

# Youth Excel's Implementation Research Approach for Youth-led and Youth-serving Organizations

## Youth Excel Goals

Youth Excel is a 5-year, USAID-funded global activity that supports cross-sectoral, positive youth development programs. One of Youth Excel's central goals is to strengthen the capacities of youth-led and youth-serving organizations to use implementation research to strengthen their work while influencing positive youth development decision-makers.

## Co-creating an Implementation Research Approach and Toolkit

Through a human-centered design process with several local, youth-led, and global development organizations, the Youth Excel consortium defined implementation research for youth organizations and produced a youth-inclusive implementation research toolkit that offers a step-by-step process to planning and carrying out research and using findings for concrete action. The Research-to-Change<sup>1</sup> Toolkit is a public good that can be used by leaders at youth-led and youth-serving organizations working across sectors, and by adult allies who want to find more inclusive ways to co-create with youth.

## Defining Implementation Research for Youth Excel

There are many conceptual frameworks for defining and actualizing implementation research. However, all point to a central purpose of using data to understand how and why programs work within real-world conditions. Scholars have advocated for practicing flexibility in the utilization and application of theories for implementation research in ways that make them most useful.<sup>2</sup> In addition to theoretical flexibility, scholars have proposed a multitude of methodologies that can be used to advance implementation research, such as mixed methods, quality improvement studies, and participatory action research.<sup>3</sup>

The Youth Excel consortium identified four core tenets to guide Youth Excel's implementation research:

- 1 Implementation research **champions the leadership of implementers in research for real-time use.**
- 2 Implementation research **is participatory, iterative, and inclusive.**
- 3 Implementation research **explores how and why programs work under real-world conditions.**
- 4 Implementation research **helps organizations gather data and take what they learn to improve what they do, in real-time.**



1. Research-to-Change is Youth Excel's rebrand of implementation research.  
 2. Damschroder, L. J. (2020). Clarity out of chaos: use of theory in implementation research. *Psychiatry research*, 283, 112461.  
 3. Peters, D. H., Adam, T., Alonge, O., Agyepong, I. A., & Tran, N. (2013). Implementation research: what it is and how to do it. *Bmj*, 347.

# What can users learn through Implementation Research?

Adapted from an existing conceptualization of implementation research outcomes, Youth Excel outlines nine domains of inquiry: feasibility, stakeholder relevance, participant relevance, adoption, fidelity, reach, effectiveness, implementation cost, and sustainability<sup>4</sup>. As there are other existing evaluative frameworks for implementation research<sup>5,6</sup>, Youth Excel also leaves room for toolkit users to frame their own domains of inquiry through the learning goals they set for their work. See *list of implementation research domains, their definitions, and sample Youth Excel participant implementation research learning goals below*.

## Implementation Research Domains



### Feasibility:

The extent to which a program is practical to implement in a particular setting.



### Stakeholder relevance:

The extent to which implementation stakeholders (e.g. people who may influence and be affected by your program) feel the program meets their needs and priorities.



### Participant relevance:

The extent to which potential or actual program participants feel that a program and its goals address problems that relate to their lives.



### Adoption:

The willingness or decision of implementation stakeholders to initiate a new program and the reasons for their decision.



### Fidelity:

The extent to which a program was implemented as it was originally planned.



### Reach:

The extent to which the people that are eligible to benefit from a program actually receive it and the equity of this benefit across social groups.



### Effectiveness:

The extent to which a program has reached its goals.



### Implementation cost:

The extent to which the financial cost of delivering the program varies across contexts.



### Sustainability:

The extent and length of time to which a program is maintained after your organization has finished implementing.



### Other:

Explore other questions or topics that you feel would strengthen your work.

4. Proctor, E., Silmere, H., Raghavan, R., Hovmand, P., Aarons, G., Bunger, A., ... & Hensley, M. (2011). Outcomes for implementation research: conceptual distinctions, measurement challenges, and research agenda. *Administration and policy in mental health and mental health services research*, 38(2), 65-76.  
5. Damschroder, L. J., Aron, D. C., Keith, R. E., Kirsh, S. R., Alexander, J. A., & Lowery, J. C. (2009). Fostering implementation of health services research findings into practice: a consolidated framework for advancing implementation science. *Implementation science*, 4(1), 1-15.  
6. Glasgow, R. E., Vogt, T. M., & Boles, S. M. (1999). Evaluating the public health impact of health promotion interventions: the RE-AIM framework. *American journal of public health*, 89(9), 1322-1327.

## Learning Goals Reflect Youth Decision Making Priorities



We need to know if the skills we are providing are necessary for the job market so that we can strengthen the effectiveness of our program.

-Dala Spaces, Kenya



We need to know the structural barriers to disability inclusion in workplaces so that we can engage relevant stakeholders to enhance inclusion in the workplace.

-Tinada Youth Organization, Kenya



We need to know the internet access of potential participants so that we can provide resources to overcome barriers to online engagement.

-The Biz Nation, Dominican Republic



We need to know how gender stereotypes influence girls, adolescents, and young people so that we can develop a greater sense of inclusion, resilience, and empowerment in the artistic discipline of Hip-Hop rap.

-Warriors Zulu Nation, Honduras



We need to know whether school administrators and students see this comic book strategy as relevant for education around menstrual health and hygiene so that we can modify our strategy to better meet their needs.

-Afrika Youth Movement and Vision in Action Cameroon, Cameroon

## How have young leaders used Implementation Research?

Young leaders across Youth Excel have developed and executed implementation research protocols to strengthen their work across multiple sectors. Below is a summary of how our partners Afrika Youth Movement and Vision in Action Cameroon established and accomplished a learning goal for strengthened programs.

**Learning Goal:** We need to know whether school administrators and students see our comic book strategy as relevant for education around menstrual health and hygiene so that we can modify our strategy to better meet their needs.



### Data collected through:

- Key informant interviews with school administrators.
- Surveys with students.



### Key Findings:

- Several school administrators recommended that the comic books would be more effective if paired with peer-to-peer learning.
- 80% of students felt that comic books would be a relevant method for communicating educational material.
- 62% of students read comic books.



### Data-informed decisions:

- Used comic book strategy as majority of students and administrators saw this as relevant.
- Complemented comic books with school champion approach and peer-to-peer education to engage those who do not currently read comic books.



## Call to Action:

Check out and use Youth Excel's Research-to-Change Toolkit! This toolkit was designed for leaders at youth-led and youth-serving organizations but can be used by leaders at any organization who are looking for new ways to better understand and strengthen their work. Implementation research can strengthen programming while advancing the localization and ownership of research and implementation<sup>7</sup>.

**Connect with Youth Excel!** Share any questions, reflections, or ideas you may have about youth-led implementation research.

Contact information:

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**Connect with Youth Excel partners leading with implementation research!** Engage and learn more about how these partners used implementation research.

Afrika Youth Movement: [info@afrikayouthmovement.org](mailto:info@afrikayouthmovement.org)

The Biz Nation: [info@thebiznation.com](mailto:info@thebiznation.com)

Tech Tribes: [info@techtribes.org](mailto:info@techtribes.org)

Vision in Action Cameroon: [info@viacame.org](mailto:info@viacame.org)



"One of the most beautiful aspects that I have learned in Research-to-Change is being able to address research and project implementation based on previous research and solid data. This creates a more solid solution and enables me to have a more feasible solution to address problems."

- Yonathan Gomez, ASOCTURG Explorando el Valle, Guatemala (Translated from Spanish)

"It's been more enjoyable to work in the field of research [because] it makes us understand the demand needed rather than doing what we think is to be done."

- Doreen Onyuro, Arise and Shine, Kenya

"Research-to-Change has built my individual capacity in utilizing evidence-based research in making data informed decisions."

- Lucy Jobita, Youth Alive! Kenya

"The research process has contributed to us taking data-based actions that allow us to address specific issues in the organization's main areas of work. [This] is one of the main contributions that this process gave Visión Legislativa, and surely, Visión Legislativa will implement it in all its activities."

- Alby Aguilar, Visión Legislativa, Guatemala (Translated from Spanish)

"I learnt that research takes time but can yield good results if you are persistent and driven by change."

- Rosemary Achieng, WISE Hub, Kenya

7. USAID (2020). Implementation Research Overview (Working Document). <https://www.edu-links.org/resources/implementation-research-overview-working-document>