

Identifying Adaptations: A Tool for Prevention Providers

Purpose of the Document

This tool highlights step by step guidance for prevention providers to assess a program changes (adaptations) by utilizing the **Red/Yellow/Green** Light Model. When considering program adaptations, it is important to work with your Prevention Systems Manager and the connecting with the program developer/owner. Identifying a needed adaptation may not be a one-time event and can occur at multiple stages. This tool aims to support wherever a community is at in their delivery process by guiding their considerations on their needed adaptation and ensuring fidelity along the way.

Understanding Program Adaptations

Adaptation *means modifications made to a program's content, structure, training, and/or processes that are described in the program's manual or curriculum.* This can help address cultural relevance, logistical barriers, or other unique community needs by making the program more accessible and relevant. When implemented thoughtfully, adaptations ensure that the program remains effective while being responsive to the unique characteristics of the population it serves. Adaptations can also include cultural adaptations which require particular care and attention as guidance for making these changes can vary. We acknowledge that cultural adaptations should be approached thoughtful and specific consideration may differ depending on the context. To support this, we have referred to external resources at the end of this document for more detailed guidance. While identifying adaptations it is also important to remember fidelity along the way.

Fidelity *means specified program components are delivered as prescribed by the developer and/or owner of the program, ensuring key elements are implemented as intended, when the program was designed and/or evaluated.* Fidelity ensures that the program remains relevant and accessible while still preserving fidelity – the extent to which specified programs components were delivered as prescribed.

Adaptations & fidelity work together. A program needs to stay true to its original design, while also allowing for changes to fit different community needs. Fidelity ensures that the program remains relevant and accessible while preserving the core program components that are to be delivered as prescribed.

The Role of Identifying Adaptation

A prevention providers' role is critical in recognizing when and how adaptations may be necessary. Their responsibilities include:

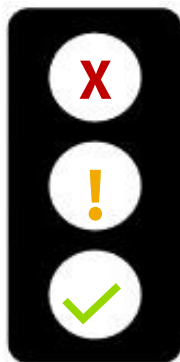
- Monitoring the implementation of the program.
- Identifying barriers that may affect program effectiveness.

- Ensuring that adaptations align with program fidelity and goals.
- Communicating with the program developer, and the Prevention Systems Manager (PSM) before making any modifications.

Pro Tip: Adaptations should be captured in Minerva 2.0 to learn more review Minerva 2.0 User Guide

Understanding the Red/Yellow/Green Light Model

The Red/Yellow/Green Light Model uses a traffic light metaphor to frame how adaptation decisions relate to program outcomes. Making too many changes to a program can reduce its original effectiveness, or worse, introduce unintended and harmful outcomes. Think of possible adaptations as you would a green, yellow, or red traffic light: red light changes should be avoided when possible; yellow light changes should be approached with caution; and green light changes are usually OK to make.



Red Light: Changes to core components of the program. These changes pose the highest risk of reducing effectiveness or creating unintended outcomes.

Yellow Light: Usually moderate adaptations. These changes pose a moderate risk of reducing effectiveness or creating unintended outcomes.

Green Light: Usually, minor surface level adaptations. These changes pose little risk of reducing effectiveness or creating unintended outcomes

Steps for Identifying and Implementing Adaptations

Step 1: Before considering any adaptations, carefully review the original program guidelines and implementation expectations. This ensures that any modifications made do not compromise the program's core principles and intended outcomes.

Step 2: Assess whether the program, as designed, meets the needs of your community. Engage with participants and facilitators to determine if any changes are needed to improve accessibility, engagement, or effectiveness.

At this step the prevention provider will connect with their Prevention Systems Manager, the program developer/owner and will consider between the lights of the Red/Yellow/Green Light model as reference below in resources to have on hand.

Pro Tip: While adaptations should be considered on a case-by-case basis. 'Green light' adaptations are generally more acceptable and commonly approved, whereas 'Red light' adaptations are rarer and typically are not as allowable and can impact EBP status overall.... Consider choosing a different program.

Red Light Adaptations

- Changes to core components of the program.
- May include:
 - Changing a health behavior model or theory
 - Note this includes changes in core values, beliefs, norms, and worldviews of a targeted cultural group, often referred to as “deep structure” cultural adaptations (e.g., [Wang-Schweig et al, 2014](#)).
 - Changing a health topic or behavior.
 - Deleting core components.
 - Cutting the program timeline.
 - Cutting the program dosage.

Yellow Light Adaptations

- Usually moderate adaptations; typically add or modify program components and contents, rather than deleting them.
- May include:
 - Substituting activities.
 - Adding activities.
 - Changing session sequence.
 - Shifting or expanding the primary audience.
 - Changing the delivery format.
 - Changes in who delivers the program.

Green Light Adaptations

- Usually, minor adaptations are made to increase the reach and receptivity of the program and increase participation from the community.
- May include:
 - Changes to program names.
 - Updated and relevant statistics or health information.
 - Tailoring language, pictures, or scenarios to be more culturally appropriate or modernized.
 - Note this aligns with “surface level” rather than “deep structure” cultural adaptations as distinguished in the research literature (e.g., [Wang-Schweig et al, 2014](#)).

Step 3: If an adaptation is deemed necessary:

- Reach out to the program developer to discuss whether the proposed change aligns with the program's fidelity.
- Communicate with your PSM who can provide guidance on the adaptation process.
- Determine whether the adaptations are green light, yellow light or red light.

Pro Tip: Work with your PSM & the EIP Page on Athena to identify the Program Developer

Step 4: Before implementing any adaptations, secure approval from your PSM – as according to the contract.

Step 5: After approval, review the adapted curriculum to ensure it aligns with the original request. Observe implementation of the adaptation and discuss progress and fidelity checks with the PSM during monthly check ins.

Recommended Documents/Resources to Have on Hand
Implementation Science at a Glance Article
The Athena Forum Excellence in Prevention Page
2023 Coalition Leadership Institute Training: Walking the Fidelity – Adaptation Tightrope
Best Practice Guidelines for Balancing Program Fidelity & Adaptation Handout
Cultural Adaptations