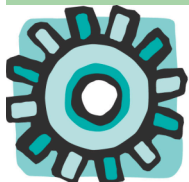# Quality Assessment and Improvement in Youth Programs

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Forum for Youth Investment
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the forum
FOR YOUTH INVESTMENT
moving ideas to impact

Why focus on quality?

- Quality *matters*.
- Quality is *measurable*
- Quality is *malleable*.

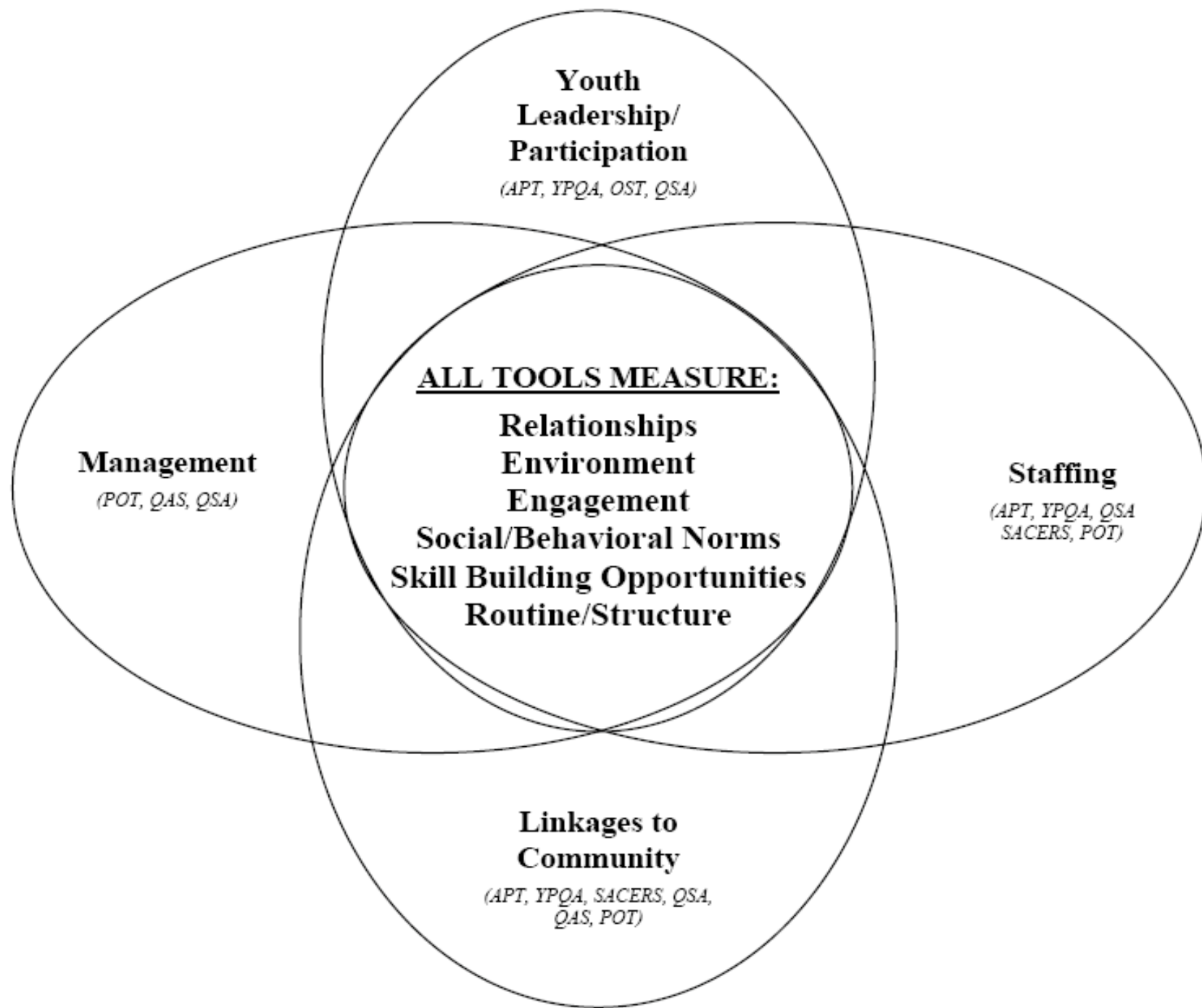# Measuring Youth Program Quality: A Guide to Assessment Tools

- Assessing Afterschool Program Practices Tool (APT)
  National Institute on Out-of-School Time and the MA Department of Education
- Out-of-School Time Observation Instrument (OST)
  Policy Studies Associates
- Program Observation Tool (POT)
  National Afterschool Association
- Program Quality Observation (PQO)
  Deborah Vandell and Kim Pierce
- Promising Practices Rating Scale (PPRS)
  WI Center for Education Research and Policy Studies Associates, Inc.
- Quality Assurance System (QAS)
  Foundations Inc.
- Program Quality Self-Assessment Tool (QSA)
  New York State Afterschool Network
- School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACERS)
  Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center, UNC
- Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA)
  High/Scope Educational Research Foundation

Measuring Youth Program Quality: A Guide to Assessment Tools

- Purpose and History
- Content
- Structure and Methodology
- Technical Properties
- User Considerations
- Application in the Field

How is quality defined?

- There is **a lot** of similarity across definitions. Common elements include:

  – Relationships
  – Environment
  – Engagement
  – Social Norms
  – Skill Building Opportunities
  – Routine/Structure

Youth Leadership/ Participation
(APT, YPQA, OST, QSA)

Management
(POT, QAS, QSA)

ALL TOOLS MEASURE:

Relationships
Environment
Engagement
Social/Behavioral Norms
Skill Building Opportunities
Routine/Structure

Staffing
(APT, YPQA, QSA
SACERS, POT)

Linkages to Community
(APT, YPQA, SACERS, QSA,
QAS, POT)

How is quality assessed?
Differences in emphasis and approach

- Why the differences?
  - Tool purposes
  - Program purposes
  - Developers' perspectives and backgrounds

Differences in emphasis

SACERS

- Social Interactions
  - 9 items
- Resources (financial, human, material)
  - 15 items
- Arrangement of Resources
  - 20 items

YPQA

- Social Interactions
  - 14 items
- Resources (financial, human, material)
  - 8 items
- Arrangement of Resources
  - 8 items

Differences in approach

- There are more differences in how quality is *measured* than there are in how it is defined.

    - Data collection methods (type and intensity)
    - Types of measures
    - Rating scales
    - Technical properties

Data collection methods

- – Type (observation, interview, questionnaire, document review)
- – Target users (program staff, external observers)
- – Intensity of data collection

High vs. low inference measures

- NAA Program Observation Tool
  - Staff are engaged with children

- High/Scope Youth Program Quality Assessment
  - During activities, staff generally smile, use friendly gestures, and make eye contact.
  - Staff encourage all youth to try out new skills or attempt higher levels of performance.
  - During activities, staff are almost always actively involved with youth (e.g. they provide directions, answer questions, work as partners or team members, check in with individuals or groups).
  - Staff make use of frequent open-ended questions.

Diagnostic vs. prescriptive measures

- Diagnostic (from the New York QSA):
  - A quality program provides participants with a variety of engagement strategies.

- Diagnostic *and* prescriptive (from NIOST's APT):
  - Youth are busy and engaged in conversation or activities.
  - Youth appear relaxed and in control of themselves.
  - Youth independently gather resources, materials or get information.
  - Youth help select, lead or contribute to the running of the activity.
  - Youth solve problems alone or in groups.
  - When trying to solve a problem, youth try to identify the source, nature of the problem and/or try out potential solutions.

Rating scales – New York QSA

Relationships

A quality program develops nurtures and maintains positive relationships and interactions among staff, participants, families and communities.

Quality indicator

A quality program:	Performance Level				Plan to Improve		
	1	2	3	4	Right Now	This Year	Next Year
Has staff who respect and communicate with one another and are role models of positive adult relationships.							
Interacts with families in a comfortable, respectful, welcoming way.							
Treats participants with respect and listens to what they say.							
Teaches participants to interact with one another in positive ways.							
Teaches participants to make responsible choices and encourages positive outcomes.							
Is sensitive to the culture and language of participants.							
Establishes meaningful community collaboration.							
Has scheduled meetings with its major stakeholders.							
Encourages former participants to contribute as volunteers or staff.							

Rating scales – High/Scope YPQA

II. Supportive Environment			
II-I. Staff support youth in building new skills			
Indicators			Supporting Evidence/Anecdotes
1 Youth are not encouraged to try out new skills or attempt higher levels of performance.	3 Some youth are encouraged to try out new skills or attempt higher levels of performance but others are not.	5 All youth are encouraged to try out new skills or attempt higher levels of performance.	n/o = 1
1 Some youth who try out new skills with imperfect results, errors or failure are informed of their errors (e.g., "That's wrong") and/or are corrected, criticized, made fun of, or punished by staff *without* explanation.	3 Some youth who try out new skills receive support from staff who problem-solve with youth despite imperfect results, errors, or failure, an/or some youth are corrected *with* an explanation.	5 All youth who try out new skills receive support from staff despite imperfect results, errors, or failure; staff allow youth to learn from and correct their own mistakes and encourage youth to keep trying to improve their skills.	n/o = 1

Technical properties

	Score Distributions	Interrater Reliability	Test-retest Reliability	Internal Consistency*	Concurrent Validity	Predictive Validity	Validity of Scale Structure*
Assessing Afterschool Program Practices Tool (APT)		✓✓†			✓✓†	✓✓†	
Out-of-School Time Observation Tool (OST)	✓✓✓	✓✓✓		✓✓✓			
Program Observation Tool (POT)		✓✓✓†	✓✓✓†	✓✓✓†	✓✓†		
Program Quality Observation (PQO)	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	N/A
Program Quality Self-Assessment (QSA)							
Promising Practices Rating System (PPRS)	✓✓	✓✓		✓✓✓		✓✓	N/A
Quality Assurance System (QAS)							
School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACERS)		✓✓✓		✓✓✓	✓✓		
Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA)	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓

How is quality improved?

- Three recent examples:
  - Michigan After-School Quality System Demonstration
  - Girls Incorporated Quality Assurance Process
  - YouthNet of Greater Kansas City Organizational Assessment & Improvement Project

Building Quality Improvement Systems, 2007

Quality improvement: lessons learned

- Quality assessment can advance multiple goals
- Data is a powerful motivator for staff
- Common language helps pave the way for change
- Important to have standards with tangible supports
- Strengthen the link between quality assessment and outcome evaluation

Building Quality Improvement Systems, 2007

Choices when designing quality improvement strategies

- Nature of Agency Involvement *(mandatory/voluntary)*
- Level of Accountability *(high stakes/low stakes)*
- Reach of the Intervention *(universal/targeted)*
- Source of Expertise *(internal/external capacity)*
- Focus of Change *(organizational issues/staff practice)*
- Staff Level Targeted *(targets leadership/line staff)*
- Type of Data Collected *(high/low inference measures)*
- How Data Inform Change *(diagnostic/prescriptive)*
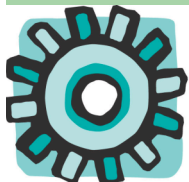- Support Strategy *(one-on-one/group support)*

To download reports on program quality and more:

www.forumfyi.org

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