

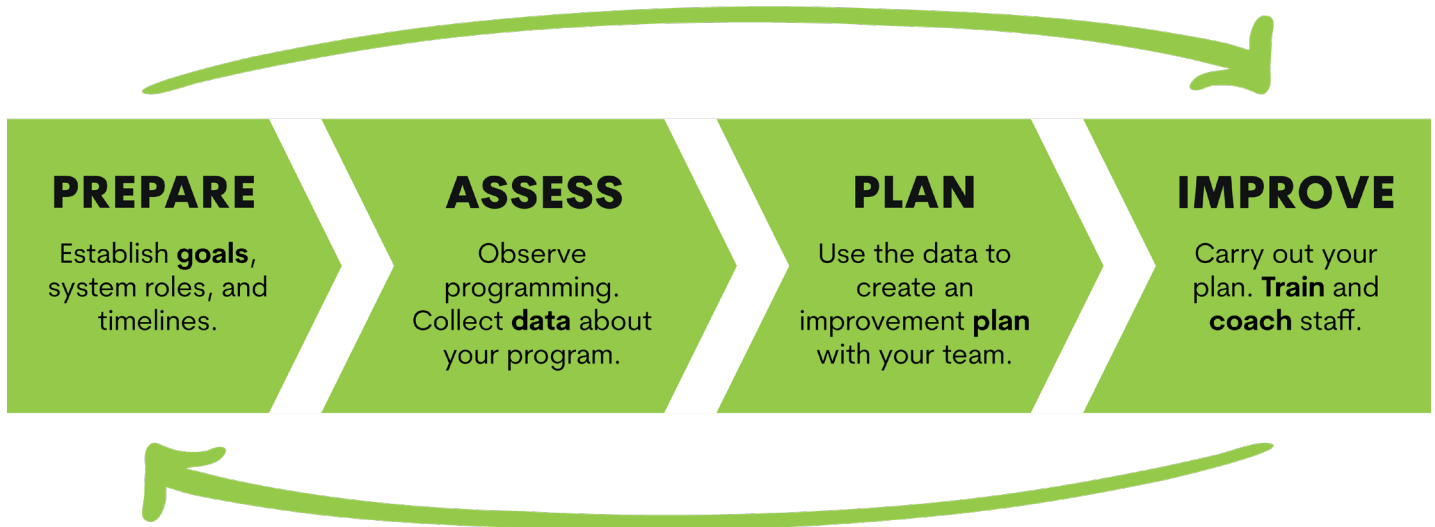


**technical  
assistance  
brief  
NO. 2**

**PROGRAM SELF-ASSESSMENT USING THE YOUTH  
PROGRAM QUALITY ASSESSMENT (YPQA)**

**YOUTH PROGRAM QUALITY INTERVENTION**

The **Youth Program Quality Intervention** (YPQI) is an effective, research-based approach that is the basis for numerous improvement in the U.S. and abroad. The YPQI follows the **Prepare – Assess – Plan – Improve** sequence illustrated below to help leaders and staff focus on and improve the quality of programs they provide for young people. **This brief describes program self-assessment** as a key component of the YPQI that helps build a shared language for youth program leaders and staff to talk about program quality.



# SELF-ASSESSMENT

## WHAT IT IS // HOW IT WORKS

Program self-assessment is an adaptable, team-driven process that provides leaders and staff with opportunities to evaluate, discuss, and build a shared understanding of instructional quality in their programs. Although program self-assessment produces a program quality rating, **the real value is in the team-building function of the process**, which includes peer-to-peer observations and a quality-focused team scoring meeting. Site leaders have endorsed the YPQI's program self-assessment process as an effective way to build communities of learners around program operation and quality. We know because we asked: [More than 95% of site leaders said that the self-assessment process helped them](#) gain increased insight into program operation, talk in greater depth about program quality, and develop a more concrete understanding of program quality among leaders and staff.

# THE SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS

## STEP BY STEP

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### 1. PREPARE THE TEAM

A site leader and additional key staff first attend a PQA Basics workshop delivered live, virtually, or in person. This workshop helps participants understand and talk about program quality, prepares them to lead a team-based self assessment process, and walks them through the observation and scoring processes required to complete the Youth PQA. The site leader then assembles an assessment team. The team is typically made up of site staff but may include volunteers, board members, or parents. The site leader then develops an observation schedule and prepares the team to collect data.

### 2. COLLECT DATA

Once the team is in place and trained, team members take turns observing each other leading activities with young people, observing and taking notes in 45-60-minute segments. Notes should be objective, detailed, and comprehensive, with a focus on staff-youth interactions. Self-assessors typically collect 3-4 full pages of handwritten notes during a single observation. The entire data collection process often takes a week or two to complete.

### 3. HAVE A SCORING MEETING

After all data has been collected, the site leader guides the team through scoring a single, program-wide PQA. This scoring process can last up to three hours and may be divided among several shorter meetings. During the scoring meetings, the team pools and reviews all anecdotal records, going through the PQA item by item, discussing evidence, and agreeing on a score for each item. **Make sure the team relies on the evidence from observations, rather than their memories,** to produce scores. While numeric scores are valuable, the most important outcome of scoring meetings is the team conversation around discussing scores and finding consensus.

# THE SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS

## NEXT STEPS

You can input scores and generate reports using the Weikart Center's online [Scores Reporter](#). Reports can be used for everything from celebrating strengths to targeting program improvement efforts. We recommend that assessment teams follow up with the Weikart Center's **Planning with Data** workshop to get support in interpreting their data and creating a data-driven plan to target key areas for program improvement. With data and a documented improvement plan, each organization we work with is better able to build and sustain a culture of continuous improvement.

# SELF-ASSESS FOR SUCCESS

- ➔ Program self-assessment using a PQA is a highly effective, low-stakes strategy for building a common language around program quality and reflecting on staff practices.
- ➔ The self-assessment process is essential for networks and programs wanting to begin internal conversations about quality practice and establish improvement goals that everyone can agree on. *Note, however, that program self-assessment does not produce rigorous, reliable scores, so it is not appropriate for comparisons over time or across programs.*
- ➔ [Our research shows](#) that program self-assessment can help establish the kind of environments in which more ambitious quality improvements systems can take root. Using program self- and external assessments sequentially helps build a positive team culture and increase staff support for more objective external assessment of program quality.
- ➔ Beginning quality improvement initiatives with program self-assessment helps networks and programs build a professional learning community founded on the relational trust necessary to support ambitious accountability and quality improvement efforts geared toward youth development.