

*State
Systems
Improvement
Self-Assessment*

October 2008

Mid-South Regional Resource Center State Systems Improvement Self Assessment and Planning Guide

Overview and Purpose of Document

This document is designed to be used as an assessment of State systems by State Part B and Part C staff and their stakeholders. It provides a detailed process for State Education Agencies (SEA) and Lead Agencies (LA) to follow that will guide improvement efforts relative to the APR indicators and other statewide initiatives. Its purpose is to assist States in

1. implementing a systematic approach to designing and refining improvement activities,
2. aligning improvement activities with State priorities,
3. allocating funding and human resources to State improvement efforts which are most effective, and
4. implementing, tracking, documenting and evaluating improvement efforts designed to achieve or maintain compliance and improve performance that lead to better results.

The framework comprises three major components and their related subcomponents and practices, including:

1. Collection and Analysis of Data
 - a. Review/Revise Existing Data Systems
 - b. Analyze Data
 - c. Clarify Needs for Improvement
2. Strategic Design of Improvement Activities
 - a. Review/Revise Existing State Performance Plan (SPP) Improvement Activities
 - b. Select and Design New Improvement Activities
 - c. Develop Plan of Action for Implementing Improvement Activities
3. Implementation, Tracking and Documentation
 - a. Implement Improvement Activities
 - b. Track and Document Implementation of Improvement Activities

Woven throughout the framework are evaluation practices to ensure SEA and LA staff have the information needed to determine the effectiveness of their improvement efforts and enhance their systems and processes.

Directions for Completing the Systems Improvement Self-Assessment

For the purposes of this self-assessment and planning process, our adopted definition of *system* refers to *interacting, interrelated, or interdependent elements that form a complex whole*. The practices are intended to be viewed as part of a larger structure. They should not be considered solely as isolated steps relative to an indicator, or the agency may risk designing an inefficient system with a fragmented approach.

To guide State agencies in examining their current practices that comprise the systems, it is suggested that SEA and LA SPP/APR teams begin with a thoughtful discussion about each component and its related subcomponents and practices. This will help the team develop a shared understanding of the practices that we believe contribute to effective systems that support continuous improvement.

It is emphasized that a key to this examination of existing systems is to identify immediate and high priority changes that will likely improve single or multiple levels of systems functioning relative to data, personnel, funding, technical assistance service delivery and monitoring systems. A SEA or LA has flexibility in how they approach the completion of this self-assessment. One option may be for the SPP/APR team to use their collective knowledge of the practices relative to each indicator to discuss how the status of these practices relate to a larger system, followed by reaching consensus on (1) whether each practice is standard; (2) whether a high priority exists that will require planning an immediate follow-up action or set of actions; or (3) whether or not improvement of the practice should be revisited during the agency's next planning cycle.

Another option the SEA or LA may choose in responding to the self assessment is to begin with a focus on a single or set of related priority indicator(s). Decisions relative to the indicators are made whether or not a practice is considered standard practice, whether a high priority exists and requires immediate follow-up action, or if the practice should be revisited during the next planning cycle.

The intent of conducting this self-assessment and planning process is for States to convene stakeholders (internal and external to the SEA and LA, as deemed appropriate) to holistically assess their systems. As priority actions are designed, it is critical that State systems in their entirety are considered. To this end, the status of each practice needs to be determined and the agency should prioritize follow-up actions based on what is most important and requires the most immediate attention.

Development of a work plan that will guide implementation of these decisions is critical. The plan should specify the personnel and fiscal resources that will support each action and the projected timelines for initiation and completion. To strive toward continuous improvement, States are encouraged to monitor implementation of their plan and revisit their practices at regular intervals to determine if the systems are supporting improvement and producing the desired results.

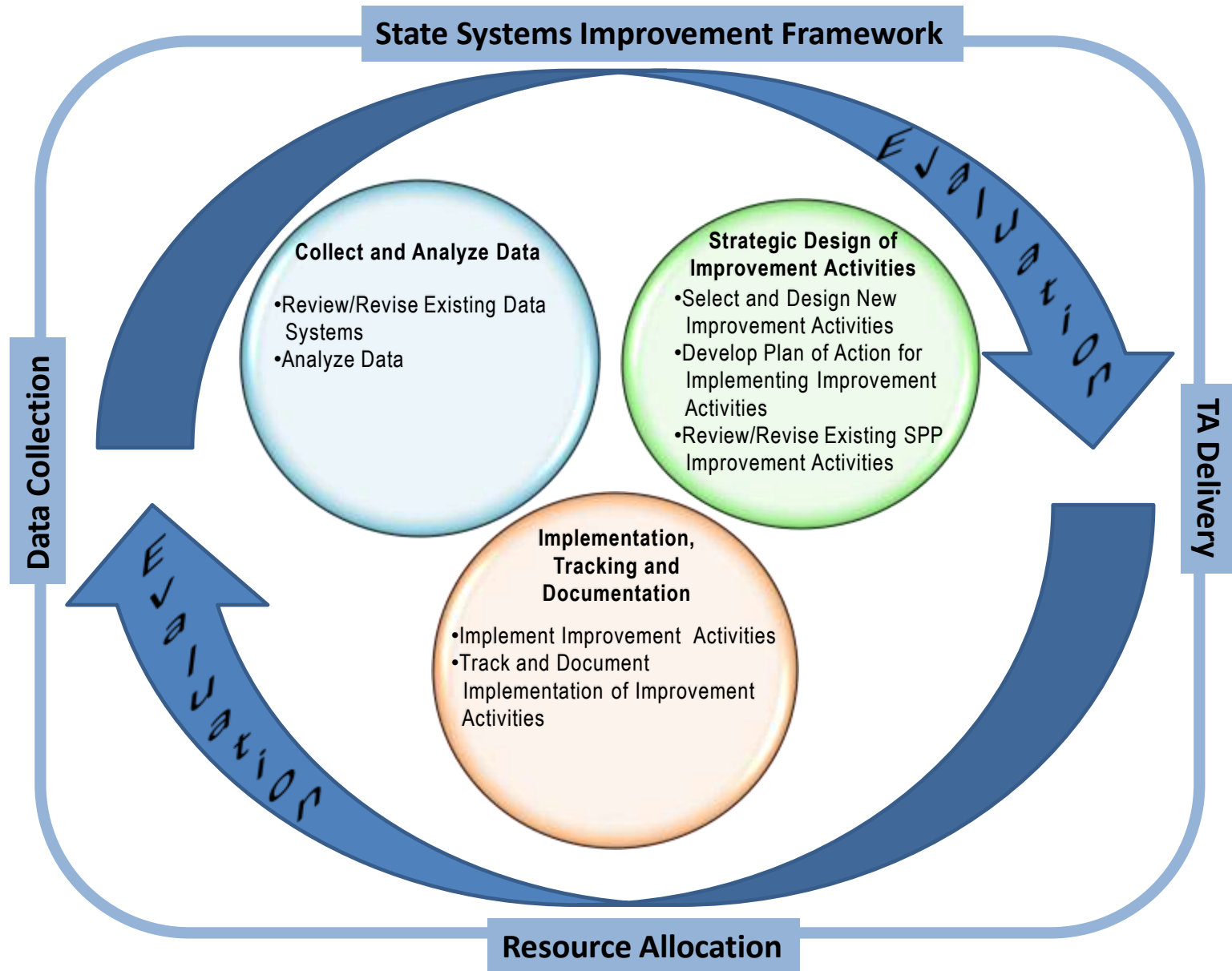
Documenting Responses to the Self-Assessment

Please insert the descriptive text in the appropriate columns for each practice as suggested below:

Standard Practice: Y/N: Indicate "Y" for Yes or "N" for No if it is considered or not considered standard practice of the agency.

High Priority; Immediate Follow-Up Action: Describe the action step(s) the agency will immediately undertake in an effort to improve the practice and ultimately, the systems.

Revisit Next Planning Cycle (mo/yr): If the agency determines that a practice is not standard and needs improvement, but is not a high priority at this time, indicate the month and year the discussion will be revisited to determine need for follow-up actions. The planning cycle refers to any time throughout the year the State typically conducts planning activities.



Component 1: Collection and Analysis of Data

Description: The Collection and Analysis of Data component includes the protocols and systems of data collection, access, analysis, and use. The data system is integral to making informed decisions regarding revising existing improvement activities and designing new improvement efforts, including understanding contexts and resources, making logical linkages between issues and activities, and involving stakeholders to ensure interconnections with other improvement initiatives.

A. Subcomponent: Review/Revise Existing Data Systems

Practice	Standard Practice Y/N	High Priority; Immediate Follow-Up Action	Revisit Next Planning Cycle (mo/yr)
1. Periodically review data system capabilities, including data elements collected, adequacy and timeliness of reporting functions, verification of data, and reliability of data entry.			
2. Refine systems for collecting and retrieving data on all indicators, as needed, including securing and synthesizing data from all essential data sources.			
3. Refine data system to improve capability of extracting and querying data across indicators.			
4. Establish/refine protocols for how, when and where to access all relevant data (internal and external to the SEA or LA) for each indicator.			
5. Create/update interagency agreements to support data sharing.			

B. Subcomponent: Analyze Data

Practice	Standard Practice Y/N	High Priority; Immediate Follow-Up Action	Revisit Next Planning Cycle (mo/yr)
1. Inform SPP/APR team members of availability of data for review (e.g. who/how/when to access all data).			
2. Identify/convene SEA or LA staff assigned to the SPP/APR team and appropriate stakeholders to examine the data.			

3. Determine gaps between actual performance and State target.			
4. Analyze all available, relevant data for the indicator and conduct a root cause analysis.			
5. Verify improvement activities are implemented as intended and are consistently implemented.			
6. Analyze evaluation of improvement activity data. Determine how/if each activity has contributed to achieving the desired outcome and whether the activity needs to be modified.			

Component 2: Strategic Design of Improvement Activities

Description: The Strategic Design component describes the design of state level initiatives ranging from selection of the specific strategies, to the assignment of resources/staff, alignment of improvement structures, evaluation measures, and reporting mechanisms.

A. Subcomponent: Review/Revise Existing SPP Improvement Activities

Practice	Standard Practice Y/N	High Priority; Immediate Follow-Up Action	Revisit Next Planning Cycle (mo/yr)
1. Use results from root cause analysis to drive decisions regarding which activities should be continued, revised or eliminated.			
2. Establish clear and logical linkages between root causes identified through data analysis and the improvement activity selected.			
3. Redesign activities to reflect evidence-based practices. Consider information gathered from other states with similar issues and contexts as well as guidance from national TA centers or both.			
4. Determine priority order of activities based on research, linkages to common needs across indicators, available resources, and expected impact on performance.			
5. Design specific action steps that will be implemented to complete the activity.			

6.	Check to see that improvement activities are interconnected across indicators to the maximum extent appropriate.		
7.	Verify alignment of each existing activity with the appropriate indicator(s) and confirm that activities collectively cover the six year span of the SPP.		
8.	Ensure that each existing activity has a measure of evaluation.		
9.	Develop and implement methods for measuring impact of each activity/set of activities.		
10.	Dedicate sufficient resources (e.g. people, time and fiscal) needed to support the implementation and evaluation of each activity.		
11.	Strategically select the partners (e.g. internal and external to agency, such as, Head Start, IHEs, Child Care, State Advisory Panels and Interagency Coordinating Councils) who will play a role in the improvement activity implementation and identify specifically how they will be engaged.		
12.	Assign indicator responsibilities to SEA/LA staff for serving as lead in obtaining the data for analysis. Adjust staff FTE as needed.		
13.	Confirm and document implementers, leaders, and timelines for implementing and completing each activity.		
14.	Consider vital connections. Ensure linkage with State priorities (e.g. State Board of Education, legislative) and all State improvement efforts.		
15.	Assess the State and regional TA service delivery system to determine sufficiency to support implementation of improvement activities. Make adjustments as needed.		
16.	Review/revise the funding mechanisms to support all levels of implementation of the SPP. Fund new initiatives as needed.		

B. Subcomponent: Select and Design New Improvement Activities			
Practice	Standard Practice Y/N	High Priority; Immediate Follow-Up Action	Revisit Next Planning Cycle (mo/yr)
1. Invite stakeholders to review data with SEA/LA staff to determine any gaps identified between State target and performance. Engage staff from other divisions within the LA/SEA and other State initiative leads to gain broader perspectives.			
2. Identify indicator areas needing improvement and use results from root cause analysis to determine whether a new activity needs to be designed to address the specified need.			
3. Determine what success will look like by identifying what you expect to see or hear that is different after implementing an improvement activity.			
4. Design initial activities that create a foundation from which other activities may be built.			
5. Confirm that each activity is: a. Desirable: SEA or LA considers the activity to be necessary and wants to do the activity b. Feasible: the activity is viewed as realistic to accomplish in the timelines reported and the number of activities per indicator(s) is realistic. Consider whether staff and funding are available and any related circumstances that are unique to the State. c. Motivating: willingness of SEA or LA to obligate the people and fiscal resources, commitment of staff and partners to work to make it happen			
6. Determine priority order of new and existing activities based on research, linkages to common needs across indicators, available resources, and expected impact on performance.			
7. Sequentially order activities that demonstrate a progression from simple to complex actions.			

8. Identify evaluation questions SEA or LA needs to answer for each single activity or set of activities to improve the data.			
9. Design evaluation measure(s) and method(s) of evaluation for each activity and/or set of activities. Consider baseline measures, intermediate (formative) measures to check progress, and summative measures to confirm improvement outcomes.			
10. Design approaches to promote improvement through incentives (e.g. protocols for determination of program/district/school eligibility for and use of discretionary funds or resources, system for allocating funds, strategies for public recognition of program/district/school accomplishments and models of excellence).			
11. Develop infrastructures to promote improvement through capacity building (e.g. structures for determining improvements in skills and knowledge and processes for developing and supporting implementation of improvement plans).			
12. Develop communication practices for programs/schools/districts to promote improvement through providing opportunities for change: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • methods for announcing available services and opportunities; • protocols for accessing waiver processes and alternate routes to certification; • methods for disseminating evidence-based “how to” information; • models for demonstrations and pilot projects 			
13. Assign a measurement that directly measures the result(s) of the activity.			
14. Select method and identify staff responsible for conducting the evaluation.			

15. Determine data source for each activity that will be used to assess the process and impact of the activity.			
16. Assign implementers for each activity (and each action, if different staff required). Consider staff connected with other state priorities and initiatives (internal and external to the SEA/LA).			
17. Develop higher leverage activities that are built from foundational activities.			
18. Review/revise the sequence of activities (existing and proposed) for a single indicator or set of indicators to ensure they are logically organized and prioritized.			
19. Align or consolidate the improvement activities with general education initiatives (e.g. preschool standards and curricula, NCLB, assessment and school improvement) and statewide systems change initiatives and programs (e.g. ICC/SAP goals/plans, State Board of Education goals or State Plans, State Legislative priorities, SPDG, Expanding Opportunities).			
20. Coordinate all relevant TA activities with general education TA delivery systems.			
21. Ensure that all subcontractors (e.g. SPDG, TA providers) align their work with the improvement activities. Install a system to obtain their data to measure process and impact of improvement efforts.			
22. Assign fiscal and staff resources needed to support implementation and evaluation.			
23. Disseminate information to regional and local TA providers on the most current guidance related to the indicators.			
24. Coordinate improvement activities with local program processes and timelines (e.g., calendars, self-assessment, planning, reporting, and evaluation).			
25. Design new activities , as needed, which are expected to have the most significant impact on improving the data.			

C. Subcomponent: Develop Plan of Action for Implementing Improvement Activities

Practice	Standard Practice Y/N	High Priority; Immediate Follow-Up Action	Revisit Next Planning Cycle (mo/yr)
1. Design the specific action steps that must be carried out to accomplish the activity.			
2. Identify/document the agency/organization and role of staff (e.g. State TA system, monitoring coordinator, assessment consultant, SPDG director) responsible for carrying out each action.			
3. Designate timelines for implementation of each action step. Compare timelines across indicators to determine if all are feasible to accomplish within the given timeframe.			
4. Confirm expectations with implementers for executing each set of actions.			
5. Monitor and adjust action steps as needed to fully accomplish the activity.			

Component 3: Implementation, Tracking and Documentation

Description: The Implementation, Tracking and Documentation component includes the implementation of the improvement activities, including data systems, training/professional development, procedural/policy changes, monitoring, personnel assignments, program development, collaboration/coordination, and other initiatives designed to achieve or maintain compliance and improve results.

A. Subcomponent: Implement improvement activities.

Practice	Standard Practice Y/N	High Priority; Immediate Follow-Up Action	Revisit Next Planning Cycle (mo/yr)
1. Execute all actions outlined for each improvement activity.			
2. Maintain ongoing communications to discuss progress between each activity lead and SEA/LA staff responsible for ensuring activity implementation.			
3. Gauge inputs and outputs as plan is implemented to assess progress, adherence to timelines, and access to resources.			
4. Evaluate fidelity of implementation of each activity.			
5. Make mid-course adjustments as needed (e.g. if implementers need additional support to do what they agreed to do).			
6. Review and refine activities as needed to meet the target.			

B. Subcomponent: Track and document implementation of improvement activities.

Practice	Standard Practice Y/N	High Priority; Immediate Follow-Up Action	Revisit Next Planning Cycle (mo/yr)
1. Identify SEA or LA staff leads to track implementation (actions and results) of improvement activities for each indicator or set of indicators.			
2. Hold regularly scheduled meetings of SPP/APR Team (and implementers of activities if they are external to the Team) to discuss progress, concerns, TA needs and ongoing opportunities for partnering across indicators/activities.			

3. Develop new databases/templates or utilize existing processes for entering and tracking status and progress of implementation of activities (e.g. documenting discussions relative to actions taken, adherence to timelines, results of activities, and needed follow-up actions and decisions).			
4. Utilize existing / create new system of evaluating process and impact of activities.			
5. Seek data and maintain documentation on implementation from all sources that support each improvement activity (e.g., SPDG, regional TA entities and subcontractors).			
6. Track all resources dedicated to TA delivery focused on improving data in the SPP/APR indicators.			
7. Monitor and evaluate effectiveness of TA services delivered in improving the data.			
8. Pinpoint any unintended outcomes. Determine how this information will be used to inform decision-making regarding current and future improvement efforts.			
9. Document and share systemic change results with EI programs, LEAs and other stakeholders.			
10. Continue to collect data and develop root cause analysis on improvement efforts for each indicator. Use results of root cause analysis to drive decisions on an annual basis regarding which activities should be continued, revised or eliminated.			
11. Dedicate human and fiscal resources to support implementation of evaluation plans.			
12. Conduct formative evaluation to guide when and type of mid-course adjustments needed.			
13. Conduct impact evaluation Determine extent to which activity/set of activities caused a desired change (results focused); Confirm that activity helped State meet their target, achieve or maintain compliance or improve performance. If activity was not deemed successful, analyze the reasons, assess whether any aspect of the activity influenced the desired outcome not being			

achieved and use these discoveries to inform maintenance or re-design of future improvement activities.			
14. Continue to evaluate and refine systems and infrastructures of technical assistance and support, data collection and reporting, SEA/LA systems administration, monitoring, and resource allocations.			

References

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