

Shaping a Service Integration Initiative - Strategies and Critical Success Factors

The chart and brief descriptions below are based on visits to numerous service integration sites in 12 states. Each site has implemented a different mix of strategies, and in the best examples of integration, the presence of critical success factors facilitated the effort. At those sites, integration strategies were implemented to facilitate interactions between clients and caseworkers with the explicit goal of improving outcomes for clients.



Achieving integration of client services, the tip of the pyramid in the graphic above, means implementing a combination of operational and administrative strategies appropriate to the needs of client populations and considering the program and service provider environment.

Administrative Strategies - behind-the-scenes changes that enable improvements in client services.

- ***Consolidating Governance Structures*** – Reorganizing government agencies to reduce the number of individual agencies.
- ***Collaborative Planning, Management, and Oversight at the Local Level*** – Creating a board or similar body composed of community leaders and local program managers to plan, set goals, and implement strategies to meet the needs of the local population.
- ***Collaborating to Provide Additional Services*** – Working with local public and private service providers to increase the range of available services.
- ***Integrating Funding Streams*** – Combining funds from multiple sources to provide services that might not otherwise be available if funded by individual sources.
- ***Integrating a Wider Range of Service Providers in Local Systems*** – Expanding the mix of organizations providing services at the local level.
- ***Integrating Information and Information Systems*** – Reaching agreement on cross-program and cross-agency information sharing; developing information systems that facilitate information sharing among agencies and service providers.

Operational Strategies – Changes that directly affect client/caseworker interactions.

- ***Collocation*** – Moving multiple agencies and service providers to a common location.
- ***Integrating Client Intake and Assessment Processes*** – Client intake and assessment for multiple programs and services through common procedures and forms.
- ***Integrating Staff from Multiple Organizations and Programs in Teams*** – Staff from multiple programs and service providers work together regularly, usually in a collocated setting.
- ***Consolidating Staff Functions*** – Combining what were previously separate functions within a single staff position (e.g., intake and ongoing case management.)
- ***Coordinating Case Plans*** – Harmonizing case planning by considering the requirements of multiple programs.
- ***Consolidating Case Management Across Programs*** – Where a single worker is responsible for ongoing casework that spans traditional program groupings, such as income support *and* employment and training programs.

Critical Success Factors - Factors that contribute to an environment in which service integration is more likely to occur.

- ***Leadership*** - Perhaps the single most important factor that affects the outcome of an effort to integrate services is determined leadership among local program directors and champions among the operational managers of the agencies involved in the effort.
- ***Management Skills/Experienced Manager*** – Managers who know their programs, know how to motivate staff, and who understand the local environment.
- ***Staff Training and Development*** – Cross-program training conducted at regular intervals and other skill-building activities.
- ***A Willingness to Take Chances, Experiment and Change*** – “Ask for forgiveness, rather

than permission.” If a new approach is unsuccessful, be willing to change direction.

- ***A Clearly Defined, Shared Mission*** – A clearly, mutually-agreed upon mission that will be the focus of the effort to integrate.
- ***Community Focus*** – A focus on community needs and the involvement of representatives of the community in planning and implementing strategies.
- ***Strength-Based, Client-Focused Processes*** – Practices that focus on client strengths.
- ***Stability*** – Management and leadership that continue throughout the process.
- ***Measuring Performance*** – Paying close attention to performance indicators.
- ***Personal Relationships*** – Developing and personal bonds with peers in other organizations.
- ***Teams, Teams, and More Teams*** – Teams at the management and staff levels.
- ***Resources*** – Staff and funds to facilitate the process of integrating services.
- ***Time, Patience, and Hard Work*** – You get the idea.

Sequencing

Obviously, the strategies chosen for a particular site cannot all be implemented simultaneously. Choosing *when* to implement particular strategies can be as important as choosing the strategies themselves. Frustration over the slow pace of change that might result from selecting a challenging strategy could doom a service integration effort. One recommendation is to focus initial efforts on one or a small number of operational strategies, which more directly affect client/worker interactions, with the expectation that additional strategies will be implemented at some point in the future. An example is collocation, which though it is not a simple strategy, can serve as the foundation for further integration, such as teaming, common intake, etc.

Of the administrative strategies listed above, the most crucial at the beginning of a project is “Collaborative Planning, Management, and Oversight” – developing a structure to guide implementation. In an environment where the programs and service providers participate in an integration effort represent multiple levels of government (e.g., state-administered and locally-administered programs) as well as private service providers, a collaborative governance structure is appropriate. Regardless, a structure is needed to ensure that decisions are made, responsibilities are assigned, tasks are completed, meetings are held, information is communicated, etc. A board representing the larger stakeholder community can provide input and feedback regarding the strategies and implementation processes to help focus the effort on community needs, and ensure buy-in. Implementing an operational strategy, such as collocation, will likely reinforce the need for a relatively formal governance structure.

Managers and staff at sites that have successfully implemented a mix of operational and administrative strategies caution that, as indicated above, substantial time and effort were required. But they also say, enthusiastically and almost universally, that the effort was worthwhile and that they would never go back to the old ways of doing business.