Slide notes

Welcome to the module on Building High Quality Finance Systems for Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education. The Early Childhood TA Center has developed a System Framework that describes a high-quality system. It can be used by states to self-assess and improve their early intervention and preschool special education systems.

As a result of participating in this module, you will review the content of the finance component of the ECTA System Framework. You will learn how to use the self-assessment tool to evaluate the finance component of your state system. And finally, you will learn how to use the self-assessment results as the basis and on-going measure for improvement planning.
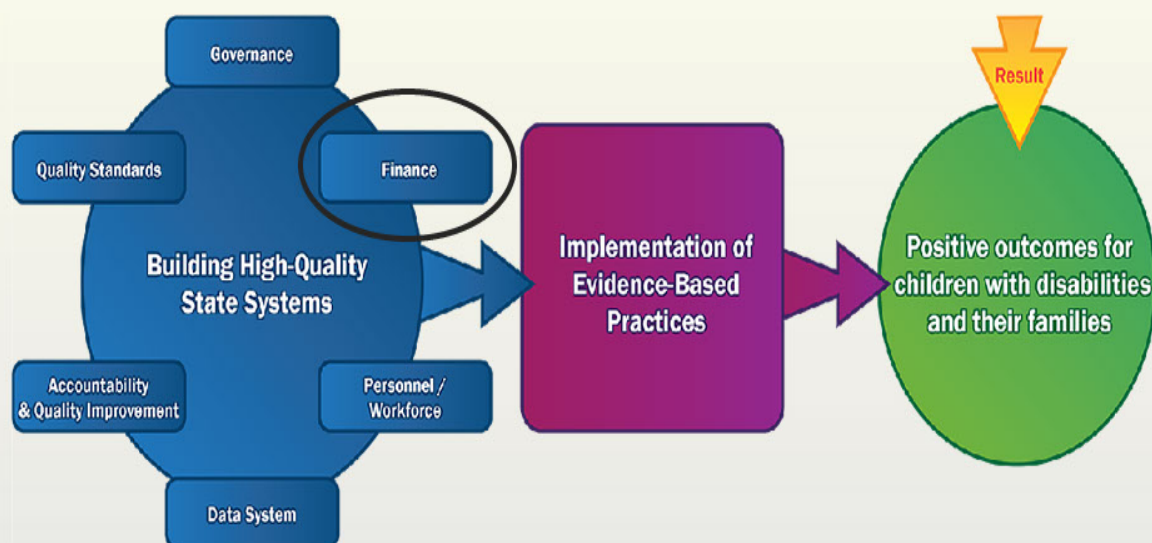
Slide notes

A state's infrastructure has multiple components that work together to ensure that the system functions effectively and supports local implementation of evidence-based practices to accomplish positive outcomes for young children with disabilities and their families.

In this module, we will focus specifically on the finance component—one of six components of a high-quality system—and how it can be used to build and sustain a high-quality system.

Finance Component Purpose

Ensure sufficient funds and resources are in place to support and sustain all components of the system.

- Finance is inter-related to all aspects of your system
- States rely on multiple funding streams at the federal, state and local levels
- Majority of funds accessed are public but entities may also access private funds
- States have discretion in determining which funds to access
- Key partners can prove to be vital as states navigate various funding steams to support the system

Slide notes

The Finance component is designed to guide state Part C and Section 619 Coordinators, their staff, and their partners in ensuring that sufficient funds and resources are in place to support and sustain all components of the system.

Finance is not a stand-alone component. The finance component of your system inter-relates to all aspects of the functioning of your system. You will see these connections referenced in other system components, particularly governance, personnel/workforce, and data system.

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Slide notes

Both Part C and Section 619 operate as systems of services and supports, relying on multiple funding streams at the federal, state, and local levels.

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Slide notes

While the majority of funds accessed to support Part C and 619 are public funds (federal, state, and/or local), state, regional, and/or local program entities may also access private funds (e.g., private insurance and family fees for Part C, or grants) to support their program.

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States have discretion in determining which funding to access. These decisions are influenced by federal, state, and local guidelines for use of funds, political will, and identified need. As a result, state systems need to be current on service utilization data, demographics of children served, and opportunities for collaboration and alignment with other early care and education programs serving the same populations.

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Slide notes

Working relationships with key partners such as agency fiscal staff, data managers, representatives from Medicaid and private insurance, other early care and education program administrators, and advocates prove to be vital as states navigate various funding streams to support the system.

Slide notes

How do you get--and maintain-- sufficient funds to support your early childhood system? You conduct finance planning.

You have access to--and use--fiscal data.

You procure funds and resources.

You allocate resources equitably.

You use funds efficiently and effectively.

You disperse funds in a manner that's timely and allowable.

And you monitor the use of those funds and resources.

These activities outline the sub-components of a high-quality finance system. Within each sub-component are quality indicators. Each quality indicator has corresponding elements of quality that operationalize its implementation. To find out how the finance component of your system is doing related to the indicators of quality, let's shift our focus to the self-assessment tool.

Slide notes

Now that you have a sense of what constitutes a high-quality finance component of your Part C or Section 619 system, you may be wondering how your state infrastructure measures up to the quality indicators specified in the System Framework. The ECTA Center, in partnership with the DaSy center, has developed a self-assessment tool to support states in this process.

Whether you are interested in doing this analysis to be more informed about your system, to identify potential areas of improvement, or are looking for a means to track infrastructure improvements over time, the Self-Assessment provides a way to review, evaluate, and track information about your early childhood system.

Features of the Self-Assessment Tool
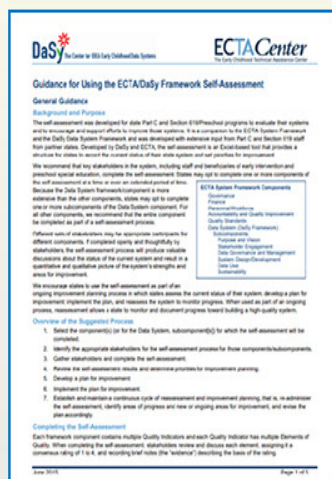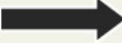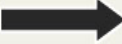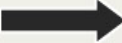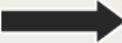
- Use for ECTA and DaSy System Frameworks
- Built in Excel
- Individual tabs for each component
- Shared rating structure:
  - Elements of Quality - 1 to 4 (team decision)
  - Quality Indicators - 1 to 7 (auto-calculated)

Slide notes

The self-assessment is designed to support states in examining one or more components of their state system. The tool is built in Excel and contains individual tabs for each component of the Framework. It contains a rating structure, which requires a team decision on each element of quality rating (selecting from a 4-point scale), and then auto-calculates across the elements of quality to give an overall rating for each quality indicator.

Slide notes

Let's begin with a description of the 4-point scale to be used by the group of stakeholders rating each element of quality. The team has four options to choose from. The first two are No's; with a rating of a 1 to be used when the element is not in place and the state is not planning to work on it.

A rating of a 2 would be used when the element is not in place, but the state is planning to work on it. The next two options are yeses, with a rating of a 3 to be used when the element is partially implemented. This rating would be appropriate if a portion of the element had been implemented, or if it had only been implemented in a portion of the state. A rating of a 4 would be used if the element was fully implemented statewide.

Again, the team completing the self-assessment would be designating a rating (1-4) for each element of quality under a quality indicator. Those scores would then auto-calculate or roll-up to give you an overall score for each quality indicator.

Slide notes

That auto-calculation will give you a number from 1-7 for each quality indicator based on team ratings of the elements under the quality Indicator.

The Quality indicator ratings capture the various levels of implementation from 1 (none of the elements are yet planned or implemented) progressing to 4 (at least half of the elements are in place) to 7 (all elements are fully implemented).

Slide notes

To begin using the self-assessment, download the Excel file using the link on the ECTA Web page and save the file to your hard drive.

There is one tab or sheet per component of the System Framework (plus sub-component tabs for the data system component). In terms of scoring, you only need to enter the element data (1-4) and the evidence for each element.

We strongly suggest you enter the evidence for the rating of each element. It is important to capture the team's understanding about why a certain rating was selected and may prove to be critical in the future when the state re-assess the status of the component in order to track improvements over time.

Without details on evidences, it can be very difficult to recall the reasoning behind previous ratings selected. Your quality indicator score will appear once all related elements of quality are rated. Note that on the component tab is an opportunity to designate prioritization (low, medium, or high) at either the element or the quality indicator level.

The QI Summary tab within the Excel workbook will provide you visualization of all your self-assessment data for each component completed.

Getting Started: A Suggested Process
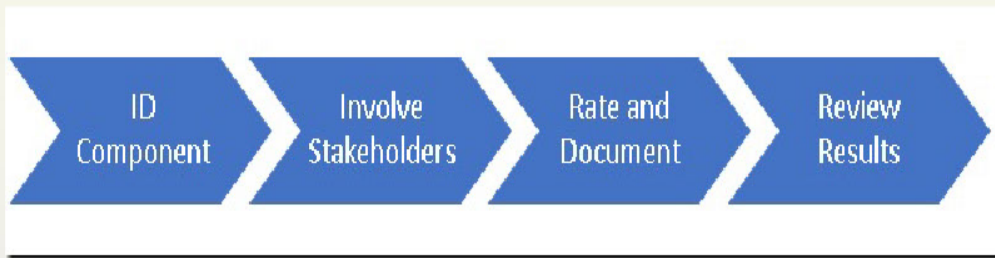
Slide notes

When you're ready to get started, we suggest that you begin by identifying the component you plan to assess first. Based on that component, identify the key stakeholders that need to be involved. If you are examining the finance component of your system, you most likely want to include key individuals such as your state agency fiscal staff, data manager, state technical assistance providers, a local program administrator and possibly a representative from Medicaid and private insurance.

Next, you will want to schedule and hold the self-assessment discussion to rate the elements of quality and document the evidence for each rating, documenting what you know is going on in your state. Once you have completed the self-assessment, the team will want to review the results (including the strengths and challenges) and determine priorities for improvement planning.

Remember that the self-assessment process is designed to be conducted periodically so that a state can monitor improvements over time and make decisions about new priorities and improvement planning activities.
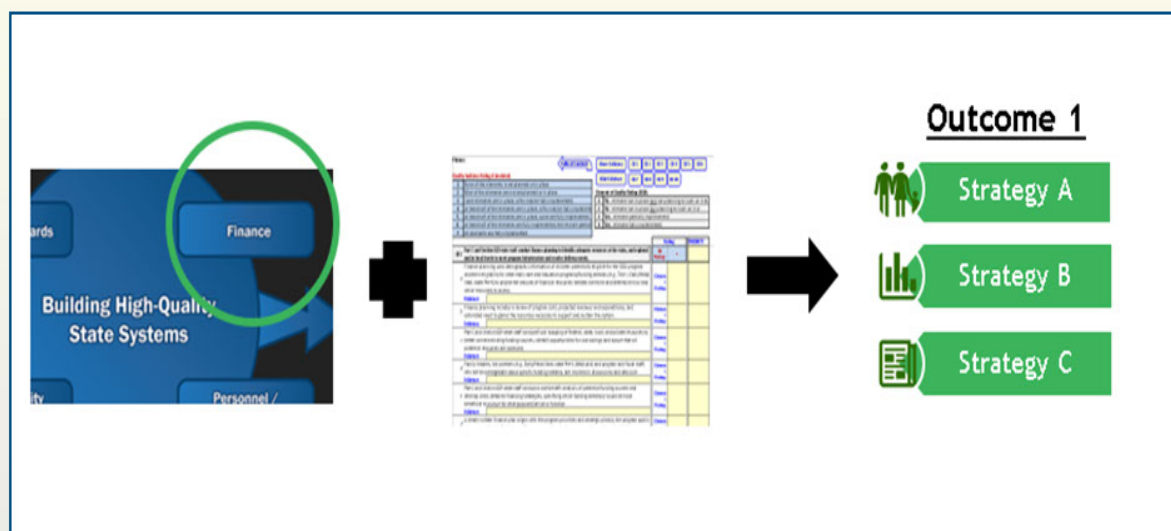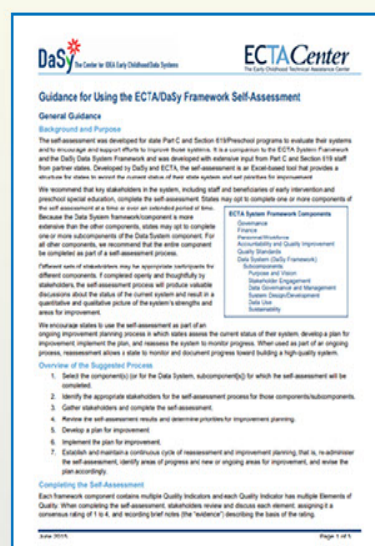
Slide notes

In summary, the finance component of the System Framework is designed to help state leaders in early intervention and preschool special education to be informed about the fiscal indicators of high quality, to self-evaluate the current status, and use that information to inform action planning to ultimately improve the finance component of their system.

Slide notes

If you have not had a chance to download the Self-Assessment Guidance document, you may wish to do that now. It will open in a new window.

The document includes detailed instructions on how to use the self-assessment, which are also available in the Excel file. States have the flexibility to complete the self-assessment on one or more components of the System Framework.

Slide notes

When you're ready to get started, you can download a variety of resources from the ECTA web site or contact the ECTA center.

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Technical Assistance Center

Thanks for watching!