

How to Interpret Youth PQA Data

How can you reduce an experience down to a few numbers?

Human relations are incredibly complex. In every moment of interaction—for example, a staff member talking with a group of youth—there are literally billions of things that could happen. Staff make on-the-fly decisions about what to say and do, and so do youth. How then is it possible to turn all that untidy stuff into a set of numbers?

The technological advancement of the Youth PQA is that it takes an infinitely complex system of human interactions, and boils it down into meaningful numbers. The instrument does this by focusing only on a key set of items, and making judgments about types of interactions in those items. These judgments become numbers.

The numbers, of course, do not tell the complete story of an interaction, but a Youth PQA score—especially an item score—can provide a reliable indication of the *quality* of interactions. The carefully tested rubrics are designed to be broad enough to capture almost any situation, but specific enough to be functional. You can think of Youth PQA data collection as a process of capturing little stories and then fitting them into important categories that tell us about quality.

But you caught me on a bad day!

Although minor variations occur, youth workers' scores tend to be fairly consistent over time—again, especially at the item level. This is not to say that improvement is not possible, but that a 'bad day' is usually not so different in terms of youth experience. So there's a very good chance that, even though you had a 'bad day', your scores can tell what typically happens when you're working with youth. In fact, your 'bad day' scores may be more valuable because they can point to what can really be improved! Plus, youth are there to experience good days and bad days.

So what do the numbers mean?

A Youth PQA Scores Report gives you item scores and domain scores. Everything is in a 5-point scale, where 5.0 is the best possible score and 1.0 is the lowest. Scores between 4.0 and 5.0 are excellent in most categories. Scores between 1.0 and 2.0 can be a general cause for concern. In Form A, scores tend to go down as items go up—in other words, Domain I usually scores the highest, on down to Domain IV, which scores the lowest.

How hard is it to raise scores?

It's much easier to raise scores in some areas than it is in others. But generally, with initiative and focus and a willingness to learn, all scores can and do increase. By working to increase your Youth PQA scores, you are moving toward improving the experience youth have in your program.