What is an Implementation Plan?

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An implementation plan is a planning tool used to document key aspects guiding a change effort, including implementation goals, strategies used, person(s) responsible, and timeline. Depending on the needs of a team or project, implementation plans may also include additional details such as resources needed, anticipated barriers or facilitators to implementation, anticipated adaptive challenges, or measures of progress (data).[1,2] Ideally, implementation plans document the work to be done so that everyone is clearly aware of the scope, roles, responsibilities, data monitoring, communications, time frames, team structures, and related aspects.

Who should be involved in creating an implementation plan?

The process of creating an implementation plan is best done collaboratively and co-created with those who will have a role in the implementation of the new program or practice and those who will be impacted by the change. This may include not only the team of staff responsible for overseeing day-to-day aspects of implementation, but additional critical perspectives from leadership (formal and informal leaders), diverse system and/or community partners, and youth and their families.

An implementation plan includes:

- Implementation goal- *What do we want to accomplish?*
- Strategies selected- *How will we do it?*
- Roles and team structures- *Who will do what?*
- Timeline & milestones- *By when?*
- Communications and feedback processes- *How will we communicate, in what forms, with whom, when?*

May also include:

- Resources needed
- Barriers & facilitators
- Adaptive challenges
- Data measures

Best practices to consider:

☑ Embed equity: Create an implementation plan through the lens of equitable implementation[3]; consider how and where explicit attention to equity is demonstrated in each component of your plan.

☑ Clearly identify roles and responsibilities: Specifying who will be responsible for each strategy or action item helps to create clarity and accountability among team members. Ensure that members who are assigned a role have the capacity (capacity= resources + abilities) to reasonably deliver what is being asked of them.

☑ Clearly document teaming structures: Consider how implementation teams, task teams or subcommittees, and others routinely link back to leaders and co-design partners who can facilitate ongoing problem solving, resourcing the work, and ensuring attention to administrative and cross-system supports.

☑ Create timelines that are realistic and achievable within your practice context: Collaboratively determine timelines for each task to track and monitor progress. Because implementation is not always linear and adaptive challenges may emerge during plan execution, teams may find that timelines need to be adjusted to remain realistic and achievable.[2] That's okay!

☑ Ensure selected implementation strategies align with implementation goals: Strategies should be well-matched to your team's identified goal and contextualized to fit your practice setting and program needs.[4] For example, selecting "training" as a primary strategy to facilitate progress on a team's goal of engaging youth and families to better understand their perspective and needs would not likely result in the desired outcomes. Better aligned strategies might include conducting focus groups in an accessible location within the community or using social media to reach and engage youth partners.

☑ Not "one and done": An implementation plan is a tool that is best utilized *throughout* the process of implementing your evidence-based practice or program. It guides collaborative conversations among co-creation partners to monitor progress, assess emerging needs, engage in collective learning and problem-solving, and celebrate wins as you move through targeted milestones.

Additional Resources

Collaborative for Implementation Practice/NIRN: Implementation Plan Template & Examples

Australian Institute of Family Studies: Implementation in Action Guide

1. Collaborative for Implementation Practice (2024, 28 February). *Implementation Plan Template and Examples.* https://www.implementationpractice.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/NIRN-CIP-Implementation-Plan-Template-and-Examples-fillable-v1.pdf

2. Australian Institute of Family Studies. (2019, June). *Implementation in action*. Retrieved from https://aifs.gov.au/resources/practice-guides/implementation-action

3. Metz, A., Woo, B., & Loper, A. (2021). Equitable implementation at work. *Stanford Social Innovation Review. 19*(3). https://ssir.org/articles/entry/equitable_implementation_at_work

4. Powell, B.J., Beidas, R.S., Lewis, C.C., Aarons, G.A., McMillen, J.C., Proctor, E.K., Khinduka, S.K., & Mandell, D.S. (2018). Methods to improve the selection and tailoring of implementation strategies. *Journal of Behavioral Sciences Research, 44*(2), 177-194. https://doi.org/10.1007%2Fs11414-015-9475-6