

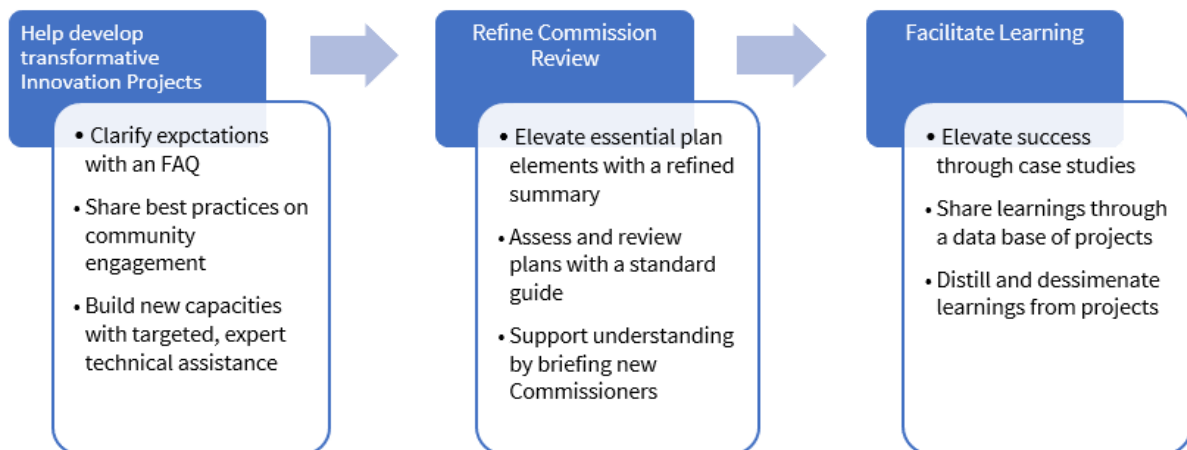
Subcommittee Discussion Guide:
Strengthening MHSOAC Innovation through a Culture of Learning and Collaboration

Summary: The Commission contracted with a team at Social Finance, a nonprofit government advisor, to better understand the challenges that counties face in developing transformative innovations, and to recommend ways to help overcome these challenges. The subcommittee is now considering a package of improvements that could help counties develop transformative innovation projects, refine the Commission’s review process, and increase the dissemination of learnings. This document distills and links proposed actions for the Subcommittee’s guidance. An updated version of this document will then be reviewed by the full Commission.

OBJECTIVES

- 1. HELP COUNTIES DEVELOP TRANSFORMATIVE INNOVATION PROJECTS:** Work with state and county partners and subject matter experts to improve understanding of the innovation process, and to provide issue-specific technical assistance and coordinate learning collaboratives on topics such as community engagement, evaluation, and sustainability.
- 2. STRENGTHEN THE COMMISSIONERS’ REVIEW PROCESS:** Work with Commission staff and Commissioners to develop tools and materials to clarify expectations among counties and Commissioners and consistently evaluate proposed projects.
- 3. FACILITATE LEARNING ACROSS AND WITHIN COUNTIES:** Work with county partners to distill and disseminate the learnings from Innovation projects through a variety of mechanisms and communication channels.

The following actions, taken together, would promote a more robust ecosystem that includes quality technical assistance, development of more effective innovation projects, an emphasis on learning and system level changes in programs and services, all focused on driving continuous improvement within and across California counties.



Catalyzing Transformational Change

The Commission's Innovation Incubator supports county efforts to improve results, and to use MHSA Innovation (INN) funds to develop, adapt or refine more effective services and supports. The Incubator is a key asset in the Commission's overall strategy to drive transformational change, as articulated in the Strategic Plan.

The Incubator deploys targeted technical assistance and facilitates learning among counties to develop INN plans and/or to build the capacity for system-scale changes and continuous improvement. The Commission has several immediate opportunities to scale this model and improve outcomes:

- The Mental Wellness Act (SB 82) could be amended so some of those funds could be used to support Incubator projects that increase crisis intervention, stabilization, treatment, rehabilitative services, and mobile crisis support teams. The experience with the Innovation Incubator suggests that funding for training, consultants, program development, pilot projects, research and analysis and other strategies may have a longer term and more systemic impact on access to care, the efficiency and effectiveness of programs, and improved outcomes.
- Fellowship programs can meaningfully increase the ability of behavioral health managers, clients and community leaders to drive improvements, increase resiliency to future disruptions, address disparities and manage transitions in leadership.
- The Early Psychosis pilot has demonstrated the ability to accelerate the transfer of knowledge from research institutions to practice, and the Incubator could be an effective way to promote new practices that prevent and reduce mental health needs.
- The Full-Service Partnership pilots demonstrated the potential for this cornerstone service system to more effectively address homelessness and other negative outcomes associated with severe mental illness. The Incubator could be a valuable means for increasing the outcomes from this \$1 billion annual investment.

Background: Strengthening MHSA Innovation

The Innovation component of the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) provides vision and funding to develop, test, scale and sustain new approaches to service delivery, with the goal of significantly improving mental health services and outcomes for all Californians.

The Commission in 2018 identified four opportunities to improve implementation of the Innovation component of the MHSA, and directed staff to develop an Innovation Incubator to promote an ecosystem that supports innovation through the following:

1. **Provide Strategic Guidance** to promote collective innovation strategies across counties and provide them with external experts who can offer advice, support, and mentoring to help them identify statewide collaboration opportunities.
2. **Support Technical Assistance and Training** to tap into California's broad innovation sector to support the innovation goals of the MHSA.
3. **Enhance Evaluation** to help California's mental health sector to better understand the need for evaluation, to build evaluation strategies into the design of innovation projects, and provide support and technical assistance for high quality, independent evaluations.
4. **Disseminate Information** to share lessons learned from individual/collective innovations to inform future projects and promote scalable and sustainable improvements.

The incubator, created in 2018 with \$5 million in one-time funding authorized by the Legislature, was designed to support county efforts in building and implementing Innovative strategies that reduce unnecessary involvement in the criminal justice system by providing more effective behavioral health responses for individuals with behavioral health needs.

The Commission saw this as an opportunity to engage a diverse set of partners, develop a business model for the incubator, and then create a portfolio of projects that advanced the Legislature's directive, while also strengthening the capacities of counties for innovation and continuous improvement.

The Commission in 2020 also launched a project with the nonprofit Social Finance to assess common barriers to developing transformative innovations, and ways the Commission can improve its approval process and support learning from innovation projects.

Social Finance conducted more than 100 interviews with behavioral health directors, stakeholder groups, consumers, Commission staff, state partners and Commissioners to understand the challenges, and opportunities to improve the MHS Innovation process. Generally, county staff said they struggle to develop innovation projects with the potential for transformational change. Innovation projects are largely seen as adaptations of existing practices, not strategically linked, and not effectively evaluated.

From an analysis of nearly 300 challenges, Social Finance consulted deeply with partners to produce recommendations in eight key areas:

1. Supplement the definition of innovation
 - a. Improve understanding of the innovation process through the creation of an FAQ and a publicly available list of innovative projects.
2. Expand and deepen technical assistance to the counties
 - a. Provide issue-specific technical assistance and consider convening an Innovation Working Group made up of individuals with diverse expertise.
3. Clarify existing expectations for project development
 - a. Revise and develop tools and materials (innovation Project Workplan and Discussion Guide) to clarify expectations among counties and commissioners.
4. Develop mechanisms for the accelerated diffusion of learnings
 - a. Distill and disseminate learnings (case studies and an enhanced database) from innovation projects through various channels.
5. Test a multi-stage approval process
 - a. Consider when and how Commissioners or the subcommittee can provide meaningful feedback early on in the process.
6. Develop a supplemental community engagement resource for counties
 - a. Identify strategies to strengthen local community engagement.
7. Publicize and clarify existing flexibilities for innovation planning
 - a. Share more broadly ways counties can use innovation funds (ex. set aside innovation funds for planning projects and joining multi-county collaboratives).
8. Develop additional orientation materials for Commissioners
 - a. To improve the Commissioners' review and approval process.

The Innovation Action Plan- (Attachment A) details each of these and is a valuable foundation of opportunities to improve the development of innovation plans at the county level and the Commission's review and support of statewide learning. The recommendations are also scored according to impact, ease of implementation and financial resources needed (Attachment B). Several of these recommendations – such as hosting an annual innovation convening and testing a multi-stage approval process – would require additional time and resources and will be revisited in the future.

Considerations for the Subcommittee

The following section identifies three objectives and priority actions for the Innovation Subcommittee to consider. Each of the actions would contribute to a specific concern raised through the consultative process. Together, the actions would promote a more robust ecosystem that includes quality technical assistance, the development of more effective innovation projects, an emphasis on learning and system level changes in programs and services, all focused on driving continuous improvement within and across California counties.

OBJECTIVE #1-Help Counties Develop Transformative Innovation Projects

The Innovation Incubator, in part, provided technical assistance to support counties in their planning and execution of innovation projects. The technical assistance improved skills in data management and analysis, system mapping and continuous quality improvement to build capacity to innovate, as well as improve overall efficiency, effectiveness and outcomes.

To improve the quality of county innovation projects, the Subcommittee should consider additional technical assistance in the areas of culturally competent community engagement, evaluation planning, performance management, and sustainability planning:

- 1. Clarify Expectations:** Develop a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document that clarifies the innovation plan requirements in the Commission's regulations. The FAQ is expected to reinforce the purpose and definition of innovation to inform the development of stronger innovation proposals to the Commission. With the involvement of the Subcommittee, this recommendation could be accomplished relatively easily with current staffing and completed within a few weeks.
- 2. Share Best Practices:** Develop together with partners a community engagement resource that:
 - a. Identifies strategies to strengthen local community engagement using local voices, perspectives and alternative strategies for developing plans, such as human-centered design and the approach Solano County took to implement culturally and linguistically appropriate standards.
 - b. Provides communications content that conveys the vision, purpose and expectations for MHSA-funded innovation projects.
 - c. Commission staff will periodically convene counties to assess the impact of this resource, the need for refinements and/or alternative approaches.

This recommendation is expected to improve community engagement efforts by supplementing them with strategies that encourage a deeper understanding of innovation and the needs of a local population. It also would create a clearer path for more focused,

culturally appropriate, and equitable solutions. This recommendation would be moderately easy to accomplish and would require additional Commission staff/time and could be completed within a few months.

- 3. Build New Capacities:** Develop in partnership with counties and subject matter experts, issue-specific technical assistance – deploying learning collaboratives, when appropriate – to build capacity for innovation and continuous quality improvement.

The expected outcome is to develop system-level capacities that ultimately enhance and improve the quality of services and the lives of those who are served. The Commission is currently fulfilling the legislative mandate to support counties in building their core capacity for innovation and provided two limited-term positions with tremendous results. To continue this work, one-two full-time positions would be needed.

This recommendation could be accomplished moderately easy with the additional staff and resources, particularly where this approach can be integrated into existing and newly funded projects and programs, such as the Mental Health Students Services Act, the Early Psychosis Learning Health Care Network and the allcove projects.

OBJECTIVE #2-Strengthen the Commissioners’ review process

The Commission is authorized to approve innovation spending for county-developed innovation projects. As part of this process, Commission staff provide feedback and technical assistance to counties as they draft projects, review plans for regulatory compliance and then prepare the projects for Commission review and approval. Given the length and number of plans, an extraordinary amount of time would be required for Commissioners to review each project in detail. As the Social Finance analysis documented, Commissioners also are concerned that the process does not produce system-scale transformational change.

In addition, county staff are uncertain regarding expectations for innovation projects, the relative importance of different project components, and what Commissioners will focus on when reviewing projects.

The Subcommittee should consider the following improvements intended to consistently elevate the elements of a plan that Commissioners seek to understand in considering approval:

- 1. Elevate Essential Elements of the Projects:** Develop a simplified Innovation Project Summary that focuses on these key questions: what is the problem, what is not working, how was the community included in developing the proposal, what is the innovation, what will be learned and evaluated, and how will the project be implemented, including budget. The Commission has made some progress encouraging a consistent description, but this tool can be further improved based on the feedback received during this project.

The expected outcome is for Commissioners to easily understand what the project is attempting to accomplish, and how the community was involved at every stage of its

development. Given the previous work on this document, this recommendation can be implemented relatively easy with current staff and could be completed within 30 days.

- 2. Assess and Review:** Develop a guide, aligned with the regulations and the summary framework completed by county staff, for the Commission and others to use when reviewing projects and the staff analyses.

The expected outcome of this guide would be to (1) have a shared understanding of the regulations, (2) align the expectations of the different project components, (3) match the descriptive summary of the innovation project and the Staff Analysis, and (4) support the Commission's discussion and deliberation of each project. This guide will also serve as a common thread that weaves the above elements to provide a consistent structure for reviewing innovation projects. This recommendation with direction from the Subcommittee, input from the Commission on its practicality, and additional staff will be moderately easy to implement. This recommendation could be created and finalized within 3-6 months.

- 3. Support Understanding:** Develop innovation-specific orientation materials to supplement the Commissioner's on-boarding process. The process would include:
 - Meeting with innovation staff to discuss the purpose of innovation, the internal process and Commissioner expectations
 - Copies of previously approved innovation plans and staff analyses
 - Refresher trainings for Commissioners when needed
 - Development of an evaluation plan in partnership with counties to assess the impact of this process, the need for refinements and/or alternative approaches.

This recommendation would help newly appointed Commissioners understand their role in and the purpose of MHSa Innovation. This recommendation with current staff and the support of additional staff to create the evaluation plan is relatively easy to implement and could be completed within 2-3 months.

OBJECTIVE #3-Facilitate learning across and within counties

Learnings from innovation projects rarely make their way across county lines, limiting the opportunity for learning and replication and adaptation by other counties. The Commission should facilitate the dissemination of the lessons learned from individual projects – as well as those involving multi-county collaboratives – to promote scalable and sustainable improvements.

The Subcommittee should consider the following implementation opportunities to accelerate the diffusion of learnings from Innovation Projects:

- 1. Elevate Successes:** Develop in partnership with counties, written case studies of stand-out practices and processes used to design and implement innovation projects that can be widely shared through various communication channels (i.e., Commission and county websites).

This recommendation would increase peer-to-peer learning and showcase best practices and processes that could be replicated and/or scaled statewide. Developing the case studies will

require additional staff, coordination with county individuals and financial resources to create public facing documents and may take 3-6 months to fully implement. In the interim, Commission staff can consider short county highlights of successful innovation projects on the Commission website.

- 2. Shared Learning:** Create, maintain, and make accessible a database of innovation projects with qualitative and quantitative outcomes, information about the population of focus, and other important elements of the project.

This recommendation would be an opportunity for shared learning, access to a repository of best practices, and innovative idea generation. A database of innovation projects is being developed but will require additional staff and time to maintain and to make publicly accessible. This could be accomplished within 6-12 months.

- 3. Distill and Disseminate:** Develop a strategy for gleaning information and insights from completed innovation projects and sharing broadly the outcomes and findings of those projects.

This recommendation is expected to focus attention on the learnings rather than just the approval of innovation projects. Although hosting an Innovation Summit was a recommendation, this would require additional staff, time and financial resources, and could be considered in the near future. To achieve similar impact and with additional staff time, the Commission can convene the counties on a quarterly basis to share learnings and best practices.

Next Steps

Based on the Subcommittee's direction, the staff will work to finalize these recommendations and prepare them for Commission review. It is recommended that the Commission provide direction to the Innovation Subcommittee to work with Commission staff to oversee the implementation of these recommendations and any future recommendations, evaluate the impact and make refinements/adjustments as necessary.

These actions if implemented, could expand county learning networks, the sharing of best practices and the hope of transforming our public mental health system.