



TRIBAL
HOME
VISITING



Building Continuous Quality Improvement Capacity Using a Collaborative Learning Approach



Continuous quality improvement (CQI) is an ongoing process for achieving measurable improvement used by organizations looking to increase efficiency, productivity, and participant and stakeholder satisfaction. This iterative process connects programmatic data to practice and seeks to identify changes that result in improved outcomes. With these aims in mind, [Tribal Home Visiting](#) grantees make CQI a priority and practice these regular methods to achieve tangible improvements for their programs. The Administration for Children and Families (ACF), which administers the Tribal Home Visiting funds, wanted to harness the strengths and expertise of tribal home visiting programs and bring together grantees in collaborative improvement projects to foster change and improvement, build CQI capacity, and engage in

collaborative learning. Tribal Home Visiting CQI Leadership Team (including ACF, working in partnership with technical assistance providers, the [Tribal Evaluation Institute](#) [TEI], and the [Programmatic Assistance for Tribal Home Visiting](#) [PATH] team) planned to develop or adapt a model for achieving improvement, that would integrate current knowledge, allow easy access to tools, and support the grantees in a sympathetic learning environment. In addition, the team felt it was essential that CQI would be conducted in a space that was comfortable, safe, and free from fear of failure. To do this, the CQI Leadership Team integrated Indigenous values like collaboration, a focus on community, and shared leadership to ensure that the work is meaningful, applicable, and sustainable for tribal programs.



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With this desire to make CQI as accessible as possible and to emphasize the shared values among Tribal Home Visiting grantees, the CQI Leadership Team worked with the Michigan Public Health Institute (MPHI) to adapt the Institute for Healthcare Improvement's Breakthrough Series Collaborative Model. The model uses the latest research in CQI practice, promotes rapid-cycle improvement to accelerate progress, integrates collaborative improvement into daily work habits, and develops CQI leaders. Most important, the model allows teams to build their leadership skills, learn from and teach each other, and share the work of CQI to improve Tribal Home Visiting family outcomes.

Planning for this CQI work began in 2017, expecting the project to end in 2022. Through those years, intensive planning, a commitment to collaboration, and ongoing peer reflection guided Tribal Home Visiting grantees to increased knowledge and improved outcomes.

As a first step, the CQI Leadership Team developed the Collaboratives Advisory Group, in which CQI experts and Tribal Home Visiting grantee representatives came together to ensure that what was being planned would be relevant, feasible, and meaningful. Through this, Tribal Home Visiting grantees were consulted to decide the topics for the

two planned CQI Collaborative (CQIC) cohorts. Grantees chose Family Engagement and Early Language & Literacy as meaningful, essential areas within Tribal Home Visiting implementation and in which teams could effect change. From there, the team developed topic-specific resources for both collaboratives, engaging subject matter experts in both topic areas so grantees could have access to their skills and knowledge. In addition, the CQIC Leadership Team developed resources to aid Tribal Home Visiting grantees in their CQIC journeys.

The Leadership Team was diligent in ensuring that grantee resources were easy to use and understand. With an equal amount of care, the planning team also considered the overall tone of the learning environment. The team developed goals and established shared norms and values. Among these, a guiding belief rooted in Indigenous values arose: Sustained, improved practice occurs through collective strengths, curiosity, reflection, and continuous applied learning, supported through transparency, respect for self-determination, and a commitment to relationships. Furthermore, the team embraced the "All teach, all learn" philosophy, with a strong emphasis on ongoing peer-sharing and discussion throughout all activity phases.



Once the behind-the-scenes details were completed, grantee teams sprang into action, chose change strategies, and completed rapid **Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles** to test, assess results, and scale change. Using **rapid-cycle improvement strategies**, a key component of the Breakthrough Series Collaborative Model, grantees were encouraged to think of implementing change strategies on a small scale—“Think big, start small!” Participants soon embraced the rapid-cycle method, which allowed them to focus on small tests of change to simplify the CQI process. At every step of the way, technical assistance providers stood ready to provide individual support to grantees.

The roadmap of CQIC activities involved four Action Periods, including intensive virtual Learning Sessions, during which teams tested changes, collected data, reported findings, and shared lessons learned. Grantees eagerly welcomed training opportunities. Several grantees noted on evaluation forms that having the CQIC framework in place before full grantee participation was helpful as grantees worked to adjust to the new training schedule, activities, and reflection. Grantees also reported the extensive support offered by the CQIC planning team to be a key reason for success throughout the process.

2020 was a productive year for the CQIC teams, despite the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, which imposed a delay in the Action Period.

While the Collaboratives were on hold, grantee teams still met regularly on calls from June 2020 until the official relaunch of the CQICs in January 2021. During these 2020 calls, participants leveraged the power of the Tribal Home Visiting network—grantees, federal staff, and technical assistance providers—to connect and learn across the larger community. These calls ensured the continuous momentum of the CQICs and allowed grantee teams to share, learn, and get to know each other better. Connecting through calls also helped establish a peer-to-peer community as grantees worked to navigate the uncertainties brought about by COVID-19. This contributed to a close-knit, secure learning environment where grantees felt as comfortable sharing challenges as they did talking about successes.

Once the CQICs were formally relaunched in 2021, grantees worked through their rapid-cycle tests of change and shared lessons learned successes, and project ideas. Conversations became easier with each monthly Action Period call as grantees were offered opportunities to share their processes and supply feedback to other teams. After a year of planning and months of sharing between teams, growth within the CQIC teams became clear. Participants shared more easily. Failures, like tests of change that were not helpful and therefore not adopted, were acknowledged as learning opportunities and chances to try again.

Family Engagement CQIC

Ten grantee teams centered their work within the Family Engagement cohort, where a focus on goal-oriented relationships had emerged from faculty input during earlier planning work. Family engagement is a key to successful home visiting: When families feel safe, supported, and understood, they are most likely to engage in all offerings of a home visiting program, increasing the benefits of participation. This is especially true in Indigenous communities and populations, where personal connections and respect for cultural values are paramount. Family Engagement cohort grantee teams worked toward one SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Results-Oriented, and Time) Aim: By April 2022, the Family Engagement CQI Collaborative will show improvement in home visitor–family relationships, as measured by the [Working Alliance Inventory](#). Grantees focused on five key drivers:



The home visiting program has a competent and skilled workforce to develop goal-directed relationships with families.



The home visiting program's processes for initial contact with families foster and support goal-directed relationships between the home visitors and families.



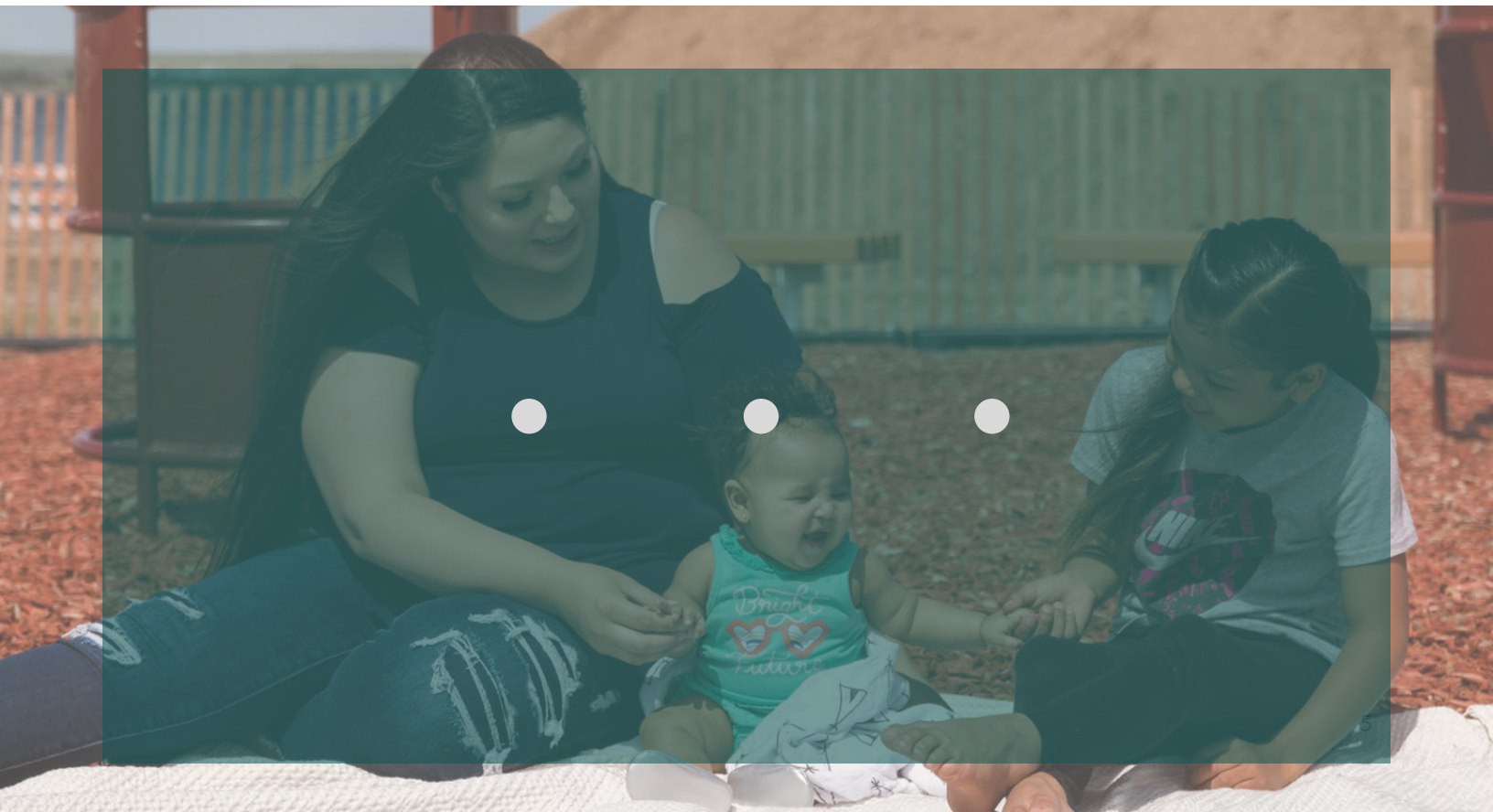
The home visiting program forms and maintains effective ongoing partnerships with communities and referral partners.



The home visiting program and home visitors are responsive and continually build goal-directed relationships with families.



The home visiting program has data tracking to assess family engagement, relationship building, and goal setting.



Several teams addressed family engagement and goal-directed relationships by incorporating community cultural practices into home-visiting activities.

The [Ch'anik'en Home Visiting Program of the Cook Inlet Tribal Council](#) had a history of low family engagement and low home visiting rates. To address these, the team worked on several tests of change that spanned the key drivers. Successful tests of change included using a timeline to assist home visitors and families in completing required screenings and assessments within the first 90 days of enrollment and an "All About You" worksheet for families to share about their culture. The "All About You" worksheet was developed by the program's Alaska Native Family Mentors and is completed with the family during the second home visit. After successful tests of change (one parent noted that the worksheet "brought back good memories of learning about my culture and gave me more inspiration to share those experiences with my child"), the worksheet was adopted into regular practice, with successful results: Family engagement and visit rates have increased. After the Ch'anik'en Home Visiting Program team shared the "All About You" worksheet with the CQIC cohort, other teams (including the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians' Nurse-Family Partnership Home Visiting Program) tested and adopted this worksheet into their practices.

With a similar focus on incorporating more cultural elements to increase family engagement, the [Gouk-Gumu Xolpelema \(All People Coming Together\): Strengthening the Core Program](#) within the Lake County Tribal Health Consortium, Inc., tried several tests of change. In one of these tests, the team hosted an A is for Acorn: A California Indian ABC book giveaway, theorizing that helping families connect to their culture would result in a stronger home visitor–caregiver relationship. After implementing this change strategy, the team found that families greatly enjoyed receiving the book and reading it with their children. Reading the book encouraged families to talk about the storytellers in their families, which was painful for some, especially if the storyteller had passed away. Because of this, the team did not fully adopt this activity. In a similar test of change, the program held virtual storytelling sessions with Indigenous–authored books. The team provided books to all program families and developed activities to supplement the books. Community elders read the books as families congregated on Zoom. One mother shared that this activity helped her recall stories told to her by her grandfather.

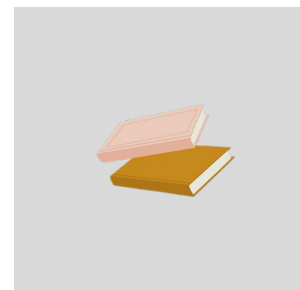
The [Turtle Mountain Tribal Home Visiting Program](#) previously used the Keys to Interactive Parenting Scale (KIPS) to assess parent–child interaction, but neither the team nor the clients enjoyed the tool. The program team realized that families were not fully engaged in assessing parent–child interaction when parent educators used the KIPS. To increase engagement, Turtle Mountain Parent Educators used a PDSA cycle to test a new tool, the Parenting Interactions with Children: Checklist of Observations Linked to Outcomes (PICCOLO) instrument. One Parent Educator was trained on the PICCOLO and tested it with two families. After a successful cycle, the team ramped up the test and trained all Parent Educators on the PICCOLO. Each Parent Educator administered the PICCOLO with two families and reported that the tool was easier to administer, and families enjoyed the assessment much more than when using the KIPS. After the adoption of PICCOLO, parent–child interaction assessment completion rates at Turtle Mountain are 19% higher than in previous years.



Early Language & Literacy CQIC

Within the Early Language & Literacy cohort, nine grantee teams worked toward accomplishing one major goal: By April 2022, increase the percentage of children enrolled in home visiting with a caregiver who reported that, during a typical week, the caregiver or family member read, told stories, or sang songs with their children every day. Grantees focused on four key drivers:

1. Home visitors have the knowledge and skills to support families in promoting Early Language & Literacy development with their children.
2. Home visitors have the support and resources necessary to support families in promoting Early Language and Literacy development with their children.
3. Families have knowledge, skills, and resources to promote Early Language & Literacy development with their children.
4. Home visiting programs and communities have resources that support families to promote Early Language & Literacy development with their children.





Grantee projects included several different activities to address the key drivers, including building grantee libraries, sharing books by Indigenous authors, and supplying training for home visitors on brain development and the importance of early literacy. Many teams' projects focused on language revitalization and Native language learning.

The [Chahta Inchukka Program of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma](#) embarked on four major change cycles throughout their CQIC journey. One of the changes included using an activity tracking sheet to support parents in reading, telling stories, or singing songs with their children. After testing this tracking sheet with a small group of parents, the team made minor revisions and tested with a larger group. The Chahta Inchukka Program now includes the activity tracker in all home visits.

In addition to this test of change, the team developed flashcards with both Choctaw and English words, plus reference pictures, for families to build their knowledge and skills in promoting Early Language & Literacy development. The flashcards went through multiple cycles of testing changes, including adding Quick Response (QR) codes (inserted to the right) that link to videos of Choctaw language lessons and resources.



The [Early Foundations Home Visiting Program of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes](#) addressed multiple drivers.

The team combined two key areas, (1) home visitors' professional development and (2) parental resources and support, to help families develop their knowledge and skills in Early Language & Literacy promotion. For example, home visitors learned the benefits of teaching sign language to infants and nonverbal children. From there, they provided "Baby Sign" books and practiced sign language with families. Home visitors also shared a video about basic infant sign language. After each process step, home visitors reviewed progress, revised their resources, and attempted additional tests of change. Feedback from families showed that the infants and children who learned simple sign language were using the signs and were, therefore, less frustrated in their attempts to communicate with their adults. This increased parents' and guardians' enthusiasm about using sign language to communicate with their infants and nonverbal children.



The [Tribal Family Partners Program at Riverside-San Bernardino County Indian Health, Inc.](#), focused on similar efforts. Program staff provided a virtual training session on the [Quality Parenting Initiative's](#) cultural connections. They also increased access to Native languages for families by creating lessons, a training guide, and a Native language vocabulary list. Home visiting staff received professional development around child development and language. Jaclyn Gray, the Program Director, reflected on the impact of this work: "It has spilled over across everything we're doing in our whole program. . . . Our team wants to gather medicines to give to their families. We created a new logo to be more culturally relevant." She continued, "We've come a long way. In the beginning, we called ourselves 'Tribal Family Partners,' but we were doing very basic activities as a Parents as Teachers [program]. Now we put the 'Tribal' into 'Tribal Family Partners' because we're incorporating culture in so many different ways. This [collaborative] has led the way for us to be able to do those things."

After four years invested in the CQIC process—beginning with extensive planning in 2017— and sixteen active months of grantees collecting and reporting data, tracking tests of change in rapid-cycle PDSAs, and taking part in Learning Sessions, monthly Action Period calls, and individualized technical assistance calls—all CQIC participants were ready to celebrate. The final Learning Session, held virtually in April 2022, featured a review of the CQIC work, included opportunities for grantees to share their experiences and takeaways, and concluded with videos and presentations detailing teams' experiences. Some portions of the agenda brought the two cohorts together to share and learn.

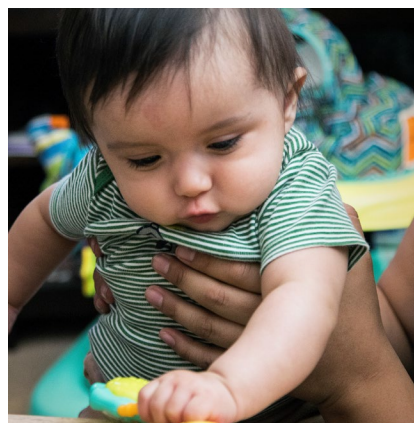


Over slideshows of PDSA results, bar graphs, line charts, numbers, and percentages, a now-familiar soundtrack played: Hearty laughter, cheers, and shared stories. The warm camaraderie within each CQIC cohort was clear through every step of the final two days of the CQICs and was reflected in the concluding thoughts of grantees, who shared their takeaways. “We are all on this journey together,” one participant reflected. “We’re changing the world one Tribal Home Visiting program at a time!” reported another, adding, “I’m proud to be part of such innovative thinkers and change agents.”

Although the CQIC work concluded in April 2022, grantee teams have continued to build on the experience, working to sustain gains, implement

changes, and build a culture of CQI within their programs. The initial CQIC planning team—ACF, PATH, and TEI—hosts quarterly CQI calls to ensure that participants are still supported through the process. TEI and PATH offer ongoing technical assistance in implementing adopted changes and incorporating CQI into regular program operations.

ACF and TEI are also conducting a process study of the CQICs, the report of which will provide a clearer picture of what worked well, what challenged participants and planners, and what could be strengthened or improved. In these ways, though the CQIC work is completed, learning is still ongoing.





Conclusion

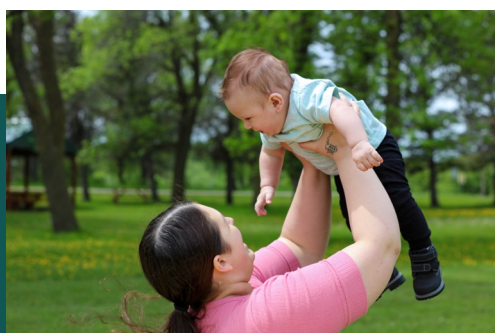
Thanks to key features, the first collaborative approach to CQI within Tribal Home Visiting programs has been tremendously successful.

First, extensive planning incorporating grantee insights established a safe and secure learning environment that is free from fear of failure.

The second key to success was using rapid-cycle PDSAs, which simplified the process, allowed small changes to be tested, fostered whole team involvement, and bolstered grantees' confidence.

Finally, teams were guided to success because of the early established guiding values and principles, which rooted the collaboration's work in principles like those valued in Indigenous communities.

Through a structured and collaborative environment, during which Tribal Home Visiting grantees were diligent with reporting monthly data, documenting PDSA cycles, and speaking as openly about barriers and failures as successes, participants demonstrated the key values of the CQICs: curiosity, reflection, transparency, and a commitment to relationships. In doing so, they succeeded in building their capacity for engaging in CQI and improving services for children and families.



ACF's Tribal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting program awards grants to tribal entities to develop, implement, and evaluate home visiting programs in American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) communities. The grants help build and strengthen tribal capacity to support and promote the health and well-being of AIAN families, expand the evidence base around home visiting in tribal communities, and support and strengthen cooperation and linkages between programs that serve tribal children and their families. Find out more about the Tribal Home Visiting program and grantees.