

ASQ

After-School Quality: The Process of Program Improvement



A guide for facilitating a 5-step, team-based approach to improving program quality.



Learn how to:

- Pair ASQ with program quality assessment tools
- Involve multiple stakeholders
- Select and train an ASQ Team
- Gather and organize data
- Develop an action plan to reach improvement goals

Welcome to ASQ — After-School Quality: The Process of Program Improvement.

With today's increasing interest in program quality, there are a growing number of tools that programs can use to assess and improve quality. What's missing is a process for involving multiple stakeholders in the effort to document program quality. That's where ASQ comes in.

ASQ is designed to assist your program to become the best it can be. ASQ is a five-step self-assessment process that helps you examine the quality of your program and then make changes that will lead to better practices and more positive youth outcomes.

The cornerstone of ASQ is a team approach. ASQ relies on the ideas and energy of all the people who care about your afterschool program— staff, families, children, youth, program directors, boards of directors, and hosts. All involved are invested, have a voice, and can help shape the solutions because ASQ includes everyone in program improvement.

The ASQ process is about change. ASQ is based on the belief that the most successful program improvements happen when key stakeholders are involved in a slow, gradual change.

ASQ supports the use of any youth program quality assessment tool. Open-ended and flexible, ASQ helps you make the most of any program observation tools and questionnaires/surveys. The ASQ process focuses on how one uses an instrument, who is involved in using it, and, most importantly, what is learned from the information gathered. This leads to developing strategies for program improvement.

ASQ: Supporting Program Assessment through the Years

ASQ was first developed in 1991 and has changed over time to meet the needs of programs like yours. ASQ originally stood for “Advancing School-Age Childcare Quality” and was used as the basis for the National Afterschool Association program improvement and accreditation system.

Today ASQ (now known as “After-School Quality: The Process of Program Improvement”) has been reformatted to support anybody who is interested in improving the quality of their program—for self-assessment purposes, state level quality rating system advancement, and as a way to become accredited from the Council on Accreditation. In each case, ASQ is a flexible, effective tool for ensuring that the process of improving program quality comes from a team of people who are invested in and care about your program.

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In gratitude to the original authors of ASQ, the many individuals that have used ASQ over the decades in support of youth, and those who contributed to this version. Please turn to page 32 where we acknowledge our authors and supporters.

National Institute on Out-of-School Time
A program of the Wellesley Centers for Women at Wellesley College
April 2011

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OVERVIEW



After School Quality: The Process of Program Improvement (ASQ) is a five-step process that helps you and a team of people committed to program improvement examine the quality of your program and then make changes that will lead to better practices. You will involve the program community in an open dialogue about your program.

Together, you will set a program vision and assess how well your program is meeting the needs of the children, youth, and families it serves. Your ASQ Team will develop an action plan to reach improvement goals. The ASQ process takes into account that "you"—administration, staff, families, children, youth, and community members—are the best people to make the changes that will improve your program.

ASQ is the process you will need to make the most of the program observation tools and questionnaires/surveys you are using. This guide will help you understand the ASQ five-step process and how to use it. Each step will be discussed in depth with an overview and goals, and tips for success. In addition, the ASQ Web Portal at www.niost.org contains downloadable resources to accompany each step. This guide is intended to provide a starting point for implementing a process that will support your program quality assessment efforts. ASQ Team leaders should feel free to adapt the materials in the way that makes sense for their programs.

GOALS



- Become familiar with the ASQ process
- Understand the ASQ approach
- Prepare to launch the five steps of ASQ



Visit the ASQ Portal for More Resources

At www.niost.org under Our Work/Training, the portal link is http://www.niost.org/asq_login

As a companion to this guide, the ASQ Portal contains materials to support each step of the ASQ process. Resources include customizable forms and letters, step-by-step instructions for running meetings, and more.

INTRODUCTION TO THE ASQ PROCESS

■ What Are the Five Steps in the ASQ Process?

Step 1: *Preparing the Program Community*

ASQ involves people in defining the problem and discovering the solutions

Introduce staff and the broader program stakeholders to ASQ and program improvement, and clarify what they want children and youth to gain from the program.

Step 2: *Preparing the ASQ Team*

Select the ASQ team, determine which tools, questionnaires and surveys to use, train and prepare team for observation and survey collection.

Step 3: *Gathering the Information*

Learn how your program is doing through observation and questionnaires surveys.

Review the “big picture” by summarizing your data.

Step 4: *Creating the Action Plan*

Identify areas of strength and areas that need to be improved, set priorities, and identify strategies for improvement.

Step 5: *Taking Action*

Coordinate the tasks set forth in the Action Plan and check on the process of making program improvements.

ASQ involves people in defining the problem and discovering the solutions.

■ Who Uses ASQ?

Any organization that wants to improve the quality of their afterschool program. In the past, programs found they were most successful implementing ASQ when they were financially stable and not undergoing significant changes. Ideally programs will have committed leadership that has been in place for several years, several staff members who have been with the program for some time, agencies that fully support their improvement efforts, and actively involved families.

■ Who Makes the ASQ Process Happen?

The ASQ process is set in motion by an ASQ Team leader. The team leader is usually the program director, but it can be anyone with the time, authority, and enthusiasm to make changes in the program. The Team works best when it includes representatives from all the stakeholders in the community, including staff, families, older children or youth, program administration, and host sites (school, community center, etc.). If your program is not ready to involve the larger community of stakeholders, it is fine to begin the ASQ process with internal staff as a first step towards involving a broader team.

ASQ is designed to be flexible. Ideally the ASQ Team represents all program stakeholders. If you are not ready for a team of staff and stakeholders, you can begin using ASQ with just staff.

■ Do People in the Program Who Are Not on the Team Have a Say?

Absolutely. ASQ encourages two meetings that are held for all who are interested in the success of the program—one at the very beginning of the process, and one toward the end. Families, older children or youth, staff, administration, the host, and other interested members of the program community are encouraged to attend so they can learn about ASQ, program quality, and progress made by the ASQ Team.

INTRODUCTION TO THE ASQ PROCESS

■ **How Does ASQ Support Your Work with Quality Assessment Tools?**

You may already be working with a specific program observation tool or questionnaires/surveys. If you have been using these tools with your staff only, ASQ recommends expanding involvement to a new, broader team by holding a community meeting and inviting other stakeholders to get involved. If you have not yet chosen questionnaires/surveys or an assessment tool or are not required to use specific tools, look to Step 2 to learn how to select the tools that make sense for your program.

■ **How Long Does the ASQ Process Take?**

The time it takes to assess your program and develop an action plan depends on your program, your program's needs, and who is involved. It may take several months to a year. Once you identify areas that need improvement, it is best to choose a few areas to begin working on and then create an action plan. The time it will take to accomplish the goals in the action plan depends on how ambitious the action plan is and what resources will be needed to implement it.

This process is a continuous cycle (see Figure 1 on pg. vi). You will continue to reflect on your practice, identify areas of improvement and establish better practices.

■ **Can You Use ASQ When You Are Pursuing COA Accreditation?**

Yes! The ASQ process allows for effective self-assessment, making it a valuable tool for any program that is in the process of obtaining accreditation from the Council of Accreditation.

■ **How Will You and Your Program Benefit from the ASQ Process?**

- You will have a way of communicating what is working well to those directly connected to your program, as well as to the larger community.
- You will demonstrate to the families who rely on you for out-of-school time programming that you are truly interested in meeting their needs.
- You will gain increased parental involvement. This may be the first time that families have a say in the decision-making process through questionnaires/surveys, speaking up at program-wide meetings, or being on the ASQ Team.
- You will provide a way to involve children and youth in planning the program. Have them complete questionnaires/surveys and involve them in the ASQ Team.
- You will ensure that families and stakeholders gain a deeper understanding of what it takes to run a quality program.
- You will gain both increased support and valuable feedback by opening up the process to the whole program community.
- You will build relationships among staff, families, the host and the program community. ASQ is a team-building experience.



Questionnaires Available at the ASQ Portal

- Visit the ASQ Portal to download ready-to-use questionnaires for Staff, Family, Child and Youth, Host, and Director. The ASQ Observation tool that measures quality items linked to the NAA national standards is available.
- In addition, go to www.niost.org for information on useful tools such as the APT and SAYO tools which make up the Afterschool Program Assessment System (APAS) system.

INTRODUCTION TO THE ASQ PROCESS

■ How Will You Benefit from the ASQ Process?

- You will be energized by the valuable input of people who care about the program.
- You will learn a process that you will be able to use as an ongoing tool for improvement. You will make time to reflect on the way you do your work.
- You will have the opportunity to compare the way you work now to quality standards.*
- You will become part of a national movement to work on program improvement through self-study.
- You will learn better ways to communicate to people within and outside the program what your program does well.
- You will be able to clarify your goals for the future.
- You will improve your observation skills.
- You will share leadership, which will reduce the burden on the director by sharing the power and sharing the work.



Figure 1: The Continuous Improvement Cycle

*You will be using observation tools and questionnaires to gather information about your program. In general, these tools are research-based instruments which focus on standards of quality for out-of-school time programs in the areas of relationships, activities, program planning, staff development, administration, etc.

For information on national standards visit the National Afterschool Association at <http://www.naaweb.org/default.asp?contentID=612>. The NAA Standards for Quality School-Age Care, are divided into 36 “keys” of quality. NAA offers these standards to programs via two publications.

Why ASQ?

ASQ was originally developed as the afterschool program improvement process to guide programs seeking national accreditation. This process was tied to the ASQ Observation Tool and NAA's national afterschool quality standards. Today, a wide range of afterschool programs use a variety of observation and survey tools.

What hasn't changed is the need for the process to enact the benefits that comes from using measurement tools. This is why ASQ is still vital. Today's ASQ, is available on the internet via the NIOST website portal. We now offer the ingredients of the process including all the agendas, forms and other support materials electronically so programs and sites can download them and adapt them to their own needs. And it works with any assessment tools or surveys that a program chooses to use. Join those who are actively engaged in continuous program improvement.



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