

Key Considerations for Reaching and Maintaining Implementation/Practice Fidelity

Fidelity refers to the degree to which an intervention or practice is delivered as intended by the developers and achieves expected results. Fidelity implies strict and continuing faithfulness to the original innovation or practice. Fidelity can be measured and compared to previous or future efforts to deliver the intervention or practice.

The Program Leadership Team (PLT) will make many decisions to guide the implementation process to fidelity. As the program launches efforts for implementation, the Leadership Team will be making critical decisions about resource allocation, procedures, policies, professional development, data collection, and staff support. The team must be organized, meet monthly, use teaming skills, and have an explicit decision-making process. The Program Coach will help guide the PLT through the process to reach fidelity.

1. The PLT will use data to guide their decision-making. Using data to guide the implementation will help teams know exactly what is working, where it is working, and why it is working. Without this kind of information, teams can waste a lot of valuable time training and creating resources or making changes that will have little influence over their desired outcomes.
2. Making sure that all program staff are on board with the change process is critical to the process of implementation. Staff must become aware of the initiative and support the changes before the PLT begins implementation. All staff must then be trained on all aspects of the program-wide initiative (i.e., processes and practices). The PLT should make sure to regularly share their action plan and data with all staff. The staff must feel comfortable asking questions and requesting additional information or resources regarding implementation from the Leadership Team.
3. Research suggests that, in order to see high-fidelity implementation, programs will need to provide training and practice-based coaching for all staff. The provision of practice-based coaching is critical to assisting practitioners in the implementation of EBPs with children and families. Program Leadership Teams will be required to include personnel who will be trained by the Program Coach as practitioner coaches and to establish a process for providing coaching to program staff. The goal of coaching is to support practice fidelity.
4. The program will use data to guide coaching content that is focused on fidelity of implementation of EBPs. The Program Leadership Team will use needs assessments, observation tools, and other sources of data to determine how to deliver coaching. Coaches will use action plans, observation tools, and other sources of data to guide coaching activities that result in implementation and intervention fidelity.

5. Please remember that implementation of any new initiative should not be thought of as a single event. It is a mission-oriented process that involves multiple complex decisions, actions, and corrections. Implementing EBPs in programs should be considered a journey. Teams should understand that implementation can take two-to-four years to be completed program-wide with fidelity.

How Do We Maintain Fidelity at Implementation Sites?

Reaching fidelity is a great accomplishment for any program. However, research has shown that it is essential to install processes and procedures to ensure that fidelity is maintained over time. This goal is one reason why Program Coaches are available to all sites even after they have reached fidelity. While the steps below should be in place for all Implementation Sites, it is critical for the State Leadership Team (SLT) to ensure them for Demonstration Sites.

1. State Leadership Teams need to establish a yearly MOU between the team and each demonstration site. The MOU should specify: a) what supports the SLT will provide/broker; b) data to be provided to the SLT; c) expectations for site visits; d) expectations for functioning of the demonstration site leadership team; e) availability of practitioner coach(es); and f) any policies/procedures needed to support the EBPs.
2. It is strongly recommended that the SLT organize an annual meeting to highlight the work of each Demonstration site. Sites can present and learn from one another, and the SLT can highlight the major accomplishments of each site. This meeting is also a great opportunity for the SLT to be reminded that their work at policy and support levels has real and tangible effects on the lives of children, adult family members, and those that serve them.
3. One predictable event that we know occurs with frustrating frequency is that personnel in EC change jobs. This turnover issue can have a devastating effect on implementation fidelity, but it need not be so. In order to maintain fidelity, SLTs need to ensure that sites have multiple practitioner coaches available as well as on-going training and program coaching. From a logistical and fiscal standpoint, it may take a couple of years to achieve such capacity.
4. Related to the turnover issue mentioned above, it is also crucial that the SLT promote ongoing policies, procedures, and necessary funding at each program to ensure that new staff members are brought up to speed on the use of the designated EBPs.

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