



Technical Assistance Model for Long-Term Systems Change Three State Examples

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A MODEL FOR LONG-TERM SYSTEMS CHANGE

The NECTAC Technical Assistance (TA) Model for Long-Term Systems Change (LTSC) (<http://www.nectac.org/pubs/titlelist.asp#tamodel>) recognizes that components of a state system are highly interactive and changes at one level are not likely to be sustained without supportive changes at all related levels. Improved child and family outcomes require: intervention practices that are research-based, high quality and individualized; a supportive local infrastructure; an effective personnel development system; state policies that guide the implementation of recommended practices; and a quality assurance system that regularly monitors and evaluates implementation, performance and results. NECTAC's LTSC model incorporates critical characteristics of successful systems change suggested by the literature:

- Involve stakeholders representing all levels of the system and diverse populations of the state.
- Garner the commitment and support of state leadership.
- Create a shared understanding of issues driving the need for change at all levels of the system.
- Create a shared "vision of the solution" that includes desired outcomes at all levels of the system.
- Plan a sequence of activities to achieve these agreed upon desired multi-level outcomes.
- Work collaboratively with other TA agencies to leverage resources and assemble a mix of expertise.
- Evaluate and monitor progress regularly to allow for corrections and fine-tuning of the plan.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the plan in making the intended improvements at all system levels.

EVALUATION OF NECTAC SYSTEMS CHANGE INITIATIVES

NECTAC has assisted states in designing and implementing over 25 LTSC initiatives. Based on a 2010 external evaluation report on the impacts of TA provided by NECTAC:

- 91% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their state level infrastructure had improved. Changes included state level guidance (84%), policies and procedures (73%), general supervision/monitoring (40%), and inter-agency relationships (31%).
- 91% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their local level infrastructure had improved. Changes included local level guidance (72%), policies and procedures (50%), inter-agency relationships (33%), and general supervision/monitoring (31%).
- 90% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that practices at the local level had improved. Changes were made in data collection and monitoring participation (60%), direct service or teaching practices (51%), screening and/or assessment practices (37%), and IFSP/IEP development (33%).

Brief highlights from three state LTSC initiatives supported by NECTAC follow.

MISSOURI: BUILDING A SYSTEM THAT ASSURES THE QUALITY OF IFSPS AND FAMILY CENTERED SERVICES

The Issue / Challenge and Goal: In 2003, The Missouri First Steps program requested support from NECTAC related to their concerns about increasing costs of services and inconsistent implementation of team-based, family-centered services.

Building the Strategic Systems Change Plan: In early 2004, NECTAC worked with key state staff to develop a strategic plan to help ensure implementation of high quality family-centered services and a more cost effective/efficient statewide early intervention system. Ultimately, the plan included a component to increase the knowledge and skills of local programs and practitioners around developing high quality IFSPs in strengthened partnership with families.

Key Activities in the Plan:

1. Develop a program Mission Statement and revise Beliefs of the First Steps Program.
2. Develop IFSP quality indicators, a rating tool, a process for quality review of IFSPs, and a plan for communicating with stakeholders.
3. Revise state guidance to reflect the mission statement, beliefs, and quality indicators.
4. Train and support regional consultants, System Point of Entry (SPOE) personnel and providers.
5. Revise monitoring and accountability processes to include the new IFSP quality indicators.
6. Conduct quality reviews of IFSPs in 3 SPOE areas and provide feedback, rewards or sanctions.
7. Support SPOEs and service providers to change local policies, procedures, and practices.
8. Use results of the first IFSP quality indicators review process to make recommendations for improving the tool and/or process, and plan to implement the process statewide.

Implementation of the Plan: In June 2004, NECTAC facilitated a meeting of diverse MO stakeholders where participants revised mission and belief statements to reflect evidence-based IFSP practices. NECTAC later helped draft quality indicators for the IFSP, an IFSP Quality Indicators Rating Scale (QIRS) and a guidance document with exemplars for the field. Service coordinators were trained on these. In 2006, the QIRS was built into the contracts that the state entered into with each region. It was later incorporated into the statewide monitoring and accountability system. Since that time, the state has conducted IFSP Quality Reviews and seen an increase in the quality of IFSPs, as well as improved practices with regard to implementation of a team model and having more engaging, meaningful conversations with families.

Outcomes / Outputs of the Systems Change Plan: Successes of MO's LTSC plan are evidenced by:

- First Steps Mission and Beliefs (<http://www.dese.mo.gov/divspeced/FirstSteps/beliefstatements.html>)
- The Missouri First Steps IFSP Quality Indicators Rating Scale (<http://dese.mo.gov/divspeced/FirstSteps/pdfs/MOIFSPRateScale.pdf>)
- Guidance and Exemplars for the Missouri First Steps IFSP Quality Indicators Rating Scale (<http://dese.mo.gov/divspeced/FirstSteps/pdfs/IFSPGuidanceExemplars.pdf>)
- Increased quality of IFSPs and more engaging, meaningful conversations with families
- Implementation of a team model

“Use of the QIRS is going well and yes, it has made a difference in the quality of the discussion that occurs at IFSPs. The conversations are more engaging with families. They are more functional and meaningful, related to families’ routines.” —Missouri (Personal Communication, August 30, 2010)

Impacts Beyond Missouri: The MO Quality Indicator Rating Scale (QIRS) and guidance document have been shared with other states and is featured on the NECTAC web site. Additionally, information on the implementation plan for their “Team Model” was shared at the 2009 national OSEP Early Childhood Conference. Several states have adapted the rating scale for use in their own systems.

NORTH DAKOTA: BUILDING A CHILD OUTCOMES MEASUREMENT SYSTEM

The Issue / Challenge and Goal: In the winter of 2006, The North Dakota Office of Special Education requested TA from NECTAC to help develop a state system for measuring child outcomes. The overall goal was to develop a system for measuring child outcomes that would produce data in less than two years to meet the requirements for reporting to OSEP on the State Performance Plan (SPP), as well as to enable data-driven decisions about training, TA and support.

Building the Strategic Systems Change Plan: In March 2006, NECTAC facilitated a planning meeting to help diverse stakeholders understand the purpose of the measurement system, determine the values that would guide its development, review options and make decisions about the approach the state would take. The group also developed strategic activities and timelines for implementation.

Key activities in the plan:

1. Develop the purpose(s), values and principles to guide the system development.
2. Determine measurement tools and processes for collecting data.
3. Plan the field test: sites, data collection processes, timelines, etc.
4. Conduct the field test and make recommendations for revising the process as needed.
5. Revise state data and monitoring systems to capture new outcomes data.
6. Develop the capacity to provide training and TA on the collection, reporting and use of data.
7. Provide and evaluate TA to local program administrators, direct service providers and families.
8. Conduct quality assurance activities and use the results for decision-making.

Implementation of the Plan: During the pilot process, staff from the Early Childhood Outcomes Center (ECO) and NECTAC conducted trainings on collecting and reporting child outcomes data. The state, with support from NECTAC, facilitated communication across sites regarding barriers and facilitators to implementation. A survey was used to gather process-specific information. Debriefings resulted in revisions to initial policies and procedures for data collection and reporting processes.

“As the ND ECO Project is implemented in pilot sites throughout ND and soon statewide, NECTAC has provided guidance and training in the development of consistent implementation practices and policies throughout the pilot sites. The development of consistent practices and policies during the pilot process will ensure a consistent and solid process at the local level statewide.” —From NECTAC Evaluation Feedback Survey (Follow-up to ND 619 COSF Training, May 5, 2007)

In February 2007, the state reported its first year of data. Additional regional trainings were provided and the state formalized written policies, procedures and training materials for implementing the new system. State-wide implementation began on July 1, 2008. ND also participated in the ECO Training Consortium that resulted in the development of training materials that are currently used nationally.

Outcomes / Outputs of the Systems Change Plan: Successes of ND’s LTSC plan are evidenced by:

- A system for collecting and reporting outcomes data that meets federal requirements
- The availability of initial progress data
- Policies, procedures and Training and TA expertise / materials
- The ND Early Childhood Outcomes Process Guide (http://www.dpi.state.nd.us/speced/early/outcomes_process_guide.pdf).
- A Quality Assurance Checklist (http://leadershipmega-conf-reg.tadnet.org/uploads/file_assets/attachments/122/original_NDCOSF_Review_Checklist2.pdf?1279897463)

Impacts Beyond North Dakota: The ND Early Childhood Outcomes Process Guide and the COSF Quality Assurance Checklist are both featured on the ECO web site. The ND Section 619 Coordinator presented these and related state resources at the 2010 national OSEP Early Childhood Conference.

WYOMING: BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE GENERAL SUPERVISION SYSTEM

The Issue / Challenge and Goal: In the spring of 2007, The Wyoming Infant and Toddler Program requested TA to improve their Part C monitoring and general supervision system to ensure compliance with the requirements of the IDEA and improve services for children and families.

Building the Strategic Systems Change Plan: In May 2007, NECTAC facilitated a WY Part C General Supervision Stakeholder Meeting where stakeholders were able to:

- Develop a shared vision for the Wyoming Part C General Supervision and Monitoring System.
- Identify priority indicators and potential data sources for measuring those indicators.
- Identify possible additions/revisions for on-site and off-site monitoring activities.

Key Activities in the Plan:

1. Develop a monitoring manual based on the new vision and priorities.
2. Pilot the new general supervision process.
3. Develop a procedure manual to support state staff in implementing the monitoring and TA process.
4. Train regional programs on the new General Supervision and Monitoring System.

Implementation of the Plan: NECTAC took the lead in helping to draft the monitoring manual, key forms, and an internal state level procedure manual. NECTAC assisted the Lead Agency in planning and conducting training for regional programs. WY has implemented the new process with much success.

Outcomes / Outputs of the Systems Change Plan: Successes of ND's LTSC plan are evidenced by:

- A Part C General Supervision and Monitoring System with multiple methods to: ensure compliance with the IDEA and the accountability of regional programs/providers; identify and correct noncompliance; facilitate improvement; and support practices for improved child/family outcomes
- A monitoring manual (<http://wdh.state.wy.us/Media.aspx?mediaId=9428>) and a procedure manual

"The State team has a better understanding of how the "puzzle" fits together and how the system should work. By not duplicating efforts, more time and energy can be spent on making sure the State of Wyoming stays in compliance and the children of Wyoming are receiving the best service possible." —From NECTAC Evaluation Feedback Survey (WY DDD Annual Conference General Supervision and Monitoring, August 15, 2007)

Impacts Beyond Wyoming: The WY Monitoring Manual has been shared with other states and is featured on the NECTAC web site. The manual's appendix, "The Program Root Cause Questions for Developing Meaningful Corrective Action Plans," became the basis of an OSEP Priority team tool designed to assist local programs/districts identify factors contributing to noncompliance for SPP/APR Indicators C1, C7, C8, B11, B12 and B15. By determining contributing factors, appropriate strategies to ensure timely correction of noncompliance can be developed. This resource has been presented and shared at national conferences and is available for all states on the NECTAC web site.

CONCLUSION

NECTAC has supported state Part C and Section 619 programs in implementing systems change initiatives to improve systems and services for young children with disabilities and their families. The examples presented provide highlights of how three states engaged in systems change over time and the types of outputs and outcomes that resulted. These examples demonstrate that successful systems change takes commitment, leadership, involvement of diverse stakeholders, a shared vision, strategic activities at all levels of the system, monitoring and evaluation of implementation/results, and time.

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