

Tool 3: Conducting a Needs Assessment

This set of resources provides basic tools and frameworks that follow the steps of the needs assessment process for States, subgrantees, or facilities to adapt as needed.

Note: There are several points in time when State educational agencies (SEAs) and State agencies (SAs) should assess the educational needs of the children and youth being served under Title I, Part D, such as:

1. when developing the State Plan (see [Section 1414\(a\)\(1\)\(A\)](#));
2. when developing the SA Application (see [Section 1414\(c\)\(1\)](#));
and
3. when implementing an institution-wide project (see [Section 1416](#)).

However, needs assessments may occur at any point in time by any agency or facility for program planning and improvement purposes; it is not an activity that is limited to Subpart 1 alone.

Purpose of the Tools

Conducting a needs assessment can be overwhelming. These tools provide a starting point for those working with Title I, Part D, programs and undertaking a needs assessment. They are intended to assist **administrators and assessment team members** as they work through the process. All of the tools can be used in isolation or as a set and are designed to be flexible and customizable in order to meet the goals of individual needs assessments. These tools do not reflect any mandatory Title I, Part D, requirements.

1. [Identifying the Scope of the Assessment and Developing a Team](#): Use to determine why the needs assessment is being conducted, the goals of the assessment, and to identify who should be involved in the needs assessment team.
2. [Developing Questions and Summarizing Data for the Program Overview](#): Once the goals of the assessment are understood, use this worksheet to identify the questions that need to be answered and help summarize the findings.
3. [Identifying and Using the Data](#): Reference these questions throughout the assessment process—from identifying data, to gathering data, to reviewing data—to determine if the available information is useable, or if more data are needed.
4. [Identifying Needs and Setting Priorities](#): Use this template to help determine which needs to focus on first when several are identified.

Details on **how to use** these tools are provided with each individual tool.

Needs Assessment 1: Identifying the Scope of the Assessment and Developing a Team

Needs assessments can be conducted for a variety of reasons and at different levels—by the SEA, SA, LEA, or facility. They can focus on a single area of interest (e.g., transition) or take a broader perspective to identify gaps throughout a system. Understanding the purpose, goals, and scope of the assessment is crucial to all the remaining steps of the process.

How to Use This Tool

Respond to the following questions **at the beginning** of the process to determine the goals of the assessment and who should be involved. Type up responses and share them so all stakeholders are in agreement before the assessment process begins. Refer back to these responses when questions about scope and priorities arise later in the assessment process.

Determining the Purpose and Scope of the Assessment
Understanding the purpose of the needs assessment will help focus the scope and detail of the assessment effort and help determine the time and resources (staff, budget, etc.) needed. Having this information will help when recruiting the assessment team and/or explaining the assessment to others.
1. What entities are requesting and guiding the needs assessment? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What level of programming is being assessed (State programs, district programs, individual facilities)?
2. What is the purpose and scope of the needs assessment? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why is the assessment being conducted?• What are the targeted goals or expected outcomes of the assessment?• What are the specific topics or areas of interest (focused vs. comprehensive overview)?
3. What entities will need to assist in providing information and data for the needs assessment?

4. What resources are required to conduct the needs assessment?

- Who should be involved? Are outside resources/consultants needed?
- How long will the effort take given the scope of the assessment?
- What will the budget allow for?

Establishing a Needs Assessment Planning Team

The planning team will lead the process of conducting the needs assessment. The members of the planning team will depend on the level at which the assessment is being conducted (SEA, SA, LEA, or facility) and on the focus of the needs assessment.

Depending upon the purpose and the scope of the assessment, identify individuals who should be involved in the assessment team.

- Establish a team leader who pulls the larger team together and directs the needs assessment process
- Make sure the team is comprised of individuals who have a variety of skills or knowledge and who can actively contribute to one or more aspects of the needs assessment process, such as the:
 - ☐ ability to request and obtain data and resources,
 - ☐ ability to analyze and synthesize the data, or access to a team of people who can assist with this
 - ☐ ability to prepare a report and develop action items
 - ☐ ability to act on the results once the action items are identified
 - ☐ ability to represent a unique perspective (e.g. teachers, parents, students) of all impacted groups
- Ensure a cross-section of individuals (as applicable) are represented on the team
 - ☐ *Individuals who work in the system* and who will be involved in implementing changes based on the results, such as administrators, principals, teachers, transition coordinators, security and/or other staff
 - ☐ *Individuals who benefit from or are impacted by the services*, such as parents or family representatives, students, community members, and other stakeholders
 - ☐ Consider developing a permanent (rather than 1-time) needs assessment team who can revisit the resulting plan and priorities, and identify new needs as they arise on an ongoing basis.

Needs Assessment 2: Developing Questions and Summarizing Data for the Program Overview

Once the goals of the assessment are understood, the assessment team should outline questions that address the areas of concern. Ultimately, these questions can be used to guide the data collection and development of the profile. In the process of developing questions, the team should also assess data availability and usability (see *Needs Assessment 3: Identifying and Using the Data*). This table provides a **sampling** of categories and questions that could be included in various needs assessments of Title I, Part D, programs.

How to Use This Tool

This table can serve as a starting framework to be edited back or expanded upon, as appropriate, to meet the purpose and scope of a needs assessment. Space is provided to note information on the results of the data as it becomes available. The table can also be expanded upon with additional columns or rows to incorporate other information the assessment team may want to use.

Categories and Guiding Questions	What Do the Data Tell You?
A. Understanding the Scope of the Current Programming and Population	
Programs: Gather information to understand what the system for children and youth who are N or D looks like. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How many agencies/facilities provide educational services to children and youth?• How many educational programs are eligible for Title I, Part D, funding?• What types of programs exist and how many are there (e.g., detention, corrections, etc.)?• Are any programs eligible to receive funding but not receiving any?	
Student Population: Gather information to describe the student population and the types of services they need. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How many students are enrolled in Title I, Part D, eligible programs?• What is the demographic makeup of the student population?• Are there particular geographic areas in which students are more likely to come from or return to after their enrollment ends?• What are the educational and other needs of the student population—e.g., English language learners, students with learning disabilities, students with mental health needs?• Have any populations of students been increasing or decreasing in size?	

Categories and Guiding Questions	What Do the Data Tell You?
B. Comparing Current Services, Resources, and Systems to the Student Population and Program Goals (e.g., identifying gaps)	
<p>Student Educational Services and Offerings: Gather information on the type(s) of educational programming that currently exist(s) to assess alignment with the needs of the student population.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the primary educational offerings within the eligible programs (e.g., basic education/vocational education/etc.)? • What types of supplemental educational services are offered? • Do these services align with the needs of the student population? • Are there enough services /staff to adequately serve the students in need? • Are the services of high quality and demonstrating results? 	
<p>Student Outcomes: Review performance data to determine whether programming is preparing students to return to school, the community, and/or obtain employment at a level at least equivalent to the local district school.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What data on student outcomes are being collected? Are data missing? • How are students performing across multiple subject areas? • Are students earning a high school diploma or obtaining a GED? • How do these data compare with district averages? • What do trend data indicate in terms of student performance? • Are students tracked after enrollment to follow their outcomes? What would be needed to do so? 	
<p>Student Support Services: Gather information about the additional services that exist to support students academically to assess whether these services are successful and readily available.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What types of additional services are offered in the eligible programs (e.g., mental health screening, counseling, transition services, family involvement policies)? • Do these services align with the needs of students being served? • Are there enough services and staff to adequately serve the population? • Are the services of high quality and meeting the needs of students? 	

Categories and Guiding Questions	What Do the Data Tell You?
<p>Teachers and Professional Development: Collect information on the teaching population and the training available to determine if there are staffing and/or professional development needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How many teachers work in the program(s)? Are there enough? • What percentage of teachers are certified or credentialed in the areas in which they teach? • What are the demographic characteristics of the teaching population? • Are teachers close to retirement? • What is the teacher retention rate? • What are salaries in comparison to the district average? • What types of recruitment activities are taking place? • What types of training are provided to new teachers/senior teachers? Are they effective? 	
<p>Collaboration Activities and Policies: Identify whether appropriate relationships exist (inter- and/or intra-agency or program) to facilitate effective programming.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What other agencies, programs, or facilities work with students who are enrolled in Title I, Part D, programs? • What information sharing and/or collaboration activities take place among these entities (e.g., records transfer and joint meetings, etc.)? • Are there activities that would make administration or programming more effective or efficient? Are there activities that are not working? • To what extent are Part D funding streams blended with other Federal or State funds? What funding streams could be blended that are not? 	

Categories and Guiding Questions	What Do the Data Tell You?
<p>Systems and Infrastructure: Explore whether the current systems work effectively for obtaining the data, information sharing and ensuring students receive services in a timely manner.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How soon do facilities receive students' records after they are enrolled? • How soon are records transferred after students exit a facility? • How soon do facilities assess students after enrollment (e.g., for academic placement, mental health, special education, etc.)? • How long are students enrolled before they begin to take classes? • How are student data collected, reported and shared? • Are the data integrated with the State educational reporting system? • Are they part of a longitudinal data collection system? 	

Needs Assessment 3: Identifying and Using the Data

Throughout the needs assessment process—when developing questions, when identifying data, and when analyzing and reviewing data—the availability and usability of the information should be taken into account to determine if more data should be collected and whether the data are accurate and reflect the reality of the program(s).

How to Use This Tool

After developing questions (see *Needs Assessment 2: Developing Questions and Summarizing Data for the Program Overview*), refer and respond to this list of questions (e.g. with data providers or during meetings with the needs assessment team) on an **ongoing** basis to help determine what data are available, when they are available, how they may be used, and how any additional data needs may impact costs and timelines.

Questions to Ask About the Data Identified and Collected	What do the data tell you?
<p>Data Availability and Usability*</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What data are already available/collected?<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Are multiple data sources available to provide additional validation of the results?• Are data accurate enough from which to draw conclusions?<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Are there any restrictions caveats on how the data may be used or what it tells you?• Are trend data available to assess patterns over time and identify needs? One year of data may not be enough.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Do the trend data suggest a need for more data to understand and interpret the information?• Is it feasible for the facility/program/subgrantee to collect or provide this data?<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> How long will it take to access this data? <p>*If the data do not exist, or are not reliable enough to be used, this may also indicate a need.</p>	

Questions to Ask About the Data Identified and Collected	What do the data tell you?
Additional Data Collection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If data have not been collected, what collection methods could be used to obtain the data? • What steps and costs are involved in collecting this information (e.g., creating and administering a survey, organizing focus groups, developing interview protocols, or hiring outside consultants)? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> How long will such a collection take to develop and implement? 	

Needs Assessment 4: Identifying Needs and Setting Priorities

After analyzing the data, gaps between the program’s goals and the current status of the program will be apparent. Next, priorities and action steps should be set. The table below provides one example of how to approach this process. Keep in mind that: (1) in order to achieve one goal, other issues may need to be addressed beforehand, and (2) there may be opportunities to be more efficient—if outcomes are examined comprehensively, problems may be identified that impact several outcomes, and as a result, solutions may address more than one need.

How to Use This Tool

The first row of this table provides sample outcomes and related responses, and additional rows may be added to include outcomes and goals in the same manner. While some assessments may not fully align with this format, this table can be used to inform an assessment team’s thinking about the prioritization process and can help identify ways to modify or develop a separate tool that meets the team’s needs.

Current Outcomes: How things are...	Desired Outcomes: How things should be...	Needs or Gaps: What is the source of the problem?	Priority Ranking: How important is this need compared with others?	Solutions/ Action Steps: What are we going to do about it?	Evaluation Items: How do we know we've succeeded?
Example: Upon release, only 25% of students are awarded the academic credits that they earned while in placement.	Upon release, 100% of students will have their academic credits transferred.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Some classes are not meeting State time and curriculum requirements. Consequently credits are not transferrable. 2. Student records are not up to date upon transfer, and information is lost or inconsistently transferred. 	3 (of 6)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Update curricula so that all courses meet State mandates or requirements and credits are transferrable. Conduct awareness meetings with local schools to ensure transferability. 2. Adopt policies that require all teachers to update the academic records of students twice per week. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Regularly or routinely review course curricula to determine whether they are meeting State standards. 2. Continue to track student transfer data and review quarterly for improvement.

Table adapted from West Virginia Department of Education Comprehensive Needs Assessment, Neglected and Delinquent Needs Assessment Committee training, March 2009.