

Planning and Preparing Activities and Requirements

Clarification of responsibilities in Phase 1 and throughout an appraisal

The activities that take place during Phase 2 of a SCAMPI appraisal often receive the most attention. But the activities of Phase 1 are equally as important, as they lay the foundation for the success of all that follows. The CMMI Institute Quality Team has encountered various issues involving understanding of the planning and preparation activities of an appraisal.

One area of concern centers around the amount of time dedicated to planning the appraisal. The majority of Certified LAs spend six or more weeks on Phase 1 of a SCAMPI A, to ensure that they are prepared for the complicated task of appraising an organizational unit's processes. However, in numerous instances LAs have entered incorrect dates for this phase in the SCAMPI Appraisal System (SAS). As a result, the SAS records falsely implied that insufficient planning had been performed. Following discussion, the LA and the Quality Team discovered that either:

- the identified start date was too late in the appraisal process, or
- the LA had identified a Phase 1 end date that came well before the actual end of the planning and preparation activities.

Phase 1 begins the day that the LA first meets with the sponsor (or someone acting on behalf of the sponsor) to discuss delivering the appraisal; it ends once a go/no-go decision is made by the LA. Accurately entering this information in the SAS record helps CMMI Institute Quality Analysts evaluate the time an LA has devoted to planning for the appraisal.

Unfortunately, there have been occasions where our quality review has determined that an LA has done an insufficient job of planning. The catalyst for this error is often pressure from the appraisal sponsor—or a consultant working as an intermediary on behalf of the sponsor—who desires a quick turnaround time. For example, a handful of LAs have shared email they received from a consultant who wanted a Maturity Level 3 appraisal on his client, but asked that only three days be spent onsite. While this scheduling alone would be problematic, the issue was compounded when LAs pressed the consultant for requirements related to Phase 1; he appeared to casually disregard these activities, suggesting that time spent preparing is unimportant.

Please remember that it is the responsibility of the LA to ensure an appropriate amount of time is given to the completion of Phase 1 activities. Each action should be executed carefully, to ensure the team and organization are ready for the Conduct Appraisal Phase. These actions include (but are not limited to):

- meeting with the sponsor to gain a thorough understanding of the organization and organizational unit (OU),

- performing sampling analysis to determine how and why processes differ between the OU's projects,
- creating a detailed data collection plan,
- scheduling the pre-onsite and onsite activities,
- meeting, vetting, and finalizing the selection of appraisal team members (ATMs),
- writing and baselining the appraisal plan,
- performing one or more readiness reviews,
- delivering SCAMPI Appraisal Team Training.

In situations where a sponsor and/or consultant asks that Phase 1 activities be rushed, it is imperative that the LA explain to them the importance of robust planning and readiness activities. If it is decided that insufficient planning and preparation has invalidated an appraisal's results, the appraisal can be rejected by CMMI Institute.

Other planning issues that have been uncovered during quality reviews tend to be less impactful in singular occurrences, but can build to a much greater concern when multiplied. These are areas where appraisal plans have been flagged for future improvement; examples include items such as risk management, plan updates, and ATM responsibilities.

- **Risk management:** Quality reviews have often uncovered plans that list only one or two risks, or "generic" risks that are reused from appraisal to appraisal without consideration for the specific context of a given delivery. Planning for an appraisal requires the careful consideration of potential obstacles and challenges relevant to that individual delivery, and documenting the actions that will be taken to mitigate their impact on its successful completion. When writing a plan, an LA should document both potential risks and any that they have already acted to mitigate.
- **Plan updates:** When notified of discrepancies between their plan and SAS record, some LAs have stated that they do not update their baselined plans when changes to appraisal data occur prior to or during the onsite. Please remember that Section 1.5 of the MDD directs that an LA "update the plan to account for information acquired and unexpected developments." This includes revisions prompted by updated data learned during Phase 2.
- **ATM responsibilities:** The role of each team member in data collection activities should be plainly spelled out in the plan. ATMs should not be assigned to multiple mini-teams, and assignments should avoid conflicts of interest for internal team members. When asked about situations where an ATM was on a mini-team whose list of process areas (PAs) included work he/she performed in the OU, LAs have often stated that the team member in question did not review the PAs specific to his/her work. However, when ATMs are assigned to a mini-team, they are each expected to thoroughly review evidence for each PA delegated to the mini-team. If an ATM is not reviewing the full set of PAs for which his/her mini-team is responsible, then the ATM is not effectively acting as part of that mini-team.

Questions regarding this Quality Tip can be sent to quality@cmmiinstitute.com.