

**PROGRAM QUALITY ROADMAP**

This overview summarizes the elements of Root Cause’s Program Quality Roadmap, a proven system for building equity and excellence in social service organizations, including descriptions of each of the Core Components of Quality below.

## Core Components of Quality



**PROGRAM ACCESSIBILITY:** How do programs address barriers to participation to ensure community members can receive needed services regardless of zip code, race, gender, language spoken, disability, work schedule, household income, and other factors?

**REFERRALS & PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT:** How do programs give and receive referrals and manage partnerships that lead to seamless service coordination between programs?

**STAFF SUPPORT & PERFORMANCE:** How do programs support their staff to promote their well-being and enable them to provide the most effective services to participants?

**TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICE:** How are programs designed to identify and address the consequences of trauma?

**DATA & MEASUREMENT CAPACITY:** How does a program collect and use data to measure performance and progress towards goals and outcomes?

**EVIDENCE-INFORMED PROGRAM DESIGN:** How do providers use evidence-based models and available research to best meet the needs of participants?

**FAMILY & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:** How are participants involved in the planning, design, leadership, feedback processes, and evaluations of programs designed to serve them?

## Foundational Conditions

**Organizational commitment to racial & economic equity.**

Structural racism and growing income and wealth disparities in the US mean that communities of color and those struggling to make ends meet are vastly overrepresented in populations receiving social services. High quality cannot be achieved, therefore, without a strong and explicit organization-wide commitment to racial and economic equity that translates into everyday practices for supporting these marginalized communities towards stability and wellbeing.

**Organizational mission & vision are driven by an authentic**

**understanding of community needs and strengths.** A respectful and trusting relationship with the service population shapes the core of the organization’s purpose and intended impact.

**Alignment between organizational mission & vision**

and Program Outcomes, such as in a theory of change or logic model, are foundational for high quality services. Organizational mission & vision are ultimately what quality services aim to achieve, and strong program outcomes are both the result of high quality services and a measure of quality improvement successes.

**Organizational & leadership supports supply tangible and intangible resources**

that are necessary for high quality services. These resources include funding, commitment from leaders, physical space and materials, and billing and accounting functions, among many others. These supports enable programs to serve their community, and when they are absent program quality suffers as a result.



# INTRODUCTION

Social service programs are built mostly or entirely on the relationships and interactions between their staff and service participants; and therefore, the quality of services is hugely dependent on how well staff are supported to perform at a consistently high level. When staff members feel supported professionally, personally, and financially by their organization, they are better prepared and more motivated to perform and excel in their roles. Organizations and programs with strong staff support and performance practices prioritize staff supervision, development, and retention initiatives within the organization with the aim of ensuring that staff have the support and preparation they need to deliver quality services. Formalized staff support and performance practices equip staff at each level of the organization to perform their roles effectively, ensuring that all clients receive the same level of quality services. With strong staff support and performance practices, team members develop self-sustaining patterns of feeling, thinking, and believing - or a strong organizational culture - that is unified, responsive, and flexible, enabling an organization to perform well across all components of the Program Quality Roadmap.

Staff support and performance practices (or lack thereof) affect program quality and service participants' outcomes in a number of direct and indirect ways. Research shows that when employees do not receive employer support for their well-being, organizations have higher turnover, lower productivity, and higher healthcare costs.<sup>1</sup> Burnout, for instance, is a common experience among nonprofit service providers that has been recognized by the World Health Organization as an "occupational phenomenon" and has been increasingly understood as a consequence of workplace conditions and employer practices rather than as an individual employee issue.<sup>2</sup> Top reasons for burnout include: unfair treatment at work, unmanageable workload, lack of role clarity, lack of communication and support from supervisors, and unreasonable time pressure.<sup>3</sup> Burnout has been shown to cause a range of health issues, from depression and anxiety to cardiovascular diseases and impaired immune function, and results in employees missing more work (absenteeism), working even when sick or otherwise less able to function (presenteeism), working less effectively, and experiencing significant job dissatisfaction.<sup>4</sup> Lower job performance among service providers means that they are less able to effectively support service participants towards their goals and the program's intended outcomes. Thus, when organizations implement and strengthen effective staff support and performance practices, they create the conditions for strong provider-participant relationships, high-quality participant experiences, and greater outcome achievement.



### Burnout

Burnout was originally named in the 1970s to describe a condition affecting people in “helping professions,” and has since been identified and studied across many sectors and job types. Experts identify burnout as including the following components: “a) emotional exhaustion, characterized by emotional depletion and loss of energy; b) depersonalization or cynicism, also described as dehumanization, detachment from work and clients and emotional hardening; and c) reduced personal accomplishment or inefficacy, that is, a feeling of personal or professional inadequacy as well as reduced productivity and coping skills.”<sup>5</sup>

Organizations often encounter financial barriers to addressing certain staff support and performance needs, but financial investments are not the only way to improve staff support and performance. For instance, increasing staff compensation may be a longer process as an organization incorporates the increases into various funding streams, but building stronger staff engagement practices can be done with little to no cost for the organization. Many of the best practices below can be implemented incrementally, without requiring large, upfront financial investments.

## WHAT DOES STRONG STAFF SUPPORT AND PERFORMANCE LOOK LIKE?

### Quality supervision and mentorship

Clearly defined and robust supervision and mentorship structures are an important component of staff support and performance. A good supervisor enables their supervisees to reflect on their work, discuss skills and needs, and supports and challenges the staff member to encourage appropriate growth in mindset and skills. Quality supervision and mentorship equips the staff member to work through new and/or challenging situations, while providing support and resources for growth.<sup>6</sup>



### **Consistent staff engagement and power-sharing**

When leaders consistently and meaningfully engage their staff members in different aspects of their work, staff members are more likely to feel valued by their team and organization, as well as more connected to and aligned with the mission and goals of the organization. Staff engagement includes ensuring that staff feel that their contributions, ideas, and feedback are valued by their teams, and that leaders are transparent about practices, procedures, and requirements on an ongoing basis.<sup>7</sup> Effective staff engagement means not only making space for staff to safely voice their opinions and ideas, but also actively integrating staff feedback into organizational practices in large and small ways. This may include distributing more decision-making power to program teams and other groups of staff members, which demonstrates trust and fosters a sense of teamwork and collective ownership of the organization's programming and outcomes. Quality staff support and performance depends on the organization's ability to recognize staff across many roles as partners and experts in their own work, such as by actively affirming the value of each team member and creating opportunities for staff to shape the aspects of the organization they are most knowledgeable about. To be truly impactful, staff engagement should be consistent at all levels, including during hiring and performance recognition.<sup>8</sup>

### **Investment in compensation, benefits, and professional development**

Fair and equitable staff compensation, quality benefits, and consistent opportunities for professional development contribute to job satisfaction, staff retention, and delivering high-quality services.<sup>9 10</sup> An organization's investments in compensation and benefits signal value, trust, and commitment to its staff members, which in turn helps to boost staff morale, engagement in their work, and commitment to the organization. Further, flexible work policies can help to prevent staff burnout over the long term,<sup>11</sup> and opportunities for professional development improve staff satisfaction and contribute to long-term retention.<sup>12</sup> On a practical level, receiving adequate compensation can reduce the need for staff (particularly frontline and hourly staff) to work extra shifts or take additional jobs to support their families, which in turn allows them to show up more fully with the people they serve.

Equitable compensation practices are also a key factor in the advancement of racial, gender, and economic equity. One important component in achieving pay equity is pay transparency, which may include standardized salary ranges and raise or promotion schedules.<sup>13</sup> Pay transparency can





diminish gaps in pay between gender and racial groups and ensure that salaries are consistent with objective market standards.<sup>14</sup>

### **Commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion**

Effective staff support requires a strong and consistently demonstrated commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) to ensure that the organization's staff reflects the multiple identities of the populations they serve; and in particular, includes and accounts for the experiences of community members who are most marginalized. Paired with organization-wide racial and economic equity values and practices, a commitment to DEI enables staff members to meaningfully engage with participants and support them towards their goals. Participants are more likely to build strong relationships with, and benefit from, staff whom they can trust and can relate to. This, in turn, provides a sense of personal satisfaction to staff.<sup>15</sup> Policies to support DEI should be in place at all levels, including inclusive human resources (HR) practices to hire and support a diverse workforce.<sup>16</sup> Inclusive HR practices will allow potential applicants from a diverse range of backgrounds to feel qualified for a job in the organization, will consider many types of strengths and skills in applicant evaluations, will ensure that job expectations are clear and designed so that people from a variety backgrounds can succeed, and will provide active support for new employees and their supervisors to ensure employees are effectively onboarded and trained for their new roles. An investment in DEI practices helps direct service organizations adequately support their staff, who are often trying to address many community needs with limited resources; and are therefore, at a higher risk for burnout and role stress.<sup>17</sup>

### **Culture of transparency, respect, and safety**

Many of the characteristics mentioned above contribute to an overall culture of transparency, respect, and safety. To further strengthen a culture of transparency, organizations should explicitly identify and state their cultural norms and values and institute policies to hold all staff accountable for their behavior, including leadership.<sup>18</sup> Managers and supervisors should look for frequent opportunities to show appreciation for employee achievement and demonstrate respect for employees' work-life balance needs.<sup>19</sup> Clarity on roles and responsibilities, regular organization-wide updates, as well as opportunities for staff to hear directly from leadership also contribute to a culture of transparency and respect.<sup>20</sup> This culture also supports, and is in turn supported by, honest feedback from staff at all levels, without which an organization cannot truly assess its own practices and quality across any number of areas. Psychological safety is a fundamental aspect of a workplace culture that promotes inclusion and respect. A psychologically safe environment is one where staff feel included and feel safe to learn, contribute, and challenge the status quo without fear of retribution.<sup>21</sup>



# BEST PRACTICES

## To ensure quality supervision and mentorship...

1. **Customize mentorship** for each staff member. Supervisors should be attuned to their supervisee's strengths and goals. Staff should be allowed and encouraged to "lead with their strengths," while working to improve in their areas of growth.<sup>22</sup>



2. **Improve training and accountability for supervisors.** Quality training for supervisors is key to reducing employee turnover and promoting teamwork across organizations. Organizations should develop and implement a universal training curriculum for all supervisors, to ensure that all employees receive a comparable supervision experience, including sufficient levels of support and recognition. In organizations with multiple departments or regional offices, managers who oversee large groups of employees should be held partially accountable for turnover within their department as part of their performance evaluation process.

## To engage staff consistently...

1. **Engage potential and new employees positively** by prioritizing respect, communication, and time efficiency during the hiring process. Application processes should be customer-service-oriented and rewarding to applicants, role descriptions should be clear, and applicants should have the opportunity to engage with those they will be working closely with throughout the hiring process. Once hired, new staff members should receive intentional onboarding that demonstrates the organization's support for and investment in them and that adequately prepares them for success in their new role.<sup>23</sup>

2. **Ensure that staff feel safe** in the roles they are asked to perform, among colleagues and clients and in their workplace. This includes ensuring a confidential avenue of submitting feedback, taking staff complaints seriously, and ensuring that organizational norms are explicitly stated and reinforced.<sup>24</sup> Working conditions,



building infrastructure, and environmental conditions should also be designed with the physical safety, comfort, and health of staff in mind.<sup>25</sup>

- 3. Share the wins.** Staff should feel ownership of their work and have a clear vision of how their work connects to the organization's larger mission and goals. Staff should be able to share in organizational wins through recognition of their contributions to the larger achievement.<sup>26</sup>
- 4. Publicly recognize staff for good performance,** rather than for tenure. Peer recognition can be particularly impactful, as well as sharing recognition stories and tying recognition to an organization's mission, values, and achievements. Intentional staff recognition efforts such as these are low-cost ways for organizations to strengthen staff morale and lower voluntary turnover rates.<sup>27</sup>

#### To ensure investment in compensation, benefits, and professional development...

- 1. Build fair and equitable compensation into the revenue model.** Organizations should build competitive compensation rates into organizational budgets and grant proposals for funds to support programming and develop a formal compensation approach that includes cost of living, market benchmarks comparing compensation with comparable organizations, plans for organization-wide evaluations and compensation increases, and other components. Doing so will allow organizations to attract and retain talented staff, maintain strong staff morale, and avoid subjective compensation offers that contribute to pay inequity.<sup>28 29</sup>
- 2. Offer good benefits to all staff.** Similarly to compensation approaches, the cost of providing health, vision, and dental insurance should be built into organizations' revenue and operating models. Providing quality insurance options demonstrates investment and care for staff and contributes to staff retention by helping ensure employees' basic needs are being met. Where possible, additional financial benefits such as cell phone and commuter reimbursements can boost staff morale and retention. However, low-cost benefits such as flexible hours, competitive paid time off, and telecommuting policies can also be of great value to staff members, by helping them to balance work with other parts of their lives. Closing the organization a few times a year is another approach to ensure that all staff have the opportunity to rest and recharge without work distractions. These types of flexible policies signal an organization's trust in its staff and commitment to overall staff wellbeing and retention.<sup>30 31</sup>
- 3. Create opportunities for professional development** for all staff members, while establishing clear staff expectations about the scope and limits of every professional initiative and opportunity.<sup>32</sup> Doing so elevates



the client experience, by ensuring that services are delivered by staff who are well-trained in their roles and up-to-date in their field. Professional development should also be responsive to the needs of staff, particularly as it pertains to preparedness for executing core job functions or meeting the expectations of a new job or new promotion.



#### To demonstrate a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion...

1. **Implement policies to support diversity, equity, and inclusion** at all levels of the organization. This involves ensuring that a DEI lens is embedded in organizational practices, including hiring, administration, and supervision. Addressing bias and discrimination in organizational practices and culture helps ensure that staff from marginalized communities can fully participate, feel safe, and contribute to the organization's mission and work.
2. **Create reflective processes** to analyze talent and staff support practices. Organizations should review hiring, supervisions, and talent promotion processes through an equity lens, with assistance from outside experts if needed. Compensation data should be periodically audited to ensure parity,<sup>33</sup> and managers should receive training and support in implementing DEI practices.<sup>34</sup>

#### To build a culture of transparency and respect...

1. **Explicitly state organizational values and cultural norms.** By doing so, organizations can prevent vaguely defined norms from being arbitrarily enforced; and instead, create both transparency and accountability with regards to its guiding values and the behaviors expected of staff.
2. **Hold staff and leadership responsible for their behaviors** and actions by ensuring expectations are clear and creating clear mechanisms for enforcing behavioral policies regardless of performance or rank.<sup>35</sup>
3. **Create opportunities for leaders to communicate regularly with staff**, through avenues such as town halls or office hours. In smaller organizations, all-team meetings can also serve this purpose. Leadership should also demonstrate to staff an investment in, and understanding of, their responsibilities and work.<sup>36 37</sup>



# CASE STUDY

## Learning Together to Advance Our Practice: A Case Study of Professional Development in DC's Public Schools

In 2010, the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) adopted the Common Core State Standards across all its schools. Although the school district began providing teachers with subject-specific training to help teach to the new standards, this support was not enough. In 2015, just 21% of DCPS students scored at the proficient level in mathematics on the Common Core-aligned Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) test, and 25% scored proficient in reading. The training that teachers received was insufficient in aligning teaching practices with the new standards, and school district leaders recognized that a change had to be made.

Professional development for DCPS teachers previously consisted of a network of instructional coaches and district-wide large-group sessions held five times a year. With the help of Leading Educators, a professional learning nonprofit, school district administrators piloted Learning Together to Advance Our Practice (LEAP), a **rigorous professional development model** that embeds regular, content-specific teacher training within schools. Under the LEAP model, teachers can collaborate on instructional strategy with colleagues who teach the same subjects and age groups and **receive personal mentorship and feedback** from their peers and supervisors on a weekly basis.

In this example, the District of Columbia Public Schools **recognized that its teachers faced a particular challenge** in implementing new instructional materials and they required intensive support in order to meet their goals of supporting student learning and excellence. By **embedding professional learning and teacher development into each school's functioning**, DCPS prepared teachers better to implement new, Common Core-focused curricula with success, while also **creating space for teachers to learn and grow** in their roles on an ongoing basis.<sup>38</sup>





## ENDNOTES

1. American Psychological Association. (2015, February 4). Stress in America: Paying with Our Health. <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2014/stress-report.pdf>
2. Moss, J. (2019, December 11). Burnout is about Your Workplace, Not Your People. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2019/12/burnout-is-about-your-workplace-not-your-people>
3. Moss, J. (2019, December 11). Burnout is about Your Workplace, Not Your People. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2019/12/burnout-is-about-your-workplace-not-your-people>
4. Salvagioni, D., Melanda, F. N., Mesas, A. E., González, A. D., Gabani, F. L., & Andrade, S. M. (2017). Physical, psychological and occupational consequences of job burnout: A systematic review of prospective studies. PLoS one, 12(10), e0185781. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0185781>
5. Salvagioni, D., Melanda, F. N., Mesas, A. E., González, A. D., Gabani, F. L., & Andrade, S. M. (2017). Physical, psychological and occupational consequences of job burnout: A systematic review of prospective studies. PLoS one, 12(10), e0185781. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0185781>
6. Lawlor, D. (2013). A Transformation Programme for Children's Social Care Managers Using an Interactional and Reflective Supervision Model to Develop Supervision Skills. Journal of Social Work Practice, 27(2), 177-189. Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330926638\\_A\\_TRANSFORMATION\\_PROGRAMME\\_FOR\\_CHILDREN'S\\_SOCIAL\\_CARE\\_MANAGERS\\_USING\\_AN\\_INTERACTIONAL\\_AND\\_REFLECTIVE\\_SUPERVISION\\_MODEL\\_TO\\_DEVELOP\\_SUPERVISION\\_SKILLS](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330926638_A_TRANSFORMATION_PROGRAMME_FOR_CHILDREN'S_SOCIAL_CARE_MANAGERS_USING_AN_INTERACTIONAL_AND_REFLECTIVE_SUPERVISION_MODEL_TO_DEVELOP_SUPERVISION_SKILLS)
7. Quinn, F. (2017). Factors Affecting Perceptions of Self-Value among Employees of Child Welfare Agencies. Child Welfare, 95(5), 39-58.
8. Templeman, J. (2020, March 10). Personal Communication.
9. Acker, G. M. (2004). The Effect of Organizational Conditions (Role Conflict, Role Ambiguity, Opportunities for Professional Development, and Social Support) on Job Satisfaction and Intention to Leave Among Social Workers in Mental Health Care. Community Mental Health Journal, 40(1), 65-73. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:COMH.0000015218.12111.26>
10. Culwell, A. C. (2018, July 13). How Leaders Can Strengthen Their Organizational Culture (SSIR). Retrieved from [https://ssir.org/articles/entry/how\\_leaders\\_can\\_strengthen\\_their\\_organizational\\_culture](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/how_leaders_can_strengthen_their_organizational_culture)
11. Neidhart, K. (2020, March 19). Personal Communication.
12. Acker, G. M. (2004). The Effect of Organizational Conditions (Role Conflict, Role Ambiguity, Opportunities for Professional Development, and Social Support) on Job Satisfaction and Intention to Leave Among Social Workers in Mental Health Care. Community Mental Health Journal, 40(1), 65-73. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:COMH.0000015218.12111.26>
13. Mercer. (2020). The Case for Pay Transparency. <https://www.mercer.us/content/dam/mercer/attachments/north-america/us/us-2020-the-case-for-pay-transparency.pdf>
14. Orr Group (2021, May 25). Why Pay Equity Transparency Are Integral Components of Your DEI Strategy. <https://orrgroup.com/2021/05/why-pay-equity-transparency-are-integral-components-of-your-dei-strategy/>
15. Templeman, J. (2020, March 10). Personal Communication.
16. Culwell, A. C. (2018, July 13). How Leaders Can Strengthen Their Organizational Culture. Stanford Social Innovation Review. Retrieved from [https://ssir.org/articles/entry/how\\_leaders\\_can\\_strengthen\\_their\\_organizational\\_culture](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/how_leaders_can_strengthen_their_organizational_culture)
17. Templeman, J. (2020, March 10). Personal Communication.
18. Culwell, A. C. (2018, July 13). How Leaders Can Strengthen Their Organizational Culture. Stanford Social Innovation Review. Retrieved from [https://ssir.org/articles/entry/how\\_leaders\\_can\\_strengthen\\_their\\_organizational\\_culture](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/how_leaders_can_strengthen_their_organizational_culture)
19. Esry, A. (n.d.). Building a Culture of Respect at Work. Retrieved July 13, 2020, from <https://www.hausmann-johnson.com/blog/building-a-culture-of-respect-at-work>
20. Templeman, J. (2020, March 10). Personal Communication.
21. Clark, Timothy R. (2020). The 4 stages of psychological safety: Defining the path to inclusion and innovation. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.
22. Neidhart, K. (2020, March 19). Personal Communication.
23. Templeman, J. (2020, March 10). Personal Communication.
24. Culwell, A. C. (2018, July 13). How Leaders Can Strengthen Their Organizational Culture. Stanford Social Innovation Review. Retrieved from [https://ssir.org/articles/entry/how\\_leaders\\_can\\_strengthen\\_their\\_organizational\\_culture](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/how_leaders_can_strengthen_their_organizational_culture)
25. Open Sourced Workplace. (2019, March 13). Importance of Safety in the Workplace - Physical, Psychological, Social, Emotional, Moral and Health Safety. Retrieved from <https://www.opensourcedworkplace.com/news/importance-of-safety-in-the-workplace-physical-psychological-social-emotional-moral-and-health-safety>
26. Neidhart, K. (2020, March 19). Personal Communication.
27. Bersin, J. (2012, July 3). New Research Unlocks the Secret of Employee Recognition. Forbes. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/joshbersin/2012/06/13/new-research-unlocks-the-secret-of-employee-recognition/#883594f52767>
28. Culwell, A. C. (2018, July 13). How Leaders Can Strengthen Their Organizational Culture. Stanford Social Innovation Review. Retrieved from [https://ssir.org/articles/entry/how\\_leaders\\_can\\_strengthen\\_their\\_organizational\\_culture](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/how_leaders_can_strengthen_their_organizational_culture)
29. Orr Group (2021, May 25). Why Pay Equity Transparency Are Integral Components of Your DEI Strategy. <https://orrgroup.com/2021/05/why-pay-equity-transparency-are-integral-components-of-your-dei-strategy/>
30. Neidhart, K. (2020, March 19). Personal Communication.
31. Templeman, J. (2020, March 10). Personal Communication.
32. Templeman, J. (2020, March 10). Personal Communication.
33. Center for Creative Leadership. (n.d.). 5 Powerful Ways to Take REAL Action on DEI (Diversity, Equity & Inclusion). Retrieved July 13, 2020, from <https://www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/5-powerful-ways-to-take-real-action-on-dei-diversity-equity-inclusion/>
34. Culwell, A. C. (2018, July 13). How Leaders Can Strengthen Their Organizational Culture. Stanford Social Innovation Review. Retrieved from [https://ssir.org/articles/entry/how\\_leaders\\_can\\_strengthen\\_their\\_organizational\\_culture](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/how_leaders_can_strengthen_their_organizational_culture)
35. Culwell, A. C. (2018, July 13). How Leaders Can Strengthen Their Organizational Culture. Stanford Social Innovation Review. Retrieved from [https://ssir.org/articles/entry/how\\_leaders\\_can\\_strengthen\\_their\\_organizational\\_culture](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/how_leaders_can_strengthen_their_organizational_culture)
36. Neidhart, K. (2020, March 19). Personal Communication.
37. Templeman, J. (2020, March 10). Personal Communication.
38. Olson, L. (2019). The Path to Instructional Excellence and Equitable Outcomes. (T. Crow, Ed.). Oxford, OH.

## INTERVIEWS

**Jennifer Templeman,**  
President and Chief Operating Officer, Jumpstart

**Kara Neidhardt,**  
Director of Schools and Community Engagement,  
Connecticut Charter Schools Association