# Project Overview: Region 5 Networked Improvement Community

The Region 5 Comprehensive Center (CC) is part of a network of 19 Regional Comprehensive Centers and one National Comprehensive Center, which is funded through a 5-year U.S. Department of Education grant, beginning in fall 2019. The Regional CCs provide capacity-building services to states with the goal of identifying, implementing, and sustaining effective evidence-based programs and practices that support improved educators and student outcomes. The Region 5 CC serves the states of Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.

## What is a Networked Improvement Community?

A Networked Improvement Community (NIC) is a group of individuals who work together to address a common priority or problem of practice. The Carnegie Foundation identifies four distinctive features of a NIC,[[1]](#footnote-1) which differentiate them from professional learning communities, communities of practice, and other social learning networks. NICs are:

* ***Focused on a well-specified objective.*** They identify a clear problem of practice and develop clearly defined and measurable outcomes which serve to guide their work.
* ***Guided by a deep understanding of the problem within a given context.*** Some groups address a problem by attempting to identify, implement, and scale programs that show strong evidence of effectiveness. However, programs that work in some contexts may not work in others. In contrast, NICs start by carefully studying the problem and context (e.g., human behaviors and organizational systems) that defines, institutionalizes, and sustains the problem. They rely on this understanding to articulate a clear theory of improvement designed to address underlying root causes, identify possible solutions, and systematically evaluate solutions as they are implemented and scaled.
* ***Guided by improvement science.*** Whereas traditional evaluations prioritize whether a program works, improvement science prioritizes an iterative cycle of continuous improvement to understand for whom, how, and under what conditions a program works reliably across different contexts.
* ***Coordinated to accelerate interventions across a variety of contexts.*** NICs require careful coordination to ensure that they work well. Coordination is essential to maintain a common objective, a shared understanding of the problem, a commonly understood approach and measurement system for tracking improvement trends, and a viable approach to managing the spread and use of knowledge about improvements generated by the NIC.

## What is this project about? How did it evolve and what are the goals?

Addressing school inequities that emerged after COVID-19 school closures is a top priority shared by all Region 5 states. Moreover, improving the use of data and technology (e.g., online curricular resources, digital tools, learning management platforms) will have important and long-lasting implications for classroom instruction and learning.

The purpose of this project is to identify, test, and scale strategies that use data and technology to address educational inequities and improve learning experiences for students. To accomplish this objective, the Region 5 CC will facilitate a NIC (see the next question for details). The NIC will serve as a vehicle for state leaders to access wide-ranging expertise, and to collectively identify and address common problems of practice. Specific goals and objectives will be developed collectively so that all Region 5 states can address their highest priorities as they relate to improving students’ immediate and long-term educational experiences and outcomes.

## How was I chosen to participate in this NIC, and what are my responsibilities as a NIC participant?

Your state superintendent and/or designee chose you to participate in this process, most likely because (1) you are leading high-priority work in your agency, (2) you have been asked to address problems that are complex and institutionalized, and/or (3) the priorities and problems for which you are responsible are most effectively addressed through a NIC. As a participant in this NIC, your responsibilities include:

* Participating in regular meetings to identify specific and measurable problems,
* Assisting in developing solutions to each problem,
* Overseeing and/or directly supporting interventions to address the problem(s),
* Providing data/information to understand how interventions are working, and
* Participating in discussions to refine interventions based on ongoing results.

## What is my expected time commitment as a state representative?

Direct participation in the NIC will require about 2-4 hours per month to attend meetings and provide ongoing project support (e.g., coordinating data sharing, directing agency staff, recruiting districts). Beyond this, the total time a state lead spends on NIC-related objectives will vary based on their agency responsibilities. For example, one state lead may involve other state agency staff in the work, while another state lead may choose to fully maintain responsibility for completing the work.

Region 5 CC resources and expertise are intended to create efficiencies, and accelerate and improve state leads’ work. With thoughtful planning up front, this NIC should significantly improve the state’s (and each state lead’s) capacity to address the most critical priorities/problems related to COVID-19.

1. For more information, see [https://www.carnegiefoundation.org/blog/why-a-nic](https://www.carnegiefoundation.org/blog/why-a-nic/). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)