



# **NYSAN**

NEW YORK STATE AFTERSCHOOL NETWORK

**PROGRAM QUALITY  
Self-Assessment Tool**

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**USER'S GUIDE  
2ND EDITION**



NYSAN is very pleased to publish this User's Guide for the NYSAN Program Quality Self-Assessment (QSA) Tool. We hope this User's Guide offers practical insight on the self-assessment process and aids you in your quality improvement and planning efforts. We wish you the best of luck as you use the QSA Tool to mobilize the stakeholders in your afterschool program to continuously strengthen your efforts to provide young people with positive learning and development opportunities. We look forward to hearing from you as the NYSAN QSA Tool is incorporated into your program planning, development, and growth. Please do not hesitate to contact NYSAN at [info@nysan.org](mailto:info@nysan.org) if you have any questions or wish to offer feedback about the self-assessment process, the QSA Tool, or this User's Guide.

Sincere regards,

NYSAN Steering Committee

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# I. WELCOME!

The New York State Afterschool Network (NYSAN) Program Quality Self-Assessment (QSA) Tool User's Guide is designed to help you get the most out of the QSA Tool and the self-assessment process for your afterschool program.

NYSAN defines afterschool broadly, to include structured activities that take place in school and community - based settings, and are offered before school, afterschool, and during summer and holiday breaks.

As an experienced youth practitioner, you have likely begun the self-assessment process to enhance and strengthen the quality of your program. In this guide, you'll find practical strategies gathered from the field to assist and support you as you formalize and build upon existing program improvement efforts. As you already know, it is essential for those involved in after school programs to make time for quality improvement. The QSA Tool and this User's Guide establish a framework for taking steps toward improvement and provide practical examples from after school practitioners on self-assessment best practices. Through the self-assessment process, you will gather information, examine what staff and other stakeholders are doing, and assess the program. Willingness to reflect, self-assess, and take action will improve program quality and make good programs great.

The process of reflection and self-assessment doesn't have a fixed beginning and end, and it can't be done by one person alone. Rather, it's an ongoing team-based process involving staff, youth participants, parents, and other stakeholders. Creating a culture that is practiced in honest reflection and dialogue about program strengths and challenges and that is active about improvement takes time and hard work, but it's worth it. As a result, stakeholders will know what they want and how to get there; they will become more creative and innovative; and hopefully, they will be willing to try new ideas, strategies, and solutions. In addition, your team will be better equipped to work and learn together to support your organization's goals.

## WHAT IS SELF-ASSESSMENT?

Self-assessment provides a lens for understanding the overall quality of your program, how it has evolved, and where it needs to go. Organizations that practice ongoing self-assessment are better prepared to share clear program goals, promising practices, and measurable outcomes and to incorporate them into an evaluation design. Although it can be used to inform and complement external evaluation efforts, self-assessment is free from the pressure of external monitoring systems.

### A SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS...

- o provides structure for comparing perceptions, voicing concerns, and identifying outcomes.
- o strengthens communication between stakeholders.
- o helps build a collective vision of desired outcomes and what's needed to achieve those outcomes (e.g., staffing, activities, etc.).
- o uses data gathered to inform practice and builds capacity.
- o is often facilitated by program staff and/or other stakeholders.

### A FORMAL PROGRAM EVALUATION...

- o takes a more formal approach to studying and assessing programs to determine how they work and what their outcomes are.
- o is outcomes focused.
- o uses data gathered for accountability and compliance with grant requirements.
- o has higher stakes and less gray areas.
- o is often facilitated by an external observer.

## II. HOW THIS USER'S GUIDE CAN HELP

This User's Guide is designed to help you initiate and support a self-assessment process whether you are brand new to the QSA Tool or simply want to invigorate your efforts. Regardless of your role within your after-school program, this User's Guide is for you!

It is full of practical, real-world strategies, tips, case studies, sample tools, and reflection questions that will guide and support you as you cultivate a culture of learning in your organization. Don't hesitate to make

this book your own: take notes, jot down ideas, and plan next steps in the spaces provided.

As you read the User's Guide, take time to reflect on what will work best for you and your community. Adapt the ideas and strategies so they work for you. Tap into your own expertise and knowledge. Be creative. Enjoy the process. Celebrate the successes as you continue striving for overall program quality.

## III. AN OVERVIEW OF THE NYSAN QSA TOOL

The QSA Tool is a resource that builds upon the experience, knowledge, and research of afterschool practitioners and policymakers from across the country. At first glance, the tool may appear daunting, but don't shy away. It's called a "tool" because it is meant to help your organization grow, and it is designed to be tailored according to your needs. How you use it depends on your organization's needs, strengths, challenges, maturity, and capacity. It is not meant to be used as a device for judging the program as "good" or "bad." Rather, the

QSA Tool is intended to be used as a guide for making every part of your program the best that it can be.

Organizations that have linked the self-assessment process to decision-making often meet their goals and achieve success. The QSA Tool should be used to promote quality and engage staff, youth, and other stakeholders in authentic discussions about how to continuously improve your afterschool program.

### QSA Tool Structure

The QSA Tool is organized around ten essential elements of an effective afterschool program, all of which come from evidence-based practice. Under each element, there is a list of quality indicators. An asterisk (\*) denotes those indicators that are critical to address prior to program start-up. Once the program is underway, each indicator should be given equal significance. The QSA Tool is meant to be used in concert with other formal and informal evaluation methods, such as youth, parent, and staff surveys, staff meetings, youth and parent focus groups, and external monitoring and evaluation. Each of these methods can help identify program strengths and areas in need of improvement.

### QSA Tool Performance Levels

Programs assess their level of competence or mastery for each indicator using the performance level rating system below:

#### Performance Level Rating System

##### 4 Excellent/Exceeds Standards.

Is prepared to help and work with others in this area.

##### 3 Satisfactory/Meets Standards.

Needs help to prepare staff to work with others in this area.

##### 2 Some Progress Made/Approaching Standard.

Could use additional focused assistance in this area.

##### 1 Must Address and Improve/Standard Not Met.

Needs significant support in this area.

Organizations are expected to strive for a satisfactory performance level (3) on all of the quality indicators within each of the ten elements of program quality. Over time, programs should continue to strive for an excellent performance level (4). At this level of performance, organizations consistently show evidence of promising practices throughout all program elements, serve as a model for other afterschool programs, and develop and support staff such that they could serve as coaches and mentors for other practitioners.

## Program Planning and Improvement

Use of the QSA Tool directly assists with program improvement. The self-assessment process offers all of the core components of program planning and improvement, including identifying areas in need of improvement, setting goals and timelines, finding resources, and assigning responsibility for strategies. For programs that already have a process for program improvement, such as annual meetings, the use of or findings from the QSA Tool can be integrated into the process and can help guide your conversations.

After completing a self-assessment using the QSA Tool, it is time to develop an action plan based on your team's findings. The QSA Tool encourages users to indicate priorities and determine the appropriate time-frame for improvements using the following categories:

- Right Now:** Area will be addressed prior to or at the start of program.
- This Year:** Area will be addressed during the program year.
- Next Year:** Area will be re-evaluated prior to the start of the next program year.

This planning process can help you generate a variety of ideas for how to improve your program and identify opportunities for growth. Developing a manageable action plan that is realistic and specific is a key factor

to ensuring your team's success. The action plan helps keep your team on track by identifying the steps you should take to achieve program goals. Don't forget about the plan once it is completed; revisit it periodically throughout the year. The plan serves as your roadmap as you are taking steps to improve and enhance the quality of your program.

*\*See Appendix I for an Action Plan template.*

Keep in mind that the quality indicators marked with an asterisk are the most critical to program start-up.\* You will also want to prioritize action items related to indicators for which your program received a performance level 1 or 2 and begin to discuss improvement strategies.

*\*See Appendix II for a list of those indicators that are specifically critical to address prior to program start-up.*

## Supporting the Development of Your Staff through Self-Assessment

After completing your action plan, you will want to consider who will be implementing it. The self-assessment process can be particularly useful in getting a clearer picture of staff's strengths and challenges and determining each person's role in making improvements. For starters, you will need to know the skill sets they presently have and what skills they need in order to make improvements. While workshops, delivered at conferences or on-site, are a common means of professional development, improving staff's capacity should not be limited to workshops. Professional development can be offered through a variety of venues, such as program observations, peer mentoring/coaching, supervision, staff meetings, conferences, networking events, and higher education courses. Keep in mind that professional development isn't just about workshops that present "new skills." It allows for everyone to get on the same page, provides tools and resources for achieving program goals and examples of promising practices, and supports and builds a community of

learners. “Research shows that a skilled, stable, and motivated workforce is a key determinant of quality programming.”<sup>1</sup>

*See Appendix III for detailed information on how to develop a professional development action plan.*

## How to Design a Program Improvement Plan

- o Start with the end in mind.
- o Determine your goals for the year.
 

Note: Goals are what you hope to achieve; outcomes are the tangibles that let you know the goals were achieved.
- o Discuss and prioritize specific quality indicators related to your goals.
- o Decide who will take the lead.
- o Set realistic deadlines.
- o Identify financial, technical, and human resources needed to achieve your goals.
- o Brainstorm specific next steps to achieve your goals.<sup>2</sup>

## IV. THE SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS: USING THE QSA TOOL

### Thinking about HOW

Determining who will lead and facilitate the self-assessment is a key first step in the process. A committed leader is one of the most important factors for a successful self-assessment process. In collaboration with other staff and stakeholders, the self-assessment leader needs to determine who will be engaged in the process, how and when it will take place, who will facilitate discussions, how data and findings will be compiled and shared, and help ensure the self-assessment process leads to planning and program improvement. The self-assessment leader may also facilitate discussions. Often, site directors or supervisors take the

lead in ensuring the organization undertakes the self-assessment process. However, staff, school personnel, volunteers, and parents can also possess the qualities needed to serve as a facilitator. In some cases, programs choose to engage an external facilitator to assist in leading the process and offering a neutral voice in discussions. The process requires a facilitator who possesses several key characteristics in order to be successful in engaging all stakeholders and creating an atmosphere that is safe, comfortable, and empowering.

### A good facilitator:

- o Taps into participants' existing knowledge and builds upon what they bring to the process.
- o Provides opportunities for everyone to contribute ideas and suggestions.
- o Actively listens and connects ideas and themes as they emerge.
- o Adjusts and adapts to support the needs and learning styles of the participants.
- o Is prepared to answer questions about policies and procedures.
- o Avoids personalizing what is shared in the process.
- o Remains non-judgmental.
- o Helps bring consensus and closure to discussions.

### Below are some questions for the leader and facilitator to consider as they plan the process.

- o What is the collective future that the program wants to create?
- o How can you challenge and expand others' thinking?
- o How can you help others embrace change as an opportunity for growth?
- o How can you help others see gains and celebrate progress?<sup>3</sup>

## More on Facilitating the Process

No matter how you choose to conduct the self-assessment, there are three main steps to follow: Prepare, Facilitate, and Follow-up. Here are some things to consider during each stage of the process:

### PREPARE

- o **Create a message.** Understanding why program self-assessment is important and how it leads to quality improvement will help you craft your message!
- o **Set Up for Success.** Work with program leaders and organizational supervisors prior to starting the process to determine how outcomes of the self-assessment process will be turned into actions.
- o **Know the Big Picture.** Before involving others, complete the QSA Tool yourself. This will help you keep the big picture in mind as the group discusses each section.
- o **Invite Them.** Send out a formal invitation that lets everyone know what to expect and what their role will be.
- o **Plan Ahead.** Allow ample time for the process.

### FACILITATE

- o **Get Acquainted.** When meeting in person, consider beginning with community building activities or icebreakers.
- o **Establish the Tone.** Refresh people's understanding of the QSA Tool and their role in the process, and ask participants to brainstorm ground rules for working successfully as a group.
- o **Keep Track.** Ask someone to take notes on feedback and suggestions.
- o **Emphasize the Positive.** Identify the strengths of everyone involved and acknowledge their investment in the program's success.

### FOLLOW-UP

- o **Share.** Ask the group to share lessons learned and recommendations for enhancing the self-assessment process.
- o **Appreciate.** Acknowledge everyone's contributions and recognize successes.
- o **Communicate.** If it is hard to get people together to debrief, consider putting information in an e-mail. Providing people with an opportunity to discuss and reflect on the results is extremely important, no matter how you do it.
- o **Take action.** Follow-up on immediate action steps as soon as possible while momentum around quality improvement is fresh and strong.



## Thinking about WHO

It is very important to involve a variety of stakeholders when using the QSA Tool, whether you are a new program in the planning stages or a mature program striving for ongoing improvement. Whether you are a site director, staff member, program participant, parent, school administrator, or other stakeholder, you are a crucial part of this process—even if you feel some parts of the QSA Tool are unrelated to you. Feel free to ask questions and get involved with all of the conversations about the quality of your afterschool program.

**Here are important strategies for engaging three key stakeholders: youth, staff, and families.**

### Youth

When young people agree to participate in the self-assessment process and to share their experiences, they become involved. But being involved is much different than being engaged. To engage youth implies action—a take-youth-seriously stance that is crucial to quality programming.

Engaging young people in this type of process helps teach leadership skills and encourages youth to become more invested in the program. It is not a secret that young people want to be listened to and valued for who they are, to give back to their communities, to be supported when they make mistakes, and recognized when they succeed. They want to be challenged.

“An organization with young people at the forefront is more likely to be appealing to other young people.”<sup>4</sup>

### YOUTH PARTICIPATION THROUGH THE SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS

- o Host a community meeting to explain why it is important to get young people’s input in the self-assessment process.
- o Administer a mini-survey to ask young people how they would like to contribute.
- o Conduct youth focus groups or individual interviews. Make sure to ask plenty of open-ended questions about the program that will encourage youth to elaborate.
- o Have a written reflection as an opening activity to accommodate young people who do not feel comfortable sharing out loud.

## Authentic Youth Involvement

Karen Pittman, Executive Director of Forum for Youth Investment, describes a paradigm shift taking place in youth work that moves us from “youth participation for youth development to youth and adult partnerships for community change.” Thinking of youth development work in this way can help organizations shift beyond being a “service provider” to being a partner.

## Staff

Having positive relationships among staff members is essential for having a productive self-assessment, but it takes a lot of work. What will help?

- o Staff should have the chance to practice what they learn about quality.
- o Staff should be able to voice their opinions without consequence.
- o Staff should have opportunities to implement ideas that come out of the self-assessment process.
- o Everyone should understand how his or her work supports the organization's mission.
- o Staff should feel comfortable holding their colleagues (including supervisors!) accountable for following through on action steps.

### STAFF PARTICIPATION THROUGH THE SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS

- o Staff should be able to suggest how they would like to contribute to the process. For example, they may wish to facilitate focus groups with young people or manage outreach efforts to parents.
- o A description of how the self-assessment will be conducted and a schedule of meetings should be distributed. By doing so, surprises are minimized and everyone can prepare for the self-assessment.
- o Program successes should be celebrated. By doing so, staff will be more excited about the process.

## Families

Strong partnerships with families are fostered and sustained through positive interactions with program staff. Engaging families as true partners in a self-assessment isn't a one-time shot; rather, it happens over time. Meaningful connections with families occur when the following characteristics are embedded into your organization on a regular basis:

- o A focus on building positive relationships
- o Collaboration as an attitude, not an activity
- o Opportunities for creating a common vision for youth learning and development
- o Shared information and resources
- o Meaningful and cooperative roles

### FAMILY PARTICIPATION THROUGH THE SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS

- o Reach out to families in multiple ways to ensure input from those who are able to visit the program site as well as those who can not.
- o Administer surveys with questions that focus on specific elements of program quality. This will clarify the process and the intended outcomes.
- o When working with families that are not native English speakers, keep in mind that the QSA Tool is available in several languages at [www.nysan.org](http://www.nysan.org). If you develop additional surveys, make them available in several languages or have a staff person translate the questions.
- o To gauge how welcoming the environment is for families, conduct a walk through assessment of your program with them. Parents can be partnered with a staff person who is able to answer questions. Don't forget to bring the group back to share their findings and brainstorm possible areas of improvement.

## Thinking about WHEN

There is no perfect time to conduct a self-assessment. You may choose to introduce the self-assessment process prior to program start-up in order to strengthen relationships and begin building consensus around vision and program goals. However, engaging in the self-assessment process in the middle of the year can be useful because it provides a means for stepping back and identifying what's working and what may need to change. You may also do a self-assessment at the end of the year as a way of identifying areas of expansion or improvement for the following year. Or, you may choose to conduct a self-assessment at all of these times.

The self-assessment process can be conducted in one day or over the course of a whole year. You can focus on one element a month throughout the program year, or choose specific elements to focus on with particular groups of stakeholders. Regardless of when it is done, the timing needs to compliment what is happening at your site.

Now that you know more about self-assessment and the QSA Tool, you are ready to get started! The next section, Taking a Closer Look, offers more information about each of the ten essential elements of an effective afterschool program, as described in the QSA Tool, in order to help you better understand how to make an accurate assessment of your program's quality.



### BEFORE MOVING ON TO THE QSA TOOL, BE SURE YOU'VE:

1. Read this introduction.
2. Identified who will lead and facilitate the process and when it will start.
3. Communicated about the self-assessment process with your program's stakeholders.

# TAKING A CLOSER LOOK

This section offers helpful strategies for using the QSA Tool. The strategies are designed to help you make observations, reflect on strengths and areas in need of improvement, and brainstorm solutions. Examples are provided from a variety of programs so you can get a better idea of what quality looks like. The tips, strategies, activities, and examples are presented in five ways:

Remember that your program may not fit these descriptions perfectly, but these examples should provide you with an idea of what a program is like at each level.



## ZOOMING IN

This section equips you to make clear distinctions when using the performance scale by providing practical examples of what a program might look like at each of the performance levels. The highlighted quality indicator has been identified by practitioners as particularly challenging, and therefore has been expanded upon in this section.



## TAKING ACTION

A solid improvement plan guides your practice as you move toward creating change. In these sections you will find practical examples for improving in areas where the program scored below satisfactory.



## TIPS FOR SUCCESS

These tips will help you engage in reflective dialogue around the indicators and identify improvement strategies that lead to exceeding standards.



## TRY THIS!

These are additional ideas and activities to help you enhance and strengthen program quality.



## SPOTLIGHT

In the spotlights you will find case vignettes that illustrate promising practices from organizations that have successfully utilized the self-assessment process for program planning and improvement.





## ZOOMING IN! QUALITY INDICATOR # 10

Has a culture that allows participants to take initiative explore their interests.

### Performance Level 1

Program supplies and materials are limited. Youth are not given choices; rather, they are assigned to activities and tasks. The arrangement of the physical space does not allow for positive interactions among participants, successful implementation of activities, or exploration of personal interests.

### Performance Level 2

Supplies and materials are available for some activities, but they are often kept in a locked closet. Young people are seldom asked for their opinions and ideas for enhancing activities. When suggestions are made, they are often not implemented. Although staff understand the importance of providing young people choices, they are not consistent in doing so.

### Performance Level 3

Supplies and materials are always accessible and kept at a central location. Young people are encouraged to provide feedback. Staff provide opportunities for youth choice by administering monthly surveys on program options. The physical space is intentionally selected to complement activities.

### Performance Level 4

Supplies and materials are consistently stocked, accessible, and visible to all participants. All the staff provide multiple opportunities for youth choice in their groups. The physical and social space is organized to allow positive peer interaction, facilitate rich discussions, and promote collaboration on projects. Space is often used as a model for other program providers to learn from.



## TIPS FOR SUCCESS

As you reflect on your program's environment and climate, keep in mind that the physical, emotional, and social space should always support positive youth development and encourage positive interactions among peers and adults. Here are a few tips to help you create a youth-centered space:

- o Establish specific ways to welcome young people into the program, e.g., orientation, buddy system, welcome committee, etc.
- o Involve young people in creating community agreements.
- o Make the space youth-friendly. Display work in the classrooms and community spaces, display magazines and books of interest, play music, or decorate with comfortable and colorful furniture.
- o Give young people a voice and opportunities for healthy self-expression through hands-on activities, such as poetry, drama, dance, rap groups, sports, etc.



## TAKING ACTION

**RIGHT NOW: ADDRESSED WITHIN THE FIRST 30-60 DAYS OF ASSESSMENT.** Staff work in partnership with young people to establish community agreements. Program supplies and materials are ordered. Broken or damaged equipment is replaced.

**THIS YEAR: ADDRESSED BY THE END OF THE PROGRAM YEAR.** During meetings, staff discuss how program activities offer youth opportunities to take initiative and explore their interests. In addition, staff deliver mini-lessons as a way of sharing promising practices with others; feedback on these is encouraged. Supplies are ordered for each activity and are stored in a central location. Staff work with youth to re-organize program space.

**NEXT YEAR: ADDRESSED AT THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW PROGRAM YEAR.** Staff meet at the beginning of the year to plan activities and reflect on their program's environment. They identify opportunities for young people to be engaged as leaders and create intentional venues for youth to share feedback. Young people are recruited to create a youth council. A staff member is assigned to work with the youth council to conduct program observations and lead activities at the site (see Try This!). Staff take inventory of program supplies and place orders on a quarterly basis. Youth are acknowledged for their leadership and ongoing contributions to the program.



## TRY THIS

### Youth as Resources

Prepare the young people to walk through the program space and give their feedback about everything from the way staff greet youth to the art on the walls. You might want to create a checklist of questions to help guide their observations and document their feedback.

### Mapping Project

1. **Ask the group to draw a map of the program** (artistic talent not required) and then color the spaces where they feel most comfortable.
2. **Use the maps as a jumping-off point for discussion** about what makes a space comfortable and welcoming.
3. **Use the information gathered to create comment cards** so that other young people and adults can give feedback about the spaces.
4. **Bring your group together after the walk-through** to share observations and brainstorm solutions for areas of improvement. Discuss what action the group may need to take to change the environment.



## More on Administration and Organization

A quality program has a clear mission statement and set of goals. It has well-defined policies and procedures, which are documented in a handbook. The organization complies with mandates from government agencies and funders. Records are well-maintained and all required licenses are up-to-date.



### ZOOMING IN! QUALITY INDICATOR #8

Has well-defined methods of communication with program stakeholders.

#### Performance Level 1

Staff members work independently of community organizations, schools, and other stakeholders that are not part of the program. Meetings with stakeholders happen on an ad hoc basis or when there is a crisis.

#### Performance Level 2

The site director initiates regular meetings with a few local principals and leaders of organizations based on his/her personal contacts. Dates and space for collaborative program activities are targeted but not finalized. There are no formal methods of documentation and there is no regular contact with other stakeholders.

#### Performance Level 3

The site director has regularly scheduled meetings with local principals and with other community leaders. The site director and other stakeholders have meeting times scheduled for planning and sharing information. As a result, collaboration begins to happen on youth recruitment and funding initiatives. School records are made available to the program and program attendance is shared with schools. Discussions are held among the partners to illustrate youth progress and success, and to identify remaining gaps in services for youth in the program.

#### Performance Level 4

The site director meets frequently with local school administrators and community leaders to reflect on program accomplishments and future directions. There are shared goals and expectations, and youth are encouraged to enroll in the program by schools and other stakeholders. The site director is actively involved in school leadership teams. The program regularly receives student records from schools and provides program information to schools. If the program wishes to access school buildings or other neighborhood facilities, there is a system for confirming dates and times in advance. Discussions are held among the partners to illustrate youth progress and success, and to identify and fill remaining gaps in services for all youth in the community.



## TAKING ACTION

**RIGHT NOW: ADDRESSED WITHIN THE FIRST 30-60 DAYS OF ASSESSMENT.** Program leadership distributes a staff manual and reviews policies and procedures to ensure the safety and well-being of all young people and staff. A meeting is set with principals in local schools to discuss and create a written memo regarding the afterschool services to be provided, resources to be shared, and a clarification of roles and expectations.

**THIS YEAR: ADDRESSED BY THE END OF THE PROGRAM YEAR.** Staff are trained on all reporting and documentation procedures. Program leadership works with school administrators on how to best share student information. They also begin meeting quarterly with principals to share successes and identify programs and projects for possible collaboration.

**NEXT YEAR: ADDRESSED AT THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW PROGRAM YEAR.** Program leadership begins planning in June for the following academic year. A strategic planning session is held for partnering schools and afterschool staff to discuss new systems for information-sharing. The staff manual is updated as necessary. Licenses that are expired are renewed.



## TRY THIS!

Try to implement these best practices in record-keeping at your site:

- o Be concise. Notes on program participants should include only relevant information in appropriate detail, e.g., only provide information that is directly relevant to the delivery of services for intended youth outcomes.
- o Be accurate. Besides providing accurate information, direct quotes should be recorded whenever possible. As the information may be shared with other agencies, the records must be legible and free from jargon (meaningless words).
- o Be up-to-date. Progress notes, crisis interventions, or incident reports should be written as soon as possible after an event has happened to prevent loss of information due to time lapse.
- o Be meaningful. Notes should distinguish clearly between facts, observations, hard data, and opinions.
- o Be internally consistent. Notes should be structured according to a pre-set format, and acronyms used should be meaningful to all within the organization.<sup>5</sup>



## TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Here are a few tips for ensuring a solid organizational structure at your site, especially when time is limited:

- o Set up a schedule that identifies deadlines for completing all necessary program reports and documentation of procedures; this can save a lot of time in the long run.
- o Get to know your community and potential partners such as schools, businesses, and faith-based organizations. Be aware of barriers for establishing collaborative relationships with potential partners.
- o Create, distribute, and review an employee handbook that outlines policies and procedures.
- o Make sure that staff, parents, schools, and other stakeholders are aware of your mission and program goals. Find a central location at your site such as a bulletin board to display your mission and program goals.





## ZOOMING IN QUALITY INDICATOR #3

Treats participants with respect and listens to what they say.

### Performance Level 1

Staff use yelling as a method of getting the attention of the group. Young people are interrupted when speaking. Staff belittle young people and use negative language. Young people's ideas are not taken seriously or are dismissed. The program culture and activities are adult-centered.

### Performance Level 2

Staff multi-task while working with youth and therefore do not make eye contact or individual connections with young people. Staff members are distant to youth and rarely call them by their names. There are few opportunities for young people to check in with staff and peers about daily experiences and issues of concern.

### Performance Level 3

A daily "check-in" or circle time is incorporated into the program routine as a tool to connect with the needs and concerns of individual youth. Young people contribute to codes of conduct. A majority of staff practice a variety of positive discipline techniques and community building strategies. Staff are starting to make time to connect with youth on an individual basis.

### Performance Level 4

Staff are aware of the needs of individual youth. All activities allow for individual feedback and contributions to the group experience. The program culture is safe and confidential; it encourages young people to speak freely. Feedback and criticism are addressed. The language and behavior of staff show sensitivity to race, ethnicity, gender, and the physical ability of all young people. Staff model cooperation and respect toward each other and youth. Positive discipline strategies are used throughout the program.



## TAKING ACTION

**RIGHT NOW: ADDRESSED WITHIN THE FIRST 30-60 DAYS OF ASSESSMENT.** Leadership holds staff training on building positive relationships with youth. Director follows-up with staff to discuss lessons from the training and share additional resources.

**THIS YEAR: ADDRESSED BY THE END OF THE PROGRAM YEAR.** Staff meetings deliberately include discussions about mutual respect and positive communication. Staff implement a daily "check-in" as a way of connecting with young people. Large groups are broken into smaller groups to allow youth to receive more individual attention.

**NEXT YEAR: ADDRESSED AT THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW PROGRAM YEAR.** Program activities are designed to provide multiple opportunities for building positive relationships. Staff are asked to take initiative and create opportunities for one-on-one dialogue with young people. Staff are formally acknowledged for maintaining respectful relationships with youth.



## TRY THIS

### Make a Personal Connection

Reflect on your interactions with the young people you work with. Is there a young person that you are having a difficult time connecting with? Challenge yourself to make a personal connection by creating a plan to develop your relationship. Questions to consider:

- o What actions can I begin to take?
- o What actions can I try to stop?
- o What is already working that I want to keep?
- o What will be a sign that demonstrates this relationship is developing?



## More on Staffing and Professional Development

A quality program employs staff who are properly equipped with the academic and experiential knowledge needed to fulfill their job requirements. Program leaders have ongoing staff recruitment and development plans to attract and retain high-quality staff. Staff should always have required credentials and licenses and meet mandatory staff-to-youth ratios. Quality programs reach beyond mandatory training requirements to provide staff with additional tools and knowledge. Professional development opportunities are frequent and offer a variety of ways for practitioners to bolster their skills, and ultimately, lead to improved program performance.



### ZOOMING IN QUALITY INDICATOR #7

**Provides positive working conditions for staff and appropriate supervision, support, and feedback.**

#### Performance Level 1

Program staff members do not participate in staff meetings or trainings. The organization does not have clear expectations for staff performance. Staff members are often reprimanded and are not acknowledged for accomplishments and contributions. An employee handbook and job descriptions are unavailable.

#### Performance Level 2

Staff meetings happen on an ad hoc basis. There is little awareness of expectations. Issues of concern are discussed, but there is no follow through or planned solutions. Written job descriptions exist but are not shared with staff members.

#### Performance Level 3

Staff meetings occur regularly. Staff members are engaged when discussing issues and brainstorming solutions about the program. Trainings on basic requirements and youth-related topics are offered. Staff members are familiar with the standards that supervisors hold them to. Program leadership is accessible and follow-up happens often.

#### Performance Level 4

Staff meetings are scheduled in advance and happen on a regular basis. The site director coaches staff members regularly; he/she meets with each staff member to discuss performance and to set individual professional development goals. There is a clear professional development plan; staff members attend trainings regularly and have opportunities to share strategies learned. Staff members seek out trainings that build skills beyond regulatory requirements and basic topics. Supervisory staff members, including the site director, participate in management training to develop skills to support other staff members' work.



## TAKING ACTION

**RIGHT NOW: ADDRESSED WITHIN THE FIRST 30-60 DAYS OF ASSESSMENT.** Meetings are scheduled with individual staff members and the site director makes program observations to identify needs, gaps, and common themes. As a follow-up, the site director meets with the staff as a team to share findings and to schedule the first group training, which is designed to build skills and establish a common vision and sense of community.

**THIS YEAR: ADDRESSED BY THE END OF THE PROGRAM YEAR.** Staff and the director work closely to develop a clear staff development plan. In-house and external training resources are identified to support the plan. Trainings are attended by staff throughout the program year. The site director meets with each staff member every three months to check in on what is working and what needs to be in place to support their professional development. Job descriptions are made available and are always accessible.

**NEXT YEAR: ADDRESSED AT THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW PROGRAM YEAR.** Program year kicks off with a staff retreat to revisit goals and to identify areas of priority for the current program year. New and returning staff attend an orientation with the goals of building community, sharing expectations, agreeing on a training plan and quality standards, and establishing a shared vision. The director creates opportunities for staff members to showcase their work. Frequent observations are performed. Accomplishments are acknowledged with announcements and awards.



## TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Here are some strategies for maximizing staff professional development opportunities:

- o For trainings that are required by regulation or by program leadership, ensure staff are informed of the purpose and content of the training prior to it happening and how it links to program improvement goals.
- o Have at least two staff members participate in most professional development opportunities, including supervisors when possible. This increases institutional knowledge and ability to share learnings with others in the program.
- o Create a system to track the time and content of staff members' professional development.
- o Create an annual professional development plan for each staff member and ensure resources for professional development are set aside in the program budget.



## TRY THIS

### “Each One, Teach One”

To maximize investment in staff participation at professional conferences, workshops, networking events, and other forums that highlight best practice in the field, ask staff to bring back information and resources gathered at these events. Give them time to share what they have learned with their colleagues one-on-one and during regular staff meetings. This will save both time and money, and everyone will benefit from events attended by any staff member.



## SPOTLIGHT

### Building Capacity through Professional Development from Loretta McCormick, Program Manager, Creating Rural Opportunities Partnership Program

*Our 21st Century Community Learning Center program, Creating Rural Opportunities Partnership Program (CROP), serves 16 school districts in three counties in rural upstate New York. Geographically it is difficult, if not impossible, to have afterschool staff, school staff, community members and parents from each of the sites attend one or several sessions to complete the NYSAN QSA Tool; therefore, we assign one element from the QSA Tool to be completed each month at the different sites. In addition, each site holds its own quarterly site management meeting inviting any and all key players to participate, including the school superintendent, principal, other school personnel, parents, community members and all afterschool program staff as well as our high school Peer Tutors.*

*Completing the QSA Tool in this manner allows each individual site to highlight its strengths and to identify areas that need to be strengthened. Once each site completes the assigned element, the results from all sites are compiled by our program manager and director. The three major areas identified as needing to be strengthened across all sites are then addressed at our biannual, all-staff development trainings that focus on concrete activities/ideas to address and strengthen specific program areas.*





## ZOOMING IN QUALITY INDICATOR #10

Integrates opportunities for the development of personal responsibility, self-direction, and leadership throughout the program.

### Performance Level 1

Young people need daily reminders of program routines. Opportunities to reflect on personal attributes, set goals, and take on formal and informal leadership roles are not part of program activities. Young people are not verbally recognized for their efforts and accomplishments. Youth are not encouraged to work with their peers to ask questions and resolve dilemmas. If youth struggle with a task, adults are quick to take over.

### Performance Level 2

Although some staff have made an effort to establish routines, most of the participants continue to need daily reminders. Some verbal recognition is provided for young people's efforts and accomplishments. Young people are continuously told how to resolve dilemmas and a process for working together with peers around solutions is not facilitated.

### Performance Level 3

Most of the program participants are able to follow daily routines without reminders. Staff are beginning to create leadership roles for youth. A majority of the staff are able to support youth as they complete a task on their own. Constructive feedback is provided to challenge youth to move beyond their current level of competency.

### Performance Level 4

Daily routines are reinforced throughout all program activities. Writing exercises and small group discussions are used as vehicles to encourage youth to discover their strengths and set personal goals. Staff refrain from taking over challenging tasks. Verbal and public recognitions are provided to encourage self-direction and success.



## TRY THIS!

### Through the Years

It is essential that staff have a basic understanding of youth developmental stages as they design and implement program activities. Consider using a staff meeting to facilitate a mini-workshop that introduces staff to the stages of development.

Divide meeting participants into small groups. The facilitator assigns each group a specific age range and asks them to brainstorm a list of developmentally appropriate program environments and activities, keeping in mind emotional, cognitive, social, and physical needs. Participants are then asked to share a few examples.

As a large group, brainstorm the activities currently offered through your program and identify how they support youth development. What core academic skills are being strengthened and developed through these activities? In what ways do these activities support emotional learning and self-expression? How do these activities promote health and physical well-being?





## TAKING ACTION

**RIGHT NOW: ADDRESSED WITHIN THE FIRST 30-60 DAYS OF ASSESSMENT.** Staff are trained on strategies and activities that promote youth leadership. A staff meeting is set up to discuss and identify leadership roles for youth in the program. A plan is developed for how these roles will be encouraged and supported.

**THIS YEAR: ADDRESSED BY THE END OF THE PROGRAM YEAR.** Staff participate in ongoing training to provide the tools and skills needed to empower young people to creatively resolve conflicts and develop activities that intentionally develop youth leadership. Staff meet on a quarterly basis to share promising practices and determine new strategies for creating opportunities for young people to take personal responsibility, become self-directed, and natural leaders.

**NEXT YEAR: ADDRESSED AT THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW PROGRAM YEAR.** Staff and young people meet to build on what has worked from the prior year. A youth council is created to institutionalize youth leadership positions across the agency. Community meetings and annual events are scheduled to be led by youth and used as a tool to build community.



## TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Afterschool programs are positioned to provide young people with a myriad of rich activities and experiences that support their overall well-being and health. Below are some basic principles that can be incorporated into all activities regardless of content.

Afterschool professionals should:

- o Provide a clear overview, learning objectives, and rationale for activities.
- o Engage young people in hands-on activities and discussion.

- o Allow young people to tap into their individual strengths and talents.
- o Provide young people with multiple opportunities to reflect upon what they have experienced.
- o Provide young people with positive reinforcement.
- o Be able to adapt to different learning styles.
- o Employ strategies that engage young people who may be resistant to participating.<sup>6</sup>





## ZOOMING IN QUALITY INDICATOR #3

Establishes strong links to the school day.

### Performance Level 1

Formal conversations and planning between school and afterschool staff are not happening. The program works independently of the school day. Staff are not aware of the academic performance standards and how program activities can be used as a vehicle to support academic growth. Program staff and teachers are not required to share lesson plans with each other.

### Performance Level 2

A few of the staff have taken it upon themselves to meet with school personnel to discuss how they can support each other. The majority of staff do not have a clear understanding of how to support academic achievement and which academic goals young people should be reaching. Staff help young people with homework ad hoc during snack time or other breaks in the program schedule.

### Performance Level 3

Meetings between school and afterschool staff happen frequently to discuss how learning can be supported through afterschool activities and experiences. Mutual sharing occurs and both school and afterschool staff contribute to the conversation. The afterschool program has a system for referring youth and families to tutorial services and other academic enrichment opportunities.

### Performance Level 4

Key school personnel and afterschool staff participate in joint professional development and planning sessions. Staff are able to incorporate varied teaching methodologies, such as coaching, direct instruction, modeling, and group work, to foster a rich learning environment. A myriad of activities such as arts, recreation, community service, peer tutoring, and games are used as tools to strengthen and extend learning.



## TAKING ACTION

**RIGHT NOW: ADDRESSED WITHIN THE FIRST 30-60 DAYS OF ASSESSMENT.** The afterschool director meets with local principals to discuss school learning goals and opportunities for collaborations. A follow-up meeting with staff is set up to discuss how the program currently supports learning. An action plan is created to strengthen those efforts and explore new ways of creating continuity between the school day and afterschool. A system of communication is established with the school administration and the afterschool program staff.

**THIS YEAR: ADDRESSED BY THE END OF THE PROGRAM YEAR.** Staff attend trainings on teaching strategies used by educators in their school district. Afterschool staff meet as a team on a quarterly basis to share enrichment curriculum that can be used in the program. The director and local principals meet on a regular basis. Program staff routinely check-in with youth about what they are learning and which topics they would like additional assistance with.

**NEXT YEAR: ADDRESSED AT THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW PROGRAM YEAR.** A joint staff retreat is planned to identify learning goals, outline program curriculum, and identify shared resources and professional development opportunities. The afterschool program director is invited to join the leadership team at local schools. The afterschool program goals are outlined in schools' comprehensive educational plans. Program staff maintain open lines of communication with teachers to discuss young people's progress, share successes, and review remaining academic needs.



## TIPS FOR SUCCESS

*“Our goal this year has been to be more intentional about learning in all of our afterschool programs. We are seeing a better product because the planning is better.”*

— Kenyatta Funderburk, Director of Afterschool Programs, Inwood House

As part of efforts to link their afterschool program with the school day, the staff at Inwood House, a community-based organization, has started utilizing the New York City Department of Education’s student pacing calendar as a tool for program planning. The pacing calendar outlines topics and skills to be developed per grade. For example, if the content topic is pollution, the afterschool program might have youth develop a talk show, skit, or cartoon to address and explore the issue of pollution in their communities. The tips below are based on the lessons learned by Inwood House as they used the pacing calendar:

- o Have the program leadership meet with the principal or assistant principal to coordinate logistics.
- o Provide training for staff on academic learning standards and goals, including the pacing calendar.
- o If possible, compensate staff for planning time.
- o Share your program plans with school staff.
- o Meet with staff periodically to capture what is working and what needs improvement.

For Inwood House, using the pacing calendar has resulted in stronger communication with schools and increased connections to the school day.



## TRY THIS! Create a Homework Resource Center

As an afterschool program, you may have the task of helping young people complete their homework. You can do more than simply help them complete assignments by presenting school material in new and different ways. Through individualized tutoring or recreational, arts, or community service projects, you can change their attitudes about learning. There are many innovative ways to integrate literacy and other academic skill development into afterschool projects and activities.

The following provides ideas and tips to help you successfully integrate homework help into your program and get kids excited about learning:

- o **Try to create a designated space for homework and tutoring.** The space should be comfortable and well lit.
- o **Set up peer tutoring pairs.**
- o **Make allowances for different learning styles.** Some learners might need a space that is completely quiet to complete their homework; others may prefer to work in small groups.
- o **Provide materials and supplies needed to successfully complete homework** such as paper, pencils, dictionaries, erasers, etc.
- o **Prepare engaging learning games** for young people who complete their homework early or do not have any assignments.
- o **Create a homework sign-off log** to let staff and parents know when a young person’s homework has been reviewed.<sup>8</sup>



## SPOTLIGHT

### Strengthening School Communications and Collaborations

Doreen Teh, Site Director of PS24 Beacon Program, Child Center of New York

As a site director of a school-based afterschool program in Queens, New York, my role is to foster and nurture collaborative relationships with school staff and oversee the daily operations of the program.

Incorporating the QSA Tool into the culture of our program has allowed me to develop strong partnerships with key stakeholders, get buy-in, and create a self-sustaining program structure. It has strengthened the communication between the afterschool program and the school: all staff have a clear understanding of the program goals and can identify real opportunities for working together. We are speaking the same language and are more focused and intentional in our practice. It has created a common framework to guide our work.

It wasn't always a smooth process. In the beginning, I just gave the entire QSA Tool to a few key staff and expected them to fill it out. I quickly realized that they were overwhelmed and resistant to the process. Now, I work with a few key staff and am able to pull out the elements of interest and relevance to the different stakeholders. For example, with the principal, I only focus on the environment/climate, relationships, programming/activities, staffing/professional development, and linkages between daytime school and afterschool. With the parent coordinator, I focus on the environment/climate, relationships, programming/activities, and parent/family/community partnerships.

At the end of year, I meet with the different stakeholders and use the QSA Tool to guide the conversations around where we are, what's working, what needs

improvement, and how we move forward. Once I have met with all the stakeholders, I meet with the principal to share our accomplishments, improvements, and vision for the upcoming program year. This process has created a cohesive team, empowered staff who now take ownership of the program, engaged staff and others in meaningful discussions around visioning and goal-setting, enhanced the partnership with the school, and allowed for the sharing of resources. Last year, we partnered with the school staff developer to offer afterschool staff training on math teaching methodologies to improve our homework-help component, offered a parent workshop through the PTA on asset-building strategies, and restructured our dismissal procedure to minimize chaos and ensure the safety of all participants. This year, I can honestly say that I have very few staffing issues as a result of this process. Staff are encouraged and supported to take on leadership roles within the program; they are publicly recognized for their commitment and hard work; and they are confident in running the program in my absence. There is a shared sense of accountability.

My advice to agencies embracing this self-assessment process: What are the top three areas that need to be improved? Once you have prioritized and have a sense of what areas you want to impact, think about whom you will need in this process. What would be the best way to get their feedback? Keep in mind that how you incorporate this process is not written in stone. Always revisit the process and ask your team for suggestions on how to make it better.





## ZOOMING IN QUALITY INDICATOR#1

Engages participants with a variety of strategies.

### Performance Level 1

Young people are not actively participating in program activities; they are often working independently, distracting the group, or not present. Young people do not practice decision-making skills. Conversations and activities are driven by adults. Program activities and experiences are limited; young people do not make meaningful choices, do not listen to staff and peers, and opportunities to build positive relationships with adults do not exist.

### Performance Level 2

Staff continue to believe that young people are not responsible or interested in connecting with adults. The majority of young people are not encouraged to share ideas or concerns about activity content. Some staff are beginning to discuss how to engage all young people through hands-on and diverse learning experiences. Some attempts are made to incorporate youth voice into planning, program design, and recruitment. There is no evidence of young people actively listening to their peers and program staff.

### Performance Level 3

Adults and youth are working together to plan and organize events. In the majority of activities, young people respond to questions, contribute opinions and ideas, and work in small groups with peers. Staff have administered youth surveys or conducted youth focus groups to capture youth experiences, feedback, and ideas for program improvement. There is evidence that staff are actively eliciting young people's opinions, ideas, and concerns for discussions.

### Performance Level 4

Young people are trained as facilitators and co-lead activities with staff. Community meetings or check-ins are used to publicly acknowledge youth for their contributions and accomplishments. All young people are practicing leadership skills. All young people actively listen to their peers and staff, have a variety of meaningful choices and are contributing opinions, ideas, and concerns to discussions. Young people are involved in recruitment and make presentations in neighborhood schools or organizations.



## TAKING ACTION

**RIGHT NOW: ADDRESSED WITHIN THE FIRST 30-60 DAYS OF ASSESSMENT.** Program staff meet to highlight existing adult-youth partnerships, identify potential barriers, and discuss how they would like to see these relationships grow or change. Young people are also engaged in similar conversations. A committee involving youth and adults is created to begin developing a plan for how to engage young people in meaningful and authentic opportunities to contribute.

**THIS YEAR: ADDRESSED BY THE END OF THE PROGRAM YEAR.** The committee enhances youth recruitment strategies. Member roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. Informal events are organized to allow for adults and youth to develop positive relationships. Adults and youth attend ongoing trainings on facilitation strategies, communication skills, and team building. Trainings offered increase staff’s capacity to engage youth in leadership experiences. Staff and young people meet quarterly to assess adult-youth partnerships.

**NEXT YEAR: ADDRESSED AT THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW PROGRAM YEAR.** Adults and youth come together at a retreat to reflect on the program. In collaboration with staff, young people facilitate working sessions at the retreat. The committee establishes a protocol for youth to voice concerns and frustrations and share their experiences with other youth. Young people are trained to be active participants in the process of hiring and evaluating staff. Youth and adults are working together to develop meeting agendas.



## TIPS FOR SUCCESS

As a youth practitioner, you are aware of the benefits of engaging youth in meaningful experiences that build a sense of connection to their community, encourage civic awareness, and create opportunities to build self-esteem. Here are some strategies for engaging young people in staff’s program planning and organizational development:

- o Be clear as to why young people are being asked to join the team. Create a purpose statement.
- o Acknowledge young people as full members of the team. Be clear about their roles.
- o Establish at least two youth positions. Young people feel more comfortable when they have a peer present.
- o Choose a convenient meeting time and place for young people.
- o Host an orientation for youth members. Review the organization’s mission, history, structure, and the responsibilities of the team members.
- o Make meetings interactive through icebreakers, small group discussions, partner chats, team-building activities, and large group share-outs.
- o Encourage young leaders to recommend other youth when their term or involvement is ending. <sup>9</sup>



## TRY THIS!

### The Power of Youth Voice!

A teen summit can be an empowering experience for young people as they exchange ideas, explore unfamiliar issues, and identify opportunities to contribute back to their communities. Young people can be engaged in planning the agenda, assigning tasks, facilitating workshops, and reflecting on their accomplishments and challenges. Having a teen summit sends a clear message: young people are resources and agents of change. The following tips are based on the lessons learned by the staff at Henry Street Settlement's Boys and Girls Republic, and can help to ensure successful and empowering experiences for youth:

- o Seek out youth-led conferences, events, and trainings, and bring youth from your program to participate.
- o Meet with other youth agencies that have coordinated youth-led activities to get ideas and share lessons learned.
- o Clarify roles and deliverables for all youth involved. Remember that process is just as important as the event.
- o Create a planning committee that consists of adults and youth; support and train young people to lead the planning process.
- o Train youth on the basics of workshop facilitation; if possible, provide advanced training.
- o On the day of the event, make sure there are opportunities for movement throughout the day.
- o If appropriate, include live performances.
- o Make sure that healthy food is provided and the menu appeals to the youth.
- o Acknowledge the contributions and accomplishments of all youth and adults involved in planning and organizing the event.





## ZOOMING IN QUALITY INDICATOR #4

Provides opportunities for literacy and related educational experiences for the families of the participants in the program.

### Performance Level 1

Parents and staff have not been formally introduced. Families are not perceived as assets and resources to the program. Families are not engaged as learning partners and are not encouraged to get involved. Educational workshops are not offered to support the needs and interest of families. Families are only called in a crisis situation.

### Performance Level 2

Some families are viewed as assets and encouraged to participate in trips and program activities, yet others feel they are only engaged during times of crisis. One type of workshop is offered during the course of the program year. The need for additional adult education is recognized. A family bulletin is created to keep families informed of program events and schedules.

### Performance Level 3

More families are contributing their expertise to the program and to other families. An adult education series of workshops is launched. Families receive strategies and resources for creating a rich learning environment at home. A peer network and book-lending library are established as a result of the interactions in the family space. More families are inquiring about how to navigate the school system, advocate for their child, and support program goals.

### Performance Level 4

The environment is welcoming; families are seen as assets and learning partners. An adult education series of workshops is developed from family input and a community needs assessment. A peer network and book-lending library are established and families are

consistently reminded to utilize the program's resources. The program partners with a local community college to increase families' access to course information. A family newsletter is created and distributed on a monthly basis. All publications are provided in English and other languages commonly spoken in the community.



## TAKING ACTION

**RIGHT NOW: ADDRESSED WITHIN THE FIRST 30-60 DAYS OF ASSESSMENT.** Hold a meeting to take an inventory of program offerings, share promising practices, and identify successful events that can be replicated. Bring families together to share their interest and availability to attend future workshops. Create a monthly calendar of literacy-based, educational workshops for families.

**THIS YEAR: ADDRESSED BY THE END OF THE PROGRAM YEAR.** Provide ongoing staff trainings on family engagement strategies. Develop a year-long calendar of workshops and educational activities for families. Invite guest speakers to present on different topics of interest to families. Create a plan for how to provide meaningful leadership opportunities for families, which can include coordinating peer education events, co-leading workshops, or managing the lending library. Develop formal systems of evaluation that capture family input and feedback.

**NEXT YEAR: ADDRESSED AT THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW PROGRAM YEAR.** Train a core group of parents as peer educators and provide opportunities for them to practice facilitating workshops and activities for families. Create a family council to assist with outreach, recruitment, and program planning. Establish protocols for communication so that families are able to discuss concerns and progress regarding their child's learning. Allocate resources to provide a web of support for families to foster learning.



## TIPS FOR SUCCESS

We know that when families have a role in shaping program activities and goals, they are invested and committed to the success of the program. Consider these suggestions for fostering and developing partnerships with families:

- o Have a family suggestion box.
- o Invite all families to be a part of a family advisory committee.
- o Provide meals and child care at meetings to decrease barriers for families to participate.
- o Create a family liaison position as part of your staffing structure.
- o Engage families in your fundraising efforts.
- o Host family forums or discussion groups that allow parents/caregivers to meet one another. Discuss their concerns about child rearing and other family matters, and share their ideas of how the program can support them.
- o Work with young people to plan and host a family appreciation event at your site.<sup>10</sup>



## TRY THIS!

### The Human Barometer

Examining attitudes regarding family partnerships can be a first step toward strengthening relationships and communication between program staff and families. Below is an idea for starting this dialogue:

This activity is commonly referred to as the Human Barometer. Identify a facilitator who can create a relaxed space for staff to be comfortable with sharing their feelings, as they will be asked to respond to a number of statements about family partnership. Before starting the activity, post signs around the room as follows: “agree” on the left of the room, “disagree” on the right, and “unsure” in the middle. Start the activity with participants standing in the middle of the room. As each statement is read, ask participants to move to the designated sections in the room that represent their responses to the statements.

Here are a few examples of statements that can be used to begin the dialogue. Feel free to tailor these statements to fit your community and to add others:

- 1 Parents/caregivers often don’t seem to care about their children’s developmental growth.
- 2 Parents/caregivers who do not participate in events are not actively involved in their children’s lives.
- 3 Parents/caregivers of teenagers have done their job and don’t need to be actively involved in program activities.

Take time to debrief to understand what is shaping staff attitudes and how they may be hindering or helping your work. As you begin to identify areas of improvement, consider how adjusting these beliefs will improve everyone’s relationships with families.<sup>11</sup>

# ELEMENT 9

## PROGRAM SUSTAINABILITY/GROWTH

A quality program has a coherent vision/mission and a plan for increasing capacity that supports continuing growth.

### A quality program:

1. \*Has a written statement of mission and goals.
2. \*Employs staff members who understand and embrace the program’s mission and goals.
3. **Involves participants, families, staff, and board members in long-term decision-making and planning efforts.**
4. Develops a long-term plan for sustaining the afterschool program.
5. Accesses resources within the community by seeking support from and building relationships with local businesses and institutions.
6. Forges relationships with advocates for program quality and availability, such as community leaders, businesses, and elected officials.
7. Has an effective marketing strategy that publicizes the program and its achievement within the school and broader community.

Performance Level				Plan To Improve		
1	2	3	4	Right Now	This Year	Next Year

### More on Program Sustainability and Growth

A quality program has a clear vision and goals, and makes time for long-term planning involving all major stakeholders. Sustainable programs use diverse strategies to support their work, including utilizing volunteers, partnerships and in-kind donations, as well as funding from public and private sources. Sustainable programs understand their current strengths, weaknesses, and growth potential, and are deeply engaged in their communities. Sustainable programs monitor changing trends in programming, funding, and other issues in the wider environment and tailor their development strategies accordingly.



## ZOOMING IN QUALITY INDICATOR #3

Involves participants, families, staff, and board members in long-term decision-making and planning efforts.

### Performance Level 1

The site director works in isolation and does not engage participants, families, staff, board members, and other stakeholders in planning and reflection. Program stakeholders are not aware of how the program is funded and that there are no plans in place to diversify funding sources. Staff do not know how their role supports program development and sustainability. The organization does not have a long-term plan.

### Performance Level 2

The site director has a sense of what the program goals should be and goals are determined each year. Program goals are not posted anywhere and are shared with staff, participants, and other stakeholders on an ad-hoc basis. The site director has started to involve a select group of stakeholders in informal conversations around program planning and decision-making.

### Performance Level 3

The site director is committed to working within a team approach. Staff are encouraged to work collaboratively to develop and strengthen programs. The program has clearly defined goals and objectives, which are included in program literature. Staff, families, and board members are viewed as resources and as instrumental to the growth and sustainability of the program. They are invited at different points to reflect, plan, and make decisions.

### Performance Level 4

The program goals and mission are collaboratively created, included in all program materials, reviewed during staff meetings and program orientation for families and youth, and are posted on a central bulletin board or location at the site. Staff can articulate how their activities support program goals and take initiative to identify areas of continuous improvement. Families are asked to participate in fundraisers. Staff are invited to provide feedback and ideas, and to participate in fundraising efforts.



## TAKING ACTION

**RIGHT NOW: ADDRESSED WITHIN THE FIRST 30-60 DAYS OF ASSESSMENT.** A planning committee made up of staff, participants, families, and board members is established. A point person is assigned to work closely with the facilitator to monitor progress and keep the committee on task. Program documents are revised to include program goals.

**THIS YEAR: ADDRESSED BY THE END OF THE PROGRAM YEAR.** An experienced facilitator is engaged to guide and coach the organization through a strategic planning session. The site director attends leadership trainings. Program goals are clearly defined, and efforts are taken to ensure stakeholders buy in to program goals. The committee identifies realistic benchmarks for achieving goals. Ongoing staff meetings are scheduled to share lessons learned and to revisit the plan.

**NEXT YEAR: ADDRESSED AT THE BEGINNING OF THE PROGRAM YEAR.** A formal orientation is held to revisit program plans and to accommodate the changing needs of participants, families, and the organization. Formal mechanisms are developed to encourage feedback from all stakeholders including staff. Designated check-in times are identified as vehicles to empower stakeholders and staff to inform the process, share concerns, and make revisions to the program plan as needed. There is a mutually supportive exchange of ideas and strategies for moving the program forward.





## TRY THIS!

A great program should not be a well kept secret. Use your successes as an opportunity to reach out to stakeholders, who include families, funders, community partners, local politicians and businesses, to tell them about your program. Use some of the time you invest in sustainability planning to develop an effective marketing strategy and revisit that strategy at least once each year. Consider using multiple mechanisms for getting the word out about the program, such as:

- o Develop a brochure that describes your program and its goals.
- o Translate the brochure into the languages spoken by your community.
- o Send out a press release when something exciting is happening at your site.
- o Create a newsletter and distribute it to all your stakeholders.
- o Create a website for your program and highlight upcoming events, awards, and news.



## TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Sustaining your program is not simply about generating new dollars. It requires taking several approaches to cultivating relationships, finding a niche, diversifying funding sources, and being adaptable to changing trends. Sustainability planning should be a team effort. It requires a constituency and a common vision and strategy. Here are some steps to help your program achieve long-term sustainability.

### Steps Towards Sustainability

- o Increase program visibility through unique marketing and outreach efforts in your community and with key stakeholders, such as school administrators, local elected officials, and other community leaders.
- o Build ongoing support among your constituents - don't wait to contact them only when you need them!
- o Diversify funding and in-kind support by having a large pool of donors and volunteers.
- o Be willing to invest in systematic changes, such as a new data management system or a strategic planning consultation.





## ZOOMING IN QUALITY INDICATOR #1

Has measurable program goals and objectives that are aligned with the organizational mission and identified needs.

### Performance Level 1

The program does not have clear goals and objectives. Activities offered are not aligned with the organization's mission. As a result, the organization's goals are vague and not measurable. There are no internal methods of assessing program activities and staff performance. A formal evaluation of the program has never been conducted.

### Performance Level 2

Program goals and objectives are defined and generally relate to the organization's mission. Goals are vague and need further clarification; they are difficult to be measured. Occasionally, surveys are administered to capture participants' feedback. Formal methods of assessing program activities and staff performance still need to be developed and are not in place.

### Performance Level 3

Program goals and objectives are developed based on the needs of participants. Activities are aligned with and support the organization's mission. Staff performance is evaluated on a yearly basis. Internal methods for assessing program activities are in place, such as benchmarking and surveying youth. An external evaluator works closely with the program director to develop the evaluation questions and design.

### Performance Level 4

Program goals and objectives are clearly defined and aligned with organization's mission. Activities are designed to support both short- and long-term goals. Staff and youth are actively engaged in designing the evaluation questions and providing feedback. Evaluation findings are used to inform planning, continuous improvement, and marketing. Staff are involved in assessing their own performance.



## TAKING ACTION

**RIGHT NOW: ADDRESSED WITHIN THE FIRST 30-60 DAYS OF ASSESSMENT.** Program director meets with staff to revisit the organization's vision and goals, assess how activities are aligned with the goals, and determine what evidence of success is available (see Try This!).

**THIS YEAR: ADDRESSED BY THE END OF THE PROGRAM YEAR.** The director works closely with staff to clarify program goals and to begin to define how they will be measured. Internal methods of assessing program success and staff performance and capturing promising practices are developed. Findings are shared with staff and key stakeholders and inform a plan for continuous program improvement.

**NEXT YEAR: ADDRESSED AT THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW PROGRAM YEAR.** The director meets with staff and stakeholders to develop a plan for how to gather and use information to encourage continuous learning and improvement of programming. Staff are trained in evaluation methods (such as data collection, program observations, or interviews) and are involved in designing the evaluation questions. The director shares key findings of the self-assessment process with an external evaluator. The director and staff meet periodically with the evaluator to provide feedback and ask questions.



## TIPS FOR SUCCESS

### Being Prepared for Evaluation

Having your programs evaluated is less daunting when you make an ongoing effort to be prepared. Here are tips to easing the burden when its time to measure your success.

#### 1. Have a Plan

You can't measure performance if your goals aren't clear from the beginning. All of your program's stakeholders should be clear on what you're aiming to achieve and how you plan to meet your objectives. There shouldn't be any surprises when your programs are being evaluated!

families attended a program. Outcomes are the goals you plan to achieve. They should link directly to your outputs. For example, if 10 families attended a program, the outcome is that those families' literacy has increased. When evaluating your programs, a logic model will provide the outcomes to be measured.

#### 2. Create a Logic Model

A logic model is a visual representation of your goals. Logic models have four main parts: inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes. Inputs are what you need to provide services or create products, such as staff and time. Activities are actions taken, which require inputs, with the goal of fulfilling the objectives set out in your mission statement. Outputs are the direct results of your activities. Outputs are often numerical; for example, 10

#### 3. Collect Data (everyday!)

While it sounds obvious, collecting data year-round should be viewed as a priority to your program's success. Investing time in collecting key information, such as daily attendance records, will save you from feeling pressured when it comes time to report statistics. By having records organized and centrally located, you will always be ready for a program evaluation.



## TRY THIS!

The following activity can help your team suggest priority issues for evaluation and contribute to the evaluation design and/or data collection. You will need plenty of chart paper, markers, and copies of your organization's mission and goals. Allow about 1 1/2 to 2 hours for this exercise.

- o As a full group, review your organization's mission and goals.
- o In small groups, have participants brainstorm a list of key aspects of the program to be evaluated. Ask the groups to also think of possible evaluation methods for each program aspect, and ways in which various stakeholders (e.g. youth, school administrators, parents) could be involved in the evaluation process.
- o Record the responses and post each group's answers. Conduct a gallery walk so participants can read each other's responses and add ideas. Return to the full group and finalize the lists by eliminating duplicate ideas. Ask the group to prioritize the most important aspects of the program to be evaluated.
- o Debrief the exercise and determine next steps for implementing an evaluation.<sup>12</sup>

# CONCLUSION

Congratulations! You are taking important first steps toward strengthening the quality of your program by engaging in a process of reflection and improvement. Self-assessment is an ongoing process that must be consistently revisited after the assessment has been completed. Now that you have taken a bird's eye view of your program practices, you should be ready to try new ideas, strategies, processes, and solutions for affecting change within your program.

Regardless of where you are in the process, NYSAN hopes that this User's Guide has provided you with insight, tools, and inspiration to advance your quality improvement efforts to the next level. We wish you the best of luck as you mobilize your afterschool community to continuously strengthen its efforts to provide young people with positive, enriching experiences.

We also welcome your questions and feedback as you incorporate the QSA Tool into your program planning efforts. Please contact us anytime at [info@nysan.org](mailto:info@nysan.org).

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- 1 Blueprint for Action, 7
  - 2 TASC Program Quality Improvement Plan
  - 3 Senge, The Fifth Discipline
  - 4 Starkman, Walking Your Talk, 32
  - 5 Documentation and Record Keeping
  - 6 PASE Learning Lab Guiding Principles for Afterschool Activities
  - 7 Child Development Training of Afterschool Professionals
  - 8 Homework Assistance & Out-of-School Time and "Tip Sheets"
  - 9 Say Y.E.S to Youth
  - 10 Out-of-School Time Program Research and Evaluation Database
  - 11 Building Effective Partnerships with Families
  - 12 Developing and Implementing an Evaluation Plan

# IMPLEMENTING IDEAS WITH AN ACTION PLAN

## PROGRAM QUALITY SELF-ASSESSMENT ACTION PLAN

Program: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Assessment: \_\_\_\_\_ Self-Assessment Team: \_\_\_\_\_

PROGRAM ELEMENT	QUALITY INDICATOR	PERFORMANCE LEVEL	IMPROVEMENT STEPS & STRATEGIES	PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE	TIMELINE FOR IMPROVEMENT PLAN (RIGHT NOW, THIS YEAR, NEXT YEAR)	RESOURCES NEEDED

# STARTING A HIGH-QUALITY PROGRAM

## QUALITY INDICATORS TO BE ADDRESSED PRIOR TO PROGRAM START-UP

The following questions will help you determine which quality indicators you have already addressed and those that require additional attention to ensure that the start-up of your program is successful.

### **Environment/Climate**

- Does your program provide a stimulating, welcoming and supportive environment for young people?
- Is the program space clean and safe?
- Do you have safety plans and procedures in place? Have you shared these plans and procedures with staff and families?
- Is there adequate security for the program?
- Are there effective arrival and dismissal procedures and safe travel home plans in place for all participants?
- Do you provide healthy and nutritious snacks and/or supper?
- Do you maintain complete records on all participants?

### **Administration/Organization**

- Are your participants aware of what is expected in regards to their attendance and participation?
- Do you maintain all required program documents such as; health certificate, security clearance, insurance etc. in a safe place?

- Have you developed an employee handbook that clarifies internal policies and procedures? Do you refer to it?
- Do have complete and current enrollment/registration documents for all participants?
- Do you have a clear salary structure for staff?
- Do you have in place an effective communication system between the school and your organization?
- Do you have a family engagement plan? Do you review and update as needed?

### **Relationships**

- Do you keep track of where the participants are during program hours?
- Is staff respectful towards each other?
- Is staff able to communicate with one another and are models of positive adult relationships?
- Is staff able to interact with families in a comfortable, respectful and welcoming manner?
- Does staff treat participants with respect and listens to what they have to say?

### **Staffing/Professional Development**

- Is the program director committed to his/her professional development?

- Does the director recruits, hires and develops staff that reflects the diversity and culture of the community?
- Is staff competent in core academic areas?
- Does your program have the required staff-to-participant ratios as per state regulations?
- Does your organization provide positive working conditions for the staff?
- Are staff supervised, supported and provided feedback on a regular basis?

### **Programming/Activities**

- Do the activities reflect the program mission?
- Are the activities developmentally appropriate for your participants?
- Do the participants learn new skills through the activities?
- Are the activities project-based and experiential?
- Do the activities promote creativity and self expression?
- Do you offer high quality academic support? For example; tutoring, homework help
- Do the activities take into account the culture and language of your participant?

- Do you offer enrichment opportunities via the arts, technology, recreation and health?
- Do you have a schedule in place? Are staff, participants and families given copies?

### **Linkages between Day and After School**

- Are you able to secure commitment of resources (classroom space, storage, bulletin boards, computer labs, office space) from school principal?

### **Youth Participation/Engagement**

- Does your program offer multiple opportunities for engaging youth?

### **Parent, Family, and Community Partnerships**

- Communicates with families on matters concerning the well-being of the child.

### **Program Sustainability/Growth**

- Do you have a written statement of mission and goals?
- Does your staff understand and embrace your mission and goals?

### **Measuring Outcomes/Evaluation**

- Has your program developed a plan for programevaluation that includes gathering of both qualitative and quantitative data?

# PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

As discussed on page 4, conducting a self-assessment is complementary to creating a professional development plan for staff. Below is a template, developed by the Partnership for After School Education (PASE), for determining staff professional development needs. After needs have been identified, this template can assist with determining the type of training and information that would be most useful to the entire staff.

## PASE Professional Development Planning: A Tool for Afterschool Supervisors

In order to develop a training plan for your staff, you can use this tool as a first step towards identifying skills and needs of each individual staff person. This process should be completed during an individual meeting between you and each staff person. Once you have determined all of the skills each person has and needs, you can look for commonalities across the entire staff to determine group training and where there are differences, you can work with each staff person to identify professional development opportunities that are appropriate for him/her.

STAFF	JOB	SKILLS/KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED	HAVE	NEED	FULLFILLING NEED
Name of staff person	Job title with brief description of job function/responsibilities	What key skills & knowledge are required for this person to successfully fulfill their job duties?	What key skills & knowledge does this person already have?	What key skills & knowledge does this person still need?	What kind of training and support will help fill the individual needs? Complete this for any needs that don't overlap with needs that are shared by most of the other staff.

## Strategies & Resources for Fulfilling Individual Staff Needs

- o Individualized coaching/mentoring-Can be provided by you, a peer and/or by an outside technical assistance provider
- o Off-site training-Staff can attend training in the form of local workshops, seminars, regional or national conferences, etc.
- o Shadowing-staff can visit other youth programs to shadow a specific staff person or observe several activities
- o Higher education-staff can matriculate into an institution of higher education for certificate or degree-bearing programs

SHARED STAFF NEEDS	RESOURCES
Based on your individual meetings with staff, what are three highest priority skills & knowledge areas of need shared by many of your staff? (e.g. 70% of staff need a better understanding of children's stages of development or 80% of staff need to learn how to create effective lesson plans)	What resources can the agency tap into for training, support, and/or knowledge--building for your staff's high priority needs?

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# NYSAN

NEW YORK STATE AFTERSCHOOL NETWORK

## About New York State Afterschool Network:

New York State Afterschool Network is a statewide public-private partnership dedicated to promoting young people’s safety, learning, and healthy development outside the traditional classroom. NYSAN’s activities are directed toward building the capacity and commitment of communities to increase the quality and availability of programs during non-school hours. NYSAN convenes partners across New York State to work in four main areas to support the afterschool field and promote increased quality and availability of afterschool opportunities, including advancing program quality, coordinating and improving professional development, setting a statewide policy agenda, and disseminating information. NYSAN also has regional afterschool network affiliates across the state. NYSAN is led by a Steering Committee and is co-chaired by The After-School Corporation and the New York State Education Department. For more information, visit [www.nysan.org](http://www.nysan.org) or call (646) 943-8670.

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