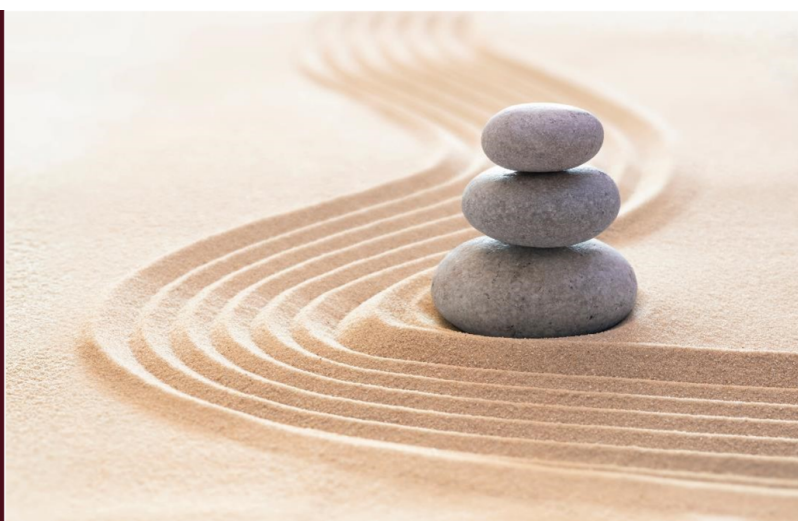# Introduction to Implementation

An Excerpt from the Collective Progress
Implementation Roadmap

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Brief Profile on Collective Progress

Collective Progress is a diverse, women-owned and operated business that supports clients in innovating and sustaining equity-centered, evidence-informed policy, practices, and decision-making through the facilitation of systems planning, site-level implementation, organizational learning, and staff development. We work in the private and public sectors and specialize in behavioral health, human services, child welfare, education, government, criminal and juvenile justice.

We work to advance equitable systems and improved outcomes for all. We prioritize relationships, evidence, and ground-up perspectives. We balance fidelity and adaptation because practices are rarely developed with diverse groups and points of view.

Our goals are to make implementation science relevant and accessible and to build the capacity of our systems to implement in a way that honors those most impacted by the change. Effective EDI-centered implementation is the key to actualizing (and sustaining) the intended outcomes of any solution. Without implementation capacity AND diverse representation that is inclusive and centered in equity, any evidence-based solution, even those perfectly suited for a system or program, will fade and be replaced by the status quo.

The following compiles research and practice on implementation, and relevant equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) topics from key leaders in the field. The research and practice concepts have been translated to improve accessibility and alignment with what has been the common experience for practitioners driving change in real-world settings.

Produced for Illuminate Colorado, the following is an excerpt from a Roadmap to Implementation designed to guide systems and organizations through an implementation process centered in EDI. The content below is an introduction to implementation developed to support the preparation phase.

A note about using, copying, building upon, or distributing this guide and resources: we **have adapted this statement from Equity Meets Decision. We give them credit for their thoughtful approach to dissemination and appreciate their leadership:**

Through the dissemination of this material we can support capacity-building of equity-informed implementation practitioners in some small way. We encourage and support the sharing of these resources in good faith and ask that you honor this by not appropriating, co-opting, or repackaging our work as your own. Please cite Collective Progress and the other leaders of implementation and EDI referenced here. Using this work for commercial purposes is not permitted. We welcome you to reach out for additional information or questions at cpinfo@collectiveprogress.net.

Suggested Citation: Airozo, A & Siman,S. (2022). Implementation Roadmap. An Equity and Implementation Science-Centered Guide to Implementation.Collective Progress.

Staff Development

Preparation requires development of anyone carrying out a change. It is often taken for granted that people leading a systems or organizational implementation are well versed in the topic itself, or know how to lead through change. In reality, competence varies.

Staff Development Preparation activities

1. Develop a shared understanding of implementation, equity, and systems leadership.
2. Develop a shared understanding of the innovation.*
3. Understand the disparities of people served.

Then, ready the system for staff development at the site level:
4. Establish selection, training, coaching, and practice group leads.
5. Develop training and coaching plans to align sites.
6. Establish Implementation Support Teams (IST) to help align and support skill development plans at the site level.

In addition to building knowledge in group process topics like collaboration and decision-making, it is increasingly more critical to build knowledge in implementation, equity, and leadership. Systems leadership is complex and it is becoming clearer that simply selecting evidence-based policies and practices is insufficient for improving outcomes. Implementation support and funding, as well as knowledge of local inequities and how to address them is critical to effective policies and their administration.

We are constantly asking under-funded and low-resourced systems to make wide-spread changes. These agencies are experiencing record high turnover while serving increasingly diverse populations with complex lives. If these policies and practices are really going to make a difference, we need to account for this gap between theory and the real world. We need tools that can help us leverage and address community context in a way that is culturally responsive and equitable. Informing decision-makers and stakeholders up-front about these critical knowledge areas is the first step.

During the preparation phase, provide information on equity, diversity, and inclusion-centered implementation and ensure all stakeholders, including implementation teams and practitioners, understand the new practice and intended changes.

*__Innovation.__ The solution identified to address a need, or through its use, produce a specific outcome that an organization or system is seeking to solve or provide. Innovations are the tangible products or services grounded in research that are put into practice through implementation. According to the National Implementation Research Network, an innovation must be operational, meaning it must be teachable, learnable, doable, and assessable, across a range of contexts

Phase 1: Prepare

# Develop a shared understanding of implementation, equity, and systems leadership

Implementation

We have all been through organizational change that does not stick—the reasons why are often evident in hindsight. Supervisors never brought up the change again. The yearly performance review did not include the practice, so staff prioritized other tasks, or forgot the skills learned.

Without effective implementation, 14% or less of changes will sustain.[1] Implementation practice assesses and addresses factors like the ones above so that change is more likely to stick. Implementation ensures the innovation achieves intended results and that practitioners have the skills and support vital to practicing the innovation as intended.

Formula For Success

Effective Innovations ✗ Effective Implementation ✗ Enabling Contexts

= Socially Significant Outcomes

NIRN/SISEP Active Implementation website

Successful implementation culminates in the right innovation, implementation practice, and a hospitable environment.[2] A hospitable environment includes organizational culture, staff motivation, communication, leadership, resources, and organizational capacity.
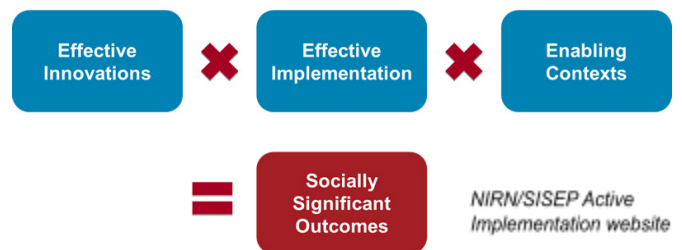
Tips

- Develop a targeted plan for middle managers. The success and failure of implementation depends on these stakeholders.[3]

- Inform people on implementation concepts.

- Allocate capacity and funding for change.

Tools & Resources

- [Six minute video on Active Implementation](#)

- [Extensive list of implementation strategies](#)

- [Implementation Brief in the Education Sector](#)

- [Guide to Implementation Concepts and Frameworks](#)

- [Free online Introduction to implementation training](#)[4]

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[1] Fixsen, Blase, Timbers, & Wolf (2001). Balas and Boren. (2000)

[2] National Implementation Research Network. University of Northern Carolina at Chapel Hill. Introduction to Implementation.

[3] Li, S. A., Jeffs, L., Barwick, M., & Stevens, B. (2018). Organizational contextual features that influence the implementation of evidence-based practices across healthcare settings: A systematic integrative review. Systematic Reviews, 7(1), 72.

[4] Center for Implementation (2021). Inspiring Change: Creating impact with evidence-based implementation.

Implementation Components

Implementation Science has identified several effective approaches that ensure an innovation is practiced as intended and sustained over time. In addition, there are a variety of frameworks that configure these categories of determining factors in differing ways.[5]

Referred to as **Implementation components** in this manual, they are sorted into categories often aligned with organizational department divisions and important implementation roles.

No organization executes the components of implementation perfectly. For example, a strength in staff development can compensate for challenges in leading change. On the other hand, when we silo implementation, such as when leaders fail to promote a change, then implementation is likely to fail. The National Implementation Research Network refers to this as **integrated and compensatory.[6]**

Each implementation component must align and integrate the goals, vision, and process of a new change. For example, an evaluation specialist will be involved in planning training to ensure staff learns documentation requirements while gaining clarity on data tracking needs.

1. **Engagement and Communication:** Identify representative stakeholders and their level of involvement. Develop a plan that maintains regular interaction and feedback loops. Build knowledge and motivation at all levels of a system.

2. **Leading Change:** Gather representative stakeholders to develop a vision, establish implementation teams to drive the work, assess the organization(s), and make an implementation plan(s). Guide the implementation process and lead the way with sponsorship. Address challenges and maintain momentum through the long hall. This component includes problem-solving at a systems level (legislation and advocacy) and alignment between policy and practice.

4. **Staff Development**: Select the people that will practice and guide the innovation. Provide training, coaching, and practice groups to drive practice change.

5. **Performance Management & Fidelity**: Identify the data to be collected (including fidelity components and measures), collect and analyze the data, report and make continuous improvement decisions.

6. **Infrastructure & Operations:** We need infrastructure and processes to lead, manage performance, communicate, and develop staff. Modify policies, build workflows, and establish data systems to maintain adherence to the change.

[5] Nilsen P. (2015). Making sense of implementation theories, models and frameworks. *Implementation science : IS*, *10*, 53. https://doi.org/10.1186/s13012-015-0242-0

[6] National Implementation Research Network. University of Northern Carolina at Chapel Hill. Integrated and Compensatory.

Phase 1: Prepare

Equitable Implementation

For implementation to be equitable, intentionally include those impacted from the start. This includes clients, front-line staff, and supervisors. Equitable implementation happens when we pay explicit attention to cultures, values, history, and the needs and resources of a community. It happens when we integrate them into our implementation frameworks.[7] Part of this process includes creating awareness around our own biases and noticing how they impact our processes and decision-making. **The original intention of implementation science was to bridge the gap between research and practice; however, until recently, cultural contexts still needed to be considered and addressed. Historically, evidence-informed interventions have not been adapted to fit the needs and lives of the people in the communities where they are delivered, creating even more significant gaps between research and practice**.

Frameworks for equitable implementation are still emerging, so we have the opportunity to apply what we know about inclusive practices, anti-racist and anti-bias approaches, and combating systemic oppression to our work. Together we can build pathways to future equitable implementation in our communities.

In addition to critical factors identified by researchers that contribute to successful, equitable implementation,[8] there are some foundational steps we can take as individuals and teams to center us in equity as we move forward.
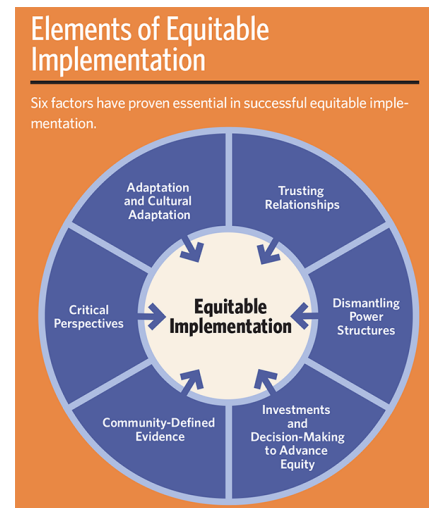
Equitable Implementation at Work, Metz, Woo & Looper, 2021

Tips

- **Learn terminology around equity, diversity, inclusion, and other related language and concepts, including anti-racism, critical race theory, and intersectionality**. Speaking the language will help naturalize these values in our workplace and increase awareness in our community interactions.
- **Conduct a cultural awareness self-assessment**. Encourage partners to do so.
- **Adopt an approach for operationalizing equity in your organization.** Clear, concrete steps and guidelines can facilitate a process where equity is at the center of organizational policy, practice, and implementation.
- **Facilitate ongoing discussions about equity, diversity, and inclusion among staff and leadership.** Explore and address biases. Create learning opportunities and discuss who is impacted in your organization and the communities served. Explore how to address access to opportunities and services. Engage in conversation about people's unique roles in social change.

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[7] Metz, A., Woo, B., & Loper, A. (2021). Equitable Implementation at Work. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, *19*(3), A29–A31. https://doi.org/10.48558/R793-6704
[8] ibid

- **From the start, ensure that everyone involved or impacted by an innovation or practice is at the table.** Continually reassess to ensure that all voices are included and heard. Consider compensating people for their time to contribute; those critical to the process are usually not paid staff.
- **Develop authentic relationships with people and communities.** Continue to build trust, finding ways to include voices without tokenizing. Remember that people and communities are not monolithic. Each person's perspective and voice are unique; don't rely on one person to represent all people with whom they culturally identify.
- **When exploring implementation solutions, follow a basic framework of questions to guide your work:**[9]
    - Are all groups affected by the policy, practice, or decision at the table?
    - How will the proposed policy, practice, or decision impact each group?
    - How will each group perceive the proposed policy, practice, or decision?
    - Does the policy, practice, or decision ignore or worsen existing disparities?
    - Based on the responses to the questions above, what revisions to policies, practices, or decisions are needed?

Tools & Resources

- [Is My Implementation Practice Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Racial Equity Toolkit: An Opportunity to Operationalize Equity](#)
- [Equity at the Center of Implementation](#)
- [Equitable Implementation at Work](#)
- [Equity is fundamental to implementation science](#)
- [Bringing Equity to Implementation: Incorporating community experience to improve outcomes](#)
- [The Anti-Racism Implementation Plan](#)
- [Centering Equity in Collective Impact](#)
- [Mapping Our Roles in Social Change Ecosystems,](#) and [Social Change Ecosystem Map Definition of Roles](#)
- [Building a Race Equity Culture](#)

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[9] *The Power of a Racial Equity Impact Analysis,* Race Matters Institute of JustPartners, Inc., ©2019. https://viablefuturescenter.org/racemattersinstitute/resources/racial-equity-impact-analysis/

Phase 1: Prepare

Establish Implementation Support Teams/Site Implementation Teams

Establish Implementation Support Teams and Site Implementation Teams after identifying stakeholders and mapping their input level.

Many of us have had the experience of being called to participate in a group where we weren't clear why we were included. Unfortunately, the time it takes to develop clarity and competence in a stakeholder group is far worse for those with less experience or authority. This reality can greatly influence participation and attrition in implementation teams.

- **Ensure teams are representative** of the people impacted by the change.
- During the first meetings, **ensure everyone is equally informed and prepared.**
- Commit **to eliciting and integrating the views of those most impacted by the change.**
- **Communicate capacity expectations** and verify participants will bring the skills, time, knowledge, and motivation to move the work forward.
    - Develop an **onboarding packet** that goes beyond a team Charter. Include guidance on roles, implementation, and equity practices.
    - Clarify **roles and responsibilities.**
    - Apply **collaboration and effective decision-making practices.**
    - Develop a **shared vision and goals.**

In the outer context [Implementation Support Teams], positive sustainment leadership was characterized as establishing a project's mission and vision, early and continued planning for sustainment, and realistic project plans.
*~Aarons, et al*

Create an equity culture. To address equity in implementation and improvement, people must have open, honest conversations about uncomfortable topics, including racism, oppression, discrimination, and privilege. Developing an equity culture takes place at the individual level, with a person examining their own biases and triggers. At the team level, consider conversations organized by power so those in marginalized positions can speak freely. Finally, at organizational levels, look closely at inequities in organizational infrastructure and operations, processes, services, and outcomes.

Ensure team understanding of equity versus equality. Equality is about treating everyone the same and the equal distribution of services or goods. Equality fails to recognize that we aren't all the same. We all begin from different places. For example, giving all children the same curriculum fails to acknowledge that

EQUALITY   VS   EQUITY
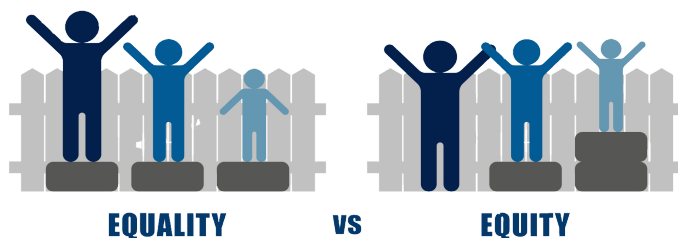
This popular graphic attempts to demonstrate equity by showing that adding blocks will improve the person's view over the fence, when it may be wiser and more equitable to remove the fence altogether.

each child starts school with different cognitive, physical, and social-emotional realities. If we want them to succeed, we must account for and address these different starting points.

Tips

Team development approaches grounded in equity

- **Verify that those attending are in a position to represent others**. Do they have time? Are they trusted and influential? Are they able to report out and up?

- **Avoid tokenizing people.** Recognize no group is monolithic. Even if someone has volunteered to represent, it does not mean they speak for everyone.

- **Actively manage power imbalances**. Integrate the perspectives of those marginalized in the room. Use a variety of tools for participation (surveys, Padlet, etc.)

- **Provide offline support** to build member competence and confidence in the process.

- Strive for a **balance** between a **manageable size (4-12) and representation**. Include those likely to challenge majority views.[2,3,4]

- **Structure meetings to the needs and norms** of involved parties**.** Incentives or support (stipends, childcare, community meals, transportation assistance, etc.) that allow people to attend help minimize barriers to attendance and maximize inclusion and participation.

General team development approaches

- **Include site-level representatives** in Implementation Support teams. They will be standing-up site level teams and championing the implementation.

- **Continually clarify roles**. Recognize and address diffusion of roles often indicated by lack of follow-through. Recognize and address role confusion characterized by competition.

- **Identify a skilled facilitator.**[10]

- **Rotate staffing** to perform research, coordination, and project management tasks.

- **Revisit the 'why' regularly**. Re-connection to the 'why' occurs in many ways. For example, take five minutes to highlight how the innovation impacted those impacted.

- Identify needs and **lobby for additional resources** early on.

- Develop a specific **strategy for supporting mid-level managers.**[11]

Phase 1: Prepare

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[10] Centre for Effective Services (2021). An Introductory Guide to Implementation
[11] Metz, A. (2019). A Closer Look at Developing an Enabling Context and Facilitators/Barriers to Implementation. National Implementation Research Network.

Phase 1: Prepare

__Tools & Resources__

- [Establishing teams](#)[2]
- [Building Teams for Effective and Sustainable Change](#)[12]
- [Inclusive Meetings](#)
- [EDI Conversation Guides](#)
- [Video: Equity versus Equality](#)

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[12] Children's Bureau Express (2019). Building Teams for Effective and Sustainable Change. Children's Bureau's Capacity Building Center for States. Vol 19, No 9