



**BELIEVE IT.  
BUILD IT.**  
EXPANDED EDITION NOW WITH **BE IT.**  
FOR YOUTH WORKERS

Minnesota's Guide to  
Effective Afterschool Practices

[IgniteAfterschool.org](https://www.IgniteAfterschool.org)

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## BELIEVE IT. BUILD IT.

**WE BELIEVE every young person can be successful.** Those of us who work in afterschool come from many backgrounds. We call ourselves youth workers, librarians, artists, teachers, coaches, social workers, or maybe something else entirely. We share a belief that the work we do every day positively impacts young people's success.

It's this belief in what's possible for young people that drives us to do our best. It gets us out the door and off to work each morning (or late afternoons and weekends!) It's why we care deeply about young people and their futures. It's why we put so much energy and passion into our programs.

**And now we have a blueprint** to help us take what we believe and BUILD IT for — and with — the young people of Minnesota.

With BELIEVE IT. BUILD IT. the afterschool community in Minnesota has come together to define what makes our programs great and put together a hands-on guidebook to help us build research-based best practices into every step.

Our work is vital. Taking time to invest in that work, to continuously reflect, improve and strive to be the best we can be — that's vital too. It's a process that can be fulfilling, exciting and a cause for celebration.

We're a community of life-longer learners. This guidebook is meant to help us find inspiration for today, and aspirations for tomorrow. Each of our programs comes to this process from a different place. And each one can find something in these pages to strengthen our programs and make a positive difference for youth.

# SAY WHAT?

Here are a few terms you'll see throughout **BELIEVE IT. BUILD IT.:**

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**Afterschool** refers to organized activities and programs involving young people that take place outside the regular school day. Sometimes called OST (out-of-school time), summer programming or afterschool, it all means the same thing here.

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**Community** includes all individuals and organizations that influence youth. This can be teachers and schools, families and community organizations, neighborhood leaders and local businesses, and more.

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**Culture** is a set of beliefs, values, and norms that are shared within a community of people, and which shape a person's actions and sense of self.

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**Dosage** refers to how much programming a young person experiences. It's generally measured in intensity — the amount of hours per day, days per week and weeks per year a young person attends; as well as duration — how long the young person participates in programs from start to finish (ideally, over a number of years); and breadth — the variety of activities a young person experiences either across multiple programs or within one program.

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**Family** includes parents, siblings, relatives, caregivers, guardians, extended families, and embraces all individuals that a young person considers "family."

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**Identity** is the conception people have of themselves, which is shaped by both social and biological characteristics, including age, socioeconomic class, nationality, language, religion, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and physical/developmental ability.

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**Professional Development** includes trainings, workshops, coaching and ongoing opportunities for reflection and improvement.

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**Youth** refers to elementary, middle and high-school-age young people (generally between the ages of 5 and 18.) Youth and young people are used interchangeably in this guide.

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What other terms are part of your afterschool lexicon?

# HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

## The BELIEVE IT. BUILD IT. guide was made to be used.

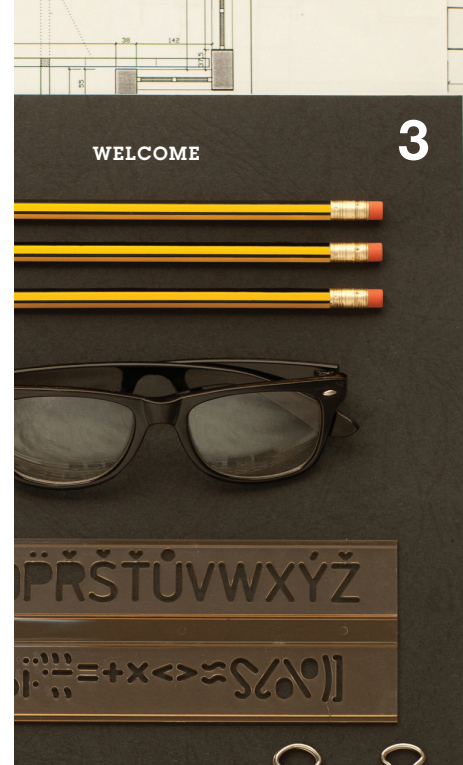
It's yours to mark up, photocopy, share, remove pages, add content from other seminars and sources...really, truly USE this book. This is an open-source workbook-style piece so you can pull apart and put together the pieces you need to help your program be the very best it can be.

The BELIEVE IT. BUILD IT. guide is divided into four main sections:

1. **WE BELIEVE:** a shared set of principles and beliefs that guide our programs and Minnesota's afterschool community.
2. **BUILDING BLOCKS:** six basic elements that build high-quality programs, with a list of research-based effective practices you can use to shape your program.
3. **BE IT:** Shared values and six strategies to thrive as youth workers.
4. **CONTINUOUS PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT (CPI):** an ongoing process to help your programs continuously raise the bar on quality.

Each section was carefully vetted and selected by the network, for the network. We came together as a statewide community of afterschool providers to review the research, determine the most effective, up-to-date practices in afterschool, and create this guide so we can improve the lives of the young people we serve. Whether you're part of a well-oiled machine, or a tiny new program that's just finding your footing, each section is meant to build upon the other in a continuous cycle of reflection and improvement.

Now we have a clearly articulated vision of quality programming, a shared language to clearly define each program element, and a guide to facilitate an ongoing improvement process — let's roll up our sleeves and get to work! The youth we serve are counting on us.



BRING IT TO LIFE

Throughout BELIEVE IT. BUILD IT., you'll find ways to act on the concepts in this book, such as:

- questions to guide reflection
- online resources for more information
- the key steps in a Continuous Program Improvement cycle.

## ONLINE TOOLKIT:

Looking for more ways to strengthen each Building Block or integrate the CPI process into your work? New tips, tools and resources are added often!



[www.igniteafterschool.org/bibi](http://www.igniteafterschool.org/bibi)

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### Do you **BELIEVE IT?**

How are these ideas reflected in your program?

What are your organization's values?

Are any principles and beliefs missing from this list?

**Every young person deserves opportunity to realize their fullest potential.** We provide many different ways and places for young people to learn so they can develop their talents and ignite their passions.

**Young people have many strengths, abilities and assets.** We value youth voice, leadership, and the many meaningful contributions young people make to our community.

**Afterschool programs are important and impactful.** When we are intentional about quality, our work positively impacts young people's growth and development.

**Community, family and culture are fundamental to a young person's identity.** We create welcoming, inclusive environments where young people of all backgrounds and abilities can feel safe, freely express and discover their identity, and belong to a supportive community of peers and adults.

**We are stronger together.** Whole communities must act together to provide the full range of resources and experiences young people need to be successful.

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BELIEVE IT. BUILD IT.



Building  
Blocks

BUILDING BLOCKS



## BUILDING BLOCK ONE

# INTENTIONAL PROGRAM DESIGN

### What it means:

Positive youth outcomes are too important to leave to chance. While each program is unique, the need for intentional program design is universal. Programs identify their desired youth outcomes and directly connect program activities to those goals.

### Why it matters:

Programs are more likely to achieve desired youth outcomes if they use a deliberate process to design, implement and evaluate activities.

### What Effective Practices look like:

- Program has clear, focused goals that align with the organization's mission.
- Program explicitly connects activities to its desired goals.
- Program activities build upon each other sequentially to support young people's ability to expand skills or gain new knowledge.
- Program supports engagement through multiple learning techniques, such as project-based, hands-on experiences that relate to everyday life.
- Program activities are flexible enough to meet the various needs and skills of youth, while still meeting the intended program goals.
- Program provides regular, ongoing sessions so youth can participate often enough to achieve positive outcomes associated with high dosage (duration, intensity and breadth).
- Programs have opportunities for young people to reflect on and make meaning from their experiences.

OVER

## BUILDING BLOCK ONE



### USE THIS BOOK!

Put a ✕ next to your strongest effective practice. Circle the one that needs the most attention.



### NEED HELP?

Check out this link for more on Intentional Program Design.

[www.igniteafterschool.org/bibi/bb1](http://www.igniteafterschool.org/bibi/bb1)

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# Reflect

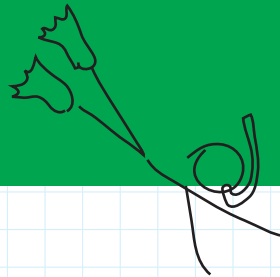
BUILDING  
BLOCK  
ONE



## INTENTIONAL PROGRAM DESIGN

What's the first step you will take to improve Intentional Program Design?

What's next after that?

**DIVE DEEPER INTO PROGRAM DESIGN!**

What is your role in intentional program design? How much time do you set aside for intentional program planning?

How well do your program activities meet the goals of your program? What could be improved?

# Reflect

BUILDING  
BLOCK  
ONE



## INTENTIONAL PROGRAM DESIGN

What learning styles are prioritized in your program? How can you design activities for other learning styles?

How and where are you creating space for youth to reflect? Is it often enough?

## BUILDING BLOCK TWO

# SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS & ENVIRONMENT

## What it means:

Programs purposefully create a welcoming environment. It's an emotionally safe place that young people want to come back to again and again, a place where they feel a sense of security, belonging and ownership.

## Why it matters:

A young person needs a time and a place to develop — a place to safely fail and try again, a place to explore their interests or discover new passions. A secure, welcoming, positive environment best supports learning and development.

## What Effective Practices look like:

- Program structure provides opportunities for staff and youth to build trusting, appropriate relationships.
- Program fosters a sense of community. Staff are welcoming, and encourage youth to connect with one another.
- Staff and youth have shared high expectations and consistency of appropriate norms and behaviors.
- Staff uses positive guidance to direct youth behavior and model positive behaviors to youth and to each other.
- Staff engages with youth as individuals to help them learn and develop.

OVER

BUILDING  
BLOCK  
TWO

## 2

## USE THIS BOOK!

Put a ✕ next to your strongest effective practice. Circle the one that needs the most attention.

## NEED HELP?

Visit our website for resources on Supportive Relationships & Environment.

www.  
igniteafterschool.  
org/bibi/bb2

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# Reflect

BUILDING  
BLOCK  
TWO

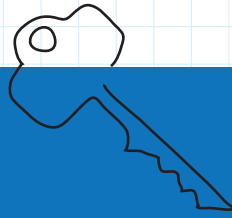
# 2

## SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS & ENVIRONMENT

Which of these effective practices are strong?

Which could use some attention?

Brainstorm three next steps.



## YOUTH WORKERS ARE KEY TO POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS.

How do you get to know each individual youth?

How comfortable are you with modeling? Do you model some behaviors more than others? Why?

# Reflect

BUILDING  
BLOCK  
TWO

## 2

### SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS & ENVIRONMENT

When it comes to reinforcing program expectations, how consistent are you across youth?

How do you handle conflict with and among youth? How well does your response promote belonging?

### BUILDING BLOCK THREE

# YOUTH VOICE & LEADERSHIP

## What it means:

Programs authentically partner with youth to build their leadership skills. Young people are involved in meaningful opportunities to plan, implement, and evaluate program activities.

## Why it matters:

Young people are more likely to stay engaged in the program when their ideas and contributions are included. This places their interests at the center.

## What Effective Practices look like:

- Staff value and encourage youth voice and expression. Youth have the opportunity to make significant choices about activities in the program.
- Youth serve as leaders and mentors to each other.
- Staff support youth's leadership development through appropriate skill-building opportunities (e.g. goals setting, planning).
- Youth input and contributions are encouraged in activity planning, implementation and evaluation. As young people gain experience, their input and contributions become increasingly sophisticated.
- Staff provide opportunities for reflection and for youth to showcase their work.

OVER



### BUILDING BLOCK THREE

# 3

## USE THIS BOOK!

Put a ✖ next to your strongest effective practice. Circle the one that needs the most attention.

## NEED HELP?

More ideas about Youth Voice & Leadership are online here:

www.  
igniteafterschool.  
org/bibi/bb3

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# Reflect

BUILDING  
BLOCK  
THREE

3

## YOUTH VOICE & LEADERSHIP

How do youth in your program give input and make choices in your program?

What else could you do to weave youth voice into the fabric of your program?



How do you solicit and incorporate youth ideas and requests? How could you do that even more?

How do you encourage and enable youth to develop their leadership skills?

# Reflect

BUILDING  
BLOCK  
THREE

# 3

## YOUTH VOICE & LEADERSHIP

What would youth say about your leadership style?

What is the biggest challenge you face in promoting youth voice? What could help you address this challenge?

**BUILDING BLOCK FOUR**

# RESPONSIVENESS TO CULTURE & IDENTITY

**What it means:**

Programs create a safe and adaptive environment which recognizes that culture, family and personal history is core to a young person's identity formation.

**Why it matters:**

Programs that provide young people with an opportunity to explore their identity within the context of their own culture as well as others deepen young people's sense of self-esteem and increase their openness and understanding toward all people.

**What Effective Practices look like:**

- Program cultivates an inclusive environment where all youth and families are welcomed and respected.
- Staff create a safe atmosphere for children and youth to explore their own identity, including cultural beliefs and practices.
- Youth are encouraged to be their whole selves, honoring their culture, sense of self and life experiences.
- Program makes a genuine effort to ensure staff reflect the diverse race, gender, culture, sexual orientation, language and special needs of the young people being served.
- Staff meet youth "where they're at" and respond to their unique interests, needs and abilities. Young people's cultures are recognized and understood.

OVER

**BUILDING  
BLOCK  
FOUR****USE THIS BOOK!**

Put a ✕ next to your strongest effective practice. Circle the one that needs the most attention.

**NEED HELP?**

We've got more tools to improve Responsiveness to Culture & Identity online:

**www.  
igniteafterschool.  
org/bibi/bb4**

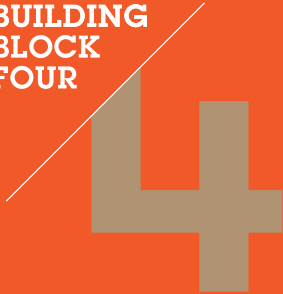
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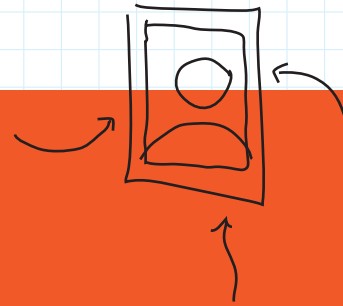
BUILDING  
BLOCK  
FOUR



## RESPONSIVENESS TO CULTURE & IDENTITY

Is there an easy first step you can take to increase Responsiveness to Culture & Identity?

What's more challenging?



## MEET YOUTH “WHERE THEY’RE AT.”

When and how are you able to reflect on your own culture and identity? How can you further develop your intercultural skills?

How do you provide youth regular opportunities to explore and discuss their own cultures and identities?

# Reflect

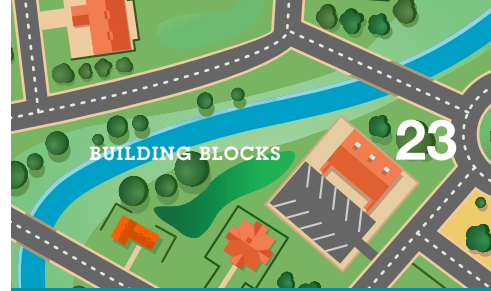
BUILDING  
BLOCK  
FOUR



## RESPONSIVENESS TO CULTURE & IDENTITY

How do you know if you are being responsive to young people's culture and identity?

How have you made your program more inclusive and responsive? What else can you do?



## BUILDING BLOCK FIVE

# COMMUNITY & FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

### What it means:

Programs communicate their value to and connect with the wider community. Staff builds positive relationships and meaningful interactions with families and community partners.

### Why it matters:

A young person's development is strengthened when positive reinforcement comes from many partners working together — from parents, families and caregivers who feel valued by the program and can better support their children at home to communities that are strengthened by a positive image of youth making valuable contributions to our world. Young people are exposed to new ideas, experiences and/or supports that the program alone can't provide.

### What Effective Practices look like:

- Program proactively builds meaningful community partnerships that have a logical fit and bring mutual value to each partner.
- Program actively embraces the culture(s) of young people, their families and their communities.
- Program encourages and welcomes family and community involvement (as volunteers, presenters, partners, etc.)
- Programs and families regularly communicate with each other about things like the youth's progress, opportunities to get involved, and feedback on the program.
- Program encourages and acknowledges young people's contributions to the community.
- Program communicates with and is visible in their local community.
- Communication takes place in multiple languages (when appropriate) and through multiple channels.

OVER

## BUILDING BLOCK FIVE

# 5

### USE THIS BOOK!

Put a ✖ next to your strongest effective practice. Circle the one that needs the most attention.

### NEED HELP?

Additional Community & Family Engagement resources can be found here:

[www.igniteafterschool.org/bibi/bb5](http://www.igniteafterschool.org/bibi/bb5)

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# Reflect

BUILDING  
BLOCK  
FIVE

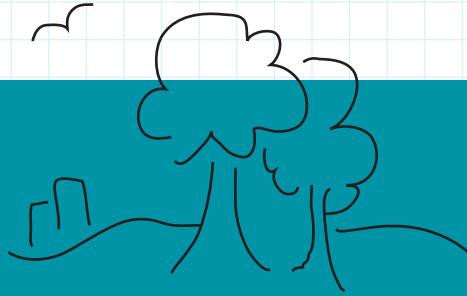
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## COMMUNITY & FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Which of these effective practices are going well?

Which need some TLC?

Brainstorm three next steps.



**WE'RE PART OF THE VILLAGE!**

What do you know and believe about the families and communities of the young people you serve? What is the source of that information?

How do you go about engaging families? How successful are you? Who can give you feedback on this?

# Reflect

BUILDING  
BLOCK  
FIVE

# 5

## COMMUNITY & FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Which organizations and individuals are your community partners? Who is not on that list that could be? What is holding you back from pursuing new relationships?

What opportunities are you creating for youth to lead in their own community?

**BUILDING BLOCK SIX**

# ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT, STAFF SUPPORT & YOUTH SAFETY

**BUILDING  
BLOCK  
SIX**

# 6

**What it means:**

Programs are safe and stable. They are part of a sustainable, well-run organization that values high-quality staff and supports them through professional development and training.

**Why it matters:**

An afterschool program is only as good as the people who run it and as solid as the foundation upon which it is built. Research shows that programs must be high-quality and have a sturdy infrastructure in order to positively impact youth success.

**What Effective Practices look like:**

- Program mission is understood by staff, board, youth and families and is aligned with the goals of the broader organization (if applicable).
- Program has written policies, systems and documentation in place to ensure a safe, appropriate environment and a response for day-to-day needs as well as emergencies.
- Program has solid oversight: a clearly defined decision-making process, set policies that are understood and followed, and competent supervision of staff/volunteers.
- Organization respects and supports the culture and identity of youth workers, and values them as individuals and professionals.
- Organization provides a clear path for staff to develop and advance, and ensures access to multiple staff professional development opportunities, including research-based best practices and cultural responsiveness.
- Program budget is tied to program goals and supported by solid financial management.
- Program has a system for collecting and evaluating data to support the program's continuous growth and improvement.

**USE THIS BOOK!**

Put a ✕ next to your strongest effective practice. Circle the one that needs the most attention.

**NEED HELP?**

For more tools to help guide Organizational Management, Staff Support & Youth Safety, check out:

**www.  
igniteafterschool.  
org/bibi/bb6**

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OVER

# Reflect

BUILDING  
BLOCK  
SIX

# 6

ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT,  
STAFF SUPPORT & YOUTH SAFETY

Is your mission statement widely understood and embraced?

Are your safety policies up-to-date?

Try going through these effective practices as a checklist at your next staff meeting.  
Develop a list of next steps for improvement.



## A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT.

How comfortable are you sharing your organization's mission and values with others?

How well do you understand your organization's policies and your role in promoting them?

# Reflect

BUILDING  
BLOCK  
SIX

6

## ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT, STAFF SUPPORT & YOUTH SAFETY

Does your organization have any policies that you don't agree with or have a hard time following? Why are they challenging for you and what could you do about it?

What professional development opportunities are you pursuing? How do you take what you learn and apply it to your organization?

# BELIEVE IT. BUILD IT.



## BE IT. GUIDE

An Addendum to Believe It. Build It. –  
Minnesota's Guide to Effective Afterschool Practices

**Youth Worker Tools  
for Navigating the  
Complexities of Working  
with Young People**

BE IT. GUIDE

# GET READY TO BE IT.

**We all want to be at our best when we show up for youth every day.**

Simple, right? But in reality, our daily interactions with young people, families, schools, managers, etc. aren't simple at all. BE IT was created to help make complicated situations more clear so we can really be at our best for young people.

Here's what you'll find in these pages:

- 1. Cornerstones of Youth Work:** Shared principles that build off the WE BELIEVE statements on p. 5. They're the values that guide our day-to-day interactions with young people.
- 2. Thriving Strategies:** Each Thriving Strategy is one interconnected piece of what we need to thrive as youth workers. They're most effective when youth workers and employers commit to them. Work through these in any order, and circle back as needed. (Don't worry if some are more solid than others — that's perfectly normal and will change as your career progresses and your organization evolves!)
- 3. Manager Action Items:** Youth workers can't fully BE IT without ongoing support from higher ups. If you supervise youth workers and help set their work culture and conditions, you (*yes, you!*) play a critical role in youth workers' success. The Manager Action Items offer specific strategies you can use right away to better support youth workers.
- 4. Building Block Reflection Questions:** We heard you — you wanted more opportunities to reflect on how your role as a youth worker supports high-quality effective practices. We've added more youth worker-centered reflection questions to each Building Block.

We know these tools won't solve every dilemma, but they can help us navigate the unexpected challenges that come with youth work. We hope they make your work more rewarding and deepen the positive impact you make on young people.



ARE YOU READY TO BE IT?

**BE IT speaks most directly to youth workers in summer and afterschool programs, but we hope anyone working with young people finds helpful insights here.**

**Manager Action Item:**  
**Give yourself a hand for supporting youth workers! Your first challenge is to reflect on what YOU currently do to help youth workers BE IT.**

Let's go!  
Turn the page to  
**get started**



## ONLINE TOOLKIT:

**www.  
igniteafterschool.  
org/bibi-beit**

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## CORNERSTONES

### OF YOUTH WORK

**Youth come first.** We put the needs and interests of young people at the heart of everything we do. That's not always easy as we often grapple with competing interests. We continuously adjust to find a balance that is receptive and responsive to the needs, concerns, and hopes of young people.

---

**We stand up for equity for all young people.** Our work is grounded in social justice. We live that truth by ending inequities in systems and opportunities. We recognize that young people experience different barriers based on class, race, gender, ability, sexual identity and more. We have a responsibility to spearhead change.

---

**We support young people's positive identity development.** We know that identity is grounded in community, family and culture, and encourage young people as they explore their place in the world. We provide opportunities for them to formulate their own positive sense of self, to build healthy relationships with others, to find a place where they are valued and give value to others, and to envision positive futures for themselves.

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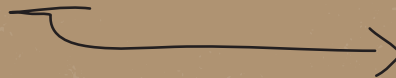
**We safeguard young people's physical and emotional well-being.** Ensuring young people are physically safe and emotionally secure is a big responsibility — and also a big sign of trust. We acknowledge that feeling safe differs for each young person, especially for those who've experienced adversity and trauma. We provide safe spaces for all young people, and always put their well-being first.

---

**We act with integrity toward ourselves, others and our profession.** We are aware of our influence on young people. We conduct ourselves knowing that we are role models. We are professionals who ensure that what we say and do increases public respect for young people and elevates the field of youth work. We know that acting with integrity requires honesty, authenticity, and courage.

---

**Youth Worker THRIVING STRATEGIES start on the next page!**



## THRIVING STRATEGY ONE

# SELF AWARENESS

### What it means:

As a youth worker, you understand who you are — your character, values, biases and lived experiences that shape the way you view yourself and others. You know that your own self-awareness impacts how you see and support young people.

### Why It Matters:

How you show up for youth affects your interactions with young people, and they pick up on that. Many things impact your sense of self — cultural background, sexual identity, class, family, education, religion, big city or small-town upbringing — the list goes on. Being self-aware means continuously re-examining your own identity to better understand your existing beliefs about how the world works and how young people navigate it. That helps you uncover any assumptions (which you might not have even realized you had!) about young people that are based on *your* experience, but don't necessarily align with *their* identity and experience. When you're self-aware, you're better positioned to support young people on their own journey to knowing themselves.

### Manager Action Item:

- ✿ Have you created intentional opportunities for youth workers to unpack their own identities? Do this: Create time and space to regularly reflect upon identity and how it shapes the way we view ourselves and others. Lead by example by sharing how your identity influences how you work with staff.

OVER



## THRIVING STRATEGY ONE

# 1

### WHAT DO YOUTH WORKERS SAY?

BB

When I'm authentic, it allows the basketball players who are secretly anime fans to hang out with the anime fans who are secretly basketball players. Authenticity creates an environment of 'we are safe and we are allowed to be whoever we want to be in this space.'

DD

### NEED RESOURCES?

Find them at [www.igniteafterschool.org/bibi-beit](http://www.igniteafterschool.org/bibi-beit)

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# Reflect

THRIVING  
STRATEGY  
ONE



## SELF AWARENESS

How do people see me? How do I know this?

How do my identities shape my approach to youth work? How do I show up for young people? Am I authentic with young people?

What power, privileges and assumptions do I bring to youth work?

What experiences shaped the way I see myself? How have those evolved over time and how do they impact my approach to youth work?

Where are my "blind spots" — biases or misperceptions that shape the way I see the world? Who can help me think about this?

## THRIVING STRATEGY TWO

# BOUNDARIES

### What it means:

Your relationship with young people is both authentic and professional, with appropriate limits on your role in a young person's life. You stay within healthy and respectful boundaries, and recognize there is a power imbalance because of your role as a youth worker.

### Why It Matters:

Youth workers tend to have a great deal of passion for helping young people and compassion for the challenges they face. This emotional connection can serve as a powerful spark for fostering relationships. (In fact, building positive, trusting relationships with young people is an afterschool effective practice!) But we're still professionals, so we must maintain professional boundaries that protect youths' physical and psychological safety. Where exactly that line is drawn often varies from one situation to the next, so it's important to have regular reflections and discussions with your supervisor and coworkers. Then, turn those conversations into opportunities to continuously clarify policies that identify appropriate boundaries.

### Manager Action Item:

- ✿ Do your organization's policies and training address appropriate boundaries? Do this: Review your policies with staff. Discuss various scenarios and identify any questions about appropriate boundaries that are not addressed in your current policies. See Building Block 6 on page 27 for inspiration.

OVER

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THRIVING  
STRATEGY  
TWO

2

### WHAT DO YOUTH WORKERS SAY?

BB

One of the biggest challenges I faced was with a youth who was going through abusive situations at home. They trusted me enough to tell me what was going on, but I had to report it. It's the conflicting emotion of I really don't want to break that trust. But I know that this is what I have to do.

DD

### NEED RESOURCES?

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# Reflect

## THRIVING STRATEGY TWO

# 2

## BOUNDARIES

What are the potential risks and consequences of not having healthy boundaries in your relationships with young people?

Think of a time when you were unsure of the appropriate role for you in a young person's life. What was the situation? How did you find clarity?

What resources are available to help you maintain healthy boundaries with youth?

What are some warning signs that a relationship boundary might be in danger of being crossed?

What can you do if you feel like a coworker's relationship is crossing boundaries with a young person?

## THRIVING STRATEGY THREE

# SELF CARE

### What it means:

You prioritize *you*. It's not always easy to “turn off” your youth worker switch at the end of the day, so you intentionally do what you need to do to unplug from the emotional and physical challenges of youth work. You recognize that you can't (and shouldn't) solve every problem in a young person's life.

### Why It Matters:

Youth workers often see young people in stressful situations. We can't always control the challenges in a young person's life, but we can control how prepared we are to offer support and help them navigate difficulties. There's no one way to care for yourself amid the daily challenges of youth work — some days you may need a quiet space to think and other times a peer group for support. Regardless of the activity, it's all about prioritizing your physical and mental health so you can sustain yourself in this line of work. It's also about you not carrying too big a burden. Sometimes self-care is connecting young people to other resources for additional support.

### Manager Action Item:

- ⚙️ You set the tone by managing workloads, building a supportive team and encouraging work/life balance. Do this: Challenge your staff to report back on one activity they did to promote self-care. Consider a team self-care challenge, activity or experience.

OVER

## THRIVING STRATEGY THREE

# 3

### WHAT DO YOUTH WORKERS SAY?



One of my values is self-care. You can't pour from an empty cup. If you don't have it in you and you didn't fill yourself back up, you can't come in and think you're ready to give it all to these kids.



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# Reflect

THRIVING  
STRATEGY  
THREE

## 3

### SELF CARE

What does good self-care look like for me?

What are my symptoms of poor self-care? How do these come through in my work with youth?

In what ways does my workplace support self-care? How could that be improved?

What is one small thing I can do for myself right now to promote self-care?  
What can I do longer-term?

How can I model and encourage self-care for the youth I serve?

## THRIVING STRATEGY FOUR

## LIFE-LONG LEARNING

**What it means:**

You embrace continuous learning and adopt a growth mindset. You take time to invest in your career as a youth worker, reflect on the work and sharpen or expand skills — both for yourself *and* to better understand the everyday lives of young people.

**Why It Matters:**

The world young people are navigating is constantly changing, and that means the field of youth work is too. We're always adapting, so life-long learning means our skills and knowledge need to evolve along with us. Professional development includes many different things and can take place in many different formats. You might attend a training, find a mentor (or mentor someone else!), go on a retreat, or meet regularly with colleagues to share techniques. All of those experiences help expand and deepen your knowledge. Adopting that growth mindset means you believe that with effort and persistence, you *can* learn and *can* improve. That's the first step toward amazing accomplishments!

**Manager Action Item:**

- ✿ Learning requires an investment of time *and* resources. Does your organizational culture value life-long learning? Is professional development included in your budget? Do This: Update (or create!) your staff professional development budget. Consider allocating a certain percentage for each staff member to use annually, and invite staff to propose a plan for how to use their annual funds.

OVER

THRIVING  
STRATEGY  
FOUR

4

**WHAT DO YOUTH WORKERS SAY?**

I'm getting better at tapping into the resources around me. I have co-workers that I can go to who have gone through the same things; I'm utilizing them to help me understand.

**NEED RESOURCES?**

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# Reflect

THRIVING  
STRATEGY  
FOUR



## LIFE-LONG LEARNING

What am I curious about? What do I want to know about the world? About young people? About youth work?

What does my current professional development plan look like and how is it working for me? How could I branch out? How do I share my professional development goals with my supervisor?

What are my strengths and where do I need to improve?

How can I share what I learn through professional development with others in my organization? What can others teach me?

## THRIVING STRATEGY FIVE

# COLLABORATION & COMMUNITY

### What it means:

Youth work links to the outside world. It's part of something bigger that's making a positive impact on young people and entire communities. As a youth worker, you are part of the community that is connected to all the pieces that touch a young person's life — family, school, neighborhoods, and more.

### Why It Matters:

There's strength in numbers. Young people get the support they need to thrive when you as a youth worker collaborate with others. Being deeply connected to a young person's community puts you closer to "where they're at" so you can better meet them there. It also helps you better understand the unique opportunities, resources and strengths in their community. When you're connected to a network of community allies, young people are part of the "bigger picture," and we're all better able to support them as a whole person. Together, struggles are divided, solutions are multiplied, and youth have more opportunities to connect, learn and lead.

### Manager Action Item:

- ⚙ Managers play a critical role in nurturing connection and collaboration. Do staff have permission to use work time to form relationships with coworkers? How can you teach community-building skills and give staff spaces to practice? Do this: Each month, pick one staff member to focus on. Make a professional introduction for them. Bring them along to one community-building meeting on your calendar and debrief afterward.

OVER

## THRIVING STRATEGY FIVE

# 5

### WHAT DO YOUTH WORKERS SAY?



I think it's really important to make connections with other youth workers, kids and families. When you start by building relationships, you're able to make more effective changes as you move forward.



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# Reflect

THRIVING  
STRATEGY  
FIVE

## 5

### COLLABORATION & COMMUNITY

Who makes up the community where I work? Where are the resources and allies?  
Who's missing and how can I engage those individuals?

How can I strengthen my community network? What can I contribute?

What resources and contacts does my community have? How can I tap into them more often?

How often do I meet new people and explore collaboration? Where else can I make connections?

What opportunities do I have to be a "link" in my community? Who can I connect to one another?

Which collaborations have been most successful? Why? What can we duplicate or build upon from those successes?

## THRIVING STRATEGY SIX

# ADVOCACY

### What it means:

Advocacy is messy. Sometimes it's personal — it can be specific to you, your program and/or the young people you support. Sometimes it's fixing policies and practices at your organization so that they better support youth and youth workers. Sometimes it's coaching young people to advocate for their own needs. And sometimes it's advocating for bigger policy change at a city, county, state or national level.

### Why It Matters:

While advocacy is undoubtedly challenging, it also has the potential for great reward. Systemic change can happen, funding sources can increase, opportunities for youth can expand — but only if we come together to advocate for our needs and values personally, publicly, and alongside young people.

### Manager Action Item:

- ✿ Understand the role your organization can play in formal advocacy efforts (especially if you are a nonprofit) and empower youth workers to engage in allowable advocacy work. Do this: Challenge your organization to take a stand for the opportunities and resources young people need. Ask youth workers to reflect on policies or practices that have the potential to improve youth outcomes and then take action to change them.

OVER

## THRIVING STRATEGY SIX

# 6

### WHAT DO YOUTH WORKERS SAY?



I've gotten phone calls from youth in a really tough place when they're looking for support. That's a big win. At the very least, we can advocate for them and talk to the right people to get them access to services.



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# Reflect

THRIVING  
STRATEGY  
SIX

## 6

### ADVOCACY

Think of a time when you struggled with advocating for a young person.  
What was the source of that struggle?

When have you had to be an advocate for young people, yourself or your program?  
What worked or didn't work about that experience?

How can you familiarize yourself with public policies that impact youth programs?  
How can you get involved in supporting those policy decisions?

How comfortable are you helping youth advocate for their needs? How can you build  
confidence and skills in this area?

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Photo Credit: NASA, ESA, and G. Bacon (STScI). Accessed via <http://hubbleite.org>

# Continuous Program Improvement

CONTINUOUS PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT

# WHY CPI?

## CONTINUOUS PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT

**We want great outcomes for youth.  
And great outcomes result from program quality.**

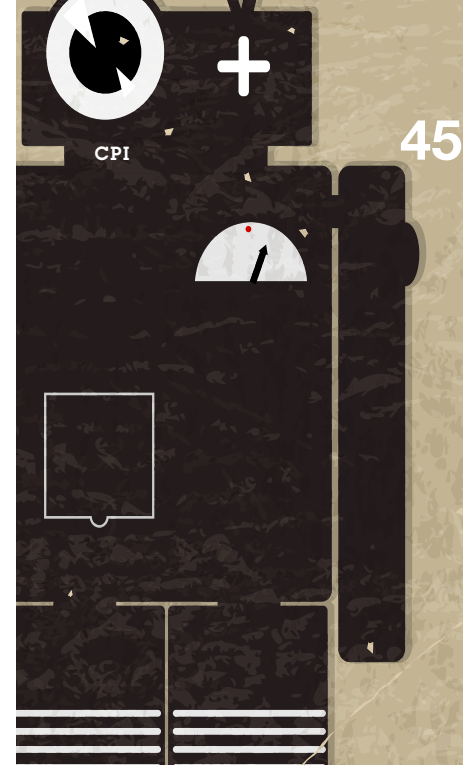
There's good news: It is possible to identify quality. Both research and practice have a lot of agreement about what makes a high quality program. The Building Blocks section of this guide helps define common hallmarks of quality that work across a broad array of programs.

But knowing what goes into quality programs is not enough. We must also be intentional about continuously improving our practices to ensure our programs are of the highest quality.

The Continuous Program Improvement cycle isn't meant to imply that our programs will never be "good enough." Rather it recognizes that program quality is not an end goal that we can check off our to-do list and set aside. Just as a garden needs continual tending to flourish, we need to continually nurture quality. CPI is a process to help us do this tending.

When programs commit to CPI, they systematically and intentionally evaluate and improve their program practices. They recognize that just as the needs of the young people they serve are always changing, so must programs change in order to best meet those needs. Programs engaged in CPI proactively make modifications and are guided by the belief that there is always room for improvement to increase quality.

The best reason for CPI is simple: better programs mean better outcomes for youth. By following the ongoing four-step cycle of **PLAN-DO-CHECK-ADJUST**, we can keep our programs dynamic, relevant, and — best of all — high quality.



IMPROVEMENT TIP >

Try doing a CPI cycle with each Building Block individually or pull specific elements from across multiple building blocks. **What you learn might surprise you!**



### NEED HELP?

We've got more tools to guide your CPI process online:

**www.  
igniteafterschool.  
org/bibi/cpi**

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# Notes

## CPI STEP ONE: **PLAN**

### WHY PLAN?

In order for young people to be positively impacted by your program, you must first identify goals and outcomes. The easier your program plan and goals are to understand, the better.

### HOW TO PLAN:

- Identify strategies and activities to meet program goals (use the Building Blocks!)
- Identify measurement benchmarks and tools — what will success in each area look like?
- Determine the resources needed to support the plan (e.g. professional development, financial)

### THERE ARE TWO KINDS OF PLANNING!

There's your **program plan**, and your **CPI plan**. Try one round of CPI over the course of one program cycle (you decide if that's one semester, one school year, one school year plus summer, etc.) Follow the natural timeline of your program, but don't be afraid to do "mini-reflections" and make adjustments on the go. It could be as simple as adding feedback loops and reflection to regularly scheduled staff meetings!

PLANNING TIP >

Select a few effective practices from the Building Blocks that you want to work on over the course of your program. Which Building Blocks will most help you meet your goals? If you're not sure, use the Intentional Design Building Block to create a program plan that ties program goals to youth needs and interests as a first step.

### NEED HELP?

We've got more tools to guide your CPI process online:

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# Notes

## CPI STEP TWO: DO

### WHY DO?

Now you have a clear vision for positively impacting young people, it's time to implement the plan and give it your best shot! Be sure to monitor and record your progress along the way. Collect data and feedback that will help with the next step.

### HOW TO DO:

- Implement Plan
- Collect data about program that aligns with measurement benchmarks
- Invite feedback throughout implementation

### THE MORE YOU DO, THE BETTER YOU GET:

As CPI becomes more and more embedded in the culture of your program, you start to develop a shared understanding and recognition of quality. And once you know what quality looks like, it becomes easier and more natural to **do it well!**

#### DOING TIP>

When first starting out, implementation may be mostly staff driven. Prepare staff to celebrate and embrace change. Some program elements that are staff favorites may need to be adjusted if the CPI suggests they're not working. Keep focused on the big picture — making positive program changes makes a direct positive impact on youth!

### NEED HELP?

We've got more tools to guide your CPI process online:

[www.igniteafterschool.org/bibi/cpi](http://www.igniteafterschool.org/bibi/cpi)

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# Notes

## CPI STEP THREE: **CHECK**

### WHY CHECK?

Quite simply, to see if your plan is working. This is the step where you compare results against goals to identify program improvements and adjustments.

### HOW TO CHECK:

- Compare what is happening against your plan — what's working? What's not?
- Analyze and interpret data against plan
- Take time to reflect...and to celebrate your success!

### HOW OFTEN TO CHECK?

How often should you check your progress against plan? Back in CPI Step One, PLAN, you determined if your CPI timeline is one semester, one school year, etc. The first CHECK should occur about half way through that timeline. Make sure your data sources — attendance data, pre/post assessments, etc. — fit this timeline. You have time to adjust before your program is done! Then, CHECK again at the end of your timeline. Now you'll have "results" from a full CPI cycle that you can use to inform your next program plan and CPI plan.

#### CHECKING TIP >

Use the Guided Reflection Questions on page 29 of this guide to help spark meaningful and productive conversations with staff, partners and other stakeholders.

### NEED HELP?

We've got more tools to guide your CPI process online:

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# Notes

## CPI STEP FOUR: **ADJUST**

### WHY ADJUST?

It's time to adopt new practices and eliminate those that aren't working. It's all about making programs the best they can be for the young people you serve. Then, start the cycle again, with a new round of **PLAN-DO-CHECK-ADJUST**.

### HOW TO ADJUST:

- Identify causes for what is/isn't working well
- Identify trainings, professional development and supports needed
- Make an improvement plan and then implement changes

### BE REALISTIC AND ASPIRATIONAL:

Be sure adjustments are realistic, both what you hope to change and the number of changes you plan to make. Do you have the resources to tackle these adjustments? This might be a great time to engage additional stakeholders like youth and board members to help you prioritize. Think in terms of "easy wins and stretch goals". Note which changes can be made over the short term and which will need more time.

#### ADJUSTING TIP >

After every CPI, reflect: What did you learn about the CPI process and how can that inform your next CPI? Will you try a different timeline? Examine different building blocks? Engage different stakeholders?

### NEED HELP?

We've got more tools to guide your CPI process online:

[www.igniteafterschool.org/bibi/cpi](http://www.igniteafterschool.org/bibi/cpi)

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BELIEVE IT. BUILD IT.

## Guided Reflection

GUIDED REFLECTION

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# Guided Reflection

Each Building Block is designed to help spark questions, ideas and conversations that will lead to program tweaks, recalibrations and ultimately, improvement. This Guided Reflection is just one more tool to help your team take the next step in the Continuous Program Improvement process.

**For each Building Block, consider:**

What are we currently doing?

Is it what we want to be doing?

What could/should we be doing but we're not?

Who else should we talk to about this? (for partnership, input, support, etc.)

OVER

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# Guided Reflection

**For each Building Block, consider:**

What surprised you most about how your program is connecting to a Building Block?

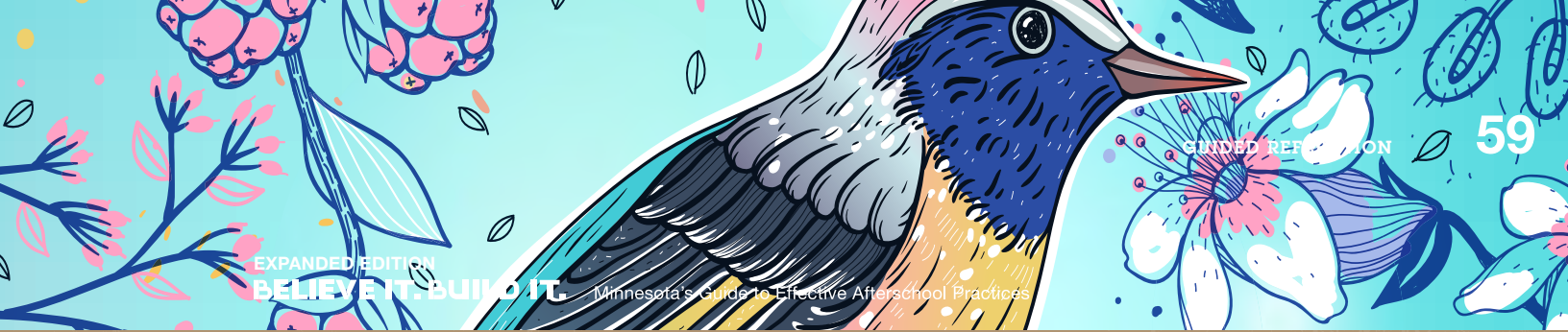
Did you find any areas where you aren't aligned with a Building Block?  
Did that surprise you?

What are the barriers to what we want to accomplish?

What are our strengths in the areas that are working well?

OVER

# Notes



# Guided Reflection

**For each Building Block, consider:**

What are the easy first steps we can take to improve our program?

What are some of the more difficult changes that we need to consider?

Do we need additional (or different) resources from what we have now to make these changes?

What new questions do we have now that we didn't have before?

# Notes



# Acknowledgments & Resources

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS & RESOURCES

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## A great big thanks

The BELIEVE IT. BUILD IT. guide is the culmination of many individuals who came together to share their deep knowledge and profound experiences in youth work. The Design and Concept Team informed the guide's preliminary content and structure, then Ignite Afterschool network partners convened 13 Regional Input Sessions to involve the afterschool community from all corners of the state in shaping the final guide. We are grateful to these individuals and organizations for generously contributing their wisdom, their time, and their passion to help afterschool providers best serve Minnesota's young people. We gratefully acknowledge:

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OVER

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- Greater Twin Cities United Way
- Itasca Networks for Youth
- Minneapolis Youth Coordinating Board
- Minnesota Association for the Education of Young Children and the Minnesota School-Age Care Alliance (MnAEYC-MnSACA)
- Northland Foundation
- PACT for Families Collaborative
- Rochester Area Youth Programs Network
- Sprockets
- University of Minnesota Extension Center for Youth Development — Moorhead Regional Office

**Ignite Afterschool's Professional Development and Quality Committee Members:**

- Brandi Olson, Brandi Olson Consulting
- Deborah Moore, University of Minnesota Youth Work Learning Lab
- Eric Billiet, Minnesota Department of Education
- Hayley Tompkins, Minneapolis Beacons Network
- Heidi Pope, Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board
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## A whole lot of research

The ideas and practices outlined in the BELIEVE IT. BUILD IT. guide are solidly based on some of the most important research currently guiding the field of afterschool. These sources include:

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## And inspiration from our peers

The ideas in the BELIEVE IT. BUILD IT. guide were inspired by the work of other statewide afterschool networks and program providers that have gone before us in creating a shared set of beliefs and best practices for their stakeholders. We are grateful for the inspiration that we found in the following guidebooks:

- A Field Guide to Best Practices and Indicators for Out-of-School Time Programs in the District of Columbia
- Georgia Afterschool Quality Standards
- Minnesota School Age Core Competencies First Edition, February 2006
- Quality Guidelines for Ohio's Afterschool Programs
- Quality Standards for Afterschool and Youth Development Programs: Washington State
- Utah Afterschool Quality Standards
- YMCA of the Greater Twin Cities Youth Programs Quality Infrastructure Tool

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