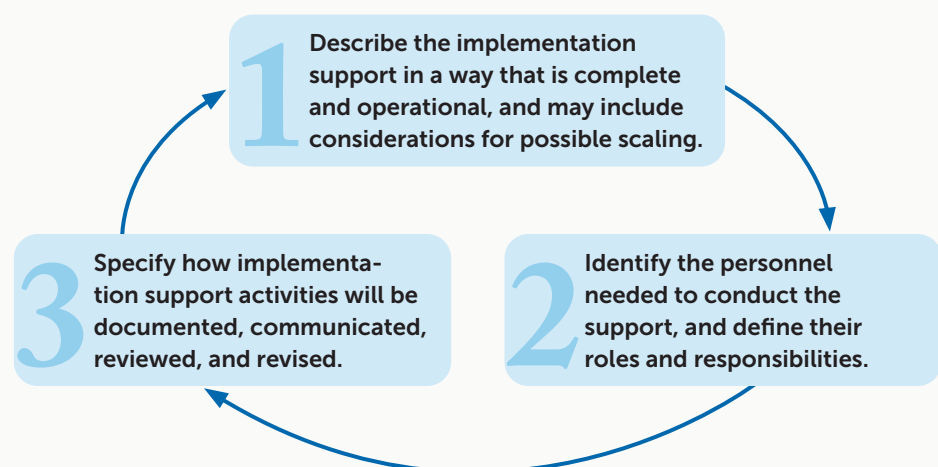# Practitioners GUIDE

Katie Eddins and Karen Needels

How to Structure Implementation Supports

Organizations use a variety of strategies to help themselves consistently deliver an intervention as it was designed—in other words, to implement an intervention with *fidelity*. These strategies, or "implementation supports," include processes such as work-force training, plans for continuous quality improvement (CQI), and supportive data systems. Having well-structured, formal implementation supports in place can be useful for ensuring that personnel and partners implement interventions consistently over time and across a variety of situations. Such measures increase the likelihood that all participants receive the intervention as it was intended to be delivered and can benefit from it. Having such supports in place can be especially beneficial when organizations are scaling an intervention, such as by serving more participants at a site or offering the intervention at new sites, because the supports can provide a framework for assessing implementation fidelity and considering changes to the intervention or implementation support processes.

This guide will help practitioners set up supports in a way that facilitates implementing an intervention with fidelity. Well-structured implementation supports can be set up in three phases: (1) describe them in complete and operational terms and consider including details on how implementation might be modified if the intervention is scaled; (2) identify the personnel needed to conduct them and define their roles and responsibilities; and (3) specify the best way to document, communicate, review, and revise implementation support plans for CQI.

Three phases of structuring an implementation support

1. Describe the implementation support in a way that is complete and operational, and may include considerations for possible scaling.

2. Identify the personnel needed to conduct the support, and define their roles and responsibilities.

3. Specify how implementation support activities will be documented, communicated, reviewed, and revised.

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DESCRIBE IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORTS

Implementation science has identified six key supports that help organizations implement and scale an intervention with fidelity: (1) implementation monitoring, (2) performance monitoring, (3) CQI processes, (4) workforce training, (5) communication systems, and (6) data systems.[1,2] For more information about some of these implementation supports, see the Further Reading section below. Each support plays a critical role in delivering an intervention as it was designed. For example, implementation monitoring focuses on whether personnel are adhering to the details of an intervention, such as delivering content in the specified time frame, and performance monitoring focuses on whether personnel are achieving certain benchmarks, such as serving a specified number of participants.[3,4] While each support is important on its own, the combination of supports can also promote implementation fidelity. For example, implementation monitoring can generate ideas for additional training to help personnel better adhere to intervention guidelines. Through conversations with practitioners, we found that having a complete and operational description for each support can help personnel conduct the activities in a consistent way across different sites and situations.

Complete. To ensure that personnel understand and meet the various goals of implementation support activities, a complete description includes specifying the goals and purposes of the support and details each key activity or task. For example, implementation monitoring may consist of documenting and observing service delivery and reviewing case files to examine whether the intervention is being implemented with fidelity. To reduce burden on personnel, organizations can also specify how support activities can be integrated with each other in mutually reinforcing ways. For example, observations may be used primarily to monitor implementation fidelity, but they may also be used as workforce training opportunities or a data source for CQI discussions.[5]

Operational. The description should include all the procedures, tools and materials, and policies or guidelines that enable personnel to implement the support consistently. For example, a description that implementation monitoring will occur "regularly" is not specific enough to provide consistent monitoring across locations where an intervention is being provided. By contrast, implementation monitoring that is described as in-person observations by specific personnel of specific activities that happen once a month, using a fidelity checklist, is operational. Organizations may wish to specify how policies and procedures vary for different personnel or partners, such as by personnel role, experience level, or length of operation. For example, supervisors, program managers, and administrators likely require training different from that of frontline personnel, and experienced personnel may require training less frequently than new personnel. An operational description includes:

- **Procedures**, or how the implementation supports have to be carried out, such as the frequency (how often); duration (how long); and mode (whether in-person versus virtual, one-on-one versus group, and paper versus electronic). For example, in-service workforce training might occur virtually every month, for one hour, for all workforce members with a particular position description.

- **Tools and materials**, such as standard templates, guides, checklists, and other materials. For example, pre-service training might include a standard presentation or interactive exercises for program managers to deliver consistent information across sites.

- **Policies or guidelines**, such as which tasks are critical versus optional and which tasks must be carried out as described versus those that can be adapted. For example, a basic set of pre-service training information might be required, but sites might add training components specific to their population or location. Organizations might also wish to describe backup plans or required actions if a task cannot be completed as planned.

Considerations for scaling. When scaling an intervention, organizations might describe specifically how supports should be carried out across various situations and, based on their capacity, prioritize certain implementation support activities. For example, when replicating an intervention at a new site, they might conduct observations to ensure that it starts up correctly, and during expansion of services at an existing site, they might find that less personnel-intensive documentation and case file reviews provide equal quality of monitoring. When adapting an intervention to a new location, organizations may wish to pay particular attention to specify-

ing which implementation support activities are critical and which can establish a baseline that can apply in all situations.

DETERMINE THE PERSONNEL NEEDED

From conversations with practitioners, we learned that having clear descriptions of which personnel need to be involved with each implementation support and of their respective responsibilities can help ensure both that the implementation supports are carried out by the most appropriate workforce member and that roles and responsibilities are clearly assigned. When determining the personnel needed for an implementation support, organizations may wish to consider:

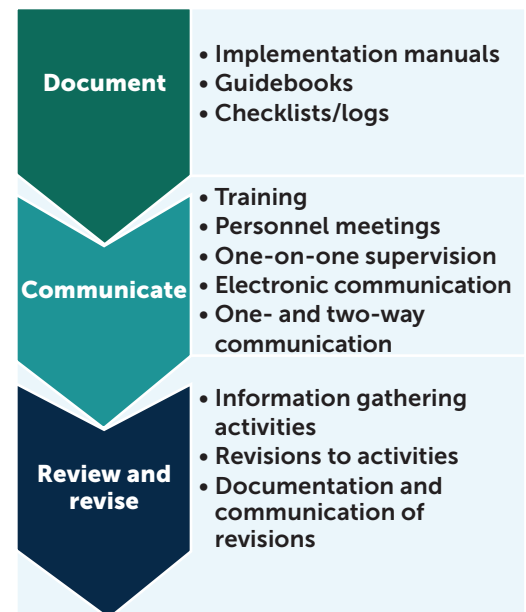**Specifying the required personnel or team for each implementation support activity.** This can help organizations be specific about involving personnel and reduce personnel burden in carrying out each support. Implementation support activities will require the varied skills of different types of workforce members, who may be internal or external to the organization. For example, data collection activities might be best completed by frontline personnel skilled in interacting with participants, and data analysis might best be performed by someone with specialized data skills. The number or types of personnel may also differ when an organization is scaling an intervention. For example, if an organization expands the number of personnel, participants, or sites, then more or different personnel may be required to deal with the additional volume or increased complexity in monitoring program implementation and performance.

Defining personnel roles and responsibilities. Various personnel might play different roles and interact with each other differently within and across implementation support activities. For example, it might be valuable to specify that a data specialist analyzes data on participants' service receipt but then shares information with both (1) program administrators, who monitor the performance of personnel and the fidelity of program implementation; and (2) frontline personnel who, along with administrators, contribute to CQI efforts.

DOCUMENT, COMMUNICATE, REVIEW, AND REVISE

Effective documentation of implementation support procedures and policies can help organizations make sure the supports are carried out completely and consistently and can be particularly important in instances of personnel turnover. When documenting implementation support goals, activities, policies, and procedures, organizations may wish to consider using easily accessible formats; describing complex policies in plain, understandable language; and providing documentation in the languages spoken by personnel, if English is not their primary language. Different types of documentation can reinforce each other: for example, implementation manuals may lay out expectations for personnel, and checklists help personnel deliver on those expectations on a daily basis.

Establishing communication procedures can help organizations share implementation support policies with the personnel responsible for conducting the support. Organizations may wish to consider aligning the format and frequency of communication about supports with ongoing communication about service delivery, and they may also wish to consider additional communication about implementation support topics that fall outside regular service delivery. For example, frontline personnel may not be regularly involved in discussions about changes to data systems, but they might benefit from information about changes that could affect their work. Different types of communication can also be

Document
- Implementation manuals
- Guidebooks
- Checklists/logs

Communicate
- Training
- Personnel meetings
- One-on-one supervision
- Electronic communication
- One- and two-way communication

Review and revise
- Information gathering activities
- Revisions to activities
- Documentation and communication of revisions

used to reinforce the same information, from initial pre-service training through ongoing meetings. Presenting information in different modes (in person, over the phone, via webinar, electronically) can also help reinforce it, as can having channels of communication be both one-way (such as electronic newsletters) and two-way (such as open chat forums).

Reviewing and revising implementation support policies and procedures can help (1) ensure that the supports are being implemented as intended, and (2) identify needed changes. This can be especially important during scaling because unanticipated challenges often arise; for example, original performance measures may not work when an intervention is adapted to a new population. For reviewing and revising supports, organizations may wish to establish a schedule that aligns with other implementation dates; for example, updates could be aligned with yearly personnel training or reporting deadlines. To review implementation support procedures, organizations can gather and analyze information from program and implementation data, CQI activities, personnel feedback, and new or current funder requirements, such as those for updated data collection. Organizations can then make any needed revisions to their implementation support activities, procedures, or policies; update the implementation support documentation; and communicate the updates with personnel.

FURTHER READING

[1] National Implementation Research Network (NIRN)

"Implementation Drivers" (https://nirn.fpg.unc.edu/module-2/implementation-drivers)

"Active Implementation Hub" (https://nirn.fpg.unc.edu/ai-hub)

[2] Mathematica. "Planned Scaling Activities of CNCS-Funded Organizations: Benchmark Findings," 2018

[3] Breitenstein et al. "Implementation Fidelity in Community-Based Interventions," 2010 (http://doi.org/10.1002/nur.20373)

[4] U.S. Department of Education. "Performance Management: Collecting and Using Data to Measure Progress, Improve Results," 2014 (https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/implementation-support-unit/tech-assist/performance-management-collecting-data.pdf)

[5] U.S. Office of Adolescent Health. "Continuous Quality Improvement," 2016 (https://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/sites/default/files/cqi-intro.pdf)

[6] Mathematica. "Practitioners Guide: Build Organizational Capacity to Implement an Intervention," 2019 (https://nationalservice.gov/impact-our-nation/evidence-exchange/build-organizational-capacity-implement-intervention)

ABOUT THE SERIES

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) supports the scaling of effective interventions that it funds. CNCS engaged Mathematica Policy Research to conduct the Scaling Evidence-Based Models project (contract GS10F0050L/CNSHQ16F0049). As part of that project, Mathematica developed a series of guides to help practitioners assess their scaling efforts critically, collect evidence on the effectiveness of their interventions, and increase the likelihood of effective scaling of successful interventions.

Each guide provides a succinct, but non-exhaustive, overview of a topic relevant to practitioners. The guides are based on implementation science research, as well as information collected during site visits conducted by Mathematica staff with three CNCS-funded grantees during fall 2018. As part of the effort, Mathematica staff reviewed program documents (such as manuals and grant applications) and conducted in-depth interviews with organizational leaders and frontline personnel, partner personnel, AmeriCorps members, and other stakeholders. More in-depth information on the topic of this guide can be found through references in the Further Reading section.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information, contact Scott Richman, director of the Scaling Evidence-Based Models project, at srichman@mathematica-mpr.com.

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