



# System Capacity for Adolescent Health: Public Health Improvement Tool

*A collaborative project of the Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs and the State Adolescent Health Coordinators Network with support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation*

## Preparing to Use the Tool

### Why Assess Adolescent Health Capacity?

From a public health perspective, assessment leads to action and action leads to quality improvement. Documenting capacity also allows for a historical record of where a program started to provide consistency for staff and partners and establish a baseline for measuring system improvement over time. And finally, assessing MCH program capacity in the context of other state level adolescent health efforts can also help define the role of the MCH program and the adolescent health coordinator as a vital piece of the network necessary to improve adolescent health.

The intended outcome of this tool is an assessment of a program's existing capacity and the organizational and environmental supports needed to improve that capacity. These discussions provide a picture of where an MCH program stands and where it wants to go and leads users through a process of considering which changes are a priority and feasible.

### What Are Your Intended Outcomes?

Before using this tool, think about what your expectations and the process of assessing adolescent health capacity.

No matter where you are starting from, this tool can help you to:

- ◆ Think about systems needed to address adolescent health.
- ◆ Document baseline efforts to track long-term progress and achievements.
- ◆ Identify best/promising strategies in certain adolescent health capacity areas to apply to other areas.
- ◆ Get input from others, internally or externally, to guide adolescent health efforts.
- ◆ Help define the role of the MCH program in addressing adolescent health at the state level.
- ◆ Identify new partners or needed resources.

Thinking about what you want to get out of this process will help determine your intended end product(s)

For example, if your MCH program is just starting to think about adolescent health, the result of this tool might be a report documenting baseline information about your systems and areas of needed improvement to develop your block grant budget. Or if your MCH program has a strong adolescent health program in place, the result of this tool might be identifying areas for improvement and developing an action plan to make those changes.

For those moving toward action planning, the Action Planning Guidance Section will provide additional resources and suggestions. To get you started, a sample worksheet on the next page will help you document your intended outcomes (which could also be a tool for providing consistent information to anyone you invite into the process).

# Sample Worksheet:

## Preparing to Use the System Capacity Tool

**Purpose:** What is your purpose for assessing system capacity for adolescent health?

**For example:**

- Define the role of MCH program in addressing adolescent health
- Action planning to improve existing program
- Identify new partners
- Document baseline capacity
- Guide budget

**Assessment Target:** Who/what is being assessed?

**For example:**

- An existing MCH adolescent health program
- MCH program
- Health department
- State level efforts within the public health agency
- State level efforts across multiple agencies

**Intended outcome/product(s):** What do you want to get out of this process? *Note that you may have more than one intended outcome of this process.*

**For example:**

- Fact sheet
- Policy recommendations
- Report on system capacity for the decision-makers or partners
- Internal planning document
- Action plan for quality improvement

**Baseline Information:** What kind of information do you need to gather in advance?

**For example:**

- Agency/program mission statements or strategic plans
- State specific negotiated measures or priority needs focusing on adolescent health
- Reports or documents MCH program has developed on adolescent health

## Who Will Participate in the Assessment Process?

Who you involve in the assessment process will depend on your purpose for conducting this assessment and your intended outcomes. When thinking about your reasons for using this tool, take into consideration these pros and cons to help you determine who you invite to participate.

Participants	Pros	Cons
All MCH/CSHCN Program Units	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Fosters sense of team- and program-building</li> <li>♦ More efficient overall than doing separately if all units are planning to participate at some point within the same timeframe</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ More difficult to schedule</li> <li>♦ Discussions may be more lengthy and contentious</li> </ul>
Selected Program Units	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Can be done more quickly/efficiently</li> <li>♦ Can go through process on a specific issue</li> <li>♦ Can be done regardless of rest of MCH/other program's ability to participate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ May miss out on leveraging complementary efforts that may be taking place concurrently in other program units</li> </ul>
Program Management Only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Keeps authorized decision-makers highly involved and informed.</li> <li>♦ Reduces complexity and streamlines discussions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ May have less effective implementation of action plan by staff</li> </ul>
Broad Staff Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Could enhance quality of discussions and assure a thorough capacity assessment</li> <li>♦ Could serve as an educational or staff development strategy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ More difficult to schedule</li> <li>♦ Discussions may be more lengthy and contentious</li> <li>♦ Staff may be reticent to express themselves freely in presence of supervisors</li> </ul>
Internal Program Personnel Only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Simpler process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Potential for only "party-line" perspectives</li> </ul>
Including External Partners* (i.e. partners from outside of your program)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Could help build support for and coordination with other adolescent health system activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ More difficult to schedule</li> <li>♦ Discussions may be more lengthy and contentious</li> </ul>

### \* When including external partners:

- *Be clear:* No matter what combinations of participants you invite into this process, be clear up front in invitations and other correspondence about your intentions and participants' roles. This will be especially important for external partners who may think about this process differently if you are engaging them to determine the MCH program role in adolescent health versus how they can partner with the MCH program.
- *Be prepared:* If you are inviting participants who are unfamiliar with your program or agency, be sure to provide orientation or background materials to bring them up to speed before beginning your assessment process.

## What is the Best "Process" for Using the Tool?

There are many ways to use this tool, from full-day meetings, to multiple meetings, to getting input via e-mail and mail. Based on the purpose of your assessment, and whom you want to participate, determine the best way of going about this assessment process. Below are pros and cons of some of the ways to conduct this assessment. Ultimately, your method should meet your needs and resources.

	Variations	Pros	Cons
Scope	<b>All Key Areas Simultaneously</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Best way to get the "big picture"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time consuming</li> <li>• Requires high level of staff and participant commitment</li> </ul>
	<b>Selected Subset(s) of Key Areas*</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More manageable organizational/management burden</li> <li>• May be a more efficient way of focusing on an essential service or functional area already deemed a priority</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May leave gaps in assessment</li> <li>• May be difficult to determine which essential services to focus on without prior planning</li> </ul>
Grouping	<b>One Assessment Team</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increases consistency of results</li> <li>• Increases facility with using tools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May increase the likelihood of "burnout"</li> </ul>
	<b>Small Workgroups</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allows for inclusion of a greater number of staff members and perspectives</li> <li>• Potentially greater "buy-in" to carry out action plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More advance preparation needed</li> <li>• Potentially more difficult to schedule meetings</li> </ul>
Method	<b>Focused One or Two Day Meeting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allows opportunity for participants to build on each others ideas and comments</li> <li>• Allows for coordinated, expedited assessment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Could reduce number of participants based on scheduling conflicts</li> <li>• Full-day meetings can be very labor intensive</li> </ul>
	<b>Individual Input via Mail or Email</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allows for inclusion of greater number of staff members and perspectives</li> <li>• Will not lead to scheduling conflicts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More advance preparation needed</li> <li>• More labor intensive follow-up and reminders</li> <li>• Key invited participants may pass off information to others to complete</li> <li>• Less opportunity for discussion</li> </ul>
	<b>Combination Meetings and Individual Follow-Up</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allows for identifying the best method for getting input and completing the assessment</li> <li>• Prevents burnout from full-day meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More advanced preparation needed</li> <li>• More labor intensive follow-up and reminders</li> </ul>

*\*If you elect to assess one or multiple key capacity areas, but not all capacity areas, consider the following assessment options:*

- Review all capacity areas before beginning your assessment to determine it is appropriate to assess selected areas, or all areas.
- Complete the Commitment to Adolescent Health capacity assessment as the first step in this process. Discussion in this capacity area is a strong foundation for all other areas.
- Complete the Planning & Evaluation and Surveillance & Data Systems sections together, as concepts and discussions in these areas are intertwined.

## How Long Will This Process Take?

The method for conducting this assessment will dictate how long the process might take. Consider these different sample scenarios using the examples given on the previous page. Keep in mind that timelines will depend in part on staff capacity, existing program resources, and other management and coordination considerations for your program.

	<b>Ideal for:</b>	<b>Sample Tasks &amp; Resources Involved</b>
<b>Email/Phone</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Getting feedback from one small group</li> <li>• Getting initial input into starting adolescent health initiatives</li> <li>• Getting input on a specific capacity area from a select group of people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One small group conducting assessment</li> <li>• Participants review assigned pieces in advance and forward comments by email or on a conference call</li> <li>• Facilitator summarizes, sends to group for review, then makes revisions</li> <li>• Resources involve only staff time to prepare for emails/call, summarize feedback and incorporate comments, conference line for group calls</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>1-6 Months</b></p>
<b>One Time Meeting or Series of Meetings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One small or large group completing entire assessment or select capacity areas</li> <li>• One core group plus select others from certain capacity areas</li> <li>• Multiple small groups completing individual capacity areas and reporting to a core group for a final comprehensive assessment</li> <li>• Inviting new partners into your discussion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Face to face meetings could be conducted in full one or two day assessments, or stretched out across days or weeks allowing for more time to complete each capacity area.</li> <li>• Participants receive orientation materials in advance, or are assigned to complete or read certain areas in advance of a face to face meeting.</li> <li>• Facilitator documents meeting discussions on tape, in written notes, on flipcharts, or with some combination.</li> <li>• Facilitator summarizes, sends to group for review, then makes revisions.</li> <li>• Resources involve staff time to prepare for emails/call, facilitate face to face meetings, summarize feedback and incorporate comments, and arrange follow up calls or meetings (or multiple meetings if conducted in a series).</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>6-12 Months</b></p>
<b>Routine or Long-Term Use</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessing one capacity area a year, a quarter, or with some other frequency until all areas assessed.</li> <li>• Revisiting a completed capacity assessment every year or two year to assess progress or revise priorities.</li> <li>• Assessing capacity every five years during block grant needs assessment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using one or a combination of methods, this assessment can be used over time to conduct routine assessments of adolescent health capacity.</li> <li>• Resources involve staff time to prepare for emails/call, facilitate face to face meetings, summarize feedback and incorporate comments, arrange follow up calls or meetings (or multiple meetings if conducted in a series), and carefully document the process so the history of the assessment is preserved over time.</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Routinely Over Time</b></p>