

# PREPARING FOR CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

## GETTING STARTED

Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) is a cyclical process of assessing performance, implementing improvement plans, and reassessing results. The intention of CQI is to constantly strive to reach the best possible outcomes through data-driven decision making. Juvenile justice organizations that choose to adopt CQI principles need to carefully plan and prepare to ensure that resources are available and allocated appropriately and that the policies and practices inspired by CQI are sustained. Time and effort spent on preparation will build a supportive foundation for data collection, analysis, and data-driven decisions, and, ultimately, yield better outcomes for the youth, families, and communities served by the juvenile justice system.



When an organization decides to adopt CQI, there are three essential steps to building a foundation for success. These steps are: **(1) commit to the process**, **(2) focus on a specified goal**, and **(3) clearly describe services and outcomes**. Once the organization has addressed these areas, the cycle of collect, analyze, and react can begin and is more likely to be effective and sustained.

**STTAC** Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention  
State Training and Technical Assistance Center  
*Dedicated to helping States and communities improve outcomes for youth.*

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## COMMIT

Adopting a CQI philosophy demands significant effort and resources on the part of the organization. It may even require changes in an organization's attitude toward measuring performance and evaluating current practices. Therefore, it is important for the leadership in the organization to demonstrate a commitment to spending both time and resources on CQI. This commitment can be shown through the formation of a multidisciplinary CQI Team, sharing the vision for CQI throughout the organization, and devoting specific time and resources to the process.

## FOCUS

It is possible to apply CQI principles to various levels of practice: a single intervention, a broader program, or an entire organization. One of the first tasks for a CQI team is to come to a shared understanding of the specific target of improvement efforts, whether a specific program or a department-wide procedure. It is valuable to consider existing data sources, such as annual reports or strategic plans, when deciding where to focus. The CQI team should clearly specify the ultimate goal for CQI efforts and share the goal with the entire organization.

## DESCRIBE

Before beginning to collect data, it is important to identify the purpose of the selected target of improvement efforts. When identifying the purpose, the CQI team should take into account the targeted population, planned activities, and anticipated outcomes. Once the expected outcomes are clear, the CQI team thoroughly describes the services and activities that are part of the targeted intervention or program, referring to or creating documentation of procedures such as manuals or written protocols as needed. Here, the CQI team focuses energy on communicating a clear understanding and shared expectations for how and why the intervention or program is implemented. This step helps when identifying important pieces of information to document, record, and measure.

## ADOPTING CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT



### THINGS TO CONSIDER

*Adopting CQI principles, as the name implies, is an ongoing process. It is not a finite task to be checked off of a “to-do” list, but rather a pervasive practice that brings about change in organizational culture. Proper planning and preparation can increase the likelihood that CQI efforts are effective and sustained; however, there are several other factors that organizational leadership should consider when they decide to embrace CQI.*

### ORGANIZATIONAL BUY-IN

For CQI efforts to be successful and sustained, staff at all levels of the organization, from top administrators to direct service providers, must understand and accept the implemented practices. Staff must be in agreement with how and why data is both collected and used. They need to agree to follow procedures, such as gathering information in an accurate and timely fashion. Administration must agree to share information, such as findings from collected data and the decisions that follow with staff.

### LEADERSHIP

Adopting CQI principles requires strong leadership not only at the administrative level, but also with staff at each level of an organization. While management may promote changes to practice through policy, it is important to find key direct service staff who are invested in the organization and will support the initiative and participate on the CQI team. Staff who implement the programming daily provide valuable insight into realistic expectations and ideas for improvement.

### VISION

In order to eliminate misunderstanding and promote organizational buy-in, it is essential for the organization to have a vision for how CQI practices will enhance programming, add value to the organization, and ultimately improve outcomes for the youth, family, and community served. The CQI team is responsible for sharing the purpose of CQI efforts with all staff and explaining how each component of the process contributes to the overall improvement of the organization.

### TRUST

To successfully engage in CQI efforts, all staff need to be willing to take risks, be innovative, and deal effectively with feedback. For these reasons, it is important that staff feel supported by administrators and comfortable trying new approaches if necessary. Organizational leadership can build a trusting environment by ensuring that data collected will not be used punitively, by soliciting feedback and ideas from staff members, and by sharing information on all CQI efforts.

### DEDICATED RESOURCES

Many juvenile justice organizations are faced with increasingly limited time, staff, and money. For CQI efforts to be successful in this environment, it's essential to create a culture that values constant improvement. This culture can be brought about by demonstrating commitment through dedicating specific time and resources to CQI efforts, such as regularly scheduled CQI team meetings and facilitating training sessions on data collection.

### TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Incorporating CQI principles into organizational practices may require new skills and knowledge, especially at the beginning. It may be necessary to seek outside guidance, support, and training from others in the field who have experience with CQI. Organizations can reach out to colleagues who do similar work or seek assistance from professionals who specialize in CQI, data collection, database management, data analysis, or evaluation.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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