



## SELECTING AN EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAM THAT FITS TIP SHEET



### Program Fit and Selection Overview

**Fit** refers to how well a program matches, or is appropriate for, the community, organization, stakeholders, and potential participants (i.e., youth). When selecting a program to implement, it is important to select a program that fits the youth, community, organization, and stakeholders. Appropriate program selection increases the likelihood that the program will be implemented with fidelity, thereby increasing the likelihood of achieving the desired health outcomes.

As PREP grantees begin to identify potential evidence-based programs for implementation, this Tip Sheet provides information that can be utilized to guide program selection.

### What is an Evidence-Based Program (EBP)?

An evidence-based program (EBP) is a program proven through rigorous evaluation to be effective at changing sexual risk-taking behavior among youth.

Although there are countless teen pregnancy, STI and/or HIV prevention programs implemented throughout the United States and internationally, not all have been proven effective in changing sexual risk-taking behavior. The US Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Office contracted with Mathematica Policy Research, Inc to identify EBPs that have been researched and scientifically proven to effectively change sexual risk-taking behavior. ([www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/prevention/research/programs/index.html](http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/prevention/research/programs/index.html)).

Evidence-Based Programs on the DHHS list demonstrate:

- Evidence of a positive, statistically significant impact on at least one of the following outcomes:
  - Sexual activity (initiation; frequency; rates of vaginal, oral and/or anal sex; number of sexual partners)
  - Contraceptive use (consistency of use or one-time use, for either condoms or another contraceptive method)
  - Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
  - Pregnancy or birth
- A positive, statistically significant impact for either the full analytic sample or a subgroup defined by (1) gender or (2) sexual experience at baseline.

EBPs have typically been proven effective with specific populations (e.g., race, ethnicity, age, and grade-level) and in a particular setting (e.g., schools, clinics, communities). Knowing which population and setting were used in the original evaluation study or replicated studies is important when selecting the most appropriate program for youth, the organization, and achievement of health goals.

Grantees are not limited to selecting one of the 28 model EBPs identified in the DHHS study. Additionally, grantees have the option of replicating EBPs or substantially incorporating elements of effective programs that have been proven on the basis of rigorous scientific research. (See State PREP Funding Opportunity Announcement, Section I.3.ii.)

## Fidelity and Adaptation

**Fidelity** is the faithfulness with which a curriculum or program is implemented; that is, how well the program is implemented without compromising the core components which are essential for the program's effectiveness.

**Core components** are the program characteristics that must be kept intact when the program is being replicated or adapted in order for it to produce program outcomes similar to those demonstrated in the original evaluation research. Core components are the essential ingredients of an evidence-based program.

Core components are separated into three categories:

- **Content:** WHAT is being taught—the knowledge, attitudes, values, norms, and skills that are addressed in the program's learning activities and are most likely to change sexual behaviors;
- **Pedagogy:** HOW the content is taught—the teaching methods, strategies, and youth-facilitator interactions that contribute to the program's effectiveness; and
- **Implementation:** LOGISTICS that are responsible for a conducive learning environment, such as program setting, facilitator-youth ratio, dosage, and sequence of sessions.

**Adaptation** is a process of making changes to an evidence-based program to make it more suitable for a particular population or an organization's capacity without compromising its core components. It is important to remember, when considering a program for fit, organizations are not making adaptations to the program. Rather, this is the time to think through potential adaptations that might be necessary in order for a program to be a good fit.

*See the PREP Fidelity Monitoring and Program Adaptation Tip Sheets for further information regarding these subjects.*

## What is Fit?

**Fit** refers to how well the program matches, or is appropriate for, the community, organization, stakeholders, and potential participants (i.e., youth).

All evidence-based programs have strengths and limitations; not all programs will work for all youth, organizations and communities. Some programs may be easily adapted to fit the needs of certain youth or communities, without compromising fidelity, while other programs may not be. When considering programs, organizations may realize that a program is not a good match for prospective participants or organizational capacities. The implementing organization may want to adapt the program, or it may be more appropriate to select another potential program to explore further. When selecting a program to implement, it is important to select a program that fits the youth, community, organization, and stakeholders. Appropriate program selection increases the likelihood that the program will be implemented with fidelity, thereby increasing the likelihood of achieving the desired health outcomes.

Often, small changes to a program can and should be made to increase fit, especially when it comes to working with particular youth participants. Thinking about possible adaptations during the program selection process will facilitate the implementation of the program with fidelity and quality, while often preventing the need to make last minute changes that may diminish program

effectiveness. Understanding fit assists in the early identification of key required changes, allowing for thoughtful and appropriate program adaptations as needed.

### **What are the Benefits of Selecting a Program with an Appropriate Fit?**

Reviewing and selecting a program based on fit increases the chances it will be appropriate for and accepted by participating youth and the community. If a program does not fit with the culture and values of the youth, organization, and stakeholders, it will be more difficult to implement and may be less effective. Selecting a program with a good fit affects all participants and constituents because:

- Programs are effective for participating youth as well as your community;
- Program components complement the efforts of other groups in the community, reducing duplication, and perhaps boosting results for multiple groups;
- Program staff are able to build strong relationships with other providers, funders, and stakeholders; and
- Target populations successfully participate in the program or strategy.

The selection of the right program with a good fit increases the chances of effecting the changes desired among program participants.

## **Steps to Assess and Select a Program that Fits**

### **Preliminary Planning and Information Gathering**

Prior to assessing a program for fit and selecting a program for implementation, the following activities and information need to be conducted and gathered.

- Complete a needs and resource assessment of the following factors
  - Sexual risk-taking behaviors
  - Risk and Protective factors (values, attitudes and beliefs)
  - Demographics
  - Knowledge of pregnancy/STD/HIV prevention information
  - Community resources, services, partnerships
- Establish program goal & objectives
- Gather information about potential programs - utilize the DHHS website and other resources
  - Content
  - Activities
  - Dosage
  - Setting
  - Participant information: age, gender, race/ethnicity
  - Program outcomes
- Generate a list of potential programs

Once an organization has gathered this critical information, the organization is ready to move on to assess potential programs for fit. The five steps below provide organizations guidance for this process. Steps 1-4 identify questions to consider for each potential program to evaluate program fit for a specific area. Step 5 provides guidance for selecting the program with the best fit, based on information assessed in steps 1-4. A Program Fit Checklist has been developed to assist in the completion of these 5 steps (see References and Resources).

### **1. Assess Fit with Participants**

- a. Have youth similar to potential participants been helped by this program?
- b. Are the planned activities socially and developmentally suitable for the potential participants?
- c. Are the planned activities culturally and linguistically suitable?

- d. Would the target youth enjoy and attend the program?

## **2. Asses Fit with Organization**

- a. Is the program goal compatible with the implementing organization's mission?
- b. What do board, staff, and leadership think of the potential program?
- c. What is the context/setting in which the program was delivered (and evaluated) versus the context/setting planned by the implementing organization?
- d. How realistic is the program dosage (i.e., number & duration of sessions)?
- e. Does the implementing organization have the staff capacity necessary to implement the program with fidelity?
  - o Level of effort, qualifications, comfort levels, training, support staff
- f. Does the implementing organization have the leadership capacity necessary to implement the program with fidelity?
  - o Diversity, longevity, support
- g. Does the implementing organization have the partnerships and collaborations necessary to implement the program with fidelity?
- h. Does the implementing organization have the fiscal, resource, and technical capacities necessary to implement the program with fidelity?
  - o Training, space, transportation, computers, software, manuals, condoms, anatomy models, notebooks, incentives, DVDs, A/V equipment, etc.

## **3. Assess Fit with Stakeholders**

- a. Is another group already implementing similar efforts?
  - o Complement or conflict?
  - o Collaboration?
  - o Need?
- b. What is the level of readiness, for youth and the community?
  - o Really ready for the activities?
  - o Support the program?
  - o Health literacy necessary?
- c. What are key stakeholders' priorities?
  - o Shared vision?

## **4. Consider Adaptations to Improve Fit**

- a. Will the potential adaptation(s) maintain the program's core components, so the program can be implemented with fidelity?
- b. Are there any costs associated with making the potential adaptation(s)?
- c. What staff training will be required so facilitators can implement the adapted program with fidelity?
- d. What is the feasibility of making the potential adaptation(s)?
- e. What materials or information is needed to make the potential adaptation(s)?

## **5. Narrow the List of Potential Programs & Select a Program that Fits**

- a. Reconsider each program with information gathered in steps #1-4
- b. Narrow list based on information, to determine most appropriate fit
  - o Remember, implementation with fidelity and quality is critical
- c. Select a program that fits, based on criteria assessed in Steps 1-4, to implement with fidelity

## **If You Have Already Selected a Program...**

Fit cannot be taken for granted, even if the program has already been selected or is already being implemented. In many cases the program's relevance and effectiveness will increase if an

organization considers ways to make it better fit with various stakeholder groups, especially the target population. Consider the selected program, from several angles:

- Discuss program fit
- Take a fresh look
- Update adaptations

## Lessons Learned

Taking time before implementing a program to make sure it fits for all stakeholder groups increases the likelihood that the community will support it and participate. Aspects of fit may change, influenced by any number of factors, including the economy, funding, changes in the demographics of the community, or shifts in organizational operations. By staying up-to-date with potentially relevant internal and external influences, it is possible to be better able to continuously improve fit, as well as respond to factors that could affect the longer-term sustainability of the program.

- Is there organizational support for the program?
- How are program benefits communicated to community?
- Is there a diverse group of program champions supporting the work?

## References & Resources

- Healthy Teen Network Program Fit Checklist:  
[http://healthyteennetwork.org/vertical/Sites/%7BB4D0CC76-CF78-4784-BA7C-5D0436F6040C%7D/uploads/Fit\\_Checklist\\_Tool.pdf](http://healthyteennetwork.org/vertical/Sites/%7BB4D0CC76-CF78-4784-BA7C-5D0436F6040C%7D/uploads/Fit_Checklist_Tool.pdf)
- Healthy Teen Network Evidence-Based Resource Center:  
[http://healthyteennetwork.org/index.asp?Type=B\\_BASIC&SEC={5E80FC23-E52F-4B64-8E81-C752F7FF3DB6}](http://healthyteennetwork.org/index.asp?Type=B_BASIC&SEC={5E80FC23-E52F-4B64-8E81-C752F7FF3DB6})
- Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative (TPPI) List of Evidence-Based Programs:  
<http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/prevention/research/programs/index.html>
- Little Promoting Science Based Approached (PBSA) to Teen Pregnancy Prevention Using Getting to Outcomes (GTO):  
[www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/adolescentreprohealth/PDF/LittlePSBA-GTO.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/adolescentreprohealth/PDF/LittlePSBA-GTO.pdf)
- Putting What Works to Work. (2010). Washington DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy.  
<http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/resources/works/PWWTWabout.aspx>
- Science and Success: Sex Education and Other Programs That Work to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, HIV & Sexually Transmitted Infections in the United States. (2008). Washington DC: Advocates for Youth. Full Report (pdf):  
<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/storage/advfy/documents/sciencesuccess.pdf>
- Doug Kirby et al. 2006 "Sex and HIV Education Programs for Youth: Their Impact and Important Characteristics": [www.etr.org/recapp/documents/programs/SexHIVedProgs.pdf](http://www.etr.org/recapp/documents/programs/SexHIVedProgs.pdf)
- Community Readiness Model, Tri-Ethnic Center for Prevention Research at Colorado State University: [www.triethniccenter.colostate.edu/communityReadiness\\_home.htm](http://www.triethniccenter.colostate.edu/communityReadiness_home.htm)
- The Community Toolbox, Work Group for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas, Chapter 2, Section 9: <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/index.aspx>