Wyoming Program Quality Practices for School Age Afterschool and Youth Development Programs
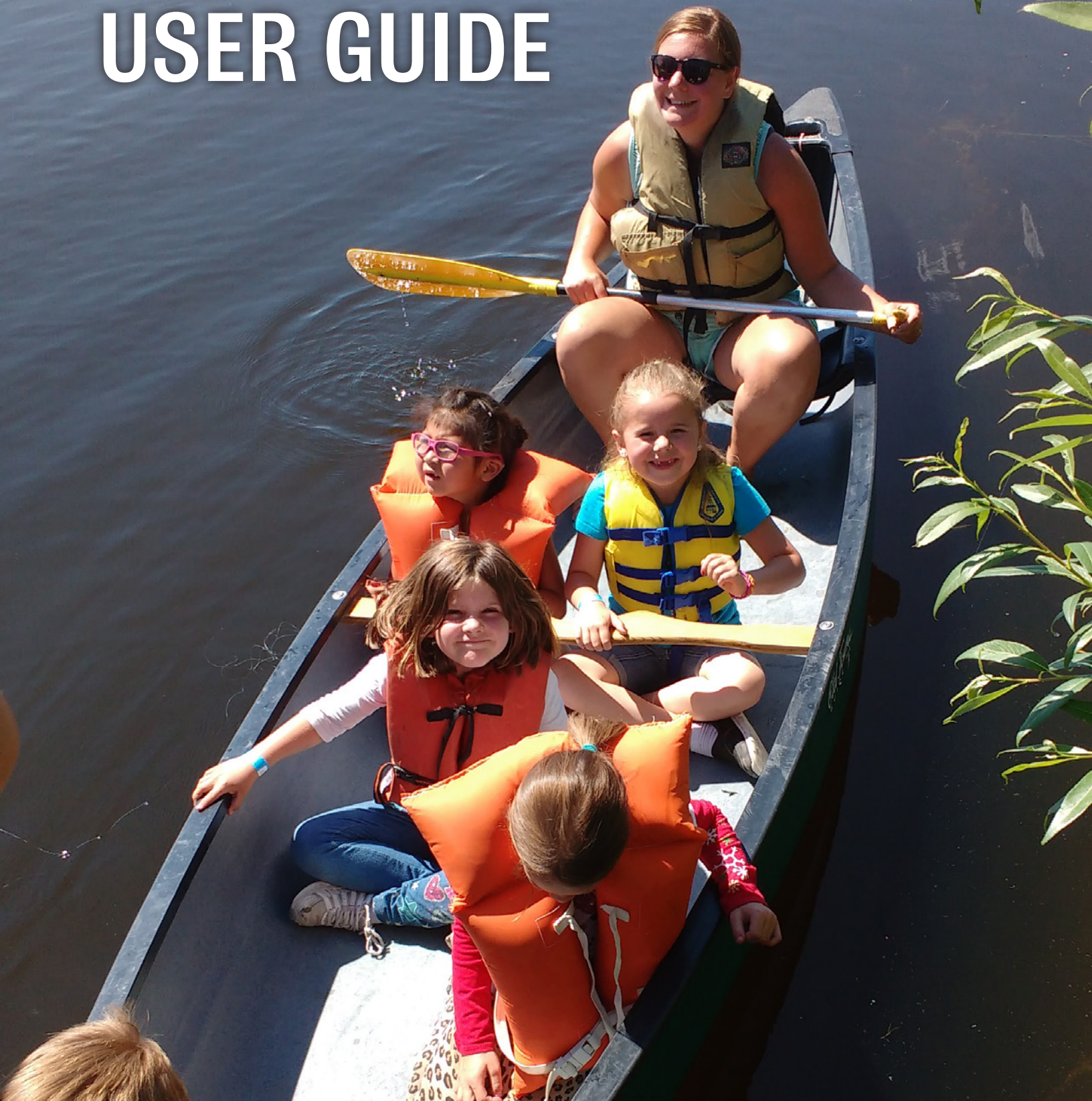
USER GUIDE

WYOMING AFTERSCHOOL ALLIANCE

Contents

Introduction

The <u>Wyoming Program Quality Practices for School Age Afterschool and Youth Development Programs</u> (PQPs) were developed by the Wyoming Afterschool Alliance (WYAA) in 2017 with support from the National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST). The PQPs reflect WYAA's commitment to provide all Wyoming families with quality afterschool programs for children and youth.

The PQPs lay the foundation for the design and implementation of high-quality programs that meet the needs of children and youth during out-of-school time. These voluntary guidelines define what quality looks like in practice.

This user guide describes how the PQPs fit into WYAA's quality improvement efforts and offers concrete ways to use the PQPs. All school-age, afterschool, and youth development programs in Wyoming can use this guide to improve their programming. This guide may also be a resource for families, community members, funders, and advocates who partner with program providers to improve outcomes for children and youth.

Define

Program Quality Practices (PQPs)

Core knowledge and competencies

Other quality frameworks

Assess

Data collection (e.g., using the **PQP Self-Assessment** or other quality assessment tools such as APAS)

Reflection

Action planning

Support

Professional development

System-level development system

Figure 1. Providing Quality Afterschool and Youth Development

WYAA knows that it is important to continually define, assess, and support quality. WYAA's quality initiatives, including the PQPs, fit into these three "buckets," as illustrated in Figure 1.[1]
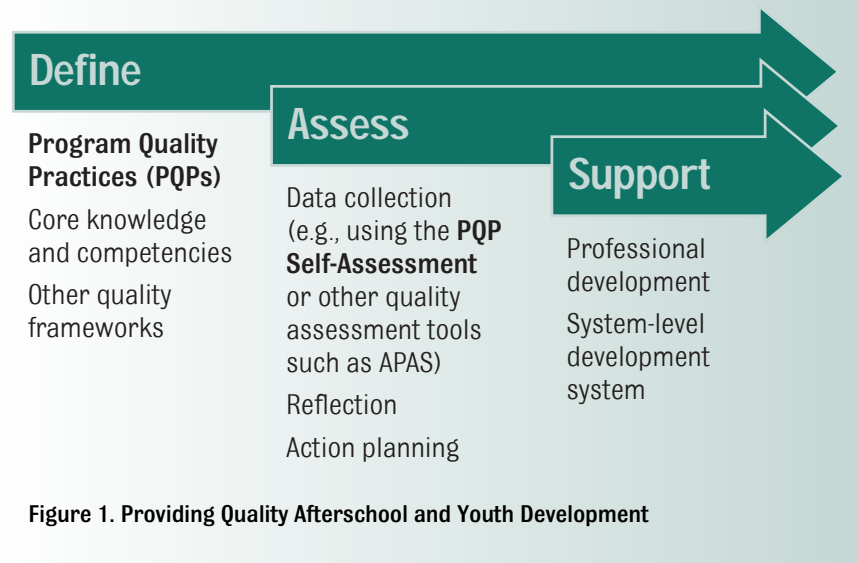
Define

What is quality? What does quality look like? As a program professional or director, how do I know if my program is high quality? How can parents, school leaders, funders, or community members know a quality program if they see one?

You may have a feeling that your afterschool program is good, but you don't have to rely on feelings. Decades of research on out-of-school time programming have demonstrated what specifically constitutes quality.

Based on this research, two types of frameworks have been adopted in Wyoming:

1. Quality practices for programs (the PQPs)

2. Core competencies for individual staff

These two aligned frameworks drive all out-of-school time quality improvement efforts in Wyoming. They provide a vision of what quality looks like.

Section 1 outlines these two frameworks and describes how they provide a common definition of quality for afterschool programs across Wyoming.

Assess

Now that I know what quality looks like, how can I be sure my program is high quality? What aspects of program quality are strong? Where are the opportunities for growth?

1 This diagram is adapted from a version developed by Elizabeth Devaney, who is currently affiliated with the American Institutes for Research.

Assessing and improving program quality is an ongoing process. It is never finished! That's why we often talk about "continuous quality improvement." The emphasis is on improvement rather than on performance evaluation.

Though families, funders, and community members should be aware of continuous improvement processes, the processes and related tools are intended for programs.

Many tools are available to assist with the process of assessing quality. One is the Wyoming PQP Self-Assessment included with this guide. Several other quality assessment tools are also available. Section 2 introduces you to these tools and shows you how to use the data you collect to plan ways to improve the quality of your program.

Support

Once I have identified areas for quality improvement, how can my program progress? What resources are available to support staff? How can other stakeholders and advocates in the community support afterschool and youth development professionals? And how can quality improvement efforts—both within a program and across programs and sectors—be aligned, so that we can be sure we are striving for the same goals?

Program quality improvement depends on two kinds of development:

• Professional development for individuals, such as training, coaching, and credentials
• Larger system-level development to build the needed infrastructure for a strong workforce

Both kinds of support are essential to quality improvement.

Section 3 links the quality domains of the PQPs to professional development. It also explores how the PQPs can be a framework for system-level development.

Below, "Using the PQPs to Improve Quality" shows how stakeholders, from program leaders to families to system-level leaders, can use the PQPs to help define, assess, and support quality. The box that follows gives an example of how a program director might specifically use the PQPs as part of continuous quality improvement.

Photo: Jade Bowden

Using the PQPs to Improve Quality

Audience	Action		
	Define	**Assess**	**Support**
Afterschool and youth development program leaders **Goal:** To implement high-quality programs	• Become familiar with the PQPs and the definition of quality.	• Use the PQP Self-Assessment or other quality assessments to identify areas for quality improvement. • Engage staff in the process of continuous quality improvement, including assessment, reflection, and planning.	• Identify professional development needs based on the PQP domains. • Support staff to participate. For example, provide paid time off to attend trainings and pay any registration fees. • Use data from your quality improvement tools and other sources to show funders and policymakers the impact of quality afterschool and youth development programs.
Afterschool and youth development staff **Goal:** To improve skills and knowledge in order to contribute to high-quality programs	• Become familiar with the PQPs and the definition of quality.	• Participate in your program's quality improvement process. • Create an individual professional development plan using the National Afterschool Association's Core Knowledge and Competencies (see Chapter 2). Assess your areas of strength and opportunities for growth; see how these areas connect with the PQP domains.	• Participate in professional development focused on the PQP quality domains identified in your individual professional development plan and your program's action plan. • Advocate for quality afterschool and youth development programs.
Families and communities **Goal:** To identify and support high-quality afterschool and youth development programs	• Become familiar with the PQPs to understand the expectations of afterschool programs and professionals.	• Select high-quality programs for your children. • Ask about the quality of local afterschool programs. Learn to identify the markers of quality.	• Advocate for high-quality afterschool and youth development programs in your community.
System Leaders and Advocates **Goal:** To build support for local, regional, and statewide afterschool and youth development programs and organizations	• Become familiar with the PQPs to understand the expectations of afterschool programs and professionals.	• Learn more about the quality of afterschool programs in your network, what those programs are doing to improve quality, and how those programs affect children and youth.	• Promote a strong career development system whose components—such as training registries, academic and career pathways, and compensation—connect to the PQPs. • Implement state and local policies to enhance the professionalism of the field.

How a Program Director Might Use the PQPs for Quality Improvement

As the director of a 21st Century Community Learning Center program, I want to improve quality. To do so, I first look over the PQPs to better understand the definition of quality. I feel like we are already doing a lot of things right.

Then I use a staff meeting to introduce the PQPs to my team. We work together to complete the self-assessment. First every staff member completes it individually. Then, at the next staff meeting, we come to a consensus on the results.

We see strengths in most areas. Our areas for improvement are relationships and youth engagement, as well as a few health and safety pieces.

Our program uses APAS, a nationally available set of program assessment tools. My next step is to see whether the recent APAS program observation data confirms what we learned from the PQP self-assessment. I'm not surprised to see that APAS also identifies relationships and engagement as areas for improvement.

We then focus on setting program goals—only a few so we don't get overwhelmed! We use the PQP action planning tool, keeping in mind what we learned from the PQP self-assessment. The school principal is very interested in supporting social and emotional learning in the school, so she supports our efforts in this area.

I next look for ways to help my staff build better relationships and engage youth more thoroughly. Of course I also look for ways to improve the health and safety areas uncovered by the PQP self-assessment. WYAA is offering several upcoming professional development opportunities on relationships and engagement. You for Youth (Y4Y), sponsored by the federal Department of Education, offers free online training. The school is also devoting teacher training time to building relationships, so we might be able to connect to that effort as well.

We will assess our program quality again in one year, using the PQP self-assessment as well as our APAS observation tool.

Define

Defining Quality

Two research- based frameworks provide Wyoming with a definition of afterschool program quality:

- The <u>Wyoming Program Quality Practices for School Age Afterschool and Youth Development Programs</u> (PQPs) define quality for programs.

- The National Afterschool Association (NAA) Core Knowledge and Competencies define quality for individual afterschool and youth development workers.

The PQPs are intentionally aligned with the NAA Core Knowledge and Competencies, covering similar content areas. These frameworks, taken together, provide a vision of quality that can drive continuous improvement.

The Wyoming Program Quality Practices

WYAA developed the <u>PQPs</u> in 2017 to provide a common understanding of the essential components of quality practice in afterschool and youth development programs. The PQPs provide a definition of quality that programs can strive to meet as they pursue continuous improvement. They enable program professionals to voluntarily examine program quality and discuss how to improve it. Most importantly, they send the message that Wyoming youth development leaders believe that quality is important. The PQPs help leaders and staff hold themselves accountable for improving quality.

The PQPs are grouped into eight domains:

1. Physical Environment, Curriculum, and Program Activities
2. Assessment, Planning, and Improvement
3. Relationships
4. Child and Youth Engagement
5. Families and Communities
6. Safety, Health, and Wellness
7. Leadership and Administration
8. Professional Development

Each domain has several quality practices, each of which includes indicators of what that quality practice looks like in action. For example, the domain Physical Environment, Curriculum, and Program Activities has four quality practices, in short:

- The environment is safe and developmentally appropriate.

- The environment is organized to promote learning.

- Activities foster children's development.

- The program includes physical activity.

Each quality practice has three to eight indicators: specific examples that enable observers to tell whether or not a program engages in that quality practice.

See the PQP Self-Assessment, which accompanies this user guide, for a complete list of the quality practices and their indicators.

The NAA Core Knowledge and Competencies

Wyoming adopted the NAA Core Knowledge and Competencies for Afterschool and Youth Development Professionals in 2012. These standards describe what individual staff need to know and do to provide high-quality programming.

The Core Knowledge and Competencies enable afterschool and youth development professionals to demonstrate their expertise and gain recognition, laying the foundation for professional development, credentials, and higher education coursework. They are grouped into 10 content areas:

1. Child/Youth Growth & Development
2. Learning Environments & Curriculum
3. Child/Youth Observation & Assessment
4. Interactions with Children & Youth
5. Youth Engagement
6. Cultural Competency & Responsiveness
7. Family, School, & Community Relationships
8. Safety & Wellness
9. Program Planning & Development
10. Professional Development & Leadership

Afterschool professionals can use this framework and its accompanying self-assessment tools to assess their own level of competency and then plan professional development to enhance their knowledge and skills.

The PQPs and the NAA Core Knowledge and Competencies are aligned so that they can work hand in hand to improve quality.

Other Quality Frameworks

Other documents help to define program quality for specific sectors and organizations. For example, programs serving school-age children that are licensed by the Wyoming early childhood system are required to follow the Wyoming Early Childhood Licensing Rules. These address health and safety standards, staff requirements, and other policies. Furthermore, national organizations, such as Boys & Girls Clubs and the YMCA, often have their own program quality standards. The PQPs can be used in combination with these other quality frameworks.

Photo: Jade Bowden

Section 2

Assess

Assessing Quality

The PQPs can be used by programs to support quality assessment using a three-step process for continuous quality improvement:

1. **Collect data** to discover your strengths and areas to improve.

2. **Reflect** on your program's current practices to identify specific opportunities for growth. Think about how any other quality initiatives your program uses connect with the PQP quality domains. The reflection tool provided in this chapter can help.

3. **Plan specific actions** that will lead to improvement. Established quality improvement frameworks often include an action planning template or process. A basic template is provided at the end of this chapter.

Remember, assessing program quality is an ongoing process of continuous quality improvement. It is different from performance evaluation, and it is never finished! Continuous quality improvement generally involves setting goals, collecting data, reflecting on the data, planning action steps, improving practice, and then re-assessing the program to help refine and set new goals.

1. Collect Data

The Wyoming PQP Self-Assessment is one tool for assessing program quality. Other quality assessment tools are available nationwide.

Wyoming Program Quality Practices Self-Assessment

The PQP Self-Assessment attached to this guide is a good place to start collecting data for your assessment. It provides a simple way to look at your program's strengths and opportunities for improvement in each of eight domains.

The self-assessment brings the PQPs to life as you think about each domain, quality practice, and indicator of what the practice looks like in action. Are these things your program already does? Is working on? Aspires to do? The tool also helps you collect data on program quality; you can use the data to plan improvements over time.

Other Program Quality Assessment Tools

The PQP Self-Assessment can be used on its own or alongside other quality assessment tools. The PQP set the overarching vision for quality, which other assessment tools and supports can help you achieve. Further, the PQP Self-Assessment may reinforce what you find with another tool, or it may shed light on quality areas not covered by your other tool.

Other quality assessment tools are available nationally to help you assess your program's quality. Your program may already use a tool, perhaps because a funder requires its use. (For example, Wyoming's 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) programs, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, use the APAS System from the National Institute on Out-of-School Time.[1])

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1 APAS comprises tested and validated tools; the system relies on data collection and coaching to drive action planning and program improvement. Key to the APAS process is the importance of staff in engaging youth, offering high-quality activities, and building relationships.

Any good assessment system guides you to collect data over time, through observations and surveys, so you can measure what quality practices are strong and which are opportunities for growth.

NAA Core Knowledge and Competencies Self-Assessment Tool

NAA provides self-assessment tools to accompany its Core Knowledge and Competencies. Staff members can use these tools to assess their own strengths and areas for improvement. Because the PQPs and the NAA core competencies are aligned, such staff self-assessments can function as part of the overall assessment of program quality.

2. Reflect

Once you have collected data, using the PQP Self-Assessment alone or in combination with other tools, the next step is to review the data and reflect on your program's current practices to identify specific opportunities for growth. The goal is to see a complete picture of the program.

If you are involved in other quality initiatives, consider how they connect with the PQPs. If you run a 21st CCLC program that uses APAS, follow state licensing requirements, or are using the NAA Core Knowledge and Competencies to shape individual professional development plans, look for consistencies and gaps. Seeing the relationships between all your quality initiatives will help you identify priorities for program improvement. The PQPs help connect your quality work by using the quality domains to frame all your quality improvement efforts.

Use the reflection tool on the next page to think about how the PQP domains connect with other quality initiatives in which you are involved and with other program interests or trends in the field.

You can then indicate whether each PQP domain is an area of strength or an opportunity for improvement.

Lastly, think about priorities. Though you may have found several areas you would like to work on, you are most likely to succeed if you focus on just one or two areas at a time. Build on what you are already doing well. Consider the urgency of each change, your capacity to make changes, and the potential impact on program participants.

Photo: Jade Bowden

Reflection Tool

PQP Domain	PQP Self-Assessment Indicate your rating from the self-assessment.	Other Tools Indicate areas of overlap between PQP findings and results of any observation tools and surveys you use.	NAA Core Knowledge & Competencies Individual staff can mark their ratings below, or you can decide as a team on areas for improvement.	Other Indicate any other relevant program priorities, areas of interest, or trends in the field; assign each to a PQP domain.	Strength? Is this an area of strength? Indicate yes or no.	Opportunity for improvement? Is this an area we want to improve? Indicate yes or no.	Priority? Indicate high, medium, or low.
1. Physical Environment, Curriculum, and Program Activities	Rating:		2. Learning Environments and Curriculum Rating:				
2. Assessment, Planning, and Improvement	Rating:		3. Child and Youth Observation and Assessment Rating:				
3. Relationships	Rating:		4. Interactions with Children and Youth Rating:				
4. Child and Youth Engagement	Rating:		5. Youth Engagement Rating:				
5. Families and Communities	Rating:		6. Cultural Competency and Responsiveness Rating: 7. Family, School, and Community Relationships Rating:				
6. Safety, Health, and Wellness	Rating:		8. Safety and Wellness Rating:				
7. Leadership and Administration	Rating:		9. Program Planning and Development Rating:				
8. Professional Development	Rating:		10. Professional Development and Leadership Rating:				

3. Plan

After you and your staff have identified one or two priority areas for improvement, work together to create an action plan. If you don't already use an action plan template or process from a quality system such as APAS, you can use the template on the next page.

Whatever template or process you use, here are some tips to keep in mind:

- **Work as a team** to build your action plan.
- **Write clear objectives that are SMART:** specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timed.
- **Generate possible strategies or action steps.** Select the strategies that have the greatest likelihood of success.
- **Identify who is responsible.** Assign tasks to team members who know the most about the goal and have motivation and time to implement the strategy.
- **Identify resources.** Resources can be internal—supplies, curriculum, individuals, and so on—or external—WYAA and other community partners, other programs, funding, and others.
- **Set a timetable.** Be realistic about when the task can be completed, taking into account other tasks or initiatives your program is already implementing.
- **Revisit your plan regularly and make adjustments as needed.** An action plan is a living document. Staff meetings are an ideal time to review the status of the action plan and discuss its impact.
- **Create a new action plan periodically,** for example, at the end of each program year.
- **Celebrate accomplishments** and milestones met. Share the news with your action team, other staff, families, and youth!

Action Plan Template

Instructions

- Review your areas of strength and areas that need improvement. Focus each action plan on one priority area.
- Use this template to specify your objectives and how you will accomplish them.

Improvement priority: _____ Date: _____

Outcome goal: _____

Action Step	Who	Resources Needed	By When
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			

Support

Supporting Quality

The PQPs support quality in two ways: by identifying professional development needs and by informing system-level development.

Professional Development

Ongoing staff training is essential for program improvement. Professional development should be selected to align with your individual or program improvement goals based on the PQP Self-Assessment Tool, the NAA Core Knowledge and Competencies Self-Assessments, any other program quality assessment system you use, and any other data you reviewed as you reflected on your program's quality.

Trainings, technical assistance, coaching, credential programs, and higher education are all available to support afterschool and youth development professionals. For example:

- WYAA offers an annual conference as well as in-person and online training and webinars*

- The Afterschool and Youth Development Credential, created by WYAA in partnership with Central Wyoming College and based on the NAA Core Knowledge and Competencies, is an online, 3-semester course series. Credits earned are transferrable within the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) and the University of Wyoming, Department of Family and Consumer Sciences.

- Training opportunities are offered by Wyoming's 21st Century Community Learning Centers program.

- You for Youth (Y4Y) is an online technical assistance and learning center. The site was developed by the U.S. Department of Education for 21st Century Community Learning Centers, but many resources are free to all.

System-Level Development

Professional development works best when it is part of a systematic career development framework. WYAA is committed to building a strong statewide system of support for afterschool and youth development professionals, ultimately improving program quality for children and youth.

A system of support includes the following components, many of which Wyoming has in place:

- **A definition of quality:** quality practices at the program level and core knowledge and competencies at the level of individual staff members. WYAA has developed the PQPs and has adopted the NAA Core Knowledge and Competencies.

- **Academic pathways:** possible paths, including training, for continued professional growth. Several options are outlined in the previous section.

*WYAA trainings will be directly aligned with the PQPs. Each training will indicate which quality practice it covers, making it easy for you to target specific areas of improvement for yourself or program staff.

If you have a request for training on a specific topic, use this convenient online form (or go directly to WYAA to let us know, and we will do our best to respond to your need.

- **Registries:** a professional registry that records staff trainings and credentials or degrees and a training or trainer registry that lists available trainings and offers a mechanism for providing feedback to trainers. Wyoming currently has a statewide system (STARS) for early childhood providers.

- **Career pathways:** steps of career advancement that are connected to professional development. Wyoming has developed a career ladder for early childhood professionals.

- **Compensation, funding, and sustainability:** salaries commensurate with education and experience, along with benefits and bonuses; public and private funding for a sustainable career development system; and ongoing system-building efforts. WYAA continues to work on all these fronts to provide a strong and sustainable system of support for afterschool and youth development programming.

Professionals, families, and the community can advocate for a strong system for afterschool and youth development professionals whose components connect to the PQPs.

Building and maintaining a strong system of support for career development is similar to building and maintaining a strong system of continuous quality improvement in your program. Both take commitment, determination, and a desire to positively impact children, youth, and families. Wyoming's afterschool and youth development professionals have these qualities in abundance! As you face the challenges—and reap the benefits—of building a system of continuous improvement, WYAA and the PQPs are here to help.

Appendix A

A Crosswalk of the Wyoming Program Quality Practices (PQP) and the Wyoming Early Childhood Licensing Rules

In the table below, the PQP Quality Domains are presented in the first column. The second column lists those items from the Wyoming Early Childhood Licensing Rules (with Chapter and Section indicated) that specify the same or similar constructs.

This crosswalk is intended to highlight areas of overlap between two quality frameworks, showing how the licensing rules relate to the PQP and impact program quality. It does not represent a rigorous evaluation of the correlations between constructs in the two documents.

WY Program Quality Practices Quality Domains	WY Early Childhood Licensing Rules How do the licensing rules relate to the PQP and impact program quality?
1. Physical Environment, Curriculum, and Program Activities	Chapter 4: Section 14 (Health and Safety Requirements); Section 15 (Indoor Play Space); Section 16 (Outdoor Play Space)
2. Assessment, Planning, and Improvement	
3. Relationships	Chapter 4: Section 6 (Discipline and Guidance)
4. Child and Youth Engagement	
5. Families and Communities	Chapter 4: Section 4 (Parental Rights); Section 5 (Policies)
6. Safety, Health, and Wellness	Chapter 4 (General Requirements): Section 2 (Capacity/Supervision Requirements); Section 3 (Provider, Director, and Staff Requirements; Section 4 (Parental Rights); Section 5 (Policies); Section 7 (Medications); Section 8 (Transportation and Field Trips); Section 9 (Training); Section 10 (Records); Section 11 (Reports); Section 12 (Confidentiality); Section 13 (Evening and Overnight Care); Section 14 (Health and Safety Requirements); Section 15 (Indoor Play Space); Section 16 (Outdoor Play Space); Section 17 (Swimming Pools, Wading Pools, and Water Hazards); Section 18 (Food Service); Section 19 (Infant and/or Toddler Care) Chapter 5: Rules for Certification of a FCCH Chapter 6: Rules for Certification of a FCCC Chapter 7: Rues for Certification of a CCC Chapter 8: Administrative Rules for Certification of Child Care Facilities: Health and Sanitation Chapter 9: Administrative Rules for Certification of Child Care Facilities: Fire Standards for Family Child Care Homes Chapter 10: Administrative Rules for Certification of Child Care Facilities Fire Standards for CCC andFCCC
7.Leadership and Administration	
8. Professional Development	Chapter 4: Section 3 (Provider, Director, and Staff Requirements; Section 9 (Training)

Acknowledgements

Dedication

The Program Quality Practices and User Guide are dedicated to all of the Wyoming Afterschool Programs that work tirelessly to improve the lives of all the children and youth in our great state.

WYOMING AFTERSCHOOL ALLIANCE

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