Learn, Innovate, Improve:

A Toolkit to help family-serving organizations leadership pursue innovation

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What is this toolkit?

This toolkit is **a step-by-step guide to addressing program challenges with the Learn, Innovate, Improve (LI^2) approach**. It contains resources and tools to help you carry out each step.

Box 1. About Agape Child & Family Services

Agape Child & Family Services a community- and faith-based organization in Memphis, Tennessee, that seeks to address poverty's effects on whole families. Its integrated whole-family service delivery model, called 2Gen, includes seven initiatives related to school, work, mental health, domestic violence, faith formation, family strengthening, and basic needs. Together, these initiatives are designed to meet the needs of families in three Memphis communities. The core of Agape's practice model is a principle it calls Voice and Choice: families are the experts in their goals, and Agape's role is to walk alongside families to help them set meaningful goals and access services to achieve them.

Why was it created?

Mathematica created this toolkit in partnership with Agape as part of a partnership between the two organizations and the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The partnership has used LI^2 (Box 2) to help Agape improve its ability to respond to family and community needs and address topics key to its family-focused approach to service delivery. who set a priority on evolving as a learning organization by testing adopting LI2 as an approach to improvement and innovation. It shares insights from the partnership on using LI^2 to improve practice and make change in family serving organizations.

Box 2. What is LI^2

LI^2 has three phases:

Learn: Identify the challenge. In this first step, staff agree on a challenge to focus on and explore its causes.

Innovate: Co-create strategies to address the challenge you prioritized in the Learn phase. Get input from staff and participants and consult accessible research to inform ideas for improvement.

Improve: Pilot the strategies, analyze information, and plan next steps. Carry out a pilot—an opportunity to try out a new idea on a small scale before committing to it. Piloting, sometimes referred to as road testing, is low stakes and allows staff to work out the kinks with a new strategy before rolling it out. After piloting, analyze data and feedback from the test to inform refinement and plan next steps.

Learn more about LI^2 here.

Who is this toolkit for?

Executive leadership and program leadership. The latter includes program directors, site coordinators, and supervisors. This toolkit aims to help these leadership members carry out innovation and strategic efforts, such as the following:

- **Supporting agency expansion.** The framework can support a family-serving organization's plans to expand into new neighborhoods collaboratively and systematically or deepen the agency's presence in existing ones.
- **Revising policies and procedures.** Leadership can use the framework to collaborate with staff to update and improve the agency's policies and procedures.
- **Undertaking strategic planning.** Strategic planning is most successful when collaborators across the agency have input into the agency's vision. LI^2 presents a roadmap for supporting collaborative planning at each step.
- **Piloting innovative ideas.** LI^2 provides a process for undertaking new ideas in a collaborative and systematic way.

How is this toolkit different from the challenge toolkit?

This toolkit focuses on innovations and agencywide efforts, which are often more complex than program challenges. LI^2 does not have a set entry point. Unlike the toolkit to help address program challenges, this toolkit assumes a different starting place: a program, initiative, idea, or policy is ready to pilot. This difference means you would start at the Improve phase. However, if the innovation does not work as expected, you might step back to the Learn phase to further study the problem you are trying to address.

Box 3. Family-Serving Organizations and two-generation approaches

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation defines a *family-serving organization* as one that centers caregivers and their children in the services it delivers. Whereas a traditional direct-service organization might focus on one service area, a family-serving organization takes a cross-cutting and holistic view of service provision. It considers how the goals and needs of an adult in a family interact with the goals and needs of the children—and how services can be designed to meet both sets of needs.

The concept of a family-serving organization aligns with a *two-generation approach*, as defined by Ascend at the Aspen Institute. Two-generation approaches are grounded in the recognition that the needs of children and their caregivers are interconnected and interdependent. Organizations with a two-generation approach aim to integrate child and caregiver services to improve whole-family well-being. In doing so, they can achieve stronger outcomes than child or caregiver services alone.

Two-generation and family-serving organizations can shift systems from a services orientation to a family orientation. They center families' voices in the design and delivery of services. By treating families as experts, these organizations gain the necessary perspective to identify and fill gaps in services and help families achieve their goals.

Source: Boisvert et al. (2024), Ascend at the Aspen Institute (2025)

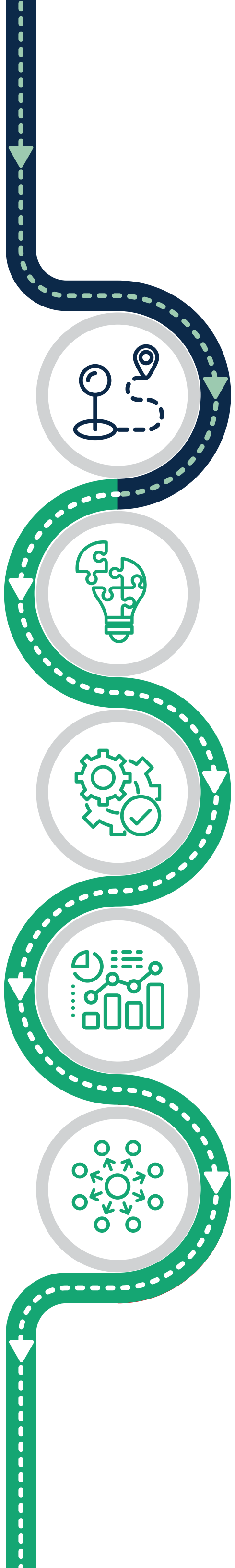
How do we use this toolkit?

Below are some guidelines and considerations for using this toolkit:

> **Box 4. The Rapid cycle Learning Process**
>
> 1. **Learn:** Understand the challenge to inform strategy ideas
> 2. **Innovate:** Co-create improvement strategies
> 3. **Improve:** Pilot strategies, reflect, and plan next steps

1. **This toolkit walks you through the key steps for using LI^2 to support innovation.** It starts with defining the new idea that is being tested; pulling together a team; and, finally, planning, carrying out, and reflecting on a pilot. Box 4 outlines this rapid cycle learning approach. The approach is not linear because a team can start at any step and jump back, as needed. For example, if the agency or a program already has an idea to pilot, you can start at Improve. But if the idea does not work as expected, the team may need to return to the Learn phase to better understand the challenge, its root causes, and its effects. Use the toolkit to help you test your innovation on a small scale. For example, when you have a new idea to roll out, first try piloting it in one program or with a few staff before rolling out agencywide.
2. **The roadmap after this introduction is your navigator.** It provides a high-level overview of the rapid cycle learning process. Click the icons at each step to jump to the relevant section with more information.
3. **Each section in the toolkit contains instructions for implementing the steps and clickable resources with more information to guide specific activities for the steps.** For example, a key part of the Improve phase, planning for and executing your pilot, is determining the learning questions that will guide data collection. The toolkit includes a resource to help you develop strong learning questions. Some of the clickable resources are videos, and others are documents in print. Most are publicly available resources, but some are internally developed and can be found in the appendices.
4. **The toolkit includes a case study about how Agape used LI^2 to pilot the Families Forward Well-Being initiative.** This initiative aims to support participants with financial planning and budgeting. The case study (Appendix A) describes Agape's experience piloting Families Forward Well-Being and its considerations for future expansion.
5. **Each section has a "Notes" page to support reflection.** You may use this toolkit as a guide or a workbook. If you want to try applying tips to your innovation or strategic idea, use the Notes pages to document thoughts relevant to your innovation as you go.

Roadmap



Starting place: Determine who should be involved in the improvement effort

Change is often easier when shaped by multiple perspectives because different people bring different experiences and ideas about how things can improve. Involving staff who work directly with participants and community members in planning and piloting innovation helps to promote their buy-in and investment in the innovation. An effective way to bring others into the change process is to form an implementation team with individuals in different roles—such as program leadership, case workers, and partners—to oversee the effort. A dedicated team also helps to ensure that specific individuals are tasked with carrying the work forward so the initiative does not get dropped if other priorities emerge. See this Implementation Teams resource for more guidance about teams, including reasons for creating a team, what to consider when putting one together, and how to get off to a good start.

Who should be on the team?

Identify key collaborators for the improvement effort. Stakeholder mapping is a human-centered design activity that is useful for identifying who should be involved in a change effort. Think about who is involved with or affected by the challenge that the innovation is trying to address. Stakeholder mapping is versatile; using it to identify an improvement team—which may include case workers, participants, program partners, or community members—to support a specific innovation effort is one way to apply the activity. To consider targeted questions that can help to determine necessary perspectives to include on the team, see this worksheet.

How do we use our meeting time?

Use structured activities to encourage participation. To facilitate broad participation and reduce the influence of power dynamics, use facilitation techniques for team conversations. The list below suggests applications for different human-centered design activities, though most are broadly applicable. For example, rose, thorn, bud is helpful for reflecting on experiences in the program and identifying challenges, but you can use it for any group reflection or even as an icebreaker for team members to share personal stories.

- Think through and map out your idea or prototype to be clear about what is being tested → concept map
- Reflect on a pilot of your innovation → rose, thorn, bud
- Consider how a client or staff member experiences an innovation → journey mapping
- Facilitate collaborative data analysis → What? So what? Now what?

Share an agenda. Agendas help team members know how they can prepare for the meeting, such as by pre-thinking about the innovation. Develop an agenda with your team and distribute it before meetings. Here is an example of an agenda.

How can we consider multiple perspectives in this step?

The "Championing Change" guide provides detailed information and resources about how to consider multiple perspectives when conducting rapid cycle learning. Review pages 4–9 of the guide. See Box 5 for high-level reflection questions that are relevant to this step.

Box 5. Considering multiple perspectives when developing and partnering with a team

- Which groups are most affected by the issues the innovation addresses? Are they involved in the effort?
- Is everyone who has been identified as a key collaborator being authentically engaged in thinking through and piloting the program change?

Notes

What reflections, ideas, or questions do you have about developing and facilitating meetings with a team to support the improvement effort? For an innovation you are planning or hoping to pilot, who needs to be part of the initiative, and how will you bring them on board?

Learn/Innovate: Ensure your innovation addresses the challenge and document the pilot

You already have an idea or plan that you want to pilot, but you should still spend time up front thinking about the challenge that the innovation is addressing and roughly defining the idea, to be clear about what you are testing. Before you launch a pilot, if you have not taken these steps already, or if you want to confirm that your idea addresses the right thing, spend a little time completing activities associated with the Learn and Innovate phases to ensure you are ready to launch.

Does the innovation make sense? (Learn)

Check that the innovation logically addresses the challenge. Because you already have an idea for an innovation, you've skipped learning about the challenge (Learn phase) and brainstorming ideas to address it (Innovate). The assumption is that you have already dug into the challenge, which is what led you to develop your innovation. If you have not spent enough time learning about the challenge, though, unpack it a little more. For instance, the problem tree exercise is a popular and useful tool for a group to break down high-level challenges into root causes or key drivers (Note: in addition to the worksheet at the link above, the problem tree exercise is described in Championing Change). As you complete the exercise, consider the following: (1) Does the innovation address a root cause? (2) If not, what challenge is it addressing? (3) Is it still important to move forward with this innovation, or does the team need to co-create a different idea? The Document Your Prototype worksheet (Appendix B) can also help you assess whether your innovation addresses the challenge. Appendix A of this brief contains another worksheet that can be used to develop a strategy.

We've confirmed the innovation aligns with the challenge. Is it time to pilot? (Learn)

Before piloting, ensure the agency or program is ready for change. Have you considered barriers to change yet? If not, engage in an activity to consider whether the agency is prepared for this change. One such activity is this readiness assessment, which helps organizations consider whether key ingredients that support change are in place and think about potential challenges and barriers ahead of time. This is an activity you would typically do during the Learn phase when you are trying to understand the challenge. For more information, this readiness brief explores components that indicate an organization is ready to implement evidence-based interventions.

We've assessed readiness for change! Are we ready to pilot? (Innovate)

Ensure you are clear on what you are testing and what you need to learn. The idea of a pilot is to flesh out a strategy, so you are not expected to know all the details about how to implement a strategy before a test. But defining the components of the innovation helps the team to (1) be clear about what you are testing and (2) identify questions or parts of the strategy that are still unclear. For example, a key question for the Families Forward pilot was, is the participant stipend an essential component of the model, or can the model still support positive outcomes without it? To document your initial idea and make it concrete and specific, use the Document Your Prototype worksheet. Next, review your documentation and consider your questions about what you need to learn in your pilot. If you have considered these questions, then you are ready to pilot and move on to the next section of the toolkit (Improve)!

How can we consider different experiences in this step?

The "Championing Change" guide has information about gathering different perspectives when assessing readiness for change ("Phase 1. Understand your program's opportunities") and accounting for potential disparities when clarifying your strategy ("Phase 2. Co-create strategies"). See Box 6 for high-level reflection questions about this step.

Box 6. Considering different experiences when developing a prototype

- Beyond the logic of the idea, consider how the change might affect different groups—for instance, does it have the potential to negatively affect one group while benefitting others?
- Has the team considered alternative approaches to reducing disparities?

Notes

What reflections, ideas, or questions do you have about how to ensure your innovation aligns with the challenge or to assess readiness for change? If you completed these steps for an innovation, what are the root causes of the focal challenge? How does your innovation address these key drivers?

Improve: Plan and execute a pilot of the strategy

After closely thinking about an innovation, consider where or with whom to pilot, how long to pilot, and the pilot's learning goals and data collection activities.

How do we get started with piloting?

Define what success looks like for the team. Before piloting, define what success looks like by setting a goal. Without a goal, you have no way of assessing success. Rapid cycle learning efforts do not prove that strategies are successful. If a strategy helps you reach your goal or make progress toward it, the strategy is likely worth keeping! For help writing a strong improvement goal, see this template (email required for download). If you need help developing a goal, think about the work you did in the Learn phase —what overarching challenge are you trying to address? What data would show you're making progress on that challenge?

Plan your pilot and outline key components. A pilot will help you implement your innovation or, after initial implementation, tweak the idea to improve the strategy. Use a road test planning template (see Appendix B in the resource, starting on page 22) to support this step and document key components of testing.

Frame learning goals by developing learning questions. Learning questions focus on implementation and outcomes—not just "What happened?" but also "How did it happen?" Look at the prototype that your team mapped out in the earlier step and consider what you are uncertain about. Create learning questions for anything you are uncertain about. Exhibit 11 in the Championing Change guide includes some examples of learning questions.

Use learning questions to guide a plan to gather data and feedback. Based on the team's questions, identify appropriate data collection activities. The Road Test Planning Template has questions to help pair activities with question types.

How can we successfully execute the pilot?

Consider people's roles and responsibilities. A pilot has two parts that require oversight. First, someone should be responsible for overseeing the implementation of the strategy. Their role may require training staff to implement it properly or ensure the program has necessary materials. Second, someone should oversee data collection. Their responsibility entails carrying out data activities, like conducting surveys or interviews (see the resource box "Need help with data collection?"). As an organizational or program leader, will you oversee the pilot or delegate to someone else, such as a supervisor or manager? If you will delegate the responsibility for conducting the pilot, explore tips for supporting staff to execute a successful pilot.

Resource: Need help with data collection?

The following resources can help you plan and conduct data collection activities:

- Survey tip sheet (Appendix C)
- Conducting focus groups or interviews
- High-quality observations

Create a data collection plan. Collecting data and feedback is essential for understanding how the innovation worked and how to improve it. A data collection plan and timeline or calendar will help ensure data activities are carried out on schedule. For each activity, note when data collection will happen, who is responsible for overseeing it, and any materials needed.

Iterate on the strategy and implementation as you go. Don't wait until the end of a pilot to reflect on how implementation is going. Review data as they come in and make changes as needed.

How can we consider multiple perspectives in this step?

The "Championing Change" guide ("Phase 3. Refine the strategies and reflect on progress") can help you identify approaches for piloting your strategy with people who have a range of experiences. See Box 7 for high-level tips.

Box 7. Considering multiple perspectives when testing strategies

- Make necessary adjustments to workloads for staff involved with piloting.
- Ask learning questions about how the innovation works for different groups, not just overall.
- Collect data that capture a range of perspectives.

Notes

What reflections, ideas, or questions do you have about piloting? If you have an innovation in mind, what is your plan for piloting? How long will you pilot? What data will you collect?

Improve: Analyze data and plan next steps

After piloting, review the data and feedback you collected and decide about the next steps. Remember, the goal of piloting is to determine how to make the innovation better rather than to decide whether the innovation is effective or not. The team's decision should focus on whether the innovation is feasible, how to improve it, and whether it seems promising enough to continue on a small scale. However, after the pilot, consider the improvement goals you set as part of piloting to determine whether outcomes are headed in the right direction and whether the innovation is worth scaling. After you have evidence that the program is working as intended and monitoring demonstrates positive outcomes, your team may consider formal evaluation. For guidance on designing and conducting an evaluation, review the Program Manager's Guide to Evaluation (Third Edition).

We piloted the innovation. What do we do with our data?

Analyze the data to pull out insights. Draw insights from pilot data using the learning questions you developed in the prior step and the high-level reflection questions. The reflection questions in the second half of this tip sheet can be used to reflect on successes and challenges with the test and transform these insights into concrete next steps. If you conducted a focus group or interview, review those transcripts or notes and identify key themes. This tutorial shows you how to use comments in Microsoft Word to organize themes, like "challenges," "successes," and "opportunities for improvement."

Determine key findings, takeaways, and corresponding refinements. To analyze the data as a group, try the What? So what? Now what? facilitation technique. If sharing data with a group, such as the implementation team, be sure to share in an accessible way. Alternatively, use a program like Google Forms to collect the data because it compiles and presents the data for you.

What are the next steps?

Reflect on findings. Use your data to reflect on challenges, successes, and opportunities during the test. This is another point at which the rose, thorn, bud activity can be helpful to support group reflection on the pilot. Decide whether to adopt the innovation; adapt it and retest; or abandon it, if the test reveals it is not feasible or not promising. Remember, in a pilot, the team is mainly reflecting on implementation experiences, as opposed to outcomes.

Resource: Do you need to conduct multiple cycles?

Your goal in a pilot is to get the strategy to a place where it is ready to be scaled to others but **don't rush the process!** You may need to pilot a few times to see how refinements are working or try it in a new context, like a new program, before you decide it's ready to scale. Use the What's next? tool for an unstructured reflection, or use this worksheet or a decision tree for a more structured reflection

Don't forget to return to your learning questions from piloting. Your learning questions state what you hoped to learn from the pilot, so bring them back for the reflection to ensure you have answered all of them. If you collected data from multiple sources during the pilot, such as case workers and participants, reviewing data across sources can be a challenge. To make the process easier, try a tool like a synthesis matrix to organize findings by your learning questions.

How can we consider multiple perspectives in this step?

You can use the "Championing Change" guide ("Phase 3. Refine the strategies and reflect on progress") to find ways to involve people from different backgrounds in analyzing and interpreting data. See Box 8 for high-level ideas.

Box 8. Considering multiple perspectives when planning next steps

- Analyze data to clarify how strategies worked for different people/groups within your pilot.
- Partner with people who are affected by your program when analyzing data, particularly to help contextualize results.

Notes

What reflections, ideas, or questions do you have about analyzing data and planning next steps? If you piloted an innovation, what were your key insights from the pilot? What are your next steps?

Assess readiness for scaling

If you've piloted the innovation a few times, worked out kinks, and collected data that support positive outcomes, you may be ready to scale agencywide or beyond. SCALER is a checklist that helps teams to assess readiness for scaling.

How do we know we're ready to scale?

Make sure the innovation is well defined. To scale an innovation with fidelity, users need a detailed guide to implementation. Take your prototype that the team defined and flesh it out based on what you learned. Everything your team learned through piloting should be documented. Importantly, a well-defined innovation should document the core components of the innovation/model, meaning the parts that must be in place to achieve desired outcomes. In the prototype document, you may have specified the different parts of your strategy. What did you learn from the pilot and monitoring about what is an essential part of your model? A logic model can help you develop a well-defined intervention.

Collect good outcome data. When scaling, you must have good data to support sustaining and expanding it. Satisfaction data alone are not enough to justify scaling: you want to determine whether the model changes attitudes or behaviors or even long-term outcomes. How did you define success in the pilot step? Which data will tell you the innovation appears to be supporting success? Satisfaction data are a good measure to use in a pilot to tell you whether an idea is worth continuing and trying the innovation in other programs. But to scale agencywide or commit to an idea long term, you need to know that the innovation is supporting progress toward the overall goal defined in the pilot step. For a complex innovation, it can be helpful to build out a theory of change. These templates support thinking through a theory of change. See Box 9 for a high-level example.

Box 9. Example theory of change

Idea: New agency-level staff training on motivational interviewing

Desired outcomes: Staff satisfaction with training → (leads to knowledge change) Increased knowledge of motivational interviewing → (leads to behavior change) Use of motivational interviewing with clients → (leads to participant outcomes) Improved client outcomes

When to scale agencywide? When you have outcome data that supports improved client outcomes

Do we need to evaluate the innovation?

At a minimum, the team should monitor the desired outcomes to demonstrate the model is successful. Depending on how high stakes the decision to scale is (for example, whether the innovation is resource intensive or a high-profile initiative), consider whether formal evaluation is necessary. A formal evaluation could include an implementation study to assess whether the model is being implemented as intended, a descriptive outcomes study to examine whether it supports positive outcomes, or an impact study to demonstrate its effectiveness. Note that an impact study should only happen after it is clear the innovation is being well implemented consistently and it demonstrates positive outcomes. This brief describes different types of evaluations for two-generation approaches and the types of questions they can answer.

How can we consider fairness and differential outcomes in this step?

You can use the "Championing Change" guide ("Looking ahead") to find reflection questions to determine next steps that are fair for all. What works for one group might not work in the same way for another, so it is often important to do several pilots before scaling to understand what works for whom and under what circumstances. See Box 10 for high-level tips.

Box 10. Considering fairness and differential outcomes when scaling

- Even if you have solid outcome data that support the innovation, be intentional about collecting outcome data that clearly demonstrate whether and how the model works for different groups and in different contexts.
- Make plans to continue to check in and course correct as needed. The pilot is over, but you may still collect feedback to assess how the innovation is working over time, especially if your data do not support sustained success.

Notes

What reflections, ideas, or questions do you have about scaling your innovation? If you piloted an innovation, what are your plans for scaling?

Learning more about rapid cycle learning and LI^2

This toolkit provides an overview of using LI^2 to innovate in family-serving organizations. If you're interested in learning more, you can start by reviewing any of the following resources:

- "Championing Change" covers tips and considerations for improvement efforts that involve those affected by a change are engaged in its design and execution.
- "Learn, Innovate, Improve: A Practice Guide for Enhancing Programs and Improving Lives" is a comprehensive guide for using LI2. It contains activities and considerations for each phase and contains a road test template.
- Rapid Learning Methods to Examine and Improve Social Programs is an online brief that links to additional resources about different rapid learning methods.

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Appendix A. Using LI^2 to Refine and Scale an Innovation

Introduction

Agencies are constantly changing to adapt to emerging needs and changing contexts. This toolkit focuses on using Learn, Innovate, Improve (LI^2) to roll out new initiatives or innovative ideas in an intentional and collaborative way. To illustrate this process, this case study describes Agape's experience piloting and scaling the Families Forward Well-Being model, an initiative to support participants with financial management and budgeting. Although Agape piloted the model independently, Mathematica joined the effort in fall 2023 to partner with the team on scaling. Lessons learned in this case study emerged from discussions during LI^2 coaching calls between 2023-2024 and are supported by research on scaling.

The first section describes the initial pilot and outstanding questions after the pilot. The second section shares lessons learned about scaling, based on the Families Forward experience.

LI^2 in practice: A process for scaling

The Families Forward Well-Being model emerged out of recognition that participants had needs that were hard for case workers, called "Connectors," across programs to meet, given that budgeting and financial topics are not their specific areas of expertise. Agape decided to pilot the model on a small scale first to see how it worked before implementing it more broadly.

The initial pilot

Given that agency staff were not sure how participants would receive the pilot, the first pilot focused on assessing satisfaction with the program. The agency recruited 11 participants from the Family Connector program and tested a monthly financial workshop series that occurred over four months, partnering with Simmons Bank to deliver the curriculum. Mathematica partnered with Agape after the pilot to reflect on what staff felt supported success. Box A1 shares the core components, or essential parts, that staff felt were necessary to support positive changes.

To learn about how the model worked, agency staff developed a data collection plan that involved administering a feedback survey and facilitating in-

Box A1. Core components identified in the initial Families Forward pilot

Core components are aspects of a program model that are thought to be necessary to support desired outcomes. Staff identified the following core components after the initial pilot.

- Workshops led by facilitators with money management expertise
- Cohort model to foster community
- Stipend to support participation
- Financial coaching to allow one-on-one discussions related to the content
- Goal setting related to financial management via Connectors

person check-ins after the series concluded. Data showed the participants were very satisfied with the program and experienced changes in attitudes and behaviors related to the content taught in the workshop. For example, participants shared that they learned "you have to prepare for big ticket purchases," and that "credit is more important than money." In a 9-month follow-up survey, participants shared that they had changed behaviors related to money management. For example, survey responses included: "As a single mom, I struggle a great deal, but taking everything I've learned—especially that first gem of saving $40 every two weeks—has become a natural habit."

Advancing the model

Although the pilot revealed enough to know the financial model was promising, it prompted new questions, as outlined below.

Does the model support positive financial outcomes related to credit and savings?

Satisfaction with the model was high, and the agency saw positive developments related to shifts in attitudes and behaviors. Participants did not, however, achieve financial management outcomes. Staff, in collaboration with participants, set three key outcomes for participants in the pilot: (1) increase credit score by at least 100 points in 12 months; (2) save at least $1,000 in 12 months; and (3) maintain a monthly budget. Staff were only able to collect 9-month data for 6 of 11 participants; thus, data quality did not support fully assessing the outcome. Of those who responded, none had achieved the credit or savings milestones, and a few indicated they were keeping monthly budgets.

Next steps. A key next step for Agape was to develop a logic model, using the core components identified in the pilot as activities and considering appropriate outcomes that align with those activities. Staff could use the logic model to guide a more detailed data collection plan in future learning cycles, focusing not just on long-term outcomes but also key outputs and short-term outcomes. Developing a comprehensive data collection plan would allow the team to gather information about more immediate outcomes, while also thinking proactively about how to overcome challenges of long-term data collection. To understand how to support sustained outcomes, the agency could experiment with different options. In fact, in a second learning cycle, Agape planned to study an option to offer post-program supports through partners, which could promote sustained outcomes.

If funding is not sustainable, are there other strategies Agape can use to promote retention?

In the initial pilot, participants received a stipend of about $500 a month, mostly to help stabilize them from life emergencies so they could focus on budgeting and financial management. Also, the stipend provided participants with money they could use to practice saving and see the results of their decisions. The pilot showed that the stipend helped to promote retention. In considering scaling the model to additional participants across the agency, staff questioned whether funding would remain available to support a stipend or incentive.

Next steps. Agape remains committed to identifying additional funding for a stipend. But in the second learning cycle, they will explore a new incentive model that acts more as a completion incentive and less as a stabilization support. For example, participants who complete the program and achieve the expected outcomes (that is, they increase their credit score by 30 points by the end of the program and save at least $300 by the end of the program) could receive the incentive.

What does the model look like if embedded into regular case management?

The initial pilot was small and cohort-based, which was part of its success. But if the model were scaled, a key aim would be to support all participants with their money management needs. Staff considered different models that would support greater reach, including an embedded model within programs rather than a standalone cohort that supports a select few.

Next steps. In March 2024, staff turnover required that a new team take responsibility for shepherding the scaling effort. Given this staff transition, the new team planned to pilot again in the Family Connector program and mostly maintain fidelity to the initial model.

Internal delivery could expand capacity to deliver the program agencywide, which would support scaling and sustainability, but does the internal model support desired outcomes?

The initial pilot relied on a partnership between Simmons Banks and Agape that leveraged the financial expertise of Simmons Bank and the relationships that Agape staff had with participants. After the pilot, Agape staff were trained on a money management curriculum, with an aim to teach the workshops internally, without involvement from Simmons or other partners.

Next steps. In a second learning cycle, Agape planned to explore this question, as internal staff would deliver the workshops directly.

Lessons learned and implications

The process of phasing in the Families Forward model, tweaking, and experimenting over time allows staff to learn about what works best throughout the agency before committing to a single approach that may not work for all. Through piloting and scaling discussions, Mathematica and Agape noted the following lessons learned about supporting a scaling effort.

1. **You need good data to make informed decisions.** Data collection for the pilot showed that participants were very satisfied with the program. It did not, however, demonstrate whether the pilot supported positive financial management outcomes. In fact, focusing purely on satisfaction during an initial pilot makes sense, because a program that does not generate high satisfaction would not be worth scaling, regardless of outcomes. But evidence of positive outcomes will eventually be needed to support scaling.

   Strategies to support solid data collection:

   - Teams should create a data collection plan before going into testing that makes it clear what is being collected, from whom, by whom, and when. A plan is especially important when the agency needs to collect long-term, follow-up data. For instance, if a program needs data from participants 12 months after participation ends, they should consider how they will collect that data for participants who are and are not involved with a program or another Agape program.
   - To support these efforts, consider efficient and low-burden data collection first. For example, after long-term data collection challenges in the Families Forward pilot, staff considered whether building data collection into the goal-setting process that Connectors already use with clients might be more effective than using a survey for collecting outcomes..
   - In many cases, monitoring outcomes short-term to inform timely decision-making and long-term to demonstrate positive changes should be enough to justify scaling. For complex or high-stakes

initiatives, however, more formal evaluations may be necessary to justify additional resources. This might mean conducting an impact evaluation. Rapid-cycle evaluation is a method that pairs rigorous evaluation techniques and short, iterative cycles, like those you complete through LI^2, to produce evidence in a timely way to inform decision making. It could also mean conducting 1) an implementation evaluation to ensure the model is being consistently implemented and to learn more about adaptations or 2) an outcomes evaluation to bring more rigorous methods to bear to support the initiative, as compared to program monitoring. To explore more resources on scaling readiness, see the SCALER checklists or the Assess Readiness for Scaling section of this toolkit.

2. **Consistency and continuity are key to supporting scaling.** One staff champion oversaw and implemented the Families Forward pilot. When this individual left the agency, a new team had to come in and get up to speed to continue the work. In fact, agency staff decided to test a similar model in the same program for the second learning cycle, partly to allow the new team to get caught up.

   Strategy to support continuity:

   - Staff turnover is unavoidable. Given this, create an implementation team to oversee initiatives. Using a team approach guards against having to start over when staff leave. Because of the iterative nature of rapid testing, staff continuity is critical, so lessons learned from one test are applied to the next. For more on implementation teams, see this tip sheet from the National Implementation Resource Network (NIRN) or review Starting Place: Determine who will support the innovation.

3. **The goal of scaling is not only to determine what works, but what works for whom and when.** Programs across family-serving organizations have different contexts, participants, staff, and goals. As a result, you would expect a model that works well in one program to work differently in another. The goal of scaling is to learn, over time, about how to adapt initiatives or models to fit different programs while still maintaining fidelity to the core components.

   Strategy to support adaptation and flexibility:

   - Be intentional about documenting core components, lessons learned, necessary adaptations, and experiences along the way. Use a tool like the Roadmap for Change (see Appendix A in the linked guide) to document a plan for the initial model and update the roadmap after each learning cycle based on what you learn.
   - It is critical to document outstanding questions after each learning cycle. What does the program still need to learn? These learning questions may change after each cycle, as some questions get answered and others become less relevant. Recognize that the team may have several outstanding questions after a pilot. You do not need to answer all these questions in the next cycle. For example, as noted above, staff overseeing the second learning cycle for the Families Forward model chose to focus the cycle primarily on one aspect, which was having internal staff deliver the program. Choose one or a few questions to focus on and document the others for the team to return to later.

The Families Forward scaling effort is ongoing. This case study captures just the start of the effort but is intended to illustrate the benefit of intentional and collaborative scaling to grow a promising model successfully.

Appendix B. Document Your Prototype

You can use this tool to document the prototype of your innovation, including thinking through why you are developing the idea and how it addresses your challenges. This tool also assists with creating a high-level sketch of the plan to pilot test. The tool supports the Learn and Innovate phases of the LI^2 process.

Questions to answer

Use the steps below to guide you in documenting your prototype. For each idea or innovation, create a new copy of this tool to document your plans.

Step 1. Describe the innovation

What is your innovation? How will it work?

What is the high-level challenge or improvement opportunity your innovation seeks to address? Explain in one sentence. You will consider the challenge in more detail in the next step.

When do you want to test the innovation?

Step 2. Break down why you are developing and seeking to test the innovation

Why is this innovation important? Why is change necessary? What improvements are you hoping to see?

How does this innovation address the challenge? What are the root causes of the challenge, and how does the innovation address these root causes?

Step 3. Identify key elements of the prototype

What do you need to prepare ahead of time for this innovation to be successful? What resources do you need? What key staff do you need to involve, and how?

What are core aspects, components, or pieces of the innovation? What are the steps for implementation? Are there key principles that underpin the idea (for example, anyone implementing the idea needs to use a participant-driven approach)? What are the “ingredients” that are required, or the steps you absolutely need to follow, for your “dish” to turn out as you intended? And what supports are necessary to help staff implement the intervention (for instance, training, incentives, or supervision supports)?

Appendix C. Preparing to Administer Short Surveys to Support Pilot Testing

This tip sheet provides guidance on administering short surveys. Using this tip sheet, you will follow steps to help you (1) prepare to develop the survey, (2) develop strong survey questions, (3) administer the survey, and (4) analyze the data. In the toolkit, the section titled "Improve: Plan and execute a pilot of the strategy" has more information about data collection.

Step 1: Consider guiding questions to inform survey development

When developing a survey, a good way to ensure you are not asking extraneous or unnecessary questions is to think first about what you need to learn. Before drafting official survey questions, consider the following:

- What do you need to know about the strategy or innovation that you can answer with a short survey?
- Why is a short survey the most appropriate means of gathering this information?
- What can you accomplish with this feedback?
- What groups of people need to take the survey?
- How will you incorporate feedback equitably?

Step 2: Develop strong survey questions

Use your answers to the guiding questions above to draft official survey questions. Keep the following in mind to write clear, concise questions:

- When drafting questions, avoid double negatives or agreement with negatives phrasing. When phrasing questions, ask respondents whether they agree with a statement.

  × **Avoid:** Do you agree that you do not feel comfortable with program staff?

  ✓ **Better:** On a scale from 1–5, how much do you agree with this statement: "I feel comfortable with program staff"?

- Include open-ended questions so people can share responses in their own words. But on a short survey, limit open-ended questions to one or two. You may also consider adding open-response questions following scale questions: for example, "If you answered, 'Some of the time or not at all,' please explain why."

- Consider using a Likert scale (Exhibit 1). If you are assessing levels of agreement or satisfaction, a Likert scale, in which respondents give a rating to express opinions or attitudes, allows respondents to place themselves on a continuum rather than give a rigid yes or no response. Don't make Likert scales too long; four or five rating options are often sufficient.
  - For Likert scale questions, make sure the scale always means the same thing for each question (that is, a positive response will always be 4 and a negative one always 1).

Exhibit 1. Sample Likert scale items

	1- Not at all	2- Some of the time	3- Most of the time	4- All of the time
I felt comfortable with staff in the program.	☐	☐	☐	☐

To learn more about writing strong survey questions, check out this resource from Pew Research Center.

Step 3: Administer the survey

When administering a survey, be transparent and flexible with respondents. Consider the following guidance on survey administration:

- Try different survey platforms. Online survey collection, such as through SurveyMonkey or Google Forms, can make data analysis easier. However, if online administration is not possible, be sure to have a backup plan for administration, such as short, paper surveys you administer during client or team meetings.
- **Pre-test your survey with a small group.** Questions that make sense to you may be confusing to others. Refine confusing questions by trying out the survey with a small group (two to three participants or staff, for example) ahead of administering it. Refine questions based on what you learn.
- **Explain the purpose of your survey.** You can either do this in person when administering the survey or on the survey itself so that respondents understand why you need the information and can provide more accurate feedback. If feedback is sensitive, allow anonymous responses.
- **Have a fielding plan.** Be clear about who is responsible for administering the survey and when.

Step 4: Analyze and interpret the survey data

Develop a plan for analyzing the survey before you administer it. Keep in mind the following tips:

- **Consider options for analysis.** Google Forms and SurveyMonkey help you analyze data and create visually appealing charts that are easy to interpret. In general, be sure to have a data entry and analysis plan that allows you to (1) document data and findings in a clear, easy-to-digest way and (2) access the data in a timely fashion.
- **Have a plan for analysis.** Only administer surveys that you have the capacity to analyze. If you collect feedback, have a plan for how you will use it.
- **Share data with respondents.** After you analyze data, share and interpret them with respondents, such as through data parties. If possible, engage respondents to inform or help develop future surveys to promote collaboration.