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The Missing Piece: Assessing Implementation Fidelity

Megan Hodge
Virginia Commonwealth University, mlhodge@gmail.com

Laura W. Gariepy
Virginia Commonwealth University, lwgariepy@vcu.edu

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The Missing Piece:
Assessing Implementation Fidelity

A chef can only prepare a fine meal if she or he has the best possible ingredients. The same is true for assessing the quality of library services: In order to understand the outcomes of a particular service, one must understand the extent to which the service was implemented as planned. This recipe explains what implementation fidelity is and how to evaluate it.

Megan Hodge, Virginia Commonwealth University, mlhodge@vcu.edu; Laura Gariepy, Virginia Commonwealth University, lwgariepy@vcu.edu

NUTRITION INFORMATION
While libraries are increasingly places of change and innovation, many of these changes are not assessed for their effectiveness or for the extent to which they were implemented as planned. While patron feedback is extremely important, it will not indicate whether the library's implementation of that new service or program is consistent with what was originally envisioned.

Implementation fidelity is "the degree to which an intervention or program is delivered as intended" (Carroll, et al. 2007, 40). Libraries should consider assessing the implementation fidelity of programs and services to avoid abandoning innovations whose theories are sound and have failed only in execution.

DIETARY STANDARDS
ACRL *Standards for Libraries in Higher Education* (2011) Principle 1, Indicator 1.5; Principle 7, Indicator 7.8

American Evaluation Association's Program Evaluation Standards

COOKING TIME
Several months

COOKING TECHNIQUE
Observations, surveys, interviews, or focus groups

INGREDIENTS
Any documentation created during the target program/service's proposal and creation

This could include models, charts, procedure manuals, and staff memos.

PREPARATION
Documentation
Compile documentation created during the program or service's proposal and creation. If such documentation does not exist—because the program grew organically, for example—take the opportunity to draft such documentation now. It is especially important to include information on the goals of the service and guidelines or procedures for how it ought to work in practice.

Questions
Determine the questions to be answered. Questions should be specific: "To what extent do staff and librarians accurately record statistics of answered questions?" for example, rather than "Does the new service model work the way as planned?" The more general the question, the more difficult to elicit meaningful responses.

Data collection method(s)
How will you gather information on whether or not the service was implemented as intended? Qualitative methods, such as interviews and focus groups, can be helpful for discovering and exploring unexpected issues due to their flexible structure, while quantitative methods are valuable for answering specific, targeted questions.

THE ASSESSMENT
Administer the evaluation(s)
Analyze the data to identify mismatches between theory and implementation. Consider potential solutions to identified problems.

Share evaluation findings
Report out to library administration and all librarians/staff who play a role in the service/program's provision. Such open communication will ensure that feedback has been correctly interpreted, and it can be helpful for staff involved in different aspects of a program to understand each other's roles.

Implement solutions as feasible

Expect to identify issues which indicate that your new service or program differs from the original plan in multiple respects. Prepare a plan of action for addressing inconsistencies and implementing solutions that bring the service or program closer in line with the original vision.

ALLERGY WARNINGS

It may be advisable to adjust the scale of the evaluation depending on the target program/service's own scale and the importance placed on it by library administration.

Ensuring confidentiality and/or anonymity of staff feedback is essential to elicit the most honest responses.

CHEF'S NOTE

This model is broadly applicable as libraries of all kinds implement new programs and services and subsequently overhaul or abandon them based upon their perceived failure when the program could have been suffering from implementation problems.

Regularly conducting evaluations of implementation fidelity and correcting any identified problems could result in staff feeling increased buy-in and ownership of future changes.

REFERENCES

Carroll, Christopher, Malcolm Patterson, Stephen Wood, Andrew Booth, Jo Rick, and Shashi Balain. "A Conceptual Framework for Implementation Fidelity." Implementation Science 2 (2007): 40–48. doi: 10.1186/1748-5908-2-40.