QI in CITY & HACKNEY FACTSHEET 4 - The project team - *Jen Taylor-Watt, Improvement Advisor*

The project team is the core of QI projects. It should involve about 4—6 people, who meet regularly to take forwards the project.

Frequency of meetings

As we've discussed above, QI involves using a specific methodology, which includes developing a deep understanding of your problem, developing theories and testing those theories through rapid learning cycles called PDSAs. It also involves continuous measurement to know if you're seeing improvement. You need to be getting together with a core group of people to be undertaking these activities. If you don't you won't be doing a QI project, but will just be making changes without testing.

On average QI project teams meet once every 2 weeks for an hour, however some teams they prefer to meet every week for 30-45 minutes or that they need longer sessions.

Project team membership and attendance at meetings

We recommend 4-6 people so you have enough to get multiple perspectives, but not too many to make the meetings hard to schedule and/or manage.

Sometimes it can obviously be hard for people to make regular meetings. For example, this can be really difficult on inpatient wards, where a lot of staff work shifts. Do your best, but don't feel too much pressure if some members can only make every 2nd or 3rd meeting. As long as they have a good basic knowledge of the project, you can catch them up so they can still participate.

You might find it works for you to have, say a group of 8 people involved in the project, although you expect 4-6 to come each time. Even if only 2 people can make it, think carefully before cancelling. Projects generally lose momentum if they aren't meeting regularly.

Project Leads should really try to prioritise QI team meetings. Although sometimes it's hard to feel it is a priority compared with operational pressures, projects will fall apart without consistent leadership and we will miss the chance to achieve the kind of major long term changes that are possible. If you're feeling constant pressure to prioritise other things, talk to your sponsor to help you. It can also be a good idea to think about naming a formal deputy from the project team to take on your responsibilities and run things if you can't be there. This continuity of leadership should not fall on the QI coach or Improvement Advisor, as they are a support function and do not have capacity to provide the core leadership of the project.

Who should make up a project team?

Project teams need to have representation from all the key groups that have a stake or role in the issue you are trying to improve. Most projects therefore need to ensure representation across the MDT. For example, in a Community Mental Health Team, that would likely include a Care Coordinator, an administrator, a doctor and perhaps a psychologist and/or an OT. Very importantly, in most cases project teams should also identify a service user and/or carer to join their project team.

Connecting with the broader team

QI projects, of course, impact the whole service involved, so it's really important that the work of the core project team remains connected with the whole team and doesn't become something that is done in isolation. It is important people feel involved and engaged in things that affect the work they do.

Quite soon, successful tests you've undertaken small-scale within the project team will need to be implemented and made business as usual across the whole team. This is a lot easier if people feel sighted and involved in the work of the project at all stages.

To achieve this, discuss the project regularly at your whole team meetings to keep people updated and to get feedback on key questions. "Nominal Group Technique" using post-its and/or a simple voting system, are really easy ways to get the feedback from groups of people really quickly (e.g. on which drivers feel the most important, which change ideas should we prioritise for testing, etc).

We recommend having the QI project as a standing item on your whole team meeting agenda for this purpose – of course you will only be able to spare perhaps 10 minutes for this, but we have successfully got feedback from the QI Forum using post-its in under 5 minutes! Another reason to do this is that your project strategy (e.g. understanding of drivers, change ideas to start with, etc) is likely to be successful more quickly if you get a broader set of perspectives from people who have experience in the issue.

Some top tips on how to run effective project team meetings

Unfortunately we've all sat in meetings that have felt like a poor use of time, which go around and around in circles.

Here are some tops tips based on our first 3 years of QI projects meetings for how to get the most of your meetings and ensure they are as effective and efficient as possible, many of which will be obvious to you:

- **Schedule all meetings on a recurring basis** and send diary invites if people use Outlook diaries. Invite your QI coach and QI sponsor to these meetings. Your QI coach will attend most, particularly at the beginning. It's good for your sponsor to know when they are so they can drop in periodically.
- **Have an agenda**: Project leads should preferably think about and set an agenda in advance or, failing that, set it at the beginning of the meeting with the team. You may find it useful to have a standing agenda, to ensure the meetings are focused on the key elements of QI methodology that you should be working through together as a team: i.e. 1. Understanding the problem, 2. Data, 3. PDSAs, 4. Implementation/Quality Control.
- **Take actions**, agree and allocate these to members of the team and review these every meeting.
- **Do as much as you can within the meeting itself**: If you can possibly have access to a laptop or computer, type actions and PDSAs as you go and email them immediately, if you can, to team members (you can even type into an email if possible).
- **Be mindful of Service Users, Carers & Patient Liaison Workers** who attend meetings, ensuring they are well supported. Let them know with good notice if you have to cancel meetings, bearing in mind they may not have easy access to emails.