

Innovation Guidelines & Key Concepts (Excerpt from DMH Information Notice 09-02)

INN projects are novel, creative and/or ingenious mental health practices/approaches that contribute to learning, and that are developed within communities through a process that is inclusive and representative, especially of unserved, underserved and inappropriately served individuals.

Voluntary Participation

INN projects must be designed for voluntary participation per CCR, Title 9, section 3400, subdivision (b)(2). No person should be denied access based solely on his/her voluntary or involuntary status.

Definition of Innovation

An Innovation project is defined, for purposes of these guidelines, as one that contributes to learning rather than a primary focus on providing a service. By providing the opportunity to “try out” new approaches that can inform current and future practices or approaches in communities, an Innovation contributes to learning in one or more of the following three ways:

- Introduces new mental health practices/approaches including prevention and early intervention that have never been done before, or
- Makes a change to an existing mental health practice/approach, including adaptation for a new setting or community, or
- Introduces a new application to the mental health system of a promising community-driven practice/approach or a practice/approach that has been successful in non-mental health contexts or settings

To clarify, a practice/approach that has been successful in one community mental health setting cannot be funded as an INN project in a different community even if the practice/approach is new to that community, unless it is changed in a way that contributes to the learning process. Merely addressing an unmet need is not sufficient to receive funding under this component. By their very nature, not all INN projects will be successful.

Proposed INN projects that have previously demonstrated their effectiveness in a mental health setting and that do not add to the learning process or move the mental health system towards the development of new practices/approaches may be eligible for funding under other components, such as Community Services and Supports (CSS) or Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI), rather than with INN funds. To clarify, an INN project may include a prevention and early intervention strategy, but such a strategy would have to be distinctive from PEI requirements. If a county wanted to test a new approach that adds to current knowledge by enhancing a PEI strategy in a way that is not currently allowable under the PEI component, a county may do so. For instance, the distinctive characteristics may include:

- The duration of the prevention and early intervention strategies may exceed the time constraints permissible in the PEI Guidelines.

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- The prevention and early intervention strategies may be targeted to a population group not listed as a "Priority Population" in the PEI Guidelines.
- The overall design of the INN project includes a full spectrum of integrated services from prevention and early intervention strategies combined with screening and treatment-oriented services.

In addition to the requirement to contribute to learning, the Innovation must be aligned with the General Standards identified in the MHSA when applicable, as set forth in CCR, Title 9, section 3320. Depending upon the Innovation, the application of these six General Standards will vary. A county is only required

Scope of Innovation

INN projects may address issues faced by children, transition age youth, adults, older adults, families (self-defined), neighborhoods, tribal and other communities, counties, multiple counties, or regions. The project may initiate, support and expand collaboration and linkages, especially connections between systems, organizations and other practitioners not traditionally defined as a part of mental health care. The project may influence individuals across all life stages and all age groups, including multigenerational practices/approaches.

An INN project may introduce a novel, creative, and/or ingenious approach to a variety of mental health practices, including those aimed at prevention and early intervention. As long as the INN project contributes to learning and maintains alignment with the MHSA General Standards set forth in CCR, Title 9, section 3320, it may affect virtually any aspect of mental health practices or assessment of a new application of a promising approach to solving persistent, seemingly intractable mental health challenges.

Time Limit

By their nature, INN projects are similar to pilot or demonstration projects and are subject to time limitations to assess and evaluate their efficacy. Since the project takes time to develop and implement, a work plan should be completed within a time frame that is sufficient to allow learning to occur and to demonstrate the feasibility of the project being assessed.

When developing a work plan, counties should consider the time needed to implement and assess the INN project and arrive at a timeframe that is logically needed for the particular project. This is not intended to fund longitudinal studies or ongoing services that would be more appropriately funded from CSS or PEI funds.