

MOST

Madison-area Out-of-School Time

Effective Out-of-School Time Practices

Adopted with permission from Minnesota's Guide to Effective Afterschool Practices



WELCOME

We believe every young person can be successful!

Those of us who work in youth development come from many backgrounds. We call ourselves youth workers, librarians, artists, teachers, coaches, social workers, or maybe something else entirely. We share a belief that the work we do every day positively impacts young people's success.

It's this belief in what's possible for young people that drives us to do our best. It gets us out the door and off to work each morning (or late afternoons and weekends!). It's why we care deeply about young people and their futures. It's why we put so much energy and passion into our programs.

The out-of-school time (OST) community in Madison has come together to define what makes our programs great and put together a hands-on guidebook to help us build research-based best practices into every step. Instead of providing a system of rewards and sanctions, MOST will provide coaching, training, program improvement tools and this guide to help coalition members improve the quality of their programs. The MOST Quality Support and Continuous Improvement work group spent the past year and a half researching OST practices, identifying the shared values and beliefs of OST programs within Madison, adopting the following building blocks that contribute to successful afterschool programs and developing this guide to help OST programs continuously improve the quality of their programs.



FULFILLING AND EXCITING WORK

This guidebook is meant to help us find inspiration for today and aspirations for tomorrow. Each of our programs comes to this process from a different place. And everyone can find something in these pages to strengthen programs and make a positive difference for youth.

Our work is vital. Taking time to invest in that work, to continuously reflect, improve and strive to be the best we can be – that’s vital too. It’s a process that can be fulfilling, exciting and a cause for celebration.

The ideas and practices outlined in this guide are based on research with proven success in guiding the field of out-of-school time towards quality, effective programming. These sources can be found on the reference page of this guide.

THANK YOU from the MOST Quality Workgroup

City of Madison Community Development
Division - Childcare and Youth
Programs

Common Wealth Development

First Tee of South Central Wisconsin

Goodman Community Center

Lussier Community Education Center

Madison Children’s Museum

Madison Metropolitan School District and
Madison School & Community
Recreation

Madison Public Library

Second Harvest Foodbank of Southern
Wisconsin

Simpson Street Free Press

State of Wisconsin Department of Youth and
Family – Youngstar

University of Wisconsin - Extension - 4H
Youth Development

University of Wisconsin - Morgridge Center

WARF & Morgridge Institute for Research

Wisconsin Afterschool Network

Wisconsin Youth Company

MOST
Madison-area Out-of-School Time

DREAM EXPLORE DISCOVER DREAM EXPLORE DISCOVER DREAM EXPLORE

SAY WHAT





Here are a few terms you'll see throughout this guide

Out-of-School Time (OST) refers to organized activities and programs involving young people that take place outside the regular school day. Sometimes called summer programming or afterschool, it all means the same thing here.

Community includes all individuals and organizations that influence youth. This can be teachers and schools, families and community organizations, neighborhood leaders and local businesses, and more.

Culture is a set of beliefs, values and norms that are shared within a community of people, and which shape a person's actions and sense of self.

Dosage refers to how much programming a young person experiences. It's generally a measure of intensity – the amount of hours per day, days per week and weeks per year a young person attends; as well as duration – how long the young person participates in programs from start to finish (ideally, over a number of years); and breadth – the variety of activities a young person experiences either across multiple programs or within one program.

Family includes parents, siblings, relatives, caregivers, guardians, extended families, and embraces all individuals that a young person considers "family."

Identity is the conception people have of themselves, which is shaped by both social and biological characteristics, including age, socioeconomic status, nationality, language, religion, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender and physical/developmental ability.

Professional Development includes trainings, workshops, coaching and ongoing opportunities for reflection and improvement.

Children and Youth refers to elementary, middle and high-school-age young people (generally between the ages of 5 and 18.) Youth is used throughout this guide to refer to children and youth.

Staff includes paid and unpaid staff as well as volunteers.



How to

Throughout this guide, you'll find ways to act on the concepts, such as:

- Questions to guide reflection
- Online resources for more information
- The key steps in a continuous program improvement cycle

The guide is written so that a variety of types of K-12 OST programs can use it. How and what each practice will look like is dependent on the type and age of the youth in your program.

Each section of this guide was vetted and selected by the MOST Quality Support and Continuous Improvement work group.

We came together as a community of OST providers to review the research, determine

the most effective practices in positive youth development, and identify the building blocks to effective OST programs with the ultimate goal of improving the lives of the young people we serve.

Whether you're part of a well-oiled machine, or a new program that's just finding your footing, each section is meant to support you in a continuous cycle of reflection and improvement.

SECTIONS

1.

WE BELIEVE

A shared set of principles and beliefs that guide our programs and Madison's out-of-school time community.

2.

BUILDING BLOCKS

Seven basic elements that build high-quality programs, with a list of research-based effective practices you can use to shape your program.

use this guide

The children and youth we serve are counting on us.

With this clearly articulated vision of quality programming, a shared language to clearly define each program element, a guide for professional development to facilitate an ongoing improvement process – let's roll up our sleeves and get to work! The children and youth we serve are counting on us.

3.

CONTINUOUS PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT (CPI)

An ongoing process to help programs continuously raise the bar on quality.



SECTION ONE:

We Believe

The values and beliefs below provide the foundation for the MOST effective practices building blocks.

We believe...

- All children are capable and competent.
- Out-of-School Time (OST) programs build on the strengths of youth.
- Families are a young person's primary and most powerful and influential educators. They are integral to their child's success.
- Youth are members of multiple cultural groups that are to be supported and celebrated.
- Youth develop best with secure and consistent relationships with responsive adults who communicate respectfully with each other, and who develop positive relationships with peers.
- Youth are individuals who develop at different rates.
- Youth exhibit a range of skills and competencies within any domain of development.
- Learning is developmental.
- Expectations are guided by knowledge of child and youth development.
- Children and youth learn through play, interaction and active exploration of their environment.
- Quality systems must be in place at the organizational level in order to sustain high-quality interactions and learning environments at the classroom or group level. These systems are inclusive of staff development, wages, benefits, written policies and procedures, fiscal management and community partnership.
- Youth develop best in safe and healthy environments that provide appropriate and well-maintained atmospheres that facilitate child/youth and staff learning and development.
- Programs are informed by ongoing systematic, formal and informal assessments to assure an ongoing improvement process which relies on data to identify strengths and weaknesses.
- Best practices are informed by experience in the field and by research, both valuable sources of knowledge.
- Just like individuals, programs and organizations are at different places and have the potential for growth and development.

MOST Vision

The Madison Out-of-School Time (MOST) initiative will ensure that all of Madison's children and youth have access to comprehensive, high-quality, out-of-school time programs that support positive youth development, educational achievement, and college, career and community readiness.

MOST Core Value

Racial equity and social justice are core principles that inform and guide all MOST decisions, policies and functions. Consequently, MOST will concentrate its efforts to achieve the MOST vision for youth who are traditionally marginalized based on factors such as their racial/ethnic identities, income or recent immigrant status.



SECTION TWO:

Building Blocks

1

Intentional Program Design

- Set clear, focused goals that are aligned with mission and are responsive to family/community needs
- Offer a variety of activities that foster the development of knowledge and skills that link to program goals
- Provide regular, ongoing sessions with activities that build upon each other
- Provide time and structure for youth to reflect on learning
- Support positive youth development
- Incorporate the strengths and interests of youth
- Offer youth the opportunity to take initiative, explore and be creative

2

Supportive Relationships with Youth

- Build authentic relationships through reliable, ongoing interactions that develop trust
- Use consistent positive guidance and behavior management techniques
- Recognize and value youth as individuals
- Believe in and focus on the development of the full potential
- Ensure youth and adults understand their roles and boundaries
- Identify and support youth's high expectations of staff

5

Community & Family Engagement

- Support ongoing meaningful partnerships with family, school, and community
- Ensure program is informed by and responsive to the culture(s) of families and community
- Provide communication methods that are respectful and inclusive of family and community assets
- Ensure families have meaningful opportunities to influence program development and continuous improvement

6

Organizational Management & Staff Support

- Ensure mission is understood by all
- Ensure regular and ongoing program oversight
- Build an organizational environment that is respectful of and values individual staff members' culture and identity
- Ensure a fiscally sound, well-managed program that meets the program's mission
- Use established internal competencies to guide staff professional development
- Provide appropriate supervision and support to staff to be effective in their jobs
- Implement ongoing collection of data and evaluation for programs' growth and improvement
- Have sufficient staff retention
- Have sufficient materials that are developmentally appropriate and accessible to all youth

While this guide represents the overall best practices for OST programs in Madison, how it looks will vary greatly by the type of program or age of youth you work with. Each building block is followed by several reflection questions which help you think about how each building block applies more specifically to your program.

3 Youth Voice & Leadership

- Respect and recognize youth for their contributions
- Engage youth to share ownership in program planning, implementation and evaluation
- Enable youth to build and practice skills that contribute to leadership and community making
- Engage youth in a range of leadership roles that positively impact themselves, others and their community

4 Racial & Cultural Inclusion

- Promote racial and cultural diversity at all levels of the organization
- Provide ongoing and progressive learning on implicit bias, racial equity and cultural inclusion at all levels of the organization
- Recognize and assess organizational bias, identify and implement strategic responses to create inclusive environments
- Ensure a culture of high expectations for all youth and families of every racial and cultural background

7 Environment & Safety

- Identify physical and emotional safety and risk factors for youth and staff and implement policies and procedures to address them
- Provide an environment that builds community
- Provide an engaging and developmentally appropriate environment to enhance the emotional and physical well-being of the participants
- Make intentional decisions about the nutritional, physical and emotional well-being of the participants
- Communicate health, safety and behavior procedures to staff, participants and families relevant to the program
- Create a system to identify and address participant health issues and concerns

1 BUILDING BLOCK ONE

INTENTIONAL PROGRAM DESIGN

What it means:

Positive youth outcomes are too important to leave to chance. While each program is unique, the need for intentional program design is universal. Programs should identify desired youth outcomes and directly connect program activities to those goals.



Why it matters:

Programs are more likely to achieve desired youth outcomes if they use a deliberate process to design, implement and evaluate activities.

Effective Practices for Intentional Program Design:

- Set clear, focused goals that are aligned with mission and are responsive to family/ community needs
- Offer a variety of activities that foster the development of knowledge and skills that link to program goals
- Provide regular, ongoing sessions with activities that build upon each other
- Provide time and structure for youth to reflect on learning
- Support positive youth development
- Incorporate the strengths and interests of youth
- Offer youth the opportunity to take initiative, explore and be creative

Reflect

- 1) What practices are you most effective at implementing? How do you know?
- 2) In what ways do you think you are most effective with intentional program design?
- 3) Can you identify any of the above effective practices as an area of growth for your program?
- 4) What future action(s) will you take to address your identified areas of growth with intentional design?

SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUTH

What it means:

Program staff take action to foster strong, supportive, and sustained relationships with youth. These relationships create an emotionally safe place where youth have a sense of security, belonging, and ownership.

Why it matters:

A relationship with a caring adult is an essential ingredient for supporting learning and development. When youth feel supported and safe, they are able to explore their interests and discover their potential.

Effective Practices for Supportive Relationships with Youth:

- Build authentic relationships through reliable, ongoing interactions that develop trust
- Use consistent positive guidance and behavior management techniques
- Recognize and value youth as individuals
- Believe in and focus on the development of the full potential
- Ensure youth and adults understand their roles and boundaries
- Identify and support youth's high expectations of staff

Reflect

- 1) Which of these effective practices are strong in your program? Why do you feel it is strong?
- 2) How do you measure the effectiveness of your staff relationships with youth?
- 3) What areas might need attention?
- 4) Have you identified any of the above effective practices as an area of growth for your program?
- 5) How can you build on your success to continue to improve?

3 BUILDING BLOCK THREE

YOUTH VOICE & LEADERSHIP



What it means:

Programs authentically partner with youth to build their leadership skills and support youth in leadership roles. Young people are involved in meaningful opportunities to plan, implement, and evaluate program activities.

Why it matters:

Young people are more likely to stay engaged in the program when their ideas and contributions are included. This places their interests at the center. Leadership opportunities help develop young people's self esteem and this valuable lifelong skill.

Effective Practices for Youth Voice and Leadership:

- Respect and recognize youth for their contributions
- Engage youth to share ownership in program planning, implementation and evaluation
- Enable youth to build and practice skills that contribute to leadership and community making
- Engage youth in a range of leadership roles that positively impact themselves, others and their community

Reflect

- 1) What opportunities are available for youth to have a voice and take leadership in your program?
- 2) In what ways do you think you are effective with youth voice and leadership in your program?
- 3) What else could you do to weave youth voice into the fabric of your program?
- 4) What future action(s) will you take to address identified areas of growth with youth voice and leadership?

RACIAL & CULTURAL INCLUSION

What it means:

Organizations create a safe and inclusive environment which recognizes that race and culture are core to youth and staff identity.

Why it matters:

Organizations that provide youth and staff with opportunities to explore and cultivate identity within the context of race and culture deepens self-esteem and increases openness and understanding toward all people. This work is essential to reducing current and historical inequities in our community.

Effective Practices for Racial and Cultural Inclusion:

- Promote racial and cultural diversity at all levels of the organization
- Provide ongoing and progressive learning on implicit bias, racial equity and cultural inclusion at all levels of the organization
- Recognize and assess organizational bias, identify and implement strategic responses to create inclusive environments
- Ensure a culture of high expectations for all youth and families of every racial and cultural background

Reflect

- 1) How does your organization support racial and cultural inclusion?
- 2) In what ways do you think you are effective with racial and cultural inclusion?
- 3) What practices present areas of growth for your program with racial and cultural inclusion?
- 4) What future actions will you take to identify your areas of growth?
- 5) What resources will you seek to support your efforts?

5 BUILDING BLOCK FIVE COMMUNITY & FAMILY ENGAGEMENT



What it means:

Programs communicate their value to and connection with the wider community. Staff builds positive relationships and meaningful partnerships with families and broader community.

Why it matters:

A young person's development is strengthened when positive reinforcement comes from many partners working together – from parents, families, and caregivers. When families and caregivers feel valued by the program, they are better able to support their children at home and in their community. Communities are strengthened when there is a positive image of youth making valuable contributions to our world. Young people are exposed to new ideas, experiences and/or supports that the program alone can't provide.

Effective Practices for Community and Family Engagement:

- Support ongoing meaningful partnerships with family, school, and community
- Ensure program is informed by and responsive to the culture(s) of families and community
- Provide communication methods that are respectful and inclusive of family and community assets
- Ensure families have meaningful opportunities to influence program development and program continuous improvement

Reflect

- 1) What are your program's current practices and activities that support community and family engagement?
- 2) In what ways do you think you are effective with community and family engagement?
- 3) Pick one or two effective practices that are going well. Why are they going well? Which need some extra attention?

ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT & STAFF SUPPORT

What it means:

Quality programs are part of a sustainable, well-run organization that develops highly competent staff through professional development and training.

Why it matters:

An out-of-school time program is only as good as the people who run it and as solid as the foundation upon which it is built. Research shows that programs must be high-quality and have a sturdy infrastructure in order to positively impact youth success.

Effective Practices for Organizational Management and Staff Support:

- Ensure mission is understood by all
- Ensure regular and ongoing program oversight
- Build an organizational environment that is respectful of and values individual staff members' culture and identity
- Ensure a fiscally sound, well-managed program that meets the program's mission
- Use established internal competencies to guide staff professional development
- Provide appropriate supervision and support to staff to be effective in their jobs
- Implement ongoing collection of data and evaluation for programs' growth and improvement
- Have sufficient and appropriate materials to support program activities

Reflect

- 1) What is your mission statement? What evidence do you have that your mission is embraced and reflected in the program?
- 2) Who, within your organization, has access to professional development and opportunities for growth?
- 3) What practices are you most effective at implementing? How do you know?
- 4) What aspect(s) of your organizational management and staff support would you like to improve?
- 5) Develop a list of next steps for improvement and possible resources.

7 BUILDING BLOCK SEVEN

ENVIRONMENT & SAFETY

What it means:

Out-of-school time programs provide developmentally appropriate environments that enhance the safety, health, and nutrition of all youth. Quality programs attend to the physical and emotional health of their participants, families, and staff.



Why it matters:

Organizations provide an important opportunity for youth to participate in enjoyable and safe programs. Healthy and safe youth are better learners; investing in strong and healthy youth contributes to the overall health of the community.

Effective Practices for Environment and Safety:

- Identify physical and emotional safety and risk factors for youth and staff and implement policies and procedures to address them
- Provide an environment that builds community
- Provide an engaging and developmentally appropriate environment to enhance the emotional and physical well-being of the participants
- Make intentional decisions about the nutritional, physical and emotional well-being of the participants
- Communicate health, safety and behavior procedures to staff, participants and families relevant to the program
- Create a system to identify and address participant health issues and concerns

Reflect

- 1) How do you review and update your safety policies?
- 2) How have you engaged with staff, partners and families and participants to identify areas of strength or need for improvement?
- 3) What practices present areas of growth for your program with environment and safety?

Additional Questions

Additional Reflective Questions for Developing an Action Plan

Each Building Block is designed to help spark questions, ideas and conversations that will lead to program tweaks, recalibrations and ultimately, improvement. Consider moving through these questions after you have answered the questions associated with the building block(s) you want to address. These additional questions will help you develop your action plan.

For each Building Block, consider:

What are we currently doing?

Is it what we want to be doing? In what way?

What could/should we be doing that we aren't?

Who else should we talk to about this (for partnership, input, support, etc.)?

What surprised you most about how your program is connecting to each Building Block?

Did you find any areas where you aren't aligned with a Building Block? Did that surprise you?

What are the barriers to what we want to accomplish?

What are our strengths in the area that are working well?

What are the easy first steps we can take to improve our program?

What are some of the more difficult changes that we need to consider?

Do we need additional (or different) resources from what we have now to make these changes?

What new questions do we have now that we didn't have before?

SECTION THREE:

Continuous Program Improvement (CPI)

We want great outcomes for youth.
And great outcomes result from quality programming.

There's good news: It is possible to identify quality. Both research and practice have a lot of agreement about what makes a high-quality program. The Building Blocks section of this guide helps define common hallmarks of quality that apply to a broad array of programs.

But knowing what goes into quality programs is not enough. We must also be intentional about continuously improving our practices to ensure our programs are of the highest quality.

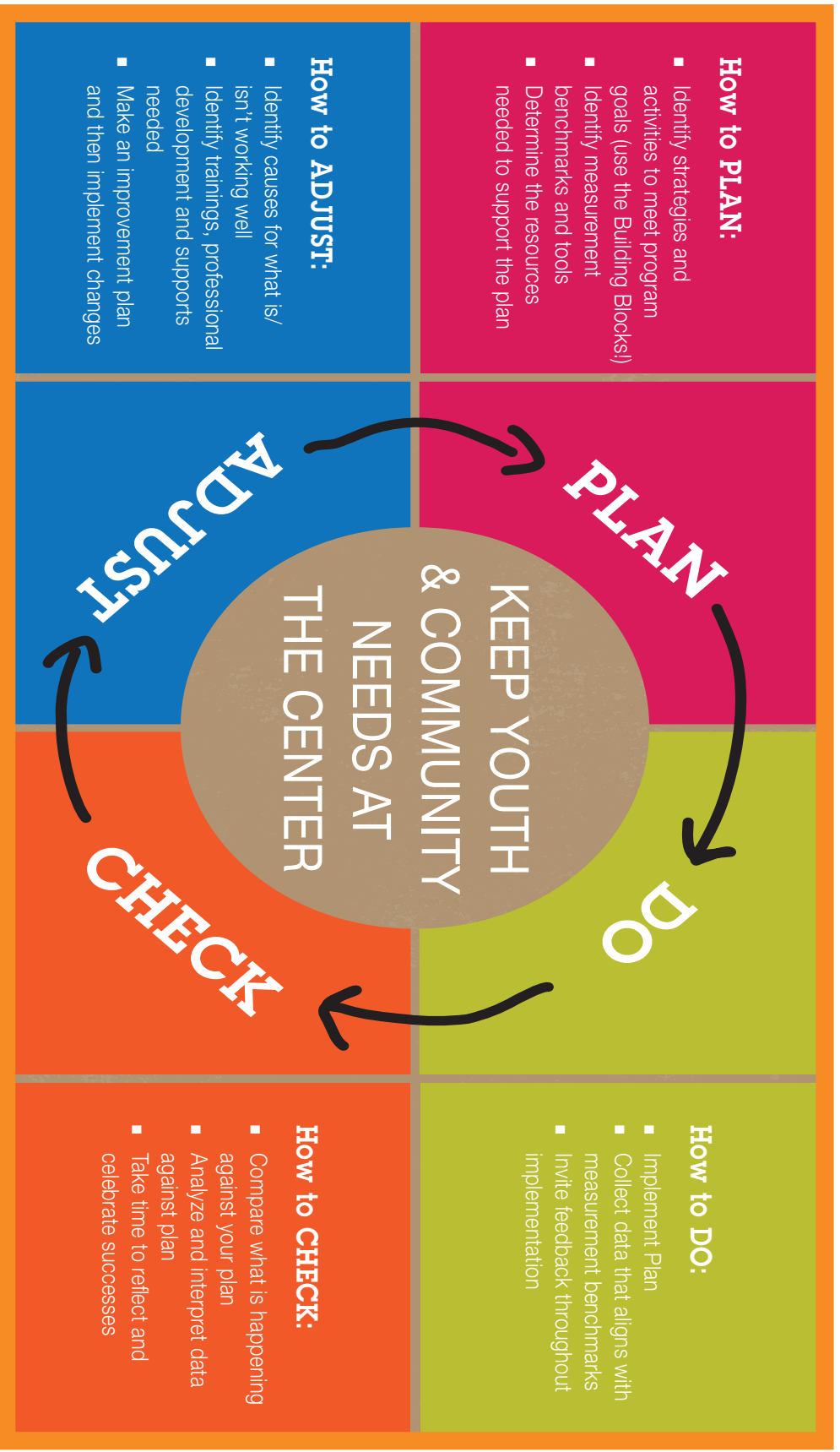
The Continuous Program Improvement (CPI) cycle isn't meant to imply that our programs will never be "good enough." Rather it recognizes that program quality is not an end goal that we can check off our to-do list and set aside. Just as a garden needs continual tending to flourish, we need to continually nurture quality. CPI is a process to help us do this tending.

When programs commit to CPI, they systematically and intentionally evaluate and improve their program practices. They recognize that just as the needs of the young people they serve are always changing, so must programs change in order to best meet those needs. Programs engaged in CPI proactively make modifications and are guided by the belief that there is always room for improvement to increase quality.

The best reason for CPI is simple: better programs mean better outcomes for youth. By following the ongoing four-step cycle of **PLAN-DO-CHECK-ADJUST**, we can keep our programs dynamic, relevant and – best of all – high-quality.



CPI Cheat Sheet



Graphic courtesy of Ignite Afterschool: igniteafterschool.org

Throughout the process, you should:

- Review research and resources
- Evaluate each Building Block individually and as a complete plan
- Provide professional development
- Educate external stakeholders about your program and progress

CPI STEP ONE: PLAN

WHY PLAN?

In order for young people to be positively impacted by your program, you must first identify goals and outcomes. The easier your program plan and goals are to understand, the better.

HOW TO PLAN:

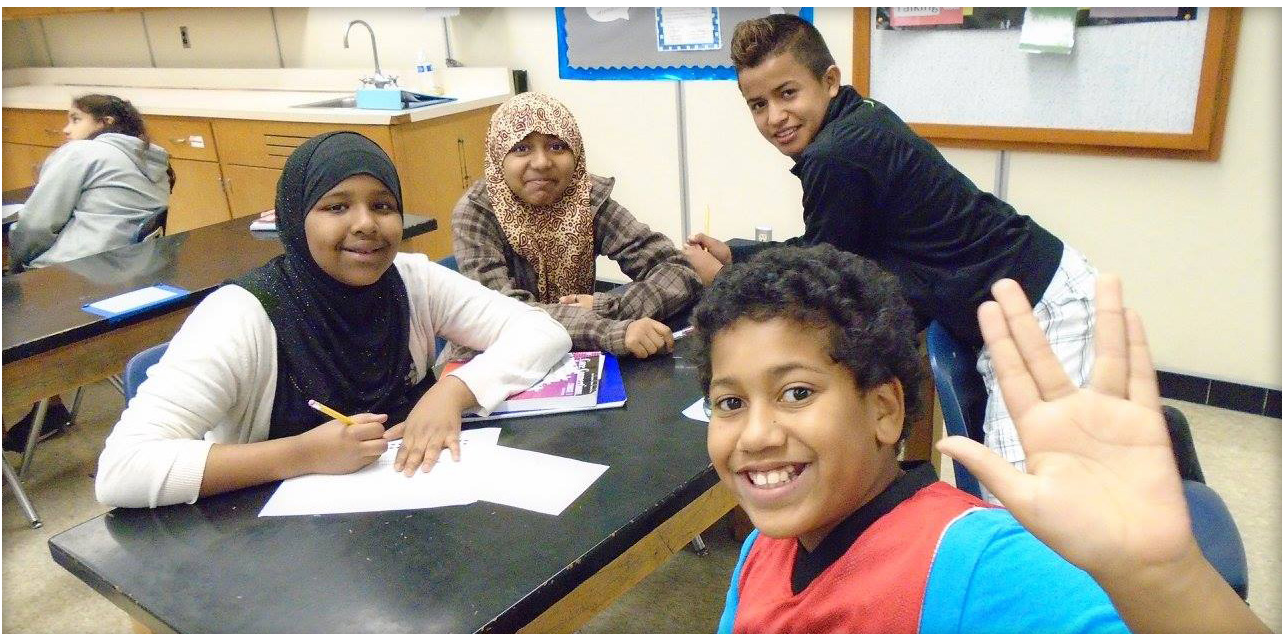
- Identify strategies and activities to meet program goals (use the Building Blocks).
- Identify measurement benchmarks and tools – what will success in each area look like?
- Determine the resources needed to support the plan (e.g., professional development, financial partnerships).

THERE ARE TWO KINDS OF PLANNING

There's your [program plan](#), and your [CPI plan](#) (4 steps). Try one round of CPI over the course of one program cycle (you decide if that's one semester, one school year, one school year plus summer, etc.). Follow the natural timeline of your program, but don't be afraid to do "mini-reflections" and make adjustments on the go. It could be as simple as adding feedback loops and reflection to regularly scheduled staff meetings!

NEED HELP?

Ask MOST about our professional development and continuous improvement program support.



CPI STEP TWO: DO



WHY DO?

Now that you have a clear vision for positively impacting young people, it's time to implement the plan and give it your best shot! Be sure to monitor and record your progress along the way. Collect data and feedback that will help with the next step.

HOW TO DO:

- Implement plan
- Collect information and data about program that aligns with measurement benchmarks
- Invite feedback throughout implementation

THE MORE YOU DO, THE BETTER YOU GET:

As CPI becomes more and more embedded in the culture of your program, you start to develop a shared understanding and recognition of quality. And once you know what quality looks like, it becomes easier and more natural to [do it well!](#)

NEED HELP?

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TIP

When first starting out, implementation may be mostly staff driven. Prepare staff to celebrate and embrace change. Some program elements that are staff favorites may need to be adjusted if the CPI suggests they're not working. Keep focused on the big picture – making positive program changes makes a direct positive impact on youth!

CPI STEP THREE: CHECK



WHY CHECK?

Quite simply, to see if your plan is working. This is the step where you compare results against goals and identify program improvements and adjustments.

HOW TO CHECK:

- Compare what is happening against your plan – what’s working? What’s not?
- Analyze and interpret data against plan.
- Take time to reflect...and to celebrate your success!
- Report your successes and challenges to family and community.

HOW OFTEN TO CHECK?

How often should you check your progress against your plan? Back in CPI Step One, PLAN, you determined if your CPI timeline is one semester, one school year, etc. The first CHECK should occur about half way through that timeline. Make sure your data sources – attendance data, pre/post assessments, etc. – fit this timeline. You have time to adjust before your program is done! Then, CHECK again at the end of your timeline. Now you’ll have “results” from a full CPI cycle that you can use to inform your next program plan and CPI plan.

NEED HELP?

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CPI STEP FOUR: ADJUST

WHY ADJUST?

It's time to adopt new practices and eliminate those that aren't working. It's all about making programs the best they can be for the young people you serve. Then, start the cycle again, with a new round of **PLAN-DO-CHECK-ADJUST**.

HOW TO ADJUST:

- Identify causes for what is/isn't working well
- Identify trainings, professional development and supports needed
- Make an improvement plan and then implement changes

BE REALISTIC AND INSPIRATIONAL:

Be sure adjustments are realistic, both what you hope to change and the number of changes you plan to make. Do you have the resources to tackle these adjustments? This might be a great time to engage additional stakeholders like youth and board members to help you prioritize. Think in terms of "easy wins and stretch goals." Note which changes can be made over the short term and which will need more time.

NEED HELP?

Ask MOST about our professional development and continuous improvement program support.



TIP

After every CPI, reflect: What did you learn about the CPI process and how can that inform your next CPI? Will you try a different timeline? Examine different building blocks? Engage different stakeholders?

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MOST Vision

The Madison Out-of-School Time (MOST) initiative will ensure that all of Madison's children and youth have access to comprehensive, high-quality, out-of-school time programs that support positive youth development, educational achievement, and college, career and community readiness.

Learn more about
Madison-area Out-of-School Time
at mostmadison.org

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