

Organize Participation for Performance Improvement

Every performance improvement process needs structure, whether it uses an existing advisory committee, an informal professional network, or a mix of methods.

Whatever its form, a successful process should:

- Enable participation needed to achieve desired results.
- Match the desired scope and vision of performance improvement.
- Build on existing structures, interests, and capacities.
- Be manageable within the time, resources, and staffing available.

Steps in Performance Improvement

1. **Organize participation for performance improvement.**
2. Prioritize areas for action.
3. Explore "root causes" of performance.
4. Develop and implement improvement plans.
5. Regularly monitor and report progress.

Source: NPHPSP Users' Guide, 2006

Options to structure improvement activities include the following:

- **Incorporate performance improvement into a broader planning process**, such as MAPP or a similar health improvement process, a governor's health task force, or a local board of health strategic planning committee.
- **Identify or form a high-level steering committee** to oversee the use of the national performance standards, measures, quality improvement process, and reporting of progress as part of a larger "performance management system."
- **Assign subcommittees or improvement teams** with subject matter experts and front line staff to delve deeper into specific Essential Services or assigned areas, test improvements, and report system progress to the steering committee.
- Create or refer participants to **improvement networks** (sometimes called "learning communities" or "quality improvement collaboratives") to learn about effective practices, spread innovations, and voluntarily benchmark results with agencies that share common improvement goals.
- For jurisdictions using all three NPHPSP instruments, set up a special statewide **coordinating committee** to analyze priorities among governance, local, and state users and align improvements for maximum impact.

Refer to the User Guide, pages 27-28, for additional ideas on organizing for performance improvement, including ways to organize efforts to gather input, share information related to the assessment, and clarify participants' roles in performance improvement.

*Adapted by PHF from: [NPHPSP User Guide](#) (2006 update), page 27

After One Year Hiatus, Marion County Rekindles NPHPSP Improvement Efforts

By the time Herman Hale began his job at the Marion County Health Department in Florida, many months had passed since the community assessed its public health system performance. Because of the delay in follow-up, Hale knew rekindling community interest would be a challenge.

Hired to spearhead the agency's MAPP efforts (the strategic improvement initiative that encompasses the NPHPSP), Hale set out to learn more at the NPHPSP annual training. While there, he picked up a number of tips on jump starting efforts after a post-assessment hiatus, which he shared with the health department team. Armed with new ideas (see [handout](#)), the team formulated a plan to connect system improvement efforts to local priorities.



In Marion County, access to care was the galvanizing issue that helped to reopen discussions about the local public health system. Hale began talking about a grant opportunity with one contact who was interested in opening a clinic in West Ocala. Prompted by the grant, a core group of partners began meeting monthly.

Conversations soon snowballed to include other partners and to focus on the local public health system standards. As a result, several organizations doing local assessments related to health insurance and access, such as WellFlorida and Public Policy Institute, also joined the discussion and identified coordination opportunities. The health department team and community partners will incorporate this information into the system improvement plan.

"We are going to correlate all of these efforts through the Performance Standards," says Hale. The core group will use the results of their assessments and feedback to develop action plans addressing weaknesses in EPHS 7 (Assure access to care).

For now, the local public health system improvement efforts are tied to health care access. Although efforts to improve on other standards are temporarily on hold, Hale says the difference is about strategy and transparency. Partners understand that the major focus of this process is on access and that this will lead to other opportunities to improve the public health system.

"Because the second portion of the NPHPSP activity [improvement] didn't happen right away, we have to show partners that we are in it for the long haul," Hale explained. Thanks to a new strategy and leadership support from the Director and Hale's supervisor, the Marion County Health Department team is up to the challenge.

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Tips to Get Things Moving Again

It is never too late to resume system improvement efforts, even if you have had a long break in activity.

➤ ***Advice from Hale Based on Marion County's Experience:***

- Latch onto timely issues or grant opportunities.
- Focus on what you want to accomplish, and ask "Can we find partners who will help us?"
- "Look forward, rather than apologize for who we are and the difficulties we face," such as staffing problems, which are common among government and nonprofit organizations.
- Accept that this may be a "start and stop process." When some partners drop off, "someone else needs to pick up the bucket."
- Tailor to local needs. "We're not approaching this in a cookie cutter mode [tied too narrowly to the indicators]. We think we'll get good results using the principles and spirit of the assessment."
- Connect to broader health improvement efforts like MAPP. "I look at everything through the eyes of MAPP," says Hale. "With a good group of partners, you can plug a variety of people into lots of different projects."

➤ ***More Tips from NPHPSP Workshop Participants and PHF:****

- Time follow-up with anniversaries of the assessment or relevant health events.
- Be mindful of participants' skepticism based on past initiatives that fizzled out. Be prepared to show how this renewed initiative will be different. Be sincere and direct in communications.
- Reach out to partners through face-to-face meetings and letters tailored to their specific interests.
- Demonstrate top leadership commitment and participation.
- Identify champions that can help rally support.

**Based upon "Jump Starting Improvement Efforts after a Post-assessment Lull," 2006 NPHPSP Annual Training and July 2006 NPHPSP User Call, Public Health Foundation.*

Why do some jurisdictions have trouble moving from assessment to action?

Workshop participants identified several reasons that contribute to a lull after an assessment:

- Turnover among key staff
- Lack of financial or staff resources to sustain efforts
- No leadership to make improvement a priority
- Unclear vision for the improvement process
- Difficulty translating NPHPSP report data into an action plan
- Feeling overwhelmed at where to begin
- People did not understand or like the NPHPSP results
- Transition among participants – partners involved in the assessment may not have time or be the right people to make improvements in the next phase
- Loss of momentum after too much time elapses
- Competing priorities

To keep an improvement process moving, prevention is the best strategy. Plan how you will avoid the most likely hiccups, and rapidly convene a team if you see danger signs—before your initiative is derailed.

"Jump Starting Improvement Efforts after a Post-assessment Lull," 2006 NPHPSP Annual Training and July 2006 NPHPSP User Call, Public Health Foundation.

Essential Resources to Jump Start Improvement Efforts

[Potential Lull-breaking Strategies](#)

Spark ideas with your team with this checklist of strategies from the NPHPSP training.

[NPHPSP User Guide \(2006 update\)](#)

Read practical guidance on the **5 Steps for Performance Improvement** in the section titled, "After We Complete the Assessment, What Next?"

[Post-Assessment / Performance Improvement Toolkit \(CDC\)](#)

Downloadable follow-up letters, improvement plans, priority setting guides, and other ideas to help you organize your improvement process.

➤ More Improvement Resources:

[NPHPSP Online Resource Center](#) (NEW!)

Use this searchable database to find information you need to improve on any Essential Public Health Service or NPHPSP Model Standard.

[Webcast: Using the NPHPS within MAPP](#) (NACCHO)

MAPP Technical Assistance Webcast Archives

[MAPP Peer Assistance Network](#) (NACCHO)

NPHPSP "User Calls"

Join other Performance Standards users on the 3rd Tuesday of every month at 2 PM Eastern. Hear what others are doing, get inspired, and ask for advice. To receive notices of the calls, contact [NNPHI](#). Registration is free.

[Improving Performance – Past Issues](#)

Read past issue topics: leadership and management support, priority setting, and root causes.