



Title IV, Part A Continuous Improvement Self-Assessment Tool



Purpose

Periodically assessing performance is an important part of continuous quality improvement efforts. Assessment can help a State education agency (SEA) articulate what grant administration activities and functions it is doing well and where activities could be improved or more fully implemented. This resource describes some of the benefits of self-assessment and contains a tool that SEAs can use to assess their own performance while working to meet Title IV, Part A requirements.

Introduction

Continuous improvement and self-assessment are critical components of planning and delivering a successful and effective program. Conducting a continuous improvement cycle can give State education agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs) insight into whether what they *think* is happening before, during, and after a program or a project is *actually* happening. Importantly, conducting ongoing improvement cycles ensures that SEAs and LEAs do not wait until a program is completed to find out that it did not work as well as planned or in the way that it was intended. Ongoing collection and review of data enables staff to identify issues as they arise, test ways to course correct, and, ultimately, better serve participants.

Continuous improvement is essentially a process of (a) identifying a problem to solve, or a practice or program to monitor; (b) collecting data about that problem, practice, or program; (c) reviewing the data and determining next steps; and (d) implementing those next steps and monitoring them using data. SEAs can engage in self-assessment as part of the first stage of an improvement cycle, to identify potential areas of focus and develop plans to address them. For example, after administering a grant program for some time, SEAs may now want to investigate where adjustments might be needed. Self-assessment can help pinpoint activities that have not been fully or successfully implemented, giving SEAs a starting point for prioritizing and planning improvements. If SEAs do not expect to make changes to their Title IV-A grant programming, SEAs can still use self-assessment to periodically document their activities and track progress over time.

Subpart 1 of Title IV-A specifically mentions the need for SEAs to document in their state plan how they will review and coordinate plans and resources across their state, monitor implementation of grant-funded activities, and provide technical assistance to LEAs in conducting those activities (see [Sections 4013\(c\)\(2\)\(C\)\(i\) and 4103\(c\)\(2\)\(C\)\(ii\)](#)). This self-assessment tool can be used as part of an overall continuous improvement strategy and can also be used to track progress over time, across improvement cycles.

Instructions for Using the Tool

First, identify who will complete the assessment. This can be an individual or a team of people. If you choose to complete the assessment as a team, members should include those most familiar with the grant activities. Additional SEA staff may need to be involved in the later steps of prioritizing and planning. Those completing the assessment may also want to gather any information they want to reference to complete the assessment, such as the grant application materials, T/TA plans, etc.

Second, complete the assessment. The assessment is organized by key functions of grant administration: (A) implementing an application process, (B) providing T/TA to LEAs, (C) evaluating progress, and (D) promoting collaboration and partnerships. Within each function are important activities that SEAs conduct. For each activity, users can check the column that best describes where the SEA is along the continuum of implementing the activity:

Not yet implementing (or unfamiliar with what the described activity means);

Partially implementing or needs improvement (for example, the SEA is doing part of what is described but not all of it, is doing what is described inconsistently, or is doing what is described but not always with the highest quality);

Fully implementing (for example, something that is consistently and completely implemented, something that is a strength of the SEA, something being implemented by all staff with fidelity, or something achieving the intended outcomes; see the [T4PA Center resource on implementation stages for additional ideas](#)); or

Not applicable (N/A), which might include activities that the SEA does not plan to do or work on.

The tool provides space for users to write notes explaining why they selected each rating, which will help facilitate discussions. Such notes can serve as an important reference for SEAs as they periodically revisit this tool to track how well they are moving along the continuum of implementation for the prioritized activities.

Third, review results and set priorities. SEAs can review the suggestions for next steps and identify and prioritize the functions and activities that they want to work on. A table in [Step 3: Review Ratings, Set Priorities, and Identify Next Steps](#) has space for notes to explain why decisions were made and how the activities are prioritized. Given that priorities can shift, documenting the reasons why decisions were made to focus on specific activities and functions will help SEAs track progress over time. Finally, after identifying priorities, SEAs can identify the next steps needed to implement an activity more fully or to implement it with better quality or consistency.

Additional SEA staff or partners may need to be included in discussing and developing a plan for executing next steps, especially in cases where staff outside the Title IV-A program office provide technical assistance. The [Appendix](#) includes links to relevant resources for each function to help with those discussions and planning.

Title IV, Part A Continuous Improvement Self-Assessment Tool

This continuous self-assessment tool can be used by SEAs to take stock of their progress and performance in the administration of Title IV-A in their state.

Step 1: Prepare

Identify who will complete the assessment and gather any information that is necessary to reference in order to complete the assessment, such as the grant application materials, training and technical assistance (T/TA) plans, etc.

Who will complete the assessment?	
What information will need to be gathered?	

Step 2: Complete the Assessment

Complete the assessment by checking the column that best describes where the SEA is along the continuum of implementing each activity. Take notes about why each rating was selected.

Key SEA Functions and Activities	1 Not yet started or unfamiliar with this	2 Partially implementing and/or needs improvement	3 Fully implementing and/or this is a strength	N/A Do not plan to do this
1. Funding and programming are grounded in identified SEA-level or LEA-level needs and priorities [Section 4103(c)(2)(C)(i)].				
<i>Notes about your rating (such as examples of this activity in practice):</i>				
2. Applications require LEAs to include information about outcomes that will be used for public reporting [Section 4106(e)(1)(E)].				
<i>Notes about your rating (such as examples of this activity in practice):</i>				

Key SEA Functions and Activities	1 Not yet started or unfamiliar with this	2 Partially implementing and/or needs improvement	3 Fully implementing and/or this is a strength	N/A Do not plan to do this	
A: Implementing an Application Process	3. At a minimum, application asks for mandatory requirements, including the items below.				
	• Description of planned programs and activities [Section 4106(e)(1)]				
	• Objectives and intended outcomes for these activities [Section 4106(e)(1)(E)]				
	• Needs assessment for LEAs with allocations above \$30,000 [Section 4106(d)(1)]				
	• Compliance with budgetary constraints [Section 4106(e)(2)(C-E)]				
	• Proof of stakeholder consultation [Section 4106(c)]				
	• Proof of private school consultation to meet equitable participation requirement [Section 4106(e)(2)(B)]				
<i>Notes about your rating (such as examples of this activity in practice):</i>					

Key SEA Functions and Activities	1 Not yet started or unfamiliar with this	2 Partially implementing and/or needs improvement	3 Fully implementing and/or this is a strength	N/A Do not plan to do this	
A: Implementing an Application Process	4. Method for completing and submitting application is user-friendly and functional.				
	<i>Notes about your rating (such as examples of this activity in practice):</i>				
	5. SEA has a rubric for review and rating of subgrantee application.				
<i>Notes about your rating (such as examples of this activity in practice):</i>					
B: Providing T/TA to LEAs	6. SEA has a plan for T/TA that is based on LEA needs [Section 4103(c)(2)(C)(ii); Section 4104(b)(1)].				
	<i>Notes about your rating (such as examples of this activity in practice):</i>				

Key SEA Functions and Activities	1 Not yet started or unfamiliar with this	2 Partially implementing and/or needs improvement	3 Fully implementing and/or this is a strength	N/A Do not plan to do this
7. SEA differentiates T/TA to support LEAs at different skill and competency levels [Section 4103(c)(2)(C)(ii); Section 4104(b)(1)].				
<i>Notes about your rating (such as examples of this activity in practice):</i>				
8. Each T/TA activity has clear objectives and an agenda [Section 4103(c)(2)(C)(ii); Section 4104(b)(1)].				
<i>Notes about your rating (such as examples of this activity in practice):</i>				
9. SEA tracks and evaluates each T/TA effort after delivery [Section 4103(c)(2)(C)(ii); Section 4104(b)(1)].				
<i>Notes about your rating (such as examples of this activity in practice):</i>				

B: Providing T/TA to LEAs

Key SEA Functions and Activities	1 Not yet started or unfamiliar with this	2 Partially implementing and/or needs improvement	3 Fully implementing and/or this is a strength	N/A Do not plan to do this
B: Providing T/TA to LEAs 10. SEA provides T/TA and responses to LEAs' questions in a timely manner [Section 4103(c)(2)(C)(ii); Section 4104(b)(1)].				
	<i>Notes about your rating (such as examples of this activity in practice):</i>			
11. SEA recommends and facilitates connections with subject matter experts where relevant [Section 4103(c)(2)(C)(ii); Section 4104(b)(1)].				
	<i>Notes about your rating (such as examples of this activity in practice):</i>			
12. SEA solicits information on LEAs' preferred method of receiving T/TA [Section 4103(c)(2)(C)(ii); Section 4104(b)(1)].				
	<i>Notes about your rating (such as examples of this activity in practice):</i>			

Key SEA Functions and Activities	1 Not yet started or unfamiliar with this	2 Partially implementing and/or needs improvement	3 Fully implementing and/or this is a strength	N/A Do not plan to do this
13. SEA has a robust LEA monitoring protocol [Section 4104(b)(1)].				
<i>Notes about your rating (such as examples of this activity in practice):</i>				
14. SEA solicits information for public reporting through different avenues (e.g., applications, monitoring visits, data submission and review) [Section 4104(a)(2)].				
<i>Notes about your rating (such as examples of this activity in practice):</i>				
15. LEAs are aware of monitoring and evaluation requirements.				
<i>Notes about your rating (such as examples of this activity in practice):</i>				

C. Evaluating Progress

Key SEA Functions and Activities	1 Not yet started or unfamiliar with this	2 Partially implementing and/or needs improvement	3 Fully implementing and/or this is a strength	N/A Do not plan to do this
C. Evaluating Progress	16. LEAs have clear definitions for effectiveness rating criteria and/or outcomes being tracked (i.e., LEAs define how their success will be measured).			
	<i>Notes about your rating (such as examples of this activity in practice):</i>			
D. Promoting Collaboration and Partnerships	17. SEA proactively reaches out to its U.S. Department of Education Federal Program Officer and T4PA Center with questions and concerns.			
	<i>Notes about your rating (such as examples of this activity in practice):</i>			
	18. SEA ensures that LEA programming and activities comply with the requirements of other Federal laws, including, but not limited to, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [Section 4103(c)(2)(C)(iii)].			
<i>Notes about your rating (such as examples of this activity in practice):</i>				

Key SEA Functions and Activities	1 Not yet started or unfamiliar with this	2 Partially implementing and/or needs improvement	3 Fully implementing and/or this is a strength	N/A Do not plan to do this
19. SEA has relationships with LEA Title IV-A coordinators.				
<i>Notes about your rating (such as examples of this activity in practice):</i>				
20. SEA has relationships with other Title program offices (Title I-A, Title II, etc.) [Section 4104(b)(2)].				
<i>Notes about your rating (such as examples of this activity in practice):</i>				
21. SEA is actively identifying and eliminating barriers that hinder collaboration at the LEA level to prevent duplication of efforts [Section 4104(b)(2)].				
<i>Notes about your rating (such as examples of this activity in practice):</i>				

D. Promoting Collaboration and Partnerships

Key SEA Functions and Activities	1 Not yet started or unfamiliar with this	2 Partially implementing and/or needs improvement	3 Fully implementing and/or this is a strength	N/A Do not plan to do this
D. Promoting Collaboration and Partnerships 22. SEA is continuously reviewing existing statewide programs and resources and integrating with the Title IV-A program and resources where relevant [Section 4103(c)(2)(C)(ii)].				
	<i>Notes about your rating (such as examples of this activity in practice):</i>			
23. SEA intentionally cultivates relationships and connections with stakeholders at all levels (e.g., school staff organizations, parent/family organizations, government and community groups, nonprofit organizations, district and school leaders, student and youth organizations) [Section 4104(b)(2)].				
	<i>Notes about your rating (such as examples of this activity in practice):</i>			

Step 3: Review Ratings, Set Priorities, and Identify Next Steps

Once Step 2 is complete, the remaining tasks are to review the ratings, prioritize activities to focus on for improvement, and make a plan for how the SEA will address each priority activity.

There are several ways to set priorities for which functions and activities the SEA will focus on for improvement; using the results of the self-assessment can be one component of that process. The SEA can first look across ratings to see which functions had the most activities marked as “1: Not yet started or unfamiliar with this.” For example, an SEA could be fully implementing most application-related activities, but be less far along on T/TA, so it could decide to initially focus on T/TA efforts (while maintaining the great work being done on applications). Or the SEA can look across functions and identify all the activities it is not yet doing, create an initial list, and then prioritize activities to focus on, which may include activities across key functions.

It is likely that SEAs will not be able to focus on every function, and certainly will not be able to focus on every activity, right away. Considerations to help guide prioritization of activities are identified below in the form of guiding questions.

Guiding Questions

1. What functions or activities are a greater priority to the SEA (given other ongoing work or priorities, strengths of the SEA more broadly, or other contextual factors)?
2. Which activities serve as a foundation for other activities and will need to be fully implemented before moving on to others?
3. Which activities require resources to begin working on or to further develop them? What type and amount of resources are necessary? Some activities may require fewer resources or require resources the SEA already has at its disposal, which could make them easier to implement.
4. What other efforts are underway or in development that could be leveraged to support or address certain activities?
5. What activities will require more time, planning, or effort to implement than others? For example, will some activities need buy-in from a broader group of stakeholders?
6. Are there aspects of certain activities that are time sensitive or that make more sense to focus on (or to leave as is) during certain times of the year?
7. Are there additional activities or functions that were not listed in the self-assessment tool that are a priority for the SEA?

Use the table below to document the key functions and activities that the SEA has identified for focus; how the SEA has decided to prioritize those activities; and what initial next steps the SEA will take to begin working on, or further develop, this activity. SEAs can use the resources linked in the Appendix to guide the development of next steps and to ground planned improvements in best practices.

Our Functions and Activities of Focus Will Be (in Order of Priority):

Priority number	Function	Activity	Reasons for prioritizing this activity	Initial next steps to begin working on this activity	Other details (e.g., person[s] responsible, target dates, etc.)
<i>Example of priority</i>	<i>T/TA</i>	<i>SEA will develop a plan for T/TA that is based on LEA needs.</i>	<i>We haven't had time to focus on T/TA in the past year. But we now have additional staff capacity, as well as LEA interest and information about LEA needs.</i>	<i>Review T/TA requests to identify the next topic or topics. Research techniques for delivering T/TA that would encourage engagement during sessions.</i>	<i>Roll out new T/TA series next quarter.</i>
1					
2					

Priority number	Function	Activity	Reasons for prioritizing this activity	Initial next steps to begin working on this activity	Other details (e.g., person[s] responsible, target dates, etc.)
3					
4					

Conclusion

Both SEAs administering the Title IV-A program and their LEA subgrantees can use continuous improvement practices to assess progress and track adjustments and improvements over time. This self-assessment tool serves as one resource to help SEAs identify functions and activities for improvement and set priorities. The tool helps SEAs take stock of what functions of Title IV-A grant administration are already being implemented well and what functions need more attention. This activity is supported by the statute, which requires SEAs to document their plans for administering and monitoring grant funds (see Sections 4103(c)(2)(C)(i) and 4103(c)(2)(C)(ii)). This resource provides suggestions for ways that SEAs can approach priority setting and next steps and offers links to resources for each potential area of focus.

Appendix

This appendix lists resources, organized by key function (i.e., the sections of the tool), for identifying best practices and steps an SEA can take to address areas identified as priorities for improvement.

A: Application-related resources

Implementing a high-quality, efficient, and effective application process involves conducting needs assessments to determine where schools, staff, and students would benefit from different types of support; designing an application; reviewing submitted applications; and providing feedback on applications. The following resources provide guidance and ideas for developing and implementing the application process:

- **[Iowa: Title IV, Part A Guidance](#)**
This overview of the Title IV-A program and requirements can help SEAs as they design their applications to solicit essential program information from LEAs.
- **[Washington: Program Planning Guide Title IV, Part A: Student Support and Academic Enrichment](#)**
This Title IV-A program planning guide for LEAs outlines the essential elements of a Title IV-A program, which can be elements included on an application.

B: T/TA-related resources

Conducting training and providing technical assistance to LEAs involve being responsive to LEA needs and requests, developing and executing engaging content, and providing different forums to provide supports and develop relationships with LEAs. The following resource outlines best practices for developing and delivering T/TA:

- **[T4PA: Best Practices in Training and Technical Assistance](#)**
This resource offers best practices for State coordinators to help plan and deliver T/TA for LEAs.

C: Evaluating progress-related resources

Ongoing evaluation of progress toward goals is just as important as the implementation of programs. The following resources highlight the components of effective evaluation:

- **[T4PA: Evaluation Guide](#)**
This guide provides an overview of evaluation basics, simple steps for conducting evaluation activities, and links to additional resources.

- **[T4PA: Evaluating the Effectiveness of Professional Development \(Requires Login\)](#)**

This Webinar discussed key principles of the effective evaluation of professional development (PD) and helped State coordinators identify points of contact they can use to gather information on PD.

- **[T4PA: Continuous Improvement Cycles \(Requires Login\)](#)**

This Webinar explored tools and resources, such as the Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle, that can be used by educational practitioners to implement continuous improvement processes within their own schools, LEAs, and SEAs.

D: Partnership and collaboration-related resources

Partnerships and collaboration between SEAs, LEAs, and Federal Program Officers can greatly strengthen the delivery and monitoring of grant funds. The following resource describes best practices for developing and maintaining collaborations:

- **[T4PA: Developing Stakeholder Relationships to Support School Programming](#)**

This resource suggests ways to identify key stakeholders and to develop relationships between SEAs, LEAs, and key stakeholders.



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