

Elevating Family Input in TANF and Child Support Programs

2: What Do We Mean by Program Improvement?

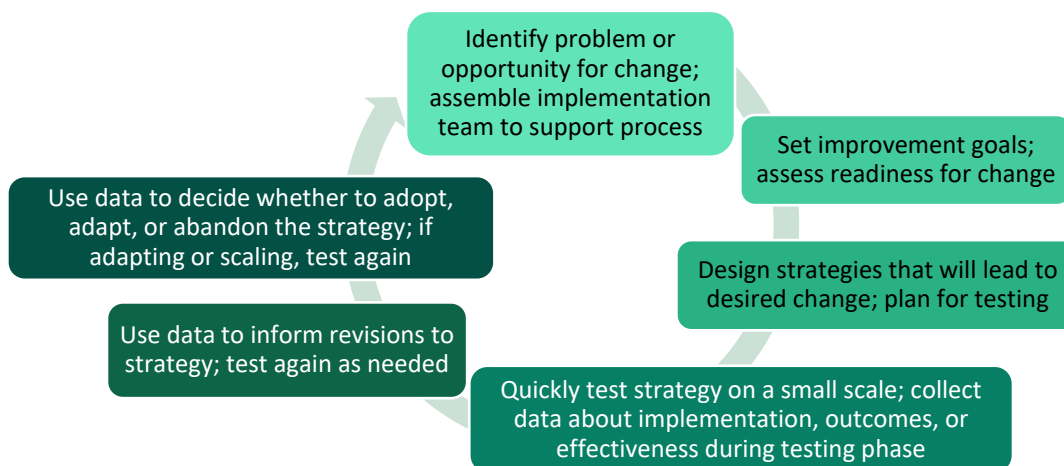
Program improvement refers to a systematic change process designed to lead to measurable improvements in program outcomes, effectiveness, efficiency, performance, and accountability.¹ Any time a program’s staff or leaders want to make a change that they believe will move outcomes in a positive direction—for example, improved family or staff experience, streamlined processes, or better outcomes—they engage in a change process.

Also sometimes called *continuous quality improvement*,² program improvement is:

- ✓ **Systematic:** no matter the change, program leaders and staff typically follow the same process to plan for, test, and evaluate the change
- ✓ **Inclusive:** staff at all levels and people the change might impact are part of the change process
- ✓ **Cyclical:** often, changes are tested, revised, and retested until they work well or achieve the desired outcomes
- ✓ **Data-driven:** deciding what to change and testing the change provide opportunities to collect data, which program leaders and staff use to inform their next steps
- ✓ **Capacity-building:** people involved in the process can learn analytic methods and access leadership opportunities by participating in committees or workgroups that lead the change effort

Exhibit 2.1 shows what activities program improvement cycles typically include.

Exhibit 2.1. Typical elements of a program improvement cycle³



You can explore the following frameworks to learn more about program improvement processes: [Plan, Do, Study, Act](#); [Breakthrough Series Collaborative](#); and [Learn, Innovate, Improve](#).

¹ The DaSy Center. “[Program Improvement](#).” 2022.

² The National Learning Consortium. “[Continuous Quality Improvement \(CQI\) Strategies to Optimize your Practice](#).” 2013.

³ This original graphic draws on three program improvement frameworks ([Plan, Do, Study, Act](#); [Breakthrough Series Collaborative](#); and [Learn, Innovate, Improve](#)) to summarize common elements.

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