

EdD in Leadership and Innovation

How to Identify Your Problem of Practice

Throughout the doctorate program, you will research a **Problem of Practice (POP)** related to your organization. You will use an academic lens to devise a strategy to implement an innovation or improvement that addresses your POP. This project replaces a dissertation.

Identification of the POP begins at the application stage and is refined during your time in the program. This optional guide helps you think through your POP and prepare to write the 750-1,000-word document that is submitted as part of your application.

Requirements for essay

You must address these three areas:

1. What problem are you trying to solve for? Why?
2. Provide background on how the problem emerged.
3. What organizational supports are in place and how does your role within the organization qualify you to embark on this program of study?

POP Selection Tips

Think measurable:

Use the SMART goals strategy for identifying your POP: specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-based.

Narrow your focus:

Do not get trapped into thinking too broadly about your POP (e.g. how do I change a school?).

Problems of Practice are shared across industries:

When addressed, your POP can make an improvement or spur an innovation at your organization, as well as be used as a case study to build understanding of organizational change across industries.

Your problem will evolve:

Get comfortable that the POP at the application stage is a starting point. During the program, faculty and expert advisors will work alongside you to shape and refine your POP.

Step 1: Identify your problem

Why does this problem matter?

- Consider why this challenge is important to solve for your organization, the people you serve, and/or the larger field.

What difference could it make to your organization if there was an innovation or improvement that solved this problem?

- Examine how you think an innovation or improvement would play out and the impact it may have on your organization.

What metrics could you have within two years?

- With your POP at the center, course work, faculty support, and research will support you in implementing a solution during the program.
- This requires that you have evidence upon which to evaluate and report on the success of your innovation or improvement. This should include what would be testable one year into your EdD studies, as well as what metrics you will have after two years.

What knowledge and/or experience will you gain from this program that will help you execute your POP?

- Consider how the course work and learnings from your cross-sector cohort can inform your POP.

Step 2: Provide context

What makes this a “problem”?

- Consider how this problem impacts a large number of people/your organization’s key performance/or the sector.

What systems have previously prevented a solution to this problem?

- Posit what may have to change to address this problem.
- Does this problem address challenges in systems, culture, talent development/training, technology, leadership development, and/or another pervasive organizational theme?

Step 3: Describe situational authority and supports

What prior knowledge do you have about the problem?

- Include the knowledge you have about why this problem exists and what the root cause may be.

How does this problem relate to your day-to-day work?

- Consider why you're best positioned to work on this POP.

What and who do you have access to within your organization that will help you study this POP?

- You'll need to include a reference from a senior-level executive in your organization who can speak to your influence, ability, and support from the organization to address this POP. Consider talking to this person as you outline your ideas.
- Think about what leaders, experts, types of data, strategic plan documentation, or other potentially confidential or proprietary information at your organization will help you research and examine this POP.

POP Selection Checklist

- Is this POP measurable?
- Is it possible to have evidence from the innovation/improvement in two years?
- Is the context of the problem well organized?
- Have I demonstrated how this is going to support my daily work and my organization?
- Have I demonstrated that I have the positional authority to address this POP?
- Do I have signoff from a senior-level executive?