



Carnegie Foundation  
for the Advancement of Teaching

# Networked Improvement Community Design Learning Lab

## WHAT IS A NETWORKED IMPROVEMENT COMMUNITY?

For over a decade, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching has been pioneering a fundamentally new approach to improve systems' performance by joining the discipline of improvement science with the powerful capacities of networks to foster innovation and social learning. This approach is embodied in what Carnegie refers to as Networked Improvement Communities, or NICs. NICs are scientific learning communities distinguished by four essential characteristics in which their work is:

- **Focused** on a well-specified common aim
- **Guided** by a deep understanding of the problem, the system that produces it, and a shared theory of practice improvement
- **Disciplined** by the rigor of improvement science
- **Coordinated** to accelerate the development, testing, and refinement of interventions, their rapid diffusion into the field, and their effective integration into varied educational contexts

The Foundation has been testing this approach through its own NICs—Carnegie Math Pathways, Building a Teaching Effectiveness Network, and Student Agency Improvement Community—and with a small number of partners, such as Tennessee's Early Literacy Network and California's Shasta County and Tulare County Offices of Education. Positive outcomes from these NICs continue to build our confidence in the model and enhance our knowledge of how to do this work reliably, effectively, and at scale. We now seek to share our learning and to support others in the field.

## WHAT WILL YOU ACCOMPLISH THROUGH THE LEARNING LAB?

The NIC Design Learning Lab is a 7-month program that supports capacity building as well as programmatic planning and execution. Participants develop their knowledge of a set of tools and processes by applying them to their own work under the tutelage of Carnegie faculty and learning guides. Through the Learning Lab, participants will move through the NIC initiation journey as part of a cohort of 4–8 teams that are scaffolded and supported through the conception, initiation, development, and launch of their NICs.

## WHO SHOULD ATTEND THE LEARNING LAB?

The Learning Lab is a unique opportunity designed for teams seeking to start a Networked Improvement Community. Participants are motivated to work collaboratively to solve a specific, persistent, high-leverage problem of practice, and they have the ability to deploy organizational resources to support the NIC launch and its ongoing operation.

Professional Learning

Importantly, teams must have consistent team member participation for the duration of the program. Teams attending the Learning Lab should be comprised of four members representing the following functions:

- **Senior-level sponsor:** an organizational leader that actively guides, monitors, and supports the effort, addressing organizational barriers as needed
- **Network director:** the day-to-day leader of the NIC
- **Improvement lead:** a strong analytical thinker who facilitates inquiry, data analysis, and theory development
- **Front-line practitioner:** an “on-the-ground” expert, such as a teacher or administrator, who has in-depth knowledge, experience, and insights about the problem of focus

## HOW IS THE LEARNING LAB STRUCTURED?

During four in-person learning sessions, participants will learn:

- **Technical skills** such as problem and systems study, establishing improvement aims, refining theories of improvement, developing measurement systems, and improvement research skills
- **Leadership skills** such as developing, sharing, and enrolling colleagues in the establishment of a NIC, and building will for participation in a new way of working
- **Learning-system development** such as creating the routines and infrastructure to generate, as well as gather, organize and spread improvement knowledge to ensure its uptake and use in a NIC

Between each learning session will be an “action period” during which participants use the knowledge and skills gained to further the establishment of a NIC through problem investigation, data analysis, team building, and leadership development. Participating teams will be expected to have completed work in their own contexts before returning to the next in-person convening. At the end of the Learning Lab, the participating team will be prepared to facilitate the launch of the NIC into a period of networked learning and collective action on the problem of focus.

Learning Labs are typically hosted at the Carnegie Foundation in Palo Alto, CA.

Tuition for the Learning Lab includes participation of the team in all four workshops, a pre-Lab webinar, customized virtual coaching for teams during action periods, textbooks and learning resources, an opening reception, and all meals and breaks onsite. Participants are responsible for the cost of travel to and from workshops, as well as lodging. Additional team members may be added upon request at a modest additional cost.

**Tuition:** \$75,000 for a 4-person team




**For more information about the NIC Design Learning Lab, please contact our professional learning opportunities team at [professionallearning@carnegiefoundation.org](mailto:professionallearning@carnegiefoundation.org).**

**For more information about the Carnegie Foundation and its other professional learning courses, please visit the Professional Learning section of our website, [CarnegieFoundation.org](http://CarnegieFoundation.org).**



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