



# Funders' Guide to Quality in Out-of-School Time

GRANTMAKERS FOR EDUCATION'S OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME FUNDER NETWORK

# Funders Guide' to Quality in Out-of-School Time

**SUMMARY:** Participating in out-of-school time (OST) programs can be transformational in the lives of young people, but only if the efforts are high-quality. This guide provides recommendations to grantmakers about how they can increase quality in OST through local, regional, statewide and national grantmaking and other strategies. It was commissioned by Grantmakers for Education's OST Funder Network as part of its Quality in Out-of-School Time Deep Dive Series for Grantmakers.

**DEFINITION:** Grantmakers for Education's OST Funder Network and this guide define **"out-of-school time"** to include all kinds of programs that happen outside of the classroom, before and after school, in the evenings, on weekends and during the summer; located in school buildings or community settings; managed or operated by schools, community organizations, parks, camps, faith-based organizations and other entities; and serving children and youth in grades K-12. This guide uses the terms afterschool and out-of-school time interchangeably.

Grantmakers for Education (GFE) is a national network of hundreds of education philanthropies, united by a passion and commitment to improve public education and learning for all students of all ages, cradle to career. GFE is a force multiplier, harnessing the collective power of education grantmakers to increase momentum, impact, and outcomes for this nation's learners. We are proud to promote a culture of learning among education funders and provide a forum for interaction and engagement that builds upon and deepens the impact of our member's individual investments. Grantmakers for Education and its members believe in the power of what we can all achieve when we work together and learn from each other's successes and challenges. For more information or to learn about membership, please contact us at [information@edfunders.org](mailto:information@edfunders.org).

# Table of Contents

Introduction .....	4
Chapter 1: Background on Out-of-School Time Quality.....	6
Chapter 2: Grantmaking Strategies to Improve Out-of-School Time Quality.....	13
Chapter 3: Principles for Quality-Focused Grantmaking.....	18
Chapter 4: Key Priorities for the Field .....	20
Conclusion .....	23
Appendix A: Quality Resources .....	24
Appendix B: Case Studies .....	26



## Introduction

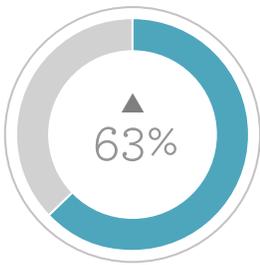
In recent years, OST programs have become the primary places where children can engage in the arts, physical activity, science and technology, leadership development and civic education – subjects and pursuits that have often been reduced during the school day as a result of increased focus on English language arts and mathematics.

Over the past several years, grantmakers focused on positive child and youth development and K-12 education reform have stepped up their investments in out-of-school time (OST) programs. This emphasis has coincided with a growing body of research connecting high-quality learning experiences during childhood and adolescence to the development of healthy and productive adults.

Why are high-quality OST programs important? For starters, they typically engage youth in different ways from schools, homes, independent or peer group experiences. For example, in OST programs, youth often make independent choices about how and with whom to spend their time in a structured, safe and engaging learning context. High-quality OST also offers young people the opportunity to forge positive relationships with adults and peers, and build social, cognitive and other vital skills. Research has shown that healthy relationships form the foundation of social/emotional skills and the ability to function successfully throughout life – at home, in school, with family and friends and as members of civic communities. The best OST programs epitomize the term “child/youth centered” in that the structures and activities are rooted in the interests and experiences, as well as the cultural and community context, of the participants and their families.

In recent years, OST programs have also become the primary places where children can engage in the arts, physical activity, science and technology, leadership development and civic education – subjects and pursuits that have often been reduced during the school day as a result of increased focus on English language arts and mathematics. Furthermore, high-quality OST programs feature pedagogical strategies – such as project-based learning, inquiry-based investigations and student-driven pursuit of interests – that education experts recognize as the best route to fostering the engaged learners who will succeed in mastering not only academic content, but the complex 21st century skills necessary for lifelong success.<sup>1</sup>

As expectations that the OST field can deliver far more than what was expected of “school-age child care” 20 years ago have risen, so has program enrollment. According to the Afterschool Alliance America After 3PM 2014 data, nearly a quarter of all families (23%) currently have a child enrolled in an afterschool program, and participation in OST activities increased 60% from 2004 to 2014.<sup>2</sup> More than 10 million children now attend afterschool programs across the country.



GFE's OST Funder Network members' interest in program quality is growing: in 2013, 63% reported they were funding evaluation and quality assessment at a systems level, up from 47% in 2008.

The stakes for successful OST programming, then, are high. But as OST becomes an increasingly crucial component in education reform and youth development, how will philanthropists, taxpayers and parents ensure that their investments produce desired youth outcomes? How will the field garner enough public and private support to serve the estimated 19.4 million children whose parents could not find an OST program in 2014? The answer is the same as the one recently noted by *New York Times* columnist David Kirp as he compared the results of various early education programs in an op-ed: The difference between poor and positive outcomes is “in a word, quality.”<sup>3</sup>

In fact, the time is right for all OST funders to focus on quality. Research confirming the role that quality plays in driving regular participation and producing positive outcomes is definitive. Grantmakers have provided the support for this research, as well as for national field and system-building efforts at the state and local levels. These investments have resulted in the development of quality standards and quality improvement systems that include the use of assessment tools, access to data that drives changes in practice, professional development and other key resources.

But many challenges remain to achieving equitable access to high-quality OST for all children across the country. While the infrastructure to enable major improvements in quality at scale is developing in many places, in others, such support is undeveloped or just beginning to emerge. All efforts face challenges in sustainably financing access for all children, regardless of age, socio-economic status or zip code. There is also a need for deep examination of the frameworks and tools currently used to define and measure quality to ensure they address the needs of diverse populations of young people, including those with special needs, English language learners, linguistic minorities, children of color and those from non-dominant cultural and ethnic communities.

Since 2009, GFE's Out-of-School Time Funder Network has provided grantmakers with access to professional learning, dialogue, research and communications focused on improving the effectiveness of OST grant making. GFE's OST Funder Network members' interest in program quality is growing: in 2013, 63% reported they were funding evaluation and quality assessment at a systems level, up from 47% in 2008. With that in mind, in 2014 the network initiated a *Deep Dive Series for Grantmakers* focusing on OST quality. The Series has included web seminars, conference sessions, speakers and a podcast to enable funders to learn from each other and share lessons from current literature on OST program quality and grant making initiatives. See the Appendix for details on the Quality Series and the literature reviewed to inform the guide's development.

This guide is intended to help funders of all sizes and locations focus on quality in their current and future OST-grant making. It reviews key pieces of the state-of-the-art knowledge about improving quality and the link between quality and youth outcomes. The guide also discusses efforts to define, measure and create systematic supports for continuous quality improvement in OST and also offers specific strategies for funders to consider – whether they invest locally, regionally or nationally, and in program operations, policy, research, system-building or other areas. Finally, the guide provides a set of recommended priorities for the field to catalyze significant change on the national and local levels, as well as case studies illustrating the different strategies grantmakers are pursuing to support OST quality improvement.

Overall, this guide was produced to catalyze grantmakers to expand their attention to and investment in building quality – actions that will be critical to enabling all children and youth to have access to high-quality OST experiences that will lead to positive growth and development.



## Background on Out-of-School Time Quality

### Defining Quality

A seminal moment in the OST field occurred in 2001 when the National Research Council convened top researchers, practitioners and philanthropic leaders to form the Committee on Community-Level Programs for Youth. Supported by public and private funders, including the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the William T. Grant Foundation and the Ford Foundation, the report published by the committee in 2002, *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*, identified the following key features of programs that best support young people in developing positive personal and social assets:

- physical and psychological safety and security;
- structure that is developmentally appropriate, with clear expectations for behavior as well as increasing opportunities to make decisions, participate in governance and rule-making and take on leadership roles as one matures and gains more expertise;
- emotional and moral support;
- opportunities for adolescents to:
  - experience supportive adult relationships;
  - learn how to form close, durable human relationships with peers that support and reinforce healthy behaviors;
  - feel a sense of belonging and being valued;
  - develop positive social values and norms;
  - build and master skills;
  - develop confidence in one's abilities to master one's environment (a sense of personal efficacy);
  - make a contribution to one's community and to develop a sense of mattering
- strong links between families, schools and broader community resources.

The council's report was based on a comprehensive review of the best literature available about youth development programs, research and evaluation.<sup>4</sup> The report was instrumental in bringing attention to out-of-school time programs as an important focus for the health and well-being of children and youth and providing a foundation for research and public policy efforts.<sup>5</sup> The report's definition of the elements of program



quality most likely to lead to positive youth outcomes is still the most relevant and comprehensive definition used today by stakeholders of the OST field.

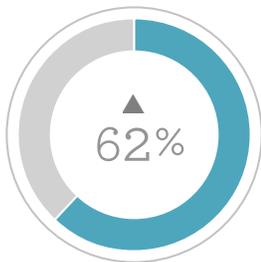
## The Importance of Quality

Supported in large part by philanthropic investments, research and evaluation efforts over the past two decades have built a knowledge base about the importance of quality in OST. Multiple studies have provided evidence that improving quality is more likely to get desired outcomes and draw parents and young people to the program. For example, a 2007 report examined the effects of high-quality after-school programs operating in high-poverty communities and found “higher standardized math test scores and better behavioral outcomes for students who regularly participated in high-quality after-school programs than for students who spent substantial after-school time without adult supervision.”<sup>6</sup> A 2011 meta-analysis of program evaluations completed by Joseph Durlak and Roger Weissburg concluded that higher quality programs resulted in successful academic, social, safety and familial impacts. Achieving high quality is important not only to producing positive benefits for participating youth, but also for securing increased and sustained public and private investments in OST programs. See Appendix A for a list of additional studies proving the link between quality afterschool programs and youth outcomes.



## Components of a High Quality OST System

The work conducted over the past two decades has helped the OST field make significant progress toward defining quality and proving its importance. With support from key grantmakers, several cities, regions and states are now building systems aimed at incorporating what is known about quality to improve the everyday OST experiences of young people. Such quality improvement systems include multiple components that are aligned and integrated, so they can address a broad swath of programs and are designed for sustainability over time. These foundational components include: quality standards, assessment tools, core competencies, professional development, workforce supports, data management and a lead intermediary. In addition, there are other key elements essential to building an infrastructure for achieving not only quality, but also sustained, equitable access to OST at scale: attention to providers' organizational capacity, partnerships with schools and other organizations, policy and advocacy, continued research and evaluation focused on effective policy and practices and capital/facilities support.



As of 2015, 33 states had adopted afterschool quality standards. A Wallace Foundation-commissioned report published in 2013 found that 62% of cities coordinating afterschool programs use quality standards or a quality framework.

The following list of components of a high-quality OST system was informed by the work of the Forum for Youth Investment, National Institute on Out-of-School Time, National Afterschool Association, Every Hour Counts, statewide afterschool networks, the Afterschool Alliance, the Harvard Family Research Project and others.

**Quality Standards.** A set of standards that clearly defines what quality looks like in an OST environment forms the foundation of a high-quality OST system. Increasingly, key stakeholders, including providers, public and private funders, technical assistance organizations, intermediaries, parents and others, are adopting and implementing such standards on the state, local and regional level. As of 2015, 33 states had adopted afterschool quality standards. A Wallace Foundation-commissioned report published in 2013 found that 62% of cities coordinating afterschool programs use quality standards or a quality framework.<sup>8</sup> In addition to comprehensive standards, leading stakeholders have developed specific sets of standards focused on healthy eating and physical activity (by the National Institute on Out-of-School Time and National Afterschool Association), summer programs (by the National Summer Learning Association) and college and career readiness and STEM (by the Indiana Afterschool Association).<sup>9</sup>

**Program Assessment Tools and Support for Continuous Quality Improvement.**

Quality standards are useful only if program providers employ them to assess and improve their programming. With that in mind, in recent years, grantmakers have funded the development of multiple evidence-based program assessment tools and training supports.

For example, programs in Palm Beach County, Florida use a version of the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality's tool called the Youth Program Quality Assessment to assess how well their current practices align with regional quality standards. In Wyoming, providers are employing *A Program Assessment System (APAS)*, developed by the National Institute on Out-of-School Time. Over the past three years, surveys completed by young people in the programs have shown improvements in attitudes, skills and behavior. (See Appendix B for more about how these evidence-based tools are used to improve quality).<sup>10</sup>

The 2009 Forum for Youth Investment brief, *Measuring Youth Program Quality: A Guide to Assessment Tools, Second Edition*, provides a useful overview of the 10 most commonly used quality assessment tools.<sup>11</sup> The report, published with support from the W. T. Grant Foundation, explains that programs need "tools that help concretize what effective practice looks like and allow practitioners to assess, reflect on and improve their programs." All of the tools included in the review measure six core constructs at varying levels of depth: relationships, environment, engagement, social norms, skill building opportunities and structures/routines.

Since the second edition of the guide to assessment tools was published in 2009, grantmakers have supported the development of other tools in specific areas. For example, the Program in Education, Afterschool & Resiliency (PEAR) has developed tools specific to science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) programs, including Dimensions of Success and the Common Instrument suite. The Weikart Center is working with the National Summer Learning Association to develop an assessment tool geared to summer programs. (See Appendix B for details).<sup>12</sup>

**Core Competencies.** While standards focus on how programs must operate to achieve quality, core competencies define the skills and knowledge required of adult professionals to deliver high-quality programming. Core competencies provide a clear definition of effective youth development practice, serving as the basis for professional



development and training and other workforce supports.<sup>13</sup> Many localities have adopted the National Afterschool Association's core competencies in whole or tailored them to meet local needs.

For example, in 2009, Prime Time Palm Beach County, a regional intermediary in Florida, convened local stakeholders to develop core competencies for practitioners. Prime Time produced a video module that provides an overview of the core competencies and takes practitioners step-by-step through the goal-setting process to plan their own professional development. (See Appendix B for more detail on how the core competencies fit into Palm Beach County's comprehensive quality improvement system).

**Professional Development and Workforce Support.** Because one of the most important drivers of program quality is skilled staff, professional development and workforce support is critical to achieving quality improvement. That includes coaching, supervision and mentoring, in addition to training and formal education. Localities building OST professional development and workforce support use core competencies as the basis for designing both credit and non-credit bearing education pathways that consider the wide range of formal education and life experiences of OST staff. Significant expansion is needed, however, to bring these efforts to scale so more afterschool staff and youth workers have access to high quality pre- and in-service education and training that can lead to certificate and degree completion, career advancement and increased compensation.

In addition to professional education, several communities and states are investing in other workforce supports, including:

- **career registries**, providing OST professionals with the opportunity to collect, organize and showcase their education, training, and experience;
- **career lattices**, assisting OST professionals in planning their career pathways by identifying and connecting to positions within the field and defining training and experience requirements;
- **compensation increases**, targeted to OST professionals who demonstrate completion of various training pathways.

**Intermediary Organizations.** Activities aimed at improving quality should not be the responsibility of each individual OST program or organization. Rather, a lead enterprise at the city, region or state level (referred to as an intermediary organization to differentiate it from a *youth-serving* organization) is often best positioned to take on the work of establishing a quality system in a locality. Its responsibilities may include setting guidelines for programs or organizations to take part in the system, identifying incentives and supports such as training and coaching, managing quality improvement data and coordinating the system components and partners. The Wallace Foundation has provided support to many cities for developing strong intermediaries, while the Every Hour Counts initiative has played a lead role in supporting a community of practice among lead intermediaries and providing technical assistance to cities and regions in developing intermediaries.

**Organizational Capacity.** To ensure that quality improvements are sustained, many grantmakers interviewed for this guide pointed out that resources targeting the program level must be matched by resources bolstering capacity at the organizational level. In 2008, a Wallace Foundation-commissioned study by Fiscal Management Associates found that "many [youth-serving] organizations lack the financial resources to invest significantly in administrative staff, facility needs, IT infrastructure and support and transformational purchases such as improved space." The study found that "the larger impact from working within this under-resourced administrative management

In addition to school partnerships, high-quality OST programs engage in partnerships with arts and cultural organizations, science centers and museums, institutions of higher education, private sector businesses and civic groups.

environment is the limits it places on organizations' leaders' ability to be forward-looking and truly strategic."<sup>14</sup> A follow-up report released in 2015 outlines the design of a successful Wallace-backed initiative to equip organizations with the ability to plan and manage their financial resources.<sup>15</sup> In addition, leadership development is also a significant need facing the field.

**Partnerships with Schools and Other Organizations.** Strong partnerships with schools and school districts enable OST programs to support students' academic success. Building relationships with teachers and administrators, participating in joint professional development, becoming familiar with individual teachers' and schools' curricula and teaching approaches and engaging in joint family outreach are a few strategies that schools and out-of-school programs can undertake to ensure that youth are able to build skills and engage in OST experiences that contribute to their school success.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to school partnerships, high-quality OST programs engage in partnerships with arts and cultural organizations, science centers and museums, institutions of higher education, private sector businesses and civic groups. Cross-sector partnerships provide mentors, tutors, new curricula and activity sequences, staff training opportunities, field trips, in-kind donations of technology and supplies and other resources that improve the quality of programs. Many OST intermediaries broker partnerships across the city, region or state to realize efficiencies of scale and streamline the administrative, outreach, coordination and training required to establish and maintain high-quality partnerships.

**Management Information Systems.** In 2012, the National League of Cities' Institute for Youth, Education and Families produced a detailed guide to building OST-focused management information systems (MIS). Among the reasons cited for investing in an OST MIS were:

- 1) "Providing policymakers and funders with accurate information on the utilization, quality and impact of afterschool programs to make better decisions and targeted investments at the systems level;
- 2) Offering regular feedback to program managers and staff about the effectiveness of their efforts, both in absolute terms and relative to other programs, to promote continuous improvement;
- 3) Reducing the time and money that programs spend completing paperwork to meet reporting requirements, freeing up valuable resources for direct programming with youth; and
- 4) Empowering program sites and instructors with (near) real-time information on student outcomes such as attendance, behavior and academic performance that allows sites to tailor their instruction more closely to the needs of the youth they serve."<sup>17</sup>

At the same time, funders would be wise not to lose sight of the human element. For example, a 2015 Wallace-commissioned report by Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago examined the OST data management efforts of nine cities and found "for systems to be effective in their collection and use of data, they need to invest in more than just an MIS and related technology. Equally important are human capital – that is, a well-trained workforce with the skills and expertise to use the technology and interpret the data appropriately – and "social processes" (i.e. norms, routines, procedures and values) that encourage fruitful analysis of data."<sup>18</sup>

**Research and Evaluation.** Research and evaluation completed over the past two decades has created the foundation on which current OST quality improvement efforts



are built. On a national level, continued research is critical to refine current tools and frameworks underlying quality improvement efforts, and to build our understanding of how young people learn. Key items on the national research agenda related to quality include effective and ongoing professional development models, the intersection between OST and social/emotional skill-building and defining effective practices for children's diverse needs, among many others. On the local and regional levels, many organizations are in the early stages of implementing assessment tools, creating data sharing agreements and building MIS solutions – efforts expected to yield useful data that can inform research on, and improvements in, the performance of OST systems.

**Policy, Advocacy and Communications.** Ultimately, evidence of impact must be used to drive the public policy agenda toward providing sustainable financing allowing children to have equitable access to high-quality OST programs. The C.S. Mott Foundation-supported statewide afterschool networks – now in all 50 states – have led efforts to raise public awareness and engage policymakers in discussions and reform aimed at better supporting high-quality OST. They are joined by local and regionally-based intermediaries and national policy and advocacy organizations, including the Afterschool Alliance and others. Increasing the capacity of stakeholders at all levels to engage in policy development, advocacy and public will-building would help secure the substantial and sustainable policy and financing reforms needed to support quality at scale over the long term.<sup>19</sup>

For example, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation prioritized policy reform, advocacy, public awareness and communications in a seven-year effort to bring attention to and improve the quality of summer programs across California. The foundation's support launched the statewide Summer Matters campaign in 2010, aimed at increasing understanding among lawmakers, as well as school leaders, parents and others, about research findings and why investments in summer learning programs were critical for achieving expected student outcomes. See Appendix B for more details.

**Financing for Quality and Sustainability.** Understanding the real costs of quality is key to building and sustaining a system over time, and particularly important to drive improved policy decisions. Consider a 2009 report from The Wallace Foundation on the cost of quality that aimed to equip decision-makers “to better assess different types of programs, their requirements and their associated costs, and weigh them more thoughtfully against the needs of their communities.” The authors wrote, “We also hope the report opens the door to a more fact-based conversation about the costs of quality among policymakers who set reimbursement rates for OST programs, funders who want to ensure that their support more accurately matches their aims and OST providers who set priorities and create the budgets for their programs.” The report found that paying for staff was the primary driver of cost overall, and costs varied significantly by program design, available resources and local conditions. An updated version of the report's cost calculator was released in February 2016.<sup>20</sup>

**Capital and Facilities Improvements.** The physical environment of an OST program is essential to quality, but providers often need capital or facilities improvements. Intermediaries can provide or coordinate assistance to providers in accessing grants or loans for needed improvements. Grantmakers whose strategies encompass capital assistance can also play a key role.