

# National Quality Forum

## NQF CONSENSUS DEVELOPMENT PROCESS 2010 – A YEAR IN REVIEW

As we approach the end of 2010, the National Quality Forum (NQF) would like to take this opportunity to review the many enhancements that have been made to the Consensus Development Process (CDP) and report on the continued efforts to refine the process. Maintaining the integrity of the CDP is a very high priority for NQF.

The NQF CDP has been utilized to endorse more than 600 measures over the last decade. In 2007, significant modifications were made to the CDP, most notably, the Consensus Standards Approval Committee (CSAC) was established and charged with reviewing and approving measures for endorsement, with its decisions subject to ratification by the Board of Directors. The NQF Board role was redefined to focus on CDP policy questions and oversight. Since that time, the basic structure of the nine-step process has not changed significantly, but there have been very important improvements often sparked by member and public input over the last two years:

- ***Evaluation Criteria Ratings.*** The process of evaluating measures has become more structured, in an effort to promote greater consistency in the application of the criteria and subcriteria. Technical advisors and Steering Committee members now rate measures against the criteria and subcriteria on a 4-point scale: completely met, partially met, minimally met, and not met.
- ***Notice of Intent to Submit Measures.*** At the beginning of each project, measure developers are asked to provide the title/description of the measures they intend to submit and this information is used to identify the types of technical advisors needed and the requisite breadth and depth of expertise on the Steering Committees. The calls for nominees are now more focused to meet the needs of the project.
- ***Public Review of Proposed Steering Committee Rosters.*** Proposed Steering Committee rosters, biographical sketches, and submitted measures are posted for a 2-week comment period to afford an opportunity for NQF members and the public to identify potential gaps in expertise and to raise any concerns regarding real or perceived conflicts of interest (COI). CSAC leadership is responsible for reviewing public input and determining if modifications in the committee structure are needed.
- ***Enhanced Transparency of Committee Proceedings.*** All project-related conference calls, webinars and face-to-face meetings are now open to the public. All meeting transcripts and meeting recordings, along with public comments and voting results are available on the NQF website.
- ***Tightened Conflict of Interest Requirements.*** NQF developed a more comprehensive disclosure of interest form. The nominee disclosure forms are closely reviewed for potential conflict and bias by the NQF General Counsel. This enhancement has reduced potential conflicts of interest but has necessitated additional time and effort to seat committees.
- ***Restricted Use of Time-Limited Endorsement.*** The use of time-limited endorsement is now restricted to non-complex measures in gap areas that are required for a time-sensitive legislative mandate, and testing results must be submitted within one year.
- ***Comprehensive 3-year Project Schedule for both Endorsement and Maintenance.*** The schedule of endorsement and maintenance projects has been projected over three years to provide greater lead time to measure developers and spread the workload more evenly over

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the three year period. Reviewing both new and endorsed measures together in a topic area provides a critical opportunity to harmonize measure specifications and endorse the “best in class” measures.

- ***Strengthen Measure Evaluation Guidance.*** NQF has consistently strived to improve the process for objective evaluation of measures. The work of two task forces, one on evidence grading and the other on measure testing, as well as the operational guidance on harmonization are now being implemented. The key findings of the task force reports are described below.

## **NQF Task Force Reports**

In October 2009, the Board of Directors directed NQF to strengthen the measure evaluation criteria and to provide guidance to expert panels to promote greater consistency in their application. To that end, NQF convened two task forces – the Evidence Task Force and the Measure Testing Task Force--to review the criteria and develop guidance to clarify and apply the measure evaluation criteria. One task force, chaired by Dr. David Shahian, focused on the evidence supporting the measure focus, as well as the criterion of Importance to Measure and Report. The other task force, chaired by Dr. Timothy Ferris, focused on measure testing for reliability and validity, as well as the criterion of Scientific Acceptability of Measure Properties. The purpose of the task force reports was to provide guidance to NQF Steering Committees and others evaluating measures for potential NQF endorsement, as well as measure developers who submit measures to NQF.

## **Evaluating the Evidence Related to the Focus of the Quality Measurement and Importance to Measure and Report**

- The guidance document identifies the type of evidence that is needed for various types of measures – primarily the quantity, quality, and consistency of a body of evidence related to the relevant structure-process-outcome linkages.
- Ratings for evaluating the quantity, quality, and consistency of the body of evidence on a scale of high, moderate, and low were developed as well as how to use those ratings to determine if a measure has met the evidence criterion.
- Two potential exceptions to the requirement for empirical evidence are addressed: 1) when expert opinion might be used, and 2) for outcome measures.
- The preferred evidence grading systems were identified (USPSTF and GRADE); however, evidence graded using other systems may be submitted in support of a measure. Regardless of the evidence grading system, the goal is transparency so that a summary of the quantity, quality, and consistency of the body of evidence needs to be submitted for review.
- The guidance does not direct that measure developers conduct primary reviews and grade the evidence; rather, they should utilize existing evidence reviews to the extent possible, such as those in guidelines or other systematic reviews and summarize the body of evidence and conclusions about the strength of the evidence when submitting a measure.
- The recommendations also indicate that all three subcriteria under *Importance to Measure and Report* (high impact, opportunity for improvement, and evidence) must be met to pass this threshold criterion.

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- At the time of review for endorsement maintenance, overall high performance with little variation should result in removal of endorsement unless there is a strong justification to continue endorsement.
- The evidence required for NQF-endorsed practices should parallel what is required for a process measure.

## **Measure Testing and Scientific Acceptability of Measure Properties**

- Reliability and validity need to be demonstrated through empirical evidence for all types of measures and data types.
- Ratings for reliability and validity on a scale of high, moderate, and low were developed, as well as how to use those ratings to determine if a measure meets the criterion for *Scientific Acceptability of Measure Properties*. Failure to pass the criterion of *Scientific Acceptability of Measure Properties* should result in no recommendation for endorsement.
- The recommendations allow flexibility and ways to mitigate some of the burden of testing to achieve a moderate rating, which is necessary to pass the criterion.
- The same criteria and guidance is applicable to measures specified for EHRs, however, that was detailed in a separate table.
- Examples of types of testing are provided in the report appendix.
- Untested measures that meet the conditions to be considered for endorsement in an NQF project must also meet requirements for specifications to be ready for testing.
- Reliability and validity testing requirements for endorsement maintenance are indicated.

## **Future Efforts**

While these enhancements have certainly strengthened the CDP, NQF is committed to ongoing process improvement. An external evaluation of the CDP is being conducted by Mathematica Policy Research and we look forward to receiving their report in early 2011 and sharing it with our membership. We will be focusing some of our future improvement efforts on enhancing the timeliness of the CDP process. Overall, recent enhancements have lengthened the time required to complete the CDP process, at a time when health reform legislation has accelerated the need to fill critical measure gaps.

We are planning a series of webinars in 2011 to help NQF Members, measure stewards and others stay abreast of the many enhancements that have been made in the process. These will focus on the updated Measure Evaluation Criteria based on the two recent task force reports, the updated measure submission and evaluation forms, as well as proposed CDP enhancements. Input from our membership is a critical component to ensuring the integrity and consistency of the CDP and work of the NQF. We encourage NQF members to actively engage in these discussions as they occur.