



Coordination, Collaboration and Networking

The State of Cities

Every city examined through the GRASP process cited “relationship-building” issues — convening, collaboration, networking, coordination — as among the most vital tasks in building greater out-of-school opportunities for young people. Similarly, among the cities applying for support as part of the National League of Cities Extended Learning Opportunities Initiative, help with collaboration was the most often-cited technical assistance need. The range of stakeholders, the different fields and organizational cultures in which they work, and the necessity of joint efforts to satisfy unmet needs add up to make connection a top priority. Further, the dizzying array of new activities creates a context where coordination and collaboration are as difficult as they are vital. While many stakeholders indicated their weariness with “collaboration for its own sake,” and collaboration mandates that come along with funding streams, all also acknowledged a need for more and stronger connectivity among existing efforts. In the words of one Little Rock stakeholder, “There’s just so much going on, so many opportunities. One question is, who’s going to coordinate all of it? Who’s going to connect the pieces?”

Several types of relationship-building efforts stood out as clear priorities and pressing challenges in conversations with city-level stakeholders:

- **Networking within sectors.** A number of cities have built lasting and effective structures for networking and resource-sharing among providers. For instance, Kansas City YouthNet and the Chicago Youth Agency Partnership have successfully mar-

shaled collective resources around training, quality standards and related issues facing youth-serving agencies. School-age care alliances around the country have played many of the same roles. Efforts to connect public sector providers into similar forums are often less well developed — a young, publicly focused Youth Services Provider Network in Sacramento is among the only examples that we encountered. Cities that lack these provider coordination networks felt their absence when it came to technical assistance, advocacy, convening and lesson-sharing functions.

I believe we have a lot of great stuff going on in the city. With that comes the frustration of how we really talk to each other. Are we headed toward the same destination? An important start is getting everyone to talk together about what they're doing.

— A public official in Chicago

- **Community organization/public provider relationships.** One of the most consistent tensions in cities around the country exists between public service providers — primarily schools and parks — and community-based youth-serving organizations. This tension has much to do with funding and access to facilities, as well as with mission — what outcomes are most important, and what is the best way to achieve those outcomes. Promising examples of one-on-one relationships exist around the country — the Beacons in New York City and the Beacon replication projects around the country are perhaps the best known efforts to form deep partnerships between single schools and single organizations. A smaller number of communities have taken on the issue of sector-to-sector relationships. Even in cities where the one-on-one relationships are the most

CRITICAL QUESTIONS

What is the connective tissue that binds together the emerging out-of-school reality in cities?

What are the structures, relationships and ad hoc arrangements that allow stakeholders in the out-of-school hours to link with one another, both one-on-one and collectively?

The GRASP project is a time-limited, focused effort to help four cities — Chicago, Little Rock, Kansas City and Sacramento — document the opportunities and infrastructures that support young people in the out-of-school hours, and to develop “big picture” plans for better supporting children and youth. GRASP was initiated by the Forum for Youth Investment with the support of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.



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Tolman, J., Pittman, K., Yohalem, N.,
Thomas, J., & Trammel, M. (2002).
*Moving an Out-of-School Agenda: Lessons
and Challenges Across Cities.* Takoma
Park, MD: Forum for Youth Investment.

established — New York and Chicago are examples — a deep difference in organizational goals and culture often still exists.

- **City-school collaborations.** Several of the cities examined indicated that relationships between city governments and school districts were of particular importance and of particular concern. As between community organizations and public providers, a mismatch related to commitment, priorities and organizational structures often characterizes these relationships. Stakeholders emphasized the challenge and complexity of building good city-school relationships — but committed themselves to doing so, even in the face of past failures and power struggles. Some cities, like Fort Worth, Texas, have made marked progress. In 1995, Fort Worth create a joint initiative and collaborative structure — Our City Our Children — to facilitate joint planning and programming between the school district and the city. In 2000, as the city began a major after-school effort, Our City Our Children was the natural launching point and organizational home for a jointly-funded project.
- **Neighborhood-based coordination and collaboration.** In cities of any significant scale, whole-city coordination and networking infrastructures are not sufficient to ensure that young people are getting the supports they need. Coordination at the neighborhood level — ensuring that supports and opportunities are adequate, accessible and well-linked — is equally vital. Even in a city like Chicago, home to both publicly-funded coordination structures in the form of YouthNets and remarkable neighborhood-based networks like the Southwest Youth Collaborative, participants in the GRASP process cited a need for additional neighborhood-specific coordination and planning infrastructure.

No matter who the players and which sectors are involved, relationship-building efforts are fueled by the same intention. In a landscape so new that it lacks basic infrastructure — advocacy horsepower, physical infrastructure and the rest — organizations have no choice but to combine resources in order to meet individual and collective needs. The

INITIATIVE PROFILE: NEW YORK CITY'S BEACONS

In 1991, the New York Department of Youth Services (DYS) took a step that still stands out in the recent history of youth services. A study group, chaired by former U.S. Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach, recommended the development of a coordinated anti-drug strategy for New York City. In response to this call, DHS proposed creating Beacons — school-based community centers offering young people and families diverse opportunities to grow and participate actively in the life of their communities. The first ten Beacons were established in 1991. By 1996 there were 40 Beacons; now, 80 Beacons operate in the city. Each Beacon receives approximately \$400,000 annually in core support from the Department of Youth and Community Development (formerly DHS) with the support of the New York City Council and the New York State Legislature.

From the start, the Beacons have been housed in schools and operated by a lead community-based organization in conjunction with a community advisory council. As such, the Beacons offer lessons for others working to link schools and community-based organizations. According to one stakeholder involved from their inception, “The Beacons have encountered significant challenges in creating partnerships with schools. There are a lot of different ways that the Beacons got started. The most effective working partnerships were created when community-based organizations were required to reach out to the school and do some joint planning work up front. If you assign schools, and have community-based organizations apply to work with them, it didn’t work. If you had an open request for proposals with little planning, it didn’t work. A lot of the obstacles are surmountable, if schools enter in voluntarily, if there’s prior planning, and if there’s buy-in to the model.”

The Beacons also represented a significant public investment and city-school district partnership. The relationship between the school district and the city determined in large part the success of the Beacons. According to the same stakeholder, “The Beacons were stronger when there was leadership at the mayoral and commissioner level, and some work inside the Department of Youth and Community Development. It took mayoral support to work across the systems. If the city agencies and the school board are left to work out the relationship, it doesn’t happen. The Board of Education doesn’t own the Beacons, because they aren’t aligned with school outcomes.”

As is often the case, a nonprofit intermediary — the Youth Development Institute (YDI) of the Fund for the City of New York — played a critical role in making the Beacons experiment work. “You had an outside intermediary that could interpret public mission, but could provide technical assistance outside of the context of monitoring,” according to the Beacons stakeholder. “Also, YDI could represent the Beacons in conversations with public agencies. They were a true intermediary, connecting to the program, the agency, the school district and individual schools. I’m not sure the program would ever have gotten off the ground without it.”

Based in part on: The Forum for Youth Investment (then IYF-US). (1997). *Beacons: A Union of Youth and Community Development*. Community & Youth Development Series, Volume 3. Takoma Park, MD: The Forum for Youth Investment, International Youth Foundation.

necessity of collaboration and coordination is a reality of this emerging area of work.

Critical Issues, Lessons Learned

Few existing tables have seats for all the stakeholders.

Broadening the discussion from after-school programming to out-of-school time means expanding the conversation to include a number of “unusual suspects” — workforce development programs, representatives from juvenile justice and law enforcement, and libraries, just to name a few. None of the GRASP cities had convening and coordination structures broad enough to naturally bring together this range of stakeholders. As a result, intentional outreach, ad hoc structures and consistent advocacy were vital to make sure that the door was opened and stayed open. Cities that have intentionally focused on this broadened discussion — for instance, the cities participating in the Making the Most of Out-of-School Time (MOST) initiative — have made progress in this direction, though usually without a focus on high school age youth.

Structural commitments are not enough. A number of cities have created convening and collaboration structures that, on the surface, look remarkably promising but fail to make concrete contributions. Regular joint planning meetings between school systems and city government lack the clear purpose and agenda necessary to create change. Potentially promising collaborations are strained — and sometimes broken — by the personalities of individual collaborators. High-level partnership commitments lack the staffing and resources necessary to do joint work.

Intermediaries make a difference. Local intermediaries — organizations by their nature in the “brokering and facilitation” business¹ — are nearly a necessity if communities hope to sustain the relationships between the range of players working in the out-of-school hours. In Little Rock, for instance, the presence of New Futures for Youth made it possible to get the range of necessary stakeholders in the room — including public and private agencies, elected officials, and large and small community-based organizations, with commitments from early childhood through the transition to adulthood.

CITY SNAPSHOT: CHICAGO

Chicago has invested in the infrastructure for a strong system of neighborhood-based coordination and collaboration. The city’s YouthNet Centers, with their renewed focus on a coordination role, are a remarkable resource. The neighborhood collaboratives established by the Chicago Community Trust’s Children, Youth and Families Initiative are a similarly unique and important vehicle in those communities where they remain active. After School Matters, a new city-supported initiative, will put new resources into linking “anchor institutions” — parks, schools and libraries — in communities around Chicago. At a citywide scale, the Chicago Youth Agency Partnership and the Chicago MOST initiative have played important convening and networking roles, and a number of organizations have joined together to develop a shared policy agenda. Specific programmatic collaborations — such as that between the Chicago Public Schools and the Polk Bros. Foundation to create full-service schools — are heartening examples.

Despite these hopeful examples, promising infrastructures and significant investments, it is clear that fragmentation and competition characterize Chicago’s out-of-school landscape. Particularly challenging — in Chicago as elsewhere — are the relationships between public institutions (schools, parks, city government) and community-based organizations. On the one hand, Chicago has been fairly successful in developing a common vision for youth, with buy-in from both public and private players. Further, there is general consensus that both public and private providers have critical roles to play in meeting the needs of young people. On the other hand, representatives of many community-based organizations feel that they are not “at the table” when major initiatives are planned, decisions made and resources allocated. And schools, parks, and community organizations all cite real obstacles to building partnerships — some deriving from what stakeholders describe as “differences in institutional cultures,” and others from differing outcomes and accountability structures. All were eager for increased participation, more structures that bring people together, citywide communication opportunities and joint planning opportunities.

Connection horsepower is difficult to sustain. Unfortunately, connection-building intermediaries are as delicate as they are essential. They are often under-supported by foundations looking to fund efforts with more tangible, direct impact on young people. Their effectiveness is often rooted in the credibility and effectiveness of the organizational leader, causing them to flounder when that leader moves on. In every city that GRASP studied, the

¹ Wynn, J.R. (2000, February). *The Role of Local Intermediary Organizations in the Youth Development Field*. Chicago: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.

intermediaries responsible for networking and coordination had undergone major tests, often coming out the other end with diminished capacity.

Policy and funding decisions can make or break collaborations. The flood of public and private dollars buoying the after-school movement is shaping organizational relationships in fundamental ways. Private philanthropy focused on “anchor institutions” — schools, libraries, parks — often creates relationships where community-based organizations are under-resourced

and left out of important decision-making processes. Federal and state dollars that fund school-based after-school programs often have the same effect. City funding streams that provide money directly to community-based organizations, on the other hand, help them enter into collaborations on more even footing. Attaching collaboration requirements to dollars may force unproductive relationships. On the other hand, keeping power dynamics between stakeholders in mind when making funding decisions can foster a climate that supports collaboration.

Contact Information for Local Efforts

The Youth Development Institute of the Fund for the City of New York

(for information on the *Beacons*)
Peter Kleinbard, Director
121 Avenue of the Americas, 6th Floor
New York, NY 10013
Tel: 212.925.6675
Web: www.fncy.org

YouthNet of Greater Kansas City

Deborah Craig, Executive Director
104 West 9th St., Suite 104
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Web: www.kcyouthnet.org

Contact Information for National Resources

The Chapin Hall Center for Children has focused concerted research horsepower on various aspects of coordination and collaboration. For instance, Chapin Hall has produced a number of publications related to the connections between schools and other organizations, and is supporting the development of school-park-library collaborations through Chicago's new After School Matters initiative. In addition, *The Role of Local Intermediary Organizations in the Youth Development Field* (by Joan Wynn) explores the convening and coordination capacity of intermediary organizations. For more information, contact:

Chapin Hall Center for Children
University of Chicago
1313 East 60th Street
Chicago, IL 60637
Tel: 773.753.5900; Fax: 773.753.5940
Web: www.chapin.uchicago.edu

The Children's Aid Society (CAS) supports the development of community-school partnerships and community schools. It has developed a number of resources on this topic, including *Building a Community School*, and has partnered to produce a national public education campaign focused on community schools. Through its National Community Schools Technical Assistance Center, CAS supports schools and communities working to create community-linked after-school programs, family resource centers, community schools and related arrangements. The Center provides training on topics including partnership development, resource assessment, integrating school day and after-school programs, parent and community engagement, and sustainability issues. For more information, contact:

The Children's Aid Society
105 East 22nd Street
New York, NY 10010
Tel: 212.949.4800
Web: www.childrensaidsociety.org

The AED Center for Youth Development and Policy Research supports local connection efforts in a variety of ways. For instance, it helps communities develop and sustain collaboration and networking efforts among youth services providers. The Center is also currently involved in a multi-year effort to document and advance the work of CBO schools, public schools operated by community-based organizations. For more information, contact:

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The Coalition for Community Schools brings together local, state and national organizations that represent individuals and groups engaged in creating and sustaining community schools. Among its current efforts: researching relationships between community-based organizations and schools, with a particular focus on new management structures; supporting the development of local leaders who promote community schools; and advancing policies that promote school-community partnerships. For more information, contact:

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