

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 is needed.

You can maximize the assets and resources you bring to the partnership by first finding out which obstacles and challenges are affecting your school partner. It may sound simple, but it’s an effective strategy: The best way to find out what a school needs is to ask...and to listen to what they say. This may open up areas of partnership that you didn’t originally envision. But once the superintendent or school principal has identified problem areas as well as opportunities, 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 improved learning for youth attending schools in your community.

Emphasize your assets.

When meeting with your school partner, highlight the resources, materials and services you will bring to the after-school program. Schools often view after-school activities at their site as an extension of what goes on during the day. Think about the academic enrichment activities that will support the work teachers are doing in the classroom and discuss how these activities will complement the school's curriculum. Some out-of-school-time programs include helping out at recess. Stress the additional "hands and eyes" that will be available to fill in at understaffed schools. Be sure to point out the experience your organization has with this youth population and demonstrate how you meet the needs.

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 stated objectives.

Make the right connections.

Experienced partners stress that establishing and maintaining a good relationship with the principal from the outset is vital to the success of the after-school program. The principal's continued support, increases the chances of building and maintaining consensus among the teachers and staff. Focus also on developing a good rapport with all levels of the partnership including superintendents and school boards, as well as those you may be working with on a day-to-day basis —teachers, custodians and kitchen staff.

"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. Remember, school partners are bound by state mandates and will ultimately be held accountable.