



**OFFICE OF ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE**  
**ANNUAL REPORT**  
**2023-2024**



UNIVERSITY OF  
**South Carolina**



## THE VALUE OF TIME

Time. It's invaluable, but often invisible. How much time does it take for students to navigate confusing processes? How much time do faculty and staff members devote to extra steps in complex systems? How much time do we all spend in unnecessary meetings?

The Office of Organizational Excellence begins each project by making the unseen — including time — visible. We map processes to depict the steps, clarify the current state to show the full picture and listen to stakeholder feedback to bring valuable insights to light.

Providing visibility to these elements creates opportunity — for students to spend less time navigating processes, for faculty and staff members to have more time for higher value work and for all of us to make small changes to meetings that can add up to big impacts.

In our first year, our office collaborated with 65 team members and seven sponsors, facilitating improvement projects and gathering feedback from more than 1,400 students and faculty and staff members. I thank each of those who engaged in these projects to better serve their stakeholders and who gave valuable input that leads to informed action.

The Office of Organizational Excellence is here to support that action. It couldn't be done without the guidance and support of President Michael Amiridis, Provost Donna Arnett, CFO Ed Walton and our Organizational Excellence Advisory Group.

We look forward to serving you in the year ahead — another year of saving time, providing visibility where needed and sparking informed action!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stacy Bradley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Stacey Bradley**

University Organizational Excellence Officer

## INFORMED ACTION

### President's cabinet retreat

It's one thing to talk improvement and informed action. It's another thing for leaders to roll up their sleeves and do it.

Members of the president's cabinet engaged in a blitz session in early 2024 that focused on maintaining or enhancing quality during a time of growth. In advance of their session, cabinet members submitted structured input to ensure they could hit the ground running during their time together. During the session, they set aside other concerns to engage fully with the task at hand. They left the day with three informed actions and are working together to move forward on those plans.

See page 10 for more about identifying meaningful improvement actions in a relatively short time frame.



President's cabinet members take a hands-on approach to improvement.

## THE PATH FORWARD

### Academic financial planning optimization

What's better than lots of individual unit plans intended to serve customers? Having all service providers come together to develop one plan and one path forward, using customer input.



Team members work together to narrow down their action plans.

That's exactly what the Academic Financial Planning Optimization team did. The Budget Office; Bursar's Office; Division of Information Technology; Office of the Controller; Office of Institutional Research, Assessment and Analytics; and Office of the Provost listened to academic financial managers and deans, reviewed the various systems and developed a plan to improve the quality and accuracy of financial planning information, all while simplifying and standardizing reporting to save the users of that information time and money.

How much time? It's estimated that the coordinated plan will save more than 4,800 hours per year in manual sourcing, compilation and verification —a significant amount of time that can be repurposed for forecasting and analysis to inform important financial decisions.

## **THE GRADUATE SCHOOL**

### **Improving the graduate school application process**

The Graduate School is engaged in a project to improve the graduate application process and its coordination with academic programs.

The project began with a close review of the current application process — an internal look at how things are done right now. Next came an external look through a survey that gathered input from 700 applicants, graduate students and partners.

The Graduate School team studied all this input to develop an action set of improvements. At the time of this writing, the team is refining its action plan for implementation.

This twofold approach — looking internally at the current-state process and then reaching out to hear from customers, stakeholders and partners — is a great template for many improvement projects. But it's essential to go further and put the insights to work in developing and rigorously implementing the highest-value improvement.

Want to stay tuned for the latest developments? Go to [sc.edu/excellence](https://sc.edu/excellence) and click on “Projects” in the left navigation, or subscribe to the organizational excellence newsletter.

## **STUDENT DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS**

### **Streamlining accommodations registration**

A small team is making a big difference. Members of the Student Disability Resource Center team partnered with the Office of Civil Rights and Title IX to review the long-standing student disability accommodations registration process.

With substantial input from students and faculty and staff members, this project team identified ways to mistake-proof the front end of the application process, adjust their workflow and coordinate and clarify communications about accessibility services.

They also partnered with the Division of Human Resources to define a new handoff for students seeking workplace accommodations to simplify the process for students.

As a result of these improvements, the team expects to save nearly 800 hours per year — time they can allocate to higher value work with their students.



Members from the Purchasing Improvement Team study and refine a current-state process map.

## PURCHASING

### Using customer input to power improvement

When it comes to improvement, customers are key. Their input should shape what we do and how we do it because a satisfied customer is the best business strategy of all.

The Department of Purchasing has this strategy very much in mind. In its 2023 project to improve the purchasing process, they reached out and heard from customers in a big way. Through focus groups and a survey, the team gathered feedback, perspectives and suggestions directly from the people they serve.

They used the resulting insights in building an improvement plan. The plan is now being implemented, with the aim of making the purchasing experience more user-friendly and efficient for the purchasing department's many customers.

Some of the improvements are aimed at reducing loopbacks. These occur when a requisition is incomplete or incorrect and purchasing needs to “loop back” to the originator. This front-end delay is time-consuming and frustrating for customers, so the purchasing department is providing straightforward tip sheets, checklists and additional guidance to make the process easier to follow from the start.

It takes three days on average for a loopback to be fully resolved due to the inevitable back and forth to get needed information, so every eliminated loopback speeds up the process by an average of three days. The initial goal of reducing the loopback rate from 80 percent to 50 percent would free up an estimated 6,300 hours for higher-value work.

# IMPROVEMENT LEADER PROGRAM

## Strengthening our in-house skills for improvement

USC has 13 newly minted improvement leaders. They're the first group to complete the USC Improvement Leader Program.

The program blends practical learning with the immediate use of improvement concepts, methods and tools. It's learning by doing: each participant facilitated an improvement project in their work areas.

- Over the course of six months, the group participated in seven practical learning sessions led by improvement practitioners from the Office of Organizational Excellence.
- At the concluding session, USC President Michael Amiridis recognized the group for making a difference and influencing positive change at the university.
- Want to see the 13 projects from this first cohort? Go to [sc.edu/excellence](https://sc.edu/excellence) to view slides and recorded presentations.

*The Improvement Leader Program application opens each year in June.*

“ I found this whole program to be a super valuable experience, and I can see so many ways of using it going forward in my future work. One of the things that was really important and really stood out for me was making the process visible. By doing that with others in my group, we had some eye-opening experiences. ”

— **Christy Stephens,**

*Academic Program Manager, College of Arts and Sciences*



USC Improvement Leaders, 2023-24

## **PARTICIPANTS**

### **Improvement Leader Program, 2023-24**

**Lindsey Cox**, *Director of Compliance and Tax, Office of the Controller*

**Erin Daugherty**, *Director of Project Management Office, Division of Information Technology*

**Maureen Derrick**, *Director, Student Conduct and Academic Integrity*

**Lydia Frass**, *Director of Assessment and Online Learning, College of Arts and Sciences*

**Kim Gore**, *Business and Office Manager, Continuing Education and Conferences*

**Maegan Gudridge**, *Executive Director for Communications and Marketing, Division of Student Affairs and Academic Support*

**Jessica McCormick**, *Director of Strategic Initiatives, College of Nursing*

**Elizabeth Muth**, *Chief Administrative Officer, USC Alumni Association*

**Alex Norwood**, *Senior Accountant, Facilities Administration and Finance*

**Christy Stephens**, *Academic Program Manager, College of Arts and Sciences*

**Amanda Therrell**, *Director, GARNET, Graduation and Retention Network*

**Eric Tyler**, *Quality Assurance RN Coordinator and Accreditation Specialist, Student Health and Well-Being*

**Mike Watson**, *Undergraduate Coordinator and Instructor, College of Hospitality, Retail and Sport Management*

## MEETING TOOLKIT

### Saving time with fewer, faster and better meetings

People rarely think of meetings as a process, but that's exactly what they are. And with so many meetings attended by so many people every week, they're a huge opportunity for improvement.

That's why the Office of Organizational Excellence took on the meeting challenge and created the online Timesaver Toolkit for Meetings. It's filled with practical recommendations, tools, sample agendas and a concise page of top 10 tips.

- All these meeting-taming resources are available at [sc.edu/excellence](https://sc.edu/excellence) under the "Resources" tab.
- One essential tool is our meeting-time calculator. You can run the numbers to see how much time you spend in meetings and how much time you'd save with fewer and better meetings.
- Get our top 10 meeting tips on a handy card for quick reference and easy sharing with colleagues. Get a free set by filling out the short form, or call our office at 803-777-9053.

## MORE RESOURCES

### Tip sheets, videos, articles and more

On our website, you'll find the meeting toolkit and a variety of other helpful resources. Visit [sc.edu/excellence](https://sc.edu/excellence) and take a look.

- Videos and online tools for process mapping
- Tip sheets on developing key measures and identifying inefficiencies
- Templates for planning your process
- 10 ideas for improving processes starting now





## ADVISORY GROUP

### Guiding organizational excellence

The Advisory Group for Organizational Excellence brings together academic and administrative leaders. Together, they ensure that the organizational excellence initiative is collaborative, coordinated and powered by different perspectives.

### Members, 2023-24

**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, College of Engineering and Computing*

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

**Joel Samuels**, *Dean, College of Arts and Sciences*

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

**Julian Williams**, *Vice President, Office of Access and Opportunity*

# **PROCESS IMPROVEMENT WORKSHOP**

## **Getting your team started with process improvement**

Want your team to learn about process improvement — and to use their new knowledge on the spot to queue up improvements to one of their processes?

That's what Process Improvement Foundations is all about. The interactive workshop delivers practical tips and tools, with participants putting their learning to work in conversation with colleagues.

Led by improvement practitioners from the Office of Organizational Excellence, Process Improvement Foundations provides ideas and tools for uncovering inefficiencies, streamlining processes, simplifying work and delivering the best to customers.

The workshop can be tailored to last for one to three hours. More time allows for more interaction and progress, but even with a brief session, Process Improvement Foundations is a great way to get people thinking and taking action to bring about improvement.

# **BLITZ PROJECTS**

## **Scoping for success when time is tight**

Some improvement projects need to unfold in a series of team sessions, especially when they're bigger projects that involve multiple areas. But with projects that have a smaller scope and span, a blitz approach can get the job done very quickly.

All types of improvement projects can be blitzed: process improvement, resource optimization, problem-solving and other special sessions to identify meaningful improvement actions. The key is to have a well-focused and relatively narrow scope, with goals that are clearly defined.

Blitz projects can be scoped as a one-and-done, with team members meeting for one six-hour stretch. For projects that are more complicated but still blitz-suitable, the team might have two or three meetings covering a maximum of 12 total hours. Effective facilitation is essential, and the Office of Organizational Excellence can guide your team from start to finish.

When they're wisely scoped and set up for success, blitz projects are a winner. They guarantee fast progress, a sense of accomplishment among team members and genuine momentum for change.

## HAVE AN IDEA?

### Work with us on your improvement project

Whether you have a broad idea or an exact focus, contact the staff of the Office of Organizational Excellence. They'll bring questions and lots of experience to help you determine the best way forward.

Perhaps you manage a process that needs to be simplified and streamlined. Or maybe you want to align strategy, ensure coordination and make better use of resources. In any case, an outside perspective from a trusted source can make a big difference.

## CONTACT US

### Office of Organizational Excellence

[sc.edu/excellence](http://sc.edu/excellence)

803-777-9053

[excellence@sc.edu](mailto:excellence@sc.edu)

**176**

individuals participated in learning sessions led by the Office of Organizational Excellence.

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**1,421**

students and faculty and staff members provided feedback through project-related surveys and input sessions conducted by the Office of Organizational Excellence.

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**14, 18  
& more**

Projects and initiatives involved 14 academic colleges/schools, 18 administrative units, undergraduate students, graduate students and the USC Alumni Association.

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**11,900**

hours saved through process improvement projects that can be repurposed for higher value work.

“ Great practical information that can be used at the individual, team and whole-staff level. The facilitator was engaging while also bringing a calm presence, which is helpful when you are talking about changing processes that can bring about anxiety. ”

— **Workshop participant**

“ The Organizational Excellence Office did a great job making complex tasks easy to understand and obtainable to achieve. ”

— **Jessica McCormick**

*Director of Strategic Initiatives, College of Nursing and Improvement  
Leader Program participant*

## **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).