TIP SHEET

Continuous Quality Improvement: Recruiting and Retaining Youth in SRAE Programs

September 2021

USING CQI TO MONITOR PROCESSES

Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) is an internal evaluation approach targeted to strengthen core systems important to increasing positive program outcomes (HITRC, 2013). This tip sheet provides tangible ideas for how Sexual Risk Avoidance Education (SRAE) programs can implement CQI processes specifically related to recruitment and retention of program participants. We review strategies useful for tracking and monitoring internal processes, including a sample Gantt chart (see p.6) helpful to study progress toward the stated goals of the program (Ary et al., 2014; Rossi et al., 2004).

CQI deploys a rapid cycle process to monitor internal strategies linked to improved outcomes. A rapid cycle process is an umbrella term for processes that collect interim data in an iterative and formative way to track progress and improve programs along the way. Figure 1 describes the most common rapid cycle process, Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA), and this tip sheet will give examples of how PDSA can be used for CQI.

Once a problem has been identified, program staff should begin the iterative process of CQI.

PLAN: In the planning or development stage, SRAE program managers and staff write SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound) and develop a plan for addressing identified problem.

DO: This is the implementation stage and is characterized by the enactment of the new recruitment and retention strategies.

STUDY: In this stage, program managers measure the effectiveness of the plan. Process-level outputs (such as the number of youth and parents/caregivers who respond to the strategy) are tracked using an internal evaluation tool such as an Excel spreadsheet or Smartsheet.

ACT: The final stage of the cycle is reflection where program managers and staff analyze the results of their efforts and set new goals.

Figure 1. *Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) Cycle*

"The PDSA Cycle (Plan-Do-Study-Act) is a systematic process for gaining valuable learning and knowledge for the continual improvement of a product, process, or service" (W. Edwards Deming Institute, n.d., para. 1).

In this next section, each step will be explored.

Step 1: Plan

• Begin by developing a specific problem statement like: With only 300 youth enrolled in the program, we are falling short of our goal of 500 participants for the program term.

• Next, write short-term SMART goals such as: Increase enrollment in youth program at Site XYZ by 15% within 30 days. Increase enrollment in youth program at Site ABC by 10% within 30 days. Increase enrollment in youth program at Site QRS by 20% within 30 days.

• Then write longer-term SMART goals such as: Increase enrollment in youth program at Site XYZ by 30% within 90 days. Increase enrollment in youth program at Site ABC by 20% within 90 days. Increase enrollment in youth program at Site QRS by 40% within 90 days.

S = Specific
M = Measurable
A = Achievable
R = Relevant
T = Time Bound

During planning sessions with staff, program managers identify solutions to improve youth recruitment and retention. Begin planning with a brainstorming session. Use a whiteboard or flip chart to make a concept map (see Figure 2, p.3) for each problem, or you can use free software programs like InVision. Be sure to include youth in these planning meetings since they have keen insight into reasons youth may not be attending or returning to program activities. Running a focus group that includes youth with a diverse representation of race and ethnicities is a strategic tool to identify effective strategies for improving marketing, recruitment, and retention of participants.

The concept map in Figure 2 describes an example of a brainstorming session addressing the problems of recruitment and retention. The focus of this session is to connect and empathize with the customer—in this case, customers include parents, caregivers, and youth participants from the target population.

Figure 2. Customer map created using a template from *invisionapp.com*

1. WHO do we need to connect/emphathize with?

busy parents and care givers
youth with too much time on their hands
teachers and coaches
social workers and school counselors

2. What do we need to DO? Increase enrollment by 10%

What do we need to do differently?
What job(s) do we need to get done?
What decision(s) do we need to make?
How will we know we were successful?

3. What do they SEE?

What do they see in the marketplace?
What do they see in their immediate environment?
What do they see others saying and doing?
What are they watching and reading?

4. What do they SAY?

What have we heard them say?
Parents don't know what the expectations are for attending the program.

5. What do they DO?

What do they do today?
What behavior have we observed?
What can we imagine them doing?

6. What do they HEAR?

What are they hearing others say?
What are they hearing from friends?
What are they hearing from colleagues?
What are they hearing second-hand?

GOALS

7. What do parents/caregivers THINK and FEEL?

What other thoughts and feelings might motivate their behaviors?

PAINS

What are their fears, frustrations, and anxieties?

Financial worry because they think they can't afford the program.

They worry about the safety of their neighborhood.

GAINS

What are their wants, needs, hopes, and dreams?

They dream of their children being successful.

They hope their children can have good friends.

Once a few connecting ideas have been presented, a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats), as presented in Table 1, can help identify strategies to overcome barriers to recruitment and retention and improve connections with customers.

Table 1. SWOT Analysis

STRENGTHS

- Positive working relationships with athletic coaches, teachers, and school administrators open up networking opportunities
- Good relationships with Boys and Girls Clubs and other afterschool programs for networking
- Good relationships with companies and other employers of parents and caregivers in the community
- Upcoming all-school assembly planned this month

How can we combine efforts?

WEAKNESSES

- Facility use at the school building is not available due to competition with other programs
- Many parents/caregivers cannot pick up their children after the program and need safe transportation home

How can we overcome these barriers?

OPPORTUNITIES

- SRAE program director is scheduled to speak at the Rotary Club next week
- A parent/caregiver information meeting is scheduled in two weeks
- Local employer is willing to donate space one block from the school
- Inexpensive transportation insurance can be purchased from the Girl Scouts if we register as a chapter
- Parents are willing to carpool, Uber, and use public transportation
- Youth leaders who have high status among their peers are willing to invite their friends
- Parent education newsletters are going out this week.

How can we provide the best community program opportunities to caregivers?

What opportunities can we leverage to overcome these barriers?

THREATS

- Inability to build in sufficient time with program partners
- Possible increase of costs of insurance
- No support from community gatekeepers

What are the risks of ignoring these threats?

Step 2: Do

After specific strategies are identified through the brainstorming sessions and the SWOT analysis, SRAE program managers again write SMART goals that will measure progress.

Examples of SMART goals:

1. SRAE program staff will document at least three unique, in-person touchpoints with potential participants for three weeks before the launch of the program.

2. One week before program launch, SRAE youth leaders will call at least 10 of their friends and peers to invite them to the launch of the program.

3. After each touchpoint and during the three weeks of enhanced recruitment activities, SRAE program staff and youth leaders will use Google Forms to collect contact information for all interested parents, caregivers, and participants.

4. A minimum of 80% of youth participants will re-enroll in the program during the subsequent program cycle.

Next, program managers enter the SMART goals into an Excel spreadsheet or similar software program to be able to track progress on the tasks. A sample CQI Gantt sheet from a software program called Smartsheet is provided. (A Gantt sheet is a chart in which a series of horizontal lines are used to show the amount of work completed in certain periods of time in relation to the amount planned for those periods. This is an effective way of visualizing progress on tasks.)

Once these monitoring systems are in place, program managers and staff should begin to implement the plan. The focus at this point is on "doing" the tasks that were decided during the "planning" stage.

Step 3: Study

SRAE program managers choose from a variety of analytic tools useful for monitoring a program's CQI processes. Internal process evaluation software simplifies program monitoring of ongoing cycles of strategic planning and quality control. Refining CQI practices with multiple iterations of the reflection, implementation, and planning cycle improves program design and capacity.

The status key in the sample CQI Gantt tool (Figure 3) indicates by color which tasks have started, are in progress, or have been completed, as well as tasks that are on hold. The first column is the number of the SMART goal, followed by the description of the CQI process phase, key staff charged with the completion of the task, percentage completed, priority level, and number of days required to complete the task. A section for major milestones related to a group of tasks is also provided in this example. These benchmarks communicate to funders and other stakeholders how your program is making progress toward the stated goals and objectives listed in the CQI evaluation process.

Step 4: Act

Gather your team to review the findings and share insights into what adjustments will improve the next round of implementation and data collection. As you reflect on the findings of the CQI process, what stands out to the team? What goals were met? For goals not met, was there progress? If not, why? Encourage your team to embrace challenges. Success is only reached when teams see challenges as opportunities for improvement.

Engaging staff members in the CQI process builds evaluation capacity and learning motivation. The more buy-in you have from staff, the more likely that the critical nuances necessary for program improvement and excellence will emerge. InVision software has many useful templates to empower team members during the reflection phase.

SUMMARY

This tip sheet shows how a CQI process such as PDSA can be used in implementing strategies to recruit and retain youth in SRAE programs. The examples, such as the PDSA Cycle, InVision, and the Gantt Chart, apply to both in-person and virtual programming, and support the development of an ongoing, internal CQI process evaluation. Once initiated, these processes can continue to be refined over time with each subsequent cycle of planned activities.

Figure 3. *CQI Gantt Sheet Example*

Note: This example was created using Smartsheet.com

STATUS KEY	● Completed	● In Progress	● On Hold	● Not Started

Ref. ID.		Task	Task Description	Assigned To	Priority	Done %
R221	●					30%
PHASE 1: PLANNING THE CQI PROCESS						74%
A001	●	Define your aim	Increase enrollment in youth program at Site XYZ by 15% within 30 days Increase enrollment in youth program at Site ABC by 10% within 30 days Increase enrollment in youth program at Site QRS by 20% within 30 days	John Smith, Youth leader 1	Low	100%
A002	●	Collect team			High	90%
A003	●	Define student populations, sites, school areas where the improvement project will proceed				85%
A004	●	Assign roles				5%
A005	●	Discuss and decide on protocol and other process changes that might lead to improvement	Milestone 1 Set Duration to 1 month			0%
A006	●	Decide on key performance indicators and what measurements and data will be collected to measure any changes or improvement				0%
A007	●	Set out how/who will collect and monitor data				0%
PHASE 2: BEGINNING THE CQI PROCESS						4%
B001	●	Begin changes in your processes — try a small group or section at a time and analyze using a Plan Do Study Act process	Increase enrollment in youth program XYZ by 30% within 90 days. Increase enrollment in youth program ABC by 20% within 90 days. Increase enrollment in youth program at site QRS by 40% within 90 days	Sarah Manager	Medium	10%
B002	●	Make any changes needed to measurement system, other processes	Learn About Gantt View			0%
B003	●	Continue changes on a slightly larger scale				0%
B004	●	Monitor data				0%
B005	●	Analyze and interpret data	Milestone 2	Sarah Manager		
PHASE 3: CONTINUING THE CQI PROCESS						0%
C001	●	Team continues to analyze how the process and the changes are working and tries additional changes as needed based on what team is finding		John Smith, Sarah Manager, Youth leader 1	Medium	0%
C002	●	Continue to measure results after those additional changes and make further adaptions				0%
C003	●	Spread changes and improvements more broadly				0%
C004	●	When you are confident that the changes are producing verifiable and continued improvement, begin planning to implement more widely across your organization	Milestone 3			0%

References

- Ary, D., Jacobs, L. D., Sorensen, C., & Walker, D. A. (2014). *Introduction to research in education.* Wadsworth, Cengage Learning. 547-588.

- Health Information Technology Research Center (HITRC). (2013). *Continuous quality improvement (CQI): Strategies to optimize your practice 1.0.* Health Information Technology Research Center. https://www.healthit.gov/sites/default/files/tools/nlc_continuousqualityimprovementprimer.pdf

- Rossi, P. H., Lipsey, M. W., & Freeman, H. E. (2004). *Evaluation: A systematic approach* (7th ed.). Sage Publications. 169-199.

- W. Edwards Deming Institute. (n.d.). PDSA cycle. https://deming.org/explore/pdsa/

Additional Resources

InVision — This software engages teams with strategies for concept mapping that can be used during all phases of the CQI process, but especially the planning and reflection steps.

Smartsheet — Smartsheet provides templates and customizable project management Excel spreadsheets with built-in formulas that support program directors with the CQI process. The Gantt sheet example in this tip sheet was created using the Smartsheet software application.

Suggested Citation

FYSB Family & Youth Services Bureau

Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Program