Collaborative for Implementation Practice

UNC SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

Equitable Implementation Guide

January 2023

Overview

The Equitable Implementation Guide is a companion piece to the case examples and practice evidence described in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review* supplement, *Bringing Equity to Implementation*. The supplement lifted up six essential factors for equitable implementation:[1]

1. **Build trusting relationships** to ensure that partners understand each other's interests and needs and feel confident that they can rely on one another to deliver on agreements.
2. **Dismantle power structures** by addressing power differentials and positioning community members at the center of decision-making and implementation activities.
3. **Invest and make decisions to advance equity** at each choice point throughout the implementation process.
4. **Develop community-defined evidence** to reflect the diversity of communities in intervention design.
5. **Make adaptations** – especially cultural adaptations – to both interventions and implementation strategies to ensure the reach and relevance needed for equitable implementation.
6. **Engage in critical perspectives on implementation science** across contexts.

The purpose of this guide is to help technical assistance providers, and others who are interested in equitable implementation, operationalize these six essential factors to center and advance equity throughout their work with communities, organizations, and funders.

Why Would You Use This Guide?

This guide can be used by anyone who identifies as a technical assistance provider. Technical assistance (TA) is "a collaborative, coordinated effort to facilitate change in systems, build capacity, improve practices, and reach agreed-upon outcomes."2 Specifically, effective TA provides a pathway to improvement through activities and materials that promote new behaviors, practices, beliefs, and understandings of staff in the systems served.2 Those delivering TA may identify as consultants, trainers, coaches, or implementation support practitioners.

Because of TA providers' role working with communities, implementing agencies and funders, they are uniquely positioned to promote strategies to advance equity. Regardless of the engagement, TA providers can find value in reflecting on their role vis-à-vis partners with whom they are working; can lift up strategies and tools to their partners to advance equitable implementation; and can reflect with funders on grantmaking mechanisms that center equity.

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[1] Metz, A., Woo, B., & Loper, A. (2021). Equitable Implementation at Work. *Stanford Social Innovation Review. 19*(3). https://ssir.org/articles/entry/equitable_implementation_at_work
[2] https://trohanis.fpg.unc.edu/effective.asp

What Resources Are Available in This Guide?

The Equitable Implementation Guide includes three resources:

- **Technical Assistance Provider Reflection Tool**: The Reflection Tool can be used by TA providers to reflect and assess their own capacity to partner effectively with communities and funders to advance equitable implementation.
- **Equitable Implementation Practice Resource**: This resource provides suggestions and resources for each of the ten recommendations for putting equitable implementation into action identified in the 2021 article, "Equitable Implementation at Work." It can be used by TA providers who are interested in implementing these recommendations with community partners and organizations.
- **Technical Assistance Provider & Funding Agency Partnership Reflection Guide:** This tool can be used by a TA provider working with a funding agency, such as a public agency, private donor, or private foundation. The TA provider may choose to complete this reflection guide independently to inform future discussions with a funder, or collaboratively with a funding partner.

Acknowledgements

Overview

Reflection is a critical means of ensuring ongoing growth and development. The Reflection Tool can be used by TA providers to reflect and assess their own capacity to partner effectively with communities and funders to advance equitable implementation.

This tool can be used at the beginning of a TA engagement when a TA provider is learning about their partner/s and defining their scope of work. It can also be used as part of ongoing work when a TA provider has concerns about how well-aligned their approach is with community needs and priorities. Reflection is not a one-time activity or to-do item to be checked off. TA providers must commit to ongoing reflection in their work as they seek to advance equity. TA providers who work for an organization or funder may find that their reflections may not be aligned with the values and principles of their employer. The TA Provider and Funding Agency Partnership Reflection Guide on page 18 may be an additional resource of support.

Instructions

- Identify the focus of the reflection:
  - What is the project or engagement?
  - Who are the partners or communities?
- Review and reflect on the questions. Some questions may not have easy answers. Uncertainty is normal, and the Reflection Tool does not have pre-determined "correct" responses. Document your responses.
- Consider:
  - What have you learned about yourself and your capacity to provide TA and support equitable implementation? What mental models do you hold about the project, partners, or communities? How might those mental models support equitable implementation or impede it?
  - What will you do with this information? How does this influence or impact your TA strategy?

TA Provider Reflection Tool:
17 Questions to Consider

Project / Engagement:

Partners / Community:

Self

1.	What is my position in this engagement?	☐ I am an external partner and not employed by the organization/s or community where I am working. ☐ I am internal and am employed by the organization/s and/or community where I am working.
2.	What is my responsibility in this work? *Example: achieving a deliverable, generating a product, etc.*	
3.	What is my authority in this work? *Example: I can make decisions about how I achieve my deliverables independently.*	
4.	What skills and expertise can I contribute to this work? What resources will I access to supplement my skills and expertise? *Example: I have subject matter expertise. I plan to access support for facilitation.*	
5.	What privilege and power do I bring to this work? What biases do I bring? *Example: I have privilege because of my race and ethnicity.*	
6.	How do my position, authority, privilege, and power impact my responsibilities in this work?	

Context

7.	What is important to the community and organization/s I am partnering with? What do the community and organization/s value? What are their strengths and successes? And how do I know this?	
8.	How are the community and organization/s I am partnering with impacted by racism and bias? What community history should I be aware of? And how do I know this?	

9. What power and privilege do this community and organization/s bring to our partnership? And how do I know this?

10. How do my biases (implicit and explicit) impact my ability to partner effectively with this community and organization/s?

11. How am I building authentic trust[3] with my partners? How do I know this is happening as intended?

12. How am I sharing authority and decision-making with my partners? How do I know this is happening as intended?

13. What support do I need to engage authentically with my partners? Who can provide me with this support?

System

14. How is power operating in the current system to create inequities? And how do I know this?

15. How does my work impact system-level factors that contribute to or prevent disparities in outcomes?

16. How does my work disrupt or uphold systems of power and privilege?

17. How am I communicating about and advocating for systems change to disrupt power and privilege and reduce disparities?

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[3] Trusting relationships are centered in vulnerability where the beliefs or expectations of the individuals in the relationships are that actions will cause no harm and provide benefit (Maiorana, et al., 2012). Trust is the cornerstone for effective partnerships. Trust engenders faith that partners can rely on each other to come through on agreements and to understand – and even anticipate – each other's needs and interests. (Tseng, Easton, & Supplee, 2017).

Overview

This resource can be used by a technical assistance (TA) provider working with a community or organization to advance equitable implementation. It can also be used by anyone interested in pursuing equitable implementation in their work.

This resource complements the 2021 article, "Equitable Implementation at Work," which identified ten recommendations for putting equitable implementation into action.[4] The recommendations were drawn from case examples and practice evidence described in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review* supplement, *Bringing Equity to Implementation*, and are organized by the six essential factors for equitable implementation:
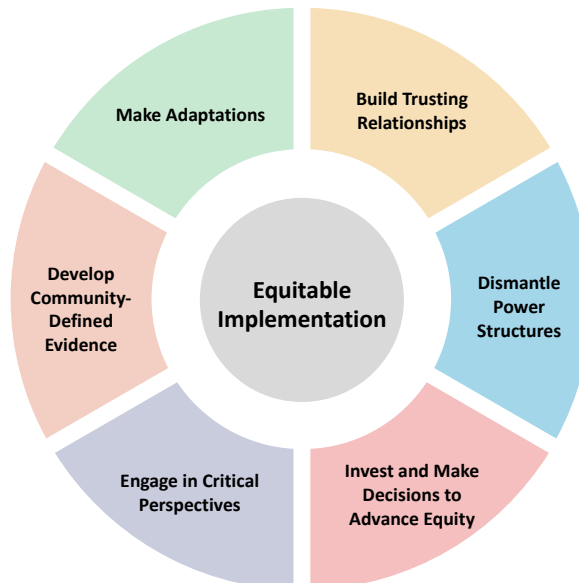
[4] Metz, A., Woo, B., & Loper, A. (2021, May). Equitable Implementation at Work. *Stanford Social Innovation Review. 2021*(2). https://ssir.org/articles/entry/equitable_implementation_at_work

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Equitable Implementation Practice Resource

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This resource provides suggestions and resources for each of the ten recommendations. The Equitable Implementation Practice Resource can be used by TA providers who are interested in implementing these recommendations with community partners and organizations.

In this resource, each recommendation is paired with:

- Suggestions for operationalizing the recommendation; and
- Resources related to equity and social justice.

Instructions

When Would You Use This Tool?

This tool can be used to inform TA at any point in a project or engagement.

How Would You Use This Tool?

- Identify the focus of your work:
  - What is the project or engagement?
  - Who are the partners or communities?
  - What funder/s are you considering?
- Review and reflect on the resource. Consider:
  - How can this help strengthen my work to advance equity?
  - What suggestions or tools can I incorporate in my work?
- Determine next steps:
  - What can you share with community partners about your work to advance equity?
  - What can you share with the funder about your work to advance equity?

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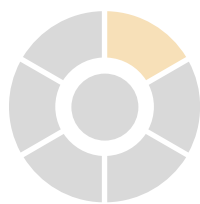
Build Trusting Relationships

Recommendation 1: Take the Time to Build Trust Through Small, Frequent Interactions

Implementation moves at the speed of trust, which can take longer than we think. Take time and dedicate resources to build trust with community members and support trust-building among partners in the community.

- **What does this look like in communities?**
  - ["Trust the People"](#)
- **What could this look like when providing technical assistance?**
  - Co-create realistic expectations for timelines with the community that honor their priorities and needs: Engage in bi-directional feedback loops with all partners about implementation staging and the amount of time needed for authentic engagement.
  - Show up when you say you will: Honor commitments to partners. Be reliable.
  - Co-develop clear expectations for communication with the community and hold all parties (gently) accountable: Support the development of partnership agreements and communication protocols and use them consistently.
  - Regularly assess the effectiveness of the level of your support in meeting needs and advancing equity, as implementation and context evolves.

Supporting Resources

- [Authentic & Equitable Partnerships: A Framework for Building Movements](#), Funders for Reproductive Equity
- [Implementation Stage resources](#), Collaborative for Implementation Practice
- [Partnership Agreements](#), Collaborative for Implementation Practice
- [Communication Protocol Templates](#), Collaborative for Implementation Practice
- [The Thin Book of Trust: An Essential Primer for Building Trust at Work](#)

Where can you make a contribution? What are your limitations? Who can support you in this work?

Dismantle Power Structures

Recommendation 2: Shed the Solo Leader Model of Implementation

Rather than relying on the energy and efforts of a single individual or organization, engage community members and diverse partner groups in ongoing, meaningful activities to develop a shared understanding of problems and potential solutions, develop strategies that address community needs and assets, and create a sense of mutual accountability for building the system of supports needed to sustain change and advance equitable outcomes. These strategies address power structures and in doing so, begin to dismantle them.

- **What does this look like in communities?**
  - ○ [“Community Takes the Wheel”](#)
- **What could this look like when providing technical assistance?**
  - ○ Extend the table: Identify formal and informal leaders and ensure representation of diverse partners in decision making.
  - ○ Pursue inclusive decision making: Establish team charters and protocols for inclusive decision making in advance of challenging situations.
  - ○ Distribute roles and responsibilities among team members at various levels.
  - ○ Identify the influence that different partners may have on the implementation. Pay particular attention to those with inherently greater power to influence the implementation process and those disenfranchised from the implementation process.
  - ○ Use facilitation techniques to make power structures visible and to protect all voices in the implementation process.

Supporting Resources

- [Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership](#)
- [Building Leadership Toolkit](#), Community Toolbox, Center for Community Health and Development
- [Team Charters and protocols](#), Collaborative for Implementation Practice
- [Troika Consulting protocol](#), Liberating Structures

Where can you make a contribution? What are your limitations? Who can support you in this work?

Recommendation 3: Distribute Information and Decision-making Authority to Those Whose Lives are Most Affected by the Implementation.
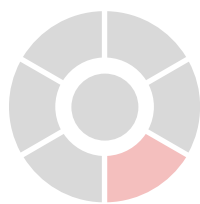
Recognize the knowledge and experience that community partners have and support them to make decisions about what is implemented, and about what strategies are used to carry out the work to ensure relevant, successful, and sustainable implementation.

- **What does this look like in communities?**
  - ["Youth Leadership in Action"](#)
- **What could this look like when providing technical assistance?**
  - Be explicit about why and how communities will be involved and be transparent about the limits of their authority and contributions.
  - Facilitate conversations to create mutual respect. Build environments in which sharing information and asking questions is the norm and decision-making power is distributed.
  - Advocate for authentic community engagement with external funders and leaders. Speak up and ask for resources necessary to support community partners and organizations, including compensating them for their expertise and participation as TA providers and funders are.
  - Ensure decisions about strategies and plans are led by those most impacted.
  - Collaborate with leaders and community partners who are trusted by the community when providing support.
  - Connect historically excluded or otherwise disconnected individuals or groups in the system by serving as a relational resource. Bridge networks to connect people strategically where there is a potential for mutual benefit.

Supporting Resources

- [Developing Community Agreements](#), The National Equity Project
- [Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership](#)

Where can you make a contribution? What are your limitations? Who can support you in this work?

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Invest & Make Decisions to Advance Equity

Recommendation 4: Engage in Deliberate and Transparent Decision-Making

Implementation decisions should be conscious, reflective, well thought through, and paced in a way that unintended consequences can be assessed. Take time to reflect, which allows for course corrections for decisions that yield any unexpected results. Communicate transparently about decision-making with partners at all levels of implementation.

- **What does this look like in communities?**
    - ["Youth Leadership in Action"](#)
- **What could this look like when providing technical assistance?**
    - Model transparent, reflective decision-making with all partners. Ask funders to share their decision-making authority and advocate for community members to have an equal voice in decision-making.
    - Promote communication with all partners. Recognize and respond to differences in communication needs across different partners involved. Differences may be due to different organizational roles, implementation expectations, involvement, responsibilities, and experiences.
    - Help implementation partners recognize and respond to differences in communication needs among focus populations through the implementation. These differences may be due to, for example, varying levels of language proficiency and literacy, different gender-, education-, or culture-based norms and preferences.

Supporting Resources

- [Equitable Decision-Making Tool](#), Clark College Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
- [Racial Equity Toolkit: An Opportunity to Operationalize Equity](#), Local and Regional Government Alliance on Race & Equity

Where can you make a contribution? What are your limitations? Who can support you in this work?
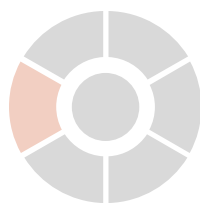
Recommendation 5: Engage Community Members in Interpreting and Using Data to Support Implementation

- **What does this look like in communities?**
  - ["Community Takes the Wheel"](#)
- **What could this look like when providing technical assistance?**
  - Work with partners to understand their capacity, strengths and needs related to implementation, and coach them in this work so they can gain confidence and competency.
  - Provide coaching to agencies and funders on how to show up in these spaces and fully engage community members. Reinforce the need for honesty and transparency when working with the community around data analysis and use.
  - Use plain language to communicate data and decisions. Consider using data walks as a way for community members and partners to draw their own conclusions about what the data say.
  - Identify existing meetings and forums where data are reviewed and discussed; when needed, work with community partners to create new opportunities for organizations and community partners to review, interpret and discuss data. Support partners in their data-based decision-making, including prioritization of needs and challenges, and the development of concrete solutions to identified problems.
  - Identify partners in the community with expertise in data use and who have experience expanding the capacity of others to use data. These partners should also have competencies related to supporting equitable implementation.

Supporting Resources

- [What, So What, Now What protocol](#), Liberating Structures
- [Powering Health Equity Action with Online Data Tools: 10 Design Principles](#)
- [Community Engagement Assessment Tool](#), Nexus Community Engagement Institute
- [Foster Conversations About Results With Data Walks](#), Annie E. Casey Foundation

Where can you make a contribution? What are your limitations? Who can support you in this work?

Develop Community-Defined Evidence

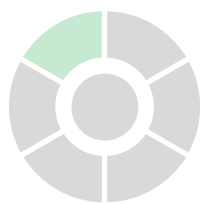## Recommendation 6: Co-design Interventions with Community Members

Ensure interventions are relevant, desired by communities, and feasible to implement. Engage with community members' experiences and perspectives to develop interventions that are aligned with community needs as *they* describe them.

- **What does this look like in communities?**
  - "[Listening to Black Parents"](#)
  - ["Community-Defined Evidence as a Framework for Equitable Implementation"](#)
- **What could this look like when providing technical assistance?**
  - Use effective co-design strategies throughout implementation. Community partners and organizations should be involved in designing interventions, implementation plans, tools, policies, resources, and all other aspects of implementation.
  - Facilitate co-design work, even if this may make funders or authority figures uncomfortable. Consider facilitating design meetings where tools and resources are developed in real time, involving multiple perspectives from community partners and organizations. Reinforce the need for honesty and transparency, particularly from funders, researchers, or others who hold power. When these tools and resources are being tested, these partners can also be engaged in gathering feedback on how they experienced and perceived these tools and resources when used in practice.

Supporting Resources

- [Equity Centered Community Design Toolkit](#), Creative Reaction Lab

Where can you make a contribution? What are your limitations? Who can support you in this work?

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Make Adaptations

Recommendation 7: Seek Locally Based Service Delivery Platforms

Implementation often relies on traditional institutions and systems of care that may limit or even impede access for specific groups of people. Engage implementation partners in adapting service delivery mechanisms to trusted community organizations to increase access for and uptake by local residents.

- **What does this look like in communities?**
  - "Faith-Based Organizations as Leaders of Implementation"
  - "Community-Driven Health Solutions on Chicago's South Side"
- **What could this look like when providing technical assistance?**
  - Work with partners to identify readily available and potential resources and assets that exist in the community to be used and leveraged in the implementation context.
  - Expand the capacity of community partners and organizations when necessary, so that they can provide services.
  - Advocate with funders and policy makers for prioritizing community partners as service providers.
- **Supporting Resources**
  - Co-location of services toolkit, Rural Health Info Hub
  - Using lay health workers, World Health Organization
- ***Where can you make a*** contribution*? What are your limitations? Who can support you in this work?*

Supporting Resources

- Co-location of services toolkit, Rural Health Info Hub
- Using lay health workers, World Health Organization

  Where can you make a contribution? What are your limitations? Who can support you in this work?

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Recommendation 8: Address Issues of Social Justice

Ensure that implementation addresses stressors and barriers to care that are rooted in systemic and structural racism and support adaptations that address issues related to these stressors.

- **What does this look like in communities?**
  - This recommendation draws on the full set of articles in the 2021 *SSIR* supplement. We encourage TA providers to familiarize themselves with the range of case studies and also review the article, "Equity in Implementation Science is Long Overdue."
- **What could this look like when providing technical assistance?**
  - Strive to understand local, state, and national context. Disparate outcomes and community context cannot be accurately understood without acknowledging structural and institutional racism and other mechanisms of discrimination.
  - Conduct root cause analyses to identify local and system factors leading to outcomes.
  - In strategy development, avoid the tendency toward only universal strategies; instead, remember to use data that support targeted strategies that address those most burdened.
  - Give attention to both local implementation and larger systems stressors and barriers that impact communities. Promote necessary adaptations and strategies to address systems stressors and barriers.
  - Communicate with partners about the need for addressing racism and discrimination in the work. Advocate for change to better center and advance equity.

Supporting Resources

- Identifying an Equity Challenge, The National Equity Project
- Root Cause Analysis Resources, Collaborative for Implementation Practice
- Diagnosing the Disparity, Advancing Health Equity
- Vision, Values, and Voice: A Communications Toolkit, The Opportunity Agenda
- Advocating for Change, Community Toolbox, Center for Community Health and Development

Where can you make a contribution? What are your limitations? Who can support you in this work?

Engage in Critical Perspectives

Recommendation 9: Develop Implementation Strategies that Address the Contextual Factors that Contribute to Disparities in Outcomes

Advocacy and policy implementation strategies focused on the macro context are more likely to advance equity than implementation strategies at organizational or local levels. Support community leaders to create advocacy networks for policies and funding that will help to sustain local programming. Encourage strategies, such as training community members to facilitate local programs and deliver interventions, that ensure that implementation is tailored to the culture, history, and values of the local community; that interventions are delivered by trusted individuals; and that communities will be able to sustain the interventions.

- **What does this look like in communities?**
  - This recommendation draws on the full set of articles in the 2021 *SSIR* supplement. We encourage TA providers to familiarize themselves with the range of case studies and also review the article, "Equity in Implementation Science is Long Overdue."
- **What could this look like when providing technical assistance?**
  - Assess the contextual fit of the proposed intervention/s or approach/es with the values, needs, skills and resources available in the community, including in specific subgroups.
  - Include people who have lived experience in the community context in the assessment of contextual fit and advocacy.
  - Assess the contextual fit of the proposed intervention/s or approach/es with the current political, funding, and organizational landscape. Consider how technical assistance is aligned with or disrupts the current landscape and how it may be used to advance equity in context.
  - Advocate for funders to address upstream factors in their funding decisions, including administrative costs. For example, programs or practices that will be delivered in rural communities may have access barriers due to limited public transportation. When working with funders, encourage them to address these larger systems issues in their grantmaking.

Supporting Resources

- Waters Center for Systems Thinking
- Hexagon Fit and Feasibility Tool, Collaborative for Implementation Practice
- Active Implementation Frameworks for Program Success, Cascading Logic Models

Where can you make a contribution? What are your limitations? Who can support you in this work?

Recommendation 10: Seek Long-term Outcomes that Advance Equity

Support selection of interventions that have a likely influence on outcomes beyond near-term changes. Selecting programs that have the potential of a spillover effect in outcomes is a mechanism for equitable implementation.

- **What does this look like in communities?**
  - This recommendation draws on the full set of articles in the [2021 *SSIR* supplement](#). We encourage TA providers to familiarize themselves with the range of case studies and also review the article, "[Equity in Implementation Science is Long Overdue](#)."
- **What could this look like when providing technical assistance?**
  - Assess potential long-term outcomes during selection of interventions or programs and implementation.
  - Help to identify and gather relevant quantitative and qualitative data about the progress and quality of implementation activities and outcomes.
  - Support partners to develop the capacity necessary to monitor long-term outcomes and make decisions using disaggregated data.
- **Supporting Resources**
- **Where *can you make a* contribution*? What are your limitations? Who can support you in this work?***

Supporting Resources

- [Powering Health Equity Action with Online Data Tools: 10 Design Principles](#)
- [Hexagon Fit and Feasibility Tool](#), Collaborative for Implementation Practice
- [Results-Based Accountability](#)

Where can you make a contribution? What are your limitations? Who can support you in this work?

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Overview

This tool can be used by a technical assistance (TA) provider working with a funding agency, such as a public agency, private donor, or private foundation. The TA provider may choose to complete this reflection guide independently to inform future discussions with a funder, or collaboratively with a funding partner.

The Partnership Reflection Guide can be used by TA providers to reflect with funders on how funding and TA can advance equitable implementation with community partners and organizations.

This tool can be used early on when a TA provider is first engaging with a funder or considering an engagement. It can also be used as part of ongoing work when a TA provider has concerns about how well-aligned their approach is with the funder and community's needs and priorities.

Instructions

For Independent Use:
- Identify the focus of the reflection:
  - What is the project or engagement?
  - Who are the partners or communities?
  - What funder/s are supporting the work?
- Review and reflect on the questions. Document responses.
- Determine next steps. How can you effectively:
  - Share your responses with the funder?
  - Ask the funder to reflect on these questions?
  - Share your responses with community partners?

For Use with a Funder:
- Prior to the meeting:
  - Identify the focus of the reflection:
    - What is the project or engagement?
    - Who are the partners or communities?
  - Individually, the TA provider/s and funder should review and reflect on the questions.
- During the meeting:
  - Discuss and document responses to the questions.
  - Determine whether to share the tool and data with community partners.

Technical Assistance Provider and Funding Agency Reflection Guide: Five Questions to Consider for Trust-building[5]

Project / Engagement:

Partners / Community:

Funding Agency & Representative/s:

Time

1. How does this funding allow for time and activities to build trust between the funding agency, organization/s, community members and TA provider/s?

Resources

2. How does this funding support flexible resources for the organization/s, community members and TA provider/s to implement what equity requires?

Control

3. How does this funding give power to the organization/s and community engaged in the work? For example, to what extent does the funder align itself with the organization's or community's desired result? What is the TA provider's role in this?

Partnership

4. How can the funding agency and TA provider partner effectively to build trust with the organization/s and community?

5. What is needed for the funding agency and TA provider to develop and strengthen a shared focus on equitable implementation?

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[5] This reflection tool is based on the Amplify Fund's "Trust-Building Check (Yourself) List for Funders." We strongly encourage funders' use of the checklist to complement the use of this reflection guide.

Next Steps

The Equitable Implementation Resource Guide is designed to promote reflection among TA providers, the communities in which they work, and their funders, and provide practical tools for equitable implementation practice. By attending to the six domains of equitable implementation, we hope that TA providers—and others who support implementation—are better equipped to advance equitable outcomes in their work.

This guide is by no means an exhaustive resource on equitable implementation. At the Collaborative for Implementation Practice, we are continuing to learn more about how to support equitable implementation and strive to uplift the voices of others who are engaged in this work. We encourage you to connect with us and look forward to learning alongside you.

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