SRAENE
Sexual Risk Avoidance Education
National Evaluation

Training Module 6

Improvement strategies and rationale

This module aligns with CQI Step 2: Strategy development—Ideas for Improvement

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**.

After you've identified root causes of your challenge, your team is well poised to develop specific strategies to address them. For a challenge like engagement, you might have identified several root causes. Prioritize these root causes with your team based on the potential impact and level of influence you believe your team has to address them. Root causes that would be very impactful to address and are within the program's control should be top priorities for strategy development. Consider bolding the priority root causes in the **Step 1: Planning** table to be clear on what you will address with your current effort.

Improvement strategies should be designed to address root causes rather than high-level challenges, as this will allow your team to develop targeted strategies. Most challenges stem from multiple root causes, meaning that a single improvement strategy is not likely to resolve the issue. But an improvement strategy could help to make progress on the challenge. Adding strategies over time then can address other root causes. CQI is about making small changes over time to support long-term improvement.

Where to look for improvement strategy ideas?

Strategy development will likely start with your core CQI team. But if you're struggling to develop ideas, there are additional resources:
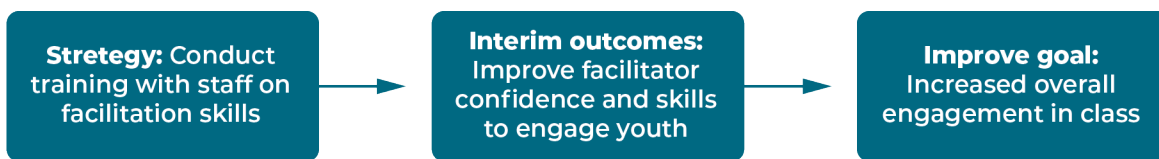
- **Your staff and program participants.** Staff and participants are closest to the program and in the best position to offer thoughts for improvement. Support structured brainstorming with tools like the Creative Matrix.

- **Other providers.** Draw on the network of other SRAE grantees for ideas or reach out to other youth providers in your community (many implementation challenges for youth programs will be common across program types). Reach out to your project officer to identify other grant recipients who have worked on similar issues and to facilitate a connection.

OPRE   FYSB Family & Youth Services Bureau   Mathematica Progress Together   Public Strategies

- **Draw on online resources for *research-based* ideas**, like this RAND guide, this University of Wisconsin brief, this Mathematica brief related to recruitment and retention strategies, or this site that summarizes research-based practices for enhancing family engagement.

Developing multiple strategy ideas is encouraged. However, if you have several ideas, consider prioritizing them using an effort-to-impact matrix. This tool allows you to rank strategies by feasibility and impact and vote on the first to test (Module 7). For an overview on the tool, visit this site.

Lastly, once you have a prioritized strategy, a good check for your team is to specify the rationale for why this strategy will work (see Figure 1). Think about how your strategy might influence staff or participants' behaviors, attitudes, or skills in a way that will help to achieve progress toward your improvement goal. Stating your rationale is important for two reasons: 1) It is a good check to ensure that the strategy you developed makes sense, and 2) measuring the interim outcomes in the middle box is useful for assessing the assumptions of your strategy (e.g., does the training improve facilitator confidence, and will enhanced confidence improve student engagement?) and provides a way to assess early promise before you might expect to see progress on your improvement goal, which is often longer term.

Figure 1: Mapping a strategy rationale

| **Stretegy:** Conduct training with staff on facilitation skills | → | **Interim outcomes:** Improve facilitator confidence and skills to engage youth | → | **Improve goal:** Increased overall engagement in class |

Example: Stating your rationale

- **Improvement goal:** Improve ratings of engagement on participant satisfaction surveys from 65 percent to 90 percent from the fall to spring semester.
- **Root cause:** You learn that poor classroom management is a barrier to engagement.
- **Improve strategy:** Train all facilitators in classroom management, including how to address disruptive students and retain attention (the improvement strategy).
- **Rationale:** Equipping facilitators with these skills will reduce distractions and enable students to focus on the content, thus enhancing their engagement with the course.

Completing the CQI Plan Template

In the CQI Plan Template, complete the table under **Step 2: Strategy development**. Use the space below to brainstorm improvement strategy ideas.

What are your team's strategy ideas to address the root cause your prioritized?

If you develop multiple strategy ideas for the same root cause, you can enter each strategy in a different row in the strategy development table. List all your team's ideas in the table, even if you are just testing one, as you may come back to promising strategies later and it is good to have them documented. Below is an example of what the completed template for **Step 2: Strategy development** could look like, starting with the prioritized root cause, then listing the prioritized improvement strategy to address the root cause, and then noting the rationale for how the strategy will influence the root cause and support progress on the team's improvement goal.

Root cause	Improvement strategy	How might the strategy lead to improvement?
Marketing materials and outreach strategies are not appealing to older youth	We know that youth who participate in the program enjoy it and gain value from it. We will develop program champions, drawing on youth alumni of the program, to make the pitch for the program to other youth.	We learned that older youth are skeptical about the value of our program. However, youth who participate provide very positive feedback. By using peers to deliver recruitment messages, we increase credibility about the value of the program (interim outcome), which will then lead to more success in recruiting (improvement goal).

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