



### **Causal Loop Diagramming**

Once the beginning phases of the needs assessment process have been completed and performance measures have been selected, the next step is to identify activities and evidence-based strategies to address each specific performance measure. One useful tool is Causal Loop Diagramming. This tool can be used to identify potential intervention points. From the intervention points, the team will be able to identify evidence-based strategies that will have the most impact on the selected performance measures.

#### **Using the Tool**

The day of the stakeholder meeting, the needs assessment team:

- Summarizes the status of the needs assessment process and shares the selected performance measures.
- Introduces the concept of causal loop diagramming and facilitates participants using the tool. Each participant is instructed to:
  - Write one performance measure (e.g. improve breastfeeding rates) on the top of their piece of blank paper or dry erase board.
  - Draw a graph that shows the change in breastfeeding rates over time (time on the x-axis and the variable (e.g. breastfeeding rates) on the Y-axis). The graph should “tell the story” for the performance measure by illustrating the start and end time of the behavior and the hoped for and “feared” behaviors.
  - Continue drawing graphs for each measure until all have been drawn.
- Divides participants into small groups and asks them to:
  - Talk through their graphs describing the behaviors and variables that were/or could potentially impact the behavior
  - Post the graphs on the wall and vote for the most important/urgent graph to address
  - Create a list of variables that contributed to the behaviors over time for the selected graph
  - Construct a causal loop diagram (using post-it notes and a flip chart) to illustrate the variables

#### **Using the Information to Inform NEXT STEPS IN the Needs Assessment PROCESS**

To ensure the information is used to inform the needs assessment process, the team spends time identifying next steps. The following next steps are identified:

- Create electronic versions of the causal loop diagrams. (Use PowerPoint or online software such as Kumu.)
- Send the diagrams to participants to elicit feedback on missing variables.
- Review the causal loop diagrams with the stakeholder group to identify leverage points to push the system toward change (e.g. goals of the system, system structure, rules/policies, information flow, delays in the system, etc.)

- Define vision/aim/goals for how the system might react positively to a change (e.g. short, mid, and long term)
- Identify specific strategies/activities to help impact the specified vision