

Quality Assurance Program

1 Process

The NTS team has an established Quality Assurance process that maintains consistently high levels of service and insures that client performance objective are met.

1.1 Planning

The first step involves establishing a work statement that describes requirements in terms of desired outcomes. Each service task is assigned a defined level of performance, and metrics are established that indicate the means of measuring the metric and the performance level expected for the task.

Once performance objectives, along with their measurement criteria are documented, procedures are developed to deliver the service in accordance with the performance work statement. During this stage, workload metrics are reviewed, and a work breakdown structure (WBS) is created to insure that sufficient resources are delivered to the project. The WBS becomes the basis for all resource and budgetary planning on the project.

Next, an implementation plan is developed that describes the project's transition elements, staff training requirements, project governance, and resource acquisition.

The final component of the planning phase is risk assessment. Project risks are identified and communicated to the client. With stakeholder involvement, each risk factor is assigned a priority and those factors that receive an unacceptable rating are reviewed by the program management office. The established procedures, workload metrics, WBS and resource allocation are refined to reduce the risk. A mitigation plan is established to address acceptable risk and develop proactive response to those risk factors.

The various components of the planning phase are assembled into an approved project plan which receive executive approval and represents the output of the planning phase.

1.2 Implementation

Once the project plan is developed, the implementation phase begins, during which the implementation plan is executed. Operational level agreements are established among the service groups within the project organization that document a clear understanding of the group's roles and responsibilities. Staff assessments are conducted to determine required training and service delivery procedures are communicated to each team member. Service responsibility is phased in to insure minimal impact to the client's business unit. The project manager plays an active role in the implementation, and for projects of sufficient size, assigns a transition manager to insure operational procedures are implemented.

During implementation, staff orientation is conducted to insure that client performance objectives are communicated to each staff member. Once the project becomes operational, periodic reviews are conducted to insure changes in requirements are incorporated into the project plan.

1.3 Operational Phase

The operational phase of the project quality plan is characterized by a never-ending cycle of continuous improvement. The project manager collects performance metrics, focused on customer satisfaction, and assembles reports of sufficient detail to allow business managers and the program manager to assess performance.

Communication and reporting are key elements of quality assurance. Each project manager conducts weekly staff meetings designed to review performance concerns before they develop into shortfalls. Each staff member is encouraged to raise objections to processes and policies in a productive manner in order to introduce change designed to improve customer experiences.

The project manager reports meeting outcomes to the program manager and develops responses to any concerns uncovered. A weekly status report is prepared for the program manager that he or she uses to gauge project progress and recommend course correction as needed.

In addition to the weekly staff meetings, the project manager meets monthly with client stakeholders to review customer issues, determine changes in requirements, and gauge customer satisfaction. Meeting outcomes are reported to the program manager and corrective action plans are generated for each customer issue discovered.

In addition to routine meetings, performance reports are prepared by the project manager for review in the program office. The program manager reviews weekly performance reports and develops trend analysis to insure that performance objective are met, project progress is within scheduled constraints, and customer satisfaction levels are within stated goals.

The final critical aspect of maintaining a quality focus involves routine skills assessment and continuing education. Staff training is an important aspect of delivering quality service and the NTS team dedicates significant resources to insuring that staff skills are routinely confirmed and changes in technology and business processes are aligned with team capability.

2 Problem Resolution

NTS employs a continuous process improvement methodology to ensure that performance problems are identified, tracked, and solved expeditiously. Our approach to problem management is derived from the ITIL framework of best practices. It includes a detailed problem solving methodology to ensure that contract expectations are achieved.

Our improvement process begins with an established guideline for process review. This guideline describes our process for solving specific problems or improving a process. This is a five-step process designed for teams to use to solve problems or improve processes:

Step 1: Identify Opportunity

Step 2: Map Process

Step 3: Redesign Process

Step 4: Implement

Step 5: Verify and Evaluate

We employ this process whenever we discover a potential problem or discover an opportunity to improve. Specifically, whenever:

- The team identifies an issue or gap while reviewing project metrics
- The team identifies an issue that is the result of not meeting customer, employer, and stakeholder expectations
- The team is not meeting its goals
- The team answers the question "Can we do better?" with "Yes!"

As problems and other opportunities for improvement are identified, a tailoring stage can be initiated to make the improvements.

Our improvement process encourages the use of tools and techniques that were developed to facilitate team activities (e.g., brainstorming, root cause analysis, etc.). It also encourages our team to cycle back--that is, the team could reenter the improvement process at an earlier or future step, task, or subtask. In addition to providing a common framework, our problem solving process provides teams with the following benefits:

- Involves a group of people affected by the problem
- Forces team to analyze the current situation before jumping to solutions
- Allows for the elimination of root causes
- Allows teams to communicate and share issues/solutions to avoid recurrence
- Since the process focuses on root cause identification and elimination, solutions are more lasting

Planning for problem resolution and defining processes to address problems allows NTS to minimize the impact a problem can have on a project.