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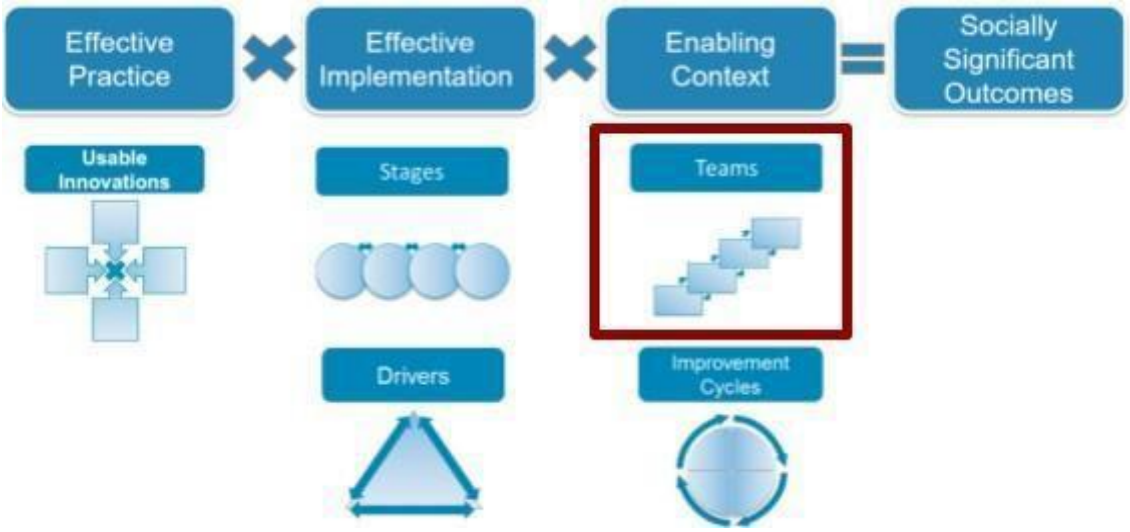
Implementation Teams Overview



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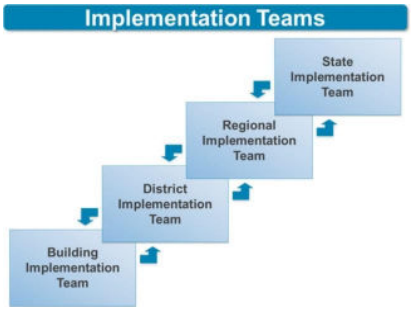
Introduction

Definition



An **Implementation Team** is a group of collaborators that oversees, attends to, and is accountable for key functions of program, selection, implementation, and improvement. More specifically, an Implementation Team focuses its energy on developing and sustaining capacity to assure identified student, staff, and/or family outcomes are achieved. An Implementation Team also engages in work that ensures relevant data are communicated up and across the system. To engage in this work effectively and efficiently, Implementation Teams require members with specific knowledge, skills, and abilities, including a general belief in the work ahead. As we unpack this further in this module, you will find we use state (SEAs) and local educational systems (LEAs) as context, for example, and application activities.

Key Takeaways

- Name the “what” (functions) and “who” (composition) of Implementation Teams
- Understand how Implementation Teams support adoption, scaling, and sustainability through a linked infrastructure
- Assess current teaming structures to determine if a new team should

be developed or if an existing team can be repurposed
- Locate tools and resources to facilitate identification of selection criteria to guide the development of Implementation Teams
- Identify how to support and sustain effective Implementation Teams

Terminology

- **SEA** - State Educational Agency
- **LEA** - Local Educational Agency
- **EBP** - Evidence-based Program (or Practice)
- **BIT** - Building Implementation Team
- **DIT** - District Implementation Team
- **DMT** - District Management Team
- **RIT** - Regional Implementation Team
- **SIT** - State Implementation Team
- **SMT** - State Management Team
- **FTE** - Full-Time Equivalence

If we look at the Active Implementation Formula (see above), it is important to start with the end in mind. Socially Significant Outcomes for students represent the “why” in the equation. We want to improve instructional practices and behavioral supports to improve student outcomes. The “what” in the equation is Effective Practices. We need to know “what” it is we’re going to be implementing so that we can ensure Effective Implementation, the “how” in the equation. Through Effective Implementation, we create the infrastructure to ensure the practice or program is in place, being used as intended, and producing outcomes.

“Who” facilitates the work? Leadership Teams support the work at all levels, focused on building capacity and using data to support implementation and improve outcomes as part of Enabling Context, the next component of our equation.

Implementation Teams are at the ***center*** of Active Implementation. Their role supports implementation, sustainability, and scale-up of Usable Innovations. By integrating a stage-based approach (Implementation Stages) and developing the system's capacity (Implementation Drivers), Implementation Teams can ensure robust systems and practices are in place, which allows for the support of effective and efficient implementation (Improvement Cycles). Forming an Implementation Team does not mean that a new team must be developed; existing positions or teams can often be repurposed. Essential criteria to inform the selection of Implementation Team members and deciding whether a new team should be formed or a current one repurposed are shared later on.

Implementation Teams are actively involved in facilitating the work of improving the competency and confidence of educators' use of effective programs or practices in their classrooms. With this in mind, we will dig deeper into how Implementation Teams support full and effective use of Usable Innovations in the context of a SEA.

Topic 1: Leadership Teams Descriptions

Linked Implementation Teams

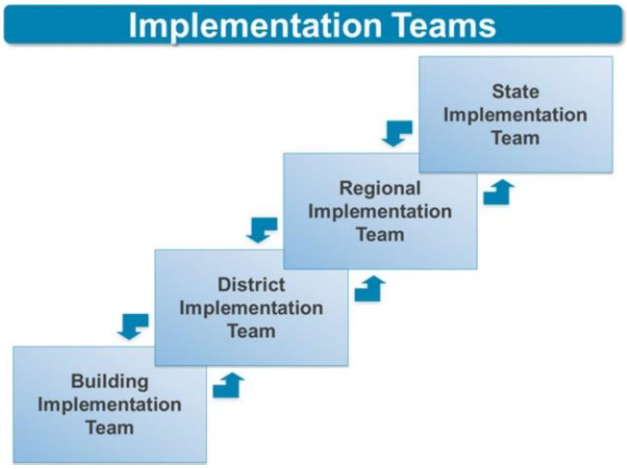


Figure 3.1: Simultaneous, Multi-Level Team Alignment in an Educational System

One Implementation Team in a state agency is not enough to assure excellent outcomes for all students. To use effective evidence-based programs or practices (EBPs) on a broad scale requires a thoughtful arrangement of connected or linked Implementation Teams. While this may seem complicated, keep in mind that Implementation Teams make use of the same Active Implementation Frameworks at each level. As you review the visual shared (Figure 3.1, above), you will see an example of how each team is embedded across an education system and its targeted tasks across that context. Notably, each team is charged with doing its part to a) support the work of teams at the level “below” them, b) share information about what is working and what barriers are present with their level “above” them, and c) engage in activities that ensure that the overall linked infrastructure is developed to:

- Support staff in delivering the EBP as intended and improving outcomes for students;
- Sustain the EBP over time and across staff;
- Scale-up the EBP over time and across units; and
- Ensure continuous improvement of fidelity and student outcomes.

An infrastructure of linked Implementation Teams contributes to creating coherent and aligned systems. By working together with a singular focus on the quality

implementation of programs and practices, Implementation Teams promote a shared culture of innovation with the attainment of desired outcomes.

Building, District, and Regional Implementation Teams in an Educational System

Each team is a part of the implementation infrastructure that leads efforts to support staff competence, build and sustain organization supports, and monitor implementation at and below their respective level. Likewise, they have dedicated personnel full-time equivalence (FTE) to engage in best practice implementation work.

Building Implementation Teams

The Building Implementation Team (BIT) focuses on helping teachers and staff in the school to use EBPs with fidelity and achieve intended outcomes. The BIT is the cornerstone of an effective system of implementation. Their role is to ensure ongoing, data-informed training and coaching. Through a continuous improvement process, the BIT mitigates barriers to implementation and monitors action planning and the feasibility, use, and impact of practices and programs being implemented.

BITs are essential to support teachers and staff as they use effective programs and practices in their daily interactions with students, colleagues, and family members. Students will benefit (or not) depending on the quality of those interactions. The use of EBPs through Active Implementation are, by definition, new and different from typical education practices. Teachers and staff should not be expected to somehow “just do it.” They deserve the support of a team that ensures they have the right resources, support, and an Enabling Context in which to use the targeted practices within the EBP.

District Implementation Teams

School-based Implementation Teams (i.e., BITs) are developed and supported by District Implementation Teams (DITs). Effective use of EBPs within a school requires responsive and active engagement from the district level. The primary roles of a DIT are twofold. First, the District Implementation Team (DIT) works to develop effective Building Implementation Teams (BITs) in each building in the district using the EBP. Using the Active Implementation Frameworks as a guide, DITs help form BITs, support the development of team competencies, help principals and staff adjust school administrative practices to align with teachers’ use of effective the program or practice, and help assure leadership engagement with and support for effective EBPs and

Implementation Team functions. Second, the DIT supports the development of a district-wide infrastructure for building competency in the implementation of evidence-based practices selected for use. This includes systems for the selection of critical staff, professional learning, coaching, and data collection and analysis. Without the organizational support of the DIT, it is difficult for the BIT to create and use the level of resources needed to sustain the program or practices with fidelity.

Regional Implementation Teams

Like teachers and schools, districts also need support for developing Implementation Teams. A Regional Implementation Team (RIT) aims to create an effective District Implementation Team (DIT) in each district in its region using the EBPs. The primary function of the RIT is to leverage resources to build capacity in districts (through the DIT) to use Implementation Science to adopt, use and sustain best practices. This includes helping the districts focus not just on the current program or practice, but also on using a stage-based approach to develop, operate, and continuously improve systems of training, coaching, data use, communication, and policy development that can be leveraged for any EBP. RITs are formed, developed, and supported by a State Implementation Team.

State Implementation Teams

State Implementation Teams (SIT) function as a critical intermediary between the State Management Team (SMT) and regional and district teams. The State Management Team (SMT) is comprised of the Chief State School Officer and state department of education decision makers who provide executive leadership for education and management within the SEA. In their role, the State Implementation Team (SIT) supports the regions and districts within a Transformation Zone approach to leverage policy, funding, and regulations from the SMT to implement EBPs. Likewise, the SIT also communicates barriers and implementation success from regions and districts to the SMT in a Practice-Policy Feedback Loop so that leadership at the state level can create and maintain an infrastructure that meets the needs of diverse students within the state. Additionally, the SIT allocates resources and builds competency in teams throughout the cascade of linked teaming structures.

For more information about functions and membership across different Implementation Teams in education, see the 1-page descriptions below. Consider reviewing the description for the level you and your team support. Then, review a level above, and/or below.

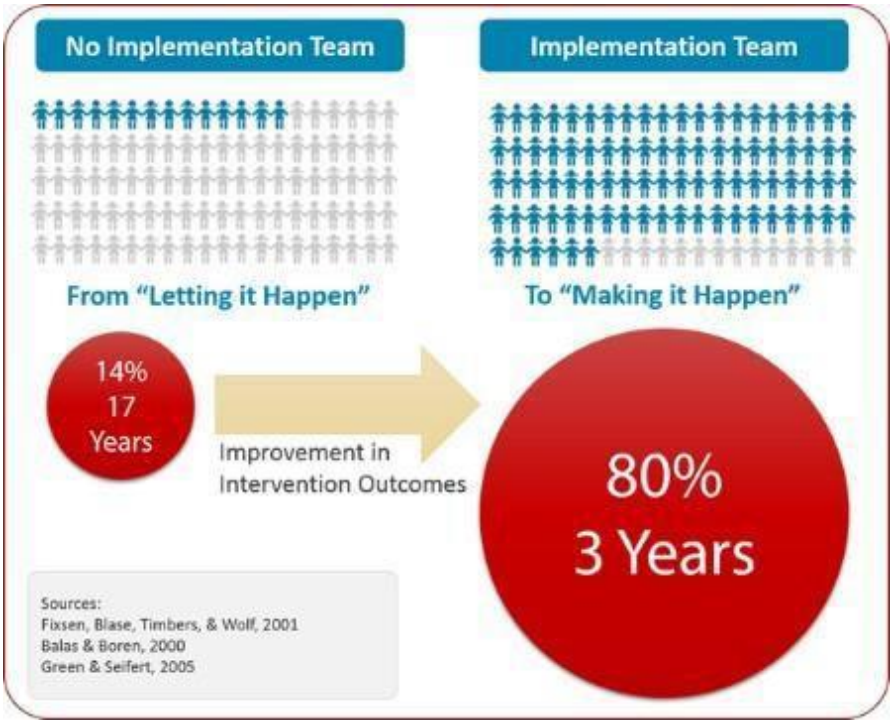
- Building Implementation Team (BIT)
- District Implementation Team (DIT)
- Regional Implementation Team (RIT)
- State Implementation Team (SIT)
- Usable Innovation Team (UIT)
- State Design Team (SDT)
- State Management Team (SMT)

Topic 2: Research and Rationales

Implementation Teams engage in stage-based work to identify and build upon current system strengths, help manage expectations, highlight systems change success, and focus on creating communication pathways among and across collaborators. The following sections will discuss rationales supporting their place in education systems and how their work facilitates effective and efficient use of evidence-based programs or practices (EBPs).

Why are Implementation Teams Important?

An investment in developing and supporting competence and capacity within Implementation Teams can lead to sustained use and dramatically improved outcomes in schools and districts. For example, with competent implementation teams' support, over 80% of attempted implementation sites used practices with fidelity. Without effective and efficient Implementation Teams, only 30% met fidelity criteria (Fixsen, Blase, Timbers, & Wolf, 2001). These authors also found that Implementation Teams contributed to increased success and efficiency, with the time required to achieve fidelity reduced from 17 to 3.6 years.



Implementation Teams are Key to Effective Implementation

A helpful distinction between passive and active ways to support effective implementation is anchored along a continuum from "letting it happen" to "helping it happen" to "making it happen" (Greenhalgh et al., 2004). Hall and Hord (1987) tied this same distinction to school leadership. Principals who employed more active, "making it happen" approaches to using EBPs were more successful. Fixsen and colleagues (2010) have applied these distinctions to implementation approaches:

"**Letting it happen**" – A policy or program has been mandated or adopted with minimal supports. Practitioners are expected to translate information to practice. Practitioners are held accountable for intended outcomes.

"**Helping it happen**" – A policy or program has been mandated or adopted with materials, training resources, and websites to support practitioners. Practitioners are left to figure out how to solve problems while being held accountable for achieving positive outcomes.

"**Making it happen**"– A policy or program has been mandated or adopted. Active and purposeful implementation best practices are used to support practitioners and administrators. An Implementation Team is accountable for developing the implementation support systems, resolving organization and system issues, and achieving positive outcomes.

Topic 3: Key Functions

We introduced the concept of an Implementation Team by sharing that it was a group of invested individuals who oversees, attends to, and is accountable for key functions of effective selection, implementation, and improvement related to evidence-based practice or program (EBP). A key aspect of this role of developing and sustaining capacity to assure academic and behavioral outcomes includes communication ensuring relevant information flows within and across the education agency and outward to include external individuals or groups such as families and community members. We will look more closely at each of these functions in the following sections.

Function 1: Ensure Implementation

Implementation of EBPs is a non-linear process with many challenges and setbacks. In education, Building, District, and Regional Implementation Teams will have the task of taking many schools and educators through the process so student outcomes can be improved purposefully. With the help of an Implementation Team, teachers and staff, district administrators, and regional entities will have support to reach Full Implementation more quickly and successfully. Even so, the process takes time and success is not guaranteed.

While there are unique roles and functions for Implementation Teams, there also are common functions that apply to any team in any stage. These functions include:

1. Assessing and creating ongoing “buy-in” and readiness
2. Installing and sustaining Implementation Drivers
3. Monitoring implementation fidelity of the EBP and related outcomes
4. Action Planning: Aligning system functions and managing stage-based work
5. Solving problems and building sustainability

Let’s have a little closer look at each of these stage-based activities.

1. Assessing and creating ongoing “buy-in” and readiness

Readiness for change seems to be an essential condition for successful change in a timely manner (Hall & Hord, 2011; Romney et al., 2014; Telfer, 2011). Readiness examines the extent in which individuals or groups are cognitively ready to accept and support implementation of the EBPs. Common questions asked by impacted individuals or groups are:

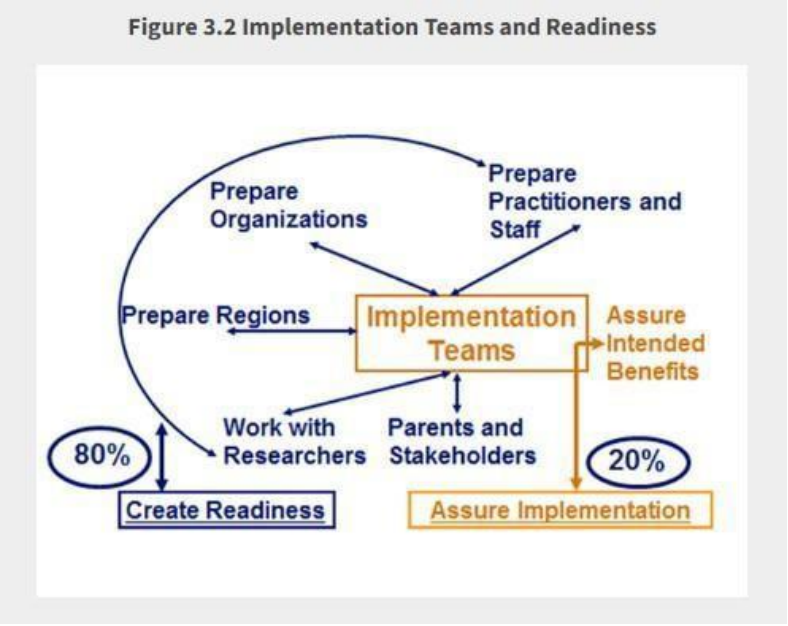
- What will be different this time?
- Is this just another 'fad' that will pass? Why should I invest my time or energy?
- What was wrong with the way we have been doing things? Does this mean I have been performing poorly?
- How can I get more information? How can I participate?

Implementation Teams provide information about the reasons for change; the program or practice; and, the implementation supports and commitment of leaders to make changes in the system that will facilitate the effective use of EBPs in classrooms, buildings, and districts. Implementation Team work supports the "buy-in" process, assessing and measuring individual's or group's buy-in for change, and works to create readiness.

Creating Readiness in Education

There are increasing demands on educators. Waiting for readiness to occur simultaneously among teachers, schools, and districts may take a long time and leave the education system churning around a mediocre mean. An alternative is to support Implementation Teams so they can help create readiness. The figure below shows that an important function of Implementation Teams is to work with various individuals and groups to help them think about the need for change, get ready for change, and to actively participate in the change process. Creating Readiness is 80% of the work of an Implementation Team.

Figure 3.2 Implementation Teams and Readiness



2. Installing and sustaining Implementation Drivers

Each Team, at each level of the system, needs to be purposeful in deciding its role and responsibility in installing, sustaining, and improving Implementation Drivers. Implementation Drivers are the key components of capacity, and the functional infrastructure supports, that enable a program to be implemented as intended. Supporting the use of EBPs with fidelity increases the likelihood of creating positive student outcomes. Each Implementation Team has a role to play in ensuring Implementation Drivers are of high quality, funded, sustainable, and improved over time. And collectively the Implementation Teams need to ensure that all the Implementation Drivers are put to good use to support teachers and staff so that students benefit.

3. Monitoring implementation fidelity of the EBP and related outcomes

Fidelity Assessments provide valuable information the Team can use for action planning and decision making.

- Fidelity and Decision Support Data Systems help determine whether the EBP is being used as intended in interactions with students (e.g. formative) and if the use of the EBP is producing positive results for all students in a classroom, school, or district (e.g., summative).
- Data about fidelity and outcomes give an Implementation Team the detailed information needed to develop Drivers Action Plans. If the results are not as positive as expected, the team can determine if results are due to selecting an inappropriate or ineffective program or practice (high fidelity/poor outcomes), or are due to a lack of fidelity in its implementation (low fidelity/poor outcomes). If the results meet current expectations (high fidelity/good outcomes), Action Plans can be developed to improve effectiveness and efficiency. Very different action plans will be developed depending on the results of this analysis.

4. Action Planning: Aligning systems and managing stage-based work

Implementation Teams do the purposeful work of action planning around the Implementation Stages. Teams hold regular meetings to Stage-base Action Plan to:

- Guide and direct activities based on data collection regarding readiness for each stage of work
- Ensure implementation supports are in place to ensure fidelity of the selected EBP

- Ensure that system functions are aligned to support the new EBP and they are diligent in referring issues of "misalignment" to relevant teams or individuals for resolution

5. Solving problems and building sustainability

Team engage Improvement Cycles to problem solve and build sustainability. Teams hold regular meetings to examine outcome and fidelity data, to Action Plan on what was learned to build and maintain the infrastructure to support the delivery of effective EBPs.

They establish feedback loops between and among the various levels of teams to:

- Share information about the facilitators to successful implementation
- Identify and remove barriers to successful implementation
- Routinely communicate directly with policymakers and administrators who can address roadblocks and develop systemic solutions to systems problems

Function 2: Engaging Critical Perspectives

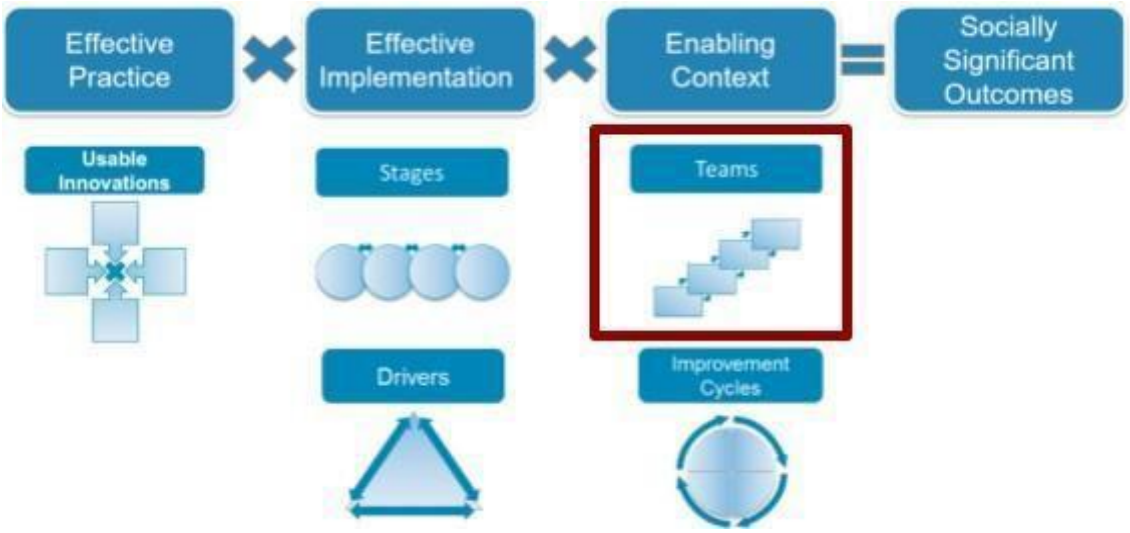
A critical role and function of any Implementation Team is to engage Critical Perspectives. Involving critical perspectives in a meaningful way creates opportunities to share information, address concerns, "mine" the expertise they bring, and build support for decisions.

In Education, depending on the EBP, critical perspectives may include genuine parent/family partnership that is representative of all students, union representation, as well as school improvement and community partners such as mental health, early childhood services, etc.

Genuine outreach and transparent communication support Implementation Teams in making sound decisions and monitoring the impact of their decisions. Decisions that can benefit from broader community input can range from:

- Deciding on which EBPs to support based on need,
- Evaluating the evidence related to the effectiveness of the EBP, and
- Assessing the quality of the data being collected (how reliable and valid are the data).

Function 3: Create Hospitable Environments



An “Enabling Context” is part of Active Implementation’s “formula of success”. Implementation Teams actively create Hospitable Environments to ensure that an enabling context exists to support new ways of work. Any given Implementation Team has areas that are under their control; areas that they can improve to create a more hospitable environment (e.g. scheduling, resources, curriculum choices, professional development resource allocation). Other areas are beyond their sphere of influence. Still, they need to be addressed. This means the Implementation Team needs to systematically and transparently communicate with other teams who can positively influence the policy, regulatory, and funding environments at their level.

How do Implementation Teams create a hospitable environment? Not only does the team collectively have the knowledge, skills and abilities - they have the authority and time to address barriers and to identify and refer issues they cannot resolve to teams who can.

Topic 4: Establishing Implementation Teams

Building Implementation Teams and selecting members does not necessarily mean hiring new professionals or adding a "new" team. Instead, start by assessing existing teams and personnel. Can an existing team be "repurposed" or redesigned for this work? Might people be added to a current team as part of the repurposing? What other factors are there to consider? Let's have a look.

How large should the team be?

We recommend a minimum of **5 to 7 diverse individuals serve as core Implementation Team members**. Other individuals can participate in Implementation Team activities as needed based on their expertise. However, these individuals may not require the same amount of time to participate in ongoing work (e.g., between meetings). We recommend 5 to 7 members, so the Implementation Team is sustainable. As individuals leave, remaining team members can carry on while a new member is brought on and learns the complex sets of skills required of Implementation Team members.

What selection criteria should guide the creation of an Implementation Team?

The Implementation Team is comprised of diverse individuals who collectively have the expertise and a wide range of experiences and perspectives necessary to implement the evidence-based practice or program (EBP) and develop and maintain the system and infrastructures to support effective and equitable implementation. One or more members of the core Implementation Team should have competency and experiences aligned with the context in which the EBP will be used in at least one of the following areas.

There should be Implementation Team members who:

- **Know the evidence-based program** – Implementation Teams possess the knowledge, skills and abilities to implement the EBP. For example, in education, Implementation Teams are fluent in instructional practices or behavioral interventions and understand proficient practice. They know what supports are available through the curriculum or intervention developer/purveyor and what supports need to be put in place and supported to promote teacher competency.

When a new EBP is adopted, knowledge of the direct program or practice may not be available, and the Implementation Team's familiarity with a similar practice will meet this need.

- **Know and use Implementation Science and best practices** – Implementation Teams are well-versed in the key components of Implementation Science. They understand Implementation Stages and appropriate activities for each stage. They are knowledgeable about Implementation Drivers and can assess the integrated and compensatory nature of their functioning.
- **Employ Improvement Cycles** – Implementation Teams make good use of Plan, Do, Study, Act Cycles, Usability Testing, and Practice-Policy Feedback Loops to continually improve the quality of the components of implementation, the use of the program or practices, and the system. They continuously identify and address challenges and barriers to effective implementation and achieving positive outcomes. If these skills are not readily available, using an improvement mindset and data-based decision-making will work as an entry-level skill until more advanced knowledge of improvement science can be developed.
- **Promote and participate in systems changes** – Implementation Team work at multiple levels of the system to create hospitable environments, cultures, policies, guidelines, data systems, and funding streams.
- **Flexibility to deal with ambiguity and ongoing change** – Implementation Teams are open to engaging in iterative cycles of improvement and action planning. This also includes being comfortable with challenging the status quo.
- **Ensure adequate FTE** - Implementation Teams dedicate FTE (personnel full-time equivalence). This is a critical factor to consider as it is necessary to dedicate time and workload capacity to implementation activities and support.
- **Willingness to engage in work** – The Implementation Team must want to engage in and be accountable for selecting, implementing, and monitoring improvement related to the use of the EBP.

Topic 5: Teaming Process

When Implementation Teams and interested collaborators are clear about their purpose, membership, processes, and ways of work from the outset, they are better able to avoid misunderstandings and engage in more focused work.

To protect, engage and guide the work of Implementation Teams, early on it is helpful to create Working Agreements. Working Agreements ensure the Team has the necessary:

- "Face time" to work as a whole Implementation Team, plus time for task-oriented small group work between meetings
- Timely access to relevant and reliable student academic and behavioral data as well as implementation fidelity data
- Clarity of the role of the Team and its members
- Reminders of the focus of the work and of the agreed upon ways of work when the work gets complicated
- Connections to Implementation Teams horizontally within an organization (i.e., teams across the school or teams across the district) that serve different and distinct functions; and vertically within the education system (classroom to SEA)

Working Agreements help clarify the Implementation Team's purpose, membership, processes, and ways of work from the outset.

Summary

In summary, Implementation Teams need to be developed at multiple levels of the system, with the key function to develop and sustain capacity to assure implementation of EBPs. Implementation Teams use data to improve implementation, communicating relevant data up and across the system.

Key Takeaways

1. Implementation Teams establish an aligned and linked teaming infrastructure that can help integrate, sustain, and scale-up innovations with fidelity over time.
2. Key teaming structures for an education system are:
    - Building Implementation Team (BIT)
    - District Implementation Team (DIT)
    - Regional Implementation Team (RIT)
    - State Implementation Team (SIT)
    - State Design Team (SDT)
    - State Management Team (SMT)
3. Implementation Teams support and sustain the widespread use of EBPs by leveraging Implementation Science principles and using systems change best practices. Implementation Teams “Make it Happen.”
4. The primary functions of Implementation Teams are to:
    - Ensure Implementation
    - Engage the Community
    - Create Hospitable Environments
5. Implementation Teams typically include 5-7 individuals with time allocated to engage in implementation infrastructure development. This means face-to-face time as a team, as well as working between meetings.

Resources

Read

- Brief: Engaging Critical Perspectives
  In educational spaces, it is no longer aspirational but imperative that the community—with its richness and diversity—joins educators as key instructional partners to liberate the creativity, uniqueness, and potential of all students. As educators, we can miss the value of this collaboration. This brief defines critical

perspectives, why engagement is necessary, how to select and engage critical perspectives, and evaluate the process.

- Handout: Implementation Teams in Education
  This resource contains handouts for the various teams that may be involved in an educational setting. The resources span from state-level agencies to build-level in the teaming cascade.

Watch

- Voices from the Field Video Series (Implementation Teams)
  Voices from the Field Video Series: Implementation Teams

Listen

- Podcast: Implementation Science for Educators Podcast (Implementation Teams)
  Implementation Science for Educators Podcasts: Implementation Teams

Reflect

- Activity: Getting started with Implementation Teams
  So, how could you leverage the Implementation Teams framework in your work? Consider the following questions when creating teaming structures to support new programs and innovations. Discuss these with your team and/or to write down your responses.
- Activity: Team Selection Criteria
  You have decided to explore the potential of having an Implementation Team in your building, district, region or state. Looking across your organization, is there an existing team that could be repurposed? Or, do you need to start fresh?

Apply

- Lesson: Communication Protocol – Linking Teams
  To be effective, useful to the work of the organization and include all appropriate levels, communication must be strategically planned and consciously monitored. This lesson introduces you to a tool for creating a strategic plan for communication in your organization.

- Tool: Implementation Team Checklist
  This checklist should be completed quarterly by the Implementation Team to monitor the development and use of core implementation components.

For additional resources, visit: https://implementation.fpg.unc.edu/resources/

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