

# Using CQI to Improve Your Program: Overview of Resources and Insights from Fellow Grantees

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TPP Tier 1 Evaluation TA Team, Mathematica  
March 13, 2025



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# Agenda

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- Overview of CQI
- CQI cycle: step-by-step tour
- Insights from fellow grantees
- Introduction to CQI toolkit and other supports
- Q&A

# CQI 101

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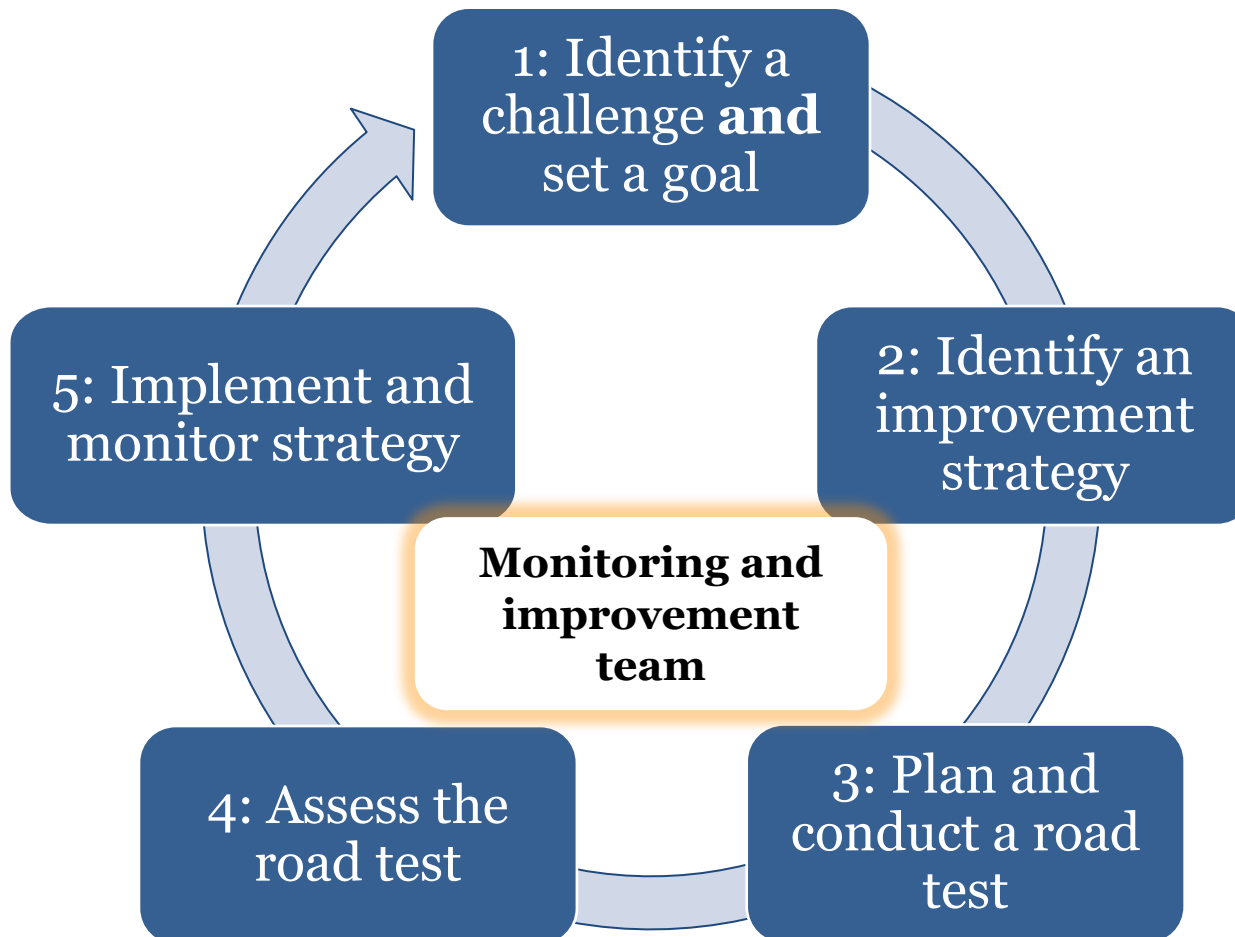
## What is CQI?

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- CQI is a process by which grant recipients first identify issues or problems and then test potential solutions to improve their program
- CQI characteristics include:
  - It is **continuous**
  - Its goal is to support **improvement**
  - It helps assess whether **strategies are promising** and whether **strategies were well implemented**
- Multiple frameworks
  - Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA)
  - Getting to Outcomes (GTO)

## Steps in the CQI cycle

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## How is CQI different from program monitoring?

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- Program monitoring documents what is happening and helps teams flag areas for improvement
- CQI is a process for improving those areas once they are identified



### Data-driven

- Requires high quality data



### Ongoing

- Involves regular meetings and checkpoints



### Iterative

- Continuously monitoring data to improve

## CQI also provides an opportunity for assessing differences between groups

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- Grantees can determine whether they are meeting the needs of all those in their community or if more tailored strategies are required for specific groups
  - For example, grantees can drill down by population, program, setting, mode (in-person vs. virtual), implementation site, etc.



# CQI cycle

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# Build a strong CQI foundation

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## Assemble your CQI team

- Decide who to include and lead the team
- Consider the perspective each person will bring
- Set team expectations from the start

## Foster a CQI culture

- Promote a curiosity for continuous learning and desire to use data for decision-making
- Encourage collaboration
- Start earlier rather than later

## Prepare to assess implementation

- Review benchmarks included in monitoring and improvement plans (MIPs) and plans for data collection
- Consider how to assess whether expectations are met

## Step 1: Identify a challenge and set a goal

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- Use data and benchmarks to identify challenges
  - Performance measure data
  - Observation and fidelity data
  - Participant exit tickets, interviews, or focus groups
  - Conversations with staff and community
- CQI team should address one challenge at a time to maintain focus
- Grantees can work with OPA to prioritize challenges



## Example challenge: low engagement

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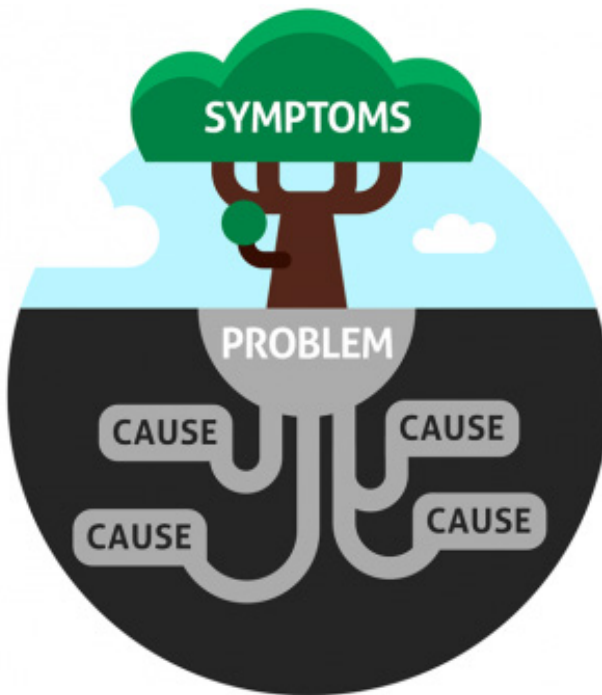
Observation data reveal a challenge with youth staying engaged during classes across settings

Youth survey responses display trends in dissatisfaction with program activities

Health educators express challenges with keeping youth engaged in focus groups

## Breaking down the challenge into root causes

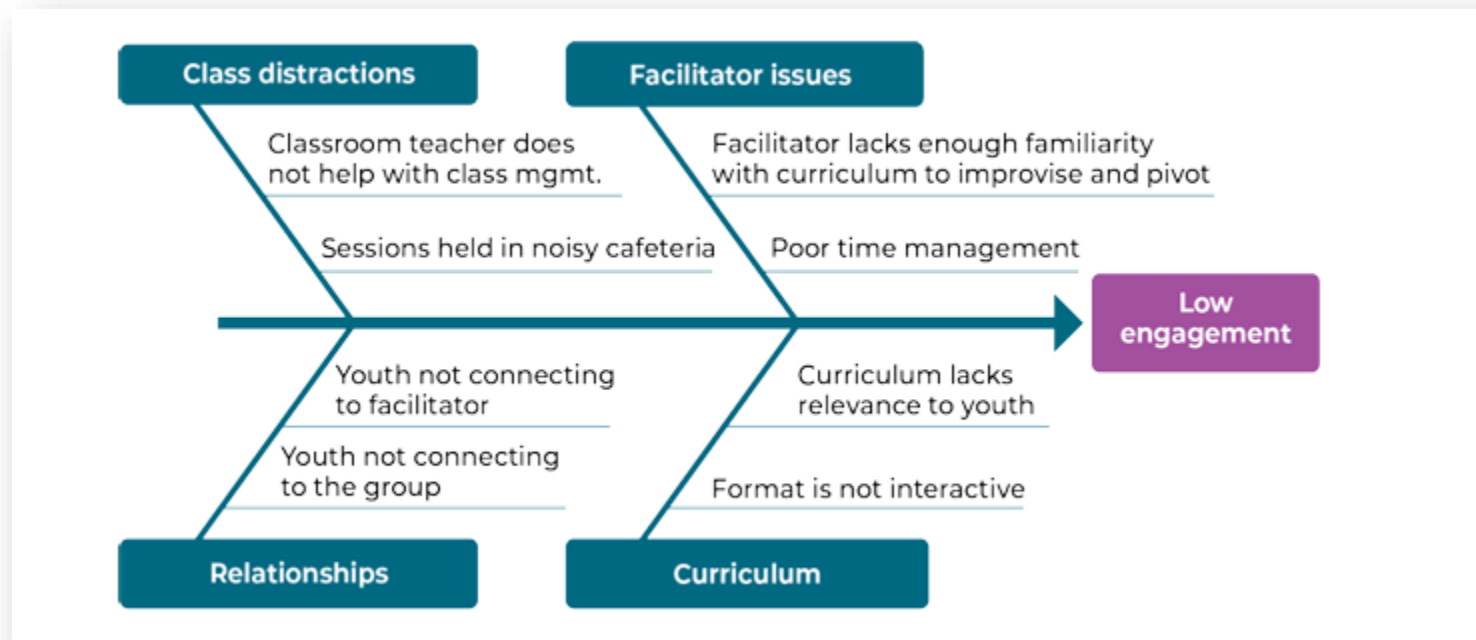
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- Grantees must consider how well they understand a challenge before developing solutions
  - You can review available data, talk to staff, participants and/or partners to develop a comprehensive understanding
  - Break the challenge down into root causes

## Tools for determining the root cause of a challenge

- Fishbone diagram example



*Other techniques include problem tree analysis and 5 why focus groups*

## Identifying a SMART improvement goal

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- Goal is the North Star
- Helps identify tailored strategies to address specific root causes
- Gives the team a way to gauge progress

### Example SMART goal

Improve youth engagement with the program, as measured by participant exit tickets, from 65 percent of youth rating the program as engaging in fall 2024 to 90 percent of youth rating the program as engaging in spring 2025.

## Step 2: Identify an improvement strategy

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- Prioritize addressing root causes that are impactful and within the team's control
- CQI is about making small changes over time to support long-term improvement
- Strategies should address root causes, NOT high-level challenges
- Adding strategies over time can address more root causes

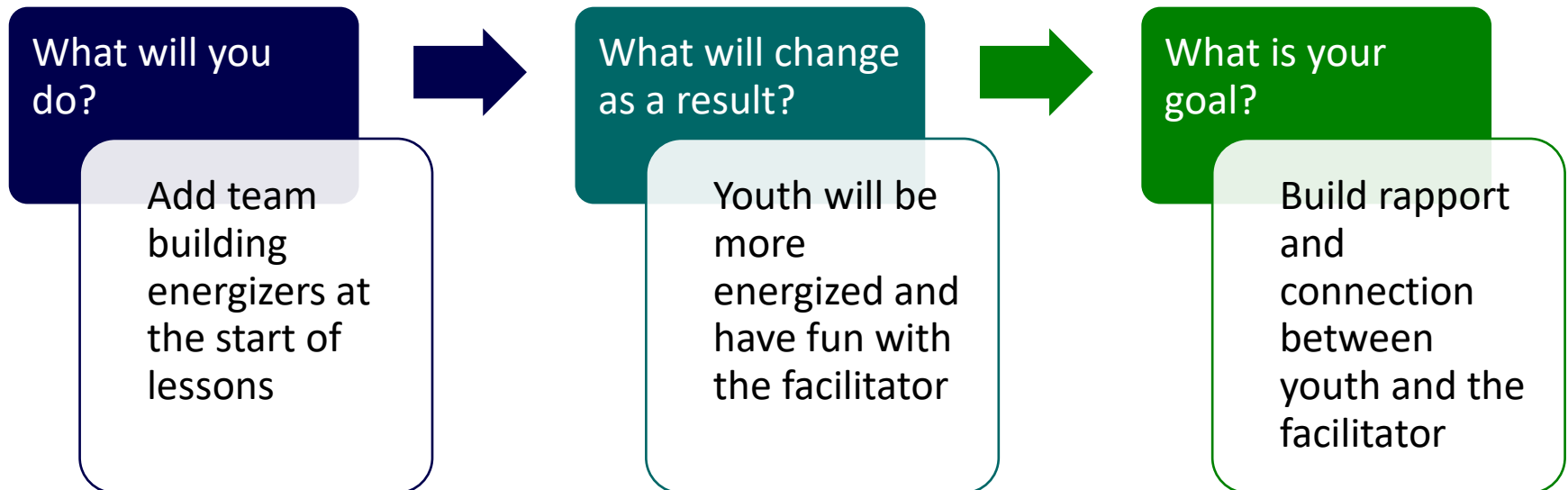
### Where to find ideas?

- Program staff
- Participants (youth, parents)
- Partners
- Other grantees
- Research
- Programmatic best practices

## Example strategy

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**Root cause:** Youth are not connecting to the facilitator

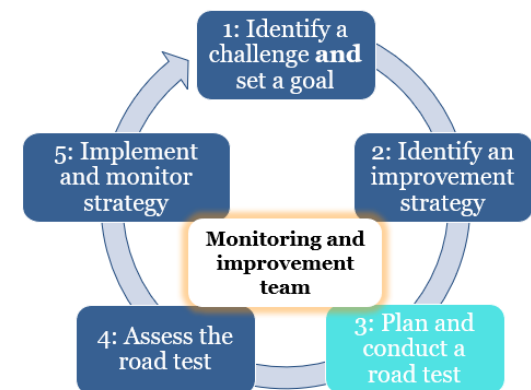




## Step 3: Plan and conduct a road test

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- A road test is a process to try out your identified strategy on a smaller scale
- The goal of a road test is to refine the strategy for a larger group or setting
- Typically involves a small number of staff and participants over a short period of time
- Provides an opportunity to learn and improve without disrupting overall program implementation



## Example: Planning for a road test

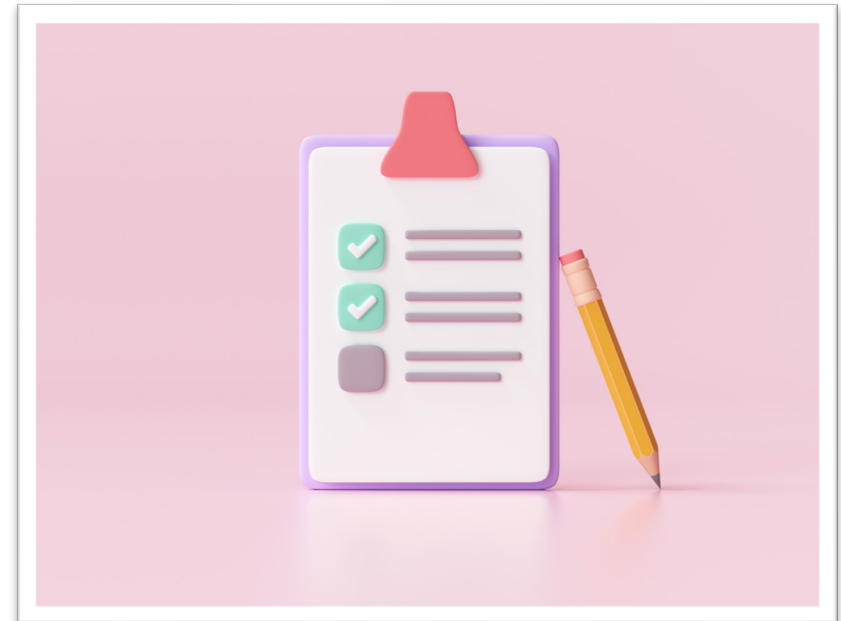
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- **Root cause:** Youth are not connecting to the facilitator
- **Strategy:** Add team building energizers at the start of each lesson
- **Timeline:** March 17 – March 28, 2025 (four lessons total)
- **Site for road test:** Main street site
- **Lead facilitator:** Hannah McInerney
- **Assessment activities:** Exit tickets administered after each lesson and two participant focus groups led by Michael Scott

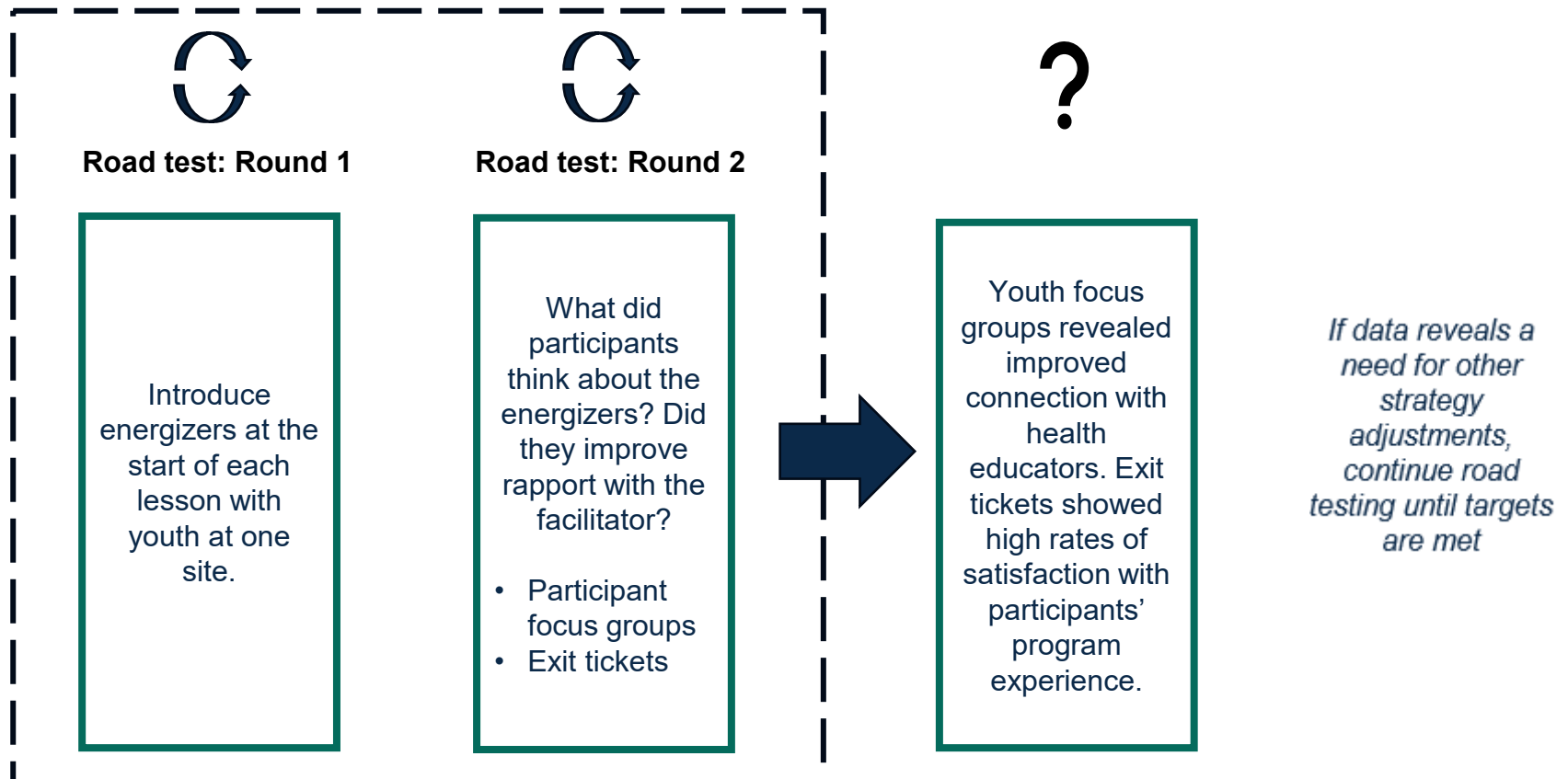
## Step 4: Assess the road test

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- At the end of a test, examine data to reflect on:
  - What worked or didn't work well?
  - What, if anything, was unexpected?
  - How might our team address aspects that didn't work well?
- Road tests may involve multiple attempts to refine the strategy

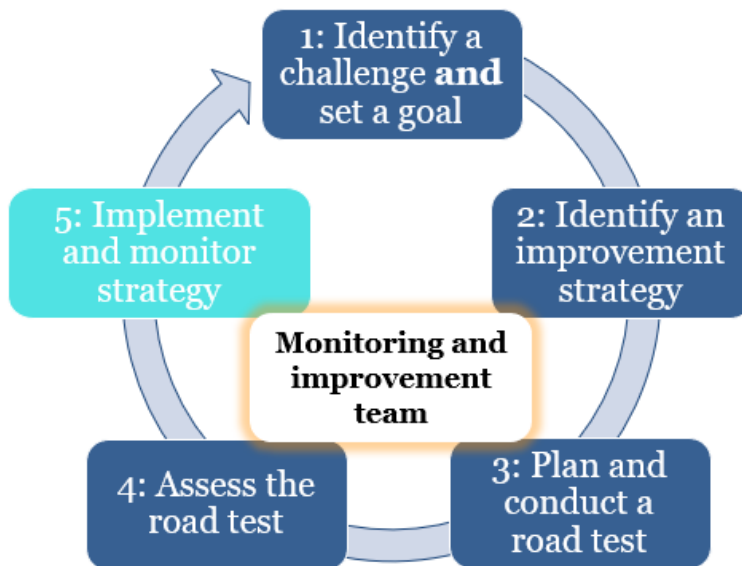


## Strategy to address low engagement: road testing



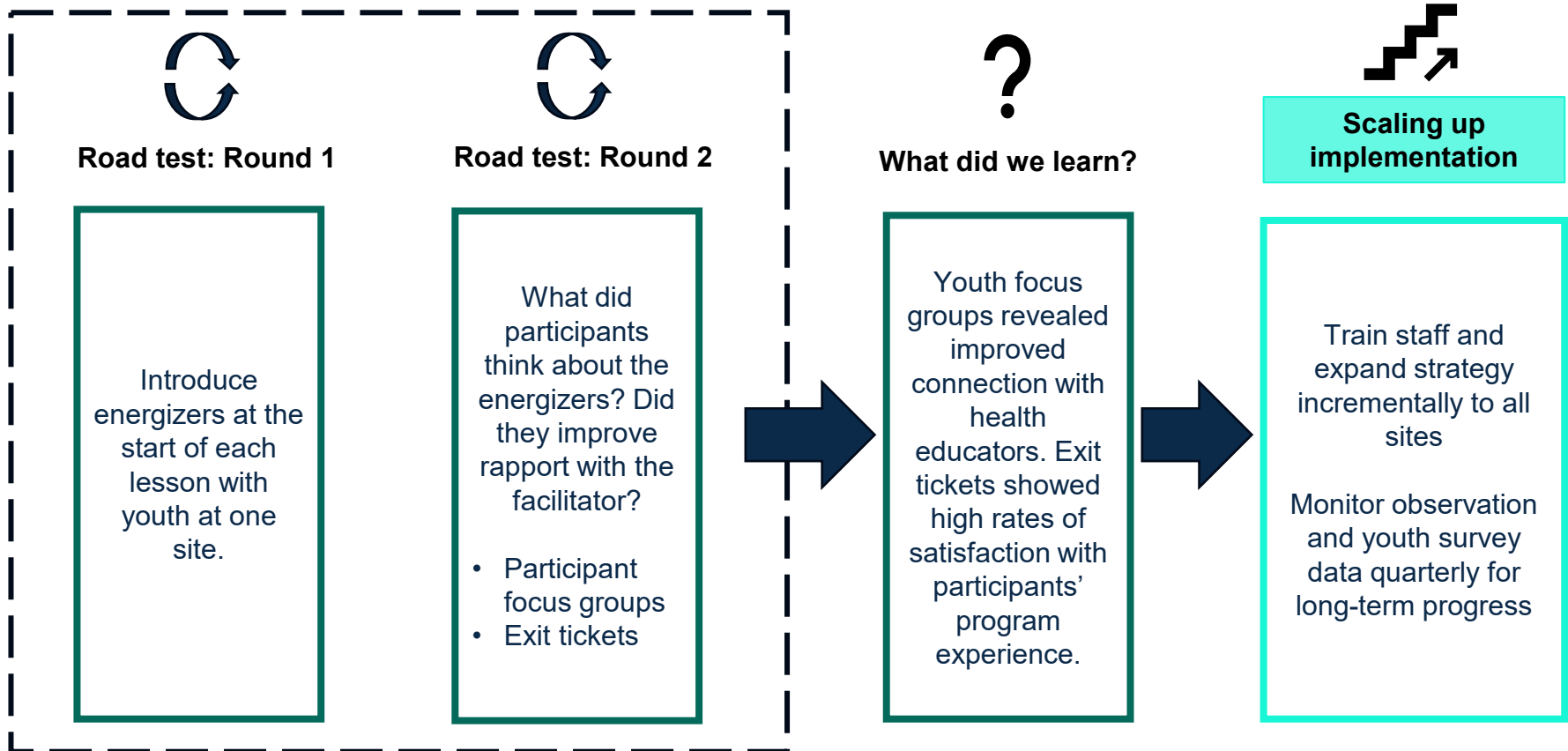
## Step 5: Implement and monitor strategy

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- Develop a plan to roll out new strategy and train staff
- Continue to monitor SMART improvement goal(s) and return to step 2 in the CQI cycle (develop a strategy) if changes are needed

# Strategy implementation to address low engagement



*If continued monitoring reveals a need for other strategy adjustments, return to steps 3 and 4 (conducting and assessing road tests)*

# Insights from fellow grantees

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## Grantee experiences with CQI

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**Rena Dixon**



**Annie Smith**



# Monitoring Community- Wide TPP Initiatives



*Annie Smith PhD MPH, Beth Marshall DrPH MPH*

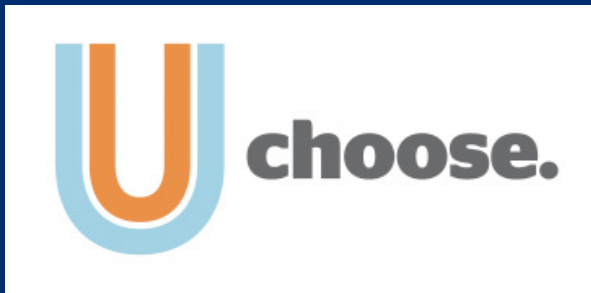
*Center for Adolescent Health*

*Department of Population, Family and Reproductive Health*



## Current TPP Projects

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2015 - present

**Baltimore City Health Department**

Baltimore City Public Schools

Title X Clinics

Community partners



2020 - present

**Maryland Department of Health**

Healthy Teen Network

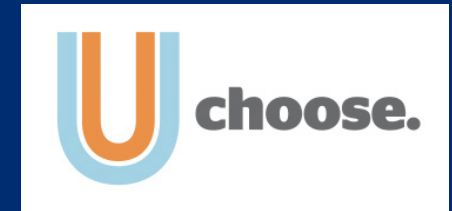
Six rural Maryland counties



# UChoose Baltimore

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- Replication of EBPs through:
  - **Classrooms**
  - **Clinics**
  - **Community**
- Currently replicating 4 EBPs
- 12 Formal project partners





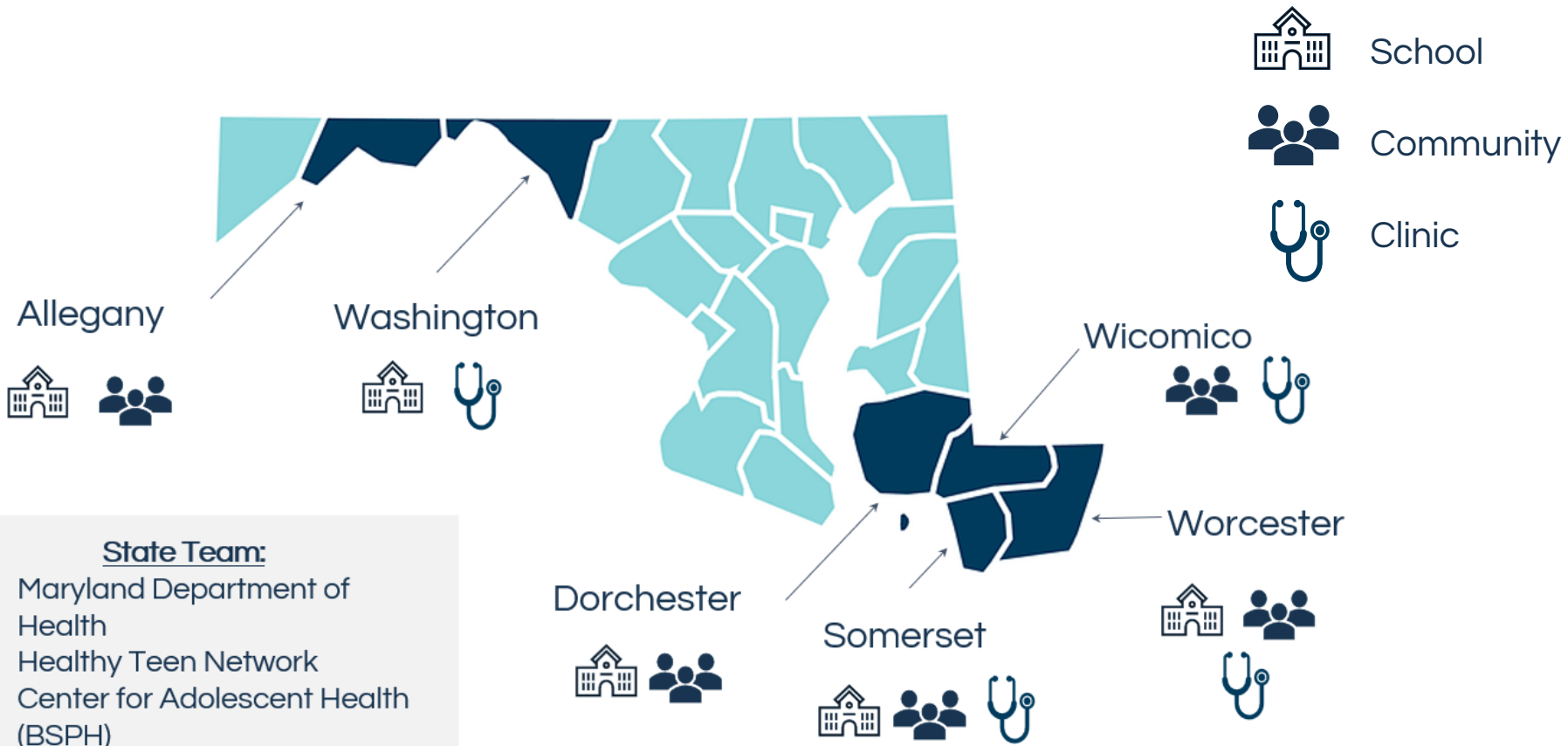
# True You Maryland

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- Replication of EBPs through:
  - **Classrooms**
  - **Clinics**
  - **Community**
- Currently replicating 6 EBPs
- County-level projects are run through local health department
  - **32 Formal project partners in last reporting period**



# True You Maryland



## Effective Monitoring and Improvement Strategies

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- Collaborate and customize
- Be flexible
- Create multiple opportunities for feedback
- Allow designated time for continuous quality improvement



## Questions for Fact Forward and Maryland Department of Health?

# CQI resources and support

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## Sexual Risk Avoidance Education (SRAE) CQI resources site

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- Includes a CQI plan template and self-assessment tool, tip sheets, and webinars
- Link available on RHNTC website under Evaluation and Improvement resources

<https://sraene.com/search-cqi-resources>



[Data Quality Video Series](#) [Descriptive Evaluation](#) [Evaluation Reports](#) [CQI](#) [Implementation Evaluation](#) [All Resources](#) [Contact](#)

### Continuous Quality Improvement Resources

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Welcome to the SRAENE Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) resources page. Here, you'll find tools and guidance to support your team in developing a CQI practice.

**If you're just learning about CQI**, you may want to begin by reviewing our [webinar series](#) on CQI practices. These webinars introduce CQI and touch on related topics, such as engaging in data collection to support improvement and fostering an improvement culture.

**If you're looking for tools to support starting CQI efforts**, see our [SRAENE CQI tools](#) developed from a pilot with eight SRAE grantees. These include a lessons learned brief about engaging in CQI based on the experiences of grantees in the pilot; a CQI self-assessment to help your team reflect on strengths and areas of growth related to CQI; a two-page CQI template to guide your team through the steps in an improvement cycle; and a series of CQI improvement modules that provide background and tips related to key parts of the CQI cycle.

## CQI plan template

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- [Fillable PDF](#) provides space for grantees to detail every step of their CQI plan
- Can be used each time you start a new CQI cycle
- Grantees are not required to use the CQI plan template or other resources
  - If using another framework, consider reviewing these resources and identify opportunities to enhance current approaches

# CQI plan template



## Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Plan Template June 2022

**Instructions:** Use this template as a guide for applying a CQI approach to a key programmatic challenge for your program. The template covers the five steps in the CQI cycle, including planning, strategy development, road testing, assessing, and implementing/next steps. For more support on these steps, please see the SRAE CQI [improvement modules](#).

### Information and coordination

Give a high-level description of your challenge and identify who will be part of the CQI process.

Briefly describe high-level challenge:

#### CQI Team

Staff name	CQI role/responsibilities (See module 2)

Date plan created:

### Step 1: Planning – Describe a challenge facing your program

Specify the challenge, set an improvement goal, and identify root causes.

Get specific about the challenge you listed above (What is the extent of the problem? Who experiences it?)	What are the root causes of your challenge? (See module 4)	What is your SMART improvement goal? (See module 5)	What data source could you use to measure progress?

### Step 2: Strategy development – Ideas for improvement

Brainstorm improvement strategies that will address the root cause(s) of the challenge.

Root cause	Improvement strategy. Remember to consult clients, staff and partners to inform strategies	How might the strategy lead to improvement? For example, what attitudes/skills/behaviors will it change that will influence your improvement goal?

### Step 3: Road testing – Try the strategy and learn how to improve it

Determine which strategy you will test, specify strategy details, and plan a test.

Specify your strategy. Note details about the parts of your strategy (e.g., duration, frequency, staff responsibilities, technology/training needs)	Develop learning questions. What do you want to learn about how the strategy works? Note at least 2-3 learning questions (module 7)

**Specify your implementation plan.** Be clear on start/end dates for your road test and where and with whom you will pilot the strategy (See module 7).

Describe how you will answer each learning question – what data will you examine or collect? If collecting new data, how will you gather it? How will you analyze data? (See module 8.)

Learning question #	Data collection activity (method/tool, respondents, point person)	Analysis plan (when and how will you analyze?)

### Step 4: Assessing – Reflect on learning and how to move forward

After you have tested the strategy, document what you learned and what you will do next.

#### We learned\* statements:

For more reflection exercises, see module 9).

We learned that ... (note one or more takeaways from your test)

#### Taking action

Based on what we learned, we will ...

- Maintain or scale up the strategy
- Abandon the strategy and try something new
- Adapt the strategy and test again

If you selected "adapt," how will you change the strategy?

### Step 5: Implementing – Monitor progress toward your goal

If you have chosen to maintain or scale up, consider how you will manage the change process. How will you communicate about the new practice and what was learned? (See module 10).

**Monitoring progress toward your improvement goal.** How will you monitor your goal to ensure sustained improvement? For an example, see module 11).

Improvement goal specified in step 1	Improvement strategy tested	Data sources to assess progress	Frequency of monitoring	Staff responsible

Questions?



## Thank you for joining us!

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*Please take a moment to complete our brief feedback survey*



For questions, please reach out to:

- OPA Project Officer
- Mathematica Eval TA Team (TPPEvalTA@Mathematica-mpr.com)
  - ✓ Copy OPA Project Officer