

Leading Through Learning

Using Evolutionary Learning to Develop, Implement, and Improve Strategic Initiatives



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Introduction

Equitably educating students requires effective differentiation of services based on students' strengths and needs. Doing so reliably at scale is difficult given the diversity of students and contexts in our public school systems and the diversity of needs created by historical and institutionalized discrimination against people of color, immigrants, and other populations.

Still, a number of systems and organizations¹ have succeeded in advancing equity at scale. They have done so by finding new ways to design, lead, and manage their operations and engage internal and external stakeholders – in our language, new ways to **govern**² their work. Cutting across these promising governance practices are adult and student learning systems that provide transparency into how school leaders actually lead, teachers actually teach, and students actually learn day to day, school by school, classroom by classroom, and lesson by lesson. This combination of transparency, experimentation, and broad participation and knowledge sharing reveals effective ways to serve individual and groups of students, severing deeply entrenched links between student background, access to opportunity, and learning outcomes.

At the Center for Public Research and Leadership (CPRL), we sometimes call this family of learning methods Evolutionary Learning.³ These learning methods customize effective strategies and implementation to the diversity of contexts for which equitable outcomes are a moral imperative. **Leading Through Learning** in this way allows organizations to define and facilitate progress toward broadly shared goals centrally while enabling diverse communities to develop and effectively implement most solutions locally. At CPRL, we have trained over 450 future leaders to govern work in this way and have helped over 100 education-sector organizations adopt and apply the approach.

Evolutionary Learning contrasts with three common methods of governing school systems and organizations:

1. **Hierarchy:** Leaders make policy and pass down directives about how each category of school and educator will implement the policy, using supervisors and disciplinary systems to ensure compliance.
2. **Performance incentives:** Leaders give schools and educators standardized student outcome targets, the freedom to decide how to meet the targets, and rewards and consequences based on their success.
3. **Assumed expertise:** Leaders hire master practitioners and grant them broad autonomy to exercise informed discretion in defining and meeting goals aligned to the strengths and needs of each student.

¹Jennifer A. O'Day and Marshall S. Smith, "Quality and Equality in American Education: Systemic Problems, Systemic Solutions." In *The Dynamics of Opportunity in America: Evidence and Perspectives* (New York: Springer, 2016), 297–358.

²By *governing* or *governance*, we mean the formal and informal structures that systems and organizations use (a) to define goals and set policy, (b) to make decisions, (c) to direct and control everyday work, (d) to manage, motivate, and hold staff accountable for progress toward objectives, and (e) to engage stakeholders.

³Name borrowed from Christopher K. Ansell, *Pragmatist Democracy: Evolutionary Learning as Public Philosophy* (New York: Oxford Press, 2011).

All three approaches struggle to advance equity. **Hierarchy** invites unequal opportunities and outcomes by treating students, classrooms, and schools the same despite their variety of strengths and needs. **Performance incentives** often reward and punish blind luck, discourage skilled actors from surfacing what they know and sharing it with others, and trigger counterproductive measures like teaching to the test and cheating. And **assumed expertise** provides little transparency into whether, why, and how practitioners actually succeed or struggle. It yields wide variability in opportunities and outcomes given the range of mindsets, skills, knowledge, and expectations that practitioners bring to bear and given unexplored mismatches between those traits and students' diverse strengths and needs.

In contrast, Evolutionary Learning is well positioned to advance equity. Evolutionary Learning is a disciplined way to learn rapidly from the carefully observed experience of people closest to the problem to be solved and the strategy to be enacted. Individuals, teams, and organizations can use Evolutionary Learning effectively for activities as simple as maximizing the impact of small changes in procedures and as complex as reorganizing an existing system's overall plan of operations. In all such cases, actors in a broadly participative manner agree on a set of goals and propose a strategy for meeting them. They treat the strategy and everyday actions as experiments.⁴ They:

- define what successful implementation entails and what desired outcomes look like
- measure whether their actions and results match their expectations
- study gaps between expectations and results to find ways to improve, holding themselves accountable for examining and elevating their work's impact on marginalized communities

In taking these steps, actors:

- multiply opportunities to develop and test ways to succeed
- empower participants to try new approaches
- invite broad participation by local staff, individuals, and communities
- facilitate learning and spread knowledge and uptake of what works

This Toolkit is designed to help you try out Evolutionary Learning. In its most straightforward form, Evolutionary Learning in support of a strategic initiative unfolds in six stages.⁵

1. Organizing your effort
2. Mapping your system and strategy
3. Defining a measurement framework
4. Implementing and observing
5. Problem-solving to improve
6. Acting on and spreading learning

If you or your system, organization, or team are new to Evolutionary Learning, a good way to try it out is to use it to design and manage a new strategic initiative, large or small. Doing so will allow you to deepen your understanding of the model while minimizing the change management required to transition an entire entity to this new operating paradigm. Once Evolutionary Learning's use in a new initiative reveals its value and generates broader interest, you may extend it to other new initiatives, to ongoing activities, or across your entire organization. CPRL is pleased to assist organizations in addressing the change management steps these extensions require.

⁴What distinguishes actions that schools take every day and the experiments we envision here is careful observation and focused adjustment of actions that don't foster student learning. Far from experimenting on children, the idea is to alter actions already being taken that don't help students learn.

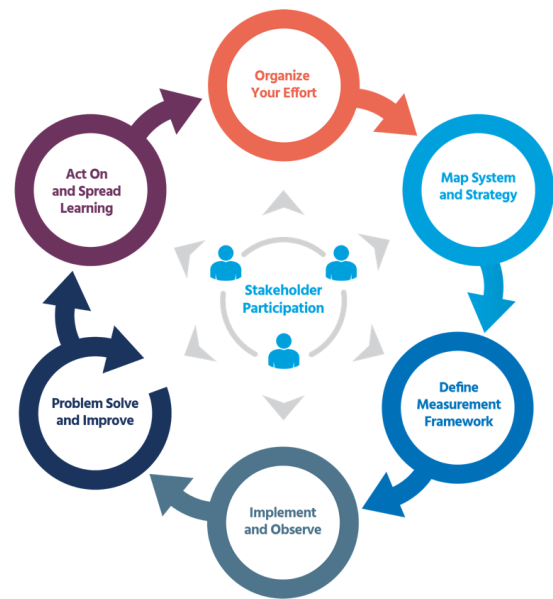
⁵Each stage is described in detail in the chapters that follow.

See Figure 1.1 for a visual representation of the Evolutionary Learning cycle.

Although we present these stages in a neat, linear progression, in practice the process is anything but a straight line. It requires you to address multiple stages at once or move from a later stage to an earlier one. We urge you, therefore, to “embrace the squiggle”⁶ by adopting and practicing individual and collective mindsets that allow you optimistically to confront the nonlinear, challenging, unpredictable, and often ambiguous nature of this work. This advice is particularly important in addressing institutionalized bias and welcoming the diversity of perspectives that Evolutionary Learning demands. Systems, by their nature, often carry explicit and implicit norms that mirror the dominant culture, as well as the sources of inequity that we are trying to disrupt. Temper these forces by embracing the twists and turns that broad participation and divergent perspectives bring.

Because this work is nonlinear, we encourage you to use this Toolkit as a guide to what the process could look like if you go through all possible stages and not as a prescription or mandate. The framework and tools described here are flexible and serve only as starting points, with the expectation that you will customize them to suit your entity’s context, strengths, and needs. In the remainder of this introduction, we outline the stages of the Evolutionary Learning process, articulating success criteria for each. Each chapter that follows elaborates a stage of the process and offers a set of tools for putting the process into operation.⁷

Figure 1.1 Evolutionary Learning Cycle



Stage 1: Organize your effort

This stage sets you up to design and manage your initiative effectively. It helps you create a working team of critical stakeholders; provides practices for establishing a healthy, well-organized, and productive team dynamic; and introduces project-management tools to ensure steady progress.

This stage has six steps:

- **1.1. Assemble your preliminary team:** Identify and convene a group of individuals who will help lead the initiative under consideration.
- **1.2. Interrogate your biases:** Analyze and reflect on personal, collective, and institutional identities, experiences, and biases brought to the work under consideration.
- **1.3. Draft your goal statement:** Establish and clearly articulate the goal of the new initiative.
- **1.4. Map your stakeholders:** Map the groups of people most likely to influence or feel the initiative’s impact, particularly stakeholders your organization or the broader school system have historically marginalized or whom your initiative could marginalize.
- **1.5. Form your team:** Adjust team composition to ensure sufficient participation by people in each impact group, particularly those your organization or the broader school system have historically marginalized or whom your initiative could marginalize.

⁶Thank you to our friends at [GoKart Labs](#), now part of West Monroe Partners, for introducing us to this term.

⁷*Leading Through Learning* is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution License. Users can share and adapt the materials as long as they credit CPRL as the source.

- **1.6. Create working norms:** Agree on the standards, processes, and mindsets that will guide interactions among team members and between the team and the broader organization or system and that will mitigate biases.

If you complete this stage successfully, your team will:

- integrate multiple viewpoints—including historically marginalized ones—and a broad range of knowledge about the initiative's likely work and effects
- possess key skill sets, including expertise in communication, community engagement, strategic thinking, implementation, project management, data management, and data analysis
- have a well-articulated understanding of the team's working and communication norms

Stage 2: Map your system and strategy

At this stage your team develops an understanding of the broader system that your initiative will operate within, the problem to be solved, the initiative's goal, and the strategy you will use to reach your goal. This stage ensures that team members have a common understanding of what you are trying to do and how you will do it, are invested in the work ahead, and have identified sources of inequity and barriers to success that the initiative must overcome.

This stage has six steps:

- **2.1. Write a problem statement:** Define the problem by describing the situation the project aims to alter.
- **2.2. Examine the system that your initiative will operate within:** Conduct systems and causal analyses to broaden your understanding of the system and the ways it gives rise to the inequities your project aims to address. Use these analyses to refine your problem statement and goal statement.
- **2.3. Conduct due diligence on strategies to address your problem and accomplish your goal:** Research how other stakeholders and organizations have done similar work.
- **2.4. Develop your high-level strategy:** Describe at a high level the logical progression of work you expect to undertake to accomplish your goal.
- **2.5. Flesh out a detailed strategy:** Create a detailed logic model (an operationalized theory of action, or OPTA) that makes clear how you plan to put your high-level strategy into action.
- **2.6. Reorganize your effort:** Informed by your deepened understanding of the strategy, adjust your team composition to ensure you have the right participants, and adjust your project plan to reflect the work ahead.

If you complete this stage successfully, your team will:

- enrich its understanding of the system you are working within and the sources of inequity your initiative intends to address
- deepen its understanding of the problems you are confronting or likely will confront in pursuing your initiative
- articulate a strategy that advances equity and that is logical and feasible, has the power to inspire action, and brings clarity and cohesion to the initiative
- develop materials the team can use to communicate the initiative to the broader system or organization, to stakeholders, and to new team members

Stage 3: Define measurement framework

At this stage, your team identifies measures, tools, and expectations aligned to your strategy that will help you determine the extent to which the strategy is being implemented as planned and achieving desired progress. Once implemented, the measurement framework will quickly and continually reveal opportunities for learning and improvement.

This stage has four steps:

- **3.1. Determine what to measure:** Select the elements of your strategy you want to measure to monitor the initiative's progress.
- **3.2. Identify your measures:** For each selected element, identify process, outcome, and balancing measures to monitor how effectively your strategy is being implemented and how it is performing against expectations.
- **3.3. Select measurement tools:** Identify tools to collect, organize, and analyze data to monitor prioritized elements of your strategy.
- **3.4. Set performance expectations:** Predict results you expect to observe if the initiative is working as theorized. Focus predictions on the quality and level of the initiative's implementation and effect.

If you complete this stage successfully, your team will:

- identify measures for key parts of your strategy that will help you know if the strategy is being implemented as planned and achieving desired progress
- select measurement tools, and decide what data to use to assess and track progress on the identified measures
- have explicit performance expectations for each measure, so you can compare your predictions with actual results and learn from gaps and discrepancies

Stage 4: Implement and observe

At this stage, your team puts its strategy and measurement framework into action, fleshing out and implementing your project plan and collecting and analyzing evaluative data on the timelines developed in Stage 3.

This stage has five steps:

- **4.1. Form the implementation team:** Identify the people who will execute the work described in the OPTA and orient them to the initiative and aligned measurement responsibilities.
- **4.2. Interrogate your biases:** Analyze and reflect on personal, collective, and institutional identities, experiences, and biases brought to the work under consideration.
- **4.3. Create working norms:** Agree on the standards, processes, and mindsets that will guide interactions among team members and between the team and the broader organization or system.
- **4.4. Generate your project plan:** Map out the workstreams, milestones, and tasks, and assign roles and responsibilities for both the initiative and its measurement framework. Communicate these workstreams, milestones, tasks, roles, and responsibilities to key stakeholders.
- **4.5. Implement:** Put your project plan into action, and monitor progress with your implementation team. Prepare for how your team will broadly solicit and use real-time stakeholder feedback.

If you complete this stage successfully, your team will:

- collaborate effectively and get the value of multiple perspectives in doing and evaluating the work
- have a detailed project plan to guide and track implementation of the initiative
- spread knowledge of the initiative to key stakeholders
- implement your strategy and your measurement framework

Stage 5: Problem solve and improve

At this stage your team identifies opportunities for improvement and uses disciplined cycles of inquiry to problem solve and adjust course when observed results differ from those you expected. These steps will ensure that your team is continually building its capacity to improve the initiative's design and implementation in order to achieve your stated goals.

This stage has seven steps:

- **5.1. Prioritize the problems to be solved:** Identify all instances in which observed and expected results differ, and decide which deviations to explore through disciplined inquiry.
- **5.2. Form a team:** Create a team to conduct that inquiry with people close to and affected by the issue to be addressed.
- **5.3. Conduct causal analysis:** Analyze the causes of each discrepancy between expectations and results that you are exploring, and articulate a problem statement for each.
- **5.4. Generate possible solutions:** Consider and prioritize solutions for the named problems.
- **5.5. Test solutions:** Design and run a quick test of the most promising solution for each problem.
- **5.6. Analyze the results, and decide if further inquiry is needed:** Study the outcome of your tests to determine if your solutions worked and if additional cycles of inquiry are warranted.
- **5.7. Act on the implications of your test:** Based on the outcome of your tests, modify your initiative's design or implementation and measurement framework so that results and expectations more fully align.

If you complete this stage successfully, your team will:

- create opportunities to strengthen your understanding of the design and implementation of your initiative and the broader system in which it operates
- engage an encompassing team of stakeholders in disciplined inquiry into discrepancies between your initiative's expected and actual results
- generate insights about how to conceptualize and implement your initiative so that it is more responsive to student or organizational strengths and needs
- use those insights to adjust and improve the initiative's OPTA and measurement framework and as a result the strategy's implementation

Stage 6: Spread learning and improvement

At this stage, your team documents, reflects on, and broadly communicates learning from the initiative and associated inquiry cycles—and the Evolutionary Learning mindsets, processes, and tools that guided the initiative—to sustain and enlarge the initiative's impact and improve the broader organization and how it's governed.

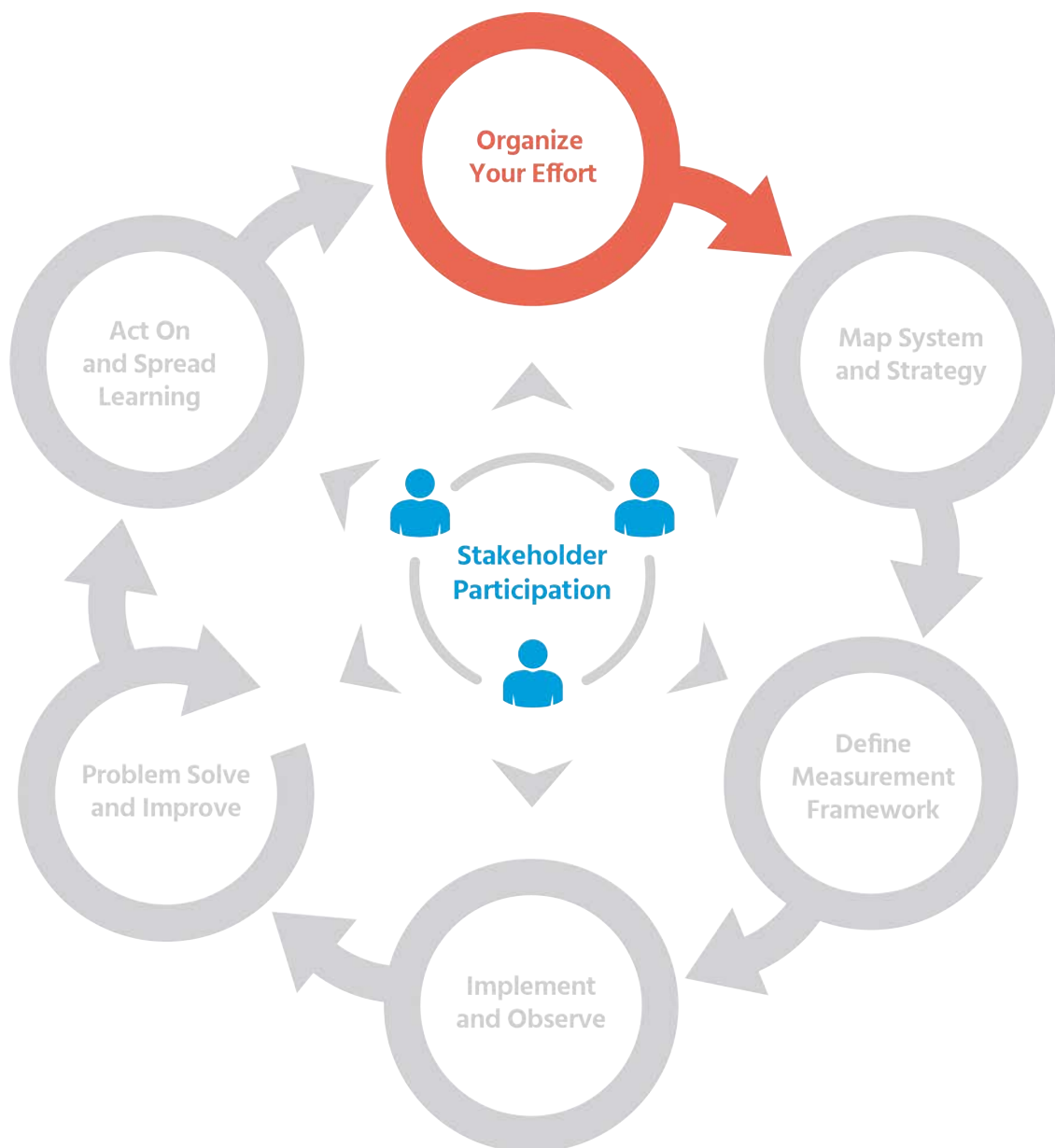
This stage has three steps:

- **6.1. Preserve and disseminate what you learned:** Reflect on, document, and disseminate insights about your initiative's goal, strategy, progress, and impact and the Evolutionary Learning steps that guided its design, implementation, and improvement.
- **6.2. Sustain and enlarge the impact of your initiative:** Sequence steps for sustaining what worked in and for enlarging the impact of your initiative, its implementation, and short-cycle tests.
- **6.3. Spread Evolutionary Learning:** Spread Evolutionary Learning across your organization, enabling others to lead through learning when pursuing their initiatives and when managing the organization as a whole.

If you complete this stage successfully, your team will:

- capture learning from your initiative and your experience with Leading Through Learning
- use insights from your close observation of the initiative's operation and impact to suggest ways the broader organization and its stakeholders can help sustain the initiative and enlarge its impact
- spread valuable programmatic insights within and beyond your organization
- inspire exploration of Leading Through Learning as a powerful way to govern your organization and ensure consequential participation by all stakeholders, especially traditionally marginalized ones

Stage 1: Organize Your Effort



Stage 1:

Organize Your Effort

Overview

This stage of Evolutionary Learning sets you up to design and manage your initiative effectively. It helps you create a working team of critical stakeholders; provides practices for establishing a healthy, well-organized, and productive team dynamic; and introduces project-management tools to ensure steady progress.

This stage has six steps, the first designed to create your initial working team, and the others taken collectively by the team:

- **1.1. Assemble your preliminary team:** Identify and convene a group of individuals who will help lead the initiative under consideration.
- **1.2. Interrogate your biases:** Analyze and reflect on personal, collective, and institutional identities, experiences, and biases brought to the work under consideration.
- **1.3. Draft your goal statement:** Establish and clearly articulate the goal of the new initiative.
- **1.4. Map your stakeholders:** Map the groups of people most likely to influence or feel the initiative's impact, particularly stakeholders your organization or the broader school system have historically marginalized or whom your initiative could marginalize.
- **1.5. Form your team:** Adjust team composition to ensure sufficient participation by people in each impact group, particularly those your organization or the broader school system have historically marginalized or whom your initiative could marginalize.
- **1.6. Create working norms:** Agree on the standards, processes, and mindsets that will guide interactions among team members and between the team and the broader organization or system and that will mitigate biases.

If you complete this Evolutionary Learning stage successfully, your team will:

- **integrate multiple viewpoints**—including historically marginalized ones—and a broad range of knowledge about the initiative's likely work and effects
- **possess key skillsets**, including expertise in communication, community engagement, strategic thinking, implementation, project management, data management, and data analysis
- **have a well-articulated understanding** of the team's working and communication norms

Stage 1 Step-by-Step

Step 1.1: Assemble Your Preliminary Team

The first step when applying Evolutionary Learning to the development and implementation of an initiative is to identify and convene a team to lead the initiative. Core to Evolutionary Learning is deep participation by people with a variety of perspectives, particularly perspectives closest to the problem.

Assemble a group of five to 10 people who collectively:

- **Possess diverse perspectives.** Include individuals who will experience the initiative at different stages and from different roles and who are close to the problem and the work of solving it (for example, teachers, school leaders, district staff members, students and families, and outside partners and collaborators). Team members should have varied racial, cultural, and socioeconomic perspectives to understand the problem better, strengthen solutions, and mitigate biases.
- **Possess required expertise.** Include individuals with relevant lived and practical experience and professional and, if available, research-based expertise in the subject matter and processes central to your initiative. Relevant areas of expertise include teaching and learning; diversity, equity, and inclusion; community engagement; communication; strategic thinking; project management; data management and analysis; and implementation.
- **Have access to necessary resources.** Include team members who can provide dedicated time and connections to critical relationships, funding, and other resources.
- **Bring relevant authority.** Team members should include individuals who (1) have responsibility for directing and implementing the initiative, (2) have influence with members of the department or team within which the initiative will operate, (3) have access to relevant decision-making authority, and (4) can facilitate changes to organization-wide policies or practices to advance your initiative's progress.

There is no right team size. Ensure that you have sufficient viewpoints and bandwidth to plan and organize the initiative successfully, but that you keep the core team small enough to foster efficient discussions and decision-making.

This [template](#) can help you identify team members. First, list the knowledge, skills, and expertise and the key stakeholder voices—racially, socially, culturally, and experientially diverse perspectives—the team needs. Then list potential team members who fill each need, keeping in mind that one person may meet several needs.

Once you name prospective participants, identify the steps you will need to secure their participation.

Do your best to anticipate the team you will need, but don't let overanalysis keep you from getting started. As your work progresses, including through the actions in Step 1.2 below, you almost certainly will find it necessary to adjust team composition to make sure your work succeeds.

Step 1.2: Interrogate Your Biases

People naturally bring their experiences when engaging in mission-critical work, yet these experiences bring with them individual and systemic biases. Facing this issue head-on is critical. Once a team is formed, therefore, it should analyze and reflect on personal, collective, and institutional identities, perspectives, experiences, and biases that could impede the work.

Many tools and frameworks can guide this type of reflection, rooted in self-study of identities, study of institutional manifestations of inequity, and design thinking. We offer three illustrations supplemented by a short list of others. Although we suggest formally creating working norms in [Step 1.6](#), the team may find it useful to explore equity norms at this stage through one or more of these exercises.

Common Beliefs Discussion Protocol From the Southern Poverty Law Center's Teaching Tolerance Project

In this [two-stage exercise](#), team members complete the short [Common Beliefs Survey](#) and then use the [13 Common Belief Descriptions](#) to expose and neutralize biases that influence how educators plan lessons and undermine equity. Teams may focus on common beliefs relevant to the initiative under consideration.

Implicit Association Test From Project Implicit

An [Implicit Association Test](#) (IAT) uses rapid sorting to identify the direction and strength of biases that team members may not realize are at play or feel constrained to discuss, including biases about race, religion, gender, and body weight. Teams then can use the [Making Sense of Your IAT Results](#) resource from the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at Ohio State University to understand common reactions to IAT results and identify effective responses.

Liberatory Design Card Deck From National Equity Project and Hasso Plattner Institute of Design at Stanford University

The [Liberatory Design Card Deck](#) provides a design-thinking framework for addressing equity challenges and change efforts in complex systems. It identifies mindsets that support equity-centered solutions and key steps in an equity-centered design-thinking process that has much in common with the Evolutionary Learning cycle.

Other Resources

These resources, tools, and discussion guides also can facilitate team discussion of obstructive biases:

- [Awareness Activities: Strategies and Preparation, Icebreakers, and Introspectives](#) (EdChange MultiCultural Pavilion)
- [Basic Principles of Equity Literacy](#) (Equity Literacy Institute)
- [Critical Practices for Anti-bias Education: Teacher Leadership](#) (SPLC's Teaching Tolerance Project)
- [Developing Community Agreements](#) (National Equity Project)
- [Equity and Justice Awareness Quiz](#) (EdChange MultiCultural Pavilion)
- [How the Best Bosses Interrupt Biases on Their Teams](#) (Harvard Business Review)
- [Interrupting Bias in Problem-Solving Teams](#) (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction)
- Using [Visualization](#) for [Avoiding Unconscious Bias at Work](#) (MindTools)

Step 1.3: Draft Your Goal Statement

In this step, you will establish and clearly articulate the goal of your initiative. Your goal drives your entire effort and should be inspiring, high leverage, specific, and measurable. It answers the question: What are you trying to accomplish?

Goal statements should be equity oriented

Your goal statement should make clear the ways in which you intend to advance equity on behalf of your organization and the people your organization serves. Making equity implications clear from the outset will motivate everyone involved in and affected by the initiative and be a crucial step in ensuring that equity priorities are not lost in planning and implementation.

Goal statements should be ambitious yet achievable with the time and resources available

Your goal statement should motivate everyone affected by the initiative. Your goal should be ambitious. How will the world be different as a result of this work? Why is it worth marshaling so many resources to pursue this effort? Developing your goal statement is a time to think in lofty, boundary-pushing terms. Of course, your goal also must be achievable within the time and with the resources available, but given those constraints, push your team to imagine how much it can achieve.

Goal statements should be clearly articulated

A vague goal statement may lead different team members to understand the project differently, proliferating conflicting variations on the initiative as the team divides up and does the work. Specificity, however, will help your goal statement provide a shared understanding of what the team is trying to achieve.

One framework a team can use to get specific is to answer these questions (5 Ws and 2 Hs):

- **Whom** will your initiative ultimately affect?
- **What** will your initiative achieve?
- **Where** will your initiative be seen? What communities or levels of the system will the initiative affect?
- **When** will your goal be achieved?
- **Why** is your initiative important?
- **How** does your initiative advance equity?
- **How** will you achieve your goal?

Goal statements should be measurable

Your goal statement must be measurable, so you can assess the extent to which you accomplish your aim. Concretely stating how you will know if you've been successful provides a common way to determine whether you have succeeded. This type of measurement and observation is critical to your ability to learn from your efforts and improve them.

Step 1.4: Map Your Stakeholders

Now that you've brought together a preliminary team and developed a goal statement, you're in position to map your stakeholders. Mapping stakeholders early in your work will ensure that you plan and implement your initiative in a broadly participative manner, which in turn will increase the likelihood that the initiative achieves its intended outcomes and does so equitably for all affected parties. Specifically, broad participation will:

- bring the breadth of perspectives, knowledge, and relationships that is essential in effectively defining, testing, implementing, and improving your initiative
- alert the team and help it respond to risks and potential conflicts that could dampen the initiative's success
- foster equity and democracy by enabling members of all affected communities to participate in defining the content, implementation, and feeding back information about the effect of the initiative

The first step in stakeholder mapping is to list all stakeholders who influence or are affected by the initiative.

Then select and apply an analytical framework to understand your stakeholders and consider how you want to involve them in developing and implementing the initiative. Commonly used tools include stakeholder proximity maps, influence and importance matrices, risk and pitfall comparisons, participation matrices, impact and priority matrices, and readiness and power matrices.

Choose tools you believe will best facilitate participation by individuals and communities that your organization or the broader school system nationwide has historically marginalized or whom your initiative could marginalize.

Below we describe step-by-step the first two of the tools listed above.

Stakeholder Proximity Map

[This tool](#) examines stakeholders' proximity to the initiative's core work or impact. To do the mapping:

- Brainstorm a list of stakeholders. Write each stakeholder on a sticky note.
- Arrange stakeholders on the diagram based on how closely they are situated to the initiative's core, with those closest to the core on the right and those furthest away on the left.

- On each sticky note, write what each stakeholder might have to gain or lose as a result of your initiative.
- As prompted by Step 3, revise where you have placed each stakeholder on the diagram.

Influence and Importance Matrix

An influence and importance matrix can help you determine whom you will need to support your initiative and whose needs you'll need to consider in its design and implementation. For purposes of this exercise, *influence* is defined as the degree to which a stakeholder can facilitate or hinder progress toward your goal; *importance* is the priority given to satisfying a stakeholder's needs.

To use the [matrix](#):

1. Brainstorm a list of stakeholders. Write each stakeholder on a sticky note.
2. Position stakeholders on a two-by-two matrix based on their level of influence and importance.
3. Consider stakeholders in quadrant I (high influence, high importance): What actions can your team take to harness these stakeholders' high degree of influence and importance?
4. Consider stakeholders in quadrant II (low influence, high importance): What actions can your team take to ensure these stakeholders' needs are met given their low level of influence?
5. Consider stakeholders in quadrant IV (high influence, low importance): What actions can your team take to ensure these stakeholders' influence is used to benefit the initiative?

After completing any of these exercises, reflect on and discuss as a team what the exercise tells you about your stakeholder mapping and about the initiative overall. (Keep notes on your ideas for use in developing the project plan in [Step 4.4](#).) Guiding questions include:

- Where are there gaps between the historically marginalized stakeholders present on your stakeholder map and those directly represented by the members of your preliminary core team? Why might these gaps exist?
- How does your analysis push you to be more inclusive of stakeholders whom your initiative strongly affects? How might you bring those stakeholders into the process?
- Are there other points when you can engage a broader set of stakeholders in planning, implementing, and improving your initiative? What later opportunities will there be to broaden your team?
- Do team members and the broader organization typically engage in stakeholder analysis like this before beginning a new initiative? If not, in what other facets of your work and your organization's work might stakeholder analysis improve the quality of ideas, implementation, or results?

Step 1.5: Form Your Team

Having drafted your goal statement and mapped your initiative's stakeholders, revisit your team membership. Does your team have the diverse perspectives, required expertise, access to resources, and authority it needs? Are the stakeholders with the most to gain or lose from your initiative represented? Have you included those your organization or the broader school system has historically marginalized or whom your initiative could marginalize? Are those with the most influence and importance represented or connected through someone on the team?

If not, make the necessary adjustments to your team.

Step 1.6: Create Working Norms

In this step, agree on the standards, processes, and mindsets that will guide interactions among team members and between the team and the broader organization or system.

Explicit efforts to create norms can help you speed up or skip some of the usual stages of team development and achieve high-level team functioning quickly. Norms are agreements about how the team will work, communicate, and make decisions. All

team members should draft and ratify norms together. An early meeting is the best time to create norms. For the duration of the effort, norms should be easily accessible to everyone (for example, posted on chart paper in meeting rooms or stored online in a shared folder), and the team should revisit, amend, or supplement norms as necessary. Absent such norming, teams often experience early bouts of “storming,” as discrepancies between team members’ views of the goal and initiative create tension and cause delays.¹

Common categories of norms to consider and questions to ask are:

- **Purpose:** How will we keep our initiative’s goal front and center?
- **Equity:** How will we ensure we are advancing equity? How will we ensure equity of voice? How will we create an inclusive team environment?
- **Communication:** How will we share ideas? How will we offer feedback? How will we organize our conversations? How will we listen to one another? How will we encourage productive debate that is also respectful? How will we seek clarity when there is misunderstanding?
- **Dissent and debate:** How will we disagree while remaining agreeable? What protocol will we use to resolve conflict?
- **Engagement:** When will we work together or apart? How will we share the work?
- **Decision-making:** How will we make decisions? How will we get input from others not on the team?
- **Documentation:** How will we record our work steps and results?
- **Technology:** What uses are appropriate during team work time?

As a team begins to work together, team members will often act in ways that are mostly but not fully consistent with the norms the team initially detailed. Keep in mind that the norms you create at this stage are working norms. As you engage in your work, you will identify norms that do and do not work for your team. Dedicate time to revisiting your norms and reflecting on the ways your team has behaved consistently or inconsistently with its norms. This reflection can yield revisions, additions, and subtractions from the original set.

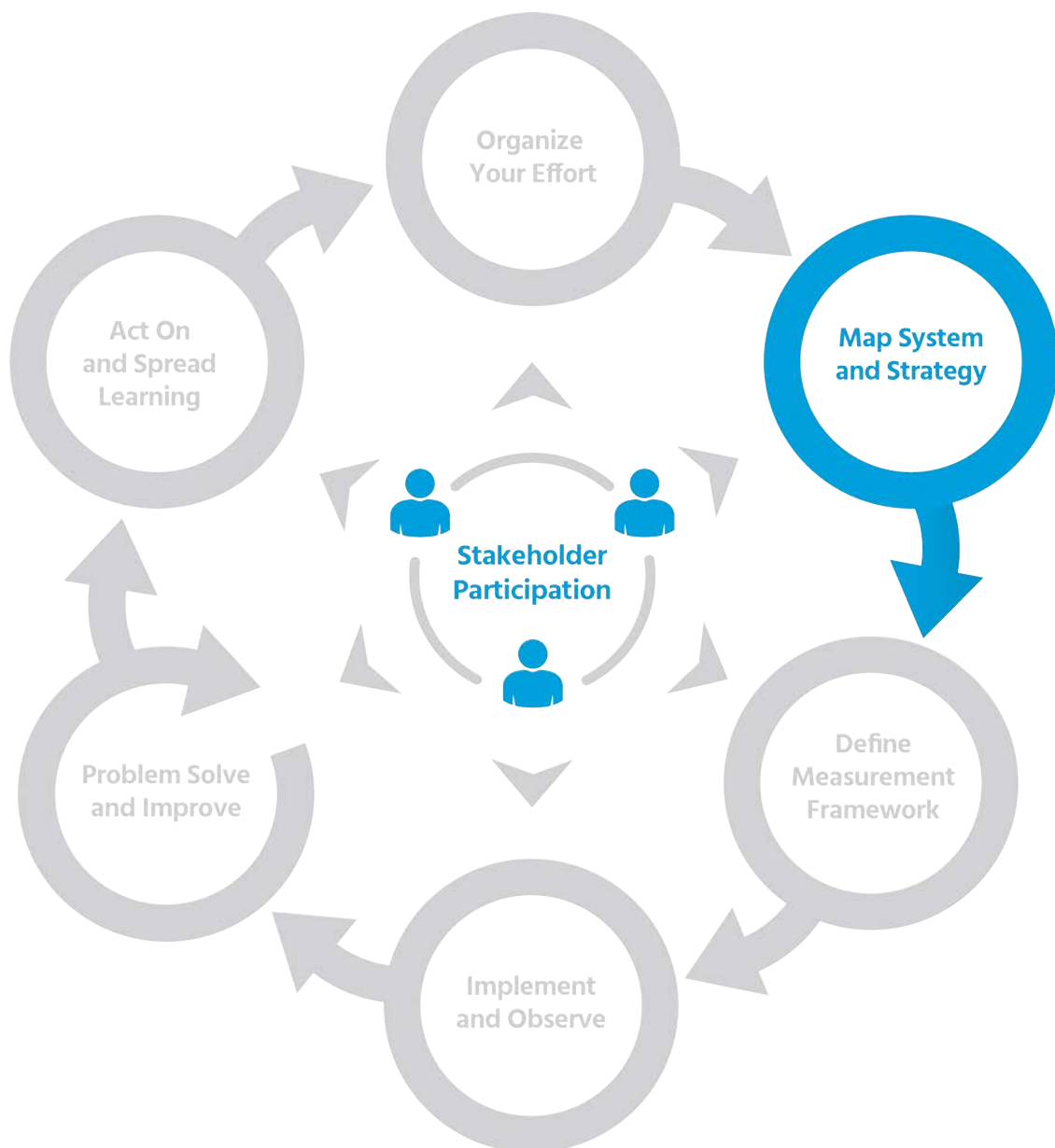
Norms for remote engagement

Since Spring 2020, the ways we conduct work have changed. Though so much remains uncertain at the time of this writing, our new reality requires that all teams at least be prepared to conduct their work remotely at times, if not for long stretches. If your team will be working remotely, consider whether you want to include some of the following norms:

- **Co-creation:** How will your team conduct work that has typically been conducted at a chalkboard or with physical materials? Will you use shared documents or one of the many collaboration apps available?
- **Webcam use:** Under what conditions will team members use or turn off their webcams?
- **Chat etiquette:** Is group or side chatting encouraged as a means to approximate more natural engagement? Or is it considered distracting?

¹Bruce W. Tuckman, “Developmental Sequence in Small Groups,” *Psychological Bulletin* 63 no. 6 (1965): 384–399.

Stage 2: Map System and Strategy



Stage 2:

Map System and Strategy

Overview

At this stage of Evolutionary Learning, your team develops an understanding of the broader system that your initiative will operate within, the problem to be solved, the initiative's goal, and the strategy you will use to reach your goal. This stage ensures that team members have a common understanding of what you are trying to do and how you will do it, are invested in the work ahead, and have identified sources of inequity and barriers to success that the initiative must overcome.

This stage has six steps:

- **2.1. Write a problem statement:** Define the problem by describing the situation the project aims to alter.
- **2.2. Examine the system that your initiative will operate within:** Conduct systems and causal analyses to broaden your understanding of the system and the ways it gives rise to the inequities your project aims to address. Use these analyses to refine your problem statement and goal statement.
- **2.3. Conduct due diligence on strategies to address your problem and accomplish your goal:** Research how other stakeholders and organizations have done similar work.
- **2.4. Develop your high-level strategy:** Describe at a high level the logical progression of work you expect to undertake to accomplish your goal.
- **2.5. Flesh out a detailed strategy:** Create a detailed logic model (an operationalized theory of action, or OPTA) that makes clear how you plan to put your high-level strategy into action.
- **2.6. Reorganize your effort:** Informed by your deepened understanding of the strategy, adjust your team composition to ensure you have the right participants, and adjust your project plan to reflect the work ahead.

If you complete this Evolutionary Learning stage successfully, your team will:

- **enrich its understanding** of the system you are working within and the sources of inequity your initiative intends to address
- **deepen its understanding** of the problems you are confronting or likely will confront in pursuing your initiative
- **articulate a strategy** that advances equity and that is logical and feasible, has the power to inspire action, and brings clarity and cohesion to the initiative
- **develop materials** the team can use to communicate the initiative to the broader system or organization, to stakeholders, and to new team members

Stage 2 Step-by-Step

Step 2.1: Write a Problem Statement

Stage 2 begins with a rough working statement of the problem your initiative seeks to solve. This problem statement should succinctly define the problem you are trying to solve by describing the what the project aims to alter. A strong problem statement describes a problem that is:

- within your sphere of influence
- possible to address within the stated time frame and with a feasible amount of resources
- strategically connected to advancing equity and to the longer-term aims of the organization
- human and user centered

Step 2.2: Examine the System Your Initiative Will Operate Within

This step starts with the crucial recognition that there is a [system designed](#) (intentionally or accidentally) to create the problems that your initiative aims to change. In other words, the system is designed to produce the inequities your initiative aims to address. Your job is to understand that [system design](#) so you can change it. Overlapping questions to ask at this step are:

- What people, conditions, or forces within your organization significantly influence the situation your initiative seeks to change?
- What people, conditions, or forces within your organization are likely to be positively or negatively affected by that situation?
- What people, conditions, or forces outside your organization significantly influence the situation your initiative seeks to change?
- What people, conditions, or forces outside your organization are likely to be positively or negatively affected by that situation?
- How might you roughly map the relationships between all these people, conditions, and forces?
- What linkages exist between the people, conditions, and forces that have influence and the people who are marginalized or are otherwise negatively affected by the situation?

Understanding the system in these ways will allow you to create a strategy that (a) addresses underlying causes of observed problems and inequities rather than symptoms, (b) takes into account enabling and inhibiting conditions, (c) minimizes unintended consequences, and (d) identifies system improvements beyond your initiative that allow you to achieve your goal and sustain progress.

Three frequently employed system-mapping techniques are [stakeholder mapping](#), causal analysis, and force-field analysis. These techniques help you visualize the relevant system, view the situation and goal from diverse perspectives, uncover root causes of the problem, and identify drivers and inhibitors of change. Getting the full benefit of this step requires meaningful participation by multiple internal and external stakeholders in addition to those on your team. Broad participation brings a diversity of perspectives, expertise, and real-life experiences to the mapping exercises. Of utmost importance is participation by the end users of the initiative—students, families, community members, practitioners—and especially when the end users are ones the system traditionally has marginalized or who your initiative could marginalize.

Set [participation norms](#) and use them when conducting these exercises, paying close attention to upholding norms that ensure equitable and inclusive participation and that counteract [individual biases](#) that might inhibit an accurate portrayal of the situation.

With your problem and goal statement in hand, proceed first to causal analysis to uncover the origins of the problem you observed, then to force-field analysis to uncover enablers and inhibitors of your initiative's success. Revisit the stakeholder

mapping exercises from Stage 1 based on your deeper understanding of the problem you are trying to solve and the goal you are hoping to achieve. Reconsider your team composition if warranted by this exercise.

Causal Analysis

Causal analysis tools bring discipline and structure to the messy process of linking cause and effect. Two commonly employed tools are the 5 Whys and the Fishbone Diagram. Going back and forth between the two tools can help you uncover causes underlying the symptoms of the problem you have observed.

5 Whys

In employing the 5 Whys technique, [this template](#) guides you to:

1. Identify the problem you want to solve, and write it in the orange box on the top of the template.
2. Ask, “Why does this happen?” Write your response in the first blue box. Make sure the cause you articulate is grounded in evidence from external research, your knowledge of the system, and how your stakeholders experience the system.
3. Ask, “Why does that happen?” Write your response in the next blue box. Make sure the cause you articulate is grounded in evidence from external research, your knowledge of the system, and how your stakeholders experience the system.
4. Continue to ask “Why does that happen?” three more times, writing your responses in the rest of the blue boxes, drilling down to the underlying cause for the problem you observed.
5. Write the original or underlying cause in the orange box at the bottom of the template.
6. Of course, you can add more “Whys” if you feel there’s more to learn, or use fewer than five if you’re sure you’ve found the root cause.

Once the 5 Whys diagram is completed, it will represent one causal chain underlying the problem you observed. As you use the 5 Whys technique, you will likely identify other causal chains to pursue. If you do, you might want to transition to using a Fishbone Diagram, which will let you explore and document many causal chains simultaneously. Keep in mind that the cause you ultimately decide to address need not be the root cause if another cause higher up in the chain is more easily tackled.

Fishbone Diagram^{1,2}

The Fishbone Diagram offers a visual way to organize the problem’s multiple causal chains. Each primary bone represents a causal chain. The primary cause is written in the box at the end of the bone, and subcauses are written underneath the secondary bones jutting from the primary bone.

To populate a Fishbone Diagram, use [this template](#) to:

1. Insert your problem statement at the end of the arrow on the right side of the diagram.
2. Brainstorm possible causes of the problem, writing each one on a sticky note. Use the 5 Whys to uncover as many causes of the problem as possible. Make sure the causes you articulate are grounded in evidence from external research, your knowledge of the system, and how your stakeholders experience the system.
3. Organize causes into major categories of factors contributing to the problem. Write the categories in the boxes at the ends of each primary bone coming off the main arrow.

¹ Anthony S. Bryk, Louis M. Gomez, Alicia Grunow, and Paul G. LeMahieu, *Learning to Improve: How America’s Schools Can Get Better at Getting Better* (Cambridge: Harvard Education Press, 2015), 280.

² Gerald J. Langley, Ronald D. Moen, Kevin M. Nolan, Thomas W. Nolan, Clifford L. Norman, and Lloyd P. Provost, *The Improvement Guide: A Practical Approach to Enhancing Organization Performance* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009).

4. Write the brainstormed ideas from Step 2 along the secondary bones of the appropriate categories. You may wish to apply 5 Whys analysis to each primary cause. If a brainstormed idea relates to more than one primary category, write it under each relevant category.
5. Add more bones as necessary.

Force-Field Analysis³

Force-field analysis lets you visualize the factors that will drive and hinder progress toward your goal. Laying out these factors will let you develop a strategy that takes advantage of facilitating factors and mitigates risks posed by inhibiting factors.

To complete a force-field analysis, use [this template](#) to:

1. Make a list of the forces that will drive progress toward your goal, including forces that are internal and ones that are external to your organization or team.
2. Rate each force that will drive progress on a scale of 1 to 5 (1=weak; 5=strong).
3. Array those driving forces in the left column of the diagram, with the strongest forces written at the top and the weakest written at the bottom. Add more force arrows as necessary.
4. List the forces that will obstruct progress toward your goal, including forces that are internal and ones that are external to your organization or team.
5. Rate each force that will obstruct progress on a scale of 1 to 5 (1=weak; 5=strong).
6. Array those opposing forces in the right column of the diagram, with the strongest forces written at the top and the weakest written at the bottom. Add more force arrows as necessary.

Problem and Goal Refinement

Based on your deeper understanding of the system in which your initiative will operate, determine if you need to adjust your problem statement. Doing so may refocus your efforts on a problem that is deeper than the one you initially articulated or is an especially important part of the initially identified problem. In addition, consider whether you need to adjust your goal statement, ensuring that the goal you set is equity oriented, clearly articulated, responsive to the named problem, ambitious yet feasible to achieve with the time and resources available, and measurable. If you do adjust your problem and goal statement, revisit your [stakeholder maps from Stage 1](#) to determine how the refined focus of the initiative changes the stakeholders who need to be involved given how close they are to the proposed work. Reconsider your team composition if warranted by these exercises.

Step 2.3: Conduct Due Diligence on Strategies to Address Your Problem and Accomplish Your Goal Statement

After identifying the problem and goal statement and developing a working understanding of the system, you are ready to gather ideas about how best to tackle your problem and achieve your goal. These ideas will eventually become the substance of your strategy. To source ideas, you might:

- Conduct interviews or focus groups with stakeholders outside your team to gather information about their views of the problem and goal statements and the strategies they believe should be employed to achieve the desired result.
- Conduct interviews with internal or external experts who have addressed analogous problems or have studied organizations that have achieved similar goals.

³ Langley, et al., The Improvement Guide.

- Conduct desktop research on how other organizations have addressed analogous problems and achieved similar goals.
- Conduct brainstorming sessions with your team to develop ideas about how the problem might best be addressed. In doing so, draw on your systems maps to identify ways to neutralize causes of the problem, use available assets, and self-consciously address inhibiting factors.
- Collect sourced ideas in a bank for use in Step 2.4.

Step 2.4: Develop Your High-Level Strategy

Now that you have mapped your system; refined your problem, goal statements, and team composition; and collected ideas about the substance of your strategy, it is time to formulate a high-level strategy by determining which sourced ideas to pursue. The high-level strategy you articulate should be equity oriented, logical and coherent, aligned with the longer-term aims of the organization, responsive to the named problem, and ambitious yet feasible to achieve with the time and resources available.

Strategy Formulation

There are many ways to move from a long list of sourced ideas to a small and logically connected set of activities that form the core of your strategy. One process for doing this is to:

1. **Consolidate your sourced ideas.** Review your sourced ideas to identify overlapping or closely connected ones. Group those ideas accordingly, and write a new idea that sufficiently describes the set.
2. **Use threshold criteria to narrow your list of sourced ideas.** Identify one to three threshold criteria so you can weed out ideas that your organization likely would not pursue. Common threshold criteria include (a) fit with the organization's mission, vision, and values, (b) demonstrated success in advancing equity, and (c) responsiveness to the named problem (or potential to facilitate progress toward your goal). Apply your threshold criteria to your ideas list, eliminating those that do not satisfy these criteria.
3. **Map the remaining ideas on an Ease vs. Impact Matrix.** Subject each remaining idea to a quick cost-benefit analysis. Using [this template](#), array each idea in the relevant quadrant, placing ideas that are relatively easy to implement and high impact in Quadrant I, those that are difficult to implement and high impact in Quadrant II, those that are difficult to implement and low impact in Quadrant III, and those that are relatively easy to implement and low impact in Quadrant IV.
4. **Formulate a high-level strategy.** Consolidate the relatively stronger ideas from your Ease vs. Impact Matrix into a logical set of steps leading from the current situation in your problem statement to the desired situation in your goal statement. To determine the best way to get there, go back and forth as many times as needed between choices among promising ideas and efforts to fit them together into an equity-oriented, logical, and feasible strategy. Later stages in the Evolutionary Learning process will flesh out, test, and improve your strategy, so at this stage the strategy needs to be reasonably sensible and workable, not perfect.

Theory of Action

You now are ready to craft a short statement capturing your high-level strategy. Doing so clarifies your team's strategic vision and creates a shared understanding of the initiative and a common language your team can use to communicate its work. A tool you can use to articulate and visualize your high-level strategy is the [Theory of Action Template](#).

A theory of action presents, at a summary level, an initiative's ultimately desired (guiding vision) impacts, its key intended outcomes, and the actions aimed at achieving those outcomes. A theory of action is specific and focused and articulates both means and ends in the form of broad tactical strategies to attain organizational goals. An effective theory of action (a) represents your hypothesis of the causal relationship between actions, outcomes, and impacts, (b) is measurable, and (c) is relatively stable but subject to modification through an iterative learning process.

A theory of action often is written in this format: “If we do X (actions), then Y (outcomes) will occur. As a result, we will achieve Z (impacts).”

To articulate your theory of action, use [this template](#) to:

1. Record your impact statement(s) in the “As a result” box. You can use your organization’s long-term goal as your impact statement or the long-term goal of your initiative. (Long term refers to impacts occurring, say, more than three years in the future.) Work to limit yourself to no more than 3 impact statements.
2. Write your shorter-term outcomes in “Then” boxes located in the middle row of the template. These outcomes are the key sets of results you intend to bring about as a result of your initiative and that you expect to lead over time to the impacts. These outcomes—which may be changes in attitudes, behaviors, and results—should be observable in the relatively near future (six to 24 months). In some cases, these shorter-term outcomes and your goal statement will be one and the same. In other cases, your goal statement will be more aligned with your impact statements. Either way, if there is a logical gap between the strategic actions you identified and the outcomes you initially articulate, you might want to add one or two outcomes you expect to arise more immediately and to lead to the outcomes you initially identified. Similarly, if your goal statement is overly broad, you might want to break it apart into a small number of specific outcomes and, possibly, multiple impacts. Work to limit yourself to no more than five outcome statements.
3. Write your high-level actions in the “If” boxes located in the top row of the template. These actions should be those you identified in the Strategy Formulation process described above. Limit yourself to no more than five high-level action statements.
4. Review the whole theory of action for (a) alignment with equity and responsiveness to your problem statement, (b) clarity and precision of language, (c) user-centered communication, (d) logic, (e) feasibility, and (f) power for inspiration. Adjust the strategy, and tweak the language as necessary.

Step 2.5: Flesh Out a Detailed Strategy

The theory of action is a crucial tool for clarifying and communicating your high-level strategy. More is needed, however, to provide a thorough, shared understanding of what the work will look like when implemented and for revealing opportunities for continual improvement and learning. Your team’s next step, therefore, is to flesh out your high-level strategy into a detailed logic model. A logic model is a graphic depiction that presents the relationship between your initiative’s activities and effects. It makes clear what your strategy will look like in action and what waves of outcomes and impacts you believe you will see as a result of your work. Creating this logic model will help your team say how you will operationalize your theory of action—how you will to put it to use.

A tool to use for this purpose is an Operationalized Theory of Action, or OPTA. An OPTA typically consists of four elements:

- **Inputs:** resources, actors, and conditions that need to be in place for you to start implementing your strategy.
- **Actions:** steps you need to take to implement your strategy.
- **Outcomes:** shorter-term changes you expect will lead to the desired impact (changes in attitudes, behaviors, results).
- **Impacts:** longer-term changes you aim to achieve.

Although the OPTA is intended to illustrate the expected causal pathway from inputs to actions to outcomes to impacts, there are many ways to conceive of and represent the relationships between the OPTA’s four elements. The simplest initiatives will often have one set of inputs that leads to one set of actions that leads to one set of outcomes, that leads to one set of impacts.

In more complex initiatives it can be helpful to make clear how particular sets of inputs, actions, outcomes, and impacts relate to one another within the overarching causal pathway. To give one of many possible examples, your team may design a strategy that has one set of inputs. These inputs may then be used to put into place three separate sets of actions, each set of which is linked to a separate set of outcomes. These outcomes may then be linked to one overall set of impacts that come about as a result of the entire body of preceding work.⁴

To create an OPTA, use [this template](#) to:

1. Articulate your short-, medium-, and long-term goals.
 - a. Translate the guiding vision or “As a result” impacts from your Theory of Action Template into a series of concrete, observable impacts. Write these down in the “Impacts” column, listing the nearest-term impact at the top, the longest-term impact at the bottom, and others in rough chronological order in between.
 - b. Translate the shorter-term outcomes (“Thens”) from your Theory of Action Template into a series of concrete, observable outcomes. Sequence these outcomes from near to far term, with the nearest-term outcomes often being changes in attitudes, followed by changes in behaviors, followed by changes in results arising from improved behaviors. Write down these outcomes in the “Outcomes” column, listing the nearest term outcome at the top, the longest-term outcome at the bottom, and others in rough chronological order in between.
2. Articulate the inputs and actions needed to achieve your goals.
 - a. Translate the actions (“Ifs”) from your Theory of Action Template into a series of concrete, observable actions, making it clear who is responsible for doing what in implementing your initiative. Sequence these actions chronologically, and write them down in the “Actions” column, with those occurring first listed at the top.
 - b. Generate a list of inputs you will need to undertake the actions listed in the second column. Include all key resources, actors, and conditions you will want to secure to support the core work of your initiative. Add your assumptions about the starting and background conditions that must be true if the logic of your OPTA is sound. Write these in the “Inputs” column.
3. Group actions and outcomes into workstreams, if useful.
 - a. Review the OPTA and determine whether grouping sets of actions into separate workstreams would help clarify and bring coherence to the initiative. If so, cluster those actions together.
 - b. If you clustered actions, review the outcomes column and determine whether there are clusters of outcomes that more directly align with clusters of actions. If so, cluster those outcomes together and demarcate a link between each causally connected cluster of actions and cluster of outcomes.
4. Review, revise, and refine the OPTA.
 - a. Review the OPTA as it stands, and check the overarching and intermediate causal pathways for missing components. Add components as needed to ensure that the causal path from inputs to final impacts is as complete as necessary for all team members to understand how the initiative will bring about the desired changes.
 - b. Review the OPTA for its alignment with your team’s theory of action and for feasibility of implementation, iteratively adjusting the theory of action and the OPTA as needed to ensure tight alignment between the two strategy documents and to ensure that the plan is ambitious yet feasible given the team’s resources and context.

⁴In other words, any single, set, or full collection of inputs can lead to any single, set, or full collection of actions, and so on for outcomes and impacts.

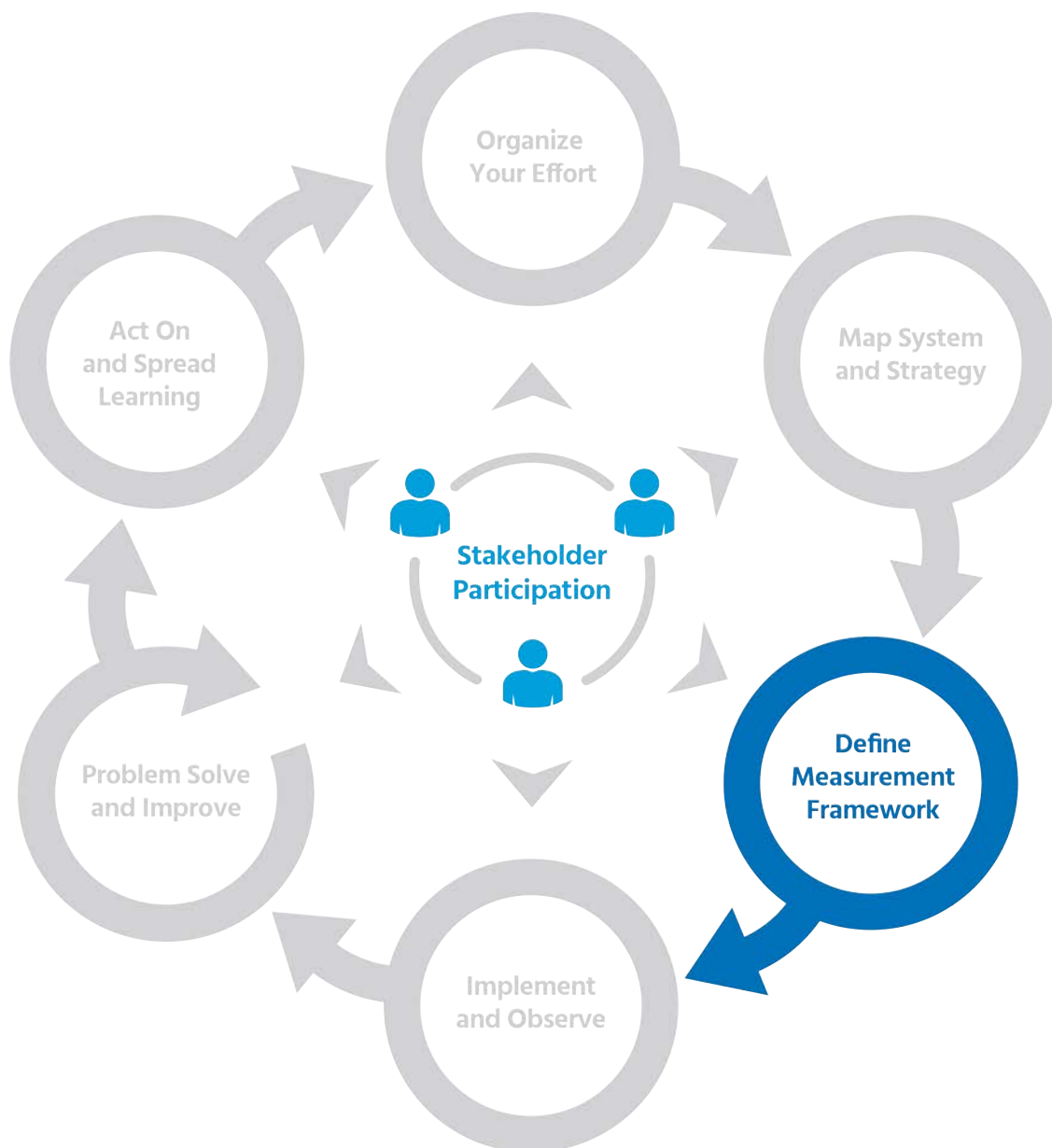
- c. Refine the language of the theory of action and OPTA to be sure that both are clear and user centered and present a coherent picture of the equity-oriented strategy.

Step 2.6: Reorganize Your Effort

Before moving to Stage 3, revisit Stage 1 steps to be sure you have the right members on your team and that your project plan reflects the progress you've made to date and the steps that remain in Stage 3. In particular, you might need to adjust your team composition if the strategy articulated differs from the strategy imagined when your team initially convened. To make this determination, update your stakeholder map based on the work products developed in Stage 2.

If you do add new team members, be sure to communicate the work to date completely and update your decision-making frameworks accordingly. In many cases, it is worthwhile to enable the new team members to suggest adjustments to the Stage 2 work products (problem and goal statements, Theory of Action Template, OPTA), making changes in alignment with your decision-making responsibilities.

Stage 3: Define Measurement Framework



Stage 3:

Define Measurement Framework

Overview

At this stage of Evolutionary Learning, your team identifies measures, tools, and expectations aligned to your strategy that will help you determine the extent to which the strategy is being implemented as planned and achieving desired progress. Once implemented, the measurement framework will quickly and continually reveal opportunities for learning and improvement.

This stage has four steps:

- **3.1. Determine what to measure:** Select the elements of your strategy that you want to measure to monitor the initiative's progress.
- **3.2. Identify your measures:** For each selected element, identify process, outcome, and balancing measures to monitor how effectively your strategy is being implemented and how it is performing against expectations.
- **3.3. Select measurement tools:** Identify tools to collect, organize, and analyze data to monitor prioritized elements of your strategy.
- **3.4. Set performance expectations:** Predict results you expect to observe if the initiative is working as theorized. Focus predictions on the quality and level of the initiative's implementation and effect.

If you complete this Evolutionary Learning stage successfully, your team will:

- **identify measures** for key parts of your strategy that will help you know if the strategy is being implemented as planned and achieving desired progress
- **select measurement tools**, and decide what data to use to assess and track progress on the identified measures
- **have explicit performance expectations** for each measure, so you can compare your predictions with actual results and learn from gaps and discrepancies

Stage 3 Step-by-Step

In Stage 2 you outlined your strategy—your hypothesis about how specified actions will lead to desired impact. In Stage 3, you will build a measurement framework to help you assess whether your hypothesis is working as you thought it would and producing the results you expected.

The measurement framework is an essential component of any improvement effort. Without it, the task of discerning—for each part of your strategy—what is happening, if it's happening as you expected, and what and how to improve is difficult or impossible. Without measurement for improvement, you can't lead through learning.

Measurement for improvement is different from measurement for accountability or research. Measurement for improvement is done more frequently and in less time than other forms of measurement. Measurement for improvement aims to increase and spread learning, while measurement for accountability assigns rank, ratings, or consequences and measurement for research derives statistically valid theories.

Step 3.1: Determine What to Measure

The first step in building your measurement framework is to determine what parts of your strategy to measure. If resources allowed, Leading Through Learning might call for measuring all elements of your strategy. When resources are constrained, however, it is sufficient to measure select elements of your strategy and to use indicators and instruments that are sensitive to variability in implementation and outcomes across multiple elements. These are likely to provide early warning of design or implementation flaws.

Aim to measure elements of your strategy that are:

- **Indicative of how equitably you have designed and are implementing your initiative.** Review your strategy to identify elements that are essential to delivering services equitably and advancing equitable outcomes.
- **Critical to its success.** Review your strategy to identify the elements that are essential to achieving your ultimate impact.
- **Provide the clearest signal of whether you are on track.** Identify "bellwether" elements that provide strong early signs of the efficacy of many prior steps or are crucial to the efficacy of many later steps.
- **New to the organization or are a known area of weakness.** Monitor elements of your strategy in which the likelihood of trouble is higher than usual, including new and previously untested elements and elements that have been the source of poor performance in the past.
- **Easy to measure or are already being measured.** In prioritizing among elements to measure, especially ones that satisfy one or more of the above criteria, consider measurement cost. You may assign higher priority to elements for which implementation steps or results are easily observable and evaluated or that your organization already measures for other purposes. In the latter regard, inventory all information your organization routinely collects to see if any of it provides a direct or approximate measure of the implementation fidelity or results of any key elements of your strategy.¹

Step 3.2: Identify Your Measures

Once you've identified elements of your strategy that you'd like to measure, the next step is to identify a set of measures, or indicators, aligned to those elements. Capture your measures in this [measurement framework template](#).

¹ Likewise, elements that are especially costly to measure may be deprioritized. Costs may not appear, however, until you take the next steps: identifying indicators, measurement tools, and performance expectations. If those steps turn out to be costly, you may need to revise your original list of elements to measure.

To identify measures for each element of your strategy that you decide to measure and their usefulness as a whole:

1. Determine whether to measure each element's quality, quantity, or both.
 - Qualitative measures indicate how well you did something. Quantitative measures indicate how much of something you did in a specified time period. When examining a fundraising event, for example, a qualitative measure might assess the clarity and visual appeal of the fundraising materials or program; a quantitative measure might count the donors who attended.
2. Specify measures for each element, aiming for measures that are:
 - Tightly aligned to what they are measuring—that is, as close to the desired processes and outcomes as possible, recognizing that almost all measures are to some degree only proxies.
 - Feasible to implement—that is, relatively easy to put in place and embedded in regular work routines when possible.
 - Capable of consistently and accurately revealing variation (a) in quality or quantity of implementation and results and (b) between expectations and what actually happened.
3. Review all the measures identified to be sure you have both process and outcome measures.
 - Process measures are often attached to input and action elements in your OPTA. By indicating whether actions or steps in your initiative are occurring as planned, process measures provide "leading" or early indicators of progress toward expected outcomes and impact. Examples of process measures: the percentage of teachers who received training, or teachers' belief about the usefulness of the training; and the number of students who had their reading level assessed, or the quality of the assessment used.
 - Outcome measures are often attached to outcome and impact elements in your OPTA. They provide "lagging" or later evidence of your initiative's success and are measurable only after some or all parts of the initiative are enacted. Examples of outcome measures: gains in the reading levels of third-grade students from the beginning to the end of the current school year, and high school graduates' assessment of their efficacy as college students and in employment settings.
4. Make sure the identified measures let you monitor disparities by race, ethnicity, and other identifiable categories in the service level and quality provided and in outcomes and impact.
5. Be sure you have taken full and appropriate advantage of measures already in use by your organization.
6. Decide whether to include balancing measures.
 - Balancing measures indicate whether the initiative is causing new and unanticipated problems for your initiative or the broader organization. Focusing improvement on one area of a system may produce unintended effects in another area. For example, increasing attention to students' ability to comprehend and use nonfiction sources in constructing their own persuasive arguments might produce an unintended decrease in the amount of instructional time dedicated to other reading skills. Or aspects of the strategy may unexpectedly increase demands on educators' time or raise the cost of instructional materials. It is helpful, therefore, to consider how elements of your strategy may affect other important activities and resources and to identify ways of measuring those effects to support later revision of the strategy to balance its prospective gains and costs more appropriately.

Step 3.3: Select Measurement Tools

With your measures tentatively in place, you now need to select measurement tools. Measurement tools are instruments used to collect, organize, and analyze the data required to assess your initiative's performance on each measure. Common tools for collecting data on measures include surveys, administrative records, standardized assessments, observation rubrics, and student work (see Figure 3.1). There are a much wider variety of data organization, analytic, and storage tools on which you are encouraged to consult experts within and beyond your organization.

To select measurement tools, complete the following steps:

1. Identify tools already in use by your organization to collect information about any of the measures you have attached to elements of your initiative, or tools your organization uses to collect analogous information for other purposes. You may need to seek input from individuals outside your improvement team to get a full sense of tools already in use.
2. Research and brainstorm new tools you can use to collect information on measures for which your organization has no existing tools. Also, use this step to identify ways you want to revise, or reasons to replace, tools already in use. When possible, identify multiple tools of potential value to facilitate comparisons and reveal the pros and cons of different approaches.
3. In addition to considering data-collection resources, identify tools you will need to analyze, organize, and store the collected data. Consult people in your organization who are responsible for data management to see if their tools and personnel are available to your initiative for these purposes. If not, how do they recommend you address these needs?
4. Determine which data collection, organization, and analytic tools to use. Rely on research and conversations with stakeholders and experts inside and beyond your organization to be sure the tools you select are appropriate and accessible to those who will collect the data.

Figure 3.1: Pros and Cons of Common Data-Collection Tools

Tool	Pros	Cons
Survey An instrument used to collect information from an individual either in person or in written or digital format.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • standardized • easy to administer to a large number of people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • difficult to ensure desired response rate • difficult to capture nuance • time-consuming to analyze open-ended responses • dependent on potentially unreliable self-reporting
Administrative Record Documentation capturing data used to manage services and comply with reporting regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • standardized • reliable, permitting apples-to-apples comparisons across individuals and sites • indicative of trends over time and across different sites, groups of people, individuals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • susceptible to overestimation of accuracy and objectivity • limited to a small number of factors that may be weak proxies for the complex information needed
Standardized Assessment A tool that uses the same questions and is scored in a consistent way to evaluate the quality or ability of someone or something	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • standardized • reliable, permitting apples-to-apples comparisons across individuals and sites • indicative of trends over time and across different sites, groups of people, individuals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • susceptible to overestimation of objectivity and fairness • limited to a set of factors or items that may be weak proxies for the complex information needed
Rubric An evaluation tool used to measure attainment against a consistent set of standards or criteria, often used in conjunction with observations and conversations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • closely linked to criteria of interest, including complex criteria • useful to practitioners as a way to define and provide actionable feedback on how to meet quality standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • time-consuming to administer • dependent on inter-rater norming to achieve reliability
Student Work Completed assignments, products, and projects, demonstrating what students have learned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • flexible, allowing close linkage to criteria of interest • useful in measuring complex learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • time-consuming to develop, link to criteria of interest, and administer • susceptible to unreliably subjective assessment, absent norming across many educators

Once you have attached a measurement tool or a set of tools to each measure, review each tool and all of them as a whole to determine their effectiveness in collecting, organizing, and analyzing the desired information and their feasibility. In doing so, consider these questions:

1. What data will you collect?
2. How will you gain access to the data you want?
3. How will you collect the data?
4. Who will collect the data?
5. How long will it take to collect the data, given when and where it will be collected?
6. How will you analyze the data?
7. Who will analyze the data?
8. How long will it take to analyze the data?

In making final decisions, you will need to balance the value of the information—how accurately and consistently it tells you what you want to know—against the cost of collecting and analyzing it. No matter how valuable the information may be, it will not serve your purposes if it cannot feasibly be obtained and used. Be prepared, therefore, to let “good enough” suffice when perfection is unattainable. One benefit of measurement for improvement, as opposed to measurement for accountability or research, is that information and analyses do not need to be near-perfect to be useful and justify steps taken based on it.

The selection process described above may lead you to change your mind about what to measure and how to measure it. If you decide that particular measures or tools will be too difficult or costly to use, consider choosing either a different element of the initiative to measure, a different measure to use for the chosen element, or different tools to implement the chosen measure.

Step 3.4: Set Performance Expectations

The final step in Stage 3 is to set performance expectations for each measure you have identified. Performance expectations specify the level and quality of implementation steps (inputs and actions to which you have attached measures) and results (outcomes and impacts to which you have attached measures) that you expect to observe if the initiative is working as planned. Performance expectations enable you to learn from the ongoing operation of your initiative how to improve it. If reality falls short of expectations, the gap between the two will reveal the problem early on and provide you with data for use in understanding why the gap exists and how to fix it—the subject of Stage 4 of Leading by Learning. If results exceed expectations, that too is an occasion to examine why your expectations were inaccurate and to adjust plans and predictions accordingly.

To ensure that your performance expectations serve these purposes, be sure they:

- **Define success.** While being realistic, you should set expectations at a level you consider to be fully satisfactory. They should reflect what you expect to observe if your strategy is working as planned.
- **Reveal how equitably you are implementing your initiative and how equitable its impact is.** Be explicit about how you expect your initiative to affect historically marginalized people whom your strategy is likely to affect. Set success at a level that increases equity and corrects processes or activities that reproduce injustice or oppression.
- **Motivate action.** Performance expectations should be specific enough to give people a clear view of what they’re aiming to do or accomplish. To inspire people to act, performance expectations also must be realistic to achieve. If they aren’t, they may not be taken seriously and may cause frustration.
- **Clarify progress.** Select performance expectations that align to your performance measures, and clearly reveal whether the actual level or quality of actions and results is at, below, or above what you expect.

Determine your process for setting performance expectations

There are three main sources you may draw upon in setting performance expectations: directives, informed judgment, and benchmarks.

- **Directives** are official regulations set by your organization or outside it that prescribe performance expectations. You can use the directives as your performance expectations when there are required results you are expected to meet. Be sure to consider, however, whether the levels regulations prescribed are sufficiently rigorous and realistic.
- Often your own **best judgment** about what success looks like is the best guide to rigorous and realistic performance expectations, especially when there are no relevant directives for a measure and when team members have relevant expertise or experience.
- **Benchmarking** uses your own team's or another organization's past performance levels in the same or a similar context as a point of reference in setting expectations for your measures. If information about such performance levels is available to you, benchmarking can be particularly useful if you have no other directives or reliable judgments to draw upon, and they can also help you determine whether directives and your own judgments are sufficiently rigorous and realistic.

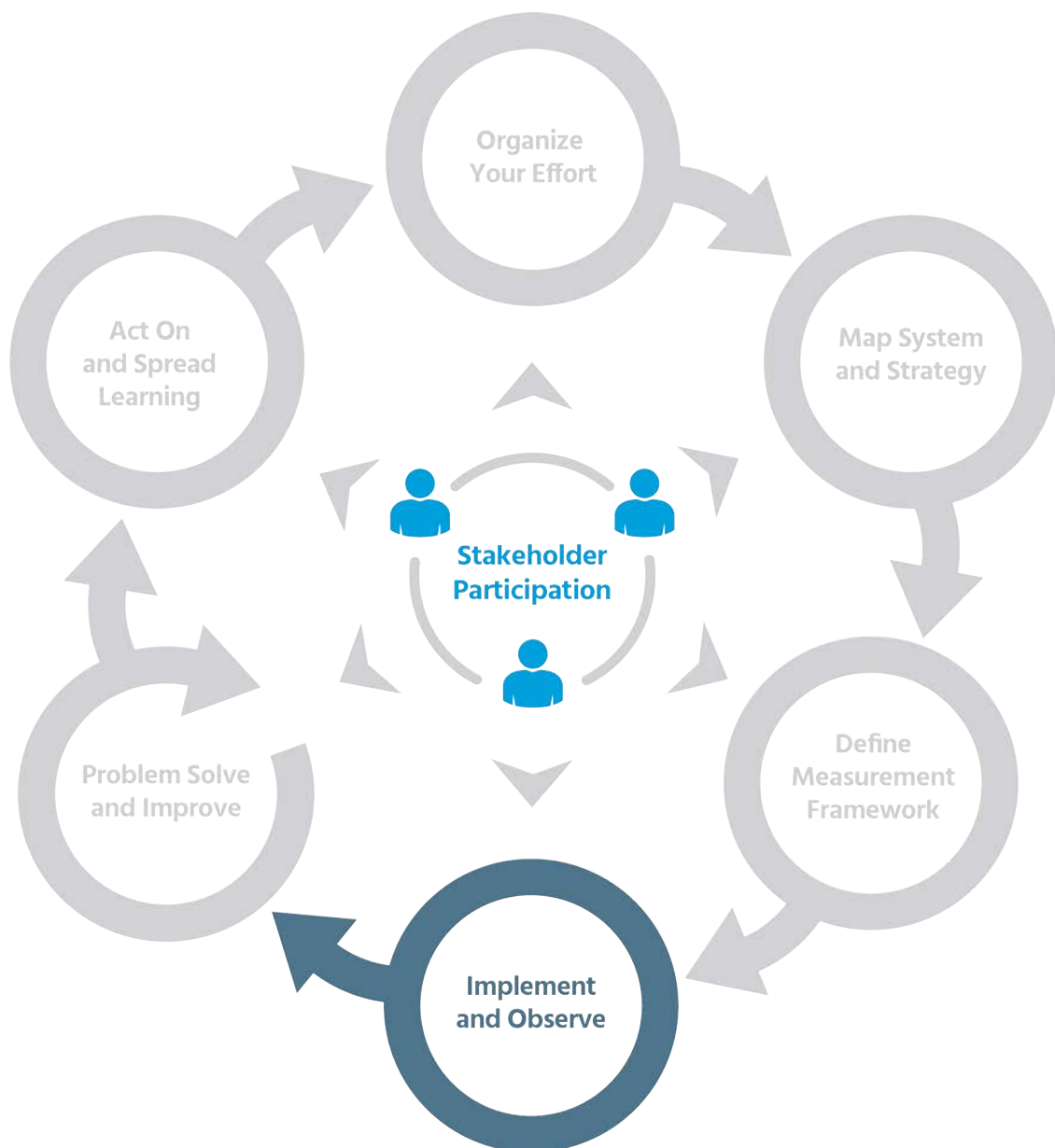
Keep in mind that performance expectations may need to change over time. As you learn more about your strategy and capabilities, revisit your expectations.

Using benchmarking to set performance expectations

These steps can help you use benchmarking to set performance expectations.

- Decide whether to benchmark against your own past performance levels, your initiatives' own initial performance levels, or against past or recent performance levels of a peer organization. Use your own past performance as a benchmark when that performance is strong or when you cannot identify or access relevant data from another organization operating in a sufficiently similar context.
- As necessary, identify peer teams or organizations—those that are similar to yours along key dimensions, that have implemented an initiative similar to yours, or that seek to achieve similar outcomes or impacts, even by slightly different means.
- Gather and analyze the appropriate data from within your organization or from peer organizations, and use that data to set the performance expectation, perhaps by setting a value that is similar to or above the performance of peer organizations or that follows your internal or other organization's trends in performance over time.

Stage 4: Implement and Observe



Stage 4: Implement and Observe

Overview

At this stage of Evolutionary Learning, your team puts its strategy and measurement framework into action, fleshing out and implementing your project plan and collecting and analyzing evaluative data on the timelines developed in Stage 3.

This stage has five steps:

- **4.1. Form the implementation team:** Identify the people who will execute the work described in the OPTA, and orient them to the initiative and aligned measurement responsibilities.
- **4.2. Interrogate your biases:** Analyze and reflect on personal, collective, and institutional identities, experiences, and biases brought to the work under consideration.
- **4.3. Create working norms:** Agree on the standards, processes, and mindsets that will guide interactions among team members and between the team and the broader organization or system.
- **4.4. Generate your project plan:** Map out the workstreams, milestones, and tasks, and assign roles and responsibilities for both the initiative and its measurement framework. Communicate these workstreams, milestones, tasks, roles, and responsibilities to key stakeholders.
- **4.5. Implement:** Put your project plan into action, and monitor progress with your implementation team. Prepare for how your team will broadly solicit and use real-time stakeholder feedback.

If you complete this Evolutionary Learning stage successfully, your team will:

- **collaborate effectively** and get the value of multiple perspectives in doing and evaluating the work
- **have a detailed project plan** to guide and track implementation of the initiative
- **spread knowledge** of the initiative to key stakeholders
- **implement your strategy** and your measurement framework

Stage 4 Step-by-Step

Step 4.1: Form the implementation team

Now that you are ready to put your strategy into action, you will want to confirm that you have the right team members to implement and monitor the progress of your strategy. The team that developed the plan also will likely form the core of your implementation team, but you may need others to help put your strategy into action.

Revisit the four characteristics of effective teams detailed in [Stage 1](#): diverse perspectives, required expertise, access to necessary resources, and relevant authority. In reviewing your core team through these four lenses, use your OPTA's detailed specification of inputs and actions and your measurement framework's delineation of required information and analyses to expose gaps in capacity and add team members as needed.

At this point or at later ones when the team adjusts its membership to align to successive implementation stages, it will need to orient new members to how the team functions, the division of roles and responsibilities, and the work done to date. If your implementation team will be active for a long time, consider creating and periodically updating an Onboarding Guide with an task list; an overview of the initiative, including its theory of action, OPTA, and measurement framework; and any other relevant reading or steps new team members can take to get acclimated.

Step 4.2: Interrogate Your Biases

Remember that team members bring their past experiences and accompanying biases to bear (see [Step 1.2](#)), and that a good way to mitigate the negative effects of these biases is to face them head-on.

As new team members join, consider revisiting your earlier efforts to surface and address biases. You can reprise the techniques you used when you launched your effort or try a new approach. Chapter 1 discusses three tools and lists several others. The entire list is reproduced here:

- [Awareness Activities: Strategies and Preparation, Icebreakers, and Introspectives](#) (EdChange MultiCultural Pavilion)
- [Basic Principles of Equity Literacy](#) (Equity Literacy Institute)
- [Common Beliefs Protocol](#) (SPLC's Teaching Tolerance Project)

Cross-Functional Implementation Teams

Initiatives benefit from implementation teams that are cross-functional, meaning they have members from most or all the different departments within your organization that affect or are affected by the initiative. Depending on your organization and the initiative, you may even invite members from outside your organization (for example, initiatives implemented by a state education department can benefit from having members representing key partner districts and schools). Cross-functional teams build cohesion between departments, foster transparent communication and consistency across your organization and its external partners and stakeholders, and enhance the initiative's long-term sustainability.

To assemble a cross-functional team:

1. Develop clear goals, objectives, roles, and responsibilities for members of the cross-functional team. (Who will do the work? Consult on it? Engage with partners? Monitor performance measures and feedback?)
2. Create membership criteria (revisiting Step 1.1) and roles and responsibilities (revisiting your OPTA actions). Use this information to identify prospective team members.
3. Generate an overview of team expectations for use when inviting individuals to join the effort.
4. Draft a scope and sequence for team responsibilities and meetings-steps you should update once you develop your project plan in Step 4.4 and regularly thereafter based on feedback and information collected through the implementation of your measurement framework.
5. Identify templates or protocols the team may wish to use, such as a standard meeting agenda template or a communications tracker.

- [Critical Practices for Anti-bias Education: Teacher Leadership](#) (SPLC's Teaching Tolerance Project)
- [Developing Community Agreements](#) (National Equity Project)
- [Equity and Justice Awareness Quiz](#) (EdChange MultiCultural Pavilion)
- [How the Best Bosses Interrupt Biases on Their Teams](#) (Harvard Business Review)
- [Implicit Association Tests](#) (Project Implicit) and [Making Sense of Your IAT Results](#) (Ohio State University's Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity)
- [Interrupting Bias in Problem-Solving Teams](#) (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction)
- [Liberatory Design Deck](#) (National Equity Project and Hasso Plattner Institute of Design at Stanford University)
- Using [Visualization](#) for [Avoiding Unconscious Bias at Work](#) (MindTools)

Step 4.3: Create Working Norms

After adjusting your team's membership to prepare for implementation, you will need to revisit your working norms. If your core and implementation team membership are similar, it may be sufficient to start with your original core team norms and update or add any that are necessary to reflect the way your implementation team will function.

If your core and implementation team members are meaningfully different, your updated team will benefit from a fuller norm-setting process like the one your core team previously used (see [Stage 1.6](#)). If your implementation team is more thoroughly cross-functional, bringing together many people who are collaborating for the first time or in a new way, re-norming may be especially important.

Step 4.4: Generate Your Project Plan

The next step at this stage is to create a project plan that will serve as a roadmap of the key actions needed to implement your initiative. The plan should also include roles, responsibilities, timeframes, and deadlines for all work detailed in your OPTA and required by your measurement framework.

Creating a project plan at this stage is critical because it:

- Surfaces and forces you to confirm resources or other prerequisites or dependencies that are critical to your initiative's success (drawing on the "input" elements in your OPTA)
- Requires your team to be specific and precise—to align everyone's expectations—about what steps need to be taken, who will take them, and how long they will take (drawing on the "action" elements in your OPTA and on the data collection and analysis steps in [Stage 3](#))
- Positions you to monitor effectively the progress of your initiative (drawing on your measurement framework)

You may want to identify a person to act as project manager. This person can lead the process of drafting the project plan and vetting it with your team. Often, a project manager is also responsible for managing the team's meeting schedule and creating and distributing meeting agendas.

As your team develops its project plan, consider whether you have:

- secured the participation in the project-planning process of the critical stakeholders identified by your stakeholder mapping.
- included preparatory and facilitative as well as execution steps. For example, if internal or external communications about your plan or progress are important, include steps to draft, vet, and finalize the communication messages and materials and get the word out.
- included steps needed to carry out the measurement framework developed at Stage 3.
- backward mapped from external deadlines or mandates with which your team must comply.

- assured the team of timely access to important decisionmakers and audiences within and surrounding your organization, scheduling events well ahead of time and taking advantage of previously scheduled or standing board, cabinet, leadership, and other meetings and public hearings.

To create your [project plan](#):

1. Choose a format and platform that work for your team. Whether you choose low-tech options or an advanced project-management application, make sure the system works for the team as a whole and for the project manager in particular.
2. Categorize the initiative into key workstreams. For example, you may decide to organize workstreams by phases of the initiative (conduct due diligence, generate and research solutions) or by type of work (deliver trainings, conduct stakeholder engagement). Your OPTA's organization of key actions provides a good starting point for this categorization process.
3. Lay out all the intermediate steps needed to complete each project. Include key milestones—again leveraging your OPTAs.
4. Check to be sure your project plan includes data-collection and monitoring tasks and steps identified in your measurement framework from Stage 3.
5. Develop timeframes and deadlines for all steps. Remember to include important meetings at or by which you will complete key steps. Leave space for entering revised deadlines during the course of the project.
6. If you are project planning for an initiative that will last many months or if later stages are not yet clear, set timeframes for intermediate steps and deadlines for the earlier tasks or stages, adding in detail for later stages after your early work gives you greater task-timeline clarity.
7. Identify progress descriptions that convey the information you want (not yet started, on time, slightly behind, very behind, complete).
8. Identify individuals with responsibility for each step.
9. Consider signifying subsequent steps that depend on each step's timely completion. Doing so can help limit and manage the waterfall effects on later steps of missing earlier deadlines.

Using a RACI to establish project plan roles

For simpler initiatives, listing one owner of each step in your project plan can suffice. For more complex initiatives with interested parties of different types at some or all steps, you can identify roles and responsibilities using an established framework, such as RACI, MOCCHA, or SRI.

The RACI framework, for example, identifies four categories of roles:

- **Responsible:** Primary owner or doer of a step
- **Accountable:** Person answerable for the completion, quality, and outcome of a step
- **Consulted:** Person with helpful knowledge the team will draw upon to complete a step
- **Informed:** Person the team should make aware of the progress or outcome of a step

Your team might apply the RACI structure to the initiative as a whole, each task, or particular steps.

Whether or not your team uses a framework to account for nonowners, in designating ownership over given units of work, consider if you need multiple owners—a primary owner and a secondary, or supporting, responsible party.

Project-plan creation is not linear. Describing and setting a deadline for one action may call to mind other actions you hadn't previously considered. Be prepared to work backward and forward from each action in the plan and its overall flow to be sure it is comprehensive.

More broadly, a project plan is a living document. Projects rarely proceed from start to finish as planned. As your initiative unfolds, your team will likely need to add new steps or dependencies, remove steps that turn out to be unnecessary, and reorder steps. These changes may be required by the speed and results of prior actions, solutions for trouble spots your measurement framework flagged, or factors outside your team's control.

To acknowledge that changes are inevitable and expected and to signal your commitment to responding quickly and flexibly, include a space on the project plan for entering revised deadlines. To head off unexpected changes, consider testing your draft project plan with others outside the core team whose cooperation is critical to the initiative's success.

Step 4.5: Implement

Now put your initiative into action.

Follow the implementation steps described in your project plan and based on your theory of action and OPTA. Monitor progress using the measurement framework in Stage 3, collecting and analyzing data on the schedule set in the project plan. Use the practices that you will develop in Stage 5 to adjust course if the initiative is proceeding more or less rapidly or effectively than expected or if the results are above or below the predicted quality or amount.

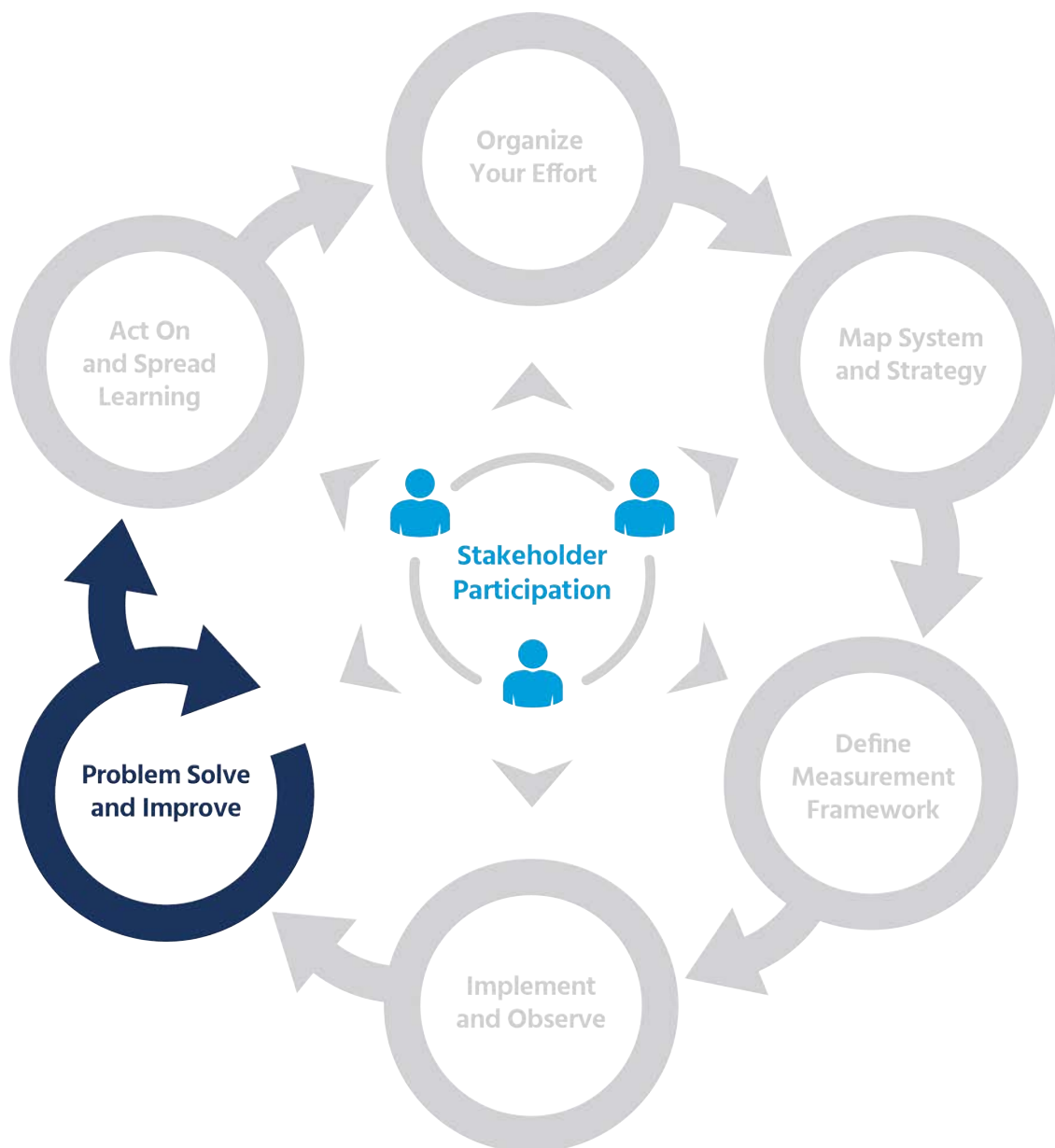
Schedule regular meetings to monitor progress, aligning their cadence to the pace of your work, the flow of information from your measurement framework, and the need to avoid accumulating more issues than can be timely addressed.

Conducting effective meetings

Conducting effective meetings is a critical but underpracticed skill. Always prepare an agenda, sending it around a day or two ahead of time. In crafting an agenda:

1. Begin with the end in mind, specifying meeting objectives. These may include providing status updates, planning next steps, reviewing and problem-solving based on data from your measurement framework, and collaboratively developing new work product.
2. Design agenda items that directly address those objectives.
 - Align your meeting structure with your organizational or team culture. Do you need an icebreaker to help attendees get to know one another or to alleviate the intensity of the work?
 - Be explicit about how much time you will spend on each agenda item. For items that require significant time—more than 15 minutes—provide an outline or protocol saying how the time will be spent.
 - Use your project plan and measurement framework to capture and communicate progress and effectiveness and to highlight successes to be celebrated and challenges to be addressed.
3. Revisit meeting attendees. Based on your objectives and agenda items, does everyone on the invite list need to attend? Is there anyone not on your team who should make a guest appearance?
4. Dedicate time at the end of each meeting to review decisions and identify next steps.
5. Depending on your organizational or team culture, take notes or meeting minutes and send them out after the meeting, highlighting next steps.

Stage 5: Problem Solve and Improve



Stage 5:

Problem Solve and Improve

Overview

At this stage of Evolutionary Learning, your team identifies opportunities for improvement and uses disciplined cycles of inquiry to problem solve and adjust course when observed results differ from those you expected. These steps will ensure that your team is continually building its capacity to improve the initiative's design and implementation in order to achieve your stated goals.

This stage has seven steps:

- **5.1. Prioritize the problems to be solved:** Identify all instances in which observed and expected results differ, and decide which deviations to explore through disciplined inquiry.
- **5.2. Form a team:** Create a team to conduct that inquiry with people close to and affected by the issue to be addressed.
- **5.3. Conduct causal analysis:** Analyze the causes of each discrepancy between expectations and results that you are exploring, and articulate a problem statement for each.
- **5.4. Generate possible solutions:** Consider and prioritize solutions for the named problems.
- **5.5. Test solutions:** Design and run a quick test of the most promising solution for each problem.
- **5.6. Analyze the results, and decide if further inquiry is needed:** Study the outcomes of your tests to determine if your solutions worked and if additional cycles of inquiry are warranted.
- **5.7. Act on the implications of your test:** Based on the outcome of your tests, modify your initiative's design or implementation and measurement framework so that results and expectations are more fully aligned.

If you complete this Evolutionary Learning stage successfully, your team will:

- **create opportunities** to strengthen your understanding of the design and implementation of your initiative and the broader system in which it operates
- **engage an encompassing team of stakeholders** in disciplined inquiry into discrepancies between your initiative's expected and actual results
- **generate insights** about how to conceptualize and implement your initiative so it is more responsive to student or organizational strengths and needs
- **use those insights to adjust and improve** the initiative's OPTA and measurement framework and as a result the strategy's implementation

Stage 5 Step-by-Step

In Stage 4, you put the operational strategy and measurement framework into action. In Stage 5, you will closely observe your strategy, identify opportunities for improvement, and engage in disciplined cycles of inquiry to move from opportunity to action.

Together, all the steps in this stage make up the problem-solving cycle. As with all the others, this stage prioritizes learning, especially when reality deviates from expectations. Since the strategy you have implemented is a hypothesis about what will work best in your context, it demands constant observation and testing. In this stage, you make good on the commitment to avoid deploying strategies that do not work and to instead continually learn and employ strategies that do.

Step 5.1: Prioritize the Problem to be Solved

The first step in the problem-solving cycle is to decide which problem to focus on for the duration of the short-cycle inquiry. A problem exists when there is a gap between what you expected to happen (articulated in your performance expectations in Stage 3) and what actually occurred (revealed from data collection during implementation).

Begin by noting all the places these gaps exist. In all likelihood, you'll have many problems from which to choose. To select a focal problem, answer the guiding questions:

- Is the problem (as stated) within the team's sphere of influence?
- Does the problem result in disparities by race, ethnicity, and other identifiable categories in the service level, quality provided, or in outcomes and impact?
- Is it possible to address the problem with currently available resources?
- Is the problem a priority for the organization or its stakeholders and community members?
- Is the problem strategically connected to the organization's mission?
- Will resolving the problem drive meaningful improvement?

Keep track of the problems that you deprioritize for the current inquiry cycle. You can return to others you identify but do not prioritize in a future inquiry cycle. As with other stages of the Evolutionary Learning cycle, this one is iterative. The definition of the problem and your approach to addressing it are likely to evolve throughout the course of the inquiry.

Step 5.2: Form a Team

Once you've prioritized a problem, [construct a team](#) well-suited to tackle it. Successful problem-solving depends on contributions from people with different expertise, perspectives, skills, and experiences, so it should be conducted in teams whenever possible. Team-based work also increases members' accountability to one another and the work, so the initiative has a better chance of staying on track even amid competing priorities. To maximize the benefits of team-based work and ensure the problem-solving team represents an array of perspectives, be sure to include members who:

- possess or have easy access to necessary expertise
- identify as or have easy access to affected stakeholders
- have relevant decision-making authority
- have experience with data analysis and, if possible, problem-solving

While gathering a diverse team of problem solvers with relevant skills and authority, keep the team to a manageable size. The ideal size will vary by organization and problem, but a team of three to eight works well for most problems. Involve someone with sufficient decision-making authority in the selection of team members, so that those likely to have a full workload can participate. Be prepared with backup selections in case someone invited declines to join.

Setting Norms and Defining Roles

Once a team forms, it is tempting to get straight into the work of problem solving. But whether the group is accustomed to working together or collaborating for the first time, it is essential to begin the work by [setting group norms](#). Norms are agreements about how the team will work, communicate, and make decisions and are critical to the success of the inquiry. Norms should be drafted and ratified by all team members and should be easily accessible to everyone (posted on chart paper in meeting rooms, stored online in a shared folder), so they can be revisited, amended, or supplemented as needed.

Norms often address these topics:

- **Purpose:** How will we keep our initiative's goal front and center?
- **Equity:** How will we ensure we are advancing equity? How will we ensure equity of voice? How will we create an inclusive team environment?
- **Communication:** How will we share ideas? How will we offer feedback? How will we organize our conversations? How will we listen to one another? How will we encourage productive debate that is also respectful? How will we seek clarity when there is misunderstanding?
- **Dissent and debate:** How will we disagree while remaining agreeable? What protocol will we use to resolve conflict?
- **Engagement:** When will we work together or apart? How will we share the work?
- **Decision-making:** How will we make decisions? How will we get input from others not on the team?
- **Documentation:** How will we record our work steps and results?
- **Technology:** What uses are appropriate during team work time?

Early on in the formation of the problem-solving team, it is also critical to define and assign roles, particularly the project manager and facilitator. Doing so will ensure that there is sufficient energy from dedicated members to keep the work progressing and the team on task. The project manager is often in charge of creating and sharing a detailed project plan that outlines the steps and timeline for the entire inquiry. The project manager may also send reminders for meetings and notes and next steps afterward. The facilitator will prepare for and run all problem-solving team meetings, ensuring that the appropriate materials are available and ready for the team's review.

Step 5.3: Conduct Causal Analysis

With your team, use causal analysis to deepen your understanding of the problem that was identified during your initial review of collected data. In the problem-solving cycle, causal analysis will help you uncover the underlying causes of the focal problem. It often leads to a refined understanding and articulation of the problem itself.

At this point, you can use the same tools to conduct causal analysis that you did to set up your initiative in [Stage 2.2](#). As with Stage 2.2, two useful tools for causal analysis in short-cycle inquiry are the 5 Whys and the Fishbone Diagram. Going back and forth between the two tools can help you uncover causes underlying the symptoms of the problem you have observed.

After conducting the causal analysis, write a problem statement that will guide the remainder of the short-cycle inquiry. It should succinctly define the problem you are trying to solve. A strong problem statement for short-cycle inquiry describes a problem that is:

- within your sphere of influence
- possible to address within the stated timeframe and with a feasible amount of resources
- strategically connected to advancing equity and to the longer-term aims of the organization
- human and user centered

Step 5.4: Generate Possible Solutions

With the benefit of an enhanced understanding of the problem, start generating potential solutions—concrete, actionable ideas. Although you are likely to test only one solution at a time, it is important to generate as many ideas for addressing the problem as you can. Draw on research and the team’s own judgment to begin a list of possible solutions. You can also consult peers, the people most affected by the identified problem, experts and respected practitioners, and other stakeholders for ideas.

With this research and your own knowledge of the system, you can use the following sample techniques to facilitate a brainstorming session focused on generating potential solutions:¹

- **Challenge the boundaries:** Define the boundaries within which you believe the change must occur, then think about if and how those boundaries can be expanded or even removed.
- **Rearrange the order of steps:** List the sequential order of activities involved in the process, then move them around to consider solutions that are prevented by the existing order.
- **Examine why you are doing something:** Reexamine the reasons for activities you are performing to make sure they are vital to the process or system.
- **Visualize the ideal:** Describe aspects of the process or system in what you consider their ideal state to help conceptualize potential solutions.

Once you have a list of potential solutions, consult your team norms and prioritize one for testing. The solution you select should be feasible to test given the time and resources available, of interest to the team, and a plausible fix for the stated problem and a helpful improvement in your pursuit of equity. Keep in mind that the inquiry cycle is an opportunity to innovate, so give yourself permission to choose solutions that depart from those tried in the past. If the selected solution does not produce the results you expect, you can always modify it or try another.

¹ Gerald J. Langley, Ronald D. Moen, Kevin M. Nolan, Thomas W. Nolan, Clifford L. Norman, and Lloyd P. Provost, *The Improvement Guide: A Practical Approach to Enhancing Organization Performance* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 37–40.

Table 5.1. Strategies for facilitating decision-making

Many teams unearth a number of potential solutions after engaging in collaborative brainstorming. The following activities can help teams decide which solution to test first:

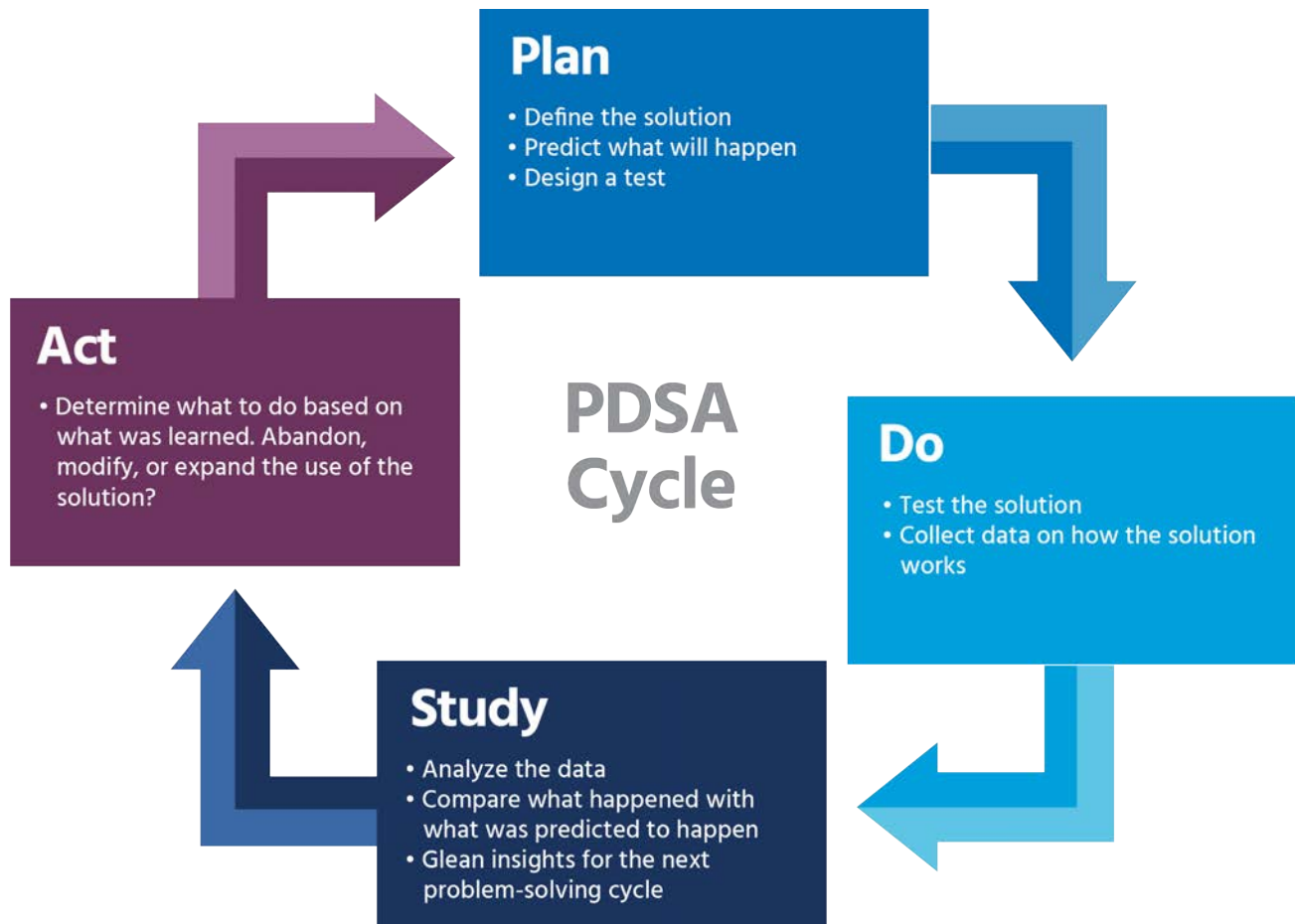
Activity	Description	Facilitation Tips
Impact-Effort Matrix	Similar in layout to the influence-importance matrix, the impact-effort is a matrix with one axis labeled impact and the other effort. The matrix allows teams to evaluate a choice in terms of the impact it will have and the effort needed to implement it. Teams plot the potential solutions in terms of their predicted impact and effort. The solutions fall into four quadrants: fill-ins (low effort, low impact), try later (high effort, low impact), quick wins (low effort, high impact), and major projects (high effort, high impact).	<p>If a team has difficulty placing a choice option on the matrix, consider the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have we tried to implement this solution before or something similar to it? What resulted? • Why is it difficult to place this solution? • Overall, how does this solution compare with others?
Power Voting	An activity that works best when team members have differing, clearly defined views about which solution to test, power voting involves giving each team member a select number of votes to use in support of particular solutions. During several voting rounds, team members attach their votes to solution ideas. Team members may spend their votes on a single option or spread them out. Reflecting on the number of solutions with the most and least number of votes may spur decision-making. In the final round, each team member has only one vote to use on a particular solution.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before voting, give participants time to make a case for and against a choice. • Depending on several factors, consider allowing participants to vote anonymously
Pro-Con Analysis	Pro-con analysis helps teams think not only about all the positive and negative attributes associated with a solution but also the way stakeholders will be affected and any risks involved. Teams list these attributes on a chart with four columns: pros, cons, stakeholder impact, and risks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give participants an opportunity to complete the table independently or in pairs before sharing with the entire group

Step 5.5: Test Solutions

Armed with a solution that is reasonable to test, inspiring to the team, a plausible fix to the stated problem, and a helpful improvement in your pursuit of equity, you are ready to plan and begin testing. When planning your test, be sure to identify an appropriate scale for the test, a plan for measuring the efficacy of the solution, and an action plan for implementing the solution and collecting data on its effect.

Many teams structure their short-cycle tests using the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle^{2,3} approach shown in Table 5.2 below. In the first PDSA step, Plan, you develop a way to test a solution and make predictions about its effects. In the second step, Do, you carry out the test and collect data on the implementation and effects of your solution. In Study, you look at the gathered data and compare what happened with your predictions. This examination prepares you to Act: adapting, adopting, or abandoning your solution and conducting another test. Follow [this link](#) to access a sample PDSA template, which you can use throughout Step 5.5.

Table 5.2 Steps of a PDSA cycle



Determining the Scale of a Test

The scale of the test dictates how broadly you test the solution. To determine the scale of the test, ask yourself the following questions:

- What is your degree of belief (level of confidence) that the change will result in improvement? Higher levels of confidence in tested solutions often lead to wider scale tests.

²Anthony S. Bryk, Louis M. Gomez, Alicia Grunow, and Paul G. LeMahieu, *Learning to Improve: How America's Schools Can Get Better at Getting Better* (Cambridge: Harvard Education Press, 2015), 280.

³Langley, et al., *The Improvement Guide*.

- What is the cost of failure if the test does not work? Lower failure costs often lead to wide-scale tests.
- Is your organization ready to make the change? Higher degrees of readiness often lead to wide-scale tests.

Table 5.3 below summarizes the appropriate scale of the test for a number of situations.^{4,5}

Table 5.3. Determining scale of the test

		Organization's Readiness to Test Solution			
		Cost of Failure	Resistant (no commitment)	Indifferent (some commitment)	Ready (strong commitment)
Low degree of belief that solution will lead to improvement	Large	Very small-scale test	Very small-scale test	Very small-scale test	
	Small	Very small-scale test	Very small-scale test	Small-scale test	
High degree of belief that solution will lead to improvement	Large	Very small-scale test	Small-scale test	Wide-scale test	
	Small	Small-scale test	Wide-scale test	Implement	

Action Planning

After determining the scale of the test, create an action plan for testing your solution. Your action plan should, at minimum, detail the following:

- Who from your team will be involved in the testing?
- What data needs to be collected during the test, and how will your team collect it?
- What will your team do during the test?
- When will testing occur?
- When will your team meet to monitor the test?
- Where will testing occur?

In answering those questions, your team will identify the measures to diagnose and assess whether your solution works as planned. For guidance on measurement selection and definition, revisit [Stage 3](#).

Making Predictions

Finally, before conducting your test, set predictions for what you expect to happen on key measures of success. Setting these predictions is perhaps the most important part of the planning phase. Without a set of clear, precise, and documented predictions, it is impossible to identify the gap between what happened and what you expected; therefore, it is much more challenging to learn from the test.

Each time the results of a test match your predictions, you have evidence that confirms your understanding of the solution. If the predictions do not match the results, advance your knowledge by understanding why the predictions were not accurate. Continually comparing your predictions with your results will enable you to determine whether you should scale up the

⁴Bryk, et al., *Learning to Improve*.

⁵Langley, et al., *The Improvement Guide*.

implementation of your solution or abandon it. A solution is worth implementing on a wide scale when you have valid and reliable test results that you were able to accurately predict over a range of conditions.

As you conduct the test, be sure to collect data along the way and document deviations from the plan. These notes will help contextualize the results in the next step.

Step 5.6: Analyze the Results and Decide if Further Inquiry is Needed

After testing a solution for the established timeframe, gather the team to study results and decide on next steps. To facilitate the team's analysis, start by ensuring all data have been collected. If you notice any missing or improbable data, follow up with others involved in testing to obtain missing data and understand the cause of any anomalies.

Next, clean and organize the data and put results into a presentation format that matches your team's data fluency and that prompts discussion and decision-making. Be sure to clearly represent actual performance versus predicted performance, as well as any relevant changes in performance over time. Commonly used visualizations include frequency tables, line graphs or run charts, bar graphs, scatterplots, and pie charts. If you have few observations and qualitative data, bringing the raw data itself to a meeting can be quite useful.

Bring the entire team and any other key stakeholders together for a series of collaborative meetings focused on gleaning lessons from the test. To maximize learning during these collaborative meetings, restate the test plan before moving to an overview of test implementation and results. As a group, analyze collected data, focusing the discussion on the comparison between the team's predictions and actual results. Then discuss suspected causes for any positive or negative deviations between the results and team's predictions. After each meeting, find agreement on next steps, including whether to modify the strategy or any aspect of the solution tested (see Step 5.7 for more detail on how to act on test implications).

When planning collaborative analysis meetings, keep in mind that successful meetings:

- align activities with meeting goals
- are time bound
- allow for reflection on results (test data, observations) and process (test implementation, logistics, fidelity to division of labor)
- move from low-inference observations (fact-based without judgment; e.g., "Many teachers were on their computers during the PLC meeting") to high-inference observations (carrying judgment or evaluation; e.g., "When teachers were on their computers, they were less engaged in the PLC meeting")
- cause the team to explore gaps between predictions and actual results
- include an opportunity to brainstorm potential next steps based on the data and on the broader test plan

Step 5.7 Act on the Implications of Your Test

After analyzing the test results, decide what to maintain or modify of the solution. Your test may have implications for the tested solution, and it may have implications for your measurement framework or the overall strategy of your initiative. Based on testing, you might amend parts of the overall strategy for the initiative or focus on modifications to the solution.

Implications for the Solution

Your test results likely showed you one of four things.^{6,7}

1. Your solution did not work, and the results were so negative that the solution is unlikely to address your problem. In these cases, you might want to abandon your solution, look to others that will be responsive to your problem, and restart the testing cycle.
2. Your solution worked to some extent at the scale and under the conditions tested, but your predictions did not match results perfectly. In these cases, you might want to modify your solution and test it again.
3. Your solution worked well (your results matched your predictions) at the scale and under the conditions of this current round of testing, but the scale is very or somewhat limited, or the conditions are different from others that are critical to your initiative. In these cases, you might want to test the solution at a wider scale and in new conditions and modify your solution for the new scale and setting.
4. Your solution worked well (your results matched your predictions) at a wide scale. In these cases, implement your solution moving forward, and integrate it into your strategy.

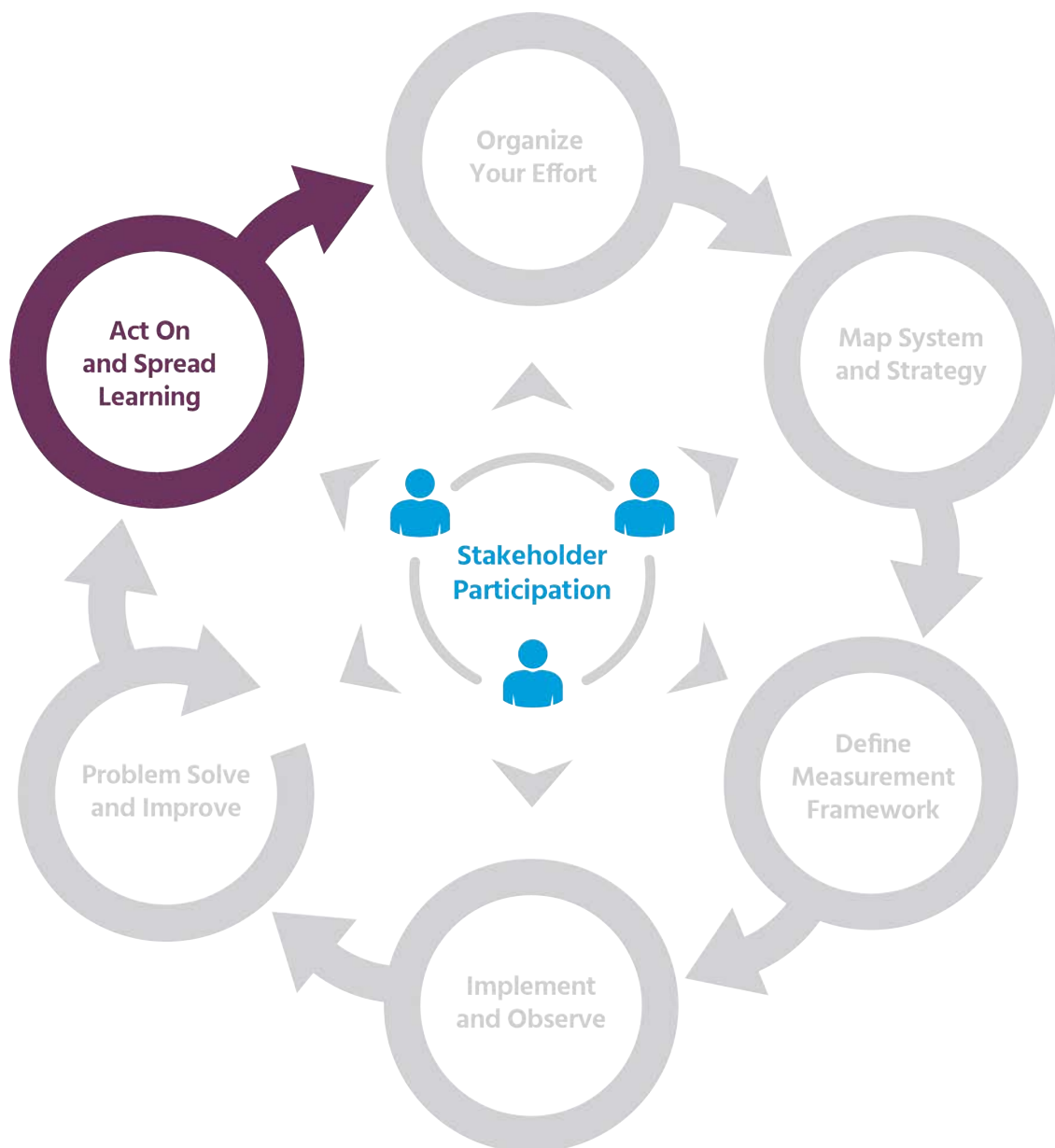
Implications for Your Strategy

If the test reveals something new about the overall strategy, such as an enhanced or improved way to enact one or more of your strategic actions, update your theory of action and OPTA. The team may run another inquiry cycle on the same solution or observe the adjusted strategy for deviations (Step 5.1) before beginning another inquiry cycle. Similarly, if a test reveals an enhanced or improved way to measure one or more elements of your strategy, update your measurement framework.

⁶ Bryk, et al., *Learning to Improve*, 120.

⁷ Langley, et al., *The Improvement Guide*.

Stage 6: Act On and Spread Learning



Stage 6:

Act On and Spread Learning

Overview

At this stage of Evolutionary Learning, your team documents, reflects on, and broadly communicates learning from the initiative and associated inquiry cycles—and the Evolutionary Learning mindsets, processes, and tools that guided the initiative—to sustain and enlarge the initiative’s impact and improve the broader organization and how it’s governed.

This stage has three steps:

- **6.1. Preserve and disseminate what you learned:** Reflect on, document, and disseminate insights about your initiative’s goal, strategy, progress, and impact and the Evolutionary Learning steps that guided its design, implementation, and improvement.
- **6.2. Sustain and enlarge the impact of your initiative:** Sequence steps for sustaining what worked and for enlarging the impact of your initiative, its implementation, and short-cycle tests.
- **6.3. Spread Evolutionary Learning:** Spread Evolutionary Learning across your organization, enabling others to lead through learning when pursuing their initiatives and when managing the organization as a whole.

If you complete this Evolutionary Learning stage successfully, your team will:

- **capture learning** from your initiative and your experience with Leading Through Learning
- **use insights from your close observation** of the initiative’s operation and impact to suggest ways the broader organization and its stakeholders can help sustain the initiative and enlarge its impact
- **spread valuable programmatic insights** within and beyond your organization
- **inspire exploration** of Leading Through Learning as a powerful way to govern your organization and ensure consequential participation by all stakeholders, especially traditionally marginalized ones

Stage 6 Step-by-Step

The preceding stages guided your team through the Evolutionary Learning process for generating, implementing, and measuring the results of your initiative and for problem-solving mismatches between expected and actual activities and outcomes to improve the initiative. This stage addresses ways of using learning from the initiative and the Evolutionary Learning process to improve how your broader organization operates and is governed. This stage's three steps—documenting and disseminating learnings, taking steps to sustain and enlarge the initiative, and leveraging and spreading Evolutionary Learning—overlap and support one another and should occur together, not in isolation.

Step 6.1: Preserve and Disseminate What You Learned

This section describes ways to document, reflect on, and share the story of what you learned.

Document and Reflect on What You Learned

Set aside time at key moments and at the close of your effort to carefully document and reflect on what you have learned about what worked and what didn't. Compiling your team's meeting agendas and minutes, theory of action, OPTA, measurement framework, and the data and analyses they generated, along with records of how your team problem solved troubles that the measurement framework revealed will ready you for these reflective moments. Retaining the various templates your team filled out in Stages 1 to 5, as well as email chains, texts, and other running records of insights along the way, can also help.

In considering how to reflect on and document learning about your initiative and Evolutionary Learning, you should:

- Resist the temptation to skip this step to save time, thinking “My team members view the situation as I do. It's obvious.” Even among close team members, memories and insights differ in ways that, when reflected upon, generate productive insights. Keep in mind, as well, how useful your learnings are to others in and beyond your organization who had have not had an opportunity to “view the situation.”
- Focus on process (e.g., team formation and efforts to widen and enrich stakeholder participation) as well as decisions reached, steps taken, and results obtained.
- Ask what you learned, and what more you can learn, from strategies and processes that failed—which often harbor exceptionally valuable information—as well as ones that worked as planned.
- Consider whether time and resources permit you to analyze and display data from your measurement framework and short-cycle tests in additional ways that are more informative to you and more useful to others.
- Take time to make sense of the information you've compiled, seeking insights from each step along the way, as well as patterns and cross-cutting inferences those smaller insights may yield in the aggregate.

One tool for making sense of information and insights you've collected is an After Action Review. Figure 6.1 lists questions you can use during that review to reflect on (1) your initiative's actual implementation and impact compared with your predictions, (2) lessons learned stated as successes and failures, (3) team processes and dynamics, (4) next steps, and (5) ways to continue and spread Evolutionary Learning.

Figure 6.1. After Action Review Questions to Pose at the Close of Your Effort

<p>Implementation and Impact</p> <p>Did we meet our expectations for inputs, actions, outcomes, and impact?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the range of performance against our expectations? • How did our effort affect subpopulations of actors? • How did our effort affect different sites? • What other information might help us better understand these results? • Who else can help us make sense of the results? 	<p>Lessons Learned</p> <p>What were our successes? What were our failures?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we explain both positive and negative deviations from expected results? • How can we use the processes and tools in Stage 5 to understand and learn from these deviations? • How might the broader organization's structures and operations have contributed to our successes or failures? • How might we celebrate our successes, including the contributions of staff members and external stakeholders?
<p>Team Processes and Dynamic</p> <p>Apart from the results of our effort, how well did our team function?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How might we adjust our team norms to permit smoother functioning in the future? • How might we more effectively collect, analyze, and share information? • How might we improve our collaboration? • How well did our decision making norms work? • How might we improve team culture and climate? 	<p>Initial Next Steps</p> <p>Based on what we learned, how should we alter the effort?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How should we alter our theory of action, OPTA, and/or measurement framework? • How should we adjust our practices to facilitate more representative and more meaningful participation from stakeholders? • How do we know these are appropriate next steps to take in the near future?
<p>Evolutionary Learning Continued</p> <p>How do we sustain our effort over time and increase its impact?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How might we sustain our effort with changes to our organizational structure and/or operations? • How might we enlarge the impact of our effort by expanding the use of our effort with new populations, sites, or conditions? • How might we change the Evolutionary Learning process to better fit the needs, resources, and goals of our organization? 	

Preparing short summaries (one to two pages) of the team's conclusions on each of the After Action Review's components is an efficient way to preserve the team's findings for its own use, orient new team members, and inform others about the initiative and spread and model Evolutionary Learning. The team should also store results of its reflections and underlying data in a manner that ensures the security and accessibility of the information and accords with federal and state law.¹

Share Your Story

A good way for your team to share lessons learned and spread ideas across your organization is through a narrative of how your team worked together, what you accomplished, and what others might learn from the experience. The team can use the diversity of its members to help it decide (and to model) how comprehensively to frame the story, how widely to project it

¹The team should anonymize data containing student or other personal identifiers or private information and store the information on a password-protected platform with clear policies about who has access to it and when to destroy it. See the Federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.

within and beyond the organization, and how to creatively spread and collect feedback from it. Creating meaningful and interactive opportunities for colleagues and external stakeholders to learn about the team's strategy and outcomes, use Evolutionary Learning, ask questions, offer feedback, and join later iterations of the work that will likely pay dividends in the future.

In taking a broader approach to the story, you might aim to do the following (not necessarily in this order):

- Explain the problem the initiative addressed and why the organization needed to address it.
- Describe team members and their recruitment.
- Explain the Evolutionary Learning process and how the team problem solved to improve the initiative.
- Give an honest and balanced account of what was—and was not—accomplished.
- Tell stories about people and communities affected by the problem and solution and how their participation in defining and tackling the problem changed their relations to one another and to the organization.

In telling the story, the team might also:

- celebrate successes and recognize how the team worked together and the contributions of members, external stakeholders, colleagues, and organizational leaders
- explain failure as a mechanism for collective sensemaking, not personal shame
- illustrate how particular failures turned out to be productive, revealing fissures in organizational systems, as well as gaps in knowledge about what client communities need and how to meet those needs, how context matters, and how success can be measured
- show how Evolutionary Learning can reveal, reinforce, and recommit organizations and stakeholders to shared values, goals, and actions

Step 6.2: Sustain and Enlarge the Impact of Your Initiative

Your team's After Action Review and other reflections on its strategy and processes may generate ideas for (1) sustaining your initiative's impact, (2) enlarging your initiative's impact, and (3) for implementing Evolutionary Learning more effectively and spreading it throughout the organization. This section describes steps you can take to sustain and enlarge the impact of your initiative. Section 6.3 addresses steps to spread Evolutionary Learning as a governance model.

Sustain the Impact of Proven Strategies and Improvement Ideas

Figure 6.2 inventories steps your team may take to sustain what worked and what you learned from failure in the initiative and in testing potential solutions to problems your measurement framework exposed.

Figure 6.2. Actions to Help Sustain Your Initiative

Operational Area	Action
Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revise your theory of action, OPTA, and measurement framework based on what you learned (see Stage 5.7 and Stage 6.3 below). Extend your due diligence, collecting additional ideas and information from peer organizations, colleagues, and external experts. Align the effort to and embed it in the organization's five-year plan or equivalent. Conduct SWOT or other risk analysis to minimize barriers and maximize impact.
Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with colleagues to include the effort in the organization's budget. Develop a funding plan to sustain the effort.
Regulatory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confirm compliance of the effort with existing organizational, local, state, and federal guidelines, contractual obligations, and funding expectations. Secure approval of organizational leadership to continue the effort. Align the effort with the organization's performance-management systems.
Talent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revise roles and responsibilities to include new activities related to the effort. Conform improvement ideas to what existing workloads make possible. Hire and train staff needed to sustain the effort.
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan to communicate the continuation of the effort to colleagues and stakeholders. Draw on successes, including the initiative's ability to reveal and address trouble spots, to support continuation of the plan.
Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrate data derived from the effort in the organization's data collection, analytic, and management processes and systems. Assemble tangible resources and technology needed to sustain the effort.

Enlarge the Impact of Proven Strategies and Improvement Ideas

The team should also consider how to enlarge the impact of the initiative's successes by extending operations or learning to other people, sites, times, or conditions. Below are examples:

- **Actors:** Increase the number or categories of stakeholders participating in or benefited by the initiative.
- **Sites:** Expand the effort within current schools, classrooms, or locations, or test or apply it in new ones.
- **Duration:** Extend the length of time the initiative is implemented.
- **Conditions:** Test the initiative in contexts in which course subjects, values, beliefs, and practices are different.

Enlarging impact also can mean aligning your strategy or solution to organizational priorities (key populations, subjects, or sites) and realities (limited budgets, time, or capacity). Possibilities include:

- **Actors:** Cut the number of staff needed to implement the initiative or limit it to subpopulations in need.
- **Sites:** Reduce unit costs per school, classrooms, or location, including through economies of scale.
- **Duration:** Lower the amount of time needed to prepare and launch the initiative.
- **Conditions:** Use the measurement framework to find contexts in which the initiative works best or costs less.

Use the processes and tools from Evolutionary Learning Stages 1 to 3 and 5 to help your team sustain and enlarge the impact of its initiative:

Stage 1: Reorganize your effort

- Reevaluate team membership. As you extend operations and impact to new sites or populations, remap your initiative's stakeholders and adjust the team to be sure it has the necessary authority, expertise, and perspectives of individuals and communities whom the effort will affect and otherwise marginalize.
- Reset goals and norms. Sustaining and enlarging impact presents challenges, triggers biases, and affects staff and communities different from those involved in developing a novel strategy. Use the Stage 1 tools and processes to revise accordingly your goal statement, efforts to mitigate bias, and working norms

Stage 2: Remap system and strategy

- Update your theory of action and OPTA. To sustain your initiative, use insights from your measurement framework, short-cycle tests, and After Action Review to adjust your hypotheses about desired impacts and how inputs and actions generate outcomes that lead to those impacts.
- Remap the system. Updated hypotheses about your initiative-and steps to extend it to new communities, contexts, and sites-may mean the system in which it operates is different, requiring a new system map.
- Restate the problem. An updated understanding of your initiative and new contexts in which it operates may also require revisions to your problem statement.
- Extend your theory of action and OPTA. Even as updated by learning from your initiative's initial run, hypotheses about desired impacts and how to achieve them will have to change further in accordance with steps to enlarge the initiative's impact.

Stage 3: Redefine measurement framework

- Update your measurement tools. Glean insights from experiences implementing and acting on data collected via your measurement framework to identify better OPTA elements to track for early signs of trouble, stronger measures of quantity and especially quality, more practical data-collection and analytic tools, and more appropriate performance expectations.
- Extend your measurement tools. Identify new OPTA elements to track and develop associated measures, data tools, and expectations, aligning them to people, communities, contexts, and sites the enlarged initiative will reach.

Stage 5: Problem solve and improve

- Address problems your reflections expose. Catalog unexamined problems that your measurement framework and After Action Review expose. Catalog improvement possibilities that prior implementation and short-cycle tests did not fully explore and difficulties encountered in rethinking your initiative's high-level hypotheses and inputs, action, outcomes, and impacts. Apply Stage 5 processes and tools-problem prioritization, causal analysis, solution identification, testing, and analysis-to problems on the list.
- Treat sustaining and enlarging your initiative as a problem to be solved. The same processes and tools can help you prioritize and tackle challenges to maintaining and extending your initiative.

Prioritize Expansion Steps

To select among ideas for sustaining and expanding the impact of your initiative, your team should consider the following:

1. **Equity:** How important to advancing equity is the proposed next step compared with others? Who seeks to gain the most from the proposed next step? Who will be negatively affected?
2. **Impact:** To what extent does the proposed next step help your broader organization pursue its mission or solve a problem important to it? How will the step affect other departments, teams, and projects?
3. **Urgency:** How important to the success, stability, and expansion of your initiative is the proposed next step compared with others? How soon must the felt need be addressed?
4. **Feasibility:** Is there the funding, time, expertise, staff, and other conditions needed for the proposed next step?
5. **Interest:** Is there a desire among colleagues and stakeholders to pursue the proposed next step?

Seek feedback from organizational leaders and stakeholders on your list of prioritized improvement steps, describing your initiative's results and process and stakeholder input. Secure leaders' and stakeholders' support in designing, implementing, and testing your improvement ideas.

6.3 Spread Evolutionary Learning Across Your Organization

This Toolkit's introduction offered Evolutionary Learning as an effective way to lead by learning from the carefully observed experience of people closest to the problem being solved and the strategy being enacted. Another use of after-action reflection is to consider whether and in what ways Evolutionary Learning in fact multiplied opportunities for your initiative to succeed, empowered participants to try and test new approaches, broadened participation by affected staff and communities, and spread knowledge and uptake of what works.

In addition to helping your team improve its own Evolutionary Learning practices, the results of this inquiry may encourage your team to spread Evolutionary Learning to colleagues for use in pursuing their initiatives and improvement efforts and to the organization's leaders for use in enhancing organizational governance.

You can begin spreading Evolutionary Learning by including the steps your team took and templates it filled out at Stages 1-5 in documenting, reflecting on, and communicating about the initiative. In conducting the After Action Review, include and summarize your team's Evolutionary Learning steps in each component of the review. In telling your initiative's story, use the Evolutionary Learning steps to frame the narrative and mark key moments and themes.

In constructing the initiative's story, use:

1. its theory of action as the narrative's starting point or plot;
2. revelations from the measurement framework as turning points;
3. solutions tested in response to trouble spots as grounded examples of what continuous learning looks like;
4. stories of what stakeholders and communities gave to and got from the initiative to demonstrate the value of diverse perspectives and ways to disrupt structural bias; and
5. examples of your team reimagining "failure" as an opportunity to learn to illuminate Evolutionary Learning's advantages over top-down edicts, high-stakes performance targets, and assumed expertise as ways to govern your organization.

A next step in spreading Evolutionary Learning is to build other individuals' and teams' familiarity with and capacity to use it. Below are five ways to do this:

1. If Evolutionary Learning is new to your organization, invite people from other divisions or levels of the organization to join the core team, bringing useful perspectives and skills and enabling them to carry knowledge about the approach back to their colleagues and leaders. Involving others in an observational capacity can serve the same purpose.
2. Use organizational initiatives that are cross-functional by their nature (see [Stage 4](#)) to familiarize people across the various departments involved with Evolutionary Learning and encourage them to share Evolutionary Learning knowledge, tools, and experience with their respective departments and levels.
3. In creating a problem-solving team to address trouble spots revealed by your measurement framework (see [Stage 5](#)), leverage the perspectives and skills of actors from other divisions or levels, especially ones with knowledge about the locations or conditions where the problem appeared. Embedding the problem-solving process at those sites or in teams with that know-how can simultaneously address the initiative's problem, enhance other actors' knowledge about that site or subject, and spread Evolutionary Learning.²
4. If an initiative you are supporting does not generally operate on Evolutionary Learning principles, use the discovery of unsatisfactory actions or outcomes as a good time to activate Evolutionary Learning. Because the Stage 5 problem-solving cycle can operate separately from and is a microcosm of the broader Evolutionary Learning process, you can use it to immerse initiative participants in Leading through Learning mindsets and tools, increasing their appetite for learning more about the broader approach.
5. Commit to using Evolutionary Learning when starting all new initiatives, over time increasing the percentage of your work governed by this approach until the balance tips and your entire set of responsibilities runs this way.

With support from organizational leadership, even more comprehensive efforts to spread Evolutionary Learning may occur (1) to broaden the impact of initiatives occurring throughout the organization and (2) to improve organizational governance. Steps with the former purpose aim to magnify the effect of the sustaining, enlarging, and spreading functions described above. Steps with the latter purpose seek to replace the one-way or diffuse flow of information and accountability in organizations governed mainly through hierarchy, performance incentives, and assumed expertise, using Leading Through Learning's transparent sharing of information about differences between actual and expected actions and results, and responsibility for improving based on them.³

Working from less to more comprehensive steps, and from ones focused mainly on the former purpose to those focused mainly on the latter, steps organizational leadership can take to spread Leadership Through Learning include:

1. Supporting efforts by teams using Evolutionary Learning to involve participants and stakeholders from other departments or levels by encouraging such participation, compensating participants for their time or departments for participants' absence, and matching interested staff to teams.
2. Designating one or more Evolutionary Learning experiments as models the organization aims to learn from and spread—providing training, facilitation, and help in disseminating results.

²In the first three of these situations, the documentation, reflection, and storytelling steps in Section 6.1 take on added importance and warrant particular attention to the views and expressed needs of members of the core, problem-solving, and reflection team from other divisions and levels.

³Hierarchical organizations spread information top-down as mandates and accountability as discipline for noncompliance. Organizations governed by performance incentives deemphasize information exchange and propel top-down accountability as consequences for meeting or missing targets. Organizations reliant on assumed expertise spread information and accountability informally and diffusely between experts seeking one another's approval. By contrast, Evolutionary Learning transparently shares information about how actions and results compare with expectations, as well as responsibility for using that information to improve, among colleagues, leaders, and affected populations.

3. Organizing a network of teams using Evolutionary Learning, providing tools for sharing methods and results across participating sites, and using results to influence organizational goals and expectations.
4. Asking all departments to conduct initiatives using Evolutionary Learning—providing training and facilitation, comparing results and distributing learning across similar sites, using the results to set and periodically revise organizational goals and expectations, and defining success within the organization based on how well individuals and teams engage in and help others lead through learning.

In pursuing these steps, leaders should proceed in good Evolutionary Learning fashion, progressing deliberately through the steps in something like the order they're presented above, transparently comparing expectations with results, and learning and improving as they go. In doing so, leadership should constantly keep in mind the importance and difficulty of shifting mindsets built around preexisting governance methods, building capacity for Leading Through Learning, and contextualizing steps to the organization's setting, staff, and underlying work.

Improvement Networks as a Mechanism for Spreading Improvement Ideas

In recent decades, the often-isolated world of teaching has become increasingly collaborative. Networks, professional learning communities, and inquiry teams are all models of collective learning and problem-solving that assemble actors around shared problems and, in some cases, shared solutions. Improvement networks, a type of network model, use highly structured formats to accelerate learning and spur innovation by sharing information or problem-solving across organization and sectors. Improvement networks are organized around a hub or intermediary that coordinates network activities. Throughout the effort, these coordinating bodies gather data and report results as a way to more quickly identify salient patterns and variations and to forecast and prevent problems across the network. At the end of rapid-cycle tests and wider-scale pilots, the intermediary may summarize lessons learned, help develop recommendations for sustaining the effort, and formally communicate results through convenings and publications.

