The Hexagon: An Exploration Tool

Hexagon Discussion & Analysis Tool Instructions

NIRN | NATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION RESEARCH NETWORK

© 2025 NIRN - University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

© 2025 NIRN – University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Modified from Metz, A. & Louison, L. (2019) The Hexagon Tool: Exploring Context. Chapel Hill, NC: National Implementation Research Network, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Based on Kiser, Zabel, Zachik, & Smith (2007) and Blase, Kiser & Van Dyke (2013).

Hexagon Discussion & Analysis Tool Instructions

The Hexagon Discussion and Analysis Tool helps organizations evaluate the fit and feasibility of implementing programs or practices in a given context. This tool is designed to be used by a team to facilitate discussion and ensure diverse perspectives are represented in a discussion of the six contextual fit and feasibility factors.

PROGRAM INDICATORS

Program indicators assess the extent to which new or existing programs or practices that will be implemented demonstrate evidence, supports for implementation, and usability across a range of contexts.

IMPLEMENTING SITE INDICATORS

Implementing site indicators assess the extent to which a new or existing program or practice matches the implementing site along the following domains: population need, fit, and capacity. The assessment specifies suggested conditions and requirements for a strong match to need, fit, and capacity for the identified program or practice.

PROGRAM AND IMPLEMENTATION SITE INDICATOR ALIGNMENT

Each program indicator has a complementary implementing site indicator assessing similar constructs. For example, consideration of a program's evidence must be done with regard to an implementing site's need. Only assessing one of this pair would limit accurate understanding of fit and feasibility. Program and implementing site indicators alternate in the discussion guide to ensure comprehensive assessment.

WHEN TO USE

The Hexagon Tool can be used at any stage in a program's implementation to determine its fit with the local context. It is most commonly used during the exploration stage, the period when a site is identifying possible new programs or practices to implement. Using the tool at a later stage can help diagnose implementation challenges related to contextual fit. If the organization has an implementation team, the team can carry out this function for the organization.

HOW TO USE

PRIOR TO USE

1. Develop a shared understanding of the broad need to be addressed, the focus population and the program(s) or practice(s) to be assessed.
2. Review the discussion questions prior to meeting to ensure any data or resources that need to be reviewed for this discussion are available. If appropriate, an organization may prioritize components for deeper exploration based on the context and potential programs or practices. Regardless of which components will be prioritized, begin by clearly identifying and considering the broad need to be addressed.
3. Identify a team to participate in the discussion. If the site has an implementation team, that team can complete the assessment as part of their work. If not, identify key stakeholders internal and external to the organization who have diverse perspectives on the need and possible programs or practices to address the identified need. Suggested team members include leaders, managers, direct practitioners, representatives from the focus population and community partners.

DURING USE

4. The team reviews and discusses the questions for each indicator and documents relevant considerations. Extra space is included in each section for notes and additional questions identified by the team to address unique needs and contexts.
5. After discussing each component, the team rates the component using the 5-point Likert scale in each section.
6. Using the discussion notes and ratings, the team makes recommendations about whether to adopt or replicate the program or practice. While ratings should be taken into account during the decision-making process, the ratings alone should not be used to determine final recommendations.

The Hexagon: An Exploration Tool

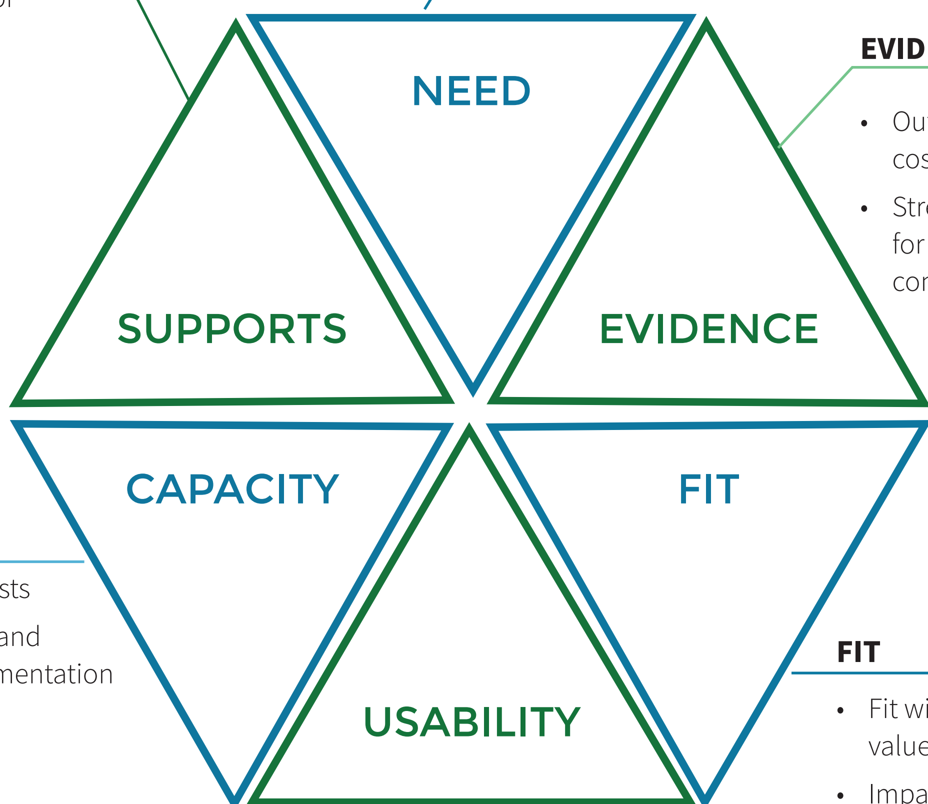
The Hexagon can be used as a planning tool to guide selection and assess the fit and feasibility of potential programs and practices for use. It includes three **program indicators** and three **implementating site** indicators.

NEED

- Identification of focus population and subpopulations
- Use of multiple data sources to understand needs and assets
- Community perception of needs and assets

SUPPORTS

- Expert assistance
- External resources for implementing sites



EVIDENCE

- Outcome, fidelity, and cost effectiveness data
- Strength of evidence: for whom and in what conditions

CAPACITY

- Implementation costs
- Resources needed and available for implementation

FIT

- Fit with community values, and history
- Impact on other initiatives
- Alignment with other priorities of the implementing site

USABILITY

- Well-defined program
- Adaptations for context and populations

The Hexagon: An Exploration Tool

Facilitator(s):

Today's Date:

Identified Need:

Individuals Participating in the Assessment:

Focus Population:

Subpopulation(s):

Identify the program or practice to be assessed. For each program or practice, write the numerical rating that best describes each indicator below.

	PROGRAM/ PRACTICE 1	PROGRAM/ PRACTICE 2	PROGRAM/ PRACTICE 3
NEED			
EVIDENCE			
FIT			
USABILITY			
CAPACITY			
SUPPORTS			

Implementing Site Indicator
NEED

1. Who is the identified focus population? Are there subpopulations? If so, please describe.
2. What is/are the identified needs of this population(s)? What are the root causes of these needs? What are the identified assets of these population(s)?
3. Was an analysis of data conducted to identify specific area(s) of need relevant to the program or practice? If yes, what data were analyzed?
4. How do members of the focus population perceive their need? What do they believe will be helpful? How were community members engaged to assess perception of need?
5. If the program or practice is implemented, what can potentially change for this population(s)?

Implementing Site Indicator
NEED

RATING

Ratings

5- Strongly Meets Need

The implementing site has demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of how the program or practice meets the needs of the focus population. The implementing site has included three or more data sources when conducting the needs assessment including administrative data and perspectives of staff, community partners and children, youth and families; and has data to identify needs of specific and relevant subpopulations.

4- Meets Need

The implementing site has demonstrated an understanding of how the program or practice meets the needs of the focus population. The implementing site has included two or more data sources when conducting the needs assessment including administrative data and perspectives of staff, community partners and children, youth and families; and has data to identify needs of specific and relevant subpopulations.

3- Somewhat Meets Need

The implementing site has demonstrated some understanding of how the program or practice meets the needs of the focus population. The implementing site has included two or more data sources when conducting the needs assessment including administrative data and perspectives of staff, community partners and children, youth and families.

2- Minimally Meets Need

The implementing site has demonstrated minimal understanding of how the program or practice meets the needs of the focus population. The implementing site has included only administrative data when conducting the needs assessment.

1-Does Not Meet Need

The implementing site has not demonstrated an understanding of how the program or practice meets the needs of the focus population.

Additional Questions/ Notes

Program Indicator
EVIDENCE

1. Are there research data available to demonstrate the effectiveness (e.g. randomized trials, quasi-experimental designs) of the program or practice? If yes, provide citations or links to reports or publications.
2. What is the strength of the evidence? Under what conditions was the evidence developed?
3. What outcomes are expected when the program or practice is implemented as intended? How much of a change can be expected?
4. If research data are not available, are there evaluation data to indicate effectiveness (e.g. pre/post data, testing results, action research)? If yes, provide citations or links to evaluation reports.
5. Is there practice-based evidence or community-defined evidence to indicate effectiveness? If yes, provide citations or links.
6. Is there a well-developed theory of change or logic model that demonstrates how the program or practice is expected to contribute to short-term and long-term outcomes? If yes, provide citations or links.
7. Do the studies (research and/or evaluation) provide data specific to the setting in which it will be implemented (e.g., has the program or practice been researched or evaluated in a similar context?)? If yes, provide citations or links to evaluation reports.
8. Do the studies (research and/or evaluation) provide data specific to effectiveness for specific populations? If yes, provide citations or links specific to effectiveness for families or communities.

Program Indicator

EVIDENCE

RATING

Ratings

5- High Evidence

The program or practice has documented evidence of effectiveness based on at least two rigorous, external research studies with the focus population and control groups, and has demonstrated sustained effects at least one year post treatment.

4- Evidence

The program or practice has demonstrated effectiveness with one rigorous, external research study with the focus population and a control group.

3- Some Evidence

The program or practice shows some evidence of effectiveness through less rigorous research studies with the focus population and comparison groups.

2- Minimal Evidence

The program or practice is guided by a well-developed theory of change or logic model for the focus population and has demonstrated a relationship between the program or practice and outcomes based on an evaluation or practice-based evidence.

1- No Evidence

The program or practice does not have a well-developed theory of change or logic model and has not demonstrated a relationship between the program or practice and outcomes based on an evaluation or practice-based evidence.

Additional Questions/ Notes

Implementing Site Indicator
FIT

1. How does the program or practice fit with priorities of the implementing site?
2. How does the program or practice fit with family and community values and assets in the impacted community?
3. What other initiatives currently being implemented will intersect with the program or practice?
4. How does the program or practice fit with other existing initiatives?
5. Will the other initiatives make it easier or more difficult to implement the proposed program or practice and achieve the desired outcomes?
6. How does the program or practice fit with the community's history relevant to the identified need or focus population? How does it disrupt the community's history or systems? What is the potential impact of this fit or disruption?

Implementing Site Indicator
FIT

RATING

Ratings

5- Strong Fit
The program or practice fits with the priorities of the implementing site; community values, including specific populations; and other existing initiatives

4- Fit
The program or practice fits with the priorities of the implementing site and community values; however, the values of specific populations and alignment with other initiatives have not been assessed for fit

3- Somewhat Fit
The program or practice fits with all of the priorities of the implementing site, but it is unclear whether it aligns with community values and other existing initiatives.

2- Minimal Fit
The program or practice fits with some of the priorities of the implementing site, but it is unclear whether it aligns with community values and other existing initiatives.

1- Does Not Fit
The program or practice does not fit with the priorities of the implementing site, community values or other existing initiatives.

Additional Questions/ Notes

Program Indicator
USABILITY

1. Is the program or practice clearly defined (e.g. what it is, for whom it is intended)?
2. Are core features of the program or practice identified, listed, named (e.g. key components of the program or practice that are required in order to be effective)?
3. Is each core feature well operationalized (e.g., staff know what to do and say, how to prepare, how to assess progress)?
4. Is there guidance on core features that can be modified or adapted to increase contextual fit? Do these core features differ for specific populations? If so, how?
5. Is there a fidelity assessment that measures practitioner behavior (i.e., assessment of whether staff use the practice as intended)? If yes, provide citations, documents, or links to fidelity assessment information.
6. Has the program or practice been adapted for use within specific populations and/or is there a recommended process for gathering input from the focus population and community on enhancements?
7. What do we know about the key reasons for previous successful replications?
8. What do we know about the key problems that led to unsuccessful replication efforts previously?
9. Are there mature sites with successful histories of implementing the program or practice who are willing to be observed?

Program Indicator

USABILITY

RATING

Ratings

5 Highly Usable

The program or practice has operationalized principles and core components that are measurable and observable and has a validated fidelity assessment; modifiable components are identified to support contextualization for new settings or populations.

4 Usable

The program or practice has operationalized principles and core components that are measurable and observable and has tools and resources to monitor fidelity, but does not have a validated fidelity measure; modifiable components are identified to support contextualization for new settings or focus populations.

3 Somewhat Usable

The program or practice has operationalized principles and core components that are measurable and observable, but does not have a fidelity assessment; modifiable components are not identified.

2 Minimally Usable

The program or practice has identified principles and core components; however, the principles and core components are not defined in measurable or observable terms; modifiable components are not identified.

1 Not Usable

The program or practice does not identify principles or core components.

Additional Questions/ Notes

Implementing Site Indicator
CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT

1. Typically, how much does it cost to run the program or practice each year? Are there resources to support this cost? If the current budget cannot support implementation, outline a resource development strategy.
2. What are the staffing requirements for the program or practice (number and type of staff, e.g., education, credentials, content knowledge).
3. Does the implementing site currently employ or have access to staff that meet these requirements?
4. If so, do those staff have a match with the population they serve, as well as relationships in community?
5. What administrative practices must be developed or refined to support the use of this program or practice?
6. Is leadership knowledgeable about and in support of this program or practice? Do leaders have the skills and perspectives representative of the focus population?
7. Do staff have the capacity to collect and use data to inform ongoing monitoring and improvement of the program or practice?
8. What administrative policies or procedures must be adjusted to support the work of practitioners and others to implement the program or practice?
9. Will the current communication system facilitate effective internal and external communication with stakeholders, including the focus population?
10. Will the program or practice require use of or changes to building facilities? Use notes section to explain. List required uses of and/or changes. Include costs if known.
11. Does the program or practice require new technology (hardware or software, such as a data system)? Use notes section to explain. List required hardware and/or software. Include costs if known.
12. Does the program or practice require use of or changes to the monitoring and reporting system? Use notes section to explain. List required uses of and/or changes. Include costs if known.

Implementing Site Indicator

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT

RATING

Ratings

5 Strong Capacity

The implementing site adopting this program or practice has all of the capacity necessary, including all of the following: a qualified workforce, financial supports, technology supports and administrative supports required to implement and sustain the program or practice with integrity.

4 Adequate Capacity

The implementing site adopting this program or practice has most of the capacity necessary, including three of the following: a qualified workforce, financial supports, technology supports and administrative supports required to implement and sustain the program or practice with integrity.

3 Some Capacity

The implementing site adopting this program or practice has some of the capacity necessary, including two of the following: a qualified workforce, financial supports, technology supports and administrative supports required to implement and sustain the program or practice with integrity.

2 Minimal Capacity

The implementing site adopting the program or practice has minimal capacity necessary, including only one of the following: a qualified workforce, financial supports, technology supports or administrative supports required to implement and sustain the program or practice with integrity.

1 No Capacity

The implementing site adopting this program or practice does not have the capacity necessary, including any of the following: qualified workforce, financial supports, technology supports or administrative supports required to implement and sustain the program or practice with integrity.

Additional Questions/ Notes

Program Indicator
SUPPORTS

1. Is there a qualified “expert” (e.g., consultant, program developer, intermediary, technical assistance provider) who can help with implementation over time? If yes, list names and/or organization (e.g. Center, University) and contacts
2. Are there start-up costs for implementation of the program or practice (e.g., fees to the program developer)? If yes, itemize in notes section. What does the implementing site receive for these costs?
3. Are there curricula and/or other resources related to the program or practice readily available? If so, list publisher or links. Are the materials representative of the focus population who will be receiving and delivering the program or practice? What is the cost of these materials? Enter in notes section.
4. Is training and professional development related to the program or practice readily available? Does the training use adult learning best practices? Include the source of training and professional development. What is the cost of these materials? Enter in notes section.
5. Is coaching available for the program or practice? If so, list coaching resources and cost in notes section.
6. Are sample job descriptions and interview protocols available for hiring or selecting new staff for the program or practice? Have these job descriptions and protocols been run through an impact analysis? If so, identify here and list any costs associated.
7. Is guidance on administrative policies and procedures available, such as what changes to existing processes will be needed? Have recommended policies and procedures been run through an impact analysis? If so, identify resources and any costs associated.
8. Are there resources to develop a data management plan for the program or practice (including data system and monitoring tools) available? If so, identify resources and any costs associated.
9. Is there a recommended orientation to facilitate buy-in for staff, key stakeholders and collaborative partners? If so, explain/describe briefly in notes section.

Program Indicator

SUPPORTS

RATING

Ratings

5 Well Supported

Comprehensive resources are available from an expert (a program developer or intermediary) to support implementation, including resources for building the competency of staff (staff selection, training, coaching, fidelity) and organizational practice (data system and data use support, policies and procedures, stakeholder and partner engagement).

4 Supported

Some resources are available to support implementation, including limited resources to support staff competency (e.g., training and coaching) and limited resources to support organizational changes (e.g., data systems).

3 Somewhat Supported

Some resources are available to support competency development or organizational development, but not both.

2 Minimally Supported

Limited resources are available beyond a curriculum or one time training.

1 Not Supported

Few to no resources are available to support implementation.

Additional Questions/ Notes