

Tips for Using Continuous Quality Improvement to Navigate Change and Complexity

Many Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood grantees are rethinking how to deliver their program services during the ongoing public health crisis and beyond. Continuous quality improvement (CQI) principles can be especially helpful in times of change when grantees must quickly develop new and untested ways to serve clients. Whether considering alternative methods for delivering in-person programming, addressing changes in referral sources, maintaining relationships with current clients, or responding to a different mix of needs and stressors faced by clients, grantees can use a systematic CQI process to guide and support changes—and improvements—in their programs. This tip sheet highlights how CQI principles can help grantees meet today's demands, along with challenges that will require rapid change going forward.

Identify the issue, set a goal that defines success, and develop a strategy for improvement



Identify the issue and define success. When rethinking a program's operations, first clearly identify the specific problem or issue area that needs to be addressed. Second, define what success looks like using a goal that is SMART—specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. For example, programs might note that their referrals declined following state shelter-in-place orders and closures. After identifying that issue, programs might set a target number of new referrals as a goal.



Develop a strategy by seeking input from various sources. Once a goal is defined, the next step is developing a strategy to achieve it. Input from managers, service providers, and clients can lead to a strategy that works for everyone. Drawing on diverse perspectives can help you anticipate challenges and identify the implementation supports needed to address them. For example, in thinking through how to move away from in-person meetings, ask staff and former clients about their preferred technology options and seek to balance the needs of both groups.



Document the new strategy. In a rapidly changing environment, establishing and documenting expectations will help staff understand what to do and when. Clearly describe the steps for implementing the new strategy and the responsibilities of everyone involved, including frontline staff and supervisors. For example, if shifting to virtual workshops, describe (1) how session invitations will be sent to clients and who will send them, (2) the online meeting platform and Internet access requirements, and (3) the tools that facilitators will use to lead sessions (such as scripts and visuals) if they are different from the tools used for in-person sessions.

Start small with a road test



Start small before going big. There is often pressure to move quickly when an organization faces significant change, but trying a new strategy on a small scale first (for example, with a subset of clients) can save time and effort in the end. Small-scale implementation provides an opportunity to see what works, identify what should change, and address kinks in processes. Once issues are resolved, roll out the new strategy more broadly.



Ensure feedback loops are in place. To help determine whether a new strategy needs adjustment, actively seek feedback from clients and program staff. For example, perhaps a new outreach strategy was implemented to address a decrease in workshop attendance. Ask clients how they are experiencing the new approach—such as, did the outreach motivate them to come to the sessions? What else do they think would help them stay connected to the program? Feedback from program staff about their experiences with the new approach can also help make the new strategy more productive and sustainable.

Track progress and plan next steps



Check progress in meeting goals. Convene regular meetings to review data and assess progress toward goals. For example, CQI implementation teams might review whether virtual workshops are taking place as often as planned and with the expected level of client attendance, or they might assess whether new referral sources have resulted in more referrals. For any issue, reviewing progress toward goals is crucial to assessing how well new strategies work. If goals are not being met, consider adjusting those strategies.



Plan for the future. Assess whether you need the strategy in the future—to supplement or replace other approaches—or whether you want to phase it out as circumstances change. For example, you might find that in-person workshops are optimal, but virtual make-up sessions help boost clients' attendance rates. As schools and businesses reopen, you might find that continuing to use alternative sources of referrals provides a more robust and diversified referral network. Continue to use goal setting, feedback loops, and data analysis to inform your plans, including plans for addressing additional challenges that may arise.

Additional resources. The following resources provide more information on the CQI principles discussed in this tip sheet:

- [Continuous Quality Improvement Plan Template](#) helps CQI implementation teams document and track their CQI efforts.
- [Getting Client and Staff Feedback Through Road Testing](#) discusses the importance of collecting feedback when road testing a new strategy and describes different sources of feedback and methods for collecting it.
- [Facilitation Strategies for Fostering Discussion and Consensus](#) describes how CQI implementation teams can structure interactions to incorporate diverse perspectives, guide question development, and gain consensus on critical questions and solutions.
- [Two Decision Making Models](#) discusses two decision making strategies CQI implementation teams can use to help address areas for improvement in their programs.