

Strategies for Success:

Build a Model

In building an after-school program, both partners have resources and strengths to bring to the table. Establishing a successful model requires partners to find ways to integrate their assets so that, when added together, both partners can accomplish goals that could not be achieved apart from each other. While developing your after-school model, keep in mind these suggestions from experienced partnerships.

“I think this would be impossible for schools to try to do this on their own. Teachers are tired and ready to go home. CBOs can offer an array of programming that students wouldn’t get otherwise.”

Find out what CBOs have to offer.

It may sound simple, but it’s an effective strategy: The best way to find out what assets community-based organization can bring to the after-school program is to ask...and to listen to what they say. This may open up areas of partnership that you didn’t originally envision. Once the CBO has identified their resources, materials, services and experience, you can assess ways and formulate plans that best respond to the needs and strengths of the youth.

Build on existing models.

You don’t have to start at ground zero. As part of doing your homework, you’ve spent time reviewing models that work. In creating your own, focus on successful school-community partnerships that already exist and integrate elements that concentrate on academics, services, supports or opportunities that you feel will lead to improvements for young people.

Emphasize your assets.

When meeting with your CBO partner, highlight the resources and assets you will bring to the after-school program, such as safe facility, infrastructure, experience and the young people themselves.

Identify challenges.

Just as it's important to share the school's resources, it is equally as important to talk about some of the barriers and challenges affecting your school. Your school may be understaffed, for example. Some CBO partners provide additional "hands and eyes" during critical activities such as recess, when this has been identified as a specific need.

Discuss expectations.

In the excitement of developing an after-school program to benefit children and youth, it may be tempting to focus on "fixing" or becoming the solution to the problems. Partners should take into account and agree that major change cannot happen over night. Be careful, as you are building your model, not to promise or expect too much, too soon. Instead, be clear about your intent and outline the model in a systematic way that defines how each piece of the program works toward achieving state objectives.

Make the right connections.

Experienced partners stress that establishing a good relationship with all levels of the partnership is vital to the success of the after-school program. Principals should focus on building a good rapport with the organization's executive director, as well as those who will be working on-site on a day-to-day basis. Be prepared to interact with and establish relationships with the parents as well. Maintaining the support and trust of parents is also crucial to the program's success. Even though the program is after-school, parents often won't make that distinction when it's operating at the school site.

"Anytime, you're using somebody else's space, you know you've got to have those relationships."

Consider both sides.

There may be areas – education, structure, discipline and facility use – that will require partners to be sensitive to other perspectives. Consider and acknowledge the experience each partner brings with them and utilize their expertise to achieve the overall mission.

"When we look at our low performance group, we know that you cannot teach all kids the same way. So it has to be manipulatives — things that are developed so that you can incorporate fun into the academic piece. And I know there are community-based groups that can do that." —*State Education Agency*