

# Partnering to Create Tools and Materials

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Active involvement by state deaf-blind project personnel, family members, and others in the development of tools and publications occurs at various stages of the product development process. Although there is no specific research indicating that this type of collaboration leads to increased or sustained use of a product, based on the experience of the National Center on Deaf-Blindness and literature on the value of participation in the development of services in both business and public service sectors, it is a valued strategy with potential benefits for organizations and end users.

Ultimately, partnering on product development should lead to products that are more likely to be useful and relevant, while at the same time increasing participants' knowledge, skills, and connections to others.

Advantages include:

- Tapping into a large pool of talent and expertise
- Providing learning opportunities for contributors
- Generating a feeling of ownership in a product
- Conducting work in a way that is consistent with an organization's values
- Generating champions and ambassadors of products

## GUIDELINES

### ***Specify the agency with final say over the product***

It is essential to have a strong lead agency and associated personnel who are ultimately responsible for the product and coordinate the process and the work of all partners. Specify, from the beginning, the agency that has this responsibility as well as quality control over the product (e.g., final decisions about content, editing, style). Inform participants that their work will be edited.

### ***Outline participant roles***

Outline, in writing, the roles of all participants (potential roles listed below). Participants need to know what they are getting into and the parts of the process in which they are and are not involved. The lead product developer needs to know that they can rely on participants to fulfill their commitments.

### ***Clarify and share the vision***

Make sure you have a clear sense of what you are trying to do—your vision for the product and desired outcomes (this is established during early stages of the product development process). Share with all participants to make sure everyone is on the same page.

### ***Make plans for editing, accessibility, and permissions***

Early on, make specific plans for a) editing, b) accessibility, and c) obtaining permission to cite or incorporate resources used to develop the product. These are three crucial and time-consuming elements of product development that are often overlooked (or left until the last minute).

## **SELECT THE RIGHT PEOPLE**

The number of people needed will depend on the size and scope of the project, but even for larger projects, try to keep product work groups small (five people maximum) and select the right people for roles that suit their abilities. Product development roles typically fall into four categories: product leads, advisors, resource contributors, and worker bees.

### **Product Leads**

#### **Who they are:**

- A primary representative from the lead agency with product development knowledge and skills
- Other relevant lead agency employees

#### **What they do:**

- Keep project on track
- Recruit and coordinate the work of all partners
- Write/edit
- Format
- Ensure product accessibility
- Disseminate

### **Advisors**

#### **Who they are:**

- Individuals with subject expertise
- Target audience members

### **What they do:**

- Assist with establishing the need, vision, and outcomes for a product
- Review and provide feedback to guide ongoing product development and revisions

## **Resource contributors**

### **Who they are:**

- Individuals with subject expertise

### **What they do:**

- Contribute resources (e.g., publications, video, photos) that can inform or be incorporated into a product
- Suggest other resources they think might be of benefit
- Suggest people they think may be helpful in developing the product

## **Worker bees**

### **Who they are:**

- Strong collaborators – are willing and able to devote a significant amount of time to the project
- Have content expertise or other expertise (videography, photography)

### **What they do:**

- Identify, summarize, and synthesize literature
- Write
- Assist with planning and design
- Serve as subjects in pilot tests (goes beyond product review)

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**[nationaldb.org](http://nationaldb.org)**

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