Why Implementation Takes Time

Contributors:
Randi Harms
Natasha Welsh
Katherine Cantu Anguiano
Loretta Severin

A common question we are asked is why IRIS implementation takes as long as it does (typically between three and six months) and whether launch could happen faster than that. The answer lies in the difference between implementation and launch of a referral platform.

A referral platform can launch anytime- with one or more organizations signed on to using the platform, the switch can be flipped, and the network (however small) can be considered 'live.' Being 'live' indicates nothing about change in the community that will result in individuals and families actually being connected with services. Additionally, this does not reflect the health of the referral network (the extent to which partners are committed to collaborating with each other) which is an early indicator about the likelihood that the network will sustain (and ideally grow!) over time.

Implementation, at least the way the IRIS Team uses the word, is a process of engaging organizations in a collaborative process of change management. The process is grounded in principles of implementation science and lived experiences in implementation approaches. Driven by local community members, on average, IRIS communities spend six months on implementation. "Ready" communities, those with collaborative roles and shared standards already established, have launched in as few as 10 to 12 weeks.

DURING THE IMPLEMNATION PHASE, ORGANIZATIONS DEVOTE SPACE AND TIME TO DEVELOPING:

- The data governance structure that fits individual organization and community needs, including client consent protocols.
- A shared definition of referral.
- Shared standards for platform engagement; and expectations for average response time and capacity indicator accuracy.

THIS PROCESS OF ACTIVE, ENGAGED COLLABORATIVE BUILDING ENSURES THREE THINGS AT PLATFORM LAUNCH:

1. Referrals are exchanged immediately because relevant partner organizations are on the platform, trained, and committed to the success and sustainability of the network.

2. Families are connected to services because the organizations exchanging the referrals are accountable to each other.

3. Organizations are confident in the platform and their partners because they spend time together strategizing and addressing potential barriers.

The outcome of this approach? An immediate impact. Here is what we found: Communities launching IRIS 'go live' with an average of 16 partner organizations who promptly begin coordinating referrals; on average, network partners make 17 referrals during the first month after launch and more than 60 referrals during their first quarter. Partners' commitment to collaborating with each other is clear in the immediate post-launch period. On average, referrals made during the first quarter are acted on in fewer than four days.

Our approach to implementation meets partners where they are, to help them get where they want to be. The space we create for communities to wrestle with complex challenges, develop partnerships, and align under a shared vision and approach translates into healthy referral networks—and immediate and sustained benefits for individuals and families.