

Assessing **SEL PRACTICES**

Part of the **SEL Strengths Builder**

www.SELpractices.org

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CENTER FOR YOUTH
PROGRAM QUALITY

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About the SEL Challenge

The Social and Emotional Learning Challenge was designed to (1) identify promising practices for building SEL skills with vulnerable adolescents and (2) develop a method for taking these practices to scale in thousands of out-of-school time (OST) settings. The promising practices are called standards for SEL practice and the method is called the SEL Strengths Builder. The SEL practices that were the focus of the Challenge were organized around adolescent skill growth in six areas: Emotion management, empathy, teamwork, responsibility, initiative, and problem solving.

The Challenge was a partnership between expert practitioners (youth workers, social workers, teachers) delivering exemplary programs in eight unique communities, a team of researchers, and a national funder. The findings are published in a Field Guide and website (SELpractices.org) launching in January 2016. A Technical Report describing the SEL Challenge method and additional findings will be available in March 2016.

The SEL Strengths Builder Method

The SEL Strengths Builder Method is an extension of the evidence-based *Assess-Plan-Improve* continuous improvement sequence (YPOI). The Strengths Builder method includes three areas of assessment designed to focus OST staff on a program's SEL strengths:

- 1. Assessing SEL Curriculum Design:** Build a better understanding of your curriculum sequence in two parts – the youth-driven learning project at the heart of the offering (e.g., build a boat), and the parallel SEL content sequence that fosters SEL skill growth.
- 2. Assessing SEL Practices:** Reflect on the intensity and quality of the responsive practices you implement to support youth in building their social and emotional skills.
- 3. Assessing Youth SEL Skills:** Create a baseline profile of the social and emotional skills of the youth you serve and what it looks like when these youth are demonstrating SEL in your program.

See the **Using the SEL Strengths Builder in a Continuous Improvement Cycle** section at the end of this document for how to use the assessments to improve your program's focus on SEL. Visit cypq.org/SELchallenge for guidance on implementation including additional resources available for training and technical assistance.

Guidelines for Assessing your SEL Practices

WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE?

Staff (and volunteers, if applicable) who are responsible for designing, planning, facilitating, teaching, supporting, or are otherwise involved in the program offering. A group of four to five participants is a good start.

HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE?

Steps 1 through 3 are recommended to prepare you and your team. Steps 4 through 6 could be completed in a one to two hour meeting. Deeper follow-up conversations on specific standards are recommended over the several weeks and months following these initial conversations.

WHAT SHOULD I EXPECT?

You may be surprised by the amount of conversation and ideas that are generated by focusing on practice. Don't try to tackle everything at once. Focus on one domain at a time, identify a few standards that your team really wants to focus on, and explore those deeply.

Standards for SEL Practice

Although each of the exemplary OST programs that were studied uses a different curriculum, their approaches to building social and emotional skills have important similarities, and these are the subject of the guide *Preparing Youth to Thrive: Promising Practices for Social & Emotional Learning*.

Because our method was to ask expert practitioners about what happens in the targeted SEL offerings, the standards within each of the six domains are shaped by their responses. Practitioners described what they wanted youth to experience during the offering and what they did to support those experiences.

We use the phrase “standards for SEL practice” and the term “standard” to describe practices that (1) appear across the Challenge offerings, (2) were described as important by the expert practitioners, and (3) were supported in the evidence base. In the guide, each standard consists of a sentence defining the standard and multiple practice indicators describing more specific facets of the standard.

The standards are presented within the framework of *key youth experience* and *staff practices*. Key youth experiences point to adult decisions and behaviors necessary to make youth experiences happen. Our definition of staff practice is broad and includes both momentary staff behavior as well as more enduring structures that the staff put into place.

KEY YOUTH EXPERIENCES

The SEL Challenge offering curricula are designed to provide youth with real-world challenges, such as providing community service, writing and performing in a theater production, surviving in the wilderness, or organizing a campaign for school improvement. These experiences are intentionally co-created by staff and youth, but they point to adult decisions and behaviors necessary to make them happen. For this reason, key youth experiences are included as standards for SEL practice. There are 17 standards and 32 practice indicators for key youth experiences across the six domains.

STAFF PRACTICES

Our definition of staff practices is broad and includes both momentary staff behaviors as well as more enduring structures that the staff put into place. There are 16 standards and 26 practice indicators for staff practices across the six domains. We also identify each standard as one of five types of practice: structure, modeling, scaffolding, coaching, facilitating.

Assessing Your SEL Practices

1. Watch the video and review *Preparing Youth to Thrive: Promising Practices for Social and Emotional Learning*.

Visit <http://SELpractices.org> and view the video *Assessing Your SEL Practice Strengths*. This will give you an overview of the process and how it connects to a larger conversation focused on improving your program's focus on SEL.

Review the introduction to Standards for SEL Practice in Part 2 of *Preparing Youth to Thrive: Promising Practices for Social and Emotional Learning*.

2. Select a program offering.

Select one of your organization's program offerings to focus on. By *offering* we mean the same group of youth with the same staff over a sequence of sessions for a clearly stated learning purpose. Further, select a program offering that is designed and run with the aim of facilitating social and emotional skills. As part of the program design, the offering may explicitly address social and emotional skills or intentionally embed SEL training or experiences within another content focus such as the arts, boat-building, or civic action.

3. Gather a team.

Invite a group of staff (and volunteers, if applicable) who are responsible for designing, planning, facilitating, teaching, supporting, or are otherwise involved in the program offering. A major objective of this exercise is to have a conversation with colleagues about the work you do. Besides, everything's more fun with a team! Reserve up to two hours for a first conversation.

4. Select a domain.

Using section 2.1 of *Preparing Youth to Thrive*, think about which SEL domain is most relevant to the program offering you selected. It may be a domain your program offering supports most organically or one that your team especially wants to support through your program work.

5. Conduct the assessment for the domain you selected using the tool on the following pages.

The standards for the six SEL domains have been converted into this self-assessment tool. For each standard, you will be asked to rate your program on how well you provide the key youth experiences or the staff practices described. You will be asked about how important each experience or practice is for your program and to what degree the practice or experience is present. For youth experiences, you will be asked how many (none, some, all) of the youth in your program have these experiences. For staff practices you will also be asked to indicate in which part of the program year the practice most typically occurs.

Read each standard and the practice indicators that describe it. For more information, or to go deeper, consult the relevant section of *Preparing Youth to Thrive* to learn more. Answer the questions based on your experience and knowledge of your program. Be as honest as you can. The goal of the assessment is to begin a conversation about your practices with your colleagues. You may want to first do a cursory pass of all of the standards, and then go back and pay more attention to those that raised discussion.

6. Reflect on the assessment results.

Look at the results of your assessment for the domain(s) you selected with your team. Reflect on your strengths and challenges. You may use some of the following questions to guide your discussion:

- First, congratulate yourselves on areas of strength. Which of the youth key experiences and staff practices implemented by the SEL Challenge programs are similar to what you do in your program?
- What factors contributed to your success in these areas? Are there ways you'd like to build on your strengths?
- Which could you do more of?
- Which standards are high priorities for you, based on the youth you serve and the goals of your program?
- Which are less of a priority, and why?
- How do the results of the assessment fit with your vision for your program?
- What weaker areas are facets of your program that you would like to improve?
- What changes might be relatively easy to incorporate? What practices make sense to focus on first?
- How could you address potential obstacles?

7. Repeat steps 4-6 for another domain if desired.

8. Use the assessment to inform program planning.

For areas of strength, plan to continue implementing these practices. If an item was rated as moderately or very important, but the experience or practice has not been implemented as intentionally or consistently as you would like, talk with your team about how you might improve in that area.

Read the section on that domain in *Preparing Youth to Thrive: Promising Practices for Social & Emotional Learning* for expanded descriptions of what it looks like when you incorporate the SEL standards. You may also read the case narratives to learn about other programs whose goals may align with those of your program. This will give you ideas about how to implement standards in your program and how to adapt as needed to fit the circumstances and structure of your program.

EMOTION MANAGEMENT

Abilities to be aware of and constructively handle both positive and challenging emotions.

Emotion Management Key Youth Experiences		How important is this to your program? 1 = Not important 3 = Moderately important 5 = Very important	Do youth have this experience in your program? 1 = Youth do not experience this as part of our program 3 = This is a casual or incidental part of youths' program experience. 5 = This is a well-developed part of youths' program experience.	How many youth in your program have this experience? 1 = None 3 = Some 5 = All
Standard	Practice Indicator			
RANGE OF EMOTIONS. Youth experience a range of positive and challenging emotions in a safe context.	(EM1) Youth engage in program work and activities in which emotions occur, are expressed, and are recognized as an important and often valuable component of human experience.			
	(EM2) Emotions are experienced within a shared program culture (e.g., rules, norms) structured to make emotional expression and reflection safe and supported.			
EMOTION AWARENESS AND SKILL. Youth practice and develop healthy and functional emotion skills.	(EM3) Youth practice being aware of, identifying, and naming emotions.			
	(EM4) Youth practice reasoning about causes and effects of emotion.			
	(EM5) Youth practice using strategies for healthy coping with strong emotions and for harnessing emotions to advance the program work.			

Emotion Management Staff Practices		How important is this to your program? 1 = Not important 3 = Moderately important 5 = Very important	In our program, we 1 = do not enact this practice 3 = enact this inconsistently 5 = enact this consistently	Mark with an X when in the program year this practice typically or most frequently occurs. (You may mark more than one column.)		
Standard	Practice Indicator			Beginning	Middle	End
STRUCTURE. Staff create and adjust the structure of daily activities to accommodate youth's processing of emotion.	(EM6) Staff create time, space, or rituals within program activities for youth to process and learn from emotion.					
	(EM7) Staff adapt program activities to respond to youth's emotional readiness and needs.					
MODELING. Staff model healthy strategies for dealing with emotion within the context of caring, mutually-respectful relationships with youth.	(EM8) Staff model healthy strategies for dealing with emotions such as: a) active listening, remaining calm during intense episodes, and using problem-solving methods; b) communicating effectively and honestly about emotions (including their own); c) respectfully acknowledging and validating emotions in others.					
COACHING. Staff provide coaching to youth about handling and learning from their ongoing emotional experiences.	(EM9) Staff provide coaching that is respectful of youth's emotional autonomy, including: a) using deep understanding of youth and their emotional styles to monitor, appraise, and respond in the moment to youth's ongoing emotions; b) fostering emotional awareness and reflection; helping youth frame the situation and emotion; c) encouraging problem solving in response to challenging emotions and the situations creating them; suggesting strategies for dealing with them.					

EMPATHY

Relating to others with acceptance, understanding, and sensitivity to their diverse perspectives and experiences.

Empathy Key Youth Experiences		How important is this to your program?	Do youth have this experience in your program?	How many youth in your program have this experience?
Standard	Practice Indicator	1 = Not important 3 = Moderately important 5 = Very important	1 = Youth do not experience this as part of our program. 3 = This is a casual or incidental part of youths' program experience. 5 = This is a well-developed part of youths' program experience.	1 = None 3 = Some 5 = All
INEQUALITY AND IDENTITY. Youth explore social structure and power in relation to themselves and others.	(E1) Youth explore effects of stereotypes, discrimination, and social structures (e.g., based on race, gender, class, sexuality, religion, ability, etc.).			
	(E2) Youth own and articulate their identities, including in relation to these social structures.			
DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES. Youth share their stories and listen to the stories of others.	(E3) Youth develop and share personal stories			
	(E4) Youth provide attentive, empathic listening to the experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives of others.			
ACCEPTANCE. Youth practice relating to others with acceptance and understanding.	(E5) Youth practice identifying, understanding, and managing judgments.			
	(E6) Youth experience empathy and demonstrate caring when others reveal or share emotional experiences.			

Empathy Staff Practices		How important is this to your program? 1 = Not important 3 = Moderately important 5 = Very important	In our program, we 1 = do not enact this practice 3 = enact this inconsistently 5 = enact this consistently	Mark with an X when in the program year this practice typically or most frequently occurs. (You may mark more than one column.)		
Standard	Practice Indicator			Beginning	Middle	End
STRUCTURE. Staff provide programs with appropriate structure for sharing experience and promoting equity.	(E7) Staff cultivate a safe and caring space, including employing appropriate structure for sharing different cultural backgrounds, personal beliefs, and stories (particularly those that are emotionally charged) without judgment.					
	(E8) Staff actively promote inclusion and equity and demonstrating support for the principles that all are different, equal, and important.					
	(E9) Staff cultivate a program culture in which people actively care for each other.					
	(E10) Staff provide programs with ritual structures for multiple sessions that allow youth to first check in, then open up, and end with reflection.					
MODELING. Staff model empathy skills with youth.	(E11) Staff model empathy skills, including: a) intentionally recognizing the influence of their own identities and how these may affect interpersonal interactions; b) active listening; c) serving as an ally for youth who are isolated by differences in culture, family background, privilege, or power; d) modeling boundary-setting, including sharing or withholding personal experiences as appropriate and as needed.					

TEAMWORK

Abilities to collaborate and coordinate action with others

Teamwork Key Youth Experiences		How important is this to your program?	Do youth have this experience in your program?	How many youth in your program have this experience?
Standard	Practice Indicator	1 = Not important 3 = Moderately important 5 = Very important	1 = Youth do not experience this as part of our program. 3 = This is a casual or incidental part of youths' program experience. 5 = This is a well-developed part of youths' program experience.	1 = None 3 = Some 5 = All
TRUST AND COHESION. Youth develop group cohesion and trust.	(T1) Youth participate in work teams that develop cohesion and trusting relationships.			
	(T2) Youth participate in work teams that develop a sense of group identity and purpose.			
COLLABORATION. Youth participate in successful collaboration.	(T3) Youth work together toward shared goals.			
	(T4) Youth practice effective communications skills (e.g., turn-taking, active listening, respectful disagreement).			
	(T5) Each group member's contribution is valued and affirmed.			
TEAM CHALLENGE. Youth manage challenges to creating and maintaining effective working relationships.	(T6) Youth practice managing the challenges of group work, such as miscommunication, obstructive behavior, and conflict over goals and methods.			

Teamwork Staff Practices		How important is this to your program? 1 = Not important 3 = Moderately important 5 = Very important	In our program, we 1 = do not enact this practice 3 = enact this inconsistently 5 = enact this consistently	Mark with an X when in the program year this practice typically or most frequently occurs. (You may mark more than one column.)		
Standard	Practice Indicator			Beginning	Middle	End
STRUCTURE. Staff provide programs with norms and structure.	(T7) Staff help youth cultivate norms and rituals for effective group work.					
MODELING. Staff model teamwork skills with youth.	(T8) Staff model sensitive and high-level interpersonal functioning in staff-youth and staff-staff interactions.					
FACILITATING. Staff facilitate or intervene as needed to foster or sustain youth-led group dynamics and successful collaboration.	(T9) Staff facilitate or intervene as needed to foster or sustain youth-led group dynamics. This includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) cultivating mutual accountability (e.g., by communicating the importance of all youth's successful contributions to the group's work) (See also Responsibility); b) intervening only as needed, allowing youth to lead group processes; c) helping to manage individuals' personalities when warranted (e.g., through one-on-one conversations before, during, or after a group activity); d) diffusing unconstructive conflict, regrouping, reorganizing, getting group back on track and functioning well. 					

RESPONSIBILITY

Dispositions and abilities to reliably meet commitments and fulfill obligations of challenging roles.

Responsibility Key Youth Experiences		How important is this to your program? 1 = Not important 3 = Moderately important 5 = Very important	Do youth have this experience in your program? 1 = Youth do not experience this as part of our program. 3 = This is a casual or incidental part of youths' program experience. 5 = This is a well-developed part of youths' program experience.	How many youth in your program have this experience? 1 = None 3 = Some 5 = All
Standard	Practice Indicator			
ROLES. Youth take on roles and obligations within program activities.	(R1) Youth choose or accept roles and their obligations; in some cases they initiate the roles.			
DEMANDS. Youth encounter difficult demands.	(R2) As youth get into the roles, they encounter demands, requirements, and obligations; they understand that their actions in response to these demands will impact self, peers, or others.			
ACCOMPLISHMENT. Youth draw on resources to fulfill challenging roles and internalize accomplishment.	(R3) Youth draw on resources to successfully fulfill roles and obligations. Resources include drawing on inner strength, commitment, or newfound resolve; a sense of obligation to their peers and the program goals; and/or leaders' support and encouragement.			
	(R4) Youth succeed in their roles and internalize the experience of having fulfilled valued roles.			

Responsibility Staff Practices		How important is this to your program? 1 = Not important 3 = Moderately important 5 = Very important	In our program, we 1 = do not enact this practice 3 = enact this inconsistently 5 = enact this consistently	Mark with an X when in the program year this practice typically or most frequently occurs. (You may mark more than one column.)		
Standard	Practice Indicator			Beginning	Middle	End
STRUCTURE. Staff provide structured but open-ended roles for youth.	(R5) The program design and the staff help create a variety of roles for youth that: a) have clear expectations and requirements; and b) have sufficient flexibility to allow youth initiative and ownership and accommodate youth's growing skills.					
	(R6) Staff help fit individual youth to roles appropriate to their interests and capacities.					
MODELING. Staff model and fulfill their own roles.	(R7) Staff model and fulfill their own roles in the program, defining and discussing them with youth.					
COACHING. Staff promote high expectations, respect youth's ownership of their roles, and provide help only as needed.	(R8) Staff articulate, encourage, and enforce high accountability for youth living up to roles and obligations.					
	(R9) Staff vigorously support youth's ownership, empowerment, and latitude for decision-making within their roles, providing assistance only as necessary.					

INITIATIVE

Capacities to take action, sustain motivation, and persevere through challenge toward an identified goal.

Initiative Key Youth Experiences		How important is this to your program? 1 = Not important 3 = Moderately important 5 = Very important	Do youth have this experience in your program? 1 = Youth do not experience this as part of our program. 3 = This is a casual or incidental part of youths' program experience. 5 = This is a well-developed part of youths' program experience.	How many youth in your program have this experience? 1 = None 3 = Some 5 = All
Standard	Practice Indicator			
SET GOALS. Youth set ambitious but realistic goals.	(I1) Youth have experiences setting challenging but achievable short- and long-term goals.			
MOTIVATION. Youth develop and sustain motivation by doing work that matters to them.	(I2) Youth develop motivation as they: a) form connections with collaborators; b) build skills and confidence; and c) see the value in the work for their futures (adult roles and career), their communities, and the world.			
PERSEVERANCE. Youth have experiences persevering through the ups and downs of difficult work.	(I3) Youth have repeated experiences of persevering through strenuous tasks and challenging work.			
	(I4) Youth experience the satisfaction of accomplishment and social acknowledgment of their efforts and achievements.			

Initiative Staff Practices		How important is this to your program? 1 = Not important 3 = Moderately important 5 = Very important	In our program, we 1 = do not enact this practice 3 = enact this inconsistently 5 = enact this consistently	Mark with an X when in the program year this practice typically or most frequently occurs. (You may mark more than one column.)		
Standard	Practice Indicator			Beginning	Middle	End
SCAFFOLDING. Staff provide ongoing assistance to help youth develop motivation within the work.	(15) Staff help youth develop motivation by having youth select or shape the program goals and project(s) according to what matters to them.					
	(16) Staff support youth's discovery of personal motivation in the program work by kindling youth's experience of belonging, competence, and connection of the program work to personal goals or societal purpose.					
COACHING. Staff encourage youth to persist through challenging work, making sure that the effort behind youth's achievements is recognized.	(17) Staff give youth opportunities to persevere through challenges, setbacks, tiredness/tedium/boredom and also provide encouragement as needed to keep youth's attention focused and their effort engaged in keeping the program work moving forward.					
	(18) Staff help youth see the progress and successes that come from their effort and perseverance.					

PROBLEM SOLVING

Abilities to plan, strategize, and implement complex tasks.

Problem Solving Key Youth Experiences		How important is this to your program? 1 = Not important 3 = Moderately important 5 = Very important	Do youth have this experience in your program? 1 = Youth do not experience this as part of our program. 3 = This is a casual or incidental part of youths' program experience. 5 = This is a well-developed part of youths' program experience.	How many youth in your program have this experience? 1 = None 3 = Some 5 = All
Standard	Practice Indicator			
SET GOALS. Youth engage in projects that involve organizing actions over time.	(PS1) Youth build project-specific knowledge and skills (e.g., carpentry, leadership, public speaking).			
	(PS2) Youth conduct projects that require organizing multiple, cumulative steps of work (e.g., creating a work of art, planning an event or a service project).			
PLANNING-ACTION CYCLES. Youth learn through cycles of strategic planning, execution, responding to emergent problems, trial and error, and reflection on outcomes.	(PS3) Youth engage in planning, including: a) brainstorming and generative planning; b) thinking strategically about the purposes, methods, content, and outcomes of the project; c) anticipatory thinking, if-then thinking (e.g., about how the work and various constraints interact), and contingency planning.			
	(PS4) Youth have multiple opportunities to practice implementing the same skills to achieve greater success (e.g., by trying and trying again).			
	(PS5) Youth grapple with adjusting short- and long-term goals and strategies to emerging challenges and changing circumstances in their work.			

Problem Solving Key Youth Experiences		How important is this to your program? 1 = Not important 3 = Moderately important 5 = Very important	Do youth have this experience in your program? 1 = Youth do not experience this as part of our program. 3 = This is a casual or incidental part of youths' program experience. 5 = This is a well-developed part of youths' program experience.	How many youth in your program have this experience? 1 = None 3 = Some 5 = All		
Standard	Practice Indicator					
OUTCOMES VERIFY SKILLS. Youth reflect on how outcomes of their work provide information that helps build and verify youth skills.	(PS6) Youth reflect on the outcomes of their efforts at all stages of the work to identify mistakes and successes, note progress, and identify current challenges.					
	(PS7) Youth's sense of self-efficacy, accomplishment, or confidence grows as outcomes demonstrate their developing skills, and they critically evaluate how their actions influenced outcomes.					

Problem Solving Staff Practices		How important is this to your program? 1 = Not important 3 = Moderately important 5 = Very important	In our program, we 1 = do not enact this practice 3 = enact this inconsistently 5 = enact this consistently	Mark with an X when in the program year this practice typically or most frequently occurs. (You may mark more than one column.)		
Standard	Practice Indicator			Beginning	Middle	End
STRUCTURE. Staff provide sufficient structure to youth-driven projects.	(PS8) Staff provide training experiences for youth to help them learn project-related skills.					
	(PS9) Staff place a high priority on youth having latitude to make choices and learn from experimenting within their projects.					
	(PS10) Staff set high expectations and structure projects that are achievable (e.g., by setting goals, setting timelines and deadlines, setting boundaries).					

Problem Solving Staff Practices		How important is this to your program? 1 = Not important 3 = Moderately important 5 = Very important	In our program, we 1 = do not enact this practice 3 = enact this inconsistently 5 = enact this consistently	Mark with an X when in the program year this practice typically or most frequently occurs. (You may mark more than one column.)		
Standard	Practice Indicator			Beginning	Middle	End
MODELING. Staff create opportunities for youth to observe models of successful work.	(PS 11) Staff model skills youth need to learn for their projects (e.g., carpentry or speaking skills, skills for planning and problem solving) and expose youth to models of successful work that set high expectations (e.g., youth learn about projects from prior years, novices work with veteran youth or expert staff).					
SCAFFOLDING. Staff provide assistance, as needed, to help youth learn and solve problems on their own.	Staff scaffold youth progress on projects by balancing: (PS12) stepping in to provide assistance and input as needed to help youth solve problems and learn (e.g., helping youth develop strategies when stuck or unsuccessful); and					
	(PS13) stepping back to support youth's increasing independence in their work as their skill grows and to allow youth space to struggle with challenges.					
REFLECTION. Staff offer youth opportunities for reflection on project outcomes.	(PS14) Staff ensure that youth have opportunities to reflect on the processes that led to the outcomes of their work and to evaluate the impact and meaning of completed projects for both the youth and other stakeholders.					

Using the SEL Strengths Builder Method in a Continuous Improvement Cycle

1. Assess your SEL Curriculum Design.

Follow the steps for **Assessing SEL Curriculum Design** (assessment and video available at [SELpractices.org](https://www.selpractices.org)). Hold a conversation with program staff and create a visual representation of the sequence of content in your program. This process should also start to build a common vocabulary around SEL. As you use *Preparing Youth to Thrive* to get a better understanding of the curriculum features, consider the following questions:

- a) What is the project content sequence for your offering? What is the main goal or “work” of the offering?
- b) What is the SEL content sequence for your offering? Where and when do the SEL practices surface?
- c) How do the project and SEL content sequences interact over the course of the offering?
- d) What staff supports do you provide to encourage staff’s own SEL and their ability to support youth’s SEL?

2. Assess your SEL Practices.

Follow the steps with **Assessing SEL Practices** (assessment and video available at [SELpractices.org](https://www.selpractices.org)). Engage the staff in your program to complete the assessment independently to identify practices that are prominent in your program and those that are missing. Hold a meeting for program staff to discuss their results, and have a conversation about what is most important in your program. This process should also start to build a common vocabulary around SEL practices. Use *Preparing Youth to Thrive* to get a better understanding of each of the practices. Consider the following questions:

- a) Which of the youth key experiences and staff practices implemented by the SEL Challenge programs are similar to what you do in your program?
- b) Which could you do more of?
- c) Which are high priorities for you, based on the youth you serve and the goals of your program?
- d) Which are less of a priority, and why?

3. Assess Youth SEL Skills.

The conversation can be extended by asking staff to **Assess Youth SEL Skills** (assessment and video available at [SELpractices.org](https://selpractices.org)). Have staff complete the SEL staff rating survey for a few program youth and produce a performance report. With these ratings in hand, staff can ask a number of important questions:

- a) Who are our youth and which social and emotional skills could help them achieve greater agency in their lives? What does it look like when these youth are demonstrating these skills in our program?
- b) Are there opportunities for these youth to practice these skills in our program? What changes to the curriculum would increase opportunities to practice these social and emotional skills?
- c) How do our current youth experiences and staff practices compare to those described in the standards? Which standards do we perform well on? Where are our weaknesses? Given the needs of our youth, where do we need to do better?
- d) Are we biased? Is there any systematic reason why we might rate one youth lower or higher than another?

4. Implement an Improvement Cycle.

The assessment conversations feed into a cycle that can lead to an improvement plan focused on modifications to the offering curriculum and clearer thinking about moments in the curriculum where opportunities to use responsive practices occur. Watch the video **Planning for Improvement** (available at [SELpractices.org](https://selpractices.org)) for guidance on creating an improvement plan.

It is important to return to the improvement plan and to check in regularly on progress towards goals. Watch the video **Reflecting on Progress** (available at [SELpractices.org](https://selpractices.org)) for guidance on how to keep staff focused on improvement year after year.

5. Identify System Supports.

For sustainable change, professional development and assessments should be aligned and integrated into the annual cycle. Visit cypq.org/SELchallenge for guidance on implementation including additional resources available for training and technical assistance.

