



An Introduction to SAMHSA's Strategic Prevention Framework

Step 4: Implementation

Implementation, the fourth step of the SPF, involves putting your plan into action by delivering evidence-based interventions as intended. Important tasks in the implementation step include the following:

- Connect with key implementation partners
- Consider fidelity and adaptation
- Maintain core components
- Adapt with care (as needed)
- Establish implementation supports

Mobilize Support and Build Capacity

You will have already identified and connected with key implementation partners during the previous steps of the SPF (i.e., assessment, capacity, and planning). These are the individuals and organizations that will be responsible for and/or involved in the delivery of your selected interventions. Sometimes these partners will want to make changes to the implementation plan. Even if they don't, it's important to communicate openly and make sure that all partners are on board with the plan as you move forward.

Balance Fidelity and Adaptation

As you prepare to implement your selected prevention interventions, it is important to consider fidelity and adaptation:

- Fidelity describes the degree to which a program or practice is implemented as intended.
- Adaptation describes how much, and in what ways, a program or practice is changed to meet local circumstances.

Evidence-based programs are defined as such because they consistently achieve positive outcomes. The greater your fidelity to the original program design, the more likely you are to reproduce these positive results.

Customizing a program to better reflect the attitudes, beliefs, experiences, and values of your focus population can increase its cultural relevance. However, it's important to keep in mind that such adaptations may compromise program effectiveness.

Maintain Core Components

Evidence-based programs are more likely to be effective when their core components (i.e., those elements responsible for producing positive outcomes) are maintained. Core components are like the key ingredients in a cookie recipe. You might be able to take out the chocolate chips, but if you take out the flour—a core component—the recipe won't work!

Here are some general guidelines for implementing a program with fidelity and maintaining core components:

- Preserve the setting as well as the number and length of sessions.
- Preserve key program content: It's safer to add rather than subtract content.
- Add new content with care: Consider program guidance and prevention research.
- Identify the best possible candidate to deliver the program.

Adapt with Care

The degree to which an evidence-based prevention intervention is a good fit for the focus population is a prime consideration when selecting a prevention program. However, even when interventions are selected with great care, there may be ways to improve a program's appropriateness for a unique focus population.

Cultural adaptation refers to modifications that are tailored to the beliefs and practices of a particular group and enhance the cultural relevance of an intervention. To make an intervention more culturally appropriate, it is crucial to consider the language, values, attitudes, beliefs, and experiences of focus population members.

When adapting an evidence-based program, it is important to consult with the following groups:

- The **program developers** can provide information on how it has been adapted in the past, how well these adaptations have worked, and what core components should be retained to maintain effectiveness.
- Members of your **focus population** can suggest ways to enhance the program materials to better reflect their concerns and experiences.

Keep in mind that adaptations can be planned in order to improve a program (as with cultural adaptation) or they can be unplanned. It is important to be aware of the potential for unplanned changes that may occur during implementation (e.g., missed sessions when schools close unexpectedly due to bad weather) and address any changes that might compromise program effectiveness (e.g., schedule make-up sessions so students don't miss out on core program content).

Establish Implementation Supports

Many factors combine to influence the implementation and support the success of prevention interventions, including the following:

- **Favorable prevention history:** An individual or organization with positive experiences implementing prevention interventions in the past will likely be more ready, willing, and able to support the implementation of a new intervention. If an individual or organization has had a negative experience with—or doesn't fully understand the potential of—a prevention intervention, then it will be important to address these concerns early in the implementation process.
- **Onsite leadership and administrative support:** Prevention interventions assume many different forms and are implemented in many different settings. To be effective, interventions require leadership and support from key stakeholders. Develop a plan for possible staff, implementation partners, and leadership turnover. Consider strategies for formalizing roles and relationships with agreements or contracts that outline key responsibilities.

- **Practitioner selection:** When selecting the best candidate to deliver a prevention intervention, consider professional qualifications and experiences, practical skills, as well as fit with your focus population. (e.g., Who is prepared to implement the intervention effectively? Who will intervention participants feel comfortable with?)
- **Practitioner training and support:** Pre- and in-service trainings can help practitioners responsible for implementing an intervention understand how and why the intervention works, practice new skills, and receive constructive feedback. Since most skills are learned on the job, it is also helpful to connect these practitioners with a coach who can provide ongoing support.
- **Program evaluation:** By closely monitoring and evaluating the delivery of an intervention, practitioners can make sure that it is being implemented as intended and improve it as needed. By assessing program outcomes, they can determine whether the intervention is working as intended and worthy of sustaining over time.
- **A clear action plan:** This should include (1) all implementation tasks, (2) deadlines, and (3) the person(s) responsible. By working with implementation partners to develop this plan, practitioners can make sure that everyone is on the same page and that no key tasks fall through the cracks.
- **Feedback loops:** This involves regularly checking in with implementers and your evaluators to monitor implementation via feedback loops and utilizing continuous quality improvement. Ensuring that you are hitting projected numbers of who is being served as well as discussing expected changes to knowledge, attitudes or behaviors.

When prevention practitioners promote both fidelity and cultural relevance and anticipate and support the many factors that influence implementation, these efforts go a long way toward producing positive outcomes. But to sustain these outcomes over time, it is important to get others involved and invested in the prevention interventions. Find concrete and meaningful ways for people to get involved, keep cultural and public opinion leaders well-informed, and get the word out to the broader community through media and other publicity efforts.

Integrate Cultural Proficiency

The following implementation activities can help to ensure that your prevention efforts will be culturally competent:

- Identify interventions with documented efficacy for your focus population
- Adapt interventions, as needed, to increase their cultural relevance
- Involve focus population members, including potential intervention participants and cultural leaders, in the adaptation process
- Identify a practitioner to implement interventions who is a good and comfortable fit for the focus population

Plan for Sustainability

Many implementation activities help support the long-term sustainability of prevention efforts. Examples include the following:

- Ensure that interventions are evidence-based and part of a comprehensive prevention plan
- Increase the cultural relevance of interventions without compromising their effectiveness (i.e., maintain core components)
- Work closely with implementation partners to build capacity for prevention and evaluation
- Reach out to implementation and other community partners to increase support for prevention