

RAPID CYCLE QUALITY IMPROVEMENT FOR OBJECTIVE REVIEWERS

Many of HRSA's current FOAs are asking applicants to use quality improvement techniques to ensure grant activities achieve their intended purposes, and promote continuous assessment and improvement of activities as needed over the grant periods. It is important for reviewers to be familiar with Rapid Cycle Quality Improvement (RCQI) and to understand how core components of this model relate to grantee efforts to improve performance in HRSA-funded grant programs.

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT OVERVIEW

Quality improvement (QI) uses a systematic assessment of program performance to test strategies designed to improve it. QI models consider:

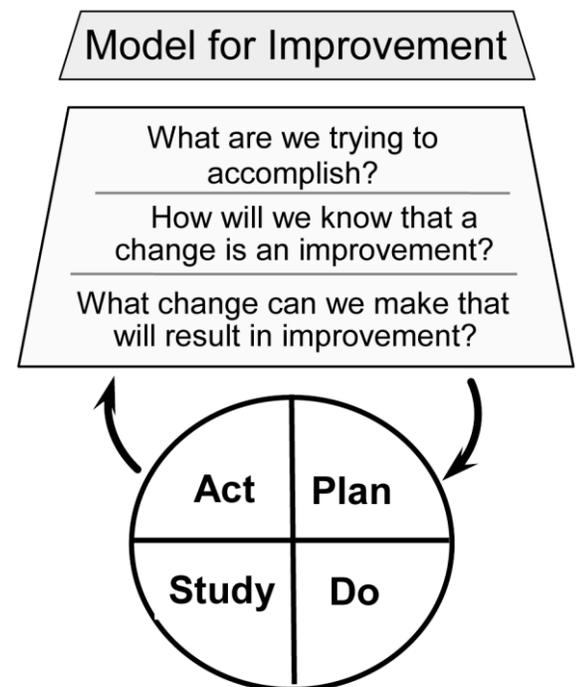
- 1) The structure, which represents the attributes of settings where program is delivered;
- 2) The process, to determine whether or not good practices are followed; and
- 3) The outcome or the impact of a change in better achieving program goals.

RCQI is defined as "systematic and continuous actions that lead to measurable improvement in health care services and the health status of targeted patient groups."¹ RCQI is based on The Model for Improvement², a simple yet powerful tool proven to accelerate improvement efforts. RCQI has been used successfully by hundreds of health care organizations as well as educators, community based organizations, and others.³ The model consists of two parts: addressing three fundamental questions and engaging in tests of change.

THREE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

- ***What are we trying to accomplish?*** Develop a specific, time-limited and measurable aim statement.
- ***How will we know if a change is an improvement?*** Identify process and outcome measures to collect over time in order to track improvement and progress toward the aim statement.
- ***What changes can we make that will result in improvement?*** Identify ideas for changes to try out to accomplish the aim.

The Model for Improvement uses a structured process where organizations focus on specific elements in need of improvement, and conduct small tests of change while measuring the impact of those changes on key process and outcome measures.



¹ Health Resources and Service Administration. <http://www.hrsa.gov/quality/toolbox/methodology/qualityimprovement/>

² Developed by Thomas Nolan, PhD and colleagues at Associates in Process Improvement

³ See the *Institute for Healthcare Improvement's* website (www.IHI.org) for stories on improved outcomes using the Model for Improvement

APPLY RCQI AS A REVIEWER

While elements of RCQI may be found throughout HRSA grant applications, certain sections should specifically address the use of RCQI as it relates to the FOA. These sections include (1) Program Purpose, (2) Impact, and (3) Budget.

1. PROGRAM PURPOSE

The program purpose section asks reviewers to evaluate the extent to which applicants provide a clear and comprehensive set of goals and objectives and a strong methodology that align with the program goals specified in the FOA. Applicants are expected to incorporate core elements of RCQI in both the Workplan and Methodology sections of their proposals.

Workplan: Reviewers should evaluate the extent to which the applicant provides a clear, comprehensive, and specific set of goals and objectives as well as a coherent strategy to achieve them. When identifying key goals and objectives of their proposals, applicants should answer the first question in the Model for Improvement “What are we trying to accomplish?” These goals and objectives should be specific and measurable. This information may also be conveyed in a logic model if the FOA requires one. Identifying key activities and deliverables allows grantees to answer the second question “What changes can we make that will result in improvement?” These activities and deliverables should be tied closely to what they hope to achieve with a clear link between deliverables and accomplishment of overall goals and objectives.

Methodology: Reviewers should determine the extent to which the applicant proposes methods and tools that adequately address the stated program goals and requirement of the FOA. Applicants may identify quality improvement as a specific approach to achieving the stated goals of the FOA, or they may identify individual aspects of quality improvement as part of a multi-pronged approach to addressing FOA goals. The tools and strategies identified by the applicant should utilize quality improvement as a core method for improving the project’s ability to accomplish the overall goals of the FOA.

2. IMPACT

Reviewers should read the impact section of the application and assess the strengths, weaknesses, and effectiveness of applicants’ proposed methods to monitor and evaluation the project’s outcomes and results. Reviewers should look for evidence of evaluative measures that can be used to assess the extent to which project objectives are achieved, and the extent to which results can be attributed to applicants’ proposed project activities. A core component of RCQI is using data over time to evaluate project impacts. The second question of the Model for Improvement asks, “How will we know a change is an improvement?” Applicants should incorporate RCQI into their plans for evaluation and include identification of key process and outcome measures, as well as methods to use data continuously.

3. BUDGET

Reviewers should assess whether the budget justification demonstrates that the proposed budget is reasonable in relation to the proposed activities and the complexity of the project. RCQI efforts often add complexity that should be accounted for in the budget. These efforts will require key personal to devote sufficient time to assure the overall success of the endeavor. The proposed budget should include the identification of key personal with quality improvement or performance improvement responsibilities. The resources and time devoted to RCQI should be accounted for in the overall budget, with adequate time allotted to support the overall success of continuous quality improvement.