

Putting What Works Into Practice

Child abuse prevention programs are under increasing pressure to demonstrate results and implement system and practice changes to improve program outcomes. However, putting a new approach or program into practice, changing the way an agency or organization operates, or how services are delivered, is easier said than done. Whether you want to expand family resource centers, begin a home visiting program, improve collaboration across systems, or take a more proactive approach to strengthening families, you are likely to encounter challenges along the way. Unfortunately, only a few innovations are sustained over time, regardless of the initial success they achieved.¹ However, there is a science to putting good ideas and new approaches into action.

This bulletin describes the important considerations for successfully implementing new approaches so they can be sustained and demonstrate lasting benefit. New ways of doing business – new practices, policies, programs, and approaches – should be based on research which provides evidence that they will effectively address a problem and improve outcomes. However, choosing to implement a program or approach supported by evidence is just the first step. Implementing programs that work requires careful planning and research shows there are critical activities that need to happen at different phases of the implementation process.² This bulletin is intended for leaders, policy makers, program managers, staff and stakeholders who want to increase their chances of successfully implementing and sustaining a new approach, innovation, or program.



Context for Implementing Change — Understanding the bigger picture

Implementation of a new approach requires a broad perspective and an understanding of the complex interrelationships across the system. Implementation must occur at multiple levels – among direct service staff, managers, administrators/leaders, multiple organizations across the system and other community stakeholders. Successful implementation will occur when a critical mass of individuals within the organization and across systems have a new mindset to engage in coordinated efforts and perform in new ways that will produce desired outcomes.³ Regardless of what you are trying to implement, research on implementation provides guidance for putting new approaches into practice.

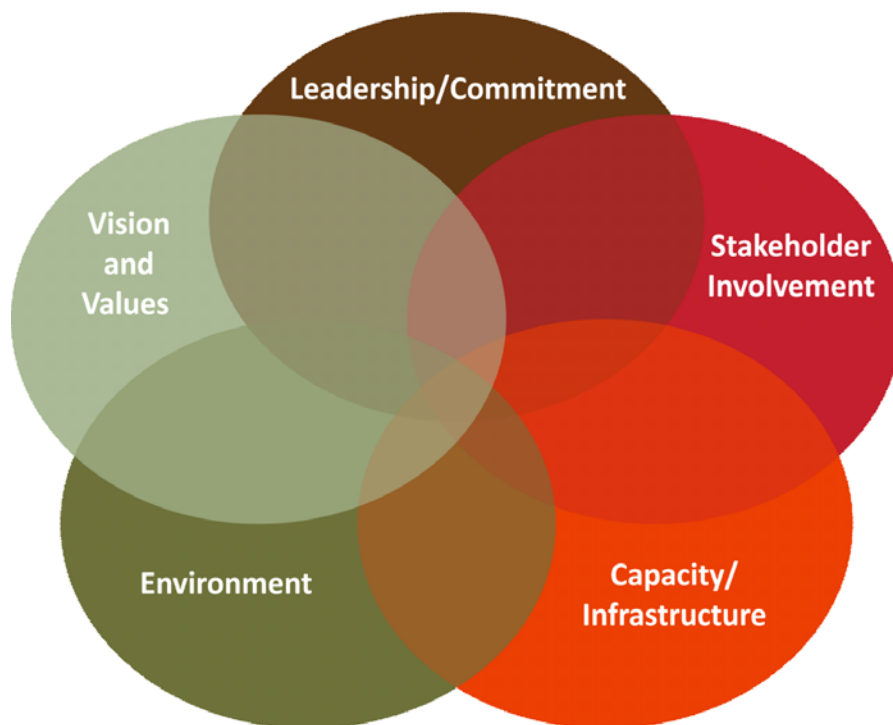
What this looks like

Examples of implementing a new way to conduct business might include:

- A CBCAP State Lead Agency (SLA) would like to redirect funding from a wide variety of programs across the State, to funding only programs identified as evidence-based.
- A CBCAP SLA is seeking input from professionals in business, political, medical, human service, education and other human service sectors across the State to determine priorities for the use of CBCAP funding. Will the State use CBCAP resources to only fund home visiting services? Or, will evidence-based, evidence-informed, and “home-grown,” but as yet unproven programs also be funded and at what level?
- A SLA would like to reallocate funding from 60 programs each receiving \$200 to \$5,000 per year to funding 10 programs across their State at a higher amount.
- A locally funded program that has traditionally provided services to women, including survivors of domestic violence, wants to provide outreach and support services to fathers.

Implementing new approaches within any organization will require changes in attitudes (about the problem and the solution), changes in behavior (knowledge, skills to implement the practice), and changes in relationships (interactions between consumers, stakeholders, and system partners).⁴ There needs to be a common awareness of the need for change, desire to participate and support the change, knowledge of how to change and the ability to implement the required skills and behaviors, and mechanisms to reinforce and sustain the change.⁵ There are five factors that are critical for achieving meaningful, lasting change in a system that are illustrated in figure 1:⁶

Figure 1. Key Elements for Implementing Sustainable Systems Change



- Vision and values - Shared vision and values provide direction and purpose, and when challenges arise reflecting back on the agreed-upon vision and values helps to realign and refocus efforts.
- Leadership and commitment - For systems change to be successful, leaders at all levels of the system must be engaged and committed to achieving expected outcomes.
- Stakeholder involvement - Meaningful involvement of stakeholders, including staff, parents, and youth in the change planning and decision making process is important both to build system wide support and to ensure that the systems change effort is responsive to the needs and desires of the community.
- Environment - Systems change requires considering the internal organizational and external social, economic and political environment, and considering approaches to change within that context, rather than in spite of it.
- Capacity and infrastructure - Sustaining changes in policies and practices within the system requires sufficient funding, staff selection, training, coaching, supervision, and ongoing quality improvement processes, among other factors.

Given what is involved, it is no surprise that implementing and sustaining effective approaches, policies, practices, programs and interventions is a complicated and long-term process that may take several years. Implementation is an adaptation process where intentional choices are made based on continuous feedback and based on the changing circumstances with the goal of improving outcomes.⁷

Phases for Ensuring Quality Implementation

Research has shown there are similar phases in the implementation process regardless of the innovation, practice, population, or the intended outcomes.⁸ These phases are consistently identified across numerous reviews about how implementation unfolds.⁹ The phases in figure 2 describe the activities necessary to develop, plan for, implement, and sustain a new approach or program within the organization or across a system. The phases often overlap and the process may be incremental with occasional setbacks that require reevaluation and problem solving. The process may not be predictable or sequential and is highly dependent on the environment, context and people involved. However for successful implementation, these activities are important to address before moving to the next phase.

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
Exploration Activities	Capacity Building Activities	Implementation Activities	Sustainability Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the need for change • Explore the nature and scope of the change • Build awareness and support for the change • Research approaches that have been effective in addressing identified needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiate active planning • Develop detailed design/plan • Assemble resources • Formalize partnerships • Select and/or define the approach, practice, program to be implemented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn how to conduct the program or implement the approach • Develop new skills • Reinforce new skills through coaching • Ensure fidelity to the core components of the program model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish funding sources • Embed practice in policies and procedures • Assess evaluation findings to identify what is working and what needs to be modified

Readiness — When There is a Will, There is a Way

Organizational readiness is a critical precursor to successful implementation. When organizational readiness is high, everyone is more invested in the effort, willing to put forth the extra effort in the process, and able to persist in the face of obstacles.¹⁰ Readiness includes a *commitment* to change based on a conviction and awareness of need and the *will* based on an emotional commitment to implement the change. Readiness is also a willingness to attain the necessary knowledge, ability, and skills to implement the change. Before you implement a new approach or program, the concerns, attitudes, thoughts and feelings of people who will be implementing the change need to be considered as these will have major implications on how to approach implementation.¹¹ Conducting an informal or formal readiness assessment will inform approaches to implementation.¹²

Phase One

Exploring the Potential for Change

During this initial phase, the organization, and its leaders, staff, and stakeholders are actively considering implementing the new approach. They are engaged in identifying the need for change, the nature and scope of the change needed, the degree of awareness and support for the change, strategies for achieving the goals, and whether desired strategies, practices and approaches are feasible. This is the time to explore whether there is leadership support given other competing priorities. Literature reviews and research on what has worked to address the identified need will inform the approach. Organizations often find it helpful to bring together staff and stakeholders to develop a logic model to map out needs, goals, objectives, activities, and expected measurable outcomes.



What this looks like

Phase One-Exploration

- A CBCAP SLA explored making changes in the focus of its' work including organizational and funding priorities based on a recent needs assessment. The assessment reflected changes in demographics and emerging challenges, the influx of new Federal funds in a particular priority area, and changes in the political climate due to a change in leadership with new priorities.
- A Family Resource Center has received low scores on parental satisfaction surveys and analysis of evaluation data demonstrate limited success in achieving outcomes. Administrators, staff, parent leaders, or other community stakeholders have expressed a desire to explore changes in the vision and purpose of the resource center, the practice approach used by staff in engaging families, and the services being delivered.



The following are important questions to consider as you begin exploring the feasibility of implementing the new approach within your organization and system:

- What is our mission, vision and goals for the children and families we serve? What outcomes do we want to achieve?
- Why are we doing this initiative, practice, or approach? What is the problem or challenge we need to resolve? Is there evidence that this new approach or practice will address the problem? Will the new approach further your program's mission?
- Are there evidence-based/evidence informed practices or programs that will work best to achieve these outcomes? Have they been tested on a population that is similar to yours?
- What are the expected costs for implementing this approach or program?
- What are the cultural preferences of consumers who will be participating in activities or services?
- Do we have the leadership capacity and authority to support the goals of the innovation?
- What environmental factors (e.g. political will, community readiness, and organizational acceptance) might help or hinder our progress toward goals? How will the external political environment affect our ability to achieve the change we are seeking?
- How do we plan to assess the capacity and readiness of our staff and agency to be sure we are ready to move forward?
- Is there buy in from critical stakeholders and is the community supportive of the proposed approach?
- What capacity do we need to strengthen to achieve the goals or implement the practice? Do we have the staff, funding, training, and quality assurance processes in place to fully implement this program?
- Have we dealt with important concerns, questions or resistance to this innovation? What possible barriers need to be addressed? How will we structure ongoing problem solving?

Phase Two

Building Capacity to Implement

During this phase the organization has made the decision to adopt a new initiative, new approach, new practice or program. Active planning can now begin to prepare for implementation. A detailed work plan for launching the program, project, or innovation should be developed. This plan of action will include clear timelines for activities, responsible parties, and measurable benchmarks to assess whether they have achieved intended goals. Organizational structures will be established such as putting contracts and Memorandums of Understanding in place or developing procedures and policies for receiving referrals and delivering services. During this phase transparent communication about the new approach will be important to engage staff, system partners, other stakeholders and the broader community in supporting efforts.

What this looks like

Phase Two-Building Capacity to Implement

- A CBCAP SLA has established an advisory council to serve as a working group to conduct many of the activities that need to be addressed in the work plan. The SLA has worked with the FRIENDS TA Coordinator, used the *Integrating Evidence-Based Practices into CBCAP Programs: A Tool for Critical Discussions*, and received guidance in developing a logic model to provide a picture of how the program will work and measure its success.
- A local CBCAP funded organization has sought assistance from the SLA to develop a logic model for implementing a program, conceptualize a strategic plan for moving forward, identify measurement tools to evaluate progress toward goals, and strategize how to gain support from community stakeholders who are not fully supportive of the new program direction.

The following questions are important to consider as you assess your capacity to implement the new approach, initiative, or practice:

- Who are the champions within the CBCAP SLA or funded organization in the State who can lead this innovation and associated practices? Who can inspire and lead others to implement the new approach?
- What team structure can we put in place to coordinate roll out of this approach (e.g., advisory council, workgroup)?

- Who will implement the new approach? Will there need to be some reorganization of staff to ensure there is adequate authority over decision making and allocation of staff time to fully implement the new approach?
- Will we need to hire more staff?
- Who will support those who are implementing the change?
- What infrastructure (e.g., Interagency agreements, standards of practice, policies, procedures, contracts, technology, and funding) is needed to ensure the new approach will be fully implemented?
- Can we provide sufficient staff training to teach the why, what, where and how regarding the new approach?
- Can we ensure that the technical assistance, training, and supervision to develop the necessary skills and competencies will be available and consistently provided?

Phase Three

Implementing the New Approach

During this phase, the organization is actively engaged in conducting the new approach. Coaching and supervision is in place to monitor and support the use of new skills, practices, and strategies. Leaders, staff and stakeholders are working to make the new approach a part of ongoing organizational processes and integrated into practices, policies and procedures. Barriers to implementation are identified, feedback from stakeholders is elicited, and the impact of the new approach is evaluated. The organization adapts and adjusts plans based on lessons learned and communicates the rationale for changes in the approach.



What this looks like

Phase Three-Implementing the New Approach

- A CBCAP SLA is implementing the Protective Factor Survey (PFS) through all of its funded programs as one evaluation measure. While locally funded program staff have received some training, the SL has provided additional training as the process moves forward. This training and ongoing technical assistance has enabled the site to effectively use the PFS in conjunction with other measurement tools, ensured the data is entered correctly in the FRIENDS PFS Database, ensured the PFS is administered consistently across programs, and analyzed the data after a full collection cycle has been completed.
- A locally funded prevention program has implemented a new home visiting model and is having challenges with recruiting and retaining staff. Two of three staff resigned after just six months of initial implementation of the program. The CBCAP SLA has partnered with the prevention program staff and the national TA provider for the home visiting model to identify strategies for improving retention of staff with recommended competencies to ensure consistent implementation of the approach.



The following questions will be important to consider as you implement the new approach:

- Can we provide the necessary technical assistance to help the organization and practitioners deal with inevitable practice problems that will develop once implementation is underway? Including fidelity to the core components of a particular program model?
- Are we prepared to address the challenging aspects of the new approach, resolve administrative conflicts, acquire more support or resources, and make required changes?
- Do we have a plan to evaluate the relative strengths and limitations of the new approach as it is implemented over time? Is data available on the different aspects of the new approach and the impact?
- What are the communication strategies for sharing key findings as a result of implementing the new approach? How are the findings shared with those involved in the new approach (e.g., stakeholders, administrators, front line practitioners) and how are these findings discussed and acted upon?
- Is the data shared in a positive (not punitive) way that provides an opportunity for further personal learning, skill development, and organizational growth that leads to quality improvement?

Phase Four

Sustaining the Change

While planning to sustain the new approach must begin right from the beginning, this phase ensures the changes are integrated into the culture and business processes of the organization and the system. Sustaining a new approach might require establishing long-term funding and establishing processes for consistently engaging key stakeholders, conducting ongoing training and supervision, measuring performance, and demonstrating cost effectiveness. Given the current budget realities, there may be limited resources and continuing efforts will need to be justified with data demonstrating effectiveness. Champions must be cultivated who can communicate and reiterate the rationale for sustaining the new approach, program, or practice.



What this looks like

Phase Four-Sustaining the Change

- The parent/child support groups in four sites across a State have analyzed a first round of data after eight groups have completed a twelve-week program of a new evidence-based practice model. Pre-post evaluations were administered using a retrospective approach. The data is very promising. The CBCAP SLA collaborates with these four sites to produce a fact sheet on the programs and their outcomes. These fact sheets are shared with potential funders and other key stakeholders, as well as potential parent participants in communities. The findings from the program data are updated as the program grows creating increased visibility and support for these services.
- With new services up and running in ten family resource centers across a State, the SLA has instituted a peer review process to support continuous quality improvement, and peer sharing and growth. Feedback from initially reluctant program staff is extremely positive and this process becomes a regular part of the ongoing quality assurance. On-site peer reviews are completed every other year for each of the ten family resource centers.

The following questions will be important to consider during this phase to ensure the sustainability of the new approach:

- Have long-term funding sources and ongoing support from systems, leaders, staff and stakeholders been established?
 - Are leaders (including new leaders) supportive of the ongoing effort? Does this effort fit into their priorities?
 - Are ongoing quality assurance and performance measurement efforts assessing the impact of the new approach? Are cost savings resulting from the change being identified?
 - Have staff selection criteria been established so that new staff will have the competencies to support the initiative or new approach?
 - Are training, guidebooks, policies and procedures in place to inform new staff of the approach?
 - Are there regular communications to promote awareness of the new approach, as well as share outcomes and lessons learned?



Conclusion

Change is hard and implementing a new approach for conducting business or establishing a new program can be challenging. Change may result in losses for those involved, including loss of familiar ways of doing business. Some resistance to change is to be expected. Taking time to communicate the need, the vision, and the new approach and engaging staff and stakeholders in planning and implementing changes is a critical part of the change process.¹³ Thoughtful planning and preparation throughout the implementation process enhances desired goals and the promise of improving outcomes for children, youth and families.

Footnotes

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⁴ Change Management Learning Center. (2012). *Best practices in change management*. Loveland, CO: Prosci.

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⁸ Meyers, D.C., Durlak, J.A., & Wandersman, A. (2012). The quality implementation framework: A synthesis of critical steps in the implementation process. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 50 (3-4), 467-480; and Fixsen, D. L., & Blase, K. A. (2005). Implementation Research: Synthesis of the Literature. National Implementation Research Network, University of South Florida.

⁹ Meyers, D.C., et. al. Op Cit.

¹⁰ Durlak, J. and DuPre, E. (2008). Implementation Matters: A review of research on the influence of implementation on program outcomes and the factors affecting implementation. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 41, 327-350.

¹¹ Hall, G and Hord, S. (2006). "Implementing Change Patterns, Principles, and Potholes, 2nd Ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

¹² Metz, A. (2007) A 10-Step guide to adopting and sustaining evidence based practices in out of school time programs. Washington, DC: Child Trends.



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