

Presentation Transcript

Maintenance of Financial Support (MFS) Toolkit: How to use the Timeline Development Tool (TDT)

Introduction

0:00

Welcome. The Center for IDEA Fiscal Reporting, or CIFR, created a toolkit to help states with understanding and meeting IDEA's Maintenance of State Financial Support, or MFS, requirements. This training covers the Timeline Development Tool, one piece of the MFS Toolkit.

The Timeline Development Tool is intended to help you create a timeline for collecting and reporting your state's MFS data. The Timeline Development Tool may also help you develop written policies and procedures for collecting and reporting MFS data for your state.

This training will provide you a tour of the tool and show you how to use it. The training will: describe the purpose of the Timeline Development Tool; give you a quick overview of the tool; illustrate a sample timeline; and show you how to enter data resulting in two different timeline displays.

You can pause and restart this video at any time and move back and forth between the video and the tool. You can skip forward and back to specific sections as needed.

Download the tool

1:08

Before we get started, you might want to download the tool. This is the direct URL to access the site: <http://cifr.wested.org/resources/mfs/mfs-toolkit/>. Or you can go to the CIFR website at <http://cifr.wested.org/>, then click on the *Resources* tab, and select *Maintenance of State Financial Support*. From there, click on the *MFS toolkit*.

Once on the MFS Toolkit page, you can download the Timeline Development Tool by clicking its download button, which we have highlighted here. Feel free to pause this video while you get to the MFS Toolkit page.

Purpose of the TDT

1:43

The Timeline Development Tool can help you to plan, organize, and coordinate the activities that are necessary to collect and report valid MFS data to OSEP. These activities may occur within your state educational agency, or SEA, and with other agency partners. The activities occur within and across fiscal years. The Timeline Development Tool can provide guidance on the activities that you may need to complete, as well as estimates of when these activities should occur.

IDEA statute and regulations do not require that states create an MFS timeline. Nevertheless, we at CIFR recommend that you make this effort because it will help you to organize your MFS data collection and reporting activities and to describe your procedures to stakeholders.

Overview of the TDT

2:33

The Timeline Development Tool is an Excel-based application that allows you to enter your own MFS data collection and reporting activities and dates in an easy-to-use spreadsheet. In this training, we will walk you through how to enter your activities and dates. The Timeline Development Tool will automatically display this information in two formats: a Gantt-style chart and a traditional linear timeline. You may choose to use either or both formats of the timeline, depending on your preference and intended audience. Linear charts tend to provide a simpler visual snapshot of the overall timeline, but Gantt charts provide more detail.

To help you think about your state's MFS data collection and reporting processes, we have included a sample timeline in the tool. You'll find it in the Sample Input tab of the Timeline Development Tool.

OSEP establishes a firm due date for submission of the application for federal funds in the spring of each year. For 2016, that date is May 12. The date for the following year is shown in the sample as May 15, though the actual date will be set by OSEP. The SEA must include MFS data for the two previous years in its application. For the 2016 application, you would report MFS data for 2014 and 2015. For the 2017 application, you would report data for 2015 and 2016.

Sample Timeline

4:07

This sample timeline starts with the state legislative session, during which appropriations for fiscal year 2017 are made. This activity is shown as occurring in April, May, and June of

2016. Then, at the close of the fiscal year — say, starting in July 2016 as shown on the timeline — you might begin data and calculation activities, such as contacting other state agencies before the audited data is available to ensure meeting the May 2017 deadline. 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 made available throughout the year. After the application has been submitted and the state's fiscal year ends, the MFS process continues as audited data becomes available and the state begins calculations for the next fiscal year's data.

Taken together, the activities and dates in the completed Timeline Development Tool can provide you with an explanation from beginning to end of the MFS process and timeline for your state.

The sample timeline takes into consideration that the SEA must contact other agencies that use state funding to provide special education and/or related services, pursuant to children's individualized education programs, or IEPs. The SEA staff person who manages the MFS data collection must communicate regularly with staff in the SEA, and staff in other state agencies that receive state funding to support special education and/or related services. Both sources of funds must be accounted for in MFS data collection and reporting. Such communication between the SEA and other state agencies can help establish collegial working relationships and mechanisms to help ensure the timely collection of accurate data.

Are the activities described here the same activities that you conduct in your state? Should you think about including some of these activities? You may want to stop here and note which of these activities you could include in your timeline.

As you can see on the sample charts created from the input worksheet, the Activity Start Date is the only date plotted for each respective activity in the Linear Chart, whereas the activity timelines in the Gantt Chart appear as dot symbols in months designated by each respective activity's start and end dates. Remember, you don't have to do anything for these timelines to populate except enter the information on the Timeline — Data Input sheet, after which they are automatically populated on the two charts.

How to Use the TDT

6:58

Now that you've seen a sample timeline, you can use the information to help you develop customized activity timelines that reflect the MFS data collection and reporting processes in your own state.

Let's create a specific timeline for your state.

There are two sets of worksheets — one set has only filler text; the other is filled with our sample timeline. You may choose to work with either one. Each set has three tabs: a Timeline — Data Input tab, a Gantt Chart display tab and a Linear Chart display tab. Displays are automatically generated as you enter information into a Timeline — Data Input tab.

The Timeline — Data Input worksheet has filler text — that is, Activity 1, Activity 2, etc. and dummy start and end dates — and allows you to overwrite the filler text to enter your own data.

We'll see how that works in a minute.

The Sample Timeline — Data Input worksheet is a suggested timeline that can be used as a reference or adapted to meet your needs without entering all the data from scratch.

This worksheet is very useful for learning the tool. It is just like the Timeline — Data Input worksheet but pre-populated with suggested activities and dates. It can be used as a starting point and tailored to meet the specific needs of your state by simply editing and updating the existing text and dates. Data entered or altered here will update the Sample Gantt Chart and Sample Linear Chart.

Now we'll go back to the Timeline — Data Input worksheet and show you how to create your timeline from scratch.

How to Use the TDT: Timeline Data Input

8:42

If you want to create your timeline from scratch, you will enter information in the Timeline — Data Input worksheet. Cells that are available for user input are shaded, while unshaded cells are table headings that cannot be altered. There are several required pieces of information that must be entered in order for your timeline to be properly charted.

Note that, when working in the Timeline — Data Input worksheet, you *cannot* delete entire rows, as this will lead to a reference error in the Gantt Chart. We'll show you how to avoid that mistake in a minute. First, let's look at entering data.

The title of the chart is in Row 1, Column A and is pre-populated. Any changes you make to the chart title will be reflected on the Gantt Chart and Linear Chart.

Beginning in row 3, you can enter up to 15 different activities. Use a different row for each activity. Some of the essential activities CIFR recommends including are due dates for legislative appropriations, the collection time period for obtaining MFS fiscal data from other state agencies, and required timelines for audits. As we go through the columns, you might look at any notes you made when we reviewed the sample timeline and include those activities as well.

Each entry row represents a specific activity, and each activity should have information in columns A, B, C, and D. Each activity requires a start date and an end date. You may enter activities with their associated start and end dates in any order because you will sort all the activities by date after you have finished entering them. Please enter the start date in Column A using a month/day/year format such as that in the filler data. These fields have been pre-populated with arbitrary dates that you should overwrite. If you aren't sure of the dates, you can enter possible or projected dates for now and update them later.

Then, use Column B to record the end date for each activity. Enter the date using the same format as for the Activity Start Date. If you are entering a one-day activity, make the end date the same as the start date.

Now let's look at Column C. The Activity Description Height is important for the Linear Chart and how it displays the information. 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 on the Linear Chart. We encourage alternating the heights — that is, using negative and positive numbers — to improve readability. If you want to stop here and vary the numbers to see how it changes, feel free to do so, but make a note of the default numbers first.

You may want to use the default numbers most of the time. Try switching back and forth between the Timeline — Data Input worksheet, where you are entering information, and the Linear Chart to make sure the activities are appearing graphically in the chart as expected.

The final required column, Column D, is the Activity Description. This text will appear as a label on both the Gantt Chart and Linear Chart. Enter the text describing the activity associated with the Activity Dates entered in columns A and B. The text will appear as a label on the chart at the corresponding date on the dateline. These fields are limited to 255 characters or fewer to improve readability of the labels. If you enter descriptions longer than this, it will result in an error message asking you to shorten the entry.

Column E, which is not required, is for any notes that will be helpful in further explaining or documenting your entry. These are for your reference and do not appear in either the Gantt Chart or the Linear Chart.

Let's enter the data for a few activities to see how this works. First we will enter the start and end dates for the state's fiscal year 2017, which begins July 1, 2016 and ends June 30, 2017.

Now we will enter the date the application for federal funds is due to OSEP. In 2016, this date is May 12. Since this is a single date, we will put the same date in Column A and Column B. For 2017, OSEP has not set the due date yet, so this date is just a projection. Let's enter May 15, 2017 on the next row in Columns A and B.

Now let's enter the legislative appropriation activity. For this example, we'll use April 1, 2016 to June 30, 2016 as the legislative session dates when appropriations are made.

Last, let's indicate the period when audited fiscal data for State Fiscal Year 2017 becomes available and the SEA begins calculation of the 2017 MFS. The start date will be October 31, 2017 and the end date will be December 31, 2017.

Once you have completed entering the activity information, delete any remaining placeholder data written in cells for the unused rows. Note that you cannot delete rows without generating an error related to the Gantt chart. After you have used all the rows you need for your activities, highlight the remaining cells that contain the filler text. Use the "Clear Contents" function to delete the information without deleting the rows. You may find it by right clicking, or it may be in the Edit menu.

After clearing the information from the unused rows, this is how the activities we entered appear. Of course, while our brief example has five activities, your timeline may use many more rows — perhaps all 15.

But we still have one more step. 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. After sorting, the first Activity Start Date — the one in Column A, Row 3 — will set the start of the date range within the Gantt Chart, and the Linear Chart will also start with the first Activity Start Date.

To sort, click on the drop-down menu in cell A2 of the Activity Start Date column; then select and click "Sort Oldest to Newest" or "Ascending." Now the activities appear in chronological order by start date.

How to Use the TDT: Charts

15:56

Let's check out the charts. The data for the activities we just entered show up in the Gantt Chart like this. The dot symbols are based on the Activity Start and End Dates entered in the Timeline — Data Input worksheet.

The activity data is displayed in the Linear Chart like this. The start dates are based on the first dates listed in the Timeline — Data Input worksheet.

Summary

16:22

We have demonstrated how the Timeline Development Tool can be used for an annual cycle of MFS data collection and reporting. 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.

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

CIFR's contingent of highly qualified technical assistance providers is available to assist states in using the MFS Toolkit. CIFR technical assistance professionals will present MFS Toolkit training to state stakeholders, assist states in personalizing the descriptive tools, and provide assistance with using the toolkit. If your state is interested in receiving training in the use of the toolkit, you can contact one of your Community of Practice facilitators or other CIFR staff with whom you are working.

This training was created and produced by CIFR, a partnership among WestEd, American Institutes for Research, Technical Assistance for Excellence in Special Education, and Westat. Thank you!