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Developing a school implementation plan

March 2025

This practice guide steps implementation teams through the process of planning to implement evidence-based teaching practices in their school.

The importance of implementation planning

Planning for implementation of evidence-based teaching practices is an important and ongoing activity. It helps schools determine what to focus on at a given time, and how implementation can be tailored to school context.

The process of drafting an implementation plan supports school leaders to systematically work through **practical aspects** of implementation, ranging from establishing an implementation goal and identifying potential enablers and barriers, through to scheduling activities according to the stages of implementation.

This planning process enables school leaders to identify existing systems, processes and practices that are working well and can be leveraged. It may also identify systems that need to be improved or established to support implementation.

Successful implementation is as much about **relationships** and stakeholder management as it is the practical components of implementation. Talking with colleagues during the planning process can help to build a shared understanding of the evidence-based teaching practice and how it will be implemented.

Implementation of evidence-based teaching practices isn't always smooth or linear; it requires detours and adjustments along the way. The implementation plan is therefore a **working document** that school leaders can regularly refer to and update as needed. It serves as a roadmap to guide change.

Using the implementation planning resources

This practice guide is part of a set of resources that support school implementation teams to draft an implementation plan. The set includes:

1. this practice guide, which provides guidance on developing a school implementation plan for a selected evidence-based teaching practice

2. a School Implementation Plan Template

3. a Worked Example of a School Implementation Plan.

Tip

Before using these implementation planning resources, if you haven't already done so:

- Complete the module, Implementation for Impact: A Deliberate and Structured Approach.

- Read the set of 5 explainers:

  – Taking an Evidence-Informed Approach to Implementation

  – Using a Staged Approach to Implementation

  – Addressing Enablers and Barriers to Implementation

  – Using Implementation Strategies

  – Monitoring Implementation Outcomes.
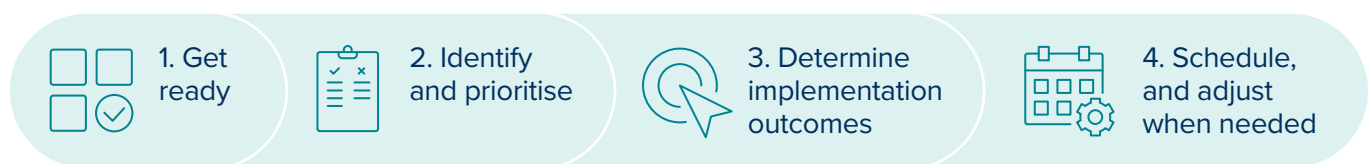

When to use these resources

Implementation of evidence-based teaching practices takes time – often beginning earlier and lasting longer than schools anticipate. Some research indicates it takes between 2 to 4 years to successfully adopt an evidence-based practice.[1] So, engage with the key ideas captured in these resources as early as you can!

Time spent on planning and other activities in the early stages of implementation is an investment for the success of later stages. Schools we work with often reflect that 'going slow to go fast' in these stages is a shift in how they have previously approached implementation.

Even if your school is already engaged in an implementation process, understanding the 4 components of a deliberate and structured approach to implementation is useful, and there will be opportunities for you to apply these components at any stage.

How this guidance is set out

This guidance, the implementation plan template and the worked example have the same 4-part structure:

1. Get ready	2. Identify and prioritise	3. Determine implementation outcomes	4. Schedule, and adjust when needed

Each part includes sections that match sections in the template and worked example.

Because implementation is not linear, and planning for implementation is an iterative process, you're likely to draft and revisit each section over time. Your implementation team may go back and forth between sections, clarifying and strengthening parts based on further thinking, updated data and discussion.

Tip

Keep both the implementation plan template and worked example of an implementation plan open while using this guidance.

1. Get ready

1. Get ready	2. Identify and prioritise	3. Determine implementation outcomes	4. Schedule, and adjust when needed

Get ready for implementation planning by:

- establishing an implementation team
- setting an implementation goal
- identifying the core elements of the evidence-based teaching practice you will implement.

1.1 Establish an implementation team

Well-functioning implementation teams are critical for the success of implementation. They lead the entire implementation process and work closely with staff to build buy-in and support practice change.

Consider the **leadership functions and capabilities** needed within your implementation team and how your team will work together. Ideally, your implementation team will include:

- the principal and/or assistant principal(s) and/or deputy principal(s)
- middle leaders for the learning area in which the evidence-based teaching practice is being implemented
- instructional coaches skilled in the evidence-based teaching practice
- staff with expertise and experience in using the evidence-based teaching practice
- community representatives.

Suggested **roles and responsibilities** for these implementation team members are set out in Table 1. As implementation capability develops, your team may expand or change to support growing expertise and ongoing implementation. In small schools, some roles and responsibilities may need to be combined.

Ensure that, besides having the technical skills and capacity to carry out their specific role, team members have **strong collaboration and reflective skills**. They need to represent diverse groups and clearly understand the role they play in supporting your school to attain its implementation goal.

Table 1: Implementation team roles and responsibilities

Implementation role	Possible responsibilities

Implementation coordinator(s)	• Working with the implementation team to establish, operationalise and monitor the implementation plan.
	• Collecting, collating and presenting data to inform implementation decisions.
	• Leading the daily functions of implementation, including:
	
	   – working with staff to identify enablers and barriers
	   – selecting and actioning implementation strategies
	   – monitoring implementation outcomes
	   – aligning implementation decisions and activities to stages.
	
	• Other responsibilities determined by school context.

Implementation team	• Budgeting/financing/resourcing implementation decisions. • Creating the conditions within the school for implementation to succeed. • Contributing and considering diverse perspectives of staff to inform implementation decisions. • Championing and coaching the implementation approach and evidenced-based teaching practice across the school. • Gathering regular staff input into implementation progress and communicating updates to staff. • Other responsibilities determined by school context.
Community member	• Contributing diverse perspectives of the community and students' families to inform key implementation decisions. • Other responsibilities determined by school context.
Additional specialised role (if required)	• Additional specialised responsibilities determined by school context.

1.2 Set an implementation goal

Setting a clear implementation goal will help to ensure that implementation efforts address a priority need and positively impact students. This goal-setting process includes a few steps, outlined in this section.

Get clear about the challenge and possible responses

To set a relevant implementation goal:

1. Identify a **priority challenge** for your school. Do this by drawing on different forms of data, such as student achievement on national assessments, teacher assessment records, attendance data and teacher observations. As you explore the data, aim to move from general high-level ideas about challenges facing your school to being confident that the selected challenge is a priority supported by data.

2. Select an **evidence-based teaching practice** (or practices) that responds to the challenge. Carefully consider whether this practice is *appropriate* for your school context and *feasible* to implement. Appropriateness and feasibility are implementation outcomes that will influence the likelihood of implementation success (see Section 3).

Set your goal

Draft a **goal statement** that includes what evidence-based teaching practice you will implement, with whom and why. For example, 'Our school's goal is to take a deliberate and structured approach to implementing explicit instruction in mathematics to increase learning outcomes for all our students.' Test the thinking behind your goal statement with different staff and community members and refine it based on their feedback.

Set long-term and short-term targets for your goal

Implementation goals often take several years to achieve because they require sustained changes to teaching practice and shifts in student outcome data. Use **longer-term (2 to 3 year)** targets to establish a clear direction and alignment with the implementation goal. Include **shorter-term (1 year)** targets to create incremental milestones and monitor progress. Make sure all targets are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timely) and contribute towards meeting the implementation goal. Review and reflect on your goal and targets periodically, and adjust them as needed.

Ensure alignment with broader improvement plans

As you develop your implementation goal:

- ensure it is presented as a priority in your school's broader **improvement plans**,
  such as your Annual Improvement Plan (AIP)/School Improvement Plan (SIP)

- make explicit connections between your school's **vision and values** and your implementation goal.

1.3 Identify the core elements of the evidence-based teaching practice

Core elements are the **essential features**, or non-negotiables, of an evidence-based teaching practice. They're critical for building a shared understanding of what's being implemented and for using the practice with fidelity. In implementation science, core elements are sometimes referred to as 'core components' or 'active ingredients'.

Because core elements must be consistently used by all teachers, reflect on whether each core element can be:

- easily understood

- clearly and consistently explained

- applied by teachers in their classrooms

- identified and observed by others.

If a core element cannot meet these criteria, it should not be included.

Identify core elements of the practice

In some instances, the core elements of an evidence-based teaching practice will be **easily identifiable**. For example, the AERO model of learning and teaching includes practices that are aligned with how students learn best. Each practice outlines key strategies and techniques that make up the core elements.

At other times, you'll need to **investigate** the most effective features of a practice to help you determine its core elements. Aim to identify as few core elements as possible without losing what makes the practice effective.
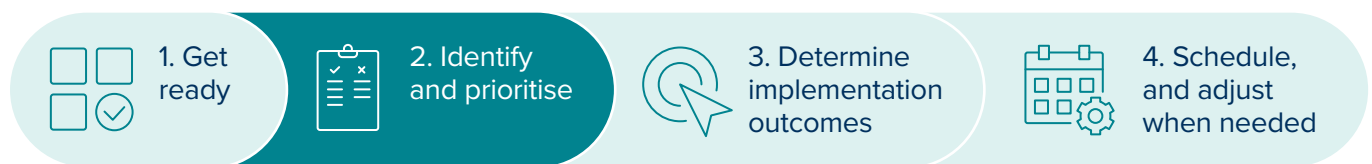
Determine what core elements will look like in your school

When you can name the core elements of the evidence-based teaching practice you're implementing, consider what consistent application of these elements will **look like in classrooms** across your school. For example, a core element of rules and routines is to have teaching routines that support active and effective participation in learning. In your school, this may involve encouraging teachers to use *structured* student 'turn and talk' opportunities (where students efficiently form pairs and have a clear purpose for their discussion that relates to the lesson).

Group core elements to inform professional learning cycles

Once you have defined all the core elements of the evidence-based teaching practice, decide how you'll **chunk them** into manageable components. Later, you can build professional learning cycles around these 'chunks'. In each professional learning cycle, staff can learn about and apply just a few core elements. They can then build on these learnings in the next professional learning cycle.

2. Identify and prioritise

1. Get ready	**2. Identify and prioritise**	3. Determine implementation outcomes	4. Schedule, and adjust when needed

Identify and prioritise by:

- identifying enablers and barriers
- selecting implementation strategies.

2.1 Identify enablers and barriers

Enablers and barriers show **what's working well** and **what's getting in the way** when implementing evidence-based teaching practices. They are specific to each school's context and what's happening at a point in time. By leveraging enablers and addressing barriers, you can increase the likelihood of successful implementation and sustainment of a practice.

Determining **exactly which enablers and barriers** are affecting your school will involve a collaborative process led by your implementation team. For example, you can guide staff through a session to identify and prioritise enablers and barriers in your context. You can undertake, and repeat, this session at any stage of implementation to provide a snapshot of staff perceptions and experiences at a point in time.

2.2 Select implementation strategies

Draw on a range of strategies

Implementation teams should draw on a **range of strategies** to support practice change, leverage current enablers and address barriers. One reason implementation fails is an over-reliance on a single implementation strategy.

Appendix A of the explainer, Using Implementation Strategies, includes a list of dozens of possible implementation strategies your school could use. If necessary, rename specific strategies to ensure they are defined in language that all your school staff understand.

Determine sequencing and timing

When selecting and planning to use implementation strategies, consider how you can deliberately **combine and sequence** strategies. For example, modelling and coaching can be combined and sequenced. Distinct combinations of strategies will influence different practice changes.[2]

You might include some strategies – such as regular implementation team meetings, communication with staff, and developing and sharing resources – **throughout** the implementation process. Other implementation strategies – such as resourcing implementation efforts – may be scheduled for **specific times.**

Consider how strategies help with enablers and barriers

Your team should also select implementation strategies that will specifically **leverage identified enablers** and **address identified barriers.** Often the strategies you already plan to use will help with this, but you may need to tailor the timing, dosage or combination of strategies to meet your school's needs. You might also need to use more than one strategy to respond to identified enablers and barriers.

3. Determine implementation outcomes

| 1. Get ready | 2. Identify and prioritise | 3. Determine implementation outcomes | 4. Schedule, and adjust when needed |

Implementation outcomes provide an indication of how well implementation is going (or how 'healthy' it is). Selecting and monitoring implementation outcomes is an essential function of implementation teams.

Different implementation outcomes are important at different stages (see Table 2) and not all outcomes need to be monitored at once. To keep things manageable, **select just a few** outcomes to monitor over the course of implementation. If you are unsure where to start, consider tracking feasibility during the Explore stage, fidelity during the Deliver stage, sustainability during the Sustain stage and acceptability throughout.

Data collection to support monitoring of implementation outcomes should not be overly burdensome. A rule of thumb is to **start small** with existing forms of data and add additional data sources as needed to help track implementation outcomes and inform decisions. It's useful to select data sources that provide information about more than one implementation outcome. For example, responses to the enablers and barriers identification activity can provide insights into a range of implementation outcomes, including appropriateness, feasibility, acceptability, fidelity and sustainability.

No implementation process will unfold exactly as intended. **Regularly tracking** implementation outcomes will allow your implementation team to responsively adjust plans to meet the needs of your school. It will also help ensure that processes are tailored to your specific context.

Table 2: Implementation outcomes and when they are most important in the implementation process

Outcome	Explore	Prepare	Deliver	Sustain
Appropriateness: The evidence-based teaching practice is relevant and compatible with the school.	✳			
Feasibility: The evidence-based teaching practice can be successfully applied in the school.	✳	✳		
Adoption: A decision is made to try the evidence-based teaching practice.	✳	✳		
Acceptability: The evidence-based teaching practice is satisfactory or agreeable.	✳	✳	✳	✳
Implementation cost: The cost of implementing the evidence-based teaching practice can be met.	✳	✳	✳	✳
Reach: The evidence-based teaching practice is integrated across the school.			✳	✳
Fidelity: The evidence-based teaching practice is implemented as intended.			✳	✳
Sustainability: The evidence-based teaching practice is embedded within the school.			✳	✳

Source: Adapted from 'Table 1' in Outcomes for Implementation Research: Conceptual Distinctions, Measurement Challenges, and Research Agenda by E. Proctor, H. Silmere, R. Raghavan, P. Hovmand, G. Aarons, A. Bunger, R. Griffey & M. Hensley, licensed under a CC BY-NC 2.0 licence.

4. Schedule, and adjust when needed

1. Get ready	2. Identify and prioritise	3. Determine implementation outcomes	4. Schedule, and adjust when needed
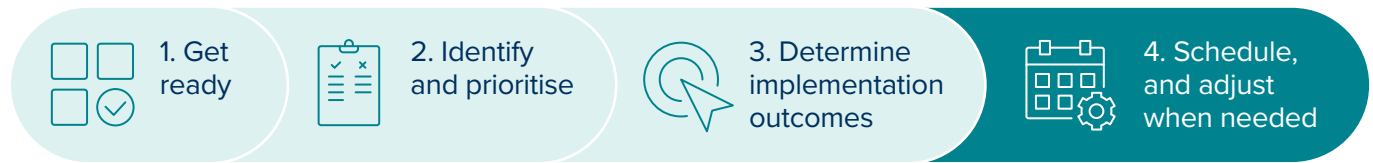
Schedule and adjust when needed by:

- using implementation stages

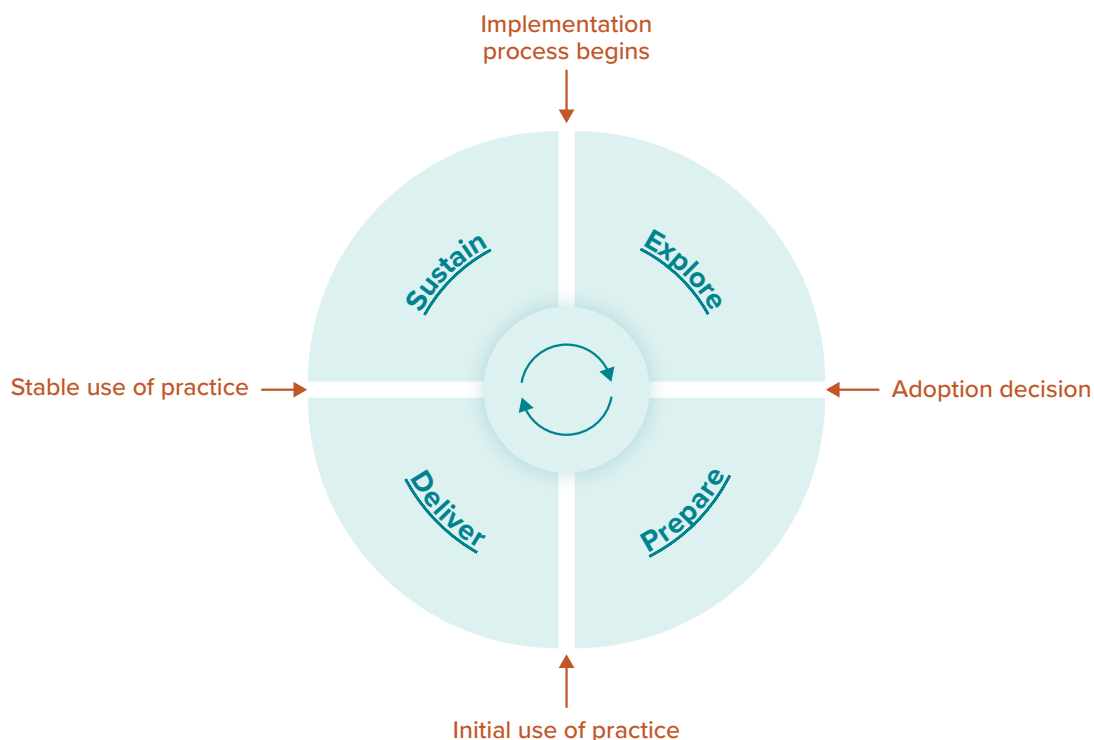- creating a schedule, but allowing room for flexibility.

4.1 Use implementation stages

Implementation takes place in **distinct but interconnected stages** (Figure 1). Understanding these stages can help reduce complexity and ensure the right activities and decisions are planned for the right time.

Use implementation stages to consider and sequence specific **activities**. These activities can be grouped according to the 3 other implementation components: implementation strategies, enablers and barriers, and implementation outcomes. Figure 2 shows the implementation stages, with the key activities of each stage detailed on the following pages.

Many of the activities in the Explore and Prepare stages outlined in Figure 1 are captured in previous sections of this practice guide.

Figure 1: The stages of implementation

Implementation process begins

Sustain   Explore

Stable use of practice →   ← Adoption decision

Deliver   Prepare

Initial use of practice

Source: Diagram adapted from 'Figure 1' in Putting Evidence to Work: A School's Guide to Implementation by E4L (2019, p. 8), licensed under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 licence. Adapted with permission, including recreating in AERO branding and simplifying content.
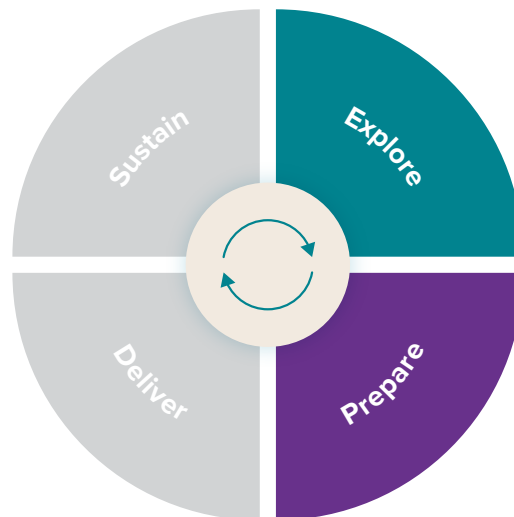
Figure 2: Example of key activities within each implementation stage

Source: Adapted with permission from E4L, 2019, p.8, CC BY NC ND 4.0.

Explore

Implementation strategies

- Establish an implementation team.

- Use evidence and data to understand and prioritise student needs, and decide on a priority challenge to address.

- Develop a specific goal for improvement that will address the priority challenge.

- Select an evidence-based teaching practice(s) that will support you to achieve your school goal.

- Build a shared understanding of your school goal and why it's a priority.

Enablers and barriers

- Identify current enablers and barriers to implementation, including staffing, systems and structures that could be enhanced to support implementation.

Implementation outcomes

- Determine whether the evidence-based teaching practice is appropriate for your setting and feasible to implement.

Prepare

Implementation strategies

- Draft a detailed implementation plan.

- Check staff's understanding of the evidence-based teaching practice and use this to tailor implementation.

- Develop or enhance the systems and structures to support teachers to implement the evidence-based teaching practice.

- Select key implementation strategies.

- Deliver foundational knowledge-building sessions about implementation and the evidence-based teaching practice.

Enablers and barriers

- Address priority enablers and barriers.

Implementation outcomes

- Establish a way of monitoring the health of implementation.

- Continue monitoring appropriateness and feasibility outcomes.

- Determine whether the evidence-based teaching practice is acceptable to teachers.
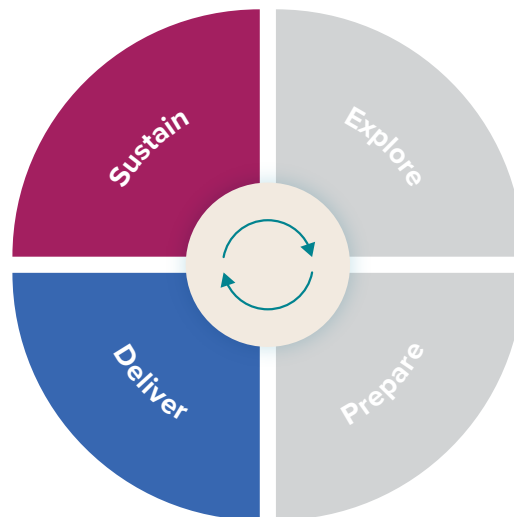
Source: Adapted with permission from E4L, 2019, p.8, CC BY NC ND 4.0.

Deliver

Implementation strategies

- Deliver professional learning cycles on each element of the evidence-based teaching practice, including knowledge-building sessions, planning, modelling, coaching and group reflective conversations.

- Ensure each teacher has the support they need to implement the evidence-based teaching practice well.

- Identify and train key champions.

Enablers and barriers

- Re-assess current enablers and barriers, and tailor implementation strategies in response.

Implementation outcomes

- Use data to monitor the health of implementation – for example, check the status of acceptability, and determine how many teachers are using the evidence-based teaching practice (reach) as intended (fidelity).

- Consider how the evidence-based teaching practice will be embedded and maintained across the school (sustainability).

Sustain

Implementation strategies

- Select and tailor implementation strategies that maintain the use of the evidence-based teaching practice, and support new staff and leaders to use it.

- Share the resources that have been developed to support the ongoing use of the evidence-based teaching practice and create more as required.

- Review and communicate plans, policies, systems and structures to support your school to sustain the evidence-based teaching practice and implementation.

- Continue developing champions to support sustaining the practice.

Enablers and barriers

- Prioritise addressing enablers and barriers that are most important for sustaining the evidence-based teaching practice.

Implementation outcomes

- Continue monitoring acceptability, reach, fidelity and sustainability.

- Evaluate attainment of your school goal using implementation outcomes.

- Consider scaling up (and begin this from the Explore stage).

4.2 Create a schedule, but allow room for flexibility

Once you have mapped activities to implementation stages, create a more **detailed schedule** that shows when you'll carry out these activities. The schedule in the underlined worked example shows how you can plan and sequence implementation activities thoughtfully in each implementation stage.

While a schedule provides transparency about what's ahead, it should always be used with your school context in mind. That means **flexibility** is key as you learn more about what's working well and what needs adjusting. For example, you might decide to take more time to properly address a barrier, or change the dosage or sequencing of some implementation strategies in response to how an implementation outcome is tracking.

Tip

If you've already completed the key activities in the Explore and Prepare stages (e.g., establishing an implementation team), you may not wish to specify them again in your schedule. However, it can be helpful to see all activities together in one overarching schedule, as this may also form the basis of future implementation plans and schedules.

Endnotes

1   Flottorp, S. A., Oxman, A. D., Krause, J., Musila, N. R., Wensing, M., Godycki-Cwirko, M., Baker, R., & Eccles, M. P. (2013). A checklist for identifying determinants of practice: A systematic review and synthesis of frameworks and taxonomies of factors that prevent or enable improvements in healthcare professional practice. *Implementation Science, 8*, 35. https://doi.org/10.1186/1748-5908-8-35

2   National Implementation Research Network. (2023). *Implementation stages overview*. State Implementation and Scaling-up of Evidence-based Practices Center (SISEP) and the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN). https://implementation.fpg.unc.edu/resource/implementation-stages-overview/

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