Best Practices for NTI Implementation

Implementation planning can take many forms. This checklist highlights the best practices. We recognize that each organization's implementation plan and process will be tailored to its needs and specific circumstances.

1. **Invite leadership involvement and establish your planning team**: Establish a Site Implementation Team to support the implementation of NTI Training. The Site Implementation Team will be the drivers of implementation and integration of NTI into your organizational system. These are the people who will determine the primary goals for integrating NTI into your training system. This Team should include programmatic and training/development leadership to ensure alignment between programmatic and professional development needs. It is important for members of this team to have a thorough understanding of the training available through NTI.

2. **Assess the need for Adoption Competency:** For the purposes of this document, we will use the term "adoption-competency" to reflect the range of practices, skills, knowledge, attitudes, and values that supports the permanency, stability and well-being of children and youth and their foster, adoptive, and kinship families. When conducting a needs assessment to evaluate your organization's level of competency in doing effective work with foster, adoption, and kinship families, asking targeted and comprehensive questions is crucial. Here are questions and considerations to include for a thorough assessment:
   - Have your staff members been assessed for their current knowledge and skills in adoption and permanency-specific issues, including trauma, attachment, loss and grief, and identity development? If yes, how is this assessed and how are the results integrated into program planning and staff development?
   - Have staff reported any gaps in adoption/foster/kinship-specific training or competency?
   - Are the current practices around foster care, adoption, and kinship aligned with your organization's overall mission and goals for family well-being and permanency?
   - How do permanency outcomes align with your agency's long-term goals or strategic plans?
   - What metrics are used to assess the success/impact of services and support? How successful is your organization at hitting success measures?

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- Does your organization have partnerships or collaborations with mental health providers specializing in foster care, kinship, and adoption-related trauma and challenges?
- In what ways are staff trained to address the mental health needs of children and families pre- and post- post-permanency?
- How does adoption competency integrate into your CSFR and FFPSA goals and agency plans/strategies?
- In what ways have the results of this assessment been compiled and shared with leadership or otherwise disseminated?

3. **Develop a customized Implementation Plan**: Create an Implementation Plan to serve as a blueprint for implementation. This will be a living document to be re-evaluated and revised as needed. Possible elements of the plan include determining which training curricula will be implemented, who the target users are, enrollment/completion timeframes, Transfer of Learning (TOL) activities, data gathering and analysis, etc.
Sample Implementation Plan Template

   - The Site Implementation Team should focus on answering the following questions to guide planning and implementation:
     - *What are the overarching goals for integrating NTI within your system?*
     - *Who will make the decision to utilize the training?*
     - *Which stakeholders will you need to consult to get "buy-in"?*
     - *Who will make resources available to implement the training?*
     - *Who will lead the implementation of the training?*
     - *What type of "beta-test" process (if any) will need to be implemented to ensure a smooth rollout?*
     - *What ongoing feedback mechanisms will you use to ensure effective implementation?*
     - *What metrics will be reviewed and by whom to ensure the plan meets the organizations implementation goals?*
     - *Who will ensure sustainability long-term and how will implementation be sustained?[1]*

   - Create a plan for participant expectations and engagement: Decision-making around participation in the training is a critical step. Essential questions and concerns around participation and agency support include:
     - *Determine which NTI curriculum will be implemented.*
     - *Determine which internal positions and/or contractors will take the training*

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[1] Adapted from Frontiers in Public Health: "Implementation Mapping: Using Intervention Mapping to Develop Implementation Strategies."

- *Determine if supervisors will take the training first; establish expectations of supervisors*
- *At what point in their employment will staff take NTI?*
- *Will NTI be mandatory or voluntary?*
- *What policy changes will be necessary to implement NTI?*
- *What are the progression and completion goals?*
- *How will performance and process be tracked?*

- Evaluate access options and technical integration: The training can be accessed in two different ways and the NTI Implementation Specialist can share the features and benefits of each option:
  - Access Option 1: C.A.S.E. Learning Management System (LMS): https://adoptionsupport.org/nti/access/.
  - Access Option 2: Integration of the training files into your organization's learning management system (LMS).

4. **Educate key stakeholders**: This includes those who may not be on the Site Implementation Team but are important to gain "buy in" for successful implementation of NTI. This could include traditional leaders who have decision-making authority, but it can also extend to include other natural leaders. For example, clinicians with strong credibility among their peers may help build excitement for implementing this training, using best practices, or using new tools.

5. **Establish an effective Transfer of Learning (TOL) Plan**: To effect system change, training implementation should incorporate a transfer of learning (TOL) plan. NTI's goal is to increase the capacity of child welfare and mental health systems to address mental health needs and improve permanency and well-being outcomes for children, youth, and their families experiencing foster care, adoption, or guardianship. The TOL process incorporates knowledge, skills, and values gleaned from the NTI Training into real-life situations and everyday practice.

   Coaching is a vital component of the transfer of learning process. It involves an intensive and systematic facilitation of result-oriented problem reflection and self-reflection. Coaching primarily aims to help individuals apply the skills they have learned in training to real-life situations, thereby fostering conscious self-change and self-development.[2] The NTI Team can provide coaching and assist sites in building the capacity to support coaching internally.

6. **Recommendations to support training participants**: Based on our experiences with sites implementing NTI, the following are best practice recommendations to ensure enrollment, completion, and a successful training experience for everyone:

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[2] Greif, S. (2007) Advances In Research On Coaching Outcomes. International Coaching Psychology Review, 2(3), pp. 222-249

- **Mandate Training:** Making the NTI training mandatory ensures the highest completion rates and promotes a shared understanding across staff and positions within the organization.
- **Supervisor Support:** The level of support by supervisors including their ability to incorporate NTI learnings in supervisory practice, especially when participation is voluntary, can improve integration of NTI into practice.
- **Set a completion timeframe:** To keep participants engaged and motivated, we recommend completing the training within 4 – 6 months. According to evaluation the majority of participants complete the training within 6 months.
- **Protected time and space:** Protected time to focus on the training content is especially important. However, the need for protected space is just as critical and often overlooked. This may include a place outside of the office or workspace where users will have fewer distractions.
- **Incentives:** Are incentives to complete the training available? Examples of incentives include recognition, pay bonus, time off, free lunch, and/or free CEUs.
- **Reminders / Encouragers:** Overloaded workforces may find it challenging to prioritize in-depth, self-directed training. Participants will benefit from reminders to log into the training system and continue to progress. Organizations can also consider creative ways to encourage progress, including sending meeting invites to block time or providing reminders in group supervision/staff meetings, etc.
- **Recognition:** Recognition can be an important motivator for participants to complete NTI. Think of ways your organization can recognize and celebrate those who complete the training.
- **Provider contracts:** To ensure that all your contract providers have a foundational level of knowledge and skills, consider embedding the NTI requirement into their contracts or scope of work.
- **Testimonials:** Another approach is to solicit and pulse testimonials from natural champions for NTI within the organization, these can be shared in team meetings, departmental newsletters, etc.

7. **Develop a communication strategy to promote NTI**:
   - Develop a strategy to communicate the value and benefits of NTI to participants.
   - Know your audience: Do they respond more positively to email or in-person/ virtual discussion? Who should deliver the message (leadership, supervisors, and peer champions)? What type of messages will motivate them?
   - Consider revising or developing training policies to mandate or support the use of NTI, especially for staff or providers required to complete NTI.

8. **Determine the data needed for assessing NTI success:** Establish a plan for collecting and disseminating accurate data.
   - Data to support NTI implementation: Data is used to understand how many people are using the training and how they are progressing. It can help the Site

Implementation Team understand if there are barriers to enrollment and if additional messages and support are needed to encourage participation and completion. We recommend involving an external evaluation team in discussions around implementation and to support the best use of data.

- Outcome data for evaluating NTI: There are several ways to evaluate NTI's outcomes, including knowledge gains, impact on practice (short-term and long-term), and system changes.
- Pre and post-test data can also be used to determine topic areas that require additional continued education for staff.

9. **Plan for sustainability and accountability**: What does system change look like? What systemic and practice changes do you expect to see? What would tell you that change has occurred?

- Practice changes**:** Do you see changes in the quality of supervision or clinical notes, the types of activities occurring during sessions, or the information clinicians share with families?
- Sustainable changes to systemic structures, policy, and processes: Are there changes to intake forms and referral processes, who is included in team meetings, and how does collaboration occur?
- Communication: Do you see changes in conversations between clinicians and parents/children and supervisors' conversations with their team?
- Relationships: Do you see changes in how clinicians collaborate with other disciplines and how they relate to the children/families they work with?
- Long-term Sustainability: What strategies are in place to ensure that adoption competency training and services remain sustainable over time? Are there plans for continued professional development and capacity building for staff around adoption competency? Are adequate resources, including financial, available to support the ongoing training and support needed to maintain adoption competency? Is this reflected accordingly in your agency's policies and procedures?

10. **Implementation Specialists & Support to Reach Your Goals Successfully**: Implementation Specialists are instrumental in supporting the implementation and sustainability of NTI and are available to assist with the successful implementation and integration of NTI by:

- Providing guidance around the creation of the Site Implementation Team
- Facilitating Site Implementation Team meetings
- Planning kick-off and other launch events
- Hosting webinars or making presentations
- Providing links to marketing tools
- Providing transfer of learning and coaching support

For more information, implementation support, or consultation, please send an e-mail to nti@adoptionsupport.org.