

# NYC Department of Youth and Community Development

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## Youth Leadership Development Practices: Program Staff Self-Reflection Tool

April 2016

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Program Staff Self-Reflection Tool**

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# Contents

<b>Introduction.</b> . . . . .	<b>1</b>
Purpose of the Self-Reflection Tool . . . . .	1
How to Use This Self-Reflection Tool . . . . .	2
<b>Youth Leadership Development</b>	
<b>Practices Rubric</b> . . . . .	<b>2</b>
Section 1: Attitude and Skill Development . . . . .	2
Section 2: Action . . . . .	5
Section 3: Reflection . . . . .	7
<b>Reflect to Improve: Scoring Your Self-Reflection and Action Planning</b> . . . . .	<b>8</b>
Score Reflection Worksheet . . . . .	9
<b>Appendix A. Why Youth Leadership?.</b> . . . . .	<b>10</b>
Youth Leadership Development Framework . . . . .	10
<b>Appendix B. Supports for Youth Leadership Development Practices</b> . . . . .	<b>12</b>
Supportive Environment . . . . .	12
Instructional Design and Strategies . . . . .	12
<b>References</b> . . . . .	<b>14</b>

# Introduction

Youth leadership development has the potential to solve community problems, enhance civic participation, and promote direct benefits for adults, organizations, and communities through stronger connections to young people in the community. Since 2007, DYCD has supported youth leadership efforts with its Teen ACTION (Achieving Change Together in Our Neighborhoods) and Youth Councils, funded as part of the Beacon and Cornerstone programs. More recently, youth leadership development was included as a requirement for middle school programs as part of the 2008 OST RFP and the SONYC expansion. The purpose of the DYCD Youth Leadership Development Framework (see Appendix A, “Why Youth Leadership?”) is to promote a common language for youth leadership development and to help providers map out and design quality youth leadership programming; it was designed to answer the question: “What is youth leadership development?” This framework guides training and professional learning opportunities for program leaders and staff members; it also underpins this self-reflection tool.

## Purpose of the Self-Reflection Tool

The self-reflection tool is grounded in the core components of the Youth Leadership Development Framework and is informed by the literature on high-quality youth leadership practices. This self-reflection tool mirrors the common language and practices identified in the leadership framework. Importantly, we recognize that any authentic guidance on implementing youth leadership practices would hold young people responsible as the primary agents of their own positive development. This tool covers the adult role in that process with an eye on supporting the young person’s role in his or her development as a leader.

This self-reflection tool includes guidance on the supports for high-quality practice. The self-reflection Youth Leadership Development rubric begins on page 2 and identifies 29 indicators in three core components: skill building, action, and reflection. Following the rubric, we provide additional background on the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) Youth Leadership Development Framework and we close with guidance on how to use the reflection tool to improve practice through action planning.

This self-reflection tool is not intended to be used for high-stakes evaluation. Rather, its primary purpose is to do the following:

- Promote a shared understanding among program leaders and staff of the core components of high quality practices that promote youth leadership development.
- Allow staff members to reflect upon their practices.
- Encourage staff members to use the indicators in the tool to improve their practices over time.

We encourage program leaders and staff to discuss their reflections with each other and with youth in their program. Using the information from the self-reflection tool and action planning template (page 8), programs can work together to make plans for program improvements. Additional information on supports for youth development practices is found in Appendix B on page 12.

## How to Use This Self-Reflection Tool

Program staff should use this tool to consider whether and how they implement leadership practices in skill building, action, and reflection. Each item in the tool encourages staff to reflect on the planned program activities and experiences that they foster for youth in the program.

# Youth Leadership Development Practices Rubric

The leadership rubric consists of three core sections: skill building, action, and reflection. These items are based on the opportunities for activities and experiences in these areas for the youth in your program. Program staff should reflect on these practices, and ratings should be based on how often and how well you implement each practice, using a 1-3-5 scale that ranges from “I rarely implement this practice” to “I implement this practice extremely well.”

**Use the following scale to fill out the Self-Rating column:**

- 1 = I rarely implement this practice; when I do, I struggle or have a difficult time implementing it.
- 3 = I implement this practice reasonably well. Sometimes I do a reasonable job, but sometimes I have challenges. I think with more practice or some support, I could implement this practice well.
- 5 = I implement this practice extremely well. I use this practice all of the time, and it is highly successful with youth.

In addition to the self-rating section, we provide space to take notes on your self-ratings and reflection. At the end of each section, we include tips and strategies for explicit and embedded practices. Refer to the *DYCD Youth Leadership Glossary* for additional examples and strategies.

## Section 1: Attitude and Skill Development

FOCUS ON KEY LEADERSHIP ATTITUDES AND SKILLS		
Item	Self-Rating	Notes
<b>Inner Self Characteristics</b>		
Ensure youth have opportunities to exhibit and continue to develop a <b>sense of motivation</b> by setting long-term goals for the future and setting high standards for themselves.		
Ensure youth have opportunities to develop and practice <b>self-awareness</b> by describing their feelings, developing an awareness of how their moods affect other people, admitting their mistakes, and understanding what skills they can improve on.		

Use the following scale to fill out the Self-Rating column:

1 = I rarely implement this practice; when I do, I struggle or have a difficult time implementing it.

3 = I implement this practice reasonably well. Sometimes I do a reasonable job, but sometimes I have challenges. I think with more practice or some support, I could implement this practice well.

5 = I implement this practice extremely well. I use this practice all of the time, and it is highly successful with youth.

FOCUS ON KEY LEADERSHIP ATTITUDES AND SKILLS		
Item	Self-Rating	Notes
<b>Inner Self Characteristics</b>		
Ensure youth have opportunities to develop and practice <b>persistence</b> by following through on promises, focusing on goals despite difficulties, and refusing to give up easily.		
<b>Strategy</b>		
<p><b>Be explicit:</b> First, name the skill you are focusing on and explain what it is. Give examples of what that skill might look like in the real world and encourage youth to practice that skill independently or by role playing. Give feedback, discuss, and continue to practice.</p> <p><b>Embed it:</b> Be on the lookout for opportunities that may arise where these skills become important. If a disagreement among youth occurs, work with them to practice self-awareness and use strategies to identify emotions, for example. If youth are playing sports, engage in an impromptu discussion of their abilities and sense of motivation.</p>		
<b>Communication</b>		
Ensure youth have opportunities to be <b>inspirational</b> by having a positive attitude, showing appreciation or giving praise, and helping others.		
Ensure youth have opportunities to exhibit and continue developing a <b>sense of confidence</b> by believing in themselves, learning how to disagree openly and constructively, and feeling comfortable talking in a group and with authority figures.		
Ensure youth have opportunities to practice <b>active listening</b> by paying attention, listening carefully, and asking questions to understand.		
Ensure youth have opportunities to practice <b>communicating effectively</b> by understanding how to get along with others who are different and disagreeing without starting an argument.		

Use the following scale to fill out the Self-Rating column:

- 1 = I rarely implement this practice; when I do, I struggle or have a difficult time implementing it.
- 3 = I implement this practice reasonably well. Sometimes I do a reasonable job, but sometimes I have challenges. I think with more practice or some support, I could implement this practice well.
- 5 = I implement this practice extremely well. I use this practice all of the time, and it is highly successful with youth.

FOCUS ON KEY LEADERSHIP ATTITUDES AND SKILLS		
Item	Self-Rating	Notes
<b>Communication</b>		
Ensure youth have the opportunity to <b>persuade</b> others by gaining support from peers, identifying how actions can show others what they want, and changing others' opinions by talking to them and persuading them to agree.		
<b>Strategy</b>		
<p><b>Be explicit:</b> Discuss and identify styles and types of effective communication, provide feedback, and encourage youth to reflect on their experience. Practice by engaging in small and large group activities and discussions where youth engage in a variety of roles including the speaker and the listener.</p> <p><b>Embed it:</b> Create opportunities for communication (e.g., speaker or listener) in content-based activities. For example, youth can present their innovative ideas in a STEM club or engage in constructive debate during a public speaking group.</p>		
<b>Collaboration</b>		
Encourage youth to create a <b>shared purpose</b> through collaborative relationships, including others who have been "left out," and working toward a common goal.		
Ensure youth have opportunities to be a <b>convener</b> by bringing people together, listening to others when making decisions, and acting as a "role model" for others.		
Ensure youth have opportunities to practice <b>delegating and organizing people</b> by understanding and respecting differences, assigning the right people to the right jobs, and understanding the emotions of others.		
<b>Strategy</b>		
<p><b>Be explicit:</b> Lead activities that are clearly intended to build relationships and foster collaboration. Discuss the necessary skills at the beginning and work with youth to identify ways in which they will demonstrate the necessary skills. For example, project-based activities require youth to plan, make decisions, and solve problems collaboratively. Offer feedback as youth work together.</p> <p><b>Embed it:</b> Afterschool program activities are ideal for creating scenarios that benefit from young people working together, solving problems, and resolving conflicts if they come up. (They will!) Make sure content-based activities offer multiple opportunities for youth to plan together, work in teams, and build relationships. Also, look for opportunities to allow youth to resolve conflicts independently or with coaching and guidance.</p>		

Use the following scale to fill out the Self-Rating column:

1 = I rarely implement this practice; when I do, I struggle or have a difficult time implementing it.

3 = I implement this practice reasonably well. Sometimes I do a reasonable job, but sometimes I have challenges. I think with more practice or some support, I could implement this practice well.

5 = I implement this practice extremely well. I use this practice all of the time, and it is highly successful with youth.

## Section 2: Action

LEARN BY DOING LEADERSHIP		
Item	Self-Rating	Notes
<b>Motivate</b>		
Provide youth with opportunities to act as a <b>role model</b> .		
Ensure youth have the opportunity to inspire and <b>motivate others</b> .		
<b>Strategy</b>		
<p><b>Be explicit:</b> Discuss with youth what it means to be a role model and ask youth to identify role models in their lives. Ask youth to write down strategies for motivating others, and encourage them to practice those strategies during activities so they can report back on their progress at a later date.</p> <p><b>Embed it:</b> Bring in content experts from the field to work with youth on projects related to their interest (e.g., arts) and ensure that youth have opportunities to both lead and participate in content-based activities. Provide apprenticeship opportunities for youth who are established in a certain content area or who have been retained in the program.</p>		
<b>Learn From Mistakes</b>		
Allow youth to <b>learn from mistakes</b> independently or in a group through observation, reflection, and problem solving.		
Provide youth with the time it takes to <b>commit</b> to a task, idea, or problem.		
Encourage youth to <b>persist</b> with tasks, ideas, or problems despite barriers.		



Use the following scale to fill out the Self-Rating column:

1 = I rarely implement this practice; when I do, I struggle or have a difficult time implementing it.

3 = I implement this practice reasonably well. Sometimes I do a reasonable job, but sometimes I have challenges. I think with more practice or some support, I could implement this practice well.

5 = I implement this practice extremely well. I use this practice all of the time, and it is highly successful with youth.

LEARN BY DOING LEADERSHIP		
Item	Self-Rating	Notes
<b>Learn From Mistakes</b>		
Provide time, space, and opportunities for youth to <b>master</b> skills during content-based activities.		
<b>Strategy</b>		
<p><b>Be explicit:</b> Provide opportunities to role-play situations where youth make mistakes. Discuss how mistakes make them feel, what they could do differently, how they can learn from mistakes, and identify strategies for persisting with tasks.</p> <p><b>Embed it:</b> Create activities and offer facilitation that allows time and space for youth to succeed, make mistakes, and rectify those mistakes in content-based activities. If you witness situations where youth make mistakes, engage in discussion in the moment that promotes reflection and learning. Ensure that activities provide enough time and space for skill mastery.</p>		
<b>Engage School and Community</b>		
Provide youth with opportunities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ to identify, plan, and execute service learning projects</li> <li>■ for active civic engagement in the school and community</li> <li>■ to plan, organize, participate in, and lead youth councils in the program, school, or community</li> <li>■ to act as a counselor or leader in training</li> </ul>		
<b>Strategy</b>		
<p><b>Be explicit:</b> Offer public-speaking workshops and writing clubs that allow youth to learn, practice, and teach public speaking and writing in a structured format. Engage in a group discussion to figure out which skills are necessary for the upcoming activity, provide feedback, and encourage youth to reflect on their experience.</p> <p><b>Embed it:</b> Include aspects of public speaking and writing in content-based activities. For example, youth can write scripts in a theater program, or present their innovative ideas in a STEM club.</p>		

Use the following scale to fill out the Self-Rating column:

1 = I rarely implement this practice; when I do, I struggle or have a difficult time implementing it.

3 = I implement this practice reasonably well. Sometimes I do a reasonable job, but sometimes I have challenges. I think with more practice or some support, I could implement this practice well.

5 = I implement this practice extremely well. I use this practice all of the time, and it is highly successful with youth.

## Section 3: Reflection

REFLECT ON ACTION		
Item	Self-Rating	Notes
Provide <b>continuous</b> opportunities for youth to reflect on the task, action, or experience.		
Provide opportunities for youth to reflect on the <b>connections</b> between the task, action, or experience and other experiences (e.g., feelings and the world around them).		
Provide opportunities for youth to reflect by <b>challenging</b> them to think critically about their ideas.		
Provide opportunities for youth to reflect on whether the activity or experience was meaningful in their <b>context</b> .		
Remind youth to <b>recognize their accomplishments</b> as a part of their reflection.		
Work with youth to <b>make new plans</b> based on their reflection (continuous, connection, challenge, and context).		
<b>Strategy</b>		
<p><b>Be explicit:</b> Plan opportunities for youth to discuss what they are doing, feeling, or thinking as they engage in activities. Provide real-time feedback that recognizes accomplishments and encourage youth to do the same.</p> <p><b>Embed it:</b> Offer reflective, content-based activities. For example, start an online journaling program and encourage youth to create weekly prompts or create art projects on topics that reflect individuals and experiences</p>		

# Reflect to Improve: Scoring Your Self-Reflection and Action Planning

An important learning process for young people and staff involves evaluating and eliciting feedback. Evaluations can focus on the usefulness of the program and activities, the relevance of the activity, suggestions for changes, and identifying ways in which participants might apply what they learned. Staff and community members involved in the program also can give (and receive) constructive feedback regarding skills, how individuals are perceived, and their effectiveness as leaders. It is important to develop an atmosphere of trust and acceptance so participants are comfortable with both giving and receiving feedback (Doherty, 2003).

Remember: If at any point during the self-reflection process you find yourself thinking that your program is unsafe, that youth are not demonstrating a connection to the program, or that things are feeling too chaotic, please refer to Appendix B for supports for youth leadership development practices to ensure the “musts” (supportive environment, intentional design, and curriculum and instruction) are in place prior to engaging in skill-building activities.

This reflection tool is a form of self-assessment that can be a part of a crucial, low-stakes process intended for program improvement. We encourage you to use your self-reflection scores either independently or with your program team to discuss strengths in implementation strategies, challenges, and opportunities for improvement. We have provided the template in the next section for your convenience in creating your action plan for improvement.

To complete the reflection tool, first add up the scores for each section and enter them in the table below. Next, calculate the percentage by dividing the total possible score by your score. Finally, use the worksheet on the next page to reflect on your scores.

ATTITUDE AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT: FOCUS ON KEY LEADERSHIP SKILLS		
Inner Self Characteristics	_____ out of 15	_____ %
Communication	_____ out of 25	_____ %
Collaboration	_____ out of 15	_____ %
ACTION: LEARN BY DOING LEADERSHIP		
Motivate	_____ out of 10	_____ %
Learn From Mistakes	_____ out of 20	_____ %
Engage School or Community	_____ out of 5	_____ %
REFLECTION: REFLECTION ON ACTION		
All items	_____ out of 30	_____ %

## Score Reflection Worksheet

Use this worksheet to reflect on your scores from the leadership rubric. You also can use your responses to the following reflection questions as you work with the DYCD “planning for leadership development programming” guide to create a more formal and intentional plan for youth leadership programming. If your program is working to develop or refine your logic model, these questions can support you in refining the inputs and activity-related outputs identified on the logic model template. Your notes and ideas for improvement from this table also can support action planning. Consider what resources and responsibilities would support continuous improvement of your leadership practices.

Reflection Question	Response	Notes and Ideas for Improvement
1. Which section (skill building, action, or reflection) had the highest overall score?		
2. Which section (skill building, action, or reflection) had the lowest overall score?		
3. Based on your scores, is there a specific <b>skill-building</b> area that you should focus on?		
4. What professional learning experiences may support improvement in this area?		
5. Based on your scores, is there a specific <b>action</b> area that would benefit from improvement?		
6. What professional learning experiences would support improvement in this area?		
7. What can you do to ensure that you are fully implementing <b>reflection</b> practices?		
8. Are there any other scores that stood out to you as an area in need of improvement? What supports do you need to make progress in this area?		
9. Are there any other scores that stood out to you as an area of strength? What can you do to capitalize on this area?		

# Appendix A.

## Why Youth Leadership?

*“Leadership is action, not position.” – Donald McGannon*

One of the most pressing issues facing today's youth-serving programs is how to best support youth in becoming productive, contributing members of society (Fox, Schroeder, & Lodi, 2003). This is especially true as youth reach middle school age, when they have more autonomy and opportunities for personal decision-making. Leadership development has become a critical component in youth programming as a strategy for working with youth, as these models increase young people's awareness of their strengths and limitations, help to establish personal and vocational goals, and build the self-confidence and motivation needed to achieve these goals. Moreover, leadership development opportunities support young people in building skills needed for success in today's world, such as goal setting, problem solving, and decision making. It increases greater understanding of the problems facing other youth and offers fresh perspectives for how to address these problems. Young people reenergize adults and counteract negative stereotypes of youth when they are engaged successfully in leadership within their communities.

### Youth Leadership Development Framework

Building on that rich history and in response to requests from SONYC providers, COMPASS's Program Quality and Innovation unit, Development Without Limits, and DYCD's program leadership partnered to create a framework for the youth leadership activity requirement. In 2014, DYCD partnered with American Institutes for Research (AIR) to engage in evaluation and resource development activities, including the development of this self-reflection tool.

The framework consists of three core components: skill building, action, and reflection.

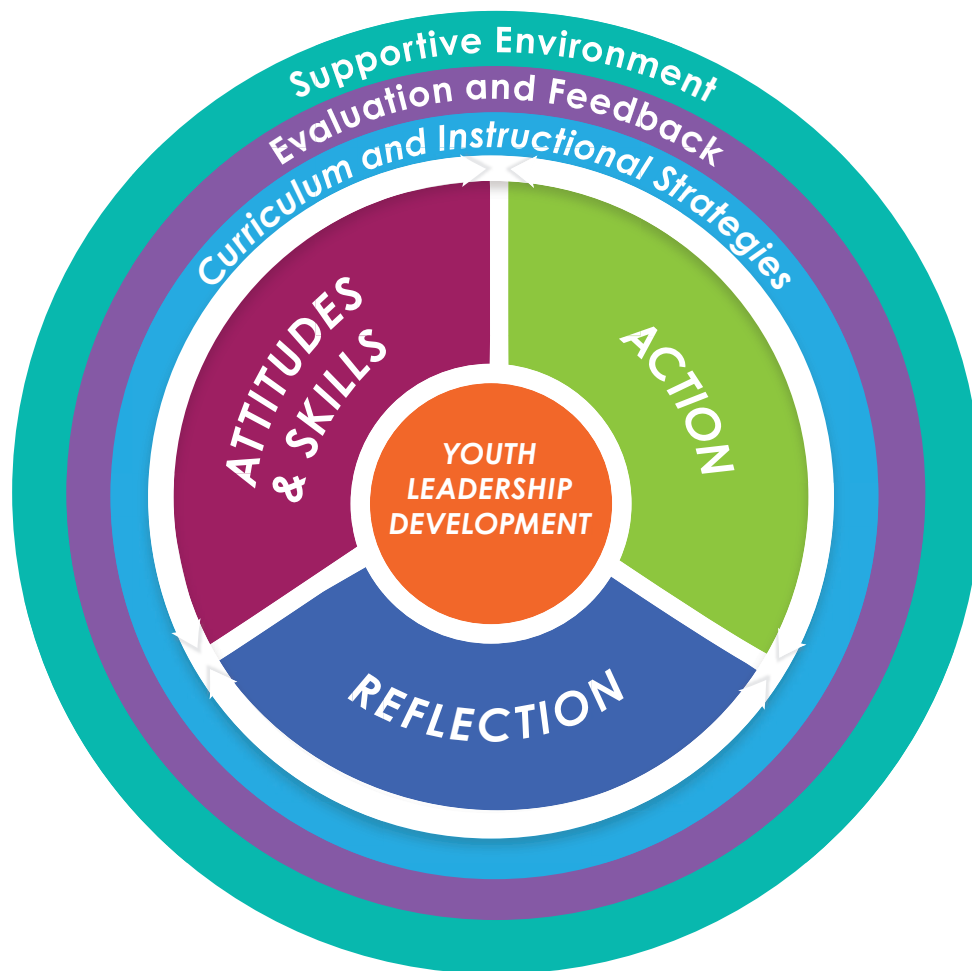
**Attitude and Skill Development.** Leadership attitudes and skills are essential for young people to feel satisfaction and contribute to their community, and activities can provide youth with opportunities to develop their skills, work closely with others, share ideas, and influence change.

**Action.** Without action, young people cannot learn to be leaders. Motivating others, learning to master new skills, and persevering through challenges are critical steps to youth leadership development.

**Reflection.** Reflection is a crucial part of youth leadership, which allows young people to look back on, think critically about, and learn from their experience or action.

Figure 1. DYCD Youth Leadership Development Framework

## YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT



### Focus on Key Leadership Attitudes & Skills

- Inner/Self Characteristics
- Communication
- Collaboration

### Learn By Doing Leadership

- Motivat
- Masterye
- Engage school and/or community

### Reflect on Action

- Continuous
- Connection
- Challenge
- Contextualize
- Recognize accomplishments
- Make new plans

### Create the right environmental conditions for leadership development

- Authentic opportunity
- Safe environment
- Community building
- Ask-listen-encourage
- Reframing conflict

# Appendix B.

## Supports for Youth Leadership Development Practices

In addition to the core components, programs must also have critical supports in place to ensure youth can engage fully in skill building, action, and reflection. First, programs must provide a **supportive environment** (safety, positive relationships, sense of belonging). Next, programs should offer **intentionally designed program activities** and experiences that use sound strategies for utilizing aligned **curriculum and instructional strategies**. Ultimately, program staff should be able to evaluate their practices based on their reflections to make improvements. In the section that follows, we describe the supports that are preconditions for skill building, action, and reflection. Following the self-reflection tool, the Reflect to Improve section (page 8) includes guidance on evaluation and action planning.

### Supportive Environment

We all can learn more and grow as people when we are engaged in environments where we feel safe and supported and have opportunities to develop positive relationships (Maslow, 1970). Staff should employ practices that support positive, purposeful interactions with participants (e.g., ask-listen-encourage) and create a high degree of rapport and mutual respect among group members. A supportive environment is the foundation for positive experiences and growth. Although it is beyond the scope of this tool to provide specific indicators for creating a supportive environment, we recommend reading the Forum for Youth Investment's 2009 comparison of several program quality assessment tools (Yohalem & Wilson-Ahlstrom, 2009).

Environments that foster leadership are no different. Young people can become leaders when they feel safe and supported. When the environment is a safe community for all youth, then they are able to take on challenges, risk possible failure, and step into leadership roles that promote learning. In a program where activities and experiences promote a safe and supportive environment, key environmental factors for youth leadership support (e.g., youth voice/choice, welcoming atmosphere, positive youth interactions, and opportunities for growth) are in place and demonstrated most of the time.

### Instructional Design and Strategies

**Intentional Design.** When developing and implementing program activities, program staff first should consider whether and how they are being intentional in the design of those experiences. This planning phase is a critical first step that sets a foundation for other curricular and instructional strategies. Research has shown that programs aimed toward fostering skill building need to structure activities intentionally so they are both focused on and explicitly incorporated into program activities (see Durlak and Weissberg [2007] for more information on “SAFE” activities). Although there are often unexpected experiences that contribute to our skill development, such experiences do not guarantee that we will build skills that will make us successful in life. Therefore, we recommend that you identify the skills you want youth to develop (they may be in the skill-building section of this tool), explicitly define these skills among your team members and with the youth in your program, and plan activities that allow young

people to learn about, practice, reflect, and master the skills. For more information about intentional activity design, refer to out-of-school time resources such as *Beyond the Bell: A Toolkit for Creating Effective Afterschool and Expanded Learning Programs*, or the online *Afterschool Training Toolkit* (McElvain, Moroney, Devaney, Singer, & Newman, 2014; National Partnership for Quality Afterschool, Learning, Jordan, Donnelly, & Heath, 2008).

**Leadership Activities and Experiences.** Activities that foster leadership should incorporate practices and processes that result in youth-centered programming that is deliberately focused on developing key leadership skills and creating a systemwide youth leadership culture within its environment. Activities may include (but are not limited to) community volunteerism; debate participation; training to be a peer mediator; participation in a youth advisory committee with the program, school, or community; learning activities about leadership principles and styles; mentoring relationship; resource-mapping activities that allow youth to take the lead in planning and carrying out a search of community resources or service learning; and developing a personal plan with goals, action steps, and deadlines. Throughout the program activities and experiences, there should be consistent and clear evidence of opportunity for youth skill building in self-awareness, motivation, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, social skills, collaboration, and communication. Moreover, youth and adults should work in partnership through a formal system, ensuring youth decision making and leadership with supportive adult input.

**Curriculum and Instructional Strategies.** The tools and methods that staff members use to impart information and facilitate an activity will vary from program to program. Some programs may opt to adopt a formal curriculum; others may have a homegrown curriculum specific to their mission and goals. Ultimately, we suggest that you ensure the curriculum and instructional strategies are designed for your setting, and that you and your colleagues are prepared to deliver the curriculum or modify as needed.

In addition to having a curriculum that provides the tools and resources that staff members need to plan an activity, program staff also need to consider the method of activity delivery. Research has shown that skill development is effective when activities explicitly target specific skills and outcomes (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007). Furthermore, the literature suggests that embedded opportunities for exploration and skill building promote youth engagement (Walker, Marczak, Blyth, & Borden, 2005). Because we know that youth learn best when they are engaged in what they are learning and have the opportunity to explore concepts and skills through a variety of formats, we suggest incorporating both explicit and embedded strategies for skill development throughout leadership development activities. In addition, there are a variety of instructional strategies that are well suited to an afterschool program including (but not limited to) ensuring that activities are hands-on and interactive, based on real-world situations, and purposeful and meaningful to the youth with whom you are working.

Likewise, many instructional strategies support program activities and experiences that are designed to promote youth leadership development. These may include opportunities for motivation and mastery, work-based learning, small group learning, reflection, coaching, modeling, experiential learning, and project-based learning. Across each activity or experience, it is key that youth are both self-directed and passionate about the activity and that they are able to direct many of the transitions and routines. Staff also should provide ongoing opportunities for youth to reflect using diverse methods (e.g., writing, speaking, listening, reading, drawing, acting, and any other way you can imagine).



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