

Strategies for Success:

Do Your Homework! Become an Expert

As partners begin to think about how community-based organizations (CBOs) and schools might better partner, information gathering becomes an integral first step. Examining data and trends will help determine the resources, strengths and needs of both the community and the school system. Below are some suggested approaches used by CBOs and schools to identify needed information and data.

- **View the school system's report card.**

Take a look at the external data and gather information about the schools, such as grades, state achievement test scores and attendance. The more knowledgeable you are about the needs of the schools, the better equipped you will be to identify the opportunities where your organization can link after-school activities that support shared goals.

- **Conduct or review a needs analysis.**

One way to effectively respond to the needs of children and youth is to include the community in the data collection process. Through a needs analysis, partners can identify important statistics and findings – drop out rates, test scores – that can be used in developing your after-school partnership.

- **Find recent articles on education issues.**

Additional information about trends in education can be found in local and national newspapers and education journals and newspapers, such as *Education Week*. Look for statistics that indicate trends in school success as well as those that identify gaps in achievement, nationally, in your state and in your local school district.

• **Review models that work.**

Schools and CBOs can get a lot of information just by finding out who is already doing the work. Tour other successful programs and interview 21st CCLC grantees to learn what strategies work and what has not worked. Another way to find out what others are doing is to subscribe to the Promising Practices in Afterschool Listserv at www.afterschool.org. Build your own list of best practices and use those as a guide for building your partnership model. By connecting with other community organizations you will also find out what resources already exist – curriculum programs, space, technical assistance – and are available for collaborative use.

• **Study school policies and procedures.**

While policies and procedures for CBOs often vary from site to site, public schools have guidelines mandated by state and local education agencies. Since you'll be working at the school site, become acquainted with the rules and regulations, such as building permits, security procedures, custodian union rules, dress code procedures, billing and payment policies. Consider too, that CBOs may have more freedom to discuss controversial topics (e.g., sex education, religion). Schools are not afforded that same liberty. You will want to be aware of these restrictions when planning your programs and to make sure your staff development reflects school policy.

• **Research 21st CCLC requirements in your state.**

Each state determines specific priorities for 21st CCLC funding. It is important to become familiar with those priorities and choose key programs that will directly address them. You should become familiar with how the 21st CCLC and other after-school funds are promoting academic achievement by supplementing and enhancing the schools' core instructional programs. Find out what additional forms you will need as well as the timeline for submitting your grant request. For state contacts and links to state applications, visit the U.S. Department of Education's Web site at <http://www.ed.gov/programs/21stcclc/applicant.html>.