oversees the TIF project; task forces to tackle specific issues encountered during implementation, such as selecting a rubric for use in evaluations and determining the multiple measures to be included in a new evaluation system; and focus groups that provide feedback on proposed career ladder systems or new compensation models. This kind of ongoing engagement—multiple opportunities to be involved in developing and implementing the TIF program—is critical both to obtaining educator buy-in and to the ultimate success of high-quality TIF programs.

Identifying the Stakeholders

One of the principal challenges TIF grantees face is communicating effectively with multiple and widely disparate audiences. Knowing who the TIF stakeholders are is the first step to developing effective engagement and communication strategies. In general, TIF grantees should consider engagement and communication within the framework of two broad categories, internal stakeholders and external stakeholders.

**Internal stakeholders** are those whom one or more of the components of the TIF program will directly affect as well as those who have responsibility for approving and implementing the new plan. In a district-based TIF program, this set of stakeholders includes educators (teachers and principals), their unions and associations, district administrators, the superintendent, and the local school board.

**External stakeholders** are groups and individuals who have an interest in the TIF program (or specific elements of it) and its outcomes, but may be less directly and immediately affected by it. These include parents and community members, including, in some circumstances, the business community. Parents, for example, may want to know how, or if, TIF affects their children’s educational program. Other external stakeholders include state or municipal officials, organizational
partners, and current or potential funders of the TIF work, beyond the federal government. The media represents a special external stakeholder group. What the local media prints or says about a grantee’s program can generate or quell enthusiasm for it among both internal and external stakeholders.

Each broad stakeholder group, internal and external, encompasses multiple subgroups. Each subgroup represents a different constituency, each of which has a set of priorities, beliefs about, and expectations for the TIF program. Grantees have learned they must consider the form of communication and the level of detail and engagement required to ensure buy-in among external stakeholders and support among both internal and external stakeholders. They must continuously grapple with the challenge of conveying consistent, though often tailored, messages to quite different audiences.

**Establishing a Representative TIF Working Committee**

A TIF Working Committee, composed of representatives of key stakeholders, engages essential players early on in the TIF process and keeps them engaged. The presence of a representative committee sends a message to members’ respective constituencies that their views and expertise are valued and that they are part of shaping this important educator effectiveness program. (Refer to the TIF Stakeholder Engagement Checklist for potential Committee members.)

Ideally, at least some of the major stakeholders were involved in developing the TIF proposal. TIF grantees’ experience, as well as a growing research base, shows that a prerequisite to smoothly implementing educator effectiveness programs (in particular, those revolving around compensation and performance appraisal) is ensuring that individuals who are most directly affected by the plans—teachers or principals—are part of the work from the outset. Excluding key internal stakeholders from the decision arena can engender mistrust and misunderstanding about the intent and purpose of the work. If key stakeholders were not part of the proposal development process, assembling a representative TIF Working Committee becomes all the more essential as work proceeds to develop program details and begin implementing program elements.

One question TIF grantees must take up immediately is whether the Working Committee is an advisory or decisionmaking group. In other words, what is the range and reach of the Committee’s authority? Does it have authority to make decisions within the TIF realm? If so, what kinds of decisions? Is the Committee’s authority limited to recommendations to some other group or individual who will make the decision? If so, in what areas is the Committee authorized to make recommendations and to whom does it direct the recommendations? Alternatively, is the TIF Working Committee meant to serve simply as a sounding board for the TIF program director?

**Representative Membership**

Whatever its level of authority, the TIF Working Committee should be a representative group of key stakeholders. In essence, ensuring representativeness on the Committee helps to build a kind of
coalition for success for the TIF program by ensuring diverse ideas and viewpoints are discussed and are ultimately reflected in program decisions.

Who, then, should be on the Working Committee? In part, this is a grantee decision based on local need and context. Experience with previous TIF grantees suggests that the following are among the essential Working Committee representatives:

- **Superintendent**—The superintendent’s presence at least at the initial meeting signals the importance of the work the Committee is undertaking. After the first meeting or two, the superintendent might appoint a designee for subsequent meetings.

- **Central Office Staff**—The Working Committee should include at least one or two members of the central administrative staff who are key to the TIF work. The director of human resources, for example, and the chief budget official might appropriately be members of the Working Committee. Other central office officials might serve as *ex officio* members, brought into Committee work on an as-needed basis.

- **Union or Association Representatives**—TIF grantees have learned that teacher buy-in often depends on the support of the local teachers’ union or association. A few school districts have an administrators’ association as well. Where these exist, principals’ and administrators’ buy-in may hinge on the support of that organization. At a minimum, an official of the local teachers’ organization (and, where there is one, principals’ organization) should be part of the Working Committee. (*Later in this primer, we consider the special circumstances that obtain in TIF districts with collective bargaining.*)

- **Teachers**—The Working Committee also should include practicing classroom teachers. How these teachers are appointed turns out to be important to their credibility as representatives of their constituency. Sometimes the local teachers’ union or association appoints these teachers, or they are appointed by or agreement between the district and the union or association. Sometimes they are part of a recognized group within the district such as those holding National Board Certification or are teachers-of-the-year or presidential award winners, or they may be members of a designated district teacher leadership group. Who these teachers represent—grade levels or subject areas, for example—depends on the nature of the grantee’s TIF program and the context in which it is situated.

- **Principal(s)**—One or more principals should be on the Working Committee. The number of principals depends on the nature of the grantee's TIF program. If key elements of the program focus on principals' jobs or working conditions—a new evaluation system or pay program, for example—then more than a single principal representative might be appropriate. As with teachers, whom the principals represent, school levels or types of schools, for example, is context specific.

- **School Board Member**—Some grantees have chosen to include a school board member on the TIF Working Committee. In part, this decision hinges on the nature of the work the Committee will assume. If a Committee is simply offering ideas to district leadership, board representation may make less sense than if the Committee is developing and determining details about the TIF program.
• **Parent or community member(s)**—Grantees should consider the extent to which parents and community members can add value to the TIF Working Committee. Does having a parent representative on the Committee help to build an important element of buy-in for the program? Is there a member of the business community whose interests and external connections might increase support among that segment of the public and, serendipitously, provide a path to additional fiscal support?

The makeup of the TIF Working Committee should reflect the grantee’s priorities and the nature of the TIF work. Grantees have learned through experience that a Working Committee that, to the extent possible, offers a range of stakeholders the opportunity to feel they are contributing to the success of the program serves them well. In addition, to the extent possible, the Committee’s work should be consistent with district strategies already underway on topical areas that touch on the TIF work and should build on strategies the district uses to engage stakeholders in decisionmaking.

**Committee Size**

What size should the TIF Working Committee be? How many members should it have? Committee size is a local decision and depends, in part, on local context and circumstances. The Working Committee should be sufficiently large to be appropriately representative of key stakeholders and constituents and sufficiently small to allow substantive discussions and deliberations to take place. As a rule of thumb, committees of approximately 10–15 members enable representativeness and allow productive conversations.

**Roles and Responsibilities**

As previously noted, the grantee should clearly define the scope of the Working Committee’s authority (decisionmaking or advisory) before the work begins. This decision largely will shape the Committee’s roles and responsibilities. A Committee with decisionmaking authority, for example to develop and approve a teacher career ladder, will have a different set of tasks from a Committee whose job is to suggest the architecture for a new pay plan but not to develop the details.

Clearly, the nature of the grantee’s TIF program will play a significant role in shaping the Committee’s work. What are the program’s goals? What are the milestones? What issues is the TIF program trying to address? What problems is it meant to solve or challenges is it trying to meet? A program that seeks to develop new evaluation and compensation programs will find itself with different tasks from one that aims to create a comprehensive HCMS.

Fleshing out the details and determining a strategy for implementing the TIF program will require thoughtful and careful planning. While the funded TIF proposal establishes the broad program goals, subgoals are likely to change over time as the program evolves. Thus, the Working Committee needs to stay engaged for the life of the grant.

In addition, while goals necessarily are context specific, TIF grantees can learn much from examining relevant programs, such as career ladders and HCMS, of prior TIF grantees.
Agreeing on Meeting Logistics and Basic Timelines

Making some important logistical decisions up front will help the Working Committee accomplish what it needs to in a timely and efficient manner. When will the Committee meet? How often? Where? Who will chair the Committee? By what date will the Committee accomplish its initial tasks? By what date does the Committee plan to accomplish project milestones? Determining a set of deadlines for tasks will help to keep the work on track.

Having Productive Conversations

Ensuring that a TIF Working Committee composed of representatives of diverse constituencies is able to move forward productively and accomplish its goals can be challenging. Getting started may be a bit awkward, especially if not all of those at the table know each other. Some sort of “ice breaker” may help to ease the natural tension inherent in initial meetings of people who are not accustomed to working with one another or working collaboratively.

Moreover, not everyone on the Committee is likely to be of one mind about the direction and specifics of the TIF program. Successful Working Committees recognize that part of the task of developing and implementing a successful TIF program requires acknowledging and respecting different perspectives and encouraging Committee members to see the work from their own as well as other Committee members’ points of view. Establishing a set of collectively determined norms that guide Committee work helps to create a foundation for Committee members to work together.

Sometimes, despite the best intentions, the Committee may reach an impasse. What if further progress seems stymied? How does the Committee get “unstuck”? In other words, how will the Committee move forward and make decisions when it reaches an impasse? At this juncture, the Committee (or the grantee) may consider bringing in a neutral third-party facilitator to help the conversation move forward. The facilitator, someone who is trusted (or is able to gain the trust) by the Committee members, needs to possess excellent listening skills, the ability to hear what everyone is saying, and help the Committee to find common ground and move forward.

The Role of Collective Bargaining

In some substantial measure, whether the grantee’s state authorizes collective bargaining likely will shape the role and authority of the TIF Working Committee. For example, in states with collective bargaining, salaries are a negotiable item. Compensation plans—their structure, dollar amounts attached to each cell or level, and opportunities for bonuses—are part of the legally binding contract between the local school board and the union or association that represents teachers (and, in some few cases, the organization that represents principals). To the extent that the statutorily defined scope of bargaining, in other words, the issues that are subject to negotiation, intersects or overlaps with the TIF program, much of the role of the Working Committee may be predetermined. In other words, the Committee’s principal task might be to develop suggested details for a pay or evaluation plan and submit those recommendations to the district and union or association bargaining team.
To Brand or Not to Brand

A decision the Working Committee will need to consider early on is whether the TIF program should have a specific and distinct identity. Is TIF meant to be a stand-alone program or is it the intention that it integrate seamlessly with the district’s other educator effectiveness programs and overall goals? Some TIF grantees have chosen to brand their programs so they are recognizable and distinct. Houston, for example, calls its performance-based compensation system ASPIRE. Denver has named its TIF-funded teacher leadership program “Teacher Leadership and Collaboration” so that the name describes what the program is about. Other grantees have chosen not to give their TIF programs specific names.

“To brand or not to brand” is purely a local decision. The advantage of branding the TIF program is that it differentiates it from other district initiatives. The disadvantage is that it may be more difficult to sustain TIF elements when federal dollars are exhausted if grantees view TIF as a separable program. Whatever decision grantees make about branding the program, that decision will have implications for developing broad-based support and buy-in for the TIF program.

Building Broad-Based Support and Buy-In

As TIF grantees have discovered, building broad support and buy-in among an array of stakeholders represents a central challenge and ongoing task. Earning educator buy-in requires time, patience, and a willingness to view from multiple perspectives the challenges of altering fundamental aspects of teachers’ work lives such as the form of pay, the nature of evaluation, or the construct of professional development.

Developing a Multistrategies Approach

TIF grantees have used a variety of strategies to communicate effectively with multiple and widely disparate audiences. We describe a sample of these below.

Communicating With Internal Stakeholders

TIF grantees have used a broad range of strategies both to secure initial buy-in and move beyond this first level of engagement and communication to bring a clear and consistent message to internal stakeholders. Among the strategies grantees have used are:

- **Written Materials**—Grantees should design a set of clear, concise, and comprehensive written materials as early in the TIF process as possible. Newsletters, brief informational flyers, and FAQs all can serve to keep educators abreast of the TIF program. Grantees have found it useful to tailor written materials to specific audiences—teachers, principals, and central office staff. The trick is simultaneously to tailor materials so they appeal to target audiences while at the same time ensuring that each audience is receiving essentially the same message.
• **Websites**—A number of grantees have developed dedicated websites that offer grantee-specific details such as a description of the program the TIF grant is funding and information about which schools and individuals are eligible to participate.

• **In-Person Meetings**—Grantees have found that school-based meetings are helpful to inform teachers and principals about the TIF program. Some grantees have taken a kind of “traveling roadshow” to schools with a district representative or district and union or association representatives together to provide TIF-related information to school personnel and answer questions school staffs may have. Similarly, presentations to district staff about the TIF program can help to ensure that they are on board with the direction of the work as well.

• **Surveys and Focus Groups**—A number of grantees have used surveys and focus groups as communication tools. Carefully constructed survey and focus group questions can provide information to potential respondents about their district’s TIF program. In addition, responses can provide information to the grantee about how educators view the TIF program, in particular, what they understand about various dimensions of the program and where they lack sufficient understanding. Thus, surveys and focus groups can enhance buy-in by making educators feel they are part of the process and that their ideas are contributing to shaping the program. They also can ensure that educators have a clear grasp of the TIF program and its implications for their work lives. This feeling of engagement and being listened to is enhanced to the extent that officials use survey results to make mid-course corrections to the program.

**Ensuring Understanding**

Knowing and understanding what the TIF program components are and how to apply them may seem central to stakeholder support and buy-in. Experience, however, suggests that ensuring understanding often is a step grantees skip. A number of grantees have found that even when educators accept the general outlines of the TIF program, understanding can come up short when program elements begin to kick in.

A grantee that is establishing an HCMS needs to ensure that stakeholders directly affected by the plan or elements of it understand the dimensions of each component and their interrelatedness. For example, what are the incentives to retain teachers at high-need schools and how do teachers qualify for them? What are the elements of the new evaluation system? How do teachers qualify for salary increases under the new pay plan or for teacher leadership positions and the pay attached to them? What kind of professional development will the district offer?

**Maintaining Continuity When Leadership Changes**

Another critical buy-in and support issue is making sure that key local district officials are on board with the program and remain on board. A number of TIF grantees have faced changes as the composition of local school boards shifts or new superintendents are hired. Changes in leadership mean that individuals who were not part of the development of the TIF plan, and may know little about it, now have authority both to make decisions about the program and to communicate about it. A break in leadership continuity can contribute to mixed, unclear, or inconsistent messages about
Teacher & Leadership Programs

An established or start-up program. As one TIF project director remarked, “When leadership changed we experienced more than a few hiccups in our program.” Communication then needs to include regular checking in with district leadership so that those at the top of the organizational chart remain fully apprised as the program develops.

Grantee experience has shown that no single strategy is sufficient to do the job of reaching all internal stakeholders. Most use some combination of those described above.

Communicating With External Stakeholders

Grantees must engage internal stakeholders from the beginning and continue to hold their support if the TIF program is to function effectively. Ongoing communication with external stakeholders is key to building and maintaining program support.

Initial communication with external stakeholders needs to provide an overview of the basic architecture of the grantee’s TIF program. It also should answer essential questions such as: Why is my district or school involved in this program? What is my district’s program about? How is the program funded? Who is eligible to participate? How will the program contribute to district goals, including student performance? Regular program updates and progress reports provide the basis for ongoing communication with this set of stakeholders. The customizable slide deck and newsletter developed as part of this suite of communication tools can facilitate this step for grantees. Additionally, grantees have approached this communication task in a variety of ways, including:

- **Written Materials**—Some grantees have distributed informational one-pagers or other brief descriptive pieces to local libraries and at public convenings such as district and state education conferences.

- **TIF Conferences and Town Hall-Style Meetings**—Grantees have held TIF-specific meetings for their school communities to apprise parents and other community members of the TIF program.

- **Informational Short Videos**—Some grantees have developed short videos describing their TIF program, or various elements of the program, and made these videos available to parents and other external stakeholders.

A Special Situation: Communicating With the Media

TIF grantees have found that the ability to communicate effectively with the local media serves them in good stead. A good working relationship with local media enhances the prospects that an article about the TIF program will be accurate and makes it more likely it will be positive. TIF grantees have discovered their names in media reports under a variety of circumstances—news stories announcing receipt of the grant; editorials, both pro and con; and straight news reports about the program. Some grantees have escaped the media spotlight. Others received media attention they neither sought nor could control. TIF grantees need a media strategy that is nimble enough to create opportunities for proactive communication and positive publicity, anticipate issues
that might arise, and deal with crises as they emerge. The media planning tool we have developed as part of the suite of communication resources can support grantees in this area.

Putting It All Together: The Comprehensive Communication Plan

A relatively small number of TIF grantees have made communication a priority from the outset of their projects. Most have put communication on the backburner, developing communication strategies on an as-needed basis in response to unanticipated stakeholder and program implementation issues. Developing a comprehensive communication plan at the start of the TIF program both provides a roadmap for program implementation and anticipates challenges that might arise. It brings order and organization to the twin tasks of engagement and communication. The plan should be a kind of “living document,” changing and evolving as the program develops.

Elements of an Effective Communication Plan

As previously mentioned, communication needs will change as the grant program develops. For example, grantees will need distinct types and methods of communication when they introduce the TIF program, when implementation begins, and as the program evolves. Grantees need to consider the purpose of communication at each stage of the TIF project and develop a plan that they carefully construct around a set of well-considered, program-specific communication goals.

While communication plans should be tailored to each grantee, effective plans have a number of elements in common:

- **Audience**—The plan should describe the audience (or audiences) for whom each communication is intended. Does a particular communication aim at internal or external stakeholders? Does it target some particular subset of a stakeholder group, such as teachers, principals, parents, or the media?

- **Content**—The plan needs to detail the content of individual communication activities. What is the focus of each piece of communication? What is it meant to accomplish?

- **Method**—Specifying the method of communication is a critical part of a well-thought-out plan. How will the grantee convey information—through written material, at meetings, electronically?

- **Owner/Lead**—Deciding in advance who is responsible for communication in general and for each communication activity also is key. Most TIF grantees make communication part of the general responsibility of the TIF program director who then parcels out responsibility for particular communication tasks to other staff members within or outside the TIF program or to members of the Working Committee. Knowing whose job it is both to oversee communications and to accomplish each communication task makes it that much more likely that a comprehensive plan will guide communications work.
– **Frequency/Dates**—A comprehensive plan lays out anticipated communication activities over the course of the grant or at least over a full school year. Communication activities should link to communication goals and coincide with program elements about which they are communicating. Plans that effectively guide communications efforts set target dates for each communication activity. When is this activity to be completed? How often is the activity to be repeated, or is it to be one-time only?

– **Feedback Mechanism**—Comprehensive communication plans include a feedback mechanism. They embed a means periodically to check on the reach and effectiveness of communication activities, “take the temperature” particularly of internal stakeholders, and provide data to the Working Committee and other district officials to enable them to make mid-course program alterations as necessary. If the grantee’s work plan includes a program evaluation, information garnered via the communications feedback loop can also provide added useful data for the evaluation.

In sum, a well-designed and executed communications plan is an important tool for grantees to use as they build and sustain support for local TIF programs. The absence of such a plan can create a yawning information gap that can jeopardize the program’s ability to develop, grow, and continue.

**Conclusion: Lessons Learned**

What have we learned from the experiences of TIF grantees? What lessons can we draw about stakeholder engagement and communication? This primer has suggested a few essential ones.

1. **Communication is a continuous work in progress.** TIF grantees have found they cannot communicate too much. As one TIF program director noted, “People assume [the program] is static, but it’s not. Communicating early and often works best. Things are always changing.”

2. **Among the key initial tasks is to identify the internal and external stakeholders.** TIF grantees should understand clearly whom they need to engage in the TIF work and those groups and individuals with whom communication is essential to building buy-in and support for the TIF program.

3. **Develop a representative TIF Working Committee.** The exact composition of the Committee will vary with the grantee, though this primer suggests the kinds of representation grantees ought to consider. Ensuring that the Working Committee adequately represents major stakeholders is key as is establishing early on the Committee’s clearly defined tasks and responsibilities.

4. **Develop a comprehensive communication plan.** The communication plan can serve as a project-long road map. A plan that details the nature, form, and content of communications and builds in a feedback mechanism can go a long way toward smoothing implementation of a necessarily complex TIF program.
TIF Communications and Stakeholder Engagement Tool

TIF grantees are more effective when they design, implement, and continuously improve their projects in collaboration with key stakeholders. Insufficient engagement of and communication with stakeholders can quickly derail the most thoughtful TIF program. As TIF history has shown, adequate stakeholder involvement in fleshing out the TIF program is necessary to achieving the widespread buy-in requisite to effective and sustainable TIF programs. While effective stakeholder engagement and communication can be challenging, it is essential. Engagement helps to create buy-in and initial acceptance of the TIF plan and allows different voices and perspectives to be heard and recognized. Communication provides the synergy to broaden buy-in and sustain support for the program.

We believe districts are more ready to take on this work when they regularly seek the feedback of educators on initiatives and programs that affect schools. This ongoing engagement is critical both to obtaining educator buy-in and the success of high-quality TIF programs.

This tool focuses on TIF project implementation related specifically to engaging and communicating with your multiple project stakeholders and should guide grantees in the development of a TIF project communication and stakeholder engagement plan. The purpose of such a plan is to both strengthen the project and to ensure it is not sidetracked by a lack of buy-in, confusion about project objectives, or concerns with the project. Designed to follow the life cycle of a grant, each element of the guided checklist incorporates recommendations for communication products and dissemination methods for developing, updating, issuing, and reissuing communications. The guided checklist items will prompt grantees to consider the strategy or methods by which their communication activities and products will support the attainment of TIF project goals, rather than just be a list to check off for compliance. Finally, the guided checklist includes references to templates that you can use as part of your communication and stakeholder engagement strategy.

To start developing a stakeholder engagement and communications plan, grantees should use the stakeholder matrix to help them identify the specific individuals, groups, and organizations that a TIF project decision, activity, or outcome could affect.

This toolkit includes the following elements:

- **Stakeholder Identification and Analysis Matrix**: Use this matrix to identify your TIF stakeholders and define what information they may need, when they need it, their preference for receiving it, and the nature and sensitivity of that information.

- **Communications and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy Guided Checklist**: Use this checklist with your project teams after completing the Stakeholder Matrix.
• **Comprehensive Communication Plan Template:** Use this tool as an action plan to ensure that all members of the project team are communicating a consistent message at appropriate times to your stakeholders.

• **Suggested Communication Products and Processes:** Use this list for ideas about the different communication formats and methods that can be used with different stakeholder groups.

You may choose to use this tool in a variety of ways. You can complete each of the tables as you go through the grant cycle.

### 1. Stakeholder Identification and Analysis Matrix

The first step to effective communication is to identify the individuals who have an interest in or are affected by your TIF project. Stakeholders may include individuals, groups, or organizations. The Stakeholder Matrix below provides a list of common TIF stakeholders. It also provides guiding questions to analyze stakeholders’ communication needs. Project directors should complete this matrix with the project’s core leadership team before starting to develop a communications and stakeholder engagement strategy. Use the matrix to document your TIF stakeholders and define what information they may need, when they need it, their preference for receiving it, and the nature and sensitivity of that information. You should ideally do this face to face with your project team, and it could take approximately one to one-and-a-half hours. Project directors should revisit this matrix a few times per year to assess whether they are engaging the appropriate stakeholders as needed.

One example of a stakeholder management strategy is to create a TIF Working Committee. A TIF Working Committee, composed of representatives of key stakeholders, engages essential players early on in the TIF process and keeps them engaged. The presence of a representative Committee sends a message to members’ respective constituents that their views and expertise are valued, that they are part of shaping this important educator effectiveness program. Please see the TIF Primer on Stakeholder Engagement and Communication for more information about establishing a representative TIF Working Committee.

Grantees may find that it is neither practical nor necessary to engage with all stakeholder groups in the same way. You may want to identify the level of interest and influence stakeholders have in your initiative and prioritize your efforts with those with the highest interest and influence. These tables should help you be more strategic about who you are engaging and why. Grantees have learned they must consider the form of communication and the level of detail and engagement required to ensure buy-in among external stakeholders and support among both internal and external stakeholders. They must continuously grapple with the challenge of conveying consistent, though often tailored, messages to quite different audiences.
## Stakeholder Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>What are their interests and concerns?</th>
<th>What are their information needs?</th>
<th>What is the best way to communicate with them?</th>
<th>How often would they like to be updated?</th>
<th>Should they receive public or private materials?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internal</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ union/association representatives</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representative group of teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representative group of principals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other central office personnel (assessment, human resources, research, student services)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School board members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (if applicable)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other community representatives (list them here)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State or municipal officials</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents/community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funders</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partners</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (if applicable)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Communications and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy Guided Checklist

Before launching your TIF project, we recommend that project teams use this guided checklist to discuss and decide how to engage stakeholders and communicate throughout the project. The guided checklist reflects the stages of the grant’s life cycle: upon receiving the grant award, ongoing communications, the beginning and end of each school year, when evaluation results are available, and the last two years of the project. Note that there is a column for suggested products. These are suggested communications products or processes you could use as a part of your communication and stakeholder engagement strategy. You will find a list of these defined in Attachment A. Project directors should complete this guided checklist, working in collaboration with other district staff and/or teachers, after completing their Stakeholder Matrix. Again, this should be done face to face with the project team and could take approximately two hours.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question/item</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Suggested products</th>
<th>Relevant stakeholder(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A. Upon Receiving Grant Award</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing a TIF Working Committee</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. How have you ensured the representativeness of your TIF Working Committee?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What is the scope of the Working Committee’s authority? For example, is the Working Committee an advisory or decisionmaking group? Can it make decisions within the TIF realm? What kinds of decisions? Or does the Committee make recommendations to some other group or individual who will make the decision?</td>
<td>Stakeholder list Nomination process Recruitment Announcement Roles and responsibilities documents Stakeholder agreement/memorandum of understanding (MOU) Schedule of meetings Invitation packet Outreach schedule Decisionmaking criteria</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How often will the Working Committee meet? And when?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. By what date will the Committee accomplish initial tasks and project milestones?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. How many members should the Working Committee have?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What are members’ roles and expectations? Will there be a Committee chair?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. How will decisions be made in the case of disagreements?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Have you established a set of collectively determined norms for the Committee?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. How have you ensured that the Committee’s decisions and activities build upon existing decisionmaking structures within the district?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Launch</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Will you have a formal launch event? If not, how will you kick off the project?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. How are you communicating with district-level leadership across a range of departments likely to be involved or institutional leadership about the new TIF project?</td>
<td>Event kickoff notice Project announcements List of key messages Implementation benchmarks Progress monitoring schedule Schedule of evaluation activities Progress monitoring schedule</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. How will you set benchmarks to assess project progress over the near, middle, and longer term and share that at the project launch so that people understand what success looks like?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. How will you communicate information about each TIF project component to internal and external stakeholders, including their role in the project and the project’s overall objectives?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. What communications are you using to explain how your TIF project will operate and why the school or district is implementing it?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. How will you communicate how you expect the program to contribute to district goals, including student performance?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question/item</td>
<td>Answer</td>
<td>Suggested products</td>
<td>Relevant stakeholder(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B. Ongoing Communications (Updates and Feedback Loops)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Updates on Project Progress</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Quarterly implementation updates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. How are you communicating with school, district, and project staff about</td>
<td>Meeting schedule</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>project progress?</td>
<td>Progress summaries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How are you communicating with the public about project progress?</td>
<td>Electronic updates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How and with whom are you reviewing near-, middle-, and longer-term</td>
<td>Quarterly press releases</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>benchmarks?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How are you providing regular program updates and progress reports to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stakeholders?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Addressing Concerns/Feedback Loops</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Updated FAQ documents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Have you identified aspects of your project plan that may cause concerns</td>
<td>Website updates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and messages to address those concerns?</td>
<td>Schedule for annual TIF project review</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. How will you ensure you respond to questions and concerns raised about</td>
<td>Internal TIF project review criteria</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the project in a timely manner?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. What internal strategy will you use to document and address common</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>concerns and questions about the project?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. How will you resolve disagreements regarding the need for changes to the</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>project?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. What means do you have to gather information from stakeholders quickly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and easily (e.g., hotline, after-school drop-in sessions, trained</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>individuals at each school site who can answer questions)?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Have you established a process for teachers, principals, and other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stakeholders to ask questions, raise concerns, and receive a response?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>TIF project informational packet for onboarding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. How are you maintaining continuity when leadership changes? How are you</td>
<td>Quarterly professional development/technical assistance sessions to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communicating with and engaging new staff who come into the schools,</td>
<td>review TIF methodology</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>district, or project mid-course? How will you catch them up on the project</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and their role?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. How will you differentiate your communication to accommodate potential</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>information requests from a variety of sources (i.e., community activists,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>media, parents, interested citizens)?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. How will you engage the media? *(For more information about communicating</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with the media, see the TIF Primer on Stakeholder Engagement and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication and “Developing a Plan to Communicate With the Media About</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your Teacher Incentive Fund Program: A Template.*)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. How will you review and update your communication and stakeholder</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>engagement plan?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question/item</td>
<td>Answer</td>
<td>Suggested products</td>
<td>Relevant stakeholder(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C. At the Beginning and End of Each School Year</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. How are you closing out and kicking off each year with project, school, and district staff?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Back to school kickoff meeting protocol Year-end TIF evaluation criteria</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How are you updating any stakeholder agreements or MOUs your project has?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Year-end MOU review criteria Year-end stakeholder meetings Year-end implementation updates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>D. When Evaluation Results Are Available</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. How will you communicate about the TIF project evaluation?</td>
<td>Evaluation summaries Evaluation questions email</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Goals of the evaluation – Scope of evaluation and evaluator’s role – Timeline for conducting the evaluation – Strategy for disseminating evaluation results</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How are you engaging stakeholders in critiquing evaluation plans and draft instruments and reports?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How will your evaluation reports inform decisionmakers and lead to potential program improvement?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>E. In the Last Two Years of the Project</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. How are you communicating the results and impacts of your TIF project with stakeholders?</td>
<td>Annual review Website updates Newsletters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How are you communicating with and engaging internal stakeholders to increase the potential to sustain TIF project activities after the grant?</td>
<td>Stakeholder feedback loop</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How are you communicating with stakeholders such as the business community, foundations, policymakers, and the public to build support to sustain the project after the grant period?</td>
<td>Business community flyers/newsletters that emphasize return on investment Policymaker flyers/newsletters that emphasize changes in student achievement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How have you determined if the strategies you used to build support for the TIF project among stakeholders such as the business community, foundations, policymakers, and the public are effective?</td>
<td>Stakeholder surveys</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. **Comprehensive Communication Plan**

Now that you have identified stakeholders and addressed the questions in the guided checklist, you are ready to develop a Comprehensive Communication Plan (CCP). This will help to bring order and organization to the twin tasks of engagement and communication. Over the life of your TIF grant, you will communicate with multiple audiences in multiple ways. Emails to participating principals and teachers, press releases or responses to media requests, and websites and fact sheets describing the project are just a few that may be used. In order to keep track of all the messages going out to multiple audiences at different times, a CCP can be helpful. Project directors can use a CCP as an action plan to ensure that all members of the project team are communicating a consistent message at appropriate times to your stakeholders and that you are effectively engaging with your stakeholders. The CCP can also specify who the lead should be for each communication.

The CCP should be informed by the TIF Stakeholder Matrix and the Communications and Stakeholder Engagement Guided Checklist and help you determine how and when to communicate with and engage your stakeholders. Project directors should develop a CCP in collaboration with the project’s core leadership team. They can do this via email or in person. It will be helpful to have a school district calendar on hand so you can plan around events such as testing or vacation and leverage events such as districtwide meetings or opportunities to engage with families. It is unlikely that the group will identify all possible and necessary communications during the initial planning session. Project directors should revisit this plan a few times per year to ensure planned communications are being executed. This plan should be a “living document,” changing and evolving as the program develops. We include a template for developing a communication plan below.

The CCP should attempt to include six components:

1. Methods that inform district-level leadership across the range of departments likely to be involved in some aspect of TIF implementation;

2. Widespread information distribution to educators and the public that provide evidence of transparency;

3. A means by which educators can gather information quickly and easily (e.g., confidential hotline, convenient after-school drop-in sessions, trained individuals at each school site who can answer questions);

4. A process for stakeholders to ask questions, raise concerns, and receive a response;

5. Targeted communications related to key events in the grant life cycle (e.g., program kickoff, mid-point, summary end-of-year/changes for next year, when evaluation results are available); and

6. Attention to the need to generate support that will make it possible to sustain the TIF project.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Key information/content</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Owner/lead</th>
<th>Frequency/issue date(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Superintendent</td>
<td>Project goals</td>
<td>Email</td>
<td>Project director</td>
<td>Last week of August</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Teachers’ union/association representatives</td>
<td>Key dates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Representative group of teachers</td>
<td>Points of contact</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Representative group of principals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Other central office personnel (assessment, human resources, research, student services)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. School board members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Other community representatives</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. State or municipal officials</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Parents/community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Media</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Funders</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Partners</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Attachment A.
Suggested Communication Products and Processes

This section presents an overview of the types of communication products grantees could consider using as part of their communications and stakeholder engagement strategy. This list is not exhaustive but provides project directors with some ideas about the different communication formats and methods that they can use.

- **Back-to-School Kickoff Meeting Protocol:** A formalized checklist that establishes all the elements that project directors must address at the beginning of each school year. Kick-off meetings set the tone for the year and influence how individuals perceive the grant and project team. Kick-off meetings should provide all the necessary information stakeholders need to understand and engage in the process. They should also generate interest and excitement. Ensure there is sufficient time to introduce the team and address questions and concerns from the audience.

- **Decisionmaking Criteria:** Set of principles, standards, or metrics that the project team will use to make decisions; should be formal and widely available.

- **Electronic Updates:** Emails sent out to individuals subscribed to listservs; provides the latest information on progress, includes interesting information to maintain excitement and engagement in the grant. Email templates that provide a formatted structure for organizing information sent via email; makes it easy for stakeholders to locate information of interest because it is always in the same place. See Attachment B for examples from TIF grantees.

- **Evaluation Questions Email:** A separate email address stakeholders can use to submit questions about the evaluation.

- **Evaluation Summary:** One-page Word or Publisher document that includes a brief overview of the evaluation purpose, key evaluation questions, and research methods; highlights key evaluation findings and recommendations; makes it easy for stakeholders to quickly learn about your evaluation.

- **FAQs:** A document or page on the project website that provides answers to the most frequently asked questions; grantees should update as a project progresses and new questions arise; helps ensure there is a definitive source for information on the project; grantees should update regularly. See Attachment B for examples from TIF grantees.

- **Flyers:** One-page document that presents grant information and can be given to many people or customized to meet the information needs of specific subgroups of stakeholders.

- **Implementation Benchmarks:** A list of target dates that ensures all parties are aware of what grant activities need to be completed by a specific date; helps maintain accountability and facilitates evaluation of progress and performance.

- **Invitation Packet:** Compilation of resources that includes all the necessary forms, documents, and requirements a new person would need to understand what is required to engage in grant activities and contribute to grant goals.
• **Kick-Off Notice:** An announcement disseminated in print or electronically that informs all stakeholders of the project start date. The announcement design should generate interest and excitement in the grant.

• **List of Key Messages:** A breakdown of the most important takeaways that the project team feels it should communicate to stakeholders.

• **Meeting Schedule (external):** Identifies the dates that meetings will address specific topics will be addressed in order to ensure diligence and increase transparency; establishes when the project team will engage different stakeholder groups.

• **Meeting Schedule (internal):** A list of dates and topics that specify what issues the meeting will address when; sets the dates when the project team should provide progress updates, express concerns, and ensure coordination of activities.

• **Newsletters:** A brief publication or formatted document containing recent updates that are of interest to a specific group; allows for customizing messages to specific groups like policymakers, teachers, or members of the business community.

• **Nomination Process:** A procedure to identify and recommend a specific group or individual for recognition or designation in a formal role. The nomination process should be formal, structured, and transparent.

• **Overall Project Summary:** A condensed description of the TIF project that makes it easy for stakeholders to learn about the grant. *See Attachment B for examples from TIF grantees.*

• **Progress Monitoring Schedule:** A list of target dates that establishes when grantees will collect and address evidence of completion of grant activities and progress toward project goals.

• **Project Review Criteria (internal):** Set of principles, standards, or metrics the project team will use to evaluate performance and progress; the review criteria should address all elements of the TIF grant as well as the effectiveness of project communications and the efficiency and effectiveness of the project team's management and operations.

• **Progress Summaries:** Brief overviews of what the project team has accomplished in terms of maintaining the project schedules; summarizes the major implementation accomplishments for each aspect of the grant at specific points in time.

• **Project Announcements:** Ongoing updates regarding the grant; can include summaries of completed activities or information about upcoming events, meetings, or decisions.

• **Quarterly Implementation Updates:** Internal documents created once every three months to summarize completed tasks and assess the overall status of implementation; allows all stakeholders to understand progress, identify issues/challenges, and maintain focus on accomplishing the project schedule.

• **Quarterly Review of TIF Methodology:** Professional development and technical assistance sessions that happen once a quarter and focus around the practices, procedures, and structure of the TIF project.
• **Quarterly Press Releases:** Documents created for broad dissemination to the public that provide information on the status of the grant's goals and achievements; can also be used to inform stakeholders about potential changes; helps provide transparency and increase public awareness. *See Attachment B for examples from TIF grantees.*

• **Recruitment Announcement:** An announcement either published in print or disseminated electronically that notifies of a vacancy on a team or project and seeks team members to fill it. The recruitment should clearly establish the roles and responsibilities for the position and clarify how the project will make the selection.

• **Roles and Responsibilities Documents:** Documents that provide guidance on the assignments and span of authority for individuals involved in managing the grant and or executing project activities. *See Attachment B for examples from TIF grantees.*

• **Schedule of Evaluation Activities:** Brief document that presents the dates for key evaluation activities and establishes the sequence of evaluation activities; sharing the evaluation timeline can help to reduce anxiety around evaluation activities and enhance transparency. This should include the annual date on which the overall performance of the grant will be reviewed. Grantees should broadly disseminate the schedule of evaluation activities to promote transparency in grant implementation activities.

• **Stakeholder Agreement/Memorandum of Understanding (MOU):** An agreement between two or more parties establishing they will follow a specified course of action or procedure.

• **Stakeholder List:** A list of potential and actual individuals involved in or affected by the grant; should consider individuals' contributions, potential impact, and the dynamic relationships they have with each other.

• **Stakeholder Surveys:** Online data collection tool that makes it possible to gather stakeholder input on a defined set of items related to the grant; can also be administered on paper. Grantees should customize survey items to the interest of specific stakeholder groups. Grantees should collect data regularly and analyze them at the end of the year, if not more often, to inform programmatic changes and improvements.

• **Website:** An easily accessible, online source that provides information on the grant's goals and activities; addresses the needs of a broad cross-section of stakeholders. Grantees should update their website regularly, possibly quarterly, with additions, edits, and changes to reflect progress and demonstrate that the project team is engaged in active implementation.

• **Year-End TIF Evaluation Criteria:** Set of principles, standards, or metrics that the project team will use to evaluate at the end of the school year the degree to which individual schools and the district accomplished grant goals and achieved performance benchmarks. The project should establish the criteria at the beginning of the project and track performance across years.

• **Year-End Implementation Updates:** Summary of quarterly implementation updates created at the end of the grant year that summarize completed tasks and assesses the annual progress of implementation; allows all stakeholders to understand progress, identify
issues/challenges, and identify issues that need to be resolved to improve implementation in the next year. The Year-End Implementation Update should also include a summary of the performance on the internal review criteria.

- **Year-End MOU Review Criteria:** Set of principles, standards, or metrics that the project team will use to evaluate the degree to which the terms, conditions, and expectations set out in MOUs were met. Grantees could also use this review process used to identify the need to modify the terms of an MOU.

- **Year-End Stakeholder Meetings:** A series of public meetings scheduled over a period of two to five weeks that bring together various groups of stakeholders and provide formal opportunities to collect feedback and suggestions and identify opportunities for improvement. These meetings should be open to the general public and widely advertised to ensure the broadest representation of feedback is gathered. Grantees could also use these meetings to recognize contributions, assess satisfaction, and seek commitment for ongoing participation.

In addition to communication products, grantees should consider communication processes. Communication processes are the activities through which information is shared or exchanged between two or more people. The goal of any communication process is to ensure the receiver develops an accurate understanding of the sender's intended message. Interactive communication processes could include in-person meetings, telephone conversations, as well as the use of technology (online meetings, texts, etc.). The diversity of communication processes contributes to a grant's overall success.

- **Design Sessions:** In-person meetings that include all project team members; provide an opportunity to brainstorm and promote collective ownership of grant activities and commitments by including input from all prior to decisionmaking.

- **Feedback Loop for Principals:** Interactive dialogue with principals to provide guidance, support, and critiques in nearly real time; feedback loops create opportunities for individuals to modify implementation strategies and achieve more positive outcomes.

- **Feedback Loop for Stakeholders:** Interactive dialogue with community members to harness their opinions and generate consensus around moving forward.

- **Focus Groups:** Interactive experiences among groups of people who participate in a guided discussion about a particular issue to highlight challenges, ask questions, and provide feedback. Focus groups can help create a clear understanding of how different stakeholders view specific issues. See Attachment B for examples from TIF grantees.

- **Online Method to Submit Questions/Concerns:** Technology-driven process that provides multiple people with an opportunity to engage with the project in an on-demand fashion; it is important to ensure that they make their responses in a timely fashion.

- **Planning Sessions:** A traditional meeting that brings all project team members, and sometimes senior executives, to identify key decisions and define activities necessary to accomplish project goals. It is sometimes helpful to include a facilitator to maintain focus and ask difficult questions.
• **Presentations:** Generally created using PowerPoint, presentations share information, objectives, and timelines and other key grant information with stakeholders; should include visuals and focus on one or two main ideas/goals.

• **Public Recognition:** Formal or informal acknowledgment; examples include taking time at a meeting to thank someone for his/her efforts or providing a certificate or award at a district event.

• **Taskforces:** A defined group of individuals come together to address specific problems or work on a defined activity or issue.

• **Workgroups:** Small teams created in order to leverage collaborative contributions related to important aspects of a project; they often focus on specific tasks or issues.
Attachment B.
Suggested Communication Products and Processes—EXAMPLES

This section provides examples of communication products from current and past TIF grantees. This list is not exhaustive and means to provide project directors with some ideas about the different communication formats and methods that they can use.

1. Electronic Updates and Newsletters
   a. School District of Lee County

---

Lee County’s TIF grant aims to provide engaging educational environments for students and professional growth opportunities for teachers and administrators. The primary roles of the TIF grant include teacher mentors, teacher leaders, professional development and leadership specialists, and team school teacher mentors and turnaround principals. Upon overall evaluation scores of effective/highly effective, individuals within those roles are eligible for significant financial rewards. The added incentives and support attract and retain more effective and highly effective educators in schools where students need them the most.

What Principals Have to Say about the TIF Grant

The grant has brought about many opportunities that would not otherwise be present in high-needs schools. Principals are able to provide job-embedded professional development. Teachers receive opportunities to hone their craft through the support of instructional coaches and mentor teachers. The grant also allows for assistance in the recruitment and retention of quality teachers through the hard-to-staff bonuses and the ability to build strong teaching cultures that increase collaboration and morale.

"The TIF program needs to be continued; it makes it more attractive to work at a hard-to-staff school...the grant also allows for professional development including modeling of best teaching practices and coaching developed by the teacher leaders."

Tommy Bowers, Principal
James Stephens International Academy

---

Four Year Comparison of Highly Effective Teachers
This document highlights aspects of the PBSS transition for schools and hopefully answers questions many of you may have regarding the process.

There are three ways in which money will flow from CEI to your school: **1) Salary increases based on your PBSS 2) Teacher Leadership stipends** and **3) Aspiring Teacher salaries.** Note that in all three scenarios listed, per audit guidelines, checks are made to your school and not directly to teachers. Funding for all 3 have different timelines and requirements. Your Site-Based Specialist (SBS) and I will be happy to offer guidance managing the requirements and staying on track.

Developing the PBSS model was the first phase of the process. Salary increases, teacher leadership stipends and aspiring teacher salaries will be closely monitored by me and I will work with you, as your direct contact for funding related inquiries, to facilitate smooth processes for all.

1) **Salary Increases:**
As soon as school staffing is finalized, please update the PBSS model with staff starting salaries and career ladder categories in lieu of the projected data the model uses. Please upload this information to the myPICCS portal by **October 17th, 2014.** Actual information is necessary when budgeting for the current and future school years using the PBSS model.

PBSS funds from PICCS to your school will occur once your evaluation scores and salary increases have been verified. Your completed PBSS, (and other supporting data around teacher evaluations), must be uploaded to the myPICCS portal by **September 1, 2015 (NJ)/ September 30, 2015 (NY).** Once verified, PICCS will issue a check to the school for the full federal contribution so that the school may issue salary increases and *retroactive pay* to staff.

Within four weeks of check issue, the school must provide me with an actual payroll register copy to serve as proof of adjusted salaries & retroactive pay. At the end of the school year or by **May 31, 2015** the school must email me the most recent payroll register again to serve as proof of adjusted salaries. Failure to meet these requests may result future funding freezes for schools that do not provide us the necessary information. All related due dates are reflected in the attached Teacher & Principle Evaluation Cycle.

2) **Teacher Leadership Stipends:**
Stipends issued for teacher leadership, (e.g. Data Coordinators & PLC Coaches), are issued as separate checks from salary increases for internal tracking as well as *taxation purposes. Teacher Leadership payout amounts and related evidence must be uploaded to the myPICCS portal by **September 1, 2015 (NJ)/ September 30, 2015 (NY).** PICCS will then issue a check to the school for the stipends. Within four weeks of the issuance of checks, schools must send me copies of them confirming accurate teacher leadership payouts.

3) **Aspiring Teachers:**
The PICCS grant allows schools to hire 2 Aspiring Teachers per school year in years 3, 4 & 5, (beginning in the 2014-15 school year), at a salary of $25,000 per teacher. Receiving these funds requires semi-annual verification. A payment of 50% at the beginning of year will be issued following the receipt of proof of hiring via a school payroll ledger showing the teachers name(s) and a copy of their resume. The remaining payment or 50% will be issued at the end of the school year upon receipt of proof of successful term completion. Receipt of a payroll ledger is also required for that reimbursement.

For topics discussed above in 1-3, all monies come from the same federal funding allocation and each school must pay their portion of the allocation each year as follows:

1) 2014-2015 PICCS share = 90%  Schools share = 10%
2) 2015-2016 PICCS share = 75%  Schools share = 25%
3) 2016-2017 PICCS share = 50%  Schools share = 50%

* Regarding Retro Pay: The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and the SSA consider back pay awards to be wages. However, for income tax purposes, the IRS treats all back pay as wages in the year paid.
2. **FAQs**

3. **Overall Project Summaries**
   a. District of Columbia Public Schools
b. National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (MN)

Making Educational Strides in Minnesota

HOW A GROUP OF MINNESOTA CHARTER SCHOOLS IS CLOSING ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

During the 2012-2013 school year, a consortium of independent Minnesota charter schools located in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area were awarded a competitive federal Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grant. Through this grant Hmong College Prep Academy, Learning for Leadership Charter School, Partnership Academy, Sojourner Truth Academy and Stonebridge World School were able to implement a new approach to supporting great classroom teaching. They chose TAP: The System for Teacher and Student Advancement as a research-based model for increasing the effectiveness of their faculty and driving to higher student learning goals.

TAP is a system developed by the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) that boosts student achievement by supporting teachers through peer leadership, performance-based compensation and weekly professional development.

In Minnesota, NIET partnered with the five charter schools to find new ways to attract, retain and develop a highly effective teaching staff through new career opportunities and support systems for teacher learning aligned to school goals.

Rates of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch range from 74 percent to 99 percent across these schools. The five schools’ hopes for TAP were to have all students meet or exceed state proficiency standards in all subjects and be prepared for college and careers. The campuses had taken initial steps with the support of Minnesota’s Q-Comp initiative, created at the state level to increase compensation for educators based on effectiveness, which supports districts to incorporate career advancement, job-embedded professional development, performance-based pay and the creation of an alternative salary schedule. The schools were ready to take these improvements to the next level.

Over the past three years, significant improvements in student learning growth have been made in all five schools, based in large part on improvements in instructional effectiveness, teacher attitudes and collegiality.
KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS: MINNESOTA

Teacher Attitudes

In Minnesota schools using TAP, teachers and school leaders work together to make meaningful improvements based on specific teacher and student needs. Support from teacher leaders, including modeling and co-teaching, enables teachers to track student progress, adjust instruction and redefine goals as part of a team. Through weekly professional development, also known as cluster meetings, teachers are given time to collaborate and learn from their fellow teachers, including ways to instill more critical-thinking and problem-solving skills in their students across diverse subjects.

These schools are using TAP to help create a common vision and common language around what great instruction looks like. Teachers from each of the five participating TAP schools overwhelmingly report that this process has increased collegiality in their schools.

Another aspect of this initiative is the development of expertise within the school faculty itself, rather than relying primarily on outside experts. Teachers can now grow into leaders while remaining connected to the classroom. This provides professional growth opportunities for individual teachers while creating the expertise needed to make school-based professional development high quality and effective for every teacher. As a result, retention has increased significantly as teachers feel supported in working with a diverse range of Minnesota students and families, many of whom face barriers to learning.

Further, Minnesota educators recognize the overall impact that TAP has had on their schools, as one teacher states, “TAP brought a shift in focus at our school, from talking about what I did in my classroom to what the kids learned or didn’t in my class. I used to say ‘I taught that...’ but now I realize it isn’t about whether I think I did it, it’s whether the kids learned it. Now I look for that. I look for kids to show me their learning instead of checking off that I taught it.”

Minnesota principals agree that TAP practices have supported teachers to be more effective as reflected in this 2015 survey.

ADMINISTRATORS REPORT TAP’S IMPACT

1. TAP professional growth activities improve my school’s teachers’ instructional practice.
2. The TAP teacher evaluation system improves my school’s teachers’ instructional practice.
3. My teachers are more effective.

MINNESOTA SUMMARY
KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS: MINNESOTA

Educator Effectiveness

In the first full year of implementation, the TAP System made a difference in the instructional skills of educators across Minnesota partner schools.

- **+12%** The percentage by which teachers with an overall SKR score of 2.5 or higher increased.
- **+10%** The percentage by which administrators increased their leadership skill scores.
- **91%** The percentage of Minnesota teachers who said they feel more effective using TAP practices.

One principal said, “TAP has changed how I hire and keep my teachers. Now I have applicants applying to my school because it is a TAP school. I use the TAP rubric to help me sort through candidates now, so I’m keeping better teachers and hiring better teachers—that’s how our school is changing.”

Student Achievement

With new ideas, energy and commitment, Minnesota TAP schools are changing every classroom in every school. Kids are achieving more, faster—and teachers are learning, growing and improving together. By redefining educational excellence in Minnesota TAP schools, the students’ futures are looking brighter every day.

- At Hmong College Prep Academy, the high school continues to increase in achievement and nearly reached the level of a Reward School in 2014-2015.
- At Learning for Leadership, math MCA scores increased in 2014-15 by 10 percent.
- At Partnership Academy, 100 percent of the teachers met the criteria for classroom skills, knowledge and responsibilities in 2014-15.
- At Sojourner Truth Academy, the school-wide learning growth score has increased every year beginning in 2012.
- At Stonebridge World School, achievement gaps have been closed.

“During my time as a mentor teacher, I have used the best practices model to enhance my teaching to incorporate an engaging and active student-centered classroom. Using the knowledge I’ve gained as a facilitator, I’ve been able to challenge students to be engaged both inside and outside of our classroom walls using a blended learning model.”

—Nicholas Fabeck
Mentor Teacher • Hmong College Prep Academy

MINNESOTA SUMMARY
The results in Minnesota are consistent with improvements in educator and student achievement throughout NIET’s partner TAP schools across the nation.

**NATIONALLY, TAP SCHOOLS OUTPERFORM COMPARISON SCHOOLS**
Percentage of schools achieving one year or more growth

- Comparison Schools: 77%
- First-Year TAP Schools: 79%
- TAP Schools: 88%

**NATIONALLY, TAP SCHOOLS RETAIN MORE TEACHERS THAN COMPARISON SCHOOLS**
Percentage of teachers retained

- National Average: 84%
- Comparison Schools: 80%
- TAP Schools: 94%

**TEACHERS IMPROVE INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICE IN DISTRICTS IMPLEMENTING TAP**

Using something discussed in pre- or post-evaluation session

- Week 1: 42%
- Week 12: 60%

Receiving classroom support or individual coaching from leadership team

- Week 1: 37%
- Week 12: 50%

c. Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey (https://ssiproject.rutgers.edu/about-us/overview/)
4. **Press Releases**

5. **Roles and Responsibilities Documents**

6. **Websites**

7. **Focus Groups**
   a. Life School of Dallas: Executive Summary of PEAK Focus Groups (https://tifcommunity.org/sites/default/files/focus_group_report_0.pdf)
A newsletter can be a terrific way to share ongoing information about your TIF program with a variety of stakeholders. Several current and past grantees have used electronic and/or hardcopy newsletters as a way to help grow stakeholders’ understanding of the initiative, share changes or updates to the program, celebrate milestones, and provide contact information.

There are a variety of types of information to include in a newsletter and even more potential ways to organize or arrange the information. The following page provides one example of the types of information to include in a newsletter as well as some suggestions for layout. This example assumes that the newsletter is being disseminated on a regular basis (e.g., monthly or quarterly).

Newsletters can and should be disseminated widely and be available in a central location on the program website for long-term access. Newsletters should be approximately three pages.
Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) Program Title

Introduction
Start the newsletter off with a few sentences about what is included.

Latest News
Consider focusing the first main section of the newsletter on the latest relevant news or information you want to share with newsletter recipients.

In-Depth Discussion
Each edition of the newsletter should include one in-depth section that is longer than the other sections focused on a specific issue related to the program. Consider concentrating the in-depth section on an aspect of the program that is new or modified or an aspect of the program that has generated a lot of recent questions.

Participant Profile or Q & A
Programs can “come to life” if stakeholders are able to learn about how the work is being implemented in the field by actual people. Consider including a section in every newsletter that profiles the work of one of the teacher or leader program participants or is a Q & A with a program administrator.

Resources
Include links to relevant and helpful tools and resources.

Conclusion
Conclude each newsletter with an announcement or highlight of work that will take place between this newsletter and the next one and what might be covered in the next edition of the newsletter.

Contact Information: Always include somewhere prominently on the newsletter an email and/or phone number that readers can use to reliably contact program staff.
Developing a Plan to Communicate With the Media About Your TIF Program: A Template

Introduction

Developing a working relationship with the local media is critical. The media can either help or hinder the success of your TIF program, particularly in or near large media markets. This template provides you a variety of prompts you can use to develop a media plan around your TIF program as well as several examples of how past TIF grantees have addressed this issue.

Step 1. State the Vision and Mission for the TIF Program and Three to Five Complementary Sound Bites to the Vision and Mission.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example: An education system that is supported by effective teachers and leaders for all students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mission</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example: To collaboratively design teacher and principal evaluation and compensation systems that reward leadership, innovation, and student learning and growth.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sound Bites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example: “The Texas TIF Project gives our district the opportunity to become leaders in the effort to increase educator effectiveness through job-embedded professional development, as well as reform our educator evaluation system,” said Superintendent Dr. LaTonya Goffney. “By involving educators in every step of the development process, we can build a system that is unique to the needs of our schools and student populations and garner great support from teachers and principals. We are excited to be part of this important endeavor that will ensure that all children in COCISD have access to a high-quality education.” (<a href="http://www.txcee.org/wp-content/uploads/COCISD-TIF-4-press-release.pdf">http://www.txcee.org/wp-content/uploads/COCISD-TIF-4-press-release.pdf</a>)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Step 2. List Newspaper, Radio, Television, and Social Media Outlets (and Contact If Known) That May Generate or Be Used to Generate Stories About the TIF Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Print or Online Newspaper</th>
<th>Radio</th>
<th>Television</th>
<th>Social Media</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chattanooga-Times Free Press</td>
<td>“The Morning Press” (WGOW, Chattanooga)</td>
<td>SCETV (South Carolina Educational Television)</td>
<td>Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Step 3. Decide How You Will Communicate With the Media Outlets Described in Step 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media Outlet</th>
<th>TIF Program Person or Key Contact Responsible for Communicating With This Media Outlet (including initial communication/launch, feedback loops, and monitoring reactions)</th>
<th>How Will You Use This Media Outlet to Drive Communication About the TIF Program?</th>
<th>What Type(s) of Communication (phone call or group conference call, email, share news release, in-person meeting, op-ed, other) Are Appropriate for This Media Outlet?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Chattanooga-Times Free Press | All communication to this media outlet conducted by or vetted by TIF project director | • Share press release for project launch  
• Invite to conference call for press.  
• Invite to conference call for press before the release of each evaluation report and major program milestones  
• Coordinate op-eds and letters to the editor | • Press release, op-eds, conference calls, letters to editor, email |

---

1 [https://www.engageny.org/sites/default/files/resource/attachments/cecrstakeholderengagement.pdf](https://www.engageny.org/sites/default/files/resource/attachments/cecrstakeholderengagement.pdf)

2 An example news release can be found in Attachment C.

3 An example Op-Ed can be found in Attachment D.
Step 4. Develop a Timeline for When to Interact With the Media Outlet Described in Steps 2 and 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media Outlet</th>
<th>Points in the Program to Communicate With Media Outlet (i.e., launch, key milestones, end of each year)</th>
<th>Specific Dates/Months/Quarters to Communicate With Media Outlet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chattanooga-Times Free Press</td>
<td>Project launch, major project milestones, and evaluation report release</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Teachers take active role in focus on training

Posted on August 31, 2011, by David Connerty-Marin

Schools for Excellence initiative piloted at 18 Maine schools with focus on training and incentives

AUGUSTA — Teachers at 18 schools in five Maine school districts are participating in focused and integrated professional development, and developing new evaluation and performance-based pay systems this fall. The goal: improved achievement for their 5,500 students.

The Maine Schools for Excellence initiative ties together intensive professional development for the 450 teachers in five school districts with meaningful performance evaluations developed largely by the teachers themselves and incentives and stipends that reward educators for increased student learning.

“The most important thing we can do to improve student achievement is to put an effective teacher in every classroom,” said Gov. Paul LePage, who has made teacher preparation, effectiveness and accountability an education priority. “I am confident the schools and teachers in this program will provide a model for others to follow.”

Maine Education Commissioner Stephen Bowen said the initiative is only one piece of a growing focus on teacher effectiveness that includes the state’s School Improvement Grant schools, other efforts to develop evaluation systems that include student progress as one of a variety of measures, and improvements to teacher preparation programs.

“We expect a lot of our teachers and if we are to hold them accountable, as we should, we must also provide them with the right training and fair tools for measuring success,” Bowen said. “The professionals participating in this project will blaze the trail for others interested in using assessment and student learning data to help teachers help their students to succeed.”

The initiative is a five-year pilot project of the Maine Department of Education and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education’s Teacher Incentive Fund. The Maine Department of Education is working closely with the participating school districts: Lewiston Public Schools; School Administrative District 24, Van Buren; and Regional School Unit 12, Whitefield; RSU 55, Hiram; and RSU 74, Anson.

This fall, teachers will participate in Take One!, a course of professional development offered through the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards that moves teachers toward earning the National Board certification, an advanced and nationally recognized teaching credential.

https://mainedoenews.net/2011/08/31/schools-for-excellence/
Also this year, teachers and administrators will set “stretch goals” for improving student achievement. When schools as a whole meet the goals, teachers and administrators become eligible to receive bonuses. Teachers can receive up to $7,500 in incentives and stipends offered through the Schools for Excellence program.

In subsequent years, teachers and administrators will be eligible for incentives based on individual performance. The measures for these incentives will be developed through a collaboration among all members of the school community, including teachers, the school board, parents, and administrators.

“Our goal is to improve educator effectiveness and student learning by building a system based on sound measurement, frequent feedback, targeted professional development, and rewards for effective teaching,” said Scott Harrison, the Schools for Excellence project director.

More details about the initiative are available below and on the Maine Schools for Excellence web page: http://maine.gov/education/educator-effectiveness/excellence.

David Connerty-Marin | Maine Department of Education | 207-624-6880

Participating Schools

Lewiston Public Schools
Farwell Elementary School, Pre-K–6
Geiger Elementary School, Pre-K–6
Lewiston Middle School, 7–8
Longley Elementary School, Pre-K–6
McMahon Elementary School, Pre-K–6
Montello Elementary School, Pre-K–6

Maine School Administrative District 24
Van Buren Elementary School, Pre-K–8

Regional School Unit 12
Somerville Elementary School, K–5
Whitefield Elementary School, K–8
Wiscasset Primary School, K–4
Wiscasset Middle School, 5–8

Regional School Unit 55
Baldwin Consolidated School, K–4
Cornish Elementary School, K–4
Sacopee Valley Middle School, Hiram, 5–8
South Hiram Elementary School, K–4

Regional School Unit 74
Carrabec Community School, North Anson, K–8
Garret Schenck School, Anson, Pre-K–4
Solon Elementary School, Pre-K–5
More Information: Questions and Answers

The Maine Schools for Excellence involves more than 450 educators of 5,500 students in intensive professional development; developing constructive performance evaluations; and building performance-based pay systems that encourage effective teaching, continued professional growth and improved student learning.

1. What measures of students’ academic performance will schools use as they design their evaluation and performance-based pay systems?

Ultimately, schools will use a variety measures they determine to be valid and reliable as part of any decision on teacher evaluation and compensation. Those measures will likely be customized for each teacher based on grade level and content area.

While the performance pay systems haven’t been finalized, they could take into account state assessments like the SAT and the New England Common Assessment Program, and classroom assessments like Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills, the Developmental Reading Assessment and computer-adaptive tests designed by the Northwest Evaluation Association.

Other job performance indicators could include classroom observations, portfolios of teaching accomplishments, student surveys, and graduation and attendance rates.

2. Have the schools participating in the initiative had to renegotiate collective bargaining agreements with teachers to allow performance-based pay?

Performance-based pay systems impact the collective bargaining agreements currently in place in most of the participating Schools for Excellence districts. As a result, school districts are working to develop written Memoranda of Agreement with their teachers’ bargaining units to address these effects and improve collaboration.

One participating district, Regional School Unit 74 of Anson, recently negotiated a new contract with teachers that allows them to choose between a performance-based salary track and the traditional salary track based on years of service.

3. Which teachers will participate in the professional development associated with Schools for Excellence?

All teachers and a number of principals at the 18 participating schools will participate in Take One!, a rigorous, job-embedded professional development experience offered through the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Teachers can apply their Take One! work toward the involved process of earning their National Board certification, an advanced credential that indicates a teacher has met a set of exacting standards customized by grade level and subject area.

Schools for Excellence teachers are eligible for $500 stipends when they submit the teaching portfolios they develop as part of Take One! to the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards for evaluation. The teachers who submit this work are also eligible for three graduate-level credits.
4. What steps are Schools for Excellence districts following to set up performance-based pay systems?

Schools for Excellence participants are using a gradual approach to develop and implement new evaluation methods and performance-based pay.

This fall marks the start of Take One! professional development and the design process for the evaluation and performance pay systems. The design of each system will vary by district and be developed largely by district steering committees that include teachers, administrators, teachers’ association representatives, school board members, parents, community members and others.

The professional development, meaningful evaluations and compensation system are meant to form a continuous loop of feedback and support to help teachers continuously improve their craft. The systems are based on regular measurement; intensive and focused professional development; and fair and sensible recognition and reward.

5. Is Schools for Excellence a project that will transfer to other schools and districts?

The Teacher Incentive Fund grant that is funding the Schools for Excellence initiative does not provide for scaling up the initiative. The grant does, however, require that districts develop plans to sustain the new systems they’re developing long-term. The participating districts also expect to share the knowledge they gain from their experiences with other districts as they go about doing similar work.
Op-Ed: Leadership Program Good for all Teachers

By Brad Buck (Iowa Director of Education) and Chris Coffelt

From the Des Moines Register

**TAP leaders provide support for colleagues, create collaborative teams**

One of the most promising new initiatives in the recently passed Iowa education reform bill is a funding stream for teacher leadership roles at about $300 per student.

As recipients of a federal Teacher Incentive Fund grant, the Saydel and Central Decatur school districts have been working to create teacher leadership roles that involve real and meaningful work to drive improved classroom instruction. Based on our experience, we believe the teacher career ladder is going to be one of the most powerful tools we have for improving schools in Iowa.

Saydel is located just outside Des Moines, and Central Decatur is a rural district in the south-central part of the state. Each of our districts worked over the last several years with teachers and principals to identify key goals. Each of our districts identified higher levels of classroom instruction as the most critical component of improvement.

**Having tried many types** of professional development without seeing significant or sustained impact on teaching practice, we were ready for a new approach.

We partnered with the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching, which oversees a national teacher effectiveness reform called TAP: The System for Teacher and Student Advancement. Together we applied for a federal Teacher Incentive Fund grant with the goal of putting our teachers and principals at the heart of efforts to drive higher levels of instruction in every classroom, even those of our most effective teachers.

The TAP system increases the skills of all teachers in a school by using teacher leaders in that school to raise instructional excellence across the faculty. Teacher leaders in each school form a leadership team with administrators responsible for setting school goals, providing school-based, job-embedded professional development and conducting multiple performance evaluations of each teacher.

This creates a more cohesive and coherent approach to professional development based on the needs of our students and takes into account the specific instructional needs of their teachers. Perhaps the most important aspect of this approach is the way it enables teachers themselves to lead the effort to redefine instructional excellence at a higher level, and to embed these higher standards in school culture, conversations and practices.

At any one time, about 20 to 25 percent of teachers in a school are serving as master or mentor teachers. Teachers must apply for these positions, and demonstrate effective instruction themselves, as well as an ability to coach and support other adults. They have ongoing training and accountability to ensure that they are providing high quality support for their peers.

Most critical of all, we use time within the school day for professional learning “clusters” and ongoing coaching in classrooms so professional growth is a part of everyone’s job. Standards for teaching are spelled out and used in evaluation and professional support, creating a common language around excellent instruction.

This approach is working, not just in our districts, but in schools across 10 states demonstrating significant, sustained increases in teacher skill and student achievement growth compared to comparable schools. Each of our communities looked carefully at TAP and visited schools and districts in other states using this approach, particularly in rural areas.

Teachers in our districts voted with more than 90 percent overall approval to bring TAP to their school. The power of this teacher-centered approach was described by Saydel’s Dia Fenton, a math teacher serving now as a master teacher.

“By using teacher leaders in each school to provide professional support to colleagues, we are creating powerful collaborative teams to build instructional excellence across the entire faculty,” Fenton said. “I am excited about the impact on student success.”

Staff in our districts have been energized by this renewed focus on school improvement. We believe our work will not only benefit our students, but create meaningful change in the way teachers approach teaching and learning.

We believe all school leaders share this common goal and look forward to supporting this movement in the state of Iowa.
The Purpose of This Template

• This template was produced to help TIF grantees coordinate their communications plan. Along with general slide layout suggestions, this deck also contains suggestions about what content to include in presentations and suggestions about how to format some of the information that you share.

• **WHILE** your communications plan should include using a presentation for different audiences – internal and external, for teachers, for central office staff, for sharing with the public – the same template should be used to create each of those presentations.

Tips for Using the Template

• **Starting Out:** Save the template to a folder or your desktop. Rename the template. View the slide options, which appear in the left column. Click on a slide in this column to begin adding your content.
Tips for Using This Template

- **Inserting a Slide:** Go to the Home tab. Click on the drop-down menu beside New Slide, and select the layout that you need (See Figure A: red circle.). You can also insert new slides by holding down the CTRL key and typing “m”.  
  
- **Changing the Layout of an Existing Slide:** Click on the slide, choose Layout in the drop-down menu, and select the desired layout; or select the slide, go to the Home tab, click on Layout, and select the desired layout. (See Figure A: red arrow.)

Tips for Using This Template

- **Inserting your graphic into the slide master:**
  - Click on the View tab at the top of the screen and select Slide Master from the menu. (See Figure B: Blue arrow.)  
  - From the slide master menu, select Insert and then select Picture. Locate your district logo and insert it on each of the master slides in the correct position. Remember to re-size the logo to fit with the design of the slides. (See Figure C: Orange arrow.)  
  - Click the Slide Master tab and select Close Master View. (See Figure D: Black arrow.)
Tips for Using This Template

- **Inserting a Table, Graph, or Picture:** Create directly in PowerPoint by clicking on the desired icon in the object placeholder box. (See green arrow in Figure E below.) Also, copy and paste graph data from Excel instead of embedding Excel graphs directly to minimize file size.

![Figure E](image)

Using This Slide Deck

- **There are two ways to use the slides in this deck:**
  1. Delete the “intro” slides (slides 1 – 6) and copy and paste your content directly into the slides that are provided. You can add additional slides as needed.
  2. Use this deck as a guide to create your own presentation. You can review the highlights, pointers, and suggestions provided and use them as a scaffold as you create your own presentation.

- **Note that some slides provide examples of what your content might include. These are noted with the word “Example” in yellow. While it is important that you include the general topics outlined in this template, you do not need to include every example given.**
2015–2016 Compensation Plan Overview

- Subheadings provide space for both the timeline and the overall goal of the project.
- Include your district-specific graphic that will be used throughout the presentation.

Program Vision and Mission

The mission articulates what your district does and your overall intention.
The vision describes how you are planning to achieve the mission.

- Use your district’s mission and vision statements, or if your program has its own vision statement, use that here.
- Center the mission and vision on the slide to have them stand out.
Purpose

- In order to attract and retain the most qualified teachers, our district will reward those teachers who.
- In order to ensure that the hiring process for new teachers reflects our desire to focus on student growth we will implement.

Summary of TIF Program Plans

- List who is a part of the TIF program
  - Schools
  - Teachers
  - Administrators
  - Central office departments/staff
- List the timeline for the TIF project
- List what the requirements for those educators will be
- List how much the budget for programs is going to total
Integration With Our System

- List **which** offices are directly connected to the work and **which** personnel are heading up the work

Highlight how the TIF work is going to integrate and affect departments across the district and how this work aligns with the goals of the district and state.

Be specific about which staff are going to support the work.

---

Example: Summary of TIF Program Plans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Additional Roles</th>
<th>Professional Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classification 1 Teachers</td>
<td>$1000 increase</td>
<td>Based on final rating</td>
<td>$500 MAX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classification 2 Teachers</td>
<td>Performance Stipend</td>
<td>Teacher Leaders</td>
<td>Improvement Stipend</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Including a table is another way to provide a summary of the TIF program. In your table make sure that colors are used to help differentiate between different parts of the program. It is best to use dark backgrounds and white text when presenting.
Program Details (Divider Slide)

Who Will Be Affected?

- Describe who will be included in the TIF work
- Include:
  - Which schools and how/why they were selected
  - Which educator groups and how/why they were selected
  - Accurate job titles and classifications
  - Any qualifiers that were used in selecting educators such as years of experience or outcomes of evaluation processes
Example: School Selection Process

- Identified schools that met the “90/90/90” criteria
- Four schools were selected:
  - East Hill Elementary School
  - West Hill Elementary School
  - Central Middle School
  - North East High School

Be clear in the language about how schools were selected and list the specific schools included in the TIF work.

Example: Teachers Who Opt-In

- Will enter into the alternative salary schedule at the step that is closest (but not below) their current salary
- Future steps will be earned through performance and added to base pay:
  - Level 5: Move 3 steps, earn $1065
  - Level 4: Move 2 steps, earn $710
  - Level 3: Move 1 step, earn $355
- Will not be allowed to opt-out at any time
- Will be eligible for the bonuses and stipends

This slide makes good use of bullets and is easy to follow.

Keep text clear and concise. If you find that there is too much text, consider adding additional slides.
Example: Eligibility Rules

- Employee must not miss more than 12 days or 95% of the remaining days from the date of hire prior to October 1st to be eligible for the bonus award. (This particular eligibility rule does not apply to the base pay increases.)
- Employees must earn a 3 or higher on the TEAM composite evaluation score. (This is the Educator Effectiveness Score.)
- Employees who are currently employed must be in “good standing.” Good standing is interpreted as holding a valid transitional, apprentice or professional license by the first day of the second semester.
- Includes all certified staff who receive a TEAM score.
- Employees must be employed by October 1st to be eligible for a bonus award for the school year, even if the employee is employed in an earlier school year.
- Employees must be supervised and evaluated by the principal or his/her designee on the campus where they serve at least twice during the year.

While the information on this example slide is important, there is too much text. This slide needs to be broken up into multiple slides, and overall wording needs to be reduced. See the following slides as an example of how this can be presented more effectively.

Example: Eligibility Rules

- To be eligible, employees must:
  - Have fewer than 12 days of absence OR
  - Have better than 95% attendance from the date of hire (prior to Oct 1st)
  - Earn a 3 or higher on TEAM composite score
  - Be in “good standing”
  - Be employed by Oct 1 of this year
  - Be continually employed until the end of the year
  - Be supervised and evaluated by the principal (or designee) on the campus where they serve at least twice during the year
**Example: Good Standing**

- Good standing is defined as holding a valid transitional, apprentice or professional license by the first day of the second semester.

Additional information from the previous slide can be included on a separate slide. This allows for discussion of an important point of clarification.

---

**Example: 2015–16 Alternative Salary Schedule**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STEPS</th>
<th>BS ADV</th>
<th>BS ADV</th>
<th>BS ADV</th>
<th>BS ADV</th>
<th>BS ADV</th>
<th>BS ADV</th>
<th>BS ADV</th>
<th>BS ADV</th>
<th>BS ADV</th>
<th>BS ADV</th>
<th>BS ADV</th>
<th>BS ADV</th>
<th>BS ADV</th>
<th>BS ADV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>34725</td>
<td>37075</td>
<td>40730</td>
<td>43035</td>
<td>46375</td>
<td>48325</td>
<td>50345</td>
<td>52235</td>
<td>54045</td>
<td>55855</td>
<td>57665</td>
<td>59475</td>
<td>61285</td>
<td>63095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>35080</td>
<td>38000</td>
<td>40850</td>
<td>43005</td>
<td>46325</td>
<td>48280</td>
<td>50295</td>
<td>52285</td>
<td>54200</td>
<td>56125</td>
<td>58050</td>
<td>60075</td>
<td>62000</td>
<td>64025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>35435</td>
<td>38335</td>
<td>40800</td>
<td>43000</td>
<td>46305</td>
<td>48260</td>
<td>50270</td>
<td>52260</td>
<td>54200</td>
<td>56125</td>
<td>58050</td>
<td>60075</td>
<td>62000</td>
<td>64025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>35790</td>
<td>38740</td>
<td>40780</td>
<td>43040</td>
<td>46315</td>
<td>48250</td>
<td>50265</td>
<td>52250</td>
<td>54200</td>
<td>56125</td>
<td>58050</td>
<td>60075</td>
<td>62000</td>
<td>64025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>36145</td>
<td>39045</td>
<td>40750</td>
<td>43010</td>
<td>46305</td>
<td>48230</td>
<td>50255</td>
<td>52240</td>
<td>54200</td>
<td>56125</td>
<td>58050</td>
<td>60075</td>
<td>62000</td>
<td>64025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>36500</td>
<td>39340</td>
<td>40720</td>
<td>43000</td>
<td>46285</td>
<td>48210</td>
<td>50245</td>
<td>52230</td>
<td>54200</td>
<td>56125</td>
<td>58050</td>
<td>60075</td>
<td>62000</td>
<td>64025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>36855</td>
<td>39635</td>
<td>40690</td>
<td>42990</td>
<td>46260</td>
<td>48185</td>
<td>50230</td>
<td>52215</td>
<td>54200</td>
<td>56125</td>
<td>58050</td>
<td>60075</td>
<td>62000</td>
<td>64025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>37210</td>
<td>39930</td>
<td>40650</td>
<td>42960</td>
<td>46235</td>
<td>48160</td>
<td>50215</td>
<td>52200</td>
<td>54200</td>
<td>56125</td>
<td>58050</td>
<td>60075</td>
<td>62000</td>
<td>64025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>37565</td>
<td>40225</td>
<td>40610</td>
<td>42930</td>
<td>46210</td>
<td>48135</td>
<td>50195</td>
<td>52180</td>
<td>54200</td>
<td>56125</td>
<td>58050</td>
<td>60075</td>
<td>62000</td>
<td>64025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>37920</td>
<td>40520</td>
<td>40570</td>
<td>42900</td>
<td>46185</td>
<td>48110</td>
<td>50175</td>
<td>52160</td>
<td>54200</td>
<td>56125</td>
<td>58050</td>
<td>60075</td>
<td>62000</td>
<td>64025</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Avoid using tables where too much information is presented to be easily readable. Consider creating attached handouts that can be used with the presentation if this type of information is needed.

For the slide presentation, it might be helpful to select a few examples from the table to highlight the overall impact of the program and then refer to the handout.
District Coordination

Example: Reflecting the Vision

- By creating an integrated management system that helps track teacher professional development, we are working to ensure that our district can continue to employ the best and most effective educators to prepare all students to be 21st century learners, leaders, and community members.

Connecting the purpose of the TIF work to the district (or state) mission and vision are key.
Example: Connecting the Dots

- We will use the new data system to track all professional learning activities for all classroom teachers.
- We will use the data system to make teachers aware of professional learning activities that best meet their needs based on grade level and content area.

Expand on the connections the TIF work is allowing to happen within the district.
Where appropriate, include specific department and staffing information.

Timeline

Include major milestones in your timeline as well as the dates for specific deliverables.
**Example: Timeline**

- **Sept:** Identify and recruit teachers
- **October:** Interview all candidates, Send letters of acceptance to teachers and principals
- **November:** Conduct Level 1 training for all principals, Conduct Level 1 training for all candidates

Timelines can be displayed using “smart art,” which allows for an easier to read slide. For each step of the timeline, you should have specific measurable steps outlined.

---

**Example: Timeline**

- **December:**
  - Complete staffing list
  - Send out newsletter

- **January:**
  - Hold training for teacher-leaders
  - Post videos of teacher conferences to internal community of practice website

- **February:**
  - Complete classroom visits
  - Send out final postobservation notes

This is another way to use “smart art” to present a timeline.
Example: Total TIF Budget

- Total TIF grant of $1.6 million to cover three years between 2015 and 2018
- Training for teachers: $160,000
- Upgrades to data systems: $240,000
- Training for district staff: $84,000

Include the total funding as well as the timeline for the grant. Include target spending by category.
Summary

Make sure to include a few summary slides at the end to highlight the most important parts of the program or project.
Questions?

- If presenting to a live audience, make sure to have places during the presentation where table discussions can take place and where audience questions can be shared
- If posting the presentation online, create a list of FAQs that can be included with the presentation

Please contact

- Make sure to include contact information