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# Developing your aims statement



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## What is it?

An aims statement is a written documentation of what you want to achieve from your improvement project and a timeframe for achieving it.

## When to use it

You should develop an aims statement to help you identify and articulate clear, focused goals with clinical leadership. Your goals should focus on problems that cause concern as well as benefits for patients and staff. Your aims need to be specific and measurable and should link to the strategic aims of your organisation.

## How to use it

When developing your aims statement, you should consider:

<b>Be specific</b>	Don't just say 'we will improve patient safety' – your aim will be much more meaningful if you are specific about what element of your service you will make safer for patients.
<b>Include clear and measurable targets</b>	Include a numerical goal where possible. It should be time-specific and measurable and should also define the patient population that will be affected, eg improve critical care outcomes by reducing healthcare associated infections rates by 5% (from 8% to 3%) within one year. An aims statement that says simply 'Reduce healthcare associated infection rates by 5%' can easily be subject to scope creep.
<b>Specify the scope</b>	The aim statement should define the scope of your project – the patient population and whether you are making the improvement across your team, department or organisation. In the example above, the aim statement clearly identifies patients in critical care as the population within scope.
<b>Include the stakeholders in developing your aims</b>	Involving your stakeholders in developing your aim can be an important way to engage the people around you in your improvement project and to ensure that your aim is shared with the people involved in your improvement project.
<b>Link your aim to benefits for patients/ service users and staff</b>	Everything we do should be able to be linked to patient outcomes in some way. It's important to think about what the benefits of the project are going to be for stakeholders – both those affected by the project and those who you want to work with you to make improvements to your service.
<b>Don't include solutions in your aims statement</b>	Avoid the temptation of jumping to conclusions about what changes you need to make – it's important to take the time to understand what's really happening in your system/processes before identifying potential changes.

<b>Link your improvement project aims to strategic objectives</b>	Aims should be consistent with national goals. By linking your aims to the strategic objectives of the organisation you will increase the chances of your project being successful.
<b>Be prepared to modify the aim</b>	Teams need to recognise that sometimes it is useful to refocus their aim, ie consciously deciding to work on a smaller part of the system as part of the overall project strategy. For example, if the overall aim is to reduce hospital associated infection rates in critical care by 5% (from 8% to 3%) within a year, then refocusing to work on a smaller part of the system is often a good tactic, eg reduce hospital associated infection rates in critical care cardiac patients by X% (from y% to z%) may help the team learn more about what's happening within the system and help them to build confidence in their solutions so helping them achieve the desired overall goal.
<b>What's your elevator pitch?</b>	Think about your elevator pitch. This is what you would say to someone, a senior manager, patient, or colleague if you had just a few moments in a lift between floors to engage them with your improvement project. How are you going to use your aim to enthuse and engage people to get involved with your project? Be realistic about what you hope to achieve – but don't be afraid to set ambitious targets and inspire those around you to aim for something really brilliant.

## What next?

Once you have developed your aims statement, you should reflect on whether it is SMART and make any necessary amendments to ensure that it is. A SMART aim is:

**S**pecific – a very clear statement of what you are trying to achieve

**M**easurable – has a numerical target that can be measured

**A**chievable – is realistic and attainable in the time allowed

**R**elevant – is linked to the strategic aims of your organisation and relates to patient outcomes

**T**ime-bound (sometimes referred to as timely, time-sensitive, time-based) – has a clearly defined timeframe within which the aim should be achieved.

## Four columns: Link your project's aim to the organisation's objectives

Linking your project aims to your organisation's aims is a key strategy for ensuring a successful project. Using the four column matrix (see below) can help you do this. It will allow you to multiply the benefits from a single project right across the organisation. As this approach has a strong focus on numbers, you may need some input from your information team and accounts department. Evidence suggests that senior leadership and clinical buy-in is instrumental in health service improvement. The ability to sell what you are doing and describe potential outcomes – for example, improved clinical outcomes – will help achieve this.

Four columns should be used at the start of your project once you have established your aims.

**Figure 1: The four column matrix**

The established project aims	Project measures	Link project to the bigger picture	The established project aims
<p><b>“We guarantee that the results for all specimens will be available within...”</b></p>	<p>(How you know your project is progressing towards your aims)</p> <p>Pathology turnaround time</p> <p>(eg time in minutes from receipt of specimen to results being available)</p>	<p>(How you know your project is progressing towards your aims)</p> <p>70% of clinical decisions depend on pathology</p>	<p>(How the project contributes to improving patient care, resource savings, etc)</p> <p>How do we measure the impact this project will have on speeding up clinical decision making and help to achieve the 18 week pathway?</p>