2.4 Using Data

Level at which system stakeholders use data both for improved service coordination at the case level and to support planning and quality improvement at the system level

Purpose

The ability to share client data within and across systems, with appropriate safeguards to protect confidential information, facilitates the system's ability to achieve the other system integration standards under Coordination. When system stakeholders share data, they can be better informed about a family's full range of strengths and needs, help families get to the right places to have their needs met, and work together more seamlessly. They can also use the data to improve quality and influence resource allocation.

Definition

The Using Data measure enables communities to conduct a self-assessment on the ways in which service providers have access to and use data, beyond the data they gather within their own programs, and to measure their progress in sharing and using data to improve system performance. The measure assesses seven topics:

1. The presence of data-sharing agreements across systems, including guidelines concerning confidentiality.

2. The extent to which data sharing is facilitated by a unique common identifier for each child and family.

3. The extent to which programs share a common database:

    a. *within an individual sector* (e.g., home visiting) where they have access to information about referrals, assessments, and past history within that sector;

    b. *across sectors in the system* (e.g., between early care and education and K-12 education) to support coordination of services with regard to specific cases and to improve planning, quality improvement, research, and evaluation efforts.

4. The extent to which the system is able to collect robust data across sectors, including feedback from parents (e.g., data are complete, the data capture all or nearly all children and families in the data universe, instruments are consistently filled out and entered, survey data are representative, etc.).

5. How well the system analyzes data and identifies key areas of progress and significant challenges.

6. The extent to which the system has developed quality improvement mechanisms *within individual sectors* that incorporate multiple programs, where separate entities collaboratively work on making breakthroughs on the same indicator.

7. The extent to which the system uses data to drive resource allocation and strategic planning, such as identifying common goals and improving services *across sectors* in order to achieve those goals (e.g., a collective impact process or a cross-sector quality improvement process).

Communities can use the preliminary model survey provided below to gather information and stakeholder opinion about this measure.

Implementation

Tool or Survey

The survey model below is preliminary; communities will want to consider the elements within this model and innovate or customize. Communities may want to start with the first few topics and build over time. Or, for communities with Integrated Data Systems, starting with topics 4-7 may be most appropriate.

Summary of Steps

1. **Set intention:** Determine what the community's goals are around using data. Define the level at which you are conducting this assessment – initiative-based, sector-based, or system-wide.

2. **Identify stakeholders:** The lead agency should consider the system stakeholders that should be sought for participation. See Stakeholders section below for considerations regarding stakeholder engagement. Confirm and refine intentions/goals with stakeholders.

3. **Outreach:** Either through a convening of system leaders or one-on-one outreach to system leaders, describe the assessment process and goals. Share the model survey tool. Solicit commitments to participate and request data administrators to respond to the survey. If possible, also solicit commitment for post-survey next steps.

4. **Identify data collection method:** Some communities may want to conduct a formal survey in which they ask stakeholders to rate these questions, and then aggregate the results. Others may wish to gather stakeholders for a conversation to discuss the questions and develop a consensus rating.

5. **Develop customized survey:** Communities may wish to customize the preliminary model survey to best meet their research interests.

6. **Field survey or convene meeting:** Depending on the data collection method(s) selected, either field an online survey with data leads and/or leaders, or convene identified stakeholders to discuss, rate and rank performance collectively.

7. **Compile results:** Aggregate and synthesize numerical results for each of the seven topics. For the strengths and challenges identified by respondents for each of the seven topics, review for common themes and important insights, then summarize.

8. **Rate:** If not already done during step 6, stakeholders should meet to discuss the results of the survey and to assign an overall level of system performance. Beyond the assignment of a level, at this convening stakeholders will want to discuss next steps, such as ongoing work to address weaknesses identified. This may suggest setting a meeting schedule and/or identification of additional information needed.

9. **Interpret:** Communities should interpret results using question prompts provided in the Interpreting Results section.

10. Plan: Determine what action should be taken as a result of the analysis and record in action planning guide. Use this assessment as an entrée to a larger conversation to support system building efforts.

Stakeholders

Target Sectors

Stakeholders across the early childhood system can be involved in this assessment process. Selection can be based on the need for, or relevance of, client data sharing between the various entities.

Roles For Different Groups of Stakeholders

Different stakeholders may be needed for different questions. Namely, questions 1-5 should include technical staff or people familiar with data and its use, and questions 6-8 should include administrative leadership and technical staff.

Lead: The lead person for this measure should be someone in the organization that coordinates the early childhood network with responsibility for data analysis, reporting, and/or for quality improvement.

Stakeholders: Stakeholders may be people in similar positions in individual service sectors and programs and may also include individuals with senior leadership responsibilities.

Data Sources

Early childhood system stakeholders collect the data to be reviewed and evaluated. They can do so through any of the following means:

- Surveys completed by data administrators.
- In-person meeting(s) to discuss and rate system performance.

Tips For Successful Implementation

- Begin the conversation with a focus on your data and information technology strengths.
- Some participating communities broke the topics into clusters associated with which stakeholders were engaged and/or which topics were most salient for the community.

Limitations

- Data systems work can be political because of funding, cost, complexity, and privacy concerns. Strong leadership helps to support data sharing and coordination across system components.

Opportunities

Additional opportunities include the following:

- In communities with Integrated Data Systems (IDS), many of these issues may already have been addressed; however, there are still several opportunities for assessment. First, implementation of the tool provides an opportunity to celebrate accomplishments, to dig deeper into aspects of the data system that could still be improved, or to investigate opportunities to connect additional sectors. Further, pursuing questions regarding whether shared data are being used to drive resource allocation and strategic planning provides an opportunity for more well-developed systems to assess how well they are using data strategically, and not just for improved service delivery. Finally, there are additional system improvement questions that IDS states may want to pursue, such as which sectors are contributing data to the IDS, how flexible the IDS is in allowing them to pull data, and what modifications might make the network more impactful.

Resources

- [Explaining the Value of Data Sharing: Lessons Learned,](#) AcademyHealth

- [Sharing Data for Better Results: A Guide to Building Integrated Data Systems Compatible with Federal Privacy Laws](#), National League of Cities, 2014

- [Confidentiality Toolkit: A Resource Tool from the ACF Interoperability Initiative,](#) Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014

2.4 Using Data: Rating Tool

For each topic 1-7 below, we suggest that communities identify:

▶ A significant strength and/or recent accomplishment that they can build upon;

▶ A significant challenge or barrier they need to address in order to make further progress;

▶ A preliminary rating on a four-point scale, as follows:

1—Little or no progress to date

2—Early uptake, with commitments from key players to move forward and initial evidence of progress

3—Some accomplishments, involving parts of the early childhood system, with some early indications of impact on broader policy and/or practice

4—Significant accomplishments, involving most or all of the components of the early childhood system, with numerous examples of impact on policy and/or practice

Topics (see more detailed descriptions within the Definitions section above):

1. Data sharing agreements ▶ Strength: ▶ Challenge:	1 2 3 4
2. Unique identifier ▶ Strength: ▶ Challenge:	1 2 3 4
3. Common database / mechanism for linking data within and across sectors ▶ Strength: ▶ Challenge:	1 2 3 4
4. Strong sources of data (including feedback from parents) ▶ Strength: ▶ Challenge:	1 2 3 4
5. Analyzing data and identifying key areas of progress and significant challenges ▶ Strength: ▶ Challenge:	1 2 3 4
6. Quality improvement mechanisms that incorporate multiple programs, where separate entities collaboratively work on making breakthroughs on the same indicator ▶ Strength: ▶ Challenge:	1 2 3 4
7. Using data to drive resource allocation and strategic planning across sectors ▶ Strength: ▶ Challenge:	1 2 3 4

2.4 Using Data: Rating Tool (Continued)

After compiling results, communities can collaboratively assess where their system falls according to the following levels:

Level 1—No formal processes to support use of data.

Level 2—Some data-sharing agreements have been developed and the infrastructure needed to support using data for improvement is being constructed.

Level 3—Data-sharing agreements cover most components of the early childhood system; programs have access to a common database, at least within their own sector; at least some sectors are using data for planning and quality improvement.

Level 4—Data-sharing agreements are supported by a unique common identifier; programs have access to a common database including most of the major components of the early childhood sectors; data is being used to drive planning and quality improvement across sectors are underway.