EBITE RESOURCE GUIDE
### Identifying Needs: Data and Needs Assessment

Purpose

Data are a critical element of determining evidence-based solutions to the problems encountered in schools. The purpose of this guide is to provide a basic process for preparing to gather data to help identify a critical need as part of your school improvement work. In this guide, you will find some suggested approaches for conducting an initial needs assessment and determining possible data sources to help you explore critical needs.

How to Use the Guide

This guide is most helpful at the beginning of your school improvement process—where you are ready to figure out where to start, but perhaps need some ideas and reminders to help you move forward with determining your school's greatest needs. Keep in mind that there are many approaches to conducting a needs assessment and this guide reflects only one approach. The information in this guide can be used in conjunction with the One Needs Assessment toolset that is part of the Ohio ED STEPS process. Use the Resources section at the end for additional readings and information. Much of the tips and suggestions referenced in this guide comes from the AIR Needs Assessment Guidebook by Cuiccio & Husby-Slater (2018). Please use this guide for more detail when needed.

What is Needs Assessment?

Cuiccio & Husby-Slater (2018) defines needs assessment as, "… a systematic examination of the gap that exists between the current state and desired state of an organization and the factors that can be attributed to this gap." (Cuiccio & Husby-Slater, 2018, p. 1). The goals of a needs assessment are to, 1) study the specific needs and challenges for which one is seeking a solution; and 2) examine the nature of the context within which those challenge and needs are situated. People conduct a needs assessment to help them understand what's happening, where it's happening, and determine the priority of the needs and challenges to inform the continuous improvement process.
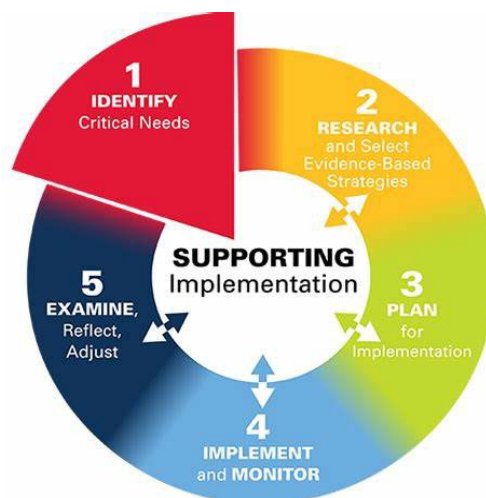
A comprehensive needs assessment is a rather large undertaking that involves lots of people, data, communication, and resources. There are many approaches to conducting a needs assessment, but most of them would involve five basic phases.
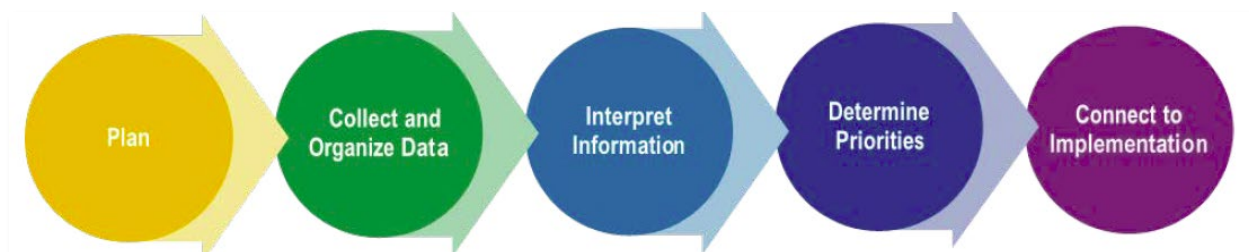
Figure 3 from Cuiccio & Husby-Slater (2018) AIR Needs Assessment Guidebook, p. 8

Preparing for Needs Assessment

Elements of a Successful Needs Analysis. According to Cuiccio & Husby-Slater (2018), an assessment that provides a comprehensive exploration of needs should involve four elements:

1) A focus on the local context and "needs framework" within that context;
2) multiple sources and types of **trustworthy** data;
3) inclusion of as many stakeholder groups as possible; and
4) collaborative perspective-taking and prioritizing of needs.

As you start the planning process, discuss each element with your team and brainstorm context-appropriate strategies for addressing each element in your needs assessment plan. For detailed explanation of these elements, consult the *Cuiccio & Husby-Slater (2018). AIR Needs Assessment Guidebook, p. 5-7.*

Figure from Cuiccio & Husby-Slater (2018) AIR Needs Assessment Guidebook, p. 24

Framing the Problem: Establishing a Needs Framework and Examining the Context

As part of the planning phase of needs assessment, Cuiccio & Husby-Slater (2018) suggest determining an organizing framework to guide your exploration of the needs and challenges that form the foundation of your target problem. Another approach is to use an exploratory

problem-framing process that can help you to leverage the voices of your stakeholders to create your context-specific needs framework.

To help you with this important phase, EBITE has created a working document, the Problem-Framing Worksheet: Needs Framework & Context (opens in an editable Word doc), that you can use with your team to start the process. Once you access the document, make a copy, share with your team, and use it during your team meetings. You can take notes directly in the document. Note that the worksheet prompts you to think of multiple data sources related to all aspects: the performance gap, the stakeholders/target audience, and the local context.

Data Sources
Another element of effective needs assessment is to rely on multiple sources of data that were collected using valid as reliable methods/instruments, and that are clean and trustworthy (as error-free as possible). Aim for a diverse set of data that includes formally and informally collected data, qualitative and quantitative data, and community data that include the following types:

- Input: Examples include improvement plans, curriculum materials, training materials, programs, data that show allocation of resources, facilities attributes, and other data on elements used to influence outcomes
- Output: Examples include attendance records (teacher and student), standardized test scores, classroom assessment results, student work samples, behavior records data, classroom observation data, and other data that help to document outcomes
- Demographic: Examples include student and employee and community demographics data, local census data, and data on any variables that are out of your control, but might influence how you might implement a solution
- Contextual: Examples include community variables such as local socio-economic trends and community resource information, family supports, and mobility/transiency data

Use your work documented in the Problem-Framing Worksheet: Needs Framework & Context to help you brainstorm the sources of the data.

Quick Tip: Preparing to Collect Data
How do you prepare to collect data? Here are some key questions to ponder with your team to help you prepare BEFORE you gather data.
- *What are all the types of data we have at our disposal?*
- *Who is our data contact person?*
- *Which types of data do we need: Student data, family/parent data? Data from teachers/colleagues or school/district documents?*
- *In what forms are these data? Numbers/scores, text/words, images/sounds?*
- *Do we have the skills, time, tools, and resources to understand and analyze these data? If not, what do we need and are we able to obtain it?*

Resources

- Cuiccio & Husby-Slater (2018). Needs Assessment Guidebook: Supporting the Development of District and School Needs Assessments
- Ed STEPS Ohio - Education Department's System of Tiered E-Plans and Supports
- Ed STEPS Ohio - Trainings (Includes a list of training resources for the ED STEPS process)
- First step of completing the ED STEPS process - One Needs Assessment
- Ohio's systematic planning tool – One Plan (Site includes video help resources for using the One Plan tool)