



Recommendations for Developing the ELC Work Plan Activities and Milestones Cross-Cutting Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity Program

Purpose:

The new 5-year Cooperative Agreement provided an opportunity to step back, review prior Notice of Funding Opportunities (NOFOs), and identify and address areas within the cooperative agreement where the organizational structure, content, and guidance might be improved. As part of the NOFO restructuring process, ELC prepared additional guidance on constructing work plans that more effectively highlight public health departments' goals and how activities and milestones can more clearly demonstrate progress toward reaching those goals, particularly with respect to cross cutting sections.

The "Quick Reference for ELC Work Plans: Developing Better Milestones" document was developed and distributed to recipients in 2017. After release of the document, a group of general recommendations to consider when constructing activities and milestones for cross-cutting epidemiology and laboratory work plans was developed based on discussions and reviews of recipient work plans.

KEY TERMS & DEFINITIONS:

Strategy: Strategies are pre-defined by the program and tie back to the overarching ELC Overall Roadmap (provided in the ELC NOFO). Strategies are groupings of related activities and usually expressed as general or brief statements.

Activity: Activities are major components of the program and support the overall strategy and related outcomes. They should be concrete and their implementation tracked through clear milestones.

Milestones: Milestones should describe major, discrete accomplishments and tangible results associated with the activity and implementation plan. Milestones should represent measurable interim products that demonstrate the recipient is on schedule to accomplish the activity. Integrate SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time- Based) criteria and outcome language where possible.

Overall Recommendations:

1. Utilizing the Overall Roadmap, consider how the strategies, activities, and milestones selected will help achieve your program goals/outcomes.
 - a. The Implementation Plan should address how the expected outcomes will be achieved by the activities proposed with measurable progress reflected in the milestones.
 - b. Descriptions of the activities and milestones should focus more on recipients work plan goals/outcomes to be accomplished and less on the staff (person-centric) who will be assigned to conducting the activities. Names (when known), responsibilities, and duties of personnel funded through the ELC Cooperative Agreement are described in the Budget Template as opposed to the Application Template, where the work plan is located.
2. Improving the integration/alignment of activities and milestones between epidemiology and laboratory.
 - a. In the 2019 ELC NOFO, the cross-cutting epidemiology and laboratory projects from prior years were integrated into one Program. This was done, in part, to encourage greater dialogue between epi and lab when developing recipient cross-cutting activities and work plans.
 - b. While it is understood that state, local, and territorial epi and lab staff routinely work very closely together, that strong working relationship has not consistently been reflected in ELC applications where they appear "siloed".
 - c. Choosing activities and developing implementation plans that include referencing each other's work where applicable, strengthens the application and highlights the collaborative efforts and shared goals between epi and lab.

Example: If WGS is newly being performed on all Salmonella isolates/specimens received at the PHL, what 'new' or enhanced surveillance activities are being pursued by the epidemiologists to more fully exploit this new technology potentially resulting in more timely and improved outbreak detection and source identification (e.g. enhanced standardized questionnaires used; engage student interview teams to attempt to contact all cases whose isolates are undergoing WGS; use GIS to look at clusters of matching WGS patterns, etc.)?

3. Number of activities and milestones.

More (activities, milestones) does not necessarily translate into "better".

- a. In some applications, work plans have included a large number of activities with numerous milestones listed under a specific strategy, resulting in redundant implementation plans and milestones
- b. Articulating and outlining **first** recipients' goals and needs regarding priority areas to be addressed in the cross-cutting section will result in a more cohesive application.
- c. Number of activities &/or milestones should be determined by the work being proposed, not by the number submitted in last year's application. The review, and related scoring, is contingent upon the strength of the work plan.
- d. Once drafted, review the entire section to identify activities and milestones that could be consolidated either under one activity listed or by rephrasing/rewording the detailed activity name.

4. Milestones.

-  a. What they are:
 - i. Specific, discrete activity accomplishments or outputs.
 - ii. Described in the Activity Implementation Plan.
 - iii. Written in active voice (examples): **Complete** (e.g., a CIDT survey of laboratories; an evaluation of the impact of utilizing a student interview team on CRF completeness and timeliness); **Develop** (e.g. a protocol on legionella outbreak investigation and management); **Build** (e.g. a new data entry system); **Establish** (e.g. an AR Taskforce; a Student Interview Team); **Implement** (e.g. revised salmonella case report form; new quarterly reports for LHDs); **Specify** a desired outcome (e.g. 80% of case report forms will be complete for critical data fields); **Train** (e.g. xx# lab staff cross-trained in performing WGS; xx# epi staff trained in basic/advanced SAS/ArcGIS); **Hire** (new staff).
- b. What they are not:
 - i. Vague (examples): **Enhance** (e.g. reporting system; case report forms; laboratory testing practices); **Improve** (e.g. quality and timeliness of reports); **Summarize** (e.g. notes from meetings); **As needed** (e.g. Participate in investigations, as needed); **Reiteration** of the Activity Name (e.g. both are "Improve quality and completeness of data")
 - ii. Ongoing, routine activities (examples): **Continue** (e.g. holding monthly meetings; monthly/quarterly reports); **Maintain** (e.g., staff person); **Attend** (e.g. meetings, conferences)

5. Timeframes for completion of milestones.

As stated previously, milestones are intended to be discrete points in time when an important stage in an activity is reached.

- a. While it may be difficult to exactly determine when an activity may be initiated and/or completed, it is expected that you provide a logical timeline for when key components of the activity (and listed as milestones) will be completed.
- b. When one milestone is dependent upon the completion or near completion of another milestone within the budget period, the second milestone's completion date should follow the first milestone's completion date.
- c. Rethink milestones that can "only" have a completion date consistent with the end of the budget year (i.e., July 2020). Again, milestones are discrete points in the work plan indicating whether work remains on-track. Milestones would not be ongoing or continuous actions routinely taken.