



Creating a Professional Learning Theory for a NEA Professional Excellence Grant

The purpose of this tool is for affiliates to identify, implement, and scale professional learning and submit this tool as part of an application for an NEA Professional Excellence Grant. Professional Excellence Grants support affiliates in promoting quality education, student success, and a professionalized workforce, fostering a system of professional supports and resources. Do you have questions about this Professional Learning Theory? **Please contact Dr. Ambereen Khan-Baker, NBCT (akhanbaker@nea.org) or Jennifer Locke, NBCT (jlocke@nea.org).** We co-created this tool with our colleagues, members, and state affiliates, on the basis of several frameworks related to improvement science and the National Equity Project's *Liberatory Design*. Please visit the [Professional Excellence Grants](#) website and our [folder](#) for resources.

Step 1: Study the System

Public Narrative: What is the story of your community?

A strong public narrative challenges dominant narratives and helps articulate a shared vision and purpose. Stories humanize our community and foster empathy and understanding. Responses should include feedback from the individuals closest to the problem.

Who are the individuals that you are focusing on in this professional learning theory?	
What experiences do they share that have affected their lives and beliefs?	
What urgent problems or challenges do they face?	
What are their hopes and dreams for the future?	

Identify a Concern

Identifying a concern can help see a system and, in turn, develop humanized change ideas to improve it. Explore your wonders and more deeply understand the root causes of your problem before developing your theory of improvement.

Problem Statement	Investigative Tools
Describe the big problem you are working to address.	Which investigative tool(s) may help you better understand your problem? Resources: Root causes , Investigative Tools , Root cause analysis , Shift video

What do you know?	What do you wonder?
What evidence do you have about the current state of the problem identified? What is currently happening? (Add bullets as needed.) Evidence can include hard data, anecdotal observations, contextual information, focus groups, and interview findings.	What questions do you have, or what do you wonder about the current state of the problem identified? (Add bullets as needed.)
★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★

Step 2: Map a Change Theory

Develop a Change Theory

A team's professional learning theory articulates the why, what, and how of achieving your aim.

Theory of Improvement

- ★ Think big picture.
- ★ Your theory is an evidence-based hypothesis describing how you believe change will happen.
- ★ What improvements could be made to a program, policy, or practice to meet a professional learning need that has been identified?

Use the following stem to articulate your theory of how you will achieve your aim:

If we [identify activity],
then we will [increase/decrease]
[identify the need],
which will lead to [identify SMARTIE aim/goal--see below].

SMARTIE Aim

Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Realistic, Time bound, Inclusive, Equitable

- ★ What will be improved
 - By when
 - How much
 - In collaboration with
 - For whom?

Resources: [Video](#), [Graphic organizer](#)
(Source: [Shift](#))

NAME OF ORGANIZATION: _____

will ☐ INCREASE ☐ DECREASE CONTENT FOCUS OF PROJECT: _____

STARTING POINT, BASELINE DATA: _____ to _____

DATE _____ IN COLLABORATION WITH _____

by _____ with _____

WHOM, POPULATION _____

for _____

Use the following stem to articulate your goal:

By [such and such date], [we] will increase/decrease ____ from ____ to ____ with [in collaboration with] for [whom, population].

Connecting to the Larger Picture: Creating and Sustaining a System of Professional Supports

Professional Excellence grants should promote a system that establishes both the value of a quality, professionalized educator workforce and the role of the Association in creating and sustaining a system of professional supports.

Role of the Association in Creating and Sustaining a System of Professional Supports

★ How does your aim and theory support your Association's values and priorities?

★ What is the value of this professional learning support to members?

★ How will the Association strategically identify members from historically underserved populations to co-create, lead, and/or participate?

Connecting to NEA's Frameworks in Creating and Sustaining a System of Professional Supports

NEA frameworks/tools may include, but are not limited to: [NEA's Leadership Competencies](#), [Great Teaching and Learning Report](#), [ESPs Professional Growth Continuum](#), [ESPs Career Families](#), [NEA's Teacher Leadership Competencies](#), [NEA's Racial Justice in Education Framework](#) ([see graphic organizer](#)), and [NEA Community Schools Strategy](#).

★ Which NEA framework(s) or tool(s) will you use to think through and implement your theory? Why is this framework relevant?

Step 3: Implement Professional Learning

Implementation Plan

What steps will we take to achieve our aim? Your implementation plan needs to include these components listed below. You can use this chart or organize this information in a narrative form. See [resources here](#).

Goals	★ What are our steps in creating, implementing, and testing this professional learning support?
Who is involved in this activity?	★ How are diverse voices included in shaping and enacting the activity? Ideally, this should include members, affiliate staff, leadership, potential partners, etc., who are closest to the work.
Predicted Outcome	★ What do we hope to happen, based on our prior knowledge, experience, and observations?
Informative Data	★ What kind(s) of information will help you know if you are making progress toward your SMARTIE aim? ★ How will you gather this information from the individuals whose experiences are most important to understand? Examples include stories, artifacts, field notes, observations, focus groups, interviews, feedback protocols, and surveys. ★ How will this information help inform action or decision-making?
Budget	★ How will you allocate funds and resources effectively?

Goals	Who is involved?	Predicted Outcome	Informative Data	Budget