



*Tennessee
Afterschool
Network*

Center for Social Impact

United Way of the Ocoee Region



PATHWAYS TO DEVELOPING AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS IN RURAL AREAS



Introduction

One of the most common and persistent needs for families in rural areas is quality child care. It is a need that affects families across the socioeconomic spectrum when resources are geographically scarce. This guide was developed from the stories and contributions of successful afterschool programs in rural areas that were built from the ground up to respond to community needs.

What are the needs?

- An afterschool program may be the answer if multiple families in a community:
- Go without child care while parents or guardians are working, or older siblings are left to care for younger children on a regular basis.
- Do not have the information or resources necessary to prepare high schoolers for educational or career advancement.
- Lack access to healthy, productive activities at the end of the school day.
- Are financially unstable, leading to food insecurity.

This guide will assist members of rural communities in asking the right questions and taking the first steps to:

- Assess the possible need for an afterschool program
- Utilize strengths and existing resources to initiate development
- Create a foundation that will lead to a sustainable, fluid program that meets the established needs
- Plan for the future and growth of a new program



First Steps

If a program is in the initial discussion phase, it is likely that a need has been observed. Begin by gathering input and collecting concrete data about what families could benefit from. This could mean creating a survey to distribute to parents through schools, and (if appropriate) inquiring about these situations from students directly.

What's Already Being Done? Reach out and gather information from

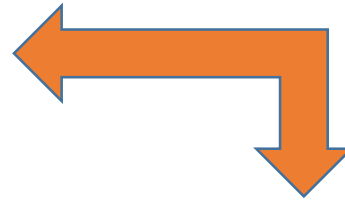
- Schools: Are they offering latchkey? Summer programs?
- Churches
- Community Centers
- Local nonprofits

Forms or spreadsheets like this one may be helpful to track participation, research, tasks, contacts, and possible partners:

Current Programs within 25 mile radius			
Name	Contact	Ages Served	Transportation

Working Documents

The early stages are the best time to create documents to keep your group organized. Separate documents, whether a list on paper or a spreadsheet that can be accessed by everyone, to answer these questions could help increase efficiency for the group.



What needs are being met by existing programs or services?

- Is transportation provided?
- Is a hot meal or snack served?
- Is the resource affordable/are there opportunities for financial aid?

Partnerships and Collaboration

Once any existing programs have been identified and assessed, evaluate the possibility of collaborating to share and conserve resources. You may find that a new program is not needed, but that an existing one could be enhanced or improved to meet needs more effectively/efficiently. Whether or not a collaboration is going to take place, strong relationships with others who share similar goals will be invaluable, so it will be advantageous to keep interactions positive and lines of communication open.

Start with Research

By reaching out to the leaders or administrators of current programs, you can begin collecting and keeping track of answers to important questions. These answers can help you to guide your judgment about forming a new partnership, or attempting to build upon an existing one.

Evaluating potential partnerships: What to consider

- What does everyone involved have to lose or gain by collaborating? Are these losses or gains long-term or short-term?
- How involved does each party intend to be?
- What does a realistic contribution to/from this organization look like?
- Are there any fundamental conflicts, such as disagreements about political, religious, or personal beliefs of those involved? If so, what are the implications of moving forward with these conflicts in mind?

Stay Organized

- Make sure everyone is informed of contacts that have been made and the status of various relationships as they develop.
- Keep a running list of people who you intend to connect with to keep your network growing.

Generating Community Buy-In

The first step in gaining support is to create awareness of the initiative. Consider presenting your plans and, if appropriate, some remaining needs, at meetings for local government (i.e., city council, county commission) and for other members of the community in local government buildings/gathering spaces (e.g., town hall, local courthouse).

Preparing the Pitch

Before presenting to community members, become confident with a mapped-out presentation that includes:

- The problem identified
- The proposed solutions
- Ways in which the whole community will benefit, rather than families/parents/children alone. Think long term: Why would others want to support this initiative?
- An opportunity for others to provide suggestions, feedback, and questions. Remain open to discussion at all times to encourage engagement. Shutting down an idea is an easy way to lose outside interest.

Financial Support

The process of gathering financial support should begin early. However, it is crucial that before making an “ask”, all of the following are clear and concrete:

- Are you asking for monetary assistance for the project, or a tangible donation? (E.g., building space, playground equipment)
- How much are you asking for?
- What will be the return-on-investment for the other party? What should the other party expect to see happen with their contribution? How will these results be measured/presented?

Opportunities for Collaborations

After identifying available grant monies, it is important to designate someone to the application process who is familiar with grant writing etiquette and procedures to increase chances of receiving assistance. Consider seeking an established grant-writer or trainings, which are often offered by non-profits, government agencies, and community colleges (and can also be found online), if needed.

Building a Staff

Once the number of children who will participate can be estimated, establish a staff-to-child ratio and begin recruiting qualified adults. For this you will need:

- Job descriptions for each position
- Requirements for employment and instructions for fulfilling these (e.g., background checks)
- A pre-determined budget for staff wages/salaries
- A curriculum for staff training
- A plan for how work will be delegated. How will volunteers be utilized? Where will they be recruited? Will they need training?

Suggestions for Building Boards of Directors/Advisory Boards

- Take advantage of existing relationships
- Recruit individuals who have been involved in schools and community programs in the past
- Teachers, nonprofit leaders, and business owners can be a good place to start, keeping in mind that individuals with investment in the program as well as diverse fields of expertise are ideal board members.

Finding a Location

When researching locations within the project's budget, consider renting a space for a "trial period" of the program. As the services become more utilized and the program takes off/reaches a point of financial security, then it is time to consider purchasing or building a space.

Get the Budget in Writing

How much is available for:

- Rent/property purchase
- Utilities
- Staff
- Supplies

When selecting a location, be cognizant of the following:

- Is the space conducive for children of various ages?
- Is there a space for eating/serving food (if applicable)?
- How many adults and children can the space comfortably and safely hold?

Shared Spaces

Borrowing or renting a space from another organization (such as a church or school) may be an option, keeping in mind that this will entail a working relationship with the space's owner.

For these circumstances, draft a "contract" that will clarify the following:

- What will the space be used for, and when? (Days and times)
- What is the initial time frame that the program will be housed in the location?
- What does each party expect from the other? Are there any parts of the space that are off limits?
- Will the owner of the space be compensated for its use?
- What will be the protocol for incidents, such as those that may cause damage to the property?

What's included in the price?

Before making any agreements, make sure your team knows what they are signing up for, and what it physically includes. Does the space come with furniture and/or equipment? If not, begin to identify potential donors or sources of used equipment to meet the remaining needs of the facility. Does it meet federal, state, and/or local safety guidelines?



Marketing

How will your team spread the word about the new program and get participants in the door? How much of the overall budget will be allocated for marketing, if any?

Visuals

- Posters
- School hand-outs/brochures
- Billboards

Word-of-Mouth

- Community leaders,
- Service-sector employees

Getting the Most out of Marketing

- Materials should catch the public eye and clearly, concisely explain:
- All programs/services offered
- Cost of participation and, if appropriate, information about payment options (e.g., “scholarships available”, “payment plans welcome”, etc.) so as not to deter with cost
- Who to contact for more information

Where to promote new programs

Local government meetings/community events where the idea was first proposed

Local businesses where parents are likely to be employed or families are likely to be patrons

Places of worship/church bulletins

School functions (family nights, PTA meetings), health and resource fairs

Program Planning

When the ages of the children served has been determined, it is time to begin thinking about what the program will look like on the inside. The following are some considerations and suggestions from rural afterschool program employees and start-up members.

How the age groups will be separated?

Using whatever freedom the location allows, it can be helpful to give each group their “own space”, meaning a room or an area where younger children can feel comfortable without the intimidation of older children and teens. Additionally, it is important for teens to feel welcome and have a space to be with their peers so that they do not feel like they are being treated the same as younger children by the staff. Providing an opportunity for each age group to take part in appropriate operational responsibilities (clean up, outdoor beautification projects) can be empowering.

Tweens and Teens

For older students, helping and mentoring the younger participants has shown to be engaging and to build a sense of confidence and responsibility. For this approach, be sure to provide the necessary training and supervision/structure so that the older students clearly understand their role and responsibilities.

Many older students in a rural area who are participating in an afterschool program may be at risk for not completing high school, and may be less likely to go on to college. Assess the needs and interest of the group, and consider offering assistance with school work, college/graduation readiness, and standardized test preparation.

Staff

It is important that the adults, be they staff or volunteers, are also educated about engaging each age group and the individual children within it. In other words, the same choice of words, tone of voice, activities, and routines should not be used with elementary students as are used with high schools students (and vice versa), and remember that each student’s interests and circumstances will vary even within those distinct age ranges.

- Periodic trainings and meetings to check in with everyone working in the facility can keep everyone informed and provide a space to share challenges and successes.
- Assigning specific people to work with each age group (based on their experience and strengths) can ensure that activities are carried out appropriately and smoothly.

Looking Forward

When the program is finally up and running (or ready to be), the administrative team of the program need to focus on three areas:

Accountability

- What obligations are there for the individuals who originally invested in the idea, and who will be in charge of seeing these obligations through?
- How will you measure the success of the program? Your supporters want to see consistent numbers to summarize: Where you started, what the goal is, and where the program is in relation to that goal at the end of each reporting period.

Sustainability

- Which funding sources are renewable, and which are time-limited?
- Develop a five-year plan for attaining financial stability as an organization.

Growth

- Keep expansion plans reasonable and practical, considering budget and participation.
- Internal growth is a great way to expand the program with existing resources, by offering more programs to participants as the program grows.
- Continuing to market long after the program has opened its doors will only be beneficial and increase awareness/participation.

This guide published as part of the Tennessee Afterschool Network, with funds provided by The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and United Way.



For more information regarding this manual or Rural Afterschool Program Development, contact United Way of the Ocoee Region, a hub of the Tennessee Afterschool Network.

www.unitedwayocoe.org || 423-479-2020

Center for Social Impact

United Way of the Ocoee Region

