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About This Guide

This Implementation Handbook was designed to assist program managers in adapting the Group Learning and Counseling model for their own organization or program. Group Learning and Counseling is an evidence-based model that utilizes non-health youth volunteers to spread Fertility Awareness (FA) within their communities, deliver Fertility Awareness Methods (FAM) directly to couples with limited access to family planning (FP) services, and support linkages to health workers through referrals for other FP options. This approach fosters male involvement in FP decision making and facilitates healthy communication in communities as it diversifies the approaches working toward the FP2020 goal of reaching 120 million additional women and girls with FP by the year 2020.

The guidelines in this handbook should assist program managers in determining the appropriateness of this model in consideration of their organization or program specific needs. Program managers should also use the guidelines within this handbook to identify the components of the model they plan to adapt. As a whole, this handbook provides a detailed framework for integration so that program managers may begin to plan for implementation of the model.

This handbook includes background information on why and how the model was developed and tested. It also includes details on both the Community Learning and Group Counseling components of the model, and key questions and actions that programs should consider and to guide the planning and implementation phases. The guidelines included here are based on the programmatic experience of the staff at the Georgetown Institute for Reproductive Health (IRH) and Save the Children who were involved in the development, implementation and testing of the model.

Readers should note that not all elements of this handbook may be relevant to their organization or program. We've included more detail than may be necessary for some experienced implementers. Program managers are encouraged to use these guidelines as a starting point, and select those elements that are most appropriate for their needs.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR ADAPTATION

Before adaptation can occur, program managers must first understand the political, social and cultural climate in and around the communities where they plan to implement the Group Learning and Counseling model. The "Visioning" section of this Handbook is designed to help determine the relevance and feasibility of adopting the model prior to considering its adaptation for integration. While it is anticipated that many program managers will have much experience working within their respective communities, it's important to recognize that some of the elements introduced in Group Learning and Counseling may require further thought and discussion. It may be the case that some of the steps outlined in this handbook will work well in some communities and not others. The "Getting Ready" section details the importance and

building relationships with local leaders and key stakeholders. Through discussions with these actors, program staff will be able to further elucidate community norms and values that may challenge specific components of the Group Learning and Counseling model.

Subsequently, the model must be adapted to reflect each context, specific capacities and constraints. Specific considerations are listed below (Local Factors Relevant to Adaptation) as those items that, on a local level, may be relevant to adaptation. In addition to these factors, there are those elements that are integral to the model's success (Essential Elements for Adaptation). These essential elements were identified during the Proof of Concept and Pilot implementation phases of the model, and should be incorporated into its adaptation.

LOCAL FACTORS RELEVANT TO ADAPTATION

- Political support at the local level is essential.
- Additional data may be needed on local barriers to implementation and acceptability of the model.
- The materials presented may need to be adapted in consideration of varying degrees of literacy/numeracy, preferences for oral versus visual methods, etc.
- A history of participation in the communities, existence of other groups, local decision making structures and processes should be taken into account when planning for adaptation.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR ADAPTATIONS

- Facilitators must work in male/female pairs to deliver sessions.
- Selection of facilitators is key to delivering effective sessions. Good training and supervision and mentorship of facilitators also are essential.
- Endorsement from local stakeholders promotes acceptance of the model within the community, and aids facilitators in mobilizing community members to attend sessions.
- Integration of the FAM Group Counseling component will require establishing or reinforcing linkages with the local health sector so that individuals not eligible for FAM are able to access other FP methods.