

Implementation of Safety Audit Recommendations

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Implementation of Safety Audit Recommendations

In our work with communities across the country that have conducted Safety and Accountability Audits, we have learned that communities have struggled with how to move from the investigation phase of the audit to the crucial phase of the implementation of audit recommendations. To find out more, in March of 2010, we interviewed seven audit coordinators and two lead audit team members from eight different communities about their experience implementing recommendations identified by their audits.

This report is an overview of the interviews that we hope will assist current and future auditors to anticipate and avoid common pitfalls and plan for and utilize successful strategies to implement recommendations. The report summarizes themes that arose during the interviews in the following areas related to implementation of audit recommendations: process and administration, impact of the audit, challenges to implementation, recommendations not implemented, and central lessons for other communities. Additionally, a site-specific summary of approaches to implementation is attached.

Implementation Process and Administration

Approaches to the implementation process ranged from highly organized and intentional to what one coordinator described as 'organic.' The approach that was chosen seemed to be related to the relationships within the audit team, access to funding, and capacity of the lead agency.

Five key elements for successful implementation could be identified:

1. Designated time set aside for the implementation process

Interviewees recommended a range of implementation strategies:

- Tie into a strategic plan
- Contract an outside evaluator to help identify change
- Take tools and products 'on the road'
- Build in recommendations for cross-agency projects
- Use a spreadsheet or website for record-keeping
- Pick the low hanging fruit first
- Assign audit team members a 'to do' list of recommendations
- Broaden the audit team by adding fresh perspectives when shifting to implementation
- Locate the coordinator in a group or agency with the capacity to support that role

2. A coordinator (agency staff or specifically funded position), with a range of skills:

Coordination of the implementation phase required a range of skills:

- Soliciting grant funds for staffing and implementation
- Building functional work groups and teams
- Reaching out to community resources
- Providing opportunities for interagency partnering and mentoring

3. Recommendations adapted or reformatted into tools that facilitate implementation

Successful transition from the audit to implementation depended on how recommendations were framed. Before implementation work could begin at any of these sites, recommendations were reformatted into user-friendly documents able to carry audit philosophy and rationale to non-audit team decision-makers. This involved considerable time and attention. The ways that communities approached reformatting recommendations varied:

- Task forces, audit teams, or committees narrowed and focused recommendations
- A new document or format was created (such as an Executive Summary or spreadsheet of task by audit trail)
- A community council¹ created a strategy for assignment and completion
- Recommendations easier to implement were completed first to build in quick success
- A formal implementation structure was created through a grant or strategic plan
- Recommendations were organized by group, category, or topic

4. Motivated and audit-educated leadership (decision-maker buy-in)

Leadership for implementation emerged from audit team members, staff of audited agencies, and a broad diverse ownership of the audit experience.

5. Funds for staff, training, and material development

The Impact of Implementation

Many forms and work products were completed during the audit discussions that were quick and easy to address. The final report that summarized the results of the audit included larger, time consuming or costly recommendations that some communities were able to address. Common work products that came out of the audit process included:

- New personnel and partnerships in hiring new personnel
- Training of agency staff with new materials, format, and content

¹ 'Council' is used generically here to refer to a domestic violence or sexual assault task force, CCR, SART, family violence council or similar group.

- Forms, technologies, policies, and procedures
- Resources to build partnerships, inter-agency coordination, and standardized protocols

Many communities expressed intangible impacts of the audits and implementation:

- A willingness to try new things
- Agencies now recognize the role they play and how important that is to others
- The community learned new language and started to talk differently about how to create change
- How interagency groups think about themselves and structure their work process has changed
- Interagency work continues to informally utilize the audit process

There were clear improvement in personal and professional relationships, inter-agency collaboration, and ways to identify and resolve problems.

Moving beyond the recommendations identified by the audit, agencies used the implementation phase to leverage funding, mentor audit coordinators in other communities, and work on new projects discovered during the audit.

The Challenges in Implementation

The implementation challenges identified in these interviews are summarized in four themes:

1. Difficulty transitioning from the audit to implementation
2. Accountability; disengaged or resistant decision-makers
3. Entrenched system culture
4. Sustaining change over time

These barriers were both discouraging and frustrating.

1. Without a doubt, the transition from the audit to implementation was a precarious moment. The process of identifying gaps, building recommendations, and writing the final report did not always lead smoothly into implementation. Time constraints at the end of the audit process meant:
 - Too many recommendations to manage in implementation
 - Teams ran out of time to pare back and focus broad recommendations which made implementation unwieldy
 - Failure to prioritize recommendations
 - Audit team fatigue made it difficult to motivate team members post-audit

Interviewees offered ideas for how to build user-friendly recommendations:

- Focus on 1-2 manageable, measureable recommendations
- Be clear about what the recommendations mean
- Think about implementing recommendations from the beginning of the audit

2. Occasionally, there was a problem holding agencies accountable for follow-through with expectations for implementation. Leadership responded by:

- Building accountability into membership or funding requirements
- Structured reporting (to group and to funders)
- Follow-up by leadership or coordinator
- Formal evaluation

However, there were other indicators of resistance to implementation:

- Failing to change work practices while 'talking the talk'
- Not wanting (or willing) to change the status quo
- Tension around philosophical differences [between the recommendations and decision-makers]
- Resistance from decision-makers who were not part of the audit team
- The audit philosophy and process were not the normal way of doing business (for instance, requests for 'hard' data and evidence)

This resistance was a difficult challenge to overcome. Two solutions were proposed:

- Think about how to write up the report and recommendations in ways that invite them into the process
- Call on audit team members to carry the 'audit memory' to resistant decision-makers

3. Agency or system culture seemed to be the most complex and long term struggle for change. Two specific areas were discussed.

- Institutionalized racism and race relations
- Challenging the credibility of victims

Leadership recognized the difficulty implementing change around institutionalized racism and serving communities of color. Some communities were hopeful and felt they were making strides; others were at a loss for how to proceed. Efforts to respond included:

- Partnering, joint projects
- Co-training
- Adding personnel from communities of color
- Increasing prevention efforts
- Increasing advertising in communities of color

There were no solutions suggested for changing practitioner's perceptions of victims.

4. Some communities completed their recommendations and, in the process, integrated the 'audit approach' into their daily interactions. Several communities expressed concerns about sustaining change. Example: During implementation, agency staff received training on a new protocol with the support of the supervisor. Within 2 years (with no personnel changes), practitioners slipped

back into the work practices they were using before the audit. Communities were unsure about how to counteract this challenge, but there were several suggestions:

- Check in with agency decision-maker
- Renew training
- Bring forward original team members who hold the 'audit memory'
- Revisit in the next audit

Recommendations Not Implemented

Six communities were successful in implementation and two of those communities appeared to have completed all of the audit recommendations. For one community it was too early to predict. One community had not implemented any of their recommendations from the audit. This community moved from one audit directly into the next with no time or funding for implementation. There was no designated staff, leadership, or process for follow-through.

In otherwise successful communities, recommendations that had not been (and were not going to be) completed were generally linked to:

- Change that required legislation, action from a political body, or state mandate
- Lack of strategies to impact a system culture (institutionalized racism, beliefs about victims)

Additional reasons for failing to implement recommendations involved:

- Lack of funding or lack of resources
- Agency decision-makers indicated implementation would violate the law, state standards, or judicial autonomy
- There were no resources for offering or sustaining new or expanded services
- Agencies with a history of conflict were not willing or able to work together

Central Lessons for Other Communities

Interviewees made specific suggestions for the transition from audit to implementation.

Audit Administration

- Talk about lead agency commitment for 2 years (1 for audit, 1 for implementation). Add as part of initial MOU with lead agency.
- Find ways to stop and not use funds designated for implementation in the last push to finish the audit report

Recommendations

- Build in adequate budget and technical assistance time for working through the recommendations
- Write clear, succinct recommendations
- Look for ways to link recommendations to collaborative or inter-agency projects
- Keep a record of products and forms developed during the audit process
- Train coordinators or teams about how to make recommendations manageable and measureable (how they should look and how you should talk about them)

Buy-in

- During the initial talk with the audited agency, be clear about outcomes, needs, and staffing
- While building recommendations, ask supervisors for their advice, what's realistic/what's not
- Bring in decision-makers throughout the audit process
- Ask decision-makers to preview the report, bring them into the final report discussions

Before the Audit Team is done

- Action planning, who is going to coordinate, lead, and monitor the implementation
- Talk about how to evaluate the changes in the short and long term
- Talk about a transition audit team

Other lessons learned about the implementation process:

- Build implementation into the initial grant
- Break down recommendations into working tools for clarity, agreement, and follow-up
- Create manageable recommendations so people see accomplishments
- Take small steps that make sense to people that are responsible for making the change
- Use the final report as an opening for implementation and action planning (what now, who, when, how)
- Present findings to a broad audience (administrators, political leaders, and line level practitioners)
- Be as specific as possible about who could be involved and how to keep them involved
- Convene a representative team
- Institutional memory is critical to implementation buy-in (look to where the history might be lost)
- Create products that will demonstrate how the change makes sense
- When an agency changes leadership, the other agencies need to step up and educate them about the audit and benefits of participation
- Monitor long-term viability of changes
- Implementing recommendations is a process of thinking about victims, impact, and safety
- Be alert to the tensions between your role as a coordinator and as an advocate

Specific suggestions for use of audit consultants or TA providers:

- Build in TA toward the end to talk in detail about implementation and offer guidance
- Consider holding a retreat to figure out what to do with the recommendations
- Guidance for the audit coordinator
- Help determine the need for another audit for gaps that need more data or focus

- Help make recommendations user-friendly (shorter, more specific, prioritized)
- TA for building strategies to implement cultural change in agencies
- Build in post-audit TA
- Help find a stopping point so the team can retain funds intended for implementation

Final Observation

The Audit is thought of as a distinct and separate event disconnected from implementation. Approaching the audit as a process of reflection **and** action to improve safety and accountability is key to successful implementation.

Overview of the implementation process at each of the eight sites

Community 1

<i>Who was involved?</i>	Interagency community council ⁱⁱ Members are agency representatives (some were audit team members) Coordinator unpaid chair, ED of member program
<i>Recommendations</i>	6 gaps and handful of large recommendations (smaller recommendations were completed during audit)
<i>How did they implement?</i>	Worked collectively, adopted audit team attitude No funding Council monitored status
<i>When/how often</i>	Met monthly for regular review
<i>What helped?</i>	Audit report recommendations were succinct, tight, & limited to things that would really make a difference.
<i>Notes:</i>	Recommendations used as laundry list of ideas

Community 2

<i>Who was involved?</i>	Interagency community council members Paid Coordinator monitored completion, made results visible Paid Evaluator looked at changes (i.e. conducted stakeholder assessment) Paid committee for 3 months to narrow recommendations from 70 to 33 (1/2 audit team, 1/2 not)
<i>Recommendations</i>	Narrowed those 33 recommendations to 12 priorities. Separated into categories (those within their control, outside of their purview, large systems changes)
<i>How did they implement?</i>	Formally adopted recommendations in their control as council's 2008-2011 Strategic Plan Did easiest first. Larger recommendations reformatted for agency heads 3 work teams created 12 month plan for each Every recommendation assigned to an agency Council work teams and coordinator monitored status Chart by recommendation Website to report, track progress on line
<i>When/how often</i>	Accountability tied to council membership and council's funder Ongoing. Annual updates to provided to Council regarding what had been done, progress for each of the 33 recommendations.
<i>What helped?</i>	Intentionality, narrowed down recommendations into strategic plan, funding, 'audit memory'
<i>Notes:</i>	\$500,000 local grant. Audit recommendations were a to-do list.

Community 3

<i>Who was involved?</i>	Audit team members were members of agencies Paid Coordinator (through state coalition grant) supported, coordinated, found resources, monitored progress
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<i>How did they implement?</i>	Reformatted recommendations into work tool (spreadsheet) developed by mentor Met with each agency decision maker to review expectations Informal agreement to back up audit team staff member Audit team members worked individually in own agency with 'to do' list Agency reports (how action implemented, products, need for funding, why not feasible)
<i>When/how often</i>	Team checked in monthly. Coordinator added addendum to grant reports State 2 yr grant (1st year = audit, 2nd year = implement)
<i>What helped?</i>	Recommendation Work Tool (spreadsheet) Audit Trails by problem statement, recommendation, understanding with agency head, final action to complete Experienced program paid to mentor
<i>Notes:</i>	State Coalition funded multiple audits sites (state staff & GTEA Task Force)

Community 4	
<i>Who was involved?</i>	Lead agency rolled coordination into job description (no outside pay) Professionally and personally connected audit team Met at member's home and talked about what to do
<i>Recommendations</i>	7 gap statements 2 sets of recommendations - system work practices & system culture
<i>How did they implement?</i>	Organic Multidisciplinary team received summary of report Coordinator broke into categories and rewrote user friendly format (5 pages) Focused meetings with specific team members by category Audit team members took recommendations to agencies Working groups within and across departments
<i>When/how often?</i>	No start date
<i>What helped?</i>	Strength of audit team relationships
<i>Notes:</i>	Grant ran out before done with audit. Originally included start of implementation

Community 5	
<i>Who was involved?</i>	Lead agency staff, coordination part of job Funded
<i>Recommendations</i>	Easy recommendations completed during audit Used funding for larger, more time consuming recommendations
<i>How did they implement?</i>	1 day district-wide conference followed by regional trainings Distributed findings and took work products on-site Subcommittees worked on products by area of expertise (all officers, etc.) Court roundtables participated
<i>What helped?</i>	Continuity in teams. Purposeful planning process w/ audit team.
<i>Notes:</i>	Key is to have good work products

Community 6	
<i>Who was involved?</i>	No paid staff, Local task force (chair). Several agencies stepped up and said they would help move it forward
<i>How did they implement?</i>	Audit team discussed recommendations & solved as a team Highlighted and broke recommendations into subcategories (children, culture,

	<p>policy, records/evidence, predominant aggressor, strangulation, victim advocates dispatch, DV training, 911)</p> <p>Each of these had 'to do' list attached</p> <p>Use these subcategories to monitor/record</p> <p>Task Force prioritized (by get these done first, these need funding, out of our control)</p> <p>Did easiest first, looked for financing</p> <p>Some agency assignments, but through task force</p> <p>Assigned someone from another agency to help</p>
<i>When/how often</i>	As implementation completed, eventually fall back into review and maintenance
<i>What helped?</i>	Funded by state coalition (training, mentoring)
<i>Notes:</i>	Working beyond recommendations, using audit information into future

Community 7	
<i>Who was involved?</i>	<p>Council was lead and provided funding and staff</p> <p>1/2 of council mandated members</p>
<i>How did they implement?</i>	<p>Created progress reports for each recommendation for each audited agency (Recommendation by what was done, barriers, etc.)</p> <p>Coordinator reviewed report with each agency.</p> <p>Team presentation to each agency</p> <p>Council committee read reports</p> <p>New ED followed up as part of [peer] introduction to agency heads</p>
<i>When/how often</i>	<p>Agency reports every 3 months</p> <p>Report to City/County Commissions (w/ updates)</p>
<i>Notes:</i>	<p>Did not use audit team. Completed recommendations and reporting faded away</p> <p>No way to hold agencies accountable</p>

Community 8	
<i>Who was involved?</i>	No lead staff for implementation, no leadership
<i>How did they implement?</i>	No time set aside and no process in place
<i>Notes:</i>	Funding for audit only. Multiple audits