

Strategies for Success:

Develop the Proposal

From the beginning to the end, partners should view the grant application process with the mindset that this is a partnership-building opportunity in and of itself. Sharing responsibility for the development of the grant proposal is an extension of schools and community-based organizations learning how to be equal partners. Here are some practical tips to guide you along the way:

Focus on the Youth.

Plan before you write! As you begin preparing to write the proposal, start from the perspective of the population that will most be affected — the youth. Get input from youth. Research and choose key programs that clearly meet the identified needs of the young people.

Form a Committee.

Start your partnership off on the right foot. In preparing to write the proposal, put together a planning committee, made up of the community-based organization staff along with teachers, the superintendent, the principal, youth and school board members. A committee will give partners an opportunity to brainstorm and hear perspectives from multiple sides. Also, be prepared to have everyone review the narrative.

Invite Key Partners.

Experience shows that having the right people, such as the superintendent and CBO Executive Director, at the table is critical. This may require partners to use their connections and influence to get the key people involved. Here's the ideal opportunity to involve youth.

Do Background Work.

Successful grantees often invest time talking to others who have already gone through the process. Before delving into the proposal writing, take advantage of experienced partnerships. Schools and CBOs can learn from previous 21st CCLCs and incorporate helpful recommendations into their plan. Often, bidders conferences or workshops are held to address questions, concerns and requests for additional information. Be sure to attend these important sessions. Find out what success community-based organizations have had in attracting youth, serving hard to reach populations, enriching academics with a range of programming and truly making organizational partnerships effective.

Know the Standards.

If your state has determined a set of standards for after-school programs, be clear on what they are and use them in your application. With a little homework, you can make certain you know what the expectations are and avoid finding yourself in a “if only I had known” position.

Be Substantive.

Too often grant reviewers have to cut through a lot of fluff. Follow the Request For Proposal guidelines and be as substantive as possible in responding to the questions. Think carefully about your past experiences and identify the practices that were done well and those that were not done well in formulating your responses.

Include Evaluations.

Evaluations are one of the most critical elements to the grant application and are too often overlooked. If partners are not experienced in this area, consider finding some experts to help with the evaluation section such as the University Cooperative Extension System or the school district. Your planning committee can play a role in seeking consultation on outcome and process evaluation. Again, respond to the Request For Proposal.