



GUIDANCE ON CREATING AND USING A QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

A Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) is a roadmap that identifies your program's (a) criteria or areas for improvement, (b) program tasks or items for improvement that will be used to achieve goals, (c) costs and resources necessary to complete actions and strategies, and (d) a timeline for goal achievement. We hope your QIP serves as a roadmap to higher program quality and better outcomes for children, families, and early childhood professionals.

HOW TO GET STARTED

Quality improvement is a continuous and iterative cycle that consists of (1) identifying your hopes for your facility; (2) identifying specific criteria or areas for improvement; (3) determining specific tasks or items for improvement; (4) working the plan; and (5) reviewing and updating the plan.

Step 1

Identifying Hopes. What do you hope for when you think about your practice? What improvements would you like to make? What are some ideas or practices that you've always wanted to try? Step 1 consists of writing down your hopes and dreams for your site. Here are some helpful questions:

What things do I most appreciate about my program? How can I support these characteristics or features?

In a "perfect world", what changes would I like to see happen within my program by this time next year?

Why do I run my program the way that I do?

Why did I choose a career in education?

What has changed about what is known to be best for young children in the field of early care and education and/or youth development? Have I addressed these changes?

What are the underlying causes for program issues? What can be changed to resolve these issues?

In assessment reports and our program self-assessment, what areas are identified as program strengths?

Step 2

Identify Criteria or Areas for Improvement. The next step is to identify specific criteria or areas in which you would like to make improvements. Generally speaking, these will be grouped into seven domains:

Education, Qualifications, & Training

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High Quality Supportive Environments

Ratio & Group Size

Family/Community Partnerships

Leadership & Program Management

Continuous Quality Improvement (items in which you may not have low “scores” but still want to make improvements)

“Something I’ve Always Wanted to Try” (great ideas you’ve always wanted to try out)

Conversations with your STARS Consultant and/or Pyramid Model coach and other early childhood professionals or assessments such as the Environment Rating Scale, Program Administration Scale, or Business Administration Scale may be very helpful in identifying areas for improvement that will move you towards your hopes and dreams for your facility.

Step 3

Determine Tasks or Items for Improvement.

Sometimes your areas for improvement still are “too big” or broad to really figure out what to do to make progress. Thus, step 3 urges you to identify the individual tasks or items that need attention in order to make progress.

Step 4

Do the Work. You might also call this “working the plan” or “implementing the plan” but in step 4, you complete each of the tasks you’ve identified in step 3.

Step 5

Review and Update. Take a breath. Step back and review your progress. Ask yourself “*What’s worked so far? What hasn’t worked? Have you achieved your goals? What are your new goals?*” You may find yourself annually reviewing and updating your plan.

Remember to always take time to celebrate your successes!

MAKE YOUR PLAN SMART

It is helpful for items within a QIP to be as focused as possible. A helpful tip is to make the QIP tasks “SMART”:

S: specific and clearly stated. Your statements should reflect a concrete need or gap in services, rather than a vague idea about how you would like to improve your program. When writing your task statements, it may be helpful to ask “*If another reader reviews this plan or tries to implement this plan, will they know exactly what I intended and what steps to take to improve quality?*” Writing task statements begins by identifying the criteria or areas for improvement. In addition, good task statements are written with an understanding of why you believe a need for improvement exists. For example, if you have received low scores on assessments of your outdoor play area, it may be helpful to write down why you think those low scores occurred. Your coach may be able to help you think through these items and brainstorm what might be necessary to improve your scores.

M: measurable and based on data. How will you know if and when you have achieved the desired improvement? Good task statements are written in such a way that success can be accurately and precisely measured. With this in mind, it may be helpful to think about and write out the following statement: “*I know I am successful when....*”

A: attainable and realistic. Good QIPs contain items that are achievable, given your timetable and financial and human resources. Therefore, it is important to think through and itemize what your tasks may cost in terms of materials, resources, your and your staff's time, and other cost-bearing items.

R: relevant to high quality and positive outcomes. Good QIPs are a roadmap to higher quality facilities, which in turn facilitate positive outcomes for children, families, and professional staff. It may be helpful to ask *"How will this improvement help the children and families I work with? How will this goal help me and my staff as professionals?"*

T: time-bound and timely. Good QIPs have items that can be achieved within a set time period. Some tasks may take longer than others, which is fine. However, each task should have a projected deadline.

Examples of SMART Task Statement:

Improve the quality of my outdoor learning environment by installing appropriate fencing and ensuring there are developmentally appropriate toys and equipment.

Improve teacher capacity for high quality socioemotional interactions by providing for professional development on the Pyramid Model.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

You may find the following individuals and resources helpful as you construct your plan:

- ✓ STARS to Quality consultants, Pyramid Model coaches and fellow participants
- ✓ Early Childhood Service Bureau staff
- ✓ Early Childhood Project staff
- ✓ National Association for the Education of Young Children
- ✓ National Association for Family Child Care
- ✓ Environment Rating Scale summary reports
- ✓ Program Administration Scale/Business Administration Scale assessment report
- ✓ Knowledge Base
- ✓ Pyramid Model
- ✓ Your ideas about quality and the things you've always wanted to try
- ✓ Professional development plans
- ✓ Educational course reading and materials