

Minimum Quality Standards for Youth Workforce Programs *

KEY:

Threshold Requirement: Threshold standards that should be requirements to apply.

Weighted Standard: Standards that should be reviewed/weighted in a grant application

Category 1 - Management for Quality

Management for Quality addresses standards for program management: the foundation for program direction, systems and operations.

Quality management of a youth program is not that different from quality management of a business. The standards in this category encourage program operators to apply practices usually associated with the private sector -- planning, review, analysis, accountability and quality assurance -- to their youth program. :

Mission

- **Threshold Requirement:** All aspects of the program form a coherent strategy for supporting and accomplishing the mission of the organization.

Leadership

- **Threshold Requirement:** The program ensures that roles and responsibilities of senior staff and any responsible boards are clearly defined.
- **Threshold Requirement:** The program hires senior staff with the experiences and credentials needed to achieve the program's mission.

Staff

- **Threshold Requirement:** The program ensures that position descriptions and qualifications for staff positions are clearly defined and reflect competencies (knowledge, skills and abilities) needed to perform each position effectively.
- **Weighted Standard:** The program invests in staff development as part of a management strategy to build staff capabilities, reduce staff turnover and achieve program goals.

Financial Management

- **Threshold Requirement:** The organization operates on an annual budget projecting income and expenditures and regularly monitors its performance against the budget.
- **Threshold Requirement:** The organization follows generally accepted accounting procedures, including internal financial controls and maintenance of records.

Performance Accountability

- **Threshold Requirement:** The program sets goals and measurable objectives for organizational and program performance.

* These Minimum Quality Standards were adapted from the PEPNet Quality Standards developed by the National Youth Employment Coalition.

- **Weighted Standard:** The program has systems in place for collecting, using and sharing data on individual youth, program activities, and performance data and bases improvement efforts on facts, including performance data and feedback from staff, youth and other stakeholders.
- **Weighted Standard:** The program communicates information internally and externally about the results of its activities.

Sustainability

- **Threshold Requirement:** The program has sufficient resources, including staff, equipment and supplies, to meet its goals and objectives.
- **Weighted Standard:** The organization leverages other financial resources and assets to reach the program's objectives.

Category 2 - Programmatic Approach

Programmatic Approach addresses standards for program design: how the program looks, how the young person experiences the program, how the pieces work together.

The first category of standards dealt with the program's mission and goals and various structures or systems to help manage operations. Now a program needs to consider its design: Who will it serve? What are their needs? How does it address or plan to address these needs?

Whether setting up a new program, assessing an existing program, or making funding decisions, it is important to think about the target participants -- about how they learn, about what motivates them; about how the program wants to provide services and about agencies and organizations it might be beneficial to have as partners.

Target Youth

- **Threshold Requirement:** The program designs activities appropriate to the ages and developmental stages of the participants.
- **Weighted Standard:** The program has a documented strategy to target, recruit and enroll young people who would benefit most from its services and activities.

Environment and Climate

- **Threshold Requirement:** The program implements policies and procedures to ensure the physical and emotional safety of participating youth and staff.

Instructional Approach

- **Threshold Requirement:** The program engages youth as active participants in the learning process throughout program activities.
- **Threshold Requirement:** The program provides opportunities for youth to engage in self assessment and reflection on their learning.
- **Weighted Standard:** The program is responsive to diverse styles and rates of learning.

Individual Planning and Guidance

- **Threshold Requirement:** The program conducts a comprehensive, objective assessment of factors relevant to academic and career goal-setting and service planning for each young person and creates and implements a realistic plan to achieve them.
- **Threshold Requirement:** The program helps youth identify their personal needs and assets (including connections to family and caring adults) and develop a strategy for support services and asset building.
- **Weighted Standard:** The program ensures frequency and length of participation are sufficient for targeted youth to achieve performance goals.

Partnership and Collaboration

- **Weighted Standard:** The organization has the ability to leverage other partnerships, programs and services to achieve the program's objectives.

Employer Engagement

- **Threshold Requirement:** The program works with employers to connect youth to work experiences, work-based learning and employment opportunities and to ensure its workforce development activities and the competencies that youth develop are relevant to employer needs, post-secondary requirements and/or industry standards.

Transition Support

- **Threshold Requirement:** The program ensures that all youth have a plan for how they will continue to pursue and achieve academic and career goals.
- **Weighted Standard:** The program design includes appropriate transition activities and supports for at least one year.

Category 3 - Youth Development Competencies

Youth Development Competencies addresses standards for program offerings: what youth need to know and be able to do to successfully transition to work and adulthood and how to help them gain those skills, knowledge and abilities.

A program's management structure and systems, its program goals and its key design features each play a role in shaping what is offered youth participating in the program. The primary factor in deciding what types of activities and services to offer is whether what those young people are doing in a program actually gives them what they need. Do the activities and services a program offers support what youth need to know and be able to do to in order to become responsible adults and workers?

Programs may find it is easier to answer this question if they refrain from thinking in terms of "activities," which basically are a series of things someone does or has happen to them. Think instead about the skills, knowledge and abilities -- the *competencies* -- young people need to gain to become responsible individuals. This is where the principles of youth development come into play.

Working

- **Weighted Standard:** The program provides opportunities for youth to develop competencies appropriate to maintaining employment, such as communication, dealing with supervision, and interpersonal and lifelong learning skills.

Academic Learning

- **Weighted Standard:** The program uses accepted assessment tools to identify academic skill levels.
- **Weighted Standard:** The program provides youth with opportunities to progress towards a recognized credential, such as the GED, high school diploma, or post-secondary education or training credential.

Thriving

- **Weighted Standard:** The program supports youth in developing independent living skills, including financial and computer literacy.