

Refining Your Evaluation: Refining Intended SSIP Outcomes

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to support states in identifying the outcomes that are most critical to the success of their SSIP and refining the language of those outcomes to best align to the theory of action.

This document is designed for states who are currently working to refine and refocus their short and/or long term intended SSIP outcomes.

Background

As part of their Phase II and Phase III SSIP, states developed sets of evaluation outcomes aligned to their theory of action for the SSIP. The number of outcomes included in state plans ranged from 0 to 149 with an average of 24. In the majority of states (88%), the evaluation will be conducted by Part C staff in addition to their other responsibilities. There is a need for states to identify ways to scale back their evaluation. One potential way to do this is to review the set of evaluation outcomes and remove those that, if not achieved, would not prevent the state from achieving the SIMR. Other worksheets in this series include “S.M.A.R.T. Performance Indicator Worksheet”, a worksheet designed to support states in refining their performance indicators using specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (S.M.A.R.T.) framework and “Data Pathway: From Source to Use”, an exercise that guides states through some questions and considerations regarding data collected for their SSIP. States can use each worksheet or exercise separately or in combination, depending on their need to reexamine different areas of their SSIP.

Defining an intended outcome

An intended evaluation outcome is a change that occurs as a result of programmatic improvement efforts. Short and long term outcomes articulate changes you intend to achieve for children, families, providers, programs, and/or systems (OSEP 2016). Well-written intended outcomes clearly relate to your project’s theory of action, are measureable, and are achievable in your context (Sierra Health Foundation 2000).

Evaluation outcomes can be grouped in various ways and states should group them in the way that makes the most sense to them and their stakeholders. A minimum requirement for grouping outcomes is to label them as short-term or long-term, as described in the SSIP Evaluation Plan Guidance Tool (OSEP 2016).

Prioritizing meaningful outcomes

To make sure that you are evaluating the most important and meaningful outcomes related to your SSIP, begin by examining the “if- then” assumptions in your logic model or theory of action. A helpful approach to identifying these outcomes is to ask, “if this outcome is not achieved, will the rest of my activities lead to the intended outcomes for children and families?”

For example:

- If the state does not enhance coaching infrastructure, will the providers gain knowledge of the procedures associated with an evidence based program? (system improvement)
- If providers do not gain knowledge of the procedures associated with an evidence based program, will providers be able to implement the intended evidence

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based program? (changes resulting from training and coaching)

- If providers do not implement the evidence based programs as intended, will families and children improve their intended outcomes? (SiMR)

Questions for consideration

Before advancing to the worksheet, take a moment to consider the following questions when reviewing your intended outcomes.

- Do the outcomes address significant milestones leading to the improvements for children/families? If the outcomes were not achieved would you expect to see improvements for children/families?
- Do you currently have unnecessary outcomes that could be eliminated (e.g. outcomes that, if they were not accomplished, you would still expect to see the intended improvements for children/families)?
- Are the remaining outcomes ones that must be accomplished in order to see improvements for children/families? Are they clearly articulated in your logic model or theory of action?
- Are you measuring multiple short, or long term outcomes that are similar or redundant with one another?

References

Office of Special Education Programs Performance Accountability Implementation Team (2016). SSIP Phase III Guidance Tool.

Sierra Health Foundation. (2000). We Did It Ourselves: An Evaluation Guidebook.

University of Virginia Human Resources. Writing S.M.A.R.T. Goals.

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Refining Your Evaluation: Refining IntendedSSIP Outcomes Worksheet

Directions: Choose one of your outcomes and respond to each question below. If your response is 'no' or not readily apparent, use the lines provided to revise your outcome. Respond to the next question using your revised outcome. Write your final revised outcome at the end of the worksheet.

Outcome:

1. Does the outcome relate to your theory of action?
2. Does the outcome communicate exactly what you intend to achieve?
3. Does your outcome identify the group that you expect to benefit (e.g. children, families, or system component)? These outcomes would start with phrases like "Children will be...." Families will be..." "Providers will be....".
4. If you do not achieve this outcome, are you likely to still be able to make the changes for children and/or families described in your SiMR?
5. Is the outcome specific and unambiguous? Are the terms included in the outcome clear and commonly understood? Would a stakeholder with basic knowledge of the program understand what the outcome means?

Revised Outcome: