CREATING A UNIFIED VISION TO SERVE GEORGIA'S YOUTH

GEORGIA

AFTERSCHOOL & YOUTH DEVELOPMENT QUALITY STANDARDS

USER'S GUIDE

CREATING A UNIFIED VISION TO SERVE GEORGIA'S YOUTH

Introduction

Georgia's afterschool and youth development programs provide thousands of youth—from kindergarten through high school—with safe and enriching environments in their time outside of the home and school contexts. High quality afterschool and youth development programs can make important contributions to young people's development and well being. To ensure that Georgia's young people are equipped to thrive and succeed in the multiple domains of their lives, our afterschool and youth development programs must provide environments and experiences that benefit youth socially, emotionally, and academically.

Funded by the Governor's Office for Children and Families (GOCF), the Georgia Afterschool and Youth Development Quality Standards (ASYD) is a collaborative project that, in addition to the Governor's Office for Children and Families, is endorsed by the following state agencies: the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE), the Georgia Department of Human Services (DHS), and the Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH). The development of the Standards was also informed and supported by an array of experts in the fields of education, youth development, public health and juvenile justice.

Georgia's Afterschool and Youth Development Quality Standards are grounded in the widely held and well-established understanding that children, youth, and families benefit when programs increase their capacity to realize their mission by providing high quality programming. Most importantly, the ASYD Quality Standards are informed by research in a variety of disciplines including education, child development and psychology, organizational psychology, business management and public health. The Standards were carefully crafted to ensure that each standard and the supporting indicators are evidence-based, reflect current best practice and correlate with positive intermediary and long-term outcomes in youth. External peer review was provided by Dr. Gabriel Kuperminc, Chair of the Community Psychology Doctoral Program with the Department of Psychology at Georgia State University, Dr. Melissa Landers-Potts with the Department of Human Development and Family Science at the University of Georgia, and Dr. Cynthia Suveg with the Department of Psychology at the University of Georgia.
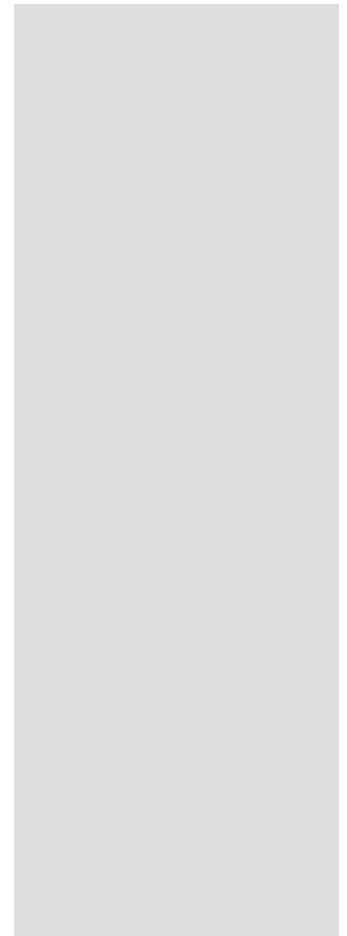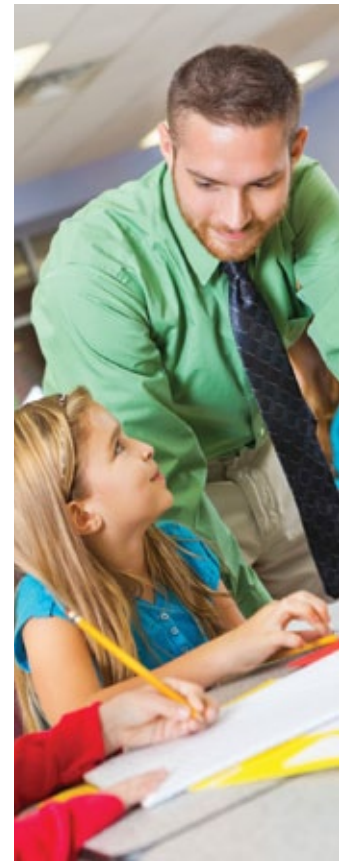
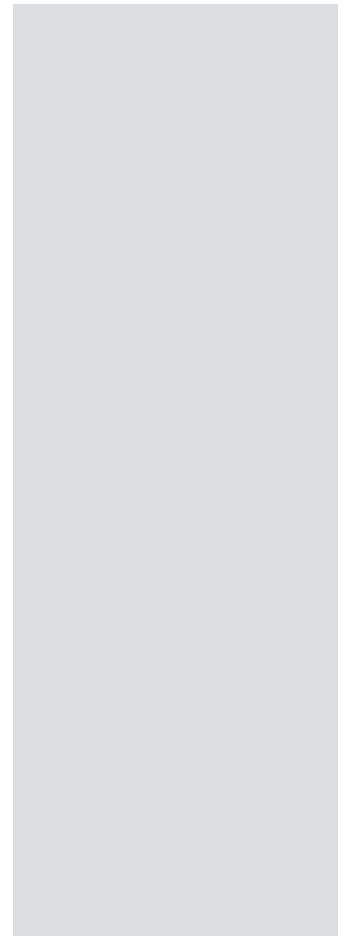# What is an "Afterschool" and/or "Youth Development" Program?

This document uses the terms "afterschool" and "youth development" to fully describe programs that serve youth any age between five and 18 during any of the following array of timeframes--before school, after school, during times and days when there is no school, during vacations, and summer. Comprehensive programs provide safe places for children and youth when their parents are not available, as well as academic support, enrichment activities, and youth development opportunities. While some stand-alone, single-purpose programs may serve youth who do not need comprehensive services, some of the same guidelines and safeguards should be available.

What are the Georgia ASYD Standards?

The Georgia ASYD Quality Standards are research-based best practice guidelines that delineate the critical components of high-quality youth development programs. These guidelines are organized by nine distinct categories, entitled quality elements. Each of these nine quality elements includes a series of related standards. The Standards are supported by a set of practice-based indicators that help to illuminate what each standard looks like in the context of a program.

A standard or best practice is a method that is widely accepted as being an effective way of accomplishing a desired outcome.

An indicator is a characteristic of a program standard that is observable and subject to measurement and can be used to describe one or more aspects of the program quality.

How Can the ASYD Quality Standards and Assessment Tool be Used?

In this document, the Standards are presented in the format of an observation-based self-assessment tool. These Standards, when adopted by afterschool and youth development programs, can be used as a framework for the design and implementation of high quality programs for youth from elementary through high school. Employed as an assessment tool, the Standards can help assist programs facilitate a process of continual improvement through an examination of what they are doing well and where to make improvements. In this regard, the Standards are a vehicle for engaging staff and stakeholder teams in ongoing data-driven collaborative decision-making processes. The assessment tool is intended to support a reflective process in which program staff and stakeholders explore their own programs and work collaboratively to develop strategies to enhance policies, procedures, and practices.

In addition to helping programs enhance their capacity to achieve their mission and validate their impact, the Standards are designed as an instrument by which funders and stakeholders can ensure that the programs they support will deliver high quality services. The Standards also serve as a practical tool for families in that they provide a lens through which families and youth can assess their expectations of programs. More broadly, adoption of the Standards exemplifies a commitment made by the state, as well as by youth development communities of practice, to provide young people with enriching out-of-school environments and engaging experiences that will help them to succeed and thrive in many arenas. Applied on multiple levels, the Standards can serve as a mechanism for educating the youth development community and its partners, as a whole, about what high quality programming looks like and how it can be achieved.
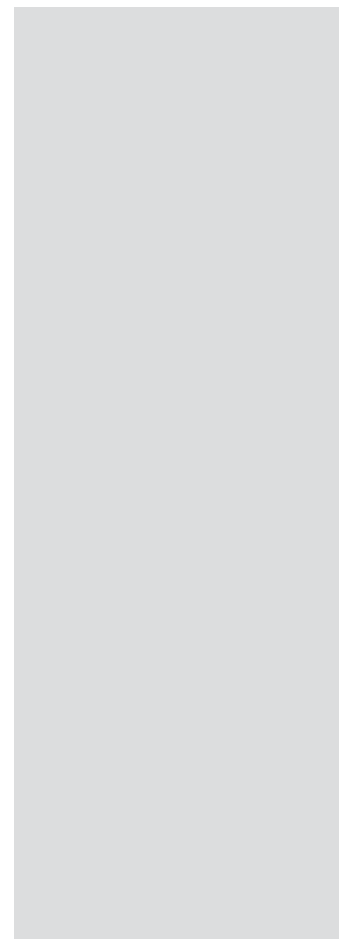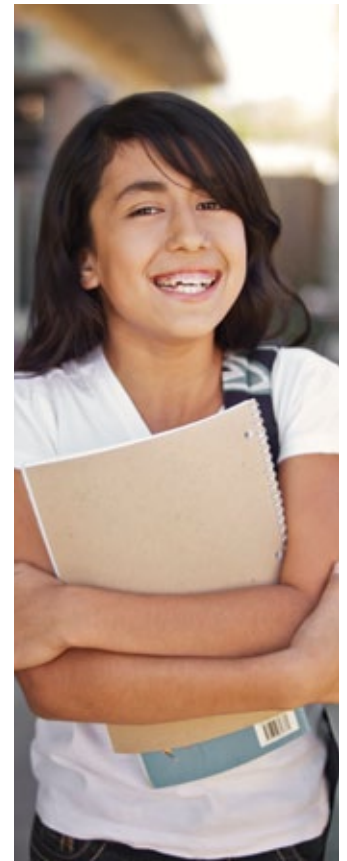
What is Self-Assessment?

Self-assessment provides a lens for examining the overall quality of a program, shows how a program evolves over time, and provides a picture of where a program should be in the future. While the ASYD Quality Assessment Tool can be employed externally, (e.g., for accountability and compliance with grant requirements) the primary purpose of the tool is to provide data to inform program improvement efforts. Organizations that practice ongoing self-assessment are better prepared and better able to realize program goals and show measurable outcomes.

Self-assessment differs from formal program evaluations in that formal evaluations tend to be highly structured, high-stakes, outcomes focused, and are often facilitated exclusively by outside observers. Self-assessment, on the other hand, provides an internal structure for comparing perceptions and is intended to facilitate a collective vision of promising practices and desired outcomes. Moreover, self-assessment is conducted according to a program's schedule and is primarily facilitated by staff or other stakeholders that are familiar with and connected to the program.
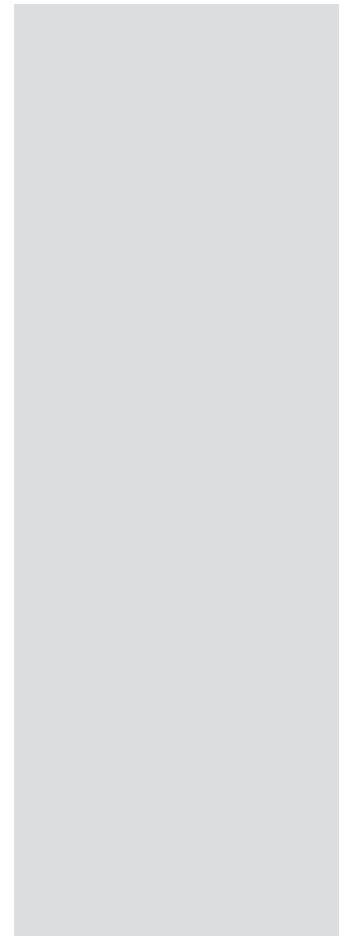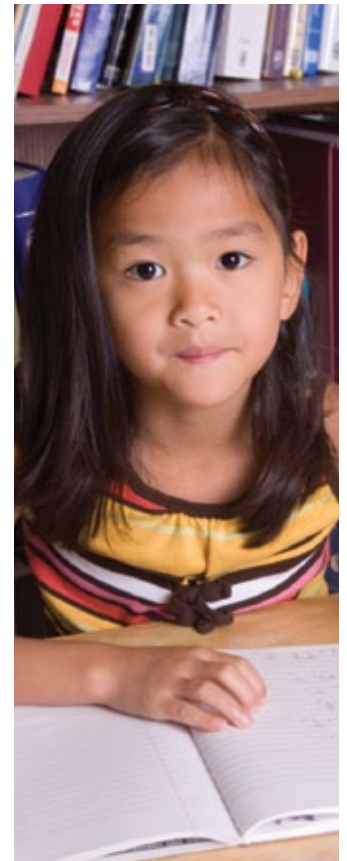
Overview of the ASYD Quality Assessment Tool

The ASYD Quality Assessment Tool is organized into nine quality elements identified through a review of current research.

Quality Element 1 / Programming & Youth Development

Quality Element 2 / Linkages with the School Day

Quality Element 3 / Environment & Climate

Quality Element 4 / Relationships

Quality Element 5 / Health & Well Being
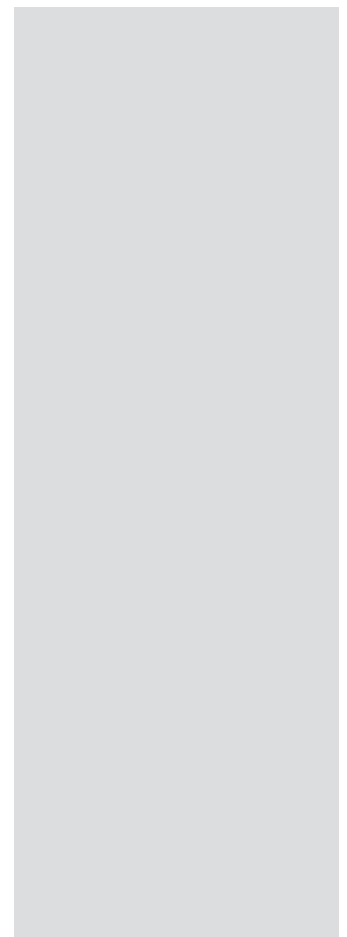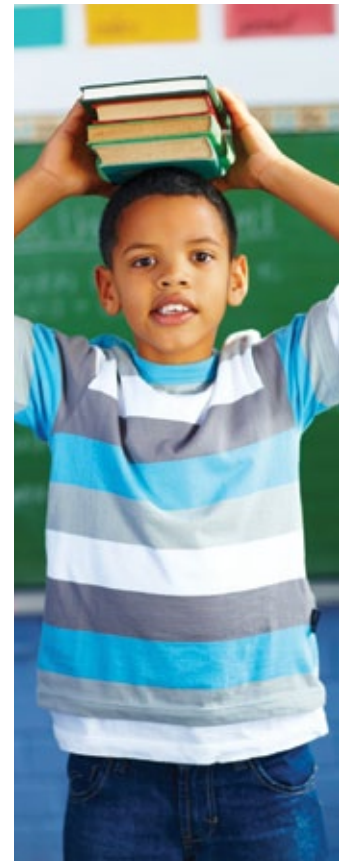
Quality Element 6 / Staffing & Professional Development

Quality Element 7 / Organizational Practices

Quality Element 8 / Evaluation & Outcomes

Quality Element 9 / Family & Community Partnerships

Rating System

The ASYD Quality Assessment Tool uses the following four-point frequency-based rating scale. The scale is designed to answer the question "how true is it that these statements describe what I observed?"

4 = Very True
The desired practices were observed consistently and/or during all expected situations and times and for all or almost all of the youth present.

3 = Mostly True
The desired practices were observed most of the time and for a good proportion of the youth but not at all expected times or perhaps not for all youth (i.e., there were some missed opportunities).

2 = Somewhat True
The desired practices are observed infrequently or only partially met (i.e., one or some of the indicators are observed but not all of the indicators are present). Or, there is some minor evidence of negative expressions of the behaviors/practices, as indicated by a "1" rating.

1 = Not True
The desired practices were expected, but not observed. Or, the observed practices were a poor approximation of the desired practices, or represented a negative expression of the desired practices, as indicated by the definition of a "1" rating.

Non-Applicable / Don't Know
The observer is not familiar enough with this aspect of the program to rate the performance on this standard or is not sure how to rate it at this time. Or, this standard and/or indicators do not apply to our site or program.

Note: It is recommended that the Don't Know / Non-Applicable rating be used infrequently. If a particular practice appears to be absent due to the nature of the organization, program, or activity, consider whether it is at all possible to achieve this practice, even by employing creative means.

Afterschool and youth development programs should strive to meet a 4 for each standard. Assistance and support should be sought for each area that is rated as a 1 or 2.
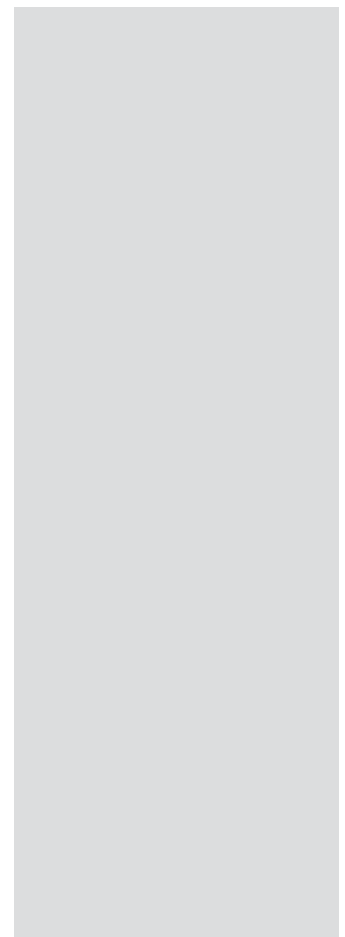
Getting Started:
How to Use the ASYD Quality Assessment Tool

The following steps will help you determine how your program can use the ASYD Quality Assessment Tool to evaluate program quality and develop an action plan based on the results.

Step 1:
Select the Quality Elements that You Want to Assess

You have several options depending on your time, capacity, and what information is most important to your program's goals.

Option A - You can complete the entire assessment, evaluating all of the quality elements to provide a comprehensive picture of quality in your program.

Option B - Or, you can select one or more of the quality elements that are most critical to your program's growth and focus your assessment on these areas. While you may choose to select from among the quality elements and not administer the entire assessment, it is critical that you assess each of the standards within the quality elements you select. The reason for doing so is that the Standards work in concert with each other to provide a comprehensive picture of quality programming in that domain.

Note: It is recommended that, whenever possible, the entire assessment be administered.
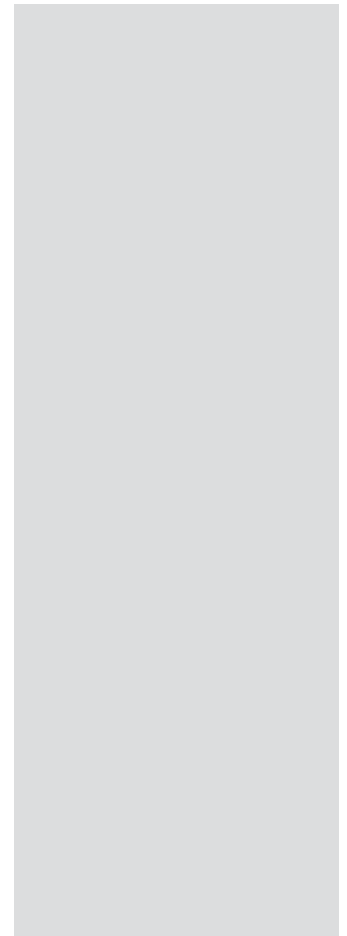
Step 2: Identify an Assessment Team Leader

Determining who will lead the assessment team is a key step in the process. In collaboration with other staff and stakeholders, the assessment team leader will coordinate who will be involved in the process, how and when it will take place, and how the data and findings will be compiled, shared and used. The leader must also ensure that the self-assessment process ends with a plan for program improvement. Often, site directors or supervisors take the lead in the assessment process. However, program staff, parents, volunteers, or other stakeholders can also possess the qualities needed to serve as the team leader. In some cases, programs select an external team leader in order offer neutrality to the process.

Note: It is recommended that the Site Director or Program Supervisor serve as the as the team leader whenever possible.
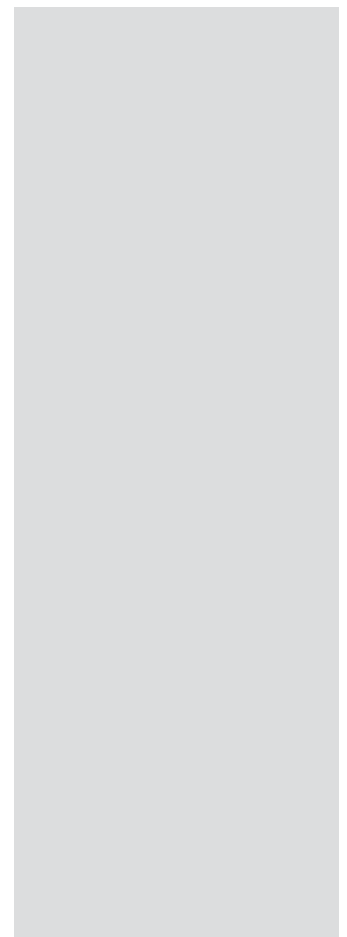
Step 3:
Select a Timeframe for Assessment

There is no perfect time to conduct a self-assessment. Many programs choose to implement the self-assessment process in the beginning of the program year in order to provide a baseline understanding of the program's performance level and to allow ample time to support program growth throughout the year. However, engaging in self-assessment process mid-year can also be useful in that it provides a lens for stepping back and identifying what's working and what needs to change prior to completing a course of action. You may also conduct the assessment at the end of the year as a mechanism for identifying growth and success achieved throughout the year (particularly if an assessment was administered at the onset of the program year as well) or as a way of identifying areas of improvement for the following year. Or, you may choose to conduct the assessment multiple times throughout the year. When selecting a timeframe for assessment, consider how the process can be integrated into a larger, multi-year planning and continual improvement effort such that findings can be compared from one assessment year to the next.

Note: It is recommended that the entire assessment be administered at least once annually.

The assessment process may be conducted in one day or over the course of a week, month, or year. For example, you could focus on one quality element a month. Just remember that for the quality elements selected, all of the standards within that area must be assessed. Regardless of when you conduct your assessment, the timing needs to complement what is happening at your site.
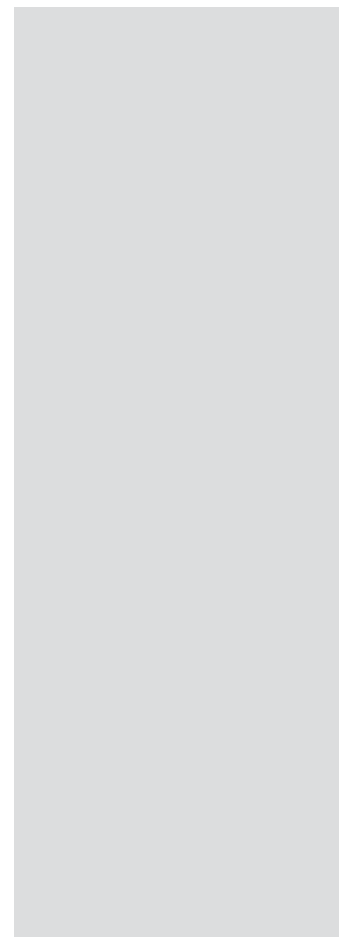
Step 4:
Choose Your Assessment Team

It is a very useful practice to involve a variety of stakeholders in the assessment process. Whether you are a new program or a long-standing organization, involving multiple parties in the process will provide a range of perspectives on current programming, enrich the team's reflection and debrief, inform a wider range of ideas for improvement, and help to increase and maintain the momentum for assessment process. Consider including site directors, staff members, program participants, parents, school staff, volunteers, and other stakeholders on the team.

Step 5:
Orient Your Assessment Team

Prior to implementing the assessment, meet with your assessment team members to provide them with a copy of the tool, review the assessment tool and process, and explain how the results will be tabulated.
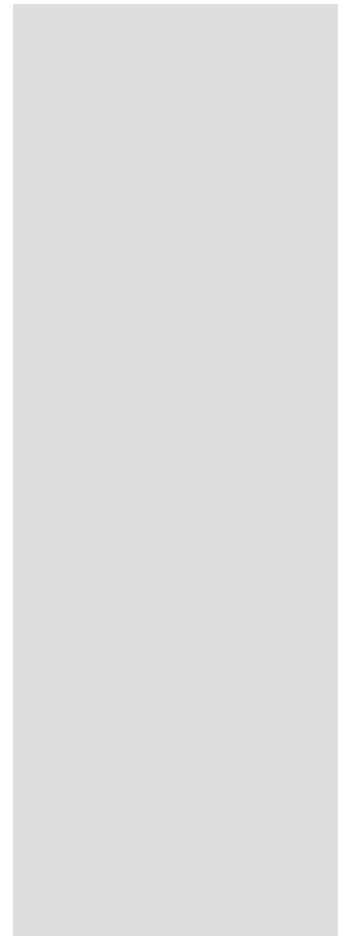
Step 6:
Complete the Assessment

The ASYD Quality Assessment Tool is an observation-based tool that requires that the assessment team to observe each standard in practice or to observe supporting evidence of the standard. The indicators are provided to clarify what the standards look like in practice. As such, some of the standards require the observation of point-of-service interactions and practices (e.g., the observation of activities) and some of the standards require that the reviewers observe elements of administrative systems (e.g., documents). In this regard, all of the standards require tangible evidence to generate a rating for each item. A lack of evidence, therefore, suggests that the practice is not in place and a lower rating would be assigned.

When conducting your assessment, the entire team will observe the program together. It is recommended that when selecting program areas to observe, the team stay present in that area for at least 20 minutes prior to moving to another program area. Each team member will independently use the rating scale to generate one rating for each item. Encourage team members to take copious notes in the space provided in order to help explain how they decided upon and selected a rating.
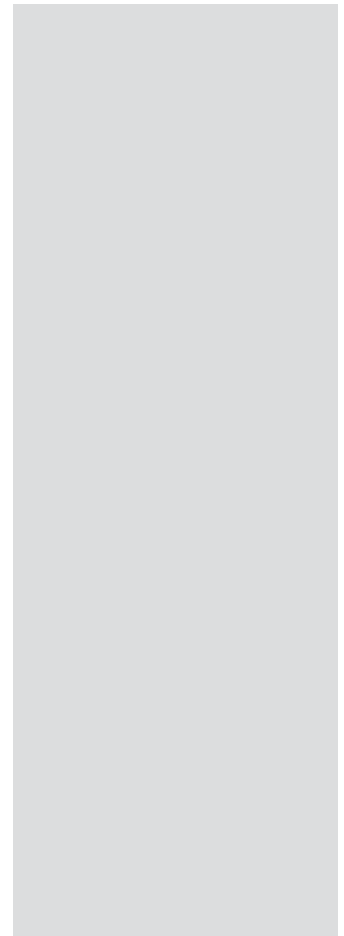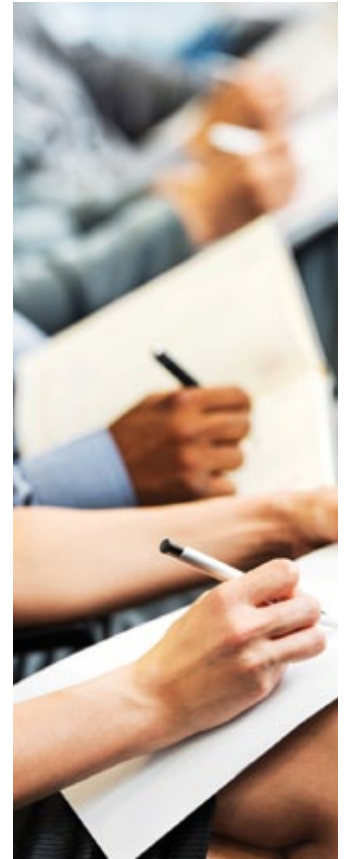
Step 7:
Come to Consensus

After completing the self-assessment, your team will meet to review the findings. Teams will review each standard, discussing each individual rating and the evidence to support the rating, with the objective of coming to consensus on each item.

In most cases, the group will agree on a rating with minimal discussion. For some standards, however, team members may suggest widely different ratings. In this case, the team should explore their divergent views with the goal of agreeing on a single rating. When resolving differences of opinion during the consensus process, consider posing the following questions:

• What would the "perfect practice" look like for you?

• How does the program measure up to your expectations, based on observable practices and policies?

• How does the rating you chose align with the examples you gave?

Note: It is recommended that teams meet to come to consensus immediately following the implementation of the assessment to ensure that the details and evidence of the observations are not forgotten.
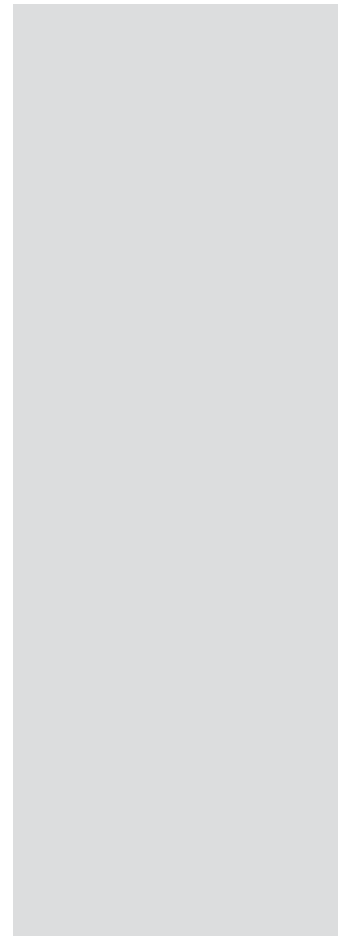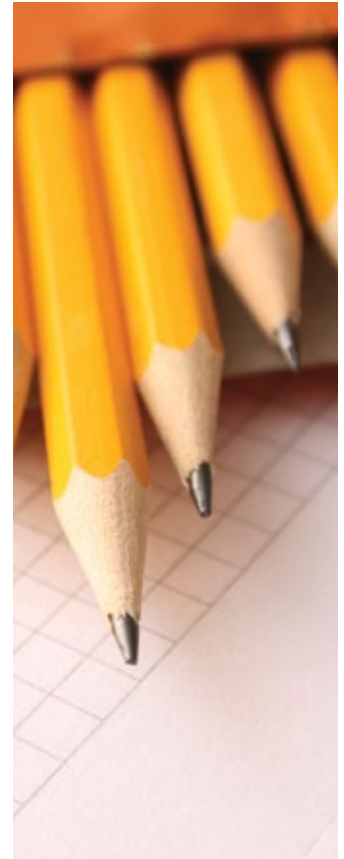
Step 8:
Review the Results

After coming to consensus, assessment teams (or subcommittees) will come together to discuss individual elements or compare results across multiple elements. When reflecting on specific quality elements discuss:

• Which standards are rating the highest? What does our program do to accomplish this?

• Which standards are rated the lowest? What does our program currently do (or not do) that affects this practice?

• Are there standards whose ratings are much higher or lower than predicted? Why might that be?

• Are there any indicators for which many people said they didn't know the answer? Does this suggest the need for additional information?

When comparing multiple quality elements discuss:

• Which program quality elements are the strongest in this program? Why?

• Which program quality elements received the lowest overall ratings? Why?

• Does a high or low rating for one program quality element affect our performance on another? How? Does this suggest need for additional information, training, or resources?

Note: It is recommended that assessment teams meet to review the results within several days of conducting the assessment and coming to consensus in order to ensure that team members recall the observations and to maintain team momentum.
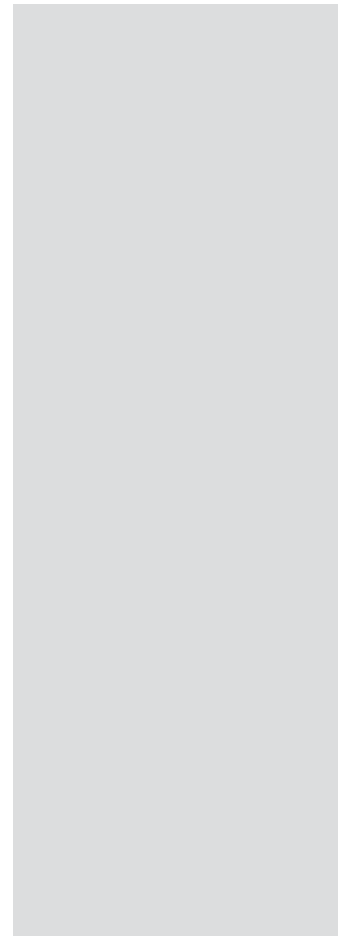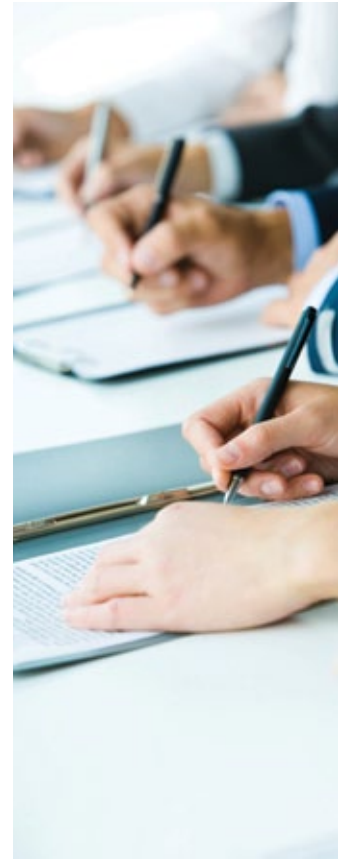
Step 9:
Share Results with Stakeholders

After reviewing the results of the assessment, the team will share these results with stakeholders. Consider sharing the results with youth, families and caregivers, the board of directors, funders, collaborating organizations, volunteers and other partners. Your team's mechanism for reporting the assessment results should be suitable to the group who will be receiving the information. For example, a written report may be appropriate for funders and board members while a one-page summary or parent meeting may be appropriate for families and caregivers.
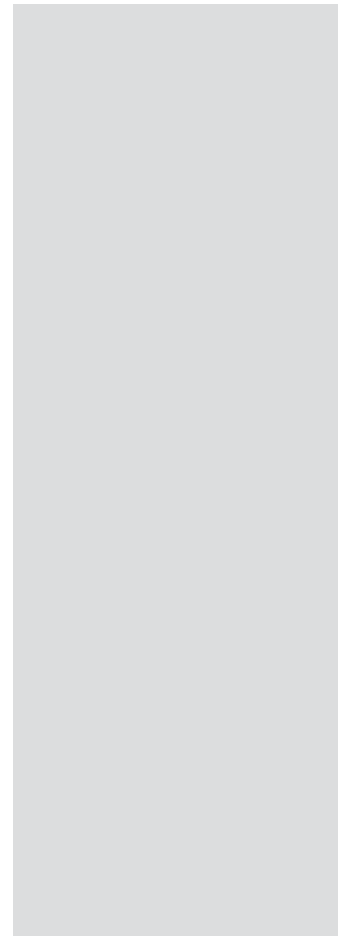
Step 10:
Create an Action Plan

Based on the team's assessment findings and review of the results, the team (or a subcommittee) will develop an action plan to improve quality practice, where needed, and to maintain those areas in which programs are the strongest. To carry out your action plan, your program may require professional development, technical assistance, or other supportive resources.

Note: It is recommended that practices that received a 1 or a 2 be immediately addressed. Also, practices that have an impact on youths' health or safety or that are closely tied to program goals should take priority in the action plan. Practices that receive a 3 should be addressed within the current program year. Practices that receive a 4 should be addressed with regard to how sustainability can be ensured.

At least three months after the implementation of the action plan, program staff should convene to discuss the activities they have undertaken to address quality and specifically, what's working, what's not working, and what remains to be done in the future.
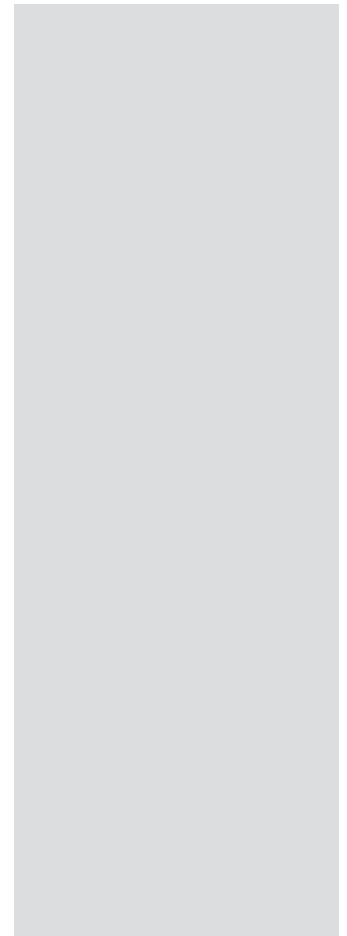
How to Use Your Data

The self-assessment process offers all of the core components of program planning and improvement, including identifying areas in need of improvement, setting goals and timelines, and assigning responsibility for strategies. For programs that already have a process for program improvement, such as professional development meetings, the use of or findings from the AYSD Quality Assessment Tool can be integrated into the process and can help guide the conversations. The self-assessment process can also determine areas in which program staff need or want additional support, such as training or coaching, and can inform the creation of a professional development plan.
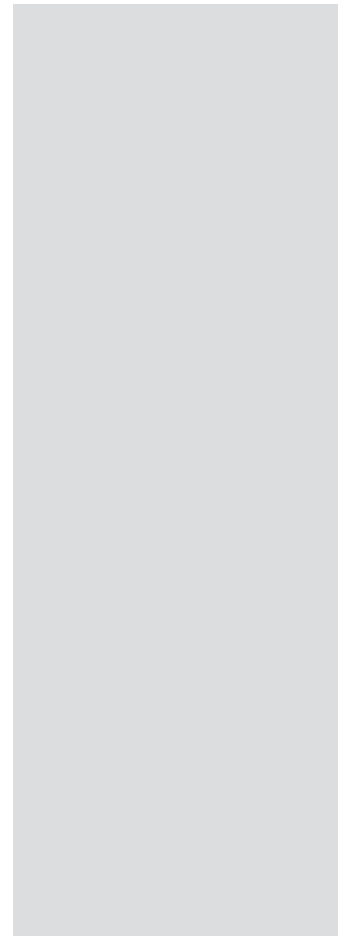
Source Documents

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