

Overcoming barriers to implementation

Implementation can be challenging. Reflect on potential barriers early on so you can proactively address or prevent them. Later, document any barriers that arose throughout the implementation process to help you tell your story and share lessons learned.

The information in the following table is from our experiences supporting implementation, consultations with partners across the child and youth mental health and addictions sector, and literature (Bach-Mortensen et al., 2018; Damschroder et al., 2009; Powell et al., 2015; Waltz et al., 2019). Work with your team to think about what barriers might apply to your implementation project, and what mitigation strategies you can add to your workplan.

Barrier	Description	Mitigation strategies
Intervention factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of evidence supporting the change, plausibility, lack of applicability, and access to the intervention. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use evidence-informed methods to develop interventions. Set clear intervention goals.
External environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited funding and stifling or unaligned policies that delay or prevent implementation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with policymakers to advocate for changes that support your goals. Look for external funding opportunities (grants) through other networks.



Barrier	Description	Mitigation strategies
Organizational culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Resistance to change, conflict with organizational mission, lack of readiness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promote change as everyone's responsibility.• Embrace learning organization principles.• Reflect on concerns and acknowledge and validate opinions.• Have representation from across the agency involved in the implementation project (service providers, administrative staff, management, others).• Acknowledge the needs and priorities of your audience. Introduce change at a pace that works for them. Plan changes to be introduced over longer periods of time as needed.
Delivery capability, knowledge, and skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff do not have the knowledge or skills to complete the practice as intended.• Lack of expertise, administrative infrastructure, or strategic planning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conduct educational outreach and training.• Audit and provide feedback.• Conduct debriefing and continuing education with supervisor.• Engage staff as partners in the implementation process.• Disseminate training material, like cheat sheets, reference documents, or one-pagers of key information.

Barrier	Description	Mitigation strategies
Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff are busy, may forget to perform the practice, or do not have the time to prioritize the practice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use reminders to prompt staff. • Provide dedicated time in workplans to perform the practice. • Integrate changes into existing practices where possible. For example, if you need staff to capture a new data item, add it to an existing form they're already filling out.
Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff do not know what is expected, how they will be held accountable, or their current performance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit and provide feedback. Regularly share process measures with staff and communicate goals. • Incorporate communication into performance reviews. • Include information in organizational policies. • Let staff know how and when performance results are rolled up, and who they are reviewed by. For example, this measure is pulled from your survey responses and sent to the Board quarterly.
Resources and staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lack of resources like physical tools, space, funding, and staff turnover. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek new funding opportunities like grants. • See where resources can be pooled or shared with partner organizations.

Barrier	Description	Mitigation strategies
Data collection methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inconsistencies, lack of measurement tools, and monitoring issues that contribute to difficulties with evaluation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use standardized data assessment tools. Encourage data sharing where possible, like gathering community demographic data from your local public health unit. Make sure staff know how data is being pulled and used, why the entry is important, and who is reviewing it. Integrate changes into existing practices where possible. For example, if you need staff to capture a new data item, add it to an existing form they're already filling out.
Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of multi-professional collaboration with other staff or organizations which hinders adoption and agreement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct local adaptations. Build local consensus groups. Incorporate into established structures.
Client and community factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruitment or retention issues, client non-participation, and stigma. Cultural and language barriers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage young people and family members in the implementation process. Encourage champions to promote the change. Incentivize participation. Engage with relevant community groups throughout the process, such as Indigenous Friendship Centres, and French language school boards.



Barrier	Description	Mitigation strategies
Buy-in	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of leadership support, change in leadership and staff.• Poor or inaccessible communication and tools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Take time to make a case for improvement and implementation. Actively involve leadership through consistent communication and address any concerns early on.• Involve new champions and deliver training on an ongoing basis to navigate staff turnover.• Involve staff in setting targets so they feel more responsible for attaining them.• Tailor your communication strategies to your audiences.

References

- Bach-Mortensen, A. M., Lange, B. C. L., & Montgomery, P. (2018). [Barriers and facilitators to implementing evidence-based interventions among third sector organisations: A systematic review](#). *Implementation Science*, *13*, 103.
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