USC Improvement Leader Program

The University of South Carolina's Improvement Leader 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 16 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 guiding and coaching participants individually. This work requires roughly 30 hours.

- **Importance:** One of the university's top three strategic priorities is to **transform service delivery and promote operational excellence**. Participants in USC's Improvement Leader Program will have an important role in making this priority a reality.

- **Cohort:** The 2024-25 cohort will be limited to 15 people.

- **Schedule:** Learning sessions 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 Leader Program Certificate. It represents the attainment of a set of practical knowledge, skills, and tools for leading the way on improvement and achieving meaningful results.

- **Application:** An application process is used to determine participants in the cohort. The application specifies selection criteria, and it guides applicants in providing three potential improvement projects. Early into the program, participants narrow to the one project they will facilitate. **Applications are due by 5 p.m. Wednesday, July 31, 2024**. **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:

Wednesday, July 31, 2024 – Deadline for submission of applications
Week of August 5 – Cohort announced

Building Your Foundation as an Improvement Leader
Session 1 • September 5 • In person

Expanding Your Know-How and Skills for Improvement Projects
Session 2 • Process Improvement • September 18 • In person
Session 3 • Resource Optimization and Problem Solving • Sept. 23 • In person

Serving as an Effective Facilitator
Session 4 • October 16 • In person

Learning from Your Improvement Colleagues
Session 5 • November 7 • via Teams

Building Momentum and Reaching the Project Finish Line
Session 6 • December 5 • via Teams
Session 7 • January 9, 2025 • In person

Sustaining Improvement in Your Work and Workplace
Session 8 • February 5 • In person

Project Presentations
Participant project presentations will be scheduled for March 2025.

- **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 concluding 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 Leader

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

SESSION 1 2 Hours • In person • Thursday, September 5, 2024 • 2-4 p.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 • Wednesday, September 18, 2024 • 9 a.m. to noon

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 • Monday, September 23, 2024 • 1:30 - 4:30 p.m.

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 three weeks before the next session, 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   2 Hours • In person • Wednesday, October 16, 2024 • 9-11 a.m.

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

> 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   1.5 Hours • Teams • Thursday, November 7, 2024 • 2-3:30 p.m.

- Gain insights from a panel of improvement leaders from last year's cohort. They'll talk about their projects, their experiences putting the tools to work, their role as change agents ... and more.
- 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   1.5 Hours • Teams • Thursday, December 5, 2024 • 2-3:30 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 moving on 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 the upcoming session.

SESSION 7 1.5 Hours • In person • Thursday, January 9, 2025 • 9-10:30 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 5, 2025 • 9-10:30 a.m.

• Celebrating progress
• Continuing to be an active advocate for improvement
• Partnering with managers and leaders
• Sharing improvement ideas and tools with colleagues
• Staying alert to future improvement opportunities

The session involves a celebration of progress, with participants sharing achievements and highlighting their improvement-oriented commitments going forward. Sponsors and other university leaders join the cohort for this session.

Project Presentations

Scheduled Separately • Most of the presentations will be in 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.

Invitations will be extended to participants' managers, project team members, cohort peers, and other colleagues.

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