



## *Planning Together to Improve Outcomes for All Students*

**U.S. Department of Education**  
Office of Elementary & Secondary Education (OESE)  
Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS)  
Implementation and Support Unit (ISU)



# **Your Theory of Action: A Foundation for Sustainable Reform**

Jamila Smith, U.S. Department of Education  
Nick Rodriguez, Reform Support Network

U.S. Department of Education  
Office of the Deputy Secretary,  
Implementation and Support Unit



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# Session Presenters



Jamila Smith  
U.S. Department of Education



Nick Rodriguez  
Reform Support Network

# Session Objectives



- **Identify opportunities to sustain priority reforms to improve student outcomes** through building the agency's capacity to sustain collaborative systems and policies, that drive student achievement
- **Understand the purpose and approach for designing a theory of action** for how collaboration across federal programs can impact student achievement
- **Develop a theory of action** for each federal program area and establish connections to inform a joint theory of action across federal program areas

# Serving the same students, and striving for like goals



|                  | Purpose  | Collaboration   |
|------------------|--|---|
| <b>Title I</b>   | To improve the opportunity for all children to meet challenging academic standards, particularly the lowest achieving students   | In general:<br>All are serving EL's, students with disabilities, and the lowest achieving students by –   |
| <b>Title III</b> | To improve the education of English learner (EL) students in achieving English language proficiency and meeting challenging State academic content and achievement standards | Ensuring all students have access to instruction aligned to college- and career-ready standards<br><br>Supporting Districts, and Schools to raise student achievement outcomes and close achievement gaps |
| <b>IDEA</b>      | To improve the results of infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities ages birth through 21   | Evaluating and providing direct supports to all teachers and principals to more accurately support improvements to teaching and learning  |

# What is Sustainability?



What words come to mind when  
you hear the term:

**Sustainability**



# There are a number of factors to consider in planning for sustainability

A *sustainable reform* is a priority reform that is durable, adaptive, and persistently focused on goals for improved student growth in the face of changing conditions.

## System Capacity

SEA Capacity

State Capacity

## Performance Management

Clarity of Outcomes & Theory of Action

Alignment of Resources

Collection and Use of Data

Accountability for Results

## Context

Alignment of the Statewide System

Public Value

# Together, the elements are our theory of action for what makes a reform sustainable



| Elements of sustainability rubric: System Capacity        |   | Category |
|---|---|----------|
| SEA Capacity  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Align human capital decisions to support reform goals</li> <li>Build a culture of continuous improvement toward reform goals</li> <li>Align organizational structure to reform goals</li> </ul>                        |          |
| State Capacity  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extend capacity through partnerships</li> <li>Extend capacity in the field</li> </ul>  |          |
| Elements of Sustainability: Performance Management        |   |          |
| Clarity of Outcomes and Theory of Action                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Set student outcome targets to achieve priority goals</li> <li>Establish a theory of action and strategies for implementing priority reforms</li> <li>Develop plans that align strategies to priority goals</li> </ul> |          |
| Alignment of Resources                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Direct resources to priority reforms</li> <li>Establish clear leadership of priority reforms</li> </ul>  |          |
| Collection and Use of Data                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure quality data on performance</li> <li>Ensure quality data on implementation</li> <li>Use data to review progress and make decisions</li> </ul>   | Variable |
| Accountability for Results                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Link internal accountability to results</li> <li>Link external accountability to results</li> <li>Engage stakeholders about results</li> </ul>   |          |
| Elements of Sustainability: Context for Sustaining Reform |   |          |
| Alignment of the Statewide System                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Align the policy agenda to support priority reforms</li> <li>Build a coalition to drive priority reforms</li> </ul>  |          |
| Public Value  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build stakeholder support for priority reforms</li> <li>Build broad public support for priority reforms</li> </ul>   | Element  |



What is one word you think of when  
you hear the term:

**Theory of Action**



# A comprehensive definition of theory of action

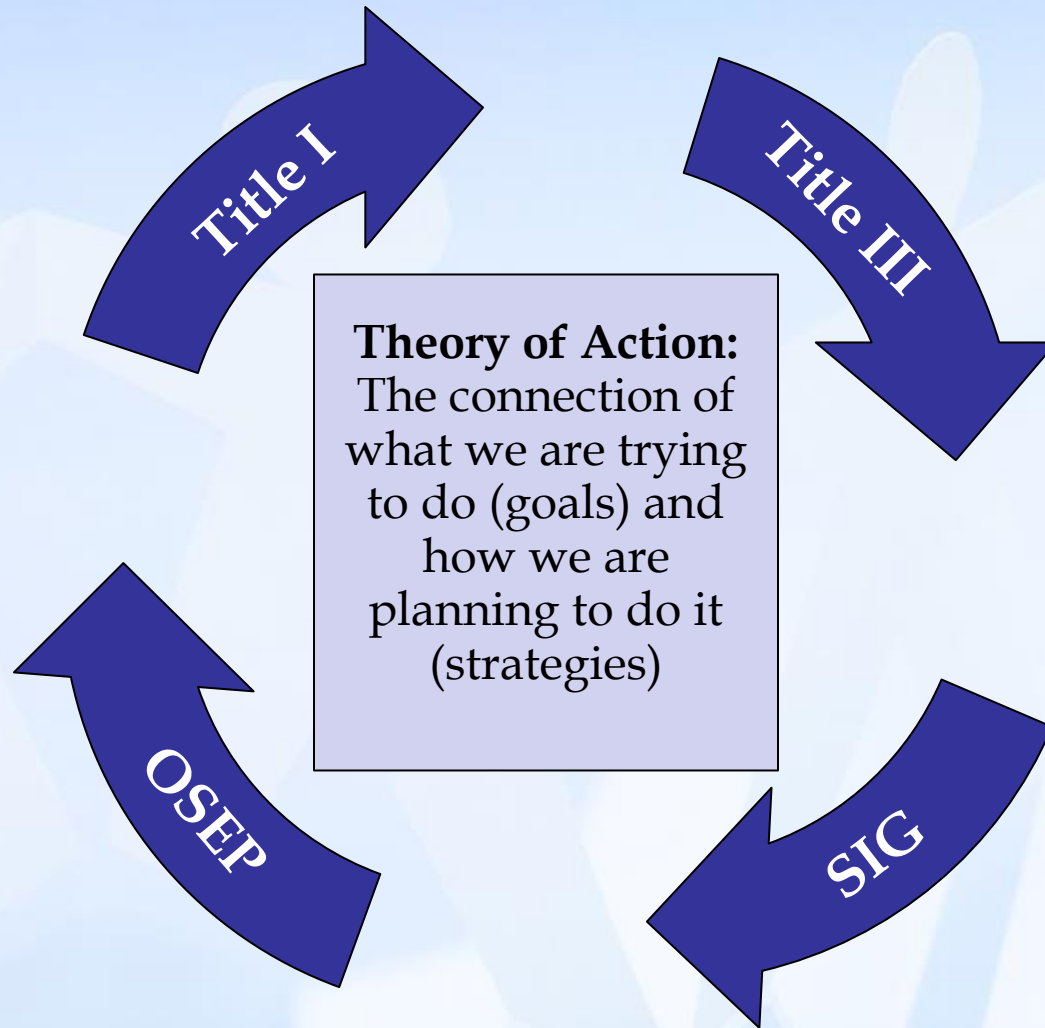


- *A theory of action* is a **short statement** that describes our **approach to the work** and **how that work connects to our intended outcomes**.

In short, it answers the questions:

- What are the collective goals we're working to accomplish?
- What are the strategies we're employing to get there?

# The theory of action sets the stage for effective implementation



# There are several potential structures for theories of action



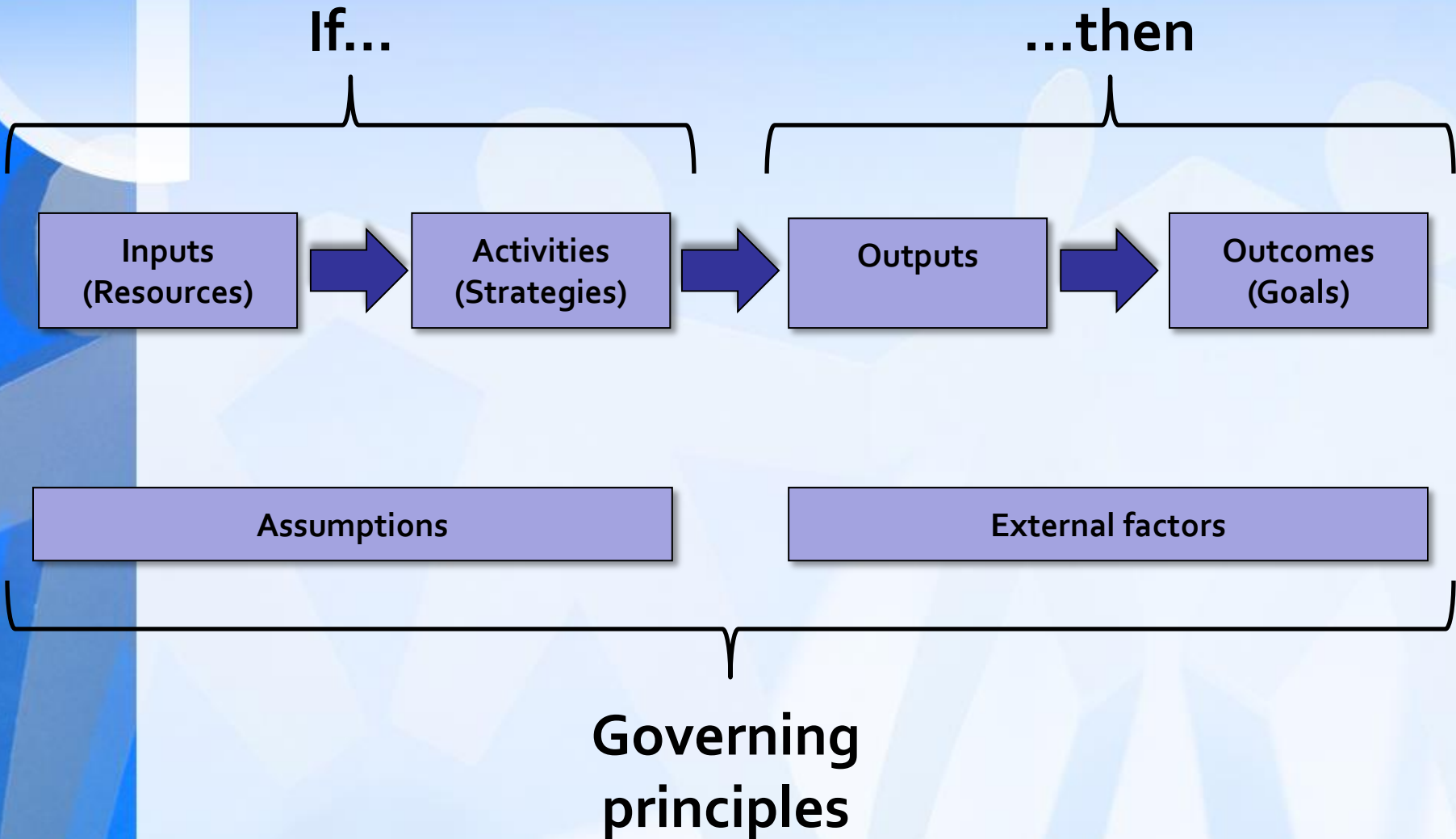
## If-then statements

- Many “if’s” leading to one “then”
- Chain of “if-then’s”

## Governing principles

- Content: What we will (and will not) do
- Process: How we will (and will not) work

# Logic models combine most of these structures



# Example: District Theory of Action



- **IF** the LEA has professional learning communities, **THEN** we will have a scheduled time for teachers to discuss their work and the work students produce.
- And **IF** teachers share their work and the results with each other, **THEN** they will be able to learn from each other's successes and draw upon the expertise of their colleagues around common challenges.
- And **IF** teachers draw upon the expertise and successes of their colleagues around common challenges, **THEN** teachers will be able to incorporate new and successful strategies into their practice with support from their colleagues.
- And **IF** teachers incorporate successful strategies into their practice, **THEN** students will benefit from more effective teaching.
- **THEN** student learning will increase.

Source: Rasmussen, H. T.. What's a Theory of Action and Why Do We Need One?,  
<http://www.abeoschoolchange.org/blog/whats-a-theory-of-action-and-why-do-we-need-one/>.

# Example: District Theory of Action Logic Model

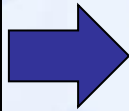


**If...**

**...then**

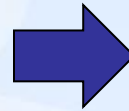
## Inputs (Resources):

- Time in the school day for collaborative learning
- Knowledge of PLC best practices
- Teacher access to reliable student data



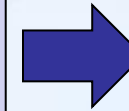
## Activities (Strategies):

- Teachers use data to share student work and best practices during PLCs



## Outputs:

- Teachers share student work
- Teachers share successes and challenges
- Teachers incorporate new strategies into their practice
- Teacher effectiveness will increase



**Outcomes:** Student learning will increase

## Governing principles

### Assumptions:

- Job-embedded and peer coaching will improve practice
- Principals believe in and will support use of time in this way
- Policies and practices allow for PLCs

### External factors:

- Restriction on amount of time available for planning and teacher prep time
- A few examples of success in other districts but it is new to many
- Available state resources end in 2015; model must be sustained by other funding sources

# Role-alike Exercise: Articulate theories of action within programs



## What

Develop a theory of action for your federal program.

Individually, record on post-its:

- Inputs
- Activities
- Outputs
- Assumptions

As a group, discuss the similarities and differences across responses.

## How

- Affiliate by federal program

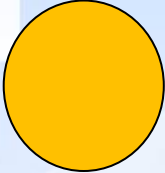
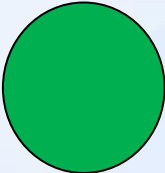
## Time

- 25

| Inputs           | Activities | Outputs | Outcomes                 | Assumptions |
|------------------|------------|---------|--------------------------|-------------|
|                  |            |         | Improve student outcomes |             |
| Theory of Action |            |         |                          |             |

# Exercise: Gallery Walk



| What   | How   | Time   |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Gallery walk:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li> Place a orange dot for areas of <b>similarity to our program's theory of action.</b></li><li> Place a green dot for areas of <b>potential partnership and collaboration.</b></li></ul></li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Visit the three other program areas</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 10</li></ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Debrief<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- What's common across the theories of action?</li><li>- Where are the major opportunities for partnership?</li></ul></li></ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Plenary</li></ul>                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 5</li></ul>  |

# Exercise: Opportunities for Collaboration



## What

## How

## Time

- 
- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reflection:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- What successes have you had in collaborating across federal programs in your State?</li><li>- What is one next step you are going to take when you return home to collaborate with colleagues to establish joint approaches to the work?</li></ul></li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pair and share</li><li>• Record on your hand-out</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 5</li></ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Table discussion, share a:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Success/strategy</li><li>- Next step to overcome a challenge</li></ul></li></ul>  |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 10</li></ul> |

# Next steps – Breakout Session 1



| Next steps to establish collaboration  |   |
|--|---|
| Collaborate across offices including analytics accountability content and standards federal program and finance                    | Establish common goals                                      |
| Develop new collaborative team   | Weekly happy hours with all divisions                       |
| Combine this work with Leading by Convening  | Multi-program discussions about low-performing districts    |
| Continue pushing towards SEA being about customer service  | Educate my staff on the process                             |
| Sit down with SPED director for meaningful discussion on SWP and early intervening 15%   | Collaborative sharing for common understanding and language |
| Collaborate school improvement and Title programs within 1 month and discuss data in terms of overlap and underlapping of programs | Communicate   |
| Share information work with leadership   | Expand theory of action model                               |
| Start talking with programs working with the same districts/schools  | Share all this with the rest of the bureau                  |
| Methodical approach to collaboration   | Learn about structures in place                             |
| Get other areas to do work with sense of urgency   | Include other programs in collaboration                     |
| Infiltrate   | Broaden circle of collaboration                             |
| Agency-wide theory of action   | Better cross communication between programs                 |

# Next steps – Breakout Session 2



| Next steps to establish collaboration   |  |
|---|--|
| Walk the science of implementation walk   | Require staff to wear t-shirts printed with theory of action |
| Initial informal conversation over lunch with IDEA, Title 1, Title III, and Priority Schools Bureau Directors | Share best practices   |
| Infiltrate  | Build relationships  |
| Teamwork  | Meet regularly and discuss real work                         |
| Share knowledge   |  |
| Meet with Title I and III to analyze data cross over  |  |
| Identify how inputs and activities across programs work towards similar outputs and outcomes                  |  |
| Schedule time for collaboration   |  |
| Schedule strategy meeting   |  |
| Schedule collaborative data meetings  |  |
| Meetings with cross-agency leaders at the state level to better coordinate efforts                            |  |
| Start a multi-program cross-functional team   |  |



- Statewide Systems of Support (SSOS)
- State Systemic Improvement Plans (SSIP)
- SEA capacity to support LEAs
- Leveraging resources

System Capacity

Performance  
Management

Context



- Considering the theory of action successes and challenges in collaborating across programs, identify one State initiative you could work to leverage Federal programs to sustain across your State.
- What is one next step toward accomplishing that goal?

# Thank you!



## **U.S. Department of Education:**

Jamila Smith: [Jamila.Smith@ed.gov](mailto:Jamila.Smith@ed.gov)

Danielle Smith: [Danielle.Smith2@ed.gov](mailto:Danielle.Smith2@ed.gov)

## **Reform Support Network:**

Nick Rodriguez: [NRodriguez@deliveryinstitute.org](mailto:NRodriguez@deliveryinstitute.org)

Corey Sullivan: [csullivan@deliveryinstitute.org](mailto:csullivan@deliveryinstitute.org)

## **Additional Sustainability Tools and Resources:**

<https://rtt.grads360.org/#communities/sea-capacity-building>