

# NAEYC Accreditation of Early Learning Programs Self-Study Cycle

Self-study is the time for your program to engage in focused reflection to determine needed improvements to comply with NAEYC 10 standards. This is the only time in the accreditation process when there is no data to return to NAEYC. In self-study, programs come to understand what accreditation will mean for them when implemented.

We encourage you to consider the assessment items and the best practices recommended by NAEYC and to compare your current practices with them.



The pace and direction of self-study is individualized based on your program's needs. As your program makes the accreditation journey, discuss the following recommended self-study tasks:

**1. Build shared understandings about what each standard means and its implications for your program**

- How does NAEYC define certain terms (lesson plans, play, developmentally appropriate practice, curriculum, child assessment etc.), and how do those definitions compare to your program's understandings?

**2. Gather evidence to describe your program**

- Pull together any resources your program uses, such as curriculum planning guides, child assessments ratings, etc.; collections of photographs that show engagement with children; classroom activities; and so on.

**3. Determine your strengths and weaknesses**

- What are the best features of your program?
- What are the areas within the 10 standards that your program needs to focus more on?

**4. Develop program improvement plans where needed**

- Based on the strengths and challenges, where can you make changes?

**5. Make improvements and document progress**

- Celebrate successes and identify markers of change.

**6. Evaluate results and determine next steps**

- Programs should be continuously improving to ensure consistent quality.

# Finding Support during Self-Study

Programs in Step 1 of the NAEYC Accreditation process conduct self-study to lay the foundation for continuous program improvement. Self-study is a collaborative process of learning and reflection. Successful programs do the following

## Form a Self-Study Team

Partnering with families and including staff members in efforts to improve a program are cornerstones of the NAEYC self-study and accreditation processes.

When selecting the self-study team, choose program staff and families who are:

- Willing to participate in the additional tasks necessary to successfully complete the self-study and accreditation processes
- Committed to maintaining a positive attitude toward learning
- Open to constructive criticism and dialogue

The self-study team takes responsibility for the following tasks:

- Meeting with family members, staff, and others to discuss the process, what is involved, and the status of the program improvement efforts
- Determining priorities and timelines for program improvement
- Determining roles and responsibilities for accomplishing specific self-study tasks
- Finding and using resources that can support the self-study effort

## Explore Resources

Self-study encourages staff to expand their vision and knowledge of early childhood practices beyond their own program. It involves both program improvement and professional development.

The following are suggested resources and strategies for programs to consider when help and support are needed:

- Sign up for NAEYC telephone consultations for support through the initial and renewal Early Learning Program Accreditation processes.
- Find an accreditation facilitation project (AFP) in your area. AFPs support the quality improvement efforts of early childhood programs.
- Meet or speak with local experts on health, nutrition, sanitation, and hazards to gather suggestions for improvements.
- Ask others who work with the program, such as volunteers, board members, and community specialists, for input and ideas.
- Contact a local child care resource and referral agency (CCR&R) that provides trainings and technical assistance to early childhood programs and teaching staff.



# Reflecting on Change

As you prepare your program for self-study, it is helpful to view the process through a change-management lens. Reflect with your team on changes your program experienced in the past. Consider both positive experiences and changes that were not so successful. What were the lessons learned from each experience?

Below are questions you can use to spark discussion in team meetings or to inspire individual reflection.

## Basic questions for team members

- › How do you tend to approach change?
- › Are you a risk taker and trailblazer?
- › Are you open to new possibilities?
- › Do you tend to actively resist change?
- › How did staff, administrators, and families react during the work that took place in self-study?

## How did classrooms change?

- › What parts of classroom schedules changed?
- › What equipment or materials were purchased?
- › Who was involved in the work?
- › How have the changes affected the teachers and children?
- › How have the changes affected the curriculum and teaching approaches?

## How did staff and families interact with one another to make plans?

- › How did staff grow and change?
- › What new things were learned?
- › What attitudes changed?
- › What slowed down the process?
- › What problems did those involved encounter?
- › What risks did those involved take?

# Outcomes of Self-Study

This framework can be used to examine the NAEYC Early Learning Programs Accreditation Standards and Assessment Items. The checklist is designed to prompt staff to reflect on and discuss each standard in detail.

## What are the expected outcomes after self-study?

- Increased commitment and supported collaborative effort of program staff to improve program and teaching practices throughout the standard.
- Program policies and procedures are strengthened, improving transparency and accessibility for staff and families under the standard.
- Best practices are reflected in learning environments, daily class activities, and teacher knowledge as specified in the standard.
- Opportunities exist for teachers to support children's interests, for children to participate in conversations, and for families to contribute to curriculum enrichment under the standard.
- Meaningful and relevant experiences impacting children's learning are supported under the standard.