

# Quality Improvement Plan Instructions

## *Quality Improvement Awards*

Quality Improvement Awards are available to support and reward eligible early childhood and out-of-school time programs to increase their Star rating in *Rising Stars for ME*. For more details about the Quality Improvement Awards, including eligibility and deadlines, see the [2024-2025 Quality Improvement Awards](#) on the [Quality Initiatives web page](#).

### Eligibility

To be eligible to receive a Quality Improvement Award, programs will:

1. Have an unexpired Star 2 rating or above on *Rising Stars for ME*, Maine's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS).
2. Have completed a *Rising Stars for ME* application that accurately reflects current programming and staff.
3. Ensure there is time for the program to meet all Standards for the desired rating by October 31, 2025.
4. Be enrolled in the DHHS OCFS Supplement Program.
5. Not have a Conditional License issued by Child Care Licensing. If your program becomes Conditional during this process, you may continue to participate in the Quality Improvement Plan process but would not be eligible for further funding. Upon resolution of Conditional status, the program may receive the remainder of the award if funding is available.
6. Have or will create a vendor account for the University of Maine System.

### Quality Improvement Award Process

To receive the Quality Improvement Award, each licensed Program Owner or Director will complete the following steps:

1. Have completed a *Rising Stars for ME* application that reflects current program practices.
2. Complete and submit a Quality Improvement Plan using its *Rising Stars for ME* Requirements and identifying steps and resources needed to meet *Rising Stars for ME* Standards. Programs working toward or maintaining a Star 5 will also use the standards of their National Accrediting body or Head Start.

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3. Meet with Maine Roads to Quality Professional Development Network (MRTQ PDN) staff to finalize the Quality Improvement Plan and connect with available resources.
4. Determine funding needs based on the Quality Improvement Plan and submit a Funding Request for MRTQ PDN approval.
5. Start the work identified on the Quality Improvement Plan and update as needed. When all requirements are met, reapply for new *Rising Stars for ME* rating.

## Timeline

To allow time to complete the *Rising Stars for ME* requirements and increase the Star rating,

- Programs need to ensure there is time to meet all Standards for the desired Star rating by October 31, 2025.
- Programs working toward a Star 3 or 4 must submit the Quality Improvement Plan no later than May 1, 2025
- Programs working on Star 5 must anticipate meeting all *Rising Stars for ME* Star 5 standards and complete the accreditation application by October 31, 2025

## Support for the Quality Improvement Award Process

MRTQ PDN provides individual support for individuals having difficulty with accessing or completing any portion of the Quality Improvement Award process due to an individualized need, such as a disability, language barriers, technology barriers, etc. If interested, contact Karen Bergeron at [mrtq.qiawards@maine.edu](mailto:mrtq.qiawards@maine.edu) or 207-653-5090.

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***To save you time, click on the Heading below to move to the section you are interested in today:***

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## *How to Complete the Quality Improvement Plan*

### **1) Complete a *Rising Stars for ME* Application and find Recommendations**

#### *Rising Stars for ME Application and E-Portfolio*

The first step in the Quality Improvement Award Process is to have a completed *Rising Stars for ME* application.

- If a program has a complete application, including uploads reflecting current practices, move to [Identify your Rating and Requirements](#) below.
- If a program has not completed an application at all or if an application was completed but documents were not uploaded or questions were not

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answered to reflect current practices, please start a new *Rising Stars for ME* application or resume one in progress. Please watch [this video](#) to learn how.

## *Identify your Rising Stars for ME rating*

Once a program has an updated *Rising Stars for ME* application, find the current **Star rating** by signing onto *Rising Stars for ME* account and opening the most recent completed application. Find the Star rating at the bottom of the list. See Figure 1, circled in red.

## *Identifying the requirements needed to increase to the desired Star rating based on your Recommendations Page*

The *Rising Stars for ME* Requirements to move to the next Star Rating are found on the Recommendations tab. See Figure 1, circled in blue.

Figure 1: List of Rising Stars for ME applications sections

[Contact Info](#)  
[Age Groups Served](#)  
[Staff](#)  
[Documents](#)  
[Standards Answers](#)  
[Recommendations](#)

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Section (Standard)

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Standard 1: Learning Environment / Developmentally Appropri

Standard 2: Program Evaluation

Standard 3: Staff Qualifications and Professional Development

Standard 4: Administration and Business Practices

Standard 5: Family Engagement and Partnership

Standard 6: Child and Youth Assessment

Standard 7: Health, Safety, Nutrition, and Physical Activity

Overall, your program is at Star:

Final Score

For details on finding the Recommendations page, read the [Instructions](#).

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## *What to include on the Quality Improvement Plan*

The Quality Improvement Awards are designed to support programs to move up one Star rating at a time. If time and funding allow, programs may receive additional Quality Improvement Awards to further increase its Star rating.

- Moving to a Star 3 or 4: The Quality Improvement Plan should only include the requirements the program needs to increase to the next Star Rating. On the Recommendations Page, find the *Rising Stars for ME* Standards that state how to move to the desired Star.

For example, a program is a Star 2 and working toward a Star 3. Find the Standards that state, **"to move to a Star 3."** The numbered list below the Standard are the requirements to include in the Quality Improvement Plan. If a program is already meeting all requirements for the desired Star rating, do not include it in the Plan. See Figure 2.

*Figure 2: Sample of Star 2 Recommendations Page and list of requirements. This Program is moving to a Star 3 so it will focus on Standard 4 but not Standard 3 as it has already met Star 3 for that Standard.*

Standard 3: Staff Qualifications and Professional Development

Your program receives a Star 3 in Standard 3. **To move to Star 4 in Standard 3,** your program must meet the following:

- 3.4.2 The Program Owner and any staff create an annual Professional Development Plan addressing their training and education goals.

Standard 4: Administration and Business Practices

Your program receives a Star 2 in Standard 4. **To move to Star 3 in Standard 4,** your program must meet the following:

- 4.3.1 All staff have a written job description defining job responsibilities. [Not applicable to programs with no staff.]
- 4.3.3 Programs with staff provide monthly opportunities for individual supervision. [Not applicable to programs with no staff.]

Note: The number label listed next to each requirement indicates the Standard, the Requirement, and the Star rating.

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- Moving to a Star 4 or Maintaining a Star 4: Programs will also identify the Standards for the National Accreditation or Head Start programming that need to be met.

Any questions with this step can be directed to [mrtq.qiawards@maine.edu](mailto:mrtq.qiawards@maine.edu).

## 2) Completing the Quality Improvement Plan Spreadsheet

The second step of the Quality Improvement Award process is to complete and submit a Quality Improvement Plan for MRTQ PDN review. The Quality Improvement Plan is the first of two pages on the Quality Improvement Plan Spreadsheet and is used to help programs plan out steps, resources, and timelines for making the anticipated changes.

### *Accessing the Quality Improvement Plan Spreadsheet*

- There are two ways to access the Quality Improvement Plan Spreadsheet:
  - a. Email [mrtq.qiawards@maine.edu](mailto:mrtq.qiawards@maine.edu) and request a shared link.
  - b. Visit the [Quality Initiatives web page](#) and download the Quality Improvement Plan Spreadsheet that matches your program. Either [Facilities - Quality Improvement Plan Spreadsheet](#) or [Family Child Care - Quality Improvement Plan Spreadsheet](#).
- Optional: If you prefer a paper version to write out your plans first, download and print the [Quality Improvement Plan Worksheet](#) from the [Quality Initiatives web page](#)
- Please reach out to [mrtq.qiawards@maine.edu](mailto:mrtq.qiawards@maine.edu) or 207-653-5090 if
  - o The spreadsheet is not working correctly as some computers, including Macs, do not read it properly. An alternate access will be sent.
  - o You need assistance in accessing the Quality Improvement Plan Spreadsheet or Worksheet due to other technology barriers,

### *Completing and submitting the Quality Improvement Plan*

The Quality Improvement Plan should include all *Rising Stars for ME* requirements

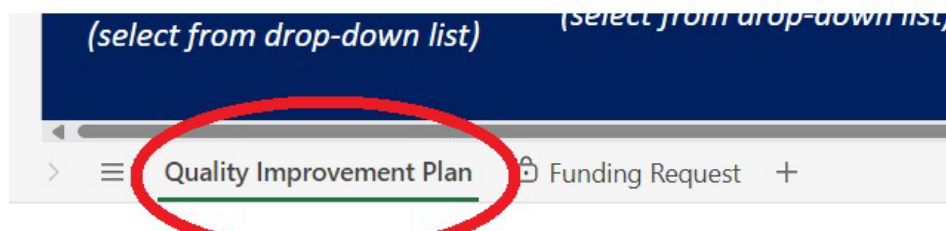


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you need to meet to increase the Star rating and are present on the Recommendations Page (see [Identifying the requirements needed to increase to the desired Star rating based on your Recommendations Page](#))

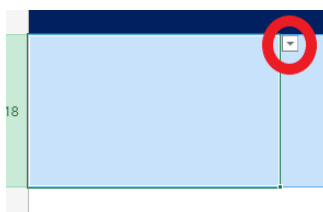
1. Open the Quality Improvement Plan sheet by clicking on the tab at the bottom of the spreadsheet. See Figure 3. Note: For some computers, the tabs are on the top of the page.

Figure 1: The tabs at the bottom of the Quality Improvement Plan Spreadsheet



2. Fill in your program and Star Rating information in the top section.
3. Move to the row below where it says, "Start here!" and click on the first cell. As you enter the information, move across the page.
  - a. **Rising Stars for ME Standard Area** (Column A): Start with the 1<sup>st</sup> *Rising Stars for ME* requirement you need to meet and indicate what Standard you will address. Standard options are in a drop-down list. Once you click on the box, click on the arrow just outside the right side of the box, and then click on the Standard you are addressing. See Figure 4.

1. Figure 2: Drop-down list arrow circled in red.



- b. **Rising Stars for ME Requirement** (Column B): Indicate what requirement will be addressed. Click on the box to access the drop-down list and choose the requirement (same steps as above). The easiest way to find the requirement is to use the number label (i.e., 1.3.4). Remember to only include the requirements needed to meet the desired Star level. Programs working on Star 5 will choose the "working toward or maintaining a Star 5" option and add details in the Notes

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Column.

- c. **Action Steps and Resources needed to meet the requirement** (Column C). Type the steps and resources that will help you meet this requirement: What steps will be taken to meet this requirement and what resources will be needed? Will you need to attend a training? Do you need to research and plan how to implement this change? Do you need to purchase items to meet this requirement? Do you need advice? Do you need funding to purchase materials?
  - d. **People Responsible or Involved in meeting the requirement** (Column D). OPTIONAL. Type the names of those who are responsible or will be involved. Will you or someone else take the lead on this requirement? Are there staff members that will play a role?
  - e. **Funding Category** (Column E). From the drop-down list, indicate the best funding category needed for this requirement. Choose from:
    - Training and Technical Assistance (TA) offering. Will you need to take training, join a peer-to-peer network, or work with a District Coordinator?
    - Material, Equipment, or Supply purchases. Will you need to purchase items for your program or make changes to the physical space?
    - No funds needed. If this requirement does not need funding.
    - Administrative Time: If you need administrative time to research, plan, and implement changes. If you qualify, a \$1000 Administrative stipend will be automatically added by MRTQ PDN when funding is approved.
    - Other. If your need does not fit into any of the above.

If unsure which funding category to choose, leave it blank. This can be completed later.
  - f. **Timeline for Completion** (Column F). From the drop-down list, indicate if you will work on this requirement in the next 0-3 months, 3-6 months, 6 plus months. This column is to help you prepare and plan your work.
  - g. **Notes** (Column G). Add any general notes you feel are important. For programs working on Star 5, enter the Standard letter/number label or a brief description on which you are working.
4. Choose the next *Rising Stars for ME* requirement and complete Steps i-viii.



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Repeat until all identified requirements appear. When completed, the Quality Improvement Plan should contain all *Rising Stars for ME* requirements needed to move to the next Star rating.

- Complete the Quality Improvement Plan to the best of their ability. If there are missing steps or resources, this can be completed when meeting with MRTQ PDN staff.
- If you have trouble completing the spreadsheet, check out the troubleshooting section at the end of this document.
- All questions can be directed to Karen Bergeron at [mrtq.qiawards@maine.edu](mailto:mrtq.qiawards@maine.edu) or 207-653-5090.

## *Submitting The Quality Improvement Plan and Next Steps*

Once the Quality Improvement Plan is complete, please attach the spreadsheet to an email and send it to [mrtq.qiawards@maine.edu](mailto:mrtq.qiawards@maine.edu) unless other instructions have been given by MRTQ PDN staff.

After receiving your spreadsheet, MRTQ PDN staff:

- Will reach out with clarifying questions or to arrange a time to meet to finalize the plan.
- May ask for before and after photos related to the anticipated changes in your program.
- Will share more details on completing the funding request page.

## **3) Completing the Quality Improvement Award Funding Request**

Once your Quality Improvement Plan has been finalized by MRTQ PDN, the next step is to prepare and submit a Funding Request. The funding request is on the second page of the Quality Improvement Plan Spreadsheet.

The Quality Improvement Award has two parts, the initial funding to support the work needed to meet the desired Star rating in *Rising Stars for ME* and a cash payment after the program has received a higher Star rating. The combination of these cannot exceed \$10,000. Programs will use their finalized Quality Improvement Plan and identified resources to request funding. The Initial funding may cover;

- The Cost of MRTQ PDN or State-Approved training, including personal or substitute time to participate,

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- Technical Assistance (TA) offerings, including personal or substitute time to attend,
- Purchases of materials and equipment,
- Changes and upgrades to the program's physical space,
- An administrative stipend to plan and implement changes (will be added by MRTQ PDN), and
- Other needs related to meeting the *Rising Stars for ME* requirements.

## *Important Information about the Quality Improvement Initial Funding*

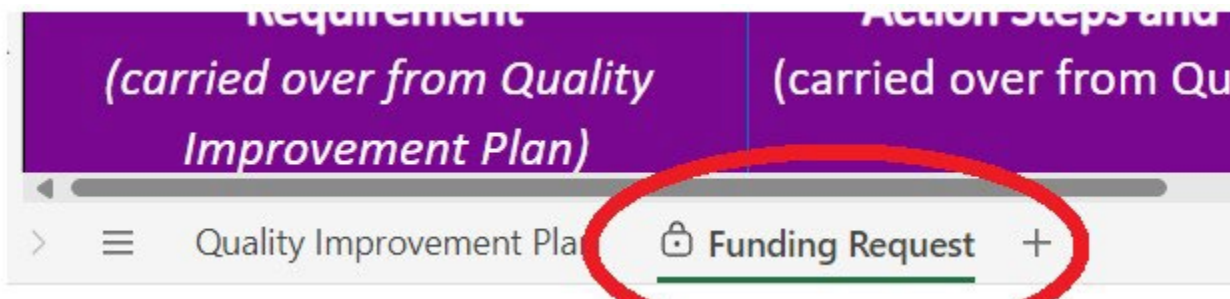
- Funding Guidelines:
  - Programs will estimate reasonable and necessary costs based on their Quality Improvement.
  - As no Quality Improvement Award can exceed \$10,000, the maximum requested funding will be
    - Star 2-3: \$6500
    - Star 3-4: \$7000
    - Star 4-5: \$7500
  - Programs cannot request funds for consumable products. These are items that are used up regularly and need to be replaced. This includes food, diapers, office supplies, and art supplies.
  - Programs cannot request funds for requirements that need to be incorporated into a program's regular routines such as staff meetings and supervision time.
- Once submitted, MRTQ PDN will
  - Calculate total training funds,
  - Add TA offering hours and calculate the total funds.
  - Add a \$1000 Administrative Stipend if the program has at least one requirement needing administrative time to research, plan, and implement the changes.
- Funds will be paid in advance of the work and may be dispersed in multiple payments. Payments are based on the timeline established on the Funding Request page and program updates, every three months.
- Programs will submit receipts of purchases and contracted work and any requested photos.

## *To Complete the Quality Improvement Plan Funding Request*

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1. Revisit your Quality Improvement Plan Spreadsheet and open the "Funding Request" tab at the bottom of the page. See Figure 5.

Figure 3: The tabs at the bottom of the Quality Improvement Plan Spreadsheet with the Funding Request tab circled in red.



- Note: The "Rising Stars for ME Requirements," "Action Steps and Resources Required," and "Funding Category" (Columns A-C) have been carried over from the Quality Improvement Plan sheet. If you need to make changes, return to the Quality Improvement Plan sheet to do so.
2. For each requirement, start under the purple cells titled "Rising Stars for ME Requirements," read across the page to Column C "Funding Category." Use this information to determine where to enter the details and funds needed. Most funding categories have one to four spaces for information and are colored yellow or orange (columns D-K). See Figure 6.

Figure 4: Columns D-K of the Funding Request sheet.

Choose the columns associated with your Funding category (listed in Column C), and enter the required details.								
Training Offering				Technical Assistance	Materials, Equipment, or Supply Purchases		Other Funding Request	
Name of Training Offering	Number of Staff taking Training	Total Training Hours (how long is the required training?)	Training Fee (cost of training)	Name of Technical Assistance (TA) Offering	Materials, Equipment, or Supplies required (description)	Cost of Materials, Equipment, or Supplies required (enter number - include taxes, shipping, contracted services)	Describe Other Funding Request	Cost

- a. **Training Offering** (Columns D-G): If you or someone from your program is required to take a MRTQ PDN training, under the "Training Offerings" columns, enter the name of the training in Column D, the number of people who need to take the training in Column E, total hours of the

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- training in Column F, and the fee for registering for the training (if any) in Column G.
- For example, if one person is required to take Infant Toddler MELDS, write Name: "Infant Toddler MELDS," Number: "1," Training Hours: "30," and Training Fees, "\$30."
  - If other comments are needed, add to the Notes column (N).
  - Training names and hours can be found on the [Training Calendar](#) or [On-Demand Training](#) list
- b. **Technical Assistance (Column H):** If you will be participating in a "Technical Assistance Offering," enter just the name.
- For example, if you are engaging in onsite or virtual consultation with a District Coordinator, write "consultation."
  - TA hours will be calculated by MRTQ PDN staff.
- c. **Materials, Equipment, or Supply Purchases (Columns I-J):** If you will be purchasing items for your program or will be changing the program's physical space, enter a description of what you will be purchasing in Column I and the calculated cost in Column J.
- Include the taxes and shipping for your purchases.
  - Items not covered by this funding are consumable items (those that get used up and need to be replaced regularly). This includes food, diapers, and office and art supplies such as paper, markers, and crayons.
  - Items may be purchased anywhere you choose.
  - Supplies to create or build your needed items are acceptable.
  - If making physical changes to your building, prepare a list of supplies needed, or get a professional estimate. Include shipping and taxes.
- d. **Other Funding Request (Columns K-L):** If your funding request does not fit into the above categories, please list it here. In Column K, add a description and how it will help meet the *Rising Stars for ME* requirement and in Column L, add the cost. Examples may be training related to established Professional Development Planning, projects related to established Continuous Quality Improvement Plans
- e. **Status (Column M):** Based on the timeline identified on the Quality Improvement Plan, select a status from the drop-down list in Column L. The options are "Starting in 0-3 Months" "Starting later" "In Progress" or "Completed,"
- Must be completed for each requirement.
  - This column is used to determine payment timing and updating progress of the plan.
- f. **Notes (Column N):** Please include any additional information needed.

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- Examples: what staff members are taking Preschool MELDS or Infant Toddler MELDS, added information about a TA offering you are engaging in, additional details about materials or supplies being purchased, donations from families that are important,

3. Fill in this information for each Rising requirement listed on the Plan.

Note:

- If you have trouble completing the spreadsheet, check out the troubleshooting section at the end of this document.
- All questions can be directed to Karen Bergeron at [mrtq.qiawards@maine.edu](mailto:mrtq.qiawards@maine.edu) or 207-653-5090.

## *Submitting your Funding Request and Next Steps*

Once complete, submit via instructions given by MRTQ PDN.

MRTQ PDN Staff will review the Funding Request, complete the calculations, and reach out to you via email with approval, funding total, and details about payment. Final calculated funds will appear on top of the Funding Request page.

At this point, you will be asked to commit to working toward your desired Star level and agree to use the funds as planned.

## **4) Completing the Quality Improvement Plan Updates**

Now that your funding request has been approved, you will work to meet the *Rising Stars for ME* requirements identified in your Quality Improvement Plan. As you make progress on your Plan, update the Funding Request form regularly until you meet all requirements and are ready to apply for your new Star rating. Updating your plan is a way to show your progress on your work, make updates to your timeline, and submit receipts or photos, as needed.

### *Update the Funding Request*

Revisit the Quality Improvement Plan Spreadsheet and the Funding Request tab. You will focus on Columns M and M, in Purple. See Figure 7 below.

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Figure 5: Columns related to Updates on the Funding Request tab.

M	N
<b>Status</b> <i>(select from drop-down list)</i>	<b>Notes: (optional write-in)</b> <i>General notes, updated funding information, actual spending, etc.</i>

- Change the Status of any requirements you have been working on or plan to work on in the next three months. Click on the box and the arrow just to the right of the cell, open the drop-down list, and choose: "In Progress" "Starting in 0-3 Months" or "Completed."
- Add any details in the Notes Column (M). This should include general notes about your progress, updated funding needs, and actual funds spent.

All questions can be directed to Karen Bergeron at [mrtq.qiawards@maine.edu](mailto:mrtq.qiawards@maine.edu) or 207-653-5090.

## Submitting your Updates and Next Steps

Submit updates via instructions given by MRTQ PDN. Continue to update the Quality Improvement Plan Spreadsheet at least once every three months until your Plan is complete and before you reapply for a new *Rising Stars for ME* Certificate.

Once your new *Rising Stars for ME* rating is confirmed,

- Email [mrtq.qiawards@maine.edu](mailto:mrtq.qiawards@maine.edu) or call 207-653-5090 and the final cash will be sent. This cash payment is funding you may use as you choose and will not require any follow-up reporting.
- Email all receipts for items purchased and any requested photos to the above address.




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## *Trouble Shooting*

- If you have downloaded the Quality Improvement Plan Spreadsheet and it does not appear to be working correctly, contact Karen Bergeron at [mrtq.qiawards@maine.edu](mailto:mrtq.qiawards@maine.edu). The spreadsheet may not work as intended on Mac Computers, Google Drive, and others.
- When Completing the Quality Improvement Plan, **if the *Rising Stars for ME* requirement you are focusing on does not appear** in the drop-down list:
  - Ensure you are using the Quality Improvement Plan Spreadsheet for your **type** of program.
  - Ensure the correct *Rising Stars for ME* Standard appears in the previous column. Your choices for the requirements are based on the Standard you chose in the previous column.
- If you are **working toward or maintaining a Star 5**:
  - Choose a *Rising Stars for ME* Standard that best fits the National Accreditation Standard you need to meet (Column A)
  - Choose "Working toward or maintaining a Star 5" for *Rising Stars for ME* Requirement (Column B)
  - Add the Standard name/letter label or short description to the Notes column (Column G). Combining similar or connected standards is accepted.
- If you **run out of rows** to enter all your requirements, please contact Karen Bergeron at [mrtq.qiawards@maine.edu](mailto:mrtq.qiawards@maine.edu).
- If you are working on the Funding Request sheet and tried **to make changes to the "*Rising Stars for ME* Requirement," "Action Steps and Resources" and "Funding Category" columns**, it will not work.
  - Changes to Columns A-C, "*Rising Stars for ME* Requirements," "Action Steps and Resources required" and "Funding Category," can only be made on the Quality Improvement Plan sheet. Once changes are made there, you will see the updates on the Funding Request sheet.
- If you type into a cell, hit enter, and **receive the message "The Value doesn't match the data validation restrictions defined for this cell."**

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- You may be typing in a cell with a drop-down list. Click on the cell and look for a down arrow just to the right of the cell. Click on the arrow and choose from the list.
- If you see a yellow **caution sign**  when you click on a cell,
  - Continue to type. This should not interfere with entering information or choosing from the drop-down list. If it does, reach out to [mrtq.qiawards@maine.edu](mailto:mrtq.qiawards@maine.edu).