# FINAL IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Making Targets Matter

# April 2nd, 2021

# Overview of the Implementation Plan

Making Targets Matter is a guide for transportation practitioners on how to make performance management a more meaningful activity at their agencies. The guide focuses on breathing new life into performance management by gathering and using feedback for performance assessment and decision-making. The guide’s strategies are based on wisdom shared by leading practitioners across the country whose experiences offer helpful insights on effective practices.

This implementation plan is Phase 1 of what could become a longer term effort. For this first phase, we propose several connected activities to help a broad set of practitioners understand and quickly deploy Making Targets Matter strategies. These include an awareness campaign, a series of conference presentations, a hands-on peer exchange series, and a tailored set of executive briefing materials to help practitioners get their leaders’ support for the efforts needed to make targets matter.

But why stop at a guidebook and one-off discussions? While participants may understand in theory the project’s six strategies after a one-day peer exchange, chances are that implementing the strategies in the real world of their agencies will be less straightforward. An ongoing support network, led by a committed facilitator, can help practitioners navigate the nuances and complexities of operationalizing feedback for better performance.

Research shows that working with partners in a group increases success. The Association for Talent Development found that people are 65% more likely to meet a goal after committing to someone else, and 95% more likely to when they meet regularly with partners to check on progress.

*People are 95% more likely to meet goals when they participate in ongoing meetings with partners to check on progress.*

After Phase 1 is complete, if interest exists among participants, the project team proposes a second phase of ongoing “practice networks” that allow practitioners to discuss common challenges, workshop real-world situations, and share experiences, successes, and promising solutions for the benefit of all participants. In addition to an added element of accountability, the chance to share experiences and troubleshoot problems together makes peer groups an excellent tool for mastering a complex set of strategies like those in the Making Targets Matter guide.

A high-level outline of the schedule, cost, and expected funding source for each phase is below. More detailed schedule, budget, and tasks are provided for Phase 1 in this plan. A general description of Phase 2 is included at the end to show the long-term vision for implementation, but detailed Phase 2 schedule, budget, and tasks would be developed at the close of Phase 1.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Phase 1: Outreach & Engagement** | Spring 2021-Spring 2022 | $120,000 via 02-27 Validation Funds |
| **Phase 2: Practice Networks** | Spring 2022-Spring 2023 | $170,000 via 20-44 Implementation Funds |

## Phase 1 Task Overview and Costs

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Task 0: Project Management | $5,000 |
| Task 1: Outreach Content and Peer Exchange Material | $20,000 |
| Task 2: Executive Content & Engagement | $15,000 |
| Task 3: Conference Sessions | $15,000 |
| Task 4: Peer Exchange Series | $55,000 |
| Task 5: Participant Feedback & Surveys | $5,000 |
| Task 6: Final Report | $5,000 |
| **Total** | **$120,000** |

## Phase 1 Schedule



## Phase 2 Task Overview and Costs

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Task 0: Project Management | $5,000 |
| Task 1: Monthly Network Facilitation (12 months) | $120,000 |
| Task 2: In-Person Workshop | $25,000 |
| Task 3: Participant Feedback & Surveys | $5,000 |
| Task 4: Final Report & Summary Products | $20,000 |
| **Total** | **$175,000** |

## Phase 2 Schedule



# Implementation Tasks

## ImagePhase 1: Outreach and Engagement

### Task 1.1: Develop Outreach Content and Peer Exchange Material

This task will turn the guide’s framework and six strategies into digital outreach content and peer exchange materials that can be used for both in-person or virtual events. High Street’s Anna Batista and Joe Crossett have been steeped in the material and are ready to expand it to a format to proactively engage practitioners.

The team will first use social media and other digital content to get word out about existing products and other phase 1 activities. The project’s custom illustrations and four short videos provide ideal content for sharing across social media, in newsletters, or in other digital communications. High Street has experience developing social media “factoids” with in-house graphic designers for the Federal Highway Administration (see right), and this effort will be aided by Mackenzie Bartek, former social media lead at the Nebraska DOT.

The team will also develop a ‘library’ of presentation material and interactive activities for use in subsequent peer exchanges and conference presentations that will include content such as:

* **TED Talk-style presentation(s)** on the Making Targets Matter framework and strategies that provides an energetic way to kick off events and introduce core concepts, staying within TED’s time-honored 18-minute limit for maximum audience absorption. TED’s presenter guidance suggests that a good idea for its format could be something new, or simply a “great basic idea with a compelling new argument behind it.” Making Targets Matter falls into this latter category, and we think in this way we can create an accessible introduction to the new strategies we developed in the guide.
* **Detailed strategy mini presentations** will get participants at workshops or peer exchanges familiar with the nuances behind each strategy— such as what they entail, when they are best applied, and how to identify relevant situations at their own agencies– in advance of discussions.
* **Guidelines for practitioner presentations** will help the team identify the most compelling examples of relevant activity already happening at transportation agencies to enlist practitioners to share their insights with the peer exchange groups. The guidelines may also help presenters focus on what is most important about their situations and prepare more impactful presentations.
* **Structured discussion guide and questions** are needed to make the most out of the peer exchange and other event discussions. The facilitation prompts and questions will be designed to drill down into the heart of practitioners’ experiences, beneath the glossier official purpose statements and processes. The team will aim to uncover the root cause of barriers, the parts of actions and decisions that are actually leading to success, and help to make clear to participants when they are missing key information and support. This will allow for more successful group brainstorming of solutions and next steps.
* **A visually focused slide deck** will serve as a backdrop and enhancement to discussion, with detailed notes related to the discussion guide.

This core content will be used in a range of later tasks that include in-person peer exchanges, virtual peer exchanges and trainings, and conference presentations and workshops.

Deliverables: Digital outreach content and strategy; training content and peer exchange activity material

**Task 1.2: Executive Content and Engagement**

The strategies in the Making Targets Matter Guide are primarily aimed at mid-level practitioners and senior managers, for both those new to performance management activities and those looking to dig deeper. However, executive leadership support for the Making Targets Matter approach will allow for more successful implementation. The research team will create a separate series of content aimed at agency executive leaders to illustrate the benefits of a feedback-based performance approach, and how they can support performance practitioners in their agencies.

Executive content will include handouts ready to go to leaders that summarize relevant aspects of the literature for them, as well as content meant for practitioners to use in conversations with their leadership on these topics, such as discussion guides and a standard presentation.

In addition to developing content geared toward leaders, the team can explore the possibility of targeting senior staff at conferences, possibly including having a small number of executive staff participate on a panel to discuss the issues at the heart of Making Targets Matter. In both developing content and organizing such events, the team will be aided by High Street’s Kyle Schneweis, former Director of the Nebraska DOT, in crafting messages and approaches most likely to work with senior leadership.

Deliverables: High-level communication material; discussion guide and/or presentations for practitioner use; potential executive participation in conference activities

### Task 1.3: Conference Sessions

The team proposes participation in three to four conferences to build awareness of the existing Making Targets Matter material and upcoming peer exchanges. Participating in conferences is an efficient way to reach relevant practitioners. We will identify conferences scheduled within the implementation plan’s period of performance for which a presentation or workshop can be added to the agenda. The conferences most likely to provide opportunities to reach relevant practitioners are outlined below. (Note: Discussions with conference organizers will need to begin quickly for the earlier dates.)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Conference** | **Date** |
| AASHTO Spring Meeting (*virtual*) | May 10-14, 2021 |
| TAM Annual Conference | August 7-10, 2021 |
| Regional AASHTO Meetings | Summer 2021 |
| AMPO Annual Conference | October 4-10, 2021 |
| AASHTO Annual Meeting | October 26-30, 2021 |
| TRB 2022 | January 2022 |

The project team has already run a successful TRB Annual Meeting workshop with 60-80 participants for this project, as well as put together or served on conference workshops, panels, or session in many other contexts. We will use this experience combined with our team’s network of contacts and knowledge of relevant work in progress across the country to identify engaging participants for panels or longer workshops.

Deliverables: Conference presentation/ workshop material; conference summaries

### Task 1.4: Peer Exchange Series

The team proposes holding three in-person peer exchanges and one to three virtual. Face-to-face peer exchanges will likely be even more valuable after a year of Zoom meetings, but virtual peer exchanges will enable participation by newer staff or those with formal or informal travel restrictions. The peer exchanges will create dialogue around the ideas, framework, strategies, and tactics in the guide and lead to expanded and refined content.

After the success of the project’s initial peer exchange series, combined with a track record of conducting similar events for other NCHRP projects like the Foresight series and DOT-sponsored gatherings of practitioners, the team is ready to roll out more using this experience to inform what practitioners are interested in and how they like to engage with material. The team will also rely on guidelines from research such as NCHRP 20-111(G): Best Practices for State DOT Peer Exchanges.

Peer Exchange Format **-** Each event will open with the TED Talk-style presentation from Task 1 that introduces the framework then lead into a training element to examine core strategies in detail, possibly with a participant presentation related to that strategy. Our experience with leading group meetings and webinars has shown that participants derive great value and satisfaction from informal discussions on focused topics, so a significant portion of the time will allow for sharing experiences, asking questions, and exploring concepts with peers.

As we develop the content, we will make a final decision among several options for how the peer exchanges are structured. The first option is to make all events identical and cover all six strategies. This has the benefit of exposing all participants to all the material. The second option is to focus each event on a subset of the strategies, which would allow for a deeper examination of each strategy. Subsets could be organized around the Guide’s Sensors-Pathways-Integrate structure, or its split between people-focused feedback and data-focused feedback. We anticipate this option might help serve distinct audiences with particular interest in one subset of guide content over another. These options can be discussed and finalized to reflect the input of the panel and interest of participants. The options are summarized below.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Option 1** | **Option 2** | **Option 3** |  |
| Peer Exchange 1: | All peer exchanges cover all strategies | Prepare Sensors   * Build Buy-In * Navigate Data | People-Focused Feedback   * Build Buy-In * Convene |  |
| Peer Exchange 2: | Establish Pathways   * Convene * Formalize Assessments | Data-Focused Feedback   * Navigate Data * Formalize Assessments |
| Peer Exchange 3: | Integrate Feedback   * Adjust Actions * Tell Your Story | Integrate Feedback   * Adjust Actions * Tell Your Story |

Treatment of Virtual Peer Exchanges **-** Since all-day meetings are difficult in a virtual environment, we will use a different format for the virtual exchanges. We envision breaking the exchange into several two- to four-hour sessions, potentially spread out over two or more days. While standard video conference software is a great default, a range of networking and online engagement software options are emerging that could be examined for potential value-added to the exchange of ideas and discussion.

Deliverables: 3 in-person and 1-3 virtual peer exchanges; peer exchange summaries; refined and expanded strategies; new case studies of successful implementation

**Task 1.5: Participant Feedback and Surveys**

The team will develop and deploy surveys to the peer exchange and workshop participants, the results of which will serve a dual role:

1. **Assessment –** Letting the project team and panel know how the events went and how the project material was received; and
2. **Gauging Interest –** Providing insights on the topics of most interest for further exploration, and the likelihood of participation in the envisioned “practice networks.”

Results will be summarized in the Final Report and will inform whether a second implementation installment should be pursued.

Deliverables: Surveys, response summaries

**Task 1.6: Final Report**

A final report will pull all the deliverables from the implementation phase of the project together. The report will document the work and outcomes from the previous tasks, as well as chart a path forward, if any, on additional implementation work. Specific content is likely to include:

* Peer exchange and conference summaries
* Additional strategies, tactics, or discussion guides to supplement the Guide content that came out of the new peer exchanges, which will be developed as stand-alone handouts that can be made available for download with the Making Targets Matter Guide.
* Survey results
* Indicators for what next steps could look like, particularly whether discussions and surveys results indicate that “practice networks” are worth pursuing

**Phase 1 Indicators of Success:**

* Video views
* Social media engagement
* Web Guide traffic
* Downloads of Guide
* Participation in peer exchanges and conference workshops
* Peer exchange/ workshop feedback surveys
* Stated interest in practice network participation

## Phase 2: Create and Run Performance Practice Networks

If the concept of a practice network is accepted among practitioners and there is interest in regular meetings among at least 8-10 participants, the team proposes a second phase to the implementation of Making Targets Matter to create and run “performance practice networks.” The networks will provide active support and guidance to groups of peers that meet regularly to discuss the six strategies in the Making Targets Matter Guide.

**Task 2.1: Performance Practice Networks**

The concept of a “practice network” comes from the use of “benchmarking networks” in some fields, which are outlined in NCHRP Report 902, Benchmarking and Comparative Measurement for Effective Performance Management by Transportation Agencies. A benchmarking network is defined as, “a group of independent agencies who join together to share benchmarking data, best practices, and research resources.” The practice network envisioned for this project is the same concept of a groups of agencies joining together to share best practices and resources, centered on the Making Targets Matter strategies.

Initially there will likely be a single network of 8-10 participants who are all implementing slightly different aspects of performance improvement in slightly different contexts. The network will therefore span all six strategies applied in a wide range of agency performance-related activities.

***Canadian Infrastructure Benchmarking Initiative***

*Started in 1997 as the National Water and Wastewater Benchmarking Initiative (NWWBI), this benchmarking network began as a small group of public water utilities that wanted to improve performance and has grown to more than 50 members that now include transportation agencies. Professional facilitators help collect data and share best practices. It is a hugely successful model of how the network concept can lead to dynamic practice sharing among committed public sector participants and improved performance over the long term.*

[*https://nationalbenchmarking.com/*](https://nationalbenchmarking.com/)

Eventually, if the network remains popular and grows, participants could form smaller groups to focus on a particular subset of strategies or particular use cases, such as strategic vision development, programming, or an operational activity.

In any kind of network, a committed facilitator helps to support the initiative by handling the logistical side of collaboration. This facilitator is the “motor” that keeps participants engaged and the network active, preventing it from fading away due to lack of clear responsibility for tasks and individuals’ general busyness. Specific tasks the facilitator is envisioned to undertake include:

* Organize meetings and facilitate discussions;
* Curate content selection and presentation;
* Collect and disseminate noteworthy practices;
* Coordinate participant presentations; and
* Synthesize meaningful results tailored to participants.

*Deliverables: Recurring meetings; presentation content; summary reports or handouts customized to participants;* refined and expanded strategies; new case studies of successful implementation.

**Task 2.2 In-Person Workshop**

Around the midpoint or in the second half of the practice network, we recommend gathering all participants in person to go in-depth on the topics discussed every month. This will be a chance for participants to meet face-to-face after many phone calls, feature participant presentations, dig in on key topics, and have more relaxed informal interactions.

**Task 2.3: Participant Feedback and Surveys**

The team will develop and deploy two rounds of surveys to the network participants- at approximately the 1/3 and 2/3 marks- to let the project team and panel know if and how the network is helping them advance performance management and how the network could function differently to be more effective. Results will be summarized in an interim report along with any applicable changes the team makes to the networks.

Deliverables: Surveys, response summaries, interim report

**Task 2.4: Final Report and Summary Products**

A final report will pull all the deliverables from Phase 2 of the project together. Specific content is likely to include:

* Topics discussed in the networks
* Specific improvements that participants implemented from network advice and products and related successes
* Changes to the networks based on interim feedback
* Updates and additions to the Making Targets Matter strategies
* Summaries of the survey results
* Lessons learned on elements of a successful practice network and prospects for their future use.

Deliverables: Updated Making Targets Matter Strategies, Practice Network Summaries, Practice Network Best Practices and Future Use, Final Project Report

**Phase 2 Indicators of Success:**

* Number of network participants, particularly growth over time
* Attrition rate among participants
* Participant feedback surveys