Change and Implementation at a Glance

Capacity Building
CENTER FOR STATES

Problem Exploration

Through problem exploration, child welfare agencies analyze data to get a clear understanding of their needs and challenges and why they occur. Teams that fully understand the underlying causes of their problems are more likely to choose and implement a solution that will make a difference.

Key Takeaways

◆ **Using data to dig deeper** helps:
  ◆ Demonstrate there is a problem
  ◆ Explore the nature and root cause(s) of the problem
  ◆ Determine who is most affected
  ◆ Examine areas of strong practice
  ◆ Identify an appropriate response

◆ **Disaggregating data**—or looking at data by subgroups—helps identify where problems are occurring and characteristics of those most affected.

◆ **Gathering stakeholder perspectives** is critical to truly understanding a problem. Stakeholders may include agency staff (from frontline workers to leadership), family and community members, and system partners (e.g., courts, tribes, service providers).

> **Root cause analysis** is a structured process for identifying why a problem occurs and what to address so that the problem does not continue or happen again.

What It Takes to Get It Done

❏ Identify a problem.

❏ Create a data plan to explore the problem.

  ◯ Identify research questions.

  ◯ Assess data sources (e.g., administrative data, surveys, focus groups, case reviews).

  ◯ Determine data analyses.

  ◯ Identify staff responsible.

❏ Collect and analyze the data.

❏ Identify possible contributing factors and possible root causes of the problem.

❏ Explore and validate possible root causes.

❏ Isolate the root cause(s) to address.

Explore a Problem's Underlying Root Cause With "5 Whys"

The 5 Whys method is an easy way to explore the underlying causes of a problem. Simply ask stakeholders "why?" to drill down into the problem (e.g., "Why are fathers not receiving services?"). With each response, again ask, "why?" (five or more times) until there are no new responses and a root cause emerges (e.g., "Because our agency culture focuses more on mothers and does not equally value the potential role of fathers."). Teams should gather data and evidence, as needed, to verify stakeholder insights and hypotheses about the problem.

Creating a visual illustration (such as a fishbone diagram) to map out contributing factors is another method to delve into underlying causes of a problem.

Problem Exploration Milestones

◆ Problem identified

◆ Data and information about the problem obtained and analyzed

◆ Needs and characteristics of affected populations identified

◆ Root cause(s) identified

◆ Findings reviewed with a variety of stakeholders

◆ Determination made that data and analyses are sufficient to explain the root cause(s) of the problem

These milestones will help teams prepare for creating a theory of change and later selecting an intervention that addresses the problem and meets identified needs.

Need more information on problem exploration?

Detailed resources are available on the **Change and Implementation in Practice** website at
https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/focus-areas/cqi/change-implementation/problem-exploration/

Indepth **brief** offers step-by-step guidance.
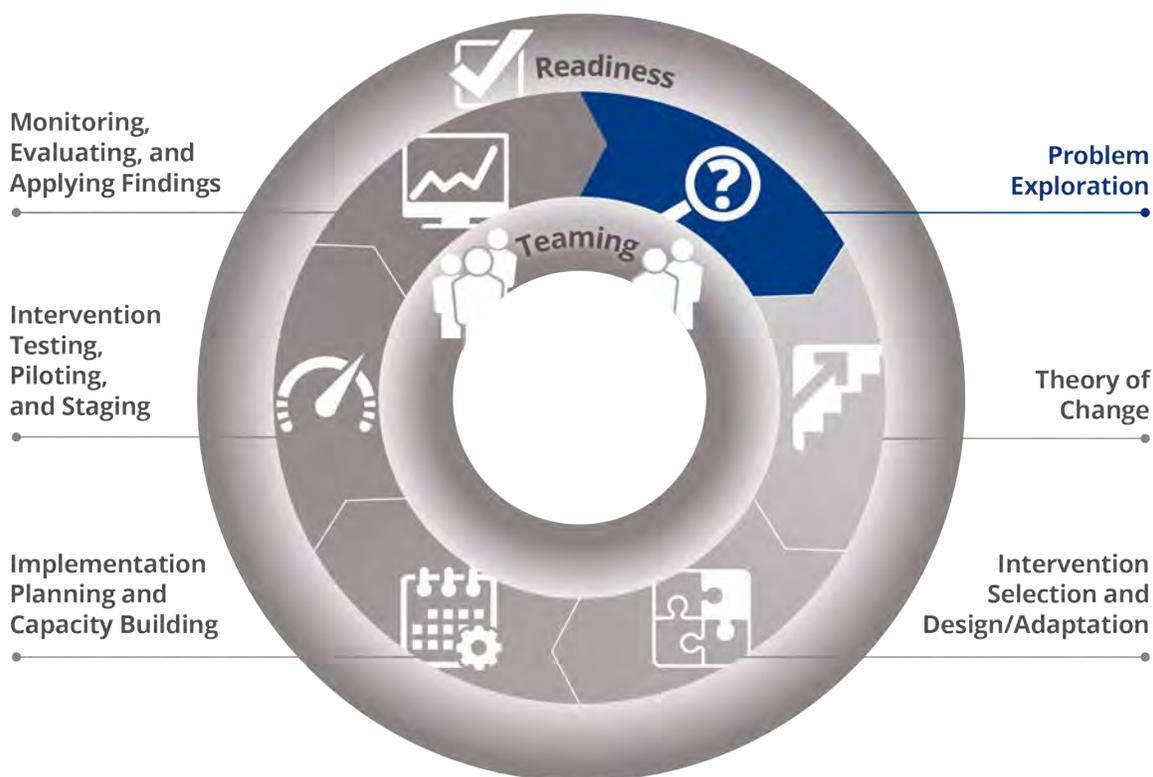Learn the details of how to dig deeper into a problem and identify the root cause(s).

Short **videos** and a workbook reinforce key concepts.
Use for training and to start thinking about application in your agency.

Recorded **webinars** feature real world examples.
Hear lessons learned and tips from experts and peers.

Key Change and Implementation Topics

Readiness

Monitoring, Evaluating, and Applying Findings

Teaming

Problem Exploration

Intervention Testing, Piloting, and Staging

Theory of Change

Implementation Planning and Capacity Building

Intervention Selection and Design/Adaptation

ℹ For resources on other **Change and Implementation** topics, visit
https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/focus-areas/cqi/change-implementation/

Children's Bureau