

# NCDA Leadership Academy Executive Summary

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**Original Proposed Project Question:** *Future content for both the on-demand training and podcasts. We need content and it will be nice to hear what topics members may enjoy most.*

**Revised & Official Project Question:** **How are members experiencing NCDA's Professional Development (PD) Resources and what can we do to improve?**

## Recommendations

- One recommendation that has already been implemented as a result of this project was the creation of Course Outlines for courses within The NCDA Hub. After sitting in on the first focus group, Melissa Venable developed a 1-page Course Outline for each course that includes the learning outcomes, price, number of CEUs, course authors and structure, and more. This met member's desire for a concise, but specific, resource on what is covered and the quality to help members assess whether or not they want to invest their time/funds.
- One of the ideas with the most positive feedback from this project was for NCDA to implement a Professional Development Digest email on a biweekly or monthly basis, similar to the Career Convergence emails in that it offers snippets of what each PD offering entails, and including all the different PD modalities and transparency about the costs of different PD options. The idea of staff writers who curate and present this information in a cohesive manner, and/or the utilization of AI in this process, also emerged for consideration.
- Other ideas with highly positive feedback were that NCDA implement a tool for searching content across all of NCDA's Professional Development resources by topic or keyword and/or provide curated packages of NCDA Professional Development resources, organized by topic or keyword. (Example: releasing packaged content relevant to international students for international education week).
- Finally, two additional potential future Leadership Academy (LA) project ideas emerged during the completion of this project:
  - A future LA member could research NCDA members' pain points when it comes to the PD offered and how it is accessed, as well as strategies to address these needs/gaps.
  - A future LA member could research the challenge of communicating to individuals in positions of power (e.g. higher education administrators) the value of professional development for career practitioners.

## Key Findings

*From survey with nearly 150 respondents:*

- Members ranked the most helpful/useful PD benefits from NCDA to be the publications (Career Convergence, Career Developments, and Career Development Quarterly), followed by Professional Credentials and Global Career Development Conference. Our Podcast, Webinars, and The NCDA Hub were ranked significantly lower.
- When asked what reason(s) members were most likely to use PD resources from NCDA, the top 3 highest ranked reasons were:
  - Seeking new knowledge and skills
  - Staying current on issues in the field
  - Seeking Continuing Education Units (CEUs)
- When identifying potential improvements to NCDA's professional development resources, the idea with the highest ranking of value was a tool for searching for content across all of NCDA's Professional Development resources by topic or keyword.
- The second highest ranked potential improvement was curated packages of NCDA Professional Development resources, organized by topic or keyword. (Example: releasing packaged content relevant to international students for international education week).
- Responses were mixed when it came to networking/cohort-based models for PD. "Seeking to connect with peers & colleagues" was not a highly ranked reason respondents accessed NCDA's PD resources, and when asked if an opportunity for learning in a cohort-model (a small group of practitioners learning in community) through The NCDA Hub would increase their likelihood of participating in a class offered through The Hub, only 52.1% said yes. Further, when asked if a synchronous or asynchronous cohort would be preferred, results were again split, with 41.1% preferring a synchronous ("live"/real time) cohort and 39% preferring an asynchronous (on demand cohort) - the remaining 19.9% had no interest in cohort participation.
- Overall, respondents ranked the selection criteria, quality, and credibility of NCDA PD resources favorably, with the publications (Career Convergence, Career Developments, and Career Development Quarterly) being ranked most highly satisfactory.
- Additional trends from respondents:
  - Multiple respondents highlighted the need for better communication about available PD opportunities and resources.
  - Multiple respondents suggested more curation, prepared expert writers, speakers, and presenters for better quality resources.
  - Multiple respondents suggested having brief blurbs/outlines to introduce PD content in a shorter, more digestible format.

*From Focus Groups/Qualitative Response:*

- One theme that emerged was the opportunity for more intentionality in the way PD resources are shared with members. Whether they are sorted by constituency groups, career development competencies, practitioners' experience level, or any other categorization, there are a variety of ways the information could be organized/promoted.
  - When the concept of practitioners' experience level came up, one participant brought up the idea of a glossary of terms for new practitioners to know the jargon of career development and know what words to use in searches.

- Another related theme was the desire for more of a sense of continuity/common thread from NCDCA's PD resources. The example was brought up that other organizations have personalities/staff writers that provide a flow or narrative through-line for the PD material.
- The concepts of efficiency of access and "frustration tolerance" emerged in that many members are extremely busy professionals, and thus it is easier to skim written content for keywords than scroll through a webinar or podcast for information. However, at least one member preferred the webinar/podcast to the written publications, so having PD in a variety of formats was appreciated by members.
  - Related to members' busy-ness, the idea of creating short snippets and/or a commercial of the webinar/podcast to help members assess whether or not they're interested emerged as well. Members needing/wanting additional methods to differentiate which content would be of value to them was a consistent theme.
  - Participants expressed that the website serves as more of a repository and is not always intuitive for them to navigate and find the PD resources they need.
- The concept of oversaturation of PD came up, and at least one participant recommended condensing content across platforms and/or reducing the number of offerings for a less-is-more approach. Providing a unique point of view emerged as a strategy to combat oversaturation as well, and focus group participants praised Career Convergence for being nimble and modern - providing a variety of cutting-edge perspectives that may take longer to emerge in other resources that have different standards of selectivity, such as Career Development Quarterly.
- The idea of a tool for searching for content across all of NCDCA's Professional Development resources by topic or keyword was further positively affirmed within the focus groups. It was brought up that there is an opportunity for NCDCA to learn more about members' pain points when it comes to the PD offered and how it is accessed.
  - Given what was mentioned above about the lack of ease with navigating the website, participants yearned for some sort of system to fast track the way they search/access material for specialties or certain subject matter.
  - Overall, a desire was expressed for NCDCA to use their position as subject matter experts to direct busy professionals where they need/want to go in terms of which PD would suit them. The idea of having known personalities (such as staff writers) who curate NCDCA PD material emerged again.
- When discussing communication about and promotion of PD opportunities, LinkedIn and email were highlighted as key preferred methods of communication. The idea of short snippets/commercials emerged again, with the idea of using AI to develop this.
  - On the topic of PD, the topic of siloing was brought up - between different modalities of PD, constituency groups, etc. - and it was encouraged to market material in ways that transcend the silos.
- The idea of a NCDCA PD Digest emerged and received greatly positive feedback, with participants saying they would not mind more emails, especially if the emails were similar to the Career Convergence emails, but more robust to include different PD modalities and transparency about the costs of different PD offerings.
- Multiple participants in both the survey and focus groups mentioned affordability/reduced fees for professional development. NCDCA received positive feedback for being more

affordable than NACE and other resources, as well as providing PD resources and CEUs at varied prices, but multiple members expressed that their employer does not provide them with a PD budget, so they were accessing such resources out of pocket.

- During the affordability topic, a new idea emerged of gamifying engagement with NCDA's PD by offering a raffle to help with free registration/accommodation for the conference for a limited number of members who engage highly with PD.
- Another sub-topic that emerged during the affordability topic was the challenge of communicating to higher education administrators and additional folks in positions of power the value of professional development for career practitioners. This may be an interesting topic for a future NCDA LA participant.

## **Methodology**

### *Survey*

To research the project question, I began by looking at past NCDA PD surveys and identifying questions to ask that might need updated data, in addition to questions that had never been asked before. To reduce survey fatigue, I partnered with fellow Leadership Academy member Angelica Gil to consolidate our two different surveys into one, sent to both members and nonmembers, with questions tailored to both the value of membership (Angelica's focus) and professional development (my focus).

### *Focus Groups*

After the survey, I conducted 2 focus groups (one with 3 participants and a second with 5 participants) and collected one written qualitative response to the focus group questions for an interested member unable to attend the scheduled focus group dates.

## **Demographics**

Overall our survey had 146 respondents representing 32 states and Canada, Japan, Hong Kong, and Saudi Arabia. 98.6% of the respondents were current NCDA members, the majority represented the Higher Education Career Counselors and Specialists (39.7%) and Private Practice, Business & Industry, and Agencies (37.7%) constituency groups. School Career Counselors and Specialists (14.4%), Counselor Educators and Researchers (6.8%), and Graduate Students (1.4%) were also represented. Focus group participants were selected (based on availability and volunteering their time) from the 146 survey respondents.

## **Additional Findings: Future Topics for NCDA Professional Development**

When asked: "*What topics would you most like to see covered in NCDA Professional Development resources?*" survey responses provided the following (initially curated by ChatGPT, edited by Shelby) listed in order of the number of responses supporting each topic:

### *AI and Technology:*

- AI: 9 responses
- Ethical considerations of AI in career development: 2 responses
- AI and its ethical implications: 1 response
- Technology and its role in career development: 1 response

### *Mental Health and Wellness:*

- Mental health and wellness topics: 9 responses
- Integration of career, mind, body, and spirit topics: 1 response

- Intersection of career and personal counseling: 1 response

*Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI):*

- DEI topics: 6 responses
- Special populations and their special needs: 2 responses
- Intersectionality of career and personal counseling: 1 response
- Addressing the needs of first-gen professionals: 1 response

*Specific Client Populations:*

- Career counseling for specific populations (e.g., students, athletes, non-traditional students): 5 responses
- Working with international students: 4 responses
- Working with military members or veterans: 3 responses
- High school resources: 3 responses
- Serving international students, graduate students, higher education: 1 response

*Career Development Theory and Practice:*

- Best practices in career counseling/coaching: 4 responses
- Application of career development theory to practice: 4 responses
- Refreshers on career theories: 1 response
- Informal career assessments and low or no-cost certification for formal assessments: 1 response
- Case studies of applied career theory in practice: 1 response

*Employer Engagement and Workplace Trends:*

- Topics related to employer relations and workplace changes: 4 responses
- Labor market trends and occupational outlook: 2 responses
- Employer engagement and career specialists: 1 response
- How to recognize toxic leadership and seek help: 1 response
- Training staff for professional development and upskilling: 1 response

*Higher Education and Policy:*

- Higher education policy and administration changes: 2 responses
- Topics related to working in higher education career services: 2 responses
- Higher education includes graduate and professional programs: 1 response
- Interaction with the registered apprenticeship program: 1 response

*Business and Private Practice:*

- Business development for career practitioners: 2 responses
- Private practice and entrepreneurship: 2 responses
- Developing leadership skills: 1 response
- How to start a private practice: 1 response
- Building and maintaining a private coaching business: 1 response
- Entrepreneurship: 1 response

*Globalization and International Work:*

- Globalization of career development work: 1 response
- Building connections for regional areas: 1 response
- Career development and expected outcomes for international students: 1 response
- International student resources: 1 response

Note from ChatGPT: Please note that some responses could fit into multiple categories, and the categorization is based on the predominant theme of the response.