This document provides a list of minimum essential steps to follow to help you determine how to make cohort development decisions for your grant that are compatible with the cohort reporting requirements. It is recommended that you follow them in sequence and that you use them in conjunction with Performance Orientation Module 2 and FAQ #2. Once you have completed each of these steps, you should have a basic but comprehensive plan for your cohort design under the TAACCCT grant.

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Pre-Cohort Development

- **Develop list of programs**: List all of the programs of study being offered by your college and every other college in your consortium (if applicable).

- **Develop policies on cohort development**: Develop policies for your grant for the following and use them consistently throughout the process of cohort development:
  - **Participant cohort selection**: In other words, the criteria for how decisions will be made about which duration, start date, and courses or colleges to select for your overall cohort design, if there are multiple options from which to choose. You may develop different policies for different programs of study.
    - Some possibilities for what could be included in your policy:
      - The option that will provide the greatest number of students
      - The option that will provide the opportunity for the most colleges to participate
      - The option that includes courses that are the same on some specific element if differences exist among colleges (e.g., all shortened to the same length, etc.)
      - The option that allows your cohort to start at a certain select point in time
      - Other?
  - **Cohort student selection**: In other words, how decisions will be made about which students will be included in both your participant and comparison cohorts. If you specified the number of students that would be in your participant cohort in your Statement of Work (SOW), then that information in your SOW should guide your decisions. Remember, you should have at least as many students in your comparison cohort as are in your participant cohort for a program of study. You may develop different policies for different programs of study.
    - Some possibilities for what could be included in your policy:
      - All students who enroll at one point in time
      - The \( n \)th semester of students to enroll in the new or modified program of study
      - \( X \) number of students from each college or course
      - Random selection
      - Other?

Developing Participant Cohorts

- **Perform sequence of steps to develop flow charts**: Follow the four steps below to determine all of the possible options for your participant cohorts for each of your programs of study. An example follows most of the steps below. You may wish to use a separate sheet of

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1 A program of study is an educational program in which a degree or certificate is granted.
paper for each program of study being offered under your grant. If your grant is a single-institution grant, you should skip step #2.

1. **Program of Study.** Start a hierarchical chart for each of your programs of study that will be created, developed or modified in whole or in part with grant funds. To do this, place the name of each grant-funded program of study inside a box by itself and leave a lot of room around it.

2. **Colleges (for consortia only).** For each of your charts, list the colleges in your consortium in separate boxes that are offering that program of study.

3. **Starting Date/Quarter.** For each of your charts, list the month and year in separate boxes that each college plans to start enrolling students in that program.

4. **Duration.** For each of your charts, after each start date, list all the different lengths of the program of study offered at each college.
- **Determine necessity of program combining**: Based on low enrollments or other unusual circumstances among programs or colleges, compare all of your flow charts with programs of study that have similar educational content or occupational outlook. If programs of study are similar in this regard and have overlap among the colleges, start dates, and durations, they can be combined, and students for the participant cohort would be derived from this overlap.

- **Apply policy for participant cohort selection**: Apply the policy you developed on participant cohort development to determine which colleges will be contributing to each cohort and when your “cohorts” will officially start.

  In this example, *if your policy is to have the most colleges represented in your cohort*, the best participant cohort would be one supplied with students from Colleges A and B who are in the 16-week program and who start in August 2012.

- **Determine need for an ETA exemption**: Determine if you need to receive ETA approval to deviate from the “same start date requirement” for any of your participant cohorts.

- **Apply policy for participant cohort student selection**: Apply the policy you developed on student selection for the participant cohorts to determine which students will be included in the participant cohorts.

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**Developing Comparison Cohorts**

- **List possible comparison cohort sources**: Determine the source for the corresponding comparison cohort for each program of study (i.e., recent students or current students; see three possible sources below), noting the special requirements for using a source where necessary. The three major sources are as follows:
A. A current group of students that starts simultaneous to the participant cohort

*Participant cohort*  
*Comparison cohort*  

**Ideas for using this source (can be used for new or existing programs of study):**
- Partner with a local college that offers the same or a similar program of study.
- Partner with another TAACCCT grantee that offers that program, but is not modifying that program with TAACCCT funds. Visit [http://tinyurl.com/7f7w6bk](http://tinyurl.com/7f7w6bk) for assistance.
- Use students from a non-TAACCCCT-funded program of study that has similar educational content or occupational outlook.
- As a last resort, use students from a non-TAACCCCT-funded program of study offering the same credential type as that for your participant cohort.

B. A current group of students that enrolls earlier (and finishes sooner) than your participant cohort

*Participant cohort*  
*Comparison cohort*  

**Ideas for using this source:**
- Use current students who enroll in your existing program prior to the program’s modification by TAACCCT funds.
- All options under Source A above are also feasible under this source.

C. A recent group of students that is no longer enrolled

*Participant cohort*  
*Comparison cohort*  

**Some options to consider for using this source:**
- All options under Sources A and B above are also feasible under this source.

**Stumped? Here are some questions to help determine the feasibility of a source:**
- Do I need to combine any programs of study in order to generate an acceptable comparison cohort?
- If so, under what broader categories of industry or college major can my programs of study be organized?
- If using recent students, do I have enough information collected on them to report on every data element in Table 2?
- Have I explored options for partnering with different colleges to get a comparison cohort?
- **Determine comparison cohort sources**: Use the analysis you conducted on feasible comparison cohorts for each program of study to make your selection on which of the three sources will supply the comparison cohort for each participant cohort.

- **Apply policy for comparison cohort student selection**: Apply the policy you developed on student selection for the comparison cohorts to determine which students will be included in the comparison cohorts.

**Post-Cohort Development**

- **Develop policies for cohort implementation**: Develop policies for your grant for the following and use them consistently throughout the process of cohort implementation and management:
  
  - **Comparison Cohort Contamination Policy**. Contamination occurs if students in the comparison group end up crossing over and participating in grant-funded training. Develop a policy to prevent and manage comparison cohort contamination that includes steps you will take to attempt to keep it from happening and steps you will take if it occurs.
  
  - **Cohort Information Dissemination Policy**. Develop a policy for how instructions and requirements for cohort development will be communicated among partners and consortia members. Your policy should include how consortia members will provide cohort data to the lead institution.
  
  - **Procedures for Student Tracking and Data Collection**. Develop procedures for how you will keep track of each data element in Table 2 of the Annual Performance Report (APR) for the students in the cohorts.
  
  - **Staff Roles**. Determine who or which staff member will perform each of the following tasks (at a minimum):
    
    - communicating policies to and facilitating communication between other offices on campus, other staff and/or other consortia members, as necessary;
    - tracking progress of students in the cohorts;
    - collecting any needed information from the cohort students as appropriate;
    - aggregating cohort data each year according to the data element definitions;
    - collecting and aggregating information from the consortia members by programs of study, as applicable;
    - reporting and submitting the cohort data in the APR each year.

- **Brainstorm and plan for other potential pitfalls**. Plan ahead. What are the errors that are likely to happen, the unknowns that may become important later, and the hold-ups that you can predict and avoid? Determine how you can mitigate those pitfalls now and develop plans or policies for addressing these problems if they occur.
Develop a timeline for cohort implementation: The timeline should cover the entire period of performance, and include at minimum:

- when to contact your college’s IRB (if necessary);
- when to seek ETA approval for an exemption to the start date requirement (if necessary);
- when to disseminate information to partners and members of the consortium;
- when your cohorts will officially start;
- when information on the cohorts will be collected;
- when cohort data will be aggregated each year by programs of study;
- when cohort data will be reported to ETA each year.

Develop a written plan for the cohort requirement. Commit all of the policies and decisions you have made using this inventory to paper and share it with your FPO.

If you get stuck while following these steps, please contact your FPO for assistance.