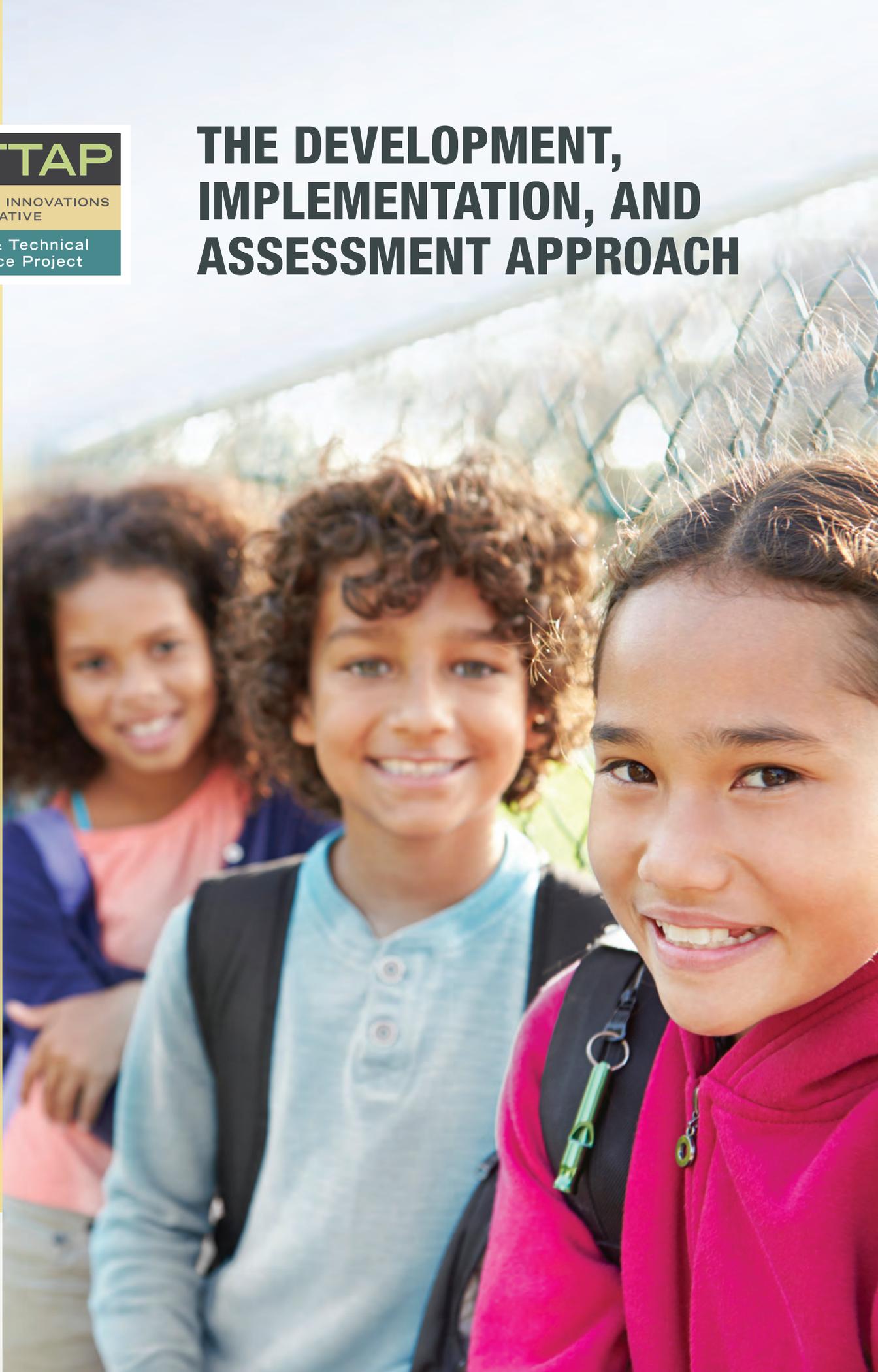


PII-TTAP

PERMANENCY INNOVATIONS
INITIATIVE

Training & Technical
Assistance Project

THE DEVELOPMENT, IMPLEMENTATION, AND ASSESSMENT APPROACH



Children's
Bureau

Acknowledgements

To support the Permanency Innovations Initiative (PII) Grantees in better meeting the needs of children and families, the PII Training and Technical Assistance Project (PII-TTAP) team created the Development, Implementation, and Assessment Approach (the Approach). The Approach helps organizations develop new innovations or adapt existing ones and effectively implement them to ultimately improve outcomes for children and families. This Approach was created by:

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¹ NIRN was actively involved in PII-TTAP from October 2010 through June 2015.

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The Development, Implementation, and Assessment Approach

Introduction

The trend in recently published literature has focused on the use of evidence-supported interventions (ESIs)² and their proper implementation in health and behavioral health settings, yet the literature often overlooks the implementation of these practices in social work settings (Manuel et al, 2009). While multiple implementation frameworks exist, the Development, Implementation, and Assessment Approach (the Approach) is unique in its documented, practical application in child welfare settings. It assumes that implementation in a child welfare setting is complex and doing it right requires a systematic approach. The Approach delivers best practices in implementation science, helping public, private, and Tribal child welfare organizations develop innovations or adapt existing ones and effectively implement them to ultimately improve outcomes for children and families. This document describes the Approach.

Background

The Approach presented below builds on work completed with Permanency Innovations Initiative (PII) Grantees. PII is a 5-year, \$100 million initiative

underway since 2010 that includes six Grantees,³ each with an innovation designed to help a specific subgroup of children leave foster care in less than 3 years.⁴ The project combines requirements for purposeful application of implementation science, rigorous evaluation, and coordinated dissemination of findings. PII aims to:

- Implement innovative strategies, informed by relevant literature, to reduce long-term foster care stays and to improve child outcomes
- Use an implementation science framework enhanced by child welfare expertise to guide technical assistance activities
- Rigorously evaluate the validity of research-informed innovations and adapted ESIs in reducing long-term foster care
- Build an evidence base and disseminate findings to build knowledge in the child welfare field

This integration of implementation science and program evaluation is intended to build or enhance the capacity of child welfare agencies to develop, implement, and evaluate research-informed innovations and adapted ESIs and to provide evidence about program effectiveness. An overarching objective of PII is to increase the number of ESIs available to the child welfare community. To this end, the integration of implementation science and program evaluation in PII focuses on clearly operationalizing the innovation and on the infrastructure needed to support practitioners' implementation of the innovations with fidelity to ensure there is a well-defined program to evaluate.

The federal government is supporting PII Grantees as they implement and evaluate their interventions through

² Evidence-supported interventions are specific, well-defined policies, programs, and services that have shown the potential, through rigorous evaluation, to improve outcomes for children and families (Framework Workgroup, 2014).

³ The PII Grantees include: Arizona Department of Economic Security; California Department of Social Services; Illinois Department of Children and Family Services; Los Angeles LGBT Center; University of Kansas; and Washoe County, Nevada Department of Social Services. For more information about Grantees' target populations and interventions, please visit <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/resource/pii-project-resources>.

⁴ At the time of this printing, PII Grantees are in a no-cost extension period.

two offices within the Administration for Children and Families. Through the PII Training and Technical Assistance Project (PII-TTAP), the Children’s Bureau is providing training and technical assistance (T/TA) to PII Grantees to strengthen their use of best practices in implementation. The Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation is supporting rigorous within-site and cross-site evaluations of PII Grantees’ interventions. This support provides an opportunity for PII Grantees to receive ongoing T/TA focused on using best practices in implementation science and to work hand-in-hand from the beginning of the implementation process with an evaluation team that assists with creating measures and collecting and analyzing data required for rigorous evaluation of implementation and outcomes.

JBS International, Inc. leads the PII-TTAP team in partnership with the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute⁵ and the Center for the Support of Families. The Approach draws largely on NIRN’s active implementation frameworks.

Overview of the Development, Implementation, and Assessment Approach

The overall goal of PII-TTAP is to support the PII Grantees in better meeting the needs of children and families by developing or adapting, implementing, and scaling up innovations in child welfare. The T/TA team used the

Approach to accomplish this goal, building PII Grantees’ capacity for implementation through detailed explanations and coaching about implementation activities, knowledge dissemination, and tools for effective application and transfer of learning. The Approach incorporates best practices and lessons from its application in the child welfare field. With the goal of developing and implementing ESIs, several steps in the Approach involve research and the use of data and other research-based information for decision-making processes. The Approach also provides a clear framework for defining and effectively implementing an innovation.

Defining the “It” Plus Effective Implementation

The Approach adheres to the theory that there needs to be a well-defined innovation or “it” and effective implementation to improve child and family outcomes. One without the other will not achieve the desired goal. This concept is commonly displayed as a mathematical equation (shown in Figure 1 below).⁶

A well-defined innovation is one that clearly outlines what a practitioner or worker needs to do or say to deliver the innovation as it was designed. Effective implementation addresses the infrastructure (e.g., teaming structure, coaching, and system partnerships) needed to support practitioners’ implementation of the innovation with fidelity. It is essential to combine effective implementation with a well-defined innovation to reach the goal of improved outcomes.

Figure 1. Interventions, implementation, and outcomes



⁵ NIRN was actively involved in PII-TTAP from October 2010 through June 2015.

⁶ National Implementation Research Network (NIRN): <http://nim.fpg.unc.edu>

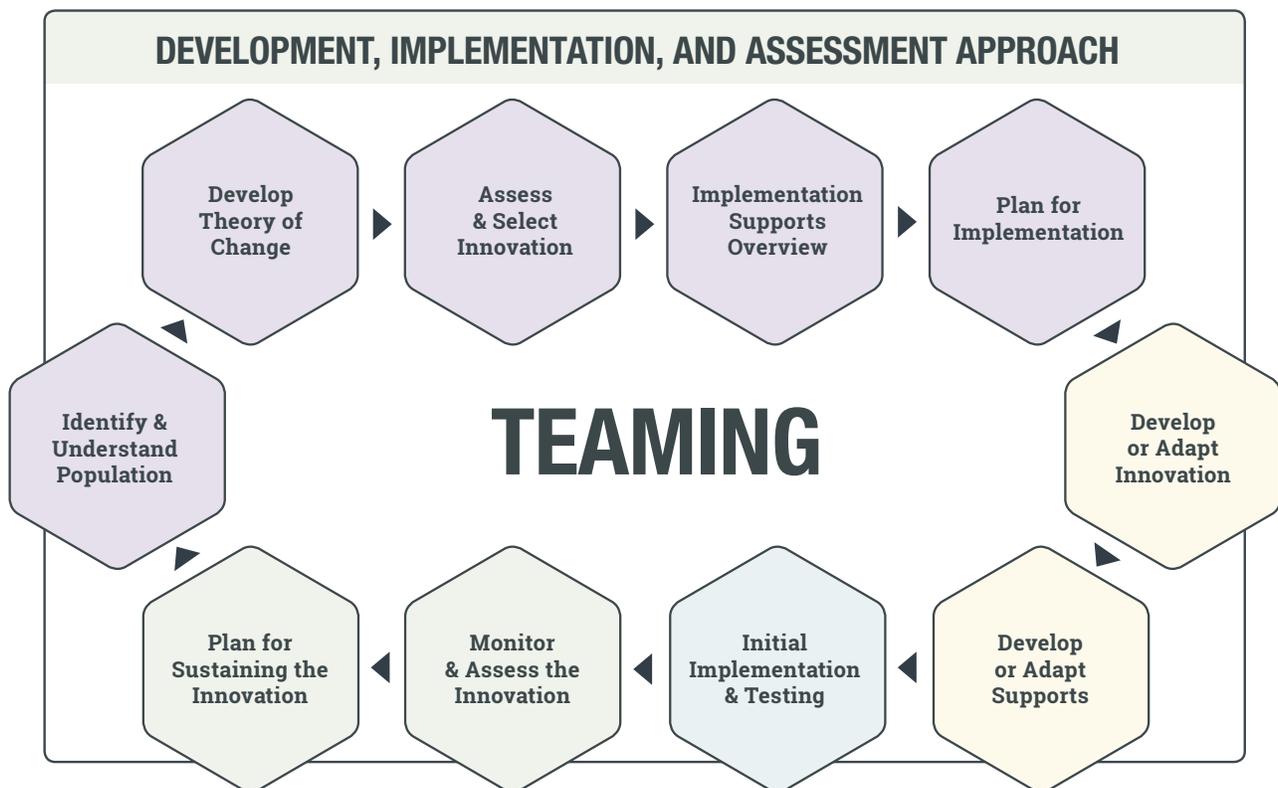
Ten Steps Plus Teaming and Communication Linkages

The Approach involves activities that can be organized within four implementation stages: exploration, installation, initial implementation, and full implementation.⁷ Early steps in the Approach focus on strategic planning: correctly identifying the problem, developing a theory of change, and selecting solutions to these problems. Later steps are focused on clearly operationalizing the innovation and the implementation supports,⁸ effectively using data to make improvements in the innovation and the implementation supports, and focused planning to sustain desired outcomes.

Figure 2 shows the process of the Approach through the four stages of implementation and the progression of the 10 steps. Teaming and Communication Linkages is placed in the center of the 10-step

process, as functional teaming and strategic communication provide a critical foundation for the entire implementation process. In this diagram, the Approach appears to be linear, but some iteration of steps and overlap of conceptual emphasis is required to effectively implement an innovation. Implementation is complex, and it takes time to effectively move through the four stages, though implementing or adapting an existing ESI may decrease time spent completing some activities. The Approach allows child welfare organizations to enter the implementation process at any point. Ideally, however, agencies that enter later in the process would complete early planning and assessments suggested in the Approach, as these activities lay the groundwork for implementing an innovation with fidelity and thus preparing it for evaluation.

Figure 2. Development, Implementation, and Assessment Approach



⁷ The four stages are based on the NIRN Active Implementation Stages.

⁸ Implementation Supports are "interactive processes . . . integrated to maximize their influence on staff behavior and the organizational culture providing an infrastructure for successful implementation of an innovation." (Fixsen et al, 2005).

Knowledge Transfer and Implementation Assistance

The PII-TTAP team has developed three products (to be released in 2016), each with a different level of interactivity, to support the transfer of learning and to assist public, private, and Tribal organizations' use of the Approach. The first product is the *Guide to Developing, Implementing, and Assessing an Innovation* (the Guide), a five-volume PDF that includes content, tests of understanding, tools, and examples to assist with applying the Approach. In addition to the Guide, the PII-TTAP team created the *Development, Implementation, and Assessment Toolkit* (the Toolkit), a virtual T/TA website that includes virtual hosts, automated tools, and interactive training modules with activities, knowledge checks, and video clips of PII Grantees.⁹ The Toolkit provides a more intensive, interactive transfer of learning than the Guide. The PII-TTAP team is creating a manual to support the transfer of learning and to assist the target audience in applying the Approach through T/TA. The manual (*Providing Technical Assistance to Build Implementation Capacity in Child Welfare: A Manual based on the Development, Implementation, and Assessment Approach*) is intended to be used by T/TA providers who are supporting public, private, and Tribal

child welfare organizations in applying the Approach.¹⁰

The relationship between the Approach and these methods of knowledge transfer and implementation assistance are presented in Figure 3 below.

Details of the Development, Implementation, and Assessment Approach



Teaming and Communication Linkages

Strong teams with the appropriate skills, levels of authority, and organizational affiliations are at the center of all change initiatives. The teaming and communication processes of the Approach include activities that precede the exploration stage of implementation and should be applied throughout the implementation process. They include assembling effective teams critical to implementation success; developing a plan for team interaction; writing a charter that defines the purpose, mission, roles, responsibilities, and timelines for the implementation team; and developing a strategy to ensure that teams communicate with maximum efficiency.

Figure 3. Knowledge Transfer and Implementation Assistance



Target Audience:

public, private, & Tribal child welfare administrators and managers

⁹ The Toolkit is currently under review by the Children's Bureau and is scheduled to be released in 2016.

¹⁰ The Manual will be released in 2016.

Teaming Structures

Integral to the Approach is the purposeful development of a network of teams (teaming structures) that follow carefully designed communication strategies for sharing information and feedback across teams and appropriately connecting to, and interfacing with, existing organizational management teams. These teams, led by an implementation team, attend to the key implementation functions and ensure that the initiative continues to move forward. The teams are critical to coordinating buy-in for implementation of the innovation and facilitating communication between leadership and internal and external stakeholders.

Building Teams and Writing Team Charters

Selecting or partnering with the right people is important as the implementation team and other teams are developed. Once teams are formed, team charters help clarify the purpose, communication process, core features and functions of each team and outline values and ways of work to guide teams.

Developing a Communication Strategy

A team communication strategy specifies the frequency and methods of communication between members of the implementation team and associated teams or task groups, if such groups are created.

A stakeholder communication strategy outlines how and when a team will provide information and/or actively involve agency leadership, agency staff, community partners, contracted providers, courts, attorneys/GALs, sister agencies, and other external stakeholders in two-way communication.

As the work of the implementation team progresses, its members will continue to monitor and supervise all associated teams and team members, ensuring that tasks are completed in a timely manner and that communication linkages help to solve problems and resolve challenges.



Exploration Stage

The purpose of the exploration stage is to: (1) create readiness for change (i.e., create a hospitable environment for implementing an innovation); (2) examine the degree to which the proposed innovations meet the needs of children and families; and (3) determine whether the innovations are appropriate, and implementation is feasible. In other words, the exploration stage involves assessing the potential match between community needs and the proposed innovation, making a decision whether to proceed with implementation, and planning for organizational change that creates an environment that is open to implementing a new innovation (Fixsen et al., 2005).

The Approach organizes the following five steps within the exploration stage:

- Identify the Problem and Understand the Target Population
- Develop a Theory of Change
- Assess and Select an Innovation
- Implementation Supports Overview
- Plan for Implementation

Step 1. Identify the Problem and Understand Target Population(s)

This critical exploration step focuses on several research-oriented activities that help agencies and organizations clearly identify the problem they want to address, understand the target population to be served, define the outcomes of interest, and identify the needs of the target population. This initial work creates a foundation for the selection or development of an innovation that has the best chances of addressing the identified problem. It also serves to provide important information for guiding the implementation of the innovation.

Step 2. Develop a Theory of Change

This exploration activity involves developing a theory of change, or a hypothesis, that describes the root cause(s) of the problem, the desired outcomes, and how the innovation will help to reach those outcomes. A theory of change provides direction for how and why change will happen in a particular practice, program, or organizational system(s). It can be considered the articulation of one's thoughts about that problem, the causes for it, and the steps that must occur and the changes that will be achieved within an agency or organization before the desired outcome can occur.

Step 3. Assess and Select an Innovation

After the implementation team has developed the theory of change, it can begin to research potential solutions and decide on an innovation or series of innovations that address the identified problem. The implementation team should conduct a thorough search to identify multiple research- or evidence-supported innovations from a variety of fields to address the problem.

Five key factors are considered for deciding which innovation to choose:

- Alignment of the innovation with the developed theory of change
- Evidence demonstrating improvement in identified short- and long-term outcomes
- Fit of the innovation with the agency or system
- Feasibility of, and organizational capacity for, implementing and sustaining the innovation
- The innovation's readiness for implementation

These factors help to determine which of the potential solutions would be the best fit for the organization. The goal of this step is a clear solution that addresses the identified needs of the target population and takes into account research from the field, as well as existing organizational factors. Without a clear solution in place, teams cannot determine whether the innovation or

other factors resulted in improved (or less desirable) outcomes for the identified population.

Step 4. Understand Implementation Supports

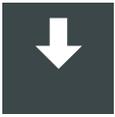
Implementation supports are processes and activities that provide an infrastructure for the successful implementation of an innovation. The six supports central to the Approach help to build an organizational environment that is open to and supportive of implementation efforts. They are:

- Staff Recruitment and Selection
- Staff Training
- Staff Coaching
- Fidelity Assessments
- Identification and Use of Data
- Leadership and Stakeholder Supports

Step 4 in the Approach addresses the need for implementation teams to become familiar with these supports and to understand their role in effectively implementing innovations and preparing an innovation for simultaneous or eventual evaluation. This cursory understanding of these supports is necessary as the implementation team begins planning for implementation.

Step 5. Initial Assessment and Implementation Plan

Planning for implementation involves innovation and organizational assessments to inform the development of an implementation plan. Assessment of the selected innovation helps to determine how much work it will take to make it ready ("operationalized") for implementation. Organizational assessment of the necessary implementation supports helps to identify the gaps that need to be addressed to create and sustain a supportive environment in which to implement the innovation. These assessments lay the groundwork for drafting an implementation plan, a comprehensive document that will guide the successful installation and implementation of the innovation.



Installation Stage

The purpose of the installation stage is to review and refine existing teaming structures, develop practice profiles or adapt innovation manuals to operationalize the innovation, and build the infrastructure to support implementation.

The Approach organizes the following two steps within the installation stage:

- Develop or Adapt the Innovation
- Develop or Adapt Implementation Supports

Step 6. Develop or Adapt the Innovation

The installation activities within the Approach help to make the innovation operational by developing practice profiles or adapting established practice manuals. A practice profile is a tool that describes how the innovation works in everyday practice by articulating the essential functions of the innovation and the activities needed to deliver the innovation as intended. Clearly defining the essential functions outlines how practitioners will conduct the innovation.

Essential Functions –The activities or strategies that a practitioner engages in to address the identified problem. Essential functions are based on research evidence and are used to guide what practitioners do and how they do it.

Step 7. Develop or Adapt Implementation Supports

Clearly operationalizing the innovation, through practice profiles for example, provides a framework for developing sustainable implementation supports for the innovation. Implementation supports include policies and procedures, staff selection criteria, training curriculum and protocols, coaching plans, and fidelity assessment processes. Activities include:

- Defining formal leadership and stakeholder roles and responsibilities
- Articulating staff recruitment strategies and using data to continuously improve it
- Creating an approach to design and deliver training
- Developing a coaching model
- Developing a fidelity assessment that measures practitioners' adherence to the essential functions and competence in delivering them



Initial Implementation Stage

The purpose of the initial implementation stage is to: (1) test critical elements, such as key processes and data collection activities, and (2) modify early-occurring components so that innovation processes are improved and implementation supports are supporting the right processes. Testing can also be a valuable strategy to further identify and operationalize the essential functions of the innovation. This stage examines the functionality and relevance of the teaming structure and ensures that teams continue to be relevant, functional, and sustainable and can weather transitions in team members. During this initial implementation, children and families begin to receive the innovation, all components of the innovation are at least partially in place, and the implementation supports begin to function.



One step, Initial Implementation and Testing, is outlined within the Initial Implementation Stage.

Step 8. Conduct Initial Implementation and Testing

In this step, teams identify the parts of an innovation that may need to be tested and modified before full implementation. Known as usability testing, this process improves the innovation, implementation supports, and data collection process.

Through the use of Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) rapid cycle testing, the implementation team can detect strengths and gaps in implementation of the innovation. The point is to gather information and learn as much as possible from the available examples. By “testing” the innovation as it is expected to be implemented, improvements can be made quickly from one cycle to the next. PDSA is the process of:

- Planning for testing the identified element (e.g., innovation component, data collection process) (Plan)
- Conducting the identified element (Do)
- Gathering feedback and examining the results (Study)
- Deciding whether and where to make improvements (Act)



Full Implementation Stage

The purpose of the full implementation stage is to continue to: (1) test critical elements, and (2) use data to strengthen and improve the innovation and implementation supports. This stage again examines the functionality and relevance of the teaming structure and ensures that implementation teams continue to be relevant, functional, and sustainable and can weather transitions in team members. Full implementation means practitioners are skilled in delivering the services, implementation supports are institutionalized, and the innovation is fully operationalized in the system or program.

The Approach organizes the following two steps within the full implementation stage:

- Monitor and Assess the Innovation
- Plan for Sustaining the Innovation

Step 9. Monitor and Assess the Innovation

This step within the Approach focuses on the essential tasks of continuous monitoring and assessment of the innovation and the implementation supports, including identifying and refining key performance indicators. The purpose of this step is to continuously improve the implementation of the innovation, institutionalize organizational and system changes, and sustain the innovation through data-driven decision-making and feedback loops.



Continuous improvement is made possible by identifying questions related to child and family experience of the innovation, implementation processes, and system capacity and infrastructure development and subsequently collecting the data to answer these questions. By identifying, collecting, and ensuring a method to analyze and share the resulting data in these areas, the innovation and implementation processes and innovation are subjected to continuous monitoring and, as needed, improvement.

Step 10. Plan for Sustaining the Innovation

The Approach encourages attention to sustainability during each stage of implementation. Throughout the implementation process, it draws attention to sustaining and improving the implementation infrastructure so that fidelity, training, coaching, and systems supports are in place, able to be maintained, monitored, and improved as necessary.

Sustainability efforts in the full implementation stage include a determination of the organizational home for innovation leadership and infrastructure. This includes decisions about who has ongoing responsibility for: developing and maintaining the competence of current and new staff, collecting and maintaining program and outcome data, making data-driven decisions, and funding the program. Sustainability planning involves the ongoing commitment of key stakeholders and community partners, as well as transparent, coordinated, and accountable communication and feedback systems.



Conclusion

The Development, Implementation, and Assessment Approach is a framework for child welfare and other social service agencies or organizations to build or adapt and implement innovations with fidelity. The Approach describes best practices in implementation, and also prepares innovations for evaluation, adding to the knowledge base of clearly defined innovations that can meet the complex needs of diverse communities of children and families.

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