

Empowering States with Procedures: How a Writing Workshop Enhanced Fiscal Management

At a glance: CIFR and NCSI provided expertise, dedicated time, and peer learning opportunities to help 18 states develop rigorous IDEA fiscal procedures.

Appropriate management of IDEA funds depends on **strong internal controls—a system of rules and processes** for making decisions about how funds are spent, monitoring the use of funds, and ensuring federal requirements are met. Well-documented procedures for both Part B and Part C programs are at the core of these controls.

Procedures are essential, helping staff to manage operations consistently, respond proactively to emerging challenges, and prioritize program needs. Implementing clear procedures for fiscal and program activities not only safeguards against the loss of institutional knowledge during staff turnover but also, over the long term, ensures accountability for states. This helps states fully realize the overarching goal of IDEA to enhance outcomes for children with disabilities, from birth through age 21, and their families.

However, creating and maintaining written procedures isn't easy. If current procedures are documented at all, they are often incomplete or outdated, or they fail to reflect current requirements and practices. Moreover, staff may struggle to find resources—including focused time with the right staff—to tackle this essential work amid other pressing priorities. Knowing where to start can be daunting.

Recognizing these challenges, the **Center for IDEA Fiscal Reporting (CIFR)** and the **National Center for Systemic Improvement (NCSI)** teamed up to plan a two-day on-site workshop in October 2023 to help state staff develop procedures for two complex and high-stakes IDEA Part B fiscal requirements: allocation of subgrants to local educational agencies and subrecipient monitoring. CIFR led the session on allocations, and NCSI provided support on subrecipient monitoring.

Writing comprehensive procedures is an intensive process that requires state commitment, preparation, and tailored support. To facilitate this undertaking, the centers invited states to apply for the workshop, selecting participants based on their need to develop

“Ultimately, these opportunities to write and discuss provided us with some excellent momentum on our work and helped us clarify the language we use to inform our audiences to help them understand the intricacies of our system.”

—Workshop Attendee

The [Center for IDEA Fiscal Reporting](#) helps states improve the quality and use of their IDEA Part B and Part C fiscal data and implement the related fiscal requirements.

The [National Center for Systemic Improvement](#) helps state use general supervision and professional development systems to establish and meet high expectations for every student with a disability.

For guidance on developing procedures, explore [CIFR](#) and [NCSI](#) resources.

procedures and their ability to fully engage in the process. The event brought together 34 staff from 18 states, with 12 states participating in allocations and 15 states participating in subrecipient monitoring.

In designing the workshop content, the **planning team tailored strategies** to meet the unique needs of each state and ensure that participants were well prepared for a highly productive on-site experience. CIFR and NCSI technical assistance (TA) providers hosted a preparatory webinar two months before the workshop to outline expectations and review the intricacies of the IDEA fiscal requirements.

Additionally, the team developed comprehensive checklists to help participants gather needed materials and answer essential questions with their state teams well ahead of the workshop. To support the states with this groundwork, the TA providers followed up with individual states to answer questions and identify additional needs to maximize their team's engagement. This preparation ensured that state staff were thoroughly equipped to tackle the task of crafting these critical procedures on-site.

At the workshop, facilitators guided the state teams through all aspects of developing written state-level procedures, providing **dedicated time and access to resources and experts** and fostering **peer learning across states**. The workshop featured working sessions for team planning and writing focused on specific procedural components, as well as opportunities for states to exchange feedback and network. One attendee noted, "We were able to share ideas, trends, and problem solve for specific problems. It was also helpful to have the TA providers there as they could listen to our discussion and suggest other connections we could make with other states."

"The preparatory work was excellent. Even for staff who are new at the role. It prepared staff to think ahead and gather whatever they could find, asking pertinent questions to facilitate making the most of the workshop."

—Workshop Attendee

100%

of survey respondents agreed

- The workshop **increased their knowledge** about writing fiscal procedures.
- They feel **more prepared** to further develop or improve their state's procedures.
- They were able to **strengthen connections** with colleagues from other states.

Participants departed with **well-developed drafts** of procedures that comply with IDEA and address their state's unique systems and priorities. They also discussed **next steps** for finalizing, approving, disseminating, and periodically updating their procedures, and how their CIFR and NCSI TA providers can support the entire implementation process.

The workshop proved invaluable for states, offering expert guidance and a supportive environment for state staff to strengthen their internal controls confidently. Looking ahead, CIFR and NCSI will build on this success to facilitate procedures for other IDEA Part B and Part C fiscal topics. Such collaborative cross-state efforts play a pivotal role in **building systemic capacity to ensure the appropriate management of federal funds and fulfill the goals of IDEA.**