

Slide 1

Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE** 

Alignment and Quality

Alignment and Quality

What is it?
What do I need to look for?

2/3/2012 Alignment and Quality 1

Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE** 

Alignment and Quality

Overview

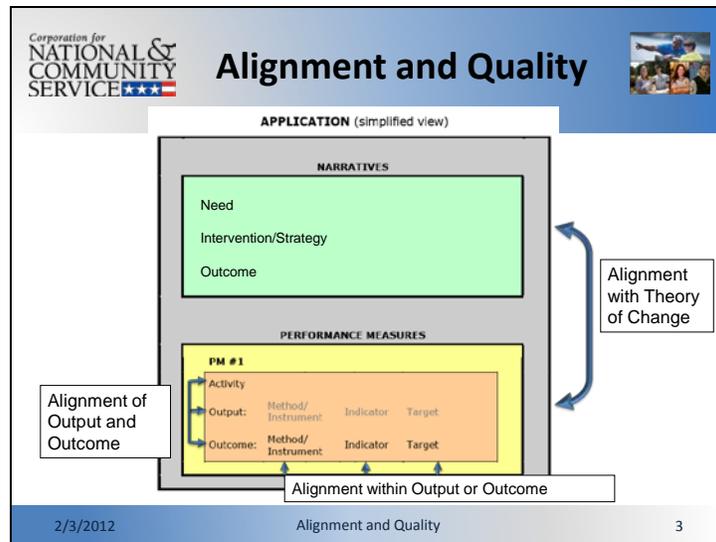
Criteria for Reviewing Performance Measures:

1. Alignment with Theory of Change
2. Alignment of Outputs and Outcomes
3. Quality and Rigor

2/3/2012 Alignment and Quality 2

When we think about alignment we include the following elements:

- Alignment with Theory of Change – Performance measures are consistent with the Theory of Change (especially need, interventions, outcomes) as articulated in the application narrative.
- Alignment of Outputs and Outcomes - Outputs and outcomes are correctly aligned in performance measures.
- Quality and rigor – The outputs and outcomes that will be measured are high quality. Outcomes address the need. Performance measures are rigorous; they utilize methods and instruments that accurately measure the stated outputs and outcomes.



This diagram illustrates the issues of alignment and quality, which are present in a good program design and reflected in the application.

- **Alignment with the Theory of Change:** Recall that a theory of change includes a need or problem, the program’s chosen intervention, and an outcome (all supported by evidence). The program’s chosen intervention (called “strategy” in the performance measure) should address the stated need and should be capable of producing the intended outcome. Also, the program’s primary set of aligned performance measures (output plus outcome) should reflect the Theory of Change as articulated in the narrative. The set of aligned performance measures should reflect the same need, intervention/strategy and outcome.
- **Alignment of Output and Outcomes:** They measure the same beneficiaries, and the outcome should flow logically from the output.
- **Alignment Within Output or Outcome:** The instrument, indicator, and target are all describing the same thing – what specifically will be measured for the output or outcome.

In addition, outputs and outcomes are high quality; they measure what matters, an important change. Measures are rigorous; instruments and methods are designed to capture these important changes consistently and accurately.

Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE** 

Alignment and Quality

What do we mean by alignment?

- Performance measures reflect Theory of Change as articulated in the narrative
- Output and outcome flow logically from intervention/strategy
- Output and outcome address the same set of beneficiaries
- Outcome flows logically from the output
- Within each output or outcome, the method, instrument, indicator, and target describe and measure same thing

2/3/2012 Alignment and Quality 4

What are the important points to consider when you think of alignment?

Alignment refers to whether:

- The Theory of Change is internally consistent (i.e., intervention/strategy addresses the need and can produce the outcome), and the primary set of aligned performance measures reflect (accurately restate) the Theory of Change as articulated in the narrative.
- The output is likely to occur, given the described intervention/strategy.
- The outcome follows logically from the intervention/strategy and output. This logic can be expressed as a series of if-then statements.
 - *If* we conduct the intervention/strategy, *then* we can reasonably expect this output to occur.
 - *If* the output occurs, *then* we can reasonably expect that some beneficiaries will experience this outcome.
- The output and outcome address the same set of beneficiaries. Indeed, the performance measure should address the same beneficiaries and intervention/strategy all the way through.
- The measurement details within each output or outcome address the same thing. That is, the indicator, target, instrument, and method are all measuring the same output or outcome.

Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE** 

Alignment and Quality

Alignment with Theory of Change

- Choose intervention/strategy that addresses need and leads to intended outcome
- Choose outcome that truly reflects the intended benefit and can be measured rigorously

There should be clear linkages between:

- Intervention/strategy and need
- Intervention/strategy and intended outcome

2/3/2012 Alignment and Quality 5

Consider the following when developing your Theory of Change and performance measures.

- Think of the intervention/strategy as the pivot point within your Theory of Change.
 - There should be clear linkages between the intervention/strategy and the need, i.e., the intervention/strategy is well-suited to address the need.
 - There should be clear linkages between the intervention/strategy and the outcome, i.e., the intervention/strategy you choose should be able to produce the intended outcome.
- The performance measures should reflect the same alignment of elements as are found in your Theory of Change.
- The significant outcome you choose to measure should truly reflect the intended benefit of your intervention/strategy.
- You are able to rigorously measure the intended outcome. If not, you will have no way of knowing with confidence if your intervention/strategy is successful in addressing the need.

Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE** 

Alignment and Quality

Example: Lack of Alignment with Theory of Change

- **Need:** According to the county health department, 75% of the Riverton population smoke a pack of cigarettes a day or more, and 360 county residents die from smoking-related illnesses each year.
- **Intervention/Strategy:** AmeriCorps members lead classes to educate Riverton County smokers about the health risks associated with smoking.
- **Outcome:** Individuals stop smoking.

2/3/2012 Alignment and Quality 6

We have just outlined the elements to consider – now let’s look at some examples: Which elements of this example are not aligned, and what is the alignment issue?

Note to facilitator: Ask participants to identify alignment issues/problems in this example.

Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE** 

Alignment and Quality

Example: Lack of Alignment with Theory of Change

Intervention/strategy and need are not aligned:

- Not clear how educating smokers will reduce consumption and deaths
- Need is defined in terms of behavior (smoking) and conditions (premature death), but the intervention/strategy is aimed at a change in knowledge

Intervention/strategy and outcome are not aligned:

- Education is often not enough to help break cycle of addiction

2/3/2012 Alignment and Quality 7

Alignment issues:

In this example, we see a lack of alignment between the intervention/strategy and the need. We also see poor alignment between the intervention/strategy and the intended outcome.

- The intervention/strategy and need are not aligned. It is not clear how educating smokers about the health risks of smoking can reduce cigarette consumption and smoking-related deaths. The need is defined in terms of problematic behavior (smoking) and conditions (premature death). However, the intervention/strategy appears to be geared primarily towards producing a change in knowledge.
- The intervention/strategy and outcome are not aligned. The intended change is that people will quit smoking. However, educating people about the health risks associated with smoking is often not enough to help them break the cycle of addiction. Indeed, if “education” were sufficient then the warning labels in cigarette packets might be enough to achieve the intended outcome.

Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE** 

Alignment and Quality

Example: Alignment with Theory of Change

- **Need:** Documented high rates of chronic absence from school (which can lead to other problems, e.g., poor academic performance).
- **Intervention/Strategy:** Members provide individual and group mentoring to students with documented attendance problems. Mentoring focuses on promoting re-engagement with school.
- **Outcome:** Students improve school attendance.

2/3/2012 Alignment and Quality 8

Here is an example of performance measures that are aligned with the program's Theory of Change. The intervention/strategy is a mentoring program that works 1:1 with students to help them re-engage with school.

Note to Facilitator: Ask participants to explain in their own words why the elements in this example are aligned.

Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE** 

Alignment and Quality

Example: Alignment with Theory of Change

Intervention/strategy aligns with the need:

- Mentoring that focuses on attendance problems is proven (supported by strong evidence) to address chronic absenteeism

Outcome aligns with the need:

- Getting students to attend school more regularly directly addresses the problem of absenteeism
- Getting students to stay in school is one important step to preventing other problems (e.g. poor academic performance)

2/3/2012 Alignment and Quality 9

Why the example is aligned:

- Why the intervention/strategy aligns with the need: Mentoring that focuses on attendance problems is proven (i.e., it is supported by strong evidence) to address chronic absenteeism.
- Why the outcome aligns with the need: Getting students to reduce absenteeism and attend school more regularly directly addresses the problem of absenteeism. Getting students to stay in school is also one important step to preventing other problems (e.g., poor academic performance).

Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE**

Alignment and Quality



Alignment of Outputs and Outcomes

- Aligned measure includes output and outcome for primary service activity
- Outcomes are likely to result from outputs
- Outputs and outcomes measure the same group of beneficiaries
- Agency-Wide Priority Measures must be aligned as directed in CNCS guidance

2/3/2012 Alignment and Quality 10

Aligned measures include an output and outcome for the primary service activity.

Alignment of outputs and outcomes means that:

- Outcomes are likely to result from the outputs
- Outputs and outcomes are measuring the same beneficiaries.

Note that Agency-Wide Priority Measures often have outputs and outcomes designed to be measured as an aligned set.

Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE** 

Alignment and Quality

Example: Lack of Alignment of Output and Outcome

Output: Individuals with disabilities receive housing upgrades and repairs.

Outcome: Volunteers assisting on these projects improve construction skills.

2/3/2012 Alignment and Quality 11

Notes to Facilitator: Ask participants to explain why this example exhibits a lack of alignment of output and outcome.

Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE** 

Alignment and Quality

Example: Lack of Alignment of Output and Outcome

Output: Individuals with disabilities receive housing upgrades and repairs.

Outcome: Volunteers assisting on these projects improve construction skills.

In this example, the *beneficiaries being measured are not the same* in the output and outcome. Although both the output and outcome may occur, the focus should be on one group of beneficiaries.

2/3/2012 Alignment and Quality 12

Why the example is not aligned:

In this housing program example, the beneficiaries being measured are not the same in the output and outcome. Although both output and outcome may occur from this activity, the focus should be on one group of beneficiaries –in this case, the individuals receiving the housing repairs. This is one way an output and outcome can be misaligned.

Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE**

Alignment and Quality



Example: Alignment of Output and Outcome

Intervention/Strategy: Members mentor students with documented attendance problems...

- **Output:** Youth/Mentor matches are sustained for at least the required time period.
- **Outcome:** Youth improve school attendance over the time they are involved in the mentoring program.

2/3/2012 Alignment and Quality 13

Let's look again at the mentoring program aimed at students that have not been attending school regularly. The output is that mentors and youth matches meet for a certain predetermined number of times over a period of time. The outcome is that these students will increase school attendance.

Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE** 

Alignment and Quality

**Example: Alignment of Output and Outcome
(Agency-Wide Priority Measures)**

Output: Number of disadvantaged youth/mentor matches that were sustained by the CNCS-supported program for at least the required time period (ED4A)

Outcome: Number of youth that improved their school attendance over the course of the CNCS-supported program's involvement with the student (ED6)

2/3/2012 Alignment and Quality 14

For this example, the program could select these Agency-Wide Priority Measures:

- ED4A: Number of disadvantaged youth/mentor matches that were sustained by the CNCS-supported program for at least the required time period.
- ED6: Number of youth that have improved their school attendance over the course of the CNCS-supported program's involvement with the student.

Note to Facilitator: Remind participants that this is an approved aligned output-outcome pair. Ask them to explain in their own words why this example exhibits proper alignment of output and outcome.

Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE**

Alignment and Quality



Example: Alignment of Output and Outcome (Agency-Wide Priority Measures)

The output and outcome both address the same set of beneficiaries, i.e., disadvantaged youth who have been paired with a mentor.

The outcome flows logically from the output. If the intervention/strategy is implemented according to plan (evidence presented in the application), the outcome is likely to occur.

2/3/2012 Alignment and Quality 15

Why the example is aligned:

- The output and outcome both address the same set of beneficiaries, i.e., disadvantaged youth who have been paired with a mentor.
- The outcome flows logically from the output. If the intervention/strategy is implemented according to plan – that is, according to the evidence for success presented in the application – we can expect the outcome to occur.

Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE** 

Alignment and Quality

Alignment Practice Exercise

1. Read through the examples for “Interventions/Strategies and Outcomes” determine whether each is aligned or not aligned.
2. If you checked “not aligned”, explain why. If you are unsure, explain what further information you would want.
3. Do the same for the examples under “Outputs and Outcomes.”

2/3/2012 Alignment and Quality 16

Note to Facilitator: Distribute the “Alignment Practice Exercise” and ask participants to read through the examples, checking “aligned”, “not aligned”, or “unsure” for each. They should be ready to explain their “not aligned” and “unsure” answers. You can ask them to work in pairs. A separate “answer key” is available to help you facilitate the discussion.

Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE** 

Alignment and Quality

Tutoring Example (Output)

Intervention/Strategy: 3rd grade students reading below grade level receive 1:1 tutoring in reading, 3 times per week, 30 minutes per session.

- **Output:** Students receive 1:1 tutoring in reading.
- **Indicator:** Students receive 1:1 tutoring in reading, 3 times per week, 30 minutes per session, for at least 6 months.
- **Target:** 200 students receive 1:1 tutoring in reading.
- **Instrument/Method:** Daily Tutoring Attendance Log

2/3/2012 Alignment and Quality 17

Now let's look at both alignment and quality within a set of measures. This is an example of an output that demonstrates alignment and quality.

In this program, 3rd grade students who are falling behind in reading receive one-on-one tutoring sessions from a trained tutor 3 times a week, 30 minutes per session, for at least six months. The program uses a tested curriculum that recommends this “dosage” of tutoring to get students up to grade level in reading.

- The output for the intervention/strategy is that students receive 1:1 tutoring in reading.
- The indicator defines the output by describing what specifically is being measured. Not every student who walks in the door will be counted toward the target. The indicator establishes a clear minimum “dosage” of service, based on evidence about how much service is required to produce measurable change.
- The target (200) simply states how many students will receive this level of tutoring.
- The instrument/method is the system for tracking the students who are tutored, including the amount of tutoring each student completes.
- The indicator, target, and instrument/method all address and support the output statement.

Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE**

Alignment and Quality



Tutoring Example (Outcome)

- **Outcome:** Tutored students improve reading ability after 6 months of tutoring.
- **Indicator:** Participating students improve reading ability to grade level or higher.
- **Target:** 150 of 200 participating students will read at grade level or higher.
- **Instrument/Method:** [NAME] standardized pre-post reading test

2/3/2012 Alignment and Quality 18

Here is the outcome for the tutoring program that demonstrates alignment and quality.

- The outcome states that the tutored students will improve reading ability after 6 months of tutoring.
- The indicator describes what is meant by “improve reading ability” – students will read at grade level or higher.
- The level of change is measured by a standardized pre-post test completed before and after receiving services. Students must improve to grade level reading ability or higher to meet the target.
- The outcome, indicator, target, and instrument/method are all talking about the same thing and in alignment.

Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE** 

Alignment and Quality

What do we mean by Quality and Rigor?

Outcomes are worth measuring; outcomes capture important changes

- Does the outcome show the intervention/strategy is addressing the problem in a substantial way?

Appropriate data sources, clearly identified

- Do you know who has the data in the form you need, when you need it?

Rigorous instruments and methods

High rigor means having confidence in your data!

2/3/2012 Alignment and Quality 19

What do we mean by “quality” and “rigor” for performance measurement?

- Outcomes should be worth measuring. Ask yourself, “Why is this change worth measuring? What does it signify in terms of an impact on the lives of beneficiaries? The community? Does the outcome show that the intervention/strategy is addressing the beneficiary’s problem or need in a substantial way?”
- Appropriate data sources and respondents should be clearly identified. Ask yourself, “Who has the information we need? Who exactly will provide the data?”
- Instruments and methods should be rigorous. Ask yourself, “Can we be confident that the data we collect accurately reflects what is happening in our program?”

Let’s look more closely at how to determine if instruments and methods are rigorous.

Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE**

Alignment and Quality



What do we mean by Quality and Rigor?

Instruments and methods are valid and appropriate.

- Do the instruments measure what you intend to measure and not something else?
- Will methods work under the conditions you have to administer them?

Instruments and methods free of bias.

- Is everything worded in neutral language? Are methods inclusive?

Data collection is effective and complete.

- Pilot test!

2/3/2012 Alignment and Quality 20

What do we mean by “quality” and “rigor” for instruments and methods?

Instruments and methods should be valid. Ask yourself, “Do our instruments really measure what we intend to measure? Will these methods work under the conditions in which we plan to administer our instruments? Have these instruments and methods been tested with comparable populations in the past?”

Instruments and methods should be designed to minimize bias. Questions should not be worded in ways that incline respondents to answer in a particular way. Ask yourself, “Are our instruments (questions and response options) worded in neutral language? Are all possible response options available to respondents? Are the methods we chose appropriate for our data source (i.e. all of our respondents)?”

If others are helping to collect the data, ask yourself, “Are our data collectors adequately trained? Do they understand how important it is to ask for information in a consistent and neutral way?” Instruments should be accompanied by instructions so that data collectors know how to administer them and so respondents know how to fill them out correctly.

Pilot testing is one of the best ways to find out if instruments and methods are appropriate for your population. Even testing with a small sample can uncover potential problems early and save time and resources in the long run.

To better understand quality and rigor, let’s look at how they could be compromised.

Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE** 

Alignment and Quality

Threats to Validity - Examples

| Instruments | Methods |
|--|---|
| A question intended to measure <u>knowledge</u> gained asks for an <u>opinion</u> : “Do you think the presentation was informative?” | Data collectors periodically record their observations of children in preschool classrooms. However, they only see them first thing in the morning. |

2/3/2012 Alignment 21

Rigor and quality can be compromised by threats to validity in the instruments and methods.

Instrument example: Attendees are asked if the presentation was informative rather than specifically about what they learned.

Note to Facilitator: Ask participants how this instrument could be improved to limit the threat to validity of the data.

(To measure knowledge, you would ideally want to do some type of pre- and post test that measures what the person knew before and after the intervention. This way, you can get a more objective idea of knowledge gained and can be more confident of your results.)

Method example: Data collectors observe children in preschool classrooms to see how much they improve in social skills over time. They use a checklist to record how much individual children improve in specific areas (e.g. sharing, taking turns, resolving conflicts on their own). However, the only time they observe the children is during the first 30 minutes after they arrive at school.

Facilitator: Ask participants how the method could be improved to limit the threat to validity of the data.

(Observe children at different times of the day to get a better picture of their normal behavior and how it might change over time.)

Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE** 

Alignment and Quality

Problems with Bias - Examples

| Instrument | Method |
|---|--|
| Q: How much did you learn from the presentation? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A great deal• Some• Don't know | You send out an electronic survey but many program participants don't have email access. |

2/3/2012 Alignment 22

Bias is also a threat to validity in that you may not be measuring what you think you're measuring and so can't be confident of the accuracy of your results. Rigor and quality can be compromised by bias in the instruments and methods.

Instrument example: Bias occurs when survey questions are worded to elicit a certain response, or response choices don't allow a full range of possibilities. In this question, people who did not learn much from the presentation do not have a response option. You can't be confident that the data is accurate if you are only collecting positive or inconclusive ("don't know") data.

Facilitator: Ask participants how this question or response option could be improved to limit bias.

(Ask for specifics about what was learned in the presentation, and provide response options for "a little" or "none".)

Method example – You send an email survey, but many of the people who should be responding don't have email access. The data collected will be biased toward responses given by people with computer access. You can't have confidence that your data will accurately reflect what's happening because you are missing data from a significant number of respondents.

Facilitator: Ask participants for suggestions on how this method could be improved to limit bias. (Provide a paper-and-pencil survey option for respondents without email access. This might help to achieve a more representative sample.)

Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE**

Alignment and Quality



Common Pitfalls—Methods

Proposed methods are not realistic because:

- They are too ambitious
- You can't get the data
- You are not able to obtain a representative sample

2/3/2012 Alignment and Quality 23

Some common problems and pitfalls to avoid in relation to methods are:

- Being too ambitious, i.e., trying to collect too much data (overly lengthy instruments) or trying to collect data from too many respondents
- Anticipating that you will be able to get data and then finding out you can't. This is a common problem when data collection requires cooperation with partner organizations (e.g., schools). Before making elaborate data collection plans, find out from key partners what data they can – and cannot – provide, as well as when they can provide it. Be specific, show them the forms you will use so they understand exactly what format your data needs to be in.
- If you will rely on sampling, it is very important to be able to collect data from individuals who represent the larger beneficiary population. This usually means faithfully executing some type of random selection process. This can get very complicated if you are collecting data from multiple sites and/or the beneficiary population has diverse characteristics that may affect how they are likely to respond to questions in your instruments.
- The next slide provides a couple of examples of situations where methods may fall flat due to unrealistic expectations about what you can do.

Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE**

Alignment and Quality



Common Pitfalls –Methods (Examples)

- A grantee plans to use a standardized pre/post test but has difficulty administering the test and aggregating the data within the grant period.
- A grantee is unable to define the population from which they will collect data.

2/3/2012 Alignment and Quality 24

Note to Facilitator: Discuss the examples with participants and see what kinds of solutions they can come up with, including steps that could have been taken initially to avoid these pitfalls.

Examples:

- *Review internal program scheduling to see if timing of the test can be adjusted.*
- *Discuss possibilities with program officer to see if sampling is appropriate (e.g. surveying every participant on X# days over the year; collecting data from every 5th person). Remind them that published FAQ's provide some guidance on when sampling might be an acceptable alternative.*

Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE** 

Alignment and Quality

Common Pitfalls—Instruments

- Instruments were not tested ahead of time
- Instruments influence responses one way or another (bias)
- Instruments don't measure what they are supposed to measure – may measure something else (validity)

2/3/2012 Alignment and Quality 25

If the instrument hasn't been tested ahead of time, you run the risk of collecting poor quality data. It is best to test the instrument, method, and analysis with some real data.

What can happen otherwise:

- People don't understand the questions or responses and don't respond or give an incorrect answer.
- Poor response rates due to an inappropriate method choice (e.g. people assume your electronic survey is spam and don't respond).
- The instrument doesn't ask for some information you later find out you need for your analysis.

If the instrument is biased, you are not getting accurate data.

Examples of bias:

- A survey scale that only measures improvement
- A survey that is only returned by individuals who feel strongly about the program

Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE** 

Alignment and Quality

Practice: Review Sample Performance Measures

1. Read the Veterans' Reintegration Assistance narratives and performance measures.
2. Read through the Performance Measurement Assessment Checklist.
3. Use the Checklist to review the performance measures. Check off areas that have been fully completed and write down any questions you have.

2/3/2012 Alignment and Quality 26

Note to Facilitator: Ask participants to read through the narrative and performance measures and respond to the items on the checklist. As part of their "review," they should write down any questions they would ask the program for clarification. If possible, have participants do the checklist in pairs or a small group and discuss.

- *What is clear and complete in the performance measures?*
- *What is not clear enough? What more information would you want from the program?*

A checklist "answer key" of suggested responses is provided to help you facilitate discussion.

Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE** 

Alignment and Quality

Included Resources

- Alignment and Practice Exercise
- Application Sample for Review: Veterans' Reintegration Assistance
- Performance Measurement Assessment Checklist

2/3/2012 Alignment and Quality 27