

# Training Module 3

Continuous Quality Improvement Series

## Defining the challenge

*This module aligns with CQI Step 1: Planning—Describe a challenge facing your program*

This module is part of a series of guidance resources and tools on continuous quality improvement (CQI) developed as part of the Sexual Risk Avoidance Education National Evaluation (SRAENE). The series includes a [template](#) to guide CQI work, a set of modules providing detailed information on the steps included in CQI, a [tool programs](#) can use to assess their CQI practices and processes, and a [brief](#) describing the development process used for the series and lessons learned from a set of Sexual Risk Avoidance Education grant recipients that used the tools during a pilot. For all resources in this series, as well as other resources developed as part of SRAENE, please visit the SRAENE website.

For more products, visit the [CQI page on the SRAENE website](#).

When you identify a programmatic challenge, a good first step is to craft a challenge (or problem) statement to describe the challenge in detail. This may require examining data for your program to learn more about the challenge. More specificity will help to you to refine your challenge statement. For instance, instead of identifying that *recruitment is a challenge*, *your team could develop more targeted insights by exploring for whom is recruitment a challenge or when and where do challenges with recruitment develop*. Explore data on your program to understand who is being recruited and who is enrolling in the program, and then assess how this compares to your program's recruitment and enrollment goals and expectations.

For example, you might learn that your program is doing very well at recruiting younger youth but struggling to attract older youth to the program. Your more specific question would be "Why is the program struggling to recruit older youth?" Specifying the challenge will set the team up to develop more targeted solutions.

Your CQI team should pick one challenge or issue to focus on at a time, as this enables the team to focus its attention on resolving one issue and avoid spreading team members too thin. Consider which issue is most pressing or most hampering your ability to operate an effective program.

### Completing the CQI Plan Template



If you are using the [CQI Plan Template](#), start by entering your high-level challenge in the Information and coordination section of the [CQI Plan Template](#). This should be a brief description of the challenge identified. Use the questions below to get specific about your challenge and be clear on why it needs to be addressed.

**What is the challenge?** Start by considering your high-level challenge in the box below. You can enter this into the Information and coordination section of the [CQI Plan Template](#).

**Next, break down the challenge.** Consider, for example, for whom is this a challenge? When does the challenge present itself? Where does the challenge present itself? If you have data to support the challenge, include it in the description of your challenge. *Example: The program has trouble recruiting older youth.*

**How does this challenge affect the people involved?** Rather than focusing on abstract challenges, it can be helpful to identify *the effects of the challenge on people*. *Example: Older youth have the potential to benefit from the program but aren't being reached.*

**Why is it important?** Thinking about the effects, explain the importance of the challenge to specify any consequences of not addressing the issue. This will help your CQI team to get on the same page about the importance of addressing the issue. *Example: Our program identified a need for SRAE programming in the community for younger and older teens, but it is particularly acute for older youth. If the program is not able to reach these youth, they will continue to engage in risky behaviors that limit their potential.*

Pull together the information and enter your challenge description in the first column of the **Step 1: Planning** table. Below is an example illustrating the level of detail that is helpful to include about your challenge in the [CQI Plan Template](#).

**Step 1: Planning.**

Get specific about the challenge	What are the root causes of your challenge?	What are your SMART improvement goals?	What data could you use to assess progress toward the goal?
<p>Our community-based sites are struggling to recruit youth into the core SRAE workshops. Our goal for the community sites is 40 youth per quarter; in the past three quarters, we have averaged 22 youth per quarter. We are struggling the most with older youth, as 17–20-year-old youth comprise just 25% of our total served in community sites. This is a problem because rates of teenage pregnancy are above the national average in our community and, in a needs assessment, our program identified a lack of pregnancy prevention program options for this age group in our community.</p>			

*\*Note that the greyed-out boxes are completed in subsequent modules.*

---

**Title:** Continuous Quality Improvement Training Modules

**November 2022**

**Authors:** Annie Buonaspina and Brittany Tabora

**Project Officers:** Calonie Gray and Tia Brown, Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, and MeGan Hill, Family and Youth Services Bureau

**Project Directors:** Susan Zief and Heather Zaveri  
Mathematica  
1100 First Street, NE, 12th Floor  
Washington, DC 2002-4221

**Contract Number:** HHSP233201500035I/HHSP23337031T

**This report is in the public domain. Permission to reproduce is not necessary.**

---

**Suggested citation:** Buonaspina, Annie, and Brittany Tabora. "Continuous Quality Improvement Training Modules." Washington DC, Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

---

**Disclaimer:** The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, the Administration for Children and Families, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This report and other reports sponsored by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation are available at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre>.

## Connect with OPRE

