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OPA EVALUATION TA

Fidelity Monitoring Tip Sheet

What is fidelity monitoring?

Fidelity refers to implementing a program or curriculum as intended, which can be a key factor in its success and whether it positively moves youth outcomes. Fidelity monitoring refers to a system of measuring and analyzing the degree to which a program is implemented as intended.

Fidelity monitoring can deepen your understanding of how your program is working in the real world, help troubleshoot challenges and conduct continuous quality improvement (CQI), ensure your program is still a good fit for your chosen population, and inform your implementation or impact evaluations.

How can I assess fidelity?

There are three common methods of measuring fidelity: facilitator fidelity logs, observations of program implementation, and observations of staff training on the curriculum or other program components. The first two methods can illuminate how well implementation with youth adhered to the planned program, while the third method can show if staff were trained as expected. Most programs have required staff training, so observations of training can demonstrate whether this requirement was adequately met. Table 1 has more information on each method. Developers often provide templates for facilitator fidelity logs or implementation observations, which can be a helpful starting place. You may wish to tweak these templates to better match your program. For instance, if you have an approved plan to adapt the program or curriculum as written by the developer, you may wish to update the facilitator fidelity logs or implementation observations to incorporate the planned adaptations.

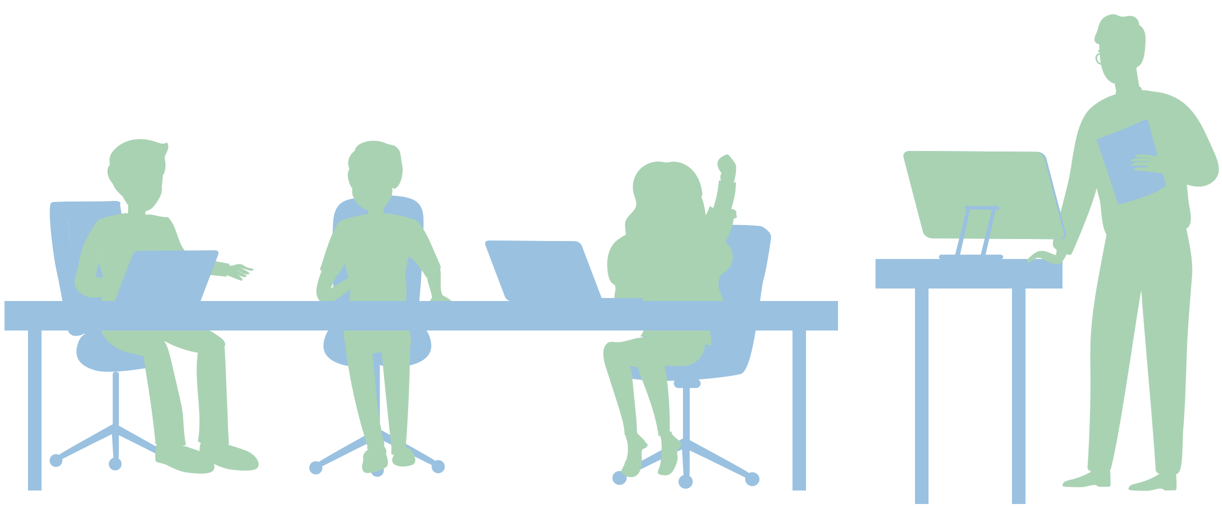

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Table 1. Summary of fidelity data collection methods

Data collection method	Data completed by	Timing of data collection	Example items
Facilitator fidelity logs	Facilitators	After each lesson	• Whether each activity was fully completed, partially completed, or not done • Whether there were additions or changes to the lesson • Any challenges or issues affecting implementation • Rating of how prepared the facilitator felt
Observations of program implementation	Trained program or evaluation staff; possibly program developers	After each observed lesson	• Whether each activity was fully completed, partially completed, or not done • Quality of lesson, including facilitator's time management, classroom management, ability to answer student questions, and enthusiasm for the program • Level of student engagement and participation
Observations of staff training on curriculum or other program components	Trained program or evaluation staff; possibly program developers	After training session(s) completed	• Length of training • Content covered, including any handouts provided • Methods used (such as lecture, teach-backs or practice sessions, small group discussions, etc.)

How do I identify which data to collect for fidelity monitoring?

When considering which data to collect for fidelity monitoring, first remember that you will need to satisfy fidelity reporting requirements provided by the Office of Population Affairs (OPA) for your grant and tier, as well as adaptation guidance for Tier 1 programs. Most teen pregnancy prevention (TPP) grantees must submit a fidelity monitoring plan to their project officers and fidelity monitoring data through performance measures. Grantees must also share adaptations with OPA for approval. Fidelity requirements may vary for different grants and tiers, so refer to the OPA fidelity monitoring expectations in your funding opportunity announcements (FOA), notice of award, and other guidance documents.

In addition to OPA grant requirements, you may decide to collect other fidelity monitoring measures to address your specific research questions or goals. Data collected through fidelity monitoring can be useful both for program staff and evaluators—they can help program staff with CQI efforts and provide evaluators with context for a rigorous evaluation or key data for an implementation evaluation. As these data can be useful for a variety of purposes, grantee program staff and evaluators should work together to decide which data to collect. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to fidelity monitoring. The data you collect will depend on your program's structure, content, and theory of change, along with the goals of your implementation plan and CQI plan and your research questions for an implementation or impact evaluation. As you establish the purpose of your fidelity monitoring process, you should consider the frequency of data collection and level of detail for your data. You may wish to collect detailed data after each lesson of the program, or you may want to collect aggregated data at the end of each implementation cycle for all lessons together. Completing a log for each lesson will typically take more time and effort to complete and analyze but can give you more nuanced information.

If your program's developer has prespecified the data to collect for your program, you may want to collect the data exactly as the developer outlined or tweak or supplement them with some of your own fidelity monitoring measures. You may need to create your own measures if your program developer does not have existing measures. If you create your own measures or adapt those from your program's developer, consider collecting data related to the following areas:

Core components of your program: Core components are elements that must be implemented for the program to be completed with fidelity. These might be core lessons of your curriculum, particularly if some are considered essential whereas others are important, but less vital. Core components can also be essential teaching strategies that facilitators should use, such as interactive discussions, games, role-plays, or lectures. You can create measures to assess whether all core components were implemented as intended. As you identify core components, remember that the developer of your curriculum might provide guidance on what they consider core components of the curriculum. Developers may also provide guidance on acceptable adaptations to the curriculum. See the Documenting Adaptations Tip Sheet for more information.

Sequence of activities or lessons: In some curricula, lessons—or individual activities within lessons—build on each other and should be implemented in a particular order, whereas others may not have such a strict requirement. If your program has an expected sequence of activities or lessons, you may want to collect data on the date each lesson was implemented and whether facilitators had to make a change from the expected curriculum sequence. You can use this data to see if the expected sequence was followed.

Required elements around the logistics of implementation: Your program may have expectations or requirements on the logistics of program implementation. For instance, your program may be designed to take place in a certain setting (such as schools or clinics); with a particular population of youth (such as female youth or American Indian/Alaska Native youth); with a certain number of youth in a group (such as no more than 20); or with facilitators of a certain background (such as health teachers). These types of requirements can be added to fidelity monitoring tools so that you can track systematically whether the requirements are being met across sites and over time.

How can I establish a fidelity monitoring process?

The process of fidelity monitoring includes identifying data collection tools, developing procedures for completing the tools, and training staff on the tools and procedures. Below we highlight considerations for two types of tools: facilitator fidelity logs and observation forms.

Facilitator fidelity logs

You can use an existing tool from your developer as written or adapt it, or you could create a new tool if one does not yet exist for your program. If you are making adaptations to an existing tool or developing your own, Table 2 has possible fields to include.

In the facilitator fidelity log, a combination of open-ended and closed-ended questions can provide a wider variety of data for analysis. Closed-ended questions (like multiple choice or yes/no questions) can allow for more quantitative analysis and easier comparison of data across facilitators and sites and over time. Open-ended

Table 2. Sample items for facilitator fidelity logs

Topic	Sample items
Lesson information	✓ Date of implementation ✓ Start and end time for lesson (or class period, if in school setting) ✓ Name of site/school ✓ Number of youth present during lesson ✓ Was another teacher or adult in the room? If so, please explain who was present. ✓ Was the lesson implemented in the intended order/sequence?
Adherence to lesson plan	✓ For each activity in the lesson, was the activity fully completed, partially completed, or not done? If any activity was partially completed or not done at all, please explain what you did not complete and why. ✓ Did you use all the prescribed methods (role-play, games, etc.) for this lesson? If not, please explain why (for instance, technology was not working properly or there were classroom management issues). ✓ Did you add anything that was not part of this lesson as written in the facilitator's instructions (such as content, activities, etc.)? If so, please describe what you added. ✓ Did you make any other changes to the lesson from what is in the facilitator's instructions? If so, please describe what you changed and why. ✓ Did you experience any distractions or interruptions during the lesson (such as loudspeaker announcements, students arriving late, students using cell phones, etc.)? ✓ Describe implementation challenges during this lesson.
Youth engagement	✓ How engaged did youth appear during this lesson?
Facilitator preparation	✓ How prepared did you feel to deliver this lesson? ✓ What (if anything) would you do differently next time?

questions (like “Describe any implementation challenges during this lesson”) provide an important source of qualitative data that can give you a richer sense of issues or successes during implementation. This can be particularly helpful for CQI efforts and evaluations.

Once you have identified or created your tool, you should establish procedures for facilitators to record data in the logs and identify the staff that will analyze these data. Consider what format would work best, based on your organizational culture, available technology, and implementation schedule. Options might include:

- ✓ Facilitators fill out paper copies of the form and submit them each day to a staff member monitoring the data in the office. The staff member enters the data in an electronic format for analysis.
- ✓ Facilitators fill out electronic versions of the form and email them as an attachment to the staff member monitoring the data. The staff member enters the data into an electronic format for analysis.
- ✓ Program or evaluation staff create an online tool that facilitators fill out daily. The staff member monitoring the data pulls data on demand from the tool. Setting up the tool will likely require more investment at the beginning, but if you can easily output data from it, this should allow you to analyze the data faster than the other methods.

Your procedures should also identify the timing of data entry. If you are collecting data for each lesson, facilitators should have to fill out the tool frequently, ideally after each lesson, when the information is still fresh in their minds. If you are collecting aggregate data from facilitators, they should complete the tool as soon after the implementation cycle ends as possible.

Before rolling out the tool, you should train facilitators on the procedures for completing it so they know what they will need to complete and how to do so. This should include demonstrating how to answer each question. If all facilitators understand what each question is asking, they will likely provide more reliable data. This, in turn, will make it easier for you to compare data across different facilitators and over time. During the training, you should explain to facilitators why these data are important. You should also stress that their practical experience is invaluable for better understanding the program and how well it is serving your target population. In particular, the data can help you to improve the program, identify and overcome challenges, provide key context for how implementation happens in a real-world setting, and generally inform any other evaluation efforts. Facilitators may see this as busywork that just adds another task to their days. However, if they understand its purpose, they can be more invested in completing it.

Observations forms

You should use the TPP observation form for performance measures; you can consider supplementing this tool with additional measures found in an existing tool from your developer or items you develop on your own. There may be value in adding items to the existing TPP observation form so that it is tailored to your program, implementation plan, and evaluation goals or research questions. For instance, if your program is implemented in a school setting, you may want to have items about the presence of other teachers or adults in the room and the classroom setup. These can affect program implementation, particularly if there are activities that require movement or open group discussion.

Table 3 has sample items to consider if you are adapting or creating your own tools. You will likely want to have a separate tool for facilitator training observations and program lesson observations; however, the example items are combined in the table below. In addition, you may want to use a scale (for example, a five-point scale ranging from poor to excellent) to assess some of the topics below, such as a quality assessment.

Once observation tools are developed, you should establish procedures for collecting and reporting data from observations referring back to OPA grant requirements. You should conduct observations of a substantial number of lessons (for instance, 10 percent) and/or a substantial number of facilitator trainings (if there are multiple trainings). As with facilitator fidelity logs, you should choose the format for entering data into the tool based on available technology and what would be least disruptive to the training or program implementation. Observers can record data on paper forms, complete electronic versions and email them, or enter data into an online data system. They should enter the data as soon as possible after each observation while the information is still fresh in their minds. They may be able to record responses in the tool during the training or program lesson, but they will likely need to complete the observation tool after the session ends.

Table 3. Sample items for observation tools

Topic	Sample items
Facilitator training	✓ How long was the facilitator training? ✓ What was the setting for the training sessions? ✓ What were the learning objectives for the training? ✓ How many people were present during the training? ✓ What material or topics were covered in the training? ✓ What methods were used during the training (for instance, lectures, teach-backs, role-plays, small group discussions)? ✓ How engaged were participants? ✓ Were there any distractions in the room during the training (such as cell phones or people coming in and out of the room)? ✓ Rate the trainer on their knowledge of the program. ✓ Rate the overall quality of the training.
Information on implementation space	✓ Where was the facilitator positioned in the room? Did he/she move around the room during the lesson? ✓ What was the participants' seating arrangement? ✓ Where were the materials (such as posters) located in the room? ✓ Were there other adults (such as classroom teachers) in the room during implementation? ✓ Were there other distractions in the room (such as loudspeaker announcements or cell phones)?
Fidelity checklist	✓ How much time was spent on each activity? ✓ Was each activity fully completed, partially completed, or not done? ✓ Did the facilitator add any content or activities that were not part of the written instructions? ✓ Did the facilitator make any other changes from the written instructions?
Quality assessment	✓ In general, how clear were the program implementer's explanations of activities?* ✓ To what extent did the implementer keep track of time during the lesson and activities?* ✓ To what extent did the presentation of materials seem rushed or hurried?* ✓ To what extent did the participants appear to understand the material?* ✓ How actively did the group members participate in discussions and activities?* ✓ Rate the facilitator on their knowledge of the program.* ✓ Rate the facilitator on their level of enthusiasm.* ✓ Rate the facilitator on their poise and confidence.* ✓ Rate the facilitator on their rapport and communication with participants.* ✓ Rate the facilitator on being able to address any participant questions or concerns effectively.* ✓ Rate the overall quality of the lesson.* ✓ Rate the facilitator on preparedness and comfort with delivering the content and activities. ✓ Rate the facilitator on preparation of required materials for the lesson.

*This item is included in the TPP observation form for performance measures.

You should train all observers on the observation tool to ensure consistent data collection and allow you to reliably compare observation data across your program. For more information on best practices for conducting observations, see the Observation Tip Sheet.

How can I use data collected through fidelity monitoring?

Fidelity monitoring data can serve many purposes. They can help you calculate fidelity metrics to track how implementation is going, can identify challenges that need immediate attention, and can support CQI efforts by helping to identify challenges and patterns of implementation over time. The data can also inform your ongoing implementation evaluation and provide context for an impact evaluation.

Your organization should select program or evaluation staff members who will be responsible for reviewing the data. They should review the facilitator fidelity log and observation data as soon as they are received, and you may ask them to create weekly summaries of the data for program and evaluation staff. This quick initial assessment can help identify whether the program is being implemented as intended, whether there are challenges, and whether a facilitator needs more support in a particular area. In some cases, the staff analyzing the data may notice a more urgent issue. For example, a classroom teacher is interrupting the class and preventing the lessons from being implemented as intended, or the facilitator is experiencing extreme classroom management issues. These issues should be escalated immediately to relevant program and evaluation staff. In addition, more in-depth, longer-term data analysis can give a complete picture of implementation and data patterns over time.

You should also establish processes for sharing the data directly with each facilitator. This can help them identify areas in which they are having success and could use further improvement.

Calculating fidelity metrics. In their initial quick assessment, staff analyzing the facilitator fidelity log and observation data can calculate summary fidelity metrics. These might include the percentage of activities that were fully completed, the percentage of lessons for which the facilitator changed something from the instructions, or the percentage of lessons in which the facilitator added something from the instructions. Data for these metrics will likely come from closed-ended items in the logs. You may wish to share these metrics with the team every week and at the end of each implementation cycle (for instance, when your team has finished implementation at one school for a semester).

Supporting CQI. CQI is a process by which grantees may identify and analyze strengths and problems; implement, test, and revise solutions; and move toward program excellence. You can use fidelity monitoring data to identify areas for improvement and then as you implement changes to address these areas, the data can help you assess whether CQI efforts are working as expected.

By looking at the data from open-ended questions across facilitators or sites, you can identify common implementation or logistical challenges. As part of your CQI process, you can bring these common challenges to the team of facilitators (or other program staff) to brainstorm solutions together. Throughout this process, you should remind facilitators that this is not a punitive measure or a criticism of their performance; instead, this exercise is intended to offer opportunities to learn and build skills together and to improve future implementation. As you continue to collect data over time, you can assess whether the solutions are working in practice or if further tweaks are needed. Here are some examples of using fidelity monitoring data within a CQI process:

- ✓ Facilitators noted that they had to make unplanned adaptations to activities because only a few youth attended some lessons, so the activities could not be completed as intended. The team brainstormed strategies for implementing activities with smaller groups of youth. In future fidelity logs or observations from lessons with a small number of youth, you could assess whether these strategies worked or if they need to be tweaked further.
- ✓ An observer indicated that an activity was only partially completed because the facilitator struggled to get a video to play and had to take time out of the lesson to try to fix the problem. This meant there was not enough time to complete the lesson in the class period. Based on this experience, your team created a new process around checking technology; first, the facilitator spoke with the site prior to the program start date to confirm the available technology and then the facilitator went to the site early each time technology was needed to test the equipment. For some sites, you may realize that they do not have reliable equipment so you must purchase your own to ensure implementation can go as planned.
- ✓ A facilitator consistently shared in her logs that a particular activity always takes longer than intended so it can never fit into the time allotted. Your team identified strategies for saving time during the activity to fit it into the lesson, and you could track whether the facilitator fully completes this activity when she delivers the program in the future.

As another avenue for CQI, you can track fidelity monitoring data systematically, over time, from lessons taught by the same facilitator (or several facilitators trained together), to see if there are patterns. For instance, you could assess whether facilitators are implementing with greater fidelity as they get more comfortable with the curriculum or program model. If so, you could use this finding to adjust your training of facilitators. Perhaps you can give facilitators more time to become comfortable with the curriculum before they implement it or allow them opportunities to shadow more seasoned facilitators to see how the curriculum actually works. Another question your data may help you answer is whether there are areas in which facilitators continue to struggle over time. If so, you need to provide them with additional training or support or clearer guidance. To track data systematically over time, you should enter all fidelity monitoring data into one file to analyze them together.

You should share with the facilitators any lessons learned, data patterns (such as consistent challenges in a particular school, age group or program lesson), or common challenges identified from analyzing the fidelity monitoring data. This will enable them to incorporate the findings in their future program delivery to support CQI. In turn, if you notice improvements in fidelity measures or in overcoming challenges, you can acknowledge and recognize the efforts facilitators are making to improve their work.

Informing your evaluations. Finally, you can use fidelity monitoring data to inform your evaluation. A more in-depth analysis of data for your full evaluation (or grant) period can help support your implementation study. Specifically, data from facilitator fidelity logs and observations can illuminate how the program was actually implemented on the ground. If you are conducting an impact evaluation, this is also valuable contextual information that can inform your impact findings. For instance, if your analysis found that program impacts on student behavior were larger at certain sites, you could review fidelity monitoring data by site to see if the larger impacts were at sites with higher fidelity metrics.

If you have not implemented an impact evaluation, but are considering one for the future, you can use fidelity monitoring data to assess whether your program is ready for a rigorous impact evaluation. To be ready, your program must be implemented consistently and with fidelity across settings and facilitators, so you are testing it as expected. Fidelity log and observation data can tell you whether your program is fulfilling these criteria. If the percentage of the planned intervention actually implemented is low (for instance, if many activities were not completed at all or completed only partially), your intervention is not being implemented with fidelity. If facilitators have to make large unplanned adaptations to each lesson, your program is not being implemented consistently with fidelity. In contrast, if fidelity metrics are very similar across implementation sites or facilitators, then your program is being implemented consistently. When fidelity is low, you may need to do additional CQI work to strengthen the program model enough to be ready for an impact evaluation.

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