

Strategies for Success:

Implement the Partnership

Once partners have received the funding, it's time to think through how to effectively manage the program, and how to best administer its resources. By now, you have nailed down the primary focus of the after-school programming. But there are still joint decisions that must be made in order to ensure the partnership accomplishes what it set out to do. Being accountable to the funders, each other and the children and youth will require careful thought about some key areas – fiscal responsibility, funding strategies, staff preparation and organizational structure, sustainability, space and program quality. Below are some recommendations from the field.

Fiscal Responsibility: Key Points to Consider

- Some CBOs, even when they have the option of being the fiscal agent, would rather the schools take that accountability since financial systems may differ dramatically between non-profit organizations and school system procedures.
- Whether the fiscal agent is the school or the CBO, decision-making on how the money is spent should be a shared responsibility between both partners. Based on the recommendations of schools and organizations that have created effective partnerships, creating a system for jointly deciding on how to allocate funds is crucial to being a true partnership.

Funding: Be a Good Steward

- Create a budget together and work at sticking to it. Consider everything that might cost such as transportation, snacks, and curriculum materials, educational and office supplies, computer technology, phone and fax, custodial services, insurance and teacher and staff salaries.
- Take into account ahead of time how reduced funding overtime could affect the program and anticipate problems by having a back up plan or possible solutions. Think about the minimum requirements to run an effective program and put them down on paper, in black and white. You'll know what you have to work with.
- Be sure to allocate some money for emergencies at each site, a program event or for an individual child who may suddenly have great needs (for example, extra scholarship, tutoring, food, etc.).

Staffing and Structure: Be Prepared and Organized

- Experience reveals there is a lot of responsibility to running an after-school program and that it takes more time and effort to do this in effective partnerships. Hire a full time director, whose sole responsibility it to run the after-school program.

“Everyone met the candidates. We didn’t decide as a school district or identify the site director for a program and then drop them in and say, ‘Here’s the new site director. This is who you are going to be working with.’” *–Local Education Agency*

- In *Principles for Effective Partnerships*, one of the steps – Stay Flexible – reminds partners that everything will not always go as planned. Be sure to hire staff and involve people who are comfortable with being flexible, and can easily handle change.
- Experienced school partners recommend that teachers and school staff work in partnership with community-based organizations to ensure fluidity between the school day and the after-school program. Remember, it’s the same youth and the same parents. Consider strategies that will promote an easy transition, such as student contracts that let the after-school program know what areas (academic, behavioral) the student is working on at school.
- Youth have been sitting in classrooms all day. When they come to the after-school program, make sure the activities – even that portion that focuses on academics – are different from the traditional classroom model. In order to keep young people engaged in learning, it is necessary to offer new approaches that build on the same skills.

“We do encourage the kids to have fun and learn, and see the differences in the structure you have during the school day and the structure you have in the day.” *– State Education Agency*

- Encourage more structure than necessary. It will be much simpler to decrease the level of structure with children than it will to increase it.
- A strategy that has proven successful for many partnerships is to hire staff from the school to work in the after-school program. Encourage school teachers to apply. This is another way to reinforce fluidity. Some organizations ensure that there is always a partnership in each activity that includes the expertise of the community-based organization and of the school system.
- Effective partnerships are ones where the principal participates and supports what happens after-school and the after-school staff spend time at the school during the day. This is one way to get to know each other and continue with team building. Find innovative ways to continue the “getting to know you” process.

- Professional development for all staff is integral to the success of the after-school program. Skills building opportunities where school and CBO staff participate together will enhance the partnership and their ability to work cohesively. And, of course, additional training provides a natural advantage to the young people who attend the after-school program.

“We’re trying to create classrooms and a community center that’s not necessarily set up as a school...there’s different expectation for the kids.” *–21st CCLC Grantee*

A Measure of Success: Promising Practices in Training

“We had individuals who actually have the community-based programs to come in and share the things they’re doing, because there are models.”

In North Carolina, a 21st CCLC site brought together teachers, teacher’s assistants, the community (members of the church including ministers), community based organization staff, parents, individuals from the Department of Public Instruction and math and reading specialists in a two-day training to learn from each other. During the engaging experience, the individuals were put into small, diverse groups to develop various curriculum activities that participants could take with them and use in their after-school program.

“We’re trying to make sure that we’re going to give students a sense of belonging, a sense of self-esteem, a sense of success. The success of one child is going to be different from the success of the other child. So, we want to be sure that we’re looking at individual needs, and trying to make sure their curriculum is lively and participatory.”

During one of the exercises, groups were charged with coming with various games to help the young people understand antonyms and synonyms. Out that one exercise, 50 different activities were born. In essence, the training created a “notebook,” inviting after-school staff to pull from it. The experience allowed for creativity and at the same time demonstrated to participants that they don’t have to reinvent the wheel.

“It was innovative and it was so much fun learning. The teachers got the message and picked up some really helpful hints.”

Sustainability: Plan for the Future

- If after-school programs are to continue beyond the life of the 21st CCLC grant, it will require partners to seek additional funding. Experienced partnerships have found that evaluations and outcomes are crucial to grant applications. Be sure to create a good evaluation process at the beginning and to think in terms of the multi-layers of the program. It will also be critical to include all the stakeholders in the formative evaluation, especially the instructors, the parents and youth.
- Because State or Local Education Agencies may not necessarily have a development department responsible for fundraising and proposal writing, it will be important for schools and the CBOs to look at innovative ways to increase the stream of funding. These could include food program assistance and fundraisers for scholarship for low-income youth.
- Some school-CBO partnerships are forming an educational foundation to become eligible for grants that only provide funds to non-profits. While the after-school program may be one of several purposes for the educational foundation, work to make it one of the major components.
- Some after-school partnerships have had doors open up to them once they became licensed by the state. A licensed program may be eligible to receive certain subsidies that they would otherwise not be allowed.
- From day one, a good publicity plan is a necessary strategy for making an after-school program sustainable. Everything your program does successfully offers an opportunity to send a positive message, and build recognition and support. One suggestion from a successful after-school partnership is to highlight the children who succeed at presentation to PTA and the school board and involve the funder in the experience. Invite potential funders, like CEOs of local businesses, to see the benefits to the young people and their future skills. Another idea is to provide a bulletin board for the after-school program so you can display and showcase students' work.

Program Quality: Aim High

- In building after-school programming, start with a clear mission. Is it to raise test scores, or improve teambuilding skills? Make certain the activities are developmentally appropriate and demonstrate that everything you've included has a purpose.
- A variety of activities that appeal to youth, integration of learning styles and lots of positive reinforcement are some of the key elements to a quality program. An effective partnership will create a program that makes young people feel cherished and successful.
- It takes effort, but successful partners know the importance of creating a program that young people view as special time for them, not as a negative invitation to be rehabilitated. Offer plenty of choices and incorporate lots of motivational incentives and rewards for the youth.
- Stay focused on the youth by creating ongoing feedback mechanisms, such as surveys, for the young people and their parents.

“My son is in a program that is less academic and largely focused on reinforcing his self-esteem as a promising, successful student. He loves it. I agree with the teacher when he said, ‘If he feels valued and his efforts are rewarded, the academics will come.’”

Strategies for Success: Mutually Beneficial

At one community-based organization, if youth in the program didn’t miss a day of school and went to the after-school program two days during the week, they received a perfect “report card” that could be turned in for a free trip to an amusement park or sporting event. The program, which began with 14 young people the first year, has grown to 600 youth. Since schools receive money based on attendance numbers, the schools saw the benefit and began working with this organization.