

NAEYC Early Learning Program Accreditation

# Recommended Practices of Accreditation Facilitation Projects

A Framework for Program Quality Improvement  
Using NAEYC Early Learning Program Standards  
and Accreditation Assessment Items

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Items

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“If you would understand anything, observe its  
beginning and its development.”—*Aristotle*



## CHAPTER 1

# Background

In 1985, the National Association for the Education of Young Children launched the nation's first accreditation system for early childhood care and education programs, setting professionally agreed-upon standards of high quality and providing an independent assessment process to recognize programs that met those standards.

By 1990, the first accreditation facilitation projects (AFPs) had emerged spontaneously in various communities across the country, without direct support from NAEYC. The early education leaders in these grassroots projects believed in the power of the new accreditation process. They recognized that programs participating in the process would embark on a journey of program quality improvement that was valuable in and of itself, regardless of the achievement of NAEYC Accreditation. These early AFP leaders also saw that many programs needed additional support and encouragement to take full advantage of the voluntary accreditation process as a quality improvement mechanism.

Since those first projects began, the number of AFPs and the variety of support they offer programs have grown immensely. In 2001 AFPs reported 93 facilitation projects in 39 states (NAEYC 2002). As of April 2010, 156 AFP projects in 37 states and the District of Columbia were active with NAEYC. Projects operate through public and/or private funding and can be associated with various entities, such as United Way, state quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS), NAEYC Affiliates, and foundations. They typically offer technical assistance: coaching, training, and on-site consultation to support and motivate programs that strive to achieve NAEYC Accreditation as well as programs that might not achieve high quality without their assistance.

Although facilitation projects were established and grew independently, NAEYC has long valued and appreciated the role that they play in supporting NAEYC Accreditation. Because AFPs build their quality improvement efforts using the framework of NAEYC Early Learning Program Standards and Assessment Items, they provide an important mechanism to strengthen programs. AFPs also help programs assess their readiness to formally apply for accreditation, and they play a critical support role as programs move through the steps of the accreditation process and after accreditation is awarded. The work of AFPs aligns with NAEYC's vision for its accreditation system, which states,

“NAEYC Accreditation shall be established as a leading force for changing children’s well-being and early learning by improving the quality of early learning programs serving children birth through kindergarten” (NAEYC Program Standards and Accreditation Assessment Items, 2008, 6).

## Purpose of This Manual

This manual is designed to extend the work of successful AFPs by defining recommended practices for facilitating NAEYC Accreditation. Just as NAEYC Accreditation defines the mark of quality for programs for young children, this manual describes effective practices for motivating and helping programs make lasting improvements in their services to children and families, using the framework established by NAEYC Accreditation.

The manual identifies key factors for supporting program quality. NAEYC Accreditation represents professional consensus: the Association has always involved an array of stakeholders in shaping and revising its accreditation system. That collaborative tradition continues with this publication. For more than a year, the Quality Improvement and Program Support (QIPS) Department solicited information from current and former AFP staff and other stakeholders. In the winter of 2009, an Accreditation Facilitation Project Advisory Group was convened to provide advice and guidance on facilitation work to QIPS. The group met on several occasions and led sessions engaging other leaders in the field at NAEYC conferences.

Based on these deliberations, the advisory group identified three key areas that together frame best practices for accreditation facilitation:

- › the supports provided to programs
- › the business practices of the facilitation project itself
- › the relationships between AFPs and community organizations that promote early learning program quality improvement and NAEYC Accreditation

A chapter is devoted to and details recommended practices for each area. Examples of practices gathered from AFPs across the country illustrate the various ways in which projects may implement these.

NAEYC's Early Learning Program Accreditation Standards and Assessment Items define high quality for programs serving young children birth through kindergarten. Parallels from the standards and assessment items can be drawn for AFPs. Throughout this manual, accreditation standards and assessment items are referenced and, where applicable, slightly modified to convey meaning relevant to AFPs. For example, many of the topics in the Leadership and Management standard directly relate to the administration of an AFP. As AFPs work with programs to understand the standards and assessment items, it can be beneficial to consider these parallels.

NAEYC defines *accreditation facilitation projects* as projects that support quality improvement efforts of child care centers, preschools, and other early learning programs in many local communities and states and, in an effort to raise program quality, provide technical assistance and support to programs working on NAEYC Accreditation.

AFPs motivate programs—both those working on accreditation and those that are not. AFPs receive guidance and resources from NAEYC's Quality Improvement and Program Support Department and participate in The Online Resources Center Headquarters (TORCH) community in HELLO and the Accreditation Portal. To be eligible, AFPs must serve 10 or more programs in the field or, if the project is in development, intend to do so. An active AFP has access to discounted accreditation training and other resources, many of which are outlined below



## Relationship Between NAEYC and AFPs

In September 2008, the QIPS Department was established within NAEYC's Program Recognition and Support Division. This marked the first time that a department focused solely on supporting NAEYC Accreditation by building various communities of quality, including the network of AFPs across the nation. NAEYC's Program Recognition and Support Division is now known as the Department of Program Support and Quality Improvement. Like NAEYC's Early Learning Program Accreditation, which is responsible for the accreditation process, the QIPS Department seeks to strengthen children's well-being and learning by improving the quality of programs serving children birth through kindergarten. Its purpose is to encourage program quality improvement using a framework based on the NAEYC Accreditation process. The creation of a separate department enables NAEYC to offer a greater array of supports

## AFPs: A Megaphone, Not a Telephone

**Remember the game Telephone, where someone whispers something to another person, who in turn repeats what they heard to someone else? And remember the garbled results as the message is repeated multiple times?** Effective AFPs take care to act as megaphones, extending and personalizing the reach of specific NAEYC Accreditation guidance and materials. They do not use their own words to describe or interpret accreditation assessment items or processes. Otherwise, the results would be like the Telephone game—inaccurate information, far from the original intent, that can be misleading or counterproductive for programs seeking accreditation.

to facilitate accreditation. It also maintains a strict division between supports to programs and the actual assessment process for accreditation, which is the responsibility of the NAEYC Early Learning Program Accreditation Department. This separation is essential for avoiding any real or perceived conflict of interest.

The QIPS Department oversees outreach and training activities that promote NAEYC Accreditation as a vehicle for program quality improvement. It is responsible for establishing and maintaining strong, effective relationships with a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including early learning programs, NAEYC Affiliate groups, accreditation facilitation projects, and government agencies that use NAEYC Accreditation to improve program quality and promote knowledge of accreditation as a change process.

While QIPS and its dedicated staff focus on program quality improvement efforts, like facilitation, the relationship between NAEYC and AFPs remains informal. NAEYC does not approve or endorse any accreditation facilitation project, but it does work intensively with AFPs through QIPS to guide and support their work and to provide regular, ongoing communication.

AFPs must contact NAEYC to establish a partnership as an active AFP. It is important to note that becoming an active AFP is not an approval process; this simply provides NAEYC's QIPS Department with a mechanism for knowing who is facilitating accreditation and for disseminating the most current information and resources developed for AFPs.

Resources available exclusively to active AFPs include:

- › monthly conference calls, with updates from QIPS and NAEYC
- › special meetings at the NAEYC Annual Conference and NAEYC's Professional Learning Institute
- › an online community in TORCH PowerPoint presentations developed for AFPs
- › access to NAEYC Accreditation self-study materials, tools, and resources
- › dedicated staff time in the QIPS Department at NAEYC

In addition to accessing resources specifically developed for them, AFPs also can take advantage of QIPS resources available to programs as noted in the QIPS Resource Flyer on page 9.



# Quality Improvement & Program Support Resources

The following resources are available from NAEYC's Quality Improvement and Program Support (QIPS) Department for NAEYC-Accredited programs and programs engaged in the accreditation process.

## TORCH

monthly e-newsletter, providing **The Online Resource Center Headquarters** in the Accreditation Portal. This is an easily available, free tool for anyone interested in the standards and assessment items or engaging in the NAEYC Accreditation process. TORCH provides a searchable database of the assessment items and related information as well as tools to help programs engage in self-study and self-assessment.

## Program News

the latest information on NAEYC Accreditation and announcements of new, helpful resources for NAEYC-Accredited programs or programs in the accreditation process. Sign up to receive this useful newsletter at the bottom of any page at [NAEYC.org](https://naeyc.org)

## NAEYC Website

contains information about the NAEYC Accreditation process and related subjects for programs interested in accreditation, pursuing accreditation, currently accredited, and accreditation facilitation projects. [NAEYC.org/accreditation/early-learning-program-accreditation](https://naeyc.org/accreditation/early-learning-program-accreditation)

## QIPS Training Center

focuses on developing and delivering training programs needed to better understand and navigate the NAEYC Accreditation process. Available at our National and Affiliate conferences, at headquarters, and through on-site and online presentations and webinars.

## Accreditation Support

[Accreditation.Information@naeyc.org](mailto:Accreditation.Information@naeyc.org) provides prompt, reliable responses to your questions about NAEYC Accreditation. An expert information coordinator can be contacted at 1-800-424-2460, option 3, then option 1.

## Guiding Principles for Accreditation Facilitation Projects

The AFP Advisory Group discussions led to the development of the following principles that should guide accreditation facilitation projects:

- › **Acknowledge NAEYC** as the authority on NAEYC Accreditation and NAEYC Early Learning Program Standards and Assessment Items.
- › **Do not make interpretations** that go beyond information publicly available from NAEYC.
- › **Be accountable** for maintaining an understanding of NAEYC’s accreditation process, tools, and program standards and assessment items, and for providing up-to-date accurate information.
- › **Act in the best interest** of children, families, and communities.
- › **Operate in an ethical manner** guided by NAEYC’s Code of Ethical Conduct (2011).
- › **Recognize the confidential nature of the work** and adhere to nondisclosure whenever and wherever programs, staff, children, or families are concerned.
- › **Adopt a mission that aligns with NAEYC’s vision** for its accreditation system.
- › **Instill ownership** of the NAEYC Accreditation process within the programs.
- › **Facilitate.** Avoid directing programs but support programs with discovering strengths and weakness and to own their work towards improvement.
- › **Seek and foster relationships** with other organizations and quality improvement efforts that advance NAEYC Accreditation and ultimately advance the field of early childhood education.
- › **Use business practices that have integrity and credibility** and that foster long-term sustainability.

- › **Model continuous quality improvement,** embedding it as an essential component of the project’s practices.

## The AFP-Program Relationship and the Role of AFP Staff

For long-lasting change within a program, recommended practice suggests that the role of AFP staff should be based on a model of facilitation that is most beneficial to programs, staff, and children. Facilitation is the act of making something easier, helping it forward, or assisting in the process. AFP staff serve as a resource for programs, helping program staff know where to turn for information. AFPs must allow ownership of the NAEYC Accreditation process to remain with programs and not assume ownership of the work. To encourage programs to be self-reliant and find answers for themselves, the AFP role is to lead, not “do”; to create and encourage conversation, not inhibit it; to ask the right questions, not provide all the answers. It is also important that AFP staff manage expectations and clearly communicate to programs that **there are no guarantees of becoming accredited** as a result of participating with an accreditation facilitation project.

Early care and education programs face many challenges in the delivery of services. They are often under-resourced, especially in the private sector, and administrators/directors often face many demands. Achieving accreditation can seem overwhelming; even programs that desire to achieve it often don’t know where to begin. Establishing a relationship with an AFP helps make the process seem more doable. But the process will be meaningful only when it is owned by the entire program, not just the administrator.

Demonstrating to families, colleagues, and the community that the program is high quality—by becoming NAEYC Accredited—is important for early childhood educators. What can be unclear and becomes a barrier is knowing what is specifically needed for the program to become

NAEYC Accredited—knowing how to get from here to there. While administrators may know the goal, knowing precisely how to achieve that goal within the context of their program’s everyday life and challenges is another matter. A program’s commitment to quality improvement is critical, and while the program leadership does not necessarily have to see themselves as ready for accreditation right away, they must be willing to take steps toward quality and secure the buy-in of their key stakeholders. AFPs help programs chart a course, navigate the twists and turns in that course, and help program staff stay focused on the goal of achieving NAEYC Accreditation.

Program administrators, like orchestra conductors, are responsible for bringing together many moving parts to create something magnificent and greater than isolated pockets of quality. According to Stephens

Administrators need to be knowledgeable about what is needed to provide a quality early learning environment, skilled in management of program staff and resources to promote such an environment, and capable of setting up efficient operations that maximize the effectiveness of resources. Programs need to have in

place policies and management systems that support efficient operations and sustained attention to maintaining and improving the quality of the learning environment. . . .

Programs also need resources sufficient to implement policies and practices essential to the program—such as hiring and retaining qualified staff, providing professional development to staff, purchasing developmentally appropriate equipment and materials, and setting up a facility that supports a developmentally appropriate learning environment and ensures health and safety.



## CHAPTER 2

# Supports to Programs

Accreditation facilitation projects provide a wide array of standard and individually tailored support and services to programs seeking NAEYC Accreditation. They help programs understand the steps of the accreditation process and the language of NAEYC Accreditation.

## Types of Support Provided by AFPs

Support ranges from guidance, such as technical assistance workshops on accreditation, to more intensive services, such as individualized, on-site consultation. As every AFP evolves, it learns the needs of its community and develops the means to respond to those unique needs.

In addition to providing tangible supports and services, AFPs also motivate and encourage program staff. They often recognize and celebrate achievement of milestones and program successes, such as completion of self-assessment or submission of candidacy materials. AFPs understand that the role of cheerleading and inspiring programs is as important as the other services they provide.

Three categories of support have been identified by the AFP Advisory Group as constituting high-quality practice:

- › individualized support to programs (focusing on the specific needs of an individual program)
- › group-focused support (addressing needs of multiple programs together and fostering peer support and networking)
- › access to resources and other supports. While not every AFP may be able to offer all of them, it is a goal to aspire to

The graphic below illustrates the recommended practices (activities and resources) within each category. The categories are described in more detail on the following pages.

### Individualized Support to Programs

- › on-site meetings
- › classroom observations
- › assessment of classrooms
- › coaching/mentoring administrator
- › assessment of the program administration (PAS) modeling

- › document review (files, policies, portfolios, accreditation documents)
- › mock assessment visits
- › professional development plans
- › board of directors workshops
- › phone consultations

### Group-Focused Support

- › program administrator meetings
- › workshops/trainings/panels
- › networking
- › training on assessment tools
- › visits to other programs
- › peer-to-peer mentoring

### Other Resources/Services

- › conferences/symposiums
- › funding (accreditation fees, materials/equipment, tuition support, facility improvements)
- › resource library (books, DVDs for staff development and for children and families)
- › recognition events
- › resource hubs (links to other community resources)
- › advertising/marketing (for programs and NAEYC accreditation)

### Individualized Support to Programs

Most AFPs offer individualized support to programs, a recommended practice that involves coaching and mentoring the program administrator; conducting classroom observations/assessments, administrative assessments, and document reviews; and hosting on-site meetings for the program staff. In addition to on-site meetings, AFPs provide technical assistance by phone and e-mail and through regular conference calls.

“Coaching is about improving the individual’s capacity to focus, learn and innovate.”—*Galileo Galilei*

### Coaching and Mentoring the Program Administrator

AFPs develop special relationships with programs. Unlike some program improvement methods designed for teaching staff, AFPs focus on administrators as change agents and help them develop the skills and expertise needed to lead their programs to a higher level of quality. Effecting change through the administrator is the most efficient and long-lasting way to see that the change becomes part of ongoing practice.



The program administrator’s role is central in the change process. “In a number of powerful ways, the [administrator] shapes the center as a workplace. The [administrator] as leader plays a pivotal role in both assessing the current situation and structuring change to improve conditions. More than anyone else, [administrators] are the agents of change. . . . They . . . encourage and support it by developing the interpersonal context which frees, encourages, and helps people to assess their program and become actively involved in the change process” (Bloom 2005, 31).

The work between the AFP and program administrator is a relationship-based model with coaching and facilitation. Studies show that coaching is an effective way to promote the implementation of new practices (Burkhauser & Metz 2009; Darling-Hammond et al. 2009). In business today, executives often use coaches to help set goals, reach goals at a faster rate, make better decisions, and improve relationships with employees. Coaching is defined as “the art and practice of inspiring, energizing and facilitating the performance, learning and development of the [individual]” (Downey 2003).

Significant work can be accomplished in the context of a relationship-based approach if the right relationship is built. Mitchell describes the AFP-program relationship: “Staff . . . invested significant amounts of time in building relationships with directors and staff of the programs they worked with. Those relationships were grounded in active and genuine respect for the programs as partners.” (2008, 5). A coach must establish trust, be well-informed and knowledgeable, be honest when they don’t know the answer, listen and respond with empathy, provide encouragement, ask—not tell, and support—not direct.

When an early learning program is part of a facilitation project, it is as if the program administrator has a personal coach. When things become challenging, the coach helps administrators persevere. The coach brings

additional resources to bear on the situation when they have the knowledge and expertise. The coach asks probing questions (often open-ended) and offers guidance. Coaching can help solve difficult problems and meet complex goals. It is a powerful means of learning. The combination of a facilitator and a coached program administrator creates an environment that allows programs to effectively manage change and ultimately become a stronger, higher-quality program.

Coaching and the establishment of coaching relationships are precisely what a program administrator needs to be an effective leader of their own team. Coaching topics focus on both management issues, such as dealing with a difficult employee, working with families, and using effective hiring practices; and leadership issues, such as fostering community advocacy, developing public policy, and improving the effectiveness of a program's board of directors.

“The wisest allocation of AFP resources is to support the program administrator as the mechanism for impacting program quality.”

When quality improvement efforts focus on the administrator, program changes are pervasive—there is a trickle-down effect—and improvements are more likely to be sustained after involvement with the AFP has ended. Directing AFP resources to build the capacity of administrators, who in turn impact whole programs, results in a greater return on investment, which means more children can be in higher-quality programs.

**The program administrator's leadership is central not only to program quality, but to the change process that occurs during self-study—and to continuous improvement.** They establish a work environment that can support or inhibit change. They must commit to quality improvement as a program-wide goal, allocate time and resources toward that goal, and motivate and support staff to make needed changes. While trying to accomplish all of this, administrators often find that the everyday challenges of running a program interfere with progress toward higher quality (Stephens 2009, 4).

## Classroom Observations and Assessments

Conducting observations of classrooms is another service provided by many AFPs. These observations provide both the program and the AFP with information on the level of quality in the classrooms. The instruments typically used for observations include NAEYC's observable assessment items tool; the revised Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-R), the revised Infant/Toddler Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ITERS-R), and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). The ECERS-R and ITERS-R measure the quality of the classroom environment through seven subscales: space and furnishings, personal care routines, language-reasoning, activities, interaction, program structure, and families and staff (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer 2005). The CLASS examines three domains: emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support (Pianta, La Pero, & Hamre 2008). Regardless of which tool is chosen, the instrument used for observations must be both valid and reliable and have inter-rater reliability among the raters. While these external assessments by informed observers are important input as programs consider making improvements, it is critical to note that they do not replace classroom observations that programs need to complete as part of self-study.

## Many Right Ways

Just as all programs are made up of individuals with individual traits who work to best serve the children and families in their communities, AFPs that serve programs share much in common and have many differences. There are many ways for a program to meet a certain assessment item, and there are many right ways for AFPs to facilitate NAEYC Accreditation.

AFPs should explore the choices they have. For example, when considering whether to review a program's official documents (such as applications, candidacy materials, annual reports) prior to submission. AFPs take two different viewpoints and approaches:

AFPs that do review program documents prior to submission to the NAEYC Academy see the review as part of capacity building and as coaching the administrator all the way through the process. Many administrators appreciate having a "second set of eyes" on the documents prior to submission. AFP staff may identify areas with errors or omissions in the documents. It is preferable to identify and correct these mistakes before submitting materials.

Other facilitation projects do not review program materials prior to submission. They feel that in doing so, they would be assuming a level of ownership that belongs wholly to the program. On-site, by request, one AFP will help the administrator review documents; however, AFP staff do not review materials as part of their ongoing program support.

Data from observational assessments are shared with teachers and the program administrator and then used to identify and prioritize areas needing improvement in the classroom and/or within the program as a whole. While the program develops its improvement plan with the guidance of the AFP staff person, the program administrator owns the process and together with the individual teachers must decide on the ultimate plan. Once

the priority areas are identified, goals can be set for the program as well as for teaching teams and individual staff members.

Observational data establish a baseline from which a program can measure its progress. Program administrators, in conjunction with AFP staff, use the data to inform classroom improvement plans and staff development plans. They can use other formal and informal observations as they work together with teachers to foster high-quality classroom climates that lead to program quality to best serve children and families and that meet the rigor of NAEYC Accreditation.

## Program Administration Assessment

Another recommended practice provided by many AFPs is providing an external assessment of a program's organizational practices. The tool often used for this type of assessment is the Program Administration Scale (PAS) (Talan & Bloom 2004). PAS measures the overall quality of the administrative practices of an early learning program by examining 10 areas:

- › human resources development
- › personnel cost and allocation, center operations
- › child assessment
- › fiscal management
- › program planning and evaluation
- › family partnerships
- › marketing and public relations
- › technology, and staff qualifications

As with the results of the environmental rating scales, PAS data are shared with the program administrator by the assigned AFP staff.

Together, they then set priorities for a program improvement plan, identifying resources and strategies to support specific areas. When the PAS and classroom observation data are combined and used to create recommendations or an improvement plan, a more comprehensive view of the program emerges, from both the classroom and administrative perspectives.



Another way AFPs assist program administrators is by reviewing program documents to provide feedback on whether existing documentation addresses NAEYC Accreditation assessment items. This review provides valuable insight into areas where improvements, revisions, or additional documentation may be needed to fully meet the accreditation assessment items. Some AFPs have found that first using the PAS to guide the document review saves a great deal of time. Documents reviewed can include staff files, classroom and program portfolios, and policies and procedures.

Some administrators find it hard to objectively assess their program's policies and procedures against the assessment items. Using the PAS allows the AFP to conduct a thorough review of a program's documents instead of waiting for the administrator to request assistance with particular documents.

Some AFPs also help administrators assess organizational practices by assisting with preparation of the Program Portfolio, a required source of evidence for the NAEYC Accreditation process. As a tool for assessing and reviewing a program's policies and procedures, the Program Portfolio helps the administrator identify what the program has already accomplished and design a strategy for next steps. This gives the administrator a better understanding of the language of NAEYC Accreditation and the expectations for paper documentation.

As a mechanism for tracking policies and recording events, the portfolio provides current evidence of implementation of standards and assessment items. As a first step, AFPs can help an administrator make sure that the program simply has policies and procedures documented; later, it is possible to consider whether the policies and procedures specifically address what is stated in the assessment items. Most administrators are grateful for the breadth of knowledge an AFP coach brings to the process. Some AFPs do this individually with programs; others offer classes for administrators

to build their portfolios and share policies and procedure documents, giving programs an even broader look at assessment items. Either way, program administrators have the opportunity to thoroughly examine their leadership and management systems and to embed quality into their Program Portfolios.

“Going to the meetings, I have met a lot of people, listened to the experiences of other directors. Their experiences have put a face on what I'm trying to do and have really encouraged me to continue.”—*An administrator*

### On-Site Meetings

Facilitating on-site meetings, such as staff meetings, workshops, or trainings, is an effective way for AFPs to focus on the specific needs of an individual program. Topics may include an overview of NAEYC's Accreditation process, giving staff an introduction to the steps and requirements of NAEYC Accreditation, program standards, and the related assessment items. These meetings are best tailored to the program's specific needs, as identified through observations or based on requests from the teachers and/or administrator. Topics are mutually agreed upon by the AFP staff and the program administrator, or they can be chosen by AFP staff.

Some program staff are more comfortable discussing program-specific issues with colleagues at on-site meetings than they are with a group of individuals from other programs. On-site meetings

also allow everyone in a program to hear the same message at once—whether the messenger is the AFP staff or the program administrator.

### Other Individualized Support

Continuous improvement is a hallmark of NAEYC Accreditation and an expectation for programs. Toward that end, some AFPs provide ongoing support to programs that have received an accreditation decision. They can use the accreditation decision report to help programs structure the next improvements and prioritize the areas in which the program had lower scores. If accreditation is deferred or denied, AFPs can provide invaluable support to program staff who may be discouraged, angry, or even grieving. AFPs can guide deferred/denied programs to accept the accreditation decision and its implications; help administrators consider the impact the decision will have on relationships among staff, families, board, and funder(s); help orchestrate the release of the information regarding the decision; and assist in determining the next step for the program.

AFPs also help administrators navigate and understand the requirements of being a NAEYC-Accredited program, such as organizing timely completion of the Annual Report and maintaining compliance with required assessment items.

### Group-Focused Support

High-quality programming is created through excellence in the program’s leadership and management. To achieve NAEYC Accreditation, an administrator must commit to improving program quality and dedicate the necessary time and resources to do so. Yet some administrators find themselves unprepared by their prior experiences or training for the management challenges they face, and the nature of their work often isolates them from others with the same responsibilities. Providing mechanisms that foster peer support for administrators is a recommended practice for AFPs.

“By far the most important result of the accreditation process is the influence it has had on our staff development in the areas of child-directed and teacher-directed activities. Particularly in a school where most of our children have been referred for special education services, it is a challenge to maintain a balance between **structured activities**, in which children learn to respond to adult requests, and **child-initiated activities**, where adults observe, engage, and plan to meet children’s interests, needs, and strengths.”  
—*An administrator*

### Facilitated Meetings with Program Administrators

AFPs recognize the unique and critical role an administrator plays in a successful program. They can directly address program needs in facilitated

meetings targeted at, and attended by, program administrators. These groups, which often meet monthly, create opportunities for networking, for information sharing, and for learning how other programs approach similar challenges. Meetings should be regular, frequent, and facilitated. The use of a cohort model, in which the same group of individuals starts and proceeds through the process at the same time, creates continuity where trust and camaraderie develop more readily. In addition to using a cohort-based model, AFPs often open the meetings to any program that would like to attend, thereby getting the word out about NAEYC Accreditation, AFP work, and quality improvement efforts in the community.

When establishing a facilitated group, another factor worth considering is the diversity of the programs represented. AFPs have found that diversity of program type, funding, size, and families served make the individuals' experience richer. Administrators learn that even though programs may differ, their challenges are basically the same. Access to diverse program types takes administrators beyond their own experiences and beyond their program's culture to expand their understanding and see new approaches to challenges.

In the facilitated meetings, administrators share examples and serve as models for each other. Often, participants connect spontaneously with each other outside of the meetings, visiting each other's programs and using each other as peer mentors. The meetings serve as check-in points to garner encouragement, report progress, and mark milestones. Administrators value this time as an opportunity to rejuvenate themselves, but getting away from the program can be challenging. To maintain the integrity of the cohort model and motivate individuals to attend meetings on a regular basis, some AFPs require administrators' attendance at a minimum number of meetings to remain part of the project.

Some meetings are held at program sites and others at locations such as the AFP office. Meeting at a program site provides opportunities for administrators not only to visit other programs but also to see how others meet accreditation assessment items in different ways.

Some AFPs organize visits to programs that have been identified as models for things such as teacher-child interactions or the classroom environment. Post-trip assignments can include reflective homework in which administrators consider and describe how they will incorporate what was learned into their program improvements.

Another way an AFP can foster program-to-program support is for its staff to accompany administrators on visits to other programs. On their way to and from these visits, they can discuss what they expect to see, what they did see, how they view what they saw, if they liked the approaches, if what they observed was effective/appropriate, and if they saw anything they would like to implement in their own programs. These conversations, rooted in shared experience, provide administrators with an opportunity for reflective thinking about their programs.

One AFP uses a unique approach to support administration. It focuses on large multi-site agencies and brings together their executives to develop strategies for making the agency-wide changes necessary to institute quality improvement across all of their programs. This approach builds leadership within larger agencies to facilitate program improvement and accreditation.

## **Content of Individualized and Group-Focused Support**

Accreditation facilitation project staff support, train, and educate program administrators and staff both on-site at individual programs and at meetings that bring together many programs throughout a community. The content of this

work falls into three categories: early childhood, administrative or business related, and accreditation process related.

Decisions about the content for trainings, meetings, and other professional development opportunities are informed by suggestions from both AFP staff and program staff. AFP staff selects topics based on knowledge of a program's strengths and what areas need improvement. Just as knowledge of each child (informed by assessment) helps a teacher plan appropriately challenging curriculum and tailor instruction that responds to the child's strengths and needs, so knowledge of program strengths and needs (informed by assessment) helps AFP staff determine meeting content.

The **early childhood content** of AFP trainings includes the assessment items within the Relationships, Curriculum, Teaching, Assessment of Child Progress, Health,\* Families,\* and Physical Environment\* program standards; and the primary focus area is children. An informal survey of some of the largest AFPs indicates that programs need the most support in the content areas of curriculum, teaching, and assessment. Meetings can focus on specific curriculum elements, such as early literacy, early mathematics, and social and emotional development, or they can address broader topics, like curriculum types (for example, HighScope or Creative Curriculum).

**Administrative or business-related content** includes assessment items within the Health,\* Teachers, Families,\* Community Relationships, Physical Environment,\* and Leadership and Management program standards. These standards focus on establishing an effective and durable support structure that promotes program accountability and makes it possible not only for classroom life to be consistently nurturing and filled with learning opportunities for each child but also for a program to sustain a high level of

quality over time. Playground design, policies and procedures, legal issues, and documentation are frequent administrative topics for AFP meetings.

### **Accreditation process related topics**

include an orientation to the four steps to NAEYC Accreditation, the requirements of each step, the self-study process (project management), the difference between self-study and self-assessment, portfolios, site visits and rights and responsibilities, and project management of the accreditation process.

Meetings focusing on the process aspects of NAEYC Accreditation help programs understand each of the steps to becoming NAEYC Accredited—and the logistics of self-study and self-assessment—and the tools associated with each. AFP staff answer such questions as, *Where do we start? How do we start? What is the process? What's this terminology? What are the deadlines, and what has to be submitted? How do we organize the work? How is this different from before?* This work is about helping people understand the whole and the parts of NAEYC Accreditation.

*“It was helpful to have a forum where administrators could share their experiences, get feedback from [others] who have gone through the accreditation process already, and get assistance from [the AFP] staff.  
—An administrator*

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\* These standards contain assessment items that are both content and administrative in focus. For example, within the Physical Environment standard, assessment items related to how the teaching staff arrange materials and space are addressed as a content area, and assessment items related to the outdoor environmental design are covered within administrative content, since environmental design is a responsibility of the program's administration.

Program participation in an AFP provides a disciplined approach to NAEYC Accreditation. AFPs help programs synchronize the information and see the connections between standards and how the standards fit together. The pace of information delivery should be such that the information is understandable and usable. Meetings should be specific and include details relevant to individual programs.

An accreditation process support worth highlighting is portfolio development. This is one of the most requested, popular, and productive AFP sessions. Displaying examples of program/classroom portfolios makes a session even more valuable and instructive for program staff. Put on a show-and-tell. Ask each administrator to invite a few teachers to a meeting to show and share their classroom portfolios. First, ask half of the teachers to display and remain with their portfolios so that as the other teachers move around the room, they are available to answer

questions, describe documentation, and share their experiences in preparing the portfolio. Then, after several minutes, ask the teachers to switch places; those who roamed now share their portfolios. This gives everyone an opportunity to see the variety of portfolios and the diversity of documentation and evidence.

This face-to-face, teacher-to-teacher exchange demystifies the process of creating a portfolio. It provides an opportunity for teachers to talk with those who have completed the process, and it helps them identify documents and other evidence they may already have that demonstrates how assessment items are met.

As AFPs assist programs in understanding and navigating the NAEYC Accreditation process, it is also important to help administrators and teachers see the connections between accreditation assessment items and other aspects of program quality and to provide experiences that illustrate the commonalities among definitions of quality.



One AFP, which holds monthly meetings with about 15 administrators, initially focuses on various aspects of quality—developmentally appropriate practice, managing challenging behaviors, and so on. The technical process of becoming accredited is introduced at the fourth or fifth meeting. Administrators pore over each book in the Self-Study Kit, gaining an understanding of the framework and uniformity of the 10 standards books, the difference between a standard and an assessment item, and how to begin the accreditation process.

For example, where are there similarities in the ECERS-R and accreditation assessment items? In what ways do state licensing regulations serve as a foundation for accreditation assessment items? Where are the parallels? Other standards, such as Head Start Program Performance Standards, early learning standards, professional development standards, and research, could be discussed as well. When professionals make the connections—the parallels—between various measures and standards of quality, they see NAEYC Accreditation as part of a process of continuous program quality improvement and not as something separate and unrelated.

Discussion is one of the best ways to help individuals think about the NAEYC Early Learning Program Standards and Assessment Items—and what they mean for their program. Through discussion and sharing different perspectives, AFPs can help program staff clarify their understanding, reflect on others' views, and gain a deeper appreciation of the assessment items. This approach is applicable to both early childhood content and administrative topics.

Managing the process of becoming NAEYC Accredited can be daunting and for some programs may seem overwhelming. AFPs report that the greatest need for program assistance—both for programs pursuing NAEYC Accreditation for the first time and for programs pursuing re-

accreditation—is in managing the process, and managing the logistical details of accreditation; in other words, project management.

Project management is a critical area of AFP support. It is an approach that involves planning, organizing, allocating resources, and directing a team to successfully meet an objective. Project management is essential for coordinating necessary and desired change. It provides a structure for organizing the work to be carried out inside of a dynamic program where things are ever changing. It is what administrators do every time they lead their program through the NAEYC self-study process.

The self-study process and steps to NAEYC Accreditation provide the architecture for individualized project management plans. AFPs can break down processes into manageable chunks so that they can be understood and acted upon. This is why it is critical that AFP staff is well versed in current NAEYC Accreditation processes, policies, and so on.

Using a project management approach, AFPs support and coach administrators as they determine exactly what has to be accomplished. By identifying all the tasks that need to be completed:

- › identify activities that can run in parallel
- › prioritize tasks
- › establish time frames for each task
- › planning the various stages
- › establishing due dates
- › identify points when the plan will be reviewed
- › assigning responsibility for each task to an individual or team
- › adjust the plan as necessary
- › track costs

Because it is easy for some programs to get lost in the process, AFPs should encourage administrators to communicate with, motivate, and support staff throughout the self-study.

Teaching project management can be part of individualized, on-site support and/or part of the facilitated administrator meetings (group-focused support). AFP staff help administrators stay on track with self-study tasks by assigning homework for upcoming meetings. (No one wants to come to the next meeting not having done their homework!) Milestones of the self-study process can be used as benchmarks.

In addition to orienting administrators to the whole process of NAEYC Accreditation, AFPs must stress what is required at each step and the commitment and work necessary to become accredited. By meeting regularly with administrators, AFPs have numerous opportunities to reinforce these concepts, assess what is difficult or confusing, and provide appropriate support.

## Professional Development

Accreditation facilitation projects recognize the vital role that professional development plays in the ability of programs to offer high-quality early childhood care and education. Serving as a critical link to professional development opportunities for teaching staff and administrators—either as a direct service or through opportunities within the community—is recommended practice.

Many AFPs help program staff create individualized professional development plans. These plans help move individuals toward formal education as well as elevate the program’s whole-staff qualifications toward candidacy requirements and accreditation assessment items. AFPs provide various types of professional development opportunities, such as full-day seminars or retreats on the accreditation process and/or program standards and accreditation assessment items, credit-bearing workshops, leadership programs for administrators, and training series for administrators and staff.

One AFP partners with higher education institutions to offer a leadership institute specifically designed for current program

administrators. College-credit courses that meet all five of the state’s Director Credential competency areas are offered in compact formats to fit administrators’ schedules, with multiple courses running simultaneously for powerful peer networking. Leadership institutes build the educational qualifications of program administrators. Mandatory enrollment meetings establish the expectations and begin the work, and courses taught by instructors skilled in adult learning theory and individualizing lead to success. From 2000 to 2009, 631 administrators enrolled in the AFP courses, and more than half completed the courses.

In a large metropolitan city, another AFP has developed a successful model of professional development. A series of training sessions addresses the importance of a supportive relationship between the administrator and the teacher, based on the assumption that both are vital to any improvement in classroom quality. The initial meeting is attended solely by the program administrator so that their role as the leader of the program, the one ultimately responsible for program quality, can be addressed in confidence. At subsequent sessions (except for the final one), a teacher identified by the administrator as a potential teacher mentor attends alone. The program administrator and the teacher attend the last meeting together. The series is designed in this way so that participants have the chance to learn and implement over time, refining quality improvement using observation and evidence

### “Begin with the end in mind.”

One of Covey’s (1998) seven habits of highly effective people, this sentence captures the essence of pursuing NAEYC Accreditation. When you begin with the end in mind, you have a clear vision of direction and destination. This approach allows you to “envision in your mind what you cannot see at present with your eyes” (8) It also means having a purpose and a plan—concepts that are central to successful pursuit of NAEYC Accreditation.

tools. The administrator can reinforce concepts and ideas learned in the series, and the teacher can serve as a peer coach and model for other teachers in the program. The knowledge gained is spread throughout the program, and all teachers and classrooms benefit.

“The facilitator’s guidance was invaluable in sorting out the details, language, and requirements for accreditation.”  
—An administrator

The professional development growth that AFPs offer the early childhood community does not just occur within those programs that achieve NAEYC Accreditation. Even when a program does not target or achieve accreditation, participating in an AFP, engaging in dialogue and self-examination around a set of nationally established assessment items, and using NAEYC’s self-study process create opportunities for growth and development. AFPs understand what can be gained through this process.

One important, yet sometimes unrecognized, role that an AFP plays is in the development of leaders. Through the support, services, and guidance provided to individual program staff, AFPs nurture administrative leadership. Since many program administrators were good teachers who were promoted, these individuals often come to their new positions without experience or education/training in management or administration. AFPs offer mentoring, coaching, training, and coursework that develop these new administrators into leaders.

Being a program administrator can be a solitary and isolating job. Meeting and networking with other administrators creates a support system,

one that often lasts well beyond an administrator’s involvement with the AFP. As these leaders mature, they become the connectors—the glue in their communities. The role of program administrators as community leaders is discussed in the last chapter of this manual.

## Other Resources and Services

In facilitating program quality improvement, AFPs provide a wide variety of other resources and services, including financial support, access to additional community resources, and advertising and marketing.

### Financial Support

Financial support typically takes the form of providing assistance with specific fees or providing funds to address a specific quality-improvement activity. Many AFPs fund program participation in NAEYC Accreditation through the partial payment of accreditation fees. Programs usually are required to pay at least some of the fees themselves so that they can see the fees as a standing cost of program operation and build them into their ongoing budgets. Some AFPs pay a percentage of each fee; others, before supporting one or more subsequent fees, require programs to pay the initial enrollment fee to demonstrate a commitment to the process. Still others pay the initial enrollment fee and then require the program to cover later fees. They also alert programs to the scholarship fund for accreditation fees available through NAEYC Quality Improvement and Program Support.

AFPs provide other fee supports, including registration fees for conferences or seminars (such as the NAEYC Annual Conference, the NAEYC Professional Learning Institute, and state or local NAEYC conferences); NAEYC membership fees; support for consultants and staff substitutes for training sessions; and fees associated with professional credentials (such as the Child Development Associate [CDA] credential or state director credential).



AFPs also assist with the costs of making quality improvements through grants or loans to programs. Funds are used for a variety of purposes, including for needed materials or equipment or for making facility upgrades. Grants are also used to support professional development of teaching staff and administrators to help them meet qualifications needed to achieve NAEYC Accreditation—for example, by providing teacher stipends or two- or four-year scholarships leading to associate or bachelor’s degrees in early childhood education. Some AFPs offer funding through low-interest loan programs that turn into grants if NAEYC Accreditation is achieved.

It is important to note that most accreditation facilitation projects are funded by sources outside of their organization and that many of these funding sources impose guidelines on the distribution of AFP funds. These funding guidelines are a critical factor in how an AFP can allocate these monies.

### **Access to Additional Community Resources**

Accreditation facilitation projects serve as a hub of resource information, an entry point connecting administrators with additional resources and information. Program administrators are often so overwhelmed with just running their programs that they have no time to sift through offered supports and services, determining which are of high quality, which reinforce their program’s mission, and which they want to access. AFPs provide an invaluable service in this regard.

AFPs stay up-to-date on various trainings in their communities and beyond and are often able to recommend those of high quality to their constituent programs. Connections might be made to training that the local resource and referral agency is providing, an event that a local museum is hosting, or an opportunity sponsored by a school district. AFPs also are often aware of staff scholarships or incentives to attain particular educational qualifications. Other AFP resources might be as simple as a lending library with books

and videos for teachers, families, and children. Lastly, AFPs should be knowledgeable about NAEYC resources, particularly scholarships for accreditation fees and other supports such as those previously mentioned under “Financial Support” in this section.

“Working with the AFP was a lifesaver. It allowed us to build collaborations and partnerships with other community-based programs.”

—An administrator

### **Maintenance of a Listserv or E-mail Circle**

Some AFPs develop and maintain an e-mail circle or listserv that regularly sends messages to programs pursuing NAEYC Accreditation. They alert programs to opportunities that arise in the community, give reminders when the Program News is being released, call attention to specific articles in *Young Children*, *Teaching Young Children*, or the Program News, and share tips and ideas between programs to build quality and move toward accreditation or toward maintenance of current accreditation.

Because there is a constant stream of information about various community resources and initiatives, administrators find it hard to keep up with what is available and to know how to best allocate their professional development dollars. AFPs can be of great assistance to early care and education programs in this regard.



## Advertising/Marketing of NAEYC Accreditation

AFPs can assist programs in publicizing their achievement of NAEYC Accreditation. One way to do this is to provide a link on the AFP website to NAEYC’s website and its accredited program search. Because the list of NAEYC-Accredited programs is dynamic and frequently updated, it is preferable for AFPs to link to the Association’s website rather than provide their own list of programs.

Additionally, AFPs have access to NAEYC promotional materials (available at [NAEYC.org](https://naeyc.org)). Promotional materials and informational brochures are available for purchase through NAEYC’s online store.

To summarize, recommended practices for supporting programs include

- › focusing on individual program administrators as well as peer groups of administrators
- › addressing quality at both the classroom and management levels

- › providing and nurturing the professional development of program staff, particularly administrators
- › coaching and mentoring rather than prescribing a “right” solution or approach
- › supporting programs in understanding and managing the logistical details of NAEYC Accreditation
- › serving as a resource hub by connecting programs with community resources

“It is unwise to be heedless ourselves while we are giving advice to others.”—*Phaedrus, Book 1 Fable 9*

# Assessment of One AFP's Contribution to Program Improvement

## S.A. Stephens

In 2009, a study was conducted of Quality New York (QNY), a New York City-based AFP, to determine what the AFP's contributions were to improvements in program quality (Stephens 2009). The study's findings are informative and have implications beyond the individual AFP studied. In particular, the results highlight how important it is for AFPs to collect and analyze data and turn the data into information. This information is important not only for internal use within the AFP but also, more importantly, because it can be invaluable to public policy and research.

Specifically, the study sought to measure how the quality of participating early care and education programs improves during their participation in QNY, identify how components of QNY contribute to improvement, and, based on these findings, consider what components of QNY might be replicated and which system-wide policies and practices adopted.

QNY's two types of support for early care and education programs—group support provided in professional development workshops and program administrator network meetings, and individualized support provided by consultation with an experienced early childhood education professional and on-site training—were both found to be effective in contributing to

quality improvement. Each type of support contributed to a different area of quality. Individualized, on-site support contributed to improvement in the overall quality of programs' classroom learning environments. Group support—particularly program administrator professional development workshops and network meetings—contributed to improved management and administrative practices. At the same time, the two types of support reinforced each other, and both contributed to reducing the differences in quality among classrooms within the programs.

Based on the initial assessment of program quality using the ECERS-R and PAS, the programs in this study were of low to moderate quality overall, with considerable variation both within programs and among them. The programs exhibited a wide range of both weaknesses and strengths in the classroom environments and in administrative practices. At the same time, the classroom learning environment and program administration and operations—as measured by the ECERS and PAS tools—were independent of each other. They represent two separate dimensions of program quality among these programs (Stephens 2009, 2).

“This process has helped me recognize areas in my own practice that I needed to look at. I have become more organized, more focused.”

## Changes in Program Quality

Overall, the study programs improved in the quality of their classroom learning environments and in administration and

operations, as measured by changes in their ECERS and PAS scores between the time they initially enrolled in QNY and the spring of 2009. Improvements were evident in programs at all points in the accreditation process—regardless of how far they had progressed toward being awarded accreditation. However, programs that had submitted their materials to NAEYC or had been awarded accreditation showed improvement in classroom quality at about twice the level as did programs that were still in self-study or had just applied for candidacy.

Overall, the quality of the classroom environments improved more than did administrative practices. Further, the initial quality of the classroom environment did not predict the level of classroom quality in 2009. That is, regardless of how good or poor the classrooms were rated when the program first joined QNY, being in QNY improved the quality of the learning environment offered to children in these programs. However, this was not the case for the quality of program administration and operations. The initial rating of this aspect of program quality was strongly correlated with how well program administration and operations were rated in 2009. This suggests that changing policies and practices at the program level is more difficult than improving classroom practices. At the same time, programs that became stronger administratively had reduced variation across their classrooms in the quality of the learning environment, an indication that strengthening management and operations is needed to improve consistency in what children experience in the program.

### **Changes in Quality of Classroom Learning Environments**

Overall . . . the study programs moved from being in the low- to moderate-quality range to the moderate- to high-quality range. . . .

On average, the study programs gained high quality ratings in more than 10 areas, and in as many as 23 areas.

Program directors and QNY staff noted other kinds of changes in teaching and learning in their programs. One director noted that “teachers are more willing to take ownership for what goes on in their classrooms and for how children are doing. Teachers are not waiting for me to tell them what to do, and they are able to articulate why they are doing certain things in the classroom.”

The quality of these programs’ classroom learning environments became more consistent between the initial ECERS assessment and the 2009 assessment. . . . One way in which participation in QNY and the NAEYC Accreditation process increased consistency in quality across classrooms was by providing a framework and language for teachers to discuss quality issues and support each other in making change. As one program director noted, “The focus on developmentally appropriate practices has us talking about improvements in quality.” The same program director noted that her own understanding of quality had improved through her participation in QNY—“I’ve become more aware of what standards need to be improved upon within the program, what’s working, and what needs to change.” According to the QNY staff, there is “stronger continuity of services and a more standardized curriculum” in this program. Another program director noted that “we are much more conscious of what we’re doing—about curriculum and planning better for the needs of the children. Everyone is on the same page.”

### **Changes in Quality of Program Administration**

By early 2009, the study programs had improved their administrative policies and practices, as measured by the PAS, by a small

amount, less than one point. . . . On average, these programs had improved their PAS scores by two or more points on just over six items out of a total of 22.

Just as important as improvements in specific areas of administration and program operations were changes in directors' understanding of their own leadership role. One director noted, "I've been in the field a long time, starting as a teacher. This process has helped me recognize areas in my own practice that I needed to look at. I have become more organized, more focused." Another noted, "It's given me a range of professional goals to be aware of—I'm now trying to step back as an administrator and understand what the impact of my actions is, thinking about the program holistically."

### **Contributions of QNY to Improvements in Program Quality**

As described earlier, there are two major types of support that early care and education programs can gain from participation in QNY. One type includes the professional development workshops for program administrators and teaching staff and the program administrator network meetings. These opportunities provided administrative and teaching staff, but especially program directors, with information and tools as well as opportunities to interact with their peers in considering how to apply these resources in their programs and classrooms. The other type includes the individualized consultation from the Quality Advisor (QA) with the program director and on-site training tailored to the specific interests and needs of the program staff.

While both types of support are valued, each appears to play a different role in contributing to program quality improvement. The measure of individualized consultation and training provided on-site at the program

was strongly associated with improvement in the classroom learning environments. . . . This type of support, however, was not associated with improvement in program administration and operations, as measured by the PAS.

**"It's given me a range of professional goals to be aware of—I'm now trying to step back as an administrator and understand what the impact of my actions is, thinking about the program holistically."**

Participation of program directors in professional development workshops and program administrator network meetings was, on the other hand, strongly associated with improvement in program administration and operations, as measured by the PAS. . . . New program directors, in particular, noted the importance of their participation in QNY in the development of their knowledge and skills in administration. One such director stated, "I'm a lot better informed. I was a brand new administrator when I started here [at the program]. QNY and the NAEYC process have taught me a lot. I made use of the information provided at the [program administrator network] meetings and went over the assessment items again and again. I learned so much of what I had to do from QNY."

Teaching staff participation in QNY professional development was strongly associated with improvements in their program's PAS scores. . . . This suggests that, as directors gain greater understanding

of their leadership and managerial roles in quality improvement and in staff supervision skills, they take advantage of the professional development workshops for their staff. The fact that the participation of teaching staff in professional development workshops was not associated with improvement in the quality of classroom environments, as measured by change in the ECERS scores, reinforces the observation that even high-quality professional development for individual teachers may not be sufficient to produce broad, program-wide quality improvement.

These patterns of the different contributions of QNY supports to early childhood education program improvement hold even when the initial level of quality is taken into account. That is, when controlling statistically for the initial ECERS level, the amount of on-site support received by a program remained strongly associated with improvement in

classroom quality. Similarly, when controlling for initial PAS score, the time spent in professional development workshops and program administrator network meetings was strongly associated with improvement in administration and operations.

As noted earlier, an important measure of both the quality of the learning environment and the strength of program management is the extent to which classrooms in the same program differ in quality. When examined together in a multiple regression analysis, both types of QNY support—individualized on-site support and participation in professional development workshops, and program administrator network meetings—were associated with decreased variability across classrooms in ECERS ratings. Both types of support appear to contribute independently to this improvement and appear to be complementary as well. Based on reports from program directors and QNY staff, workshops and network meetings support improvement in such administrative practices as supervision, internal communication, and professional development, while on-site consultation assists teachers and the director to identify and improve specific areas of the classroom experience.



Excerpted, with permission, from S.A. Stephens, *Quality New York: Assessment of Its Contributions to Program Improvement in Early Care and Education Programs in New York City* (New York: Center for Assessment and Quality Development, 2009), 12–16. Prepared with support from United Way NYC.



## CHAPTER 3

# Business Practices of an AFP

In the rationale for the Leadership and Management program standard, NAEYC (2008) points out, “Excellent programming requires effective leadership and governance structures and comprehensive, well-functioning administrative policies, procedures, and systems. (2022)”

The same is true for accreditation facilitation projects. To support the development of high-quality early learning programs, AFPs must themselves be effective organizations with qualified staff, sound fiscal practices, accountability, effective communication, professional development opportunities, and ongoing assessment.

This chapter is not intended to be a comprehensive description of all the business practices that should exist within an AFP. It is meant to provide guidance on certain business practices for organizations facilitating accreditation. In any business focused on success, sound business practices are important. Following them is recommended practice.

AFPs should have job descriptions that provide employees with details regarding their roles and responsibilities. Employees should be evaluated annually on their performance and be provided with professional development opportunities, and the success and effectiveness of the project should be evaluated at least annually. The specifics of these policies and procedures are decisions each AFP must make for itself. The same is true of business relationships with programs. AFPs should create documents for agreements with the programs they provide services to, with the consultants they engage, and for the training and support they provide.

## Qualifications of AFP Staff

AFPs have an obligation to ensure their staff is well-informed with accurate and up-to-date information regarding NAEYC Accreditation. Although no formal relationship exists between AFPs and NAEYC, programs and others in the community often view AFPs as an extension of NAEYC. As ambassadors for the NAEYC Accreditation system, when AFP staff are misinformed about accreditation, the credibility of the project and NAEYC is damaged. AFPs must be clear that the Association is the official authority on NAEYC Accreditation.

In addition to having knowledge of NAEYC's accreditation process and the NAEYC Early Learning Program Standards and Assessment Items, AFPs should also have an understanding of the early childhood system within their state—in particular, its licensing requirements, professional development system, and quality rating and improvement system (if one exists). Understanding the delivery of early childhood care and education in their respective states enables AFPs to help programs see connections between and across the different regulations and standards. This is often a unique characteristic of AFPs.

At a minimum, AFP staff should have qualifications that meet the assessment item for the program administrators (assessment item 6C.3): preferably a bachelor's degree; at least nine credit-bearing hours of specialized college-level course work in administration, leadership, and management; at least 24 credit hours of specialized college-level course work (in early childhood education, child development, elementary education, or early childhood special education that encompasses child development and children's learning from birth through kindergarten; family and community relationships; the practice of observing, documenting, and assessing young children; teaching and learning processes; and professional practices and development). In instances where the AFP uses instruments such as ECERS-R, ITERS-R, CLASS, and/or PAS to assess classroom/program quality, it is important that the individual is knowledgeable about and reliable with the instruments.

Since AFPs are a hub of community resources and networking opportunities for programs, staff also must keep abreast of the professional development opportunities that exist within the state/community (such as scholarships, tuition reimbursement programs, and training) and help programs access those opportunities.

Most importantly, AFP staff should have excellent interpersonal skills. Whether working with a single program or with a group of administrators,



an effective facilitator will be open, honest, fair, consistent, patient, focused, an active listener, accessible, enthusiastic, and flexible. Hiring individuals with interpersonal skills is essential—as important as knowledge of accreditation.

Experienced AFPs recommend that staff

- › spend time building relationships
- › seek rather than provide solutions
- › ask rather than tell
- › coach, mentor, and counsel
- › be aware of and open to differences in culture
- › negotiate differences rather than prescribe an answer
- › understand the big picture while working on the details

AFPs sometimes use consultants, full-time or part-time. Whether a project is staffed by employees or consultants, the same expectations should be used for qualifications, ongoing professional development, and evaluation of performance.

A project also should consider the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of the team as a whole. The AFP team should possess expertise in adult learning, early learning program administration, diverse communities, cultural competence, and developmentally appropriate practice.

## Professional Development

Just as professional development should be an ongoing and integral part of an early learning program, continuing education should also be available for staff of accreditation facilitation projects. The results of each staff member's annual evaluation should inform a professional development plan for that individual and should be updated at least every year.

It is important to include NAEYC-sponsored training, webinars, and conference sessions in AFP staff's ongoing professional development because NAEYC's Early Learning Program and Quality

Improvement and Program Support Department operates in a mode of continuous improvement. AFP staff should attend NAEYC conferences, participate in monthly AFP conference calls, read NAEYC Accreditation Program News, and sign up for TORCH (The Online Resource Center Headquarters) to stay well informed and up-to-date on accreditation. (See QIPS resource flyer on page 9 of this manual.)

## Selecting Programs for Participation

Often, when an AFP first begins operations, assessment items for selecting programs to receive services are not established, other than what is prescribed by funding requirements. Funding requirements typically specify that services be provided to programs serving particular populations of children and families or to programs serving a specific geographic area. After some time in operation, many AFPs have found that the best way to allocate their funding and services is to establish baseline requirements for participation. Experienced AFPs' recommended quality practice calls for setting baseline requirements that help AFPs select programs that are most ready to engage in quality improvement efforts and ultimately with the NAEYC Accreditation process.



Establishing a minimum threshold for entry into the project ensures the wise allocation of AFP resources. Factors that influence readiness and can serve as baseline requirements involve programs being in good standing with licensing, having an administrator who has been in place for a significant period of time and is willing to engage in this work, and having an established and supportive board of directors. It is important to identify essential characteristics that ensure the whole program's buy-in.

AFPs have different mandates for the level of programs that they engage in. Some projects have multiple tiers, working with programs that need substantial improvements prior to entering the accreditation system, programs on the verge of self-

study, and others that are immediately ready to join the accreditation process. Various assessments by AFPs help determine the initial cohort of programs.

## Agreements with Programs

To ensure that the appropriate entities are informed and on board with programs making the necessary improvements, many AFPs formalize their program relationships with written agreements. These agreements minimize potential misunderstandings about roles and responsibilities—they outline what is expected of the program and what the program can expect from the AFP. Boards, parent advisory groups, and other governance/oversight bodies with decision-making authority on behalf of the program should be well-informed about participation in both the AFP and the NAEYC Accreditation process.

In general, AFPs use two types of agreements:

- › **Partnership agreement or memorandum of understanding (MOU)**—an agreement among three parties: the AFP, the program administrator, and the owner/operator or board of directors.
- › **Letter of commitment (LOC)**—a document of understanding between the AFP and the program's parent advisory group or, if no such group exists, a parent representative.

## Partnership Agreements or Memorandums of Understanding

Once programs are accepted as project participants, it is valuable for both parties (the AFP and the program) to demonstrate their commitment to the process. Several AFPs have noted that when their projects first began serving programs, they did not require an MOU; however, after a number of misunderstandings with programs regarding what supports would be (and would not be) provided, MOUs were put in place.

An MOU is a written agreement, signed by all parties (AFP, program administrator, and program board or owner), establishing a clear

### Advice from Other AFP Leaders on the Management of Data:

- Don't ask for data that you don't or won't use.
- Don't rely so heavily on things you can "count" or "measure" that you underestimate the value of anecdotal information. Real stories are valuable tools for illustrating points, particularly to those outside of the field.
- Leverage your data. Use data to effectively influence advocacy, for fund raising, and to grow your business.
- Engage in data-driven decision making, such as determining the best use of staff time and other resources.
- Consider how to connect your data to other institutions, such as institutions of higher education.
- Report outcomes (this is different from research).
- Think carefully about outcomes so you can deliver on promises—and not be asked to prove the impossible.

understanding of how the relationship will function and spelling out each party's role and responsibilities. It outlines the mutual benefits, the resources/supports provided, the timeframe of the relationships, a confidentiality agreement form, and specifics regarding termination/expiration of the agreement. A task and timeline chart specifying tasks to be completed, persons responsible, deadline date, and the expected outcome can also be part of an MOU. The document allows all involved to know what they are agreeing to and serves as a reference should any issues or questions arise.

Here are some examples of MOU conditions for program participation in an AFP:

- › maintaining a current license and abiding by all licensing regulations
- › completing criminal background checks and health check requirements
- › meeting all requirements as stated by funding agencies/agreements
- › signing and abiding by the confidentiality agreement
- › informing the AFP contact immediately of any program citations or complaints involving licensing, abuse/neglect issues, or NAEYC-required assessment items
- › providing notification in writing of any of the following:
  - changes in ownership or administration
  - investigations
  - changes in program operation, such as short- or long-term closures
  - new or additional funding sources
  - new or additional resources
- › developing and maintaining a written plan to achieve NAEYC Accreditation, supported with evidence that the program is taking steps toward accreditation

- › participating in the NAEYC Accreditation process on a scheduled plan
- › demonstrating progress (defined as consistently setting, documenting, and meeting goals) toward quality improvements
- › submitting required information and documents to NAEYC to meet deadlines—immediately informing the AFP of the inability to meet any part of the timeline
- › documenting program achievements
- › being available for scheduled site visits
- › being an active participant—having ongoing contact with the AFP

Active participation includes

- › monthly administrator meetings
- › workshops or training sessions sponsored by the AFP
- › individualized assistance, including staff training, observations, program tours, and staff/administration/board self-study team meetings for up to three hours at the site per month
- › telephone contact that actively reviews or plans for any of the above

If a period of time (determined by the AFP or funder) passes during which the program does not access the resources of the AFP, the program's status with the project will be designated as inactive, and support may cease. AFP staff will

- › meet with the program administrator contact following their receipt of Accreditation Decision Report (ADR) to review and create a plan for continuous improvement
- › provide assistance (after achieving NAEYC Accreditation) to other programs by participating in the group meetings, mentoring another program within the AFP, and so on
- › abide by NAEYC's "Code of Ethics"

Including the board of directors or owner in the MOU is important for a couple of reasons. Needed improvements are identified during the self-study

process, and making those improvements might require expenditures that were unanticipated when the program’s annual budget was created. The self-study process might also reveal issues with program policies and procedures that necessitate policy revision. A governing body or owner (or other entity with fiscal/policy-making authority) typically has responsibility for adjustments to the program’s budget and for revisions to policies. Therefore, it is critical that the board or owner have knowledge of and support the program’s participation with the AFP and in the NAEYC Accreditation process.

Confidentiality agreements are used to assure project participants that information they share will be held in confidence—by both AFP staff and program participants—and to ensure that any information they learn about another program, its staff, children, or families will be held in confidence. If participation in an AFP gives a program priority for other resources (such as scholarship dollars), a statement to this effect should be included in the confidentiality agreement, so that AFP staff may release pertinent information.

MOUs also may include details about funding procedures, how licensing violations observed by AFP staff will be handled, how incidences of abuse and/or neglect will be reported, how data will be collected and used, and what will and will not be included in public communications.

## Letters of Commitment

The purpose of the letter of commitment (LOC) is similar to that of the MOU. The LOC demonstrates that families are aware and supportive of the program’s decision to improve quality. It can include details, from the program administrator’s perspective, about how engagement in the NAEYC Accreditation process will benefit the program. Informing families is not only consistent with NAEYC’s program standard on Families, but it also becomes an internal mechanism and motivator for keeping programs on track and moving forward in the accreditation process. Both LOCs and MOUs

are formal documents that minimize potential misunderstandings about expectations of programs in an AFP.

## General Caveats

Finally, regardless of what formalized agreements are in place, AFPs should keep in mind that the programs with which they work will vary in terms of organizational structure. Variations include independent entities (nonprofit and for-profit) with their own boards of directors; programs that are part of a large corporation; programs that are part of a public school system; programs housed in federal buildings, which might have oversight from the General Service Administration (GSA); and programs on military bases, which are subject to Department of Defense oversight.

It is recommended that any agreement between a program and an AFP include a disclaimer making it clear that participation in the accreditation facilitation project does not guarantee a particular outcome.

Additionally, agreements should make clear that the program is ultimately responsible for meeting accreditation requirements and for all communications with the NAEYC Early Learning Program Accreditation Department.

## Awareness of Other Collaborations

In an effort to leverage all available resources, administrators often may seek and obtain assistance from many sources, and this can result in a program with too many masters. For example, in a single program, the local resource and referral agency might train the infant/toddler staff; the county health-care consultant might visit twice a month, and the cooperative extension might provide on-site consultation on challenging behaviors—and each of these partnerships generates action items for the program to implement. When programs receive guidance and “to-dos” from multiple sources, wires can get crossed—priorities become unclear, the staff

becomes confused and frustrated, and program improvements are not made. One AFP staff member explained it this way: “We used to find out, sometimes months after we had been working with a program, that someone else was doing the exact same work with the program!” AFPs can facilitate connections with and coordination of various advisors, and they can establish a method for ensuring that they are made aware of other collaborations. Next is an example of how one AFP resolves the issue of one program, many masters.

Before the AFP begins working with a program, it asks the program administrator to complete a coordination agreement. The agreement provides information on all of the resources the program is receiving, gives contact information for the other supporting organizations, and authorizes each organization to share information on the program in order to avoid duplication of services. The agreement allows the AFP to collaborate with the other organizations without breaching confidentiality. A resource team is convened, with representatives from each organization to identify specifically who is doing what work and to detail how the organizations will collaborate and coordinate services. Resource teams, which meet regularly, can clarify specific problems and sort roles.

The AFP initiates an additional agreement—a technical assistance and confidentiality agreement—among the program, the AFP, and the other supporting organizations, stipulating that

1. all parties agree that pertinent information regarding technical assistance and training needs may be shared among the identified agencies
2. sharing of information is done with the intent to support the program’s pursuit to achieve high-quality standards
3. the program receives the most comprehensive support, guidance, and assistance

4. all information shared among agencies is confidential, unless otherwise required by law.

The results from the process and agreements are described by an AFP staff member: “We [the various organizations] now call each other for help both formally and informally. We coordinate to help programs access services from agencies that we can’t provide . . . [it] removes the hindrance of competition—especially from those of us in the field.” She added that it is an “unexpected and welcome surprise” when relationships develop and trust is established.

Entering into these agreements is done in an effort to minimize the degree to which multiple organizations provide the same service and to better allocate funds. For example, if the research and referral agency assesses a program using the PAS, the AFP can forgo using that tool and spend time supporting the program in other ways. Given the limited resources for quality improvement in the early childhood community, it is important for AFPs to capitalize on available resources.



This model has led to formal agreements between organizations as well. Now coordination on a program's needs takes place—who has the best/most appropriate funding or service and which relationship most benefits the children and families. With an environment of collaboration between organizations, the impact on the quality of the early childhood community is greater.

## Pairing AFP Staff and Program Administrators

The relationship between a program administrator and the AFP staff can enhance or inhibit progress in making improvements. Experienced AFPs recommend that projects pair one staff person—not several—with a program administrator. In pairing staff and administrators, AFPs look for points of compatibility, such as temperament, age and life experiences; needs of the administrator/program; and expertise of the AFP staff. Even when care is taken to match individuals, mismatches occasionally occur. Accept that not all pairings will work out, and have a process to resolve the situation.

Attention should be given to the ratio of AFP staff to programs. While there is no magic formula, the variables of program size, how far along a program is in the process (just starting self-study, awaiting a site visit), history of licensing violations, geographical distance between programs, and other factors should be weighed in the decision. Many AFPs find that a 1:10 ratio of staff to active participants is best—and one that works financially for the AFP. In addition, within that 1:10 ratio, having programs that are at various points in the accreditation process is beneficial for all.

Since program size can vary (some centers are very large, and others may have just two classrooms), some AFPs also employ a staff-to-classroom ratio. Considering the staff-to-classroom ratio in addition to the staff-to-program ratio helps the AFP staff person manage the caseload. (With larger

programs, an AFP staff member with a 1:10 staff-to-program ratio may work with 50–70 classrooms or more.)

## Fiscal Management

Good financial management and fiscal accountability are essential components of AFP management. Those in AFP leadership positions should be knowledgeable about and adept at fiscal planning, budget preparation, and budget oversight. Budget priorities should be established with a mission-driven approach. This approach allows the project to align costs with services.

Financial policies and the procedures to implement them must be based on sound fiscal accountability using standard accounting practices. Both should be consistent with the project's vision, philosophy, mission, and goals. Annual budgets should be reviewed and amended as needed. Sound financial management leads to sustainability. The same assessment items used by programs for good fiscal management apply to AFPs.

Sound fiscal management principles include

- › knowing funding and/or grant requirements
- › documenting policies and maintaining good internal controls
- › maintaining adequate documentation to support expenditures (such as period expense reports, financial status reports, and electronic funds requests or draw downs)
- › maintaining cash flow effectively
- › having and utilizing an efficient accounting system
- › maintaining effective internal controls
- › documenting and reporting employee time and activities accurately
- › documenting in-kind contributions appropriately
- › reporting timely and accurate financial information
- › monitoring subcontractors/consultants

## Accreditation Facilitation Project Evaluation

To ensure accountability and continuous improvement, AFPs should regularly evaluate their projects. This requires systematic assessment and evaluation of the AFP's performance, staff abilities, and community needs. Several NAEYC Accreditation assessment items address program evaluation. Slightly modified, these assessment items are applicable to accreditation facilitation projects.

- › At least annually, the AFP conducts a comprehensive evaluation that measures progress toward the project's goals and objectives.
- › The AFP evaluation process includes gathering evidence in all areas, including policies and procedures, project progress and learning, and project satisfaction.
- › The AFP establishes goals for continuous improvement and innovation using information from the annual evaluation. The AFP uses this information to plan its professional development and quality improvement activities as well as to improve its policies and procedures.
- › The AFP uses an ongoing monitoring system to ensure that its goals and requirements are met. The AFP uses a data system to collect and report evidence that goals and objectives are met; the evidence is incorporated into the annual AFP evaluation.

AFP evaluation can help staff understand, verify, and even increase the impact that services have on programs. Don't rely on instinct or passion to determine what programs need and which services the AFP should provide them. Use results from evaluations for public relations/marketing purposes to promote the AFP's services to the community. Evaluation data that allows for comparison between the AFP's activities may provide valuable information (for example, which aspects to retain in the face of a loss of funding). AFP evaluations can provide useful details for

either scalability or replicating AFP successes. Sustainability is built in part on demonstrating how the AFP makes a difference, and AFP evaluations are a vital source of information.

## Data

To conduct AFP evaluations, plan and set goals, solicit additional funding, report to funders, create marketing materials, promote the AFP's work, and perhaps—most important—demonstrate the benefits of participating with the AFP and in NAEYC Accreditation, data must be gathered, stored, and effectively used. Data provide an AFP with details about its own performance as well as the performance of the programs with which it works. Being a data-driven organization is recommended practice.

The director of a large East Coast AFP stresses, "Data is pivotal. It not only informs the project, its effectiveness, and opportunities for improvement, [but] it also informs and advances the field. It can save you from extinction. It provides financial information. It provides policymakers with information that can be used to structure effective public policies. It proves you are making a difference—that you are sustainable and worth sustaining."

The ability to store and use data depends on an information management system. Recognize that the data system will evolve over time. It may be difficult at the start of a new AFP to know exactly what data to keep. As the AFP learns more about the work, staff are better able to determine what it is they want to show others and what data and functions are needed to do so.

Depending on the types of services provided and the types of data collected, AFPs could be sitting on a gold mine of data on program quality. Data on program quality can be used to demonstrate

- › how much and what kinds of services and program-quality interventions programs find most useful

- › which design features of AFPs best support lasting program quality improvements
- › what happens to program quality when the AFP is no longer supporting the program
- › what, if any, community impact the AFP has
- › what changes in resource allocation or public policy occurred as a result of the AFP's efforts
- › how ratings of classrooms (such as ECERS-R or CLASS) might relate to the scores of program administration (PAS)
- › if and how program administrator participation in regular facilitated meetings improves program administration
- › whether and how on-site consultation and training relate to improvements in process quality
- › which types of facilitation support best enable a program to maintain quality after AFP participation ends; which types and levels of program support positively correlate to changes

in classroom quality; which types and levels of program support positively correlate to changes in program administration

- › whether the length of time that a program participates in an AFP correlates to improved quality and/or achieving NAEYC Accreditation

To date, very little research has been done on accreditation project facilitation. Imagine the interest that would be generated if questions such as those above could be answered with data. For a list of the types of data that AFPs should gather, store, and use, see page 52.

## Sustainability of AFPs

While this manual is devoted to AFPs' recommended practices in program support, business operations, and community relationships, it is important that accreditation facilitation projects address sustainability. How do AFPs ensure their own long-term existence? How





do AFPs ensure continued impact on both the early childhood community and the community at large? How do AFPs continue to do the good work that they do? Numerous factors impact an organization's sustainability: strategic, financial, personnel, program, and competing priorities, among other considerations.

Funders care about sustainability. Often, funders ask their grantees, "How will you sustain the program once our funding ends?" Many AFPs are supported wholly or in part by grants. Asking and answering the following questions can help accreditation facilitation projects focus on sustainability.

- › Are there potential partners who might be critical to sustainability?
- › Who needs to be kept informed along the way (for example, local policy makers, current and potential funders)?
- › How are you going to get the word out about what you're accomplishing?
- › How does this project build upon efforts that exist in the community?
- › What types of data are you collecting to demonstrate that the effort is effective and worth continuing?
- › What tools are you going to use to help plan for continuation beyond the grant? When are you going to start planning?

To summarize, best practices for AFP business operations include

- › staff qualifications that include hiring those individuals with the knowledge, skills, and attributes of a facilitator and coach
- › ongoing professional development for AFP staff that includes training in NAEYC Accreditation
- › baseline requirements for selecting programs to participate in the AFP
- › written agreements among AFPs, program administrators, and boards of directors

- › knowledge of other projects/initiatives with which each program is involved
- › collaboration agreements with the other projects/initiatives
- › sound fiscal management
- › project evaluation
- › system for collection and use of data
- › sustainability

*"I also was taught not to ask in the face of need, 'Why doesn't somebody do something?' but rather 'Why don't I do something?'"—Marian Wright Edelman, Children's Defense Fund*



## CHAPTER 4

# Community Leadership

In today's economic climate, states and communities face enormous challenges. It is more critical than ever that early childhood professionals join with business and civic leaders to promote and advance their visions to improve the lives of children and families.

AFPs are pivotal and influential leaders in their communities, and as such, they should forge effective community partnerships. AFPs should create and maintain relationships with agencies, businesses, and institutions to support the achievement of high quality in early learning programs.

As visible advocates for quality, many AFPs are invited to join other quality improvement initiatives. These invitations provide an opportunity (for both individual staff and the AFPs as a whole) to further the AFP mission, to be a part of a larger effort, and to educate others about high-quality early learning programming. AFPs, when in a position of influence, should encourage the development of coordinated systems rather than the continuation of important but fragmented or isolated services and activities.

## Communications and Outreach

Reaching out to raise awareness and to educate the broader community about an AFP, its work, and the importance of high-quality early learning programming is recommended practice. Newsletters and websites are two basic ways to get out the message to a broader audience within the community and beyond. Making presentations to other organizations for the purpose of making them aware of the AFP's existence and its work, and opening AFP training to programs not in the project are two direct, overt methods of outreach. Many AFPs celebrate and recognize the achievements of programs (such as becoming accredited) at award ceremonies. Press releases to announce the event and the programs' achievement of NAEYC Accreditation can attract favorable attention from the media as well as from others in the community.

With the growing attention to the importance of early care and education, many communities are interested in hearing knowledgeable people on the issues. Some organizations that may be interested in hosting an event include Junior League, Rotary Club, Chamber of Commerce, Kiwanis, labor

unions, and church-affiliated groups. Another avenue for AFPs to inform community groups about early childhood issues is establishing a speakers' bureau. By providing speakers on various topics, the AFP not only provides a valuable service but also develops constituency support.

## Create Collaborations

Collaborations can be a specific project or a wider effort. For example, an AFP might collaborate with the United Way to provide additional resources for programs striving for NAEYC Accreditation. Or an AFP could partner with a college or university and Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H) to connect programs going through accreditation with degree programs. Focused collaborations pool resources, ideas, and energy.

Before creating collaborations or coalitions, it is important to understand the elements of building successful collaborations. AFPs can act as a catalyst



for building and strengthening collaborations, and the spheres of influence that an AFP can have are wide ranging.

Consider establishing collaborations with

- › NAEYC Affiliates or an Affiliate AFP
- › other AFPs around the country
- › businesses and corporations
- › quality rating and improvement systems
- › community-based organizations (such as United Way) that are funding quality initiatives
- › institutions of higher education
- › licensing agencies
- › resource and referral agencies
- › state child care administrators
- › state and local educational agencies working on early childhood education (for example, state-funded prekindergarten, preschool programs, and early intervention)
- › Head Start
- › health and human service agencies
- › After-School Association state affiliate
- › family child care associations
- › service organizations (such as Junior League, Big Brothers Big Sisters of America)
- › labor unions
- › chambers of commerce
- › local foundations

Other collaborations involve public policy. For more on public policy considerations, see the public policy advocacy section on page 45.

*“In promoting NAEYC Accreditation, what AFPs are really doing is advocating for quality and lifting up early childhood*

*education as a whole.”—An AFP director*

## Linking with NAEYC Affiliates

NAEYC Affiliates have a long history of supporting NAEYC Accreditation through local funding efforts, dedicated conference tracks, study groups, annual recognition events, and other avenues.

Many Affiliates now sponsor accreditation facilitation projects as part of their quality improvement efforts. These Affiliate-staffed AFPs join the AFP community through the same approval process as all AFPs. NAEYC’s Goals for Effective Organizations (NAEYC 1996) are similar to the recommended practices outlined for AFPs.

- › **Goal II:** Facilitate improvements in, and uphold high standards for, professional development and working conditions to achieve high-quality practice in early education.
  - **Assessment Item: (II-C-2)** The Affiliate Group promotes accreditation through the National Academy of Early Learning Programs (former name of the NAEYC Academy for Early Learning Program Accreditation)
- › **Goal III:** Improve public understanding of, and support and funding for, high-quality programs in centers, homes, and schools for young children and their families.

As a part of meeting these goals and as part of their leadership, NAEYC Affiliates have accreditation committees and accreditation chairs whose role is to support and promote NAEYC Accreditation. Affiliate Accreditation Committees are part of a required set of assessment items that each Affiliate must meet in order to maintain their relationship with NAEYC. In 2009, the Affiliate Council approved several recommendations, including creating optional models for NAEYC Accreditation support that allow for greater flexibility for NAEYC Accreditation of programs, broadening the context of quality, and creating new opportunities to

support NAEYC Higher Education Accreditation. The Affiliate Council’s work in these areas is expected to be completed in late 2010.

An example illustrating a NAEYC Affiliate’s relationship with an AFP and NAEYC Accreditation is a program administrator credential administered by a NAEYC State Affiliate. The credential was offered only in a limited area of the state and was not accessible to the vast majority of program administrators in the region. Furthermore, the credentialing process was quite costly to the participant. The local AFP suggested that the credential be housed at an urban early childhood professional development institute under the auspices of the local university. This reduced costs and greatly expanded access to the credential. Working collaboratively, the Affiliate and the AFP made this plan a reality.

AFPs are known for their program quality improvement efforts, but their work is much broader. AFPs also promote early childhood workforce development. During a webinar for NAEYC’s Early Childhood Workforce Systems Initiative, the following core values of workforce development systems were outlined (NAEYC 2009). These values are also at the heart of the accreditation facilitation projects’ and NAEYC Affiliates’ work.

Core values of workforce development systems

- › build partnerships for professional development
- › reach the diversity of the field
- › use and strengthen existing higher education systems
- › increase collaboration
- › collect, analyze, and share data
- › create educational pathways
- › strengthen early childhood infrastructure
- › work to deliver high-quality, outcome-focused services
- › think *system*, not *program*

- › advocate for increased compensation for the early childhood workforce

## Public Policy Advocacy

There are different kinds of advocacy: advocacy for an individual child or family, advocacy for a particular practice, and public policy advocacy that is broad reaching. Merriam-webster defines advocacy as “the act or process of supporting a cause or proposal : the act or process of advocating.”

Being a part of the public policy conversation—whether it is about universal pre-K, a quality rating system, or changes in state licensing regulations—can have an influence. The existence of a well-known and effective AFP raises the bar, paving the way for other local quality improvement efforts. AFPs and others can use NAEYC Accreditation as leverage to advance policies related to quality improvements in programs for young children.

To promote a more integrated system of early childhood education, AFPs should have an understanding of where NAEYC Accreditation intersects with and supports other public policies and programs. As an AFP matures and becomes known as the source for information about NAEYC Accreditation and quality early education, it can play an important role in collaborations around state and local public policy.

It is crucial that AFPs collaborate with existing advocacy coalitions and organizations. AFPs have experience in helping a range of providers and programs reach and sustain high levels of quality. They can help shape the larger advocacy agenda of a coalition and be a partner in moving public policies and resources toward quality. For example, AFPs should coordinate with NAEYC Affiliates on their public policy agendas and coalition work at the state level. Other areas in which AFPs have expertise include advocating for better articulation between two- and four-year higher education institutions, changes in licensing regulations, and comprehensive state systems for early childhood



care and education. AFPs can provide a lot of data and stories, which are important tools in moving a particular bill or calling for additional public funds for quality improvement.

NAEYC notes that for effective advocacy, there is a progression of ability. First, the individual or organization must become knowledgeable about a policy issue or objective; next, be able to discuss and debate the issue; and then be able to persuade others to take a requested public policy action. An effective public policy advocate also knows the various legislative and regulatory processes, is familiar with applicable laws governing lobbying activity, builds coalitions, and works with the media.

NAEYC's *Advocates in Action: Making a Difference for Young Children* (Robinson & Stark 2005) offers guidance and concrete strategies for making change on behalf of young children through public policies and media relations at all

levels. It also includes a chapter on what nonprofit organizations can and cannot do during an election year, material on the legislative process, and a glossary of legislative terms. The book offers profiles of a variety of public policy advocacy efforts around the country.

For more specific information on this topic, visit NAEYC's online public policy section at [NAEYC.org/our-work/public-policy-advocacy](https://naeyc.org/our-work/public-policy-advocacy).

## Engaging the Media

Do reporters see your AFP as an important source of information on early childhood issues? How frequently does your project get calls to speak as an advocate for high-quality programs?

To cultivate a greater societal commitment to improving programs, a greater public awareness of the benefits of high-quality early education is necessary. Engaging the media is critical for getting out the message of program quality and the importance of the AFP's work. Communicating through the media also shapes the image that stakeholders (early learning programs, current and potential funders, local and state agencies, and the larger community) have about the AFP—and this in turn can affect future resources, funding, opportunities, and other areas. Positive media relations can promote the AFP and high-quality early education.

Here are some of NAEYC's Affiliate Group Handbook suggestions to engage the media:

- › Develop a communications strategy.
- › Build media relationships with reporters and editorial boards. Ensure that the list is current.
- › Appoint a press spokesperson for the AFP.
- › Provide reporters with accurate, current, and succinct information. Have statistics, anecdotes, and resources at your fingertips. Make every word count.

- › Invite reporters/editors to speak to program administrators about “pitching stories” and cultivating relationships with reporters.
- › Write letters to the editor and op-ed articles.
- › Address a wide variety of media outlets (TV, cable, radio, newspapers).
- › Host a breakfast meeting to educate local education reporters (print, radio, and TV) about AFP work.
- › Provide articles of interest to local parenting magazines.
- › Grant interviews on important issues.
- › Write press releases to announce upcoming partnerships or other information.
- › Offer regular photo or video opportunities in NAEYC-Accredited programs.
- › Capitalize on timing when issues are in the forefront—for example, during back-to-school time in August/September.
- › Meet media deadlines.
- › Make calls or send thank-you notes to reporters and photographers who represent programs well. Do this on the day the story is published.
- › Save and use your good press. Send press clippings to key decision makers.
- › Include reporters, business and community leaders, and government officials (such as those at the state department of education) in the distribution of your newsletter.
- › Don’t forget media that represent the families in the programs with which the AFP works—for example, Spanish-language radio, Telemundo, and so on. Finally, before engaging the media, consider establishing media policies and creating an organized plan for cultivating media relationships.

Remember, reporters need concrete, real-life examples that illustrate the value of early childhood education—for example, how it differs from education in elementary, middle, or high school.

AFPs know the stories of progress and the positive changes that occur in the lives of children, families, teachers, and program leadership when program practices are transformed. Be proactive. Contact reporters to suggest issues and ideas for future stories, and let them know about upcoming projects, events, or research. When an AFP develops a good relationship with a reporter, the reporter is likely to seek out the AFP as a source of information on future stories.

To summarize, best practices for community leadership include

- › communications and outreach
- › creating collaborations
- › connecting with your NAEYC Affiliate
- › advocacy
- › engaging the media

# Leadership Strategies

## Dwayne A. Crompton

The leader who makes a difference is not a sit-at-your-desk kind of person. This individual is out in the community, educating others about important issues in a way that mobilizes them to action. For the early care and education professional, this means helping the community understand—on both an intellectual and visceral level—why early care is crucial. . . . It means communicating a story so compelling that the power brokers in your city or state make improving early care and education a major community priority.

### The best leader in early care and education

- demonstrates to the community that early care and education is a watershed issue that determines to a great extent the future success of children in school and in life.
- persuades local power brokers to put improved early care at or near the top of the community's agenda.
- functions as the community's early care and education expert in a way that influences early care policy making on a community-wide basis. This includes defining what needs to be done—for example, providing more training, securing increased resources, or offering better programming—to create early learning programs that give children the care and support they need to thrive.
- plays a key role in securing or leveraging the kind of substantial public and private human and financial resources required to improve early care and education programming in all parts of the community.

## Leadership Strategies

- **No more business as usual.** You cannot afford to be invisible. Become involved in a wide variety of societal and civic concerns.
- **Visibility.** Get noticed. Be recognized as a positive force. Care about and participate in community issues. Start small. Join a local neighborhood group that works to improve the quality of life in the community.
- **Plug into the community's power source.** Early care professionals rarely have access to the inner circle of community decision makers because, in an environment of scarce resources, we tend to devote all of our energy to program management. As a result, we're not out in the community telling the early care and education story. This is a costly mistake.
- **Tell the early care and education story.** Talk about the poor quality that exists in your community. Explain in simple human terms what happens to a child who receives inadequate early care.
- **Make meaning. Connect with what people already have in their hearts and minds.** A leader who can make meaning, who can demonstrate how an idea or point of view coincides with the values of the majority, will find it much easier to win the support of the community. Define your vision.
- **Collaborate with community power brokers.** If you are to be viewed by your community's power brokers as a leader in your field, you must lend your support to all important early care projects, not just those that you will manage or those that will result in funds for your agency.
- **Forge community partnerships and collaborations.** Partnerships and collaborations are essential in early care and education, since it is almost impossible for one



person acting alone—no matter how skilled and charismatic—to spur meaningful change within the field.

- **Adapt to the private sector.** One of the biggest mistakes early care and education professionals make is assuming that the private sector will meet our needs on our terms. Business executives are successful primarily because they manage lean, efficient, productive organizations. They do not understand and frequently will not tolerate
  - long rambling presentations or funding proposals that never adequately explain the needs of young children or how a specific early care program will make a difference
  - vague program budgets that do not detail and adequately explain program costs
  - a communication style based on the lingo of our field. Our goal is not to create within the private sector a master’s level understanding of early childhood principles; rather, it is our responsibility to explain in simple, ordinary terms the purpose and value of early care and education.

## Conclusion

In the early care and education field, an effective leader is someone who can mobilize the entire community to improve the quality of care that children receive. In most cases, this requires a change in attitude and a change in strategy. We must go into the community and tell the early care story, explaining in ways that people can understand. . . . We must maintain our integrity and develop the personal and professional skills necessary to earn the respect of funders and other community power brokers. We must demonstrate that our agencies operate efficient, productive programs that make a discernible

difference in the lives of children and families. We must forge partnerships with other institutions, both within and outside the early care field, to generate the resources and broad public support needed to improve early care and education in our communities.

This kind of leadership is not an overnight phenomenon, a sudden flash of brilliance manifested by someone with no track record or history in the community. True leadership—rooted in the high regard the community has for a person who has been an articulate, thoughtful, and effective advocate for a cause—is built over many years. In essence, our success as leaders is tied to who we are (personal attributes) our professional skills, and how we use these strategies to further the cause of early care and education.



Adapted from Crompton, D.A. 1997. “Community Leadership,” in *Leadership in Early Care and Education*, ed. S.L. Kagan & B.T. Bowman (Washington, DC: NAEYC), 49–52.



## CHAPTER 5

# Conclusion and Appendices

This Recommended Practices of Accreditation Facilitation Projects manual was developed to provide the early childhood community with a guide for implementing support to AFPs that are seeking to assist early care and education programs in achieving high-quality practices using the NAEYC Accreditation process.

It is our hope that this guide will reinforce the work of Accreditation Facilitation Projects using these practices to enrich their current work and bring new ideas into their projects to further their reach toward quality improvement in the programs they are engaging in NAEYC Accreditation.

It is also intended that AFPs in their infancy will use this manual as a pathway of recommended practices in facilitating accreditation, learning from the experience of the tenured AFPs in this community of quality. There are many lessons learned in the guide that new projects can use to avoid some of the stumbling blocks that veteran projects have encountered.

The diversity of AFPs in our community reflects in the many services offered by these initiatives. Having the chance to learn from each other is priceless, and the evolution of the work is advanced by the innovations that each community brings forward. Quality can be elusive, diverse, and complicated to achieve. This manual reflects the recommended practices to date, which will certainly continue to be further developed over time.

Quality early childhood education is an ever-changing field as we learn more about our practices through our accreditation system, data collection, research, and continuous engagement in self-study on all levels—programs, projects, and the NAEYC Academy itself. The synergy of accreditation facilitation projects and both the NAEYC Academy for Early Learning Program Accreditation and the Quality Improvement and Program Support Department advances all of our efforts in striving for excellence for early care and education programs in our nation.



# Appendices

## Summaries of accreditation facilitation project recommended practices

The following recommended practices have been brought together on these pages for your convenience.

### Best practices for supporting programs include

- › focusing on individual program administrators as well as peer groups of administrators, thereby addressing quality at both the classroom and management levels
- › providing and nurturing the professional development of program staff, particularly the administrators
- › coaching and mentoring rather than prescribing a “right” solution or approach
- › supporting programs in understanding and managing the logistical details of NAEYC Accreditation
- › serving as a resource hub by connecting programs with community resources

### Best practices for AFP business operations include

- › staff qualifications that include hiring individuals with the knowledge, skills, and attributes of a facilitator and coach
- › ongoing professional development for AFP staff that includes training in NAEYC Accreditation
- › baseline requirements for selecting programs to participate in the AFP
- › written agreements among the AFP, program administrators, and boards of directors

- › knowledge of other projects/initiatives with which each program is involved
- › collaboration agreements with the other projects/initiatives
- › sound fiscal management
- › AFP evaluation
- › system for collection and use of data
- › sustainability

### Best practices for community leadership include

- › communications and outreach
- › creating collaborations
- › connecting with your NAEYC Affiliate
- › advocacy
- › engaging the media

## Data elements

The following is a list of data elements that experienced AFPs collect. In addition to recording and storing the data, consider date- and time-stamping each database event so that, over time, changes and modifications can be tracked and measured.

### Program Data

- › Program information
  - Name of program
  - Name of program administrator
- › Full address
  - City, State, and County
  - Phone number(s)
  - Email address of program administrator
- › Program funding sources
- › Groups

- Total number of groups by age group
- Total number of groups
- Number of children enrolled by age group
- Total number of children enrolled
- Group size and teacher:child ratio for each group
- Characteristics of families/children served
- Income levels of families
- Food program
- Race of children/families
- Ethnicity of children/families
- Special needs
- › Program characteristics (such as full day, half day, both)
- › Personnel/staffing
  - Administrator qualifications
  - Teacher qualifications
  - Assistant teacher qualifications
  - Turnover data
- › Accreditation data
  - Accreditation process status and associated dates (for example, submitted Candidacy, accepted as Candidate, visit conducted)
  - Decisions—accredited, revoked, denied, deferred
- › Tracking contact between an AFP staff member and individual programs
  - Number of times on-site
  - Amount of time on-site per visit
  - Services provided (coaching, observations, staff meeting, training)
  - Phone support
- › Administrator and/or teachers attending trainings—who attends, what session attended
- › Administrator attendance at facilitated administrator meetings—number of times

### AFP Data

- › Professional development provided by the AFP (training, administrator meetings)
  - Role of attendees
  - Number of attendees
- › Community relationships
  - Contact with other organizations (how, who, for what purpose, frequency)
  - Time spent in the community promoting the AFP
  - Trainings provided for community partners

In addition, interviews, surveys from programs, and anecdotal data may be useful.

### Data About AFP Supports

- › Scores from various instruments (pre and post)
  - ECERS-R and ITERS-R
  - CLASS
  - PAS

# NAEYC Early Learning Program Accreditation Standards and Corresponding AFP Recommended Practices

Standard	AFP Recommended Practices
<b>Standard 1: Relationships</b>	<b>Relationships Between Programs and AFP Staff</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› building positive relationships between facilitators and programs</li> <li>› helping administrators make friends</li> <li>› creating a predictable, consistent, and harmonious self-study process</li> <li>› addressing challenging behaviors</li> <li>› promoting self-regulation</li> </ul>
<b>Standard 2: Curriculum</b>	<b>What Should the AFP Teach?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› curriculum implementation</li> <li>› child development</li> <li>› supporting children’s learning goals</li> </ul>
<b>Standard 3: Teaching</b>	<b>Teaching Approaches</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› designing the learning environment</li> <li>› creating caring communities for learning</li> <li>› supervising</li> <li>› using structure (time, routines) to achieve goals</li> <li>› responding to program’s interests and needs</li> <li>› making learning meaningful</li> <li>› using instruction to deepen understanding and build skills and knowledge</li> </ul>

Standard	AFP Recommended Practices
<b>Standard 4: Assessment</b>	<p><b>Ongoing Systematic, Formal and Informal Assessment To Provide Information On Learning (Results Used To Inform Decisions, Improve Practice)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› creating an assessment plan</li> <li>› using assessment methods (funder)</li> <li>› identifying interests, needs, and describing progress</li> <li>› adapting curriculum, individualizing teaching, and informing program development</li> </ul>
<b>Standard 6: Teachers &amp; Facilitators</b>	<p><b>Employs and Supports a Staff that has the Educational Qualifications, Knowledge, &amp; Professional Commitment Necessary</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› preparation, knowledge, and skill of staff</li> <li>› disposition and professional commitment</li> </ul>
<b>Standard 8: Community Relationships</b>	<p><b>Relationships with the Community to Support Achievement of Program Goals</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› linking with the community</li> <li>› accessing community resources</li> <li>› acting as a citizen in the neighborhood and the early childhood education community</li> </ul>
<b>Standard 10: Leadership &amp; Management</b>	<p><b>Effective Implementation of Policies, Procedures, and Systems Leadership</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› management policies and procedures</li> <li>› fiscal accountability policies and procedures</li> <li>› personnel policies</li> <li>› program evaluation, accountability, and continuous improvement</li> <li>› ratios</li> </ul>

## AFP Recommended Operational Practices

Role of Facilitator to Support Programs	Role of Facilitator in Business Operations	Role of Facilitator for Community Leadership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› facilitated program administrator, meetings, and networking</li> <li>› coaching administrators</li> <li>› coaching administrators around personnel issues</li> <li>› programs should “own” the process</li> <li>› early childhood content</li> <li>› content of professional development opportunities, meetings, and individualized support</li> <li>› provide “frame” or path to program/project management</li> <li>› use of ECERS, ITERS, CLASS, PAS, NAEYC tools</li> <li>› project management</li> <li>› individualized support to programs</li> <li>› role of facilitator, coach</li> <li>› hub of resources</li> <li>› project evaluation; guiding principles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› qualified of AFP staff</li> <li>› follow Code of Ethical Conduct</li> <li>› professional development</li> <li>› knowledge</li> <li>› skills</li> <li>› abilities</li> <li>› guiding principles</li> <li>› business practices</li> <li>› fiscal management</li> <li>› AFP staff-to-program ratios</li> <li>› written agreements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› leadership</li> <li>› outreach</li> <li>› communications</li> <li>› collaborations</li> <li>› advocacy</li> <li>› engaging media</li> </ul>



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# AFP approval process

To register with NAEYC as an accreditation facilitation project, you must meet ONE of the following requirements:

- The AFP is funded by public money and works with 10 or more programs  
The AFP is funded by a private entity to provide facilitation services to 10 or more programs that are not part of the same corporate structure

- If you provide local support to programs but do not meet the requirements above, please contact us at [accreditation.information@naeyc.org](mailto:accreditation.information@naeyc.org) for more information on how the Quality Improvement and Program Support department can assist you.

See page 9 of this book for the resources that QIPS currently provides.



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