New York Strengthening Treatment Access and Retention-State Implementation Provider Recruitment

Eighteen providers of outpatient addiction treatment services in New York were introduced to the NIATx approach to process improvement through Strengthening Treatment Access and Retention-State Implementation (STAR-SI). STAR-SI is a three-year Robert Wood Johnson grant awarded to the New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) in 2006. STAR-SI providers represent 1 percent of all agencies certified by OASAS. As the second largest addiction treatment system in the United States, OASAS viewed STAR-SI as an opportunity to learn how to better assist providers to address client access and retention challenges. In so doing, STAR-SI has the potential to influence spread of process improvement methods to the larger outpatient system of care.

Over the course of this grant, OASAS refined criteria and strategies to engage providers in mastering NIATx methods. The following case study chronicles lessons learned in recruiting participants who would be effective in incorporating process improvement activities within their daily operations. These lessons will inform future activities within New York as we seek to expand use of NIATx methods across our system.

What Year I taught us about selecting participants

Program design decisions embedded in our proposal for funding influenced the initial selection of providers.
- OASAS targeted participants in geographic areas with large concentrations of outpatient addiction treatment providers. (Year I and III providers were to be selected from New York City; Year II providers were to be from Long Island). These locations supported face-to-face contact among providers while assuring that a diversity of clinic types would be represented: e.g., hospital-based and freestanding programs.
- Participation was voluntary. Providers did not have to participate and could withdraw from STAR-SI without penalty from the state.
- Providers received technical assistance in using NIATx methods but no annual monetary stipend
- Participants could not have "flags" related to state reporting or other certification requirements.

With these caveats, six Year I providers were selected. The turnaround time between grant award and start up was limited in our state, which necessitated a quick recruitment process. OASAS drew on advice from agency leaders and our New York City field office to identify and confirm agency participation.

During the first year, we saw fairly stark differences in the experiences of providers that influenced overall participation. Some agencies knew of NIATx prior to STAR-SI as a result of attending workshops sponsored by the Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Providers Association of New York State (ASAP) earlier in 2006. They had a sense of

the activities they would be engaging in. Others did not. Some joined the program with strong commitment to building quality into their programs, while others had limited senior level support. Early into the year, two agencies underwent major organizational changes that compromised their ability to commit resources to grant activities. One of these agencies ultimately dropped from STAR-SI.

Creating a Formal Recruitment Process

Drawing from these experiences, OASAS determined to develop a process to recruit providers who would be highly likely to succeed in the program, i.e., apply rapid-cycle testing to changes addressing access and retention challenges, establish sustainability plans to maintain positive results, and be active participants in learning collaboratives and other grant activities. Here is what we did to make this happen in Year II and III:

SEEDING INTEREST

We recognized that the more familiar providers were with NIATx, the more likely they would be to self-identify and/or respond to invitations to participate in STAR-SI. Educating others about NIATx became an on-going activity for the State Change Team. OASAS Change Team and regional office staff now make group presentations and contact individual providers to describe NIATx. They also share STAR-SI participant results and experiences with other state and county staff who have regular contact with providers. These individuals are routinely invited to join STAR-SI learning collaboratives and monthly calls to create a broader network of people who will support spread of this program. In Year II, our first preconference training was conducted at the annual ASAP conference to introduce statewide providers to NIATx.

FORMAL APPLICATION PROCESS

OASAS established a three-step process for recruiting Year II and III participants: conducting introductory briefings on STAR-SI for potential participants; completion of provider applications; and selection of participants by State Change Team members.

- Executive Directors of addiction treatment agencies in targeted areas that had NO state reporting or certification requirements "flags" received invitations to a STAR-SI briefing. We encouraged them to bring colleagues along since we knew that transforming significant agency practices is helped when there is more than one advocate for a new program present.

- A two-hour briefing was conducted that addressed:
    o NYS goals for addressing access and retention challenges
    o NIATx methods
    o NYS' electronic data collection and reporting system for STAR-SI
    o Current STAR-SI provider results
    o Benefits and expectations for STAR-SI participants
    o Steps in the application and selection process

- Attendee questions

While several people made presentations at these sessions, hearing from current providers proved most powerful. We asked two current STAR-SI participants to share their experiences. They spoke about what it takes to collect baseline data and build teams, how results were shared and how they increased support for use of process improvement across their clinics and/or agencies. These individuals were our best ambassadors in encouraging others to consider joining the STAR-SI family.

- Application Submission

Providers were required to submit applications to become STAR-SI participants. The application is not onerous, but does require some reflection and planning. This requirement helps encourage applications from providers serious about participation. Issues addressed include:
  - Agency background and licensing data
  - Reason for interest in STAR-SI, including current access and/or retention challenges
  - Past involvement in quality initiatives
  - Background of potential executive sponsor and change team leaders
  - Identification of significant changes anticipated for the coming year (e.g., moving to new space, new grants, new information technology systems)
  - Qualifications of agency to participate
  - Confirmation of current encounter data collected
  - Availability of phone and Internet access for potential team members (This is a critical need in NY to maximize use of the OASAS data collection system designed for STAR-SI.)
  - Provider acceptance of participant responsibilities for data collection and other grant activities.

- Selection of Participants

Providers were selected following a review of applications by our State Change Team. Based on our earlier learning, we sought applicants who were interested in improving quality of services, as well as organizations that were "stable," e.g., the executive director/ sponsor had been in the agency for at least one year, and no major organizational change was planned. We also considered the potential capacity of providers to spread use of process improvement to other sites within their agencies. Providers received phone calls alerting them to their selection by the STAR-SI Project Director as well as formal letters of acceptance.

During Years II and III of STAR-SI, all providers recruited have remained in the program. We have minimal resistance to required activities such as data collection. We believe being clear about what developing process improvement skills entails and can

promote for an organization, has helped New York engage motivated providers in STAR-SI.