



Implementation Strategies for Rural Schools and Districts

December 10, 2018

As a follow-up to the public webinar hosted by the i3/EIR Improving Rural Achievement Community, Leading Innovation in Rural Districts, and as a supplement to the [Leading Education Innovations in Rural Schools: Reflections from i3 Grantees](#) paper produced in 2017, this document summarizes strategies to guide program implementation in rural schools and shares resources developed by i3 grantees and the i3/EIR Improving Rural Achievement Community.

Implementation Strategies

- **Buy-in and stakeholder engagement.** Project directors and implementors should seek buy-in and engagement from school leaders and administrators, teachers, school staff, and parents, as well as from other key community stakeholders, including local churches, community colleges, local business owners, local government or council members, mental health and social service providers, and local clubs and associations. In order to gain access and valuable insight into the community, school district, and students, seek out this engagement and buy-in early and on an ongoing basis throughout the project. By meeting with local stakeholders in the early phases of the project, these individuals can assist with recruitment, retention, and implementation; help establish credibility and trust around the project and project staff; and serve as thought partners along the way.
- **Needs and asset assessments and listening sessions.** Engage school leaders and teachers around their priorities, challenges, and concerns. Listen to what teachers are already doing and trying in their classrooms and what they'd like to do. Find out what existing resources, skill sets, and initiatives are already in place or available, and tap into the expert knowledge of those working in the district to uncover important community insights. Project directors and innovators should plan to research the district and conduct needs and readiness assessments to tailor the intervention to the capacity, readiness, and existing infrastructure and culture of the community.
- **Relationship building.** Have regular, ongoing conversations and meetings with stakeholders to build trust and credibility. Get to know the community and the culture of the schools and districts. Foster positive relationships with teachers and school administration and check in over coffee or in other face-to-face capacities.
- **Tailor the intervention to the specific context.** Adapt the intervention based on the needs and capacity of the community, and consider the available resources, talents, and priorities to make the intervention a better fit. Rural districts all have a unique culture and community. This can make them hard to define. Ask leaders to share factors that would enable or hinder implementation and provide numerous supports, such as a plain language explanation of the intervention, training, and coaching. In addition, consider the context of the intervention: many



rural districts have unique challenges around technology accessibility, funding, and staff playing multiple roles.

- **Communication and transparency.** Communicate the roles and expectations of everyone involved in the project so that all stakeholders are aware of who is working on different components of program and how to get in touch with them. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is a common way to do this. In addition, clear communication about the process, findings, and challenges is important to maintain support and buy-in.

Grantee-Developed Resources

NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT (NWP), 2012 (VALIDATION) AND 2016 (SCALE-UP) I3 GRANTEE

- [PROJECT WEBSITE](#)
- [START AN NWP SITE](#)
- [NWP MODEL & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT](#)

BUILDING ASSETS, REDUCING RISKS (BARR), SEARCH INSTITUTE, 2010 I3 GRANTEE

- [PROJECT WEBSITE](#)
- [PROGRAM EVALUATION FINAL REPORT](#)
- [THE 8 BARR STRATEGIES](#)

C3R, KENTUCKY VALLEY EDUCATIONAL COOPERATIVE (KVEC), 2011 I3 GRANTEE

- [PROJECT WEBSITE](#)
- [KVEC RESOURCES](#)

Rural Community Resources

- *Leading Innovation in Rural Schools.* Webinar. (June 18, 2018).
 - [CALL RECORDING](#) (ADOBE CONNECT)
- *Leading Education Innovations in Rural Schools: Reflections from i3 Grantees.* (September 2017).
 - [WHITE PAPER](#) (PDF)
- *Grant Implementation in Rural Schools.* Conference Session at the i3/EIR Annual Project Directors Meeting. (June 11, 2018).
 - [SESSION SLIDES](#) (PDF)