

The Quality of a Quality Improvement Project:

Sponsor's Checklists

Erin Barkema¹ and John W. Moran²

October 2014

A couple of questions sponsors often asked us are: How do I know a good quality improvement (QI) project from a bad one? When my direct reports bring me a project to sponsor, what criteria should I use to judge its merits? Although these are two different types of questions, they are still important questions from a sponsor's standpoint.

To determine whether or not to sponsor a QI project, managers/leaders need to have basic information about the potential project. When being pitched an idea for a QI project, a sponsor should look for the following basic information:

- An understanding of the issue, including:
 - An AIM statement has been identified that is:
 - Discrete, measurable, and time bound
 - Describes the current and future state
 - Indicates an improvement goal from baseline data
 - Baseline data to establish how the process to be improved is currently operating (thus validating the need for the project)
- An understanding of customer needs and wants (as well as an understanding of internal and external customers)
- Identification of the problem solving method to be used (such as PDCA) to define causes and develop solutions
- A proposed QI team with clear roles and responsibilities, including:
 - Team leader
 - Team facilitator
 - Members
 - Who have first-hand experience with the problem
 - Who see the problem from different perspectives
 - Who will influence the success of the project

¹ Erin Barkema Erin Barkema, MPH is Performance Management/Quality Improvement Consultant for the Public Health Foundation, a Regional Community Health Consultant for the Iowa Department of Public Health, and an Adjunct Professor in the MPH Program at Des Moines University.

² John Moran John W. Moran, Ph.D. is a Senior Quality Advisor to the Public Health Foundation and a Senior Fellow at the University of Minnesota, School of Public Health in the Division of Health Policy and Management. A member of PHAB's Evaluation and Quality Improvement Committee 2013 – present. Adjunct Professor Arizona State University College of Health Solutions' School for the Science of Health 2013 - 2014

If the sponsor chooses to approve the project, he/she needs to determine any additional needs the QI team may have. Questions to ask to assess needs are as follows:

1. Are QI team members skilled in QI methods? If not, the sponsor needs to identify people within the organization who can assist the team.
2. Are the right people on the team? One tool that can be used to assess this aspect is the Team Selection Matrix (used to help pick team members – available at <http://www.phf.org/search/results2.aspx?k=Team%20Selection>)
3. Is the AIM statement clear and complete? Sponsors can use the Twelve Essential Questions to Help Improve Your Project's AIM Statement³ as a guideline to determine the quality of an AIM statement.

<u>AIM Statement Questions</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Needs Development</u>
1. Does the proposed project needing improvement align with the Organization's strategic goals and priorities?			
2. Does the improvement project have a sponsor within leadership?			
3. Does the AIM discretely describe the project purpose and define clearly "What are we trying to improve (leaving no room for misinterpretation)?"			
4. Are those impacted by the project in agreement that improvement is needed?			
5. Is there a timeline for the project to be completed by?			
6. Is the scope of the improvement effort appropriate for the time allotted?			
7. Does the team assigned have the skills and ability to achieve an effective solution during the time allotted?			
8. Does the AIM statement describe specific quantitative improvement targets?			
9. There are no solutions indicated in the AIM statement? (Remember an AIM statement is a problem statement with no solution indicated.)			
10. There are no sub AIMS indicated? If so they may need their own AIM Statements.			
11. Does it identify the internal and external customer rationale for the improvement?			

On the flip side, there are number of factors that come into play when distinguishing a good QI project from a bad one. Every successful improvement effort involves a knowledgeable sponsor, a committed team leader, the right team members, a clearly defined problem, and a problem solving process that is followed.

³ Twelve Essential Questions to Help Improve Your Project's AIM Statement: The AIM Statement Check List, L. Beitsch, MD, J. Moran, and B. Riley, Process Excellence Newsletter, June 2013 - <http://www.processexcellencenetwork.com/people-performance-and-change-in-process-improveme/articles/twelve-questions-to-help-improve-your-aim-the-aim/>

As a sponsor it is important to know what to look for throughout the “life” of a QI project. It is easy to judge the merits and success of an improvement project if the following have been implemented and/or documented:

- An understanding of the issue, including:
 - An AIM statement was identified that is:
 - Discrete, measurable, and time bound
 - Described the current and future state
 - Indicated an improvement goal from baseline data
 - Baseline data that validated the need for the project
- An understanding of customer needs and wants (as well as an understanding of internal and external customers)
- Utilization of a problem solving method (such as PDCA) that was followed to define causes and develop solutions
 - Current state flow chart indicating where the problem(s) are occurring
 - Root cause analysis of the problem areas
 - Potential solutions developed using a Solution and Effect Diagram
 - Solutions implemented – project planning
- QI team roles and responsibilities including:
 - Sponsor
 - Team leader
 - Team facilitator
 - Team members
- QI team meeting guidelines:
 - Agendas
 - Regular/standing meeting schedule
 - Minutes issued
 - Use the QI tools, methods, and techniques
 - Follow up on action items between meetings
 - Understand when additional resources are needed
 - Keep action registers on when changes are made
- Reporting and communication including
 - Regular progress reports to other QI teams and management
 - Feedback requested
 - Communication of successes
- Team success was celebrated