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Implementing and Sustaining an Effective Service Delivery Approach: Stages and Steps

December 2011

This document has been excerpted from the NECTAC Interactive Guide to Implementing and Sustaining an Effective Service Delivery Approach: Stages and Steps (2011). For the full version, which includes greater detail and downloadable resource documents, visit: <http://www.nectac.org/effectiveservicedelivery/splash.asp>

This guide describes five major stages in the process of changing your state's service delivery approach and the critical considerations and steps that need to be addressed for each stage. While not a rigid sequence of activities, there is a logical flow. In actual implementation, the activities may cross stages and may be worked on simultaneously. Also, a change effort may begin at a later stage but back-track to do the work of the earlier stages.

Introduction

Over the last 10 years, states' lead agencies for Part C Infant and Toddler early intervention programs began to seriously examine their approach to service delivery for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families. Evidence from research, model demonstration and outreach projects has produced national awareness of validated practices in early intervention. There is a growing consensus about effective practices and the mission and principles of early intervention that are relevant across specific models, providing a "model neutral" view (see Key Principles and Practices for Providing Early Intervention Services in Natural Environments).

In addition to the growing evidence-base, increasing pressure from federal monitoring, growing numbers of children served, and difficulties of recruiting and retaining various disciplines to work in early intervention also motivated states to closely examine how the service system was structured, and the nature and timeliness of service delivery. State administrators began to explore the various team-based approaches to find a way to provide more efficient and effective services and to extend the reach of scarce personnel. By 2011, 34 states were engaged in work to explore or change their service delivery approach.

The stages and considerations were developed by analyzing 3 states' long term system change plans; reviewing the implementation literature and incorporating extensive feedback from NECTAC and NIRN staff with experience in implementing long term systems change. Resources were collected from a survey of state Part C Coordinators who are involved in this work, web searches and literature reviews.

The stages suggest a sequence of activities, but in actual implementation, some stages may be worked on simultaneously. Also, a change effort may begin at a later stage and then back track to do the work of earlier stages.

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1. Explore Service Delivery Approaches with Stakeholders

There are many nationally known models, evidence-based components and practices and trainers who can support adaptation or adoption of various approaches. A state, regional or local program must consider how any approach "fits" with their infrastructure, management and staffing. Most important, all stakeholders should be included in exploring approaches, and determining the "fit" with their values and their vision of the mission and principles of early intervention. An articulation of the critical components of the approach, including practices, processes and procedures is vital to guide implementation.

Step: Articulate Mission

Identify and bring together a diverse group of stakeholders that will develop a common understanding of the scope, mission and principles for the Part C Program.

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- Define the scope and purpose of Part C services provided under their Infant Toddler Program
- Develop or reaffirm mission and principles that will underlie the service delivery approach

Step: Compare Approaches

Explore service delivery approaches or models to select the core features and components of service delivery that the state wants to adopt/adapt.

- Review literature, gather information from other states and consultants
- Identify desired core features and functions of each approach; discuss benefits, implementation process and potential fiscal impact
- Choose the approach that best aligns with mission, values and desired direction for the state

Step: State Desired Changes

Compare the current service delivery system and practices to the desired approach and articulate the desired outcomes / changes needed.

- List the concerns /problems the state is trying to address, at all levels of the service system (e.g., state, regional, local services children and families)
- List desired outcomes/changes for all levels that the new approach will address
- Review infrastructure & current service delivery, including issues, concerns, strengths; what to keep and what to change

Step: Explore Implementation

Begin discussion about how to implement, evaluate and sustain new approach.

- Explore/measure readiness of potential adopters, commitment of leadership (Begin to plan the evaluation questions and methods)
- Study implementation and sustainability literature



2. Build Support and Commitment

Successful implementation of any service delivery approach is dependent on widespread support among a diverse stakeholder group. Change requires champions, advocates and committed leadership. Stakeholders likely to be resistant should also be included and their input used to address concerns and garner more persuasive information. Building multiple communication channels with the field and using those channels to get information out and reactions and feedback to the implementers is vital. Implementers need to build public support through sharing the vision of infant and toddler services and the research and information that supports it.

Step: Advocate for Changes

Provide multiple opportunities to raise stakeholder group's awareness, understanding and commitment so that they can advocate with their constituencies to support the selected service delivery approach.

- Make sure stakeholders understand the research and evidence base supporting service approach
- Provide multiple opportunities to raise stakeholders' awareness, to get questions asked and answered, to clarify what supports or changes are needed to successfully implement
- Use stakeholder input to tweak the service delivery approach and/or consider in the implementation plan

Step: Secure Leadership Support

Identify administrators and decision makers whose buy in will be needed to assure necessary support and resources for implementation and sustainability.

- Identify within the lead agency and supportive agencies (Medicaid, state insurance, collaborators) who will need to be supportive of the changes
- Use multiple relationship-building methods and communication strategies to turn them into champions who will help promote the service delivery approach

Step: Develop Communication Plan

Develop communication plan to build statewide understanding and buy in.

- Identify a variety of “audiences”, messages, materials, and formats appropriate to each
- Identify potential opposition, their issues and your response
- Develop multiple communication strategies assure you disseminate information out to stakeholders and get feedback from them
- Make sure your plan includes ways to use your stakeholders and champions to promote the service delivery approach

Step: Develop Messages/Materials

Develop, evaluate and refine "PR" materials/activities for your identified audiences.

- Broadly disseminate the Purpose of Part C, Mission and Principles statements
- Develop common language, benefits for all stakeholders (outcomes at all levels)
- Describe core features/ components of the new approach to service delivery
- Include evidence supporting the new approach



3. Develop Implementation Plan

A long term implementation plan creates a path to achieving desired outcomes of adopting the selected approach. Activities at each level of the service system are necessary to assure desired practices are supported and maintained, including infrastructure changes at state and regional/district and local levels, and T & TA capacity necessary to provide and sustain needed training. Funding plans need to address both start-up costs of implementation, as well as continued costs of sustaining the desired approach. The most important task during this stage is to create an implementation team, with consistent leader(s) and membership, which can develop the plan and oversee implementation. This team needs expertise in both the desired service delivery approach and implementation science.

Step: Build Implementation Team

Build implementation team to develop a written implementation plan, oversee all activities, track timelines and evaluate and make adjustments as needed.

- Be intentional about team make-up with representation from all levels of the system, varied experiences and perspectives and understanding of implementation
- Define the roles and responsibilities of the implementation team members and their long term commitment to implementation and sustainability
- Assure the team has the resources, information and skills necessary to lead the change effort
- Appoint a team leader and hold regular meetings to develop a plan and do the work

Step: Determine System Supports

Determine changes needed within state, regional and/or and local infrastructure, including funding mechanisms, to support and sustain the service delivery model.

- Determine change needed to administrative structures to support desired change in practice such as: contracts, Interagency Agreements, general supervision/oversight, policies and procedures, guidance and forms
- Determine changes needed in current funding mechanisms, find and align the fiscal resources to cover: start- up costs, infrastructure costs, resources, TA, training, materials, and new service delivery costs such as, team meetings, consultations, joint visits, etc.

Step: Build Training and TA Capacity

Build state capacity for training and TA to support and sustain the new service delivery approach over time.

- Conduct needs assessments and plan T & TA activities; determine T & TA materials, human resources needed
- Review and revise licensure and certification requirements, as needed to align with service delivery model
- Involve pre-service, higher education programs involvement to align pre-service teaching with service delivery approach
- Develop an evaluation plan to understand the effectiveness and outcomes of T & TA planned

Step: Draft Implementation Plan

Write and disseminate the implementation plan to address all of the above with: activities, timelines, benchmarks, evaluation, roles and responsibilities.

- Determine how to introduce and implement new approach over time (pilots, state wide implementation, incentives, and state-wide “kick-off”, outside expert consultant?)
- Develop communication and evaluation protocols, to assure on-going input from diverse stakeholders
- Use stakeholders group to disseminate the plan widely and institute multiple venues to receive feedback
- Incorporate important feedback and make changes to the plan to assure feasibility and timeliness
- Use a variety of methods to widely disseminate the completed plan



4. Implement the Plan

The implementation team actively facilitates each implementation activity and evaluates if benchmarks of success are met (the activity has accomplished intended outputs). If not or not entirely, the team asks "why not" and problem-solves. The activity or outputs may need adjustment; a different or supplemental activity may be needed. For example, a review of new policies and procedures may indicate areas where more clarity is needed or an evaluation of a training event or program may indicate that new procedural guidelines are necessary. Feedback loops are critical and the actual written plan needs to be continually revised and stakeholders kept apprised of any important changes. Piloting and field-testing all steps and outputs, including early implementation of practices is necessary to identify and make revisions, changes and adaptations before proceeding to full implementation.

Step: Adapt/Adjust Infrastructure

Adapt and adjust infrastructure (state and local) to assure consistency with and fidelity to the core features and practices of the service delivery model.

- Adjust administrative structures, revising contracts and Interagency Agreements as necessary
- Provide general supervision/oversight and implement credentialing programs
- Revise policies and procedures, guidance and forms
- Develop and implement fiscal policies and procedures and funding mechanisms

Step: Implement Training and TA

Build training and TA capacity and implement training and TA Plan activities at all levels: state-wide, regional, program, teams, individual providers, and families.

- Develop guidance and training materials, such as: on-line courses, written manuals, workshops agendas and presentations, etc.
- Implement training and TA Plan activities at all levels, such as: kickoff presentations, workshops, mentoring, reflective supervision, peer modeling, program visits
- Maintain relationships and provide materials to higher education and professional organizations to impact preservice education and licensing requirements

Step: Begin Implementation

Begin implementation of service delivery approach, using communication and evaluation protocols to problem solve barriers, test adaptations, and identify additional supports or infrastructure changes.

- Implementation team oversees all aspects of implementation, reviewing evaluation information and feedback
- Gather information about actual startup and implementation costs
- Plan and test adaptations, putting any additional supports and resources in place as needed.

Step: Fully Implement

Make necessary changes and move to full implementation, providing in adequate oversight and on-going support for practice.

- Use evaluation and monitoring mechanisms to assure fidelity to chosen approach and that desired results are being achieved
- Continuously update Implementation Plan with any changes in activities, timelines, benchmarks, evaluation, roles and responsibilities
- Implementation team continues to use information about what programs and providers need to continue and improve implementation and results



5. Assure Sustainability

Thinking about sustainability is important from the beginning and throughout the implementation stages. From the beginning, the exploration of various approaches should consider what it would cost in fiscal, human and material resources to sustain an approach. After implementation is underway, building ways to continually check fidelity and success in achieving results with children and families must be built into on-going monitoring and quality assurance procedures. Most important, keeping track of progress, sharing successes, keeping champions (spokespersons and advocates) active and stakeholders aware and involved will keep on-going implementation a priority, rather than allowing shift from fidelity.

Step: Maintain/Expand Support Base

Continue to maintain and expand the support base for the service delivery approach, through a variety of on-going activities and strategies.

- Make sure the Champions are active and new Champions are nurtured
- Disseminate a variety of public awareness activities including evaluation results, child and family outcomes, testimonials, cost benefits, etc.
- Keep the focus and priorities on continued quality implementation



Step: Continue Infrastructure/Fiscal Support

Continue to review and revise infrastructure and provide fiscal resources to support on-going implementation.

- Track information about on-going actual costs to support the service delivery approach
- Review and revise policy, procedure, guidance, forms, program structures, job descriptions, team assignments and organization, etc.
- Continue to explore and expand fiscal resources

Step: Continue T/TA for Fidelity

Provide on-going orientation, training, TA and supervision to support fidelity to desired practices over time.

- Recruit and orient new staff to be able to provide services according to the service delivery approach
- Provide tiered training and support opportunities that match the experience and skill levels of all staff involved in implementation.
- Provide on-going mentoring, reflective supervision
- Continuously fund team-level support and learning opportunities
- Update and expand training materials, on-line courses, workshops, etc.

Step: Evaluate for Fidelity/Quality

Conduct on-going evaluation of fidelity and quality practices.

- Integrate measures of quality practice into on-going monitoring
- Provide fiscal incentives for quality practice
- Assure provider contracts support service approach
- Implementation team uses evaluation and monitoring results to maintain and improve the service delivery approach

The National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (NECTAC) is supported by cooperative agreement H326H060005 with the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), U.S. Department of Education (ED). NECTAC is a part of OSEP's Technical Assistance and Dissemination (TA&D) Network. Grantees undertaking projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express their judgment in professional and technical matters. Opinions expressed do not necessarily represent the Department of Education's position or policy.

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