**First-Year Seminar Self-Assessment Tool for Supporting Students from Low-Income Background**

Christine Harrington, Michael Sparrow, and Karen Irving

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**What is the First-Year Seminar Self-Assessment Tool?**

This tool, informed by literature and practitioner input, is designed to help first-year seminar leaders and their teams assess and improve the first-year seminar at their institution to serve students from low-income backgrounds better. The tool contains nearly a hundred suggested first-year seminar teaching and institutional practices. It is organized into nine categories: developing a sense of community, resources, academic strategies, career, mindset, assignments, professional learning for faculty and peer leaders, assessment, and institutional efforts. Practitioners can use the assessment tool results to plan improvements for the first-year seminar at their institution.

**What is the purpose of this tool?**

The purpose of the tool is for first-year seminar leaders and teams to engage in self-assessment and determine ways to improve the first-year seminar course for all students, especially students from low-income backgrounds.

*Please note that the expectation is not for every practice to be included in all first-year seminar courses but rather that those who design, lead, and teach the course consider the varied practices that can support students, especially those from low-income backgrounds, and determine the practices that best fit their institutional context.*

**What is the definition of students from low-income backgrounds?**

The definition of students from low-income backgrounds is multivalent, context-specific, and therefore difficult to summarize into one clear and well-defined universal definition, but for this project, we have chosen to define students from low-income backgrounds as those who are Pell Grant-eligible. We understand that this definition is incomplete and ignores scores of students who should be defined as low-income, but we also recognize that Pell eligibility is one characteristic that most American colleges can identify and track in their systems.

**Who should be completing and using this tool?**

First-year seminar directors and their leadership team should complete Section 1. Faculty can be invited to complete Section 2. A team of leaders, faculty, and other professionals who work with the director to design and implement the course can complete Sections 3 and 4.

**What resources are available to help directors use the tool?**

Directors and their teams are encouraged to access on and off-campus resources when developing action plans. Partnering with the Teaching and Learning Center for guidance on action items related to faculty development or with the Financial Aid office for action items related to financial aid workshops or modules can be helpful. Seeking external resources and support, such as those provided by the National Resource Center on the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, is also recommended.

**How should this tool be used?**

Step 1: Review Tool

Familiarize yourself with the key and questions in the tool. You can add institution-specific items if desired.

Step 2: Determine Who to Include in Self-Assessment Process

If completing it yourself, who will you consult with to answer all questions?

If completing it as a leadership team, is there an existing team or do you need to create a new team? If a new team, who should you invite?

Full and part-time faculty teaching the course can be invited to complete section 2.

Step 3: Complete the Tool

Directors and leadership team complete Section 1; faculty complete Section 2. Complete individual items first and then respond to overall category. Share responses with team.

Step 4: Discuss Results and Determine Strengths and Priority Areas for Improvement

Discuss the consistencies and inconsistencies of responses. Determine approximately 3 strengths of the course and 3 areas that could be improved. Indicate these in Section 3. Consider what changes are within your control and may be implemented soon, and what changes might take longer and require making a case for change.

Step 5: Determine Resources Needed.

Identify what resources are needed and put these in Section 3. Consult with mid and senior-level administrators about how to access needed resources.

Step 6: Develop an Action Plan

For three target areas, determine the action steps needed, the person responsible for overseeing these steps, and the timeline for doing so. Identify desired outcomes and indicate these in Section 3. Consult internal and external resources for guidance.

Step 7: Develop an Assessment Plan

Determine how you will know if improvements resulted in desired outcomes and indicate this in Section 3.

Step 8: Implement the Plan

Take identified actions, involving key faculty and staff.

Step 9: Assess the Course

Collect and analyze data needed to determine if identified outcomes were achieved.

Step 10: Celebrate Accomplishments and Engage in Continuous Improvement

Communicate and celebrate successful achievement of outcomes and determine a schedule to repeat this process with different priorities for improvement.

**Section 1: For First-Year Seminar Directors and Leadership Teams**

***Part I:******Key with Response Categories and Descriptions for First-Year Seminar Self-Assessment Tool Use***

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Drop Down Option** | **Title** | **Description** |
| **Priority of Teaching and Institutional Practices** |
| HIGH | High priority | This practice is viewed as critically important, heavily emphasized in the curriculum, and is a primary focus of professional learning experiences for faculty.  |
| MODERATE | Moderate priority | This practice is considered important and is included in the curriculum and on agendas for professional learning experiences for faculty.  |
| LOW | Low priority | This practice is only minimally addressed in the curriculum and professional learning experiences for faculty. It is not typically a required component of the curriculum and is not often on agendas for professional learning experiences for faculty. |
| EMERGING | Emerging priority | This practice is not currently being addressed, but there are plans to focus on it in the near future. |
| POSSIBLE  | Possible future priority | This practice is viewed as beneficial but is not a current priority for curriculum or professional learning experiences for faculty, perhaps because of resource limitations, other barriers, or competing priorities being the current focus. |
| NOT | Not a priority | This practice is not a priority and will not likely be a priority in the near future.  |
| **Need for Action**  |
| CONTINUE | Already effectively doing this practice, so no actions are needed. | Evidence suggests that this practice is being implemented effectively. |
| STRENGTHEN | Already doing this practice, but there is room for improvement.  | Evidence that this practice is being used, but it could be implemented more effectively. |
| EXPLORE | Not doing this practice currently but plan to explore ways to incorporate the practice moving forward | Although the practice is not currently being used, the promise of this practice is noted, and an exploration of how to incorporate the practice will take place. |
| NOT APPLICABLE | Not doing the practice and not planning to incorporate it because it does not seem to be a good fit for the course at this institution, is not a current priority, or there are insufficient resources. | Although the value of this practice may be recognized, it does not fit the context of this institution and, therefore, is not being considered at this time. |

***Part 2: First-Year Seminar Self-Assessment Tool for Directors and Leaders: Practices to Support Students from Low-Income Backgrounds***

**Directions:**

Referring to the key provided in Part I, first-year seminar directors and leadership team members can indicate each practice's curriculum and faculty development priority level and the need for action, if any, using the drop-down menus. Because institutional contexts and priorities vary, not all practices may be relevant or applicable.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Teaching Practices**  | **How much of a priority is this practice in the curriculum?** | **How much of a priority is this practice in faculty development?** | **What action is needed, if any, to use or improve this practice?**  |
| Developing a Sense of Community | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Use surveys to learn about students, along with a welcoming message, are sent out before the start of the semester | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Share professor information, including teaching philosophy and positionality, in the syllabus and on the first day of class | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Create a sense of belonging through the first day of class icebreakers | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Ask students to write a personal statement or share information about themselves early in the semester, including their identities and strengths, such as emotional intelligence | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Use Getting to Know You activities throughout the semester | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Faculty meet with students outside of class at least once to get to know them | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Conduct mid-semester check-ins with students  | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Create partner work opportunities during class | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Allocate class time for group projects  | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Assign group projects designed to be conducted outside of class | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Use reflection activities and assignments | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Engage in discussions in class | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Use peer mentors in class | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Use peer mentors outside of class | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Help students connect to alumni | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
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| Resources | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |  |
| Share on and off-campus resources with students in the syllabus or via the learning management system | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Share how students can get in touch with their professors and the value of those interactions | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Talk about resources, including food and housing resources, in class | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Professors make personalized referrals and help connect students to resources | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Share information on scholarships and emergency funding options and how to apply for these funds | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Financial aid modules that include definitions of terms and concepts along with benefits and costs of student loans and employment, designed by financial aid professionals, included in the course | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Financial literacy modules (i.e., budgeting and investing) are included in the course | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Well-being or mental health modules are included in the course | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Academic Strategies | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |  |
| Introduce college language and define terms | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Share study strategies in the syllabus | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Teach study strategies  | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Help students identify academic goals and steps to achieve their goals | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Teach self-regulation skills (i.e., monitoring progress and engaging in productive behaviors) | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Teach scientific argumentation (how to build, question, and critique claims) | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Teach writing skills | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Teach research skills | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Teach how to leverage technology for academic success | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Practice opportunities in class for students to use study strategies | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Teach time management strategies | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Practice opportunities for time management via assignments | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Career | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |  |
| Help students explore career options | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Encourage attendance at career fairs and other career events | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Encourage students to conduct informational interviews | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Access to career assessments | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Help students identify career goals and steps to achieve their goals | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Teach resume and cover letter skills | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Teach job-seeking strategies, including federal work-study and other on-campus employment opportunities | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Support networking development and expansion, including connecting students to alumni  | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Support nurturing of professional networks | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Mindset | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |  |
| Address imposter syndrome (feelings of self-doubt) and how to combat it | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Teach growth mindset (believing abilities can improve) and strategies to develop it | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Practice growth-mindset strategies through teaching strategies | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Explain stereotype threat (fear of confirming stereotypes) and strategies to combat it | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Help students develop self-affirmations (positive statements) and write about their strengths | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Help students develop self-efficacy (belief task can be accomplished) through scaffolded (supports provided) learning tasks | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Normalize help-seeking behavior | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Assignments | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |  |
| Formative assessments of learning outcomes provide students and instructors with feedback on learning progress | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Authentic, real-world assignments | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Rigorous assignments | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Assignments that build transferable skills for other courses | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Assignments that provide reflection and revision opportunities for students | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Collaborative assignments | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Transparent assignment expectations (i.e., purpose statement, steps or tasks, and grading criteria such as rubrics) | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Provide undergraduate research opportunities, especially compensated positions | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Peer-review opportunities | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Nudging or reminders of just-in-time actions related to academic actions, such as applying for financial aid or registering for courses | Choose an item. | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |

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| **Institutional Practices**  | **How much of a priority is**  | **What action is needed, if any, to use or improve this practice?**  |
| Professional Learning for Faculty and Peer Leaders | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Utilize on-campus expertise (ex., financial aid officers, mental health counselors) to design and deliver specialized modules  | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Provide accessible teaching resource materials for faculty  | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Offer training programs before faculty start teaching  | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Provide ongoing support for faculty teaching the course | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Offer training programs for faculty on how to use data to improve teaching practices | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Offer customized learning opportunities for faculty with different experiences and needs | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Create opportunities for faculty to learn from faculty colleagues | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Celebrate and acknowledge faculty efforts to support students  | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Offer training for peer mentors | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Assessment | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Identify and code students, including students from low-income backgrounds | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Use summative or end-of-term assessments to determine achievement of learning outcomes in aggregated and disaggregated formats, including for students from low-income backgrounds | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Track persistence and academic performance of students taking the course in aggregated and disaggregated formats, including for students from low-income backgrounds | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Disseminate course-level success data for students in the course, including disaggregated data for students from low-income backgrounds | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Use data, including student perspectives, to improve the course design and delivery | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Use an early alert system | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Institutional Efforts | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Hire faculty committed to student success and equity reform | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Ensure faculty evaluation standards are aligned with course outcomes | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Make intentional connections between FYS and other programs like orientation, summer bridge, TRIO, and departments | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Have flexible scheduling course options, including online modality to accommodate work schedules | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Offer a 2-semester FYS course or other intentional strategies to provide yearlong support | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Use affordable textbooks or Open Educational Resources (free reading and other class resources) | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Assign 3 credit hours to the course | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Offer living-learning communities  | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Require the FYS course for all students | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Partner with high schools to help them build curriculum leading up to the FYS course so the content is not all new | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Offer family programming related to financial aid, scholarships, and other resources | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Connect this course to second-year programming efforts | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Review course-level policies, such as late or missed work policies, through an equity lens | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |

**Section 2: For Faculty**

***Part I:******Key with Response Categories and Descriptions for First-Year Seminar Self-Assessment Tool Use***

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| **Drop Down Option** | **Title** | **Description** |
| **Use of Practice** |
| HIGH | High area of focus | This practice is heavily emphasized and used in my course.  |
| MODERATE | Moderate area of focus | This practice is included in my course but is not one of the main focus areas.  |
| MINIMAL | Minimal area of focus | This practice is only minimally used in the course.  |
| NOT  | Not an area of focus | This practice is not currently a focus of the course and will not likely be one in the near future.  |
| **Support Needed** |
| YES | Want professional learning experiences related to this practice to be offered | I need to learn more about this practice so that I can use it in my course. |
| MAYBE | May want professional learning experiences related to this practice to be offered | I am familiar with this practice, but it could be beneficial to learn more about this practice. |
| NO | Do not need professional learning experiences related to this practice to be offered | I am confident in my ability to use this practice and do not need support implementing it, or I do not view this as a practice needed in my course. |

***Part II: First-Year Seminar Self-Assessment Tool for Faculty: Practices to Support Students from Low-Income Backgrounds***

**Directions:**

Referring to the key provided in Part I, full and part-time faculty can use drop-down menus to indicate how much of a focus each practice is in their course and whether support is needed to incorporate this practice into their course. Start with individual items and then provide a response for each category. Having all practices incorporated into the course is not necessarily the goal because institutional contexts and priorities vary.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Teaching Practices  | How much of a focus is this practice in your course? | Would you want the institution to provide you with support in implementing this practice? |
| Developing a Sense of Community | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Use surveys to learn about students, along with a welcoming message, are sent out before the start of the semester | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Share professor information, including teaching philosophy and positionality, in the syllabus and on the first day of class | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Create a sense of belonging through the first day of class icebreakers | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Ask students to write a personal statement or share information about themselves early in the semester, including their identities and strengths, such as emotional intelligence | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Use Getting to Know You activities throughout the semester | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Faculty meet with students outside of class at least once to get to know students | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Conduct mid-semester check-ins with students  | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Create partner work opportunities during class | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Allocate class time for group projects | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Assign group projects designed to be conducted outside of class | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Use reflection activities and assignments | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Engage in discussions in class | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Use peer mentors in class | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Use peer mentors outside of class | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Help students connect to alumni | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Resources | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Share on and off-campus resources with students in the syllabus or via the learning management system | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Share how students can get in touch with their professors and the value of those interactions | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Talk about resources, including food and housing resources, in class | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Professors make personalized referrals and help connect students to resources | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Share information on scholarships and emergency funding options and how to apply for these funds | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Financial aid modules that include definitions of terms and concepts and benefits/costs of student loans and employment, designed by financial aid professionals, included in the course | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Financial literacy modules (ex. budgeting and investing) are included in the course | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Well-being or mental health modules included in the course | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Academic Strategies | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Introduce college language and define terms | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Share study strategies in the syllabus | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Teach study strategies  | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Help students identify academic goals and steps to achieve their goals | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Teach self-regulation skills (ex. monitoring progress and engaging in productive behaviors) | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Teach scientific argumentation (how to build, question, and critique claims) | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Teach writing skills | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Teach research skills | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Teach how to leverage technology for academic success | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Practice opportunities in class for students to use study strategies | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Teach time management strategies | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Practice opportunities for time management via assignments | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Career | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Help students explore career options | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Encourage attendance at career fairs and other career events | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Encourage students to conduct informational interviews | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Access to career assessments | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Help students identify career goals and steps to achieve their goals | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Teach resume and cover letter skills | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Teach job-seeking strategies, including federal work-study and other on-campus employment opportunities | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Support networking development and expansion, including connecting students to alumni  | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Support nurturing of professional networks | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Mindset | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Address imposter syndrome (feelings of self-doubt) and how to combat it | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Teach growth mindset (believing abilities can improve) and strategies to develop it | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Practice growth-mindset strategies through teaching strategies | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Explain stereotype threat (fear of confirming stereotypes) and strategies to combat it | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Help students develop self-affirmations (positive statements) and write about their strengths | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Help students develop self-efficacy (belief task can be accomplished) through scaffolded (supports provided) learning tasks | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Normalize help-seeking behavior | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Assignments | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Formative assessments of learning outcomes provide students and instructors with feedback on learning progress | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Authentic, real-world assignments | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Rigorous assignments | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Assignments that build transferable skills for other courses | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Assignments that provide reflection and revision opportunities for students | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Collaborative assignments | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Transparent assignment expectations (i.e., purpose statement, steps or tasks, and grading criteria such as rubrics) | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Provide undergraduate research opportunities, especially compensated positions | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Peer-review opportunities | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |
| Nudging or reminders of just-in-time actions related to academic actions, such as applying for financial aid or registering for courses | Choose an item. | Choose an item. |

**Section 3: Executive Summary and Action Plan**

***Part I: Executive Summary of First-Year Seminar Self-Assessment Findings***

Using a team approach, summarize the key strengths and areas targeted for improvement based on Section 1 and 2 findings. Consider inviting faculty, administrators, student affairs professionals, teaching and learning center staff, and assessment/data professionals to the team.

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| **Self-Assessment Process** |
| Course Name |  |
| Date Self-Assessment Completed |  |
| Who Completed Assessment? |  |
| **Strengths** |
| 1 |  |
| 2 |  |
| 3 |  |
| **Areas Targeted for Improvement** |
| 1 |  |
| 2 |  |
| 3 |  |

**Part II: First-Year Seminar Action Plan for Areas Targeted for Improvement**

Map out an action plan for improvement by putting the 3 areas targeted for improvement and the resources, action steps needed to improve, the person responsible, the expected timeline, the desired outcome, and how the outcome will be assessed into the table.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Target Area** | **Resources Needed**  | **Action Steps Needed** | **Person Responsible** | **Timeline** | **Desired Outcome** | **Assessment Plan** |
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