

# RAPID Cycle Learning

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New England Community Action Partnership Conference Rapid Cycle Learning Workshop Overview

- Overview of Performance Management
- Data analysis
- What is Rapid Cycle Learning and how it can be used?
- Examples of Rapid Cycle Learning projects
- Creating a RCL Project
- Helpful tools





What is Performance Management?

## Performance Management

...is an ongoing, systematic approach to improving results through **evidence-based** decision making, continuous organizational learning, and a focus on **accountability** for performance.

#### **The National Community Action Network Theory of Change**

#### **Community Action Goals**



A national network of over 1,000 high performing Community Action Agencies, State Associations, State offices, and Federal partners supported by the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) to mobilize communities to fight poverty.

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## **CSBG Performance Management Framework**



# **Applying Performance Management**

- You can't just take a performance-based framework and try to use it with a service-delivery culture.
- To be successful, the practices must be integrated into all aspects of an organization's management and policy-making processes, transforming an organization's practices so it is focused on achieving improved results for the public.

### How does your organization approach accountability?



I don't know how it started, I just know it is part of our corporate culture!

# DOES YOUR ORGANIZATION EXPERIENCE THESE?

- Living with low expectations. Doing what has always been done even if results are not great, rather than exploring creative responses.
- Focused on each little problem as it comes up having a feeling that there is always something going wrong.
- Accepting the constraints that generated the problems in the first place! Not challenging "the way things are/have always been".



# **ARE YOU TOO BUSY TO IMPROVE?**

No

thanks!

We are

too busy

## ROMA Cycle-Traditional Process

- Typical time frames for Assessment and Planning happen over 3–5-year periods.
- We know that both processes can be done more frequently to enable agencies to do course corrections if needed.



## ROMA Cycle-Traditional Process

- Programs are implemented most often for a "program year", a "calendar year", or a "fiscal year."
- Reporting may be done monthly, quarterly or annually.
- Evaluation can happen all throughout the cycle.

#### The Results Oriented Management and Accountability Cycle



Effective agencies have a quick and easy process to allow for amendment to their plans that embraces a continuous learning process.

- They develop a "check in" process to update the plan if needed.
- They respect the on-going nature of assessing needs while conducting routine business.



If something is "urgent," that doesn't mean that ANY quick solution is right!





### DATA ANALYSIS

The area of skill development most requested by our network!





#### SIMPLE ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES



# Important reasons to analyze data

- To fulfill internal or external reporting requirements
- Mission or Local Theory of Change validation
- To determine if something can work better
- To decide to strengthen or abandon something that is not producing outcomes



# For improvement issues, a Rapid Cycle Learning process might be your best approach.

What is Rapid Cycle Learning?

### WHAT ARE RAPID LEARNING METHODS?

- Rapid learning methods are sets of approaches that can quickly test program improvements or evaluate program implementation or impact to expedite program improvement and effectiveness.
- These methods support data-driven decision-making in the spirit of ongoing improvement.
- They use data to test a proposed change over a short period.
- Expect many cycles of learning in which findings are discussed and analyzed, and additional changes are tried out.

# Rapid cycle learning:

- Maximizes learning and action, while simultaneously minimizing the data collection and analysis processes.
- The process is quick and intentionally remains flexible to adapt to real-time learning.
- Rapid ROMA is about the use of the full ROMA cycle "rapidly".

### **Rapid Cycle Learning**



Time

### **RCL** supports ROMA!



### How does RCL support ROMA?

#### **ROMA:**

Planning step

#### How RCL can support:

- Overcome decision paralysis.
- Start small by piloting before rollout.

#### ROMA:

Implementation step

#### How RCL can support:

- Identify implementation barriers.
- Pilot supports to address barriers.



#### **ROMA:** Results and evaluation steps



#### How RCL can support:

- Respond to missed benchmarks.
- Develop strategies to address challenges.











# TAKE TIME FOR LEARNING

**RAPID LEARNING METHODS AND THEIR PURPOSE** 

#### Look at the factors!



We recognize the big problem but divide it into smaller parts of the problem.

As long as you understand that there is a big picture and that the small parts must eventually be brought back together, looking at a small part of the problem is the basis of the concept of rapid cycle learning.

### Steps to addressing a big problem

Big overwhelming problem (like reduction of poverty) can paralyze the person experiencing it so no activity can be done.

A technique to help address these big problems is called "Swiss cheesing". Stop waiting for the one big fix that will solve all the problems

e.g.: a new data base system.

Think in terms of multiple smaller solutions rather than finding that one big perfect thing that fixes it all forever.

- 1. Make a list of all the factors that you want to learn about in this problem.
- 2. Prioritize your list with the biggest and most important factors at the top of the list.
  - 3. "Drill holes" in your big top items.





#### MATHEMATICA/OPRE EXAMPLE

## Rapid cycle learning example





A NETWORK OF COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCIES SERVING MD, DC & DE



Alex Dupree Regional Projects Coordinator



### Identification of the problem



### First attempt to solve the problem




### Second attempt to solve the problem

#### RAPID CYCLE TIMELINE





# Continue to assess and refine



# Don't let the problem sit



# Continue to refine other areas



# Write it down and be flexible!



#### Seek input from those impacted by the decision





David Jimenez, NCRI

Director, Practice Transformation







# Narrowing the focus



Rapid Cycle Learning



#### Data collection to identify the problem



#### Deploy the intervention



#### Barriers to deploying the intervention



Words of advice



Setting up a rapid ROMA project

### How do you decide what to do?

- Pick something that isn't going to damage your current programing.
  - For instance, don't start with closing a service site to see what kind of impact that will have.
  - Rather, consider a test that will help you find out what would happen if the site was closed by using some interviews and other explorative activities – before you do anything drastic. Important!

\*\*\*\*\* Be sure to pick something that is in your control, or that you have influence over changing! \*\*\*\*\*

### Some topic areas for this kind of data analysis

- Implementation challenges in areas such as recruitment, participation, and program completion.
- Areas related to data collection, storage and retrieval.
- Processes related to intake and delivery of services.
- Time frame for follow up (or lack of it).
- Tools and processes for measuring success.





# Be sure to engage a project team

Who is with you?

You don't want to do this kind of project alone!

# "Rapid" ROMA Cycle Includes Frequent, Periodic Checks

- The process of frequent, periodic checks will allow an agency to see a problem situation in "real time" so that they can make changes for improvement before they settle on a solution.
- This can also allow them to see successes that can be highlighted for advocacy and marketing.

For your project you will have to identify your agency's data collection processes



Who has the data that will tell you what you need to know.



Who collects it?



How do they do it?



What do they do with it when they have it?





# WHAT ABOUT TIMING?

#### How often the data is collected?

#### How often reported

- Within a program,
- Across the agency,
- To the board,
- To your funders?

#### How often the data is analyzed?



### ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

# Is it good?

Clarify what you are looking for

If we <u>assisted</u> 100 people to secure employment, is that good?

- Define what we mean by "assisted."
- How is "employment" defined?
- What do other agencies who have employment as an outcome achieve?
  - Are our populations similar?
  - How might differences in population impact differences in outcomes?
- What kind of services are provided by others? How do these compare with ours? How might the services impact differences in outcomes?

#### A SAMPLING OF QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT WANT TO ANSWER WITH YOUR DATA

- Did we do what we thought we would do?
- Did we serve the population we thought we would serve?
- Did we make an impact on the identified needs?



- Can we tell what services (or set of services) produced the best opportunity for results?
- Are some populations achieving outcomes at different rates than others?
- Did we recruit and enroll sufficient numbers to allow us to achieve our target outcomes?
- Do we need additional resources?
- Was there something unexpected that influenced the outcomes?

# WHAT KIND OF QUESTION? ARE YOU EXPLORING OR EXPLAINING?



#### Exploring

Exploring starts with an answerable question and seeks to find the answer.

#### Explaining

Explaining starts with an answer (an observation or pre-existing argument) and works backward to find evidence to support it.

#### Plan your data gathering

Narrow your question's focus so you can gather sufficient meaningful data in a short time (a few weeks).

You know the kind of data you already have that could give you some answers.

Next identify how you can get the data you don't have now that you need.

Make a clear plan for data collection AND analysis. (Who will do it? By when?)



# Analyze Data

- Remove outliers or obvious errors
- Question missing data
- Make comparisons
- Define, clarify the context
- Create a Visualization of the data

After you have gathered data and made meaning out of it, you will design an action to test.

The action is something that you feel will improve the situation you are tackling.

- Who will design the improvements to be tested?
  - What outputs or outcomes will be monitored?
- What comparisons will be used to identify the value of the test improvements?

# 01

#### Then try it out !!

02

Implement the strategy for 3 – 8 weeks.

03

Set a time to consider what you learned.

#### IMPLEMENT THE PROPOSED SOLUTION

Once you have a proposed action to address the item you have identified, you have to **move that action into reality**.

Sometimes there is a "fear factor" related to the proposed solution.

Sometimes the solution requires approval before it can be tried, and that can lead to delays in the project.

YOU MUST OVERCOME THE BARRIERS THAT STAND IN THE WAY OF YOU MOVING FROM PLANNING TO ACTION







# Use Rapid Cycle Learning With ROMA Principles

- Don't just implement changes and think you will come back in a year to see what happened!
- After you have put your plan in action, be sure you are:
  - Collecting data
  - Analyzing the data to:
    - Determine if anything improved
    - Understand what is happening
    - Plan for your next learning cycle

USE YOUR KNOWLEDGE TO LOOK BEYOND BASIC DATA TO SEE RELATIONSHIPS Examine elements to determine how or if they are related.

• Multiple variables can be observed to find patterns.

Examine the influence of underlying causes and conditions.

- Relationship among the effects may be the result of the same factors influencing the situation.
- Unrelated factors can be discounted as the root cause of the effect.

Keep the cycle going

Assess your data, make a plan, implement the change, collect data, analyze the data and....


# CLOSING THOUGHTS



### WHAT CAN YOU DO? What is the first thing you will do? Who will you talk to?

### WHAT ELSE DO YOU NEED?

## For more information

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