

Sustainability Worksheet

A resource to plan for sustaining the gains

Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) is an effective approach to improve services, processes, and outcomes at your organization; however, intentional and strategic efforts to sustain gains achieved during the course of a CQI project are required to ensure improvements are lasting. Gains often start to disappear when a project ends, attention shifts, and staff return to their previous way of working. Making improvements last is challenging work and requires that you focus on sustainability throughout the planning and implementation of a project. Sustainability occurs “when new ways of working and improved outcomes become the norm.”¹ Let’s look at an example:

Over the course of a CQI project, your team achieves measurable improvement in the percent of women screened for depression within 3 months of enrollment.

What does sustainability look like?

NEW WAYS OF WORKING

A year from now, women continue to be routinely screened for depression.

AND IMPROVED OUTCOMES

Screening rates remain at or above the rates achieved during your project.

BECOME THE NORM

Home visitors view screening for depression as part of their standard practice with families.

How to use this resource

The worksheet that follows lists eight factors that contribute to sustaining quality improvements. Attention to these factors throughout the course of a CQI project, from planning through implementation, will help sustain new ways of working and improved outcomes. Review Table 1 to learn about the factors and how they can be used to support sustainability. Then complete the worksheet with your state/territory CQI team or use it to support local implementing agencies to plan for sustainability. Consider actions to take before, during, and after a project, and incorporate these activities into your state/territory CQI plan to promote follow through and alignment with other CQI efforts.

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¹ Sustaining Improved Outcomes: A Toolkit (2010) by Scott Thomas, PhD and Deborah Zahn, MPH.

TABLE 1. EIGHT FACTORS TO SUSTAIN IMPROVEMENT²

Factor	Definition	How to use the factor to influence sustainability
Perceived Value	Acknowledged value by those affected by new ways of working and improved outcomes.	Give regular feedback on your outcomes to key stakeholders; present data at meetings with staff and leaders.
Monitoring and Feedback	Information on improved outcomes is collected and communicated to target audiences.	Host regular calls to monitor progress; display outcomes for target audiences; develop systems for easy monitoring of data.
Leadership	The degree to which leaders, including decision-makers and champions are actively engaged.	Invite leaders to participate in planning meetings; present updates in meetings where leaders are present.
Staff	Staff have the skills, confidence, and interest in continuing new ways of working and improved outcomes.	Staff contribute to change ideas and testing; provide training on new processes and their impact for families.
Organizational Infrastructure	The degree to which operations support new ways of working and improved outcomes.	Revise job descriptions to include new ways of working; update agency policies and procedures to include new processes.
Organizational Fit	The degree to which improvements match the organization's overall goal and mission.	Align project work with organization's strategic plan; train staff on the purpose and importance of new ways of working.
Partners	Involvement of partners who actively support the project aims and outcomes.	Invite relevant partners to participate on CQI team; develop agreements to share resources and cooperate beyond the project.
Spread	Expansion of new ways of working and improved outcomes to additional locations.	Expand implementation of new processes to additional home visiting programs or partner agencies.

² Adapted from Sustaining Improved Outcomes: A Toolkit (2010) by Scott Thomas, PhD and Deborah Zahn, MPH.

SUSTAINABILITY WORKSHEET

Instructions: Select up to four factors defined in Table 1 to begin building a sustainability plan. For each factor selected, note why it is important to sustaining improvement for this particular project. List key activities that will be undertaken to strengthen sustainability and the person(s) responsible for those activities.

Example: To sustain improvement in the percent of women screened for depression, our team will focus on perceived value. We believe this factor is important to sustaining our outcomes because screenings will be more likely to happen if staff and families view this as an important part of our program's services. To strengthen this factor, we will share screening rates in quarterly staff meetings and spotlight work in this area on our agency website and family newsletter.

CQI Project Description:

Team Members:

Factor	Why the factor is important to sustainability	Activities to strengthen sustainability	Person(s) responsible
PERCEIVED VALUE			
MONITORING AND FEEDBACK			
LEADERSHIP			

Factor	Why the factor is important to sustainability	Activities to strengthen sustainability	Person(s) responsible
STAFF			
ORGANIZATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE			
ORGANIZATIONAL FIT			
PARTNERS			
SPREAD			