



Recommendations for the Innovation Approval Process

Summary

The Chair of the Commission in May 2020 asked the Innovation Subcommittee to review the Commission’s practices for reviewing and approving Innovation plans and provide recommendations for “agenda reform” in 30 to 45 days. The Commission in May 2020 also approved a “system change” project that will assess learnings from the Innovation Incubator and explore ways the Commission can better support innovation among the counties.

Background

Over the last five years, the Commission has reviewed approximately 148 county Innovation plans or extensions. The Commission has approved 142 of these 148 plans (96 percent). The attached Innovation Dashboard provides specifics.

During that time, the Commission also expanded its role in supporting the development of county Innovation plans, primarily through its support for multi-county Innovation collaboratives that have the potential for statewide impact. The Commission’s Innovation Incubator is one element of a broader strategy to encourage counties to work together to improve learning opportunities and to replicate and scale innovations among the counties.

The System Change Project will assess the Commission’s efforts to help counties build the capacity for innovation and continuous improvement and identify further actions that would support the development, implementation and replication of effective innovations. A draft workplan for the project also is attached.

One consideration is how the Commission uses its time during meetings to catalyze transformational change of the mental health system. Innovation plans receive 5 percent of Mental Health Services Act revenues – and less than 1 percent of overall public mental health spending. The Commission, however, typically spends more than 50 percent of its meeting time reviewing and approving plans, and virtually no time setting priorities that should be addressed through innovation plans, assessing the learnings across plans and promoting replication of lessons learned.

The Commission in May 2019 considered four options regarding the approval process:

1. Full Commission review of Innovation Plans: The Commission would review each plan in a public meeting, receive public comment, deliberate, and take a roll-call vote.

2. Review by the Innovation Subcommittee: The Subcommittee would facilitate in-depth discussions and either act on behalf of the Commission or make a recommendation to the full Commission, where the plans could be on a consent agenda.
3. Delegate joint authority to the Executive Director and the Commission Chair: The Executive Director would be delegated the authority to approve new Innovation plans or amendments to previously approved plans with budgets up to \$1 million. The Chair also would also have to consent to the approval, resulting in joint delegated authority.
4. Develop Consent Items for the Commission Agenda: Innovation plans that have not raised substantive issues or concerns in the staff analysis, including public comments received by the Commission prior to the posting of the agenda, would be placed on a consent agenda by the Chair. Any member of the Commission without explanation could remove an item from the consent agenda prior to a vote.

The Commission adopted options 3 and 4 to streamline the approval process. Despite those changes, concerns remain regarding the number of Innovation plans on the Commission's agenda and the time spent on those plans, compounded by two factors: 1) To ensure that counties did not lose Innovation funds that were subject to reversion after June 30, 2020, the Commission calendared 11 Innovation projects in May and June; 2) Due to the pandemic, shorter Commission meetings were conducted over Zoom, and two previously unscheduled meetings were held in June to accommodate the counties.

Subsequently, the 2020-21 Budget Act extended the reversion deadline by one year, reducing the pressure on counties and the Commission to approve Innovation projects in the near term. The Commission has 16 Innovation projects under consideration; 15 of which could be approved through delegated authority and one that may be eligible for the consent agenda.

In addition to the time consumed considering plans, Commissioners have expressed concerns that innovation projects are often unconnected with core county operations or priority public concerns. As such, even a successful innovation project is unlikely to fundamentally improve outcomes, lower costs, or enhance access to care beyond the specific program.

Agenda Reform and Innovation Plan Reforms

The Chair's request for "agenda reforms" seeks additional steps to ensure efficient and adequate Commission review, especially during the era of virtual Commission meetings.

In turn, the Innovation Systems Change Project seeks to more fundamentally explore how the Commission can better support the development of innovation plans that address priority issues and produce meaningful improvements that can be replicated and taken to scale.

The Subcommittee should discuss and advise on 1) Immediate opportunities for managing the Commission time required to review and approve plans, 2) Other near-term opportunities to influence the focus and scope of Innovation plans, and 3) Issues and options that should be explored during the System Change Project that could improve the Commission's efforts to catalyze continuous improvement and innovation.

Some Immediate Opportunities:

1. Time limitations on the county presentations: During the two June meetings counties were limited to five-minute PowerPoint presentations to allow for more Commission discussion and reduce the overall time spent on each plan. This change was somewhat successful, but five minutes may not work well for complex Innovation plans. The Subcommittee may want to consider time limitations with specific guidance to counties on the focus of the presentations. The time allocated for presentation and discussion also could be tiered to give more time for complex plans or larger funding requests.
2. Additional ways to gather and incorporate public comment: To encourage early public input, the staff shares Innovation plans with the Commission's listserv and stakeholder contractors twice – during the county's 30-day public comment period and after receiving the final innovation plan. These comments are incorporated into the staff analysis provided to the Commissioners prior to meetings. However, the comments are often limited and may not fully reflect opportunities for public engagement on county plans. The Subcommittee may want to consider additional opportunities for public engagement to strengthen innovation plans and support more efficient plan review.
3. Short-term refinements to the staff screening and analysis process: The Subcommittee may want to consider providing guidance on key questions that would be helpful to include in the staff analysis.

Other Near-Term Opportunities

1. Encourage counties to address highest priorities. The Commission could provide guidance or criteria on the focus and scope of Innovation Plans with the potential to positively impact the greatest needs. The guidance could be coordinated with the priorities identified in the community planning process and informally signal to the counties an easier path for approval of projects aligned with the guidance.
2. Further refine analysis and scoring of proposals. The Commission staff has significantly improved its analysis of Innovation Plans and have worked with county staff to improve those plans. Further refinement of the analytical framework – and promotion of that framework with county staff – could elevate plans to meet Commission expectations.

System Change Opportunities

The System change project will in part develop in consultation with counties a “continuous improvement framework” that will document the core capacities needed to improve results and to test and assess new solutions. The project will allow the Commission to identify and pursue a variety of strategic opportunities to better inform the development, implementation and assessment of innovation plans, and then aligning Commission resources – including the time of the Subcommittee and the Commission – to advancing those strategic opportunities. The Subcommittee can guide the work of the project in its review of the workplan and its oversight of the project.