



We asked three of our QI coaches to share some of the most common questions they receive about the quality improvement process.

### 1 What do you mean when you say “trust the process”?

Anyone involved in a quality improvement project knows it can take significant time to move through the stages of planning, diagnostics, identifying solutions, testing, sustainability and spread. Many QI initiatives can take a year from the point of making a decision to hardwiring the change. It's tempting to want to skip steps, particularly when you feel you know the root cause of the problem or feel that you don't need data to tell you what your gut already knows. When we say, “trust the process”, it means taking the time to work through the steps because each one is valuable. It's not a race to arrive at the final destination. Make the journey thoughtful and meaningful – the time spent working through the process will pay back in spades when it comes to implementing and sustaining a change initiative that will positively impact clients and families.

### 2 How do we use data to inform the QI process?

Determining the data you're going to use to assess the impact of the change is one of the most valuable parts of the QI process. Start by understanding the problem and find a data point that supports it.

Keep it simple, this isn't about robust spreadsheets. It can be one count of something

that will show the impact to clients and families. Consider using qualitative data and client/family feedback as ways to show improvement.

Be thoughtful about data and create an appropriate measurement plan. Use it to tell your story. If it isn't showing an improvement, adjust and pivot. Let it point you to where you should go next.

### 3 Is it the team lead who does the majority of the work?

There is a common misconception that the team lead needs to take on the bulk of the work. Everyone on the team is responsible for the project's success and that means everyone should have equal workload. The other misconception is that team members should only be assigned work that aligns with their skill set. We encourage team members to think of this journey as an opportunity to grow. Taking on work that is new and outside your comfort zone contributes to your own professional development.

### 4 What are some things the QI team should know before getting started?

1. Stay curious and keep an open mind. Being open to new ideas helps to move the process forward.
2. Don't rush through the process just to get it done. Set your pace and work through each step. It will position your QI team for success.





# Quality Improvement Ideas

## Ten common questions about the QI process

3. Be comfortable in the unknown. A quality improvement project can evolve. Being nimble and open to the ebbs and flows will help get you to the finish line.
4. It's not about how you fail, it's about how you recover. As you test change initiatives, failure is inevitable. You won't hit a home run every time, holding out for that level of perfectionism can cause burnout. Embrace failure and learn from it.
5. See the value in all the stages and know it's not a linear process. Often, you have to circle back. You may realize what you thought was the problem, is not the problem after all. Use new information and understandings to help refine your work.
6. When working to understand the problem always think of it in terms of outcomes. Always ask, how will it make a difference to clients and families? Keep this top of mind throughout the process.

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### What if during the exploration phase, we realize that we don't have the right people on the team?

Your team is as iterative as your problem statement. After diving into the data, you may need to bring in additional stakeholders or replace team members with those who are closest to the work. That's okay. It's part of the process. There is no defined number of members that makes the perfect sized team, it's about having the right people at the table to push the initiative forward.

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### Why do we have to keep revisiting and updating the project charter?

Think of the project charter as an important communication tool. As the work evolves, the project charter should be updated to ensure there is a consistent "source of truth", meaning there is a document where stakeholders can get up-to-date information about the project. This also reduces the risk of losing important information if team members leave the organization.

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### Which tools do I use and in which order?

It really depends. The QI process is not linear. It's about trying different tools to see which one works best for your initiative. Each tool has its own benefit which will help determine which to use and in what order. There are general suggestions such as starting with the QI diagnostic tools (e.g. fishbone, process map, 5 Whys) and then shifting into developing change ideas (e.g. idea generation tools to generate creativity), followed by using PDSA worksheets to document your small tests of change. Measurement tools such as the measurement plan outlining the details of collecting and measuring your measures, and run charts to plot your measures over time can be used throughout the project. QI project management tools such as the project charter and driver diagrams can also be built throughout the life cycle of a project.





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**The Mental Health and Addiction sector doesn't have a structured quality improvement plan that needs to be adhered to. How do we align the work with the organization's strategic plan?**

Always bring it back to client and family outcomes which is a priority across all mental health and addiction agencies. To help you articulate the vision of the quality improvement initiative, draft an 'elevator speech'. An elevator speech goes by that name because it's meant to be delivered in the time it takes to ride a floor in an elevator. In 100 to 150 words, the speech should speak to ways your work will address the problem and what it will mean for clients and families. Use it when introducing the initiative and re-visit it throughout the project to keep what you're doing top of mind.

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**How do we manage the naysayers who say, "this isn't going to work, it's been done before"?**

Sustainability and spread is the last step in the process, but it needs to be considered right from the start. Trusting the process and working through each step will help you build a strong case for support. Include naysayers in the QI work. Their insights will add both richness and depth to the project outcomes and will help teams understand what didn't work before and inform what needs to be done differently. Throughout the process use data to tell the story and demonstrate which change ideas are having an impact. This is why trusting the process is so important. It's hard to challenge the data.

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**Which change idea do I start with first?**

There are a number of quality improvement tools to help you narrow your change idea. One is the impact/effort grid. Look at the change ideas that have high effort and high impact, as well as those that have low effort and high impact. Those that have low-effort but high impact are the best ideas to tackle first. Always think about the six domains of quality and choose ideas that will improve at least one of the domains for clients and families.

