Reviewer’s report

Title: Applying the balanced scorecard to local public health performance measurement: deliberations and decisions

Version: 1 Date: 15 January 2009

Reviewer: Corinne Schalm

Reviewer’s report:

Major Compulsory Revisions

Minor Essential Revisions

1. Typos/grammar issues: Recommend having someone read this over who is a good editor – a few things the reviewer picked up while not looking for grammatical stuff (i.e. haven’t read for that purpose so very likely did not pick up everything):
   a. Period missing after first use of reference #4 on page 4
   b. Word missing line 5 page 6 “development of public health performance” – assuming it was to say something like “development of a public health performance framework”
   c. Last line page 7 needs “the” before “health unit’s”
   d. Second line page 8 needs “s” after “indicator”
   e. Midway through page 8 second paragraph should be “A series of . . . was held” (rather than “were”)
   f. Is the panel referred to in this section the same as the team mentioned earlier in the section – use the same terms if so as I wasn’t sure if a new group was being introduced
   g. Third line from the bottom of page 8 should be singular “program” areas
   h. 1st line on page 12 needs “a” before “table”
   i. A number of the references (page 16) go back and forth between capitalizing/not capitalizing in the titles of publications
   j. Reference 9 needs “d” on the end of “retrieve”
   k. Text box on York needs a new sentence (capitalize) after 22.4%

Discretionary Revisions

2. It is helpful to have a descriptive article on a BSC in this field as there is very little literature in this specific subject area with respect to the BSC. The paper would be strengthened by elaborating on a number of the points made and providing evidence to support them. The points themselves are not at issue, but there is not always explanatory support provided for the statements, or evidence
or literature to support them. Most if not all of the revisions suggested below are examples of this overall general comment.

3. The authors identify correctly that the balanced scorecard is ideally a strategic management tool—more than a dashboard of operational indicators, but a tool to drive strategy development and monitoring on key strategic priorities. Most organizations do not achieve this level, at least not initially in their BSC development. The authors indicate that they looked at the option of describing what the health unit does, vs. a focus on the strategic vision, and decided to go with the first option “as this was the first attempt at the BSC”. Given that this option is not the primary intended purpose of a BSC it is recommended that they elaborate on why they chose the less ideal option. Likely this was an issue of pragmatics but it would be helpful for the reader to know the thinking behind this, and their thoughts about moving beyond this first stage to a more strategic focus at a later stage in their evolution as they become more comfortable with using a BSC.

4. The authors indicate correctly that there are a number of audiences for the BSC, and then state that the decision was made to present the initial BSC to the Board of Health. It would be helpful to know why this was decided, and what the plan is for the other audiences identified. Also further elaboration on the statement at the end of this section “Feedback from the Board on the BSC report was sought to better align health unit’s mandate . . . “ would be useful.

5. Each of the sections on the four quadrants’ indicators starts with a definitive statement about what that quadrant should include. There is no reference provided here in terms of literature, and no explanation of why these particular measures should be included. It would be helpful to provide the reader with the evidence on why these are the measures that need to be in there. Perhaps these come from the ICES framework and if so that could be explained.

6. It would have been helpful to hear some of the issues encountered in the process of developing the BSC. What compromises had to be made and why. What lessons were learned through mistakes made or opposition encountered. What actual evidence was used to support the indicators chosen or the process used. This would strengthen the paper and increase its usefulness to others.

7. In the section on comparators, several options are presented but we are not told which one was selected and why.

8. The tips at the end are a good summary, but the reader is not told why these tips are useful. The paper described that this approach was used (i.e. each of these tips), but does not provide any analysis of why that was a good idea. It would be strengthened by either demonstrating through evidence from the literature that this was chosen based on experience elsewhere, or by giving some evaluative evidence from the York Region experience, even if it is the subjective feedback of participants, or if that is not available then the authors’ rationale for why these tips are good advice to the reader. Each of the tips are worthwhile but they need some support.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely
related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests