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Implementation Guide

Youth Programming Assessment Tool (YPAT)

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Introduction

FHI 360 has developed the Youth Programming Assessment Tool (YPAT) to help youth-serving organizations (YSOs) reflect upon their own internal programming and institutional practices and identify areas for improvement. In developing the YPAT tool, FHI 360 reviewed over 20 youth program assessment tools, held consultations with experts and stakeholders in the field, and pilot tested it with three YSOs in Jordan and six YSOs in Jamaica. The tool sets standards of best practice against which YSOs can evaluate their own practices and guides them through analyzing their programming and creating actionable priorities for improving it.

Purpose

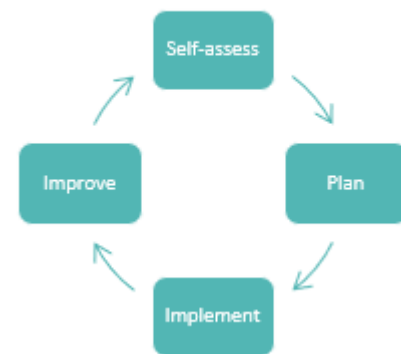
The purpose of the YPAT is to help YSOs understand the extent to which they are implementing evidence-based youth programming practices and identify areas that need strengthening or further development. It provides concrete steps and examples for how a YSO can improve their programming based on the Positive Youth Development (PYD) approach to enhance developmental outcomes for youth. The tool was designed primarily for assessment and program improvement purposes rather than for program accreditation or research and evaluation purposes.

The tool's primary goals are:

- 1) To promote reflection among key program staff and youth participants on programming practices, based on the Positive Youth Development (PYD) approach.
- 2) To inform program improvement plans with data resulting from concrete standards and benchmarks.
- 3) To gain youth perspectives on program services.

Organizations that piloted the YPAT found that it helped them consider meaningful improvements to better support their youth, including: improving skills instruction, developing youth councils, and building organizational capacity (such as governance structures and human resources) with an eye towards youth.

Figure 1: Assessment and improvement cycle



Target Organizations and Program Offerings

The tool is applicable to any YSO with program(s) targeting youth ages 10–29. The YPAT is designed to facilitate assessment of youth program offering(s) and youth-related organizational and management practices. It does not provide an assessment of the overall organizational capacity, which can be conducted using tools such as the Organizational Capacity Assessment (Tool), or the Organizational Performance Index (OPI).

Organizations can administer the tool for one or more specific program offerings¹ or across all programs if they are relatively homogenous. If the organization has multiple heterogeneous programs it should score each program separately. See below section on scoring for details on how to score if an organization has multiple heterogeneous programs.

The YPAT can be applied across a variety of program offerings, such as:

- Work readiness programs
- Community service projects
- Arts
- Sports
- Entrepreneurship programs
- Outdoor adventure programs
- Service learning
- Skills training

Frequency of Assessment

For programs that last three or more years, we recommend that the Assessment be conducted once per year, starting in year 2. For programs that last two years or less, the Assessment can be conducted every 6 months, starting at the first six-month mark.

Conducting the assessment repeatedly generates results that can inform planning, implementation, and program improvement on an ongoing basis. The YPAT can also help programs establish baselines and measure change over time.

Conceptual Framework: Positive Youth Development

The YPAT is primarily informed by USAID’s YouthPower Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework and approach to youth programming. PYD is an evidence-based approach that can be implemented across different types of programs and settings and that has been shown to improve multiple youth outcomes in the U.S. and other high-income countries (Catalano, 2002; Gavin et al., 2010; Roth 2003). While the evidence base on PYD-based programs in low- and middle-income countries may still be thin, the approach is quickly gaining traction.²

Since the 1990s, PYD has evolved in response to both the failure of approaches that focused primarily on reducing negative behaviors as well as research that recognized the importance of building youth social, cognitive, and emotional assets to promote positive youth outcomes. PYD

¹ We define program offerings as structured activities with a clearly defined purpose, led by a specific group of staff with a specific group of youth.

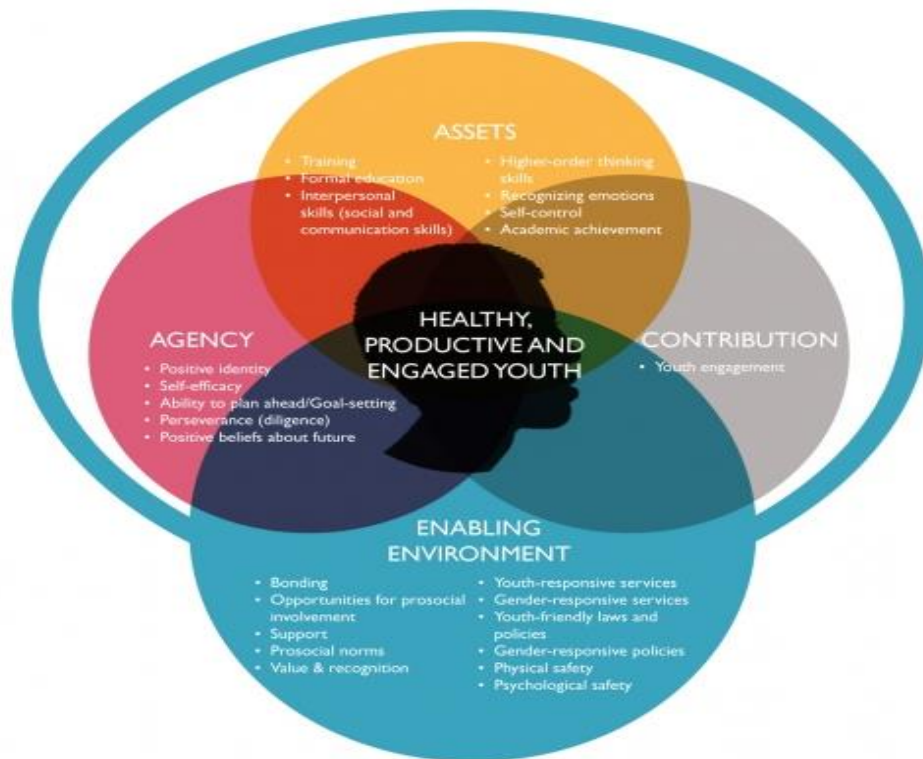
² YouthPower Learning’s (2017) Systematic Review of PYD Programs in Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs) identified at least 100 programs in 60 LMICs that are implementing aspects of PYD approaches, but not necessarily labeling them as “PYD” or implementing the full PYD approach (Alvarado et al., 2017).

emphasizes not only cultivating individual strengths but also the critical importance of youth being supported by family, educational, and community institutions to facilitate a successful transition to adulthood.

YouthPower Learning has developed a comprehensive definition of PYD:

Positive youth development engages **youth** along with their families, communities, and/or governments so that **youth** are empowered to reach their full potential. PYD approaches build skills, assets, and competencies; foster healthy relationships; strengthen the environment; and transform systems.

Based on the above definition of PYD, YouthPower Learning distilled the concept of PYD into four main domains.³ These domains and their associated features (below) are grounded in the PYD literature, especially the work of the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (Hinson et al., 2016). The four domains of the PYD Framework are linked to seven features or characteristics of effective PYD programs, as described in Table 1.⁴



³ For more information on PYD's domains and features, and the source of the above image, visit <http://www.youthpower.org/positive-youth-development-pyd-framework>.

⁴ While the tool is based on the PYD Domains and Program Features described in Table 1, an organization may decide to only focus on the most relevant domains.

Table 1: PYD Framework Domains and PYD Program Features

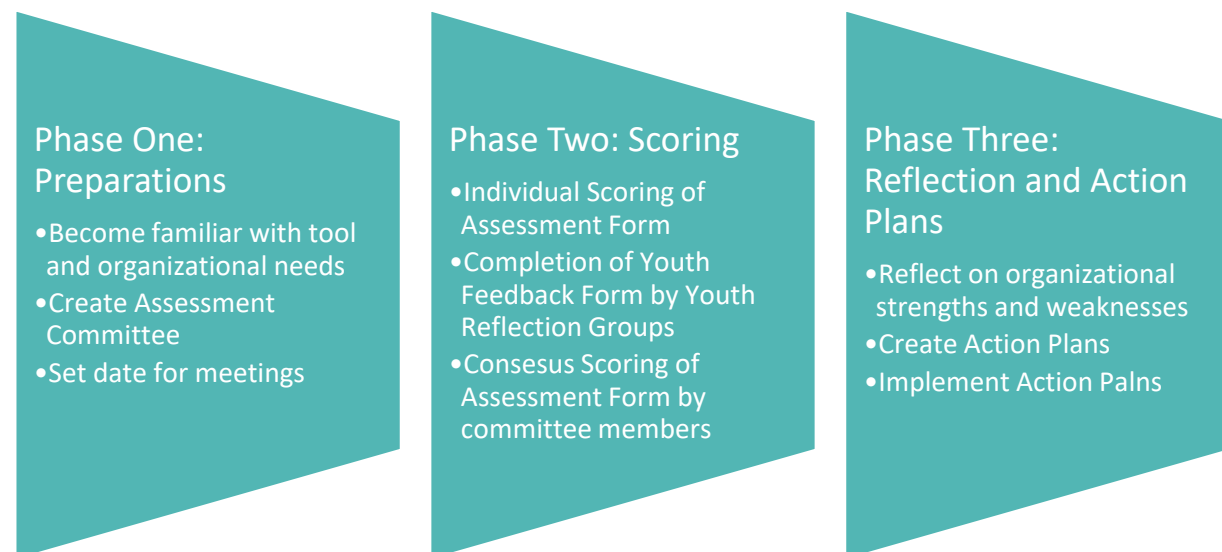
PYD Domains	PYD Features	How to Implement Program Features	How this can help your program or organization
Assets	Skill building	Build youth’s soft and life skills through experiential learning activities that allow youth to practice using skills, receive feedback, and reflect.	Youth need technical and academic skills for economic opportunities, but they also need life skills and soft skills that help them navigate challenges and new situations. The tool reflects ongoing evidence-based research on program design and staff practices that are most effective in helping youth develop critical soft or life skills. To learn more about the growing research on soft skills, read: Guiding Principles on Building Soft Skills among Adolescents and Young Adults and Key Soft Skills for Cross-Sectoral Youth Outcomes.
Agency			
Contribution	Youth engagement and contribution	Promote youth engagement through youth expression, youth involvement in community service, and/or by creating opportunities for youth decision-making and leadership at the program, community, or national level.	Meaningful youth engagement is an intentional partnership between youth and adults, where youth are recognized as leaders, equal partners in decision-making and capable of recognizing and vocalizing their needs and priorities. The tool identifies ways in which an organization can incorporate meaningful youth engagement and opportunities for youth contribution within the organization’s governance structures, everyday decision making and program offerings. To learn more read: Hart’s Ladder; Core Principles for Engaging Youth, Six Tips for Meaningful Youth Engagement and “Eight Successful Youth Engagement Approaches.” For specifics on youth engagement in the activity cycle, visit here.
Enabling Environment	Healthy relationships and bonding	Expand youth access to healthy adult relationships and positive role models. Ideally, youth have at least one caring and consistent adult in their lives. Within the program setting, emphasize healthy peer relationships.	Healthy relationships provide youth with positive role models and provide emotional safety and trust. A student’s relationship with a teacher or coach can greatly impact youth success. The tool promotes reflection on the quality of relationships among staff and suggests programmatic activities to enhance relationships among youth, with youth workers and family members. To learn more, visit Search Institute, Developmental Relationships
	Belonging and membership	Provide activities and space for youth to feel included regardless of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation or disability status, and support activities that provide positive sense of belonging (e.g., sports, community service, or faith-based youth groups). Promote youth behaviors that are respectful of diversity and equity.	Having a sense of belonging is extremely important for youth, particularly in early and mid-adolescence. The tool promotes reflection on recruitment practices, programmatic activities and staff training to ensure YSOs provide an inclusive environment and a sense of belonging for all youth. Click the following links to learn more about gender practices, LGBT inclusion, and working with Persons with Disability.
	Positive norms, expectations, and perceptions	Ensure youth and program staff have a clear shared understanding of norms and expectations about their behavior. Consistently uphold and model norms.	Positive social norms influence the behaviors and roles that are acceptable for and expected from youth. Expectation and boundaries help youth know what is expected of them both in terms of contribution and responsibility. The tool provides indicators that help YSOs reflect on how well they create and disseminate ground rules and positive norms for the program. To learn more, read this fact sheet.
	Safe space	Provide youth with safe (physical and emotional) spaces to practice, engage, and learn. Promote practices that increase safe peer group interactions and decrease unsafe peer confrontation.	The combination of safe physical and emotional spaces is essential for youth to feel comfortable and ready to absorb the other features, such as skills youth engagement and a sense of belonging. The tool assesses policies and practices relating to child protection, supporting youth with special needs and having physical and emotional safe spaces. To learn how safe space overlaps with other features, read this article, and here to read youth perspectives on safe spaces.
	Access to age appropriate and youth friendly services; integration among services	Connect youth and families to health and social services so there is a continuum of care and support at the community level.	The PYD approach recognizes that youth outcomes are impacted by the broader community and needs beyond what any one organization can provide. The tool assesses how well an organization connects with other important actors, such as families, schools, and social and health services.

In addition to the PYD framework, the YPAT design was also informed by YouthPower Action’s research on [Guiding Principles for Building Soft Skills among Adolescents and Young Adults](#). This analysis of literature reviews, meta-analyses, general guides on skill development, and technical documents revealed six guiding principles for effective soft and life skills development that are consistent with the PYD approach:

- Principle 1: Promote experiential learning (through challenge, experience, practice, and reflection)
- Principle 2: Address skills in combination rather than in isolation, recognizing how they interconnect
- Principle 3: Promote strong relationships between adults and youth and among youth themselves
- Principle 4: Promote positive staff practices
- Principle 5: Create a safe, caring, supportive, and enriching program environment
- Principle 6: Promote integration of learning contexts

Implementation of the YPAT

The YPAT will be implemented in three phases as illustrated below. Broadly, Phase 1 consists of preparatory activities for the assessment; Phase 2 refers to the different sub-steps involved the scoring process; and finally, Phase 3 is about reflecting on the results of the scoring process to generate implementable action plan. The YPAT tool is comprised of three main instruments: (1) Youth Feedback Form; (2) Assessment Form; and (3) Action Plan template. The remainder of this section provides guidance and details for each of the three phases and corresponding steps in the assessment process.



Phase One: Preparations

Step 1: Create Youth Reflection Group(s) and Assessment Committee

Youth Reflection Groups: The facilitator will convene 5–10 current or recent youth program participants for each Youth Reflection Group(s). If programs target different ages or have different goals, the organization may decide to hold multiple Youth Reflection Group meetings. Some programs may also decide to separate meetings by gender. The Youth Reflection Group(s) will be responsible for completing the Youth Feedback Form.

Assessment Committee: We recommend that the Assessment Form be completed in a participatory manner by an Assessment Committee comprising 5–8 members. The participatory Assessment approach is aimed at combining multiple perspectives. The committee members should represent the program’s leadership, management staff, program staff involved in program delivery, and at least two participants from the Youth Reflection Groups. We consider program staff as anyone who is involved in program design, planning, delivery, or facilitation. Program staff may refer to trainers, facilitators, supervisors, teachers, coaches, mentors, volunteers, or others. Participant youth include youth who are currently participating in or recently finished a youth program.



Try to select diverse committee members in terms of gender, age, and background. We recommend also prioritizing youth staff (staff under the age of 35) as part of the committee. The Assessment Committee members should be familiar enough with the program offering(s) to be able to apply the generic descriptions of the items contained in the Assessment Form to the program.

Step 2: Set date for Youth Reflection Group and Assessment meetings

The facilitator should discuss potential dates with selected committee members and Youth Reflection Group participants. We recommend that the committee plan to have the Youth Feedback Form completed prior to the Assessment Form. When choosing the date and time for conducting both the Assessment Form and the Youth Feedback Form, make sure to consider youth’s availability.

Summary of Preparation Phase

	Step 1: Create Youth Reflection Group(s) and Assessment Committee	Step 2: Set date to conduct Youth Reflection Group(s) and Assessment
PARTICIPANTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organization POC • Facilitator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitator • Organization POC

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment Committee • Youth representatives
PURPOSE	<p>Determine number of youth reflection groups and identify youth group participants</p> <p>Identify 5–8 members to be in Assessment Committee.</p>	<p>Choose date for both youth reflection group meeting and Assessment meeting, with special consideration of youth’s schedules.</p>

Phase Two: Scoring

Step 3. Individual Scoring of YPAT

Members of the Assessment committee should first complete the Assessment Form individually, using the following steps:

- Read each domain and the key program features that describe it.
- Read each standard and reflect on how it is operationalized within each program. Use your own knowledge and experience with the program offering to record evidence and/or anecdotes that describe the extent to which the standard is implemented in practice. Be honest in your reflection to ensure the final scores represent the program reality. Remember that the ultimate goal of the Assessment is improved programming and youth outcomes.
- Rate each item using a scale comprising the following levels: “Not yet developed;” “Beginning;” “Developing;” or “Competent,” basing your score on the evidence and/or anecdotes described in the previous step.

Step 4. Completion of Youth Feedback Form in Youth Reflection Groups

Youth engagement in the Assessment will follow a two-stage process: 1) completion of Youth Feedback Form in Youth Reflection Groups, followed by 2) participation of selected youth representatives in the Assessment Committee.

Stage One: Youth Reflection Group participants will complete the Youth Feedback Form, which captures youth experiences and perceptions of key standards. The questions are directly related to many of the standards in the full Assessment Form but have been re-worded to better gather youth perceptions. We advise that program staff do not observe or attend this meeting to reduce any pressure youth may feel to answer questions a certain way.

To provide a transparent and fair process, we also suggest that YSOs release an open call for youth who may be interested in participating in the Assessment process. We encourage YSOs to consider youth that represent diverse skills, ages, disability status, gender, and time involved in the program. If the open call does not provide sufficient diversity, the YSO may need to intentionally recruit additional youth to ensure the reflection group represents the breadth of program participants.

Stage Two: Two or more youth representatives from the Youth Reflection Groups will participate in the Assessment committee and present the views, opinions, suggestions that arose from the group reflections. The Youth Feedback Form scores do not match the performance levels in the primary Assessment Form and will not be included in committee scoring; rather they should be used to help inform program staff's understanding of youth participants' perception of the program. Therefore, anecdotes from the reflection groups can be as important if not more important than the overall score.

Step 5. Consensus Scoring by Assessment Committee

Once all members of the Assessment Committee have individually completed the Assessment Form, the facilitator will convene a committee meeting. During the meeting, the facilitator or other committee member reads aloud each standard as well as the description and examples associated with each performance level.

Determine the score for each standard. The committee jointly reviews the standards item by item, discusses, and reaches a consensus on the final score. The facilitator will ask for participants' evidence and anecdotes to guide discussion on each item. The facilitator is responsible for ensuring that the committee's score matches the description of each performance level (as opposed to what the committee thinks each level may mean).

The organization can choose to score one of the following ways:

- Focus on only one program offering
- Score each standard by program and obtain a YPAT score for each program
- Average program scores for each standard
- Use the lowest score of the programs to emphasize the need to improve that standard

Summary of Scoring Phase

	Step 3: Individual scoring	Step 4: Youth Feedback Group(s)	Step 5: Committee scoring
LENGTH	1 week	1-2 hours	3-4 hours
PARTICIPANTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitator • Assessment Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitator • 5-10 current or recently graduated youth participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitator • Assessment Committee
PURPOSE	Committee members familiarize themselves with Assessment form and submit individual scores to the facilitator	Youth participants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete Youth Assessment form • Choose at least 2 representatives for Assessment Committee 	Committee reaches consensus on score for each standard

Phase Three: Reflection and Action Plans

Step 6. Reflection

The Assessment committee will look at the results in the Scoring Grid and reflect upon it as a team. The following questions may help guide the reflection process:

General reflection:

- A. What did you think of the domains/features? Did you think they represented our program offerings well? If not, what was missing?
- B. Did anything about the final scores surprise you?

Reflect on strengths:

- C. Which domain(s) and key program feature(s) emerged as the strongest?
- D. Are there any program feature(s) that stand out as one of our strengths?
 - a. What might account for the strength of these program feature(s)?
 - b. Is it possible to mainstream the practices which led to strong feature(s) to other areas of the program or other organizational programs?

Reflect on weaknesses:

- E. Which domain(s) and key program feature(s) emerged as the weakest?
- F. Are there any program feature(s) that stand out as a weakness?
 - a. What might account for the weak key program feature(s)?
 - b. What actions can be taken to address the weak feature(s)?
 - c. Which standards are priority and should be addressed first?

Step 7. Develop and Implement an Action Plan

Based on the assessment results, develop an Action Plan following the steps below:

1. Review each standard that you scored below a four, and as a committee, decide on the standards for each domain that the organization would like to address.
2. Use the “Action Plan” sheet in the Excel workbook to determine the necessary action, roles and responsibilities, priority level, and timeline.
3. Identify a small group who will be responsible for monitoring the action plan implementation. This group should be at least 50% youth participants.

Often, action plans include more than is possible to achieve. In this case, the facilitator will lead the committee in an exercise to select priority actions for implementation. Be sure to include youth from the reflection groups as part of this action planning process; involve them in prioritizing actions and in identifying youth roles and responsibilities for carrying out the action plans. Once the action plan page is finished, the organization should share the final plan with the youth feedback groups, and ideally with the whole organization.

Step 8. Repeat the Process

Conduct the Assessment again, ideally one year after the initial Assessment, and repeat all the steps above so that the Assessment can help your program track progress overtime.

Summary of Reflection and Action Plans

	Step 6: Reflection	Step 7: Action Plan
LENGTH:	1–2 hours	3–4 hours to create 3–6 months to implement
PARTICIPANTS:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Facilitator• Assessment Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Facilitator• Assessment Committee
PURPOSE:	Committee will begin to determine which areas they want to prioritize for improvement	Committee will: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Determine concrete actions• Complete second page of scoring rubric• Create a monitoring committee to help ensure actions are implemented