

General Guidance to Support a Quality Improvement Council

Prepared by the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials

Overview

ASTHO prepared general guidance, recommendations, and resources to guide the development of a Quality Improvement (QI) Council as well as assist in improvements to QI processes consistent with PHAB Accreditation Standards and Measures. Resources used to develop the document are from ASTHO, NNPHI, NACCHO and other national partners, as well as ASTHO's staff experiences.

QI is useful for professionals, teams, and organizations to improve processes and achieve measurable results in things such as efficiency, effectiveness, performance, accountability, outcomes, and indicators of quality services or processes which achieve equity and improve health. Understanding and properly implementing quality improvement can promote operational excellence and strengthen the public health system overall.

Additionally, governmental public health must carry out foundational public health responsibilities, and the foundational capabilities must be present in every community to promote and protect the health of all people across jurisdictions. The Foundational Capabilities represent the public health infrastructure needed to support basic public health protections and other programs and activities that are key to ensuring the community's health and achieving equitable health outcomes. Organizational management is one of the nine Foundational Capabilities, which refers to the ability to apply business practices that assure efficient use of resources, achieve desired outcomes, and foster a continuous learning environment.

Defining Quality Improvement

QI in public health is the use of a deliberate and defined improvement process, such as Plan-Do-Check-Act, which is focused on activities that are responsive to community needs and improving population health.

QI Council Charter Design Concepts

- A QI council charter is a key element to ensuring a productive and successful QI council. The charter outlines the authority, roles, and responsibilities of the council.
- Council charters help ensure members are meeting the duties they put forth in the design of the QI council.
- Key elements of a good charter include:
 - Statement of purpose
 - Scope
 - Committee structure
 - Membership

- Meeting frequency
- Time commitment
- Roles and responsibilities
- Measures for success
- Definitions

Ideas for Recruitment of QI Council Members

- To work efficiently, QI teams need diversity: people with different skills, experience, knowledge, and viewpoints. The typical size of this group is 5-10 members and it can be a mix of leaders, managers, and front-line staff.
- Consider allocating many membership positions to key leaders and staff that are QI champions for the department. Ideally, these individuals should have training, knowledge, and experience with QI, but at a minimum they should be committed to leading QI efforts and encouraging participation while building interest within the agency.
- Consider reserving two to three positions for staff volunteers. For example, some health departments send out a “call for volunteers” to serve on their QI Council. In this way, you are encouraging enthusiastic staff at all levels to become involved and providing opportunity for those interested in learning more about QI and the agency’s strategic activities. It helps to identify QI champions, provides a source of job enrichment, and learning and professional development (e.g., link to workforce development).

Tips for Creating an Effective QI Council Structure

- A QI council can be structured differently based on agency composition and capacity. Typically, a QI council has representation from leadership, performance management and/or QI coordinators, programmatic staff, and administrative support (notetaking, minutes, and meeting logistics).
- A successful QI team needs clear objectives to guide its activities, as well as support from its leadership and the right resources. If team members participate and collaborate, the project is more likely to be effective.
- A QI team and staff affected by QI should have a shared understanding of terms and definitions.
 - Examples can be found in [Minnesota’s Public Health and QI toolbox](#) for an extensive list of terms and definitions.
- Oversight for QI can be structured differently depending on the organization. For example, for agencies with a performance management system in place, the QI organizational structure is often integrated into the performance management structure.

Operational and Administrative Best Practices

- Establish overall agency QI policies, goals, and selected performance indicators. These will also be part of your QI Plan and Performance Management System and in this way your council contributes to the development of that plan.
- Establish a QI project selection and review process. Including regular review of customer needs, agency performance data, ensuring that decisions are data-driven and not based on hunches or opinions. This will assist in developing criteria for deciding when a QI effort or project might be necessary.
- Provide guidance and oversight of the agency's QI efforts: 1) review quality performance indicators quarterly to assure progress toward specific, achievable QI goals and objectives, 2) identify potential QI program implementation issues and develop secondary data analysis to determine if further review is warranted, and 3) recommend changes in program, process, and policy.
- Consider goals that align with the strategic and annual operations plans within your agency.

Best Practices for Implementation and Communication

- Communication of QI activities give visibility to agency efforts and improvements. Sharing QI information on an agency intranet or shared drive are good, centralized places to communicate council activity. QI council updates or recent quality initiatives can help keep a focus on substance.
- For transparency, consider making QI council meetings open to all agency personnel as their time allows.
- Encourage staff at all levels to present QI achievements in larger and more prominent forums.
 - A good example of this could be working with leadership to allow 5-10 minutes for a QI spotlight agenda item at leadership meetings; all staff meetings; or local conferences. Members do not need to lead but facilitate other staff who may not be on the council and that are willing to present their work. Storyboards and other visuals posted throughout the agency are a method to facilitate a culture of QI throughout the agency.

Facilitation Practices for QI Council Leaders

- The role of the facilitator is to help manage the team dynamics and relationship process. They do not necessarily need to be content experts. Some of the important responsibilities include cultivating an unbiased and impartial environment, reinforcing focus on mission and objectives of the group, help organize multiple and diverse viewpoints, mitigate interruptions, and ensure everyone on the team has an opportunity to participate in discussions and decision making.
- To carry out these responsibilities, a facilitator typically: encourages reluctant participants to speak, help resolve conflict between members, provides feedback to the leader or team, ensure ground rules are followed, checks for agreement, maintains focus on the agenda, and synthesizes ideas to connect to the goals of the conversation.

- Consider identifying and recruiting a member of staff or leader in your agency that has demonstrated facilitation skills to serve on the Council in this capacity.
- If you are conducting virtual meetings, NACCHO's [Introduction to Virtual Facilitation for Collaboration](#) provides an introduction and overview of common and best practices for virtual facilitation processes.

Measures and Indicators for Success

- Identifying measures for success comes in many different stages of a QI process. It can start with data collection with your performance management system, which will help guide improvements and potentially initiate QI projects and activities.
- The QI council is encouraged to set measurable goals and objectives as a team, which will help you prioritize opportunities and track improvements related to QI.
 - An example of a QI council goal may be, "Move from Phase 2 to Phase 3 of the QI Culture Roadmap." The objective may be, "By December 2023, provide all staff with an orientation to performance management and QI emphasizing their importance and applicability to the health department."
- Additionally, the QI projects and activities that arise will have a separate team charter and measures to track its' progress activity to determine progress or completion.
- A general resource on the importance of measurement can be found below:
 - [NACCHO's Measuring What Matters in Public Health](#), contains guidance for launching a performance management system, while also offering ideas for improvement for health departments with well-established PM systems. This is a great resource if your QI structure is directly linked to your performance management system.

Assessment of QI Culture

- If you plan to create or update a QI plan, consider assessing your QI culture with your leadership, staff and QI council. You can use the roadmap as a guide to help obtain a culture of quality and use or adapt the self-assessment tool to assess the departments current culture of quality:
 - NACCHO's [Roadmap to a culture of quality improvement](#) describes six elements of a QI culture. Included with the Roadmap is guidance for moving through the six elements to the goal of a comprehensive QI culture within your department.
 - [The NACCHO QI SAT 2.0](#) provides deep insight into an organization's maturity with both a leadership and staff version of this assessment tool and resources to implement this tool such as:
 - SAT facilitator guide
 - SAT scoring summary
 - QI Culture Staff Orientation Slides
 - QI Leadership Assessment Group Scoring Slides

PHAB Reaccreditation Alignment

- PHAB reaccreditation places a heavy emphasis on the concept of continuous improvement both in the quality of departmental services and population health outcomes.
- Domain 9 in PHAB reaccreditation standards and measures include a performance management, quality improvement plan, two documented QI projects, a narrative of the QI culture, having evidence-based programs and interventions, and how the department fosters innovation. Consider these items as responsibilities for the QI council by including them in the charter and making them standing agenda items and discussion points. The council is encouraged to update, revise and assess Domain 9 requirements and identify gaps and areas that need assistance.
- Encourage QI council members to review PHAB reaccreditation standards and measures that relate to PMQI. This could be a part of the QI council onboarding process and will ensure a shared understanding of what is necessary to meet national public health standards.

QI Training and Online Resources

- A key part of QI is determining the agency's QI training strategy. To create a training strategy that will facilitate implementation of successful QI efforts, the following questions need to be addressed:
 - Who will be trained, when, and what will the training content be?
 - Do staff need training in performance management as well as quality improvement?
 - What training will be most effective to facilitate a QI culture?
- [ASTHO's Quality Improvement Learning Series](#) is designed to support public health agencies to increase knowledge of quality improvement principles and introduce QI tools to explain the connection to public health performance management.
- [PHF Quality Improvement Quick Guide](#), consists of a Plan-Do-Check-Act Tutorial, a Quick Quiz, and tailored resources.
- Connect your staff and QI Council to the following national resources and QI peer network:
 - [NNPHI newsletter subscription request form](#), National Network of Public Health Institutes (NNPHI)
 - [phPIN: How do I join?](#), Public Health Performance Improvement Network (peer exchange network)

Other Considerations

- Incorporating a leadership and learning component to your QI council will keep members engaged and empowered to help the agency move toward their mission and vision. For example, consider having your QI council learn about and incorporate concepts of change management, innovation, re-accreditation requirements, and

workforce resiliency. These topics can help build a great foundation for improving public health infrastructure.

- Change management strategies can be used to help prepare your agency for shifting towards a culture of QI. [ASTHO's change management e-Learning series](#) can help you manage change within your organization using tools like John Kotter's 8-Step Framework for Leading Change and his 4 Core Change Principles. After completing the course, you should be able to:
 - Define change.
 - List the stages of change.
 - Assess organization readiness for change.
 - Outline best practices in change management.
 - Identify guiding principles and key roles of a leader in the change management process.
 - Discuss Kotter's 8-Step and 4 Principles to Accelerate Change.

For questions, feedback, or follow-up questions, please email performanceimprovement@astho.org.

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