

Obtaining Organizational Buy-In

More than 30 years of justice system research has shown “what works” to improve outcomes. Many staff embrace these evidence-based practices (EBP) while others demonstrate resistance. There are many reasons for this potential resistance.

For example, staff may:

- be uncomfortable with any type of change
- express a general reluctance or skepticism toward management initiatives
- feel that they do not have adequate knowledge or skill to effectively implement the new practices
- feel uncomfortable assuming a behavior-change role in addition to an accountability role
- perceive that, given current demands, they do not have time to implement new strategies
- fundamentally not believe in the new direction or in the premise that people on supervision can change
- view EBP as a “flavor of the month” which, like other initiatives, will disappear
- feel that they are not being supported by management

15 TIPS FOR ENCOURAGING BUY-IN

Leaders have learned the importance of staff buy-in to the success of any new initiative.

The following are tips for increasing staff buy-in:

- 1. Assess the culture:** Assess the organizational culture prior to EBP implementation. Address barriers and build on strengths to improve outcomes.
- 2. Be united:** Ensure that the management team (supervisors and above) are aligned in their core beliefs and united in their desire to implement EBP.
- 3. Be inclusive:** Involve staff in the development of the EBP implementation plan. The plan should build capacity, ensure sustainability, follow a logical sequence, and be communicated clearly and frequently.
- 4. Update policies and practices:** Update protocols and procedures, other internal documents, and human resource practices (e.g., hiring, performance evaluations, promotion policies) to reflect and support EBP.
- 5. Articulate your vision:** Communicate a clear vision for why the change is needed and how it will positively impact staff, people on supervision, and the community. Update organizational mission and vision statements.
- 6. Build excitement:** Generate excitement around the initiative and identify champions both inside and outside of the department to “talk up” and promote EBP. Champions should be credible messengers—either other staff members or other justice system professionals whom staff respect.

PREPARE YOUR STAFF FOR CHANGE

From the outset, clearly communicate the direction of the department, expectations, and your commitment to EBP. Be honest about the complexity of EBP implementation. Dedicate the necessary time, resources, and energy.

7. **Provide a forum:** Offer opportunities for staff to be heard and for leadership to address any concerns.
8. **Create a learning environment:** Support staff by providing trainings, booster sessions, coaching, and spaces for them to practice skills and ask questions. Focus on translating research and theories into real-world applications.
9. **Evaluate workloads:** Review staff's current workloads and adjust to allow for additional demands.
10. **Adapt:** Adjust and modify new strategies and programs in ways that suit the agency while ensuring the fidelity of the model.
11. **Celebrate success:** Chunk implementation into stages and celebrate incremental successes.
12. **Take your time:** Implementing EBP takes significant time. It is important to not overload staff with too many new concepts, skills, and new responsibilities at once. Give them the opportunity to develop fundamentals prior to introducing new ideas and roles.
13. **Reassign staff:** When needed, reassign staff to job functions that better align with their perspectives and preferred roles.
14. **Keep the momentum going:** As with any initiative, there will be barriers and setbacks. In most cases, even though it may be appropriate to take the foot off the gas pedal, do not completely stop or go in reverse unless necessary.
15. **Ensure continuous quality improvement:** Implement EBP within a CQI framework. Collect data, actively share it with staff, and incorporate it in a plan to increase fidelity.

BUY-IN DOES NOT STOP WITH STAFF

Obtaining buy-in from key stakeholders, such as judges, prosecutors, defense counsel, and service providers, is essential and can assist with leveraging staff buy-in.

CHECKLIST FOR EBP LEADERS

- ✓ **Are leaders' core beliefs aligned?**
- ✓ **Have you articulated your agency's vision, mission, values, and ideal culture?**
- ✓ **Do you prioritize activities that are critical to the agency's mission and culture?**
- ✓ **Have you honed your EBP skills so that you can serve as a model?**
- ✓ **In what ways do you demonstrate that you are advancing an EBP culture?**
- ✓ **How do you prepare staff for change?**
- ✓ **What portion of time is devoted to mentoring and coaching?**
- ✓ **How do you respond when you witness change efforts?**
- ✓ **How do you respond to challenges?**
- ✓ **Does the agency routinely collect and review data, and use data to drive decision making?**