

MONTANA EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES BUREAU

STARS TO QUALITY

GUIDANCE ON CREATING AND USING A QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

A Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) is a roadmap that identifies your program's (a) criteria or areas for improvement, (b) program tasks or items for improvement that will be used to achieve goals, (c) costs and resources necessary to complete actions and strategies, and (d) a timeline for goal achievement. **We hope your QIP serves as a roadmap to higher program quality and better outcomes for children, families, and early childhood professionals.**

HOW TO GET STARTED

Quality improvement is a continuous and iterative cycle that consists of (1) identifying your hopes for your facility; (2) identifying specific criteria or areas for improvement; (3) determining specific tasks or items for improvement; (4) working the plan; and (5) reviewing and updating the plan. These steps are illustrated in Exhibit 1.

Step 1: Identifying Hopes. What do you hope for when you think about your practice? What improvements would you like to make? What are some ideas or practices that you've always wanted to try? Step 1 consists of writing down your hopes and dreams for your site. Here are some helpful questions¹:

- What things do I most appreciate about my program? How can I support these characteristics or features?
- In a "perfect world", what changes would I like to see happen within my program by this time next year?
- Why do I run my program the way that I do?
- Why did I choose a career in education?
- What has changed about what is known to be best for young children in the field of early care and education and/or youth development? Have I addressed these changes?
- What are the underlying causes for program issues? What can be changed to resolve these issues?
- In assessment reports and our program self-assessment, what areas are identified as program strengths?

Step 2: Identify Criteria or Areas for Improvement. The next step is to identify specific criteria or areas in which you would like to make improvements. Generally speaking, these will be grouped into seven domains:

¹ These and other items taken from BrightStars Quality Improvement Plan

- Education, Qualifications, & Training
- High Quality Supportive Environments
- Ratio & Group Size
- Family/Community Partnerships
- Leadership & Program Management
- Continuous Quality Improvement (items in which you may not have low “scores” but still want to make improvements)
- “Something I’ve Always Wanted to Try” (great ideas you’ve always wanted to try out)

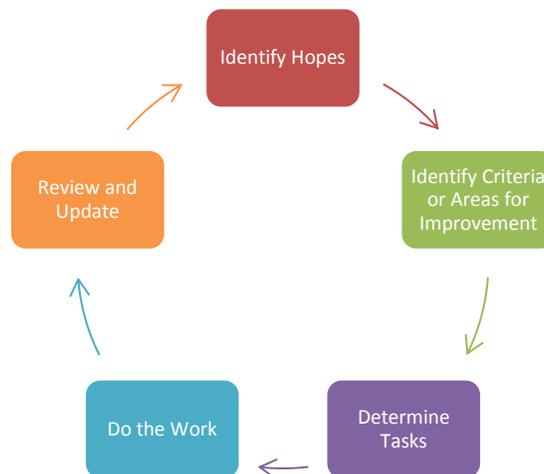
Conversations with your coach and other early childhood professionals or assessments such as the Environment Rating Scale, Program Administration Scale, or Business Administration Scale may be very helpful in identifying areas for improvement that will move you towards your hopes and dreams for your facility.

Step 3: Determine Tasks or Items for Improvement. Sometimes your areas for improvement still are “too big” or broad to really figure out what to do to make progress. Thus, step 3 urges you to identify the individual tasks or items that need attention in order to make progress.

Step 4: Do the Work. You might also call this “working the plan” or “implementing the plan” but in step 4, you complete each of the tasks you’ve identified in step 3.

Step 5: Review and Update. Take a breath. Step back and review your progress. Ask yourself “*What’s worked so far? What hasn’t worked? Have you achieved your goals? What are your new goals?*” You may find yourself annually reviewing and updating your plan. **Remember to always take time to celebrate your successes!**

Exhibit 1: The Quality Cycle



Adapted from BrightStars Quality Improvement Plan

MAKE YOUR PLAN SMART

It is helpful for items within a QIP to be as focused as possible. A helpful tip is to make the QIP tasks “SMART”:

S: specific and clearly stated. Your statements should reflect a concrete need or gap in services, rather than a vague idea about how you would like to improve your program. When writing your task statements, it may be helpful to ask *“If another reader reviews this plan or tries to implement this plan, will they know exactly what I intended and what steps to take to improve quality?”* Writing task statements begins by identifying the criteria or areas for improvement. In addition, good task statements are written with an understanding of why you believe a need for improvement exists. For example, if you have received low scores on assessments of your outdoor play area, it may be helpful to write down why you think those low scores occurred. Your coach may be able to help you think through these items and brainstorm what might be necessary to improve your scores.

M: measurable and based on data. How will you know if and when you have achieved the desired improvement? Good task statements are written in such a way that success can be accurately and precisely measured. With this in mind, it may be helpful to think about and write out the following statement: *“I know I am successful when....”*

A: attainable and realistic. Good QIPs contain items that are achievable, given your timetable and financial and human resources. Therefore, it is important to think through and itemize what your tasks may cost in terms of materials, resources, your and your staff’s time, and other cost-bearing items.

R: relevant to high quality and positive outcomes. Good QIPs are a roadmap to higher quality facilities, which in turn facilitate positive outcomes for children, families, and professional staff. It may be helpful to ask *“How will this improvement help the children and families I work with? How will this goal help me and my staff as professionals?”*

T: time-bound and timely. Good QIPs have items that can be achieved within a set time period. Some tasks may take longer than others, which is fine. However, each task should have a projected deadline.

Examples of SMART Task Statement:

Improve the quality of my outdoor learning environment by installing appropriate fencing and ensuring there are developmentally appropriate toys and equipment.

Improve teacher capacity for high quality socioemotional interactions by providing for professional development on the Pyramid Model.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

You may find the following individuals and resources helpful as you construct your plan:

- STARS to Quality coaches and fellow participants
- Early Childhood Service Bureau staff
- Early Childhood Project staff
- National Association for the Education of Young Children/National Association for Family Child Care
- Environment Rating Scale assessment scores
- Knowledge Base
- Program Administration Scale or Business Administration Scale assessment scores
- Pyramid Model
- Your ideas about quality and the things you've always wanted to try
- Professional development plans
- Educational course reading and materials



SAMPLE QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN



Montana STARS to Quality

Quality Improvement Plan

Program Name We Love Kids! Child Care

Date August 1, 2013

PV # 00000

Name of Person Completing Form Jane Kids

Total Classrooms 3

Age ranges of children

Infants (birth through 11 months)	1
Toddlers (12 through 23 months)	2
Two year olds (24 months through 35 months)	0
Three year olds (36 months through 47 months)	2
Preschooler/K (48 months -72 months)	6
School-age (6-12 years)	4

Total Number of Children Enrolled

Tools Used (check all that apply)

ECERS-R	<input type="checkbox"/>	PAS	<input type="checkbox"/>
ITERS-R	<input type="checkbox"/>	BAS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
FCCERS-R	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Professional Development Plan	<input type="checkbox"/>
Knowledge Base	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Coach feedback	<input type="checkbox"/>
Continuous Quality Improvement Item			<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (professional community, great idea, need, etc.): _____			
Reminder: ERS Age Ranges			
ITERS: birth through 2.5 years old (includes infants—birth through 11 months-- and toddlers—12 through 29 months) ECERS: 2 through 5 years old (includes preschoolers—30 months of age and older) FCCERS: birth through school age, up to 12 years of age)			

October 7, 2013

Areas of Strength

Use the matrix below to identify areas of strength at your site. Examples are provided for you in the first two rows of the matrix. It may be helpful to consider the following questions when completing the matrix; ***please note that these are suggestions for your consideration and not requirements.***

(1) Have I identified a strength in each of the five domains that contribute to STAR rating? The five domains are Education, Qualifications, & Training; High Quality Supportive Environments; Ratio & Group Size; Family/Community Partnerships; and Leadership & Program Management.

(2) What criteria am I using to identify something as a strength? For example, are you using relatively high scores on an assessment such as the Program Administration Scale? Are you using coach or peer feedback? Are you using completion of STARS criteria or checklist items?

Use as many rows as necessary

Source of Information (ERS, PAS, BAS, PDP, Knowledge Base, Self-Assessment, coach feedback, STARS criteria or checklist items, etc.)	Scale or Item Score (if applicable; enter N/A if not applicable)	Strength:	I can maintain this strength by:
FCCERS-R	Indoor space	There is great natural light and easy-to-clean surfaces, which allow for easy clean-up and maintenance of area.	Keeping the area maintained and repaired as needed.
FCCERS-R	Greeting/ Departing	We always greet the children and parents so we know how the child's night and morning were.	Continue to follow our routine.
FCCERS-R	Use of books	We have many books and love to read and encourage reading.	Continue to use and purchase books
FCCERS-R	Science, Math, & Art	Very high score in these areas and are used frequently throughout the entire day and encouraged with open-ended questions to encourage children's interest.	Maintain the interest in these areas by modeling interest
BAS	Risk Management	We have a thorough risk management plan.	Keep plan updated as needed

Areas for Improvement

Use the matrix below to identify action steps that will improve your site's quality and quality practices. Examples are provided for you in the first two rows of the matrix. It may be helpful to consider the following questions when completing the matrix; ***please note that these are suggestions for your consideration and not requirements.***

- (1) Do I or should I have action steps in each of the five domains that contribute to STAR rating?** The five domains are Education, Qualifications, & Training; High Quality Supportive Environments; Ratio & Group Size; Family/Community Partnerships; and Leadership & Program Management.
- (2) Which areas of improvement and specific tasks are a priority for my site at the current time? Why?**
- (3) Am I writing tasks or items for improvement in such a way that I can easily determine whether or not I have achieved success?** For example, the sample task item provided in the first row of the matrix, below, can easily be observed—the program schedule either will be or will not be posted on each classroom wall. Sample task items such as “*get teachers trained*” or “*improve the driveway*” are less easily assessed. To make the success of these items more assessable, you might consider rephrasing these items as “*enroll, provide release time, and collect completion certificates from all teachers for the Safe Sleep [or other] training*” or “*re-pave the driveway*”.
- (4) Do I have a current and correct cost for the task? Do I have tasks that do not cost anything?** The information from this plan may be used to inform your budget. Therefore, it is very important to have current and correct costs for each item that bears a cost—including the costs of substitute hours and director or owner time in completing the tasks. This being said, there are many tasks that may have little to no cost, such as the example provided in the first row of the matrix, below.
- (5) Do I or will I need help from my coach on this item?** You may or may not need or benefit from a coach consultation on each action item. You also may be unsure as to whether you need or can benefit from a consultation. If you check “Yes” or “Unsure” for an item, it may be helpful to follow-up with your coach.

Note: we encourage providers to include Continuous Quality Improvement items—items on which you already may be performing well (i.e., do not have a low score) but still are hoping to make improvements. Also, please consider including items that are things you've always wanted to try—we always are looking for new and great ideas!

Use as many rows as necessary

STARS to Quality Domain ² (EQT, HQSE, RGS, FCP, LPM)	STARS Criteria or Areas of Improvement (cite scale or item score, if applicable) Enter CQI or SWT if this is an item or area without a score, without a low score, or something you've always wanted to try	Specific Task or Item for Improvement (cite specific guideline, requirement, or indicator, as applicable)	Estimated Cost (enter N/A if not applicable or if there is no cost associated with the improvement)	Budget Category (enter the number of the budget category that is the best match; see list at the end of this document)	Estimated Completion Date	Person(s) Responsible and Specific Actions	Will you or do you want to consult with your coach on this action item?	Additional Resources Needed (enter N/A if not applicable or if no additional resources are necessary)
LPM FCP	Marketing & Public Relations	Improve marketing by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating a scrapbook or photo album of the facility • Displaying album at sign-in station • Making copies available for families to purchase 	\$70 for book and printing	5 <i>(printing costs)</i>	Nov. 2013	Jane Kids	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Unsure	
FCP	Family Involvement	Increase family involvement by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hosting family nights to encourage family involvement • Trying to have one family night every quarter 	N/A; we will ask families to bring food, have a "potluck"	N/A <i>(no costs identified)</i>	December 2013	Jane and Jill Kids	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unsure	
HQSE	Safety Practices	Improve outdoor safety by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Installing child-friendly, developmentally appropriate, approved fencing in outdoor space 	\$1,205	3 <i>(supplies)</i>	December 2013	Jane and Jill	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Unsure	Internet
HQSE	Music	Encourage more music involvement by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchasing 2 sets of musical instruments 	\$100 for supplies	3 <i>(supplies)</i>	December 2013	Jane and Jill	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Unsure	Internet

² EDT= Education, Qualifications, & Training; HQSE = High Quality Supportive Environments; RGS = Ratio & Group Size; FCP = Family/Community Partnerships; LPM = Leadership & Program Management; CQI = Continuous Quality Improvement; SWT = "Something I've Always Wanted to Try"

Sample Budget

Remember, your QIP should link to the budget you submit to ECSB. The sample below shows how the items presented in the QIP (above) are presented in the budget spreadsheet.

STARS To Quality Budget Request

Form Revised 4/3/2013

Director Name Jane Kids
PV# 00000
Business Name We Love Kids Child Care
Address Anywhere, MT
Fiscal Agent Name and Phone same 555 555 55555
 (For Centers)
Date range of budget October-December 2013

(12 months from Month/year to Month/year)

Line Item Desc.	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total Budget
Personnel Expense					
Dues, Subscriptions, Professional Fees					
Supplies				\$1,305 (photo album, music supplies, and fencing)	\$1,305
Insurance					
Operations (postage, printing, office supplies, computers)				\$70 (photo album printing costs)	\$70
Travel					
Total				\$1,375	\$1,375

October 7, 2013

BUDGET CATEGORIES

Sites are required to have this column identified in their Quality Improvement Plans. Failure to identify a budget category will lead to a denial of the budget; providers will be ineligible to re-apply for a STAR level until the following quarter.

If your specific task or item for improvement best matches....	Then enter this number in the Budget Category
Personnel Expense	1
Dues, Subscriptions, Professional Fees	2
Supplies	3
Insurance	4
Operations (postage, printing, office supplies, computers)	5
Travel	6