



Creating a Vision for Afterschool Partnerships



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Child Care Bureau





The Afterschool Investments Project

The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) provides federal resources for child care that support both direct services and quality enhancements. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Child Care Bureau awards CCDF grants to states, territories and Indian tribes. With nearly half of the children receiving services being of school or kindergarten age, CCDF provides significant funding for afterschool care in a variety of settings. The majority of CCDF dollars are used to provide subsidies to eligible low-income children under age 13. A portion of CCDF funding is also used for quality improvement initiatives such as professional development and technical assistance with the goal of building the capacity of states to deliver quality services including programs before and after-school, during summers and on school holidays.

To support state efforts to provide quality afterschool opportunities, the Child Care Bureau awarded a technical assistance contract on out-of-school time to The Finance Project and their partner, The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices. The Afterschool Investments project provides technical assistance to Child Care and Development Fund grantees and other state and local leaders supporting afterschool efforts. The goals of the project include:

- Identifying ways that states and communities are using Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) subsidy and quality dollars to support out-of-school time programs, and sharing these practices and approaches with other states;
- Identifying administrative and implementation issues related to CCDF investments in out-of-school time programs, and providing information and context (about barriers, problems, opportunities) as well as practical tools that will help CCDF administrators make decisions; and
- Identifying other major programs and sectors that are potential partners for CCDF in supporting out-of-school time programs, and providing models, strategies and tools for coordination with other programs and sectors.

To meet these goals, the Afterschool Investments project:

- Develops state profiles of afterschool resources, policies and issues;
- Creates tools and materials to support the development and sustainability of afterschool efforts; and
- Provides technical assistance at meetings and conferences around building state collaborations for afterschool.

For more information about the project or to submit a request for technical assistance or information, contact The Finance Project at (202) 587-1000 or by email at afterschool@financeproject.org, or visit <http://www.nccic.org/afterschool>.



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CREATING A VISION FOR AFTERSCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

Creating and sharing a common vision is a critical element for the success of **afterschool programs**. This tool is intended to help the growing number of new afterschool partnerships create a shared vision for their work. It contains information to educate partners on what a vision statement is and the purpose it serves; provides two alternative techniques for creating a vision; and includes a variety of considerations for planning teams as they finalize a vision statement.



Background

The past decade has witnessed a rapid expansion of afterschool programs and opportunities. And the demand for affordable, high-quality afterschool programs continues to grow. Public support for these programs is at an all-time high.¹ Educators, crime-prevention advocates, welfare leaders and others have joined the chorus of voices in support of organized activities for children and youth during non-school hours, as well as coordinated support programs for families. In response, government agencies at all levels, along with many national and regional foundations, have launched initiatives to develop and expand afterschool programs across the nation. Federal investments from the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21stCCLC) program and the Child Care and Development Fund, combined with a variety of other federal programs and increased state and local funding, have fueled the growth of initiatives.

While new programs are fast becoming a part of the American landscape, issues of quality and sustainability threaten their long-term success. To some extent these issues are the result of rushed efforts to create programs as new resources have become available with less attention on the resources required to ensure quality and longevity. To overcome these problems, public- and private-sector leaders need to address several important challenges: matching supply and demand; developing and strengthening program staffing; finding sustainable funding; and creating an infrastructure that can support strong programs and deliver positive results.



Recent developments have opened new opportunities for those seeking to create and sustain out-of-school time and community school efforts. One of the more significant developments was the decision to change the way in which 21stCCLC grants were awarded. The 2001 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (No Child Left Behind Act, U.S. Public Law 107-110) changed 21stCCLC from a competitive grant program to a formula grant program. Now, each state receives a 21stCCLC allocation and is responsible for distributing it and overseeing the program. As a result, states have a new source of money dedicated to out-of-school time and can use these funds, and the corresponding technical assistance and administrative funding, to help build statewide systems of care. Other federal initiatives, such as President George W. Bush's faith-based and community initiative and the increased funding available through the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act, provide additional opportunities for attracting new afterschool partners.



¹ See, for example, the Afterschool Alliance's 2002 nationwide poll. Available at www.afterschoolalliance.org/school_poll_final_2002.pdf.

Building Partnerships

These recent developments have prompted a flurry of activity at the state and local levels. As a result, a growing number of states and cities are exploring ways to strengthen afterschool initiatives by building partnerships among school-age child care programs and an array of federal and state programs that have related goals and serve the same population. These groups are also employing strategies for effective public-private partnerships in an effort to increase resources and support for all types of care for school-age children. Specifically, the partnerships are improving program quality by expanding opportunities for training and technical assistance; documenting the supply of and demand for afterschool care; looking for ways to make better use of available funding; working to build public support for afterschool programs; documenting the results of the programs; and seeking additional funding to make quality programs available to more school-age children.

These new partnerships bring together diverse stakeholders around a common issue—afterschool programs. While the various stakeholders all may have afterschool programs on their agendas, each is likely to bring a unique set of views, opinions, assets and needs. That is why developing a vision statement is such an important step in forming new partnerships. It allows the group members to jointly state their goals and create a common vision that is the first step in making it a reality.

It is also important to remember that no two partnerships are the same; there is no formula for a successful partnership. Rather, each state or community will bring together a different set of interested parties. The amount of time and resources that each will contribute is also unique to the particular partnership.

Understanding the Intersection of Partners' Needs and Interests²

It is critical to recognize that each prospective partner has a unique set of reasons for participating. Preparing a vision statement can help partners better understand the unique role each participant has in increasing and improving supports and services for school-age children. Vision statements are commonly created at planning sessions or retreats for new partnerships. To ensure that the vision truly represents the goals of all members, representatives from all of the stakeholder groups should be included. What follows is a list of potential partners and motivations for each.



² Adapted from: Sharon Deich, *A Guide to Successful Public-Private Partnerships for Out-of-School Time and Community School Initiatives* (Washington, D.C.: The Finance Project, January 2001).



Building Partnerships: *Creating a Shared Vision*

Potential Partners

Why They Are Interested

Families

Families desire safe places for their children, with supervision by caring individuals after the school day ends and before the workday does. They want afterschool programs to support their children's educational, physical, social and emotional development, a variety of settings that reflect diverse family and community cultures, languages, values and work schedules, and to be included in designing and evaluating programs in which they have a stake.

Consider including:

- Parents
- Youth

Government

Government at all levels is supporting investments in afterschool programming and activities. Partnerships allow governments to enhance services and programs by offering complementary services, such as training, technical assistance and public efforts, to foster public support. Governments also look to private-sector initiatives and leadership to provide continuity when elected and appointed public-sector leaders change.

Consider including:

Representatives from state or local agencies that are supporting afterschool programs

- 21st Century Community Learning Centers
- Child care licensors
- Child care subsidy administrators
- Juvenile justice
- Food and nutrition programs

Representatives from the Governor's office

- Children or Youth Cabinet
- Governor's policy advisors

Representatives from Indian tribes

Representatives from communities that are focused on afterschool programs

Educators

Educators want children to succeed in school and see afterschool initiatives as one way to help. Afterschool community school programs can supplement scarce resources. Educators see afterschool initiatives as a way to bolster student achievement and academic success.

Consider including:

- School superintendents and principals
- State School Board Association members
- Representatives from teacher's unions or professional organizations
- State or local Parent-Teacher Association members

Child Care Providers

Child care providers strive to offer children safe and enriching environments. Providers seek ways to make their programs responsive to the needs of families while interesting and engaging for the children. Child care providers have resources and practices to share, but can also learn from the growing number of organizations and agencies serving school-age children.

Consider including:

Program providers

- Large school district providers
- YMCAs
- Boys and Girls Clubs

Employers

Addressing the needs of their employees is a way for businesses to attract and retain qualified workers. Employees focused on work and not worried about their children are more productive. Investments in afterschool programs are an investment in the workforce of the future. Long-term well-being depends on the economic viability of their communities, and quality supports and services for children and youth, such as afterschool programs, are an important element of economic vitality.

Consider including:

- State or local Chamber of Commerce
- Other state or local business organizations (e.g., local business roundtable or economic development collaboratives)



Potential Partners

Why They Are Interested

Philanthropic Organizations

Philanthropic organizations seek to leverage their investments by fostering systemic changes that may improve the way that states and communities address the needs of children and their families. For example, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation provides training and technical assistance to the growing number of 21stCCLC grantees that receive program support from the federal government. Philanthropic organizations are expanding and looking for ways to sustain investments in programs for school-age children and youth.

Consider including:

- National or regional foundations with an interest in children and youth
- Local community foundations
- Local United Way organizations

Youth Development Workers

Youth development workers seek to ensure healthy social, emotional and cognitive development of school-age children and youth. Youth development workers find ways to engage youth in activities that help connect them to school and assist with their transition to the labor force.

Consider including:

- Local community-based organizations
- Faith-based organizations
- Boys and Girls Clubs
- YMCAs
- 4H Clubs

Community, Youth-Serving and Civic Organizations

Community, youth-serving and civic organizations have been pioneers in creating and expanding quality afterschool initiatives as an important strategy for attracting and retaining businesses; preparing children for a productive future in school and work; reducing future dependence on public assistance; and reducing crime. Their experience, knowledge and know-how can aid new partners looking to expand or improve afterschool opportunities.

Consider including:

Representatives from statewide or large membership associations and advocacy groups

- National School-Age Care Alliance affiliates
- State Parent-Teacher Associations

Training and Technical assistance providers

- Non-profit agencies, universities, intermediary agencies

Civic organizations

- Junior League, Rotary, Kiwanis

Child care resource and referral agencies

Police and Other Law Enforcement Agencies

Police and other law enforcement agencies know that most juvenile crime occurs between 3:00 P.M. and 8:00 P.M. They see afterschool programs as a way to lower crime rates and provide children and youth with alternatives to risky behaviors.

Consider including:

- Fight Crime: Invest in Kids' state affiliates
- Fraternal Order of Police and other law enforcement civic organizations

Other State and Community Partners

Child welfare authorities, hospitals and clinics, faith-based institutions, local universities and colleges, libraries, arts and cultural institutions, community development groups and local business groups are some of the many potential partners with vested interests in better outcomes for children and youth.

Consider including:

- University and academic staff with an interest in afterschool programs
- Community health providers and hospitals
- Organizations with an interest in substance abuse and violence prevention
- Cultural institutions, museums, libraries



Creating a Vision Statement

A vision statement should be compelling and inspiring and motivate people to work together toward shared success. It is a succinct way to describe the ideal result a partnership is seeking. One well-known organizational tenet is that the group will never be greater than the vision that guides it; thus, the development of a vision statement requires that partners think boldly and set high goals.

“A vision is a description in words that conjures up a similar picture for each member of the group of the destination of the group’s work together.”³

Successful partnerships engage in a thoughtful process to define their shared vision. This requires taking all the time that is needed to ensure complete agreement and understanding among all the partners. The objective is to obtain consensus, not compromise, so that all partners are enthusiastic about the work that lies ahead. “A clear vision serves as both the glue that holds a partnership together and as a rudder that directs its actions. If all of the partners are committed to the same goals,

then they are better equipped to negotiate the inevitable differences of perspective and opinion that arise as they work together. Likewise, if the goals are held firm, the partnership can be flexible in how they are accomplished. Flexibility is essential to accommodate political, economic, leadership or other changes, and clear goals help guide the partnership as it evolves over time.”³

In addition to the potential partners listed on the previous pages, others who are important to the afterschool effort in states also should be included in the group developing the vision statement. Ideally, the size of the group should be no more than 30-40 people. If the planning team is for a local initiative, the composition should reflect that local nature and include such relevant participants as officials from the mayor’s office, local departments and the school system.

It is also highly recommended that the group use an outside facilitator for this process. The role of the facilitator is to serve as a neutral party to ensure that all ideas are considered. The greatest benefit of an outside facilitator is that he or she comes to the table without any preconceived ideas. As a truly neutral party, the facilitator will be able to clarify options and sort through differences that are almost certain to arise.

Finding a Facilitator

Universities, intermediary organizations, foundations (including local and community) and the state liaisons for the National Child Care Information Center (800.616.2242) are good places to start when looking for a skilled facilitator.

In the best-case scenario, the facilitator will be familiar with the language of and issues around afterschool programming. If the facilitator is new to the afterschool issue, it will be helpful to provide him/her with a list of commonly used vocabulary and a brief introduction into some of the issues that are likely to emerge. Regardless of his/her background, it is always helpful to give the facilitator some information on the participants who will be at the meeting.



³ Deich, Guide.

North Carolina Center for Afterschool Programs

The North Carolina Center for Afterschool Programs (NCCAP) described the process of developing its vision statement as an important bonding exercise for the new board. Agreeing on the vision statement involved negotiation about what was core to NCCAP's work and what is part of, but not central to, NCCAP's vision. It was developing the vision statement that gave NCCAP focus on how to proceed. The vision statement has now become central to NCCAP's activities — it is highlighted on a Web site that is being developed — and represents what NCCAP stands for. For the partnership, the vision statement continues to provide a vehicle for finding consensus on difficult issues. For more information, visit <http://www.nccap.net>.

Preparing the Partnership to Develop Its Vision

Before beginning the session, the facilitator will need to lay out ground rules for the meeting. The following suggestions should help keep the process on track:

1. Establish a "parking lot." A variety of important issues are likely to arise during discussion of the vision statement. In order to keep the group on task, the facilitator will have to decide which issues are central to the discussion and which should be considered at a later time. The issues to be discussed later should be placed in a "parking lot." The most common way to keep track of such issues is to post them on a sheet of flip-chart paper and keep it in a place where the group can refer to it throughout the meeting. At the end of the session, the group should review the issues placed in the "parking lot" and decide how they will be resolved.

The most successful partnerships understand and accommodate overlapping motivations and strive to shape partnership goals and activities to benefit all partners.

2. Agree upon a common vocabulary for the partnership. "Out-of-school time," "child care," "youth development" and "extra learning opportunities" are just a few of the terms used to describe programs and activities in which school-age children engage when they are not in school. Before beginning the discussion of a common vision, the partners need to agree on the language they will use to describe their common work.

3. Determine how the group will make decisions. The partnership will have to establish clear rules for how and when it will move forward. Most partnerships want to see unanimous consent from the partners before moving forward. Some establish methods, such as the "thumbs-up/thumbs-down" approach (see text box), to determine if the group is ready to move forward with a decision.

4. Modify the exercises to meet the need of your group. The exercises and tips included



in this tool are provided as a guide or roadmap for new partnerships. Creating a vision is more of an art than a science, and the facilitator and partners should feel free to adapt the exercises to best meet the needs of the group.

Thumbs-up/thumbs-down

This approach to decision-making involves asking each partner to vote on various decisions with his or her thumb. Partners have the option of showing a thumb up to indicate agreement, thumb down to indicate disagreement or thumb to the side to indicate indecision. The group may then choose to hear from those who disagree or are undecided to see where more information or discussion is needed.

Addressing “Hot” Topics

Afterschool partnerships bring together stakeholders from different backgrounds, including those in schools and in child care, youth development and community organizations. Each of these provider-partners has a unique culture and approach to afterschool programming, and friction may develop as new groups of afterschool stakeholders sit down to find their common purpose. A facilitator who is knowledgeable about such “hot” topics can help address potentially sticky issues. The facilitator can also reassure the group that all partnerships will face times when members cannot quickly agree on a solution or strategy but that part of this process is finding the common ground. Among those topics:

■ **Care versus education.** As more and more schools grapple with the issue of achieving state standards, programs sponsored by schools are seeking ways to use the afterschool hours to directly improve educational outcomes. On the other hand, many community-based providers and children’s advocates believe that too much academic emphasis limits the ability of children to learn through exploration and develop important social and emotional skills.

The key to diffusing this issue is to focus on the middle ground where both opportunities for exploration and support for academics are provided.

■ **Free versus fees.** Another difficult question for afterschool partnerships is whether or not to charge for services. Traditional child care providers always charge for services (though many may use a sliding fee scale); some community-based programs have one-time or annual member fees that help offset the cost of the programs; and other providers feel strongly that children will not attend if there is a fee associated with the program.

The common ground here is understanding that the network of afterschool programs is strongest when it provides options for children and families. Each program and initiative needs to make its own decision regarding fees. For the purposes of creating the vision, it is best to avoid any philosophical debate about the benefits and drawbacks to charging fees.



As the groups move forward with their common vision there will be other opportunities to discuss this issue.

■ **Regulated versus non-regulated (licensing).** Child care policymakers and advocates have spent decades working for regulations and licensing requirements to ensure the health and safety of children while encouraging quality in the care provided. Afterschool programs, especially those set in school buildings, may not be required or able to meet all of the regulations due to space, facilities and a variety of other constraints. Issues concerning licensing and regulations can lead to tensions between different providers.

Different states have taken different approaches to this issue. At one extreme, some states have issued separate licensing requirements and regulations for school-age care. Other states have chosen to exempt school-based programs from regulatory requirements. Some states continue to treat all programs the same and have uniform regulations. If the state has not provided clear guidance on this issue, the facilitator can suggest putting this issue into the “parking lot” for consideration later, when a fuller discussion that includes a range of options can be discussed.

■ **Competition versus cooperation.** Inevitably, efforts to engage a wide group of stakeholders may bring together potential partners who see themselves as competitors rather than collaborators. This may be the case between for-profit providers and public providers, among various community-based providers, and between advocates for school-age programs and those advocating services for younger children. Successful partnerships must develop a level of trust before moving forward as a group. Competitive behavior can derail these efforts.

Facilitators can take several steps to keep competition to a minimum. First and most important is the task of helping all participants understand how everyone will benefit from a successful partnership. To address this, the facilitator may ask partners to set aside their individual organizational agendas, with an agreement that time will be made available at the end of the meeting to discuss how the day’s events, plans and decisions would affect the individual partner organizations. A second approach to minimize competition is to find ways for competitors to support each other. Public providers could refer children who may not be “income eligible” for their programs to local for-profit providers. In each of these cases, competitive situations can be transformed into cooperative solutions.

As the group works to develop the vision, the facilitator needs to keep participants focused on issues that must be addressed immediately versus those which are better put in the “parking lot” for later discussion (see page 7). In general, when developing a vision, it is best to put issues of program design or implementation (e.g., staffing, credentials, pay, hours of operation, etc.) into the parking lot and to focus on issues of culture and approaches (e.g., care versus education) that need agreement at this point.



A Shared Vision

Many teams have noted that the process of developing a vision statement is critical to the later success of the partnership and that through the development process, partners find common ground and an understanding of the assets that each offers the program. Developing a vision statement can energize the group by providing the needed momentum to move through the work ahead.

Creating a Vision Statement: Step-by-Step

While there are many different exercises for developing a shared vision, most rely on a three-step process. That process: 1) begins with brainstorming ideas; 2) involves crafting a vision from the results of brainstorming; and 3) ends with a review of the final vision statement by the group to ensure unanimous support.

1. Brainstorming

This section provides two alternative brainstorming techniques for generating the vision statement. While there are many variations on these techniques, the following two approaches have been successfully employed in a wide variety of circumstances. The facilitator should feel free to adapt the exercises to best meet the needs of the partnership.

Option One: Looking into the future

The facilitator provides the following directions to the group: Imagine it is five years from now and a magazine is writing a feature story on the success of your statewide afterschool partnership. As a team, you need to come up with a headline and an opening paragraph for the article.

The facilitator then asks each member to generate a headline and a sentence or two for the first paragraph. In small groups of 4-6 people, common themes and phrases are generated. The small groups then report to each other, and a combined list of common themes and phrases is produced. That list is used to craft the vision statement.



Option Two: The ideal partnership

The facilitator asks the group: If you could imagine an ideal afterschool partnership, what would it look like? What functions would it serve? What would result from this effort?

Each participant is given about 5-6 index cards to write down his or her thoughts. As the participants finish, the notes are posted on the wall.

Participants then organize the notes by ideas and key words. Individuals can move around the notes, or for a large group, the facilitator can move them. Once the notes have been sorted, the facilitator summarizes the ideas and key phrases. That summary is then used to generate the vision statement.

2. Drafting the Vision Statement

At the conclusion of the brainstorming session, the group should appoint a small team to draft one or two statements. Another option is to have the facilitator draft a statement based on the input of the group. If this exercise is part of a longer meeting, the small group or facilitator can present the draft statements at the conclusion of the meeting—leaving time for discussion. If the draft vision statements are to be presented at a later time, be sure to schedule that meeting for the near future.

3. Reviewing and Revising the Statement

Once the drafts are ready, they must be presented to the group so a statement that all partners find satisfactory can be selected. Once the partnership is in agreement on a statement, each member of the team will have the opportunity to present it to members of his or her organization and others with whom they work closely. It is expected that the vision statement will go through several revisions before it is ready to be shared publicly.

PlusTime NH

PlusTime NH, a resource organization for afterschool programs in New Hampshire, employed a group process in creating its vision statement. PlusTime NH's board and management team (about 14 people) developed the draft statement. After it was shown to the staff, the draft was circulated broadly with other stakeholders to generate additional comments. Here's how it was presented: "This is the vision that we have for the state, but we see two things affecting our ability to reach this goal: Increasing program quality, and increasing the number of kids served. Do we all agree with that?" Agreement was unanimous, and the larger group was then able to form subcommittees to begin the work of achieving that vision. All of the resulting strategies continued to reflect the vision statement. For more information, visit <http://www.plustime.org>.



Sample Vision Statements

Kansas Enrichment Network: The partnership supports a state where all students are academically, socially, culturally and physically healthy. Private and public stakeholders, along with schools, children and their families, will work together to assure that all public schools are open to the entire community as havens for promoting student development and lifelong learning.

North Carolina Center for Afterschool Programs: By crafting a network of afterschool stakeholders that includes state agencies, state and local policy makers, afterschool providers and the private sector, the state believes it can dramatically expand high quality afterschool opportunities, dramatically increase educational attainment, and dramatically improve the quality of life in our communities.

PlusTime NH: PlusTime NH strives for a day when every community supports all its youth and families by providing access to quality afterschool programs designed to promote the positive well-being of the whole child.

As the group works toward agreement on a vision statement, the following questions can help guide discussions:⁴

- Is the vision statement bold enough to inspire yet credible enough that stakeholders believe it can come true?
- Is the vision focused on the future?
- Does the vision spark and sustain passion?
- Does the vision clarify your direction and instill a sense of common commitment?
- Does the vision mobilize and coordinate efforts into a single cohesive enterprise?
- Can the vision see you through the hard times as well as the good?
- Does the vision act as a living reminder of what is important and what can be achieved?
- Does the vision statement build loyalty by providing an ideal that is valuable to all members?



⁴ Adapted from: Andria J. Fletcher, "Developing a State Plan: Vision and Leadership" (Sacramento, Calif.: Center for Collaborative Solutions, n.d.).

Moving Forward with Your Vision

With a vision statement in hand, it is now time to begin putting your afterschool partnership in place. Keep a copy of your vision statement handy—some partnerships choose to begin each meeting by reviewing it. Throughout this work, the partnership will be continually challenged to connect its actions to the vision. This will require staying focused on the big picture, regularly reexamining priorities, and spending time and making time to think strategically and systematically. The vision statement is the first tool the partnership has to make the vision a reality. Put it on a brochure or fact sheet about the new partnership; use it to interest new partners and supports; and mark the progress of the group towards achieving the vision.

For the Kansas Enrichment Network, regularly reviewing its vision is a way to make sure that the vision statement remains a strong reminder of what the partners believe in and why they are engaged in this work.





Acknowledgments

This document was prepared by Sharon Deich for the Afterschool Investments Project, a multiyear technical assistance effort funded by the Child Care Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The author would like to thank Heather Clapp Padgette, Elisabeth Wright, Michelle Jones, Theresa Clarke, Janelle Cousino and Karen Finn for their thoughtful comments. Many thanks, also, to Jerry Bailey, Nancy Kellogg Harper and Debbie Elder, of the Kansas Enrichment Network, Cynthia Billings, of PlusTime NH, and Gail Daughtry and John Dornan, of the North Carolina Center for Afterschool Programs, all of whom were willing to share their experiences to educate others in the field.

In developing this report, many other resources were consulted, including:

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