

ADVANCING THE USE OF CORE COMPONENTS OF EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS

THE PROBLEM

Anyone who has designed, adapted, or implemented a program knows just how many factors can lead to different sites doing different things and getting different results. Running a program is dynamic and often requires adjusting to changing circumstances and conditions.

Amid this complexity, how can policymakers, practitioners, and evaluators ensure that interventions are responsive to what agencies know is the latest evidence about what works and implemented in ways that will work for their target populations in various local contexts?

THE SOLUTION

Core components are the parts, features, attributes, or characteristics of a program that a range of research techniques show influence its success when implemented effectively.

In the approaches described in this paper, core components serve as the unit of analysis that researchers use to determine or describe “what works,” and they become the things practitioners and policymakers seek to replicate within and across a range of related programs and systems.

THE BENEFITS: “WHY SHOULD I USE THIS APPROACH?”

ABILITY TO GENERALIZE

By looking at core components, communities can more quickly and efficiently gain insights on a whole range of related programs rather than just one specific program.

ABILITY TO ADAPT

Practitioners can adapt an intervention with confidence, knowing that as long as it includes the core components, it will likely remain at least as effective as the original design.

ABILITY TO CONTINUOUSLY IMPROVE

Components provide a set of best practices that can be incorporated into continuous improvement approaches to help programs get better results over time.

ABILITY TO SCALE

As individual components allow more flexibility for preparation and support to implement, they can drive change and provide more options for scaling-up.

THE STEPS: “HOW DO I ADVANCE THE USE OF CORE COMPONENTS?”

Identifying: Developing theories about which identified components of programs might be instrumental in helping targeted populations achieve desired outcomes

Testing: Winnowing the identified components based on which ones empirically predict the targeted population’s improvement in desired outcomes across multiple contexts and subpopulations

Empowering: Creating guides, tools, assessments, protocols, techniques, and processes that facilitate the translation and dissemination of core components for use by practitioners

Validating: Testing the tools and methods to see if they increased the use of the core components and if this led to better participant outcomes

Scaling: Implementing a strategy to scale up the use of the tools and methods that were proven to increase practitioners’ use of the core components

RECOMMENDATIONS: “AGENCIES NEED TO...”

Agencies should require grant-funded evaluations to collect and report on factors needed to support studies utilizing meta-analysis methodologies.

Federal agencies should incorporate this approach into existing guidance and policy documents.

Agencies should create joint funding opportunities to conduct evaluations on core components of effective programs across contexts.

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) should incorporate this approach into existing guidance and policy documents.

Chief Evaluation Officers at federal agencies should include core component approaches in their forthcoming learning agendas.

Agencies should work together to develop shared definitions and language for Notices of Funding Availability, in order to incorporate core components of effective programs into their grant programs in rigorous and consistent ways.