MANUAL FOR QUALITY IMPROVEMENT EVALUATION PROJECTS

Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) Scholarly Project
CONTENTS

Principles of Quality Improvement ................................................................. 2
  Definition of Quality Improvement Projects .................................................. 2
  Purpose of Quality Improvement Projects ..................................................... 2
  Steps for the Evaluation of an Existing Quality Improvement Initiative .......... 3
Resources ........................................................................................................ 9

Appendix A .................................................................................................... 10
  Site Approval Documentation for Quality Improvement Doctoral Project .......... 10
Prior to beginning the work of any DNP scholarly project, Walden students will complete the steps of prospectus development and approval. Once the prospectus is approved, the committee will be formed, the proposal will be developed, and the oral proposal defense will be completed per the [DNP Project Process Guide](#). The ethics approval process begins during proposal development but can only be finalized after the proposal defense is entered into MyDR.

It is important to understand what is meant by a Quality Improvement (QI) Project and the expectations for evaluating a QI Project in the context of the DNP scholarly project.

Evaluation of a QI project is aligned with the *DNP Essentials* and within the scope of practice for the Doctor of Nursing Practice.
PRINCIPLES OF QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

Quality is directly linked to an organization’s service delivery approach or underlying systems of care. To achieve a better performance and improve quality, an organization’s current system often needs to change. While each QI program may appear different, a successful program always incorporates the following four key principles:

• QI works across systems and processes
• QI focuses on patient outcomes
• QI focuses on being the healthcare team
• QI focuses on use of data

Definition of Quality Improvement Projects

DNP quality improvement (QI) projects are scholarly projects that focus on one or more clinical or nonclinical area(s) with the goal of improving healthcare outcomes, improving organizational processes, and improving workplace and patient satisfaction. A variety of clinical or administrative topics may fall under this broad category of QI, including projects related to policy, cost reduction, information management, patient satisfaction, discharge planning, and improving clinical outcomes across chronic and acute conditions. The commonality across all these projects is that they use the analysis of existing organizational data to address the question and formulate recommendations. This project will provide the steps to evaluate an existing QI project that was developed by the organization.

Purpose of Quality Improvement Projects

The purpose of the DNP QI project is to improve a practice within an organization and gain insight into the effectiveness of an organization’s practice change/QI initiative by examining, analyzing, and synthesizing secondary data from the results of the outcome measures associated with the QI initiative.

The doctoral project is grounded in a focused application of related concepts, models, and/or theories consistent with the DNP Checklist.
Steps for the Evaluation of an Existing Quality Improvement Initiative

The evaluation summarizes the goals and objectives of the site’s specific Quality Improvement Plan for the project; the quality improvement activities conducted, including the targeted process, systems, and outcomes; the performance indicators utilized; the findings of the measurement, data aggregation, assessment and analysis processes; and the quality improvement initiatives taken in response to the findings.

- Describe the problem the QI project addressed. Use Groves Burns and Gray model for problem statements.
- Describe the purpose of the QI project and the students DNP evaluation project.
- State the guiding practice-focused questions addressed by the DNP evaluation project.
- Examine the current literature to support the identified need.
- Identify the gap in literature or practice (obtain organizational deidentified data to support the need for the QI project that you are evaluating or provide theoretical support or support from the literature).
- Discuss the QI project and how it was implemented (include the outcome variables for the DNP project evaluation).
- After receiving the IRB’s ethics approval (see steps below), obtain deidentified data that reflects the time period prior to the implementation of the QI activities you are evaluating (ideally, data should reflect a time period 3–6 months before the QI activity).
- Obtain deidentified data post QI project implementation of the QI project you are evaluating (3–6 months after if possible).
- Analyze the pre/post data, and synthesize the results. Compare what is known in the literature to your findings.

Summarize the Progress Toward Meeting the Annual Goals/Objectives for the Site

- For each of the QI project goals, include a brief summary of progress including progress in relation to training goal(s).
- Provide a brief summary of the findings for each of the indicators that were used for the evaluation. These summaries should include both the outcomes of the measurement process and the conclusions and actions taken in response to these outcomes. Organize a team of organizational leaders or key stakeholders to review the findings of the evaluation. Summarize your progress in relation to the Site’s QI initiative. What are the next steps? How will you recommend that the site can “hold the gains”? Describe any implications of the quality improvement process for clinical practice and for social change.
- Lead the stakeholders in planning for next steps, if needed. Recommendations: Based upon the evaluation, state the actions you see as necessary to improve the effectiveness of the QI Plan.
• Disseminate results (use the DNP checklist as a guide for DNP project capstone writing)
  o Present findings to key stakeholders (for example: poster, newsletter, presentation at staff meetings or for nursing staff)
  o Resource for reporting:
    https://www.omh.ny.gov/omhweb/cqi/plan_template.html

Obtaining Ethics Approval in Compliance With Institutional Review Board (IRB) Requirements

All doctoral projects are required to have ethics approval from the university’s IRB, even those that might not be considered “research.” The DNP program has developed a blanket ethics preapproval for QI doctoral projects falling within the parameters described in the blue table below, as per the pre-approved Site Agreement (Appendix A). Only QI projects involving public data, the literature, and archival data from the organization(s) are eligible for the blanket preapproval.

Edits to Appendix A are not permitted. If a student needs to customize anything about the appendix or add more data points (such as surveys, observations, or interviews), then the blanket approval cannot be utilized (and the student should follow the standard IRB approval steps in the DNP Project Process Guide).

Steps for Ethics Approval

These steps can be completed any time after (a) the chair has uploaded the proposal into MyDR for URR review, and (b) the student has identified a partner site.

Step 1: To qualify for preapproved status, all doctoral students completing QI projects are responsible for completing the web-based Form A (the same form that all DNP students use to start the ethics approval process). In the first page of Form A, the students need to indicate that they will be conducting a project that falls within the preapproved parameters for QI, and this will them to skip the questions that are not applicable. The students will also need to enter the details for the partner site(s). The final page in Form A will provide instructions for next steps, based on the responses the students enter into Form A.

Step 2: For QI projects on the preapproved track, the instructions on the final page of Form A will indicate that the students can either upload the signed Site Agreement (Appendix A) into the form or e-mail it to IRB@waldenu.edu at a later date.

Step 3: Once Form A is received by the IRB, an IRB staff member will respond within 10 business days to the students and chairs with either (a) an e-mail confirmation that the ethical standards have been met (i.e., the data collection procedures fall within the preapproved parameters), or (b) a request for more information. For certain sites (within
Department of Defense, international contexts, universities, or research hospital systems), additional documentation and compliance steps may be required by the site, so the IRB staff will work with the students to meet all of the site’s requirements. The IRB would continue to correspond with the students until all ethical issues are addressed. Once (a) occurs, the students can focus on working toward proposal approval. Doctoral students with project data falling outside the preapproved parameters will be directed to obtain IRB approval in the standard manner, which is likely to take a minimum of 4 weeks longer.

**Step 4:** At this point, to finalize ethics approval, students just need to have the project design approved via the proposal defense. Thus, once students successfully defend the proposal, the MyDR system will automatically copy the IRB on the proposal approval notice and that will trigger the **IRB to reach out to the students via e-mail to confirm whether/how the data collection plan might have changed** as a result of the proposal defense. If changes to the data collection plan were made, then the IRB will need updated versions of the ethics application materials. If the **students confirm no changes were made, then the IRB will e-mail the students and chairs a formal ethics approval notification**, which signifies that the students may begin collecting data.

The doctoral students must be actively enrolled in the doctoral study course shell to receive final IRB approval notification and must remain enrolled while collecting data. IRB approval is not valid if students are on a leave of absence or otherwise not enrolled.

**Ethical Requirements for Quality Improvement Doctoral Projects**

All DNP students completing QI doctoral projects are required to adhere to the following ethical requirements:

- In the doctoral project documents, the doctoral students must change the name of any partner organizations and generalize the location(s) so that the organizations are not identifiable. It is important that the doctoral students redact any information that will lead a reader to identify an organization’s identity. It is up to the organization to choose if the project should be publicized. Therefore, it is not appropriate for doctoral students to make the partner site’s name known in the doctoral project document. The doctoral students are required to change the name of the organization in all materials (including drafts shared with peers and faculty members) to protect the organization’s identity. In some cases, it might be appropriate for the doctoral students to maintain confidentiality by removing key pieces of evidence/data that might give away the organization’s identity. The doctoral students should direct questions to **IRB@waldenu.edu** when these situations arise.

- The doctoral students may not collect any type of data from patients or patients’ family members for this type of project. If, at some point, the doctoral students wish to pursue that type of data collection, they will need to follow the standard university procedures to obtain prior approval from the Walden University IRB. Collecting data from human
subjects without appropriate IRB approval can result in invalidation of the data and dismissal from the program.

- The doctoral students are responsible for ensuring that no proprietary, sensitive, or confidential information is disclosed in the doctoral project document.

- The doctoral students are responsible for complying with all of the organization’s policies. This includes, but is not limited to, site IRB policies and site resource use policies (pertaining to copying/ printing materials, etc.).

Please note that Walden University does not accept responsibility or liability for research activities conducted without the IRB’s ethics approval, and the university will not accept or grant credit for student work that fails to comply with the policies and procedures related to ethical standards in research.

Other student obligations will be outlined in the final page of Form A. Faculty supervision requirements for QI projects include the following:

- The supervising faculty member will ensure that the student properly requests any project design changes by e-mailing ethicsDNP@waldenu.edu.

- The supervising faculty member will ensure that the students promptly report any unexpected or otherwise significant adverse events and general problems within 1 week by e-mailing ethicsDNP@waldenu.edu.

- The supervising faculty member will report any possible noncompliance on the part of the students by e-mailing ethicsDNP@waldenu.edu.

- The supervising faculty member’s supervision role continues as long as the students remain enrolled in the present course with the faculty member.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Sources That Have Been Preapproved by IRB for Quality Improvement Doctoral Projects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public Data:</strong> Reports, websites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Literature as Data</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em><em>Partner Organization’s Internal Data</em>: Operational Records and Other Artifacts</em>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*As the partner organization’s leadership deems fit to share with student (as per confidentiality terms in this guide)

**Students are only preapproved to analyze patient records that have been aggregated via asking a site contact for high level summary data (without the student actually looking at patient records). Examples:

- Citing rates of certain diagnoses—“Before the new protocol was implemented, 20% of asthma cases were readmitted within 30 days. After the protocol was implemented, readmissions went down to 10%.”
- Citing patterns among patients—“At this facility, males are twice as likely to be admitted for [X diagnosis] than females.”
- Press Ganey scores can be analyzed.
- Patient satisfaction reports can be analyzed.

The table below includes those data tools that do NOT fall under the IRB’s preapproval. Any student wishing to analyze one of the data sources below must go through the standard IRB process to gain formal IRB approval independently.
### Data Sources That Are NOT Preapproved by IRB for Quality Improvement Doctoral Projects

*(These all require the student to obtain IRB review/approval independently via the standard process.)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection via Surveys/Interviews</th>
<th>The preapproval does not cover posing questions via questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, or any other method.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Video as Data</td>
<td>The preapproval does not cover filming of events to observe behaviors, study environments and processes, or capture products and/or outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations of specific individuals</td>
<td>The preapproval does not include collection of observational data.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This manual and its appendices may not be modified without prior approval from the IRB. Please submit proposed revisions to IRB@mail.waldenu.edu.
RESOURCES


APPENDIX A

Site Approval Documentation for Quality Improvement Doctoral Project

Partner Site
Contact Information
Date

The doctoral student, [Insert Student Name], is involved in a Quality Improvement project at our organization, and is therefore approved to access and analyze internal, deidentified site records that I deem appropriate to release for the student’s doctoral project. This approval to use our organization’s data pertains only to this doctoral project and not to the student’s future scholarly projects or research (which would need a separate request for approval).

I understand that, as per DNP program requirements, the student will publish a scholarly report of this QI project in Proquest as a doctoral capstone (withholding the identity of the site).

The student will be responsible for complying with our organization’s internal policies and requirements regarding access and use of site data for QI purposes.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve these activities in this setting.

Signed,

Authorization Official Name
Title