# NPCR Work Plan Guidance

A *work plan* is a document, often created in chart form and used as a program management tool to provide direction and guidance for the overall program as well as each component (quality assurance, data collection, education and training, data analysis and use, and management). Eight recommended components follow each other in the work plan development process and are designed to be used for program planning, implementation, and monitoring progress toward reaching program goals. These components fit into the following categories.

## Program Planning

### 1. Goals

A *goal* is an outcome a program intends to accomplish to fulfill its mission; for example, 100% of ambulatory surgery centers (ASC) will report to the central cancer registry at the end of one year. Goals are general, “big picture” statements of outcomes a program intends to accomplish to fulfill its mission. (Be sure that you know your program’s mission.) They should not contain a measurement. A goal may focus on something new, or it could concentrate on fixing a problem. Either way, the goal should be written so that the desired outcome is clear. One of the easiest ways to develop an appropriate goal is to focus on priority problems.

Answer the following questions to establish goals:

* What are the strengths of this program?
* What areas need improvement?

Answer the following questions to determine the priority problems on which to focus:

* Do data show that this problem has had a negative impact on the success of the program?
* Has this issue been a problem for more than one year?
* Which program components are most affected by this problem?

Answer the following questions to assess whether a goal is appropriate:

* Is this a general statement of what a program or program component hopes to accomplish during the year?
* Does it describe the desired outcome the program intends to accomplish?
* Is it written clearly? That is, do you understand what the desired outcome is?

### 2. Objectives

An *objective* is a step a program plans to take to achieve a goal; for example, increase ASC reporting to the central cancer registry. Objectives can be used to determine a program’s status at any point in time, and they can be measured during the project period. Objectives answer the question, “What steps must be completed to accomplish our goal?” They should not include more than one expectation each.

Objectives should be **S.M.A.R.T.** This is

* **S**pecific: Is the objective specific? Identify who, what, where, and how.
* **M**easurable: Is the objective measurable? Identify how many.
* **A**chievable: Is the objective achievable? Can it be attained?
* **R**ealistic: Is the objective realistic? Can it be attained with the time and resources available?
* **T**ime-framed: Is the objective time-framed? Identify when.

### 3. Activities

An *activity* is a step taken to accomplish an objective; for example, identify and contact non-reporting ASCs, provide software and training to ASCs for reporting, and track the number of ASCs reporting in relation to the number required to report.

Activities are a means to an end, not an end in themselves. When related to objectives, activities have a purpose. Activities are what a program does: its specific tasks to meet its objectives and ultimately fulfill its goal. Activities answer the question, “What actions are needed to meet this objective?”

### 4. Measures of Effectiveness

*Effectiveness measures* are realistic measurable standards that a program sets for itself to gauge progress in achieving its goals. Because goals are broad, multiple measures of success may be required to assess progress toward a particular goal. Measures of effectiveness should contain a numeric value or clearly observable behavior; for example, the percentage of ASCs reporting to the central registry at the end of one year.

Measures of effectiveness answer the following questions:

* How will we know if our program has achieved this goal?
* What would it take to convince me that our program has achieved this goal?

### 5. Data

*Data* are pieces of information gathered for purposes of evaluation or to determine the direction of the program. Data identified at this stage consist of information that can be used to determine the program’s success in reaching its goals and objectives; for example, a management report showing the percentage of ASCs reporting to the central registry.

Data collected through some type of assessment, such as management reports, can be used to determine which activities may be most successful. A focused review of the literature, especially review articles or *meta-analyses* (analysis of many analyses), would be very useful when trying to determine which activities to implement.

When selecting specific activities, ask the following questions:

* Has it worked before?
* Do the data and theory support the idea?
* Does the literature support the idea?
* Did the members of the intended audience tell you they thought it would work?
* Does the program’s current status warrant such an activity? Is the program ready for advanced activities?

## Implementation

The two parts of implementing a program are the time frame and assignment of team members.

### 6. Time Frame for Assessing Progress

Questions that may help determine a reasonable time frame include the following:

* How long will it take to assess progress based on data or previous experience?
* Is this appropriate given the other activities you are planning?
* Is this time-frame reasonable based on your funding cycle?

### 7. Team Members Responsible

Determine which team members are responsible for each of the tasks involved. Consider the following questions:

* Who is the appropriate team member to complete this task?
* Given the other activities you are planning, will this person be available to complete this task?

## Monitoring Program Progress

### 8. Progress Report

The final component of the work plan is the progress report that describes the following:

* Significant accomplishments to date.
* Major problems encountered.
* Strategies for problem solving.
* Work plan revisions needed.

The progress report is a requirement for NPCR and also can used to communicate with staff.

## NPCR Templates

### Work Plan

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| --- |
| **NPCR Work Plan Template** |
| **Five-Year Goal:** |
| **Work Plan [insert year]** |
| **Objectives** | **Activities** | **Measures of Effectiveness** | **Data** | **Time Frame for Assessing Progress** | **Team Members Responsible** |
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### Progress Report Template (to be completed for the annual progress report)

This section will be used for reporting future progress to NPCR and will not be used for this application process.

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| **NPCR Progress Report Template** |
| **Five-Year Goal:** |
| **Work Plan [insert year]** |
| **Objectives** | **Activities** | **Measures of Effectiveness** | **Data** | **Time Frame for Assessing Progress** | **Team Members Responsible** |
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Provide a brief description of

* Significant accomplishments to date.
* Major problems encountered.
* Strategies for problem solving.