

STARTING AN OST PROGRAM

12 steps to get you started:



Step 1 : What's your why?

As the lead for starting a program it is important to explore your why - then take time to research the growing field of OST programs and their benefits. Connect with others in your area who may already be offering a program to learn about their structure and offerings. Below are a few resources to get you started.

[Value of OST Programs](#); [Afterschool Care Crisis](#); [Overview](#)



Step 2 : Build Your Team

This is not the time to go it alone. Who needs to be at the table? What resources does your community have? The broader the team, the better.

Team members to consider: parents; teachers; school board; foundations; local businesses; financial officers; faith-based community; childcare resource & referral agency; early childcare providers.

[Breaking Down Silos](#)



Step 3 : Assessing the Need

Your team needs data. As you create a shared vision, who brings knowledge of the community and potential resources? You will also need to know what families want. For this a family survey may be needed.

Survey tips: short and easy to complete; concise questions; simple language; allow comments; multiple modes to access survey; assure responses confidential.

[Sample Needs Assessment](#); [Community Resources](#); [Needs Assessment How To](#)



Step 4 : Program Structure

From your needs assessment, you can make some decisions about your program: estimated number of youth; days and hours of operation; what the program should provide; and fees. With this information your team can begin to layout the specifics of your program structure and offerings.

[Starting Licensed Child Care](#); [Program Design](#)



Step 5 : Program Location

Many of your programs will be offered within your school facility. Are you able to provide dedicated space to the program? Will your program use a shared space? Depending on the program location, your furnishing and material needs may be different and storage may need to be a consideration. Where your program is located can also have an impact on its ability to create a warm, welcoming space for youth and families.

[Setting the Stage for Children's Success](#)



Step 6 : Program Operation

There are two main options for who will operate your program: either you will operate it yourself or choose an outside agency to contract with to operate your program. In general, programs operated by schools are licensed-exempt and are not regulated by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) but by statute are expected to follow the licensing guidelines. Programs operated by community organizations are to be licensed and regulated by DCF. *There is no best option - you need to determine which works best for you and your program.*

The primary difference is responsibility for program operation duties required to operate the program day to day (hiring and training staff, budgeting and governance, registration and enrollment, etc).

[Operational Decisions](#)



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Step 7 : What will it cost?

There are many considerations when thinking about program cost; there are one-time start-up costs and on-going costs. Start-up costs can include furnishings, initial supplies and legal or financial fees. The largest on-going cost is often program staff. Periodic expenses should also be considered such as insurance or maintenance.

[Cost of Quality](#); [Cost Calculator](#); [Program Inventory](#); [What Will it Cost](#)



Step 8 : Long-term Funding

As you begin to explore cost programming can seem out of reach. Using information from your needs assessment, can you charge parent fees? Can you access foundation funding, Fund 80, corporate donations, 21st CCLC grant or childcare subsidy? there are many ways to braid and blend program funding.

[Childcare Subsidy](#); [21CCLC Funding](#); [Fund 80](#)



Step 9 : Program Staffing

The quality of your program is directly related to the quality of your staff. How many staff will you need based on your program size? What are the staff qualifications you would like to see? What positions are needed? Licensing regulations can offer some guidance on types of positions and educational requirements.

Program Positions from licensing?

[Healthy Org Culture](#)



Step 10 : Staff Recruitment

Finding the right staff can be challenging. You will need clear job descriptions for each position and preferred staff characteristics at the start. As you craft job posts, think about where applicants are mostly likely to see your open positions. Also consider application accessibility to maximize your recruitment pool.



Step 11 : Staff Training

The training that your staff receives is key to the quality of your program. Working with school-age children in an informal educational setting calls for a unique set of skills. Included in this is knowledge of child growth and development, relationship and behavior guidance skills, activity and curriculum development, family engagement and more. WAN offers many formal and informal training opportunities - many are approved to meeting staff licensing requirements.

[WAN Courses](#); [WAN Trainings](#)



Step 12 : Program Governance

As you move forward with your program there will be an on-going need to establish policies and procedures to assure that the program is maintaining high quality program standards. Some programs prefer a direct governance model while others prefer advisory councils. If you are located within a school district, you will already have governance through a school board and may prefer an advisory council.

[Policies and Procedures](#)



Need more information as you embark on this journey? The Wisconsin Afterschool Network is here to help you. Visit our [website](#) or complete a [Technical Assistance Request Form](#) for additional consultation services. Check out resources in the [OST Resource Center - Starting a Program](#).