



## Key Themes Overview & Step-by-Step Instructions

A **key theme** is a perception or observation that recurs throughout the scorebook, across processes and results, reflecting major strengths, opportunities, or vulnerabilities.

### Features of Key Themes

- address high-level strengths or opportunities for improvement
- are significant in terms of the applicant's key factors
- are often common to more than one item/category (cross-cutting) or address an issue of particular significance in one item (often found in a comment that has been bolded)
- must be traceable to individual item comments
- summarize how well an applicant has addressed the Criteria requirements
- serve as an executive summary of the Feedback Report

### What to ask in identifying key themes

For the "a" and "b" key themes, which are related to **process** items, the A-D-L-I evaluation factors are a good starting point. Asking the following questions will help identify the key themes:

- Which approaches are sound and systematic (or not)?
- What approaches are well-deployed throughout the organization (or not)?
- Are there areas of strength or opportunity related to organizational learning?
- Where is there strong linkage between and among processes? What areas are poorly aligned? In a more mature applicant, what areas exhibit or lack integration?
- Do you see any role model processes?

For the "c" and "d" key themes, which are related to **results** items, asking the following questions related to the results evaluation factors (Le-T-C-I) is a good starting point for determining commonality or themes:

- Are results trending consistently either favorably or unfavorably? If results are tracked over time, are they sustained?
- How do results compare to competitors or best-in-class organizations? Are adequate comparisons provided?
- To what extent are results segmented to reflect important customer, product and service, market, process, and action plan performance requirements identified in the Organizational Profile and in process Items?
- Do you see any role model results?

Core values may serve as a source for strength key themes, when examples can be identified from item comments.

Are there core values reflected in the item comments (e.g., visionary leadership, management by fact)?

## Key Theme Customers

- **Examiners** – Key themes capture the shared understanding of a team of Examiners and are used to help focus the site visit
- **Applicants** – the Key themes may be the only section of the Feedback Report that is reviewed and used by senior leaders for acknowledging best practices and focusing improvement efforts
- **Judges** – Key themes help judges to develop an overall understanding of each applicant and to distinguish role model practices and key vulnerabilities.

## Step-By-Step Instructions

Steps	Actions
<b>Complete the Key Themes Worksheet</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review the <b>Core Values and Concepts</b> from the Criteria to help identify cross-cutting themes.</li> <li>• Key theme comments generally should be at a higher level than item comments and should cut across multiple items and/or areas to address.</li> <li>• All key theme comments must be traceable to individual item comments</li> </ul>
<b>Key Themes Worksheet</b>  <b>Question A</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read all of the strength comments for all of the items in categories 1 – 6, paying special attention to those suggested as key themes by your teammates.</li> <li>• Identify any ideas, threads or patterns that recur and/or are expanded upon in multiple items or categories.</li> <li>• Craft a brief statement for each of these potential key themes. Examples of these themes might include the applicant’s: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>process orientation</b>, with the statement highlighting the approaches where this orientation is seen</li> <li>– <b>deployment</b> of its key processes to all appropriate work units, with the statement listing examples of key processes that appear to be fully deployed</li> <li>– use of a systematic <b>learning</b>, evaluation and improvement methodology, with the statement giving examples across the items where the methodology is used</li> <li>– <b>integration</b> of its approaches with its strategic objectives or challenges, or other critical key factors, with the statement noting specific examples of this integration</li> <li>– demonstration of a specific <b>core value</b> from the Criteria, with the statement providing specific examples from multiple items.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Review all of the ++ item-level comments.</li> <li>• Consider whether the ++ item-level comments should be repeated as a key theme if not already covered by the strength themes you have crafted.</li> </ul> <p><b>Note: For lower-scoring applicants, you may have few key theme comments under Question A.</b></p>

Steps	Actions
<p><b>Key Themes Worksheet</b></p> <p><b>Question B</b></p>	<p>Read all of the OFI comments for all of the items in categories 1 – 6, paying special attention to those suggested as key themes by your teammates.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify any ideas, threads or patterns reflecting OFIs that recur and/or are expanded on in multiple items or categories.</li> <li>• Craft a brief statement for each of these potential key themes. Examples of these themes might include the applicant’s: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– lack of systematic <b>approaches</b>, with the statement highlighting areas where gaps are noted</li> <li>– lack of clarity around gaps in <b>deployment</b> of its key approaches to appropriate work units or key stakeholders, with the statement giving examples of where the lack of clarity or gaps exist</li> <li>– opportunity to improve the <b>integration</b> of its approaches with its strategic objectives, strategic challenges, or other critical key factors, with the statement noting specific examples of which objectives, challenges, or key customer/student/patient groups are not addressed by the applicant’s approaches</li> <li>– lack of cycle of <b>learning</b> for evaluating or improving key work processes, accompanied by a list of examples where a process for learning was not seen</li> <li>– <b>gaps</b> in responding to the Criteria requirements, with the statement giving examples of Criteria items or areas not responded to and important to the applicant.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Review all of the item-level comments.</li> <li>• Consider whether the item-level comments should be repeated as a key theme if not already covered by the OFI themes you have crafted.</li> <li>• <b>Note: For lower-scoring applicants, you would expect to see fewer comments in question A (strengths) than in question B (vulnerabilities).</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>Key Themes Worksheet</b></p> <p><b>Question C</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read all of the strength comments for all of the items in category 7, paying special attention to those suggested as key themes by your teammates.</li> <li>• Consider possible themes in the following areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>good performance levels and positive trends</b> across items in the measures most important to the applicant’s organization, including how the applicant <b>compares</b> to other organizations</li> <li>– <b>segmentation/linkage</b> – the presence of results addressing specific segments of the applicant’s customers, students, employees, patients, locations, and so forth.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Review all ++ comments in the category 7 items.</li> <li>• Consider whether these ++ comments should be repeated as key themes if not already covered by the question C themes you have crafted.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Key Themes Worksheet</b></p> <p><b>Question D</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read all of the OFI comments for all of the category 7 items, paying special attention to those suggested as key themes by your teammates.</li> <li>• Consider possible themes in the following areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>poor performance levels and/or unfavorable trends</b> across the items in the measures most important to the applicant’s organization</li> <li>– the absence of <b>comparative data</b> overall (giving specific examples from the items) or the absence of a particular type of comparative data that would be important to the</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Steps	Actions
	<p>applicant in guiding its improvement efforts (e.g., competitive data, use of industry averages as benchmarks when the applicant’s goal is to be world class or where the applicant’s performance already exceeds the industry average)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>missing data or gaps</b> – the absence of results addressing specific areas of the category 7 items; the absence of results on key measures discussed in categories 1 – 6 (e.g., measures of key processes, or progress relative to strategic action plans)</li> <li>– <b>segmentation/linkage</b> – the absence of results addressing specific segments of the applicant’s customers, students, employees, patients, locations, and so forth.</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review all -- comments in the category 7 items. Consider whether these -- comments should be repeated as key themes if not already covered by the question D themes you have crafted.</li> </ul>

### Example

The applicant creates an environment for organizational learning through the creation of an annual workforce development plan that serves as a key input to the Strategic Planning Process and drives the development of the organization’s annual training and education plan. Other means used to develop and maintain a learning environment include the use of the Plan, Do, Check, Act (PDCA) process and OASIS design and improvement models. The models include systematic benchmarking and identification of best practices, the development of annual Individual Development Plans (IDPs) for all staff and volunteers, and the offer of multiple educational benefits, such as Work to Learn, tuition reimbursement, and scholarships for staff and their children. In addition, the organization participates in multiple national, state, and local associations to gather and share best practices and learning.

*This is a key theme because it*

- *Goes beyond one area to address, item or category*
- *Describes various systematic processes that are important to the organization’s performance*
- *Is well deployed throughout the organization*
- *Is integrated (in harmony across the organization)*
- *Is linked to a Core Value – organizational learning and agility*

### Non-example

Although the applicant assigns a “single point of responsibility” for modifying action plans when required, it is not clear how it supports rapid execution of new plans, especially considering its semiannual review and various approval approaches.

*This is not a key theme because, although it may be important to the applicant’s agility, it articulates only one of the multiple requirements of item 2.2. The only instance that an item-level comment such as this would rise to the level of a key theme would be if this issue had been mentioned multiple times in other categories, or if, for example, a major health care issue had not been addressed as a result of this opportunity for improvement.*

### Key themes guidelines

Enter your key themes into one of four sections:

- a = process strengths
- b = process opportunities
- c = results strengths
- d = results opportunities

Write complete sentences that adhere to the comment guidelines, beginning with a summary (i.e. topic) sentence. Include evidence that adds clarity and value for the application without parroting the application.