QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK, VOLUME 2:
A Framework for Advancing High-Quality Vocational and Technical Training
NOTE ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

This document is part of a set of training resources for the Quality Assessment Framework, or QAF, designed by RTI International. The QAF forms, rubric, processes, and other tools are intended to help technical and vocational education and training centers worldwide to assess their own strengths and weaknesses, the demands of the workplace in their context, national or subnational education policies, and the corresponding services they should offer to students and prospective employers.

The framework’s premise is that, in order to meet current and future workforce needs, promote sustainable program quality, and ensure longstanding impact for individual students and the larger economy,

- Training centers must provide a comprehensive set of services;
- Governments must adopt a comprehensive set of quality standards that apply universally to all programs;
- Industry partners must have confidence that training programs are aligned with labor market demands; and
- International aid organizations will benefit from working from a similar set of criteria.

The training resources in this set are:

1. **Overview** – Summarizes the critical need globally for better educational opportunities that lead directly to youth employment in particular, and sets the stage for the QAF
2. **Framework** – Elaborates upon the rationale for the QAF, and describes its components
3. **Trainer’s manual** – Serves as a guide for master trainers and facilitators responsible for training others in how to roll out the use of the QAF across networks of technical training centers
4. **Appendices** – Consist of reproducible handouts, forms, and other resources to accompany the trainer’s manual
5. **PowerPoint slide deck** – Contains slides to accompany the trainer’s manual

This package of training materials is available for free download from RTI International’s education resources website, https://shared.rti.org.

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A FRAMEWORK FOR ADVANCING HIGH-QUALITY VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL TRAINING

This document is a short introduction to the rationale for, and the components of, the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) designed by RTI International.

Master trainers who thoroughly understand this framework will lead a QAF General Training for a group of prospective facilitators, using the QAF trainer’s manual and accompanying resources. The trained facilitators later will guide self-assessment and action-planning sessions for leaders and participants from their country’s technical training centers that want to take concrete actions to improve their services.

Technical and vocational training institutions and systems differ from country to country. Instruction may be delivered by technical and vocational schools (public and private), continuing-education or postsecondary schools, polytechnics, diversified secondary schools, enterprises, or apprenticeship training centers.

Partly in response to the global issue of unemployed and underemployed youth, there have been urgent calls to reform low-capacity and underperforming secondary and technical education systems. Doing so, however, will require a strategic and research-based approach. It must involve individual technical training centers, provincial and national governments, and international aid organizations, all of which would benefit from a road map to guide change and improvement.

Drawing on research from best practices, RTI constructed a framework based upon five key drivers of quality, or domains, as indicated by the diagram at right.

RTI International’s Quality Assurance Framework is built upon a set of research-based, universal quality criteria for training programs and centers. The framework’s premise is that, in order to meet current and future workforce needs, promote sustainable program quality, and ensure longstanding impact for individual students and the larger economy,

1. Training centers must provide a comprehensive set of services;

2. Governments must adopt a comprehensive set of quality standards that apply universally to all programs;
3. Industry partners must have confidence that training programs are aligned with labor market demands; and
4. International aid organizations will benefit from working from a similar set of criteria.

QUALITY CRITERIA

The quality criteria are the basis for the tools that comprise the Quality Assurance Framework. They succinctly represent the research-based features of a comprehensive training center and program. As elaborated below, the criteria are organized around the five domains:

- Leadership
- Partnerships
- Equity and Access
- Teaching and Learning
- Operations

Next, by domain, we describe the QAF’s expectations of what optimal conditions would look like in a high-performing technical and vocational training system.
Leadership

Leaders of training centers play a vital role in ensuring the quality of the services delivered. They have a clear (shared) vision and create a collaborative, inclusive, and transparent culture with distributed leadership and shared accountability. It is not unusual for training centers to have developed organically to serve a small number of jobless youth in a particular community. To help them evolve and grow, leaders engage in a comprehensive and thoughtful process to plan for expanded, high-quality programs that serve a growing and targeted population of youth eager to enter the regional workforce.

The leaders also commit to regular self-examination of their institution, and ongoing improvements in quality. The planned improvements are directly aligned with and measured by student outcomes. The leaders put systems in place to collect and examine student-level data, and they evaluate the benefits of training program participation using a set of success indicators (the quality criteria), which makes it easier to be accountable to their multiple constituencies. The Leadership quality criteria against which the centers will assess themselves using the QAF tools are:

**Leadership Quality Criteria**

- **Vision and Mission**: Center and program are guided by a clearly defined vision and mission, supported by all key stakeholders.

- **Leadership**: Qualified leaders demonstrate a high degree of competence and, through distributed leadership practices and shared decision-making, have earned trust and support across all stakeholder groups.

- **Culture**: There is a culture that promotes inclusiveness, collaboration, and transparency, with all stakeholders participating in continuous improvement of services and sharing responsibility for positive results.

- **Planning**: Center periodically conducts strategic reviews to draft multiyear improvement plans, and implements plans in a way that promotes aligned resources and coherent programming.

- **Data and Accountability**: Center collects, maintains, and regularly analyzes student-level data. The analyses then inform continuous improvement and decision-making, thus ensuring mutual accountability for results.
Partnerships

Ideally, systems will be prepared to train large numbers of mostly poor and vulnerable youth to enter and succeed in an increasingly technological and global economy. Doing so will require contributions and commitments from all key sectors of society: government, business, education and training, and the local community. All partners have a key role to play; none can do it alone. Together, they commit to a shared vision and dedicate the necessary resources to put the vision into practice and sustain it.

Business and industry partners ensure that training programs remain relevant to meet their employment needs. Government partners ensure that vocational training centers receive ministry support and adhere to quality standards. Community organizations provide support services to help students succeed in a demanding program of study. Education and training entities ensure that youth have basic literacy and numeracy skills to succeed in technical and vocational education and training programs; they also provide opportunities for further training to promote career advancement. The Partnerships QAF quality criteria are:

| **Partnerships Quality Criteria** |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| **DEMAND**                | Training areas are aligned with occupations that are currently and projected to continue to be in demand in the regional economy. |
| **BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY** | Center maintains strong working relationships with multiple employers in related industry sector(s). The employers play active roles in promoting, supporting, and guiding the center, its staff and students—i.e., by offering regular advisement; hosting work-based learning and apprenticeship opportunities; informing curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and supporting facilities and equipment. |
| **GOVERNMENT**            | Center maintains strong relations with local and regional ministry representatives, and partners with them to ensure ongoing guidance and support. |
| **COMMUNITY**             | Center maintains strong relations with local community members and partners with them to assist with recruitment of students, ensure effective use of and access to facilities, and coordinate with local providers to offer support services to students. |
| **EDUCATION AND TRAINING INSTITUTIONS** | Center maintains mutually beneficial agreements with other education and training institutions to facilitate smooth transitions for students. |
Many countries around the world struggle to support large populations of poor and vulnerable youth, who too often are drains on the local economy rather than contributors to it.

To remedy the all-too-common barriers to gainful employment, training centers and their partners can prioritize outreach, access, and support to those who need it most: poor and vulnerable youth, people with disabilities, and women choosing to work in fields that have historically been male-dominated.

For many youth, to complete a technical or vocational training program successfully and transition to employment, they must have extra support in areas such as health care, housing, transportation, child care, counseling, tutoring, and more. Community, government, and business partners can all play a role in ensuring that the targeted populations receive the support they need to become contributing members of a vibrant local economy. The quality criteria for the Equity and Access domain are:

- **MARKETING**: Outreach strategies target the recruitment, enrollment, and success of poor and vulnerable youth.
- **EQUITABLE ACCESS**: Policies and practices ensure that any interested and qualified student can be admitted, enrolled, and supported, and can successfully complete the program.
- **TARGET POPULATIONS**: Policies and practices promote recruitment, enrollment, support, and program completion for target populations. Example populations are poor and vulnerable youth, people with disabilities, and girls and women in nontraditional career fields.
- **SUPPORT**: Target populations have access to a full range of supports to ensure ease of enrollment, successful completion, and timely transition to employment. Services may include tutoring, counseling, housing, health care, child care, job placement, and more.
- **FINANCIAL AID**: Students with financial need are offered scholarships so that they may enroll, complete the program, participate in the local economy, and support their families.
Teaching and Learning

The relevance and value of training centers depend on the degree to which (1) their curriculum aligns with current demands of local industry and (2) their instruction effectively builds student knowledge and skills.

Too often, training institutions focus exclusively on technical training. When they do so, they miss the opportunity to fully prepare youth by also teaching work-readiness skills, entrepreneurship skills, and basic numeracy and literacy. These additional skills will better enable underperforming youth to succeed and advance.

High-performing technical and vocational training centers enable youth to practice the skills that workplaces require by collaborating on real-world projects that require critical thinking and problem solving. These centers ask students to demonstrate, and are prepared to assess, student competency in technical, workplace, and entrepreneurial skills that can lead to a skills certificate issued by industry or government. The goal is to gradually shift both the nature and quality of learning so that it aligns with evidence-based and evidence-producing standards of practice. The QAF quality criteria for the Teaching and Learning domain are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Criteria</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program</td>
<td>The learning program is clearly defined and articulated, including standards, curricula, syllabus, instructional methods, and assessments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>Academic and technical curricula are aligned with national standards, validated by industry advisors, and evaluated and updated regularly. These steps ensure that students have necessary academic foundations to complete the program, enter the workforce, and enjoy mobility once employed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>Instruction is interactive and project-based, is designed to promote students' demonstration of competencies, and includes practical experience in work settings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>Assessment is performance-based. It requires students to demonstrate that they have mastered knowledge, skills, and workplace competencies. Skills and competencies result in certification validated by industry and portable for employment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>The program strives toward and achieves a level of quality that leads to accreditation by national or international agencies, when available.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of course, most students, parents, and partners pay attention to the training that happens in the classroom and the workplace, but training institutions’ administrators know that high-quality services are not possible without adequate and sustained funding; safe and well-maintained facilities and equipment; and, most of all, highly qualified teachers.

For this reason, the “back-of-the-house” operations are essential and are attended to persistently in order to ensure effective and efficient functioning. The QAF quality criteria for Operations are:

**Operations Quality Criteria**

| Human Resources | Center operates a transparent recruitment and hiring process, hires based on demonstrated competency and qualifications, provides ample support for professional growth of employees, and manages an effective system for evaluating staff. |
| Facilities      | Facilities are safe, appropriate to accommodate student population, designed to reflect workplace realities, maintained effectively, and upgraded as needed. |
| Finance         | Center maintains sound financial practices, including transparent budgeting processes, revenue and spending plans, and annual financial audits. |