# After-School Toolkit

*Tips, Techniques and Templates
for Improving Program Quality*

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and Kathryn Furano

**The CORAL Series: Lessons learned from a major after-school initiative**

Visit www.irvine.org or www.ppv.org to download these publications based on The James Irvine Foundation's CORAL initiative.

**Launching Literacy In After-School Programs**
Early Lessons from the CORAL Initiative

*Presents interim findings from CORAL, with a focus on reading gains for participating youth. Offers insights for after-school funders, researchers, advocates, intermediary organizations and practitioners regarding the key components of quality in literacy programming.*

**Midcourse Corrections to a Major Initiative**
A Report on The James Irvine Foundation's CORAL Experience

*Reports circumstances and challenges related to midpoint change in the multiyear CORAL initiative. Informs grantmakers involved in major initiatives of the need to include midcourse assessment as a critical component in initiative design.*

**Advancing Achievement**
Findings from an Independent Evaluation of a Major After-School Initiative

*Presents findings from independent research on CORAL. Demonstrates the relationship between high-quality literacy programming and academic gains. Informs the after-school field of the potential role of quality programs in the ongoing drive to improve academic achievement. Includes executive summary.*

**What Matters, What Works**
Advancing Achievement After School

*Highlights findings from independent research on CORAL. Informs those who seek to fund, design, implement and otherwise advance effective after-school programs.*

**Supporting Success**
Why and How to Improve Quality in After-School Programs

*Examines strategies used to promote quality academic programming in CORAL. Makes the case for after-school funders, advocates, intermediary organizations and practitioners to support investment in continuous program improvement.*

**After-School Toolkit**
Tips, Techniques and Templates for Improving Program Quality

*Provides a practical, hands-on guide for implementing high-quality after-school literacy programming. Supplies program managers with tested tools and techniques employed in CORAL.*

**Gaining Ground**
Supporting English Learners Through After-School Literacy Programming

*Demonstrates a relationship between key CORAL approaches and the academic progress of English learners. Makes the case for action by policymakers and funders interested in boosting the achievement of this growing student population.*

# Contents

**A WORD ABOUT THE TOOLS**

In addition to strategies, process and instructions, this toolkit offers a series of tools you and your team can use to build the quality of your after-school program. Within the body of the toolkit, you'll encounter examples often highlighting a portion of a tool filled out for your reference. In Appendix C, you'll find all tools collected in their complete form; many are shown fully or partially filled out in this section, and all are available for download from www.ppv.org as Microsoft® Word® documents you can start using today.

# Acknowledgments

This toolkit would not be possible without the considerable efforts and cooperation of program directors, literacy coaches, site coordinators, team leaders, youth and other members of the CORAL communities in Pasadena, Long Beach, Fresno, San Jose and Sacramento. They gave generously of their time and expertise, sharing their experiences with the CORAL initiative and their ideas around issues of staff development and program improvement. We deeply appreciate their efforts and hope that this toolkit adequately represents their innovative practices and commitment to quality programming for youth.

Several other people also provided invaluable support. Leigh Hopkins coordinated and provided guidance for Public/Private Ventures' technical assistance in CORAL. We wish to thank Malka Borrego who provided valuable feedback on subsequent drafts of this toolkit and Gloria Cardona who traveled with P/PV staff throughout the state to conduct observations and provide feedback on program implementation.

With the contributions of these and other individuals and groups, the CORAL initiative helped shed new light on the importance of program improvement in achieving quality. It is the hope of both The James Irvine Foundation and P/PV that, in sharing the CORAL lessons, we help practitioners, funders and policymakers better serve the neediest youth.

# Background

Recent research has begun to explore the relationship between quality after-school programming and the enhanced academic outcomes sought by schools and districts. As program managers work to add academic components to the after-school enrichment and developmental opportunities already offered, they increasingly face the expectation that these programs will contribute to participants' academic success — both in the classroom and on high-stakes tests. While the debate continues on whether or not after-school programs can or should be held accountable for academic gains, the need for quality programming, regardless of its focus, is widely apparent.

Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) developed this toolkit to help after-school managers create and sustain quality academic programs. It is based on lessons learned during a three-year study[1] of the Communities Organizing Resources to Advance Learning (CORAL) initiative funded by The James Irvine Foundation in five California cities. P/PV provided research-based technical support to CORAL instructors in this literacy-focused after-school effort that targeted first- through sixth-grade students. This toolkit was informed by on-the-ground experience and research findings. While the toolkit draws on many CORAL lessons and examples, the structures, processes and tools it offers are broadly applicable to the work of practitioners who seek to enhance program quality.

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### COMMUNITIES ORGANIZING RESOURCES TO ADVANCE LEARNING (CORAL)

The James Irvine Foundation launched the eight-year CORAL after-school initiative in 1999 with the goal of helping to improve the academic achievement of children in the lowest-performing schools in five California cities: Fresno, Long Beach, Pasadena, Sacramento and San Jose.

Once fully operational, this large-scale initiative served approximately 5,000 children each year — more than half of whom were designated as English learners and many of whom came from low-income families — across over 30 school- and community-based sites. Most of the youth were of elementary-school age, primarily first- to fifth-graders, with a small proportion in middle-school grades. The Foundation provided implementation support in all of the cities, with the objective of funding the initiative for five to six years in each site. In total, the Foundation committed over $58 million to CORAL, making it the most significant and ambitious initiative undertaken by Irvine.

Following disappointing outcomes identified through a midpoint review, CORAL focused the wide breadth of programs offered at its sites on literacy activities and boosted program quality through a rigorous process of continuous improvement and staff development. These changes led to pronounced gains in achievement for a range of students.

The children involved in CORAL represented great diversity in their ethnicity and language proficiency and also, to some degree, in their performance at school. This diversity adds dimension to an examination of the role that after-school programs can play in the lives of different subgroups of youth and, in particular, English learners — a topic often missing in after-school research.

CORAL offers several key lessons to those with a stake in the success of after-school programs. Chief among the lessons are that after-school programs can, indeed, help promote student academic achievement, and that success requires targeted investment, stakeholder commitments, focused academic support, quality programming, and a process of continual improvement to attain and maintain high levels of quality.

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[1] For a complete series of publications based on P/PV's evaluations of CORAL, go to www.ppv.org or www.irvine.org.

## Who Should Use This Toolkit?

The After-School Toolkit is designed for use by program managers who seek to support and enhance instructional practice in after-school settings and who are prepared to invest the time and energy necessary to identify, agree to and adopt a series of Essential Program Elements that will drive a cycle of program improvement throughout the year. The toolkit aims to provide valuable information for those responsible for overseeing program implementation — whether they are part of an entire leadership team that oversees multiple sites within or across school districts, or they work alone or with a partner running a simple program in a single school. The toolkit also:

• Meets you where you are. The toolkit acknowledges that programs seeking to provide quality academic programming exist at various stages of evolution and responds with appropriate tools.

• Is intended to be practical. Throughout the toolkit, typical on-the-ground challenges are described and made tangible with clear examples. Ready-to-use tools are provided to help programs overcome these challenges.

• Offers proven practices for supporting the quality of academic programming in the after-school setting. Because the process of improving quality isn't limited to academic instruction, it's also very likely that the practices in this guide will promote the quality of enrichment programming as well.

• Assists in setting up structures that can be useful for refocusing a variety of specific academic topics — beyond those addressed by CORAL.

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**STAFF TITLES REFERENCE**

Throughout this toolkit, we use certain terms to refer to key staff roles. We recognize that programs may use different titles or staffing structures (for instance, some positions may be combined). CORAL staff titles referenced throughout this toolkit are defined below to help you connect toolkit recommendations to corresponding roles within your program.

**Program Director:** The person who is ultimately responsible for program implementation. Commonly called the executive director or program director.

**Content Expert/Trainer:** The person who is responsible for determining program needs, designing training, providing training to other staff and driving program quality. This role is sometimes assumed by the program director; other times, it is a separate position.

**Site Managers/Coordinators:** The mid-level managers who supervise and help develop the line staff on a daily basis. Site managers/coordinators often play the role of "principal" during after-school. They also frequently act as the liaison between after-school, the school (teachers and principal), and parents.

**Team Leaders:** The line staff who implement the program on the ground. Team leaders provide instruction, mentor, lead enrichment activities, and more.

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# Overview

The toolkit is divided into five sections. The first section focuses on defining the essential elements that programs must include to achieve their goals. The remaining four sections cover steps of a distinct cycle of continuous program improvement that, when implemented in sequence, contribute to improved after-school program quality and enhanced student outcomes.

Each section includes a brief description of the nature and intent of the process step being discussed and provides the following information:

- What the process is and how it fits into a cycle of program improvement

- How to implement the process

- What tools and/or other materials are necessary to implement the process (with samples from the field)

- Advice and lessons learned based on the testing of this program improvement model during the CORAL demonstration
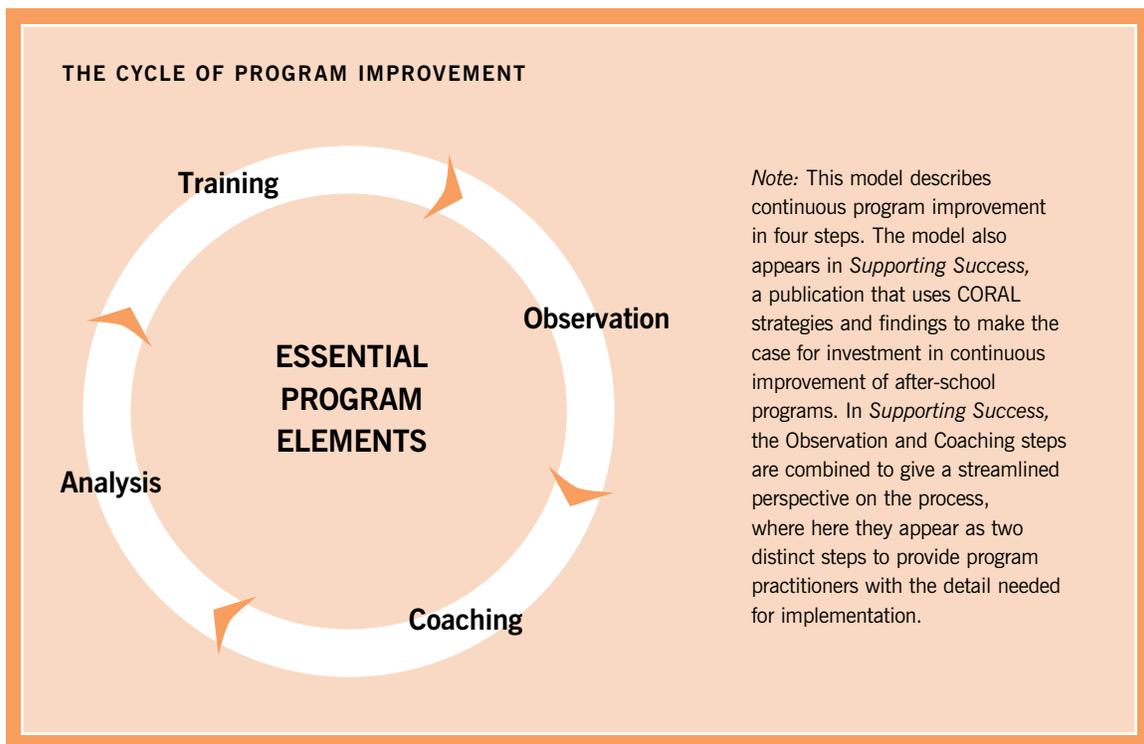
***Section One: Essential Program Elements.*** At the heart of the cycle, Essential Program Elements inform all aspects of program improvement. These elements consist of the components and strategies deemed necessary to ensure quality by individual after-school programs as well as the research literature. This section, which includes samples from CORAL sites, provides program managers with a process for establishing these Essential Program Elements.

***Section Two: Observation.*** The Essential Program Elements inform what is observed in individual learning environments. In this section, program managers will learn how to generate an observation tool and learn to conduct effective observations of instructional practice.

***Section Three: Coaching.*** Team Leader observations inform coaching content. This section provides the program manager with information about how to use these observations to create coaching content that is tailored to individual instructors.

***Section Four: Analysis.*** In addition to using observation data to tailor coaching, program managers can gather a range of data to inform their efforts to enhance program quality. This section guides program managers, regardless of their experience level, through a process in which they effectively analyze observation data, use it to improve program delivery and enhance overall quality.

*Section Five: Training.* Training is both the first and last step in the cycle of program improvement, setting the stage for the next round of improvement-related work and representing the culmination of prior steps taken. In this section, program managers will learn how to use the data collected during observations, along with coaching notes, to develop targeted trainings and related evaluations. Tools include the questions and instructions for developing a training agenda, as well as sample training evaluations.

**THE CYCLE OF PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT**



**Training**

**Observation**

**ESSENTIAL PROGRAM ELEMENTS**

**Analysis**

**Coaching**

*Note:* This model describes continuous program improvement in four steps. The model also appears in *Supporting Success,* a publication that uses CORAL strategies and findings to make the case for investment in continuous improvement of after-school programs. In *Supporting Success,* the Observation and Coaching steps are combined to give a streamlined perspective on the process, where here they appear as two distinct steps to provide program practitioners with the detail needed for implementation.

# Section 1: Essential Program Elements

Essential Program Elements are the agreed-upon strategies and practices that, when in place and well implemented, signify the existence of a quality program. Within the context of this toolkit, the Essential Program Elements have several distinct but related functions:



**ESSENTIAL PROGRAM ELEMENTS**

Training · Observation · Coaching · Analysis

- They form a set of common and consistent program elements that contribute to and reflect a quality after-school literacy program. Establishing these norms communicates to new staff what is expected in the after-school classroom both in terms of content (e.g., which components of what literacy program will be taught when) and delivery (e.g., teaching practice, engagement strategies, etc.). As noted previously, while CORAL's core academic component was literacy, other types of programs could use a similar process to identify their Essential Program Elements.

- They are the basis of the classroom observations. Program managers will look for these elements and provide coaching and support to team leaders based on what they see (and don't see) during classroom visits. When the elements of the Essential Program Elements are in place, so is quality.

- They tell the program manager where to focus and how to prioritize training and technical assistance for literacy teaching staff as a whole.
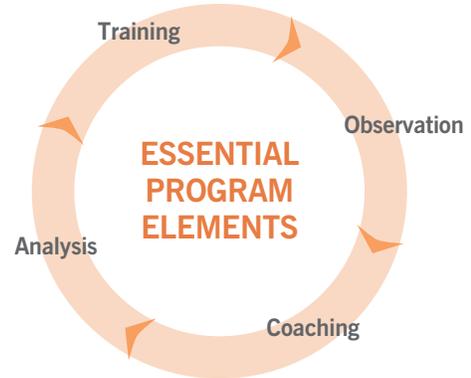
Essential Program Elements help an after-school program communicate what is important, both internally to staff and externally to the district and funders. As such, they reside at the core of the continuous improvement process and are the standards against which existing practice and progress toward improved quality are measured.

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**IN THIS SECTION**

| Learn how to: | Use these tools: | Invest this time: | Involve this team: |
|---|---|---|---|
| Identify the major components of your program; these should reflect best practices and program goals/priorities | Defining Essential Program Elements Tool and a literacy programming example | 8 hours (this time frame assumes that best practices have been researched and are available for reference by the team) | Program manager<br><br>Content expert<br><br>Site managers |
| Define Essential Program Elements as they should be implemented | Leveling Essential Program Elements Tool and a literacy programming example | | |
| Set program expectations | | | |
| Develop an initial training | | | |

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**Step 1: Identify the Major Components of Your Program**

Because Essential Program Elements are central to the entire program improvement process, we recommend that you bring together staff from various levels (management, site managers and team leaders) of your program to define and prioritize major program components and to set program expectations.

*Document the components of your program.* Ask your program team the following questions:

*What major components make up the program?*

If you have a standardized or commercial curriculum or program, this will be easy, since this information is usually listed on the curriculum binder or in the literature that is included with the program materials. In the CORAL initiative, literacy programming consisted of five components, described in the box on this page.

If you do not implement a structured program model with easily defined components, lead the team in a discussion about which program components or activities are effective and important in demonstrating quality.

*What do we expect to see implemented every day by every staff person?*

Broad or specific, the only requirements are that components need to be implemented across sites, and they must be observable during programming.

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**EXAMPLE: CORAL PROGRAM COMPONENTS**

These components pertaining to the CORAL experience represent balanced literacy strategies.

- Read alouds — staff read to youth from works of fiction and nonfiction that can be completed in 10 or 15 minutes and from chapter books covered over the course of several days.
- Book discussions — staff lead youth in talking about the story that has just been read.
- Writing activities — youth write about topics they have just discussed, or they create their own stories.
- Vocabulary/skill development activities—youth review or learn new words and practice particular literacy skills, such as letter sounds or spelling.
- Independent reading — youth spend time reading books of their choice at levels where they can read fluently and with high comprehension.

In a homework-focused program, these may include:

- Check-in
- Group activity
- Homework centers
- Check-out

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***Add informal components or aspects of the program you want to observe and improve.***
Ask your program team the following question:

*Taking into consideration our vision, are there any other activities or components within this program that we feel are important, that we want to observe and that we are able to improve?*

Examples of "informal" but critical components include: classroom environment, classroom management, positive youth development strategies, or relationship-building opportunities. For example, if your vision is to help youth learn reading strategies, you might add the informal component of maintaining a print-rich environment that includes educational posters, word walls and other posted written material used in a lesson. These surroundings can be easily observed and noted. They help support the overall program goal as well as specific program components such as Vocabulary Activities and Writing.

### Step 2: Define Essential Program Elements as They Should Be Implemented

Now that you have all the components listed, it is time to further define them. Hold a brainstorming session using the process below together with the Defining Essential Program Elements Tool (Tool 1.A., Appendix C).

- In the *Component* column, ask staff to list all of your program components.

- In the *Staff Strategies/Activities* column, list all of the strategies or activities that are indicators of quality for each component. Refer to best practices, your own experience and research-proven strategies.

- When listing strategies, try to word them using language that is objective and free of jargon, so they can be understood by stakeholders with varying degrees of expertise in the program area. It is also important that the strategies be observable since these components will inform the focus of observations of staff.

**Example: Tool 1.A.**

| Defining Essential Program Elements Tool | |
|---|---|
| **Component** | **Staff Strategies/Activities** <br> What are the indicators of quality (strategies and activities used by instructors) that we expect to see in programming? |
| **Component** 1 <br> Read Aloud | Use strategies that engage youth: voices, sounds, movement, pauses <br> Are excited about the text <br> Encourage youth to make personal connections to the topic <br> Define or clarify important words <br> Note the name and author of the text <br> Vary volume and inflection of voice while reading <br> Read at an appropriate pace <br> Call attention to literary devices <br> Occasionally ask open-ended questions <br> Point out pictures and other graphics when appropriate |

**Step 3: Set Program Expectations**

Once you have completed the Defining Essential Program Elements Tool (Tool 1.A.), you will probably notice that the lists are quite long. Look at the lists, remembering that the Essential Program Elements represent expectations for what should be occurring when programming is at its best. Use the Leveling Essential Program Elements Tool (Tool 1.B.) together with the following process.

***Study the list for a particular component.*** Ask yourselves the following question:

*Do some strategies or activities listed require more training or a more sophisticated skill set than others?*

Using the example on page 11, you might not expect an inexperienced team leader with only introductory training to be able to effectively and smoothly call attention to literary devices during a Read Aloud. You could, however, expect a team leader with minimal training to note the author and title of the book before reading it.

Later, when you are observing and then planning trainings, it will be essential that you take into consideration each staff member's level of training and experience so that you know where to focus trainings and what you can expect from individuals as they learn and develop the necessary skills.

Using the Leveling Essential Program Elements Tool, review each component list and place supporting strategies/activities into one of three categories based on staff competency:

• Level I: inexperienced staff members with only introductory training

• Level II: returning staff with some training

• Level III: senior staff

Keep in mind that this exercise is not an exact science; it involves a number of educated judgment calls based on your program's priorities, best practice and research. Throughout the process, consider the skill set that new staff generally bring to your program, and consider their learning curve. Enlist your content expert in this process to help you understand the progression of skills necessary to implement strategies.

**Example: Tool 1.B.**

*As staff progress through the levels, the number and quality of strategies/activities they employ are expected to increase. In this example, a subtle difference exists between the final expectation at Level II and the corresponding expectation at Level III. Set expectations for your own program staff by completing the Leveling Essential Program Elements Tool. An additional example showing this tool filled out for the CORAL site in Sacramento is provided in Appendix C.*

### Leveling Essential Program Elements Tool

| Program Component | Level I Expectations *Inexperienced Staff* | Level II Expectations *Returning/Experienced Staff* | Level III Expectations *Senior Staff* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Read Aloud | Use strategies that engage youth (voices, sounds, movement, pauses) | Use strategies that engage youth (voices, sounds, movement, pauses) | Use strategies that engage youth (voices, sounds, movement, pauses) |
| | Define or clarify important words | Use an introductory activity to get youth excited about the text | Call attention to literary devices |
| | Point out pictures and other graphics when appropriate | Encourage youth to make personal connections to the topic | Use an introductory activity to get youth excited about the text |
| | Read at an appropriate pace | Define or clarify important words | Encourage youth to make personal connections to the topic |
| | Note the name and author of the text | Note the name and author of the text | Define or clarify important words |
| | | Vary volume and inflection of voice while reading | Note the name and author of the text |
| | | Read at an appropriate pace | Vary volume and inflection of voice while reading |
| | | Point out pictures and other graphics when appropriate | Read at an appropriate pace |
| | | Occasionally use open-ended questions and ask for clarification | Point out pictures and other graphics when appropriate |
| | | | Routinely use open-ended questions, ask for clarification and help students make connections |

## Step 4: Use the Essential Program Elements to Inform Initial Training

In many after-school programs, staffing is seasonal; programs often find themselves hiring the bulk of their staff in mid to late summer and feeling the immediate pressure of school starting. These programs have the challenging task of training staff adequately in the short amount of time before programming begins. During this training time, they attempt to introduce and review required administrative duties and paperwork, accomplish team building and provide a basic overview of the many components of their programs. This often leads to overwhelmed and under-prepared team leaders who feel as though they have gone through an after-school buffet line — getting only a taste of everything and not really understanding the ingredients of anything.

While training must cover administrative duties and rules for all the various aspects of your program, you must also train team leaders on their interactions with youth, making sure your plans for this training are simple, clear and strategic. Look at your completed Leveling Essential Program Elements Tool and review the items included at the first level. Those activities and strategies might provide a good starting point for planning initial trainings.

***Prioritize your trainings and align them with your most immediate goals.*** Using your Essential Program Elements and what you know about your staff, ask yourselves the following questions which will help you identify your initial training topics/areas:

*What skills will team leaders need in place to even be able to deliver programming?*

*Which components of the program:*

- *Give team leaders an "easy win" (skills or strategies that team leaders can learn quickly and have some measure of success delivering)?*

- *Set the tone of your program from the beginning and should be prioritized for implementation because they are the cornerstones of your work?*

***Give staff being trained a broad overview of the program as a whole — let them know what it will look like eventually.*** By conducting a model lesson, you can give staff a "big picture" of the program.

***Explain and emphasize that staff should concentrate on the component(s) and strategies that they are being trained on because they will build from these.*** Teach specific strategies and allow for practice.

***Conduct all trainings using strategies and activities that are rooted in youth development and that you want staff to use as they work with youth.*** Before training, ask them to listen for strategies that engage youth, use a strengths-based approach, and help build relationships during the training. Model the strategies, then debrief on what they have experienced and how they can use these techniques when working with youth. Too often, when youth development trainings are conducted in isolation, team leaders find it hard to see how they can integrate the strategies into everything they do. By conducting trainings that use these strategies and then explicitly addressing them throughout the process, you emphasize that youth development is woven through every part of a program — and not a program unto itself.

# Section 2: Observation

Observations of team leaders provide program managers with the information they need to offer immediate coaching to individual staff and to develop training for all instructional staff. Because these observations — and the tool used to conduct them — are based on the established Essential Program Elements, staff know what is expected of them and the focus of the observations.



**IN THIS SECTION**

| Learn how to: | Use these tools: | Invest this time: | Involve this team: |
|---|---|---|---|
| Use the Essential Program Elements to create an observation tool that will be used for individual, site-level and program-wide staff development; set guidelines for its use<br><br>Test and refine the observation process | Instructions for creating an observation tool<br><br>Observation Tool<br><br>Sample observation tools | 8 hours (3 hours of this should be set aside for testing the observation tool) | Any staff who will be conducting observations* |

\* Note: As you begin this process, those who conduct observations should be senior staff with the experience and expertise necessary to provide feedback and coaching. As your program improvement process becomes more established, you may want to incorporate peer observation and feedback.

## Step 1: Creating an Observation Tool

*Establish an observation process.* Programs are often tempted to simply turn their Essential Program Elements into a checklist and use that as an observation tool. Resist the temptation. Remember, Essential Program Elements describe programming in a perfect world. A checklist is limiting because it will always focus on what you didn't get done. Instead, you want a tool that will allow you to focus on — and build upon — what you are doing.

A good observation tool:

•  Allows you to record innovations that you want to share program-wide

•  Encourages you to meet your staff where they are and focus on what they do as opposed to what they don't do

•  Sets the stage for a conversation around strengths, needs and goal-setting

An observation tool, however, is only as good as the process through which it is created and used. Whenever a group observes programming, each person sees something different. The unique experiences, values and expertise of each individual shape what she sees and how she interprets it. Everyone brings to the table a personal set of priorities and expectations. The process of creating and testing your observation tool will emphasize the need for a common definition and expectation of what high-quality programming should look like on the ground.

*Begin tool creation.* Before you start creating your observation tool, keep in mind these basic guidelines:

• Make it manageable — no more than three pages.

• Provide very basic descriptions of program expectations for each component.

• As much as possible, it should follow the flow of your Essential Program Elements. For example, if "Read Aloud" is listed as your first component, the space to describe it should be on the first page.

• Allot space for some basic information, such as date, staff and observer names, etc.

• Provide plenty of space for evidence notes, examples, etc.

*Develop your observation tool.* Use the Observation Tool (Tool 2.A., Appendix C) and consider what kind of basic information you need to gather during an observation, such as names, dates, materials being used, etc. Remember to include space for basics such as grade level, number of students and the site name. This information will help you spot trends later as you consider specialized trainings. Create and label space on the tool for this information.

**Example: Tool 2.A.**

## Observation Tool

Team leader: *Joe A.*   Date Observed: *8/10/07*   Meeting: *8/11/07*

Observer: *Maria D.*   Site: *#1234*   Grade: *4*   Number of Students: *13*

Book/text: *The Great Gilly Hopkins, "William Earnest and Other Mean Flowers"*   Lesson:

| Lesson Components/Expectations | Evidence/Comments |
|---|---|
| Read Aloud: The team leader (TL) presents the title, author and vocabulary words and displays them throughout the lesson. Team leader has an engaging Read Aloud that includes questions.<br><br>Start time:<br>End time: | |

***Fill out the lesson components/expectations column.*** List one program component in each box, and include a short description. Descriptions should be broad and express the basic expectations for each component. When creating the descriptions, the team should consider the following: At the basic level of quality, what do we expect to see?

***Create an evidence/comments column.*** Provide plenty of space to write down notes and observations.

### Step 2. Test and Refine the Observation Process

Once an observation tool has been created, it is important that the observation process be tested to make sure that:

- It can capture the information that you seek.

- Staff who are observing know how to use the tool appropriately and effectively.

Regardless of whether observations will be conducted by a team or a single staff member, it is necessary to make sure that the observation process is effective, fair and helpful in the effort to support and develop staff.

If you are a single observer, consider inviting a colleague who is also a content expert or otherwise familiar with your programming to join you as a participant in the testing process. With the help of this additional professional who can act as a critical questioner, you can work toward observations that are as unbiased as possible and based on evidence that can be observed during programming.

If you have a team of observers (for example, site managers who will observe at their sites), then it will be important to use the testing process to make sure that observations are consistent across sites and that staff understand what they should be looking for, the standard that is expected and their role in the process.

*Preparation: One to Two Weeks before the Testing Exercise*

***Record sample team leader lessons.*** Choose two team leaders who you would consider average in terms of performance. You will only use one, but you should always have a backup. Video record full lessons with these team leaders. When recording, focus on the team leader, not the youth. Do not edit the recording; the group will be observing the lesson in its entirety.

**TESTING EXERCISE REQUIREMENTS**

Time:       2–3 hours (depending on the length of programming you will watch)

Materials:  Blank copies of completed observation/coaching forms
            Copies of completed Leveling Essential Program Elements Tool (completed version of Tool 1.B.)
            Video recording of unedited lesson/programming
            One enlarged copy of the coaching section of your observation/coaching tool
            Clock that everyone can see during observations
            Easel paper and markers

*Before Viewing the Programming*

***Present the guiding questions.*** As the team prepares to use the observation tool, have them keep these three questions in mind. On easel paper, present the questions:

- *Is the observation tool usable? Is it formatted in a way that makes it easy to use?*

- *Is the observation tool relevant? Does it capture the components that you want it to measure?*

- *Is the observation tool helpful? Does it clarify what to look for and set the stage for discussion?*

***Clarify expectations about the Essential Program Elements.*** Review the Essential Program Elements and clarify any questions observers might have about what activities/behaviors meet certain criteria.

***Set observation guidelines.*** Pass out the observation tool. The group will be observing a full lesson of programming, completing the observation form as they watch.

**GUIDELINES FOR OBSERVATIONS**

**Stick to the facts; don't use value statements.** What are you seeing? Provide specific examples like quotes, examples, time stamps, etc. For example, do write: *During Read Aloud, L said "I need your eyes."*
*(卌 IIII times)*

**Record what is happening, not what isn't.** For example, don't write: *M seems to have no behavior plan in place.* Instead, describe what that looks like:
*M repeated "eyes on me" (卌 times) during discussion time.*
*3:45 p.m.: M stopped the group until they could settle down.*
*3:50 p.m.: M promised youth who stayed quiet licorice sticks.*
*4:10 p.m.: M told group everyone was staying in during break.*

**Write down everything you see.** You won't use it all, but it will help you present a detailed snapshot of what happened when you talk to the team leader.

*After Viewing the Programming*

If you are working with a group, it will be helpful to have an electronic version of the observation tool on a computer/projector during this process. You'll be able to make edits and changes as people make suggestions or give feedback. Then, as you debrief the programming, you can create an example group observation to show all participants good practices for filling out the form, emphasizing common definitions of priorities and expectations.

***Debrief about the observation tool.*** On a piece of easel paper, refer to the guiding questions presented on the previous page and discuss. Record responses and problem-solve for possible edits like increasing box size, adding space for other information, etc. Make appropriate edits.

***Debrief about the programming.*** Ask team members to shift their thinking to focus on the lesson they observed and the notes they took.

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**ANALYZING OBSERVATIONS**

For each programming component, ask members to share some of their observations. Are observations:

- **Similar?** Do you notice common opinions and definitions?
- **Factual?** Are observations backed up with evidence?
- **Fair?** Were the observers' expectations fair and consistent?
- **Strengths-based?** Did the observers' perspective seek to build on the team leader's skills?

---

As you debrief about observations, clarify comments and question one another's views. Remember, your goal is to come to — and buy into — common definitions about what you are looking for in programming. By agreeing on what has been observed, you can be confident that each member is viewing the work of staff in a similar way and that the subsequent coaching provided is focused on what matters most for the program (and the staff member who is being supported).

Since the observation tool and related process are the foundation of coaching content, it is essential that everyone be "on the same page." Buy-in is critical for the usefulness and success of the coaching process, which, in turn, is a necessary contributor to program quality.

# Section 3: Coaching

Program managers provide coaching based on what they observe during a lesson or activity, using the observation tool described in the previous section. The coaching that takes place at this stage in the cycle of program improvement is intended to support the work of individual instructors and is typically provided on a one-on-one basis, often immediately after the observation has taken place. The observation tool becomes a coaching tool — providing information about progress and needed improvement.

**Training**

**Observation**

**ESSENTIAL PROGRAM ELEMENTS**

**Analysis**

**Coaching**

**IN THIS SECTION**
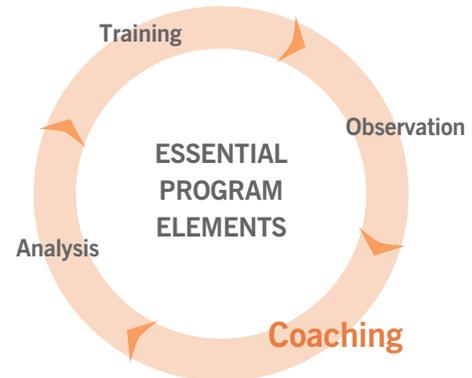
| Learn how to: | Use these tools: | Invest this time: | Involve this team: |
|---|---|---|---|
| Define what makes an effective coach: set ground rules for coaching; fill out a Coaching Tool that organizes a series of short- and long-term goals based on observations | Sample Coaching Tool | 4 hours (2 hours for practicing and debriefing on the Coaching Tool) | Program manager |
| | Completed Coaching Tool with notes | | Any staff person who will be observing and coaching |
| Implement the observations and coaching process, including the training of site managers to conduct observations and coaching at the site level | Instructions for training site managers to do observations/coaching at the site level (the exercises in this section require that you use the observation completed while watching the video recorded lesson) | | |

## Turning Your Observation Tool into a Coaching Tool

Why do most employees fear being observed? Three basic reasons:

- They fear being criticized.
- They fear having a great professional weakness put on display.
- They fear that, despite their greatest efforts, they are going to come up short in the eyes of the person who is watching.

In too many situations, observations are used to catch people when they're doing something incorrectly, and deficits are captured in a written document that becomes part of a staff member's permanent record.

If you want line staff to stop viewing observations as a form of punishment, you must reframe the process. Observations aren't about highlighting staff's weaknesses. Instead, they should reveal the areas where you, as their manager, need to work with them to improve. An observation is beneficial because it allows a manager to see "where it hurts" so she can help the staff member make it better.

So how does the observation tool do this? It doesn't. An observation tool alone does not perform this function: It requires a coaching section. The steps below will help you develop one.

### Step 1. Define What Makes an Effective Coach

Think about effective coaches you have interacted with or know about. Consider the strategies they use to build winning players and teams. Ask the following question: *What strategies support effective coaches?*

A good coaching tool (see Tool 3.A.) asks everyone to commit to some action and requires commitments from staff at all levels of the program:

- Line staff must commit to "trying" and practicing new strategies.

- Site managers must commit to coaching, supporting and providing feedback to line staff as they practice new strategies.

- Content experts must commit to using their expertise to guide the entire process of improvement.

- Management must commit to being a presence that continually eliminates barriers to program improvement.

As a team, brainstorm the characteristics and actions of an effective coach.

**Sample responses to effective coaches brainstorming session**

**EFFECTIVE COACHES SHOULD:**

- Create a team that works together to win
- Share their skills and guide the team
- Spot challenges and address them
- Find strengths and build on them
- Cheer victories and keep looking for the next win

**Step 2. Set the Ground Rules for Coaching**

Your list of effective coaching techniques will, in many ways, define how you coach your staff and guide coaches on their approach to this work. Even so, you need more general ground rules to ensure, once again, that this process is used to support and develop staff rather than "catch" them in a weak moment.

***Have a dialogue.*** The observation and coaching tools should be used to start conversations. Although you might have some ideas about what the goals should be, the goals should not be considered a "done deal." Keep goal areas blank because the team leaders will most likely have some skills or goals that they want to work on. For instance, you might begin an observation thinking the team leader should have a midterm goal related to behavior management skills, only to discover the team leader is struggling significantly with how to manage lesson time, affecting his ability to establish structure in the group. Make the case for your diagnosis of the issue, but be open to input about what the team leader feels might be the problem. Remember, staff will be more motivated to work toward a goal they feel is important, as opposed to one you have deemed important for them. If you have very different goals, negotiate. This is an ongoing process, and other goals can always be added. Start the session with these questions for the team leader:

- *How do you think your lesson went?*
- *What do you think went well? What were your strengths?*
- *Were there any places where you or the lesson struggled? Where were they?*
- *What do you wish you could do over or improve?*

***See the glass as half full.*** Use a strengths-based approach. When observing and later debriefing with the team leader, it is crucial that you believe and communicate that the team leader has strengths and skills that can be built on. Always begin your part of the conversation by describing the activities or strategies the team leader did well. Team leaders are waiting to hear what they did wrong. Let them know first, in no uncertain terms, what they did well, so they know to keep doing it.

***Be specific.*** The more detail you can provide, the better. Draw a verbal picture of the room and the lesson. You'll be surprised how many times a team leader will ask, "I did that?" when you call out an action in great detail. By providing details about exactly what took place, you make the conversation less subjective and judgmental. Be specific about needs — and strengths. Always point out in detail something that the team leader did particularly well and explain to her what made it a strength. Phrases like "you did great" tell a team leader nothing substantive about what she should be doing. Instead, say, "It was great when you (specific action) because (reason this is an effective strategy)." Anchoring your feedback in best practice helps a team leader understand what is expected of her and how her actions affect youth.

***Take responsibility for your role.*** The bulk of the conversation started with the coaching tool is about what the team leader has done, what he needs to do and what he needs to prioritize. It is integral to the success of this process that you support the team leader by offering constructive and specific suggestions during the session. To tell a team leader, "Have a set of rules or group agreements posted by midweek" is not enough. You must provide him with guidance on how to create group agreements,

on which group agreements are age-appropriate, how these should be worded (positively!) and how he can facilitate an activity to create the group agreements. In the follow-up section of the coaching tool, be sure to communicate what you, as a coach, are committing to do to support the team leader. Provide specific supports, dates you can commit and additional resources as appropriate.

***Follow through.*** This process is time intensive. Most after-school programs experience daily emergencies: sick youth, upset parents, absent staff, locked rooms and more. As a trainer, coach and/or site manager, you will feel pulled to do many things every day. You must commit to follow through on the support promised to the team leader. Understand that this is an investment. A team leader who is coached and feels supported will be more apt to try new strategies and to practice and continually develop his or her skills. By helping staff improve current techniques, you may avoid having to "fix" a situation later. Your follow-through will make this process real — without it, observations and debriefing are merely another management process that team leaders must "endure."

### Step 3. Fill Out the Coaching Tool

Using the instructions that follow together with the Coaching Tool (Tool 3.A., on the following page), debrief about the lesson you observed in the last section and fill out the chart. Remember to prioritize: You can't (and shouldn't try to) address everything at once.

***General comments.*** This is where you decide how to define your focus. Start with the positive and keep your feedback fair. Be specific so staff know exactly what they did well and will know to keep doing it! Then highlight some specific strategies or components they still need to work on.

***Goals.*** Although you might have some ideas in mind already, make sure you also give the team leader an opportunity to provide input on the goals. Set goals in phases:

- *Short-term (1–3 days)* — Everyone needs an easy win! Together with the team leader, set a goal that can be accomplished in the next several days. The idea is that by the next day or so, a manager could walk in and say, "I see that you are already improving!" Good short-term goals include: "Have your rules posted," or "Introduce the book title and author before the Read Aloud."

- *Midterm (2 weeks)* — This is a goal that will require at least minimal coaching by a supervisor and practice on the team leader's part, but you should be able to see progress within two weeks. Good midterm goals include: "Use specific praise with youth," or "Develop and use a 'table points' system for youth behavior and participation."

- *Long-term (2–3 months)* — This is a goal that requires extended support from the coach, possibly a training, some modeling and practice. Good long-term goals include: "Emphasize literary devices in the text," or "Use a variety of coaching strategies with youth during Independent Reading."

***Follow-up.*** This is the point at which you, as the coach, write up what you are going to do to support the team leader. What are you responsible for doing to help? Be specific, give dates, and include the names of staff responsible for coaching or follow-up.

***Next observation.*** Document when you will observe this team leader next and what you will be looking for while you observe.

**Tool 3.A. Coaching Tool**

## Coaching Tool

### General Comments

Joe is supportive and friendly with youth — quick to smile and praise them. Youth seemed comfortable in the group. The Read Aloud was fluid; he had great voice and was well rehearsed. Joe ran a structured Independent Reading time — used coaching cards. Joe needs to work on giving specific praise and feedback to youth, developing and implementing a pre-reading activity, and clarifying his instructions, assignments and themes.

### Goals

### Short-term (1–3 days)

Joe will post a schedule and classroom rules. He will work on providing specific praise — not just "good job," but rather "that was a good job because it included a, b, and c."

### Midterm (2 weeks)

Joe will work on having a pre-reading activity. Joe will work with the site coordinator to develop a variety of pre-reading activities.

### Long-term (2-3 months)

Joe will work on introducing a clear message/theme to youth. Joe will create activities that emphasize his message/theme throughout the lesson.

### Follow-Up

Maria (site coordinator) to check room for posted rules/schedule.

8/15 — Nora (Literacy Coach) will model specific praise during Independent Reading Time and sharing time after youth have read. Debrief after programming.

8/17 — Maria will meet with Joe during lesson-planning time to work on developing pre-reading activities. Will model pre-reading activity with youth on 8/20.

9/7 — All-staff training on developing themes/overall message. In September, Nora will arrange for Joe to observe Joanne at Site B doing themes. In September and October, Maria will develop a buddy system with staff working in teams to develop themes.

### Next Observation

9/4 — Maria will observe. Main focus: specific praise, posted rules/schedule and implementation of a pre-reading activity.

Go to www.ppv.org to download a blank version of this tool and customize it to suit your program.

### Step 4. Implement the Observation and Coaching Process

At this stage, it is important that you communicate the process for observation and coaching with staff and management.

**Set up an observation process.**

• Clarify and make sure staff understand the observation and coaching process: how often it happens, what will be observed and what to expect in terms of follow-up.

• Provide staff opportunities to ask questions about the list of Essential Program Elements, so they understand what is expected of them.

• Set a minimum number of rounds of observations that each staff person should expect. Depending on the number of coaches and the number of staff available, you should consider observing each staff person at least once a semester, with more frequent coaching in between. Allow for flexibility, as some staff might need more follow-up and coaching than others.

• Establish a system that ensures you follow up on coaching items. Before making second-round observations, it's helpful to study a binder or staff folders that collect each person's observations and notes on follow-up. In this way, you can assess progress and remember what you emphasized the last time you observed.

**Prepare to observe.**

• Conduct an information session for all staff to be observed and make sure to:

  – Review the observation calendar

  – Provide all staff with a copy of the observation tool, the Essential Program Elements and the ground rules for coaching

  – Allow for questions and discussion regarding observations

• Give the team leaders time to prepare: About a week before starting observations, the observer should set appointments with the team leaders to be observed.

• Observe team leaders for the entire lesson time.

• Have the team leader and observer debrief and begin a coaching session within 48 hours of the observation.

• Provide the team leader a copy of the completed observation and coaching tool within a week of the debriefing session.

*Manage multi-site observations.* If you run a multi-site initiative with a group of site managers who will conduct observations and coach staff, it is essential you standardize the observation and coaching process. To do this, you will have to conduct effective site manager trainings. It is important to understand that is a time- and resource-intensive process. Program managers and content experts in the CORAL cities that implemented this process noted that they initially considered this an impossible task, but eventually they came to see it as an important and worthwhile investment. At first, program

managers were continually being called to sites to "fix" problems. Training site managers to become observers and coaches sometimes left program managers feeling that they might better spend this time conducting the observations themselves. Nevertheless, they persisted in their training efforts and noted that three months after starting the process, site managers were able to manage many of the "little fires" that naturally arise; site managers felt much more confident in running the day-to-day programming and, as a result, program managers were able to focus on larger issues.

The benefits of training site managers to do observations and coaching are many. Doing so…

- Multiplies the number of people able to coach and support staff

- Frees up the content expert/lead trainer from putting out the small everyday fires and concentrating on program-wide training goals

- Creates consistency in implementation across sites

- Builds buy-in at the site level because staff start to own the process

Ideally, if you have between four and seven site managers, you can train them on a one-to-one basis. If you have a larger staff, you can adapt the process to work in a two-to-one ratio. Allowing for such individualized practice will give staff ample opportunity to observe and practice debriefing and coaching staff.

***Practice gradual release.*** As with every exercise in this guide, you are encouraged to use an instructional strategy that you would like site managers to apply with team leaders that they, in turn, use with youth: gradual release of responsibility. Gradual release is a way of scaffolding learning that can be summarized as "I do, We do, You do." In gradual release, the responsibility for being able to complete a task shifts in increments from the team leader to the student. As you train your staff, expect to explain and model the process, allow for guided practice and then move on to individual practice. Supporting staff in this manner develops a safe environment for learning and practicing new skills that will lead to quality improvements and benefits for youth. See Tool 3.B. for instructions on gradual release.

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**TRAINER'S CHECKLIST FOR SITE MANAGER OBSERVATION AND COACHING**

- Conduct a meeting with site managers before the first observation appointment to review the process, ground rules and goals of each observation.

- Schedule three sessions (at least one week apart) with each site manager. For each appointment, the site manager must:

  - Free his or her schedule during the programming time to permit the observation of an entire lesson.

  - Inform the team leader that she will be observed on the given day and schedule up to an hour-long debriefing session with her to take place within 48 hours of the observation.

- Follow the instructions for the gradual release process outlined in Tool 3.B.

# Section 4: Analysis

In the education and youth services fields, there is an ever-present, ever-growing emphasis on measuring outcomes with quantitative and qualitative data. Members of your organization may find themselves under increasing pressure to use numbers to document the effectiveness of your program to current and potential funders. At the same time, you may feel you lack the resources (both time and technical skill) to collect and manipulate the kinds of data you are typically asked to produce. Despite these obstacles, your observation data can provide important information you can use to improve the quality of your program and, when linked with other data you collect, observation data can give you the confidence to convey on the quality, value and strengths of your program to an outside audience.



**IN THIS SECTION**
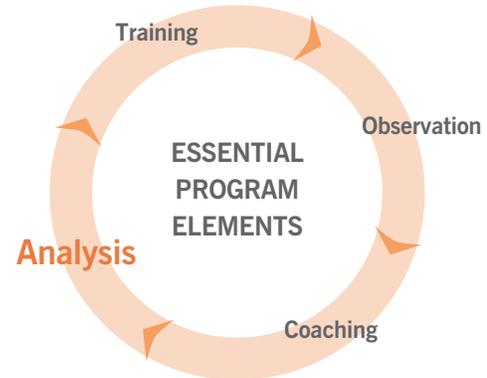
| Learn how to: | Use these tools: | Invest this time: | Involve this team: |
|---|---|---|---|
| Create a process that uses observation data to help improve the quality of programming | Your observation data | Ongoing | Persons involved with implementing and/or developing trainings |
| Link and expand upon observation data to offer more insight for the program staff | | | Individuals with the content knowledge to interpret the observations |
| | | | Individuals involved in data collection or reporting on program implementation |

**Analysis: Using Data to Support a System of Quality Improvement**

Data collection may not be in your job description or your immediate responsibility. But the collection of observation data could be considered a piece of the data collection and reporting effort of the organization as a whole. You may find yourself needing to report on certain aspects of your program and its components. Observation data are rich in both qualitative and quantitative information, providing documentation about what is being presented to youth. The steps outlined below will help

you organize your data in ways that allow you to respond to certain requests (for information), but the real purpose of this section is to help you use observation data to focus your priorities when creating a training agenda.

***Check the observation data.*** Review the data for completeness and accuracy as they are collected. In Section 3 of this guide, the importance of testing the observation tool was demonstrated. Similarly, checking data will help to maintain the quality of the data as they are collected. A simple random review early on will help make sure there are no delays or problems when you are ready to begin your analysis.

If completed observation tools start to pile up, gather a few of them and check that the information is complete, clear and reflective of what you are trying to capture about programming. Conduct a quality check after every round of observations. As a general rule of thumb, be sure to check at least 20 percent of the total number of observations collected per round.

***Organize the observation data.*** If the data are on paper, organize them in a way that is easy to follow. If you wish to enter the data in electronic format, create a database and enter the data during the collection process. There are some advantages to entering data collected on paper into an electronic format. It is easier to maintain and store an electronic file than many sheets of loose paper. A database can be used to produce calculations, charts or other types of documents that help to present the results of your program. However, storing the data in an electronic format offers little benefit if there is no plan to use them.

***Determine your focus.*** Use the levels and expectations from the Essential Program Elements identified by your team as the lens to review your data. For example, if reading to youth a minimum of 25 minutes is one of your essential elements, then it's critical to focus on this benchmark: Comb through each observation and record the total time of the Read Aloud. After recording the total time across each observation, you can calculate and analyze the following:

- The range (i.e., the high and the low)

- The average amount of time

- The percent of the observations in which the goal was achieved

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**ANALYZING OBSERVATION DATA**

There are simple and useful ways to analyze observation data. But it is important to recognize what can and cannot be said of the information you have collected. The type of data and how you collect them influence the confidence you have in your analyses. Some data are limited in what they can reveal. Observing one classroom may not reveal a trend in programming. Remember: see it more than once before you call it a trend. Ideally, you should see it more than three times on three different occasions, and call it a trend only after asking three different individuals if they also noticed what you discovered.

*Start counting*. Create a system for tallying the data about key benchmarks. First, identify the components of interest based on the Essential Program Elements, and focus on those of high priority. Create a grid, listing the various components of interest across the top and including data taken from each individual observation. In the data grid below, observation 1 showed 13 minutes taken for Read Aloud; observation 2 showed 7 minutes. You can include identifiers (information that identifies the site or person being observed), unless you plan to share the document with others. List the components of interest by the level of priority — limiting your list to a reasonable number of components makes the process manageable. Remember that what interests you is not necessarily what interests everyone else. Don't feel the pressure to report on everything, but be prepared to review more items than you actually report on.

**DATA GRID**

COMPONENTS OF INTEREST

| Observation Number | Total Read Aloud Minutes | Rules Posted with Positive Language | Read Aloud is Fluent and Reflects Preparedness | Established Process for Student Sharing |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 13 | ☑ | ☑ | ☑ |
| 2 | 7 | ☑ | ☑ | ☐ |
| 3 | 20 | ☑ | ☐ | ☑ |
| 4 | 26 | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 5 | 18 | ☑ | ☑ | ☐ |

As further rounds of observation are completed, the analysis questions of interest should change and will allow you to look at more data over a larger period of time. The components of interest that are listed in the data grid above could be considered the first layer of quality expected by a newly implemented program. But, as the program delivery becomes more sophisticated, so will the focus of the observations and analysis. Answering simple questions isn't bad: It can offer a lot of helpful information and could be an indication of initial success. But by asking more complicated questions, you can add a layer of depth and expand what can be accomplished by data collection efforts. The chart below, adapted from a recent P/PV publication, *Good Stories Aren't Enough,*[2] provides example questions to take you to this next level of thinking.

**ASK MORE OF YOUR OBSERVATIONS**

QUESTIONS OF **CONTEXT**, SUCH AS:

How do these data compare with last year's results?

QUESTIONS OF **SPECIFICITY**, SUCH AS:

How did students identified as English learners perform compared with others?

QUESTIONS OF **INQUIRY**, SUCH AS:

What are the possible reasons reading test scores are lower?

QUESTIONS OF **VALIDITY**, SUCH AS:

How can we be sure that data are measuring the right concept?

[2] To download a copy of *Good Stories Aren't Enough,* go to the publications section of P/PV's website, www.ppv.org.

***Determine whether you need more information to understand an emerging theme or pattern.***
Before making a major change (or issuing a proclamation), ask yourself if you need more information. At this point, you might make the decision to add a layer of data collection. If this is needed, create a system to collect these data now or during the next round of observations. Also consider working with staff whose job is to collect other data, such as enrollment or attendance — adding this type of data could provide further insight.

***Define the scope of the finding.*** First ask: To which level does this finding apply? Then ask: Am I seeing this across the entire program level, at the site level, or is this at an individual team leader/student group level? Understanding the scope helps direct the appropriate response to an emerging issue.

***Decide whether and to whom the analysis should be presented.*** As explained in the previous section, observation data can help focus future trainings. Presenting results from the observations will help to justify the training agenda. When presenting information to others inside and outside of your organization, you must first explain how data were collected. The volume and frequency of data collection impacts how powerful the results will be and what can be said about them. Observations provide an insight that is informative, and when combined with other types of data such as enrollment and attendance, build a multifaceted and more complex picture of programming. For example, the tally of youth from 10 observations does not provide a complete and accurate representation of attendance, because your observations are completed during isolated points in time, unlike daily attendance which is collected over the course of a program year.

***Develop training.*** The findings of the data analysis will help guide you as you develop the training agenda. The components that have not been satisfactorily delivered should be of top priority. The next section contains guidelines for developing a training agenda.

# Section 5: Training

Training can be considered both the end and the beginning of the cycle of program improvement. This is because training content reflects the activities that preceded it — including observations and analysis of the data collected — while providing the basis for a subsequent round of observation and analysis. The content of staff training, unlike that of individual coaching, takes into account what management observed and learned throughout the improvement cycle. It is neither generic nor predetermined, but rather responds directly to what is happening in a particular program over a specific period of time. By making trainings both responsive and relevant to program staff, program managers can significantly enhance program quality.

**Training**

ESSENTIAL PROGRAM ELEMENTS

Observation

Coaching

Analysis

**IN THIS SECTION**

| **Learn how to:** | **Use these tools:** | **Invest this time:** | **Involve this team:** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Categorize and prioritize trends in program implementation gathered during the observation process | Categorizing Trends Tool | Ongoing | Program director/trainer |
| Plan a training that integrates instructional strategies, classroom practices and innovations | Training Plan Tool | | Any staff conducting operations |
| Create a training feedback process to inform training and support follow-up | Training Evaluation Tool | | |

Initial trainings should be designed to give staff a general overview of the entire program. At the same time, these trainings should provide in-depth instruction and practice on key components or strategies that:

• Staff can learn to implement quickly with some amount of quality

• Staff need in order to be able to deliver programming (for example, youth development strategies, behavior management)

• Staff can use as an instructional foundation upon which they can add other components, activities or strategies (for example, train on how to do a Read Aloud first; later, train on components that flow naturally from that — discussion facilitation, literature response activities, etc.)

With an initial training, you equip staff with the basic instructional tools that they can build on throughout the year. At this point in the program improvement cycle, you will be able to use the Essential Program Elements, your observation tools and coaching notes to inform the development of a training agenda that is responsive to the needs that have emerged as programming has begun, builds on the good practices already occurring and is targeted to staff who will benefit from the training.

### Step 1: Categorize and Prioritize Program Implementation Trends Gathered During the Observation Process

***Categorize trends.*** After gathering your observations and analyzing the information they capture, you should see some trends that illustrate gaps in programming or needs that are emerging among team leaders. Using Tool 5.A. (see Appendix C), put these trends into one of three categories:

- *Instructional strategies* are the "nuts and bolts" approaches that team leaders use in lesson delivery. Examples include: showing a book's pictures during a Read Aloud, explaining vocabulary, providing youth with a model of the writing they expect, etc.

- *Classroom practices* are the connection pieces of lesson delivery. These are the strategies or activities that draw in, engage and motivate youth. Examples include: classroom management, building connections, developing adult-youth relationships, challenging and inspiring youth, etc.

- *Innovations* are practices or resources that were created and/or used by team leaders and that should be shared with the larger group. An innovation does not have to be complicated — it may be a simple solution that a team leader has developed to respond to a problem, or a short activity she conducts with youth that makes learning fun.

***Prioritize programming gaps and staff needs.*** After completing your list of trends, reference your Essential Program Elements and start to prioritize what should be covered. To guide the process, ask yourself the following questions:

*Do the trends show that staff are:*

- *Implementing what they learned at the initial program training very well and are ready for new strategies or the integration of a new component?*

- *In need of remediation to improve on what they are doing?*

- *In need of a mixture of remediation and new skills?*

*Which Essential Program Elements at the "beginner" level need more teaching/introduction before moving on to a second-tier training?*

*Which innovations can be incorporated into the training? (Pick one or two.)*

**Example: Tool 5.A.**

*Below, the program director/trainer has checked the trends she wants to focus on during training. Further descriptions of innovations are included in Appendix A.*

**Categorizing Trends Tool**

| Instructional Strategies Trends | Classroom Practices Trends | Innovations |
|---|---|---|
| ☑ 60% of team leaders are obviously not practicing the reading before they read the book in front of the class — mispronouncing words, not reading fluidly. | ☑ 75% of team leaders do not have "agreements" posted — the majority has posted rules in negative language. | ☑ Pants hangers used to hang posters and easel paper. |
| ☐ 70% are trying to use at least one reading strategy — either doing the voices, varying speed, etc. | ☑ 50% have an orderly system for youth to share when they want to do so. Often a small subset of youth does most of the sharing. | ☑ "The Tank" is a monster tri-fold used as a multipurpose tool for the team leader — who can post student work schedules, agreements, etc. This tool holds materials and serves as a "word wall." |
| ☑ 15% are defining/explaining vocabulary. | ☐ 50% of team leaders do not seem excited about doing the reading portion of the lesson. Comments like, "well, once we finish reading, we can do something fun" are not uncommon. | ☐ "Star Cards" on which youth write a creative fantasy bio that can be used to introduce them during sharing time. |
| ☑ 70% are asking questions, but only around 20% are asking personal connection questions. | ☑ 70% of the time, negative behavior is being addressed promptly but positive behaviors are not being reinforced. | |
| ☐ 90% of team leaders are introducing the book and the author. | | |

*This seems to be a positive trend, but the director might want to make sure to reinforce it at a later training.*

*This might best be handled by managers at the site level. It may also be mentioned at the training but should not be a focus.*

*This innovation can be shown off at the next training. Option: include it in an "Innovations to Try" handout passed out at the training.*

## Step 2: Plan a Training that Integrates Instructional Strategies, Classroom Practices and Innovations
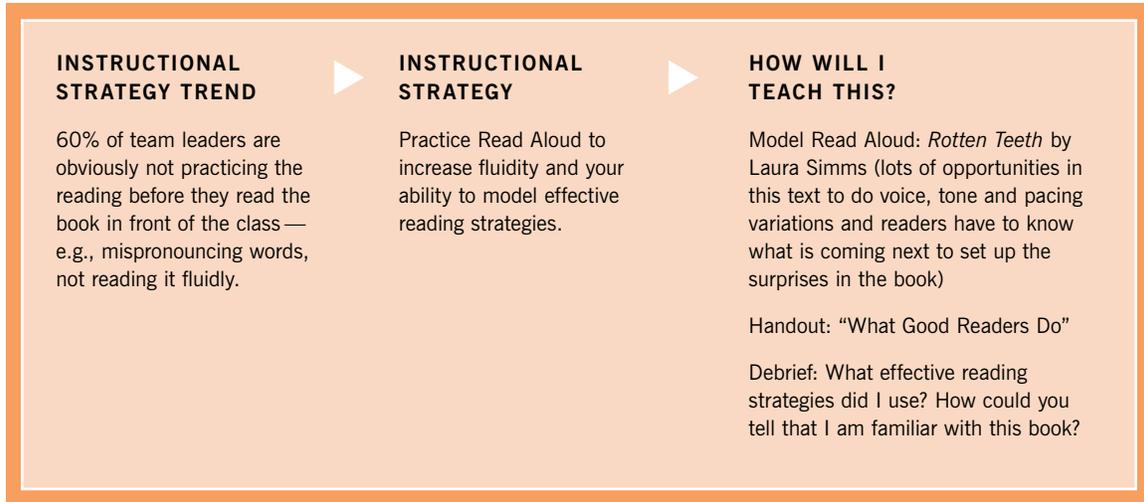
Because you probably don't have eight hours allotted for a training marathon, you will want to make sure that your training plan allows you to cover everything you've prioritized while not overwhelming participants. An effective way of achieving this is to:

• *Teach* participants the instructional strategies

• *Model* the classroom practices

• *Use* the innovations

**Rephrase your trends into action statements.** This will help you clarify what you need to communicate to your training participants. See the Training Plan Tool (Tool 5.B.) in Appendix C to view a completed training plan and download a blank plan for your use.

**Outline your activities.** For each action statement, outline the activity that will teach or model each instructional strategy or classroom practice.

**Illustrate how your innovations will be used.** List each innovation and describe how you will use it during training.

| INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY TREND | ▶ | INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY | ▶ | HOW WILL I TEACH THIS? |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 60% of team leaders are obviously not practicing the reading before they read the book in front of the class — e.g., mispronouncing words, not reading it fluidly. | | Practice Read Aloud to increase fluidity and your ability to model effective reading strategies. | | Model Read Aloud: *Rotten Teeth* by Laura Simms (lots of opportunities in this text to do voice, tone and pacing variations and readers have to know what is coming next to set up the surprises in the book)<br><br>Handout: "What Good Readers Do"<br><br>Debrief: What effective reading strategies did I use? How could you tell that I am familiar with this book? |

### Step 3: Create a Training Feedback Process to Inform Training and Support Follow-up

*Capture informal feedback.* During your training, you should be informally assessing the learning that is taking place from what participants are asking, saying and doing. It is important that your training have plenty of opportunities for your participants to:

- Ask questions of you and each other

- Verbalize what they are learning and how they can use it in their own practice

- Demonstrate what they are learning through practice and presentation

These informal feedback mechanisms can help you answer the following:

- What resources and strategies do team leaders feel they need in order to do a better job?

- What challenges and successes are they experiencing that might not be apparent in the observations?

- Is this training addressing the programming gaps and staff needs that were identified in the observations?

- Are participants able to see how the training will help them do their job better?

*Capture formal feedback.* You can gather formal feedback in two ways: training evaluation forms and further observations. Directly after the training, have participants fill out a training evaluation form. These forms can yield valuable information, but only if they ask the right questions and if they are filled out thoughtfully. When creating a training evaluation form that will help you plan follow-up training and support, keep the following in mind:

- Keep it short. People don't want to spend a long time filling it out.

- Provide a structured time for participants to fill out the evaluation form. If you hand an evaluation to participants as they are packing up, you will get blank evaluations and/or evaluations that were filled out with little thought (for example, people circle straight 5s on the rankings and answer

"Everything" to the question that asks, *What material did you find most useful?*). Instead, pass out the evaluation form and give participants five to ten minutes to fill it out before you do the final debrief or announcements.

• Provide questions and prompts that allow participants to rank certain aspects of the training, such as food, room set-up, clarity and helpfulness of handouts. Also include some questions/prompts that require a short answer. Examples: *Name three strategies you can use in your practice in the coming week. What strategies/components would you like to see covered in a future training?*

• Ask questions that will result in information you really want to know. If you don't want to know if the time of the training was convenient because you have no flexibility to change it, then don't ask. People are prone to fill out evaluation forms more thoughtfully when they actually think their feedback will be addressed, so if you can't change it, don't ask.

• Acknowledge that training is more than just learning components. Trainings are also about team building and making staff feel respected and supported. The little things count, so ask: *Was the room comfortable? If not, how could it be more comfortable? Is the time of the training convenient? What times are good? What kind of snacks/dinner would be good for next time?* (Provide them with a list of options.) Balance this bit of advice with the one above. Don't ask if you don't really want to know or can't change it.

Consider a two-part evaluation, using a "parking lot" to get a quick snapshot of the training at midpoint. Hand everyone a sticky note before participants go on a break and ask them to either list the most important thing they have learned so far or a burning question they might have. Have them post their comments and questions on a "parking lot" board before the break. Review these notes to see if there are some aspects of your training that you can adapt immediately to make it more effective/engaging for participants. Have participants fill out an evaluation at the end of the training and require them to do an assignment: Document what learning they have incorporated into their practice since the training. Participants should complete this assignment at a later date (two weeks maximum). See Tool 5.C. in Appendix C for an example training evaluation.

***Return to the cycle with further observations.*** You will be assessing the learning that has taken place in another formal way when you observe again and ask:

• *Are the concepts and strategies that were covered in training being implemented by staff?*

• *Are the gaps and needs identified in the observations being addressed?*

• *Is programming improving?*

Taken together, the training feedback and information gleaned from a new round of observations will help you build a training agenda that is relevant and responsive to staff needs, is based on evidence and reinforces the Essential Program Elements that lead to quality programming.

## Conclusion

The use of a continuous cycle of program improvement as a vehicle to enhance program practice and improve outcomes is neither new nor unique to the education field. In the corporate sector, similar quality improvement strategies are common. P/PV's research on the CORAL initiative suggests that utilizing this system can indeed improve quality in after-school programs — which, in turn, increase the odds of achieving educational outcomes.

While each step of the cycle described in this toolkit is valuable on its own, it is the combination of these steps as part of a complete and continuous sequence of activity and review that makes this approach a powerful and lasting one. Once the Essential Program Elements (which reflect best practices and local priorities and state the goals of the after-school program) are established, the cycle has its foundation and can begin.

While it may seem daunting to develop such a process in a context where critical resources — time, money and personnel — are often in short supply, the benefits that can accrue for after-school programs and their participants cannot be overstated. By investing in a process for continuous program improvement, after-school providers create the circumstances for achieving the enhanced academic outcomes they seek.

# Appendix A

**Innovations**

The CORAL staff with whom we worked developed and implemented a range of innovative practices to address challenges they encountered and to take advantage of opportunities that presented themselves. Several of them are shared here to both illustrate the kinds of creative solutions that are possible when program staff work together to ensure program success and to remind the reader that even if a strategy doesn't yet exist in a toolkit or established curriculum, it can be invented or adapted and utilized by creative and enterprising staff.

**The Tank**

At one CORAL site, teachers had asked team leaders not to post materials or write on the dry erase boards in their rooms. Of course, during their lessons, team leaders wanted to post youth's brainstorming ideas, samples of student work, rules and other materials that would facilitate the lesson and create a print rich environment for their youth. Additionally, team leaders had to transport books, paper, pens, pencils, markers and any other materials they might need to deliver their lessons. While some team leaders found themselves carrying or wheeling in crates of materials and enlisting youth to help them set up, one team leader decided to create his own solution: "The Tank."

Using a clothing rack with wheels, the team leader secured two tri-fold presentation boards, one on top of the other, creating a 5- to 6-foot "wall" made of sturdy cardboard. He then covered it with colorful paper and used it as an all-purpose tool for both himself and the youth in his group. Along the back, he stapled some pencil bags providing youth access to pens, pencils, tape, etc. Using a large binder clip, he attached sentence strips that he had laminated so that he could re-use them. He applied Velcro® to the board, to the back of the sentence strips, and to other laminated posters so he could post and remove them from the wall as needed. Along the front of the wall, he posted the group's name, rules, consequences and rewards. He also created space to post student work. Finally, he added pockets made of sturdy envelopes that contained paper and popsicle sticks with youth names written on them so that he could draw names to call on the youth during lessons. The wheels on the clothing rack made the entire wall easy to transport to whatever room he was using that day.

This team leader created a solution to a very common challenge in after school programming — creating an interactive learning space that respects restrictions from school day teachers. In practice, The Tank, as the presentation board was soon named by other team leaders, was an invaluable tool. By modeling how he used it, the team leader helped The Tank very quickly become a central resource where youth would read the announcements of the day, access materials and consult when they needed to reference information (vocabulary, brainstorming notes, or writing topics) that had been covered.

**Star Cards**

Team leaders often find middle school youth especially challenging to engage in the after-school hours. At one CORAL site, team leaders found ways to engage youth and encourage participation in not only writing but also public speaking by creating "star cards." Giving youth 3 x 5 note cards, the team leader instructed them to write a short fantasy biography of themselves in third person that could be used to introduce them during sharing time. Other than providing their real first name, youth had creative license in writing a bio that also revealed their interests, talents and goals. In one example, a youth claimed that to attend the program, he had to make room in his busy NBA schedule and work around travel with his superstar wife, Beyoncé Knowles. He described his talent in writing and how he loved to share his gift with words when he rapped and spoke publicly. Other youth changed their last names to that of their favorite movie or pop stars or discussed their busy lives as doctors, lawyers, entrepreneurs and sports stars.

After writing the short bios on the note cards, youth turned them in and the team leader kept them in a small box. The next time that youth were called on to share their writing, the team leader took her box and leaned toward youth with dramatic flair. She announced to youth that they had a celebrity in the room and that they were very lucky to have this special person come to share his or her thoughts with the group. With youth looking around for the "special guest," she took out a card from the box and read the bio, ending with the youth's name.

The team leader used this strategy to choose youth to share their writing at least once a week as a treat. Every time she did it, she found youth listening raptly as they tried to guess the identity of the next "special guest." Additionally, youth who were chosen to share their writing found themselves subjected to loud applause, snapping fingers and cheers as their peers welcomed them to the stage, listened to what they had written and asked questions. In addition to increasing youth engagement in the activities, the process also increased youth's engagement with each other–shifting their focus from the instructor to their peers.

To keep the activity fresh, a team leader should have youth update their cards periodically and be willing to have other youth read the introductions.

**Job Applications**

One CORAL site decided to develop youth's real world skills by expanding on the traditional "jobs list" that many team leaders use to assign youth roles during programming.

Team leaders created detailed descriptions for every job — from pencil distributor to line leader. Then they created a short job application that asked youth to list any relevant experience and reasons they wanted the job. Youth interested in applying could work with a team leader to fill out their applications and receive tips on the next step in the process: the interview. Youth were soon filling out applications where, for example, they listed experience in cleaning their rooms as the reason they should be chosen to monitor the daily cleanup of the room by their peers. Others listed experience taking care of younger siblings and varied interests that might make them likely candidates for the position. Why were these positions so attractive and competitive? Two reasons: 1) the jobs were to last anywhere from one to three weeks depending on age group, giving the youth a sense of empowerment, and 2) during this time, youth earned extra CORAL tickets. CORAL tickets were part of an existing system to reward youth for positive behavior. The tickets could be used at the CORAL store where youth could buy paper, small toys, pencils, etc. Youth could now earn extra tickets for their work during the time they were "on the job."

Team leaders reported how giving youth this structured process not only taught them about the job process, but also taught them about self-presentation, public speaking and the value of a job well done. They noted that when the tasks were deemed "jobs," youth took the process seriously — some even attending their interviews in suits or dresses — and also took their roles more seriously.
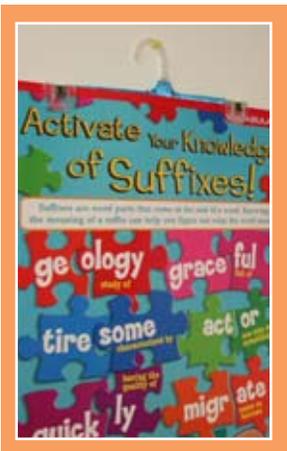


**Hangers for Posting**

One CORAL team leader provided another simple way to deal with restrictions against posting materials. Posting all of her pre-made examples and information up on large sheets of easel paper, she then used pant hangers with clips to hang them from various places in the room — over existing pushpins, doorknobs, hooks, etc. When leaving the classroom, she was able to keep the posters organized and available for use the next day, and transporting the bulky posters was as easy as carrying her dry cleaning.

**Site Managers as Experts**

In one CORAL city, team leaders often struggled to create positive learning environments. During their training before programming started, site managers listed the chronic team leader missteps often witnessed at their sites. Site managers brainstormed and listed positive alternatives or solutions they had tried and knew were effective. After recording all of these ideas, they noticed two things:

1) The alternatives were varied and reflective of different personality styles. A team leader who was shy and reserved might not feel comfortable implementing the strategies of an extroverted site manager, but he might be able to implement the strategies of someone who was more like himself.

2) The site managers were experts at creating positive learning environments. They knew the population, had experience implementing the strategies and knew what worked.

The trainers decided to use this expertise. They gathered the brainstorming notes and began putting them into broad categories — attention getters, reward systems, setting expectations, consequences, etc. Where necessary, notes were expanded upon and examples were added to illustrate the concept. Everything was formatted into a training/resource workbook that was used in a site manager-led training.

The training was reflective of real problems and solutions that site managers had witnessed at their sites. It captured the depth and breadth of expertise in the room.

And, it expanded on that expertise when team leaders were prompted to brainstorm their own solutions to problems and record them in the workbook. Finally, by creating their own workbook, the site managers/trainers were able to emphasize the types of strategies that they felt were reflective of best practice and their mission as an organization.

## Appendix B

**Tips for Successful Trainings**

Following are tips that CORAL staff found to be particularly helpful. They are shared here because they represent useful — and easily utilized — strategies that anyone who is responsible for conducting trainings and/or professional development sessions can use to enhance the likelihood of a successful outcome. These tips may be useful in any setting and with any training content. And, while they may seem self-evident, we include them here as a reminder of their effectiveness.

**Answer the Need**

One of the first things that busy, yet highly organized, program directors often do is set the training calendar for the year. They usually do this in July or August and are excited to share the calendar with staff at the first training. While in theory, this would seem like a great strategy — staff would be well informed of the timing of trainings, the workshops' logical flow would be apparent, etc. — there is one big flaw. The calendar is not responsive to what is being observed in the program. If you have scheduled your training on engagement strategies for December, you might end up with frantic staff who can't understand why you are training them how to run math skill stations in October when they are unable to engage the youth long enough to listen to instructions.

While it is a great idea to schedule the time and dates of trainings well in advance, make sure that your observations drive the topics of your trainings. This ensures that the training meets your staff where they are, that it addresses something they are invested in learning how to do, and that it teaches them to do something that they need to improve. Create standing dates but stay flexible in terms of the topics. You'll find that staff are more open to training if they feel that you are being responsive to some of the challenges they are experiencing while they are experiencing them.

**Make it Real**

In one city, a trainer excitedly showed a video depicting an expert teacher leading a literacy lesson. In the video, the teacher was surrounded by youth who were highly engaged, who asked questions and who were responding to her highly effective teaching strategies. It was a model lesson. Surely her team leaders would see the expert teacher and feel ready to try the strategies during the practice portion of the training. Wrong. The trainer was met with complaints that "this woman is not real," "those kids must be actors" and "those kids look nothing like the kids we have in our programs!"

Even though the trainer had meant to show team leaders a "model" lesson, the model was beyond the realm of the team leaders' reality, and they immediately rejected it as being unfeasible for their own practice. For the next training, a session that focused on coaching strategies during independent reading, the trainer video-recorded a wide variety of youth from different sites reading excerpts from texts at different levels. Each excerpt ended with youth looking into the camera questioningly — as if

they were waiting for some feedback. Team leaders recognized the youth and were highly motivated to brainstorm in groups on how to coach their youth. Later, team leaders commented on how "real" the training was for them and that they thought it was one of the best trainings they had attended that year.

When possible, enrich training with actual, realistic situations taking place in your program. Show videos of peers or trainers working with youth in the program, mixing these with videos showing best practices and/or experts modeling in ideal "scenarios." Team leaders are often tempted, out of their own frustration, to immediately dismiss a strategy, saying, "That won't work with my kids." Show them how it can.

**Provide Something for Participants to Take Away**

In the first year of CORAL, after some initial trainings had taken place, several trainers were frustrated. They had conducted trainings where participants were taught how to make great materials — games, posters, skill building materials or incentive charts. And though participants seemed excited during the trainings and claimed to love the materials, when trainers observed programs they rarely saw evidence of any of those materials in practice. When asked, team leaders often explained that they had a great deal of raw materials in their file cabinets, but that they had not gotten around to actually creating or using the materials. There just wasn't enough time. Some of the trainers — former teachers — were understandably frustrated. To some, this situation seemed to be the result of laziness. Most of these teachers had experienced plenty of evenings where, on their own time, on their own living room floors, they created games or posters for use the next day. Why couldn't team leaders do that? In debriefing, the trainers had to acknowledge the many pressures that part-time workers often face: little to no prep-time, crowded schedules outside of work (often their own college courses, other jobs, families, etc.). But even without the values judgment, the fact remained that the intended materials were not being utilized.

In response, trainers planned a "make and take" training on literacy games. Structured as a two-part training in one night, the first half gave team leaders an opportunity to play each game by rotating through six stations. For eight minutes at each station, team leaders read instructions, and then played the game before discussing what skill the game reinforced and how it might be adapted. During the second part of the training, team leaders had access to all the materials they needed to create the games they wanted and structured time to work on them. Every team leader walked out of the training with several games he or she could use the next day. Later, during the next round of observations, the trainers saw many instances of the games being played.

Give staff the opportunity to actually create materials you want them to use. It is not a waste of time. In fact, you'll often find that an incredible amount of peer learning happens as staff create materials, share suggestions with one another or brainstorm on how they can adapt and improve the materials. In order to maximize the sharing and productivity, make sure to emphasize that the structured time is intended for creating materials. Staff should be discouraged from going home early to work on the materials later. Consider incorporating a debriefing toward the end of the workshop so participants can share ideas for adaptations and improvements. Record their ideas and distribute copies to the sites within the week.

**Be Explicit and Purposeful About the Fact That You Are Modeling Effective Practice**

During the first year of CORAL literacy implementation, program directors would spend the bulk of their time in the classrooms with team leaders and in trainings modeling instructional and engagement strategies. Time after time, they would conduct the same training in which they modeled a fun and engaging Read Aloud or showed staff how to coach youth as they wrote. After observations, the same program directors would be frustrated with the lack of progress. At one point, one program director exclaimed, "They see me do it all the time! I keep modeling for them and showing them! Why don't they get it?" The answer was simple: The team leaders had no idea that she was modeling for them. They thought she was an incredible instructor that somehow could make things magically interesting and engaging. She was a "natural" and they loved what she did, but they had no idea how they could transfer what they were seeing into their own practice. Even worse, they often didn't even know which strategies they should be attempting.

All trainings should incorporate some modeling of the practices and strategies you want to see staff using. The key to making sure that they are aware of what is being modeled is to be explicit about what you are doing. For example, if you are conducting a training on Read Alouds and plan to incorporate a variety of instructional and engagement strategies, try this:

Before the model lesson, say: "Today, as I do this sample lesson, I want you to look for the types of instructional strategies I am using. How do I make sure that you are learning what I want you to learn? Additionally, observe how I work to keep you engaged and on task. Afterward, I'm going to ask you for feedback on what I did well during this lesson and what I could have done better or how I could adapt the lesson for another group."

This approach gives staff a focus by pointing out specific practices that they need to be analyzing.

After the model lesson, lead the group in a debriefing of the lesson and have them list the effective strategies they observed. Record their responses and engage them in discussion to make sure they understand why a strategy was implemented and what it does. Have them brainstorm on adaptations for their own groups. Finally, ask them to think about which strategies they can try for themselves in the coming week and to plan how they will do it. Later that week, provide them with printed copies of the debriefing and brainstorming notes.

Being explicit about what you are modeling and then later emphasizing it by debriefing on the modeled lesson ensures that team leaders are focused on what you want them to learn. Additionally, having to explain what they saw you do and why it was effective for them requires team leaders to analyze and dissect your strategies and takes the strategies out of the realm of a "mysterious gift that this trainer has" into the realm of "I can do this!"

**Level Trainings**

In many programs, trainers are faced with a predominantly new workforce every school year due to turnover. Every year, they provide the same introductory training because it is effective and it gives a great overview of the program.

In most CORAL cities, as trainers did this, they found themselves faced with a small population of returning or veteran staff who had to endure the same training year after year. In one CORAL city, a veteran team leader had attended the same trainings year after year to the point where he could have conducted the trainings himself. As you build capacity in your training staff, hopefully utilizing your site managers and veteran staff with advanced skill sets as trainers, consider offering leveled trainings. Team leaders at a Level II (see page 12 for definitions of each level) should not be subjected to an introductory training where they learn nothing. Instead, provide them with a training that builds on their skill sets and challenges them to improve. In consultation with site managers and observations, assign team leaders to the appropriate trainings — they'll thank you for sparing them the experience of attending the introductory training for the third or fourth time!

*Note: Providing leveled trainings does not mean that you should completely track team leaders. Trainings should still provide opportunities for the entire group to come together to learn and share ideas.*

**Make It Fun**

Trainers often are of the mind that the adult staff whom they are training want to be treated as "professionals," so trainings should be interactive but, by and large, should be loosely modeled after a college seminar. College-age team leaders are professionals, and they do very important work. But the youth they are instructing are not adults and the young staff leaders need trainers to model and incorporate some of the fun that defines after-school programming. Remember, after school programming is not simply "more school" after school. In trainings, it's important to make sure staff have plenty of opportunities to interact and learn from each other. Model fun and engaging team building activities that they can use with youth — team building, dance, art, cheers, incentive prizes, raffles, etc. Having team leaders, trainers and site managers participate in fun activities together gives them opportunities to bond and reinforce the supportive relationships you want them to have. In CORAL cities, trainers reinforced fun through "Soul Train" dance lines, scavenger hunts, cross-site competitions and opportunities to represent the personalities of their sites. Be purposeful about integrating fun into all the activities so that when staff go back to work with youth, they don't make a delineation between "fun" and "learning" — instead really understanding that learning can be fun.

**Provide Food and Incentives**

Many project managers struggle with deciding whether or not to provide food because realistically, there is often not a budget line for feeding people during a staff training. The same is true for giving out incentives. Other times, project managers feel that trainings are part of the job and not a "party." This is true. Trainings should be structured as targeted professional development and should have the goal of improving program quality — not merely providing an opportunity to socialize. That stated, consider the research pointing to the increased learning that occurs when youth are well fed. Consider that most trainings are held directly after programming, and often, team leaders have not had an opportunity to eat. Consider what most youth workers are paid and the fact that they often reach into their own pockets to purchase materials. Food and prizes do not have to be that expensive, and you can often ask a local store or restaurant to donate goods for your trainings. Food and incentives — along with supportive professional development — go a long way toward developing staff who feel valued and appreciated and who, in turn, will be willing to go that extra mile for your program.

# Appendix C

**Tool 1.A. Defining Essential Program Elements**

| Defining Essential Program Elements Tool | |
|---|---|
| **Component** | **Staff Strategies/Activities**<br>What are the indicators of quality (strategies and activities used by instructors) that we expect to see in programming? |
| **Component** 1<br>Read Aloud | Use strategies that engage youth: voices, sounds, movement, pauses<br>Are excited about the text<br>Encourage youth to make personal connections to the topic<br>Define or clarify important words<br>Note the name and author of the text<br>Vary volume and inflection of voice while reading<br>Read at an appropriate pace<br>Call attention to literary devices<br>Occasionally ask open-ended questions<br>Point out pictures and other graphics when appropriate |
| **Component** 2<br>Shout Out/Discussion | Select a topic/question related to the book read<br>Provide opportunities for youth to make personal connections to the text<br>Focus on open-ended questions as opposed to "yes/no" or "right/wrong" |
| **Component** 3 | |

Go to www.ppv.org to download a blank version of this tool and customize it to suit your program.

**Tool 1.B. Leveling Essential Program Elements (as filled out by a CORAL site in Sacramento)**

## Leveling Essential Program Elements Tool

| Program Component | Level I Expectations *Inexperienced Staff* | Level II Expectations *Returning/Experienced Staff* | Level III Expectations *Senior Staff* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Pre-reading Activity | Students are given an opportunity to learn<br><br>Team leader introduces the theme/message, title and author of book | Students are given an opportunity to actively get ready to learn<br><br>Pre-reading is connected to the theme/message<br><br>Team leader uses a variety of activities | Students are given an opportunity to actively get ready to learn<br><br>Team leader uses a variety of activities to emphasize the connection to the theme/message |
| Read Aloud | Team leader has pre-read the materials<br><br>Team leader uses at least one strategy during reading to engage students (voices, sounds, movement, pauses)<br><br>Team leader explains vocabulary words and gives examples to help students make connections<br><br>Team leader includes clarification and connection questions<br><br>Team leader summarizes the Read Aloud<br><br>Team leader uses a transition sentence to lead into the Shout Out activity | Team leader has read and is familiar with reading materials<br><br>Team leader uses more than one strategy during reading to engage students (voices, sounds, movement, pauses)<br><br>Team leader explains vocabulary words and gives examples to help students make connections<br><br>Team leader includes clarification, connection, and thought-provoking questions<br><br>Team leader summarizes the Read Aloud and makes connections back to the theme/message<br><br>Team leader uses a variety of transitions to lead into the Shout Out activity. | Team leader has rehearsed and is familiar with reading materials<br><br>Team leader regularly uses a variety of strategies during reading to engage students (voices, sounds, movement, pauses)<br><br>Team leader explains vocabulary words and gives examples to help students make connections<br><br>Team leader highlights/acknowledges words within the reading material<br><br>Team leader includes clarification, connection and thought-provoking questions and asks follow-up questions<br><br>Team leader summarizes the Read Aloud and makes connections back to the theme/message<br><br>Team leader uses a variety of effective transitions to lead into the Shout Out activity |

Go to www.ppv.org to download a blank version of this tool and customize it to suit your program.

**Tool 2.A: Observation** *(page one of two)*

## Observation Tool

Team leader: *Joe A.*　　　　Date Observed: *8/10/07*　　　　Meeting: *8/11/07*

Observer: *Maria D.*　　　　Site: *#1234*　　　　Grade: *4*　　Number of Students: *13*

Book/text: *The Great Gilly Hopkins, "William Earnest and Other Mean Flowers"*　　　　Lesson:

| Lesson Components/Expectations | Evidence/Comments |
|---|---|
| Read Aloud: The team leader (TL) presents the title, author and vocabulary words and displays them throughout the lesson.<br><br>The TL has an engaging Read Aloud that includes questions. The TL uses a transition to lead into Shout Out. | TL introduced book and title, and vocabulary words.<br>TL used inflection and tone to portray different "voices" — sounded mean with her Gilly voice and made Trotter sound Southern.<br>TL put the book away right after reading it instead of displaying it throughout the lesson.<br>TL had students answer questions, but did not reinforce or clarify students' answers.<br>TL had students define words and give examples. TL had students put words on word wall.<br>All the questions were basic and informational.<br>No transition — students just got up and went back to seats.<br>Questions: Who is Agnes? Who did Gilly have lunch with? What did Gilly teach William Earnest to do? Was William Earnest happy about his plane? |
| Shout Out/Discussion: The TL presents a discussion question that connects to the reading or theme.<br><br>Shout out: How to make friends<br>(Explained: *What are some ways that you make new friends?* After kids seem confused, TL gave them an example: "*I ask someone if they want to share something with me… my chocolate, my ball, etc."* ) | Shout Out was not clearly written or stated.<br>TL gave an example for the Shout Out.<br>Students seemed eager to respond — all responses were accepted, but would have benefited from follow-up questions and more direction (Example: Tony answered, *"I'm nice."* The answer would have been richer if asked what "nice" things he did.)<br>TL did use a bubble chart for writing down students' answers.<br>TL had students repeat their answers at the end of the Shout Out.<br>TL had students share, but it seemed to be the same students.<br>TL kept the students' responses on the board during the writing. |
| Writing: the TL uses a Writing prompt that is related to the theme/message for the day and allows students an opportunity to share.<br>*Prompt: Advice for Gilly to make friends. I think you should try to…* | TL did not have a writing sample, just a starting phrase.<br>TL conferenced with students and directed them to use resources around the room.<br>The writing prompt was unclear.<br>TL gave expectations about what he expected from the writing.<br>TL also gave a mini-lesson for writing.<br>Students were allowed to share, and students were able to ask questions about their writing.<br>Mini-lesson: Parts of a letter. (Quick review of poster with parts of the letter) |
| Independent Reading: The TL sets aside a minimum of 30 minutes for Independent Reading time. Students read independently at their "just right level" and are provided an opportunity to share.<br><br>Start time: 4:45 p.m.<br>End time: 5:00 p.m. | TL gave a focus question, though the question was unclear.<br>TL used skill cards, though he did not give comprehension question for the material that was just read.<br>TL gave reading strategies and encouraged the students to read with feeling.<br>TL used reading log and a sticker chart.<br>Students were allowed to pick other students to whom they would ask questions during sharing time after reading.<br>TL did not provide guidelines for sharing time — kids started talking over each other. |

> Writing down the questions illustrates that the team leader was only asking basic informational questions.

> Provide any details that will help the team leader problem-solve on how to present material more clearly

**Tool 2.A: Observation** *(page two of two)*

## Observation Tool

Team leader: *Joe A.*

Observer: *Maria D.*

Date Observed: *8/10/07*

Site: *#1234*

Meeting: *8/11/07*

Grade: *4*   Number of Students: *13*

Book/text: *The Great Gilly Hopkins, "William Earnest and Other Mean Flowers"*

Lesson:

| Lesson Components/Expectations | Evidence/Comments |
|---|---|
| **Environment:** (Physical surroundings — materials) The TL creates a literacy-rich environment. | TL had literacy-rich environment in which students could interact. TL did not have a schedule or rules posted.<br><br>Poster of "How to Write a Letter"; Word Wall; student work posted. |
| **Group management/climate/adult youth relationships:** The TL provides a safe and orderly environment for students to learn. The TL creates a positive learning environment. | TL has developed a routine; youth seemed to know what was coming next. TL is positive and gives praise to students. TL knows the students — called students by name, referred to Dwayne's aunt and little sister in an example, joked with Teresa about how she always mentions her puppy in her writings. TL encouraged everyone to participate — made a special effort with EL students… set up a system of "buddy presenters" so they could have a buddy translate. The environment seems respectful, and it seemed safe for students to share. Transitions need to be more structured. Positive reinforcement needs more explanation and specifics. Said "Great job, Antonio" (but didn't explain what Antonio was doing well). TL made sure students were on task — he walked around, asked questions and kept time. |

> The more detail you provide, the easier it will be for you and the team leader to know what he or she is doing well and what needs work.

Go to www.ppv.org to download a blank version of this tool and customize it to suit your program.

**Tool 3.A. Coaching**

## Coaching Tool

### General Comments

*Joe is supportive and friendly with youth — quick to smile and praise them. Youth seemed comfortable in the group. The Read Aloud was fluid; he had great voice and was well rehearsed. Joe ran a structured Independent Reading time — used coaching cards. Joe needs to work on giving specific praise and feedback to youth, developing and implementing a pre-reading activity, and clarifying his instructions, assignments and themes.*

> The glass is always half-full! Focus on what team leaders are doing well and then where they need to build.

### Goals

### Short-term (1–3 days)

*Joe will post a schedule and classroom rules. He will work on providing specific praise — not just "good job," but rather "that was a good job because it included a, b, and c."*

### Midterm (2 weeks)

*Joe will work on having a pre-reading activity. Joe will work with the site coordinator to develop a variety of pre-reading activities.*

> Provide some broad instruction to guide the team leader on the strategies you want to see him improve.

### Long-term (2–3 months)

*Joe will work on introducing a clear message/theme to youth. Joe will create activities that emphasize his message/theme throughout the lesson.*

### Follow-Up

*Maria (site coordinator) to check room for posted rules/schedule.*
*8/15 — Nora (Literacy Coach) will model specific praise during Independent Reading time and sharing time after youth have read. Debrief after programming.*
*8/17 — Maria will meet with Joe during lesson-planning time to work on developing pre-reading activities. Will model pre-reading activity with youth on 8/20.*
*9/7 — All-staff training on developing themes/overall message. In September, Nora will arrange for Joe to observe Joanne at Site B doing themes. In September and October, Maria will develop a buddy system with staff working in teams to develop themes.*

### Next Observation

*9/4 — Maria will observe. Main focus: specific praise, posted rules/schedule and implementation of a pre-reading activity.*

> This focuses the observer on what they should be looking for the next time — the skills and strategies that you have targeted for training and coaching.

Go to www.ppv.org to download a blank version of this tool and customize it to suit your program.

**Tool 3.B. Instructions for Gradual Release Process**

| **Instructions for Gradual Release Process** (training site managers to coach) | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Session 1**<br><br>Program Manager/Trainer Modeling for Site Manager<br><br>**I Do** | **Session 2**<br><br>Program Manager/Trainer Working with Site Manager<br><br>**We Do** | **Session 3**<br><br>Program Manager/Trainer Observing and Coaching Site Manager<br><br>**You Do** |
| 1. Trainer observes a team leader for the full programming time (complete lesson or component).<br><br>2. Trainer and site manager fill out observation forms independently as they observe.<br><br>3. Immediately after the observation, trainer and site manager meet for 15 to 30 minutes to debrief on what was observed and synthesize their observations and recommendations.<br><br>4. Within 24 hours of the observation, trainer, site manager and team leader meet to debrief. **Trainer takes the lead in the debriefing and coaching session; site manager observes the trainer.**<br><br>5. After the observation debrief, trainer and site manager meet to debrief about the entire process, clarify any questions, review lessons learned and plan for the next session. | 1. Steps 1 to 3 from Session 1 are repeated. This may consist of a follow-up observation of the same team leader from Session 1, or it may involve a different team leader.<br><br>2. Within 48 hours of the observation, trainer, site manager and team leader meet to debrief. This time, *both* **trainer and site manager conduct the debriefing and coaching session.**<br><br>3. Trainer and site manager meet afterward to debrief about the process, clarify any questions, review lessons learned and plan for the next session. | 1. Steps 1 to 3 from Session 1 are repeated. This may consist of a follow-up observation of a team leader from a previous session, or it may involve a different team leader.<br><br>2. Within 48 hours of the observation, trainer, site manager and team leader will meet to debrief. This time, **site manager conducts the debriefing and coaching session and trainer observes.**<br><br>3. Trainer and site manager meet afterward to debrief about the process, clarify any questions, review lessons learned and plan for the next session. |

Go to www.ppv.org to download these instructions.

**Tool 5.A. Categorizing Trends**

## Categorizing Trends Tool

| Instructional Strategies Trends | Classroom Practices Trends | Innovations |
|---|---|---|
| ☐ 60% of team leaders are obviously not practicing the reading before they read the book in front of the class — mispronouncing words, not reading fluidly. | ☐ 75% of team leaders do not have "agreements" posted — the majority has posted rules in negative language. | ☐ Pants hangers used to hang posters and easel paper. |
| ☐ 70% are trying to use at least one reading strategy — either doing the voices, varying speed, etc. | ☐ 50% have an orderly system for youth to share when they want to do so. Often a small subset of youth does most of the sharing. | ☐ "The Tank" is a monster tri-fold used as a multipurpose tool for the team leader — who can post student work schedules, agreements, etc. This tool holds materials and serves as a "word wall." |
| ☐ 15% are defining/explaining vocabulary. | ☐ 50% of team leaders do not seem excited about doing the reading portion of the lesson. Comments like, "well, once we finish reading, we can do something fun" are not uncommon. | ☐ "Star Cards" on which youth write a creative fantasy bio that can be used to introduce them during sharing time. |
| ☐ 70% are asking questions but only around 20% are asking personal connection questions. | ☐ 70% of the time, negative behavior is being addressed promptly but positive behaviors are not being reinforced. | |
| ☐ 90% of team leaders are introducing the book and the author. | | |

Go to www.ppv.org to download a blank version of this tool and customize it to suit your program.

**Tool 5.B. Training Plan**

### Training Plan Tool

| Instructional Strategies | How will I TEACH this? | Classroom Practices | How will I MODEL this? |
|---|---|---|---|
| Practice Read Aloud to increase fluidity and your ability to model effective reading strategies | Model Read Aloud: *Rotten Teeth* by Laura Simms (lots of opportunities in the text to do voice, tone and pacing variations, and readers have to know what is coming next in order to set up the surprises in the book).<br><br>Hand out: "What Good Readers Do"<br>Debrief: What effective reading strategies did I use? How can you tell I am familiar with this book? | Create classroom agreements that are worded in positive language. | At the beginning of the training, set up agreements for participation during the training.<br><br>Conduct 5–10 minute debrief of process, asking: Why did we do this? and Why should I use it with my group?<br><br>Take away: provide participants with How to Set Up Agreements packet. |
| Ask a variety of questions — including questions for clarification and questions about personal connections | Use both kinds of questions during Read Aloud.<br><br>Review the difference between clarification and personal connection questions.<br><br>Post list of the questions asked and have participants categorize them as clarification or personal connection.<br><br>Large group: brainstorm at least three more clarification questions and three personal connection questions they could ask for modeled Read Aloud. | Develop and maintain a process for youth to share when they want to do so. | When participants walk in, have a stack of popsicle sticks and markers. Instruct them to write their names on the sticks and put them in the pocket on "The Tank." Draw sticks to select participants who will share.<br><br>Require participants to raise their hands to share in group brainstorm.<br><br>Before the Read Aloud, ask participants to complete and share their responses to "how we show we are listening." Record responses on easel paper and post — refer to it when they get ready to share. |
| Emphasize and help youth understand vocabulary | Before the Read Aloud: go over key vocabulary. Present the vocabulary in context, have participants write definitions in their own words. Be sure to emphasize it during the reading — have participants rub their hands when they hear a vocabulary word. Debrief how it was used. | Focus on and reinforce positive behaviors. | Look for and verbally reinforce positive behaviors. Use:<br>I like how [name] is [behavior/activity].<br>Thank you [name], for [behavior/activity].<br>I see that [name] is ready because he/she has [agreed-upon indication of readiness].<br><br>Use tickets system for participation — have several "raffles" throughout the training. |
| Putting it all together | Assigned a week in advance: participants bring a book they are planning to use for a lesson — already, they should have read and practiced the selection they are going to use.<br><br>During training: allow 30 minutes to prepare. Practice the Read Aloud, picking two to four vocabulary words team leaders will emphasize and creating three to five clarification and personal connection questions. Allow 30 minutes for triad presentations in which team leaders present, get feedback and problem-solve. | | At beginning of training, let participants know that you will be using a variety of strategies to engage and motivate them while still moving the lesson along. They should watch for them as you do the lesson and be ready to discuss.<br><br>At the end of the training, debrief and ask participants to list the strategies you used.<br><br>Questions to ask:<br>What strategies did I use?<br>Why were those strategies effective?<br>Which ones can you try? How can they be adapted for your group? (if applicable) |

Innovations
The Tank: post theme of the day, vocabulary, picture of the book; it will have pockets for popsicle sticks used by students who wish to share. (Take Away — instructions for making a Tank — have Eddie present on how and why he made it.
Pants hangers: Post agreements and "how we show we are listening" easel papers on hangers throughout the room. Have Ruthie show how and why she uses them.

Go to www.ppv.org to download a blank version of this tool and customize it to suit your program.

**Tool 5.C. Training Evaluation**

## Training Evaluation Tool

Please help us make trainings relevant to your needs and interests. Rate the following comments from 1 to 4.

1 = strongly disagree      2 = disagree      3 = agree      4 = strongly agree

Date:

### Logistics

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| The time and location of the training were convenient for me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| The training space was comfortable and conducive to learning. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| I enjoyed the snacks and refreshments. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

*Please feel free to comment further:*

### Trainer

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| The trainer was knowledgeable about the training topic. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| The trainer was engaging and encouraged questions and participation. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| The trainer modeled strategies and behaviors that I can use with my groups. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

*Please feel free to comment further:*

### Content

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| The materials provided were helpful. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| There was time to practice the information and strategies taught. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| The training was relevant to my work. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| The training addressed some of the challenges that I am facing in my work. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

*Please feel free to comment further:*

*Please respond with a short answer to the following questions.*

What three strategies from the training can you use in your practice in the next two weeks?

What strategies or components would you like to see covered in a future training?

Go to www.ppv.org to download a blank version of this tool and customize it to suit your program.

**INSIGHT AFTER-SCHOOL TOOLKIT**

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