

Aligned for Achievement:

How South Carolina Reorganized Our SEA Around Foundational Skills

September 9, 2026

Ellen E. Weaver | State Superintendent of Education

Dr. Rebecca M. Gunnlaugsson | Chief of Staff

Dr. Abbey S. Duggins | Chief Academic Officer





Additional Resources

Scaling Our Instructional Vision



South Carolina's Instructional Vision

Instructional Quality, Literacy	In South Carolina, K-12 students will engage with complex, knowledge-building texts and develop their ability to write and speak about them, supported by high-quality materials. Early grades will emphasize foundational literacy skills to accelerate reading growth in later years, ensuring students are prepared for grade-level content as measured by end-of-year assessments. Personalized interventions, such as small-group instruction and one-on-one tutoring, will provide targeted support, equipping all learners with the skills needed for academic success.
Instructional Quality, Math	In all K-12 math classrooms across the state, students will use high-quality, standards-aligned math materials to build deep conceptual understanding and problem-solving skills. They will discuss, write, and reason about mathematical ideas, applying their knowledge to real-world problems. Teachers will facilitate learning to develop procedural fluency and critical thinking, ensuring all students achieve mastery of grade-level content.
Both	Students will benefit from an integrated support system that includes ongoing family engagement and access to resources. This system will empower families to participate in their child's learning journey actively, provide tools to reinforce math and literacy development at home, and connect families to community resources that enhance educational outcomes. Together, these will create a collaborative foundation for lifelong learning and achievement.



What we **want to be true** in South Carolina

By August 2026, the South Carolina Department of Education will have established and communicated clear, statewide expectations for HQIM implementation. The first HQIM Leadership Academy cohort will be implementing HQIM with integrity, supported by trained leaders, aligned professional learning, and role-specific toolkits.

- ❑ Cohort 1 schools will implement math HQIM with integrity, with teachers planning collaboratively, delivering curriculum-aligned lessons, and using student work analysis to guide instruction.
- ❑ State-based coaches and CAOs will enable consistent practices to support instruction.
- ❑ Families will begin receiving clearer, more accessible information about student progress, building the foundation for sustained engagement in literacy and math learning.

As a result:

- ❑ Students will experience more consistent, standards-aligned instruction and receive targeted interventions connected to HQIM to accelerate literacy and math development.

South Carolina’s Path to Scale

Over the next three years, SCDE will move educator groups from baseline learning to deeper and more skillful HQIM implementation.

	Year 1 (2025-2026): Building the Foundation	Year 2 (2026-2027): Deepening Practice and Expanding Reach of Foundational Supports	Year 3 (2027-2028): Sustaining and Scaling Practice
Field	Cohort I Districts: - Collect baseline data on teacher practice across HQIM Leadership Academy districts: % of teachers using HQIM as the basis for core instruction (observation tool) - Collect baseline data on school/system conditions that support HQIM: % of school leaders in HQIM Leadership Academy providing dedicated collaborative planning time (site visit checklist) % of state-based coaches supporting Leadership Academy schools who feel equipped to lead HQIM implementation (post-assessment) All Districts: - Establish data on % of teachers reporting use of HQIM in math and ELA (statewide fall/spring survey) - Establish data on % of coaches who are knowledgeable on observation & feedback protocols (statewide fall/spring survey) - Establish data on % of school/district leaders who are ready to lead HQIM implementation(statewide fall/spring survey)	Cohort I Districts: Increase in % of teachers using HQIM as the basis for core instruction (observation tool) Increase in % of school leaders providing adequate time for collaborative planning (site visit checklist) Increase in % of school leaders and coaches regularly using unit and lesson internalization tools in collaborative planning (site visit checklist) Increase in the % of school and district leaders who feel equipped to lead HQIM work in Math and ELA (post-assessment) Cohort II Districts follow Cohort 1 trajectory All Districts: - Increase the % of teachers reporting use of HQIM in math and ELA (statewide fall/spring survey) - Increase in the % of coaches who are knowledgeable of observation & feedback protocols (statewide fall/spring survey) - Increase in the % of school/district leaders who are ready to lead HQIM implementation(statewide fall/spring survey)	Cohort I Districts: Increase in % of teachers using HQIM as the basis for core instruction (observation tool) Increase in % of schools providing adequate time for collaborative planning (site visit checklist) Increase in % of schools regularly using unit and lesson internalization tools in collaborative planning (site visit checklist) Cohort II Districts follow Cohort I trajectory Cohort III Districts follow Cohort II trajectory All Districts: - Increase the % of teachers reporting use of HQIM in math and ELA (statewide fall/spring survey) - Increase in the % of coaches who are knowledgeable on observation & feedback protocols (statewide fall/spring survey) - Increase in the % of school/district leaders who are ready to lead HQIM implementation(statewide fall/spring survey)

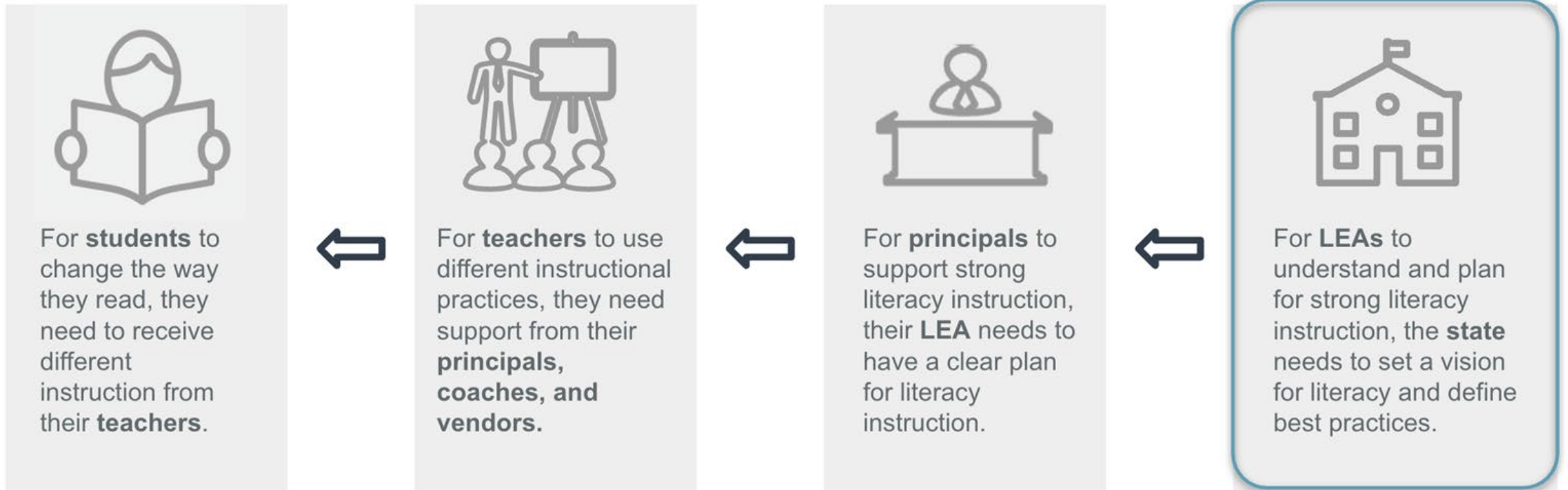
South Carolina’s Path to Scale

To enable more skillful implementation, SCDE will align state supports around HQIM priorities, making the right instructional choices easier and more consistent across the system.

	Year 1 (2025-2026): Building the Foundation	Year 2 (2026-2027): Building Coherence, Strengthening Practice, and Measuring Implementation	Year 3 (2027-2028): Sustaining and Scaling Practice
SEA	Training and Support ● Developed HQIM toolkits and trained coaches and CAOs ● Launched Leadership Academy Cohort 1 (one-third of districts) Funding ● Designed the Unified Application pilot (priorities, timeline, platform) Auditing and Planning to Align Existing Systems ● Audited existing field-facing training and supports ● Developed key HQIM messages and tools Begin Measuring Implementation ● Establish statewide data collection framework and to measure implementation; collect baseline data	Training and Support ● Expand the HQIM Leadership Academy to Cohort 2 and deepen support for Cohort 1 and CAOs ● Reinforce expectations for state coach support for HQIM implementation Funding ● Launch a unified application in the spring to plan for the upcoming year Aligning Systems for Impact ● Establishing common professional learning expectations and processes ● Build comprehensive math policy that reinforces HQIM priorities ● Publish spotlights for high-growth schools ● Develop resources to support school communication with families ● Audit district-facing communications Use Data to Strengthen Implementation ● Regularly collect and evaluate implementation data; adjust supports.	Training and Support ● Extend the Leadership Academy to Cohort 3 (all districts) ● Sustain Cohort 1/2 through ongoing support Funding ● Evolve priorities and requirements based on pilot data; launch application for all districts Sustaining Aligned Systems ● Streamline and maximize district-facing communications aligned to priorities ● Continue spotlighting high-growth schools and districts as statewide proof points ● Ensure guidance consistently directs districts toward HQIM-aligned decisions ● Advance ideal math policy and build internal systems to support Use Data to Sustain Implementation ● Continue collecting and evaluating implementation data and regularly refine supports

How can a **unified application** shift behaviors?

A unified application positions the South Carolina Department of Education to scale best practices, such as the HQIM Leadership Academy, statewide; advance state priorities; and evolve those priorities to meet the needs of students and teachers.



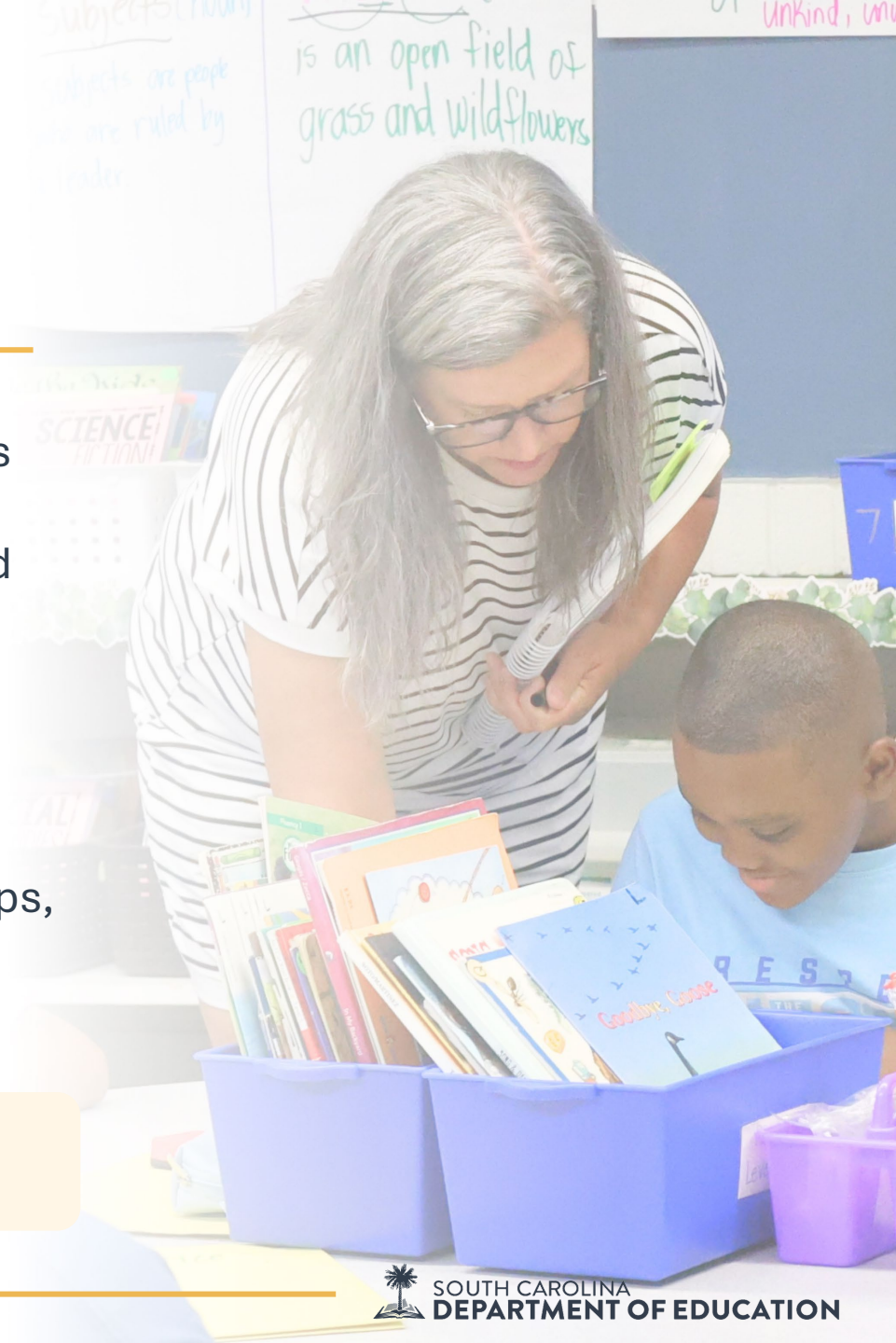
Our Research Agenda: Measuring Impact, Driving Change

- Research Agenda aligned to SCDE's goals and strategic priorities
- Agency researchers develop and execute projects to analyze and communicate the impact of SCDE initiatives
- Have established (and seek new) partnerships with nationally-renowned researchers to conduct further study
- Exploring the need for qualitative researchers to lead focus groups, interviews, and observation work



SCDE Research Agenda

Dr. Vann Holden,
cvannholden@ed.sc.gov





Additional Resources

Scaling Cross-Functional Strategy



Why X-Teams?

When critical initiatives **span multiple offices** and systems without a clear, consistent **structure for collaboration** and leadership, they risk becoming **fragmented and inconsistent** and not delivering desired results.

Cross-functional **X-Teams**

Collaboration Cross-office engagement replaces silos.

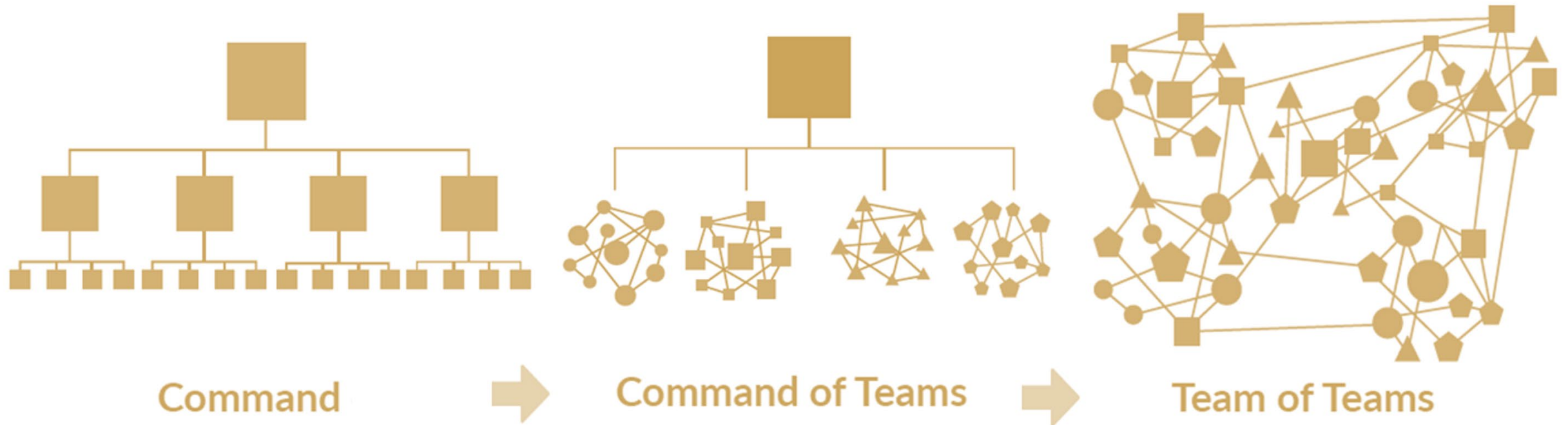
Clarity Defined roles, timelines, and deliverables maintain year-round focus on recurring initiatives.

Alignment Strategy, operations, and communication match SCDE goals.

Agility Scalable structure enables recurring yet changing work.

Continuous Improvement Built-in learning cycle ensures improvement after each phase.

X-Team



Connects multiple specialized teams through **shared purpose, transparency, and decentralized decision-making**. Each team retains its expertise but operates as part of a larger, **networked system that can sense, learn, and act collectively**.

X-Team Organizational Structure

Role	Position	Responsibility
Initiative Lead	Expert/Lead from office with primary responsibility. Chief Cat-Herder	Owens the initiative. Sets vision, prioritizes work, coordinates across functions. Accountable for outcomes.
Stakeholders	Internal (mostly) experts/leads from collaborating offices. (Comms, Legal, Finance, Policy, CCMR, Research, IT)	Provide governance, resource alignment and set direction.
Core Team	Dedicated staff from office(s) with primary responsibility.	Execute regular, ongoing work, including project management needs.
Flexible Execution Pods	Rotating or part-time members from each stakeholder team.	Assigned based on project phase/need.
Advisory Contributors	External (mostly) partners or domain specialists.	Looped in when appropriate for expertise, review, or buy-in.

X-Team Charter

Mission

Why does this team exist, and what it is responsible for?

Goals

What are this team's high level annual goals, outputs (deliverables), and how does it align with agency strategic goals?

Governance

How does this team make decisions?

Cadence

What is this team's annual roadmap—milestones, responsibilities, timelines, reporting, and coordination?

1. Review last cycle outcomes
2. Map upcoming initiatives
3. Define processes and requirements
4. Align responsibilities to roles
5. Set milestones and delivery dates
6. Schedule governance and check-in points

X-Team Management Infrastructure

X-Team Toolkit for Clear, Simple, Visual Management

Implementation & Support (I&S) along with IT will design and push out a standard, uniform X-Team Toolkit to include:

- **Custom X-Team Template**
 - Team Charter (mission, goals, members, governance)
 - Roles & Responsibilities (RACI Matrix)
 - Agendas, Status and Decision Documentation
 - OneDrive Directory (standard structure and guidelines)
 - Annual Cadence Tracker (Asana permanent project work plan)
 - Links to Detailed Workplans
 - Communications Protocols

Training and Support

I&S members will be embedded in X-Teams at the start, providing training and support on digital tools and management processes, until this capability becomes a shared skill set across the agency.