

When effective interventions are in place, it is critical that these interventions receive sufficient attention and resources to maintain on-going operations. While the literature on the sustainability of evidence-based programs (EBPs) is limited, there are some studies that can inform systems and organizations in their efforts to plan and maintain EBP sustainability.

FOR SENIOR LEADERS & MANAGERS

Plan for sustainability from the beginning

The [Exploration, Preparation, Implementation, Sustainment \(EPIS\) framework](#) proposes EBP sustainability as the ultimate goal of implementation efforts (Moullin, Dickson, Stadnick, Rabin, & Aarons, 2019). The groundwork for sustainment is laid during the Exploration Phase after an agency conducts a needs assessment and identifies EBPs that address those needs. The agency then critically assesses the requirements of the prospective EBPs and their capacity to meet those requirements. Sustainability is more likely to occur if there is a high fit between the chosen EBP, the agency, and the families served.

Champion the new program

Research has found that agency leaders need to develop the strategic climate for implementation (Aarons, Ehrhart, & Farahnak, 2014). Four implementation leadership dimensions to EBP success include: (1) leaders being *knowledgeable* about the practice to be implemented, (2) being *proactive* in anticipating implementation issues, (3) being *supportive* of direct service providers, and (4) *persevering* through the ups-and-downs of the implementation process.

Collaborate with external partners

Research has documented that there is a relationship between collaboration and EBP sustainability. Green et al. (2016) found that providers that fully sustained an EBP reported significantly greater levels of effective collaboration compared to those that did not. Effective collaboration consisted of sharing values, goals, and the commitment to the EBP, and offering problem-solving and resource-sharing. It can also include partnership with local academic institutions to assist in supporting EBP sustainability.

Expect, support, and reward EBP use

Implementing organizational culture change can be challenging. Leaders can help facilitate a positive implementation climate within their organization by developing strategies and policies involving the workers and the EBP. These should actively create the expectation the EBP should be used, the support needed to use it, and rewards for those who do (Jacobs, Weiner, & Bunger, 2014). It is important that agency leadership address all three dimensions to create a positive implementation climate and increase the likelihood the EBP is sustained over time (Aarons, Moullin, & Ehrhart, 2018).

Relevant Recorded CEBC Webinars

[Keeping the Intervention Going: Planning for & Maintaining Long-Term Sustainability](#)

Describes the findings of a long-term study examining sustainment of multiple evidence-based programs in a large county mental health system, then highlights practical considerations for monitoring & addressing implementation issues as they arise.

[Leadership & Organizational Change for Implementation](#)

Covers recent research on the role of leaders in implementation & sustainability, including contracting & collaboration, in child welfare and other service settings.

[Using the CEBC Selection & Implementation Guide: How to Apply the Guide to Common Situations in Child Welfare](#)

[Part One](#) reviews the critical organizational factors for selecting & implementing new programs. [Part Two](#) presents CEBC implementation resources and how to overcome common barriers to implementation & sustainment.

Address staff turnover

EBP sustainability is highly influenced by staff turnover (Peterson et al., 2014). Factors associated with lower staff turnover in child welfare include higher self-efficacy, lower emotional exhaustion, supervisor and co-worker support, salary, and benefits (DePanfilis & Zlotnik, 2008). Aarons, Fettes, Sommerfeld, & Palinkas (2012) found that implementation of an EBP in child welfare was associated with a greater likelihood of workers staying with their agencies for a longer period of time and many of the providers reported satisfaction with the structure provided by the EBP. Lastly, the [Availability, Responsiveness, and Continuity \(ARC\) organizational intervention](#) has demonstrated improvement in reducing staff turnover in child welfare and mental health settings (rated by the CEBC as “3 – Promising Research Evidence”).

Relevant CEBC Technical Assistance Materials

Sustainable Funding

Provides considerations for planning current and future funding needs.

Maintaining Fidelity

Discussion questions for planning & maintaining program fidelity.

Ongoing Training and Coaching Needs

Discussion questions for identifying and addressing training issues.

FOR CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

Collect & monitor multiple data sources

Collecting and using data is vital to sustaining a newly implemented EBP. Fidelity assessment data is used to determine if an agency is maintaining adherence to the EBP model. Nonadherence to the model (low fidelity) may jeopardize the EBP’s success in reaching positive outcomes. Fidelity tools are program-specific and the assessment can include various methods such as staff self-report checklists, trained observers, or audio/video recordings of sessions. Fidelity data should be collected and monitored on an on-going basis. If fidelity is low, then agencies need to identify the cause and address the deficit.

Agencies should consider collecting and monitoring additional sources of data relevant to sustainability. These can include client satisfaction, referral streams, and numbers served. Finally, researchers have produced numerous measurement tools to assess factors that influence sustainability. Sample tools include the Program Sustainability Index (Mancini & Marek, 2004), the Program Sustainability Assessment Tool (Luke, Calhoun, Robichaux, Elliott, & Moreland-Russell, 2014), and the Sustained Implementation Support Scale (Hodge, Turner, Sanders, & Filus, 2017). These tools may be helpful for EBP providers.

Anticipate modification

Unique aspects of the implementation setting or context may give rise to the need for providers to adapt the program. In fact, research suggests that program adaptation may be necessary in order to sustain most newly implemented EBPs (Stirman et al., 2012). Agency leaders should consult the Program Developer prior to making any modifications. It is recommended that agencies review the program’s fidelity requirements prior to making the decision to adopt the program in order to determine if modification would be required. If modification is made postadoption, changes should be documented when they are made and the agency should continue to collect and monitor agency data to ensure the modification doesn’t have a negative effect.

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