

What is a “focus area?”

- A focus area is a particular issue, problem or challenge that Innovation funding might address.
- An innovation within a focus area is not limited to service delivery. A broader choice of options is required by your Resource Paper, which states, “Innovation funds can support a wide range of interventions in addition to services and programs: for example (but not limited to), advocacy, outreach, capacity and community development, planning, prevention, early intervention, policy and system development and change, public educational efforts, education and training for service providers (including people not currently defined as mental health practitioners) and research.”
- A focus area does not imply a statewide or regional approach, though both are possibilities. Counties could and likely would conduct distinct Innovative Programs to address common focus areas.
- Within a focus area, the Innovation would still be “developed within communities in ways that are inclusive and representative, especially of underserved, underserved and inappropriately served individuals,” as called for in your Resource Paper.
- Focus areas would have to address one or more of the “priorities for innovation,” namely increase access to underserved groups, increase the quality of services including better outcomes, promote interagency collaboration, and/or increase access to services.

Possible Advantages of Defining Focus Areas for Innovation

- Greater potential impact in key areas given limited funds for Innovation
- Maximizes the potential statewide learning and development of useful models that can be replicated and adapted; promotes a larger statewide learning community
- Makes efficient use of resources for training and technical assistance
- Creates opportunities for peer learning and peer support for people working on a common issue
- Minimizes the work of local needs assessment; allows community stakeholders to assess needs, resources, priorities, etc. in a few key areas

Possible Advantages of Not Defining Focus Areas for Innovation

- Avoids delay in Guideline development to allow diverse stakeholders to agree about focus areas
- Maximizes the flexibility of counties and local communities to determine their priorities for learning through Innovation; reflects and supports likely differences among stakeholders about priorities

- Avoids defining statewide focus areas that might not fit the needs and priorities of a particular county
- Focuses training and technical assistance resources on areas of greatest priority to counties and local communities
- Could prioritize local learning and development of local learning communities