

ASTHO's Process Improvement Readiness Assessment Tool

Introducing Process Improvement

Process improvement aims to identify and eliminate unnecessary waste in administrative or programmatic processes and systems. However, achieving this goal often proves challenging as it requires overcoming resistance to change and the tendency to stick to a routine. Successful process improvement demands focus, strong leadership, and diligent effort. Even minor adjustments can significantly enhance efficiency, while in other cases, a more substantial transformation may be necessary for an organization or team. Regardless of the situation, organizations or teams stand to gain numerous benefits by focusing on process improvement. These benefits include streamlining outdated processes, adopting new technologies, fostering effective collaboration with others, and delivering improved outcomes for the public.

To maximize the effectiveness of process improvement, several key factors come into play:

- Strong leadership
- Dedicated resources (such as time and personnel)
- Shared ownership
- A culture of high accountability

Open and effective communication, including visual management techniques, can further facilitate improvement efforts. Additionally, deploying strategies such as comprehensive training, appropriate staffing, and suitable tools is crucial for successful implementation. Most importantly, approaching improvement initiatives with humility, curiosity, and a commitment to continuous learning ensures sustained progress.

ASTHO has developed a tool designed to assess an organization or teams' readiness for undertaking an effective process improvement initiative. By utilizing this tool, an organization can align their expectations, enhance the likelihood of success, and pave the way for rewarding improvements.

Benefits of Process Improvement

- Reduce waste of time and resources
- Increase efficiency
- Increase productivity
- Improve employee satisfaction
- Reduce employee frustration
- Improve customer satisfaction
- Reduce chances of unwanted outcomes
- Increase compliance
- Improve community health

Note: [ASTHO's Introduction to Process Improvement training](#) outlines evidence-based steps used to conduct process improvement work within health agencies to improve business, administrative, or programmatic processes.

When to Use this Assessment Tool

This readiness assessment tool is designed to assess an organization or team's preparedness to start a process improvement initiative. A process improvement initiative could focus on a specific program or team within the organization or involve multiple programs or teams within the same organizational structure. Organizations can use the assessment to consider readiness in two ways:

- **Readiness to Transition:** Determine if the organization is prepared to deviate from established methods of operation to address a recognized problem, need, or opportunity.
- **Readiness for Enhancement:** Evaluate the organization's readiness to improve a specific program or multiple programs, practices, or interventions.

It is often beneficial to determine in advance whether your organization or team will utilize this tool as a one-time assessment for a specific initiative or if you intend to utilize the tool as a baseline and periodically revisit it to track progress.

It is important to note that this tool should not be viewed as a definitive assessment of readiness but rather as a guide to assist organizations or teams in adequately preparing for a successful change initiative and actively developing necessary capabilities.

Instructions for Using the Readiness Assessment

The readiness assessment tool consists of key elements that contribute to process improvement readiness. A well-prepared organization or team is one that recognizes itself as mature in all seven key elements. However, it is important to note that these key elements are not exhaustive, and completion of the assessment does not guarantee success in process improvement initiatives.

When completing the assessment for the first time, carefully review each item and explanation to indicate the initial status. Each key element includes a set of items, and respondents should rate the most applicable rating on a scale of 1-9 in each key element area. The self-assessment ratings are as follows:

- A rating of 1-3 indicates little or initial development of the task in the readiness area.
- A rating of 4-6 indicates basic progress and competency.
- A rating of 7-9 indicates advanced and standardized execution of the task.

It is important to note that the readiness levels are progressive. This means that an organization that has achieved basic progress in tasks or has reached advanced and standardized readiness is assumed to have fulfilled the readiness criteria outlined in the preceding readiness level(s).

By assessing the readiness of your organization or team in these areas, you can identify strengths and areas for improvement as you proceed with process improvement initiatives.

Tips for Completing the Readiness Assessment

- Appoint an executive sponsor who will oversee the implementation of the assessment and future initiatives.
- Form a team, preferably the same team who will be involved in the process improvement initiative.
- Each team member should initially complete the assessment individually, considering their own perspectives.

- Conduct team discussions by scheduling meetings to exchange different viewpoints and identify common ground for each key element.
- Determine agreed-upon answers that most accurately represent your agency or program area.

Seven Key Elements

The readiness assessment is designed for users to consider key organizational elements of readiness prior to starting a process improvement initiative:

- Need
- Desire or Willingness
- Leadership Support
- Accountability
- Resources
- Organizational Capacity
- Communication

Key Element 1:

Need

Item	Explanation	Little or Initial Development			Basic Progress			Advanced and Standardized		
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Clear problems or needs are defined when considering process improvement.	<i>An agency is more likely to succeed in a process improvement initiative when it has specific knowledge to support the need for improving specific areas.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Specified teams are created to address agency improvement needs.	<i>Setting up a team of invested individuals is a key component of addressing agency needs and offers a powerful solution to improve collaboration and communication within an agency.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments, questions, and priorities for action planning:										

Key Element 2:

Desire or Willingness

Item	Explanation	Little or Initial Development			Basic Progress			Advanced and Standardized		
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
The beliefs and attitudes of individuals reflect a desire or willingness to change for the better.	<i>Once an agency understands why a change is needed, another essential part of ensuring success is individuals making personal decisions to support and participate in the change.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Those who will carry out the process are committed and support the change efforts.	<i>Commitment is achieved when individuals understand how their roles are involved in and contribute to the change. When individuals have a clear understanding of how they fit into a process that contributes to the overall success of the agency, they have a sense of belonging, which can lead to further commitment, empowerment, and support.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Note: ASTHO's Change Management e-Learning series can help you manage change within your agency or program area.</p>										
<p>Comments, questions, and priorities for action planning:</p>										

Key Element 3:

Leadership Support

Item	Explanation	Little or Initial Development			Basic Progress			Advanced and Standardized		
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Leadership supports change and process improvement initiatives.	<i>It is essential that the leaders of an agency actively support and champion process improvement initiatives. Leaders need to understand the requirements to undertake such initiatives and be an advocate to reduce barriers to success.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Managers and supervisors understand the need for change and are receptive to improvement initiatives.	<i>Not all levels of leadership need to be champions, but all should see value in changing for the better. Ensuring front-line managers are aware of process improvement activities will increase visibility and engagement if or when staff become involved in the process.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments, questions, and priorities for action planning:										

Key Element 4:

Accountability

Item	Explanation	Little or Initial Development			Basic Progress			Advanced and Standardized		
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Process improvement is part of the organization's operational or strategic plan.	<i>Having process improvement as part of an organization's operational or strategic plan shows a commitment to improvement as part of the agency's culture rather than process improvement being a one-time event. If this is not currently in place, it is encouraged for future plans to ensure the sustainability of process improvement efforts.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The organization or team is willing to measure and assess the success and support of process improvement activities.	<i>Sustaining process improvement as part of an organization's culture requires an understanding of whether efforts are adequately supported. Continually measuring the ongoing effectiveness of process improvement activities enables the agency to understand whether support for activities is adequate and to celebrate the benefits of process improvement efforts.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments, questions, and priorities for action planning:										

Key Element 5:

Resources

Item	Explanation	Little or Initial Development			Basic Progress			Advanced and Standardized		
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
The organization has the infrastructure resources to engage in process improvement initiatives.	<i>Having adequate funding and infrastructure resources to support ongoing process improvement activities will increase the likelihood of successful initiatives. Things like equipment (i.e., computers, printers), supplies (i.e., whiteboards, markers), and other infrastructure (i.e., gathering spaces, digital tools), are tangible tools needed for process improvement activities.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Data and information management systems are in place.	<i>Having an appropriate system to manage data and information utilized for process improvement will improve tracking and monitoring activities. Accessible data is important for measuring success and sustaining process improvement activities.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments, questions, and priorities for action planning:										

Key Element 6:

Organizational Capacity

Item	Explanation	Little or Initial Development			Basic Progress			Advanced and Standardized		
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Sufficient time is allocated to participate in process improvement initiatives.	<i>Time spent on process improvement initiatives should not be viewed as “additional work.” Improvement work should be embedded within daily operations. It is important to allocate enough time to staff for them to feel comfortable and confident in pursuing process improvement activities.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff understand the time required to implement a process improvement initiative.	<i>Change in process will not occur overnight. It takes significant time for staff at all levels to successfully implement a process improvement. Those carrying out the process should have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities, including the time they will dedicate to the process improvement.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Team(s) performing process improvement activities are appropriately staffed.	<i>Process improvement team(s) will need enough staff to provide a variety of skills, knowledge, and perspectives, but should not be too large for efficient decision-making. Team(s) are not effective in isolation and need support from leadership and others to successfully make improvements.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments, questions, and priorities for action planning:										

Key Element 7:

Communication

Item	Explanation	Little or Initial Development			Basic Progress			Advanced and Standardized		
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
A strategy is in place to effectively communicate about an organization's process improvement activities.	<i>Staff involved with or affected by planned improvements should be informed of the status, progress, and potential impacts of process improvement activities. It is important to establish a communication strategy at the beginning of the improvement effort, and regularly share information on progress. This should be easily accessible by anyone impacted by an initiative. Highlighting incremental successes during process improvement activities can increase visibility, foster motivation, and inspire staff.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Tip: If your agency intends to seek accreditation or reaccreditation, be sure your project communications and outcomes are documented. Your process improvement initiative may be used to meet PHAB standards and measures under Domain 9.</p>										
Those who carry out process improvement activities understand the fundamentals of Quality Improvement or QI tools.	<i>It is important for staff involved in the effort to have a basic understanding of quality and process improvement methods and tools. Consider providing just-in-time training as part of team orientation. Staff will be empowered throughout the process when they begin to see and hear familiar terms, tools, and resources.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Note: [ASTHO's Quality Improvement Learning Series](#) can be a resource to increase knowledge of quality improvement principles and introduce tools to those involved in a process improvement initiative.

Comments, questions, and priorities for action planning:

Summary of Responses

Please utilize the provided table to aggregate scores from each key element. Compare the scores and take note of any similarities and discrepancies in the assessment from each area. Please note the lower the score, the more preparation is needed, the higher the score the more likely you will achieve success in a process improvement initiative. Utilize these findings as a foundation for crafting a plan of action aimed at enhancing the readiness level or sustaining a high level of readiness, as deemed appropriate.

Key Elements	Score	Notes
1. Need		
2. Desire or Willingness		
3. Leadership Support		
4. Accountability		
5. Resources		
6. Organizational Capacity		
7. Communication		
Total		

After Completing the Tool: Next Steps

We trust that this tool has provided you with an opportunity to assess your present situation and identify your future goals. To assist you in moving forward, here are a few suggestions:

- **Analyze your results**
 - Take some time to review your assessment responses and examine any patterns or trends that emerge. Identify areas where you scored high and areas where there is room for improvement.
- **Prioritize areas for improvement**
 - Based on your analysis, prioritize the areas that require attention and improvement. Focus on those aspects that will have the most significant impact on your process improvement efforts.
- **Develop an action plan**
 - Create a detailed action plan that outlines the steps you need to take to enhance your process improvement capabilities. Set clear goals, establish timelines, and allocate resources accordingly.
- **Seek additional resources**
 - If you identify gaps in your knowledge or skills, consider seeking out additional resources to support your process improvement journey. This could involve attending training programs, workshops, or connecting with ASTHO at performanceimprovement@astho.org.
- **Implement and monitor progress**
 - Put your plan into action and track your progress regularly. Monitor the effectiveness of the changes you make and adjust as needed to ensure continuous improvement.
- **Foster a culture of continuous improvement**
 - Encourage your team and colleagues to embrace a growth mindset of continuous improvement. Foster a supportive and collaborative environment where everyone is empowered to contribute ideas and suggestions for process enhancement.

Process improvement is an ongoing journey, and it requires dedication, effort, and a willingness to adapt. Celebrate successes along the way and remain committed to the pursuit of excellence. Best of luck!