

Priority Setting Matrix with Example Criteria

A matrix like the one below can be used to decide priorities for performance improvement from a list of NPHPSP indicators. Such a matrix also may be used to decide priorities among possible causes of a performance weakness or problem to address, or to choose the best solution(s) for a given problem. Decisions are based on agreed upon criteria, thus reducing the potential for choices based on hidden agendas. For instructions on using this technique, see the next page.

In this example, a jurisdiction has scored low on four indicators in the NPHPSP assessment. Because the group believes all are important, the matrix will help them decide which indicators should be addressed in a performance improvement process.

Options for Improvement	Criteria (weight)	Impact on important health issues (5)	Feasibility to address (4)	Time required (2)	Support (3)	Total
Identification and surveillance of health threats (2.1)		4* X 5** = 20	4 X 4 = 16	5 X 2 = 10	4 X 3 = 12	58
Constituency development (4.1)		2 X 5 = 10	1 X 4 = 4	2 X 2 = 4	3 X 3 = 9	27
Identification of populations with barriers to personal health services (7.1)		3 X 5 = 15	3 X 4 = 12	4 X 2 = 8	3 X 3 = 9	44
Linkage with institutions of higher learning and/or research (10.2)		3 X 5 = 15	5 X 4 = 20	2 X 2 = 4	2 X 3 = 6	45

*Score (0-5) assigned to each option in relation to criterion

** Weight (multiplier) for the criterion (1-5)

Commonly used criteria to set priorities

Priority setting criteria commonly fall under the following categories:

- Effectiveness
- Feasibility
- Resources
- Seriousness
- Impact on systems or health
- Size of population affected
- Support or acceptability
- Within control of team

Instructions

The following lists the steps to take in developing a priority setting matrix.

1. List the options the team will be considering.
2. Brainstorm the criteria that will be used to evaluate the options.
3. Discuss and refine the list of criteria. Ideally, reduce the list to two to five criteria that the team believes are most important.
4. Decide if some criteria are more important than others; and if so, assign a relative weight (multiplier) to each criterion. For example, if the team finds “Cost” to be a more important criterion than “Time” in considering a solution, they would give “Cost” a higher numerical weight than “Time.” It is suggested to use a weight scale between 1 and 5 to keep scoring simple. Determining the weight of each criterion may be done by discussion and consensus. Or each member can record weights for each criterion, then the use the team average as the weight.
5. Draw a matrix similar to the example. Write the criteria and their corresponding weights as labels along one edge and the list of options along the other edge.
6. Rate each option (0-5 points) according to the criteria—assigning higher points to those with favorable characteristics. For example, if the team favors low cost options, the lowest cost option receives the highest score (5) related to the “Cost” criterion. Points may be assigned individually or as a group, using data or opinion as appropriate.
7. Multiply each option’s point rating by the weight. Add the total points for each option. The option with the highest score may not always be the best option, but the relative scores can generate meaningful discussion and lead the team toward consensus.

Adapted from the American Society of Quality, <http://www.asq.org>, and Goal QPC, <http://www.goalqpc.com>.

Other potential priority setting criteria to use in a performance improvement process	
When you have many problems or improvement opportunities, and you need to choose one(s) to work on...	When you have a list of many potential solutions to a defined problem, and you need to choose one(s) to try...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Impact of the problem on health issues ● Effect on other system issues (i.e., Is it causing weakness in many EPHS?) ● Availability of effective solutions ● Within control of the team to solve ● Cost of problem (or potential financial payback to resolve) ● Resources likely required to solve (money, time, others) ● Ease of solving ● # of people or organizations affected ● “Customer pain” caused by problem (to partners, staff, consumers, others) ● Support for solving the problem (interest or buy-in from team, partners, community, management, or leaders) ● Urgency of solving the problem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Effectiveness of solution ● Extent it will resolve the problem; or # of root causes addressed by a solution ● Potential effects on other systems ● Within control and authority to implement ● Cost to implement and maintain (or return on investment) ● Availability of needed resources ● Capability or expertise to implement ● Ease of implementation or maintenance ● Time until solution is fully implemented ● Support for the solution (interest or buy-in from team, partners, community, management, or leaders) ● Safety, health, or environmental factors ● Legal or ethical considerations ● Potential negative consequences