

Interested in starting or improving an afterschool program?

Afterschool programs can be a great asset to your community. Afterschool programs support schools, working families and students in helping them round out their education and provide healthy life experiences. Communities gain when their young people are safe and off the streets, healthy, staying physically active and engaged in school and learning. If you are currently running an afterschool program, or have an idea for starting one, there are a number of steps you can take to establish or expand your program. GAIC has compiled some key steps to assist you in reaching your goals. These steps are not listed in any specific order and you should modify them to fit your personal ideas and goals.

- **Consider the specific program content areas that you wish to target (e.g. academics and enrichment).** Start by having conversations with others in your community who share your afterschool interest. Talk with students, neighbors, friends, school leadership, and local PTA members. Older youth especially may have strong opinions about wanting to learn more about arts, technology, civic leadership, or needing the extra help on math and science. Through these conversations, you can begin assessing the current resources available and what areas are lacking to deliver the most high-quality program. Working in large numbers gives greater strength and influence. Remember to document these resources and needs.
- **Schedule a meeting with individuals (or groups) who are interested in improving afterschool in your community.** During this meeting, you can discuss the benefits to the community of high-quality afterschool programs. Ask these individuals if they know how other afterschool programs in the area and what type of activities they currently offer. If you do not find an existing agency that seems right, you must decide if you are ready to begin the exciting but difficult process of starting your own program.
- **Evaluate your community needs using a survey.** Review current data that has already been collected on your community. You can find data at www.census.gov under American Community Survey. Creating a survey will help you identify potential resources and develop an understanding of how they fit with your community needs. ***Remember to keep the survey brief.*** The survey should be simple to answer and design so that you can easily retrieve, compile and summarize the provided information. Consider the following questions: Would you enroll your child into an afterschool program? What would be the ideal hours of operation? What type of activities would you like to see offered in the program? How important is the location of the afterschool program? What qualifications (years of experience, education level, etc.) are important for staff and the director to have? What is an ideal staff-to-child ratio?

- **Planning your program.** Think about the kind of human and material resources you have and what you need to reach your goals and create a successful program. Consider the following questions: What age group will the program serve? How will you work with the students' school leaders to partner for their growth and learning? Will you weave experiential learning into your program? How will you schedule and plan activities? How many volunteers do you have or can you recruit? What kind of space is available in your school and/or community? Who can donate equipment, expertise, or time? When will the program operate? (i.e., summer, weekends, holidays, before or after school) How will children/youth get to and from the program? Will you charge a fee for the program? Who will staff the program? What types of afterschool professional development opportunities are you going to offer? Please visit www.afterschool.gov for planning and operating resource guides that you can purchase.
- **Evaluate licensing requirements.** The Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) oversees school-age and early childhood programs. Rules and regulations regarding licensing and requirements can be found under "Rules and Regulations" on the following page:
<http://www.dec.state.ga.us/ChildCareServices/ChildCare/ChildCareRulesAndRegulations.aspx>.

The Georgia School-Age Care Association (www.gsaca.com) also provides resources on how to start a school-age program as well as licensing information (<http://www.ciclt.net/gsaca/docs/Licensing.pdf>).
- **Create a preliminary budget and fundraising plan.** Determine how many kids you want to serve, number of staff it will take to manage and engage these kids, costs of materials, professional development for staff, field trips, and stipends or sliding scale so parents pay some/little and grants, sponsors, school pays to offset other costs. Begin researching different volunteer and sponsor pools, like local businesses & colleges and universities, to determine potential funders and volunteers. Know how much the program will cost over the next 3-5 years so you base this on longer-term planning. Also, please see Georgia Afterschool's funding resource list.

Additional Resources: The Afterschool Alliance (www.afterschoolalliance.org) has a variety of resources on starting and funding afterschool programs, as well as various public relations and advocacy campaign information and links to research. Their 20-page Action Kit is helpful and available in English and Spanish (<http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/documents/AfterschoolActionBookletEnglish.pdf> or <http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/documents/AfterschoolActionBookletSpanish.pdf>).