



**technical
assistance
brief
NO. 1**

**UNDERSTANDING THE YOUTH PROGRAM
QUALITY INTERVENTION (YPQI)**

YOUTH PROGRAM QUALITY INTERVENTION

**the
forum**
FOR YOUTH INVESTMENT



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THE YPQI

WHAT IT IS // HOW IT WORKS

The **Youth Program Quality Intervention** (YPQI) is an effective, research-based approach that is the basis for numerous improvement initiatives in the U.S. and abroad. A [randomized trial](#) showed that engaging in the **Prepare - Assess - Plan - Improve** sequence of the YPQI significantly improves the quality of youth programs. This sequence helps youth program leaders to focus on and improve the quality of program offerings they provide for young people. [This brief describes the YPQI and how it can be implemented in city, county, state, and national networks.](#) While the YPQI is designed to improve quality in the learning setting—the quality that youth actually experience—the process is anchored by commitments and actions at the policy and organizational levels that create the conditions for quality. **The YPQI works across all three levels to help programs meet their full potential:**

In the policy setting, networks adopt program quality standards and commit resources to the *Prepare - Assess - Plan - Improve* process.

policy setting

In the organization setting, leaders implement a set of continuous improvement practices focused on the quality of staff practices.

organization setting

In the point-of-service setting (the programming youth experience), staff in a high-quality program provide youth with opportunities to meet crucial developmental needs.

point-of-service setting

THE CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PROCESS

STAGES OF THE YPQI

PREPARE

Based on each program's specific needs, goals, and resources, Weikart Center staff help network leaders make decisions about how the system will work. For example, one network might train a large cohort of external assessors; another might focus on providing technical assistance through coaching. Network leaders identify participating sites and work with Weikart Center staff to map out and conduct trainings and other parts of the intervention. Leaders and site staff also attend training to learn to use the Youth Program Quality Assessment (Youth PQA) for program self-assessment and external assessment.

ASSESS

Leaders and site staff conduct program self-assessments at their sites using the PQA and host external assessment visits at selected sites. All data can be stored online using the Weikart Center's [Scores Reporter](#), which can also be used to generate reports.

PLAN

We encourage all staff who participate in self-assessment to attend a full-day Planning with Data workshop facilitated by Weikart Center staff or local endorsed trainers. This workshop demystifies the process of using data and equips staff with strategies and tools to create a workable plan to improve the quality of their programs. Participants leave the workshop with draft improvement plans that include attainable, measurable, time-tracked improvement goals to take back to their sites.

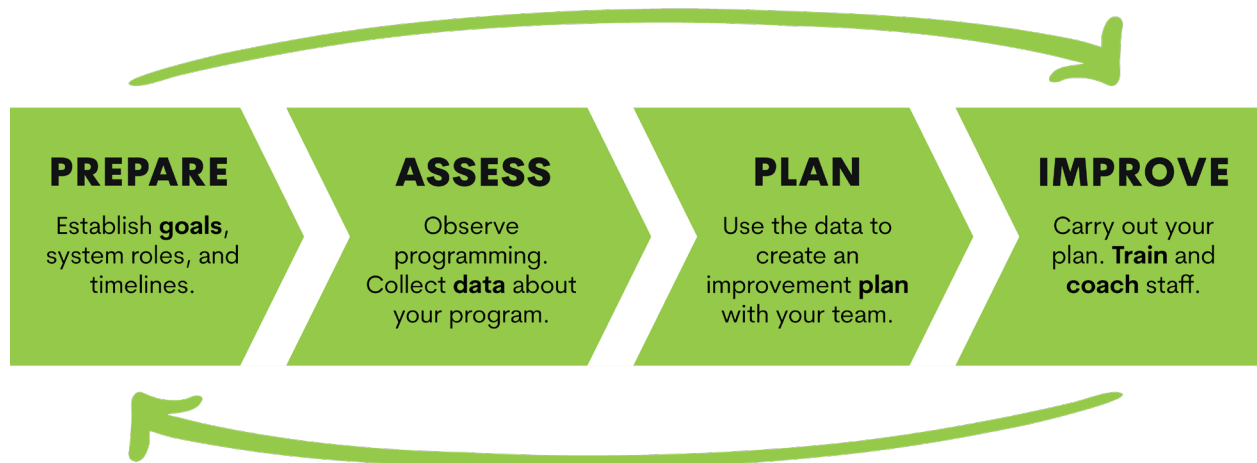
IMPROVE

Leaders and staff carry out their improvement plan. Staff may attend Youth Work Methods workshops designed to strengthen skills and improve quality at the point of service; leaders may attend Quality Coaching workshops to help them effectively support staff in implementing quality practices. Some networks also have regional coaches who provide ongoing support and mentoring to program staff.

REPEAT

The Prepare - Assess - Plan - Improve sequence is designed to initiate **a cycle of continuous program improvement**. When improving program quality is an ongoing process, leaders and staff are more effective at building the safe, supportive, interactive, and engaging environments that young people need to learn and grow.

VISUALIZING THE PROCESS



The YPQI offers networks an opportunity to engage a process of continuous quality improvement with the goal of enhancing the experience of youth and the skills of those who work with youth. This multi-level approach, combining training and assessment, informed by theory and supported by field research, can support programs to align the practices of leaders and staff across the policy, organizational, and point-of-service levels with a positive youth development model.

WHY IT WORKS

it's **integrated**

The YPQI works best in networks where **leaders integrate the YPQI** into existing structures and pursue the Prepare – Assess – Plan – Improve cycle at every level (policy, organization, and point-of-service). Leaders can help staff understand the benefits of the approach by 1) embedding the process into existing staff routines and requirements; 2) reflecting on performance and progress of leaders, staff, and program on a regular basis; and 3) providing training and technical assistance to staff as part of the process.

it's **flexible**

The YPQI is designed to support network leaders in their efforts to improve the quality of the programs in their network. **Flexible by design**, the process is meant to be adapted to local needs and contexts. The Weikart Center works with organizations across diverse program and community contexts to meet local needs and goals through designing and implementing sustainable continuous quality improvement systems.

it's **productive**

The YPQI produces a range of **positive outcomes**, from helping improve staff retention to increasing staff ownership of and investment in the assessment process and helping staff become more reflective about their own work. Honing the practices measured on the Youth PQA enables staff to deepen relationships with young people and provide higher-quality opportunities for youth voice, engagement, and ownership. As youth have increased opportunities for key developmental experiences, they are able to cultivate the skills they need for success in school, work, and life.