

Overview of the Child Outcomes Summary Process

The following questions and answers reflect the ECO Center's current thinking on the use of the **Child Outcomes Summary (COS) Process**. We continue to receive feedback on the COS process and the supporting materials and have made revisions based on that feedback. Please continue to check the ECO web site for additional revisions.

1. What is the COS process?

The COS process is a team process for summarizing information related to a child's progress on each of the three child outcome areas on a 7-point scale. The COS process can be used:

- 1) When the state wants to use multiple sources of information to describe a child's functioning on each of the outcomes. The information could include one or more norm-referenced or curriculum-based assessments, parent report on child's skills and behavior, progress notes of therapists working with the child, observations by a teacher or child care provider, or other sources; and/or
- 2) When different assessments have been given to different children across the state and the results need to be placed on the same scale to be aggregated.

The COS form is **NOT** an assessment instrument. It is a document used for summarizing across multiple sources of information about the child. The COS process allows states to address the OSEP reporting requirement as well as look at the child outcomes data in other ways. Using the COS process does not require that programs collect more data about children's progress; it is a mechanism that allows them to summarize assessment information for federal reporting as well as for their own purposes, such as for accountability, program planning, and program improvement.

2. What materials related to the COS process are available on the ECO web site?

The following materials are available on the ECO web site:

- [**Instructions for Completing the Child Outcomes Summary \(COS\) form**](#) – This document contains instructions for completing the form along with the definitions of the scale points.
- [**Child Outcomes Summary \(COS\) form**](#). - This form can be used to summarize information from multiple sources on the 3 outcomes. The form includes a cover sheet and 3 pages, one for each outcome.
- [**How Data from the COS form Can be Used to Address the OSEP Reporting Requirement**](#) – This document explains how data from the COS form at entry and at exit produces data required by OSEP.
- [**COS to OSEP Categories Calculators**](#) - These excel files demonstrate how various combinations of outcome ratings at entry and exit are converted into each of the 5 OSEP reporting categories. Model 2.0 versions automatically create graphic presentations (charts and tables) of entry and exit data and progress categories.



- [**Child Outcome Summary \(COS\) Form Training Materials**](#) – Materials include a sample training agenda and power point presentations and activities on a number of COS topics (e.g. COS refresher, working with families, COS quality assurance, looking at data). Materials can be adapted for state training sessions.
- [**State-Developed COS Materials**](#)- These COS materials were created or adapted by a number of states. These materials have not been reviewed or critiqued by the ECO center, but are provided as a convenience for others to use to meet training needs in their specific locations.

3. What is the basis for the scale on the COS form?

The scale on the COS form is based on several assumptions:

- a. The overall goal of programs and services for children is active and successful participation now and in the future across a variety of settings. Achieving each of the three outcomes is key to this overall goal.
- b. For many, but certainly not all young children with disabilities, receipt of high quality services will allow them to move closer to age-appropriate functioning than they would have been able to without those services.
- c. Documenting children’s movement toward age-appropriate functioning is one type of evidence that can be used to make a case for the effectiveness of early intervention and early childhood special education.

Building off of these assumptions, the highest end of the scale represents age-expected or age-appropriate functioning with each lower point being a degree of distance from age expectations. Additional information about the scale points is included in the document *“Instructions for Completing the Child Outcome Summary (COS) Form.”*

4. Who completes the COS process?

States need to decide who completes the COS process. The ECO Center recommends that the ratings be determined by a team including family members, professionals who work with the child, and others familiar with the child’s functioning. Teams in states already using the COS process generally range from 2 -7 people. The ECO Center strongly recommends that the ratings not be determined by individuals who do not know the child, for example, by assigning a rating based only on information available in the child’s records, or for the rating scale to be provided without any guidance or instructions.

5. How often is the COS process to be completed?

To provide data for the OSEP reporting requirements, the COS process must be completed at a minimum once at program entry and again at program exit with at least 6 months in between. States that want outcome data for their own purposes should consider completing the form more often, for example, annually or every 6 months.

6. When is the COS process to be completed?

The COS process is to be completed in present time to reflect the child’s current functioning. Some states are completing the form at IFSP or IEP meetings and regularly scheduled reviews when a team is assembled but it does not have to be done as part of one of these meetings.



We recommend against trying to assign ratings for past time periods, for example, trying in December to assign a rating for what the child was like in August.

7. Are training materials available?

The ECO Center has developed training and guidance materials for use of the COS process. Materials are available on the ECO website under [Professional Development Resources](#). These include a sample training agenda, power point presentations and activities related to both general outcomes topics as well as COS topics. We always welcome suggestions for training materials as well as information about training approaches underway in states and programs.

8. How much training is required to use the COS process?

Field testing has shown that training is essential to effective and reliable use of the COS process. Sample training materials available on the ECO website outline a day-and-a-half training activity that includes general background information on child outcomes measurement, information to promote understanding of the three outcome areas, and references to recommended assessment practices. In addition, field testing has shown that training must include opportunities to “practice” the ratings through case examples. Walking through several cases in a large group discussion and smaller team breakout formats help to clarify differences between the points on the rating scale, as participants review multiple sources of assessment information about a child, compare that information to age expectations, and then determine a rating. We also strongly recommend that states develop opportunities for periodic feedback sessions with providers, after they have begun to use the summary form. These sessions will allow individuals to share effective strategies that work with specific local populations as well as to ask questions and share information in an effort to enhance the consistency of approaches used.

9. Is information available on the validity and reliability of the COS ratings?

The ECO Center is currently funded to examine the validity of the COS ratings. Ideally, this information would have been available before the tool was released but the OSEP reporting timeline did not allow for this. Preliminary results from pilot data collected to date is promising, leading us to feel confident that under proper conditions (e.g., sufficient training, adequate opportunities to have questions addressed, adequate monitoring of the process), the COS will produce valid and reliable information. Data and future findings will be shared on the ECO website as they become available.

10. Why is the COS copyrighted?

States and programs are encouraged to use and reproduce the form. There is no charge to use any materials produced by the ECO Center. We are copyrighting materials to prevent anyone from charging for them in the future.

11. Why should we contact ECO if we want to use or adapt the COS process?

ECO would like to keep track of which states are using the form to learn more about how the process is working. We would appreciate a state contacting us so we have an accurate list. At that time we will also be happy to discuss advantages and disadvantages of potential



adaptations to the COS process that states are considering.

12. Can a state make changes to the COS process or form?

States can change the process or form to meet their needs but we encourage them to think through the consequences of those changes. Some adaptations, such as formatting changes, are minor and not likely to impact the type of data that will result. Other adaptations (for example, using a 5-point instead of a 7-point scale) are major and could interfere with easy translation from the rating scale to the OSEP reporting categories. Using a very different scale also will mean that the lessons being learned from piloting the ECO version of the form will not apply. We plan to collect considerable data about the use and properties of the summary process and it will be difficult to say how much of that research will apply if a state has made major changes in the COS process or form. We encourage states to contact us to discuss what they would like to change so we can keep track of which states are using the ECO-developed process and form and which are using their own adaptation.

13. What if I have a question about the COS process or the related materials? Can states and others comment on the COS process and related materials?

Yes. Questions and comments are encouraged. Send them to ectacenter@unc.edu.

