

# Change and Implementation in Practice



Capacity Building  
CENTER FOR STATES

## Overview

### Change and Implementation in Practice Series

Child welfare agencies continually undertake efforts to implement new programs and practices to produce better outcomes for children, youth, and families. Effectively implementing new approaches and achieving sustainable change can be challenging. The Capacity Building Center for States (the Center) has developed the **Change and Implementation in Practice** series to support agencies in applying a structured approach to implementation and overcoming common challenges.

Briefs in this series provide user-friendly information on implementation concepts to strengthen the ability of child welfare systems to implement change. These “how to” guides explain key steps and tasks for moving through a systematic change and implementation process, from identifying a problem or need through finding and implementing a sustainable solution and monitoring and evaluating results. The briefs draw from a rich collection of implementation frameworks and tools and offer examples relevant to child welfare agencies.

### Why Follow a Change and Implementation Process?

Current research indicates that the success of a new program or practice depends as much on effective implementation as on the strength of the selected intervention (Fixsen, Blase, Metz, & Van Dyke, 2013). Evidence-based and evidence-informed solutions will fall short without two essential conditions:

- ◆ An understanding of organizational capacity to make lasting change
- ◆ Knowledge of how to put identified interventions into practice effectively

Implementation frameworks provide stage-based approaches that can support sustainable practice and lasting system improvements. A well-defined change and implementation process or framework offers a structured approach to help child welfare agencies and their system partners analyze the challenges they face and select and implement appropriate solutions (Aarons, Hurlburt, & Horwitz, 2011; Bertram, Blase, & Fixsen, 2015; Meyers, Durlak, & Wandersman, 2012).

A change and implementation process also helps agencies monitor and evaluate an intervention to determine if it is achieving the desired outcomes. Through feedback loops and quality assurance measures, agencies can continuously refine the implementation process. In addition, monitoring and evaluation can help agencies institutionalize the changes that have been put in place and sustain the intervention over time (Framework Workgroup, 2014; Permanency Innovations Initiative Training and Technical Assistance Project, 2016b).

## Change and Implementation in Practice Briefs

The briefs in the **Change and Implementation in Practice** series synthesize available research in implementation science and provide expertise to build knowledge and improve implementation practice in the following crucial areas:

- ◆ Assessing readiness and ensuring that the necessary organizational capacities are in place to successfully plan, implement, and sustain an intervention
- ◆ Helping agencies better understand the problems or challenges they face and how to use data to “dig deeper” into the root causes
- ◆ Forming teams to guide the change process
- ◆ Developing a theory of change to determine the most effective ways to get from the root cause(s) of the problem to the desired outcomes
- ◆ Selecting and adapting or designing interventions that meet an agency’s particular needs
- ◆ Planning and laying a foundation for successful and sustainable implementation and evaluation
- ◆ Piloting or staging the intervention so the agency can learn and adjust as needed before implementing on a larger scale
- ◆ Collecting and using data to monitor progress, inform improvements, evaluate outcomes, and expand or modify programs

Each **Change and Implementation in Practice** brief includes: (1) an explanation of the purpose and rationale for each part of the change and implementation process; (2) definitions of key concepts and terms; (3) recommendations for working through each part of the process; (4) sample scenarios from the child welfare field; and (5) links to related tools, resources, and tutorials.

Child welfare leaders, program managers, teams, and stakeholders can use the briefs to build their understanding of implementation concepts and practices. Drawing on existing implementation frameworks and tools, the briefs feature application examples that reflect real challenges facing child welfare agencies. Though states and jurisdictions can access those materials that best correspond to where they are in their change and implementation process, the briefs assume that some prior milestones have been met before moving on to the work described in each one.

## Key Terms Used in the Change and Implementation in Practice Series

### Process structure:

- ◆ **Phase** – a stage of the change and implementation process common to most implementation frameworks
- ◆ **Step** – a discrete part of the change and implementation process designed to guide users through core change and implementation tasks in a meaningful way
- ◆ **Milestone** – a key accomplishment that helps the team to know whether it is ready to move to the next phase or step
- ◆ **Essential function** – a critical task that needs to be completed to achieve a milestone

### Additional terms:

- ◆ **Change and implementation process** – a structured, implementation science-informed, and research-based approach to drive change (also referred to by some as change management)
- ◆ **Readiness** – the extent to which an organization is willing and able to change or implement a particular intervention
- ◆ **Problem** – what needs to change to meet agency priorities; problems may reflect identified needs or opportunities to build on successes to improve agency or system functioning and outcomes
- ◆ **Team** – a group reflecting diverse expertise and perspectives that guides a change and implementation process
- ◆ **Theory of change** – a tool that illustrates the pathway from an identified problem to a desired change in conditions among people, organizations, or systems
- ◆ **Intervention** – any specific practice, service, policy, strategy, program, practice model, or combination of these that is clearly defined, operationalized, and distinguishable from one or more alternatives
- ◆ **Implementation** – a specified set of activities designed to put into practice an activity or intervention
- ◆ **Pilot** – a test of an intervention before wider implementation
- ◆ **Evaluation** – use of data to answer questions about what happened during implementation, whether the intervention is being implemented as designed, and whether it is effective

Exhibit 1 illustrates the change and implementation process and highlights the relationships among the topics covered in the **Change and Implementation in Practice** briefs. Assessing organizational readiness (outer ring) is ongoing throughout the process, while teaming (inner ring) is a key consideration during all other activities. Each icon in the second ring represents an important activity in the change and implementation process. While the icons are represented sequentially, in practice there often will be overlap and movement back and forth among the activities. The icons shown here will be used throughout the briefs and related materials in the series.

### Exhibit 1: Key Change and Implementation Topics



### The Change and Implementation Process

The **Change and Implementation in Practice** series describes common steps in several implementation and continuous quality improvement frameworks.<sup>1</sup> The Change and Implementation Process—used by the Child Welfare Capacity Building Collaborative (Collaborative) in much of its work—depicts 5 overlapping phases and 12 steps that guide organizations from problem exploration through sustainable implementation (Child Welfare Capacity Building Collaborative, 2015). While the briefs align with the Collaborative’s approach to supporting agencies and courts with implementation, they can be used with other similar implementation frameworks.

Table 1 illustrates the relationship between key topics in the **Change and Implementation in Practice** series and the phases and steps in the Change and Implementation Process.

<sup>1</sup> The change and implementation process described in the series synthesizes evidence-informed implementation frameworks, including: the Active Implementation Framework and associated work developed by the National Implementation Research Network (Bertram, Blase, & Fixsen, 2015; Metz & Bartley, 2012); A Framework to Design, Test, Spread, and Sustain Effective Practice in Child Welfare (Framework Workgroup, 2014); and the Evidence-Based System for Innovation Support (Wandersman, Chien, & Katz, 2012). It also reflects guidance provided in: *A Guide for Implementing Improvement Through the CFSP and CFSR* (Children’s Bureau, 2014); *Guide to Developing, Implementing, and Assessing an Innovation* (Permanency Innovations Initiative Training and Technical Assistance Project, 2016a); *CQI Training Academy* (JBS, 2015), and related resources.

**Table 1: The Change and Implementation in Practice Briefs and Their Connection to the Collaborative’s Change and Implementation Process**

Change and Implementation in Practice Brief	Focus	Phase	Corresponding Step(s)
Overview	Gaining an understanding of the <b>Change and Implementation in Practice</b> series	Preparation	1-12
 Readiness (Organizational and Practice-Specific)	Evaluating initial and ongoing readiness for change and implementation		1-12
 Problem Exploration	Identifying a need or opportunity to be addressed Gathering data and exploring the problem in depth	Phase I: Identify and Assess Needs and Opportunities	1,3
 Teaming	Forming teams to guide the change process		2
 Theory of Change	Developing a theory of change	Phase II: Develop Theory of Change	4
 Intervention Selection and Adaptation/Design	Identifying, researching, and selecting from possible interventions Adapting existing interventions or designing new ones	Phase III: Select and Adapt/Design Intervention	5-6
 Implementation Planning and Capacity Building	Assessing readiness and planning for implementation of the intervention(s) Building capacity to support implementation of the intervention(s)	Phase IV: Plan, Prepare, and Implement	7-8
 Intervention Testing, Piloting, and Staging	Piloting and/or staging implementation		9
 Monitoring, Evaluating, and Applying the Findings	Collecting and using data to adjust the intervention and/or implementation strategies* Evaluating to measure implementation quality, as well as short- and long-term outcomes* Making decisions to further spread, adjust, or discontinue the intervention*	Phase V: Evaluate and Apply Findings	10-12* *These activities also occur throughout the process

Access other **Change and Implementation in Practice** briefs and related resources at: <https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/focus-areas/cqi/change-implementation>

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