



IOWA QUALITY STANDARDS

Supporting a Statewide System
of Homelessness Services

Final Status Summary June 15, 2016

At the end of nearly three years of focused work, the Iowa Council on Homelessness (ICH) has a valuable tool and resource to guide beginning or experienced programs in improving the system of quality programs and services serving those experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Peer developed and broadly reviewed statewide, the Iowa Quality Standards offer a free tool to all with a click of a mouse. Work in this third year relied on the input and guidance of the State Planning Advisory Committee (SPAC) throughout these months, as well as support from Iowa Finance Authority (IFA) staff.

The Iowa Quality Standards (IQS) are available on the ICH pages of the Iowa Finance Authority website at <http://www.iowafinanceauthority.gov/PageSection/Index/1>.

- » Download the IQS Handbook [here](#) to view the standards and self-appraisal tool.
- » Download the IQS Appendix with a list of helpful resources [here](#).

As a reminder, use of the IQS is voluntary. The IQS cover four main areas: governance, operations, services, and performance. The purpose of the IQS is to help Iowa organizations identify their strengths, as well as areas for improvement, and provide helpful resources in both areas.

We at SPPG have continued to move the IQS initiative forward in the most recent fiscal year. Primary activities occurring since July 1, 2015 involved working with IFA to create a responsive website for users of all experience levels, developing informational materials to promote the IQS, and working with a small group to test out and provide feedback on their experiences with the IQS.

Website Resource

The 2015 summer and fall months were spent in working back and forth with the IFA staff to create and test the IFA web pages where the Iowa Quality Standards now reside. Steps needed to be coordinated in this process to ensure the dozens of links to resource documents worked and that all parts of the site appeared and functioned correctly. While some issues remain with certain browsers, the site works well with Internet Explorer.

It was necessary for the website to be fully functional prior to outreach aimed at directing people to the site.

Promotional Materials and Outreach

A logo and style was developed to support the identity of the Iowa Quality Standards. The logo appears at the top of this summary, and the colors and style type is carried through here as well. Materials developed and recent communications sent via email are consistent with this style. SPPG has provided the logo and all documents to ICH and IFA staff during the course of this phase of work.

The SPAC agreed that two simple and short pieces would be most useful for programs. One piece is a higher level introduction to the Iowa Quality standards intended for use with Board and community members as well as a general audience introduction to the IQS.

Organization and program staff are the audience for the second piece. The content of this piece is designed to give a simple overview of how to get started using the standards. Both of these pieces have been shared statewide by SPPG through email newsletters and by ICH staff as well. We encourage you to share these two introductory pieces with others and use them in your community.

- » [Iowa Quality Standards Backgrounder](#)
- » [Iowa Quality Standards Fact Sheet](#)

Demonstration Project

Part of the second year of work brought discussion by the State Planning Advisory Committee (SPAC) on how to introduce the IQS standards to Iowa organizations and how to gather some feedback on them from people who were not involved in their development. In spring 2016, SPPG launched a demonstration project to get the standards into the hands of organizations serving individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness and to hear how the standards held up in the “real world”.

SPAC members recruited several organizations around the state to take part. They began by conducting their self-appraisal, did some planning, and began to implement the standards that were most important to their organizations. They agreed to provide information about their experiences and feedback on the IQS and the website.

Five organizations initially agreed to participate:

- » Council on Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence, Sioux City
- » Rally Point Cedar Valley Veterans, Waverly
- » Helping Services of Northeast Iowa, Waverly
- » Fort Dodge Housing Transitional Housing Program, Fort Dodge
- » Project Concern, Dubuque

Early in the project SPPG hosted a conference call with all of the participating organizations and ICH board members to provide project participants with additional context for the IQS and to facilitate a Q&A session with board members.

Full project participation was lower than anticipated and not all organizations submitted their status updates. One program had to drop out due to the organization’s dissolution and others cited busy schedules as their reason for incompleteness of the project.

Of the feedback collected, comments were positive and, overall, participants were happy to have been a part of the project. Training was a common category where organizations thought they could implement the most standards. One participant noted that time and funding are constraints to meeting all of the training-related standards, but that it was important to do so. In this way, the demonstration project confirmed what was learned during the outreach conducted as part of development of the standards.

From participants about their experience:

- » *“I thought it was a worthwhile experience to participate in the project and would highly recommend it to others.”*

- » *“I would encourage programs to participate in the project because it encourages review of standards and best practices for agencies assisting homeless individuals.”*

- » *“Thank you so much for this opportunity and for organizing this project.”*

A Look to the Future

The Iowa Council on Homelessness and State Planning Advisory Committee have taken a leap toward promoting a system of quality services in Iowa through this three-year investment. As you consider the next steps, there is a good bit of information and advice contained in the body of work created over the past years. There was discussion by the ICH on how best to keep the standards current and review them for potential needed updates. Ongoing promotion and introduction of the standards to those who still may not be aware will be important. As SPPG now steps back from the scene, we would hope that the ICH can house and nurture the IQS, encourage their use, and make use of them considered part of an organization’s best practices.

It is noteworthy that the peer-driven and statewide outreach-based approach to development and implementation of the Iowa Quality Standards seems to have dissipated the doubt and preconceived notions about the standards as another layer of work for organizations. Rather, they are perceived as a useful resource made available at no cost and provide straightforward assistance. The Council and SPAC can celebrate that achievement.

Final Note from the SPPG Team

As the contracted staff you entrusted with this challenge, we thank you for that trust, guidance, and support throughout this process. We have said many times, and it is as true as ever, the members of the State Planning Advisory Committee deserve recognition for their expertise, ability to listen and explain, reach consensus, and do their homework each month. If there were awards given to most dedicated and hardworking committees, they would be the winner.

It has been our pleasure to be part of the Council’s work, and we will certainly be watching from the wings as the IQS gains widespread use.