



## **Choosing a Program Quality Assessment**

Program quality assessments measure your Club's use of quality afterschool practices such as staff and youth interaction, incorporating youth voice, and creating a youth-centered learning environment. This is important because program quality is a lead indicator that predicts positive youth outcomes.

Programs that use researched and validated program quality best practices see significant increases in positive youth outcomes. Using site-level program quality assessments will help your organization identify where your practices align with best practices, and where you can provide more support and training to your staff.

A good program quality assessment should include the following:

**1. The assessment should be rooted in research and program quality standards.**

- What this means → The standards (measurable items) in the assessment should be informed by what up-to-date youth development research tells us are the best practices to foster positive outcomes for young people. These best practices are the goal, so the assessment should be looking for them specifically and measure to what degree they are showing up in your program.

**2. Program quality assessments should be observational and focused on the setting-level.**

- What this means → The assessment you choose should be completed by watching staff in action running programs. Program quality is achieved through the practices that staff do day-to-day and the interactions between and among youth and staff. While other assessment approaches, such as youth and parent surveys, also give insight into program quality, observation is the only way to know for sure the areas where staff shine and where they may have growth opportunities.

**3. The items on the assessment should be clear, reliable, and applicable to a range of program offerings and settings.**

- What this means → Each item should be measuring one specific practice. They should be written in clear language. Additionally, because the assessment should be measuring youth development practices in general, it should be able to be used in a traditional Club, school-based site, pop-up event, or any other kind of youth-serving setting, and in any type of program offering, whether an Art activity, in the Gamesroom, or in a Keystone session, to name a few.

**4. The assessment should be paired with resources and information to help staff improve their practice.**

- What this means → Without actionable tools, your assessment will be just another pile of numbers nobody will do anything with. Meaningful improvement will only occur through targeted training, coaching, and practice tied to the standards the assessment is based on. Staff should be familiar with the assessment and understand what the items are looking for.



- 5. Consider what assessments are used by other youth-serving organizations in your networks, whether at the local, state, or national level.**
- What this means → Some Clubs may be a part of program quality networks, and those networks may require or recommend a specific assessment. As long as they meet these other criteria, using the same tool will allow you to share resources and get community support. Additionally, some grants may require use of specific assessments. You should not overwhelm or confuse staff by using multiple program quality observational assessments at once.

*Adapted in part from Yohlem, N. and Wilson-Ahlstrom, A. with Fischer, S. and Shinn, M. (2009, January). "Measuring Youth Program Quality: A Guide to Assessment Tools, Second Edition." Washington, D.C.: The Forum for Youth Investment. Available at <https://bit.ly/3OXNuxO>.*