



Prevention Planning Into Action



Capacity Building
CENTER FOR STATES

Change and Implementation Prevention Planning Crosswalk

Agencies making the shift to prevention are engaging in complex work to strengthen families and communities. Applying a structured approach that draws from implementation science can help agencies ensure sustainable prevention program and practice changes that meet community needs and help improve outcomes for children and families. The **Change and Implementation in Practice** series resources provide detailed information and strategies for agencies tackling change management and program implementation. This complementary publication can help with prevention planning and guide implementation teams to think about specific considerations for applying change and implementation topics to their prevention work.

Each section covers a specific change and implementation topic and connects it with prevention planning activities. While often presented as a linear process, it's important to note that teams will often move back and forth among the activities in a change and implementation process. For example, assessing readiness may be ongoing throughout, and teaming is a key consideration during each of the activities.

Read this to:

- ◆ Learn more about the intersections between prevention planning and a change and implementation process
- ◆ Explore ideas for applying a change and implementation process to prevention planning and implementation
- ◆ Identify next steps and considerations for prevention planning and implementation teams



You may find yourself asking different questions during different phases of your process, such as:



Are we ready to develop (or implement) our prevention plan?



Who needs to be at the table?



What problem(s) is our prevention plan designed to address?



What is our pathway to prevention?



Which prevention services are needed achieve outcomes?



What do we need to successfully implement our prevention plan?



How should we roll out prevention services?



How do we know what's working and what needs to change?



Readiness

Assessing and building readiness are important parts of a successful change and implementation process. Readiness describes the extent to which an organization is both willing and able to put new programs and practices in place (Dymnicki et al., 2014). Agencies should plan to assess, build, and reassess readiness over time.

Key tasks of assessing readiness:

1. Consider factors that contribute to readiness:

- a. Motivation: Do our leadership, staff, and stakeholders want to make these changes? Are they committed?
- b. General capacity: How well does our agency function generally? Do we have the resources, knowledge, and infrastructure we need? Is our agency staff aligned with this new work? Do we have a strong track record of internal and external engagement?
- c. Intervention-specific capacity: Is this program or intervention a good fit for our agency? Is it feasible for us to implement?

2. Develop an assessment approach

3. Conduct assessment and analyze findings

Assessing readiness should repeat over time at different phases of your process.

Are You Ready to Develop (or Implement) a Prevention Plan?

Your team will want to consider and assess readiness at several different phases, including:

- ◆ **Before planning begins:** Does your team have the capacity to move forward? Is everyone on board?
- ◆ **Before implementing the prevention plan:** Is everything in place to move all the different pieces of the plan into action?
- ◆ **Before implementing specific prevention programs:** Are providers ready to implement the programs? Do they have the capacity they need? What does your team need to do to support them?

Think about how the readiness factors align with prevention and what the indicators might be. For example:

- ◆ Your team is **motivated** to move forward with prevention. This is apparent because:
 - ◆ There is an established vision for transformational change and agency leaders, staff, and partners demonstrate commitment to that vision
 - ◆ The team understands the importance of and has a clear plan to include partners with lived experience in developing and implementing the plan
- ◆ Your team knows what **capacity** it needs to begin planning. This is apparent because:
 - ◆ The team used a readiness assessment to determine strengths and areas for growth
 - ◆ While the agency has strong leadership and a supportive framework, a need for additional financial resources and dedicated staff before beginning the process was identified

Suggested Next Steps and Considerations

1. Create and facilitate a process to move through the key tasks of readiness.
2. Remember to revisit and reassess readiness at different phases of your process.



Teaming

Teaming brings together individuals with the different types of skills and expertise needed to effectively guide change and implementation activities.

Teams can be formed at several points in the change and implementation process. While a core steering team typically comes together once a problem or need is identified, subteams or workgroups may be formed as needed for specific activities (e.g., creating a theory of change, researching potential interventions, training staff, evaluating implementation).

Key tasks of teaming:

1. Identify the team's purpose
2. Identify team members and the teaming structure
3. Develop a team charter
4. Develop a team communication plan and external communication strategy
5. Guide the change process
6. Analyze results and repeat as necessary

Who Needs to Be at the Table?

Prevention planning and implementation will involve multiple different teams that include both internal and external partners. These teams might be part of an established structure responsible for leadership and oversight of prevention efforts (sometimes called a governance structure) and could include steering committees, advisory groups, subcommittees, workgroups, and implementation teams. These teams should not remain static. Members should evolve depending on the stage of implementation and the required skills and experiences needed. However, people with lived experience should always be represented.

Convening teams early in your process offers an opportunity to develop authentic partnership with a broad group of stakeholders who represent different perspectives. Prevention planning will require deep involvement of youth and families with lived experience. Careful attention should be paid to ensure wide representation of families, youth, and communities are invited to participate throughout the planning and implementation process as experts and co-creators. Each member should be prepared and supported to ensure their voice is heard.

Potential prevention team members include (but are not limited to):

- ◆ Youth and families with lived experience in child welfare
- ◆ Youth and families who could be eligible for prevention services
- ◆ Tribal partners
- ◆ Community leaders and advocates, including from faith-based organizations
- ◆ Community-based agencies that work with youth and families, including those who provide family support and family strengthening programming, mental health treatment, and substance use treatment
- ◆ Cross-system partners such as Tribal governments, Medicaid, behavioral health care systems, providers, and schools



Problem Exploration

Problem exploration includes data analysis to get a clear understanding of needs and challenges and why they occur. Teams that fully understand the underlying causes of their problems are more likely to choose and implement a solution that will make a difference.

Key tasks of intervention selection and design/adaptation:

1. Identify a problem
2. Create a data plan to explore the problem
3. Collect and analyze data
4. Identify possible contributing factors and possible root causes
5. Explore and validate possible root causes
6. Isolate the root cause to address

Problem exploration helps teams prepare to develop a theory of change.

What Problem(s) Is Being Addressed?

As the child welfare system grapples with too many children entering into child welfare services, problem exploration offers an opportunity to understand more about why some families are likely to experience child welfare involvement and family separation. Digging into data can help agencies better understand the reasons why certain families are overrepresented in child welfare and can uncover systemic issues, such as the conflation of poverty with neglect as well as practice issues, such as the quality and effectiveness of in-home services.

Targeted prevention services and policy/practice changes that tackle the root causes of child welfare involvement and entry into foster care are more likely to result in desired outcomes.

Suggested Next Steps and Considerations

1. Identify whether your planning team includes the partners needed (e.g., researchers, data specialists, and individuals close to the problem or need) to conduct problem exploration. If not, make a plan to bring others to the table.
2. Consider the following as you identify key sources of data to inform problem exploration:
 - ◆ Youth and families with lived experience in child welfare, as well as those who could potentially benefit from prevention services, can provide rich information unavailable from other data sources.
 - ◆ Community-level data, such as census data and community health assessment data, can help teams identify gaps, needs, and opportunities.
 - ◆ Child welfare administrative data can help teams understand the children, youth, and families most likely to enter care.
3. Identify a strategy to interpret and share data. Consider what context your partners will need to understand the nuances of the data.
4. Facilitate a problem exploration process using the six key tasks as a guide.



Theory of Change

A theory of change helps illustrate a series of changes that must occur to address a problem or need. Without a theory of change, agencies may move down the wrong path when trying to solve a problem.

A theory of change includes a series of causal links (conditions, changes, short-term outcomes) that must unfold to achieve the desired outcome. Together, these links make up the pathway of change from the root cause(s) of the problem to the long-term outcome.

Key tasks of theory of change development:

1. Gather information on the problem statement, root cause(s), and target population
2. Identify a long-term outcome
3. Develop the pathways of change (also known as causal links)
4. Define actions
5. Document assumptions and rationale

The creation of a theory of change helps teams, partners, and other stakeholders get on the same page about what needs to happen to reach shared goals. It also helps set a foundation for selecting, adapting, or designing interventions.

The terms **theory of change** and **logic model** are often used interchangeably, but they are different tools. As teams embark on this work, it may be helpful to define terms and clarify how each plays a unique role in prevention planning. A theory of change explains **why** the change will occur and shows the pathway from the root cause to the desired outcome. A logic model focuses on **what** happens to make a program successful and is typically organized in a linear fashion (inputs + outputs + activities = outcomes).

What Is the Pathway to Prevention?

A prevention-focused theory of change illustrates the pathway from a reactionary system of foster care to desired outcomes in which families receive the supports they need to thrive and fewer children and youth are separated from their families. An established theory of change will then help inform the team's exploration of prevention programs and services.

Suggested Next Steps and Considerations

Developing a clear vision can help you and your team think about the pathway to actualize that vision.

1. Consider reaching out to your peers in other states to hear how their teams developed their theory of change.
2. As your team begins the development process, ask yourselves the following questions for consideration:
 - How does the theory of change reflect the input and priorities of youth, families, and communities?
 - How does the theory of change reflect unique local factors, including the community's vision for prevention, identified needs, and local conditions?
3. Develop a theory of change using the five key tasks as a guide.



Intervention Selection and Design/Adaptation

As child welfare agencies face decisions about how to address their needs, choosing the right set of solutions is crucial to improving outcomes. While there often is pressure to rush to a decision, taking time to research options and think critically about fit and feasibility can save resources and lead to improved outcomes.

Key tasks of intervention selection and design/adaptation:

Part I: The selection process

1. Research possible intervention options
2. Assess evidence, fit, and feasibility of possible interventions
3. Determine whether interventions are well-defined (usable and transferable)
4. Decide to replicate or adapt an existing intervention or design a new one

Part II: A well-defined intervention

1. Define the intervention
2. Develop a proposal
3. Further define and operationalize the intervention

Following intervention selection and design/adaptation, agencies can move on to assess readiness for the intervention and begin implementation planning and capacity building.

Which Prevention Services Are Needed to Achieve Outcomes?

Prevention planning teams will be tasked with identifying which programs, services, or other interventions will meet the needs of the identified candidates for prevention services. Selected programs should align with the theory of change and have evidence of effectiveness with the target population, and the agency should consider whether the programs are a good fit and feasible to implement.

Suggested Next Steps and Considerations

Create a plan to move through the key tasks of intervention selection and design/adaptation. Consider the following as you begin the selection process:

- ◆ Solicit input from youth and families in your identified target population to understand what prevention services they need and want.
- ◆ Identify the sources and type of data you will use to inform selection.
- ◆ Consider the need for population-specific and community-based adaptations.
 - Have you talked to program developers, subject matter experts, and community members about how the program might be adapted appropriately?
 - Have you talked to other agencies that have implemented similar programs or strategies for lessons learned?
- ◆ Consider funding sources, including title IV-E funds as a possible payer of last resort. For example:
 - Which programs are currently reimbursable through Medicaid or other funding streams?
 - Is the funding sustainable?
- ◆ Consider replication needs:
 - Are there service providers skilled in implementation? Are they implementing the program with fidelity? How do you know?
 - Will implementers need additional capacity to serve the prevention program target population?



Implementation Planning and Capacity Building

Thoughtful planning and capacity building lay the groundwork for new programs and practice changes. An intentional process can save time and resources and can improve the likelihood of sustainable success.

A high-quality implementation plan reflects prior work on problem exploration, theory of change, and intervention selection. It addresses agency readiness for implementation and guides next steps in testing, piloting, staging, and monitoring. In addition, implementation plans should anticipate challenges and should be designed as living documents that evolve over time.

Key tasks of implementation planning and capacity building:

Part I: Preparation

1. Outline implementation plan elements, identify sources, and consider context
2. Revisit teaming and leadership structure

Part II: Planning for Capacity Building

1. Review readiness assessment findings
2. Develop strategies to build capacity and strengthen motivation

Part III: Implementation plan development

1. Build work plan: identify activities to get the intervention and the agency ready prior to implementation
2. Build work plan: identify activities to “roll out” the intervention and measure implementation quality and outcomes
3. Identify communication and engagement activities
4. Consolidate and review implementation plan

These tasks may overlap, and teams may move between them over time.

What Needs to Be in Place Before Implementation?

Prevention plans require thoughtful preparation for the implementation of the plan in its entirety and implementation of specific programs or interventions.

As prevention planning teams consider approaches to implementation, they may want to ask themselves the following questions:

- ◆ **Continuous quality improvement (CQI):** How is prevention embedded within your CQI system? How can you plan for tracking and monitoring success?
- ◆ **Communication:** Who needs what information and when do they need it? What kinds of feedback loops have been established? Who has been engaged in your process and who else needs to be at the table?
- ◆ **Data and outcomes:** How will you know your prevention plan is making a difference in the lives of children and families? How will family voice inform your evaluation?
- ◆ **Continuous monitoring:** How will you know if the selected interventions are working? Will you be able to course correct quickly if there are any unexpected negative consequences?

► Suggested Next Steps and Considerations

1. Revisit your teams and make changes as needed.
2. Consider whether there are prevention services that have existing implementation plans and, if so, what needs to be added or changed.
3. Using the eight key tasks as a guide, facilitate a process to develop an implementation approach that is continuously reviewed and revised, as needed.



Intervention Testing, Piloting, and Staging

Before an agency launches a new program or intervention on a large scale, components or procedures should be tested (usability testing), implementation should be piloted on a small scale (piloting), and/or the intervention should be introduced gradually (staging). These approaches can help build readiness and capacity for wide-scale replication.

Key tasks of intervention testing, piloting, and staging:

Part I: Usability testing

1. Create usability testing plan
2. Conduct usability testing, analyze results, and make adjustments

Part II: Piloting

1. Determine approach and develop plan
2. Identify and recruit sites
3. Conduct pilot
4. Assess results, review progress, and make adjustments

Part III: Staging and scaling up

1. Develop/refine plans for staging the intervention and scaling up
2. Identify sites and sequencing
3. Build capacity and scale up
4. Review progress and benchmarks

These tasks may overlap, and teams may need to loop back and forth between functions. While not all agencies will go through all three parts of the process, the implementation plan should include the rationale for why specific approaches were selected.

How Should Prevention Services Be Rolled Out?

As you begin to think through implementation, your team will want to make some decisions about how to take the next best steps for success.

Suggested Next Steps and Considerations

1. Identify any new tools or processes that would benefit from usability testing. For example, usability testing can help ensure that caseworkers are easily able to complete a child-specific prevention plan and refer families to prevention services. This approach allows for necessary modifications prior to wide-scale implementation.
2. Consider how each new program will be delivered. Will you deliver statewide or would you be more successful with a single site or regional pilot? Piloting offers an opportunity to observe, refine, and make changes to training and coaching based on lessons learned. It can also provide important information about whether the intervention is a good fit or there is a need to change course.
3. Consider whether you will deliver all new services at once or whether you will strategically focus resources and gradually scale up one program or candidate group at a time.



Monitoring, Evaluating, and Applying Findings

Monitoring and evaluation help support informed decision-making and guide improvements to a program or other intervention and its implementation.

Monitoring and evaluation can help agencies determine what is working well, what is not working well, and what needs to change. Monitoring, evaluating, applying findings, and planning for sustainability should be integral parts of change and implementation activities from the earliest phases.

Key tasks of monitoring, evaluating, and applying findings:

Part I: Setting the stage for monitoring and evaluation

1. Consider the circumstances and needs of the agency
2. Develop a logic model
3. Identify questions
4. Identify measures, data sources, and potential data collection methods
5. Develop an evaluation plan

Part II: Data collection and analysis

1. Collect and analyze data

Part III: Using data to make decisions and adjustments

1. Share findings and recommendations
2. Make decisions to further spread, adjust, or discontinue the intervention

Part IV: Sustainability planning

1. Refine and implement sustainability plan

What Is Working and What Needs to Change?

Prevention planning teams will want to ensure that there is a process in place to assess effective implementation of the strategies included in the plan, including any identified interventions or programs.

Suggested Next Steps and Considerations

1. Determine what type of evaluation is needed for each proposed intervention in the prevention plan. The Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago [Family First Planning and Readiness Toolkit](#) includes examples of state evaluation plans.
2. Determine how your CQI process is aligned with implementation of each intervention.
3. Consider the following questions:
 - ◆ Who are your key partners that can support monitoring and evaluation? These may include:
 - Agency CQI or data systems staff
 - Universities or other independent evaluators
 - Model developers
 - Intermediary organizations that support effective implementation
 - Youth and families
 - Community-based organizations/providers
 - ◆ How will individuals with lived experience be involved?
 - ◆ How will your data systems need to be modified to track short- and long-term outcomes? What types of data sharing may be needed with partner organizations?
 - ◆ How will lessons learned be used to make improvements?
4. Work with your partners to facilitate a process guided by Part 1 of the key tasks.
5. Collaboratively develop an evaluation plan that attends to the other key tasks.

Looking for Related Resources and Support?

The National Child Welfare Center for Innovation and Advancement (NCWCIA) provides data-driven assistance to public child welfare agencies to help them identify innovative ways to address challenges and improve performance and outcomes so that children can remain safe and with their families whenever possible. For additional resources, visit the NCWCIA website. To request services tailored to your needs, email NCWCIA-Info@jbsinternational.com or contact your [NCWCIA innovation and advancement navigator](#).

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