



# FAQ: Updating Your Regional Needs Assessment



This FAQ addresses questions and concerns raised during and following the RIPRC's Understanding and Applying Data Group TA Series. It is intended to clarify expectations, address uncertainties, and support regional staff in updating their needs assessment.

This FAQ is organized into five topics:

- Expectations and Scope
- Timeline & Deliverables
- Budget & Staffing
- Collaboration & Data Sharing
- Content of Update

## Expectations and Scope

### **Q: What exactly is expected for the upcoming needs assessment update?**

A: Regional Coalitions (coalitions) are expected to revise their needs assessments by November 1, 2025. Updates must reflect new RISS data on 30-day cannabis use and bullying. If a coalition's current needs assessment does not include bullying, a new section on bullying must be added.

### **Q: Is there a deadline for submitting the updated needs assessment?**

A: Yes. The timeline was shared during a recent Regional Prevention Task Force meeting and on the RPTF Task List. The due date is November 1, 2025. Coalitions are receiving TA in June and July to assist them with completing this task and they are expected to begin revisions and planning in June 2025, giving them 5 months to complete the task.

### **Q: Does every region need to make the same level of update, or will expectations vary?**

A: All regions are expected to complete a comparable level of update, though the specific data content and interpretation will vary by region. For example, one region may see a notable increase in 30-day cannabis use among middle school students, prompting additional context in their report, while another region may report no change.

## Timeline & Deliverables

### **Q: How does the timeline for the needs assessment update align with planning and implementation activities?**

A: Coalitions are being asked to implement their current workplan while simultaneously updating the needs assessment. The SPF is designed to be dynamic and iterative, not strictly linear. SAMHSA explicitly encourages planners to revisit earlier steps—like assessment—even while

implementation is underway. This reflects real-world practice, where new data often becomes available after plans are in motion. This flexibility supports SPF's emphasis on data-driven decision-making and enables coalitions to adjust their strategies as new priorities emerge.

**Q: What if the timing of the update overlaps with the next full needs assessment cycle—is it still worth doing now?**

A: The timing of the update does not overlap with the next full needs assessment cycle.

## **Budget & Staffing**

**Q: Can we use funds to hire an external evaluator to support the update?**

A: No. For the current contract cycle that ends 9/30/25, the next contract cycle that starts 10/1/25, and revision process, BHDDH's expectation is that each Regional Director will revise their region's needs assessment and strategic plan. BHDDH will not approve the use of funds for external evaluators.

**Q: If we plan to hire an evaluator, will we need to submit a budget amendment?**

A: This is not applicable at present since hiring evaluators is not permitted for this round of revisions.

**Q: How would adding new content areas, like bullying, impact our existing workplans and budgets?**

A: Workplans can be revised quarterly to align with updates to the needs assessment. However, BHDDH acknowledges that budgetary limitations may constrain coalitions' ability to make rapid or flexible changes to their workplans in response to new content.

## **Collaboration & Data Sharing**

**Q: Can we explore data sharing agreements with Health Equity Zones (HEZs) to strengthen our assessment?**

A: While coalitions and HEZs are encouraged to share their needs assessments, BHDDH clarified that the BHDDH and HEZ needs assessments are separate processes overseen and funded by different state departments. Therefore, as long as data is collected around behavioral health needs, demographics, and social determinants of health, a data sharing agreement would be allowed.

**Q: If we share data with HEZs, are we still expected to produce a separate needs assessment report?**

A: Yes. Coalitions are still expected to develop and/or incorporate behavioral health-specific needs assessments into their strategic plans, even if data is shared between entities.

## **Content of Update**

**Q: If bullying wasn't included in our previous needs assessment or strategic plan, are we now expected to include it?**

A: Yes. BHDDH expects that bullying be added to the needs assessment if it is not previously included.

**Q (added 7/31/25):** The RPTF Task List specifies one marijuana indicator (30-day middle school use) for inclusion in the needs assessment update but refers more generally to “bullying indicators.” Should Regional Directors update their reports to include all eight bullying-related indicators, or are there specific ones BHDDH would like them to focus on? Should they focus on high school, middle school, or both?

A: Regional Directors are encouraged to review all eight bullying-related indicators. However, they should incorporate only those that are most relevant to their region (where the data suggest a clear trend, shift, or concern that warrants attention). Both middle and high school data may be appropriate to include, depending on regional patterns.

**Q (added 7/31/25):** If there are other indicators we believe are worth mentioning, should we include them?

A: While there is no requirement to include additional indicators, Regional Directors may choose to do so. Including new or updated data that reveal meaningful trends or emerging issues can help ensure that your needs assessment reflects the most relevant information. Because the needs assessment serves as the foundation for the strategic plan, doing so also helps ensure that the plan remains responsive to current community conditions.