Intermediate Problem Solving: Introduction to the A3

PURPOSE

ANALYSIS

STRATEGY

RESULTS & ISSUES

STANDARDIZE & SUSTAIN

Most of the problems that Arizona state employees are asked to solve are "Just Do It" types of problems or ones that require basic problem solving skills and tools. But agencies should develop a pool of employees who have mastered more sophisticated problem solving techniques for resolving relatively complex problems and managing projects.

For this reason, the state's Government Transformation Office (GTO) has developed workshops to train agencies in intermediate-level problem solving that requires significant data analysis and project management. Sometimes referred to as seven- or eight-step problem solving, the GTO approach is known as "A3" problem solving for the single 11x17-inch (A3) template used to manage and document the work.

A living document that evolves over the life of the project, the A3 helps teams both visually and narratively communicate progress and next actions, and it serves as the project record to tell the story upon completion. The A3 template is simple and standard, aligning with the familiar Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle of continuous improvement through five sections:

- **Purpose** (PLAN)
- **Analysis** (PLAN)
- **Strategy** (PLAN/DO)
- **Results & Issues** (CHECK)
- **Standardize & Sustain** (ACT)

Let's look at each of these sections in some detail over the next several editions of AMS In Focus.

Purpose (PLAN)

The Purpose section comprises the Problem Statement, Scope and Goal.

The Problem Statement describes the problem and who or what it affects. It should be clear and concise, avoiding acronyms and jargon. As appropriate, it should identify customers and current performance level. It should not include all known background information and never identify presumed solutions.

> **Bad:** "Given our backlogged work, we need a bigger budget because we do not have enough people to get our jobs done."

> **Better:** "The Finance Division's monthly report shows the pay backlog growing by 15% and average service times increasing by 10 days, which are resulting in poor customer satisfaction ratings."

Scope defines the boundary limits for which the problem is addressed. It often drives how much time it may take to find a solution. For example, you might choose a whole process value stream with numerous issues at each step, or may choose to address only one or a few steps. The point is to stay focused so goals can be met and celebrated.

Goal statements should be SMART - i.e., Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound.

> **Example:**
> "By June 30, 2018, Team ABC will reduce service time for Process XYZ by 25%, issuing all Type A documents within 12 calendar days of application receipt."