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# The Change Agent States for Diversity Project: The Catalyst Team Approach

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**Abstract**
The Change Agent States for Diversity is a consortium of several states dedicated to supporting greater cultural diversity in land-grant universities. The overall goal is to build the capacity of land-grant universities to function inclusively and effectively in a multicultural world. This study reported here evaluated the progress of the project. This article reports findings from interviews with project coordinators in each state and focuses on the value of the Catalyst Team approach. Conclusions suggest that efforts of the Catalyst Teams are strengthening the capacity of the individual state organizations to create change around issues of diversity.

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The mission of the Cooperative Extension System's Emphasis on Diversity and the strategic plan is to achieve and sustain pluralism as an integral part of every aspect of Extension: mission and vision; work force; programs; audiences; and relationships with other people, groups, and organizations.

*Pathway to Diversity,* 1991, p. 8

## Introduction

The Change Agent States for Diversity (CASD) project was initiated by Cooperative Extension (Change Agent, 2003) in response to a number of circumstances. Among these were the growing demographic diversity of our nation (2000 Census Bureau), the persistence of inequities among more powerful and less powerful groups in the workplace (Linnehen & Konrad, 1999), and disparities among historically white and other land-grant universities (Harris & Worthen, 2004). In this article, diversity refers to differences based on identity group memberships, including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, and social class.

CASD is a consortium of seven states dedicated to supporting greater cultural diversity in land-grant universities by bringing the needed technical skills and training to each of the member states. CASD project states include: Arizona, Colorado, Missouri, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, and Pennsylvania. In Missouri and North Carolina, both the 1862 and the 1890 institutions participated in the project. Through this collaborative approach, the consortium will develop successful models and strategies that can be applied throughout the system to bring about organizational change.

In 2004, seven additional states joined the project. These seven states were named the Change Agent States for Engagement (CASE). They include Delaware, Louisiana, Mississippi (each with both 1862 and 1890 institutions), New Mexico, South Dakota, Utah, and Washington. Teams in the CASE states are being mentored by teams in the CASD states.

The overall goal of the CASD project is to build the capacity of land-grant universities to function inclusively and effectively in an increasingly multicultural world. Additionally, the project aims to set standards and implement a vision for supporting healthy, thriving, culturally diverse communities through Extension, research, and academic programs. This project is supported by funding from USDA.

The framework of the project is built on four strategies: leadership development, catalyst teams, diversity coordinators, and organizational climate and profile assessments. An earlier *Journal of Extension* article, "A Snapshot of the Change Agent States For Diversity Project" <http://www.joe.org/joe/2005february/a5.shtml>, focused on findings related to key administrator interviews. This article focuses on the Catalyst Team approach to accomplishing diversity goals within the CASD states. For a more detailed description of the Project objectives, please refer to the first article.

The Catalyst Team in each state is an integral part of the CASD Project. While each state works individually to address diversity issues within their state, the collaborative approach of all project states working together is intended to produce achievements for the extension system that move far beyond what each state could attain alone.

Clegg, Kornberger, and Pitis (2005) state that "collaboration is typically designed to either advance a shared vision or to resolve a conflict. It usually results in either an exchange of information or a joint agreement or commitment to action between two or more parties, such as organizations" (p. 495).

Inter-organizational collaboration and networks have become increasingly important for organizations" (Clegg et al, 2005). Oliver (1990) distinguishes six reasons why organizations might collaborate with other organizations:

Necessity--to meet legal or regulatory requirements

Asymmetry--to exercise control and power over another organization

Reciprocity--to benefit by joining forces

Efficiency--to improve organizational performance through collaboration

Stability--to maintain a level of stability otherwise unreachable

Legitimacy--to collaborate in order to legitimize their own business

Clegg et al further suggest that collaboration among organizations help them to grow and expand. Specifically they state, "From a learning perspective, collaboration is an important means to access new knowledge and transfer skills that an organization lacks" (p. 360).

As depicted in the model (Figure 1), along with *accessibility* and *sustainability*, the Isoph Corporation considers *collaboration* as a key ingredient in the capacity to lead and manage change (Isoph, 2002). Interaction with other learners, tutors, instructors, and mentors is necessary to move beyond mere knowledge transfer to actual learning. Resource sharing across organizations encourages new perspectives and ideas (Isoph, 2002).

**Figure 1.**
Capacity to Initiate, Lead, and Manage Change (Printed with permission of Isoph Corporation)

sustainability

generative learning

integrative learning

integrative learning

**capacity to initiate, lead, and manage change**

generative learning

generative learning

collaboration — integrative learning → accessibility

# Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study reported here was to evaluate the progress of the Change Agent States for Diversity (CASD) Project. This evaluation assesses states' movement in three organizational change initiatives over a 5-year period of time: Organizational Profile, Valuing Differences Education, and Managing Diversity Skill Development. What role does the Catalyst Team play in helping the CASD consortium achieve its goals?

The Catalyst Team is the driving force within the CASD/CASE project in each state. The Catalyst Team makes recommendations and works with administration to implement diversity change strategies. This article focuses on the Catalyst Team initiative of the CASD (original seven) states.

The following key research questions guided this part of the study.

1. What is the composition of the catalyst team; what administrative positions are represented on the team; and how often do those in administrative positions participate in the meetings?

2. What type of financial support is provided by the organization for Catalyst Team activities?

3. What diversity-related recommendations have come from the Catalyst Team? Have these recommendations been implemented?

4. To what extent has the state's participation in the CASD Project had an impact on the state Cooperative Extension organization?

5. What benefits have been derived from working collaboratively as the CASD consortium, as opposed to working as individual states?

# Methods

The evaluation study was designed to collect data at two distinct points in time--at the beginning of the project (2002), and 5 years later (2007). A comparison of data collected at these two points in time will provide a basis for determining the effectiveness of the project toward achieving its goals. This article summarizes selected data collected during the first part of the project, representing baseline data.

Data were collected by telephone interview, allowing for more in-depth responses than are typically possible with quantitative methods. Interview and research questions (listed above) were developed by the researcher in consultation with members of the CASD consortium and two professors of Agricultural Sciences, both of whom have expertise in the area of research design and implementation. Open-ended questions were designed to reflect the objectives of the study. In addition, one Likert-type question was included. This item used the following scale: very high impact, high impact, some impact, not much impact, no impact.

A telephone interview was conducted with each of the State Coordinators in the Change Agent States for Diversity Project, nine from 1862 and two from 1890 organizations. A total of 11 state coordinators were interviewed.

Each Coordinator was contacted to schedule a telephone interview with the researcher. Once the date had been set, a copy of the interview questions was emailed to Coordinators for review prior to the interview. Interviews were between 45 and 75 minutes in duration. Each interview was tape recorded for accuracy of transcription. Data were analyzed using NVivo, a software package for qualitative data (NVivo, 2002). Using content-analysis procedures, the findings were separated into content-related categorizes, then grouped by theme.

# Findings

## Composition of the Catalyst Team

**Research Question 1**: What is the composition of the Catalyst Team in your state? How often does the team meet? What administrative positions are represented? And how often do those in administrative positions participate in the meetings?

Catalyst Teams ranged in size from 10 to 20 members. All teams were racially, ethnically, and gender diverse, depending upon the demographic make-up of the state. Additionally, Catalyst Teams included members who represented a diversity of program areas, organizational levels, county and campus positions, and university-wide positions. All Catalyst Teams included Extension administrators, Extension specialists, faculty, and county educators. Some teams included support staff, paraprofessionals, college communications staff, researchers, representatives from LGBT commissions, Native American programs, Migrant worker programs, and college students. One team included an ombudsman.

On all but one team, the top executive administrator of Cooperative Extension was a member of the Catalyst Team. Other administrative positions on various states' teams included Associate/Assistant Directors of Extension, Assistant Dean for Human Resources, Fiscal Officer, Head of Workforce Diversity, and University Diversity Leader.

Catalyst Teams are active. Most teams meet between two and four times per year face-to-face. Additionally, most meet monthly, bi-monthly, or quarterly by conference call for task group or committee work. One team meets monthly, rotating face-to-face, Interactive Television, and conference call venues. In a given state, meeting length ranges from most of a day to 3 days. Administrators are members in more than name only. Participation by administrators ranges from "most meetings" to "regular attendance." Extension Directors attend at least part of most meetings.

## Financial Support for the Catalyst Team

**Research Question 2**: What type of financial support is provided by the organization for Catalyst Team activities?

It is one thing to give verbal support for diversity efforts, but it is another to back up such efforts with financial support. In all seven states, financial support was provided for the work of the Catalyst Team. Expenses related to in-state Catalyst Team meetings such as meals, and in some states, travel and hotel expenses, were picked up by the director's office. Additionally, state coordinators, USDA representatives, and representatives of the Diversity Task Force generally meet twice a year as a consortium for planning and professional development. Travel expenses to these meetings are supported by the respective state organizations. Other support for teams and members has included:

- Registration fees and travel expenses to diversity conferences and workshops for individual members or groups

- Consultant fees for special diversity training for extension educators

- Diversity focused literature and educational resources

- Part-time or full-time state diversity coordinator positions

While most teams do not have a line-item budget, their expenses are compensated by the Director's office in each state.

## Recommendations from the Catalyst Team

**Research Question 3**: What recommendations have come from the Catalyst Team? Have these recommendations been implemented?

An important function of the Catalyst Team in each state is to make recommendations that help to move the organizational system to become more inclusive. The following are major recommendations from Catalyst Teams that **have been implemented** in one or more states. These recommendations are grouped into three major categories: policies, professional development, and recognition.

### *Policies*

- Formalize a system of exit interviews.

- Include sexual orientation in the EEO statement of the organization (where not previously included).

- Include a diversity component or expectation in every individual Plan of Work.

- Create a Cooperative Extension System Diversity Administrative Fellow Program to provide leadership growth experiences for current employees from diverse backgrounds.

- Require a minimum of 8 hours of diversity-focused professional development experiences for each Extension educator each year *and* document these experiences in the annual Staff Review Development Program.

### *Professional Development*

- Appoint a Catalyst Team member to each of the core area professional development planning committees and statewide conference planning teams to ensure the inclusion of diversity-focused workshops.

- Devote the statewide in-service program to the topic of diversity *and* make attendance mandatory for all Extension educators (recommended and implemented in one state).

- Integrate diversity issues into the on-going training offered to Extension employees.

### *Recognition*

- Increase opportunities for recognition of diversity accomplishments through special "diversity focused" awards.

- Incorporate "diversity effort" into the selection criteria for Extension and college/university awards.

The following are recommendations that **had been approved and were slated for implementation**.

- Provide a system-wide training in diversity issues related to recruitment and retention of underrepresented employees.

- Train an Ombudsman in issues of diversity.

- Integrate diversity issues more fully into the on-going work of the leadership team.

The following are recommendations that **had been made and were under discussion**.

- Establish a mentoring program to support new underrepresented employees.

- Educate staff on the difference between diversity and affirmative action.

- Disaggregate statistics related to hiring of African Americans and Africans to more accurately reflect gains made with African Americans.

The following are recommendations to **strengthen on-going efforts**.

- Contact formal and informal leaders in diverse communities to establish collaborative relationships and to accurately determine needs of the community.

- Expand programs and services to reach new diverse populations and audiences.

- Increase the diversity of the workforce.

- Expand diversity focused professional development opportunities.

## Impact of the Catalyst Team on the Organization

**Research Question 4**: To what extent has the state's participation in the CASD Project had an impact on your organization?

State Coordinators were asked to rate the impact of their state's participation in the CASD project on their state organization. Response choices were: very high impact, high impact, some impact, very little impact, and no impact. Four (57%) of the seven State Coordinators rated the impact of CASD on their organizations to be "Very High" or "High." Three (43%) Coordinators felt involvement in CASD has had "Some Impact" on their organization.

State Coordinators gave the following reasons for their **high impact** ratings. The CASD Consortium has provided:

- Greater awareness of issues related to gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, class, age, and other dimensions of diversity
  - "The team has created an awareness that did not exist before."
  - "Diversity is consistently a topic of conversation and attention."
- More openness to discussing diversity issues
  - "There has been a reduction in fear of discussing diversity issues."
- A new organizational philosophy and agreement to make systemic changes
  - "Being a CASD state provided motivation to do more."
  - "A lot of counties are doing a lot. Our participation in CASD has had that impact."
- A reason to look at who we are, how we look, and how we behave
  - "This has helped us to see that we need change."

State Coordinators gave the following reasons for **lower impact** ratings (Some Impact).

- "Although diversity is on the minds of our administrative team, it may not have been [as deeply] factored into the thinking and the program planning at the county level."

- "We have a ways to go until we embed diversity fully and integrate it into the organization."

- "Some Extension educators do not recognize that we have a problem with diversity."

- "We have been limited by our fear of possible responses to our recommendations."

## Benefits of Working Collaboratively

**Research Question 5**: What benefits have been derived from working collaboratively as a consortium, as opposed to working as individual states?

While each state works individually on issues of diversity, it was hoped that the collaborative effort of the consortium would produce more than the sum of the parts. State Coordinators were asked to state the benefits of working collaboratively as a consortium, as opposed to working only as an individual state. A number of benefits were offered in the following comments.

- "Support, support, support and accountability, accountability, accountability!"

- "Motivation. Being a part of the consortium provides competition to make changes. Each state wants to move forward at the same pace as the other states. Leverage, leverage, leverage!"

- "A benefit is knowing that there are others having the same or different struggles, just struggling together."

- "The Consortium provides a richness of ideas and strategies that we can share with each

other."

- "Learning from others provides a roadmap. There is no need to reinvent the wheel"

- "The consortium provides emotional and professional support from others for this work."

- "By rotating meetings to the consortium states, we learn about diverse issues in other states."

- "Being a part of the consortium has provided an opportunity to work with different types of institutions within the system, e.g., 1890 and 1994 institutions."

- "By pooling our resources, we can afford training and tools that would not otherwise be available to any one state."

- "Sharing training materials, books, and diversity-related resources is a benefit."

- "Being a part of the consortium created a connection to USDA that motivated participation in the effort."

Participation in the CASD Project has not been without struggles. Catalyst Teams enjoy strong positive and supportive relationships with administration (top administrators are members of most Catalyst Teams). However, one team struggles between strengthening the relationship with top administration while maintaining autonomy to raise prickly issues related to policies in the system. Other teams have echoed another struggle--that people are very busy, and "like it or not, unless you have a personal passion for this work, you can be full of good intentions and this work just does not become a top priority. It is perceived as an add-on."

# Summary

The Catalyst Teams in the seven states are representative of diverse peoples, positions, and levels within their extension organization. The teams are active, and they benefit from the participation and financial support of top-level Extension administrators. The importance of both personal and resource commitment by top management is, according to Cox (1994), especially crucial to any major organizational change effort.

A variety of recommendations have emerged from the Catalyst Teams in the seven states. Many of these recommendations have been fully implemented; others are in various stages of implementation. Recommendations that have been offered are designed to have an impact on the organizational profile, increase valuing differences education, and manage diversity at the organizational level, all helping to reposition the Cooperative Extension and Land-Grant System to function successfully in a multicultural community.

Examples include incorporation of diversity competence in the formal evaluation system, infusing diversity throughout the Plan of Work, integrating diversity in statewide professional development planning and opportunities, and the creation of a Diversity Fellowship Program.

Working together as a consortium has indeed had a synergetic impact on the work, motivation, and accomplishments of the individual states. The collaborative efforts of the Catalyst Teams have strengthened the capacity of the individual organizations to create change around issues of diversity. The Change Agent States for Diversity and Engagement is an on-going project. It is hoped that the impact of the project will continue to evolve.

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