## Common Challenges to Implementation Support Practice

Despite the sturdy theoretical foundation, comprehensive practice model, interactive systems, broad collaboration, evidence-based practices, and numerous resources that make ICTP implementation support practice successful, challenges to the quality, consistency, and stability of ICTP implementation support practice are inevitable. It is only by outlining these challenges, and identifying strategies to address them, that they can be mitigated.

### Limited Case Examples & Professional Development Opportunities

Implementation support practice is dynamic in nature and requires ICTP ISPs to draw from experience and knowledge to adapt to diverse contexts and situations. Even the most skilled ISP can find delivering support in typically complex and varied practice environments to be challenging. Exposure to case examples illustrating ISPs working through practice dilemmas and related strategies is therefore helpful to both the novice and experienced ICTP ISP. However, because the field of implementation practice is still very young, access to professional development offerings—particularly those involving case examples of implementation support practice—is limited. Therefore, increasing the availability of professional development opportunities can be an especially important contribution to both the ICTP projects and the broader field.

Without access to external professional development and case examples, ISPs can feel directionless at times and find it difficult to know if they are engaging in implementation support practice as intended. When there are field examples to look at, it’s easier for ISPs to know if they are on the right path. We’re currently on the developing edge of the implementation science practice field. In a “pre-mortem” of implementation science, Beidas and colleagues [33] discussed the field-level threat of recreating the research to practice gap. The authors encouraged the integration of learning from implementation practice into implementation research as a strategy to support the field in its entirety. As professional development opportunities grow and case examples become more available, we expect the use of this strategy to expand considerably.

### Partners’ Lack of Readiness for Participation in ICTP Implementation Support

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Download Brief #6: ICTP Implementation Support Practice at the Regional Level, section [Determining Readiness](https://ictp.fpg.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/determiningreadiness.docx)(docx) for more information.

Implementation support may be only as effective as the willingness and ability of the individuals, teams, organizations, and systems participating in support to engage in related work. Factors such as deficient administrative or funding support, lack of engagement among leadership, staff turnover, organizational cultures that reinforce compliance rather than learning, and resistance to community partnerships or addressing historical and structural inequities can impede engagement. ICTP ISPs can influence readiness by building collaborative relationships, assessing context and using data, and co-designing with support participants and co-creation partners the goals on which to focus support.

In addition to these typical approaches to increase readiness, ICTP ISPs can offer alternative formats of support, such as universal or design and consultation supports. *Universal supports* include system-wide learning opportunities that are not tailored to a specific need or context. *Design and consultation supports* are brief, time-limited exchanges of information designed to be carried forward by the recipient of the consultation and not facilitated by the ISP. However, even with an intentional focus on these practice strategies, change efforts can be slow or stalled at times.

### Role Confusion in Statewide Triple P Systems

Role clarity is an important factor in any facet of implementation practice but is especially important when ISPs are collectively working across multiple levels of statewide Triple P systems. Being valued partners in statewide Triple P systems can strengthen ISPs’ influence as change agents. For example, in North Carolina ICTP activities, the ICTP project team’s dual roles—providing tailored implementation support at regional levels and providing design and consultation supports at state leadership levels—enables ICTP ISPs to facilitate information sharing across system levels. However, if role confusion exists, this process is hindered. For example, if regional Triple P partners experience ICTP ISPs as their main conduit for regional advocacy or problem solving on issues requiring state leadership, or vice versa, there can be an overreliance on ICTP ISPs.

Because ICTP ISPs work to build strong collaborative relationships with support participants at the levels of the system they support, this can create hardships on ICTP ISP teams or risk tension between ICTP ISPs working at different system levels. This is particularly true if ICTP ISPs begin to overidentify with their support participants rather than maintain a supportive stance toward the full statewide Triple P system.

SOCIAL COGNITIVE THEORY IN ACTION

Further details on social cognitive theory in action: human agency, is covered in this brief in section [Theoretical Underpinnings.](https://ictp.fpg.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/theoreticalunderpinnings.docx)

These challenges are best mitigated by clearly defining and operationalizing system actor roles and responsibilities. For example, early and often in the support engagement, ICTP ISPs benefit from reinforcing support participants’ own agency in identifying and addressing adaptive system issues with appropriate system partners at other system levels. Rather than being communication conduits themselves, ICTP ISPs reinforce existing relationships and communication channels within and across each system level.