Top 10 Reasons to Document Your IDEA Data Processes

10. It builds agency resiliency.
Developing a "playbook" that describes the who, what, when, where, and how of the federally required 616 and 618 IDEA data collections institutionalizes those processes for your state and therefore helps build resiliency in your agency. Such a playbook may help mitigate some of the challenges when there are departures or changes in job responsibilities for key staff (e.g., Part B data manager).

9. It helps distribute knowledge among your team about these data collections.
The documentation process is strengthened when all team members involved in a particular data collection are included. Therefore, the experience of documenting the data collection, validation, and submission steps creates shared knowledge among all team members and, as a result, can strengthen team communications and practices. In addition, the data processes experience is a wonderful opportunity for leadership within your agency to learn more about the ins and outs of particular data collections and be a part of any conversations about possible changes or improvements.

8. It supports intra-agency collaboration.
If there are data collections that involve agency staff outside the special education division (e.g., assessment), the data processes experience can provide a helpful structure for discussing various roles and responsibilities and build shared understanding across divisions about processes, timelines, expectations, etc.

7. It provides an opportunity to connect with contractors.
Similarly, if your state agency employs contractors or others outside your agency to support any aspect of your 616 or 618 data collections, documenting data processes can serve as a chance to check in with those contractors about their efforts and therefore build state agency awareness and understanding of the work that is being undertaken.

6. All of your friends are doing it!
Fifteen states have documented one or more data collections to date.

5. It provides protected time for discussion.

The data processes experience (which often initially requires a full-day, or even a 2-day, meeting facilitated by IDC staff) carves out space for a state team to have the kinds of in-depth, detailed conversations about data collection processes that can sometimes be difficult to have in the hubbub of a typical workday.

4. It ignites ideas for improvements and efficiencies.

Although not the stated purpose of the data processes experience, documenting your state's processes ("current state"), almost always leads to explorations of what could be improved or made more efficient ("future state"). As part of documenting data processes, teams often organically generate insightful reflections, observations, "aha moments," and suggestions for ways those processes can be improved.

3. It gives you an opportunity to spend some quality time with your friendly IDC State Liaison!

Having the process facilitated by a neutral third party can help to ensure the time spent documenting your processes is productive and positive. Many states have chosen to initiate this work through several, in-person meetings and then continue or follow up with specific pieces virtually.

2. It helps you master skills and a process that you can use to support LEA staff to refine their processes and procedures.

State teams are not the only ones who can benefit from the experience of discussing, in detail, special education data collection, validation, submission, and reporting processes. Ultimately, ensuring high-quality data at the state level starts with ensuring high-quality data at the local level.

1. It's just a good thing to do.

Whether you approach it from the perspective of wanting to craft a special education data "playbook" for your state agency, prompt conversations within your division that may not happen otherwise, create a neutral structure for cross-division collaboration, or try out a process that might be useful at the district level, the data processes experience is time well spent. Also, have we mentioned? It's free! All that is required of you and your staff is time…