



Out-of-School Time Sponsors and Partners

A Review of Programs for Low-Income Adolescents

Rebecca S. Levine

As communities grapple with the harmful, inequitable effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which have been particularly hard on low-income and marginalized youth, renewed attention has been directed toward how out-of-school time (OST) programs can help youth reconnect and re-engage (Afterschool Alliance, 2021; Stanford, 2022).

As OST providers respond to today's complex issues, however, they are not alone. For decades, OST programs have been supported by a diverse range of sponsors and partners, including local nonprofits, schools, universities, and municipal governments. What can we learn about how these various partners have worked together to design and implement OST programs? In this article, I present the results of a systematic literature review on the sponsors and partners that support OST programs for low-income

adolescents. The goal is to synthesize the types of organizations involved in OST programs, what they offered, and how they worked together to support youth in OST settings.

The Importance of Partnerships

Prior work on OST partnerships reveals various benefits and effective strategies. Griffin & Martinez (2013) identified seven categories of contributions that partnerships can provide: evaluation services, fundraising, programming or activity-related services, goods, volunteer staffing, paid staffing, and other types of contributions. Other studies have identified effective practices involving one type of partner, such as schools (Anthony & Morra, 2016; Dilles, 2010) or universities (Afterschool Alliance, 2007), or have focused on partnerships that sustain specific goals, such as extended learning (Little, 2013) or

REBECCA S. LEVINE, LICSW, is a PhD student in the Department of Education Studies at the University of California, San Diego.

career readiness (Cohen et al., 2019). The National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education, and Families recommends that OST programs involve a broad set of partners in order to take full advantage of available community resources and to establish a shared vision with a common set of outcomes (Hayes et al., 2009).

In this article, I review and synthesize the available research on OST programs involving sponsors and partners from various sectors, from local nonprofits to national organizations, across a wide range of afterschool and summer programs that serve low-income adolescents. I focus on young people aged 11 to 19, or in middle or high school. The developmental tasks of this age group, such as identity exploration and college and career readiness, are different from those of younger children; therefore, potential partnerships look different (Afterschool Alliance, 2009). Further, I focus on adolescents from low-income families and those from marginalized backgrounds. These youth often face logistical, social, and cultural barriers to participation in OST programming. The barriers, many of which stem from structural inequities and discrimination, include fewer quality programs than in more affluent communities, lack of safe and affordable transportation to and from programs, wanting or needing to work or care for family members, and harassment or bullying at the program itself (Kennedy et al., 2007; Lin et al., 2016; Little, 2007; Wallace Foundation, 2022). Therefore, OST partnerships must consider the unique circumstances of low-income youth, including the resources, strengths, and needs of the youth themselves and of their communities, in order to be effective.

Methods

This article is part of a larger systematic review on OST programs serving low-income adolescents; for this article, I coded the data for themes and patterns related to OST sponsoring organizations and partnerships. In other words, I examined the types and prevalence of organizations that were either sponsoring an OST program alone or partnering with other organizations as part of their initiative.

For this review, I followed best practices set forth by Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA; Page et al., 2021). First, on June 16, 2022, I searched ERIC, PsycINFO, and Web of Science to find studies that report on

OST programs serving low-income adolescents. I also hand-searched all publications posted on the National Institute of Out-of-School Time's website, including all issues of *Afterschool Matters*, through Spring 2022. Searches were limited to studies published in English after December 31, 2011.

The search yielded 1,266 results: 1,108 articles from databases and 158 articles from NIOST. Two additional studies were added from hand searching, for a total of 1,268 results. I reviewed all articles based on inclusion criteria: studies had to be written in English, empirical in nature, and published either in a peer-reviewed journal or as a working paper from a reputable organization; articles also had to report on an OST program that was at least four weeks in duration and served primarily low-income adolescents in the United States. With these inclusion criteria, a total of 118 articles representing 100 discrete OST programs were in my final sample. For the findings, I designed a Qualtrics survey to extract relevant information about sponsor and partner organizations from the 100 programs. Table 1 outlines the content categories of the programs.

Varieties of Sponsoring and Partner Organizations

OST programs were sustained by many constellations of organizations, including schools and school districts,

Table 1. Types of Programs Included in the Review

Program Content	Number of Programs
STEM or STEAM (science, technology, engineering, [arts], math)	34
Multipurpose	10
Literacy	10
Mental health and social-emotional learning	9
Sports and recreation	9
Community health and well-being	8
Academics	5
Sexual health	3
Employment*	3
Other specialty activities	9

* Includes only programs whose emphasis was primarily on providing employment and job training. Some programs in other categories offered stipends or wages for work in their areas of emphasis.

colleges and universities, local nonprofits and community-based organizations, municipal and state organizations and agencies, and national organizations (Table 2).

Table 2. Types of Sponsoring Organizations and Partners

Type of Sponsoring or Partner Organization	Number of Programs
Schools and school districts	53
Colleges and universities	45
Local nonprofits and community-based organizations	36
Municipal and state organizations and agencies	16
National organizations	15

Schools and School Districts

Fifty-three of the 100 reviewed programs involved school sites or school districts. Often, these programs were hosted after school on school grounds. Schools provided space and facilities for programming, such as classrooms, cafeterias, libraries, and recreational spaces. Often teachers were hired to stay after school and run these programs. Hosting an afterschool program at a school can be beneficial for a number of reasons, including convenience, familiarity, and additional opportunities for students to develop positive relationships and a sense of belonging in the school community (Fenzel & Richardson, 2018).

However, hosting a program at a school can have its drawbacks. Students (and parents for any parent engagement opportunities) who feel disconnected from or unsafe at school may be less likely to stay for an afterschool program (Pelcher & Rajan, 2016). Additionally, as Maljak et al. (2014) found, afterschool programs sometimes must compete for space with school clubs or sports, navigate bureaucratic structures with teachers and administrators, and, in general, cope with complex organizational hurdles that can hinder successful programming. In their study of physical activity clubs at urban high schools, Maljak et al. (2014) found that difficulty obtaining space for afterschool programming had downstream effects such as canceled sessions, frustration for students and staff, and eventually decreased participant attendance. Securing support from school administrators may help

program staff prevent, navigate, and resolve any tensions (Maljak et al., 2014).

In other OST partnerships, schools did not physically host programs but still played a critical role. One clear example is recruitment. For a number of OST programs, school teachers and counselors acted as referral sources, alerting students to OST opportunities and encouraging attendance (Whalen et al., 2016). Schools can also help advertise OST programs by posting flyers or hosting informational sessions.

At the school district level, some superintendents helped match the district curriculum standards to the goals for academic OST programs; some advocated for space and funding. One district assigned staff members, such as a coordinator of extended time, to assist in developing OST programming (López et al., 2020). However, one disadvantage of alignment with district standards is that it can limit the ability of OST organizations to design creative and engaging programs (Symons & Ponzio, 2019).

Colleges and Universities

Forty-five programs relied on colleges and universities. These institutions provided valuable resources for OST programs, including facilities such as research labs and summertime dorms, faculty who provided instruction and training, undergraduate and graduate students who served as mentors, researchers who led program evaluations, and grant funding. In OST programs hosted at colleges and universities, middle and high school students were introduced to university life, resources, skills, and networking, all of which helped make postsecondary education feel more realistic and attainable (Geenen et al., 2015; Matthews & Mellom, 2012; Monk et al., 2014; Salto et al., 2014).

Colleges and universities did not have to host an entire program in order to make a contribution; even a one-day field trip or a culminating student research conference can leave a positive impression on youth. One program included in this review partnered with a higher education institution to offer pre-college endorsements (Martin et al., 2020); another offered college credit (Bernier & Fowler, 2020) for program completion. Furthermore, some university departments of education helped OST programs with curriculum design. For example, the Whitaker Center for STEM Education at Florida Gulf Coast University supported a local science camp for Latinx students who were part of a migrant farming community by

ensuring that camp activities included evidence-based practices (Frost et al., 2021).

Colleges and universities occasionally initiated and sponsored OST programs. Such was the case of the Young Scientist Program at the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis (Chiappinelli et al., 2016). An MD and a PhD student founded the program in 1991 to “recruit talent for the scientific future”; since then, the nine-week research experience has been hosted annually at the university, led almost entirely by graduate student volunteers (Chiappinelli et al., 2016).

Another mode of collaboration is when college students work or volunteer in community-based OST programs, serving as near-peer mentors, leaders, or interns. In such partnerships described in the literature, OST programs and university departments formed reciprocal relationships through which students in education, psychology, social work, medicine, and public health received exposure and supervision in their field, sometimes even receiving course credit for their time (Oparaji et al., 2015). This mode of partnership can be especially valuable in under-resourced communities, where college interns can provide academic, physical health, and mental health support that may otherwise be difficult to access (Oparaji et al., 2015).

Local Nonprofits and Community-Based Organizations

Thirty-six OST programs, across all categories, relied on nonprofit and community-based organizations (CBOs). These organizations served a variety of functions, including assisting with recruitment; providing space, funding, and materials; training staff; and developing and delivering programming. OST programs also referred youth participants as necessary to community-based social work or outreach programs for help with basic needs, such as physical health, mental health, or housing, thereby providing stability and wraparound services (Kabacoff et al., 2013).

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well positioned to host, support, and sustain OST programs. For example, the Newcomer English Language Learners Summer Enrichment Academy (López et al., 2020), hosted by New England Public Schools (pseudonym), was a four-week summer program serving refugee students in grades 5 to 9. To meet students’ needs, the school district partnered with the International Center, a local nonprofit that supported refugee families through resettlement, education, career support, and pathways to citizenship. Center staff hosted an information session for parents and helped parents enroll their children, served as tutors during the summer program, and acted as parent liaisons

when parents spoke a language other than English. Center staff also trained the schoolteachers who led classes about the refugee experience, trauma, and mental health. The teachers therefore displayed a high level of awareness of and appropriate sensitivity to the social and emotional needs of the youth. The program achieved academic success as well: Students in the program showed improvement in reading and writing across all grades (López et al., 2020).

Municipal and State Organizations and Agencies

Partnerships with municipal and state organizations and agencies appeared 16 times in the literature. Below are examples of programs that were sponsored by or partnered with parks and recreation divisions, public libraries, museums, and foster care and adoption agencies.

Parks and Recreation Divisions

Two afterschool OST programs were hosted by city parks and recreation departments (Frazier et al., 2015; Goodman et al., 2021). Both programs, delivered at parks in urban neighborhoods experiencing high levels of violence and a lack of safe spaces for youth to play outside after school, focused on mental health and social and emotional development for middle school youth. Park staff were involved in program design, recruitment, and implementation. In the case of Fit2Lead Youth Enrichment and Sports (Good-

man et al., 2021), the Miami-Dade County Parks, Recreation, and Open Spaces Department mobilized both existing and new partners, including local colleges and universities, the local school district, and the juvenile services department, to help shape program goals, curricula, and outcome measures. Meanwhile, *Leaders @ Play* (Frazier et al., 2015) was a collaboration among a university research team, park staff, and mental health providers in response to requests from park supervisors who recognized that middle school students were aging out of their child-focused program, *Kids @ Play*, but were still too young for teen clubs.

Public Libraries

The program *4 Youth, By Youth* (Fields & Rafferty, 2012) was a partnership between Baltimore County Public Libraries and the local 4-H chapter. The program was hosted at the library by trained library staff, along with 4-H educators, volunteers, and college interns. In another example, program staff of a summer enrichment program for English learners in Georgia used the local library to hold evening informational meetings for families (Matthews & Mellom, 2012).

Museums

The education division of the New-York Historical Society, a history museum, offered a seven-month internship for high school students (Frosini, 2017). Staff designers, archivists, and curators supervised, trained, and worked alongside the interns, known as student historians. The student historians, 60 percent of whom qualified for free or reduced-price lunch, received an hourly stipend. They led meaningful projects including curating satellite exhibits and developing resources for local history students and teachers. Interviewed participants reported an increase in agency as they developed competence in their subject area, took on responsibility, and felt a sense of purpose as they worked toward a goal (Frosini, 2017). Another program, sponsored by UConn Health, offered museum field trips during its summer programming, complementing the organization's focus on academic enrichment to prepare middle and high school students to enter health professions (Wrensford et al., 2019).

Foster Care and Adoption Agencies

Although four of the 100 reviewed OST programs were reported as serving youth in the foster care sys-

tem, only two programs served this population exclusively. The Better Futures Project (Geenen et al., 2015) provided postsecondary preparation for youth in foster care who had mental health conditions. For this OST program, the state foster care agency generated a list of potential participants and checked their database for program eligibility based on age, target area, and mental health diagnosis. Then, with the caseworker's approval, a liaison from the state department of human services made contact with the family (Geenan et al., 2015). In the second case, a local adoption agency selected students to participate in a summer media literacy course within a college preparatory program (Friesem & Greene, 2020).

National Organizations

For 15 of the reviewed programs, national organizations provided support in various ways, most often with STEAM or multipurpose initiatives. Some had a central office that supported mission-oriented chapters around the country, often partnering locally for program implementation. For example, the non-profit National Council for Science and the Environment sponsored a program called *EnvironMentors*, a science outreach program established in 1992. The Louisiana State University chapter of *EnvironMentors* partnered with another national initiative, the U.S. Department of Education's *GEAR UP* program (*Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs*), which supported *EnvironMentors* with selecting students, providing transportation and food, offering case management, and acting as parent liaisons (Monk et al., 2014). In other cases, organizations functioned as national networks with local chapters operating as independent franchises, such as the *Boys & Girls Clubs of America*. In a few cases in the review, national organizations were called in by a program to provide specialized services or professional development. For example, *Innovative Learning for Minority Males*, a STEM program for Black boys in middle school, partnered with a national mentoring organization to train its staff in culturally affirming mentorship practices (Ladeji-Osias et al., 2018).

Cross-Sector Partnerships

Over half of the 100 reviewed programs involved some sort of cross-sector partnership, meaning that they relied on partners from more than one sector. Cross-sector partnerships were most successful when

the partners shared a clear vision and aligned missions, engaged in ongoing communication, and made sure each partner had delineated roles and responsibilities. The case of 4 Youth, By Youth (Fields & Rafferty, 2012), the previously mentioned partnership between Baltimore County 4-H and Baltimore County Public Libraries, illustrates this point. The partners came together to offer structured experiential after-school activities to meet the needs of youth visiting the library. 4-H contributed curricula, staff training, and university 4-H educators; the library system conducted a needs assessment with youth and provided facilities, librarians, and youth participants. Both partners met their goals: 4-H increased the number of community partnerships, youth programs, and trained facilitators in the area, reaching a larger youth audience. The public library system increased its program offerings, recruited potential library patrons, and found a new funding source (Fields & Rafferty, 2012).

In another example, in 2010, the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development and the nonprofit New York Academy of Sciences partnered to develop a model for increasing OST program capacity to facilitate STEM learning (Groome & Rodríguez, 2014). This initiative placed young scientists, many of whom were volunteer graduate students, as mentors in OST programs. The city youth department provided professional development on youth development and teaching STEM, identified potential OST programs, monitored OST programs, and facilitated volunteer screening. Meanwhile, the New York Academy of Science had long-standing relationships with dozens of universities and medical institutions in the city. It recruited and trained mentors, selected STEM curricula, facilitated communication and troubleshooting between mentors and OST programs, organized events, and secured curriculum resources. Most mentors were drawn to volunteer to improve their skills in teaching and mentoring, engage in community service, or serve as role models; OST programs benefited from their mentorship and scientific training and expertise (Groome & Rodríguez, 2014).

Finally, teen employment initiatives were a notable example of cross-sector partnerships including local

government, businesses, and nonprofit organizations. Various government employment agencies—including Baltimore’s Youthworks (Laurenzano et al., 2021; Pierce et al., 2017), the Minneapolis Step-Up Program (Rogers et al., 2020), NYC’s Summer Youth Employment Program (Grant et al., 2016; Leos-Urbel, 2014; Schwartz et al., 2014), and Chicago’s One Summer Plus (Heller, 2014)—were referenced in the included studies, either as the main OST program or as a municipal partner that provided wages to youth participants for a more specialized program. Each initiative recruited, screened, and trained young participants and then connected them to private, nonprofit, and city and state government employers for summer work. These programs, made possible through a combination of federal, state, city, and private funds, were administered by various government agencies, including the Mayor’s Office of Employment Development in Baltimore (Laurenzano et al., 2021), the Department of Youth and Community Development in NYC (Grant et al., 2016), and the Department of Family and Support Services in Chicago (Heller, 2014).

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Limitations

This review only included studies published as peer-reviewed journal articles, reports, or working papers between 2012 and 2022. Therefore, this review does not reflect research from outside of this date range or from other study types such as dissertations or conference proceedings. All studies were conducted in the U.S., so conclusions cannot be drawn about OST programming for low-income adolescents in other countries. Additionally, many effective programs and partnerships, from which much can be learned, are not reflected in the research literature, in part due to the immense amount of resources required for the research and publication process. This review does not capture important work that happens in OST programs across the country every day.

Implications for Practice

Over 20 years ago, Noam (2001) theorized that society was entering an “era of connection,” increasingly bridging institutions to solve complex challenges. As

he explained in his analysis of OST programs, “From epidemiological and resilience studies we now understand that just as risks are intertwined, so are most solutions” (Noam, 2001, p. 5).

As this systematic review demonstrates, OST programs serving low-income youth rarely worked in silos. They relied on partnerships for funding, recruitment, space and materials, curriculum design, professional development, staffing, and program evaluation. Successful partnerships had clear roles, responsibilities, and ongoing communication among all involved. Importantly, cross-sector OST programs provided a way for partners not only to meet their existing goals, but also to create new goals together that expanded their reach or services in a way that benefited the community. Partnerships were especially crucial for serving hard-to-reach youth, as well as for developing and maintaining trust with community members. Some organizations, such as foster care or refugee resettlement agencies, relied on existing databases and relationships to facilitate participant identification and recruitment, while other organizations offered staff training or designed curriculum that was relevant to the strengths and needs of the youth served.

For program leaders and staff looking to partner with other entities, a helpful starting place may be to map the landscape of local organizations, broadly conceived, including schools, universities, CBOs, and municipal and state agencies. Some areas, such as rural locations, may have fewer resources available. An important resource to consider, as some of the literature suggests, is the skills and knowledge of family members, community members, and the youth themselves (Kekelis et al., 2017). National organizations can also step in to play various roles, such as providing curricula and in-person or virtual trainings or consultation.

A more targeted approach may be to begin inward: identify a program need or area for improvement, and then scan for potential partners that can help fill that need. As the review revealed, identifying potential partners who have overlapping or comple-

mentary goals or missions can help set up a particularly fruitful relationship (e.g., Fields & Rafferty, 2012; Groome & Rodríguez, 2014). Program leaders should remember, too, that potential partners can find OST programs, especially if leaders effectively advertise the program and its goals in the community.

Researchers still have much to learn from OST program leaders about how they find, form, and sustain meaningful partnerships. The research tends to focus on what the partners do, rather than on the challenging and time-consuming process of creating partnerships and navigating the collaboration over time. However, this process can be worth the trouble. Articles in this review consistently credited programs’ successes to their partners, as all made vital contributions to positive youth and community outcomes. As the field learns from successful OST programs, the immense opportunity and need for effective partnerships emerges. Such collaborations are especially important in programs for youth in underserved communities and those from marginalized backgrounds, as the field works toward creating an ecosystem of OST support that will help youth thrive.

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