Evidence Based Practices (EBPs)

What are EBPs and Why Implement Them?

What are evidence-based practices or EBPs? According to the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) definition, evidence-based approaches:

- Are based in theory
- Have undergone scientific evaluation
- Are not based on tradition, convention, belief, or anecdotal evidence

Evidence-based practices have been shown through scientific research and evaluation to be effective at preventing or delaying behaviors we all want to prevent or delay, such as underage drinking.

Promising practices have some scientific research or data showing positive outcomes, but do not have enough evidence to support generalizable conclusions.

Some strategies are neither evidence-based nor promising—at best they may be ineffective at reducing the problem of interest but effective in delivering other beneficial outcomes; worst-case scenario they may be counter-productive or harmful (such as scare tactics).

Benefits to Implementing EBPs

Implementing evidence-based strategies as intended can help you:

- Produce positive results and have a strong likelihood of success
- Use scarce prevention resources strategically
- Meet funder requirements

What Constitutes Evidence?

Various funders may require different levels of evidence. Substance abuse prevention efforts funded by SAMSHA or by the Minnesota Department of Human services recognize three definitions of evidence-based programming:

1. It has been included in a federal registry of evidence-based interventions (such as SAMHSA’s NREPP)
2. Its effectiveness in achieving target outcomes has been reported in peer reviewed journals (e.g., The Journal of Primary Prevention)
3. Its effectiveness has been formally documented in other specific ways in the past (for example through unpublished outcome evaluations) and the program or practice’s effectiveness is supported by the consensus judgment of informed experts.
**Definition 1**—several federal agencies have been developing registries of health and human services programs that they consider to be effective. Registries have a number of pros and cons to consider.

**Pros:**
- Compiled by teams with years of evaluation expertise
- Feature programs with demonstrated effectiveness
- Describe programs core elements, target populations, outcomes, risk and protective factors addressed, and community conditions
- Reliable and user-friendly

**Cons:**
- Criteria used to determine effectiveness can vary from registry to registry
- More focus on individual and school strategies rather than on community and environmental strategies
- Most practices have not been tested in diverse settings or with culturally diverse populations

**Definition 2**—a practice is considered to be evidence-based if its effectiveness has been reported in a peer review journal. There are pros and cons to using peer review journals to find EBPs.

**Pros:**
- The articles have been reviewed and approved by an independent panel of experts.
- Articles can be found in on-line databases, through the Minnesota Prevention Resource Center, or at public libraries.

**Cons:**
- Articles found on-line are sometimes expensive
- They are often written using very technical language
- The articles must be carefully read to determine the quality of the study and the strength of the findings

**Definition 3**—communities are also allowed to use other sources of information on effectiveness, provided four guidelines are met.

- Guideline 1: The intervention is based on a theory of change that is documented in a clear logic model or conceptual model.
- Guideline 2: The intervention is similar in content and structure to interventions that meet definition 1 or 2.
- Guideline 3: The intervention’s effectiveness has been documented multiple times in multiple settings showing consistent results; and
- Guideline 4: The intervention is reviewed and deemed appropriate by a panel of informed prevention experts.
Adaptation and Fidelity

Once you have identified an evidence-based program or strategy that seems right for your community, it will be important to consider whether or not you can implement the strategy exactly as its original developer intended (this is often referred to in prevention literature as implementing the program model with high “fidelity”). There are a number of things to consider when determining whether you can implement a strategy with fidelity:

- Will you be implementing the strategy with a target population that is same as or similar to the original target population?
- Will you be working in a similar environmental context with similar local conditions?
- Do you have the required program leadership, staff, and expertise to implement the program or strategy as intended?
- Do you have necessary resources and infrastructure to implement the strategy with the same intensity and frequency as originally intended?
- Are you certain that you can implement the “core components” of the strategy?
- Are there are other important differences in the way you intend to implement the strategy in your community?

Practices implemented with high fidelity are more likely to achieve their desired outcomes. However, most practitioners trying to replicate proven strategies need to adapt these strategies slightly to fit local needs. If you do plan to make adaptations:

- Consult the program developer, an environmental strategies expert, or an evaluator.
- Add rather than subtract program elements so that no core components are eliminated.

Cultural adaptation refers to program modifications that are culturally sensitive and tailored to a particular group’s traditional world views:

- Cultural adaptation is more than just translation.
- Effective cultural adaptation considers the values, attitudes, beliefs, and experiences of the target audience.
- Create strong links to cultural leaders and enhance the cultural competency of staff.

Other Considerations

In addition to considering whether or not a strategy is evidence-based, there are other important considerations:

- Conceptual fit
- Practical fit
- Cultural considerations
- Need for innovation
**Conceptual fit**—is the intervention or strategy relevant to the identified community needs? The selected intervention should be carefully targeted to your community’s specific characteristics, target populations, and local conditions.

- Characteristics: Community characteristics to consider include but are not limited to culture, religion, socio-economic factors, and whether your community is rural or urban.
- Target populations: This is the population selected by your coalition or by the funder to be targeted with prevention strategies—for example, individuals aged 12 to 25 might be a target population for preventing high-risk drinking.
- Local conditions: These describe why something is or is not a problem within your community. For example, one reason underage drinking might be a problem in a community is that retailers do not check IDs to see if the person purchasing alcohol is of legal age.

**Practical fit**—is the intervention or strategy feasible for your community to implement? Does your community have the necessary political will, community readiness, and resources to implement the strategy?

- Political support/buy-in: To what extent are community leaders supportive of the strategies under consideration? For example, passing an ordinance will likely require the approval of a county board and county attorney or similar entities.
- Community readiness: To what extent is the broader community aware of the problem and supportive of prevention efforts?
- Resources: Does your community have adequate financial, human, and organizational resources to implement the strategy?
- Sustainability: How will your community continue to implement the strategy beyond the initial project period? For example, can fines be increased to cover the cost of increased enforcement? Who will carry out activities in the event that there is no longer a paid project staff?

**Cultural considerations**—unfortunately, many evidence-based strategies have not been tested with diverse populations, or in a variety of settings. Depending on the target population being served, you may need to adapt evidence-based practices or consider promising practices that are culturally appropriate.

**Need for innovation**—the prevention field will be strengthened as additional programs, policies, and practices are identified as evidence-based. In particular, there is a need to identify evidence-based practices that have been shown to be effective in diverse settings (especially environmental strategies implemented in community settings) and with diverse population.

**Additional Information**