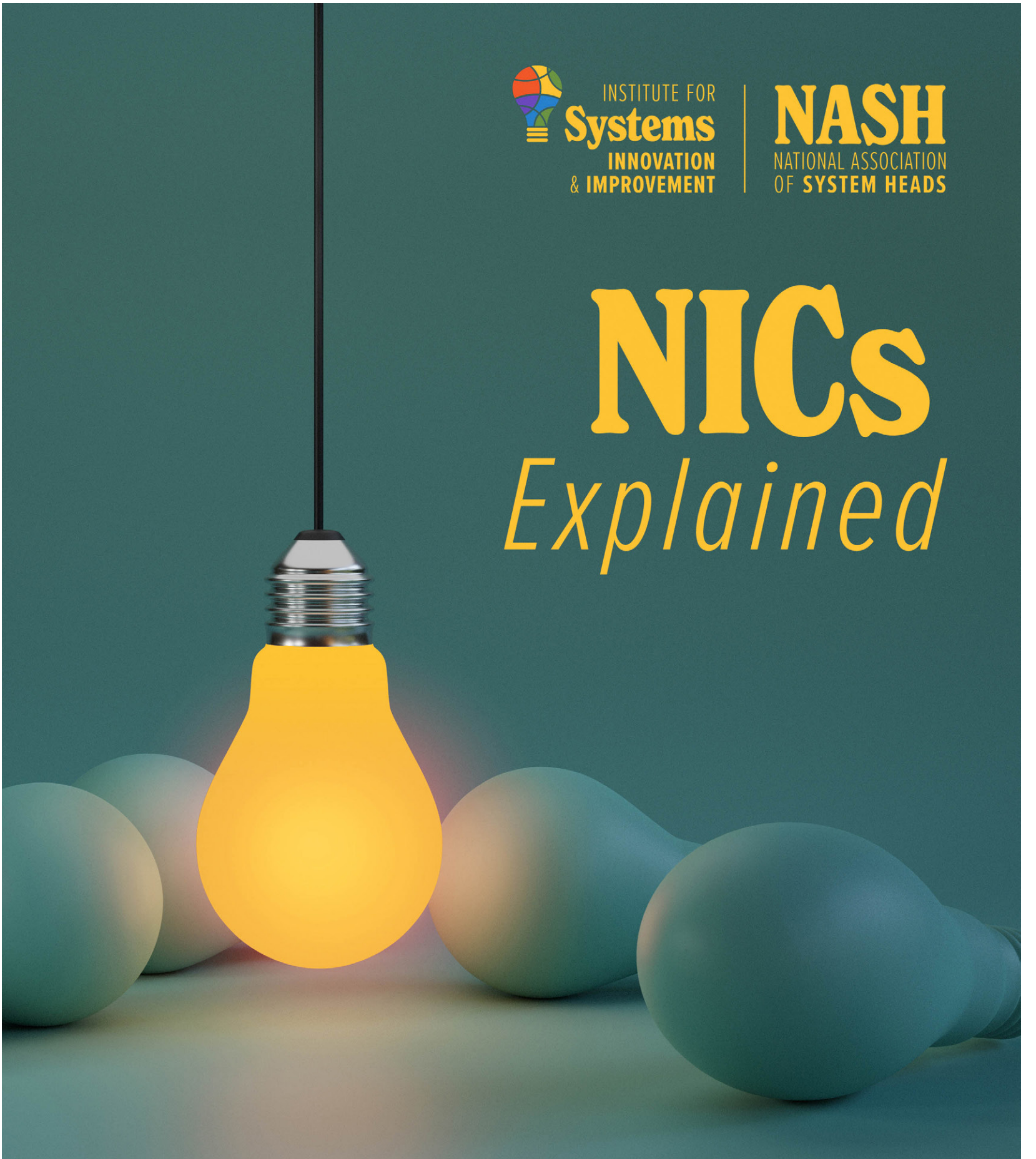
INSTITUTE FOR Systems INNOVATION & IMPROVEMENT

NASH NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SYSTEM HEADS

NICs *Explained*



INSTITUTE FOR SYSTEMS INNOVATION & IMPROVEMENT AT NASH

NICs Explained

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED WHY SOMETHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION COULDN'T JUST WORK...BETTER?

NASH has adapted the improvement science methodologies successfully utilized in sectors such as health care and software development to public higher education systems. The vehicle for this work are our NASH Improvement Communities (NICs).

NICs are Grassroots at Scale

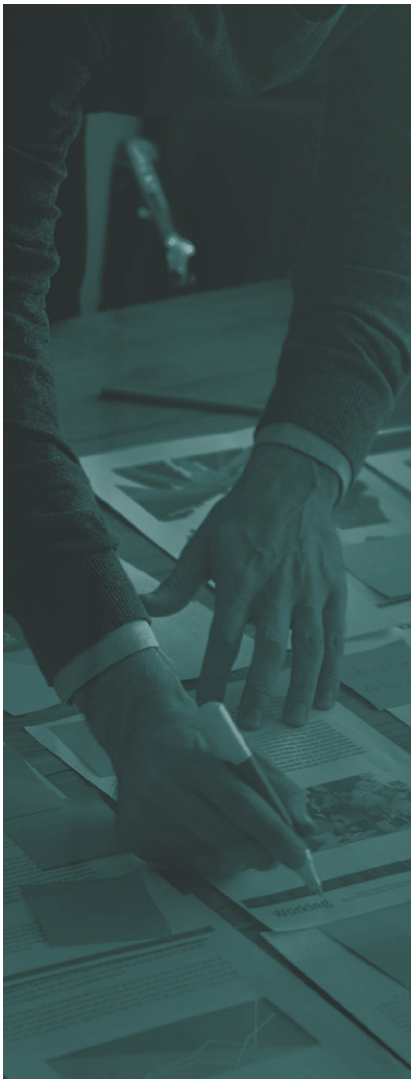
By leveraging improvement science, NICs test interventions that address challenges in higher education. They provide a grassroots – rather than top-down – approach to developing and testing measurable change. The hallmark of the NIC model is that NASH facilitates its member systems and their campuses so that the people doing the work are the ones engaged in creating, testing, and implementing change.

These positive results can in turn create customizable, turn-key solutions that NASH helps to scale within and across systems around the country.

NICs are Process-Driven

NASH provides coordination, project support, professional development, and knowledge management for NICs. The participating systems provide leadership and coordination to their campus teams, which include leaders at the system level and individuals directly involved in addressing the identified problem at the campus.

For example, a Transfer NIC team might include representatives from the admissions, advising, registrar, faculty, and other campus departments who work closely with students. These teams devise "tests of change" to redesign campus systems and processes for students along three phases.



- **PHASE 1: Assessment & Preparation (8 weeks)** – System personnel gather data, study the problem, and engage in disciplined inquiry to best understand the issue. System teams analyze the information and attend virtual workshops on improvement science before a face-to-face NASH convening.

- **PHASE 2: Workshops & Action Cycles (12 months)** – Systems identify an aim statement with measurable goals, explore root causes of the problem, prioritize approaches, identify problem areas, and then create plans to conduct rapid tests of change of possible solutions to achieve the aim. Based on the results, system teams decide to adopt, adapt, or abandon a change idea for the next Action Cycle.

- **PHASE 3: Analysis, Reflection, and Dissemination (4 weeks)** – Systems analyze their findings to see if the tests of change work and are worthy for scaling.

Throughout all three phases, NASH provides robust support, including coaching, project management, knowledge management, technical support, coordination, and dissemination of results.

NICs are Changing the Game

NICs represent a fundamentally different approach to change in higher education with the following characteristics:

- **SPEED:** Teams operate in **45-day "Action Cycles,"** each team testing three change ideas per Action Cycle. Data is collected to determine the effectiveness of these ideas. At the end of each cycle, teams share results and decide which ideas are worth iterating or discarding for new ones. Initially, these rapid tests are done on relatively small numbers of students, which allows for swift progress and minimizes the risk in case the test does not produce improvement.

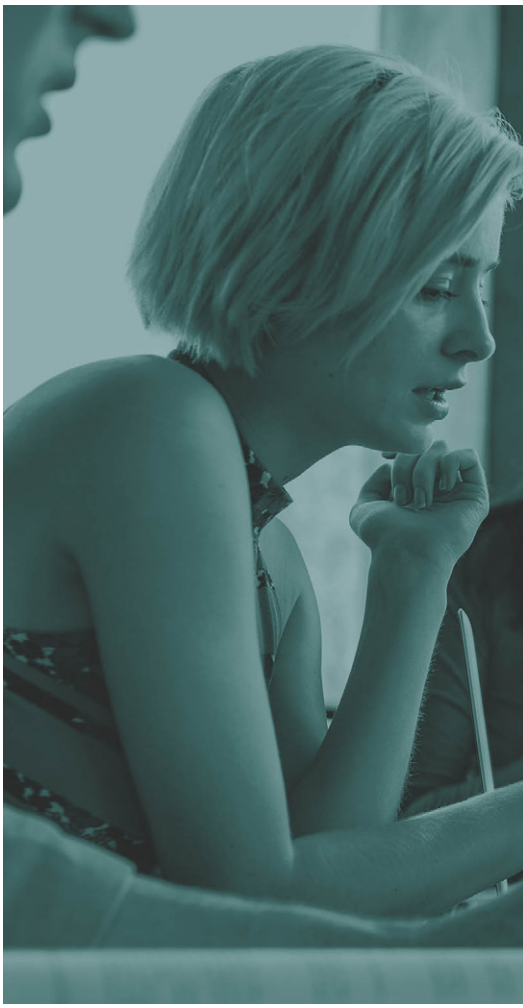
- **CULTURE:** NICs foster organizational trust and embrace the notion of failure as a learning opportunity. The initial small-scale tests of change lower the stakes and encourage quick learning. Ideas are only scaled up after enough evidence is collected to show that the intervention can work at scale across different environments or, as we like to say, "fail before scale."

- **NETWORKED LEARNING:** Knowledge generated within participating systems can be shared and applied to other campuses and systems. Rigorously tested ideas result in a **"change package"** that can be scaled across the nation's 65 public higher education systems and to other higher education institutions.

- **STRUCTURE:** NICs reverse the traditional top-down model of education reform. They empower those closest to the problem to design and test solutions. Tested and researched ideas are then scaled up for broader implementation.

NICs are Working

To date, with the support of philanthropic partners, NASH has launched NICs on transfer, curricular flexibility (course sharing), and closing equity gaps in degree completion. Results from NICs are promising, generating positive outcomes and several early success stories.



1. **FROM SMALL TEST OF CHANGE TO SYSTEM PRACTICE.** One team at a four-year campus collaborated with their colleagues at a community college. During the first step of the process, they scoped a small test of change to help **11 summer-to-fall transfer students** register successfully for the fall semester. The team found that students were falling through the cracks because they were assigned to faculty advisers with limited availability during the summer. They decided to test whether assigning students to non-faculty advising staff would improve the student experience and increase registrations. Within **24 hours**, the staff reported that the students reached were elated to be supported in their transition, and the staff asked if they could reach out to more students. Since then, this test has been replicated and expanded to additional campuses in the system and has now become the institutional practice for the system.

2. **REDESIGNING FLAWED ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESSES.** A second team documented the current administrative process for transfer students and uncover inefficiencies in the admissions and advising processes. The team discovered one driver of this was the communication between the admissions department and the relevant program department. Starting with one campus, the team redesigned the alert system to produce weekly reports/alerts to the program regarding newly admitted/ committed students into their program, allowing the program staff/

faculty to reach out to students in a timely manner proactively. The new system, coupled with proactive outreach from advisors, led to a **30% increase** in the number of new transfer students registered for the spring semester.

3. **UNDERSTANDING VARIATION BETWEEN SYSTEM POLICY AND CAMPUS REALITY.** A third team decided to test whether their internal systems were consistent with system-wide transfer-friendly policies. By conducting an audit on all recently-transferred transfer students to determine how the transfer credit pathways were working, the team found a gap between how incoming credits should have been awarded and what the current process was awarding. The initial audit revealed that **456 students** were due ***additional transfer credits***. In total, **2,414 credits** were able to be awarded to these transfer students, representing an average of **5.3 credits per student**. This finding allowed the campus to award these credits immediately, and shortened time to degree for current students. Going forward, this discovery has led to closer examination around what processes the campus needs to change in order to award the appropriate transfer credits for each incoming transfer student with reliability.

1. WHO CAN CURRENTLY APPLY TO PARTICIPATE IN NICS?

At this time, NICs are exclusive to NASH system members and their campuses. As our work results in proven "change packages," we will publish the results and explore expansion.

2. HOW ARE THE NIC TOPICS AND PARTICIPANTS SELECTED?

NIC topics are solicited from NASH member systems based on their most urgent problems of practice that impact students. Once a NIC topic is identified, NASH conducts outreach to system members to solicit interest.

3. WHAT KINDS OF CHALLENGES CAN NICS ADDRESS?

Improvement science methodologies and NICs' collaborative approach can be applied to address many types of challenges. Importantly, you can't improve something that doesn't exist. While the NIC model is not appropriate to test brand new policies or interventions, the goal is to develop "change packages" of evidence-based interventions adaptable across multiple contexts that can be used to improve outcomes for students across all NASH systems.

4. HOW ARE THE RESULTS AND SUCCESSES OF NICS SHARED WITH THE WIDER EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITY?

NICs promote networked learning and the dissemination of knowledge. The results and successes of NICs are typically shared through workshops, conferences, publications, and other channels to inspire and inform other campuses and systems.

5. CAN NICS BE CUSTOMIZED TO ADDRESS SPECIFIC CHALLENGES INDIVIDUAL SYSTEMS OR CAMPUSES FACE?

Yes, NICs can be designed to address the specific challenges identified by individual campuses within the broader framework of advancing equitable student success in higher education. NIC teams work together to devise and test change ideas that are relevant to their particular context and problem area.

6. WHAT IS AN AIM STATEMENT?

In collaboration with participating systems, NASH co-develops a high-level goal for each NIC. Using common outcomes variables, System Leads also develop their own high-level aim statement aligned with system goals, including a timeframe.

7. WHAT ARE TESTS OF CHANGE?

Tests of change refer to experiments undertaken to assess the effectiveness of new approaches, policies, or interventions. They evaluate the impact of proposed changes on various aspects of the educational system, such as teaching methods, curriculum design, administrative processes, student support services, and technological advancements. These tests help NIC teams gather data and insights to make informed decisions about implementing and scaling innovative practices.

8. WHAT IS AN ACTION CYCLE?

Action cycles are typically 45 days in length and are the period in which the teams implement their tests of change. At the end of each action cycle, a workshop is conducted where systems and campus teams share their learnings and determine whether to iterate, adopt, or abandon tests of change.

IN CASE YOU HAVE MORE QUESTIONS....

Want to learn more or participate in a NIC? Visit NASH.edu and contact our team!