HAP Standards Development Process

Field Assessment Phase

Results: Short Report

1 December 2006

Drafted By
Jennifer Harvey Birdsall, HAP Researcher

In Consultation With
Monica Oliver, CARE International Researcher

Author: Jennifer Harvey Birdsall, HAP Researcher

This research was undertaken for the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership under the mandate of the Standards Development Working Group 3: 'The Business Case'. Its purpose was twofold: 1) to examine the clarity and relevance of the proposed benchmarks of the HAP Standard, and 2) to examine the clarity, relevance, feasibility, affordability, and measurability of the proposed requirements and their associated means of verification. This research generated a set of recommendations which were submitted to the HAP Standards Development Manager and the HAP Editorial Steering Committee Management Team.

The recommendations stated herein refer to version 3 of the HAP Standard and are based upon the authors' analysis of the data collected through the field assessment phase detailed in this short report.

This research would not have been possible without the financial support of the Emergency Capacity Building Project 2 (ECB2).

Introduction

HAP endeavors to protect the rights of recipients of emergency aid through a commitment on the part of its members to uphold a minimum level of accountability and quality assurance. As part of this commitment, HAP has been developing a Standard on accountability to beneficiaries, consisting of seven benchmarks, their requirements, and the associated means of verifications in cooperation with beneficiaries, member agencies, interested non-members, and other quality initiatives. The HAP Standard reflects a desire on the part of HAP members to revere the values of humanity, accountability, and responsible independence and to more concretely define what they are willing to be held accountable for.

The HAP Accountability and Quality Management Standard is now in its fourth redraft[1], following consultation over 18 months and the field assessment phase detailed below. Version 3 of the HAP Standard was revised 2 November 2006 into version 4[2]. Version 4 was redrafted following the submittal of the full version of this report to the HAP ESC Management Team, thus resulting in version 5. Version 5 functions as the working document of the Editorial Steering Committee meeting 14-15 December 2006.

Methodology

To properly assess the proposed benchmarks and proposed requirements, HAP selected five aspects to examine on two levels of analysis: 1) the proposed benchmarks in terms of clarity and relevance, and 2) the proposed requirements and means of verification in terms of clarity, relevance, feasibility, affordability and measurability. To carry out this examination, it proved necessary to consult beneficiaries, field practitioners, HAP member agencies, other quality initiatives, interested independents, and donors. HAP carried out this consultation through four main venues: regional workshops, feedback forms, agency-led self-assessments, and field visits between May and November 2006.

The desired end products of this phase were: 1) a set of recommendations regarding the above, to contribute to a redrafting of the HAP Standard, to ensure a set of viable requirements and their appropriate means of verification, and 2) a collection of good practice examples, audit recommendations, and a broad range of commentary on accountability practices. This report addresses the first of these desired outputs. The latter two are addressed as examples sent to the HAP Standards Development Manager.

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[1] The HAP Standard referred to in this report is draft version 3 issued on 27 July 2006. This can be found in Appendix A.
[2] Version 5 of the HAP Standard issued on 2 December 2006 can be found in Appendix B.

Key Findings: Venues of Analysis

Regional Workshops

HAP hosted two regional two-day workshops bringing together approximately 73 field practitioners and beneficiaries to learn, improve and refine the proposed requirements, and identify tools. These workshops have enabled HAP to spread awareness of the HAP Standard, while consulting with field practitioners, beneficiaries, and donors to assess and improve upon the benchmarks and their requirements.

Furthermore, these workshops facilitated the third and fourth levels of investigation, the agency-led self-assessments and field visits, through clear site identification and voluntary participation. The workshops also enabled the piloting of some of the interview schedules proposed for the agency-led self-assessment and field visit packets. The information emerging from these workshops proved a valuable contribution to both the field assessment process and the overall Standards Development process.

Feedback Forms

HAP distributed the draft HAP Standard to its large pool of reference group members and HAP partner agencies twice during the field assessment phase for consultation on two drafts of the HAP Standard. We asked the respondents to use a semi-structured feedback form and to comment on: 1) the clarity and relevance of each benchmark, and 2) the clarity, relevance, feasibility, and affordability of the proposed requirements.

Approximately, 65 individuals and agencies contributed to the development of version 3 and version 4 of the HAP Standard[3]. Version 3 is the version used for field-testing, while the Standards Development Manager presented Version 4 to the HAP Board on 3 November 2006.

Agency Led Self-Assessments

The self-assessments only took 1-2 days of an agency's time; they also proved to be a more flexible option for those agencies with limited time and resource capacities to devote to the standards development process. And while the field site visits are the main venue for assessing: 1) the appropriateness and thoroughness of the proposed requirements (as proxies for the proposed standards) and 2) the feasibility of testing their associated means of verification, the agency-led self-assessments have proved to be an important source of

[3] Please see Appendix C for the numerical results of the first round of feedback, the graphic results of the second round of feedback, and the collated comments from the second round of feedback.

additional, but vital, feedback regarding the applicability of the benchmarks across a range of cultures and languages.

Four agencies completed the process and submitted their data to HAP: Christian Aid, MERCY Malaysia, CARE Niger, and World Vision Colombia. These assessments took place between 20 August and 1 November 2006.

Without prompting from HAP, all four agencies chose to examine Benchmark 3. MERCY Malaysia also examined Benchmark 6. This worked out well from the analysis point of view, as the data received was comparable and extremely useful. This data has been analyzed alongside the field visit data to produce a set of benchmark specific key findings and recommendations. These assessments enabled HAP to assess the benchmarks across three continents with agencies of varying size and structure working in significantly different environments. Christian Aid works mainly through partner agencies, while CARE Niger is operational and working in a slow onset emergency. World Vision Colombia is a fairly large program working in a conflict zone, while MERCY Malaysia is a smaller agency working mostly in post-disaster relief.

Field Visits

For the field visit aspect of the field assessment phase, HAP carried out three field visits between 20 August 2006 and 31 October 2006 interviewing approximately 40 field practitioners and 7 groups of beneficiaries. The key characteristics identifying a relevant site were: 1) willingness to participate in the field assessment phase, and 2) agencies of varying size, location, and focus. By fulfilling these characteristics we hoped to address the traditional criticism levelled at common standards: they are too general and inappropriate in many contexts. Three agencies volunteered for this field-testing process: OFADEC in Senegal, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) in Somaliland, and World Vision Tsunami Response Team in Sri Lanka. These sites allowed HAP to review the proposed requirements in a variety of humanitarian contexts with a range of humanitarian agencies working under significantly different sets of constraints. These sites also enabled us to use program size as a proxy for scaling purposes. The data gleaned from these visits has been analyzed using cross comparative case study analysis coupled with low intensity quantitative analysis alongside the self-assessment data to produce a set of benchmark specific key findings and results.

Key Findings: The Criteria

Overall, the benchmarks were found to have clarity and relevance, with some wording and translation issues to be worked out. Meanwhile, the requirements were found to require significant rewording or replacement, as they did not meet clarity or relevance. In terms of feasibility, some of the requirements and proposed verifications did not meet feasibility and should be reworked or replaced. Likewise, the affordability of some of the requirements and means of verification proved questionable, requiring a reexamination of the requirements.

Key Findings: The Benchmarks

Benchmark 1

It is clear confusion remains regarding what this benchmark is asking of an agency. This confusion clearly contributed to an internal disagreement about where agencies stand in regard to the requirements of this benchmark.

Findings

The participants issued three key critiques regarding this benchmark:

- "It was unclear who was responsible for this document and what implications or role the field teams would have / should have."
- "Definitions of accountability framework and quality management system would be helpful as well as an example or guideline to show this can be created (or the minimum requirements can be outlined)"
- "Replace 'publish' with 'disseminate', 'publish' doesn't make sense"

Furthermore, the participants suggested that demonstrative examples of each term and idea be included in the manual and any training materials developed.

General Benefits & Costs

Once this benchmark was more clearly explained, participants felt it to be essential for: 1) providing a framework for daily work which would enable an agency to better fulfill their commitments, 2) increasing an agency's internal transparency, 3) increasing an agency's external transparency, 4) improving the image of the agency to outside stakeholders, and 5) "will help in knowing how the apply processes and how to prioritize, especially within federated agencies – the standard will help bring agreement across the federation as to what is the minimum standard. It will also help bring some unity into approaches. "

The participants envisioned the following costs if their agencies complied with the requirements of Benchmark 1: a) "perceptions and attitudes need to change and the will to make it work is needed", b) performance monitoring with staff to ensure up take, and c) "the implications such a document may have in the field as the field were not aware that there were any codes/principles etc signed to."

Feasibility & Affordability

There was disagreement among the participants regarding how long it would take and the resources required to consolidate the existing documents into a single, coherent system. The expected timeline ranged from 6 months to 2 years, with visible benefits within 3 months. These timelines assumed minimal additional investment.

The participants observed the following feasibility challenges with this benchmark and its requirements: 1) the ability to work transparently, 2) commitment of staff, and 3) ability to change in a given context. They also observed the following affordability challenge: limited resources. However, they observed that implementing this benchmark would result in the increased credibility and transparency of the participating agency. In general, however, the interviewees felt this benchmark and its requirements to both feasible and affordable if given the time and support required. They specifically requested context appropriate examples, additional HAP monitoring and capacity building visits, and more HAP sponsored workshop and training sessions.

Recommendations

In light of these comments, the authors recommend: 1) clarifying the division of responsibilities between the head office and the field expected by HAP, 2) providing clear definitions of the 'jargon' used in the benchmark and its requirements, 3) providing an example framework within the good practice section of the manual, and 4) minor rewriting to simplify and clarify the text of this benchmark. Additionally, the authors recommend a closer look at the placement of this benchmark as a benchmark or as a framework document. If it remains a benchmark, then a closer examination of the documentation burden induced by this standard needs to be carried out.

Benchmark 2

Overall, the participants found the clarity of Benchmark 2 to be high, but it was clear that the participants were not as clear regarding the details of points a, b, c, and d.

Findings

The participants issued four key critiques regarding this benchmark:

- "'Accountability and Quality Management System' unclear unless you are familiar with HAP"
- "Change 'publish' to 'produce and disseminate' as 'publish' does not cover the many ways one should disseminate information.
- Clarify progress. "Is this progress of project plans or progress of everything?"
- More details are necessary regarding points a, b, c, and d. In particular, "what information and what level of information?"

The participants stated that: 1) each term needs to be clearly defined, and 2) demonstrative examples of each term and idea should be included in the manual and any training materials developed. They felt these changes would not only the requirements clearer, but would more firmly root them in practical terms.

The participants found requirement 2.1 to be generally clearly written and relevant but questioned the wording of 'main languages'. They questioned who would determine what the 'main languages' were as this is subject to bias, convenience (finding translators), and resources (if an agency is operating in an area with many languages. Likewise, 'specified stakeholders' has the same problem as 'main languages'. The participants asked, "who are 'specified stakeholders' and who determines who they are?"

Requirements 2.2 and 2.3 were found to be clearly worded although there were security concerns raised about making this information public. The reactions were mixed regarding whether or not they were relevant, however. The participants all saw value in these requirements, but questioned their current placement and whether or not they were repetitive. Some of the participants felt these requirements could either be combined into one requirement under Benchmark 2 or moved to Benchmark 6 entirely. One aspect of these requirements, the participants questioned: "what is meant by organizational structure?" They recommended clearly defining the detail of 'organizational structure' meant and providing examples of one in the manual or finding a different phrase to communicate the same point.

General Benefits & Costs

Once this benchmark and its requirements were more clearly explained, participants felt them to be essential for: 1) "creating dialogue (with)" and "ensuring beneficiaries have access to information and understand what is happening", 2) "provide people with the basis to respond back to the agency", 3) "increased transparency (of the agency)" or a "clearer agency ID", 4) "limit who gets harassed within the agency," and 5) "increased efficiency" or "save time as they (the beneficiaries) will go to the right person (for problems)."

The participants envisioned the following costs if their agencies complied with the requirements of Benchmark 2 and its requirements: 1) additional work and time as in "every group demands that communication be done in their language and this takes time" and an "influx of queries", and 2) organizational worries as in "we will be held accountable", "security concerns" and "potential government interference", and 3) "may raise false expectations" and "need to make sure information is not a marketing ploy".

Feasibility & Affordability

As the requirements currently stand, continual questions were raised about how to meet the requirements of this benchmark and the feasibility and affordability of doing so. The time needed to meet this standard varied between 2 months and 1 year. Overall, the participants indicated they felt the requirements of this benchmark are important and feasible, but the question the affordability of certain aspects of the requirements.

The participants observed the following general feasibility challenges with this benchmark and its requirements: 1) time needed for translations and producing information for vulnerable groups, 2) staff willingness, and 3) turn around time for translation, 4) information overload for beneficiaries. The following general affordability challenges were also observed: 1) "budgeting for correctly assessing information needs" (including translators and staff to prepare information), 2) "staff overstretch", and 3) "(it is) logistically difficult to disseminate information in the early days of an emergency, but that is when it is most beneficial, it is more challenging to introduce the information in the latter stages of a program".

The interviewees expressed particular concern about the feasibility and affordability of meeting requirement 2.1. They stated that they already conduct beneficiary meetings in multiple languages and are barely able to do that much less document those interactions thus raising the question of what level of verification 2.1.6 is HAP looking for. Likewise, the participants raised concerns regarding the feasibility of disseminating information consistently among different groups of beneficiaries. At present they are reliant upon beneficiary representatives or community representatives to relay the information but know the communication lines do not operate consistently even when they get coherent information.

In other words, the majority of participants felt this benchmark and its requirements would require at least one additional staff member (100 percent of participants mentioned additional staff) and a budget line (86 percent of participants mentioned additional, but minimal financial resources), if not information teams depending the size of the program and agency in question. However, the general consensus among the participants was that this was an important and feasible benchmark despite the additional work it would require.

The participants felt additional advice regarding the type of information, the detail of that information, and how often they should disseminate. They thought demonstrative examples of internal communication mechanisms and the provision of information dissemination models in the manual and any training materials developed would improve the feasibility and affordability of the requirements (following redrafting) of this benchmark.

They also suggested communication-training workshops, on the job mentoring programs, and orientation sessions for managers to increase staff willingness and understanding regarding fulfilling these requirements.

Recommendations

In light of these comments, the authors recommend: 1) reexamining the documentation burden associated with this set of requirements and means of verification, 2) rethinking the linkages between the benchmark and the requirements and works on a way to strengthen those links, 3) providing clear definitions of the terminology used in the benchmark and the requirements, 4) minor rewriting to simplify and clarify the text of this benchmark and its requirements, 5) providing demonstrative examples of the type of information desired and information dissemination structures and mechanisms, 6) reexamining the process by which 'main languages' and 'specified stakeholders' are determined as both are key for information dissemination, and 7) reexamining the overlap between benchmarks 2, 3, and 6 and more clearly defining the differences between them. If these recommendations are followed, then the majority of concerns, with the exception of future capacity building assistance, raised by the participants should be addressed.

Benchmark 3

The participants found this benchmark to be clearly written but they disagreed with the informed consent part of the benchmark.

Findings

The participants issued three key critiques regarding this benchmark:

- The participants expressed concern that requirement 3.3 requires 'consent' where the benchmark requires 'seeking consent'. They felt this should be clarified as one or the other.
- "Clarify representatives: who is meant? Is it community segment representatives, government chosen representatives, representatives elected by the beneficiaries, or representatives chosen by (the agency)?"
- 'Identify' is the wrong word. 'Identify' implies the agency either choosing the representatives or using the government appointed representatives. The participants felt agencies should monitor the selection process but should not interfere in it unless they suspect a communication breakdown or another problem.

The participants stated that if: 1) each term is clearly defined and 2) demonstrative examples of each term and idea are included in the manual and any training materials developed, then only would the requirements clearer, but the overall benchmark would be as well.

The participants felt requirement 3.1 was not clear as to whether or not it requires a written document. They believe it should and that this needs to be clarified through a minor rewriting of the requirement and the means of verification. The participants felt having "documented processes would make them easier to implement". They did not suggest an alternative wording. However, they felt this requirement was not only a "good proxy" for the benchmark but that it was "vital" for an effective benchmark.

For requirement 3.2, the participants were concerned about the legitimacy of 'beneficiary representatives.' They said bad representatives can be extremely problematic both from the agency's perspective and from the beneficiary community's perspective. They emphasized the importance of 'monitoring' the selection process and make it clear how important that selection process is rather than just 'recognizing' or 'identifying' representatives. The participants felt this was an important requirement and relevant requirement to have. They also felt this requirement only asked for representatives to be identified, not that they be involved in agency activities. They did not think this is what HAP meant, and so asked for clarification as to which level of commitment HAP was asking for. The participants felt HAP should be asking for both: "good identification and good involvement."

Requirement 3.3 raised significant concern among the participants. The participants liked 3.3a. But they felt the wording should be modified to "inform the beneficiary community" not just the beneficiaries. 3.3b was problematic and caused extensive discussion. The participants questioned whether HAP was looking for 'consent' or the processes to get consent. They viewed 'consent' as two way communication, whereas 'inform' is one way communication. Likewise, they did not like 'register' as it is not clear what it requires of an agency. They suggested replacing 'informed consent' with "inform (the beneficiary community of the agency's) limitations and then consult or seek consent within that framework." However, the majority of participants preferred 'consent through participation' rather than 'registering' it. The participants further felt requirement 3.4 should be merged into requirement 3.2 or 3.3 as it felt repetitive and unconnected to the rest of the requirements and the benchmark. If it is not merged with either 3.2 or 3.3, then at the very least, the participants felt 'arrangements' should be deleted from the requirement for more clarity.

General Benefits & Costs

The participants observed the following key benefits if they were to implement these requirements: 1) "increased credibility" and less conflict and confusion, 2) "improved relations between the agency and the beneficiaries," including a "sense of (program) ownership by the beneficiaries," and 3) "the ability to make informed decisions at the agency level and then communicate these decisions to the intended beneficiary for consensus building towards a decision that is acceptable to all parties." The participants also thought their agencies would see the following benefits if they implemented these requirements: 1) the ability to "measure both the processes and the progress" made within those processes leading to "increased operational efficiency," 2) processing a "reduced (number of) complaints," 3) an overall "improved response" or "good program," 4) "improved sustainability of the program," and 5) "improved trust and accountability."

The participants envisioned the following general costs (disadvantages) to fulfilling these requirements: 1) possible "delays in project implementation and completion," 2) "if the wrong representatives are chosen, then they will hurt the process," and 3) additional time and staffing required.

Feasibility & Affordability

The contributors felt these requirements were both feasible and affordable but that they would take time with estimations between 2 months and 10 months. They felt the feasibility of these requirements depended upon the level of commitment HAP desires from the agency. That desired level of commitment is not currently clear. The interviewees observed three feasibility challenges: 1) the participants felt that empowering the community to participate in this process would take time; 2) it would be a challenge to get staff properly oriented, onboard, and following these procedures consistently; and 3) security and access problems.

The participants envisioned the following affordability challenges: 1) additional staff would be needed to reduce the time to compliance for all of these requirements; 2) requirement 3.4 would definitely necessitate additional staff; and 3) the time needed to orient field and management level staff appropriately in participatory methodologies. The participants agree they need to document some of these processes and more consistently apply them, but question the necessity of the documentation outlined in the means of verification. Overall, the participants felt these requirements required a minimum level of resource investment.

The participants felt having demonstrative examples in the manual coupled with clear definitions and appropriate orientation training materials would improve the feasibility and affordability of these requirements.

Recommendations

In light of these comments the authors recommend: 1) reexamining the documentation burden associated with these requirements and associated means of verification, 2) clarifying what HAP means by 'participation', 3) providing clear definitions of the terminology used in the benchmark and the requirements, 4) engaging in rewriting to simplify and clarify the text of this benchmark and the requirements, 5) providing demonstrative examples of participation structures, 6) reexamining the process by which 'beneficiary representatives' and 'informed consent' are determined, and 7) condensing 3.4 into either 3.2 or 3.3. Furthermore, HAP needs to examine what level of participation is acceptable during what phase of a project. This is an issue that needs to be sorted out for the audit and certification process. If these recommendations are addressed then some of the concerns raised by the participants will be addressed, but it is important to keep in mind that this benchmark and these requirements are, by their very nature, controversial and universal agreement on wording and feasibility is unlikely as it is too dependent upon existing perceptions in the humanitarian field.

<u>Benchmark 4</u>

The confusion surrounding this benchmark and the requirements was pervasive with all of the participants initially saying they did not know what this benchmark was asking of them. The level of confusion derailed a few of the clarity and relevance sessions. The participants' understanding of the requirements was no clearer. It was only during the feasibility and affordability sessions that a discussion of the requirements could advance. That discussion revealed that many agencies intuitively pursue a strategy of identifying and supporting local capacities but in an ad hoc, undocumented manner. The participating agencies each felt they needed to do more in this regard. The beneficiary interviews revealed a mixed response on this issue, but all felt agencies should do more to support local capacities.

Findings

The participants issued four key criticisms regarding this benchmark and its requirements:

- The requirements do not match the benchmark. The benchmark and the requirements are saying two different things.
- 'Local Capacities' is not clear. "What is meant by 'local capacity'? Are we talking about staff, authorities, local organizations? I have to look at the requirements to understand what this benchmark is asking."
- A 'capacity analysis' is different from a 'vulnerability analysis' in terms of staffing.
- Recognizing local capacities is not enough. They should also be supported or "respected" and agency activities should have a "beneficial" impact. The participants felt the auditors should be checking for the latter rather than just for mechanisms to recognize local capacities.

The participants recommended a 'stakeholder map' or a 'gap identification map' linked to the program instead of the 'capacity and vulnerability analysis' mentioned in the benchmark. They said examining and clarifying the linkages between the benchmark and the requirements, clearly defining the above terminology, and making significant wording changes would greatly improve the clarity and relevance of both the benchmark and the requirements.

General Benefits & Costs

Once this benchmark was more clearly explained, the majority of participating agencies felt it was an important benchmark and its requirements equally important. They envisioned: 1) "better relations", 2) "sustainable work", 3) "improved efficiency", 4) improved legitimacy and transparency, 5) improved credibility and trust, and 5) improved security as obvious benefits to implementing these requirements. The participants also felt the 'vulnerability analysis' would help in program planning. However, to reap these benefits, the participants felt there needed to be an official agency-wide policy in place otherwise such systems would remain ad hoc and inconsistently applied.

The participants envisioned the following general costs: 1) the agency risks "raising the expectations of the beneficiaries," 2) "government manipulation of the benchmark," and 3) substantial changes in current operating system.

Feasibility & Affordability

The participants mentioned the following feasibility challenges in trying to implement the requirements of this benchmark: 1) staff skepticism regarding the usefulness of carrying out such analyses, and 2) how feasible is the documentation required in the means of verification for a small agency? The participants observed one major affordability challenge: staff overstretching in smaller and more rural program areas. They recommended additional staff if these requirements are to be met consistently.

To improve the feasibility and affordability of these requirements, the participants recommended additional reporting to monitor requirement 4.2. Additionally, they said the commitment of the project head is critical; otherwise these requirements will never be consistently implemented. The participants recommended having existing sources of information, rather than having to reinvent everything for each emergency. They requested demonstrative examples of how to carry out a 'capacity and vulnerability analysis' including what questions to ask in order to bypass staff biases.

Recommendations

The authors recommend a careful review of this benchmark and its requirements. As it currently stands, this benchmark is problematic and confusing and either needs to be significantly reworded or removed from the 2006 edition of the HAP Standard. HAP should also reexamine what is desired from the benchmark, and thus strengthen the linkages between the benchmark and the requirements. Next, HAP needs to seriously think about how much documentation is truly needed for the audit process? Is HAP going to fail to certify an agency which intuitively carries out the requirements of a particular benchmark but which does not document those processes? Lastly, HAP needs clearly define the terminology used and provide demonstrative examples of each of the processes described in the requirements and the means of verification.

<u>Benchmark 5</u>

This benchmark and its respective requirements received mixed reviews in terms of clarity and relevance. The majority of participants found this benchmark to be clearly worded but felt minor wording changes would improve it further. They felt this benchmark to be important and most stated they would pursue it even if it was not part of the HAP Standard. A few participants questioned why HAP was including a human resources requirement, but following the justification explanation and a discussion regarding how agency field personnel are the only face of the agency beneficiaries see, these participants felt they understood why it was there.

Findings

The participants issued two key criticisms regarding this benchmark and its requirements:

- 'Monitor' was too strong a word for what the participants felt HAP was looking for.
- "Having a system is not enough", the system must be implemented. The implementation requirement is not clear as the benchmark and requirements are currently written.

There was also a general feeling that the means of verification ask much more of an agency than the requirements. They felt HAP needed to choose which level of commitment is desired in this benchmark: the one represented by the requirements or the one represented by the means of verification.

In requirement 5.1, the participants recommended changing 'competency' to 'job descriptions' or the equivalent, as 'competency' is unclear. With this change, the participants felt the requirement became much clearer in what was being asked of an agency. Likewise, the participants recommended changing the wording of 5.2 to read 'transparent system of personnel performance evaluation' or 'staff appraisal system' as they felt the current wording was unclear. In the same vein, the phrase 'continuous development' in 5.3 was continually understood to be formal 'training'.

General Benefits & Costs

The interviewees saw these requirements bringing: 1) improved performance and quality of work to the agency, 2) a way to decrease conflict of interest hires, 3) will result in more confident, competent staff as they will know more clearly what is expected of them and on what basis they will be reviewed ("staff will feel heard and become more motivated"), 4) "people are the agency's greatest reserve and asset thus investment in our staff impacts the image of the agency", and 5) it "impacts the whole industry".

The participants envisioned the following costs: 1) time and management training, and 2) an initially high invest level to get the systems into place. The participants did, however, emphasize the importance of these requirements and stated that their agencies would try doing this regardless of whether or not required by HAP.

Feasibility & Affordability

The participants felt the commitment level represented by the requirements to be feasible and affordable, but that the commitment level represented by the means of verification remained questionable as to its feasibility and affordability. An interesting footnote in response to this concern is that 80 percent of the participants interviewed felt their agencies had already fulfilled these requirements and means of verification and that only low levels of investment were needed to keep their systems updated.

The following feasibility challenges were observed if the participating agencies were to comply with this benchmark and its requirements: 1) time management to ensure staff performance is undertaken, 2) time needed to do appraisal and effective performance monitoring, and 3) staff willingness to follow procedures. The participants envisioned the following affordability challenges: 1) additional staff required for continuous staff training, 2) additional staff required to ensure a regular and effective performance appraisal system, and 3) training staff to use the system properly.

Overall, the participants felt this benchmark and its requirements to be both feasible and affordable if minor changes were made to the benchmark, the requirements, and the means of verification. Specifically, they felt these requirements would become more feasible and affordable if the training aspect was expanded to include more informal staff development mechanisms. They also requested context appropriate examples and clear definitions for the manual and in any HAP training materials developed.

Recommendations

Thus, the authors recommend: 1) the means of verification wording under 5.3 needs to be broadened to include informal means of individual development rather than formal, expensive training and workshop sessions, 2) adopting the minor wording changes suggested by the participants, 3) adopting clear definitions of the terminology used, 4) more clarification regarding who should know the information specified, and 5) a thorough reexamination of the quality monitoring aspect of this benchmark. If these items are addressed, then this benchmark and set of requirements should meet the above criteria.

<u>Benchmark 6</u>

The participants felt this benchmark to be both clearly worded and of great importance to their operations.

Findings

The participants issued three key criticisms regarding this benchmark:

- The participants suggested the replacement of 'publish' with 'disseminate' to increase the clarity of what is being asked of an agency.
- Requirement 6.2 also caused controversy in terms of the confidentiality of complaints that the participants felt was important but they pointed out that few complaint mechanisms are truly confidential if redress is to occur.
- Requirement 6.3 was felt to be clear and relevant to the standard, but repetitive of 6.2. The participants felt these two requirements could easily be combined into one simpler and more feasible requirement.

Despite these criticisms, the participants felt benchmark was "important and the requirements good proxies" as they show the "effective implementation" of the benchmark.

Requirement 6.1 can be read two ways: 1) one-way communication from the agency to the beneficiary community regarding how to file a complaint, and 2) two-way communication between the agency and the beneficiary community regarding how to set up appropriate complaints handling procedures.

The wording of this requirement needs to be clarified to emphasize mutuality rather than 'informing.' In requirement 6.2, the participants felt 'referral' was not clear and instead the requirement should "specify a hierarchical system of complaints handling." The participants felt requirement 6.4 was both clear and relevant, while they found requirement 6.3 to be repetitive and unnecessary.

General Benefits & Costs

The participants felt a well functioning complaints mechanism would: 1) "decrease confusion and potential conflict with beneficiaries," 2) improve the agency's credibility and perceived levels of transparency, 3) improve the "image of the agency," 4) a credible system, 5) more legitimacy to "enforce quality assurance programs," and 6) "(the ability to) monitor staff." But they expressed concern regarding the feasibility and affordability of implementing and documenting this set of requirements.

The participants envisioned the following costs: 1) may receive a lot of complaints which will take a significant amount of time to process thus hindering other work, 2) may "receive unrelated complaints," and 3) "(additional) staff orientation and training needs."

Feasibility & Affordability

The contributors felt these requirements were both feasible and affordable but that they would require a minimum of six months to meet. The HAP Team estimated a minimum of a year in most cases. They felt the feasibility of these requirements depended upon the level of commitment HAP desires from the agency. The level of commitment desired by HAP was not clear to those interviewed.

The participants observed the following feasibility challenges: 1) developing credible procedures with partners and other stakeholders, 2) it will be more difficult to implement these requirements in larger scale agencies and projects, 3) how agencies address community access restrictions, 4) limited resources to consult beneficiaries, set up and operate the system, 5) "communities need time to become confident (in the system before they) use the system," and 6) "monitoring the actual application of procedures will be difficult."

They observed the following affordability challenges: 1) additional staff to operate these procedures, 2) additional training and orientation for field staff and managers, and 3) carrying out these procedures is very time and resource intensive.

The participants thought demonstrative examples regarding how to set up and operate such mechanisms transparently and efficiently in the manual and any training materials developed would improve the feasibility and affordability of the requirements (following redrafting) of this benchmark. Additional capacity building support including pre-audit visits, complaints workshops, and staff orientation and training sessions would also increase the feasibility and affordability of these requirements by developing staff willingness regarding the importance of having such mechanisms.

Recommendations

In light of these comments, the authors recommend: 1) adopting the suggested wording changes mentioned above or engaging in additional rewriting to simplify and clarify the text of this benchmark and its requirements, 2) providing clear definitions and demonstrative examples of each term and idea expressed in the benchmark and in the requirements, 3) reexamining the documentation burden associated with these requirements and their means of verification, 4) combining 6.2 and 6.3 and rewording 6.1, 5) providing demonstrative examples of how to set up and operate such mechanisms transparently and efficiently in the manual and any training materials, and 6) addressing the linkage between benchmarks 2 and 6 in terms of the audit and certification process: is it possible to achieve benchmark 6 without meeting benchmark 2?

Benchmark 7

The field assessment phase revealed mixed reactions to this benchmark and its requirements. The participants initially expressed confusion regarding the clarity and relevance of this benchmark, but once it was more clearly explained, they questioned why it was about processes rather than the implementation of such processes.

Findings

The participants issued three key criticisms regarding this benchmark:

- Auditors should look for implementation of processes not just the processes as the requirements currently suggest. The participants felt strongly that if such processes exist, then they should be implemented.
- What are the boundaries of Benchmark 7? "Does it (Benchmark 7) cover only Std (Benchmark) 1 or does it cover all guidelines, policies, etc held by the agency?" This is not currently clear from the wording.
- The word 'method' should be replaced. It is not clear.

The participants suggested clarifying the boundaries of this benchmark and clarifying what exactly HAP is looking for in this benchmark. By doing both of these, the benchmark and its requirement will significantly improve in clarity and relevance.

General Benefits & Costs

The participating agencies saw the following benefits in implementing such processes: 1) helping to integrate change in the way the organization works, 2) that such processes are a sign of overture and openness, 3) illustrating "the weak points in the organization" and the overall accountability and quality management system, 4) enabling the agency to continually integrate beneficiary needs and concerns, 5) "ensur(ing) verbal discussions are followed up on," 6) ensuring "verification visits by coordinators and senior management are planned in and carried out" rather than ad hoc, and 7) "ensuring lessons learnt are handed over to all staff (so they can) keep improving (and) ensure work (is) still relevant." After observing these benefits, a participant made an interesting observation: "benchmark 7 appears more directly related to the agency's own growth and well being though indirectly this should impact beneficiaries". In light of these comments, the participants observed two costs: 1) an initial review meeting and follow up for the tasks needed to meet this benchmark, and 2) regular but non-intensive time commitment by staff.

Feasibility & Affordability
Ideally, the participants felt benchmarks 1-6 must be in place before this benchmark can be achieved. Overall, the interviewees felt this benchmark to be feasible and affordable and stated that initial results would be available within 1 to 3 months of starting to work on the process.

The participants observed the following feasibility challenges: 1) assessing the current status of the processes in place and what needs to be updated and integrated, 2) ensuring "program staff comply with (the) processes" once they are set up, 3) inflexibility of agency and staff to adapt, 4) the lack of a "basic management system to follow," and 5) "ensur(ing) dissemination at the beneficiary level." The participants cited one affordability challenge: "time intensive to implement quality monitoring within a tight time schedule." The participants specifically commented, "throwing money at the problem is not the answer." For these requirements to be implemented effectively there must be "organizational change" and this change is what HAP should facilitate.

They felt this development process would benefit from periodic HAP audit and advice visits and specifically requested demonstrative examples in the manual regarding how to set up these systems. They also requested clear definitions of the terminology used in the benchmark and the requirements.

Recommendations
In light of these comments, the authors recommend: 1) reexamining the desired boundaries (what benchmark 7 is monitoring and improving upon) of benchmark 7 in depth as they are not clear and thus continue to cause confusion, 2) reexamining the documentation burden association with the means of verification, 3) reexamining whether HAP is looking for 'processes for implementation' or 'implementation' itself, and 4) adopting the minor wording changes recommended by the participants.

Conclusions & Recommendations
This field assessment phase was as thorough as HAP's time and funding constraints allowed. Through this phase's processes, the HAP Standard has been redrafted four times to reflect the ongoing findings of these various assessments. The Standard is now in draft version 5 and, without intensive longitudinal application and monitoring, has been assessed to HAP's satisfaction. The authors recommend approving the working draft as the changes made to it reflect the feedback received during the field assessment phase and the current draft is believed to meet the five criteria mentioned above. This does not mean the Standard

is fixed in stone per say, instead, HAP plans to pursue longitudinal testing and impact assessments once agencies have implemented the HAP Standard into practice. These future studies will enable the continuous improvement and periodic redrafting of the Standard.