



NATIONAL
RURAL HEALTH
RESOURCE CENTER

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Flex Program Evaluation Toolkit



Overview of Toolkit

The purpose of this evaluation toolkit is to provide information, tools, and resources to effectively collect data and assess the activities performed for the Medicare Rural Hospital Flexibility (Flex) program.

Overview of Toolkit (cont.)

The toolkit is made up of two units broken into six sections:

Unit 1 provides an overview of the pre work and planning that must precede a comprehensive evaluation.

Section 1: Evaluation Background and Basics

Section 2: Program Planning, Building the Work Plan

Section 3: Measurement

Overview of Toolkit (cont.)

Unit 2 focuses on evaluation design, assessing and collecting data that can be disseminated and acted upon to enhance the program.

Section 1: Designing an Evaluation

Section 2: Assessment and Data Collection
Methods

Section 3: Interpreting and Reporting Evaluation
Data and Using the Information

Background

The Medicare Rural Hospital Flexibility Program (referred to as the Flex program) is an ideal mechanism for supporting improvements in the quality of health care provided in communities served by critical access hospitals (CAHs), supporting efforts to improve the financial and operational performance of the CAHs, and supporting communities in developing collaborative regional and local delivery systems.

(retrieved from Flex Guidance FY 12)

Flex Program Requirements

Currently applicants are required to prepare a work plan to engage in four required (core) areas of the Flex program.

1. Support for Quality Improvement
2. Support for Operational and Financial Improvement
3. Support for Health System Development and Community Engagement
4. Conversion to CAH status

Where the Flex Program is Headed

- The current direction of the Flex program involves moving all of the state-level Flex programs to a minimum standard of reporting on **outcomes**.
- The concept of **measurement** is a key factor of the grant work plans.
- The federal Office of Rural Health Policy (ORHP) is developing a framework for national **measures** to demonstrate the impact of the Flex program funding.

Why Evaluate?



Evaluation of state Flex programs, as well as the national program, is critical to both the success and sustainability of the program. It is critical to assess impact of the activities to demonstrate value.

- Evaluation measures need to be appropriate and quantifiable in order to demonstrate progress towards overall program **goals**.
- Evaluation findings will also be utilized to identify areas of strength and determine program improvements needed. Findings will be used to replicate best practices.

Flex Programs are Required to Evaluate

- Flex programs are required to evaluate project results
 - A portion of the grant proposal review criteria points are related to evaluation and impact assessment
- Evaluative measures must assess both:
 - To what extent the program objectives have been met (Quantitative)
 - To what extent these can be associated to the project (Qualitative)

ORHP NCC with Measurement Outline
[NCC/Interventions document](#)

What Happens If You Don't Evaluate?



If you don't evaluate, hunches will always be hunches.

- The state Flex program won't have measures to inform progress toward outcomes, and it won't dedicate time to review those measures and what they mean.
- The state Flex program will only be able to guess at what activities produced outcomes.
- There will be no opportunity to learn or gain insight from feedback.
- State Flex programs will miss important early warning signs of possible failure.
- The state Flex program will miss the chance to tell its story and prove that the program actually had an impact.

How to Use this Toolkit

Each unit includes a glossary of terms used in the unit. A full **glossary of terms** is included in **Appendix B**. Each section contains information, tools, and resources. Full lists of all tools and resources are included as **Appendix C**.

An overall [Legend](#) is provided to aid in navigation through the toolkit.

How to Use this Toolkit

- The toolkit is not meant to be read and used in one sitting, but more as a guide and resource throughout the process of evaluating a state Flex program.
- A [Legend](#) explaining how to drill down for more information at different points in the toolkit is provided.
- Use the arrow keys to move back and forth in the toolkit.
- Every page has a link that will take you to the table of contents or the glossary of terms.

Legend

- **Green** text refers to a term that is included in the glossary of terms. These terms are defined in two areas: 1) at the beginning of each unit and 2) as an appendix. Click “Glossary of Terms” at the bottom of each page to access the full glossary in the appendix.
- **Blue** text refers to hyperlinked information, e.g., websites or sections within the toolkit.



Content circled with a orange box and light bulb indicate an important message.

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Executive Summary

Unit 1

- [Section 1: Evaluation Background and Basics](#)
- [Section 2: Program Planning, Building the Work Plan](#)
- Section 3: Measurement

Unit 2

- Section 1: Designing an Evaluation
- Section 2: Assessment and Data Collection Methods
- Section 3: Interpreting and Reporting Evaluation Data and Using the Information

Appendices

- A: Program Planning Models
 - Logic Models
 - [Balanced Scorecard](#)
 - [Star Model](#)
- B: Full Glossary
- C: Complete list of Tools and Resources



Flex Evaluation Toolkit

Unit 1

Background, evaluation goals,
expectations, program planning

Terms (cont.)

Benchmarking

Providing a standard against which something can be measured or assessed by determining the progress toward a goal in intervals as measured to the desired end result.

Core Area **FLEX-SPECIFIC DEFINITION**

Categories created within the Flex grant guidance to organize grant activities.

There are four core areas of the Flex program: support for quality improvement, support for operational and financial improvement, support for health system development and community engagement, facilitate the conversion of small rural hospitals to critical access hospital (CAH) status.

Data

Information, often in the form of facts or figures obtained from quality improvement reports or financial information from cost reports or surveys, used as a basis for making calculations or drawing conclusions. Data can be categorized as **qualitative data** or **quantitative data**.



Learning Outcomes

- Understand the direction of the Flex program and its need to evaluate and report meaningful program outcomes at both the state and federal program level.
- Learn the benefits of evaluation, and what happens if you do not evaluate.

Example Outcome Measures: Quality Improvement

Flex programs are *required to support efforts to improve and sustain the quality of care provided by CAHs*

Activity	Measure	Outcome
Support development and implementation of evidence-based protocols for common diagnosis	# of CAHs using evidence-based protocols Improvement in hospital care measures	Increased CAH utilization of evidence-based protocols Improved hospital quality of care and patient safety
Support activities to reduce unnecessary hospital readmissions	# of CAHs using re-admission guides and protocols Reduction in preventable hospital re-admission rates	Reduction in CAH unnecessary re-admissions

Source: Gale (2012)

Program Goals

HRSA Flex Program Core Area 1: Support for Quality Improvement in CAHs
Indiana Flex Program Goal 1
Develop a statewide data reporting and sharing system via a secure portal for data exchange.
Support CAHs in building upon a multi-hospital quality improvement project involving hospital readmissions targeting chronic diseases to increase patient safety and quality of care.
Increase access to care for specialty and subspecialty services through telehealth services.
HRSA Flex Program Core Area 2: Support for Operational and Financial Improvement in CAHs
Indiana Flex Program Goal 2
Support CAHs with planning and implementing evidence-based strategies for improving financial performance
HRSA Flex Program Core Area 3: Support for Health System Development and Community Engagement, including integrating EMS in regional and local systems of care
Indiana Program Goal 3
Develop and expand the use of electronic tools and e-Learning to enhance communication, training and education, and interaction among CAHs in Indiana to increase access to health care services by residents in Indiana.
HRSA Flex Program Core Area 4: Designation of CAHs in the State
Indiana Flex Program Goal 4
Facilitate conversion of small rural hospitals to CAH status in accordance with federal and state regulations as needs arise among Indiana rural hospital providers.

Source: Indiana Flex Evaluation (2011). Accessed at:


http://www.indianaruralhealth.org/clientuploads/FLEX%20Program/2011_November_Flex_Annual_Eval_Bowen_Center.pdf

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[Glossary of Terms](#)

Program Output/Process Measures

Data Collection Method: Flex Score, SORH Director, Indiana Flex Program Coordinator	
Indicator Measure	Status
Completion of a secure portal/data repository within the ISDH Network	In Development
Clinical, operational and financial measures reported to Flex Coordinator via Scorecard by CAHs	None at this time – In Development
Number of CAHs using portal	None at this time – In Development
Total number and percent of CAHs reporting quality/clinical data to the portal by specific measures	None at this time – In Development
Amount and type of assistance provided to CAHs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of statewide Flex related meetings provided Total number attending statewide meetings (Rural Partners RT/IFPAC) 	Ongoing <p>Six statewide meetings were conducted by the Flex Coordinator from September 2010 to August 2011, including roundtables (2), National Rural Health Association Meeting (1), and Indiana Flex Advisory Council meetings (3).</p>



Process Measure



Output

Source: Indiana Flex Evaluation (2011). Accessed at:

http://www.indianaruralhealth.org/clientuploads/FLEX%20Program/2011_November_Flex_Annual_Eval_Bowen_Center.pdf

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Program Outcome Measures

Objective: Support CAHs in implementing a quality/patient safety project focused on reducing avoidable readmissions through improvements in discharge processes

Activity: Develop CAH Quality Project partnering with QIO focusing on reducing unnecessary hospital readmission in identified diagnosis of **congestive heart failure (CHF)** and **pneumonia (PN)**, which includes implementation of evidence-based protocols for common diagnoses identified.

Data Collection Methods: Flex Scorecard

Indicator/Measure	Status
Number of CHF/PN readmissions (prior to intervention)	Completed: Benchmark reported in April = 9 CHF/PN readmissions
Average number of CHF/PN readmissions (avg monthly rate following implementation intervention)	Ongoing: Avg monthly rate for April-July = 11
Average monthly rate of CHF/PN readmissions prior to intervention compared to rate following intervention (utilization reduction)	Ongoing: Avg utilization reduction for April-July = -2

Outcome Measure

Outcome

Source: Indiana Flex Evaluation (2011). Accessed at:

http://www.indianaruralhealth.org/clientuploads/FLEX%20Program/2011_November_Flex_Annual_Eval_Bowen_Center.pdf

Choosing Goals and Objectives Consistent with Program Needs

Part of an effective work plan and the foundation of a comprehensive evaluation is choosing goals and objectives that are consistent with program needs.

CDC Action Guide for Assessing Community Needs
[Guide to Community Needs Assessment](#)

ORHP has provided specific goals and objectives with measures in order to gain uniformity, consistency, and an accurate national picture of the Flex program.

ORHP NCC with Measurement Outline
[NCC/Interventions document](#)

Additional Resources

- A guide for developing Flex specific logic models to guide evaluations
 - [Using Logic Models for State Flex Programs](#) (John Gale presentation)
- Checklist for Writing SMART Objectives
 - [CDC Guide](#)
- A guide for writing outcome objectives
 - [Writing Outcomes](#) (tool)

Assessment Methods

1. Focus group
2. Interview
3. Case study
4. Questionnaire/Surveys/Checklist
5. Document review
6. Observation
7. Pre-test/Post-test
8. Recommendation Adoption Process (RAP) report

Method 3: Case Studies

Overall Purpose	Advantages	Challenges
To fully understand or depict client's experiences in a program, and conduct comprehensive examination through cross comparison of cases	Fully depicts participant's experience in program input, process, and results Powerful means to portray program to outsiders	Usually quite time consuming to collect, organize, and describe Represents depth of information regarding specific aspects of the program from stakeholder perspectives

Case Study Helpful Hints

- It is better to complete fewer thorough case studies than several vague case studies.
- Allow time for follow-up and revisiting issues that may arise through the entire case study process.
- Do not limit your case study to one assessment or data collection method (e.g., utilize both interviews and document review) or one resource (e.g., hospital administrator only).
- Include both successes and failures in a case study because it is through lessons learned that program improvements can occur.

Example Case Study Reports

These three links provide case studies regarding Flex participating hospitals that detail financial and quality improvement activities that may prove useful for evaluation planning.

[Idaho Case Studies of CAHs](#)

[California Case Study](#)

[NORC/RHRC Case Studies](#)

Case Study Resources

This resource provides a step by step guide regarding how to complete a case study.

[Application of a Case Study Methodology](#)

This resource provides an in-depth description about case study research methodology.

[How to Do Case Study Research](#)

This resource provides a comprehensive overview of case study methods, including data analysis techniques and writing examples.

[Case Study Guide](#)

Tools and Resources

- Recommendation Adoption Process (RAP) report Template



Document

- Assessment as Learning tool



Document

- [Survey example for educational event](#)
- [Pre-/Post-test Example](#)

Data Analysis Resources

- University of Wisconsin-Extension has a comprehensive set of data analysis resources.

[UW-Extension Analysis Site](#)

- Computerworld published a great set of free resources available for analyzing data.

[22 Resources for Data Visualization and Analysis](#)

- The Office of Research Integrity developed a module on data management, including an entire section on data analysis.

[ORI Data Management and Analysis](#)

Data Analysis Resources (cont.)

Below are links to resources to assist with both quantitative and qualitative data analysis.

[NNLM Evaluation Data Analysis Workbook](#) (quantitative and qualitative)

[GAO Data Analysis](#) (quantitative)

[NSF Evaluation Handbook](#) (quantitative and qualitative)

[Research Methods Knowledge Base](#) (multiple methods)

[UW-Extension](#) (quantitative)

[UW-Extension](#) (qualitative)

[CDC](#) (quantitative)

[CDC](#) (qualitative)

Sample Flex Evaluation Reports

[Indiana](#)

[Minnesota](#)

Resources

[Flex Monitoring Team—Linking Community Benefit and Assessment](#)

[American Evaluation Association](#)

[CDC Program Evaluation Tools](#)

[U of Wisconsin-Extension Program Evaluation Toolkit](#) (including online training)

[W.K. Kellogg Foundation Evaluation Handbook](#)

[National Science Foundation User Friendly Evaluation Handbook](#)

[Bureau of Justice Assistance Center for Program Evaluation and Performance Measurement](#)



Logic Models



Balanced Scorecard

The STAR Model for Effective Technical Assistance

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[Glossary of Terms](#)



Appendix B

Glossary of Terms

Glossary of Terms

Activities

Actions developed to achieve objectives for goal attainment.

Alignment

An organization's people, processes ,and resources all moving in the same direction.

Analysis

A systematic approach to problem solving where a complete structure is reviewed. Complex problems are simplified by separating them into more understandable components. Purposes and facts are identified, defensible assumptions are stated, and conclusions are developed.

Assessment

The process of judging impressions/thoughts, progress, achievements, or skills.

Assessment Tool

A data collection instrument designed to collect information about impressions/thoughts, progress, achievements, or skills.



Appendix C

List of Tools and Resources