



National Quality Forum
Overview of 2-Stage Consensus Development Process Redesign
April 2012

In recent years, the healthcare field has become increasingly focused on performance measurement, quality improvement, and accountability, generating new opportunities for the measurement community – but also creating significant pressures and challenges for all those involved. Accordingly, NQF endorsement projects have increased in number and complexity while stakeholder expectations for the timeliness and effectiveness of the entire measure development, testing, and endorsement process have intensified.

NQF strives to continually improve its own systems, policies, and processes, and is committed to seeking feedback on its processes to remain responsive to its stakeholders' needs. In response to requests from various stakeholders, NQF is examining a potential redesign of the Consensus Development Process (CDP), to accomplish two objectives: 1) to provide measure stewards with a determination of whether a "measure concept" satisfies the "importance to measure" endorsement criterion prior to full development and testing of the measure; and 2) once a measure concept has been approved, to provide greater flexibility for stewards to bring fully developed and tested measures back to NQF at any point in time to complete the endorsement process.

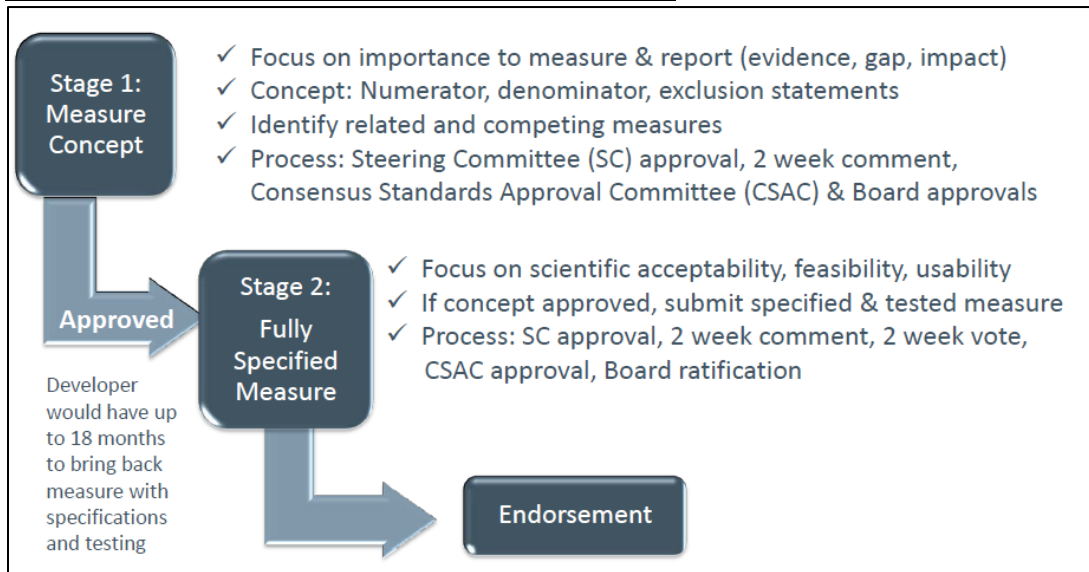
Why is NQF considering a change to its endorsement process?

To be endorsed, a measure submitted to NQF must satisfy four criteria—importance to measure and report (must pass), scientific acceptability of the measure properties (must pass), feasibility to implement, and usability of the measure results—and must be judged to be "best in class." Often, measures do not make it past the importance criterion. Since measure developers are currently required to submit fully specified and tested measures for consideration, this leads to costly investments of developers' time and resources to specify and test a measure that does not achieve NQF endorsement.

In recent months, NQF was asked to determine if the CDP could be modified to enable early review and approval of "measure concepts" against the importance criterion. Once a "concept" has passed the importance criterion, the steward would then be able to move forward with testing and further development of the measure having been assured by a steering committee that the basic concept of the measure was sound.

What will the new process look like?

Figure 1: Proposed Two-Stage Endorsement Process



In the proposed redesign, the consensus development process would be conducted in two stages. As described in Figure 1 above, measure “concepts” against NQF’s importance criterion (addresses a high impact area, gap in care or opportunity for improvement exists, and evidence is sufficient to support the focus) would be evaluated in Stage 1. Potential related and competing measures would also be identified during this stage. All measures, regardless of their stage of development (e.g., concept, fully specified measure, fully specified measure with testing, undergoing maintenance review with NQF) would be required to undergo concept review.

Once the importance threshold has been met, a measure or concept could move into the second stage of the CDP. In the case of concepts, stewards would have up to 18 months to complete testing and full specification of their measures and bring back the measure for Stage 2 review.

Stage 2 would evaluate fully specified and tested measures against the remaining three criteria: scientific acceptability, usability, and feasibility. At the end of Stage 2, measures that are ratified by the Board will receive endorsement.

To accomplish these reviews, NQF will convene approximately 19 standing committees consisting of a mix of both clinical subject areas, like cardiovascular or perinatal care, and cross-cutting topics, like patient safety or care coordination. These committees would consider measure concepts and measures on a preset schedule throughout the year.

What are the benefits of the new process?

The two-stage process would have a number of important benefits, including:

- **More frequent endorsement cycles.** Instead of NQF's current three-year cycle of projects in measure endorsement topic areas, there would be at least two opportunities to submit measures and measure concepts into a topic area each year.
- **Better use of measure development resources.** Should stewards avail themselves of the measure concept approval option prior to specifying and testing a measure, it is less likely that measure development resources will be expended on the specification and testing of measures that would not pass the importance criterion.
- **Early opportunities for feedback.** The redesigned process will provide opportunities for feedback from NQF expert panels, as well as other key stakeholders such as consumers and purchasers, at the 'conceptual' stage, helping stewards refine their measures at an early stage in their development.
- **Harmonization and best-in-class selection of measures.** The concept review stage will allow for early identification of harmonization and competing measure issues. Developers will have time to identify other measures that they should harmonize with, and to foster earlier collaboration with other developers.
- **More predictable schedules.** Establishing a system of standing committees meeting on regular, fixed timelines will increase the predictability of NQF's endorsement process, which will benefit all stakeholders. Measure developers will have a greater ability to plan their development efforts to correspond with the appropriate endorsement cycles; NQF members and the public will have a better sense of when measures will be available for comment and voting; and Steering Committee members, who participate on a volunteer basis and must balance their contributions to NQF projects with their already-busy work schedules, will be able to plan for in-person meetings, conference calls, and other NQF-related activities well in advance.

How would the new process be implemented?

NQF will continue using LEAN improvement principles to further define the new process while also seeking feedback from stakeholders throughout the proposed redesign. Input will be sought from measure developers, current and past Committee members, NQF membership, NQF leadership, CSAC, and Board of Directors as the process is further outlined.

Prior to full implementation, NQF will conduct a pilot project to help assess the feasibility and efficiency of the new process. Current measure endorsement projects would continue to their conclusion using NQF's existing process. It is anticipated that the first measure reviews using the new process would begin no earlier than the first quarter of 2013.

How can I provide input?

NQF is actively seeking feedback on the proposed redesign; comments, questions, and suggestions are welcome, and may be submitted to Heidi Bossley, Vice President of Performance Measures at hbossley@qualityforum.org, or Helen Burstin, Senior Vice President of Performance Measures, at hburstin@qualityforum.org.