

Spread and Sustainability Story

Learn, Teach, Share: Spreading and Sustaining our STAR Efforts

Oklahoma is known for its rural geography, which presents a challenge if you're trying to spread, monitor, and sustain an effort statewide. But despite those challenges, the STAR-SI initiative continues to spread across our great state. The Oklahoma effort to spread the NIATx process improvement techniques uses several approaches, some directed toward providers, and some focused on building this knowledge in our administrative office staff so we can continue to teach and support NIATx techniques after the STAR-SI funding ends.

The STAR-SI Learning Collaboratives are the most direct way we share NIATx process improvement. For the first two years of STAR-SI we met monthly. However, as we approached Year 3, the state change team really began to think about how this effort would be sustained once grant ended. We discussed our concerns with STAR-SI participants and asked for their suggestions about sustaining collaborative meetings. Participants were concerned about the long travel times to get to monthly meetings, and since some of the participants were also clinicians, this meant time away from treatment. And skyrocketing gas prices were not making travel any cheaper.

Oklahoma is fortunate to also be a recipient of a Transformation Grant, and through this grant the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (DMHSAS) has recently installed videoconferencing technology throughout the state. For Year 3, the STAR-SI state team set a quarterly learning collaborative meeting schedule and half of those meetings will be available via videoconference. This allows a couple meetings per year where we meet face-to-face, eat together, and reconnect; but also allows for a more frequent information exchange via video technology. We have already learned a lot about what meeting formats work most effectively with the technology.

One of our favorite spread techniques is attending state and local conferences and meetings to share NIATx process improvement techniques and our success stories. Both the state change team and providers have had opportunities to share successful change projects at statewide conferences, annual contract meetings, and monthly Process Improvement (PI) Board Subcommittee Meetings. The PI Board Subcommittee meetings give everyone a chance to share their stories with members of the DMHSAS board and leadership. At the same time, we have educated our board members about NIATx techniques, the STAR-SI initiative, and change occurring at our provider sites. It is a terrific experience for providers to come share their successes and receive lots of positive feedback from board members and leadership.

Just as Oklahoma spent much time pondering the question of how to sustain our learning collaboratives into Year 3 and beyond, we have also considered the

need to train and sustain change leaders in our provider agencies as well as in our administrative office. Our approach encompasses change leaders in both places. Change leaders are the core of the NIATx PI model; they also tend to be bright, busy, and promotable staff. All of these traits mean change leaders get promoted into new positions, get hired away, or frequently just have so much to do that their time for change projects is limited. Understanding this is the reality of the workforce; Oklahoma is preparing to train two or three change leaders in each provider facility. The hope is that this will sustain change in the facilities despite the workforce turnover mentioned above. We also hope to increase the number of SSA staff trained in NIATx PI techniques.

Oklahoma has also made a number of state level changes to assure the NIATx Process Improvement model is sustained and used long after the STAR-SI grant is over. Early in the project, a state rule went into effect requiring all outpatient substance abuse providers to do a walk through and write a report on the results. This allows an opportunity for all providers to assess their business processes, customer focus, and welcoming atmosphere.

Before the STAR-SI grant was awarded, the then-commissioner hired a permanent, full time position to oversee process improvement in DMHSAS. This position, the Systems Process Improvement Coordinator, is responsible for the STAR-SI initiative as well. Later, the STAR-SI project manager position became permanent as well and will continue to be in place to teach, support, and implement change in the Oklahoma mental health and substance abuse treatment system.

Other features in place to sustain improvements in Oklahoma include an Enhanced Tier Payment Contract, which pays bonuses to mental health providers who over perform on selected process and outcome measures. We also have a well-respected Decision Support Services staff that actively supports performance management with their individualized trainings and reports. With all of these supports in place, we believe that DMHSAS and our provider agencies will continue to partner to improve client access and retention to mental health and substance abuse services.