# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Components of Assessment</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021-22 Workflow &amp; Deadlines</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using AEFIS to Document Annual Program Assessment</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assessment Plan</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Description</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Learning Outcomes</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures &amp; Targets</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assessment Report</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Results for Seeking Improvement</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status Update on a Previously Identified Action</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Foreword

The purpose of academic program assessment is for program faculty to gather information about what and how students are learning, discuss that information as a faculty group, and use it to inform continuous improvement efforts within the academic program. By extension, these efforts aid in enhancing the educational experience for students, improving program learning outcome (PLO) assessment results, further developing students’ skills in the identified PLOs, and actively involving program faculty in the curricular quality improvement process. The information presented in each section of this manual defines Texas A&M University’s expectations for the documentation of PLO assessment. This “how-to” manual is designed to guide academic programs through this process, highlight best practices, and facilitate self- and peer-review of Assessment Plans and Assessment Reports.
Components of Assessment

The walkthrough sections of this companion manual follow the same order of the sections comprising the Assessment Plan and Assessment Report, as outlined below.

NOTE: Each section of this companion manual includes an FAQ list. The FAQs in blue text indicate technical information that addresses functionality within the AEFIS system.

Assessment Plan. The Assessment Plan, completed every Spring semester, identifies which program learning outcomes (PLOs) will be assessed during the upcoming academic year, as well as the measures and targets that will be used to assess each PLO. Programs may identify as many PLOs as they see fit to assess in a given year, but at least one PLO must be assessed annually.

The Assessment Plan consists of the following:
- Program Description
- Program Learning Outcome(s)
- Measures & Targets

Assessment Report. The Assessment Report, completed every Fall semester, includes assessment findings from the data gathered over the course of the previous academic year, as outlined in the established Assessment Plan for that year. The Assessment Report also includes the program’s intended use of results, formerly called Data-Informed Actions. In the Use of Results section, the program describes action(s) program faculty will implement to improve PLOs. A minimum of one (1) content-based action (i.e., curricular change) designed to improve one or more of the assessed PLOs is required each year.

Finally, the Assessment Report includes a status update of an action identified in a previous assessment report, a process formerly referred to as Closing the Loop.

The Assessment Report consists of the following:
- Findings
- Use of Results
- Status Update of a Previously Identified Action

The components making up the Plan and Report are covered individually and in detail throughout this manual. Component sections include:
- A description of the component
- Criteria for what each component should include and on which internal liaisons provide feedback
- Examples
- Frequently asked questions
- Snapshots of what the components look like in AEFIS
# 2021-22 Workflow & Deadlines

Over the course of the two-year assessment cycle, assessment forms follow an 8-step workflow. Individuals in the following roles participate at one or various points in the cycle:

- **Program Coordinators**: The faculty responsible for documenting and submitting Assessment Plans and Reports in AEFIS
- **Assessment Liaisons**: College, school, or campus appointees who work with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness & Evaluation (OIE&E) to provide support and communicate expectations to Program Coordinators in their respective college, school, or campus; responsible for providing internal feedback on Assessment Plans and Reports
- **Final Approvers**: Individuals (most often Department Heads and/or Associate Department Heads) who provide the final review of the Assessment Report before submitting it to OIE&E for end-of-cycle comments
- **OIE&E**: The administrative office responsible for providing support to those in the roles defined above as they participate in the annual program assessment process; responsible for managing the assessment platform (AEFIS) and publishing resources for users, as well as providing final comments on completed Assessment Reports

The 2021-22 assessment cycle is as follows, and a visual representation of this workflow can be found on the next page:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workflow Step</th>
<th>Step Name (in AEFIS)</th>
<th>Assigned Role</th>
<th>Submission Deadline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td>Enter Plan</td>
<td>Program Coordinator</td>
<td>April 9, 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td>Internal Feedback on Plan</td>
<td>Assessment Liaison</td>
<td>May 21, 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3</td>
<td>Draft Report</td>
<td>Program Coordinator</td>
<td>October 28, 2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 4</td>
<td>Internal Feedback on Report</td>
<td>Assessment Liaison</td>
<td>November 18, 2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 5</td>
<td>Revise/Finalize Report</td>
<td>Program Coordinator</td>
<td>December 2, 2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 6</td>
<td>Final Approval of Report</td>
<td>Final Approver (Dept)</td>
<td>December 16, 2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 7</td>
<td>OIE&amp;E Comments</td>
<td>OIE&amp;E</td>
<td>February 3, 2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 8</td>
<td>Acknowledge Final Comments</td>
<td>Program Coordinator</td>
<td>February 10, 2023</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Using AEFIS to Document Annual Program Assessment

**Getting Started**

Faculty and staff who are responsible for the submission of Assessment Plans & Reports are called **Program Coordinators** in AEFIS. Program Coordinators use their NetID and password to log in to AEFIS (tamu.aefis.net).

New users can request access via the form found [here](#).

Newly appointed Program Coordinators should refer to the [AY21-22 AEFIS User Guide](#) for specific instructions on logging in, accessing, and submitting Assessment Plans. This visual guide includes helpful tips, things to remember, and information about system features that Program Coordinators may find useful (such as using Tasks and Notes to communicate with other Program Coordinators with access to program assessment forms). The following information covers the basics of using AEFIS for program assessment.

**Accessing Program Assessment Forms**

Assessment forms assigned to Program Coordinators will appear in the Action Items list on the right side of the browser after logging in to AEFIS. Click the blue pencil icon to edit the information in the program assessment form. **If the Action Items list does not automatically appear, it can be accessed by clicking on the bell icon at the top right of the screen in the blue bar:**

![Action Items](image)

Please pay particular attention to the academic year listed on the form in which you are working. At any given time, there are two active program assessment cycles—the cycle for which the Plan is being documented and the cycle for which assessment data is being collected and the Report is being documented. Sometimes those forms will be visible in the Action Items list at the same time. Program Coordinators should verify they are working in the intended form.

Upon opening the 2021-22 assessment form for the first time, Program Coordinators will find information is already entered in some fields. The following information has been pre-populated in the 2021-22 forms (from the 2020-21 forms)¹:

- In the Program Description section, the “Discipline-specific purpose and focus” text

¹ New programs will not have any information pre-populated in their 21-22 forms.
● All Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)
● All Measures and Targets information that was entered under existing PLOs

Submitting Program Assessment Forms

Over the course of the assessment cycle, Program Coordinators will submit the Assessment Plan once (Step 1) and the Assessment Report twice (Steps 3 and 5). See page 6 for a graphic representation of the assessment cycle.

Upon submitting the 2021-22 Plan, it will be sent to the Assessment Liaison for feedback. Simply click the “I’m Finished, Submit” button at the bottom of the form to submit it.

An additional step is required for all submissions after the initial submission. There will be two additional buttons above the “I’m Finished, Submit” button: Approve Form and Reject Form. In order to successfully submit the form, Approve Form must be selected first. This button indicates the form should move to the next step in the workflow. The Reject Form button indicates the form should move back a step in the workflow. Program Coordinators will likely not use the Reject Form button very often, if at all. For example, it may be used in rare cases when the Assessment Liaison asks for the form to be sent back to them.

NOTE: After receiving feedback on the Assessment Plan from the internal Assessment Liaison (i.e., when the form is at Step 3), Program Coordinators may update the Program Description, PLOs, Measures, and/or Targets as they see fit. However, the form should NOT be submitted again until after the Assessment Report (Findings and Use of Results) information is entered in Fall 2022. Simply use the “Continue Later” button to save any changes made to the form. The form will conveniently remain in the Action Items list over the course of the academic year as assessment data is gathered.

Accessing Submitted Assessment Forms

After the Program Coordinator submits a form it will no longer appear on their Action Items list. However, Program Coordinators can view read-only copies of submitted forms from their AEFIS dashboard widget labeled My Data Collection Forms. Simply click the three-dot icon at the top right of the widget and filter by “In Progress Forms.”
Reviewing Form History

AEFIS tracks the changes made within assessment forms and progression of assessment forms through the workflow. While in a form, you can review this information by clicking the clock icon at the top right of the screen (pictured above).

The resulting menu has two sections:

**Form Actions**
This section shows the assessment form's submission history including date, time, whether the form was sent forward in the workflow (Action: Proceed) or backward (Action: Rejected), and by who.

**Form Update History**
This section shows a list of dated sessions in which a Program Coordinator, Liaison, Final Approver, or OIE&E staff member was making edits to the form. Each session is date-stamped and labeled with the user’s name.

Click the upward pointing arrow next to a particular session to expand that section. This view will show each individual change that was made in the form (timestamped). Clicking on an individual change/update will automatically navigate you to that section of the form.

This is a particularly useful feature if more than one Program Coordinator is responsible for entering information in the assessment form. It provides a total history of what has been entered, when, and by whom.
Email Notifications

When feedback is submitted to Program Coordinators—whether from the Assessment Liaison or OIEE staff—the system automatically sends an email notification indicating that an assessment form is available on the Program Coordinator’s Action Items list. The sender of these notifications is listed as “The Office of Institutional Effectiveness & Evaluation,” but the notifications are sent automatically by the AEFIS system. *Please read these email notifications carefully as they provide important information, such as who provided feedback, next steps and future deadlines, and technical information about the AEFIS system.*

**NOTE:** If you have a student email address (@email.tamu.edu) in addition to a work email address (@tamu.edu), you may need to forward these notifications from your student account to your work account. AEFIS receives a nightly update from the University’s Student Information System, during which student email addresses overwrite work email addresses. Therefore, if you do not believe you are receiving these notifications please check your student email account and set up the forwarding function.
Program Description

In this beginning section of the Assessment Plan, Program Coordinators are asked to provide some general information about the program(s). The Program Description section includes three prompts/items:

1. **Discipline-specific purpose and focus of the program(s)**

   Describe the purpose and focus of the academic program (i.e., what students with this degree will be prepared to do after graduation with the knowledge and skills gained in the program). This may resemble the program’s mission statement and/or catalog description.

2. **Campus/approved location of delivery and/or delivery through distance education technology**

   The **physical geographic location** of program delivery should be clearly stated for all programs included in the Assessment Plan. This refers to the campus (College Station, Galveston, Qatar) and/or the approved teaching site (e.g., City Centre in Houston, HSC in Bryan, Dallas, McAllen, etc.). If the program is available at multiple locations please include each site, separated by a comma or semicolon.

   If the program is available through **distance education (DE) technology**, this should be noted and the format of delivery should also be clearly stated (i.e., asynchronous, synchronous, or both).

   **Definitions:**

   - **Program offered through DE technology**: More than half or all of the curriculum (>50%) is available to students through asynchronous web-based delivery and/or through synchronous delivery where content is delivered real-time but the instructor and student(s) are in different geographic locations. This **DOES NOT include temporary remote delivery of courses due to the pandemic**.

   - **Asynchronous delivery**: Majority of instruction does not occur in real time. Instructors provide content which the student can access via technology on their own time.

   - **Synchronous delivery**: Majority of instruction is available to and accessed by students in real time with the instructor via technology.

   - **Both**: Program offers 50% or more of the CHs **synchronously AND 50% or more of the CHs asynchronously**.

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2 The Program Description section does not have specific Yes/No criteria on which Liaisons provide feedback. Only qualitative feedback is provided.
**NOTE:** Programs that are offered in both modalities (i.e., fully online and fully face-to-face) should clearly indicate this in the DE text box.

3. *During which academic year were students first enrolled in this program?*

Programs are prompted to select from a dropdown menu the first academic year during which students were enrolled in the program. This helps assessment staff determine expectations for reporting. For example, new four- or five-year programs are expected to submit a Plan but may not yet have data for the Report. Conversely, programs that have enrolled students for a number of years are expected to report assessment results annually.

**NOTE:** Assessment Plans that include more than one program should select the option that describes the newest program.

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**FAQs**

**Q:** The discipline-specific purpose from the 20-21 assessment form is already populated in the form. Can we just leave it as it is?

**A:** If the existing information addresses the overall purpose of the program(s) it can be left as is. However, any location/DE information should be moved to the appropriate text box. If that information is missing from the existing description it should be added in the appropriate text box. If this Assessment Plan covers more than one program, double check that the program purpose AND location/DE information is communicated for all programs.
Program Learning Outcomes

All degree programs and certificates are expected to establish a minimum of three program learning outcomes (PLOs) to assess within the program’s comprehensive Assessment Plan. However, these PLOs may be assessed on rotation, and in such cases the program should determine that rotation schedule in advance. Programs are expected to meet the minimum requirement of assessing at least one PLO per cycle.

A program learning outcome (PLO) is a skill or competency students are expected to demonstrate or articulate by the time they graduate from the academic program and/or complete the requirements for a certificate.

Criteria

1. **PLO reflects what students are expected to learn by the end of the program (i.e., program-level, not course-level)**

   PLO descriptions should clearly state the specific knowledge and skills graduates of the program are expected to possess. A strong PLO is written in clear, straightforward terms and is appropriate to the degree level (or certificate level). Whereas course learning outcomes (CLOs) describe knowledge and abilities students should possess at the end of a course, PLOs describe the broader knowledge and abilities students should be able to demonstrate as a result of their combined coursework.

2. **PLO is mapped appropriately to Relevant Association(s)**

   In AEFIS, Program Coordinators are prompted to select Relevant Associations for each PLO in the Assessment Plan. There may be multiple sets of outcomes listed in the Relevant Associations dropdown menu, depending on the program level:

   *Undergraduate Programs*
   
   Be sure to select Relevant Associations from each category, if applicable.
• **Baccalaureate student learning outcomes** - Texas A&M University has identified seven learning outcomes which describe the knowledge and skills undergraduate students should possess upon graduation from TAMU. These also apply to undergraduate certificates.

• **Core Curriculum objectives** - The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) has established six skills which prepare students for the job market and their role in a diverse world and democratic society. These skills are introduced and reinforced throughout the Core Curriculum. All undergraduate degree programs are asked to map PLOs to these outcomes if relevant.

• **EmpowerU outcomes** - Texas A&M University System (TAMUS) has identified six learning outcomes that apply to undergraduate degree programs and undergraduate-level certificates.

**Graduate Programs**

• **Master’s and doctoral learning outcomes** – Texas A&M University has identified several learning outcomes which describe the knowledge and skills graduate students should possess upon graduation from TAMU. Graduate-level certificate programs are also asked to map their PLOs to the master’s and/or doctoral learning outcomes.

**Relevant Associations**

1. Select Relevant Associations from the menu. Select only the associations that directly align with the PLO. If multiple sets of associations are listed, please select the appropriate association(s) from each set.
FAQs

Q: Our program has external accreditation requirements for the discipline which requires specific PLOs be assessed. Can we use those outcomes in this Assessment Plan?

A: Yes, in fact we encourage accredited programs to ensure close alignment between the annual program assessment process and program accreditation requirements.

Q: Do we have to measure the same outcomes every year? / Can we measure the same outcomes every year?

A: Program faculty should guide the assessment process, including determining which outcomes are measured and when. Some programs place their learning outcomes on two- or three-year rotations, focusing on just one or two PLOs in a given academic year. In any case, assessment planning should be an intentional process. For some programs this might mean measuring the same PLOs every year, and in others this might mean measuring PLOs on a rotation. Even programs that assess their outcomes on a planned rotation might need to deviate from their rotation from time to time. Again, these decisions should be driven by faculty and the observations they make.

Q: Can this Assessment Plan include program objectives like participation in educational activities, publication productivity, etc.?

A: The primary purpose of the assessment reporting process is to document student learning. Other objectives and program outputs (e.g., tracking the number of manuscripts submitted by students) may be included as part of the Assessment Report as additional objectives; however, programs should ensure they are meeting the minimum expectation of reporting assessment results for one Program Learning Outcome annually, and that any programmatic objectives are in addition to PLO(s).

Q: Regarding the selection of Relevant Associations, is it better to indicate all that are somewhat associated or to be more selective?

A: The associations should be as closely aligned as possible. That is, each PLO should only be associated with the Relevant Associations it most closely resembles. If two associations are closely related to the PLO, both may be selected. One purpose of making these associations is to demonstrate how the program is addressing the university- and/or system-wide outcomes through its annual assessment practices.

Q: If we plan to make significant changes to one of our outcomes, should we revise the existing outcome or add a new outcome in the assessment form?
A: If the revision is one that will fundamentally change how that outcome will be measured (e.g., changing a Communication outcome to a Critical Thinking outcome, or a Depth of Knowledge outcome that will focus on a different content area), always add a new outcome instead of simply revising the existing outcome. This ensures that the old version of the outcome remains intact and tied to its relevant measures in assessment forms from previous cycles. Add the new outcome and simply de-select the old outcome to indicate that it will not be assessed in the current cycle. These outdated outcomes can be permanently deleted later on.

Q: We are adding a new outcome—what should we enter in the Outcome Code field in the assessment form?

A: The Outcome Code should be a unique identifier no more than 20 characters long. All Outcome Codes should begin with the division code and unit code, separated by a dash, and end with characters that will make it easy to identify the focus of the outcome. For example, the Biology BS program might wish to add a visual communication outcome, for which an appropriate outcome code might be “BS-BIOL-VCOMM”. Refer to the codes for the PLOs that were pre-loaded into the assessment forms.
Measures & Targets

A measure describes the methods of collecting and evaluating assessment data. A strong measure description makes the assessment strategy easy to follow for an external party who is not intimately involved in the day-to-day operations of the program. The Measures section can be thought of as a miniature methods and data analysis section of a research paper.

A target is the level at which a program considers their program learning outcome (PLO) to be “met” or achieved on a given measure. Strong targets are clear, static levels of achievement.

Types of Measures

There are two types of measures: direct and indirect. All PLOs must be assessed with at least one direct measure. Indirect measures may supplement direct measures, but the focus of the Assessment Plan should be on the direct measurement of PLOs.

Direct measures require students to demonstrate their competency or ability in a way that is evaluated for measurable quality by an expert such as an instructor, assessment professional, internship supervisor, or industry representative. Some examples of direct measures are:

- Written assignments, oral presentations, portfolios, or demonstrations to which a rubric—or other detailed criteria—are applied
- Exam questions focused on a particular PLO
- Scores on standardized exams (e.g., licensure, certification, or subject area tests)
- Employer or internship supervisor ratings of student performance
- Other assignment grades based on detailed criteria

Indirect measures provide secondhand information about student learning. Whereas direct measures are concerned with the quality of student work as it relates to certain PLOs, indirect measures are indicators that students are probably learning. Often, indirect measures are too broad to depict achievement of specific PLOs. Some examples of indirect measures are:

- Tasks tracked by recording completion or participation rates
- Completion of degree requirements
- Number of students who publish manuscripts or give conference presentations
- Survey questions students answer about their own perception of their abilities
- Job placement
- Course grades and some exam grades (see FAQs below)
- GPAs
- Course enrollment data
Criteria

1. The measure aligns with the PLO as defined

Programs should ensure alignment between PLOs and their measures. For example, if the PLO states students will articulate a discipline-specific concept, the measure should describe a written or oral activity through which students discuss that concept (versus identifying the concepts on a multiple-choice exam, for example).

2. Both data collection and methodology are clear

An external reviewer of the Assessment Plan will not have an in-depth knowledge of the program and its curriculum, so it is important to clearly communicate where data are coming from by including the following information, where appropriate: The course designation and/or point in the curriculum when the data is collected, who collects the data, sampling methods, etc. Enough detail should be provided that it is clear how the measure addresses the PLO.

The measure description should also include information about how the data will be evaluated and reported. For example, the measure description might include how the assessment data will be aggregated and analyzed for a program-level discussion about student learning.

3. Target(s) is/are clear and specific

Strong targets have the following characteristics: (1) Alignment with the measure and PLO in terms of language and specificity, (2) the minimally acceptable performance on the measure, and (3) the proportion of students who are expected to reach that performance level.

For example:

A PLO is about synthesizing information from different sources.

The measure is a rubric applied to a research paper. The rubric has the following categories: Introduction of Topic, Literature Review, Methodology, Results, Implications. Each of the rubric categories is defined at the following performance levels: Exemplary, Accomplished, Developing, Beginner. The Literature Review category specifically includes consideration of the level at which students synthesize information from different sources.

An appropriate target might be as follows: 80% of students will be rated as either Accomplished or Exemplary on the Literature Review category of the rubric.
Notice that the target (1) refers to the specific rubric category that addresses the specific PLO, (2) indicates the minimally acceptable performance level (Accomplished), and (3) communicates the proportion of students that should meet this level (80%).

Additionally, targets should be meaningfully selected. They might be more or less rigorous depending on the degree level or on past student performance. Program faculty should collectively determine appropriate and meaningful targets.

4. All referenced or relevant rubrics/surveys are attached or sufficiently described

As often as possible, programs should attach instruments used in the assessment process (i.e., rubrics, prompts, surveys, exam items, etc.) as supporting documentation to the Assessment Plan. There is an option to upload supporting documentation in each Measures section, as seen below. Uploaded and selected documents can be previewed by clicking on the “eye” button.

FAQs

Q: Why aren’t course grades and GPAs considered direct measures?

A: Final course grades and GPAs are very broad metrics. PLOs are much more specific. Although a great deal of instruction in a particular course might focus on developing skills related to a PLO, the course likely addresses a variety of other skills and knowledge as well. It is difficult to determine how much of a course grade or GPA is actually due to how well students demonstrate a single, specific learning outcome. Furthermore, many course grades also take into account factors like class participation and attendance. The inclusion of these metrics in the final grade or GPA further complicates the determination of how much a course grade actually captures a specific PLO.

Q: Why aren’t exam grades considered direct measures?

A: Similar to course grades (see above), comprehensive or multi-unit exam grades are often quite broad. However, some exams focused on specific topics and/or skills can make them candidates for
use in direct assessment. When it comes to exam scores, program faculty should always consider which data would be more meaningful as evidence of a specific PLO: a comprehensive exam grade or performance on specific exam items (e.g., essay questions or a grouping of multiple-choice items relating to the same topic).

Q: Should we use more than one measure to assess a PLO? Do we have to use more than one measure?

A: Consider this—you wouldn’t award a diploma based on a single exam grade. Relying on a single measure to capture collective student performance on a PLO will provide only limited information about the extent to which students are achieving that PLO. Programs are strongly encouraged to use more than one measure to assess student ability as this will provide a more complete picture of the curriculum and what students learn in the program. As a byproduct, use of multiple measures will also facilitate conversations about continuous improvement.

Q: We received previous feedback about using a comprehensive rubric score as evidence of a PLO. Why is this a problem?

A: Aggregating rubric scores is not inherently a problem. Many multi-criteria rubrics exist, in which each individual criterion may directly relate to the overall learning outcome (for example, AAC&U rubrics). However, depending on what the program wishes to accomplish, it might be more useful to report the results for each rubric criterion separately. Breaking down the results like this can uncover gaps in learning that might not have been as obvious in the aggregate score alone. More granular results also make continuous improvement opportunities easier to identify. Additionally, some rubrics may include criteria for unrelated skills. For example, the rubric to evaluate a research paper might include criteria for the Literature Review, Methods, Analysis, and Discussion, but also include a criterion for Grammar, Syntax, and Mechanics. If the PLO is specific to research skills, only results from the research-related criteria should be reported.

Q: What are some other examples of strong targets that include a specific proportion of students expected to meet the minimally acceptable performance level?

A: Here are some examples of strong targets:

- 85% of students will earn at least 7 out of 10 points on the critical thinking essay question.
- 100% of students will achieve the ‘Competent’ threshold on the Content Development rubric criterion.
- 70% of students will score above the 80th percentile on the ACS standardized exam.

Sometimes the minimally acceptable performance level is an average, in which case a proportion of students does not need to be reported. For example: The average score on the related rubric criterion will be at least 4.0.
Q: How often, if at all, should targets be revised?

A: Program faculty should revisit targets annually and revise them as necessary, particularly if the targets are met year after year. Targets that are consistently met year after year may also be a sign that other methods of measuring the outcome should be explored. It is considered good practice to rely on multiple measures for evidence of a PLO.

Q: Do the file names of the uploaded supporting documents matter?

A: The file name of a supporting document should be descriptive enough that it is clear to a reviewer how it relates to the measure to which it is connected. If supporting documents are sometimes revised year to-year, we suggest instituting a naming convention that includes the assessment cycle to which the document is relevant. Documents linked to measures in assessment forms from the previous cycle are carried forward into the new assessment forms every year (accessible from the ‘Manage Artifacts’ menu at the top right of the form), so using this kind of naming convention will make it easier for new Program Coordinators to see the historical record of assessment-related documents.

Q: We have more than one target for one of our measures—how should we indicate this in the assessment form?

A: At the bottom of each Measure & Target section there is an “+Add Target” button. Additional Target text boxes can be added using this feature. If multiple targets are created for a measure, remember to report the results for each target when the time comes to enter Findings.
Findings

Findings are the results from analysis of assessment data. Strong Assessment Reports will consistently communicate findings in a clear manner using language that aligns with the related measure and target. In addition to the findings statement itself, programs should select the appropriate designation (called a target status indicator)—whether the target was Met, Not Met, or Partially Met—from the provided menu. Please see the FAQs section for information about the appropriate use of Partially Met.

If there are no findings to report for a given measure/target, programs may select one of two other options in the target status indicator dropdown menu: (1) No students enrolled or (2) No data collected/reported. Appropriate use of each is briefly described below:

- **No students enrolled**: Select this option if there were no students enrolled in the program during the academic year for which the Report is being prepared.

- **No data collected/reported**: This option might be selected for a number of reasons, but must always be accompanied by a brief explanation. Most often it will be selected if there are fewer than 5 students enrolled in a given academic year, or if there are fewer than 5 students at the point in the curriculum where assessment data is collected. Programs with uncharacteristically low enrollment (or an uncharacteristically small number of students from whom assessment data could be collected) are not required to report assessment results for fewer than 5 students. **Programs that experience consistently low enrollment from year-to-year are required to report assessment results annually. Please refer to the FAQs section for more information.**
Criteria

1. **Target status indicator is accurate based on reported findings**

   Target status indicators are used to indicate whether the target was *Met, Not Met, or Partially Met*. The findings statement should support the selected indicator. If no findings are reported, either *No students enrolled* or *No data collected/reported* should be selected (with an explanation accompanying the latter selection).

2. **Findings statement includes information regarding implications and/or comparison with past findings**

   The main findings are reported in the “Findings” text box in the AEFIS assessment form. There is a second text box in which programs are prompted to briefly reflect on the implications of the findings and/or how the current data compare to the data from the last time the PLO was measured. Findings should be discussed in the context of past results if possible, as the longitudinal pattern of findings can provide valuable information to the program.

3. **Where appropriate, findings are disaggregated (i.e., by program, by mode of delivery, by geographic location)**

   Provided here are some examples of Assessment Reports in which results should be disaggregated:
   
   - The Assessment Plan includes two programs with different credentials (e.g., MS/PhD or MS/MEd combined in a single Plan)
   - The Assessment Plan includes two or more programs with different modes of delivery (e.g., a Distance Education program in the same Plan as a face-to-face program)
   - The Assessment Plan includes a single program, but that program is offered both face-to-face and via technology OR face-to-face in two different geographic locations

   Programs falling into any of the three categories listed above (or any combination of the above) are required to disaggregate assessment results by these characteristics.

FAQs

**Q:** *What does ‘Partially Met’ mean and when should it be used?*

**A:** *Partially Met* should ONLY be used when reporting findings for compound or complex targets.
For example: A program uses a four-criteria, four-point rating scale rubric to measure written communication. The target states that 80% of the students will achieve a score of 3 or higher on all criteria of the rubric. The results show that 83% of students achieved 3 or higher on two of the criteria, but only 75% achieved a 3 or higher on the other two criteria. This Target would be Partially Met. Partially Met should not be used if the target was close to being met.

Q: There is consistently low enrollment in the program—can we always select ‘No data collected/reported’ if there are fewer than 5 students on which to report assessment results?

A: No. Only programs that occasionally experience low enrollment or only occasionally assess fewer than 5 students should select this option. Programs with consistently low enrollment must utilize other methods of reporting results. We recommend combining current assessment results with assessment results from the past two or three cycles in which the same measures were used. This creates a larger sample and results in more data on which to base continuous improvement efforts.

Q: All of the targets are met, which is an indication our students are performing well. Can we just say that in our reflection about the findings?

A: Saying that the findings are an indication that students are performing well is essentially the same as indicating the target is Met. The reflection should go one step further by contextualizing the results. This can be done in a variety of ways, but one of the most powerful ways to discuss the meaning of results for continuous improvement is to describe the longitudinal trend. How have students performed on this outcome/measure over the past few assessment cycles? Is progress being made? If not, to what might faculty attribute this trend?

Q: How should findings statements be structured?

A: There is not a prescribed template all findings statements must follow. However, the following is a template programs might find useful:
- First sentence: Present the assessment results in the context of the measure (e.g., 85% of students achieved at least 3 points on the ‘Written Communication’ rubric criterion).
- Second sentence: Reiterate the target, stating whether it was met, not met, or partially met (e.g., The target of 80% achieving at least a 3 was met).
- Third sentence (in the second text box): Contextualize the results by discussing longitudinal data trends, presenting other supporting data (if available), and/or by reflecting on whether results were surprising or affirming and why.

Q: Should we upload supporting documentation regarding our findings? If so, what are some examples of appropriate documentation?

A: Supporting documentation for the findings is optional. Some programs may find it useful to upload documents that further illustrate their findings (reports, charts and graphs, raw data, etc.), as AEFIS then becomes a central location for that information from year-to-year. Please ensure uploaded
documents do not include any identifying student information. You will upload this documentation in the same place as the Measures documentation.

**Q:** We identified multiple targets for one of our measures but there is only one place to report findings for that measure. How should we report our results?

**A:** Simply address all targets in the “Findings” text box. We recommend numbering the findings statements based on how many targets were established (1, 2, 3, etc.). In the second text box that prompts you to discuss implications or past results, feel free to discuss each finding separately or to discuss the findings more holistically.
Use of Results for Seeking Improvement

How programs use their assessment results is a process called **continuous improvement**. Through participation in the annual program assessment cycle, programs demonstrate their commitment to the ongoing, gradual enhancement of student learning and overall improvement of the program for its enrolled students.

The action(s) discussed in the Use of Results section of the Assessment Report should have a close, clear connection to the data collected during the assessment cycle. The action(s) should be curricular in nature. **Every program is expected to establish and submit a minimum of one action or change that fulfills the criteria below, regardless of whether all targets are met.**

**Criteria**

1. **Action is designed to improve student learning**

   Program Coordinators are prompted to select the type of action being taken (see the screenshot below). The categories in the dropdown menu are broad “bucket” categories in which most curricular actions tend to fall. Please note that there is an “Other” option.

   The Use of Results description should clearly articulate a specific course of action designed to improve student achievement of a targeted PLO. There should be enough detail provided that an external reviewer is able to understand which finding is informing the action, what the action entails, how the action relates to the targeted PLO, and what the various implementation details are (e.g., responsible party, planned timeline, timeline for re-assessment of the targeted PLO).

   See also FAQs for specific examples of appropriate actions/curricular changes.
2. **Action includes consideration of how faculty know the action will have worked**

Program Coordinators are prompted to respond to a second question about how faculty will know whether the action will have made a difference. Though the answer to this question may seem obvious, it is asked to encourage intentional thought around about future assessment of the PLO. It also prompts consideration of how “success” or “improvement” will be quantified (or qualitatively defined) in the continuous improvement process.

**Remember**: The information reported in the assessment form should not be written on behalf of an individual Program Coordinator, but on behalf of the entire body of program faculty. These discussions should be held as a faculty group prior to submission of the Report.

3. **Action explains how faculty and program leadership were involved in the development of the action**

Program assessment should be a faculty-owned and faculty-driven process. Individuals who hold leadership positions in the program and/or department should be involved in some capacity. The response to this prompt in the assessment form should describe how both faculty and program leadership were involved in the discussion and decision-making about the specific action that will be implemented based on current assessment findings.

**FAQs**

**Q: Do we have to establish an action for every assessment finding included in the Assessment Report?**

**A:** No. However, ideally, programs will be prepared to address PLOs for which targets were not met. During the planning stage, program faculty should consider—to the best of their ability—the program’s capacity for engaging in continuous improvement. For example, programs that plan to assess five or six PLOs in a given year should be prepared to determine appropriate actions for all of those PLOs should all targets be unmet.

**Q: How specific does an action need to be?**

**A:** The development of an action should be a collaborative decision-making process involving program faculty. It should reflect a specific, systematic response to the findings. This does not mean the action must be a large, resource-demanding overhaul to the program or curriculum. Rather, the action should be specific, identifiable, and should be able to be implemented in a systematic and intentional way. Listing possible curricular changes without committing to a specific action does not demonstrate a clear and intentional use of assessment data for improvement.

Examples of appropriate actions include, but are not limited to:
• A course-level adjustment at any point in the curriculum
• New text, assignments, etc.
• Guest lecturer in a specific course
• New programming or activities designed to enhance and improve PLO results
• A pilot program or initiative
• Prerequisite or other curriculum-based adjustment
• Changes to assignment requirements
• Changes to meeting requirements
• Changes to advising strategies
• Additional required trainings for faculty, staff, or students

Q: Can the action be to change the program’s assessment strategy?

A: The expectation is that at least one action will be a curricular change designed to improve student learning directly. Changes to measurement strategies and/or to the overall assessment process do not fit this criterion, but could be added as supplemental actions if the program wishes to do so.

Q: How do we determine an appropriate, intentional action when all of the targets are met?

A: Met targets are a sign the program is functioning well and the established PLOs are achievable. However, it does not mean that all of the work is done and there is no further need for assessment or attention to continuous improvement. Therefore, the program should still consider how the collected data can inform continuous improvement efforts. Strategies for identifying continuous improvement opportunities include but are not limited to:

• Drilling down into the results further, perhaps by demographic information, course section, or some other dimension in an effort to identify possible gaps or disparities
• Adjusting the target in future Assessment Plans
  o IMPORTANT: If the program follows this strategy, it is critical to include a discussion of what action the program will take in order to help students meet the new target. This keeps the focus of the action on a curricular change rather than simply on updating the target (which would be considered a change to the assessment strategy).

Q: If we plan to implement a number of different actions, how should we document this in the assessment form?

A: As long as it is clear which findings are informing each action, it is up to the program how to document actions in the Use of Results section. We recommend using the “+Add Use of Results” button to add a new section for each PLO for which an action will be implemented.
Status Update on a Previously Identified Action

In this section of the Report the program is prompted to identify a previously implemented action and provide an update on that action. In this update, the program should explain what changes, if any, have been seen in the PLO assessment results since the implementation of the action. If the action has not yet been fully implemented, describe, in detail, where the program is in the implementation process and when program faculty expect to re-assess the targeted PLO(s).

Criteria

1. Status update on a previously identified action is provided

Provide a summary of the previously identified action. Describe the specific action that was taken, which Assessment Report it was from (including the assessment findings that prompted it), and which PLO(s) it was intended to improve.

2. Action is content-based/curricular in nature (i.e., not a change to the assessment process)

The focus of the assessment process is on student learning, so the update provided here should be on a learning-centered action. It is expected that a program’s assessment strategies will change over time as the program develops and evolves, but those changes are reflected in the Assessment Plan each year and thus should not be updated here. The Status Update section specifically focuses on curricular changes that have been made (or are currently being implemented).

3. Discusses the impact of the action to date

Consider the impact the action may have had on the learning outcome results. Whether results were improved or not improved, reflect on what role the action may have played and discuss how the program aims to further improve outcome achievement in the future.

When possible, clearly state the specific results of the subsequent PLO assessment and how these results compare to the previous findings (i.e., the specific findings which prompted the action in the first place). Avoid vague statements such as “the target wasn’t met in the previous report.” Be as specific as possible: In the AY19-20 Report only 70% of students scored Acceptable on the rubric, but after implementing the action and re-assessing the outcome we found that the percentage of students scoring Acceptable or higher increased to 78%.
FAQs

Q: **What if there was no improvement in the targeted PLO(s)?**

A: The purpose of this process is to engage in and provide evidence of seeking improvement. There are no repercussions for unmet targets or unimproved assessment findings. In cases where improvement was not observed, this is valuable information in and of itself. Reflect on what might be done differently in the future to guide improvement.

Q: **What if we don’t have any follow-up results yet?**

A: As noted above, if an action has not yet been fully implemented (and if there are no other fully implemented actions on which to provide a status update), describe in detail where the program is in the implementation process and when program faculty expect to be able to re-assess the targeted PLO(s).

Q: **What should we write in the Status Update section if our program is brand new?**

A: If the program is brand new as of the current reporting cycle there won’t be a previous action on which to provide an update, so the Program Coordinator can simply state this in the text box. Brand new programs are also not required to report findings or use of results.

Q: **The program is using different measures than before, so the pre- and post-action data aren’t directly comparable. Is this an issue?**

A: No, this is not an issue. Assessment is not a hard science, so it is not necessary for the methodology to stay the same throughout the process. Assessment itself is a process, so it makes sense for measures to change as the program evolves. The program’s reflection on the efforts made to improve student learning is more important than ensuring directly comparable assessment results.

Q: **What if none of the program’s previous actions were curricular in nature/none were designed to improve PLOs?**

A: As this documentation is specific to **program learning outcome** assessment, the action discussed in the Status Update section should be curricular in nature (and specifically related to a PLO). If none of the program’s previous actions (i.e., actions submitted in previous Assessment Reports) were curricular in nature, the program should instead discuss some other curricular change made over the last few years.