

Stages of Implementation: Activities for Taking Programs and Practices to Scale

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A “purveyor” is a group of individuals representing a program or practice who actively work to implement that practice or program with fidelity and good effect. An “implementer” is a group of individuals employed by a provider organization to implement a particular program or practice with a group of consumers (see Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005 for further discussion). Participants in presentations of the findings of literature review have asked many questions about the purveyor role and wanted to know more about the kinds of activities and supports they might expect from a purveyor. In an effort to answer these questions, we conducted the following qualitative analysis of information provided by purveyors and implementers of evidence-based practices and programs.

Currently, purveyors are very closely tied to particular programs or practices, often acting in close proximity to and with the full approval and participation of the original developers of an evidence-based practice or program.

Participants

Respondents participated in one of three meetings held in the last half of 2004. These three working meetings were designed to explore the “craft knowledge” related to the implementation of evidence-based programs and practices. The first meeting in the summer of 2004 included implementers of the school-wide Positive Behavior Support program with representatives from 26 school districts in Florida who were in various stages of implementing PBS. In the fall of 2004, the second meeting was conducted with the purveyors of evidence-based programs and practices and the third meeting was conducted with implementers of the same evidence-based programs and practices. These two meetings included representatives from the Federation for Families, the National Alliance of Multicultural Behavioral Health Associations, Assertive Community Treatment, Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, Dialectical Behavior Therapy, Functional Family Therapy, Incredible

Years, Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care, Multisystemic Therapy, Nurse-Family Partnership, Nutrition Model Program for Elderly, Positive Behavior Support, School-based mental health, Supported Employment, and SAMHSA.

PBIS Implementers and Purveyors: There were 72 implementers and purveyors representing 26 school districts in Florida who participated in a nominal group process that focused on factors contributing to the success of their implementation efforts. The participants were in the first year or two of implementing the School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Support program and attended the annual meeting of PBIS schools in Florida.

Purveyors: There were 13 purveyors, 2 family and cultural representatives, and 4 federal partners who participated in a nominal group process that focused on implementation strategies and their key components. The purveyors were selected as exemplary based on a review of the implementation evaluation literature (Fixsen, et al., 2005).

Implementers: There were 12 implementers of evidence-based programs or practices, 2 family and cultural representatives, and 3 federal partners who contributed to a concept mapping process that was focused on policy and procedural factors critical to their success. The implementers were selected by using a snowball approach. A number of purveyors were asked to recommend “well performing” implementers of their specific program or practice. Thus, each of the implementers was currently involved in program or practice implementation efforts for a different evidence-based program or practice.

Information

In a round-robin response format, each participant was asked to respond to the questions regarding implementation that were posed in the meeting. The participant was asked to briefly state his or her response and invited to offer a brief rationale for the item. In this manner, the participants generated a total of 584 items related to facilitators, barriers, and factors of importance to implementation. Out of these, 7 items were not interpretable leaving 577 items for this analysis.

Information Analysis

With respect to the implementation of evidence-based practices and programs, what do purveyors do and when do they do it? To begin to answer these questions, one author (DF) who

is knowledgeable about implementation practices categorized the items generated by the purveyors and implementers. Each item was examined for content and meaning regarding the activity in which a purveyor might be engaged to actively influence the topic presented by the item. As the items were examined in this manner, a number of purveyor activities emerged: assessment, planning, training, coaching, evaluation, organizational development, and systems intervention. Thus, this initial sort helps to answer the question, “what do purveyors do?”

After the items were grouped by purveyor activities, the author then sorted the items within each group into the implementation stages identified in a review and synthesis of the implementation literature (Fixsen, et al., 2005). The stages are exploration, installation, initial implementation, full implementation, innovation, and sustainability. This sort of the items helps to answer the question, “when do they do it?”

Results

Table 1 shows the results of the analysis. Because only very few of the 577 items were sorted into the full implementation, innovation, or sustainability stages of implementation, these more advanced stages are not shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Purveyor activities within stages of implementation.

Purveyor Activities	Implementation Stages		
	Explore	Install	Init Impl
Assessment	97%	1%	2%
Planning	20%	32%	48%
Training	3%	31%	66%
Coaching	8%	6%	86%
Evaluation	3%	23%	73%
Organizational Development	11%	16%	73%
Systems Intervention	37%	30%	33%

The absence of items related to these later stages makes sense given the relatively short time that most purveyors have been actively engaged in implementation activities and the fact that nearly all of the implementers had been engaged in implementation efforts for about two years. As a result, this analysis and the information in Table 1 focus on the early implementation stages of exploration, installation, and initial implementation. Some of the results shown in Table 1 are fairly predictable. Nearly all the purveyor’s assessment activities occurred during the

exploration stage and training, coaching, and evaluation activities were most predominant during the initial implementation stage. The results for planning, organizational development, and systems intervention were less predictable. These three purveyor activities began during the exploration stage and continued through installation and initial implementation. These results provide a hint of the range and intensity of purveyor efforts to implement an evidence-based practice or program at a new implementation site.

Exploration Stage

During the exploration stage, the purveyor is actively working with those connected to a potential implementation site to assess the motivation and buy in of organizational leaders and staff, identify and match the needs of the community with the potential benefits of the evidence-based program, identify leaders and champions in the community, and assess the community context. During the exploration stage, purveyors need to be explicit in their descriptions and have ready rationales for why any changes are important to the functioning of the evidence-based practice or program. In some ways, the exploration stage is like an elaborate informed consent process where extensive relevant information is provided, procedures are described in some detail, and potential risks and benefits are examined. When each party feels fully informed then consent is given to proceed with implementation.

As one would expect, nearly all of the **assessment activities** occurred during the exploration stage (see Table 6). Some specific purveyor-implementer items describing assessment activities during the exploration stage are:

- Willingness and ability to change
- Major stakeholder and leadership buy-in and support of the new model
- Stakeholder alignment with the values of the programs
- Program alignment with values of the community
- Participating staff agreement on goals
- Leaders' and agencies' understanding of the importance of fidelity to the model
- Money to ensure the program is successful
- Regulations at the county, state, federal, or agency level

Assessment activities are generally aimed at a more global view of the implementation site. In the process of presenting information and discussing the possibilities, the purveyor is asking

questions about philosophy, values, and beliefs while exploring the motivation and willingness to change of key individuals. The purveyor activities might end at this more general level of assessment in some cases when local conditions appear not to be conducive to implementation.

As the assessment activities are being carried out for a site that looks promising, the purveyor also is engaged in **planning activities**. Some specific purveyor-implementer items describing planning activities during the exploration stage are:

- Clarify for implementers the communication loop for accessing resources about implementation
- Understand the current practices and the agency at the ground level (e.g. context, daily operations, racial mix of clients)
- The degree of disruption of the new program in relation to current operations
- Set appropriate expectations about timeframes
- Preparation for controversies and common questions that arise
- Estimate volume of growth
- Timing of training
- Determine who participates in planning and preparations

Planning goes beyond global assessment and begins to look at the details of what it would take to implement the program or practice in the specific context of this particular implementation site.

The purveyor is getting more information and using that information to begin to develop a plan.

As assessment and planning progress, the purveyor also is beginning to look at organizational development needs. Some specific purveyor-implementer items describing **organizational development activities** during the exploration stage are:

- A culture of learning is needed in the program and in the system
- Define program and change requirements; fit (organizational fit), philosophical fit
- See how well the interventions are directly aligned with the goals of the program
- Creating “space” for the new behavior; willingness to change
- Creating readiness is an ongoing activity; identify barriers; assure a “barrier busting process”
- Setting up core expectations and requirements; discriminate the “non-negotiables” from the “adaptable negotiables” (assessing whether they can be modified)
- Critical factors defined that need to be changed in agency; recognize that implementation covers areas that the evidence-based intervention does not cover

- Expansion and embedding after relationship building (beyond key people); creating alliances at all levels to affect the system better

Purveyor activities relate to assessing the degree of change that may be needed in organizational and systems structures and cultures. This is not a passive process but one that involves working with leaders and participants in those organizations and systems to help create understanding of why the changes are needed, identify strengths and barriers, and create greater degrees of buy in and readiness to change.

Another set of purveyor activities during the exploration stage concerns interventions that might be needed with larger systems that impact the program. Some specific purveyor-implementer items describing **systems intervention activities** during the exploration stage are:

- To educate accrediting bodies about the new methods of treatment and documentation
- A way to connect and problem solve with other implementers of the program
- The ability to respond to stakeholder and funder questions and concerns about cost
- Research in your hands so you can promote evidence-based practice and buy-in
- Align billing and billing codes with evidence-based practices
- Barrier identification and “barrier busting”
- State/district/building/faculty commitments (system, practice level, data) (blueprint for schools; clearly define what schools need to do)
- Economic issues are broader than “funding”

Leaders and others in these broader systems need to understand the program and any changes that might be needed to accommodate the requirements of the new practice or program.

Discussions are held, descriptions are provided, issues are identified, solutions are discussed, and working relationships are formed.

Installation Stage

Once the purveyor and implementation site leaders conclude the exploration stage and mutually decide to proceed with implementation, the installation stage begins and activity intensifies. Before the first consumer is seen, the purveyor works with the implementation site to establish clear plans and expectations, prepare stakeholders, prepare organizational leaders and staff, develop implementation action groups, and begin to establish the infrastructure required to operate the program. As shown in Table 6, planning activities intensify during the installation

stage, training and evaluation activities begin in earnest, and organizational development and systems intervention activities continue.

During the installation stage, planning activities take on a sharper focus. Some specific purveyor-implementer items describing **planning activities** during the installation stage are:

- Knowing where to start with implementation
- Anticipatory guidance (set clear expectations based on past experiences at site development) and stress inoculation (recommendations based on data from experience)
- Create infrastructure with everyone at the table (with people, not for people); simple and common language; teamwork
- System development and improvement teams; develop roles and work plans with fidelity in mind
- Identify needs for purveyor's initial work at agency level and community level; write a mission statement; establish work plan and advocacy agenda; hold a public kick off event
- Team looks at infrastructure capacity and makes plans regarding data and how to use them
- Work plan based on a list of start up issues
- Assistance with setting an initial budget that is accurate and adequate for initial implementation

Planning takes the form of laying out implementation plans and creating and guiding teams to carry out the plans at the implementation site. Having a longer-term vision of how things might progress and helping teams anticipate problems seem to be important purveyor activities of the planning process during installation.

Training plays a significant role in installation as plans take shape and preparations for changes in clinical functions and organizational supports. Some specific purveyor-implementer items describing **training activities** during the installation stage are:

- Orientation training
- Build capacity of people
- Training in assessment
- Prepare supervisors to support change

Some training activities are provided to a range of individuals associated with an implementation site to inform them about the program, provide opportunities for questions and discussion, and prepare the individuals for changes in their functions within the new program. Other skill-

oriented training activities are to prepare supervisory and administrative staff to provide specific functions within the new program. Training provided by purveyors during the installation stage helps to set the stage for actual changes in clinical interventions.

Coaching related activities also are part of the installation process. Some specific purveyor-implementer items describing **coaching activities** during the installation stage are:

- Prepare systems for consultation and on-the-job monitoring
- Build beliefs with cultural guides and families; find the right people
- Relationship development (meetings, face to face time)
- Time for dialogue about the program/practice

Successful implementation depends on frequent, knowledgeable coaching to develop new skills and provide advice on general clinical skills. During the installation stage, purveyors are working to set up the people and systems, assure that the philosophy and beliefs of the coaches match the needs of the consumers and evidence-based program, and establish solid working relationships with the individuals who will be coaches. In later stages, the coaches and supervisors at an implementation site are the main technical link between the purveyor and the program.

Preparation for participation in evaluation systems is another focus of purveyor activities during the installation process. Some specific purveyor-implementer items describing **evaluation activities** during the installation stage are:

- Establish expectation of accountability at all levels: for/with families; organizations; community level; supervisor level
- Set up quality assurance systems; a full evaluation model; what outcomes; who monitors
- Establish multiple feedback loops; supports for decision making
- Detail the collection of fidelity data and consumer data

During installation, purveyors are working to set the stage for later evaluation activities by providing descriptions, procedures, and expected uses of evaluation.

Purveyor activities related to program development continue during the installation stage. Some specific purveyor-implementer items describing **program development activities** during the installation stage are:

- Work with the organization at all levels; integration function
- How to become a bridge to new culture

- Create infrastructure
- Sit down with system leaders, build system of informed support
- Leadership needs to demonstrate sustained commitment
- Redeployment of existing resources/ people
- Work through problems/ tackle the barriers
- Funding methods that embrace quality of services versus quantity of services

During installation, purveyors work intensively with organization leaders to change organizational structures and begin the process of establishing a new culture within the agency. Infrastructure development often includes new job descriptions, hiring procedures, pay scales, and performance evaluation methods in human resources; hiring new staff or reassigning current staff for new roles with respect to training, coaching, and evaluation of practitioners in the new program; simplifying organizational structures to focus on outcomes; and setting up new meeting structures and changing meeting agendas. The extent and pace of change in the clinical program and the eventual sustainability of the program depend upon organizational supports. The process of aligning those supports with the requirements of the evidence-based program begins in earnest during the installation stage.

During the installation stage, the purveyor continues to work with larger systems to align those systems with the new practices at the implementation site. Some specific purveyor-implementer items describing **systems intervention activities** during the installation stage are:

- Create champions; build relationships with key people in community; establish presence as a good neighbor (long term)
- State advocacy contacts
- Connect to multiple champions (parents, district)
- Create teams (families, consumers) and detail their roles
- Public kickoff
- System level planning of referrals and discharges
- Leverage existing resources
- Consensus building across stakeholder groups; hear and work out the issues

The purveyor works with a broad range of stakeholders to help them understand and support the new program. Meetings are held with consumer, advocacy, and community groups to share information, discuss issues, and develop support for the program. Similar meetings are held with

system leaders to continue the process of aligning referral, payment, and regulatory systems with the requirements of the program. Throughout these meetings, the purveyor continues to identify champions who appear to be willing and able to provide meaningful supports to the implementation site.

Initial Implementation Stage

As noted by Fixsen, et al. (2005), the stages of implementation are not linear. There seems to be a more fluid shift from installation to initial implementation depending upon the opportunities and barriers presented at a particular implementation site. In addition, the stages are overlapping so that the preparatory work that characterizes installation continues even after initial implementation has begun. Nevertheless, a marker for the beginning of initial implementation is when the first consumer receives services based on the new program or practice.

Planning remains important during the initial implementation stage. Some specific purveyor-implementer items describing **planning activities** during the initial implementation stage are:

- Having a purveyor know what reasonable goals are (e.g. utilization, number of units operational) and help implementer set them
- Having a realistic timeline for implementation
- Financial strain while the program is getting off the ground
- Sensitivity to agency's limitations
- To identify areas in which the smallest effort will create the greatest amount of change/impact on program goals
- The ability of the purveyor to anticipate and have the capacity to respond to cultural/ linguistic/ racial adaptations identified by implementers
- Educating consumers about the new program
- Expand capacity building – must be ready to continue the program after purveyor leaves

A purveyor needs to help develop clear expectations for implementation of the program. A purveyor needs an implementation strategy with well-specified core competencies related to fidelity and good outcomes for consumers. This helps practitioners, leaders, and other staff at an

implementation site anticipate what will happen next, help them prepare for typical problems, and help reduce the stress and anxiety that are a part of any change process.

Training is a central feature of initial implementation and occupies a considerable portion of purveyor time. For nearly all evidence-based practices and programs, the purveyor provides the initial training for practitioners. For some evidence-based practices and programs, the purveyor also is training on-site trainers, coaches, fidelity evaluators, and administrative support staff. Some specific purveyor-implementer items describing **training activities** during the initial implementation stage are:

- Structure follows function (need clarity regarding function = the core intervention components)
- Modeling, training, and coaching of supervisors
- Adjust supervision training based on outcomes
- Initial staff training (be sure coaching and supervision are in place)
- Train administrators and others on how to run a meeting
- Train all staff on the core principles
- The understanding and application of appropriate learning theories (i.e. early childhood, adolescent, and adult)
- Identify ongoing training needs – keep monitoring and adjusting

Training is not a one-time event. It is a continuing process that is adjusted to produce better outcomes over time. Training is not a singular event. It is an important part of an overall set of components (selection, training, coaching, performance evaluation, and facilitative administrative supports) designed to help practitioners at an implementation site achieve and maintain high levels of fidelity and benefits to consumers. Many purveyors have well-established workshop training for practitioners. Few have developed training for trainers, coaches, evaluators, and administrators to the same level.

As shown in Table 6, coaching is a major purveyor activity during initial implementation. Some specific purveyor-implementer items describing **coaching activities** during the initial implementation stage are:

- Help staff move from theory to practice
- Get beyond the training to implementation with fidelity

- Clinical mentorship
- Practitioner understanding of the active ingredients, the “why” of the program and practices
- Implementing the appropriate program that produces the desired outcomes (achieve fidelity)
- Internalize motivation: a) enhance confidence, b) enhance ownership- self-efficacy, c) enhance connections to others in environment- part of a whole
- Keep your eye on the practices to be sure staff are using research- based information
- Building from strengths and learning from mistakes

Coaching is key to helping practitioners and others move from concepts and newly learned skills to incorporating those concepts and skills in their daily practices. Skill development, clinical judgment, relationship development, and other general clinical skills are addressed in coaching as part of a staff development plan. Initially, purveyors are teaching and coaching the new on-site coaches at the same time they are providing coaching directly to new practitioners. This “double-loop” teaching, coaching, and learning is common during the initial implementation stage.

Evaluation activities also become more intense and focused during the initial implementation stage. Some specific purveyor-implementer items describing **evaluation activities** during the initial implementation stage are:

- Establish benchmarks for administrative review to track implementation progress
- Celebrate success
- Help people see changes
- Share data that will motivate them; relate to competing agendas

Purveyors establish evaluation systems at the practitioner level (often referred to as “fidelity measures”) and at the program level. As with any evaluation activity, the resulting data are only as good as the reliability and validity of the measurement and reporting systems. Applying established protocols for measuring fidelity or developing measures of organizational processes and outcomes are common purveyor activities during the initial implementation stage. Once the data begin to flow, purveyors then help practitioners and others at the implementation site learn how to use the data to inform decisions at the practice, supervisory-coaching, and managerial levels of the organization.

Purveyor activities with respect to organizational development intensify during the initial implementation stage. Some specific purveyor-implementer items describing **organizational development activities** during the initial implementation stage are:

- Develop the program manager's ability to advocate for the program both within the agency and outside the agency
- A recruitment and retention plan; hiring staff with a pre-determined set of criteria to maximize the likelihood of good outcomes
- Policies to provide adequate and competitive compensation for staff to increase their longevity in their position which ultimately leads to better program outcomes
- Relationship development; infrastructure in place; taking ownership of intervention; monitoring progress (feedback, adaptations)
- Cultural/ racial/ linguistic competence of the program
- Do adherence (fidelity) first, then look at data, then innovate.
- Meet monthly to review data and help the implementation site staff understand they are on a continuum of implementation (help them see where they are on the continuum)
- Adaptation of the agency's culture in order to deliver the practice with fidelity

Purveyor activities focus on changing the structures and culture of the organization to improve the fit between the organization and evidence-based practices at the implementation site.

Purveyors prompt change, help manage the change process, and measure outcomes to help assure organizational practices, procedures, and policies that support the work of practitioners as they begin to implement the new program. Throughout this process, purveyors offer rationales and teach the links between overall philosophy, values, and mission and current decisions and practices within the organization. These purveyor activities result in a culture change that helps to support and sustain the new practices after the excitement of initial implementation has become standard practice.

Purveyors and organizational staff continue their efforts to impact external systems during the implementation stage. Some specific purveyor-implementer items describing **system intervention activities** during the initial implementation stage are:

- Support and create strong family and consumer involvement
- Establish an agenda; have a “go to” person external or internal
- Willingness to carry the message up the line.

- Take on productivity standards that dismantle the treatment
- Community-building; develop trusting relationships
- Policy & legislative mandate, work on alignment
- Modification of state statutes to support interventions
- Consistency in implementation across settings; learning from experiences across implementation sites

Purveyors begin working to influence external systems during the exploration stage and continue their activities during the installation and initial implementation stages. During initial implementation, the impacts of external policies become very apparent and purveyors and implementation site managers work to influence and align those policies with the evidence-based practices that are being implemented. Purveyors representing a number of different evidence-based practices and programs have commented that most of their implementation sites that “fail” do so because of systems issues, not effectiveness issues. While influencing external systems seems to require persistence, it can be done. Purveyor and organizational staff continue these activities throughout the implementation process and beyond. External systems are run by people and turnover is experienced in those positions. Thus, agreements struck at one time may hold no sway at another time as personnel and regulations change. Purveyors and program directors must remain vigilant and involved to maintain alignment once it is achieved.

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References

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