

Systems Thinking Adoption and Integration Plan

The Waters Center has developed this sample Adoption and Integration Plan (A & I Plan) outlining key factors to building and sustaining systems thinking capacity within an organization. The plan includes customization based on the needs and desired outcomes of any interested organization. Factors such as strategic plans, organizational goals, success indicators, organizational culture and community engagement and support influence the design of each customized plan.

The A & I plan is designed to build systems thinking capacities of all stakeholders. When systems thinking implementation extends throughout an organization, members develop and practice a shared understanding of language, habits of thinking and visual tools to deepen and enrich the thinking leading to action. Organizations that incorporate systems thinking at both broad and deep levels will maximize their capabilities to generate their desired results.

Establish a Design Team

A design team of key representative stakeholders will be formed and invited to help develop an implementation plan that includes

- Identification of a designated liaison who will be responsible for leading and facilitating the design team's work. This person will also work closely with Water's Center staff and faculty and oversee logistics such as scheduling, communication and contractual agreements.
- Establishment of desired outcomes for systems thinking capacity building, both short-term and long-term.
- Align and develop structures for initial and ongoing technical assistance, including workshops and follow-up coaching. The pace and level of participation in early and subsequent stages of the project will be determined by the design team.
- Develop a timeline for all aspects of the plan.
- Monitor and assess progress, and make modifications when necessary.
- The team will convene approximately 2 times per year to assess progress and ensure fidelity of project implementation.

Build initial systems thinking capacity

Waters Center faculty will develop and facilitate a series of systems thinking workshops that are customized to align with organizational goals and challenges. These professional development experiences will engage participants in relevant learning environments that directly apply to individual roles and responsibilities. Initially, an initial select group of people are invited or volunteer to participate in what is called the first cohort. Gradually, additional cohorts will be added so that capacity building is paced at appropriate rates, with steady levels of support provided for all members.

Examples of systems thinking workshop outcomes that are possible for each cohort of learners include, but are not limited to:

- Learners will develop knowledge of and skills in the use of systems thinking habits, concepts and tools
- Through interactive, inquiry-based instruction, learners will experience, practice, and apply systems thinking habits, concepts and tools to personal and professional goals.
- Learners will use systems thinking tools to analyze complex issues and identify high-leverage interventions
- Learners will develop and share a plan of application relevant to their work.

Follow-up coaching and embedded technical assistance

After participation in workshops, cohorts of learners will have follow-up coaching support.

Examples of coaching support include, but are not limited to:

- Coaching meetings to plan, discuss a challenge, reflect on practice, or debrief an experience
- Co-facilitation or teaching opportunity with a learner working directly with a coach
- Demonstration facilitation or teaching with learner observing a coach
- Small, collaborative learning groups where learners regularly meet with peers and share their experiences with systems thinking practice and provide feedback to one another. Structures and guidance for these small collaborative groups will be provided by coaches.
- One-on-one online meetings or phone calls between learner(s) and coach.
- Small group online meetings or conference calls with a coach.

Deepen systems thinking understanding and application

Sometime referred to as “level 2” or “advanced” technical assistance, experienced learners will be provided advanced professional development that will deepen the understanding and application of systems thinking. This is best done after a year of practice and follow-up coaching. Examples of advanced systems thinking workshop outcomes for experienced learners include, but are not limited to:

Experienced learners will be able to

- deepen their understanding of the ladder of inference and iceberg visuals as frameworks, build interconnected causal loops, create stock/flow maps and apply causal loop archetypes to day-to-day challenges.
- apply ST habits and tools to change management processes, and/or specific improvement initiatives.
- critique the work of others by learning how to advise and give feedback when examining systems thinking artifacts.
- engage in simulated exercises and provide insightful connections to their own systems demonstrating the ability to transfer understanding within and between systems.

Facilitators in training: Building an internal capacity to sustain systems thinking integration

Based on demonstrated skills, after approximately 2 years, experienced individuals will be invited to participate in a facilitators-in-training group. This group will be provided additional support and technical assistance so that they can develop systems thinking facilitation and

coaching expertise. The Waters Center has a process that includes expected performance outcomes for facilitators. The pace of developing facilitators is individualized and is based on demonstrated performance, so it is likely that facilitators will develop at different rates. Developing facilitators will also be provided an opportunity to work towards and earn a Waters Center credential.