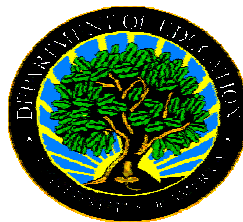


ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF AN SLC EVALUATION

A Framework for Federal Smaller Learning Communities Grantees

**U.S. Department of Education
Office of Vocational and Adult Education**

August 2004



ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF AN SLC EVALUATION

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I. INTRODUCTION

As one of the conditions for receiving federal funding, all Smaller Learning Communities (SLC) grantees in Cohort 3 and beyond must submit an Evaluation Report to the Department of Education at the conclusion of every program year. *Essential Elements of an SLC Evaluation* is designed to be a reference resource for these grantees – and for any SLC grantee that wishes to put together an evaluation – on the basic elements of an SLC evaluation. While the document is targeted specifically to SLC grantee project directors, site coordinators, and administrators, it can be a useful resource for any member of a grantee’s evaluation team – including its third-party evaluator. As you – the grantee – implement your evaluation, you can use this document as a roadmap that provides guidance on the types of issues that may arise during the evaluation process.

Essential Elements is organized around four basic themes:

- Planning
- Implementation
- Data Analysis
- Using Results

For each of these elements, this document provides:

- A concise statement of the concept underlying the element;
- A description of how the element relates to an SLC, including specific examples; and
- A summary of specific action steps that you can take to put the element into practice.

Essential Elements is organized to reflect the elements that should occur during any SLC evaluation. It is crucial to note, however, that all grantees will find themselves in different stages of their evaluations at different times. Although this document presents a sort of “progression” through different evaluation elements, most of you will soon find yourselves involved in several or all of the elements simultaneously. The evaluation “process” is an iterative one, which requires development of objectives for the very short term, the very long term, and many other stops in between. This means that, at the same time you are analyzing data on early indicators for Year 1 of the evaluation, you are also likely to be revisiting objectives for Years 2 and 3, implementing new program strategies, and collecting data for longer-term measures. Which element you deal with will depend on the feedback you are receiving as the evaluation progresses.

What is Program Evaluation?

At its most basic level, program evaluation looks at the *results* of your investment of time, expertise and energy and compares those results with what you said you wanted to achieve. Evaluation also looks at *how* you did your work in order to improve the results of future work.

The simple theory behind high school reform in general and SLC in particular is that changing to a more effective approach – and implementing it well – will lead to improved student performance. In order to know whether you are succeeding with students and have the correct approach, the key questions to examine are:

- Is student performance improving?
- Given our needs, have we implemented our program effectively?

Throughout this document, we will refer to these questions over and over again. The terms we will use to describe these issues – “student outcomes” and “program implementation”– are best understood as follows:

Student Outcome Evaluation: What do you expect to happen to students' knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, achievement, etc., as a result of the SLC program? Student outcomes may include graduation rates, post-graduation placements, student achievement (in the form of assessment scores, for example), and student satisfaction with school.

Program Implementation Results Evaluation: What processes do you expect the program to employ and what are the support systems necessary for success? Program implementation issues include the SLC services or strategies you plan to implement as well as the resources and infrastructure necessary to support the SLC initiative, such as revised staffing arrangements, professional training and development, changes to physical space, arrangements for common planning time, methods to determine teacher satisfaction, and curriculum.

The SLC evaluation framework that follows stresses the need to keep student outcomes in mind first and foremost. Chronologically, however, grantees may have a sense of their program implementation results before student outcomes are clear. For example, you will “know” whether you implemented team teaching before data becomes available on whether year-to-year retention has improved. Nevertheless, the evaluation elements we are presenting here will make it possible for you to look at results in a methodical, structured way, and then reflect on how processes may have affected results. The virtue and benefit of the formal evaluation is to help resist the temptation to view program implementation achievements as ends in themselves without connecting them to student outcomes. The overriding message of the *Essential Elements of an SLC Evaluation* is that, throughout your evaluation, it is critical to remain focused squarely on the central purpose of an SLC: improved student outcomes.

II. FRAMEWORK OF SLC EVALUATION ELEMENTS

The conceptual framework for this document consists of four elements, represented in the schematic on the following page and summarized below:

Planning. Working from program goals and objectives set in the program plan, an evaluation team is assembled to plan the evaluation process. That process includes methods for collecting data that will track progress, monitoring required resources and infrastructure, and implementing a feedback loop for continuous improvement.

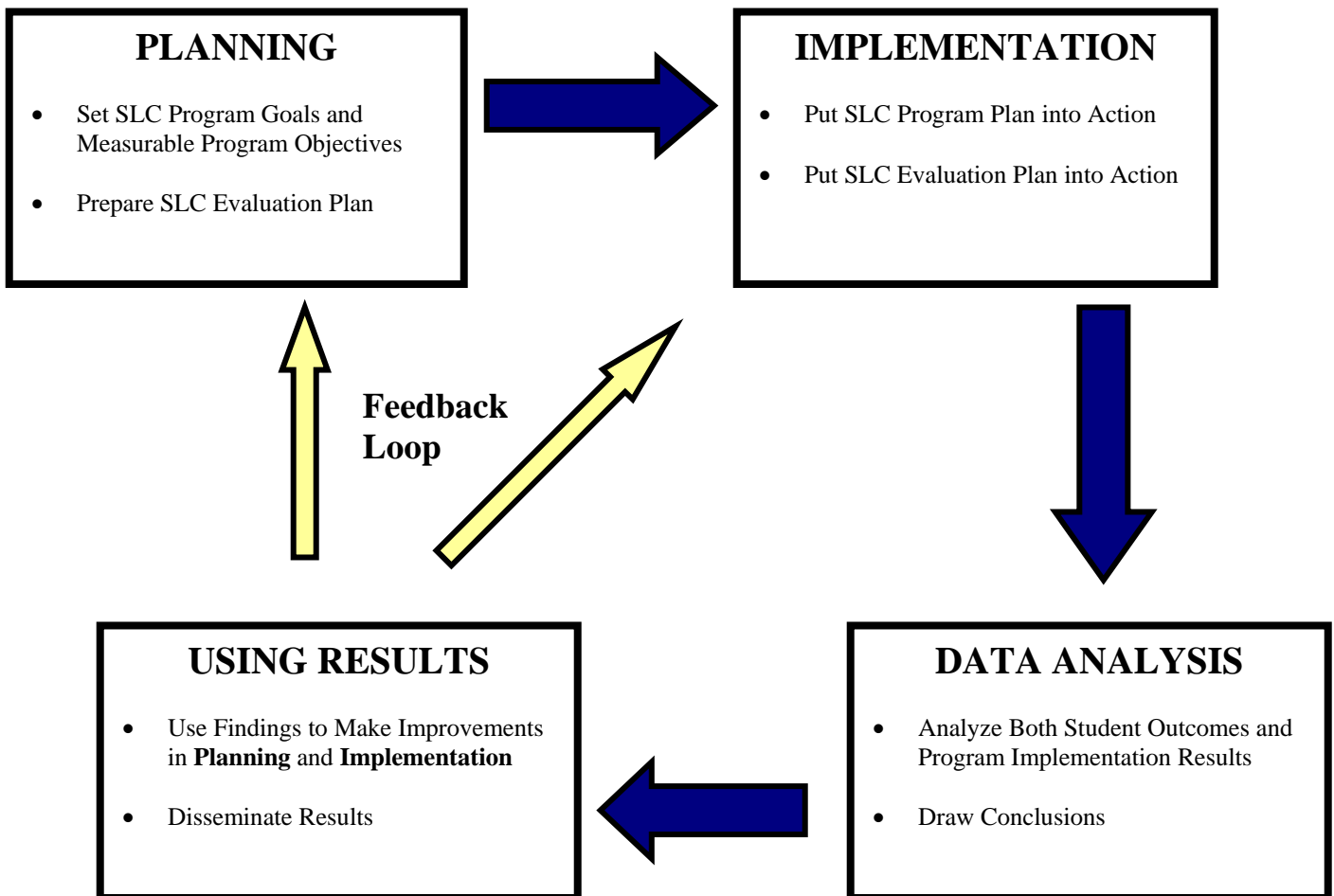
Implementation. The actions necessary to support planned strategies and structures are taken, the work of teaching within those strategies and structures takes place, and the evaluation plan is implemented through collection of program data.

Data Analysis. Data and information collected during program implementation are analyzed, inferences are drawn as to possible reasons why some results occurred and others did not, and questions are raised as to what additional information is needed to fill gaps. In addition, comparative effectiveness of various strategies can be assessed.

Using Results. Data analysis and the conclusions drawn from that analysis inform practical decisions in two key areas. Program improvement can occur through strategic changes to program implementation and adjustments to original program objectives or evaluation plans. Informing stakeholders in the school and community also occurs, through dissemination of the results of the program.

As the schematic on the following page shows, this framework is in fact a continuous cycle in which information gained from each element contributes to a feedback loop. Thus, this conceptual framework can be used immediately by all grantees, regardless of what stage of their evaluation they may be in.

THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF AN SLC EVALUATION



III. ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF AN SLC EVALUATION

PLANNING

Working from program goals and objectives set in the program plan, an evaluation team is assembled to plan the evaluation process. That process includes methods for collecting data that will track progress, monitoring required resources and infrastructure, and implementing a feedback loop for continuous improvement.

The most important foundation for your SLC evaluation will need to be in place before the formal evaluation process even begins – setting program goals and objectives. To conduct a successful evaluation, it is absolutely essential that you have clear and meaningful program goals and objectives already in place for your SLC. Your SLC program goals should be reflective of your overall school-wide goals.

Program Goals

Program goals are broad statements that reflect a vision and describe long term changes you want to accomplish through your SLC. Fundamentally, goals are about ultimate effects, results, impacts, and payoffs – for example, student graduation and post graduation outcomes. You should have a small number of SLC-specific program goals - no more than two to four that capture the overarching idea of what your program will achieve. To establish a strong foundation for the evaluation process, your SLC program will need to have two types of goals:

Student outcome goals for the SLC program have to do with student achievement, and typically relate to outcomes such as graduation rates and post-graduation outcomes. The Department of Education’s application instructions to SLC grantees note that the overarching goal of the SLC program is “to ensure that all students graduate with the knowledge and skills necessary to make successful transitions to college and careers.”

Program implementation goals represent the crucial system change and support activities that set the foundation to achieve student outcome goals. They can be referred to as “process goals.” These goals are usually measured in terms of stages of progress or steps toward an administrative or system-building purpose. Program implementation goals are established as a means to achieving student outcome goals.

In developing your student outcome and program implementation goals, it is crucial that the members of the SLC grantee team take the lead. You will have to live with your program goals and objectives every day as you implement your SLC. Ideally, however, your third-party evaluator and outside stakeholders should be involved in the goal and objective-setting process from the beginning, and decision-making on both program goals and program objectives should be consensus-driven. It is better to gain support and “buy-in” from the wider community at the beginning of the process than to attempt to explain your program “from scratch” after the fact.

Program Objectives

Program objectives are the metrics that you will use to track the progress of your SLC program toward reaching each of your overarching goals. They are measurable statements that describe

the *specific* changes expected as a result of the SLC program. In other words, objectives operationalize your goals in a specific, clear, and measurable way, within a specified timeframe. Objectives often include intermediate milestones that serve as “way stations” where you can measure your program’s progress.

It is important to remember that program objectives should focus on achieving a particular measurable outcome, not on completing a daily activity. A good objective will be quantifiable by number, percentage or time, have a stated target-level of performance, and be action-oriented. *Each goal must have at least one – and usually more – objective that indicates how, precisely, that goal will be achieved.* Because your SLC program objectives will map directly to your original SLC program goals, it will be necessary for you to develop objectives for both student outcomes and program implementation results. Some objectives, such as those contained within the Department of Education’s Annual Performance Report (APR) or other Departmental requirements, are mandatory for all SLCs. Others will depend on each grantee’s identified needs.

Following is one example of how a set of measurable program objectives can be created to measure progress toward overarching program goals:

Goal

Student Achievement: To assist all high school students in maximizing their academic potential as demonstrated by meeting the State Academic Standards.

Objectives

Objective A: Increase the number of students taking SAT and ACT exams each school year.

Objective B: Increase SAT/ACT scores each year for the second and third years [of the grant].

Objective C: Increase the percentage of students passing the High School Graduation Test each year for the second and third years [of the grant].

Objective D: Increase the percentage of students improving course grades each school year.

Identifying Required Program Resources and Infrastructure

All grantees were asked in their SLC grant applications to describe the “foundation for implementation” of their SLC program. This foundation includes such factors as teacher involvement in planning the SLC program, budgeted financial commitments, scheduling changes and district-wide and school-wide policies that are required to achieve your objectives. As you develop the measurable program objectives that you intend to use to track your SLC’s progress, it is important to ensure that you have the infrastructure in place – or available – to reach those objectives. The best objectives will be unachievable to you if you do not have the capability within your district or school to carry out the plans you have established.

Examples of important foundational resources that your school or district may address in its program plan are:

- Budget and scheduled time for professional training and development
- Specific schedules and funded time for common teacher planning periods
- Plans and structures for parent involvement

Assembling an Evaluation Team

With the fundamentals of your program in place – program goals, program objectives, and required program resources and infrastructure – you can begin planning your SLC evaluation. The first key step in planning for your SLC evaluation is to put together a core of people who will lead your district in the evaluation process. This requires the assembly of an evaluation team, including the hiring of an outside, third-party evaluator.

Planning and executing any evaluation should be a team effort, and an SLC evaluation is no exception. Federal regulations require a “third-party” evaluator, meaning someone who is not part of managing or working in the SLC program. This person or organization should be hired prior to or at the very beginning of program implementation. Ideally, he/she should participate in helping schools and the school district define their goals and measurable objectives during the SLC program goal setting phase. In addition to the SLC Project Director and third-party evaluator, your evaluation team should include, at a minimum, site coordinators from each participating SLC school, a district-level data analyst, and an SLC teacher. It is also extremely helpful to the success of the evaluation to gain the early involvement of high-level administrators at the school and district level, as well as any outside stakeholders with significant interests in the outcome of the SLC.

Preparing Your Evaluation Plan

With the program goals and objectives for your SLC as the foundation, your evaluation team will need to develop a plan to guide you in tracking how well you are achieving your objectives. An evaluation plan is a written document that specifies the evaluation design and details the practices and procedures for conducting the evaluation. It will contain the SLC program goals and objectives, the early indicators for which you will collect data, and the methods for collecting, analyzing, and using the information needed. Finally, the plan will discuss the process by which evaluation results will feed into a process of continuous program improvement.

One of the tools established in your evaluation plan will be a set of *early indicators* whose data will provide a link to your longer-term program objectives. These early indicators should relate to issues of student participation, engagement and achievement that may be related to longer-term success. Because longer term program objectives are difficult to turn around in the first year or two, early indicators related to students should be tracked periodically and routinely. They may give you a window on how you will do on your longer term student outcome objectives at the end of three years. For example, average daily attendance rate, tardiness rates, course passing rates, and year-to-year retention may be indicators of longer-term student achievement outcomes.

In addition to early indicators, the evaluation plan must include measures that will track progress on the longer-term indicators contained in your SLC’s program objectives. These longer-term indicators follow directly from the SLC program objectives created at the outset of program development, and should focus on key measurements of student outcomes and program implementation. The new SLC APR contains a number of these longer-term indicators, such as graduation rates, post-graduation placements, assessment scores, and school climate factors (violence, drug or alcohol use, overall disciplinary actions).

Ultimately, your evaluation plan should contain a workplan with timelines and milestones, and should include specific decisions on:

- What early indicators to track;
- What longer-term student outcome and program implementation measures to track;
- What data will be needed to measure the early indicators;
- How to obtain the necessary data;
- What forms of analysis to conduct;
- How to present results to different audiences; and
- How results feed into the continuous improvement feedback loop

In developing your evaluation plan, it may be necessary to revisit your original program goals, objectives, and required resources and infrastructure. Once your evaluation team begins the process of actually deciding how to *measure* the established program objectives, you may discover that adjustments are necessary. Your third-party evaluator in particular can be very helpful in identifying potential disconnects between stated program objectives or resources and the realities of an evaluation plan.

During this process of reviewing your foundation, changes to overarching program goals are extremely unlikely, as long as the goals were well-written initially and truly reflect your vision for the program. Wholesale changes to program objectives are also unlikely, but you may find it necessary to revisit these objectives as their practical implications for your evaluation become clearer. Specifically, you may find (with the help of your third-party evaluator) that the program objectives you have established are unmeasurable in practice, measure the wrong outcome, or will require data collection resources that are beyond your means. If you find that critical parts of your infrastructure are unable to handle the requirements of your evaluation plan, you will need to take action before beginning implementation of your evaluation.

SUMMARY OF ACTION STEPS

PLANNING

Step 1: Set Program Goals and Objectives

- **Keep number of goals small – two to four**
- **Develop measurable objectives for each goal**
- **Identify both student outcomes and program implementation results**
- **Identify needed resources and infrastructure**

Step 2: Assemble an Evaluation Team

- **Hire an evaluator and choose team members strategically**

Step 3: Prepare an Evaluation Plan

- **Link with program fundamentals**
- **Identify indicators, data needed, and methods for collecting data**
- **Establish continuous improvement feedback process**
- **Develop workplan with timelines and milestones**

IMPLEMENTATION

The actions necessary to support planned strategies and structures are taken, the work of teaching within those strategies and structures takes place, and the evaluation plan is implemented through collection of program data.

This is the phase in which the work of implementing both your SLC program and your SLC evaluation will occur. This section of *Essential Elements* is designed to provide guidance on the implementation of your *evaluation* – not of your program. *Measuring* program implementation results is a key aspect of SLC evaluation (along with analysis of student outcomes), but details on *how* to implement an SLC program are outside the scope of this document.

Once your SLC program is up and running, the critical evaluation-related work that must be done is collecting the data and information that will be used to assess progress. Your evaluation plan will describe the data to be collected, as well as the data sources and the processes to be used. Though your third-party evaluator will take on some of the responsibility for collecting data, school personnel will need to collect much of the data required for the evaluation. Data collection should involve collecting both quantitative and qualitative information.

Quantitative data refer to numeric information that include things like test scores, amount of time, or a rating of an opinion on a scale from 1 to 5. Quantitative data are used with closed-ended questions, where users are given a limited set of possible answers to a question. Examples of quantitative data sources for your SLC include your SLC APR and your annual No Child Left Behind report card.

Qualitative data provide a record of thoughts, observations, opinions, or words. Qualitative data typically come from asking open-ended questions to which the answers are not limited by a set of choices or a scale. Examples of qualitative data include answers to questions like How can the program be improved? or What did you like best about your experience? Sources for qualitative data for your SLC evaluation could include focus groups or surveys.

In addition to ensuring that you can collect both quantitative and qualitative data, your data collection system should allow you to assess both student outcomes and program implementation results. The system should also be capable of allowing you to compare outcomes for SLC students in your district and school with outcomes for non-SLC students. The Department of Education requires all grantees to collect information on items in the Annual Performance Report, but you should also collect data on levels of teacher, student, and parent satisfaction, program implementation progress, and other key early indicators related to your program objectives.

Over the longer term, your evaluation team will probably realize that there are some types of information that the district or a school will want to gather for itself on a continual basis, rather than waiting for a third-party to present annual findings at the end of a formal evaluation process. Be sure to think about the sources of data already available in your state, district, and school, and use them to the maximum extent possible. Data collection can be expensive, and federal SLC grant funds are to be used to supplement – not supplant – efforts that are already in place. The

long-term goal of an SLC evaluation process should be for high schools to integrate the evaluation approach into their ongoing work, having learned from the experience provided by the grant funding to hire an evaluator.

SUMMARY OF ACTION STEPS

IMPLEMENTATION

Step 1: Put SLC Program Into Action

- **Implement program strategies and program structures**

Step 2: Put SLC Evaluation Into Action

- **Collect both quantitative and qualitative data**
- **Collect data on student outcomes and program implementation results**

DATA ANALYSIS

Data and information collected during program implementation are analyzed, inferences are drawn as to possible reasons why some results occurred and others did not, and questions are raised as to what additional information is needed to fill gaps. In addition, comparative effectiveness of various strategies can be assessed.

At its most basic level, SLC evaluation involves comparing what you planned to do (your program goals and objectives) with their status at the point in time when your evaluation observations are conducted. Your SLC evaluation will need to assess both student outcomes and program implementation results.

To make this assessment, your evaluation team will need to analyze the data you are collecting on your SLC program. The process of data analysis can be very complex, and your third-party evaluator will take the lead in analytical techniques and methods for disaggregating and comparing data. It is critical to keep in mind, however, that, even though your evaluator will lead your team in this aspect of the evaluation, it is important that all members of the evaluation team understand and participate in the data review. Only through active participation in this process will the team be fully prepared to make key decisions on program change.

Drawing Initial Inferences

A good first step in analyzing your data is to compare original student outcome objectives with the general information gathered on your SLC during the data collection process. The purpose this initial drawing of general inferences is to answer the basic question: Did we accomplish what we wanted to accomplish by the end of the time period is being evaluated? This question refers directly to your measurable objectives: did we meet the targets we set for ourselves? It also refers indirectly to your overarching goals: did we make progress toward achieving the vision we have for our SLC?

As with every other element of your evaluation, it is essential during data analysis to compare data and information for both student outcomes and program implementation objectives. Because the ultimate goal for any SLC is improvement in student performance, student outcomes should be the foundation for your analysis. Although student outcomes may not show obvious progress in the early stages of your program's implementation, it is important always to keep in mind that these are the results that are most fundamental to gauging the true success of your SLC. *A program that does not improve student outcomes – even if its processes, structures, and strategies have been implemented perfectly according to plan – is not a successful program.* Student-related results are distinguished from results relating to program implementation results (processes) that are meant to *produce* the desired student outcomes. Types of student outcome questions that your data analysis should be designed to answer include: Did the expected changes in students' knowledge, attitudes, behavior and achievements occur? If so, what factors contributed to the success? If not, why not?

Data Review

Two different forms of student results should emerge from your data: early indicator results and long-term outcome results. As discussed in the section on planning, data on early indicators can be used to track questions that will provide a first-year window on the progress that might be made on program objectives over the longer run.

Data on longer-term program objectives, such as graduation rates, college enrollment, and job placement will be more difficult to interpret – particularly in the early years of program implementation. These should be an important part of your evaluation, but it is important to note that it is not expected that an SLC will have an effect in these areas in first year or two of the program. By their very nature, these types of outcomes require a “build-up” through an entire cohort of students before their full effects can be seen. In fact, in some cases the immediate effect of a well-implemented SLC program on long-term outcomes can actually be negative! For example, improvements in year-to-year retention and daily attendance (early indicators, as discussed below) may lead to initial *decreases* in indicators such as test scores and course passing rates because lower-performing at-risk students are still participating in school rather than dropping out. Over longer periods of time, as potentially at-risk students benefit from the SLC, improvements in all of these indicators should occur.

As your team is reviewing data on student outcomes, it is important also to take a look at program implementation results. Although student outcomes are the ultimate basis upon which your SLC should be evaluated, tracking program implementation can provide important insights on the “why” questions that will inform final program-related decisions – “Why are attendance rates still low?” “Why have course passing rates increased?” As part of the evaluation process, your team should review information on SLC program implementation results with two purposes in mind:

- To determine whether the desired organizational development has occurred.
- To determine whether success or failure to achieve process objectives explains success or failure on achieving student results objectives

Drawing Conclusions, Comparing Results, and Raising New Questions

After reviewing the data on student outcomes and program implementation results, your evaluation team should be able to draw conclusions based on the *totality* of the information collected. Often, the tendency in examining your results will be to look at different pieces of data in isolation from one another. However, it is very important in drawing conclusions that your evaluation team “connect the dots” among the various types of data. Single data points related to single objectives *in isolation* rarely provide truly meaningful information on a program as complex as a Smaller Learning Community.

In conducting its analysis, your evaluation team should assess progress on each individual program objective, but it should also raise questions about connections and begin to make comparisons across objectives. For example, were student outcomes consistent with progress made in program implementation? Was the information contained in the quantitative data consistent with the information in the qualitative data? Can we make any connections between the results in test scores and the results in retention rates?

Inevitably, the data analysis will produce two types of results. For areas where clear conclusions can be drawn, the data analysis will provide evidence to support concrete program changes, reinforcement of successful practices, and, in some cases, a revisiting of program objectives or even program goals. (Using your analysis to effect program improvement is discussed in the next section of this document.)

Where conclusions are less clear, the analysis will lead to new questions and, in many cases, a need to take a second look at program objectives and program implementation strategies. If your evaluation team finds itself in a situation where the answer to “Did we accomplish planned objectives in the stated timeframe?” is “We can’t tell,” the problem may be that

- Objectives were unclear. They may have been ambiguous, not defined in a measurable way, too numerous, or inconsistent with each other. If any of these problems exist, then work on refining objectives.
- Important data were missing. This could be because there was no method or plan for collecting it, or because the data simply do not exist. If either of these is the case, then you may need to work on your original program measures as well as data and information gathering. You may need to improve your data sources, your data gathering methods, or your analysis.
- Data do not provide the information needed. In this situation, data have been collected and analyzed, but they do not provide useful information or show any significant results. If this is the case, you may need to give strategies more time, implement them more effectively, or consider alternative strategies.

Once your team has completed its data analysis, it is essential not to allow the evaluation to end. As the next section describes, data analysis is only meaningful to the extent that it informs your decision-making process for the direction your SLC will take.

SUMMARY OF ACTION STEPS

DATA ANALYSIS

Step 1: Draw Initial Inferences

- **Compare general results with program objectives**

Step 2: Review Data

- **Examine student outcome data using both early and long-term indicators**
- **Examine program implementation data to assess structures and strategies**

Step 3: Draw Final Conclusions

- **Draw conclusions based on the totality of data sources and types**
- **Raise new questions**

USING RESULTS

Data analysis and the conclusions drawn from that analysis inform practical decisions in two key areas. Program improvement can occur through strategic changes to program implementation and adjustments to original program objectives or evaluation plans. Informing stakeholders in the school and community also occurs, through dissemination of the results of the program.

The final written product of an SLC evaluation will be an Evaluation Report drafted by your third-party evaluator and reviewed by the evaluation team. Grantees in Cohort 3 and beyond must submit a federally required Evaluation Report to the Department of Education at the end of every program year. The report should describe the program and provide the results of both the student outcome and program implementation result data analysis. It should also include an interpretation of the results and implications for program improvement. *It is critical to keep in mind that the Evaluation Report is not the same document as the APR required of all SLC grantees.* As we have noted throughout this document, the APR is merely one data source out of many that should be used for your evaluation. While the APR supplies important “raw” information to you and to the Department of Education, it is in the evaluation process that larger questions can be asked, larger conclusions can be drawn, and the information you need to make decisions on program improvement can be gathered.

An evaluation is only as useful as the actions it produces to improve your SLC. Planning, creating goals and objectives, implementing programs, and collecting and analyzing data are empty activities if they do not lead to concrete decisions on how to make your program work better. The final evaluation report developed by your third-party evaluator needs to be a “must-read” document for all key members of the SLC evaluation team, and its main themes need to be disseminated to the wider community as well. In maintaining the environment and infrastructure necessary to run a successful SLC, the involvement and support of the wider stakeholder community is essential. As the Kellogg Foundation has noted, a good evaluation must “balance the call to improve with the call to prove.”

Using Findings for Program Improvement

As was discussed in the preceding section on data analysis, two different types of conclusions can emerge from the evaluation team’s look at the data. The team may decide that it is unable to draw any conclusions at all. (Such a situation is discussed in the Data Analysis section of this document.) Alternatively, the final report may draw clear conclusions about what is happening in your SLC. These conclusions could run in two general directions.

“We did what we planned to do and met our student outcome objectives.”

Remember to consider both student outcome *and* program implementation objectives before making decisions on program improvement. Perfect implementation results, in which structures were in fact put into place exactly as planned, do not necessarily translate automatically into good student outcomes. As discussed in the Data Analysis section, it is essential to assess both types of evaluation results before drawing final conclusions and making decisions. If program objectives for both student outcomes and program implementation have been achieved, next steps could include:

- Reviewing planned program objectives to check whether they are still relevant and the targets are appropriate. In a program that is making strong progress and showing excellent results, it may be necessary to revise future objectives upward. You do not want to find yourself in a situation where little or no progress in coming years will still “meet” objectives.
- Reallocating resources from the most successful areas to the least successful areas, or vice-versa. You may find that program objectives stated in the plan have been achieved, and now new approaches will be necessary. This may mean placing more resources in an area that is especially successful, in order to make the program more successful overall. Alternatively, it may mean placing more resources in areas that did not show the expected success, in order to “lift” those areas up. Which strategy is appropriate will depend on the team’s judgment and, potentially, on the types of community feedback received.

“We didn’t do what we planned and/or didn’t meet our student outcome objectives”

As always, remember to pay attention most of all to student outcomes. A well-implemented structure that did not produce good student results is *not* a successful SLC. Conversely, a program implementation process that strayed from its original plan but still led to strong student results may very well be a successful SLC. To decide what program changes might be necessary to effect improvement, it is important to understand why the evaluation found what it found. Possible reasons for not achieving success might include overambitious program objectives, “wrong” program objectives, insufficient program resources, or unforeseen events. Steps to improve the program could include:

- Focusing on fewer program objectives and making them clearer. Work with the evaluator to assess whether there were too many program objectives, whether targets were too high or too broad, and whether program objectives were simply too vague to measure successfully.
- Reexamining program objectives to ensure that they are measuring the “right” things. Again, the evaluator can help judge whether program objectives were focused on the types of things that are truly most important to accomplish within the timeframes established in the evaluation plan. It may be necessary to modify program objectives before proceeding into the next year.
- Taking a close, realistic look at the resources available and re-evaluating the objectives that can reasonably be met. This could include revisiting the program implementation milestones (objectives) that were in the evaluation plan, assessing whether the necessary resource inputs were made available, and revising the program plan to account for unforeseen events that may have hindered this year’s progress.

Disseminating Results to the Wider Community

The second key purpose for conducting an SLC evaluation, which should inform the use of evaluation findings, is to disseminate results to the wider community of SLC stakeholders.

There are a number of audiences you should consider as you spread the word on the evaluation findings, including:

- Teachers
- Administrators (school & district level)
- Board of Education
- Parents
- Students
- Local community
- Department of Education
- Congress
- Local media
- Higher education institutions
- Education research groups
- Business associates

Selected findings may be prepared and disseminated in different ways for different audiences. A color brochure with graphs and charts focusing on student-related early indicators may be useful for a School Board, for example, while a more detailed report might be prepared for potential funders.

SUMMARY OF ACTION STEPS

USING RESULTS

Step 1: Use Evaluation Findings to Make Program Improvements

- **Consider adjustments to structures and strategies to reflect findings**
- **Re-examine/revise program objectives**

Step 2: Disseminate Results to the Wider Community

- **Spread a wide net in getting the word out to stakeholders on results**
- **Pay attention to the target audience in each communication**

APPENDIX A: SUMMARY OF SLC EVALUATION ACTION STEPS

PLANNING

Step 1: Set Program Goals and Objectives

- Keep number of goals small – two to four
- Develop measurable objectives for each goal
- Identify both student outcomes and program implementation results
- Identify needed resources and infrastructure

Step 2: Assemble an Evaluation Team

- Hire an evaluator and choose team members strategically

Step 3: Prepare an Evaluation Plan

- Link with program fundamentals
- Identify indicators, data needed, and methods for collecting data
- Establish continuous improvement feedback process
- Develop workplan with timelines and milestones

IMPLEMENTATION

Step 1: Put SLC Program Into Action

- Implement program strategies and program structures

Step 2: Put SLC Evaluation Into Action

- Collect both quantitative and qualitative data
- Collect data on student outcomes and program implementation results

DATA ANALYSIS

Step 1: Draw Initial Inferences

- Compare general results with program objectives

Step 2: Review Data

- Examine student outcome data using both early and long-term indicators
- Examine program implementation data to assess structures and strategies

Step 3: Draw Final Conclusions

- Draw conclusions based on the totality of data sources and types
- Raise new questions

USING RESULTS

Step 1: Use Evaluation Findings to Make Program Improvements

- Consider adjustments to structures and strategies to reflect findings
- Re-examine/revise program objectives

Step 2: Disseminate Results to the Wider Community

- Spread a wide net in getting the word out to stakeholders on results
- Pay attention to the target audience for each communication