

A Systems Approach

to Substance Use Services in Canada



Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse
Centre canadien de lutte contre l'alcoolisme et les toxicomanies

Systems Approach Workbook

Change Management Module: **Implementation**

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Who should use the change management modules?

- Leaders and decision makers in the substance abuse and mental health services field, such as regional directors and program managers
- Anyone interested in learning more about a system-change approach to improving substance use and mental health services and supports

Why use the change management modules?

- Many people have difficulty accessing and navigating the current system
- The system is constantly evolving and is influenced by many factors
- The Tiered Model presented in *A Systems Approach to Substance Use in Canada: Recommendations for a National Treatment Strategy* provides an evidence-based framework to guide system change
- Taking a change management approach increases the efficiency and sustainability of system development

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Taking a Systems Approach: Implementation

Scenario:

The following example is provided to illustrate the context in which the Systems Approach Workbook might be helpful. The example develops throughout the change modules to help readers situate themselves in the process.

The implementation plan has been approved by senior decision makers. There has been consistent communication between the implementation team and organizational staff. The regional director is confident that detailed preparation has set the stage for successful implementation and wants to ensure the process is kept on track despite inevitable challenges.

What needs to be done to stay true to the implementation plan, monitor progress, recognize success and address unexpected barriers?

The following section outlines the key considerations to be taken into account when using [*A systems Approach to Substance Use in Canada*](#) to guide system¹ change. The third stage of the process consists of carrying out the [*implementation plan*](#) developed in the preparation stage.

The change modules provide guidance according to five *change management* categories leaders should consider throughout any change process: Context, Leadership, Communication, Outcomes and Benefits, and Individual Considerations.

Context

Reviewing and verifying the *context analysis* prepared in earlier phases just prior to implementation will inform final adjustments to the implementation plan. Ensuring the context is up to date will also provide accurate baseline data for tracking progress and evaluating outcomes.

Any updates to the context analysis will need to be considered in terms of their impact on other components of the plan. For example, if a new service addresses a previously identified gap (e.g., gender-specific services or community outreach), the service development plan can be adjusted to prioritize a different area.

The context analysis can also inform the **timing** of implementation. A broad range of factors may impact the implementation of the Systems Approach, including:

- **Staff workload:** Is there a particular time when workload eases or increases. For example, does workload increase prior to or just following a service intake period, or decrease during the summer or winter holidays?

¹ Please see the Glossary for an explanation of italicized terms.

- **Organizational change:** Are there other change processes currently under way or planned? If so, can they be coordinated to reduce *change fatigue*?

Most importantly, the context information remains a key reference point to ensure organizational strengths are being supported and built on throughout the implementation process.

Partnership is a major component of the Systems Approach. Conducting context analyses with potential partners will help to inform plans for collaboration.

Workbook Toolbox

- [Context Analysis Template for Substance Use Systems & Programs](#)
- Collaboration in Substance Use Systems

Leadership

Leadership is playing a dual role at the implementation stage by being both the visible champion for change at the organizational² and external levels as well as the behind-the-scenes engine driving the process. Strong internal coordination and communication will promote consistency while those leading the implementation are being pulled in many directions at once. Keeping the implementation plan front and centre as a guide will also help to provide focus and keep the process on track.

Strategic objectives for leadership at the implementation stage include:

- **Fostering empowerment and leadership throughout the organization:** For example, through the recognition of creative ideas and the delegation of responsibility for various project components.
- **Proactively identifying potential problems:** Ongoing communication between leadership, staff members and the teams developed to support the change process provides the opportunity to identify challenges before they reach a crisis state.
- **Promoting a strengths-based approach to problem solving:** For example, if resources for external training in community-based outreach and intervention are not able to meet demand, leadership can develop an internal “train-the-trainers” network that builds on existing internal expertise.
- **Keeping senior decision makers on board:** Keeping senior decision makers apprised of successes and progress toward goals validates their support for the process and the associated allocation of resources.

Workbook Toolbox

- [Effective Leadership](#)
- [Working with Teams to Support Change](#)
- Collaboration in Substance Use Systems

² Implementation may be taking place at the system, regional or service level. In the interest of brevity, “organization” is being used inclusively to refer to whichever level is most appropriate.

- **Supporting morale:** By recognizing commitment and innovation contributing to the implementation process at the group and individual levels.

Communication

Communication at this stage should follow the *communication strategy* developed in the preparation phase. Although internal communication remains important, at this stage communication should also include external partners and stakeholders that will be impacted.

The communication strategy likely involves a formal launch of the implementation plan to demonstrate organizational commitment and recognize the contributions being made. The nature of the launch will vary based on the organization, the scope of changes taking place, and the level of public or political sponsorship or visibility being sought. For example, a new agreement to hold screening and brief intervention training with a local primary care team might be announced through organizational email, whereas the introduction of a new multisectoral community outreach program to address a gap in the continuum of services might provide an opportunity for a ministerial announcement or press release.

The principles of consistency, accuracy, transparency and timeliness continue to guide communication; however, areas of focus now vary depending on internal or external audiences. *Strengths-based messaging* promotes engagement, enthusiasm and support across all audiences.

- **Internally**, the implementation or other support team continues to provide a direct contact for communication and feedback throughout the organization. It keeps everyone apprised of successes, challenges and changes during the implementation process.
- **Externally**, communication focuses on introducing partners (current and potential) to the Systems Approach and the organizational changes it frames. Messages should focus on the partnerships component and the benefits resulting from working together to comprehensively address substance use and related issues.
- **Vertically**, communication to senior decision makers should focus on successes. This communication could include key messages or briefing material that can continue up the line to provide recognition for the efforts being made at all levels.

Workbook Toolbox

- [Communications Plan](#)
- [Communications Tools](#)

Outcomes and Benefits

At the implementation stage, the focus shifts from identifying outcomes and benefits to tracking progress toward their achievement.

Developing and maintaining momentum and enthusiasm is facilitated by “early wins”—that is, concrete, short-term successes that have tangible benefits. Examples might include:

- Holding a cross-training workshop with inter-sectoral partners;

- Adding client representation to organizational advisory groups; or
- Introducing a *gender and diversity* component to staff training programs.

Internally, leadership and support teams can work with staff at various levels to identify group and individual outcomes and benefits that feed into the larger organizational process. These might relate to specific activities under the Systems Approach, such as new partnerships, or to organizational function, such as staff morale.

Analyzing and presenting outcomes and benefits at a range of levels promotes broad engagement. For example, the benefits that are most relevant to staff, senior management and external stakeholders will likely be very different and should be emphasized accordingly depending on the audience.

Tracking progress toward goals at all levels will also provide comprehensive information for evaluating the implementation process, and will aid in identifying both successes and potential challenges. Identifying benchmarks that measure, for example, current alignment of organizational practice with the System's Approach's *guiding concepts* is an important step in monitoring progress and an achievement that can be celebrated early in the process.

Individual Considerations

Effective leadership and communication continue to play key roles in ensuring individual considerations are taken into account during the implementation stage. The primary objectives at the implementation stage are promoting individual engagement and taking a strengths-based approach to addressing potential challenges. For example, leadership can recognize staff members' ability to help their clients through periods of change and illustrate that those same skills can be applied to organizational changes. Input should be encouraged both on what's working and what's not. This feedback will provide a more comprehensive picture and, ideally, present solutions by building on successes.

Adhering to the implementation plan demonstrates respect for staff input into its development. However, the Systems Approach's guiding concept of flexibility also applies—unanticipated situations can arise and their impact at the individual level may require revisions to the plan. As changes during the implementation process will create opportunities for staff to demonstrate creativity and develop new skills, leadership can provide recognition for innovation and initiative.

Considerations that might be raised during the implementation stage include:

- How do I express concerns about the progress or impacts of implementation in a meaningful way?
- I have an idea that I think will be helpful. How do I make it happen?
- Will the training process provide me with the skills that I need?
- Will my current skills still be valued?

Discussion Questions

The following list of discussion questions is intended as a tool to promote dialogue on key components of the implementation process; there are right or wrong answers.

Question	Considerations
1. What changes in context have occurred since your initial context analysis? What revisions to the implementation plan do these changes require?	Updating the context analysis can provide an opportunity to touch base and promote engagement with project partners.
2. What has been the biggest surprise in the implementation process so far? How did you deal with it?	Nothing ever goes strictly according to plan—but good planning helps deal with the unexpected.
3. How are leadership and creativity during the implementation process being recognized?	Rewarding these qualities will encourage them in those individuals recognized as well as in the rest of the organization.

Question	Considerations
4. What approach to problem solving is being used? Provide an example of how it's been applied to address a challenge or conflict.	The Effective Leadership module includes resources to assist with different approaches to leadership and problem solving.
5. What <i>knowledge exchange</i> mechanisms are being used to support the change process?	Consider whether these mechanisms are for short-term purposes only or part of broader knowledge exchange capacity.
6. Who is responsible for tracking progress and fidelity to the implementation plan?	The implementation plan should allow for flexibility; changes should be noted and reflected in the project evaluation.

Question	Considerations
7. How will needed adjustments to the implementation plan be assessed and decided upon?	Whatever leadership team approach you are using, this team should be involved in the decision process.
8. For each of the following groups—staff, senior leadership, external partners, clients—what is the first priority outcome or goal you think you will achieve? How will you know when you have achieved it?	Setting concrete, achievable, short-term goals relevant to the various stakeholders in the process helps generate engagement and momentum.
9. How have you or will you communicate early successes?	Highlighting early wins provides validation and motivation.

Question	Considerations
10. How are you keeping external partners informed of and involved with progress related to Systems Approach implementation?	Consulting with external partners throughout the change process is an important component of a collaborative approach. Consult the Collaboration in Substance Use Systems tool for a step-by-step process to developing collaborations.
11. Who are the different audiences for communication as the change is implemented?	Examples may include senior leadership, management, staff, partners, clients, etc.
12. What are the key messages about the change you would communicate to each group at this stage? (Identify between three and six key messages.)	Pulling out key messages provides focus and consistency. Ensure communications address goals and concerns relevant to each group.

Question	Considerations
13. What is the greatest motivating factor for staff, senior leadership and external partners to engage in the change process?	Consider whether these motivations have changed (recall Q12 in the background module). Don't forget to ask "what's in it for me" from each perspective.
14. What is the biggest challenge that has been identified by staff to date? How was it or will it be addressed?	The Working with Teams to Support Change and Effective Leadership modules can provide assistance in addressing challenges.

Summary Checklist

This checklist is intended as an opportunity to “check in” and ensure that key considerations and activities appropriate to the implementation stage have been accounted for. The list below is intended to be comprehensive but flexible; that is, not all items will apply in all situations. However, ensuring that as many of the boxes below are checked off as possible will make moving on to the sustainability stage easier.

- ☐ The context analysis has been updated.
- ☐ The implementation plan is underway.
- ☐ There is organization-wide understanding of the Systems Approach, Tiered Model and guiding concepts.
- ☐ There is an organization-wide understanding of the change process.
- ☐ The implementation or other liaison team is promoting engagement throughout the organization.
- ☐ Ongoing leadership or stewardship for the Systems Approach has been identified.
- ☐ A process is in place for addressing concerns with the change process.
- ☐ The communications plan is implemented.
- ☐ Indicators are being measured for the evaluation.
- ☐ Early targets have been reached.
- ☐ Early successes have been communicated.
- ☐ Amendments have been made to the implementation plan and logic model as necessary.
- ☐ External partners have been engaged and are aware of the Systems Approach.
- ☐ Preliminary evaluation data has been reviewed.
- ☐ Unions have been kept apprised of the process and been involved as appropriate.

References³

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³ The purpose of this reference list is to provide a range of options for additional information and ideas. References have been identified by both CCSA and project partners. Some of the references listed are proprietary. Inclusion in this list does not indicate CCSA endorsement. Categories are for ease of reference and are not mutually exclusive; for example, most references under Leadership are also relevant to Change Management.

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Leadership

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- The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) website (http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/about_apropos/evaluation/resources-eng.php) provides access to a program evaluation toolkit and a guide to project evaluation, as well as information about PHAC's own data collection and evaluation initiatives.

Suggestions?

We'd like to add to this list to provide a more diverse list of resource materials. If there are any information sources that you have found particularly useful, please let us know!

Send your suggestions to systems@ccsa.ca.