# Tier 2 Innovation and Impact Network – Evaluation Technical Assistance Kickoff Webinar

Wednesday, July 14, 2021

4:00-5:00 p.m. ET

Webinar transcript

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| Jean Knab | Thank you, Russ. I believe you received a copy of the slides via email before the webinar. So, you'll have copies of the links, and we'll provide the email addresses at the end of call. And the slides and the recording will also be posted to max.gov in the near future. Right now, I'm going to turn things over to Tammy Bartasavich from the OPA TPP [Office of Population Affairs Teen Pregnancy Prevention] Innovation team to give a brief introduction to the webinar. |
| Tammy Bartasavich | Great. Thanks, Jean. Hi, everyone, and thanks for taking time today to attend the webinar. We're really excited. The Innovation team has been working hard to get Year 1 under our belts. And now we're excited to kick off Year 2 and introduce the Innovation Impact Network Evaluation Technical Assistance team. So, basically, the purpose of today will be to introduce the Mathematica staff, the evaluation team, to orient all of you to the support that's available for you during this coming year for evaluation.<br><br>As you work across the stages of your interventions, learning and evaluating what you're doing, I hope today will be very useful to all of you. I am very excited about this opportunity, and I'm sure that if you have questions, there will be time during the webinar today, or you can talk with your PO [project officer] on your next call, but I want to thank all of you for coming. It looks like there's great attendance today. So, with that, I'm going to turn it over, I think, to Russell. |
| Jean Knab | Nope, back to me. Nope, back to me. |
| Tammy Bartasavich | Oh, okay, Jean. |
| Jean Knab | That's okay. |
| Tammy Bartasavich | So, Jean will be taking over. And we also have Lauren today, Russell, and Jonathan. They will all be presenting. Thank you all. And go ahead, Jean. |
| Jean Knab | Great. Thanks, Tammy. Russ, you can go to the next slide. As Tammy said, as most of you are moving into the test and refine or evaluate stage |

for at least some of your interventions, OPA asked us to be available to support you on evaluation-related activities. Our contract is separate from the program TA [technical assistance] contract we've already been working with, and is really designed to complement the work that they do with you.

So, today, the Evaluation TA team wants to briefly introduce ourselves and the TA we can provide. First, we'll set the stage for the rest of the webinar by talking broadly about feasibility research and the goals for these innovation grants. Then we'll talk about the goals for each of the stages, some illustrative activities that might be occurring in each phase, and how we can be helpful to you in that phase. Then we'll briefly talk about some other support we can provide to you that may be useful in any phase. And then, finally, we'll discuss next steps, which includes a needs assessment survey that we'll be sending out to you. And then we'll be opening the floor for questions. Next slide, Russ.

So, before we dive into the content, Tammy gave you a preview, but I'd like to briefly introduce the TA leadership team. As I mentioned, I'm Jean Knab. I'm the project director of the contract. Lauren Scher is the deputy project director. And Russ Cole is the principal investigator. You'll hear from both Lauren and Russ today. Each of us has provided TA for OPA since 2010. We've also provided TA for other agencies on rigorous, informative evaluations. Among us, we've also done development work, CQI [continuous quality improvement], anything that's under design activities, and descriptive and impact evaluations. So, we have experience with many of the tasks that you'll be undertaking. And we've had the pleasure of working with some of you before, and we look forward to working with you again in this new capacity.

We'll also draw on others at Mathematica to speak to your needs. We're a large organization. We have experts in evaluation, data collection, program delivery, and human-centered design, among other topics across our Health Division and our Human Services Division. We also have a subcontractor public strategy that is an experienced TA provider as well as a program provider themselves. So, we'll really look to match you with a TA provider that can best speak to your needs and bring in others to assist as needed. Next slide.

Today, we've enlisted the help of one of these experts here at Mathematica, Jon McCay, to talk through a process we developed with ACF [Administration for Children and Families] to develop and refine interventions. And Russ will introduce Jon in a few minutes. Next slide.

For those who haven't worked with us before, Mathematica currently holds two evaluation technical assistance contracts with OPA. One is formative and process evaluations. We worked with the TPP ’18 grantees and are wrapping up with the TPP ’19 grantees. And this contract has been working with the Tier 2B Impact Evaluations funded in 2020, and now we’ll be working with you as well.

When we talk about evaluation TA, we’re not just talking about impact evaluations. We’re really talking broadly about TA focused on data collection and how to use that data for different purposes. Russ and Lauren will get into more detail, but we’ve provided TA using continuous quality improvement activities, including how to collect data using observations, interviews, and focus groups; how to collect data to assess need and demand for your program; and how to monitor recruitment and retention, among other topics.

Many of the resources we’ve created under these contracts are available on max.gov and the new Reproductive Health National Training Center site. So, today, OPA asked us to spend some time talking about the evaluation activities you might be undertaking during the different phases of your grant, how you might know when you’re ready for the next phase, and how Mathematica might be able to help you as you undertake these activities.

As I mentioned, we’re going to send out a needs assessment survey to hear more about how we may be able to help you by providing TA to you or to organizations in your network as you undertake evaluation activities. We know that each of you has unique needs; you’re in different places across grants and also within grants for different interventions. So, we’ll try to customize our TA for you. We’ll be available for one-on-one TA, but we’ll also look for opportunities to connect you to one another and conduct group-based TA when there are topics that multiple grantees or evaluators are interested in. It’s likely that we’ll be most useful to you in the Test and Refine stage and the Evaluate stage, but we’re really available no matter what stage you are in. So, with that, I will turn it over to Russ to get into more detail.

Russell Cole

Thanks, Jean. So, what we’re going to do in the next few sections is paint a picture of how the Evaluation TA team can support you in the various stages of your IIN [Innovation and Impact Network] projects. I’m going to start by introducing something called feasibility research because it might help provide some guidance and some illustrations that will be helpful as you’re thinking about your own IIN projects and the stages for the grant program. We know that some of you are working on traditional in-class curricula while others are doing interventions with different forms, like technology or policy changes or different methods of program delivery. What we’re going to discuss today can be applied to all those different types of interventions, and we can work with you individually to figure out how best to support you given the unique ways you've defined your intervention plans.

A recent article from Daniel Gadke in the *Journal of School Psychology* talks about incorporating feasibility research into more traditional intervention research. The Gadke article makes the argument that traditional intervention research is focused on the effectiveness of interventions. Oftentimes, effectiveness evaluations are done by comparing a group that receives an intervention against a group that doesn't, potentially through a randomized controlled trial [RCT] or other group design. And Lauren will talk more about this in a bit.

Gadke cautions that there's potentially a problem with being too focused on whether a program is effective. Often, we find that the programs aren't effective in a rigorous RCT or other effectiveness study. Maybe the program isn't a good match for the target population, or it can't be implemented well in a given setting. Or maybe recruitment lows result in a smaller-than-expected sample size that leads to an underpowered study. There are a lot of ways that jumping to an effectiveness research study can produce unsatisfying tests and, therefore, unsatisfying evidence about the effective program.

Feasibility research is presented as a potential precursor to effectiveness research. Feasibility research is more focused on understanding and providing information about intervention process. What are the needs of the target population? What's the gap in the available services? How can an intervention or a collection of interventions address that gap and so on? Taking a feasibility research perspective helps us to see how getting to effectiveness is a staged process. It also helps us to understand and realize opportunities for generating lots of useful information on the way to producing evidence of effectiveness. Certainly, at one end of the continuum of information that an IIN project can generate is evidence of intervention of effectiveness from something like a rigorous RCT, but there are lots of other types of information about an intervention that can be produced and disseminated along the way to showcase the potential of an intervention— for example, to show lessons learned.

This feasibility research perspective aligns nicely with the IIN stages, and it creates opportunities for us as your Evaluation TA providers to demonstrate where we can be most useful to you. In addition, it helps us to structure this presentation today and offer guidance for your IIN projects that's grounded in the literature.

The Gadke article provides this illustration of different stages of activity for interventions, with the goal of eventually moving toward producing rigorous evidence of program effectiveness through something like an

RCT. There are two nice things about this figure. First, the figure highlights a sequence of stages that is well-aligned with the stages of IIN. At the top of this figure is the Intervention Development stage. This aligns well with the IIN’s Explore and Develop stage. At this early stage, environmental scans are performed to identify needs and gaps, innovate possible solutions, and develop possible theories of change and logic models that show how interventions help address needs and potentially improve outcomes.

Next, there’s the intervention feasibility stage. This aligns well with the IIN’s test and refine stage. Here you are road-testing the program, working out its issues, and getting it ready for a more rigorous test. Finally, in this figure, there are two levels, one for a pilot study and one for conducting an RCT. These feel well aligned with the IIN’s Evaluate stage. Here, you’re developing some preliminary information about how your programming is working in a pilot study and then producing evidence of effectiveness through a rigorous design.

Another nice thing about this figure is that it shows that the progress through these stages is nonlinear. There are arrows that are moving toward evidence of effectiveness as you move down the stages. There’s also an acknowledgment that, at some point, you need to pivot away and drop an intervention or components of an intervention based on what you’ve learned at that stage, and potentially go backwards. So, just to say this, different audience members might be thinking about their stages slightly differently, and that’s totally fine. Our goal here is to try to illustrate a way of thinking about this to help you frame your work successfully.

OPA understands that grantees are going to have different approaches to development, testing, and evaluation, and thus there can’t be rigid, inflexible definitions for what constitutes progress or activity or expectations for a given stage. That being said, several grantees have indicated they would appreciate some guidance, some assistance understanding how to think about these different stages. So, what we’ve attempted to do in today’s presentation is give some illustrations, given some examples of how you and your team might want to think about this. But it is important for me to point out that the guidance shown here is illustrative, and it doesn’t outline expectations. OPA is, however, expecting that you’ll work with your teams and with your project officer to try to operationalize your own goals, your own milestones and deliverables, and the activities that you’ll do at each stage. That way OPA can better track your progress and ensure that you’re getting the help that you need.

Today, we’re going to stick with a single example built from that feasibility of research framework to try and provide a more concrete illustration of what this could look like for a given IIN project. So, we're going to begin with the first IIN stage for today, Explore and Develop. You're in your two-year grant. So, several of you may have already done substantial work in this phase already, while others may just now be preparing to enter this stage, and there may be some who are stepping backward and returning to the stage after pivoting and dropping an intervention.

In our attempt to operationalize the Explore and Develop stage relative to the feasibility research framing, we saw two main activities happening that would interact with each other. On the left-hand side, we have environmental scans and stakeholder engagement. This is where we're trying to figure out who our target population is, what their needs and strengths are, and what gaps in services exist. And then trying to identify or innovate interventions that address those gaps, and document a logic model or a theory of change for how the identified or innovative interventions will meet needs and potentially change outcomes.

On the right-hand side is where we then assess the feasibility of the proposed solution in a given setting. Do potential participants perceive the intervention as appropriate, reasonable, and potentially effective? Is it practical from the perspective of implementers? Can it be implemented within the constraints of the setting in terms of time, space, or resources? Will the intervention lend itself to adaptation so that it can accommodate diversity and the needs of the intended population? And can the intervention be integrated into the system so that it's potentially sustainable long term?

Through this iterative process of scanning and assessing feasibility, it's expected that one or more interventions may emerge as potentially promising and warranting implementation. So, how might you talk about your work at this stage when developing your own definitions and sharing your progress with OPA? Here's how we would frame our thinking on this, to try to establish some common understanding for our goals at this stage, the activities that we'd be undertaking, and how we'd argue that we're ready to transition to the next stage of the grant program. Again, this is not intended to be applicable to everyone. This is more of an illustration to help show an example for grantees who want to see a little bit more guidance.

We would frame our work at this stage around the goals shown in this first bullet, identifying and establishing interventions that meet needs and appear to be feasible. To demonstrate that we're making progress on this goal, we would try to show readiness for implementation and the appropriateness of the interventions for implementation. Notably, this means showing and documenting the merit of an intervention to OPA and to other stakeholders. This might be sharing the results of your environmental scan, to highlight population needs and gaps in services, and mapping how the interventions that you've selected address those needs and gaps. This might also include developing manuals to standardize program implementation and drafting theories of change or logic models that show how the selected interventions are expected to change outcomes.

Importantly, this also means documenting that the program is satisfactory or acceptable, both to the youth who are eventually going to receive it as well as the providers and stakeholders who will be offering it, and that it's feasible to implement and integrate into existing systems. This documentation is going to be dependent on data. It might be quantitative data, like surveys of needs, or qualitative data, like interviews with potential facilitators or focus groups with youth. And it will need to be summarized and shared with OPA and stakeholders, again, to demonstrate the merit of the interventions and their appropriateness for addressing the goals shown above.

We've framed this stage as ending with a selection of interventions appropriate for implementation but before implementation begins. That's the delineation for where the Test and Refine stage begins for our working example. Your team might have a different framework for how you define the start and end points for each stage, and how you move between them, and that's totally fine. Just work with your project officer to help figure this out.

I'm going to do a quick pivot here and try to lay out some of the places where the Evaluation TA team can be particularly useful under this illustration of the Explore and Develop phase. We can provide individual, group, or peer-to-peer TA on many topics relevant to this stage. For example, we can help with measuring youth and stakeholder needs through interviews or surveys as part of an environmental scan. We can help with your assessment of the acceptability and feasibility of intervention through conversations with site stakeholders and potential facilitators.

We can assist with the development and refinement of logic models or theories of change that identify how selected interventions can address needs identified through a scan, and how the outcomes are likely to be affected by the selected interventions. We can help you with your own articulations of goals, activities, milestones, or another framing for how you'd like to define those stages, and for ways for you to communicate the merit of your interventions to warrant progression to another stage of the grant, or the problems that you've had at this stage and the need to continue to iterate. Finally, we can help you disseminate the evaluation learning that you've done at this stage to a broad audience.

As Jean mentioned, at the end of the presentation, there will be an Evaluation TA needs assessment survey that we'll issue where you can express interest in receiving TA on these topics and others. For now, let's continue our working example, assume that we've got a promising intervention that we want to move forward with for the next phase of our project.

So, from the feasibility framing we did earlier on, we argued that the Test and Refine stage is where program implementation is happening, but the reality of program implementation is that it almost never goes as intended. Problems come up like lower-than-expected recruitment yield or poor program take-up or attendance, low levels of student engagement or weak program delivery. The Test and Refine stage can help you to identify those problems, determine solutions, to improve the implementation process.

What I'm going to do now is stop talking so that we can bring on Jon McCay, a senior program analyst at Mathematica, to talk about the framework developed here and the TA we've provided for several projects. We think it's particularly useful for addressing these types of problems with implementation process, though it certainly can be used for more than just process refinement if you're interested in learning more. It's called Learn, Innovate, Improve. Jon trained me on it, so he's definitely the point person for me for these types of questions. And Jon is going to give us a brief introduction to this framework now.

Jonathan McCay

All right. Thanks, Russ. And hi, everybody. My name is Jon. I'm really glad to be with you today. So, I want to talk about $LI^2$—Learn, Innovate, Improve—and give you a way to think about this work of really getting your intervention to succeed. As Russ mentioned before, and one of the ways that I like to frame this, so often in evaluation we can find that an intervention doesn't work. It has no impacts. And what's sad about that is that, more often than not, it isn't that it was a bad idea or that it was a poor intervention; it was that the intervention was poorly implemented. And one of the things that $LI^2$ is trying to do is to get us to a point where our interventions—our ideas and our innovations—can be really well implemented and integrated into the environment. So, next slide.

We talk about $LI^2$ being both a framework and a process model. Now, what do I mean by that? Framework is simply a way to think about it. A process model is a series of steps that you can follow. And this whole framework and process model was born out of a need, a gap that we saw in the field, which is how do we take innovative ideas, building on the evidence that exists, but also trying to generate new ideas and new evidence through the process of implementation and innovation. And we found that a lot of what's out there in the research field is not particularly accessible to practitioners, and there is a gap between those of you who are doing the work of implementation and those who are studying implementation. So, this was meant to bridge that gap and bring those two things together.

As the graphic suggests, $LI^2$ is not a linear process. It's cyclical. It's iterative, because, again, as Russ mentioned, the process of getting your intervention from idea to impact is going to be a very iterative process. You're going to have to fail. You're going to have to try things, realize that they aren't being implemented or carried out as intended, and you're going to have to adapt, and that's what this framework is meant to help you do.

I'll talk more about each of the phases in just a couple of seconds, but the Learn phase is about making sure that we have a really clear understanding of what's our motivation for improvement and iteration for change. So, if you are dealing with a situation where you have low engagement or poor take-up of services, let's make sure that we understand what we know about that problem, why it's a problem, for whom it's a problem, and what we might then do about it.

It's also really important to assess the environment. I like to talk about this as making sure that whatever change we develop is actually going to stick based on the circumstances and the context that we have to work with. It's sort of like accounting for a possible autoimmune response of the body,. If you introduce a foreign object into the body, the body will have an autoimmune response; that is, it will attack that foreign object inside of the body and try to kill it or expel it. You don't want that to happen with your intervention. So, we want to make sure we've thought carefully about the environment or the ecosystem in which you're implementing so that we align it with the changes that you're making.

In the Innovate phase, it's really about being intentional about the design of your intervention, but more specifically, about the design of your process improvements. So, again, if you're trying to increase engagement, you're trying to mitigate attrition, you're trying to create greater uptake of these services, then let's be really thoughtful about the logic or the reasoning or the argument for why this strategy will lead to these changes in behavior and, therefore, these immediate or proximal outcomes that we can see or measure.

That then leads us to an opportunity to improve, which is the spirit of the Test and Refine stage altogether. You learn about the problem and the idea, you innovate, you create an intentional plan around it, and then you start to test and refine it. Is this strategy (or are these strategies) helping us address the engagement problem or the attrition problem? And you're not asking questions about impact. You're often asking questions about process and implementation and integration. Is this working well? What are the experiences of these various stakeholders? How do we know that behavior is changing? And then that feeds right back into further learning and innovation. Next slide.

The other thing that is really important to say about this is that $LI^2$ was designed to put people at the center. This is what you might refer to as a human-centered approach. And I know that many of you have experience using human-centered design approaches. So, hopefully this resonates. But at every step of the process, $LI^2$ is meant to involve the diverse array of human experiences. So, if you're dealing with the youth engagement issue, it stands to reason that you need to talk to youth to understand why there is an engagement problem. You need to talk to those who have engaged, those who haven't engaged, and those who are struggling to engage. But you also need to talk to the various stakeholders, maybe the curriculum developer or the instructor. Maybe you need to talk to a mentor or a coach in the field. Maybe you need to talk to a guidance counselor at the high school.

Whatever the case may be, it's being really thoughtful about engaging your stakeholders because human services, at the end of the day, are about humans. And if we don't talk to the humans involved in the work, then we are missing a really important opportunity to account for their lived experience and make that part of the solution. So, as you identify the problem with implementation, as you explore new possibilities or innovations to address that problem, and then as you test and improve those solutions to the problem, bring those stakeholders and individuals into the process.

In $LI^2$, our sort of overarching question is, what works for whom and under what circumstances? What works typically is about getting to impact, but what I want to underscore here is that it is about for whom. You can look at impacts and say here is the average effect, but the real story tends to be about above and below the average; right? Why did it work so well for these people and not so well for these people? Don't wait until you get to your impact results to talk about that. The Test and Refine stage is exactly the right time to start to think about who's benefiting more and who's benefiting less from these strategies. How do we engage the disengaged? How do we represent the voices of those who may have been marginalized in this process and make sure that we're developing strategies that represent their experiences? Next slide, please.

The role that human-centered design can play is that you use human-centered design methods to evoke and incorporate the experiences of these stakeholders. And I think it’s also really about empathy. We can get lost in data collection being about data points, but data points really, at their core, represent human experiences. And one of the most important ways that human-centered design plays a role is that we both converge and diverge in our thinking, right?

Whenever we’re faced with a problem we might perceive that, oh, well, youth aren’t taking up these services. And then it’s easy to jump to a solution to that problem, right? We might do some divergent thinking about what we might do to address this low engagement issue. And then we converge around the solution. But, in fact, what we need to do is make sure we’ve gotten to the right problem. Taking that perceived problem and saying, is that just an effect of a deeper root cause? Human-centered design can be a really effective way for you to get to the right problem before you start to solve the problem. And that’s what this is really all about. The Test and Refine stage is an iteration of making sure that you are getting to the right problem and then righting that problem.

On the next slide here, I want to talk a little bit more about the Learn phase. The Learn phase is, as I mentioned before, primarily about three things: what’s our motivation for change or improvement, who are the key stakeholders that we need to engage in this, and is the environment ready for this change. So, when you’re thinking about a process or implementation improvement, consider why is this a problem. According to whom is this a problem? For those who are implementing or administering the program, you don’t want to see high attrition. You don’t want to see low engagement, but it’s really important to make sure we’re vetting that with the people who are both benefiting from and have a stake in the program.

That’s where identifying stakeholders can be really important. As you get into the Test and Refine stage, make sure that you’re thinking about who you could bring to the table and engage in some human-centered design activities, walking through a process of analytic discovery to uncover what are those root causes. It might be that students aren’t engaging in your program because they have transportation challenges, or because the way it’s being communicated by messengers at the high school, in their after-school program, or at the Boys and Girls Club is very different from the way that you wanted it to be communicated. And so if you start changing something over here but, in fact, the real problem is around transportation access and communication style, then we could end up fixing a problem that never existed and leaving the true problem unresolved. That’s why it’s so important to have a diverse array of stakeholders at the table to clarify the problem and why we are changing it.

It’s also critical to make sure you’re thinking about the environment because if you’re going to change up your communication strategy and you’re dealing with youth, sending mailers to communicate what your program is all about is probably a lost cause, right? Thinking about your environment would show you that if I’m trying to communicate with 18-year-olds or 22-year-olds, then I probably need to go the route of social media or text messaging if I’m going to get my message across. That’s where the environmental piece comes into play. That’s what the Learn phase is all about. You know you’re ready to move on from the Learn phase when you have a clarified sense of why we are changing or needing to address this problem, we’ve engaged diverse groups, and we’ve thought carefully about the context. Next slide.

In the Innovate phase, it’s building on what you’ve learned from the Learn phase and starting to draw on what might already be out there, what could you look to from existing research or other promising practices to design a solution. But it’s also about cocreating new ways to address the problem because, let’s face it, a lot of what you’re doing is adaptive work. There aren’t known solutions to many of the problems you’re dealing with. It’s not like an oil change. A light doesn’t just pop on, and you know immediately what to do. You have to think creatively with your stakeholders about how do we get this group of youth engaged from that neighborhood, how do we try to reach the folks at this high school, or how do we connect with these mentors and coaches in the community. Bringing together your stakeholders for a process of analytic creativity is what the Innovate phase is all about, and I encourage you to use human-centered design methods to do that.

On the next slide, I want to illustrate one of the ways that we try to do this, and that’s through a roadmap for change. Roadmap for change is a really nice way of making your best argument for why this is going to work. So, think about it this way. A roadmap can be used to map out, soup to nuts, an entire intervention, but specifically what I want to encourage you to think about is a process improvement to your intervention.

Think about what are you going to do differently. That’s that blue box of the intervention. If you’re dealing with low youth engagement, then what is your strategy to increase engagement. Maybe you’re going to try a messaging campaign. Maybe you’re going to try to get peers to talk to their peers about why this would be valuable. Maybe you’re going to send text messages. Maybe you’re also going to try to introduce an incentive to lure people into the program. Whatever it is, this is about spelling out really, in detailed terms, what you’re going to do.

This is where, if you kind of zoned out because it's 4:30 East Coast time, like, pay attention because what we often miss in implementation work is linking what we're going to do with the measurable success we want to see, and that's getting at how do you change behavior. That's that nice yellow box there in the middle, called Change Strategies. So often we miss this link. We say what we're going to do and then we say how we're going to measure what we did, but we don't articulate how do we get people to change their behavior.

So, if what you want a guidance counselor in a high school to do is change the way they message the program to high school students, how are you going to get that guidance counselor who's kind of been difficult to work with to change his or her behavior? What is your strategy to change behavior in other people? And that's where we're talking about the what and the how of process improvement. Both are critical, and implementation falters when we aren't clear about how we get the change to work and only focus on what the change is.

To do this, you need to think really carefully about the influencers, which is that nice blue bar across the bottom. What factors might help or hinder success? So, if I'm trying to implement a communication strategy to bring these students into my program, and one of the ways I want to do that is through an in-school person or a mentor or a peer, what do I think is going to help me do that, what factors are benefiting us, and what factors are going to get in our way? Maybe they're going to be resistant to our message. Maybe they have way too much on their plate. If they're overburdened, how will I train them on the new messaging strategy so that they then articulate it correctly to the youth we want to engage? This is where you're getting really into the weeds around your intervention or your process improvement and articulate it in this tool called a roadmap. This then serves as a way to manage the Improve phase.

On the next slide, the Improve phase is really about taking your idea, your process improvement, and trying it out, refining it. So, to just relate this to general life, I own a Subaru. Subaru doesn't just roll out a car and start testing the whole car on the road. In order for them to build that Subaru with all of its fancy technology, they've got to refine each of the different components of that vehicle over time, right? So, it's got the eyesight technology that literally watches the car in front of you on the road. They had to test and refine that specific technology before they could integrate it into the full intervention, the car, and make it work on the road in the way that you and I experience it.

The Improve phase is about taking that one component or that specific process improvement of the overall model and saying, how do we get this to work as well as it possibly can? It's not, "Does it work, yes or no." It's

"How do we get it to work better?" It's not, "Do we see an impact," but, rather, we want to head north, are we headed north or are we headed south? And so we use a process called road testing. Road testing is all about strengthening and refining implementation.

On the next slide, you'll see an illustration of what that could look like. If you're trying to iterate on a workshop, then you might think about, we're going to try the workshop format in this way, and we're going to gather feedback from our youth, and we're going to gather feedback from our facilitator. But it might be that you're trying out a new messaging strategy. What you need to do is to get the perspectives of youth who receive the different messages that you created and ask, what was your response to that? How did it make you feel? Were you more inclined to show up? Were you more inclined to engage with your mentor? These are the kinds of things that you want to do in the road-testing phase, and it allows you to gather the experiences of people and use those to understand why your change strategies are playing out in the way that they are.

Using your roadmap for change, you can ask questions about, is my "what," my process improvement, occurring in the way that I expect. And in the "How" column, my change strategies, am I seeing behavior change evolve in the way that I expected? So, on the next slide, you see the iteration. It's not a one and done. That's why we say test and refine. And test again is what it probably should say. You're always kind of coming back and thinking, what did we learn?

Anchoring your road testing in a set of learning objectives makes it really powerful and well defined. What is it that you want to learn about the process improvement that then frames what kinds of questions you ask, what kind of feedback you gather from your stakeholders as they try it out? Then you come back together and say, okay, well, what did we learn? Do we feel like we're headed in the right direction now? Have we begun to see some of those very near-term proximal outcomes related to engagement improve, or has attrition slowed?

And then you might try it again with some adaptations. It might be a revised version of the workshop. It might be using some different technologies to engage your youth. And you do that as much as you need to. These are meant to be very rapid tests, but, again, this is not traditional piloting. This is not about asking, does it work? This is about asking, how do we get it to work, and how do we get it to work better?

Finally, just a couple of examples of what this might look like on the next slide. You might think about using this $LI^2$ framework in a Test and Refine stage to clarify your interventions or components. Again, going back to the Subaru analogy, think of all the different components that make that car work well. Focusing in on just one of them, to really refine it and get it to work better is what we're talking about. It might be that you've seen a lot of early implementation challenges, the curriculum or the mentoring models not being carried out in the way that you expected. So, how can we troubleshoot that with a diverse group of stakeholders and co-design some solutions for how to make it stronger and more well-aligned with what we expected to see?

Or maybe it's that your intervention is experiencing some real success, but what you want to do is try some different methods related to communication, try some different formats, hybrid, virtual, and in person, to engage youth, and try those out. Road test them. Gather feedback from the youth, the facilitators, the mentors, the coaches, the parents, and see what their experiences are, and bring that back into your thinking about how to make this intervention as well implemented as it can be. So, that was a very high-level overview of $LI^2$, and I'm certainly happy to answer questions, but I will stop there so that we can wrap up and allow you to time to ask questions.

Russell Cole

Thanks so much, Jon. I definitely think that was a great way for folks to get a high-level overview of $LI^2$ and to kind of see how it dovetails with the Test and Refine phase. And as Jon mentioned, there is going to be opportunity for us to elaborate on it in greater detail in the future. Jon 's presentation on $LI^2$ can really help showcase a way to think about articulating your goals, your activities, your milestones for the Test and Refine stage. Here's how we would propose to define the work happening in this stage and document the merit of our project with OPA and other audiences.

Our articulated goal here for this stage is to hone aspects of implementation and delivery. To demonstrate that this is happening, we'd want to document and disseminate an argument that this program has been implemented, that issues have been identified and resolved, and that lessons have been learned. Based on what happened during this refinement stage, the next logical step in evidence building is to move forward to a more formal pilot study.

To showcase this to OPA and other audiences, we might share that we implemented the program; that we used CQI processes like $LI^2$ to identify problems, innovate solutions, and integrate them into intervention delivery; that the youth and the facilitators that are participating in this are satisfied and engaged with the programming that they've received; and that the information and the lessons that we've learned have been shared across the way. What we're trying to argue for for this illustration is that the end point at this stage is a demonstration of readiness for a pilot outcome study, since that's the next logical step in the evidence-building continuum toward showing the effectiveness of the intervention as a whole.

Where might we, as the Evaluation TA team, add some value to your team? Well, again, Jon gave an overview. We could go much further in-depth about the $LI^2$ process. We can show real-world examples and provide guidance and best practices that we've learned from current and previous projects. We can get specifics of $LI^2$ to CQI more broadly—for example, using available data to identify problems or creating measures for data collection when available data don't exist. We can talk about best practices around data collection approaches generally from surveys, interviews, and focus groups. We can coach on appropriate analyses to answer your questions with the data that you have, and help you interpret the findings appropriately, and, most notably, understand the limitations of the data, the analyses that you're conducting.

Again, we can provide help on similar things that I hinted at for the Explore and Develop stage. We can help develop definitions and document readiness for movement forward or backward across the stages, and disseminating the data-driven things that you've learned at this stage. So, again, you'll have an opportunity to raise your hand for different types of TA in the needs assessment in the future, but, with that, I'm going to turn it over to Lauren Scher who's going to talk about the Evaluate stage building from this existing framework.

Lauren Scher: Hi, everyone. Thanks, Russ. So, at this point, you have an intervention or strategy that you feel like meets the needs of your population; it's feasible to be implemented and has been refined in an effort to make it as strong and as relevant as it can be. So, now it's time to begin to assess whether the intervention's yielding the kind of outcomes that you're expecting.

Some of you might be interested in jumping right into a rigorous evaluation at this point, but, as Russ mentioned earlier when he was talking about the Gadke framework, there's always that danger in jumping in too soon to an RCT. So, we're recommending here that the key next step in this Evaluate stage is to carefully plan, develop, and implement a pilot study. Can you go to the next slide, Russ?

In general, a pilot study involves using data to inform whether the intervention is being implemented as expected, in other words, with fidelity, and also whether it's yielding the kind of outcomes that might be expected based on the logic model that you've developed. This typically includes collecting and analyzing implementation data as well as pre/post outcomes. Since pilot studies are short-term assessments, you're more likely to see differences in more proximal outcomes—for example, changes in knowledge or attitudes or behavioral intent, as opposed to distal outcomes, such as changes in sexual behavior outcomes. At the end of the pilot study, you may decide that you might need to go back and rethink your logic model or continue to refine your intervention, or you may feel confident that the intervention is ready for more rigorous evaluation.

Given that we think that most of you will be more focused on piloting during this grant period as opposed to rigorous evaluation, we're not going to spend a lot of time today talking about details related to randomized controlled trials or quasi-experimental design. However, we do want to point out the benefits of rigorous evaluation once you do get to the point where you feel like the intervention has the strongest chance for generating evidence of effectiveness. I'm not going to go through this slide here, but I just want to say, you know, to design a rigorous study takes a lot of effort and thought, and we can certainly help you along the way if you are at that point where you are thinking about design and rigorous evaluation.

But we just want to reiterate that while some interventions you're developing may get to the point where you're planning a rigorous evaluation, we expect that many of the interventions that you've developed to this point will likely be ready for pilot testing during the grant period. So, we see the Evaluate phase as a time where you can produce preliminary evidence that might motivate an argument for an eventual rigorous effectiveness study. We see key activities during the Evaluate stage as consistently measuring implementation and changes in outcomes, disseminating findings, and then when relevant and when it makes the most sense, beginning to design the rigorous evaluation, which could include a randomized controlled trial design or may include other rigorous methods for assessing impacts.

Our team can help you throughout the evaluate stage with a variety of issues that you might face. At the setup phase, we can provide guidance related to planning and implementing data collection procedures, developing strong tracking and monitoring systems, and navigating the institutional review board approval process. We can also help you think about analysis and reporting, and providing guidance on the various considerations you'll need to think through the feasibility and design of an eventual impact evaluation. And, of course, dissemination of findings from your pilot study will be critical to help motivate a future impact evaluation.

As we've mentioned multiple times, as you're moving up and down through each of these stages, dissemination is going to be a critical tool to ensure that stakeholders and partners understand your progress and can see where you're headed. The goal of dissemination is to be showing merit to warrant moving to each stage or from each stage. And dissemination may look a little different at each stage, but it's no less important in one stage versus another. For example, in the Explore and Develop phase, the critical piece is to be clear about who your target population is and why the intended intervention is expected to address their needs or why it was decided to pivot to another strategy. During the Test and Refine stage, you'll need to be clear about the process you went through to ensure that you've developed a strong intervention that's ready for further evaluation. And finally, during the Evaluate stage, you'll need to share the emerging findings to help provide motivation for continued development and testing of the intervention.

At this point, we've discussed the kinds of issues that you'll need to consider at each of the stages and some of the activities that we might be able to support you with at each of the stages; however, we also wanted to point out that there are broader evaluation technical assistance topics that we can also provide support on. Some are more specific to impact evaluations, while others cover broader topics that you might be interested in delving more deeply into. We're happy to chat with you about your individual needs, as Russ and Jean had mentioned earlier, so that we can best support you through the remainder of the grant period.

I also wanted to point out that we have prepared two toolkits that are available on max.gov that compile resources on a variety of evaluation-related topics—one related to formative evaluation and one to impact evaluation planning and implementation. And these toolkits are set up in a filterable spreadsheet format to make it easier for you to find resources. For example, in the impact evaluation toolkit, you can filter along categories such as planning, implementation, data collection, analysis and reporting. And all of the resources are also available through the training center website. We're happy to help you navigate through these toolkits if you have any questions about them. And obviously all of the things that we've mentioned thus far, we are really looking forward to working with you on. I'm going to pass the torch back to Jean so she can talk about next steps. And hopefully we'll have a few minutes for some Q&A.

Jean Knab

Thanks, Lauren. Russ, you can go to the next slide. So, in terms of next steps, we're going to send out a needs assessment to the grantee and evaluation lead of each grant. It's going to ask you about your interest in TA and a range of topics. Many of them were listed on the slides earlier, but there are others, and you can also feel free to write in topics that we haven't listed, and that will help us learn how to support you individually but also as a larger group. The survey is still undergoing OMB [Office of Management and Budget] approval, but we expect to send it out in the near future. Right now, we're planning on asking for responses by August

4, but we may revisit the due date, depending on when we get the survey sent out.

If you would like to request TA before you get the needs assessment survey, you can feel free to drop a note in the chat today. You can request TA via your project officer or you can send a note to our TPP Evaluation TA address listed on the slide. As Lauren mentioned, we're really looking forward to working with you.

We've got some time for questions. Feel free to drop a question in the chat or unmute yourself. While we're waiting, I will mention that the LI$^2$ process that Jon talked about, we've used that for curriculum development and refinement in a number of different areas, I believe it was adult education and also some facilitation training. I know they often use it with TANF offices to really think about process improvements, how to improve paperwork streams and things like that. So, you know, it's really applicable to a broad range of different topics, and we can help think about how it could be applicable to you, as I know some of you are doing in-classroom sort of traditional program implementation.

Jaclyn tossed a note in the chat, whether or not you've worked with us in the past. Yes, who's that?

Jaclyn Ruiz — Yeah, I was just going to comment. I'm sorry. I know I should be quiet because this isn't even my group of grantees, but I'm joining on behalf of Lizzy who couldn't make it. I'm just so excited. This presentation was amazing. And if you have not worked with MPR in the past, you are in for quite a treat. So, any questions you do have, I strongly encourage you to reach out and talk to them. I'm sure everyone's processing, but I'm just so excited to hear that you all are getting to work with the network grantees and that the network grantees are getting to work with you all.

Tammy Bartasavich — And I would second that. This is Tammy. I'm very excited, as I said at the beginning, and I'm hoping that, you know, all of you think very seriously about reaching out. You know, those that haven't, don't be shy. Like Jaclyn said, this is a great learning opportunity. It's just, you know, phenomenal that we have this available. So, if you want to talk to your PO about it and brainstorm, I think that's a good idea, too. So, just offering some encouragement.

Russell Cole — Lynn, we liked working with you, too.

Jean Knab — And, again, TA can look very different for different folks. For some folks, it might just be, you know, an hour-long call where we help you brainstorm, you know, measures that you might want to collect for something, and for others, it might be a more extended relationship, you know, to tackle a particular topic or approach. So, you know, this TA can be very flexible, and it's really just designed to meet your needs.

Minju Kim I just want to say, too, thank you so much. I think this presentation was very much needed, and I'm sure it answered a lot of questions or maybe prompted a lot of questions in people's heads. I'm sure questions will be coming forward after they do process, but I think we were just, you know, really needing a comprehensive overview of all of the stages that you went over, and I think you explained it well. This is being recorded, so we'll be putting it on max.gov, I think, for partners.

Jean Knab Yes.

Minju Kim I would encourage grantees to show it to their partners and their evaluators, because I don't know if all the evaluators are on the call. So, that's another suggestion.

Jean Knab Yes, we are working with OPA to figure out the best place to post this and get some of the slides around in this space. Great. All right. Well, we are here. Again, you can reach out to us directly or reach out through your project officer. And we'll be sending out that needs assessment survey soon. So, we expect to talk to many of you again soon. Thanks, everyone.

Minju Kim Thank you, Mathematica. It was great. Thanks everyone for attending.