

The Essential Five-Step Recipe for Process Improvement

An institution's work processes are its means of production. They determine how people operate. Simplifying and standardizing those processes can create efficiency, free up capacity, and even unlock opportunities to scale.

Many formalized process improvement methodologies compete for attention, but you don't have to decipher all the buzzwords. Regardless of which approach you adopt, five steps contain the active ingredients to understand and untangle processes that are overly complex, paper-based, out of sync with policy, or otherwise "broken."

This infographic outlines the **five critical steps** that organizations must take as part of their process improvement journey.



1

Assemble the Right People

The best process improvement teams draw on **different perspectives and approaches** to make processes more simple, standardized, and beneficial to the customer. Consider the following roles and perspectives in assembling your team.

Team size: five to eight people

Team roles:

- Process improvement coordinator
- Top customers
- Central office representatives
- Distributed unit representatives
- End users
- Process managers

Other on-deck team members and perspectives:

- Subject-matter experts
- Technology experts
- Resident complainers
- Faculty members
- Auditors
- Apprentice process improvement coordinators



2

Map the Current State

Teams should work from start through finish of a process to understand **what happens, why it happens, and who is involved**. If your campus is new to this activity, begin with a high-level map of five to seven tasks or subprocesses, and then drill down from there. Consider the following questions as you work together.

Capture "as-is" process steps:

- When does this process begin, and when does it end?
- Who is involved in this process? What are their roles?
- Who owns which process steps?
- What prompts a step to begin and end?
- What inputs and outputs are necessary for each step?
- What workarounds, shortcuts, duplicative work, and shadow systems are necessary to complete the process?

Evaluate redesign opportunities:

- Why is the step necessary? What other steps rely on it?
- What value does the step provide?
- What manual steps are opportunities for automation?
- How and why does the process vary across campus?



3

Collect Current-State Data

Establishing baseline metrics is critical for understanding **where you are now and how you can improve**. It's impossible to prove later successes without this step. Focus on just a handful of metrics that are important to stakeholders and customers based on the following considerations.

Baseline metrics should be...

- ...tied to the part of the process that is being improved.
- ...measurable, simple, and expressed in an equation.
- ...aligned with business objectives.
- ...tracked at a proper frequency.
- ...expressed graphically over time.
- ...validated with a master service agreement.

Possible metrics:

- Productivity
- Cycle time
- Accuracy
- Satisfaction
- Savings
- Volume of work
- Response time
- Number of steps



4

Design the Future State

This is the time to think creatively about what the process **should look like in terms of meeting the goals you established** in the previous step. You'll want to look for opportunities to eliminate waste and maximize efficiency while maintaining high customer satisfaction.

What steps...

- ...can be eliminated?
- ...can be combined with others?
- ...can be performed in parallel?
- ...take too long?
- ...should be done in a shared services unit?
- ...could benefit from technology solutions?
- ...are necessary because of legal or regulatory requirements?

Consider the perspective of customers and end-users

- What does the customer want or need this process to look like?
- What steps need to be added to improve communication, reduce backlog, or solve other problems?
- What technologies and solutions exist outside of higher education that customers might expect to use to complete this process?



5

Develop an Implementation Plan

To bring the future-state model to life, you'll need a plan. That plan should focus on how realizing your future state will impact **policy, staffing, technology, and communication**. Use these questions to get started.

Policy

- What current policies need to be enforced or changed?
- What new policies need to be created?

Staffing

- What additional training will be needed?
- What organizational changes should support the new process?

Technology

- What digitization, automation, or other solutions are needed?
- What measurement systems are in place or can be supplemented with technology resources?

Communication

- Who will be affected by or need to know about the changes (staff, customers, faculty)?
- What is the best medium for sharing this information?

SAMPLE OPPORTUNITIES

Finance

- Non-student billing
- Budget revisions
- Departmental cashiering

Human Resources

- I-9 processing
- International student hiring
- Base pay adjustments

Procurement

- Procure-to-pay
- Travel booking
- Expense approvals

Facilities

- Temporary building access requests
- Minor facilities renovations
- Work order processing and billing

Auxiliaries

- PO box rental and billing
- Resident check-out processes
- Housing and dining utilities billing

Information Technology

- Granting access to IT systems for new employees
- Revoking access to IT systems for exiting employees
- IT help desk responses

Research Administration

- Award setup
- Award closeout
- Collaborative research approvals

Faculty-Facing Processes

- Classroom space allocation
- Faculty summer compensation

Student-Facing Processes

- Student housing assignments
- Intent-to-graduate applications
- H1B visa processing
- Financial aid verification
- Scholarship selection and notification
- Student withdrawals
- Adding and dropping courses
- Student mailroom package pickup