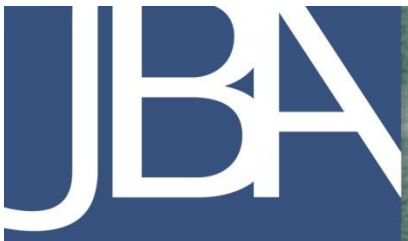


james bell associates

Lessons Learned through the Application of Implementation Science Concepts to Children's Bureau Discretionary Grant Programs

January 2013

1001 19th Street, North
Suite 1500
Arlington, VA 22209
Phone: (703) 528-3230
Fax: (703) 243-3017

This publication was developed by James Bell Associates on behalf of the Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families (ACF), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), under Contract Number GS10F0204K, Order Number 06Y010102. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the author and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Children's Bureau, ACF, or HHS. Material contained in this publication is in the public domain and may be reproduced, fully or partially, without permission from James Bell Associates or the Federal Government. The courtesy of attribution or crediting the source of the material is requested. The recommended citation is as follows:

James Bell Associates (2013). *Lessons learned through the application of implementation science concepts to Children's Bureau discretionary grant programs*. Arlington, VA: Author.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary iii

Chapter I: Background on Implementation Science Research and the Purpose of this Report 1

Chapter II: Study Methods 9

Chapter III: Analysis of the NIRN Model in the CB Grantee Context 20

Chapter IV: Analysis of Implementation Factors among Successful Program Implementers 30

Chapter V: Implications and Recommendations for CB Discretionary Grant Programs 51

References 60

Appendix A: Site Visit Summary Checklist 63

List of Exhibits

Exhibit I-1: EBP Continuum in Child Welfare 4
Exhibit I-2: NIRN Implementation Science Model and Parallel JBA Concepts 6
Exhibit II-1: CB Discretionary Grantees Active as of January 2011 10
Exhibit II-2: Key Project Partnerships 11
Exhibit II-3: Use of EBPs 12
Exhibit II-4: Implementation Challenges 13
Exhibit II-5: Discretionary Grantees Selected for Follow-up Data Collection 16
Exhibit III-1: NIRN Stages of Implementation 21
Exhibit III-2: Pre-Grant Assessments 22
Exhibit III-3: Timing of Program Adaptations 25
Exhibit III-4: Degrees of Implementation 26
Exhibit III-5: Factors Associated with Effective Implementation 28
Exhibit IV-1: Project Design Elements 32
Exhibit IV-2: Planning for Program Evaluation 34
Exhibit IV-3: Role of Project Champion 34
Exhibit IV-4: Internal Organizational Support and Resources 35
Exhibit IV-5: Development of Organizational Partnerships 36
Exhibit IV-6: Role of Project Champion 37
Exhibit IV-7: Key Staff Characteristics 38
Exhibit IV-8: Staff Training 39
Exhibit IV-9: Ongoing Staff Training, Supervision, Support, and Evaluation 40

Exhibit IV-10: Participant Recruitment Strategies 41
Exhibit IV-11: Participant Retention Strategies 43
Exhibit IV-12: Modifications to Programs and Practices 44
Exhibit IV-13: Information Dissemination 45
Exhibit IV-14: Project Sustainability Efforts 48
Exhibit IV-15: Use of Technical Assistance 48
Exhibit IV-16: Program Evaluation 50
Exhibit V-1: Characteristics of Successful Program Implementers 52

Executive Summary

In recent years the Children's Bureau (CB) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has focused more attention on issues that affect the implementation of federally funded child welfare programs, and has expressed interest in applying the concepts of existing implementation models such as that developed by the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) to its discretionary grant programs. Research to develop conceptual models that explain or promote effective implementation is sometimes referred to as "implementation science." Through its efforts to provide evaluation technical assistance to CB discretionary grantees, James Bell Associates (JBA) has made anecdotal observations regarding the relationship between the successful implementation of project activities and positive programmatic and participant outcomes.

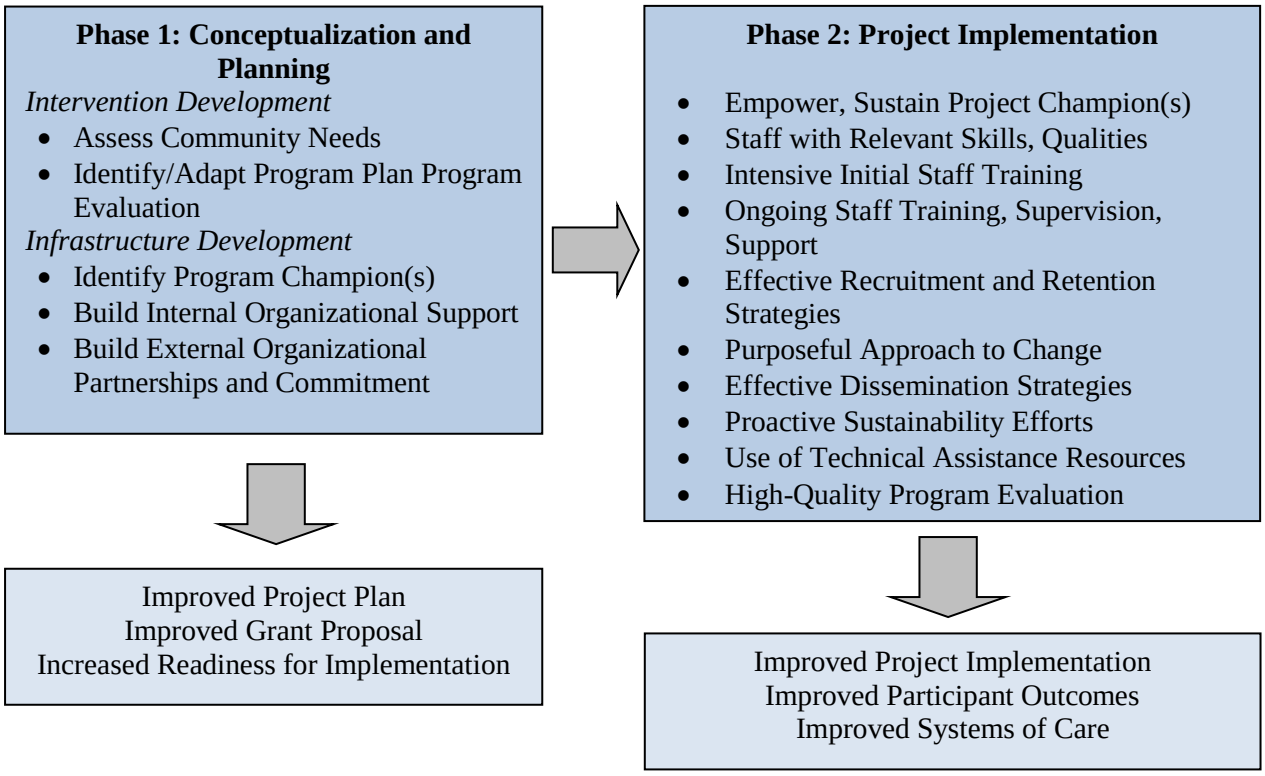
This report explores the organizational characteristics, activities, and processes that facilitate the successful implementation of innovative CB discretionary grant projects, with the goal of aiding current and future grantees in efforts to implement child welfare programs and services successfully within the parameters of the Federal grant-making and management process. To accomplish this, JBA undertook a qualitative study in 2011 that involved document reviews, site visits, and conference calls with 17 CB grantees that demonstrated initial evidence of successful program implementation. JBA held in-depth discussions with grantee staff members and other stakeholders to explore over 100 implementation factors and concepts adapted specifically from the NIRN model and JBA's own implementation research.

Through this study, JBA found that the NIRN model incorporates many useful concepts for understanding the implementation experiences of selected CB discretionary grantees. One possible limitation of the NIRN framework is its focus on the successful replication of existing and well-defined evidence-based programs and practices (EBPs). In contrast, CB discretionary grantees most often focus on developing and implementing innovative, untested interventions that may have the potential to become EBPs in the future. In addition, implementation science concepts such as "fidelity" may be less relevant during the formative phases of new discretionary grant programs that may not yet be manualized and operationalized at the level of specificity needed for fidelity management and evaluation.

Second, the NIRN model may not account fully for the realities and constraints imposed by the Federal grants' award and management process. For example, organizations that seek Federal grants must respond to Funding Opportunity Announcements within short timeframes and adapt proposals to be responsive to problems or issues that have already been identified by the Federal government. In contrast, the NIRN model assumes a community-driven planning and conceptualization process in which State and/or local government agencies and organizations identify a problem, build commitment to address the problem, identify the best evidence-based interventions for solving the problem, and then find the resources to refine and implement the selected interventions. The implementation timeframes of discretionary grant projects are further constrained by the limited duration of CB grants, which typically last between three and five years and sometimes as little as 17 months. These factors all affect the speed and trajectory of the

implementation process of discretionary grant programs from initial start-up to long-term program adaptation and sustainability.

Nonetheless, the NIRN model provides a powerful framework for analyzing the implementation experiences of time-limited CB discretionary grant projects and for identifying many of the organizational characteristics, activities, and processes—referred to in this report as "implementation factors"—that contribute most significantly to successful implementation. These key factors are summarized in the graphic below, which identifies two distinct yet related implementation phases. The "Conceptualization and Planning Phase" is relevant to all potential CB grantees and highlights the actions, decisions, and processes that have a positive impact on the development of grant applications and subsequent program implementation. Phase 2 — Project Implementation — notes factors that are important to the functioning and sustainability of a project after a grant has been awarded.



As described in more detail in the body of this report, several common themes characterize the work of successful program implementers. Some of the most important recommendations for CB discretionary grantees that are derived from these themes include the following:

Identify and Empower a Project Champion within the Grantee Organization

- Identify one or two people with the grantee organization who are committed to and believe in the potential of the project to serve as "Project Champions." Assign this person(s) an official role to guide and oversee project planning, start-up, and implementation.

- Ensure that the Project Champions have the authority or organizational "clout" to overcome internal barriers and to speak for the organization with potential project partners.

Build New or Enhance Existing Community Partnerships and Commitment

- Build partnerships by tapping into existing organizational relationships.

- Develop new relationships by building on shared opportunities and personal relationships.

- Assign responsibility for developing partner relationships to the Project Champion(s).

- Make program implementation a collaborative process by involving project partners in initial project planning and start-up.

- Use Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) to formalize expectations for collaborative relationships as well as respective project roles and responsibilities.

Hire or Assign Project Staff Members with Appropriate Skills and Characteristics

- Hire or assign staff members who are advocates for the program and who believe in its potential to help the project's target population.

- Ensure the effectiveness of project personnel in management, supervisory, case management, clinical, and evaluation positions by hiring staff members with appropriate education and work experience.

- Be aware that the personal characteristics of front-line project staff members can be equally important determinants of effectiveness as their education and professional skills. The most effective personnel are often described by program participants as genuine, caring, able to connect on a personal level, and non-judgmental.

Build Sustainability into the Project Design and Implementation Process

- Create and start implementing a plan for sustainability early in the grant period.
- Foster community buy-in to the program's value and involve community partners in developing strategies for sustainability.
- Create a niche for the project by providing services that are not otherwise available.
- Use evaluation data to demonstrate the effectiveness of the program to potential funders.
- Identify the key elements of the program and find ways to sustain these elements after the end of the Federal grant.

Chapter I
Background on Implementation Science Research and the Purpose of this Report

The Push toward Evidence and Accountability in the Child Welfare Field

The last two decades have witnessed a gradual trend toward higher expectations and standards for accountability on the part of the recipients of grants awarded through multiple Federal departments, including child welfare organizations that receive funding through discretionary grant programs administered by the Children's Bureau (CB) within the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). This demand for greater quality and demonstrable results is reflected in the introduction of the Program Assessment and Rating Tool performance assessment process across multiple Federal agencies, which was developed in response to the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993. Within the sphere of child welfare services specifically, the establishment of the Child and Family Services Review process by HHS in January 2000, which created new rules for assessing States' conformity with Federal requirements for child protection, foster care, adoption, family preservation, and independent living services, has contributed to an environment in which State and local child welfare agencies are focused on demonstrating positive outcomes from the provision of child and family services.

The push toward greater accountability and results in the child welfare field has in turn fostered greater emphasis within HHS and other Federal agencies on the implementation of what are sometimes referred to as "evidence-based" programs and practices (EBPs) (OMB, 2009). EBPs encompass an array of complex concepts, with no consensus having emerged across or within various disciplines (including medicine, psychology, and education) on a standardized definition of an EBP or on the criteria for designating a program or practice as an EBP. The discourse on EBPs is further complicated by the myriad of related and sometimes overlapping concepts to describe efforts to develop the evidence base for effective human service interventions, such as "best practices", "model programs", "empirically supported treatments", and "promising practices."

Interest in EBPs and the ensuing debate surrounding this concept has also grown in the child welfare field in recent years. Although no consensus has emerged within the field regarding a standard definition or key components of EBPs, in general they include services, practices, and interventions for which conclusive evidence of efficacy exists based on findings from a rigorous and systematic evaluation design, as established by criteria stipulated in one or more widely accepted EBP classification systems. Some of the most prominent EBP classification systems that have been applied to child welfare programs include the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare (CEBC) developed by the Chadwick Center for Children and Families, Rady Children's Hospital; the National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices (NREPP) developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA); the Model Programs Guide developed by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP); the What Works Clearinghouse developed by the U.S. Department of Education; and the Top Tier Evidence Initiative developed by the non-profit Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy.

One of the most debated issues surrounding EBPs in the child welfare field involves establishing the level of evidence necessary to be classified as "evidence-based," and as a corollary, which research designs are regarded as sufficiently rigorous to provide this evidence. Whereas some classification systems such as CEBC, the Model Programs Guide, and the Top Tier Evidence Initiative require randomized controlled trials to support the highest level of evidence rating, other systems such as NREPP and the What Works Clearinghouse allow for quasi-experimental designs (e.g., matched case comparison, regression discontinuity, and single case designs) to support the highest evidence rating. Whatever classification system is applied, examples of programs and services that are used widely by child welfare service providers and that are generally regarded as having strong clinical evidence of effectiveness include Multi-Systemic Therapy, Multi-Dimensional Treatment Foster Care, Nurse-Family Partnership, and the Positive Parenting Program (CEBC, 2011).

The Field of Implementation Science

Concomitant with a growing demand for conclusive evidence of effectiveness has been the recognition that improving services to support the needs and well-being of children and families involved in child welfare systems is influenced as much by the process of implementing innovative practices as by the specific practice(s) selected for implementation (Aarons & Palinkas, 2007). Even when they are supported by strong empirical evidence, implementing EBPs in real-world practice and field settings can prove difficult (Fixsen & Blase, 2009). Frequently, programs and practices that demonstrated effectiveness in tightly controlled clinical settings fail to produce the same positive results when put into practice in other environments in which the program's developers have less control over a range of personal, practice, professional, organizational, and other potentially confounding contextual factors. Social service programs in particular are often implemented inconsistently and ineffectively, which can contribute to harmful outcomes for service recipients (National Institute of Medicine, 2001).

Traditionally, failures to replicate EBPs in real practice settings have been attributed to a lack of fidelity to an EBP's service model (O'Donnell, 2008; Mihalic, 2008). Fidelity, also referred to as adherence, integrity, and quality of implementation, is the extent to which the delivery of an intervention adheres to the protocol or program model as intended by the developers of the intervention (Dane & Schneider, 1998; Domitrovich & Greenberg, 2000; Mowbray, Holter, Teague, & Bybee, 2003). Researchers typically conceptualize fidelity in terms of five dimensions: adherence, exposure, quality of delivery, participant responsiveness, and program differentiation (Dane & Schneider, 1998; Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Dusenbury, Branningan, Falco, & Hansen, 2003; Fagan, Hanson, Hawkins, & Arthur, 2008).

The challenges inherent in implementing EBPs have contributed to growing interest in developing tools and strategies that promote the effective implementation of health and human service programs. Research to develop conceptual models for understanding and promoting the effective implementation of programs in real-practice settings is often collectively referred to as "implementation science." Implementation science involves the study of methods to promote the successful integration of EBPs into routine organizational practice, thereby improving effectiveness, reliability, safety, appropriateness, equity, and efficiency (The Clinical

Effectiveness Research Agenda Group [CERAG], 2009). Several groups of researchers have developed conceptual models for understanding and supporting effective implementation, including Aarons, Hurlburt, and Horwitz (2011); Aarons and Palinkas (2007); Barbee, Christensen, Antle, Wandersman, and Cahn (2011); Bumbarger, Perkins, and Greenberg (2009); Chinman et al. (2004); Damschroder, Aron, Keith, Kirsh, Alexander, and Lowery (2009); Dariotis, Bumbarger, Duncan, and Greenberg; Proctor et al., (2009); Mendel, Meredith, Schoenbaum, Sherbourne, and Wells, 2008; the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) (Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005); and Wandersman, Imm, Chinman, and Kaftarian (2000). Implementation science models developed by these groups have attempted to provide insight into the organizational characteristics, activities, and processes that promote the successful implementation of EBPs. As CB has focused more attention on factors that facilitate the implementation of its child welfare discretionary grant programs, it has expressed interest in applying the concepts of existing implementation science models, most notably the NIRN model, to its discretionary grant programs.

EBPs in the Context of CB Discretionary Grant Programs

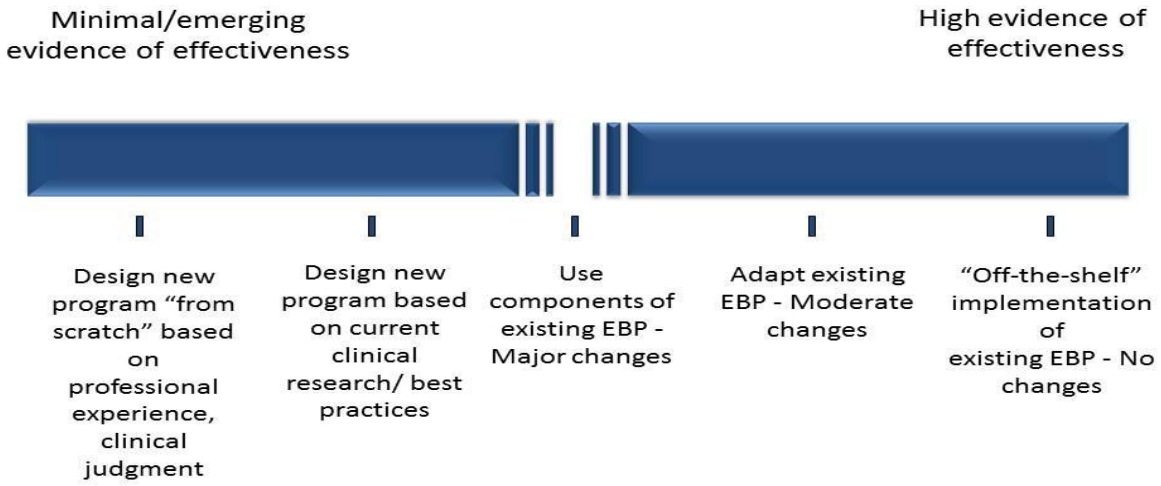
Although model fidelity is often critical to the effective implementation of EBPs and to the achievement of positive participant outcomes, more practitioners and researchers are acknowledging that some adaptations to EBPs may be necessary to accommodate variations in organizational settings and target populations. Adaptation is often inevitable because the original environmental parameters in which the EBP was developed and tested can rarely be recreated (HHS, 2010; Wandersman et al., 2000). EBPs are sometimes implemented to address a certain problem with a different target population than the one in which the EBP was demonstrated to be effective. For example, an agency that seeks to provide parenting skills training to non-custodial parents in a substance abuse treatment program may find that the best training curriculum is one that was developed and tested to teach parenting skills to the caregivers of children enrolled in Head Start; while effective when used with a general population of parents of pre-school children, this same curriculum may prove to be entirely ineffective when applied to a population with substantially different needs and service histories.

Moreover, EBPs often incorporate detailed implementation guidelines or practice protocols that offer service providers detailed information about specific activities or content that should be included when serving program participants (e.g., what specific topics to cover, in what order, and for how long). These protocols are often confined to staff-participant interactions and do not typically address the many external factors that can facilitate or hinder program success. For example, two organizations that adopt the same evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention program using identical practice protocols may have dramatically different implementation experiences, with one organization achieving its enrollment targets while the other struggles with low enrollment as a result of different recruitment methods, more limited resources, or competition from organizations in its target community that offer a similar service.

Established EBPs are in turn comparatively rare in the child welfare field. For example, among the 135 rated programs documented in the *California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare* (CEBC), only 22 were rated as a "1" (well supported by research evidence) and of at

least "medium" relevance to the child welfare field (CEBC, 2012). As will be discussed in more detail later in this report, many CB discretionary projects are not based on an EBP but rather seek to implement innovative but untested services grounded in implicit theories or clinical judgments regarding what is effective in addressing the problem or population in question. *Exhibit I-1: EBP Continuum in Child Welfare* illustrates the range of implementation experiences of child welfare programs with respect to EBPs. The majority of programs fall on the left side of the continuum either by designing brand-new programs "from scratch" based on professional experiences or clinical judgment, by designing new programs informed by current child welfare research or best practices, or by utilizing heavily modified components of one or more existing EBPs. Given the relative paucity of child welfare programs that can be categorized as evidence-based, few organizations fall on the right side of the continuum in which they implement "off the shelf" EBPs with no or only minor modifications.

Exhibit I-1: EBP Continuum in Child Welfare



Given the emerging state of research on effective child welfare interventions, CB discretionary grantees that must modify an existing EBP or that are implementing a new and untested program confront the challenge of demonstrating implementation success without the benefit of established evidence of effectiveness.

Background and Purpose of this Study

CB funds research and demonstration projects under the authority of several pieces of Federal legislation, including the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act and the Social Security Act, through its discretionary grant programs. Discretionary grants allow CB to allocate Federal dollars for innovative programs and interventions that address child welfare issues of special interest to the Federal government, particularly those that relate to the safety, permanency, and well-being of vulnerable children and their families. In an effort to improve the quality of these grantees' evaluations and thereby enhance the validity and reliability of new knowledge in the

child welfare field, CB has made evaluation technical assistance (TA) available to grantees through contracts with James Bell Associates (JBA) since 1999. Through its efforts to provide evaluation TA to CB discretionary grantees, JBA has made many anecdotal observations regarding the apparent relationship between the successful implementation of project activities and positive participant outcomes. Specifically, JBA has observed that some grantees experience exceptional success with implementing projects in terms of the ability to execute core program activities as originally intended, reach enrollment and participation targets, work collaboratively with key project partners, and build the necessary organizational infrastructure to sustain projects beyond the period of Federal funding.

JBA's interest in factors that contribute to successful program implementation evolved further under a prior contract with the Office of Family Assistance (OFA) within HHS to provide evaluation TA to organizations that were funded to implement healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood education programs. Under this contract, JBA conducted research on the programmatic, organizational, and environmental/contextual factors that were associated with enhanced program performance among healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood grantees, which culminated in the publication of a monograph titled *Implementation Resource Guide for Social Service Programs: An Introduction to Evidence-Based Programming* (James Bell Associates, 2010). Through this work JBA developed a general framework referred to as "evidence-based programming" with a goal of highlighting factors that promote successful program implementation that could in turn build the evidence base regarding the effectiveness of healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood education programs. As illustrated in *Exhibit I-2: NIRN Implementation Model and Parallel JBA Concepts* on the following page, many of the variables contained in JBA's evidence-based programming framework parallel concepts in the NIRN implementation science framework.

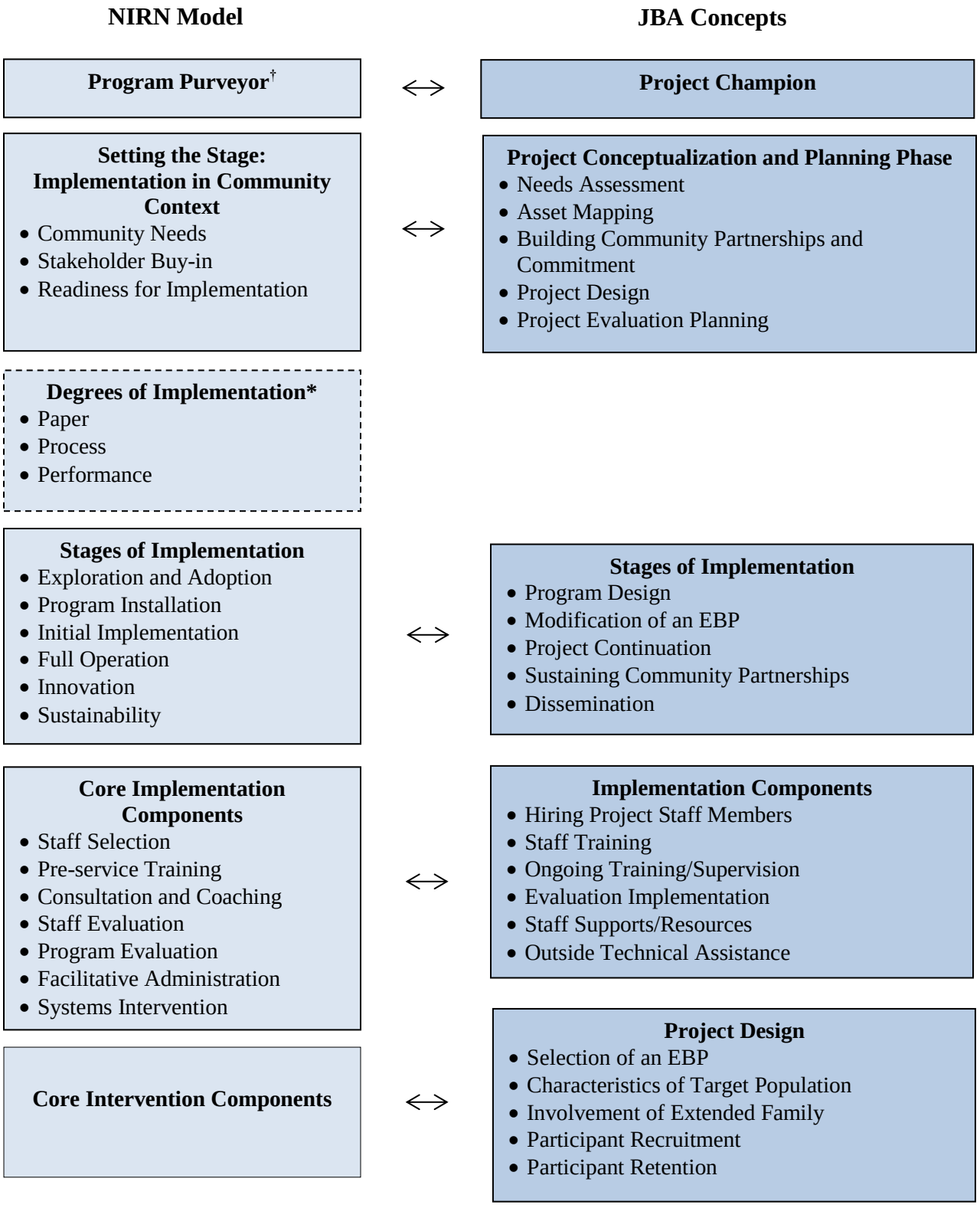
Based on this past work, anecdotal observations of CB discretionary grantees, and CB's interest in the implementation science research conducted by NIRN, JBA proposed a qualitative study in 2010 to elucidate the factors that contribute to successful program implementation among CB discretionary grantees. This study was designed to address three overarching questions:

- To what extent does the NIRN implementation science model correspond to and explain the implementation experiences and efforts of CB discretionary grantees?

- What organizational characteristics, activities, and processes are instrumental to the successful implementation of CB discretionary grant projects?

- To what extent are these implementation factors aligned with the NIRN model? Are there other factors outside of this model that contribute to the successful implementation of CB discretionary grant projects?

Exhibit I-2: NIRN Implementation Science Model and Parallel JBA Concepts



†Note: Parallels between the concept of a program "champion" and of a "purveyor" are somewhat limited. In the NIRN model a purveyor often refers to the individual(s) that developed and promote a program rather than to an individual internal to an organization who facilitates the program's implementation.

*No parallel JBA concept.

In short, the goal of this effort was to study the implementation experiences of CB grantees through the lens of the NIRN model and to synthesize the findings of this research into a framework of recommendations to promote the successful implementation of current and future discretionary grant programs. A corollary goal was to identify recommendations that are germane both to grantees that are implementing EBPs, as well as those that are implementing unproven programs based on implicit theories of change or clinical experience and judgment. In conducting this study, JBA was guided by its past experience conducting implementation research among OFA healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood grantees, the prior work of NIRN, and particular questions of interest to CB regarding the implementation of discretionary grant projects.

The remainder of this report is divided into four chapters. Chapter II (Study Methods) provides an overview of the research methodology that JBA used to study implementation among a subset of CB discretionary grantees served through JBA's evaluation TA contract. Based on data collected through this study, Chapter III (Analysis of the NIRN Model in CB Grantee Context) assesses the relationship between key components of the NIRN model and the implementation experiences of this subset of grantees. Chapter IV (Analysis of Implementation Factors among Successful Program Implementers) discusses the implementation factors derived from NIRN and JBA's prior research that appear to have the strongest influence on effective implementation among the selected grantees. Chapter V (Implications and Recommendations for CB Discretionary Grant Programs) offers recommendations that emerge from the key factors identified in Chapter IV that may be of particular importance in promoting the successful implementation of current and future CB discretionary grant programs.

Caveats

Several caveats are necessary to frame the research methods and discussion of findings presented in this report. First, this study reflects an attempt to understand the personnel, organizational, and contextual factors that facilitate successful program implementation in the context of CB discretionary grant programs, specifically among discretionary grantees that are served through JBA's evaluation technical assistance contract with CB; as such, the findings reported in subsequent chapters may have limited relevance to CB-funded discretionary grantees not served by JBA, including those funded through the Regional Partnership Grant Program, or to other Federal, State, and locally funded child welfare or social service programs more generally. As is outlined in the following chapter, the small sample size and qualitative methods employed in conducting the study also limit the generalizability of findings to a broader range of child welfare or other human service programs.

Second, this study did not constitute an effort to build a new implementation science model *per se*; such an endeavor would require a more extensive and comprehensive research effort involving the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data from a larger and diverse sample of organizations. Rather, this project represents an effort to borrow from and adapt the NIRN implementation science model to create a loose framework for understanding what contributes to the successful implementation of time-limited discretionary grant programs. A related caveat is that the findings presented in this report are limited to the analytical lens of the

NIRN model. Although NIRN is often regarded as a pioneer in the field of implementation science, as noted elsewhere in this chapter other frameworks have emerged in recent years for studying and facilitating effective program implementation. Thus, other concepts and factors that may be useful for understanding the implementation experiences of CB discretionary grantees were not addressed in this study.

Third, there is currently no consensus in the child welfare field regarding the definition of an EBP, nor does an established research framework exist for developing evidence-based child welfare programs or practices. The various EBP classification systems that currently exist set different standards with respect to the need for randomized controlled trials, replication in other practice settings, and dissemination in peer-reviewed journals. This debate is confounded by the use in the field of several related terms and concepts, including "promising practices," "evidence-informed practices," and "best practices." Given the general lack of agreement in the child welfare field, JBA adopted an agnostic approach to EBPs for the purposes of this study by defining it as any program, practice, or service model that is classified as such by one of the existing EBP rating systems; or that otherwise has conclusive empirical evidence of effectiveness as established by a systematic and high-quality evaluation reported in a peer-reviewed periodical, technical report, or other formal publication.

Fourth, the process for selecting grantees for further study that is described in Chapter II should not be interpreted to mean that grantees that were not selected have poorly implemented programs, or that the selected grantees have inherently superior programs or have achieved better outcomes. Rather, the selection process was guided primarily by an interest in identifying grantees whose implementation experiences were most instructive in understanding the factors that facilitate successful program implementation among CB discretionary grantees, as well as the need to ensure that the eventual study sample reflected the geographic, programmatic, and organizational diversity of agencies that receive discretionary funding.

A final caveat involves an acknowledgement of some areas in which CB's discretionary grant program has evolved since the research described in this report was conducted. As will be described in more detail in subsequent chapters, many of the grantees involved in this study were not implementing EBPs and most faced the challenge of implementing projects immediately following the award of Federal funding. In contrast, during the last couple of years CB has placed growing emphasis on grants that require the implementation of established EBPs and/or that include a start-up or planning phase of up to 12 months; these changing requirements are reflected in several of the Funding Opportunity Announcements (FOAs) issued by CB in 2011 and 2012. Thus, many current and future grantees are facing a different funding "landscape" from the one encountered by the grantees involved in this study. Despite this evolution, the general observations and lessons learned from this study remain largely pertinent to the newest rounds of discretionary grant awardees.

With these caveats in mind, it is hoped that this report will provide valuable insights into the implementation experiences of a small group of CB discretionary grant projects that may inform the work of future discretionary grantees, and potentially of a broader range of Federal, State, and local child welfare programs.

Chapter II
Study Methods

JBA addressed the key questions outlined in the previous chapter by undertaking a two-stage qualitative study beginning in January 2011 and ending in July 2011. The first stage involved conducting screening calls with all organizations with active CB discretionary grants that JBA serves through its evaluation TA contract with CB with a goal of identifying a smaller group of grantees that demonstrated evidence of effective program implementation. In the second stage, JBA conducted site visits to this group of selected grantees in an effort to collect more in-depth information regarding the contextual factors that contributed to the successful implementation of discretionary grant programs. Each of these steps is described in detail in the remaining sections of this chapter.

Stage One: Identifying Successful Program Implementers

Screening Protocol

As shown in *Exhibit II: CB Discretionary Grantees Active as of January 2011*, JBA served a total of 58 organizations with active discretionary grants through its evaluation TA contract. The grant periods of five grantees, including one active grantee in the 2005 Open Adoption cluster and four grantees in the 2005 Substance-Exposed Newborn cluster, were officially completed but had been extended through no-cost extensions for periods of between three and 12 months. JBA began the first stage of the study by contacting the Project Directors of 57 grantees to describe the nature and goals of the project and to invite them to participate in an initial screening call. The Project Directors of 54 grantees agreed to participate in a screening call, which occurred in January and February 2011. (The Project Director for the one active Open Adoption grantee was not contacted since its no-cost extension was scheduled to end in March 2011, which would have excluded it from follow-up data collection and a possible site visit.)

A two-person team of JBA personnel conducted the screening calls, with one staff member facilitating the call and the other staff member taking detailed notes. Prior to conducting each call, the assigned two-person team reviewed all relevant background documents for the grantee in question, including its original grant proposal, evaluation plan, and progress reports. The JBA teams used a detailed data collection form to amass and organize data during the initial review of relevant documents and the subsequent screening calls. In most cases, call participants included each grantee's project director, one or two key front-line personnel responsible for delivering project services, and the evaluator for the grantee's project. Major topics covered during the calls included

- the grantee's key organizational partners involved in project planning and/or service delivery;
- major project descriptors (e.g., the primary target population, enrollment and retention levels);
- major project activities (e.g., services provided, any curricula or EBPs used);

Exhibit II-1: CB Discretionary Grantees Active as of January 2011[1]

Grantee Cluster	Year Funded	Number of Grantees in Cluster	Number of Years Funded	End Date of Cluster	Number of Grantees Screened
Diligent Recruitment of Families for Children in Foster Care (Diligent Recruitment)	2010	7	5	9/30/2015	7
Abandoned Infants Assistance: Comprehensive Support Services for Families affected by Substance Abuse and/or HIV/AIDS (AIA)	2009	8	4	9/30/2013	6
Diligent Recruitment of Families for Children in Foster Care	2008	8	5	9/30/2013	8
Curriculum Development & Evaluation for Healthy Marriage	2008	1	5	9/30/2013	1
Abandoned Infants Assistance Comprehensive Support Services (AIA)	2008	9	4	9/30/2012	9
Nurse Home Visitation (NHV)	2007	3	5	9/30/2012	3
Comprehensive Family Assessment (CFA)	2007	5	5	9/30/2012	5
Demonstration Projects in Post-Adoption Services and Marriage Education (PAS/ME)	2006	7	5	9/30/2011	6
Collaboration between TANF and Child Welfare Services to Improve Child Welfare Program Outcomes (CW-TANF)	2006	5	5	9/30/2011	5
Developing Adoption Services and Supports for Youth Who Wish to Retain Contact with Family Members in Order to Improve Permanency Outcomes (Open Adoption)	2005	1	5	3/31/2011	0
Model Development or Replication to Implement the CAPTA Requirement to Identify and Serve Substance Exposed Newborns (SEN)	2005	4	5	9/30/2011	4
Totals		**58**			**54**

[1] The abbreviated names of several grantee clusters, which are noted in parentheses in the first column, are used frequently throughout this report.

- implementation issues (e.g., changes to project, implementation challenges or facilitators);
- program evaluation activities, with a focus on systematic data collection to provide evidence of effective program implementation;
- dissemination of information regarding the activities and impact of the project; and
- plans for and strategies to sustain the project following the official end of the Federal grant.

Given that the seven Diligent Recruitment grantees funded in 2010 were still in the planning phase of the projects and for the most part had not begun implementing major program activities, the screening calls conducted with them focused less on project implementation and more on project planning and early start-up activities.

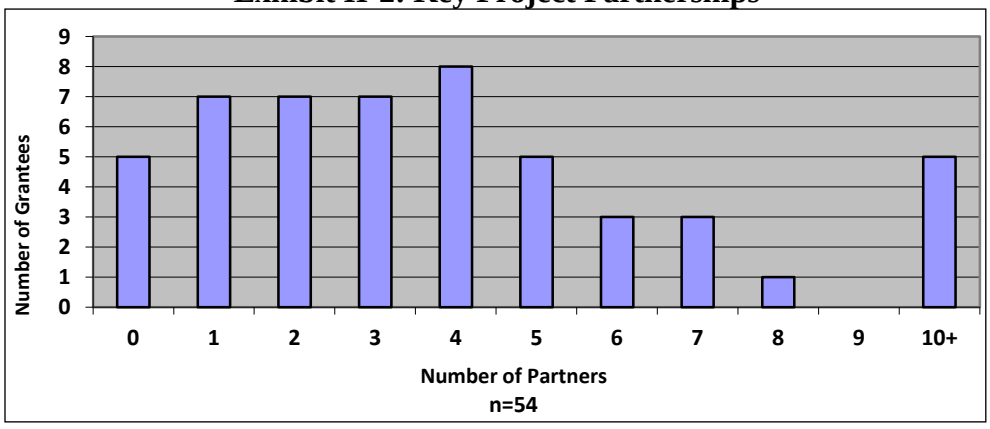
Following the completion of each screening call, the assigned JBA team completed a brief (three-to-five page) memorandum for CB use that reviewed the major topics and issues covered during the call and offered a preliminary rating of the grantee's implementation effectiveness (see Selection of Grantees for Further Study below).

Summary of Selected Results from Screening Calls

Organization type. Over half of the 54 screened grantees (30) were State or local government entities, most commonly public child welfare agencies. An additional 19 grantees were private or public non-profit organizations and the remaining five grantees were public State universities.

Key project partnerships. The development of partnerships with key organizations in the target community was an important component of most grantees' discretionary grant activities, with 49 grantees indicating that they had established new or expanded existing partnerships with other organizations to assist with grant planning, recruitment, or service delivery. Examples of partnering organizations include contracted service providers (e.g., mental health or substance abuse treatment providers), law enforcement agencies, public child welfare agencies, community centers and other neighborhood-based organizations, and local colleges and universities. As shown in *Exhibit II-2: Key Project Partnerships*, most grantees had between one and four major project partners, with some grantees reporting the establishment of 10 or more partnerships.

Exhibit II-2: Key Project Partnerships



Use of EBPs. As indicated in *Exhibit II-3: Use of EBPs* fewer than half of screened grantees (19) reported incorporating an EBP, either in the form of an evidence-based training, education curriculum, or an evidence-based service model, into their funded projects. The remaining grantees without an EBP project component were primarily engaged in activities that did not involve a direct service component (e.g., marketing and public outreach and education), provided general case management services that are not based on an EBP, or were developing their own curriculum or service model. The 2010 Diligent Recruitment grantees were still in the planning and start-up phase and had not necessarily selected an EBP to integrate into program activities.

Exhibit II-3: Use of EBPs
(n=54)

Core Service Approach	Examples	Number of Grantees
EBPs		
Evidence-Based Curricula	Preventive Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP); Parent Resources for Information, Development, and Education (PRIDE)	16 (12 as primary grant activity and 4 as secondary grant activity)
Evidence-Based Program with Curriculum Component	Nurse-Family Partnership	3
Total		**19**
Non-Evidence-Based Approaches		
Non-Direct Service Activities	System change efforts, marketing and recruitment of foster/adoptive families	10
General Case Management	AIA and SEN grantees	11
Developing Own Service Model or Curriculum	2008 Curriculum Development for Healthy Marriage Training grantee cluster	4
Still in Planning Phase – No Curriculum or Model Selected	2010 Diligent Recruitment grantees	5
Total		**30**

Implementation challenges. All 49 grantees that were included in this analysis reported at least one unexpected challenge in implementing their projects. (The 2010 Diligent Recruitment grantees were excluded since they were still in the project planning and start-up phase.) Most grantees reported more than one challenge (see *Exhibit II-4: Implementation Challenges*). The most commonly reported challenge involved problems with participant recruitment and retention (25 grantees), followed by environmental or contextual factors (e.g., an agency fiscal crisis), challenges with establishing collaborative relationships with organizational partners, resource constraints, and staffing issues (e.g., high staff turnover). Several grantees also noted challenges with evaluation activities such as developing or identifying a valid and reliable data collection instrument.

Exhibit II-4: Implementation Challenges
(n=54)

Category	Example(s)	Number of Grantees
Recruitment and Retention	Low project enrollment; participants difficult to engage	25
Environmental/ Community Context	Agency fiscal crisis; organization- or system-wide reform efforts; changing political leadership; competing organizations or programs	19
Partnerships	Difficulties communicating with and getting buy-in from potential partners into the project	18
Resources	Activity more costly, time consuming, or difficult to implement than anticipated; participant needs greater than anticipated	16
Staffing	High staff turnover; difficulties finding and hiring qualified staff	16
Evaluation/Data Collection	Coordinating evaluation activities with other programs or partners; developing or identifying appropriate data collection instruments	14

Sustainability. Discretionary grantees operate in a time-limited funding cycle in which Federal funding is typically provided for three to five years. During the screening calls JBA asked grantees about their thoughts, plans, and preparations for sustaining the projects (or some components thereof) following the end of Federal funding. The grantees' level of preparedness for sustainability fit into one of four categories that varied from having no sustainability plan to having already achieved some level of sustainability:

- *No Plan* (n=13). These grantees had yet to consider the long-term sustainability of the projects or did not plan to sustain the project following the end of Federal funding.

- *Thinking About Sustainability* (n=19). Grantees in this category had given some thought to sustaining their projects. While some internal conversations about sustainability may have occurred, no concrete actions had been taken to facilitate project continuation. Many grantees in this category reported that they would probably rely on continued Federal or other government funding to sustain projects; if such funding was not forthcoming, they would likely discontinue their projects.

- *Taking Action for Sustainability* (n=13). These grantees were actively seeking to sustain their projects or component thereof once Federal funding ends. Grantees' actions in this regard included outreach to potential alternative funders, taking concrete steps to continue program services through other funding sources, or modifying arrangements for staffing or service delivery (for example, re-assigning core project activities to internal

agency staff members or delivering training via the Internet instead of through classroom-based instruction).

- *Sustainability Achieved* (n=9). A small group of grantees had already achieved some level of sustainability by implementing organizational changes that involved modified staffing or service delivery modalities (see the examples in the previous bullet), securing alternative funding sources, or delegating the provision of core services to one or more organizational partners that could maintain the project following the end of the Federal grant.

Not surprisingly, a general correlation existed between the length of time a grantee had been operating its project and the level of activity around sustainability, although this relationship was stronger for some grantees than for others. Many grantees in the later years of the projects had still not made plans for achieving sustainability, whereas some grantees had made sustainability a core element in the design of their programs from the beginning of the grant application process.

Stage Two: Selection of Grantees for Further Study

Using the information generated during the screening calls and document review process, JBA's research team next identified a smaller group of grantees that were identified as good candidates to participate in follow-up data collection activities via site visits. Selections were made based on an overall assessment of the grantees' implementation effectiveness, which was vetted using criteria derived from a review of the implementation science literature (see Chapter I) and JBA's prior work involving the implementation of healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood grantees. Specifically, JBA looked for evidence of the following factors:

- Presence of a project "champion"
- Active and effective collaboration with one or more partnering organizations
- High morale and commitment to the project among key staff members
- Implementation of an EBP
- Innovative project management strategies (e.g., highly integrated research/evaluation and clinical activities)
- Successful recruitment and retention of program participants
- Full implementation of core project services or activities (whether part of an EBP or not)
- Adaptability in the face of organizational and contextual challenges
- A strong evaluation design

- High-quality data to corroborate claims regarding effective implementation and positive participant outcomes

- Promoting organizational or system-level changes

- Effective strategies for disseminating knowledge regarding the project to key stakeholders and/or the broader child welfare field

- Action taken to sustain the project following the end of the Federal grant or concrete sustainability plans in place

Using a qualitative assessment of these rating factors, JBA assigned each grantee an overall implementation strength rating of "high," "medium," or "low." Although grantees that demonstrated evidence of more rating factors in general received higher strength ratings, JBA researchers also rated grantees based on their in-depth knowledge of grantees' projects gained through the provision of evaluation TA and the relative strength of various rating factors. For example, a grantee that demonstrated weak evidence of many rating factors may have only received a strength rating of "medium," whereas a grantee that demonstrated exceptional evidence for fewer rating factors may have been assigned a strength rating of "high."

Once all 54 grantees had been assigned an overall strength rating, JBA made preliminary selections of grantees to contact for further study. In addition to overall strength ratings, initial selections were based on the requirements that at least one grantee from each active grantee cluster be included in the sample, that the selected grantees represent a diversity of geographic regions and organizational types (i.e., both government and non-profit entities), and that the Federal Project Officers (FPOs) for the selected grantees concur with JBA's selections. With few exceptions the FPOs agreed with JBA's selections of grantees for further study, thus demonstrating a high degree of agreement between JBA's selection process and the FPOs' professional assessments of the implementation capacity of their assigned grantees. JBA ultimately recommended 18 grantees for further study, which are listed on the following page in *Exhibit II-5: Discretionary Grantees Selected for Follow-up Data Collection*. For the sake of convenience, these grantees are often referred to throughout this report as "successful program implementers" or "selected grantees."

Following CB's approval, the Project Directors of the selected grantees were contacted by JBA to request participation in further data collection through a site visit; the Project Directors of all 18 grantees consented to the site visits, although two grantees (Cook Inlet Tribal Council and University of Missouri) requested that data collection occur via conference calls rather than site visits due to logistical and time constraints. The site visits, which usually lasted two days, were conducted by two-person teams of JBA researchers and consisted of a series of small group discussions and face-to-face interviews with key project staff members and other major project stakeholders. When appropriate and feasible, the research teams also conducted semi-structured observations of project activities (e.g., training sessions). The JBA research team identified discussion group and interview participants in consultation with each grantee's Project

Exhibit II-5: Discretionary Grantees Selected for Follow-up Data Collection

Cluster	Date of Visit	Project Name	Grantee	Location
2005 Substance Exposed Newborns (SEN)	May 24–27, 2011	Project FEAT: Family Early Advocacy and Treatment	University of Oregon	Eugene, OR
2006 Post-Adoption Services & Marriage Education (PAS/ME)	May 24–25, 2011	Marriage Education to Promote Adoption Stability and Healthy Families	Children's Home and Aid	Rockford, IL
	April 21, 2011	Strong and Stable Families: A Marriage Education and Family Support Project	University of Kansas	Lawrence, KS
2006 Temporary Assistance for Needy Families/Child Welfare Services (TANF/CW)	July 11 & 14, 2011 (Teleconference)	Child Welfare Reform: Agency Without Walls	Cook Inlet Tribal Council	Anchorage, AK
	July 6–7, 2011	Linkages: California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) and Child Welfare Collaboration to Improve Outcomes	California Department of Social Services	Sacramento, CA
2007 Comprehensive Family Assessment (CFA)	June 28–30, 2011	Comprehensive Assessments for Positive Family Outcomes (CAPFO)	Contra Costa County Children and Family Services Department	Martinez, CA
	June 21–22, 2011	Evaluation of Integrated Assessment Program	Illinois Department of Children and Family Services	Chicago, IL
	Cancelled	Alabama's Comprehensive Assessment Process Project	Alabama Department of Human Resources	Montgomery, AL
2007 Nurse Home Visitation (NHV)	July 7–8, 2011	Summer's Project: Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect through Nurse Home Visitation	Spokane Regional Health District	Spokane, WA
	July 6–7, 2011	Enhanced Yakima County Nurse Family Partnership Program at Children's Village (EYCNFP): Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect through Nurse Home Visitation	Yakima Valley	Toppenish, WA
2008 Curriculum Development/Healthy Marriage	June 6 & 24, 2011 (Teleconference)	Healthy Relationship and Marriage Education Training Project	University of Missouri	Columbia, MO

Cluster	Date of Visit	Project Name	Grantee	Location
2008 Abandoned Infants Assistance (AIA)	May 15–17, 2011	Healthy Connections (HC)	St. Vincent Mercy Medical Center	Toledo, OH
	June 15–17, 2011	Project Stable Home (PSH)	Children's Institute, Inc.	Los Angeles, CA
2008 Diligent Recruitment of Families for Children in the Foster Care System (Diligent Recruitment)	July 12–13, 2011	Permanent Families Recruitment Project	Ramsey County Human Services Department	Saint Paul, MN
	June 13–14, 2011	Making Appropriate and Timely Connections for Children (MATCH)	Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services	Frankfort, KY
2009 Abandoned Infants Assistance (AIA)	June 28–29, 2011	Lifelong Families Program	The Children's Place Association	Chicago, IL
	July 6–7, 2011	Cherish the Family	Family Central, Inc.	North Lauderdale, FL
2010 Diligent Recruitment of Families for Children in the Foster Care System (Diligent Recruitment)	June 20–21, 2011	Diligent Recruitment of Families for Children in the Foster Care System	Mississippi Department of Human Services	Jackson, MS

Director; although the number and variety of participants varied widely across grantees, most site visits involved contact with the following grantee staff members and stakeholders:

- The project director or manager
- Agency directors or other senior managerial personnel
- Front-line staff members involved in direct service provision or the implementation of other core project activities
- The project evaluator and other staff members involved in research and data collection activities
- Representatives from partnering organizations, including managerial and front-line staff members
- Other persons not identified above who were involved in the grant writing and early project implementation process

JBA ultimately completed 17 site visits or conference calls between April and July 2011. A site visit to collect data on the Alabama Department of Human Resources' Comprehensive Family Assessment project was cancelled at the grantee's request due to devastating storms and tornados that struck that State in late April 2011, which required the grantee to divert most organizational personnel and resources to crisis relief and other disaster assistance activities.

Stage Three: Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection during the site visits was accomplished through informal discussions with key project staff members and other stakeholders that were designed to elicit information regarding the major research questions identified in Chapter I. Although the specific content of these dialogues was tailored to the service models, target population, and organizational context of each grantee's project, discussions with all selected grantees touched on the following topics:

- Presence and role of project champions
- Use (or lack) of formal and informal assessment processes in the preparation of grant proposals
- Involvement and roles of organizational partners in project planning and service delivery
- "Degree" of project implementation per the NIRN implementation science model
- "Stage" of project implementation" per the NIRN model[2]

[2] See Chapter III for a more detailed discussion of these components of the NIRN implementation science model.

- Challenges to project implementation and responses to these challenges
- Use of EBPs and fidelity or adaptations to EBPs
- Selection, training, and supervision of direct service personnel
- Participant recruitment and retention
- Impact of organizational, community, and systems-level changes on the project
- Dissemination of information regarding project services and outcomes
- Plans for project sustainability
- Evaluation and data collection activities
- Use of programmatic and evaluation TA available through CB or third-party contractors such as JBA

Following the completion of each site visit, the assigned JBA research team completed a brief (five-to-seven-page) summary that reviewed the major topics and issues discussed during the visit; this site visit summary was first shared with the grantee to ensure factual accuracy before forwarding to the grantee's FPO for review and comment. Immediately following each site visit, the assigned members of the research team independently completed an "implementation checklist" that assessed the presence or absence of 115 implementation factors in the grantee's project, as well as the degree and stage of the project's implementation. These factors were derived from the NIRN implementation science model as well as from JBA's past work with OFA healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood grantees. (See Appendix A for a copy of this checklist.) Any discrepancies in the ratings of each factor by the members of the site visit team were discussed and resolved before the checklist ratings were finalized.

These checklists, combined with the site visit summaries and information collected during the earlier screening calls, provided the data sources for the analysis of the selected grantees' implementation experiences that are discussed in the following two chapters. This discussion begins in Chapter III with the application of concepts from the NIRN model to the implementation experiences and context of CB discretionary grantees.

Chapter III
Analysis of the NIRN Model in the CB Grantee Context

As described in Chapter I, one of the goals of this study was to examine the implementation of CB discretionary grant programs through the lens of the NIRN implementation science model. This chapter attempts to accomplish this goal by exploring components of the NIRN model and their applicability to the implementation experiences of CB discretionary grantees. The discussion in this chapter will also highlight important concepts derived from the NIRN model that can be adapted to elucidate and promote the successful implementation of discretionary grant projects.

Assumptions of the NIRN Model

The NIRN model is based on certain assumptions regarding the characteristics and organizational parameters of human service programs that may not always apply to CB discretionary grant programs. The "science-to-practice" paradigm described by NIRN was developed specifically to foster the successful replication of EBPs in various human service practice settings. As noted by Fixsen and colleagues (2005), the goal of implementation in the NIRN framework is to have practitioners base interactions with clients and stakeholders on research findings, i.e., evidence-based practices or practices within evidence-based programs. In other words, the NIRN model assumes that organizations are implementing established, well-defined, and presumably evidence-based programs. However, as described in Chapter II, JBA found that fewer than half of all screened CB grantees were implementing some type of EBP. This same pattern was found during site visits to selected programs described in Chapter II, with only six grantees (35 percent) implementing an EBP project component and the remaining 11 grantees engaged primarily in non-direct service activities, general case management, or in the development of innovative service models or curricula.

The fact that many CB grantees are not implementing EBPs is partially rooted in the reality that few evidence-based service models and practices have been developed to address certain child welfare issues effectively. However, the absence of EBPs does not necessarily imply that grantees were engaged in activities that lacked direction or clear objectives. JBA's analysis of data collected during site visits suggests that a majority of grantees (14 out of 17) assessed the match between proposed interventions and the needs and characteristics of target populations during the proposal development process. In addition, most grantees had attempted to make explicit the implicit theories of change underlying the projects through the development of logic models that articulate logical linkages among program activities, outputs, and short- and long-term outcomes. Combined with a rigorous evaluation, this preliminary work could provide a foundation for building credible evidence regarding programs' effectiveness.

Another assumption of the NIRN model is that program conceptualization and implementation occur through a community-driven planning and development process in which State and/or local governments and community organizations identify a problem, build commitment to address the problem, identify the best strategies for solving the problem, and then find the

resources to implement the selected strategies. The purpose of this exploration process is to "assess the potential match between community needs, evidence-based practice and program needs, and community resources and to make a decision to proceed (or not)" (Fixsen et al., 2005). This assumption, in which the locus of control lies primarily with the implementing organization, may not fully account for the realities and constraints imposed by the Federal grants award and management process. For example, organizations that seek Federal grants must respond to Funding Opportunity Announcements (FOAs) within short timeframes and adapt proposals to be responsive to problems or issues that have already been identified by the Federal government. In addition, grantees in some priority areas must adhere to external programmatic, reporting, and evaluation requirements imposed by Cooperative Agreements with CB. The limited duration of CB grants, which typically last between three and five years and sometimes for no more than 17 months, is another external constraint imposed on the implementation timeframes of discretionary grant projects. All of these factors affect the speed and trajectory of the entire implementation process from start-up to long-term program adaptation and sustainability.

Stages of Implementation

Another lens through which to explore the NIRN model involves an examination of the model's six Stages of Implementation: (1) Exploration and Adoption, (2) Program Installation, (3) Initial Implementation, (4) Full Operation, (5) Innovation, and (6) Sustainability.

Attempts to apply the NIRN Stages of Implementation to successful CB grant program implementers revealed several important findings. For example, it was common for these grantees to be in more than one implementation stage concurrently. While conceptually distinct, these stages in reality co-mingled and overlapped with one another as observed "from the ground" in the discretionary grantees' projects. *Exhibit III-1: NIRN Stages of Implementation* indicates JBA's assessment of the primary Stage of Implementation among the 17 grantees studied during the site visit process.

Exhibit III-1: NIRN Stages of Implementation (n=17)

Stage of Implementation	Number	Percent
Exploration and Adoption	0	0
Program Installation	1	6
Initial Implementation	2	12
Full Operation	7	41
Innovation	4	24
Sustainability	3	18

In some cases, different components of the grantees' projects were in different implementation phases (e.g., case management services may be in the Full Operational stage while a participant

support group remains in the Program Installation phase). Of particular note is JBA's observation that aspects of the Innovation stage were found in all other stages of implementation, with grantees making adaptations to service models during initial planning and start-up, early implementation, and well into the later years of program operation. The remainder of this section provides a deeper examination of each stage of implementation in the NIRN model.

Stage 1: Exploration and Adoption. This stage refers to the process of assessing the match between a proposed program and the community's needs and resources. In other words, will the community or target population of interest actually benefit from the proposed program; does the community have adequate organizational and material resources to ensure that the program will be implemented efficiently and effectively; and are key community stakeholders sufficiently committed to the program to ensure its full implementation? This stage ideally involves conducting some type of formal needs assessment, asset mapping, or assessment of community readiness well before program implementation proceeds. "Asset mapping" refers to a process of inventorying the resources available to a particular neighborhood or community, including community assets to promote individual development as well as public capital and cultural resources (Michigan State University, 1999). As summarized in *Exhibit III-2: Pre-Grant Assessments*, successful CB program implementers often relied on informal processes to assess community needs, assets, and commitment before applying for a Federal grant, or did not assess these factors at all.

Exhibit III-2: Pre-Grant Assessments

Assessment Process	Number	Percent
Needs Assessment (n=17)		
Used data from formal needs assessment only	4	24
Used both formal and informal needs assessment	5	29
Conducted an informal needs assessment only	4	24
Conducted no needs assessment	4	24
Asset Mapping (n=17)		
Used data from formal asset mapping only	1	6
Used both formal and informal asset mapping	2	12
Conducted an informal asset mapping only	5	29
Conducted no asset mapping	9	53
Assessment of Community Readiness (n=17)		
Used data from formal assessment of readiness only	0	0
Used both formal and informal assessment of readiness	2	12
Conducted an informal assessment of readiness only	6	35
Conducted no assessment of readiness	9	53

Only nine grantees (53 percent) included data from a formal needs assessment in their grant proposals; most often such information was available from a needs assessment that had been conducted independently by the grantee or another organization before the release of the FOA to which the grantees responded. Five grantees (29 percent) who used data from formal needs assessments also used informal processes (e.g., talking with key front-line staff members and community leaders) to assess and establish the need for a new program. An additional four grantees used only informal processes to study the needs of target communities and the final four grantees did not conduct any type of formal or informal needs assessment.

Even fewer grantees engaged in asset mapping to assess the quality and quantity of community resources available to ensure successful project implementation, with only three grantees using data from a formal asset mapping process to inform their grant applications; the same held true for assessments of community readiness, with only two grantees having engaged in any formal assessment of the target community's receptiveness and capacity to implement and accommodate a new program. During site visits many grantees indicated that few formal studies of community assets and readiness existed that were relevant to the issues addressed by their discretionary grant projects, and most indicated that they have neither the time nor the resources to engage in such efforts. More frequently grantees conducted informal assessments by speaking with community leaders, potential project partners, and internal staff members to gain a better understanding of readiness for the project and the assets available for the effort. However, over half of all grantees engaged in no formal or informal assessment of readiness or resources when preparing grant applications, with many relying on the professional judgment and experience of the proposal developers to address these issues.

These findings suggest that the process of collecting information for and preparing a Federal grant application shares some features of, but does not fully reflect the ideal process of program exploration and adoption as articulated by the NIRN model. As will be described in Chapter IV, this process tends to be more informal in nature and is highly dependent on pre-existing relationships with potential organizational partners.

Stage 2: Program Installation. This phase refers to the period after a decision has been made to implement a new program in which an organization completes start-up tasks that are necessary before the direct provision of services can begin; these activities include hiring and training staff members and securing operating resources like space and equipment. While applicable to CB discretionary grantees, this stage may be experienced in a much more condensed and time-limited environment. During site visits several grantees expressed frustration with the timing of the notification of discretionary grant awards and the expectation of commencing project activities quickly. Some grantees reported that they were not notified of an award until immediately before or sometimes after the beginning of the grant's performance period, thus affording them little time to secure internal and external implementation resources. Since grantees cannot know in advance whether they will receive a Federal grant, they may be reluctant to divert scarce personnel and other resources to project start-up activities when the applications may ultimately be unsuccessful. In some cases grantees reported that they were expected to begin services almost immediately following a grant award, thus contributing to inevitable delays in program enrollment and service delivery.

Stage 3: Initial Implementation. In this stage of the NIRN model, major program activities and services begin and confidence in the decision to adopt the program is being tested. During this stage the "forces of fear of change, inertia, and investment in the status quo combine with the inherently difficult and complex work of implementing something new" (NIRN, 2011). For CB grantees examined for this study, the period of initial implementation also included significant adaptations to program activities. Whereas the NIRN model assumes that major adaptations primarily occur after a program is well established, CB grantees commonly modified programs during the early phases of implementation in an effort to better serve target populations or achieve program goals. Approximately one-third of successful program implementers made significant modifications to program activities during the first two years of project implementation (see *Exhibit III-3: Timing of Program Adaptations*). As noted earlier, components of some grantees' projects remained in the early stages of implementation while other components had advanced to later implementation stages; in fact, grantees rarely implemented all major program activities within the same timeframe.

Stage 4: Full Operation. During this stage, new skills, services, and activities become integrated into the routine practices, policies, and procedures of an organization. While a fully operational program typically enjoys a full staff complement and consistent participant enrollment, it must still address the realities of "doing business" in real-life practice settings, including staff member turnover and problems with participant recruitment and retention. These and other operational issues were consistently faced by selected CB grantees throughout the duration of the projects, even when most major program components had been fully established. For many grantees this *Full Operation* stage constituted for all practical purposes the final phase of project implementation. This was particularly true for some grantees that had given minimal thought to the long-term sustainability of funded projects, with the assumption being that program services would simply cease once Federal funding had ended.

Stage 5: Innovation. Once full program operation is achieved, the next stage involves the refinement or expansion of a new program or practice. In the NIRN model, innovation typically does not occur until the original model has been implemented with fidelity and conclusive evidence of effectiveness has been established. However, for CB grantees selected for this study, the realities of implementing and adapting programs were somewhat more complex. Whether implementing an EBP or a non-evidence-based approach, the grantees tended to modify original programs at approximately the same rate. As shown in Exhibit III-3, about one-third of selected grantees made changes to original program theories or service models within the first two years of implementation, which is typically before most programs could be implemented with fidelity and demonstrate positive outcomes. Among grantees that had been funded for two or more years, almost half had made new or additional modifications to programs and a similar proportion had made no changes. Project modifications ranged from minor changes in the frequency of service delivery or cultural adaptations to an existing instructional curriculum, to major changes such as the replacement of a core service component or the expansion of a target population or geographic service area. Given that adaptation could occur at any point in the life of the grants, the concept of an independent *Innovation* stage may be of less relevance in the context of CB discretionary grant projects, for which the process of innovation and adaptation often happens throughout the project lifespan.

Stage 6: Sustainability. Within the NIRN framework, sustainability refers to long-term efforts to maintain and ensure the continued effectiveness of a program in the context of changing organizational, political, economic, and community circumstances. Because discretionary grants have a predetermined end date that is known to organizations before they apply for Federal funding, sustainability in the context of CB grantees is best conceived as a process that unfolds before project implementation even begins rather than as a discrete phase that occurs after full program operation has been achieved. As noted in the previous chapter, well over one-third of the 54 grantees that were screened as part of this study had actively taken steps toward or had already achieved some degree of sustainability before the end of the Federal grants.

Exhibit III-3: Timing of Program Adaptations

Stage of Adaptation	Number	Percent
The project's program theory or service model was modified during the first two years of the grant (n=17).	6	35
The project's program theory or service model was modified after the first two years (n=14).	6	43
The program theory or service model remained unchanged after the first two years (n=14).	6	43

Degrees of Implementation

In addition to Stages of Implementation, the NIRN model frames implementation in terms of "Degrees of Implementation", which refers to the extent to which the integration of new program activities, processes, and procedures into an organization's normal business practices has actually been achieved. The NIRN model provides for three possible implementation outcomes.

- *Paper implementation* refers to the development of new policies and procedures. At this level, the program or practice only exists on paper; the work practices and behaviors of the organization's personnel remain the same as before implementation.

- *Process implementation* indicates that an organization has created processes to support the actual implementation of new work activities, policies, and procedures (for example, through trainings, workshops, enhanced supervision, and modifications to data collection and reporting requirements).

- *Performance implementation* indicates that new activities, policies, and procedures have been incorporated into workplace routines to the extent that they contribute to measurable benefits or changes in participants, organizations, and systems of care.

To assess the applicability of these terms to CB discretionary grantees, JBA rated the degree of implementation for each of the 17 grantees that participated in a site visit. As indicated in *Exhibit III-4: Degree of Implementation*, a majority of grantees (13) were judged to be at the "performance" level of implementation; the remaining grantees (specifically the one new 2010

Diligent Recruitment grantee and the two 2009 AIA grantees) were judged to be at the "process" level of implementation; no grantees were rated as still in the "paper" implementation phase. The motivation and resources that helped grantees prepare competitive grant applications may also foster the successful implementation of funded programs. In addition, the time-limited nature of discretionary grants creates further incentives for successful CB program implementers to enact meaningful change as quickly and fully as possible. Although most selected grantees appeared to reach the performance implementation phase relatively quickly, the Degrees of Implementation framework provides another lens through which the implementation processes of the selected grantees can be analyzed.

Exhibit III-4: Degrees of Implementation (n=17)

Degree of Implementation	Number	Percent
Paper Implementation	0	0
Process Implementation	4	24
Performance Implementation	13	76

Core Implementation and Core Intervention Components

According to the NIRN model, core implementation components are the most important activities that facilitate the implementation of a new program or practice. Based on its review of the NIRN model, JBA identified the following core components as typifying the implementation activities of successful CB program implementers:

- Staff member selection
- Pre-service and in-service training
- Ongoing consultation and coaching
- Staff and program evaluation
- Administrative support
- Systems interventions

These implementation components have been identified repeatedly as factors that are correlated with successful program outcomes (NIRN, 2011). As described in detail in the following chapter, these factors were relevant to the selected CB grantees regardless of whether they were implementing an EBP or a non-evidence-based program.

The NIRN model also stipulates that the more clearly the discrete activities and processes associated with a program or practice (referred to as "intervention components") are known and

defined, the more likely and readily it will be implemented successfully. The failure to identify and operationalize these core intervention components leads to the expenditure of time and resources on attempts to implement non-essential or non-functional program elements. Although the concept of intervention components may appear to be most relevant to EBPs, JBA's examination of selected CB grantees suggests that understanding the implementation of non-evidence-based programs and practices is equally important. As discussed in the following chapter, a clear and concise understanding of the core functional elements of a program was instrumental to the achievement of positive implementation outcomes among selected CB grantees.

Factors Associated with the Successful Implementation of CB Discretionary Grant Programs

The analysis presented in this chapter suggests that while not directly applicable in all respects, the NIRN model incorporates many useful concepts for elucidating the implementation experiences of CB discretionary grantees. This examination of NIRN, coupled with JBA's past research involving OFA-funded healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood grantees, points to several core factors that contribute to the successful implementation of time-limited discretionary grant programs in real-life organizational and community settings. Factors associated with effective program implementation rest on the following core assumptions:

- Both EBPs and non-evidence-based programs can be implemented effectively.
- The modification of key programmatic elements may (and in some cases must) occur during the life of a program.
- Evaluation is an integral part of the program implementation and improvement process.

Past research (HHS, 2010), as well as this current study, suggests that successful projects, whether implementing EBPs or not, engage in a similar set of processes and activities that promote successful program implementation and increase the likelihood that desired programmatic and participant outcomes will be realized. These processes and activities can be distilled into several key elements that promote the successful implementation of time-limited discretionary grant projects. As depicted on the following page in *Exhibit III-5: Factors Associated with Effective Implementation*, these critical elements can be loosely organized into a "planning and conceptualization phase" and a "project implementation" phase.

Phase One: Planning and Conceptualization

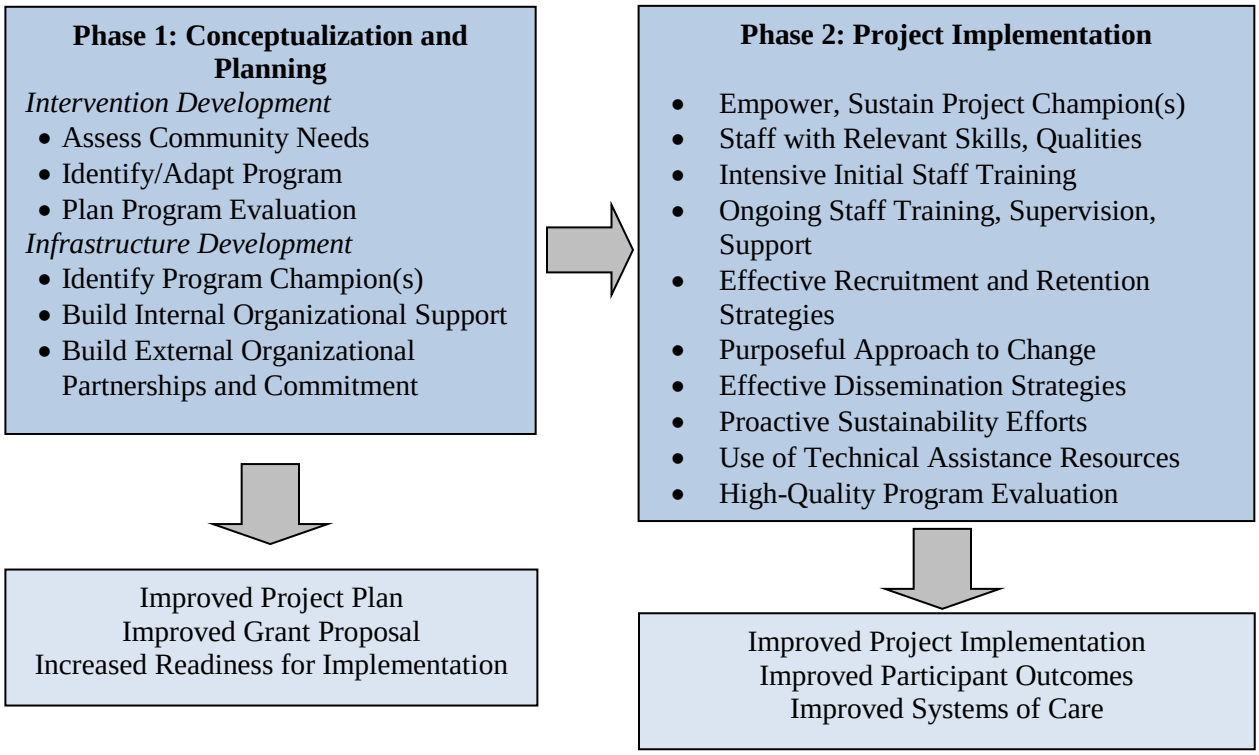
As discussed elsewhere in this report, the Federal grant-making and management process imposes certain constraints on when and how organizations conceive of and plan for the implementation of discretionary grant projects; timeframes may be shorter and some fundamental decisions regarding the nature and scope of the problems that the program will address have already been determined by the funding agency. Although these parameters do not preclude discretionary grantees from engaging in a thoughtful process of assessing community

needs and conceptualizing an ideal program, the way in which they go about this often looks somewhat different from the exploration and planning processes envisioned by the NIRN models. As suggested by the experiences of the grantees examined in this study, the planning and conceptualization process for CB grantees revolves around the development of a high-quality grant application in which the need for funding is clearly documented, a program or service model that can plausibly address this need has been identified, key project champions and organizational partners have been identified, and a solid evaluation plan has been outlined. These factors can in turn be organized into two general categories of intervention and infrastructure development. A well-conceived grant application built around these factors both improves the chances of receiving funding and sets the stages for effective project implementation later on.

Phase Two: Project Implementation

Whereas the elements described in the Planning and Conceptualization Phase are applicable to all potential grantees, a new set of factors that are relevant to the smaller group of organizations that receive grants are encapsulated in a subsequent Project Implementation Phase. Although the factors identified in *Exhibit III-5* are presented in approximate chronological order, in reality many factors play an important role throughout the process of program implementation, adaptation, and maintenance. For example, Project Champions may change over time as staff members' roles and responsibilities change, thus requiring an iterative process of empowering new champions and building new relationships with project staff members and organizational partners. As such, the elements comprising the Project Implementation Phase should not be conceived of as discrete and linear steps but rather as fundamental conceptual aspects of the implementation process that must be addressed and revisited throughout the life of a program.

Exhibit III-5: Factors Associated with Effective Implementation



One important caveat regarding the factors identified in Exhibit III-5 is that they should not be regarded as exhaustive or encompassing all of the variables that may affect and drive successful program implementation. Potentially important elements that are missing from the exhibit include setting up and maintaining an effective information collection and management system. While this and other variables may have a significant influence on program implementation, the analysis presented in this report focused on those factors that appeared to be most salient to the successful implementation of the 17 CB discretionary grant projects included in this study. For example, whereas many successful CB grantees examined in this study did not have sophisticated information management systems, the presence or absence of such systems did not appear to be critical to the overall effectiveness of implementation efforts. The following chapter will explore in greater detail each of the most significant factors associated with the successful implementation of these 17 discretionary grant projects.

Chapter IV
Analysis of Implementation Factors among Successful Program Implementers

As described in previous chapters, this study examined the implementation experiences of a sample of 17 CB discretionary grantees through the lens of the NIRN implementation science model, coupled with JBA's past experience studying OFA-funded healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood projects, in an effort to understand the programmatic, organizational, and contextual factors that facilitate the successful implementation of certain time-limited child welfare discretionary grant projects. Based on this assessment, several characteristics of the program planning and implementation process were identified that appeared to be closely associated with the effective implementation of these projects. What follows in this chapter is a detailed discussion of these core implementation factors organized according to the Project Conceptualization/Planning and Project Implementation Phases identified in Exhibit III-5 in the previous chapter.

Most major implementation factors reviewed in this chapter are further divided into discrete "sub-factors" that describe the specific activities, actions, or characteristics of each grantee's project that facilitated effective program implementation; these sub-factors serve as the concrete underpinnings of the larger concept reflected in each major factor. Although most of these sub-factors applied to all or most selected grantees, some were not applicable to certain grantees given their organizational characteristics or the nature, scope, or implementation stage of the projects. For example, whereas all of the sub-factors associated with the identification of a Project Champion were relevant to all selected grantees, sub-factors associated with the recruitment and retention of program participants were less relevant to projects that did not have a direct service component (e.g., projects that focused on organizational change or public education). In a few cases the JBA team was unable to collect adequate information to assess a sub-factor's relevance to a given grantee's project. JBA removed grantees from the analysis of a sub-factor in these cases, which is reflected in the various exhibits in this chapter when a sample of less than 17 is indicated. The data in these exhibits illustrate the importance of certain program activities and characteristics in discerning the key elements of effective implementation across a diverse set of discretionary grant projects.

Phase One: Project Conceptualization and Planning (Intervention Development)

The implementation and long-term outcomes of a project are intrinsically linked to choices made and actions taken during the project's initial conceptualization and planning phase. For the grantees highlighted in this report, this phase involved choices during the grant application process regarding the leadership of the proposed project, whether and how to involve potential organizational partners in project planning and start-up, the selection of an EBP or a non-evidence-based program or practice model, and the development of an initial evaluation plan. The implementation factors that are most relevant to this conceptualization and planning phase are outlined below.

Assessing Community Needs

As discussed in Chapter III, most selected CB grantees did not conduct formal assessments of the needs of the communities or target populations—or of the readiness and resources of the community for a new program—before applying for Federal funding. When hard data were used to support a grant application, it was most often derived from assessments that had been conducted earlier and/or by other organizations for other purposes. However, the relative paucity of formal assessment processes did not diminish the general importance of basing grant applications on a thorough knowledge of community needs, resources, and readiness that was derived from or corroborated by credible anecdotal information and grantees' professional experiences. As noted in Exhibit III-2 in the previous chapter, three-fourths of selected projects conducted some type of needs assessment (whether formal or informal), and about half conducted informal asset mapping and/or community readiness assessments. Effective informal assessment processes often had the following attributes:

- They were based on the extensive experience of key organizational personnel and community leaders who understand the community and the needs of the target population.

- They relied on extant data from local and national sources (e.g., Census data, statewide or national studies) that were useful for framing and clarifying the nature and scope of the problems addressed by the grantees' projects.

- They were enhanced by dialogue and information sharing among organizational partners that work with the same target populations or address the same child welfare or other social issues as the grantees.

When formal assessments were conducted, they improved the quality of the grantees' discretionary grant applications and produced long-term benefits that supported project implementation. These benefits included the following:

- A more data-grounded proposal that established the need for the program in the grantee's community

- A better match between the grantee's proposed intervention and the target population of interest

- Enhanced leveraging of relationships with potential project partners based on earlier data collection and sharing efforts

- Stronger community support based on a clear assessment of the community's interest in and capacity to support the project

Identifying, Adapting, or Designing a Program

Once the need for the project had been established, the selected grantees strove to identify, adapt, or develop a cogent program for addressing the problem(s) of interest. The development of a sound program design or service model is the critical step during a grant's planning phase since it affects both whether a grant application has credibility and merit in the eyes of grant reviewers and whether a project will be successful once funding is secured. *Exhibit IV-1: Project Design Elements* identifies features of the selected grantees' program designs or of the program design process that may have influenced subsequent project implementation.

Exhibit IV-1: Project Design Elements

Elements	Number	Percent
The program is targeted at a high-risk population (those most in need of assistance) (n=17).	15	88
The program is designed to impact participants during a key life stage or event (n=17).	14	82
The program is "family focused" and involves relevant family members in service delivery (n=16).	14	88
The project incorporates an EBP (n=17).	8	47
The project team carefully assessed the match between the proposed program and the needs/characteristics of the target population (n=16).	14	88

Identifying an Appropriate Target Population

Although most child welfare programs by definition target at-risk and needy populations, child welfare organizations are faced with hard decisions about whom to serve with limited resources. Almost all selected grantees were astute in identifying populations that had the greatest need for assistance and that were most likely to benefit from the proposed interventions. Information regarding the needs and characteristics of these target population was often derived from the formal and informal assessment processes described in the previous section.

Targeting Participants When They Are Most Receptive to Change

After a target population has been identified, one of the challenges faced by human service organizations is engaging this target group in program services and activities. Organizations can mitigate this problem by timing the offer of services in a way that makes them more attractive and useful to potential participants. Such participants may be in crisis or another transition point that makes them more open to receiving services and to subsequent significant behavioral changes. In addition to involvement in the child welfare system, other examples of transition include the birth of a child, the death of a family member, marriage, divorce, a job loss, or release from prison. When designing and implementing projects, most selected grantees sought to "time" project referrals to coincide with these or a similar crisis/transition point in the lives of prospective program participants.

Involvement of Extended Family Members

Once target audiences were defined, most grantees gave consideration to the broader family context of primary service recipients. People who are the targets of program services rarely live in isolation, and many program implementers found ways to involve larger family networks in project activities. Extended family involvement can encourage greater investment and engagement of the primary target population in program services and provide a natural support network to encourage program completion. Examples of extended family members include parents of young mothers as well as the fathers and grandparents of at-risk children.

Use of Evidence-Based or Theory-Based Programs and Practices

As described in Chapter III, approximately half of the selected grantees did not incorporate what could be described as an EBP into their proposed projects. However, the lack of an EBP does not imply the absence of direction or clear objectives during the program design process. A majority of grantees assessed the match between proposed programs and the needs and characteristics of the target population during the grant development process. When available, data from formal or informal needs assessments corroborated the link between the proposed program design and the issues identified in the Federal government's FOA. When a specific EBP did not exist to address the issue of interest, many selected grantees sought to identify or create a program that demonstrated the most promise, on either empirical or theoretical grounds, of producing positive participant outcomes.

Planning for Program Evaluation

All prospective CB grantees are required to include a plan for a systematic program evaluation in grant applications; the selected grantees were particularly adept at integrating evaluation activities into the initial planning and conceptualization phase of their projects. As indicated in *Exhibit IV-2: Planning for Program Evaluation*, all of the grantees retained the services of a trained evaluator in developing the evaluation plans for their grant applications. Well-designed evaluation plans not only strengthened the grantees' funding applications, they also provided a blueprint for ensuring that the grantees had access to high-quality information following project start-up to make improvements or corrections as needed. In addition, the early engagement of skilled evaluators provided grantees with another important perspective in assessing the match between stated program goals and proposed program designs, and ensured greater support and buy-in to evaluation and data collection activities following project implementation.

Although most FOAs require applicants to include logic models in grant proposals, the selected grantees used logic models early on to reflect on and critique the presumed linkages among proposed project activities, outputs, and short- and long-term outcomes. Grantees also used logic models as a tool to communicate with organizational partners and community stakeholders about the proposed project, thus enhancing understanding of and buy-in to the project's service model and goals.

Exhibit IV-2: Planning for Program Evaluation
(n=16)

Sub-Factors	Number	Percent
A formal evaluation plan was developed prior to start-up.	16	100
An evaluation expert was involved in developing the plan.	16	100
The program had a formal logic model prior to start-up.	16	100

Phase One: Project Conceptualization and Planning (Infrastructure Development)

Identifying a Project Champion

The critical role of a strong program or project "champion" who provides leadership in guiding a program's implementation has been well documented in the implementation science literature (Gold and Taylor, 2007; Kilbourne, Neumann, Pincus, Bauer, and **S**tall, 2007). This study suggests that Project Champions were no less important to selected grantees during the project conceptualization and grant application process then they were during project implementation. As shown in *Exhibit IV-3: Role of Project Champion*, all grantees had a Project Champion who was involved in developing an initial grant proposal. These Champions had the administrative authority or "clout" to ensure that proposed projects moved from discussion to direct action and that the necessary organizational resources would be allocated to support the project once Federal funding was secured. Moreover, all Champions played a role in conceptualizing the project to ensure a good fit with the grantee's organizational mission and the needs of the service population, and were involved in engaging potential organizational partners to foster buy-in and bring ancillary resources to bear. Successful Project Champions also ensured the ongoing availability of sufficient internal and external organizational resources to sustain the project.

Exhibit IV-3: Role of Project Champion (Planning and Start-up)
(n=17)

Sub-factors	Number	Percent
The project has a Project Champion(s).	17	100
The Project Champion has organizational clout or administrative authority.	17	100
The Champion played a role in project conceptualization.	16	94
The Champion was involved in building relationships with potential organizational partners.	17	100

Building Internal Organizational Support and Resources

A project's chances of success will be greatly augmented when influential managers and executives of the grantee organization know of and care about the project. Staff members from all 17 selected grantees reported that high-level managers and executives within the organizations were aware of and actively supported the discretionary grant projects (see *Exhibit IV-4: Internal Organizational Support and Resources*). This support manifested itself in many ways; for example, most grantee organizations reviewed and adapted organizational policies and procedures to remove potential barriers to or expedite project implementation, and nearly all projects ensured that project personnel had adequate material resources (e.g., office space, supplies, technology) to optimize performance.

In addition to material resources, internal organizational support for a new grant was revealed in the time that front-line staff members and supervisors allocated to work on the project. Among the 12 selected grantees whose projects have a direct service component, front-line personnel from all 12 organizations reported that participant-to-staff member ratios were reasonable and that overall workloads were manageable. By keeping caseloads and overall work responsibilities at a sustainable level, both front-line personnel and project supervisors were able to deliver services in a responsive, effective, and efficient manner. In addition, both front-line staff members and supervisors tended to agree that front-line workers were more effective when they were assigned to work primarily or exclusively on the discretionary grant project as opposed to working on multiple programs simultaneously or having additional administrative responsibilities. Front-line staff members from several selected grantees also commented on the important role that direct supervisors or Project Champions played in transmitting concerns and suggestions regarding the project to agency executives or representatives from partnering organizations.

Exhibit IV-4: Internal Organizational Support and Resources

Sub-factors	Number	Percent
The grantee organization's management/ administration is supportive of the project (n=17).	17	100
The agency has developed clear policies and procedures to facilitate project implementation (n=14).	13	93
Staff members are provided with equipment and other resources (e.g., space, supplies, technology) to optimize job performance (n=16).	16	100
There is a reasonable participant-to-staff ratio; workloads are not excessive (n= 12).	12	100

Building External Organizational Partnerships and Commitment

Collaborating with other organizations in the development of a grant proposal can be a key factor affecting a project's success following implementation. Collaboration facilitates the development

of a more thoughtful and comprehensive proposal that incorporates a range of ideas and that demonstrates the broader community's buy-in to the project. In addition, partnering organizations contribute personnel and material resources that the grantee agency may not be able to provide alone. Not only had a large majority of selected grantees secured a clear commitment from one or more project partners before submitting grant applications, but all partners also played a significant role in conceptualizing and planning the project. In addition as shown in *Exhibit IV-5: Development of Organizational Partnerships*, all grantees had designated one or more persons (usually a Project Champion) who were responsible for fostering and maintaining relationships with potential or confirmed organizational partners. When appropriate, a majority of grantees already had in place or had developed formal Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) or contracts before or shortly after receiving grant awards.

Exhibit IV-5: Development of Organizational Partnerships

Sub-factors	Number	Percent
Clear commitment to the project was evident among potential partners during the planning stage (n=16).	13	81
Potential partners only became interested in the project after it had demonstrated effectiveness (n=16).	3	19
Project partners were involved in initial project planning/conceptualization (n=16).	13	81
Grantee identified staff members with responsibility for developing and maintaining organizational relationships (n=17).	17	100
Grantee used informal contacts to develop relationships with key staff members from other organizations (n=16).	15	94
Grantee has formal MOUs (or contracts) with key community partners (n=13).	11	85

Phase Two: Project Implementation

Once prospective grantees receive notice of awards of Federal funding, they are faced with the challenging task of implementing projects within a limited timeframe. As described earlier in this chapter, grantees whose planning and grant development processes incorporated certain activities and priorities not only produced stronger proposals, but they were also in a better position to proceed with implementation in a systematic and orderly fashion. However, the successful start-up and long-term operation of grantees' projects were also predicated on the presence of several key implementation factors outlined in the previous chapter. Each of these major factors is discussed in the following section.

Empowering and Sustaining Project Champion(s)

Project Champions remained essential to the successful implementation of selected grantees' projects immediately after grant award and throughout all subsequent planning, operational, and

sustainability phases. All grantees retained one or more Champions following the receipt of a discretionary grant, and nearly all Champions played an ongoing active role in managing the projects and in overseeing the delivery of program services (see *Exhibit IV-6: Role of Project Champion*). During site visits to the selected grantees, many project stakeholders observed that their projects might have been dismissed, ignored, or sabotaged without a strong Champion who possessed adequate organizational authority. In addition, Champions ensured that resources dedicated to a discretionary grant project were not absorbed or siphoned off by other organizational priorities. For example, some Champions were able to protect front-line staff members allocated to work on a funded project from being assigned additional work responsibilities that were not related to the project related. For projects involving multiple organizational partners, the presence of a Champion in each collaborating agency ensured ongoing commitment and investment in the project.

Close to half of the selected grantees experienced one or more changes in Project Champions as a result of staff turnover or shifts in internal organizational responsibilities. Most grantees weathered these changes by hiring or assigning new Champions with sufficient organizational power to sustain project activities. These new Champions were often project staff members or other individuals in the grantee organization who became invested in the success of the project after observing positive impacts on participants. As the grantees' projects progressed, nearly all Champions played an active role in sustainability planning, for example, by finding new funding sources or by exploring ways to integrate core project elements into other organizational programs and activities. In addition, projects that experienced turnover in a Project Champion were better positioned to come through this major leadership transition if clear program policies, procedures, and work roles were established to ensure core program activities could proceed without interruption or confusion regarding the division of project responsibilities (see Exhibit IV-4 above).

Exhibit IV-6: Role of Project Champion (Post-Implementation) (n=17)

Sub-factors	Number	Percent
The project has one or more Project Champion(s).	17	100
The Project Champion changed over time.	7	41
The Project Champion plays a role in managing the project.	16	94
The Project Champion plays a role in providing or managing the delivery of services.	15	88
The Project Champion is involved in sustainability efforts.	16	94

Hiring/Assigning Project Staff Members with Relevant Skills and Qualities

JBA's examination of successful program implementers suggests that the most important factor in ensuring effective program implementation (whether of an EBP or a non-evidence-based

program) involves hiring or assigning the right project personnel. The specific qualifications, characteristics, and skills required for various staff positions differ with the responsibilities of the position, the activities of the program, and the needs and characteristics of the participants. For example, programs without a direct service component have significantly different staffing needs than direct service programs. Projects involving system-level change efforts or curriculum development may not require significant new personnel resources but will require highly skilled and specialized staff members to conduct project activities. Regardless of program type, one nearly universal staff characteristic that was observed among selected projects is a passionate belief in the program's capacity to improve people's lives (see *Exhibit IV-7: Key Staff Characteristics*).

Projects that involve direct interaction with program participants are only as effective as the front-line personnel who work with these participants. This study confirmed past implementation science research regarding the importance of finding the right people to fill these front-line positions. When asked to describe the most effective front-line personnel, site-visit participants frequently used the same descriptors. Specifically, the best front-line workers were repeatedly described as

- compassionate and caring,
- able to connect directly and personally with program participants,
- authentic and credible to program participants, and
- respectful of participants regardless of their past decisions and current life situations.

Exhibit IV-7: Key Staff Characteristics

Sub-factors	Number	Percent
Front-line staff members are required to have specific/minimum education, experience, or background (n=16).	15	94
Front-line staff members are perceived by project participants as compassionate and caring (n=14).	14	100
Front-line staff members are perceived by project participants as authentic and credible (n=15).	15	100
Front-line staff members can connect with project participants (n=15).	15	100
Staff members believe in and are passionate about the program (n=16).	16	100
Project staff members are perceived as respectful of project participants (n=15).	15	100
Formal job descriptions exist for front-line staff positions (n=14).	14	100

Site visit participants often rated front-line staff members' interpersonal skills, compassion, and commitment as equally important determinants of effectiveness as educational levels and professional skills or experience. The importance of educational background and experience appeared to vary depending on the type of program implemented by a selected grantee. For example, projects involving curriculum-based education or training in which the same set of information is provided on an ongoing basis to different audiences usually did not require specific educational credentials or professional experience; for these projects, the communication and interpersonal skills of trainers were generally considered more important. In contrast, projects involving intensive case management or crisis intervention services generally required front-line personnel with relevant and significant clinical experience and appropriate education and training.

Providing Intensive Initial Staff Training

Once appropriate project personnel have been identified, providing extensive and high-quality training is the next key step in enhancing a program's positive impact. As indicated in *Exhibit IV-8: Staff Training*, most selected grantees engaged in rigorous and comprehensive training of new project staff members. The nature and scope of this initial training varied across grantees depending on how structured primary program activities were, i.e., whether they are based on an EBP or another formal program with a standardized training manual and protocol. In most cases, training that was specific to the discretionary grant project was integrated into training regarding the grantee organization as a whole, which helped employees develop a shared vision regarding the goals of the project as well as a sense of the project's role in advancing the organization's core mission. Most grantees' training regimens included supplemental training to prepare project employees to address the specific issues or needs of the project's target population. Examples of topics covered during these supplemental trainings include recognizing and reporting child maltreatment and domestic violence, child development, adult and child mental health, substance abuse, and cultural sensitivity.

Exhibit IV-8: Staff Training

Sub-factors	Number	Percent
Front-line staff members receive intensive and complete training (n=15).	14	93
Initial training includes developing a shared vision of the program among all staff members (n=13).	12	92
Initial training includes an overview of the grantee agency and how the program fits into the mission of the grantee's organization (n=12).	11	92
Staff members receive supplemental training to prepare for issues likely to arise or exist in the target population (n=14).	13	93

Ongoing Staff Training, Supervision, and Support

Once staff selection and initial training are complete, organizations must provide ongoing opportunities for employees to improve skills and integrate feedback regarding job performance into daily work routines. This process involves continuous training to maintain and hone employees' work-related knowledge and skills, continual supervision to provide employees with immediate feedback and advice regarding specific work activities and issues, and staff evaluations to assess the quality and proficiency of employees' work performance and to develop plans for rectifying concerns or enhancing core job competencies.

Exhibit IV-9: Ongoing Staff Training, Supervision, Support, and Evaluation suggests that most selected grantees had previously or recently instituted policies and procedures to address employees' needs in all three of these areas. Front-line personnel from most grantees reported that ongoing opportunities for formal training and professional development through seminars, workshops, and presentations at staff meetings were offered. However, the most common and useful form of training reported by front-line personnel involved informal on-the-job coaching and supervision during the performance of work responsibilities. In addition to the less formal supervision that occurs as needed throughout the workday, most grantees reported that a formal structure existed for ongoing supervision through regular one-on-one meetings between the project supervisor and front-line staff members. For many front-line employees, the emotional support and encouragement provided by supervisors was critical to maintaining morale, a sense of purpose, and commitment to their work. For grantees implementing both EBPs and non-evidence-based programs, supervision often included feedback and suggestions regarding the implementation of the project's core service model or program.

Exhibit IV-9: Ongoing Staff Training, Supervision, Support, and Evaluation

Sub-factors	Number	Percent
Staff members are given opportunities for ongoing training/ professional development (n=13).	12	92
Ongoing on-the-job coaching or supervision is incorporated into the training process (n=14).	14	100
Regular feedback is provided to staff members regarding performance in implementing the project's program/service model (n=13).	13	100
There is a formal structure for supervision (e.g., regularly scheduled meetings) (n=15).	14	93
Supervisors provide emotional support and encouragement to front-line staff members (n=16).	15	94
There is a clear distinction between supervision and staff members' performance assessment/evaluation (n=11).	11	100
Staff member's evaluation is a formal process with standardized performance measurement tools and a regular review schedule (n=14).	14	100

Although most selected grantees have formal policies and procedures in place for evaluating employees' job performance, these staff member evaluations tend to be generic, agency-wide processes that are not specifically tied to the grantees' discretionary grant projects. As such, a clear distinction was generally evident between supervision provided to employees to improve implementation of core project activities and performance assessments conducted to assess employees' generic work skills and competencies (e.g., communication skills, adherence to workplace rules and policies, professional demeanor).

Implementing Effective Participant Recruitment and Retention Strategies

Among human service agencies that provide direct client services, a perennial problem involves getting targeted populations to show up and participate in services. Even the most effective EBPs as measured by past performance are *de facto* ineffective if no one enrolls and participates. Reasons for low enrollment and participation include faulty assumptions regarding the nature, scope, and severity of the problems faced by the intended target population, as well as ineffective and/or insufficient recruitment efforts. As discussed earlier in this chapter, this first issue was addressed by selected grantees in part by carefully assessing the match between proposed projects and the needs of service populations through both formal and informal needs assessments and asset mapping. As indicated in *Exhibit IV-10: Participant Recruitment Strategies*, selected grantees addressed the second issue through a range of general recruitment strategies that were often effective in building prospective participants' interest in programs and in overcoming potential barriers to participation.

Exhibit IV-10: Participant Recruitment Strategies

Sub-factors	Number	Percent
Project involves community leaders and organizational partners in recruitment (n=14).	10	71
Project uses recruiters who can connect with and be seen as credible by potential participants (n=14).	11	79
Project uses outreach and marketing strategies and/or technology to aid in recruitment (n=13).	8	62
Project uses incentives from non-grant dollars (e.g., gift cards, Baby Bucks) to facilitate recruitment efforts (n= 14).	4	29
Project uses resources to overcome barriers to participation (e.g., transportation, childcare, meals) (n=11).	11	100

Referrals from Organizational Partners

Among grantees engaged in providing direct client services, a majority highlighted the important and sometimes critical role that partnering organizations play in gaining access to and recruiting project participants. Some grantees relied almost exclusively on one or more organizational partners to refer children, families, and other target populations to the projects. Initial success in

referring and enrolling participants appeared to be based in part on pre-existing formal and informal organizational relationships, as well as the belief among partnering organizations in the goals and ultimate efficacy of a grantee's project. Several selected grantees used MOUs or other formal agreements with partnering organizations to establish specific program eligibility criteria and procedures for referring potential participants. These observations resonate with the discussion earlier in this chapter regarding the importance of building or expanding organizational partnerships during the conceptualization and planning phase of a new program.

Outreach and Recruitment Efforts

Referring a person to a program is often an insufficient incentive to induce participation in services; as such, the selected grantees used a variety of methods to encourage enrollment. Several grantees reported a number of general and targeted recruitment strategies to encourage participation, including advertising and public awareness campaigns, the distribution of print materials in public spaces and community events, new or enhanced project Websites, and outreach efforts in locations frequented by the project's target audience. However, none of these strategies appeared to be as important in fostering successful recruitment efforts as the "personal factor" that was also critical to successful efforts to hire or assign effective project staff members. Among grantees involved in providing direct client services, a large majority identified the importance of project employees who could connect with and be perceived as credible to potential participants as crucial to outreach and recruitment efforts. Since direct financial incentives (e.g., gift cards) were regarded by many grantees as ineffective in encouraging project participation and Federal policy prohibits the use of discretionary grant funds for financial incentives to induce participation, few grantees used them.

Overcoming Barriers to Participation

Even when potential participants know about and are interested in a new program, a number of practical and logistical barriers may hinder efforts to maximize project enrollment. Among CB discretionary grantees in general, some of the most common barriers faced by targeted families include unreliable and/or limited transportation options, a lack of childcare, and conflicts between programming schedules and participants' jobs and family obligations. Among the 11 selected grantees for which logistical issues were potential or actual barriers to participation, all used a variety of tools to meet the transportation, childcare, and scheduling needs of project participants.

To address transportation barriers some selected grantees are able to provide certain program services in participants' homes, while other grantees addressed transportation problems directly by giving participants pre-paid gas cards or bus tokens, paying for taxi rides, or by having project employees drive participants to programming sites. When childcare is an issue, some grantees offer childcare on site, use organizational partners to provide childcare, give participants vouchers to pay for childcare, or find ways to involve children directly in project services. Many selected grantees provide meals or snacks to participants as a way to further incentivize participation and to foster a relaxed service environment that promotes bonding among participants and project employees.

Following initial enrollment, keeping participants actively engaged in program services and activities can prove challenging. In general, the experiences of CB discretionary grantees suggest that once participants have resolved an immediate crisis or the legal mandate that compels them to participate in services has ended (e.g., a court order), interest wanes in longer-term engagement. However, the completion of or long-term participation in core program services is often essential to producing positive participant outcomes. Many of the barriers to participant retention parallel the barriers to participant recruitment identified above.

As indicated in *Exhibit IV-11: Participant Retention Strategies*, the primary reason that people continue to participate in the selected grantees' programs is that they find them to be useful or helpful in some way. Because a participant's initial impression of the value of a program is often established during the first interaction with project personnel (which often influences whether involvement is continued), many grantees strove to provide project participants with concrete "take-aways" (e.g., a brochure or educational materials) that further reinforced the project's appeal. Efforts to keep participants actively engaged in project services (for example, by giving them a direct voice in the case planning process or engaging them in teaching or providing assistance to other project participants) further encourage ongoing participation. Whenever possible, selected grantees sought to minimize passive participant activities such as lecture-based classroom instruction.

Exhibit IV-11: Participant Retention Strategies

Sub-factors	Number	Percent
The project is perceived as useful to participants (n=15).	15	100
Participants are fully engaged/actively participate in project services (n=11).	10	91
Participants bond with staff members in appropriate ways (n=10).	10	100
Participants are encouraged to bond with each other in appropriate ways (n=6).	6	100
The project finds ways to celebrate participants' successes and acknowledge personal growth (n=10).	10	100
The project uses resources to overcome barriers to continued participation (e.g., transportation, childcare) (n=13).	11	85
Project uses incentives from non-grant dollars (e.g., gift cards, Baby Bucks) to encourage continued participation (n=14).	4	29

Among grantees whose projects involve direct contact between participants and front-line staff members, efforts to cultivate healthy and appropriate personal relationships further encourage ongoing participation in project activities. Many selected grantees provide these opportunities for inter-personal bonding through the creation of safe and welcoming programming environments

and by hosting events (e.g., family picnics, support groups) that encourage sharing and one-on-one interaction. For many grantees, these same events serve as a venue to celebrate participants' successes and to acknowledge personal growth and achievements. The regular and open celebration of grantees' successes further strengthens commitment to the project and validates the decision to continue involvement in project services.

Making Program Changes

As discussed elsewhere in this report, less than half of all selected grantees were implementing an EBP but rather had developed programs based on implicit program theories, had significantly modified an existing EBP or best practice for use with different target populations, or had developed and were testing new and innovative service models or practices. However, implementation of an EBP did not necessarily preclude the occasional need for program modifications. As indicated in *Exhibit IV-12: Modifications to Program l or Practices*, about one-third of the grantees made changes to their original interventions (including some grantees implementing EBPs) within the first two years of implementation; and almost half of the grantees made changes after the first two years of operation. Changes to EBPs reflect the realities of implementing programs within the context of complex organizations that operate in unpredictable and malleable socio-economic and political environments.

Regardless of whether they were implementing an EBP or not, what distinguished the selected grantees was a careful, deliberative, and purposeful approach to making program modifications. Decisions to make program modifications were usually based on substantial and reliable empirical evidence rather than piecemeal or anecdotal information. When program adaptations were deemed necessary, nearly all grantees retained internal or external experts to advise and guide the modification process. Whenever possible, grantees that implemented EBPs sought the assistance of certified program trainers or even of the original program developers. In addition, grantees often sought to minimize adaptations to the EBP in an effort to maximize fidelity to the original evidence-based program model and thereby increase the likelihood of achieving positive participant outcomes.

Exhibit IV-12: Modifications to Programs or Practices

Sub-factors	Number	Percent
The project's program theory or service model was adapted or modified in the first two years (n=16).	6	38
The project's program theory or service model was adapted or modified after the first two years (n= 13).	6	46
The program used external or internal experts to assist with implementation/modification of the program (n=16).	16	100

Implementing Effective and Diverse Dissemination Strategies

Given their time-limited nature, the long-term impact and maintenance of programs begun under a CB discretionary grant rests in part on effective dissemination. Proactive and strategic dissemination can contribute to the long-term sustainability of key project activities and services and may also increase awareness, recognition, and the possible replication of a program by organizations in new service settings. *Exhibit IV-13: Information Dissemination* summarizes the major audiences that were targets of selected grantees' dissemination activities. Almost all grantees disseminated information regarding the projects to stakeholders in their immediate communities, including organizational partners; other community organizations; and public entities such as government agencies, the media, and concerned citizens. In addition, most grantees engaged in efforts to disseminate information regarding the projects to practitioners, researchers, and academics in the broader child welfare field. Two-thirds of selected grantees targeted dissemination specifically at potential future funders, such as State child welfare departments and philanthropic foundations.

Exhibit IV-13: Information Dissemination

Sub-factors	Number	Percent
The grantee disseminates information regarding the program to organizational partners, other community organizations, or the broader public (n=17).	15	88
The grantee disseminates information regarding the program to the child welfare/human services field (n=15).	13	87
The grantee disseminates information regarding the program and its importance to potential funders (n=14).	12	86
Dissemination efforts have contributed to improved systems of care (e.g., organizational partners adopt common intake tools) (n=8).	4	50

In order of frequency, project directors and evaluators of selected grantees identified several dissemination activities for each major target audience.

<u>Organizational Partners/Other Community Organizations</u>

- Presentations at project meetings
- Providing copies of project materials (e.g., brochures, user guides)
- One-on-one conversations
- Training staff members from partnering organizations

Broader Public

- Community fairs/events
- Web-based media (e.g., Websites, Twitter, Facebook, podcasts)
- Grantee or project-specific newsletters
- Newspaper articles
- Flyers/brochures
- Video production
- TV, radio advertisements
- Press conferences

Child Welfare/Human Services Field

- Presentations at national and local professional and academic conferences
- Newsletters (published by local, regional, or national child welfare organizations)
- Formal publications (e.g., journal articles, technical reports, user guides)
- Presentations to State and local child welfare workers

Potential Funders

- Briefing documents and white papers
- Presentations (most often to State welfare agency administrators)

For a small number of grantees, the impact of dissemination efforts was evidenced in part by improved systems of care in the grantees' communities, for example, the adoption of common child and family intake tools among partnering organizations.

Engaging in Proactive Sustainability Efforts

Sustainability is an important and often overlooked aspect of implementation; even successfully implemented projects may have little long-term impact if no action is taken to secure resources to maintain critical program activities once original funding has decreased or ended. As discussed in Chapter II, less than half of the 54 active discretionary grantees included in initial screening calls had taken any concrete steps to sustain projects beyond the period of Federal

funding, and even fewer had actually achieved some measure of long-term program sustainability. Information collected from the smaller group of successful program implementers suggests that these grantees were more purposeful and aggressive in exploring options for sustaining projects over the long run than were CB grantees as a whole. Of the 15 selected grantees that hoped to sustain projects beyond the end of Federal funding, 80 percent (12) had already taken one or more concrete steps towards sustainability (see *Exhibit IV-14: Project Sustainability Efforts*).

One way to sustain program activities after the end of grant funding is to secure new funding to support the same or similar activities. Several selected grantees' projects were actually continuations of projects that existed before the current round of Federal discretionary grants was received, which suggests some degree of past success in securing Federal funding. Since Federal support to sustain projects cannot be relied on indefinitely, several discretionary grantees had already begun to explore alternative funding sources (e.g., grants through State and local child welfare agencies and foundations). Seven grantees had already identified non-grant financial resources to support certain project activities. In some cases grantees sought to pay for continued program services by making them billable to Medicare or Medicaid or by adopting a fee-for-service approach to service delivery.

Several selected grantees also sought to sustain project activities through non-monetary strategies. Some grantees looked to volunteers to implement certain program components before or during the end of the Federal grants, for example, by having former participants in a marriage enrichment program serve as volunteer educators or trainers. Grantees also found ways to integrate certain project elements into regular organizational activities and processes so that they became "business as usual" rather than temporary add-ons to regular agency programming. When project activities could not be sustained internally for funding or other reasons, other grantees have sought to transfer the continuing operation of certain project components to partnering organizations or other service providers in the community. In these situations, grantees often created a set of resources (e.g., a new training curriculum) that could be adopted wholesale by new service providers with few or no additional modifications. Finally, some grantees approached sustainability from a systemic standpoint by seeking to transform the broader service environment of their communities through the development of common inter-agency protocols and tools (e.g., common intake and screening forms); the creation of permanent mechanisms for inter-disciplinary case planning and management; and the establishment of new rules and regulations at the State or local level that govern the treatment of vulnerable service populations and the management of client cases and information.

Exhibit IV-14: Project Sustainability Efforts lists specific activities observed among the selected grantees that suggest some degree of readiness for the long-term continuation of all or parts of the discretionary grant projects. Readiness for sustaining funded projects is evidenced by the fact that almost all grantees had provided a service that would otherwise not be available and had already identified key project elements whose continuation was most critical. Perhaps most importantly, almost all grantees that worked with one or more organizational partners indicated that these organizations had been changed in some substantive way by participation in the project, thus indicating a certain level of capacity outside of the grantees' organizations to continue certain programs or services in some form. As will be discussed in more detail later in

this chapter, a large majority of selected grantees used evaluation data in a systematic way to demonstrate the effectiveness of funded projects, thereby increasing interest among potential funders.

Exhibit IV-14: Project Sustainability Efforts

Sub-factors	Number	Percent
The grantee has taken concrete steps to support long-term sustainability of the project or of certain project components (n=15).	12	80
The grantee supports project activities with non-grant dollars (n=13).	7	54
The program makes significant use of volunteers, students, or other low-cost personnel (n=17).	6	35
The grantee uses evaluation data to demonstrate the effectiveness of the project (n=14).	14	100
The project created a niche by providing services not otherwise available (n=17).	16	94
The grantee has distinguished between the essential and non-essential components of the project (n=12).	10	83
Organizational partners have been changed in substantive ways as a result of the project (n=12).	11	92

Using Technical Assistance Resources

CB discretionary grantees have access to various forms of TA, including TA available directly from FPOs and contracted TA providers such as JBA. TA can provide an invaluable resource to assist grantees that are struggling with various implementation and evaluation challenges. *Exhibit IV-15: Use of Technical Assistance* indicates that a majority of successful program implementers availed themselves of TA on one or more occasions.

Exhibit IV-15: Use of Technical Assistance

Sub-factors	Number	Percent
The grantee uses federally contracted or sponsored TA resources to support implementation or evaluation (n=15).	11	73
The grantee uses other external or internal experts to support implementation (n=16).	16	100

During site visits grantee personnel and evaluators reported that direct individualized TA was generally the most useful form of assistance, followed closely by peer networking and learning opportunities supported by CB through annual grantees meetings, e-mail distribution lists, and conference calls. Most grantees indicated that TA is most beneficial during the first two years of

project implementation when major program components are still being developed, refined, and institutionalized. Beyond federally sponsored TA resources, nearly all selected grantees made use of other internal or external experts to guide and support project implementation.

Implementing a High-Quality Program Evaluation

As noted earlier in this report, all CB grantees are required to implement a project evaluation as a condition of receiving Federal discretionary grants, and organizations applying for grants in most priority areas are required to demonstrate preliminary evidence of a systemic approach to evaluation by including a basic evaluation plan and a logic model in grant applications. What distinguishes many of the 17 successful program implementers is commitment to implementing the most rigorous evaluations possible within organizational and resource constraints and to using evaluation findings to inform program improvement and decision-making. In this regard, the selected grantees as a group reflect the developmental approach to evaluation articulated by Patton (2010) in which the evaluator is part of a team whose members collaborate to conceptualize, design, and test new approaches in a long-term, ongoing process of continuous improvement, adaptation, and intentional change. As summarized in *Exhibit IV-16: Program Evaluation,* many selected grantees' evaluations incorporated elements that reflect both this developmental philosophy and commitment to high-quality research.

- *Clear process measures to assess the implementation of project services and activities*. All 17 selected grantees had articulated well-defined process measures to quantify success in meeting key implementation objectives. For example, one grantee discovered through collecting detailed demographic and enrollment data that efforts to recruit and involve individuals from a certain cultural group had not been successful. The grantee used these findings to develop more culturally targeted and appropriate outreach and recruitment methods. Among grantees implementing EBPs or another empirically or theoretically based program, the majority assessed program fidelity as part of process evaluation efforts.

- *Use of both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods*. The evaluations of nearly all selected grantees incorporated both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Such a "mixed methods" approach strengthens an overarching evaluation design by providing reliable and verifiable evidence of program outcomes and by offering greater insights into the factors that contribute to those observed outcomes. As such, a mixed methods approach affords greater explanatory power and provides more useful data to inform subsequent program improvements.

- *Use of standardized assessment instruments*. When appropriate, a majority of grantees used existing standardized instruments to collect data on participant knowledge, attitudes, skills, behaviors, and functioning. Although they are not always tailored to the specific content and goals of a given program, standardized tools have established validity and reliability and are therefore more likely to elicit accurate and trustworthy information regarding a program's impact on participant outcomes. In addition, by using existing standardized instruments a grantee can forgo the considerable time and resources required to develop, test, and validate a new "home-grown" tool.

- *Use of evaluation data for clinical purposes*. Among grantees implementing direct service programs, over half collected data that were useful both for evaluating program effectiveness and for making clinical decisions regarding the treatment or service needs of enrolled participants. When project personnel benefit directly from information that informs case planning and management, they are more supportive of data collection efforts and evaluation as a whole. In addition, data that are useful for clinical purposes are often more valid proxies for the participant problems or service needs that evaluators seek to measure as part of efforts to assess program effectiveness.

Exhibit IV-16: Program Evaluation

Sub-factors	Number	Percent
Clear process measures are in place to evaluate program implementation (e.g., number of enrollees; number, frequency, and duration of program activities) (n=17).	17	100
Evaluators assess fidelity to the program model (n=11).	7	64
The grantee uses both quantitative and qualitative data (n=17).	15	88
The evaluation uses standardized assessment/measurement instruments (n=17).	11	65
Evaluation data are used for clinical purposes (i.e., to assess participants' strengths, needs, abilities, functioning) (n=16).	9	56

This chapter has sought to elucidate key implementation factors that both explain and facilitate the successful implementation of CB discretionary grant projects. The final chapter that follows will review the implications and recommendations that arise from this analysis for CB discretionary grantees and for a potentially broader range of Federal, State, and locally funded child welfare programs.

Chapter V
Implications and Recommendations for CB Discretionary Grant Programs

The study described in this report explored the implementation experiences of a small sample of CB discretionary grantees through the framework of the NIRN implementation science model and JBA's past implementation research with OFA-funded grantees as part of an effort to identify factors that contribute to the successful implementation of CB discretionary grant projects. JBA concluded that when examined in its entirety, the NIRN model incorporates many valuable concepts for understanding the implementation experiences of CB discretionary grantees. Some limits to the explanatory power of the NIRN model arise from certain assumptions regarding the characteristics and parameters of human service programs and practices that may not always apply to CB discretionary grantees:

- Organizations are implementing established, well-defined, EBPs.

- Program conceptualization and implementation occur through a community-driven planning and development process—one in which State and/or local government agencies and community organizations identify a problem, build commitment to address the problem, determine the best strategies for solving the problem, and find the resources to implement the selected strategies.

Nonetheless, NIRN provides a powerful lens for examining the implementation experiences of CB discretionary grants. In the context of this study, NIRN facilitated the development of an analytical framework for identifying a set of organizational characteristics, activities, and processes—referred to as implementation factors—that contribute significantly to the successful implementation of these projects. These key factors are summarized in the framework of recommendations presented in *Exhibit V-1: Characteristics of Successful Program Implementers*. This framework, which organizes recommended actions to promote successful program design and implementation into several conceptual categories, is further articulated in the set of detailed recommendations presented in the remainder of this chapter.

Use Formal and Informal Data Sources to Inform Project Development

- Whenever possible, find and utilize data from formal needs assessments and asset mapping projects that have already been conducted in or for the community of interest. Considerable information that is relevant to the proposed project may already be available to establish the need for the project and to refine its focus.

- Conduct informal needs and readiness assessments by listening to the experiences and insights of human service professionals, community leaders, and citizens with an interest in and knowledge of the target population or issue in question, and by engaging in collaborative dialogue with organizations in the community that share an interest in the

Exhibit V-1: Characteristics of Successful Program Implementers

Project Conceptualization and Design	Resource and Infrastructure Development	Staff Recruitment, Training, and Supervision	Program Implementation and Adaptation	Evaluation, Dissemination, and Sustainability
Successful CB Discretionary Grantees:				
• Use both formal and informal data sources to guide needs assessment and project design • Are based on the best available research evidence • Are responsive to the established needs of the target population(s)	• Integrate program evaluation into the program design and planning process • Identify and empower a Project Champion(s) within the organization with sufficient power to effect change • Build new and/or enhanced organizational partnerships and commitment • Modify agency policies, procedures, and practices as appropriate to accommodate implementation • Make full use of available technical assistance resources	• Hire or assign personnel with appropriate skills, characteristics, education, and experience • Conduct intensive initial and ongoing staff training • Provide ongoing supervision that is responsive to staff needs	• Use proactive and collaborative strategies to recruit and retain program participants • Make program modifications when necessary but sparingly, with assistance from internal or external program experts	• Engage in strategic information dissemination with a focus on sustainability • Build sustainability planning into the project design and implementation process • Implement the highest-quality evaluation possible with a focus on program development and improvement

target population or issue at stake. A collaborative data collection process can also help identify potential project partners and generate stronger buy-in and interest in the project.

Design Programs to be Responsive to the Needs of the Target Population and Based on the Best Available Evidence

- Target programs at children, families, or other populations of interest that have the greatest needs based on an analysis of the most accurate and reliable information available. These populations are sometimes harder to access and engage in services, but they often have the greatest potential to improve and thereby demonstrate the effectiveness of a new project.

- Whenever appropriate and feasible, time the offer and/or delivery of services to coincide with major transitions in the lives of targeted participants (e.g., birth of a child, death of a family member, marriage, divorce, a job loss, release from prison). Careful timing can affect participants when they are more receptive to receiving services and to making significant life changes.

- Whenever appropriate and feasible, involve members of the target participant's immediate and/or extended family in service planning, participation, or delivery. Change will be easier and more permanent when the skills and behaviors of the individuals, with which the target participant lives, change as well.

- Base a new program on an existing evidence-based or theory-based service model or practice whenever possible; in general, an existing program with established procedures and protocols and a demonstrated implementation track record will be easier to implement than a newly developed program. Given the relative rarity of EBPs in the child welfare field, the task for grantees is to choose the program or practice that appears to show the most promise, on empirical or theoretical grounds, of producing good outcomes.

Integrate Program Evaluation into the Project Design and Planning Process

- Integrate evaluation activities into the beginning of the project conceptualization and planning process. One of the first steps is to develop a comprehensive logic model that demonstrates the logical linkages among project activities, outputs, and outcomes, and that can serve as a blueprint to guide and assess program implementation.

- Do not "skimp" on evaluation; identify and retain someone with the proper training, education, and experience to implement the highest-quality and most rigorous evaluation possible. If needed, consider the merits of hiring a third-party contractor to maximize objectivity and provide an "outsider's" perspective.

- Implement the most sophisticated and rigorous evaluation possible within the resource constraints and commitment level of the organization. Efforts to implement an overly ambitious evaluation that is beyond the capacity of the organization or of the evaluation

team will likely produce poor information, possibly contributing to poor implementation decisions.

Identify and Empower a Project Champion within the Grantee Organization

- Identify one or two people within the grantee organization who are deeply committed to and believe in the potential of the project to serve as "Project Champions." Assign this person(s) an official role to guide and oversee project planning, start-up, and implementation.

- Ensure that the Champions have the authority or organizational "clout" to overcome internal barriers and speak for the organization with potential project partners.

Build New or Enhance Existing Organizational Partnerships and Commitment

- Build partnerships by tapping into existing organizational relationships; some of the most successful project partnerships involve relationships with organizations that are long standing and have already leveraged successful collaborative efforts.

- Develop new relationships by building on shared interests and personal relationships. Funding opportunities provide avenues to cultivate new relationships with organizations that share an interest in the grant's target population or issues of concern. These new relationships can be useful to both parties in the future whether or not a particular grant application is successful.

- Most organizational relationships grow out of personal relationships. Leverage informal contacts at committee meetings, conferences, and similar events to develop personal relationships with key individuals from potential organizational partners.

- Identify a person in the organization who will be responsible for developing and maintaining organizational relationships. During the project conceptualization and startup process, this person will most likely be the Project Champion(s).

- Make program implementation a truly collaborative process by involving project partners in initial project planning and start-up. Collaboration is often most effective when based on mutual acknowledgement and respect for the goals, talents, and strengths of each partnering organization and when one organization does not dominate.

- Where appropriate, use MOUs or other agreements to formalize expectations for collaborative relationships as well as respective project roles and responsibilities.

Modify Agency Policies, Procedures, and Practices to Accommodate Project Implementation

- Review and modify existing organizational policies, procedures, and practices to remove potential barriers to project implementation. When appropriate and feasible, create new policies and procedures that streamline and facilitate implementation.

- Solicit input from front-line personnel and supervisors regarding potential barriers to implementation as well as regarding effective strategies for improving implementation.

- To the extent feasible, dedicate the time of front-line personnel assigned to a new project exclusively to that project; assign them as few outside tasks and responsibilities as possible. As a general rule, assigning a smaller number of personnel to work full time on a project is preferable to having a larger number of personnel working only part time.

Make Full Use of Existing Technical Assistance Resources

- Make early and frequent use of programmatic and evaluation TA resources available directly from FPOs, Federal TA contractors, the Child Welfare Information Gateway, and members or providers in CB's T/TA Network that are charged with assisting particular discretionary grant clusters (e.g., Family Connection). These TA resources offer a low-cost strategy for improving project performance and for addressing implementation or evaluation challenges before they become more serious.

- Fellow discretionary grantees can be a rich source of knowledge and wisdom regarding strategies to support successful program implementation. As such, grantees should take advantage of opportunities to engage in peer networking and learning supported by CB through annual grantees meetings, e-mail distribution lists, and conference calls.

Hire or Assign Project Staff Members with Appropriate Skills and Characteristics

- Hire or assign staff members who are enthusiastic advocates for the program and believe strongly in its potential to help the project's target population.

- The most effective front-line project personnel have the ability to connect with program participants on a personal level and are perceived as credible and non-judgmental. These personal characteristics are often equally important determinants of workers' effectiveness as their education credentials, training, and professional backgrounds. However, appropriate education and work experience remain critical factors for successful job performance, especially for personnel in management, supervisory, clinical, and evaluation positions.

Conduct Intensive and Comprehensive Initial and Ongoing Staff Training

- Provide immediate, intensive, and complete training to front-line staff members on projects involving EBPs or other empirically or theory-based program models. If available, base this training on an existing training curriculum and/or practice guide.

- Ensure that the training helps employees develop a shared vision of the goals of the project as well as a sense of the project's role in advancing the organization's core mission.

- Provide supplemental training that prepares project personnel to address the specific issues or needs of the target population (e.g., child maltreatment, domestic violence, early childhood development, substance abuse, child and adult mental health).

Provide Ongoing Supervision that is Responsive to Staff Members' Needs

- Provide ongoing training following initial project implementation to maintain and improve employees' work-related knowledge and skills. Regular training is particularly important for EBPs in which model fidelity is critical to effective implementation.

- Provide frequent and ongoing supervision that offers employees immediate feedback and advice regarding specific work activities and issues. Supervision is most effective when it is provided through a combination of on-the-job coaching and regular, more formal face-to-face meetings.

- Give front-line employees emotional support and encouragement in an effort to maintain morale, sustain a sense of purpose and commitment to the project, and prevent "burnout" from job-related stressors.

Use Proactive and Collaborative Strategies to Recruit and Retain Program Participants

- Use organizational partners to recruit, refer, and provide access to potential project participants. Use MOUs or other formal agreements with partnering organizations to establish specific program eligibility criteria and procedures for referring potential participants.

- Engage in proactive and assertive outreach efforts. Project employees who can connect with and be perceived as credible to potential participants often serve as an organization's most effective recruitment tool.

- Provide concrete supports to overcome logistical barriers to participation, including transportation, childcare, and meals, or by modifying programming schedules to accommodate the work and family obligations of participants.

- Keep participants engaged in project services by demonstrating the project's value and usefulness. Strategies for engaging participants include the following:

    - Giving participants concrete "take-aways" (e.g., brochures, educational materials) that reinforce the project's immediate worth

    - Giving participants a direct voice in case planning or service delivery by engaging them to teach or provide assistance to other project participants

    - Keeping programming fun and interesting by minimizing passive activities such as lecture-based instruction

    - Cultivating healthy and appropriate relationships between and among project employees and participants through the creation of safe and welcoming programming environments and by hosting events (e.g., family picnics, support groups) that encourage sharing and one-on-one interaction

    - Celebrating participants' successes and acknowledging their personal growth and achievements

Make Program Modifications When Necessary but Sparingly

- Adapt EBPs or other empirically or theoretically grounded programs when necessary to accommodate the culture, language, or socio-economic environment of the target population. Avoid changes in service dosage or delivery format in order to maintain fidelity to the original program model as closely as possible.

- Limit significant program adaptations to those that are justified by clear and convincing evidence.

- Make adaptations to a program (whether an EBP or a non-evidence-based program) as early as possible during the project start-up and implementation process. Avoid further changes if possible to facilitate the implementation and evaluation of a consistent and coherent program or practice.

- Make changes with the assistance of internal or external program experts. For projects involving EBPs, engage the original program developers if possible to oversee and provide guidance regarding proposed modifications.

Engage in Strategic Information Dissemination with an Eye toward Sustainability

- Disseminate program findings regularly to a range of stakeholders, including organizational partners, other major organizations in the target community, and the broader child welfare

field. Pay special attention to the dissemination of information to potential project funders or to other organizations that can facilitate long-term program sustainability.

- Tailor program findings and messages toward specific dissemination audiences using a variety of modalities that include written information, electronic media, and in-person contact.

- Draw upon existing organizational resources, relationships, and regional or national professional networks (e.g., State or national child welfare associations) to assist in dissemination efforts.

Build Sustainability into the Project Design and Implementation Process

- Develop a detailed sustainability plan as soon as possible following grant award that reflects an awareness of other organizational priorities and potential resource and other contextual constraints.

- Foster community buy-in to the program's value and involve community partners in developing strategies for sustainability. A network of organizational partners that are invested in the long-term success of a project increases the avenues that are available to sustain core project services.

- Create a niche for the project by providing services that are not otherwise available in the target community. The chances of long-term sustainability increase when major organizations such as a State or local child welfare department wish to keep the services or program in place.

- Use evaluation data to demonstrate the effectiveness of the program to potential funders.

- Identify the key elements of the program and find creative ways to sustain these elements after the end of a Federal grant. Financial sustainability strategies include applying for grants through State and local child welfare agencies and foundations, determining whether certain clinical services are billable to Medicare or Medicaid, and adopting a fee-for-service model for certain project activities. Non-financial sustainability strategies include using volunteers to implement certain program components, integrating selected project elements into regular organizational activities and processes so that they become "business as usual", and transferring the operation of certain project components to partnering organizations or other service providers.

Implement the Highest-Quality Evaluation Possible with a Focus on Program Development and Improvement

- Use evaluation findings on an iterative and continual basis throughout the life of a project to inform program improvement, adaptation, and decision-making in a systematic and intentional manner.

- Define and quantify clear process measures to assess the implementation of project services and activities. When implementing an EBP or another empirically or theoretically based program, assess program fidelity as part of process evaluation efforts.

- Use both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to provide reliable and verifiable evidence of program outcomes as well as greater insights into the factors that contribute to observed outcomes.

- Employ standardized assessment instruments when appropriate and feasible to increase the validity and reliability of observed evaluation outcomes and to minimize the use of evaluation resources to develop, test, and validate "home grown" instruments.

- Collect data that are useful for both evaluation and clinical purposes when feasible and appropriate to reduce data collection burdens on project personnel, provide project personnel with information that is useful for case planning and management purposes, and increase support among project staff members of the evaluation effort.

The qualitative study described in this report also points to potential areas for further research involving more extensive and systematic data collection with a wider range of Federal grantees or other human service organizations. Future areas of inquiry may include exploring the application of implementation science concepts to the development of new and untested programs in addition to existing, well-established EBPs. In the interim, it is hoped that these recommendations and the analytical framework in which they are presented will prove useful to CB discretionary grantees, CB officials, and the broader child welfare field in understanding and fostering the successful implementation of time-limited Federal discretionary grant projects. In turn, the observations and lessons learned summarized in this report may have broader implications for child welfare programs implemented in other settings and through other funding sources.

References

Aarons, G. A., Hurlburt, M., & McCue-Horwitz, S. (2010). Advancing a conceptual model of evidence-based practice implementation in public service sectors. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research, 38* (1), 4-23.

Aarons, G. A., & Palinkas, L.A. (2007). Implementation of evidence-based practice in child welfare: Service provider perspectives. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research, 349* (4), 411-419.

Barbee, A. P., Christensen, D., Antle, B., Wandersman, A., & Cahn, K. (2011). Successful adoption and implementation of a comprehensive casework practice model in a public child welfare agency: Application of the Getting to Outcomes (GTO) model. *Children and Youth Services Review, 33* (5), 622-633.

Bumbarger, B. K., Perkins, D. F., & Greenberg, M. T. (2009). Taking effective prevention to scale. In B. Doll W., W. Pfohl, & J. Yoon (Eds.), *Handbook of Prevention Science*. Oxford, England: Taylor & Francis.

Chinman, M., Early, D., Ebener, P.A., Hunter, S., Imm, P., Jenkins, P., Sheldon, J., & Wandersman, A. (2004). Getting To Outcomes: A community-based participatory approach to preventive interventions. *Journal of Interprofessional Care*, *18* (4), 441-443.

Damschroder, L., Aron, D., Keith, R., Kirsh, S., Alexander, J., & Lowery, J. (2009). Fostering implementation of health services research findings into practice: A consolidated framework for advancing implementation science. *Implementation Science, 4,* 50.

Dane, A.V., & Schneider, B.H. (1998). Program integrity in primary and early secondary prevention: Are implementation effects out of control? *Clinical Psychology Review*, *18*, 23-45.

Dariotis, J. K., Bumbarger, B. K., Duncan, L. G. & Greenberg, M. T. (2008). How do implementation efforts relate to program adherence? Examining the role of organizational, implementer, and program factors. *Journal of Community Psychology, 36*, 744–760.

Domitrovich, C. E., & Greenberg, M. T. (2000). The study of implementation: Current findings from effective programs that prevent mental disorders in school-aged children. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, *11*, 193-221.

Durlak, J.A., & DuPre, E.P. (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.

Dusenbury, L., Branningan, R., Falco, M., & Hansen, W.B. (2003). A review of research on fidelity of implementation: Implications for drug abuse prevention in school settings. *Health Education Research, 18*, 237-256.

Fagan, A.A., Hanson, K., Hawkins, J.D., & Arthur, M.W. (2008). Bridging science to practice: Achieving prevention program implementation fidelity in the community youth development study. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *41*, 235-249.

Fixsen, D. L., & Blase, K. A. (2009). Implementation: The missing link between research and practice. *NIRN Implementation Brief #1*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, FPG, NIRN.

Fixsen, D., Naoom, S.F., Blase, D.A., Friedman, R.M., & Wallace, F. (2005). *Implementation research: A synthesis of the literature*. University of South Florida, Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute: The National Implementation Research Network (FMHI Publication #231).

Gold, M., & Taylor, E. F. (2007). Moving research into practice: lessons from the US Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality's IDSRN program. *Implementation Science, 2,* 9.

Kilbourne, A. M., Neumann, M. S., Pincus, H. A., Bauer, M. S., & Stall, R. (2007). Implementing evidence-based interventions in health care: Application of the replicating effective programs framework. *Implementation Science, 2*, 42.

James Bell Associates. (2010). *Implementation resource guide for social service programs: An introduction to evidence-based programming.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance.

Mendel, P., Meredith, L.S., Schoenbaum, M., Sherbourne, C. D., & Wells, K. B. (2008). Interventions in organizational and community context: A framework for building evidence on dissemination and implementation in health services research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health, 35,* 21-37.

Michigan State University (1999). The several forms of community mapping. *Best Practice Brief, Number 4*. East Lansing, MI: Author.

Mihalic, S. (2008). *Implementation fidelity blueprint project.* Available at: http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/Fidelity.pdf

Mowbray, C.T., Holter, M.C., Teague, G.B., & Bybee, D. (2003). Fidelity criteria: Development, measurement, and validation. *American Journal of Evaluation, 24*, 315-340.

National Institute of Medicine (2001). *Crossing the quality chasm: A new health system for the 21st Century*. Washington, DC: National Academy of Sciences.

O'Donnell, C. L. (2008). Defining, conceptualizing, and measuring fidelity of implementation and its relationship to outcomes in K-12 curriculum intervention research. *Review of Educational Research, 78* (1), 33-84.

Patton, M. Q. (2010). *Developmental evaluation: Applying complexity concepts to enhance innovation and use*. New York: Guilford Publications.

Proctor, E. K., Landsverk, J., Aarons, G., Chambers, D., Glisson, C., & Mittman, B. (2009). Implementation research in mental health services: An emerging science with conceptual, methodological, and training challenges. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research, 36* (1), 24-34.

The California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare (CEBC) (2011). Available at: http://www.cebc4cw.org/

The Clinical Effectiveness Research Agenda Group (CERAG) (2009). *An implementation research agenda.* Available at: http://www.implementationscience.com/content/supplementary/1748-5908-4-18-s1.pdf

The National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) (2011). Available at: http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~nirn/

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (HHS) (2010). *National registry of evidence-based programs and practices*. Available at: http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov/

U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) (2010). *OJJDP Model programs guide.* Available at: http://www2.dsgonline.com/mpg/

U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) (2009). *Building rigorous evidence to drive policy.* Available at: http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/blog/09/06/08/BuildingRigorousEvidencetoDrivePolicy

Wandersman, A., Imm, P., Chinman, M., & Kaftarian, K. (2000). Getting to outcomes: a results-based approach to accountability. *Evaluation and Program Planning, 23* (3), 389-395.

Appendix A

Site Visit Summary Checklist

CB Implementation Science Project

Implementation Summary and Checklist

This checklist is to be completed after all interviews and observations of project activities have been conducted. The purpose of the summary form is to record overall impressions of the project developed during this site visit. The items on the checklist represent specific concepts, practices, activities, or characteristics of grantee implementation practices that have been proposed as important.

For each item on the summary form please indicate "Y" for yes, "N" for no, "U" for unclear or insufficient information to assess, or "NA" for not applicable. Record any other useful information in the comments section (e.g., descriptions of project activities related to implementation, clarifications, observations, etc.).

NOTE: This summary should not be shared with the grantee.

Project Information			
Grantee Name:		**Grantee Cluster:**	
Program Name:			
Grant Number:		**FPO:**	
Site Visit Information			
Site Visit Conducted by		**Date**	

Program Champion / Purveyor					
Y	**N**	**U**	**NA**	**Practices**	**Comments**
				Was there a champion(s) that built support for the proposed project in the organization and/or the community?	**Site visitors should make note of the following issues:** Who were/are the champions? How did the champions change over time?
				Did the champion play a role in project conceptualization (pre-award)?	
				Did/does the champion play a role in managing project implementation (post-award)?	
				Did/does the champion play a role in providing or managing the delivery of ongoing services?	
				Did/does the champion interact with/build relationships with potential or existing project partners?	
				Did the champion change over time?	
				Is the champion involved in efforts to sustain the project after the Federal grant ends?	
				Did/does the champion have organizational clout or administrative authority?	

Additional Notes:

Project Conceptualization - Setting the Stage					
Y	**N**	**U**	**NA**	**Practices**	**Comments**
				The organization or some other community entity conducted a **FORMAL** needs assessment to establish need for program.	**Site visitors should make note of the following issues:** How did these processes involve other organizations?
				The organization or some other community entity conducted an **INFORMAL** needs assessment to establish need for program.	
				The organization or some other community entity conducted a **FORMAL** asset mapping process, which guided the development of the project.	
				The organization or some other community entity conducted an **INFORMAL** asset mapping process, which guided the development of the project.	
				The organization or some other community entity conducted a **FORMAL** assessment of community readiness for the project prior to implementation.	
				The organization or some other community entity conducted an **INFORMAL** assessment of community readiness for the project prior to implementation.	
				There was clear commitment within the grantee organization prior to its implementation.	
				There was a clear commitment to the project among collaborative partners and/or the broader community before its implementation.	
				Collaborative partners/community organizations only became interested in the project after it demonstrated its effectiveness.	

Additional Notes:

Project Conceptualization – Project Design and Adaptation					
Y	**N**	**U**	**NA**	**Practices**	**Comments**
				The grantee's project incorporates an evidenced-based program (EBP) model.	**Site visitors should make note of the following issues:** What EBP was selected (if any)? When were modifications made? Why were modifications necessary/made?
				The grantee uses a standardized but unproven/unrated intervention.	
				The grantee uses no pre-existing model or developed its own model.	
				The grantee made modifications to the intervention prior to implementation.	
				The grantee made modifications to the intervention after implementation.	
				Modifications to the intervention were made with the assistance of program experts or developers.	
				Once implemented, the grantee was reluctant to modify the intervention or associated curriculum.	
				The program was designed to target participants during a particular life stage or event (e.g., CWS case opening, birth of child).	
				The program is "family focused" and considers all relevant family members in providing services.	
				The program is targeted at a high-risk population (those most in need of assistance).	
				The program had a formal logic model prior to start-up.	
				The program logic model has been revised since the program began.	
				An evaluation was planned in advance and evaluation experts were involved from the start.	
				The grantee or evaluator assesses fidelity to the planned EBP or other program model in a systematic way.	

Additional Notes:

Degree of Implementation					
Y	**N**	**U**	**NA**	**Practices**	**Comments**
				Have new policies and procedures been created or modified within the grantee organization to support, or in response to, the grantee's project?	**Site visitors should make note of the following issues:** What "NIRN degree of implementation" has the program achieved? Are different aspects/components of the program at different levels (degrees) of implementation?
				Have front-line staff members been given clear information about how and why the program is supposed to work (theory of change)?	
				Have trainings been put into place specifically to support the implementation of this project?	
				Do available data (e.g., staff evaluations, staff supervision processes, and process evaluation efforts) demonstrate that planned project activities have been faithfully implemented?	
				Has implementation of the program required the introduction of new staff members' roles/activities, or changes in grantee services or activities?	
				Does the grantee have evaluation data that demonstrates a positive impact on participants?	

Additional Notes:

Degrees of Implementation (as described by NIRN)

Paper implementation means putting into place new policies and procedures (the "recorded theory of change") with the adoption of an innovation as the rationale for the policies and procedures.

Process implementation means putting new operating procedures into place to conduct training workshops, provide supervision, change information reporting forms, and so on (the "expressed theory of change" and "active theory of change") with the adoption of an innovation as the rationale for the procedures.

Performance implementation means putting procedures and processes into place in such a way that the identified functional components of change are used with good effect for consumers (the "integrated theory of change"). It appears that implementation that produces actual benefits to consumers, organizations, and systems require more careful and thoughtful efforts.

Stages of Implementation					
Y	**N**	**U**	**NA**	**Practices**	**Comments**
				Did the grantee assess the potential match between community needs and resources before making a decision to proceed with the project (*see project conceptualization notes)*?	**Site visitors should make note of the following issues**: What "NIRN stage of implementation" has the program achieved? Are different aspects of the program at different stages of implementation? How quickly were exploration, installation, and early implementation each Sustainability (EV, Admin, CP)
				Did the grantee assess the match between the proposed intervention and the needs/characteristics of the target population before proceeding?	
				Did the grantee struggle with hiring staff members or other installation activities in a way that delayed program implementation?	
				Do project staff members believe in the project? Have they bought into the project's theory of change?	
				Are project activities different from activities implemented through other or previous grantee projects?	
				Are project staff members fully implementing project activities as described in the proposal?	
				Are project activities that may be new or have changed from the original proposal being fully implemented?	
				Has the project's program theory or service model been adapted or modified from its original conceptualization (before Year 2)?	
				Has the project's program theory or service model been adapted or modified from its original implementation (after Year 2)?	
Sustainability					
				Is the grantee currently supporting any program activities (or very similar program activities or approaches in a different project) with non-federal funding?	What steps have been taken to support sustainability?
				Has the grantee taken concrete steps to support the long-term sustainability of services or key elements of the program?	
				Does the grantee use evaluation data to demonstrate the effectiveness of the program and build support for continuation?	
				Has the program created a niche by providing services not otherwise available?	
				Has the program identified the critical components of the program that must be sustained and other activities that can be discontinued?	

Additional Notes:

NIRN Stages of Implementation

Exploration and Adoption is the process of assessing the potential match between community needs, evidence-based practices and program needs, *(i.e., does the EBP meet the needs of the target population*) and community resources to determine whether or not to proceed with program implementation.

Program Installation occurs after the decision is made to begin implementing a program and involves the completion of certain tasks before the first participant is enrolled. These activities define the installation stage of implementation (*i.e., hiring and training staff members, securing operating resources like space and equipment*).

Initial Implementation is the period in which major program activities/servicers begin and when confidence in the decision to adopt the program is being tested. During the initial stage of implementation, the forces of fear of change, inertia, and investment in the status quo combine with the inherently difficult and complex work of implementing something new.

Full Operation occurs when new learning, services, and activities become integrated into the practices, policies, and procedures of staff, the organization, and/or the broader community. At this point the program becomes fully operational with full staffing complements and full client loads, while also dealing with all of the realities of "doing business" in real-life practice settings.

Innovation involves the refinement and expansion of new practices and programs.

Sustainability refers to the long-term maintenance and continued effectiveness of the program in the context of changing organizational, political, economic, and community circumstances.

Stages of Implementation- Continued					
Y	**N**	**U**	**NA**	**Practices**	**Comments**
Collaboration					**Site visitors should make special noted of the following issues:**
				Project uses community leaders and collaborative partners in recruitment efforts.	What forms or strategies of dissemination are evident?
				The program has identified staff members with responsibility for developing and maintaining organizational relationships.	
				Program staff members use informal meetings to develop personal relationships with key staff members in other organizations.	
				The program maintains regular communication with community partners.	
				The grantee agency has formal MOUs with key community partners.	
				Project partners were involved in the initial planning/ conceptualization of the project.	
				Project partners have been changed in substantive ways as a result of the project (e.g., new policies, practices, and ways of doing business).	
Dissemination					
				Has the grantee disseminated information regarding the program and its importance to collaborative partners, other community organizations, or the broader public?	Where and how has information been disseminated?
				Is there evidence that dissemination has resulted in improved systems of care in the grantee's community (e.g., collaborative partners adopt common intake tools, etc.)?	
				Has the grantee disseminated information regarding the program and its importance to potential funding sources?	
				Has the program disseminated information regarding the program and its importance to the child welfare/human services field?	

Additional Notes:

Implementation Components					
Y	**N**	**U**	**NA**	**Practices**	**Comments**
Hiring Project Staff Members					**Site visitors should make special note of the following issues:**
				Front-line staff members hired for the project are required to have specific/minimum education, experience, or background.	What educational, background, or personal characteristics make staff members successful?
				Front-line staff members are perceived by project participants as genuine and caring.	
				Front-line staff members are perceived as having the ability to connect with project participants.	
				Staff members believe in and are passionate about the program.	
				Project staff members are perceived as showing respect for project participants.	
				The program makes significant use of volunteers, students, or other less "formal" personnel.	
Staff Training					
				Front-line staff members receive intensive and complete training in the program.	
				Initial training includes developing a shared vision of the program among all staff members.	
				Initial training includes an overview of the grantee agency and how this program fits into the grantee's organizational mission.	
				Staff members receive supplemental training to prepare for issues likely to arise or exist in the target population (e.g., DV, SA, child developmental issues, etc.).	
Ongoing Training/Supervision					
				Ongoing on-the-job coaching or supervision is incorporated into the training process.	
				Staff members are provided with opportunities for ongoing training/ professional development outside of supervision.	
				There is a formal structure for supervision (e.g., regularly scheduled meetings).	
				Supervisors provide emotional support and encouragement to staff.	

Implementation Components – Continued					
Y	**N**	**U**	**NA**	**Practices**	**Comments**
Staff Member Evaluation					**Site visitors should make special note of the following issues:** What kinds of TA are utilized by the grantee?
				There is a clear distinction between supervision and staff performance measurement/evaluation.	
				Staff member's evaluation is a formal process (e.g., with standardized performance measurement tools and regular review schedules).	
				Feedback is provided to staff members in regard to performance in implementing the project's program/ service model.	
				Formal job descriptions exist for front-line staff (FLS) positions.	
Staff Member Supports and Resources / Facilitative Administration					
				Upper management is supportive of this project.	
				Staff members are provided with equipment and other resources (e.g., space, supplies, technology) necessary to optimize job performance.	
				The agency has developed clear policies and procedures to assist with the implementation of project activities.	
				There is a reasonable participant-to - staff member ratio; caseloads are not excessive	
Outside Technical Assistance					
				The grantee has used consultants, including Federal TA providers to support implementation.	
				The program has used other external or internal experts (not specific to this project) to assist with implementation.	
Environmental/Systemic Factors					
				Did the program face challenges due to larger community or systemic challenges (e.g., political, economic, organizational, demographic, budgetary issues)?	
				Was the grantee program able to adapt to or overcome these challenges?	

Additional Notes:

Additional Project Design / Core Intervention Components					
Y	**N**	**U**	**NA**	**Practices**	**Comments**
Recruitment of participants					
				Project uses community leaders and partners in recruitment.	**Site visitors should make special note of the following issues:** What marketing and outreach activities take place to help recruit clients?
				Project uses recruiters who can connect with and be seen as credible by potential participants.	
				Project uses resources to overcome barriers to participation (e.g., transportation, childcare, meals).	
				Project uses outreach and marketing strategies and/or technology to aid in recruitment.	
				Project uses incentives from non-federal dollars (gift cards, baby bucks) to entice/ enhance recruitment efforts.	
Retention of participants					
				The project is perceived as useful to participants in a direct and immediate way.	
				Participants perceive the program as fun and interesting.	
				Participants are encouraged to bond with each other in appropriate ways.	
				Participants are encouraged to bond with staff members in appropriate ways.	
				The project finds ways to celebrate participants' success and acknowledge personal growth.	
				Participants are fully engaged/actively participate in project services.	
				Project uses incentives from non-federal dollars (gift cards, baby bucks) to encourage continued participation.	
				The project uses resources to overcome barriers to continued participation (e.g., transportation, childcare, meals).	
Specific mechanisms to overcome barriers					
				The program provides transportation support.	
				The program provides child care support.	
				The program provides meals or snacks when programming occurs during meal times.	
				Other mechanism (describe):	

Additional Notes:

Project Evaluation					
Y	**N**	**U**	**NA**	**Practices**	**Comments**
				The grantee involved persons with research/evaluation experience from the beginning of the planning process.	
				The evaluation uses both quantitative and qualitative data.	
				The evaluation uses standardized assessment/measurement instruments.	
				Evaluation data are used for clinical purposes (i.e., to assess participants' strengths, needs, abilities, functioning).	
				The grantee has used consultants or Federal technical assistance providers (e.g., JBA) to improve the effectiveness of the evaluation.	
				Evaluators assess fidelity to the EBP/other program model at some level.	
				The program assesses CONTEXT fidelity.	
				The program assesses COMPLIANCE fidelity.	
				The program assesses COMPETENCE fidelity.	
				Clear process measures are used to measure implementation (e.g., number of enrollees, number, frequency, and duration of program activities, etc.).	

Additional Notes:

NIRN Fidelity Dimensions

Context fidelity measures describe the necessary precursors to high-level performance (e.g., completion of training, acceptable practitioner-coach ratio, acceptable caseload, availability of colleagues with special skills, availability of certain resources) for a particular program or practice.

Compliance fidelity measures provide an outline of the core intervention components and their use by the practitioner.

Competence fidelity measures are essential for determining the extent to which the core intervention components were delivered with skill and attention to the craft when interacting with consumers. Competence is the level of skill shown by a practitioner in delivering an intervention (e.g., appropriate responses to contextual factors such as client variables, particular

aspects of the presenting problems, client's individual life situation, sensitivity of timing, recognizing opportunities to intervene).