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Implementation Specialist Position Description and Interview Protocol

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The Implementation Specialist position is key to accomplishing intervention and improvement goals in any organization, system, or community. Implementation Teams have members who are Implementation Specialists and those Teams have a key role in organization and systemic change and scaling to achieve socially significant outcomes. Recruiting, interviewing, and hiring Implementation Specialists are important activities.

General human resources staff can do advertising and can screen applicants for basic qualifications. Advertising for new people to be hired as Implementation Specialists can include information on the training and coaching support and opportunities to learn innovative implementation, improvement, and scaling practices. *Appendix A* provides an example position description. Based on interviews with Implementation Specialists who met fidelity criteria, statements in the recruiting ad about support and learning were attractive and led them to apply. Advertising for people already employed in an organization might take the form of an email alerting staff about the intended use of implementation practice and science to support the use of innovations and the name of a person to contact if anyone is interested.

The following example of a best practices interview process is conducted by those who have a stake in hiring the Implementation Specialist; that is, those who will “live with” the decision to hire. Typically, interviewers include current Implementation Team members who know implementation practice and science well and have a “feel for” successful (and not successful) Implementation Specialists, a manager or director responsible for implementation and improvement activities, and a member of the executive management team. A best practices interview process is described in *Appendix B* and includes:

- Initial phone call: 10 minutes to describe the position, the use implementation practice and science, and supports for using implementation practices as intended; 40 minutes asking the applicant about relevant experience, asking for self-ratings on verbal and written communication experience and abilities, and asking the applicant to respond to simple scenarios that provide examples of the kinds of work to be done using the innovation; 10 minutes asking the applicant questions about her resume or other application materials related to experience and qualifications, and answering any questions the applicant may have.

- Look for candidates who are engaging and enthusiastic; who ask questions related to implementation practice and science and not just the position (salary, benefits); who exhibit knowledge, skills, and abilities that are a good fit with the mission and values of the organization.
- Invite a promising applicant for an in-person interview.
- In person interview – Part 1: 10 minutes for discussion to answer any questions the applicant has about the position, the work to be done, and the supports provided to do the work with fidelity; 20 minutes asking the applicant to respond to more complex scenarios taken from the experience of Implementation Specialists. The interview is conducted in a conversational and friendly way with some humor and banter to help the applicant relax and display her best behavior.
 - Look for candidates who are engaging and enthusiastic; who exhibit knowledge, skills, and abilities that are a good fit with the organization; and who provide reasonable responses to the scenarios. The scenarios elicit hints about an applicant’s personal philosophy and values that can be explored further with a few observations and questions.
 - For many candidates, this is the end of the interview process. They have not met the standards of the interview team. Let the candidate know when a decision will be made and how they will be contacted.
 - For candidates who still look like potentially good hires, take a quick break then begin Part 2.
- In person interview – Part 2: 40 minutes to conduct two role plays. For each one, the lead interviewer (role play leader) presents a situation (complicated, but not too difficult) and asks the applicant to put her/himself in the role of the practitioner. The second interviewer (confederate) plays the role of the intended recipient of the innovation services (child, parent, patient, community member). The role play is scripted so the confederate knows what to say and not say as the applicant engages the “recipient.” At the end of role play #1, the lead interviewer provides descriptive praise for two or three aspects on the applicant’s behavior and provides constructive criticism of one thing the applicant did or omitted. After assuring understanding of the appropriate alternative behavior, the lead interviewer re-starts the role play at a point where the applicant has an opportunity to engage in the new behavior with the “recipient.” Then do role play #2 and repeat the process. 20 minutes for questions and next steps.
 - The detailed role plays are described in the Staff Selection paper at www.activeimplementation.org.

Appendix A: Implementation Specialist Position Description

NOTE: This document has been developed to advertise and recruit Implementation Specialists who provide training, coaching, and performance (fidelity) assessments and regularly interact with others to promote and manage change so that effective innovations and their outcomes are supported. For detailed information, refer to:

Van Dyke, M. (2015). Active implementation practitioner: Practice profile. Retrieved from Chapel Hill, NC: Active Implementation Research Network:
<https://www.activeimplementation.org/resources/active-implementation-practitioner-practice-profile/>

Roles and Functions of Implementation Specialists

Implementation Specialists know and apply the science and best practices of implementation. Implementation Specialists have the skills to build the capacity of others to effectively use the science and practice of implementation. By investing in the development of implementation capacity in others, organizations, communities, and systems become equipped to successfully lead and sustain their change efforts, continue to improve their systems, and generalize the learning to future change efforts. To achieve this outcome, Implementation Specialists are competent in four domains and ten competencies:

- ❖ Engagement and Collaboration
 - Relationship Development
 - Leadership Engagement and Guidance
- ❖ Building Effective Teams
 - Team Development
 - Team-Based Project Management
- ❖ Facilitating Change
 - Implementation Instruction
 - Implementation Facilitation
 - Intervention Operationalization
 - Coaching
- ❖ Diagnosis and Analysis
 - Strategic Analysis to Support Change
 - Data-Informed Decision Making

Given these critical functions, Implementation Specialists work collaboratively at all levels of organizations and systems.

Implementation Specialists in these dedicated leadership positions have roles and responsibilities related to:

- Acquiring comprehensive knowledge, skills, and abilities related to the science and practice of implementation
- Communication linkages with other Implementation Specialists and organization/system staff
- Developing and operationalizing Implementation Teams
- Serving in a leadership capacity as the Practice to Policy liaison with the Executive Management Group
- Developing and leading internal change groups
- Participation in the Global Implementation Society in order to learn from and contribute to implementation and scaling technology and knowledge generally

Why Are Implementation Specialists Important to Implementation and Scaling Up?

Implementation Specialists help to ensure the organization has the internal capacity to regenerate the skills and abilities needed for sustainable implementation and scale-up supports for effective innovations.

How Will Implementation Specialists Be Selected?

Nominees are interviewed by implementation experts in the organization with final selection as a mutual decision between the candidate and Selection Committee. Both parties need to be confident in and committed to conducting the work that is described and producing the intended outcomes.

How Will Implementation Specialists Develop Needed Skills?

Implementation Specialists are the recipients of training and coaching as they are generating relevant materials, processes, and evaluation protocols for the implementation and scale-up efforts.

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Implementation Specialist Positions

POSITION

NAME OF APPLICANT

LEAD INTERVIEWER

INTERVIEWER #2

INTERVIEWER #3 _____

DATE

Overall Application Process

All Reviewers should review the applicant CV and other materials before the call. Look for basic qualifications and experience specifically related to implementation practice and science. Also look for specific experience in a content area if that also is a consideration (e.g. education, child welfare, global health). Our primary consideration relates to the applicant's experience with implementation science and best practices and with service and systems change in the real world.

Interview Process

Part 1: Telephone Interview

1. The Lead Interviewer explains the overall organization and the specific unit/project in which the work will be done. Let the person know that the interview will take less than one hour.
2. Lead Interviewer explains the position and asks questions to gain a deeper understanding of the person's qualifications.
3. The questions are designed to meet the applicant, get first impressions, obtain a self assessment, and rate responses to vignettes per the form.
4. In addition, listen for enthusiasm, self assurance, ease of talking, and other attributes related to working well with others in change agent roles.
5. Also get a sense of the person's experience using implementation science and leading change or improvement initiatives.
6. The Lead Interviewer asks the questions unless the team decides otherwise. The Lead Interviewer pauses at the end of each section to ask the other Interviewers if there is anything they want to ask or add. Be conscious of the time.
7. It is helpful to have an Interview Rating Sheet that asks you to rate and summarize 7 areas following the interview and turn them into the lead interviewer. Please note that these become part of the permanent file so professional language and rationales are important, as always.

At the end of the telephone interview, the Lead Interviewer should thank the person and offer to follow up should the applicant have additional questions about the position. There is no need to discuss next steps other than to say that the Selection team will review all the information and make a decision soon.

Part 2: Scenario Interview

Part 2 of the process is used for those who look like good candidates at the end of Part 1. Part 2 consists of an in-person presentation by the applicant and in-depth explorations of the applicant's experience and knowledge of implementation, organization change, and system transformation.

1. [After a brief introduction of all present.] Do you have any questions about the organization or what the position generally entails?
2. Briefly describe some recent experiences you have had with implementation of evidence-based programs or other innovations in human services. [Pause for answer.] Please highlight what you learned about implementation from the work.
3. Briefly describe your experiences in guiding and supporting large scale service or systems change? Highlight what you have learned from your work.

4. Describe any implementation research or implementation informed evaluation work you have done? (ask follow-up questions related to design, measurement, analyses.) What is most challenging about this work? What have you learned?

Self-Assessment of Skills and Abilities

Rate yourself on your ability 1= Very Little, 10= Very High. Explain in one sentence. Don't be shy! Make this fun.

[] Writing Skills _____

[] Public Speaking _____

[] Work Under Pressure/Meet Deadlines _____

[] Give and Accept Constructive Feedback _____

[] Ability to Think and Write Conceptually _____

[] Command of Research related to implementation science _____

[] Knowledge of and ability to use implementation frameworks and tools as TA strategies _____

[] Experience building teams and facilitating relationships of the team members to accomplish goals _____

Situational Opinions

Implementation work requires us to interact with a variety of agencies and organizations:

1. What would be your approach to gaining cooperation from agency directors, department leaders, and others who often are frustrated with lack of progress and are reluctant to invest time and energy in implementation work?

2. It is common for Implementation Specialists to work evenings and weekends in order to schedule visits at times that are convenient for partners and those we serve.

Are you able to fulfill this requirement of the position?

3. Implementation Specialists work with a wide variety of people from different ethnic groups, racial backgrounds, and cultures for around the world. Describe your experiences working with diverse colleagues and diverse cultures.

Verbal Vignettes (ask one or two)

How would you handle this situation as an Implementation Specialist?

1. The director of the implementation unit in the district education office just announced that they have decided to invest \$3 million in a series of training meetings for (name practitioners related to the position). He then turns to you and says, “Isn’t that wonderful news?” How would you respond?

2. What do you think are some of the biggest challenges related to successful implementation and scale-up of evidence-based and evidence-informed practices and programs? (Let them answer). Given those challenges, what do you think NIRN’s role might be addressing them?

3. What areas would be professional ‘growth’ areas for you to develop in this position? What else do we need to know about you as we make our decisions about this position?

5. Other:

What is your current salary? What are your salary expectations?

Would you be willing to relocate (if necessary)?

The organization carries out routine degree and criminal background checks. Would you be willing to participate in these checks?

Part 3: Role Play Interview

For the 2 or 3 (out of 10) candidates who still look like potential good hires, invite the candidate to participate in the next part of the interview process. This is the role play part of the interview.

The role plays are the most telling aspect of the interview process. Perhaps 1 or 2 candidates excel in the role play scenes and are hired, and there always seem to be one or two surprises in each group of candidates – apparent stars who fade quickly during the role plays. Even after candidates are informed that they are not hired, they often thank the interviewers for providing a very interesting experience.