



# **YOUTH PROGRAM QUALITY ASSESSMENT**

Organization name:

Site/program name:

Name(s) of program offering(s) observed:

Date of observation:

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David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality

A unit of the Forum for Youth Investment

7064 Eastern Ave NW

Washington, DC 20012

202.207.3333

[www.forumfyi.org](http://www.forumfyi.org)

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# INTRODUCTION

## PURPOSE

The Youth Program Quality Assessment (Youth PQA) is designed to evaluate the quality of youth programs & identify staff training needs. It consists of a set of score-able standards for best practices in afterschool programs, community organizations, schools, summer programs & other places where youth have fun, work & learn with adults. The Youth PQA is designed to empower people & organizations to envision optimal-quality programming for youth by providing a shared language for practice & decision-making & producing scores that can be used for comparison & assessment of progress over time. The Youth PQA measures the quality of youths' experiences & promotes the creation of environments that tap the most important resource available to any youth-serving organization: a young person's motivation to engage critically with the world.

## THE 2012 REVISION

The Youth PQA is an assessment tool for best practices for any youth-serving program. Each scale was given a short label or name to focus attention on the intent & purpose of the scale. This edition also contains some minor changes to make the items easier to interpret & score. When an item was substantively rewritten to clarify scoring, the original intent of the item was preserved wherever possible. We added three items to Skill-Building to better assess this important scale. Minor changes were made to increase consistency in wording across the School-Age PQA & the Youth PQA. Items in the Youth PQA but not the School-Age PQA are identified by (Y) after the item number.

## THE 2020 REVISION

In March 2020, many programs transitioned to virtual learning environments. To support virtual assessment, an additional scoring option, Not Scored (NS), was created, allowing assessors to decide before the assessment not to score specific items because they are not applicable to the purpose or modality of the program. Similar to an "X", it was decided that a score of "NS" will also be excluded from the scale and domain averages so as not to negatively impact the scores. This change then updated the scoring calculations.

If less than 50% of items in a scale are given a 1, 3 or 5 score, no scale score will be computed. If less than 50% of the scale in a domain have scores, no domain score will be computed. If less than 50% of the domains in the tool have scores, no Total Score will be computed.

## BENEFITS

The Youth PQA offers several important attributes:

- *Experience-tested approach* – The standards for best practices that make up the Youth PQA are grounded in extensive experience working with young people. Together, the scales in the instrument represent a youth development approach that works.
- *Research-based rubrics* – The Youth PQA contains proven measurement rubrics that allow observers to differentiate programs in important and meaningful ways.
- *Opportunities to observe practice* – Staff using the Youth PQA must spend time watching what happens in their program.
- *Flexibility* – The Youth PQA is designed to meet a range of accountability and improvement needs, from self-assessment to research and evaluation.

## TERMINOLOGY

- *Form* refers to the entire group of scales used for assessment. For example: Form A – Program Offerings and Form B – Organization Practices & Policies.
- *Domain* refers to the group of scales falling under one of the sections I–VII. For example, in Form A – Program Offerings, a domain is "I. Safe Environment," which contains scales that pertain to that domain. *Domain score* is the average of scale scores for each domain I–VII. For example, the domain "I. Safe Environment" contains five scale scores to be averaged for a domain score.
- *Scale score* refers to the average of the scores (one per item) that make up a scale. For example, the Healthy Environment scale, has four items that can be scored as 1, 3 or 5 and then averaged for a scale score.
- *Item or item row* refers to a single row on the Youth PQA for which there are descriptors for scores 1, 3 and 5. Level 5 is best practice.

## DEFINITIONS

- *Organization* refers to the agency that operates services for young people. An organization may be a community-based nonprofit agency, church or temple, private center, neighborhood association or school.
- *Site* refers to the physical location of the activities being observed. For example, Middleton School or Bay Area Country Club.
- *Program offerings* refer to structured activities led by regular staff with the same youth over time. This includes the range of scheduled services available to youth at an organization (classes, workshops, meetings, special events, homework help, discussion groups, etc.)
- *Session* refers to one scheduled period of a program offering, e.g., a session might be when the photography club meets from 3 to 5 p.m. on Wednesday.
- *Staff* refers to the person or persons facilitating a session. Staff may include paid workers, volunteers or peer leaders.
- *Activities* are the planned interactions led by staff within a program offering. For example, the activities in an art club might include making a collage, learning different painting techniques and making sculptures with found objects.
- *Program hours* are the normal hours that the full range of program offerings are in session.

## INTRODUCTION TO ITEMS & SCORING

The Youth PQA items measure quality in different ways. Some items measure aspects of the environment or the way the session is structured. The bulk of these are in domain "I. Safe Environment." Some items measure if staff exhibit specific behaviors or best practice methods, or how frequently staff carries out the practice. Some items distinguish between youth-initiated behaviors that occur informally/spontaneously & those that have been set up intentionally by staff. Others measure *how many* youths have certain opportunities. It is important to note that items generally capture *either* staff practices *or* youth behaviors/opportunities, but not both. Both are indicators of a quality program, although the Youth PQA & continuous improvement approach focus on staff behaviors as that is where staff can directly make changes or improvements.

Scores at all levels are based on a five-point measurement scale ranging from 1-5, where 1 generally represents the absence of a practice or the presence of a poor practice, 3 represents the informal presence of the practice or availability of the practice to only some youth, and 5 represents intentional delivery of the highest quality practices.

A site, network or organization may decide in advance not to score specific practices because they are not relevant to the program offering (e.g., fire extinguisher in a virtual program). Before the assessment, have a conversation to determine if any items or scales are not to be scored because they are not applicable to the purpose or modality of the program.

To complete the assessment, any items which were pre-determined to be omitted are marked NS. A rater may decide certain items should be scored with an "X" as instructed in the instrument. A mark of an "X" indicates that a specific practice was not able to be scored during the program offering (e.g., Reframing Conflict if no conflict situation was observed).

In observing and scoring, it is helpful to keep the following in mind:

- Think about the intent of the item when scoring. Consult the handbook as needed.
- Follow through and pay attention to an entire sequence of events (e.g., youth behavior, staff response, youth response).
- If the item assesses youths' opportunity for something, score based on whether the opportunity was present or explicitly offered, even if some youth do not take advantage of the opportunity.
- Score based on what you see that day, even if there were extenuating circumstances present that affected scores.
- If there are two or more staff members, score on whether any one of the staff members carry out a certain practice. Otherwise, focus on the primary staff member.
- *Structured* refers to the quality of being intentional, planned, prompted, initiated and/or named by the staff; it does not refer to youths' informal conversation or actions.

# CONDUCTING A PROGRAM SELF-ASSESSMENT

Team-based program self-assessment using the Youth PQA is a highly effective, low-stakes strategy for building a quality-focused culture. Program self-assessment can help managers and staff co-create meaningful improvement objectives for the quality of their programming and ultimately the outcomes for their young participants.

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

- Work as a team.
- Base scores on observational evidence.
- Focus on conversations about quality.

## 1. SELECT & TRAIN A SELF-ASSESSMENT TEAM

The program self-assessment team should consist of the site leader and at least two program staff, volunteers or parents. The site leader attends PQA Basics training. Team members can prepare to be a part of the program self-assessment process by completing the PQA Basics training online. The site lead should also conduct a meeting or mini training for team members using the materials shared at PQA Basics. Use this time to have a conversation with your team to decide if any items or scales are not to be scored because they are not applicable to the purpose or modality of the program.

## 2. PREPARE FOR DATA COLLECTION

Team members collect data by taking turns observing their programs in action. Sometimes, schedules need to be rearranged or a program manager needs to arrange coverage in order to provide the opportunity for staff to observe each other. Plan time as soon as possible following the observations for discussion and scoring.

The site teams should observe *program offerings*: 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. Avoid homework help, open gym, unstructured computer lab time, drop-in, etc. Always notify program staff of scheduled observations ahead of time. This is not a test!

If timing and staff schedules do not allow for full observations, then try to observe at least one hour of programming, divided among self-assessment team members (e.g., three people each observe for 20 minutes, four people each observe for 15 minutes). Vary observation times so that your observations include the beginning, middle and end of different sessions.

## 3. OBSERVE & TAKE NOTES

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 back page of the Youth PQA. You can bring the full Youth PQA to your observation, but do not write notes onto the form or try to score the form while observing.

Take notes throughout the offering on factual information; include quotes, actions, etc. As a general rule, expect to take 3–4 or more handwritten pages (1–2 typed) of notes per 30 minutes of observation.

Your notes should be:

- Factual & objective (rather than judgmental, evaluative or impressionistic)
- Specific and detailed (rather than general)
- Accessible (language should make sense six months from now)
- Chronological (include time markers)

Your notes should include:

- Anecdotal descriptions of interactions
- Quotes of what youth and/or staff say when interacting
- Actions and language of the youth involved
- Materials lists
- Sequences of daily events and routines

At the end of the session, ask the session leader(s) any follow-up questions, as listed on the back of the PQA. After the observation, you will not score the PQA, but save your notes to use during the scoring meeting.

## 4. SCORING THE PQA

After all data has been collected, the site leader guides the team in scoring a single, program-wide Youth PQA Form A. This scoring process can last three hours or more 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 Youth 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 the conversation that occurs while discussing scores and arriving at agreement. The scores can provide a reliable indication of the quality of staff interactions with youth, so it is important to be accurate.

## **5. ENTER SCORES**

The Youth PQA produces scores at the item, scale and domain level. All scores beyond the item level are created using mathematical means, or averages. Scales are averages of items, and domains are averages of scales.

After scoring the items in Form A of the Youth PQA, you can enter the scores into the online Scores Reporter. You can access the online Scores Reporter through the Weikart Center website at [www.cypq.org](http://www.cypq.org). The staff at the Weikart Center is available to offer technical assistance as needed.

# CONDUCTING AN EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

For an external assessment, a trained, reliable external assessor visits a site to observe a single program offering and score a PQA based on the observation.

## 1. ATTEND AN EXTERNAL ASSESSOR RELIABILITY TRAINING

External assessors attend an External Assessment Reliability Training to practice skills and complete a reliability check. All assessors must pass the reliability check to be endorsed as external assessors prior to conducting any site visits.

## 2. PREPARE FOR DATA COLLECTION

The network leader will often coordinate schedules and assign assessors to sites. External assessors should confirm the date and time of observation with the site leader and ask him or her to inform the relevant staff that they will be visiting to conduct an observation. This time should also be used to confirm if any items or scales are not to be scored because they are not applicable to the purpose or modality of the program.

## 3. OBSERVE AND TAKE NOTES

When travelling to the assigned youth program, assessors should arrive at least 15 minutes before the scheduled observation time. Assessors will view program offerings in their entirety (usually 45-90 minutes long).

Assessors take objective observational notes which describe only observable behaviors, language and materials. They focus on the behaviors of the staff and youth with whom the staff is interacting and record as many quotations as possible.

Notes should be:

- Factual and objective (rather than judgmental, evaluative or impressionistic)
- Specific and detailed (rather than general)
- Accessible (language should make sense six months from now)
- Chronological (include time markers)

Notes should include:

- Anecdotal descriptions of interactions
- Quotes of what youth and/or staff say when interacting
- Actions and language of the youth involved
- Materials lists
- Sequences of daily events and routines

At the end of the session, the assessor asks the session leader(s) any follow-up questions as listed on the back of the PQA. The assessor should also ask the staff who led the session the questions on the Staff Information page.

## 4. SCORING THE PQA

After the visit, assessors fit and score using their notes, making sure to fill out all evidence boxes and program description information. The assessor uses the answers to the follow-up questions as evidence to score the items as applicable. Some evidence can be cross-referenced against multiple items. In fact, items with a score of 5 may provide a full listing of relevant evidence.

## 5. ENTER SCORES

The Youth PQA produces scores at the item, scale and domain levels. All scores beyond the item level are created using mathematical means, or averages. Scales are averages of items, and domains are averages of scales. Please note that items scored as "X" or "NS" are excluded from the scale and domain averages, so as not to negatively impact the scores. When more than half of the items within a scale are unscored, there is not enough available data to calculate a valid scale score. Similarly, when more than half of the scales within a domain are unable to be scored, there is not enough available data to calculate a valid domain score. Under these circumstances, scale and domain scores should not be calculated.

After scoring the items in the Youth PQA, the assessor can enter the scores into the online Scores Reporter. The online Scores Reporter can be accessed through the Weikart Center website at [www.cypq.org](http://www.cypq.org). The staff at the Weikart Center is available to offer technical assistance as needed.



# PROGRAM INFORMATION

*[Complete for Program Self-Assessment or External Assessment]*

Organization name: \_\_\_\_\_ Site/program name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of observation (mm/dd/yyyy): \_\_\_\_\_

*If multiple observations were conducted, provide the date of the last one conducted.*

## How was this observation conducted? Check all that apply:

- In-person observation     Live virtual observation     Observed a recorded session

Name(s) of program offering(s) observed: \_\_\_\_\_

Brief description of program offering(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Staff: Youth Ratio:    Total number of staff observed \_\_\_\_\_    Total number of youths observed \_\_\_\_\_

## Grades of young people observed (Circle all that apply):

K    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10    11    12    12+

## Type(s) of program/activity observed (Check all that apply):

- Mentoring                       Literacy                       STEM                       Other academic enrichment  
(e.g., homework help, tutoring, college prep)
- Career readiness  
(e.g., entrepreneurship)                       Youth leadership                       Community service/  
civic engagement                       Visual & performing arts  
(e.g., drama, painting, music)
- Sports, fitness & physical health  
(e.g., basketball, dance, cooking)                       Other:

# EMOTIONAL SAFETY | Psychological & emotional safety is promoted.

ITEMS			SUPPORTING EVIDENCE/ANECDOTES
1.	1 The emotional climate of the session is predominantly negative (e.g., disrespectful, tense, exclusive, even angry or hostile); negative behaviors, such as rudeness, bragging, insults, “trash talking,” negative gestures or other such actions are not mediated by either youth or staff.	3 The emotional climate of the session is neutral or characterized by both positive and negative behaviors.	5 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.	1 Comments or slurs intended to hurt someone who is present explicitly indicate religious, ethnic, class, gender, ability, appearance or sexual orientation bias(es).	3 There is evidence (e.g., comments or slurs) of religious, ethnic, class, gender, ability, appearance or sexual orientation bias, but comments are not directed at anyone present.	5 There is no evidence of bias; rather, there is mutual respect for and inclusion of others of a different religion, race/ethnicity, class, gender, ability, appearance or sexual orientation.

# HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT | The physical environment is safe & free of health hazards.

ITEMS			SUPPORTING EVIDENCE/ANECDOTES		
1.	1 There are major safety and health hazards (e.g., broken equipment or supplies, un-mopped spills, flammable and/or toxic materials) affecting the program space.	3 There are minor safety and health concerns (e.g., dirty floors or furniture, wobbly furniture, program materials in disarray) affecting the program space.	5 The program space is free of health and safety hazards.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
2.	1 There are major sanitary concerns (e.g., unsanitary toilet facilities, dirty or clogged drains, open or spoiling food, overflowing trash container) affecting the program space.	3 There are minor sanitary concerns (e.g., un-swept floor, dirty tables or chairs) affecting the program space.	5 The program space is clean and sanitary.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3.	1 There are major inadequacies in either ventilation or lighting in the program space.	3 Ventilation or lighting is inadequate in some areas in the program space.	5 Ventilation and lighting are adequate in the program space.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
4.	1 The temperature is uncomfortable (e.g., it is too hot or too cold) in the program space.	3 The temperature is uncomfortable for some activities and/or in some areas of the program space.	5 The temperature is comfortable for all activities in the program space.	<input type="checkbox"/>	

# EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS | Appropriate emergency procedures & supplies are present.

*Note: Local fire codes govern the number & location of fire extinguishers.*

ITEMS			SUPPORTING EVIDENCE/ANECDOTES		
1.	1 There are no written emergency procedures (e.g., fire escape route, lost swimmer drill, severe weather instructions), or staff are unable to locate procedures.	3 Written emergency procedures are not posted, but staff is able to locate them.	5 Written emergency procedures are posted in plain view.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Where are the emergency procedures posted?
2.	1 There is no charged fire extinguisher accessible from the program space.	3 At least one charged fire extinguisher is accessible (but not plainly visible) from the program space.	5 At least one charged fire extinguisher is accessible and visible from the program space.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is there an accessible fire extinguisher?
3.	1 A complete first-aid kit is not accessible from the program space.	3 At least one complete first-aid kit is accessible (but not plainly visible) from the program space.	5 At least one complete first-aid kit is accessible and visible from the program space.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is there an accessible first-aid kit?
4.	1 Other safety or emergency equipment appropriate to the activities is not available to the program offering.	3 Other safety and/or emergency equipment appropriate for the program offering is in poor condition, and/or staff cannot locate it.	5 Other appropriate safety and emergency equipment (e.g., for water or vehicle safety, sports or repairs) is available to the program offering as needed, can be located by staff and is maintained in full-service condition.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Does the site have any special safety or emergency equipment? If other equipment is not needed, do not rate. Write an "X" in the box at the left.
5.	1 Entrances to the indoor program space are unsupervised during program hours.	3 At least one entrance to the indoor program space is supervised for security during program hours but others are not, or entrance(s) are sometimes supervised and sometimes not.	5 All entrances to the indoor program space are supervised for security during program hours. (Can include electronic security system.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are entrances to the indoor program space supervised? If there is no indoor program space, do not rate. Write an "X" in the box at the left.
6.	1 Access to outdoor program space is unsupervised during program hours.	3 Access to outdoor program space is sometimes supervised during program hours.	5 Access to outdoor program space is supervised during program hours.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is access to the outdoor program space supervised? If there is no outdoor program space, do not rate. Write an "X" in the box at the left.

## ACCOMMODATING ENVIRONMENT | Program space & furniture accommodate activities.

ITEMS			SUPPORTING EVIDENCE/ANECDOTES	
1.	1 Program space is crowded, without sufficient room to move freely.	3 Program space is crowded in some areas.	5 Program space allows youth and staff to move freely while carrying out activities (e.g., room accommodates all participants without youth blocking doorways, bumping into one another and crowding).	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	1 Program space is not suitable for activities offered.	3 Program space is suitable for some of the activities offered.	5 Program space is suitable for all activities offered (e.g., furniture and room support small and large groups; if athletic activity is offered, then program space supports this).	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	1 Furniture is neither comfortable nor of sufficient quantity for the program offering.	3 Furniture is either comfortable or of sufficient quantity for the program offering (but not both).	5 Furniture is comfortable and of sufficient quantity for all youth participating in the program offering.	<input type="checkbox"/> If there is no furniture and none required, do not rate. Write an "X" in the box at the left.
4.	1 The physical environment cannot be modified to meet the needs of the program offering.	3 The physical environment can be modified to meet the needs of the program offering, but youth and/or staff are discouraged from doing so.	5 The physical environment can be modified to meet the needs of the program offering (e.g., furniture and/or supplies can be moved).	<input type="checkbox"/> If there is no furniture and none required, do not rate. Write an "X" in the box at the left.  Can the furniture be moved around?

# NOURISHMENT | Healthy food & drinks are provided.

ITEMS			SUPPORTING EVIDENCE/ANECDOTES
1. 1 Drinking water is not available.	3 Drinking water is available but not easily accessible (e.g., water is located away from program space; faucet is difficult to use).	5 Drinking water is available and easily accessible to all youth.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. 1 Food or drinks are not available to youth during the session.	3 Food and drinks are available at appropriate times, but there is not enough for every youth to receive a serving.	5 Food and drinks are plentiful and available at appropriate times for all youth during the session.	<input type="checkbox"/> If a meal or snack is not necessary because of structure of program offering, do not rate. Write an "X" in the box at the left.
3. 1 Available food or drink is not nutritious (e.g., junk food – high in fat, sugar or hydrogenated oils).	3 Some available food or drink is not nutritious, and some is healthy.	5 Available food and drink is healthy (e.g., vegetables, fresh fruit, real juices).	<input type="checkbox"/> If no food or drink is served, do not rate. Write an "X" in the box at the left.

## WARM WELCOME | Staff provides a welcoming atmosphere.

ITEMS			SUPPORTING EVIDENCE/ANECDOTES
1.	1 No youth are greeted by staff as they arrive or at the start of the session.	3 Some youth are greeted by staff as they arrive or at the start of the session.	5 All youth are greeted by staff as they arrive or at the start of the session. <input type="checkbox"/>
2.	1 Staff mainly uses a negative tone of voice and disrespectful language.	3 Staff sometimes uses a negative tone of voice and disrespectful language and sometimes uses a warm tone of voice and respectful language.	5 Staff mainly uses a warm tone of voice and respectful language. <input type="checkbox"/>
3.	1 Staff generally frowns or scowls, uses unfriendly gestures and avoids eye contact.	3 Staff sometimes exhibits unfriendly behaviors and sometimes uses a friendly approach.	5 Staff generally smiles, uses friendly gestures and makes eye contact. <input type="checkbox"/>

## SESSION FLOW | Session flow is planned, presented & paced for youth.

ITEMS			SUPPORTING EVIDENCE/ANECDOTES
1. 1 Staff does not start or end session within 10 minutes of scheduled time.	3 Staff either starts or ends session within 10 minutes of scheduled time (but not both).	5 Staff starts and ends session within 10 minutes of scheduled time.	<input type="checkbox"/> Record the following: Scheduled starting time _____ Actual starting time _____ Scheduled end time _____ Actual end time _____
2. 1 Staff does not have materials and supplies ready to begin activities.	3 Staff has some materials and supplies ready to begin activities, or staff has materials and supplies ready to begin only some activities.	5 Staff has all materials and supplies ready to begin all activities (e.g., materials are gathered, set up).	<input type="checkbox"/> If no materials/supplies are required, do not rate. Write an "X" in the box at the left.
3. 1 There are only enough materials and supplies prepared for less than half of the youth to begin activities.	3 There are enough materials and supplies prepared for more than half, but not all, of the youth to begin activities.	5 There are enough materials and supplies prepared for all youth to begin activities.	<input type="checkbox"/> If no materials/supplies are required, do not rate. Write an "X" in the box at the left.
4. 1 Staff does not explain any activities clearly.	3 Staff explains some activities clearly.	5 Staff explains all activities clearly (e.g., youth appear to understand directions; sequence of events and purpose are clear).	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. 1 There is not an appropriate amount of time for more than one activity.	3 There is an appropriate amount of time for all but one activity (e.g., for one activity, most youth either do not finish or finish early with nothing to do).	5 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).	<input type="checkbox"/>



# ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT | Activities support active engagement.

ITEMS			SUPPORTING EVIDENCE/ANECDOTES	
1.	<p><b>1</b> The activities provide no opportunities for youth to engage with materials or ideas; activities mostly involve waiting, listening, watching and repeating.</p>	<p><b>3</b> The activities provide opportunities for youth to engage with materials or ideas for less than half of the time.</p>	<p><b>5</b> The activities involve youth in engaging with (creating, combining, reforming) materials or ideas (e.g., role play, projects, experiments, writing and illustrating stories, outside exploration) for at least half of the time.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	<p><b>1</b> Staff does not provide youth any structured opportunities to talk about (or otherwise communicate) what they are doing and what they are thinking about to others.</p>	<p><b>3</b> During activities, staff provides some youth a structured opportunity to talk about (or otherwise communicate) what they are doing and what they are thinking about to others (e.g., staff asks some youth to explain what they are doing or why, staff has half the group explain their art project to another youth).</p>	<p><b>5</b> 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 their design to staff; staff assigns youth to small groups to work on a shared task).</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. (Y)	<p><b>1</b> 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; lecture format).</p>	<p><b>3</b> The activities focus almost exclusively on concrete experiences, providing limited or no opportunities to engage with related abstract learning (activities almost entirely consist of youth doing, practicing, or experiencing, without learning about or discussing the how, what, or why).</p>	<p><b>5</b> The activities balance concrete experiences involving materials, people, and projects (e.g., field trips, experiments, interviews, practicing dance routines, creative writing) with abstract learning or concepts (e.g., learning/talking about a topic, lectures, staff providing diagrams/formulas).</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. (Y)	<p><b>1</b> The activities do not (will not) lead to tangible products or performances.</p>	<p><b>3</b> The activities lead (or will lead) to tangible products/performances, but do not reflect ideas or designs of youth (e.g., youth will perform dances selected by staff, all youth make birdhouses according to the design supplied by staff).</p>	<p><b>5</b> The program activities lead (or will lead in future sessions) to tangible products/performances that reflect youths' ideas/designs (e.g., youth explain their projects to whole group, all create dance routines to perform later, youth create their own sculptures).</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## SKILL-BUILDING | Staff supports youth in building skills.

ITEMS			SUPPORTING EVIDENCE/ANECDOTES	
1.	<b>1</b> Staff never mentions a specific learning or skill-building focus for the session or activity (e.g., objective, learning target, goal).	<b>3</b> Staff tells youth a specific learning or skill-building focus for the session or activity (e.g., objective, learning target, goal) but the focus is not clearly linked to the activity.	<b>5</b> Staff tells youth a specific learning or skill-building focus for the session or activity (e.g., objective, learning target, goal) and the focus is clearly linked to the activity (e.g., youth do activity related to focus, language from focus is described in activity).	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	<b>1</b> Staff does not encourage youth to try skills or attempt higher levels of performance.	<b>3</b> Staff encourages some youth to try skills or attempt higher levels of performance.	<b>5</b> Staff encourages all youth to try skills or attempt higher levels of performance.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	<b>1</b> Staff does not model skills.	<b>3</b> Staff models skills for some youth.	<b>5</b> Staff models skills for all youth.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	<b>1</b> Staff does not break difficult task(s) into smaller, simpler steps for any youth or there are no tasks of sufficient difficulty to warrant explaining steps.	<b>3</b> Staff breaks difficult task(s) into smaller, simpler steps for some youth.	<b>5</b> Staff breaks difficult task(s) into smaller, simpler steps for all youth (e.g., steps are explained in sequence; instructions are provided for specific steps; examples of completed steps are shared).	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	<b>1</b> When youth struggle (with errors, imperfect results or failure), staff, even once, responds with sarcasm, condescension, criticism, punishment or making fun of the youth.	<b>3</b> 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 not get around to responding to all of them; staff ignores struggling youth).	<b>5</b> 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)	<input type="checkbox"/> If no youth struggle with imperfect results, do not score. Write an "X" in the box at the left. Expect to score this item if item 2 above scores a 3 or 5.

## ENCOURAGEMENT | Staff supports youth with encouragement.

**Note:** Open-ended questions do not have predetermined, correct answers; they seek the opinions, thoughts & ideas of youth.

ITEMS			SUPPORTING EVIDENCE/ANECDOTES	
1.	<b>1</b> Staff does not support contributions or accomplishments of youth in either of the ways described for a score of 3 or 5, or simply doesn't support youth at all.	<b>3</b> Staff supports contributions or accomplishments of youth but uses subjective or evaluative comments, such as "Good job!", "I like it!" or "You're so smart!"	<b>5</b> Staff supports at least some contributions/accomplishments of youth by acknowledging what they've said or done with specific, non-evaluative language (e.g., "Yes, the cleanup project you suggested is a way to give back to the community," "It looks like you put a lot of time into choosing the colors for your painting").	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	<b>1</b> Staff rarely or never asks open-ended questions.	<b>3</b> Staff makes limited use of open-ended questions (e.g., only uses them during certain parts of the activity or repeats the same questions).	<b>5</b> Staff makes frequent use of open-ended questions (e.g., staff asks open-ended questions throughout the activity and questions are related to the context; most youth have opportunities to answer questions that seek opinions or require thoughtful answers).	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. (Y)	<b>1</b> Staff is not actively involved with youth except for brief introductions, endings, or transitions (e.g., they are physically separated from youth or do not interact with them).	<b>3</b> Staff (or some of the staff) is sometimes or intermittently actively involved with youth.	<b>5</b> 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).	<input type="checkbox"/>

## REFRAMING CONFLICT | Staff uses youth-centered approaches to reframe conflict.

*Note: A conflict is an interaction between youth that involves strong feelings or serious negative behaviors. Strong feelings are any emotions that interrupt the learning of an individual or group of youth. If there is not a conflict or incident involving strong feelings, do not score. Mark all items with an "X".*

ITEMS			SUPPORTING EVIDENCE/ANECDOTES	
1. (Y)	1 Staff even once approaches conflicts or negative behavior by shaming, yelling, scolding, or threatening youth.	3 Staff sometimes does not approach conflicts or negative behavior calmly.	5 Staff always approaches conflicts or negative behavior calmly (i.e., approaches, stops any hurtful actions, and acknowledges youths' feelings).	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. (Y)	1 Staff does not seek input from youth in determining either the cause or solution of conflicts or negative behavior.	3 Staff seeks input from youth in determining the cause or solution (but not both) of conflicts and negative behavior.	5 Staff seeks input from youth in order to determine both the cause and solution of conflicts and negative behavior (e.g., youth generate possible solutions and choose one).	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. (Y)	1 In conflict and negative behavior situations, staff does not deal with the relationship between youths' actions and their consequences.	3 In conflict and negative behavior situations, staff tells youth the relationship between their actions and the consequences.	5 To help youth understand and resolve conflicts and negative behavior, staff encourages youth to examine the relationship between their actions and the consequences.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. (Y)	1 Staff neither acknowledges conflicts or negative behavior nor follows up with those involved afterward.	3 Staff acknowledges conflicts and negative behavior but does not follow up with those involved afterward.	5 Staff acknowledges conflicts and negative behavior and follows up with those involved afterward.	<input type="checkbox"/>

# BELONGING | Youth have opportunities to develop a sense of belonging.

ITEMS			SUPPORTING EVIDENCE/ANECDOTES	
1.	1 Staff does not provide opportunities for youth to get to know each other (e.g., the entire session is structured so youth have no time where talking among themselves is allowed or encouraged).	3 Staff provides informal opportunities for youth to get to know each other (e.g., youth engage in informal conversations, youth get to know each other as a by-product of an activity).	5 Staff provides structured opportunities with the purpose of helping youth get to know each other (e.g., there are team-building activities, introductions, personal updates, welcomes of new group members, icebreakers).	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	1 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 in play, introduce excluded youth to other youth, say, "Remember, 'Be Kind' is one of our rules").	3 Youth exhibit some evidence of excluding peers and staff intervenes, but not sufficiently to end exclusion (e.g., staff introduces an excluded youth to other youth, but the newcomer is treated coolly and avoided or ignored; staff intervenes in some instances of exclusionary behavior but not others).	5 Youth do not exhibit any exclusion or staff successfully intervenes if exclusive behavior occurs (e.g., staff introduces excluded youth to other youth and they then include them, staff successfully suggests a way to include a lone boy in youths' play).	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	1 Youth do not identify with the program offering (e.g., many youth complain about or express dislike of the program offering or activities).	3 Youth do not strongly identify with the program offering but do not complain or express dislike.	5 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).	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. (Y)	1 Staff does not provide opportunities to acknowledge the achievements, work, or contributions of youth.	3 Staff provides opportunities to acknowledge the achievements, work, or contributions of some youth, but opportunities are unscheduled or impromptu (e.g., staff spontaneously asks two youth to show off their dance moves to the group).	5 Staff provides structured opportunities (e.g., group presentations, sharing times, upcoming recognition celebrations, exhibitions, performances) to publicly acknowledge the achievements, work, or contributions of at least some youth.	<input type="checkbox"/>

# COLLABORATION | Youth have opportunities to collaborate & work cooperatively with other

ITEMS			SUPPORTING EVIDENCE/ANECDOTES	
1. (Y)	1 Staff does not provide opportunities for youth to work cooperatively as a team or in a group.	3 Staff provides opportunities for some youth to work cooperatively as a team or in a group.	5 Staff provides opportunities for all youth to work cooperatively as a team or in a group.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. (Y)	1 Staff does not provide opportunities for interdependent youth roles.	3 Staff provides the opportunity for some youth to participate in activities with interdependent roles.	5 Staff provides all youth opportunities to participate in activities with interdependent roles (e.g., note-taker; treasurer, spokesperson for planning committee; tennis players, singles or doubles).	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. (Y)	1 Staff does not provide opportunities for youth to work toward shared goals.	3 Staff provides opportunities for some youth to work toward shared goals.	5 Staff provides opportunities for all youth (groups or individuals) to work toward shared goals (e.g., each youth contributes a section to a story, youth build a catapult together).	<input type="checkbox"/>

# LEADERSHIP | Youth have opportunities to act as group facilitators & mentors.

ITEMS			SUPPORTING EVIDENCE/ANECDOTES	
1. (Y)	1 Staff does not provide all youth opportunities to practice group-process skills.	3 Staff provides all youth at least a limited opportunity to practice group-process skills (e.g., a full-group discussion is long enough for all youth to contribute, youth briefly share in pairs).	5 Staff provides all youth multiple or extended opportunities to practice group-process skills (e.g., contribute ideas or actions to the group, do a task with others, take responsibility for a part).	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. (Y)	1 Staff does not provide opportunities for youth to mentor an individual.	3 Staff provides opportunities for some youth to mentor an individual.	5 Staff provides opportunities for all youth to mentor an individual (e.g., youth teach or coach each other).	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. (Y)	1 Staff does not provide opportunities for youth to lead a group.	3 Staff provides opportunities for some youth to lead a group (e.g., some youth lead warmup exercises, some youth lead a small-group discussion).	5 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).	<input type="checkbox"/>

## ADULT PARTNERS | Youth have opportunities to partner with adults.

ITEMS			SUPPORTING EVIDENCE/ANECDOTES
<p><b>1. (Y)</b></p>	<p><b>1</b> Staff rarely shares or attempts to share control of activities with youth.</p>	<p><b>3</b> Staff attempts to share control with youth but ends up controlling most activities themselves.</p>	<p><b>5</b> Staff shares control of most activities with youth, providing guidance and facilitation while retaining overall responsibility (e.g., staff uses youth leaders, semiautonomous small groups or individually guided activities).</p>
<p><b>2. (Y)</b></p>	<p><b>1</b> Staff provides no explanation or reason for behavioral expectations, guidelines, or directions given to youth.</p>	<p><b>3</b> Staff provides an explanation or reason for some behavioral expectations, guidelines, or directions given to youth.</p>	<p><b>5</b> Staff provides an explanation or reason for every behavioral expectation, guideline, or direction given to youth.</p>
			<p><input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Score X if no behavioral directions or guidelines are given.</p>



# PLANNING | Youth have opportunities to make plans.

ITEMS			SUPPORTING EVIDENCE/ANECDOTES
<p><b>1.</b> <b>(Y)</b></p>	<p><b>1</b> Staff does not provide opportunities for youth to make plans for projects or activities.</p>	<p><b>3</b> Staff provides at least one opportunity for youth (individual or group) to make plans for a project or activity (e.g., how to spend their time, how to do a task).</p>	<p><b>5</b> 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).</p>
<p><b>2.</b> <b>(Y)</b></p>	<p><b>1</b> There is no planning for projects or activities, or no identifiable planning strategies are used.</p>	<p><b>3</b> When planning projects or activities, at least one identifiable planning strategy is used.</p>	<p><b>5</b> In the course of planning the projects or activities, two or more planning strategies are used (e.g., brainstorming, idea webbing and backward planning).</p>

## CHOICE | Youth have opportunities to make choices based on their interests.

*Note: (a) Discrete refers to a finite list of specific alternatives. (b) Open-ended indicates non-discrete, open possibilities within some boundaries. (c) All youth refers to situations where all youth make individual choices or situations where all youth participate in group decision making.*

ITEMS			SUPPORTING EVIDENCE/ANECDOTES
<p>1. (Y)</p>	<p>1 Staff does not provide opportunities for all youth to make content choices.</p>	<p>3 Staff provides opportunities for all youth to choose among content alternatives, but choices are limited to discrete choices presented by the leader.</p>	<p>5 Staff provides opportunities for all youth to make at least one open-ended content choice within the content framework of the activities (e.g., youth decide topics within a given subject area, subtopics, or aspects of a given topic).</p>
<p>2. (Y)</p>	<p>1 Staff does not provide opportunities for all youth to make process choices.</p>	<p>3 Staff provides opportunities for all youth to choose among process alternatives, but choices are limited to discrete choices presented by the leader.</p>	<p>5 Staff provides opportunities for all youth to make at least one open-ended process choice (e.g., youth decide roles, order of activities, tools or materials, or how to present results).</p>

## REFLECTION | Youth have opportunities to reflect.

**Note: Reflect means to review, summarize and/or evaluate recent events or activities.**

**Reflections are usually expressed by talking with others and/or in writing (a journal or report, for example).**

ITEMS			SUPPORTING EVIDENCE/ANECDOTES	
1.	1 Staff does not engage youth in an intentional process of reflecting on what they have done.	3 Staff engages some youth in an intentional process of reflecting on what they have done.	5 Staff engages all youth in an intentional process of reflecting on what they have done (e.g., writing in journals; reviewing minutes; sharing progress, accomplishments, or feelings about the experience).	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	1 Staff does not encourage youth to share what they have done with others or to reflect on their experiences.	3 Staff uses at least one identifiable strategy to help youth to share what they have done and reflect on their experiences (e.g., staff asks youth, "What did you do today?").	5 Staff uses two or more strategies to encourage youth to share what they have done and reflect on their experiences (e.g., writing, role playing, using media or technology, drawing, using props).	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	1 Staff dismisses feedback from youth who initiate it, or youth have no opportunities to provide feedback on the activities.	3 Staff is receptive to feedback initiated by youth on the activities but does not solicit it.	5 Staff initiates structured opportunities for youth to give feedback on the activities (e.g., staff asks feedback questions, provides session evaluations).	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. (Y)	1 In the course of the program offering, staff does not provide structured opportunities for youth to make presentations to the whole group.	3 In the course of the program offering, staff provides some youth opportunities to make presentations to the whole group.	5 In the course of the program offering, staff provides all youth opportunities to make presentations to the whole group.	<input type="checkbox"/> In the course of the program offering, do youth make presentations?

# YOUTH PQA OBSERVATION GUIDE

## Program Offerings Youth – Grades 4-12

### Summary of Scales

#### I. Safe Environment

Emotional Safety  
Healthy Environment  
Emergency Preparedness  
Accommodating Environment  
Nourishment

#### II. Supportive Environment

Warm Welcome  
Session Flow  
Active Engagement  
Skill-Building  
Encouragement  
Reframing Conflict

#### III. Interaction

Belonging  
Collaboration  
Leadership  
Adult Partners

#### IV. Engagement

Planning  
Choice  
Reflection

### Follow-Up Questions

- Where are the emergency procedures posted?
- Is there an accessible fire extinguisher?
- Is there an accessible first-aid kit?
- Does site have any special safety or emergency equipment?
- Are entrances to the indoor program space supervised?
- Is access to the outdoor program space supervised?
- Can the furniture be moved around?
- In the course of the program offering, do youth make presentations?

Scheduled starting time: \_\_\_\_\_ Actual starting time: \_\_\_\_\_

Scheduled end time: \_\_\_\_\_ Actual end time: \_\_\_\_\_

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