Assessing Readiness for Rigorous Evaluation

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Webinar Transcript

Cay Bradley — All right, great. Well, good afternoon and welcome to the IIN webinar, entitled "Assessing Readiness for Rigorous Evaluation." I'm Cay Bradley, and I will be presenting today along with my colleague, Lauren Scher, and we're really excited to have you all here.

Again, please try to mute yourself whenever possible. We certainly welcome comments and questions in the chat box, or raise your hand, or unmute yourself. But if, for the most part, we hang out on mute during the presentation, that would be terrific. Lauren and I will address clarifying questions during the presentation, but if you put something in the chat box and it's a question that isn't really a clarifying question, just know that we may leave it until the end. It's not that we've forgotten about you, it's that we're going to probably focus more on clarifying questions during the actual presentation.

We want to make sure you all know what we're doing today. First of all, our focus today is on evaluate. As you're going to hear, there are lots of different evaluation activities that could be useful, and Lauren will also talk about designing or planning a rigorous evaluation.

Lauren Scher — Cay, are you sharing your screen?

Cay Bradley — Oh, Lord (inaudible). You know, come on, Lauren.

Lauren Scher — Well, I caught you on slide two, so that's good.

Cay Bradley — As I said, it's always helpful to know what we're going to do, so here is what we're going to do today. And then here is where I was when Lauren reminded me that I can't work technology. So, as I said, my name is Cay Bradley. I am one of your speakers today. I'm a principal researcher here at Mathematica. Some of you know me from previous OPA-OAH grant rounds, and I'm joined by my colleague, Lauren Scher, who I think you all probably know, because she's been working with IIN a lot longer than I have. I just came back to the party, so I'm excited to be back at the party, if you will.

I'm going to talk about building evidence, and for those of you who don't know me, I love metaphors. I'm going to use hiking as my metaphor for developing evidence, and thereby demonstrating your readiness for your next stage. It's kind of like moving from flatlands into rolling hills into snow-covered mountains, and there are lots of different types of evidence, just like there are lots of different types of flatlands. Some of them aren't quite flat. Some of them are paved. Some of them have holes and different sizes of rolling hills and things like that. So, let's use this metaphor for my portion in particular. But Lauren uses it too.

And I want you to remember that before moving from flatlands to rolling hills to snow-covered mountains, you want to make sure you're ready. So, if you think about hiking, you want to make sure you have built your stamina, that you have a good set of shoes on. There are lots of things you want to make sure you're ready for before you start going into the bigger mountains, if you will. Same thing with building evidence—there are things you're going to want to do before you move on to the next stage.

We're actually going to touch on what could go wrong if you move a little too fast. But I actually want you guys to remember that hiking is a great metaphor, because sometimes you'll move into the rolling hills and you'll pull a muscle, and so you go back towards the flatlands for a little while. Or you'll venture into a snow-covered mountain and go, "Oh, my gosh," and you go back down to rolling hills. Same thing when you're building evidence, sometimes something happens when you're building some type of evidence that may cause you to backtrack a little bit, and that's fine, not a problem there. Off the top of my head, [for example] you discover nobody will come and participate in your program. We don't want to keep hiking that big mountain if nobody's participating. You may go back to try to figure that out.

And I'm going to pause for a second, because I have lost my chat box, so hopefully none of you are asking me questions while I'm here. So, give me one second just to get that back.

Lauren Scher We're all good.

Cay Bradley All right. So, initially, you may be building evidence without fully acknowledging the work that you're doing is building evidence. That doesn't mean it's not evidence just because you don't see it as evidence, or that your stroll on flat land or a paved surface isn't valuable. Coming back to the flatlands, like I said, is also okay, to be expected. Many of you have been in the flatlands. You may be very tired of being in the flatlands, and you're ready for something that gives you a bigger challenge. But it's still important to make sure that you've done this so that you're ready for the next stage. As I said, think about having enough stamina and well-fitting

shoes and knowing exactly how much water you have to carry, and you actually carry that much water. You can tell I've had some bad hiking experiences.

I've been intrigued by the way y'all have been working to identify innovation and the way that you supported their development. So, most of you are accustomed to having to document things like the problem that you're trying to solve, the target population, available services and interventions and the result from that, and support from the community. All of that is evidence for your innovation or intervention. It is important that you remember, even something that seems simple like that is evidence. It's not the evidence that you're going to generate from your rigorous evaluation or even a formative evaluation, but it is evidence that your innovation or intervention are needed, and finding your lessons can help get communities, schools, parents, and funders on board to support your additional outcome evaluation activities. So, this work can also help you identify the parts that need more attention in the test and refine stage.

Are you using new measures? Will they actually work for your population? Does the intervention rely on technology? Is that technology new to your area or to your interventions? Did you change where people come for services, and can they get there? Do you know how to track fidelity? And how do you know if something is off, or how are you going to address issues with implementation? There are lots of ways to disseminate this type of evidence. You can use it to write grant applications. You can include it in annual reports. You can use it in peer learning experiences and share your lessons learned with other people. You can write blogs. You can put it in your manuals. You can write articles, and you can make conference presentations. All of this is coming out of the flatlands, and you're exploring and developing.

I think the one thing that always amazes me is we usually assume that everyone knows what we do and we have nothing novel to add to a conversation. But sometimes it's novel to know that an intervention targeting the same population found the same challenges and different solutions, or found the same challenges and same solutions.

All right, so let's talk about the pros of spending time in the flatlands. All of us, truthfully, we all want to go to those snow-covered mountains just as fast as we can get there. But there are benefits for taking time to prepare, and this slide identifies some of the questions you probably want to answer when you're in the flatland, not when you're in the snow-covered mountains. So, it's super easy to get excited about a program and convince yourself that it's innovation. However, there's a possibility it's not quite as big of an innovation as you think it is. It may not be quite as different from what's offered in the community. So, for example, pre-

pandemic, the thought of virtual programs was really an innovation. There wasn't a lot of virtual programming going on necessarily. But now, with all of the virtual learning that's been happening, it may be that a virtual offering is not quite the innovation that you thought it was, and, in fact, you might actually have more trouble with a virtual innovation now than you would have pre-pandemic because all the kids are burned out from all the time they spend staring at a computer screen.

I don't know whether anybody—well, I do know that some of you have had tough conversations in the middle of an evaluation about enrolling youth, and the reason that I know some of you have had those conversations is because I've been a part of some of those conversations. I also know that sometimes it's tough, in the middle of an evaluation, if you have to find new partners because you're not getting the enrollment that you expected from your current partners, so you have to expand. Those aren't fun conversations. It's tough to change recruitment and enrollment on the fly or to dig up another 10 partners while you're also trying to keep an evaluation steadily moving. So, spending time figuring out those things before you get into more rigorous work gives you more time to reflect and to course correct.

You may also find that you need to support partners and facilitators differently. Again, thinking to other OAH and OPA opportunities, I've worked with grantees who learn things like they needed to provide hotspots to partners because the internet didn't support the activities that were needed to deliver the evaluation reliably. It's also important to learn what your facilitators do well and what they skip or modify, and why they skip or modify something. Ideally, every person in your evaluation will get the same innovation or program. Not saying everything has to be scripted, but, ideally, they're all going to get the same stuff.

But what if you have facilitators who are changing things, and you don't know that? The information you learn in the flatlands can help you make the case to OPA or to other partners and funders, that you’re ready to move to the test and refine phase. The information you provide can help your OPA project officer understand what the right phase is for your program. And given the current focus, the reality is you may spend a lot of time in the flatlands, or circling back to them, and that's perfectly fine. You guys are building programs from the bottom up, from scratch most often, and that is going to take more exploration in the flatlands than if you're just implementing a program that's already been tested and implemented in a lot of other places.

All right, let's move on to the rolling hills. So, you're going to be ready, if you're not already ready, for more than just a stroll through the flatlands. But you're not quite ready to scale the mountain. So that's the rolling hills

or the test and refine phase. This could be thought of as a time to learn, innovate, and improve, or LI squared, which you guys heard about in the earlier webinar. In the rolling hills of test and refine, you're not fully committed to scaling Mount Everest, but you're also proving you can do more than just walk on flat land.

The focus here is not effectiveness; rather, you're focused on the process and building evidence that shows the innovation or intervention can be implemented as intended, that data can be collected as you'll watch in a rigorous evaluation, that the innovation or intervention can be implemented within the systems and settings that you're trying to work in. You may also be working to show whether and how the innovation or intervention can be adapted. For example, if it was conceived of as an in-person program, can it be delivered virtually? You may collect outcomes during this stage, but you're not aiming to show the intervention is effective or changing those outcomes; rather, it's about telling you if you can collect the data to and to show that the populations can be moved in a desired direction.

Frequently, the evidence that you develop during this stage will be of a rinse-and-repeat variety, if you will, meaning that you'll want to demonstrate it more than once. You may do it with a small group, and then you may do it again with a small group. And, remember, in the rolling hills, you could learn that you need to go back to the flatlands, and that's perfectly fine. It's better to do that than to risk [inaudible].

All right, so let's think about what you gain by hanging out in hills for a little bit. So, in the flatlands, you may have gained some information about whether you and others think your program can change the outcome. But now, you may be learning about whether you can document your program and measure those key outcomes. Perhaps you're doing a pre/post with a multiple post-measure to see when do those things change. There's no reason to annoy participants and complicate data collections or increase costs associated with data collection by collecting data before changes are likely to happen. You may be able to talk about evidence, the program changes outcomes, but you're still in the rolling hills, so it's likely that you're looking at data from just one group for early or proximal outcomes.

Many programs and evaluations are really embracing and integrating CQI, or continuous quality improvement. A CQI practice that might work when it's a single organization doing all of the programming and data collection may be more challenging if there are more people involved. This is a time to not only make sure that increasing programming can be done with fidelity, but also to understand whether processes can be effectively and efficiently monitored. When you're in the rolling hills, you're building on what you learned in the flatlands. For example, you find out that an

activity resonated with one group during the flatlands time, but it failed to engage when you move to a different partner organization when you're in the rolling hills, or you begin to identify additional skills and traits that are important for your facilitator or your interventionists to have. You had one in the beginning and now, all of a sudden, others end up seeing differences.

Building evidence takes time, money, and participants. You can leverage the evidence from your flatlands work and some rolling hills evidence to help convince other partners and facilitators and funders to support your program and your evaluation activities. Again, you can gain information when you're in the rolling hills to help make the case that you're ready for the next phase, and that you are worthy of investing in, if you will.

All right, so now let's talk about the snow-covered mountain, which we all want to go to, unless right now you live in Oklahoma where there's bad weather, right? Or I guess in the Midwest in general, where there's bad storms coming through. But we're going there anyway. This is the evaluate phase. You've shown that the intervention or innovation can be implemented, that it will be used, that you can capture key outcomes, and possibly that your program at least begins to move your target individuals in the intended direction. And the big question here is, can you demonstrate the perspective on the outcomes you're interested in?

During this phase, you're focused on building more comprehensive evidence and showing that your intervention works—in part, because you've already just demonstrated that it can be implemented and that it will be used—you did that back in the rolling hills and the flatlands—and that it's feasible and acceptable to the intended participants and it will likely be effective, or it was effective for a small group of individuals. Maybe you did that when you were in the rolling hills.

However, just as there are lots of snow-covered mountains, there are lots of rigorous evaluations [inaudible], and you may start with a smaller snow-covered mountain, like a pre/post pilot study you have, before undertaking a larger mountain like an RCT. When you think about what your evaluate phase may look like, think about the readiness of your program, your partners, and yourselves. What have you learned? It's also important to think about resources, not just money and time but also commitment of partners and staff and the capacity and capability of all to undertake what is going to be asked in a specific design.

So, rather than talking about the pros of scaling the snowy mountains, because we all probably have a good sense of that, let's talk about what happens if you rush the hike. So, first of all, evaluation activities can be big investments of time, money, and good will. You'll want to make sure

that you're making those investments and learning as much as you can, and part of that is making sure that you made the most of your earlier investment, the time that you spent in the flat fields or the rolling hills.

Another concern is whether you're testing what you intended. So, this goes to understanding fidelity and having CQI processes and understanding the contrast, which means you understand the comparison. You don't want to end up thinking you're talking about program X, only to discover that you're talking about program X prime. At the end of the day, you also don't want to risk finding no evidence, or perhaps even worse, evidence that your program doesn't work. So, that's why stepping your learning process in this way is important. Moving the outcomes with just a simple pre/post and making a difference with a two-group pre/post may be super important to do before you go all in with that more rigorous evaluation.

Evaluation can be frustrating work. Things can go wrong. That is just a given. But why not invest in learning what could go wrong before it does go wrong, and you have a big price tag attached to it. So, as I said over and over again, building evidence will take time, and there's absolutely no shame in learning that you need to go back and try something else. So, whether that means that you go hang out in the flatlands for a long time or you start treading in those rolling hills and go back to the flatlands, or, heck, you start climbing that snow-covered mountain and decide, oh, it's important to learn from all of your evaluation activity.

I'm going to turn it over now to my colleague, Lauren, to talk about moving from more rigorous evaluation design. Lauren.

Lauren Scher

Hi everyone. Can you move to the next slide. All right, look, we've hit the mountain, so we're going to start by just talking about moving toward the evaluate phase. We're looking at the snow and it looks very much like my outdoor, that’s that window behind me, looks like. We got two feet of snow last week, so, just trudging up a hill feels like climbing a mountain around here in Massachusetts. But, anyway, so let's just start digging into this. Like climbing a mountain, moving to the evaluate phase may seem a bit daunting, and, you know, maybe hopefully you didn't get too scared off from what Cay said. But the key is to have the right equipment and to take one step in front of the other. You want to move to the next slide.

One way that we recommend getting started on this climb is to conduct a larger pilot test. When you have done smaller—while you might have done the smaller pilot testing in the test-and-refine phase, you should consider a broader higher stakes pilot test as you transition to the evaluate phase. This could cover a broader population or take place in different settings. For example, you may have tested a curriculum in one or two settings with one facilitator who may have played a role in creating the

curriculum. You may want to expand to different populations with different partners, which would require more facilitators who will be less familiar with the curriculum. The research questions that you may ask during this pilot may overlap with what you learned in the earlier test-and-refine effort, but you'll continue to learn about these issues in more nuanced ways as you expand programming and test with new populations.

Some questions you'd want to think about answering are related to assessing community needs and demands, support for the program, and assessment of whether the innovation could be implemented as intended, and whether there's evidence to suggest that there are near-term or proximal outcomes and that improve from pre- to post-program. The near-term outcomes might include changes in knowledge, beliefs, or behavior intentions, and you should look at the program's logic model and engage in discussions with partners to think through what are those key near-term outcomes that you might want to focus on. And once you complete this larger pilot, you'll be able to disseminate the findings that will help you make that argument for further program expansion, which could help set the stage for the whole evaluation and impact evaluation. You want to go to the next slide.

So, when you prepare for an expanded pilot, you should think in advance about the kinds of methods and data that you're going to need to collect. We suggest you consider incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data, which could be pre-program and post-program outcomes, which you might collect through surveys or administrative records. We also recommend collecting and analyzing a variety of qualitative data, including interviews with a range of stakeholders, document reviews, program observations, and implementing different data collection, including fidelity monitoring, measuring things like dosage and engagement. Developing procedures to collect the data will be helpful to you during the pilot study, and it's also going to give you the tools to expand your evidence-based and future studies. You want to go to the next slide.

So, regardless of the outcome of that pilot, you'll certainly learn information that's going to be helpful to you in understanding what's working well and what's working not so well, just what Cay was talking about. This will help you think through what the next steps will be. You should plan to document and disseminate not only the answers to your research questions, but also the contextual factors that may support active barriers to limitations and lessons learned that may help support program improvement. All of this will help you and your partners think about what the appropriate next steps should be. This could include moving back to the test-and-refine phase if you feel like the interventions might need some more work. It might mean further pilot testing if you feel like you might

want to learn a bit more; for example, with a broader or different population. Or you may want to consider whether your program might be ready for planning for an impact evaluation. Next slide.

So then the logical question is, when is there merit for moving to an impact evaluation? Here are some key issues you may want to think about in assessing readiness, many of which are similar to what you've documented in your early development and early testing of the intervention. This includes evidence that the innovation is clearly defined and the community lacks similar programming, and the participants and others like the program and think it's a good fit. And through the pilot, you'll be able to see whether near-term outcomes improve from baseline to follow-up. Next slide. Thanks.

Although it's unlikely that it will be feasible to implement a formal impact evaluation during this contract period, and OPA is not expecting that you conduct randomized control trials or quasi-experimental studies, RCTs and QEDs, during this grant period. There are a number of ways that you can help set the stage for an impact evaluation as you finish your final year. We now talk about some key issues you would need to think about if you're considering working on planning for a future impact evaluation.

We're going to focus today on randomized control trials and quasi-experimental designs, but we also want to acknowledge that these designs may not be appropriate in all situations. There are other design options to consider, depending on the type of intervention that you're testing and how and to whom the intervention might roll out. For example, a change to a broad policy may require a different kind of design. We encourage you to talk to your eval TA liaison. I'm going to say this a lot over the next few minutes about this. And I just also want to put a plug in that we're going to be having a webinar next month on systems-level design evaluations.

So, two important issues for all RCTs and QEDs is that they need to include a control or comparison group, meaning that the comparison group is either no treatment or some other alternative treatment … typically a business-as-usual type of condition. They also need to include a large enough sample size so that you'll be able to detect specifically significant effects, and that's what makes it really challenging to get one up and running and get the sample that you need in a very short period of time. So, like Cay said, you don't want to rush into this. All right, next slide.

And so here is a checklist of things that you would want to consider as you develop an impact evaluation. Any future proposals you may prepare would require that you consider and prepare a clear description of each of these elements. Today, we're going to discuss most of these issues. We're not going to go into lots of depth with them. We're just going to try and

talk about what these issues are and why you'd want to be planning for these things. We are certainly happy to discuss them in more detail with you one on one, but these are the key things you might want to be thinking about in the planning stage. Next slide.

Okay, so similar to when you're planning a pilot study, you should think carefully about the research questions that you want to answer in an impact study. Think about what you want to learn. For example, are you interested in learning about overall program impact, or do you want to test the addition of a particular component? Again, you should consult your logic model, theory of change, and clearly specify the primary and secondary outcomes that you think will change as a result of participation in your program within the time frame that you plan to measure those outcomes.

The last bullet in this slide provides an illustrative example of the kind of research question that you could formulate with an impact evaluation. Here, you see that this research question focuses on assessing the overall impact of a program on a specific outcome—sexual initiation rates—and a specific time frame—six months following the program. You want to make sure that these research questions are clearly defined and answerable. Next slide.

So, next, you need to choose a study design that will answer your research questions, and make sure that the design is feasible. In an RCT, you would plan to use a random mechanism to assign samples to two or more groups; typically, the treatment group and either no treatment or the business as usual. This random assignment can occur at the individual level, so youth being randomly assigned, or you could randomly assign clusters like classrooms or schools, community organizations. Randomization helps to ensure that the groups are similar to each other in ways that you can measure—for example, things like demographic characteristics—as well as in ways you can't measure—for example, motivation to participate in a program. And in a well-implemented RCT, you can feel confident that any differences between the groups that you measure in outcomes are due to the program itself and not some other explanation. Next slide.

Now, before you commit to an RCT, there's a lot to think about, and you really need to think about whether it is feasible. So, things that you might want to consider are your level of confidence the program will make a difference in the outcomes that you and your partners care about; that randomization is feasible; and that your partners are on board with randomizing to treatment and comparison conditions. And assessing the feasibility requires a lot of collaboration, creativity, flexibility, and clear and ongoing communication. There are lots of ways to think creatively about how to randomize the conditions in a way that answers the research

questions you want to learn about, but also addresses the needs and concerns of stakeholders. But it does require some careful thinking. It's not as simple as some people might think.

Again, I'm putting a plug in for the eval TA team. Your liaisons can really help you think through those issues before they turn into big issues, and really help you think about how to communicate the idea and the value of random assignments, and provide you some suggestions for being creative and how to be able to pull that off in your particular situation. Next slide.

Now, it's not always going to be feasible. And if an RCT is not feasible, then you may want to consider implementing a quasi-experimental design. In a QED, you'll use some other non-random method of assignment to treatment and comparison condition. For example, you may include volunteers to a program and compare that to the non-volunteers. Or you may identify a group of schools who are rolling out a new program and compare it to other very similar schools that aren't yet implementing the program. The danger here is that, without randomization, the treatment and comparison groups may be different in important ways, including ways that we can't measure. Most differences may provide an alternate explanation to any differences that you might see in the outcomes between those groups. For that reason, QEDs need to be designed to minimize differences between the groups. You want to go to the next slide. Thanks.

So, following along with this, in talking about design considerations for any impact study, whether it be an RCT or QED, and particularly this first bullet is important for QEDs, but also RCTs, you really do need to be prepared to demonstrate that the treatment and comparison groups are similar to each other, or, in other words, you should plan to demonstrate that the groups are baseline equivalent on measurable characteristics like demographic characteristics, as well as baseline measures of outcomes. At this planning stage, you should pre-specify these measures and have a plan to measure and report baseline equivalence for your ultimate analysis sample.

In addition, there are many other design issues you're going to need to think about at the planning stage. This slide explains a few of them, including making sure that there is sufficient contrast between the treatment and comparison condition, because that's what you're measuring the impact on, what the experience is that's different, that contrast.

You also need to make sure you have the appropriate sample size, like I mentioned earlier, to be able to detect statistically significant results, and that you're avoiding other factors that might provide an alternate explanation for differences in outcomes that you might find between the groups. For example, there are potential confounding factors that might

arise based on, for example, if you measure outcomes at different times for the treatment group versus the control group. Even for certain populations, measuring something three months later for the control group might mean very different kinds of outcomes, especially when you start looking at outcomes like sexual initiation.

So, as you can see, there are a lot of considerations to think about in the design phase to ensure that you're planning for a strong and useful impact study. And, again, this is where you want to reach out to your eval TA liaison to talk about your particular situation. Every RCT is different, all of the different contingencies that you might want to consider might be different depending on your situation, and so it's really important to think about it and to bring together people to really have good discussions about what you need to do to ensure that you're creating the strongest study that you possibly can.

And along those lines, in addition to the design considerations, you also need to think about logistical issues when you're planning for an impact evaluation, so when you want to make sure that you're implementing the study well. And so, these include issues around recruitment, including setting realistic timelines and being clear about who will be included in the study. Also, thinking through issues around obtaining consent or assent for participation in the study. This is going to require a good understanding of IRB requirements, as well as local requirements for obtaining consent, collecting data, storing data, things like that, and, also, specifying data collection procedures. You should think carefully about the kinds of data that you're going to need and who is going to collect it, and, hopefully, you'll have a head start on a lot of this from your early piloting phases. But you should plan to have clear protocols for data collection and obtaining follow-up data.

Finally, and importantly, we strongly recommend that you develop a plan not only to measure outcomes but also to understand whether the program was implemented as intended and with fidelity for the model. With a companion process and implementation evaluation, you'll be able to understand why you did or didn't see the expected differences in outcomes, and it will also help you continue to learn more about what worked, for whom, and in what conditions.

Again, think about reaching about to your TA liaison to bounce off ideas or provide recommendations that address your specific needs. And, also, in addition to our team at Mathematica, I also want to put in a plug for JSI, who will help you think through some of the program logistical issues. Next slide.

So, finally, even at the planning stages, you should think carefully about how you're going to analyze the results and how you want to keep a range of stakeholders in the loop on your study throughout the course of implementing the study and beyond. While your plans may change as you get deeper into the work, just having a plan from the start will help make your life a lot easier once you get this up and running. Or, to go back to Cay's metaphor, if you're prepared and have the right gear and road map, it makes scaling the mountain a lot easier.

So on the next slide, we are happy to take questions. Before we do, I just want to mention that there is an impact evaluation tool kit. It's on MAC. And this can help you along the way. It has a lot of resources that cover a lot of what we've talked about today, and, of course, I am a broken record officially. I'm going to call myself one. But please reach at to your eval TA liaison. We can help you think through your current and future evaluation plans, help you consider design options and provide suggestions on measures and procedures for data collection, and also, like I mentioned before, you could reach out to Stacy and Donna, Megan at JSI—and I see that Megan wrote something in the chat—if you're looking for programmatic support. So, with that, we would love to answer any questions that you might have.

Cay Bradley So, Lauren, I'm going to jump in. I did respond to Lisa C. in the chat, but let me just—in case other people are not reading the chat like you and I are, Lisa C said, how does this fit with expectations of both program development and evaluation phases [to] be completed in the three-year grant period? It's a lot to do, the process you described, in three years. And so, yes, Lisa is right. What I was talking about could take more than three years. It … depends on where did you start, right? Are you working with something that was sort of half-baked, if you will, and you're working on finishing it off? Are you working?

It also depends maybe on how long your program is, right? If it's a really short intervention, you may be able to move faster through the flatlands and the rolling hills, because it just doesn't take as long. So it's important that each of you think about what's logical for your program. That's part of the reason that we are talking about … thinking about what you were learning in each stage, and talking about …what you think you've learned with your PO, and, as Lauren said, your various TA providers to help you think about, like, what's the next logical step for you. Are you ready to try to move to the next level, or do you need to spend some time learning something else? So, Lisa, I hope that answered your question. And if anybody else has any questions, we're happy to take them in the chat.

Lauren Scher And, Cay, I'll answer to what you just said a little bit. Just thinking about your particular grant program and the fact that you've got a bunch of irons

in the fire, you're testing out a bunch of innovations and there's never—and OPA can chime in—but there's never an expectation that all of your promising interventions are going to make it all the way through, you know. But there is an expectation that there are some that will be able to move forward, and so that you'll … be covering all of those different phases, the explore, develop, test and refine, and evaluate. But you should be thinking about the evaluate phase more broadly, right? So, it's that pilot testing, that expanding out the pilot testing, that might be just fine for this grant period.

You might want to be planning for an impact evaluation. Maybe at the end of the three years, you'll be setting yourself up to write a bang-up proposal to get funding to do that. But there's no expectation on OPA's side. When we shared the slides with them, that was one thing that they clearly said to us, was make sure they know it's not an expectation that you do an RCT before the end of these three years. And just like we've been saying, you don't want to be jumping into that too quickly, because it's just … counterproductive. So, I think it's important to think about all the different interventions, where they're at now, and as you're moving through the next year and a half, and what is realistic for them, for each of them.

Cay Bradley

So, we had another question that came in about thinking about whether or not your project is innovative, and I think that, for me, a lot of that is about not just, is it new to your area, but is it new to the field? Because, to me, if you're taking something that's … used a lot in another state or another county, or whatever, and putting it in yours, yeah, there's a little bit of innovation there, but it's not truly innovative. It's more just trying it out in a different setting. So, I think that's one key thing for me, is thinking about, like, is the innovation just because it's not in your area, or [is] the innovation because it's newer to the field? And it's really about what's new or different about what you're doing. How can you distinguish your intervention from what's available, from what your target population might be able to get somewhere else?

So, I don't know, Emma, if that answers your question fully. But I think, from my perspective, one of the places that people really … get stuck is thinking about—and this was not true with an OAH or OPA grantee, it was true with another grantee—they were very wedded to, they had an innovation because they were teaching their workers a different way to interact with you. Well, the reality is, what they were teaching their workers to do was standard practice in lots of different localities. So, I think it's important to think about … the field, not just your local area. And then, let's see, so I hope that helps, Emma.

And technology is new to some extent, right? But, again, trying to think of that, like, how different is it really from what's been going on? So I hope

that helps. Any other questions? Okay. So, Lizzy, nice selection. Lizzy is asking about ways to think about new or different organizations and folks to engage in your findings. Lauren, do you have any thoughts, or Russ or Dean, do you guys want to take yourselves off mute. Any thoughts about this? It seems [to be about thinking] more innovatively or expansively about who they include in their dissemination channel?

Lauren Scher — I'd be interested if there are any participants who wanted to think about what their strategies might be. I mean, I think what's really cool about this grant program, this IIN grant program, is that it's kind of topic specific, and so it broadens beyond just the region that you're working with. For example, if you're working on interventions for caregivers, it opens up this whole world of programs that support caregivers. And … I think that the question is, how do you find that? And I think thinking even beyond TPP might be helpful. I think it is a bit challenging to think about, thinking beyond what you've done all the time. But I think the more that you talk and you start … getting out there, talking to folks and asking them, oh, well, where do you go to conferences and who do you talk to, that might help you broaden out your base of the typical people that you might disseminate to.

Cay Bradley — And I like that idea, Lauren. Some of you know this about me already, but I spend a lot of time in the child welfare world as well, and so some of you are working with caregivers or with children who are involved with the child welfare system, and thinking about, as Lauren was saying, where do people who focus on child welfare research [go]? Where do they go? They go to the SWRC, which is the Social Work Research Conference, there are places like that that you can go.

But I also think it's important to think about how you get to the field and to the practitioner, and what are the newsletters that they read, what are the listservs that they're on, and … try to figure that out. And it may be that your facilitators are people who can help you figure out … where are those people, or your partners can tell you … where they go to learn about things. So, those are ways to think about it as well.

Does anybody else have any ideas or suggestions about how to get your information out there in different ways?

Russell Cole — This is Russ. And this is definitely not my area of expertise, but I'm going to attempt to channel some of the things that I've heard our communications staff at Mathematica talk about in the past. So a lot of times, they put in our minds: who are you trying to communicate to, and once you've gone through that process of thinking about who the folks that you're trying to get a message out to, the next step becomes, what's the typical dissemination channel that they are taking advantage of or that

they are reading or that they're subscribed to, or conferences that they attend, or whatever? That's like a second thing, is,… think about the mode, the method by which to get the message to those individuals.

And then another layer that we have to add on top of this is the appropriate level of detail or what the message needs to be for each individual, because different consumers are going to have different priorities or different things that they're going to pay attention to. So I think the main principle behind all of this is: There isn't one message that's going to be applicable to all of these different audiences, and one mode isn't going to be appropriate for getting that message out. It's definitely going to be a multistage process of identifying your intended dissemination audience, figuring out the modes and the methods that are going to be appropriate for getting a message out to them, and then also, like, the actual detail and the content and the format of the message that you're trying to send. It's this multilayered piece.

I don't know if that's helpful or not, but to … go to something that Lauren said, if this is something that you would like TA [on], we can get you connected with our communications staff, and they can help do this a lot better than what I just stumbled through.

Cay Bradley — So, I also want to point out that Lauren, Russ, and I have all shown our home base being research, and Rebecca has raised a great question, which is, hey, we've got that. We know how to get it out to practitioners. That's not the innovation part on our end. But what they're struggling with is how to write it up formally for an academic journal, and that it takes a lot of time, and trying to figure out how to do that. So I'm going to put in a plug that Russ just put in, which is you should feel free to talk to your TA liaison about that, because they might be able to help.

Jean Knab — Can I just jump in?

Cay Bradley — Yes, please. I was going to ask you to.

Jean Knab — Yeah, so one outlet for that is a special issue that we are putting together for … *Prevention Science*. You should have all received [inaudible]. If you haven't, let us know in the chat, and we can get that out to you. As part of that, of course, as everyone said, reach out to your TA liaison. We're happy to help you think about what topics might work, what sort of [inaudible] might work. We will also have office hours in conjunction with OPA. I believe on the [inaudible], the 11th, and I'll just double check. On the 11th and the 23rd, we will have actual office hours, if anyone wants to attend those to talk through their topics as well.

You're right … in general, moving to a journal can be an intimidating thing, and sometimes you feel like you're going to invest a lot of time and you're not sure how helpful it is or what the target journal is. We're happy to help you think about a target journal. Again, some journals accept papers that are very short, right? It's just really a way to just draw attention to something, versus a long evaluation paper. So, we're happy to help with the target journal.

Lauren Scher — And I would say one other thing about journals is, you know, you don't want to be spending, like, time trying to submit something that's just not going to work for that journal. So, doing some good prep work and understanding what kind of things did they publish, what is the expectation, what kind of guidance that does journal provide will help you in the long run to have a more chance of a successful at actually getting published.

Cay Bradley — All right, Stacy is sharing that if you're partnering with community health centers or [inaudible] qualitied health centers, the National Association of Community Health Centers launched the Center for Community Health Innovation, and they would be interested in learning about and sharing information, so RHNTC could help you connect there. Lizzy is saying, hey, OPA has got the list of typical journals, and reach out if you want some information. That's a handy way to get to the journals that are more likely to love your paper, and that's a great resource.

Anything else, room people? I'm going to flip the slide for a minute. Lauren, we have two upcoming webinars. One is about systems and network analysis on March 24, and then core components on June 8, so I'm sure that announcements will be coming and things like that, but those are the upcoming webinars. Lauren, those are both from Mathematica, right?

Lauren Scher — Yes.

Cay Bradley — All right. And then just in case you feel the need to get in touch with either myself or Lauren, here are our email addresses. Everybody at Mathematica is first initial, last name, so we're easy to find, as long as you know how to spell our first names and our last names. But we have four more minutes, so I'll hang out for another second and see if anybody else has any questions.

And I see people are leaving the meeting, so I think I'm going to say thank you for much for joining us, and Lauren and I were really excited to do this webinar, and we look forward to questions. Lauren, I don't know if you want to say anything on your way as people leave.

Lauren Scher	No. Thanks. Thanks. And, yeah, we look forward to continuing to have this conversation with you all.
Webinar Attendee	I have a question.
Cay Bradley	Sure.
Webinar Attendee	So, we're in South Carolina. We're Fast Forward. One of our innovations that we were looking to explore further was something that was already existing, and I know that some other partners were using some existing things, but kind of looking at them from a different way, and I wanted to know if you had any suggestions or if using an existing program, is that theme innovative if you're testing it for a different purpose than what it was originally designed for?
Lauren Scher	That seems like something you should talk to your project officer about, you know. But certainly, that's in the path. You know, that has been a way to innovate, is to learn about what people do in other fields and then try it out in a different scenario. But definitely, that's something you want to talk to the project officer about.
Cay Bradley	Yeah.
Webinar Attendee	Okay. Great. Thank you.
Cay Bradley	Any other questions? I'm seeing lots and lots of people leave, so I think we're getting down to—but I don't want to cut anybody off if anybody has any questions. All right, Lexi, I think if you want to stop the recording, you can do that, and thank you for all of the rest of you who have hung on to the last minute. We'll let you go with one minute to spare, and have a good rest of your Wednesday, and a good rest of your week.
Lauren Scher	Thanks everyone. Bye.