EVIDENCE-BASED IMPROVEMENT

A Guide for States to Strengthen Their Frameworks and Supports Aligned to the Evidence Requirements of ESSA

TOOL 1:  
SEA INVENTORY OF CURRENT PRACTICE

Sylvie Hale   
Lenay Dunn   
Nikola Filby   
John Rice   
Lori Van Houten



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## Feedback

We welcome your feedback. This tool and the related guide are a first generation set of materials to help states and districts implement ESSA; we hope to revise and improve them based on use in the field. Suggestions of other resources are welcome, as are requests to develop new tools to fill gaps in the field. Access the full guide at: [http://www.wested.org/resources/evidence-based-improvement-essa-guide-for-states](http://www.wested.org/resources/evidence-based-improvement-essa-guide-for-states%20)

## Contact Information

Nikola Filby

415.615.3124

[nfilby@WestEd.org](mailto:nfilby@WestEd.org)

Sylvie Hale

415.615.3188

[shale@WestEd.org](mailto:shale@WestEd.org)

# **Tool 1:** SEA Inventory of Current Practice

### Purpose

To help state education agency (SEA) staff members be explicit about the SEA’s process for engaging with local education agencies (LEAs) in evidence-based improvement planning and decision-making, and the support the SEA provides for effective use of the process; identify gaps or needed changes to strengthen the model or framework; and prioritize next steps.

### Outcome

The discussions prompted by this tool will lead to a plan of action to address gaps and ensure that the state’s process for supporting LEAs is evidence-based and is aligned with ESSA requirements. The completed tool will also serve as an artifact of discussions and decisions.

### Materials

In preparation, gather guides, graphics, and other documentation that describe your state’s processes for improvement planning, monitoring, decision-making, and related activities.

### Who Should Be Involved

Staff who oversee the state’s improvement efforts are key participants in working through this tool. Those involved should have substantive knowledge of the relevant federal programs and requirements. Participants may include multiple staff from one program or department, or, ideally, staff from multiple programs and offices, in order to support alignment across the agency.

### Time

Set aside 1–2 hours for each step, or longer (3 or more hours) if multiple programs or departments are working together. This time can be spaced out over several weeks, with breaks between steps to reflect or to gather additional information to inform the subsequent step(s).

### Instructions Overview (detailed instructions are provided with each step)

* Step 1: Get organized, including identifying roles and responsibilities, gathering materials, establishing a schedule, and reviewing documentation.
* Step 2: Describe the context of your SEA’s process for engaging with LEAs in evidence-based improvement planning and decision-making, and for providing support to the LEAs in this process.
* Step 3: Map the steps of your improvement process to the steps of the recommended process (described in section 2 of this guide) and identify any gaps or needed changes in order for your state’s process to incorporate the elements of the recommended process.
* Step 4: Identify the supports offered to LEAs (e.g., webinar, guidebook, training, side-by-side coaching, regional forums); the timing or sequence (e.g., specific dates, or times of the year, such as fall or spring); and any gaps or needed changes (e.g., redundancies, timing issues, lack of resources) in order for the SEA’s process to incorporate the elements of the recommended process.
* Step 5: Review your inventory of current practice (steps 2–4), select priority areas to address, and describe next steps. Develop an action plan.

### Leading the Conversation

* One outcome of this conversation is to build a common understanding of an evidence-based framework that will drive improvement work. Especially in steps 2, 3, and 4, be aware that participants will likely have different backgrounds and experiences through which they view the framework and how it is implemented. While participants may seem to agree, it will be important to regularly check for understanding. Ask participants to repeat what they heard. Paraphrase contributions to ensure that your understanding is accurate. Regularly ask participants if they have questions.
* For step 3, consider having copies of the continuous improvement framework from section 2 of this guide, including the descriptions of each element of the process, available. Being able to compare the state’s recommended framework with this guide’s framework will inform the conversation about alignment and possible gaps.

### Modifications or Variations

* For step 3, consider using this tool in two phases. In the first phase, focus exclusively on the model or framework for improvement planning for your state and on identifying its strengths and areas for needed adjustments. In the second phase, revisit each of your steps and delve deeper into how the use of evidence and data is infused in your planning framework. Is this use of evidence an explicit activity, such as requiring certain data in a needs assessment or requiring an evidence base for interventions? What decisions does it inform? Are relevant data readily available? Are there adequate supports built in? You might consider modifying the provided table by adding a column to capture details about the use of evidence or data.

STEP 1: Get Organized

Take time to get organized and build your knowledge base by gathering necessary materials and building a well-informed team to complete subsequent steps. Things to consider:

**Who is involved?** Identify which departments or programs should be represented; then identify the individuals who will participate in this work. What are their respective roles and responsibilities in the group (e.g., note taker, facilitator)?

| Department or Program | Name | Contact Information | Role/Responsibility |
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**What do we need to know?** Gather and organize documents and other materials that describe the planning and related support processes to LEAs. Consider the value of having graphics or models from sources other than your own department or program. Review documentation and ensure that all participants have strong foundational knowledge of the information. Does everyone have a common understanding of the subject matter (e.g., state improvement framework, ESSA requirements, evidence-based interventions)?

| Document or Material  (title, description, source) | Why It Is Important  (what everyone should know) |
| --- | --- |
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**Attend to logistics**. What will the meeting schedule be? Where will you meet? What materials do you need (e.g., chart paper, sticky notes)?

Notes

STEP 2: Describe Context

Briefly describe the context of your SEA’s process for engaging with LEAs in evidence-based improvement planning and decision-making, and for providing support to the LEAs in this process. Questions to consider:

* What model or framework have you defined that guides this work with LEAs?
* What services, resources, or other supports are you required to provide to LEAs (e.g., based on funding or other programmatic requirements)?
* How is evidence-based decision-making part of this process? Where does it fit in?
* What is produced as a result of going through the improvement planning process?

Briefly Describe Your Improvement Planning and Decision-making Processes

STEP 3: Map Current Process

The first column of the table below outlines the five steps of a recommended evidence-based improvement process, including key decision-making elements (full descriptions of each step are provided in section 2 of this guide). In the second column, map the steps in your state’s improvement process for LEAs to the steps in the recommended process. Be sure to include how each step uses evidence. Note that there may be more than one step in your process for each step in the recommended process (e.g., the Inform step of the recommended process might include both “Needs Assessment” and “Goal Development” from your state’s process). In the third column, identify any gaps or needed changes in order for your state’s process to incorporate the elements of the recommended process. Questions to consider:

* Does your state’s process address all of the steps in the recommended process? If not, what are the gaps?
* How is the use of research or data integral to each step of the continuous improvement process? That is, how is each step designed so that it must be successfully completed by incorporating research or data?
* How does your model reinforce a continuous (cyclical) process?

| Continuous Improvement Steps | Your Improvement Process Steps | Gaps or Possible Changes |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Inform**: Analyze local needs; adjust focus. |  |  |
| **Select**: Identify, examine, and select evidence-based interventions. |  |  |
| **Plan**: Develop implementation strategies, adjust for local context. |  |  |
| **Implement**: Proceed with improvement interventions; make formative adjustments. |  |  |
| **Analyze**: Conduct summative assessment of performance and effectiveness. |  |  |

STEP 4: Identify Current Supports

In the table below, identify the supports that your SEA offers (e.g., webinar, guidebook, training, side-by-side coaching, regional forums) to build LEA capacity in each of the five steps of a continuous improvement process. List the supports in chronological or sequential order and indicate which of the steps each support relates to. In the last column, indicate whether the resource supports or incorporates the use of evidence or data to inform decisions. After filling in the table, review what you have listed and identify gaps or needed changes (e.g., redundancies, timing issues, lack of resources). Questions to consider:

* Do the supports that you provide address all of the steps? Is the timing or sequence appropriate?
* Are the supports strong enough to allow LEAs to navigate the process independently, or is additional direct support from the SEA or from intermediaries still required?
* How effective are the supports, and what seems to make them effective? How do you know?
* Does everyone who needs support receive it?
* Are there adequate supports for the use of evidence or data to inform decisions?

| Timing or Sequence | Specific Support Provided | Inform | Select | Plan | Implement | Analyze | Evidence? |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
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Gaps or Needed Changes

STEP 5: Identify Priorities and Next Steps

Review the results of your inventory of current practice (steps 2–4), select priority areas to address, and describe next steps, including action items, persons responsible, and due dates. Questions to consider:

* What changes in the structure of your evidence-based continuous improvement process need to be made in order to include each step of the recommended continuous improvement process, and to incorporate research or data throughout the process? (See the results captured in the step 3 chart.)
* What can you change, add, or remove in order to have the biggest impact?
* What changes in support might be most beneficial? (See the results captured in the step 4 chart.)
* What resources (time, funding, personnel) will you need?
* How will you communicate any changes to others in the SEA, to state support providers, and to LEAs?

Priority Areas to Address

Next Steps