

# Title IV, Part A Student Support & Academic Enrichment Program Guide to Writing Quality Objectives and Outcomes<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

Two sections of the Title IV, Part A statute of the Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE) program address the topics of objectives and outcomes - state use of funds, and local educational agency (LEA) applications:

- Under ESSA § 4104, State Use of Funds, states may use a small percentage of administrative costs to report how LEAs “have made progress toward meeting the objectives and outcomes.”
- Under ESSA § 4106, Contents of the Local Application, LEAs must describe “the program objectives and intended outcomes for activities” and how they will “periodically evaluate the effectiveness of the activities...”

Based on the statute, LEAs in Tennessee are required to describe in the Consolidated Funding Application (CFA) the program objectives and intended outcomes for activities under Title IV, Part A, and how the LEA will evaluate the effectiveness of the activities carried out under this section based on such objectives and outcomes.

The purpose of this guide is to provide Title IV, Part A staff with information and strategies that focus on writing high-quality objectives and outcomes for their Title IV program. Included for consideration are references to statutory requirements, non-regulatory guidance, topic-specific examples, and related resources in one easy-to-access location.

## Defining Objectives and Outcomes

For the purposes of this guide, objectives and outcomes are defined as follows:

- **Outcomes** are typically the long-term, big-picture end results that LEAs expect their programs to accomplish. That is, begin with the end in mind. Outcomes are generally broad statements of impact. Outcomes may also be written as short-term or intermediate impacts, but they still refer to an end point that describes what the program (or an aspect of the program) expects to achieve.
- **Objectives** are the smaller, incremental steps that lead to the achievement of the intended outcomes. Objectives have a narrow focus and are both actionable and tangible. Most importantly, objectives must be measurable. It is best to write objectives using the S.M.A.R.T. acronym so that they are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound. Some organizations adopt an expanded version of S.M.A.R.T. goals that incorporate additional indicators for inclusivity and equity (i.e., S.M.A.R.T.I.E. goals).

---

<sup>1</sup> This document has been adapted from the Title IV-A Technical Assistance Center's [Coaching LEAs to Write Quality Objectives and Outcomes](#) guide.

## Writing Objectives and Outcomes

Writing and reporting on objectives and outcomes are both foundational Title IV, Part A program requirements. Moreover, writing high-quality objectives and outcomes helps LEAs determine whether the program activities they are implementing have the intended and expected impact. The process of developing quality objectives and outcomes works best when LEAs engage in backwards planning. That is, they begin with the end in mind by envisioning expected outcomes. Once LEAs know the intended outcomes, they can create measurable objectives and develop activities or implement interventions to help achieve them.

Measuring objectives and outcomes provides evidence of effectiveness, bolstering LEAs' confidence that the activities or interventions they offer are of high quality. Furthermore, the process may alert LEAs to important and necessary programmatic changes. For example, some activities may not have the intended impact, so continuously measuring progress allows for timely adjustments to improve the interventions or activities. As LEAs measure progress, they may also choose to report to their stakeholders — which is a good practice that ensures awareness of program successes among those who are directly and indirectly affected by these activities.

## Four-Step Process for Implementing and Attaining High-Quality Objectives and Outcomes

Implementing — and ultimately ensuring the attainment of — high-quality objectives and outcomes can be a daunting process. One of the most important aspects of this process is that it is continual, not just a one-time event. It involves an iterative cycle of identifying needs, developing responsive objectives and outcomes, measuring progress toward objectives, and sharing the outcomes with stakeholders.

The four steps of the process, as shown in Figure 1, are:

- Step 1: Determine Activities Based on Identified Needs;
- Step 2: Write High-Quality Objectives and Outcomes;
- Step 3: Continuously Monitor Objectives; and
- Step 4: Publicly Report Outcomes.



### Step 1: Determine Activities Based on Identified Need






Starting a project can be a difficult task. However, it is always important to look to the requirements of any Federal grant program, such as Title IV, Part A, as a starting point. The Title IV, Part A statute, § 4101. [20 U.S.C. 7111] specifies that the purpose of the program is, “to improve students’ academic achievement by increasing the capacity of States, local educational agencies, schools, and local communities to —

- (1) provide all students with access to a well-rounded education;
- (2) improve school conditions for student learning; and
- (3) improve the use of technology in order to improve the academic achievement and digital literacy of all students.”

Knowing the purpose of the program helps serve as a guide for LEAs to narrow the focus of the programs they will provide. This section describes two valuable tools for LEAs to use to start the process of developing high-quality objectives and outcomes for their Title IV, Part A programs: needs assessments and logic models.

### **Needs Assessment**

An LEA must first conduct a needs assessment to determine the foundation and structure of its Title IV, Part A program. In Tennessee, this needs assessment is conducted through the annual planning process that takes place via InformTN<sup>2</sup> which containing three prompts specific to the Title IV, Part A program.

		
<b>Well-Rounded Education</b>	<b>Safe &amp; Healthy Students</b>	<b>Effective Use of Technology</b>
<p><i>A well-rounded education includes the courses, activities, and subject programming that an LEA will provide to ensure that all students have access to an enriched curriculum and educational experience, including access to high quality materials. Describe the LEA's vision of a well-rounded education and how it will ensure all students, including those with disabilities, have access to those courses, activities, and programs.</i></p>	<p><i>Describe the priority needs for providing safe, supportive, and healthy environments in all schools and how the district will meet those needs.</i></p>	<p><i>Describe the level of access that students have to technology as part of the instructional program and the challenges faced in effectively integrating technology into the instructional program. What steps is the district taking to address these challenges?</i></p>

LEAs should use the information from this needs assessment to align the Title IV, Part A program purpose more specifically to the community. According to the [Non-Regulatory Guidance for Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants \(2016\)](#), When conducted properly, a needs assessment can becomes a driver for developing outcomes and objectives, as well as determining program design and informing the selection of specific activities and interventions.

Conducting a needs assessment and gathering stakeholder feedback will tell the LEA the:

- Areas of greatest need;
- Underlying causes of the needs; and
- Types of activities to offer.

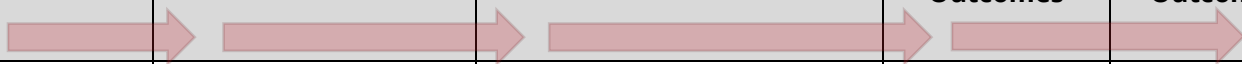
<sup>2</sup> More information regarding the Title IV, Part A needs assessment in InformTN may be accessed [here](#) and [here](#).

LEAs can then use this information to create measurable objectives and outcomes. For example, if an LEA's needs assessment indicated, based on academic data, that fourth-grade students were behind on reading comprehension, but the LEA decided to use Title IV, Part A funds to provide supplemental after-school tutoring for first-grade math, the activity would not be aligned to the need. Thus, the LEA would not be able to embed effective measures of the objectives and outcomes into the activity. Conversely, if the LEA used Title IV, Part A funds to provide after-school tutoring for fourth-grade students with a specific focus on decoding, fluency, and vocabulary (i.e., skills related to reading comprehension), the LEA would more accurately be able to determine outcomes based on objectives tied directly to the need. In this example, a high-quality objective could be that 95 percent of fourth-grade students attending the after-school tutoring program will increase their decoding, fluency, and vocabulary skills by 10 percent by the end of the fall term, as measured by the pre-post assessment.

### **Logic Model**

Another way for LEAs to determine a starting point for developing program objectives and outcomes is to refer to (or create) logic models for their Title IV, Part A program. According to the U.S. Department of Education (ED), a logic model, or theory of action, is a “framework that identifies key project components of the proposed project (i.e., the active ‘ingredients’ that are hypothesized to be critical to achieving the relevant outcomes) and describes the theoretical and operational relationships among the key project components and relevant outcomes.”<sup>3</sup>

Logic models show the relationships between all critical elements of a program — from the needs assessment to the planning, implementation, and improvement of program elements through continuous monitoring and evaluation. They lay out the vision and provide useful tools to help LEAs write high-quality objectives and outcomes. Logic models can help LEAs determine where their Title IV, Part A programs will go by describing the course of action. They do this by helping LEAs think logically about which activities would best meet student needs. Using the logic model as a springboard, LEAs can then write the objectives to attain intended outcomes. Finally, the process of creating a logic model helps LEAs determine how they will know that their programs have achieved the expected end results. A sample logic model can be found below.

<b>Inputs</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Benchmarks</b>	<b>Short-Term Outcomes</b>	<b>Long-Term Outcomes</b>
				
Students and teachers at Tennessee Elementary School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Teachers learn new reading program.</li> <li>-Teachers and students use the program.</li> <li>-Students take the statewide reading test (the indicator).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Year 1: 40% of students scoring “Needs Improvement” in the previous year score “Proficient.”</li> <li>-Year 2: 60% of the students scoring “Needs Improvement” in the previous year score “Proficient.”</li> </ul>	Students are reading better.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Increased high school graduation rate.</li> <li>-Increased rate of college attendance.</li> </ul>

<sup>3</sup> Definitions that apply to all ED programs, 34 C.F.R. Subtitle A, Part 77.1. (2022). <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-34/subtitle-A/part-77>

Logic models are iterative and can be modified as needed. According to the National Student Support Accelerator, logic models can help LEAs achieve the following:

- **Organizational alignment:** A logic model helps align your entire organization around a shared understanding of what you are trying to achieve and how to go about achieving it. A high level of clarity and detail in the logic model ensures that everyone knows what the organization is working toward and moves in the same direction.
- **Goal setting and progress monitoring:** A clear logic model allows you to set goals for program impact and easily monitor if you are on- or off-track to reaching those goals. More importantly, the established relationships can help explain why your program is on- or off-track and where to target improvement efforts.
- **Alignment with external stakeholders:** A clear logic model allows you to easily provide concise explanations of your program's design and intended impact to students, families, schools, and prospective funders.
- **High-impact investments:** A clear logic model allows you to annually assess whether your investments are leading to impact. If you find that they are not, you can see where to adjust and improve.
- **Guidance for improvement, innovation, and expansion:** A clear logic model helps you set up routines to regularly reflect on your program's impact and improve it. It can also make innovation and expansion much smoother. When LEAs have a clear understanding of what drives their program's impact, they can make better decisions around innovation and growth.

## Step 2: Write High-Quality Objectives and Outcomes

LEAs should consider many important questions when crafting objectives and outcomes, such as how many objectives and outcomes are sufficient? There is no right or wrong way to engage in this process, but, as previously stated, it is easier to start from the end and work backward. In this case, determining outcomes is first, followed by writing objectives, then developing the activities that the LEA will implement to improve outcomes.



**Outcomes** are the broad, big-picture end results that LEAs expect their Title IV, Part A programs to accomplish. If objectives are the incremental steps that LEAs take toward achieving the end results, then outcomes are the top of the staircase. Although outcomes can be broken down into short- or long-term outcomes, they still encompass the overall impact the program expects to achieve. High-quality outcomes tie back to the needs identified in the needs assessment. Additionally, outcomes should be actionable and easily convey the change or effect the LEA expects to see.

Sample Outcomes	
<b>Need:</b> High school students in the LEA reported an increase in anxiety, depression, drug use, and suicidal thoughts and behaviors on the mid-year school climate survey.	
Aligned Outcomes	Misaligned Outcome
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the accessibility of school-based mental health services in the Sample LEA.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve ACT scores for high school students.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decrease the number of students reporting an increase in anxiety, depression, drug use, and suicidal thoughts and behaviors on the next administration of the mid-year school climate survey.</li> </ul>	<p>Note: In the above example, the misaligned outcome does not match the identified need. Although increasing ACT scores is a desirable outcome that may well fit within the Title IV, Part A program goals, it does not directly relate to increasing mental health services for high school students.</p>
---	---

**Objectives** are the actionable, incremental steps that LEAs take toward achieving their outcomes. Once LEAs identify outcomes tied directly to needs, they can create high-quality objectives that align with the needs and outcomes. However, objectives must also be measurable to determine whether the outcomes are met. Therefore, when writing high-quality objectives, it is best to use the S.M.A.R.T or S.M.A.R.T.I.E. acronym so that they are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time bound or, additionally, inclusive, and equitable.

Sample Objectives	
<p><b>Need:</b> High school students in the LEA reported an increase in anxiety, depression, drug use, and suicidal thoughts and behaviors on the mid-year school climate survey.</p> <p><b>Activity:</b> Provide on-site counseling and mental health services to students on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday before, during, and after school hours.</p>	
Measurable Objectives	Non-Measurable Objective
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The LEA will increase access to on-site mental health counselors for high school students at 80 percent of its campuses no later than the start of the school year, August 15, 2025.</li> <li>The LEA will increase awareness of mental health issues and substance use among middle and high school students by offering at least six student assemblies and presentations on this topic to all campuses before the end of the school year, May 30, 2026.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The LEA will add mental health counselors.</li> </ul> <p>Note: The non-measurable objective provided in the example is not specific because it does not identify the population that would benefit from the services. It is not measurable because there are no specific numbers or quantities mentioned and the data are not identified. It may be attainable, but, again, because it is not quantified, it is unknown whether the LEA has the capacity to hire the counselors. Although adding mental health counselors may be relevant to the needs, the objective is not time bound, so it would be difficult to measure any level of success.</p>

**Activities** are the specific tasks, interventions, or events the LEA will implement for its identified stakeholders, such as students and educators. As previously stated, the process of developing objectives, outcomes, and activities involves some backwards planning. Once LEAs know the focus of their outcomes

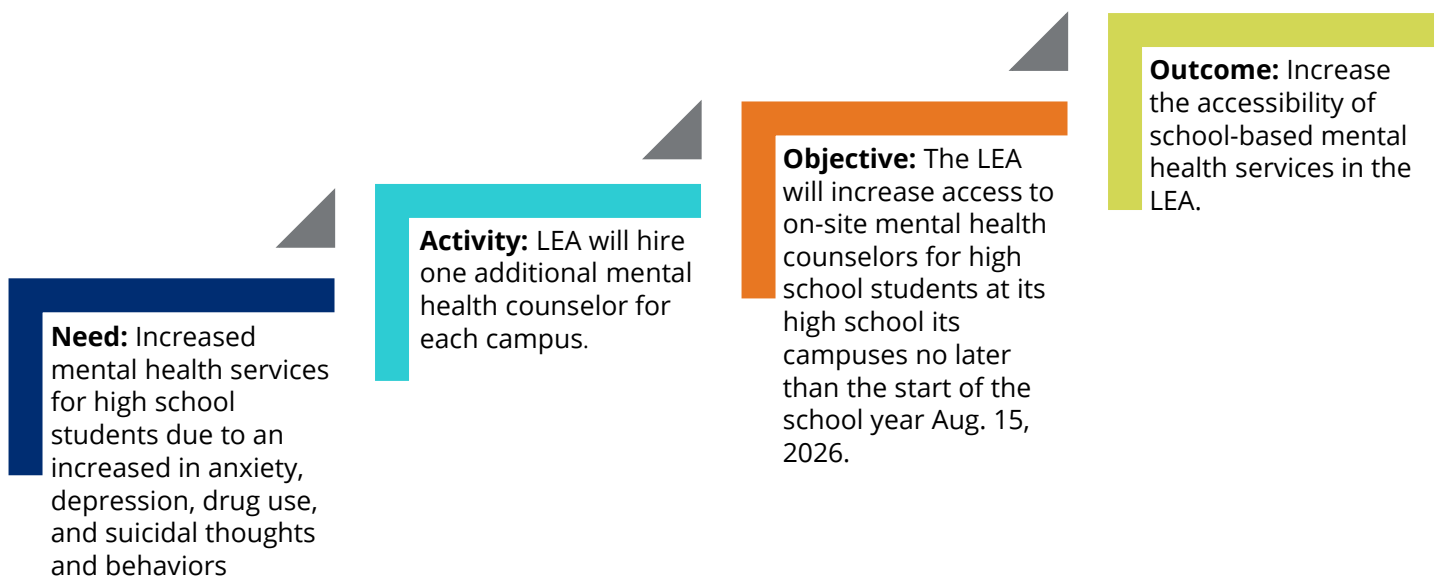
and objectives, they can create the specific program activities that align with the needs to meet the program outcomes and objectives.

The Non-Regulatory Guidance for Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants provides examples of activities for which LEAs can use Title IV, Part A funds under three content areas:

- Well-rounded educational opportunities (WR);
- Safe and healthy students (SH); and
- Effective use of technology (ET).

Activities can provide direct services for students, professional development for teachers and administrators, salaries of personnel to carry out identified programs and services, and supplemental educational resources and equipment. Evidence-based activities are more likely to improve outcomes.

The figure below shows how the activity offered leads to the measurable objective, which aligns to the outcome — all of which occur as a direct result of the demonstrated need.



### ***How many objectives and outcomes are needed for Title IV, Part A?***

LEAs often ask: What is a suitable number of objectives and outcomes to include in a Title IV, Part A application? There is not a straightforward answer to this question, beyond that the number of objectives and outcomes will depend on several variables. Most importantly, the needs identified in the needs assessment will be the main indicator of the number of expected outcomes. The number of Title IV, Part A objectives and outcomes should:

- Reflect the level of needs identified but also align with the Title IV, Part A program purpose;
- Fit with the size and resources available to the LEA;
- Focus on data and stakeholder feedback to determine priorities;
- Align to one of the three content areas: WR/SH/ET; and
- Link with an overall need rather than each specific activity offered.



Writing too many objectives and outcomes can be cumbersome to implement, monitor, and report. On the other hand, not having enough objectives and outcomes may not make use of the full benefit of the Title IV, Part A program and the funding. LEAs should focus on writing objectives and outcomes around the purpose of the Title IV, Part A or the intent of one (or all three) of the priority content areas (i.e., WR, SH, ET). Further, LEAs should focus objectives on higher-level needs rather than writing objectives and outcomes for every activity offered. Although each activity offered should work toward meeting the overall outcomes, writing objectives and outcomes for each activity can make it difficult to collect data to report on outcomes. Instead, LEAs should summarize how each activity is intended to meet the expected outcomes and focus their objectives on this summary.

### Step 3: Continuously Monitor Objectives

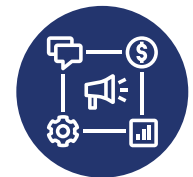


Once LEAs have identified and written high-quality objectives and outcomes, and provided activities and interventions, it is important to use data to continuously monitor program implementation. Therefore, LEAs must monitor objectives and outcomes on an ongoing basis to determine if issues arise and make course corrections to keep the intended outcomes on track.

Monitoring is not a one-time process, but should occur at the beginning, middle, and end of an activity. If the activity implementation is going well, track the reasons for success — for example, staff, resources, and implementation hours. If implementation is not going well, determine what needs to be improved and what adjustments need to be made to resources, timelines, inputs, and other factors. To monitor continuously, LEAs need to collect the correct data, so they must ensure that measurement is built into the process. These data are critical information, in that they will ultimately be used for reporting outcomes.

### Step 4: Publicly Report Outcomes

The Title IV, Part A statute requires LEAs to report program outcomes. This transparency is important to ensure effective use of federal funds. Second, it is critical that LEAs create a communication plan to share outcomes with the stakeholders the program serves and to inform them about the services it seeks to improve.



Outcomes can be reported in several ways, and a solid communication plan will help identify the most efficient methods for disseminating information to the target audience. A communication plan serves as “a strategic blueprint for delivering consistent, coordinated, and targeted messaging to achieve specific goals.”<sup>4</sup> Below are considerations for LEAs to develop effective communication plans:

- Align communication goals directly to the Title IV, Part A program goals;
- Target program-specific stakeholders;
- Clearly identify the specific information to share and how it will be shared; and
- Designate a timeline for communication.

---

<sup>4</sup> Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest. (n.d.). Developing a communication plan. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/regions/southwest/publications/pdf/5.2.10-comm-plan-508.pdf>



Once a LEA develops its communication plan, the LEA can more efficiently say how it will report its outcomes. The format for dissemination depends on the LEA's target audience and can include the following:

- Website/data dashboard
- Infographic
- Social media
- Part of a comprehensive program evaluation
- Executive summary/summary of outcomes
- Training/conference/webinar

## Conclusion

The purpose of this guide was to provide LEAs with strategies and resources with writing high-quality objectives and outcomes. A four-step process for implementing and attaining high-quality objectives and outcomes was introduced that focused on key elements such as a needs assessment, continuously monitoring objectives, and publicly reporting outcomes. This guide also advocated for the creation of logic models to help with developing objectives and outcomes and with ensuring that both objectives and outcomes follow the S.M.A.R.T or S.M.A.R.T.I.E acronym. It is also important to show how the needs assessment informed the development of Title IV, Part A program activities, which in turn affect the program objectives and outcomes. LEAs are encouraged to use this guide and the strategies found within it as tools as to improve the Title IV, Part A program objectives and outcomes.

## Resources

- [Title IV, Part A LEA Needs Assessment Tool](#)  
ED has developed this comprehensive LEA Needs Assessment Tool, which SEAs can share with LEAs. SCs may opt to adopt the tool for their use, offer the tool as an option for LEAs, or offer an alternative tool or resource. The tool includes outcome focused indicators. Collecting and analyzing outcome data during a needs assessment can help LEAs identify where their schools are facing challenges and stay focused on those outcomes as they implement their Title IV-A program.
- [Title IV, Part A Evaluation Guide](#)  
This evaluation guide serves as a companion piece to the Title IV-A LEA Needs Assessment Tool. The Tool prompts LEAs to think first about the desired outcomes, then work backward to identify the programs, projects, or activities (interventions) that will best serve those outcomes under the Title IV-A statute. This guide offers a high-level overview of the evaluation cycle and can assist LEAs in evaluating whether a selected program is meeting the needs and desired goals identified in the Tool.
- [Title IV Activity Evaluation Form](#)  
This optional tool allows LEAs to document the evaluation process and results for Title IV, Part A funded activities.
- [Developing a Communication Plan](#)  
The Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest created this resource, which identifies seven steps to developing an effective communication plan. The resource provides examples of how to identify target audiences, determining communication strategies, and creating an outreach plan for dissemination.