



STARTING AN AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM TOOLKIT

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USING THIS TOOLKIT

Who is CTNCY?

The Network for Children and Youth is a statewide coalition. We bring people together through strong local and statewide partnerships to help children, youth and families thrive.

Using this Toolkit

This guide is for organizations looking to start or strengthen an after school programs. This guide provides steps organizations can take to gather information and resources, along with questions to ask yourself and your collaborators. We divided the guide into three parts.

Learn - know the basics before you start programming

Plan - develop your program design and practices

Grow - take your program to the next level

We encourage you to start at the beginning and work your way through this toolkit to design high-quality after school programs. The last piece of this guide has the appendices and resources. It is the best practice to read the guide first to understand how to use the resources.

Quality Standards

This toolkit is based on the Connecticut After School Quality Standards, comprised of several research-based benchmarks to promote high-quality programs.

Find out more about the Standards on page.



Look for this icon to identify references to a Standard

Resources

This toolkit includes quality resources. Use the following icon next to each resource for a clickable link or scan the QR code on page

Look for this icon to identify references to a Standard.

Report broken links to CTNCY at info@ctncy.org.

PLANNING TIMELINE

YEAR ONE

SEPTEMBER- DECEMBER

LEARN

conduct needs assessment
connect with other programs

JANUARY - AUGUST

FUND

identify potential
funding streams

FEBRUARY - MARCH

PROGRAM DESIGN

secure location
establish program standards

APRIL - JUNE

PLAN

create recruitment plan
build community relationships

JULY - AUGUST

ENGAGE

determine curricula
register youth and families

YEAR TWO

START

SEPTEMBER

begin programming
plan continuous quality improvement

EVALUATE

JAN - MARCH

apply for additional funding
make any program adjustments

GROW

MAY - AUGUST

plan for upcoming year
begin summer programming

YEAR THREE+

ENGAGE

SEPTEMBER

prioritize staff development and
retention
connect with families and communities

EVALUATE

JAN - MARCH

make any program adjustments
sustain continuous quality improvement

GROW

MAY - AUGUST

plan for upcoming year
begin summer programming

LEARN

WHY AFTERSCHOOL?

Children spend 80% of their time outside the school day. Out-of-school time programs make the most of these hours. High-quality programs are places where youth can learn new things explore interests, and have a safe space to be themselves. By starting an afterschool program embedded with community resources, you affect the mental, social, physical and academic well-being of youth and their families.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Research allows you to understand the needs of your community and ensure that your program is responsive to those needs. By answering these questions first, you address needs and decide how to make a lasting impact.

CONSIDER

- What programs already exist in my community?
- What are the areas of high need in my community?
- What do other members of my community want from an afterschool program?

Conduct **community outreach** through surveys, focus groups, and listening sessions. Reach out to family members, youth, school staff, business leaders, and others. Your goal is to gather information about their need for, and interest in, afterschool programming.

NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

The data you collect in community outreach is a key part of a **needs assessment**. Defined as a collection of data that shows both assets and gaps in community services; grant funding commonly requires a need assessment.

It is best to gather a variety of data early in the process to get the most complete picture possible. There are two types of data you will collect: **quantitative** and **qualitative**. See more about the data you may include during a needs assessment on the next page.

LEARN

Quantitative data are numbers, often collected by surveys or assessments. Examples include attendance, participant demographics, academic performance, and behavioral changes.

Qualitative data are anything captured without numbers such as observations, descriptions, or narratives. Examples include the experiences and stories of youth, parents, and staff involved in programming.

The structure of your needs assessment can take whatever form makes sense to you; however, it should clearly show the community you are working with, the areas of community need, and the data backing your observation.

Use the chart below to explore what sources of data you might use in a needs assessment:



ASSESSMENT TEMPLATE

Check out Starting an Afterschool Program
[Community Outreach and Partnerships Guide.](#)

Audience	Area of Need	Potential Data Sources
Youth & Families	Academic	Local high school graduation rates
	Social Emotional Support	State rank of mental health Feeling of school safety
	Physical	Food insecurity rates
Community Members	Academic	Local unemployment rates
	Social Emotional Support	Exposure to violence Community satisfaction rate
	Physical	Access to preventive healthcare

LEARN

PARTNERSHIPS

When you conduct community outreach, you may want to find potential partners. Partnering with schools and other community-based organizations will help you build infrastructure and plan for your program's longevity. Developing robust Family and Community Partnerships is Core Area 2 of the Connecticut Afterschool Quality Standards, recognizing the importance of partnership in high-quality afterschool.

CONSIDER

- Which community organizations or schools would be best to partner with?
- What is the difference between a partner, vendor, and funder?
- How do you set up a formal partnership with a school or community partner?

Early on, think about partnering with a local organization like those listed above. This might be easier than starting a new program, allowing you to grow your program organically and leverage community strengths. An established program may offer you:

Structure and resources	Local community partners will have administrative practices and operational structures in place. For example, you may find a partner to share building space or equipment.
Access to a diverse network	Your partners already have relationships with schools, families, and local leaders. From there, you can find new participants, volunteers, or funders. Partners can help connect your afterschool program with the community, increase its visibility, and help with collaboration.
Program sustainability	Running an afterschool program requires ongoing funding, staffing, and support. Your partners may provide funding, grant opportunities, or in-kind services that help you operate.
Knowledge and experience	Partners may have staff who have worked in youth development, education, or program management. You can learn from their insights, guidance, and best practices.
Cultural history	Community partners can help to make your afterschool program culturally relevant and responsive. By collaborating with them, you ensure the program aligns with local values, desires, and traditions.

LEARN

TYPES OF PARTNERSHIPS

A variety of partnership structures exist when starting an afterschool program. Traditionally, a partner collaborates, a vendor provides services, and a funder provides financial support.



MOU

All partnerships need documentation of agreements.
Check out our [Memorandum of Understanding \(MOU\) template](#).

Partner

A partner collaborates with the program to provide resources, staff, services, or support that helps achieve shared goals. Partnerships may involve joint activities or shared staff and resources.

Local library partnering to provide reading resources or literacy workshops.

Vendor

A vendor is a business or individual contracted to provide specific goods or services to the program, usually for a fee. Vendors typically have a transactional relationship with the program, providing things without a ongoing partnership.

Suppliers of items like snacks, equipment, educational supplies, or outsourced services.

Funder

A funder is an individual, organization, corporation or foundation that provides financial support to the program.

A foundation that awarded the program a grant.



FIND LOCAL PARTNERS

CTNCY's self-reported [Afterschool Map & Database](#), includes information on programs in the state and contact information. Once your program is up and running you can add it to the map.

LEARN

MISSION & VISION

When developing an afterschool program, you will need a clear and concise mission to share with partners and community members who may support you. Mission statements lay the foundation for your work, defining your program's reason for existence, your purpose, intentions, and overall goals. Vision statements are far more inspirational and aspirational; they outline the problems you aim to address and how you will solve them.

When drafting your mission and vision statements, in addition to referencing your completed needs assessment, consider these essential questions:

CONSIDER

- Who are we here to serve and why?
- What can I offer the field that is not already available?
- What are the goals and objectives of our program and why?
- What expertise and networks can I use to meet these goals?
- How will we measure success?



MISSION & VISION GUIDE

Use this [worksheet](#) to guide you through the process of writing a mission and vision statement.



PROGRESS CHECK

Have you completed the following steps to learn about your community before starting an afterschool program?

- ☐ Hosted a listening session about afterschool in your community?
- ☐ Written your mission & values?
- ☐ Met with potential community partners like schools or libraries?
- ☐ Completed a community needs assessment?

LEARN

FUNDING

There are many local, state, federal, and private funding sources to help fuel afterschool programs. A successful program will use a funding approach often referred to as braiding funding. This means you use multiple funding sources to run your program. These sources can include local business sponsorships, public and private grants, fundraising activities, and fee-for-service.

Public Grant Funding in Connecticut

Often, programs use grants as financial support. To receive a grant, organizations must compete for funds through an application and undergo an ongoing evaluation process. The two Connecticut state agencies that manage common afterschool and community school funding are the CT State Department of Education (CTSDE) and Office of Early Childhood (OEC).

Common Afterschool Funding

SDE

21st Century Community Learning Centers
Afterschool Programs
School District Title I

OEC

State Funded Child Care Centers
Care 4 Kids
Child Care Assistance Program



FIND GRANTS

Check out these grant seekers and other local funding sources.
[Afterschool Alliance](#), [Grant Station](#), [Grant Watch](#), your public library.

LEARN

FEE-FOR-SERVICE

Many afterschool programs use a fee-for-service model, where participating families or communities pay a set fee, either on a per-day, per-week, or monthly basis, for their youth to attend the program. Most pricing models cover the most basic operational costs while allowing for flexibility with other services like tutoring and special classes. A discount structure incentivizes long-term participation and accommodates families with multiple children. Review the following service types when considering a fee-for-service model:

Service	Description
Registration	Covers administrative setup, materials, and enrollment processing
Weekly, Daily, or Monthly	Options for full time, part time, or drop-in attendance
Day's Off	Runs when schools are not in session (summer, holidays, etc.)
Extended Services	Includes of extended hour care or special enrichment classes
Discounts	Suggestions include discounts for siblings, referrals, scholarships, or monthly or annual payments



FEE STRUCTURES

Check out these [sample fee structures](#) from programs around CT.

LEARN

FISCAL SPONSORS

You can also consider a **fiscal sponsorship**, a partnership with an organization that provides financial oversight and management. By partnering with a fiscal sponsor, you receive help from their existing 501 (c)3, which gives them a tax-exempt status. This saves you the time of waiting for your own status and lets you focus on getting to work. Additionally, fiscal sponsors can help with administrative tasks such as financial management, payroll processing, human resources, and grant management. It is important to carefully select a fiscal sponsor and set up a clear agreement that outlines the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of both parties.

FUNDRAISING



Individual, corporate and foundation fundraising can provide other sources of financial support for your program. There are multiple options that provide excellent recommendations to launch a fundraising campaign.

FISCAL PLANNING



You for Youth (Y4Y) created a helpful **[fiscal management planning checklist](#)** which you can use as a model for your own fiscal management processes.

LEARN

LICENSING REQUIREMENTS

The CT Office of Early Childhood Division of Licensing oversees licensing for over 4,000 child care centers, group child care homes, family child care homes and youth camps in CT. They are committed to promoting the health, safety and welfare of Connecticut's children.

In most cases child care programs including afterschool programs require licensing with very few exceptions. It is important that you connect with OEC to complete your licensing application before opening your program.

Here are possible licensing exemptions:

- Administered by a public school system or municipal agency/department
- Administered by a private school (accredited by SDE or approved by State Board of Education)
 - Only children whose ages are listed in accreditation or approval
- Programs that teach a single skill and are no longer than 2 hours in length including music, dance, drama, art, sports activities, rehearsals or academic tutoring
- Library programs that are no longer than two hours
- Scouting programs
- Programs exclusively for children 13 years of age and older
- Programs administered by Solar Youth, a nationally chartered boys & Girls Club, Cardinal Shehan Center, OPMAD, LEAP or Police Athletic League of Stamford, Inc
- Programs administered under contract with DSS that promote the reduction of teenage pregnancy to persons who are 10 to 19 years of age
- Programs that exclusively provide care for children of members of the US Coast Guard or any branch of the military on federal property or administered by the federal government



This resource is to provide awareness of licensing regulation only. We encourage you to contact [CT Office of Early Childhood Licensing](#) with questions.

PLAN

ACTIVITIES & PROGRAMMING

Next, you can start planning the day-to-day logistics of your afterschool program! This section will lead you through the key steps to develop your program's design, procedure, staffing requirements, safety measures, recruitment plans, and evaluation tools.

It is now time to apply what you have learned so far and begin designing your program structure and schedule. Developing culturally responsive program activities is Core Area 4 of the CT Afterschool Quality Standards, demonstrating the impact of youth-centered design in high-quality afterschool. Below, are a few key consider while designing your program.

Concept	Description
Structured vs Unstructured	Afterschool is an opportunity for youth to choose their activities, unwind, and explore. Be sure to have a balance of structured schedules and activities with unstructured flex time.
Youth Voice & Choice	If you offer youth the power to make decisions, they will be more invested in the program. Ask for their input on activity ideas. Let them design part of the space. Provide time for youth to choose.
Transitions	<p>Moving from the school day to afterschool programming is a big transition. Youth will require different things to make that transition successful. Ideally, you can offer options to support all youth:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Laps - Youth need some sort of physical activity to spend energy.Snacks - Youth need something to eat and drink.Raps - Youth prefer to hang out and socialize with friends.Naps - Youth in this group need quiet, relaxing time.
Safety & Supervision	What is your provider-to-youth ratio? Do you have access to your building at all times? Who will be welcoming youth and overseeing pick up? Do you have enough staff to run programs safely?

PLAN

DAILY SCHEDULE

Establishing regular and reliable hours of operation is key to building community trust and a quality program. There are a variety of models to consider below.

Model	Hours	Description
Traditional	School dismissal until 5:00 - 6:00 PM	Provides care and enrichment for youth after the school day ends, until families traditionally finish work.
Extended Hours	School dismissal until 7:00 - 9:00 PM	Offers longer hours for working families who may need care for their children beyond the typical afterschool time.
School's Out, Seasonal or Break-Specific Programs	8:00 AM - 5:00 PM on school nonattendance days	Operates when schools are closed, such as holidays, breaks, teacher workdays, or school breaks.
Before and After School Care	7:00 AM - 9:00 AM and 3:00 PM - 6:00 PM	Provides both before-school and afterschool care. Ideal for families who need coverage at the beginning and end of the school day.
Drop-In or Flexible Hours	Varies based on community need	Allows families to drop children off as needed, without committing to a set schedule.

PLAN

CURRICULUM & ACTIVITIES

A high-quality afterschool program includes diverse, age-appropriate, and accessible curricula and activities. Choose a diversity of topics and subject matters that are reflective of your students' interests. Remember to practice the activity ahead of time with your staff before sharing the youth.

Curriculum Recommendations

Look for
curriculums that
include

Hands-on, minds-on activities
Social-emotional learning competencies
Easily available materials and space
Age-appropriate and inclusive activities

Sources

Mizzen Education
CASEL
Curiosity machine
BOOST Cafe



DESIGN ACTIVITIES

Check out this resource from [WNET Thirteen Education](#) to help you dive deep into your program's design.

YOUTH VOICE

The program staff should work with youth to choose curricula and activities. Authentic youth voice encourages ongoing engagement. Consider using the following strategies to center youth voice at your program:

- Provide [Interest Surveys](#) for youth to provide feedback before the program begins.
- Offer them two or three options that you have already vetted.
- At intake, ask about their interests and plan around those.
- Allow the youth to name a need in their community and encourage a service-based project addressing that need.
- Establish regular check-ins or circle time to allow the youth to share and speak.
- After completion of a curriculum or program, get feedback from the youth using a survey on their program experience and what topics interest them in the future.

PLAN

POLICIES & PROCEDURES

Having firm and documented policies and procedures is essential to running a successful and impactful afterschool program. These policies are a plan for program operations: day-to-day and long-term. So, you should create them before starting any program. All afterschool programs should keep written policies and procedures including, but not limited to, the following topics:

Medical	Safety	Behavioral	Administrative
Dispensing Medication	Emergency Procedures	Positive Guidance	Staff & Volunteer Screening Policy
Asthma	Transportation Procedures	Following up with Late or Absent Youth	Background Check Policy
Head Lice	Youth Arrival & Departure		Child Abuse & Neglect Reporting Act
Handwashing	Visitor Sign-in & Out		Enrollment & Termination
Illness	Serving Snacks & Meals		Inventory Tracking
Injury	Internet Blocking Software		Secure Data Management

Funders and partners may also require you to keep other written policies and procedures. Check your contracts to find required policy deliverables.



POLICY REVIEW

Review and customize our [Program Policy Review](#) checklist to fit your program.

PLAN

ADMINISTRATION & STAFFING

Organizations must have **strong staffing practices** in place. This starts by designing thorough **job descriptions** for all positions, including volunteers. Additionally, all adults, including volunteers and interns, who work with youth aged 17 years or younger must complete **a background check**. Developing ethical and clear administrative practices is Core Area 3 of the CT Afterschool Quality Standards, recognizing the impact of successful administration in high-quality afterschool.

BACKGROUND CHECKS

In CT, comprehensive background checks for childcare providers including afterschool programs go through:

- Background Check Information System (BCIS)

Complete all background checks before working with youth.

JOB DESCRIPTIONS & HIRING

Well-written job descriptions are important for finding qualified staff. Job descriptions outline the scope of the role, from daily tasks and functions to reporting structures. The time and effort agencies put into drafting high quality job descriptions and planning salaries will all be for nothing if we are not able to recruit, hire, and keep quality staff. Staff turnover is one of the biggest challenges in the out-of-school time (OST) field and impacts program consistency and youth and family trust.

Check out our [job postings](#) for current job descriptions. 

INDOOR & OUTDOOR ENVIRONMENT

The indoor and outdoor environment should be conducive to all programmatic activities. It should also be inclusive of a variety of **physical, mental, and social abilities**. Regardless of your location, ensure that you are following all legal health and safety regulations that apply. Developing safe environments is Core Area 4 of the **CT Afterschool Quality Standards**, defining safety in high-quality afterschool.



TRAINING

Check out our [training service & annual professional development](#) opportunities.

PLAN

CONSIDER

- Is your space wheelchair-accessible or compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)?
- Is there a calm space for youth or people who are over-stimulated?
- Do you need to follow any external regulations from the building or partners?

Recommended organizations to partner with for space

Local schools

Museums

Community colleges

Faith centers

Park districts

Daycare facilities

Community centers

Libraries

Sports facilities

ACCESSIBILITY & THE MYTH OF AVERAGE

When designing your program environment, many providers try to plan for an "average" youth. This is a mistake, as there is no such thing as an "average" youth. Designing programming for the widest range of needs possible builds a program that can serve the true diversity of youth and families in a community. When taking this wide lens, you will find that all youth benefit from accommodations, not just those that need them the most. The following is a list of potential accommodations that programs can make to serve as many youth and families as possible.



NEURODIVERSITY TOOLKIT

Check out ACT Now's [Neurodiversity in OST toolkit](#) strategies for fostering inclusion and practical approaches to accommodations.

PLAN

Provide Earplugs & Headphones

Pair Youth with Peer Mentors

Offer Alternative Seating Options

Offer Remote Options

Use Soft Lights

Written & Verbal Instructions facilities

Designate High & Low Energy Zones

Offer Quiet Fidget Items

Minimize Visual Clutter

SAFETY, HEALTH & NUTRITION

Before you begin programming, you need to **create systems** and standards for addressing potential emergencies and hazards. Focusing on Safety, Health, and Nutrition is Core Area 5 of the **CT Afterschool Quality Standards**, recognizing the importance of health practices in high-quality afterschool.

CONSIDER

- How will you respond in a case of harm or violence?
- Are your staff trained in first aid, mental health first aid, and CPR?
- What are the dietary needs of your community?

HUNGER & MEALS

If youth are coming to your program after the school day, many will be hungry. If you are offering programming before school, they may need breakfast. If you are running summer programming, you need a plan for meals. In short, by providing meals and snacks, you are improving the quality of your program and lowering the barrier for youth participation.

Food varies widely by region, so you want to be inclusive of the youth in your program.



FUNDING MEALS

Review CT's **Afterschool Snack** Program for afterschool meals and ways to address food scarcity.

PLAN

TRANSPORTATION

A major barrier to many afterschool programs across urban, suburban, and rural areas is transportation. By providing transportation, it makes it easier for families to take part. Whatever options you choose, explore safety practices, including required car seats, licensure, and background checks.

CONSIDER

- Do youth have safe passage to your program?
- How will youth arrive home safely?
- What is your plan for late pick up or dismissal?

Options for Transportation

Walking

Choose a location near enough that youth can walk. Staff can meet them and escort youth from that location to your program via a walking bus.

Public Transportation

Try getting a subsidy from your collaborators, city, or state government to help cover costs.

School Bus

Coordinate with the school district you serve to take advantage of their bus system.

Family Carpool

Organize a family carpooling network and schedule.

Program Vehicle

Get creative! Can a local business donate vehicles? Can you share a vehicle with another community-based organization?

PLAN

RECRUITMENT

Getting enough youth to register for your program requires designing a culturally responsive recruitment program. Recruitment is a part of the yearly program cycle and the strategies you use should evolve based on feedback from your community.

CONSIDER

- What methods of communication are families most comfortable using?
- Are there trusted messengers in your community who can help with recruitment?
- Is registration easy for families to complete?

Strategies for Recruitment

Community Events

Host community events in your space for youth and families to attend.

In-School Events for Youth

Partner with schools to host in-school events, building interest among youth.

Flyers & Materials Sent to Homes

Use school partnerships to send materials home with youth for families.



RECRUITMENT TOOLKIT

Check out the [Summer Learning Recruitment Toolkit](#) with templates for recruitment and messaging.

PLAN

FAMILY & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Partnerships with families and the larger community create a successful afterschool program. While **building trust** takes time, there are several strategies you can use to engage families successfully. Developing strong Family & Community Engagement practices is Core Area 2, of the **CT Afterschool Quality Standards**, recognizing the power of centering families and communities in high-quality afterschool.

CONSIDER

- How will you build and support relationships with families and community members?
- What activities or events are particularly accessible and fun for your community?
- Who can you ask for guidance when planning family engagement events?

ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Start by creating a family engagement plan, including designing family nights to bring folks into your program and establishing regular lines of communication. This plan will map out the ways you build relationships with families, involve them in programming, and include them in decision-making. Consider the following strategies for serving whole families and community members:

Open Drop-in
hours

Family Dinner
Nights

Cultural
Celebrations

College or Career
Readiness

Flexible
Childcare

Adult Education
Classes

Family Enrichment
Events

Social Media
Engagement



FAMILY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

Check out this [Family Engagement Toolkit](#) form ACT Now for strategies to developing a robust family engagement plan.

PLAN

DATA. QUALITY & EVALUATION

Just as the school day has standards, so does afterschool. In CT, we use the **CT Afterschool Quality Standards** to set benchmarks for programs across the state. Created in 2007 (updated in 2025), the Standards provide a common definition of quality that leads to quality programs and positive outcomes for youth.

CONSIDER

- Which of the Standards best fit your program site?
- What do you use to evaluate your program? Which assessments are right for you?
- How will you figure out if your program meets these Standards?

CT Quality Standards Core Areas

Environment

Safety

Administration &
Organization

Activities &
Programming

Staffing &
Professional
Development

Family &
Community
Partnerships

Relationships

Sustainability &
Evaluation

CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

Continuous Quality Improvement (COI) is a consistent process that evaluates all parts of your program and finds areas for growth. These practices will encourage you to keep evaluating and improving your organization. It also helps to satisfy funders and collaborators by showing positive changes as you learn and grow. Evaluations involve gathering data and feedback on a particular aspect of your program.

You can gather this feedback from youth, families, staff, community members, and partners. On the next page, is a selection of activities and outcomes to track. You may not evaluate all these areas or use every method we shared. Choose what makes the most sense depending on your goals and priorities.

PLAN

Program Activity	Outcome	Methods to Track
Academic Success	Track academic progress, social-emotional development, behavior metrics, engagement, or learning a skill	Academic progress Adult to youth ratio Advisory board participation Alumni surveys Attendance rate College & career pathways Content comprehension rate Event attendance Family testimonials Focus groups Legislator engagement Newsletter distribution Open ended surveys Program observations Satisfaction rates Staff feedback Social media engagement Space availability Use of resources Youth interviews
Attendance & participation	Learn about the program's ability to engage and keep youth & families	
Partnership & participation	evaluate the relationships you have with schools and other organizations	
Program implementation	Check back with your first program design versus practical application	
Staff performance	Find gaps in your staff's qualifications & performance	
Participation satisfaction	Ask about youth, family, staff & partners' experiences and suggestions	
Program sustainability	Look at strategies for finding resources & funding for future success	
Safety & well-being	Review your safety protocols & procedures	

PLAN

CT QUALITY PROGRAM SELF-ASSESSMENT

CT created the **Connecticut After School Program Quality Self-Assessment Tool** and an annual coaching process, which measures any or all the activities listed below. After evaluating your program using the CTQSAT, you can create an action plan. Using your data, this action plan will map out your next steps for improvement.



SELF ASSESSMENT

Use the **CTQSAT** as a way to measure your program's success.



STEM EVALUATION

CTNCY staff are available to provide a **Dimensions of Success (DOS)** evaluation of your STEM program.

PROGRESS CHECK



Have you completed the following steps to plan your program before the first day?

- ☐ Determined the best program design for your community?
- ☐ Identified high-quality staff members?
- ☐ Secured a safe location for program and play?
- ☐ Written comprehensive policies and procedures?
- ☐ Developed a recruitment strategy for youth and families?
- ☐ Established an evaluation and assessment plan for your program?

GROW

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

No staff member will have all the skills and expertise you need. However, investment in organization-wide professional development is a proven method for **retaining high-quality staff** and building an effective program. By providing opportunities for high-quality professional development, you grow your team's abilities to respond to youth successfully. Offering quality Professional Development Opportunities is Core Area 6 of the **CT Afterschool Quality Standards** recognizing the importance of trained staff in high-quality afterschool.

CONSIDER

- What skills do your team members need to grow professionally or personally?
- Are you providing appropriate salary and benefits to program staff?
- How will you determine which professional development opportunities are high-quality?

CTNCY TRAINING & RESOURCES

The Network provides various professional development training and technical assistance opportunities for people working in after school programs through our **training service, conference, in-person and online workshops**.

The following organizations also provide ongoing professional development and adult learning opportunities in the afterschool field:

- The Afterschool Alliance
- The National AfterSchool Association
- BOOST



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Check out our training opportunities listed on our [website](#).

GROW

SALARY & BENEFITS

During the process of developing job descriptions, employers will need to decide the salary ranges that go with each position. Additionally, employers need to assess the type of benefits they can offer their employees. Be sure to research what benefits are standard and realistic to offer your employees.



PAY RANGES

Check [Indeed's How-to-Guide](#) for building pay grades and salary ranges.

EMPLOYMENT RECORDS

Maintaining accurate employee records is crucial for afterschool programs to ensure legal compliance, manage safety and liability, and streamline operations. It ensures accurate payroll and benefits administration, supports efficient performance tracking and staff management, and demonstrates professionalism to employees and stakeholders.



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SURVEY

CTNCY has developed a [Professional Development Survey](#), for managers to administer with their employees.



PLANNING TOOL

Help individuals track their goals and progress in their career with the ACT Now [Professional Development Planning Tool](#).

GROW

ADVOCACY

We believe that afterschool is an essential part of the network of support for youth in CT. To that end, CTNCY designed resources to increase the quality and availability of afterschool programming and address outreach and advocacy. Through advocacy, we connect with change-makers to do the following:

- Highlight the increasing demand for quality afterschool programs in CT
- Share the stories of youth and communities your programs support statewide
- Educate on the connection between enrollment in afterschool and increased youth health and safety outcomes

POWER IN ADVOCACY

Policies created at both the state and federal levels affect afterschool programs. This means that local representatives of your state and federal government could be champions of afterschool in your community by directing public funding and resources to afterschool. By engaging directly with lawmakers through advocacy, we keep the Lights On for Afterschool, a national advocacy effort by the [Afterschool Alliance](#).



ADVOCACY TOOL

Ready to write a letter, make a call, connect on social media, or invite a legislator to your program?
Visit [NAA's Advocacy page](#) for tips and best practices.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Strategic planning is how organizations prepare for their programs and activities to be successful long term. A strategic plan should be developed over time, with input from across your community.

CONSIDER

- What do we want to achieve as an organization in the next several years?
- How will we reach these goals?
- What support do we need from outside collaborators?

GROW

Organizations often lean heavily on the '**why**' captured in their **mission statement** when addressing these questions. According to the evaluation experts at **PIE ORG**, strategic plans "are ways of thinking, acting, and pivoting over time in a desired direction so we can better serve our clients, build our organizations, and support one another."

S.W.O.T. ANALYSIS

By focusing on the **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats** an organization or group experiences, a S. W.O. T. Analysis creates an effective strategic plan. PI E ORG offers some questions to consider as you complete your analysis.

S.W.O.T	Guiding Questions
Strengths	What are we good at? What positions us to excel? What should we be capitalizing on to make progress?
Weaknesses	What are the gaps in programs, operations, or funding? What could slow down or stall our progress?
Opportunities	What are we not taking advantage of that could support our growth?
Threats	What are risks that could derail progress?

As you begin working on your analysis, you will find questions that align with your organization and community.

STRATEGIC PLANNING TEAMS

It is best practice to establish a strategic plan with a team of a wide variety of collaborators. Consider returning to your community collaborators and encourage youth input when creating a strategic plan.

The CT Quality Program Self-Assessment (CTQSAT) is another strategic planning tool that can be used by program leaders, staff & community collaborators.

GROW

SHARED LEADERSHIP

By this point, you know that collaboration is a focal point in any strong afterschool program. By engaging a wide variety of collaborators, like program staff, community members, youth, families, and more, in decision-making, you practice **shared leadership**. This practice centers diverse voices and experiences and addresses the needs of young people to amplify your agency's mission.




CONSIDER

- Who has been a close collaborator to our organization?
- When do we consider the feedback of youth in our choices?
- What advice are we looking for from our community?

ADVISORY BOARDS

A common way to engage multiple collaborators in your **decision-making processes** is to set up an Advisory Board. This is different from a Board of Directors, as advisory boards often include **various voices from within the community** to support the program's success, but do not provide management or fiscal oversight to the organization.

Steps to Build an Advisory Board

Step	Consider	Resource
Find Members	Who - Prioritize program staff, families, and youth members.	Use a matrix to think what additional expertise you would like at the table. 
Invite Members	Invitations should be personal and speak to specific reasons.	Use this worksheet to explore the questions members will have. 
Create Community	Foster a sense of community to encourage a space for learning, idea sharing, and progress.	Use the Creating and Engaging Environment Tool as you cultivate the culture of your Advisory board. 

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Spaces like an Advisory Board or other meeting environments may feel familiar to the adults at the table however, this type of situation may be new to youth who have agreed to join. Incorporating and amplifying youth voice is incredibly important in all aspects of afterschool programming, but it is particularly important here.



YOUTH VOICE

Check out the [Afterschool Alliance](#) on incorporating youth voice as you build out your Advisory Board team.

CONGRATULATIONS

If you made it this far, **congratulations!** Your passion and dedication for high-quality afterschool programming can transform your community. You have all the necessary tools and resources to create a space for youth to **learn, plan, and grow**. While creating a program takes time and effort, you can do it and ACT Now is here to help support you every step of the way.

PUT YOUR PROGRAM ON THE MAP

CTNCY created a self-reported map of afterschool programs across the state, services offered, and contact information. Once your program is up and running, sign the [Drive to Quality Pledge](#) and add it to the map!

JOIN OUR COALITION

Be a voice for CT youth and the afterschool programs serving them and their families. It's easy to join, simply sign up for our free weekly newsletter to stay up to date on the latest tools to access professional development opportunities, engage in networking events, and access resources for running strong programs. [Subscribe](#) today!

MEET WITH CTNCY

If you are looking for more help, [please reach out to us!](#) Schedule a 1-on-1 meeting to learn more about your program's goals and help point you in the right direction. We look forward to watching your program and your professional career grow into a sustainable afterschool program for the youth in Illinois.

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