CHAPTER 1

Program Assessment and Design

PROGRAM ASSESSMENT AND DESIGN

This Chapter covers the following Core Competencies:

13S: Ability to design program activities that support program goals and incorporate needs and interests of program participants, their families, and the broader community

14S: Ability to articulate within the organization and to external stakeholders the program's mission and goals, and how program activities align to them

15S: Ability to gather and review data and conduct evaluations for timely program improvement

Overview

What is Program Assessment and Design?
The ability to design, assess, and then make data driven revisions to the structure of your afterschool program will set you on the cycle of continuous growth and improvement that is very important when creating a high quality afterschool program.

Effective programming is not something that happens in the vacuum of your office. As part of that cycle, it is necessary for you, your staff, your program participants, and all other relevant stakeholders to be given opportunities to provide input into the design and functioning of your program.

Potential issues that are plaguing your program, such as low attendance, staff turnover, or chronic behavior problems can often be most effectively tackled through finding out the "root of the issue" via program assessment and evaluation, and then restructuring program policies and practices to address the results of your findings. Too often we make "quick fixes" from the board room that temporarily make things better within our programs, without taking the time to thoroughly evaluate the structural and programmatic issues that are the real underlying causes of the problems.

This chapter covers some of the fundamental practices that will enable you to effectively design, assess, and lead a successful afterschool program. From looking at best practices in *Program Management*, to understanding how to create a program *Vision and Mission*, to learning how to conduct *Program Evaluations*, the How To's in this chapter will help you get started on the road to continuous program improvement… and the related goal of program excellence.

QSA SECTION 1

In our program youth attend programs and we design and conduct activities focused on program goals

In our Program...	Low Quality Indicators	Approaching Quality Indicators	Quality Indicators
Youth Attend programs	❑ Attendance is 50% or less of projected program attendance goal	❑ Attendance is 50% - 70% of projected program attendance goal	❑ Attendance is 90% or more of projected program attendance goal
We design and conduct activities focused on program goals	❑ Staff are unclear on the purpose of the program ❑ Staff use strategies and approaches in their work that are not in alignment with each other (everyone is not on the same page) ❑ Activities are added on an ad-hoc basis, and do not necessarily align to program goals	❑ There is a clearly defined and well understood vision and mission statement ❑ Staff can articulate program goals and how individual activities support them ❑ Lesson plans state the purpose of the activity as it relates to program goals	❑ Staff and stakeholders agree upon the mission and vision statements ❑ All program activities & instructional strategies align to reinforce program goals ❑ A set of guiding values are used to solve problems and address issues that arise

QSA SECTION 1

Activities are evaluated regularly and our program design is youth centered

In our Program…	Low Quality Indicators	Approaching Quality Indicators	Quality Indicators
Activities are evaluated regularly	❑ Programs are not evaluated at all or are evaluated through an ad-hoc process ❑ Participant satisfaction or workshop surveys are given out and never reviewed.	❑ Programs are evaluated at least annually led by management team ❑ Findings from the evaluation are shared with stakeholders (staff, board, etc.) ❑ Staff meetings are used to reflect on program progress, needs and issues	❑ Staff and youth participate in regular program evaluation ❑ Assessment is guided by clearly defined, measurable goals linked to participant and community needs ❑ Key stakeholders participate in assessing program offerings and impact through surveys, focus groups and other tools ❑ An outside evaluator conducts evaluation using strong research design ❑ Activities are redesigned to reflect the findings from evaluations
Our program design is youth centered	❑ Programs are designed by adults with no input from youth ❑ Adults lecture youth during program ❑ Program feels overly structured like school or under-structured and chaotic	❑ Activities are defined by staff with some youth input ❑ Activities are based on project-based learning, with structured de-brief sessions ❑ Youth development, academics and recreation activities are offered regularly	❑ Youth and staff work together to design programs ❑ Principles of youth development, academics and recreation are integrated into all aspects of programming ❑ Activities are part of a scope and sequence, part of a unit ❑ A culminating event marks the end of a unit of study, and showcases youth talent and learning

TIPS
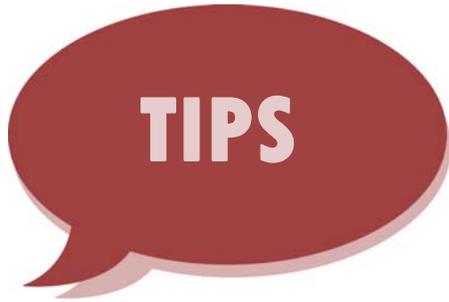
Establish basic systems for day- to-day program operations.

❑ Make sure basic program management infrastructures are in place. Post the program schedule, assign classrooms for specific activities, and establish procedures for snack and sign-in/out. Communicate these procedures and expectations with staff, participants, parents, and the school community, and be sure that these procedures and expectations are aligned with the school day.

❑ Build relationships with participants, staff, parents, and other stakeholders through Family Nights, a newsletter, or showcase events that celebrate participant work.

❑ Develop an effective communication system such as an event board, newsletter, or weekly memo. Make sure you reach parents, participants, teachers, principals, and others in the community.

Establish a philosophy and framework for program success.

❑ Create a mission, vision, and goals for your program. Involve staff, participants, and parents in this process.

❑ Provide leadership opportunities for staff, participants, and parents. For example, staff can facilitate program meetings. Participants might distribute snacks or collect attendance.

❑ Use "action plans" to drive the program forward.

Create sustainable management and assessment structures.

❑ Develop a sustainability plan that takes into account grants, partnerships, and fundraising.

❑ Foster the creation of an afterschool advisory board that includes staff, parents , and participants (if age appropriate).

❑ Conduct regular evaluations and solicit feedback from key stakeholders. Use the results to guide program design.

HOW TO

Ensure Effective Program Management

Set Clear Staff Expectations

Expectations need to be communicated before and after staff are hired. Gather the staff as a group, and:

- Give everyone an opportunity to review job descriptions and expectations together.

- Clearly communicate proper staff behavior, program rules, staff schedule, timecards, calling in sick, lessons plans, timelines, etc.

- Revisit expectations as needed throughout the year, during regular scheduled staff meetings or with individuals privately.

- Align job descriptions, professional development, and staff evaluations with the SF ELC Core Competencies to ensure consistency. For more information, visit: http://sfelc.org/ .

Designate Assigned Classrooms and Space

- Assigned classrooms and space will give you the overall blueprint of how activities need to be implemented and transitions monitored.

- Locations of space will determine the flow of transitions and expose areas in need of more supervision or structure.

- The size of the space allocated to you will also determine what activities will work best in the space provided.

Develop and Post a Program Schedule

- The program schedule is essential to the overall structure of your program. When developing your program schedule, consider:

- Factors that will contribute to smooth transitions between activities in order to reduce unorganized chaos (e.g. consider how participants are grouped, how they line up or move from one activity to the next, alternating highly active activities with those that require sitting still and concentrating, etc.).

- Program activities should always meet afterschool funding requirements and should aim to have a skill building component.

- Scheduling time for staff to plan age- and interest-appropriate activities that engage both youth and staff in order to reduce behavior challenges and staff burn out.

Create, Share, and Reinforce Program Rules

Program rules that are created by the youth in the program leads to youth buy-in and ownership. Participants are empowered to keep themselves and their peers in check. Post program rules throughout the afterschool program so that everyone can see them. Ensure that the rules are developmentally appropriate for the reading level of your participants.

Establish a Consistent Behavior System and Consequences

If your program is located at a school site, ideally, the afterschool behavior system should be the same behavior system that the school day has adopted so that youth do not have to learn a whole new system for the afterschool program. This way youth are aware of expectations, rules, and consequences and will be better prepared to enter the afterschool program. All behavior systems must be clear, consistent, and offer follow-up with the youth and their parent/caregiver.

Develop Procedures for Snack Distribution

Procedures for snack distribution must be organized and clear to the participants and the staff distributing the snacks. Consider how your participants will wash their hands, line up, clean up, and dispose of trash.

HOW TO

Ensure Effective Program Management
...continued

Communicate Program Sign-in/Out Procedures

Program sign-in/out procedures must be clear to staff, youth, site administration, school day teachers, parents, and caregivers. Program accountability will increase and liability decrease if these procedures are well organized and highly monitored to account for participants' safety and whereabouts.

Build a Communication System

An organized and clear communication system with follow-up must be established for staff, youth, parents, school day teachers, and site administration. The way you communicate information with each one will vary on what it is, how it's done, and when it's shared. Consistency of the information shared will get all parties on the same page.

What Should I Have in My Toolbox?

- ❑ A staff manual that puts into writing all policies and procedures

- ❑ Copies of the program schedule for all staff, youth, parents, and teachers

- ❑ Printed copies of the program rules, rewards, and consequences system for all participants and families

- ❑ A sign-in/out binder

- ❑ A communication system (cards with your phone number, a mailbox to receive notes, an e-mail address, etc.)

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I have a tight budget, what is this going to cost me?

- ❑ The cost of photocopies
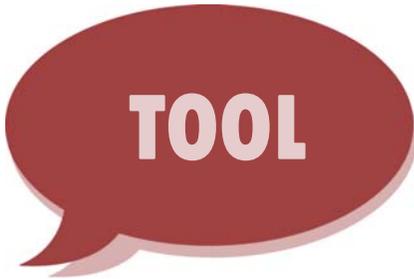
Sample Program Schedule

This schedule is designed to alternate highly interactive and/or physically active activities with activities that require quiet and concentration. For example, Kidzlit follows recess, and participants are given a break before settling down for homework time. Time for participants to transition from one activity to the next is also included in the schedule.

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
2:40-3:05	Community Building	Community Building	Community Building	Community Building	2:40-2:45 Attendance in classrooms
3:05-3:20	Snack	Snack	Snack	Snack	
3:20-3:40	Outside Recess/ Inside Play	Outside Recess/ Inside Play	Outside Recess/ Inside Play	Outside Recess/ Inside Play	2:50-5:00 Field Trip
3:40-3:45	Transition	Transition	Transition	Transition	
3:45-4:35	Kidzlit/ Read-Aloud	Enrichment Electives	Kidzlit/ Read-Aloud	Enrichment Electives	
4:35-4:55	Break	Break	Break	Break	
4:55-5:00	Transition	Transition	Transition	Transition	
5:00-5:45	Homework Help and Skill Building	Homework Help and Skill Building	Homework Help and Skill Building	Homework Help and Skill Building	
5:45-6:00	Closing Activity	Closing Activity	Closing Activity	Closing Activity	

HOW TO

Create a Program Vision and Mission

Begin developing your mission, goals, and objectives at the beginning of the year by collecting input from youth, teachers, parents, community members, and/or the school administrator on what their goals and vision for the program are. You can collect program mission information from stakeholders in fun ways: distributing index cards to be filled out and placed in a "mission" box, leading brainstorming sessions during the program or at a staff meeting, or distributing a "mission" survey.

Hold a contest for youth to design a logo or mascot that represents your program's mission.

Find a quote or coin a phrase that sums up your mission and include it on the program materials you distribute.

Design a program fact sheet that succinctly explains your program. Share the sheet with everyone who comes to visit your program.

Post your mission statement and goals around the program area. Put them on all materials, letters, and flyers you distribute.

Create a bulletin board in a prominent location that highlights your mission and goals by showcasing activities that are aligned with that mission.

Share program information and materials with potential partners, local agencies, and the community at large via program fact sheets, brochures, and flyers.

Keep your dream alive by asking yourself, "How is this activity helping the program meet our mission, goals, and objectives?"

Honor a staff or youth of the month whose work honors the program's dream. Distribute certificates and awards at assemblies or meetings to your awardees.

What Should I Have in My Toolbox?

- ❑ Sample visions or missions from other organizations
- ❑ A vision/mission planning sheet
- ❑ Access to key stakeholders that will best inform the creation of your vision
- ❑ Survey data or focus group information that will help to guide the creation of the vision

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I have a tight budget, what is this going to cost me?

- ❑ Incentives for community participants to participate in and support the creation of the vision.

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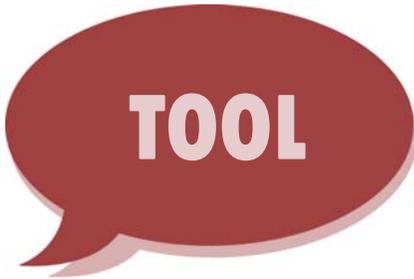
Sample Vision Planning Sheet

Gather key stakeholders and as a group discuss the following questions:

1. Why does your afterschool program exist (parent request, funds allocated, etc.)?

2. Who does your program serve (all school students, specific grades, specific subjects)?

3. What is the purpose of your afterschool program? What does it do (support homework completion, teach new skills, work with a school, provide enrichment opportunities)?

4. What are your fundamental values and beliefs related to afterschool programming?

5. Utilize the information provided above and create a vision that tells what your afterschool program does, who it serves, and what it hopes to accomplish.

HOW TO

Use an Action Plan

What is it?

An action plan is a template that states what actions need to be done, who will be doing them, and when they need to be completed by.

Why use an action plan?

When things need to get done, action plans help keep everyone on track. They also ensure that tasks are distributed evenly and are a great delegation tool that encourages staff to take on leadership responsibilities.

When do you use it?

Create your weekly or monthly action plan at a staff meeting when everyone is present. You can brainstorm a list of tasks and their due dates and then have staff volunteer for those tasks they would most like to take responsibility for.

At a subsequent meeting, bring out the action plan and check off any of the tasks that have been completed. Transfer any uncompleted tasks to your new plan.

You can also create long-term action plans that outline activities that will be happening throughout the year.

How do you use it?

Some activities to include in your action plan might be:

- Enter weekly attendance numbers into the computer
- Set up snack
- Contact parents and caregivers about Family Night
- File all participant registration forms

What Should I Have in My Toolbox?

- ❑ Action Plan template (see Tools)

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I have a tight budget, what is this going to cost me?

- ❑ Using an action plan costs absolutely nothing! All you need is a pencil and a piece of paper.

TOOL

Action Plan Template "To-Do List"

What?	Who?	By When?

HOW TO

Create an Afterschool Program Leadership Team

In developing a successful afterschool program, it is important to establish a relationship with all involved parties. Each afterschool site should have a Leadership Team that acts as an Afterschool Program Advisory Board to provide guidance, decision-making, and planning.

The Leadership Team traditionally consists of:

- Afterschool program Site Coordinator or Program Manager
- Parent/Caregiver representative (e.g., PTA member)
- Community partner representative (e.g., Executive or Program Director of nonprofit operator, neighborhood group, and/or youth-serving organization)
- Youth representative
- Afterschool program lead teacher if applicable
- Site administrator (e.g., principal) if applicable
- Other afterschool program stakeholders

If your program is located at a school site, the Leadership Team may also consist of other resource and support providers at the school, such as the school counselor, school nurse, and others.

10 Steps to Building Your Leadership Team

1. Initiate contact with leadership team before the start of the program to begin forging your relationship and to discuss the program's vision, mission and goals.

2. If applicable, build a relationship with the Lead Teacher and assist in the recruitment if necessary.

3. Gather available dates and times for the year from your lead teacher, site administrator, community based organization partner, and parent representative, and create a meeting schedule. Distribute a schedule to all participants.

4. Remind all participants in writing a week before each meeting. You may solicit information from participants at this time that may be included in the agenda for the meeting.

5. Continually make efforts to get to know all those in your community in order to understand their personality and perspective. These strong relationships will provide a strong foundation for well-coordinated, useful, and more effective youth support services.

6. Prepare an agenda (see Tools) and other necessary documents with enough copies for the meeting. Bring your workplan to all meetings to ensure that goals and objectives are being met.

7. Provide snacks at the meeting and be sure to appreciate stakeholders' time commitments.

8. Follow up on all action items from the meeting. Doing what you say you will do builds trust and respect.

9. When not meeting, continue to keep all stakeholders informed about what is happening in your program. You may choose to use a newsletter, notes, faculty meetings, etc., in order to do this.

10. Continue to be prepared and remind participants of upcoming meetings. You may need to be flexible, but persistence, communication, and understanding should help.

What Should I Have in My Toolbox?

- ❑ Workplan of program goals and objectives.
- ❑ Afterschool program budget & copies of grant applications.
- ❑ A calendar of regular meeting times.
- ❑ An agenda! Before each meeting of the Leadership Team, it is very important to identify what you wish to accomplish. (See Tools for sample agenda).
- ❑ Clear communication system such as memos, email reminders, and phone calls.

$ I have a tight budget, what is this going to cost me?

- ❑ Creating a Leadership Team can be as inexpensive as you want it to be…. Here are some costs which can be incurred:
- ❑ Handwritten "thank-you" cards from youth: $0 - $3 depending on materials used.
- ❑ Snacks for meetings ($20) or donated food items from local stores or restaurants.
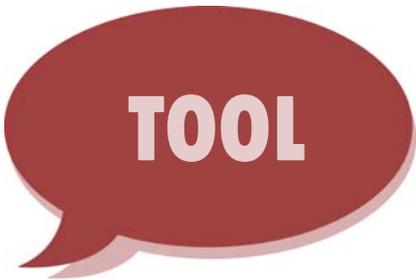
TOOL

Leadership Team Meetings

The Leadership Team should meet prior to the start of the program to discuss the mission, goals, and objectives of the afterschool program. They should also set the dates for a minimum of three meetings (each to last at least one hour) throughout the school year. We recommend meeting monthly. The afterschool program site coordinator or program manager should type up and distribute the schedule, and coordinate all meetings and associated documents. During these meetings, the team will share information, coordinate services, plan, and make decisions.

Some suggested meeting topics include:

- Business/Updates—school events/issues, fundraisers for the afterschool program, calendar changes, new business from the district/community, new community-based organization services, program updates

- Planning/Coordination of Upcoming Events/Activities—Black History Month Performance and Potluck, Spring into Health Month

- End of Year—reflection on strengths and weaknesses of the program to date, plan for the next school year

- Other—coordinating communication about homework, afterschool security, individual participant cases, recurring issues

SAMPLE LEADERSHIP TEAM MEETING AGENDA	
10 minutes	**Check-In:** Get to know your Leadership Team participants both personally and professionally by having a check-in question or ice breaker activity for all to answer. Allow some time for personal interactions and getting-to-know-you activities. *Example: What is a good book or movie you enjoyed recently? Why?*
10 minutes	**General Updates:** What is going on in the program or school that your participants need to know? Are there schedule changes? Are there school or community events to consider?
20 minutes	**Burning Issues:** What is a current burning issue that needs to be discussed/resolved? Are you struggling with behavior? Are there issues with staff or equipment that need to be resolved? Use this opportunity to do some problem solving and brainstorming about current issues.
5 minutes	**Next Steps:** What did the group agree upon? *What* are the next steps and *who* is responsible for the next steps and by *when* will the task be accomplished? Is there any follow up required?
5 minutes	**Next Agenda Items:** What needs to be followed up on? What topics were left off of this agenda due to time constraints? What conversations were started today that need to be continued?

Before the Meeting Starts, Assign Roles

Meeting roles are essential to a productive meeting, and they also create buy-in to the system and ownership of the program.

Facilitator: Facilitates agenda and discussion during meeting by remaining neutral, keeping the focus, being positive, encouraging participation, protecting ideas and not evaluating ideas being suggested, suggesting methods and procedures that will help group to make a decision, and repeating ideas, topics, and concerns for clarity and understanding.

Timekeeper: Informs facilitator of the time remaining for each segment of the agenda.

Recorder: Distributes and takes notes during meeting.

Scribe: Records action items, discussion topics, or decisions that were made.

HOW TO

Reach Attendance Targets

Students attend afterschool programs for a variety of reasons. These range from "My mom makes me," to "I love that we can play basketball all afternoon," and everything in between. If attendance is low in your program, it is important not to jump to conclusions. Instead, use the survey tool that follows this how-to to help you determine the reasons behind your program's low attendance.

The Program Attendance Survey tool can be given to current program participants, as well as program participants who have stopped coming to your program and or parents/caregivers. The tool can also be used as a phone survey.

Once you have gathered the data, analyzed it, and determined the main reasons being reported for low attendance, check the related table of suggestions below for how to tackle each issue.

What Should I Have in My Toolbox?

❑ Sample Program Attendance Survey (see Tools)

❑ Program Attendance Tips (see Tools)

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I have a tight budget, what is this going to cost me?

❑ Doing an attendance survey will cost very little other than your staff time and the price of photocopies. Online survey tools, such as SurveyMonkey, offer free trial subscriptions.

❑ Depending on how hard you think it will be to get surveys back, you may wish to offer small incentives to people who return surveys.

TOOL

Sample Attendance Survey

Age of Participant:

1. How do you get to the program each day?

❑ Walk

❑ MUNI

❑ Program van

❑ SFUSD bus

❑ Car (parent/caregiver/carpool)

❑ Other:

Is there anything we could do to make it easier for you to get to the program?

2. How much fun do you typically have in the program?

❑ 1 – None at all

❑ 2 -

❑ 3 -

❑ 4 -

❑ 5 – A lot!

What could we do to make the program more fun?

3. Do you have any friends who attend the program?

❑ Yes

❑ No

4. Would you like to have more friends attend the program?

❑ Yes

❑ No

5. What are your favorite activities at the program?

6. What activities do you wish were offered at the program?

7. Do you like the staff at the program?

❑ Yes

❑ No

If so, why? If not, why not?

8. Is there another afterschool program you would rather attend?

❑ Yes

❑ No

Why?

9. Why do you come to program everyday? (Check as many boxes as you want)

❑ My mom/dad/caregiver makes me

❑ My friends are there

❑ I like the staff

❑ I like the activities

❑ Being at home is boring

❑ I learn new things

❑ I feel safe

❑ It is fun

❑ Other:

OR

Why are you no longer attending program?

❑ None of my friends go

❑ I don't like the staff

❑ I don't like the activities

❑ I prefer being at home

❑ I didn't feel safe

❑ It was boring

❑ I couldn't get there

❑ I had other activities I had to do

❑ Other:

TOOL

Program Attendance Tips

Attendance Issue	Suggestions
My parent/caregiver makes me attend, but… • Caregiver does not check in to ensure participant has attended program • Even though mandated by parents/caregivers to attend an afterschool program, if participants do not like the program, they may complain to their parents/caregivers who may allow them to switch programs	• Create a system for calling parents/caregivers when participants do not show up at the program as expected to find out why and make sure the student is in a supervised situation. • Make sure you are communicating with parents/caregivers regularly to find out what feedback they are hearing from participants about your program.
Too hard/dangerous to get to program location	• Send a staff member to pick students up from a school site • Make the area immediately surrounding the program feel more safe (adding lighting, locking doors/gates, having staff outside) • Consider providing transportation (e.g. bus passes) for students who have to travel a long distance
Program is experienced as "boring" or not "cool" Program may be too "school like" Program may be too unstructured and chaotic	• Make sure the program is not too full of long-winded lectures and/or staff-directed. • Allow participants to have an opportunity to provide input on and lead activities or set up the space. • Check-in on whether participants are having fun; allow for free time. • Stop to observe the noise and activity level regularly to make sure the program does not feel chaotic or unsafe. • Consider implementing a junior staff or mentoring program for older participants to help out with younger participants
I do not have any friends at the program	• Encourage staff to lead activities that help participants get to know each other and form friendships. • Work to disrupt cliques and nip any bullying or ostracizing in the bud.
I do not like the activities offered at the program	• Survey students regularly to find out what they are interested in doing. • Help staff plan lessons and activities that are engaging and that carry on for multiple days/weeks (see Project Based Learning, Chapter 6) • Plan weekly/monthly events, trips, and special activities that are out-of-the-routine and especially fun
The staff at the program are mean, don't care about me, etc.	• Ensure staff are building positive relationships with participants. • Create a discipline system that is not overly punitive. • Coach staff to use positive reinforcement and respectful language at all times.
There are too many competing programs nearby/ on site	• Invite current participants to "bring a friend" for a day to check out your program • Communicate with nearby programs to see whether you can do cross-referrals
There are no incentives for attendance at the program	• Develop an incentive system (certificates, field trips, "bucks") for participants who meet attendance criteria • Plan activities that last for several days or weeks and that culminate in a performance or major project/event

Conduct Program Evaluation

There are several types of evaluation that can be done in your afterschool program. Each type will provide you with a different set of data that will be valuable to improving the quality of the programs and services you offer.

Program Observation

What: In this type of evaluation, the assessor observes the program using a tool that asks her to look for specific indicators. For example, the observation tool may ask the evaluator to look for examples of differentiated instruction, respectful interactions, or youth leadership roles.

Who: Staff can use an observation tool to observe each other, supervisors can use it to observe their staff, and outside evaluators can use it to observe everyone.

Why: Using a program observation tool allows the assessor to focus in on actual activities that are happening in front of him at that very moment. Findings can often be surprising, as many times we do not realize how frequently we reprimand a given student, fail to encourage our participants to work independently, or miss opportunities to modify activities for students who need extra support.

How:

- Create a plan for who is going to observe what parts of program, and what areas they will look for.

- An example of a Program Observation Tool is included in the Tools section.

- Schedule Program Observations for typical program days.

- Observations can last anywhere from one hour, to the entire program duration.

- You may wish to do one large observation of the entire program on a single day, or multiple, shorter observations over the course of a week or two.

Follow Up: Meet with the assessor to review her findings. Look for any trends that can be addressed via programmatic changes, staff development, or other means. Share the findings and follow-up plan with program stakeholders.

Surveys

What: One popular way of getting program feedback is via survey tools. Surveys are usually a short set (5-10) of questions that can be given in paper form, online, or over the phone.

Who: Surveys can be given to staff, program participants, families/caregivers, school teachers and principals, or any other constituents who have a stake in the program.

Why: Soliciting feedback via surveys is a quick and easy way to find out what stakeholders want and need from your afterschool program. It allows you to be responsive to community needs within a relatively short turn-around time.

How:

- Create a set of questions for the particular group you wish to survey.

- Examples of surveys for students and families can be found in Chapters 6 and 8.

- Translate the questions as needed.

- If the group you are surveying is tech-saavy, you may consider using surveymonkey.com to create your survey online.

- Provide a timeframe by which you want the survey returned. A week or two should be more than enough time.

- Survey questions can request "yes/no", multiple choice, or short answer responses.

- You may wish to keep the surveys anonymous to encourage honesty.

Follow Up: Once you have collected surveys from a significant portion of the population you wish to hear from, tabulate the data. Now look for any trends (e.g. the majority of respondents said they wanted to have a dance class) that you can use to drive program improvement. Make sure to share survey response data and your follow-up plan with the people you surveyed!

Focus Groups

What: Focus groups are small groups of stakeholders (usually no more than 5-10) who come together to respond to a series of questions about their experiences with the program.

Who: Focus groups can be done with anyone involved in the program. You can conduct them with your staff, with a group of program participants, with families/caregivers, with school-site staff, community members, etc. It is usually best if your focus groups are conducted by an outside evaluator (someone not directly connected to your program) in order to encourage participants to speak freely and openly.

Why: Similar to a survey, focus groups provide more in-depth data than surveys as participants respond to each other's comments and can be asked follow up questions regarding their responses. They also work better for program participants who may be too young to respond to written survey questions or who do not feel comfortable writing long answers on what can sometimes come across as a "test".

How:

- Create a series of 5-7 questions that you wish to get feedback on.

- See the Tools for Focus Group tips

- Find an outside evaluator who can run the focus group.

- Select a small group of focus group participants (5-10) and schedule a date and time that works for them to meet for an hour or so.

- The evaluator must take detailed notes of participants' responses, which can later be summarized in the follow up.

Follow Up:
Review the complete notes and/or the summary from the evaluator. Look for trends that can be acted upon to address participants' feedback and improve the quality of programs and services you offer. Make sure to share the focus group results and follow-up plan with participants!

The SF ELC Quality Self-Assessment Tool

What: The San Francisco Expanded Learning Collaborative Quality Self-Assessment Tool (QSA) was designed with input and feedback from a broad range of local afterschool stakeholders including program managers, line staff, parents/caregivers, and funders. It consists of eleven sections, each of which covers a different aspect of afterschool programming.

Who: Because it is a "self" assessment, the QSA is best done by those who work inside the program on a regular basis, such as program managers and line staff.

Why: Using the QSA helps staff understand what a quality afterschool program looks like and enables them to pinpoint their own program's areas of strength, and areas where improvements can be made.

How:

- Determine which sections of the QSA you wish to have staff complete (choose the sections that are the most relevant to your program).

- Introduce the QSA to your staff, and explain how the results will be used. You may wish to keep the QSAs anonymous to encourage honesty.

- Set aside time in a staff meeting to complete the QSA, or give staff a timeframe of a week or two to return the completed QSA to you.

Follow Up: Look for any trends in the data that can drive programmatic adjustments, professional development, or

What Should I Have in My Toolbox?

other improvements within the program. Make sure to share the QSA results and follow up plan with your staff!

- ❑ Program Observation Tool, Surveys, Focus Group Questions, or QSA

I have a tight budget, what is this going to cost me?

- ❑ You may decide to pay an outside evaluator. If you choose to do so, costs can vary. However, doing the evaluations on your own will cost only your time and effort.
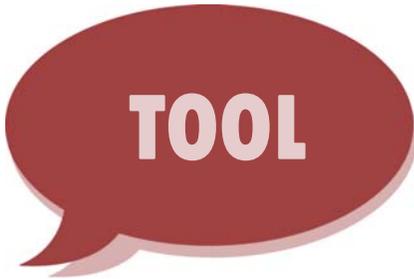
TOOL

Program Observation Tool Example

This observation sheet is a page from the DCYF Community-Based OST Site Visit Tool.

1. There is enough space for the activities offered during the observation.		
1	**3**	**5**
The program space is crowded. There is not room to move around comfortably.	*Some program spaces are crowded, while others are not.*	*None of the program spaces are crowded. Youth and staff can move around comfortably.*
Evidence		**Rating**

2. Staff use a variety of strategies to focus youths' attention.		
1	**3**	**5**
Staff primarily shout to gain the group's attention.	*Staff sometimes use group focus strategies and sometimes shout at the group.*	*Staff nearly always use group focus strategies, they do not shout at the group during the observation.*
Evidence		**Rating**

3. Interactions between staff and youth are predominately positive.		
1	**3**	**5**
Staff and youth are predominately negative with one another, using dismissive or sarcastic tones of voice, rolling their eyes, sighing loudly, etc.	*Staff and youth interact with one another in a generally positive fashion, (e.g. speaking in warm tones, making eye contact, smiling) but sometimes interact*	*Nearly all interactions among staff and youth are positive, characterized by warm tones of voice, frequent eye contact, and smiles. Few to no negative*
Evidence		**Rating**

TOOL

Focus Group Tips

Overview: You want to promote a casual atmosphere and establish a sense of trust and safety among members. This means that the facilitators:

- Must be open and neutral, refraining from expressing any personal positions on the issues being discussed.

- Are aware of participants' energy and concentration levels and provide short breaks if necessary.

- Let participants know their contributions are valuable (both through what you say and also your body language).

- Step in and keep the session on-track.

- Manage disagreements and debates carefully. They can be useful when they lead to new and interesting ideas.

- Sensitively manage issues of power and privacy.

- Should wind-up the session by stressing all that has been achieved and casting it in a positive light.

Managing risks: A number of potential problems could arise during focus groups, which will all need addressing:

- If one participant tries to dominate the session, the moderator should invite each person to speak in turn.

- If possible, avoid interviewing friends in the same group as they can form cliques - if cliques do form, suggest taking a break and changing seating positions upon returning from the break.

- Avoid personal confrontation - allow the group to police itself (e.g. "do others in the group agree?")

- Respect someone's right to be quiet, but do give them a chance to share their ideas 1-to-1 (e.g. during a break).

- Use differences of opinion as a topic of discussion - the moderator should avoid taking sides.

Tips to encourage discussion:

- Ask participants to think about an issue for a few minutes and write down their responses.

- Ask each participant to read, and elaborate on, one of their responses.

- Note the responses on a flipchart/whiteboard.

- Once everyone has given a response, ask participants for a second or third response, until all of their answers have been noted.

- These responses can then be discussed.

Source: Partnership for Children and Youth