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**GILLINGS SCHOOL  
OF GLOBAL  
PUBLIC HEALTH**



## Summary Code Report

Between December 2021 and January 2022, a team of UNC Capstone students conducted a total of 23 qualitative interviews with RLI participants (7), coaches (5), facilitators (7) and ROI staff members (4). This report provides an in-depth look of the themes and sub-themes that emerged through our coding and analysis process.

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## RLI Mission

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**Decisional Rule:** Apply when participants describe RLI's mission in their own words

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RLI's official mission is to "support public agencies in Edgecombe County to implement trauma-informed policies and practices to better support the health, safety, and well-being of public agency staff and community members".

All interviewees were asked to describe the mission of the Resilient Leaders Initiative in their own words. This section of the report provides insight into which components of the program were emphasized based on participant, coach, facilitator, and ROI Staff Member experience.

### Fostering Trauma-Informed Communities

When discussing RLI's mission, participants, coaches, and facilitators alike emphasized the importance of having a local impact. One coach described RLI as:

*"an organization [...] focused on bringing together the community in eastern North Carolina, specifically in Edgecombe and Nash County, to use trauma-informed practices to inform how they do their work within a community. Bringing together a collective of individuals to assess how they take on these principles of trauma-informed work to do their work."* -Coach

Additionally, multiple participants described gaps in their community's services and knowledge regarding trauma-informed approaches and that RLI and ROI aims to help address these gaps.

*"The mission of ROI is to address the gaps in leadership and trauma-informed training approaches in rural areas [...]. They're really equipping leaders in community organizations with these tools to help address and build resiliency in these communities. The one thing I forgot to add about that that I think is really important is it's a very community-led initiative and organization. It's not people parachuting in with tools and techniques, but building tools and techniques in community with those that are every day working to build a stronger social fabric in these areas."* -Facilitator

### Empowerment & Resilience

Another theme that emerged as central to the way interviewees conceptualized RLI's mission was that the program focused on empowering local leaders and supported an existing culture of resilience in the community. There was a resounding acknowledgement of community resilience in the face of barriers and challenges.

*"The way I've explained it to people, it seems to me like this grassroots effort to build community, and to build it through the lens of trauma-informed care, but not so much—I mean recognizing and realizing that there are traumas and adversities in the community, but I think they have really kind of focused on, yes, and the resiliency side of this. How do we as a community build resilience knowing that we have these things going on? You can certainly just kind of sit on that, and kind of wallow in that or whatever, but I think they're taking this community grassroots*

*approach to say educate everybody about what trauma and adversities are, and that there's this resilient side of it." -Coach*

Coaches, facilitators, and ROI Staff Members recognized that an assets-based approach would help community members *"connect with their own power"*. Participants described how their experience in RLI provided them with the tools they needed to continue these efforts and have a greater impact on their communities.

## Expectations

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**Decisional Rule:** Apply when participants describe their expectations for the program and whether or not they were met. This can be double coded with Strengths, Challenges, or Missed Opportunities as relevant.

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### Positive Expectations Were Met

Participants, coaches, and facilitators all shared generally positive expectations for the program, stating that they *“knew how powerful it would be”* and *“expected to meet some people that would be really dope [...] and would inspire me”*. Almost everyone we spoke with said that the program either met or exceeded their expectations.

*“It was good. It just changed the way I think when it comes to service”* -Participant

One facilitator specifically mentioned that the process ran much smoother than they expected given the challenges of working virtually and that the community they were introducing new concepts to likely had a history of dealing with outside influence not being helpful.

### Participants Unsure of What to Expect

Despite these positive expectations, at least a few participants described not knowing what to expect out of the process. One participant expressed interest in the program as a new opportunity, but initially felt overwhelmed and unsure of the approach.

*“At first I was like, ‘really don’t know what’s going on. I know that it’s just an opportunity’ and I think on the backend, you just see how wonderful it is”* -Participant

Multiple participants also shared that they hadn’t realized how much would be expected of them, noting the length and number of meetings along with the amount of homework as things that initially surprised them

*“It was totally different from what I had first expected because you work in that program. I mean, you work.”* -Participant

The same participants, however, also shared that, although the Zoom meetings were longer than they had expected, they found them to be engaging. One participant shared:

*“I didn’t know what to expect because [...] when they told me about the timing and that we would have these meetings and at first, I was like, oh lord, not another boring meeting. But it was nothing like that. The people that did the presentations were very captivating and so it was not boring at all”* -Participant

## Facilitator/Coach Onboarding Set Expectation of Adaptive Process

Although the process wasn't clearly laid out from the get-go, facilitators and coaches agreed that their onboarding set the expectation that, as part of the support team for the first cohort going through RLI, the process would be adaptive.

*"I think that just having the expectation that this cohort's going to be adaptive, and we're going to be reacting in - we're gonna have an idea of where we're going, but there's gonna be a lot that we're figuring out between sessions based on how things are actually progressing with the teams. I think that having that expectation in advance really set us up well because we knew we had to be flexible" -Facilitator*

By making the iterative and adaptive nature of this first cohort clear from the start, coaches and facilitators weren't overwhelmed or surprised when adjustments were made over the course of the program.

## Strengths

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**Decisional Rule:** Apply when participants describe RLI program strengths with regards to content, process, or relationships. Apply when participants describe RLI's 'secret sauce'.

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### Flexibility

A large majority of interviewees highlighted ROI's flexible approach when asked to discuss the strengths of RLI. They described ROI leadership as accommodating and understanding, as they were flexible with regards to being open to participants changing directions during the program, iterative when approaching the curriculum's content, receptive to feedback from participants, willing to learn from others, and understanding with regards to conflict.

#### *Allowing for variation*

In a few cases, teams described instances where during the RLI program, their interests and focus shifted. For example, in the case of one organization that decided to switch their focus from mental health to housing midway through the program, both a participant and coach from the team remarked that ROI was very understanding and made the process of them switching go more smoothly.

*"I will say I was impressed with how ROI handled that. It wasn't like a, 'You're outta the program. Don't come to us for funding for that because you didn't finish this project.' It was like, 'If they want your support to do that for the rest of this time, then we'll support that.' They were very flexible and adaptive, which I think is really important in building these relationships. I know that the [participant organization] really appreciated that." -Coach*

Another coach also reflected that ROI allowed room for variation among the leaders and let coaches customize their materials to best suit them, stating:

*"I could coach the way I felt like I needed to coach and be responsive to the team...I feel like ROI, kinda by giving me enough room to do my own thing, I didn't feel overwhelmed like I was not doing what other people did. I was able to do it my way and honor the vision but show up in a way that was authentic for me. You know?" -Coach*

#### *Iterative Process*

A few coaches and facilitators noted that ROI was flexible when it came to the curriculum of the initiative. They described the content of the program as iterative, as leadership and staff continuously adapted the material to better meet the needs of participating organizations. Particularly with regards to the on-boarding process, staff remarked that having that iterative mindset prepared them well when carrying out the program:

*"I thought [the onboarding process] prepared us pretty well. I think that just having the expectation that this cohort's going to be adaptive...we're gonna have an idea of where we're going, but there's gonna be a lot that we're figuring out between sessions based on how things are actually progressing with the teams. I think that having that expectation in advance really set us up well because we knew that we had to be flexible." -Facilitator*



Another coach also remarked that the process was flexible and adaptive from the recruitment phase onward:

*“I just got an email that said ‘Hey, would you be interested in this opportunity? It’s a commitment for X amount of time for nine months.’ It was very open-ended, and this was the first cycle, the first pilot group. I did like that it was open-ended. We’re building this; you’re gonna help us build this as we go through it.” -Coach*

### *Receptivity to Feedback*

As a part of the process of adapting and revising the curriculum to meet the needs of participants, RLI leadership also was described as very receptive to feedback from individuals. Many interviewees stated that ROI *“walked the walk”* when it came to creating a culture where feedback was encouraged and listened to. As described by a member of the ROI internal team, this attitude was critical to the program’s success:

*“We can do a whole team session, internal team, and we’d look at it and we’d say, here’s what’s going well, what’s not going well. Here’s what we should improve. That’s a strength.” -ROI Staff Member*

Team members similarly noted that any critiques were welcome and would be responded to, with one participant explaining that this exchange of feedback occurred:

*“Every time we convened because they were open to whatever it is that—this was not a Zoom meeting in which you sat down and didn’t participate in. They opened up for you to give your feedback on anything. They were positive on whatever you did say,” -Participant*

Another participant also noted their appreciation that ROI prioritized feedback from teams:

*“They checked and made sure they were asking clarifying questions to see how they could better their process.” -Participant*

### *Willingness to Learn*

Another aspect of ROI’s flexibility described by interviewees included that despite their previously described expertise, ROI leadership did not approach the initiative under the assumption that they knew everything. Instead interviewees felt ROI entered the process with a willingness to listen and learn from others on the team. A participant remarked that ROI leadership did not act like *“know-it-alls”* and described it as *“fly[ing] as you learn the process”*. Likewise, a facilitator noted:

*“Another strength is the willingness to learn and be flexible. They don’t present as, ‘We got this figured out.’ It’s like, ‘Let’s get [laughter] in this fishbowl together [laughter] and try to figure it out.’” -Facilitator*

The willingness of ROI to learn from others allowed interviewees to feel as though their contributions and opinions mattered and were taken into account during the program.

## Supportive

In addition to describing safe environment and maintaining a flexible culture, the majority of interviewees also spoke of feelings being well supported throughout RLI. The participants described the positivity of the staff and how their teams were constantly given the supports that they needed. One participant described this general feeling of being fully supported well, stating:

*"If I could find every word in the dictionary to use to just to give a description of how supportive they were, the dictionary would never have all the words that I could possibly come up with"*

**-Participant**

Similarly, when asked what the greatest supports to their work were, a facilitator described the abundance of support from the ROI team during the program:

*"I can't think of anything that wasn't a support. Having seen our work before, I think it gave them a space to understand exactly what we do and how we do it, and they felt like that would be value-added to the participants."* **-Facilitator**

When explaining the support provided by ROI leadership and staff, interviewees pointed to the ROI's dedication to being available to teams and giving teams the resources they needed for success,

### Availability

Participants, coaches, and facilitators described how the ROI team constantly made themselves available to the cohort and responded promptly to any needs that they brought up. They recalled that the ROI team was frequently asking if there were any additional ways they could support their efforts, during meetings and over email. One participant noted that the support and availability of ROI was presented in a genuine, authentic manner:

*"Just being nice in emails [laughter], saying, 'If you need anything, I'm here for you,' and then when you take people, they actually mean it. Like I said, I think a lotta people, you can just tell when people genuinely care. They're not just going through the motions."* **-Participant**

Similarly, a facilitator described how consistently they feel supported by ROI:

*"I always feel supported. There's a constant, 'Is there anything you need? Can we help you with backup? What do you need from us?' They've always been very open and welcoming, and available to help us however we needed help."* **-Facilitator**

### Giving Teams the Resources Needed for Success

The ROI team also supported participants by doing everything they could to ensure that teams had were necessary for them be successful. One participant noted how much they valued the work ROI did to enable them to be successful, stating:

*"It was just so amazing to see people so purpose driven and providing support...it's just a culture of wanting to make sure that you have what you need to be successful, and that's rare these days."* **-Participant**

The culture of providing whatever resources necessary to teams was noted by members of the ROI team themselves, as they described their commitment to helping teams even after the RLI program ended:

*“Any resource we have that teams have had access to, they continue to have access to. To date, the vision is that there isn’t a—we’re like, hey, you’ve been with us for three months, it’s time for you to move on.” -ROI Staff Member*

These resources provided by ROI included their support system of coaches, facilitators, and ROI leadership. Participants described how they felt staff were able to help them when they encountered challenges, and staff likewise described the benefits of being a part of a team of supporters when helping participants. Overall, the availability of the ROI team and the plethora of resources at the disposal of participants created a positive culture of support.

## Collaboration with Other Teams

When asked to describe the strengths of RLI, a majority of interviewees identified the opportunity to collaborate with other teams and members of the RLI cohort. Participants described the benefits of connecting with and learning from other organizations in the area with a similar interest in creating community-based, trauma-informed solutions.

### *Creating a Sense of Community Among the Cohort*

Interviewees described how the RLI program resulted in a sense of community across organizations in the first cohort. Participants, coaches, and facilitators all remarked that connecting with organizations in the cohort increased their team’s capacity to promote their work, as they were equipped with a new network of supports. As explained by one coach:

*“I think having the cohort itself is a strength. You have kind of strength in numbers. You’ve got folks coming together on a monthly basis around while you’re kind of doing your own thing in terms of programming, you’ve got this larger mission that you’re all trying to forward.” -Coach*

Similarly, a facilitator explained how this creation of a community through interactions with other members of the RLI cohort had a positive impact on teams and will continue to in the future:

*“Also, just the ability to ground your work, your experience, or your project in the ecosystem of the other three projects...it made me feel more hopeful that the work that [participant organization] did would find purchase and stick because there is less opportunity for them to go, ‘Oh, man. No one else cares about this stuff. No one else is doing this. Let’s just focus on what we have to do.’ No. It’s like they have their peers now...Now you feel like you’re part of something bigger, that even if you encounter some bumps in the road, you have your community, you have your village to tap into.” -Coach*

Participants also described a new awareness of others working in the field. They stated that they felt as though they were not alone and that this had a benefit on their initiatives:

*“I feel that now I’m better equipped to handle challenges because I know that I have pretty much a friend in the community, or resource in the community, that can help me navigate some things or some challenges and connect me with people that can help us.” -Participant*

By having this new community of other participants in the program, organizations were able to learn about groups doing similar work that they stated they were previously unaware of. These connections proved valuable to advancing their work.

## *Learning from Others*

As members of the RLI cohort made connections with one another, these connections also allowed participants to learn from the experiences of those in other organizations. Hearing about the ways in which other groups dealt with issues and carried out their work in the field allowed groups to use these experiences as a reference point when carrying out their own initiatives. One participant explained that in break-out rooms with members of other teams they recognized that other local organizations deeply understood the local context and history:

*“You got a chance to kinda hear and experience what the other teams were working with and some of the issues, some of the traumas that we were going through you would hear of in different groups or whatever. It helped.” -Participant*

The community created in the RLI cohort allowed members to openly exchange ideas and turn to one another to create solutions. A coach described this process of groups learning from one another:

*“I think as we all kind of got to know each other, and all of these monthly relationships grew, I think people were pretty open about saying, ‘Well, I don’t understand this, or make sure I’m doing this the right way, or what about this?’” -Coach*

By creating this sense of community among the cohort where organizations could share and learn from each other’s experiences, RLI created a network of organizations with a vested interest in trauma-informed solutions. Interviewees reflected on this and their hopes to continue to work with and grow together in the future.

## Passion

Participants, coaches, and facilitators all noted that the passion of everyone in the cohort strengthened the program. All members of the cohort were described during the interviews as committed and engaging, as they were willing to dive deep and be vulnerable.

### *Participant Team Passion*

Facilitators, coaches, and members of the ROI internal team all remarked that they were impressed with the enthusiasm and commitment of the participants. Multiple individuals described being “blown away” by the passion and willingness to do the work that the participants displayed, and also stated that participants stood out from other groups they had worked with in terms of their enthusiasm. One facilitator described how impressed they were with the passion and drive that the participants demonstrated:

*“They were so gracious and so kind, and clearly cared so much. Yeah, it’s definitely a different type of group than I’m used to working with. I don’t know if you watched recordings and stuff, but people would be, like, ‘Oh my God, it’s God’s calling to do this,’ it’s, like, wow, I’ve never heard that at work, you know? It’s definitely a very different side than I’ve gotten. Much more, I don’t know, just maybe sincere and kind of vibe than I’ve gotten elsewhere.” -Facilitator*

Not only did staff and leadership describe the passion of participants, but participants themselves also described the excitement they felt towards the program and their cohort. As stated by one participant:

*“A lot of it worked naturally because we would just sit back and talk to one another and just the excitement of getting things done, what kind of ideas we could come up with, and when the next meeting would come up, we would just have ideas of what we wanted to do, and would bring them to our coach, and she was spot on, and she was ready to just go forth with it.” -Participant*

This eagerness to engage impressed staff and inspired them as they guided participants through the material.

### *ROI Team Passion*

The enthusiastic attitude of participants in the program was matched by a shared passion from the ROI team. Participants, coaches, and facilitators all picked up on this passion and appreciated ROI's dedication to advancing the initiative. When asked what they believed RLI's 'secret sauce' to be, multiple individuals identified the ROI team and their passion and commitment to their work, with one participant asserting that without that passion, the program would not have been as strong:

*“I think they really believe in what they're doing. They're genuine. There's a realness. There's an authenticity, a passion that's there that you can't just cook that up like that, manufacture that, and so, if that wasn't there, then if that the love isn't there, then I don't know. I just don't think—I don't think it would be as good as it was.” -Participant*

This shared passion by the ROI team and the RLI cohort created a cyclical effect, where leadership and participants' passion was furthered by the passion of others.

## Tools

A large number of participants, coaches and facilitators all described excitement that at the end of the program, they had gained concrete skills and tools that could be used in their future work. These tools included trauma-informed approaches that members of the ROI team hoped would *“really change how organizations respond to trauma and, also, address any problem that they're facing in a more human-centered way”*. Interviewees reflected on the novelty of the tools provided throughout the program, with one facilitator reflecting that they had never seen an organization take the time to leave such tangible tools for others to use before. These tools included conflict resolution skills, grounding exercises to bring others together during meetings, and idea testing in the form of 'little bets'.

## Being on the Ground

Particularly among coaches and facilitators, ROI having *“boots on the ground”* in Edgecombe County was identified as increasing the organization's credibility in the community and strengthened the Resilient Leaders Initiative. By taking the time to form relationships in the community, ROI's leadership was able to lay the groundwork necessary before launching RLI.

### *Centering Community Members*

By being on the ground in Edgecombe County and forming relationships in the community, RLI established itself as a community-centered initiative, which participants and staff viewed as a major strength of the program. RLI, and ROI in general, was regarded positively for allowing the mission and content of its programs to be led by community members. In several instances, interviewees viewed RLI's

community focus as something that distinguished the initiatives from other programs they had worked with in the past. One facilitator stated:

*“It’s a very community-led initiative and organization. It’s not people parachuting in with tools and techniques, but building tools and techniques in community with those that are every day working to build a stronger social fabric in these areas.” -Facilitator*

RLI’s community-centered mission also increased trust between participants and the program’s leadership, as community members felt their personal outcomes were prioritized over any metrics:

*“The reasons I trust Rural Opportunity is because I see the data, the results of the work, but I also see that they are not just about the numbers. They’re about the people...Lots of organizations just wanna know, well, how many people? What’s the stats? What’s this? Rural Opportunity takes the time to get to know the why behind things and to get the nuance of what’s going on.” -Participant*

This human-centered approach allowed ROI to further establish credibility within the community members involved in the initiative and made the program material be more warmly received by participants.

## Safe Space

The term ‘safe space’ was commonly used by interviewees when describing the atmosphere of the RLI program. Staff and participants explained that they felt the environment during the program was welcoming and open, and individuals felt comfortable sharing their experiences and learning from others. As with other strengths of the RLI program, participants noted how this positive environment stood out from them and was especially impressive compared to other initiatives they had participated in:

*“After going through ROI, where I always feel that I’m in a safe space no matter what we were doing, that was just astounding. There were other people there who also, I think, had been through ROI types of things, and we were just dumbfounded...ROI always made us feel safe, and it was very enlightening to be in that space and hear people share their points of view, which you may not agree with, but I could understand.” -Participant*

When asked about what they felt ROI’s ‘secret sauce’ was, another participant identified this safe space where equitable learning could occur without judgment and regardless of education level:

*“It’s a safe space that you can have the PhD in all the things, or you can be completely ignorant in all the things. You show up, and everyone’s on the same, equal space. Everyone is gonna learn from where they are, and there’s equity in it, right.” -Participant*

This ability to be open without being afraid of making mistakes or being looked down upon allowed all involved parties to learn and grow from one another.

## Diverse Identities

A few interviewees noted that RLI was strengthened due to the fact that the cohort was a group of diverse individuals and that participants could safely arrive to the space in their full identity, including race, religion, and sexual orientation. Participants both felt like there were others like them on the team

that could relate to their experiences on a deeper level, as well as others from unique backgrounds that they could learn from. One participant how RLI team members having an understanding the dynamics of race in the United States profoundly resonated with their team and allowed them to be open during the program:

*“We had a Black coach, and that was just helpful...It’s good to have people who understand those dynamics. I would also say that the plus overall, which I saw not just in our coach but in also the other presenters, some of them were Black. Some of them weren’t, but they all understood the dynamics of race in America...we didn’t have to overdo work or hide any perspective of our self or anything like that in order to placate to her in order to placate to others.”* **-Participant**

In addition to feeling that they could express their own identities, participants also felt there was room to learn about the diverse experiences of others without judgment. One coach reflected on how ROI leadership was able to generate these conversations for individuals to learn and grow, in this case with regards to the use of pronouns:

*“You can say, ‘I don’t really get pronouns.’ Oh, you’re canceled. No. I wasn’t saying I’m against it. I’m saying I don’t understand it and I need to learn. We can jump to trying to be so super woke that we shut the people up who are trying to learn. ROI created a space where people could—it wasn’t a big part of it, but I think people could talk about these—the way that my team talked, they call it taboo topics. Some people would say, ‘Taboo? You’re not woke. You call this taboo?’ No, no. That’s the language that they know. Just accept them. Allow them to have the conversation.”* **-Coach**

The ability to share and learn from the diverse identities of everyone in the RLI cohort allowed participants to dive deeper into the material and make greater connections and progress with their teams.

## Expertise

Interviewees noted they were impressed with the expertise of the leadership in the RLI program. Participants reflects that Whether it was ROI leadership, coaches, and/or facilitators, individuals remarked that you could tell that everyone “*knew their stuff*”. They reflected that it was beneficial to see that everyone brought something to the table and had clearly been selected due to their existing knowledge.

## Specialization

With regards to the expertise of those involved in RLI, the specialization of individuals was particularly viewed as a strength of the program. Leadership, coaches, and facilitators each possessed their own specific strengths, resulting in participants being able to turn to whomever was best suited to handle a certain problem or situation. A coach described how the perspectives of each leader served as a valuable resource:

*“The variety of constant experts that were available to the teams, so you had a systems person. You had a data person. You had a variety of different specialties that teams could tap into.”*  
**-Coach**

Similarly, a participant reflected how this idea of specialization allowed their own team members to lead where their strengths were, and for their group to gain new, diverse perspectives. This also allowed the team to have equal footing with leadership and play to their strengths, as the participant explained:

*“Everyone had the same amount of influence at the table, so, if the guidance counselor took lead, she took lead. If the EC teacher took lead, he took lead. If it was myself, whatever. Whoever best had whatever grasp, we would go that way. Working together, which we did every day, was really great, and having their coach to help to rein us in when we needed to be reined in and then to help push us when we needed...to stretch our thinking or help us to see things maybe from a different perspective was very helpful.” -Participant*

By creating a system of specialization within a team of experts in their respective fields, ROI was able to more efficiently pull from the strength of both individuals and organizations to advance the larger goals of the initiative

## Community Impact

Interviewees also described the benefit they felt RLI held at a community-level. They reflected on measured positive impacts they had already observed the program had on their community. In particular, facilitators highlighted noticed changes including greater community awareness of trauma-informed approaches, and relatedly the implementation of these valuable tools for use in the community. One facilitator illustrated the benefit of sharing these tools with the community during the program:

*“It felt really exciting to be able to share that with a wider group of community members so that they can be just having these tools in their toolbox for really being able to understand the full range of complexity that they're dealing with in these really challenging areas. Also, to be able to bring people together which is a big part of how we understand systems. You have to be able to bring a system together. It felt really exciting to be able to share those tools more broadly in their community.” -Facilitator*

Interviewees described the ability to share these tools and raise awareness of trauma-informed solutions in the community as an opportunity to create real and long-term change in their communities.

## Language

Despite identifying difficulties with understanding jargon as an initial challenge of the program, interviewees also described RLI's use of clear language as well as their work to make content more understandable for participants. They described presentations as effective in presenting the key themes of the material. Despite the detailed program material, participants appreciated that ROI leaders were not *“talking over your head.”*

### *Debriefing and Breaking Down Material*

When language was difficult to understand, participants appreciated that ROI staff took the time to reiterate the key points of the material and also adapt content's language so it would be more digestible. Multiple participants described staff going back and rewording material after they gave the feedback that it was difficult to follow. One participant described how they were grateful for the way their coach responded when they had difficulty following:



*"I am not a mental-health-trained person. Some of the conversations at the very beginning were overwhelming to me because I didn't know what they were talking about. I didn't get the language. I'm like, 'I don't know what y'all talking about. Y'all over my head. You'll have to bring this down to layman's terms so we can understand.' They were very receptive of that, and I really appreciated that." -Participant*

This process of "breaking down" the content allowed participants who were initially struggling to be more at ease with the program material and process key concepts better.

## Facilitator/Coach Meetings

Facilitators and coaches described a positive working relationship with each other and appreciated the opportunity to meet and debrief with one another prior to and during each monthly convening. These meetings gave coaches and facilitators the opportunity to check-in with each other and set agendas to guide their work with their teams. As explained by one coach:

*"To be able to take what collectively we're getting as a group, and still applying how I've been able to do things in my experiences to our team, I think having those central trainings or those central meetings, I think, was super helpful for us as coaches to kind of have some guidance and direction on how to push out things." -Coach*

These meetings were consistent with RLI's culture of creating shared values and goals while still letting individuals play to their strengths and deviate from the agenda as needed.

## Feeling Heard/seen

Participants were asked during interviews to describe a time they felt heard or seen during the program. Several participants answered that they "always" did, or that they could not think of a time that they did not feel they were being listened to during the program. The participants described the attitude of RLI as very attentive to their needs and that their experience was prioritized. A few participants contrasted that with the attitudes they had typically experienced from other institutions, for example:

*"That's one of the beauties of this group and of what they do. When we went through the face-to-face training, my guidance counselor was having a very bad migraine. They made a space for her to go and just get in the dark and do what she needed to do. They would always make you feel as though whatever you needed to do for yourself, do that. Coming from corporate worlds and from other areas, that's not how life is. You just suck it up, do what they tell you to do, and just be done with it...Yeah. That has been a lasting imprint for me." -Participant*

Participants reflected that they were able to tell that ROI leadership were actually invested in their success and not just going through the motions. This set RLI, and ROI in general, apart from other organizations and increased their satisfaction with the initiative.

## Understanding with Regards to Conflicts

A final component of the flexibility of the RLI program was the leadership's understanding when conflicting circumstances arose throughout the program. As previously mentioned by a participant describing an instance when a team member was allowed to step out due to a migraine, interviewees appreciated that when an individual was unable to make a particular event, the program was not thrown

off course but rather staff were accommodating and willing to figure out a solution that would work for everyone. A participant described how ROI struck this balance of accountability but understanding well, as there was not too much pressure put on participants:

“One of my favorite things about this experience and I think it’s consistent with the culture of ROI is that they are very serious about this stuff, but they’re also like, ‘Hey, it’s not that deep.’ I think that is a really hard thing to balance out, but they do it really well...It’s like there was a expectation without pressure, and I think the not just the coaches, but then also with the program and all of it, every person who took part in it, who taught a different part of the cohort, or taught a different skill set, all had that same consistent dynamic.” **-Participant**

Overall, RLI’s flexible culture gave participants the room they needed to thrive and accomplish their goals. Acknowledging that conflicts were bound to happen reduced the negative impact of these circumstances and actually created greater feelings of support and success among participants.

## Challenges

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**Decisional Rule:** Apply when participants describe RLI program challenges with regards to content, process, or relationships. This can include personal challenges or general tensions that arose.

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In order to understand how ROI might improve the implementation of RLI for future cohorts, we asked participants, coaches, facilitators, and ROI Staff Members to share stories about the challenges they faced as part of the first iteration of the program. Challenges included facing learning curves, unclear expectations, burnout, and dealing with the impacts of working virtually and during the pandemic.

### Learning Curves

#### *Disorganization*

As part of RLI's first cohort, many interviewees noted facing challenges as they familiarized themselves with the program content and structure. We heard that there was a need for ROI to better "*seamlessly facilitate*" and clearly articulate the goals and structure of the program. Many participants noted that the program "*sometimes felt like a lot*" and that sometimes they would feel "*totally lost*". One participant describing needing additional context shared:

"I think sometimes, it just felt like a lot. It just feel like a lot, and but part of that process is there's just this natural 'Am I doing this right? Where are we headed? What are we doing?' It's natural, but there were some times where it just seemed like there was a lot of work, so which is not a bad thing, but it just—it took a lot of [laughter] time, so yeah." **-Participant**

Participants were not alone in hoping for "*more clarity upfront*". One coach shared:

*"I think maybe more clarity upfront would've helped. I also know that we were piloting many aspects of this. I don't know how much more could you have given me. Right? If they had gotten really granular, some of that stuff, it changed from what we thought it would be to what it ended up being. It would've been more time to quote unquote 'master' something that we might not have done. Then I would've been like, 'Well, we learned all this and we didn't end up doing it.'"*  
**-Coach**

Additionally, participants and facilitators expressed struggling to meet program expectations while simultaneously working with and building relationships with new people.

*"there's opportunity and there's challenge in really being given the opportunity to fully co-design something with people you've just met."* **-Facilitator**

Interviewees acknowledged that many of the challenges they faced arose from the fact that they were participating in a pilot program. As part of the first cohort, most went in fully expecting there to be a learning curve, both for themselves and for ROI.

## *Jargon and Unfamiliar Language*

Participants unfamiliar with concepts like systems mapping felt like they were behind and needed to catch up. Several participants shared sentiments and experiences similar to the one provided below:

*“it can seem overwhelming, and you can be listening to people. In some of the presentations, there were people who were talking, and if you’re not familiar with the vernacular, you’re not familiar with the academic language, then you can get lost. That was what was happening is that people were having these conversations, and they’re using these academic terms. A lotta people have no idea what that stuff means. They have no idea what you’re talking about [laughter], and so, I think—and somebody even said something like that. I think towards the end, they backed away from that stuff, but to start off with that is—it’s a lot. It’s normal to feel overwhelmed. Hang in there. You’re gonna make it.” -Participant*

This was similarly echoed when participants discussed the systems thinking language as part of the resources used for RLI. The concepts seemed too “academic,” “too complex”.

Perhaps by nature of the fact that RLI recruited coaches and facilitators from various backgrounds, coaches and facilitators expressed difficulty getting on the same page with regards to language used when sharing information with participants. Facilitators and coaches worried about overwhelming participants and wrestled with how to best present information.

*“I think that in—that diversity is a real strength. Within that, there, inevitably, tend to be tensions around how to approach a process, how to engage with your community, that sort of thing. [...] It gets to be overwhelming, and I think that the world view I bring is more like pragmatic where we do (a) and then we do (b), like, yes, it’s a linear process, but we get to get good results” -Facilitator*

## Unclear Expectations

### *Lack of Accountability*

A few interviewees described their frustration with the lack of accountability and follow-through from others for the duration of the RLI program. Interviewees expressed that there was no “built in way” to ensure that participants were “doing the work” they committed to and/or “taking ownership” of their team projects. Some facilitators and coaches had difficulty ensuring their team members would regularly meet and/or follow through on tasks.

Likewise, ROI Staff Members described not setting up expectations and contracts in a way to keep coaches and facilitators accountable for goals set at the outset of the program.

*“All of the members were like, ‘Well, they said they’re gonna do XYZ, and they’re gonna measure this, and they’re gonna sustain it this way,’ but there was no built-in way [...]. There’s no built-in check-in being like, ‘In six months, we want you to provide a report, or just give us a progress update on what you’ve been doing.’ We just gave you [salary], and we have no way of holding you accountable that you’re actually gonna spend it in this way or actually measure these things.” -ROI Staff Member*

Facilitators, coaches, and ROI Staff Members all expressed a desire for the program to incorporate more built-in accountability mechanisms to keep teams on track. For the next cohort, to overcome these challenges, ROI hopes to *“build a culture of ownership or doing the work”*.

### *Lack of Clarity on Roles*

ROI Staff Members described how encouraging facilitators to take the lead with content planning and delivery felt like having *“too many cooks in the kitchen”*. Our research team got the sense that this made it challenging for facilitators to design a streamlined and cohesive program, especially given the time-constraints and lack of prior connection between facilitators.

This lack of clarity on roles led to teams feeling *“a little restricted”* and confusion for all RLI coaches, facilitators, and participants and a desire to better *“utilize skills a little more effectively”*. As one facilitator said, *“It felt like I wasn't sure what my role was —I've mostly just stepped in and was there to support and encourage and offer some tools if I could.”*

ROI leadership described not fully utilizing individuals' skills to the best of their ability and that participating teams *“felt a little restricted”*.

### *Lack of Clarity on Intended Outcomes*

Participants, coaches, and facilitators expressed confusion about what they were *“supposed to be getting out of [RLI]”*. Specifically, some of our interviewees expressed that as the program came to an end, there was a pressure to let the *“systems strengthening piece fall away”* and *“just get a great project”*. Coaches and facilitators shared that their expectations of teams were too low at the beginning; that there was confusion about testing prototypes; and that there was a *“lack of focus on implementation and sustainability”*.

### **Burn Out**

When asked about challenges, interviewees expressed that they *“worked harder in the beginning”* and there was *“less energy”* and *“less motivation”* as the program went on. Interviewees pointed to *“the nature of the stressors we're all living under”* as a factor to the burn out participants experienced. Interviewees suggested that ROI could help with burn out by shortening the length of convenings, better preparing coaches, better communicating expectations upfront, and assigning less homework.

### **Pandemic & Virtual Programming**

In our qualitative interviews, we asked participants about their experiences engaging in RLI during the COVID-19 pandemic and in a virtual setting. We heard that coaches could have *“facilitated better”* in person and some participants described preferring the opportunity to do activities in-person.

*“I like classroom stuff with posters and sticky notes, but it was still good. I think I'm not the only one who kinda sometimes got Zoom burnout, but it was good to still be able to meet. I think bein' in a room setting was always better.” -Participant*

Participants, coaches, and facilitators all noted that it was more difficult to build relationships without in-person meetings.

*“Because I’m a social person, I felt stifled. I am that social person that really just wants to touch and hug, and be in the midst of stuff. COVID has definitely been a hindrance to that. I feel like all of the work got done. I would have loved for us to been able to do it in person, because that connection piece gets missed and gets lost when you’re on Zoom. It does. It gets lost.” -Facilitator*

On the other hand, at least one facilitator shared being surprised that they had been able to build relationships and feel like part of a community despite the physical distance.

There were at least a few participants that struggled due to being less familiar or comfortable working with technology and one ROI staff member that noted having internet issues.

*“Everyone can’t have high-speed internet. The internet that you do have is shaky. Even if it rains, it could just wipe out your internet. It just really depends. It definitely made it hard at first.” -ROI Staff Member*

Although many interviewees described experiencing Zoom fatigue, at least a few mentioned being surprised at how engaged they were in the relatively long cohort meetings.

## Suggestions & Missed Opportunities

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**Decisional Rule:** Apply when participants describe suggestions on how to improve specific aspects of RLI programming. Apply when participants describe things they wished would have been incorporated into RLI with regards to content, process, or relationships.

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In our interviews with internal team members, coaches, facilitators, and participants, we asked for suggestions on how they would recommend improving the program.

### Community Context

Multiple coaches and facilitators suggested including an overview of participant community context as part of their onboarding.

*“Maybe if there’s a community resource guide that could’ve been shared with coaches beforehand. [North Carolina] is so different county to county, what region of the state you’re in. Just a little more orientation [...], our strengths are we have this, this and this, or we’re lacking transportation - just a little more data like that type of information.” -Coach*

One potential way to help provide this context would be for facilitators and coaches to meet with the same community members that reviewed participant applications prior to the first cohort meeting.

### Diversity

At least a few coaches and facilitators noted that there was limited diversity amongst their group and although they did not notice its impact on their relationships with and support for participants, they wondered how participants felt.

*“I was surprised there were not more facilitators who represented the population, right. Other than the consultants that did the diversity and equity, from what I remember, and myself, all of the other facilitators were white, and not that we can’t learn things from everybody. However, I go back to my background in the school system and education. I need my Black students to see Black people in leadership. I need them to hear that voice, and that was not there. It was a little bit of a disconnect for me” -Facilitator*

One facilitator also expressed concern about the fact that facilitators and coaches were not based in rural areas or in the community.

*“Many of the coaches and facilitators were not based in [county] and the participants were. It seemed like we had a good working relationship — I just wonder if anybody—how any of the participants felt about that tension because I grew up in a little town, probably not any bigger than [town]. [In my town] I felt like there was very much this ‘be aware of the outside’ or ‘what would they know’. In general, in our sessions, everybody seemed to be really open and very willing to engage with us and engage with the process. I just wonder what you hear from the participants, if they felt like at some point they were not being—that they felt there were tensions between*

*outsiders and insiders, and outsiders in terms of geography, outsiders in terms of race.”*

**-Facilitator**

Not a single participant explicitly mentioned a lack of diversity or feeling uncomfortable working with facilitators and coaches on sensitive issues, instead describing their appreciation of coach and facilitator competence and awareness of social issues.

For future cohorts, two suggestions were made. First, was simply to recruit a more diverse set of coaches and facilitators. The second was to have RLI alumni serve as coaches or peer supporters for future teams. This latter suggestion would not only ensure that coaches have plenty of community context, but also a deep familiarity with the program.

Although not brought up by many interviewees, one facilitator discussed their disappointment with the lack of integration of diversity, equity, and inclusion content throughout the program.

*“I think what was a missed opportunity was the information that was provided on diversity, equity, and inclusion. It was provided almost as an addendum, right. Tap into, if you can, and again, I appreciate the forethought to include it at all, right. However, it was offered on a Friday in the afternoon for an hour. Videos were not available afterwards. Not only does the trauma-informed information serve as a foundation to the work, but I think diversity, equity, and inclusion is also a foundation to what is being done. To have it as an addendum, to me, minimizes the importance of it. I think that was a missed opportunity, and I don’t think that any of us know enough about the injustices embedded in our systems and policies to say, “We’ve arrived. We don’t need to learn any more about that information...””* **-Facilitator**

## Provide an Overview

Another major theme that emerged from coaches, facilitators, and participants was the need to provide an overview at the beginning of the program.

*“I think the teams were like, “What is the end goal? Where am I going? How do I get there?” I think there could have been a way clearer journey map that was defined at the beginning.”* **-ROI Staff Member**

Such an overview should include a description of the content to be covered, the arc of the program process, expectations for different team members, and examples of success. One facilitator summed this suggestion up nicely in saying:

*“I think it’s just [a] logic model basically being quite clear about what the outcomes are that you want at the other end. Then actually being quite prescriptive about how you’re gonna get there, and then plugging in our skills where necessary”* **-Facilitator**

Coaches and facilitators alike seemed to appreciate when Seth and Vichi were a bit more prescriptive and recommended providing more direction and oversight for future cohorts.

One participant in particular described feeling that some of the sessions were a bit too abstract/philosophical as he went through them. In the end the participant realized how these sessions informed his team’s actions in a later session and appreciated having the additional background, but emphasized that making the connection between conceptual discussion and its associated action from



the get-go would have helped him see the value of these more abstract discussions as they were happening.

Now that the first cohort has completed its work, a few interviewees suggested having alumni come back to share an overview of their work and outcomes with future cohorts,

*“Making it more real for people of what it could look like, just so they can anchor onto something.” -ROI Staff Member*

This would provide future teams with inspiration as well as give them a sense of what type or scale of outcomes they might expect from their work in RLI.

## Foster Relationships & Connections

The vast majority of interviewees described wanting a greater emphasis on fostering relationships during their time in the program.

*“It’s such a great group of really experienced and talented people. I think there were ways that we could’ve been maybe a bit more interconnected across the project” -Facilitator*

By-far the most commonly mentioned suggestion was to host in-person events or sessions at the beginning and/or end of the program. Although benefits of conducting the program virtually included safety during the pandemic and the option to engage coaches/facilitators across the country, many interviewees believed that at least some in-person engagement at the beginning of the program would have helped foster relationships between teams and their coaches and facilitators. In particular, many coaches and facilitators tried to share some of the intangible benefits of in-person relationship building as compared to on Zoom, especially towards the beginning of the program.

*“Heavy relationship building, I think would’ve been a wise investment earlier on” -Coach*

A more general recommendation was to incorporate more time specifically focused on helping team members, coaches, and facilitators connect. One facilitator described feeling like there were so many things to get done that there wasn’t time to foster relationships and connections:

*“Just offering also more time to connect, right, ‘cause that - part of the framework that was set up is let’s practice what we’re engaging people to do and inviting people to do, which is resiliency and to make connection [...]. You do the resilience tool, and that’s it. Then you do a connection and that’s - and then you just move on really quickly. I understand” -Facilitator*

There was also a particular emphasis from coaches and facilitators on encouraging teams to connect with and learn from each other. At least a few participants also brought up wanting to learn more about the work that other teams were doing, but didn’t necessarily believe that there was much room for cross-team collaboration or reason that teams would work with each other after completing the program.

Coaches and facilitators also highlighted wanting more of an opportunity for greater connection between coaches, between facilitators, and between coaches and facilitators. One coach said:

*“I feel like if I had stronger relationships with the facilitators and other coaches, that maybe I would have known or even felt more comfortable to call on them for additional support.*

*Everyone offered it. Everyone was always like, 'I'm here to' - but I didn't really know what to call on them for" -Coach*

One coach suggested making at least a few of the facilitator planning sessions mandatory for coaches to attend. This would not only facilitate connection, but also provide coaches with more context on what is being presented.

*"I think there were moments where I wished that I had attended the session, so then I knew what the facilitators were doing, so I might be able to support and add value." -Coach*

## Streamline Content and Simplify Vocabulary

Another suggestion that was widely agreed upon among coaches, facilitators, and participants was to streamline with regards to both content and vocabulary.

*"I think, now that the first cycle of this program is coming to completion, bringing in those learnings and insights and maybe structuring a little further out what the different sessions are gonna be focusing on and tightening up those area of focus" -Facilitator*

The first cohort was introduced to many frameworks from different facilitators and contexts. Participants generally felt overwhelmed by the sheer number of frameworks and approaches as well as the unfamiliar vocabulary attached to each. Coaches and facilitators recognized the need to consolidate and be more prescriptive.

*"I think it was our bad, basically, that we didn't structure it super-intuitively for the team, so then it felt like drinking out of a garden hose, which would have still been a lot of information." -Facilitator*

There were a few different suggestions on how to consolidate. Two coaches suggested reducing the number of facilitators and working together to ensure a uniformity of language. One solution that emerged part of the way through the program was a consolidated central framework for everyone to work off of.

*"I'm gonna describe it as the double-diamond diagram. [...] I feel like having that from the very start, that became the framework for this howl thing. I think we have it, it was in our minds, but it wasn't articulated clearly until about halfway through" -Facilitator*

## Be More Prescriptive

Internal team members and a few coaches and facilitators reflected on how being more prescriptive about roles/responsibilities, activities, and process would have helped streamline the information shared with participants.

*"I feel like we could probably be a little bit more prescriptive on what activities are gonna generate a win for each team. Ultimately [...] we're gonna simplify it down and be really prescriptive because once you do this, we guarantee you're gonna have an insight that's gonna be useful. I think that sort of thing would be an opportunity for improvement" -Facilitator*

Additionally, most internal team members and many facilitators suggested that RLI leadership provide clearer descriptions of facilitator roles and how facilitators should split up work.

*“To some extent, I just think if we're not gonna have the time to really get together and come up with [...] the stages of what we're gonna go through [...] then Seth and Vichi need to come up with that and tell us what to do. Does that make sense? Like, you have this skill, you have this skill, you have this skill, this is where you're plugged in here, this is where you're plugged in. I almost feel like someone needs to go up and do that, as opposed to kind of relying enough to collaborate and do it when you don't have a structure or time to really do that properly.”*

**-Facilitator**

This would likely help facilitate the development of a more cohesive narrative to present to participants, while reducing ambiguity around seemingly overlapping facilitator responsibilities.

## Timing & Scheduling

Suggestions in relation to timing and scheduling were somewhat conflicting but all centered around wanting the opportunity to dig deeper. Some thought that reducing the number of facilitators presenting in each session would give each facilitator more time to present their topic as well as make content delivery less overwhelming for participants. Other suggestions included making the Zoom meetings longer, reducing the length of Zoom meetings but increasing the number of them, and extending the length of the program from nine months to twelve.

## Meet Teams Where They Are

In speaking with coaches, facilitators, and participants, it became clear that teams began the program at different stages of project ideation, testing, and implementation. While one facilitator suggested encouraging teams to focus on *“identifying blindspots”* with and *“making tweaks to existing programs”* rather than starting at the ideation stage with a completely blank slate, the vast majority of facilitators emphasized the value of tailoring RLI programming to meet teams wherever they are in this process.

*“Ideally, you would have that systems-thinking framework at a stage when you've done the research. You've also done some background research, and now you're assessing everything as a system, then you're boiling it down to, okay, what's that bit of the system I want to impact? Then dive even further into, what's that human that I want to impact's problem that I could do something with human-centered design? It was kind of just, like—but I think it wasn't structured that way, basically. It was structured so that all three of us, or all four of us, actually, presented our frameworks one after another.”* **-Facilitator**

An alternative suggestion offered by one coach was for RLI to do more *“vetting”* such as to select teams that already had a particular area of focus or for teams to do more *“narrowing down of what [they] want to do when [they] come into the program”* such as to ensure all teams are starting out on equal footing.

## Post-Program Engagement

Facilitators, coaches, and participants alike shared hopes that ROI would develop some sort of alumni program to engage past participants/teams. One participant shared their hope that,:

*“Long term [ROI] continue to invest in those [alumni] or find out if those organizations continue to need long-term help after the project is over. [...] to make sure that everything [participants] set out to do is accomplished”* **-Participant**

This post-program engagement could include anything from continued mentorship and coaching to the opportunity to apply for additional funding through ROI.

A few interviewees raised the opportunity ROI has to meaningfully engage alumni to share their wisdom with future cohorts. Not only would this allow RLI to *“build a community of like-minded people”* but also for future participants to have the benefit of *“peer leaders”*. As was previously mentioned in this summary code report, interviewees suggested having alumni serve on the panel of community members to review applications and serve as coaches for future teams. Additionally, future cohorts could benefit from having alumni present their work during the first cohort meeting. This would give teams a sense of the success that comes from the program as well as help them determine an appropriate score for their efforts.

## Program Fit & Advice

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**Decisional Rule:** Apply when participants describe the type of person/organization that would or would not be a good fit for RLI. Apply when participants describe advice they have for future participants, coaches, or facilitators.

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Interviewees emphasized that the Resilient Leaders Initiative was/is an immersive and enriching experience but that those who are interested in partaking should reflect on their own journeys and be ready to “dig in”.

### Deep Dive/Introspection

A common theme identified across interviewees was that RLI was best suited for people who were ready to reflect on the role that they individually play in perpetuating or protecting against trauma as well as the role their organization plays. Through RLI, organizations have gained valuable tools to address trauma and respond to the communities needs in a human centered approach. Many suggested that this program would not be a good fit for those who weren't ready to embark on a journey of introspection and who weren't ready to change or “grow”. One facilitator shared the following advice for future participants:

*“I think just a reminder that this program is for you and about you. Not that structure of a fellowship that I think sometimes is what we associate these things with, which is, “I need to perform.” It's not about your performing for the fellowship. It's about a resource to help you perform in the ways in which that you feel are best to support yourself and your community. I think just reminding them that it's just really centered on you. It's not about achievement. It's about sustaining the beautiful work that you're already doing.” -Facilitator*

One participant similarly shared advice on how to get the most out of the program:

*“Dig in. Don't be afraid to embrace whatever it is that they're offering. Don't be too scared to look at yourself to see what it is that's in your life that, maybe, needs to be addressed. I think it's just not being afraid of it.” -Participant*

RLI provides an opportunity for teams to engage in deep reflection on the systems impacting their community and encourages everyone involved in the program to be part of and co-design trauma-informed solutions.

### Growing Pains

While the vast majority of reflections were positive, at least a few current participants suggested that future participants should be aware of the rigors of the program, describing feeling overwhelmed by the amount of work required.

*“I would just say don't let the beginning part intimidate you. Stay true to the process. It's gonna work out and you will be successful. What you put in is what you're gonna get. If you stay true to the process without getting frustrated you will accomplish your goals.” -Participant*

Another participant noted that the process RLI used to teach new content felt unfamiliar. While it took some getting used to, they shared that the program's methods worked well.

“Be flexible because sometimes it's a method of learnin' that we're not used to. Don't just quit because it seems hard because it's gonna open your mind to think differently. It really is. It opens your mind to think differently.” **-Participant**

Participants, facilitators, and coaches noted the importance of staying true to the process and being open to new ways of thinking.

Some participants described wishing they had a stronger background on trauma and trauma-informed approaches prior to joining the program and thought that *“this initiative should be for people [...] who understand all of that first before coming in”*. A few coaches and facilitators instead suggested incorporating other ROI resources such as the Reconnect for Resilience training into RLI programming.