

WHAT IS NREPP?

The National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (<http://samhsa.nrepp.gov/>) is an online, searchable database of substance use and mental health interventions. NREPP is a public service funded and administered by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The goal of NREPP is to encourage the use of evidence-based practices by providing objective, peer-reviewed information on interventions that have been evaluated in studies and are ready for dissemination. The primary target audiences are agencies and community organizations that are responsible for selecting and implementing interventions for their service communities. People who visit NREPP's Web site can compare features of programs and practices to narrow down their search to ones that best match their needs. The Registry currently has 220 interventions and is continually growing as new interventions are added each month.

WHAT IS NREPP'S HISTORY?

NREPP has been in existence since the 1990s and has gone through several changes in that time. The predecessor to today's NREPP was the National Registry of Effective Prevention Programs (later renamed the National Registry of Effective Programs and Practices), which was developed by SAMHSA's Center for Substance Abuse Prevention as part of the Model Programs initiative. Under this earlier system, interventions that were reviewed and found to meet certain criteria could be designated as Model, Effective, or Promising.

In 2004, SAMHSA began a process of collecting extensive input from scientific communities, service providers, expert panels, and the public regarding how to revise and improve the NREPP system. Revised procedures were implemented starting in 2006, and the new NREPP Web site debuted in March 2007. Many of the interventions reviewed under the earlier NREPP system have been re-reviewed using the revised review procedures and are included in the current Registry.

WHAT DOES NREPP DO?

NREPP's core function is to conduct reviews of interventions in four areas: substance abuse prevention, substance abuse treatment, mental health promotion, and mental health treatment. NREPP staff coordinate and manage an expert review process in which an intervention's research base and readiness for dissemination are examined and rated by independent reviewers using predefined rating criteria.

Most of NREPP's work and budget is dedicated to the many complex activities that go into conducting reviews. These activities fall into three areas: (1) managing the public open submission process, (2) managing the queue of accepted interventions, and (3) conducting reviews.

Open submission process

Each year, SAMHSA publishes an announcement in the Federal Register inviting the public to submit interventions for potential review. After this 3-month open submission period, staff from SAMHSA's three Centers evaluate the submissions that meet NREPP's minimum criteria for review and decide which will be accepted.

NREPP staff oversee the entire submission process, from the initial announcement through the final notification of acceptance status. This includes an intensive triage stage in which NREPP staff determine whether interventions meet minimum criteria and request more information from submitters when needed. As many as 100 interventions or more can be submitted in a single year, so a considerable investment of time is required to give each submission the appropriate attention.

To make the process easier for applicants, NREPP has developed an online submission system that is accessible through its Web site. This system allows applicants to request usernames and securely upload their submission documents online, eliminating the need to prepare and mail materials in hard copy.

Managing the queue

NREPP has a large number of reviews to complete each year, each of which requires several months to complete. Reviews are therefore conducted on a year-round basis, working from a "queue" or waiting list of interventions. Continual monitoring and management of the queue is essential to ensure a steady and efficient pipeline of interventions. These activities include keeping in periodic contact with developers of accepted interventions, collecting preliminary information, and working with developers to schedule kickoff calls to start their reviews.

The NREPP Information Tracking System (NITS) supports the many administrative and operational functions involved in queue management. This Web-based information and document management system enables NREPP staff to access information on every intervention that has been accepted by SAMHSA, whether pending review, in review, or already reviewed. It tracks data such as the review status, correspondence history, names of staff and reviewers assigned to the review, and contact information for the program developer. NITS also houses electronic copies of almost all the documents collected for or used in the review, including authorization forms, correspondence, research studies, and supporting materials.

Conducting reviews

There are many steps involved in conducting a review. These steps include, for example, working with developers to identify the materials and outcomes to be used in the review, selecting reviewers,

preparing review packets, validating the ratings and comments provided by reviewers, preparing an intervention summary, and obtaining developer approval to finalize and post the summary online.

The review process requires a high degree of coordination and communication with program developers and consultant reviewers. NREPP's staff of highly trained, doctoral-level review coordinators and liaisons work extensively with these outside parties to explain the requirements and procedural aspects of the review, discuss substantive matters related to the intervention or the rating criteria, and resolve technical questions or other issues when they arise.

WHAT DOES AN NREPP REVIEW EVALUATE?

Interventions that are reviewed by NREPP undergo a two-part review process. The Quality of Research (QOR) review assesses the strength of evidence for the outcomes targeted. The Readiness for Dissemination (RFD) review examines the intervention's potential for successful use in the field based on the quality and availability of implementation materials, training and technical assistance, and quality assurance procedures.

The QOR and RFD reviews measure two equally important aspects of an intervention's suitability for real-world implementation. QOR reviews focus on research studies (up to three can be included). RFD reviews look at implementation materials and processes, such as manuals, curricula, training materials, and quality assurance procedures.

QOR ratings, given on a scale of 0.0 to 4.0, indicate the strength of the evidence supporting the outcomes of the intervention. Higher scores indicate stronger, more compelling evidence. Each outcome is rated separately because interventions may target multiple outcomes (e.g., alcohol use, marijuana use, behavior problems in school), and the evidence supporting the different outcomes may vary. The QOR rating criteria are:

- ✓ Reliability of measures
- ✓ Validity of measures
- ✓ Intervention fidelity
- ✓ Missing data and attrition
- ✓ Potential confounding variables
- ✓ Appropriateness of analysis

RFD ratings, also given on a scale of 0.0 to 4.0, indicate the amount and quality of the resources available to support the use of the intervention. Higher scores indicate that resources are readily available and of high quality. These ratings apply to the intervention as a whole. The RFD criteria are:

- ✓ Availability of implementation materials
- ✓ Availability of training and support resources
- ✓ Availability of quality assurance procedures

At the end of a review, the OOR ratings and RFD ratings are incorporated into an intervention summary. The numerical ratings are shown in conjunction with written comments from the reviewers that help to explain and provide context for the ratings. In addition, the summary provides general descriptive information about the intervention obtained during the review. This combination of descriptive information with ratings derived from a rigorous review process is designed to help NREPP users determine if a particular intervention is a good fit and meets their own requirements for effectiveness.

What NREPP *does not evaluate* or claim to quantify is an intervention's effectiveness, appropriateness, or suitability for use in any particular setting. NREPP's Web site cautions that the information provided by the Registry is subject to certain limitations. For example, NREPP does not claim to be an exhaustive or complete list of evidence-based interventions. Inclusion of a program in the Registry does not constitute its endorsement, approval, or recommendation. Readers are encouraged to seek additional information from program developers before making decisions about purchasing or implementing programs reviewed on the site.

WHO ARE NREPP'S EXPERT REVIEWERS?

NREPP maintains a pool of about 110 highly trained, carefully selected consultants to serve as its expert reviewers. OOR reviewers have doctoral-level degrees and typically a professional background in mental health or substance abuse prevention or treatment. They are required to have a strong understanding of research methods, statistics, and current methods of evaluating interventions. RFD reviewers are direct services experts (either providers or consumers) or experts in the field of implementation. Direct service experts are required to have experience evaluating prevention or treatment interventions and knowledge of mental health or substance abuse prevention or treatment content areas. Implementation experts are required to have experience implementing interventions, doing evaluation work in service settings, and/or conducting research across interventions, as well as knowledge of mental health or substance abuse prevention or treatment content areas.

Reviewers are invited to participate in individual reviews based on their areas of expertise and knowledge of the content area involved. The identity of reviewers assigned to specific reviews is confidential and is not shared with anyone outside NREPP staff, including SAMHSA and program developers.

To maintain a strong and balanced reviewer pool, NREPP staff continually recruit new reviewers and make recommendations to SAMHSA regarding potential candidates. SAMHSA provides the final approval on each candidate. NREPP staff extensively train each reviewer (once approved for hiring) on the procedures and criteria they will use to rate interventions. Reviewers are required to sign a Conflict of Interest form for each intervention they review to ensure they have no professional ties or financial or other interests in the intervention that could prevent an objective review.

Though NREPP recruits most of its reviewers by invitation, any interested individual who meets the requirements can express an interest in becoming a reviewer by submitting a curriculum vitae.

HOW IS AN NREPP REVIEW CONDUCTED?

Each intervention is reviewed by four reviewers: two for QOR and two for RFD. Reviewers work independently, rating the same materials. Reviewers' ratings are averaged to generate final scores. Both reviews are conducted by reviewers who have expertise and experience in areas relevant to the intervention. Working under the direction of NREPP staff, the reviewers use NREPP's rating criteria to rate various aspects of the intervention's research studies and implementation materials. Once the two reviews are completed, the intervention is added to the NREPP database and an intervention summary is posted on the NREPP Web site. The summary presents the results of the QOR and RFD reviews, general descriptive information about the intervention, and the developer's contact information so that interested users can find out more.

While the review process is ongoing, NREPP staff also work with the program developer to collect basic information about the intervention, such as program objectives, types of populations served, and implementation history.

HOW DOES NREPP DECIDE WHICH INTERVENTIONS ARE REVIEWED?

Any individual can submit an intervention to NREPP for review. Interventions must be in the area of substance abuse prevention, substance abuse treatment, mental health promotion, or mental health treatment. Submissions are accepted during an annual open submission period that runs November 1 through February 1. Announcements about the open submission period are made on the NREPP Web site and in the Federal Register.

Submissions must demonstrate that they meet four minimum criteria:

- ✓ The intervention has produced one or more positive behavioral outcomes ($p \leq .05$) in mental health, mental disorders, substance abuse, or substance use disorders use among individuals, communities, or populations.
- ✓ Evidence of these outcomes has been demonstrated in at least one study using an experimental or quasi-experimental design.
- ✓ The results of these studies have been published in a peer-reviewed journal or other professional publication, or documented in a comprehensive evaluation report.
- ✓ Implementation materials, training and support resources, and quality assurance procedures have been developed and are ready for use by the public.

From the eligible submissions received, SAMHSA selects a limited number of interventions to be reviewed each year.

In addition, all interventions in the Registry are invited to undergo a new review 4 or 5 years after their initial review.

WHAT OTHER WORK IS NREPP INVOLVED IN?

NREPP is continually looking for ways to expand its utility and reach wider audiences. Some examples of these efforts include (1) conducting reviews for other agencies, (2) maintaining an Online Learning Center, (3) translating summaries into Spanish, (4) conducting literature searches, and (5) presenting at national and international conferences.

Conducting reviews for other agencies

Since its relaunch in 2005, there has been growing interest in NREPP's model of rating evidence-based programs. At least two agencies have adapted NREPP's review process and rating criteria: the National Cancer Institute (NCI) and the Administration on Aging (AoA). NREPP staff are currently conducting reviews for NCI and AoA through contract with SAMHSA. The intervention summaries developed for NCI are available on the Research-tested Intervention Protocols (RTIPs) Web site, <http://rtips.cancer.gov/rtips/index.do>.

Online Learning Center

NREPP maintains an online Learning Center to supplement the review-based information provided through the Registry. Current offerings in the Learning Center include learning modules on implementation and preparing for NREPP submission; a research paper on evidence-based therapy relationships; and links to screening and assessment tools for mental health and substance use. A new learning module on program evaluation will be added in 2012. Also in 2012, NREPP will begin offering systematic reviews on hot topics in the behavioral health field, such as bullying, motivational interviewing, and posttraumatic stress disorder. Similar to annotated bibliographies, these systematic reviews will summarize the literature currently available on each topic and provide a list of citations. NREPP plans to offer these systematic reviews as PDFs available through the Online Learning Center.

Translation of summaries into Spanish

To better serve its Spanish-speaking Web site users, NREPP is working with a professional translation service provider to provide Spanish-language versions of summaries on its Web site. Translations will be provided for the 40 interventions currently listed on the Web site that offer implementation materials in Spanish. In addition, the search options on NREPP's Web site will be expanded to include a checkbox for interventions with materials available in Spanish.

Literature searches

NREPP has generally relied on voluntary submissions from the public. Over time and as the Registry grows, the number of applicants may decline, making it important to actively seek out new interventions whose developers may not know about the Registry or who may not have considered submitting their intervention to NREPP. In addition, SAMHSA is interested in expanding NREPP's scope and reach by seeking out interventions that have been developed and tested in other countries.

To help identify these additional interventions, literature searches of major journals from the United States and other countries are currently being conducted by topic area. Once a list of potential

candidate programs is generated for a given topic, NREPP assesses whether each program meets the eligibility requirements and could be implemented in the United States. Developers of eligible programs are then contacted to determine their interest in participating in a review.

National and international conferences

NREPP continually seeks opportunities to give presentations at conferences to increase awareness of the Registry and promote the submission of new interventions. Over the past several years, NREPP staff have presented at more than 50 conferences and other events. In 2012, NREPP has already given presentations at several conferences in the United States and in Australia. Several more presentations are planned for this year at other national and international conferences, including some to be held in Canada and England.