

## Overview of SPF Step 4: Implementation

Nike might encourage people to “Just do it!”, but implementing an intervention takes planning and preparation. Under the SPF, implementation includes three broad tasks:

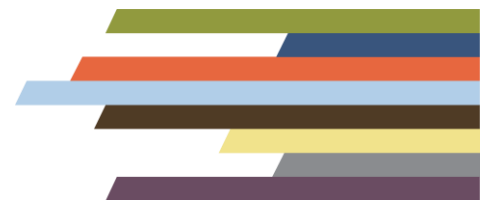
1. Enhance support and building capacity related to implementation
2. Implementing evidence-based programs, policies and practices, paying specific attention to issues of adaptation and fidelity
3. Monitoring implementation by collecting evaluation data and making mid-course corrections based on what the data reveal

### *Mobilize Support and Build Capacity*

Is the community aware of the problems and intervention(s) selected, and is there adequate support for the intervention? Have key leaders been brought to the table? Does the population that the intervention(s) serve believe that the problem(s) need to be addressed? Has the intervention been introduced to the stakeholders? What training is needed to support implementation?

Mobilizing and building capacity to support implementation involves the following:

- **Increasing community awareness** of the problem and of the intervention(s) selected to address it. This will help improve the readiness of the community to adopt the intervention and carry it out successfully. It is like fertilizing the soil so that a plant—in this case, an intervention—will take root and flourish. So before implementing anything, do your homework and figure out how to best increase awareness of the problem among stakeholders, community leaders, and the population the intervention serves.
- **Introducing the intervention to stakeholders** to obtain their buy-in and expand partnerships. Getting stakeholders, partners and community members onboard and ready to implement an intervention can take time, particularly when there is turnover among key partners or if there is resistance. Partnerships may also need to be expanded to include new partners—to individuals or organizations you didn't initially think needed to be involved or to individuals with specific skill sets.
- **Training** may be necessary for the people implementing the intervention if they do not have the necessary skills. Training can also help overcome hesitation or resistance by alleviating misperceptions and clarifying expectations. Some evidence suggests that training may also be correlated with the completeness and fidelity of implementation efforts: trained staff members are more likely to implement more of the key components of an intervention and do so according to the guidelines provided by the developer than untrained staff.



## *Implement Evidence-based Programs, Policies, and Practices*

In what ways can and should the intervention(s) be tailored to fit local circumstances? Will the adaptations compromise fidelity? Has an action plan been developed that outlines who is responsible for doing what and when? Have potential challenges to implementation been considered?

SPF Step 3—planning—focuses on finding evidence-based interventions that are a good conceptual and practical fit for a community. Now it's time to implement these interventions. When doing so, consider the following:

- **Balance fidelity with adaptation.** Fidelity refers to the degree to which a program is implemented as its developer intended. For example, when baking a cake, you have to be faithful to the recipe or it won't work; changing the flavor of the icing might be okay, but changing the amounts of flour or salt could be disastrous! The same applies to interventions. It is possible that some elements of the intervention could be adapted without influencing the outcome, but most elements must be kept the same. Having said that, it is sometimes necessary to adapt an intervention to fit certain population groups or local circumstances, such as budget constraints, staff availability, and time issues. In these situations, it is important to think carefully about balancing the need for maintaining fidelity of the intervention with the need to adapt it.

*It is helpful to work with an evaluator, as well as the intervention developer, to determine how to best adapt it (i.e., to identify those elements that should be maintained.) Remember, interventions that are implemented with complete fidelity are more likely to be effective.*

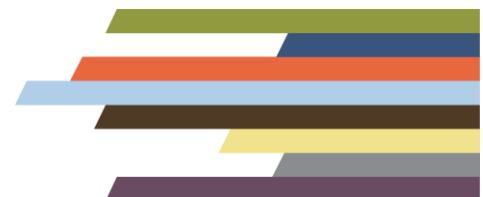
- **Develop and carry out an action plan** that details what is to occur, who is responsible, and a timeline for doing so. Similar to an itinerary for a trip, this action plan will help ensure that everyone involved is on the same page, and that the intervention is carried out successfully.

## *Monitor Implementation*

How will you know the intervention has been implemented successfully? What will you do if the results are not what you projected?

This task includes these activities:

- **Monitoring implementation** to determine if the intervention was delivered the way it was designed. For example, was the same material presented, in the same number of sessions, over the same time frame, using the same methods? To find out, you will need to collect data on the details of implementation. Any adaptations—even those that are seemingly minor—could impact the evaluation results.



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- **Making mid-course corrections** to the intervention or its implementation, if the monitoring data are not what you anticipated. Perhaps the intervention calls for six parent education classes, but the implementation schedule only includes four. This difference between intended and actual implementation may occur for many different reasons, including scheduling conflicts or discomfort with the content among either participants or trainer(s). Once you determine the reason(s) for the gap, take strides to close it. For example, if it turns out that the trainer feels ill-prepared to handle the content, you could provide additional coaching to increase trainer comfort and skills and add the two remaining classes back to the schedule.

## Guidelines for Adaptation

Adaptation refers to how much, and in what ways, a program, policy, or practice is changed to meet local needs and circumstances. It is important to balance adaptation with fidelity. Fidelity refers to the degree to which a prevention program is implemented as its developer intended. Be aware that any change or adaptation to a program can compromise its results.

Here are some general guidelines to follow when adapting a program:

- **Select programs with the best practical fit to local needs and conditions.**  
This will reduce the likelihood that you will need to make any significant adaptations.
- **Change capacity before changing the program.**  
It may be easier to change the program, but changing local capacity to deliver it as it was designed (e.g. through training, mentoring) is a safer choice.
- **Consult with the program developer.**  
Consult with the program developer to determine what experience and/or advice he or she has about adapting the program to a particular setting or circumstance.
- **Retain core components.**  
There is a greater likelihood of effectiveness when a program retains the core component(s) of the original intervention. The program developer or your evaluator can identify these core components.
- **Add, rather than subtract.**  
It is safer to add to a program (e.g. more activities, increased length of time an intervention is offered) than to modify or subtract from it.