



# USC Improvement Practitioner Program

The University of South Carolina's **Improvement Practitioner Program** blends practical learning with the immediate use of improvement concepts, methods, and tools.

Participants build their know-how by putting it to work on improvement efforts in their units. As the program unfolds, they facilitate start-to-finish projects that generate real results.

The learning portion unfolds in a series of eight sessions totaling 14 hours. Sessions are led by improvement practitioners from the Office of Organizational Excellence, with additional subject-matter experts brought in for specific segments.

The hands-on experience of using the tools occurs between sessions, with OE practitioners available to guide and coach participants individually. This work requires roughly 30 hours.

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- **Importance:** One of the university's top three strategic priorities is to **transform service delivery and promote operational excellence**. Participants in USC's Improvement Practitioner Development Program will have an important role in making this priority a reality.
  - **Cohort:** The 2023-24 cohort will be limited to 15 people.
  - **Schedule:** Learning sessions will begin in September and conclude in February. See pages 2-5 for detail.
  - **Improvement Project:** Applicants will identify three potential improvement projects supported by their department – and select one of these to work on during the program.
  - **Program Certificate:** Upon completion of the eight learning sessions, participants will receive an Improvement Practitioner Program Certificate. It represents a set of practical knowledge, skills, and abilities that are valued in every workplace.
  - **Improvement Practitioner Garnet Belt:** With completion and presentation of an improvement project, participants will receive recognition and credentialing in the form of a University of South Carolina Garnet Belt. It confirms success in putting the ideas and tools to work to achieve meaningful results.
  - **Application:** An application process is being used to determine participants in the cohort. The application specifies selection criteria, and it guides applicants in providing three potential improvement projects – to be narrowed to the one they will facilitate during the hands-on learning portion of the program. Applications are due by 5 p.m. Tuesday, August 1, 2023. **Go to the application.**
  - **Support:** The applicant, and the potential improvement projects submitted as part of the application, are to have the support of their immediate manager and department leadership.

# Program Timeline:

August 1, 2023 – Deadline for submission of [applications](#)

Week of August 7 – Cohort announced

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## Building Your Foundation as an Improvement Practitioner

September 13 – Session 1

## Expanding Your Know-How and Skills for Improvement Projects

September 28 – Session 2: Process Improvement

October 5 – Session 3: Resource Optimization and Problem Solving

## Serving as an Effective Facilitator

October 31 – Session 4

## Learning from Your Improvement Colleagues

November 15 – Session 5

## Building Momentum and Reaching the Project Finish Line

December 7 – Session 6

Week of January 8 – Session 7

## Sustaining Improvement in Your Work and Workplace

February – Session 8

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## Project Presentations

Presentations will be scheduled as projects are completed

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- **Sessions:** Program learning sessions are listed on the left, with detail for the entire program beginning below.
- **Projects:** As the program unfolds, each participant facilitates an improvement project. This hands-on work occurs in between the learning sessions.
- **Guidance:** Practitioners from the Office of Organizational Excellence are available throughout the program to provide guidance.
- **Presentations:** Each participant is to deliver a capstone presentation that reports on key aspects of their project, including background, purpose, goals, stages of work, action plans, and projected results.

# Program Detail: Continues through page 5

## Building Your Foundation as an Improvement Practitioner

In the opening session, participants build a base of key concepts and approaches for improvement.

**SESSION 1** 2 Hours • In Person • Wednesday, September 13 • 9-11 a.m.

- Defining, achieving, and sustaining excellence at USC
- Three approaches for improvement: Resource Optimization, Process Improvement, Problem Solving
- Focusing and scoping an improvement effort
- Developing a project charter that sets up the project for success
- Gathering key input from customers and stakeholders
- Gaining insights from a small set of meaningful measures

Individual work following this session: Review and refine your project possibilities.

# Expanding Your Know-How and Skills for Improvement Projects

In two in-depth sessions, participants learn about three key approaches to improvement.

**SESSION 2** 3 Hours • In Person • Thursday, September 28 • 1-4 p.m.

## Process Improvement

- Getting started: The WHY, WHAT, and overall HOW of a process improvement project
- Developing the project charter for a process improvement project
- Following the project roadmap through three phases: Discovery, Possibility, Planning
- Using essential concepts, tools, and techniques as the phases unfold (including process mapping, process waste, mistake-proofing, standardization, and many more)
- Preventing common pitfalls – and responding quickly when they occur
- Moving from planning to implementation in a way that maintains momentum
- Tracking progress, measuring impact and results, and telling the story.



**SESSION 3** 3 Hours • In Person • Thursday, October 5 • 9 a.m. to noon

## Resource Optimization

- Getting started: The WHY, WHAT, and overall HOW of a resource optimization project
- Establishing plain language intended outcomes that communicate a clear end in mind
- Developing the project charter for a resource optimization project
- Following the project roadmap through three phases: Discovery, Possibility, Planning
- Understanding how resource optimization projects differ from process improvement projects – and call for a number of different approaches and tools.
- Preventing pitfalls common to these projects – and responding promptly when they occur
- Transitioning to implementation
- Tracking progress, measuring impact and results, and telling the story.



## Problem Solving

- Getting started: WHY and WHEN to pursue problem solving
- Defining the problem, why it needs to be solved, current condition, and goal statement
- Diving deep to uncover root causes
- Developing countermeasures, an action plan, and ways to track impact
- Using the A3 template to prompt, plan, document, and track all aspects of the effort.



Individual work following this session: Finalize development of the charter for your project. Begin work on the project when ready. Consult with the OE team for guidance. (With four weeks between this session and the next, participants have a long stretch to make progress on their projects.)

## Serving as an Effective Facilitator

This session provides essential tips, tools, and techniques for facilitating improvement teams.

**SESSION 4** 1.5 Hours • In Person • Tuesday, October 31 • 9-10:30 a.m.

- Understanding the facilitator role, how it's unique, and why it adds value
- Managing the inevitable ups and downs of guiding a project team
- Knowing when to stay neutral and objective – and when to take a stand
- Sharpening key facilitation skills for maximizing participation, sparking creativity, building consensus, keeping groups on track, working with different styles, etc.

Individual work following this session: Continue working on your improvement project.

## Learning from Your Improvement Colleagues

In this special session two months into the program, participants share their key learnings to date.

**SESSION 5** 1 Hour • Teams • Wednesday, November 15 • 2-3 p.m.

Participants have an open forum to:

- Share updates regarding their improvement efforts
- Discuss milestones achieved, pitfalls encountered and addressed, lessons learned, etc.
- Give and get guidance from others in the cohort.

Individual work following this session: Continue working on your improvement project. As always, reach out to the Office of Organizational Excellence for project-related guidance.

## Building Momentum and Reaching the Project Finish Line

These sessions add insight and energy at a key point in the projects.

**SESSION 6** 1 Hour • Teams • Thursday, December 7 • 2-3 p.m.

With the calendar year winding down, this is a timely look-ahead session in which participants:

- Share their plans for concluding their improvement projects and setting the stage for a smooth transition to implementation
- Seek input (as needed) from cohort peers and the OE team regarding any aspect of next steps.

Individual work following this session: Continue working on your project. Report progress and challenges to inform upcoming session.

**SESSION 7** 1 Hour • Teams • Thursday, January 11 • 9-10 a.m.

- Meeting the challenge of guiding the project all the way through to completion
- Making the most of momentum as you transition to implementation
- (Additional content for this session will be tailored to meet the specific learning needs of participants, based on where they are with their projects.)

Individual work following this session: Continue working on your project.

## Sustaining Improvement in Your Work and Workplace

This last session looks ahead – and concludes with an appreciation of progress to date.

**SESSION 8** 1.5 Hours • In Person • Wednesday, February 7 • 9-10:30 a.m.

- Remaining an active advocate for improvement
- Staying alert to future improvement opportunities
- Sharing improvement ideas and tools with colleagues
- Partnering with managers and leaders
- Encouraging others to learn and use the tools, and to facilitate improvement with others

The session concludes with an informal celebration of progress, with participants sharing achievements and highlighting their improvement-oriented commitments going forward.

## Project Presentations

**Scheduled Separately** • Most of the presentations will be in February and March

Each participant will deliver a presentation (approx. 20 minutes) that reports on project background, purpose, goals, stages of work, action plans, and projected results.

Several project presentations will be scheduled for the same session, with an invitation extended to participants' managers, colleagues, cohort peers, and other colleagues.

A schedule for these presentation sessions will be developed as the practitioner program unfolds, to match the completion dates that participants expect for their improvement efforts.