



OFFICE OF ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE

# ANNUAL REPORT

## 2025-2026



UNIVERSITY OF  
**South Carolina**



## ADVANCING TOGETHER

"If you dislike change, you're going to dislike irrelevance even more." This striking quote from Eric Shinseki has resonated with me for years. But how we approach change matters just as much as whether we embrace it. Change can be made with people or to people — and that distinction has never been more important.

Today's higher education environment demands thoughtful adaptation and informed action — work we're investing in across the university. From the president's cabinet to project teams and improvement leaders, faculty and staff are analyzing data, prioritizing high-value activities and driving progress in their units.

An important part of this effort is practicing subtractive improvement. Too often our work is reflexively additive. By redesigning processes and removing activities that no longer add value, we create room for innovative approaches that better support our strategic priorities. And we position ourselves to leverage transformational technology, such as AI, in ways employees experience as opportunities rather than impositions.

The work reflected in this report represents more than individual projects — it reflects a growing institutional capability to improve how we work together. And it clearly demonstrates that when we approach change collaboratively, guided by data and focused on what truly adds value, we not only achieve meaningful results but also strengthen our resilience for the future.

**Stacey Bradley**

University Organizational Excellence Officer



## AT A GLANCE

### This year ...

- 15 new improvement leaders are driving meaningful change in their units.
- 181 individuals built improvement skills through learning sessions led by the Office of Organizational Excellence.
- 87 units across 11 divisions, 15 colleges and schools, and three campuses invested in improvement through projects and learning sessions guided by the Office of Organizational Excellence.

### Since 2023 ...

- 43 projects guided by Improvement Leader Program participants have reduced duplication, saved time, improved clarity and strengthened decision-making in units across the university.
- 14,000+ hours have been saved through improvement projects and can be repurposed for higher value work.



## IMPROVEMENT LEADER PROGRAM

### A growing network of improvement leaders

The 15 newest graduates of USC's Improvement Leader Program are applying practical tools and methods to make meaningful change in their units.

Over six months, the group participated in seven hands-on learning sessions led by the Office of Organizational Excellence. Each participant led an improvement project in their work area and presented results at the program's conclusion.

They join a growing network of 43 improvement leaders across the university. Since 2023, the Improvement Leader Program has strengthened USC's capacity for continuous improvement — delivering high-impact projects that benefit teams, units and the broader institution.

For more about the program — including how to apply for the next cohort, and to see the slides and recorded project presentations — [visit \*\*sc.edu/excellence\*\*](https://sc.edu/excellence).

“This program gave me a practical framework for improvement: begin with discovery, explore possibilities, plan thoughtfully and then implement. Most importantly, it showed me the value of getting input and buy-in from the people closest to the work so that change is not designed in a vacuum, but in a way that can truly succeed.”

— **La Trice Small**, director of institutional assessment, 2025-26 improvement leader

## PARTICIPANTS

**Morgan Bailey**, Director of Programs, Anne Frank Center

**Kadejah Bethea**, Senior Compliance and Tax Accountant, Office of the Controller

**Lauren Clark**, Director, Office of Undergraduate Research

**Elizabeth Crane**, Director of Career and Professional Development, Joseph F. Rice School of Law

**Ellyn Domanico**, Graduate Student Services Manager, School of Information Science

**Laura Faile**, Academic Program Director, Palmetto Programs

**Justin Light**, Director of Football Academics, Athletics

**Kimberley Massey**, Senior Associate Director of Design, Division of Marketing

**Stephanie McCarter**, Assistant Director of Compliance and Quality Control, Student Financial Aid and Scholarships

**Chavis McDonald**, Director of Customer Experience and Change Management, Business Affairs

**J. Scott Parker**, Communications Director, College of Information and Communications

**La Trice Small**, Director of Institutional Assessment, Office of Institutional Research, Assessment and Analytics

**Manda GJ Fontenot Tuk**, Business Operations Specialist, College of Education

**John Waters III**, IT Business Data Analyst, Division of Human Resources

**Catherine Wiggins**, Vice Dean for External Relations, College of Hospitality, Retail and Sport Management

# ENGAGEMENTS

## Practical improvement, universitywide

This year, the Office of Organizational Excellence partnered with teams across the university to improve how work gets done — focusing on efforts that save time, reduce duplication and strengthen decision-making. These engagements reflect a range of approaches, from leadership alignment to process redesign, all grounded in practical improvements that deliver measurable results and position units for continued progress.



## President's cabinet and deans retreat

University leaders identified actions to drive progress on key focus areas during the president's retreat facilitated by the Office of Organizational Excellence.

The president's cabinet and academic deans worked individually and in teams to define a focused set of action items for the next two years, aligning efforts with the university's strategic priorities.

The actions will continue to be refined with additional input from across the institution to guide implementation and next steps.

## Board-approved academic personnel action notifications process

Preparation time for notifications of board-approved academic personnel actions, including tenure and promotion, has been cut in half, and distribution accuracy has increased to 100 percent.

The improvement project team, including staff from the offices of the Board of Trustees, the provost and University Communications, streamlined this high-volume, deadline-driven process by standardizing formats, aligning distribution and centralizing workflows — improving accuracy and consistency while reducing manual effort.

## Grant proposal, award and account setup process

Grants and Funds Management staff are projected to save 750-1,000 hours annually through improvements identified by the project team.

The team, composed of staff from the Controller's Office, Sponsored Awards Management and several colleges and schools, focused on changes that support the rollout of the new Huron grants management system launching this year. Their improvements are expected to reduce errors, increase transparency and enhance service over time.

“Continuous improvement is critically important for administrative and support functions of the university. This project provided meaningful opportunity to hear feedback from the university research community, and, most important, it was the catalyst for process mapping that gave a solid foundation for Grants and Funds Management's post-award improvement project.”

— Mandy Kibler, associate vice president for administration and finance and university controller, project co-sponsor

## Additional team support and engagement

In addition to formal project facilitation, the Office of Organizational Excellence supported teams with improvement guidance, priority-setting and strategic decision-making.

Guided by the office:

- The Human Resources Business Partner team identified priorities to strengthen relationships, clarify roles and improve communication as they implement the new service model.
- Student Affairs and Academic Support, in collaboration with University Libraries, developed plans to better coordinate memberships and subscriptions, reduce duplication and increase awareness of available resources.
- The Office of Special Events designed a future-state process and scalable workflow for event photo management to improve turnaround time, access and guest experience.

These efforts equipped teams with clear priorities, stronger coordination and practical next steps to support implementation and ongoing improvement.

## TRAINING AND RESOURCES

### Building capacity for improvement across USC

Expanding improvement work across the university means equipping more people with the tools, skills and confidence to lead change within their own areas. This year, the Office of Organizational Excellence continued to grow that capacity — making learning more accessible, more practical and more immediately useful.

### Improvement Foundations: learning by doing

Improvement Foundations has evolved into a flexible, high-impact session that introduces key concepts and tools, and puts them into action right away. Now offered more frequently — and in both in-person and virtual formats — the session is reaching more groups across the university.

Participants learn how improvement efforts unfold, from identifying the right opportunity to developing and implementing meaningful changes. Along the way, they explore practical tools for engaging teams, generating ideas and focusing on the actions that will have the greatest impact.

Best of all, participants apply what they learn in real time. They identify opportunities within their own areas, begin shaping potential improvements and leave with clear next steps. This hands-on approach helps embed improvement within units — not as a one-time effort, but as an ongoing way of working.

### AI for PI: practical prompts that power improvement

This year, the office launched a prompt library designed to help individuals and teams harness AI at every stage of their improvement work.

Organized around the core phases of improvement — discovery, possibility, planning and implementation — these prompts offer concrete ways to apply AI. From analyzing stakeholder feedback and identifying process waste to generating ideas and building implementation plans, users can move quickly from a blank page to meaningful insights.

The results are faster progress, sharper analysis and a greater ability for anyone across the university to gain immediate insights and ideas for improvement. Visit the toolbox at [sc.edu/excellence](https://sc.edu/excellence) to learn more.

## NCCI LEADERSHIP

### A national voice in higher education improvement

The Office of Organizational Excellence is an active and growing contributor to the Network for Change and Continuous Innovation, which advances excellence in higher education by promoting practices that drive change, innovation and continuous improvement.

Stacey Bradley serves on the NCCI Board of Directors, bringing USC's perspective to the national conversation on improvement in higher education. She has also served twice as invited faculty for NCCI's Organizational Effectiveness Institute for senior leaders. Her involvement reflects a commitment not only to internal excellence, but also to advancing the broader field.

Maegan Gudridge is vice chair of NCCI's Volunteer and Member Engagement Council, helping increase institutional memberships and individual engagement.

The team has presented at the NCCI Annual Conference twice and will present again this year.

In 2024, they shared their experience launching the Improvement Leader Program and achieving early results. In 2025, they addressed a common workplace challenge with "Achieving the Miracle of Fewer, Faster, Better Meetings."

At this year's conference, the team will present "Staying Relevant in Turbulent Times," exploring how an improvement office maximizes its impact amid uncertainty, resource constraints and shifting priorities.

Kelly DeShazo, student services program coordinator with the Graduation and Retention Network and a member of the 2024-25 improvement leader cohort, also presented a poster at the 2025 conference. She highlighted her improvement project streamlining the interdisciplinary certificate process to better meet growing student demand.

USC faculty and staff can take advantage of the university's institutional NCCI membership at no cost, gaining access to webinars and a member-only library of improvement resources. To join, visit the toolbox at [sc.edu/excellence](https://sc.edu/excellence).

## ADVISORY GROUP

### Guiding organizational excellence

The Advisory Group for Organizational Excellence is composed of academic and administrative leaders from across the university. Together, they ensure that the organizational excellence initiative is collaborative, coordinated and powered by different perspectives.

### Members, 2025-26

**Caroline Agardy**, Vice President for Human Resources

**Jeannette Andrews**, Dean and Helen Gurley Wolford Professor, College of Nursing

**Brice Bible**, Vice President for Information Technology and Chief Information Officer

**Stacey Bradley**, University Organizational Excellence Officer

**Kelly Epting**, Associate Vice President for Finance and Budget

**Julius Fridriksson**, Vice President for Research

**Hossein Haj-Hariri**, Dean, Molinaroli College of Engineering and Computing

**Tommy Hodges**, Interim Dean, McCausland College of Arts and Sciences  
(beginning January 2026)

**Mandy Kibler**, Associate Vice President for Administration and Finance, University Controller

**Shannon Means**, Vice Provost for Strategy and Innovation

**Joel Samuels**, Dean, McCausland College of Arts and Sciences  
(through December 2025)

**J. Rex Tolliver**, Vice President for Student Affairs and Academic Support

**Julian Williams**, Vice President for System Affairs and Community Engagement



## OUR SERVICES

We partner with you to improve how work gets done — offering guidance, facilitation and practical tools to help your team achieve meaningful, measurable results.

- **Improvement guidance:**  
Clarifying opportunities and identifying the best path forward
- **Project facilitation:**  
Leading improvement projects to keep teams aligned, focused and driving progress
- **Operational strategy:**  
Helping you set priorities, make decisions and plan for action
- **Knowledge and skill building:**  
Strengthening internal capacity through training and resources

## CONTACT US

Office of Organizational Excellence

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“Real improvement starts with disciplined discovery — not just identifying the surface problem but understanding its root causes and exploring multiple possibilities before acting. That methodical approach has changed how I think about solving problems and has made our work much more effective.”

— Justin Light, director of football academics, 2025-26 improvement leader

## STAY IN THE LOOP WITH OUR NEWSLETTER

Sent four times a year, the organizational excellence newsletter will keep you up to date regarding improvement projects, improvement leaders, newly posted tools, practical tips, announcements and more. Subscribe at [sc.edu/excellence](https://sc.edu/excellence).



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