



Asking the Right Questions

What you'll learn...

If you're revising the standards for your state's QRIS, it may be time to revise your identity as well. In part 1 of this four-part series, learn the right questions to ask in order to uncover all the information that will impact your evolving brand.

If your state is evolving the standards for its quality rating and improvement system, you also have an opportunity to reassess the way others see your QRIS—and, in the process, significantly impact its success.

Revising the standards for your QRIS means taking a fresh look at the entire system, questioning all assumptions, and establishing new standards and a new definition of success. In the same way, revising your visual identity requires looking at your communication materials with fresh eyes; understanding the changes that have taken place in your system and creating a more accurate representation of what your quality rating and improvement system stands for; and identifying ways to engage providers, parents, and all constituents and partners in this important work.

Given that your QRIS already has a presence in the community and among stakeholders, developing an effective communication strategy and a relevant brand identity involves working on many different levels and considering the needs of several audiences. The brand identity will need to stand out in an environment crowded with messages about quality care and education (all of them competing for attention), and it's critical to know when—and where—to deploy your message to ensure it reaches the right audience at the right time.

This four-part series will outline the key steps needed to develop and effectively redesign the brand identity of your quality rating and improvement system. Specifically, we'll guide you in:

- 1** Asking the right questions to understand the past and use that learning to move forward
- 2** Building for the future by developing a clear and effective communications strategy for executing your new brand identity
- 3** Designing a new brand identity and messaging that works for the next generation of your state's quality rating and improvement system, and creates a foundation for years to come
- 4** Efficiently disseminating your new messages and marketing materials to ensure the best return on your investment

Throughout this series, you'll see examples of how this process came to life in our work with Virginia as they sought to redesign the brand identity for their QRIS, Virginia Quality.

[Read on...](#)

To provide a real-life example of a redesigned QRIS brand identity, [Parts 2, 3, and 4](#) of this series will use examples from our work with the state of Virginia and the redesign of their quality rating and improvement system when it was revised from a ratings-based system to a levels-based QRIS focusing on continuous quality improvement.

Asking the Right Questions

In order to move forward and redesign the brand identity of your quality rating and improvement system, it's critical to understand the past—including the forces, pressures, and influences that have affected your brand. (For example, most states have a variety of programs related to early care and education; how those interconnect with your QRIS is incredibly important.)

It's impossible to redesign the brand identity so it solves your problem without the correct input, so the first step to understanding your brand identity's past is to ask the right questions. Doing so will help you uncover all the information that will impact your evolving brand.

What are the right questions to ask? The following sections will outline several kinds of questions that will uncover the information you'll need to effectively redesign the brand identity for your QRIS.

Big-Picture Questions

When working with a communications firm, they'll first need to learn more about your quality rating and improvement system overall:

- 1 Who are you?
- 2 What do you do?
- 3 How do you do it?
- 4 Where do you want to go?

Although these questions sound simple and may seem easy to answer, the responses for your QRIS in the past may be very different from what you envision for your QRIS in the future. Capturing what those shifts mean for your new brand identity is vital.

Questions About Your QRIS's DNA

Describing the many pieces and parts of your quality rating and improvement system will clarify how it all works together, why it works, and why it matters.

Orange Square has a scientifically based extraction tool which shows us your authentic truth—an amalgamation of past experience; what you've learned; all of the work you've done to this point; and, all the staff, partners, providers, and parents who have experienced your QRIS and been touched by its mission.

This process examines your quality rating and improvement system from nine different perspectives—allowing us to get to the heart of who your QRIS really is, and giving us

insight into relevant information, relationships, and identity so we can align your redesigned brand identity with the future quality rating and improvement system you envision.

The nine perspectives are:

- 1 Identity:** Who are we? What is our identity? What is our history, individually and collectively?
- 2 Intention:** What are we trying to do? What are our intentions? What is our future potential?
- 3 Issues:** What problems and issues do we face? What are our dilemmas, paradoxes, and questions? What is holding us back from moving forward on a project/making a change? How do we “unclog” the system?
- 4 Relationship:** What are our relationships like? How are we connected to other individuals and organizations that we need? What is the quality of these connections? Are there too many or too few of them?
- 5 Principles and Standards:** What are our principles and standards of behavior? What are the actual ground rules—really? What are the undiscussable behaviors that go on over and over?
- 6 Work:** What is our work? What are we physically doing? What is the actual task at hand?
- 7 Information:** Do people know what is going on? How do we create and handle information?

8 Learning: Are we learning anything? What is our learning process? What is the future potential?

9 Structure and Context: How are we organized? What is our structure? Where does the energy come from that makes things happen in the organization? Is our hierarchy deep or flat? What is happening in the larger environment in which we are trying to thrive? Who are our competitors and what are they doing? What is the context or surrounding environment in which we’re living and working?

Working through this process will also help as you revisit your mission, vision, and values, and will help clarify how your state’s quality rating and improvement system operates in the state’s larger framework around quality in early care and education.

Tapping into your authenticity—what makes your QRIS unique—is essential to creating resonant connections with target audiences. After examining these nine perspectives, it’s easier to see your identity, learn new things and confirm things you know, and have a collective vision to use in moving forward.

Questions About Audiences and Constituents

In this work, there are many constituents who are connected in some way with your state’s quality rating and improvement system.

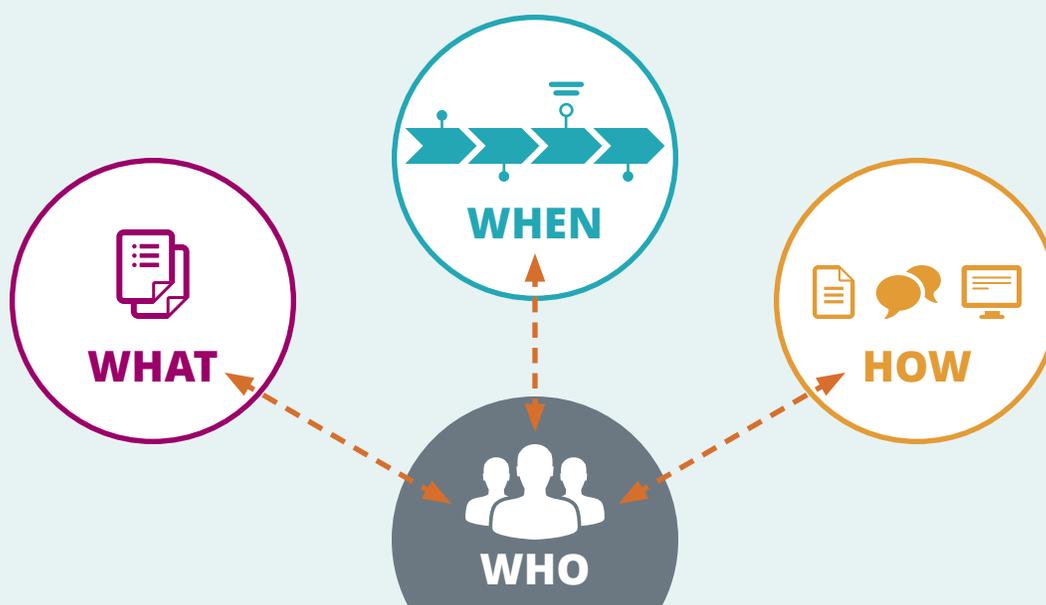
Depending on the state, these groups run the gamut from public to private and everything in between. They may include:

- Early care and education programs and providers
- Parents and families
- Private, public, and corporate funders
- All state agencies that intersect with this work
 - Department of Social Services
 - Department of Health
 - Department of Education
- Early childhood education partners
- Accrediting organizations
- Public-funded early childhood programs (state and local)
- Related early childhood associations and organizations
- Child advocacy organizations

Each group has its own goals, mission, messages, and communication style and outlets. Because your quality rating and improvement system intersects with these aspects of each group, you'll need to be very clear on your high-level goals, and create a [communications strategy](#) that reflects those clear goals. (See [Part 2 of this series](#) for more on this topic.)

In particular, the questions you'll need to answer in clarifying the goals for your communication strategy should focus on:

- 1 **Who** do you need to communicate with and **when**?
- 2 **What** information do you need to communicate to each audience?
- 3 It's only then that you can answer the question, **how** should you communicate?



With all of these different constituents and partners, there are many outside forces that impact and inform your work. We know that these organizations aren't exactly like yours (as we all know, quality rating and improvement systems are very unique!), so your challenge is very clear: to ensure that everyone understands how your unique system is the only way to achieve what the BUILD Initiative describes as a five-fold purpose for quality rating and improvement systems:

- 1 Improving early care and education workforce activities and outcomes
- 2 Improving family outcomes
- 3 Improving child outcomes
- 4 Raising the floor on basic health and safety in early care and education
- 5 Raising the floor of quality in early care and education

Questions About External Forces

There are a variety of external factors that can impact your work. In uncovering the full scope of your QRIS to successfully redesign your brand identity, it's important to understand:

- 1 What are the current economic conditions that affect early care and education?
- 2 What is the political climate in early care and education—both locally and nationally?
- 3 What are the current trends in this work?

- 4 How does technology impact your system and how it works?
- 5 What are the environments that can affect your work in the state?

What's Next in This Series?

Read [Part 2](#) to learn the 7 guidelines to keep in mind when developing a communications strategy in support of your redesigned brand identity.

About Orange Square

Orange Square is dedicated to improving the lives of children and their families by combining your expertise in QRIS with our expertise in marketing communications and the QRIS National Learning Network.

Together with you, we work to improve the quality of early care and education by building public awareness and engagement.



Learn more about our services and knowledge on QRIS marketing communications at orangesquare.com/QRIS



Join our LinkedIn group dedicated to QRIS marketing and communications at [linkedin.com/groups/8540612](https://www.linkedin.com/groups/8540612)



For questions or to get in touch with us, email kristine@orangesquare.com



Orange Square Inc.
161 Exchange Street, Suite 1
Pawtucket RI 02860
401-305-6611
orangesquare.com