

Continuous Quality Improvement

Correctional practices that adhere to the principles of effective intervention result in lower recidivism rates, while interventions that do not adhere to these principles have higher recidivism rates.¹ Jurisdictions can use quality assurance (QA) and continuous quality improvement (CQI) processes to evaluate the effectiveness of current policies and practices, weed out activities that are inconsistent with risk reduction research, encourage and support activities that are consistent with it, and develop a framework for further improvement.²

Quality Assurance and Continuous Quality Improvement

Quality assurance (QA) is a process that determines whether practices are being delivered as intended. It involves looking back in time to discover what occurred and how that compares with the model for change.

Continuous quality improvement (CQI) uses feedback to facilitate incremental improvements in both staff performance and organizational processes.

CQI ACTIVITIES

There are many areas in which a jurisdiction can conduct CQI. A CQI committee can help determine which areas to focus on, establish priorities and timelines, develop CQI strategies, decide how to keep staff and others informed, and collect and share information. The following are some areas of focus and possible activities.

AREAS OF FOCUS	CQI ACTIVITIES
RISK/NEEDS ASSESSMENTS Do staff score and interpret assessments accurately and consistently? Are assessments and reassessments conducted in a timely manner? How frequently are overrides requested and granted?	Hold initial and booster trainings focused on interrater reliability, in which everyone scores the same case and their scores are compared to those of an expert scorer. Review electronic or paper reports related to assessments. Offer feedback and coaching.
CASE PLANNING Do staff develop case plans with those on their caseload? Do they develop case plans in a timely manner? Do case plans reflect a person's level of risk; criminogenic needs, especially the driver; strengths; triggers; responsivity factors; and stabilization factors? Are case plan goals clear and concise? Are action steps SMART? Do they include opportunities for skill building? Do staff review and update case plans frequently?	Conduct initial and booster trainings focused on effective case planning and management. Review case plans using a checklist to identify whether they are effective. Offer feedback and coaching. Encourage communities of practice in which staff use a checklist to review each other's case plans and provide one another with feedback.

¹ Bonta, J., & Andrews, D. A. (2017). *The psychology of criminal conduct* (6th ed.). Routledge; Taxman, F.S., & Belenko, S. (2012). *Implementing evidence-based practices in community corrections and addiction treatment*. Springer.

² For more information on evaluating policies and practices, see the EBP brief *Collecting, Analyzing, and Sharing Data*.

AREAS OF FOCUS	CQI ACTIVITIES
ONE-ON-ONE INTERVENTIONS	
<p>Do staff establish professional alliance and use motivational interviewing techniques? Do they use case plans as a basis for appointments? Do they structure appointments intentionally? Do they focus the majority of appointment time on helping people build skills associated with their criminogenic needs?</p>	<p>Conduct initial and booster trainings to increase staff’s knowledge, comfort, and competency in implementing evidence-based practices.</p>
BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT	
<p>Do staff identify prosocial and harmful attitudes and behaviors? Do they use a combination of rewards and responses to noncompliance, with rewards outnumbering responses to noncompliance by a ratio of at least 4:1? Are rewards genuine, immediate, customized, specific, and meaningful? Are responses to noncompliance swift, certain, and fair?</p>	<p>Observe one-on-one appointments using checklists and other observation tools. Provide feedback and coaching.</p> <p>Encourage communities of practice in which staff work together to further develop their skills.</p> <p>Where available, review reports related to the use of rewards and responses to noncompliance. Provide feedback and coaching.</p>
COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES	
<p>What is the quality of community-based services? Are staff adhering to program models? Are they offering the expected dosage (i.e., amount) of programming? Are services having the desired impact?</p>	<p>Conduct fidelity assessments using instruments such as the Correctional Program Checklist or Correctional Program Assessment Inventory.</p> <p>Work with community-based agencies to set expectations and make improvements indicated by the fidelity assessments.</p>
EXPERIENCES OF PEOPLE WHO ARE JUSTICE-IMPACTED	
<p>Are people on supervision engaged? Do they feel that they are being treated with respect and that their appointments are beneficial? Do victims feel like they are being heard?</p>	<p>Gather feedback from people, family, and others through surveys, interviews, focus groups, and pre- and post-surveys.</p>

Tips from Experts

- **Set the right tone.** Early on, create a culture of learning. Emphasize that CQI is not a “gotcha” process but one designed to help improve quality.
- **Start small.** Pilot the CQI process first, and then roll out the initiative to the entire jurisdiction.
- **Begin with the easiest CQI effort, to gain some experience.** Master one area before moving on to another.
- **Use existing processes and technology.** Reduce the burden on staff by using processes that make CQI familiar and easy.
- **Disburse responsibility for quality.** Use coaches, supervisors, and staff to engage everyone in the pursuit of quality.
- **Identify and celebrate success.** Affirm individuals who are performing as intended or who are putting forth the effort.