

Healthy Transitions New Project Directors: Developing a Clear Implementation Approach

Purpose of this Document

Life as a new Healthy Transitions Project Director can feel like a rollercoaster of highs and lows. It's a journey that can involve anticipation, while awaiting the status of your grant application; excitement, when you receive your notice of award; fear and anxiety, because life just got real; and even feeling overwhelmed, when you are unsure of where to start or feel stuck. You are now responsible for turning your words into actions and implementing a program that will make a positive impact in the lives of youth, young adults, families, and ultimately communities. We might all be intimidated of such a crucial, yet achievable, expectation. These feelings are normal, whether you are new to project directing or have several years of experience as a Project Director. **No one expects for you to have all the answers, but no one will know that you need assistance unless you ask.**

The goal of this document is, first, to let you know that you are not alone; and second, to provide you with a few foundational tips for developing (or clarifying) your implementation approach, while working alongside your entire project team and young people in your communities. **This document was developed for new Healthy Transitions Project Directors, but it may also be useful for other new and experienced SAMHSA-funded Project Directors.**

Challenge

Project Goals and Objectives need to be revised from the original grant application, to better align with the current statement of need, to ensure strong implementation of the grant.

Process

It is important to review your current implementation approach as identified in your grant application. Will the specified approach, goals, and action steps place your team on track to meet/exceed your organization's current targets and SAMHSA's requirements? Sometimes what was written may longer be effective, or changes in the culture or environment prompt opportunities to better engage with youth, young adults, and families. As the Project Director, it is important to do an inventory at every level of the project — local, state, and federal — to identify how they all intersect.

- Review current goals and objectives
- Review program outcomes
- Review current organizational processes and flow of services
- Engage organizations and state leaders in the process
- Engage the Evaluation Team in the process
- Communicate with the SAMHSA project officer to secure support
- Facilitate team meetings to obtain youth and young adult voice and choice using the [Dreams, Opportunities, Barriers, and Strengths \(D.O.B.S.\) tool](#)
- Update goals and objectives using information from the D.O.B.S. and SAMHSA targets

Team Alignment

- The SAMHSA key personnel are critical in the overall project management, implementation, and evaluation. Since Healthy Transitions projects work at multiple levels, your role as the Project Director must also span

all these levels. It is important to identify the strategic leadership team that is ultimately responsible for the grant funds. Who among the project team maintains the contract with the grantee (state/tribal organization) to implement and evaluate services and supports for young people? Is there a shared vision and set of goals? Does everyone fully understand the purpose of Healthy Transitions' projects? How is information related to the grant communicated, and how often?

- Identify the stakeholders who are accountable for the implementation of the project
- Intentionally define space within your meeting agendas to listen and understand the voices, choices, and needs of the young people and their families
- Provide an overview (or refresher) of the vision and purpose of the project
- Share updated goals, objectives, and processes with the team
- Engage staff in brainstorming innovative strategies for achieving the goals
- Develop a schedule for ongoing team meetings, preferably monthly, but not exceeding a quarterly basis

Future Steps

The next step is to translate the measurable goals and objectives to the provider and organization contracts.

- Develop contracts for grant-funded providers with the revised goals and objectives, requirements, meetings, services reporting, and timelines using a table format helps with readability
- Implement SMARTIE goals to ensure accountability (Specific, Measurable, Achievable or Ambitious, Relevant or Realistic, Timebound, Inclusive, Equitable)
- Use your quantitative and qualitative data; monitor progress and outcomes via team conversations, SPARS data, participant feedback, and other evaluation mechanisms

Additional Recommendations

- The Funding Award Announcement provides guidance on the intention and structure of the project — keep this document close for routine reference
- Applying for grants often happens quickly — once a grant is awarded, some details and plans may have changed; communicate with your SAMHSA project officer to determine if a formal Post Award Amendment is needed, and make the needed adjustments
- Communicate, communicate, communicate with your SAMHSA project officer, as they can assist you and truly want you to succeed
- Developing contracts that are clear and written in such a way that any team member reviewing it can understand will strengthen implementation
- Communicate at every level of the project to ensure that individuals at both the local and state levels have access to the same information
- Connect with other grantees, as they are always willing to provide support and share their lessons learned
- Seek out available SAMHSA-funded technical assistance
- Breathe! You are not the first new grantee or Project Director, and you will not be the last. Ask lots of questions. Embrace the entire journey, even the scary and uncomfortable parts. You will make it, and you will be able to assist others along the way. **You've got this!**

Authors:

Kate Perrotta, LCSW, CCM (North Carolina HT Project Director)

Tonica Freeman-Foster, Ed.D. (NTTAC TA Consultant)