

DATA DASHBOARDS: TIPS FOR DEVELOPMENT AND UTILIZATION

WHAT ARE DATA DASHBOARDS?

Data dashboards are information management tools that can help an organization visually track, analyze, and display key performance indicators, metrics, and data points. In the field of healthcare and quality improvement initiatives, data dashboards can be used to track important statistics related to patient health or organizational processes with the goals of performance improvement, increased patient satisfaction, and improved population health. In late September 2020, grantees of the Small Health Care Provider Quality Improvement Program participated in a peer call to share approaches to data dashboard development and ways they are being effectively used within organizations to support quality improvement initiatives. This document provides key insights from the call focusing on developing a meaningful dashboard and data utilization, and includes questions organizations might consider as they create or build upon existing dashboards.

DEVELOPING A MEANINGFUL DASHBOARD

Data dashboards are most effective when they help an organization easily track information over time to support actionable decision-making. What follows are some key points shared by grantees during an open discussion that focused on considerations for developing an effective dashboard.

TIPS FOR A MEANINGFUL DASHBOARD

- 1 Thinking about what you want to know:** Quality improvement initiatives need buy-in from staff at all levels of the organization. However, the data that is most important to senior leadership, providers, and frontline staff will likely differ across each of these groups and is influenced by the different perspectives they hold within the organization. It is important to capture these perspectives and incorporate them in the development of the dashboard to ensure value and utility of the final product.
- 2 Your approach will evolve:** The hardest part is just getting started if not already an organizational practice. Once you develop a dashboard, actively seek feedback to inform it. Recognize that you can expect it to evolve over time based on needs and priorities of your stakeholders and organization and improved abilities to collect and analyze data.
- 3 Considering the audience for the data:** Here you want to consider who will use your data and what story do you want your data to tell? The story that you want to convey to internal and external stakeholders will likely be presented differently, but you want data points that will resonate with both. For internal stakeholders, you may want data that helps to inspire improved performance, but for external stakeholders (e.g., funders) you may want data that will convince them to fund your initiative.

GRANTEE EXAMPLES

ACUTE CARE HOSPITAL SOUTHERN WISCONSIN

The organization has experience using registry data to develop a monthly scorecard and used those scorecards as a model for their dashboard.

To help end users (e.g. providers) understand the data and “what it means”, the organization presents information in the same format over time to ensure measurement consistency and increase understanding of the data.

COMMUNITY HOSPITAL NORTH CENTRAL MONTANA

As an organization, dashboards were a newer practice. In development of their dashboard, the implementation team consulted their medical advisory group to ask “what would we want to know” to determine the scope of the end product.

DASHBOARD UTILIZATION

Data utilization is something to be considered throughout the dashboard development process and continues once the dashboard is created and is being used. It is important to ensure that stakeholders frequently have access to the dashboard and are reviewing it to support ongoing program improvements. What follows are some key points shared by grantees during open discussion that focused on considerations for optimizing dashboard utilization.

TIPS FOR UTILIZATION

1 Interact closely with the project implementation team: The project implementation team will likely have more contact with stakeholders and the end users of the dashboard. It is important for the data development team to meet regularly with the project implementation team to receive continuous feedback about what information will be most helpful for stakeholders and how to best collect that data.

2 Many ways to share data: Data should be shared consistently, tangibly, in a variety of ways, and maximize the amount of people reached. Sharing data consistently gives organization members the opportunity to see data from across projects and ideally displayed in the same types of ways. Sharing data tangibly refers to the information being easy to view, read, and understand what is being presented. To maximize persons reached and share in a variety of ways, an organization may consider posting the data to bulletin boards, sending it out via organizational newsletters or other communications, and presenting it at staff and leadership meetings.

3 Make the data engaging: Look for opportunities to highlight key data points and let staff know where they can find out more details. Prioritize what is important with simple presentation, celebrate big wins, and zero in on key areas for improvement.

4 Organizational culture change: See this dashboard as part of larger efforts to build a culture and credibility with data within your organization. It takes time to cultivate but dedicating effort here can eventually lead to the development of organizational champions that support efforts around data transparency and use.

GRANTEE EXAMPLES

ACUTE CARE HOSPITAL SOUTHERN WISCONSIN

Used their dashboard to track trends over time and show how providers are progressing toward a particular goal. Drilling down to provider level data also allows them to uncover provider best practices that can be disseminated across clinics to improve overall performance.

COMMUNITY HOSPITAL NORTH CENTRAL MONTANA

Use of the dashboard has allowed the implementation team to pinpoint acute areas of need such as a lack of diabetic eye exams, which led to implementation of a diabetic retinopathy tele-screening program.

The dashboard is shared with the hospital's board of directors as a part of regular project implementation reporting, supporting engagement from leadership.

QUESTIONS FOR ADDITIONAL REFLECTION

The following questions are included to stimulate thought and reflections on how you may be currently using a data dashboard and what ways you could enhance its development and utilization to further quality improvement goals and processes.

- How are you currently engaging staff, leadership, and other stakeholders in the development of your data dashboard? If you aren't currently engaging some of these groups, what are some strategies you could consider implementing to increase engagement and receipt of feedback?
- What are some strategic ways to apply the dashboard in support of your program and quality improvement efforts?
- What are some strategies to limit or mitigate "data overwhelm?" More specifically, how can data be most meaningfully communicated and presented in a way that gets staff to pay attention to it?
- In what ways might you incorporate data dashboards into your communication efforts (both internal and external)?