

Arkansas Webinar Series on Child Outcomes Summary Form Quality Assurance Questions and Answers

1. What do we do if the parent says the child has skills but those skills aren't evident in the classroom?

The COSF rating should be based on the child's functioning across situations and settings. Since young children act differently across settings and with different people, it is important to consider information from a wide range of people who know the child and interact with him/her regularly. Family report is one important source of information needed to determine the rating. Encouraging families to share specific examples of how the child acts in different situations will be most helpful in deciding on a rating. Information about the child's functioning with different people and across settings can then be combined in the rating. For example, if the family describes skills that are age appropriate at home, but you have not observed the age-appropriate skills in a group setting (or vice versa), you might consider a rating of 5 or 4, which reflect a mix of skills that are and are not at age level. Similarly, if the family describes functioning that is at the 'immediate foundational level,' but you have not observed these skills – or vice versa – you would consider a rating of 2 or 4, depending upon whether the child's other skills are closer or further away from age level.

2. What do you do if everyone has a different view of the child's ability? What if the team can't reach consensus?

The following handout has information and conversation prompts to guide a team in reaching consensus: <http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/assets/pdfs/Consensus.pdf> . Helping team members describe specific information about the child's functioning in different contexts and how they believe these are related to the kind of functioning expected for a child that age will usually generate enough further discussion so that the group can continue the dialogue. Combining these conversation prompts with the decision tree usually helps groups reach consensus on a rating.

3. How do we provide evidence when the parent doesn't come and the child is new to the rest of the team?

In order to complete the Child Outcomes Summary Form, teams must have multiple sources of information about the child's current functioning. This includes information about the child's functioning across settings and situations and with different people. States vary in their recommendations about how and when to gather information needed for the rating. However, one way or another, learning what families know about their child's functioning is essential for a complete picture of the child's functioning, and therefore essential for an accurate rating. Families have several important roles in the COSF process such as, team member, child information provider, rating participant, and consumer. Please read "Including Families in the Rating Discussion" to learn more about different ways that families are involved in different aspects of the COSF process: http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/assets/pdfs/Role_of_Families.pdf

4. Is the parent supposed to be part of deciding the rating?

Since young children act differently across settings and with different people, it is important to consider information from a wide range of people who know the child and interact with him/her regularly across different settings in order to get a complete picture of the child's functioning for a rating. The information that parents or family members provide about the child's functioning at home and in their care is one critical part of having a complete picture of the child. States vary in recommendations about how to involve parents and family members in the COSF process (see question 3 for a link to a document describing some of the different roles for family involvement). For information on best practices and/or policies about family roles in the COSF in Arkansas, see <http://arksped.k12.ar.us/sections/Early%20Childhood.htm>

5. How can I glean more information from parents and teachers?

Parents and teachers often can provide specific examples of the child's functioning in a variety of everyday situations that can provide a useful picture of the child's skills in the three outcome areas. It is important to set aside time to listen to parents and teachers and ask follow-up questions to understand what they mean when they describe their observations of their child's functioning. Some examples of questions that may be useful conversation starters to draw out examples of child functioning across each of the three outcome areas are included in the following file:

http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/assets/pdfs/COSF_discussion_prompts_4-4-07.pdf . Some

local providers also have shared that use of Routines Based Interviewing (see <http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~inclusion/RBI.pdf>) in their practice or making changes in the kinds of information requested and recorded from families at intake and during reviews has provided more detailed information that has been useful for the COSF rating process.

6. Where does the information come from for making the rating?

The ECO Center recommends that the ratings be determined by a team including family members, professionals who work with the child, and others familiar with the child's functioning in everyday situations and as documented in assessments. Consider the different kinds of settings and people that the child interacts with over time and use information shared from these sources to develop a picture of the child's functioning at that time and to be sure that the evidence in the summary of relevant results reflects the array of information known and skills observed.. See also "Instructions for completing the COSF" here: http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/assets/pdfs/COSF_Instructions.pdf (although the example in the documentation section is being updated, so watch for a revised version in coming months).

7. What do we do when the families report different skills and behaviors than those observed by teachers and other service providers?

The COSF rating should be based on the child's functioning across situations and settings. It is common for young children's functioning to vary in different settings and with different people. For example, children's functioning can vary greatly when they are asked to participate in groups versus one-on-one, when in situations with more or less structured routines, when the child has different levels of energy or familiarity with people, or when there is differential access to different kinds of assistive technology or

varying levels of understanding of sign language or articulation patterns, to name just a few. The COSF rating reflects the overall sense of the child's functioning across situations with different demands and with different people. Discussing the specific ways the child functions across situations will help the team identify the most appropriate rating. Sometimes a mix of different types of functioning (e.g., age-appropriate and not or immediate foundational and like that of a younger child) is seen similarly across all settings and with all people; other times, the mix of functioning occurs because the child consistently functions at one level in certain kinds of environments or with certain people, but functions at a different level in other environments or with other people.

8. Do we have to address each bullet on the COSF when documenting the rating?

Provide enough information so that it is clear that you considered the breadth of the outcome when determining the rating. It would not be appropriate to base a rating on only one aspect of the outcome. For example, a rating for Outcome 1 should not be based solely on how the child interacts with peers. The rating for Outcome 1 should be based on interaction with peers, adults, in group settings (for older children) and expressing emotions. The bullets are not a checklist, but simply reminders of several key things captured in the outcome. For additional ideas about the kinds of information related to each outcome, see http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/assets/pdfs/COSF_discussion_prompts_4-4-07.pdf. The crosswalks section of the ECO Center website also can clarify some of the kinds of assessment items or sections on commonly used tools that would inform the rating on a given outcome area.

9. What types of examples are best?

Examples should be functional, consider the breadth of the outcome, and should support the rating given. Looking at the array of examples used in the documentation, an outside reviewer should be able to see some of the kinds of information that informed the branching on the decision tree.

10. What should be written under the progress question 'b' on the COSF at the annual?

Under progress question "b" (which asks whether any progress has been made since the previous rating), the team should write a description of the child's development in the outcome area since the previous rating. This section can describe even small steps of individual progress made by the child. If the child has made any progress, learned or begun to functionally use any new or elaborated skills since the last rating, the progress question should be answered yes, even if the rate of the child's progress means that the child has "lost ground" relative to the new skills other children of the same age have acquired.

11. If the rating stays the same from one time to the next, can I still say that progress has been made? Even though the number stays the same?

Yes. Children who make progress but have not moved closer to functioning like same aged peers are counted in category "b" for OSEP reporting purposes. They are counted as children who made progress. Even small steps of individual progress should be counted as progress for category "b."

12. Can you really give a child a 7? Aren't there always concerns?

Every child has strengths and weaknesses, including areas that adults might target for continued growth. Ratings of “6” or “7” should be given when the child’s functioning is considered *appropriate* for his or her chronological age in *all or almost all everyday situations* that are part of the child’s life. In both ratings, right now the child’s behavior is considered age-appropriate. The distinction between a rating of “6” and a “7” is that children receiving a rating of “6” are exhibiting skills that, while now age appropriate, are of significant enough concern that if they were to continue, the child might not be considered age-appropriate in the near future. A child with a rating of “7” does not generate these kinds of concerns. When discussing concerns, these concerns are more than simply areas where there are goals for continued improvement or strengthening. They are significant concerns. For example, a two-year-old who is generally developmentally on track, but who bites and hits when he doesn’t get what he wants, might receive a rating of “6” on outcome 3. Biting and hitting, although not condoned, are reasonably common among two-year-olds and not out of the realm of age-appropriate behavior. However, the child’s pattern of biting and hitting responses might be a significant concern, that if it is not greatly minimized soon, it might interfere with the child’s age-appropriate ways of expressing his wants and needs and result in the child no longer displaying age-appropriate functioning.

13. Do you have to show input from each person that was at the conference?

The documentation, over the three outcomes, should include input from everyone who participated in the rating discussion at the conference. The documentation needs to provide a snapshot of the overall functioning of the child across settings and situations (including assessments) and with different people. Each person has a different lens and experience with the child’s functioning. So, the similarity and differences in these observations and experiences should be conveyed in the documentation as well.

14. How much time should be devoted to this in the actual conference?

Most of the discussion is focused on getting a strong description of how the child functions across settings and situations and with different people. Ideally, this discussion about the child’s functioning should take place throughout the conference and make it fairly easy to reach consensus on the appropriate rating based on how the functioning compares to age-appropriate functioning. Some teams pause and decide upon a rating for Outcome 1 after discussing the child’s social skills, for Outcome 2 after discussing the child’s learning, and for Outcome 3 after discussing how the child gets his or her needs met. If the discussion is integrated throughout the conference, the rating should not add much extra time to the conference.

15. Is the rating a group decision, or is it justified by the test scores, or the parents’ opinion?

The rating should be a team decision, based on multiple sources of information from assessments, parent and teacher observations, and the observation of the child by team members. This decision-making process should be based up on criteria found in the decision tree, see: http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/assets/pdfs/Decision_Tree.pdf .

16. Will this 3-part training be available for me to use to train my staff who could not attend?

This particular training has not been recorded. However, a number of training materials are available on topics related to the COSF. Please see our “Professional Development” page, under “COSF Topics” or click here:

http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/pages/training_resources.cfm#COSFTopics . We also plan to make available additional slides and resources shown throughout this training.

17. What are immediate foundational skills?

Immediate foundational skills are those that emerge *just before* age-expected skills in the usual sequence of acquiring developmental skills. A child is probably showing ‘immediate foundational skills’ when her functioning does not meet age expectations, but she demonstrates skills and behaviors that occur developmentally just prior to age expected functioning. For more information about immediate foundational skills please see: http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/assets/pdfs/Immediate_foundational_skills.pdf --

18. Where can I find resources on age-appropriate child development?

The ECO Center has a handout with links to child development resources on child development http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/assets/pdfs/Age-expected_Resources.pdf .

These are not organized around the three outcome areas and they are not necessarily all examples of functional descriptions or descriptions with universal design. However, they may still be a useful guide at times.

Arkansas was one of the first states with Frameworks for Infant Toddler Care and Early Childhood Education. These frameworks cover the five domain areas of child development and can be accessed at

<http://www.state.ar.us/childcare/services/earlyed.html>

19. Where can I find more information about how to complete the COSF?

You can find the Overview, Instructions, and Definitions on the ECO website here:

<http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/pages/outcomes.cfm#COSFandInstructions> . Also, reviewing the guidance materials on what to look for in conducting quality reviews of completed COSFs can be helpful, see:

http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/assets/pdfs/Guidance_for_reviewing_COSFs.pdf.

20. Where can I find the decision tree?

The decision tree can be found on the “COSF and Instructions” webpage, or click here:

http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/assets/pdfs/Decision_Tree.pdf . The definitions for each of the points on the scale can also be found at

http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/assets/pdfs/Definitions_Outcome_Ratings.pdf.

21. Do you feel the completed COSF is objective?

Making COSF ratings requires teams to synthesize an enormous amount of information about a child's functioning from multiple sources and across different settings to identify an overall sense of the child's functioning at a given point in time in three outcome areas. It takes some practice for teams to become comfortable with this process. When team members take time to collectively discuss the questions on the decision tree and describe specific examples from assessments and observations that influenced their responses to the questions on the decision tree, then teams have been very successful in consistently applying the criteria and ratings and reaching consensus. Teams that use this process report that it feels much more objective and clear. However, sometimes teams jump quickly to a rating number without describing the evidence influencing the rating or thinking through the decision points that led them to that rating. Rushing to a rating quickly without supporting evidence and discussion of criteria allows more variability in different ratings and creates a process that many people describe as more subjective. We encourage teams to reflect on their discussion process and become comfortable with the rating criteria embedded in the decision tree. For more information see the decision tree at http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/assets/pdfs/Decision_Tree.pdf and think about some of the quality review questions with regard to team discussions http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/assets/pdfs/Quality_Review_Team_discussion.pdf or even review some key points trainers have used in breaking down some of the content that should be part of the COSF rating discussion http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/assets/pdfs/Team_discussion_of_outcomes.pdf.

22. How do we rate a child who is under 6 months of age?

All COSF ratings require individuals to identify the extent to which a child's functioning is comparable to children of the same chronological age at that given moment in time. When rating infants, teams use the same process as when rating older children. The main difference is that children functioning at age-appropriate levels when they are 6 months old have a less extensive repertoire of skills than older children. Nevertheless, in each outcome area there are specific kinds of functioning that we can look for at this age. Rate the child's functioning relative to functioning of other six-month-olds. In many cases, ratings for young infants will be closer to age-appropriate than ratings for older children where there is a more extensive sequence of development that many peers have developed through. This pattern of early age-appropriate development with a drop-off over time simulates the actual developmental trajectory for many young children with diagnosed conditions or disabilities. Often functioning is at or near age-appropriate levels early on and then subsequently begins to lag behind peers of the same age as their rate of growth or complexity of functioning develops at a different rate. It is fine for a child's rating to begin as a "7" or a "6" and later drop to a lower rating. Those analyzing the data will look for patterns and analyze changes in ratings based on the child's age at entry or type of disability to consider how this pattern is influencing overall numbers. The COSF ratings are not expected to be used for eligibility determination. Instead they show the child's current level of functioning at a given point in time.

23. Could an example of a completed COSF be provided on a child?

The ECO Center has developed a written child example to be used for training purposes. This activity can be found here:

http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/pages/training_activities.cfm#written. Materials shared on these webinars will also be made available and provide some information from reviewing COSFs and some training exercises. Do keep in mind though that teams who really know a specific child will have access to much more information than in training exercises. Generally, teams find discussing and rating actual functioning of children they know to be much easier than written examples. We also encourage teams to describe a child's functioning and their rating process and forms and have others ask questions and share feedback to further improve their discussion and documentation process.

24. How do the ratings relate to the child who is 'speech only' (receiving only articulation services)

OSEP requires that states provide data on all three outcomes for every child leaving Part C or Part B/619 services. Data are required for all outcomes even if there are no concerns about a child's development, or if the child only has delays in one or two outcome areas. This includes children receiving only a single service such as speech therapy.

25. When do you fill out a COSF?

To provide data for the OSEP reporting requirements, the COSF must be completed at a minimum once near program entry and again near program exit with at least 6 months in between. When it is completed more often, it provides additional information about the trajectory of changes for children and minimizes missing information for those that exit without warning.

Arkansas' policy is to report entry and exit scores with at least 6 months in between. It is optional to complete assessments more often.

DDS policy is to provide entry and exit scores regardless of how long the child has been in the program.

26. Are the forms different for birth through two?

No. All EC programs 0-5 should be using forms with the same information. There may be some minor, largely cosmetic differences, or additional cover sheet information requested in some local programs. For more specific information about the forms in use in Arkansas see: <http://arksped.k12.ar.us/sections/Early%20Childhood.htm>

27. Has the COSF been updated since 2006?

The core parts of the COSF remain unchanged. ECO has updated the COSF with supporting evidences boxes because some states have found it easier to document the kinds of evidence that led to their rating in this format. As you see forms with different documentation spaces, please share feedback by email with Jana Villemez javillemez@ualr.edu so that the state can consider if the form in use in Arkansas should

be changed. The COSF and guidelines to assist you in using the supporting evidence boxes can be found at the bottom of the page on ECO's website at <http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/pages/outcomes.cfm#COSFandInstructions> .

28. How do you get all that information in the boxes under "summary of relevant results?" My space seems to be very limited.

Space to document evidence may be a consideration in the COSF form recommended for use statewide (share feedback by email with Jana Villemez (javillemez@ualr.edu)). If the space cannot be expanded by filling the form out digitally, providers in many states have been able to note supporting evidence by outcome area on an additional page and attach it to the COSF record in the file.

29. Is there a way to make documentation less redundant with assessment results and information on due process forms?

Evidence on the COSF needs to provide enough information to point to the rationale for the rating. Many assessment reports include a lot of skills that are not functional, are not organized by the three outcome areas, and do not always incorporate information about the child's functioning across a full range of settings and situations. So, it is important to provide a glimpse of that conversion thought process in the COSF documentation. Some states have been working toward revising the format and content of assessment reports to take some of these factors into account. These kinds of changes might make align the COSF and existing assessment documentation more. Suggestions about how to integrate the COSF process more fully and seamlessly into practice are always appreciated by ECO. Sharing this information at the state level as well can help them consider if ideas if changes are needed in policies or forms and/or be able to share effective strategies throughout the state to improve the process.

30. I was doing a Child's Outcome for our DDS Center in SEAS yesterday and Arkansas only has room for 2 lines of info for each source. Not much details there. Ideas? The state keeps pushing to put everything into SEAS...do we not do this one in there?

If someone wants to add more information a blank page can be added.

So in the provided blank the user can write "see attached page"...

Then on the next page, (be sure to add student's name and other needed information) Identify what information is being added. Please note, brevity and specificity are important. It is a summary.

31. Sometimes children's ratings seem to change a lot with changes in settings or technology. Is this ok?

COSF ratings are always based upon the child's level of functioning at a given point in time across the variety of settings and situations (including as documented in assessments) in which the child has been observed and relative to functioning of same-aged peers. Naturally, the kinds of settings where children are (including the different demands these settings impose on children) and what is expected from children changes across ages and time. Many children with more common developmental pathways will readily modify their behavior to easily function across settings and situations. However,

for some children with disabilities, it is precisely by looking at the variation in functioning across settings or situations where the disability or special needs become most apparent. It is ok and expected for ratings to change over time when these changes are a true reflection of the changes in the child's overall functioning in response to new demands and changing situations. For instance, ratings may be higher for very young infants but drop as the age-expected demands become greater with the child's increasing age. Or, a child's rating on social relationships may drop when the child shifts from only interacting with siblings and cousins in a home setting to interacting with a wider range and number of peers in a preschool or child care setting. Likewise, ratings may go up dramatically if a child's functioning improves extensively after receiving assistive technology that allows her greater mobility to get to things that she wants and needs in her environment or communicate wants and needs to others. Or ratings might go down if some kind of assistive technology is available in one setting but not in others. Since the child's functioning should be rated based on whatever is available to them in the variety of settings and situations where they are, if the child does not have access to assistive technology in some settings, the child's overall level of functioning may drop relative to what it was when all settings were able to provide assistive technology support. The ratings are not a reflection of what the child can do, but rather they describe what the child does do given the reality of the environments and situations and supports available to them.

32. How do I encourage my co-workers to do the COSF in more of a team process? Right now they use the age equivalents and percents of delay and one statement from the parents. How do I get them to change?

A quality COSF process does involve a team. A quality team process requires support at different levels, including support for teaming within the program, expectations for a team process communicated by the leadership of the program, and the commitment of individual service providers. There are different ways teams can integrate conversations about the child's everyday functioning into their work. Teams should discuss child functioning not only as part of a quality COSF process, but also in order to develop and implement a quality IFSP or IEP. A team is important to the COSF process because it provides information about the child's functioning across the situations and settings that make up the child's everyday life. Family members are always a critical part of the team. Ratings should take into account the way the child interacts with each of the team members, including the family, at home, in the community and in assessment situations with professionals. Best practice for assessment, as well as for the COSF rating, involves basing decisions about the child on multiple sources of information including assessment tools, observation, and parent report.

Have more Questions? Check out ECO's Q &A Page, with more frequently asked questions and their answers: <http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/pages/faqs.cfm>