

# The Ohio Afterschool Network's Afterschool Program Quality Guidelines User's Guide

## Appendix: Taking a Closer Look

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

### **Taking Action**

A solid improvement plan guides plans to create change. These sections contain practical strategies for improving if a program scored below satisfactory in that Program Area.

### **Tip for Success**

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

### **Try This!**

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

### **Spotlight [in development]**

In the spotlights are case vignettes that illustrate promising practices from organizations that have successfully utilized the self-assessment process for program planning and improvement and those that organizations already had in place.

## AREA 1: PROGRAMMING & CURRICULUM:

TAKING ACTION	TIPS FOR SUCCESS
<p><i>A suggested plan of action for a program scoring below level 3 on indicators focused on <b>children’s/youth’s personal responsibility and leadership.</b></i></p> <p><b>Right Now: Addressed within the First 30-60 Days of Assessment</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A staff meeting is scheduled to identify leadership roles that children/youth are and/or could be provided and to discuss barriers that may have inhibited staff from encouraging more responsibility and independence in children/youth.</li> <li>2. Trainings are developed to assist staff members in the planning of activities and the use of specific strategies that promote personal responsibility, independence, conflict management and leadership.</li> </ol> <p><b>This Year: Addressed by the End of the Program Year</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Staff members participate in ongoing trainings to provide the tools and skills needed to empower children/youth to creatively resolve conflicts.</li> <li>2. Staff members participate in ongoing trainings to learn how to plan sequential activities that develop personal responsibility, independence and leadership in children/youth.</li> <li>3. Staff members meet on a regular basis to share promising practices and to determine new strategies for creating opportunities for children/youth to take personal responsibility, be independent and become leaders.</li> </ol> <p><b>Next Year: Addressed at the Beginning of the New Program Year</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Staff and children/youth meet to build on what has worked from the prior year and determine child/youth</li> </ol>	<p><b>Here are some strategies to maximize the development of personal responsibility and leadership.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage children/youth to push beyond their present level of comfort.</li> <li>• Use activities that are well-organized and age-appropriate that offer opportunities to learn and build new skills, problem solve, and build community.</li> <li>• Allow children/youth to tap into their individual strengths and talents.</li> <li>• Provide children/youth with opportunities to reflect upon what they have experienced.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>TRY THIS</b></p>
	<p><b>“Share The Power”</b></p> <p>To ensure mutual respect, it is imperative that both adults and children/youth have opportunities to communicate and demonstrate their expertise and knowledge. One idea is to create rotating schedules where adults and children/youth switch leadership roles in the program. For example allow a child or youth to create and present activities and/or lead a program meeting (i.e. circle time).</p> <p>Afterschool programs are a joint endeavor. Children and youth are not silent partners. Everyone should contribute!</p>

- leadership roles for current year.
- Children/youth will be given additional leadership roles, a voice in program planning and additional choices in offered program activities.

## AREA 2: INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

TAKING ACTION	TIPS FOR SUCCESS
<p><i>A suggested plan of action for a program scoring below level 3 on indicators focused on <b>building positive relationships with children/youth.</b></i></p> <p><b>Right Now: Addressed within the First 30-60 Days of Assessment</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A staff meeting discussion focuses on identifying practices currently happening that support positive relationship building and opportunities that are currently being missed.</li> <li>Leadership selects strategies around mutual respect and positive communication that will be presented and discussed at staff meetings.</li> </ol> <p><b>This Year: Addressed by the End of the Program Year</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff meeting agendas are planned to include time to discuss selected strategies in building mutual respect and positive communications in day-to-day program interactions.</li> <li>Staff members regularly have opportunities to share both successes and challenges in building positive relationships with children/youth, families and community.</li> <li>Program activities are designed to provide opportunities that engage children/youth in developing strategies to build positive relationships.</li> </ol> <p><b>Next Year: Addressed at the Beginning of the New Program Year</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Program continues emphasis on building positive</li> </ol>	<p><b>Here are some strategies to maximize building positive relationships:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage staff to model cooperation and respect toward children/youth and others.</li> <li>Use positive language that supports children/youth's growth and potential.</li> <li>Interact with child/youth on a one-on-one basis.</li> <li>Organize activities that promote positive communication.</li> </ul> <p style="background-color: #fff2cc; padding: 5px;"><b>TRY THIS</b></p> <p><b>“Make A Personal Connection”</b></p> <p>Reflect on your interactions with the children and youth you work with. Is there a child or youth that you are having a difficult time connecting with? Challenge yourself to make a personal connection by creating a plan to develop your relationship.</p> <p>Questions to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What actions can I begin to take?</li> <li>What actions can I try to stop?</li> <li>What is already working that I want to keep?</li> <li>What will be a sign that demonstrates that this relationship is developing?</li> </ul>

relationships among staff, children/youth, families and community.

### AREA 3: PROFESSIONALISM

TAKING ACTION	TIPS FOR SUCCESS
<p><i>A suggested plan of action for a program scoring below level 3 on indicators focused on <b>building staff members' knowledge and skill</b>:</i></p> <p><b>Right Now: Addressed within the First 30-60 Days of Assessment</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The administrator meets with each staff member to identify areas of strength and areas in need of development.</li> <li>2. A staff meeting is scheduled for the administrator to share findings of the survey of strengths and gaps among knowledge and skills across all staff.</li> <li>3. A group training is scheduled that is designed to build skills and establish a common vision and sense of community.</li> </ol> <p><b>This Year: Addressed by the End of the Program Year</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Job descriptions are available and accessible.</li> <li>2. A clear staff development plan is created. In-house and external training resources are identified to support the plan.</li> <li>3. Staff members attend trainings throughout the program year that align with identified individual goals.</li> <li>4. The administrator and each staff member meet quarterly to assess progress and growth and check in on what is working and what needs to be in place to support their professional development.</li> </ol> <p><b>Next Year: Addressed at the Beginning of the New Program Year</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A staff retreat is held to revisit goals, celebrate progress, and identify training areas of priority for the current program year.</li> <li>2. An orientation is held for new and returning staff members with the goals of building community, sharing expectations, agreeing on a training plan and quality standards, and establishing a shared vision.</li> <li>3. Opportunities are created for staff members to showcase their work</li> </ol>	<p>Here are some strategies to maximizing <b>staff professional development</b> opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For trainings that are required by regulation or by program leadership, ensure staff members are informed of purpose and content of the training prior to it happening and how it links to program improvement goals.</li> <li>• Have at least two staff members participate in most professional development opportunities, including supervisors when possible. This increases institutional knowledge and ability to share learning with others in the program.</li> <li>• Create a system to track the time and content of staff members' professional development.</li> <li>• Create an annual professional development plan for each staff member and ensure resources for professional development are set aside in the program budget.</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>TRY THIS</b></p> <p><b>“Each One, Teach One”</b></p> <p>To maximize investment in staff participation at professional conferences, workshops, networking events, and other forums that highlight best practice in the field, ask staff to bring back</p>

through peer learning sessions. Accomplishments will be acknowledged with announcements and awards.

information and resources gathered at these events. Give them time to share what they have learned with their colleagues one-on-one and during regular staff meetings. This will save both time and money, and everyone will benefit from events attended by any staff member.

## AREA 4: PROGRAM ENVIRONMENT

TAKING ACTION	TIPS FOR SUCCESS
<p><i>A suggested plan of action for a program scoring below level 3 on indicators focused on an <b>environment that supports positive development</b>:</i></p> <p><b>Right Now: Addressed within the First 30-60 Days of Assessment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program supplies are inventoried.</li> <li>• Broken or damaged equipment is replaced.</li> <li>• Orders are placed based on current needs.</li> <li>• Staff members establish a prioritized "wish list" of items needed and/or desired.</li> <li>• Staff members work in partnership with young people to organize program space and begin to assess the interests of children and youth.</li> </ul> <p><b>This Year: Addressed by the End of the Program Year</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff members discuss how program activities offer children/youth opportunities to take initiative and explore their interests.</li> <li>• Staff members share promising practices with others.</li> <li>• Staff members and children/youth reflect on program improvement and accomplishments throughout the year.</li> </ul> <p><b>Next Year: Addressed at the Beginning of the New Program</b></p>	<p>As you reflect on your <b>program's environment</b>, keep in mind that the physical, emotional, and social space should always support positive child/youth development and encourage positive interactions among peers and adults. Here are a few tips to help you create a child- and youth-centered space:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish specific ways to welcome children and youth into the program, such as holding orientations, organizing a buddy system, creating a welcome committee, etc.</li> <li>• Involve children and youth in creating program guidelines.</li> <li>• Make the space child/youth-friendly – display young people's work in the program spaces, display magazines and books of interest, play music, or decorate with comfortable and colorful furniture.</li> <li>• Give young people a voice and opportunities for healthy self-expression through hands-on activities, such as poetry, drama, dance, rap performance, sports, etc.</li> </ul> <p><b>TRY THIS</b></p> <p><b>Youth as Resources</b></p> <p>Prepare young people to walk through the program space and give their feedback about everything from the way staff members greet youth to the art on the walls. You might create a checklist of questions to help guide their observations and document their feedback. Here is a suggestion for encouraging young people to share their feedback</p>

<p><b>Year</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff meets at the beginning of the year to plan activities. Staff members reflect on their program's environment and identify opportunities for young people to be engaged as leaders creating intentional venues for children/youth to share feedback.</li> <li>• Children/youth are recruited to create a youth council in which staff members will assign work to conduct program observations and lead activities at the site.</li> <li>• The inventory of program supplies will be completed and supplies will be ordered on a quarterly basis.</li> <li>• Children/youth are acknowledged for their leadership and ongoing contributions to the program.</li> </ul>	<p>and ideas.</p> <p><b>Mapping Project:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask the group to draw a map of the program (artistic talent not required) and then color the spaces where they feel most comfortable.</li> <li>• Use the maps as a jumping-off point for discussion about what makes a space comfortable and welcoming.</li> <li>• Use the information gathered to create comment cards so that other young people and adults can give feedback about the spaces.</li> <li>• Bring your group together after the walk-through to share observations and brainstorm solutions for areas of improvement. Discuss what action the group may need to take to change the environment.</li> </ul>
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## AREA 5: HEALTH & SAFETY

TAKING ACTION	TIPS FOR SUCCESS
<p><i>A suggested plan of action for a program scoring below level 3 on indicators supporting <b>health and wellness</b>:</i></p> <p><b>Right Now: Addressed within the First 30-60 Days of Assessment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff members work in partnership with administrators to review policies to support wellness and prevention of disease and harm.</li> <li>• Health and wellness practices are reviewed for sensitivity to the diversity of children and families.</li> <li>• Staff members become aware of children's' history and needs.</li> </ul> <p><b>This Year: Addressed by the End of the Program Year</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff members along with administrators adjust, create, and/or update policies as needed to ensure the health and well-being of children and families.</li> <li>• Staff members and children/youth are trained on emergency preparedness and response plan.</li> <li>• Staff members and children/youth reflect on program improvement and accomplishments throughout the year.</li> </ul> <p><b>Next Year: Addressed at the Beginning of the New Program Year</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quarterly reviews of health and wellness policies/procedures are scheduled.</li> <li>• Periodic training and practice of emergency procedures during</li> </ul>	<p>As you reflect on <b>health and safety issues</b> in your program, understand that until children and youth have their physical and emotional needs met they are not likely to succeed in activities that require concentration, memory or higher-level thinking skills. Vigilance in addressing risks that may harm participants is an important aspect of quality afterschool programming. Here are a few tips to help you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Serve nutritional snacks in a timely manner.</li> <li>• Involve young people in the planning of health and wellness practices, for example nutrition snack menus, personal hygiene, physical fitness, adequate sleep.</li> <li>• Ensure that staff model positive health and wellness practices for children and parents.</li> <li>• Maintain a safe environment. Involve both staff and children/youth in performing a daily scan of program space(s) to ensure that no hazardous elements exist.</li> <li>• Give young people a voice and opportunities to explore similarities and differences among peers. Establish a culture of respect for all.</li> <li>• Include parents in the health and wellness efforts of the program in a variety of ways, such as providing bulletin boards, articles on health and wellness in newsletters, cooking activities, meetings on the topic, etc.</li> </ul>

program hours are scheduled.

## TRY THIS

**The Week of the Young Cook** can be an empowering experience for young people as they exchange ideas, explore different cultures, and discover the benefits of health and nutrition. Young people can be engaged in planning the menu, assigning tasks, working within a budget, and gaining a better understanding of daily nutritional requirements. Cooking activities foster academic and life skills. Here are a few suggestions to ensure successful and empowering experiences for children/youth:

- Spend some time working with the food pyramid and daily nutrition requirements. Know what the USDA requirements are for Afterschool snacks.
- Establish a budget for a week of snacks; assign work groups
- Plan the snack menu, prepare a shopping list, and review grocery advertisements and coupons.
- Shop for necessary items
- Measure ingredients and prepare snacks
- Eat and enjoy
- Clean up
- Survey and graph the results to determine whether each snack was a good, nutritious, economical choice

## AREA 6: ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICES

### TAKING ACTION

*A suggested plan of action for a program scoring below level 3 on indicators focused on **strategic planning**:*

#### **Right Now: Addressed within the First 30-60 Days of Assessment**

1. Establish a planning committee made up of staff, participants, families, and board members.
2. Assign a point person to monitor progress and keep the committee on task.
3. Revise program documents to include program goals.

#### **This Year: Addressed by the End of the Program Year**

1. Find an experienced facilitator to guide and coach the organization through a strategic planning session.
2. Schedule leadership trainings for Site Director and other program leaders.
3. Committee identifies realistic benchmarks for achieving goals and ways to measure them.
4. Schedule ongoing staff meetings to share lessons learned and to revisit the plan.
5. Provide decision-making, leadership, and communication trainings to stakeholders in preparation for strategic planning conversations.

#### **Next Year: Addressed at the Beginning of the New Program Year**

### TIPS FOR SUCCESS

**Ensuring a solid organizational structure** at your site, especially when time is limited:

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

#### **Steps towards Sustainability**

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

- Increase program visibility through unique marketing and outreach efforts in your

1. Hold formal orientation to revisit program plans and to accommodate the changing needs of participants, families, and the organization.
2. Develop formal mechanisms to encourage feedback from all stakeholders including staff.
3. Identify a designated check-in time as a vehicle to empower stakeholders and staff to inform the process, share concerns, and make revisions to the program plan as needed.

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

**TRY THIS**

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

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