



**PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT:**

Follow-up Support Tool Kit

Introduction:

Once a professional development event has been completed, continued and targeted follow-up support should be conducted to strengthen the knowledge and skill level of participants. Follow-up support is intended to strengthen the transfer of learned strategies or skills so they will be retained and applied effectively. This tool kit provides an overview of the concepts of professional development and follow-up support, as well as tools and information about follow up-support. It also includes resources from CDC's School Health Branch and other sources.

What Is Professional Development?

- Professional development is a systematic process that strengthens how professionals obtain and retain knowledge, skills, and attitudes.
- Professional development is designed to actively engage learners. It includes the planning, design, marketing, delivery, follow-up, and evaluation of professional development offerings, such as events, information sessions, and technical assistance.

What Is a Professional Development Event?

A professional development event includes a set of skill-building processes and activities designed to help targeted groups of participants master specific learning objectives. Such events are delivered in an adequate time span (at least 3 hours) and may include trainings, workshops, coaching, and online or distance learning courses. A professional development event introduces a new skill.

What Is Effective Professional Development?

Effective professional development includes the planning for and provision of one or more follow-up support strategies after a professional development event. Follow-up support is intended to strengthen the transfer of learned strategies or skills so they will be retained and applied effectively. It may take place over time and can be altered as the needs of the participants change. Follow-up support is not the introduction of new information; it is the reinforcement of information provided at the professional development event.



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Effective professional development does not have to use a linear, step-by-step formula. It should flow logically from one stage to the next.

What Professional Development Practices Are Recommended by CDC?

CDC developed and recommends a set of Professional Development Practices as a framework to help ensure that key stages of professional development are not avoided.

The ultimate goal of professional development is the effective implementation of skills and strategies that enhance knowledge and transfer of learning. The Professional Development Practices are based on research and best practice and provide the best conditions for implementation to occur. They can be delivered in a group setting (e.g., trainings, presentations, meetings) and one-on-one (e.g., general technical assistance, coaching or mentoring).

Professional Development Practices

- **SUSTAIN** a Professional Development Infrastructure
- **DESIGN** Professional Development Offerings
- **MARKET** Professional Development Services
- **DELIVER** Professional Development
- Provide **FOLLOW-UP SUPPORT**
- **EVALUATE** Professional Development Processes



For more information, use the following documents in this tool kit:

- [Professional Development Practices](#)
- [Professional Development Practices: Inventory](#)

What Is Follow-up Support?

Follow-up support includes providing or using a targeted strategy or set of strategies after a learning event to reinforce and strengthen new concepts or skills. Follow-up support is ongoing over time and may change as participants' skills and needs change. It works best when planned in advance of a learning event, and it should be developed during the design phase of a professional development event. Follow-up support is an essential and intentional part of effective professional development.

Follow-up support is often a neglected element in the professional development process. But this step is essential if transfer of knowledge and skill is the goal. Follow-up support helps participants by cementing what they have learned, reminding them to practice the new skill(s), and giving them an opportunity to ask questions.

The documents in this tool kit will help you (1) plan for follow-up support before a professional development event, (2) collect information during the event to identify the best type of follow-up support to use, and (3) put your follow-up support strategies into action.

Three Phases of Follow-up Support

Phase 1: Planning

Effective Follow-up Support Planning

Planning for follow-up support should begin during the design phase of a professional development event. A comprehensive plan, including tools and a time line, should be developed before the event, and participants should be informed of the plan before and during the event. Follow-up support plans must take into account the skills and knowledge of the trainer or facilitator and the available resources. They should also include data on participants, such as their needs and perceived barriers (for example: their ability or comfort to implement a new skill).

For more information, use the following documents in this tool kit:

- [Guide for Follow-up Support Planning](#)
 - [Providing Follow-up Support: Guiding Questions](#)
 - [Professional Development Follow-Up Support: The Continuum](#)
 - [Online Professional Development Follow-Up Support Tools](#)
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Phase 2: Process

Follow-up Support During Professional Development Events

Participants should be informed of the follow-up support plan during professional development events. They should also be allowed to practice the new skills being taught during the event, to help them transfer these skills once the event is over. Follow-up support is ongoing over time and may change as participants' skills and needs change. During an event, additional data on participants can be collected to help identify the best follow-up options. Options vary in terms of cost and how much time is needed; factors include where participants are located and travel and equipment costs.

For more information, use the following documents in this tool kit:

- [Follow-up Support: Team Action Plan Template](#)
 - [Follow-up Support: Technology Survey](#)
 - [Professional Development Follow-Up Support: The Continuum](#)
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Phase 3: Implementation

Follow-up Support Strategies

Once participants have mastered a skill during training, you can help them transfer this skill into daily professional practice through follow-up support and coaching. Follow-up support will strengthen the transfer of the skill(s) that participants have learned. Do not introduce new content, research, or skills during the follow-up support process. New information can overwhelm participants, making it less likely that they will be able to retain and apply the initial skill(s) taught.

Follow-up support plans should include the following components:

- A summary with a brief time line. (Note: This section can be used as a checklist.)
 - A detailed description of support activities to be conducted before, during, and after the professional development event.
 - An action plan for how new skills will be used.
 - A detailed time line that shows when support activities will be conducted.
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Common ingredients for successful implementation of new skills and how these ingredients can affect the design and delivery process are outlined in the following table:

Ingredients for Success	Implication for Professional Development Process
Participants leave the training event with the confidence (and curiosity) to at least try the new skill or innovation.	Deliver a training design that allows adequate time for the critical training components: discussion of theory/rationale, demonstration, and practice of the new innovation with an expectation that participants will gain enough confidence to at least give the new skill a try. For example, we suggest a minimum of two days for curriculum training.
Participants have a social network—an avenue for gaining a response to questions, ideas, and concerns.	Provide a follow-up support process that is embedded in training design, allowing participants to construct a process for self-reflection and then share insights. Assign a learning buddy, learning group, or coach/mentor.
Participants are given ample time post- training to practice, self-reflect, and refine the skill, preferably with support from peers.	Provide a follow-up support process that allows time between check-ins. Make sure, during the training, that participants understand that the early stages of implementation will probably feel awkward and unrefined. Urge participants to expect the awkwardness, know it is a normal stage in the change process, and stay the course.
Adequate balance of support and pressure.	State expectations before and during the training event, letting participants know you will be checking in. Ask for a commitment (actions and time line) from them during the event that is shared in writing. Follow through. Provide support and encouragement.

SOURCE: Christopher D. Reaching the implementation finish line: follow-up is key. *The RMC Health Educator* 2008;8(2):3.

For more information, use the following documents in this tool kit:

- [Follow-Up Support and Evaluation: The Distinctions](#)

Conclusion

This tool kit provides guidance and resources on how to provide follow-up support to help strengthen the knowledge and skill level of participants after a professional development event. Follow-up support is intended to

reinforce information from the event, not to introduce new information. Effective follow-up support increase the chances that participants will practice what they learned.