Introduction

Purpose

As Race to the Top States work to raise student achievement, you face a new challenge: sustaining the gains you have made, and the reforms that are producing those gains, beyond the life of the grant. The coming transition requires all stakeholders to think through what today’s reforms will look like in a post-Race to the Top world. Specifically, will these efforts be durable enough to weather inevitable shifts in public support and political will? How will reforms withstand a significant decrease in federal funding?

The Reform Support Network has formed the Sustainability Work Group to support States that are taking on this challenge. The Sustainability Work Group has one goal for State education agencies (SEAs): to sustain their highest-priority reforms for improving student achievement beyond the life of the Race to the Top grant. To meet this goal, States participating in the Work Group will accomplish the following objectives:

1. Identify priority student achievement goals and the priority reforms that must be sustained in order to reach them.
2. Assess the current sustainability of the priority reforms against comprehensive criteria.
3. Take action to ensure those priority reforms can be sustained; specific strategies may include:
   - Aligning human capital resources
   - Improving partnerships with external stakeholders
   - Cultivating systems and processes that use goals, data and reflection to drive decision-making
4. Empower staff to manage progress on sustainability strategies using performance management systems and processes.
5. Contribute learnings within the Work Group and throughout the RSN and other States.

Work Group States will use two tools to prepare for the group’s first convening. The first is a Sustainability Rubric that lays out key variables to consider in making a particular reform sustainable. The rubric is broad in scope while illustrative of what sustainability looks like at various levels (from inadequate to exemplary), with “look-fors” and elements to add clarity. Your team and fellow Work Group members will be the first in the nation to use this rubric to diagnose your strengths and areas of challenge with respect to different aspects of sustainability.

The second tool is this Self-Assessment Workbook. The workbook is designed as a companion to the Sustainability Rubric and will guide you through five exercises that will help you to conduct an initial self-assessment of the sustainability of your reforms.
Roles and Responsibilities

Your team can complete the self-assessment process with minimal support from the RSN. This process will be most valuable to States whose teams include leaders who are knowledgeable of and responsible for the successful implementation of priority reforms selected for assessment. Although each SEA is unique, we recommend consideration of certain positions within the SEA for the following roles:

State facilitator (11-15 hours prior to the convening): This person serves as the primary contact for the Sustainability Work Group and should hold a leadership position in the SEA. Responsibilities include: facilitating the self-assessment process for the State team (see below), preparing and participating in all facilitator calls (introductory webinar, calibration webinar and follow-up calls) and shepherding the State team through the self-assessment process. State facilitators will receive ongoing coaching from RSN experts on how to play this role.

State team (nine to 11 hours prior to the convening): Members of the State team should include the State chief (a minimum of one hour), the Race to the Top Lead, and key leaders of the State’s Race to the Top reforms. The team should also include SEA leaders with responsibility for such areas as budgeting, finance and human resources. The major task of State team members is to participate in the self-assessment process and the convening. After the convening, State team members will become leaders in developing (or refining) and implementing the State’s sustainability plan. At a minimum, the chief should be consulted and give input on critical decisions during the self-assessment process and beyond.

RSN facilitator (ongoing): States will be assigned an RSN facilitator to support State facilitators through the self-assessment process. State facilitators may request an RSN facilitator to participate in virtual or in-person meetings. The RSN facilitator is expected to serve as a support to each State facilitator in the self-assessment process and will be available to lead or attend sessions. RSN facilitators will also work with State facilitators to look at the results of the self-assessment process across States, both to calibrate each State’s results and to identify common areas of strength and challenge for the work group to focus on. The overall objective is for the RSN facilitator to support and coach State facilitators to be able to lead their teams in developing (or refining) and implementing a sustainability plan for any priority reform.
Suggested Calendar and Routines to Complete Exercises #1 - #5

This timeline outlines each State’s commitment for fall 2013 as a Sustainability Work Group member, and contains a handful of deadlines that are important for the RSN to prepare for the November convening. Beyond that, however, the specific timeline of activities is flexible; a suggested calendar follows. Specific approaches to conducting the self-assessment can be coordinated with each State’s RSN facilitator.

September 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
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</table>
| 16           | 17            | 18            | 19            | 20
| Schedule call with RSN facilitator | 24
| Identify team and meeting times to share with RSN facilitator | 25
| Complete call with RSN facilitator to review roles and timeline | 26 |
| 27           |               |               |               |                         |

This timeline is included for illustrative purposes. It provides suggested steps and timeframes for completing each of the exercises.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Meet deadline for wrap-up of Exercises 1 and 2; prepare for Exercise 3 with RSN facilitator</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Meet with State team to begin Exercise 3</strong></td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Meet deadline to wrap up Exercise 3; prepare for Exercises 4 and 5 with RSN facilitator</strong></td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Meet deadline for finishing review with chief state school officer and submit revised exercise 3 to the RSN</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Attend RSN webinar to calibrate ratings</strong></td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Deadline for wrap-up of Exercises 4 and 5 with RSN facilitator</strong></td>
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This timeline is included for illustrative purposes. It provides suggested steps and timeframes for completing each of the exercises.
November 2013

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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*Check in* with RSN facilitator to prepare for convening and (optional) submit any revisions to Exercises 4 and 5

<table>
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<tr>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>15</th>
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*Tentative Week of Convening*

This timeline is included for illustrative purposes. It provides suggested steps and timeframes for completing each of the exercises.

*Review results of Exercises 4 and 5 with chief state school officer*
How to Use this Workbook

The workbook contains five exercises meant to help you achieve the self-assessment objectives. The overarching purpose of these exercises is to help your team assess the sustainability of a specific priority reform — a body of work that an SEA is undertaking in order to achieve two or more priority goals for student outcomes — and to home in on aspects of sustainability to focus on over the next year.

The description of each exercise includes State facilitator notes (see callout box on the right) that provide recommendations for how to complete each exercise and templates that can be used in facilitation. The templates, however, are not the exercises; they are merely optional guides to help you complete the exercises if they are helpful.

Use this workbook to drive the assessment process, unless your State has its own system for self-assessment. The objectives of these five exercises are the real requirement; the exercises and the templates that accompany them are merely one way to reach those objectives. Follow the deadlines in the calendar, whether through the exercises here or through some alternative means. You can work with your RSN facilitator to decide on a course of action that makes the most sense for you.

Throughout the self-assessment, do one of three things to wrap up each exercise: 1) fill out and submit the relevant template enclosed in this workbook to your RSN facilitator; 2) submit something similar to your RSN facilitator that represents the objective of the exercise; or 3) schedule a debrief call with your RSN facilitator to share results.

### Exercise Facilitator notes
- **Time:** [Suggest the amount of time needed to complete each exercise.]
- **Team:** [Provide recommendations on who to engage in each exercise.]
- **Notes:** [Suggest activities and discussion questions for getting the most out of each exercise.]

### Exercises (sequential) | Objectives
--- | ---
#1: Articulate State priority goals | States will identify or reaffirm their priority goals for improving student achievement
#2: Identify two to three priority reforms | States will identify the priority reforms that will be most critical to sustain in order to reach their priority goals
#3: Assess sustainability of priority reforms | States will use the Sustainability Rubric to reflect on the sustainability of priority reforms
#4: Identify areas of strength | States will note areas of sustainability where their reforms are already strong
#5: Identify areas of focus for the Work Group | States will also note which areas of sustainability to prioritize so that the Sustainability Work Group can home in on those areas, starting with the November convening
Exercises

Exercise 1: Articulate State Priority Goals

Student achievement goals are the ultimate aim of any effort to improve sustainability. Many States have already defined these goals; this exercise is about agreeing on a smaller subset of priority goals (or, if necessary, articulating these priority goals for the first time).

Objective: Identify or reaffirm the State's priority goals for improving student achievement

Instructions:

• Brainstorm all of the State's potential goals for student achievement. Consider the usual sources: State board of education and/or SEA strategic plans, gubernatorial or legislative goals, Race to the Top and other Federal commitments.

• Discuss and prioritize three to five goals that you consider to be most critical to realizing and maintaining dramatic gains in student achievement (for example, improving third-grade reading proficiency). Consider which goals should be driving the SEA’s day-to-day work. Fill in your highest priority goals on the left column of Table 1 (below).

• For each goal, fill in the right column of Table 1 by documenting the current evidence of progress (or lack thereof) towards the goal. What was the baseline date and level of performance when the goal was set? Where are we now? At this rate, are we on track to reach the goal?

Table 1. Articulating State Goals

| Description of Goal (What is the goal? Why does it matter? What is its origin?) | Progress Toward Goal Thus Far (Data documenting progress) |
| --- |
|  |
|  |
|  |

Exercise #1
Facilitator notes

Time: 60 minutes
Team: State facilitator and team
Notes:

• Use the table to ensure that members of your State team have a shared understanding of the goals selected. If they have committed to more than three goals, guide team members to prioritize a few.

• Be sure to list resources that detail the goals or document the State’s progress toward them.

• Urge the team to consider the origin of each goal (Race to the Top, State, SEA and the like) and whether broad support exists for attaining the goal.

• The team may want to keep every goal the State is formally committed to. Encourage it to prioritize a few, even including Federal commitments.
Exercise 2: Identify Two to Three Priority Reforms

A priority reform is a body of work that an SEA is undertaking in order to achieve one or more of the priority goals identified in Exercise 1 (implementing college- and career-ready standards and assessments, implementing new educator evaluation systems, or the integration of all three). This exercise serves two purposes: 1) It establishes which reforms State leaders will focus on to improve sustainability and 2) it helps State teams consider and reaffirm what those reforms entail.

Part A: Identify and Prioritize Reforms

Objective: Identify the priority reforms that will be most critical to sustain in order to reach the State’s priority goals.

Instructions:

• For a given goal identified in Table 1 (above), brainstorm the reforms underway that are central to the State attaining that goal. Record them on sticky notes or cards.

• For each of the reforms identified, place them on a 2 by 2 inch matrix like the one in Table 2 (below), based on where they best fit in relationship to other reforms.
  
  ∙ What is the potential impact of each reform on the goal? Measure the impact in terms of the number of additional students affected (such as the number of additional students proficient, graduating or on track, as a result of the reform).
  
  ∙ How difficult will it be to sustain that reform over time?

• If necessary, repeat the exercise with the remaining goals identified in Table 1 (above). Based on where the reforms fall on the matrix, select two or three reforms as your team’s top priorities.

Exercise #2A
Facilitator notes

Time: 60 minutes
Team: State facilitator and team
Notes:

• Gauge the group’s energy level. Then either have the group brainstorm reforms and post the cards yourself; or have each team member brainstorm reforms and post them on the wall, combine ideas with others, eliminate duplicates and discuss. The second option encourages equal participation by everyone.

• The group members will likely brainstorm “reforms” at different levels (for example, “Implement Common Core” as opposed to “Webinar series for regional leaders on the instructional shifts”). Urge the group to consider priority reforms according to the RSN definition: a body of work rather than individual actions. Participants might break down implementing Common Core into a few large pieces of work, such as professional development, instructional materials, and so on.

• You can likely put the reforms from each goal on one matrix (Table 2) as there may be some overlap. Using different colored cards for each goal can help. However, if the cards get crowded, consider creating a matrix for each goal.

• Encourage participants to create a spread when placing the reforms on the matrix. If all reforms are deemed high impact and difficult to sustain, urge the team to think about which reforms have a higher or lower impact than others.

• When choosing priority reforms, consider the matrix as a discussion guide, but there are no hard rules about which reforms to prioritize (for example, they do not all have to come from one quadrant).

• Be sure that your State’s chief has weighed in on the results of these first two exercises before moving on.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Difficulty to Sustain Over Time</th>
<th>Potential Impact on Student Achievement Goals (Number of additional students)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Identifying Priority Reforms
Part B: Describe Priority Reforms

Objective: Arrive at a shared understanding of what each priority reform means and what it entails for the State.

Instructions to reflect on priority reforms identified:

- Refer to your State's list of reforms in Table 2 and the chosen two to three reforms that are most critical to attaining the State's student achievement goals.
- For each reform, complete Table 3, reflecting on the reform's current impact and the major barriers to sustaining that reform over the next several years.
- Reflect on the descriptions of each priority reform, and select one reform for a complete self-assessment using the Sustainability Rubric.

Table 3. Reflecting on Priority Reforms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority Reform</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Describe the reform: What is it, and how will it help you to achieve one or more of your goals (listed in Table 1)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What has been the reform's impact on the priority goal(s) thus far? How do you know?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If this reform were wildly successful, what would be different five years from now? Describe results in terms of the reform itself rather than the priority goal (which you have already identified above).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What has been the response to the reform from external stakeholders? How do you know?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What major activities is the State using to implement this reform? In your own words, how sustainable is this approach in its current form, and why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the major challenges to sustaining the reform?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exercise #2B

Facilitator notes

Time: 2 hours
Team: State facilitator and team
Notes:

- The team may already have strong descriptions of your priority reforms. If so, be sure to have the team look at these descriptions and affirm or refine them.
- You might split the team into groups for each priority reform and do the exercise on their own, then share and compare across groups.
- This template includes critical questions that might already have been answered in the two-by-two activity.
- Use the questions from this template to facilitate a discussion among State team members to capture their thinking on their selected reform.
- Use these questions to test any assumptions made in the two by two and prepare for your close read of the Sustainability Rubric.
- Table 3 may be useful to include in a check-in with your State's chief.
- While RSN is asking your State to choose just one priority reform for completing the self-assessment, remind the group that it is free to undertake the same process (or a variation on it) for all of its other priority reforms if it so chooses.
Exercise 3: Assess the Sustainability of Priority Reforms

The previous two exercises intended to ensure that States zero in on their two to three priority reforms, selecting one for use with the Sustainability Rubric. This exercise will ask you to use the rubric to assess the current sustainability of your selected reform.

Objective: Use the Sustainability Rubric to reflect on the sustainability of priority reforms.

Instructions:

• Read the introduction to the Sustainability Rubric, and briefly discuss your reactions to its definitions and terms.

• With your selected priority reform in mind, review the first row of the rubric, including the guiding questions, the descriptors from left to right, and the look-fors. Consider which descriptors (inadequate, emerging, strong or exemplary) best describes the current situation in your State.

• Indicate your vote to the rest of the group, perhaps using dot stickers on a flipchart with Table 4 below or a digital voting version of the same.

• Discuss your votes and the evidence for them; record comments in the Rationale/ Evidence section of Table 4.

• Reach consensus on the State’s current rating (inadequate, emerging, strong or exemplary) and record that in the rubric rating section in Table 4.

• Repeat this process with the remaining rows in the Capacity section, then the Performance Management section, and finally the Context section.

• When you have completed the full rubric, reflect on the complete picture and consider whether your ratings still make sense when compared with one another. Make changes as necessary. If you have not already done so, indicate your level of interest in receiving expert support on each element.

Optional Extension for Exercise 3: To assess the sustainability of additional priority reforms.

Some States will want to conduct the self-assessment on more than one priority reform. To that end, we have suggested a number of variations to consider:

• Complete the full assessment (see instructions for Exercise 3).

• Use the two-page version of the Sustainability Rubric to assess each element:
  - Refer to the two-page version of the sustainability rubric.
  - Again, ask the team to reflect on the first element of the rubric. This time, consider whether this priority reform is stronger, weaker or about the same as the first priority reform. Reach consensus as a team and record your responses on Table 4.
  - Throughout the discussion, continue to record the main points and evidence in the Rationale Evidence column of Table 4.
  - Repeat for the remaining elements of the rubric.

• Use the two-page version of the rubric to quickly rate the priority reform on each element, and discuss ratings and evidence at the end, only in areas of disagreement.

• Use the two-page version of the rubric for each team member to identify the three to five biggest elements of strength and weaknesses, discuss ratings and evidence, and reach consensus.

• Use the two-page version of the rubric to identify three to five elements of interest or concern, and do the full assessment (using the regular rubric) on them only.
Exercise #3
Facilitator notes

Time: 4-6 hours
Team: State facilitator and team
Notes:
• Have people complete this exercise as a team.
• Tell the team that this exercise takes a significant amount of time. Consider asking team members to read the rubric and prepare their votes and rationales in advance.
• Use comparisons to guide your discussions of the team’s votes, such as the following examples:
  - Ask the highest voters why they voted the way they did; then ask the lowest voters to provide a counterpoint (or vice versa).
  - For a group that is less forthcoming, start with the voters who chose the category that got the most votes.
  - Urge the group to justify their votes through comparison. Ask someone who gave a “strong” rating: “What is keeping it from being exemplary?” Or ask a person who gave an “emerging” rating: “What keeps it from being inadequate?”
  - Periodically compare votes across rows of the rubric using the record compiled in Table 4. You might say, “This is the highest rating you have given yet. Are you really stronger in this area than in any other thus far?” Or suggest, “You are considering a strong rating — yet the evidence is similar for Row X and you only gave that an emerging rating. Which is it?”
• Urge the team to be honest and transparent about its ratings. This exercise is only useful if people are willing to celebrate areas of success and acknowledge areas where they fall short. Encourage a spread of ratings from inadequate to exemplary. If this does not happen, ask why.
• Your RSN facilitator can help you plan, observe or co-lead this initial discussion and troubleshoot any challenges in selecting ratings.
• Work through the entire Sustainability Rubric for at least one of the priority reforms. The State team may discover elements and questions that it had not previously considered.
• For each element, take careful notes as to why the team considered that rating. This information is critical to creating purposeful sessions at the convening.
### Table 4. Applying the Rubric to the Priority Reforms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority Reform:</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Rubric Rating</th>
<th>Rationale/Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. System Capacity</td>
<td>A. SEA Capacity</td>
<td>i. Align human capital decisions with priority goals and reforms</td>
<td>[e.g. Exemplary]</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>ii. Build a culture of continuous improvement toward priority goals</td>
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<td>iii. Align organizational structure with priority goals and reforms</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. State Capacity</td>
<td>i. Extend capacity through partnerships</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ii. Extend capacity in the field</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Performance Management</td>
<td>A. Clarity of Outcomes and Theory of Action</td>
<td>i. Set student outcome targets to achieve priority goals</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ii. Establish a theory of action and strategies for implementing priority reforms</td>
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<td></td>
<td>iii. Develop plan(s) that aligns strategies with priority goals</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. Alignment of Resources</td>
<td>i. Direct resources to priority reforms</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ii. Establish clear leadership of priority goals and reforms</td>
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<td></td>
<td>C. Collection and Use of Data</td>
<td>i. Ensure quality data on performance</td>
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<td>ii. Ensure quality data on implementation</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>iii. Use data to review progress and make mid-course corrections</td>
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<td></td>
<td>D. Accountability for Results</td>
<td>i. Link internal accountability to results</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ii. Link external accountability to results</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>iii. Engage stakeholders about results</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Context for Sustaining Reform</td>
<td>A. Alignment of the Statewide System</td>
<td>i. Align the policy agenda with priority reforms</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ii. Build a coalition to drive priority reforms</td>
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<td></td>
<td>B. Public Value</td>
<td>i. Build stakeholder support for priority goals and reforms</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ii. Build broad public support for priority goals and reforms</td>
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**Exercise 4: Identify Areas of Strength**

The purpose of this exercise is to review your ratings from Exercise 3 to identify areas of strength in your State's sustainability efforts. For each element in the rubric, a rating of exemplary constitutes an area of strength; some elements rated strong may also fall into this category. States also may choose to identify areas of strength at the variable level. This exercise will also help the RSN identify opportunities to spotlight State efforts to sustain reforms.

**Objective:** Note areas of sustainability where the State's efforts are already strong.

**Instructions:**

- Review your results from Exercise 3 and consider:
  - Where are the Strong and Exemplary ratings for the priority reforms that you considered?
  - Are there any variables that have particular concentrations of Strong and Exemplary ratings?
  - Are there any reforms that have many Strong and Exemplary ratings across the board?

- Identify areas of strength — either elements or variables within one reform, elements or variables across several reforms, or reforms themselves — and record them on the chart below.

- For each area of strength that you identified, consider:
  - What evidence demonstrates that this area of strength is having a positive impact? Which priority reforms or goals is it affecting?
  - Why is this area strong? What have SEA leaders or others done to cause this to be a strength?
  - Are there lessons learned that could be applied to other reforms or other elements of sustainability?

**Table 5. Identify Areas of Strength**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Strength (element, variable or reform)</th>
<th>Evidence of Impact</th>
<th>Why is this Area Strong?</th>
<th>Lessons Learned</th>
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Exercise 5: Identify Areas of Focus for the Work Group

A central purpose of the November convening is to help States strengthen the sustainability of their priority reforms. In this final exercise, States will use the results from Exercises 3 and 4 to identify focus areas of sustainability for the convening.

This exercise will inform a few things: 1) the sustainability plan that States develop or refine as part of their work in this work group and 2) the resources and expertise that the RSN cultivates in order to support this work.

Objective: Note which areas of sustainability to prioritize so that the Sustainability Work Group can home in on those areas, starting with the November convening.

Instructions:
• Look across the ratings in the previous exercises and reflect on the positive, constructive evidence for each.
• Within each priority reform (or across reforms), which are the sustainability areas you will need to focus on, either because they are strengths to build on or weaknesses to address? Complete the brief template below, which will be shared with other States.
• While your thinking is fresh, consider what additional questions you have or topics of interest you wish to address at the November convening.

Table 6. Focus Areas for Sustainability — Elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority Reform</th>
<th>Area of Focus (elements)</th>
<th>Why have You Chosen this Element?</th>
<th>Questions for Experts or Suggestions for Topics for the Convening?</th>
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