PROJECT AND TEAM SELECTION GUIDELINES
Improvement Science in Practice
Carnegie Foundation
December 2-4, 2015

Improvement Science is a methodology for using disciplined inquiry to solve a specific problem of practice. *Improvement Science in Practice* is designed to help participants learn improvement methodologies through working on a specific problem facing their organization over the course of a semester. Choosing an appropriate project and the right team is critical in having a productive learning experience. The following guidelines outline what to consider in selecting who to bring and what to work on through this workshop.

IMPROVEMENT PROJECT OVERVIEW

Project Launch: Teams will begin working on their project before coming to the in-person workshop. With the support of Carnegie improvement advisors and pre-readings, your team will complete activities designed to help you select an initial improvement goal and understand your current performance. These kinds of activities can only be done while you are physically in your organization so it is critical to make time for launching your project before coming to the workshop.

At the workshop: Over the course of three days, teams will:
 ➢ Define a specific problem of practice
 ➢ Develop a working theory of practice improvement
 ➢ Create a measurement system to track their progress
 ➢ Learn the tools of testing and learning from changes
 ➢ Draft a project plan for the team's work going forward

Project Execution: The real work happens *after* the workshop. Over the course of the spring semester, teams will continue to work together in a structured learning process. This learning requires regular team meetings, conducting iterative tests of various practices as well as tracking a series of measures on a weekly basis. Learning takes time, so you will want to protect time to work on this over the spring semester.

SELECTING A PROJECT

You will begin by selecting a focus for your improvement project. This often begins by identifying a problematic outcome in your organization that you would like to improve. Also consider the following characteristics of successful projects:

Supported by leadership. Improvement science takes a *learning to improve* approach to solving problems. This type of approach requires both sustained attention to the project from the team and protected space to try different approaches to solving your problem of practice. Creating this time and space requires the participation of leadership. Your team will need the support of at least one key leader who will serve as your project sponsor.

Feasible to complete in six months. For the purposes of this course, the project should be scoped so it can reasonably be completed in six months or less. If your work is focused on a large, long-term,

improvement project, you should choose another project, scale down the effort, or partition the large project so that one part can be completed in the allocated time. Improvement Science can be used to structure these longer term improvement needs, but learning the methodology will be aided by picking a project in which you can get an early win.

Under your control. The most successful teams select a project that is directly related to their work within their organizations. The methodology entails iterative tests of changes to daily work practices and this will be facilitated if the changes are to the daily work practices of members of the team.

**For third party organizations that may serve schools or districts but not work in them on a daily basis (the Carnegie Foundation fits in this category, for example) we would recommend that you consider selecting a project inside your own organization for the purposes of the workshop. You will have greater control over the work, be able to engage in more frequent testing and will subsequently learn more through the process. The learning that comes from leading a successful change effort in your organization can then be transferred to supporting a similar methodology in the schools with which you work.

Examples of Projects

In your initial application, we ask that you describe the goal you hope to achieve, propose an outcome measure that could help you know if you have met this goal, and explain why the goal is of critical importance to your organization. See below for some excerpts from previous applications:

Goal	Possible Outcome Measure	Why Important
Increase the rates of participation in after school programs by Native American youth in our after-school programs	# of Native American students attending one of our after school programs	Participation in high-quality after-school programs is correlated with positive outcomes for students in school and beyond. Our district has a significant population of Native American students who do not currently attend our programs.
Increase the effectiveness of feedback in helping our teachers to grow	Teachers ratings on TAP rubric	We want to better use feedback to support our teachers because we believe it is critical to meaningful teacher growth and to improving student learning.
Decrease the number of fights among girls in our high school	# of female fights during the Spring semester	Current high rates of fighting among girls are detrimental to the climate of our school. Fighting also results in students being suspended, reducing their time spent learning.
Improve the efficiency of our publication process	Average # of days it takes to complete a publication	Our team regularly needs to revisit and re-do steps of the publication process, resulting in wasted time and energy, as well as frustration among team members.

BUILDING THE "RIGHT" TEAM

Characteristics of Effective Improvement Teams
- ➢ Involved in work that directly impacts the problem space
- ➢ Will be able to collaborate effectively upon returning home (i.e. work together already, have complementary schedules, are able to meet face-to-face)
- ➢ Invested in the problem and highly motivated to solve it
- ➢ Curious and willing to take risks/learn from failures

Improvement Team Roles:

Team Lead. The team lead is responsible for keeping the team on track, scheduling and organizing team meetings and maintaining contact with the project sponsor (see below). The team lead will also be the main point of contact for the Carnegie improvement advisor.

Team Members. The rest of the team should be made up of the various people that are needed achieve the goal you select. The teams should be comprised of 2-5 people that can meet together on a regular basis (e.g weekly).   The team members will be responsible for collecting data, regularly executing tests of change and collectively reflecting on what is being learned.

It is particularly important that your team contains at least one **front-line worker.** This could be a teacher, administrator or other staff that is directly involved in the core work related to your goal on a daily basis. You will need the front line workers' buy-in and expertise in order to effectively identify and solve problems.

Project Sponsor. Your project sponsor is an organizational leader that may or may not be a member of the improvement team. The project sponsor agrees to actively provide guidance, routinely monitor project progress, aggressively remove barriers, and provide protected time for the team to work on the project. Having this kind of advocate for your work is critical because learning anything new requires time and sustained focus.

NOW YOU'RE READY TO APPLY!

Selecting a project and a team can be harder than it first seems! Thoughtful consideration of these factors is a critical step in ensuring you have the most productive workshop experience. In order to help you, we ask that you fill out a short application that prompts you to articulate an initial project goal and a team to bring to the workshop. You will iterate on this material, so do not worry at this point if you are not completely certain what you would like to work on.

Upon receipt of your application, a Carnegie improvement advisor will follow up with you to answer any questions you might have about project and team selection before you register for the workshop. Following registration, your team will complete a series of pre-work exercises to prepare you for the workshop.