

TALENT STRONG TEXAS PATHWAYS INSTITUTE

# Continuous Improvement as Change Management

*A Framework for Advancing Student Success*

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At **Sova**, we partner with higher education systems and institutions, associations, and philanthropies to achieve large-scale change through careful attention to actionable strategy and practical implementation support.

We use problem solving as a pathway toward equitable outcomes and strengthened social and economic mobility for all.

# To Begin...

*Every institution has student success initiatives....and student success problems*

*System level issues are treated with program level solutions*

*We are not at a loss for great ideas. We struggle to move from idea to implementation.*

*Without implementation, change cannot be realized.*

# Implementation Science



# ACTIVATION

This Institute focuses on moving from strategy to execution. Building on the strategy map your team developed in November, you will refine and strengthen clear action plans that outline how your work will be implemented, monitored, and sustained over the next two years.

- Translate strategy maps into **actionable implementation plans**
- **Clarify priorities, sequencing, timelines, and responsible leads**
- Strengthen **cross-functional alignment** to support execution
- Identify **change management strategies** to sustain momentum
- Anticipate **barriers** and plan for adaptation
- Define early indicators of **progress and success**

# Implementation Science

Implementation science is the scientific study of methods and strategies that facilitate the uptake of evidence-based practice and research into regular use by practitioners and policymakers.

**research + theory + policy**



**practice**

# The Know-Do Gap

The field of implementation science seeks to **systematically close the gap between what we *know* and what we *do***

by

**identifying and addressing the barriers that slow or halt the adoption of proven interventions and evidence-based practices.**

WHAT WE

**KNOW**

Evidence-based practices exist.  
Research is clear. Data supports needs.  
Interventions work.



WHAT WE

**DO**

**Fragmented programs.  
Silos. Uneven reach.  
Students underserved.**

## **At most colleges, this gap is structural.**

Students experience the institution horizontally — across financial aid, advising, their school/college, student affairs. The institution is organized vertically. Students with the least margin for error — first-generation, Pell-eligible, commuters — are most harmed when systems don't connect.



**TOYOTA**

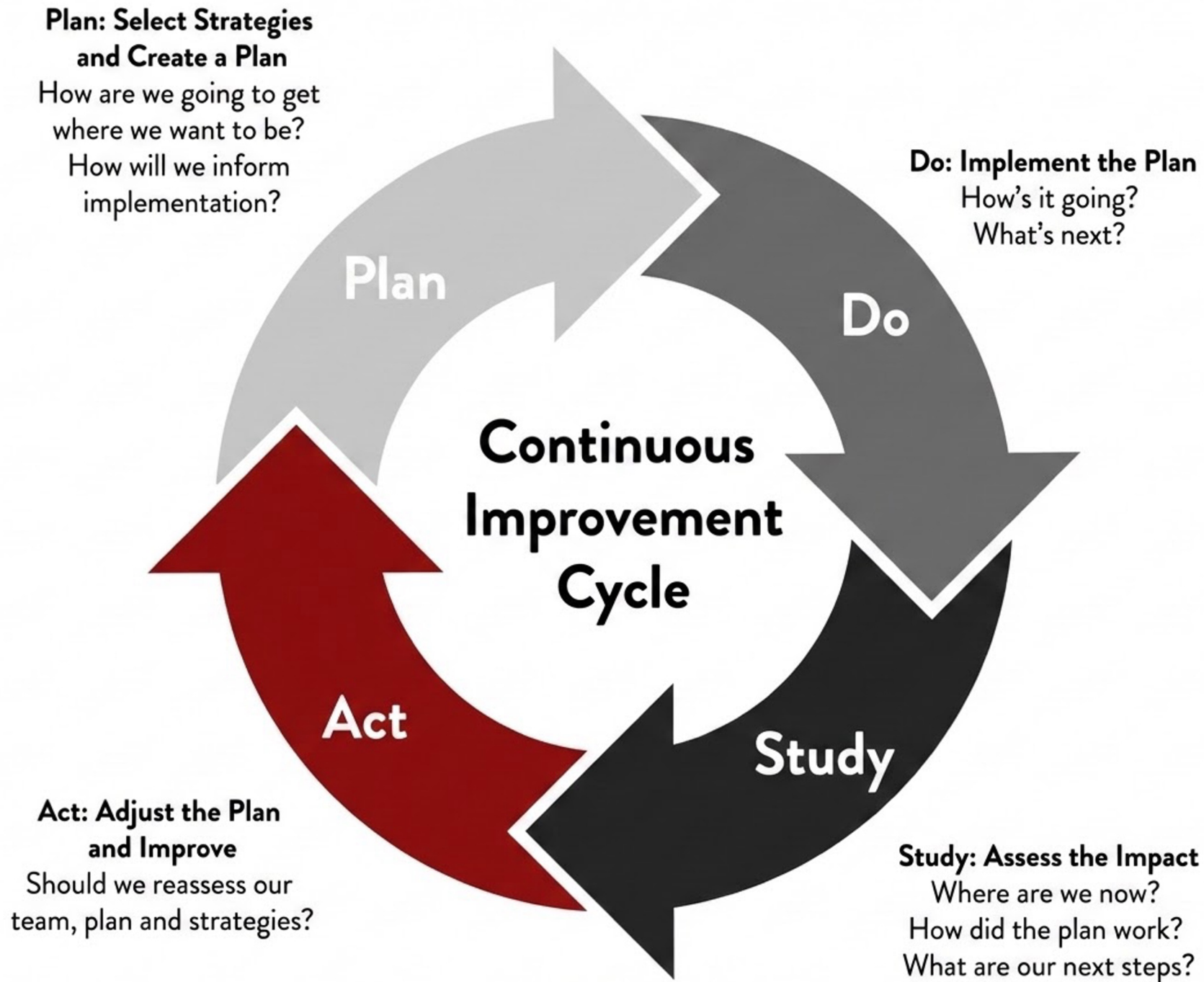


**What if we focused on addressing the barriers preventing our success rather than the big idea of what needs to be accomplished?**

# Continuous Improvement Framework

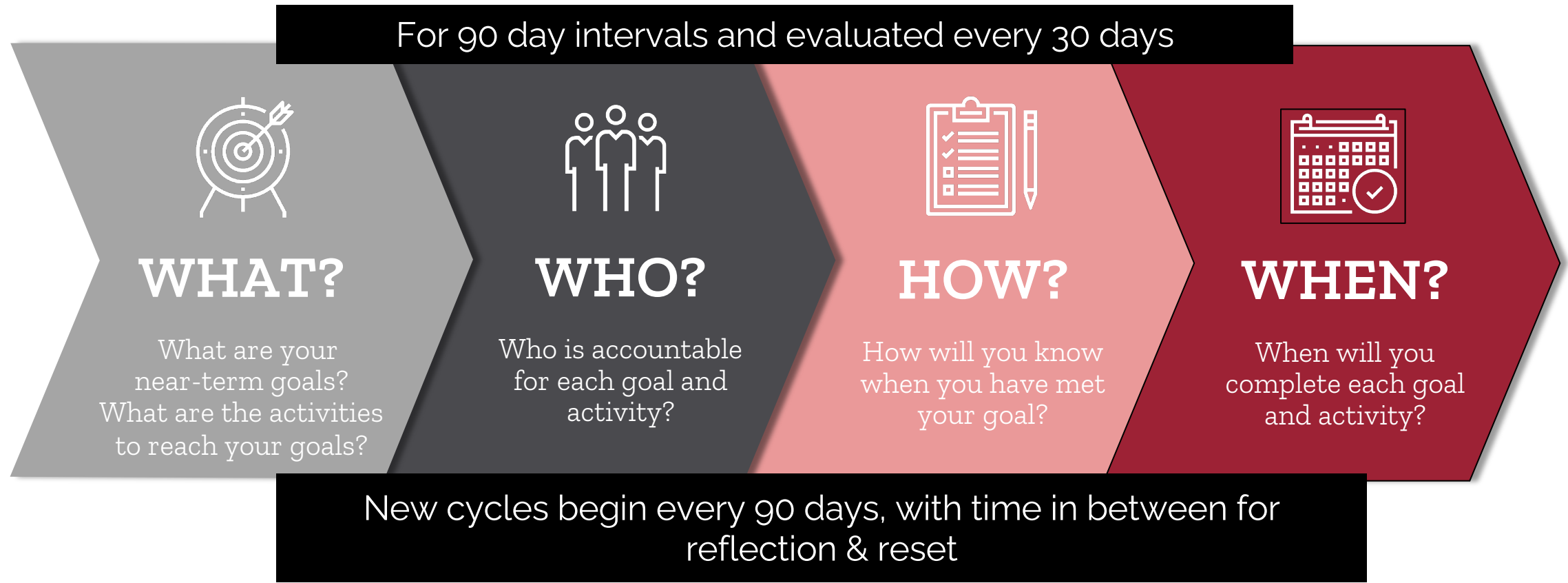
**Continuous improvement is the ongoing process of analyzing performance, identifying opportunities, and making incremental and breakthrough changes to processes, products, and personnel.**

**By analyzing and fine-tuning processes, organizations can create efficiencies, build capacity, meet goals, and improve decision-making.**



# Learn Fast, Fail Fast, Improve Quickly

## *Elements of Continuous Improvement Cycles*



**What can prevent failing fast? Our ego.**

**Failing fast isn't failure. It's learning.**

**We must create environments where  
failing fast is permitted:  
both personally and by leadership.**

# Continuous Improvement Benefits

**Makes overwhelming  
and complicated  
scenarios more  
manageable.**

**Forces  
acknowledgement of  
key challenges  
thwarting success**

**Allows competing  
priorities to be managed  
with focus on  
organizational needs &  
health**

**Creates structures for  
progress and  
accountability**

**Provides intentional  
space for reflection and  
mid-course changes to  
drive innovation**

# Continuous Improvement Tools to Drive and Sustain Change

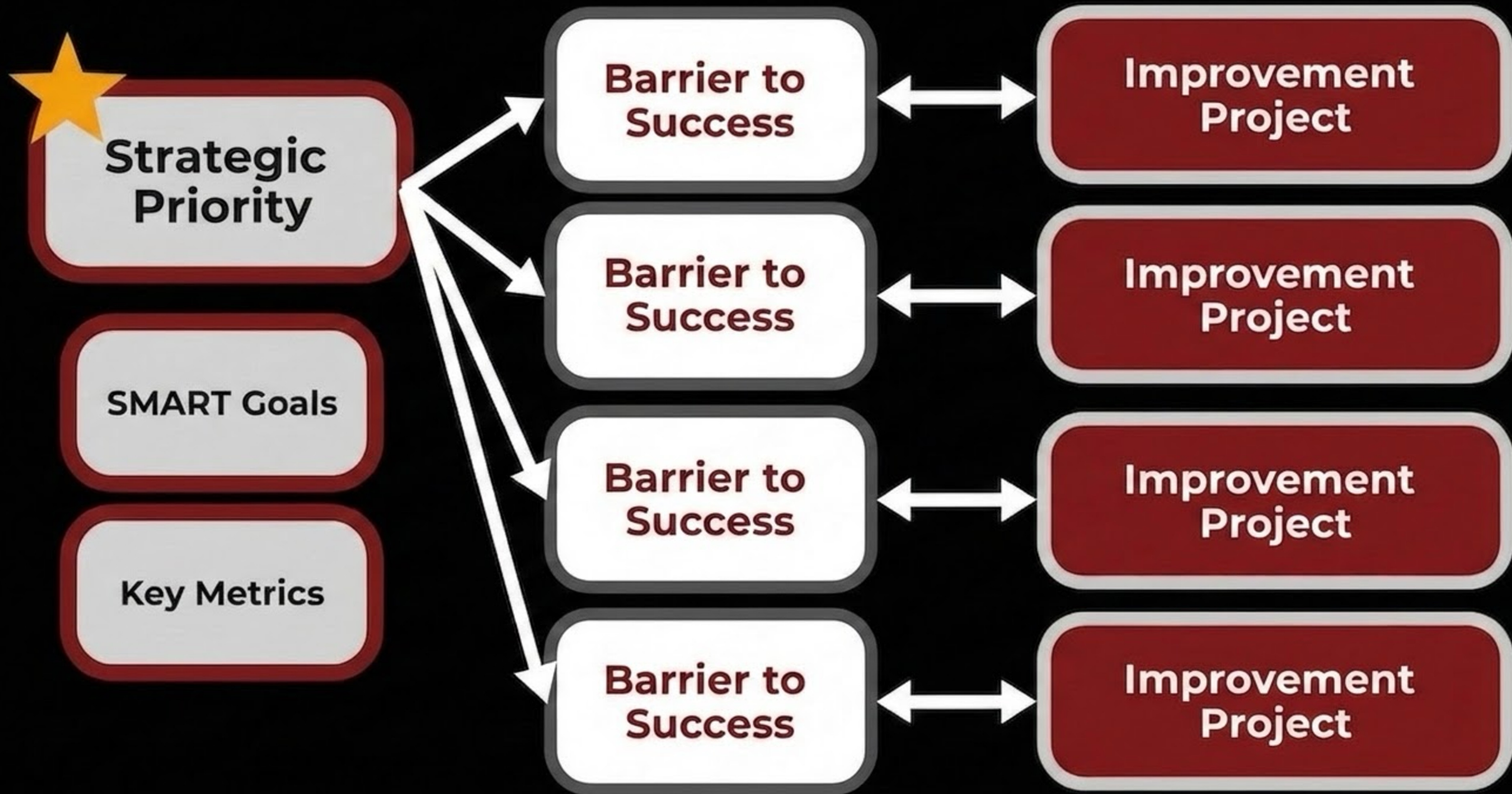
# Driver Diagram

**Often, implementation approaches become so focused on tactics that the strategic goals of the project are lost and key metrics are not considered.**

Through development of a **driver diagram** - a foundational component of continuous improvement - leaders:

- state strategic goals
- identify intended outcomes
- select metrics to measure progress and success
- examine key barriers to progress
- determine tactical projects.

This provides useful guardrails in collaborative work where many competing priorities exist and decision-making can become challenging.



# Driver Diagram in Action: Virginia Tech



**Strategic Priority Alignment:** Enrollment growth and subsequent completion grown for underserved populations

**SMART Goal:** Increase the persistence and completion of first-generation college students by 2% each academic year for a total of 8% over the next four years.

**Metrics:** Semester & Annual persistence and completion data, comparison population data, segmented by academic discipline, intersectional identity.

**Barriers:** Communication, Data Collection & Sharing, Faculty & Staff Training  
**Improvement Projects** aligned with each barrier category.

# Sample Institution/Entity Driver Diagram

## Institution Focus Area

*What are we trying to accomplish?*

### INSTITUTION FOCUS AREA

#### SMART Goal

*A high-level improvement goal. Specific. Measurable. Achievable. Relevant. Timed.*

Increase the first-gen retention and graduation rates by 2% annually for a total of 8% over the next four years.

#### Metric

*The specific metric(s) you are seeking to address*

Track retention and graduation rates of first-gen students at the following intervals: Fall-to-Spring retention rate; Fall-to-Fall retention rate; Fall graduation rate; Spring graduation rate; Term credit hours attempted vs. completed; Retention and graduation rates based on in state vs. out of state

## Communication

1

There is a need to help current and prospective students, faculty, staff, alumni, parents and supporters and other campus constituents know how we define first-generation and the resources available to support students.

### 1 Strengthen Communication:

⋮

Develop a communication plan for all constituent groups, which highlights the information they need to know and the timeframe for when it needs to be communicated.

### 2 Improve Data Collection and Sharing:

⋮

1) Add a first-gen filter for all categories to existing university databases. 2) Create a one-page document that highlights significant data points. 3) Develop a first-gen student survey. Also, encourage other offices to capture and to share their survey data regarding first-gen students.

## Data Collection and Sharing

2

University reports primarily focus on the retention and graduation rates of first-gen students. There is a need-to-know other metrics and to be able to disaggregate the data. In addition, feedback on student experiences and needs should be collected.

### 3 Faculty and Staff Training and Informational Sessions

⋮

1) Promote the First-Gen Forward faculty and staff module. 2) Participate in New Faculty Academy. 3) Speak with different campus groups (e.g. College Deans; CADO Officers; Staff/Faculty Senate)

## Faculty and Staff Training

3

Faculty and staff are instrumental in fostering a sense of belonging and support for first-gen students. It is necessary to increase their understanding of the best ways to serve this population from an asset-based approach.

### 4 Remove Financial Barriers

⋮

1) Partner with Residence Life & Housing to develop a plan to offer on-campus housing to first-gen students after their first year. 2) Submit grants to provide students with an opportunity to apply for funding to participate in high impact practices (e.g. Study Abroad, internships, undergraduate research)

**Improvement Project #1: <description>**

**30 Days**

- **Tasks**
- **Timeline**
- **Responsible Party**
- **Completion Tracking**

**60 Days**

- **Tasks**
- **Timeline**
- **Responsible Party**
- **Completion Tracking**

**90 Days**

- **Tasks**
- **Timeline**
- **Responsible Party**
- **Completion Tracking**

# Improvement Projects in Action: Baton Rouge Community College



**Goal:** Increase the number of adult learners earning credit-bearing credentials of value by 10% through embedding Industry-Based Credentials (IBCs) into at least 5 Catapult courses by Fall 2027.

**Identified Barrier:** Gaps in Student Engagement & Preparedness

**Improvement Project #2:** BRCC's academic deans will create a comprehensive crosswalk from non-credit IBC courses to credit courses, including those IBC courses that can be assigned credit via Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) toward completion of lower-level certificates that are embedded as exit points within associate degrees.

**Within 90 Days:** Academic Deans deliver a first draft of the crosswalk for review by a selected team of college navigators and the registrar.

# Project Management



# **Working Groups in Action:** **Louisiana State University Eunice**



**Meauxmentum Project: Course Redesign for HIST 2055: US History to 1865**

## **Working Group**

- **Aligned with improvement project for in person offering**
  - **History department chair**
  - **HIST 2055 faculty member**
  - **AI educator**
  - **Writing faculty member**
  - **LMS Support (as needed)**

**Each person assigned specific tasks for 30 days, clear reporting structure, small group for meeting efficiency.**

**At 90 Days...**

**PAUSE**

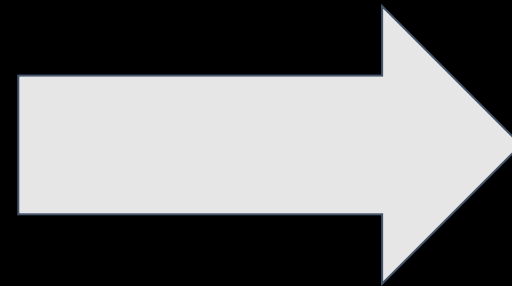
**EDIT**

**SEEK  
COUNSEL**

**REFLECT**

**DISCUSS**

**CELEBRATE**



**FORGE  
AHEAD**

# 90 Day Reflection in Action: Nevada State University



Dr. DeRionne Pollard, then president of NSU, made a commitment to the 90-day process and asked her Cabinet to prioritize the 75/90 day processes.

**30 & 60 Day Check In: Project Team + External Coach**

**75 Day Check In: Project Team, External Coach, Provost, VPSA + Invited Cabinet Leaders**

**90 Day Check In: Project Team, External Coach, Invited Cabinet Leaders + President**

- **Meeting focus**
  - direct asks to the president for support
  - seek approval for next 90 days
  - providing president with talking points to meet her goals

# **Aligning Humans: Change Management within Continuous Improvement**

# Practical Strategies for Aligning Change Management

- **Prioritize Stakeholder & Landscape Analysis**
  - Collect and share data, ask specific questions about concerns/fears, apply these as barriers.
- **Hybrid Leadership Teams**
  - Identify those who can advance change and have the attention of the campus community.
  - You aren't asking people to give up territory, you are asking them to solve a collective problem.
- **Consolidate Implementation Plans**
  - Change management should be embedded in the continuous improvement cycle

# Practical Strategies for Aligning Change Management

- **Unified Metrics**

- Focus on outcomes that are collectively beneficial and align the storytelling. Prioritize measuring change.

- **Shared Learning Systems**

- Create intentional feedback loops on both the continuous improvement project and the change management.

- **Joint Training**

- Cross train everyone involved in both continuous improvement and change management methodologies.

# Consider Proven Implementation Strategy Research

*Successful implementation occurs when explicit attention to the culture, history, values, assets, and needs of the community are integrated into the principles, strategies, frameworks, and tools of implementation science.*

- **Cultural Adaptation**
- **Trusting Relationships**
- **Critical Perspectives**
- **Community-Defined Evidence**
- **Dismantling Power Structures**
- **Audience-Informed Investments and Decision-Making**

***Stanford Social Innovation Review: Implementation at Work***

# Continuous Improvement Still Requires Cultural & Mindset Shifts

## Will

Connect improvement work to what people already care about — their students, their programs, the institution. Consider institutional culture and context.

Involve student. Always.

CI can't be imposed; it has to be owned.

## Capacity

Protect time and resources for improvement cycles. It cannot be 'in addition to' everything else, or it will stall.

Leaders must make space for the work.

It is okay to sunset efforts in higher education.

## Conditions

Create psychological safety to admit what isn't working. Improvement requires honest diagnosis.

That takes courage — and it starts with leadership modeling it.

Failing fast is learning.

SPACE

&

GRACE

# Reminder: Join Me Tomorrow!

**Applying Implementation Science & Continuous Improvement as Drivers in Institutional Transformation**

**Thursday, April 9th**

**9:00am - 9:50am or 10:00am - 10:50am**

**Live Oak - Level 4**

**Thanks!**

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