WEEK 11 – WRITING THE IMPLEMENTATION PLAN
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And effective implementation plan should first clearly articulate what success looks like. It should also be succinct and free of jargon. It should be based on sound program logic with inputs and outputs to expected outcomes and benefits. It should also outline the assumptions made about the links in the delivery chain and how the delivery chain and what happens in the chain will be evaluated. It should clearly outline time frames and project phases, and pay close attention to actions and events that are dependent with the other programs and measures or legislation and regulations.

It should also clearly articulate the decision pathways-- why this was chosen as opposed to another. It should also identify standards and quality controls for use during implementation. It should also explicitly identify and address the implementation challenges and how change will be managed. And finally, it should be precise about risks and identify the source, determine the occurrence, consider the consequences of such risks, and plan for mitigation strategies.

As with a policy brief or other working document, the introduction of an implementation plan should establish the context models and strategies that will be used, how outputs will be delivered, and how the outputs will achieve the stated goal of the policy objective. Not only should this be easily understandable to a wide range of stakeholders, it should be directed to the broadest grouping of stakeholders as the target audience.

Next, one should describe the benefits of the project policy or practice. Benefits should be specific, measurable, relevant to the objectives of the initiative, achievable within the time frame, and agreed upon by all implementing parties. As accurately as possible, describe the intended benefits and beneficiaries for each policy objective, describe the benefits that should occur from specific deliverables, and describe the benefits that will be realized, how they will be monitored, and how they will be delivered.

As soon as one writes this section, you should also begin to identify performance measures to assess the level of success in achieving these benefits. A deliverable is defined as a measurable, tangible, or verifiable output. In this section, you will explain which activities will be undertaken to deliver the project. You will also list and link each deliverable in the plan to specific project milestones. And finally, if you are in a partnership of working as a joint implementation across agencies, you will identify internal and external deliverables so everyone knows what is expected from all partners for the implementation.

Deliverables lead to the next part of the plan, the schedule. An implementation schedule is essential to make sure that the implementation can be benchmarked as to milestones identified in the deliverables section, as well as assigning responsibility and documenting any interdependencies among agencies, resources, project phases, or individuals.

Effective governance arrangements are critical to successful delivery. They should be one of the first considerations in planning for a new initiative. So what is governance? A governance structure is comprised of management groups and individuals who will lead, plan and manage implementation. The governance structure should include clearly defined responsibilities, lines of accountability, and reporting. It also establishes reporting relationships, decision-making responsibility, as well as consultation channels and avenues for collaboration.

Typical structures include a project manager overseeing any number of project teams, a steering committee, a project board, a senior responsible official, and/or an advisory committee comprised of stakeholder representatives. As with all projects, stakeholder engagement is essential. Engaged participants have a sense of ownership in having an essential role in the success of a project, however large or small that role may be.

Stakeholders can be individuals, groups, organizations, state and federal agencies, or any number of partnerships. Stakeholders can be engaged throughout the policy life cycle, including during the development of the policy as well as the implementation, delivery, and review stages.

The implementation plan should clearly map the key stakeholders and determine their skills and expertise. It should also map their interests and their ability to influence the project. A good plan will also gauge their capacity to engage with a project and project staff, and it will identify the level of involvement they will have. The level of involvement also plays into the assigning responsibility and accountability. And finally, this section of the plan will determine how stakeholder engagement activities will be monitored, reviewed, and evaluated.

A risk is an uncertain event or a set of events which, should they occur, will have an effect on the achievement of objectives. An effect may be positive, negative, or neutral. All projects have risks, whether it's external-- as in not finishing construction project on time due to extreme weather or to congressional sequesters, which affect funding and reimbursement. Risks can also emerge due to changing circumstances, new developments, or changes to the scope of the project.

Risk management is a necessary part of public policy and operational management. Risk happens or risk is managed. We obviously prefer the latter approach. Risk planning is about preventing risks that can be avoided and minimizing those that cannot be avoided. It provides a structure to identify, mitigate, accept, and assign responsibility to the risks that might affect successful implementation. Risk planning also helps with transparency.

This section of the plan depends upon the stakeholders engaged in the project, to identify risks specific to their areas of expertise. It also requires a review of current and past projects that are similar in scope to the one you're implementing. A tricky area to assess is to assess risks achieving policy outcomes. There is a general expectation that public service will systematically identify and manage risks. Consider the public and private sector distaste for surprises and implementing policy. Since they are concerned about language and publicity, systematic risk management allows for solutions or recommended courses of actions.

It also allows a review of statutory and regulatory language to see if there needs to be amendments or changes to existing laws and codes. The plan should also identify and list risks, record how each risk will be managed, who, what, when, where, and how. And finally, it should identify who is responsible for reviewing and updating the plan and schedule regular reviews.

Monitoring review and evaluation are meant to guide decision-making to improve the delivery of the policy initiative and to enhance accountability. This section ties back into the introduction where we state the objectives and outcomes of the implementation and identify what measures will be needed. And details evaluation methodology we will be using to inform decision-making, the information provided in the plan, as well as the information it collects, builds the evidence base that will inform the decision-makers.

Here's the caveat on monitoring review and evaluation-- which methods and data will produce the most robust and credible evidence base within given time frames and available resources? As we said in an earlier lecture, don't over promise, and don't underperform.

The resource management portion of the implementation plan should address financial resources, including budget and other tangible and intangible resources such as facilities, equipment technology, and human resources. It is very similar to creating a business plan where you address the costs and the benefits of what needs to be done to implement a policy, practice, or to change something successfully and effectively. Some of this can be drawn from other sections of the plan as background. However, resource management really addresses the overall strategic capability of the group to deliver the stated outcomes.

Management strategy also sets out key decision points in the process which will indicate whether the governance framework and reporting and monitoring arrangements will deliver these goals. In short, it allows you to see whether time frames and outcomes are achievable within the proposed financial human facility and technical resources.

It should be realistic. Again, don't underestimate or over promise. The decision-makers will be using your document and information to make choices about moving the project forward, selecting vendors, and addressing unexpected time or financial constraints. Really complex projects can be handled more effectively through project management software or by a dedicated project management office.