

Elev8 Extended Learning Self-Assessment (ELSA) Tool and User's Guide

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I. WELCOME!

The Elev8 Extended Learning Self-Assessment (ELSA) Tool was designed to help you reflect upon the quality of your program through a self-assessment process. The self-assessment process doesn't have a fixed beginning and end, and it can't be done by one person alone. Rather, it's an ongoing, team-based process involving staff members, youth, families, school administrators, and other stakeholders. As a result of this process, you will set new goals for the program, become more creative and innovative, and, hopefully, be willing to try new ideas, strategies, and solutions. In addition, your team will be better equipped to work and learn together to support your goals.

In addition to the ELSA Tool, this User's Guide includes practical strategies to assist and support you as you assess your program and build upon existing program improvement efforts. It is full of practical strategies, tips, case studies, sample tools, and reflection questions that will guide and support you through this process. Don't hesitate to make this guide your own: take notes, jot down ideas, and plan next steps in the spaces provided.

As you read the information in this User's Guide, take time to reflect on what will work best for you and your community. Adapt the ideas and strategies so they work for you. Tap into your own expertise and knowledge. Be creative. Enjoy the process and be sure to celebrate successes as you continue striving for program quality.

WHAT IS SELF-ASSESSMENT?

Self-assessment provides a lens for understanding the overall quality of your program; for considering how the program has evolved and where it will go in the future. Organizations that practice ongoing self-assessment are better prepared to share clear program goals, promising practices, and measurable outcomes, and to incorporate them into an evaluation design. Although it can be used to inform and complement Elev8 evaluations and assessments conducted by external observers, self-assessment does not impact the results of external monitoring systems. Self-assessment findings are exclusively for your program.

A SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS...

- provides structure for comparing perceptions, voicing concerns, and identifying outcomes.
- Is focused on expanding and improving communication between stakeholders.
- helps build a collective vision of desired outcomes and what's needed to achieve those outcomes.
- uses data gathered to inform practice and builds capacity.
- is often facilitated by program staff and/or other stakeholders.

A FORMAL PROGRAM EVALUATION...

- takes a more formal approach to assessing programs to determine what their outcomes are.
- is focused on mining data to determine program outcomes.
- uses data to hold program staff members accountable for outcomes and compliance with requirements.
- has more structure, higher stakes, and less gray areas.
- is often facilitated by an external observer.

II. HOW THIS SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL CAN HELP

The ELSA Tool is a resource built upon the experience, knowledge, and research of afterschool and youth development practitioners and policymakers from across the country. At first glance, the tool may appear daunting. However, it's called a "tool" because it is meant to help your program grow and meet your goals. It is not to be used as a device for judging the program as "good" or "bad." Rather, the ELSA Tool is intended to be used as a guide for making every part of your program the best that it can be. The ELSA Tool should be used to promote quality and engage staff, youth, and other stakeholders in authentic discussions about how to continuously improve your program.

III. AN OVERVIEW OF THE ELEV8 ELSA TOOL

ELSA Tool Structure

The ELSA Tool is organized around ten elements needed to run an effective afterschool program at an Elev8 site. Under each element, there is a list of quality indicators. An asterisk (*) denotes those indicators that are critical to address prior to program start-up. Once the program is underway, each indicator should be given equal significance. The ELSA Tool is meant to be used in concert with other formal and informal evaluation methods, such as youth, family, and staff surveys, staff meetings, youth and family focus groups, and formal evaluations. Each of these methods can help identify program strengths and areas in need of improvement.

ELSA Tool Performance Levels

With the ELSA Tool, you will assess your program for each quality indicator using the performance level rating system below.

4 Excellent/Exceeds Standards

The program is prepared to help and work with others in this area.

3 Satisfactory/Meets Standards

The program needs help to prepare staff to work with others in this area.

2 Some Progress Made/Approaching Standard

The program could use additional focused assistance in this area.

1 Must Address and Improve/Standard Not Met

The program needs significant support in this area.

Programs are expected to strive for performance level 3 on all of the quality indicators within each of the ten elements of program quality. Over time, programs should continue to strive for a performance level 4. Programs at this level of performance consistently show evidence of promising practices and achieving outcomes. While performance level 3 indicates the program is exhibiting quality on an indicator, performance level 4 suggests that the program could serve as a model for other programs or that staff could serve as mentors for other practitioners.

Program Planning and Improvement

Use of the ELSA Tool directly assists with program improvement. The self-assessment process offers all of the core components of program planning and improvement, including identifying areas in need of improvement, setting goals and timelines, finding resources, and assigning responsibility for strategies. For programs that already have a process for program improvement, such as annual meetings, the use of or findings from the ELSA Tool can be integrated into the process and can help guide your conversations.

After completing a self-assessment, it is time to develop an action plan based on your team's findings. The ELSA Tool encourages users to indicate priorities and determine the appropriate timeframe for improvements using the following categories:

Right Now: Area will be addressed prior to or at the start of program.

This Year: Area will be addressed during the program year.

Next Year: Area will be re-evaluated prior to the start of the next program year.

This planning process can help you generate a variety of ideas for how to improve your program and identify opportunities for growth. Developing a manageable action plan that is realistic and specific is a key factor to

ensuring your team's success. The action plan helps keep your team on track by identifying the steps you should take to achieve program goals. Don't forget about the plan once it is completed; revisit it periodically throughout the year. The plan serves as your roadmap as you are taking steps to improve and enhance the quality of your program.

When creating your action plan, keep in mind that the quality indicators marked with an asterisk are the most critical to program start-up. You will also want to prioritize action items related to indicators for which your program received a performance level 1 or 2 and begin to discuss improvement strategies. *See Appendix I for an Action Plan template.*

Supporting the Development of Your Staff through Self-Assessment

After completing your action plan, you will want to consider who will be implementing it. The self-assessment process can be particularly useful in getting a clear picture of overall staff strengths and areas in need of improvement. Use of the ELSA Tool may reveal needs and opportunities for professional development for staff members.

Professional development can be offered through a variety of venues, such as workshops, program observations, peer mentoring and coaching, staff meetings, conferences, networking events, and higher education courses. Keep in mind that professional development isn't just about workshops that present "new skills." It allows for everyone to get on the same page, provides tools and resources for achieving program goals and examples of promising practices, and supports and builds a community of learners.

The Site Manager or Program Director responsible for your site will likely want to conduct an inventory of the skills staff members have and what skills they may need in order to implement program improvements. *See Appendix II for a Professional Development Planning tool.*

How to Design a Program Improvement Plan

- Start with the end in mind.
- Determine your goals for the year.
- Discuss and prioritize specific skills needed to fulfill your goals.
- Set realistic deadlines for connecting staff members with learning opportunities.
- Identify financial, technical, and human resources needed to achieve your goals.
- Brainstorm specific next steps and assign responsibility for completing them.¹

IV. THE SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS: USING THE ELSA TOOL

Thinking about WHO

It is very important to involve a variety of stakeholders when using the ELSA Tool. Whether you are a Program Director, staff member, program participant, family member, school administrator, volunteer, or other stakeholder, you are a crucial part of this process. Feel free to ask questions and get involved with all of the conversations about the quality of your afterschool program.

***Quick Tip:** While you will likely want to invite all stakeholders to participate throughout the process, different conversations will be of interest to different stakeholders. It is not necessary for every person involved with the self-assessment to be present for every conversation (with the exception of the facilitator and the Program Director). It will be easier to plan the self-assessment with this in mind.*

¹ Adapted from The After-School Corporation, *Program Quality Improvement Plan*

Here are important strategies for engaging four key stakeholder groups: youth, staff, families, and school administrators.

Youth

Engaging young people in the self-assessment process encourages youth to become more invested in the program. The process provides an excellent opportunity for them; it's no secret that young people want to be listened to and valued, to give back to their communities, and to be engaged in meaningful roles.

Youth Participation in the Self-Assessment Process

- Host a community meeting to explain why it is important to get young people's input in the self-assessment process.
- In preparation of the self-assessment, conduct youth focus groups or interviews. Make sure to ask plenty of open-ended questions about the program that will encourage youth to elaborate on their ideas.
- During the self-assessment, have a written reflection as an opening activity to accommodate young people who do not feel comfortable sharing out loud.
- When building your self-assessment team, try to have two or more young people at the table; it will likely be easier for a young person to provide feedback if they have peers present.

Staff

Having positive relationships among staff members is essential for having a productive self-assessment, but it takes a lot of work. In order to have honest conversations about quality, it is extremely important for staff to know that they may voice their opinions without consequence. Staff should have opportunities to implement ideas that come out of the self-assessment process so they are contributing to the program's improvement efforts. Staff should feel comfortable holding their colleagues (including supervisors!) accountable for following through on action steps.

Staff Participation in the Self-Assessment Process

- Staff should be able to suggest how they would like to contribute to the process. For example, they may wish to facilitate focus groups with young people or manage outreach efforts to parents.
- A description of how the self-assessment will be conducted and a schedule of meetings should be distributed. By doing so, surprises are minimized and everyone can prepare for the self-assessment.
- Program successes should be celebrated. By doing so, staff will be reinvigorated by the process.

Families

Strong partnerships with families are fostered and sustained through positive interactions with program staff. Engaging families as true partners in a self-assessment isn't a one-time shot; rather, it happens over time. Meaningful connections with families occur when your program has a focus on building positive relationships and views collaboration as an attitude, not an activity.

Family Participation in the Self-Assessment Process

- Reach out to families in multiple ways to ensure input from those who are able to visit the program as well as those who cannot.
- Administer surveys with questions that focus on specific elements of program quality. This will clarify the process and the intended outcomes.
- When working with families that are not native English speakers, try to make surveys available in several languages or have a staff person translate the questions verbally.

Other School-Based Staff

Other school-based staff, including principals, teachers, health staff, and family liaisons are important partners in the self-assessment process. In order to engage school staff in your program, you might have a conversation with them about the benefits of partnership. The self-assessment process provides an opportunity for joint planning around best use of shared resources, providing increased consistency for youth between the school day and the afterschool program, and networking and relationship-building among educators and afterschool providers.

Engaging School Staff in the Self-Assessment Process

- Scheduling a meeting between school and program staff can be difficult. Try to map your program calendar onto your school's calendar to look for opportunities to meet.
- Principals are important partners, but often have full calendars. If you've invited a principal who cannot attend, consider inviting other administrators to come in their place.
- Don't forget about all of the different school staff who may have a relevant interest or skill from which your program can benefit. This includes guidance counselors, teaching artists, coaches, and parent coordinators.

Thinking about HOW

Determining who will lead and facilitate the self-assessment process is a key first step. A committed leader is one of the most important factors in order to complete a successful self-assessment.

Many times, a Program Director or Site Manager will facilitate the self-assessment. However, program staff, school personnel, volunteers, or family members can also possess the qualities needed to serve as a facilitator. Regardless of who is leading the self-assessment, the process requires a facilitator who possesses several key characteristics in order to be successful in engaging all stakeholders and creating an atmosphere that is safe, comfortable, and empowering.

A good facilitator:

- Taps into participants' existing knowledge and builds upon what they bring to the process.
- Provides opportunities for everyone to contribute ideas and suggestions.
- Actively listens and connects ideas and themes as they emerge.
- Adjusts and adapts to support the needs and learning styles of the participants.
- Is prepared to answer questions about policies and procedures.
- Avoids personalizing what is shared in the process.
- Remains non-judgmental.
- Helps bring consensus and closure to discussions.

Below are some questions for the leader and facilitator to consider as they plan the process.

- What is the collective future that the program wants to create?
- How can you challenge and expand others' thinking?
- How can you help others embrace change as an opportunity for growth?
- How does this self-assessment complement other program improvement efforts?
- How can you help others see gains and celebrate progress?²

Quick Tip: *The facilitator should be able to commit to the full process, from planning the process to following up on items in the action plan. If the facilitator is unable to facilitate the entire self-assessment, be sure to have a transition plan to ensure that findings from the self-assessment are recorded, an action plan is developed, and decisions are implemented.*

² Senge, The Fifth Discipline

More on Facilitating the Process

No matter how you choose to conduct the self-assessment, there are three main steps for the facilitator to follow: Prepare, Facilitate, and Follow-up. Here are some things for the facilitator to consider during each stage of the self-assessment process.

PREPARE

Create a message. Understanding why the process is important and how it leads to quality improvement will help you craft a message about why others should participate in the self-assessment.

Know the Big Picture. Before involving others, complete the ELSA Tool yourself. This will help you keep the big picture in mind as the group discusses each section.

Send a formal invitation. Sending out a formal invitation that lets everyone know what to expect and what their role will be will support them as they participate.

Plan Ahead. Allow ample time for discussions about quality, allowing time for each participant to weigh in.

FACILITATE

Get Acquainted. Consider beginning with team-building activities or icebreakers.

Establish the Tone. Refresh people's understanding of the ELSA Tool and their role in the process, and ask participants to brainstorm ground rules for working successfully as a group.

Keep Track. Ask someone to record items for the action plan and to take notes on feedback and suggestions.

Emphasize the Positive. Identify the strengths of the program involved and acknowledge each participant's investment in the program's success.

FOLLOW-UP

Share. Ask the group to share lessons learned and recommendations for enhancing the self-assessment process.

Appreciate. Acknowledge everyone's contributions and recognize successes.

Communicate. If it is hard to get people together to debrief, consider putting information in an e-mail. Providing people with an opportunity to discuss and reflect on findings and the action plan is extremely important, no matter how you do it.

Take action. Follow-up on immediate action steps as soon as possible while momentum around quality improvement is fresh and strong.

Thinking about WHEN

Elev8 Extended Learning programs should use this tool to self-assess the program at least once each year. Still, your program can decide when to use the tool and how to structure the process. There is no perfect time to conduct a self-assessment: it can serve various purposes depending on the needs of your program:

- Introducing the self-assessment process prior to program start-up in order to strengthen relationships and begin building consensus around vision and program goals.
- Introducing the self-assessment process in the middle of the year can be useful as it provides a means for stepping back from daily operations and identifying what works and what may need to change.
- Introducing the self-assessment process at the end of the year serves as a way of identifying areas of expansion or improvement for the following year.

The self-assessment process can be conducted in one day or over the course of a whole year. Regardless of when the self-assessment is done, the timing needs to compliment what is happening at your site. Here are some ways in which you might structure your self-assessment:

- A one or two day retreat during which stakeholders complete the entire self-assessment
- A series of meetings over several weeks during which stakeholders complete the entire self-assessment

- One meeting a week or month until the self-assessment is completed

Quick Tip: The ten quality elements in the ELSA Tool can be addressed in the order in which they appear in the tool, or in a different order based on the priorities of the program.

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V. TAKING A CLOSER LOOK: THE ELSA TOOL

In this section you will find the ELSA Tool as well as helpful strategies for using the tool and improving quality. The strategies are designed to help you make observations, reflect on strengths and areas in need of improvement, and brainstorm solutions. The tips, strategies, activities, and examples are presented in four ways:

ZOOMING IN

This section equips you to make clear distinctions when using the performance scale by providing practical examples of what a program might look like at each of the performance levels. Use this section to “calibrate” your team so each self-assessment participant views the performance levels similarly.

TAKING ACTION

A solid improvement plan guides your practice as you move toward creating change. In these sections you will find a sample action plan that shows how a program might address areas in which the program scored below satisfactory.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

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

TRY THIS!

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

Remember that your program may not fit these descriptions perfectly, but these examples should provide you with an idea of what a program is like at each level.

ENVIRONMENT AND SAFETY

A quality program provides a safe, healthy, and nurturing environment for all participants.

A QUALITY PROGRAM:	Performance Level					Plan To Improve		
	1	2	3	4		Right Now	This Year	Next Year
1. *Provides a stimulating, comfortable, and supportive environment for young people.								
2. *Uses program space that is safe and clean.								
3. Has program space and facilities that are regularly maintained and appropriately equipped and suitable for activities being conducted.								
4. *Develops, implements, and shares approved safety and emergency plans and procedures with youth, staff, and families.								
5. *Provides adequate security for program.								
6. *Develops and manages effective arrival and dismissal procedures and plans for safe travel home.								
7. *Provides healthy and nutritious snacks and/or supper.								
8. *Is aware of, records, and informs staff of special health needs of participants.								
9. *Conducts fire/safety drills.								
10. *Fire extinguishers, first aid kits, and other safety equipment are accessible throughout the program space.								
11. Ensures youth are greeted when they arrive at the program.								
12. Establishes, maintains, and communicates code of conduct to youth, staff, and their families.								
13. *Ensures accessibility for all students regardless of physical abilities (including transportation and program space).								
14. Has a culture that allows participants to take initiative and explore their interests.								
15. Applies rewards and consequences for participant behavior appropriately and consistently.								

**Denotes items to be assessed prior to program start-up.*

More on Environment and Safety

A quality program has a space that supports positive youth development and encourages positive interactions among peers and adults. Youth feel safe from intimidation, teasing, bullying, and violence, and mutual respect is encouraged. The physical space is accessible for all youth and is well-equipped for all activities. All health codes are met and safety policies are documented and followed.

ZOOMING IN

QUALITY INDICATOR # 14: Has a culture that allows participants to take initiative and explore their interests.

Performance Level 1

There is no opportunity for youth voice in creating the direction of programming. The program does not allow for students to express interests. Few leadership opportunities for students to show initiative exist. Program supplies

and materials are limited. Youth are not given choices; rather, they are assigned to activities and tasks. The arrangement of the physical space does not allow for positive interactions among participants, successful implementation of activities, or exploration of personal interests.

Performance Level 2

Even with limited supplies, participants are given opportunities to engage in activities that are of interest to them. Supplies and materials are available for some activities, but they are often kept in a locked closet. Young people are seldom asked for their opinions and ideas for enhancing activities. When suggestions are made, they are sometimes implemented. Although staff members understand the importance of providing young people choices, they are not consistent in doing so.

Performance Level 3

Supplies and materials are always accessible and kept at a central location. Young people are encouraged to provide feedback on activities. Staff members provide opportunities for youth choice by administering monthly surveys on program options. The physical space is intentionally arranged to complement activities.

Performance Level 4

Supplies and materials are consistently stocked, accessible, and visible to all participants. All the staff members provide multiple opportunities for youth choice in their groups. The physical and social space is organized to allow positive peer interaction, facilitate rich discussions, and promote collaboration on projects. Space is often used as a model for other program providers to learn from.

TAKING ACTION

Program Element	Quality Indicator	Timeline for Improvement and Improvement Steps		Person(s) Responsible	Resources Needed
Environment and Safety	#14 Has a culture that allows participants to take initiative and explore their interests.	Right Now	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review activity menu with youth. 2. Order program supplies for new activities. 3. Replace broken or damaged equipment. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Program Director: Anne Johnson 2. Staff Members: Eddie Rivera and Jessica Barnes 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. New Supplies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Basketball equipment ▪ Paint sets ▪ Science kits
		This Year	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hold meeting to discuss how activities offer youth opportunities to take initiative and explore their interests. 2. Work with youth to re-organize program space. 		
		Next Year	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hold meeting at the beginning of the year to plan activities and reflect on program environment. 2. Identify opportunities for young people to be engaged as leaders and create intentional venues for youth to share feedback. 3. Recruit young people to create a youth council to lead activities at the site. 4. Create a plan to acknowledge youth for their leadership and ongoing contributions to the program. 		

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

As you reflect on your program’s environment and safety, keep in mind that the physical, emotional, and social space should always support positive youth development and encourage positive interactions among peers and adults. Here are a few tips to help you create a youth-centered space:

- Establish specific ways to welcome young people into the program, i.e., orientation events, buddy system, welcome committee, etc.
- Involve young people in creating community agreements.
- Make the space youth-friendly. Display work in the classrooms and community spaces, display magazines and books of interest, play music, or decorate with comfortable and colorful furniture.
- Give young people a voice and opportunities for healthy self-expression through activities such as poetry, drama, dance, rap groups, sports, etc.

TRY THIS!

Youth Mapping Project

Prepare the young people to walk through the program space and give their feedback about everything from the way staff members greet youth to the art on the walls. You might want to create a checklist of questions to help guide their observations and document their feedback.

1. **Ask the group to draw a map of the program** (artistic talent not required) and then color the spaces where they feel most comfortable.
2. **Use the maps as a jumping-off point for discussion** about what makes a space comfortable and welcoming.
3. **Use the information gathered to create comment cards** so that other young people and adults can give feedback about the spaces.
4. **Bring your group together after the walk-through** to share observations and brainstorm solutions for areas of improvement. Discuss what action the group may need to take to change the environment.

ADMINISTRATION AND ORGANIZATION

A quality program has well-developed systems and sound fiscal management to support and enhance worthwhile programming and activities for all participants.

A QUALITY PROGRAM:	Performance Level					Plan To Improve		
	1	2	3	4		Right Now	This Year	Next Year
1. *Establishes clear attendance and participation expectations and maintains a system for the collection and monitoring of attendance data.								
2. *Maintains all required documents (e.g. health certificate, security clearance, insurance, etc.) where applicable.								
3. *Creates and uses an employee handbook that clarifies internal policies and procedures.								
4. Has clear job descriptions which include integration expectations, where applicable.								
5. *Has an open enrollment process for all students.								
6. Has complete and current enrollment/registration documents for all participants.								
7. Has access to accurate medical records on participants.								
8. *Has a clear salary structure for program staff.								
9. Develops, follows, and adjusts a budget that includes all program expenses, including those related to school integration (attending school events, PTA meetings, family activities, etc.).								
10. Establishes and maintains a centralized database of program and participant information that is regularly updated and usable by staff.								
11. Completes all required reports and submits them in a timely manner.								
12. Ensures that supplies are organized, maintained, and accessible.								
13. Complies with government mandates.								
14. Negotiates optimal use of school, CBO, and community resources to best meet the needs of participants and their families.								
15. *Documents where participants are during program hours.								
16. Uses common (one form for all providers in the school) registration and referral forms.								
17. Works with other EL program providers on budgeting and paying for shared expenses to maximize resources.								
18. Shares key documents (such as parent handbooks, staff manuals, etc.) with other EL program providers.								
19. Is committed to implementing best practice quality-building strategies recognized by the State of New Mexico.								

**Denotes items to be assessed prior to program start-up.*

More on Administration and Organization

A quality program has a clear mission statement and set of goals. It has well-defined policies and procedures, which are documented in handbooks and records. The organization complies with mandates from the school district, government agencies, and funders. Information is updated and databases are well-maintained.

ZOOMING IN

QUALITY INDICATOR #3: *Creates and uses an employee handbook that clarifies internal policies and procedures.

Performance Level 1

No employee handbook exists. No formal policy review is done for staff. Policies and procedures are reviewed when an issue arises.

Performance Level 2

An employee handbook outlining internal policies and procedures exists. The handbook is available at the program site for staff members to review. Staff members are not given copies or any formal review of the handbook.

Performance Level 3

An employee handbook outlining internal policies and procedures is given to each new staff member. Staff members are encouraged to review the handbook.

Performance Level 4

An employee handbook outlining internal policies and procedures is given to each new staff member during their orientation. Staff members are encouraged to review the handbook. A site director or other staff member formally reviews the handbook with new staff members and allows time for them to ask questions regarding policies.

TAKING ACTION

Program Element	Quality Indicator	Timeline for Improvement and Improvement Steps		Person(s) Responsible	Resources Needed
Administration and Organization	#4 *Creates and uses an employee handbook that clarifies internal policies and procedures.	Right Now	1. Hold a staff meeting is held to discuss what information should be included in a staff handbook. 2. Program Director to draft employee handbook.	1. Program Director: Anne Johnson 2. All staff	None
		This Year	1. Print handbook and distribute to employees. 2. Ask for staff feedback.		
		Next Year	1. Ensure all new staff members receive a copy of the handbook and have the opportunity to discuss its contents with the Program Director.		

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Here are a few tips for ensuring a solid structure for your program, especially when time is limited:

- Set up a schedule that identifies deadlines for completing all necessary program reports and documentation of procedures; this can save a lot of time in the long run.
- Get to know your community and potential partners such as businesses and faith-based organizations. Be aware of barriers that may exist for establishing collaborative relationships with potential partners.
- Create an employee handbook that outlines policies and procedures and distribute it immediately upon hiring new staff members.

- Make sure that youth, staff members, families, and other stakeholders are aware of your mission and program goals. Find a central location at your school such as a bulletin board to display your mission and program goals.

TRY THIS!

Try to implement these best practices in record-keeping at your site:

- *Be concise.* Notes on program participants should include only relevant information in appropriate detail, i.e., only provide information that is directly relevant to the delivery of services for intended youth outcomes.
- *Be accurate.* Besides providing accurate information, direct quotes should be recorded whenever possible. As the information may be shared with other agencies, the records must be legible and free from jargon (meaningless words).
- *Be up-to-date.* Progress notes, crisis interventions, or incident reports should be written as soon as possible after an event has happened to prevent loss of information due to time lapse.
- *Be meaningful.* Notes should distinguish clearly between facts, observations, hard data, and opinions.
- *Be consistent.* Notes should be structured according to a pre-set format, and acronyms used should be meaningful to all within the organization.³

³ Adapted from National Council on Social Service, *Documentation and Record Keeping*

RELATIONSHIPS

A **quality** program develops, nurtures, and maintains positive relationships and interactions among staff, participants, families and communities.

A QUALITY PROGRAM:	Performance Level				Plan To Improve		
	1	2	3	4	Right Now	This Year	Next Year
1. *Has staff who respect and communicate with one another and are role models of positive adult relationships.							
2. *Actively builds relationships with participants' families and interacts with them in a comfortable, respectful, welcoming way.							
3. *Treats participants with respect and listens to what they say.							
4. Teaches participants to interact with one another in positive ways.							
5. Is sensitive to the culture and language of participants.							
6. Promotes inclusion of youth regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, class, gender, sexual orientation, and physical ability.							
7. Has scheduled meetings with its major stakeholders.							
8. Has scheduled meetings with program directors from other EL program providers for information-sharing and planning.							
9. Encourages former participants to contribute as volunteers or staff.							
10. Actively participates in events led by school partners and other EL providers.							

**Denotes items to be assessed prior to program start-up.*

More on Relationships

A quality program fosters relationships by developing them intentionally and carefully. Relationships build a positive foundation for healthy social and emotional development. To create quality relationships, staff model cooperation and respect toward youth, other staff, and families, use positive language that supports young people's growth and potential, interact with youth on a one-on-one basis, and organize activities that promote positive communication. Meaningful relationships are built and maintained with other program providers and external stakeholders.

ZOOMING IN

QUALITY INDICATOR #3: Treats participants with respect and listens to what they say.

Performance Level 1

Staff members are observed yelling to get the attention of the group. Young people are interrupted when speaking. Staff members belittle young people and use negative language. Young people's ideas are not taken seriously or are dismissed. The program culture and activities are adult-centered.

Performance Level 2

Staff members multi-task while working with youth and do not make eye contact or individual connections with young people. Staff members are distant to youth and rarely call them by name. There are few opportunities for young people to check in with staff members and peers about daily experiences and issues of concern.

Performance Level 3

A daily "check-in" or circle time is incorporated into the program routine as a tool to connect with the needs and concerns of individual youth. Young people contribute to a code of conduct. Youth are valued as peer mediators or leaders. A majority of staff members practice a variety of behavior modification techniques and community-building strategies. Staff members are starting to make time to connect with youth on an individual basis.

Performance Level 4

Staff members are aware of the needs of individual youth. All activities allow for individual feedback and contributions to the group experience. The program culture is safe and confidential; encourages young people to speak freely. Participants are viewed as peer role models and youth leaders. Feedback and criticism are addressed. The language and behavior of staff members show sensitivity to race, ethnicity, gender, and the physical ability of all young people. Staff members model cooperation and respect toward each other and youth. Positive discipline strategies are used throughout the program.

TAKING ACTION

Program Element	Quality Indicator	Timeline for Improvement and Improvement Steps		Person(s) Responsible	Resources Needed
Relationships	#3 *Treats participants with respect and listens to what they say.	Right Now	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hold staff training on building positive relationships with youth. 2. Follow-up between individual staff members and Program Director to discuss lessons from the training and share additional resources. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Program Director: Anne Johnson 2. Staff Members Eddie Rivera and Jessica Barnes 3. Youth (all) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reports on importance of respectful relationships with youth 2. Search Institute Training Kit
		This Year	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Deliberately include discussions about mutual respect and positive communication in staff meetings. 2. Implement a one-on-one "check-in" routine as a way for staff members to connect with each participant. 3. Break large groups into smaller groups to allow youth to receive more individual attention. 4. Develop staff and participant ground rules, norms, and expectations together in the form of a community agreement. 		
		Next Year	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Design program activities to provide multiple opportunities for building positive relationships between staff members and youth. 2. Ask staff members to regularly share stories when positive interactions with youth occur. 3. Create a system for Program Director and other staff to formally acknowledge staff members who maintain respectful relationships with youth, and for youth to acknowledge staff who are following the norms established in the community agreement. 		

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Here are a few tips for promoting healthy partnerships with young people:

- *Ensure mutual respect exists.* In a quality program, both adults and youth have opportunities to communicate their expertise and knowledge.
- *Share responsibilities.* Create rotating schedules of roles; for example, alternate adults and youth as activity leaders.

- *Everyone should contribute.* Youth programs are a joint endeavor. Youth are not silent partners when working with adults!

TRY THIS!

Make a Personal Connection

Reflect on your interactions with the young people you work with. Is there a young person that you are having a difficult time connecting with? Challenge yourself to make a personal connection by creating a plan to develop your relationship. Questions to consider:

- What actions can I begin to take?
- What actions can I try to stop?
- What is already working that I want to keep?
- What will be a sign that demonstrates this relationship is developing?

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STAFFING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A quality program recruits, hires and trains diverse staff members who value each participant, understand their developmental needs, and work closely with families, school partners, and co-workers.

A QUALITY PROGRAM:	Performance Level				Plan To Improve		
	1	2	3	4	Right Now	This Year	Next Year
1. *Has a program director who is committed to his/her own professional development and participates in trainings.							
2. *Recruits, hires, and develops staff who reflect the diversity and culture(s) of the community.							
3. Treats staff as professionals and provides opportunities for advancement.							
4. *Ensures staff has competence in core academic areas, where appropriate.							
5. Provides ongoing staff development in order to engage and retain staff.							
6. *Maintains staff-to-participant ratio as per program requirements.							
7. *Provides positive working conditions for staff and appropriate supervision, support, and feedback.							
8. Assesses professional development needs of staff and provides appropriate training.							
9. Trains staff to plan suitable activities that correspond to the developmental needs of participants.							
10. Trains staff on techniques for generating positive behavior among youth.							
11. Has regular staff meetings.							
12. Works with staff to achieve credentialing and accreditation where available.							
13. Trains staff on what is offered by the health services and family support resources provided by, located in or connected the school.							

**Denotes items to be assessed prior to program start-up.*

More on Staffing and Professional Development

A quality program employs staff members who are equipped with the academic and experiential knowledge needed to fulfill their job requirements. Program directors have ongoing staff recruitment and development plans to attract and retain high-quality staff. Quality programs reach beyond mandatory training requirements to provide staff with additional tools and knowledge. Professional development opportunities are frequent and offer a variety of ways for practitioners to bolster their skills, and ultimately, lead to improved program performance. All staff members are committed to their program's mission and goals, as well as to those of Elev8 New Mexico.

ZOOMING IN

QUALITY INDICATOR #7: Provides positive working conditions for staff and appropriate supervision, support, and feedback.

Performance Level 1

Staff members do not participate in staff meetings or trainings. The program does not have clear expectations for staff performance. Staff members are often reprimanded and are not acknowledged for accomplishments and

contributions. An employee handbook and job descriptions are unavailable.

Performance Level 2

Staff meetings happen on an ad hoc basis. There is little awareness of expectations. Issues of concern are discussed, and sometimes there is follow through or solutions are planned. Written job descriptions exist but are not always shared with staff members.

Performance Level 3

There are regular staff meetings. Staff members are engaged when discussing issues and brainstorming solutions. Trainings are offered, though focus mostly on basic requirements. Some staff members are familiar with the standards that supervisors hold them to. Program leadership is accessible and follow-up happens often.

Performance Level 4

The program director coaches staff members regularly. Staff meetings are scheduled in advance and happen on a regular basis. The program director meets with each staff member to discuss performance and to set individual professional development goals. There is a clear professional development plan; staff members attend trainings regularly and are given opportunities to share strategies and ideas learned. Staff members seek out trainings which build skills beyond regulatory training requirements.

TAKING ACTION

Program Element	Quality Indicator	Timeline for Improvement and Improvement Steps		Person(s) Responsible	Resources Needed
Staffing and Professional Development	#7 *Provides positive working conditions for staff and appropriate supervision, support, and feedback.	Right Now	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Schedule meetings for Program Director and each staff member to identify strengths, needs, gaps, and common themes. 2. Schedule staff meeting for Program Director to share findings from individual meetings. 3. Schedule a group training designed to build skills and establish a common vision and sense of community. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Program Director: Anne Johnson 2. Executive Director: Lisa Herrera 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Staff job descriptions 2. Training Facilitator
		This Year	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create a clear staff development plan. Identify in-house and external resources needed. 2. Attend staff trainings throughout the year. 3. Hold meeting every three months for Program Director and each staff member to assess progress and growth and check in on what is working and what needs to be in place to support their professional development. 4. Make job descriptions available. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Principal: David Smith 4. Staff Members: Eddie Rivera and Jessica Barnes 	
		Next Year	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hold staff retreat to revisit goals, celebrate progress, and identify training areas of priority for the current program year. 2. Hold an orientation for new and returning staff members with the goals of building community, sharing expectations, agreeing on quality standards, and establishing a shared vision. 3. Create opportunities for staff members to showcase their work through peer learning sessions. Accomplishments will be acknowledged with announcements and awards. 		

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Here are some strategies for maximizing staff professional development opportunities:

- For required trainings, ensure staff members are informed of the purpose and content of the training and how it links to program improvement goals prior to the event.
- Have at least two staff members participate in most professional development opportunities, including supervisors when possible. This increases institutional knowledge and ability to share learnings with others in the program.
- Create a system to track the time and content of staff members' professional development.
- Create an annual professional development plan for each staff member and ensure resources for professional development are set aside in the program budget.

TRY THIS!

To maximize investment in staff participation at professional conferences, workshops, networking events, and other forums that highlight best practice in the field, ask staff members to bring back information and resources gathered at events. Give them time to share what they have learned with their colleagues one-on-one and during regular staff meetings. This will save both time and money, and everyone will benefit from events attended by any staff member.

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PROGRAMMING AND ACTIVITIES

A quality program provides a well-rounded variety of activities and opportunities that support the physical, social and cognitive growth and development of all participants.

A QUALITY PROGRAM:	Performance Level				Plan To Improve		
	1	2	3	4	Right Now	This Year	Next Year
1. *Provides activities that reflect the mission of the program.							
2. Addresses academic, physical, social, and emotional needs of the participants.							
3. *Features activities that are commensurate with the age and skill level of the participants and enable participants to develop new skills.							
4. *Offers project-based, experiential activities that promote creativity and development of participant self-expression.							
5. *Offers high quality academic support and activities, including tutoring and/or homework help.							
6. *Offers enrichment opportunities in core academic areas as well as in culture and the arts, technology, recreation, and health.							
7. *Includes activities that take into account the culture and language of participants.							
8. *Establishes and follows a schedule that is known to all staff, participants, and their families.							
9. Provides a range of opportunities in which participants' work can be showcased.							
10. Integrates opportunities for the development of personal and social responsibility, self-direction, and leadership throughout the program.							
11. Coordinates with other EL programs to offer wrap-around programming for students who participate in other afterschool activities.							
12. Utilizes health and family supports staff members in developing and leading afterschool activities (if available at or connect to the school).							
13. Plans individual, small group, and large group activities.							
14. Uses evidence-based curricula to plan activities.							

**Denotes items to be assessed prior to program start up.*

More on Programming and Activities

A quality program provides youth with guidance and emotional support; staff members take a genuine interest in youth and their academic, physical, social, and emotional development. Staff members use strategies that are geared toward encouraging youth to push beyond their present level of competency. Activities are well-organized and age-appropriate, provide exposure to new ideas, and offer opportunities to learn and build new skills, solve problems, and build a sense of civic engagement. Youth play an active role in developing and selecting activities, and have opportunities to take on leadership roles in the program.

ZOOMING IN

QUALITY INDICATOR #10: Integrates opportunities for the development of personal and social responsibility, self-direction, and leadership throughout the program.

Performance Level 1

Staff members schedule participants' activities and routines with no leadership opportunities or areas of responsibility for youth. Staff members make decisions and solve problems for young people as they arise.

Performance Level 2

Staff members decide upon and schedule most activities, with youth providing input on an occasional and informal basis. Staff members make most decisions for youth, but occasionally ask a few young people to speak or lead an activity.

Performance Level 3

Staff members have created a youth leadership team to provide input and feedback and to assist with activity selection. A majority of the staff members support youth as they complete tasks on their own and focus on learner-centered projects. Constructive feedback is provided to challenge youth to move beyond their current level of competency.

Performance Level 4

An adult and youth leadership team plans, implements, and assesses all aspects of the program. Youth receive extensive leadership training and have meaningful voices, roles, and participation. Youth feel ownership of the program and know that they play a significant role in their own success and the success of the program. All activities and projects encourage youth to discover their strengths and set personal goals with support from peers and staff members. Staff members refrain from taking over challenging tasks, but rather use questioning, coaching, and other effective strategies to build the capacity of youth. Public recognitions and celebrations are provided to encourage and acknowledge self-direction and success.

TAKING ACTION

Program Element	Quality Indicator	Timeline for Improvement and Improvement Steps		Person(s) Responsible	Resources Needed
Programming and Activities	#10 Integrates opportunities for the development of personal and social responsibility, self-direction, and leadership throughout the program.	Right Now	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Train staff members on strategies and activities that promote youth leadership.2. Hold meeting to discuss and identify leadership roles for youth in the program.3. Develop a plan for how these leadership roles will be encouraged and supported.	1. Program Director: Anne Johnson 2. Staff Members: Eddie Rivera and Jessica Barnes	1. SEDL Curriculum database 2. National 4-H activity database 3. Training Facilitator
		This Year	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Provide ongoing training on the tools and skills needed to empower young people to creatively resolve conflicts and develop activities that intentionally develop youth leadership.2. Hold quarterly staff meeting to share promising practices and determine new strategies for creating opportunities for young people to take personal responsibility and become self-directed, natural leaders.3. Record and assess effectiveness of program efforts to foster responsibility and leadership by administering student survey and adding related questions to program evaluation.		

		Next Year	1. Hold meeting for staff members and young people to discuss what worked from prior year. 2. Schedule community meetings and annual events to be led by youth and used as a tool to build community.		
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TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Extended learning programs are positioned to provide young people with a myriad of rich activities and experiences that support their overall well-being and health. Below are some basic principles that can be incorporated into all activities regardless of content.

Youth workers should:

- Provide a clear overview, learning objectives, and rationale for activities.
- Engage young people in hands-on activities and discussion.
- Allow young people to tap into their individual strengths and talents.
- Provide young people with multiple opportunities to reflect upon what they have experienced.
- Provide young people with positive reinforcement.
- Be able to adapt to different learning styles.
- Employ strategies that engage young people who may be resistant to participating.⁴

TRY THIS!

It is essential that staff have a basic understanding of youth developmental stages as they design and implement program activities. Consider using a staff meeting to facilitate a mini-workshop that introduces staff to the stages of development.

Divide meeting participants into small groups. The facilitator should assign each group a specific age, and ask the groups to brainstorm a list of developmentally appropriate program environments and activities, keeping in mind academic, physical, social, and emotional needs. Participants should then be asked to share several examples. As a large group, think about the activities currently offered through your program and identify how they support youth development. As the group thinks of ways to enhance program offerings, record ideas and add them to your program's action plan for improvement.⁵

⁴ Adapted from Partnership for After School Education, *Learning Lab Guiding Principles for Afterschool Activities*

⁵ Adapted from Development Without Limits, *Child Development Training of Afterschool Professionals*

YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT

A quality program provides opportunities for youth to participate in planning, to exercise choice, and to engage in a rich variety of offerings.

<i>A QUALITY PROGRAM:</i>	Performance Level					Plan To Improve		
	1	2	3	4		Right Now	This Year	Next Year
1. *Engages participants with a variety of strategies.								
2. Encourages participants to make choices and take ownership of program selection and development.								
3. Enables participants to develop life skills, resiliency, and self-esteem via activities.								
4. Affords participants opportunities to express their ideas, concerns, and opinions.								
5. Enables participants to explore resources and issues in their community through projects and activities.								
6. Promotes consistent and active participation.								
7. Promotes teamwork and respect for others.								
8. Involves participants in the development of disciplinary practices.								
9. Encourages participants to recruit others into the program.								
10. Develops and implements an intentional participant recruitment and retention plan in coordination with all other program providers.								

**Denotes items to be assessed prior to program start-up.*

More on Youth Participation and Engagement

A quality program ensures that youth both actively participate in program activities and in program design. Youth are given meaningful roles and have a variety of opportunities to lead activities, assess the program and staff, and contribute ideas. All youth feel ownership of the program. Youth enjoy activities and are excited to attend the program; youth actively recruit their peers to participate.

ZOOMING IN

QUALITY INDICATOR#1: Engages participants with a variety of strategies.

Performance Level 1

Program strategies and activities are selected and implemented by adults. Youth are rarely active participants in program design. Youth often show signs of being bored, such as distracting the group or consistently being absent. Youth need to be coaxed to participate in activities. There are few opportunities for youth to lead, make decisions, work collaboratively with other youth and adults, and to build positive relationships with adults and other youth.

Performance Level 2

Some program strategies and activities are youth-selected and led. Staff members are beginning to discuss how to engage all young people through hands-on and diverse learning experiences. Some attempts are made to incorporate youth voice into planning, program design, assessment, and recruitment. A few activities are planned

and led by youth with adult support. Some staff members believe that young people are not responsible, capable of, or interested in program planning and decision-making or in connecting with adults. The majority of young people are not asked or encouraged to share ideas or concerns about activity content.

Performance Level 3

Adults and youth work together to plan, select, implement, and organize activities and events. In the majority of activities, young people develop and respond to questions, contribute opinions and ideas, and work in small groups with peers on activities and topics that they feel are relevant and meaningful. Staff members have administered surveys or conducted focus groups to capture youth experiences, feedback, and ideas for program improvement. There is evidence that staff members are actively eliciting young people's opinions, ideas, and concerns and integrating them into programming.

Performance Level 4

Young people are trained as leaders and facilitators and co-lead activities with staff members. Community meetings or check-ins are used to publicly acknowledge youth for their contributions and accomplishments. All young people are practicing leadership skills. All young people have a voice, actively listen to their peers and staff members, have a variety of meaningful choices and are contributing opinions, ideas, and concerns to discussions. Young people are involved in recruitment and make presentations and participate in community service or service learning in neighborhood schools or organizations.

TAKING ACTION

Program Element	Quality Indicator	Timeline for Improvement and Improvement Steps		Person(s) Responsible	Resources Needed
Youth Participation and Engagement	#1 *Engages participants with a variety of strategies.	Right Now	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Facilitate staff discussion on existing adult-youth partnerships, potential barriers to further developing them, and how these relationships could grow or change. 2. Form a committee involving youth and adults to begin developing a plan for how to engage young people in meaningful and authentic opportunities. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Program Director: Anne Johnson 2. Staff Members: Eddie Rivera and Jessica Barnes 3. Youth (all) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reports on youth engagement 2. Search Institute Training Kit 3. Training Facilitator
		This Year	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Update youth recruitment strategies. 2. Organize informal events to allow for adults and youth to develop positive relationships. 3. Offer trainings to increase staff capacity to engage youth in leadership experiences. 		
		Next Year	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hold retreat for adults and youth to reflect on the program. In collaboration with staff, young people will facilitate working sessions at the retreat. 2. Establish a protocol for youth to voice concerns and frustrations and share their experiences with other youth. 3. Train young people to be active participants in the process of hiring and evaluating staff. 		

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

As a youth practitioner, you are aware of the benefits of engaging youth in meaningful experiences that build a sense of connection to their community, encourage civic awareness, and create opportunities to build self-esteem.

Here are some strategies for engaging young people in program planning and organizational development:

- Be clear as to why young people are being asked to join the team. Create a purpose statement.
- Acknowledge young people as full members of the team. Be clear about their roles.

- Establish at least two youth positions. Young people feel more comfortable when they have a peer present.
- Choose a convenient meeting time and place for young people.
- Host an orientation for youth members. Review the organization's mission, history, structure, and the responsibilities of the team members.
- Make meetings interactive through icebreakers, small group discussions, partner chats, team-building activities, and large group share-outs.
- Encourage young leaders to recommend other youth when their term or involvement is ending.⁶

TRY THIS!

Create and Support Meaningful Youth Voice

When fostering a deep level of youth engagement in your program, consider trying these promising practices in creating youth voice. Here, the term youth voice means intentionally creating meaningful ways for young people to have input in and authority over programs, events, initiatives, or public policy matters.

Make one or more staff members responsible for setting up a youth voice initiative.

Creating a youth voice emphasis is like creating a new program; one or more staff members will need to share responsibility and it should be incorporated into their regular role in the program.

Understand your program's current youth voice profile.

Programs are at different places in the program development process with regard to involving youth in decision-making and meaningful involvement. Be aware of where you are starting. Starting from scratch means, first, creating a climate which supports increasing young people's influence on the organization.

Consider recruitment and targeting strategies first.

Youth who have had discouraging school, family, or peer experiences may shy away from the image that an active youth voice presence conveys to organizations or communities. These are often the young people who could benefit the most from involvement in program efforts that take them seriously. Spending time on planning strategies that ensure social, economic, and cultural diversity will give your organization and community efforts a real sense of integrity.

Recognize that logistics and environment will always play a key role in establishing youth voice.

Consider when and where you have meetings, and if your meeting structure encourages youth to offer input.

Directly address adult attitudes through training, reflection, and discussion.

To develop youth voice, it is crucial for adults to take youth seriously, be open-minded, and be willing to give up control. Plan for training and ongoing reflection to ensure that the critical issue of adult attitudes continues to be addressed.⁷

⁶ Say Y.E.S. to Youth, *Youth Engagement Strategies*

⁷ Adapted from A.C.T. for Youth, *Profiles of Youth Engagement and Voice in New York State, Current Strategies*

DAY SCHOOL AND EXTENDED LEARNING LINKAGES

A **quality** program has its staff work closely with school staff to ensure that extended learning components and activities are aligned with and enrich school standards and curricula.

A QUALITY PROGRAM:	Performance Level					Plan To Improve		
	1	2	3	4		Right Now	This Year	Next Year
1. *Secures commitment of resources (e.g., classroom space, bulletin boards, storage space, computer facilities) from the school.								
2. Maintains communication with principal, school administration and students support staff (if applicable, this may include Family Liaison, Community Schools Coordinator or like position).								
3. Incorporates programming that integrates and complements school day activities the school's mission.								
4. Collaborates regularly with school-day personnel regarding use of facilities and resources.								
5. Has intentional and documented connection to New Mexico State Educational Standards or related learning concepts. Supports state and local performance standards and benchmarks.								
6. Communicates with school-day staff to monitor academic and behavioral progress of students.								
7. Allocates sufficient program time for homework and homework help.								
8. Has activities that build participants' study skills.								
9. Operates with concern for the maintenance and care of school facilities and equipment, and ensures spaces are neat and properly set at the end of the program day.								

**Denotes items to be assessed prior to program start-up*

More on Day School and Extended Learning Linkages

A quality program works with the school to share information about young people's needs and progress, to assign staff roles, and to coordinate use of space and other resources. Program staff and school staff establish regular mechanisms for ongoing communication and coordination. The transition between the school day and program time is seamless. Responsibility for young people's academic, physical, social, and emotional development is shared between the program and school. As a result, the program and the school complement one another.

ZOOMING IN

QUALITY INDICATOR #5: Has intentional and documented connection to New Mexico State Educational Standards or related learning concepts.

Performance Level 1

The program director and staff members are unaware of state educational standards or do not believe that there is a role for the program in helping youth reach the standards. Program activities are not planned in consideration of state standards.

Performance Level 2

The program director is aware of state educational standards. These standards are considered when program activities are planned. However, the program activities only sometimes support the standards.

Performance Level 3

The program director and some staff members are aware of state educational standards. These standards are considered when program activities are planned. School teachers are consulted during the program planning process. Many of the standards are supported by a set of program activities available to participants.

Performance Level 4

The program director and all staff members are aware of state educational standards. These standards guide the development of some program activities. School day teachers are included as regular members of the program planning team and related processes. Most of the standards are supported by program activities available to participants.

TAKING ACTION

Program Element	Quality Indicator	Timeline for Improvement and Improvement Steps		Person(s) Responsible	Resources Needed
Day School and Extended Learning Linkages	#3 Establishes strong links to the school day.	Right Now	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hold meeting for Program Director and local principals to discuss school learning goals and opportunities for working together toward the district mission. 2. Schedule a follow-up meeting with staff members to discuss how the program currently supports learning and the district mission. 3. Create an action plan to strengthen efforts and explore new ways of creating continuity between the school day and the program. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Program Director: Anne Johnson 2. School Staff: Pete Jones, Susan Silver, John Kim, David Smith 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. SEDL Curriculum database 2. National 4-H activity database 3. NM Academic Performance Benchmarks
		This Year	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Work with school teachers to share best practices in learning and to plan authentic applications of school day lessons in the program. 2. Meet on a quarterly basis to share enrichment curriculum that can be used in the program. 3. Regularly hold meetings for the Program Director and principal. 4. Routinely check-in with youth about what they are learning in school and which topics they would like additional assistance with. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Staff Members: Eddie Rivera and Jessica Barnes 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Training Facilitator
		Next Year	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hold joint retreat for school and program staff to identify learning goals, outline program curriculum, and identify shared resources and professional development opportunities. 2. Request a seat on the school leadership team for Program Director. 3. Maintain open lines of communication with teachers to discuss young people's progress, share successes, and review remaining academic needs. 		

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

It is extremely important for program providers to understand and use state learning benchmarks and standards. The New Mexico Public Education Department's website, MyStandards.org, provides access for teachers and program providers to all state standards and hundreds of lesson plans – ready to use! When planning activities, be sure to visit MyStandards.org to see how your activity fits into the state standards. Stuck on an activity idea? Search the lesson plan database for ideas and instructions on how to lead the suggested activity.

TRY THIS!

As an Extended learning program, you may have the task of helping young people complete their homework. You can do more than simply help them complete assignments by presenting school material in new and different ways. Through individualized tutoring or recreational, arts, or community service projects, you can change their attitudes about learning. There are many innovative ways to integrate literacy and other academic skill development into projects and activities. The following provides ideas and tips to help you successfully integrate homework help into your program and get kids excited about learning:

- **Try to create a designated space for homework and tutoring.** The space should be comfortable and well lit.
- **Set up peer tutoring pairs.**
- **Make allowances for different learning styles.** Some learners might need a space that is completely quiet to complete their homework; others may prefer to work in small groups.
- **Provide materials and supplies needed to successfully complete homework** such as paper, pencils, dictionaries, erasers, etc.
- **Prepare engaging learning games** for young people who complete their homework early or do not have any assignments.
- **Create a homework sign-off log** to let staff and parents know when a young person's homework has been reviewed.⁸

⁸ Homework Assistance & Out-of-School Time "Tip Sheets"

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

A quality program establishes a strong partnership with families and communities in order to achieve program goals.

A QUALITY PROGRAM:	Performance Level					Plan To Improve		
	1	2	3	4		Right Now	This Year	Next Year
1. Involves families in decision-making and planning.								
2. Involves families and the community in program events.								
3. Communicates with families on matters concerning the well-being of the participant.								
4. Provides opportunities for literacy and related educational experiences for the families of the participants in the program.								
5. Provides families with information about community resources to meet their needs.								
6. Builds relationships with arts, cultural, and other community institutions to expand and enhance program offerings.								
7. Coordinates staff development activities with those of school and community partners.								
8. Regularly communicates with families and community members through a variety of mechanisms (i.e. newsletters).								
9. *Develops, reviews, and updates plan for family involvement in collaboration with family support staff.								

**Denotes items to be assessed prior to program start-up.*

More on Family and Community Partnerships

A quality program recognizes that families and communities play an important role in supporting and fostering the healthy development of young people. Creating effective collaborations with families and communities is approached with the understanding that they are assets and partners in the program's learning environment. Creating partnerships with families and the surrounding community is an ongoing and multi-faceted effort. Specific steps are taken to ensure that information and programs are offered in multiple languages. Community resources are frequently incorporated in program activities and shared with families.

ZOOMING IN

QUALITY INDICATOR # 4: Provides opportunities for literacy and related educational experiences for the families of the participants in the program.

Performance Level 1

The program does not offer family literacy and related educational experiences.

Performance Level 2

One family literacy or related educational opportunity is offered during the course of the program year. The need for additional adult education is recognized. A family bulletin is created to keep families informed of program events and schedules.

Performance Level 3

A series of family literacy and related educational workshops is launched. Families receive strategies and resources for creating a rich learning environment at home. A peer network and book-lending library are

established as a result of the interactions in the family space. Families often inquire about how to navigate the school system, assist their child's learning, advocate for their child, and support program goals.

Performance Level 4

The environment is welcoming; families are seen as assets and treated as critical partners in meeting the program's youth development goals. A family literacy and related education series of workshops are developed and offered from family input and a community needs assessment. A peer network and book-lending library are established and families are consistently asked for resource suggestions and reminded to utilize the program's resources. The program partners with a local college to increase families' access to information about courses available. A family newsletter containing family literacy information, resources, offerings, and opportunities is distributed on a monthly basis. All publications are provided in English and other languages commonly spoken in the community.

TAKING ACTION

Program Element	Quality Indicator	Timeline for Improvement and Improvement Steps		Person(s) Responsible	Resources Needed
Family and Community Partnerships	#5 Provides opportunities for literacy and related educational experiences for the families of the participants in the program.	Right Now	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hold a meeting to take an inventory of promising practices and identify previously successful events for families that can be replicated. 2. Bring families together to share their interest and availability to attend future workshops. 3. Create a monthly calendar of literacy and other educational workshops occurring in the community for families and other community partners. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Program Director: Anne Johnson 2. Staff Members: Eddie Rivera and Jessica Barnes 3. Family Members: Monica Anderson, Frank Jones, Allison Donahue, and Maria De Luca 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. List of community events and workshops 2. Training Facilitator and guest speakers 3. TASC Guide on engaging families
		This Year	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide ongoing staff trainings on family engagement strategies. 2. Develop a calendar of workshops and educational activities for families. 3. Invite guest speakers to present on different topics of interest to families. 4. Create a plan for how to provide meaningful opportunities for families, which can include coordinating peer education events or co-leading workshops. 5. Develop formal systems of evaluation that capture family input and feedback. 		
		Next Year	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Train a core group of parents as peer educators and provide opportunities for them to practice facilitating workshops and activities for families. 2. Create a family council to assist with outreach, recruitment, and program planning. 3. Establish protocols for communication so families are able to discuss concerns and progress regarding their child's learning. 4. Build capacity of community partners to run trainings and events. 		

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

We know that when families have a role in shaping program activities and goals, they are invested and committed to the success of the program. Consider these suggestions for fostering and developing partnerships with families:

- Have a family suggestion box.
- Invite all families to be a part of a family advisory committee.
- Provide meals and child care at meetings to decrease barriers for families to participate.
- Create a family liaison position as part of your staffing structure.
- Engage families in your fundraising efforts.
- Host family forums or discussion groups that allow parents/caregivers to meet one another. Discuss their concerns about child rearing and other family matters, and share their ideas of how the program can support them.
- Work with young people to plan and host a family appreciation event at your site.⁹

TRY THIS!

Examining attitudes and brainstorming ideas regarding family partnerships can strengthen relationships and communication between staff members and families. As a first step, this activity will help staff members to think about family partnerships in new ways.

First, identify a facilitator who can create a relaxed space in which staff members will feel comfortable responding to statements and sharing their feelings. Tell staff members that a number of statements will be read to them, and they will respond by moving to various parts of the room (for example, the right of the room is “agree,” the left is “disagree”, and the middle is “unsure”). Start the activity with participants in the middle of the room; they will then move to various parts of the room based on their views.

Here are statements that can be used to begin this dialogue. Feel free to tailor these statements or add new ones to fit your needs.

1. Family members often don't seem to care about their children's developmental growth.
2. Family members should be involved with program planning and evaluation.
3. Family members who do not participate in events are not actively involved in their children's lives.
4. Family members can provide resources for the program.
5. Family members of middle-schoolers feel their children are old enough and don't need parents or caregivers to be actively involved in their program activities.
6. Family members can serve as advocates for the program.
7. Family members can get in the way when they visit the school during program time.
8. Family members get support from our program.

Take time after each statement is read to have staff members discuss why they chose their response. Ask them to share ideas on how to address challenges in developing family partnerships. Be sure to have a note-taker in the room.

⁹ Out-of-School Time Program Research and Evaluation Database

PROGRAM SUSTAINABILITY AND GROWTH

A quality program has a coherent vision/mission and a plan for increasing capacity that supports continuing growth.

A QUALITY PROGRAM:	Performance Level					Plan To Improve		
	1	2	3	4		Right Now	This Year	Next Year
1. *Has a written statement of mission and goals.								
2. *Employs staff who understand and embrace the program's mission and goals.								
3. Involves participants, families, staff, and other stakeholders in long-term decision-making and planning efforts.								
4. Develops a long-term plan for sustaining the program.								
5. Accesses resources within the community by seeking support from and building relationships with local businesses and institutions.								
6. Forges relationships with youth advocates, such as community leaders, businesses, and elected officials.								
7. Has an effective marketing strategy that publicizes the program and its achievements within the school and broader community.								

**Denotes items to be assessed prior to program start-up.*

More on Program Sustainability and Growth

A quality program has a clear vision and goals, and makes time for long-term planning involving all stakeholders. Diverse strategies are used to support their work, including utilizing volunteers, partnerships, and in-kind donations, as well as funding from public and private sources. Sustainable programs understand their current strengths, weaknesses, and growth potential, and are deeply engaged in their communities. Changing trends in programming, funding, and other issues in the wider environment are monitored and development strategies are tailored accordingly.

ZOOMING IN

QUALITY INDICATOR #3: Involves participants, families, staff, and other stakeholders in long-term decision-making and planning efforts.

Performance Level 1

The program director conducts long-term decision-making and planning.

Performance Level 2

The program director conducts long-term decision-making and planning. The program director occasionally involves select stakeholders in informal conversations around program planning and decision-making.

Performance Level 3

The program director is committed to shared stakeholder decision-making within a team approach. The program has clearly defined goals and objectives, and plans and makes decisions-based on these goals which are included in program literature. Staff members are encouraged to work collaboratively to plan, develop, and strengthen programs. Staff members, youth, families, and other stakeholders are viewed as resources and as instrumental to the growth and sustainability of the program. Stakeholders are invited at different points to reflect, plan, and participate in the decision-making process.

Performance Level 4

The program goals and related decisions are collaboratively made by multiple stakeholders. Information on the importance and role of stakeholder involvement and shared decision-making is clearly communicated in all program materials, reviewed during staff meetings and program orientation for families and youth, and are posted on a central bulletin board or location at the site. Training is provided to stakeholders on sustainability planning. Staff members can articulate how their activities and decisions support program goals and take initiative to identify areas of continuous improvement.

TAKING ACTION

Program Element	Quality Indicator	Timeline for Improvement and Improvement Steps		Person(s) Responsible	Resources Needed
Program Sustainability and Growth	#3 Involves participants, families, staff, and other stakeholders in long-term decision-making and planning efforts.	Right Now	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish a planning committee made up of staff, participants, families, and other stakeholders. 2. Assign a point person to monitor progress and keep the committee on task. 3. Revise documents to include program goals. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Program Director: Anne Johnson 2. Staff Members: Eddie Rivera and Jessica Barnes 	1. Strategic Planning Facilitator
		This Year	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Find an experienced facilitator to guide and coach the organization through a strategic planning session. 2. Schedule leadership trainings for Program Director and other program leaders. 3. Committee identifies realistic benchmarks for achieving goals and ways to measure them. 4. Schedule ongoing staff meetings to share lessons learned and to revisit the plan. 5. Provide decision-making, leadership, and communication trainings to stakeholders in preparation for strategic planning conversations. 		
		Next Year	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hold formal orientation to revisit program plans and to accommodate the changing needs of participants, families, and the program. 2. Develop formal mechanisms to encourage feedback from all stakeholders including staff. 3. Identify a designated check-in time as a vehicle to empower stakeholders and staff to inform the process, share concerns, and make revisions to the program plan as needed. 		

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

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

Steps Towards Sustainability:

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

TRY THIS!

A great program should not be a secret. Use your successes as an opportunity to reach out to stakeholders, who include families, funders, community partners, local politicians, and businesses, to tell them about your program. Use some of the time you invest in sustainability planning to develop an effective marketing strategy and revisit that strategy at least once each year. Consider using multiple mechanisms for getting the word out about the program, such as:

- Develop a brochure that describes your program and its goals.
- Translate the brochure into the languages spoken by your community.
- Send out a press release when something exciting is happening at your site.
- Create a newsletter and distribute it to all your stakeholders.
- Create a website for your program and highlight upcoming events, awards, and news.

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MEASURING OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION

A quality program has a system for measuring outcomes and using that information for on-going program planning, improvement and evaluation.

A QUALITY PROGRAM:	Performance Level					Plan To Improve		
	1	2	3	4		Right Now	This Year	Next Year
1. Has measurable goals and objectives that are aligned with the organization and school mission, and identified community needs.								
2. *Develops and/or plans for program evaluation that includes gathering both qualitative and quantitative data and is aligned with the all funder and/or best practice evaluation plans.								
3. Uses and collects objective data to measure participants' academic progress.								
4. Identifies and shares promising practices.								
5. Makes evaluation summaries available to the general public.								
6. Creates an internal method for assessing program activities that includes youth feedback.								
7. Creates an internal method for assessing student engagement levels that includes youth feedback.								
8. Creates an internal method for assessing staff performance that includes youth feedback.								
9. Includes feedback from stakeholders in the program evaluation.								
10. Uses evaluation findings for continuous program improvement.								
11. Actively participates in all funder and where appropriate school evaluation and data collection.								

*Denotes items to be assessed prior to program start-up.

More on Measuring Outcomes and Evaluation

A quality program has clearly defined goals and specific outcomes to measure progress towards its goals. Goals and outcomes are aligned with the missions of the program, school, and community needs. The program has a plan for regularly gathering data and evaluating performance against its intended outcomes. Evaluations include assessment of program activities, staff performance, and student engagement. Evaluations are based on both quantitative data collection and qualitative feedback from staff members, youth, families, and other stakeholders. Evaluation findings are used to shape plans for future program improvement and professional development.

ZOOMING IN

QUALITY INDICATOR #1: Has measurable program goals and objectives that are aligned with the organizational mission, school mission, and identified community needs.

Performance Level 1

The program goals and objectives are unclear or the relationship between the program goals and objectives and the organizational mission and/or identified needs is unclear. As a result, the goals are not measurable.

Performance Level 2

Broad program goals and objectives generally relate to the organization's mission. Goals are vague and some are

difficult to measure. The relationship of goals and objectives to identified needs is vague or unknown.

Performance Level 3

Program goals and objectives are developed based on the needs of participants. Goals and objectives are specific, measurable, and aligned with and support the school's mission.

Performance Level 4

Program goals and objectives are developed based on the identified strengths and needs of program participants. Goals and objectives are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART), and are clearly aligned with the school's mission. Activities are designed to support both short- and long-term goals. Staff members, youth, families, and other stakeholders are actively engaged in developing, assessing, and evaluating goals and objectives.

TAKING ACTION

Program Element	Quality Indicator	Timeline for Improvement and Improvement Steps		Person(s) Responsible	Resources Needed
Measuring Outcomes and Evaluation	#1 Has measurable program goals and objectives that are aligned with the organizational mission, school mission, and identified community needs.	Right Now	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hold meeting to revisit the organization's vision and goals, assess how activities are aligned with the goals, and determine what evidence of success is currently available. 2. Prepare this information for a stakeholder meeting for input and approval. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Program Director: Anne Johnson 2. Staff Members: Eddie Rivera and Jessica Barnes 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Harvard Family Research Project guide on collecting data
		This Year	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hold meeting for Program Director and staff members to clarify program goals and to begin to define how they will be measured. 2. Develop internal methods of assessing program success and staff performance. 3. Share findings with staff and stakeholders to inform a group planning process for continuous program improvement. 		
		Next Year	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hold meeting with staff members and stakeholders to develop a process for to gather and use information to encourage continuous learning and improvement of programming. 2. Train staff in evaluation methods (such as data collection, program observations, or interviews) and involve staff in designing the evaluation questions. 3. Identify an external evaluator and share key findings from the self-assessment process with them. 4. Meet periodically with the evaluator to receive feedback and ask questions. 		

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Being Prepared for Evaluation

Having your programs evaluated is less daunting when you make an ongoing effort to be prepared.

Here are tips to easing the burden when its time to measure your success.

1. Have a Plan

You can't measure performance if your goals aren't clear from the beginning. All of your program's stakeholders should be clear on what you're aiming to achieve and how you plan to meet your objectives. There shouldn't be any surprises when your programs are being evaluated!

2. Create a Logic Model

A logic model is a visual representation of your goals. Logic models have four main parts: inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes. Inputs are what you need to provide services or create products, such as staff and time. Activities are actions taken, which require inputs, with the goal of fulfilling the objectives set out in your mission statement. Outputs are the direct results of your activities. Outputs are often numerical; for example, 10 families attended a program. Outcomes are the goals you plan to achieve. They should link directly to your outputs. For example, if 10 families attended a program, the outcome is that those families' literacy has increased. When evaluating your programs, a logic model will provide the outcomes to be measured.

3. Collect Data (everyday!)

While it sounds obvious, collecting data year round should be viewed as a priority to your program's success. Investing time in collecting key information, such as daily attendance records, will save you from feeling pressured when it comes time to report statistics. By having records organized and centrally located, you will always be ready for a program evaluation.

TRY THIS!

The following activity can help your team suggest priority issues for evaluation and contribute to the evaluation design and data collection. You will need plenty of chart paper, markers, and copies of your organization's mission and goals. Allow about 1 1/2 to 2 hours for this exercise.

- As a full group, review your program's mission and goals.
- In small groups, have participants brainstorm a list of key aspects of the program to be evaluated. Ask the groups to also think of possible evaluation methods for each program aspect, and ways in which various stakeholders (i.e. youth, school administrators, parents) could be involved in the evaluation process.
- Record the responses and post each group's answers. Conduct a gallery walk so participants can read each other's responses and add ideas. Return to the full group and finalize the lists by eliminating duplicate ideas. Ask the group to prioritize the most important aspects of the program to be evaluated.
- Debrief the exercise and determine next steps for implementing an evaluation.¹⁰

¹⁰ Adapted from Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development, *Developing and Implementing an Evaluation Plan*

CONCLUSION

Congratulations! You are taking important first steps toward strengthening the quality of your program by engaging in a process of reflection and improvement. Self-assessment is an ongoing process that must be consistently revisited after the assessment has been completed. Now that you have taken a bird's eye view of your program practices, you should be ready to try new ideas, strategies, processes, and solutions for affecting change within your program.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank Atlantic Philanthropies and the New Mexico Community Foundation for their generous support of this project.

This self-assessment tool and User's Guide are based on work initially done by the New York State Afterschool Network (NYSAN), and were adapted for Elev8 New Mexico Extended Learning programs by NYSAN and The After-School Corporation (TASC).

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Appendix II: Professional Development Planning Tool

Assessing Staff Needs: Professional Development Planning Tool for Program Directors¹¹

Conducting a program self-assessment and creating an action plan for improvement may reveal or create staff professional development needs. In order to develop a professional development plan, Program Directors might use this tool as a first step towards identifying skills and needs of each individual staff member.

Part I: Individual Staff Needs Assessment

This part of the tool should be completed during individual meetings between the Program Director and each staff person. This discussion should begin with an assessment of the knowledge and skills needed to fulfill the staff member's role. The meeting should then address which of the required knowledge areas and skills the staff member possesses, and which ones need to be acquired.

The Program Director can use a chart to track staff members' needs. Fill in the chart below, or develop your own!

Staff	Job	Skills/Knowledge Required	Have	Need	Fulfilling Need
Name of staff person	Job title with brief description of job responsibilities	What key skills & knowledge are required for this person to successfully fulfill their job duties?	What key skills & knowledge does this person already have?	What key skills & knowledge does this person still need?	What kind of training and support will help fill the individual needs?

¹¹ Adapted from Professional Development Planning: A Tool for Afterschool Supervisors, Partnership for After School Education (PASE)

Part II: Summary of Staff Needs and Professional Development Plan

Once the skills and knowledge of each staff member are discussed, the Program Director can look for commonalities across the entire staff to identify and prioritize group training needs.

Where there are unique needs, the Program Director should work with individual staff members to identify professional development opportunities that are appropriate.

Shared Staff Needs	Resources
Based on individual meetings with staff, what are three highest priority skills & knowledge areas of need shared by many of your staff? (e.g. 70% of staff need a better understanding of children's stages of development or 80% of staff need to learn how to create effective lesson plans)	What resources can the agency tap into for training, support, and/or knowledge building for your staff's high priority areas of need?

***Quick Tip:** If your program's staff has shared professional development needs, it's possible that staff from other programs at your school might have the same needs as well. Work with your Site Manager and other Program Directors to compare professional development plans and plan joint trainings. This is an easy way to maximize resources and bring staff members from different programs together.*

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