

ACTIVITIES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Target Audiences

The two primary target audiences for NCLVI are doctoral fellows and the greater Blindness/Visual Impairment Leadership Community.

Fellows. NCLVI provides a means for individuals wishing to assume leadership roles in the field of blindness and visual impairment to obtain doctoral degrees at NCLVI Consortium universities of their choice, to participate in a wider community of practice (which includes other fellows, university faculty, and current leaders in the field), and to enrich their doctoral studies with a leadership and blindness/visual impairment-focused value-added curriculum.

Blindness/Visual Impairment Leadership Community. NCLVI provides a means to build capacity in three facets of the leadership community:

- Consortium universities –by increasing the capacity of Consortium universities to enroll and support doctoral students
- Additional institutions of higher education –by increasing the capacity of additional IHEs to offer doctoral programs with an emphasis in blindness and visual impairment
- Current leadership community –by preparing 25 doctoral-level leaders to assume positions in public policy, higher education, research, administration, and curriculum development in the greater special education community, including consumer and parent organizations.

Major NCLVI Activities

The first eight months of NCLVI have seen concerns related to critical leadership shortages in the field of blindness and visual impairment materialize into the selection of 14 doctoral Fellows. The two quotes below, expressed one year apart, reflect NCLVI's role in helping meet the need for leadership personnel.

“There is a critical shortage of leadership personnel in the field of visual impairments with serious implications in the ability to prepare future teachers to serve learners who are visually impaired”

--Professor of Education, Letter of Support for NCLVI Proposal, January 24, 2004

“When I first began considering returning to school for my doctoral degree several months ago, my focus was a vague desire to further my education and expand my professional opportunities. My initial information seeking was discouraging. If I attended a local university so that I could continue to

teach, I would have to settle for a degree in a different field. Then I received notice of the NCLVI Fellowships and my planning took on a new focus. Suddenly the possibility of pursuing a doctorate in my chosen field at a university that would truly challenge me was no longer a far off dream, but a very real possibility”

--NCLVI Applicant #4905, From Application Essay, May 1, 2005

During the eight months in which NCLVI has existed major project activities have centered on the following:

- Developing the NCLVI collaborative model for producing leadership personnel in blindness and visual impairment
 - Establishing the University Consortium
 - Determining, through consensus, NCLVI policies and procedures to be followed for recruitment, application requirements, and the application review process
 - Determining, through consensus, NCLVI tuition reimbursement procedures, university contractual agreement components, and strategies to be applied to determine Fellows' stipend allotments based on cost of living in different Consortium university geographic locations
 - Determining, through consensus, policies regarding credit/noncredit value for Enrichment Program participation by Fellows
 - Establishing a Public Advisory Council
 - Determining, through consensus, NCLVI mission and guiding principles
 - Determining, through consensus, communications and evaluation systems to be applied to NCLVI.
- Facilitating the preparation of leadership personnel in blindness and visual impairment by
 - Disseminating information about NCLVI as quickly as possible
 - Recruiting fellows
 - Developing and disseminating applications for fellows
 - Collecting and maintaining data files on applicants
 - Securing and posting information about potential applicants on the NCLVI website
 - Selecting and securing qualified application reviewers
 - Processing applications
 - Selecting fellows
 - Notifying selected fellows
- Enhancing the training of leadership personnel by creating an enrichment program
 - Determining major focus areas for 4 years of Enrichment Program content by University Consortium and Public Advisory Council
 - Determining initial draft competencies to be achieved by NCLVI fellows through Enrichment Program

- Determining the draft activities and outcome measures to be achieved by the NCLVI fellows through the Enrichment Program
- Determining the initial recommendations of leaders to contribute to the Enrichment Program learning activities
- Constructing and furnishing the NCLVI office space.

Developing the Collaborative Model. The NCLVI collaborative model involves the key personnel discussed in Section I: Pennsylvania College of Optometry, the University Consortium, the Public Advisory Council, and the recently selected doctoral Fellows. This collaborative has taken shape through four modes of communication: face-to-face meetings, listservs, a Blackboard site, and the NCLVI website, each of which will be described below.

Face-To-Face Meetings

The **University Consortium** convened for the first time in December of 2004 at OSEP. It was during this three-day meeting that Consortium representatives

- Agreed upon a set of guiding principles under which the Consortium would operate
- Developed a mission statement
- Agreed upon a decision-making protocol based on consensus
- Shared their institution policies
- Established policies and guidelines for the Consortium
- Formulated the fellowship referral and application process
- Established committees
- Planned for the recruitment of scholars
- Discussed stipend/scholarship formulas and university contracts.

Anonymous comments from the meeting evaluations completed by attendees included the following:

“The group was collegial and shared a variety of perspectives with integrity and respect.”

“In my opinion, the primary strength was the collaboration of many competing universities for the betterment of the profession. Open dialogue, candor and honesty were the rule. It was an excellent meeting made better by shared commitment.”

Following the meeting of the University Consortium, the NCLVI **Public Advisory Council** convened January of 2005 in Baltimore, MD at the headquarters of the National Federation of the Blind, the nation’s largest organization of individuals who are blind or visually impaired. At this two-day meeting the NCLVI Public Advisors

- Established a set of guiding principles under which the PAC would operate

- Identified qualities they want developed in future leaders in the field
- Planned for the process of information dissemination and recruitment
- Suggested enrichment program topics
- Identified NCLVI Fellow competencies
- Presented information about resources their respective organizations could share with NCLVI fellows, including opportunities for short-term residencies and internships. Some of these residencies and internships involved collaboration between and among several Public Advisory organizations which have never before been possible.

Anonymous feedback from the meeting participants was likewise positive:

“The presentation by the NCLVI was very well organized and clear. There was ample opportunity for the PAC to provide input into the process, and for the PAC to get information about how the program will function.”

“I thought that the dialogue was very useful and opened the door to much needed collaboration across the field and across the country.”

A third face-to-face NCLVI meeting took place in March of 2005 with representatives from both the **University Consortium and PAC** in attendance. This one-day joint meeting was held in Boston prior to the Josephine. L. Taylor Leadership Institute Conference organized by the American Foundation for the Blind. The primary focus of this joint meeting was to further develop the NCLVI enrichment program. Meeting participants worked in small groups to develop competencies, activities, and measurable outcomes related to enrichment program topics. Afterwards, the NCLVI Enrichment Committee was able to meet face-to-face to develop a timeline for the implementation of the enrichment program. The outcome of these meetings is represented in the annual focus areas for the enrichment program and in the syllabus and draft agenda for the first year enrichment program activities. See Appendix I.

Comments from anonymous evaluations of the joint University Consortium-PAC meeting included:

“Honest and frank discussion, sharing of diverse ideas and opinions, willingness of people to hear all sides of a question. Good representation of parties with an interest in the issues.”

“A lot of work was completed. I appreciate the leadership that went into this meeting.”

Listserves, Blackboard, and NCLVI Website

In addition to these three face-to-face meetings, the NCLVI collaborative model has developed through communication vehicles such as announcements, updates, and discussions that take place on the two NCLVI **listservs**, one for the

University Consortium (hosted by University of Northern Colorado) and one for the PAC (hosted by University of Arizona). An NCLVI Fellows Listserv will be created prior to the fall as well as a Full Consortium listserv that will include University Consortium members, PAC members, and the Fellows.

The University Consortium also communicates through a **Blackboard** course website. Blackboard will also be the platform for the Fellows' online learning experiences. The first course is already under construction for the first year enrichment program focusing on public policy, issues, and collaboration. See Appendix I.

NCLVI as a whole stores documents of interest, offers doctoral program and PAC organization contact information and NCLVI application materials on the **NCLVI website** (www.pco.edu/nclvi.htm). All NCLVI materials are available on the website for review by all interested parties including minutes for all meetings, presentations, application forms, press releases, and other materials.

Facilitating the Preparation of Leadership Personnel. In addition to activities aimed at developing the NCLVI collaborative, another major focus of activity has centered on facilitating the preparation of leadership personnel through recruitment of Fellows and dissemination of information about the project; orchestration of the fellowship application process; and, most recently, the selection of NCLVI Fellows.

Recruitment and Information Dissemination

Activities related to dissemination of information about the project have served the added purpose of recruitment. All NCLVI participants (Staff, Consortium Members, and Public Advisors) have taken part in dissemination and recruitment efforts. Planning for this aspect of the project has likewise involved input from all these participants. Recruitment and information dissemination efforts have taken the form of hard copy announcements and articles, presentations, word-of-mouth, and website links, electronic articles, and email announcements. Appendix C contains a summary of all recruitment and information dissemination efforts as well as examples of the actual products.

Fellowship Application Process

In addition to recruitment and information dissemination, NCLVI has executed the processing of fellowship applications. An Application Form Committee was established at the December 2004 University Consortium meeting. The committee consists of Dr. Anne Corn (Vanderbilt University), Dr. Jane Erin (University of Arizona), Dr. Missy Garber (Pennsylvania College of Optometry), Dr. Gaylen Kapperman (Northern Illinois University), Dr. William Penrod (University of Louisville), and Dr. George Zimmerman (University of Pittsburgh).

The University Consortium as a whole discussed necessary elements of the NCLVI Fellowship Application. Drafts developed by the Application Form Committee were presented to the Consortium, discussed, revised, and finalized

for 2005. See Appendix D for the Fellowship Application and Application Evaluation Form; the latter is discussed below. The application reviewers were selected from the University Consortium members. Their identity is confidential at their request and agreement.

Selection of Fellows

The NCLVI University Consortium also discussed and agreed upon a process by which an Application Review Committee would be selected for the 2005 competition as well as the criteria by which the applications would be evaluated.

The members of the Application Review Committee (as well as one University Consortium member who is a new faculty member and who wished to be mentored through the process) each received the fellowship applications in which information identifying the applicant and the host institution was removed. Applications were scored using the Application Evaluation Form (see Appendix D). The reviewers paneled via conference call and discussed any discrepancies between their scores that represented more than .50 on a 4-point scale. As a result of the paneling, the applications were ranked. The top 15 candidates were offered fellowships as the first NCLVI cohort.

Enhancing the Training of Leadership Personnel. In addition to developing the collaborative model and facilitating the preparation of leadership personnel, NCLVI has been active in a third major area of the project, that is, enhancing the training of leadership personnel through the development of the NCLVI Enrichment Program. The Enrichment Program activities related to its development to date include

- Surveying University Consortium faculty members and Public Advisors about preferences for enrichment topics
- Surveying students who are currently enrolled in doctoral programs in blindness and visual impairment (as well as those who have recently graduated) for input on Enrichment Program components
- Establishing an Enrichment Committee
- Dedicating time at face-to-face meetings of the University Consortium and PAC to planning the Enrichment Program
- Convening University Consortium members and PAC members at a joint meeting devoted to the development of Enrichment Program competencies.

See Appendix I for more detailed plans.

Constructing NCLVI Office Space. While not directly related to the major project objectives, a necessary activity was to design the space to house the three additional NCLVI staff (Project Coordinator, Technology Manager, and Administrative Assistant). Between October 15th and January 30th, NCLVI Project Staff were granted permission from Pennsylvania College of Optometry

to use existing space, redesign it into a set of three offices and a small conference room, and facilitate its construction and furnishing as an office suite with desks, file cabinets and storage space for the NCLVI files and materials. The funds for the cost of this were contributed by PCO.

Products

The three major products created during the eight months of NCLVI's existence have been described in previous sections. These are

- The NCLVI collaborative
- 14 NCLVI Fellows beginning doctoral studies with an emphasis in blindness and visual impairment with NCLVI funding
- NCLVI information dissemination and recruitment efforts, including publications. See Appendix C.

A fourth major NCLVI product is its valued added Enrichment Program, which will has been discussed and further details can be found in Appendix I.

Challenges and Solutions

NCLVI has encountered three notable challenges in carrying out its activities: hiring a Technology Manager, making decisions efficiently through collaboration, and communicating quickly with geographically dispersed parties.

The **Technology Manager** position was advertised during the first week of the approved project during mid-October 2004, along with the Administrative Assistant and the Project Coordinator positions. PCO's human resources staff advertised the position in Monster.com, but very few applications were received, in contrast to the enormous number of applications received for the Administrative Assistant position. NCLVI staff followed up on the applications, but only one individual interviewed. This individual was interested in the project and the position but declined, stating that the salary was insufficient.

In addition to advertising the position on Monster.com, NCLVI staff placed announcements on various listservs which are known to be of interest to individuals with technology experience and who also have disabilities, such as the Blind Computer User Group listserv. Announcements were also posted on the NCLVI, the American Foundations for the Blind, and consumer organization websites. It was hoped that an individual with the appropriate skills who was also visually impaired would come forward. Several individuals who were visually impaired responded, but these individuals did not live within commuting distance of PCO and explained that they were unable to move within a commutable distance from NCLVI headquarters. NCLVI staff continued to make efforts to locate a qualified part-time Technology Manager by contacting the AFB Access

to Technology Center in West Virginia as well as other consumers with technology experience who might be aware of potential job applicants.

As a result of not having a Technology Manager, the NCLVI staff outsourced the listservs to Consortium members. The University of Northern Colorado established and maintains the University Consortium listserv while the University of Arizona at Tucson does likewise for the PAC listserv. The website was established through the efforts of the NCLVI staff and PCO's current webmaster.

NCLVI still requires assistance with the design of project databases. Recently, we hired a part-time staff member of PCO's Department of Academic Computing to work on NCLVI technology-related activities on a contractual basis while we continue the search. He is assisting with the identification and development of needed databases and will also assist with the recruitment of a permanent part-time Technology Manager from among his many Information Sciences colleagues.

The second challenge NCLVI has encountered relates to the Consortium **decision-making** process. In order to develop the University Consortium and facilitate its development as a true collaborative, numerous decisions needed to be made early on in the project in a timely matter and by all fourteen members. The University Consortium members were brought together for a three-day face-to-face meeting in order to make the bulk of these decisions. Some strategies that were used to balance collaboration with efficient decision-making included

- Requiring each Consortium University to name a representative as well as one alternate to ensure representation at all meetings
- Facilitating face-to-face meetings with a clear, organized agenda that was distributed beforehand
- Adhering to agenda topics during meetings
- Allowing time at meetings for a "checking in" and "checking out" procedure that requires each attendee to speak (or "pass") at least twice during each day of a meeting.

The final notable challenge we have encountered in carrying out NCLVI activities is maintaining **timely communication** about substantive matters when the Consortium is not present face-to-face. At the beginning of the project we envisioned the Blackboard platform as a location where drafts of documents could be stored and where discussion boards would exist for individual issues needing to be addressed by the Consortium. However, not all Consortium members felt proficient using Blackboard nor did some regularly visit the site to participate on a regular basis. Realizing this, Consortium members soon suggested that the NCLVI staff place less emphasis on Blackboard when communicating to the Consortium and suggested, instead, utilizing the Consortium listserv to carry on communication. We have done this, and timely communication about substantive matters with the Consortium has improved greatly.