



EDUCATION POLICY  
INITIATIVE *at* CAROLINA



April 2023

# Tinkering or Tearing Towards Teacher Preparation Program Transformation: US PREP’s Technical Assistance and the Scale Up and Sustainability of the Transformed Model

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US PREP is a technical assistance center that supports university-based teacher preparation programs (TPPs) in implementing a transformed preparation model. The transformed model is designed to increase teacher candidates’ readiness to teach by strengthening program coherence, providing extensive opportunities to practice instruction, improving the work of teacher educators, centering the role of data in decision making, and deepening partnerships between TPPs and PK-12 districts. In this research brief, we report formative findings from our analyses of interview data with a range of US PREP, TPP, and PK-12 stakeholders. Our hope is that these formative findings will be of assistance to US PREP and the technical assistance they provide. Interviewees consistently spoke to the ways in which US PREP’s technical assistance was differentiated to specific contexts and helped TPPs enact meaningful reforms. US PREP is working in historic ways to help make change among PK-12 and higher education structures and processes that hew towards incrementalism and the status quo. This work is historically and systemically challenging, even among TPP and PK-12 partners who have stepped up to engage in this collaborative, ambitious work. Our findings highlight: (1) consistent definitional understandings of scale-up of the transformed model alongside of how scale up of the transformed model has differed across TPPs; (2) variation as to when US PREP supports TPPs towards flexibility or fidelity to the transformed model; and (3) the need for on-going attention to sustainability of the transformed model. These findings are consistent with the hard work of enacting scaled and sustained change in PK-12 and higher education. To further the work of US PREP we offer several recommendations for continued improvement. Central to many of these recommendations is the notion that US PREP can leverage existing structures and processes to enhance their technical assistance.

## Introduction

US PREP is a national technical assistance center that seeks to disrupt inequities at scale through the establishment of partnerships between university-based teacher preparation programs (TPPs) and

PK-12 districts aimed at the creation and assurance of high-quality teacher preparation. Specifically, US PREP provides supports and resources to TPPs and their partners to ensure that “all candidates, across all pathways, have access to a yearlong clinical experience, practice-based coursework, trained and effective teacher educators

<sup>1</sup> For more about the mission and work of US PREP: <https://www.usprepnationalcenter.com/about>

that leverage timely and meaningful data, and a TPP that puts PK-12 partnerships at the core of its decisions and improvements.” US PREP seeks to engage with TPP partners so that program change happens at scale and is sustainable.

In this formative evaluation of US PREP’s technical assistance, we focus explicitly on scale-up and sustainability of the transformed model for TPPs in US PREP’s inaugural and second cohorts. Institutions in cohorts 1 and 2 are now alumni of US PREP; as such, this is an opportune time to examine their perceptions of scaling and sustaining program transformation. In doing so, we note that US PREP’s efforts are part of a long history of educational goals and educational reform. Early in the 19th century Horace Mann proclaimed, “Education, then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men – the balance-wheel of the social machinery.” Mann’s lofty ambitions for schooling are embedded in the very DNA of how educators, researchers, policymakers, and elected officials speak about what U.S. schooling might be able to do and for whom. So powerful were schools to be that Mann imagined that “our means of education are the grand machinery by which the ‘raw material’ of human nature can be worked up into inventors and discoverers, into skilled artisans and scientific farmers, into scholars and jurists, into the founders of benevolent institutions, and the great expounders of ethical and theological science.” But data on U.S. school children’s learning has always been marked by significant variation in access and outcomes and by relatively poor performance in international comparisons of student learning. US PREP speaks directly to these concerns about inequities and outcomes when elaborating their goals for transformation: “Our theory of action, our mission is rooted in the idea that if we have a high-quality teacher in our most marginalized schools that we’re going to disrupt inequities. So, for me, remaining true to that theory of action is the most significant thing we can do to disrupt inequities in schools” (US PREP leader). US PREP and its partners – who themselves have stepped up to do this collaborative, ambitious work – bring herculean aims, seeking to substantively improve teacher preparation so that the children in our nation who need the most access to high-quality teaching can, finally, receive that teaching.

Meanwhile, the history of efforts to reform our schools, from PK-12 through teacher education, have also been marked by

lofty and ambitious goals. Educational reformists have repeatedly sought to redesign how teachers are taught and how students learn. Across that work, historians of education have noted “the conservative grammar of schooling” and how this conservative grammar seeks to conserve the normative ways of “doing school.” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995) These forces of conservation press at and complicate work towards ambitious education reform. As Tyack and Tobin note: “The basic ‘grammar’ of schooling, like the shape of classrooms, has remained remarkably stable over the decades. By the ‘grammar’ of schooling we mean the regular structure and rules that organize the work of instruction” (Tyack & Tobin, 1994).

US PREP, while relatively new to the space of reform and redesign, brings goals that mirror the loftiness and ambitions of past efforts. It is against this backdrop of aspiration and design for TPP transformation that we evaluate US PREP’s efforts to help TPPs enact scaled and sustained change. In particular, we address the following questions in this research brief:

- What do scale-up and sustainability mean, and how does that impact the work of TPP transformation?
- How have the meanings of scale-up and sustainability been consistent? How have they evolved?
- How do programs and US PREP make decisions – together and reciprocally -- regarding which aspects of the transformed model they adapt and which they implement with fidelity?

Across our formative findings we see that the conservative grammar of schooling and the work of tinkering or tearing towards utopia continues to challenge US PREP’s ambitious efforts at reform. The transformation of teacher preparation demands cross-cultural, sustained change and encompasses actors who often have not worked in concert. This complicates the work of scale-up and poses challenges for long-term sustainability. US PREP names and works to overcome these complications as they forge partnerships across TPPs and PK-12 districts to collaboratively transform teacher preparation

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<sup>2</sup> These 12 TPPs are as follows: Brooklyn College, Jackson State University, Lehman College, Sam Houston State University, San Diego State University, Southeastern Louisiana University, Texas Tech University, Touro College, the University of Houston, the University of the Pacific, the University of Texas El Paso, and the University of Texas San Antonio.

<sup>3</sup> See the following for prior deliverables from our US PREP evaluation: [https://epic.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/1268/2021/11/EPIC\\_US-PREP\\_survey\\_analyses\\_2021\\_final.pdf](https://epic.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/1268/2021/11/EPIC_US-PREP_survey_analyses_2021_final.pdf); <https://epic.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/1268/2021/10/Bringing-an-Implementation-Science-Lens-to-Program-Transformation-Stakeholders-Perceptions-of-US-PREPs-Technical-Assistance-for-Inaugural-Sites.pdf> and <https://epic.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/1268/2021/10/Bringing-an-Implementation-Science-Lens-to-Program-Transformation-Stakeholders-Perceptions-of-US-PREPs-Technical-Assistance-for-Cohort-Two-Sites.pdf>

# Background

US PREP is a national technical assistance center that provides a range of supports and resources—transformation specialists, clinical coaches, professional development sessions, data sharing—to help TPPs enact a transformed preparation model. This transformed model differs from a traditional preparation model in several important ways, including an emphasis on a common understanding of effective teaching, extensive opportunities to practice instruction, highly-effective teacher educators, the analysis and use of data, and strong partnerships between TPPs and PK-12 districts. It also differs in the ways in which its partners choose to join the US PREP coalition and to set themselves on paths of transformation. In a transformed TPP, teacher candidates have a year-long student teaching experience, co-teaching and high-quality feedback happen frequently, field supervisors and cooperating teachers are intentionally selected and trained, data is the basis of decision making, and TPP and PK-12 district personnel regularly meet. US PREP aims to help TPPs enact these transformations at scale and sustain them over time.

Since the fall of 2018, we at the Education Policy Initiative at Carolina (EPIC) have partnered with US PREP to assess the implementation and impact of its technical assistance for TPPs. Our research has focused on the 12 TPPs in US PREP’s inaugural and second technical assistance cohorts. To assess the work of US PREP, we have developed and administered candidate, university personnel, and PK-12 district personnel surveys; built data systems connecting TPP and state-level workforce data; and conducted interviews with a range of TPP and PK-12 stakeholders. This brief includes formative findings from a series of six virtual, multi-day site visits—three with Cohort 1 TPPs and their partners and three with Cohort 2 TPPs and their partners—that EPIC

conducted in early 2022. When selecting the six TPPs for site visits we considered a range of factors, including their location, characteristics of the TPP/university (e.g., size, demographics and background of candidates and faculty), and characteristics of PK-12 district partners (e.g., size, rurality, demographics of PK-12 students and personnel). During virtual site visits we conducted interviews with TPP leadership, program faculty, teacher candidates and graduates, PK-12 district leadership, principals, and cooperating teachers. The protocols that we used to guide these interviews were collaboratively built, with US PREP and EPIC working together to ensure that we would attend to and ask about questions scale-up, sustainability, and decision making between TPPs and US PREP.

As shown in **Table 1**, across six TPPs and their PK-12 partners, we conducted 73 total interviews with 135 participants. In addition, we interviewed 7 US PREP personnel. The interviews averaged one and a half hours. All interviews were conducted by two-person interview teams, which included one lead interviewer and a second interviewer for support and notetaking. All interview data were transcribed and coded in Dedoose, a web-based qualitative analysis software program that enables synchronous coding and analysis by research teams. We created a codebook inductively, refining the codebook several times until it captured all relevant themes in the data. After reconciling codes and ensuring consistent understanding and application across coders, we divided transcripts across seven individual coders. We then created an analysis for each cohort, as well as for interviews conducted with US PREP personnel. Analyses were informed by emerging themes of scale, sustainability, and flexibility and fidelity. Finally, the evaluation team created a cross-site analysis to draw conclusions across cohorts.

**Table 1:** Counts of Interviews and Participants with TPPs and their PK-12 Partners

TOTAL # OF INTERVIEWS 72						
INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS BY ROLE AND SITE (N=135)						
PARTICIPANT ROLE	UNIVERSITY SITE PARTICIPANTS					
	COHORT 1			COHORT 2		
	SITE 1	SITE 2	SITE 3	SITE 4	SITE 5	SITE 6
TPP LEADERSHIP	8	3	4	5	6	5
PROGRAM FACULTY/STAFF	4	5	8	7	3	5
SITE COORDINATORS	N/A	5	2	2	3	5
CANDIDATES/PROGRAM GRADUATES	7	7	4	4	0	3
K-12 DISTRICT PERSONNEL	2	4	10	8	3	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	21	24	28	26	15	21

# Results

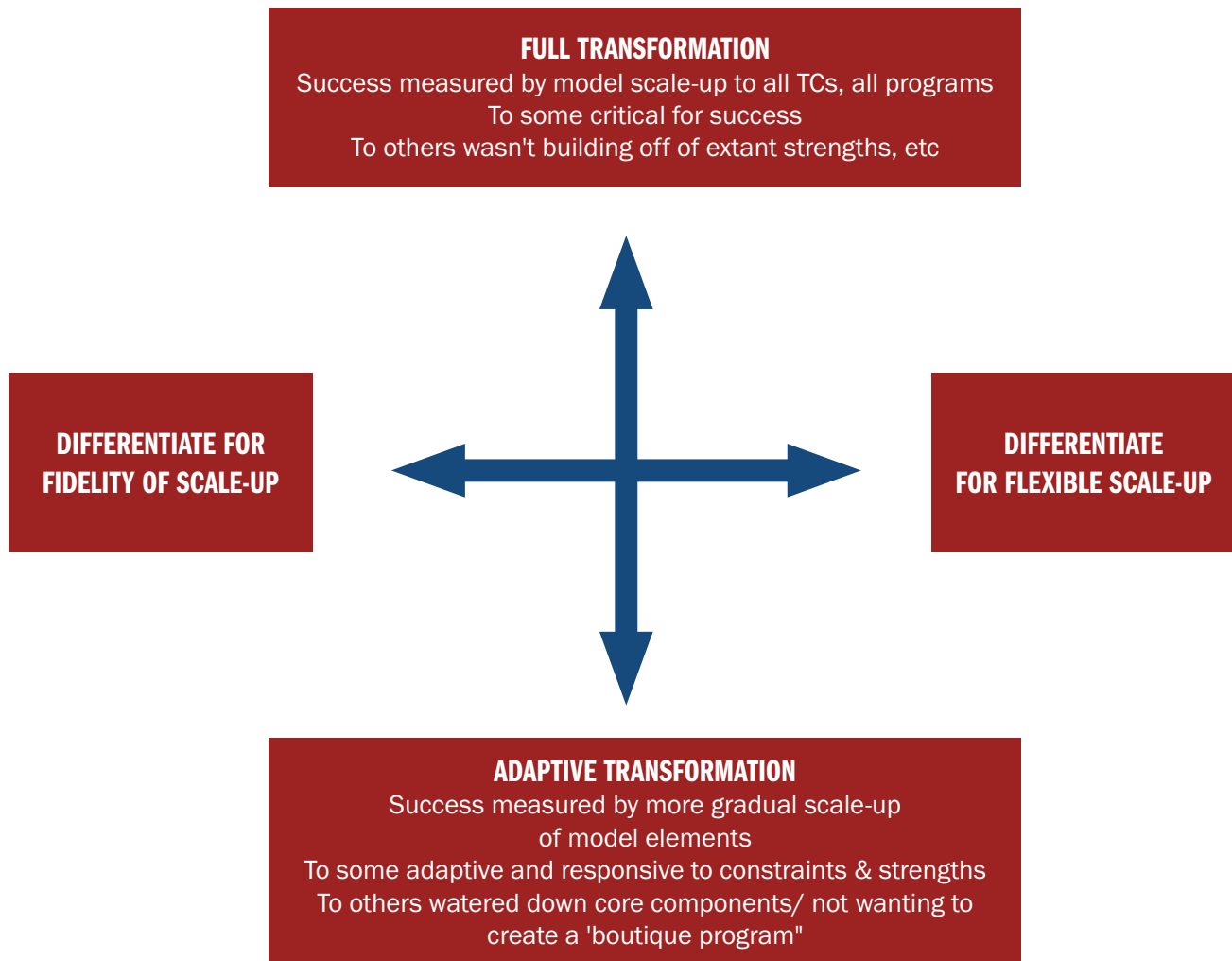
In this section we present our formative findings. We begin by discussing the ways in which US PREP’s partners have defined and implemented work to scale-up the transformed model. From scale-up, we discuss sustainability and US PREP’s partners’ efforts to define and plan for sustaining the transformed elements of their TPPs. As we detail below, partners spoke at length about how and in what ways they have worked towards operationalizing scale-up. Meanwhile partners spoke with comparatively less clarity and specificity regarding sustainability. Making use of and analyzing these silences helps us to better understand what next steps US PREP and its partners can take to plan for and engage the cross-cultural, concerted efforts needed for sustained change.

Next, we consider the evolution of US PREP leaders' definitions of scale-up and sustainability and how they believe these definitions have impacted the work of TPP transformation.

In considering the evolution of scale-up and sustainability, we highlight the reciprocity between US PREP and their partners as they negotiate which components of the transformed model they adapt and which they implement with fidelity. Across interviews, US PREP personnel spoke of variance in their technical assistance, from guiding institutions in ways that either support the TPP towards fidelity of the transformed model and/or adapting the transformed model to the contextualized expertise and needs of TPPs.

Considering these themes of adaptation and fidelity, we characterize scale-up of program transformation across two bi-directional continuums. As illustrated in **Figure 1**, implementation of transformation is along the y-axis and how US PREP engages with TPPs to both adapt and enact with fidelity falls along the x-axis. That is, the y-axis captures where TPPs get to in program transformation while the x-axis captures how US PREP and TPPs engage to reach that point. We use this matrix as a way to illustrate the patterns and themes uncovered in our analysis.

**Figure 1:** A Matrix of Full to Adaptive Transformation and Differentiation from Fidelity to Flexibility.



## Meanings of Scale-Up: Learnings from US PREP’s Partners

When asked about definitions of scale, interview participants called on the same elemental pieces that constituted growing the transformed model out of the pilot phase. This includes recruiting more site coordinators, establishing more partnerships with PK-12 districts, continuing to construct data collection and use practices, expanding to more programs within the TPP, and working to ensure that every candidate would have access to the yearlong residency. We illustrate this consistency in the definition of scale up in **Table 2**.

Despite the consistency in definitions of scale-up, discussions of on-the-ground implementation and the ways that scale-up has been operationalized varied across TPPs. The y-axis in **Figure 2** (on page 6) illustrates this variation in implementation along a continuum from full transformation to adaptive transformation. Here, “Full Transformation” is characterized by an orientation towards success as measured by transformed model scale-up to all teacher candidates and all programs. To those who spoke from the full transformation perspective, this approach is considered critical for success. Each of the following two quotes, one from Cohort 1 and one from Cohort 2, exemplify this approach:

**Table 2:** Consistency in Definition of Scale-up Across Sites

<p><b>SUCCESS MEASURED BY MODEL SCALE-UP TO ALL TCS, ALL PROGRAMS</b></p>	<p>“With scale, our definition would be anybody who is in the program... is in a yearlong residency, they have two semesters of student teaching and they look different depending on the level, but it is a two-semester experience, they are assigned a site coordinator [SC], then they are placed into a partner school and the SC is the one who completes the observation cycles and we do follow the pop cycle format and also, that SC holds the governance meetings with those candidates’ mentor teachers and administrators. So, for the most part, when we talk about scale, it really is scaling of the student teaching experience...” (Cohort 1 Leadership)</p>
	<p>“Scale would be a program that provided every student in our preparation pathways access to a full residency experience... So, it’s scaling it across the different concentration areas that we have within our BS in education, so across different certification areas and then it’s also scaling in terms of partnerships and districts that we work with. It’s also scaling outside of the College of Ed and this is where we’re still working on this part...” (Cohort 2 Leadership)</p>
	<p>“I think that we are scaled because to me, scale means that all of our candidates go through the transform model...there are some different versions of the transform model...but all of our students go through a transform model. They all have a yearlong placement, they all have a site coordinator, etc.” (Cohort 1 Leadership)</p>

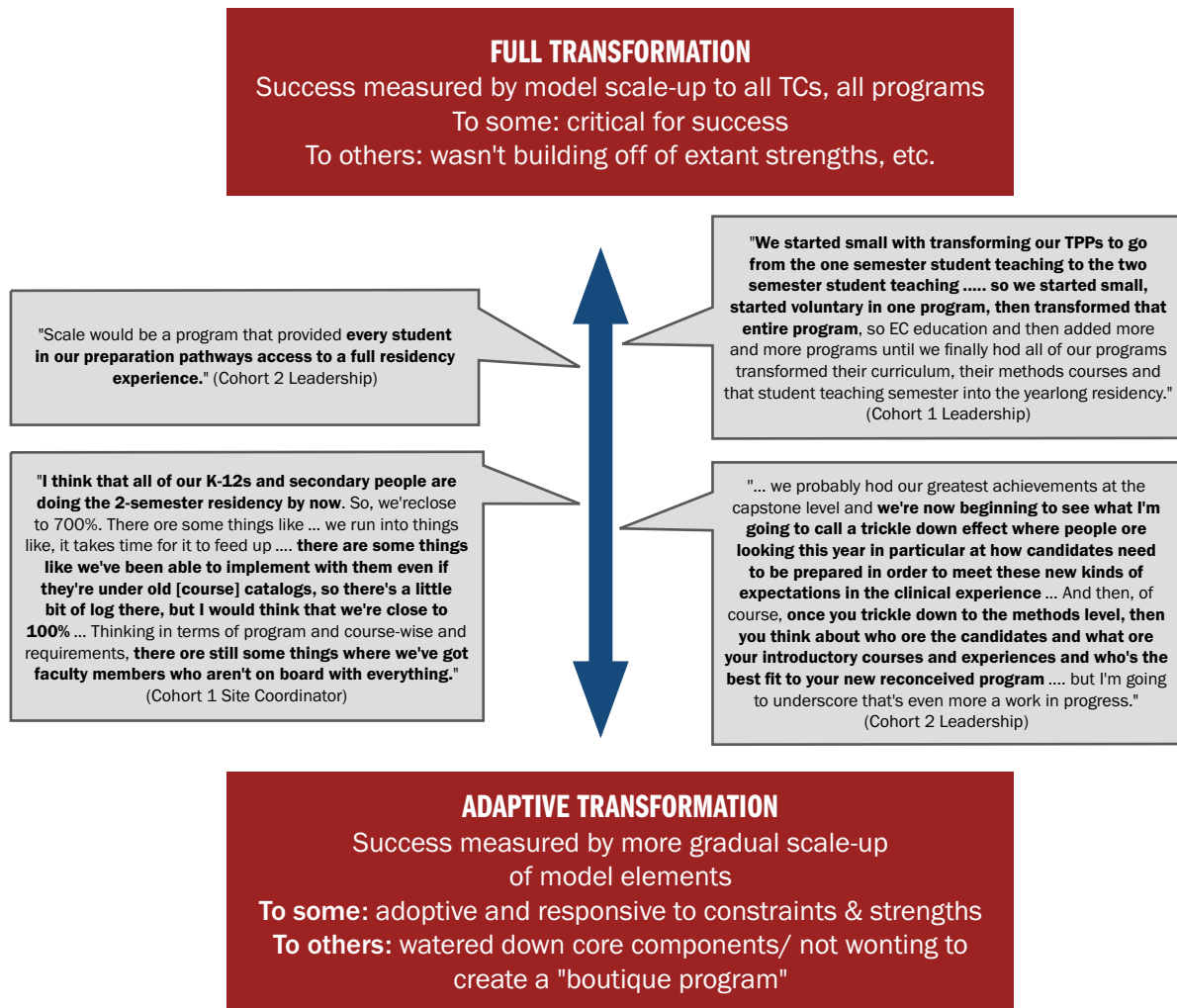
“Scale would be a program that provided every student in our preparation pathways access to a full residency experience.” (Cohort 2 Leadership) “We started small with transforming our TPPs to go from the one semester student teaching to the two semester student teaching.... so we started small, started voluntary in one program, then transformed that entire program, so EC education and then added more and more programs until we finally had all of our programs transformed their curriculum, their methods courses and that student teaching semester into the yearlong residency.” (Cohort 1 Leadership)

The first of these examples hews to the shared definitions of scale-up that we named above and mirrors the ways in which US PREP has written about scale-up of the transformed model in their developmental framework. In the second quote, this participant names their program’s gradual process of growing their transformed model, with the final result of this process reaching all programs and teacher candidates and thus embodying US PREP’s definition of scale-up and transformation.

Meanwhile, “Adaptive Transformation” lies at the other end of the continuum. In this construction, success is measured by a more gradual approach to scale-up of model elements. Stakeholders advocating this approach argued that this is a way to be more adaptive and responsive to both the strengths and the constraints that are contextual to TPPs and PK-12 districts. To

those who named the importance of full transformation, adaptive transformation represents a diluted approach to the core, research-based components of US PREP’s model. Below are two additional quotes, again drawing from both Cohorts 1 and 2, which are illustrative of this end of the continuum:

**Figure 2:** Findings as patterns on a matrix: Patterns of enactors’ implementation of scale-up



*"I think that all of our K-12s and secondary people are doing the 2-semester residency by now. So, we're close to 100%. There are some things like...we run into things like, it takes time for it to feed up.... there are some things like we've been able to implement with them even if they're under old [course] catalogs, so there's a little bit of lag there, but I would think that we're close to 100% ... Thinking in terms of program and course-wise and requirements, there are still some things where we've got faculty members who aren't on board with everything."*  
 (Cohort 1 Site Coordinator)

This quote mirrors the language used in US PREP’s developmental framework with regard to measuring scale-up, particularly around their use of a percentage to characterize the degree to which transformation has reached candidates. However, this participant also names that there are some programmatic elements that have not been fully transformed. This is notable because while many, if not all, of their K-12 and secondary candidates are engaged in yearlong residency, the “lagging” of other program pieces, such as coursework, has implications for model fidelity and US PREP’s bridging of theory and practice-based coursework.



A final exemplar is the closest of these quotes to the “adaptive” end of the continuum:

*“...we probably had our greatest achievements at the capstone level and we’re now beginning to see what I’m going to call a trickle down effect where people are looking this year in particular at how candidates need to be prepared in order to meet these new kinds of expectations in the clinical experience... And then, of course, once you trickle down to the methods level, then you think about who are the candidates and what are your introductory courses and experiences and who’s the best fit to your new reconceived program.... but I’m going to underscore that’s even more a work in progress.” (Cohort 2 Leadership)*

In this last example, the participant describes a process that is less concerned with expanding teacher residency to all candidates and all program elements, conceptions of scale-up that were shared by many other participants. Rather, this Cohort 2 leader notes that their work was marked by careful thinking about recruiting particular candidates and other elements that would be focal to their scale-up work. This approach, which shifts away from volume as an indicator of success, differs from language used in US PREP’s developmental framework, and by other cohorts and actors, in its implementation of scaling-up.

While there was variation in sites’ approaches to scaling up transformation, there was also considerable agreement regarding the factors that participants found to be critical to driving the progress of scaling-up. Across cohorts and actors, factors such as consistent reflection on implementation processes, strong leadership, stakeholder commitment, training and calibration, partnership, and the relationships afforded to sites through the US PREP coalition were all named as critical ingredients to scaling-up.

Bearing out the role that leadership and commitment play in facilitating successful scale-up, one Cohort 2 institution shared:

*“it wouldn’t have happened without having someone in [their] role as Dean to facilitate the movement forward and also have that vision... Leadership is huge. I think faculty in a few different ways. We have several faculty who work in our undergraduate TPP and we also have a fair number of clinical faculty as well who that’s what they live and breathe, is undergraduate TPP and so that commitment that comes to our students and preparing them for being successful when they get into their own classrooms” (Cohort 2 Leadership)*

Here, the participant describes the importance of the Dean in propelling program transformation as well as the commitment that faculty have to their students. This commitment translates to their contributions in scaling-up a model that prepares them for success.

A Cohort 1 site reflected on the essentials of partnership and training, sharing:

*“When we think about scale up, it really is about providing quality systems of support at all levels. So... we have what is called a system of support... So, we first... identified all of these people that we think are valuable stakeholders and we went to these stakeholders and said things like, who are we forgetting? Whose voice is not being heard in the appropriate way? And we did notice that... our training of site coordinators was not as consistent as it could be and that was the piece when it comes to coherence and consistency through the program that we really wanted to hone in on and that was a big focus of our goal’s beginning... and again, it’s all about building internal capacity, so think about it through that lens.” (Cohort 1 Leadership)*

In this quote, the participant shares the careful thought their program gave to the inclusion of diverse partner voices in planning for scale-up. They also named changes the program underwent to build coherence and consistency in site coordinator training, demonstrating an importance in building the will and skill of a role that is essential to scaled-up model implementation.

## Sustainability: Learnings from US PREP’s Partners

We turn now to the ways in which interviewees at TPP and PK-12 district sites discussed their planning and efforts to sustain progress made in transformation. Just as we asked interviewees to define scale-up in the context of transformation, so too did we ask participants: How do programs define sustainability in transformation? When asked about definitions of sustainability, sites most often referred to continuity of model elements that had already been scaled. Sites frequently named continuous funding as foundational for sustaining the model. Given their view of the importance of funding, interviewees spoke about sustainability with more tenuousness, often calling into question the long-term possibility of maintaining sufficient funding.

*“For example, we’re supporting university supervisors with small stipends, particularly for looking at the tool that we’re using for evaluation. I think that we are asking when this goes away, when the funds go away to support this extra work... So, we are thinking about issues of sustainability as we move forward” (Cohort 2 Leadership).*

Here, Cohort 2 Leadership noted that they are able to provide stipends to key players in the transformation process through current funding. With the foresight of knowing that this financial support will not be available after the grant cycle and with less

clarity around how budgets will account for sustaining what US PREP funding has enabled, this interviewee names the potential strain on recruiting and retaining staff to take part in the transformed model. This worry about financial sustainability was echoed consistently across the data: given the challenges facing higher education and teacher preparation in particular, how might programs continue the difficult and ongoing work of sustaining their transformation?

Teaching has long been a service profession, one in which educators' attention to the "psychic rewards" of teaching (Lortie, 1977) and altruism have been used as a substitute for good pay. As such, another strand of responses named not just the dependence on grants, but on the good will of teacher educators who, as a result of their commitment to transformation, continue to work despite low pay:

*"I guess that we are considered sustainable, but in my mind, we're not sustainable because we are still paying our site coordinators with a lot of good will. It's hard to find good site coordinators for what we're able to pay them and so, every single year, there's this worry of... how many are going to say, 'I'm well and truly ready to retire now'. So, on paper, do we have the budget for the site coordinators that we need? Yes. In reality, I don't consider that truly sustainable because you're counting on people willing to work out of the goodness of their heart and I think there's far too much of that in education already" (Cohort 1 Leadership).*

As noted above, funding was consistently named across both cohorts as the most critical ingredient for sustainability. Meanwhile, there were some, albeit far fewer, references to other needed ingredients for sustainability, such as leadership, partnership, training, and calibration. Consideration of these elements was more common among Cohort 2 sites, with participants calling on these critical ingredients in tandem with funding to continue propelling the transformed model forward. In this smaller and less frequent pool of responses, some interviewees did name other ingredients, in addition to financial supports, that they deemed elemental to successful sustainability:

*"Well, I can see sustainability, and that is making sure that what we're doing is here to stay not just initially with funding that's provided, but working with our partner schools, working with our superintendents, working with our partner principals and teachers, so that they see the benefit and it's a reciprocal effect they're learning from us, we're learning from them and it's getting stronger and stronger..." (Cohort 1 Faculty)*

Here, a Cohort 1 faculty member enumerated how, to them, sustainability is dependent on funding and also cross-

organizational partnership and reciprocity. Beginning with the importance of funding, the interviewee then elaborated the importance of maintaining and sustaining their mutually beneficial partnership with their PK-12 district.

A small number of TPPs and PK-12 districts named the importance of continued training and onboarding of new staff and faculty to sustain transformation. Site coordinators play a critical role in the transformed model and are responsible for creating communication and cohesion between TPPs and PK-12 districts. Given that this is both a relatively new role and a role that differs in important ways from the traditional field supervisor role, training and support to enact the role is crucial. Knowing how to enact this role successfully is dependent on the building of skill and will:

*"I think that's very important to the sustainability part of all this because if we hire new site coordinators and they don't receive adequate onboarding then it's very likely that they'll get overwhelmed and stressed out about all the work that a site coordinator does, so it would be great for us to have something in place for new site coordinators, something strategic... US PREP sent us to... a site coordinator training. That was wonderful, but it would have also been great to have that practice-based learning to go see it in action... It was hard to visualize it all. We were trying to learn a million things as well as do it at the same time. So, that was a bit of a challenge, so I'd like for us to maybe receive some support and for us to think about how to make it better for future site coordinators." (Cohort 2 Site Coordinator)*

Funding is necessary but not sufficient to sustain ongoing training, support, and onboarding for key TPP roles. When Site Coordinators leave their role, they take with them their knowledge and expertise regarding the transformed model. Incoming Site Coordinators are highly unlikely to have either seen or enacted this innovative role. As such, sustaining the transformed model also necessitates scaffolded opportunities for teacher educators to practice their learnings.

## Scale-Up and Sustainability: Learnings from US PREP Leadership, Changes Over Time

In this section we introduce voices of US PREP personnel and consider how the US PREP organization has defined and supported scale-up and sustainability of the transformed model and how these fixtures of implementation have evolved over time.

Analysis of interviews with US PREP personnel uncover an evolution in how the organization defined scale-up and sustainability and in how they approached technical assistance.



Some US PREP leaders saw this evolution as a positive set of changes. For example, one interviewee from US PREP leadership stated:

*When I first started, we were very specific about what the model should look like and that it should scale in a particular way... But as I've done the work, I've recognized that it looks different in different contexts and that universities have been innovative as they think about the model, so one university might scale the site coordinator role in one way or structure in one way. Another university might do it a different way, however, they can accomplish the same goal. So, that site coordinator being a liaison between the district and the university and high-quality support to candidates and all those things can happen, yet the roles can look slightly different in different universities, so I think that has changed over time (US PREP).*

Here, we see that this participant observed a change over time, moving from an earlier approach that stressed consistency and specificity to an expanded understanding that different approaches to scale-up, trained on contextual needs and priorities, could still lead to accomplishing “the same goal.” According to the interviewee this is emblematic of change that they had seen in the US PREP approach to scaling the transformed model over time.

While all US PREP leadership reiterated the importance of the transformed model, there was variability in how US PREP personnel spoke about evolutions in definition and support. Some saw new flexibility as a strength to scale-up and sustainability of the model, while others debated the wisdom of flexibility in the details:

*“When it came to what we thought of as a transformed model in the beginning, it's still there. We haven't changed our goals of yearlong residency by any means, but it's the details. Like, even the rubric. When we first started, all Cohort 1, they had to have this certain rubric. Well, that's not the case anymore. They're across the country, they're all using different rubrics. We're all fine. Is the rubric addressing the needs of diverse students? Is it preparing them to be effective teachers for students of color and diverse student bodies? That's what's important” (US PREP).*

Speaking to this, another US PREP leader suggested that too much flexibility and deference to TPP partners stalls progress, and ultimately, may have negative implications for program transformation:

*“So, yes, we should have a series of very practical tools that we use as examples that programs can then adapt to their context to build out a whole, to look at their whole coursework from beginning to graduation that hits these particular elements in this particular order based on what research has suggested about the way a person learns how to teach. We have defaulted to deferring to what programs want to do and I think our results have reflected that, that we have not seen very many changes as a result of that strategy and so the progress has been very slow.” (US PREP)*

## Transformation Dynamics: Reciprocal relationships, fidelity, and flexibility

We turn now to the following question: How do teacher preparation programs and US PREP make decisions – together and reciprocally – regarding which aspects of the transformed model they implement with flexibility and which they implement with fidelity? How has US PREP managed the fundamentally reciprocal relationships that they nurture with their partners and what has this meant for scale-up, sustainability, and program transformation? These questions pertain to tension(s) around what differentiating support for TPPs means and looks like. These questions also bring attention to the ways that the reciprocal relationships between US PREP and TPPs result, at times, in pressing towards model flexibility (or fidelity) because that is what the partner is seeking. As noted earlier, we see that US PREP consistently supports sites by differentiating to their contexts, and that sites consistently reported appreciation for that differentiation. However, we found that how they differentiate varies along a continuum from fidelity to flexibility. In analyzing interview data we see that diverse sets of voices, across TPPs and US PREP, speak to the complications and affordances of managing this tension.

Across the interviews there was a strong, patterned appreciation for the ways that US PREP differentiates their support. TPP stakeholders consistently named differentiation—attention to individual contexts, capacities, and learning trajectories of TPPs and PK-12 districts—as a key resource and asset of the US PREP approach. This individualized support is also featured in US PREP materials. Support begins with the provision of an Individualized Transformation Plan (ITP) and progresses through a series of highly scaffolded and supported sets of next steps. US PREP, in their documents and outward-facing materials, stresses the importance of on-the-ground support:

*“The ITP will also outline the support that US PREP staff will give to help the member institution achieve the actions and goals on the designated timelines. The implementation plan will be highly supported, monitored quarterly, and evaluated through a Program Development Framework Review at the end of the year to ensure that appropriate progress is achieved. Teacher preparation leaders’ commitment and measurable progress will be required for continued membership. Based on the goals, actions, and timelines designated in the ITP, the US PREP Center will allocate a team of US PREP Transformation Specialists and Clinical Coaches to assist the member institution with piloting and scaling the transformation initiative.”*

TPPs and PK-12 districts reiterated the importance of this differentiated support, noting that this was critical in the building of skill and will for transformation:

*“I think one of the things that was very helpful for us was the different meetings that they would have as far as with the faculty. The different training. Making sure that we know how to observe our TCs, how to make sure that we were well informed about the lessons that we were doing, and so that really helped us a lot as far as all the training that we had to do and as a matter of fact, I’m getting a certification [inaudible] with US PREP that was very informative for me. So, we knew exactly what you observe when you go out to observe your TCs, how to relate with your student teacher, that was very informative. Those particular trainings were ideal for [TPP name].” (Cohort 1, TPP Leadership).*

In this quote the interviewee named substantive and nuanced support from US PREP during transformation, support that

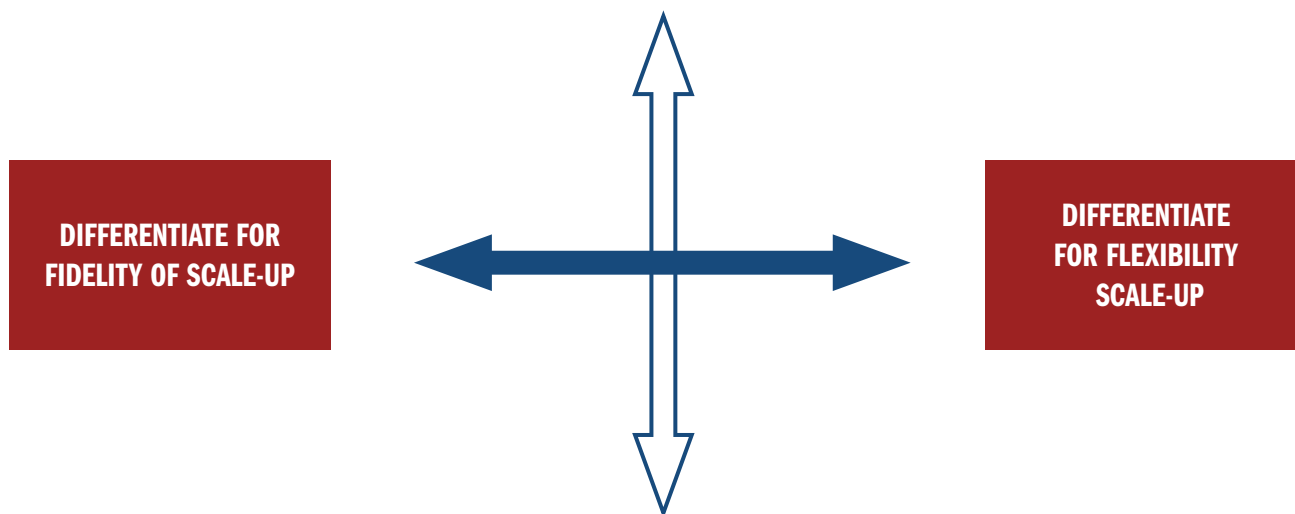
enabled the construction of complementary structures, such as governance meetings, and support that enabled the development of new practices and skills.

US PREP’s approach centers differentiation by applying careful consideration and responsiveness to contextual differences in structures, challenges, extant relationships, and skill, and will. Overall, this perspective—that differentiation is a critical component of US PREP technical assistance—was consistently voiced across interviews. In this view, differentiation is a given and a resource. And yet, while discussing US PREP’s technical assistance, interviewees also consistently named an important dynamic regarding decision-making among TPPs, PK-12 districts, and US PREP personnel, and how this dynamic might impact successful transformation. In our analysis of the interview data, this decision-making dynamic falls along a continuum between differentiation for fidelity of scale-up and differentiation for flexibility of scale-up. This dynamic is illustrated along the continuum in **Figure 3**.

**Figure 4** (on page 11) features a Cohort 1 leader remarking how they worry that US PREP has become too flexible. They then name a series of challenges that might contribute to why US PREP, according to them, has become too flexible: (1) the challenge of growing a movement and US PREP’s own scaling up work across many more institutions and (2) the national context, including ways that challenges nationally might complicate the extent to which US PREP can be “inflexible.”

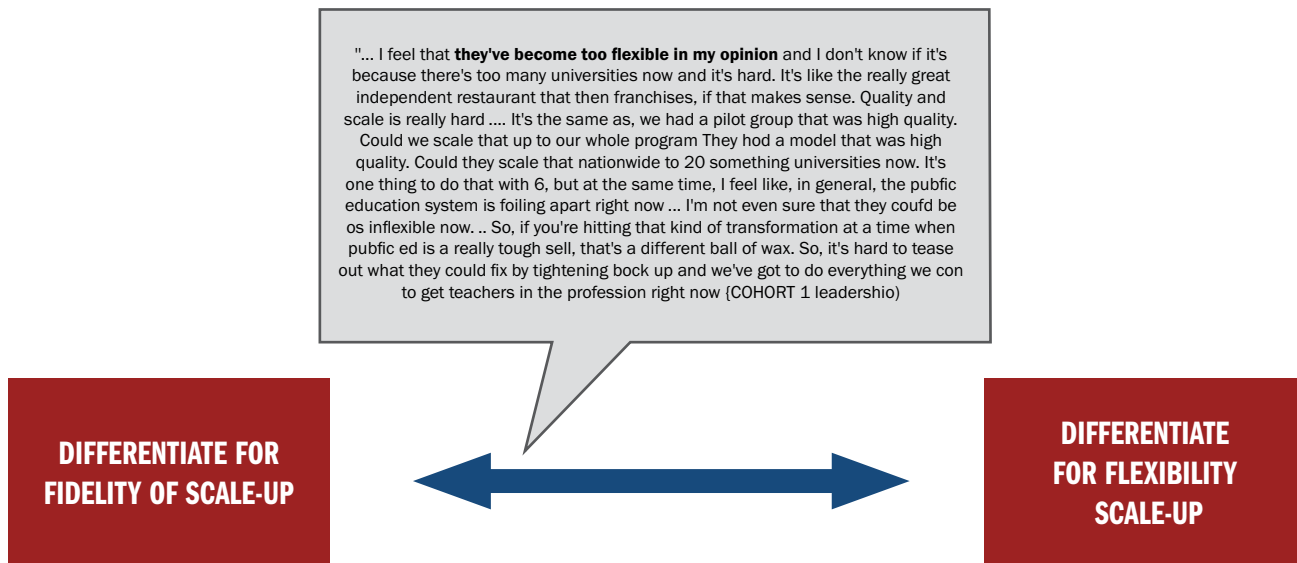
This quote is important for several reasons. First, it is an exemplar of the ways that some program leadership spoke about differentiating for fidelity. Second, it illuminates and names the multiple pressures on US PREP as they work to support their partners. There are the individual partners’ needs, which US PREP

**Figure 3:** A Continuum of differentiating for fidelity to differentiating for flexibility



In **Figure 3**, the x-axis represents HOW implementation is enacted. Beginning on the far-left side of the x-axis, participants spoke to the importance of approaching the work of transformation with uniformity and alignment.

**Figure 4:** A Continuum of differentiating for fidelity to differentiating for flexibility



can attend to anywhere on the fidelity/flexibility continuum, and state and national contexts which, in this instance, bring their own pressures that affect the extent to which US PREP might be able to press more or less on fidelity and flexibility.

Moving a bit further to the right side of the axis, we find a Cohort 2 TPP Leader (**Figure 5**) reflecting on their work on transformation, still hewing closely to the model, but adapting more than the previous interviewee might have advocated for.

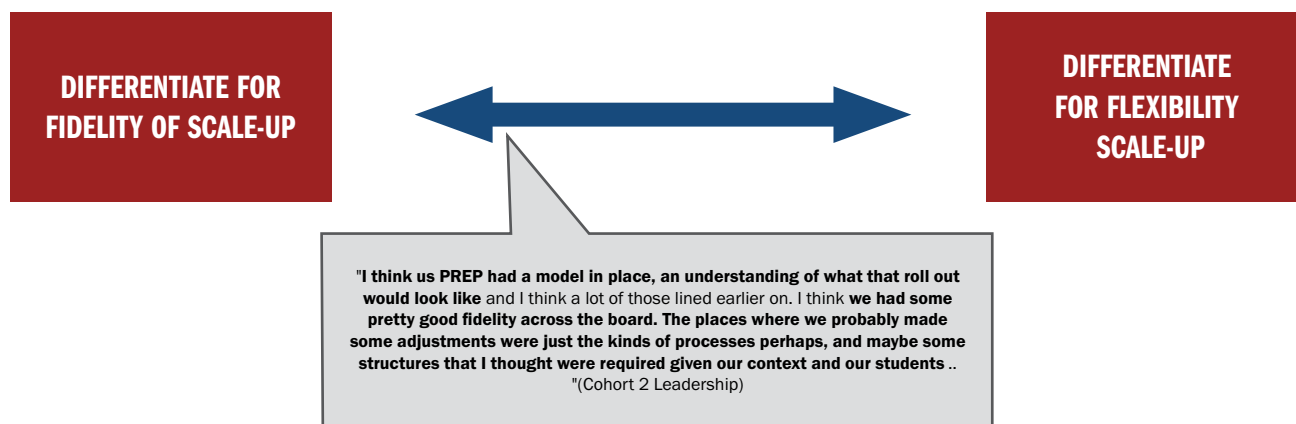
In this example, the interviewee noted continued “good fidelity across the board.” While there was adaptation, we see that the roll-out largely aligned with US PREP’s understanding. Moving to the next exemplar quote (**Figure 6** on page 12), we find ourselves further along the continuum towards flexibility.

Here, the message from this Cohort 2 leader is nuanced. We can see that they experienced approaches characterized by fidelity and

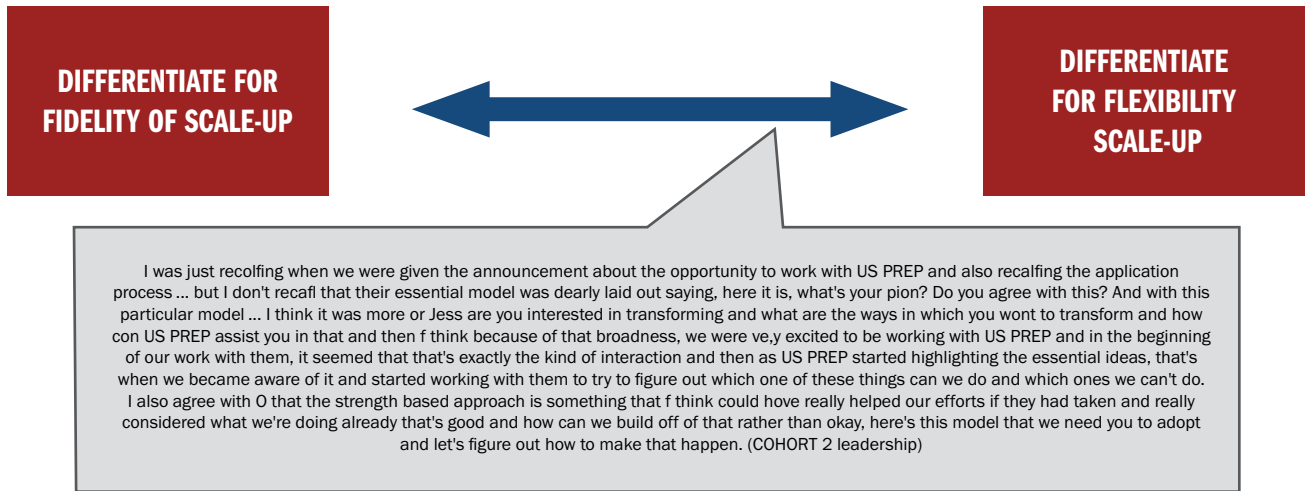
approaches characterized by flexibility and, in their view, there was variance in the levels of flexibility and fidelity across time in the ways that US PREP supported them. Originally it seemed to this Cohort 2 leader that there might be a lot of flexibility, but then, “US PREP started highlighting the essential ideas” which pushed towards fidelity. However, after that, the institution “started working with them [US PREP] to try to figure out which one of these things can we do.” While noting this variability, the interviewee also named how they wish flexibility in differentiation was offered—tied to the strengths that they believe their institution was bringing to the hard work of change.

**Figure 7** (on page 12) presents a final example along the far-right side of the axis towards differentiate for flexibility for scale up. In this exemplar we hear from a Cohort 1 faculty member who names the ways in which flexibility helped them, and how US PREP technical assistance supported their institution in adapting the model given their specific local contextual needs.

**Figure 5:** A Continuum of differentiating for fidelity to differentiating for flexibility



**Figure 6:** A Continuum of differentiating for fidelity to differentiating for flexibility

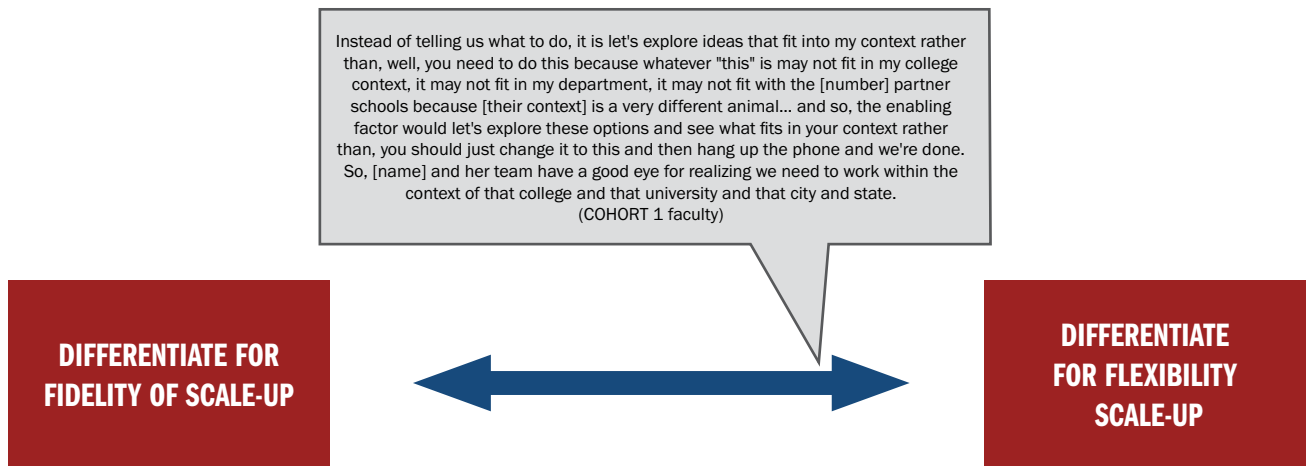


Across these exemplars we see a continuum – with some lauding the flexibility that they had and others valuing differentiation that helped them to scale-up with fidelity. It is important to note that there was a number of partners who wondered, as we saw in **Figure 4** (on page 11), whether US PREP was erring too much on the side of flexibility. Another example of that follows:

*“I’m not sure I know what US PREP even is anymore... there were some fights and some mashing of the teeth ..., but I think our program’s better....the only thing that we did in compliance with US PREP that I would say we changed, because even the site coordinator model, we didn’t get exactly what they wanted, but we got the spirit of what the goal was and it worked for us.” (Cohort 1 Leadership)*

Ultimately, technical assistance is not something that is done “to” partners but is work that is done with partners. Just as teachers are dependent upon students’ will and skill, so too are technical assistance providers in reciprocal relationship with their partners. US PREP does not decide in a vacuum when to aim for flexibility or fidelity; instead they make these decisions inside of often fraught state, district, and national contexts, and in response to the needs and expectations of their partners. These different approaches to differentiation—for fidelity or flexibility—likely influence outcomes and success of program transformation. However, at this time we do not know in what ways or how outcomes are influenced. As such, in our recommendations, we name the importance of studying how and in what ways US PREP’s technical assistance hews towards fidelity or flexibility and the extent to which that is related to data on transformation success.

**Figure 7:** A Continuum of differentiating for fidelity to differentiating for flexibility



## Implications

In this brief we have presented formative analyses of US PREP and their Cohort 1 and 2 partners' work to scale up and sustain teacher preparation transformation. We hope these analyses will inform US PREP as they continue to refine and enhance their technical assistance. As noted here, this analysis has uncovered times at which US PREP's engagement with partners has been characterized by tinkering and times at which the work has been characterized by tearing towards the utopia of high-quality teacher preparation for all teacher candidates. Again and again, we saw the ways in which US PREP is seeking to create truly transformative change in a system that has, historically, had precious little success in reforming itself. Seeking to do this, at scale and in sustainable ways, is herculean work. Inspiring programs to join them in this, voluntarily, at a moment of great uncertainty – with falling enrollments and nation-wide problems with the recruitment and retention of teachers – adds additional challenges to an already difficult task. This work represents another phase in a long history of efforts to reform U.S. public education and reflects long histories of these reform efforts:

*“We call this book Tinkering toward Utopia to highlight the tension between Americans' intense faith in education—almost a secular religion—and the gradualness of changes in educational practices. For over a century citizens have sought to perfect the future by debating how to improve the young through education. Actual reforms in schools have rarely matched such aspirations, however. The words “utopia” and “tinkering” each have positive and negative connotations. Utopian thinking can be dismissed as pie-in-the-sky or valued as visionary; tinkering can be condemned as mere incrementalism or praised as a commonsense remedy for everyday problems. Both positive and negative examples of tinkering and utopian thinking abound in the record of educational reform. At the heart of that history lies the complex interplay between the purposes and processes of institutional change.” Tinkering toward Utopia, Prologue: Tyack & Cuban, 1997, p. 1*

Regarding scale-up of the transformed model, key findings include: (1) Strong and consistent definitional agreement regarding scale up and (2) significant variation in how sites have operationalized and implemented towards scale-up.

Participants spoke of a myriad of important elemental factors related to scale-up and the importance of coordinating among and between these factors. These elemental factors included the recruitment, training, and support of site coordinators; establishing and nurturing TPP partnerships with PK-12 districts; continuing to construct data collection and use practices and mobilizing to understand and leverage what is learned from data; expanding transformation to more programs within the TPP; and ensuring every candidate would have access to the yearlong residency.

There was considerably less refinement or specificity in the ways that interviewees spoke about and conceptualized sustainability. The one consistent way that participants defined sustainability was financial. Absent were considerations of the many elemental factors that participants named as critical for scale-up. As such, there is a possibility to leverage the findings around scale up to help elaborate what might be needed for sustainability.

**Continued, consistent, and sustainable funding is necessary to sustain hard-won TPP transformations. However, given the findings on scale-up and the conservative grammar of schooling, it is likely that sustainability will necessitate long-term attention to the on-going capacity, skill, and will of both individuals inside of TPPs and PK-12 districts and the very organizations themselves.**

Throughout this brief we have also attended to how it is that US PREP works towards transformation with their partners, and how this runs on a continuum from differentiating for fidelity to differentiating for flexibility. The data forms a continuum – not alternate poles, but instead, variation across the continuum and partners. There is a need for US PREP to better understand the relationships between the how of their work and the what, especially along the differentiation from fidelity to flexibility continuum.

These sets of findings lead us to the following six recommendations for US PREP and their partners:

- (1) Continue to build coherent organizational definitions for what “counts” as scale, including decision points about priorities (e.g. should the organization be stretching towards “full” or “adaptive” implementation.
- (2) Study how variation along the continuum from fidelity to flexibility and the “moves” of key technical assistance personnel (e.g. regional transformation specialists, clinical coaches) are related to transformation success.
- (3) Continue to build coherent organizational decision rules about when and about what guidance hews towards fidelity and/or flexibility, while also protecting the work of differentiation, which was widely valued across US PREP and enactors.
- (4) The relative paucity of voices speaking to and about sustainability is a clarion call. Lean into this and build more clarity and concreteness regarding what it takes to be sustainable.



- (5) Money is likely necessary but insufficient for sustainability. Critical ingredients for scale up (e.g. consistent reflection, leadership, relationships, shared understandings, partnership) can be leveraged in the elaboration of what it takes to be sustainable.
- (6) For sustained transformation, build on extant structures—e.g. convenings, coalition relationships, transformation specialists—to support partners’ extended learning and (re)commitment to the model.

Attending to these implications will be key to US PREP’s goals of visionary and contextually sensitive change.

## Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge funding for this work from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

## For More on This Topic:

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