

Innovation Decision Path for Counties

The following are key decisions counties need to make, through their community program planning, regarding their Innovation component of the MHSA. Counties won't necessarily consider the decision points in a prescribed order.

Issue for County	Barrier	Essential Purpose for Innovation (MHSA)	County's Learning/Change Goal	Mental Health Practice/Approach to Test
A significant, challenging problem for the county	What has prevented the county from solving this problem? Why isn't the desired solution in place now?	The four purposes for Innovation, specified in the MHSA and in Innovation Guidelines	What county wants to learn in its effort to surmount the barriers and resolve identified issues; learning/practice change that is the focus of the Innovation	The identified mental health practice or approach the county wants to try out: this is the vehicle for county's learning, practice change and system development

Issue for County

- Issue to be addressed by Innovation funding; needs to be selected by community planning.
- Ideas for relevant issues can be generated from various sources, including previous community program planning.
- Describe basis for selection in Community Program Planning section of Work Plan.
- Guidelines: "INN projects may address issues faced by children, transition-age youth, adults, older adults, families (self-defined), neighborhoods, tribal and other communities, counties, multiple counties, or region."

Barrier

- Community program planning analyzes barriers from perspectives of diverse, representative participants.
- Analysis of barriers to solving issues can be informed, for example, by data and previous community planning discussions.
- If the county already has evidence that the proposed approach is likely to be successful and the main/only barrier is lack of funding, then Innovation is not an appropriate source of funds.
- Analysis of barriers provides relevant context to several Work Plan sections: e.g. Community Program Planning, Contribution to Learning, Project Measurement.
- Guidelines: "As long as the Inn project contributes to learning and maintains alignment with the MHSA General Standards...it may affect virtually any aspect of mental health practices or assessment of a new application of a promising approach to solving persistent, seemingly intractable mental health challenges."

Essential Purpose for Innovation

- Essential Purpose to be addressed by Innovation to be selected by informed community planning.
- Typically learning goals will cluster around a *single* Essential Purpose. It is useful to select one priority learning goal even if, from a service perspective, the proposed mental health practice/approach affects all four Essential Purposes. Instruction to Work Plan that states “Check All that Apply” refers to Essential Purpose for key learning/practice change goals.
- Selected essential purpose is relevant to most sections of work plan, especially Project Measurement.
- Guidelines: “Counties must select one or more of these purposes for each INN project. The selected purpose(s) will be the key focus for learning and change.”

County’s Learning/Practice Change Goal

- County’s priority learning/change goals for Innovation funding need to be selected by informed community planning.
- Useful questions: What will the county learn and how will the learning be applied? What will be different if the Innovation is successful? How will the county determine if the Innovation should be replicated? What aspects of the Innovation should be replicated? What are the best ways/areas to apply this Innovation? How will community members expected to benefit from the Innovation contribute to refining and answering learning questions?
- County should include in work plan: a) brief statement of learning/practice change goal in Project Description section; b) details of expected learning/change in Contribution to Learning section; c) timeframe for learning in Timeline section; d) proposed outcomes and measurement of learning goals in Project Measurement section.
- Learning/change goals and outcomes should be consistent with the selected Essential Purpose for Innovation.
- Guidelines: “An Innovation project is defined, for purposes of these guidelines, as one that contributes to learning rather than a primary focus on providing a service.”

Mental Health Practices/Approaches County Wants to Try Out

- Mental health practices/approaches to be funded by Innovation component need to be selected by informed community planning.
- Ideas for potential mental health practices/approaches for Innovation funding can be generated from various sources, including previous community program planning.
- Selected mental health practice/approach must be consistent with Essential Purpose and learning/change goals.
- Proposed mental health practices/approaches might include elements that are already established and not relevant to the Innovation learning to be tested. In Project Description, county should differentiate which included elements of proposed mental health practice/approach are already demonstrated and which elements comprise the Innovation expected to contribute to learning and practice change.

- “Mental health practice” or “service” outcomes are likely to be important elements of the Innovation learning outcomes. However, there may be practice/service outcomes that are not relevant or less relevant to Innovation learning outcomes. While the county will for its own purposes assess outcomes of the entire practice or service, MHSOAC only needs to review proposed outcomes that are relevant to the key Innovation learning/change goals.
- Guidelines: “INN projects are novel, creative and/or ingenious mental health practices/approaches that contribute to learning and that are developed within communities through a process that is inclusive and representative, especially of unserved, underserved and inappropriately served individuals.” “By providing the opportunity to ‘try out’ new approaches that can inform current and future practices/approaches in communities, an Innovation contributes to learning....”