

# IMPLEMENTATION 101

A high-level best practice guide  
to support your implementation journey



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## Introduction to this Guide

Welcome to AGE-WELL's condensed implementation support guide! This document contains high-level best practices from various sources to help you along your implementation journey, from exploration to sustainability and scaling. Some of the content may be directly applicable to your project, while other parts might not be, depending on your specific project, context and previous implementation experience. We have structured this document to be used according to your site's specific needs and encourage you to select the most applicable and relevant sections. For information about our more comprehensive guide, please contact [sydney@agewell-nce.ca](mailto:sydney@agewell-nce.ca).

We wish you the best on your implementation journey!

## Implementation Factors

Successful implementation is dependent on the following factors, all of which must be carefully planned and consistently maintained throughout the process to achieve your outcomes:

### Implementation Equation



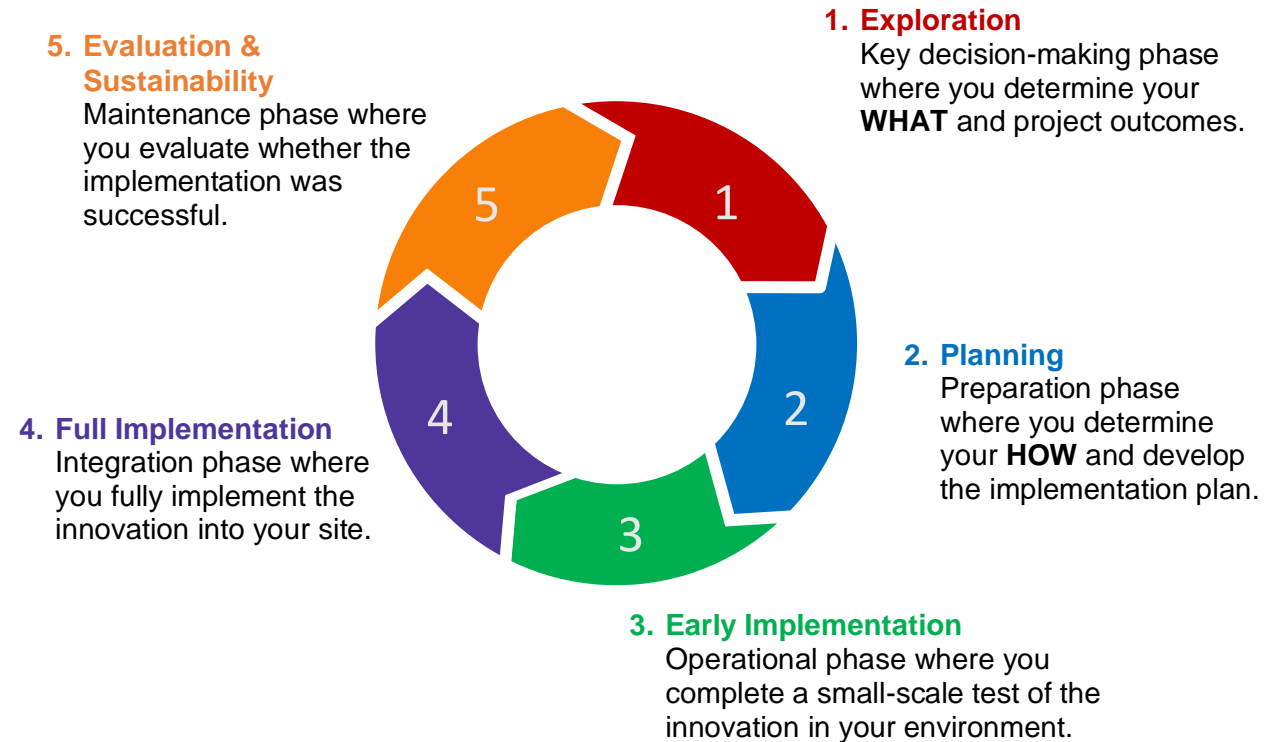
Based on DiCenso (2009). Image adapted by The Center for Implementation, © 2023 | V2024.01  
For full citation: <https://thecenterforimplementation.com/toolbox/implementation-equation>

1. **WHAT** are you implementing (the innovation) and who might be impacted?<sup>1</sup>
2. **HOW** will you implement the technology ([integration strategies](#)) to create the change?<sup>1</sup>
3. Do you have a supportive team and an enabling **CONTEXT**? Context is the unique circumstances and factors of the site where the implementation will happen.<sup>2,3</sup>
4. Are you maintaining implementation **QUALITY**? Implementation quality relates to whether the innovation was implemented as intended.<sup>4</sup>

The interplay between these four elements will impact the outcomes of your implementation: **WHAT, HOW, CONTEXT, and QUALITY.**

## Phases of Implementation

Implementation is usually a non-linear process that can take two to four years and typically includes five iterative phases (also called stages). While these phases may overlap, it is important to take sufficient time in each phase<sup>5</sup>.



### 1. Exploration<sup>3,6</sup>

Take time to determine the need(s), or gaps to be addressed, and outline the overall goal, expectations and anticipated value and benefits of the project. Then identify or clarify the needs and challenges within your site's specific context.

After the outline has been developed and the need(s) identified, select the innovation that best meets the identified needs. Consider the changes you want to see because of the implementation (these are your outcomes). To help determine outcomes, consider the impact you would like the innovation to make.

Some tasks to consider during this phase are:

- Identify and engage with stakeholders, including end users, staff and leadership, to help with exploration and planning.
- Complete a [needs assessment](#) and determine what you want to address.
- Identify and select relevant innovations and assess the fit, feasibility and appropriateness for your context. A free tool that your organization can use to help determine the fit of your chosen technology with your site is the [Idea Explorer for Senior Living](#).
- Determine your site's readiness for the innovation. This includes both your organizational readiness, including IT capacity, and the individual readiness of your staff and end users.

- Determine the technical support required to implement the chosen innovation, with considerations towards data security and system compatibility.
- Draft your logic model, if appropriate.

During your implementation process, there is an interaction between your site's specific context, including readiness level, and the characteristics of the innovation, such as the usability, scalability, evidence base, size of the project, and financial requirements. By understanding your site's readiness for an innovation, you can identify your organization's strengths and challenges with implementation and develop a plan to address these. Then, you can incorporate how you can leverage the strengths to set up your site for the planned implementation.

### Motivating Individual Change<sup>7,8</sup>

During the implementation process, maintaining the motivation of both those delivering the innovation and those impacted by the change will contribute to the success of the technology implementation. By engaging these two groups from the outset of the process, they are enabled to have increased ownership over their actions (**autonomy**), can identify any supports they may need to make them feel successful during the change (**competence**), and make them feel that they belong and are involved in the process (**connection**). By supporting these three motivational drivers, you help to build intrinsic motivation and increase the likelihood of a successful implementation.

## 2. Planning<sup>3,4</sup>

The planning phase is where the [integration strategies](#) of the implementation are determined, an [implementation plan](#) is developed, key performance indicators (KPIs) are defined and team roles and responsibilities are established. It is important during this phase to plan for sustainability to ensure the long-term success of the innovation, as well as scaling, if appropriate. Ensure sufficient time is allocated for this phase – it is critical to develop an implementation plan to steer the project before it starts. Consider the tasks, including who is responsible for each, objectives, activities, time frames, inputs and outcomes, risk management strategies, and monitoring and reporting processes.

Some tasks to consider during this phase are:

- Share the implementation plan, especially with those who will have active roles in implementing and evaluating/monitoring the innovation's integration.
- Identify your site champions (management to front-line staff).
- Engage with stakeholders, including technical support and end users, to help with planning and gather feedback.
- Determine what structures/supports/resources/training are needed and secure them.
- Identify potential barriers and facilitators to the implementation process.
- Identify potential challenges and limitations in using the technology and its integration.
- Identify and make any adaptations to the innovation as needed.
- Determine how you will monitor and evaluate the implementation process and the feedback systems you will use to monitor implementation quality.
- Draft a sustainability plan with the involvement of your end-users, including how you will monitor the continued use of the technology once it is integrated into your site.
- Draft a plan for scaling the innovation, if appropriate for your organization.

Before beginning your implementation, it is important to understand who is in your system. This includes the people at the centre who are required to change their behaviour and, importantly, the intervention recipients. Understand who has direct, indirect and no involvement in the process.

### Sustainability<sup>9</sup>

Planning for sustainability at the start of the project is imperative to sustain the technology's integration post-project. Your site must maintain what has been changed, the integration strategies used, and the outcomes, and monitor any adaptations made or that need to be made to the innovation. In addition, your site will need to adapt to any contextual factors that could disrupt the sustainability of your chosen innovation. Sustainability needs will change over time as your site's context changes. As a result, this means that your approach to the innovation will change over time. As with all implementation phases, it is important to regularly monitor what has been changed to ensure the desired outcomes and benefits continue post-project.

Examples of sustainability planning tools:

- Community settings – [Program Sustainability Tool](#)
- Healthcare settings – [NHS Sustainability model and guide](#)
- Implementing improvements in healthcare settings - [Long-Term Success Tool](#)

### Scaling the Innovation<sup>10</sup>

Scaling an innovation is an active, complex process to increase the coverage of the innovation, if applicable to your organization. To scale successfully, it is important to plan for it in the planning phase and gather evidence during the early and full implementation phases that the innovation addressed the identified need. [ExpandNet](#) has Scaling-Up guides to support planning for scaling, developing scaling-up strategies and providing practical guidance for scaling up innovations (focused on health service innovations).

Below are four steps to consider when planning for sustainability:

1. Scalability assessment – gather information about the scalability of your chosen innovation to determine if the innovation is acceptable to your stakeholders, has proven effectiveness, is adaptable, the potential cost of the innovation at scale, and whether the innovation is appropriate for your site's context and demographic.
2. Develop a plan for scaling – collaborate with stakeholders who were/will be involved in the implementation to plan out how you will scale your chosen innovation. Determine the objectives and target groups for scaling, whether the essential elements of the innovation will be retained during adaptations, how you will mobilize resources, how you will ensure continued data security and system compatibility, and how you will evaluate and monitor scaling up.
3. Preparation for scaling – gather your resources and ensure the plan is acceptable to your stakeholders, revising the scale-up plan as needed. Determine what strategies will be used to engage with your stakeholders and decision-makers, develop your training plans and implementation protocols, and identify potential funding sources for scaling.

4. Operationalize your scale-up plan – action the strategies and plans from the scale-up plan while continuing to gather feedback and revising your approach as necessary. Determine whether changes need to be made to deliver the innovation effectively, responsibilities are clearly laid out, and mechanisms are in place to collect feedback throughout the process. Other considerations are the budget for the implementation at scale and the strategies that will be used to ensure the innovation is being sustained.

### 3. Early Implementation<sup>3,6</sup>

This phase is where you operationalize the [implementation plan](#). It is important to manage the expectations of the stakeholders involved in the implementation, especially as this phase can take longer than anticipated. During this phase, review your implementation plan and revise it as necessary to reflect the changing circumstances.

Some tasks to consider during this phase are:

- Test the innovation in a small-scale, real-life situation to observe how end users (e.g., clients, residents, staff) interact with it. Collect feedback to inform the implementation and sustainability plans and any needed adaptations.
- Review the potential technological challenges and limitations identified in the planning phase and update or adapt the technology as necessary.
- Manage stakeholder expectations and communicate why the innovation is important.
- Continue to coach/mentor the implementation team and stakeholders who are directly involved in the implementation process.
- Monitor the implementation process and quality to inform necessary adaptations for your site and context. This includes having regular stakeholder check-ins for feedback (formal and informal).
- Perform cycles of improvement as necessary, such as [Plan, Do, Study, Act](#).

### Making Adaptations<sup>11</sup>

To ensure the innovation aligns with your site, you will need to make some adaptations, usually during the sustainability phase. These changes can be either **WHAT** you want people to do differently or **HOW** individuals, organizations or systems will change ([integration strategies](#)). Planning for potential adaptations early on and including stakeholder feedback will help you address barriers during the process. Even though adaptations will happen, think about what needs to remain the same throughout the implementation and with the innovation's sustained use post-project.

### 4. Full Implementation<sup>3,6</sup>

During this phase, the innovation becomes a fully integrated part of your site, with all necessary resources provided to support it. Regularly review your [implementation plan](#) to monitor your progress and evaluate whether you are reaching your intended outcomes and KPIs, which will provide insight into the impact of the innovation.

It is important to engage with your implementation team and other stakeholders involved in the implementation process to reflect on their experience and gather learnings to help inform any needed modifications to your implementation or sustainability plans, and future innovation implementations. You can apply these insights to identify efficiencies in your implementation approach through ongoing improvement cycles.

Some tasks to consider during this phase are:

- Gather feedback from your stakeholders, particularly the end users of the technology, at various time points during this phase (i.e. 3-, 6-, 12-months after full implementation).
- Monitor the fidelity of your implementation and make any necessary adjustments to address barriers to sustainability.
- Monitor the implementation process and quality to inform necessary adaptations for your site and context. This includes having regular stakeholder check-ins for feedback (formal and informal).
- Perform cycles of improvement as necessary, such as [Plan, Do, Study, Act](#).
- Continue to coach/mentor the implementation team and stakeholders who are directly involved in the process.

## 5. Evaluation and Sustainability<sup>3,6</sup>

As the integration of the innovation becomes part of the status quo, it is important to evaluate how the implementation process went and look at whether the anticipated outcomes and KPIs were achieved. In this phase, you determine if what you are doing is working and whether the innovation addressed your identified need.

Some tasks to consider during this phase are:

- Review your needs assessment to evaluate whether the technology implementation has addressed your identified need(s).
- Review your sustainability plan with your stakeholders and make any necessary adjustments or adaptations.
- Complete ongoing evaluation and monitoring of the technology's use, including any data security requirements.
- Continue to provide training for the stakeholders who use or are impacted by the technology.
- Continue to gather feedback about the usability, sentiments, and outcomes of the technology's use.

## Implementation Evaluation<sup>12,13,14</sup>

To measure the success and implementation quality of your project, it is important to complete an evaluation. The following types of evaluations can be used at various phases of the implementation process:

1. **Formative** – aims to answer how you will do the implementation and are used to make early improvements to the implementation plan. Activities involved in planning and implementing an intervention fall within this category.

2. **Process** – aims to answer how you did the implementation and what activities were done in different settings or at different implementation stages.
3. **Outcome** – aims to answer how effective the implementation was (how well did you do) and to what extent you reached your goals with the implementation.
4. **Summative** – aims to answer whether you reached your implementation goals and how effective the innovation's integration was after being implemented.
5. **Empowerment** – aims to increase the likelihood of implementation success by providing project stakeholders with the tools to complete other evaluations. An example is the the [Getting to Outcomes](#) process model.

The [RE-AIM framework](#) is useful to measure the process and outcomes of an intervention and helps you to select the types of indicators to use in your evaluation plan.

## Conclusion

Implementation is a non-linear process comprised of five stages: exploration, planning, early implementation, full implementation, and evaluation and sustainability. To increase the likelihood of success, take time in the first two stages to assess your organization's readiness for change, plan out what needs to happen, determine who will make up your implementation and support teams, gather stakeholder input, especially from those directly impacted by the innovation, and think through potential adaptations to make the innovation better suited to your site's specific context. This will then allow you to determine what resources are needed and set up your implementation process. It will also enable you to address the four factors that affect the outcomes of your implementation: 1) what you are changing, 2) how you implement the change (integration strategies), 3) your implementation quality, and 4) your site-specific context.

**The implementation process is iterative, allowing you to incorporate feedback from your stakeholders and make changes as needed throughout implementation.**

As not all innovations require the same implementation approach and not all organizations have the same level of experience with implementation, this document serves as a reminder of important considerations to support the increased likelihood of your implementation's success. For any phase of implementation and regardless of experience, expertise or readiness of your organization, tailored assistance can help you make significant strides. AGE-WELL's implementation support team can provide such assistance.

If you are interested, please reach out to us directly: [implementation@agewell-nce.ca](mailto:implementation@agewell-nce.ca).

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