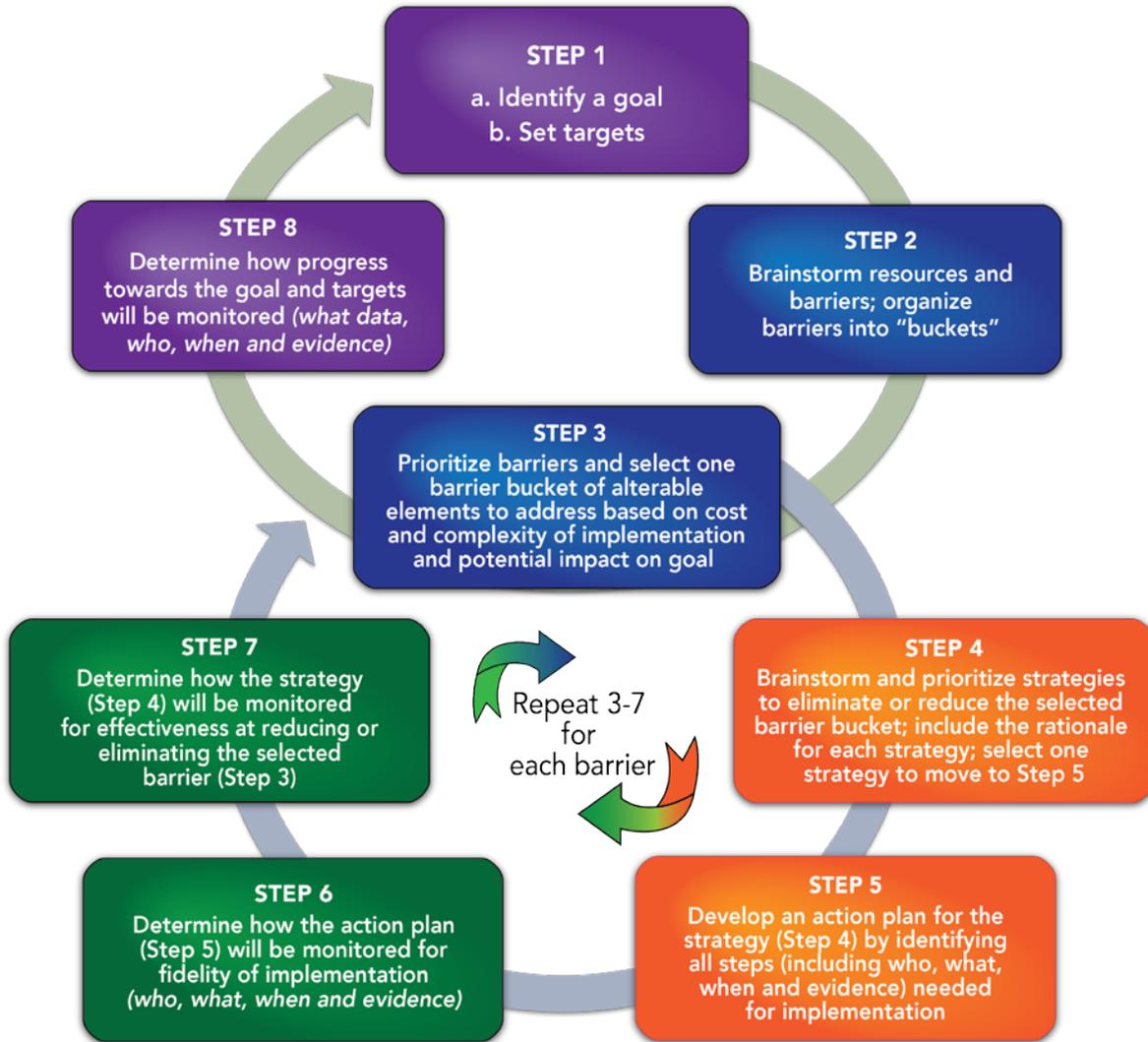# APPENDIX F: A GUIDE TO 8-STEP PLANNING AND PROBLEM-SOLVING FOR SIG PROPOSALS

2014

8-Step Planning and Problem-Solving Process
FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

STEP 1
a. Identify a goal
b. Set targets

STEP 2
Brainstorm resources and barriers; organize barriers into "buckets"

STEP 3
Prioritize barriers and select one barrier bucket of alterable elements to address based on cost and complexity of implementation and potential impact on goal

STEP 4
Brainstorm and prioritize strategies to eliminate or reduce the selected barrier bucket; include the rationale for each strategy; select one strategy to move to Step 5

STEP 5
Develop an action plan for the strategy (Step 4) by identifying all steps (including who, what, when and evidence) needed for implementation

STEP 6
Determine how the action plan (Step 5) will be monitored for fidelity of implementation *(who, what, when and evidence)*

STEP 7
Determine how the strategy (Step 4) will be monitored for effectiveness at reducing or eliminating the selected barrier (Step 3)

STEP 8
Determine how progress towards the goal and targets will be monitored *(what data, who, when and evidence)*

Repeat 3-7 for each barrier

Introduction

Over the past decade, Florida engaged in systems-level change to implement a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) at all levels of the educational system to more effectively meet the academic and behavioral needs of all students. "Need-driven" decision-making seeks to ensure resources reach the appropriate students at the appropriate levels to accelerate the performance of *all* students within a school to achieve and/or exceed proficiency.

The purpose of a systems approach to change is not only to fix problems but build capacity of the system to self-correct and be able to anticipate and resolve issues more efficiently through the ongoing use of a structured, data-based, problem-solving process. This process requires that planning team members be able to collaborate to move through the following stages:

- Accurate identification of problems and goals
- Analysis of data to determine and validate root causes of undesirable outcomes
- Design, support, and implementation of interventions
- Use of data to evaluate progress toward the goals and make adjustments to interventions as needed

There are many research-based models which encompass these stages, and the Florida Department of Education has adapted an 8-step planning and problem-solving model to assist teams in designing and implementing meaningful and effective plans.

Planning Teams

The planning team must be representative of all stakeholders who will be impacted by its decisions. This will increase the likelihood that a true understanding of the problems and resources within a system will be attained and action plans developed to address systems change will have the necessary buy-in to be implemented as intended. Additionally, the planning must occur together as a full team, ideally from start to finish, but especially in Steps 1-3 of problem solving. Partitioning out steps or content areas to various team members and then trying to piece it together again will not result in meaningful and effective plans.

Roles within the planning team should be established from the beginning; for instance, a team might assign a Facilitator, a Recorder, and a Timekeeper to each meeting. It could be the same people each time the group meets or it could be a rotating designation to allow each person to practice such skills. In either case, the roles should be defined and understood by all on the team.

Facilitators

Facilitators play a very important role in the 8-step process, especially when the planning team is composed of multiple stakeholders representing various interests. The job of the facilitator is not to direct the discussion but to create a safe and structured space for true collaboration to occur, listen and ask open-ended or clarifying questions, summarize information presented during meetings and ask for consensus, and prompt participants to follow group norms and procedures.

Brainstorming

Much of the problem-solving process is spent brainstorming before selecting priority barriers and corresponding strategies to incorporate into the plan. The purpose of brainstorming is to get all ideas on the table so that a full picture of the situation can be understood. It can be tempting to

evaluate or criticize suggestions as they are offered. However, this practice may inhibit creativity and reduce the likelihood that all members will continue to participate. Once a person gets an idea "shot down," they are more likely to keep to themselves.

A good facilitator will employ certain norms to ensure all members have the opportunity to speak. One method is a "round-robin" approach, in which the group literally goes around the circle repeatedly to allow each person to state a barrier, resource, or strategy (depending on the step) without any additional discussion until all ideas are exhausted. As each idea is stated, a recorder should write them down in clear and concise words/phrases.

Brainstorming sessions may be more productive if completed offline using a worksheet and/or by simply using chart paper so that all present can see the results.

Moving through the Process

While the team should strive to move through all eight steps, and generally in order, problem solving will not necessarily occur in lockstep fashion. Sometimes the group will need to cycle back to Step 1 to reframe the goal after a particularly illuminating brainstorming session in Step 2 of identifying true barriers. Instances like these are common and can be embraced to a point that they do not indefinitely stall the process. A good facilitator will understand the difference between productive discussion and "wheel-spinning" and be able to encourage the group to move on when the time is right.

Monitoring

There are four modes of monitoring in the 8-step process.

- To ensure each step in the action plan is carried out. This occurs in Step 5.
- To establish whether strategies, including all associated action steps, are being implemented with *fidelity*, which simply means "as intended." This occurs in Step 6.
- To understand whether strategies are effective in reducing the targeted barrier to the goal. This occurs in Step 7.
- To gauge progress toward the targets and goal itself in order to determine whether any course adjustments need to be considered. This occurs in Step 8.

Throughout Steps 5-8 you will identify persons responsible (the "who"). Sometimes this person is not part of the planning team. In these cases, an action step might be added to the plan in which a member of the planning team becomes responsible for reaching out to that person by a certain date to explain the step and ask for their participation. The role of each person assigned as the "who" in each step should be clearly defined, understood by all stakeholders, and supported by their supervisors.

The four are distinct and equally important to the process. Step 8, while listed last, must be considered from the outset, to determine whether the goal can be measured and how. If the goal is not measurable it cannot be monitored.

Step 1: a) Identify a goal. b) From the list provided, select the data indicators the district will use as evidence the goal has been achieved and set the annual numeric targets for the district and/or for select schools (SIG-targeted schools must have targets for the next three years).

When sitting down to identify goals, the team must be prepared with the right data in a digestible format. The needs analysis exercise will have prompted the team to analyze the current state of affairs at the school. It is imperative that goals be based upon verified information and not feelings or guesses. Equally imperative is that progress toward goals be measurable and that specific measures (i.e., Targets) be identified from the outset. In both cases, data sources may be quantitative or qualitative in nature but must be documented.

There must be at least one goal but there is no limit to the number you must establish. Keep in mind that for each potential goal there are eight steps to complete in the problem-solving process. Therefore, it is not recommended that a team draft a lengthy list of goals (e.g., if ten goals are written, that amounts to 80 steps). Instead, choose a small number (1-3) of meaningful goals that can reasonably be addressed over the next three years. The purpose of the 8-step process is not to necessarily touch on every problem in one year, but is instead intended to engage in strategic problem solving, addressing the highest areas of need.

- Goals should support one or more data targets and may cross content areas.
- Goals are specific and detailed.
- Goals describe the desired outcome that would result from a problem being resolved.
- Goals are measurable but may not be numeric.
- Goals are rigorous but attainable within the timeframe allotted

The goal and targets together form a "Theory of Action" [e.g. If we (1a), then we will see (1b)] which will be tested and refined through this process.

It is recommended that goals specifically address the needs of subgroups not meeting Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) targets for the prior school year, and the special needs of subgroups not addressed by AMOs (e.g., migrant, homeless, neglected and delinquent).

Examples

- ✓ Increase students' comprehension of rigorous text through the use of reading for meaning strategies.
- ✓ Improve students' critical thinking skills by teaching compare and contrast strategies.
- ✓ Increase student engagement during instructional delivery through the use of purposeful peer-to-peer discourse.

Step 2: Brainstorm which resources are available to support the goal and barriers that could hinder achieving the goal. Organize barriers into thematic "buckets."

Brainstorm Resources

- Resources include anything that is already available that can be used to achieve the goal.
- They may include tangibles such as personnel, professional skills, budgets, and supplies, or intangibles such as attitudes and cultural climates.
- Resources that are not already available to you could be listed as barriers, if you feel they are necessary to reaching your goal.

Examples

- ✓ Personnel, professional development opportunities, materials, schedules, curriculum, instruction, funding, leadership, partners, environment, school culture, volunteers, etc.

Brainstorm Barriers

A structured planning and problem-solving process helps focus attention toward objective evidence and solutions rather than subjective assumptions and time-consuming guesses. Step 2 is designed to identify and verify the root causes of the current outcomes experienced at a school by analyzing existing barriers to the goals that have been identified. The alternative tends to result in the inefficient and usually ineffective practice of tossing possible solutions at a perceived problem. Often, the perceived problem is simply a symptom of the root cause.

For example, in a school where reading scores have dropped over the last year, systematically working through the eight steps could lead a team to identify that the English/language arts department had a 60 percent teacher turnover rate and excessive teacher absence during that time. When root causes are identified and verified with evidence, it then becomes possible to effectively match solutions to address the root cause and ultimately lead to the desired goal. In this example, rather than setting a goal to improve FCAT reading scores, a more effective, specific goal might be related to improving teacher engagement, as evidenced by increased teacher attendance and student outcomes. Achievement of this goal would address the verified root causes, and addressing the root causes will ultimately lead to attainment of the school's targets to increase student achievement.

- Don't skip the brainstorming process! Identify all possible barriers before moving to the categorizing phase. During brainstorming all ideas are valid; team members should refrain from passing judgment on or asking questions about ideas put forward.
- Cycle back to Step 1 to refine the goal as the problem becomes better defined by the team.

Examples

- ✓ Instructional strategies, scheduling, assessment practices, teachers' knowledge and skills, parental involvement, student motivation, school culture, alignment of instruction with standards, etc.

Categorize Barriers

- Distinguish between barriers that are symptoms and root causes; focus on the root causes.
  - Keep asking "why" until you get to root causes; keeping in mind that barriers are "alterable conditions," things you can change.
- Group like barriers into thematic "buckets" which can be addressed as a whole – you may find some are duplicative or subsets of others.
- During this exercise team members may ask clarifying questions to determine whether barriers should remain on the list.

Step 3: Select one barrier bucket of *alterable elements* (e.g., curriculum, instruction, environment and organizational systems) to address, based on the cost and complexity of implementation and the potential impact the elimination or reduction of the barrier would have on the goal.

Prioritize Buckets

- Ensure barriers listed are alterable existing conditions that limit the effectiveness of current efforts to improve student achievement.
    o Ask…What can we change that will help achieve the goal?
- Identify the highest priority barriers.
    o Ask…Which barriers can we afford the time and resources to address?
    o Ask…Which barriers, if removed, would result in the greatest impact on the goal?
    o Ask…Which barriers are of shared interest across the team?
- Finalize your list of targeted barriers. These are your high-priority barriers that you wish to address throughout the year.

Select one priority barrier at a time and apply Steps 4-7. You will not need to complete Steps 4-7 for all targeted barriers in one sitting. The *SIP Online* will store your targeted barriers until you are ready to brainstorm strategies to address them.

Step 4: Brainstorm strategies that could be used to eliminate or reduce the selected barrier bucket; include the rationale for each strategy. Select a strategy to develop an action plan for implementation.

The same approach for identifying barriers will apply in this step, starting with a free-flowing idea session and ending with a process of prioritization. Remember, strategies are actions taken to address, reduce, or eliminate a *targeted barrier*; they are not detailed action steps (those will be outlined in Step 5).

The list of resources identified in Step 2 can serve as a starting point for this discussion. Rather than reinventing the wheel, often a resource just needs to be repurposed or better implemented in order to be effective in reducing a barrier.

It is important in this step to examine the current programs and projects already in place at the school. Brainstorming new strategies does not necessarily mean you have to "add something to your plate." A strategy can actually be to stop doing something, or to refine current projects. Since we have a finite amount of time each day, for every new program or project added, there should be thought given to what could be taken off your plate.

For each strategy listed, be sure to consider how it supports or complicates other strategies in the SIP or those already being implementing at the school. This will ensure that selected strategies are integrated rather than isolated.

When prioritizing strategies, ask:

- Is this an evidence-based practice?
- To what extent does it impact or remove the priority barrier?
- Is it doable within current resource constraints? A "no" here should not necessarily eliminate the strategy, but procurement of a new resource will need to be included as part of the action plan created in Step 5. You will be able to indicate if an action step is a budget line item, which will then help you complete the budget.

Depending on how many strategies you have identified to reduce or eliminate the barrier, you will not necessarily need to complete Steps 5-7 for all strategies in one sitting. The *SIP Online* will store your identified strategies until you are ready to create an action plan for each.

For each strategy entered, include a rationale for why the team believes it will help to reduce or eliminate the barrier.

Step 5: Develop an action plan by identifying all steps that need to be taken to implement the strategy selected in Step 4.

This is where you build your detailed action plan, step by step, to implement your selected strategy for reducing or eliminating the barrier to the goal.

For each *action step*, identify:

- **What** will be done specifically and by whom (including as much detail as possible).
- **Who** will ensure the action step is carried out (who is responsible for completing the step).
- **When** and for how long it will be implemented (start/end dates, frequency).
- How you will monitor task completion (what **evidence** you will collect).
- Indicate whether the step is a **budget** item. Budget items will require additional detail, such as budget codes, a description, funding source and the amount needed. SIG 1003(g)-funded budget items will require a three-year budget.
- Indicate whether the step is a **professional development opportunity (PD) and/or technical assistance (TA)**. These items will require additional detail, such as the facilitator or developer and the intended audience.

Well-developed action plans will have multiple steps and each step should only include one task. For example, "developing and delivering professional development" would be at least two separate action steps in your plan.

Step 6: Determine how the action plan (Step 5) will be monitored for fidelity of implementation.

For each *strategy*, develop a plan that will support the team in completing action steps on time and as intended. This plan should be viewed as a proactive approach of providing support to help the team stay on schedule rather than reactive after you have already fallen behind. This type of monitoring is meant to be supportive, not punitive. Include:

- **What** will be done to monitor fidelity of implementation of and support for the strategy. This might include looking at the evidence of completion submitted for each step of the action plan, actually observing the steps, or a combination. The monitoring plan should also outline what support will be provided for person(s) implementing the action plan (e.g., ensuring necessary materials are obtained, providing protected time to complete tasks).
- **Who** is responsible for monitoring the strategy. This person might be seen as a "project manager" for the strategy, in that they will ensure all tasks identified in the action step are implemented on time and as intended by the planning team, which may include looking for additional resources if needed to make it happen.
- **When** and how often monitoring will occur (dates/schedule/frequency).
- How **evidence** of completion of monitoring activities will be collected/reported.

Step 7: Determine how the action plan (Step 5) will be monitored for effectiveness at reducing or eliminating the barrier(s) selected in Step 3.

For each *strategy*, develop a detailed plan that explains how data will be collected to evaluate whether the strategy is working and using what benchmarks. Include:

- **What** data will be collected and set benchmarks for success. What will successful implementation produce? What will questionable or poor implementation produce, and what will we do if we see those results or lack of results?

- **Who** is responsible to collect, chart, and prepare data.
- **When** data will be collected and evaluated. Use multiple measures where possible.
- How **evidence** of completion of monitoring activities will be collected/reported.

At predetermined intervals, the team should be made aware of any strategies that do not appear to be working so that they may determine whether it is an issue of implementation fidelity (as evidenced in Step 6) or if the strategy itself is flawed.

After completion of Step 7, cycle back to Step 4 to select the next strategy, or to Step 3 to select the next barrier bucket, and continue through the steps.

Step 8: Determine how progress towards the annual targets and goal established in Step 1 will be monitored (what data will be collected and reviewed throughout the year).

For each *goal*, include:

- **Who** is responsible to monitor progress toward the goal. Ensure critical decision makers are involved.
- The process (**what**) for using data collected through Step 7 and/or collecting additional data to decide if progress toward the goal is satisfactory. Determine criteria to evaluate results and plans for what you will do to address each type of result (positive, questionable, or poor). Use multiple measures where possible.
- A schedule to measure and monitor incremental changes (**when**).
- How **evidence** of completion of monitoring activities will be collected/reported.

At predetermined intervals, decide as a team to continue, intensify, modify, or terminate strategies, revisit barriers, or modify the goal itself based on data.

After completion of Step 8, cycle back to Step 1 to start on the next goal.

Professional Development and Technical Assistance

This report will be generated automatically based upon each activity identified as PD and/or TA as part of the 8-step planning and problem-solving process for the Areas of Focus. Review the information to ensure the plan includes all required components and reads smoothly. Any necessary revisions must be made in the appropriate problem-solving section.

Budget

This report will be generated automatically based upon each budget item identified in the Areas of Assurance or in the 8-step planning and problem-solving process for Areas of Focus. Review the budget to ensure all is accurate. Any necessary revisions must be made in the appropriate problem-solving section.