

THE NATIONAL QUALITY FORUM

NQF Time-Limited Endorsement

BACKGROUND

In December 2006 the NQF Board approved recommendations from the *ad hoc* Committee on improving the Consensus Development Process (CDP). One of the approved recommendations was: “NQF should establish a “time-limited endorsement” for measures that meet all evaluation criteria with the exception of adequate field testing.” The *ad hoc* Committee noted the enormous pressures from public and private purchasers to introduce robust public reporting and pay-for-performance for all settings and types of providers including individual clinicians, specialty providers. For some types of providers, performance measures may not yet exist that have been adequately tested to satisfy all the NQF criteria or meet all thresholds or evidence grades.

The *ad hoc* Committee advised that “NQF should be flexible during this period of extraordinary transition in the healthcare industry. For measures that satisfy most requirements, but have not been adequately pilot tested, NQF should grant time-limited endorsement that will not exceed two years. To remain transparent, NQF must provide clear and explicit documentation regarding the circumstances under which a measure is provisionally endorsed.”

Additionally, the *ad hoc* Committee recommended that prior to granting time-limited endorsement to a measure, NQF should review and approve the measure developer’s plan for conducting its pilot test and providing to NQF complete information on the results. Finally, the Committee recommended that execution of the plan and submission of the testing results by the measure developer may result in full endorsement by NQF if the testing results are adequate. If the measure developer’s plan is not fully executed, NQF would allow the provisional designation to elapse.

In 2007 the NQF Board adopted a revised CDP version 1.8 which includes provision for “time-limited endorsement” to be implemented by the Consensus Standards Approval Committee (CSAC):

The CSAC may recommend to the BoD that proposed consensus standards be endorsed for a limited period of time provided that the proposed consensus standard meets the NQF- endorsed evaluation criteria with the exception of not having been adequately field tested. Such time limited endorsement shall be in effect for a period of 12-24 months, during which time the consensus standards “owner” shall provide evidence and results from the testing to the CSAC. Upon completion of adequate testing and provision of the results, the CSAC may remove the time limitation on the endorsement.

CSAC PROCESS FOR TIME-LIMITED ENDORSEMENT

The CSAC is specifically charged with oversight of time-limited endorsement. Time-limited endorsement allows endorsement of measures before field-testing is completed when urgency of endorsement is a priority. Time-limited measures must meet all the criteria for full endorsement within two years of the time-limited designation for endorsement to remain in effect. Time-limited endorsement is neither a “short-cut” nor a “lite” version of NQF endorsement.

Recommending Time-Limited Endorsement

- The CSAC may recommend to the Board that a proposed consensus standard be endorsed for a limited period of time provided that the proposed consensus standard meets the NQF-endorsed evaluation criteria with the exception of not having been adequately field tested.
- The Steering Committee may also recommend a candidate consensus standard go to the NQF Membership for voting on a time-limited endorsement. Measure developers and others may not request time-limited endorsement.
- Candidate consensus standards must meet all other evaluation criteria (scientific acceptability, importance, feasibility and usability) except for “field testing” to be considered for time-limited endorsement. The CSAC encourages a minimal amount of feasibility testing on a small scale as part of the basic evaluation to “test out” the specifications. Measures that have been pilot or field tested cannot be granted time-limited endorsement (even if there are other concerns about the feasibility of the measure).
- Time-limited endorsement shall be in effect for a period of 12 to 24 months, during which time the consensus standard “owner” must provide results from the testing to the CSAC. The time-limitation on the measure can be removed at any time before the end of the 24 month period when adequate testing and results are approved by the CSAC.

Requirements for Full Endorsement

- When measures that have not undergone field testing are recommended by the Steering Committee to go forward for review and voting and possible endorsement, NQF will notify the measure developer that a plan for testing must be presented to the CSAC before an endorsement decision is made.
- Prior to granting a time-limited endorsement status to a measure, the CSAC will review and approve the measure developer’s plan and timeline for conducting field testing and provision of results to the CSAC.

- *Adequate field testing* is defined as:
 - multi-site testing in a variety of settings- 50-100 entities (e.g., for practitioners, testing should include large groups, health plans, small groups, individual practitioners in rural, urban, academic and community practices);
 - demonstration of reliability of the data (e.g. test re-test reproducibility analysis);
 - measure results, including the number of cases, the measure calculations, sample size, and use of exclusions;
 - analysis of excluded cases (how many and reason for exclusion; whether excluded from numerator or denominator);
 - any feasibility challenges and/or adjustments that were made to facilitate obtaining measure results;
 - baseline performance data including variation among providers and testing sites and evidence of a “gap” such that there is room for improvement;
 - an estimation of the costs or burden of data collection and analysis; and
 - demonstration of validity (e.g., comparison to a criterion or “gold standard” such as medical record, inter-rater/abstractor);
 - for outcome measures, demonstration of adequacy of risk adjustment/stratification or that outcomes do not vary by patient characteristics.

- A measure developer’s plan for testing should address
 - who will conduct the testing and their qualifications;
 - the sites and patient sample sizes;
 - data collection methodology;
 - planned analyses;
 - patient confidentiality and/or IRB compliance;
 - assessment of usability of the measure results;
 - all the elements of adequate field-testing, as defined above, and
 - the timeline for completion of the testing (the measure developer should indicate the target date when the results of testing will be available to the CSAC.)

- Upon completion of adequate testing and provision of the results, the CSAC may remove the time limitation on the endorsement. If no such evidence is provided by the end of the designated period or if the evidence provided indicates that the measure does not meet NQF criteria, NQF endorsement will expire and NQF shall issue a public notification that the consensus standard is no longer endorsed.