

# Section K: Recommending Priority Solutions

Step 4: Make Decisions		
Activities	Recommended Tasks	Highly Recommended
Recommend priority solutions	NAC determines: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Priority criteria for solutions</li> <li>• Prioritized list of solutions</li> </ul>	For each of the selection criteria, consideration of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acceptability by the community</li> <li>• Feasibility of solutions</li> </ul>

Now that a broad range of solutions and related solution strategies has been identified to address the needs of migrant students in your state, the next step is to prioritize the solutions. The Needs Assessment Committee (NAC) will need to determine what are the most promising solutions based on their potential impact, replicability, appropriateness, and cost.

Now is the time for the NAC to implement processes to reach consensus and closure for comments and questions. We recommend that this task be accomplished by the NAC in an onsite meeting where discussion is generated and consensus is reached on priorities and top-rated solutions.

Considerations for Small States In small states, or in states where a face-to-face meeting is not feasible, a small group can be charged with developing criteria and arranging ways to obtain feedback from a larger group of stakeholders. We suggest that the small group be comprised, at the very least, of other state-level program managers who have experience in prioritizing activities and tasks. Once the criteria have been set, you may identify certain stakeholders, such as regional or local Migrant Education Program (MEP) coordinators, parents, school district staff and program coordinators, or service providers, from whom you would like input on how to prioritize the proposed solutions. You may consider conducting an online survey or focus groups (perhaps at meetings where these stakeholders may be attending or by phone), and then develop a final prioritized list based on the input you receive.

## K.1 Developing Criteria for Prioritizing Proposed Solutions

Prioritizing the solutions that were generated by Expert Work Groups or other stakeholders will assist in making decisions on which solutions should be recommended for implementation. This task will also assist in instances where NAC members, with their various perspectives and experiences, have some predispositions toward a favorite program or intervention to meet migrant student needs. Using criteria to review the proposed solutions will minimize the

impact of personal views so that the range of solutions may be prioritized as objectively as possible.

The criteria for prioritizing the proposed solutions will vary from state to state. We suggest that the state director request input from other stakeholders in developing the criteria. Follow are two suggestions for this task:

- Develop a list of criteria and solicit input from NAC committee members, state-level program managers, MEP staff from the state and local level, parents, or other stakeholders. This input may be solicited in a face-to-face meeting of all stakeholders, through phone calls, or focus groups. Once you receive input, you and the Management Team can make the final selection of criteria.
- In a face-to-face meeting, have the NAC generate a list of criteria and then discuss which criteria are most essential for including in the final list.
- Have NAC members complete a Cause and Consequence Analysis to rate needs according to their severity. (See *Appendix K.1 Cause and Consequence Analysis Worksheet* for a worksheet on conducting a Cause and Consequence Analysis.)

A group process activity that works well for any task that requires input on identifying priorities is that of providing team members sticky dots to place next to the items (posted on chart paper) that they feel are the most important to include. A follow up discussion will focus on those items with the most dots – why they were selected, which of the most-frequently indicated items should be placed in the final list, and if the ones with fewer dots should be included or incorporated with others that are similar but were dotted more frequently.

Suggested Criteria Some of the most commonly selected criteria for prioritizing solutions in the Comprehensive Needs Assessment (CNA) include:

- The extent to which the solution addresses a critical need, evidenced as large gap between “what is” and “what should be,” the impact on a large number of migrant children, or the impact on subgroups of migrant children most in need, such as Priority for Service (PFS) students
- Likelihood the proposed solution will reduce the gap between “what is” and “what should be”
- Likelihood that the proposed solution will be appropriate for migrant students in your state
- Feasibility of implementing the solution (cost, training, resources)
- Whether the proposed solution will address a need that will only increase in severity if not addressed early
- Addresses a root cause of poor academic performance of migrant children
- Can supplement existing programs

- Can be enhanced through cross-program or cross-agency collaboration
- Can be supported with available resources

See *Appendix K.2 Additional Sample Criteria for Prioritizing Solutions* for another type of framework for prioritizing solutions.

## **K.2 Prioritizing Solutions**

This step in the process is the culmination of all the work of the needs assessment process. Having given NAC members all of the relevant information and factors to consider, now a decision is needed on which solutions should be recommended for inclusion in an action plan, or specifically, the MEP Service Delivery Plan.

To initiate the prioritization process, we suggest that you provide a summary report of all solutions generated by the Expert Work Groups that is categorized by the Need Statements.

Considerations for small states If you are a state director for a small state, it will be important to limit the number of Need Statements for which you will prioritize solutions to ensure that resources can target the needs in a way to maximize impact. Program planners, when making these types of choices, generally advise to go “deep” rather than “wide.” Needs that you decide not to address at this time can be included at a later date, as you think about the improvement of your program in the long term.

Considerations for state MEPs with little experience in comprehensive needs assessment and service delivery planning Until a MEP has experience with the needs assessment process, it may be useful to consider limiting the number of Needs Statements, keeping those that would form the basis for SEA action to a relatively low number. The greater the number of needs and solutions proposed, the greater the complexity of the implementation plan, due to the number of steps that need to be taken at the state and local levels to implement the solutions, confirm that the targeted migrant student and family needs are being addressed, and document that the MEP program is able to assess the effectiveness of program improvement efforts from year to year. (More discussion of the overall planning process is included in *Section L: Transitioning to a Service Delivery Plan*.)

In prioritizing the proposed solutions, you should implement a process by which each NAC member rates the solutions according to the agreed upon criteria. This can be done:

- Individually, by survey or checklist
- In pairs or small groups to ensure that all stakeholder viewpoints are considered
- By a process called “weighted voting,” where each NAC member is given a set of votes that he or she can cast for one need or distribute over several needs. (Using a visual display of voting “dots” on chart paper illustrates what the collective majority feels is the top priorities on which the state MEP should focus.)

After NAC input is provided, it is important to reach consensus on the prioritized list. Consensus decision making is a process by which groups seek *consent*, not necessarily agreement, on an issue. Ensuring that the group reaches consensus on the list of prioritized solutions will enable each team member to feel that the list is one that he or she can live with (unlike straight voting where “losers” preferences are eliminated).

### K.3 Developing Measurable Program Outcomes for Prioritized Solutions

An additional step that will ease the transition from the CNA to the SDP is to develop Measurable Program Outcomes (MPOs) for the prioritized solutions and solution strategies. MPOs are the desired outcomes of solutions and strategies. They are focused, detailed, quantifiable, and clearly define what would be considered a "success" in meeting a particular need of migrant students.

Key components of a MPO define:

- Which students will participate
- What will happen in the program
- What is expected to happen as a result of participation in the migrant program
- In what time frame this will occur

Table K.1 provides an example of a MPO and its related solution strategy.

Table K.1 Solution Strategy and Measurable Program Outcome

<u>Need</u> : School districts report that in September 2012, 38 percent of six-year-old migrants students enrolled in first grade had not attended kindergarten, as compared to 5 percent of other six-year-old children who enrolled in first grade.
<u>Need Statement</u> : The number of five-year-old migrant students enrolling in kindergarten needs to increase by 33%.
<u>Solution Strategy</u> : Local migrant programs should conduct a school enrollment fair for five-year-old migrant students at migrant camps in their school district at the beginning of the school year.
<u>Measurable Program Outcomes</u> :

#### Fist to Five Consensus Building

In discussing the prioritized solutions, have team members register their level of agreement according to the following:

Five fingers – “I am highly supportive of this solution.”

Four fingers – “I feel the solution is good.”

Three fingers – “I am satisfied with the solution.”

Two fingers – “I have some concerns about the solution.”

One finger – “I am not in favor of the solution.”

Fist – “I am strongly opposed to the solution.”

To reach consensus, as long as there is someone who raises one finger or a fist, the group needs to discuss concerns and determine what adjustments can be made for this person to be able to “live with the solution.”

- By the end of the 2012-2013 school year and each year after, the percentage of five-year-old migrant children enrolled in kindergarten will increase by at least 5%.

MPOs make solutions and strategies concrete and ensure that everyone can easily understand what the successful outcome of a strategy is. MPOs are the foundation of the SDP evaluation plan.

The SDP committee will review all prioritized solutions and strategies in the CNA and select which ones to include in the SDP. Each solution strategy will have a MPO. Therefore, one of the first tasks of the SDP is to develop MPOs. We recommend that the process of developing MPOs begin in the CNA. Developing MPOs for the solution strategies will enable the NAC to “test” the degree to which they are concrete and measurable.

#### **K.4 Archiving Information for the CNA**

We recommend that you include the following information in your records and archives:

- Criteria for prioritization of proposed solutions
- Prioritized list of criteria categorized by need
- MPOs for each solution strategy

#### **K.5 Manager’s Checklist and Reflection**

Here are some key accomplishments for *Section K: Recommend Priority Solutions*. Take a moment to jot down your progress on the items below. Also, note any issues or challenges.

##### **Manager’s Checklist**

- Established criteria for prioritizing proposed solutions
- Determined the appropriate number of needs and solutions for our state to address
- Worked with the NAC or stakeholders to develop a prioritized list of solutions
- Utilized a consensus decision-making process
- Developed MPOs for each prioritized solution

##### **Reflection**

1. What were the key factors you considered when selecting the appropriate number of solutions to include in the prioritized list?
2. In what way were any of the prioritized solutions or strategies revised when the MPOs were developed?
3. To what extent do you believe that the prioritized solutions, when implemented, will meet the needs of migrant children and youth in our state?

## **K.6 Resources and Tools in Appendix K**

Appendix K.1 Cause and Consequence Analysis Worksheet

Appendix K.2 Additional Sample Criteria for Prioritizing Solutions

Appendix K.1 Cause and Consequence Analysis Worksheet

Purpose

- To determine the priority of each need, examine both the difficulty of meeting it and its degree to which it is critical to meet the goal.
- To review the ratings in light of the magnitude of the discrepancy between the present and desired states.
- To provide data for consideration in setting priorities and moving to solution strategies.

<b>Goal:</b>				
<b>Need</b>	<b>Causes</b>	<b>Difficulty to Meet Need (low, medium, high)</b>	<b>Consequences if Cause is Not Removed</b>	<b>Criticality of need 5, 4, 3, 2, 1</b>
1.				
2.				

Column 1: List needs that were previously identified in the needs assessment.

Column 2: List all possible “treatable” causes of each need; itemize causes separately for each need. A given need may have more than one cause.

Column 3: List consequences if the cause is not removed and the need is not met; also itemize consequences separately for each need. There may be more than one consequence for each need.

Column 4: Enter a rating (low, medium, high) of the difficulty in meeting the need once it has occurred.

Column 5: Enter a rating, on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 indicating the most critical.

## Appendix K.2 Additional Sample Criteria for Prioritizing Solutions

1. Importance and Feasibility – These criteria assist with thinking about the importance of resolving a need and the nature and strength of the organizational orientation and willingness to commit to the endeavor.

### Importance

- Size of gap
- Number affected
- Need for immediate attention

### Feasibility

- Educational efficacy
- Resources

2. Risk Factors – These criteria assist with dividing the risks associated with the needs into internal and external categories. These are criteria to consider prior to allocating resources.

- Short- and long-term economic risk
- Political risks
- Internal disruption

3. Distributing Resources – These criteria assist with focusing the discussion of resources and how distribution of resources deals with a form of political risk. You should also discuss alternatives for how resources can be given out and the consequences of each strategy.

- Should resources be distributed toward one group with the greatest need?
- Or, should resources be distributed across groups in regard to political concerns?

Adapted from: Altschuld, J.W. and White, J.L (2010) *Needs Assessment by Analysis and Prioritization*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. (p. 11)