



READY BY 21 WEBINAR- ASSESSING AND IMPROVING YOUTH PROGRAM QUALITY

In November, 2009, the Forum for Youth Investment hosted a webinar on the topic “Assessing and Improving Youth Program Quality”. Part of the Ready by 21 Webinar series, the session offered the opportunity to hear from experts on the topic of youth program quality from the Forum, the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality and the United Way Capital Area of Austin, Texas. The webinar explored foundational concepts such as why a community would want to gather information regarding program quality and how the information can be used to help leaders make decisions and take action. The discussion also reviewed specific tools for measuring, tracking and improving quality and explored the impact that a focus on quality has had for youth programs in Austin, TX.

The first presenter was Nicole Yohalem, Director of Special Projects at the Forum for Youth Investment, who explored the importance of looking at program quality and why assessing and improving quality is an integral component of the Ready by 21 Approach. Leaders seeking to change the odds for children and youth in their communities must carefully examine and work to maximize the settings where children and youth spend their time. Nicole also reviewed the Ready by 21 Quality Counts Initiative, an effort underway in 7 cities and 5 states to build sustainable ways to improve the quality and reach of youth programs across sectors.

The second presenter was Erica Curry, National Advancement Senior Manager of the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality, a joint venture of the Forum for Youth Investment and the HighScope Educational Foundation. Erica described the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPOA) tool, which measures the quality of formal and informal learning environments. The tool has been validated through research, tracks young people’s access to key developmental experiences, and allows for comparison and assessment of progress over time. Erica went on to describe the Youth Program Quality Intervention (YPOI), a program improvement model anchored by the YPOA. The impact of the YPOI was recently tested over an 18 month period in 100 youth programs across 4 states. The implications of the YPOI study, Erica shared, were that programs can improve, management and instructional skills matter, intensity of staff engagement matters, and low stakes accountability policies matter.



Laura Garcia, Director of Community Building- Education with the United Way Capital Area, wrapped up the day's session with a look at how quality assessment and improvement work is implemented in a community, in this case Austin, TX. A core focus of the efforts underway on behalf of youth in Austin is to strengthen and align leadership efforts around a shared vision for young people's success. Thus there was a critical need for the local Ready by 21 coalition to help service providers understand the link between what happens at the point of service and positive outcomes for youth. The community was able to bring together a range of leadership groups to develop and advance a quality improvement initiative in 2008, including the Ready by 21 Coalition, Central Texas Afterschool Network, School Districts, Texas State University, and the local United Way. The groups were able to develop an aligned plan, train a number of assessors and hold three rounds of baseline and follow-up assessments and have achieved some preliminary achievements in the first year of implementation. Between staffing at the school district and the United Way, this effort has allowed 32 organizations, 70 self-assessors, 18 external assessors, and 10 advanced level coaches to be trained in the framework and these individuals are now available and deployed to make an ongoing impact.

Additional Resources

<http://forumfyi.org/content/out-school-time-policy-commentary-15-raising-bar>

This recent policy commentary discusses systemic efforts to improve youth program quality around the country using the YPQI model. It also includes preliminary findings from the YPQI study.

<http://forumfyi.org/content/measuring-youth-program-quality-guide-assessment-tools-2nd-edition>

This is a compendium of youth/OST program quality assessment tools, comparing ten different tools in terms of their content and purpose as well as their technical properties (reliability, validity).

<http://www.highscope.org/file/EducationalPrograms/Adolescent/ResearchEvidence/WebFinalYouthPQATechReport.pdf>

This is a technical report summarizing the full findings from the YPQA validation study, which looks at the reliability and validity of the YPQA tool.

Q & A

For more information contact Joe Bertolotti joe@cypq.org or Erica Curry Erica@cypq.org at the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality. They are available by phone at 734-961-6900, ext 202.

Lawrence Lewis: What training opportunities exist for managers and supervisors?

Weikart Center: The Youth Program Quality Intervention (YPQI) is an evidence based approach to professional development that results in continuous quality improvement in manager and instructional practices. The YPQI is based on a sequence of assessment, data driven planning, and aligned training and coaching supports. In the first year of YPQI, we recommend managers and supervisors participate in the three core trainings described below. We have additional training programs for the full YPQI implementation including External Assessment and our Youth Work Methods series that we'd be happy to discuss with you in a follow up call. You can attend training by sponsoring one in your local community, or contacting the Weikart Center to get a list of trainings being offered in your region.

Youth PQA Basics (online 3-6 hr, or 1-day live) – This course prepares participants to lead and conduct a team-based program self-assessment using the Youth Program Quality Assessment. Online course is self-paced with instant enrollment.

Planning with Data (1-day live) – This course is for program managers and site supervisors who have a self and or external assessment PQA data available for their program. Participants consider the realities of change initiatives and make improvement plans based on their program quality data.

Quality Coaching (1-day; Pre req: YPQA Basics, Planning with Data) – Prepares program managers to support direct staff during the self-assessment process and during the staff attempts to change their performances with youth.

Maurice Muchene: How are organizations typically selected to participate in a process like this?

Weikart Center: Network leaders that are sponsoring a YPQI pilot project generally try to find a diverse set of youth program providers to participate. We recommend selecting program sites with the following characteristics:

1. Providing programming for youth 4+ days a week
2. Programming includes offerings where *groups* of youth are working with staff, meeting over time, for some recreations, educational, or therapeutic goal.
3. Full time manager that is available to attend the trainings and lead team through the multi-month process
4. Administrative support for the intervention and time to attending trainings and implement

Diana Torres: Who typically conducts the observations?

Weikart Center: Site teams conduct self assessments. We encourage sites to determine their own teams, but generally speaking we recommend participation by front line staff, site managers and program supervisors. Staff takes turns observing each other and collecting observational anecdotal evidence, and then come together for a scoring consensus meeting to discuss what they have observed and to score the Youth PQA.

External assessments are conducted by trained and endorsed observers. Some general guidelines regarding external assessment include recruiting individuals with some experience in youth development and observational assessment. A variety of people have been employed to conduct external assessments for their networks, including:

- Staff from local third party institution such as a college or intermediary
- Local evaluators
- Program staff or administrators often do external assessment at other area programs

Diana Torres: Staff feeling like they're being "tested" is an issue we dealt with. Has subjectivity been an issue amongst staff ratings?

Weikart Center: For External Assessment, this is not an issue because external assessors are typically external staff from a third party organization or intermediary and before they conduct observations, they go through extensive training to become endorsed as a reliable assessor. For Self Assessment, it is important to stress that the process is low stakes and honest and genuine engagement in the process is more important than the actual ratings. The self assessment data is not intended to be used in external reporting or for higher stakes purposes, so the emphasis is on the conversation. Experiencing the improvement process is the most important outcome.

Lawrence Lewis: Is this really a community change model versus an organizational change model?

Forum/Weikart Center: Ready by 21 is a community change/mobilization model that acknowledges that if we are truly going to change the odds for young people in this country, we must, among other key strategies, improve the quality of the settings (programs, organizations, systems, etc.) where they spend their time. The Youth Program Quality Intervention (YPQI) is really both an organizational and community change model. At the organizational level, the YQPI is an assessment and improvement process that helps build an environment that supports continuous quality improvement, facilitative management, and reflective practice. But the intervention can also be and often is part of a broader community change strategy, with linkages to a comprehensive child/youth agenda and relevant youth policies.

Stan Schwartz: How do you determine a community's "readiness" to undertake this type of effort?

Weikart Center: Any community can engage with Ready by 21 because one of the core principles is that we meet leaders where they are <http://forumfyi.org/readyby21>. When communities are considering the YPQI specifically, we look for a variety of readiness factors. The most important is interest and passion to engage in a youth program quality improvement initiative across a diverse range of stakeholder groups. It is important to have a funder valuing this work enough to sponsor a pilot project for a group of youth program providers, whether that is at the state or local level. In localized projects, we look for engagement by system leaders within the United Way, community foundations, and representatives from city and county funding authorities. In state projects, we look for engagement by system leaders within the Department of Education (21st CCLC), the Department of Human Service (TANF), Juvenile Justice and (if present) the state coalitions for OST (Afterschool Networks, Afterschool Associations). We work with system leaders to support the YPQI through low stakes accountability policies and sustained investments in system infrastructure. We also look for champions who can represent the model and engage providers in a YPQI pilot. These champions may come in the form of a state or regional intermediary capable of providing ongoing training, technical assistance and coaching supports for the YPQI as it is implemented. We encourage communities to consider a multi-year investment (min 3-5 years) of both human and financial capital to build the professional development system. Below is a sample timeline for YPQI implementation. This includes key readiness questions to consider at each phase of implementation.

Sample Time line for YPQI Implementation

Dates	Time	Tasks	CYPO Support	Questions?
	3-6 months	Build the System -Design of System -Identifying Resources -Engaging stakeholders -Recruitment of Pilot sites	Sample MOUs Phone and Email TA Kickoff or Recruitment Meeting Webinar or conf. call to review process	Who are the decision makers that need to be engaged early on? Will participation be optional or required?
	1.5-2 Months	Assessments -Self Assessment -External Assessment (2 observations/site) - collect other data	Youth PQA Basics Training (Live and online) Youth PQA External Assessor Workshop Phone and Email TA Scores Reporter/Self Assessment Webinar Online Scores Reporter	Who will serve as external assessors? What is the purpose of this element and how will this element be communicated to pilots?
	1 month	Data Driven Planning -Sites make plans based on data -Submission of Improvement Plans	Planning with Data workshop Phone and Email TA Online Scores Reporter	How will data be used and by whom? Will this data complement other reporting requirements for funding, and if so, how will that be streamlined/ communicated to pilot sites?
	3-6 months	Improvement Phase - Sites attend YW Methods Workshops - Sites implement plans	Youth Work Methods Training of Trainer Youth Work Methods Guidebooks Phone and Email TA	Who will serve as Methods trainers? How many workshops will be offered and when?
	1-3 months	Review and prep for next cycle	Satisfaction Survey Phone and Email TA	What worked, what didn't, what will the next round look like?