

## Implementation Stages Planning Tool

### Introduction

Implementation happens in four discernible stages:

- **Exploration** involves assessment of needs and assets of the focus population, fit of the program or practice with those needs and assets and feasibility of implementation.
- **Installation** involves building the infrastructure necessary to implement the program or practice, which includes building practitioner and organizational capacity.
- **Initial implementation** includes the initial efforts of staff to use the program or practice, with attention to using data for continuous improvement.
- **Full implementation** occurs as staff use the program or practice successfully, and population-level results are achieved.

Identifying the current stage of implementation for a program, practice or initiative can help stakeholders to better understand implementation progress, ensure the use of appropriate implementation strategies for that stage and plan for data collection. It is important to note that each stage does not end cleanly as the next begins; stages often overlap, and activities can cross stages. To that end, it is not necessary for all implementation outcomes<sup>1</sup> in a stage to be achieved before proceeding to the next stage. However, sufficient progress must be made in each stage in order to be adequately prepared for the next stage.

The following table describes the types of activities<sup>2</sup> that should occur at each stage of implementation, as well as evidence or expected benchmarks of progress as a result of those activities. However, there is not a direct match between activities and benchmarks of progress; if you are not seeing evidence of successful implementation at each stage, you can use this tool to assess whether certain activities still need to be completed. The final column allows for action planning and refinement based on your analysis of implementation stages and progress.

This planning tool provides a general template for stage-based activities and evidence of implementation progress and should be customized based on the specific program or practice of focus. Teams should reflect on the logic model for their program or practice and incorporate specific outputs and outcomes to understand whether implementation is occurring as intended and achieved the desired outcomes. For example, the team may want to include the number of practitioners to be trained in the program or practice during Installation as a critical output to be achieved before moving on to Initial Implementation.

<sup>1</sup> Proctor, E., Silmere, H., Raghavan, R. et al. (2011). Outcomes for implementation research: Conceptual distinctions, measurement challenges, and research agenda. *Adm Policy Ment Health*, 38, 65–76. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-010-0319-7>

<sup>2</sup> Metz, A., Naom, S. F., Halle, T., & Bartley, L. (2015). An integrated stage-based framework for implementation of early childhood programs and systems (OPRE Research Brief OPRE 2015 48). Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

## Implementation Stages Planning Tool

Exploration: The agency conducts an assessment of needs and assets, fit and feasibility of implementing a program or practice.		
What are key implementation activities at this stage?	What does successful implementation look like at this stage? <sup>3</sup>	What are next steps based on our assessment of this stage?
<input type="checkbox"/> Develop an implementation team (identify members and initiate buy-in) to support the work as it progresses through the stages. <input type="checkbox"/> Identify needs and assets within a community and focus population. <input type="checkbox"/> Identify and learn about possible programs or practices that may align with the community's needs and assets. <input type="checkbox"/> Grow relationships with practitioners, organization and systems leaders, community partners and the focus population to support implementation. <input type="checkbox"/> Assess and create practitioner, organizational and community readiness for change. <input type="checkbox"/> Develop communication processes to support the work. <input type="checkbox"/> Learn about what it takes to implement the program or practice effectively, including what is needed to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• optimize community buy-in;</li> <li>• develop staff competency for the program or practice; and</li> <li>• create organizational and systems changes supportive of implementation (e.g., policies).</li> </ul> <input type="checkbox"/> Make a decision to proceed with selected program or practice or not.	<input type="checkbox"/> Formation of a core implementation team to guide the work <input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrated needs for the program or practice (i.e., deemed an appropriate model to support identified needs and assets) <input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrated appropriateness and relevance of program or practice through assessment of fit and feasibility <input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrated acceptability and buy-in from practitioners and community partners (e.g., individuals, families, community members)	

<sup>3</sup> This column includes incremental benchmarks that demonstrate implementation progress as well as longer term outcomes that demonstrate successful completion of the implementation stage.

**Installation: The implementation team builds the infrastructure necessary to implement the program or practice, which includes building practitioner and organizational capacity.**

What are key implementation activities at this stage?	What indicates success of implementation at this stage? <sup>4</sup>	What are next steps based on our assessment of this stage?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Convene implementation team regularly to gather and use data to assess implementation.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ensure the implementation team has the appropriate knowledge, skills, functions and authority to support infrastructure development and improvement of the program or practice.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Develop timely feedback loops among community partners, practitioners, leadership and the focus population in order to ensure bi-directional and inclusive communication.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Gather feedback on how the program or practice will be implemented from stakeholders including community partners, individuals and families, practitioners and leaders.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Identify what data will be used to measure implementation progress</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Discuss how data will be used to support communication, decision-making and continuous improvement.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Assess, secure and develop the implementation infrastructure needed to put the program or practice into place as intended.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Bi-directional communication is taking place among stakeholders including community partners, individuals and families, practitioners, supervisors and leaders</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> A process is in place for referring and orienting individuals and/or families to program or practice</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Majority of practitioners are trained in the program or practice</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Infrastructure is in place to support coaching to effectively reinforce competencies required to use the program or practice</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Fidelity criteria are established for the program or practice</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Infrastructure is in place to collect and use data (i.e., fidelity, program, and outcome) to continuously improve delivery of the program or practice</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Staff have access to data infrastructure and are equipped to use it</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Policies and procedures to support adoption and uptake of the program and practice are in place and understood by practitioners, individuals, families and community partners</li> </ul>	

<sup>4</sup> This column includes incremental benchmarks that demonstrate implementation progress as well as longer term outcomes that demonstrate successful completion of the implementation stage.

**Initial Implementation: The implementation team supports initial efforts of staff to use the program or practice and uses data for continuous improvement.**

What are key implementation activities of this stage?	What indicates success of implementation at this stage? <sup>5</sup>	What are next steps based on our assessment of this stage?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Convene implementation team regularly to gather and use data to assess implementation.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Gather data and feedback through multiple sources including individuals and families to understand how implementation is going.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Develop improvement strategies through the implementation team’s analysis of data and feedback.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Communicate with practitioners, leadership, community partners and the focus population about implementation progress, improvement strategies and successes.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Refine implementation infrastructure based on these data.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Data are used regularly to inform decision-making and improve implementation of the program or practice</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Majority of practitioners are using the program or practice</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Fidelity to the program or practice is achieved by most practitioners</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Variability exists in the quality of program or practice implementation, however quality is improving across practitioners</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Evidence of implementation feasibility through outputs such as 1) increase in delivery of the program or practice; 2) increase in staff confidence and skill in using the program or practice; 3) increase in supervisors’ confidence in coaching staff; and 4) successful engagement of individuals and families in the program or practice</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Some evidence that intermediate outcomes of the program or practice are improved (i.e., intermediate or short-term outcomes identified in a logic model)</li> </ul>	

<sup>5</sup> This column includes incremental benchmarks that demonstrate implementation progress as well as longer term outcomes that demonstrate successful completion of the implementation stage.

Full Implementation: Staff use the program or practice successfully, and outcomes are achieved.		
What are key implementation activities at this stage?	What indicates success of implementation at this stage? <sup>6</sup>	What are next steps based on our assessment of this stage?
<input type="checkbox"/> Convene implementation team regularly to gather and use data for ongoing improvement. <input type="checkbox"/> Plans for and secures any resources needed to sustain the implementation. team and use of the program or practice <input type="checkbox"/> Collect and analyze fidelity and outcome data. <input type="checkbox"/> Communicate with and gather feedback from practitioners, leadership, community partners and the focus population about implementation progress, improvement strategies and successes. <input type="checkbox"/> Monitor and improve infrastructure as needed.	<input type="checkbox"/> Data are used regularly to inform decision-making and improve implementation of the program or practice <input type="checkbox"/> Sustained use of the program or practice with all practitioners delivering the model with fidelity and ease <input type="checkbox"/> Sustained use of program or practice with all supervisors effectively coaching staff to fidelity <input type="checkbox"/> Evidence that the program or practice’s intermediate outcomes for the focus population are improving through use of the program or practice <input type="checkbox"/> Emerging evidence of connections between intermediate outcomes and improved population-level results for the focus population through use of the program or practice	

<sup>6</sup> This column includes incremental benchmarks that demonstrate implementation progress as well as longer term outcomes that demonstrate successful completion of the implementation stage.