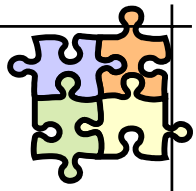
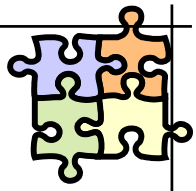
Archived Information



COMPREHENSIVE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Materials adapted from "Planning and Conducting Needs Assessments: A Practical Guide" (1995)



Summary of Foundation Concepts

- A "need" is a discrepancy or gap between "what is" and "what should be."

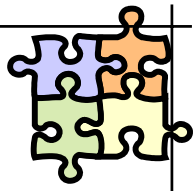
- A "needs assessment" is a systematic set of procedures that are used to determine needs, examine their nature and causes, and set priorities for future action.

- In the real world, there is never enough money to meet all needs. Needs assessments are conducted to help program planners identify and select the *right job* before doing the *job right*.

KEY TOPICS

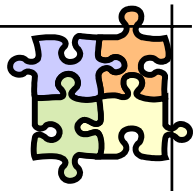
In this session, we will answer the following:

- What is a needs assessment?
- What steps are involved in conducting a needs assessment?
- What aspects of a needs assessment are important to its success?



Why Conduct a Needs Assessment?

Why do program planners in education, business, industry, government, etc. conduct needs assessments?



Legal Requirements

The law requires States to submit applications that describe:

- a comprehensive plan for needs assessment and service delivery that identifies the special educational needs of migrant children;
- how the State's priorities for the use of funds relate to the State's needs assessment; and
- how the State will award subgrants to reflect the results of the comprehensive needs assessment plan.

  [See Section 1304 - State Applications; Services & Section 1306 - Comprehensive Needs Assessment and Service-Delivery; Authorized Activities.]

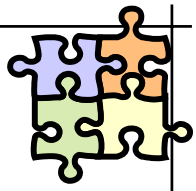
Program Requirements

Policy guidance issued by the Office of Migrant Education states that needs assessments:

- are conducted annually;
- use the best information available;
- are a process by which each state determines how to integrate MEP-funded services into the state's comprehensive education reform plan to best meet the identified needs of migrant children;
- establish statewide priorities for local procedures; and
- provide a basis for the allocation of funds.

It is not possible to succeed with a brilliant idea and superb execution of the wrong strategy…

John O'Tool
Author, Advertising



"Knowing and not doing are equal to not knowing at all."

Anonymous

Definition of Key Terms

"Need" refers to the gap or discrepancy between a present state (what is) and a desired state (what should be). **The need is neither the present nor the future state; it is the gap between them**.

Desired Results (What should be)	-	Current results (What is)	=	Need
100% of third grade migrant students meet the state proficiency level in reading	-	30% of third grade migrant students meet the state proficiency level in reading	=	70% of third grade migrant children must reach the proficiency level in reading

"Target Group"

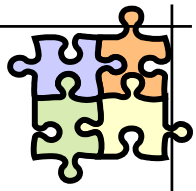
Needs Assessments are focused on particular target groups in a system.

Common target groups in education settings include students, parents, teachers, administrators, and the community at-large.

Ideally, needs assessments are <u>initially</u> conducted to determine the needs of the people (i.e., service receivers) for whom the organization or system exists (e.g., students).

However, a "*comprehensive*" needs assessment often takes into account needs identified in other parts of a system.

For example, a needs assessment might include the concerns of the "service providers" (e.g. teachers, guidance counselors, or school principals—the people who have a direct relationship with the service receivers) or "system issues" (e.g., availability of programs, services, and personnel; level of program coordination; and access to appropriate facilities).



Definition of Key Terms (continued)

A "Needs Assessment" is a ***systematic*** approach that progresses through a defined ***series of phases***.

Needs Assessment focuses on the ***ends*** (i.e., outcomes) to be attained, rather than the ***means*** (i.e., process). For example, reading achievement is an outcome whereas reading instruction is a means toward that end.

It gathers data by means of ***established procedures and methods*** designed for specific purposes. The kinds and scope of methods are selected to fit the purposes and context of the needs assessment.

Needs assessment ***sets priorities and determines criteria for solutions*** so that planners and managers can make sound decisions.

Needs assessment ***sets criteria*** for determining how best to allocate available money, people, facilities, and other resources.

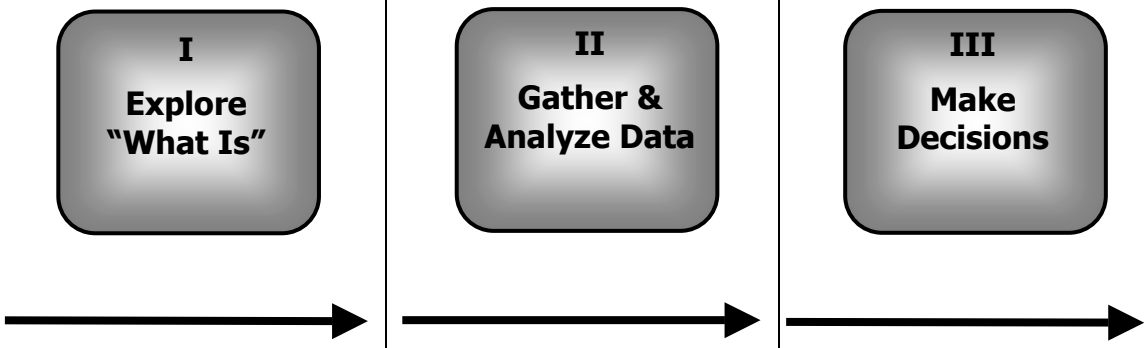
Needs assessment leads to ***action*** that will ***improve*** programs, services, organizational structure and operations, or a combination of these elements.

A system is a set of regularly interacting elements that form a unified whole and organized for a common purpose.

An important characteristic of a system is that all parts are interdependent. Anything that affects one part of the system has consequences for the whole.

A Three-Phase Model of Needs Assessment

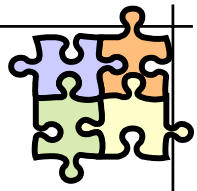
*…a **systematic** approach that progresses through a defined **series of phases***

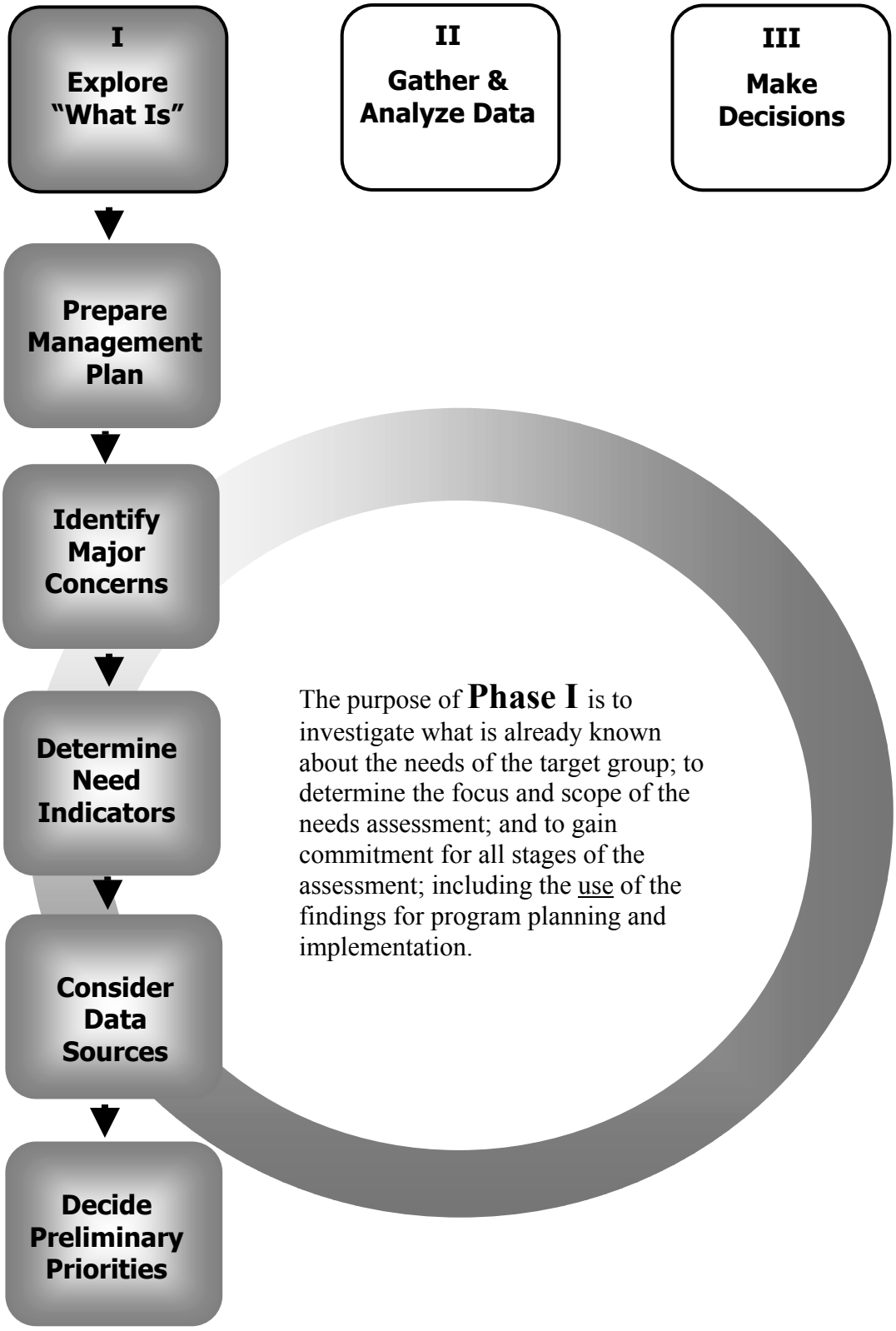


- Prepare a Management Plan
- Identify Concerns
- Determine Measurable Indicators
- Consider Data Sources
- Decide Preliminary Priorities

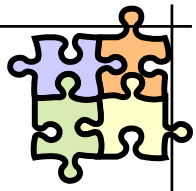
- Determine Target Groups
- Gather Data to Define Needs
- Prioritize Needs
- Identify & Analyze Causes
- Summarize Findings

- Set Priority Needs
- Identify Possible Solutions
- Select Solution Strategies
- Propose Action Plan
- Prepare Report





The purpose of **Phase I** is to investigate what is already known about the needs of the target group; to determine the focus and scope of the needs assessment; and to gain commitment for all stages of the assessment; including the use of the findings for program planning and implementation.



Phase I: Explore "What Is"

- Two major objectives of the exploration phase are gaining: 1) **a sense of commitment to the needs assessment** at all levels in the organization; and 2) **an assurance that decision makers will follow-up (i.e., use) the findings** with appropriate and timely action.

STEP 1: Prepare Management Plan

- Successful projects have leadership. A key person in planning and managing a needs assessment is the project manager.

- **Form a Needs Assessment Committee**.

  The members of a Needs Assessment Committee should represent those organizations and individuals that are critical to ensuring commitment and follow-up.

- Determine a reporting schedule.

  Timely reports to top management and other important stakeholders, with opportunities for interaction on major issues, also are critical.

"Who is important to have as a member of your Needs Assessment Committee?"

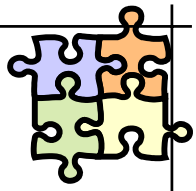
STEP 2: Identify Major Concerns

- Reach consensus on the goals (desired outcomes) of greatest importance to the target group.

- Refine the list of goals to the top 3 – 5 goals.

- Brainstorm a list of concerns/factors for each of the goals.

- Decide on the major concerns for each goal.



Phase I: Explore "What Is" (continued)

STEP 3: Determine Need Indicators

- Identify indicators that could verify that the concern/issue exist.

  [An indicator is data that can verify that a concern exists.]

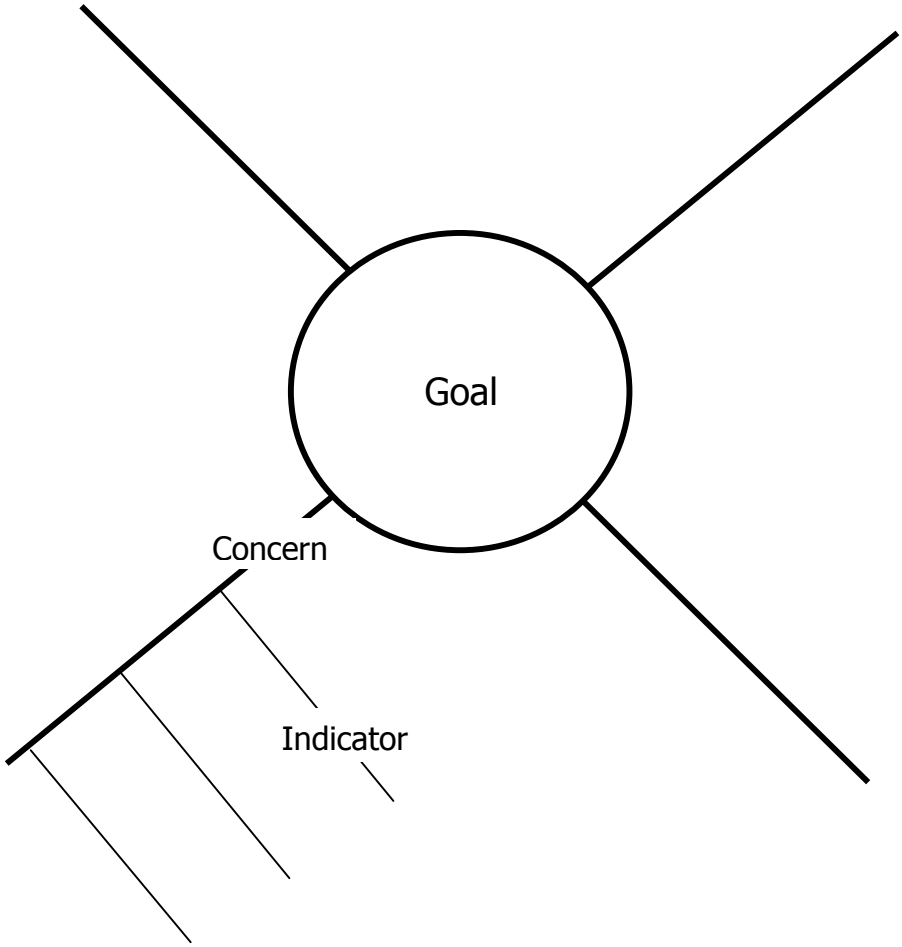
STEP 4: Consider Data Sources

- Determine what kinds of information would be helpful to more clearly define the need and where to get the data.

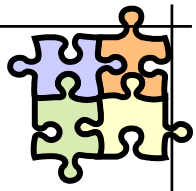
STEP 5: Decide on Preliminary Priorities

- Set the priorities of each concern as a focus in the gathering of data.

Group Activity: Exploring "What Is"



Project Mapping can be used to provide a visual map of all of the concerns and indicators related to a goal.

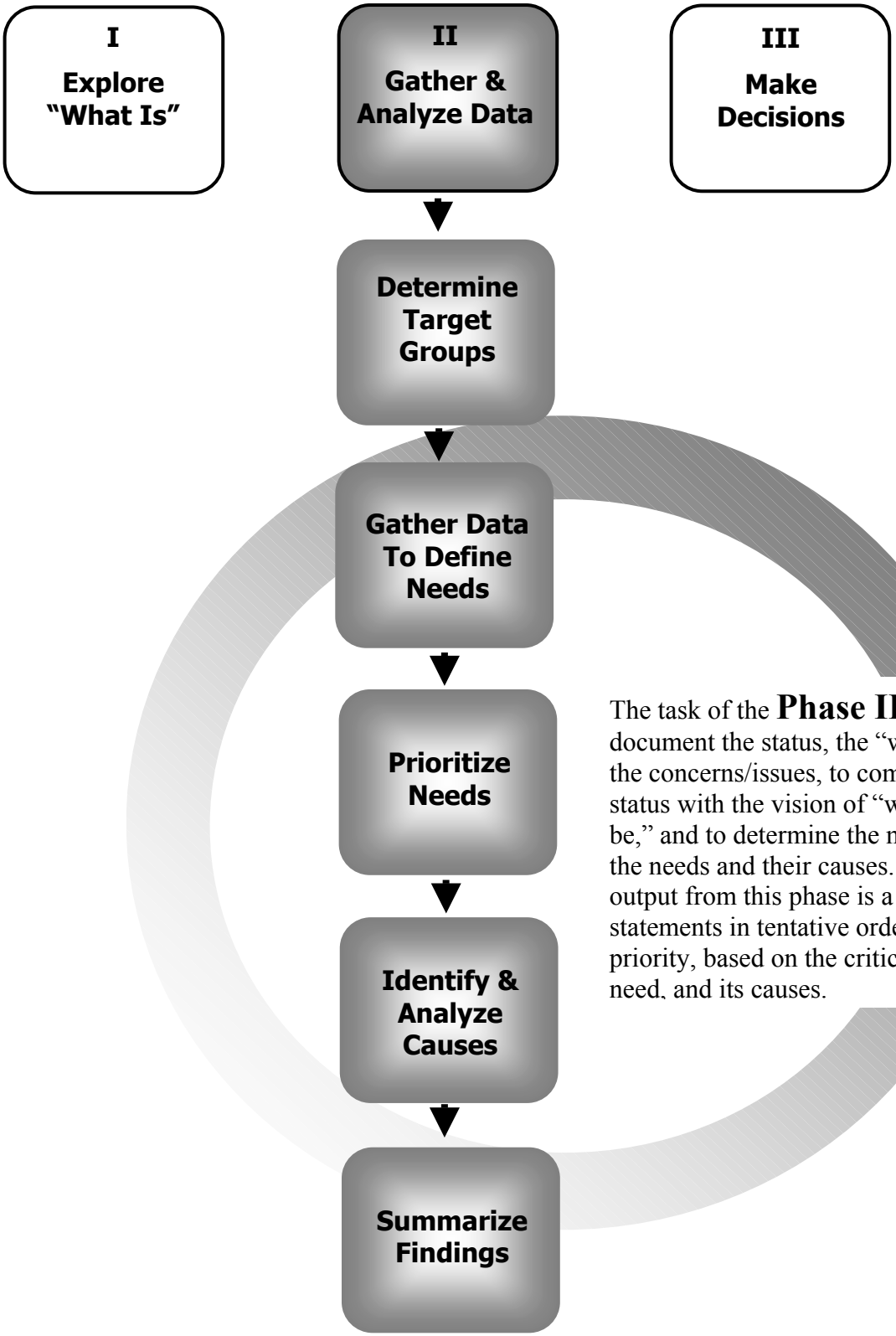


Group Activity: Exploring "What Is" (continued)

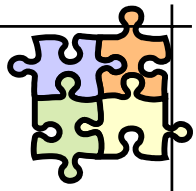
GOAL:

CONCERN (FACTORS):

INDICATORS:	SOURCES OF DATA:



The task of the **Phase II** is to document the status, the "what is" of the concerns/issues, to compare the status with the vision of "what should be," and to determine the magnitude of the needs and their causes. The major output from this phase is a set of needs statements in tentative order of priority, based on the criticality of the need, and its causes.



Phase II: Data Gathering & Analysis

STEP 1: Determine Target Groups

- Determine the scope of the needs assessment—e.g., all districts with eligible migrant children.
- Determine target groups—e.g., migrant students, parents, teachers, etc.

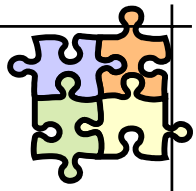
*A **Need Statement** describes the gap, or discrepancy, between "what is" and "what should be".*

STEP 2: Gather Data to Define Needs

- Specify a desired outcome based on the program's goals.
- Collect data to determine the current state of the target group in relation to the desired outcome.
- Formulate need statements based on discrepancies between current and desired outcomes.

STEP 3: Prioritize Needs—Based on Data

- List concerns (need areas) in rank order of importance (e.g., School affliation, English Language, Course Completion).
- Within each area of concern, separately rank the identified needs (e.g., Within School affliation—Counselor-student contact, peer network, extra curricula activities).



Phase II: Data Gathering & Analysis (continued)

STEP 4: Identify & Analyze Causes

- Determine general and specific causes of high priority needs.

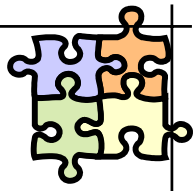
  In general, try to answer question "*Why does this need persist*?"

- Identify the factors that are amenable to intervention with control of your program.

STEP 5: Summarize Findings

- Summarize and document findings by need with an explanation of the major causes.

- Share the results with the Needs Assessment Committee, managers, and other key stakeholders.



Tool: Identifying & Analyzing Causes

(Cause and Consequence Analysis)

- To determine the priority of each need, examine both the difficulty to correct the need and the degree of criticality.
- Review the ratings in light of the magnitude of the discrepancy between the present and desired states.
- Use results to provide data for consideration in setting priorities and moving to solution strategies.

NEED	CAUSES	CONSEQUENCES	DIFFICULTY TO CORRECT [low, medium, high]	CRITICALITY 1 2 3 4 5

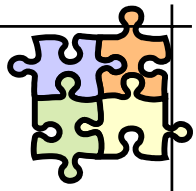
In column 1: List *needs* that were previously identified in the needs assessment.

In column 2: List all possible "treatable" *causes* of each need (concern), itemized separately for each need. A given need may have more than one cause.

In column 3: List *consequences* if the cause is not removed and the need is not meet, also itemize separately for each need. There may be more than one consequence for each need.

In column 4: Enter a rating (low, medium, high) of the *difficulty of correcting the problem* once it has occurred.

In column 5: Enter a rating, on a scale of 1 to 5, of the degree of *criticality* of the need if it is not met, with 5 being the most critical.



I
Explore "What Is"

II
Gathering & Analyze Data

III
Make Decisions

- **Set Priority of Needs**
- **Identify Possible Solutions**
- **Select Solutions**
- **Propose Action Plan**
- **Prepare Report**

It cannot be emphasized too strongly—that a needs assessment is not complete unless plans are made to use the information in a practical way.

Phase III is the bridge from the analysis to action—to use needs assessment findings. It answers important questions: What needs are the most critical? What are some possible solutions? Which solutions are best?

Phase III: Decision-making

STEP 1: Set Priority of Needs

Criteria for assigning priorities among needs are based on several factors:

- The magnitude of discrepancies between current and target states;
- Causes and contributing factors to the needs;
- The degree of difficulty in addressing the needs;
- Risk assessment—the consequences of ignoring the needs;
- The effect on other parts of the system or other needs if a specific need is or is not met;
- The cost of implementing solutions; and
- Other factors that might affect efforts to solve the need.

Set priorities in two stages: (a) broad areas, such as goals, concerns (needs) or target groups; and (b) critical needs within each area.

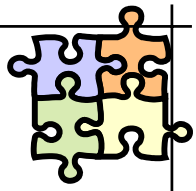
STEP 2: Identify Possible Solutions

- Set criteria (or standards) for judging the merits of alternative solution strategies.

  At a minimum, proposed solutions should meet the criteria of ***effect on causes, acceptability***, and ***feasibility*** (includes resources).

- Generate and examine potential solutions. In examining possible solutions—***review and document research and evaluation data*** that supports the merits of each alternative.

What Is → **Possible Solutions** → **What Should Be**



Phase III: Decision-making (continued)

STEP 3: Select Solutions

- Evaluate and rate each solution separately against the evaluation criteria.
- Consider whether each of the high-ranking solutions will drive toward the contemplated change or whether they will push in the opposite direction, preventing change.
- On the basis of all the information, select one or more solutions for each need area.

STEP 4: Propose Action Plan

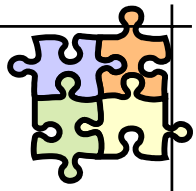
- The plan should include descriptions of the solutions, rationale, proposed timelines, and resource requirements.

STEP 5: Prepare Report

At the end of this phase, a written report should be prepared to communicate the methods and results of the needs assessment to decision-makers, policymakers, and key stakeholders.

The report should include:

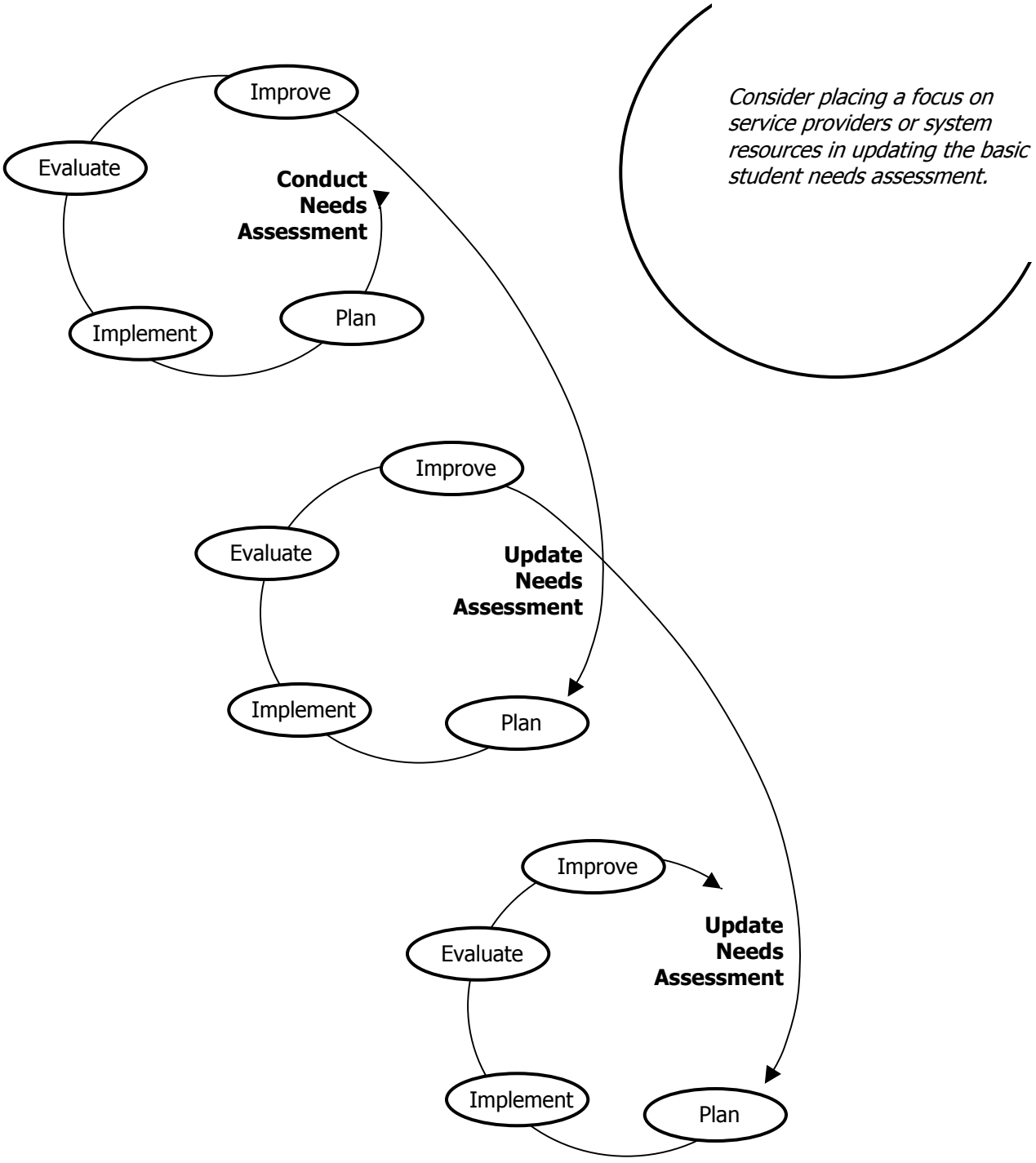
- Description of the needs assessment process;
- Major outcomes (identified needs);
- Priority Needs (and criteria used to determine such priorities);
- Action Plan (with the data and criteria used to arrive at the solution strategies); and
- Recommendations for future needs assessments.



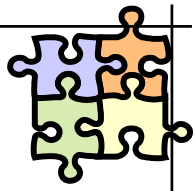
Review of the Three-Phases of Needs Assessment

I **Explore "What Is"**	II **Gather & Analyze Data**	III **Make Decisions**
Set up management plan for needs assessment	Select target group(s)	Prioritize needs
Conduct preliminary investigation of "what is"	Gather data on need indicators to formulate need statements (describing the discrepancy between "what is" and "what should be")	Identify potential solution strategies to meet the needs
Identify major concerns or factors	Prioritize needs	Evaluate alternative solutions
Determine indicators of need in each area of concern	Perform causal analyses	Select one or more solutions
Identify the best potential sources of data to fully define each need indicator	Identify factors within program control	Propose an action plan to implement the solutions
Set preliminary priorities for each need indicator (by level) to focus data gathering	Analyze and interpret all data, summarize findings	Prepare written reports and oral briefings
Outcome:	**Outcome:**	**Outcome:**
Preliminary plan for data collection in Phase 2	Criteria for action based on high-priority needs	Action plan(s), written and oral briefings, and final report

Needs Assessment in a Continuous Improvement Cycle

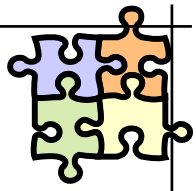


Consider placing a focus on service providers or system resources in updating the basic student needs assessment.



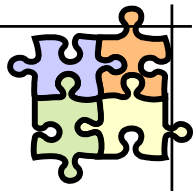
Summary

- There is no one correct needs assessment model or procedure.
- The active use of a Needs Assessment Committee is one important method for obtaining expert advice and gaining commitment to the process and using the results.
- Make sure needs focus on desired outcomes and are listed as the gaps between "what is" and "what should be."
- Before you gather data, spend the time to investigate what is known about the needs of the target group—to identify all of the concerns.
- Develop measurable need indicators to guide your data collection process.
- Perform a causal analysis—Ask "why" does this need still exist? To solve a problem, planners must understand it first.
- Share information with decision makers, policymakers, and stakeholders throughout the needs assessment process. Frequent communication with these groups is important for the "buy in" needed to use the needs assessment results.
- Document the research base for potential solutions.
- Prepare a written report that describes the methods and results of the needs assessment.



Reflection

What are three of the top challenges you face as you prepare to plan and manage a statewide needs assessment for your program?



TYPES OF NEEDS ASSESSMENT DATA

TYPES OF "STUDENT" DATA ELEMENTS COLLECTED FOR MEP NEEDS ASSESSMENT PURPOSES

(SAMPLE OF 13 STATES)

TEST SCORES

State Assessment Scores
Standardized Tests Scores
Norm-Reference Test Scores
Criterion Reference Test Scores
Cognitive Ability Test Score

Language Proficiency Ratings (English & Primary Language Other than English)
Portfolio Assessment Ratings
Teacher Survey of Basic Skill Needs
Early Childhood Development Test
Early Childhood Development Survey
Computer/Technology Literacy Skills

ACADEMIC PROGRESS

Age-Grade Discrepancy
Grade Retention
Attendance Record
Number of Interruptions to Education During Regular School Year
Number of TASS Objectives Mastered
Last Grade Completed
Grades
Credits Accrued for Graduation
Number of Failed Courses
Dropout Status

SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT

Affiliation with teacher(s)
Special Education (IEP)
Free Lunch Participation
Discipline Record
Personal Relationships (i.e., friends)
Enrollment/Placement in Other Programs (Title I, ESL, Bilingual, Even Start, Preschool, etc.)
Gifted & Talented
Interest in Adult Basic Education
Interest in GED
Interest in Enrollment in Public School System
Interest in Job Training

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Self Concept Rating
Self Esteem Rating
Special Talents/Strengths
Social Behavior Assessment Inventory Score

Feeling, Attitudes, Behavior Scale Index
Education Goals
Career Goals
Hours of Employment
Library Card & Use
Legal problem
Recommendation for Counseling

FAMILY BACKGROUND

Residency Data
Homebase State/District
Educational Attainment of Parents
Educational Attainment of Siblings
Language Spoken in the Home

Language Proficiency of Parent

Access to Transportation
Level of Parental Involvement
Mobility (Number of Moves)
Family Income

Shelter/Food/Clothing

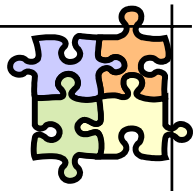
Abuse/Neglect
Family Conditions (e.g., foster care, married teen, guardian, etc.)

HEALTH INDICATORS

Medical Screening Result

Dental Screening Result

Visual Screening Result
Auditory Screening Result
Immunizations
Primary Health Care Access
TB Test
Most Recent Physical Exam



RESOURCES

SUGGESTED READINGS

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KAUFMAN, Roger., and Fenwick W. English. *Needs Assessment—Concept and Application*. 1979

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