

YPQ Messaging

The process of doing "continuous improvement" with an observation tool can be really new for our teams. Here is some messaging we've used over the years to communicate about the process.

Why are we conducting observations instead of doing a survey

- We're starting a process that has been done in thousands of youth programs all across the United States, and over 80 youth programs in Oregon. It may feel strange to us, but it is well-known in the larger youth development field.
- One typical way that lots of youth programs evaluate their effectiveness is to survey youth. While that type of data is helpful, it is just one method, and like all evaluation methods, surveying youth has its pros and its cons.
- Observation data is another method we can use to get data about our program. When we observe a program, we can learn about what happens for everyone present.
- A lot of times, when people walk into a room, they focus on what youth are doing/saying. However, what youth are doing/saying is often a result of responding to the situations they are in. So by focusing on adult behavior instead of student response, we have the opportunity to really understand what is happening in our program and how we can get better as a team.

I'm nervous and I want my scores to be perfect

- This is about growth, not grades.
- It isn't realistic for anyone to get all perfect scores. Let's all let that go. This process isn't about proving we are perfect. No one is perfect.
- This process is about 1) learning about best practices, 2) opening up about what small shifts your team can do that will make big impacts, and 3) recognizing what your team already does that is a best practices. And every one of us has things that we can get better on!
- The Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality explains it this way: some data is high stakes data (if you don't score well, there are consequences). This type of data can be

scary. Low stakes data is very different. Low stakes data is data that we can use ourselves to help ourselves. It is “feedback data”.

I’m worried this observation will impact my employment / or organization’s reputation

- Staff are not being evaluated for employment through this process. The data collected from this effort is to support our overall team in improving the strategies and structures within our programs. Staff evaluation will take place in an intentionally separate process.
- Oregon Community Foundation and Ford Family Foundation will never see the scores connected to the observations of our program. Our grant funding is connected to *our participation in the learning community and use of the tool, not the scores* that result from our participation.
 - Just to clarify: Celeste, Lena, and Eric have access to reports that contain your internal scores, but they do not review them unless your team requests us to. Belle, Alysia, Kelly, and the greater funding teams DO NOT have access to any scores (internal or external).
- We can be intentional about anonymizing internal observation notes to support the sense of safety of participating programming staff. I can work with my coaches in the learning community to create systems to support this.

About observing each other

- When you observe each other, you all are going to see each other for just 20 minutes of time. This observation doesn’t capture everything you know. It isn’t going to! It isn’t going to label you as a good youth worker or poor youth worker. It is just meant to have your team start to unpack what happens on a typical day.
- If we are worried about this, let’s de-indentify our data (let’s take the names out) so that we can look at the actions without stressing about who did what. I can work with my coaches in the learning community to create systems to support this.

About internal scoring

- These scores are created by our staff, and they are for our staff. No one in the outside world will ever see them or pay attention to them. It is okay for the scores to honestly reflect what we see. Our board won’t see this, our funders won’t see this.

- These scores are collected so that we can learn about best practices, and we can compare these scores to our scores we will receive in January. These scores are for us, and our own planning.
- If there is a debate about an item, and we can't come to an agreement, it is okay for 1) our team to pick the lower of the scores we are debating. That just means that we aren't 100% certain that we consistently meet the higher score. And 2) to take a step back and remember the conversation we are having about quality is more information about the score.
- Remember that if we aren't certified external assessors, our scores are not accurate. They are the best we can do, but don't worry about "who is right" – it could be that neither of us are. (Remember, use the handbook to try to understand each item).