



## PHASE IV Vendor Relationship Management

Vendor relationship management begins during contract negotiations and continues through implementation and continued use. The contract serves as the blueprint for the vendor relationship and sets expectations for customer service. It is important to identify roles and responsibilities, beyond the terms in

the contract, to establish the procedures and processes for issue resolution and managing EHR system updates, upgrades, and add-ons. The steps in this last phase are critical to ensure a successful EHR implementation and working relationship.



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### KEY STEPS

- 1 Designate a primary point of contact from your organization
- 2 Identify primary point of contact from vendor
- 3 Establish a process for issue documentation and resolution
- 4 Establish a process for management of system updates, upgrades, and add-ons



# 1

## Designate a primary point of contact from your organization who will manage the relationship with the vendor

Your organization should identify and designate a key point of contact to manage the vendor relationship. This person needs to have an understanding of the terms of the contract and

your organization's operations and technical capabilities in order to serve as a liaison with the vendor to help address EHR system problems. This person will be responsible for

working with the vendor account manager, as well the vendor helpdesk support, to manage issues and guide testing of product updates, upgrades, and add-ons prior to "go-live."



The team should be prepared to ask questions and discuss options with the vendor representatives.



## 2

### Identify primary point of contact from the vendor who will handle account and issues

Ensure the vendor identifies a primary contact who is also familiar with the contract terms, as well as with your organization's needs and technical infrastructure. This person will be responsible for working with the primary contact from your organization to determine the need for additional vendor products (adding on new modules); updates (fixing known bugs or product issues); or upgrades (increasing functionality). This individual should also be the contact if you encounter problems that have not been resolved by the vendor's helpdesk support.



The vendor contact should also be the contact if you encounter problems that have not been resolved by the vendor's helpdesk support.



# 3

## Establish a process for issue documentation and resolution during pre, intra, and post implementation

Your organization should ensure that there is a process for documenting and resolving issues that arise. This process needs to be in place as soon as the contract is finalized. You and your vendor's approach to issues resolution begins when the problem is identified and then submitted to the appropriate person for



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problem solving. An agreed-upon process for submitting and addressing each issue should be established with your EHR vendor, including the time-frame within which the issue should be resolved, disposition milestones, and an understanding of liability and costs associated with each issue.

The Case Log is intended to help your organization maintain consistent documentation to allow for tracking of incidences that may occur before, during, and post implementation of the system. The log will help you track various topics including the three most common:

- Problem – is a problem encountered during use of the system that cannot be solved. It is disrupting use of the system and requires intervention by the vendor.
- Enhancement – is a non-urgent request typically asking the vendor to program the system with additional functionality or for the software to perform functions in a different manner.
- Question – is a non-urgent inquiry made to the vendor to clarify use of system, explain system functions or other questions related to the use of the vendor product.

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Use this tool as a guideline for managing vendor relationships:



Issues Management

# 4

## Establish a process for management of system updates, upgrades, and add-ons once EHR product is installed



Your software license will require your EHR vendor to regularly update or fix software bugs and provide you with upgrades as regulatory, technology, and clinical discoveries continue to emerge.

Most updates occur on a regular basis and are minor tweaks that will not affect your organization's workflow. Upgrades are major software fixes or updates to accommodate client requests, regulatory features such as incorporating ICD-10 codes, or a way of helping you meet quality or value-based payment incentives. Add-ons are additional products or modules purchased to increase system functionality. Updates, upgrades, and add-ons can be very disruptive to your organization. However, the disruption can be greatly reduced with proper planning and an established approach to these system enhancements, including:

- Assess the benefits for the changes. Read the reason behind the update, upgrade, and add-on. If the upgrade is optional, assess if your organization stands to gain from the upgrade. Security upgrades are not optional.
- Vendor approach to demonstrating the upgrade. Ask your EHR vendor if they will have a "sandbox" where you and your organization's end users can experience firsthand the upgraded version of your product.
- Vendor plans for the upgrade. Ask the EHR vendor about the processes typically undertaken for the upgrade including the required length of time; whether the system is generally down during the upgrade; anticipated software or hardware costs associated with the upgrade or add-on; activities of vendor during the upgrade process; testing plans; and level of training required of end users.
- Schedule a go-live date. Work with your vendor to select a time when business is slow or when the appointments/resources can be adjusted. Upgrades should not be completed while you are in clinic. Discuss with your vendor the need for additional training in order to pre-empt surprises, complaints, and frustration among your staff due to the upgrade.

The Software Management Checklist can be used to standardize your organization's processes when dealing with updates, upgrades, and add-ons.

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Use this tool to manage vendor issues management and updates, upgrades and add-ons:



Software Management Checklist



## Final Words of Wisdom

EHR planning and procurement is a complex process that requires thoughtful assessment and thorough planning. Commitment of staff resources and time is key to ensure that all phases are explored, and due diligence uncovers both anticipated and unexpected outcomes related to EHR adoption. The EHR process can be ineffective when time is not allocated and steps are skipped or shortcuts taken — and can often have serious consequences that are difficult to fix later during implementation. Negative outcomes include unexpected costs, missed project milestones and even EHR un-installation.

To increase the likelihood that your EHR planning and procurement is thorough and that the EHR implementation is a success, ensure that your organization:

- 1 Prioritizes the EHR planning and procurement process as part of normal staff job responsibilities;
- 2 Assigns responsibility to internal staff, external staff (e.g., consultants), or both who are held accountable for the process;
- 3 Outsources planning activities (e.g., contract review, IT assessment) when organizational time or resources are limited;
- 4 Contacts other colleagues, local facilities, and health care organizations that have implemented EHRs to seek insight when resources are limited;
- 5 Assumes EHR planning and procurement process will be a long-term continuous cycle, even after initial EHR installation, as organizational needs change and vendor products are updated.

The initial EHR implementation may be a short-term project; however, the decisions made during the planning and procurement phases will have a long-term impact in all aspects of your organization's business and clinical operations. Selecting the right vendor is important to make sure your investment dollars will lead to long-term success — not only of the EHR implementation but also for your organization's continued operations. The data collected in, and information produced from, an EHR system are considered invaluable assets. Every effort needs to be made by your organization to find a vendor that has the experience, products, and services to handle one of your organization's most prized resources.