

New Mexico LEND Program Capstone Project

Background

Beginning Fall semester 2016, the NM LEND Program will implement a new requirement for LEND Trainees who are in graduate programs or are Family Trainees or Advocates.¹ The Capstone Project replaces separate research and leadership projects.

Description

The Capstone project addresses a practical problem in the world of developmental disabilities on an organizational, program or policy level. The project is an opportunity for Trainees to demonstrate the knowledge and skills they have learned in the LEND program, in prior or current academic programs of study, in professional or volunteer positions they have held, or in their life experiences as family members of people with disabilities or advocates. Capstone projects are expected to make a contribution to solving a real-world problem. While the topic and format are flexible, Trainees are expected to demonstrate mastery of three types of skills.

- **Problem-Framing:** The Capstone Project is focused on a real-world or practical problem in the areas of neurodevelopmental and related disabilities. The first step in designing the Capstone Project is to develop an appropriate question or problem that the project will address. The question may be linked to a particular organization (e.g., working with a public, private or non-profit organization to address an issue or problem within that organization); a particular policy or program (e.g., examining gaps in a current policy or program and recommending solutions); evaluation (e.g., evaluating the efficacy of a particular program or intervention); a topic stemming from a clinical setting (e.g., clinical practice involving evidence-based practice; or to a larger issue within the content areas contained in the LEND program (e.g., a systematic analysis of the “state of the field” in a content area relevant to the LEND program.)
- **Investigation:** Trainees come from a variety of disciplines, each of which has different requirements and expectations concerning research-related knowledge and skills. Despite these differences, Trainees are expected to use systematic investigation skills as part of the Capstone. These could include formal research methodologies such as analysis of secondary data, surveys, interviews or focus groups. They could also include searching for “best practice” programs or services that could be adopted in New Mexico, or systematically and critically evaluating the literature on a given topic.
- **Personal Leadership and Communication:** Each Trainee will make a formal presentation to Trainees and LEND faculty at the end of their second semester. In addition, Trainees must demonstrate skills in effectively communicating the results of their Capstone projects to a wider audience. This can take many forms, including making an oral and/or written report

¹ Doctoral or post-Doctoral Trainees have a separate set of requirements.

to the organization with which they are working on the project, perhaps with relevant documents (tip sheets, Infographics, etc.); a presentation to relevant policymakers; an oral or poster presentation at a conference or meeting; or authoring or co-authoring a journal article.

Trainees may work by themselves, or, if the project is sufficiently large, may work with another Trainee. In this case, the Capstone proposal must clearly delineate the role of each Trainee and his or her contribution to the final product.

Mentorship

Trainees will work with their assigned faculty mentor to develop the Capstone project proposal. In some cases, the faculty mentor may not be the individual who provides primary guidance on the project. In this case, the proposal must be formally agreed to by the primary Capstone mentor and it is expected that the primary mentor will provide regular updates on progress to the LEND faculty mentor. In all cases, the LEND faculty member will work with the Trainee over the course of the project to assess progress, address gaps or problems as they arise, and provide guidance as the project progresses.

LEND faculty mentors must indicate their acceptance of the proposal. In cases in which another individual serves as the primary mentor, that individual must also approve the proposal before the project can begin.

Links to Academic Requirements or Work Done in Other Organizations

Trainees are encouraged to incorporate work required by their academic programs and/or work they are doing with an organization as a staff member or volunteer into their Capstone project. Examples include final requirements for a graduate degree, academic coursework, internships they are completing as part of the academic program, or tasks they have been assigned at organizations at which they work or volunteer. However, the requirements of the Capstone project as laid out in this document must be met.

Process

Each Trainee will work with their LEND faculty mentor to develop a proposal for the Capstone project. The proposal must contain the following elements:

- **Topic or Question:** a succinct statement of the topic or question, usually in one sentence.
- **Background and Significance:** a brief summary of the background of the problem or topic. Why is it important? What are the practical implications of addressing this topic (e.g., what can potentially be accomplished if the project is completed? Why is it worth spending sev-

eral months focusing on this topic?). If the topic is related to an organization, a brief summary of the organization and the significance of the topic for the organization should be included.

- **Methods, Timeline and Milestones:** What are the methods that will be used to address the topic? Each major step in the process of completing the Capstone should be described, along with an approximate time line. The time line should contain major milestones over the course of the project that can be used to assess progress and demonstrate that the project is feasible and can be accomplished within the time and other resources available to the Trainee.
- **Products:** In addition to the formal presentation to LEND Trainees and faculty, the proposal should describe the other forms of dissemination that will occur, including specific information on the product or event.
- **Links to Other Projects:** If the Capstone project is being used to partially fulfill requirements of an academic program or work in an organization as a staff member or volunteer, the proposal must indicate this and discuss the overlap as well as differences.
- **Joint Projects:** If two Trainees are working on a single Capstone project, or if the project involves individuals not part of LEND (e.g., serving on a Task Force or committee), the proposal must clearly identify the role that the Trainee will play, including specific methods, activities and products for which he or she will be responsible. Products must also include information on joint authorship or contributions by other individuals.

Feedback from Other LEND Trainees and Faculty

As part of the process of preparing the project proposal, each Trainee will produce a summary of his or her project that will be distributed to other LEND Trainees and faculty members. Each Trainee will make a brief presentation during the proposal development process for feedback. This feedback can then be incorporated into the proposal as it is developed and finalized.

Time Line

- Proposal Developed and Approved: first two months after start of program
- Project proposal presentation made: within one month of program start to elicit feedback from peers and faculty
- Project substantively completed: at least two months before end of program
- LEND Presentation: last two weeks of program
- Other Products and Presentations: as described in the proposal