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# Improvement Coach

## Project selection guidance

To gain maximum benefit from the Improvement Coach program, it is essential that you identify a team, ideally new or just beginning, with an improvement project on which to focus your learning.

We recommend you scope out smaller projects. The project will have a good chance of success and produce results that will be seen as important to your organisation. Ideally, the team will be able to test ideas and see results from those ideas within the 12 weeks of the program.

### Considerations for project selection

Scope out projects that can be used for learning and development during this program.

It helps if they:

- **are smaller-scale projects** – for example, at a unit or department level to start. If the project is focused on a large, long-term improvement project, consider breaking it down into smaller components and work on one component with an intermediate aim to allow you and the team to practise the methods and tools and see results
- **have a good chance of producing positive results** that are important to your organisation. Ideally, the project and results should be connected to the strategic and business plans of your organisation
- **can be tested and measured within the 12 weeks** of this program, so you can see the results. The systems, processes, products, or organisations where the anticipated changes must be made should be within the control of the team or the leader supporting the project.
- are focused on either:
  - **a process to be improved** (one process where you can identify the boundaries – start and endpoints – and that is not undergoing significant changes already)
  - **a problem** that is clearly linked to an identifiable process.
- **have key measures of success** that connect directly to the goals for the project have been identified. Ideally, data can be collected daily (can be weekly if needed) for the measures. Availability of baseline data is recommended but not necessary.

The project must have a sponsor – i.e. a leader responsible for the area under study – who agrees to actively provide guidance, routinely monitor project progress, and aggressively remove barriers.

## Examples of appropriate projects

- Improve a process that produces good results most of the time but occasionally results in errors or problems (e.g. testing new protocols for reducing errors).
- Identify a process that better matches and meets a patient or family need, even if patients or families have not expressly asked for it (e.g. test a process to better assess long-term care residents' needs).
- Identify and improve processes, products, and services by making fundamental changes even though the output is currently not considered a problem to deliver even better outcomes in the future.
- Improve a product, process or service today, which will put you in a better competitive position (e.g. improve outcomes for patients with chronic conditions through self-management support that includes collaborative goal setting, action planning, and problem solving).
- Fix a recent or recurring problem that all agree needs to be fixed to put a process back (restore) to the level it was designed to perform or to exceed expected performance.

## Projects that aren't appropriate for this program

- Any project where you expect an information technology or training solution.
- A project around something that happens infrequently (e.g. quarterly, annually).
- Any project where you cannot answer the question, 'How do I know a change is an improvement?'
- A project that is lacking leadership ownership or support. For example, a process owner who has the authority to make and sustain change is not on the team. Or with larger, cross-functional teams, the executive sponsor is not assigned or supportive.
- Huge ('solving world hunger') projects. Strategic issues, while worthy of work by their very nature, will require more than three to six months. Consider scaling down or partitioning these projects into a more manageable 'chunk' (i.e. no more than 4-8 major components).
- Politically charged issues are not a wise choice as they can easily get mired in conflict.
- A project that aims to:
  - develop a measurement or data collection system - such as a balanced scorecard, dashboard, surveys, or core measures
  - fix a transient problem or an emergency
  - implement various types of inspection or reviews to prevent errors from reaching a customer
  - improve employee compensation or rewards
  - implement or improve a one-time or infrequent training or educational workshop.

## Project topics from previous participants

- Improve emergency department flow from admission to time in a bed.
- Improve emergency department care for patients with deep venous thrombosis/pulmonary embolism.
- Decrease inappropriate utilisation of emergency department.
- Reduce pressure ulcers; visual cues for bedside staff in paediatric pressure ulcer prevention.
- Improve follow-up post-hospital stay.
- Reduce the number of days to schedule an appointment for surgery.
- Decrease wait time for cancer patients seeking overnight lodging.
- Patient centred design: Reduce paperwork for patients (and increase patient and provider workflow and satisfaction).
- Reduce appointment 'no-shows'.
- Improve medical screening process; increase screening rate for social needs in an ambulatory clinic.
- Improve completion of a tobacco smoking history reminder in outpatient primary care.
- Reduce resident falls with harm.
- Improve hydration on an elderly ward.
- Increase student asthma medications in school nurse's office.
- Reduce parental complaints regarding homework.
- Improve housing placements; Improve rapid re-housing.