

Improvement Communities: Engaging Stakeholders in Evidence-Based Policy Implementation to Improve Instruction

Vermont Agency of Education's (VT AOE) most intensive front-line improvement work happens in Networked Improvement Communities (NICs). These programs are designed for organizations committed to achieving sustainable change within a specific topic area and committed to problem-solving and continuous improvement. Through shared learning, teams made up from a variety of experts, researchers, and SU/SD practitioners work with each other, and the VT AOE Staff to rapidly test and implement changes that lead to scalable, sustainable and lasting improvement.

Networked Improvement Communities (NICs)

A NIC is a scientific professional learning community in which members focus on one specific, agreed upon issue and together identifies problem-solving plans, implements those plans and solutions, measure the results of implementation, and adjusts strategies based on data that is gathered throughout the process. Specifically, NICs are:

- focused on a well-specified common aim;
- guided by a deep understanding of the problem, the system that produces it, and a shared working theory to improve it;
- disciplined by the methods of improvement research to develop, test, and refine interventions; and
- organized to accelerate interventions into the field and to effectively integrate them into varied educational contexts (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu, 2015)

A basic logic model, describing the theory of the NIC, is displayed in Figure 1.

Network Members. NIC members collaborate to tackle a common problem of practice, collectively. They employ improvement science principles (see figure 2) and processes to deeply understand the current system, and co-design evidence-based change ideas to test and adapt in classrooms. They share learning and co-construct knowledge to be spread and scaled, reliably. Membership includes educational researchers, practitioners, and other subject matter experts and partners, based on the network's focus.

Coordinating Hub. The AOE will serve as a coordinating hub, facilitating network meetings, coordinating action period tasks, and helping to harness and spread of learning.

The Lifecycle of the NIC. The NIC lifecycle begins with the *Chartering Phase* (see figure 3). During this phase, NIC members begin by building relationships, deeply analyzing problems of practice and data in context and developing a working theory of improvement. Members then move on to the *Testing Phase*, in which they use improvement science processes (e.g., iterative plan-do-study-act cycles) to test evidence-based change ideas and build confidence in their efficacy, prior to implementing across contexts. In the final, *Scaling Phase*, members codify the network's learning and practices for scale widely and reliably.

Member Commitment. Representative from all levels of the SU/SD must support and/or engage in the work. As participating members of the NIC, your team, including SU/SD leadership (superintendent support, and curriculum director involvement/support) school-level leadership (principals), and classroom educators will support and/or engage in collaborative problem solving with other network members. Classroom teachers will be involved by co-designing and testing out change ideas in classrooms. The work will occur in both network meetings and action periods, which continue until improvement is achieved. The structure of work is illustrated in Figure 4.

Member Benefits. As participating members, your team will have the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues, researchers, and other subject matter experts/partners to build data literacy, co-design and co-conduct classroom-based research with evidence-based practices, and build collective knowledge to improve instruction and student performance, and reduce achievement gaps. School improvement and funds, and other Title funds may be invested to support the work.

The field of education is hungry for ways students can access equitable educational opportunities and improve student achievement outcomes. The NIC offers a framework and structure for bringing about dramatic and lasting change. The rapid spread of the Networked Improvement Communities model demonstrates promise for improving all aspects of students learning. Results show that it is indeed possible to overcome barriers and collectively improve quality education.

For additional information about NICs, please visit [The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching](#)

Figure 1: NIC Theory of Improvement

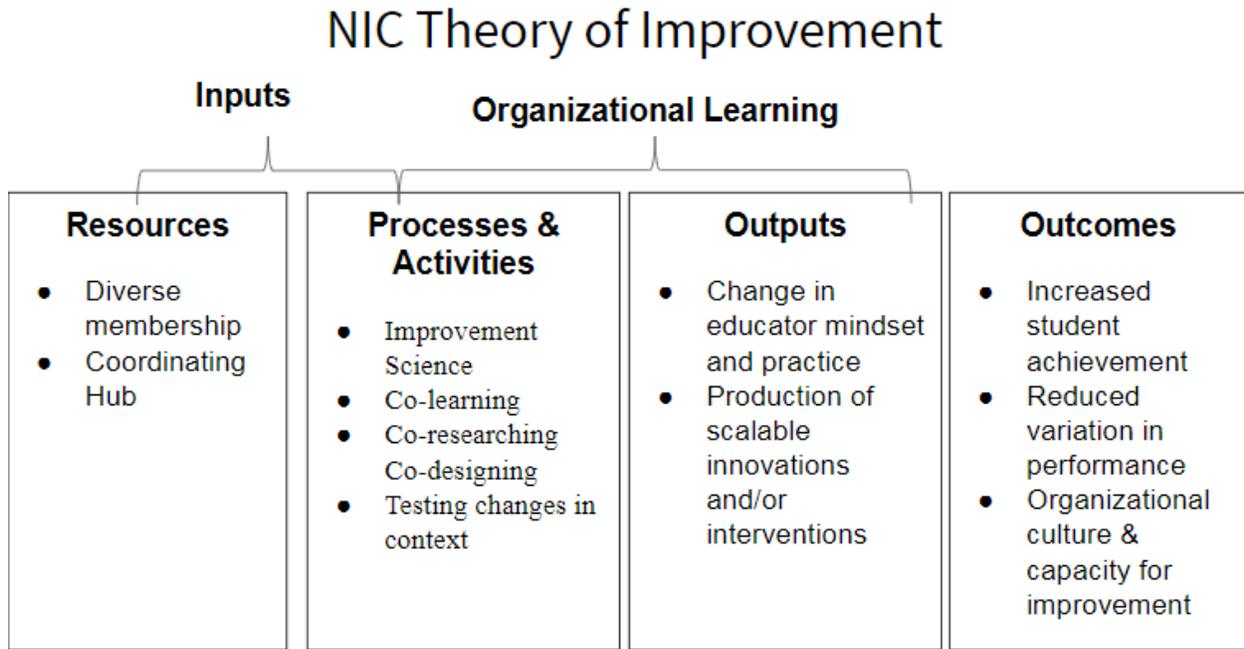
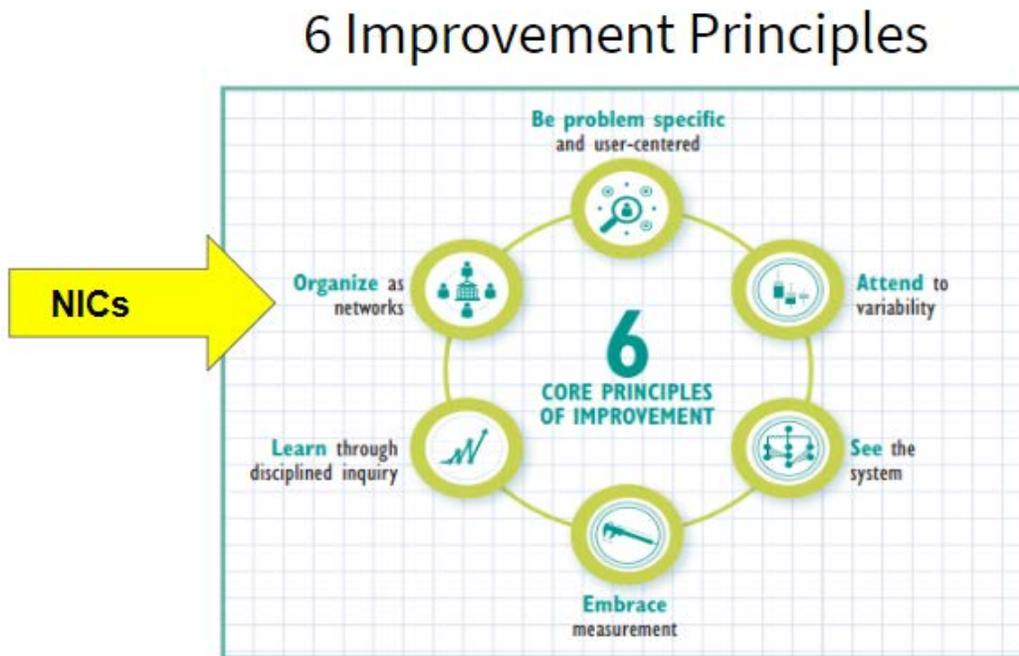


Figure 2: Improvement Science Principles



Source: Carnegie Foundation for Advancement of Teaching, 2017

Figure 3: Developmental Lifecycle of the NIC

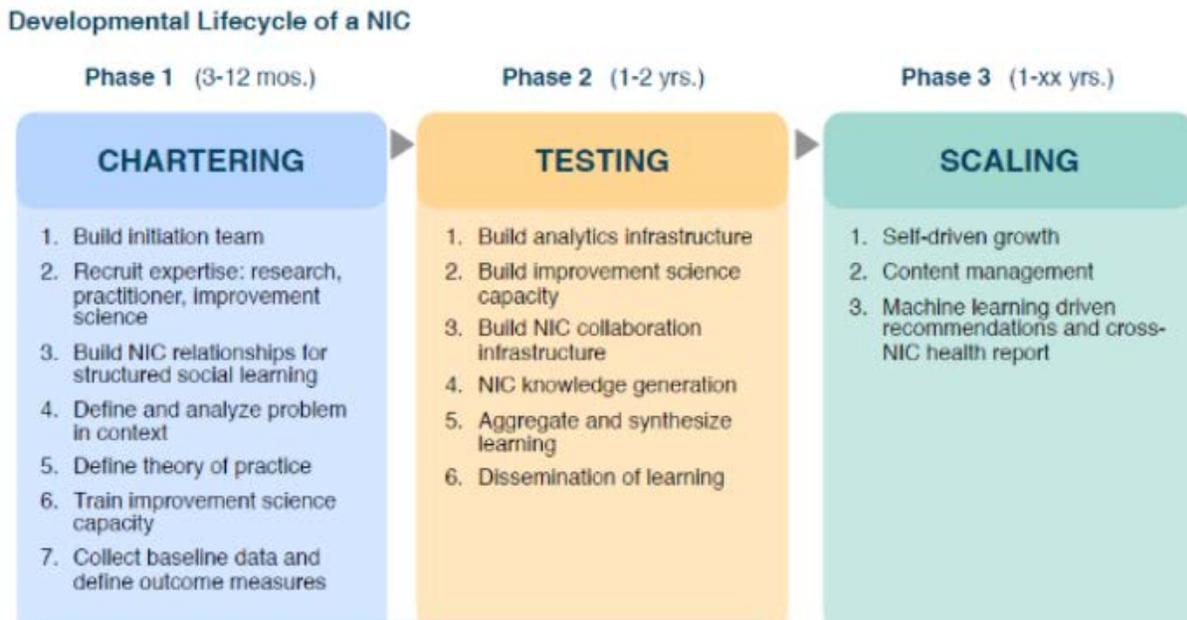
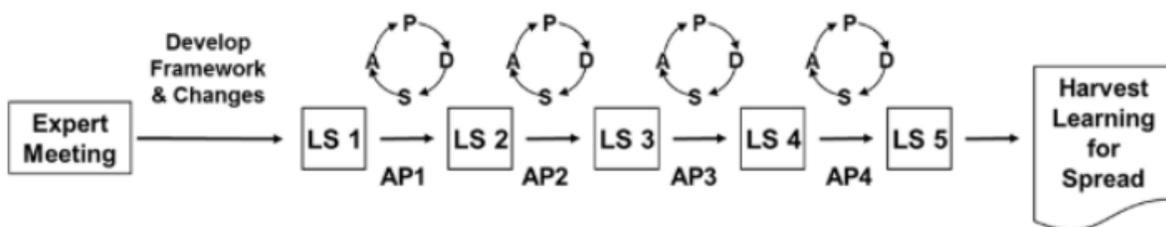


Figure 4: The NIC Structure for Collaborative Work

LS = Learning Session/Full Network Meeting in which members share learning
AP = Action Period (local teams test change ideas on-site)

NIC Structure for Collaborative Work



Source: National Board of Professional Teaching Standards' Network to Transform Teaching
<http://nt3.nbhtq.org/home/nt3-charter>