WALKING THE TIGHTROPE:
Part I: Fidelity and Fit When Scaling
Program Adaptation Lessons from the i3/EIR Program

OII i3/EIR Cross-Project Analysis
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Federal and state agencies and foundations are increasingly prioritizing initiatives that scale proven, evidence-based programs (EBP) to new locations and populations. As the educational community explores effective scaling and sustainability strategies in response, a key question for program developers becomes, "How much adaptation of EBPs to improve fit in local contexts is allowed without threatening program outcomes?" **In this paper, we share lessons learned from six Investing in Innovation (i3) / Education Innovation and Research (EIR) grantees on how they "walk the tightrope" between program fidelity and fit during scale-up.** "Walking the tightrope between fidelity and fit" means that, as the program scale expands, program leadership and local implementors work to manage a tension between standardization, which allows for consistent results based on an evaluation of the program, and customization based on educators' need for flexibility. **This paper provides a Fidelity-Fit Framework, strategies for walking the tightrope of fidelity and fit when scaling based on the lessons learned from the i3/EIR grantees, and a toolkit to help program developers strategically factor contextual fit into an intervention when scaling.**

Because the i3/EIR grants documented the scaling of evidence-based practices through an external program evaluation, the grantee cohorts act as an ideal study for balancing fidelity and fit while demonstrating effectiveness in improving student achievement. In _Scaling Up Evidence-Based Practices: Strategies from Investing in Innovation_ (i3), the authors share strategies for scaling EBP across diverse education settings based on reflections from i3/EIR grantees. The authors touch upon the critical nature of having flexibility in a successful i3 grant: "To successfully implement, expand, and sustain an education intervention, organizations have to be adaptable to change and responsive to lessons learned…" (DeWire, McKitchen, & Carey, 2017, p.8).

A nuanced challenge in scaling and sustaining an EBP is creating a program that is adaptable to change based on the realities, strengths and limitations of the local sites that are adopting the EBP. **If successful scaling depends on local educators making informed and continual adjustments to programs (Weinbaum & Supovitz, 2010), then implementation sites need tools and resources to make those necessary adjustments in a strategic way**. In the case of the grantees interviewed for this paper, we found that lead organizations closely monitored program fidelity in partnership with their external evaluators while also providing on-the-ground support to implementing sites as they adapt programs to their contexts. **The question the grantees are asking is not "Is adaptation to improve fit of the program allowed?", but instead, "How can we authentically support local sites in adapting our program while maximizing program outcomes?"**

Defining Fidelity and Fit

Fidelity is the degree to which a program is implemented as it was intended by its designers. An evaluation of fidelity to an original program allows researchers to prove that a program is effective across settings (Carroll, Patterson, Wood, Booth, Rick & Balain, 2007).

Fit is the degree to which a program is suited to the specific conditions of a site. Achieving fit means the program aligns with the availability of a site's resources (staffing, time and funding) and the unique aspects of the local context (staffing characteristics, community setting, or political context) (Backer, 2002; Fixsen, Naoom, Blasé, Friedman, &Wallace, 2005). For the purposes of this paper, adaptations are modifications to a program made at a site to improve fit.

What is i3/EIR?

The i3 and EIR programs have awarded 206 grants since 2010 to scale innovative and evidence-based practices that improve student achievement.

i3/EIR Grantees Studied for This Paper

Teach for America

Scaling Teach for America: Growing the Talent Force to Ensure All Our Nation's Students Have Access to a Quality Education

Cohort: 2010 – 2015

Project Type: Scale-Up

Results: Impact Evaluation, Implementation Report

Description: Teach For America, in partnership with 148 local education agencies nationwide and with broad support from public and private sector champions, aimed to grow its teacher corps by more than 80 percent by September 2015.

Success for All

Scale-Up and Evaluation of Success for All in Struggling Elementary Schools

Cohort: 2010 – 2015

Project Type: Scale-Up

Results: Evaluation Report

Description: The project is designed to scale an evidence-based, whole-school turnaround model by bringing local coaching support centers to cash-strapped districts. Each participating district receives sustainable coaching support to implement the proven model for improving student achievement in the elementary years, as well as financial assistance to offset start-up costs.

eMINTS

eMINTS Validation Project: Assessing the Impact of the eMINTS Professional Development on Student and Teacher Outcomes

Cohort: 2010 – 2015

Project Type: Validation

Results: Impact Evaluation

Description: The eMINTS (enhancing Missouri's Instructional Networked Teaching Strategies) Validation Project is a study of the impact of the eMINTS Comprehensive professional development (eMINTS PD) program on more than 240 teachers and 10,800 students across seventh- and eighth-grade classrooms in 60 rural Missouri middle schools.

BARR

Building Assets Reducing Risks: A Proven Strategy to Increase Student Achievement by Improving Teacher Effectiveness

Cohort: 2010 – 2015

Project Type: Development

Results: Development Study

Description: BARR is a comprehensive, strength-based approach to education that improves achievement for all students by increasing a school's effectiveness at building relationships, leveraging real-time data, and capitalizing on the strengths of each student.

Reading Recovery

Reading Recovery: Scaling Up What Works

Cohort: 2010 – 2015

Project Type: Scale-Up

Results: Evaluation Report

Description: Reading Recovery is a highly effective, research-based, short-term literacy intervention of one-to-one tutoring for the lowest-achieving first-graders. Experimentally driven research has revealed that Reading Recovery improves student reading achievement, on average, by more than 30 percentile points.

KIPP

Success as the Norm: Scaling-Up KIPP's Effective Leadership Development Model

Cohort: 2010 – 2015

Project Type: Scale-Up

Results: Evaluation Volume I, Evaluation Volume II

Description: Success as the Norm objectives were to deepen and expand the reach of KIPP's leadership development programs, support and evaluate the effectiveness of KIPP principals by enhancing elements of KIPP's performance evaluation system, and equip high-needs urban and rural school districts and charter management organizations with KIPP's best practices.

RESEARCH ON FIDELITY AND FIT

Limited attention has been paid to fidelity and adapting programs to improve fit in education implementation science. Available research reveals that a dichotomy exists in the literature (O'Donnell, 2008). Some research indicates that local adaptations to EBP to meet site-specific needs during scale-up are commonplace and necessary. Many programs result in positive outcomes for students despite or because of significant adaptation to local needs (Backer, 2002). And yet, recent evaluations have shown that implementations, even large-scale ones, can occur with a high degree of fidelity (Fixsen et al., 2005). Some research offers strong empirical evidence that high levels of implementation lead to better outcomes (Durlak & Dupre, 2008; Backer, 2002; Blakely, C., Mayer, P., Gottschalk, J., Schmitt, N., Davidson, William, B. Roitman, D & Emshoff, J., 1987).

A helpful nuance to keep in mind is that adaptations can occur within both high-fidelity settings and low-fidelity settings. In other words, it's possible to implement a program with high fidelity while adhering to adaptation best practices, since adaptations do not necessarily deviate from the programs' original design and theory (Kemp, 2016). The research settles on fidelity and fit as a balance, which we call "walking the tightrope". This balance involves attunement to the tension between central control and local control of the innovation. The desired outcome of this tension is the maintenance of the integrity of the program when aspects of the model are modified at a local site. The i3/EIR grantees studied below demonstrate that fidelity and fit is a "dynamic concept in which both elements are needed for program success" (Backer, 2002, p. 42).

Why Thoughtful Program Adaptation to Improve Fit is Valuable When Scaling:

- Adaptation of programs will occur in the real world, so it's best to plan for the required flexibility (Carroll et al., 2007).

- In some cases, successful program implementation *requires* adaptation to local circumstances (Backer, 2002).

- Cultural program adaptations can have a positive impact on site recruitment and retention (Castro, F.G., Barrera, M., and Martinez, C.R. 2004).

- Flexible innovations have a more rapid rate of adoption and can fit to a broader range of site conditions (Rogers, 2003).

- Adaptation is vital for community ownership6 and can lead to a higher degree of sustainability (Goodman & Steckler, 1989; Rogers, 2003).

A FIDELITY-FIT FRAMEWORK

In order to explore i3/EIR grantee approaches to fidelity and making adaptations to improve fit, we developed a framework with three research-based elements[1] that we found to be highly relevant to the i3/EIR grantee experience. Program developers can consider each framework element and the corresponding key question in the table below to manage a deliberate approach to scaling while balancing fidelity and adaptation at implementation sites.

Each of these framework elements are defined and described in the following section. Examples from grantees are shared to provide on-the-ground cases for how each of these framework elements contributes to "walking the tightrope" of fidelity and fit.

Framework Element	Key Question for Program Developers:
Core Components	*Are the program's core components and any allowable and non-allowable adaptations of core components clearly defined?*
Fidelity and Adaptation Approaches	*Does the approach to scaling the program encourage or discourage adaptations to improve fit, and how will fidelity be monitored?*
Facilitation Strategies	*What supports and resources are available to local sites to support both program fit and program fidelity?*

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[1] The framework is informed by Strategies to Scale Up Social Programs: Pathways, Partnerships and Fidelity by Larson, Dearing, and Backer (2017) and A conceptual framework for implementation fidelity by Christopher Carroll, Malcolm Patterson, Stephen Wood, Andrew Booth, Jo Rick, and Shashi Balain (2007).

Core Components[2]

Key question for Program Developers: ***Are the program's core components and any allowable and non-allowable adaptations of core components clearly defined?***

A common position on the balance between fidelity and fit is that implementation can be flexible if there is high fidelity to the program's core components, i.e. the essential elements of the program. The task for program designers when initiating scaling is to accurately define the absolute requirements for program effectiveness and the acceptable adaptations for unique settings (if any). A scientifically-based understanding of each core component's effect on program outcomes allows program developers to be specific about the most impactful aspects of the program; and higher specificity of the intervention often leads to higher fidelity (O'Donnell, 2008). If an evaluation of the program finds that a core component is an element of the intervention that is the most challenging to implement at multiple sites, this can provide key information to program developers about any undesirable outcomes of the intervention (Carroll et al., 2007).

i3/EIR Grantee Insights on Core Components

In designing their model, Teach for America (TFA) reports devoting abundant thought to identifying the core components that keep TFA working as a unified organization across regions. TFA seeks to improve educational opportunities for disadvantaged students by recruiting and training teachers to work in low-income schools. An example of a TFA core component includes their commitment to recruiting racial and ethnic minority corps members from low-income backgrounds. Beyond consideration and communication of their core components, TFA further strategized around the allowable and non-allowable local adaptations of the program. To clearly communicate what's possible as far as local

adaptations, TFA created and shared with sites a set of "freedoms and mutual responsibilities". This document specifically outlines for all stakeholders the ways in which TFA regional sites can and cannot exercise flexibility or adapt the program to local needs.

When asked about the eMINTS program's core components, the Director of the eMINTS National Center, Christine Terry, recognized how core components help implementing sites manage their efforts (personal communication, September 21, 2018): "[Schools, districts, and teachers] are investing a lot of effort in this program, so they need to know where to invest it." The eMINTS program developers identified the program's core components and then weighted them according to their scientific impact on school performance. The developers found that achieving successful outcomes requires that schools implement eight program components to help educators integrate technology, promote teacher collaboration, and meet the other eMINTS goals. This level of scientific specificity around program core components generated a high level of success. eMINTS evaluators found that the more closely aligned the school's implementation of eMINTS was to the core components, the greater the impact the program had on students' performance (Martin, W., Strother, S., Reitzes T., 2009).

Program developers may find that the specific elements of a core component can evolve over time based on accumulated lessons learned from implementing sites. According to the evaluation of Success for All (SFA), a core component that was critical to the program's success was the existence of a full-time SFA facilitator at each school. By the third and final year of their i3 program, SFA schools without a facilitator received an average implementation score of 59 percent of the maximum possible score, while schools with a facilitator had an average implementation score of 89 percent (Quint, Pei, Balu, Rappaport, & DeLaurentis, 2015).

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[2] The concept of core components is based on A conceptual framework for implementation fidelity by Carroll, C., Patterson, M., Wood, S., Booth, A., Rick, J., & Balain, S. (2007)

However, having a full-time staff role solely dedicated to the SFA programs became an insurmountable financial challenge for some schools. In response, SFA altered their definition of a full-time SFA facilitator to that of a full-time staff member without teaching responsibilities. This change to a core program component provided schools with a responsive program modification that made implementation with fidelity less burdensome.

In Reading Recovery (RR), there are five core components to every lesson, but lesson development is otherwise customizable based on each student's strengths and needs. There is flexibility in how much emphasis a teacher places on each core component and when schools work with students (before or after school). Reading Recovery Project Director Jerome D'Agostino shares that "Implementation fidelity to us means not that you followed a script—it's, to what degree did [teachers] modify it in order to make that child's experience as good as possible? You don't treat each child like a blank slate, you see what specific issues that child is having. That's the balancing act." RR has found great value in internal, ongoing research "to see what is necessary [for program success] and what is simply holding on to rituals" (personal communication, September 21, 2018).

Building Assets, Reducing Risks (BARR) provides schools with a comprehensive approach to meeting the academic, social, and emotional needs of students by harnessing the power of data and intentional relationships. BARR has three weekly core components that all schools, even those on a slower implementation track, can implement. The three core components of the program that all schools must implement are: (1) meetings with teams of teachers that share the same students; (2) risk reviews for higher-needs students that require interventions beyond the classroom; (3) BARR's social-emotional curriculum. BARR Center's Director of Quality and Analytics Maryann Corsello confirms that "If schools do those [core components] to fidelity, we'll see outcomes" (personal communication, September 19, 2018). The BARR coaches use the three core

components as a mechanism to teach the school staff about how to implement the additional program components when they are ready.

Emphasizing a shared language across sites can be a positive outcome of clearly articulating a program's core components. Jonathan Cowan of KIPP talks about identifying core components in terms of "being clear about your North Star".[3] For KIPP, this meant starting with a shared agreement that all kids can learn, that visionary school leadership matters, and that support for school leadership is foundational. KIPP emphasizes that, as organizations scale, ensuring a common language about the program's core components across sites is key and prevents leaders from debating language, so they can instead examine the deeper meaning of ideas. In an example of creating a common language, all KIPP schools share a Framework for Excellent Teaching that was developed in-house and disseminated across the network as a core framework on what constitutes "highly effective" teaching.

Fidelity-Fit Strategy Based on Lessons Learned from i3/EIR Grantees

Key question for Program Developers:

Are the program's core components and any allowable and non-allowable adaptations of core components clearly defined?

Strategy: Specify the Core Components

Program developers must identify, communicate, and regularly revisit the core components of the program. This includes describing in detail what acceptable and unacceptable variations or adaptations look like.

See the Defining Your Core Components Planning Tool on page 13 for help with this process.

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[3] Quotes from Johnathon Kowan, Chief Research, Data & Innovation Officer at the KIPP Foundation, are from a i3/EIR Dissemination Webinar recording that was uploaded to YouTube: I3/EIR Dissemination. 2015, November 11. Scale Up Lessons from OSU & KIPP. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9sulO7YVOtI&feature=youtu.be

Fidelity and Adaptation Approaches[4]

Key question: ***Does the approach to scaling the program encourage or discourage adaptations to improve fit, and how will fidelity be monitored?***

When program developers determine how a program will strategically scale to additional sites, a key consideration is the dynamic of local control versus central control over the program, including who can make decisions about program adaptations to improve fit. Program developers differ in the degree to which they seek to maintain control over potential adaptations by local sites. Some lead organizations maintain that adaptations for program fit are inevitable when scaling if a local site is going to authentically assume ownership of a program. Other organizations have specific and valid reasons for discouraging program adaptations. A program's approach to fidelity and adaptation when scaling greatly impacts the dynamic between lead organizations and their implementing sites, the degree of flexibility given to sites, and the role of the lead partner in monitoring implementation. Accordingly, Figure 1 shows four approaches to fidelity and adaptation. Many programs apply a hybrid approach in which some elements of the program require high fidelity and are closely monitored, while other elements of the program provide more flexibility and less oversight.

Figure 1. Fidelity and Adaptation Approaches[5]
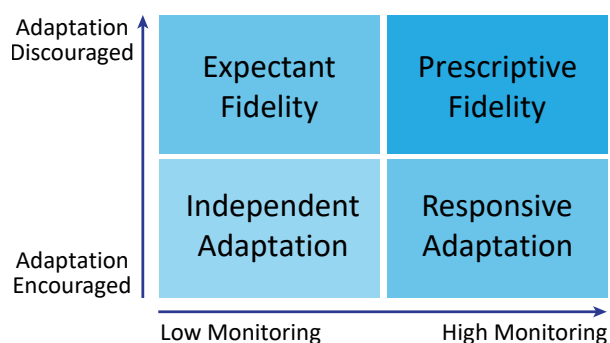
- **Expectant fidelity** – Local adaptation is discouraged, but implementation is loosely monitored.

- **Prescriptive fidelity** – Local adaptation is discouraged, and implementation is closely monitored.
- **Independent adaptation** - Local adaptation is encouraged or expected, but implementation is loosely monitored.
- **Responsive adaptation** – Local adaptation is encouraged or expected, and implementation is monitored.

i3/EIR Grantee Insights on Fidelity Approaches

Several of the grantees studied for this paper implement an approach to fidelity and adaptation that aligns with **responsive adaptation,** in which the lead partner is sensitive to the need for adaptation by implementers. For example, Success for All supports teachers in using the model as designed with modifications for teaching style. Once schools have thoroughly mastered the program, SFA staff then encourages schools to adapt it to best meet their students' needs (Mathematica Policy Research, 2017). Dr. Slavin adds, "When you start a new program, especially one with so many different components, you want to focus on the program as it is. It's not the time to start innovations. We say, 'Try it our way first. And once you have it up and running, we'll discuss ways to adapt it for your specific school.' But it interferes with the quality of implementation to do that from the outset" (personal communication, September 19, 2018).

In another example of a **responsive adaptation** approach, eMINTS Director Christine Terry adds that "Context is essential. If you're too rigid about implementation, you begin to lack relevancy and responsiveness, both of which are so important. Sometimes districts can't do the model exactly as asked. And instead of us saying, 'You're bad!' we say, 'Here's the deal: here's what we know makes a difference. If you flex beyond those things, you're agreeing that you might not meet your goals'" (personal communication, September 21, 2018). In the case where a school believes they require a program adaptation, the school team submits requested

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[4] The concept of Fidelity Approaches and the four specific approaches explained in this section are from *Strategies to Scale Up Social Programs: Pathways, Partnerships and Fidelity,* 2017, by Larson, Dearing, & Backer. Available at https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Strategies-to-Scale-Up-Social-Programs.pdf

[5] Adapted from Larson, Dearing, & Backer, 2017, *Strategies to Scale Up Social Programs: Pathways, Partnerships and Fidelity*. Available at https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Strategies-to-Scale-Up-Social-Programs.pdf

program adaptations for approval by their assigned trainer, and eMINTS provides as much flexibility as possible for their context.

Teach for America's approach to scaling, fidelity and fit evolved over time, which is not unusual for social programs that are continuously improving over many years. TFA started as a centralized national organization with a high level of control of the program to maintain fidelity during its initial growth. Over time, that level of central control began to confine regions overseeing TFA programs. Anna Mahle, TFA's Senior Vice President of Public Partnerships, noted that "Los Angeles, Chicago, rural Arkansas—they need different levels of autonomy. We really shifted our organizational capacity from a central set of structures and supports to regional autonomy where they could make their own decisions to help their region. Scaling showed us that regions needed to determine how they got and supported teachers" (personal communication, September 25, 2018). Now, TFA uses **responsive adaptation** to allow regions to more effectively adapt their work to local contexts, leverage existing networks to meet corps member needs, and exercise more control over their budget and staffing. Under this approach, regions can select their desired national staff support services from a menu of options. TFA relies on their "freedoms and mutual responsibilities" document that outlines the ways in which regions can and cannot adapt the program to local needs.

KIPP is structured as a national network of public charter schools that each belong to regions, such as KIPP Houston. The national KIPP foundation focuses on growing the network while maintaining the core components that define KIPP. In an example of **independent adaptation**, the KIPP regions autonomously operate the schools in that area and make decisions related to instruction, operations, and fundraising. Regions can improve the fit of the national KIPP model by infusing the model with their own resources, partnerships, and community-based knowledge. An evaluation of KIPP found that there is indeed substantial diversity in practices within each region, as regional directors balance the need to maintain consistency to KIPP core components while maximizing the available flexibility provided to them (Furgeson J., Knechtel, V., Sullivan, M., Tuttle, C., Akers, L., Anderson, M.A., Barna M., Nichols-Barrer, I., 2014).

KIPP principals also have substantial flexibility for **independent adaptation;** each school's adaptive decision-making is expected and the power to do so is explicitly provided. The "power to lead" is one of the five core components that all KIPP schools share. The power to lead provides KIPP principals: (1) the ability to hire and fire staff based on performance, and (2) the ability to allocate resources based on student needs. KIPP's approach to scaling allows for adaptation by both local regions and sites to ensure that the KIPP model is appropriately matched to the needs, strengths and circumstances of local contexts.

In an example of how programs can exist on a spectrum of fidelity and adaptation, the BARR program encourages **prescriptive fidelity** in some areas and allows adaptation in others. As previously stated by Maryann Corsello, The BARR model rests firmly on the grounds that, if schools implement the three core components with fidelity, they'll see outcomes. According to the BARR evaluation, "Fidelity of implementation is key to understanding the impact of the BARR Model" (Corsello, M. &

Fidelity-Fit Strategy Based on Lessons Learned from i3/EIR Grantees

Key question for Program Developers:

Does the approach to scaling the program encourage or discourage adaptations to improve fit, and how will fidelity be monitored?

Strategy: Scale using a Fidelity and Adaptation Approach that meet your needs

The approach to fidelity affects how much or how little control lead organizations have over sites' adaptations and how much monitoring of implementation is required. Consider what approach matches the program's method for scaling and maintains integrity of the program's core components.

See the

Sharma A., 2015, p. 27). Per their i3 evaluation, the schools that did not maintain implementation fidelity did not attain student outcomes that those schools The concept and information on Facilitation Strategies is from A conceptual framework for implementation fidelity by Carroll, C., Patterson, M., Wood, S., Booth, A., Rick, J., & Balain, S. (2007) who implemented BARR strategies with fidelity achieved. However, there remains a recognition that this is an authentic partnership in which local sites' needs are heard. The BARR Center has observed that while all schools can do BARR, some may start more slowly with particular components. If it looks like it's going to be a struggle for a school, or when there is significant school staff turnover, the BARR coach works closely with the school to implement the same process but at an adapted, slower pace. The BARR model provides an example of how many programs exist on a spectrum with prescriptive fidelity on some components and responsive adaptation in other components.

Facilitation Strategies[6]

Key Question: **What supports and resources are available to local sites to support both program fit and program fidelity?**

Measuring implementation fidelity as part of scaling up and increasing sustainability requires examining faithfulness to the program components and the ways in which sites overcame challenges in creating program fit. Program designers can proactively develop and share facilitation strategies that support sites in improving their fidelity to the model and overcoming the potential challenges to successful implementation. Facilitation strategies can be guidelines, training, metrics, and tools created by program developers and provided to sites to help them effectively implement a program. Facilitation strategies are used to maximize fidelity and encourage thoughtful planning around allowable adaptations. These supports also serve to standardize implementation, so that all sites in the scale-up effort are receiving the same training and technical assistance. It's not about the number of facilitation strategies deployed to implementing sites, but rather the adequacy of the facilitation strategies based on the complexity of the program being adopted. For example, while a simple program may require very

little guidance to achieve high fidelity, a more complex intervention may require a higher level of facilitation strategies to prevent varied implementation across settings.

i3/EIR Grantee Insights on Facilitation Strategies

When asked about the strategies Success for All (SFA) used to support implementation fidelity and manage adaptations as they brought the program to scale, SFA Co-founder Dr. Robert Slavin responded, "It takes a lot of professional development. It makes us an expensive program, so that's an obstacle. We'd be more popular if we didn't insist on that, but we'd also be ineffective" (personal communication, September 19, 2018). SFA offers several levels of professional development to implementing sites, including (1) initial training; (2) onsite facilitators; and (3) monthly coach visits to schools. The coaches visit classrooms with the school-based facilitator, meet with teachers and administrators, examine data, uncover problems, and identify next steps. SFA coaches establish consistent and long-term relationships with the schools so that their coaching extends beyond technical support to deeper concerns on how to successfully understand the program's core components and adapt the program onsite.

eMINTS staff provides the essential technology, professional development, and ongoing coaching to support the eMINTS program at the district, school, and classroom levels. Christine Terry of eMINTS says, "We found that trainers in districts who work side-by-side every day with the system and students they serve understand how the program needs to be flexed to meet the needs of the school. They also have the knowledge and trust of the people they work with, which leads to faster uptake. We specifically train trainers on what elements are most appropriate to adapt in new sites, where, and how." In some cases, a program's facilitation strategy can itself become a core component of the program. Christine Terry shares the following insight: "The coaching provided to schools is an important element of our program, and we have research to back it up. So if someone wants to eliminate the coaching at that school, we work with them to find a way to do it that meets the needs of the schools" (personal communication, September 21, 2018). eMINTS also provides schools with a matrix

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[6] The concept and information on Facilitation Strategies is from [A conceptual framework for implementation fidelity](#) by Carroll, C., Patterson, M., Wood, S., Booth, A., Rick, J., & Balain, S. (2007)

of fidelity measures, organizes monthly support calls with the trainers and teachers, and hosts an event for all stakeholders twice a year so local teams can deepen their practice together.

The BARR team believes that facilitation strategies begin during the pre-implementation stage, when the BARR team and the local site are determining if they feel the program is a fit. The BARR team learns as much as possible about an interested school upfront; they start with a webinar for school decision-makers, during which the staff shares as much as they can about the program to support the site in determining fit on the school end. Once a school is accepted, a coach conducts an in-depth interview, during which the coach drills into the specifics of the program core components, roles and responsibilities, and unpacks any areas of concern about program fit. Once implementation begins, BARR continually communicates their core components by providing schools with regular feedback through coaching and tools e.g. a fidelity metric that assesses the extent to which BARR strategies are being implemented.

The weekly coaching is the primary facilitation strategy for BARR implementation to maximize fit and success at school sites. From BARR Center's Director of Quality and Analytics Maryann Corsello, "Regardless of where students and teacher are, they need help and encouragement. It's important to have a coach on the journey. We've found that the coach becomes this non-threatening mentor to the school and the teachers so they can stretch and improve quickly in response to failure. It's okay to fail; there are no repercussions for that" (personal communication, September 19, 2018). BARR has also found that an additional facilitation strategy for program fidelity is providing opportunities for connections between teachers. BARR offers a national conference for teachers to share experiences and unique approaches to implementing the program's core components.

Reading Recovery prepares teachers to make the best possible professional adaptations to the program on the fly by training teachers to be good diagnosticians and flexible, on-the-go decision-makers within the program framework. To do this, university trainers

provide ongoing, onsite support for the teacher leaders, and the teacher leaders then train and support teachers. The teacher leaders are employees of the district that have been identified for having a reputation of being wise, thoughtful and respected. "The intervention is put in the fabric of the district in that way, and those respected leaders advocate for the program within the district" (J. D'Agostino, personal communication, September 21, 2018). Teachers who deliver the Reading Recovery intervention also complete an intensive, year-long, graduate-level training course to develop expertise in delivering responsive instruction based on the teacher's ability to modify the program to meet each student's needs.

Fidelity-Fit Strategy Based on Lessons Learned from i3/EIR Grantees

Key question for Program Developers:

What supports and resources are available to local sites to support both program fit and program fidelity?

Strategy: Scale using a Fidelity and Adaptation Approach that meet your needs

A key component of effective scaling involves giving sites the knowledge and tools they need to manage fidelity and strategically consider allowable adaptations. For example, grantees studied for this paper highly valued coaching as a key facilitation strategy for successful program implementation.

See Facilitation Supports and Resources Interview Guide, on page 17, which is a tool that can be provided to help sites access the support they need to implement.

See Documenting Program Adaptations Template on page 19 for a tool that can be used to request, document and track program modifications on an ongoing basis.

CONCLUSIONS

What we've learned from the i3/EIR grantees studied for this paper is that the tension between fidelity and adaptation during scaling is best seen as a dance between partners, rather than a conflict between opposing needs. It's natural to assume that the concern from program developers is that modifications to an intervention will weaken outcomes; and that the concern from educators is that programs must accommodate their unique contexts. However, in the case of these grantees, we see that program developers are consistently supportive of well-executed adaptation to improve fit. Likewise, it's probable that the on-the-ground implementers in schools see the value of pursuing program fidelity. Across the i3/EIR grantees in this paper, there is evidence of each of the elements of the Fidelity-Fit Framework shared on page 4 - structured core components, consideration of fidelity and adaptation approaches, and facilitation strategies; and continual pursuit of a common agreement between program developers and educators on how to implement programs for sites in ways that result in the best outcomes for students.

A mindset shift for program developers is to view unique local settings not as challenges to fidelity and but as opportunities to collect data on how to refine program elements to suit a variety of circumstances. Programs that track sites' adaptations can use this data to evaluate if modified programs are as effective as the original, perhaps leading to an innovation that impacts the model. From Christine Terry, Director of the eMINTS National Center, "Sometimes we find out that outside the grant, districts can't do the model exactly as we ask. And sometimes they [adapt the program], and those "flexes" become innovations" (personal communication, September 21, 2018). In

these cases, eMINTS will monitor that site's data to see if this adaptation might lead to a future topic of study. KIPP leadership found that *because* each KIPP school has the flexibility to interpret leadership practices differently, the program inherently enables innovation that can spread across the network. With TFA, two regions improved program fit by hosting their own corps member training institute rather than requiring participants to go the national training. Now half of TFA regions do the same, thanks to TFA's openness to the question of "How do we learn best?"

Programs that are seeking to scale to new locations and new populations in a sustainable way will consistently encounter decision points related to "walking the tightrope" of fidelity and fit. Effectively "walking the tightrope" comes down to striking a balance between the evidence of what works and empowering local leaders who deeply understand the community, families and students. The role of program developers is to clearly identify and communicate core components; determine the level of expected fidelity and allowable adaptations; continually provide resources, tools and other facilitation strategies that help sites make informed decisions about implementation and own the work; and regularly revisit the balance between fidelity and fit during the program's lifecycle. Because communities and practices evolve over time, revisiting program fidelity and proposed adaptations provides an opportunity to refresh the program's intent and improve local implementation and outcomes (Backer, 2002). Through seeking to continually understand what's working and what could be improved to work better, program developers and educators can co-create the success of proven programs that improve student outcomes in a variety of settings.

FIDELITY-FIT TOOLKIT

Based on lessons learned from these grantees and the research literature, the following tools provide action-oriented guidance for program developers in walking the tightrope between fidelity and fit when scaling and when considering program sustainability. We've also included a tool that is helpful for implementing sites. Each tool is aligned to one of the Fidelity-Fit Framework elements – Core Components, Fidelity and Adaptation Approaches, and Facilitation Strategies. These tools are theoretically grounded resources that can be adapted, tested and refined by practitioners in the field.

Figure 2. Overview of Toolkit

Framework Element	Tool	Audience	Page Number(s)	Purpose
Core Components	Defining Your Core Components Planning Tool	Program Developers	page 13–14	This tool will help program developers clearly define the core components of their evidence-based program, as well as acceptable and unacceptable variations of program activities, to inform adaptation guidelines when scaling.
Fidelity and Adaptation Approaches	Choosing your Fidelity Approach: A Reflection Guide	Program Developers	page 15–16	Deciding on a strategic approach to fidelity and adaptation is critical to scaling programs. This tool summarizes the approaches to adaptation, provides examples of each, and encourages consideration of which strategic approach to fidelity best promotes program outcomes.
Facilitation Strategies	Facilitation Supports and Resources Interview Guide	Implementing Sites	page 17–18	This guide provides questions that local sites (e.g. schools, districts) can ask program developers when determining what supports and resources are necessary and available to successfully implement and sustain a program.
Facilitation Strategies	Documenting Program Adaptations Template	Program Developers	page 19–22	This template provides a form for local sites to complete when documenting or requesting adaptations to a program. Documenting adaptations provides data for program developers and program evaluators on what adaptations are made and why.

Defining Your Core Components Planning Tool

Adapted from Larson, Dearing, & Backer, 2017, Strategies to Scale Up Social Programs: Pathways, Partnerships and Fidelity. Available at https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Strategies-to-Scale-Up-Social-Programs.pdf

Audience:
Program Developers

Definition:
Core Components
Core components are those elements of your program that must be implemented with fidelity for the program to achieve the desired outcomes.

Introduction to Tool:
In order to implement an evidence-based program with fidelity, program developers must clearly define and communicate the core components. For local sites implementing the program, clearly defined core components not only provide insight into what they must do to obtain positive outcomes, they also provide implementors with data on what aspects of the program are not likely to be adaptable.

This tool prompts program designers to identify the core components of your evidence-based program and explain what the program would "look like" if you were to observe implementors' practices on site.

Instructions:

For each core component, complete the table below.

Core Component	Contribution to Desired Outcomes	Proficient Practice	Developmental Practice	Unacceptable Variation of Practice
Describe an element of your program that must be implemented with fidelity for the program to achieve desired outcomes.	Describe why the component is essential to achieving outcomes.	Describe activities that show consistent implementation of this component. Describe what generalizing the required skills and knowledge to a range of settings or contexts looks like.	Describe activities that show inconsistent implementation of this component. Describe what implementation looks like when activities are limited in the range of settings or contexts.	Describe activities that are unacceptable variations of the program because such practices erode the intention of the program design.

Choosing your Approach to Fidelity: A Reflection Guide

Adapted from Larson, Dearing, Backer, 2017, Strategies to Scale Up Social Programs: Pathways, Partnerships and Fidelity. Available at https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Strategies-to-Scale-Up-Social-Programs.pdf

Audience:
Program Developers

Introduction to Tool:

In their 2017 report <u>Strategies to Scale Up Social Programs: Pathways, Partnerships and Fidelity</u>, the Wallace Foundation described how program fidelity and adaptation can be strategically approached in the expansion of a program. This tool describes the distinguishing characteristics of the four approaches to fidelity. The purpose of this tool is to encourage program developers to consider which approach best suits your program depending on the degree of importance of program fidelity, local adaptation, and monitoring in achieving the desired program outcomes.

Definition:

Adaptation

Adaptations are modifications made to a program during implementation that deviate from the developer's original design to accommodate the context of a new site and improve the fit of a program.

Examples of adaptations made by implementing sites include the enhancement, modification, or deletion of a program component, changes to the content, curriculum or other materials, changes in the frequency or duration of an intervention, modifications to the scope of the target audience, and cultural modifications to adapt to local circumstances.

Types of Adaptation:

There are four types of program adaptation. Each type of adaptation has unique effects on both the program and the implementing site.

Figure 1. Types of Adaptation
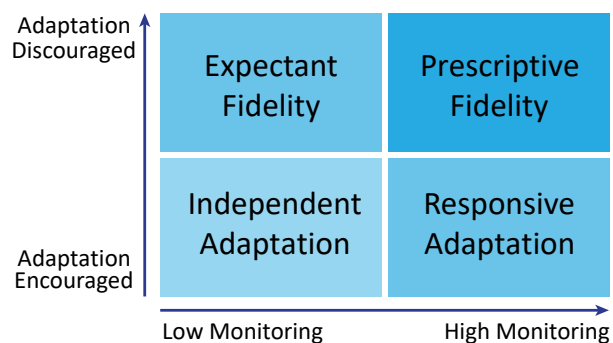
Reflection on the Types of Adaptation

Below are descriptions of the types of adaptation depicted in Figure 1. Use the note-taking lines to reflect on why each approach would or would not work for your program. Use the checkboxes to select the type(s) of reinvention or adaptation that suit your program design.

❑ **Prescriptive fidelity –** Local adaptation is discouraged, and implementation is closely monitored.

Examples: The program must be implemented in a specific order or the program provides a script that educators must follow. Those delivering the program are required to be certified in the program. The lead organization frequently collects data or conducts regular evaluations to monitor outcomes.

Notes on why this model would or would not work for your program:

_____
_____
_____
_____

❑ **Expectant fidelity –** Local adaptation is discouraged, but implementation is loosely monitored.

Example: An educational intervention comes with optional training. Program guidelines that can be followed without ongoing support are provided. Very little to no monitoring from the program developer is provided but it's clear the program expects fidelity.

Notes on why this model would or would not work for your program:

_____
_____
_____
_____

❑ **Responsive adaptation –** Local adaptation is encouraged or expected, and implantation is monitored.

Example: lead partner is sensitive to the need for achieving "fit" between a program and each local site using the program. Training on how to implement the program at your site is offered. Program developers monitors adaptation by regularly collecting data and feedback.

Notes on why this model would or would not work for your program:

_____
_____
_____
_____

❑ **Independent adaptation -** Local adaptation is encouraged or expected, but implementation is loosely monitored.

Example: A program consists of components that can be mixed and matched. Lead partner provides training but does not visit site or collect data on which program components are being implemented.

Notes on why this model would or would not work for your program:

_____
_____
_____
_____

Facilitation Supports and Resources Interview Guide

Adapted from National Implementation Research Network (NIRN), 2018, Program Developer Interview Guide, and NIRN, 2018, The Hexagon: An Exploration Tool.

Audience:
For use by local sites (e.g. schools and districts) implementing a new program

Introduction to Interview Guide:
This tool assists local sites in determining what supports and resources are necessary and available to successfully implement and sustain a new program. This guide provides specific questions and prompts that local sites (e.g. schools and districts) can ask program developers to assess the availability of program facilitation supports and resources. Use this guide as part of the exploration stage of new program implementation.

Interview questions are grouped by the following Facilitation Supports and Resources categories:

- Staffing Requirements
- Staff Supports
- Administration Supports
- Guidance Documents
- Tools for Measuring Success
- Supports to Manage External Influences

Interview Guide:

Facilitation Category	Questions to Ask the Program Developer	Additional Prompts (use if necessary)
Staffing Requirements	Our understanding is that your program has identified the following requirements for staffing *[insert program staffing requirements noted in program documents]*. Can you provide any additional information about staffing requirements? (Number and type of staff, e.g., education, credentials, content knowledge) What support does the program provide to sites to select the right people?	Are sample job descriptions and interview protocols available for hiring or selecting new staff for this program if necessary? What skills and competencies are most challenging to train or coach? What challenges have sites experienced around recruiting, selecting, and/or retaining the right staff?
Staff Supports	Is there a recommended orientation to facilitate "buy-in" for staff and key stakeholders? What support do staff using the program need to be competent and successful in their roles?	Is there a qualified "expert" (e.g., consultant, program developer) who can provide implementation technical assistance? What training is available? Do those implementing the program receive monitoring and feedback to improve their capacity to implement the program with high fidelity?
Administration Supports	What internal processes, procedures and policies do sites need to update to support the work of practitioners to implement the program? What support do administrative staff need to be competent and successful in their roles supporting this program?	Is guidance on administrative policies and procedures available? Is there a qualified "expert" (e.g., consultant, program developer) who can provide implementation technical assistance? What training is available? Does leadership staff supporting the program receive monitoring and feedback to improve their capacity to implement the program with high fidelity?
Guidance Documents	What guidance documents (i.e. manuals, guidelines, checklists) are available? Are there curricula and other key resources related to the program readily available?	Are the materials and the available training or coaching culturally sensitive and/or culturally adaptable? What other support strategies are available to help us achieve implementation fidelity?
Tools for Measuring Success	How will we know if we are successful in implementing the program as intended?	What processes and support will we be provided to help staff build capacity to collect and use data to inform ongoing monitoring and improvement of the program?
Supports to Manage External Influences	What external partnerships do sites need to form or strengthen to use the program effectively? What policies, regulations, or funding requirements could impact the work of our site?	What support does the program provide to mitigate the impact of external influences that can negatively impact program success?

Documenting Program Adaptations Template

Adapted from Cummins, M. Goddard, C., Formica, S., Cohen, D., Harding, W. (2003). Assessing Program Fidelity and Adaptations Toolkit. Education Development Center. Education Development Center, Inc. and Pemberton, G.C. 2012. How are implementation and adaptation of evidence-based programs applied in community practice settings? A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Audience:
Program Developers can adapt this template for use by their Implementing Sites (e.g. schools and districts)

Introduction to Tool:
Adaptations made to an evidence-based program to improve the fit of the program must be carefully considered to avoid modifications to a program's core components and negatively impacting desired program outcomes. Consistently documenting and tracking adaptations can guide local sites and program developers in a more formal adaptation consideration process. Tracked program adaptations can also provide critical fidelity data to the program developer and evaluator and may contribute to the program's knowledge-base about balancing fidelity and fit.

Ways Program Developers Can Adapt this Tool:

1. **Program Planning:** The tool can be used by implementing sites to guide discussion with program developers around anticipated adaptation needs during planning.

2. **Requesting Adaptations:** The tool can be used as to formally request permission from program providers to modify an evidence-based program to effectively meet local needs.

3. **Evaluation Data:** This tool may provide a record of appropriate adaptations to a program for program evaluators.

Section 1. Adaptations of Program Components

Review the list of program adaptations in Table 1. Check any adaptation your program requires.

Table 1. Type of Program Adaptation

Type of Adaptation	Specific Adaptation Made (check every box that applies)	
Nature of the Program	The content of the intervention	
Program Delivery	☐ Delivery method of intervention (type of activities)	☐ Duration of activities
	☐ Frequency of sessions	☐ Length of sessions
	☐ Order of sessions	☐ Number of sessions
	☐ Materials that support implementation	
Target Population	☐ Number of students served	☐ Student recruitment methods
	☐ Target population characteristics (age, gender, ethnicity, risk level, geography, etc.)	
Program Setting	☐ Setting/location (e.g. classroom, after-school center)	
Program Implementors	☐ Staff recruitment/retention/selection method	☐ Training required/provided
	☐ Number of staff/volunteers	
Other	☐	☐_____

For each check mark made in Table 1, complete Table 2.

Table 2. Describing the Program Adaptation and Why It is Necessary

Describe the original program component	Describe the adaptation to this program component

Primary Reason for Adaptation
(*Check a box and provide additional detail in the space provided about why you made the adaptation*)

☐ **Student/Recipient (demographics, developmental fit, etc.)**
Example: We translated materials into Spanish.
_____
_____

☐ **Staff/Provider (staff retention issues, etc.)**
Example: Staff was not able to attend a required training day due to testing schedule.
_____
_____

☐ **Community/Cultural (traumatic incident, community norms, cultural values or relevance)**
Example: We altered materials because the community did not think the content was a priority.
_____
_____

☐ **Setting (policies, scheduling, facilities, etc.)**
Example: We only completed seven out of eight sessions because the school was closed for a snow day.
_____
_____

☐ **Evaluation (sample size requirements, schedule, etc.)**
Example: We only had enough money to evaluate use of the curriculum, so we cut the technology program.
_____
_____

☐ **Sustainability (funding, community buy-in, etc.)**
Example: The principal won't commit to program long-term, so we minimized staff involvement in the program.
_____
_____

Section 2. Support for Adaptations

Which guidance or resources did you or your site use to implement this adaptation?

☐ Guidance from Program Staff

☐ Available Program Materials

☐ Staff Expertise

☐ Online Tools or Resources: _____

☐ Technical Assistance from a Consultant or Expert

☐ Other: _____

What type of assistance or resources are you or our staff in need of now to further support implementation and/or adaptation of the program?
(e.g. training, guidance documents, more funding, more flexibility, technical assistance)

Do you believe it is (or will be) necessary to modify your evaluation design to accommodate this programmatic change?

☐ NO   ☐ YES

If "No," describe why no changes are necessary. If "Yes," describe what evaluation change(s) you believe should be made.

Date that Adaptation or Modification was Approved by:

Site Leader   _____/_____/_____

Program Designer or Implementation Expert   _____/_____/_____

Date of Adaptation or Modification to Program Component   _____/_____/_____

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