

**State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP)
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for Indicators B-17 and C-11
January 9, 2017**

Revisions to the Phase II Submission

1. **Question:** *How did the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) review States' Phase II submissions?*

Answer: The Performance Accountability Implementation Team developed a review tool to promote consistency for scope and content across the reviewers. The review tool was based on the measurement language for the B17/C11 indicator and drew from guidance and technical assistance documents provided by OSEP and the TA centers. The PAIT reviewer completed the tool and discussed with the State lead any questions or considerations for follow-up with the State.

2. **Question:** *Are States required to make changes to the Phase II SSIP if OSEP identifies areas of weakness or gaps?*

Answer: States are not required to resubmit the Phase II SSIP based on OSEP's feedback. However, States are strongly encouraged to incorporate updated information into their Phase III submissions to address weaknesses or gaps that were identified through OSEP's Phase II review. States are also strongly encouraged to utilize the technical assistance resources available as they implement their SSIPs.

3. **Question:** *When should a State provide Phase II updates and revisions to OSEP?*

Answer: States cannot formally share Phase II updates with OSEP via GRADS until the time of their Phase III submissions due on April 3, 2017. However, States are free to update or revise their Phase II SSIPs at any time and post the updated documents to their States' websites. In those circumstances, States are encouraged to notify their OSEP State lead of posting. All updates or revisions made to Phase II should be summarized and justified with a supporting rationale and included in the Phase III submission.

4. **Question:** *What are the implications for States that submit a Phase II SSIP that is missing elements?*

Answer: The SSIP is an area for designations under OSEP's Differentiated Monitoring and Support (DMS) process. Information from OSEP's review of each State's Phase II SSIP submission was included for consideration in a State's designation for universal, targeted, or intensive engagement. States that submitted inadequately developed Phase II plans were identified as needing targeted or intensive support.

Guidance for Phase III

5. **Question:** *Following the initial feedback call, are there specific expectations for follow-up calls and OSEP support between now and when Phase III submissions are due?*

Answer: While there is not a standard expectation with regard to the frequency or type of follow-up, correspondence, activities, and timelines should be mutually agreed upon between the State and OSEP. The initial feedback call should conclude with agreed upon next steps based on OSEP's recommendations and any TA priorities or needs identified by the State.

6. **Question:** *What TA or guidance will be provided to States for Phase III prior to the April, 2017 submission date?*

Answer: All States will be provided universal technical assistance via telephone calls with the State lead/State team, OSEP's monthly national TA calls, and notification of newly developed webinars and resource materials. OSEP has released the following resources to assist States in preparing their Phase III submissions: Evaluation Plan Guidance Tool and an optional SSIP Phase III Report Organizational Outline (organizational outline). Additional resources will be developed in response to State identified needs and requests.

A Phase III Process Guide was developed by the TA centers and reviewed by OSEP. It is posted as a pdf to the Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (ECTA) website at: http://ectacenter.org/topics/ssip/ssip_phase3.asp.

Additionally, a measurement and data brief as well as webinars on progress monitoring are under development in response to the National Center for Systemic Improvement (NCSI) Part B and Part C Measurement Thought Leader Forums.

7. **Question:** *Will OSEP provide guidance to States or create a forum for discussions regarding recommendations for aligning State Personnel Development Grants (SPDGs) and SSIPs?*

Answer: OSEP currently runs an SSIP/SPDG Community of Practice through the Sig Network. Any SPDG grantee that has aligned or is interested in aligning the SPDG work with the SSIP is invited to participate. Information is provided in GRADS to direct interested parties to the contact information for the community. OSEP will also arrange conversations between States that are already aligned and States that are interested in aligning, to help facilitate the work.

8. **Question:** *Will OSEP provide guidance to States that are facing systems change issues that may lead to challenges in meeting SSIP timelines?*

Answer: Yes, OSEP will provide support through its DMS engagement designation process for States that struggle to meet State-established SSIP timelines for implementation and evaluation of the activities and outcomes described in the Phase II submission. The Phase III submission is due on April 3, 2017 and extensions will not be granted. States should notify their State leads if there are concerns about meeting the indicated timeline for submission.

9. **Question:** *How are States expected to use the organizational outline and the Evaluation Plan*

Guidance Tool to structure the Phase III submission?

Answer: The organizational outline was developed in response to State requests for a reporting template that provided greater clarity on what to include in the Phase III submission for Indicators B-17 and C-11 and a way to organize the information. The organizational outline is an *optional* tool that States can use as they prepare their Phase III submissions. However, States may opt to organize their SSIP submissions in any way that best communicates the State's SSIP work to their stakeholders.

The Evaluation Plan Guidance Tool is a universal technical assistance resource intended to support States throughout the four years of Phase III as they implement and evaluate the SSIP and make data-informed decisions about progress. Some elements of this tool may not be relevant to States at this point in their implementation and evaluation process. States are not required to "answer" each question from the evaluation tool. Rather, these questions are intended to guide States as they implement their SSIP activities, collect, analyze and interpret data, and consider what is important to include in the Phase III submission. These questions guide States in how to demonstrate progress implementing the SSIP and progress toward the State-identified Measurable Result (SiMR), as described in the indicator measurement.

OSEP received input on these two documents from technical assistance providers with the IDEA Data Center (IDC), the Center for IDEA Early Childhood Data systems (DaSY), ECTA, the National Center for Systemic Improvement (NCSI), and American Institutes for Research (AIR). This input helped to ensure consensus on OSEP's expectations and use of terminology, and generally assist OSEP TA providers to support States around these elements.

10. **Question:** *How will the organizational outline and Evaluation Plan Guidance Tool be used by OSEP in its review of State's Phase III SSIPs?*

Answer: The organizational outline is aligned with the indicator measurement language for B-17/C-11 and the Phase III review tool (still under development) that OSEP will use to review, organize feedback to States, and inform DMS designations for FFY 2017-2018. The Evaluation Plan Guidance Tool is a resource to assist States and their stakeholders as they implement and evaluate the coherent improvement strategies and evidence-based practices (EBPs) identified in the SSIP Phase II submission. OSEP may use the Evaluation Plan Guidance tool to structure conversations with States about their evaluation processes and inform recommendations for TA and support.

11. **Question:** *Please clarify the intended alignment between the Evaluation Plan Guidance Tool and the organizational outline.*

Answer: The four years that comprise the Phase III period are essentially the implementation and evaluation of the State's SSIP. The Evaluation Plan Guidance Tool reflects the plan-do-study-act (PDSA) cycle that is a critical component of well-developed evaluation plans, intervention work, and implementation activities. It is intended to be used by States throughout each implementation and reporting year as strategies and practices are implemented and evaluated. The results of this work are aligned with State-identified critical outcomes and decision points. The questions for

consideration included in the Evaluation Plan Guidance Tool should be used by States to engage in robust conversations about the SSIP work with stakeholders and ensure that a data-informed decision-making process is used throughout the Phase III period.

The organizational outline is intended to guide States in writing and structuring their SSIPs in a way that will enable them to meet the B-17/C-11 reporting requirements outlined in OSEP's Indicator Measurement Table.

12. **Question:** *Do the organizational outline and the Evaluation Plan Guidance Tool align with GRADS 360? If not, when will these documents and GRADS be aligned?*

Answer: OSEP has made adjustments to the B-17/C-11 indicator pages on Grads 360 to include fields that match the organizational outline's headings as well as "prompts" that cue States to include specific information in a certain location or order. However, as stated earlier, the outline is optional and States are not required to follow this format. States have the option of submitting their SSIP as an attachment (as in the previous two years).

13. **Question:** *Can you provide guidance or suggestions about how to prioritize measuring a large number of outcomes?*

Answer: OSEP recognizes that it can be challenging to identify in advance the most significant outcomes that may potentially have the biggest impact, and that States may make revisions to their evaluation plans (e.g., timelines), and supporting charts or graphs (e.g., logic model), as a result of implementing their SSIP strategies and activities. Using a PDSA approach to the work will support these changes and help States prioritize critical activities and outcomes that align with the State's theory of action. We encourage States to partner with TA providers and discuss what this process could entail and how State resources can be utilized effectively. We also encourage States to develop a logic model or graphic representation that identifies critical outcomes or activities that is in alignment with the State's theory of action and evaluation plan.

14. **Question:** *What suggestions do you have to operationalize stakeholder engagement? For example, in some cases, States may have engaged a larger number of stakeholders earlier in the SSIP process, and now it seems appropriate to engage a smaller, more targeted set of stakeholders. What is your perspective about who should be at the table? And what do you advise in terms of depth of detail for such engagement? How do we ensure that all stakeholder needs are addressed?*

Answer: States are expected to include key stakeholders throughout the implementation and evaluation of their SSIPs. OSEP recognizes that stakeholders may change throughout the course of the SSIP. Resources available through OSEP-funded TA centers, specifically those related to Implementation Science and Leading by Convening, should help States effectively engage stakeholders with the implementation of the SSIP, data collection and analysis, and establishment of high quality communication plans that ensure the timely dissemination of information and feedback loops for decision-making are utilized.

Phase III Content Requirements

15. **Question:** *Is there an expectation that States provide specific information about funding for*

improvement strategies in their Phase III reports? If so, will the OSEP language for Phase III, B-17 and C-11, include any specific requirements for reporting on funding (e.g. submitting a budget)?

Answer: OSEP does not expect States to submit a budget or specify funding resources as part of the Phase III submission. Some States identified finance as a barrier to the SSIP work and included finance or fiscal resources as part of its infrastructure improvement activities. OSEP expects States to report on the status of improvement efforts relative to finance if that was a priority identified by the State. OSEP will not review or approve budgets specific to the SSIP.

16. **Question:** *Regarding the report outline content that speaks to evidence based practices (EBPs implemented “to date,” what is the timeframe for reporting?*

Answer: The State identified its activities and proposed timelines for implementation in the Phase II submission. States are expected to report on the activities that have supported the EBPs since the April 2016 submission. The timelines for this are State-specific and any modifications to the timeline should be explained by the State. States are in various stages of implementation and evaluation and the Phase III submissions will need to reflect the work the State has done and what it intends to do in the upcoming year. For example, if the State has begun to implement and support its EBPs, then it should discuss in which element(s) they expect to first see changes (at the program level, provider/teacher level, family level or child level). States should also consider how outcomes will be identified and measured and what timelines were met. States should consider how data were used to inform whether or not to continue the practice, implement additional supports, or revise/change the selected practice.

17. **Question:** *Must the State include data on all elements in the previously submitted plan?*

Answer: The State is required to report the data that are collected annually for the SiMR and whether or not it met its target for the FFY reporting year. In addition, States should report the relevant data or data sources that were used to assess State-identified key outcomes and priorities. The level of detail provided in the SSIP is up to the State and its stakeholders. However, the conclusions drawn as a result of the activity and the State’s next steps for a given strategy or activity should be clearly supported by the data reported.

18. **Question:** *In the suggested organizational outline, there are several items that address making modifications to the SSIP as necessary (based on implementation and evaluation data). How much detail do States need to include regarding the changes they made to their improvement strategies and/or evaluation plan? Does OSEP want to see word for word changes along with the justification for these changes, or is a more general description of the changes sufficient?*

Answer: The State should report a description of the change, a rationale or justification, the data that support the change, and how stakeholders were engaged in the decision-making process. States may include any additional information that the State deems necessary to support the modification or change. It is not necessary to include word-for-word edits or changes but the State

should provide an executive summary of any changes or modifications, why they are important, and how they align with the theory of action and key evaluation questions or activities.

19. **Question:** *How much of Phases I and II needs to be written into Phase III? When is it appropriate to refer back to Phases I and II, and not provide the details in Phase III?*

Answer: In the Phase III submission, States will explain, based on their Phase II plan, what they have already begun to implement and evaluate, as well as, what they intend to do in subsequent years. A logic model or graphic representation could convey this information, which should be supported by narrative in the submission articulating implementation details and any changes to the initial plan. If States reference Phases I and II, they should cite (e.g. footnotes) where in those SSIP submissions the information is included.

SSIP and Determinations

20. **Question:** *Was the Phase II SSIP included in the State's 2016 annual determination?*

Answer: No. The FFY 2014 data provided in the Phase II SSIP (Indicator B-17/C-11 of the States' FFY 2014 SPP/APR) submitted on April 1, 2016, was not included in the Results-Driven Accountability Matrix that was the basis for States' 2016 annual determinations.

21. **Question:** *Will the SSIP submission due April 3, 2017 be included in the 2017 SPP/APR determination?*

Answer: The FFY 2015 data provided in the SSIP (Indicator B-17/C-11 of the States' FFY 2015 SPP/APR) will not be included as a stand-alone factor in the Results Driven Accountability Matrix that will be the basis for States' 2017 annual determinations. However, whether a State provides valid and reliable data and submits its FFY 2015 SSIP in a timely manner may be factored into the scoring of the State's Timely and Accurate Data Rubric, which would have an impact on a State's annual determination.

SSIP Relationship to ESSA

22. **Question:** *In relation to the ESSA roll-out, are efforts being undertaken to support a result in which IDEA and SSIPs are an integral part of ESSA at the federal level?*

Answer: OSEP has been actively involved in the Department's work surrounding ESSA, participating in policy workgroups, in the development of the regulations, and in ongoing work to support implementation. As we move into the next phase of implementation, we look forward to hearing from States about how we can best support State and local efforts to encourage collaboration between general education and special education and to support States in their efforts to blend ongoing SSIP work with new planning that takes place as a result of ESSA. OSEP will develop guidance as appropriate based on the needs of States and any challenges they experience as they align their SSIP and ESSA priorities and activities.

Other

23. **Question:** *How will the transition to a new Administration impact the SSIP?*

Answer: The SSIP is a required component of the SPP/APR through 2020. OSEP remains committed to supporting State efforts to improve their education and early intervention systems and special education services/programs in order to achieve positive outcomes for children with disabilities and their families.