Determining Root Cause

This example illustrates one in a series of meetings a group is holding to determine and address root causes for an identified issue within a state. These meetings involve in-depth analysis of data related to both implementation and outcomes that the state collected over time. Meeting participants include stakeholders with expertise in data analysis, as well as those with high levels of content and context knowledge. (The sample data this example uses may or may not be relevant to your objectives. The example is a guide only and is not inclusive of all specific content that you could include in a data meeting.)

Before the Meeting	
Data Meeting Protocol Steps	**Example: Determining Root Cause**
Determine the Objective	The state education agency (SEA) assistant director of special education, who oversees the State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report (SPP/APR), and the Part B data manager scheduled a series of meetings with the SEA Data Team and representatives from two districts. The state had identified both districts as having disproportionate representation in specific disability categories due to inappropriate identification for multiple years, based on a risk ratio with a threshold of 2.0. - District 1: Black or African American children were at least 2.5 times as likely as all other children in the district to receive special education and related services for emotional disturbance. - District 2: White children were 2.9 times as likely as all other children in the district to receive special education and related services for autism. The purpose of the data meetings was to determine causes for the disproportionate representation and establish a plan of action for addressing the disproportionality. To help plan the series of data meetings, the Part B data manager used the Before the Meeting Planning document. At previous meetings, the group had reviewed data collection and validation procedures and were confident the data were reliable. They also had looked at risk ratios for these two districts over the last 5 years, disaggregated by school. The group identified some ways they wanted to continue to examine the data, including examining the data with respect to both under- and overrepresentation and considering other relevant data, such as achievement data. The assistant director and data manager determined that the current data meeting would focus on reviewing and making meaning of disproportionality in the identified districts alongside achievement data on state reading and math assessments. They identified the following guiding questions for the meeting: - What do the data tell us about risk for nonproficiency among racial/ethnic groups and across schools? - What do underrepresented groups have in common? What do overrepresented groups have in common? - Do the achievement data point toward any causes of the disproportionality in identification? - Do we have enough information to feel confident using only these data, or do we need to investigate further?

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Identify the Data	For this meeting, the Part B data manager identified relevant data on students not meeting proficiency goals on state reading and math assessments for each district. The data were available in disaggregated form by racial/ethnic groups for each school.
Identify Participants and Key Responsibilities	In this case, the protocol lead added additional stakeholders representing local districts to an existing state-level data review team. The SEA Data Team included the SEA assistant special education director, the Part B data manager, the SEA data analyst, and the lead for the SEA Compliance and Monitoring Team. For these data meetings, directors of special education and curriculum and instruction from each of the identified districts joined the team.
	District representatives included those leading local data use efforts and assisting others in understanding and using data. They had an understanding of aggregated and disaggregated data, as well as descriptive and some inferential statistics. They were also aware of issues and constraints related to data quality. Finally, they brought a high level of knowledge about the local context for the data.
	The Part B data manager served as protocol lead for this meeting, identifying and organizing the relevant data and preparing the meeting agenda. The assistant special education director was the meeting facilitator. The Compliance and Monitoring Team lead acted as the notetaker during the meetings. The district representatives provided local context to the data. All members of the team committed to reviewing the data in advance of the meeting.

Data Meeting Protocol Steps	Example: Determining Root Cause
Organize the Data to Present	The protocol lead pulled the district proficiency data and computed risk ratios for reading and math assessments. Similar to risk ratios for identification for special education in specific disability categories, these ratios presented students' risk of not meeting proficiency standards on state reading and math assessments, by school, in each race/ethnic group for the last 5 years. Data files presented proficiency risk data for students receiving special education and related services for emotional disturbance (ED) in District 1 and for students receiving special education and related services for autism in District 2.

Protocol leads organized the data in a table for each school, such as Table 1 below:

Table 1 |

Risk of achievement nonproficiency among students with ED: District 1, School 1

Assessment and Year	Hispanic/ Latino	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black or African American	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	White	Two or More Races
Reading Year 1	1.75	0.74	1.10	2.37	0.21	0.72	1.67
Reading Year 2	1.43	1.33	0.18	2.59	1.43	1.10	1.32
Reading Year 3	1.64	1.25	0.89	2.42	0.17	0.81	1.78
Reading Year 4	1.88	1.10	0.27	2.85	0.70	0.68	1.46
Reading Year 5	2.16	1.49	0.43	3.21	1.05	0.41	1.94
Math Year 1	1.67	1.21	0.88	2.87	0.47	1.04	0.88
Math Year 2	1.74	1.03	0.65	2.43	1.65	1.32	1.14
Math Year 3	1.83	1.15	0.37	2.51	0.28	1.16	0.93
Math Year 4	1.96	1.12	0.41	2.75	0.83	0.87	0.86
Math Year 5	2.01	1.08	0.32	2.63	0.98	0.65	0.74

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Prepare and Distribute the Agenda	The protocol lead created participant and process agendas for the meeting, informed by the previous meetings' notes and the objectives of the current meeting. The agendas focused on the following meeting activities: • Discuss context considerations for the proficiency risk data. • Answer any questions about the data as presented. • Record the group's data observations. • Discuss and interpret the data. • Discuss data implications. • Determine next steps. The process agenda also included • times for each major section of the meeting; • prompts to remind the facilitator of key information to highlight; • required materials — chart paper and markers; — internet-connected computer, projector, and screen; and — paper copies of data tables. Because invited meeting participants were familiar with the data as part of the ongoing data review process, the protocol lead sent the disaggregated data in advance to participants to preview along with the agenda 2 weeks before the meeting.

During the Meeting	
Data Meeting Protocol Steps	**Example: Determining Root Cause**
Do Introductions and Review Key Messages	The group, having worked together at previous meetings, greeted one another and previewed the meeting agenda together. The assistant special education director, serving as the meeting facilitator, summarized the purpose of the meeting and reminded the group of the protocol process they would be following.
Present the Data	The meeting facilitator prompted the special education directors from each of the districts to remind the group of relevant contextual information: • In District 1, only one school did not show disproportionality for Black or African American children receiving special education and related services for emotional disturbance. • In District 2, White children were 2.9 times as likely as all other children to receive special education and related services for autism. An autism support center opened 3 years ago. The center had a good reputation and families of students with autism have reported they moved to the district because of its proximity to the center. The facilitator then presented the disaggregated data tables the protocol lead prepared for this meeting.

During the Meeting	
Data Meeting Protocol Steps	*Example: Determining Root Cause*
Discuss Observations of the Data	The group started by reviewing the proficiency data from District 1 related to students receiving special education and related services for emotional disturbance. The facilitator prompted the group for initial thoughts, reactions, and observations about the data. Participants noted the following: • Black or African American students were at the highest risk for not being proficient on state reading and math assessments, followed by Hispanic students; White and Asian students were at the lowest levels of risk • In 3 of the last 5 years, the trends were consistent. • One school had more equally distributed risk for identification; the overall percentage of students that were proficient in this school was higher. • These observations were similar to trends for risk of identification for special education across ethnic groups. The facilitator moved the group on to observations of the data from District 2 for students receiving special education and related services for autism. Participants noted: • Black or African American students were at the highest risk for not being proficient on state reading and math assessments, followed by Hispanic students; White and Asian students were at the lowest levels of risk. • These observations were opposite of the trends for risk of identification for special education. • In two schools out of five, the data were rather inconsistent and unstable; these two schools were also smaller and in more rural parts of the district.
Discuss Interpretations of the Data	The facilitator then prompted the group to express how they could interpret the observations of the data they had made in the meeting in light of the evaluation questions. The group discussed what the data could tell them in terms of differences across schools and between groups, and what underrepresented and overrepresented groups have in common. The group also discussed the limitations of the data for drawing conclusions, including the relative variability of the data in some of the smaller schools.
Discuss Implications of the Data	The group then shifted to a discussion of implications of the proficiency data for understanding and addressing disproportionality within the districts. As with the group's observations and interpretations, the meeting notetaker recorded the key points from the implications discussion for the group to see. The group noted that while they had learned a great deal about the relationship between proficiency and identification within the districts, they also had developed further questions about the special education identification and instructional practices within the schools: • What is known about the curriculum and instructional practices in these schools? • What is different about the school where more students reach proficiency standards? • Are there differences in the way the schools identified these students? How can districts assess the fidelity of identification?

During the Meeting	
Data Meeting Protocol Steps	*Example: Determining Root Cause*
Determine Next Steps for the Group	The group determined that it needed more information about the identification and instruction of these groups of students. The group also decided to gather the perspectives of those who were involved at the school and classroom levels. For example, to discuss curriculum choices and instructional practices, the team would need to include classroom teachers and instructional leaders. The group discussed including information on districts that were experiencing success in these areas to glean ideas for effective practices. Including staff who have a good understanding of how to match curriculum and instruction to the student population also would be important. The group created a plan to collect the following data: • a review of district identification policies and school identification procedures; • interviews with district and school staff about instructional practices and summaries of school walk-through data collected by building principals; and • whether or not achievement level varies based on the placement of the student. The group also included in the plan the data sources, target dates, and the additional staff perspectives they needed. As a final step, the group confirmed the next meeting date.
Reflect on the Meeting's Effectiveness	Before concluding, the facilitator asked the group to assess what went well in the meeting and what could have been improved. Although the group identified additional questions to be answered through subsequent data review, the group was pleased with the outcomes of the meeting overall.

After the Meeting	
Data Meeting Protocol Steps	*Example: Determining Root Cause*
Distribute Notes From the Protocol Process	Protocol leads distributed the notes to the team members, along with the outline of recommendations and next steps and a reminder about the next meeting date.
Confirm Next Steps and Timeline for Additional Actions, as Appropriate	During a debrief after the meeting, the SEA Data Team reviewed the *Follow-Up Checklist* together. Key staff assigned each team member specific responsibilities to collect data before the next meeting and identified data sources and contacts and dates to visit the districts and schools. The protocol lead sent out the notes and reminders about participants' specific tasks.