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# HOW TO START AN AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAM 10 THINGS TO CONSIDER

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SO YOU WANT  
TO START AN  
AFTERSCHOOL  
PROGRAM?

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## WHEN ORGANIZATIONS, SCHOOLS OR INDIVIDUALS DECIDE TO START AN AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAM IT IS OFTEN IN RESPONSE TO A COMMUNITY NEED.

Maybe you are a working parent who is having trouble finding a safe place for your child to go after school. You may be employed by juvenile justice or social services and have noticed an upward trend in the occurrence of youth crime and violence between the hours of 3:00 and 6:00 p.m.

Perhaps you volunteer in a youth-serving field like education, youth ministry or a community based organization and are realizing that there are not enough opportunities for the youth in your community after school.

Maybe you are a school day teacher who has noticed your students need access to technology afterschool to complete homework or learn digital skills.

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Whatever your reason for starting an Afterschool program, you should know that sometimes the general public may be unfamiliar with the proven results of Afterschool programs and might think of them only in the context of child care. However, research shows that high-quality Afterschool programs do more – they are proven solutions to community issues like workforce development, college readiness, truancy, food insecurity, youth crime and violence and social-emotional competency development. Citing years of surveys, data collection and

first-hand testimonials, research by organizations like the National Institute for Out-of-School Time (NIOST), The Mott Foundation, The Wallace Foundation, the Afterschool Alliance and more illustrate the effectiveness of Afterschool programs.

You should also know that the need for high-quality Afterschool programs far exceeds the demand. In fact, for every one young person in an Afterschool program there are two more who would attend one, if it were available. This statistic - along with all the research of the many proven outcomes – is why

NAA and our state affiliates believe that additional quality programs are desperately needed.

Starting an Afterschool program will be challenging... but rewarding! There are many things to consider. This guide, created in partnership with the Ohio Afterschool Network, is designed to be a starting point of things you might want to think about as you embark on your journey. Help and support are available through numerous online resources and membership organizations, like [NAA](#) and its [state affiliates](#).

**BEST OF LUCK TO YOU!**

# 10 CONSIDERATIONS WHEN OPENING A NEW AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAM

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01

**VARIETY** Afterschool programs vary widely in frequency, program length and content and demographics of young people served, among many other things. There is no one perfect way to run an Afterschool program, provided the young people are safe, both physically and emotionally, and your community needs are met. In fact, your unique spin on an Afterschool program can prove to be an asset when drawing staff, participants and community support.

However, one agreed upon over-arching principle among those of us in the field is that a continuous evaluation and improvement process is critical. High-quality Afterschool programs are those that meet the best practice criteria. **Read on:**

02

**QUALITY** Quality is defined as “the degree of excellence, as compared to other things of a similar kind.” High-quality Afterschool programs subscribe to best practices established by leading experts in the field, like the National Afterschool Association, its state affiliates, the PEAR Institute at Harvard, NIOST, the Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality and others. The established criteria for high-quality programs ensure youth safety, staff professionalism and the achievement of desired outcomes.

To build a high-quality Afterschool program, consider the needs of the families, community and youth you serve. Define the outcomes you want your program to reach. Figure out how you’ll know if you reach those outcomes. Then, start planning the activities that will help you get to where you want to go.



03

**POPULATION SERVED** The population you will serve should be one of your first considerations. What age group(s) will you serve? What student needs are you trying to address? Will your participants require that your program have a targeted focus for curriculum? What are the unique priorities or needs of the community, families, and young people? What languages and cultures are represented by your target population? Understanding the target population is a critical first step that will ensure you will meet the needs program participants, their family and their community.

# 04

**LICENSING** Some states require that programs for children and youth are licensed and in others it's either optional or not required. The NAA Affiliate in your state can help you find out more about these requirements. Becoming a licensed program has both benefits and challenges. Becoming licensed means that you will have the "seal of approval" of a quality program, access and support to an established continuous improvement system and opportunities for funding. However, licensing requirements aren't just suggestions; they are non-negotiable regulations. Take some time to read through the rules and gain a good understanding of them so that you are aware of expectations. Connect with your licensing agency to have any questions answered.

# 05

**PARTNERS** Creating strategic partnerships with other individuals or organizations can bring great value to your program. Partnerships can provide you with funding, with resources (like facility space or snacks), with staff or curriculum, or provide administrative support. A partner can also be the recipient of goods or services that your program creates. The best partnerships are those that have a benefit for both parties.

Keep in mind that a partner is not the same as a sub-contractor. A partner understands and shares your mission, is an ambassador for your program and can see the symbiosis in the partnership. Dollars may or may not change hands, depending on the partnership agreement. Partners frequently sign memorandums of understanding (MOUs) so that the expectations for all parties are clear and documented.



**FACILITY** Choose a space that meets the needs of your program. Depending on the population you serve and the focus of your program, consider the following:

## DEDICATED SPACE DURING PROGRAM HOURS

### LOCATION AND TRANSPORTATION

### BUILDING LAYOUT / ACCESSIBILITY TO PROGRAM SPACES

### RESTROOMS FOR STAFF AND YOUTH

### STORAGE FOR EQUIPMENT

### AMPLE SQUARE FOOTAGE FOR TYPICAL MOVEMENT

### AGE APPROPRIATE TABLES AND CHAIRS FOR HOMEWORK AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

### FLOOR SPACE FOR ACTIVITIES

### PHYSICAL ACTIVITY (GYM AND/OR PLAYGROUND) SPACE

### BUILDING SAFETY AND CONTROL OF PUBLIC ACCESS

### KITCHEN STORAGE FOR SNACKS OR MEALS

### WI-FI CAPABILITIES

### TUTORING ROOMS

### SECURE SPECIALTY EQUIPMENT STORAGE

**STAFF** Your Afterschool program staff are the foundation of your program. Regardless of whether they are paid or volunteer, all staff must have the knowledge, skills and abilities to effectively operate your Afterschool program. They must have the ability to interact professionally, communicate clearly and effectively lead young people and adults alike.

Because of the limited pay and weekly hours typically available and time of day in which Afterschool programs occur, many programs have success in recruiting and hiring teachers, high school or college students (especially those in education, social service or other youth-serving fields), stay-at-home parents of school-age children and retirees.

To gain an understanding of typical staff policies your program might need, consider asking to review an existing Afterschool program's staff policy handbook.

Connect with your NAA State Affiliate lead for introductions to existing afterschool programs in your state.



# 08

**CURRICULUM AND ACTIVITIES** Once young people arrive at the program, what will they do? Curriculum is the content that will be provided for your Afterschool program participants by the staff. Curriculum may range from a posted calendar of planned activities, to detailed lesson plans tied to a school district curriculum map. Communicating your curriculum to parents and staff helps with setting expectations and creating consistency. Depending on the focus of your Afterschool program, lessons might have an academic focus or a youth development focus. Some Afterschool programs have Curriculum or Education Directors designated to develop activities for the entire program; others have all the staff plan collaboratively. In tutoring programs, teachers will frequently plan their own class tutoring lessons, but collaborate on the group curriculum. Youth voice, having the young people plan and provide input, is also an important component of curriculum development.

**SAMPLE  
PROGRAM  
DAILY  
SCHEDULE**

**GREETING AND COMMUNITY BUILDING**

**PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**

**HEALTHY SNACK OR MEAL**

**HOMEWORK, TUTORING, OR ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES**

**YOUTH DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES**

# 09

**FUNDING** Sustainability depends on continuous funding, and finding money is challenging! Seeking grant dollars as a funding source can be time consuming, elusive and temporary. But still the number of Afterschool programs continue to grow. How can this be? It is through the tenacious and creative minds of Afterschool advocates who want to make a difference!

**You may already have an idea of how you will fund your program, but here are a few that some programs are using successfully:**

**CONSIDER CHARGING A FEE -EVEN A SMALL ONE- FOR PARTICIPATION  
(FREQUENTLY REFERRED TO AS "PARENT PAY")**

**IDENTIFY ORGANIZATIONS OR INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE LOOKING TO INVEST IN YOUTH  
AND THE COMMUNITY - SPECIFICALLY SOMEONE WHO SHARES YOUR VISION -  
AND MAKE A FINANCIAL REQUEST**

**BECOME A LICENSED PROGRAM AND RECEIVE SUBSIDY DOLLARS  
FOR ELIGIBLE FAMILIES**

**IF YOUR PROGRAM HAS A READING OR MATH ACADEMIC FOCUS, CONSIDER APPLYING  
FOR 21ST CENTURY COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTER GRANT FUNDING IN YOUR STATE**

**UTILIZE VOLUNTEERS FROM YOUR COMMUNITY TO REDUCE STAFF COSTS**

**BLEND FUNDING SOURCES - GRANTS, COMMUNITY RESOURCES, DONATIONS -  
TO HELP OFFSET COSTS**

# 10

**SUPPORT** What happens when you have a question about opening your Afterschool program that no one on your team can answer? When you want to see a sample of student file, or an evacuation plan, or a snack menu? Or when you just want to talk to someone who "gets it"? You're going to need support.

Join the National AfterSchool Association for inspiration, connections, and opportunities to learn and share. As a member, you will be part of a national movement and you'll find that many of us have been right where you are. If you are interested in local connections consider joining one of our state affiliates! Our community of members are eager to share resources and advice. We want you to be successful! **After all, your success means that a greater positive impact our nation's youth ... and that means everyone wins!**

