Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Working Paper
Building the Capacity of the CQI Workforce
September, 2013

This document is one of eight working papers focusing on the components of a CQI system:

1. Leadership and Making the Business Case,
2. Managing Data to Support CQI,
3. Qualitative Case Review Processes,
4. Turning Data into Information,
5. Action Planning,
6. Program Evaluation Basics,
7. Building the Capacity of the CQI Workforce and
8. CQI Structure, Teams and Communication.

The purpose of these documents is to define and describe the range of specific strategies within each component to implement a high functioning CQI system in a jurisdiction. While recognizing that the evolution of CQI is iterative and requires time to refine and implement strategies, each working paper is intended to stimulate thinking about a range of strategies, to identify possible barriers to implementation and to identify solutions and recommendations.

Each document includes specific citations and suggestions for additional background publications, information and materials, but all the working papers derive critical background information from three key sources. First, the CQI Framework helped identify the 8 components and key strategies across the working papers.[i] Second, the Administration for Children and Families Information Memorandum on CQI helped inform many of the concepts in these papers.[ii] Third, and perhaps most important, the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement (NRCOI), in collaboration with the National Resource Center for Child Welfare Data and Technology (NRC-CWDT), convened 75 representatives from 23 states and numerous organizations to attend a National CQI Working Meeting on August 29-30, 2012. Participants reviewed draft working papers and worked intensively to refine their content during and after the working meeting.[iii]

I. Definition and Background

A core implementation component within a CQI system is dedicated staff. These *staff have specific responsibility to support and help implement all aspects of CQI within an agency, including supporting practice and systemic improvements.* They play a critical, foundational role in building the capacity of the overall workforce to create and sustain a CQI culture. Ideally, child welfare personnel at all levels will seek to understand the families they serve, seek best and most effective practices, use data to set priorities and manage their work, and participate as leaders in quality improvement efforts. Jurisdiction leadership can set the stage and expectations for the agency to become a learning organization, but to achieve this, supervisors, regional leaders, and CQI dedicated staff must reinforce, coach, and mentor more novice members of the

workforce. Although CQI is not a replacement for sound supervision, well trained CQI staff can lead change efforts, coach and mentor staff, and facilitate the CQI process and commitment at all levels.

Dedicated and well-trained staff should lead and own the CQI process. These staff benefit from having an understanding of child welfare and must have an interest in data, a willingness to learn, personal skills that engage and support others through change processes, and a belief that people have the capacity to shape their practice and improve outcomes for children and families. This staff needs ongoing training, support and supervision to continue to grow their experience and expertise. It helps if they have basic skills in using spreadsheets and/or other software tools their IT system uses.

Building the capacity of the CQI workforce is an essential component of a CQI system as described in the Children's Bureau's five components of CQI (ACYF-CB-IM-12-07). The first component, Foundational Administrative Structure describes, "There is a capacity and resources to sustain an ongoing CQI process, including designated CQI staff or CQI contractor staff." The need for a well-supported dedicated CQI staff is also articulated in the CQI Framework as a key part of "an organizational culture that supports and actively promotes CQI. Dedicated CQI staff exist within the agency to facilitate the collection, analysis, and use of data and information to support practice and systemic improvements in the agency."

There is variance between states and jurisdictions in regards to having dedicated CQI staff. Numerous department structures exist, with some jurisdictions having one team of dedicated CQI staff that focus solely on CQI activities while others spread the CQI responsibilities throughout various staff and teams. The required qualifications and responsibilities of CQI staff also vary. Some jurisdictions require CQI staff to have at minimum a Master's Degree in Social Work or a related field with qualifications similar to that of a casework supervisor. In other areas the requirements are much less specific.

II. Key Strategies

Recruit, select and retain a dedicated CQI staff. This is a purposeful process that results in a skill set and capacity (ideally, across a team of individuals) to support CQI. The skills, knowledge and abilities described below are ideal and while they might not all be present in a particular individual at the onset, can be developed both within specific staff and across a CQI team or unit.

Suggested qualifications for dedicated CQI staff include:

Knowledge to work with people in performance improvement:
- Types of program evaluation and logic of program evaluation
- Stages of readiness for change
- Skills in understanding different perspectives on the same topic
- Critical thinking skills and how to apply to action planning
- Adult learning theory – asking what if, why, what, and how
- Empowerment evaluation strategies

Knowledge and skills to use data in performance improvement:
- Ability to complete simple and trend analyses – to draw conclusions from data
- Data presentation skills (handouts, visuals, preparing for audience)
- Telling the story of data (e.g., what does data tell you, how do you know, what does it mean?)
- Understanding that behind every data point is a real child, family, and worker
- Skills with spreadsheets and perhaps SPSS and any local management software
- Understand reports and analyze them
- Willingness to share tricks, skills, and data tips with other dedicated CQI staff

Skills in facilitating meetings aimed toward performance improvement:
- Using facilitation skills in action planning
- Explaining report content, drawing out field practices that impact report content
- Negotiation strategies
- Learning how to problem solve across levels and synthesize action planning with leadership
- Assessing needs of groups: attitudes, barriers and using person-centered or process-centered facilitation
- Knowing and teaching time management
- Skills in analysis of work cycles or other agency processes
- Communication skills in a group setting, willingness to listen and explore
- Run effective meetings and keeping meetings on target

Adequate program knowledge or willingness to listen and learn programs and then guide others in performance improvement:
- Program knowledge of child welfare practice
- Where to access policy and how to understand it
- Understand the case work practices behind child welfare indicators and outcomes

Leadership skills in performance improvement efforts:
- Frame CQI to leadership and strategically plan for the CQI process
- Describe CQI processes to front line workers and supervisors
- Develop attitudes and skills for engagement: willingness to exchange information, validation of field experiences, and openness to understanding
- Strength focus: ability to find strengths and celebrate success
- Flexibility to entertain multiple solutions to problems
- Teaching and mentoring attitude and skills
- Belief that people can change and results can be achieved: "can do" and optimistic
- Develop and model non-judgmental work styles: creative and adaptive, solution-focused, confident and assertive

Attitudes and skills for building relationships with multiple persons in their jurisdiction:
- Coping with time and resource shifts (e.g., budget and staff cuts)
- Time management skills

- Willing to share practices that work and skills for CQI with others
- Fostering collaboration between agencies, teams and all levels
- Running regional meetings and empowering staff to solve problems
- Strategic planning within the jurisdiction
- Visiting and knowing front line staff, and jurisdiction leadership
- Understanding the jurisdiction – strengths and needs
- Advocating across levels for best practices and improved outcomes

The capacity to manage or participate in activities or projects in collaboration with jurisdiction leadership that support improved performance, such as private foundation efforts, cross system change projects, grant activities, or a host of other special initiatives.

Develop standardized job descriptions. One way to support the hiring and retention of dedicated CQI staff is to build the desired knowledge, skills and abilities into standardized CQI position job descriptions. This allows for a shared and consistent understanding of the preferred education, experience and skill set. It is also an opportunity to clarify job duties and expectations.

Provide ongoing training, coaching and support for CQI staff. Ideally, the agency has identified a consistent training plan for initial and ongoing training to ensure CQI staff are oriented within the agency and continue to enhance and expand their knowledge and skills. CQI staff can benefit from training and coaching related specifically to enhancing their CQI skills, such as trainings on advanced data analysis, data presentation, or facilitation skills. Follow-up coaching will help solidify these skills as CQI staff apply them in their work. One key to supporting CQI staff is convening them regularly (e.g., a combination of in-person and remote via telephone, webinar, etc.) to discuss their work, trade ideas and information, maintain consistency and assess effectiveness.

Integrate CQI staff into the agency. Though dedicated CQI staff likely is a part of a team or unit with similar quality improvement or assurance functions, it is critical to ensure that the staff is well integrated within the agency. Strategies for integration can include cross-functional teams, special projects, seating location, etc. Purposeful integration helps build relationships, reduces isolation, ensures a CQI grounding in the day-to-day child welfare context and work and signals the need for staff at all levels to play a role in CQI.

III.   Implementation Barriers

Very real barriers and challenges emerge as organizations commit to hiring, supporting and retaining dedicated staff to build the organization's CQI capacity.

Lack of sufficient resources. In hard budgetary times, it may be difficult to justify staff dedicated to anything other than direct services. When times are hard, some leaders may add CQI to the other duties of front line workers or supervisors rather than invest in or maintain dedicated CQI staff. Or, dedicated CQI staff may have to take on case work duties that dilute their CQI focus. A lack of resources also may result in insufficient training, support and skill development opportunities for CQI staff.

Distrust of CQI staff by others within the agency. Some may fear that CQI processes or dedicated staff will interfere or usurp the role of the child welfare supervisor. CQI staff should recognize that such fears may be reinforced or exacerbated if CQI staff jump to conclusions and/or are overly prescriptive in their recommendations.

Belief that CQI responsibilities exist within the CQI unit. One potential unintended consequence of having dedicated CQI staff and/or units is a belief within the agency that CQI is something that occurs only within that CQI unit. To overcome this impression, CQI staff will have to use many of the skills discussed earlier to engage staff at all levels in the collection, analysis and use of data and information to make improvements. In addition, some agencies have developed CQI training and/or materials for all staff that articulate the goal of engaging everyone in CQI activities and linking those to the agency's vision and mission of supporting children, youth and families.

IV.   Background Information and Materials

Fetterman, D.M., Kaftarian, S.J., & Wandersman, A (Eds). (1996). *Empowerment evaluation: Knowledge and tools for self-assessment and accountability*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Fixen, D.L., Naoom, S.F., Blasé, K.A., Friedman, R.M., Wallace, F. (2005). *Implementation research: A synthesis of the literature*. Tampa, FL: University of South Florida.
http://nirn.fmhi.usf.educ

Heiffetz, R., Glashow, A., & Linsky, M. (2009). *The practice of adaptive leadership.* Boston: Harvard Business Press.

Hess, P.M., Mullen E.J. (Eds.), (1995). *Practitioner-researcher partnerships: Building knowledge from, in, and for practice*. Washington, DC: NASCW Press

NIATx website: http://www.niatx.net/

NRCOI CQI Research Project summary on CQI staff responsibilities and qualifications:
http://muskie.usm.maine.edu/helpkids/CQIproj/cqistaff.pdf

NRCOI CQI Research Project summary on CQI staff training:
http://muskie.usm.maine.edu/helpkids/CQIproj/cqitraining.pdf

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[i] Using Continuous Quality Improvement to Improve Child Welfare Practice – A Framework for Implementation, Casey Family Programs and the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement, May 2005.
http://muskie.usm.maine.edu/helpkids/rcpdfs/CQIFramework.pdf

[ii] Information Memorandum: Continuous Quality Improvement in Title IV-B and IV-E Programs. ACYF-CB-IM-12-07.
http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/resource/im1207

National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement
A service of the Children's Bureau, a member of the T/TA Network

iii This was an intense working meeting that detailed the current needs and successes among child welfare jurisdictions in the core implementation components of CQI. Prior to the meeting participants received and reviewed draft working papers developed by the NRCs on 8 CQI core components. Participants with shared expertise worked in groups during the meeting and focused on refining the working papers on the content and execution of CQI core components. Large group sessions focused on the links between these components and the technical assistance (TA) needs of jurisdictions.   As key stakeholders in the process, participants defined their needs, shared their successes and struggles, and thought creatively to further refine a CQI framework to advance the work in child welfare. The NRCOI and NRC-CWDT thank them for these efforts.

NRCOI

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