

Afterschool Programs in Your Community, Funding and Collaboration

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An estimated eight million school age children between the ages of 5 and 14, go home to an empty house. Statistics reveal that most juvenile crime is committed between the hours of 2:00 pm and 8:00 pm, with the crime rate tripling in the first hour after school is out. Ninety-four percent of Americans believe that school-age children need structured activities during afterschool hours, and 67 percent of Americans are ready to forego a tax cut to provide children with quality afterschool programs. Afterschool programs provide an opportunity for children to interact, improve academic and social development skills, and afford many children a safe haven "to be children."

Afterschool programs should reflect the need in the various neighborhoods of your community. Some programs are targeted to at-risk students while others are open to all children. Some are designed primarily as recreational safe havens while others have strong academic components. Some may serve students a few hours after school and others extend the school day from 6:00 am to 6:00 pm.

Before embarking on a program, find out what's already happening in your community. You can easily develop a picture of afterschool opportunities by contacting your local school district, United Way and other community groups about information they have collected. This information may then be used to survey local agencies for baseline data on the number of programs, the neighborhoods being served, services provided, and the number of children being served. Locating current programs on a city/county map and reviewing the distribution across neighborhoods may reveal unmet needs and possible duplication of efforts. Compare this information to academic achievement and juvenile crime in the neighborhoods identified, and you now have a guide for future decisions about where to target programs for maximum impact. This baseline data will also help in evaluations for further funding.

Low salaries and limited hours may contribute to frequent staff turnover at afterschool programs. Supplementing paid staff with volunteers may help. Seek involvement from local mentoring programs, college service learning programs, churches and faith based organizations, older youth, and senior citizen centers. Some municipalities provide free shuttle service between senior centers and the schools to address the transportation issue.

Increased access to afterschool programs is a key to success. After identifying underserved areas of the community, target grants financed through city partnerships with community foundations or local businesses. Parks and recreation departments can open their facilities to community groups willing to offer afterschool programs.

Transportation may be the most challenging aspect of the program. Metropolitan areas may negotiate to offer free or reduced fare on buses. Local government officials in some areas have helped to identify central locations for afterschool programs so that parents/guardians have easier access to pick up children at the end of the day. The city then supported the program by providing minibus transportation to and from program sites. You may have local agencies which provide transportation for their clients that are willing to work with your coalition in providing transportation during the hours they are not busy with clients.

Involve leaders from identified neighborhoods early in the process. This involvement serves to broaden access for diverse populations, including identifying potential staff, curriculum, and activities that reflect cultural traditions.

Municipal leaders can be strong advocates for increased funding levels to be sure their localities receive their share of state/federal funding. Mayors and city council members can be advocates for administering funds locally, since they are in the best position to work with schools and community organizations to build afterschool systems. Areas that secure state and/or federal funding and build a strong local funding base are better positioned for long term success. A system of shared responsibility will demonstrate broad support and may serve to leverage additional support from federal/state/local and private sources.

School districts, youth development organizations, municipal governments, and community based organizations can all work together to make the best possible afterschool experiences for youth. Promoting partnerships demonstrates a broad support base for afterschool initiatives and makes it more attractive to potential funders.

Join forces with community supporters of afterschool programs to heighten awareness by using easily recognizable names, slogans and logos that reinforce your campaign message. Coalitions underscore the depth of community support and help keep citizens updated and involved in community efforts.

Children who attend an afterschool program miss fewer days of school, exhibit improved behavior in school, complete their homework more regularly, and earn higher test scores. Parents report they are able to work more hours and maintain more flexible schedules. Students who spend one to four hours per week in extracurricular activities are 51 percent less likely to use drugs, and 63 percent less likely to become teen parents than students who do not participate (Adolescent Time Use, Risky Behavior and Outcomes, U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, 1995).

Access and Collaboration:

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) initiative has been the primary federal response to the well documented need for quality after school care. The program encouraged school districts to partner with community based organizations, which include youth development organizations. Participants found that the two collaborative entities may not always work well together.

A study conducted by the National Assembly of Health & Human Service Organizations identified best practices regarding school/community collaboration in afterschool programs. The study included a literature review; an “Obstacles Survey” of school and community partner participants of 21st CCLC Summer Institute; a mail survey of the first 100 21st CCLC afterschool projects; phone interviews with key informants from selected projects perceived to be successful by both school and community partners; and site visits to 21st CCLC projects identified from surveys and phone interviews.

Some of the obstacles identified included:

- Each partner had a different focus on what children need after school.
- A huge difference in salaries between staff of community based organizations and school district staff.
- The use of school facilities.
- The need for one partner to take credit for work done by all partners.
- Differences in accountability between community based agencies and school districts.
- How to sustain the programs after 21st CCLC funding is expended.

Conclusions included:

- Establish a clear consensus of what is to be achieved among members of the collaboration. Each member should consider the time and effort possible to accomplish the goals, and the other responsibilities each partner has outside of the collaboration.
- Decentralize decision making to individual schools regarding how to balance after school programs between academic and youth development. This was best accomplished by creating site-based committees to balance youth development and academic activities, and funding a site based coordinator responsible for managing day to day involvement of partners.
- Regular and open discussion between partners, and development of relationships between partners was at the heart of the projects examined.
- Identify specific measures of success.
- Negotiate Letters of Agreement between schools and community organizations, and clearly define roles, responsibilities and expectations of each partner.
- Develop a clear timeline with measurable milestones.
- Make decisions about the use of school facilities as a group.
- Share in-kind resources.
- Participate in training on collaboration.
- Conduct on-going training and discussion meetings for partners.

Afterschool programs are not a “stand alone” component in youth development programming, but serve as a fundamental delivery mode in our hectic society. What we do in afterschool programming, as in all of our 4-H youth development programming, should follow the key concepts outlined in the Local/State/National Conversation on Youth Development, conducted during 2002. The items outlined above do support the key results of the conversation process.

Key elements of the Local/State/National Conversation on Youth Development:

- Empower youth as partners in creating policy and decision-making, at all levels.
- Increase access to positive youth development programs by ALL youth.
- Encourage collaboration between public schools and youth development organizations.
- Establish safe and inviting environments for youth development opportunities.
- Strengthen the profession of youth development.

Sources:

National Assembly of Health & Human Service Organizations, www.nassembly.org
National League of Cities’ Institute for Youth, Education and Families, 2003, “Action Kit for Municipal Leaders.”

Noam, G. G. and Miller, B. M. 2002. New Directions for Youth Development, No. 94 (Summer), “Youth Development and Afterschool Time: A Tale of Many Cities.”

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