### This advisory provides an overview of the needs assessment process and supports for Sponsoring Organizations (SOs) in preparing a submission comprised of sufficient evidence to demonstrate need for a new program or programs with low completion rates.

In this Needs Assessment Advisory, you will find the following:

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Policy Overview

Needs assessments **are** required if an SO would like to operate:

1. **Low-Completion Programs**: At the point of formal review, ESE requires SOs to assess the breadth and depth of their program offerings as there may not be a continual need for some programs. ESE identifies programs with low completion rates for the last three years. The threshold for low completion is determined by ESE annually and takes into account state-level completer data.
2. **New Programs**: SOs may put forth new programs during the formal or informal review cycle.

In both of these instances, SOs must demonstrate need for the program according to one of the categories of need described [below](#_Categories_of_Need) as well as the SOs’ ability to meet the demand. ESE will not review programs unless the SO demonstrates need.

**Low/Zero-Completer STEM Programs:**

Needs assessments **are not** required for low/zero-completer science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) programs because there continues to be a shortage of qualified STEM educators in the Commonwealth and ESE recognizes this need. Therefore, beginning in fall 2016, all STEM programs with low completion rates over the past three years will receive automatic confirmation of need once ESE receives a signed [affidavit form](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edprep/toolkit/1819/memo-affidavit.pdf) the SO’s President/Executive Director. This affidavit acknowledges the low number of completers and confirms the SO would like to continue operating the program regardless. The affidavit affirms that the SO will conduct a yearly audit to ensure program materials are up to date and will internally monitor data to demonstrate program efficacy during formal review.

**Zero-completer (non-STEM) Programs:**

Beginning in fall 2016, all non-STEM programs with zero completers in the last three years will automatically expire at the point of formal review. Zero-completer programs do not have data available to be reviewed for efficacy. If an SO wishes to operate a program after it has been expired under the zero-completer clause, they must submit a needs assessment for the previously expired program as a new program.

Rationale for a Needs Assessment Process

In 2013, there were 1,719 initial licensure teacher programs approved to operate in Massachusetts, though just 46% (n=787) of those programs were active[[1]](#footnote-2). The simple existence of a program does not guarantee that the employment needs of local districts will be addressed. ESE is eager to review and approve programs that are going to actively recruit, enroll, and produce educators for the Commonwealth. The needs assessment fosters an efficient formal review and approval process for the following reasons:

* Programs should meet the employment demands of the workforce.
  + SOs must demonstrate that specific programs are needed to meet specific Massachusetts employment demands and that the SO is able to address this employment need.
  + To meet the need of districts, SOs need to **increase** enrollment and completion in programs identified as low-completion.
  + To ensure that the existence and operation of a program will meet the needs of the Commonwealth, ESE needs to see evidence of what the SO will do **differently** in order to actively recruit and increase enrollment in low-completion programs, as previous recruitment efforts have resulted in low completion rates over three years.
* Investments should be made where they are most needed.
  + Operating a high-quality program and reviewing it effectively require a considerable amount of resources from the SO and the state, respectively. We are cognizant of where resources (i.e., taxpayer money) are best allocated to support the needs of our schools in Massachusetts.
* Efficacy data needs to be available for review during the formal review process for ESE to evaluate whether a program is fully meeting the approval criteria.
  + As a result of federal education law, any public reports containing performance data must suppress results for small groups when there are characteristics that would make it possible to identify individuals.
  + Consequently, it is challenging for ESE to evaluate and fully approve programs when completer effectiveness data is unavailable.
  + ESE is not setting a precedent via the needs assessment process. The Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), which conducts national accreditation reviews, does not review any low-completion programs as there is insufficient data to evaluate program efficacy.

While the bar for demonstrating need is high, many SOs have presented sufficient evidence to demonstrate need through the needs assessment process. During the 2016 Informal review period, 16 out of 25 needs assessments were confirmed on their first attempt.

This advisory supports organizations that are preparing for needs assessments by making ESE’s decision-making response rationale explicit. While the information below will be helpful in completing the needs assessment form, ultimately, confirmation of need is predicated on a program that has been built intentionally to fill a need in Massachusetts.

Demonstrating Need

Sponsoring Organizations are responsible for demonstrating need for a program and providing evidence that they will be able to meet the demand. Prior to submitting a needs assessment, ESE highly encourages the SO to conduct an internal [self-study](#_Appendix_A:_Conducting) to assess whether the operation of this program will meet the need of the SO and its stakeholder groups according to one of the categories of need listed below. Guidance for the self-study can be found in [Appendix A](#_Appendix_A:_Conducting).

The section below describes categories in which need can be demonstrated. It may be the case that need is confirmed in one or more of these category areas; SOs do not need to demonstrate need in each area to have need for their program confirmed.

Categories of Need

After analyzing past years’ needs assessments, ESE found there are common categories in which need for a program tends to be based: district need, candidate interest, diversity in the workforce, and impact/effectiveness of completers.

The chart below provides a brief description of what need in each of these categories may look like and potential evidence sources that have been presented in the past. This is not an exhaustive list; SOs may use other sources of evidence.

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| **Category of Need** | **Description** | **Potential Evidence Sources** |
| District need | License areas in which a school/district has indicated hiring need | * Survey data from districts demonstrating future employment need in specific license areas * Letters/communication from districts indicating explicit future hiring need in specific license areas |
| Candidate interest | Candidates or potential candidates have demonstrated explicit interest in enrolling in a specific program | * Survey data from potential candidates indicating interest in enrollment * Current candidate enrollment data |
| Diversity of the workforce | Ability of a program to fill the increasing need for a more racially and ethnically diverse workforce.  Evidence in this category must be particularly demonstrative of the educator preparation’s unit ability to enroll *and* complete diverse candidates. | * Recruitment/enrollment data * Demographic data for the specific program |
| Impact/Effectiveness of completers  *Note: This category is only applicable for low-completion programs.* | Candidates who complete this program are demonstrably and consistently effective in their roles.  Evidence must be particularly compelling for need to be confirmed under this category. For example, ESE seeks evidence of recent completers receiving prestigious recognition for their work as educators under the license for which they were prepared. | For recent completers:   * High proportion of candidates receiving “exemplary” on educator evaluation data * SGP data * Prestigious recognition/excellence awards |

**Note:** The two most commonly demonstrated categories of need are district need and candidate interest. SOs should keep this in mind when collecting evidence to demonstrate need.

Additional Guidance

Overall, SOs should work to construct a clear, concise and cogent argument for need. ESE will not make assumptions. ESE will review only the evidence presented and will not connect dots that are not clearly articulated. Other considerations to keep in mind are:

* **Explicitly share program details.** If the program is more active than it looks on paper, it is beneficial to articulate that argument. For example, if History 5-8 and History 8-12 candidates have the same program of study and go through coursework as a cohort, that needs to be explicitly shared via the needs assessment because these programs may be grouped together and as a result exceed the minimum threshold to demonstrate need.
* **Choose your best evidence.** By being selective, you will focus the narrative on only the most powerful pieces of evidence. Even one piece of strong evidence can justify confirmation of need. For more information on choosing the best evidence, see page 3 of the [Worksheet Overview](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edprep/toolkit/1516/Overview-DomainWsheets.pdf) document provided in the Toolkit.
* **Pay attention to the instructions.** Importantly, adhere to the word limit and only attach supplemental documents (maximum 3) if they strengthen your claim to offer the program and are clearly referenced in the narrative. Additional information about the inclusion of supplemental documents is in the [Worksheet Overview](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edprep/toolkit/1516/Overview-DomainWsheets.pdf) document in the Toolkit.
* **Program design is evaluated as a component of the review, not as evidence of need.** While we appreciate efforts with regards to program design (e.g., philosophy, curriculum), particulars about program delivery and design are not considered relevant to the demonstration of need. For example, the SO may have state of the art technology or offer online courses with increased flexibility, but these specifics do not demonstrate there is a need for the program to exist. Program design and delivery will be evaluated during the formal review process, not the needs assessment process.

For further guidance on how to construct a needs assessment with sufficient evidence, refer to [Appendix B: Further Guidance](#_Appendix_B:_Further_2).

Appendix A: Conducting a Self-Study to Determine Need

To ensure time and resources are best utilized by SOs and ESE, ESE highly encourages SOs to conduct an internal self-study prior to completing the needs assessment to determine if there is a need for the proposed programs and how to select your best evidence for demonstrating need.

Please take the following questions into consideration when deciding whether or not to put forth a needs assessment or selecting your best evidence to demonstrate need:

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| 1. What is the **objective** for your organization to operate these programs?    * How do these programs align/contribute to organizational goals?    * Are these programs where your organization would like to allocate resources even though few candidates are enrolling? |
| *Notes:* |

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| 1. **Whose needs** would the program meet?  * Local districts? Candidates? **How do you know?** |
| *Notes:* |

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| 1. Which of the following categories of need will have the **best data and evidence**? |
| * 1. **District Need:**   + Which districts would hire or have hired completers from these programs?     - What are the future employment needs for these districts?     - Have these districts indicated they will hire completers from these programs in the next few years? |
| *Notes:* |
| * 1. **Candidate Interest:**   + Have you had close to six completers in the past three years?   + Do you have evidence demonstrating more candidates will enroll in these programs in the future?     - How does your organization project future candidate enrollment in these programs? |
| *Notes:* |
| * 1. **Diversity of Workforce:**   + Will these programs contribute to higher diversity rates in the workforce?   + What evidence do you have of the educator preparation unit’s ability to recruit and admit a racially and ethnically diverse candidate pool?   + What evidence do you have to demonstrate that these recruitment and admission systems will result in increased racial and ethnic diversity of completers (for these program) in the workforce? |
| *Notes:* |
| * 1. **Impact/Effectiveness of Completers:**   + Are completers from these low-completion programs more effective than their peers during employment?   + Have recent completers received unique awards or recognition for their work with PK-12 students?   + What are the SGPs of recent program completers and how do they compare with completers from other organizations?   + What are the educator evaluation ratings for recent program completers? Are many completers rated as “exemplary” by their employers? |
| *Notes:* |

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| 1. Does your organization have the intention and resources **to actively recruit and enroll** candidates?    1. **For new programs:**    * What are specific recruitment strategies your organization will utilize to drive candidate enrollment?    1. **For low-completion programs:**    * What are specific active recruitment strategies your organization will utilize to increase enrollment? |
| *Notes:* |

Appendix B: Further Guidance

The table below provides further guidance and examples of strong and weak evidence.

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| **Guidance** | **Strong Evidence** | **Weak Evidence** |
| Evidence should be program-specific  *Data and information should speak to both the subject and the level of the program for which you are applying* | * Differentiates between Initial and Professional programs * Differentiates between levels (i.e. Moderate Disabilities Prek-8, Moderate Disabilities 8-12) | * Aggregates all special education programs together when you are putting forth a needs assessment for a Severe Disabilities, Initial program * Describes need for Moderate Disabilities 5-12 educators when putting forth a needs assessment for Moderate Disabilities Prek-8 * Describes need for Moderate Disabilities in general when putting forth a Moderate Disabilities Prek-8, Initial Post-Baccalaureate |
| Avoid generalizations and unsubstantiated assumptions  *Organizations should embed evidence within their narrative to support claims that are made* | * “Survey data (see supplemental doc #1) indicates that 6 candidates would be interested in enrolling in this program.” * “Of the twenty-one responding districts, eleven districts (52%) indicated that their district will need to hire a Teacher of Visual Arts 5-12 in the next three years (see supplemental doc #2).” | * “Many candidates have expressed interest in the program.” * “There is an ongoing shortage of special education teachers nationally and in Massachusetts. This is most clearly seen in the Nationwide Teacher Shortage Areas (TSA) report from the U.S. Department of Education.” While this evidence cites a national and state-wide shortage, the simple existence and operation of a program does not ensure that this need will be met. |
| Use clear, specific language  *Language should be concise such that the evidence or narrative can clearly speak for itself* | * In a survey to principals, the question asks, “In the next three years, do you need to hire Visual Arts 5-12 educators?” * In a survey to potential candidates, the question asks, “Would you apply and enroll in a Moderate Disabilities program at the 5-8 level at [SO] in the next five years?” * A District Letter of Support states, “We need to hire five German 5-12 teachers in the next three years.” | * In a survey to principals, the question asks, “Do you think there is a need for Elementary teachers?” * In a survey to potential candidates, the question asks, “Are you interested in the special education program?” * A District Letter of Support states, “We have hired many completers from [SO] in the past,” or “We value candidates from [SO].” |
| Share specifics about how active recruitment will lead to increased enrollment | * State explicit future (new) plans for recruitment and support with evidence to show this will lead to increased enrollment and completion in the program. | * “We will continue to conduct office hours so anyone interested in becoming an educator may visit and talk to a program representative.” While ESE recognizes this as a recruitment effort, it has led to low completion rates. For low-completer programs, the SO must describe new recruitment plans to increase candidate enrollment and completion in the program. |

1. For purposes of this analysis, we considered “active programs” to be those for which there was at least 1 completer in 2013-2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)