

Quality Improvement Corner: September 2020: Introducing Quality Improvement to New Staff

In this installment of Quality Improvement Corner, PHAB Accreditation Specialist April Harris, MPH, CHES, shares information about introducing quality improvement activities to new health department staff.

Think back to your first day on the job – bombarded with documents, signatures, and introductions. While it is an appropriate time for health departments to introduce the basics of their work environment, including a culture of quality improvement (QI), it can be an overwhelming time to absorb new information. It is important that health departments set the tone early for a new employee that quality improvement is more than a checkbox on a list of required trainings. Onboarding activities should be the starting point to many other opportunities to understand and get involved with QI.

Brittany Parker, Accreditation Coordinator of Franklin County Health Department (Kentucky), which achieved reaccreditation in 2019, says continuous QI training has been key to maintain a culture of improvement at FCHD. She stated, “Even in the midst of COVID-19, we’ve provided staff the opportunity to dive deeper in their QI knowledge through recorded trainings and other web-based activities. Additionally, with staff working from home and a little more time in front of their computers, we have jumped on the opportunity to assess the QI culture of the agency using NACCHO’s QI Self-Assessment tool. What better time to have a check point in our QI culture and emphasize improvement! Even though we provide a basic introduction to staff during their orientation period, we’ve found as we continue to build a strong QI culture, we must also progress with more opportunities for staff to learn and grow. Over the past couple years, we’ve worked to incorporate quality improvement with our community health improvement efforts, so it’s extremely important for all staff to understand and practice QI. As the health department shifted to COVID-19 response, mass drive-through testing has been our most recent QI project. Within an afternoon, we completed a rapid improvement process to a) decrease drive through time for the client as well as b) decrease exposure points to our staff.” [Click here](#) to view a QI storyboard of the example Brittany described.

For initial accreditation, PHAB Standards and Measures Version 1.5, Requirement 9.2.1 outlines the elements specific to a quality improvement plan, which includes the types of QI trainings available. This measure references new employee orientation, as well as other types of ongoing trainings that can help health departments continue their staff’s QI knowledge, such as advanced trainings for QI leads and regular communication of QI activities. PHAB also encourages that all staff understand how the health department’s key operational plans, such as performance management and health improvement plan, align with quality improvement.

Health departments need to find balance with quality improvement training, ranging from early introduction during onboarding to consistent QI training and other improvement activities. It is also important, as employees begin to feel more confident in their new role in the health department, for leadership to communicate the agency’s expectation of participating in QI efforts. Internally, PM/QI mentors can also assist as new staff become oriented with improvement efforts. Consider seeking out training resources with your regional public health training center, ASTHO, NACCHO, NIHB, NNPHI and PHF. Health departments may also consider working with other nearby health departments to bring in-person training opportunities while leveraging resources.