History, Methodology and Science of Licensing Key Indicators

History & Methodology

The Key Indicator methodology evolved from a request by the Federal Government, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) in 1977 to come up with an abbreviated or short form of their Federal Interagency Day Care Requirements (FIDCR). Staff from the department approached Dr Richard Fiene and Dr Susan Aronson, both of whom were working on a new program monitoring and evaluation system in Pennsylvania called the Child Development Program Evaluation (CDPE). At a meeting in Washington DC, Dr Fiene proposed the idea taken from the tests and measurement field of how to utilize key indicators to make predictions to a larger assessment instrument. HEW staff liked the idea and asked Dr Fiene to develop the idea into a methodology that could apply to FIDCR.

In 1979 - 1984, Dr Fiene received a large research grant to develop his ideas more fully and several publications were published regarding the methodology culminating in the 1985 publication in Child Care Quarterly that described the Key Indicator methodology and the resulting Child Development Program Evaluation Scale (CDPES). Five states (Pennsylvania, Michigan, New York, California, and West Virginia) began testing the key indicator methodology during this period and the original outcome validation study was conducted in 1987.

During the 1990’s, several other states became interested in the methodology, in particular the risk assessment portion of the methodology along with the Maternal and Child Health Bureau as they were developing Caring for Our Children. Based upon the risk assessment methodology, Stepping Stones to Caring for Our Children was first published in the mid 1990’s.

In 2000, the National Association for Regulatory Administration (NARA) asked Dr Fiene and Karen Kroh to write a chapter explaining the methodology for the NARA Licensing Curriculum. This led to an ongoing relationship between NARA and Dr Fiene for the dissemination of the methodologies. In 2002, the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and the Assistant Secretary’s Office of Program and Evaluation asked Dr Fiene to write up the key indicator methodology as a research brief which has been disseminated and used widely since its publication.

In 2013, Dr Fiene created the Research Institute for Key Indicators (RIKIIc) in order to consolidate all research being done on key indicators and risk assessment since a great deal of work was being done at that point (http://rikinstitute.com). In 2015, NARA and RIKI formed an exclusive partnership on the future development and dissemination of the methodologies which had expanded into a formalized method of differential monitoring. Several Federal publications appeared during this time describing and encouraging states to use the methodologies and differential monitoring. It culminated in the publication of Caring for Our Children Basics which was suggested as voluntary standards for all early care and education programs, as well as the reauthorization of CCDBG Legislation in which differential monitoring was specifically highlighted in the legislation encouraging states regarding its use.

Since that time, NARA has been taken over more of the development and dissemination of the methodologies (https://www.naralicensing.org/key-indicators).
Science

The key indicator and risk assessment methodologies are tried and tested methods borrowed from the tests and measurement as well as program evaluation fields. Both methodologies are statistically based and have been refined and tested over 40 years since being originally proposed by Dr Richard Fiene in 1977.

The methodologies have been validated or are being validated repeatedly over the years in the US (Pennsylvania, Washington, and Head Start) and Canada (Ontario and Saskatchewan). Standards, Measures, Outputs and Outcome validation studies have been performed on the methodologies to make certain that they are working as they should. For the interested reader, please go to the Research Institute for Key Indicators (RIKIlc) (http://rikinstitute.com) for additional information and the studies that have been done over the years.