A. Introduction

Have you and the team completed the self-assessment tool/rating form and now want to take action to improve the quality of your program? Now is the time to think about writing an action plan!

An action plan is a plan for how to improve the quality of your program. It takes areas of program difficulty and breaks them down into simple steps that you can keep track of and complete. An action plan usually includes goals, steps, assignments, and deadlines.

Dedication to the youth and families you serve daily will cause you to want to immediately improve and respond to changes in your program every year. However, it may take more than a year to implement major changes or achieve larger goals. Allow yourself ample time to implement major changes and goals. Your action plan may take one, two or even three years to complete. Short and long-term goals are important for the success of your program and continuous quality program improvement.

Using A Team Approach

The old quote states, "*two heads are better than one.*" The inclusion of the perspectives and ideas of program staff and stakeholders in the development and implementation of your action plan should lead to a stronger action plan.

Additional reasons to consider using a team:

- It is common to use a team for writing action plans. It may be best if team members think about the questions and issues on their own and then bring their ideas to the table. This should help you:
    o obtain a wider variety of ideas to work with;
    o reduce "group think," where original ideas are overshadowed;
    o result in a stronger action plan.

- You may develop the action plan with the same team that completed the self-assessment or set up a different team to write and carry out the action plan.

- You may choose to obtain additional input from program youth, families, staff, or partners about questions that come up through the action plan process.

Sample Action Plan Template:

Your program may already have a format that you utilize for action plans or you may have a format in mind based on your needs. If you're not sure what format you want to use, you may find this sample chart helpful:

Agency/Program Name: _____ *Date of Action Plan:* _____ *Team Members:* _____	
Goal 1:	
Related Standard/ Standard Element: *Self-Assessment Tool Rating:*	
Projected Date to Reach Goal:	
Staff Responsible?	
Action Step(s):	
Goal 2:	
Related Standard/ Standard Element: *Self-Assessment Tool Rating:*	
Projected Date to Reach Goal:	
Staff Responsible?	
Action Step(s):	
Goal 3:	
Related Standard/ Standard Element: *Self-Assessment Tool Rating:*	
Projected Date to Reach Goal:	
Staff Responsible?	
Action Step(s):	

Sample Completed Action Plan Template:

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">Agency/Program Name: Garden State
Date of Action Plan: November 15, 2018
Team Members: Tonya, Sean, Juan, Lucille and Diane</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2"></td></tr>
<tr><td><u>Goal 1:</u></td><td>To ensure staff are aware of the individual health needs of the youth.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Related Standard/ Standard Element:

Self-Assessment Tool Rating:</td><td>Safety and Environmental Health 1 "Staff are aware of the individual health needs of the youth."

Rating: 2</td></tr>
<tr><td>Projected Date to Reach Goal:</td><td>December 1, 2018</td></tr>
<tr><td>Staff Responsible?</td><td>Director and Assistant Director</td></tr>
<tr><td>Action Step(s):</td><td>Create allergy and health needs list for all staff
Ensure each staff has the list in an accessible, yet private place
Provide training to the staff on how to use and protect the list</td></tr>
<tr><td>Goal 2:</td><td>To increase the amount of non-florescent lighting in program space and to utilize the natural light where possible</td></tr>
<tr><td>Related Standard/ Standard Element:

Self-Assessment Tool Rating:</td><td>Indoor Environment 1b. "The space is well-lit."

Rating: 2</td></tr>
<tr><td>Projected Date to Reach Goal:</td><td>January 5, 2019</td></tr>
<tr><td>Staff Responsible?</td><td>Director and Lead Teacher A</td></tr>
<tr><td>Action Step(s):</td><td>Explore non-florescent lighting options
Select several types of safe, portable lights/lamps that can enhance the lighting in the reading area
Move science and art area closer to the windows</td></tr>
</table>

Choosing Your Goals

When choosing goals and standards/elements to focus on, consider these three questions:

- What is our <u>rating</u> on this standard/element?

- How <u>important</u> is this standard/element or goal to the improvement of the program?

- How <u>attainable</u> is this goal?

We suggest these steps to help you choose quality improvement goals:

- Identify any standards/elements your program rated 1 or 2;

- Highlight the standards you and/or the team believe are most important. You may want to obtain additional input from other stakeholders to obtain a better sense of what they care most about; and

- Choose the standard(s)/element(s) you and the team believe are most likely to improve the rating on within the time frame outlined in the Action Plan.

  Note: Please keep in mind that the health and safety of the program and all of its' participants is the most important. If you and the team find there are safety issues; prioritize the Safety and Environmental Health standard first to implement required program changes.

Some tips to consider when developing and implementing the Action Plan:

- You may choose a goal for your Action Plan that relates to more than one standard. You may find that low ratings on a few standards stem from the same problem.

- Consider choosing goals that you can reach in a short time period so you and the team have a sense of progress and success. Keep spirits high!

- You and the team may choose to focus most on one or two categories in one year and focus on other categories the next year.

Choosing the Steps to Take

Now it's time to choose the steps to reach your goals.

Keep these tips in mind:

- For each part of the program that you and the team want to improve, ask:
  o What is the reason we are having this problem?
  o Is there more than one part to the problem?
  o What might fix the problem?
  o What steps can program staff or others take to help us reach the goal?

- Try your best to set realistic target deadlines. Ask these questions that relate to the timeline and resources:

  o Can we do this in-house or do we need outside help to meet this goal?
  o Do we need extra financial resources?

- Review the resource section of this booklet.

- Contact NJSACC for assistance.

Using Your Program's Strengths

Which standards/elements did your program rate well on? You should review these as well. This can help you:

- Celebrate your program's strengths! Recognize the people behind those strengths.

- Define what makes the program special. For the Action Plan, you and the team can develop ideas about how to solve problems using your program's strengths.

For example, maybe your staff have great relationships with the youth but programming needs to improve. You could involve the staff in thinking of new programming ideas that reflect the interests and needs of the youth.

- Maintain program strengths. You may need to pay special attention to a part of the program that is already strong in order to maintain that strength.

    For example, grant money may be decreasing or a strong staff person is leaving the program. You and the team can include in the action plan goals to find the funds to replace the grant money or steps to maintain program quality and activities through staff changes.

Action Plan Follow-Up

It is a good idea to review the action plan approximately every three months to check on your progress and make needed changes.

You and the team may choose to:

- Check off goals that you have reached. Celebrate your success and recognize the people who helped to accomplish those achievements!
- Share this information with the entire program so everyone can share in the celebration.
- Revise steps, assignments, or deadlines based on how the plan is progressing.
- Revise goals if you and the team observe a major problem with the Action Plan.

 Checking in with the action plan occasionally should help keep you and the team on track and observe the quality of the program improve!