Learn, Innovate, Improve (LI²)

Using evidence for continuous program improvement

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what is LI²?

- **A change management process**

- **A framework for continuous quality improvement**

- **Three phases of replicable, evidence-informed activities marked by close collaboration between researchers, practitioners, and other relevant stakeholders**

- **Designed specifically for public programs with the aim of better using and producing evidence**

how is LI^2 different?

- Embeds analytic approaches and evidence at each stage of the change process

- Builds local capacity to institutionalize this approach

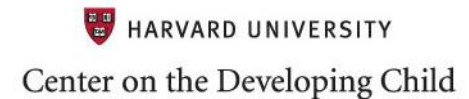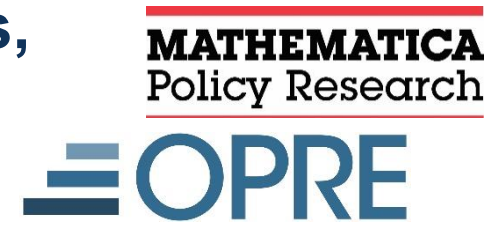- Emphasizes building the knowledge base

- Couples "design thinking" strategies with strong research methods

how was LI² created?

- **Through a partnership with researchers, practitioners, and federal partners (including ACF's Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation)**

- **Inspired by the Translational Science Model (Harvard's Center on the Developing Child)**

- **Draws on design thinking (human-centered design) techniques**

- **Used and refined extensively with TANF and workforce development programs**

  - **More recently: early care/education, child support, child welfare**

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OPRE

HARVARD UNIVERSITY
Center on the Developing Child

LUMA INSTITUTE℠

LARIMER COUNTY WORKFORCE CENTER

RAMSEY COUNTY
Workforce Solutions

GOODWILL | EASTER SEALS
FOUNDED 1919
Together, we prepare people for work.

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key features of LI^2

- **Close collaboration and "co-creation"**
  - **TA team inspires and supports change initiative, but program team "owns" it**

- **Meets the program where it's at**
  - **Emphasis on building local capacity to use LI^2 without the help of a TA team**
  - **No research experience or capabilities required to start!**

- **Takes an analytic approach to every stage of change**

- **Translates research findings and approaches into more accessible, concrete applications for designing change in the context of public programs**

the phases of LI^2

Learn

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- **Purpose:**

  - **Clarify the reason for making a change**
    - What problem are we trying to solve?
    - Why is there a desire or need for change?

  - **Assess the program environment's readiness for change**
    - Are there any factors that could support or inhibit the proposed change?

- **How?**

  - **Facilitated dialogue with key stakeholders**

  - **A qualitative assessment of the program environment**
    - An outsider's perspective on strengths, challenges, and opportunities

- **The Learn phase should lead to:**
  - **Common understanding of the motivation for change**
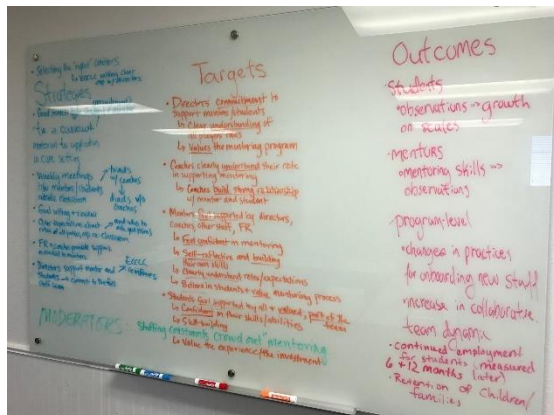 - **Clearer understanding of the program's readiness for change**

- **Examples**

VERMONT
DEPARTMENT FOR
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

DENVER
HUMAN SERVICES

the phases of LI^2

 Innovate

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purpose & methods

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- **Purpose:**
  - **Explore and design evidence-informed solutions that address the reason for change**

- **How?**
  - **Strategic design and planning with program stakeholders**
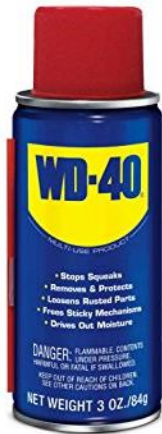 - **Interpret and translate existing evidence to make informed design choices**

- **The Innovate phase should lead to:**

  - **"Road map" for change**
    - Defines the desired program change in terms of strategies, targets for change, measurable outcomes, and potential influencers
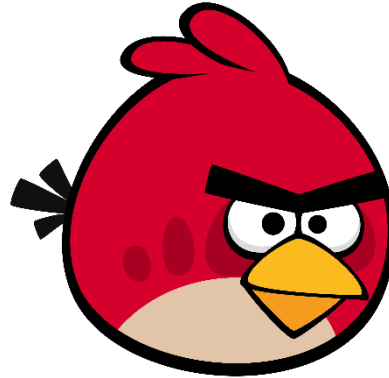
- **Examples:**

Jefferson County
Human Services
Steps to a better, safer life

La Plata County
Colorado
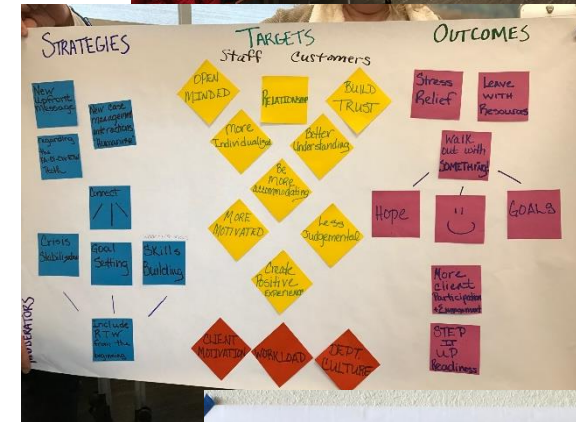
- **What do these three things have in common?**

40th
attempt

52nd
attempt

5,126th
attempt

Lots (and lots) of failures before success.

ingredients of successful innovation

- **Innovation requires**
  - **Time to think**
  - **Space to try**
  - **Safety to fail**

- **Innovation draws on**
  - **Best available evidence**
  - **Science of human behavior**
  - **Practice wisdom**

- **Innovation is strengthened by**
  - **Having the right mix of people involved**
    - Movers and shakers (leaders, directors, administrators)
    - Keepers of the culture (supervisors, seasoned staff)
    - Frontline (case managers)
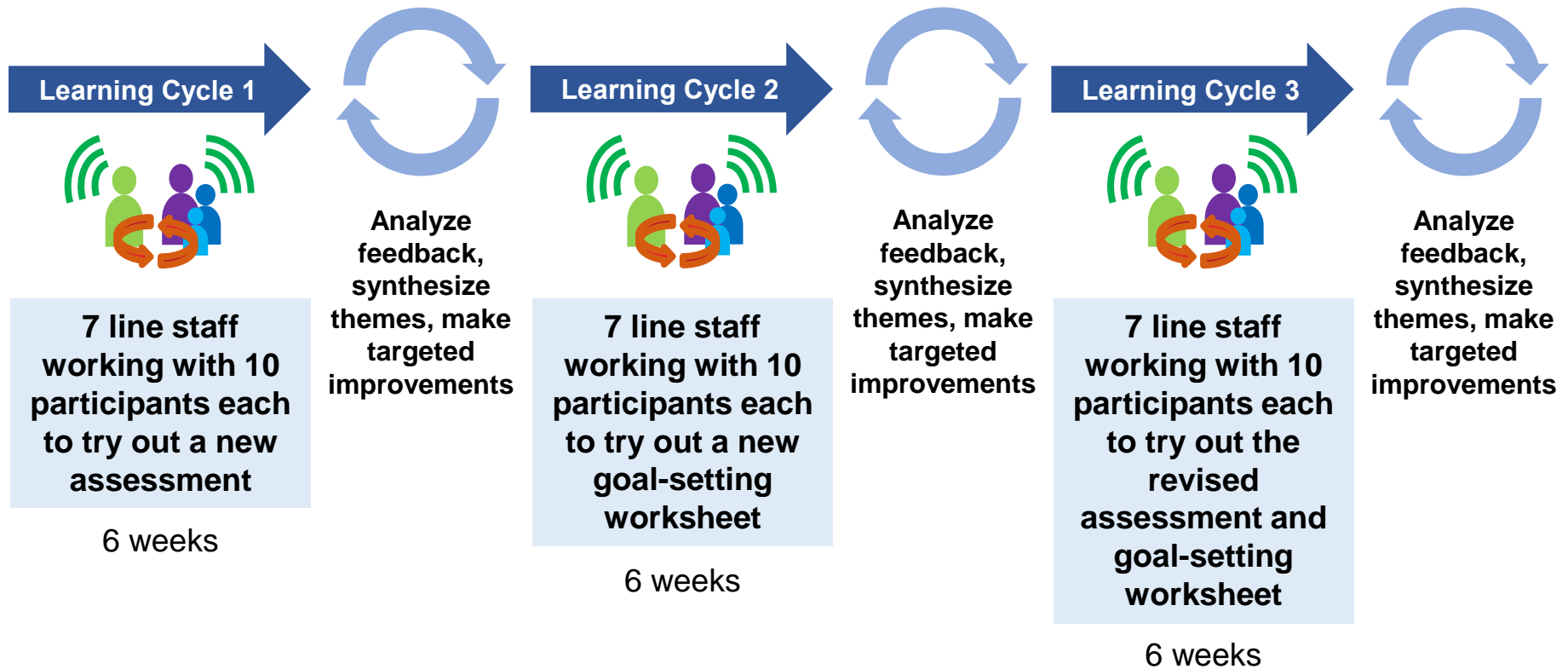
the phases of LI^2

Improve

IMPROVE
purpose & methods

- **Purpose:**
  - **Gather feedback to refine the strategy**
  - **Build staff capacity to collect, analyze, and use data for everyday decision-making and continuous improvement**

- **How?**
  - **Conduct "road tests" – small, rapid-cycle pilots designed to gather specific feedback from users**
  - **Use quantitative and qualitative research methods to improve and study the change**
 - **Test, and test again!**

road testing

Learning Cycle 1

7 line staff working with 10 participants each to try out a new assessment

6 weeks

Analyze feedback, synthesize themes, make targeted improvements

Learning Cycle 2

7 line staff working with 10 participants each to try out a new goal-setting worksheet

6 weeks

Analyze feedback, synthesize themes, make targeted improvements

Learning Cycle 3

7 line staff working with 10 participants each to try out the revised assessment and goal-setting worksheet

6 weeks

Analyze feedback, synthesize themes, make targeted improvements

where does this lead us?

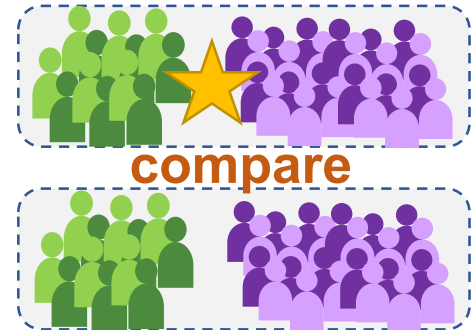- **To identify promising practices and suggest opportunities to strengthen the strategy**

Road test to refine ideas and prototypes
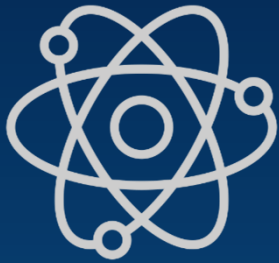
Look at outcomes and study what's happening
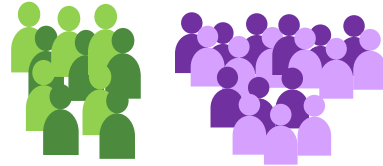
Test for impact using a research experiment

compare

- **Examples:**

a case study: the Colorado Works Innovation Initiative

the motivation for change

- **Persistent problem of mediocre engagement in the Colorado Works (TANF) program**
  - **Desire to see counties serve as incubators of innovative practices and drive change to promote stronger engagement**

- **CO Department of Human Services invited all 64 county agencies to join the "Colorado Works Innovation Initiative"**

LEARN

CDHS
CO

COLORADO
Office of Economic Security
Division of Employment & Benefits

19 county incubators

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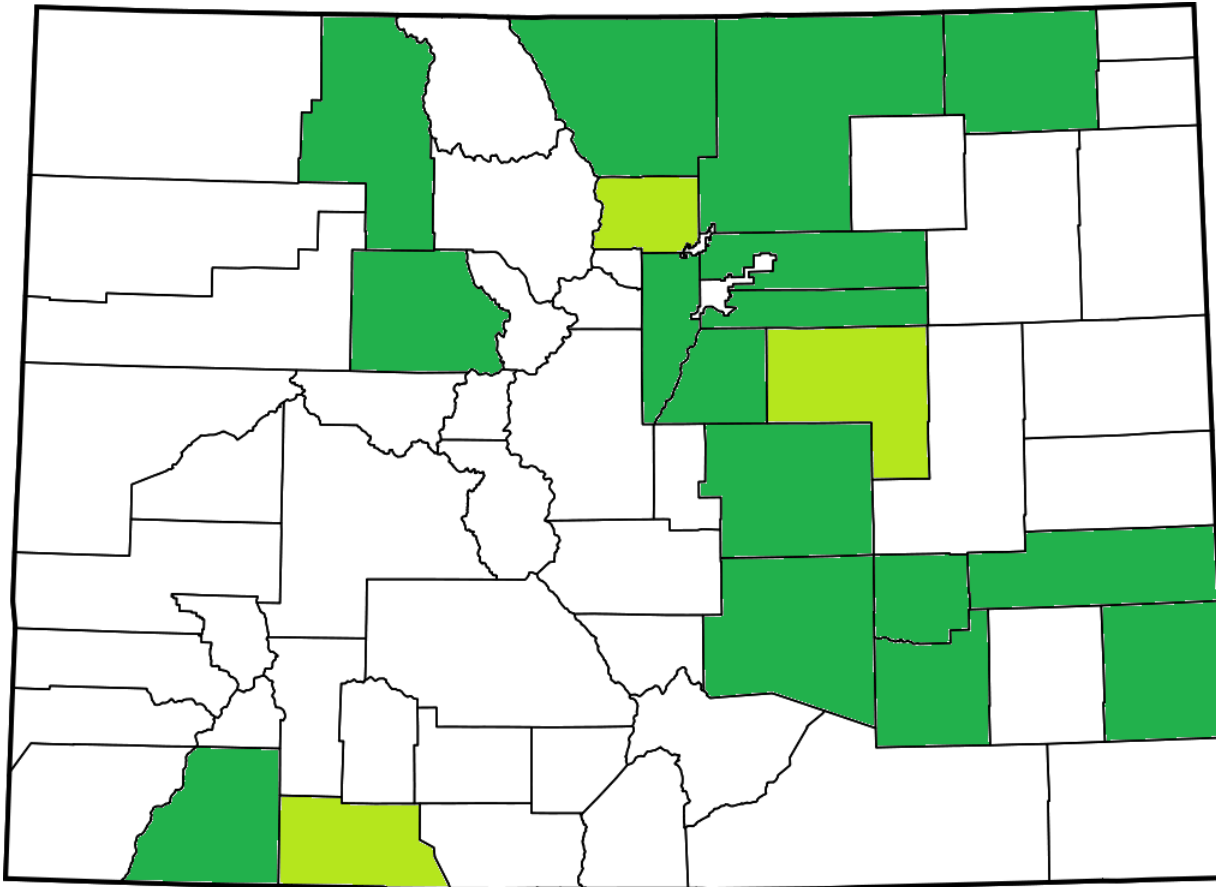
- **Adams**
- **Arapahoe**
- **Archuleta***
- **Boulder***
- **Crowley**
- **Douglas**
- **Eagle**
- **El Paso**
- **Elbert***
- **Jefferson**
- **Kiowa**
- **La Plata**
- **Larimer**
- **Logan**
- **Otero**
- **Prowers**
- **Pueblo**
- **Routt**
- **Weld**

*County withdrew from the Innovation Initiative prior to completion

kick-off workshop in Breck

- **Unpacking "engagement"**
  - **Articulating the factors that support and undermine full engagement**
  - **Defining ways of measuring engagement**

- **Pinpointing an aspect of programming for change**
  - **Clear, consistent messaging**
  - **Streamlined assessments**
  - **Staff training in coaching**
  - **Integration of services, cross-agency coordination**
  - **Family-centered service approaches**
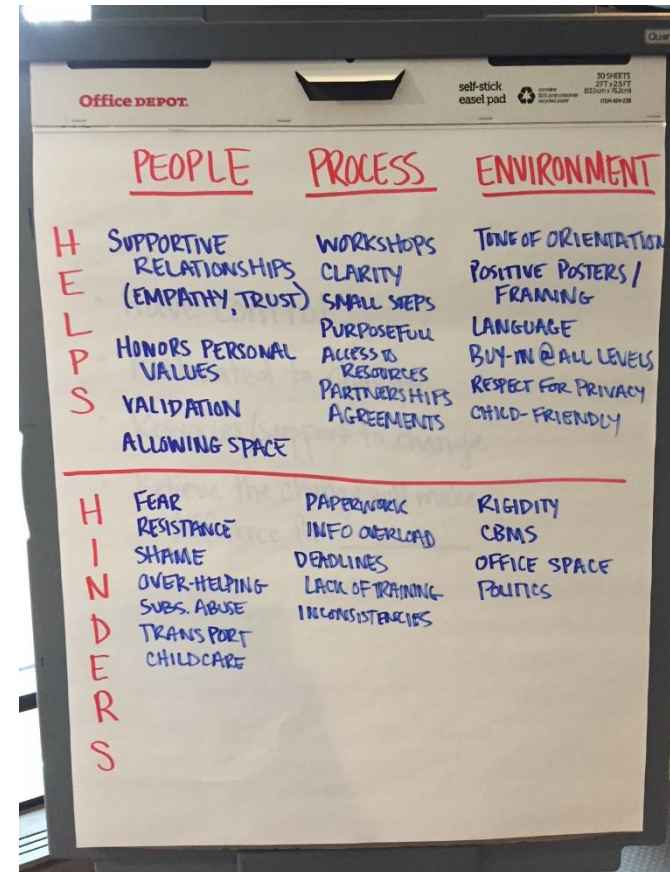
moving into innovation mode

- **Building on the kickoff workshop, counties began working with a site coach**
  - Monthly or biweekly check-ins on progress
  - Gather, review program materials and secure buy-in from leaders
  - Refine and narrow the scope of change

- **"Ask the Expert" webinar series to generate ideas and inform counties' innovations**
  - Poverty, stress, and executive function skills
  - Designing meaningful incentives
  - Coaching

INNOVATE

road mapping in Longmont & Pueblo

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precision in design

- **Named targets for improvement including attitudes, behaviors, and skills among participants and frontline staff**
  - Improving collaboration with workforce, child welfare
  - Shifting views about Colorado Works
  - Creating clear pathways for participants
  - Use of web-based technology to reach participants remotely
  - Coaching and goal-setting techniques
  - Engaging children
  - Incentivizing participation
  - Improving staff well-being at work
 - Delivering proactive, clear messages

implement and improve

- **Each county began implementing all or part of their road map**
  - Coupled with a road test process to provide formative feedback
- **Defining learning objectives, creating feedback loops, and analyzing data**

road testing

- **Pueblo County**
  - **Staff self-care initiative**
  - **Road test examined whether staff were using these new practices, how often, and how it was affecting them**
  - **How might better staff self-care promote increased client engagement?**

- **Weld County**
  - **Revamped messaging strategies to clarify expectations of clients**
 - **Show rates to orientation and timely submission of "monthly timesheets"**
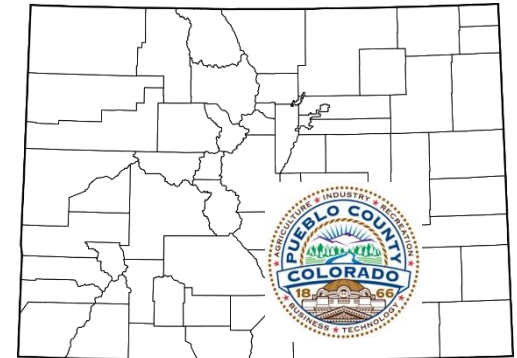
IMPROVE
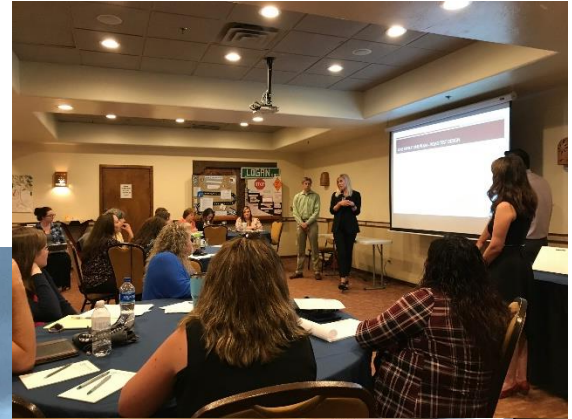
- **Organized research panels composed of practitioners discussing their innovation projects, road test findings, and next steps**
  - **Put me in, coach! Strengthening the worker-client relationship**
  - **Collaboration: Integrating services to better serve families**
  - **There's no "I" in team: Staff engagement strategies and fostering worker buy-in**
  - **Nudge: Changing the program environment to promote engagement**
  - **Motivation: Meaningfully using incentives to promote progress**
  - **Tech savvy: Using an online tool to increase the accessibility of Colorado Works resources**
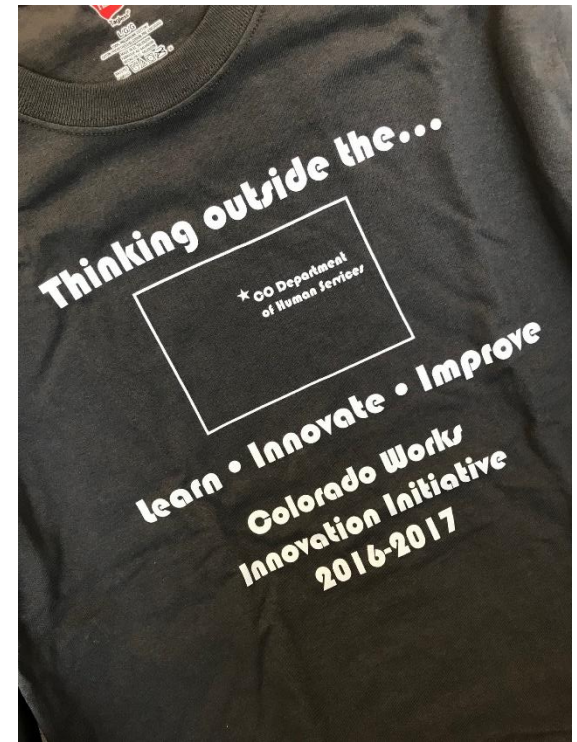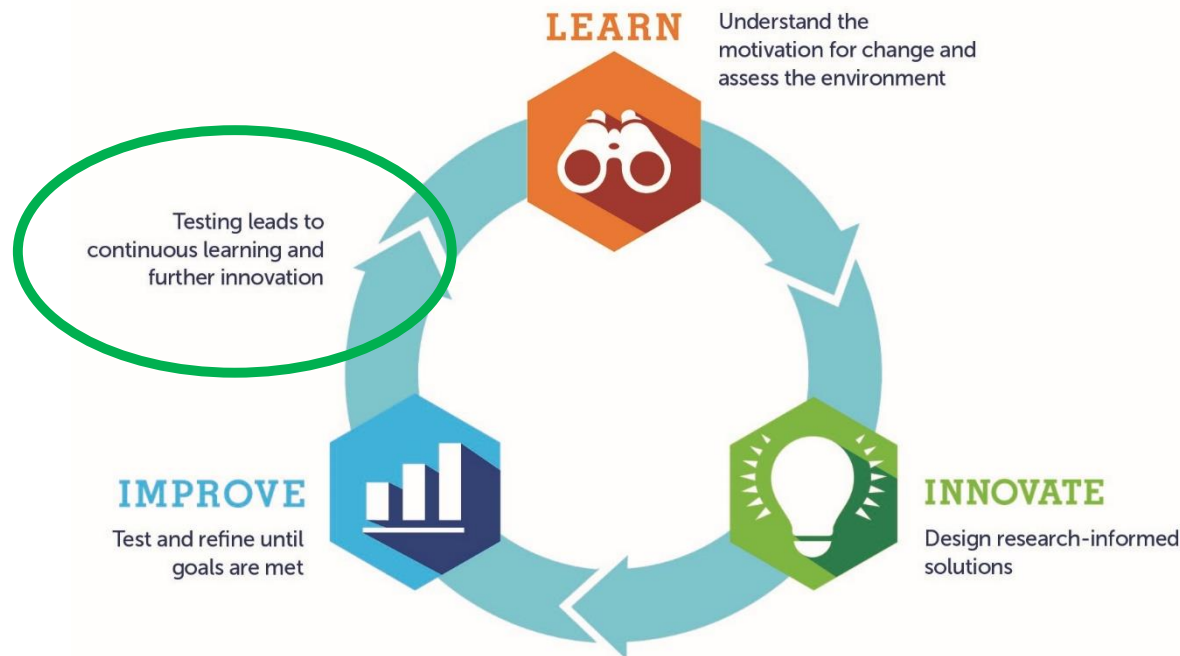
- **Local programs are incubators for innovation and change**
  - Evidence-building → evidence-informed → evidence-based
- **LI^2 provided an accessible frame to shape program improvement across a learning community**
  - Counties learned from their own projects and from one another as much, if not more, than the "research experts"
- **Integration of research and practice in the spirit of program improvement**

- **Where are counties now?**
  - **Participating in a large-scale impact evaluation**
  - **Self-directing a small descriptive study sponsored by OPRE**
  - **Conducted rapid experiments of behavioral interventions to increase upfront engagement**

LEARN Understand the motivation for change and assess the environment

Testing leads to continuous learning and further innovation

IMPROVE Test and refine until goals are met

INNOVATE Design research-informed solutions

for more info

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Find all of our LI^2 resources on our website:

https://www.mathematica-mpr.com/toolkits/li-squared

▶ **Practice briefs**
▶ **Case study of the Innovation Initiative**
▶ **Webinar on road testing**
▶ **And more to come soon!**