



California AfterSchool Network

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CAN'S QUALITY SYSTEM

Resources to Support an Equitable Approach to Quality and Continuous Quality Improvement in Expanded Learning

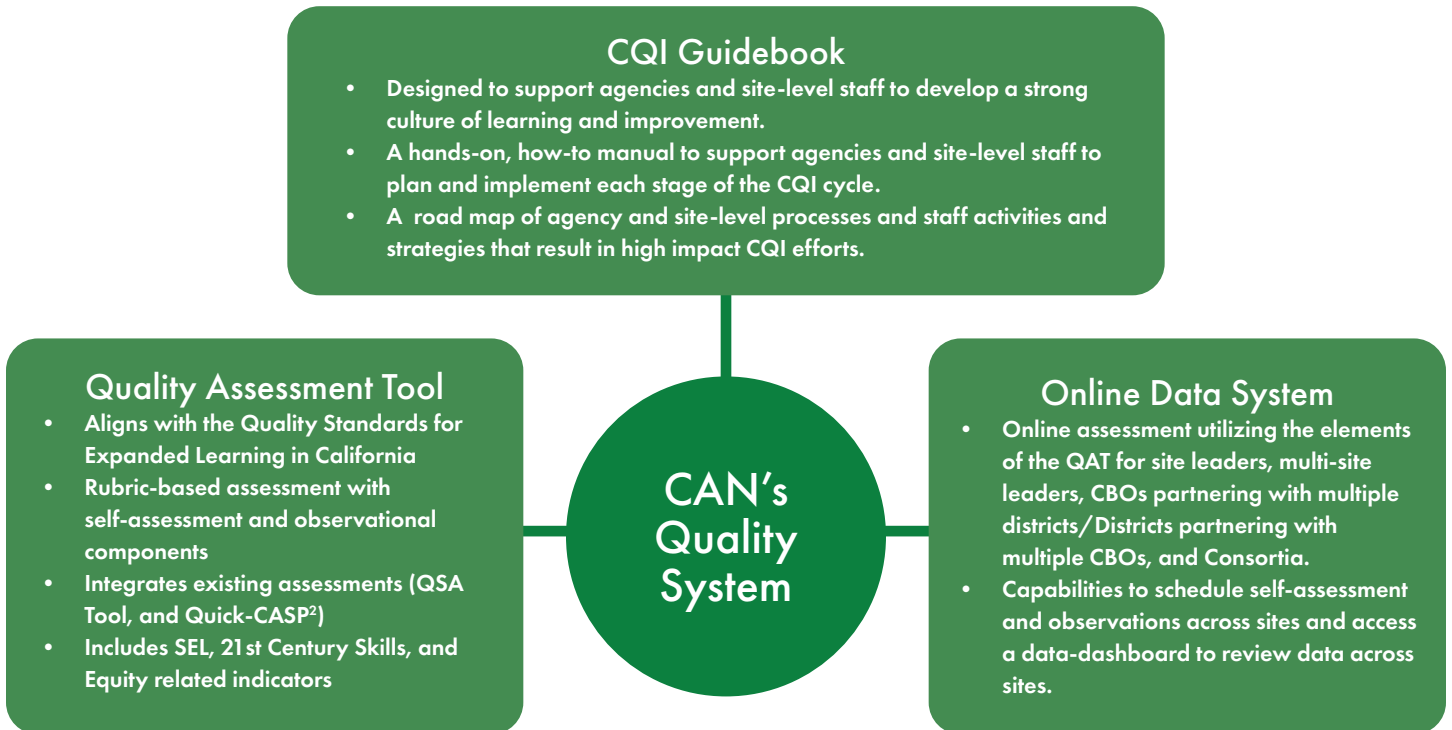
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Background and Context

The Quality Standards for Expanded Learning in California are grounded in research-based Positive Youth Development and the Science of Learning and Development. They describe the kinds of contexts that result in the youth success and well-being outcomes that we seek to promote. This document provides an overview of resources and strategies to support a comprehensive and equitable approach to Quality and Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) for Expanded Learning and other Out-of-School Time (OST)¹ programs. It provides an overview and description of how to use **CAN's Quality System** consisting of three resources to support the CQI process. These resources include a new *Expanded Learning Quality Assessment Tool (QAT)*, an online Quality Assessment System, and a *CQI Guidebook* which provides a comprehensive description of each stage of the CQI process including equitable practices in the implementation of a CQI process.



These resources were created with intention and partnership over multiple years. CAN is thankful to the field leaders that informed and supported the original trajectory of the work. This includes the CAN Leadership team, the System of Support for Expanded Learning in California, the CDE Expanded Learning Social Emotional Learning Work Group, the American Institutes for Research (that supported the integration of SEL assessment elements), Development without Limits and the Monterey County Office of Education (that supported the integration of specific elements for supporting English Learners), and Equity Meets Design (that supported integrating equity assessment indicators, and equitable approaches to the CQI process). We are thankful to our partners in this work to develop these resources including Public Profit and Redwood Consulting. Additionally, we are grateful to the many school districts and community based organizations that participated in piloting and offering input to these resources. None of these resources could have been created without the support of the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and the S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation.

¹According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Out-of-School Time (OST) is a supervised program that young people regularly attend when school is not in session. This can include before-and after-school programs on a school campus or facilities such as academic programs (e.g., reading or math focused programs), specialty programs (e.g. sports teams, STEM, arts enrichment), and multipurpose programs that provide an array of activities (e.g., 21st Century Community Learning Centers, Boys & Girls Clubs, YMCAs).” California has the largest collection of OST programs in the nation consisting of federal, state, local, city, community, and fee-based programs. Each system has its own unique networks, standards, and practices.

Expanded Learning programs are a subset of OST programs in California that receive funding administered by the California Department of Education’s Expanded Learning Division and are defined as “before and after school, summer, and intersession learning experiences that develop the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs and interests of students. Expanded Learning opportunities should be hands-on, engaging, student-centered, results-driven, involve community partners, and complement learning activities in the regular school day/year.”

CAN's Process for Change

CAN partnered with Equity Meets Design (EMD) to complete an organizational “equity audit” that examined our organizational processes and governance, and our approach to quality and CQI. CAN's Quality System described in this document were all examined and revised through an equity lens. This process exemplifies how equity-driven organizational change can happen through increasing awareness, applying new equity-driven practices, and sustaining those practices by embedding them into organizational policies. This experience has shifted CAN's perspective toward centering equity in program quality, and how we support an equitable process of change through CQI.



CAN Leadership Team Equity Statement

CAN is Committed to Equity and Justice

CAN is not neutral on issues of equity, social and racial justice. We acknowledge neutrality as complicity in perpetuating injustice.

The Quality Standards for Expanded Learning in California highlight that quality programs create an environment in which students experience values that embrace diversity and equity regardless of race, color, religion, sex, age, income level, national origin, physical ability, sexual orientation, and/or gender identity and expression. **As leaders in our field we seek to perpetuate these conditions for children, families, OST professionals, and communities.**

CAN acknowledges a history of white supremacy, racial injustice, patriarchy, hetero-normativity, capitalism, environmental injustice, and oppression that has resulted in inequitable outcomes for children, youth, families, and communities. **Serving as CAN Leaders requires us to acknowledge our history and to act intentionally as geographically, culturally, and professionally diverse allies to bring about a more just and equitable future.**

CAN acknowledges that our current systems are designed to produce the outcomes they are producing. These systems can be redesigned. CAN applies equity design principles to how CAN works, and integrates equity-driven principles into what CAN does. **CAN actively works to create a NEW WAY OF BEING, one that is human-centered, socially just, and anti-racist. We recognize that this approach supports the success of all people, and devalues none.**

We understand that the culture is steeped in norms and patterns of white dominance, patriarchy, hetero-normativity, etc. that are often difficult to recognize (like a fish recognizing water). **It is incumbent upon us as CAN Leaders to be open and inclusive of a diversity of perspectives, engage in personal reflection, and examine how our biases show up in our leadership.**

While CAN advocates and lobbies for policies supportive of Out-of-School Time (OST) access and quality, we also acknowledge that OST programs exist within a broader context that impacts the lives of the children, youth, families, and communities we serve. **Therefore, we advocate and lobby for just and equitable human-serving systems including and beyond OST.**



CAN's Equity Symbol

This symbol is utilized in the center of the new CQI process image to highlight the importance of equity considerations in promoting quality and continuous quality improvement.

²The new California Expanded Learning Quality Assessment Tool (QAT) integrated the California After-School Quality Self-Assessment Tool (QSAT, 2009) and the Quick-CASP (Comprehensive Assessment of Summer Programs, 2016)

Equitable Quality Through CQI

If the perspectives of those who most directly experience and influence quality drive your CQI efforts, your efforts will yield higher quality (equitable) practices that meet the needs of every participant. This section explicitly explains **how** CAN embeds equity in all aspects of our quality work.

Equity Implications of Quality

Quality without equity is quality for some, but not others. Often it means quality for those who are the easiest to reach and closest to the status quo.

For all participants to receive high-quality programming, the program must adopt policies and practices that:

- Seek to understand the experiences of students on the margins
- Affirm and celebrate the identities and abilities of all participants
- Equip staff with the tools and supports they need to engage every participant in ways that are meaningful to them

Equity Implications of CQI

CQI without equity is a process that aims to solve problems without the leadership and perspective of those who most deeply experience them. It prioritizes implementation over learning and information over understanding.

For continuous quality improvement to occur the process must be:

- Led by a group of people with diverse experiences and identities, centering those with direct experiences and challenges to be addressed
- Inclusive of those who have direct program implementation experience and bear responsibility for implementing site-based improvements
- Steeped in ongoing reflection on the process and how decisions are made

Anchor in Inquiry

If the goal is to ensure a human-centered approach and a shared vision created by participants most greatly impacted by the decisions made and the outcomes of the work, then utilizing tools, investigation strategies, and framings that anchor in inquiry will help create shared language and learnings to influence those decisions. One simple way to summarize the overall approach is an ongoing process of transforming the quality of:

- thinking together;
- relationships; and
- the quality of collective action.

Pedagogical Methodology of Expanded Learning

CAN's Expanded Learning Pedagogical Methodology

We believe every child, youth, and the adults that live, love, and work with them deserve just and affirming spaces and opportunities that enrich, empower, enlighten, educate, and elevate them. We know learning happens in every context and young people are assets in supporting their own learning, and co-creating the solutions to the issues and challenges they face.

Expanded Learning/OST spaces can be cultivated by anchoring in some core beliefs and shared mindsets:

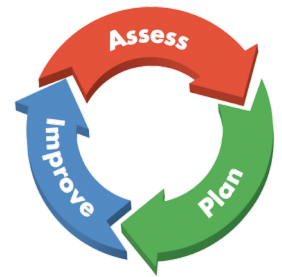
- We are rooted in love and love is shown in our actions and our words.
- We are asset-anchored AND driven.
- We are aspirational in our mindsets, words, and actions.
- We are connected by our differences because that is what gives us strength and creates our collective. The appreciation of every cultural, language, and lived experience is what we leverage to grow our collective spaces.
- We make decisions based on elevating the intrinsic gifts, talents, and wisdom of those closest to the problems we work collaboratively to solve.
- We learn by doing and we grow by reflecting on that learning.

CQI: An Overview and Evolution

CQI in Expanded Learning is an ongoing process intended to improve outcomes for participating children and youth. When introduced in 2014, the CQI process had 3 defined steps—Assess, Plan, and Improve. After several years of CQI implementation, CAN’s CQI Guidebook Workgroup highlighted the importance of adding preparation and reflection to the cycle, and clarifying the “improve” part of the cycle.

The following sections describe the five stages and approaches to the CQI process outlined in the CQI Guidebook.

What It Was



How It Has Grown



Prepare to Engage

- Start to Build a Culture of Improvement
- Establish Your Quality Improvement Team
- Consider Your Capacity for CQI
- Plan an Attainable CQI Strategy

Assess Program Quality

- Choose Guiding Questions
- Choose Methods and Tools
- Collect High Quality Data
- Analyze and Share Findings

Plan to Implement

- Review Data Collaboratively
- Create an Improvement Plan

Implement Planned Improvements

- Build a Shared Understanding of the Improvement Plan
- Provide Staff the Necessary Supports to Implement Improvements
- Implement the Improvement Plan

Reflect on the CQI Cycle

- Reflect on Process and Impact
- Consider Your Capacity for CQI, Again
- Institutionalize Improvements

What CQI Is: Guiding Principles of CQI

- **Ongoing:** CQI is an iterative process consisting of cycles that each occur within a defined timeline. The repeated nature of the CQI cycles help to build a culture of learning over time.
- **Supportive:** Learning occurs through both our successes and our failures in each CQI cycle. During a CQI cycle, it is important to build a culture of openness, trust, and transparency so that people can share their challenges and learn from them.
- **Intentional:** CQI requires a systematic process, at both the organization and program level, to collect data in order to understand strengths and areas for growth. The process must be methodical and data driven by using multiple data sources and analysis methods so that improvement goals and plans are grounded in a holistic understanding of program quality.
- **Collaborative:** CQI is a team-based activity that needs to be responsive and equitable. Programs seek out and use input and expertise from all levels of program staff and collaborators including youth, families, and school and community partners. CQI is led by a group of people with diverse experiences and identities and places a priority on creating a deeper understanding, building buy-in, and involving those with direct experience with the organizational issues or implementation challenges that it aims to improve.
- **Individualized:** CQI requires a tailored approach, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. Each organization and each program site have unique contexts, strengths, and needs. Additionally, organizations are composed of individuals. In order to be effective, the CQI cycle, at both the program and organizational level, needs to meet people where they are and help them grow their capacity to improve program quality over time. In this way, your CQI plan will be authentic to your organization’s needs, capacity, and resources.

What CQI Is Not:

- An evaluation... although it does have evaluation elements
- A punitive process
- A one size fits all plan that you never revisit

Prepare to Engage in a CQI cycle

The first step of the CQI cycle is **Prepare**. Prepare focuses on building a culture of improvement into your organization or program site and how to build the capacity and readiness of the staff to be successful in implementing quality improvement efforts.

1 TASK ONE: Start to Build a Culture of Improvement

The first task focuses on setting up the necessary conditions for effective CQI within an organization or program site. Building this kind of culture is an ongoing process, but the more effort you invest in building a CQI-supportive culture now, the more successful you will be. All staff should be aware of the organization's improvement priorities and the strategies in place to achieve those priorities. It is also critical to foster an open and trusting environment for staff by developing close and supportive relationships. CQI is all about "getting better at getting better" and by having this level of trust with your staff, gives them the confidence to speak up, knowing they will not be dismissed or criticized.



Data can be utilized for various purposes. For a CQI process, data should be used for improvement NOT for accountability. When preparing for the CQI process, it is important that those with positional authority communicate that the CQI process focuses on data for improvement only. Beyond communication, it is critical to create conditions for safety, trust, and authentic engagement in the process so the data is authentically grounded in the experiences of all who are impacted by the program.

2 TASK TWO: Establish Your Quality Improvement Team

Once you have started to build a culture of improvement, the next task is to establish your CQI Leadership and Advisory Quality Improvement Team (QIT). This QIT will be responsible for overseeing CQI in your organization, implementing your program-wide CQI strategy, and supporting site-level QITs. Each team includes representation from diverse students and families, staff, community members, and partners with multiple perspectives on the program. The configuration depends on the needs of your organization and the outcome you are trying to achieve. A successful QIT works together regularly, has clear objectives with a defined timeline, clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and decision-making processes, as well as a sense of accountability throughout the team.

3 TASK THREE: Consider Your Capacity for CQI

Prior to launching a CQI cycle, it is important to consider your capacity (financial, systems and structures, supportive culture, CQI leadership, internal vs external support) to plan a CQI cycle that aligns with your resources, increasing the likelihood of a successful CQI process.

4 TASK FOUR: Plan an Attainable CQI Strategy

Now that you have created your QIT and considered your CQI capacity, you are ready to plan your strategy. Remember there is no one-size-fits-all-approach. Tips to keep in mind:

- start small,
- be open-minded and patient,
- create a realistic timeline,
- borrow the capacity of others,
- complete one stage before beginning the next,
- allow sufficient time for improvements to become established.

Equity Considerations to Prepare

Do this!	Not this...	To get started, ask yourself:	To go deeper, think about:
<p>Put together a Quality Improvement Team that centers people with first-hand experience with the problems you are trying to solve.</p> <p>Experience is expertise and you'll want a lot of these kinds of experts on your team.</p> <p>Frontline staff, for example, have invaluable experience-expertise that must be leveraged throughout the QI process if improvements are to be</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the right improvements, 2. actually implemented, and 3. sustainable. 	<p>Put together a quality improvement team with all the usual suspects: many people with a lot of positional authority and traditional forms of "expertise," but nobody with ears to the ground.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kinds of experiences would help you better understand the problems you are trying to solve and/or how inequities manifest in your program/organization? • Who has this experience-expertise and how can you get them on your team? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you balance building community (creating and maintaining safe spaces) and building capacity (learning something new) with practice (contextualizing the learning) and research/reflection (what was shared and how can it be applied). • What was shared? • How can it be applied? • What was learned?
<p>Disaggregate and share leadership responsibilities among the QIT. The process to select "leadership" then becomes a process of naming and claiming roles according to relevant experience-expertise.</p>	<p>Pick the leader of the QIT before the team has been assembled.</p> <p>Allow this person to make key decisions throughout this process without accountability to other members of the team and/or students and families, staff, community members, and partners.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kinds of tasks would a leader of this process take on? What kinds of decisions would they make? • How might you share these responsibilities as a team? • Who might you share specific responsibilities with? 	<p>Over multiple CQI cycles, how does the QIT create capacity-building systems that increase the opportunities for different team members to lead various parts of the work?</p>
<p>Be intentional about building trust with your Quality Improvement Team.</p> <p>Managing power within QITs is an issue all its own (particularly as you decide to engage non-traditional members on your team), which requires your team to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. have open discussions about who has power, who can wield it, and when they can wield it, 2. create a space that promotes feedback culture through psychological safety, 3. and develop transparent decision-making protocols to use throughout the entire process. 	<p>Let unexamined power dynamics threaten the cohesiveness and efficacy of your QIT. Risk making nontraditional members of your team feel that their contributions are not taken seriously.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is likely to feel the least powerful? • Who has the most power? • Who can use their power and when? • What needs to be true to ensure you work together successfully as a team? • How has program leadership created the safe and supportive conditions for authentic engagement of all staff? • How should decisions be made? 	<p>Now co-create the structure and design how shared time together is spent to ensure everyone has access, voice, choice, and decision-making power in the space.</p>

Assess Program Quality

The second step of the CQI cycle is **Assess**. CQI is designed to meet programs and organizations where they are. So to improve, you must make an intentional and systematic approach to understanding what quality looks like for your community and how to make a plan to achieve that success.

1 TASK ONE: Choose Guiding Questions

Identify general and targeted questions that may help you understand strengths and areas for growth. Then implement an equitable process to simplify and finalize the questions. For each question, think about what data you will need to answer this question, so you can take action for improvement.

2 TASK TWO: Choose Methods and Tools

Now, you are ready to finalize the methods and tools you will use to answer these questions. Assessment needs to be intentional and systematic, and can happen at both the organization and program level. Program assessments should inform the organization process. Some methods include self assessment, observation, surveys, individual and group listening sessions, and empathy interviews. We suggest using a mix of methods to effectively and comprehensively assess the quality of your programs and organization because often times using only one method does not tell the whole story.

3 TASK THREE: Collect High Quality Data

Strategies for collecting high quality data are highly dependent on which methods you choose to use. When possible, provide site-level staff with opportunities to engage in data collection efforts. It helps to build a shared understanding of program quality across the organization. As you choose your data collection methods and tools, it is critical how you are capturing what is happening within or across subgroups of students and families, staff, community members, and partners (ensuring that different genders, ages, ethnicities, geographical areas, or socioeconomic statuses are represented). Doing so will help you understand if these groups experience program quality differently.

4 TASK FOUR: Analyze and Share Findings

Once you have collected your data, it is time to analyze, summarize, and share your findings. Each different type of data — such as observations versus surveys, or qualitative versus quantitative data - requires different analysis techniques. Then share your findings with the QIT and your larger community. Engage in meaningful conversations to make meaning of the analysis and contextualize it with the lived experience of the QIT and community.



Equity Considerations to Assess

Do this!	Not this...	To get started, ask yourself:	To go deeper, think about:
<p>Collect data on what is happening at the margins or within subgroups of students and families, staff, community members, and partners to understand if there are differential experiences across demographics as well as what those differential experiences are. Analyze this data to understand what is and is not working for particular subgroups.</p> <p>Data collection strategies can include administering surveys, interviewing key students and families, staff, community members, and partners, holding focus groups, and conducting formal observations of specific subgroups.</p> <p>Quality improvement will occur for all when focused effort is made to improve quality at the margins. We suggest encouraging organizations to approach their quality improvement process with this lens in order to prioritize</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. identifying who is at the margins, 2. learning about differential experiences at the margins, and 3. pursuing quality improvement goals that will greatly impact those on the margins. 	<p>Fail to collect demographic data or perform any subgroup analyses. Base your understanding of your program’s quality and outcomes on the “average” experience of the “average” participant.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Neglect to address inequities in your programming because the data and data collection methods you use don’t provide you with adequate information to identify inequitable practices and outcomes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who are my participants (race, gender, ability, etc.)? • Who is experiencing our program differently than most? • Why are they experiencing our program differently than most? • What do we want to know from whom? • What are the multiple ways that we can come to authentically understand what we want to know from them? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you define what you aspire to grow as a team? • What is your vision? • What are the different ways you need to think to create the tools, resources, practices, programs, services, and policies that actualize those thoughts and beliefs? • Then how do you enact them in all your interactions so they become the culture of your program/work and result in your aspiration?
<p>Use two-person teams to conduct formal observations, where at least one person holds the same positional power as the person being observed. This will ensure that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. assumptions made about the work of the person being observed do not go unchecked, and 2. the person being observed doesn’t feel like they can’t speak freely or challenge the observer (who is traditionally someone of greater positional power and authority). 	<p>Conduct formal observations without accounting for power dynamics. Risk missing out on valuable information because the person being observed doesn’t feel comfortable engaging with the observer honestly and transparently.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is typically an observer? • Who is typically observed? • How can we make observation an empowering experience for those being observed? • What is the process by which observations are shared with those being observed? • How do we celebrate promising practices while also offering data for improvement? 	<p>How can we utilize the data from multiple observations to create relevant capacity building opportunities for staff?</p>




Quality Assessment Tool (QAT)

CAN has developed an assessment tool and online quality assessment to support Expanded Learning and OST providers in the assessment process. The California Expanded Learning Quality Assessment Tool (“QAT” or “The Tool”) is intended to:

Align with the Quality Standards for Expanded Learning in California, and integrate elements of commonly utilized assessment tools in the field (standards plus) including the California After-School Quality Self-Assessment Tool, and the Quick-CASP (Comprehensive Assessment of Summer Programs) to create one assessment resource that can be used all year long.

Support quality and Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) processes.




Build on the strong youth development foundation of the Expanded Learning field by incorporating elements of:

- Equity and Inclusion, 
- Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), 
- and 21st Century Skills. 

The items in the QAT describe what high-quality practice looks like, not how it should be implemented. This enables a broad spectrum of programs to see themselves in the QAT. Items in The Tool are grouped into two categories: **self-assessment** and **observation**.

3 Stages

These stages describe the evolution of a program in which high-quality practices are implemented periodically and based on individual staff preference (Early) to one characterized by the consistent, intentional practice among all staff (Mature).

-  **EARLY:** Desired policies, practices, and interactions take place periodically or are implemented based on individual staff members’ interests and abilities.
-  **DEVELOPING:** Policies, practices, and interactions associated with high-quality programs are implemented somewhat consistently, both across staff members and at different points in time.
-  **MATURE:** Policies, practices, and interactions associated with high-quality programs are implemented consistently across staff members and points in time.

These **additional instructions** show how programs can use the QAT to assess quality.

1. Prepare the team.

Taking the time to build trust and effective communication among key staff and collaborators should be part of your preparation.

2. Select 2-3 standards.

Some members of the QIT can focus on specific sections of the Tool. For example, parents and caregivers might focus on the Community Partnerships section, while program participants could focus on the Youth Voice section.

3. Self-assess policies and processes.

Sometimes the rating is less important than the justification for the rating. Including robust examples provides essential data about what’s working well and what can be improved.

4. Observe and rate program practices.

Select 2-3 program activities to rate that reflect the range of activities offered and range of ages served in the program.

Tip: Do not try to complete the observation rating items while observing program activities - you’ll miss out on too much!

5. Reflect.

As a team, complete the Equity Pause and the Reflection and Planning questions at the end of each section to record thoughts about the self-assessment and observation.

Learn more about the online tool: <https://www.afterschoolnetwork.org/quality-self-assessment-tool>

Quality Standards+ for Expanded Learning

Point-of-Service Quality Standards

1 Safe and Supportive Environment

The program provides a safe and nurturing environment that supports the developmental, social-emotional, and physical needs of all students.

2 Active and Engaged Learning

Program design and activities reflect active, meaningful, and engaging learning methods that promote collaboration and expand student horizons.

3 Skill Building

The program maintains high expectations for all students, intentionally links program goals and curricula with 21st-century skills, and provides activities to help students achieve mastery.

4 Youth Voice and Leadership

The program provides and supports intentional opportunities for students to play a meaningful role in program design and implementation, and provides ongoing access to authentic leadership roles.

5 Healthy Choices and Behaviors

The program promotes student well-being through opportunities to learn about and practice balanced nutrition, physical activity, and other healthy choices in an environment that supports a healthy life style.

6 Diversity, Access and Equity

The program creates an environment in which students experience values that embrace diversity and equity regardless of race, color, religion, sex, age, income level, national origin, physical ability, sexual orientation, and/or gender identity and expression.

6a Diversity, Access and Equity — Supporting English Learners

The program implements practices that support English Learners in fully engaging in activities, building positive relationships with peers and adults, and building language skills.

Programmatic Quality Standards

7 Quality Staff

The program recruits and retains high quality staff and volunteers who are focused on creating a positive learning environment, and provides ongoing professional development based on assessed staff needs.

8 Clear Vision, Mission and Purpose

The program has a clearly defined vision, mission, goals, and measurable outcomes that reflect broad stakeholder input and drive program design, implementation, and improvement.

9 Collaborative Partnerships

The program intentionally builds and supports collaborative relationships among families, schools, and community to achieve program goals.

9a Collaborative Partnerships - District & Schools

The program incorporates multiple strategies to communicate with staff from the school district and school site, and to leverage activities in expanded learning to support the district and school site goals for participants.

9b Collaborative Partnerships - Family Engagement

The program incorporates multiple strategies to meaningfully involve parents and caregivers in programmatic activities and leadership opportunities.

10 Continuous Quality Improvement

The program uses data from multiple sources to assess its strengths and weaknesses in order to continuously improve program design, outcomes, and impact.

11 Program Management

The program has sound fiscal and administrative practices supported by well-defined and documented policies and procedures that meet grant requirements.

12 Sustainability

The program builds enduring partnerships with the community and secures commitments for in-kind and monetary contributions.

Access the Quality Standards:



ENGLISH



SPANISH

Plan to Improve Program Quality

The third step of the CQI cycle is **Plan**. To create your plan you must objectively and collaboratively review the data you collected and identify specific priorities, objectives, and strategies you will implement to promote change.

1 TASK ONE: Review Data Collaboratively

As a collective, review assessment data to identify the program's strengths you wish to sustain and opportunities for improvement.

Once you have the data, you must contextualize it. You do this by considering what contributed to the data (i.e. structures such as hiring/staffing, program schedules, policies, procedures at the site or within the organization).

2 TASK TWO: Create an Improvement Plan

Prioritize what needs to improve. Consider what challenges were identified, what were the contributing factors, and if there are any outstanding questions the QIT needs to explore. Additionally, consider your available capacity, and the urgency and impact of what you might prioritize. Ensure the people most impacted by the plan help make the decision.

Choose your improvement strategies that may include professional development, coaching/mentoring for staff, shifting program schedules, design and/or structure, engaging new partners, etc. Remember to start with your strengths, consider best and promising practices, engage people closest to the problem because they will be most knowledgeable about possible solutions, learn from others, and experiment before institutionalizing. Prototype in a safe to fail space, pilot to build out structures and processes, and then consider how to bring the change to scale.

Turn your priorities into SMART objectives. In our CQI process, goals are big, bold, and aspirational. Objectives are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound.

Write the Plan. Be as specific as possible and include the following elements: objective, strategy, timeline, resources needed, individuals responsible, and a clear picture of what success looks like. When possible, include benchmarks to check for progress throughout the process. A good way for new team members to contribute to the plan is to have them focus on explicit skill building, allowing them to identify what success looks like.



Equity Considerations to Plan

Do this!	Not this...	To get started, ask yourself:	To go deeper, think about:
<p>Involve everyone who will be charged with implementing the improvement plan in the process of developing the plan using the Ladder of Citizen Participation (Arnstein, 1969) as your guide.</p> <p>As a general rule, if someone is touched by a problem, they should be involved in addressing it. That said, there is a marked difference between co-design, engaging people in focus groups, and soliciting feedback. People have the most power in co-design (defining the process, i.e. members of the QIT), less power in a focus group (the process is being orchestrated by someone else), and less power giving feedback (the process was already enacted on them). It is up to your team to decide who it makes sense to engage at each level.</p>	<p>Attempt to get people to “buy-in” to a plan that they had no part in designing and which may not have been designed to address their needs and objectives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is touched by the problem(s) we are trying to solve? • How should we engage them in developing our improvement plan? • Why have we decided to engage them in this way and not in another (deeper or lighter touch) way? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When assessing where you want to grow, how do you take a collective assessment of the current reality— strengths, challenges, and opportunities for growth? • How do you also include strategies to build the personal mastery of your team as individuals and as a collective?
<p>Choose your quality improvement priorities systematically and transparently.</p> <p>Since there will likely be divergent priorities among the QIT if its members are diverse, this part of the process has the most equity implications. Who gets to define “high impact,” “high feasibility,” “low effort,” and “high urgency,” and who gets to decide how each of them are prioritized to determine which issues are deserving of the team’s time and resources are key issues.</p>	<p>Let the member of the QIT who, historically, has the most decision-making power make this decision. Risk breaking the trust of your colleagues and prioritizing the lowest hanging fruit over deep change.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does “high impact” mean to your organization? • What makes something “highly feasible?” If something is “low effort,” for whom is it “low effort?” • What makes something “highly urgent?” • Which of these is most important to your team? Why? • Where do equity issues fall? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What inequity are you trying to address? Who determined that? • How will the QIT ensure all interested parties understand the process for choosing priorities, who had the power to make those decisions, and what the intended impact of the work will be?

Implement Planned Improvements

The fourth step of the CQI cycle is **Implement**. What are the steps and strategies needed to help you successfully implement your planned improvements? Remember, they will necessarily look different from program to program and site to site based on your improvement priorities and objectives.



1 TASK ONE: Build a Shared Understanding of the Improvement Plan

Share the plan widely with students and families, staff, community members, and partners so they know what you are working on and what you are trying to grow in your program and/or community. You want everyone to know what success could look like. Ensure staff understand how their input resulted in the plan, what the specific actions are and why they are being made, and what are their roles and responsibilities in the plan.

2 TASK TWO: Provide Staff the Necessary Supports to Implement Improvements

High-quality professional development, technical assistance, and support are offered to staff at every level. It should be ongoing and responsive. It will be offered using different strategies and methods to ensure accessibility and inclusivity and will be embedded in the daily activities of their work day. Lastly, create opportunities for cross-sharing and learning within the team and the larger programmatic landscape.

3 TASK THREE: Implement the Improvement Plan

Communication is key. Creating intentional structures to ensure the QIT can talk about what they are doing, learning, and where they may need to make adjustments is critical and should be identified at the beginning of the Implementation process. Learning is not always a linear process. There may be setbacks and challenges, so creating opportunities for staff to share, inspire, and motivate each other, problem-solve with their peers, adjust, and fine tune timelines and expectations should be proactively considered and co-created. Lastly, discuss what the process will be to help everyone meet the expectation and as leaders, ALWAYS express appreciation, recognition, and rewards for the hard work the team is doing.

4 TASK FOUR: Measure the Change

The plan should have identified what success looks like, when it should be achieved, and benchmarks along the way. Take these measurements. Don't add value judgments to the findings. Use them as a way to simply define where you were at the beginning, where you are now, and what you have learned.

Equity Considerations to Implement

Do this!	Not this...	To get started, ask yourself:	To go deeper, think about:
<p>Test small pieces of your plan with key stakeholder groups. Record the feedback you receive and meet with your Quality Improvement Team to make any necessary adjustments.</p> <p>Continue to roll out your plan as the pieces come together.</p>	<p>Roll out a huge plan without first testing small pieces of the plan with the people who will be responsible for implementing it.</p> <p>Risk prioritization implementation to the detriment of learning and adaptation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who will be implementing this plan? • Have they been sufficiently involved in developing this plan? • What piece(s) of this plan present the greatest risk if it isn't rolled out properly? • What are the risks? • How can we test this part of the plan on a small scale? 	<p>How do we ensure staff has the resources/supports to successfully implement the plan?</p>

Reflect on the CQI Cycle

The fifth and final step of the CQI cycle is **Reflect**. Now is the time to pause and reflect on this CQI cycle, the processes the QIT tried, the strategies used, the outcomes proposed, and the lessons learned. And remember, every voice that supported the effort should be heard!



1 TASK ONE: Reflect on Process & Impact

It is important that everyone involved in creating the plan participate in the end-of-cycle reflection. The reflection should include both the process that the team engaged in and the impact of that process. Gather the information you compiled throughout the process from all parties, so the discussion will be robust and inclusive of everyone’s perspective on what happened.

2 TASK TWO: Consider Your Capacity for CQI, Again

Revisit your original readiness assessment to see how and/or if your capacity for CQI has changed over the course of the cycle. This can help the organization determine if additional investment is needed to increase their capacity to be a learning organization.

3 TASK THREE: Institutionalize Improvements

Once you identify the strategies that had a positive impact on quality, document the conditions that made that success possible and if they were actions of individuals or systemic structures enacted within the program. Then, you must determine if they are scalable and/or sustainable. This exploration should be a full QIT conversation or series of conversations.

Equity Considerations to Reflect

Do this!	Not this...	To get <i>started</i> , ask yourself:	To go <i>deeper</i> , think about:
<p>Engage in formal reflection after every step of the CQI process.</p> <p>The goal for QITs is not to move through the process, but to learn throughout the entire process, so that the process itself may be shaped by that learning. This kind of adaptive approach is particularly powerful for addressing the complex problem space, where most equity issues tend to live.</p>	<p>Wait until the end of the process to reflect on what went wrong (or well) so that you can make improvements.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we work better together as a team? • Where do we need to include additional perspectives? • What have we learned? • What do we need to learn more about? 	<p>Reflect on your process and your learning. Examine your intended intent/impact and the outcomes of the work.</p> <p>Actively examine what were growing actions vs limiting or constraining ones, and how do you consider those in your next learning cycle.</p>

The CQI Cycle

Prepare to Engage

- Start to Build a Culture of Improvement
- Establish Your Quality Improvement Team
- Consider Your Capacity for CQI
- Plan an Attainable CQI Strategy

Assess Program Quality

- Choose Guiding Questions
- Choose Methods and Tools
- Collect High Quality Data
- Analyze and Share Findings

Reflect on the CQI Cycle

- Reflect on Process and Impact
- Consider Your Capacity for CQI, Again
- Institutionalize Improvements



Implement Planned Improvements

- Build a Shared Understanding of the Improvement Plan
- Provide Staff the Necessary Supports to Implement Improvements
- Implement the Improvement Plan

Plan to Implement

- Review Data Collaboratively
- Create an Improvement Plan

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