

Your Guide to Improvement Planning

Including an Overview of Improvement Plans as a Part of Perkins IV
Perkins IV Local Program Improvement [Perkins Act 2006, Sec. 123]



Minnesota
STATE COLLEGES
& UNIVERSITIES

Minnesota
Department
of Education

Perkins IV Local Program Improvement [Perkins Act 2006, Sec. 123]

Under Perkins IV, Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Office of the Chancellor and the Minnesota Department of Education are required to annually review each consortium’s Perkins program based on its performance on federally determined accountability indicators. Minnesota will monitor compliance with this requirement by collecting Improvement Reports or Improvement Plans.

The improvement plan must be developed in consultation with the two state agencies and implemented during the first program year after the year the performance level was not met. The agencies will work with the local consortium to implement improvement activities and provide technical assistance.

If the consortium does not meet the targets established during the negotiation processes for two years, the consortium will be provided technical assistance that will help to draft a plan to show what dollars will be used in the deficient core indicator(s) and what types of changes or support mechanisms will need to be implemented throughout the consortium to improve the consortium core indicator scores.

When does my consortium prepare an Improvement Report vs. a full Improvement Plan?



If the consortium scored **between 90 and 99%** of their negotiated target for any indicator, they will be required to write an improvement report describing how or what they will do to increase their scores. The report must be completed for each indicator where a performance gap existed. A report is a necessary step, occurs as part of the normal APR process and must describe what changes will occur to increase the core indicator scores.

If the consortium scored **below 90%** of its negotiated target for any indicator, a full improvement plan will need to be submitted for each indicator where a performance lower than 90% occurred. The full Improvement Plan asks for more detailed information that will allow the State Perkins staff to assist the consortium to identify resources and interventions appropriate to address its situation.

Using Data to Inform Improvement

Schools and colleges engage in data collection for many purposes – to inform instruction, to record student achievement, to report to policy makers, to document fiscal operations, to communicate with stakeholders, and more. While all of these data uses are common and essential to the current educational landscape, this guide is intended to focus on the differences between data use for accountability or reporting and using data for improvement purposes.

Differences in Purpose: Accountability vs. Improvement

Because all schools and colleges are now accustomed to collecting data, let’s start the conversation with an important comparison - data for accountability vs. data for program improvement. In column one of Table 1, you see several common sources or types of data collected in schools and colleges. In column two, you see how those data might be used for accountability or compliance purposes. In column three, you see how the same data might be used to inform improvement planning. Seeing these uses lined up side-by-side gets quickly at the differences between accountability and improvement.

Table 1: Comparing data for accountability vs. data for improvement

Comparing Accountability or Reporting Purposes to Improvement Purposes		
Data Sources or types	Accountability or reporting purposes	Improvement purposes
Attendance records	Obtain reimbursement from state or federal funding sources	Reduce student absences
Grades	Prepare student report cards	Reduce failure/dropout rates
Test scores	Meet requirements to assess students	Assess and modify curriculum and instructional strategies
Transfer records	Report to board or funding agency who requires reporting on this measure	Facilitate successful transfers for students; identify reasons for and trends in transfer that might be related to labor market trends or institutional programs or processes
Transcripts	Support student applications for other educational institutions, scholarships, or employers	Increase on-time graduation; Encourage rigorous course-taking
Graduation rates	Federal and state reporting requirements	Improve student success, preparation for the workforce

This distinction between data use for accountability and data use for improvement is not purely academic. Many government and foundation funding sources have adopted the language of accountability and regularly ask for measures of accountability to be reported as a condition of funding. Still, when you scratch just below the surface, the intent of this accountability reporting is often really asking educational institutions and programs to engage in improvement processes that get at underlying

performance. In other words, the implementation of a law or funding program does not align with the genuine intent of a law or funding program. Let's talk about how we might bridge that gap.

Shifting focus to Improvement

When the process of data use focuses on improving performance on a measure or a set of data indicators, it's time to step back and rethink your process and purpose for using data. Schools and colleges do not exist to produce scores, ratios, or percentages. They exist to foster the intellectual growth, skill attainment, and social development of students. The pressure of current accountability systems has made it difficult for all of us to remain focused on student outcomes as we engage in data use. Most often, the de facto goal of collecting, analyzing, and using data has become improving the data, not linking performance indicators in the goals an institution has for student outcomes. This section will describe one way to realign data use with goals for students...not indicators of systems.

Overview of Improvement Planning

This guide will now outline a process intended to help consortia develop the habits of collaboration, discussion, inquiry, and decision making that are necessary for ongoing improvement through a permanent cycle of inquiry and action.

While Perkins core indicators offer consortia with reliable insight into who is



involved in Perkins funded activities and offers some evidence of the level of performance, the indicators are insufficient to answer more complex questions that guide the program improvement process. In



other words, the indicators might serve as a compass that points you in the direction of opportunities to improve programs and enhance

student success but the improvement process requires a detailed map. An improvement plan is that map. Developing that plan requires involvement of many consortium stakeholders, information and data beyond the Perkins indicators, and a willingness to ask difficult questions about programs and processes so that plans can be developed that move a consortium forward.

Selecting the Right Improvement Planning Process for Your Team

Let it be said that there is no right or wrong process to do improvement planning. There are many different approaches which have been written about, presented, and used over the years. As you think about which approach your consortium will use, think about which approach works best for your members. The common Improvement Planning Model described in this document is a model often used but many of your member institutions may have improvement planning processes that may work for your consortium as well [Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP), North Central Association (NCA) Commission on Accreditation and School

Improvement, etc.]. Here are some questions to ask as your consortium scans the field for an improvement planning process:

1. **Does the process make sense?** Use your common sense in making this judgment. Can you explain it to others in the involved institutions? Do you think it will make sense to them?
2. **Is it useful?** If it is not useful seek another process. The process should use concise understandable formats that actually help teachers, faculty, and administrators manage programs.
3. **Does it address student achievement, learning needs, and opportunity for knowledge and skill attainment?** The most important performance measures are measures of whether and to what extent your students are better off as a result of their participation in career & technical education.
4. **Does it get you from talk to action?** This should not simply be an academic or compliance exercise. The purpose of improvement planning is to improve performance. Does the planning model you choose help you do that?

Common Improvement Planning Model

A common improvement planning model is shown in Figure 1. It compresses the process described above into four simple steps. The model outlines the steps in an improvement planning process that may help your consortium prepare and implement the needed Perkins IV Local Improvement Plan required.

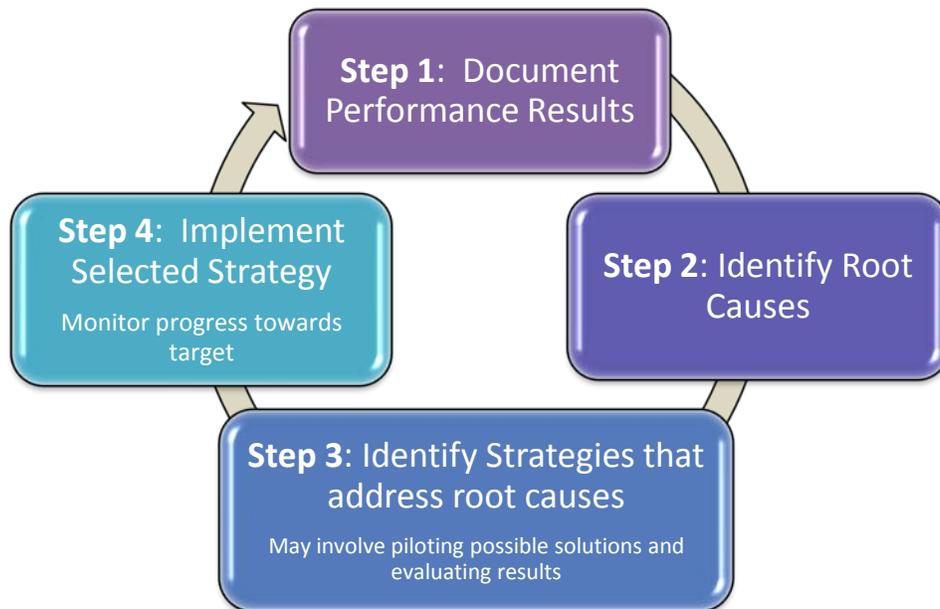


Figure 1: Common Improvement Planning Model

The following section will outline the steps of the Improvement Planning process in more detail and highlight critical considerations for your team in engaging in this process.

Beginning the Actual Work of Improvement, Not Just Reporting

Before your team rolls up its sleeves to do improvement planning, make sure your team involves important stakeholders in your collaborative and systematic improvement planning process. Students, parents, area business and community leaders have an important perspective on how schools can improve. Their meaningful participation in the process should be considered from the onset.

STEP ONE: Document current program performance

Your team knows your performance on Perkins IV indicators. These indicators tend to answer *who, how many* and *how “well.”* You also have the ability to break down (disaggregate) data by subgroups (by school, by gender, by special pops, etc.). Now that you know these pieces of information, your team can move on to better understand the stories behind the data.

STEP TWO: Questions that Guide Your Root Causes Conversation

Once you start to shift the focus from improvement planning for reporting to improvement planning to improve student and program outcomes, your group will engage in a lively conversation about the ways your programs are planned, delivered, and managed. A number of key questions can help your group get at root causes for the current performance.

1. Who do we need to focus our efforts on? Are there differences in performance among different sub-groups (eg. By school? By college? By program? By gender? By special population?)
2. How do we know we are delivering instruction well? Does instruction contribute to the performance gap?
3. How do we know our programs are run well? Do program operations contribute to the performance gap?
4. What additional information/data will allow us to close performance gaps?
5. Who are the partners who have a potential role to play in doing better?

These questions and the discussions around these questions will allow your team to identify contextual factors that may contribute performance gaps (the forces at work behind the scene) and help you sort through root causes that are challenging to see when only looking at the performance on indicators. Root causes will often be related to school or classroom climate, student guidance/support, instruction, access, program processes, resource misalignment, policies that contribute to gaps, etc.

Your team may quickly realize that you need to collect or gather other sources of information and data related to how the program was implemented, how resources were aligned to support performance on indicator, how affected group(s) experienced the program, whether staff had sufficient expertise, etc. Your team will need to decide what other sources of data exist or are needed to better understand root causes and determine whom and how this data will be gathered, analyzed and interpreted before the group can move to the next step of identifying possible strategies to address the causes.

Once root causes can be determined, your team is much better equipped to set goals for improvement...goals focused on student outcomes. What policies, processes, or program elements become priorities for action should be well-grounded in discussion with a broad group of stakeholders and your team should demonstrate a shared understanding and commitment to the priorities selected within your consortium. The ultimate goal is improving student achievement. Goal-setting involves questions such as:

- What goals are already required by Perkins?
- What are the areas of greatest need?
- Which of these goals have the highest potential for impact? Which goals would influence strategies that would have the greatest impact?

To prioritize the goals, the team must work back from the end point to consider what has to happen first, next, and continuously. A sample agenda (Figure 2) for a consortium meeting to set and prioritize goals might look like this:

Sample Leadership Team Meeting: Selecting and Prioritizing Improvement Goals

Meeting goals
1) Organize data issues into themes; 2) Develop improvement goals; and 3) Prioritize goals

Meeting Tasks

- 1) What are the themes that emerge repeatedly from the different data and information related to the performance indicators of interest? What are the strengths in consortium schools, colleges, programs, etc.? What areas need work?
- 2) Develop goals that are focused, student-centered, measurable, realistic, and time bound to improve performance on desired outcomes.
- 3) To determine priorities, discuss what the most critical areas are based on your thoughtful review of the data and the order in which areas will be targeted for improvement.

Who Should Be Involved?
The leadership team will be involved in writing the goal statements. Providing opportunity for appropriate teacher/faculty input and reaction is often useful as well.

How Much Time is needed for This Stage?
2-3 hours.

Figure 2: Sample Goal Setting Meeting Agenda

STEP 3: Use a systematic process to identify possible strategies that address root causes/needs that are aligned with goals.

This is often the step in the process that educators really enjoy...identifying strategies and actions that might begin to improve the outcome of interest. A number of questions might inform your early work in identifying strategies:

- What existing programs/resources in the consortium might address the gap?
- What promising models exist elsewhere that might address the local need?
- What tells us the strategy is of good quality?
- How might priorities and resources be redirected to address the gap?

Your leadership team may designate a work group to explore best practices related to the goals of the consortium or may divide up duties to explore options to each member of the group. Some members of your team may have better access or capacity to engage in this work. Just as we expect doctors to draw on a body of scientific knowledge before making a decision, educators are obligated to base improvement practices on reliable research. A significant amount of evidence exists to guide schools and colleges in efforts to improve performance. This includes lessons from similar programs, schools, or colleges that have achieved these goals. In this step, your team will conduct research on education practices related to your improvement goals. Team members will thoroughly investigate what other programs, schools or colleges with similar demographics have done to deal with the same types of issues your consortium faces. This will be accomplished by contacting other schools, and by reading and discussing scientifically based research and articles related to the improvement goals. After looking at what could be done, the team may propose strategies or simply report back on lessons learned to the entire group who will then decide which strategies to implement. Ideally, you will allow 4-6 weeks for those involved in doing this kind of research.

You might consider asking the team examining best practices to use a standardized format for documenting their research like the sample shown in Figure 3.

Sample Best Practices Research Group Report			
Study team members:			
Improvement Goal:			
Special considerations related to the goal (i.e. poverty, instructional practices, ESL, etc.):			
What we learned about promising practices:			
Rationale (why we'd recommend using this approach):			
Considerations for putting this practice into use (resources, instructor professional development, policy change, etc.):			
Source of information for this Best Practice			
Research Literature		Popular or trade literature	
Position paper		Anecdotal/Opinion	
Theoretical/Model		Other	
		(Including conference presentation, observation, personal communication, interview, etc.)	
At what level would we expect to see the most change/improvement (student, instruction, other program practice, or institution)? Describe.			

Figure 3: Sample Best Practices Research Report

STEP 4: Develop detailed work plans for selected strategy, implement, and monitor for improvement

The action plan pulls together the team's findings into a commitment to act. Organized around the 3-5 school improvement goals that were identified based on data, the work plan outlines:

- What is the goal?
- What are the activities/steps for achieving the goal?
- Who is responsible? What can partners bring?
- What is the timeline for implementation?
- What resources are needed, including professional development?
- How will implementation be **monitored locally**? What will count as evidence of successful implementation?

The process of developing the detailed work plan could take your team 2-4 hours to complete. These details above align with the Minnesota Perkins IV Improvement Plan Template found on the next page.

The four steps outlined in this guide are intended to offer a planning process that directs the consortium through a cycle of continuous improvement. It provides resources and tools to engage all stakeholders in the process and to develop deeper, sustainable change in the consortium's Perkins efforts.

Using the Minnesota Perkins IV Improvement Plan Template

The following template serves as a tool intended to help consortia prepare an improvement report or a full improvement plan. You will see the upper section of the form provides the space for your consortium to prepare an improvement report. The lower portion of the template guides your consortium in developing and reporting the full improvement plan. ***A separate template form must be completed for EACH indicator found not in compliance.***

Complete for REPORT & PLAN	Perkins IV Local Improvement Report				
	Consortium Name: _____				
	Indicator Not Met: _____	Negotiated Performance: _____		Actual Performance: _____	
	General strategies planned to improve performance:				
Comments or context for actual performance (optional):					
Complete for IMPROVEMENT PLAN ONLY	Perkins IV Local Improvement Plan				
	Sub-populations or groups where gap exists (could be by demographic characteristic, school, program, other)				Describe any contextual factors that might contribute to this gap.
	Action steps to improve the performance Identify the strategies/activities that will be taken to achieve the specified goal and improve the quality of CTE programs and core indicator performance	Resources Needed	Timeline	Person(s) Responsible Identify the person(s) who will oversee implementation of strategies and who determines or communicates significant dates or achievement points throughout the year	How will progress be documented? Identify how the strategies or activities will be evaluated to measure progress. These measures should be observable or quantifiable.
Describe stakeholders involved, process and sources of data used to determine strategies/action steps listed above:					