NAEYC Academy for Early Childhood Program Accreditation
**Criteria Review—Discussion Guide**

A Consideration of Lessons Learned and a Vision for Continued Success

Thank you for your willingness to lead a discussion on NAEYC Early Childhood Program Accreditation. This guide is designed to facilitate conversations to inform a review of the accreditation process. The review is part of our planned, periodic updates to the NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria and the accreditation system. This review process ensures that these statements of best practice remain the gold standard in early childhood education and that the system for seeking and maintaining NAEYC Accreditation is a meaningful tool for program quality improvement.

The review process includes two distinct steps. The first step is to reaffirm the 10 Early Childhood Program Standards as essential elements of quality and the Accreditation Criteria as comprehensive statements of best practice defining each element. These discussion groups are one of the primary vehicles for collecting feedback on the standards and criteria as statements of best practice. This review reflects NAEYC's continued commitment to convene diverse perspectives to capture cutting-edge knowledge from research and practice. The review is also an opportunity to consider adjustments to the process of NAEYC Accreditation in order to better meet the needs of early childhood programs.

The second step will build upon the results of the initial review to identify specific measurable characteristics that reflect a program's effective implementation of the statements of best practice within the criteria. This is a new approach to the assessment process. The current approach uses subsets of criteria as predictors of performance for each standard. Although programs are assessed only on the subsets, they are expected to be prepared to be assessed on any of the current 400-plus criteria. The new approach will identify a smaller subset of measurable items, likely pulled from across all criteria. Programs will demonstrate their capacity to meet and maintain the 10 standards, and their understanding of all criteria, by preparing to be assessed on this smaller set of measurable items, using sources of evidence that include observation, documentation, and surveys of key stakeholders.

The two illustrations below depict these two distinct aspects: statements of best practice and assessment tools.
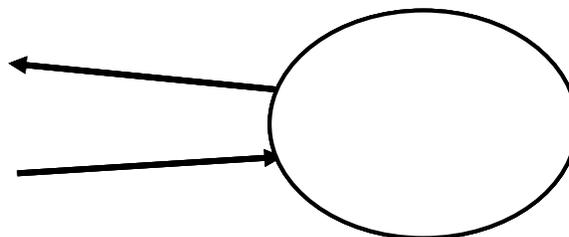
The feedback collected as part of these feedback forums will inform the revisions to be considered by the NAEYC Council for Accreditation for recommendation and approval by the NAEYC Governing Board. This guide presents a number of core questions that can be presented and discussed in a one-and-a-half-hour time period. The discussion questions include several "straw polls" created to obtain quantitative data, as well as open-ended questions to capture the full range of thoughts and perceptions of the participants. Additionally, we are asking participants to answer a few questions related to their role in the early childhood community, allowing us to ensure that the myriad of voices in our field are heard.

We are asking you, as a discussion leader, to collect the data and return it to NAEYC headquarters no later than **August 16, 2010.** We have designed a set of data collection forms for you to use during these discussions. Several options for returning the data to the NAEYC Academy are outlined in the *returning data collection form* section of this document.

Goals and Tasks

To set the foundation for these discussions, we have developed goals and key tasks for the criteria revision process. The goals have been identified based on feedback from programs, other consumers of NAEYC Accreditation, and through NAEYC's experience in implementing the "reinvented" process over the past three years.

Revision Goals

- ✓ Streamline criteria and process.
- ✓ Reflect current research and practice knowledge.
- ✓ Continue as the mark of excellence.
- ✓ Make assessment more transparent.
- ✓ Ensure that the process is rigorous but not burdensome.

Key Tasks

- ✓ Reaffirm the 10 Early Childhood Standards.
- ✓ Review the Accreditation Criteria in terms of their organization and their reflection of current research and practice knowledge.
- ✓ Recognize the importance of the criteria as conceptual tools that define expectations of effective practice within each standard and based on these statements design a smaller set of indicators that will comprise the assessment of programs.
- ✓ Review the current assessment process to be sure that the underlying principles that guide the process and the specific tools and measures are appropriate.
    - o Review of candidacy requirements
    - o Review of sources of evidence
    - o Review of staff qualifications

Involving consumers of NAEYC Accreditation at the community level in identifying key areas of improvement is a priority, and the discussion you are leading is one of the main sources for collecting that information.

Discussion Guide

This guide first highlights the most salient, global questions. Some discussion leaders may find the more detailed questions listed later on in the document helpful in initiating discussion. Considering the time available and the context of the group, use your discretion when determining what questions you would like to pose. Any data returned will be reviewed; there is no requirement to answer or ask all of the questions!

Encourage participants to speak from their perspective and current level of understanding. Some people may not have firsthand experience with NAEYC Accreditation—and that is OK. Their interest in participating is all that is required. The discussions are just that—discussions; do not worry about correcting misperceptions. Instead, if questions or inaccuracies become apparent, provide participants with the list of NAEYC resources. This handout and other resources that may be helpful for the discussion can be found in TORCH, Resource Library, folder 8, Criteria Review. We have also included a place in the data collection forms for you to provide contact information for participants who would like specific follow-up from NAEYC. Encouraging participants to contact NAEYC directly when there are specific questions is an important message to share with participants at the beginning of your session. We also encourage you to set group ground rules to also guide your interactions.

To assist you in the discussions, a companion PowerPoint presentation organized in the same order as the following questions has been developed. Talking points are incorporated into the notes section of the PowerPoint and will also be helpful in describing the intent of these discussions and the goals of the criteria review. A copy of the discussion guide companion presentation with the corresponding notes has been included in TORCH, Resource Library, folder 8, Criteria Review.

In preparation for your discussion, here are a few tips for successful facilitation:

- Set a few discussion ground rules to guide the interactions of the group.
- Plan some time for introductions to make sure everybody has the opportunity to share their role in early education and express their reason for participating in the discussion group.
- Assign a note taker, someone to assist in capturing information shared by the group. It may be helpful for this person to follow along and take notes directly on the posted data forms.

To better understand the context from which participants are sharing their feedback, we have selected several variables on which to gather information. These variables are listed on the data collection form and include role in the early childhood community, experience with NAEYC Accreditation (new vs. reaccredited), and characteristics of the

community in which participants work. In addition to collecting numerical totals, provide a description of the group—for example, participants may have expertise in working with dual-language learning, special needs, or other areas

Overall Reflections

1. What is the best thing about NAEYC Accreditation in its current form?
2. What is the thing you most want to see modified in the review process?
3. If you had to grade (A-F) the NAEYC Academy for Early Childhood Program Accreditation on
   - its implementation of the four-step process, what would it be?
   - its use as a process for program quality improvement, what would it be?
   - its framework of best practice in early childhood education, what would it be?

NAEYC Accreditation and Your Community

1. In your state, are there community initiatives that align well with NAEYC Accreditation?
   - Are there redundancies between the systems?
2. In your state, are there community initiatives that have conflicting requirements?
3. Are there program stakeholders that, considering their context, find NAEYC Accreditation difficult?
4. What, if any, advancements in early childhood professional development systems have occurred since the NAEYC Standards and criteria were last revised?
5. Are the NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards relevant to the diverse populations of families and children served in early childhood programs?
6. What enhancements are needed to ensure the standards and criteria are a valid framework for all children?

NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards

1. Do these global statements of quality still resonate and capture the core elements of high- quality programs?

Note for facilitator: Feedback on the specific language and organization of the Standards, Topic Areas, and Criteria should be noted individually to gather concrete

information. Please refer to the Criteria Suggestions/Revision form, which can be accessed in TORCH/Criteria Feedback.

Sources of Evidence
Questions designed to elicit feedback about the perceived validity of the NAEYC assessment process

1. Do the classroom portfolios encourage reflective practice?
2. Does the preparation of the program portfolio encourage the development of stronger policies?
3. Does the program portfolio result in clearer communication of policies and procedures with staff?
4. Does the program portfolio result in clearer communication of policies and procedures with families?
5. Are the staff surveys a useful tool for measuring staff knowledge?
6. Are the parent surveys a useful tool for measuring parent knowledge?
7. Are there additional sources of evidence we should include as part of the assessment?
8. What source of evidence is the best representation/example of your program?

The Four-Step Process
Questions designed to elicit specific feedback about the efficiency, value and clarity of each step of the NAEYC Accreditation process

Step 1—Enrollment. Step 1 provides programs the opportunity to engage in self-study and quality improvement, using the NAEYC Standards and Criteria, without making a formal commitment to the accreditation process.

1. What do you see as the most important part of the self-study process?
   Note for facilitator: Some programs find the literature reviews/research to support best practices helpful in advocating for improved practice, others find the discussions with staff about the process and how it relates to their day-to-day practice most useful, and so on.
2. Can you identify information or tools that would enrich the self-study process?

Step 2—Application. Step 2 marks a program's formal commitment to seek NAEYC Accreditation and requires programs to select a timeframe for a site visit and to complete a formal self-assessment documenting its performance of the standards and criteria.

1. Do you see a distinction between tasks conducted as part of the self-assessment and those conducted as part of self-study?
2. What do you see as the most important part of the Application/self-assessment process and why?

Step 3—Candidacy. Candidacy provides an assessment of a program's readiness to successfully achieve NAEYC Accreditation and demonstrates that the program meets baseline requirements for staff qualifications when those criteria are not met.

> *Note for facilitator: The companion PowerPoint presentation outlines the candidacy requirements for reference. Additionally, the overview for Candidacy requirements for educational qualifications/definitions of equivalencies can be found in TORCH, Resource Library, folder 8, Criteria Review.*

1. Are the staff qualifications evaluated at candidacy achievable?
2. Are there staff roles in addition to the director, teachers, and assistant teachers that should be included as part of the assessment of staff qualifications?
   Note to facilitator: Education coordinators, family outreach specialists, and other professionals often assist programs in achieving high-quality programming. Should they be included as part of the qualification review?
3. What is useful for programs about Step3—Candidacy?

Step 4—Site Visit.

1. Do you have confidence that site-visit assessments are conducted reliably and consistently whenever or wherever the assessment occurs?
2. Does the site-visit capture the major components of your program? Are there parts of your program that you would like to see added to the assessment?
3. NAEYC recognizes the limitation of the current NAEYC Accreditation Decision Report and will be modifying the report along with creating the assessment tools. What information do you want to see included in the decision report to programs?

Step 4—Maintaining.

1. Does the annual report to NAEYC assist your program in the process of continuous quality improvement?
2. What strategies would you like to see NAEYC implement to encourage programs in maintaining the mark of quality throughout their term of accreditation?
3. What changes need to be made to this step and why?

Assessment Categories

1. Do the assessment categories help program staff prioritize preparation tasks for the site visit?
2. Do the Required Criteria seem fair and reasonable?
3. What other mechanisms would you suggest to distinguish criteria, or not?
4. Do the practices outlined in Emerging Criteria seem more achievable now than when first presented in 2006?

NAEYC Accreditation Support Resources

During the discussions it may come to light that some of the participants have not had the opportunity to access all of the available NAEYC resources to assist programs. Additionally, some questions specific to individual programs can arise that may require discussion with NAEYC staff. To assist individuals seeking clarification, please print a copy of the posted resources included in TORCH, Resource Library, folder 8, Criteria Review.

These resources include

- Criteria Review—Discussion Guide PowerPoint presentation to assist in discussion facilitation
- Overview of steps to achieve NAEYC Accreditation/program requirements for each step of accreditation
- Candidacy requirements for educational qualifications/definitions of equivalencies
- 10 Early Childhood Program Standards rationale/NAEYC Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria sources of evidence

- Required criteria for NAEYC Accreditation
- TORCH flyer
- Accreditation Program Support resource flyer

Data Collection Form

The data collection forms are designed to ensure that information is collected in a way that it can be easily organized for meaningful review. For each group discussion, please complete one data collection form. The form is available in TORCH, Resource Library, folder 8, Criteria Review. Data can be entered online directly in Survey Monkey (see instructions in the Criteria Review folder in TORCH), mailed, faxed, or emailed to the NAEYC Academy. Instructions on how to complete the form and instructions for returning the information to the NAEYC Academy are on the form itself. If questions arise before, during, or after the discussions, please give us a call at 800-424-2460, ext. 3, ext. 1 and let the information coordinator know that you are calling with questions related to the Criteria Review Discussion Guide.

In conclusion, the review process is a critical component to providing a comprehensive framework for quality improvement in early childhood programs. Our intent is to revise the conceptual framework underlying the accreditation assessment process. Under the current framework, subsets of criteria have been identified that predict performance of each standard. Programs are assessed on a subset of criteria, but are expected to be prepared to be assessed on any criteria. Under the revised conceptual framework, we will identify a smaller set of measurable indicators that, based on analysis of program performance, are determined to predict effective performance across all standards and criteria. Programs will demonstrate their capacity to meet and maintain the 10 standards, and their understanding of all criteria, by preparing to be assessed on this smaller set of measurable items, using sources of evidence that include observation, documentation, and surveys of key stakeholders.

Thank you for your contributions to this review. Please look for NAEYC Accreditation e-updates to see how the process is progressing!