Maintenance of State Financial Support (MFS) Timeline Development Tool

Description and Instructions

Intended Audience(s)

- State educational agency (SEA) MFS Manager
- SEA Director of Special Education
- SEA divisions/departments/offices involved in MFS data reporting
- Other state agency partners

Purpose

The Timeline Development Tool (TDT) is designed to help plan, organize, and coordinate activities occurring within and across fiscal years that are necessary for collecting and reporting valid Maintenance of State Financial Support (MFS) data to the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). The TDT also provides guidance on the activities that states may want to consider in tracking, collecting, and reporting MFS as well as estimates of when these activities should occur.

There is currently no published model that state educational agencies (SEAs) can use to develop a timeline of the annual recommended activities involved in collecting and reporting data to demonstrate MFS compliance (under 34 CFR §300.163). Although not required by the IDEA statute and regulations, it may be useful for SEAs to develop a timeline of their annual MFS data collection and reporting activities, due to the multifaceted nature of the MFS requirement. For example, the SEA must include two years of MFS data in its application for federal funds to OSEP in May of each year. In order to accurately calculate MFS, the SEA must contact other agencies that use state funding to provide special education and/or related services to eligible children with disabilities pursuant to their individualized education programs (IEPs).

Description

The MFS Timeline Development Tool is designed to delineate the activities involved in the required annual MFS data collection and reporting cycle. Specifically, it helps SEA staff managing the MFS data collection and reporting process generate a realistic timeline for efficiently accomplishing all the activities necessary to report accurate MFS calculations to OSEP. In addition to providing users with a sample timeline, the tool allows users to develop customized activity timelines in a variety of formats, depending on user preference and intended audience.

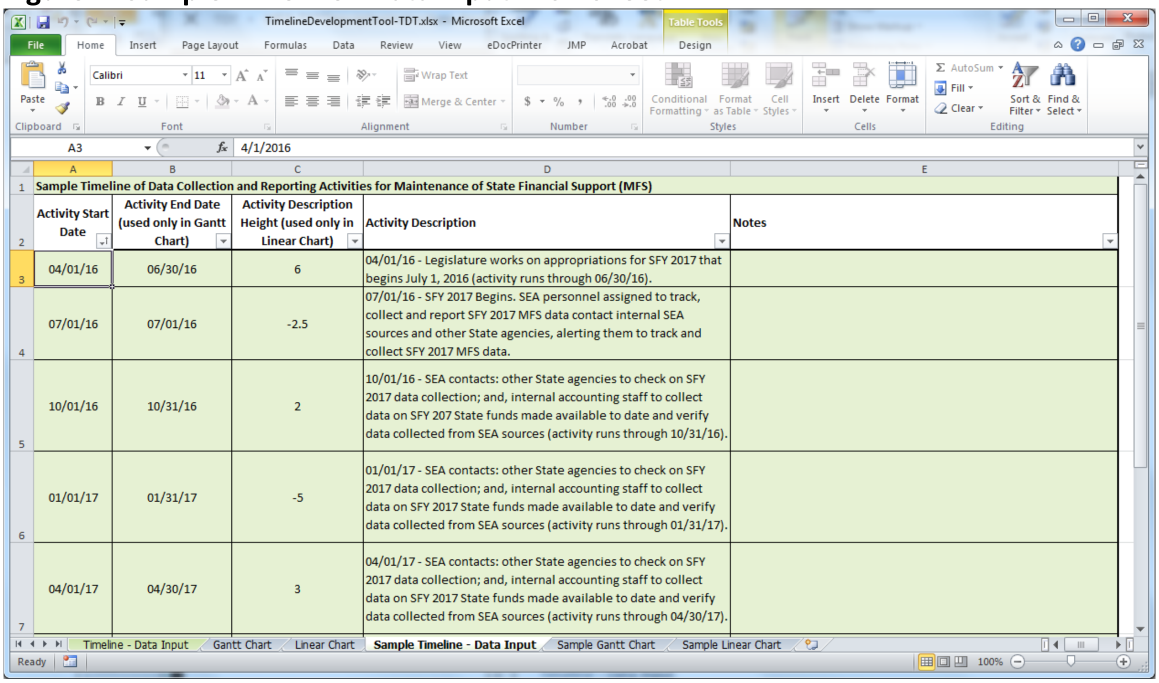
This tool is an Excel-based application that allows SEA staff to enter their MFS data collection activities and dates, which then auto-populated in both a Gantt-style chart and a traditional linear timeline.

The timeline is designed to facilitate regular communication between the MFS manager and staff in both the SEA and other state agencies that make state funding available to provide special education and/or related services included in children's IEPs (i.e., those dollars that must be accounted for in the MFS data collection and reporting). Such communication can help establish collegial working relationships and mechanisms to help ensure the timely collection of accurate data. Periodic collection and verification of the SEA's relevant financial data also allows the MFS manager to track funds that were initially made available by the legislature, as well as any additional funds that are made available throughout the year.

Tool Instructions

This section provides detailed instructions on how to use the Timeline Development Tool, including guidance on entering data into the *Timeline – Data Input* worksheet, as well as descriptions of the *Gantt Chart* and *Linear Chart* that are automatically generated from information entered by the user. The *Timeline – Data Input* worksheet is shown below.

Figure 1. Sample Timeline - Data Input Worksheet

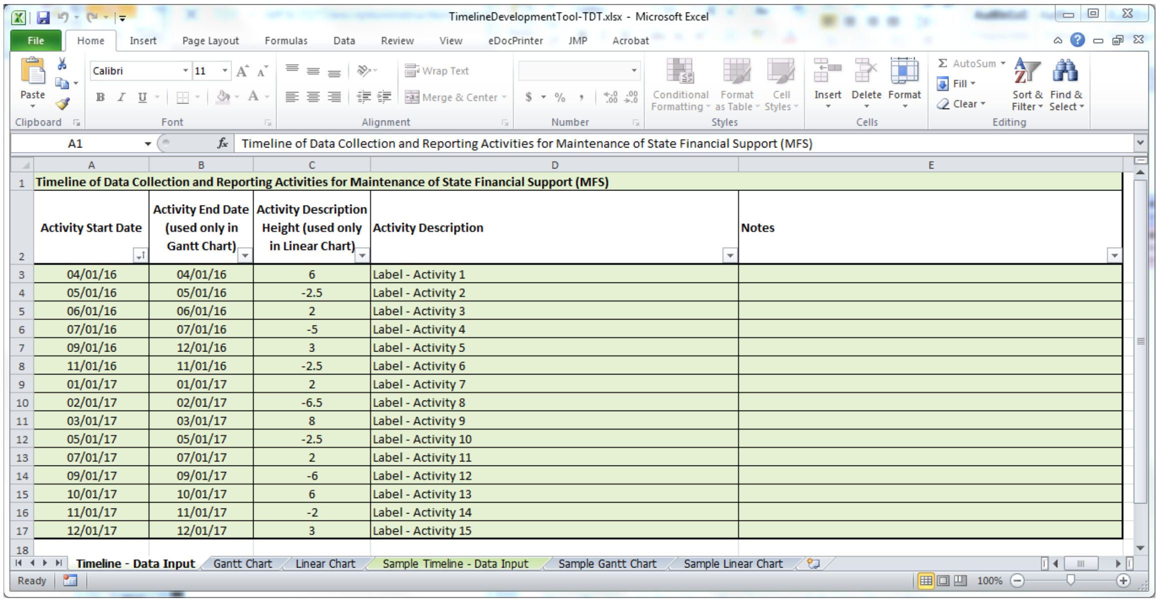


Sample Timeline of Data Collection and Reporting Activities for Maintenance of State Financial Support (MFS)

Activity Start Date	Activity End Date (used only in Gantt Chart)	Activity Description Height (used only in Linear Chart)	Activity Description	Notes
04/01/16	06/30/16	6	04/01/16 - Legislature works on appropriations for SFY 2017 that begins July 1, 2016 (activity runs through 06/30/16).	
07/01/16	07/01/16	-2.5	07/01/16 - SFY 2017 Begins. SEA personnel assigned to track, collect and report SFY 2017 MFS data contact internal SEA sources and other State agencies, alerting them to track and collect SFY 2017 MFS data.	
10/01/16	10/31/16	2	10/01/16 - SEA contacts: other State agencies to check on SFY 2017 data collection; and, internal accounting staff to collect data on SFY 207 State funds made available to date and verify data collected from SEA sources (activity runs through 10/31/16).	
01/01/17	01/31/17	-5	01/01/17 - SEA contacts: other State agencies to check on SFY 2017 data collection; and, internal accounting staff to collect data on SFY 2017 State funds made available to date and verify data collected from SEA sources (activity runs through 01/31/17).	
04/01/17	04/30/17	3	04/01/17 - SEA contacts: other State agencies to check on SFY 2017 data collection; and, internal accounting staff to collect data on SFY 2017 State funds made available to date and verify data collected from SEA sources (activity runs through 04/30/17).	

The *Sample Timeline – Data Input* worksheet (Figure 1) is a copy of the *Timeline – Data Input* worksheet, pre-populated with suggested activities and dates. This worksheet can also be used as a starting point and then tailored to meet the specific needs of your state. Data entered or altered here will update the *Sample Gantt Chart* and *Sample Linear Chart.*

Figure 2. Timeline - Data Input Worksheet



Timeline of Data Collection and Reporting Activities for Maintenance of State Financial Support (MFS)				
Activity Start Date	Activity End Date (used only in Gantt Chart)	Activity Description Height (used only in Linear Chart)	Activity Description	Notes
04/01/16	04/01/16	6	Label - Activity 1	
05/01/16	05/01/16	-2.5	Label - Activity 2	
06/01/16	06/01/16	2	Label - Activity 3	
07/01/16	07/01/16	-5	Label - Activity 4	
09/01/16	12/01/16	3	Label - Activity 5	
11/01/16	11/01/16	-2.5	Label - Activity 6	
01/01/17	01/01/17	2	Label - Activity 7	
02/01/17	02/01/17	-6.5	Label - Activity 8	
03/01/17	03/01/17	8	Label - Activity 9	
05/01/17	05/01/17	-2.5	Label - Activity 10	
07/01/17	07/01/17	2	Label - Activity 11	
09/01/17	09/01/17	-6	Label - Activity 12	
10/01/17	10/01/17	6	Label - Activity 13	
11/01/17	11/01/17	-2	Label - Activity 14	
12/01/17	12/01/17	3	Label - Activity 15	

Timeline - Data Input

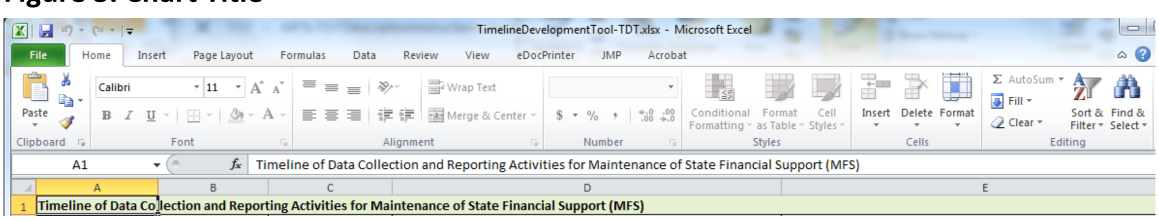
The *Timeline – Data Input* worksheet (Figure 2) is where all of the information used to automatically generate your timelines must be entered, if you choose to start your timeline from scratch (rather than using the Sample Timeline as your starting point). You can enter up to 15 different activities. Cells that are available for user input are shaded, while unshaded cells are table headings that cannot be altered.

Do not delete entire rows, as this will lead to a reference error in the *Gantt Chart*.

In order for the activities to be properly charted on your timeline, you must enter the required pieces of information, as follows:

1. *Chart Title* - In the first row (Row 1, Column A) enter the title of the chart (see Figure 3). The field is pre-populated, but users may edit or overwrite the title. Changes to the chart title will be reflected on the *Gantt Chart* and the *Linear Chart*.

Figure 3. Chart Title



2. *Activity Start Date* (Column A) - Each of the rows in this column denote a specific activity for which a start date and an end date must be entered (see Figure 4). Enter the start date in Column A using a month/day/year format such as the format used in the placeholder data (the fields in Column A have been pre-populated with arbitrary dates that should be overwritten by the user). Please note that the Activity Start Date will be the only date plotted in the *Linear Chart*, whereas the activities in the *Gantt Chart* will appear as dot symbols in months designated by both the start and end dates.

Figure 4. Activity Start Date (Column A)

Activity Start Date
04/01/16
05/01/16
06/01/16
07/01/16
09/01/16
11/01/16
01/01/17
02/01/17
03/01/17
05/01/17
07/01/17
09/01/17
10/01/17
11/01/17
12/01/17

3. *Activity End Date* (Column B) - Date values are entered in the same way in this column (see Figure 5) as for the Activity Start Date column. This specific end date will only be shown within the *Gantt Chart*. If you are entering a one-day activity, make the end date the same as the start date.

Figure 5. Activity End Date (Column B)

Activity End Date (used only in Gantt Chart)
04/01/16
05/01/16
06/01/16
07/01/16
12/01/16
11/01/16
01/01/17
02/01/17
03/01/17
05/01/17
07/01/17
09/01/17
10/01/17
11/01/17
12/01/17

4. *Activity Description Height* (Column C) - Enter a number from -10 to 10 to control how far above or below the dateline the Activity Description will appear in the *Linear Chart*. These fields have been pre-populated with values that vary the heights of the activity description labels so you can read them clearly (see Figure 6). We encourage alternating the values for each subsequent Activity Description Height (i.e., negative, positive, negative, positive) to improve readability.

Figure 6. Activity Description Height (Column C)

Activity Description Height (used only in Linear Chart)
6
-2.5
2
-5
3
-2.5
2
-6.5
8
-2.5
2
-6
6
-2
3

5. *Activity Description* (Column D) – This text will appear as a label on both the *Gantt Chart* and *Linear Chart*. Enter the text describing the activity associated with each Activity Start Date listed in step 2; the text will appear as a label on the chart at the corresponding date on the dateline. Note that these fields are limited to 255 characters or fewer to improve readability of the labels. Attempts to enter descriptions exceeding this length will result in an error message requesting the user to shorten the entry. These fields have been pre-populated with arbitrary activity description labels (e.g., Label - Activity 1, Label – Activity 2; see Figure 7) that should be overwritten by the user.

Figure 7. Activity Description (Column D)

Activity Description
Label - Activity 1
Label - Activity 2
Label - Activity 3
Label - Activity 4
Label - Activity 5
Label - Activity 6
Label - Activity 7
Label - Activity 8
Label - Activity 9
Label - Activity 10
Label - Activity 11
Label - Activity 12
Label - Activity 13
Label - Activity 14
Label - Activity 15

6. *Notes* (Column E) - Provide any notes in this column that will be helpful in further explaining or documenting your entry. These notes are for your reference and do not appear in either the *Gantt Chart* or the *Linear Chart*.

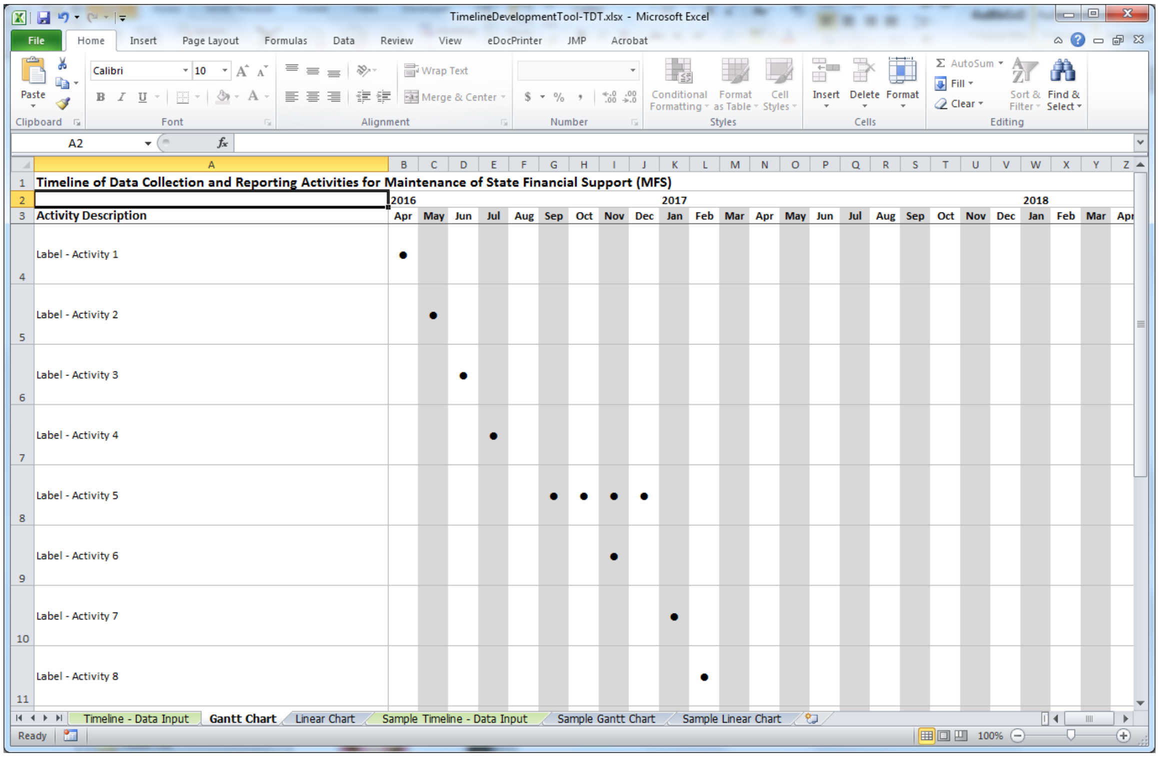
Once you have completed entering all of the activity information, you should then delete any remaining placeholder data written in cells for the unused rows. To do this, highlight the remaining cells that contain placeholder text, then use the “Clear Contents” function (accessible by right clicking or going to your Edit menu) to delete the remaining information without deleting the rows. (Remember that you cannot delete entire rows, as this will lead to a reference error in the *Gantt Chart*.)

For the charts to function properly and the timeline to be useful, the data input sheet must be sorted in chronological order by start date. To do this, click on the drop-down menu in cell A2 (Activity Start Date) and select “Sort Oldest to Newest.” After sorting, the first Activity Start Date (Column A, Row 3) will be used to set the start of the date range within the *Gantt Chart* and the *Linear Chart*.

Gantt Chart

The *Gantt Chart* worksheet is automated to populate your data in a Gantt-style chart (see Figure 8). The activity descriptions in the chart are auto-populated using the corresponding text in the *Timeline – Data Input* worksheet. The dot symbols (●) appearing in each row are based on the Activity Start and End Dates entered in the *Timeline – Data Input* worksheet. The date range is automatically set by the first Activity Start Date in the *Timeline – Data Input* worksheet.

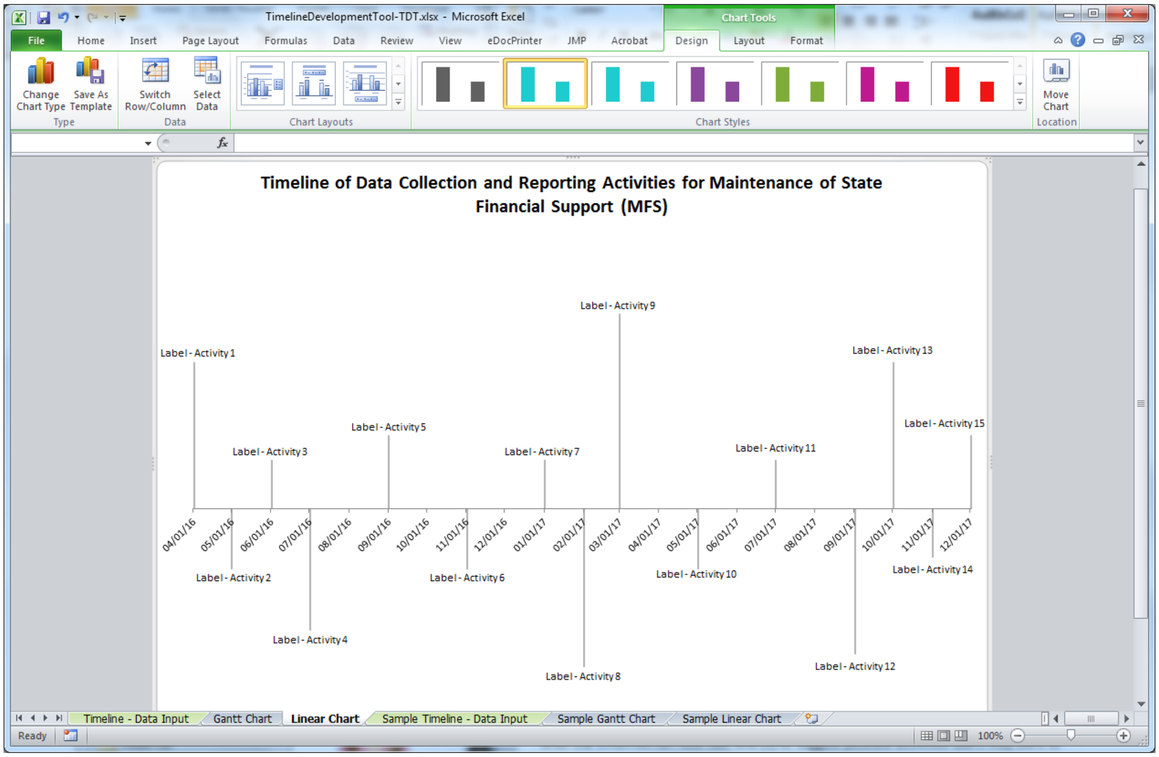
Figure 8. Gantt Chart



Linear Chart

The *Linear Chart* worksheet contains an auto-populated timeline chart (see Figure 9) that displays the activities that were entered on the *Timeline – Data Input* worksheet. Users will likely want to switch back and forth between the *Timeline – Data Input* worksheet panel where they are entering information and the corresponding *Linear Chart* in order to make sure the activities are appearing graphically as expected. The start date and end dates of the timeline are based on the first and last dates listed in the *Timeline – Data Input* worksheet.

Figure 9. Linear Chart



Sample Timeline Worksheets

The remaining worksheets are identical in their functionality to those described above, but contain pre-populated sample timeline information for two purposes: (1) to give users an idea of what the timelines can look like; and (2) to suggest possible activities users may want to consider in creating their own timeline. The sample timeline worksheets are editable so the user can modify what has already been input there. Users can also copy and paste any of the information from the *Sample Timeline – Data Input* worksheet to the *Timeline – Data Input* worksheet if they want to borrow some of the activities from the sample timeline data.

Workbook Protection

In order to preserve the underlying functionality, many of the worksheets are protected. For advanced Excel users looking for additional control, an unprotected version of this tool is available upon request.

Updating for Future Years

The Timeline Development Tool can be used for an annual cycle. To use the tool for additional cycles or years, simply use the “Save As” feature to create a duplicate copy of the Excel workbook. Then open the new copy and adjust the activities and dates accordingly.

Acknowledgments

Many CIFR staff contributed to this work. Jesse Levin, Chris Lysy, and Amanda Pierce led the development team. Virginia Beridon, Carol Cohen, Sara Doutre, Laura Johnson, Deborah Morrow, and Steven Smith were contributing authors. Tom Munk was lead reviewer and Sanjay Pardanani was production coordinator. CIFR co-directors Cecelia Dodge, Jenifer Harr-Robins, and Dave Phillips guided its development.

Suggested Citation: Center for IDEA Fiscal Reporting. (2016). *Maintenance of state financial support timeline development tool*. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

The Center for IDEA Fiscal Reporting helps states improve their capacity to report special education fiscal data. The center is a partnership among WestEd, American Institutes for Research (AIR), Technical Assistance for Excellence in Special Education (TAESE) at Utah State University, and Westat.

The contents of this document were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, #H373F140001. However, these contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government. Project Officer: Matthew Schneer, February 2016.