# Putting Productivity Plans to Work

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This is the last in a series of three "Coding Notes" articles addressing productivity measurement and incentive plans for coding professionals. The April *Journal of AHIMA* (vol. 72, no. 4) article discussed the general principles of developing facility-specific productivity measures. The July-August *Journal of AHIMA* (vol. 72, no. 7) article summarized the results of the productivity requirements survey that included information from more than 90 respondents across the United States. In this article, we'll look at two sample incentive plans for coding professionals.

**First Things First**

As noted in the first article, before preparing a productivity requirement and an incentive plan, you should take several steps:

1. **Understand the coding process at your facility**. What steps does the process entail?
2. **Determine the amount of time the coding process takes**. Regardless of the survey results, every facility is different and you may find that your coding staff produces more or less because of the work environment and the steps in the process.
3. **Prepare your recommendations**.
4. **Review the recommendations with the coding team**.
5. **Assign the average amount of time per chart type**.
6. **Obtain the coding team's agreement**.
7. **Start the program**. Those familiar with the "Plan, Do, Check, Act" method will realize that this is not the end of the process. You must continue to monitor and, if necessary, change the program.

Because of today's heightened compliance concerns, some organizations are hesitant to place coding professionals on an incentive plan because they fear the tendency to code at the minimum level to increase productivity. Sadly, the idea that credentialed coding professionals would sacrifice quality for quantity has emerged because of a few bad apples. However, the result has been increased Office of Inspector General activity. It is in coding professionals' best interests to ensure an adequate sampling of coding quality occurs under any productivity or incentive program.

**What's the Incentive?**

Incentive programs offer management an alternative approach to increasing the base pay of the coding specialists employed. These programs may also reduce the department dependency on outside support.

To assist you in developing either an incentive plan that will compensate coders individually for their productivity or a bonus plan that will compensate the coding team for its overall productivity, two sample plans have been provided. For both, the productivity requirements are noted. Note that the compensation amounts and productivity levels identified in these plans are only examples. Each facility should determine the productivity level and compensation factor that is appropriate for the organization.

Keep in mind some of the factors affecting coding productivity that were noted in the April article and confirmed by the survey results reported in the July/August article:

- **Other job duties**: Some coders also perform analysis, release of information, and cancer registry abstraction
- **Specialization**: Coders may specialize in a certain type of records. By doing so, their proficiency and speed are enhanced. Therefore, the productivity measure should be increased to recognize this advantage
- **Shifts**: Depending on the shift work, staff may have fewer or more interruptions. However, flexibility in shifts worked also enhances recruitment

There will be many issues for you to consider as you develop your plan. By involving your management team and coding staff, your planning efforts will be improved and the program you develop will more effectively address your needs. u

*Note: AHIMA does not officially endorse any specific productivity standards or incentive plan because of the variability discussed in the three articles by the author. These articles are offered to help you develop a customized plan for your department.*

[Sample Coding Incentive Plan 1](#)
[Sample Coding Incentive Plan 2](#)

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