NATIONAL QUALITY FORUM

Variation in Measure Specifications

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Project Objectives

- Identify where, how, and why variation is happening
- Develop a standard language to talk about variation, harmonization, alignment as well as other related terms
- Develop a tool or framework to identify and assess measure variation, and to help prevent or mitigate unnecessary variation

Expert Panel

- **Andrew Baskin, MD- Co-chair**
- **Blackford Middleton, MD, MPH, MSc- Co-chair**
- Matt Austin, PhD
- Mary Barton, MD, MPP
- Beverly Court, PhD
- Hazel Crews, PT, MHA, MHS, CPHQ
- Tricia Elliot, MBA, CPHQ
- Charles Gallia, PhD
- Jeff Geppert, PMP, EdM, JD
- Matt Gigot, MPH
- Kendra Hanley, MS
- Amy Moyer, MS, PMP
- Allison Peel, DC, MHA, MPH, PMP
- Peter Robertson, MPA
- Patrick Romano, MD, MPH

Methodology

- Environmental Scan
  - *Literature Review*
    - » Relatively scarce literature
    - » Studies generally indicated significant changes in measure results when specifications were changed
  - *Key Informant Interviews*
    - » Cited data availability, measure complexity challenges as strong contributors to variation
    - » Noted lack of transparency in specification changes

Consensus Definitions of Key Terms

- The Expert Panel defines **measure variation as *any deviation from reference measure specifications*.**
  - *A reference measure is the "parent" measure from which a variant has been created.*
- Alignment*:* Measures are aligned when they target the same outcome or care process in the same target population, but may not be completely identical with respect to specific measure element characteristics.
- Other terms defined include 'modification', 'transparency', 'mitigation', 'feedback loops', 'burden', and others.

Variation Taxonomy: Identifying Reasons for Variation

- Modification of existing specifications to accommodate user or provider preferences
- Modification of existing specifications to accommodate changing science
- Lack of awareness of existing measures that would meet user needs
- Incomplete or ambiguous measure specifications or a lack of operational guidance
- Implementation challenges (e.g. data or resource limitations)
- Alignment with current measures in use

Variation Taxonomy: Identifying Impact of Variation

- Innovation
  - *Updating and/or testing alternative specifications based on new guidelines and policies or user feedback on the performance of the measure*
- Burden
  - *"Double reporting," reduced understanding of how to implement measures, and conflicting measure results*
- Comparability
  - *Measure results obtained from different specifications are not comparable*

Strategies to Address Variation

Prevent Variation

- Access to Measures
- Feedback Loops
- Implementation Guidance
- Expand data collection

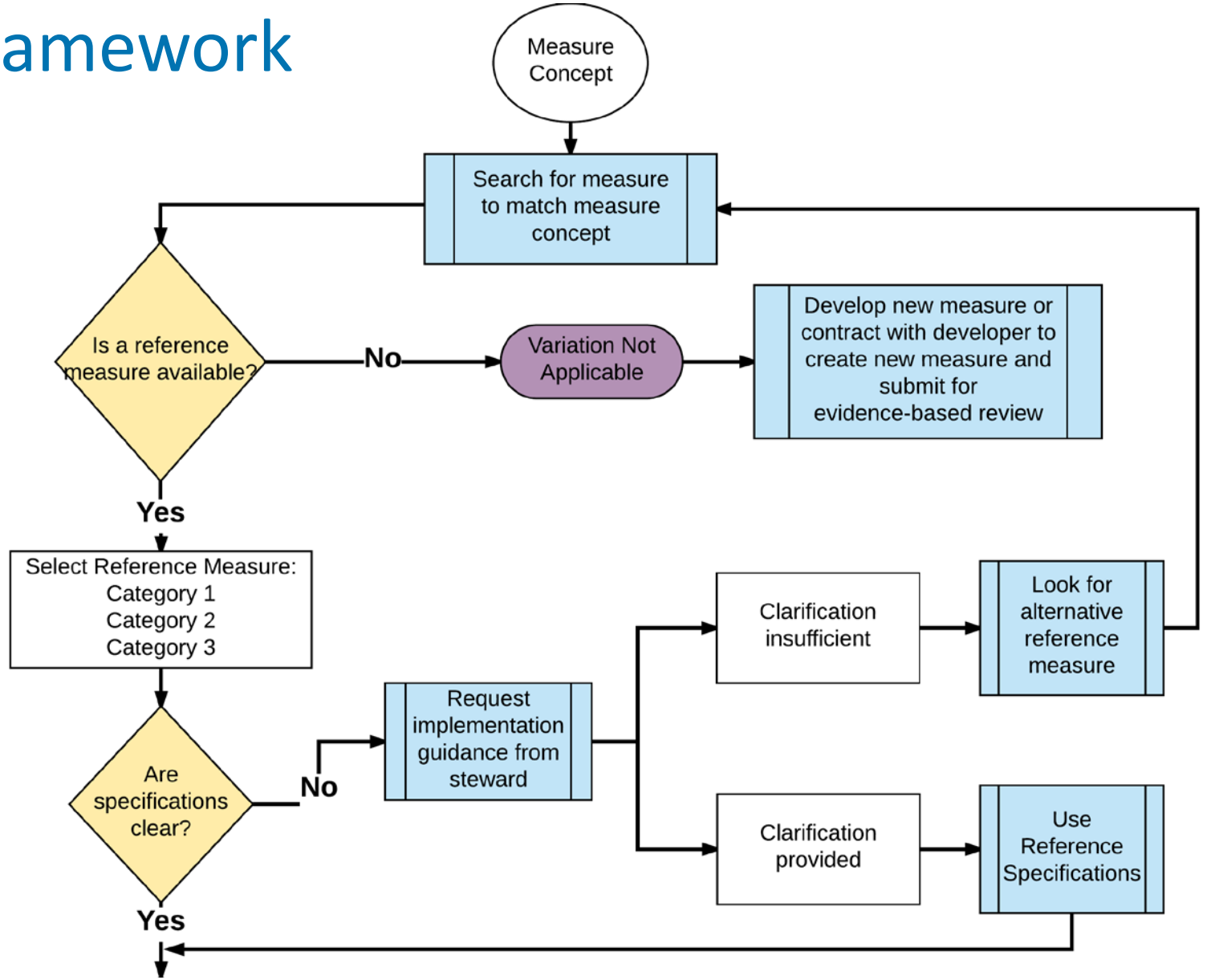
Mitigate Variation

- Identifying Measures
- Feedback Loops
- Transparency
  - *Acknowledging and disclosing variation*
- Collaboration
- Benchmarking

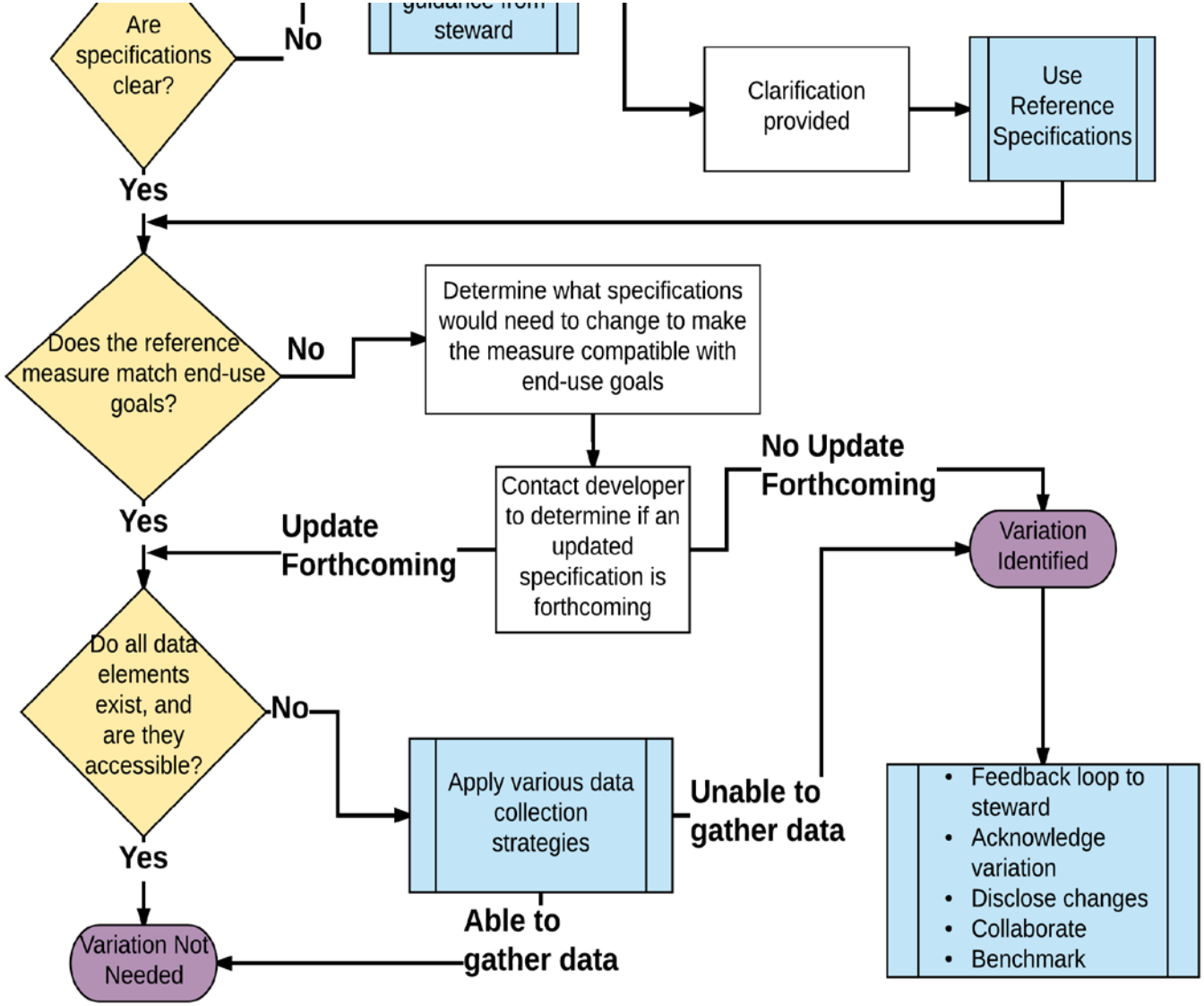
Guiding Principles for Developers and Implementers

- Promotion of comparability
- Reduction of burden
- Protecting innovation
- Meeting end-user needs
- Specificity
- Transparency

Framework


Measure Concept
Search for measure to match measure concept
Is a reference measure available?
No
Variation Not Applicable
Develop new measure or contract with developer to create new measure and submit for evidence-based review
Yes
Select Reference Measure:
Category 1
Category 2
Category 3
Are specifications clear?
No
Request implementation guidance from steward
Clarification insufficient
Look for alternative reference measure
Clarification provided
Use Reference Specifications
Yes

Framework (continued)



Revisions to Final Draft

- 'Harmonization' – revise definition to include key idea:
  - *Standardization is accomplished by degrees, depending on what is achievable or desirable, with the ultimate goal being complete standardization where the specifications are absolutely identical.*
- Audits – incorporate as new strategy to prevent variation
- Methodology
  - *Additional details on Key Informants selected for interviews*
  - *Detailed literature review strategy*

Proposed Follow-On Projects

- Pilot test and facilitate operationalizing the decision logic to address variation
- Develop best practice recommendations and worked examples of transparent specifications, implementation guidance, and disclosure of changes
- Propose a measure repository to include measures under development and measure variants
- Adapt Measure Evaluation Criteria to be responsive to the causes and consequences of measure variants, and develop additional guidance for the consideration of related and competing measures as part of the NQF Consensus Development Process.

Next Steps

Milestone	Date/Time
Final Report	December 21, 2016