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# Essential Elements of High Performing, High Quality Part C Systems

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#### INTRODUCTION

NECTAC was asked to identify essential elements for supporting high performance and provision of high quality early intervention Part C services as determined by the Annual Performance Review (APR) required under IDEA. To respond, NECTAC interviewed one state and conducted a focus group with four other states that have consistently met requirements on the APR indicators and are maintaining effective, efficient practices. The Part C Coordinators of these five states responded to the following broad discussion question:

"In thinking about your own state system, what would you say are the 2-3 essential elements of your Part C system that have allowed you to be consistently high performing, determined to be meeting the requirements in the Annual Performance Review as well as maintaining effective, efficient practices?"

Additionally, the NECTAC review of states' APR early childhood indicators and technical assistance experience also helped inform the identification of commonalities across states that could be considered essential elements of a high performing Part C system.



# ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF HIGH PERFORMING, HIGH QUALITY PART C SYSTEMS

Four essential elements emerged from the discussion with the selected states:

- 1. Reliable and Current Data for Decision Making
- 2. Monitoring and Accountability
- 3. Adequate Numbers of Qualified Personnel
- 4. Strong Leadership, Administrative Support, and Partnerships between State and Local Levels.

Each element is listed below and illustrated with specific activities and procedures noted by states. Quotes from participating states are included to provide examples of comments related to the various elements and to further describe how states are implementing these essential elements.



# 1. Reliable and Current Data for Decision Making

Having reliable data that reflects current performance and using it for making decisions was identified as one of the most important elements across the interviewed states.

"We are able to focus our energy and resources based on having reliable data and good information."

- Having a data system provide information that is needed when it's needed
- Having standard forms and procedures for data entry supports consistency across the state
- Having a limited number of people enter data makes training for consistency and accuracy easier
- Having designated individual(s) to check the data on an ongoing basis for accuracy and to correct problems as needed
- Reviewing and using data to make important decisions related to accountability and oversight (including contract revisions), personnel development, personnel recruitment and deployment, correction of noncompliance, improvement planning, allocation of funds (including targeted improvement activities), etc.
- Reviewing and using data to clarify or develop policies, procedures, and guidance

# 2. Monitoring and Accountability

Having a strong accountability system that incorporates monitoring of both quality and compliance and that can target technical assistance and other resources for improvement are also essential.

- Having an accountability structure that holds local programs responsible for requirements, with a single line of authority that can monitor performance and impose sanctions if necessary
- Assisting local programs in understanding the data, including factors contributing to noncompliance or performance issues
- Helping local programs develop effective corrective action or improvement plans based on the data and contributing factors
- Providing targeted technical assistance (TA) to address specific local needs related to improvement
- Providing financial incentives (including higher fees/reimbursements for services in compliance or bonuses for high performance) and sanctions (e.g., disenrolling providers, not paying for services until documentation is complete and accurate)
- Implementing ongoing oversight to identify and immediately resolve patterns of poor performance of an individual provider or agency
- Having an effective yet efficient system of general supervision that minimizes redundancies and focuses efforts on priority areas
- Focusing on quality measures despite the pressure to ensure compliance (e.g., using child and family outcome data to rank programs for focused monitoring, using family survey to inform monitoring conclusions, conducting quality review of programs overtime, or including quality measures in monitoring and record reviews)

"If we don't do anything with our data we won't improve performance. We have a variety of strategies for correcting, including how relentless we want to be - looking at data [weekly], monthly or quarterly and following up with programs so they know we are watching and they'll pay attention."

"Providers can be held directly accountable and can be disenrolled if corrective actions are not made ([even with] TA support). Having the capacity and willingness to hold providers accountable is really important and helps keep the focus on what's good for families."

"Along with accountability, we provide financial incentives to drive practice. Now we pay for initial IFSP meetings if the meeting is on time (unless delayed for family reasons). This clearly drives providers to get [initial IFSP] meetings done before 45 days."

"I concur that a good data system is an essential element, but I think general supervision and accountability that includes ongoing TA and support is more important. We used to put data in front of people and talk about it and what is needed. [Now understanding and using the data to] construct mutually agreed upon CAPs, timelines and expectations for completion and follow-up has placed a different level of accountability on our system. This [process] leverages the TA that is needed."

# 3. Adequate Numbers of Qualified Personnel

Having adequate numbers of qualified personnel including recruitment, effective and efficient deployment of personnel, and adequate technical assistance and training to support personnel in carrying their responsibilities is critical for supporting high performance and high quality early intervention services.

- Having sufficient Part C lead agency staff to fulfill all requirements, including accountability, monitoring, program improvement, technical assistance and reporting
- Using a variety of mechanisms for ensuring adequate numbers of personnel (e.g., enrolling agencies/programs and private providers to provider Part C services, using incentives such as loan forgiveness and tuition payments, incorporating career ladders that support paraprofessional to professional levels of training, using a certification process for personnel, etc.)
- Ensuring that personnel are qualified to work with infants and toddlers and their families including understanding and implementing requirements and evidence based practices (e.g., through orientation, required training for enrollment, focused TA and training, mentoring and/or supervision programs)

4. Strong Leadership, Administrative Support, and Partnerships between State and Local Levels

Having administrative support and strong leadership are critical for any program to be successful. An added element for high performance is building partnerships between the leadership at the state and local levels.

- Having mechanisms for local leaders to communicate and support one another (e.g., leadership mentoring programs, regularly scheduled meetings, multiple communication mechanisms, collaborative workgroups, means of sharing successful strategies and resources)
- Having consistency in leadership and support (including fiscal support) is always desirable but not always attainable; therefore programs must nurture multiple sources of ongoing support (including higher level administrators, legislators, appropriation committee members, State ICC, general public, etc.)
- Having a variety of strategies for sustaining support (e.g., public reporting, public awareness, parent advocacy, educational media releases)
- Having a good match between the Part C program and the Lead Agency's structure, capabilities, strengths and mission

"The state has standard trainings in place, but is currently working on other aspects of personnel development (how to do mentoring and ongoing support necessary for changing practice). We have an eye on quality and are attempting to link providers to resources."

"We have an early childhood training center. We use our CSPD funds (619 and Part C) and other interagency funds (Head Start, early childhood education, child care) to delivery comprehensive TA and training across the state."

"Through TA, we are changing our service delivery system to primary coaching and teaming. Early reports from pilot teams are very promising. It's a coaching approach to help change practice. Hopefully, we'll be able to measure differences in child and family outcomes in several years."

"Whenever we do training or a TA visit, we approach the whole team including the service coordinator and district personnel. We have a joint conversation, or provide joint training, so all can hear the information. We ensure family partners are included. Trainings are open to all so everyone can hear the same information and we can promote consistency of understanding throughout the state."



"Strengthening and enhancing relationships with local and state leadership and establishing partnerships... the human element of problem solving and fixing our problems together, including what we pay attention to, pays off."

"Another thing our state is doing (which we hope will have long term payoff), is using a results based accountability model for appropriations. We report APR data plus one additional measure to show effectiveness of the program. It's a report card for the Part C program – part of our budget process."

"We had new agency managers and needed to bring them up to speed so we had a planning summit, which resulted in lots of recommendations. We stepped back and took a systemic look and mapped changes/improvements strategically, aligning them with quality features and pulling in supporting resources and solutions."



### **SUMMARY**

All participating states, although quite different in lead agencies and infrastructure, expressed consensus in their opinions about important elements of a successful Part C system. Similarly, improvement activities listed by states in their Part C APRs often focus on the four essential elements described above. States often attribute improvements on compliance and performance measures to enhancements in these elements of their systems.

This paper may be of use to other states to explore the characteristics of their own systems. A work group might consider the activities/procedures under each of the essential elements to identify what they have in place and where they may need to strengthen their system to enhance performance and quality.

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