

## Think Tank Summary: Using the Internet to Promote Synthesis in Implementation Research

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### The Key Issue/Challenge

We described initiatives to develop online tools to accomplish three broad strategic goals: (1) a web-based system for large-scale collaborative collection and synthesis of findings from multiple, diverse implementation projects to enable evaluation of the impact of factors that promote or inhibit successful implementation; (2) a web-based tool for collecting and describing data collection methods, tools, and measures; and (3) a web-based clearinghouse of overarching resources such as theories and frameworks, annotated bibliographies, and journals and conferences.

Dialogue in this Think Tank centered around the first objective because it is the most challenging of the three. Our fundamental challenge to participants was: If we build a Wiki for implementation researchers to provide feedback on definitions of key concepts and a repository in which to enter study findings related to implementation, will researchers use it?

### Barriers and Strategies to Overcoming Barriers

The participants identified the following challenges. Each challenge will be addressed below:

- Who should the target audience be?
- How can incentives be put in place for researchers to contribute to the site?
- How can we encourage posting of negative findings?
- Who will do the review and “censor” the information that’s submitted to ensure accuracy and make sure that sensitive information is not being disseminated?
- How will this effort, which could be expensive, be funded?
- How can we create a repository for existing tools (developed/adapted) for various settings and populations, with particular emphasis on VA’s veteran population?

**Challenge:** Who should the target audience be?

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**Strategies:** Implementation researchers would be the target for contributing information and also be beneficiaries of the web site. However, some suggested that practitioners and policy makers should also be targeted as beneficiaries as we synthesize findings across studies which can be turned into useful products for them. A very simple and efficient interface is needed for entering and extracting information from the repository. One suggestion, as away to minimize the amount of information researchers would have to enter, is to “scrape” information from other web sites (e.g., ClinicalTrials.gov). This kind of approach would require higher up-front development costs, however. Medical school librarians understand, fundamentally, how people access information and they may help inform design of the application.

It might be useful to start with specific hypotheses or research questions, to focus contributions by researchers and to make the site more appealing to researchers and practitioners alike. We could pick an issue or question to address and appeal specifically to researchers who have addressed this topic, so that the turnaround time to producing findings is more rapid—to demonstrate utility of this site. This will help shorten the cycle from initial concept to launching a *useful* product. It will also clearly show researchers how they’ve contributed; and, in addition to help practitioners see the value of research in their own domain. Also, actively collecting data on a specific question may be a useful strategy by which to engage people who might not otherwise be engaged. This incremental approach would provide a stimulus for contributing information by appealing to researchers who want to make a tangible impact.

Other strategies to make the site useful for researchers:

- Make it easy to find information about other studies to prevent duplication of research.
- Emphasize that this site will allow them to post study details that are not well reported in published articles. Peer-reviewed journals do not typically report findings related to context.
- Demonstrate how the site can actively to promote synthesis and analysis by helping researchers develop proposals or write synthesis papers

One strategy to make the site appealing to practitioners and policy-makers is to create a separate interface for them. This suggestion was inspired by the Institute of Medicine who creates separate “report briefs” for policy makers versus researchers. Many websites (including most universities) have separate interfaces for different users (e.g., students, researchers, parents). Getting a lot of hits from practitioners and policy makers will help to demonstrate impact which would provide an incentive for researchers to contribute their work to the site.

**Challenge:** How can incentives be put in place for researchers to contribute to the site?

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**Strategies:** Within the VA, it might be possible to make contributions a requirement for VA funded projects, as part of the annual reporting requirements. Other granting agencies might want to institute a similar requirement. Contributions could also be a requirement of publishing in *Implementation Science* (an online peer-reviewed journal). The site could be used to organize working groups around particular areas, methods, tools and should interface with existing databases (like ART for VA and Reporter for NIH).

**Challenge:** How can we encourage posting of negative findings?

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**Strategies:** It is important to include both negative and positive findings in this repository to identify which organizational constructs are associated with implementation success. To the extent that journals tend not to be interested in publishing negative findings, the web site could serve as an attractive venue for disseminating these findings.

**Challenge:** Who will do the review and “censor” the information that’s submitted to ensure accuracy and make sure that sensitive information is not being disseminated?

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**Strategies:** Need an oversight committee of senior researchers and policy makers to give authority to the project.

**Challenge:** How will this effort, which could be expensive, be funded?

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**Strategies:** Use a modular/incremental approach, rather than trying to develop a massive superstructure from the start. There are a lot of details of operationalization that we don’t know about yet. We can start to implement on a pilot basis and start by using the site as a clearinghouse of VA funded work. This could create a model for other groups and help to answer the question of whether this is worth supporting.

**Challenge:** How can we create a repository for existing tools (developed/adapted) for various settings and populations, with particular emphasis on VA’s veteran population?

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**Strategies:** Discussions during the think-tank session led to the identification of 3 user groups for these tools: researchers, policy-makers and quality improvement managers. Ideally, the repository of tools (research tools and quality improvement tools) would include tools developed as well as used within the VA and non-VA tools with brief description about each tool. This will allow the potential users to review the existing tools and then make the appropriate selection. It is equally important that researchers continuously provide their tools to this growing exhaustive repository. Such efforts require vetting of tools as well updating of the repository of new tools.

## Questions for Future Research

The next step for this project will be to build a prototype, based on the above suggestions. We will focus the functionality of the site initially on soliciting feedback on the CFIR framework construct definitions to begin to build consensus on the definitions and taxonomy for the constructs, which will, in turn, help other

researchers. We will also explore the viability of identifying a few high priority research questions on which we can focus initial collection of study findings. The feedback from this think tank will be extremely helpful for designing a site that will be useful and sustainable for researchers, practitioners, and policy makers alike for the foreseeable future.