

LLI Leadership

A guide to help organizational leaders to sustainably shape the implementation and integration of the Lifelong Learning Initiative

December 2018

I. The LLI vision

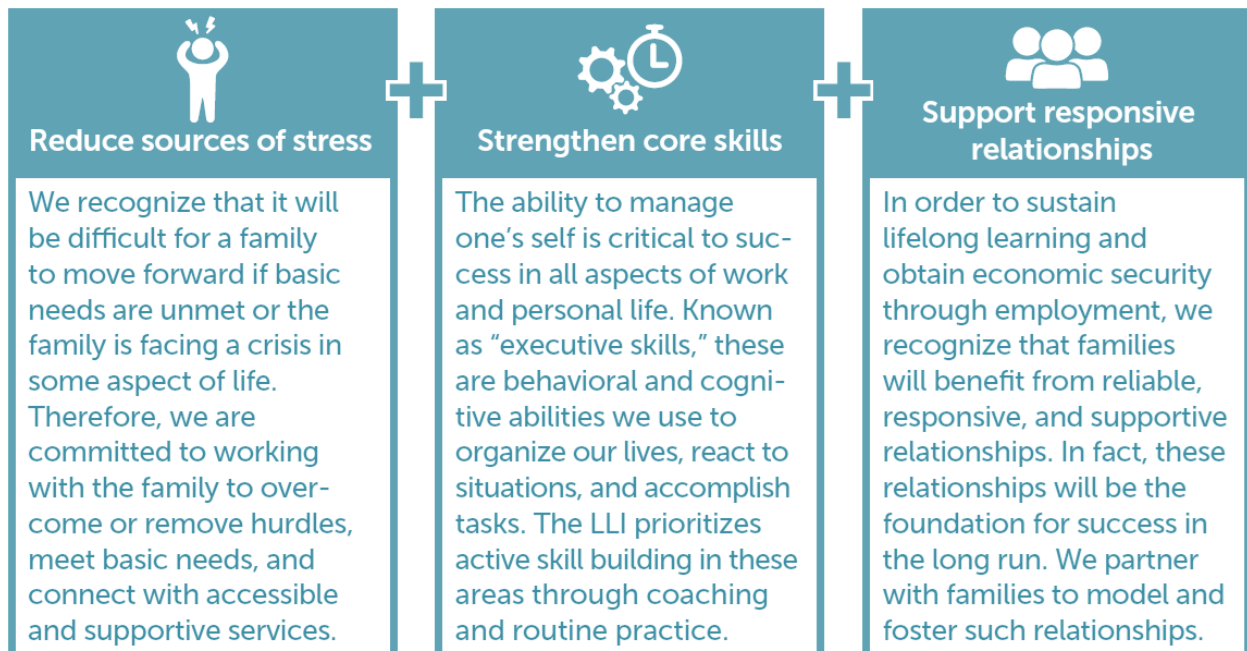
The mission of the Lifelong Learning Initiative (LLI) is to:

Partner with families to build work and life skills and to create opportunities for lifelong learning and economic security through employment.

In order to deliver on this mission, and to progress toward the agency’s vision of being a leader in building the economic success of employers and individuals, managers and supervisors will first need understand and apply the LLI philosophy. Drawing on the research evidence and science of self-regulation and goal pursuit, the LLI framework is built upon five core principles:

- The family is at the center of a process designed to enhance their ability to make informed decisions, set priorities, and manage their life.
- Staff model goal-directed behaviors and practices aimed at positive habit formation among parents and their children.
- Staff and parents engage in a responsive, supportive, nonjudgmental, and mutually accountable coaching relationship—**guided self-determination**.
- The program provides resources and support to increase the family’s likelihood of success.
- Staff inspire and celebrate the family’s progress.

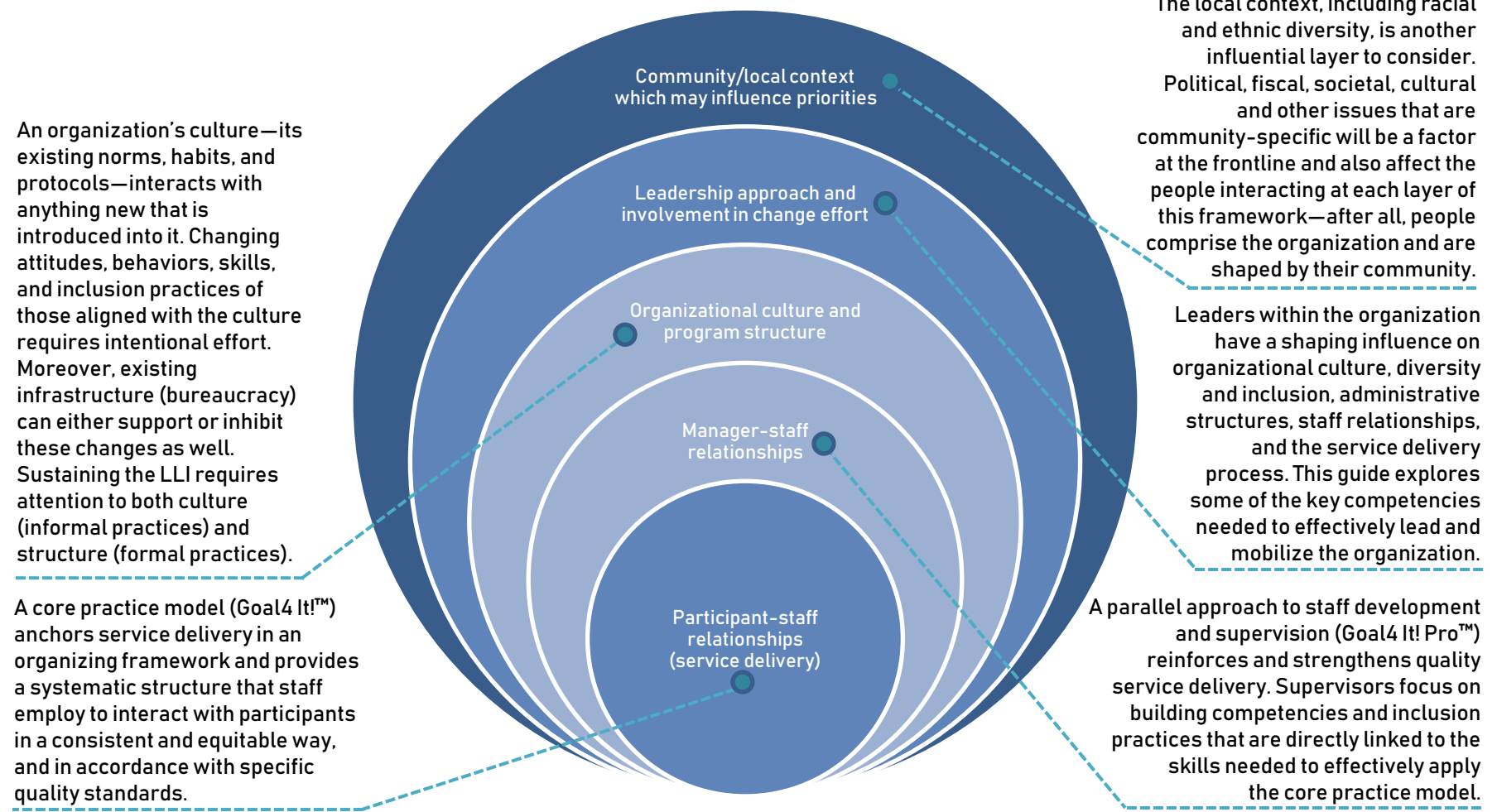
Moreover, the LLI approach can be characterized by three primary strategies¹:



¹ Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2016). Building Core Capabilities for Life: The Science Behind the Skills Adults Need to Succeed in Parenting and in the Workplace. Retrieved from www.developingchild.harvard.edu.

II. An implementation framework for the LLI

The effectiveness, sustainability, and scalability of the LLI hinges upon the integration and the institutionalization of its core philosophical principles and practices throughout the organization. Consider that the core practice model of the LLI—Goal4 It!™—is situated with multiple layers of infrastructure and influencing conditions. Some of these conditions can be viewed as enablers; others as inhibitors. The figure below presents a **context-conscious** framework for thinking about these various conditions and the relationships between each layer of the organization’s structure and culture.



III. Trauma-informed, equity-focused

Many participants in the LLI are *care-seekers*—parents and their dependents who seek services and supports to help them address challenges and traumatic experiences they face. In many respects, LLI staff serve in a *care-giving* capacity by providing direct support to these families seeking healing, growth, learning, or support.² Staff tend to experience trauma themselves in cumulative, secondary, and subtle ways; for example, participants may shout at or berate staff out of frustration or fear, which adds up over time, and staff may be regularly exposed to participants' emotional pain or trauma with little means to intervene themselves.^{3,4}

Trauma-informed leadership

Leaders must recognize this important characteristic of the service environment and be prepared to help staff navigate it proactively. In fact, leaders have a unique opportunity to help counteract the parallel process of trauma that is unfolding among staff due to their close and consistent interactions with participants' trauma.⁵ The parallel approach to self-regulation and goal-pursuit, which encourages operating with intentionality rather than reactively, as envisioned in the Goal4 It!™ (for use with participants) and Goal4 It! Pro™ (for use with staff) models is a critical step toward a proactive, positive strategy to respond to the chronic stressors of the organizational environment. Yet, leaders will need to consistently and intentionally work to identify trauma-*reactive* habits within the organization and adaptively guide staff through course correction—shifting both mindsets and behaviors toward a trauma-informed approach.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) defines a trauma-informed approach as one that:

1. Realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery;
2. Recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in participants, families, staff, and others involved with the system;
3. Responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices; and
4. Seeks to actively resist re-traumatization.⁶

Building on SAMHSA's principles of a trauma-informed approach, leaders should consider the extent to which the organizational context (as described in section II):

- Ensures the physical and emotional safety of both participants and staff;
- Provides clear information about what the participant can consistently expect and maintains appropriate interpersonal boundaries for both participants and staff;

² Kahn, W. A. (2003). The revelation of organizational trauma. *Journal of Applied Science*, 39(4), 365.

³ Ibid, 366.

⁴ Bloom, S. L. (2010). Trauma-organized systems and parallel process. In N. Tehrani (Ed.), *Managing Trauma in the Workplace* (pp. 139-153). Routledge, 2010.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ National Center for Trauma-Informed Care, & Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (n.d.) What is trauma-informed care? Retrieved December 28, 2018, from <https://www.samhsa.gov/nctic/trauma-interventions>.

- Prioritizes participant experiences of choice and control;
- Maximizes collaboration and the sharing of power between participants and staff; and
- Emphasizes participant empowerment, recognizes participants' strengths, and builds participants' skills.⁷

Pursuing a focus on equity

Pursuing an organizational culture of equity—specifically with respect to race, class, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation—is another key aspect of LLI leadership. A recent synthesis of research highlights how staff attitudes and implicit biases can contribute to disparate participant experiences on the basis of race, gender, or other identities—this includes differences in the use of sanctions for similar behaviors and access to education and training opportunities.⁸ Leaders have a unique position of authority to:

- Prioritize an environment where different lived experiences and backgrounds are valued and seen as assets to the organization;
- Regularly discuss issues tied to equity while acknowledging and recognizing that they are on a personal journey toward a more inclusive culture; and
- Model a responsibility to speak about diversity and inclusion, and threats to it both inside and outside the organization.⁹

In order for the LLI vision to succeed, leaders will need to give focused attention to the barriers and systemic conditions that create inequitable experiences and outcomes for the staff and participants involved. As leaders pursue a greater focus on equity, [this resource](#) from *Equity in the Center* can be a practical guide for planning and taking concrete steps toward a more equitable culture.

⁷ Fallot, R., & Harris, M. H. (2001). Trauma-informed approaches to systems of care. *Trauma Psychology Newsletter Division 56*, 3(1), 6–7.

⁸ Gaffney, Angela, Asaph Glosser, and Crystal Agoncillo. (2018). *Organizational Culture in TANF Offices: A Review of the Literature*. OPRE Report 2018-116. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

⁹ Equity in the Center (2018). *Awake to woke to work: Building a race equity culture*, 13.

IV. Core leadership competencies and skills

Much work has been done to identify critical abilities of social sector leaders. In fact, many frameworks already exist, naming several key competencies and skills that are essential to effective leadership. Although many of these existing frameworks are helpful and should be consulted, this guide outlines a discrete set of leadership competencies and skills as they relate to a mission-driven adaptive leadership style geared to the unique context of public human services agencies. Each competency is categorized as primarily a strategic/visionary skill, an operational skill, or a developmental skill; however, these categories are fluid and interrelated, and should not be treated as mutually exclusive.

Competency	How it shows up in the organization
Strategic/Visionary	
Clearly communicates the mission and vision of the organization	Staff throughout the organization are aware of and understand the mission and vision, and how these statements apply to their roles. Leaders encourage mindsets and promote behaviors among staff that align with the mission and vision.
Promotes values of diversity, equity, and inclusion within the organization	Leaders are focused on representation by increasing numbers of racially and ethnically diverse people. Staff at all levels discuss and are working toward a culture that values all people's identities and contributions. The organization as a whole strives toward equity and addresses causes of inequity internally and externally.
Adaptive approach to problem identification and solution generation	Leaders routinely explore the deeper, root causes of challenges that arise within the organization. Leaders recognize when challenges do not have known or obvious solutions, in which cases they mobilize staff to creatively solve the problem. Data and evidence play an important role in this process. Leaders act proactively and with intentionality rather than reactively.
Motivates staff to provide quality service delivery	Leaders evoke intrinsic drivers among staff to deploy their motivation toward positive outcomes and aspirations. Staff feel empowered and motivated to pursue their work and to bring about change, particularly when challenges and obstacles get in the way.
Self-reflective decision-making	Leaders are self-reflective and routinely seek diverse perspectives and expertise to inform their decision-making, without compromising efficiency or decisiveness where necessary. Major decisions and changes within the organization are often the product of consultation, dialogue, and exploration.
Operational	
Effectively and efficiently executes strategies that align with mission and vision	Change initiatives are deliberate and systematic; they appear to be the product of thoughtful consideration and strike a balance between "top-down" and "bottom-up" approaches. Changes are consistently and clearly linked to delivering on the organization's mission and vision.
Efficiently builds and realistically manages resources in service of mission and vision	Leaders allocate resources (financial and staff) in a way that clearly aligns with the organization's mission and vision, according to their level of authority and discretion. Leaders advocate when additional resources are needed to support strategically important efforts.
Efficiently manages staff time and resources	Roles and responsibilities of staff are clearly delineated and defined to support efficient service delivery and administration. In addition, leaders allocate sufficient resources to carry out the mission and vision. Where bureaucratic "siloes" exist, leaders ensure seamless communication across groups to ensure that the resources allocation is adequate within and across service components and/or program initiatives. Staff time spent on routine roles and responsibilities is generally efficient and productive.
Balances bureaucracy and infrastructure with innovation and iteration	Organizational practices, processes, and operations are consistently implemented efficiently and with fidelity. At the same time, staff are routinely given flexibility, safety, and time to experiment with new approaches. Failed experiments are culturally acceptable within the organization, in service of iterative improvement.
Developmental	
Responsive and supportive toward changes and needs	Staff routinely approach leadership with their challenges and generally view leaders as engaged in the problem-solving process. Staff feel heard and believe that leaders understand the stress (or trauma) experienced in service delivery. Leaders routinely follow through on requests.

Competency	How it shows up in the organization
Clearly articulates and consistently maintains expectations/quality standards	Leaders clearly communicate realistic expectations at all levels and hold staff accountable to them. Quality standards are reasonable, trained to, and well understood. Accountability to these standards is a shared responsibility among all staff, and is not exclusively an authority role. Expectations and quality standards are fully within the control of staff to meet such standards.
Exhibits a growth mindset	Embraces the concept of converting mistakes into opportunities for organizational and lifelong learning and growth. Focus is on learning from rather than punishing mistakes.
Regularly engages in reflective supervision to support development of staff	Regular and frequent supervision involves active listening and thoughtful questioning on the part of both supervisor and supervisee. Supervision interactions routinely evoke the experiences, thoughts, and feelings associated with the work.
Empowers others to act based on their relative strengths	Staff are routinely empowered to take initiative, solve problems, provide input, and invest in the development of others based on their relevant abilities and strengths. Leaders with formal authority rarely lead the day-to-day work of change; rather, staff (including those with little to no formal authority) take ownership of and lead these efforts while leaders with formal authority champion and enable their work.

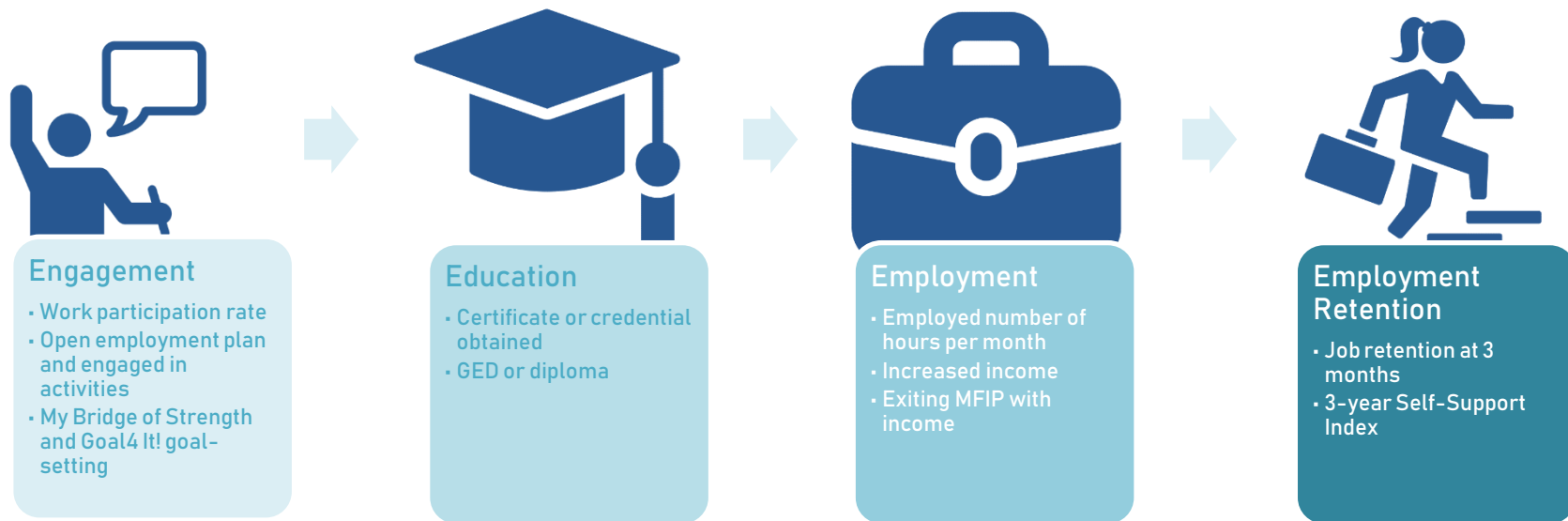
V. Stepping Stones to Leadership Development

Stepping Stones for Leadership Development presents a broad, high-level view of the key leadership competencies and skills for the LLI. This tool serves as a starting point for leaders to consider specific domains for change, and to assess and visualize progress over time.

Competency	Basic ability	Novice	Apprentice	Journeyman	Master	Mastery
Strategic/Visionary						
Mission and vision-driven	Has defined a program mission and vision					Capably promotes staff mindsets and behaviors that further the mission and vision
Diversity, equity, and inclusion	Is aware of, but does not consistently model or promote equity or inclusion					Promotes and empowers efforts to increase equity and inclusion
Adaptive management	Identifies problems as they arise and sometimes seeks to solve them					Adaptive, intentional approach to problem identification and solution generation
Motivation	Talks about motivation underlying the work					Evokes motivation among staff to propel quality service delivery
Self-reflective decision-making	Makes decisions in isolation					Reflective about one's strengths and limitations; seeks input from others
Operational						
Administration and operations	Has defined standard operating procedures					Efficiently equips staff to execute key strategies and operations in service of the mission and vision
Resource management	Accounts for use of existing resources					Efficiently builds and manages resources in service of mission and vision
Time management	Tends to complete tasks in a timely manner					Promotes efficient time investments among and across all roles and responsibilities
Innovation	Listens to ideas, but often does not know how to apply them within the existing infrastructure					Balances bureaucracy and infrastructure with innovation, enabling iteration of new ideas
Developmental						
Responsiveness	Approachable by staff regarding ongoing changes and needs					Responsive and supportive toward changes and needs
Quality assurance	Has defined quality standards					Clearly articulates and consistently maintains expectations/quality standards
Exhibits a growth mindset	Buys into the basic concept of learning and growth					Converts mistakes or problems into opportunities for organizational and lifelong learning and growth
Reflective supervision	Holds supervision sessions					Regularly and frequently engages in reflective supervision to support development of staff
Empowering others	Inconsistently delegates tasks and responsibilities to others					Consistently empowers others to act based on their relative strengths

VI. Stepping Stones to Organizational Success

Workforce Solutions and the LLI operate under a core set of outcomes, known as the 4 E's: engagement, education, employment, and employment retention. Moreover, each quarter, the department releases report cards documenting performance relative to these target outcome and progress indicators. Leaders bear responsibility for making meaning out of these performance measures for their staff; that is, leaders are well positioned to help their teams stay connected to the indicators and measures that matter to their jobs, and to manage to these outcomes on a regular basis. The figure below shows the four core outcomes and key indicators/measures for each.



Reflection questions

- How do these outcome categories and key performance measures align with our mission and vision?
- To what extent do these outcomes and measures “tell the story” of success we are striving for? Is anything missing?
- How are data for each of these measures used to inform performance at the individual and collective (teams or the organization as a whole) levels?
- How are we performing according to these benchmarks and measures? What are our specific goals for improvement?

VII. Organizational self-assessment

The purpose of this tool is to assess an organization's readiness for program change. It is designed for program administrators and direct service staff to rate their organization on a list of core indicators of a well-implemented program and of well-aligned performance management. The intent is to gather a cross-section of viewpoints directly from staff about the organization's operations and its capacity for change. It also highlights the factors that could help or hinder the implementation of a program change.

Who should complete the assessment?

- The self-assessment may be completed by administrators and/or staff individually or as a group. If administered individually, the tool may be converted to an online survey; it should take between 15-20 minutes to complete. If completing the tool as a group, then allow for up to 2 hours to allow for discussion. To streamline the group discussion, you may ask group members to fill out the assessment prior to the meeting and bring their responses with them.
- Distribute the assessment to a mix of respondents within the organization to capture a range of viewpoints (for example, program administrators, supervisors, and direct service staff). This allows the organization to assess the degree of agreement at different levels within the organization. It also increases the richness of the data and strengthens buy-in for the change process.
- Be sure to create a safe environment for respondents to voice their opinions either verbally or in written form.

Instructions for administering the assessment?

- The assessment is divided into two sections: (1) organizational and program elements and (2) capacity to use the *Learn, Innovate, Improve* (LI²) process. Each section includes a list of indicators—statements describing specific elements of a well-implemented program and strong organizational capacity.
- Respondents should read each indicator and rate the status for your organization. There is no right or wrong answer. Encourage staff to be objective and honest—think about the evidence or information that supports your rating.
 - **Implementation status.** Indicate the degree to which the component has been implemented using the following rating scale: “describes my organization,” “somewhat describes my organization,” or “does not describe my organization.”
- Once rated, the respondent is asked to consider the level of priority assigned to the element by thinking about the investment required to bring about change and the potential payoff. It often (though not always) makes sense to prioritize the areas with relatively low investment that will have a relatively high payoff.
 - **Priority for change.** For the indicators you marked “somewhat describes my organization” or “does not describe my organization,” for implementation status, rate the level of priority for change addressing this issue, “high,” “medium,” or “low.”

Instructions: Read each indicator and rate the status for your organization. There is no right or wrong answer. Try to be objective and honest—think about the evidence or information that supports your rating.

- ▶ **Describes my organization** – Component is part of the system and “evidence” of it is observable and/or measurable.
- ▶ **Somewhat describes my organization** – Part of the component has been established, the component has been conceptualized but not fully used, or the component exists, but is not being utilized on a regular basis
- ▶ **Does not describe my organization** – The component does not exist or has not yet been initiated.
- ▶ **Priority** –Indicate the level of priority the individual or group places on addressing it.

	Implementation status			Priority for change			
	Describes my organization	Somewhat describes my organization	Does not describe my organization	High	Moderate	Low	Don't know
1. Organizational and program elements							
A. Leadership							
Leadership stays focused on the goals of the program during times of change							
Leadership communicates a clear vision for the program							
Leadership communicates a clear plan for implementing the organization’s vision							
Leadership involves multiple levels of staff in designing and implementing program changes							
Leadership advocates for resources to execute program goals							
Leadership instills a sense of confidence among program staff							
Leadership effectively manages and supports staff							
B. Organizational and program structure and culture							
The organization and its programs have a reputation for providing quality services							
Organizational values are clearly defined							
Organizational culture and practices promote diversity and inclusion							

	Implementation status			Priority for change			
	Describes my organization	Somewhat describes my organization	Does not describe my organization	High	Moderate	Low	Don't know
The organization has adequate resources (funding and/or staff) to carry out program goals							
Policies and procedures are well-aligned with program goals							
Organizational performance measures are well-aligned with program goals							
The organization experiences relatively low overall turnover							
Services are clearly defined and appropriately meet the needs of program participants							
Participants flow easily through the service delivery process, including to and from community partners							
The physical space where services are provided is welcoming							
Participants are able to easily access all services and supports available from the organization and/or by community partners							
The organization has strong working relationships with community partners that are relevant to the needs of program participants							
C. Staffing and staff development							
Staff roles and responsibilities are clearly defined at all levels in the organization							
There is a clearly defined process for supervision of staff that is consistent throughout the organization							
There is a clearly defined list of core competencies to guide hiring and staff development							
Staff understand what is expected of them							

	Implementation status			Priority for change			
	Describes my organization	Somewhat describes my organization	Does not describe my organization	High	Moderate	Low	Don't know
Staff are inclusive of people of all backgrounds and experiences							
Workloads are manageable							
Staff have the resources to effectively deliver services to participants							
Staff are knowledgeable about community resources and when to refer participants to partner providers							
Staff consistently complete required tasks on time							
Staff have access to career development opportunities (either within or outside the organization)							
Staff have access to supports to help them manage work-related stress							
Supervisors hold regular, frequent meetings with staff they supervise							
Staff supervision is implemented consistently across the organization							
D. Staff interactions with participants							
Services are implemented according to the organization's mission and values							
Staff meet regularly with participants to promote progress toward goals							
Staff instill in participants a sense of possibility							
Staff facilitate nonjudgmental process with participants							
Staff set clear and consistent boundaries when interacting with participants							
Staff help participants set clear and time-bound action plans that promote progress toward a goal							
Service quality is consistent across direct service staff							

	Implementation status			Priority for change			
	Describes my organization	Somewhat describes my organization	Does not describe my organization	High	Moderate	Low	Don't know
2. Capacity to use the Learn, Innovate, Improve (LI²) process							
A. Change management and evaluation							
Staff at all levels exhibit curiosity about continuous learning							
Staff at all levels appreciate the value of clarifying the motivation for change							
Staff at all levels value activities that new ideas and possibilities for solving complex problems within the organization							
Staff at all levels value processes for trying out and gathering feedback about changes before scaling them up within the organization							
Someone within the organization “owns” the change process, dedicating time, interest, and resources to it							
Administrative data are clearly understood across staff and programs within the organization (including contracted service providers as relevant)							
B. Performance measures and management							
Staff accountability measures (for example: application timeliness, accuracy, etc.) are a regular part of supervision with staff at all levels.							
Staff accountability measures are clearly defined and tied to progress toward the desired outcomes							
Participant accountability measures are clearly defined and tied to progress toward the desired outcomes							
Contracted service provider accountability measures are clearly defined and tied to progress toward the desired outcomes							
The organization defines performance measures that relate to its organizational goals							

	Implementation status			Priority for change			
	Describes my organization	Somewhat describes my organization	Does not describe my organization	High	Moderate	Low	Don't know
Performance measures are consistently used to inform and improve the quality of services							
Data management systems provide staff within the organization with relevant information							
Data management systems are easy to navigate for staff							
Data management systems provide staff within the organization with timely information							

Notes: