

CAMP

Program Quality Assessment (PQA) SHORT FORM

CAMP NAME

CAMP SELF ASSESSMENT TEAM

DATE RANGE OF OBSERVATIONS

DESCRIPTION OF OBSERVATIONS (WHO OBSERVED WHAT)

How to use the Camp PQA SHORT FORM

Program Quality Assessment
SHORT FORM

The Camp PQA Short Form is designed for a team to use to examine, discuss, and plan to improve the quality of your camp.

The Short Form provides an introduction to the best practices of positive youth development contained in the full Camp PQA assessment tool. Steps for using the Short Form appear in the column on the right.

The Camp PQA is based on the HighScope Youth Program Quality Assessment, which was validated in 2004. The full Camp PQA is user-friendly enough to be used for self assessment and robust enough for reliable external assessment (note the Short Form is only for self assessment). Unlike the Short Form, the full Camp PQA produces a numeric score profile with supporting narrative, and includes three forms:

Form A is for program offerings, and is typically used 2-4 times in an external assessment. It contains 13 scales and assesses activity climate, learning environment, and support for youth engagement.

Form A2 assesses informal offerings at camp, such as meals, room group activities, and transitions.

Form B captures information about the overall camp, focused on program support and nature-based opportunities.

The full Camp PQA can be used with the Youth Program Quality Intervention (YPQI), a process scientifically proven to improve the quality of youth settings.

For more information on the full Camp PQA and the YPQI please contact the Weikart Center at (734) 961-6900, visit us online at cypq.org, or email info@cypq.org.

STEPS

1. Training and team selection

Decide who will conduct the Short Form assessment. We recommend a team with as many staff as possible – the entire camp program staff if possible. Once the team is chosen, they should receive training in observational note taking and use of the Short Form. Training in objective observation is critical and may determine how successful you are with the Short Form. This training is available from the American Camp Association.

2. Observation & note taking.

We recommend staff observe each other leading activities and take objective notes while watching. Observers should take notes on a separate paper (or laptop) and then complete the Short Form *after* the observation.

3. Camp quality meeting(s)

Next the assessment team can get together to discuss what they saw and what they think. It's important to remember people's feelings—it can be scary to have others give feedback about your youth work! The point is not to make anyone feel bad but to celebrate what staff do well and to identify areas for improvement.

4. Improvement planning

Ideally, the camp quality meeting should lead right into ideas for how to make things better (though this might be split into separate meetings). While it's great when this happens informally, it's even better if you put a plan in place to make improvements and to check in on progress. We recommend you identify overall strengths of your camp and identify no more than 3 specific areas that you seek to improve. Make sure you identify how you'll improve these areas and how you'll know they have improved. Later, have another meeting to discuss how the improvements went!

1 | Staff friendliness & circulation

BEST PRACTICES

Staff mainly use a warm tone of voice and respectful language. Staff generally smile, use friendly gestures, and make eye contact. When campers approach them, staff are attentive and responsive to campers.

Staff circulate (and spread out if multiple staff) to interact with every camper (in groups or individually) at some point during every activity. Staff interact one-on-one at least once with every (or almost every) camper during every activity. Staff are actively involved with campers (e.g., they provide directions, answer questions, work as partners or team members, check in with individuals or small groups).

OBSERVATIONS

REFLECTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

2 | Emotional safety

BEST PRACTICES

Staff shows respect for all campers and insists that campers show respect for each other (e.g., use kind words, take turns, help each other). Staff address any incidents in which a camper or campers are made fun of. Campers seem like they feel free to be themselves.

When there is a conflict or an incident involving strong feelings, staff ask about and/or acknowledge the feelings of the campers involved. Adults ask the campers what happened. When strong feelings are involved, staff consistently help campers respond appropriately (e.g., staff encourage campers to brainstorm possible solutions, take time to “cool off,” find an appropriate physical outlet, etc.)

OBSERVATIONS

REFLECTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

3 | Support for belonging

BEST PRACTICES

Throughout their camp experience, youth take part in many activities designed to help them feel a sense of belonging.

These activities may include:

- Individual welcomes
- Group welcomes
- Introductions
- Verbal icebreakers
- Physical icebreakers
- Challenge/problem-solving games
- Communication games
- Trust games
- Get-to-know-you games
- Self-awareness activities
- Name games
- Reflection/planning activities
- Partner activities

OBSERVATIONS

REFLECTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

4 | High expectations & good challenge

BEST PRACTICES

All campers are encouraged to try out new skills or attempt higher levels of performance. Staff provide intentional opportunities for development of specific skills (as opposed to activities with just a recreation or 'having fun' focus) for all campers in the session.

Campers seem challenged (in a good way) by the activities. Activities are appropriately challenging (not too easy, not too hard) for all or nearly all of the campers; there is little or no evidence of boredom or frustration on the part of campers. There is sufficient time for all of the activities (e.g., campers do not appear rushed, frustrated, bored, or distracted; most campers finish activities).

Staff members use questions effectively with campers. Staff frequently ask challenging questions (i.e., questions that make campers think, require more than a quick answer, etc.)

OBSERVATIONS

REFLECTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5 | Active and cooperative learning

BEST PRACTICES

Campers have opportunities for their brains to be active. This may or may not include hands-on or physical activities—but should include cognitive activities. This may include:

- Hands-on activities
- Problem-solving
- Tangible products
- Simulations
- Games with a purpose
- Abstract ideas and concrete experiences
- Deliberate practice on a skill
- Opportunities to manipulate ideas
- Opportunities to express creatively
- Opportunities to build with materials

Campers have the experience of collaborating with others. Activities include opportunities for campers to work toward shared goals and to have interdependent tasks (i.e., campers have different tasks or roles that come together for a task or project)

OBSERVATIONS

REFLECTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

6 | Camper Voice

BEST PRACTICES

Campers have a say in how they spend their time at the camp and during activities. All campers have the opportunity to make at least one open-ended choice within activities (e.g., campers decide roles, tools or materials, topics within a given subject area, subtopics, or aspects of a given topic). Staff actively encourage campers to take an activity in a new or unplanned direction (e.g., staff says, “Can you guys think of a better way to do this or how we might change this activity to make it more interesting or challenging?”; Staff supports campers’ suggestions/responses). Staff share control of most activities with campers, providing guidance and facilitation while retaining overall responsibility (e.g., staff use youth leaders, semiautonomous small groups, or individually guided activities).

OBSERVATIONS

REFLECTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

7 | Planning and Reflection

BEST PRACTICES

Campers have multiple opportunities to make individual or group plans for projects and activities (e.g., Written or sketched plan for a building project, verbal plans about an art project, staff asks, “what’s your plan?”). There is a specific time or times for planning during the session routine.

Campers have opportunities to look back on things they are doing and make learning connections. All campers are engaged in an intentional process of reflecting on what they are doing or have done (e.g., writing in journals; reviewing minutes; sharing progress, accomplishments, or feelings about the experience). Activities involve structured times in which staff ask campers debrief questions (e.g., questions that ask campers about the experiences they had in the activity).

OBSERVATIONS

REFLECTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

BEST PRACTICES

Campers have multiple opportunities to experience and explore outdoor areas. Camp activities utilize natural and outdoor settings. Campers have fun in nature. Staff are enthusiastic when outdoors with campers. Staff informally discuss and explore natural topics with campers. Staff encourage campers to experience nature with their senses—to touch, see, taste, smell, and hear nature.

OBSERVATIONS

REFLECTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS