Failing Forward in County Government
Executive Masterclasses

Background
The Fail Forward program is a year-long program that will work with executive-level county officials and individual departments in up to seven counties to create cultures that promote innovation, risk taking, and learning from failure - prerequisites for continuous improvement and breakthrough innovation in complex environments. The program will consist of 1) a series of quarterly **executive masterclasses**, which will equip county executives and department directors with the knowledge necessary to develop a sustainable and widespread fail forward culture in their counties, and 2) a series of quarterly **departmental workshops** where department staff at all levels of seniority will collaborate to diagnose internal challenges to failing forward and develop action plans to break down those barriers. **This document provides an overview of the executive masterclasses.**

Objectives
The executive masterclasses will bring together county executives (county administrators, county managers) and department/division directors (or equivalent titles) in quarterly sessions where they will have the opportunity to learn from and interact with subject matter experts on critical leadership topics related to innovation, risk taking, and learning from failure. Through these sessions, county leaders will go through a learning journey where they will gain insight into how they can best support their teams in building a culture of innovation.

To accomplish this, the masterclasses will support leaders to:

1. **Understand Barriers**: Better understand the barriers that prevent county governments from embracing and centering learning in their approach to governing.

2. **Gain Knowledge**: Receive tactical guidance from expert speakers on how to cultivate a fail forward culture from a leadership position.

3. **Build Networks**: Participate in a community of practice made up of county leaders committed to building cultures of innovation centered around learning.

Session Topics & Schedule
The executive masterclasses will consist of four, two-hour sessions where participants will learn from renowned guest speakers. Prior to each session, preparatory materials will be

sent to participants to prime them for engagement in the masterclass. After each session, participants will be encouraged to complete post-session activities geared towards driving actionable change based on learnings from the masterclasses, and to create a community of practice among participants.

Below is an outline of the topics and speakers. Please note that CPI has only confirmed topics and speakers for sessions 1 and 2 to leave room for participant feedback and requests to shape future sessions.

1. **Session 1: Learning (and leading) in complex environments.**
   - **Title: Learning and Leading in Complex Environments**
   - **Date:** August 18, 2021 - 12:00 - 2:00 pm
   - **Speaker:** [Toby Lowe](#), Senior Lecturer in Public Management in the Newcastle Business School and Visiting Professor in Public Management at CPI.
   - **Description:** At its core, 'failing forward' is about how to better orient services, organizations and systems to be continuously learning rather than optimizing them for standardization and control. Doing so challenges traditional notions of accountability and hierarchy - how we do public administration. This is because in situations of uncertainty and complexity, we do not know what the 'right' thing to do is. There is no manual to operate from. So everyone must learn as they go. It is the job of leaders to create learning environments and practices. This session will focus on *how* leaders can build learning systems and a continuous learning mindset in their organizations.

2. **Session 2: Radical Help: How We Can Remake the Relationships Between Us**
   - **Title:** Reimagining Relationships: The power of connection, dialogue, and experimentation to tackling complex problems
   - **Date:** October 7, 2021 - 12:00 - 2:00 pm
   - **Speaker:** [Hilary Cottam](#), Honorary Professor at the Institute of Innovation and Public Purpose at UCL and author of Radical Help.
   - **Description:** Governments are grappling with a series of concurrent challenges unlike any we have seen in our lifetimes: a looming climate catastrophe, an ongoing global pandemic, civil unrest due to decades of systemic racism, and rising inequality. How should governments act in the face of these challenges? Dr. Cottam's work calls for a social revolution: exploring the new forms of thinking, working and organizing we need to navigate the twin challenges of climate change and technology driven socio-economic change. To do this, her work emphasizes the need and importance of relationships and connection between people and between people and the governments who serve them.

     This executive masterclass session will focus on the importance of relationships, connection, and practical experimentation for creating healthier systems and addressing deep social challenges. We will also discuss how all public servants,

especially those on the frontline, can be a source of innovation, and the role of leaders in building a culture that creates the conditions for better relationships and continuous learning between both government and communities and within government teams.

3. **Session 3:** *Topic and Speaker TBD - Mid-February 2022*

4. **Session 4:** *Topic and Speaker TBD - Mid-May 2022*

Learning Community
Participants will also have the opportunity to connect with other attendees across the country between sessions. Online platforms will be established for informal conversations, opportunities to share best practices and information, and community building.

Participation Availability & Fee
CPI and NACA are making 25 spots available for county leaders in any NACA member countiescounty to participate in the executive masterclass series. The total cost for all four sessions is $500 which provides access to all four masterclasses as well as the learning network. Participants will be admitted to join on a first come, first served basis at the time of payment.