Australian Education Research Organisation

Leading implementation

Building and operating an effective school implementation team

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Implementation of evidence-based teaching practices is a collaborative effort that relies on leadership from more than one or two individuals. This practice resource helps leaders of implementation to form and maintain a team that can best support implementation efforts in their school.

Using this practice resource

This practice resource is part of a set of resources about leading implementation through a school implementation team. The set also includes:

the Leading Implementation: Building an Effective Team and a Specific Implementation Goal module, which provides an overview of leading implementation through an implementation team

a video case study, Building and Operating an Effective Implementation Team at Mount Hutton Public School, which is also included in the module

an Implementation Team Meeting practice guide and template, which helps with planning for and facilitating regular implementation team meetings that focus on a deliberate and structured approach to implementation.

This practice resource is designed to be used in 2 ways, depending on the stage of implementation:

During the Explore stage, it aims to support **school leaders** in establishing a team to lead the implementation of evidence-based teaching practice(s) in their school (see Building your implementation team).

Throughout the Prepare, Deliver and Sustain stages, it aims to support **school implementation teams** with operating effectively (see Operating as an implementation team).

This resource also includes a section on why it's important to lead implementation through a team, and an appendix with reflection questions for school leaders and implementation teams.

About this practice resource

This practice resource is informed by key findings and guidance from implementation research, including literature on effective implementation teams. It also incorporates insights from the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO)'s work with schools through the Learning Partner project. This project operationalises key concepts and frameworks from implementation research to support schools in using a deliberate and structured approach to implementing evidence-based teaching practices.

Purpose of an implementation team

Effective school implementation leadership guides a school community to adopt, use and sustain evidenced-based teaching practice(s) to ultimately improve student outcomes. This section discusses the benefits of leading implementation through a team, as well as the core activities of an effective implementation team.

Benefits of an effective implementation team

An effective implementation team, with the right membership, processes and accountabilities, is a significant enabler for successful implementation.[1] An effective implementation team can:

- enable greater adoption of evidence-based practice(s)
- improve staff buy-in to implementation efforts
- increase the likelihood of sustaining the evidence-based practice(s).[2]

By contrast, relying too heavily on one or two individuals to drive an implementation effort, regardless of how capable or motivated those individuals are, can be problematic.[3]

A team is essential for leading implementation because (among other things):

- Implementation is as much about the relationships between those involved in implementation as it is about technical and practical considerations. Relationships that develop a sense of 'connection' or 'community' may strengthen implementation outcomes.[4]

- A team of people with diverse perspectives has a more complete understanding of the implementation context in a school and, therefore, can develop more contextually relevant implementation plans and strategies.[5]
- Working as a team buffers implementation efforts from changes such as key individuals leaving or taking on a different role at the school.[6]

Core activities of an effective implementation team

It's important for an implementation team to have a common purpose that's meaningful for members both individually and as a group.[7] The team needs to spend time agreeing on their school's priority implementation challenge, as well as their team's purpose and rationale.

An effective implementation team engages their school community, including teachers, support staff, parents and primary caregivers and students. The team should collate data and diverse perspectives regarding the need and context for change.[8] These data and perspectives will inform **what** and **how** evidence-based teaching practice(s) will be implemented.

An effective implementation team also fosters a learning culture across their school.[9] This could include normalising observation of teaching practice and teachers receiving feedback on teaching practice.

Guided by data on enablers and barriers and implementation outcomes, an implementation team regularly reviews and adapts their school's existing systems and processes to enable effective implementation.[10]

Building your implementation team

This section discusses the suggested features of your implementation team. School leaders – including mid-level leaders who aim to drive teacher practice change – should use this information when forming a team.

Suggested structure and characteristics of your implementation team

Number of team members

An implementation team is usually made up of 3 to 8 members. Having at least 3 members should allow your team to access the benefits of leading implementation through a team and ensure all necessary team roles can be fulfilled. Having no more than 8 members should keep your team at a workable size.

The exact number of members in your team may depend on factors such as:

- your school size
- the range of expertise individual team members bring to your team
- the number of teachers involved in implementation and the diversity of your implementation context
- the complexity of the practice(s) being implemented
- the availability of potential team members.

Repurposing existing teams

Implementation teams are often repurposed existing teams.[11] For example, your school may have a leadership team that meets every week. You could turn this team's fortnightly meetings into implementation team meetings, with new implementation team members invited.

Before forming your implementation team, consider what teams already exist, which ones might make an effective implementation team, and what changes might be needed. Also consider existing meeting purposes and agendas, team capabilities and meeting schedules.

Roles of team members

Your implementation team will require people with specific skills and experience who also need to fulfil specific functions (see Table 1).

Table 1: Suggested roles of implementation team members

Specific function in the implementation team	People who commonly fill this role
• Make **decisions**, including about resourcing and use of time • Ensure the implementation focus aligns with **overarching school priorities**	Senior school leader(s)
• Share **experience with implementing** evidenced-based teaching practice(s) • Coordinate **data** and information so that others in the team can engage with it	Experienced implementers
• Share expertise on the **practice(s)** being implemented • Lead implementation **strategies** like modelling and coaching	Practice expert(s) and/or instructional coach(es)
• Understand the **context** the practice(s) will be implemented in • Closely **relate to** and have influence among staff who will be involved in implementation efforts	Staff who represent diverse groups who will be involved in implementation efforts (e.g., year level coordinators, diverse learning coordinators)
• Clarify, document and **communicate** key discussion points, outcomes and next steps and update the implementation plan	Staff with excellent organisational and communication skills
• Share a **community perspective** to help tailor implementation or the practice(s) to better fit the school community	• Parents and primary caregivers • Representatives from community services such as early learning or flexible learning centres • First Nations staff and representatives, such as First Nations teaching partners or consultive group representatives

When thinking about who might fulfil these roles, note that:

- Your implementation team doesn't necessarily need to include all members of your school executive, and will likely include members outside official school leadership.
- Depending on your school's context, implementation team functions may be carried out by one member or split across multiple members.
  - For example, a senior leader who can support decisions on resourcing and use of time may also be an instructional coach who can support modelling. Larger schools may also have additional instructional coaches who aren't part of the implementation team but are involved in delivering implementation strategies.
- It may not be clear who could best fulfil some of these roles until a draft implementation goal has been set.
  - For example, you may not be able to select a practice expert until your implementation team has an initial idea of what evidence-based teaching practice(s) your school intends to implement.
- Your implementation team's membership should reflect the demographics of your school community. This can help foster a culturally responsive implementation process and enable a culturally safe environment for staff and students.

Tip

For examples of how roles could be allocated across implementation team members, see AERO's examples of a primary school implementation plan and a secondary school implementation plan.

Capabilities of team members

Beyond performing their individual roles well, members of your implementation team will need to collaborate and coordinate with one another on interdependent tasks.[12] Ideally, all implementation team members will demonstrate key capabilities that assist with effective collaboration and coordination (see Table 2).

Table 2: Suggested capabilities of implementation team members

Implementation team members...	Why this capability is important and/or what it looks like	For example, in schools AERO has worked with, implementation team members...
share a common **purpose and rationale**[13]	Knowing why the implementation team exists and what it sets out to achieve helps: • determine who should be part of the team • support the team's decisions and actions • motivate team members (allowing them to persist through challenges) • the team relate to and engage with other teams.	remained focused on the 4 key components of implementation during implementation team meetings
form high-quality **relationships** based on shared norms and values[14]	High-quality relationships are evident when: • implementation team members show mutual trust and respect, fostering a team culture that values mutual support, transparency, conscientiousness, sharing and celebrating • norms and values underpin relationships. For some teams, it may be useful to agree and document the norms the team expects everyone to follow.[15, 16]	invited teachers into their classrooms so teachers could see how they use evidence-based teaching practices (as part of an implementation strategy of modelling)
are skilled **communicators**[17]	Effective communication within implementation teams: • is easily understood, concise, complete and timely • often results in a coming together of different perspectives and expertise that no one person working alone would have been able to create.[18]	met regularly to discuss and monitor the timeline for their professional learning cycles, making time for all perspectives to be considered, and adapted the timeline when required
engage with one another and with others[19]	Meaningful engagement: • occurs when implementation team members and others are involved and included in sharing knowledge and expertise, solving problems and making decisions • is planned, with a clear purpose (see Operating your implementation team).	facilitated honest and transparent discussions with staff about implementation enablers and barriers
reflect on data together[20]	Shared reflection on data: • helps implementation teams monitor the implementation process and assess progress • looks and sounds like team members setting aside time in meetings to analyse data, and critically discuss implementation barriers, enablers and outcomes.	used informal classroom observations to gather data about the current level of fidelity of explicit instruction across their school, and reviewed this data together to make decisions about how to tailor modelling and coaching support and adjust their pace of implementation

Although the capabilities in Table 2 are necessary for team functioning, they need to be complemented with clear roles and procedures for implementation teams to perform effectively (see Building your team structures and procedures). An implementation team with these capabilities but without clear roles and procedures will be pleasant to be part of but not very effective at leading implementation.

Considerations when building your implementation team

It may be difficult to establish an implementation team that meets all the suggested features, especially given competing demands on staff members. If your school is in this situation, consider whether and how:

- any other school activities could be deprioritised to ensure implementation team members are able to support this implementation effort
- staff could be upskilled to carry out certain functions or demonstrate certain capabilities
- team meetings could be more efficient (e.g., whether all team members will be required at every meeting)
- any other steps could be taken to make involvement in the implementation team more feasible for members
- job descriptions for advertised roles could incorporate the suggested implementation roles or capabilities
- you could access any external support (e.g., from regional school improvement workforces, external consultants or other school leaders who've undertaken similar change efforts).

Alternatively, it may be more appropriate to slow down by considering whether:

- your school is ready (has the capacity and willingness) to implement at this time, or should prepare to start implementation efforts later
- to plan for a slower pace of implementation (for example, meeting as a leadership team every 3 weeks instead of every 2 weeks), without losing momentum for change
- it's useful to pilot implementation of the evidence-based teaching practice(s) in a small group first and consider scale-up at a later date.

Operating your implementation team

This section details how your implementation team can build implementation skills, establish structures and procedures, and know when to slow down or renew team membership.

Building team members' skills in taking a deliberate and structured approach to implementation

Taking an evidence-informed approach to implementation is grounded in school context (the **where**), focuses on evidence-based teaching practices (the **what**) and relies on 4 implementation components (the **how**). These 4 implementation components are:


using a staged approach


using implementation strategies


addressing enablers and barriers


monitoring implementation outcomes.

Members of your implementation team should be supported in building their knowledge and skills in taking a deliberate and structured approach so they can collectively use the 4 implementation components to guide decisions and actions. This capability-building should start early in the Explore and Prepare stages – a time when the implementation team is making critical decisions about what and how implementation will occur.

Tip

To start building team members' knowledge and understanding of a deliberate and structured approach to implementation:

- use AERO's professional learning module for school implementation teams, Implementation for Impact: A Deliberate and Structured Approach
- read and discuss AERO's set of explainers on taking an evidence-informed approach to implementation
- consider how school leaders might upskill other leaders, either in the approach itself or in specific implementation strategies like coaching.[21]

Building your team structures and procedures

Predictable and efficient team structures will help your implementation team members carry out their roles. It's, therefore, recommended that your team develops an implementation plan that covers all aspects of implementation, ranging from establishing an implementation goal and identifying potential enablers and barriers, through to scheduling activities. This plan ensures everyone knows what they need to do by when, and how to do it well.

Structures and procedures to support implementation team meetings include:

- a regular meeting schedule that helps maintain momentum for change
- a meeting structure that supports team members to use the concepts and language of a deliberate and structured approach to implementation.

Tip

AERO has developed practice guides and templates to assist implementation teams in creating their own implementation plans and running deliberate and structured implementation meetings.

Knowing when to slow down or revisit team membership

Implementation teams that are missing important members, understaffed or experience high turnover may struggle to maintain momentum. For example, an implementation team without a senior school leader will lack the authority to make decisions about resourcing. Persisting despite these barriers may jeopardise implementation success. In these circumstances, it may be advisable to slow down or pause implementation activities until the team can be re-established and their skills developed.

Revisiting team membership during sustainment and scale-up

Your implementation team may need to adjust its membership when you are sustaining or scaling up your implementation effort. For example, new practice expert(s) and/or instructional coaches may need to join the team to lead modelling and coaching of the evidence-based teaching practice to additional teaching teams. Reviewing the membership of your implementation team will help to ensure that your team continues to fulfill all the functions of an effective implementation team.

Appendix A: Reflection questions

This appendix includes reflection questions based on the content in this practice resource.

These reflection questions could be considered by individual school leaders, or form the basis of group discussions with school leadership teams or implementation teams.

Building your implementation team

- How will you ensure all team members support the team's **purpose and rationale**? How will you check that team members view the challenge the team is tackling as a priority?
- How will you create and develop a team that consistently demonstrates **positive, productive relationships**? How will you support all team members to voice their opinions and ideas prior to deciding on specific steps?
- Are members easily understood, concise and complete in what they communicate, and are they timely in sharing information with others? What will you do to support the team to be **effective communicators**?
- What actions will the team take to **facilitate meaningful engagement** that is considered, well-planned, and has a clear purpose?
- What routines will you put in place to ensure the team **reflects on data** and critically discusses progress?
- How will the implementation team ensure **key roles and functions** in the team are sustainable?

Operating as an implementation team

- How will your team know the **purpose of team meetings**? (For example, you could write a clear goal that's linked to a working implementation plan for the team.)
- What will support your team to **meet regularly**, with clear meeting roles and agenda items shared in advance?
- How will meeting **time be protected** to look at data, discuss reasons for this data, be clear on the need or challenge and explore options, before committing to decisions?
- How will your team's discussion and **decision-making process** be facilitated?
- What will be your team's approach to creating and updating an **implementation plan**?

Endnotes

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