

Out-of-School Time Stories

BOOST Grantee Spotlight: **Georgia Recreation and Parks Association**



“Outside of the school system, the local recreation agency is the best opportunity for children of all socio-economic and demographic backgrounds to come together to participate in community activities.”

— GRPA Staff Member

Parks and recreation agencies play a crucial role in enhancing the quality of life in communities by providing access to recreational opportunities, fostering social connections, and promoting healthy lifestyles. The Georgia Recreation and Parks Association (GRPA) is a statewide organization that supports over 200 parks and recreation agencies in all but a few of the 159 Georgia counties through education, resources, and grants to enhance the well-being of residents in their local communities.

As one of four statewide BOOST grantees, GRPA has leveraged BOOST funds to help their partner agencies **enhance the quality and reach of existing afterschool and summer programs** and **establish new programs** in under-resourced communities.



Youth Served in Year Two:
4,498 in Afterschool
16,856 in Summer



Ages Served:
Elementary, Middle, and High School

Counties Served:
Statewide

Programming Offered:
Afterschool & Summer

BOOST Grant Purpose:

- Expand Access
- Reduce Barriers
- Increase Quality

Website:
www.grpa.org



Building Capacity, Expanding Reach

“[BOOST] has given our agencies an easier way to achieve funding to better their communities than what they would have had if we did not exist as a statewide partner.”

— GRPA BOOST Administrator

In Year 2, GRPA received \$4,050,000 in BOOST funds, distributed to 35 partner agencies via a competitive grant process. “This is the largest funding opportunity that’s ever been offered through GRPA to its member organizations,” explained a GRPA administrator. “We are just an avenue to get [the funds] to the grassroots level in an easier way.” Ultimately, BOOST funds supported academic year programming at 80 sites and summer programming at 119 sites across Georgia during the 2022-23 grant year.

The partner agencies leveraged BOOST funds in a variety of ways to meet the individualized needs of their local communities. For example, most parks and recreation agencies are experienced in providing healthy eating and physical activity programs for youth. BOOST funds encouraged agencies to think “outside the box” and add more variety to these existing programs, such as incorporating sports that youth may not have been exposed to and which have the potential to be life-long physical activities, such as pickleball, swimming, tennis, and disc golf. However, **a primary benefit of the BOOST grant was its potential to help agencies increase their capacity to provide high-quality learning experiences for youth.**



A Focus on Learning Acceleration

“Accelerated learning is the biggest need because our recreation program, we have athletics, and we have cheerleading, all types of activities for kids, everything that was in BOOST, except for the accelerated learning program and tutoring. So, this is a major component that was much needed for the program.”

— DeKalb County GRPA Administrator

The DeKalb County Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Affairs Department was one of the GRPA partner agencies that received BOOST funding in Year 2. They used BOOST funds to add an accelerated learning component to their existing afterschool and summer recreational programs. Specifically, the funds were used to hire certified teachers and purchase curriculum and supplies, including Chromebooks and subscriptions to personalized learning curriculum. They also used BOOST funds to expand

“My son was really struggling with reading and I was looking for programs for him and tutors for him, but I couldn’t afford what they were offering. So, for my son to be able to get that help and have it be funded was really great.”

— GRPA BOOST Parent

cultural arts programming and build partnerships with local STEM program providers. “It’s been extremely helpful,” explained one of the program administrators. “We wouldn’t have had the funds to do [accelerated learning] if we had not received the BOOST funding. And we couldn’t have hired certified teachers. One center has two teachers because there is such a need. So, the BOOST funding has been a tremendous help.”

Indeed, demand for the personalized learning program has been great, even during the summer when students are most reluctant to engage in learning activities. “I was very surprised that as many folks signed up [for the summer program],” commented a program administrator. According to parents, **the program has provided a much-needed service that is convenient and accessible for working families.** “As a parent, it’s kind of hard to make all the things happen the way you want them to happen. It was convenient that [it was offered] during the afterschool program. They can get that enrichment and then get back to having fun.”

Satisfaction

Parents, youth, and staff expressed deep satisfaction with the enhancements made to the DeKalb County afterschool and summer programs. Parents and students were particularly pleased with the personalized learning component of the program, citing great improvements in students’ reading skills. “I was very surprised at how much he improved,” one parent commented. “From where he started and where he ended, it looked like he improved two grade [levels]. He can sit and read a whole book now.” Other parents agreed that the program helped their children become more comfortable with reading and improved their confidence and reading comprehension.

Overall, the BOOST grant has been instrumental in helping agencies like DeKalb County Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Affairs to provide more robust afterschool and summer program offerings to their local communities. “It’s been extremely helpful to be able to get [the teachers] everything that they need and the kids what they need,” noted a DeKalb County administrator. Similarly, a parent shared how appreciative they were that their child was “in a program where he’s getting everything he needs as a young child, he’s getting some education, he’s getting physical things, he’s learning how to work with other kids, and actually learning at the same time.”

Regarding sustainability, DeKalb County is optimistic that they will be able to continue the enhancements made with BOOST funds in the future. “[The agency is] really committed to expanding the recreation and educational programs for the kids. They like this program, and we have good outcomes to present. They will definitely continue to fund this program,” particularly at the centers with the greatest need. “We didn’t invest all this to just stop at the end of the program.”

“I want to come here every day because I love learning to read.”

— GRPA BOOST Student



SPOTLIGHT DATA SOURCES

- Case study interviews & focus groups with deep center youth, staff, and administrators
- End-of-year reports



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GEORGIA STATEWIDE AFTERSCHOOL NETWORK

75 Marietta Street, Suite 401

Atlanta, Georgia 30303

(404) 521-0355 | info@afterschoolga.org

www.afterschoolga.org



[@AfterschoolGA](https://twitter.com/AfterschoolGA)



Facebook.com/AfterschoolGA



Building Opportunities in Out-of-School Time (BOOST) is a competitive grant program administered by the Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network (GSAN) and operated in partnership with the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE). BOOST offers \$85 million via three-year grants, renewed annually, with funding made available through the American Rescue Plan. The grants program is aimed at promoting evidence-based practices and whole child supports in afterschool and summer learning programs. BOOST is designed to expand access, reduce barriers to enrollment, and increase programmatic quality to improve outcomes for students and families throughout the state. GSAN provides recommendations for grant awards based on rigorous application criteria and offers technical assistance and training to grantees to ensure successful implementation. All grants are approved by GaDOE, ensuring alignment with statewide priorities and goals.