

WHAT IS CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT?

ANNE RACKOW, TERI DEAL, AND ANNE FROMKNECHT

NCJFCJ
est. 1937
WWW.NCJFCJ.ORG

NCJJ
est. 1973
WWW.NCJJ.ORG

JUNE 2013

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. Organizations that adopt CQI principles make a conscious commitment to not only collect specific and meaningful information, but also to learn from it and make improvements to routine practices as necessary. Juvenile justice organizations can use CQI in multiple ways: to help quantify and describe services, to engage in data-driven decision making at various levels of the system, and to monitor progress towards program or department goals.

CQI is not a one-time event. It is a mindset and a commitment to collecting meaningful data and using it to improve practices and move an organization towards its goals.

CQI is not a one-time fix; it is a shift in the culture and day-to-day functioning of an organization. Adopting CQI principles requires an organization to commit to systematically prioritizing the collection and use of data to make decisions toward improving performance. In order for an organization to successfully implement and sustain CQI, the leadership must support a mindset of accountability and actively create an environment where staff trust that data will not be used punitively, but rather to identify areas for improvement. One way for the leadership to support CQI efforts is to organize a multidisciplinary CQI team with representatives from all departments and areas of expertise – from administration to direct service. This team meets regularly to review the data, monitor progress towards benchmarks, and discuss necessary practice changes. The inclusive nature of the CQI team supports the sustainability of CQI efforts and promotes ownership of the data, the results, and most importantly, of the progress made.



Continuous Quality Improvement

Collect: Gather data that is accurate, reliable, and directly related to a defined goal.

Analyze: Review data to determine if benchmarks are met. If expectations are not met, identify possible reasons why.

React: Learn from the data. Make an action plan to address shortcomings. Implement and monitor the plan.

STTAC

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
State Training and Technical Assistance Center

Dedicated to helping States and communities improve outcomes for youth.

Developed for the State Training and Technical Assistance Center by the National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ), with funding from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice.

COLLECT

Juvenile justice organizations are asked to collect several types of information, such as number of referrals, level of risk or identified needs, or services received. All of this data can be viewed through the lens of CQI and used to inform improvements intended to move organizations closer to reaching their goals. It is important for CQI efforts, that data collected is both relevant and meaningful. The CQI team must share an understanding of the purpose of the processes to be examined in order to appropriately identify indicators of performance and success.

When there is a clear consensus on the specific information that is important, the CQI team identifies the ways in which the data should be collected. Existing forms and processes may be used if they accurately capture the information; however, sometimes it is necessary to select or develop new data collection tools. It is useful to document the specific information to be measured, how it will be measured, person(s) responsible for the measurement, and the expected timeline before data collection begins. It is also important to ensure that all staff involved, from line staff to administrators, understand the purpose for collecting the information and expectations for how it is to be collected. Both at the start of data collection and intermittently, data collection forms and practices should be reviewed to ensure that the documented procedures are occurring.

ANALYZE

After data has been collected, the CQI team reviews and analyzes it. Analyzing the data doesn't necessarily mean performing sophisticated statistical analyses. It simply means that the CQI team reviews the information and determines if expectations are being met. If the services are being provided as planned and outcomes are meeting expectations, the CQI team may choose to increase expectations for the future or continue to monitor to ensure that satisfactory performance continues. However, if expectations are not met, the CQI team attempts to learn from the data and brainstorms possible contributing factors for the lower than expected performance. This is another reason why it is important to include staff from various levels of responsibility in the organization on the CQI team; staff who work directly with youth will have valuable and often different perspectives than administrators about barriers to meeting expectations and ideas for how practices can be improved.

REACT

In the event that expectations were not met, the CQI team must be prepared to address shortcomings. After considering possible contributing factors, the CQI team identifies and prioritizes concrete changes or alterations in practice that may increase performance in the future. Perhaps additional training or supervision is needed, or increased resources are required to successfully implement the programming as planned. The CQI team develops an improvement plan to document these changes in practice. In the plan, the CQI team sets goals and identifies action steps, resources required, and person(s) responsible for each task. It is also useful to document deadlines in the plan to help maintain momentum, monitor the CQI team's progress, and help to understand changes in performance following any modifications in practice. Throughout the implementation of the improvement plan, the CQI team continues to collect data on performance in preparation for the cycle to begin again.

When an organization adopts CQI principles to improve outcomes for a program, practice, or department, the CQI team must consider the performance of a group of participants. Many juvenile justice organizations have case management databases that make it very easy to view information for one individual at a time. To engage in CQI, it is important that data are able to be aggregated (i.e., added together across youth). Therefore, it is important that there is a mechanism for aggregating the data, such as a spreadsheet or database, in place. At times, organizations have a pre-existing data system that can do this task or might be able to perform this task with some additional components. However, a specialized system is not always necessary. A simple spreadsheet can work just as well, as long as it contains all of the pieces of information needed to determine performance.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

National Center for Juvenile Justice
3700 South Water Street, Suite 200
Pittsburgh, PA 15203
(412)227-6950 - www.ncjj.org

STTAC

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
State Training and Technical Assistance Center

Dedicated to helping States and communities improve outcomes for youth.