



Evaluating Current and New Initiatives and Strategies

A Toolkit to Support Continuous Improvement
Leaders, Facilitators, and Team Members

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Introduction

The purpose of the MICIP toolkits is to help a district dig more deeply into topics that are critical to the continuous improvement mindset and process. This toolkit is designed for evaluating current and new initiatives/strategies and incorporates resources from the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN). Following the [initial initiative inventory](#), the next steps would be to evaluate current and/or new initiatives/strategies to determine fit and feasibility in achieving desired district goal(s). This process will support districts in prioritizing the initiatives/strategies selected for their district improvement plan. The entire process could take 2-3 hours depending on how many initiatives/strategies are being evaluated and the extent of subsequent conversations around Hexagon tool results. To prepare to facilitate this process, the facilitator should consider the suggestions at the end of the kit.

Learner Outcome:

- Understand how to use the Hexagon tool to systematically evaluate and prioritize current or new initiatives /strategies in district improvement plans.

Success requires an agile improvement plan aimed at truly moving a district toward its mission and vision. Prior to engaging in this process, district leaders should revisit the district mission, vision, and beliefs to ensure that decisions about initiatives or strategies align with these statements. The ability to prioritize the most impactful initiatives/strategies helps the district make improvements over the short-term while simultaneously deselecting underperforming or legacy initiatives/strategies that could interfere with the district's ability to ensure effective implementation to achieve end targets and sustain its goals.

Once districts have completed the Initial Initiative Inventory, the MICIP Continuous Improvement Team should focus on to what extent the current initiatives/strategies support the existing district(s) goals or whether a new approach is needed. Strategies or initiatives can be evaluated and prioritized by utilizing the Hexagon Tool from the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) and reflecting on guiding questions and activities around these six components grouped into two categories: Innovation Indicators (Evidence, Usability, Supports) and System Indicators (Capacity, Fit, Need).

Using The Hexagon Discussion and Analysis Tool

Overview

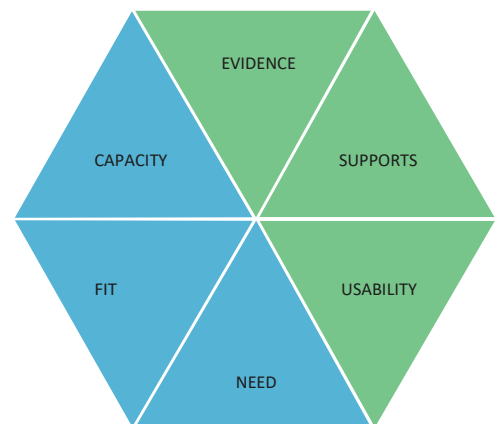
[The Hexagon: An Exploration Tool](#) helps organizations evaluate the fit and feasibility of implementing initiatives/strategies in a given context. This tool is designed to be used by a team to facilitate discussion and ensure diverse perspectives are represented in a discussion of the six contextual fit and feasibility indicators.

INITIATIVE/STRATEGY INDICATORS

Initiative/strategy indicators assess new or existing initiatives/strategies that will be implemented along the following domains: evidence, supports, and usability. These indicators specify the extent to which the identified initiatives/strategies demonstrate evidence, supports for implementation, and usability across a range of contexts.

SYSTEM INDICATORS

System indicators assess the extent to which a new or existing initiative/strategy is a match for the organization along the following domains: need, fit, and capacity. The assessment specifies suggested conditions and requirements for a strong match to need, fit, and capacity for the identified initiative/strategy.



When to Use

The Hexagon Tool can be used at any stage (e.g., choosing a new initiative/strategy or strengthening one already in use) in an initiative/strategy implementation to determine its fit with the local context (e.g., size of the district, location [rural or urban], funding structure, etc.). It is most commonly used during the Exploration stage, the period when an organization is identifying possible new initiatives/strategies to implement; however, it can also be used to identify gaps in initial implementation when beginning to rethink the use of an existing initiative/strategy.

Equity Considerations

Assessment of fit and feasibility is inextricably linked to considerations of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).¹ Using the Hexagon Tool with an equity lens can prompt teams to consider potential impacts of the program or practice on the focus population and whether implementation of the initiative/strategy could advance equitable outcomes for all individuals and families. Best practices for using this tool include:

- The focus population and community partners should be engaged in determining the broad need as members of the discussion team and in the selection of programs and practices to be considered.
- The team conducting the assessment should either have a background in or be provided with training on DEI so that they can apply these concepts in their assessment of fit and feasibility.
- All data (programmatic, fidelity, outcome, etc.) used to assess need and evidence should be disaggregated by race/ethnicity where appropriate, as well as by sub-population characteristics (e.g., gender, socioeconomic status, geography).

How to Use - Prior to Use:

1. Develop a shared understanding of the broad need to be addressed, the focus population and the initiatives/strategies to be assessed.
2. Review the discussion questions prior to meeting to ensure any data or resources that need to be reviewed for this discussion are available. If appropriate, an organization may prioritize components for deeper exploration based on the context and potential programs or practices. Regardless of which components will be prioritized, begin by clearly identifying and considering the broad need to be addressed.
3. Identify a team to participate in the discussion. If the site has an implementation team, that team can complete the assessment as part of their work. If not, identify key stakeholders internal and external to the organization who have diverse perspectives on the need and possible programs or practices to address the identified need. Suggested team members include leaders, managers, direct practitioners, representatives from the focus population and community partners.

How to Use - During Use

1. Using pages 2 – 10 of the [Education Adaptation from the Kentucky Department of Education](#), the team should review and discuss the questions for each indicator and document relevant considerations. Note: for the MICIP context, the team should substitute the terms Initiative/Strategy Indicators for the Kentucky term Innovation. The team may modify or add questions in the blank spaces provided when considering evidence for use of an innovation in a specific content area (e.g., math, literacy). Notes can be added in the available space to address unique needs and contexts. If appropriate, an organization may prioritize components for deeper exploration based on the organization's context and initiative/strategy under analysis.

¹Diversity focuses on all the ways in which people differ and encompasses all the different characteristics that make one individual or group different from another. Equity is a condition that would be achieved if one's identity (race, gender, etc.) no longer was a statistical predictor of one's outcomes. Inclusion is authentically bringing traditionally excluded individuals and/or groups into processes, activities and decision/policy making in a way that shares power. [Race Equity Tools Glossary](#).

2. After discussing each component, the team rates the component using the 5-point Likert scale in each section.

The above material on using The Hexagon Discussion and Analysis Tool has been adapted from Metz, A. & Louison, L. (2018) *The Hexagon Tool: Exploring Context*. Chapel Hill, NC: National Implementation Research Network, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Based on Kiser, Zabel, Zachik, & Smith (2007) and Blase, Kiser & Van Dyke (2013).

Prioritizing Existing Strategies

Once the team has completed the initiative inventory using the Hexagon Analysis Tool, it is time to determine whether the current strategies are the right ones or whether the team should consider deselecting and adding or adopting new strategies. And given the fact that a district likely does not have the capacity to focus on all initiatives at the same time, it is critical that they be prioritized so they can be addressed in a timeframe that supports successful implementation.

Based on the Hexagon Analysis Tool and using the [Strategic Planning and De-selection Tool](#), evaluate the impact and feasibility of each existing initiative/strategy. In which quadrant would each fit? Plot each one as a way of determining what should take priority and what should wait for future planning cycles or what should be totally deselected. Based on your evaluation, decide whether the existing initiatives/strategies are sufficient to accomplish your goals or whether you need to consider new ones. While ratings should be taken into account during the decision-making process, the ratings alone should not be used to determine final recommendations.

Following the discussion above, the team can summarize it in the Initial Initiative Inventory section of MICIP.



Selecting a New Initiative/Strategy

If a new initiative/strategy is needed, selecting one that has proven evidence-based results is critical to equitably improving student outcomes. Potential choices need to align strongly with the root cause as outlined in the assess needs process and should be assessed for fit and feasibility to ensure successful implementation. When initially scanning for potential strategies/initiatives, need, fit, and feasibility for the target audience should be at the forefront of leaders' consideration to determine "Is this the right fit?" and "Can we do this the right way?".

What does it mean to be evidence-based?

The *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) states that evidence-based “means an activity, strategy, or intervention that:

1. demonstrates a statistically significant effect on improving student outcomes or other relevant outcomes based on
 - strong evidence from at least 1 well-designed and well-implemented experimental study;
 - moderate evidence from at least 1 well-designed and well-implemented quasi-experimental study;
 - promising evidence from at least 1 well-designed and well-implemented correlational study with statistical controls for selection bias; or
2. demonstrates a rationale based on high-quality research findings or positive evaluation that such activity, strategy, or intervention is likely to improve student outcomes or other relevant outcomes; and includes ongoing efforts to examine the effects of such activity, strategy, or intervention.”

Where do I find evidence-based practices?

The U.S. Department of Education and other organizations maintain websites and databases with information on evidence-based practices in the field of education (see Strategy Resources at the end of this toolkit). You will also find them in MiStrategyBank. All strategies used in MICIP must be taken from MiStrategyBank. If a district does not see a strategy it wants to use in the Bank, it is able to add the strategy to the bank, but only the district will be able to see and use it. An ISD/ESA can add strategies so all districts in the ISD service area are able to access it.

It is important to note the difference between the MICIP strategy definition (actions taken by adults to address a goal) and the MiStrategyBank definition (an intentional effort that a student, teacher, school, or district is operationalizing to improve scale, capacity, fidelity, and/or outcomes, by implementing: a practice, a process, a program, a resource, a system, an activity, an initiative, an instructional strategy). Strategies used for MICIP are designated “improvement” in MiStrategyBank. [MiStrategyBank Resources](#) include instructions on how to use the bank.

Once a new Initiative/strategy has been identified for potential adoption, the team should again engage in the Hexagon tool discussion and analysis process to maximize fit and feasibility as it aligns to the entire district improvement plan. It should also revisit the Strategic Planning and Deselection Tool to help prioritize where it fits.

Next Steps

Once all initiatives/strategies have been identified and prioritized, the team can move to creating strategy implementation plans in MICIP. Information from the Hexagon Tool and the Strategy Planning and Deselection Tool will be useful in identifying the details for these plans. Information on how to create and implement a strategy implementation plan can be found in the [MICIP Process Guide](#).

Facilitator Readiness Considerations

It is recommended that the facilitator of this process engage in the following to prepare for the conversation; timeframes are estimates and will vary based on the facilitator's prior knowledge and experience.

- Plan for reviewing the district mission, vision, and beliefs – 30 minutes
- View the [Hex Tool Interactive PowerPoint](#) (name and email address required) - 30 minutes
- Familiarize themselves with how to use the Hexagon Tool and [The Hexagon: An Exploration Tool Hexagon Discussion & Analysis Tool Instructions](#) – 60 minutes
- Review the Hexagon Tool discussion found in the [MICIP Process Guide](#)

Strategy Resources

- [What Works Clearinghouse](#) produces practice guides and reports with recommendations for schools on interventions in various topical areas.
 - Reviews of interventions focused on [Children with Disabilities](#)
 - Tips for preventing and addressing [Behavior Problems](#)
- [Doing What Works Library](#) helps educators understand and use research-based practice.
- [Best Evidence Encyclopedia](#) presents reviews of research-proven educational programs.
- [Iris Center](#) has summaries of research about the effectiveness of instructional strategies and interventions.



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