



## **NYSAN PROGRAM QUALITY SELF-ASSESSMENT (QSA) TOOL, 2<sup>ND</sup> EDITION QUALITY INDICATOR DEFINITIONS**

### **ELEMENT 7: YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT**

**A quality program provides opportunities for youth to participate in planning, to exercise choice, and to engage in a rich variety of offerings.**

#### **Youth Participation and Engagement, Indicator 1**

\*Engages participants with a variety of strategies.

##### **Performance Level 1**

Young people are not actively participating in program activities; they are often working independently, distracting the group, or not present. Young people do not practice decision-making skills. Conversations and activities are driven by adults without informing or consulting youth. Program activities and experiences are limited; young people do not make meaningful choices, do not listen to staff and peers, and opportunities to build positive relationships with adults do not exist. Youth do not receive data or information about the program.

##### **Performance Level 2**

Staff members continue to believe that young people are not responsible or interested in connecting with adults. The majority of young people are informed of decisions, but not encouraged to share ideas or concerns about activity content. Some staff members discuss how to engage young people through hands-on and diverse learning experiences. Some attempts are made to incorporate youth voice into planning, program design, and recruitment. There is no evidence of young people actively listening to their peers and program staff. Adults usually inform young people of data or information about the program when it becomes available.

##### **Performance Level 3**

Adults and youth are working together to plan and organize events. In the majority of activities, young people respond to questions, contribute opinions and ideas, and work in small groups with peers. Staff have administered youth surveys or conducted focus groups to consult youth participants and capture their experiences, feedback, and ideas for program improvement. There is evidence that staff are actively eliciting young people's opinions, ideas, and concerns for discussions. Young people collect data or information about the program with adults.

##### **Performance Level 4**

Young people are trained as facilitators and co-lead activities with staff. Community meetings or check-ins are used to publicly acknowledge youth for their contributions and accomplishments. All young people are practicing leadership skills. All young people are consulted on program decisions, actively listen to their peers and staff, have a variety of meaningful choices to make, and contribute opinions, ideas, and concerns. Young people collaboratively develop and collect data or information about the program with adults. Young people are involved in recruitment and make presentations in neighborhood schools or organizations.

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#### **Youth Participation and Engagement, Indicator 2**

Has participants who take ownership of program selection and development.

##### **Performance Level 1**

Staff members plan and select all activities and curricula.

##### **Performance Level 2**

Staff members plan all activities and curricula, but sometimes ask participants for input on activities.

### Performance Level 3

Staff members consult with participants throughout the year about activities they believe would be helpful, relevant, and meaningful, academic topics in which they need assistance, and other program suggestions and concerns. Staff members then develop the program based on these recommendations.

### Performance Level 4

Staff members form a program development committee made up of participants, staff members, school representatives, and family members. This group discusses learning opportunities and related activities that would be relevant, meaningful, and of interest to youth, the academic topics in which they need or would benefit from assistance, and other program suggestions or concerns. The committee then develops the program based on these recommendations and regularly assesses and revises the program based on regular feedback and data collection. All participants have the opportunity to lead or assist with implementing activities.

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## **Youth Participation and Engagement, Indicator 3**

Enables participants to develop life skills, resiliency, and self-esteem via activities.

### Performance Level 1

The program includes limited activities offered irregularly that staff members believe help participants build skills.

### Performance Level 2

The program includes several activities offered regularly that focus on one or more life skills, but the activities are not sequenced. Staff asks students to try harder or pay better attention when they are struggling or not doing well.

### Performance Level 3

The program plan includes goals and objectives for youth to develop and practice life skills such as communication and decision-making. Staff members support and measure youth progress, acknowledging and celebrating success based on effort. Learning is aligned with student strengths and competencies and youth are taught how to overcome challenges by applying strengths. Staff members believe and generally communicate that all youth have strengths and can succeed.

### Performance Level 4

The program plan includes goals and objectives for youth to develop and practice life skills such as communication and decision-making in authentic situations. The program has adopted and implements a research-based effective youth skill-building program; related activities are offered regularly and sequentially. Youth and staff members support and measure youth progress in relevant and meaningful situations, acknowledging and celebrating success based on effort. Learning is aligned with student strengths and competencies and youth are taught how to overcome challenges by applying strengths. Staff members believe and continuously demonstrate and communicate that all youth have strengths and can succeed. Mistakes and challenges are used as normal and expected learning opportunities.

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## **Youth Participation and Engagement, Indicator 4**

Affords participants opportunities to express their ideas, concerns, and opinions.

### Performance Level 1

Participants are rarely or never asked to express their ideas, concerns, and opinions. Youth who express themselves to staff members are generally not listened to. There is no formal way for youth to deliver feedback about the program and staff.

### Performance Level 2

Participants are sometimes asked to express their ideas, concerns, and opinions; these conversations happen irregularly or when a problem arises. Youth who express themselves to staff members are listened to, but their suggestions are rarely acted upon. There is no formal way for youth to deliver feedback about the program.

### Performance Level 3

Participants are encouraged to express their ideas, concerns, and opinions on an ongoing basis. These conversations happen on a regular schedule created by staff members. Youth who express themselves to staff members are listened to, and their feelings are sometimes incorporated into program planning and staff debriefs.

### Performance Level 4

Participants are frequently encouraged to express their ideas, concerns, and opinions on an ongoing basis. These conversations happen both on a regular schedule created by staff members and on an ad hoc basis as needed. Youth who express themselves to staff members are listened to, and their feelings are incorporated into program planning and staff debriefs. Participants are included on the program planning and leadership team and regularly have formal opportunities for input at all points of planning, decision-making, implementation, and evaluation. Staff members always have follow-up conversations with youth to tell them how their feedback was addressed.

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## **Youth Participation and Engagement, Indicator 5**

Enables participants to explore resources and issues in their community through projects and activities.

### Performance Level 1

Participants have no or few opportunities to engage in their community through projects and activities. The program operates independent of the community and community-based organizations.

### Performance Level 2

The program occasionally engages participants in their community through projects and activities. The program is designed to run on a schedule that can be altered to incorporate emerging resources and issues, but staff members generally do not stray from the activities they've planned. The program usually operates independent of the community and other community-based organizations.

### Performance Level 3

The program engages participants in their community through meaningful projects and activities on a regular basis. The program is designed to run on a schedule that can be altered to incorporate emerging resources and issues, and staff members will often include projects and activities in the community. The program operates in partnership with the community and community-based organizations, and is able to collaborate with these groups to bring additional perspectives and opportunities to the participants and program.

### Performance Level 4

Participants engage in their community through projects and activities on a regular basis. Youth often learn of community opportunities or generate suggestions for meaningful, relevant, and helpful community opportunities. The program is designed to run on a schedule that can be altered to incorporate emerging resources and issues, youth ideas, and needs. Staff members ensure that programming includes meaningful and relevant youth-driven, community-based projects and activities. Staff members seek information from participants, families, and other sources on potential opportunities and needs in the community. The program operates in close partnership with other community-based organizations, and is able to collaborate with these groups to bring additional perspectives to the program. Partners also offer resources, such as artists, journalists, and historians, to add additional community context to the program.

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## **Youth Participation and Engagement, Indicator 6**

Promotes consistent and active participation.

### Performance Level 1

Participants are allowed to drop in and out of the program with no formal commitment to regular participation. Therefore, different participants are present everyday and it is difficult to run sequential activities that require several days or weeks to complete. Participants often decide to sit out of activities or become frustrated with the revolving door of participants making meaningful programming difficult. Many participants do not seem actively engaged.

#### Performance Level 2

Participants are asked to come to the program everyday, but some still drop in whenever they choose to. Most, but not all, of the participants come everyday; a few participants join activities that require several days or weeks to complete. During the program, all participants are asked to join an activity, though some participants do not seem actively engaged.

#### Performance Level 3

Participants are required to come to the program everyday. Almost all of the participants come everyday; most participants join activities that require several days or weeks to complete. During the program, participants are encouraged to join an activity, and most participants seem actively engaged.

#### Performance Level 4

Participants are required to come to the program everyday. All of the participants come everyday; most participants join activities that require several days or weeks to complete. During the program, participants are encouraged to join an activity. Staff members work with participants to decide what activities will be offered, how they will be implemented and what leadership role students will play. All or most participants are actively engaged.

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### **Youth Participation and Engagement, Indicator 7**

Promotes teamwork and respect for others.

#### Performance Level 1

The program's mission, goals, objectives, and activities do not address teamwork and respect. All activities are done independently. Respect is not part of the program's community agreement.

#### Performance Level 2

The program addresses teamwork and respect sometimes. Most activities are done independently, with a few activities requiring participants to work in teams, but participants are not explicitly prepared by the staff to work with others. Respect is part of the program's community agreement, but the agreement is not always enforced. Signs of disrespectful behavior are not always addressed.

#### Performance Level 3

The program goals and objectives explicitly address teamwork and respect. Most activities are done collaboratively in teams. Participants are prepared by the staff to work with others through exercises that address leading and following, sharing, and other team-building skills in the beginning of the year. Respect is part of the program's community agreement, and participants know that respecting one another is necessary to being in the program. Signs of disrespectful behavior are generally addressed by a staff member to remind participants of the importance of respect.

#### Performance Level 4

The program mission, goals, and objectives explicitly promote and support teamwork and respect. Most activities are done in teams. Participants are prepared by the staff to work with others through exercises that address leading and following, sharing, and other team-building skills. Respect is part of the program's community agreement, and participants know that respecting one another is necessary to being in the program. Participants, staff members, and families define and translate what respect looks like and sounds like in different settings and staff model, teach, support, acknowledge, and celebrate respectful behavior on a regular basis. Signs of disrespectful behavior are always immediately addressed by a staff member asking students if their behavior is aligned and what they could do differently to be respectful. Severe or continued disrespectful behavior is disciplined uniformly and fairly.

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### **Youth Participation and Engagement, Indicator 8**

Involves participants in the development of disciplinary practices.

#### Performance Level 1

Staff members develop discipline practices. Participants are told about behavior policies and discipline practices and are expected to follow them. Discipline practices are punishment-focused.

#### Performance Level 2

Participants are not formally involved in the development of disciplinary practices. Participants are told about behavior policies and discipline practices, and sometimes the feedback they give to staff members is incorporated into the policies. Once policies and practices are in place, participants are expected to follow them or incur punishments.

#### Performance Level 3

Participants are formally involved in the development of disciplinary practices. Participants work with staff members to create behavior policies, and participants sign an agreement to follow them. Once policies are in place, participants are expected to follow them.

#### Performance Level 4

Participants, school partners, families, and staff members are formally involved in the development of disciplinary practices. Participants work with staff members, school partners, and family members to create positive behavior policies and expectations, and participants sign an agreement to follow them. All partners translate the positive expectations (what they look like, sound like and feel like) in the program and the information is posted throughout the program space. Staff members teach positive expectations, model positive behaviors, and acknowledge and reward students for positive behaviors that align with the expectations. Staff members sign an agreement to fairly enforce the policies. Signs of disrespectful behavior are immediately addressed by staff members by pointing out the translated respectful behavior and asking students if their behavior is aligned and what they could do differently to be respectful. When necessary, severe or continued disrespectful behavior is disciplined uniformly and fairly per the policy. Policies and expectations are revisited several times throughout the year to ensure participants understand them and receive support to follow them.

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### **Youth Participation and Engagement, Indicator 9**

Encourages participants to recruit others into the program.

#### Performance Level 1

Staff members recruit participants into the program. Participants do not know details about how to register, or about who can be contacted for more information about program registration.

#### Performance Level 2

Staff members sometimes ask participants to bring others to the program, and have enrolled new participants because of it. Participants generally know which staff members manage program registration.

#### Performance Level 3

Staff members regularly encourage participants to bring their peers to the program. One staff member is designated as the contact person for information regarding registration. New participants have joined the program as a result.

#### Performance Level 4

Staff members regularly and frequently encourage participants to bring their peers to the program. There is a designated staff member as the contact person for information regarding registration, and their name, phone number, and email address are clearly listed on all program posters and flyers. Throughout the year, staff members are asked to interact with participants' friends and siblings in order to attract them to the program. Youth leaders serve as program liaisons, promoting the program's benefits, building relationships, and encouraging more youth enrollment into their program.

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### **Youth Participation and Engagement, Indicator 10**

Allows participants to be meaningfully involved in program planning, implementation, data collection, and evaluation.

#### Performance Level 1

The program does not include participants in program planning, implementation, data collection, and evaluation.

#### Performance Level 2

The program includes a few participants in program planning and implementation by soliciting their opinions on activities and structure through informal conversations. Participant opinions are collected by staff members and may be incorporated into the program's plan. The program may conduct an evaluation that incorporates these opinions as well.

#### Performance Level 3

The program formally includes many participants in program planning and implementation by soliciting their opinions on activities, structure, and policies through surveys and interviews. Participant opinions are collected by staff members and always considered when compiling the program's plan. Participants are also involved in data collection and evaluation by providing feedback on all aspects of the program to be used for continuous improvement purposes.

#### Performance Level 4

The program formally includes all participants in program planning and implementation by including a groups of youth in program planning discussions, and then soliciting all participants' opinions on a draft plan that covers activities, structure, and policies through surveys and interviews. These opinions are then used to revise and finalize the program plan. Participants are involved in the design of data collection and evaluation methodologies, and are given the opportunity to provide feedback on all aspects of the program to be used for continuous improvement purposes.

\*Indicator is critical to program start-up.