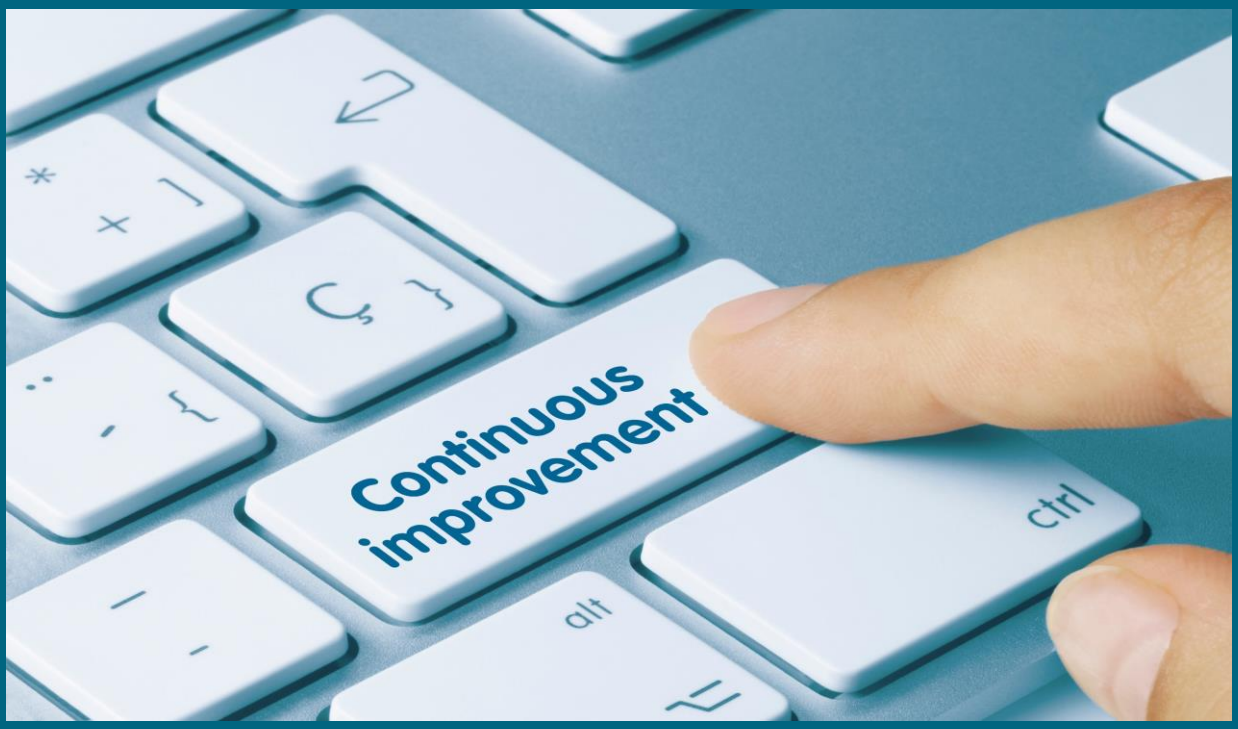

The Office of Innovation, Alignment, and Accountability

DCYF QUALITY ASSURANCE & CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT (QA/CQI) FRAMEWORK

Washington State Department of CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

DCYF does not discriminate and provides equal access to its programs and services for all persons without regard to race, color, gender, religion, creed, marital status, national origin, sexual orientation, age, veteran's status, or presence of any physical, sensory, or mental disability.

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July 25, 2023 | Office of Innovation, Alignment, and Accountability (OIAA)
Approved for distribution by Vickie Ybarra, OIAA Director

Washington State Department of
CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

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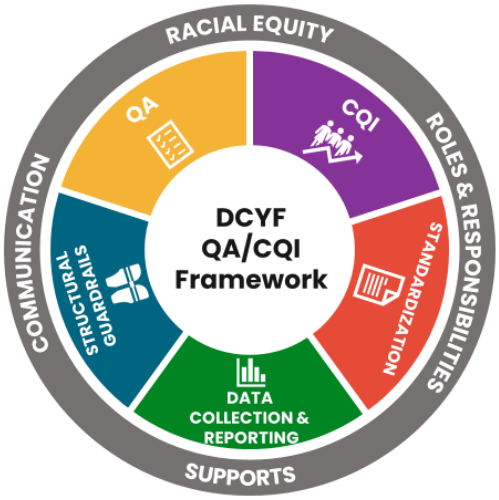
Executive Summary

The Washington State Legislature and governor established DCYF in 2018, bringing together three large child and family serving agencies: Children's Administration, Department of Early Learning, and Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration. Prior to the creation of DCYF, each of these agencies of origin had their own quality assurance (QA) and continuous quality improvement (CQI) practices, many of which continue to be practiced today. House Bill 1661[1], the agency's founding legislation, establishes a clear intent for DCYF to identify and address systemic issues and substantially improve outcomes for children, youth, and families at scale. In 2020, agency leadership recognized that to fully realize the vision and intent of the agency, DCYF needs to establish an agency-wide QA/CQI framework that aligns the improvement work being done within divisions, regions, and administrations.[2]

To that end, in late 2020 DCYF leadership directed the Office of Innovation, Alignment, and Accountability (OIAA) to assess QA/CQI coordination, capacity, and oversight across the agency. Based on the assessment, DCYF leadership approved a series of recommendations in June 2021 and the OIAA published the 2022 OIAA Strengthening Agency-wide Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement report as a summary of the assessment and recommendations. This framework addresses the following approved recommendations:

- Develop an agency-wide QA/CQI framework and standards;
- Institute structural guardrails for programmatically embedded QA/CQI practitioner functions;
- Establish a minimum threshold of QA/CQI resources for service delivery programs; and
- Fully integrate QA/CQI data collection and reporting functions.



The agency-wide framework presented in this report defines quality assurance as activities to ensure quality requirements are fulfilled and continuous quality improvement as activities to improve practice and performance. The framework also recognizes that a primary function of QA/CQI is to address systems that continue to support structural racism and to identify and scale up processes and programs that produce improved outcomes for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities.

[1] *Washington State House Bill 1661*

[2] Divisions, regions and administrations refers to the service lines that provide direct services to children, youth, and families, including contracted services. For the remainder of this report, these service lines will be referred to as divisions.

The agency-wide quality assurance and continuous quality improvement (QA/CQI) framework presented in this document brings together multiple components to produce high-level quality improvement, including the creation of minimum standards, identifying roles and responsibilities, and communication related to QA/CQI. The framework establishes minimum standards for data collection and reporting, quality assurance, continuous quality improvement, and documentation of practices, referred to as a QA/CQI manual that will serve as a user guide for program staff. Additionally, the document outlines the development of clear roles and responsibilities and communication related to QA/CQI in DCYF.

Assessment Process and Findings

Project Overview

In September 2022, OIAA formed a cross-functional advisory committee of DCYF staff to guide the development of the agency-wide QA/CQI framework. The OIAA QA/CQI staff structured the enterprise framework to include QA/CQI roles and responsibilities, minimum standards, guardrails, and supports. Additional partner engagement included interviews with leadership teams of each division and discussions with QA/CQI practitioners and staff throughout the agency. OIAA relied on the 2022 OIAA Strengthening Agency-wide Quality Assurance and Continuous Quality Improvement report and supporting documents, advisory expertise, interview results, and information gathered from literature reviews and interviews with other state agencies and government child serving agencies across the nation throughout the process.

Interview Results

A critical step in the development of the framework was to obtain feedback from division leadership, QA/CQI practitioners, and additional DCYF staff at three junctions: predevelopment, after the development of a first iteration of the framework, and after the development of a second iteration of the framework. In total, 17 staff feedback engagements occurred and informed the development of DCYF's QA/CQI framework. Another important step was to examine other government agencies' QA/CQI frameworks, both within Washington state and nationally. This examination expanded to meeting with the following agencies to discuss their QA/CQI structure:

- Nevada Department of Child & Family Services
- New Jersey Department of Children & Families, Office of Quality
- Utah Department of Child & Family Services
- Washington Department of Social & Health Services, Division of Child Support
- Wisconsin Division of Management Services, Bureau of Performance Management

Key Findings

Equity: A reoccurring theme from QA/CQI staff and program leadership was the need to elevate equity within QA/CQI. Specifically, QA/CQI practitioners requested tools and access to trainings to support growth in this area.

Structure and Standards: QA/CQI staff and program leadership communicated that they desire a formalized structure for QA/CQI, as well as trainings and tools to support their work. Additionally, division leadership and staff were clear that they did not want an overly prescriptive framework due to the diversity in programing, state and federal requirements, and QA/CQI structures that exist.

Prioritization: While QA/CQI is important to division leadership and practitioners, they noted that competing priorities and a lack of resources are barriers. This is magnified for programs with little to no QA/CQI resources and the functions of QA/CQI practitioners fall to program managers. Additionally, QA/CQI staff reported that other assigned duties can take up to 50% of their workload, decreasing their ability to complete QA/CQI functions.

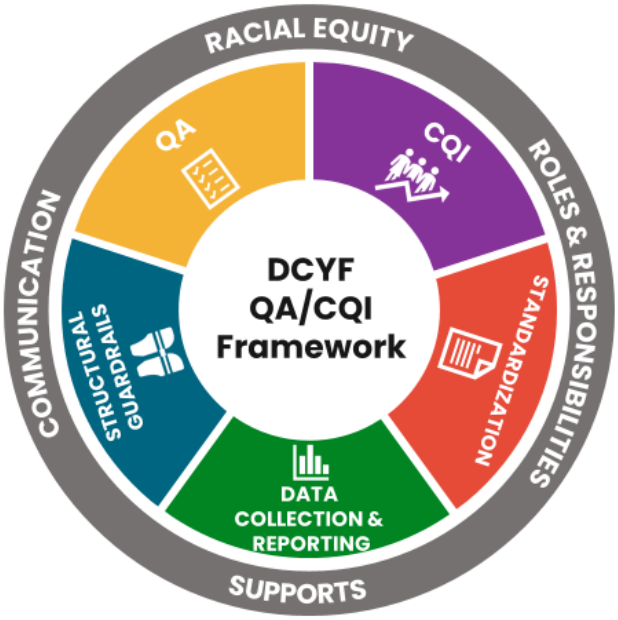
Data Support and Integration: A barrier identified in every meeting with staff was a lack of data support and integration. Specifically, this refers to some programs not having easy or regular access to data impacting practice, resulting in an inability to make data-informed decisions. This was also identified in the 2020 QA/CQI assessment conducted by OIAA. Staff collect a lot of data about families and contracted services but some QA/CQI staff perceive that current data systems do not support the utilization of this information in a timely way across all services/programs. Additionally, there is variation in staff data literacy.

Communication: A theme from the QA/CQI practitioner survey conducted in 2020 and framework predevelopment interviews was that QA/CQI staff would like to know how their efforts support achieving the strategic priorities of DCYF.

Structure: A primary finding from the interviews with the government agencies listed above was that while each department/division had a QA/CQI structure, there was no formalized enterprise QA/CQI structure present.

DCYF Quality Assurance & Continuous Quality Improvement (QA/CQI) Framework

The DCYF QA/CQI Framework includes the following components:



Minimum Standards for Data Collection and Reporting, Quality Assurance (QA), Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI), Standardization, and Structural Guardrails, which are represented in the inner circle.

Supporting Structures, including Racial Equity, Roles and Responsibilities, Communication, and DCYF Staff Supports, which are represented in the outer circle.

Minimum Standards

Data collection and reporting, quality assurance, and continuous quality improvement are interrelated and build upon each other to reach maximum client outcomes.

Data Collection and Reporting

Activities related to data collection, including data quality assurance, for the purposes of QA/CQI reporting.

The minimum standards for data collection and reporting are:

- Data collection meets needs for state, federal, and agency reporting requirements, including demographic information.
- Programs prioritize QA/CQI data indicators to be reported based on DCYF strategic priorities, programmatic requirements, and division leadership metrics, as well as consideration of available data collection resources.
- Programs document data collection plans that include data quality assurance.
- Data reporting (whether within the transactional system or external to the transactional system) allows for monitoring of identified priority QA/CQI measures, patterns, and trends.

- QA/CQI practitioners, and program leaders, review data at leverage points, including opportunities to align practice changes based on program theories of change.
- QA/CQI data reports are accessible to staff at multiple levels, including direct service staff, QA/CQI staff, program supervisors, management, and division leadership.
- Transactional data systems are built and maintained in a way that support effective data collection, data quality, and reporting.
- Demographic information, except where explicitly mandated by state or federal reporting requirements, will follow DCYF's WSRDAC/M data collection and reporting standards.[3]
- For contracted client service programs with a Data Management System (DMS), an average of 1.0 FTE for approximately every $22M in program dollars is devoted to program staff to support data entry and front-line program DMS problem solving with providers and users.

Racial Equity in Practice: Following DCYF's WSRDAC/M data collection and reporting standards allows DCYF to disaggregate data and accurately monitor and report on racial disproportionality across DCYF programs and divisions. Quality data is the foundation of being able to identify services and programs that produce positive outcomes for marginalized and oppressed communities.

Quality Assurance

Activities to ensure quality requirements are fulfilled.

The minimum standards for quality assurance are:

- Adhere to relevant federal, state, legal, and agency requirements and timelines.
- QA/CQI practitioners are trained in QA processes.
- Reporting is done in collaboration between program staff and QA/CQI practitioners.
- QA measures and results are shared with program staff at multiple levels and individually with frontline staff.

[3] Cummings, K., Graham, J. C., Veele, S., & Ybarra, V. (2021, pg. 42-43). Using Data in DCYF to Advance Racial Equity. *Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families – Office of Innovation, Alignment, and Accountability.*

Racial Equity in Practice: Children, youth and families help determine if the metrics measured are capturing their experiences. Collaboration between program staff, QA/CQI practitioners, and children, youth, and families allow for conversations regarding whether the quality assurance and data metrics being measured are producing the anticipated outcomes and impacting the strategic priorities.

Data without context and stories cannot produce a complete picture.

Continuous Quality Improvement

Activities to improve practice and performance.

The minimum standards for continuous quality improvement are:

- QA/CQI practitioners are trained in CQI processes that advance equity by prioritizing CQI activities that reduce disproportionality and incorporate liberatory, human, or healing design principles.
- QA/CQI projects align with and are prioritized based on DCYF strategic priorities, program requirements and division metrics.
- Program leadership regularly highlights and recognizes CQI activities that reduce waste, inefficiencies, and/or improve outcomes.
- Programs solicit and incorporate partner feedback in the development of CQI plans/activities.
- Programs follow up with partners. The follow up informs them of the developed CQI plans/activities and how their feedback was utilized.
- Findings and recommendations from external review and monitoring processes are integrated into CQI plans and activities.
- For contracted client service programs, QA/CQI roles and responsibilities are specified in contracts.
- For both direct provided and contracted client service programs, 1.0 QA/CQI FTE/equivalent to every $3.3-3.8M in program dollars is the average QA/CQI resources for new and existing service delivery programs.
- Utilize a CQI Feedback Loop to fidelity.

CQI Feedback Loop

There are many feedback loops that can be used in continuous quality improvement. Feedback loops need to meet the following criteria:

- Identify an area of improvement, ideally using data disaggregated by race, ethnicity, language or other marginalized identities.
- Develop and implement data-informed improvement plans.
- Monitor implementation of improvement plans to determine effectiveness.
- The process is continuous
  - Use data collected from implementation monitoring to continue the cycle
- Standardize the changes made during the improvement process. Improvements should be standardized across work sites and should be sustained over time.

On the next page is a list of common feedback loops currently being used across DCYF. If programs do not have established feedback loops, programs should consider adopting one of these. If these feedback loops do not meet program needs, please reach out to the OIAA QA/CQI team for consultation. Figure 1 demonstrates how programs using different feedback loops can align their work when partnering on projects.

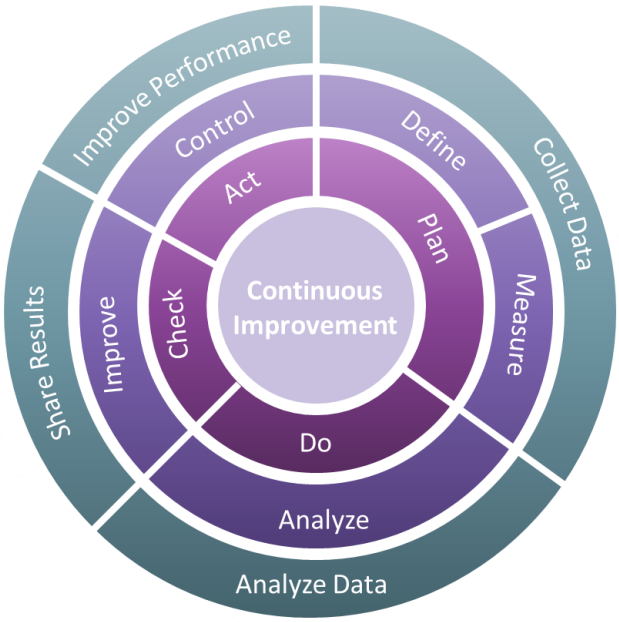


Figure 1: Integrating Multiple Disciplines adapted from Jennings & Oestreich (2021) [4]

Racial Equity in Practice: CQI can be one important tool to eliminate racial disproportionalities and disparities. CQI provides a structure to create successful improvement plans and identify opportunities to improve services to best serve marginalized and oppressed populations. With that, all CQI plans need to include racial equity data and questions. Use the tools listed in the Racial Equity section as a resource.

[4] Jennings, R., Oestreich, J. (2021, November 4). Washington State Government Lean Transformation Conference [Conference presentation]. 2021 Washington State Government Lean Transformation Conference, virtual.

Plan, Do, Check, Act (PDCA)

Also known as PDSA (Plan, Do, Study, Act), the Deming or Shewhart cycle, PDCA stands for Plan, Do, Check, Act. Additionally, "A" can also represent Adjust. It has been incorporated into many quality improvement methods, including Lean, Lean Six Sigma, and ISO 9011.

Plan: define the problem, goals, deliverables, responsibilities, and metrics
Do: implement changes
Check: check the effects of implementation
Act: standardize effective actions and make necessary adjustments by repeating the cycle

Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve, Control (DMAIC)

DMAIC is an essential component to Six Sigma and Lean Six Sigma, two types of CQI methodologies. DMAIC stands for: define, measure, analyze, improve, and control.

Define: define the problem with the process
Measure: measure the process to identify current state
Analyze: analyze and determine the root causes of the defects
Improve: improve the process by eliminating the defects
Control: control the improved process to avoid backsliding

Performance Based Contracting

For contracted client service programs- After working collaboratively with contractors, and partners to identify and incorporate PBC metrics into contracts, DCYF contract groups engage in the following activities to support continuous improvement: collect data, analyze data, share results, and improve performance.

Collect Data: collect qualitative and quantitative data from contractors
Analyze Data: analyze and partner with partners to identify themes, areas that require further inquiry, and ensure understanding of data
Share Results: results are shared with contractors and publicly reported annually
Improve Performance: celebrate successes and develop improvement strategies with contractors, including providing resources to support improvement strategies

Racial Equity in Practice: High quality feedback loops bring the voices of those closest to the problem or area needing improvement to the decision-making table. This can change the inherent power dynamics, resulting in more equitable and impactful quality improvement activities.

Standardization

Activities to formalize and document processes and best practices across a program, division, or agency.

Quality systems rely on documented practice expectations and processes. Programs maintain documentation on data collection and reporting, quality assurance, and continuous quality improvement practices. This will serve as the QA/CQI manual for programs. For programs without a current manual, OIAA QA/CQI staff will work with program staff to collaboratively create an initial manual to capture existing documentation and processes and to identify and address any gaps. The manual will include:

- CQI model and/or methodologies used.
- Programmatic theory of change and/or desired program outcomes.
- Outline of all major CQI activities.
- Defined roles and responsibilities.
- Identification of internal and external partners and how they are involved in the CQI process.
- Outline of how information flows between direct service staff and those implementing/ coordinating CQI process to ensure that staff at all levels receive information on CQI evidence and findings.
- Process for direct service staff and their supervisors to have timely access to information they need to implement CQI plans.
- Process for timely delivery of data from direct service staff to staff coordinating CQI processes.
- Identification of core areas of QA/CQI being measured and the purpose/goal.
    - Includes connection to relevant state and federal or other governing requirements and policies.
- Definition of measurement practices, including:
    - Data collection and analysis methods;
    - Measurement process; and
    - Applicable timeframes.

Equity in Practice: The development of a CQI manual allows all staff to understand their role in the CQI process, rather than relying on a few people within programs to share that vision and understanding, thus doing away with the need for information gatekeepers. It also allows staff and programs to keep themselves and each other accountable to the responsibilities and processes outlined in the CQI manuals.

Structural Guardrails

System of checks and balances to minimize the risk of programmatically embedded QA/CQI functions.

The 2022 OIAA Strengthening Agency wide Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement report notes that in DCYF most QA/CQI functions are performed by staff and practitioners embedded within the programs they support. There are many benefits to this structure, but agency leadership recognizes that having QA/CQI staff and program staff in the same reporting structure poses a risk for minimizing problems. As such, a system of checks and balances, or guardrails, are necessary, to minimize and mitigate this risk.

Examples of current guardrails are the expectation that staff do not conduct quality assurance on their own work and metrics related to strategic priorities and state and federal requirements are publicly reported. Additionally, DCYF leadership regularly monitors program, division, and agency performance. Following the 2022 QA/CQI assessment, subsequent structural guardrails were developed, including development of centralized OIAA QA/CQI supports.

Additional guardrails include:

- Review of division/programmatic QA/CQI structure and functions by the OIAA QA/CQI staff.
- Ongoing professional development outside of program lines including training, Community of Practice, and peer reviews.
- Integration of QA/CQI data collection and reporting functions.
- Oversight of DCYF strategic priorities.

Racial Equity in Practice: Public reporting provides transparency between DCYF and the public. It serves as a mechanism by which the public, partners, communities, and policymakers can hold DCYF accountable to the strategic priorities, including the first priority of "eliminating racial disparities and disproportionalities and advance racial equity."

Supporting Structures

In addition to establishing minimum standards, DCYF has identified four key supporting structures that will enable DCYF's client-serving divisions to successfully implement the minimum standards, including Racial Equity, Roles and Responsibilities, DCYF Staff Supports, and Communication.

Racial Equity

One strategic priority for DCYF is to eliminate racial disproportionalities and advance racial equity.[5] DCYF recognizes that a white supremacy mindset is perpetuated when elements of this system are not named or actively undone.[6] The use of healing, human, and liberatory design are necessary to truly understand the root cause of racial disproportionalities and disparities and co-create solutions with the people most impacted by the problem, ensuring their true needs are the focal point. If practice, system, and structural improvements are not reducing disproportionality and disparities, CQI is one tool that can be used to inquire about why and what more can be done. A white supremacist mindset creates assumptions and blind spots in CQI plans and activities. DCYF needs to develop systems and supports to regularly solicit and incorporate partner feedback representative of the population. Information used to identify QA/CQI projects should be both quantitative and qualitative data. Strategies and programs chosen to address disproportionalities and disparities should be powerful enough and resourced adequately to accomplish their intended outcomes. Figure 2 below demonstrates the integration of equity and QA/CQI by aligning the processes of industry standard feedback loops with an equity feedback loop.

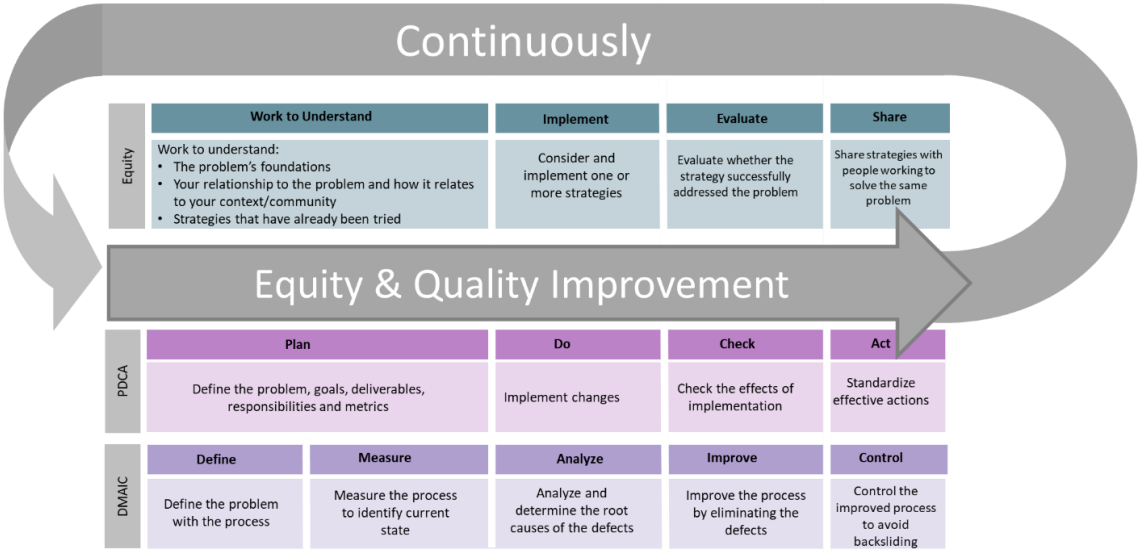


Figure 2: Integrating Multiple Disciplines adapted from Jennings & Oestreich (2021) and Hughes-Hassell, Rawson, & Hirsh (2019) [7,8]

[5] Washington Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF). (2021, pg. 1). DCYF Strategic Priorities 2021-2026. *Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families*.

[6] Washington Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF). (2020, pg. 3). Racial Equity and Social Justice Framework. *Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families*.

[7] Jennings, R., Oestreich, J. (2021, November 4). Washington State Government Lean Transformation Conference [Conference presentation]. 2021 Washington State Government Lean Transformation Conference, virtual.

[8] Hughes-Hassell, S., Rawson, C. H., & Hirsh, K. (2019). Project READY: Reimagining equity and access to diverse youth [online curriculum].

Racial Equity Tools

The tools below are intended to support DCYF staff and should be used in conjunction with continuing development of a theory of change that is specific to the racial disproportionalities and disparities present in programs and divisions/regions.

Racial Equity Toolkit- The Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice has created a Racial Equity Toolkit to provide a structure for considerations of racial equity when making decisions around policies, practices, and programs.

OIAA Equity Resources- The Office of Innovation, Alignment, and Accountability maintains an intranet page to serve as a resource for data and equity products that support the agency priority to "eliminate racial disproportionalities and advance racial equity." Some of these resources include research and evaluation to identify best practices, opportunities for improvement within programs, and opportunities for systemic and/or structural improvements across programs, agencies, or policy to reduce/eliminate disproportionalities and disparities.

Healing Centered Design- This design approach is intended to center healing necessary due to trauma, with a recognition that trauma expands beyond adverse childhood experiences (ACES) to include historical trauma and trauma caused by ongoing racism.

Human Centered Design- This design approach focuses on designing solutions and improvements with people so that their true needs are the focal point.

Liberatory Design- This is a design approach intended to address equity challenges and change efforts in complex systems. The approach can be used as a design model and as a set of equity leadership habits.

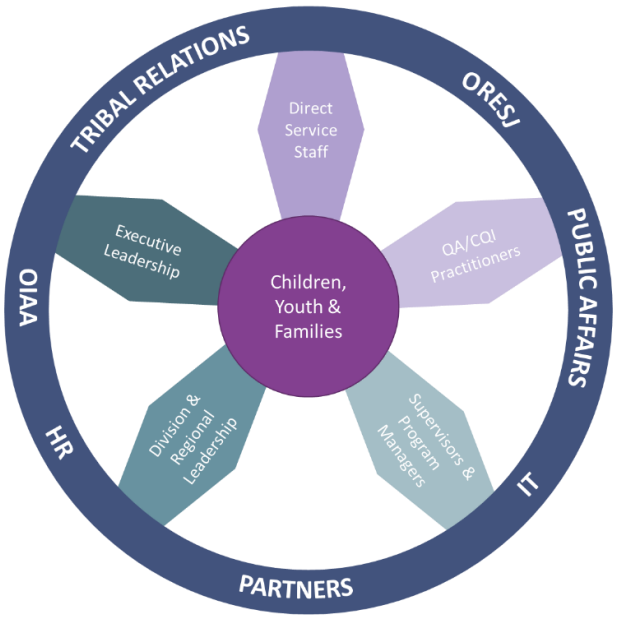


Figure 3: QA/CQI Roles & Responsibilities

Roles and Responsibilities

Continuous quality improvement is not the responsibility of just one person, unit, or division. ***CQI is the responsibility of all staff within DCYF.*** Figure 3 highlights the roles and responsibilities of staff across DCYF, with the surrounding circle representing the departments and offices within DCYF that support programs. The roles and responsibilities presented in this section represent the ideal state. With the recognition that not all programs are structured in the same fashion, OIAA QA/CQI staff will work with programs to develop a clear understanding of how responsibilities fall within their role structure.

Children, Youth & Families

Children, youth, and their families play an integral role in the CQI process. Their voice speaks to the experience and effectiveness of DCYF services. While the participation of children, youth and families is voluntary, DCYF staff have used engagement best practices and (where allowable) tools to reimburse them for their time. The Office of Public Affairs is a resource in the utilization of these tools and the development of a partner engagement plan. If children, youth, and families choose to participate in DCYF's QA/CQI efforts, their responsibilities may include:

- Serve as subject matter experts on their needs.
- Elevate lived experience.
- Participate in identification, design, and implementation of CQI processes and procedures.
- Recommend areas for practice and resource allocation to support QA/CQI.

Direct Services - DCYF Staff and Contractors

Direct service staff and contractors are the people working and interacting with children, youth, and families daily. The changes they make in their practice through continuous quality improvement activities directly impact the experience and outcomes of families. Their responsibilities include:

- Participate in identification, design, and implementation of continuous quality improvement processes and procedures.
- Implement improvement strategies.
- Share progress on implementation of improvement strategies.
- Recommend areas for practice and resource allocation to support QA/CQI.
- Data collection occurs regularly (where applicable).

QA/CQI Practitioners

QA/CQI Practitioners assist in ensuring compliance with program fidelity standards (if applicable), agency, state, and federal requirements, and provide education and guidance in quality management measures for the agency. They hold expertise in the CQI process and guide staff through the process as programs are developing their CQI plans to incrementally improve their practice. Their responsibilities include:

- Plan and conduct reviews to evaluate practices and standards.
- Identify trends in data about practice and make recommendations and proposals regarding practice improvement.
- Collaborate with program management and direct service staff to identify, design, implement, and assess continuous quality improvement processes and procedures.

Supervisors and Program Managers

Supervisors and program managers support and help build staff skills while monitoring the effectiveness of services and programs. Staff look to them for leadership and guidance in their daily work. Their responsibilities include:

- Ensure prioritization and communicate importance of quality improvement strategies.
- Facilitate alignment of CQI priorities with programmatic theories of change and/or desired program outcomes.
- Engage the field and systems leaders in developing improvement strategies.
- Facilitate implementation of identified improvement strategies.
- Monitor strategy implementation and ongoing performance on key practices and indicators.
- Initiate requests for analysis of program performance issues.
- Participate in data analysis reviews and interpretation of program data.
- Oversee data quality.

Division/Regional Leadership

Division/regional leadership guide the work of their divisions and regions. They determine strategies to reach goals and set priorities within their division/region. Their responsibilities include:

- Prioritize and communicate the importance/value of continuous quality improvement.
- Ensure CQI priorities are aligned with programmatic theories of change and/or desired program outcomes.
- Initiate requests for analysis of performance issues within division/region.
- Make data informed division/regional decisions.
- Remove barriers to CQI within the division/region.
- Identify and develop measures and benchmarks for division/region, in alignment with programmatic theories of change and/or desired program outcomes.
- Facilitate alignment of division, region, and program quality improvement activities with agency strategic priorities and leadership metrics.
- Invest in professional development of Supervisors and Program Leadership so that they can fulfill their QA/CQI responsibilities.
- Participate in data analysis reviews and interpretation of division data.

Executive Leadership

Executive leadership holds the strategic and operational focus of DCYF, being accountable to internal and external partners. They serve as models for other staff in all positions throughout agency. Their responsibilities include:

- Facilitate resource allocation.
- Approve and communicate agency-wide priorities.
- Make data informed agency decisions.
- Remove barriers to CQI including allocation and adjustment of resources to advance equity and priorities developed in partnership with those we serve.
- Initiate requests for analysis of agency performance issues.
- Identify and develop measures and benchmarks, in alignment with agency strategic plans, external requirements, and state statute.
- Participate in data analysis reviews and interpretation of agency data.
- Invest in professional development of Supervisors and Program Managers so that they can fulfill their QA/CQI responsibilities.
- Approve changes to programs, policy, and practice.

DCYF Operational Departments and Partners

Human Resources (HR)- HR supports the hiring and onboarding of new staff at DCYF. They also support staff throughout their employment with DCYF by assisting with benefits, grievances, providing professional growth opportunities, and the DCYF Learning Center.

Information Technology (IT)- IT supports DCYF staff in technology problem solving, online communication and collaboration tools, and in the development and maintenance of DCYF's technology infrastructure, including procuring, implementing, and supporting programmatic data collection/management systems.

Office of Innovation, Alignment and Accountability (OIAA)- The purpose of OIAA is to build agency capacity to make evidence-informed decisions, continuously learn and improve, and successfully enact system reform. This is done through implementation supports; making descriptive data widely available through data reporting, dashboards, and other regularly updated data displays; performance-based contracting (PBC) support; research and program evaluation that produce published reports; consultation; and centralized QA and CQI supports.

Office of Public Affairs (OPA)- OPA houses many operational staff that support the work of programs. Specifically, Communications and Community Engagement operate under OPA. Support with partner engagement can be obtained from Community Engagement, specifically with the development of a partner engagement plan prior to the start of an improvement project. Additionally, each program has a designated communications consultant that should be collaborated with when designing communication plans for QA/CQI projects.

Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORESJ)- ORESJ supports DCYF staff in growing their skills and capacity to engage in work that impacts equity, diversity, and promotes inclusion. They offer multiple trainings throughout the year, facilitate affinity groups, offer resources for self-education, and lead the DCYF Inclusive Racial Equity Change Team (DIRECT).

Office of Tribal Relations (OTR)- OTR supports staff in understanding tribal sovereignty through joint trainings with ORESJ. They also support government-to-government relations between DCYF and tribes. Leadership and staff working in programs that regularly interface with tribes are encouraged to attend provided trainings and engage in consultation with OTR.

Partners - Tribes, community agencies, school districts, and local nonprofit organizations support DCYF staff by working in collaboration toward shared goals.

Racial Equity in Practice: Quality improvement requires that those most impacted by the problem are engaged in developing solutions. Children, youth, and families and staff providing services directly to them are integral in the creation of successful improvement plans and activities.

DCYF Staff Supports

This section identifies specific supports provided to DCYF staff to support high-quality QA/CQI activities across the agency.

Technical Resources and Tools

The OIAA QA/CQI team will make technical resources and tools available inside the agency, including templates and user guides, a repository of QA/CQI manuals developed by programs/division, and QA/CQI Community of Practice information will also be found here. Additionally, it will include a link to a request for consultation from the OIAA QA/CQI staff.

Training and Consultation

OIAA QA/CQI staff will develop and provide trainings to DCYF staff, including a "CQI 101" training. OIAA QA/CQI staff will also consult with DCYF client-serving divisions at their request.

Data

Program staff are the experts in their data and therefore are the data stewards. Figure 4 (next page) outlines the high-level data management responsibilities developed by IT, OIAA, and Programs at the start of the new DCYF agency and adopted by the DCYF Data Governance Committee.

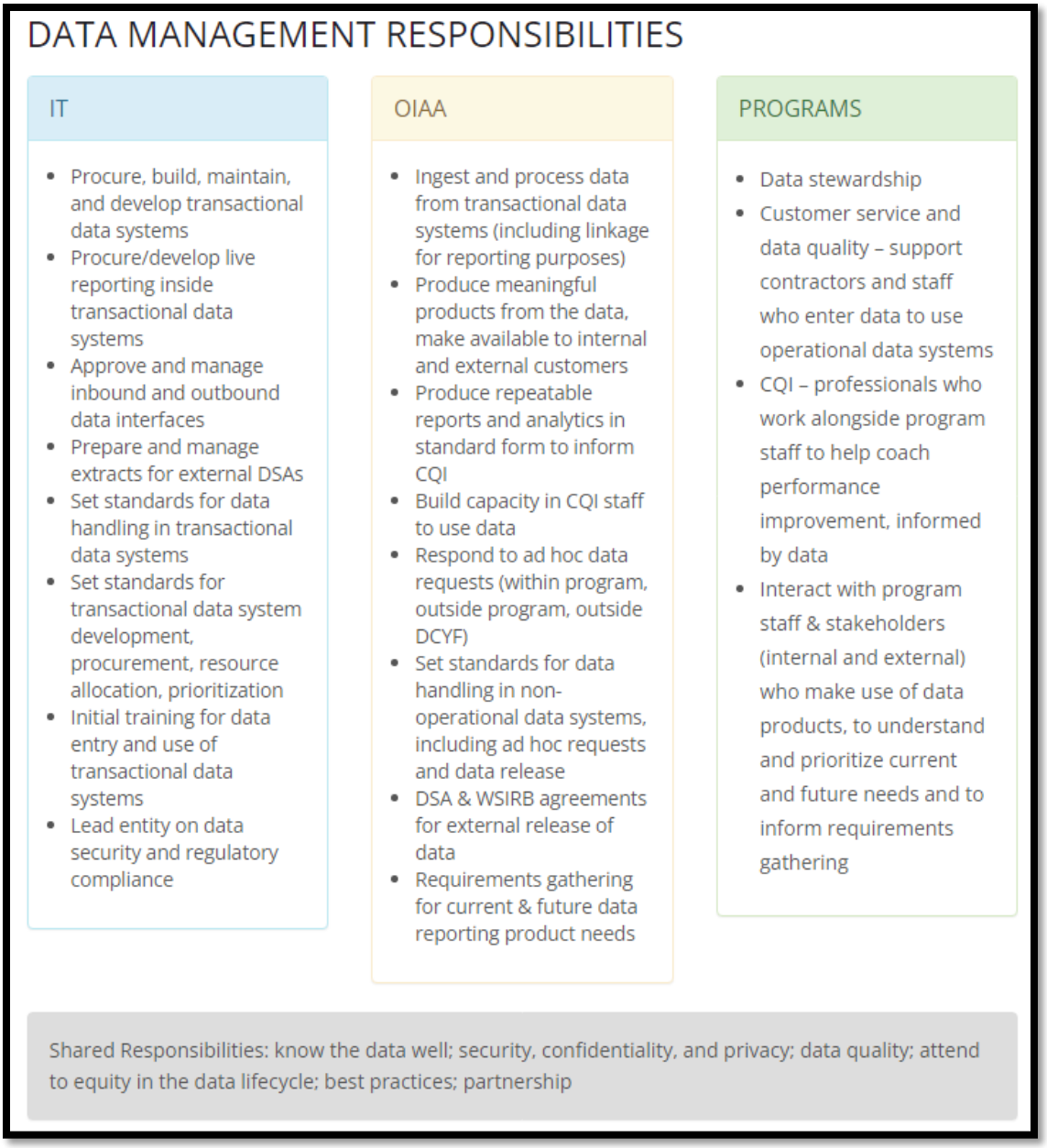


Figure 4: Data Management Responsibilities, Data Governance Committee

OIAA maintains a data portal for agency staff on its internal intranet site, and maintains the external Agency Performance reporting on the DCYF Strategic Priorities on the DCYF website.

Racial Equity in Practice: Meeting DCYF's strategic priorities is the role of the entire agency. This requires that all offices and programs are focused on how they support divisions in improving their performance as measured by division metrics, made to contribute to DCYF's strategic priorities, including the first strategic priority to eliminate racial disproportionality and disparities.

Communication

Good communication is an essential component to successful QA/CQI efforts. Figure 5 demonstrates what and how QA/CQI information is communicated throughout DCYF and with the children, youth, and families served by DCYF.

Executive Leadership	• Progress on strategic priorities and division leadership metrics with staff • Any changes in strategic priorities and division leadership metrics or new emphasis with staff	• Progress on strategic priorities and division leadership metrics with the public • Any changes in strategic priorities and division leadership metrics or new emphasis with the public
Division & Regional Leadership	• Progress on division metrics to staff • How CQI activities align with strategic priorities and metrics	• Progress of CQI activities that impact division metrics • Resource needs for improvement strategies
Supervisor & Program Managers	• QA findings to direct service staff • How CQI activities align with strategic priorities and metrics	• CQI activity progress • Barriers to improvement strategies
QA/CQI Practitioners	• QA findings • Trends • Recommendations regarding improvement strategies	• QA findings • Trends • Recommendations regarding improvement strategies
Direct Service Staff	• Improvement strategy changes that impact direct service staff interactions with children, youth, and families	• Progress on implementation of improvement strategies • Possible improvement strategies
Children, Youth & Families		• Experience of receiving services • Areas of need • Possible improvement strategies

Figure 5: QA/CQI Communication Responsibilities adapted from Green-Rodgers (2021) [10]

Racial Equity in Practice: Communication does not need to follow a hierarchical chain of command. For example, communication grounded in equity would mean that people in positions of authority communicate directly with all levels, including children, youth, & families and direct service staff.

[10] Green-Rodgers, Y. (2021, October 6-7). CQI Conference 2021: CQI is for Everyone [Conference presentation]. 2021 CQI Conference, virtual.

Implementation and Ongoing Review

The DCYF QA/CQI framework will be implemented in phases, starting July 2023, and is anticipated to be a multi-year initiative.

Phase 1: Assess current QA/CQI structure and processes.

Phase 2: Provide support to meet minimum standards, standardize practice, and build staff capacity. Once minimum standards are met, create improvement plans to help divisions elevate their practices beyond the minimum standards.

Phase 3: Sustain QA/CQI framework.

A subsequent review of QA/CQI functioning will occur one year after the division/program completes a full cycle of implementation (through Phase 3) to ensure the QA/CQI framework is sustained over time.

Racial Equity in Practice: Being an anti-racist organization goes beyond checking a box. It requires continued monitoring and improvement. Ongoing assessment ensures that quality QA/CQI continues to occur and, ideally, continues to reach beyond the minimum standards recommended in this framework, towards best practices.

Conclusion

DCYF is excited to embark on this important cross-agency system reform initiative to strengthen its QA/CQI practices, services to children, youth, and families, and ultimately improve client outcomes. The QA/CQI Framework offers the agency an opportunity to establish effective processes to identify and enact meaningful change.

Appendix A: Glossary

Acronyms

BIPOC	Black, Indigenous, and People of Color
CQI	Continuous quality improvement
DCF	Department of Children and Families
DCYF	Department of Children, Youth & Families
DHHS	Department of Health and Human Services
DIRECT	DCYF Inclusive Racial Equity Change Team
DMAIC	Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve, Control
DSHS	Department of Social and Health Services
FTE	Full time equivalent
HR	Human Resources
IT	Information Technology
OIAA	Office of Innovation, Alignment and Accountability
OPA	Office of Public Affairs
ORESJ	Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice
OTR	Office of Tribal Relations
PBC	Performance based contracting
PDCA	Plan, Do, Check, Act (also sometimes known as PDSA: Plan, Do, Study, Act)
QA	Quality assurance
WSRDAC/M	Washington State Racial Disproportionality Advisory Committee/ Modified

Terms

Agencies of origin: Refers to the three agencies that came together in 2018 and 2019 to become DCYF: Children's Administration, Department of Early Learning, and Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration.

Continuous quality improvement: Activities to improve practice and performance (learning/improvement-focused).

Data collection and reporting: Activities related to data collection, including data quality assurance, for the purposes of QA/CQI reporting.

Data quality: Information that is fit for its intended uses, accurate, consistent, timely, and complete at entry.

Division: Inclusive of terms regional and administration, referring to the naming conventions of the three agencies of origin.

Feedback loop: A system by which information collected during a process (output) is then used to restart the process (input), resulting in incremental improvement. It is cyclical in nature.

Leverage points: A place where a small shift can produce change. An example is the development or expansion of a program based on a program theory of change.

Quality assurance: Activities to ensure quality requirements are fulfilled (compliance/accountability-focused).

Standardization: Activities to formalize and document processes and best practices across a program, division, or agency.

Structural guardrails: A system of checks and balances to maintain the integrity of programmatically embedded QA/CQI functions.

Theory of Change: Articulation of mechanisms or pathways at work that will produce the change to meet organizational goals or strategic priorities. It is used to prioritize resources based on the expected impact. After a program articulates a theory of change is articulated, they may develop a logic model to show how activities will impact metrics related to goals or strategic priorities.

Appendix B: Acknowledgements

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