SUMMER STARTS IN SEPTEMBER

A COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING GUIDE
### FOR SUMMER LEARNING PROGRAMS

choose your adventure

NATIONAL
SUMMER
LEARNING
ASSOCIATION

WHY DO WE SAY SUMMER STARTS IN SEPTEMBER?

We say "SS in S" because the process of planning, delivering and improving summer learning programs is continuous. So just as the summer program ends, planning for the next year should begin!

NSLA QUALITY IMPROVEMENT CYCLE
NSLA supports programs and networks to continuously improve their programs through a four-part annual quality improvement cycle:
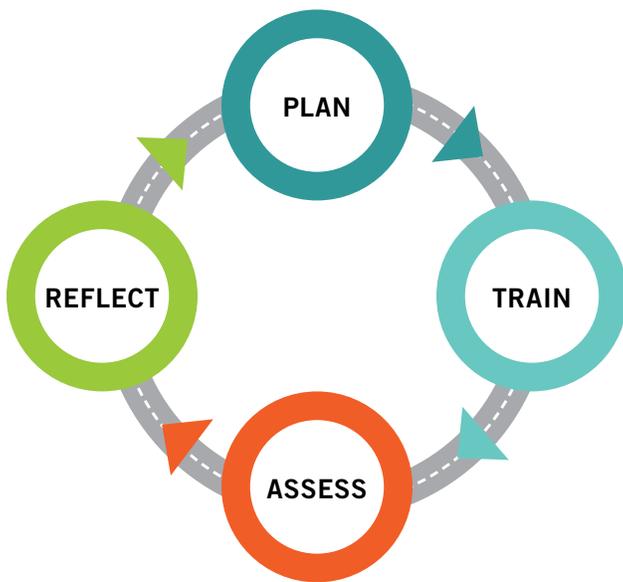
- **PLAN:** Set quality improvement goals and develop and implement a plan for achieving them

- **TRAIN:** Develop staff understanding and ownership of program quality goals and strategies

- **ASSESS:** Look for evidence of quality improvement during the program

- **REFLECT:** Review summer program data and debrief with key stakeholders

COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT OF SUMMER PROGRAMS
This guide and the Quality Improvement Cycle are brought to life by 80 summer learning quality indicators, developed and tested through years of partnership with summer learning programs, researchers and trainers. Together, these indicators make up the Comprehensive Assessment of Summer Programs (CASP). The CASP defines summer program quality in both planning and implementation in the following domains:

Purpose, Program Sustainability, Planning, Staff, Partnerships, Individualized, Intentional, Integrated and Unique Program Culture.

"SS in S" is full of information and ideas for integrating CASP quality into your program.

WHAT makes a high-quality summer learning program?

QUALITY MATTERS

Regular attendance in high-quality summer programs is associated with a range of positive academic and social development outcomes, including improved skills in literacy (Chaplin & Capizzano 2006) and math (Roderick & Nagaoka 2003), successful transition to the next grade (Cooper, et al. 1996), improved self-esteem and leadership skills (Bialeschki, Henderson and James 2007), increased attachment to the labor market and increased likelihood of future employment (Sum, et.al 2007). However, research in afterschool has shown that program attendance alone will not make a difference for young people and that **as many as half of existing programs show no positive youth outcomes** (Granger, Durlak, Yohalem and Reisner 2007). Rather, it takes a high quality program to make a lasting impact on youth.

Recent research from the RAND Corporation (McCombs, et.al 2011) confirms and adds to the foundational research on which the CASP is built. Researchers from RAND synthesized evidence from research about summer learning loss and the effectiveness of programs and found the four following indicators of quality to be integral to preventing summer learning loss:

> **Program attendance alone will not make a difference for young people. Research shows that as many as half of existing programs show no positive youth outcomes.**

1. High-quality instruction (hiring effective and motivated teachers and providing professional development)
2. Aligned school-year and summer curricula
3. Engaging and rigorous programming
4. Maximized participation and attendance

Studies show several additional program components that are related to improved achievement for summer program attendees:
- small-group or individualized instruction;
- early intervention during the primary grades;
- parent involvement and participation; and
- careful scrutiny for treatment fidelity, including monitoring to ensure that instruction is being delivered as prescribed.

On the other hand, studies of summer programs suggest that failed summer programs may share several of the following characteristics:
- short program duration;
- loose organization and little time for advanced planning;
- low academic expectations; and
- limited academic focus.

In addition, a variety of research on promising practices of afterschool programs informs indicators of quality for summer programs. Research-based practices include an intentional focus on learning (McLaughlin 2000); a broad array of enrichment opportunities; intentional relationship building (Birmingham, Pechman & Mielke 2005); opportunities for skill-building and mastery; inclusion of youth voice (Miller 2003); and support for sustainability.

CASP indicators were selected based on research, and defined through a rating scale based on information gleaned through program site visits, written narrative reports and in-depth interviews with staff. The purpose of the CASP rating scale is to define the progression of quality from a program that has not addressed a particular indicator (1-Basic) to a program that achieves exemplary quality in an indicator (4-Exemplary). The scale provides a clear pathway to improvement for programs.

P-CASP: A Phased CASP Self-Assessment

A self-assessment is an important way to begin a quality improvement process. The P-CASP is designed to initiate conversation among program staff about the program's quality and to match evidence about the program's strengths and weaknesses with the quality rating scale within the tool. At the end of the self-assessment process, programs will have agreed on scores of 1-4 for each indicator and will have an aligned Quality Improvement Plan that reflects the program's priorities for quality improvement this year.

The indicators in this self-assessment are drawn from the Comprehensive Assessment of Summer Programs, a set of 80 research-based indicators of program quality. The selected indicators have been identified as critical levers to improving summer program quality and therefore, priority areas for planning and quality improvement. They are organized into four progressive phases, as described on *page 21* in the *Which Quality Improvements Should Come First?* overview.

In general, the indicators are intended to reflect a hierarchy of program quality - with the indicators in Phases One and Two seen as most foundational to program quality and those in Phases Three and Four being appropriate for programs that have already achieved high quality in Phases One and Two. The rating scale is designed to help programs make honest, objective ratings. Here is a simple way to think about the ratings:

1   "We haven't started to work on this yet" **(BASIC)**

2   "We could use some improvement in this area" **(EMERGING)**

3   "We have a good foundation in this area, but could use some additional focus to take it to the next level of quality" **(PROFICIENT)**

**4**   "We are exemplary in this area and are a model for other summer programs" **(EXEMPLARY)**

Ways to use the P-CASP:

- **Individual Survey to Discussion:** Complete survey independently, tally results and discuss as a group.

- **Small Group Survey to Discussion:** Complete the survey in small groups and have each group report or record their scores to be tallied. Discuss as a group to come to consensus.

- **Consensus-Based Survey:** Walk through each indicator as a group and come to real-time consensus on the scores.

Overview of Domain Roadmaps

In the following chapters, you will find a Domain Roadmap for each of the nine CASP domains.

Each Roadmap is organized by quality indicator (in alignment with the Quick Reference Guide on *page 43*). So, you'll find background information, quality improvement strategies and tools and resources connected to each indicator in each domain. Following is a description of how each chapter is laid out:
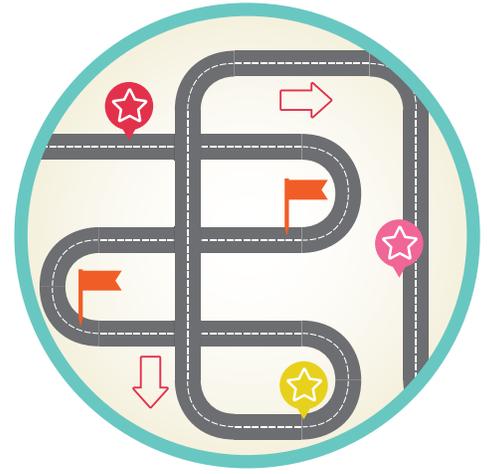
Background Knowledge and Strategies

Each Roadmap contains a section of content designed to build the reader's background knowledge on each indicator in the domain. Within this section, quality indicators are called out with bold text and a star icon.

Proposed quality improvement strategies and ideas are included throughout each Background Knowledge and Strategies section. These strategies are designed to provide ideas for engaging staff or accessing resources to improve a particular program practice and are noted with a lightbulb icon.

Tools and Resources

After all indicators have been addressed, each Roadmap section contains a list of tools and resources found in the manual and online.

Domain Roadmap
PURPOSE

START

Average Daily Attendance

Grounded Mission and Vision

Recruitment and Enrollment

Youth Retention

Stakeholder Feedback

Quality Improvement Goals

Youth Outcome Goals

Goal Measurement

Data Collection Methods

Staff Retention

Collection and Analysis of Data by Staff

FINISH

⭐ 3. Youth Outcome Goals

Once you have established the needs of your community of learners you will meet in the summer, you can begin to work with staff to identify the relationship between the program's inputs, activities and changes or results you hope to achieve. You can visually represent these relationships through a logic model, an evaluation tool that facilitates effective program planning, implementation and evaluation. The Logic Model Planning Tool (*page 75*) is a great tool to guide you through this process.

Beginning with the end in mind is the centerpiece of outcomes-based planning, and starting with long term outcomes, instead of with inputs, allows you to effectively align staff and youth recruitment, partnerships and resource allocation with the goals of your program. As you establish a logic model, realize that it is an organic, dynamic representation of what you do and how you do it. The logic model can and should be changed over time to reflect your evolving thinking in response to new information.

Long-term outcomes
Long-term outcomes should reflect the change that you desire to foster in participants after 2-5 years of programming. Compared to goals or objectives, long-term outcomes can be phrased in a higher level, slightly more general language. They simply answer, *in what way will youth be different after attending the program for 2-5 years that is a direct result of program attendance?*

Short-term outcomes
After setting a few long term outcome goals, set short-term outcome goals that reflect progress made toward each long term outcome this summer. Goals should be SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-limited) and should take into consideration whether or not it is possible to collect baseline data. For example, a goal should not be written to measure change from the previous summer unless you have data on the goal from the previous summer.

💡 OUTCOME GOAL DESIGN

In general, a weak goal may only reflect access or exposure to something and is not measurable or time-limited. An output goal may be appropriate in some circumstances, but does not reflect a change in skill, knowledge or behavior and therefore is not as strong as an outcome goal.

- Weak Goal: Youth will have access to reading materials.

- Output Goal: All youth will read at least five age-appropriate chapter books this summer.

- Outcome Goal: At least 75% of youth participants will show an increase in engagement in reading from the beginning to the end of the program.

Aim High – Strategic Planning (Vision 2015) and Building an Organization Learning Culture

In 1986, Alec Lee and Eleanor McBride co-founded Aim High with the idea of giving urban middle school students a summer of high quality learning in an environment that promoted education as a way to unlock the future. They chose to focus on middle school students because research pointed to the time between elementary school and high school as a critical juncture for keeping at-risk students engaged in their education, a moment when a little intervention could go a long way to helping students graduate from high school.
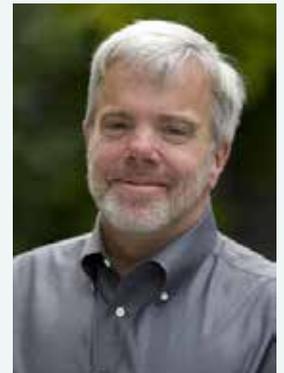
Aim High began with one campus in San Francisco, where Alec and Eleanor were teachers. The San Francisco Foundation gave them a two-year grant to get the program started. "We didn't even have a name for the program," Lee says, "but we had an idea of what it might look like. We wanted to create a place that celebrated progressive teaching and learning, a place where it's safe for kids to learn, make new friends, take risks, and try new things." What students now call the "Aim High Magic"—the idea that opportunities are available all around us if we know how to make the most of them—was present from the beginning.

Over the past 28 summers, Aim High has expanded from one campus to 14, from 50 students and 12 teachers to over 1,450 students and 400 teachers. The program has become a pipeline for developing young teachers by giving them an opportunity for hands-on experience while working with a master teacher. In addition, many of Aim High's graduates continue to work as teaching assistants and interns during their high school and college years, often working alongside the very teachers who inspired them while they were in the program.

Looking back on those heady, inspiring early days of Aim High, it is somewhat amazing that we started the program with no strategic plan or clear idea of outcomes. Many years into our organizational journey, we created our first strategic plan, Vision 2010. This plan was essentially about "doing more"—creating more summer campuses and serving more students. The need in the Bay Area was clearly acute. That original plan served us well though we still did not have a clear sense of outcomes and causality.

Aim High Executive Director Alec Lee

In 2010 we were chosen by the GAP Foundation and the Bridgespan Group to participate in a pro bono strategic plan initiative titled, "Doing More Good Better." It was a rigorous and highly rewarding process and the end result was VISION 2015. This strategic plan has served as a much more sophisticated planning tool for the organization. Instead of "doing more," the hallmark of the plan is our three pillars: Strategic and targeted growth, deepening quality and measuring impact. We have tried, mostly successfully, to weigh these equally. We use the three pillars as a starting point for our annual staff and board retreat. We refer to them regularly in our weekly staff meetings. We make budget and resources decisions based on the three pillars.

This current strategic plan became a pivot point for the organization: Instead of being strictly about growth, we became as much about quality and impact. For example, we have invested in social workers at our most high-need campuses; we have build an online platform of curriculum tools and best practices for faculty; and, lastly, we have made significant investments in gathering data and using that data to assess impact and create and organizational learning culture.

The program has become a pipeline for developing young teachers by giving them an opportunity for hands-on experience while working with a master teacher.

✔ Assess the Current State of Your Staff Development

© National Summer Learning Association

Think through the practical aspects of delivering staff development to your summer staff. Use this information to inform your choices of staff development structures and topics.

Do we have a budget line specifically for staff development? How much can we spend? Is there time to write staff development and paid time for planning into the budget?

_____

_____

Do we require all staff members to participate in staff development as part of their jobs? _____

Do we link staff development and performance evaluation? Do we recommend staff development opportunities? Do we count participation in staff development as a "plus" for performance evaluation?

_____

_____

What training content and schedule do we already have in place? What has already been scheduled? What training components from previous years do we want to repeat?

_____

_____

Who are our full-time staff? How many year-round staff are available? How many full-time seasonal staff? When are they available for staff development?

_____

How many seasonal staff will be new? How many returning? _____

When are all staff available for staff development? _____

What methods have worked well to deliver training to our staff? Based on previous experience, what approaches to staff development have worked best with our staff?

_____

_____

_____

Youth Development Standards

Developmental or social-emotional learning is an important complement to academic learning that out-of-school time programs are particularly well positioned to address. In the Integrated chapter (*page 167*) you can find some examples of activities, units and projects that blend academic learning with social-emotional learning. In order to ensure that a program's developmental targets are building skills at the right level, the Search Institute offers comprehensive lists of developmental assets by age group as well as an Activity Generator and a Conversation Generator with simple ideas and prompts for incorporating developmental assets into activities and programs. Visit www.search-institute.org for more information.

🔍 PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: BOSTON SUMMER LEARNING PROJECT

The Excellence Award-winning Boston Summer Learning Project, a partnership of Boston Public Schools, Boston Afterschool and Beyond and the Boston Opportunity Agenda, developed a curriculum that aligns with Common Core goals around building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction texts and reading writing and speaking grounded in evidence from text.

SLP sites follow a three-tiered paradigm to make academics and skill development fun, challenging, and relevant to students. All sites are driven by an essential question, a concept co-developed by BPS and the Center for Collaborative Education. Essential questions promote inquiry-based learning and the connection of all site activities. For example, at Camp Ponkapoag where the YMCA partnered with five BPS schools, students answered, "How are humans related to nature?" Students wrote and illustrated books about woodland animals, and discussed habitats in groups during hikes and adaptation to different environments during swim class.

The essential question enables sites to incorporate academic and skill mastery into exciting, engaging activities. In alignment with SLP evaluation, this allows students to master critical thinking, build relationships with their peers and teachers, and develop confidence for success. This approach aligns with Boston's Achieve-Connect-Thrive (ACT) skills framework.

Introducing Your Staff to the Common Core

Provide your staff with academic and developmental standards by grade level for the youth they serve by accessing the Common Core and Search Institute web resources. You can also utilize youth development training for your frontline staff, such as Advancing Youth Development from the Youth Development Training and Resource Center or a variety of trained consultants around the country. You can also research Common Core-aligned curriculum or curriculum maps depending on your program's theme or goal. Gathering samples of curriculum and units will bring the Common Core to life for program staff and aid in planning the program.

Background Knowledge and Strategies

⭐ **63. Integration of Academic and Developmental Focus**

Once your program has researched both academic and developmental standards by grade level, integrating the two into the same activities can be the most fun, and most challenging, part. The purpose of having a quality domain focused on the integration of programming that supports academic and developmental growth is that traditionally, many summer programs have followed a model of academics in the morning (often remedial) and enrichment in the afternoon. Programs that get kids hooked, and change the way they feel about learning, make the whole day engaging, active and fun, instead of making youth feel like learning is the task and play is the reward. This isn't to say that an academic focus in the morning is a bad idea. After a good breakfast, morning can be a great, fresh and alert time for both staff and youth to tackle deep thinking and stretch their mental muscles. Just make sure you can sustain the blend of learning and development throughout the whole day.

So what does an integrated activity look like?
From our experience, programs that design their summer programs with a core theme such as social justice, leadership, healthy behaviors or career exploration often have the best platform for developing meaningfully integrated activities.

The Sadie Nash Leadership Project is designed to guide young women through a process in which they come to understand the importance of their individual life experiences, and how these experiences can be applied to taking action and making change. SNLP is an educational and advocacy program that provides young women the opportunity to analyze and explore the very nature of leadership.

Model:
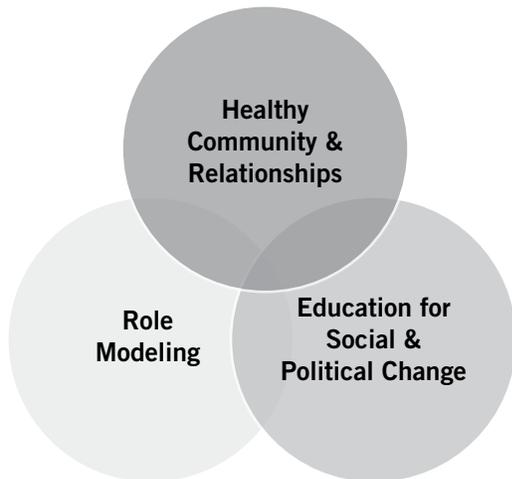
Background Knowledge and Strategies

⭐ **75. Program Spirit**

Now for the really fun part! Programs will need to supplement their curriculum with the daily and weekly traditions, themes, and events that make the program unique and define its culture.

Summer culture and program spirit are important staff training and planning topics. While it's important to have an existing culture and traditions for the program for new staff, it's also valuable to allow each summer's staff to develop and set some new traditions of which they feel ownership. Don't forget to work with programs to brainstorm some great ideas to bond youth together and bond youth with staff. Here are some ideas:

- Town hall-style meetings with youth
- Cheers, chants and team designations to build spirit
- Daily competitions and awards
- Shout-outs and other recognitions and acknowledgements
- Incorporation of music or other entertainment into daily activities
- Fun and youth-centered activity space and environment
- Program space that represents the work and ideas of youth and staff

🔍 **PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: SUMMER DREAMERS ACADEMY**

Pittsburgh Public School's Summer Dreamers Academy starts every day with an All Camp Meeting designed to energize and motivate staff and youth for the day. They have a signature program chant that sets the tone for the day and reinforces the expectations of participants to dream big and realize the Pittsburgh Promise—a college scholarship program for PPS students. The chant goes, in part:

I am a Big Dreamer
I know what to do
I will grad-u-ate
And I'll **GET** the Promise too!

WE have got the knowledge
WE have lots of fun
WE will go to college
And show **YOU** just how it's done!

Now, **IF** you want to doubt us
And **DON'T** believe it's true
Then **COME** to Summer Dreamers
And **SEE** what we can do!

Harlem RBI - Culminating Event

Harlem RBI's mission is to provide inner-city youth with opportunities to play, learn and grow. Harlem RBI uses the power of teams to coach, teach and inspire youth to recognize their potential and realize their dreams. The organization began in 1991 when a group of local volunteers transformed an abandoned, garbage-strewn lot into two baseball diamonds for the youth of East Harlem. Since that time, Harlem RBI has evolved from a seasonal rec-reation program into a nationally recognized youth development and education organization serving more than 1,400 youth between the ages of 5 and 22 each year.

The REAL Kids Program provides summer programming in a youth-centered learning environment for boys and girls in grades K-5. After 22 years, Harlem RBI will expand its work outside of East Harlem for the first time and deliver this award-winning program to the Mott Haven section of the South Bronx. Starting on July 2, more than 750 youth in East Harlem and the South Bronx will avoid summer learning loss and receive quality, comprehensive and professionally facilitated programs in literacy, social-emotional learning and baseball/softball for six intensive weeks.

At each grade level, REAL Kids signature programs such as Workshop (Literacy), Clubhouse (Team Building) and Baseball/Softball each have a special culminating event that provides participants an opportunity to showcase their work to the Harlem RBI community. REAL Kids events are directed by Campus Culture Coordinators, who are well versed in planning. These coordinators are deeply invested in Harlem RBI youth, and put youth at the center of all activities.

In Workshop, participants celebrate their achievements in literacy with a Publishing Party where they read from original pieces. This celebration also features a gallery of projects, which range from creative board games inspired by popular works of literature to theatrical pieces written by youth based on their favorite stories.

Clubhouse activities end with Exhibition Day, where youth display projects they have carefully and collaboratively planned for weeks. Examples of team projects include a team museum, comic books, movies and even press conferences. Each Exhibition Day has a theme based on one of the Harlem RBI core values of teamwork, respect, diversity, promise, effort, integrity and fun.
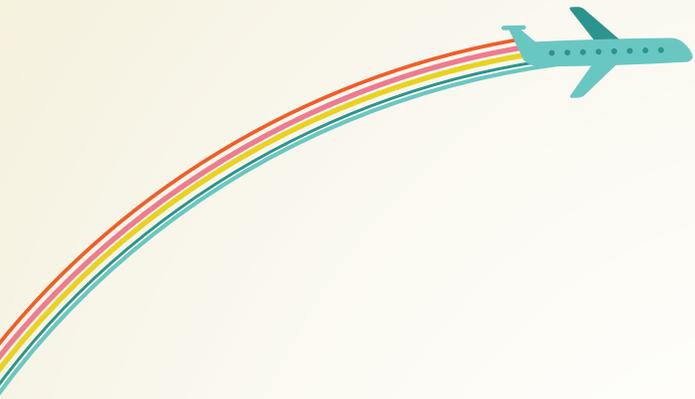
Baseball and Softball activities culminate in REAL Kids Championship Day when youth cheer on their peers throughout the day on the Field of Dreams. Participants also have the opportunity to test their voices for play-by-play announcing. The day ends with a trophy celebration when all youth perform their team cheer and receive a trophy.

Youth invest deeply in these celebratory events. Staff consistently use feedback from youth to ensure that they play an integral role in the planning stages of these events. The end product is a youth-driven, authentic experience for the Harlem RBI community as a whole.

Harlem RBI uses the power of teams to coach, teach and inspire youth to recognize their potential and realize their dreams.

HARLEM RBI
PLAY • LEARN • GROW