

# Maintaining and Monitoring Fidelity for Teen Pregnancy Prevention Programs

## Introduction

Implementation of a program with fidelity ensures that the program is delivered as intended, and increases the likelihood that participants will experience similar outcomes to those found in the original evaluation study. Monitoring fidelity is essential because it allows program administrators to learn about how a program is being implemented, to strengthen what works, and to improve what does not.

## Defining Fidelity

The definition of fidelity can vary by program or organization. OAH defines fidelity as the degree to which a program is implemented with adherence to its **core components** — the key ingredients related to achieving the outcomes associated with the program model. Ideally, program developers and evaluators determine a program's core components, which include two categories: program content and program delivery.

- **Program Content** refers to *what* is being communicated in program sessions and can include, for example, the information in a lesson or instructions for specific activities.
- **Program Delivery** refers to *how* program content is being delivered. This can include, for example, the teaching strategies employed; the training and qualifications of the facilitator; the number and schedule of sessions; and the optimal group size.

Core components to a program model can include program content only, or program delivery methods only, or both.

## Importance of Fidelity

There are many reasons why it is important to monitor and maintain fidelity. When a program maintains fidelity to a program model, implementation of the intended program is ensured. For evidence-based programs, implementation with fidelity increases the likelihood that the participants served will experience similar outcomes to those found in the original evaluation study.

Monitoring fidelity allows program administrators and implementers to understand how well a program has been implemented as intended. The information garnered from fidelity monitoring can help identify a poor fit between program activities and the target population. Moreover, monitoring fidelity allows program administrators to learn about program implementation and strengthen what works and improve what does not.

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## Fidelity and Adaptations

Maintaining and monitoring fidelity does not mean never making adaptations to a program model. In fact, monitoring fidelity can help a program make appropriate adaptations and provide justification for doing so. However, to reduce the need for adaptations, organizations should focus on selecting a program that is a good fit for (1) the community and population served, (2) the implementation setting, (3) the capacity of the implementing organization, and (4) the outcome the organization is intending to impact. Once implementation is underway, monitoring fidelity can help determine if the program is a good fit and what adaptations might be necessary.

When rigorously evaluating new and innovative programs, it is important to identify the core components of the program and implement with fidelity. **Organizations rigorously testing new and innovative programs should proceed with caution in making adaptations once an evaluation is underway.**

# Establishing a Fidelity Monitoring Plan

Before program implementation begins, organizations should establish processes and procedures for monitoring fidelity. Assign an individual(s) to be responsible for fidelity monitoring. It is critical for fidelity monitoring to occur throughout duration of a program.

At a minimum, an organization's fidelity monitoring plan should include:



## 1. Train Staff and Observers on Maintaining and Monitoring Fidelity

Recruit program observers. Train observers and facilitators about the program, the importance of maintaining fidelity, how to monitor fidelity, and fidelity expectations. During the training, include information on the program logic model, theory of change, and core components. A thorough understanding of the program can support effective implementation and help maintain fidelity.

## 2. Collect Fidelity Monitoring Data

During program implementation, collect fidelity monitoring data. Fidelity monitoring data should include, at a minimum:

- Attendance data from participants for all sessions completed;
- A facilitator self-assessment or fidelity monitoring log for each session implemented;
- Information on planned and unplanned adaptations; and,
- Observation data from program observers for 5%-10% of all sessions implemented (observation data includes a fidelity monitoring log, which tracks fidelity to program content and also an observation form, which tracks information about the quality of program implementation).

Gather and finalize fidelity monitoring data collection tools that capture detailed information about the program and its activities.<sup>1</sup> Establish a process to effectively manage the data. Determine who will enter data, the frequency of data entry, and the mode of data entry.

Fidelity monitoring data are an important part of the uniform performance measures required for teen pregnancy prevention grantees. OAH has a comprehensive set of performance measures that are reported biannually through a [web-based performance measures reporting system](#). Performance measure data, including fidelity monitoring data, help program administrators learn about their program and how to improve implementation.

### **3. Review and Analyze Data**

Effective fidelity monitoring also includes reviewing and analyzing the fidelity monitoring data. Determine who will be responsible for reviewing and analyzing the data. Regularly review the data and identify issues and challenges early, such as concerns regarding a lack of fidelity. Determine the type of analyses that will be performed and who will conduct the analysis. TPP grantees can generate reports using fidelity monitoring data in the web-based performance measure system.

### **4. Provide Feedback on a Regular Basis**

Although collecting, reviewing, and analyzing data are important steps to a fidelity monitoring plan, it is equally important to provide feedback to facilitators and staff on a regular basis. Determine who will provide feedback, how the feedback will be communicated (i.e., written, in-person, electronically, in groups, or individually), and when feedback will be communicated. It is important for feedback to be provided frequently and at regular intervals to allow for meaningful adjustments to be made. Provide training on the most appropriate approach for feedback, understanding that people have different preferences for both giving and receiving feedback.

### **5. Use Data for Continuous Quality Improvement**

Monitoring fidelity can help organizations learn about the strengths of their program and areas for improvement throughout the duration of a project. Use the data to learn about implementation and make decisions about the program. Engage in data-driven decision making to help improve the quality of the program. Use the information to make adaptations, improve program delivery, and improve the overall program.

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Questions or comments should be directed to [oah.gov@hhs.gov](mailto:oah.gov@hhs.gov).

<sup>1</sup> Fidelity monitoring logs are typically available from the program developers. A standard observation form to assess quality of implementation is available from OAH at [https://tpp.rti.org/Portals/0/Program\\_Observation\\_Form\\_for\\_TPP\\_Grantees-July\\_2011.pdf](https://tpp.rti.org/Portals/0/Program_Observation_Form_for_TPP_Grantees-July_2011.pdf).