Implementation Research in Randomized Controlled Trial Evaluations

SREE 2017 SHORT COURSE
Part 1: Overview
Overview

• Organization of Today’s Session
  • Part 1: Welcome, Background, Assumptions
  • Part 2: Understanding and Measuring Adaptation
  • Part 3: Understanding and Measuring Service Contrast
  • Part 4: Gaining Insight into Adaptation and Service Contrast through Operational Support & Technical Assistance Activities
  • Part 5: Tying it all Together

• Take-always
  • Definitions, constructs, frameworks, measurement tools, possibilities
  • Key questions to consider (not always answers!)

• Logistics
  • Format: Lecture, full-group discussions, small-group discussions
  • 10-15 minute break ~ 2:15pm
Welcome & Setting the Stage

• Introductions

• Implementation research (IR) is a necessary complement to impact evaluation

• IR informs why an intervention produces impacts (or why not), typically exploring
  • Context
  • Strength of treatment (description or model fidelity)
  • Treatment contrast
  • Cost
Findings from IR and RCTs inform program & policy decisions

• IR helps us interpret impact findings beyond an “up or down” decision: did it work?

• Whether to stop implementation
  • Of an existing program
  • Of particular program components

• Whether to adopt a new program
  • Expand to a different population (horizontal scaling)
  • Introduce in a new site (vertical scaling)
Types of programs/ interventions we’ll discuss today

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discrete program change</th>
<th>Enhancement or replacement of existing services</th>
<th>Multiple service components requiring coordination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓ BIAS</td>
<td>✓ RP</td>
<td>✓ ASAP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓ PACE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part 2: Fidelity & Adaptation
Components of fidelity

5 dimensions (*Dane and Schneider, 1998*)
- Adherence (are intervention components delivered as planned),
- Dosage (is the intervention offered at the quantity intended),
- Quality of service delivery,
- Differentiation (are the intervention’s distinguishing elements present as expected),
- *Engagement* (do participants take-up the intervention at expected levels).

**Critical components (various)**
- Structural/ procedural
- Instructional/ substantive
Considerations when measuring fidelity (1)

Some program implementers and evaluators assume program will be (or is) implemented as planned. So...

1) How specific is the program plan for each site? Not all plans are equal.
   ◦ Manualized, prescriptive programs specify service delivery
     ◦ PACE
   ◦ Flexible, principle-based programs may specify “what” but give sites discretion on “how, who or when”
     ◦ YouthBuild

2) Is the intervention new or replication/expansion of an existing intervention?
Considerations when measuring fidelity (2)

3) By type of intervention
   ◦ Discrete, operational change
   ◦ Program enhancement
   ◦ Multi-component

4) How similar is the context between sites?
   ◦ Same policy environment?
   ◦ Same organizational structure?
   ◦ Same resources (budget, staff)

These conditions may facilitate or undermine fidelity.

Reflection: What else can throw off fidelity?
Deviation from fidelity (1)

**Inconsistent fidelity (between site):** Variation between sites in:

- who is served,
- which/how many components are implemented, and
- how they are delivered.

May be a function of the site context.
Variation in site-level fidelity scores

Reading Partners:

Study schools

Fidelity score

Regular 1:1 tutoring
Space and materials
Data-driven instruction
Training
Supervision and support

(maximum score = 3)
(maximum score = 5)
(maximum score = 5)
(maximum score = 5)
(maximum score = 7)
Deviation from fidelity (2)

Adaptation (within site): Intentional choices about variations, subtractions or supplements to a program and/or implementation plan.

• **Planned** (before implementation begins):
  • Take the specified program and actively decide to change program components or their service delivery. Or take a flexible program and introduce specifics.
  • Usually occurs with agreement from the program developer.

• **Unplanned** (after implementation starts):
  • Respond to implementation challenges by not implementing certain components or changing service delivery.
  • Usually occurs with less consultation/approval from the program developer.

May be a function of the program plan and discretion. Therefore, adaptation does not necessarily mean non-compliance.
Reflection

Think back to the MDRC evaluations.

• How, when or where would you expect adaptation to manifest in these cases?

• Were there signs of inconsistent fidelity between sites?
What would adaptations mean for your study’s…

• Logic Model
• Required operational support
• Measurement tools
• Impacts
  • Analysis Plan
  • Internal Validity
Logic model

ADD ROWS TO YOUR LOGIC MODEL TO COMPARE INTENDED PLAN TO ACTUAL IMPLEMENTATION
Recruit and train caring adult volunteers to work with students needing reading support

Provide structured, curriculum-based reading support, with an individualized reading plan

Align RP curriculum with local curriculum and learning standards

Administer assessments and analyze state-sanctioned standardized tests to benchmark and track student progress

Work closely with classroom teachers to develop and modify each student’s reading plan

Provide ongoing training and support to RP staff and volunteers

Recruit students in need of intensive intervention in reading

Conduct twice weekly tutoring sessions to provide opportunities for literacy instruction and development of reading skills

Use a one-on-one tutoring model to help students build close relationships with caring adults

Students gain literacy skills and improve their reading abilities

Students are better prepared to learn and demonstrate better academic behavior in the classroom.

Students gain self-confidence and develop a positive outlook on school.

Students make academic progress in other subject areas (e.g., math, science)

Students demonstrate better long-term outcomes than their non-RP peers on both academic and social indicators (e.g., lower rates of school dropout, teen pregnancy, and juvenile delinquency; higher rates of on-time grade promotion, high school graduation)
**Who modifies**
- Researcher
- Developer
- Service provider
- Other stakeholders (e.g., policymakers)

**For whom is the modification**
- Recipient
- Frontline staff
- Administrators
- Site
- System

**Who delivers change**
- Service provider (frontline staff/ administrator/ site)
- System director (e.g., change in eligibility)

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**Reading Partners Logic Model**

**Inputs**
- Recruit and train caring adult volunteers to work with students needing reading support
- Provide structured, curriculum-based reading support, with an individualized reading plan
- Align RP curriculum with local curriculum and learning standards
- Administer assessments and analyze state-sanctioned standardized tests to benchmark and track student progress
- Work closely with classroom teachers to develop and modify each student's reading plan
- Provide ongoing training and support to RP staff and volunteers

**Activities**
- Recruit students in need of intensive intervention in reading
- Conduct twice weekly tutoring sessions to provide opportunities for literacy instruction and development of reading skills
- Use a one-on-one tutoring model to help students build close relationships with caring adults

**Proximal Outcomes**
- Students gain literacy skills and improve their reading abilities
- Students are better prepared to learn and demonstrate better academic behavior in the classroom.
- Students gain self-confidence and develop a positive outlook on school.
- Students make academic progress in other subject areas (e.g., math, science)
- Students demonstrate better long-term outcomes than their non-RP peers on both academic and social indicators (e.g., lower rates of school dropout, teen pregnancy, and juvenile delinquency; higher rates of on-time grade promotion, high school graduation)
**INPUTS**

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- Provide ongoing training and support to RP staff and volunteers

**Modify inputs**
- Format, delivery mode
- Staff
- Training
- Target population

**Modify content**
- Remove or add components
- Alter component focus

**Adapt to context**
- Change intended setting
- Align to policy or budget rather than implementation plan

**PROXIMAL OUTCOMES**

- Students gain literacy skills and improve their reading abilities
- Students are better prepared to learn and demonstrate better academic behavior in the classroom.
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**Reading Partners Logic Model**

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**ACTIVITIES**
- Recruit students in need of intensive intervention in reading
- Conduct twice weekly tutoring sessions to provide opportunities for literacy instruction and development of reading skills
- Use a one-on-one tutoring model to help students build close relationships with caring adults

**Modify activities**
- Looser or tighter structure/prescription
- Different order/sequence
- Different location
- Different pacing/timing (shorten or extend certain components)
- Different degree of tailoring/personalizing
- Selecting only some components to implement
- Adding evaluation intervention to another intervention

**PROXIMAL OUTCOMES**
- Students gain literacy skills and improve their reading abilities
- Students are better prepared to learn and demonstrate better academic behavior in the classroom.
- Students gain self-confidence and develop a positive outlook on school.
- Students make academic progress in other subject areas (e.g., math, science)
- Students demonstrate better long-term outcomes than their non-RP peers on both academic and social indicators (e.g., lower rates of school dropout, teen pregnancy, and juvenile delinquency; higher rates of on-time grade promotion, high school graduation)
Test drive

Take the logic model for PACE and identify where adaptations may have occurred
Measurement tool

ADD COLUMNS TO YOUR FIDELITY TOOL TO DOCUMENT AND SCORE CHANGES
## Adaptation Traction Tool

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Description1</th>
<th>Measure1</th>
<th>Description2</th>
<th>Measure2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A</strong></td>
<td>Part of original implementation plan?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>% trained volunteers</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B</strong></td>
<td>Necessary component? (1=yes, 0=no)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C</strong></td>
<td>Type of adaptation</td>
<td>Modified who delivers the intervention</td>
<td>Change in who tutors</td>
<td>Held team meetings without director, to encourage staff buy-in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>D</strong></td>
<td>Adaptation score (z=undesirable, k=desirable)</td>
<td>Undesirable because it changes adherence</td>
<td>[z, k]</td>
<td>Desirable because it changes quality and adherence, addresses buy-in</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Score (B*D)
Consider information from your fidelity tool and adaptation traction tool, and see where your study sits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adaptation to the initial program</th>
<th>Fidelity of Implementation to the designed/initial program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>Low: Poor specification of practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planned</td>
<td>Low: Changes to entire intervention component to improve fit, but necessary and unique elements are insufficiently implemented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unplanned (not sanctioned by developer)</td>
<td>Low: Several necessary and unique elements are not in place; Implementation plan using prohibited approaches</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Test drive

• Complete an adaptation traction tool for PACE.
• For example, focus on measuring adaptation for components related to:
  • Academic instruction
  • Parental engagement
Impact and internal validity
Implications of interaction between fidelity and adaptation for program impacts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adaptation to the initial program</th>
<th>Fidelity of Implementation to the designed/initial program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Low</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>Poor implementation: impact diluted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planned</td>
<td>Not a fair test of the program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unplanned (not sanctioned by the intervention developer)</td>
<td>Program “drift” away from original model: not a fair test of the program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>High</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May observe an impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adaptation may enhance impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adaptation may dilute impact</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Questions to consider:

☐ Think about the timeline of your RCT. At what points are there risks or opportunities for adaptation?

*Implications for Sample:*
- Is it possible for service providers to adapt eligibility screening, thus changing who receives the intervention?

☐ Think about implementation of the program itself.

*Implications for Dosage:*
- Adaptations that change the *timing* or *intensity* of the intervention.
- Could these adaptations change the amount of the intervention that participants receive?

*Could these adaptations change the program model?*
Part 3: Service contrast
The construct of “service contrast”

**Standard definition**

- *Difference* between program services received by the program group and relevant] program services received by the control group

\[ SC = PS_p - PS_c \]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WBB (2014) terms</th>
<th>D&amp;S (1998) terms</th>
<th>Question of interest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>Adherence</td>
<td>What svcs are provided?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantity</td>
<td>Dosage</td>
<td>How much of the svcs are provided?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>How well are the svcs provided?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conveyance</td>
<td>Adherence</td>
<td>How, when, and by whom are svcs provided?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Client Characteristics (e.g., level of risk, readiness)

Context (e.g., unemployment rate, neighborhood conditions)
The construct of “service contrast” (cont.)

Reflections:

◦ What is your usual starting point for thinking about service contrast?
  → SC ?
  → PSp ?
  → PSc ?

◦ Where does Business as Usual (BAU) fit?

◦ When you hear the term “program environment,” what do you think of?

◦ Do you tend to think of “service contrast” or “the service contrast”? 
Reading Partners:
Program group receives higher total reading time, and additional tutoring

Although 65% of students in the control group also received support services, program group received more tutoring time.
Understanding contrast: ASAP

Students' First-Year Experiences: Career Services

Three-Year Impacts Report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>Program Group</th>
<th>Control Group</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>P-Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ever met with career or employment services staff (%)</td>
<td>736</td>
<td>79.5</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>50.6 ***</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of times spoke with career or employment services staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First semester</td>
<td>719</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>3.8 ***</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second semester</td>
<td>721</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>3.5 ***</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey sample size</td>
<td>742</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>358</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from the MDRC student survey.
**Table 3.1**

Key Differences Between ASAP and Usual College Services

Three-Year Impacts Report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASAP</th>
<th>Usual College Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Requirements and Messages**

- **Full-time enrollment**: Required
- **Taking developmental courses early**: Encouraged consistently and strongly
- **Graduating within three years**: Encouraged consistently and strongly

- **Full-time enrollment**: Not required
- **Taking developmental courses early**: Encouraged often but not strongly
- **Graduating within three years**: Not typically encouraged

**Student Services**

- **Advising**: Student-to-adviser ratio between 60:1 and 80:1; 95 percent of students met with an adviser during first year and students met with an adviser an average of 38 times in that period
- **Career Services**: 80 percent of students met with career and employment services staff during first year and students met with such staff an average of 9 times in that period
- **Tutoring**: 74 percent of students received tutoring outside of class during first year and students met with a tutor an average of 24 times in that period

- **Advising**: Student-to-adviser ratio between 600:1 and 1,500:1; 80 percent of students met with an adviser during first year and students met with an adviser an average of 6 times in that period
- **Career Services**: 29 percent of students met with career and employment services staff during first year and students met with such staff an average of 2 times in that period
- **Tutoring**: 39 percent of students received tutoring outside of class during first year and students met with a tutor an average of 7 times in that period

**Course Enrollment**

- **Blocked or linked courses**: Available for first year; few students took complete block of courses, but most students took at least 1 class with a concentration of ASAP students
- **ASAP seminar**: Most students took an ASAP seminar for 3 semesters

- **Blocked or linked courses**: Available at 2 colleges during first semester; participation in blocked or linked courses unknown
- **Support seminars**: Some students took a freshmen seminar or student success course during first year

**Financial Supports**

- **Tuition waiver**: 3-11 percent of students received waiver, depending on semester
- **Free MetroCards**: Most students received free MetroCards for use on public transportation, contingent on participation in the program
- **Free use of textbooks**: Most or all students

- **Tuition waiver**: Not available
- **Free MetroCards**: Not available
- **Free use of textbooks**: Not available
# Service Contrast Traction Tool

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program or Service</th>
<th>Aspect or Component</th>
<th>PROGRAM GROUP</th>
<th>CONTROL GROUP</th>
<th>SERVICE CONTRAST (DIFFERENCE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Planned Services</td>
<td>Available Services</td>
<td>Planned / Available Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Received Services</td>
<td>Received Services</td>
<td>Received Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Aspect 1

Aspect 2

Aspect 3

etc.
## Service Contrast Traction Tool

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program or Service Aspect or Component</th>
<th>PROGRAM GROUP</th>
<th>CONTROL GROUP</th>
<th>SERVICE CONTRAST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planned Services</td>
<td>Planned Services</td>
<td>Available Services</td>
<td>Planned / Available Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received Services</td>
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<td>Received Services</td>
<td>Received Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure</td>
<td>Measure</td>
<td>Measure</td>
<td>Measure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Aspect 1

Aspect 2

Aspect 3

etc.
Getting traction on service contrast through the study’s…

- Logic model
- Measurement
Logic model

USE A LOGIC MODEL TO GAIN TRACTION ON SERVICE CONTRAST
How a logic model can help gain traction on understanding service contrast

• Provides comprehensive listing of core program components

• Shows hypothesized linkages between program components, proximal outcomes, and distal outcomes
  • Are particular outcomes likely to be activated by particular service components?
  • What are implications of strong or weak service contrast (in theory or as measured) for chances of seeing program impacts in those outcomes?

• Other…?
Low-income students at BMCC, KCC, & LGCC in certain majors, in need of 1 or 2 developmental courses, willing to attend college full-time
Test drive

Try out the Service Contrast Traction Tool for PACE
Measurement
Low-income students at BMCC, KCC, & LGCC in certain majors, in need of 1 or 2 developmental courses, willing to attend college full-time
How measurement can help gain traction on understanding service contrast

• Remember distinction between program components *in theory, in practice, as measured*

**Reflection**

☞ Is there a standard measure of service contrast or program services you typically use or see in studies?

☞ How are treatment fidelity measures used to understand service contrast?

☞ Do aspects of the “program environment” (organization, local, regional, state) affect service contrast?

☞ Even if no, how could understanding them be relevant for the implementing the intervention in other settings?
Test drive

Try out mapping measures for PACE.
Part 4: Operational Support & TA
What is Operational Support or Technical Assistance?

• Staff whose role is to work with program sites to develop and implement demonstrations and other evaluations.

• Likely separate from research staff

• Gain deep knowledge of program roll-out, bottlenecks, leadership and management strengths and challenges, and contexts.

• At MDRC, operations teams serve as a bridge between the program managers and the research team in interpreting these data and deciding where technical assistance may be warranted to improve the strength of the treatment
How operational support can help gain traction on understanding adaptation and service contrast

• With appropriate protections in place, program administrative monitoring data can provide insight into both service availability & take-up
  ◦ Differential availability of data for program and control group?
  ◦ Differential availability of services for program and control group?

• Can help identify adaptations and emerging changes in program services as well as program environment
  • How can operational/technical assistance data document planned adaptations or unplanned adaptations?

• Tools such as process maps (with step-by-step sequences), can help illuminate possible experiences of both program group and treatment group
Operations Traction Tool: Process Map
Example from a Child Support Intervention

Franklin County – Administrative Adjustment Review (AAR) – Page 2 of 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Client</th>
<th>Support Officers</th>
<th>Mod Squad</th>
<th>Clerical staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Generate and mail County AAR packet and affidavits (AO JFS07606) *county packet informs client to ignore state packet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Update SETS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Program group only</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Send reminders, engage parents, etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mail dismissal letter (JFS01868)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Review mod packet and affidavits; Qualify for mod? (test 5 day rule)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Complete AAR recommendation and data entry, drops in QAD folder for review</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Client receives, reads, and understands mod packet and affidavits.
Requesting party responds within (45 day) time frame?

Yes

No

Yes

MAIL DISMISSAL LETTER (JFS01868)

No

Review mod packet and affidavits; Qualify for mod? (test 5 day rule)

Yes

Complete AAR recommendation and data entry, drops in QAD folder for review

No

Control group only

Program Group: Generate and mail redesigned affidavit packet

Send reminders, engage parents, etc.

Complete AAR recommendation and data entry, drops in QAD folder for review

Control group only

Check random assignment status in new MIS (or randomly assign if no status); suppress state packets for program group; and pass controls to SOs

Update SETS
Process maps can help you describe the service contrast to both operations/technical assistance staff and evaluation staff.

→ How could evaluation staff use this before a site visit?
Part 5: Tying it all together
A Conceptual Framework for Studying Variation in Program Effects, Treatment Contrasts, and Implementation

Weiss, Bloom, and Brock, 2014 JPAM
Reflections

- What’s the minimum/essential amount of the intervention that needs to be implemented?
  - What would represent insufficient implementation for a fair test?
- What is most contrast I could expect to see?
  - What would represent insufficient contrast between program and usual services? Can you define that threshold?
  - On how many components of the services is a contrast likely?
  - Risky to rely on the combination itself to bring about impacts
- Is fade-out possible? When are we likely to see:
  - Fading of fidelity of implementation
  - Introduction of adaptations
  - Catch-up of control group
Findings from IR and RCTs inform program & policy decisions

• IR helps us interpret impact findings beyond an “up or down” decision on impacts without context.

• Comprehensive approach to IR involves:
  • Advance planning and anticipation of different scenarios
  • Analytic thinking and use of frameworks
  • Careful alignment between key constructs and measures
  • Both quantitative and qualitative methods

• IR helps us learn regardless of whether we have:
  • Null impacts, positive impacts, negative impacts
  • Implementation as planned or with deviations
Contact information

• Suggested citation for this presentation/workshop:
  

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• Carolyn Hill, Senior Fellow, MDRC  carolyn.hill@mdrc.org

• MDRC’s Implementation Research Incubator  www.mdrc.org/iri