nys-ocfs program quality assessment handbook
The David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality, a division of the Forum for Youth Investment, is dedicated to empowering education and human service leaders to adapt, implement, and scale best-in-class, research-validated quality improvement systems to advance child and youth development.

The Weikart Center encourages managers to prioritize program quality. We offer training, technical assistance, and research services that all come together in the Youth Program Quality Intervention, a comprehensive system for improving the quality of youth programs.

The Program Quality Assessment Handbook Series supports training with and use of the Youth and School-Age Program Quality Assessment (PQA). The Youth Program Quality Assessment (PQA) is a validated instrument designed to evaluate the quality of youth programs and identify staff training needs. It has been used in community organizations, schools, camps, and other places where youth have fun, work, and learn with adults.

The Youth PQA is a dual-purpose instrument, robust enough to use for accountability and research purposes and user-friendly enough to serve as a tool for program assessment. It is both a quality monitoring tool and a learning tool.

To learn more, please visit www.cypq.org.
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Welcome to the NYS-OCFS PQA Handbook!

Across the nation, high-quality youth programs are being recognized by their communities for the valuable contributions they can make to young people’s growth. Studies suggest that children and youth who spend their out-of-school hours in safe and nurturing learning environments are at significantly less risk for truancy, emotional stress, poor grades, substance use, sexual activity, and crime. Participating in out-of-school activities on a consistent basis, with access to a variety of enriching activities and the opportunity to build meaningful relationships with peers and adults, has shown to benefit young people socially, emotionally, and academically.*

Research has also revealed that out-of-school time programs that contain quality features make larger impacts than those without. This underscores the importance of looking not just at outcomes but at the point-of-service – what happens when youth and adults get together in the program space – and strengthening the quality of those opportunities and interactions.

The New York State Office of Children and Family Services Program Quality Assessment (NYS-OCFS PQA) Short Form is designed for a team to use to examine, discuss, and plan to improve the quality of their youth program. The NYS-OCFS PQA provides an introduction to the best practices of positive youth development. The NYS-OCFS PQA draws upon elements of the Youth Program Quality Assessment (Youth PQA), which is a validated instrument designed to evaluate the quality of youth programs and identify staff training needs. The NYS-OCFS PQA is structured around the 8 key developmental features developed by the National Research Council. This tool consists of a set of scorable standards for best practices in afterschool programs, community organizations, schools, summer programs, and other places where youth have fun, work, and learn with adults.

This instrument is meant for use as a program assessment by a team. As such, the methods we recommend for scoring the tool are designed primarily to achieve adult learning ends for members of teams who are reflecting on their own practice and planning for change. The full Youth PQA is designed for both program self assessment and external assessment conducted by reliable outside observers. The Youth PQA is at the heart of the Youth Program Quality Intervention, a continuous improvement program that has been shown in an experimental field trial to improve program quality. Though rooted in youth development research, the NYS-OCFS PQA has not yet been subjected to evaluation for validation. For this reason, this tool is best used through an assessment process and with a low stakes accountability policy.

The David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality, a division of the Forum for Youth Investment, is charged with empowering education and human services leaders to adapt, implement, and scale research-validated, quality improvement systems to advance child and youth development. Our goal is to translate our experience and expertise in the field of youth development research to the folks working with youth in out-of-school time settings so that they can create youth programs that best support the developmental needs of youth.

Whether you believe that the purpose of an out-of-school time program is to improve academics, to build life skills, or just to provide a place where kids can hang out and be kids, our approach provides the foundations for building a safe and productive environment for young people. In short, the approach is based on the belief that it is a youth worker’s job to set up an environment for young people in which their needs are met and learning is encouraged—to set up a space in which youth needs are met so that they can thrive!

*See the following scholarly articles for more information:
The Youth Program Quality Assessment (PQA) was designed to assess the quality of learning environments and to identify staff training needs. The New York State Office of Children and Family Services short form (NYS-OCFS PQA) is a subset of the items from the Youth PQA. While the Youth PQA has gone through a rigorous validation study, there has not been a similar validation of the short form NYS-OCFS PQA.

When using any of the PQAs, we recommend that you consult the Youth Program Quality Assessment Handbook and that you, or someone on your team, consider attending a one-day PQA Basics training. Evidence concerning the reliability and validity of the PQAs was produced using very specific methods and the handbook and training are endorsed by the Weikart Center as an introduction to these methods. In applications of the PQAs where rater precision is required, additional External Assessor Reliability Training and supports are available and recommended. Please visit www.cypq.org for additional information about training and supports.

When the PQAs are used as part of the Youth Program Quality Intervention (YPQI), the quality of staff instruction is known to improve (http://cypq.org/ypqi). The YPQI is a comprehensive system for improving program quality, built around the research-validated Youth Program Quality Assessment (PQA). It involves a three-part approach to program quality: the assess-plan-improve sequence as shown in Figure 1. This sequence begins with assessment in order to identify both youth workers’ existing strengths and areas for improvement. These areas then become goals in an improvement plan, with clear steps and benchmarks for success. To manage improvement, the Weikart Center also provides powerful supports for youth leaders and the high quality Youth Work Methods series of workshops for staff. As a whole, the assess-plan-improve sequence establishes a supportive system for continuous improvement.

The assess-plan-improve sequence helps programs to turn data into useful information for program improvement. Assessment and evaluation can supply a wealth of valuable data about the quality of a youth program, but assessment provides just the data—numbers and words. To learn from the data and use it effectively to improve the quality of experiences for youth, program staff engage in conversations that lead to professional development decisions. The Weikart Center Youth Work Methods trainings are aligned to the practices promoted in the Youth PQA and are designed to strengthen the skills of program staff. Program managers can provide support to their staff by using Quality Instructional Coaching to observe staff and reflect with them on their practice.

The next few pages provide more detail on what the YPQI looks like for programs from the New York State Office of Children and Family Services.

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Figure 1: Assess-Plan-Improve Sequence

ASSESS

Quality assessment.

PLAN

Team based improvement planning with data.

IMPROVE

Instructional coaching for staff by site managers.

Targeted staff trainings for instructional skill building.
YPQI Roles and Responsibilities

Below is an overview of all key roles within the YPQI process. As you examine the various roles, please consider where you fit and how you think you can support this quality improvement work. Then consider the complete breakdown of responsibilities for your role throughout the assess-plan-improve sequence which is included in Figure 3.

**Assessment Leader** is responsible for leading a program (or programs) through the YPQI. He or she is usually a site manager, supervisor, or director, but could be anyone at the site, or even at the county level. It is important that this person has sufficient time to coordinate the process and attend all trainings. The role of the Assessment Leader is explained in detail throughout the bulk of this handbook. The activities fall in the areas of managing assessment, managing improvement planning, and seeing that the improvement plan gets carried out.

**Program Staff** are primarily responsible for working directly with youth and enacting improvements in the quality of youth experience available at the program. They may take part in an assessment and improvement team. They may have some responsibilities for leading this team through the YPQI.

**External monitors** may visit programs and prepare independent assessments to be used for network analysis and for program improvement. External monitors can also support sites with improvement.

**Agency Managers and County Youth Bureau Staff** help program directors and staff experience success in the YPQI. This can involve guiding program assessment, helping with improvement planning, working with individual staff, and facilitating trainings. These individuals attend the live trainings led by the Weikart Center so that they may lead programs through the process.

The **New York State Staff** is involved in supporting the entire quality improvement system work. They do all system coordinating for the YPQI, including communicating important information, scheduling, coordinating external assessment, and providing youth program personnel with access to supports. Most importantly, they send signals to program staff that the improvement work is important.

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**Figure 2: Elements of Assess - Plan - Improve with Trainings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Training</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ASSESS</strong></td>
<td>Program assessment</td>
<td>NYS-OCFS PQA Basics (online)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment by Youth Bureau external monitor or other funder (optional)</td>
<td>NYS-OCFS PQA Basics (online)</td>
<td>Assessors work with the assessment team or independently to conduct an assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PLAN</strong></td>
<td>Improvement Planning</td>
<td>Planning with Data (online)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IMPROVE</strong></td>
<td>Youth Work Methods (Active Participatory Approach aligned to PQA)</td>
<td>Youth Work Methods Workshops (2 hour workshops, usually in a half-day or one day summit, also available online) optional, $</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality Instructional Coaching</td>
<td>Quality Coaching Workshop (1 day) optional, $</td>
<td>Managers are trained to support staff improvement through one-on-one consultation using strengths-based feedback on practices in the PQA.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Figure 3: Assess - Plan - Improve Roles and Responsibilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Leader</th>
<th>Program staff</th>
<th>External Monitors</th>
<th>County Youth Bureau Staff and Agency Managers</th>
<th>New York State Staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ASSESS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take <em>PQA Basics</em> online</td>
<td>Take <em>PQA Basics</em> (online)</td>
<td>Take <em>PQA Basics</em> (online)</td>
<td>Take <em>PQA Basics</em> (live or online)</td>
<td>Plan trainings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead Crash Course for staff</td>
<td>Participate in program assessment</td>
<td>Conduct assessment</td>
<td>Support team in program assessment</td>
<td>Coordinate external monitors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead program assessment team</td>
<td>Enter data into Excel Scores Reporter</td>
<td>Participate in program assessment</td>
<td>Attend live training led by Weikart Center</td>
<td>Manage program assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PLAN</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take <em>Planning With Data</em> online</td>
<td>Participate in improvement planning</td>
<td>Take <em>Planning With Data</em> online</td>
<td>Support team improvement planning</td>
<td>Activate external monitors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead team improvement planning</td>
<td>With Assessment Leader, facilitate improvement planning with the team</td>
<td>With Assessment Leader, facilitate improvement planning with the team</td>
<td>Manage improvement planning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Record goals in Improvement Plan Form</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IMPROVE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take <em>Quality Coaching</em> training (optional, $)</td>
<td>Attend <em>Youth Work Methods</em> training (optional, $)</td>
<td>Support team in improvement</td>
<td>Support team in improvement</td>
<td>Support sites in improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead staff in improving point-of-service</td>
<td>Enact best practices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Plan trainings (optional, $)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
part 1
assessment with the nys-ocfs pqa

ASSESS
Quality assessment.

PLAN
Team based improvement planning with data.

IMPROVE
Instructional coaching for staff by site managers. Targeted staff trainings for instructional skill building.
The NYS-OCFS PQA Short Form is designed for use by a team to examine, discuss, and plan to improve the quality of their youth program. The NYS-OCFS PQA provides an introduction to the best practices of positive youth development. The NYS-OCFS PQA draws upon elements of the Youth Program Quality Assessment (Youth PQA), which is a validated instrument designed to evaluate the quality of youth programs and identify staff training needs.¹ The NYS-OCFS PQA is structured around the 8 key developmental features developed by the National Research Council.² This tool consists of a set of scorable standards for best practices in afterschool programs, community organizations, schools, summer programs, and other places where youth have fun, work, and learn with adults.

This instrument is meant for use as a program assessment by a team. As such, the methods we recommend for scoring the tool are designed primarily to achieve adult learning ends for members of teams who are reflecting on their own practice and planning for change. The full Youth PQA is designed for both program self assessment and external assessment conducted by reliable outside observers. The Youth PQA is at the heart of the Youth Program Quality Intervention, a continuous improvement program that has been shown in an experimental field trial to improve program quality. Though rooted in youth development research, the NYS-OCFSPQA has not yet been subjected to evaluation for validation. For this reason, this tool is best used through an assessment process and with a low stakes accountability policy.

The tool is structured with observational items listed at the top of the page, followed by Administrator Self Interview items, highlighted in gray.

connections to the youth pqa

The image below shows how the domains of the Youth PQA are aligned to the 8 features recommended by the National Research Council, plus an additional scale on Continuous Improvement that completes the NYS-OCFS PQA.

For more information about using the full Youth PQA or the School-Age PQA, which incorporates age-appropriate experiences for school-aged children K – 6th grade visit www.cypq.org.
### Physical and Psychological Safety

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Supporting Evidence/Anecdotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The emotional climate of the session is predominantly negative (e.g., disrespectful, tense, exclusive, even angry or hostile; with negative behaviors, such as rudeness, bragging, insults, “trash talking,” negative gestures, or other such actions that are not mediated by either youth or staff).</td>
<td>n/o = 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The emotional climate of the session is predominantly positive (e.g., mutually respectful, relaxed, supportive; characterized by teamwork, camaraderie, inclusiveness, and an absence of negative behaviors). Any playful negative behaviors (not considered offensive by parties involved) are mediated by staff or youth.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The emotional climate of the session is neutral or characterized by both positive and negative behaviors.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The program space is free of health and safety hazards.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are minor safety and health concerns (e.g., dirty floors or furniture, wobbly furniture, program materials in disarray) affecting the program space.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are major safety and health hazards (e.g., broken equipment or supplies, unmopped spills, flammable and/or toxic materials) affecting the program space.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written emergency procedures and exits are not posted, but staff is able to locate them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written emergency procedures and exits are posted in plain view.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written emergency procedures or exits (e.g., fire escape route, lost swimmer drill, severe weather instructions), or staff are unable to locate procedures.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to indoor and outdoor program space is supervised during program hours.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to indoor and outdoor program space is unsupervised during program hours.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to either the indoor or outdoor program space is sometimes supervised during program hours and sometimes not.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**DIRECTIONS:** Reading across each row, decide what score each descriptor represents. Label each descriptor with a score of 1, 3, or 5 by that item. After you are done, jot down keywords that helped you distinguish between the descriptions of 1, 3, and 5. Answers are on page 85.
### Positive Social Norms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Supporting Evidence/Anecdotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth exhibit evidence of excluding peers (e.g., youth are avoided or ostracized by other youth, “I don’t want to sit with her – she’s not my friend”) and staff does not explicitly promote more inclusive relationships (e.g., suggest ways to include others, introduce excluded youth, say, “Remember, being inclusive is one of our ideals”).</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth do not exhibit any exclusion or staff successfully intervenes if exclusive behavior occurs (e.g., staff introduces newcomer to other youth and they then include her, staff successfully suggests including a lone youth in a game).</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth exhibit some evidence of excluding peers and staff intervenes, but not sufficiently to end exclusion (e.g., staff introduces a newcomer to other youth, but the newcomer is treated coolly and avoided or ignored; staff intervenes in some instances of exclusionary behavior but not others).</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth strongly identify with the program offering (e.g., hold one another to established guidelines, use ownership language, such as “our program,” engage in shared traditions such as shared jokes, songs, gestures).</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth do not identify with the program offering (e.g., many youth complain about or express dislike of the program offering or activities).</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth do not strongly identify with the program offering but do not complain or express dislike.</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The activities provide opportunities to acknowledge the achievements, work, or contributions of some youth, but opportunities are unscheduled or impromptu (e.g. staff spontaneously asks two youth show off their dance moves to the group).</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The activities provide no opportunities to acknowledge the achievements, work, or contributions of youth.</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The activities include structured opportunities (e.g., group presentations, sharing times, recognition celebrations, exhibitions, performances) to publicly acknowledge the achievements, work, or contributions of at least some youth.</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Administrator Self Interview

| The organization does not have explicit conflict resolution policies or procedures. | The organization has explicit conflict resolution policy or procedure that consists of several steps that staff uses when addressing conflict including: (1) approaches youth conflicts in a non-threatening manner (i.e. approaches calmly, stops hurtful actions, and acknowledges youth feelings); (2) seeks input from youth to determine cause and solution of conflict; (3) examines relationship between actions and consequences; (4) follows up with those involved afterward. | Does the organization have a conflict resolution policy? If yes, what does it entail? | ![ ] |
## Administrator Self Interview

### Continuous Improvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Supporting Evidence/Anecdotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The organization has explicit continuous improvement policy or procedure that consists of several steps, including: (1) self assessment with a site team; (2) planning with team; (3) providing feedback on implementation of the plan; (4) aligning professional development.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The organization has continuous improvement policies or procedures, but they include only one of the following: 1) self-assessment with a site team; 2) team planning for improvement; 3) providing feedback on the implementation of the plan; 4) aligning professional development with identified areas for improvement.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The organization does not have explicit continuous improvement policies or procedures.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Team-based program assessment using the NYS-OCFS PQA is a highly effective, low stakes strategy for building a quality-focused culture. Program assessment can help managers and staff co-create meaningful improvement objectives for the quality of their programming and ultimately the outcomes for their youth participants.

Throughout the process, keep in mind these three aspects of a constructive program assessment process:

- working as a team
- basing scores on observational evidence
- focusing on conversations about quality

The graph below shows estimated times for each major task in the program assessment process for the Assessment Leader and two team members. If you include additional team members, the time estimates will increase. The total time estimate for one Assessment Leader and two team members is roughly 20 hours of staff time.

* Team member training could include NYS-OCFS PQA Basics online, or a Assessment Leader-led introduction using the Crash Course powerpoint and agenda on pages 14-15.
Below is an overview of the Team-Based Program Assessment process. The pages that follow provide more detailed instructions on each step.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Training and Team Selection (page 13) | ✓ The program assessment team should consist of the Assessment Leader and at least two program staff, volunteers, or parents.  
✓ Program assessment team leader takes NYS-OCFS PQA Basics online course.  
✓ To prepare to be a part of the program assessment process, we recommend that all program staff complete the NYS-OCFS PQA Basics online course or participate in a Crash Course led by the Assessment Leader. |
| 2. Data Collection Preparation (page 17) | ✓ Team members collect data by taking turns observing their programs in action.  
✓ Sometimes, schedules need to be rearranged, or a program manager needs to provide coverage in order to provide the opportunity for staff to observe each other.  
✓ Schedule observation of a variety of offerings, including: academic enrichment, arts/culture enrichment, leadership programs and/or sports. Avoid: homework help, open gym, unstructured computer lab time, drop-in, etc.  
✓ Always notify program staff of scheduled observation times. This is not a test!  
✓ Plan time as soon as possible following the observations for discussion and scoring. |
| 3. Observation and Note Taking (page 18) | ✓ When possible, observe full program offerings – when youth enter the room, until they leave, or as much of the program as time and coverage will allow.  
✓ Take notes throughout the offering on factual information (include quotes, actions, etc.); refer to NYS-OCFS PQA instrument for additional questions for follow-up. |
| 4. Team-based Scoring Meeting (page 20) | ✓ Program assessment team discusses each item row: each team member presents evidence from their observations; together, they select the best score for each item.  
✓ Score one NYS-OCFS PQA instrument for the site. |
| 5. Entering scores (page 27) | ✓ Enter NYS-OCFS PQA scores into the Excel-based Scores Reporter. |

“YPQA has absolutely changed the way we are looking at assessment, from the inside out.”

-Debbi Herr, Georgetown, CA
STEP 1: Training and Team Selection

While program assessment is a team-based method, we recommend that programs name a Assessment Leader to coordinate the entire process. This person will likely be the site manager, administrator or director, but could also be other site staff, or county level people. **The most important thing is that the Assessment Leader has adequate time to coordinate the process and attend all of the trainings.**

The Assessment Leader (and sometimes one or two additional team members) will first complete the NYS-OCFS PQA Basics online course. NYS-OCFS PQA Basics helps participants understand and talk about program quality and the NYS-OCFS PQA so they feel comfortable using the instrument. The training also walks participants through the program assessment observation and scoring processes required to complete a program assessment using the NYS-OCFS PQA.

After the Assessment Leader completes the online NYS-OCFS PQA Basics training, he or she then assembles the team that will do the assessment and improvement work. This team is typically made up of program staff, but may also include volunteers, board members, or parents, as well as youth or County Youth Bureau Staff. We recommend that the team consist of 1-3 additional members. In addition to the Assessment Leader, there should be 1-2 other staff or volunteers. However, program assessment teams vary based on the size of the program and the Assessment Leader should do the best he or she can to include as many other people as possible. In cases where the program only has one staff member and including outside persons is not possible, contact the Weikart Center for suggestions on how to complete a program assessment.

Below are a few possible examples of program assessment teams:

- Assessment Leader and 2 program staff
- Assessment Leader, 2 program staff, 1 external monitor, and 1 parent
- Assessment Leader, 1 program staff, and 1 volunteer
- Assessment Leader, 1, program staff, 1 parent, and 1 youth

After the team members have been selected, the Assessment Leader can prepare the other team members to participate in the program assessment. The Assessment leader can also train staff in their own NYS-OCFS Crash Course. The 90-minute agenda on the next page provides an outline. Participant slides and materials are available through the online course.

**STEP 1 for External Monitors:**

Youth Bureau external monitors or other funders could work with the assessment team or independently to conduct observations. External monitors should complete the online NYS-OCFS PQA Basics course and the online Planning With Data course.

An external monitor should be expected to conduct an assessment in a timely fashion, enter scores by a set date, and take the report to the team to present and guide the improvement planning process.
The agenda that appears on the next several pages is designed for those who have completed the NYS-OCFS PQA Basics live training or online course and wish to share the PQA and Assessment process with their staff or colleagues. Typically, this means you have completed the training yourself and now you are going back to facilitate the assessment process with your team.

We recommend you adopt three goals for this introduction to the NYS-OCFS PQA and assessment:

After participating in this meeting, team members will:
1. understand the team-based, non-punitive nature of assessment
2. have a working understanding of the NYS-OCFS PQA instrument and what it measures
3. grasp the importance of objective observations to drive scoring decisions

If you have ideas for ways to meet these goals that go beyond this agenda, we encourage you to use them! We estimate that this agenda will take about an hour, maybe more, depending on the size of your group.

Preparation
Make sure you have all the materials listed below. Also, we recommend that you ask your staff to read the first 2 pages of the NYS-OCFS PQA handbook before the meeting.

- Web access and a projector
- PQA Crash Course Slides (download from online course)
- Copies of the following from the Handbook: Introduction, Youth Program Quality Intervention
- Assessment Plan (downloaded from the online course)
- Index cards, each with one of the 9 scales written on them
- Index Cards

Overview
1. Welcome (5 minutes)
2. Introduction to the New York State OCFS Program Quality Assessment (NYS-OCFS PQA) (10 minutes)
3. Card Sort (10-20 minutes)
4. Observation & Note Taking (10-20 minutes)
5. Planning for Data Collection & Scoring (10-20 minutes)
6. Closing Reflection (5 minutes)
Crash Course Agenda and Slides

Welcome (5 minutes)

Welcome participants to the workshop and introduce yourself. You might also lead your team through an icebreaker or energizer to start the meeting off on a positive note.

Introduction to the New York OCFS Program Quality Assessment (NYS-OCFS PQA) (10 minutes)

Present the first 6 slides. Notes are provided in the downloadable annotated slideshow.

Card Sort (10-20 minutes)

Use the stack of 9 scales index cards to lead an activity to get participants familiar with the construct of the NYS-OCFS PQA. We suggest a card-sorting activity. Introduce it in this way: For the next ten minutes, we will be assessing different aspects of our program. Each card represents one scale on the NYS-OCFS PQA. For each card, decide if the program is low, medium, or high quality. As we rate each item, one person should share an example or anecdote that supports the rating.

If there are more than five people in the group, they can be divided into pairs or smaller groups, otherwise everyone can work together. Cards can be chosen randomly. After groups are done, facilitate a reflection discussion. Here are some questions you might use:

How did it feel to assess in this way?
How did you know how to rate each item?
Were you surprised by any of the scores?
Did you disagree with any of the scores?
What were some of the limitations of this process?

Present slide 8, with the sample item.
Crash Course Agenda and Slides (continued)

Observation and Note Taking (10-20 minutes)

Show slide 9, people on the train. Ask, What do you see here? Guide participants to the concept of objective observation.

Divide large group into three smaller groups (you may have people working individually or going up more than once). Assign one group a freeze-frame scene, one a silent picture, and one a “talkie.” Give each group two minutes to plan their skit, then 30 seconds to present. Instruct observers to take notes while their peers present.

After skits are done, facilitate a reflection discussion. Some questions you might use:

  - What did the audience get right?
  - What did they miss?
  - What does this mean for how we observe?

Present slide 10, Note Taking. Explain the difference between effective and ineffective notes. Discuss the principles and logistics of observing and taking notes.

Planning for Data Collection and Scoring (10-20 minutes)

Show slide 11, Planning for Data Collection and Scoring.

As a group, determine the logistics for data collection and agree upon dates. Use the questions provided as a guide. Refer to your handbook for more information.

If you have external assessor(s) coming in, this is a good time to explain that person’s role.

Closing Reflection (5 minutes)

Distribute index cards to each participant. Instruct everyone to write one hope that they have for the assessment process, and on the other side, one fear that they have. Have volunteers share.
STEP 2: Data Collection Preparation

Since program assessment is a team effort, the Assessment Leader will need to create a schedule to give all team members an opportunity to observe some program offerings. Have team members take turns observing activities in action. Whenever possible, allow time to observe the entire session, from when the youth enter the space to when they exit. The Assessment Leader may need to rearrange schedules or provide coverage in order to free up staff to observe. If timing and staff schedules do not allow for full observations, then try to observe at least one hour of programming, divided among assessment team members (e.g., 3 people each observe for 20 minutes, 4 people each observe for 15 minutes, etc.). Vary observation times so that your observations include the beginning, middle, and end of different sessions. The Scoring Meeting for all members should be scheduled shortly after the last observation will occur.

The teams should observe “program offerings” in your program. We define program offerings as structured activities that are led by regular staff with the same youth over time. Enrichment classes or afterschool clubs that get together at the same time each week for the entire school semester are a great example.

Below are some general guidelines for selecting what the team will observe:

✓ Observe a total of at least 1 hour of programming. The more you can observe, the better.
✓ Offerings should have at least 4 youth in attendance
✓ Offerings should be “typical,” not something special that they only do once a year.

While the NYS-OCFS tool can be used to assess programming like open gym, drop-in, and tutoring, you may find that the lack of certain types of structure in those settings can make many items difficult to score or will consistently produce a low score. If you need to use the tool to assess a drop-in type program, we suggest you try and observe when something organized is happening (a workshop, a tournament, a structured group activity, etc.) in order to get more useful evidence for the tool.

When the observations are scheduled, the Assessment Leader should notify the frontline staff of the scheduled times and have them notify youth. We don’t want to surprise anyone!

STEP 2 for External Monitors:

External monitors should work with the Assessment Leader to schedule observations so that instructional staff can be notified. Follow the same guidelines listed above for suggestions on the types of offerings to observe.
**STEP 3: Observation and Note Taking**

Each team member will observe program offerings at the selected time. When conducting an observation, find a place to sit that allows you to see and hear as much as possible without getting in the way. Take notes by hand or using a laptop. Bring a copy of the Summary of the NYS-OCFS PQA on page 60 of this handbook. You can bring the full NYS-OCFS PQA to your observation, but do not write notes onto the form or try to score the form while observing. You only have a limited amount of time to observe the program and if you are filling out the form, you might miss something important. You can use the full form for reference, but we recommend you use it sparingly.

As a general rule, expect to take 1–2 handwritten pages (1–2 typed) of notes per 15 minutes of observation. Write down a description of what happens, and write as objectively as possible. Describe who, what, when, where, and how. Do not include descriptions of internal states or motivations (e.g., he was bored or she really wanted to complete the skit) unless feelings or motivations are revealed in actual spoken language of the program participants and recorded as quotation in the anecdotal record. Write what you see, not what you think about what you see.

After the observation, do not score the NYS-OCFS PQA, but save your notes to use during the Scoring Meeting.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>More effective notes and anecdotes</th>
<th>Less effective notes and anecdotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓ Are factual and objective</td>
<td>✗ Use subjective terms such as good or bad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Offer rich detail in snapshot form</td>
<td>✓ State your opinions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Focus on the interactions between:</td>
<td>✓ Make assumptions about internal states: “she felt angry”; “he did not get it”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Staff and youth</td>
<td>✓ Are too vague, lack detail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Youth and youth</td>
<td>✓ Lack facts about what you saw and heard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Youth and the environment</td>
<td>✓ Summarize discussions instead of using quotes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Depict interactions that have been allowed to reach completion, and if applicable, state the outcome of the interaction</td>
<td>✓ Repeat what the item says</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Describe who, what, when, and where</td>
<td>✓ Do not fit the item</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Contain quotes: What youth and staff actually said</td>
<td>✓ Could support more than one score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ List the materials used</td>
<td>✓ Can stand alone — someone who is not the assessor should be able to read anecdote and score correctly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Describe what you see in the room</td>
<td>✓ Can be used for more than one item.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**STEP 3 for External Monitors:**

External Monitors should follow these same recommendations for Observation and Note-Taking. However, they will score the NYS-OCFS PQA independently.
Sample Narrative Notes
The following is an excerpt of narrative notes.
The highlighted portions are fitted in the anecdotes in the sample on page 26.

Observation: Thursday, July 8, 2004
Attendees: 7 boys and 3 girls, plus C. and L., counselors
Room: Classroom with most of the desks pushed back against the wall so that there is free space in the front of the room for activity. They do not have the lights on since it is pretty warm and there is no air conditioning. There are two homemade posters (markers on easel paper) on the wall that list rules.

C. asks them to draw “something you want in your future.” She asks if they want to do one large picture or individual ones. They choose individual. One youth asks if she could draw stick figures. C. says, “I don’t know, can you?” She reminds them to share the markers. “Remember everyone only needs one marker at a time. Share and have patience.”

C. says to one youth, “Tell me about those clouds you’re drawing.” The youth says, “They’re big and white but this brush ain’t working good.”

She tells them that the pictures are for a wall for Prevention Works. She once again suggests one big piece of paper on the floor — “Wouldn’t that be easier?” but the group once again says no, and she says, “Okay, you’re just not that kind of group.” She then passes out snacks.

C. sits down with youth to chat while they are working on the pictures. Julius talks about his sister and a bottle rocket. C. says, “What did you learn from that experience?”

C. says, “Look at March’s paper; there’s color and vibrance.”

Once again, she asks about doing one large picture together. “If I bring out the glitter and paints, will you do a picture together?”

L. reads and explains a worksheet. They then break into twos and share with their partner.

C. says, “What do you think of what achievement is?” She then says, “My achievement could be finishing college. Yours could be different, like finishing a series of books.”

C. then explains addiction and character. Then she asks them, “Where would you go if you could go anywhere in the world?” They then have discussions on different cultures and places. Someone makes comments about food, and C. reminds them that other cultures would say the same thing about our food because it is different to them.
STEP 4: Team-based Scoring Meeting
After all data has been collected, the Assessment Leader guides the team in scoring a single, program-wide NYS-OCFS PQA. This scoring process can last up to three hours and may be divided among several shorter meetings. During the scoring meetings, the team will pool and review all anecdotal records and go through the NYS-OCFS PQA item by item, selecting an anecdote, and agreeing on a score for each. It is important that the team rely on the anecdotes rather than their memories to produce scores.

*The most important outcome of the scoring meeting is not the numeric scores, but the conversation that occurs while discussing scores and arriving at consensus.*

First, turn observational notes into anecdotes.
The following examples list sample anecdotes for several items. Note how the anecdotes focus on specific events and avoid inferences or interpretation. There are scenarios and scoring suggestions for all items, starting on page 59 of this handbook.

- Physical and Psychological Safety Item 3 (Written emergency procedures are posted in plain view.)
  *There are exit and emergency procedures posted by the door. A diagram shows which door to exit in case of a fire. There is also a list of what to do for other emergencies.*

- Support for Efficacy and Mattering Item 3 (Youth have multiple opportunities to make plans for projects and activities [individual or group].)
  *No planning observed.*

Then, fit and score.
Match the content of your written evidence to relevant scales on the Youth PQA and then fit evidence to the most appropriate item.

Once you have gathered supporting evidence for an item, write it in the evidence box for the item. Look to the 5s to see a description of what the item is about. Based on the evidence you have gathered, score each item by choosing only one score (1, 3, or 5).

The evidence boxes for each item provide important instructions for evidence gathering and scoring. If the evidence box for an item contains a question(s), and the relevant evidence was not observed during the session, the question(s) should be addressed to the program leader. Staff answers should be written as evidence and then scored on the appropriate items. If the item was not observed and the evidence box is marked with a not observed code (n/o) as in n/o=1, n/o=3, or n/o=5, then the item can be scored a 1, 3, or 5 as instructed.

**STEP 4 for External Monitors:**
Follow the guidelines described, but score the tool independently (though still based on observational notes), without input from the team.

Alternatively, external monitors could attend a team-based scoring meeting with their observational evidence and contribute to the discussion and scoring of the tool.
Scoring Tips

Timing
✓ Set aside a meeting time for the specific purpose of scoring.
✓ Plan for more time than you think you will need.

Fitting & Scoring
✓ Carefully read the three levels of an item and determine who has evidence that fits. You must have evidence for every score you give.
✓ The same anecdote can be used for more than one item. You can fit the anecdotes wherever they apply. Always try to see multiple items in every interaction and cross-reference constantly.
✓ Based on your evidence, score the item: Choose the number (1, 3, or 5) that best matches your evidence and enter it in the box.
✓ Try to score every item on every page.
✓ Since you must have evidence for every score you give, if you lack evidence with “fit” (i.e., that relates to the description in the item), collect more data.

Consensus
✓ Make a concerted effort to use only the written evidence and not prior knowledge. Select the most appropriate score for each item by working to reach consensus in the group.
✓ Often, several team members may have evidence that fits a particular item, and the score you write may depend on which evidence you use. In such a case, use your judgment and decide as a team which is most representative of your program, and score accordingly.

✓ When in doubt, consider the experience from the youths’ perspective.
✓ Take note of contentious items—these will be great things to consider for your improvement planning!

Next steps
✓ To compute scale scores, add up the item scores and divide by the number of items.
✓ At the end of the meeting, assess progress and identify remaining tasks. There may be a need to collect more data to clarify scores or fill in remaining gaps. Decide what is needed to complete the scoring task, and design a plan to do so. If necessary, schedule a final scoring meeting to reach consensus on new evidence and scores.

Remember the Big Picture!
✓ The conversation during the scoring meeting is the most important part of program assessment. Make sure that everyone on the team has a voice in the process and knows that being honest about low scores is not only safe but encouraged.
Strengthening Anecdotes

**DIRECTIONS:** First, read the narrative notes below. Then look at the anecdotes on page 23 created for each PQA item based on the narrative notes. Identify the type(s) of problems in each anecdote and rewrite an improved anecdote in the space provided.

Narrative notes:

The session started at 3pm. 10-12 youth came into the room and staff (named Kevin) said, “Just sit anywhere.” He did not greet any of the youth by name.

Kevin began the session by saying, “Let’s do an ice breaker. Everyone stand in a circle and share one great thing that happened to you this week.” One youth told a story about changing a flat tire on her bike. The other youth laughed. All youth responded to each other’s stories with laughter and smiles.

After the icebreaker, Kevin (the staff), tells youth to get back in a group and they will brainstorm what committees they will need to accomplish their fashion show fundraiser. All the young people share ideas. One young woman, Alicia, says, “We should have a committee that just focuses on getting clothing donations.” Another youth, Jasmine replies, “That’s brilliant!”

The group decides that they need four committees: publicity, clothing donations, set design and materials. Kevin says, “Who would like to volunteer to lead each of these committees? We need 4 volunteers. Let’s stick to people who didn’t lead a committee during the bake sale last week so that we make sure everyone in the group has a chance to lead something during this semester.”

Kevin picks the first four youth to volunteer as committee leaders. Each committee leader picks a corner of the room and the remaining youth join the committee they are the most interested in. Kevin draws a long timeline on the chalkboard with “today” written on one end and “day of the fashion show” written on the other. He says, “Use the post-it notes at your table to write the things you need to have accomplished on the day of the fashion show to make it a success. Next, use another round of sticky notes to plan backwards and figure out what you need to accomplish in order to get to that point, then plan backwards another step, until you get to what you need to accomplish this week.”

After 20 minutes of discussion youth have the board full of sticky notes. Each committee’s notes are a different color. Kevin instructs the committee leaders to write each of the notes on their calendar so that they can keep track of what they need to accomplish by each date. Then he tells the group, “Make sure that you give your email and phone number to your committee leader. He or she will need to be able to get in touch with you to ask questions or for help.”
**Strengthening Anecdotes (continued)**

**DIRECTIONS:** Now, look at the anecdotes that relate to the above narrative. Identify the problem with the anecdotes and write an improved version. Look at page 18 of this manual for a reminder on how to write high quality anecdotes.

Physical and Psychological Safety Item 1. Kids are nice to each other.

Appropriate Structure Item 4. Youth are told to “sit anywhere” when they arrive.

Positive Social Norms Item 1. Youth really like each other.

Support for Efficacy and Mattering Item 2. All the youth get to lead at some point.

Support for Efficacy and Mattering Item 3. There was a lot of planning.
The agenda that appears on the next page is for teams who have completed assessment data collection and need to meet to score the NYS-OCFS PQA.

We recommend you adopt three goals for this meeting:

In this meeting, team members will:
1. assign program scores for every item in the NYS-OCFS PQA.
2. identify successes.
3. identify aspects of programming to work on improving.

We recommend that you set aside three hours for your scoring meeting(s). This may occur in a single sitting or be spread across multiple meetings.

**Preparation**

Make sure team members bring their notes from observations. For the meeting, make sure you have the following materials:

- Blank copies of the NYS-OCFS PQA, some for reference and one to record agreed-on scores
- Snacks for brain food! (optional)

**Overview**

1. Welcome (5 minutes)
2. Icebreaker (10 minutes)
3. Fitting and Scoring (2-3 hours)
4. Reflection (10 minutes)
5. Closing (15 minutes)
### Scoring Meeting Sample Agenda

#### Welcome (5 minutes)
Ask team members to introduce themselves and review the agenda for the meeting. Review the purpose for the meeting. You might even want to put the goals listed on the previous page on a handout or easel paper. Be sure to touch on the following points:

- NYS-OCFS PQA scores are not connected to funding decisions
- we will score every item in the NYS-OCFS PQA
- we will rely on our observation notes
- the conversation is most important – it’s okay to disagree
- we hope to acknowledge areas for growth

#### Icebreaker (10 minutes)
Have team members rate on a scale of 1-10 how anxious they are. If you wish, you could do this as a physical activity by having team members stand against the wall along a continuum. Discuss. Then have team members rate on a scale of 1-10 how excited they are. Discuss.

#### Fitting and Scoring (2-3 hours)
Work through the NYS-OCFS PQA, item by item. Use evidence from observational notes to score each item. Agree as a team on each score.
Note items that are particularly contentious or that have contradictory evidence; these are likely to be good candidates for improvement planning.
Take breaks as needed!

#### Reflection (10 minutes)
Have each team member share a rose, bud, and thorn:
Rose – Something you realized you were doing well.
Bud – A new idea or something already in the works.
Thorn – Something you would like to see change or improve as a result of the assessment.

#### Closing (15 minutes)
Schedule additional time to complete next steps:
- Additional observations
- Continuation of scoring meeting
- Entering scores in the online scores reporter at www.cypq.org
- Planning with Data and improvement planning meeting

Thank team members for their participation.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Supporting Evidence/Anecdotes</th>
<th>n/o = 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 The activities provide no opportunities for youth to engage with either materials or ideas or to improve a skill through guided practice; activities mostly involve waiting, listening, watching, and repeating.</td>
<td><em>C</em> asked them to draw &quot;something you want in your future.&quot; The children then spent several minutes drawing. The rest of the time, however, was group conversation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 The activities provide limited opportunities for youth to engage with materials or ideas or to improve a skill through guided practice.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 The bulk of the activities involve youth in engaging with (creating, combining, reforming) materials or ideas or improving a skill through guided practice (e.g., debating ideas, learning or improving a dance routine or technique, designing a model rocket, modeling with clay. This does not include just memorizing facts or learning about something).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 The activities focus almost exclusively on abstract learning or concepts, providing limited or no related concrete experiences (activities almost exclusively consist of learning about a topic, i.e. lecture format)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 The activities focus almost exclusively on concrete experiences, providing limited or no opportunities to engage with related abstract learning or concepts (activities almost exclusively consist of youth doing, practicing, or experiencing, without learning about or discussing the how, what, or why).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 The activities balance concrete experiences involving materials, people, and projects (e.g., field trips, experiments, practicing dance routines, creative writing) with abstract learning or concepts (e.g., learning, talking about a topic; lectures; staff providing diagrams, formulas).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Youth are not encouraged to try out skills or attempt higher levels of performance.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Some youth are encouraged to try out skills or attempt higher levels of performance but others are not.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 All youth are encouraged to try out skills or attempt higher levels of performance.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 When youth struggle (with errors, imperfect results or failure), staff, even once, responds with sarcasm, condescension, criticism, punishment, or making fun of the youth.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 When youth struggle (with errors, imperfect results or failure), staff sometimes does not respond with learning supports or encouragement (e.g., numerous youth are raising their hands for help, but the staff does get around to responding to all of them; staff ignores struggling youth).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 When youth struggle (with errors, imperfect results or failure), staff always provides learning supports or encouragement (e.g., youth are helped to problem solve, encouraged to try another approach, told why an error was made, encouraged to keep trying, given guidance or explanation when needed).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample Completed item

The David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality is a division of the Forum for Youth Investment. Visit us online at www.cypq.org.
**STEP 5: Entering Scores**

The NYS-OCFS PQA produces scores at the item and scale level. All scores beyond the item level are created using mathematical means, or averages; scales are averages of items.

After scoring the items in the NYS-OCFS PQA, you can enter the scores into the Excel-based Scores Reporter.

**Tips for Entering Scores**
- It is a great idea to save the hard copy of the forms.
- You can enter as many sets of scores as you would like, but we recommend that you hold a consensus meeting to come to one final set of NYS-OCFS PQA scores for your program assessment.
- Once you enter your data, you can access it and print a report at any time.
- You can complete additional program assessments all year long.

---

**Summary Report**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical and Psychological Safety</td>
<td>3.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional climate</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy and safety</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency procedures and exits</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervised access to program space</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate Structure</td>
<td>3.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff explain activities clearly</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate time for activities</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff appropriately share control</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff give reasons for expectations</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior guidelines developed together</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules and expectations available</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Team Selection**

Who will you include on your team?
- **Administrator:**
- **Program Staff:**
- **Program Staff:**
- **Other:** (board member, parent, youth, community member, funder, staff, etc.)

**Data Collection Preparation**

How many observations will you schedule?
How long will each observation last?
Which programs will you choose?
When will you conduct observations?
Who will observe which staff?

**Team Training**

When will you train your team?
- **Date:**
- **Time:**
- **Location:**

How will you introduce the NYS-OCFS PQA Self Assessment to your staff?

Resources: (agenda and materials, online Basics, technical support)
What specific steps do you need to take in order to ensure that scoring meetings flow effectively, fitting appropriate evidence into the tool, coming to a consensus around scores, and staying focused on the big picture?

**Observation and Note-Taking**

What specific supports will your Agency Managers need in order to ensure that their staff conducts objective observations and take effective notes?

What steps do you need to take in order to ensure that the Administrator Self-Interview happens?

**Improvement Planning**

What specific steps do you need to take in order to ensure that your Agency Managers are ready to train their self-assessment team(s) on using their NYOCFS PQA self assessment data to create meaningful program improvement plans?

**Entering Scores**

What specific steps do you need to take in order to ensure that Agency Managers designate a person to enter their scores and that scores are entered in a timely fashion?

By what date do all of your program(s) need to have their scores entered?

**Team-Based Scoring Meeting**

What specific steps do you need to take in order to ensure that their staff conducts objective observations and take effective notes?

What steps do you need to take in order to ensure that the Administrator Self-Interview happens?

**IMPORTANT DATES:**

*Scores Due:*

*Improvement Plans Due:*

What specific steps do you need to take in order to ensure that Agency Managers designate a person to enter their scores and that scores are entered in a timely fashion?

By what date do all of your program(s) need to have their scores entered?
**Team Selection**

What specific supports will you provide to Agency Managers in order to ensure that teams are made up of frontline staff?

By what date should teams be selected in your program(s)?

**Data Collection Preparation**

What specific supports will your Agency Managers need in order to collect a representative set of data?

What specific offerings within the program(s) you oversee do you consider especially important to observe?

During what time frame should your program(s) be collecting data?

**Team Training**

What specific steps do you need to take in order to ensure that your Agency Managers are ready to train their self-assessment team(s) on the NYS-OCFS PQA tool?

By what date should teams be trained in your program(s)?
What specific supports will your Agency Managers need in order to ensure that their staff conducts objective observations and take effective notes?

What steps do you need to take in order to ensure that the Administrator Self-Interview happens?

What specific steps do you need to take in order to ensure that scoring meetings flow effectively, fitting appropriate evidence into the tool, coming to a consensus around scores, and staying focused on the big picture?

What specific steps do you need to take in order to ensure that Agency Managers designate a person to enter their scores and that scores are entered in a timely fashion?

By what date do all of your program(s) need to have their scores entered?

What specific steps do you need to take in order to ensure that your Agency Managers are ready to train their self-assessment team(s) on using their NYS-OCFS PQA self assessment data to create meaningful program improvement plans?

IMPORTANT DATES: Scores Due: Improvement Plans Due:

Entering Scores

Team-Based Scoring Meeting

Observation and Note-Taking

Improvement Planning

IMPORTANT DATES:
Scores Due: Improvement Plans Due:

Entering Scores

Team-Based Scoring Meeting

Observation and Note-Taking

Improvement Planning

What specific steps do you need to take in order to ensure that scoring meetings flow effectively, fitting appropriate evidence into the tool, coming to a consensus around scores, and staying focused on the big picture?

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What specific steps do you need to take in order to ensure that your Agency Managers are ready to train their self-assessment team(s) on using their NYS-OCFS PQA self assessment data to create meaningful program improvement plans?
part 2 planning for improvement

ASSESS
Quality assessment.

PLAN
Team based improvement planning with data.

IMPROVE
Instructional coaching for staff by site managers. Targeted staff trainings for instructional skill building.
Assessment and evaluation can supply a wealth of valuable data about the quality of a youth program. But assessment just provides the data—a list of numbers and words. In an efficient quality improvement system, participants must learn from the data and use it effectively to improve their programs.

**Improvement plans**
Once the scores have been entered online, the program assessment team can use the Weikart Center's online Scores Reporter to create program quality reports. You can locate the Scores Reporter at www.cypq.org. With the online Scores Reporter, you can print an automatic report, where it’s easy to highlight areas of strengths and areas in which you may wish to target improvement efforts.

These score reports can be used for a variety of purposes, including celebrating strengths and targeting program improvement efforts. Many program assessment teams enroll in the Weikart Center’s Planning with Data Workshop and subsequently create a formal program improvement document that defines performance objectives in terms of the PQA. We find that organizations that produce such a document are more successful in building and sustaining a quality-focused culture and continuous improvement orientation. We recommend setting no more than three goals at the scale level. Scale level goals are usually just about the right amount to be successful.

Goals can respond to scores in a number of ways:
- Focus on increasing scores for low-scoring scales or items.
- Work on structural/organizational improvements to increase scores.
- Set up a mechanism for individuals to be supported in improving items.
- Set focused targets for improvement.

“If you look at people after coronary-artery bypass grafting two years later, 90% of them have not changed their lifestyle [when a lifestyle change could likely reduce pain or need to repeat the surgery]…even though they know they have a very bad disease and they know they should change their lifestyle, for whatever reason, they can’t.”

-Dr. Edward Miller, dean of medical school and CEO of hospital at Johns Hopkins University


**Planning With Data Online Course**
Planning with Data is about examining data to make meaningful improvement plans. This training prepares participants to develop effective program improvement plans and to take this planning process back to their program settings.
change: actionable truths

Very few organizational change attempts succeed. There are reasons for this. Change can feel uncomfortable, like wearing a new pair of shoes you haven’t broken in yet. Change always involves a move from the known to the unknown, so there can be fear involved—you’re stepping into a new room and you never quite know what you’ll find in there! Change in an organization can create havoc, as everyone scrambles around trying to learn or resist new patterns.

Changes involving ways of interacting with youth can be particularly tricky. First of all, many people have strong notions of what adults should or should not do with youth—youth work taps into our beliefs about parenting and about society. Also, there’s the peculiar truth that unlearning is much more difficult than learning. If you’ve been working with young people in a certain way for a long time, it’s hard to let go of the old ways.

There is no need to despair. Change does happen. In fact, change happens every day. People make constructive life changes and stick to them. Organizations change in dramatic and positive ways all the time. And once you get going, there is momentum—initial changes in behavior can produce visible outcomes which can provide a psychological boost to try bigger and more sustained changes. Best of all, successful change can feel good!

Part of the reason change attempts often fail is that there are many widely held misconceptions about change, but research tells us a lot about what works. Consider the following list of sometimes counter-intuitive but actionable truths.

- **Radical, sweeping changes work better than small, gradual changes.** If you make little changes it’s easy to slip back into the old way of doing things. If you make major changes, commitment is required, and it’s harder to regress.

- **Change is personal.** For any organizational change to happen, individuals must buy in. If individual reactions to change are not addressed, a change initiative can backfire.

- **Behavior is key.** Personal change involves three things—thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Many change attempts address thoughts and feelings but never impact behavior (e.g. a pep rally on vision). Without behavior change, there is no change.

- **The point of service is the bottom line.** In youth programs, change initiatives are often aimed at administrative levels. Although it’s critical for managers to be involved in any change project, the point-of-service—the place where kids & staff & resources come together—is where the change initiative lives or dies because this is where real results are seen.

“According to conventional wisdom, change works like this: You start by getting people to buy into a new corporate vision, thereby changing their attitudes. They will then automatically change their behavior, which will result in improved corporate performance. After seeing this improvement, they will confirm their commitment to the corporate change program, and the success spiral will continue...In most companies, the real context for change is exactly the opposite. Top management should start by requiring a change of behavior, and when that yields improved performance, the excitement and belief will follow.”

The stages of change are:

- **Precontemplation**: The idea of change isn't even on my radar.
- **Contemplation**: Maybe I'll change sometime in the future.
- **Preparation**: I'm going to change very soon!
- **Action**: Here it is! I'm doing it!
- **Maintenance**: Change is working. Gotta keep it going.
- **Termination**: Old ways all gone.
What is the job of a youth program director or manager?

Typically, the answer to this question is something like “resource coordinator” or “I deal with the administrative stuff so the frontline staff can be with the kids.” This means managers spend their time working on the very critical tasks of keeping the place running, but basically leave the youth work to the frontline staff. To really engage with program quality improvement, however, this definition must be expanded or even reframed.

To be successful in a quality improvement initiative, it is critical that managers see themselves as staff developers. It is the job of managers to guide their staff to continually improve their frontline practice. The parallels to youth development here should not be missed. Just as the strongest youth workers are youth-centered and guide youth to learn and be successful, strong managers guide and support their staff to be successful.

With such a framing, staff meetings (and stakeholder processes) become less about deciding “what to do” and more about helping staff figure out how to be successful within the framework of the youth program. It is critical for staff members to hear managers set high expectations (e.g. “we are going to provide more opportunities for youth to plan and set goals” and then to ask staff what they need to make it happen.

Considerable research has been conducted in the medical field about how people change behaviors. In 1975 a psychologist, Dr. Prochaska, compared 18 major theories of behavior change and developed what he called a transtheoretical model. This led to a paper in 1982 which presented the following stages of change (steps on the previous page), which have been studied extensively in the last few decades. Although developed in the health field, these stages of behavior change apply to individuals engaged in organizational change initiatives.

Stage 1: Pre-contemplation
You don’t see any reason to change. You may feel annoyed by suggestions of change.
   * I have a great relationship with kids.
   * This is the way adults treated me and it works just fine.
   * It’s the kids, the permissive schools, and bad parenting that’s the problem.

Stage 2: Contemplation
You open up to the possibility of change. You consider making a change within the next six months.
   * These techniques seem like a good idea—maybe I’ll try them someday.
   * I know we need to better meet our youths’ needs, and we will eventually.

Stage 3: Preparation
You’re getting ready to change very soon (within the next 30 days). You have taken some initial planning and behavior steps toward this change. In health research, 85% of people do not get past this stage.
   * These are the details we need to consider as we change things.
   * We are committed to making these changes within the next month.
   * Well, here we go!

Stage 4: Action
This is where the change actually occurs. This stage can involve emotions and pining for the ways things were. It’s important to change quickly so that the positive benefits can be seen and felt.
   * I never thought we would get this far, but the young people have adapted so easily to the new style.
   * We need to find more of these materials to take advantage of the energy the kids have around putting an event together.
   * Is ____ a good choice to offer in this activity?

Stage 5: Maintenance
There is now a solid new way in place, but the old ways still live in people’s brains and it’s easy to slip into old ways. It’s important to have strong systems in place to keep the change going.
   * How will we bring new youth up to the leadership level of our current youth?”
   * We should take a look at program quality regularly, now that these changes

The central point here is this: a program director or manager engaging in a quality improvement sequence is asking their staff to undertake a change process. By paying attention to these steps, the likelihood that a change process will be successful is increased.
Ideally, the people responsible for carrying out a goal should be the ones setting it, and it’s important to have your staff team involved in the planning process. For example, if a goal is to improve opportunities for youth to set goals and make plans (Support for Efficacy and Mattering), the success of meeting that goal will depend on the frontline staff, who work directly with youth. If these staff members are involved in the decision to set this goal, the likelihood of meeting the goal is increased. If, on the other hand, your goal is to have more regular staff meetings, it may be up to an administrator to arrange these meetings.

Remember, setting and meeting goals requires skill, experience, and patience. The first time you attempt the improvement cycle you may not meet every goal but you’ll learn a lot about the kinds of goals that work best for your program. So think of this as an annual learning process—the second and third times you sit down to set goals, you’ll be a pro!

The planning form provides the space to plan a goal in depth. This allows a team to think through the steps for each goal and to give adequate thought to goals that may seem appropriate on the surface. Below, each of the fields on the planning form are explained.

**Program Goal** *(What does success look like?)*
Goals should be specific, measurable, and do-able. Typically goals are at the item or scale level. Why? Scales and items are measureable and linked to specific behaviors.

The following samples demonstrate more effective and less effective goals.

**More Effective Goals**

| 1. To create more opportunities for youth to set goals and make plans. |
| 2. To develop a more unified and effective conflict resolution policy, and have staff reliably follow it. |
| 3. To help the older kids get a youth advisory board up and running. |
| 4. To have more opportunities for skill-building for youth. |
| 5. To have more staff engaged in the decision-making of the organization. |

**Less Effective Goals**

| To improve program quality. |
| To make activities more engaging. |
| To be more youth-centered. |
| To be more supportive. |

**Measurement** *(How will you measure progress?)*
Your goal should tie to one or more NYS-OCFS PQA items or scales. Although you don’t want to list so many items that a goal becomes overwhelming, two or even three items in one goal is acceptable. The practices defined in the NYS-OCFS PQA are often connected, so it is quite reasonable to attempt to raise scores in a few areas at once.

It is important to be clear on your metrics for success. Percentages of staff scoring above a certain score in a later team- or outside-assessment is a reasonable way to do this, as is an overall aggregate score. Other goals may be measured in ways which do not require another assessment. Here are a few ways to measure the goals listed as “more effective” below:

- scores from peer observations using the NYS-OCFS PQA documentation of new policy
- number of meetings held and attendance rates

**Progress Check** *(When will you check in to be sure you’re on track to meet your goal, or to make adjustments to your plan?)*
This should be the date when you believe your current efforts at carrying out a goal will show signs of improvement. It’s not necessarily the end of the goal (since even once goals are met they may require ongoing attention) but it could be. At this time, you could assess your progress to date and revise your goal and action steps if you have gotten off track.
Each step to reaching the goal has five parts:

**Action Steps** *(What needs to happen?)*
The steps themselves should be short, simple if possible, and tangible. Breaking a larger goal into short steps is a way to make it achievable.

**Outcome** *(When this step is completed, what will be done?)* This summarizes the purpose for completing the action step. What will you have in hand or be able to see once the step is completed?

**Leader** *(Who will be responsible?)*
On this line list the name of the staff who is most responsible for carrying out a goal. Write a single staff name if possible. Although several staff will be involved in carrying out any goal, goals tend to be more successful when one staff is clearly charged with the responsibility to make sure it happens. If everyone is responsible, often no one ends up taking responsibility.

**Resources** *(What is needed for success?)*
How you complete the ‘desired support’ section depends on the network system in which you are working. In many systems, a network intermediary—an organization or people dedicated to supporting the improvement process—exists. If this is the case and if there are particular things you think your network intermediary can help with, you can use this space in the planning form to request services.

**Timeline** *(When will this step be completed?)*
Having expected dates for completion of each step can help you to keep on track to reach the end goal. Be realistic with your time estimates, and consider which dates to avoid.

Progress should be monitored for every improvement plan. Otherwise you run the risk of the plan sitting on a shelf collecting dust—an empty exercise rather than a stimulus for action. This section is for monitoring the improvement plan as a whole. When it is time to follow up on your goal, you might consider employing one or more of the following:

**Assessment by an External Monitor** – The advantage to this method is that it’s objective. The downside is that external assessment rarely occurs more often than yearly, and your goals may be short-term.

**Program assessment** – You might do a modified program assessment, i.e. one in which you assess only the items targeted for improvement.

**Observation-Reflection** – Observation-reflection is a special method for observing an individual staff one-on-one, and then having a conversation with that staff about their practice. Observation-reflection can be conducted by supervisors, by peer coaches, or by outside consultants. The Weikart Center offers in-depth training in how to do observation-reflection—it’s included in the Quality Coaching workshop. Visit www.cypq.org for more information.

**Staff meeting check-in** – In a staff meeting you can discuss whether or not you’re meeting a goal. You can also use staff meeting time to talk in-depth about how a goal is being met, or if it’s not being met you can talk about how to meet it. The value of discussing as a staff should not be underestimated.

“*You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it.*”

improvement plan analysis

On the next few pages you will find two examples of typical improvement plans from sites that have gone through the Planning with Data process. Review the plan, then assess its effectiveness by answering the questions that follow.

1. What, if any, basic elements of the goal are missing?

_____________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________

2. How well is the goal aligned with the stated PQA item or scale?

_____________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________

3. How could you improve the wording of the goal?

_____________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________

4. Do you think the goal meets the criteria of being specific? Why or why not?

_____________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________

5. Do you think the goal meets the criteria of being measurable? Why or why not?

_____________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________

6. Do you think the goal meets the criteria of being doable? Why or why not?

_____________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________
7. Take a close look at the steps that are outlined. Are actionable, realistic steps outlined in the plan? How could the steps be improved?

_____________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________

8. Take a close look at how the site plans to evaluate progress. Do you think this measure would be an effective method for measuring progress? Why or why not?

_____________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________

9. Take a close look at the desired supports. How helpful do you think these supports will be for this specific goal? What other types of supports might be realistic and useful for this goal?

_____________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________

10. In order to support this site in improving their goal, what are some open-ended guiding questions you could ask the staff involved?

_____________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROGRAM GOAL:</th>
<th>MEASUREMENT:</th>
<th>PROGRESS CHECKS:</th>
<th>ACTION STEPS:</th>
<th>TIMELINE:</th>
<th>RESOURCES:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(What does success look like?)</td>
<td>(How will you measure progress?)</td>
<td>(When will you check in to be sure you’re on track to meet your goal, or to make adjustments to your plan?)</td>
<td>(What needs to happen?)</td>
<td>(When this step is completed, what will be done?)</td>
<td>(What is needed for success?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To create more opportunities for youth to set goals and make plans.</td>
<td>PQA Scale or item: Support for Efficacy and Mattering, Row 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>PQA copies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Staff Training: Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Consistency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Josie leads activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Staff reviews plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Stephen enforces consistency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Josie leads activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Maria makes purchases</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**OUTCOME:**
Staff are familiar with the items.

**ACTION STEPS:**
- Have a meeting in which frontline staff members review the three items for this scale.
- Make plans to involve youth in every activity in long-term planning.
- Establish “planning time” as part of daily choice time.
- At the staff meeting brainstorm ways for staff to help young people share their plans.
- Obtain some resource materials about youth planning.

**TIMELINE:**
- Mar 16
- Apr 13
- Apr 3
- Mar 12
- Apr 13

**RESOURCES:**
- PQA copies
- Staff Training: Planning
- Consistency
- Josie leads activity
- Maria makes purchases
- $
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROGRAM GOAL:</th>
<th>Staff support youth in building new skills.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(What does success look like?)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEASUREMENT:</th>
<th>□ PQA Scale or Item: Opportunities for Skill Building</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(How will you measure progress?)</td>
<td>Other:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Survey of ____________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Feedback from ___________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROGRESS CHECKS:</th>
<th>Every week at staff meetings and every day after programming.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(When will you check in to be sure you’re on track to meet your goal, or to make adjustments to your plan?)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTION STEPS:</th>
<th>OUTCOME:</th>
<th>LEADER:</th>
<th>RESOURCES:</th>
<th>TIMELINE:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(What needs to happen?)</td>
<td>(When this step is completed, what will be done?)</td>
<td>(Who will be responsible?)</td>
<td>(What is needed for success?)</td>
<td>(When will this step be completed?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Each staff member will contribute to an &quot;encouraging wall&quot; where staff and students are recognized each time they encourage others to try new skills.</td>
<td>Verbal encouragement and recognition at snack/end of day.</td>
<td>From Program Coordinators, school day staff</td>
<td>time</td>
<td>Every week</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
New York State Office of Child and Family Services
Program Quality Assessment Short Form
Self Assessment Report

Youth Program
Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde
October 15 through October 31

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical and Psychological Safety</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional climate</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy and safety</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency procedures and exits</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervised access to program space</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate Structure</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff explain activities clearly</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate time for activities</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff appropriately share control</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff gives reasons for expectations</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior guidelines developed together</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules and expectations available</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive Relationships</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff is warm and respectful</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff actively involved with youth</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for youth to talk</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff orientation on youth development</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff training provided regularly</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities to Belong</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutual respect</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities to get to know each other</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth work cooperatively together</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural diversity</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive Social Norms</strong></td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth do not exhibit exclusion</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly identify with the program</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicly acknowledge achievements</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit conflict resolution policy</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support for Efficacy and Mattering</strong></td>
<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tangible products or performances</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities to lead a group</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plans for projects and activities</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open-ended choices</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intentional process of reflecting</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share administrative responsibilities</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opportunities for Skill Building</strong></td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth engage with materials or ideas</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance concrete and abstract</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraged to try or improve skills</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth supported through struggle</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Integration of Families, Schools, Communities</strong></td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family welcomed as part of program</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate with families</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication is strength-based</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate with schools</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate with other organizations</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Links to the community</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Continuous Improvement</strong></td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit continuous improvement policy</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall</strong></td>
<td>3.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On the previous page is a typical report for a site that just conducted assessment using the NYS-OCFS PQA. Take a few minutes to look at the report, then answer the questions below.

1. What do you think is the story of this data? What do the numbers tell you?

2. What might be missing from the data? (Although you are not familiar with this sample program, what do you think staff might identify as being missing from a report like this one?)

3. Where are the gaps between the high quality standards of the NYS-OCFS PQA and what the data says the program is providing?
planning practice

Now that you have looked at a site’s report and thought about the story behind that data, it’s time to think about improvement. Use the following form to develop a sample improvement plan around one goal. Since you are not familiar with this site or its programming, try to consider how it might compare to a program that you do know, and use your familiarity with that program’s resources to inform how you structure your plan.

Begin by choosing a scale or an item within a scale that has an average score below a 4.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROGRAM GOAL:</th>
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<tbody>
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- □ PQA Scale or Item: _______
- □ Other:
  - □ Survey of ____________
  - □ Feedback from ____________

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<tr>
<td><em>(What needs to happen?)</em></td>
<td><em>(When this step is completed, what will be done?)</em></td>
<td><em>(Who will be responsible?)</em></td>
<td><em>(What is needed for success?)</em></td>
<td><em>(When will this step be completed?)</em></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
taking it all back

After completing this training, you should be ready to lead your program(s) through the quality improvement process! Using a format similar to the standard quality improvement plans, consider your program(s) needs, and develop an overarching improvement plan to help guide you in your role.
| PROGRAM GOAL:  
(What does success look like?) | TO SUCCESSFULLY SUPPORT AGENCY MANAGERS IN INITIATING AND SUSTAINING A QUALITY ACCOUNTABILITY AND IMPROVEMENT SYSTEM IN THEIR PROGRAMS BASED ON THE NYS-OCFS PQA TOOL. |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| MEASUREMENT:  
(How will you measure progress?) | ☐ PQA Scale or Item: _______  
☐ Other:  
☐ Survey of ____________  
☐ Feedback from ____________ |
| PROGRESS CHECKS:  
(When will you check in to be sure you’re on track to meet your goal, or to make adjustments to your plan?) | |
| ACTION STEPS:  
(What needs to happen?) | OUTCOME:  
(When this step is completed, what will be done?)  
LEADER:  
(Who will be responsible?)  
RESOURCES:  
(What is needed for success?)  
TIMELINE:  
(When will this step be completed?) |
| PROGRAM GOAL: (What does success look like?) | MEASUREMENT: (How will you measure progress?) | PROGRESS CHECKS: (When will you check in to be sure you're on track to meet your goal, or to make adjustments to your plan?) | ACTION STEPS: (What needs to happen?) | OUTCOME: (When this step is completed, what will be done?) | RESOURCES: (What is needed for success?) | LEADER: (Who will be responsible?) | TIMELINE: (When will this step be completed?) | OTHER: □ Survey of ___________ □ Feedback from ___________ □ PQA Scale or Item: _______ |
Implementing a program improvement plan can be considered the most important step. While it is crucial to assess and plan for improvement, unless change actually happens, the process was in vain. There are a number of possible supports that can help you as you seek to implement your improvement plan.

**Youth Work Methods**
One method of improving quality is to offer in-service training focused on that area. This source of consultation and support will be a great asset for turning improvement plans into improved experiences for youth. Our Youth Work Methods Training of Trainers (TOT) course equips participants to offer workshops that focus on specific target areas, each aligned to the particular Youth PQA scales. A complete description of the Methods workshops and Training of Trainers is listed below.

**Youth Work Methods workshops**
These 2- to 3-hour workshops are aligned with the items of the Youth PQA found in the pyramid. After a program participates in year 1 of the YPQI, a training summit may be put together with the half-day workshops as building blocks. These workshops may take place for a network or a program.

**Introduction to Youth Development**
This course describes the overall Methods series, rooted in positive youth development, education, and psychological theory and research.

**Active Learning**
Meaningful content and adult support are key ingredients for creating an interesting and productive learning environment.

**Ask-Listen-Encourage**
Build supportive, youth-centered relationships by asking effective questions and listening actively to youth. Empower and support youth to learn through the use of specific, non-evaluative comments and questions.

**Building Community**
A strong, welcoming community can encourage positive peer relationships, personal growth, and create a space for learning.

**Cooperative Learning**
Using small groups to meet the social and intellectual needs of youth can result in productive and collaborative experiences.

**Homework Help**
Implement research-based strategies for making homework time productive, organized around providing positive adult support, effective routines, and communication with teachers.

**Planning and Reflection**
The planning and reflection process, central to the Weikart Center approach for every age, can turn a fun activity into a powerful learning experience!

**Reframing Conflict**
In this approach, adults support youth in addressing their conflicts, and youth have a voice in determining both the cause and the solution to the conflict.

**Structure and Clear Limits**
Appropriate structure and clear limits can provide stability, predictability, and organization for youth—a safe and productive space for learning!

**Youth Voice**
Providing young people with authentic, meaningful choices and a voice in the program are hallmarks of truly engaging environments.

**Youth Work Methods Training of Trainers**
Our most intensive training prepares participants to lead the item-aligned workshops described in the training summit. The Methods TOT begins with 4 weeks of online coursework comparable to a college-level course. Participants should expect to spend 3-4 hours per week considering youth work and adult learning concepts and completing assignments. Participants then attend a 3-day residential intensive workshop. The TOT culminates in a final online week.

Participants receive a thick guidebook with training agendas for all of the item-aligned workshops. Due to the rigor of the course, participants are required to go through an application process. Training experience is highly recommended.
Quality Coaching Training
A Quality Coach is a youth program professional who helps someone improve their program or the way they work with youth. The Quality Coaching workshop focuses on preparing participants to lead one-on-one consultations with staff about instruction. Our coaching method is called Observation-Reflection and is based on three main concepts: respect, observe, and support. First, you must start with a foundation of respect to maximize productivity in the consultant/manager-staff relationship. Then you take time to observe staff at the point-of-service, and finally you support staff to develop professionally.

Youth Work Management Training of Trainers
The Youth Work Management TOT prepares external consultants to support program staff in implementing the assess-plan-improve sequence. Training prerequisites include completion of PQA Basics, PQA External Assessor, and Planning with Data workshops. Completion of the Quality Coaching workshop is recommended but not required.

The following are typical tasks that someone who has complete the Training of Consultants may be asked to do:

1. Support assessment:
   - Help Managers plan YPQI sequence
   - Coach YPQI team in data collection
   - Support other data collection (youth survey, attendance data, etc.)
   - Support participants of PQA Basics online

2. Support improvement planning:
   - Coach YPQI Team through improvement planning process
   - Deliver Planning With Data workshop
   - Deliver Planning With Data short versions

3. Support improvement:
   - Conduct observation-reflection
   - Support Managers to do observation-reflection
   - Help Managers set priorities
   - Help Managers gauge progress
   - Help with resource management

Outside Resources
There are also likely a plethora of other trainings and strategies that you can seek to help you implement your improvement plan, and we encourage you to seek out other resources that can support you through this process. Once in the improve phase, you now have the opportunity to take action to enact continuous improvement in all possible ways at your program.
plan-do-review with staff

Making organizational improvement plans is important, but it's also important to make sure the improvement gets down to the point of service. When program staff are engaged in a plan-do-review sequence, they develop professionally, and improve the supports and opportunities for youth.

Plan
It's important that program staff take time to plan and are supported in doing so. If staff are currently not spending ample time planning their activities, a substantial gain in program quality can occur by systematizing staff planning. Activity planning forms like the one on the next page can help. Many effective managers require their program staff to submit activity plans, and make the time to often review these plans and provide feedback.

A good way to build an improvement system is to make NYS-OCFS PQA improvement part of your staff performance review process. Program staff set goals to improve their practice based on NYS-OCFS PQA items or scales.

Do
Program staff carry out their plans and learn what works and what doesn’t. This can be particularly powerful if combined with a peer observation process.

Review
It's important for program staff to look back on their plans and learn from them. This can be part of a formal performance review process, and it can also be done continuously by staff.

Recently a program director of a multi-site 21st Century Learning Center, participating in a state-wide Youth PQA improvement initiative had great success helping his staff plan, do, and review. He set up a series of meetings to help his staff understand the Youth PQA. Each meeting had time dedicated to one item. Staff read the item thoroughly, and spent time brainstorming and planning for how they might meet the standard in their program. Soon, he also used meeting time to have staff review how they were doing with items. Through this process, staff were able to continually improve by looking at one thing at a time.
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<tr>
<th>Level 5 descriptor of item of focus:</th>
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<tr>
<th>Brief description of activity:</th>
<th>Materials:</th>
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<tr>
<th>Steps to take and strategies to try (based on item above):</th>
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Part 3

NYS-OCFS PQA Reference Guide

ASSESS
Quality assessment.

PLAN
Team based improvement planning with data.

IMPROVE
Instructional coaching for staff by site managers. Targeted staff trainings for instructional skill building.
### nys-ocfs pqa summary

#### Physical and Psychological Safety
- Emotional climate
- Healthy and safety
- Emergency procedures and exits
- Supervised access to program space

#### Positive Social Norms
- Youth do not exhibit exclusion
- Strongly identify with the program
- Publicly acknowledge achievements
- Explicit conflict resolution policy

#### Appropriate Structure
- Staff explains activities clearly
- Appropriate time for activities
- Staff appropriately shares control
- Staff gives reasons for expectations
- Behavior guidelines developed together
- Rules and expectations available

#### Support for Efficacy and Mattering
- Tangible products or performances
- Opportunities to lead a group
- Plans for projects and activities
- Open-ended choices
- Intentional process of reflecting
- Share administrative responsibilities

#### Supportive Relationships
- Staff is warm and respectful
- Staff actively involved with youth
- Opportunities for youth to talk
- Staff orientation on youth development
- Staff training provided regularly

#### Opportunities for Skill Building
- Youth engage with materials or ideas
- Balance concrete and abstract
- Encouraged to try or improve skills
- Youth supported through struggle

#### Integration of Families, Schools, Communities
- Family welcomed as part of program
- Communicate with families
- Communication is strength-based
- Communicate with schools
- Communicate with other organizations
- Links to the community

#### Opportunities to Belong
- Mutual Respect
- Opportunities to get to know each other
- Youth work cooperatively together
- Cultural diversity

#### Continuous Improvement
- Explicit continuous improvement policy
The youth advisory council, comprising 6 eighth graders and 4 seventh graders, at the after-school program met to plan the annual party for the younger youth participants. The participants met in the homework help room at the community center that had 6 large round tables with 12 chairs at each table. There was lots of room to move around between the tables. A (fully charged) fire extinguisher hung next to an emergency exit plan on the wall by the door. Temperature appeared comfortable — youth wore t-shirts and pants, and no one complained.

All of the students and the facilitator, Madison, sat at one of the tables. Madison asked the youth to brainstorm ideas for how they would like to operate this year’s event. The youth advisory council chair, Aria, said, “Let’s start by brainstorming all of the activities that we want to have for the kids.” The other members randomly called out activities such as coloring, a dance contest, games, and bobbing for apples as Aria wrote down the ideas. A seventh grader, Jonathan, stopped the group brainstorm to say, “Ewww, bobbing for apples? That is not sanitary.” Madison asked the group, “What are everyone else’s thoughts on the bobbing for apples activity?” One by one each member expressed his or her feelings until the group members came to the consensus that they would not have bobbing for apples as an activity. Aria drew a line through it.

Once all of the youth agreed upon all of the activities, they formed a committee for each activity and choose the one that they wanted to serve on. Each committee had a minimum of two members.

Each activity was written on a separate sheet of butcher paper and placed around the room on the walls. In random pairs, the students rotated around to each of the stations to write the supplies that were needed, the tasks that needed to be done, and some ideas on how to facilitate the activity. Once everyone contributed their ideas to each sheet of paper, the participants walked around the room clockwise rotating from station to station to read and see what it would take to successfully implement each activity.

Madison said, “Okay, guys, now get back into committee groups and on a fresh piece of butcher paper, devise a plan for your activity to present to the rest of the group. There are markers, pastels, and crayons on the table so feel free to make your presentation as creative as you would like.”

The activity committees then got the butcher paper that corresponded to their activity, considered all of the suggestions, and came up with presentations for the rest of the group on how they would carry out the activity at the party. As Jonathan and his partner Mari were planning their presentation, he suggested, “Once we have our plan, why don’t we actually take the group through one of our games?” Mari said, “Yeah, that would be fun. Just reading to them from a piece of paper is so boring.”

After all of the groups were done presenting, with 20 minutes left before the meeting was scheduled to end, everyone had a seat around the table and Madison said, “Let’s do the Rose and Thorn Activity. In this activity each of us will go around and share a rose, something that we are looking forward to in this process, and a thorn, something that we feel might be a challenge during this process.” Everyone, including Madison, went around the circle and shared his or her rose and thorn. Afterward, Madison asked, “Does anyone have any ideas of any strategies that we could use to reduce some of the challenges or fears that we have about this process?”
How familiar are you with assessment talk? Understanding the following terms will help you learn to use the NYS-OCFS PQA:

- Mean or average
- Anecdotal evidence
- Reliability and validity
- Scale and item

A mathematical mean or average is obtained by adding up a series of numbers and dividing by the amount of numbers. For example, to calculate the average of 3, 5, 1, and 3, first add them up for a sum of 12. Next, since there are four numbers, divide 12 by 4 for a result of 3. This calculation is used in numerous ways throughout the NYS-OCFS PQA.

A completed NYS-OCFS PQA contains numeric scores, but every score must be supported by narrative anecdotal evidence. An anecdote is a little story.

**Reliability** is about how consistently different people give a single observation the same scores. **Validity** is about measuring what you think you’re measuring. In other words, the Youth PQA is reliable because assessors tend to rate the same offerings similarly; it is valid because when asked, youth reports of quality align with assessors’ reports. While the Youth PQA has undergone an extensive study to establish both reliability and validity, the NYS-OCFS PQA has not yet been subjected to evaluation for validation. For this reason, this tool is best used through an assessment process and with a low stakes accountability policy.

**Scale** refers to a page of the NYS-OCFS PQA. For example, Opportunities to Belong and Supportive Relationships are scales. There are 9 scales in the NYS-OCFS PQA.

An item (sometimes called an item row) is a measurable standard of best practice. A scale is made up of 1 to 6 items — horizontal paths across the page. The NYS-OCFS PQA describes low (1), medium (3), and high (5) scores for every row.

It's all about the items. Items contain the actual assessment of behaviors; however, scales and domains provide useful ways for thinking about quality.
physical and psychological safety

1. The emotional climate of the session is predominantly positive (e.g., mutually respectful, relaxed, supportive; characterized by teamwork, camaraderie, inclusiveness, and an absence of negative behaviors). Any playful negative behaviors (not considered offensive by parties involved) are mediated (countered, curtailed, defused) by staff or youth.

2. The program space is free of health and safety hazards.

3. Written emergency procedures and exits are posted in plain view.

4. Access to indoor and outdoor program space is supervised during program hours.

Item 1: Emotional climate

Assesses the climate — the general feel of the social and emotional environment. Do the youth and staff respect each other? Do people get along? Are there lots of conflicts? Do youth include each other in activities? There is no magic pill for establishing a positive climate, and, indeed, it is not completely in the control of the youth worker. But it begins with the staff setting a positive tone, modeling positive climate, and encouraging youth to do the same.

Tips for Scoring

• Many youth workers struggle with this item because they feel that an element of playful negativity is part of the culture of the program, or of the youth they work with. It is important to keep in mind, however, that the youth worker’s assessment that the negative behavior is playful and part of group bonding may not be shared by all youth, and that youth may not feel comfortable speaking up when they feel emotionally unsafe.

• Look for examples of youth interacting in positives ways:
  • Youth helps another youth with a task.
  • Youth complement each other, smile at each other, etc.
• Look for a lack of evidence of negative behavior or negative behavior that staff mediates.
  • One playfully calls another stupid. Staff responds, “Let’s not have putdowns.” — Score a 5.
  • During a presentation of artwork, one youth yells out, “that’s ugly” but at other points during the presentation, youth give each other encouragement “I like that” and “that’s cool.” — Score a 3.
  • Youth in a small group repeatedly insult each other, saying “you’re stupid,” “you’re an idiot,” staff watches but does not intervene. — Score a 1.
### Scenario 1: Staff and youth interactions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The emotional climate is overall positive. However, at one point one youth says to another, “You are so stupid”. The two youth traded insults for several minutes, but the staff does not intervene. The youth smiled as they talked and did not seem angry at each other.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>The level 5 descriptor requires that “any playful negative behaviors are mediated by staff or youth.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth call each other names but it is in a positive, “community-building” sort of way. For example, several youth seem to have insulting nicknames that don’t seem to be intended maliciously.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>In most cases this should score a 1. Even though insults can be intended and even received playfully, you never know when an insult will be taken at face value and, as a result, a youth will feel unsafe. Children and youth are often more sensitive than they might appear to playful insults — even if they act like they don’t mind. However, if a session is overwhelmingly positive with a few ignored playful insults, an assessor may score this item a 3 at his or her discretion.</td>
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### Item 2: Health and safety

This item assesses whether the program space is free from hazards. This item generally scores high unless there is something clearly out of place; however, safety hazards are not always obvious. Although these items appear to be simple and straightforward, make sure you are very careful about assessing safety hazards.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is a hot coffee pot within children’s reach.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>For middle-school age youth, unless the coffee pot would be considered dangerous for adults (e.g., precariously balanced on a ledge), it should not be counted as a hazard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are objects on the floor that appear to be potential tripping hazards such as magazines, papers, sports equipment, etc.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>In most situations this would qualify as “program materials in disarray.”</td>
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### Item 3: Emergency procedures and exits

This item assesses whether a physical environment for youth has posted emergency procedures and emergency exits.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There are directions on an emergency exit (e.g., “Warning: Door opening triggers alarm”) but nothing else posted related to emergencies.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>This does not constitute emergency procedures, unless staff locates procedures during follow-up questions in which case it should score a 3.</td>
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<tr>
<td>There are no emergency procedures in the room in which you are observing, but there are fire escape routes posted in the hallway just outside the door.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>If something is posted right outside the door to the program space, it is probably safe to assume the staff can locate it.</td>
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</table>
Item 4: Supervised access to program space

This assesses the security of access points to the indoor and outdoor program space. If those points of access are not actively supervised but locked, these items should score a 5.

Tips for Scoring
- This item assesses the ability of unfriendly guests to get to the program space. Therefore, even if the program room is not monitored, but the building entrance is, you can assess that entrance as representative of security for the program space.

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<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The program space is small enough that someone can always see the door</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>The requirement for a score of a 5 is that all entrances are supervised. If no one can come in or out unobserved by program staff, it counts as supervising the entrance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(and there is no unlocked hidden entrance). The door is kept unlocked,</td>
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<td>but everyone looks up whenever anyone comes in.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The front door, which leads to a lobby, is kept unlocked. There is</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>usually a person sitting at the front desk, checking people in, but</td>
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<tr>
<td>not always.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The front door is continuously supervised; however, a back door is</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>left unlocked.</td>
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</table>
appropriate structure

1. Staff explains all activities clearly (e.g., youth appear to understand directions; sequence of events and purpose are clear.
2. There is an appropriate amount of time for all of the activities (e.g., youth do not appear rushed; most youth who are generally on task finish activities; most youth do not finish significantly early with nothing planned to do).
3. Staff share control of most activities with youth, providing guidance and facilitation while retaining overall responsibility (e.g., staff uses youth leaders, semi-autonomous small groups, or individually guided activities).
4. Staff provides an explanation or reason for every behavioral expectation, guideline or direction given to youth.
5. Almost all guidelines for behavior (e.g., attire and standards of respect and cultural awareness) are developed by youth and staff together.
6. Rules and behavioral expectations are readily available and the staff reviews them with participants over the course of the program offering (e.g., at the beginning of every session or whenever infractions are likely to occur.

Item 1: Staff explain activities clearly

This assesses the staff’s ability to explain directions in a way that youth understand. It’s important to be clear, and it’s also important to use language that works for youth.

Tips for Scoring
- For this item, look to the youth’s reactions to staff directions. Remember to be realistic, in a group there may be 1 or 2 youth who do not understand the directions even if they are clear.
- Examples of signs that directions are not clear:
  - Several youth saying to each other, “I don’t understand.
  - The majority of youth not following the directions.
  - Youth asking clarifying questions that the staff does not answer or becomes frustrated by.

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<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
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<th>Notes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff directions seemed clear to me, but youth were confused and had to ask several questions.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Score based on your perception of whether the youth understand the directions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff member explains directions and then youth ask some clarifying questions. After staff answers these questions, the youth proceed to follow the directions.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>It is normal for youth to ask clarifying questions. Only lower the score if directions are unclear and youth proceed without getting clarification.</td>
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Item 2: Appropriate time for activities

This is really an “art of youth work” item. All too often, well-intentioned staff members go way too fast for youth, way too slow or a combination of both. Staff might spend 20 minutes explaining an over-simplification concept to youth, then rush through an activity the youth are particularly engaged in. Staff may provide an hour-long activity that would have been more appropriate for 20 minutes.

It should be stressed that consistently facilitating well-paced activities is extremely difficult. Experience helps. So does regularly asking the youth questions about the activities, what they think of the pacing, etc. On the
plus side, however, this scale is tied to other scales. Improvements in session flow are likely to result in higher scores in other scales and vice versa.

**Tips for Scoring**

- Pay close attention to the number of activities. Scoring a 1 requires that there be more than one activity.
- This item also requires you to be realistic and take youth’s developmental stages into account. Some level of boredom near the end of a session is normal.
- Examples of pacing that is fast:
  - The majority of youth do not finish their project.
  - Part of the session has to be cut because another part went over.
  - Staff repeatedly tells youth to hurry.
- Examples of pacing that is too slow:
  - The majority of youth finish the project and have nothing to do afterwards.
  - Staff has to fill the last minutes of the session with unplanned free time.
- If the activity is a skill-building activity and some youth, but not all youth, have time to practice the skill, there is not enough time unless the staff announces ahead of time that the youth who did not practice in this session will get to practice the skill at the next session. When teaching skills where new elements build on previously practiced skills, it is important that all youth have a chance to practice each step or element.
- Having larger, more involved projects that are intended extend over multiple sessions is a high quality practice. If there is evidence that the observed activity is intended to carry over into a future session, and the youth are not rushed through today’s portion, score a 5. If the staff announces something to the effect that, “We may not finish today, and that’s alright – we’ll finish next time,” do not score lower. The staff is planning accommodations so that the activity is paced appropriately. If, on the other hand, it appears the activity was intended to be finished in one session and when the students cannot finish on time, the staff says, “Okay, you can finish next time,” score lower.
- Youth do not all work at the same pace. If it appears that staff has planned for this and has created optional activities for youth who finish before other youth, score a 5.
- If there is only one activity and there was too much or too little time for that activity, score a 3. If there were multiple activities and there was an appropriate amount of time for all but one of them, score a 3.
- If there were multiple activities and there was not an appropriate amount of time for two or more of them, score a 1.
- If most of the youth or a large portion of the youth finish an activity and the only youth who do not finish are those goofing off much of the time, still score a 5. The evidence (the bulk of the youth finishing) suggests that there was an appropriate amount of time planned for the activity.

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth are engaged throughout, but they are working on multi-session projects and so do not complete them.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Extended projects are intended to be worked on over more than one session. “Finishing” applies only to activities staff planned to finish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff member says, “We expect to finish this activity today. But if need be, we can continue tomorrow.” Youth are engaged throughout – the activity just takes longer than expected.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>The staff had announced a contingency plan (finishing the next day) and the youth are engaged throughout.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some youth are off-task a considerable amount of time and because of this, they do not complete activities. The youth who spend their time focused on the activity finish it.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>There appeared to be a sufficient amount of time for the activity, although the youth did not use it well and did not complete activities. Score a 5.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Almost all of the youth are off task and goofing around and do not finish the activity. There is only one activity planned.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Since there was only one activity, scoring gives the benefit of the doubt and gives a 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of the youth finish the two activities early. They goof off and talk to each other when they are done.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>There was too much time for the only two activities. Staff did not have another activity planned for the remainder of the time.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Item 3: Staff share control

This is about sharing control with youth. This does not mean a free-for-all, and it does not mean a dictatorship. It means creating a balance of power that requires artful skill from the youth worker. Youth thrive when power is shared in a healthy way. Several examples are given in the item.

Effectively sharing control is one of the most important things to do as a youth worker. It can be what separates the average youth experience from the extraordinary one. It can also be one of the most difficult to do well, especially for an inexperienced youth worker. Sometimes, an attempt to share control can result in a chaotic environment. For example, you may be used to running things yourself, attempt to open up control, and the youth may react in less than productive ways. It’s important to recognize that learning to share control doesn’t happen overnight and to keep trying.

There is always a balance between setting clear limits and structure and sharing control so that youth have a voice. Finding a balance is one of the keys to successful facilitation.

Tips for Scoring

- Giving youth meaningful choices or allowing them to set goals that affect future sessions are ways to allow youth to share control, so note the anecdotes used in scoring IV-P and IV-Q as they will apply to this item also.
- Situations that produce a score of 3 will often be when the staff asks questions, asks for input, or offers choices, but then jumps in quickly with answers or ideas without giving the youth time to think or respond. If youth respond, but the staff rarely uses the input, also score a 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff member shares control but not in any of the ways listed.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Provide the evidence for how the staff shares control.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff lectures on a topic and then asks youth questions to test them on their listening comprehension.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Staff attempt to share control by only sharing it with select youth but end up controlling if themselves by not extending that sharing of control to all of the youth.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Item 4: Staff give reasons for expectations

This is about explanation, and it is often misread. The item says nothing about the expectations that staff set or the guidelines or directions they give. It simply involves looking for the expectations to be explained. This item tires to make sure youth know what is going on and are not being asked to do things “because I said so.” Also, this item is about behavioral guidelines and expectations, not instructions on how to do a project or activity, although giving reasons for those type of instructions is also good practice.

Tips for Scoring

- The key is the word “explanation.” When staff gives expectations, guidelines or directions, you are looking to see if they provide an explanation for why these things are set or given.
- Consider if staff explains why something is the way it is to the youth, or if they just tell youth that they should do something a certain way without giving a reason.
- Staff should explain each guideline at least once. If they refer to the same guideline a second (or more) time, but do not give an explanation when they raise it the second time, it can still score a 5.
- Behavioral guidelines include rules quoted by staff, directions (“sit down,” “raise your hand,” “don’t interrupt,” “line up in a straight line”). The staff needs to explain, at least once for every “command” or direction, why it is being given.
- Note if staff has a style of giving directions or commands to youth without giving reasons for why they are necessary.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The staff tells one youth that backpacks must be kept by the coat rack because if everyone kept theirs by the seats, there would not be enough room in the aisle ways. The staff casually state expectations with an explanation such as “I want everyone to wait to get seconds on the snack until everyone has had firsts, so we’re sure we have enough.”</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>The expectations and directions can be part of normal routines, but if the staff almost always provides reasons or explanations when they have to remind youth, then score 5. Whether the rules or directions are written down or part of a previously established set of guidelines is not the relevant issue for scoring this item.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff provides explanations or reasons when there is a big or chronic issue to resolve, but otherwise just give directions or guidelines without explanation.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Explanations and reasons are given only sometimes, when the staff is trying to create extra emphasis or motivation for compliance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The staff starts the session by saying that they are on a tight schedule that day and in order to get the glue on everybody’s projects today, they’ll have to sit down promptly when reminded. Several times throughout the session, staff says, “Tina, please sit down,” “George, please return to your seat,” without further explanation. No other behavioral directions or expectations were given by staff.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>The reason for the expectation/direction to sit down was given during the session.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The staff frequently says things like “Line up, please,” “I need you to listen. Stephan, thank-you for listening.” “Everybody sit down,” but never gives a reason for the behavioral instructions.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>If the staff gives a reason for even one behavioral rule, direction, expectation, or safety rule, score a 3. Otherwise score a 1.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Administrator Self Interview Items**

The items in the Administrator Self Interview section of the tool measure the organizational supports for the observational items listed above. Oftentimes, the policies and procedures an organization adopts determine the actions and behaviors that the members of the organization exhibit. Examining the organizational structures that undergird your program could provide you with a more comprehensive plan for improvement that addresses all levels of program quality, from administration down to the point-of-service.

Many of the Administrator Self Interview items are scored based on the presence or absence of a written policy or procedure. Some items require specific dosage or amounts of the criteria being measured. Review these items carefully and produce the evidence necessary to justify your scores.
1. During activities, staff mainly uses a warm tone of voice and respectful language.
2. During activities, staff is almost always actively involved with youth (e.g., they provide directions, answer questions, work as partners or team members, check in with individuals or small groups).
3. During activities, staff provides all youth a structured opportunity to talk about (or otherwise communicate) what they are doing and what they are thinking about to others (e.g., each youth explains the reasoning behind his or her design to staff; staff assigns youth to small groups to work on a shared task).
4. New staff participates in 4 or more hours of preservice orientation activities AND preservice orientation activities include elements of youth development.
5. Relevant training for program staff is provided two or more times a year, either on- or off-site, on a variety of topics related to positive youth development. Topics may include but are not limited to: conflict resolution, social/emotional development, cultural competency, focus on youth strengths, or resiliency.

### Item 1: Staff warm and respectful

This is about the way staff presents themselves to youth. It is about the verbal way that staff creates a warm program. A positive, welcoming atmosphere is preferable to a negative, unwelcoming one. While the ways a youth worker may establish a welcoming atmosphere may differ in different cultures and in different youth programs, the general idea is to focus on being as welcoming as possible so that young people feel comfortable to engage in the program.

#### Tips for Scoring
- More so than most, this item requires you to make a judgment about the overall feel of the climate. It's important for you to be aware that what's considered “warm tone of voice” and “respectful language” can vary by group and by culture and to take youths’ reactions into account when scoring.
- Remember that staff with different personalities and backgrounds may express this differently.
- Examples of warm and respectful language:
  - Complements youth, expresses excitement or enthusiasm, repeats what youth are saying to show that staff is listening
- Examples of disrespectful or negative tone:
  - Insults students, uses inappropriate foul language, uses sarcasm

To receive the 3 score; there must be some negative language, not simply a neutral atmosphere.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
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<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff is soft-spoken and does not joke or act playful. However, she also does not use any disrespectful language and youth respond positively to her. For example, youth smile, and pay attention when she speaks.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>This is an example of how warm and respectful language should not be limited to a particular cultural background or personality. If staff is not disrespectful and youth respond to the staff positively this should score a 5.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff teases youth in a playful way — so the language is technically not “respectful” but staff member is just joking.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>For more on this, see the items in Physical and Psychological Safety.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Item 2: Staff actively involved with youth

This is easy to do, but often lacking in youth programs. It’s the simple idea that you should partner and participate with youth — not spend all of your time sitting at a desk in front of the room. Work side by side with youth. Become a partner in the learning process by following their lead, experimenting with the materials they are using, and exploring the problems they are attempting to solve.

Tips for Scoring

- When you arrive to observe the session, make sure to clarify who are the people leading the session and if there are going to be other staff members in the room. That way you will be clear on who you expect to be actively involved with youth.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
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<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One staff member is involved but others are not.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff member gives directions, works with youth for a few minutes, and then sits at desk.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>The purpose of this item to assess whether staff participates with and guides youth, rather than just giving directions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Staff member circulates to observe youth as they construct a tower, but he rarely provides feedback or intervenes.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sometimes a staff member will be intentionally “hands-off” to allow youth to come up with strategies on their own. If this is the case, and if the staff member is still observing and providing some feedback this item can score a 5.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Item 3: Opportunities for youth to talk

Learning occurs when youth mentally connect what they are doing to their prior knowledge and construct new understandings. This can happen when youth describe their experience using their own words and ideas. Adults can create opportunities for youth to share their understanding with others. For example, have youth talk about a project and what they think about it in small groups or pairs.

Tips for scoring

- Examples of ways staff creates opportunities for youth to talk about what they are doing:
  - Staff has youth work together in teams or small groups.
  - Staff circulates to ask youth to talk about their process as they are working on a project.
  - Staff selects one youth to demonstrate who he or she solved a problem. – This would score a 3, unless staff eventually selects all youth.
- When unsure if youth have the opportunity, add the word “intentional” to this item. To score a 5, some way for youth to talk about what they’re doing must be intentionally set up (presumably by the youth worker).
- To score a 3 or a 5, some way for youth to talk about what they’re doing must be intentionally set up (presumably by the youth worker). The difference between a 3 and a 5 is whether all or only some of the youth have a structured opportunity to talk about what they are doing.
- The key difference between this item and reflection is that it asks about whether youth have opportunities to explain their thinking, or to talk about what they are doing during or as a part of an activity. Reflection involves looking back on an activity. Reflection often occurs at the end of a session, when youth might talk about what they were doing, thinking or feeling. Planning, on the other hand, happens before an activity.
- The learning value comes in when youth talk about what they are doing or thinking about their activities. However, it is not realistic to assess whether each youth in a small group is talking about the activity. So, score a 5 when a) all youth are assigned by staff to work in small groups, and b) the group works on a shared task or the staff encourages the youth to talk about their activity in the group.
- If the room is furnished with tables that seat more than one person, simply sitting at a table with others does not count as staff providing a structured opportunity to talk about the activity, unless the staff refers those at the table as a group working together or encourages the youth to share their ideas or progress.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
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<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The youth are working individually on an art project. They whisper to each other while working.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>The staff did not set up a structured or intentional opportunity to talk about the activity. Unless the staff provided other opportunities for each youth to talk about the activity, score a 1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The activity is a group discussion. The staff asks for several youth to share their ideas, but not all of the youth have an opportunity to talk.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Within the activity, there need to be opportunities for every youth to talk about what he or she is doing or thinking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth work in groups of four trying to build a tower out of a collection of materials.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>The small groups and the shared tasks represent intentional structures that allow and encourage youth to talk with each other about what they are doing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All the youth are working individually on art projects. A staff member stops the youth mid-way to ask if anyone wants to describe their progress. A few of the youth respond.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>While it may appear that a structured opportunity to talk about their work was available to all youth, unless the staff actually allowed enough time for all the youth to respond or encouraged all the youth to respond, score a 3. Realistically, there was only an opportunity for some youth to respond.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All of the staff members circulate and stop by each youth multiple times to ask questions about their art project. For example, “I love your color choices. What made you pick yellow?”</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Staff circulated to provide time for each youth to talk about their project. If the staff only visited some of the youth, this item would score a 3.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Administrator Self Interview Items**

The items in the Administrator Self Interview section of the tool measure the organizational supports for the observational items listed above. Oftentimes, the policies and procedures an organization adopts determine the actions and behaviors that the members of the organization exhibit. Examining the organizational structures that undergird your program could provide you with a more comprehensive plan for improvement that addresses all levels of program quality, from administration down to the point-of-service.

Many of the Administrator Self Interview items are scored based on the presence or absence of a written policy or procedure. Some items require specific dosage or amounts of the criteria being measured. Review these items carefully and produce the evidence necessary to justify your scores.
opportunities to belong

1. There is no evidence of bias but rather there is mutual respect for and inclusion of others of a different religion, ethnicity, class, gender, ability, appearance or sexual orientation.
2. Youth have structured opportunities to get to know each other (e.g., there are team-building activities, introductions, personal updates, welcomes of new group members, icebreakers, and a variety of groupings for activities.
3. The activity includes opportunities for all youth to work cooperatively together.
4. Cultural diversity is promoted by at least 3 of the following: a staff member speaks an other-than-English language spoken by program participants, food reflects cultural diversity, decorations reflect cultural diversity, some staff share cultural/ethnic/racial backgrounds of participants, youth or families are invited to share about their culture, the program space displays youths’ work.

item 1: Lack of bias

This item specifically deals with bias along the lines of religion, ethnicity, class, gender, ability, appearance and sexual orientation. Bias, no matter how it is intended, can have a negative effect on program climate. It is particularly important to address subtle bias (e.g., youth say “that’s so gay” to indicate dislike for something). A common question is this: What if our youth playfully tease each other and that’s part of how the youth build community? Here are two questions in response: Is there any way to know that every youth in every situation is not affected negatively by such teasing? Could you help the youth build community in a way that does not rely on stereotypes and slander?

Tips for Scoring

• If no bias is observed, score a 5.
• Specific identity-based insults/slurs directed at a youth will score a 1, regardless of staff reaction.
  • One youth says to another, “Why do you act so gay?” Regardless of how staff responds, this item will score a 1.
• General identity based insults/slurs not directed at others will score a 3, regardless of staff reaction.
  • Youth refer to the activity as “retarded.” Staff responds by saying, “That’s not an appropriate word to use.” This still scores a 3.
• This item also is difficult for many youth workers who feel that a playful use of identity-based insults is part of their program culture. However, it is difficult to truly know what a youth is truly feeling. In addition, it may be exceptionally difficult for youth who are a minority in the group to speak out about bias and identity-based slurs directed at them.
  • This item is about identity-based insults or slurs specifically. It is not about other instances where youth might not behave sensitively (i.e., youth snicker if another child makes a slip of the tongue or says something embarrassing).
### Item 1: Opportunities to get to know each other

This is about get-to-know-you activities. They often happen as a group is forming but should also happen throughout sessions. They may be simple icebreakers, name games, serious sharing activities, or they may relate directly to the goals or content of the group gathering. These activities may be used to bring participants back together after they have been apart. They may tie up unfinished business, review concepts, gauge opinions/motivations, and generally check in with the group as it moves on to its next set of tasks.

### Tips for Scoring

- Ask the corresponding follow-up question if you don’t have enough information to score: “How do youth get to know each other? Are there any games or activities designed for this?” Generally, you should stick to the standard questions, although it is acceptable to ask unprinted follow-up questions if necessary.
- It is important for activities that build inclusive relationships happen through the year, not just as the group is forming. Even if the assessment takes place in the middle of a program cycle, it should still be expected that the session contain some get-to-know-you activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There are get-to-know-you games at the beginning of the year but it’s now several months later.</td>
<td>1 or 3</td>
<td>This item measures whether the session observed has a structured opportunity for youth to get to know each other. Even if youth already know each other’s names, youth benefit from team-building and icebreakers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth wear name tags.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Just because youth wear name tags doesn’t guarantee that they will learn and use each other’s names. This does not count as a structured opportunity for youth to get to know each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are no obvious get-to-know-you games, but youth work together in small groups.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Youth have informal opportunities to get to know each other as they work together in the small groups.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Item 2: Youth work cooperatively together**

Collaboration in work, play, and learning enables young people to interact with others; to appreciate others’ opinions and experiences; and to enhance personal perspectives, goals, and projects. In many traditional teaching models, helping one another is considered cheating, and competition is promoted by the practice of grading on a curve. Small-group work, however, is now common in “real world” work situations. This item is based on the assumption that young people can learn as much from one another as they can from adults and that working in small groups can have a range of benefits.

In school and elsewhere, youth may have experienced group work of varying levels of quality. Small-group activities can be less than effective; most of us have experienced poor quality grouping situations. Nevertheless, the danger of creating less than perfect small-group environments should not stop youth workers from experimenting with and practicing grouping.

This item assesses whether youth whether group members cooperate toward a common purpose. When the goals are clear to all members of the group, the group will be more focused on its pursuits. Depending on the task, it can be useful to have youth differentiate roles. For example, in a small group engaged in planning a presentation for younger youth, one youth might take notes, one might draw pictures for a presentation poster, and one might take responsibility for public speaking. Making sure everyone has a role can help create an environment in which each youth participates and can develop a sense of group membership.

**Tips for Scoring**

- Look for intentional strategies created by the staff to ensure that group members cooperate and work towards a shared purpose. Staff can assign roles, check-in regularly with groups or ask groups which young person completed which part of the project.
- In making sure that “all group members” cooperate is not necessary to take exhaustive notes about the individual contributions of each young person in the group. Rather, look for the lack of evidence of youth not participating in the group or for staff to intervene if some young people are not participating.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
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<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Everything is large group, but there is a clear purpose.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Staff does not use small groups for activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth are told to get into groups of 4 for free time.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Even though the staff person created groups, there was no goal for the group to accomplish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In one of the groups, 2 youth sit and talk with each other while the other 2 youth work on completing the project. Staff doesn’t intervene.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Not all youth in the group were involved in accomplishing the goal.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Administrator Self Interview Items**

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**positive social norms**

1. Youth do not exhibit any exclusion or staff successfully intervenes if exclusive behavior occurs (e.g., staff introduces newcomer to other youth and they then include her, staff successfully suggests including a lone youth in a game).

2. Youth strongly identify with the program offering (e.g., hold one another to established guidelines, use ownership language, such as “our program,” engage in shared traditions such as shared jokes, songs, gestures).

3. The activities include structured opportunities (e.g., group presentations, sharing times, recognition celebrations, exhibitions, performances) to publicly acknowledge the achievements, work, or contributions of at least some youth.

4. The organization has explicit conflict resolution policy or procedure that consists of several steps that staff use when addressing conflict including (1) approaches youth conflicts in a non-threatening manner (i.e., approaches calmly, stops hurtful actions, acknowledges youth feelings); (2) seeks input from youth to determine cause of and solution to conflict; (3) examines relationship between actions and consequences; (4) follows up with those involved afterward.

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**Item 1: Inclusive relationships**

Unlike most items in the NYS-OCFS PQA, this assesses youth behaviors rather than staff performance. Although the peer environment is driven by the youth who attend, a program in which youth are consistently inclusive with each other and identify with the program usually requires staff efforts.

When youth include others, even those they do not know well, this promotes a sense of belonging for all youth. Inclusive relationships are the goal. Inclusive refers to relationships that are welcoming and friendly and include others, even newcomers or youth they do not like. It is not always something that happens on the first day of a program but builds over time. Once established, this process is likely to continue. However, youth are not always naturally inclusive. They, like most people, prefer to play with their friends, those who are most popular, or those who are most socially adept. A commonly heard phrase among adolescents is, “You’re not my friend anymore!” Older youth may be less likely to be that direct, but it is commonplace for youth to separate into exclusionary groups, associating mainly with others in their cliques or social grouping. The subtle forms of exclusion simply involve avoiding certain others. If one youth is sitting by herself and the rest of the youth have found friends to sit with, we count that as exclusion. Encouraging and helping youth to be inclusive may take intervention, training and effort on the part of staff. However, youth programs can have a profound and positive effect on youth by promoting a sense of belonging.

Understanding typical dynamics of social groupings of youth, this item does not make the requirement for a high score 100 percent inclusive relationships. However, that is still the goal. If staff successfully intervenes to support inclusive relationships, a score of 5 can be achieved. Intervening can be subtle, as long as it is successful. Additionally, it is usually easier to identify exclusion than to tell if youth are truly being inclusive.

**Tips for Scoring:**

- This item is scored similarly to Emotional Safety, item 1: “any playful negative behaviors are mediated (countered, curtailed, diffused) by staff or youth.” If the staff intervenes and the exclusion ceases, score a 5. If the staff makes an attempt to intervene, but youth continue to behave exclusively, score a 3. If exclusion occurs, but the staff does not attempt to curtain or diffuse it, score a 1.
Staff intervention can take many forms. The staff may make a specific announcement to find someone you don’t know very well to partner with (which would count for item 1 in Belonging as well). Staff may invite a youth who appears to be less popular to join another group of students, or staff may say, “Remember, one of our values is to be friendly.”

Pay attention to a) whether exclusion is observed, b) if it is, does the staff intervene? c) if staff intervenes, is it successful, does the exclusion cease? The following table illustrates how to use the answers to those questions to determine the score for this item.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The youth come in and find their friends. A newcomer comes in shyly and finds a seat away from the others. A youth goes over to the newcomer and makes introductions. No other evidence of exclusion.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Home run! Having a youth initiate welcoming a newcomer is ideal! However, if the staff introduced the newcomer and the youth responded by welcoming, a score of 5 would still apply.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When assigned to a particular group, Rachel says “I don’t want to be in this group, I want to be with Zoe. She’s my friend.” So the staff says ok.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>An example of exclusion and no staff intervention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same as above, but the staff says, “It’s important to get to know youth you don’t know as well.” Rachel does not change groups, but continues to grumble and does not interact positively with the youth in the group.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>The staff intervened to promote inclusive relationships, but nonetheless, Rachel continued to relate in an unfriendly way to members of the group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth appear to know each other and do not show any evidence of being exclusive.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Example 2: Youth identify with program

This also examines youth behaviors as a reflection of how the staff sets up the environment. It looks for a sense of program ownership from the youth. Several examples are given. This is something to strive for in a youth program.

### Tips for Scoring

- “Pay attention to “we” language: “Remember last year when we ...,” “We do it this way.”
- If there is evidence of youth acknowledging shared memories, shared history, inside jokes, this is evidence for a 5. It can also include youth proudly self-identifying as a member of the program.
- If this is not observed, score a 3.
- If youth are talking in positive ways about being members of the program or trying to reflect positively on the program, those are examples of identifying with the program.
Item 3: Publicly acknowledge achievements

Assesses whether activities occur to publicly celebrate and acknowledge youth work and achievements. These can be simple — such as a sharing time — or more elaborate like a formal exhibition. The more elaborate activities won’t necessarily happen in every session, but the less formal type can. These activities should involve discussion and celebration of accomplishment rather than momentary praise or rewards. Presentations, posted artwork, web pages, and callouts in the full group are all ways to celebrate successes. The goal is to do what you can as a youth worker to help youth feel like they belong.

Tips for Scoring

- “Publicly” in this context can mean both within the group and outside the group.
- You may not see the public recognition during this session, but score if you hear a reference to some sort of public recognition. For example, if the instructor reminds youth that their paintings will be displayed on parents’ night or if their poetry will be included in a published book.

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presentations are scheduled for several weeks from now.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Even if presentations are scheduled for the end of a program-offering term, it still counts as an opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At parent night, a few of the youths’ work will be highlighted.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>The item says “…at least some youth.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff says, “Let’s hear from each group about what you accomplished today. Show us your model and tell us a little bit about it. Each group will have 2 minutes so that we have time to hear from all of the groups.”</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>This presentation is within the session, but allows youth the opportunity to share what they have worked on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff asks one youth to show his dance footwork to the whole group to illustrate a point.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Only one youth was acknowledged, and the performance was impromptu.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Administrator Self Interview Items

The items in the Administrator Self Interview section of the tool measure the organizational supports for the observational items listed above. Oftentimes, the policies and procedures an organization adopts determine the actions and behaviors that the members of the organization exhibit. Examining the organizational structures that undergird your program could provide you with a more comprehensive plan for improvement that addresses all levels of program quality, from administration down to the point-of-service.

Many of the Administrator Self Interview items are scored based on the presence or absence of a written policy or procedure. Some items require specific dosage or amounts of the criteria being measured. Review these items carefully and produce the evidence necessary to justify your scores.
1. The program activities lead (or will lead in future sessions) to tangible products or performances that reflect ideas or designs of youth (e.g., youth explain their projects to whole group, all create dance routines to perform later, youth create their own sculptures).

2. Staff provides all youth one or more opportunities to lead a group (e.g., teach others; lead a discussion, song, project, event, outing or other activity).

3. Staff provides multiple opportunities for youth (individual or group) to make plans for projects and activities, (e.g., how to spend their time, how to do a task).

4. Staff provides opportunities for all youth to make at least one open-ended choice (content or process) within the content framework of the activities (e.g., youth decide topics within a given subject area, subtopics, or aspects of a given topic; youth decide roles, order of activities, tools or materials, or how to present results).

5. Staff engages all youth in an intentional process of reflecting on what they are doing or have done (e.g., writing in journals; reviewing minutes; sharing progress or feelings about the experience).

6. Youth and staff share responsibilities on at least three of the following: (1) program quality review/improvement; (2) hiring or training staff; (3) recruiting new youth to the organization; (4) program evaluation and feedback; (5) determining program schedules and program offerings.

**Item 1: Tangible products or performances**

A tangible product or performance allows youth to experience feelings of success. By tangible, we mean something that can be seen, felt, or heard, and shown to other people. For example, youth may create objects, demonstrations, shows, or presentations. Specifically, they may build a model boat, record or perform a song, create a poster entitled Teen Drug Use, or chart a shift in their thinking about civil discourse.

**Tips for scoring**

- This item does not require that the young people create something that is presented to the public, only that there is either a tangible product or something that can be performed or presented to the group.

- Examples of tangible products or performances:
  - Youth perform an experiment and present their findings to the group.
  - Each young person creates a short poem and reads it to the group.
  - Youth create a sculpture illustrating cell biology.

- Examples of tangible products/performances that do not reflect the ideas of youth, and so would score a 3:
  - Children learn about color theory by painting a water color painting only in shades of yellow. The painting is tangible, but the staff completely controls what is painted.
  - Youth perform a play that was selected by the staff with no youth input.
  - At the end of the program all the youth will demonstrate the standardized gymnastics routines they have learned.

- Simply learning a skill (physical or academic) is not a “tangible product or performance.” The staff must arrange for youth to present, show off, or demonstrate the skill to the whole group or to a wider audience to count for this item. For a 5, the performance or product must incorporate the ideas or designs of youth to score a 5.
**Item 2: Youth lead a group**

This represents an important opportunity that unfortunately not all youth often have: to lead a group. This doesn’t necessarily have to be an elaborate, formal event, but can happen in small ways as well. For example, you can ask a youth to lead a small group. A youth can explain the directions of a game to a group. A youth can lead parents or guests on a tour of the youth facility.

Typically, opportunities to lead happen for a select group of youth, those dubbed “natural leaders.” Although it is important to build on youth’s strengths, the intention of this scale is to assess whether all youth have opportunities to practice leading, not just the youth to whom leading is natural. The challenge for the youth worker is to find opportunities for the youth who otherwise might not have them.

**Tips for Scoring**

- Be sure to note the less obvious forms of leadership—especially those that occur in smaller groups. The staff may tell everyone to take turns explaining or deciding how to play a game.
- The staff does not need to use the word leader, but either the group or the staff must appoint someone to direct, report out, facilitate, organize, demonstrate, explain or decide.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth leaders are paired up with individuals.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>All youth do not have an opportunity to lead (just the youth leaders, the individuals being led do not get the opportunity). This is an example of mentoring, not leading a group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Several youth lead today but there’s not enough time for everyone to.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>All youth do not have an opportunity to lead. You may also use the follow-up question here, “Do youth ever lead activities?” The answer will let you know if all youth get the opportunity to be a leader at some point.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone is divided up into groups of 4. The staff has 4 questions for the groups to discuss. For each question staff designates a different leader for the group discussion.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Leadership rotated so that all youth had an opportunity to lead.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Item 3: Plans for projects and activities**

This item assesses whether youth have opportunities to make plans. These do not have to be big life plans but rather small plans for how they will spend their time or conduct an activity or project. The ideal is to give youth several opportunities throughout each session to make plans. The more they plan, the better they will get at this important life skill.

**Tips for scoring**
- Planning is something that happens before beginning an activity or before the next part of a more involved activity.
- Planning is not simply making a choice about what to do, although it might include that. Planning means youth must figure out how to do something – what steps are involved, what sequence to do things in, who should be involved, the time frame for the tasks, and so on. For the purpose of this item, setting goals can be included in planning. It may also include brainstorming what the possible options are.
- Youth could plan for current activities within the program offering, future activities, their learning goals and special events.
- Remember that planning can be either big or small. It does not have to be a long-term plan; it can be simply planning how the youth is going to spend their time during a one-hour session. But remember, planning is more than simply choosing an activity. It is deciding ahead of time how, when, in what sequence, for how long, what method to use to come up with ideas, or which alternatives to choose among.
- If evidence of planning is not observed, then score a 1 on all items. However, more elaborate planning can take multiple sessions to carry out. Longer range planning is a program strength, not a weakness, so any evidence that children are using or acting on previous plans counts as an opportunity for planning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth do some planning today and did some two sessions ago.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>This is evidence that youth have multiple opportunities to plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth are in small groups. Staff says “Okay. Decide whether you are going to decorate the outside of the cards first, or write the script inside.”</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>This is one opportunity for all youth to make one very simple plan. Note they are deciding the sequence of the tasks before they begin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth are in small groups. Staff says “Okay. Which groups want to decorate the outside of the cards and which groups want to write the script inside?”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>The youth are making a choice about which activity to do, but this is not a plan. To count as a plan there must be some element of coming up with ideas of what to do beforehand, deciding steps or order to do things in, figuring out what will be involved in carrying out a task, setting a goal etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Item 4: Open-ended choices**

Opening up opportunities for youth to make choices can help make a learning activity successful and engaging. In addition, giving youth opportunities to make decisions encourages them to explore their interests, participate as group members and leaders, and ultimately become stronger decision makers in life. The choices you provide should have real outcomes and should matter to youth. Superficial choices like “They can choose to be here or not” are not meaningful and don’t count.

Youth workers who provide opportunities for youth to make choices must not play a passive role. It is critical that staff members actively support youth decision making by providing a setting (space and materials) that promotes learning, by asking thought-provoking questions, by participating with youth in the learning experience, and by scaffolding tasks whenever possible. These are all other items in the NYS-OCFS PQA; all of these strategies work together and build on each other.

There are infinite ways to provide opportunities for content choices, depending on the activity. In a photography workshop youth can choose the pictures to take or choose shots within a theme. During a craft project, rather than following a set procedure for creating a Thanksgiving turkey, youth can make their own designs. In a workshop on leadership, youth can make meaningful decisions about what concepts they wish to explore in depth.

It is also important to provide process choices — how activities are carried out. It is best if this is explicit. For example, youth are asked to choose what role they will take in the group or list out the order in which they will carry out activities. As you can see, when used in combination with planning and reflection (plan-do-review), choice naturally fits in.

**Tips for scoring**
- High-Scoring examples—Score a 5
  - **Youth chose what task groups to work in.**
  - **During enrichment time, youth got to choose from several games to play (Magic, Set, standard cards, board games), they could work on projects, or they could go into the gym for basketball or four-square.**
  - **Youth developed agenda and activities and set time schedule within session: Leader youth said, “We have 1 hour to work on planning; let’s meet back in ½ hour.”**
  - **Youth negotiated game rules within games ("Dude, my turn"; “Let’s play Magic”; “Can I use that card?")**
  - **The large group of youth involved in the catapult project decided who would work on what.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth chose to be in this workshop but once there they have to do what they’re doing.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>While youth are allowed to choose the program offering that they want to be in, they are not allowed to choose the content within that offering.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a set curriculum with no opportunities for choice.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The staff says the youth can make place-mats for the fall session by laminating an oak, maple, or hickory leaf cutout to cardstock.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>The youth have the choice for an oak, maple, or hickory placemat, but the can only choose between those three cutouts provided. They also do not have process choice because the staff decided that all placemats will be created in the same way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During choice time youth can choose whatever they want to do and how to do it.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>While this may lack structure and clear limits it would still score a 5 because all youth have the opportunity to make open-ended process choices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The staff says, “For your art project you may use paints, markers, or pastels.”</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>This is a process choice among 3 discrete alternatives.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Item 5: Intentional process of reflecting

This assesses whether an intentional reflection occurs. This does not mean deep, spiritual life reflection, but rather a simple processing of activities and events. Reflection can be as simple as taking 5 minutes at the end of a session to discuss what youth did that day. Again, reflection happens after an activity or at the end of a session. Planning happens before starting an activity or part of an activity and Active Engagement item 2 is about processing or talking about an activity in the midst of the activity.

Reflecting on an experience is where processing new information and learning can occur. It is, therefore, incredibly beneficial for youth workers to deliberately build in time for young people to reflect. Consider the following list of what young people do as they review:

- Recapture experiences
- Consider feelings connected to experiences
- Evaluate experiences
- Connect experiences to abstract principles about how the world works
- Refine their understanding
- Learn from experiences
- Engage in critical thinking
- Recognize accomplishments
- Make new plans

Tips for scoring

- Reflection is looking back on an activity (even if it is not completed) and having children think about or communicate what they have done, what they were thinking or feeling, or what they learned.
- High-Scoring Examples—Score a 5
  - Full group reflected on last year’s card tournament (“What went well during last year’s tournament?”) and how they felt about it (this helped plan current event.)
  - Youth came together for the last 10 minutes of enrichment time to write in their journals about yesterday’s activity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth informally reflect about school (or other outside events) but not about what they’re doing.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>While youth are reflecting, it is not intentional and it is not about what they are doing or have done.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The session is a reflection activity.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>All youth are engaged in intentional reflection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During free time, the youth are given a choice of drawing a picture about what they liked best during the day’s activities.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Some, but not all of the youth use drawing as a means to reflect on and communicate about the day’s activities. However, unless all youth are involved in some form of reflection, this is scored a 3.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Administrator Self Interview Items

The items in the Administrator Self Interview section of the tool measure the organizational supports for the observational items listed above. Oftentimes, the policies and procedures an organization adopts determine the actions and behaviors that the members of the organization exhibit. Examining the organizational structures that undergird your program could provide you with a more comprehensive plan for improvement that addresses all levels of program quality, from administration down to the point-of-service.

Many of the Administrator Self Interview items are scored based on the presence or absence of a written policy or procedure. Some items require specific dosage or amounts of the criteria being measured. Review these items carefully and produce the evidence necessary to justify your scores.
opportunities for skill building

1. The bulk of the activities involve youth in engaging with (creating, combining, reforming) materials or ideas or improving a skill through guided practice (e.g. debating ideas, learning or improving a dance routine or technique, designing a model rocket, modeling with clay. This does not include just memorizing facts or learning about something).
2. The activities balance concrete experiences involving materials, people, and projects (e.g., field trips, experiments, practicing dance routines, creative writing) with abstract learning or concepts (e.g., learning, talking about a topic; lectures; staff providing diagrams, formulas).
3. All youth are encouraged to try out new skills or attempt higher levels of performance.
4. When youth struggle (with errors, imperfect results or failure), staff always provides learning supports or encouragement (e.g., youth are helped to problem solve, encouraged to try another approach, told why an error was made, encouraged to keep trying, given guidance or explanation when needed).

Item 1: Youth engage with materials or ideas

This item is about getting young people up and moving and using their hands and bodies as well as their minds. Motivation and learning increase when youth experiment with and actively manipulate materials and critically engage with ideas or processes. Figuring out problems also allows youth to engage. For example, youth may be given wires, batteries and bulbs, and be asked to figure out how to make the bulb light up. Through this process, they can learn about issues related to current and voltage, and the vocabulary needed to talk about electricity.

Tips for scoring

- Remember that “active learning” doesn’t have to be “hands on” learning. What you are looking for is for youth to be mentally engaged with ideas or materials, as opposed to learning from rote or filling out worksheets.
- Examples of active learning that doesn’t involve materials:
  - Youth learn about a poetry form, and then write their own poems.
  - Youth create a math problem that is a real-world application of a mathematical concept.
  - Youth create a short play about a social issue.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth spent the bulk of the time completing math worksheets.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Worksheets do not qualify as active engagement even though it is possible to argue that worksheets can involve “engaging with ideas.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth are sitting the entire time, and they read to each other.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>There is some limited engagement with ideas. However, if the youth read to each other, then engaged in a joint debate or discussion of the passage read, score a 5.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The majority of the session is a discussion about gender roles. All youth participate in sharing their opinions, and debating points with others. There are no materials other than the markers used to take notes.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Even though there are no materials, youth are actively engaged with ideas, by forming and debating opinions on a topic.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Item 2: Balance concrete and abstract

The intention of the final item is to look for a nice balance between learning about and learning by doing, experiencing, practicing, discovering, or applying – in other words, abstract learning versus concrete experience. Abstract learning, for this item, typically will mean lecture or instruction about broader concepts, general rules, or ideas, but may include specific examples. Abstract concepts help young people to make connections to big picture ideas and to maximize the learning from doing. For example, “It’s good to be nice to people” could be the abstract concept that staff are trying to teach. Concrete experiences are also important so that youth can have a real experience to make the lesson meaningful to them. A simulation game in which people are nice and not nice to each other could be a way to teach the abstract concept. A debriefing discussion after the simulation would be a perfect way to put the two together, creating an environment where high quality learning can occur.

For the purpose of this item, the words concrete and abstract have a slightly different or narrower meaning than how the terms are frequently used. Sometimes people use the word concrete to mean specific, as in “a concrete example.” But note, for the purpose of this item it is not enough for the staff to provide specific examples in a lecture – i.e., “Mammals have hair. Deer, dogs, sheep, and whales are mammals.” The youth have to do something, or interact with something in a way that involves them applying, doing, touching, or practicing the concept learned. This is another way to assess active engagement. For this item, concrete activities involve youth doing things, trying things out, using their hands or bodies, etc. in some way to interact with, carry out, or use specific examples. Abstract, for this item, focuses on knowledge about, learning or thinking about concepts or ideas. If the activity is lecture or instruction in basic rules or ideas, for this item it counts as abstract. Often this item requires a close examination of the program session observed. Abstract concepts may be less obvious, such as youth writing out plans – which would be a concrete example of planning but an abstraction of the activity planned! In other words, the planning is a “thinking about” an activity rather than doing the activity itself. It is best when concrete experiences and abstract concepts are connected (e.g., after building towers out of newspaper, youth may discuss engineering concepts).

This chart gives some examples of concrete and abstract activities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concrete: doing, practicing</th>
<th>Abstract: knowledge about; listening to ideas, concepts; lecture, teaching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth build with blocks.</td>
<td>Staff facilitates lecture/discussion noting how red blocks are twice as long as yellow blocks, green are 3 times as long; brings in math concepts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth do physical activity for 20 minutes.</td>
<td>Staff talks about how exercise is good for the body and brain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth do a science experiment.</td>
<td>Staff gives scientific principles behind science experiment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth practice dance moves.</td>
<td>Staff talks about different styles of dance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth draw pictures of the sources of waste or trash they’ve seen that day.</td>
<td>Staff lectures about the importance of eliminating waste.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth make a model of a solar system.</td>
<td>Instructor uses a model of the solar system as a prop in a lecture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth draw or make clay models of specific types of reptiles.</td>
<td>Staff identifies specific types of reptiles in a lecture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing a game of soccer.</td>
<td>Instruction in the rules of soccer, the names of the different positions and how-to descriptions of the proper way to kick.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Tips for Scoring
- A simple way to distinguish abstract from concrete for this item is to ask “Is this learning/thinking about the topic, or doing/practicing the topic.”
- Examples of abstract concepts.
  - Staff explains the concepts in physics before an experiment testing those concepts.
  - Staff presents an outline of an artistic movement before having students create a painting in that style.
  - Children learn about verbs and nouns.
- Examples of concrete experiences.
  - Any art project
  - Writing an original work
  - An experiment or guided discovery
- To score, think through everything observed then make a decision about whether a balance was achieved.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
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<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mostly youth spent the time doing a craft activity but at the very end the youth worker asked some abstract questions not related to the activity.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>The craft project is concrete, but staff did not tie it in to something abstract.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A guest lecturer spoke to the youth almost the entire time. He occasionally asked them some questions.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>A lecture with no opportunity for practical activities is only abstract.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The instructor lectures about impressionist art. The rest of the session youth work individually on paintings in the same style.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>This is an example of how abstract content can be applied in concrete ways.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Item 3: Youth encouraged to try new skills

Simply assesses whether youth are encouraged to achieve. Learning and growth occurs when the activity has an element of challenge in it. This is a very simple item to read but requires a great deal of skill for a youth worker to do well.

**Tips for Scoring**
- The purpose of this item is to differentiate between activities with a skill-building focus and activities that are not. However, even if a skill building focus was not identified in item 1, if the staff points out ways for youth to improve an activity, project, or skill – that counts.
- Unlike item 1, this item has to do only with performance or learning skills. The youth must do something, not just gain knowledge.
- All youth, at some point in the session, should be encouraged to try to do something new or to improve their performance in some way. The easiest situation to score is when the staff encourages the whole group to try to improve their performance, challenge themselves or do their best.
- Observe the youth carefully and try to see hints about whether or not they are challenged. You’ll have to make a decision based on your experience in the room, so the more concentration you are able to give this during observation, the better.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth are having “Friday free time”. They socialize with each other. Some youth are reading but there is no expectation that youth do that, and the staff does not encourage youth either way.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>This would score a 1 because there are no structured opportunities for skill building.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The students are working on creating clay pots. The staff circulates. Once or twice the staff points out considerations for improving the design or process to individual youth.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>The staff encourages a couple of youth to improve their work.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Item 4: Support for struggling youth

This item looks for a “mistakes allowed” environment in which it is clear that youth will receive support when they try new things or participate even though they make errors. Sometimes support involves giving youth information about an error, so they can make adjustments or know how to improve. The key point is that youth should never be shamed, humiliated or made to feel bad because they are still learning. Encouragement to keep trying, emotional support in the face of frustration, breaking the task into smaller steps or providing helpful hints are all ways to support youths’ learning when they are attempting new skills or challenging tasks.

Key Scoring Criteria

1. When staff encounters errors, mistakes, imperfect results by youth, staff should never respond harshly with sarcasm, condescension, criticism, punishment, or making fun.
2. When youth are obviously struggling (with errors, imperfect results, or mistakes), staff should always respond supportively in some way – emotional support, practical support, or both.
3. This item applies to both skills and knowledge.

Other Tips for Scoring

- In a large group discussion, note how staff responds to wrong answers. The point is youth should not feel bad about speaking up, even if they might make errors.
- In the case of a large group discussion or other instances of imperfection or wrong answers where youth make a mistake or give a wrong answer, but are not “struggling”, the criterion is not that staff responds to every error “supportively,” but that the staff never responds negatively.
- If youth are obviously struggling or asking for help, the criterion is that staff always responds supportively in some way. Observe any time the staff is interacting with a youth who make mistakes or does something imperfectly, and note how the staff responds. The staff should never respond with sarcasm, condescension, criticism, punishment, or making fun.
- “Criticism” for this item does not mean simply noting something is done incorrectly. Criticism has a harsh tone or conveys a “you’re bad” message.
- The focus here is on the staff’s response to errors, imperfect results, or failure, not on how much or whether the youth are upset by their errors.
- If no errors, failures or imperfect results are observed, do not score.
- If staff does not notice or respond when youth struggle, score a 3. It is better for youth to struggle on their own than to receive harsh or unhelpful interaction with a staff member. If youth push through to figure out how to correct errors on their own, they have learned something valuable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The youth are involved in a game which involves tossing a bean bag. The game appears easy to the youth, so the staff encourages them to try to see if they can toss it further on their next turn.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>The youth were encouraged to attempt higher levels of performance each time. This was addressed to all the youth. The key here for a “5” score is that all the youth were encouraged to improve their performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A bean bag tossing activity seems easy for all the youth. They all seem familiar with the game and play it without much staff input.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>There is no evidence that this is a new activity or that staff encouraged youth to improve their performance. Unless the youth were challenged at other points in the session, score a 1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The activity is a basketball exercise. A couple of students protest, saying that they don’t know how to play and it’s too hard. The staff allows them to sit out the activity without encouraging them to try it.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>The key is that the staff did not encourage or support attempting a new skill. If some had been encouraged to try and others were not, the score would have been 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario</td>
<td>Score</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only one youth appears to be struggling with the task, and she is supported.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>The rubric states “when youth struggle,” so you should score this based on the youth who struggle or make errors – in this case, only one person. If the staff does not respond harshly to any other errors made by youth, score a 5.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A number of youth repeatedly re-fill a beaker in a science experiment because they overfilled it. The staff responds with irritation, “It’s not that hard! Just be careful!” This is the only occasion that youth are making errors or struggling.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>The key here is that the staff responded in an irritated, critical tone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A number of youth repeatedly re-fill a beaker in a science experiment because they overfilled it. The staff responds with irritation, “It’s not that hard! Just be careful!” At other times the staff responds gently with encouragement when youth make mistakes.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>If the staff responded with sarcasm even once, score a 1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One youth has been making slow progress and is nearly finished. Staff says, “It’s not that hard. You can do it!” in a warm and encouraging tone and does not respond harshly or with criticism to errors at other points,</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>The staff responded in a warm tone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a homework help session, staff does not get around to helping all those with their hands up and does not offer all struggling youth some sort of learning support or encouragement.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Unless the staff responded in some encouraging or helpful way, score a 3. The highest quality programs have sufficient staff to respond to the learning needs of all the youth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The staff member says, “I see several of you have your hands up and I may not be able to get to you individually. You can try this other approach,” and explains it if needed to the group.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>All youth received acknowledgement of their need for help and were given a suggestion to try.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Several youth are tired and lagging way behind in a mile run. The staff says, “That’s okay. You can make it!”</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>The staff responded to struggling youth with encouragement. Unless staff ignored struggles or responded critically at other times, score a 5.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
integration of families, schools, communities

1. Family members are formally welcomed as part of the program (e.g., there is an open door policy, families are given opportunities to volunteer or participate, there is an orientation on program enrollment).
2. Staff has intentional or established ways of communicating with families (e.g., conferences, communicate about youth academic and social or emotional goals, newsletters and phone calls).
3. Communication with families usually focuses on youth strengths, setting goals, and building a team with families rather than on dealing with problems.
4. Communication with schools occurs to better coordinate supports and opportunities for youth.
5. Communication with other youth organizations occurs to better coordinate supports and opportunities for youth.
6. The organization actively builds links to the community in two of the following ways: (1) actively seeks new participants within the community, (2) seeks opportunities for youth to participate in community service, (3) recruits community volunteers from diverse backgrounds to assist in program, (4) pursues new opportunities for community members to support the program (e.g., in-kind donations of space and materials, financial support).

Administrator Self Interview Items

The items in the Administrator Self Interview section of the tool measure the organizational supports for the observational items listed above. Oftentimes, the policies and procedures an organization adopts determine the actions and behaviors that the members of the organization exhibit. Examining the organizational structures that undergird your program could provide you with a more comprehensive plan for improvement that addresses all levels of program quality, from administration down to the point-of-service.

Many of the Administrator Self Interview items are scored based on the presence or absence of a written policy or procedure. Some items require specific dosage or amounts of the criteria being measured. Review these items carefully and produce the evidence necessary to justify your scores.
1. The organization has explicit continuous improvement policy or procedure that consists of several steps, including: (1) assessment with a team, (2) planning with team, (3) providing feedback on implementation of the plan, (4) aligning professional development.

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item scramble

Physical and Psychological Safety (page 8)
1-5-3
3-5-1
3-1-5
5-3-1

Positive Social Norms (page 9)
1-5-3
5-1-3
3-1-5
1-5-3

Continuous Improvement (page 10)
5-3-1
The Youth Program Quality Intervention (YPQI) is a comprehensive system for improving the quality of youth programs. The YPQI involves a three-part approach to program quality: the assess-plan-improve sequence as shown below. This sequence begins with assessment in order to identify both youth workers’ existing strengths and areas for improvement. These areas then become goals in an improvement plan, with clear steps and benchmarks for success. To manage improvement, the Weikart Center also provides powerful supports for leaders and the high quality Youth Work Methods series of workshops for staff.

As a whole, the assess-plan-improve sequence establishes a supportive system for continuous improvement.

To learn more, please visit www.cypq.org.
The Youth Program Quality Assessment (PQA) is a validated instrument designed to evaluate the quality of youth programs and identify staff training needs. It has been used in community organizations, schools, camps, and other places where youth have fun, work, and learn with adults.

The Youth PQA is an evidence-based assessment tool. Evidence is gathered through observation and interview. Program staff or an outside specialist observe program activities, take notes, and then conduct an interview with a program administrator. Notes, observations, and interview data are used as evidence to score items. Item scores are combined to create an overall program quality profile.

The pyramid below shows the domains of the Youth PQA. Each domain contains a set of specific and observable elements of best practice for working with children and youth.

To learn more, visit www.cypq.org.