

Co-implementation

What happens during co-implementation?

In the final phase of a TDR project, the knowledge or the research that has been generated needs to become useful through implementation planning. This phase focuses on actualizing the intended impacts by integrating, testing, and applying the created knowledge. Here, the roles of project participants, including researchers and societal actors, are crucial, as each brings unique strengths to this implementation phase.

In this phase, there is a need for the team of researchers and societal actors to be highly collaborative, ensuring that the project has the greatest impact. Developing structures for collaboration or agreements are key. It is likely that the expertise of the societal actors becomes elevated as they may have a better understanding of the world of practice, while the roles of the researchers shift to supporting and communicating, because they may have less experience strategizing and planning implementation steps. It will be important for the project partners to take initiative within their organizations, communities, and interest groups in that they are familiar with various pathways to fostering or implementing change that have been successful in the past.

One possible structure is to return to the planning and scoping work of Phase A, the theory of change, the shared vision, and the goals and outcomes. Nancy White, an experienced community engagement facilitator recommends these questions to help the team think about strategy:

- What is the fundamental purpose of our work?
- What is happening around us that demands change?
- Based on what we have discovered, what is now possible?
- What are our next steps, and how will we know we are making progress?

While these questions may have been discussed during the project co-design phase (theory of change), now is the time to implement the work beyond knowledge co-production. This may involve the researchers thinking through carefully how best to communicate the data or findings of the research to make it accessible to non-researchers on the team and to facilitate ongoing dialogue.

Another key component of this final phase of a TDR project is to decide whether the project is completed or whether a follow-on project is warranted. If you decide to continue – often a wise decision, given the large investment in relationship building – it may still be that only some team members will continue while new partners and colleagues join for the next iteration. Regardless, it is important to properly end those relationships that will not be continued. Additionally, the project team must address if or how the data, tools, and models will be transferred to users.



Closing the project also needs a clear plan for communicating, documenting, and evaluating what happened and what was learned. The researchers may intend to publish in academic journals, but those articles are unlikely to be read by the societal actors and their colleagues. Planning for reporting to diverse audiences is critical, including to funders, relevant decision-makers and societal partners, and the larger public that may be interested in or impacted by the project. Societal partners may themselves play a significant role in that outreach and reporting.

By following these strategies and focusing on empowerment, collaboration, and continuous engagement, the third phase of a TDR project can effectively translate created knowledge into meaningful impacts, benefiting both science and society. And it sets the stage for another TDR cycle, as the real-world problem is unlikely to be resolved through a single project.

Further reading:

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- Khan, Sobia, Moore, Julia E. 2021. [Core competencies for implementation practice](#). Integration and Implementation Insights. June 29, 2021.
- Mauser, Wolfram, Gernot Klepper, Martin Rice, Bettina Susanne Schmalzbauer, Heide Hackmann, Rik Leemans, and Howard Moore. 2013. [Transdisciplinary Global Change Research: The Co-Creation of Knowledge for Sustainability](#). *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability* 5 (3–4): 420–31.
- Mitchell, Cynthia, Fam, Dena, Cordell, Dana. 2017. [Designing for impact in transdisciplinary research](#). Integration and Implementation Insights. February 16, 2017.