



Implementing Practice Standards Implementation Plan Guide and Template

An implementation plan is a document that describes key steps, activities, timelines, and milestones needed to put an intervention in place. Implementation plans provide a roadmap for the implementation team by identifying needs and potential challenges, outlining the communication protocol among the team members, leadership, and stakeholders, and providing decision-making support. An implementation plan:¹

- Explains how an agency will prepare to implement an intervention and build needed capacity.
- Outlines who is on the implementation team, their roles, responsibilities, and the teaming structure.
- Identifies tasks, timeframes, and milestones.
- Coordinates and sequences activities.

As a leader, it is your responsibility to develop and integrate an implementation plan as part of your phased approach to the implementation of a new strategy. By creating an implementation plan, you will be able to monitor the implementation process on change efforts and make course corrections as needed. Taking a deliberate and structured approach to implementation planning can help your agency achieve goals for change and improvement. The guide below outlines information to include in each section of an implementation plan. A blank implementation plan template follows the guide.

North Carolina Child Welfare Implementation Plan Guide

Section I: Background

This first section should lay the foundation for the implementation plan. Included in this section is information about the problem statement or identified problem, the readiness assessment, and the target population.

Problem Statement or Identified Problem

Provide a brief description of the problem statement that supports the need for the new intervention or strategy, including the assessed need for the new intervention and the case for change that describes why the new intervention is necessary.

Readiness Assessment

The readiness assessment includes the findings from a prior analysis that evaluates whether the agency is prepared for a specific change. The readiness assessment will help the agency prepare for a successful change initiative and build capacity where there are gaps. Using information from the readiness assessment, the implementation team will be able to identify and prioritize intervention-specific capacity needs, such as training or technology, that will affect the successful implementation of the new intervention. It is also important to look at existing strengths in the agency that can be leveraged to build capacity and support a successful implementation, such as the existence of strong change champions within the agency or community that be used to help build motivation.¹

Target Population

The problem statement should also include a description of the target population that the intervention or strategy is designed to serve.

Section II: Theory of Change

When working toward implementation of a new intervention or strategy, the implementation team must envision the desired results and the necessary changes that will ultimately lead to those results. A theory of change is a roadmap that outlines the identified problem and the steps to achieve the desired outcomes. A theory of change will help the agency to achieve buy-in, select the right intervention, guide decision-making, and informs continuous quality improvement efforts. Typically, a theory of change is developed before the agency selects the intervention, so the information included in this

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section should be formulated prior to developing the implementation plan. The theory of change section should explain how change will occur and include a description of the pathway to get from the need to the desired outcomes, including the results, accomplishments, or changes the intervention seeks to achieve.ⁱⁱ

Section III: Intervention or Strategy to be Implemented

This section will include an overview of the intervention or strategy, as well as a description of the implementation team.

Intervention Overview

This section will include a description of the intervention, the purpose of the intervention, the underlying principles, and the expected outcomes. Additionally, a description of the intervention's core components should be included to lay the groundwork for the implementation work plan.

Implementation Timeline

The implementation timeline should provide the timeframe by which the intervention or strategy is expected to be implemented. This may include initial implementation of pilot sites and full implementation agency-wide. A more detailed description of the timeframes associated with specific work plan activities is found below in the work plan.

Implementation Team

The implementation plan must outline the members of the implementation team, their roles and responsibilities, and the teaming structure. It will be important to revisit membership of the implementation team and the teaming structure periodically as implementation efforts progress. Revisions to the team may be needed to continue implementation work effectively.

Section IV: Work Plan

The work plan will outline activities that will occur before, during, and after implementation. The work plan is the heart of the implementation plan and will detail how the agency will operationalize the intervention.

Preparation Activities

This section should include a description of required activities to prepare for implementation of the intervention, such as identification of a pilot set to test the intervention, resources like staff, facilities, and training that will be needed, and engagement with stakeholders, individuals with lived expertise, or the courts. As part of the preparation activities, the implementation team should consider where and with whom to begin to implement the intervention. The team should determine if implementation should begin in one site or many sites, through a regional approach, or agency-wide. The team will need to consider a variety of factors when making these decisions, including related mandates and timeframes, the agency's available capacity, and other infrastructure needs. Lastly, the team should consider whether usability or pilot testing are preferred approaches to implementation. Both of these approaches will allow the agency to test components of the intervention, such as forms, policies, tools, and procedures. This will give the agency an opportunity to assess the effectiveness of the intervention, identify potential challenges, and make necessary adaptations prior to implementation within the agency.

Workplan Framework

The work plan framework should outline the activities that are needed to support implementation. The framework should also include information about the individual or group who is responsible for completing the task or activity, activity milestones, and projected timeframes to complete the work.

Workplan Framework				
Activity	Description	Task Lead	Milestones	Timeframe
Identified activities for initiating, enhancing, or supporting implementation	Brief description of the activity	Individual or group who is responsible for completing the task or activity	Milestones, such as deliverables, training, or other indicators of completion	Projected timeframes to complete the work

Section V: Data Collection, Evaluation, and CQI

This section should provide information on how implementation will be monitored and how data will be used to adjust implementation and make improvements. Collecting data and establishing an evaluation process gives the agency the ability to assess and monitor if implementation is occurring to fidelity and to make adjustments to better support implementation efforts.

Data Collection and CQI

This section provides information on how data will be collected to monitor fidelity and how the agency will identify and track indicators of success.

Evaluation

This section outlines the process for developing evaluation procedures and tools, such as surveys, focus groups, observations, and data collection. Within this section, details about how the agency will plan for evaluation outcomes and sustainability should be outlined.

Section VI: Anticipated Challenges and Strategies to Address Barriers

This section of the implementation plan will outline the potential challenges or barriers and strategies to address them. There may be occurrences where the implementation team must address an identified challenge prior to beginning implementation efforts, such as improvements to data collection systems that may be necessary to collect data to inform decision-making and monitor fidelity during implementation. It is recommended that the implementation team identify potential challenges and strategies in collaboration with agency stakeholders.

Anticipated Challenges, Risks, and Strategies		
Challenge or Barrier	Risk	Strategy to Address Barrier
Anticipated challenge that may impact implementation, such as staff turnover, funding, or competing priorities.	Risks may arise from ambitious implementation decisions. However, these may be mitigated through pilot testing or other efforts to test and gather feedback on whether implementation is leading to the intended results.	Identified strategy that is anticipated to address the barrier, such as proactive communication, additional training, or hiring of new staff.

Section VII: Communication Plan

This section will describe how the implementation team will keep leadership and stakeholders at all levels informed and engaged in the implementation efforts. The communication plan should include both internal and external communication. Communication and engagement are vital to obtaining and sustaining needed buy-in, support, and motivation as part of implementation success.

Communication Strategies

This section should describe the strategies for engagement and communication with agency leadership, staff, partner agencies, the target population, and other key stakeholders. Communication strategies should focus on improving motivation and buy-in and should go beyond simply keeping individuals informed of implementation progress.

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Communication Strategies	
Type of Communication Strategy	Description of Communication Strategy
One-Way Communication Strategies	One-way communication strategies include examples like emails to listservs or webinars that are not intended to allow for feedback loops. These types of communication strategies serve as forums for the agency to share messaging, expectations during implementation, implementation updates, and other important updates to the intended audience.
Two-Way Communication Strategies	Two-way communication strategies include examples like an email address that can be used to submit questions, Community of Practice, and Office Hours. These types of communication strategies allow for feedback, opportunities to ask questions and receive answers, and forums to receive implementation support.

Section VIII: Implementation Plan Document History

Implementation Plan Document History		
Version	Date	Description

ⁱ Capacity Building Center for States. (2019). Change and implementation in practice: Implementation planning and capacity building. Washington, DC: Children’s Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

ⁱⁱ Capacity Building Center for States. (2018). Change and implementation in practice: Theory of change. Washington, DC: Children’s Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.



North Carolina Child Welfare Implementation Plan Template

Section I: Background

Problem Statement or Identified Problem	Provide a brief description of the problem statement.
Readiness Assessment	Provide the information from the findings a prior analysis that evaluates whether the agency is prepared for a specific change.
Target Population	Description of the target population that the intervention or strategy is designed to serve.

Section II: Theory of Change

Theory of Change	Description of the desired results and necessary changes that will ultimately lead to those results. Theory of change should provide an explanation of how change will occur and the pathway to get from the need to the desired outcomes, including the results, accomplishments, or changes the intervention seeks to achieve
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Section III: Intervention or Strategy to be Implemented

Intervention Overview	Description of the intervention, the purpose of the intervention, the underlying principles, and the expected outcomes.
Implementation Timeline	The timeframe by which the intervention or strategy is expected to be implemented.
Implementation Team	Members of the implementation team, their roles and responsibilities, and the teaming structure.

Section IV: Workplan

Preparation Activities	Description of required activities to prepare for implementation of the intervention, such as identification of a pilot set to test the intervention, resources like staff, facilities, and training that will be needed, and engagement with stakeholders, individuals with lived expertise, or the courts.
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Workplan Framework

Activity	Description	Task Lead	Milestones	Timeframe
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Section V: Data Collection, Evaluation, and CQI

Data Collection and CQI	Information on how data will be collected to monitor fidelity and how the agency will identify and track indicators of success.
Evaluation	Outline of the process for developing evaluation procedures and tools, such as surveys, focus groups, observations, and data collection. Within this section, details about how the agency will plan for evaluation outcomes and sustainability should be outlined.

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Section VI: Anticipated Challenges and Strategies to Address Barriers

Challenge or Barrier	Risk	Strategy to Address Barrier
Anticipated challenge that may impact implementation, such as staff turnover, funding, or competing priorities.	Risks may arise from ambitious implementation decisions. However, these may be mitigated through pilot testing or other efforts to test and gather feedback on whether implementation is leading to the intended results.	Identified strategy that is anticipated to address the barrier, such as proactive communication, additional training, or hiring of new staff.

Section VII: Communication Plan

Description of the strategies for engagement and communication with agency leadership, staff, partner agencies, the target population, and other key stakeholders.

Type of Communication Strategy	Description of Communication Strategy
One-Way Communication Strategies	One-way communication strategies include examples like emails to listservs or webinars that are not intended to allow for feedback loops. These types of communication strategies serve as forums for the agency to share messaging, expectations during implementation, implementation updates, and other important updates to the intended audience.
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