SRAENE
Sexual Risk Avoidance Education National Evaluation

November 2022

Training Module 5

Continuous Quality Improvement Series

Identifying a SMART improvement goal

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.

A key first step is to specify your improvement goal as a team. This goal should be a response to the question, **what are we trying to accomplish?** An improvement goal needs to be specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-bound (SMART). It should specify how much, for whom, and by when. This goal will serve as your north star as you test different strategies to address your challenge, as it gives you a way to gauge whether the team is making progress.

Example Problem: Youth are not engaged with the programming.

Goal 1: Improve youth engagement with the program

Is it SMART? ✗

Goal 2: Improve youth engagement with the program, as measured via participant satisfaction surveys, from 65 percent of youth rating the program as engaging to 90 percent of youth rating the program as engaging.

Is it SMART? ✗

Goal 3: Improve youth engagement with the program, as measured via participant satisfaction surveys, from 65 percent of youth rating the program as engaging in fall 2021 groups to 90 percent of youth rating the program as engaging in spring 2022 groups.

Is it SMART? ✓

Setting a SMART improvement goal serves two main purposes. First, it helps members of the CQI team agree on what needs to be improved and by when. Second, it creates a measurable target the team can use to assess the success of improvement efforts.

After creating a goal, you should also note what data you can use to determine progress on the goal. Data should be measured over time to understand whether your program is seeing improvement as you undertake your improvement efforts. Seek data sources that are quantifiable and feasible to track at multiple points in time. Avoid data sources are not easy to quantify (e.g., interviews) or feasible to track repeatedly (e.g., long surveys).

> **"Whenever you want to achieve something, keep your eyes open, concentrate, and make sure you know exactly what it is you want. No one can hit their target with their eyes closed."**
>
> **—Paulo Coelho**

For the example above related to youth engagement, you could decide to start tracking a stand-in measure for engagement – for example, the number of students verbally participating in class each session – or use an existing measure – for example, youth satisfaction survey ratings or program attendance.

Completing the CQI Plan Template

In the third column of the **Step 1: Planning** table in the CQI Plan Template, write your improvement goal. Use the template below for support in developing a SMART goal:

Our goal is to:

Increase/decrease: _____ (outcome)

From: _____ (baseline)

To: _____ (goal)

By: _____ (date, timeframe)

For/In: _____ (population, program component)

Check with key stakeholders to ensure the goal is relevant and attainable!
Adapted from the Institute for Healthcare Improvement

In the example below, the CQI team sets a short- and long-term goal, which is an option for both specifying your overall definition of success (long-term goal) and your quick win (what does success look like near term?). The team also sets a goal for the specific population of interest to understand whether strategies to improve outreach to older youth are having an influence.

In the final column, note that data source you can use to assess progress toward the goal.

Get specific about the challenge	What are the root causes of your challenge?	What is your SMART improvement goals?	What data could you use to assess progress?
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.	**Curriculum:** · Content is not appealing to older youth **Recruitment:** · Current outreach locations are not suitable for finding older youth · Marketing materials and outreach strategies aren't appealing to older youth **Program structure:** · The program is held during times when many older youth have other activities/sports	Our goal is to increase the number of youth in our community-based sites from 22 per quarter to 40 per quarter within one year. In the short-term, the program aims to increase from 22 youth per quarter to an average of 28 per quarter within three months. The program aims to increase the percentage of 17-20-year-old youth served out of total youth from 25% to 35% by next quarter.	We will track enrollment numbers to determine if the program is hitting targets. We will also track demographics of those enrolling to understand whether we are increasing the percentage of 17-20-year-old youth being served.

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