EDUCATION AGENCY STATE OF READINESS
ASSESSMENT TOOL FOR SUCCESSFUL CAPACITY-BUILDING SERVICES

Matthew Finster and Jackson Miller

CCNETWORK
Comprehensive Center Network

REGION 5
Kentucky
Tennessee
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Contents

Introduction

The charge of the Regional Comprehensive Center program is to build the capacity of state education agencies (SEAs), regional education agencies (REAs), local education agencies (LEAs), and schools so they can improve educational outcomes for all students, close achievement gaps, and improve the quality of instruction. The U.S. Department of Education defines capacity-building services as assistance that strengthens an individual's or organization's ability to engage in continuous improvement and achieve expected outcomes. An integral component of capacity-building efforts is assessing the readiness of an organization to participate in the process and make changes to policy, practices, and programs. To successfully meet this charge, Regional Comprehensive Centers must have a process for assessing educational agencies' readiness to engage with and benefit from capacity-building services.

Reflecting the importance of readiness assessments, the U.S. Department of Education specified in the Federal Register that Regional Comprehensive Centers must assess the "readiness of clients and recipients to work with the center; measure client and recipient capacity across the four capacity-building dimensions, including available resources; and measure the ability of the client and recipients to build capacity at the local level" (Federal Register, 2019). To address this charge, the Comprehensive Centers have adapted resources (Capacity Building Center for States, 2019; St. Martin et al., 2015; Ward et al., 2019) to assess state readiness or capacity.[1] For example, the Region 8 Comprehensive Center Capacity Assessment Tool and the Region 7 Comprehensive Center State Readiness Survey focus on the human, organizational, policy, and resource capacity dimensions regional centers are charged with addressing in their work.

The Region 5 Comprehensive Center (R5CC) developed the Education Agency State of Readiness Assessment Tool to assess the readiness of SEAs to take on capacity-building projects. The tool is based on factors important in determining whether an SEA would be likely to engage in and follow through with a capacity-building project by focusing on whether: (a) the high-leverage problem the education agency wants to address is amenable to capacity-building services that strengthen an individual's or organization's ability to engage in continuous improvement and achieve expected outcomes; and (b) the indicators of potential success are in place and can be used as criteria for selection. The indicators are adapted from the NECTAC Technical Assistance Model for Long-Term Systems Change (Kahn et al., 2009). Kahn and colleagues (2009) developed the indicators based on years of developing and implementing technical assistance (TA) for systems change. However, "validating" the assessment tool for use by regional centers and other TA providers will be an ongoing process of compiling evidence showing that the benefits of using the tool generalize to the capacity-building services provided by regional centers (Kane, 2006). For example, it will involve examining the construct and predictive validity of the assessment tool by assessing how well the indicators measure a "state of readiness" and the extent to which they may be predictive

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[1] For example, the Change and Implementation Readiness Assessment Tool (Capacity Building Center for States, 2019), the Regional Capacity Assessment (St. Martin et al., 2015), and the State Capacity Assessment (Ward et al., 2019).

of education agencies' likelihood to engage in and follow through with a project. Developing and validating a state of readiness assessment tool could ultimately benefit all TA centers funded by the U.S. Department of Education with the purpose of improving the capacity building of SEAs and LEAs.

Instructions

This guide provides information on how to implement the assessment tool when planning and executing projects. Team members should work collaboratively to complete the assessment tool based on their knowledge of the education agency and on their previous and current experience providing capacity-building services in the state.

Objective: Assess an education agency's readiness to engage in and benefit from capacity-building services using the Education Agency State of Readiness Assessment Tool for Capacity-Building Services.

Directions: Use the assessment tool to assess an education agency's state of readiness to benefit from capacity-building services throughout the project lifecycle. Begin by providing a title and description of the project. Then use the rating scale described in figure 1 to rate each indicator in the assessment tool (figure 2). Use the description section to provide any additional information on the rationale for the rating and, if possible, provide mitigating factors that could improve the rating.

Not all components may be applicable to a project. In these cases, select **Not applicable** and provide an explanation for why the specific component does not apply. After completing each component of the assessment tool, provide an assessment of the education agency's overall state of readiness to engage in and follow through with a project, and provide a detailed explanation of the rating.

Figure 1. Rating scale for assessing readiness

> **Rating scale**
>
> › Full: Project addresses all aspects of the criterion.
> › Partial: Project addresses criterion but could be improved.
> › Insufficient: Project fails to address criterion.
> › Not applicable: Criterion does not apply to this product.

Duration: The time required for completing the assessment tool may vary based on technical assistance (TA) providers' familiarity with the education agency, the project, the subject matter, the amount of discussion, and the response tendencies. However, as a general guideline, TA providers should plan on completing the assessment tool in 15 to 25 minutes. This estimate includes time for reading instructions, assessing factors, and selecting ratings. Adding detailed descriptions or

comments explaining the ratings may require additional time but will provide useful context for projects that have partial or limited readiness.

Using the assessment tool: Completion of the assessment tool should guide TA teams' decisions about how and where to focus capacity-building efforts. For example, if the education agency lacks experience working with R5CC, then the TA team might spend additional time building relationships with key staff and explaining the types of support offered by the Center.

The overall rating can also inform R5CC's decisions on whether to pursue a project. For example, TA teams should proceed confidently if the education agency receives an overall rating of Full. However, for an overall rating of Partial, if the project proceeds, the team should discuss ways to improve the state of readiness. For an overall rating of Insufficient, the team may consider ways to improve the state of readiness before beginning the project; and if there are no mechanisms for improvement, then the team may consider dropping the project entirely.

Frequency: To address the potential for change, project teams should complete the assessment tool at least twice a year, adjusting ratings and the approach to TA as necessary. TA teams should consider completing the assessment tool at the start of a project to provide a baseline indicator of readiness, and at the year's end or the close of an initiative to document changes in readiness within the education agency. Since priorities, resources, and staffing change over time, teams could also choose to include an interim time point such as midway through the year or at some key stages in the initiative.

List the project and provide a brief description that includes the area of focus and expected outcomes: _____.

Figure 2. Education agency state of readiness assessment tool for capacity-building services

Questions and indicators	Response	
	Rating *For each item, select your response from the menu (Full, Partial, Insufficient, Not applicable)*	**Description** *Use this section to provide any additional information to consider as part of the rating.*
About the high-leverage problem and education agency: *Is the high-leverage problem the education agency wants to address amenable to capacity-building services that strengthen an individual's or organization's ability to engage in continuous improvement and achieve expected outcomes?*		
Significant: Addressing the high-leverage problem will result in substantial improvements for many students or for key subgroups of students	☐ Full ☐ Partial ☐ Insufficient ☐ Not applicable	

Questions and indicators	Response	
	Rating *For each item, select your response from the menu (Full, Partial, Insufficient, Not applicable)*	**Description** *Use this section to provide any additional information to consider as part of the rating.*
Priority: The high-leverage problem is a priority for education policymakers, particularly at the state level.	□ Full □ Partial □ Insufficient □ Not applicable	
Appropriate: The education agency would benefit from capacity-building services intended to help it to manage or resolve the high-leverage problem.	□ Full □ Partial □ Insufficient □ Not applicable	
Timely: The high-leverage problem is a priority for the SEA that requires immediate attention.	□ Full □ Partial □ Insufficient □ Not applicable	
Doable: The focus of the service plan is defined, within the scope of the regional center, and can be addressed in 1–3 years.	□ Full □ Partial □ Insufficient □ Not applicable	
Are the following indicators of potential success in place, and can they be used as criteria for selection?		
Commitment: Key leaders in the education agency support efforts to address the high-leverage problem and have clear expectations and understanding of capacity building.	□ Full □ Partial □ Insufficient □ Not applicable	
Coordination: The capacity-building services will support and not duplicate existing agency functions or activities.	□ Full □ Partial □ Insufficient □ Not applicable	
Involvement: Key stakeholders' perspectives and involvement are included to interpret the scope and significance of the high-leverage problem.	□ Full □ Partial □ Insufficient □ Not applicable	
Communication: Key agencies and their staff have established effective strategies for inter- and/or intra-agency communication.	□ Full □ Partial □ Insufficient □ Not applicable	
Human capacity readiness: The education agency staff and other key stakeholders have the potential to improve individual knowledge, skills, technical expertise, and ability to adapt.	□ Full □ Partial □ Insufficient □ Not applicable	

Questions and indicators	Response	
	Rating *For each item, select your response from the menu (Full, Partial, Insufficient, Not applicable)*	**Description** *Use this section to provide any additional information to consider as part of the rating.*
Organizational capacity readiness: The education agency has structures supporting clear communication of individual roles and responsibilities and a shared understanding of an organization's visions and goals.	□ Full □ Partial □ Insufficient □ Not applicable	
Policy capacity readiness: There are structures that support alignment, differentiation, or enactment of local, state, and federal policies and initiatives.	□ Full □ Partial □ Insufficient □ Not applicable	
Resource capacity readiness: There are tangible materials and assets that support alignment and use of federal, state, private, and local funds.	□ Full □ Partial □ Insufficient □ Not applicable	
Collaboration: The education agency staff and other key stakeholders have demonstrated readiness to work with the regional comprehensive center on the project.	□ Full □ Partial □ Insufficient □ Not applicable	
Experience: The education agency has experience with the intensive capacity-building services and has used it to address high-leverage problems to make a change.	□ Full □ Partial □ Insufficient □ Not applicable	
Local capacity: The education agency staff and other key stakeholders have the capacity support implementation of the project at the local level.	□ Full □ Partial □ Insufficient □ Not applicable	
Sustainability: The education agency and other stakeholders are capable of developing the required capacity to sustain the project after receiving TA from the comprehensive center.	□ Full □ Partial □ Insufficient □ Not applicable	

Questions and indicators	Response	
	Rating *For each item, select your response from the menu (Full, Partial, Insufficient, Not applicable)*	**Description** *Use this section to provide any additional information to consider as part of the rating.*

Based on all the items above, what is the state of readiness of the education agency to engage and benefit from capacity-building services?

Guidance for rating: If a majority of items are rated Full, the project should be considered as full state of readiness, unless otherwise noted in the description. If the average rating of items is Partial, the project should be considered as partial state of readiness, unless otherwise noted in the description. If a majority of items are rated Partial or Insufficient, the project should be considered as an insufficient state of readiness

| Overall rating | ☐ Full
☐ Partial
☐ Insufficient
☐ Not applicable | Explain why you provided the given rating. If you did not equally weight all components of the assessment tool, your explanation should include a rationale for why you chose to prioritize performance on certain components over others. |

Source: Adapted from Kahn et al., 2009.

Key Terms

Capacity-building services means assistance that strengthens an individual's or organization's ability to engage in continuous improvement and achieve expected outcomes.

Human capacity means development or improvement of individual knowledge, skills, technical expertise, and ability to adapt and be resilient to policy and leadership changes.

Organizational capacity means structures that support clear communication and a shared understanding of an organization's visions and goals, and delineated individual roles and responsibilities in functional areas.

Policy capacity means structures that support alignment, differentiation, or enactment of local, State, and Federal policies and initiatives.

Resource capacity means tangible materials and assets that support alignment and use of Federal, State, private, and local funds.

Intensive capacity-building means assistance often provided on-site and requiring a stable, ongoing relationship between the Regional Center and its clients and recipients, as well as periodic reflection, continuous feedback, and use of evidence-based improvement strategies. This category of capacity-building services should support increased recipient capacity in more than one capacity dimension and result in medium-term and long-term outcomes at one or more system levels.

High-leverage problems means problems that: (1) if addressed could result in substantial improvements for many students or for key subgroups of students; (2) are priorities for education policymakers, particularly at the State level; and (3) require intensive capacity-building services to achieve outcomes that address the problem.

Service plan project means a series of interconnected capacity-building services designed to achieve recipient outcomes and outputs. A service plan project includes, but is not limited to, a well-defined high-leverage problem, an approach to capacity-building services, intended recipients, key personnel, expected outcomes, expected outputs, and milestones.

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