

Needs Assessment Development Module 4 Facilitator’s Guide

Module 4: Needs Assessment Phases and Process

Overall Goal: To support a State or district in developing a comprehensive needs assessment process that can be used by schools for implementation at the local level. Please note that this module focuses on developing a standard needs assessment process rather than conducting a needs assessment at the school level.

Module Purpose: Map the needs assessment process across the needs assessment implementation phases.

Participant Outcomes: As a result of this module, participants will be able to do the following:

- Identify activities for each of the needs assessment implementation phases.
- Establish roles and responsibilities at school, district, and State education agency levels.
- Draft a sequence of activities.

Materials

The following materials are recommended for the work session and associated activities:

- Module 4 Presentation slide deck
- Participant agenda
- Chart paper
- Sticky notes in multiple colors

Agenda Outline

Table 1 provides a detailed outline of the agenda for the work session. It includes timing, slide numbers, activities, and materials. This outline provides facilitators with a big-picture view of this module and the corresponding activities. You may need to allot additional time for the activities depending on the audience’s familiarity with the content.

Table 1. Detailed Outline of the Agenda

Agenda Item	Time	Slides	Activities	Materials Needed	Participant Configuration
Welcome, Overview, and Introductions	10 min.	1–6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welcome and introduce facilitators. Review the overall goals and purpose for developing a needs assessment, and preview activities for this module. 	Presentation slide deck	Whole group
Ice Breaker	10 min.	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct ice breaker of choice as a way of facilitating introductions from participants (name, title, role). 	N/A	Whole group
Norms for Interaction	5 min.	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review norms on the slide and pick one to focus on today; determine whether any should be added. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentation slide deck Chart paper 	Whole group
Planning the Needs Assessment Process	15 min.	9–18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce and describe the phases of needs assessment. 	Presentation slide deck	Whole group
Journey Mapping: Laying out the Process	45 min.	19–22	<p><i>For this activity, you will need to hang 4–5 pieces of chart paper adjacent to one another along a wall, in order to create an 8- or 10-foot length of paper. Then draw an arrow across the center of the paper, from left to right, and divide it into 5 sections labeled with the phases on Slide 14.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentation slide deck Chart paper Sticky notes (color-coded) Pens and markers 	Whole group

Agenda Item	Time	Slides	Activities	Materials Needed	Participant Configuration
Journey Mapping: Laying out the Process (continued)	45 min.	19–22	<p><i>On the left side, at the beginning of the arrow, write “local level” above the line, and “[State or district] level” below the line. Participants will be placing sticky notes containing milestones and activities along this line, within the appropriate phases, and will place them above or below the line based upon where the work is taking place. See the photo in Slide 21 for a completed example.</i></p> <p>Individually: Brainstorm milestones and activities and place them on the implementation path.</p> <p>As a group: Review what is on path; add and reorganize as necessary.</p> <p>Note: Both of these activities take place in silence.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation slide deck • Chart paper • Sticky notes (color-coded) • Pens and markers 	Whole group
Reflection and Next Steps	10 min.	23–27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflect on implementation path. Facilitator should capture questions that are raised during this conversation. • Discuss next steps. Be sure to capture photos of the implementation path. • Review next module. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation slide deck • Chart paper 	Whole group

Script

The following slide-by-slide script provides guidance to facilitators as they present the content and learning activities included in the work session based on this module. Reviewing the entire guide prior to facilitating the work session is highly recommended.

Module 4: Needs Assessment Phases and Process

Facilitation Note:

Officially welcome the participants. Introduce yourself and fellow facilitators. Discuss your relevant background experiences to build participant confidence in your skills as facilitators.

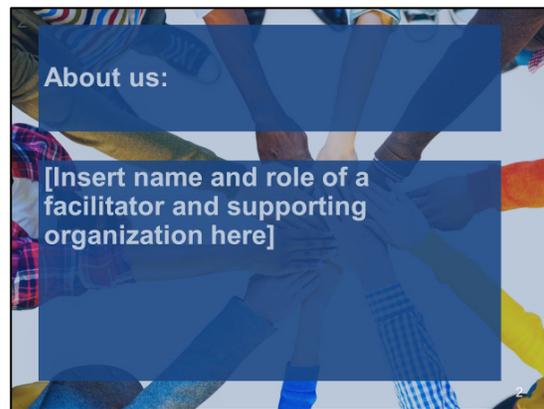
** Note: Other entities using this presentation may insert their logo in place of the State Support Network logo.*



Slide 1

Facilitation Note:

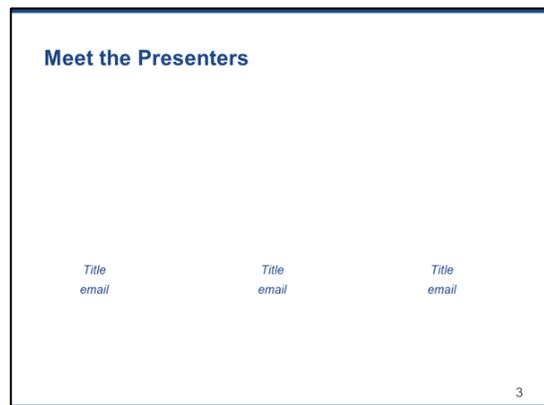
If you are presenting on behalf of an organization (e.g., a regional educational service center), you may use this slide to introduce your organization supporting this work, or you may replace this slide with your own “about us” slide.



Slide 2

Facilitation Note:

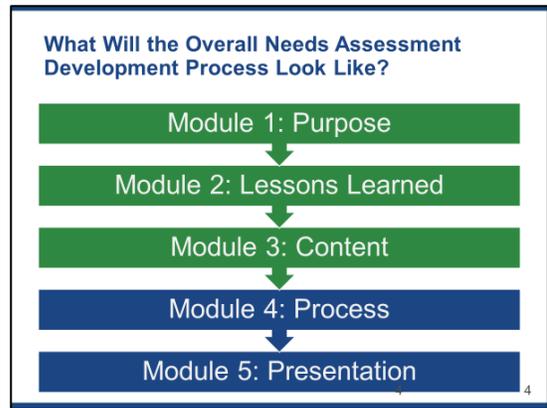
Introduce presenters, and (if desired) go around the room to allow participants to introduce themselves.



Slide 3

Explain:

“Throughout the process, we work toward progressively greater detail level, starting with the broadest scope (the purpose) and gradually working down to the details of action planning. This approach ensures that each level of detail answers to the next highest level of magnitude. The framework gets us to achieve the purpose, ensure the data collected are aligned to the framework, and so on.”



Slide 4

Facilitation Note:

Review outcomes.

Outcomes

As a result of this module, participants will be able to do the following:

- Identify activities for each of the needs assessment implementation phases.
- Establish roles and responsibilities at school, district, and State education agency levels.
- Draft a sequence of activities.

Slide 5

Facilitation Note:

Review agenda and meeting timing.

Agenda, Module 4

1. Welcome, Overview, and Introductions
2. Planning the Needs Assessment Process
3. Journey Mapping: Laying Out the Process
4. Reflect on Module and Next Steps

Slide 6

Facilitation Note:

Use icebreaker as part of group introductions. When choosing the ice breaker, consider what you think the specific group will need and explain the “why” before beginning the activity.

Ice Breaker

Placeholder for icebreaker/introductions activity.

7

Slide 7

Facilitation Note:

Look at the norms on the slide and pick one to focus on today.

Ask: “Are there other norms you typically work with in your agencies?”

Ask: “What else might our group struggle with? What norms might support productive dialogue and respectful decision making?”

Facilitation Note:

Insert “manage technology” if no one else offers it.

Norms for Interaction

- Be present.
- Share the air.
- Assume goodwill.
- Respect what is shared.
- Honor the thoughts behind all perspectives.
- Ask for clarification when you disagree or don't understand.
- Others?



8

Slide 8

Explain:

“Today we are going to focus on the process—that is, how the needs assessment plays out at the local level.”

Planning the Needs Assessment Process

9

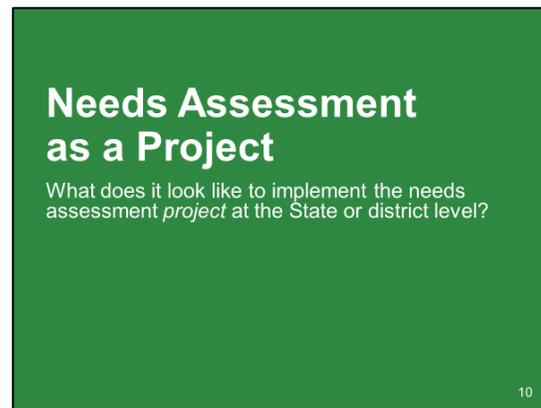
Slide 9

Explain:

“Most of our conversations in this community focus on the ultimate execution of the needs assessment at the local level. After all, this is a tool we are developing FOR districts and schools. However, we also need to spend some time reflecting on the effort you are all currently engaged in, the project of the needs assessment for your [State or district].

For you and your team, the needs assessment is a project you are implementing. The schools will only interact with a small amount of the total activity required to make that project a success.

For your schools to interact with the needs assessments you are developing, you have to accomplish a lot of tasks and reach a lot of important internal milestones before the needs assessment is ready to reach practitioners.”



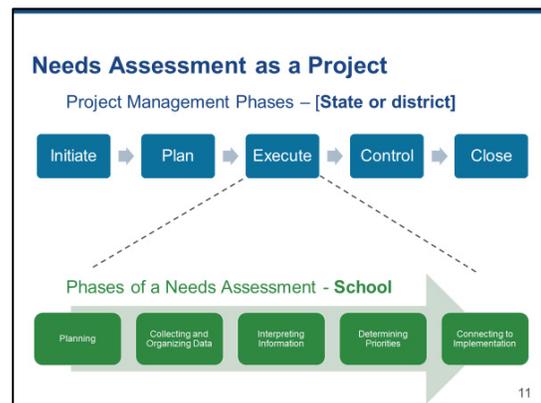
Slide 10

Explain:

“Here I’d like to introduce the implementation path concept. An implementation path is a tool we use to brainstorm the steps and major milestones that comprise a project. It is like a project timeline but doesn’t include dates or projections for length or duration of the tasks. It just helps you visualize the sequence of events and organize tasks within that sequence.

You may recognize the blue path as the phases of project management. We’ve included this series of activities to acknowledge that in order for the needs assessment effort to be successful at the local level, a number of activities need to take place at the State or district level.

When we think about the needs assessment as a project, one way to organize our thoughts about that project is using the basic phases of project management. You are likely familiar with these phases or something similar from this or other work you have done at the agency. The point of the phases is to define the progress of the project and types of activities you should be engaged in as the project matures. The phases are:



Slide 11

- **Initiate:** Define the project scope and purpose. This is where you determine that a needs assessment will happen and what it will do. Module 1 fell into the initiation phase.
- **Plan:** Develop or formalize all the details necessary for the project to be a success. Develop tools, timelines, communications, and training for those who will carry out the project. We are in the planning phase now.
- **Execute:** Deliver on the project objectives. This is where the needs assessment is being carried out by the districts and schools.
- **Control:** Monitor and support project implementation. Controlling should happen throughout the project and so overlaps with execution a bit. It is the internal improvement effort of the project. For the needs assessment, this may mean piloting prior to full rollout or capturing lessons learned from one year of implementation to improve the next.
- **Close:** Complete the project. Although the needs assessment may be an annual activity over the course of many years, each year the project has to end in order for the next year to begin. This isn't a never-ending effort but a cyclical process.

Importantly, the Phases of a Needs Assessment all take place at the local level (though, of course, there's some overlap with State-level responsibilities) and fall within the "Execute" phase. The phases in green on this slide are like the play within a play, the substory that lies within—and forms the largest piece of the larger project represented in blue."

Facilitation Note:

Introduce the next section on Needs Assessment Phases.



Slide 12

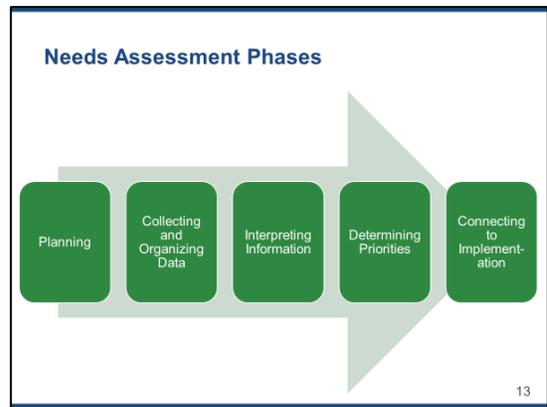
Explain:

“This graphic is another example of an implementation path—a sequence of events or activities that bring you through a process. (It is also one half of the “story within a story” implementation path graphic I shared a moment ago.)

The needs assessment takes place at the local level, in schools or districts, (or both, depending on your approach). These phases describe the steps a district or school will engage in during its needs assessment. I am going to talk through these phases briefly, and then we will engage in creating a collaborative implementation path for your needs assessment.

As we go through these phases of implementation, consider two things:

1. What does it look like to ensure the activities are responsive to the purpose in this phase?
This will help you start thinking forward to the outcomes, which we will discuss at the end of today’s module.
2. What are the key activities or deliverables that your team needs to accomplish for schools or districts to be successful in this phase? This will help you start thinking about the activity we have next and to unpack the needs assessment implementation a little more.”



Slide 13

Explain:

“This is where we are now. But schools have a planning phase, too.

- In Module 1, we articulated the purpose and intended outcomes of the needs assessment process. At the local level, schools and districts will in turn communicate this purpose and these intended outcomes locally.
- In Module 2, we started a conversation about content, process, and presentation by examining other examples we could draw from.
- In Module 3, we articulated the content (what the needs assessment will cover), determined the central questions that the needs assessment should address, and began work on data sources.
- Here in Module 4 we will focus more specifically upon the process, which includes a discussion about roles and responsibilities among stakeholders.

At the local level, schools and districts will be following your guidance regarding content and process, using the materials and resources that you present. At the State or district level, you’ll be articulating roles and responsibilities for completing the process—and this will also take place at the school level, with the additional task of identifying relevant local stakeholders, planning for their involvement, and inviting their participation.”

Planning

- Articulate the purpose and intended outcomes.
- Define your content, process, presentation.
- Determine central guiding questions that the needs assessment should address.
- Identify relevant stakeholders.

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Slide 14

Explain:

“At the [State or district] level, collecting and organizing data happens during the planning phase, but once the needs assessment is being executed locally, there may be additional data collection and organization required (this is up to you). But even if you are providing all the data that will be utilized locally, at the local level, schools and districts still need to find a way to make those data visible to other stakeholders—this falls under data organization.

Collecting and Organizing Data

- Organize readily available data from existing sources.
- Determine and collect additional needed data.
- Decide on presentation of data.

15

Slide 15

This includes responding to the question of how those data can be presented in a way that is easily understood by stakeholders. Consider the need to avoid assumptions and preconceptions and to ensure opportunities for triangulation across data sets.”

Explain:

“This activity happens entirely at the local level, based upon the guidance you provide. School and district participants will have to determine what the individual data sources say about the guiding questions that the needs assessment is trying to answer. They’ll also need to consider:

- What themes emerge when multiple sources are cross-referenced or triangulated across a given topic?
- Are there places in which the various stakeholder voices disagree with one another or present a different perspective than your own? How can the underlying causes of these differences be explored?
- How can we articulate what we have learned in language that is specific to our community yet does not cast blame?

Remember that data interpretation means articulating the picture the data seem to present when considered in aggregate. Data interpretation does not mean levying a judgment or applying a label (e.g., ‘failing school’). It does not mean casting blame or assuming probable cause (e.g., ‘students don’t come to school because they don’t care’). It does mean identifying and naming issues (e.g., ‘chronic absenteeism is an issue that emerges in the middle grades and increases at the high school level’).

Interpreting Information

- Uncover what individual data sources say about guiding questions.
- Crystallize themes.
- Investigate areas of stakeholder disagreement and causes of disagreement.
- Articulate findings for stakeholders without casting blame.

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Slide 16

Explain:

“Once issues or themes have been identified within the data, schools and districts must prioritize those that, if addressed, will have the greatest potential for impact on student outcomes. This is a separate phase from data interpretation, even though sometimes these activities happen in the same workshop or meeting together because they are distinct activities. Issues must be articulated before they can be prioritized.

Schools and districts must also ensure that those issues that are prioritized for action are issues that are within their purview to address. For example, a district examining leadership issues may determine that their school board is problematic, but this is likely not an issue they have the agency to change. By the same token, a school cannot change their student demographics, but it can prioritize an issue that identifies the supports those students need to succeed.

Determining priorities is important because what comes out of the needs assessment must connect to implementation, and effective implementation efforts must have a strong focus. Schools may, for example, come out of the needs assessment with 75 findings or data points that seem to warrant attention. However, in order to create a manageable plan, those data points must be aggregated into key themes with priorities attached.”

Determining Priorities

- Conclude what findings and themes will have the greatest impact (if addressed).
- Contemplate whether there are additional data that should be reviewed.

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Slide 17

Explain:

“How will the needs assessment results be used to create meaningful, long-term change?”

At this phase, participants may also discuss whether there are additional data that should be considered in order to make informed decisions about priorities and capacity for implementation, which may involve root cause analysis around their prioritized issues or themes.

Connecting to Implementation

- Collect additional information about identified priorities.
- Investigate root causes of priorities.
- Use results to create meaningful, long-term change.
- Reflect on the progress of improvement efforts.

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Slide 18

There should be a process for moving the needs assessment results into school improvement plans or funding applications, which will also require thinking about research-based interventions, and capacity for implementation.

And finally, it’s important to consider what processes will be created to ensure regular opportunities for utilizing data to reflect on the progress of improvement efforts—before the next needs assessment cycle occurs.”

Explain:

“Next, we will draft an implementation path for this particular needs assessment. I think you’ll like this activity as it provides an opportunity for both creativity and physical activity—you get to get up and move around.”

Facilitation note:

For this activity, you will need to hang four to five pieces of chart paper adjacent to one another along a wall, in order to create an 8- or 10-foot length of paper. Then draw an arrow across the center of the paper, from left to right, and divide it into five sections labeled with the phases on Slide 13. On the left side, at the beginning of the arrow, write “local level” above the line, and “[State or district] level” below the line. Participants will be placing sticky notes containing milestones and activities along this line, within the appropriate phases, and will place them above or below the line based upon where the work is taking place. See the photo in Slide 20 for a completed example.



Slide 19

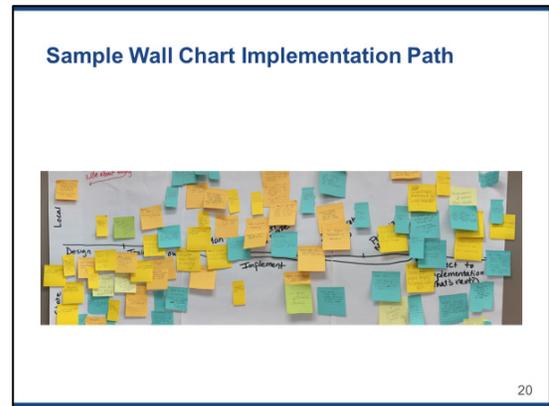
Explain:

“Today we are going to create what is known as an Implementation Path, which is a visual representation of how a project will unfold. Generally speaking, this is an informal timeline. It can be a useful tool while you are in the planning phase to map out which activities happen when. This is a photo of an implementation path that was created by a State team as they planned their needs assessment process. Doing it on a wall chart with sticky notes allows a group of people to visualize and move ideas around in real time.

To begin, we need to determine how many stakeholder groups, or levels, will be involved in needs assessment implementation. We are going to assume the State level, the district level, and the school level. Are there others?”

Facilitation Note:

Possible prompts: Intermediate agencies? Vendors? Field coaches?



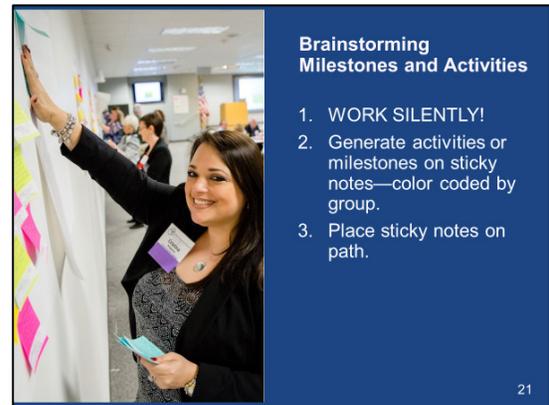
Slide 20

Facilitation Note:

The following activity must be done in SILENCE. It does work, and it goes more quickly when there is no talking. You should also see a high level of engagement, as even those who are reluctant to speak up willingly step into a silent activity.

Count off by number. Assign each number a stakeholder group and a color and provide participants with a supply of sticky notes in the appropriate color. For example, someone who counted “1” would be given yellow sticky notes and asked to think about what the State is doing. 2s will think about the district and will write on green sticky notes. 3s will think about what the schools are doing and will write on pink sticky notes.

There is no need to move into small groups. Everyone works individually and IN SILENCE.



Slide 21

Explain:

“Here you will use a single color of sticky note to jot down the activities and timelines you think will be carried out by the group you are representing. For example, if you are the school group, use the yellow notes and think about the implementation phases. What activities are you engaging in along the way? Put a single activity or milestone on each note—we’ll be moving them around, and if you have two separate things on one note, that won’t work!

Here are the instructions!

1. First, only ONE activity or milestone per note. This is because we will be moving them around and clustering them later.
2. Second, no talking! This entire planning session will be done silently. Because you’ll be generating ideas on your own, there is no need to move seats.

Facilitation Note:

Allot 10–15 minutes for this task, based on the size of the group. It’s better to have more notes than fewer, so encourage people to generate as many as possible.

Once complete, ask each group to divide their sticky notes among their members and then to come and place their notes where they think those activities or milestones will take place along the implementation path. If your group is large, you might have people come up in waves.

Facilitation Note:

This activity must be done in SILENCE. It does work, and it goes more quickly when there is no talking. You should also see a high level of engagement, as even those who are reluctant to speak up willingly step into a silent activity.

Once all the notes are on chart paper, provide additional sticky notes and two markers (people will have to share!), and ask everyone to review what’s on the wall.

As a Large Group

1. STILL WORK SILENTLY!
2. Review milestones along the path.
3. Move sticky notes as necessary to improve accuracy.
4. Identify additional milestones and activities as needed to fill out.
5. Make notes and ask questions directly on paper with markers.



Slide 22

Explain:

“Here are some questions to consider:

- As you look at each phase, are there activities missing?
- Is there anything a school would need to know in order for them to complete each phase that has implications for State or district planning or support activities?
- Do you think anything is in the wrong place? (If so, go ahead and move it!)”

Facilitation Note:

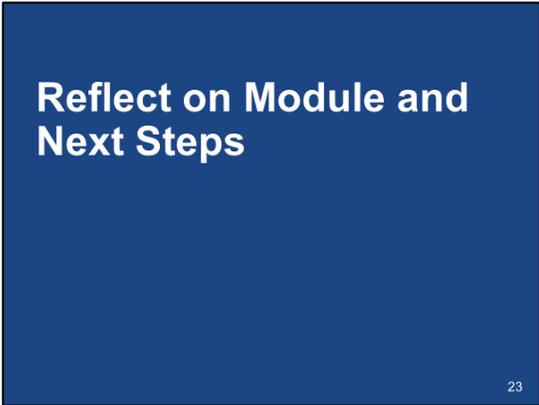
They can add additional sticky notes if they think of an activity that isn't represented—but make sure they use the correct color!

They can also make notes or pose questions using the marker directly onto the chart paper, and/or move things around—but NO TALKING. This activity should take about 30 minutes.

Note: If your group is quite large, you might need to divide them across two teams, each of which works on a separate implementation path. Just consider what is physically comfortable and feasible based upon the space in which you are working.

Facilitation Note:

Transition to the final section of this module.



Reflect on Module and Next Steps

23

Slide 23

Facilitation Note:

Facilitator should capture questions that are raised during this conversation.

For the question about timelines, prompt participants to consider all the tasks and milestones they've articulated, and ask them about implications for the timeline they may have had in mind before today. Typically, this exercise encourages participants to rethink a shorter timeline in favor of one that provides space for meeting all the expectations they've set forth.

Implementation Map Reflection

- As you look at the completed map, what stands out to you?
- What questions does this raise for you?
- How does the implementation path you created affect your thinking about timelines?
- How have today's activities increased your understanding of the needs assessment?

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Slide 24

Explain:

“This work will need to continue, and these bulleted tasks completed to move to the next module. You'll need to capture the roles, responsibilities, and milestones that were jotted on sticky notes and placed on the implementation path—taking good photos of the map as it looks right now will help in translating later. You'll also want to assign a calendar timeline to the implementation path, working out timing for each phase. Consider the amount of activity taking place within each phase and ensure adequate time is allotted for everything that must take place.”

Facilitation note:

Be sure to capture photos of the implementation map—as a whole, and section by section—to aid in transcription later.)

Next Steps

Continue the work we started today:

- Assign a timeline to the implementation path.
- Capture the roles, responsibilities, and milestones articulated here.
- Make note of additional tasks, responsibilities, and/or questions that arise as you capture this work.

25

Slide 25

Explain:

“Note that we considered the overall rollout of the needs assessment; however, we did not have a detailed group conversation about what happens at the school level. This is because we have found that it is helpful for participants to get a handle on the overall flow of things before drilling down to that level of activity. However, you will need to convey expectations for how this process is completed, and you'll need to know what those expectations are BEFORE you can engage in the next module.

Next Steps: What Happens at the School Level?

How is a school community engaging in this work?

- Local data collection
- Stakeholder engagement – who, how, when?
- Data presentation
- Data analysis
- Collaborative identification of improvement needs
- Connecting to implementation

<https://statesupportnetwork.ed.gov/resources/needs-assessment-guidebook>

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Slide 26

The State Support Network has prepared a guidebook that describes the success elements and implementation phases of an effective needs assessment process as well as a webinar introducing the guidebook’s contents and how you might use them.

This link will take you to the resource page where the guidebook and webinar recording are housed.) Within the guidebook, discussion questions are provided to help you think through each of the implementation phases. You might find this a useful resource as you are working on framing out your expectations.”

Explain:

“In the next and final module, we’ll determine how the needs assessment materials will be formatted and disseminated and how the needs assessment will be implemented.”

Module 5: Presentation

As a result of this module, participants will be able to do the following:

- Determine how the needs assessment materials will be formatted and disseminated.
- Describe how the needs assessment will be implemented.
- Draft a plan for supporting implementation.

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Slide 27