



## **Summary of the Innovation Incubator Convening**

August 6, 2021  
10:00 AM–12:00 PM

### **Background**

The Innovation component of the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) advances transformational change of the mental health system by providing vision and funding to test novel approaches that improve outcomes for all Californians. To promote an ecosystem that supports innovation, the Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission developed the Innovation Incubator. It was created in 2018 with \$5 million in one-time funding. The Incubator was intended to support county efforts to build and implement novel strategies and provide guidance on the use of MHSA Innovation funds to develop, adapt, or refine more effective services and supports. This approach deploys targeted technical assistance and facilitates learning among counties to bolster their ability to develop Innovation projects and build the capacity for system-level changes and continuous improvement.

The Innovation Incubator Convening was organized to collect feedback from Innovation Incubator project contractors on the factors or conditions that made the technical assistance, capacity building, and continuous improvement strategies successful. This information will be used to guide the discussion in the second convening and to develop a framework for success in Incubator projects.

The convening was held on Friday, August 6, 2021 via a Zoom video call. At least one contractor from each of the Innovation Incubator projects attended the session to report out on their project and share their lessons learned. Staff organized three separate interviews over the following two weeks to gather feedback from contractors who couldn't make it to the convening. This document summarizes all of the feedback collected.

### **Convening Summary**

The participating contractors generally reported that their projects had been successful in helping counties build their capacity and implement new strategies for greater innovation and continuous improvement. Contractors identified the most important lessons learned from their projects, which fell within six overarching themes: Putting Together the Right Team, Finding the Right Partners, Planning and Building a Strong Foundation, Building the Data Infrastructure, Facilitating Frequent Engagement, and Prioritizing the Project. Contractors emphasized that it's vital to bring the right people together. First, it's important to put together the right project team, including people with lived experience, people with knowledge of how the county works at the local level, people with knowledge of the MHSA,

and/or people who understand and “speak the language” of the group or groups you’re working with. It’s also important to find the right partners, including a “champion” within the county, making connections at every level, and partnering with others who may be doing similar work.

Next, it’s necessary to put time and effort into the planning process. Contractors noted how helpful it was to set the context ahead of time, define the problem and discuss the broader vision for the project, and identify clear goals, ensuring that everyone was on the same page. They also mentioned the need to understand how the specific county or counties work, and to recognize the differing needs and challenges of counties based on factors such as size, rural vs. urban setting, and geographic location. Further, assessing and addressing capacity, technical assistance, and infrastructure needs early on can streamline the project’s later phases. Chief amongst these needs are those related to data infrastructure; contractors should make sure to bring the right resources (including people) to collect, store, and use data, as the counties may not have the systems or the people in place to work with data. Along with infrastructure related to working with data, there is a need for a central location where data and other resources and lessons learned can be shared across counties.

Contractors also noted the importance of engaging with the community, staff, and stakeholders. Engagement should start early on (including in the planning phases) and happen regularly (e.g., bi-weekly, monthly). It should also include a diverse range of stakeholders and perspectives, including peers and those with lived experience.

Finally, contractors spoke of the need for counties to carve out dedicated staff time and resources to dedicate to the project. It may be helpful to leverage leadership to get commitment to the project (e.g., asking for a recommendation from the governor or county leadership to participate in the project). Keeping the project’s requirements and standards high can also help maintain the project’s value and motivate staff to participate in a meaningful way.

## Contractor Feedback

### Themes Identified from Convening

- Putting Together the Right Team
  - Include diverse perspectives, people with lived experience, people with knowledge of how the county works at the local level, and people with MHSOAC knowledge.
  - Include people who understand and “speak the language” of the particular group(s) you’re working with (e.g., government, law enforcement).
- Finding the Right Partners
  - Find a strong touchpoint and project advocate (or “champion”) within the county.
  - Be intentional in making connections at every level, including leadership.

- Partner with other departments, organizations, and advocacy groups who may be doing similar work.
- Planning and Building a Strong Foundation
  - Start with a broad vision and building a roadmap.
  - Set the context and understand how the project fits with other projects, programs, and systems; define the problem; and set specific and achievable goals.
  - Understand how the specific county works.
  - Recognize the differing needs and challenges of different counties (based on size, urban vs. rural, geographic location, etc.).
  - Assess and address capacity, technical assistance, and infrastructure needs early on (including with Innovation planning funds).
- Building the Data Infrastructure
  - Create a central location for cross-county sharing of lessons learned and resources.
  - Build or bring the right infrastructure and resources (including people) to support the collection and use of data.
  - Implement standardization at the state level but leave room for flexibility at the county level.
- Facilitating Frequent Engagement
  - Engage the community early and often.
  - Build in regular, consistent engagement with project and county staff and stakeholders.
- Prioritizing the Project
  - Encourage counties to carve out dedicated staff time and resources for the project.
  - Leveraging leadership to increase commitment to the project.

## Post-Convening Feedback

A post-convening feedback survey was conducted immediately following the convening. A link to the survey was sent via email to each contractor the afternoon of August 6, 2021. Six responses were collected between August 6, 2021 and August 11, 2021.

Survey participants agreed that the convening was either “very valuable” (50%) or “extremely valuable” (50%). All six participants agreed or strongly agreed that:

- They were able to participate in the convening in a meaningful way.
- The convening was well-organized.
- Communications about the convening were sufficient.
- They were able to share important information during the convening.
- They gained valuable information from other participants at the convening.



However, participants noted that the convening may not have offered sufficient opportunities to engage with other participants (33% indicated “neither agree nor disagree”) or with MHSOAC staff and facilitators (17% indicated “neither agree nor disagree” and 17% indicated “disagree”). Open-ended feedback supported these findings. Participants requested more time for each project to give background information and report out on project progress, and more opportunities for group discussion.