

Twelve Essential Questions to Help Improve Your Project's AIM Statement: The AIM Statement Check List¹

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Quality Improvement (QI) problem solving teams often flounder from the lack of an initial clear and concise problem statement. Once QI teams narrow their problem statement down to a discrete issue they are able to focus on, they can effectively apply QI tools, and mature as a team. This saves valuable problem solving time and avoids early disengagement. When teams are unable to focus on the real issue, they lose valuable problem solving time, and become discouraged about the value of QI. Team members become disenfranchised from the process since they seem to be going in circles without making any progress. Below are 'some questions to facilitate the process when crafting a clear, specific, and focused AIM statement.

Below are twelve questions to facilitate the process of developing AIM statements that are clear, specific, and focused, as well as a checklist for tracking whether each element is in place.

1. **Does the proposed project needing improvement align with the Organization's strategic goals and priorities?** If it does not, the effort may be a wasted opportunity of time and resources that could have been utilized on an important organizational priority. If it does align, can it be clearly articulated?
2. **Does the improvement project have a sponsor within leadership?** A sponsor gives improvement project credibility. A sponsor can also help an improvement team by giving guidance about how to navigate politically sensitive waters as well as remove barriers to the project's success
3. **Does the AIM discretely describe the project purpose and define clearly "What are we trying to improve (leaving no room for misinterpretation)?"** Too often AIM statements are ambiguous and open to many interpretations. The Team may want to test their AIM statement on a third party.
4. **Are those impacted by the project in agreement that improvement is needed?** If an improvement project is started in an area and those being impacted are not informed about the reasons for doing it they may not help the team or resist any attempts to implement improvements. They may also be able to identify unintended consequences from the improvement which helps avoid time and expense that would not otherwise be considered.
5. **Is there a timeline for completion of the project?** Improvement projects should always have a timeline associated with it. It is often best for an improvement team to subdivide the effort into smaller pieces of a large project. This allows the team to achieve early success, which helps motivate them to the next improvement.
6. **Is the scope of the improvement effort appropriate for the time allotted?** Too often we try to compress a large project into a short time frame and cause the team to skip steps in the problem solving process because of time pressure. This may result in a project that does not tackle the real root cause of the problem, and instead addresses symptoms.
7. **Does the team assigned have the skills and ability to achieve an effective solution during the time allotted?** Assembling a team that does not have the team members with the skills to accomplish the task can be disastrous. This sets the team up for immediate

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failure and sends the wrong message to the organization about management's commitment to having a robust improvement process.

8. **Does the AIM statement describe specific quantitative measureable improvement targets?** Too often we see AIM statements that say we will achieve a 20% improvement. There is no mention of a baseline from which to measure the 20% improvement. AIM statements need to clearly state the improvement planned such as: "We will decrease wait time by 20% from a current level of 30 minutes to 24 minutes in 3 months."
9. **Are there any solutions indicated in the AIM statement?** *Remember an AIM statement is a problem statement with no solution indicated. If we indicate solutions in the AIM Statement the team assigned my just jump to them as the solution without any investigation as to what is the real root cause. An AIM statement does not describe how we will achieve the goal; rather, it states what the goal is.*
10. **Are there any sub AIMs indicated?** *If so they may need their own AIM Statements. Many times as we investigate a problem we may see some other factors that can be improved simultaneously that will need either a sub Aim Statement or its own improvement AIM. We might be improving a billing process to reduce rejections but see the opportunity to increase revenue. The revenue increase will need its own AIM Statement.*
11. **Does it identify the internal and external customer rationale for the improvement?** *It is important to identify the customers for the improvement project since this is the reason we are doing it in the first place: to improve customer satisfaction and value.*
12. **Is the AIM statement flexible?** *Can it be modified as new information is uncovered? As a team moves through a problem solving process new facts emerge which may require the AIM Statement to be modified to meet the current reality. The team should go back to the sponsor and work together to revise the AIM statement when needed.*

AIM Statement Checklist

Questions	Yes	No	Needs Development
1. Does the proposed project needing improvement align with the Organization's strategic goals and priorities?			
2. Does the improvement project have a sponsor within leadership?			
3. Does the AIM discretely describe the project purpose and define clearly " <i>What are we trying to improve (leaving no room for misinterpretation)?</i> "			
4. Are those impacted by the project in agreement that improvement is needed?			
5. Is there a timeline for the project to be completed by?			
6. Is the scope of the improvement effort appropriate for the time allotted?			
7. Does the team assigned have the skills and ability to achieve an effective solution during the time allotted?			
8. Does the AIM statement describe specific quantitative improvement targets?			
9. Are there any solutions indicated in the AIM statement? (<i>Remember an AIM statement is a problem statement with no solution indicated.</i>)			
10. Are there any sub AIMs indicated? <i>If so they may need their own AIM Statements.</i>			
11. Does it identify the internal and external customer rationale for the improvement?			
12. Is the AIM statement flexible? <i>Can it be modified as new information is uncovered?</i>			

When you have all "Yes" in every column you then have a discrete, time bound, and measureable AIM Statement and you are ready to proceed with problem solving.