# SUSTAINING IMPLEMENTATION BEST PRACTICES
# AND DATA-BASED DECISION MAKING

Sustainability of the Child and Family Practice Model requires that effective implementation supports continue to be in place, are well supported, and make use of implementation best practices to strengthen and sustain fidelity to the Practice Model. Core infrastructure supports to be maintained are the linked teaming structures developed within the agency, which effectively "wrap around" staff to support consistent and effective use of the practice and continually lift up system challenges and barriers. Without linked leadership and implementation teams engaged in data-based decision making, ongoing learning, active problem solving, and day-to-day support of staff, the status quo is likely to reassert itself and practice and system behaviors will drift. The significant investment of time, resources, and energy that have been needed for installation and early implementation of the Practice Model will reap little benefit for children and families unless implementation infrastructure and best practices are sustained.

Implementing jurisdictions chose to maintain their linked leadership and implementation team structures for sustaining the Practice Model, as well as for integrating other new practices and initiatives as they were identified over time. This has included re-visioning the job roles of individual staff positions, units, workgroups, and teams (e.g., supervisory, management, and leadership teams) into linked implementation support structures. While a sustained implementation teams ensures the nimble and responsive day-to-day support that is needed by practitioners, re-visioning job roles and anchoring implementation best practices in agency teaming structures strengthens the functioning of the entire system and its ability to support implementation of any practice over time.

Continuously assessing and embedding implementation best practices within agency programs, practices, and processes is critical for effective sustained support of the Practice Model. Implementing jurisdictions are continuously learning about and exploring how to incorporate and strengthen implementation best practices within their system. For example, though there was little early focus on recruitment and selection by implementing jurisdictions, recent inclusion of behavioral observation in interviewing candidates for hire or promotion has been "turning heads" in several implementing jurisdictions due to the ability of this strategy to provide information much more effectively on who is and is not a good fit for the agency, the Practice Model, and the position.

Implementing jurisdictions are also beginning to see the effects of not using implementation best practices. For example, while the implementation team in an implementing jurisdiction was aware of and working with various leaders to strategize testing and use of improved practices in Practice Model recruitment and selection, in this same jurisdiction, agency leaders were hiring two new leadership positions that they, unfortunately, did not conceive as being positions connected to the Practice Model. On their face, the leadership positions related to a new project; however, there was a significant tie to the Practice Model as it was the identified intervention to be used in the new project.

The experience described in the example below demonstrates the ongoing need for individuals, such as implementation team members who are confident and competent in applying implementation best practices, to be available to nurture readiness and to help the system and its leaders identify, develop and support implementation best practices for greater system efficiency and effectiveness.

In an implementing jurisdiction, two leaders were recruited and selected to oversee a local project in which the Practice Model was the identified intervention. As they came into these newly created leadership positions, they came with their own experience and understanding of what the agency would require of them in leading and supporting the initiative.

Imagine the consternation and confusion of implementation team members when it became clear that these two leaders wanted to operate outside of the local leadership and implementation teaming structures that were set up years ago. As an alternative, they also seemed to be considering whether/how they could use those structures for their own project administration and management purposes without understanding the purpose of the team and the principles and frameworks for active implementation and scale-up on which the team was based. While this got sorted out, and project leadership is being integrated into the Practice Model leadership and implementation team structure, missed opportunities abounded.

For example, targeted strategies could have been used at multiple points in the recruitment, selection, promotion, and on-boarding processes to orient these leaders to active implementation frameworks and to the implementation supports and experiences of the agency, including the linked leadership and implementation infrastructure, which the agency had committed to sustain and with which project leadership and management would be expected to work and become a part.

Given the importance of embedding implementation best practices for effective, sustained support of an intervention, federal evaluation partners worked with federal training and TA providers to develop an implementation driver assessment survey to be conducted in each implementing jurisdiction annually. An online implementation driver assessment survey was disseminated to community partners involved in local implementation and to implementation team members and supervisors, managers, and leaders who had staff under them delivering the Practice Model. While it was expected that the inclusive nature of the survey respondents would be helpful, over time, the people taking the survey changed significantly and their connection to the implementation work did as well. Many supervisors and some managers lacked perspective on the work of the implementation team and the status of many of the implementation drivers, and community partners often only had external perspective in one implementation area in which they were actively involved, such as training, coaching, or fidelity assessment. This meant it was difficult to understand the survey results and to track trends from 1 year to the next.

A facilitated implementation driver assessment, contextualized to the CFPM, is currently being developed, refined, and tested by TA providers from the University of North Carolina's Frank Porter Graham Institute in partnership with an implementing jurisdiction. This emerging assessment uses a facilitated, consensus-based process with the local implementation team every 6 months to assess scores on each survey question and area of implementation. This approach is better able to provide actionable information about practice model implementation supports so the jurisdiction can understand its implementation strengths and areas for improvement and develop smart next steps for supporting and sustaining the Practice Model. The original implementation driver assessment survey is

posted as a resource link on the Implementation Page of the CFPM website, however in late September of 2016 it is expected to be replaced by the facilitated CFPM Driver Assessment.

In addition to ongoing use of an implementation driver assessment, another key strategy for prioritizing sustainability of the Practice Model was lifted up from implementing jurisdictions. Jurisdictions that have integrated the Practice Model into the child welfare strategic plan, federal or state Program or System Improvement Plan, and other cross-agency initiatives are well positioned to support and sustain the Practice Model. In one jurisdiction, a joint child welfare/children's mental health collaborative formed to embed the Practice Model as the central model of practice for children and families being served within those systems. The cross-agency leadership and visibility gave significant cross-agency support; helped align child and family supports and services across the jurisdiction; and created a broad, enabling context for supporting and sustaining the Practice Model. I In another jurisdiction, both community partnerships and the Practice Model have been included as essential activities in the agency's strategic plan, Stepping Into The Future. (See http://www.co.fresno.ca.us/uploadedFiles/Departments/DSS/Family_Services/SelfEval/SE_Home_Page/Fresno%20ISP%20Final%205%207%2014.pdf.)

Finally, a sustainable system for the Practice Model continuously makes use of data and feedback loops for ongoing learning and improvement. As feedback loops become routine, and capacity is developed to gather, use, and share data and information from multiple sources and perspectives, linked leadership and implementation teams and community partners are better able to recognize progress and needs, celebrate successes, strengthen implementation supports, and respond adaptively to the challenges and complexities inherent in implementation of the Practice Model.

When resources need to shift, data-based decision making ensures that meaningful data can be brought into digestible formats to help those affected understand the rationale behind the decision to shift resources and the agency's commitment to system responsiveness, transparency, and accountability to the children and families served. Incorporating implementation data as part of CQI processes and sharing it widely keeps staff and community partners informed of how well the system is supporting use of the Practice Model and to what extent the practice is reaching children and families and positively affecting their outcomes. Use of data in decision making enables the agency to increase system effectiveness, efficiency, and support of the Practice Model and to ensure targeted and strategic efforts to improve child and family outcomes. This is critical information for agency leaders and policymakers to have in making decisions about whether/how to prioritize and sustain the CFPM.