



Finding Sustainability for Oregon's 21st Century Community Learning Centers

OregonASK AmeriCorps VISTA Sustainability Planning

2011-2013

21st Century Community Learning Centers and Sustainability

The 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) initiative began in 1994 under Title IV, Part B, of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). It was renewed in 2002 with an amended focus to ensure that low-income children in particular have access to before-school, afterschool, and summer academic enrichment opportunities. 21st CCLC is the only federal funding source devoted solely to supporting before-school, afterschool and summer programs. Over the past ten years, 21st CCLC programs have given thousands of low-income children the chance to make strong academic gains and created a valuable community resource for working families across the country.

The goals of 21st CCLC are primarily to support student success and build stable, well-founded programs that can be sustained past the expiration of their 21st CCLC grant period. Over the last thirteen years, the state of Oregon has received and distributed roughly \$112 million of 21st CCLC funds, providing thousands of children and families with before-school, afterschool and summer programming to support their academic and social-emotional success. However, despite this significant investment in programs, Oregon cannot currently claim a large number of 21st CCLC programs that have been sustained following the expiration of their 21st CCLC funding.

Oregon Afterschool for Kids, the statewide afterschool network, is committed to supporting, expanding and advocating for quality out-of-school time programs and activities for children, youth, and families throughout Oregon. As such, we have worked closely with fourteen programs that are currently receiving 21st CCLC funding to establish fiscal sustainability via strategic planning. This report will outline the sustainability planning process, lessons learned, and recommendations for improving the likelihood that programs be sustained following their original 21st CCLC grant.

Oregon Afterschool for Kids Sustainability Planning Project

In August 2011, OregonASK partnered with three national organizations, Afterschool Alliance, AmeriCorps VISTA, and The Finance Project, to host two Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA). Danielle Biselli and Mary Masla facilitated a fiscal sustainability planning process with eleven 21st CCLC programs in rural, suburban and urban communities across Oregon, all of which were nearing the end of their funding. Using The Finance Project sustainability planning workbook modules and support as a guide, the VISTAs customized this strategic planning process to fit the unique needs of 21st CCLC funded afterschool programs.

Sustainability Planning Districts 2011-2013			
School District	Region	Student's Enrolled	Free & Reduced Lunch Percentage
Eugene	Willamette Valley	16,729	40.3%
Falls City	Willamette Valley	148	84.5%
Forest Grove	Greater Portland	5,989	62.9%
Mapleton	Oregon Coast	178	78.7%
Medford (Kids Unlimited)	Southern Oregon	12,653	50.6%
North Clackamas (Metropolitan Family Service)	Greater Portland	17,112	44.0%
Reynolds	Mt. Hood and Columbia Gorge	11,189	71.5%
Salem-Keizer (Salem-Keizer Education Foundation)	Willamette Valley	40,085	60.2%
Sheridan	Willamette Valley	1,055	60.4%
Sherman County	Eastern Oregon	231	52.4%
Siuslaw	Oregon Coast	1,380	54.1%
Springfield	Willamette Valley	10,594	59.9%
Sweet Home	Willamette Valley	2,291	61.8%
Woodburn	Willamette Valley	5,480	78.0%

The VISTAs helped program leaders assemble stakeholder groups—called Local Sustainability Teams, or LSTs. These groups were the critical component to completing the five-module planning process, which included 1) evaluating current program activities and operations, 2) creating a multi-year funding gap analysis, and 3) developing strategic action items that would support the long-term sustainability of the programs.

Building on this technical assistance model, throughout the 2012-13 school year OregonASK continued its sustainability planning work with two new VISTAs: Bethany Ard and Ta Vang. In our two years of work on this project OregonASK has worked with 14 Oregon communities, representing 16 21st CCLC sub-grantees, written 12 sustainability plans, and learned a number of important lessons on the challenges of creating sustainable programs in low-income communities.

The Process

Based on The Finance Project's *Sustainability Planning Workbook*, OregonASK created a strategic planning process customized for afterschool programs and for the fourteen individual communities participating in the project. OregonASK's sustainability planning process, like The Finance Project's model, begins with the composition of a Local Sustainability Team, followed by the implementation of five planning modules.

The composition and recruitment of the Local Sustainability Team (LST) began with brainstorming, identifying and approaching the "movers and shakers" for out-of-school-time programming in each individual community. LSTs looked different in each of the fourteen communities, and consisted of:

- Program Staff: Administrators, coordinators, front-line staff
- School staff: teachers, principals, district administrators
- Local agencies: Parks & Recreation departments
- Political Leaders: Mayors, City Council members
- Business Leaders
- Parents
- Faith Leaders
- Youth
- School Board members
- Volunteers
- Other key community members
- Partner and Peer organizations

The five planning modules consisted of several exercises, many of which were customized in order to fit the needs of each specific community. In implementing sustainability planning, OregonASK was careful to recognize that while the basic concepts of each module—establishing a collective mission and vision, strategically evaluating finances, and creating community support and strong internal systems—are incredibly valuable, the way in which a community accomplishes these tasks may, and did, look different. The five modules included:

Sustainability Planning Modules	
Module 1	Self-Assessment: Where are we now?
Module 2	Mission, Vision and Logic Model: Where do we want to go? How are we going to get there?
Module 3	Estimating our fiscal needs
	Identifying our current resources
	Assessing our funding gaps
	Identifying funding sources and financing strategies
Module 4	Adaptability to changing environments
	Creating broad-based community support
	Cultivating key champions
	Establishing strong internal systems
Module 5	Writing the plan

Challenges and Successes to Sustainability Planning: Year One

The OregonASK sustainability planning project was successful in many ways. The project:

- Provided much-needed in-depth support to complete sustainability planning modules (see the challenge of time and capacity of program directors below).
- Tailored sustainability planning tools to fit the needs of individual communities.
- Created opportunities for community conversations, partnerships and “buy-in” creation, and identified action items to be implemented.
- Provided tools for in-depth analysis of 21st CCLC budgets and assisted program directors in making strategic budget decisions to maximize efficient use of funds.
- Hosted community events to raise awareness of the afterschool program.

The primary challenges OregonASK faced in implementing and facilitating the sustainability planning process in 21st CCLC communities included:

- Clarifying, on a district level, the purpose and intention of sustainability planning. The majority of the grantees (twelve of the fourteen) with whom OregonASK worked were housed within school districts. In general, OregonASK observed that school districts do not have experience or practice with raising funds, proving value/outcomes, and self-promotion. Our challenge involved helping them shift their approach from that of their experience, which was more frequently with “allocated” funds, to one closer to that of a traditional non-profit looking for funding partnerships and self-promotional opportunities.
- Time and capacity proved a significant barrier to success for program leadership and LST members. Despite being a part of the 21st CCLC grant, sustainability planning was often not a designated part of program leadership job descriptions. As a result, many program leaders had little time and capacity to complete sustainability planning exercises. Similarly, LST members also had limited time and capacity, which at times created a barrier to in-depth involvement in the process. This capacity shortage contributed to an overall feeling of urgency and members had difficulty taking time to create meaningful and thorough solutions. Often, there was the sense that grantees wanted to check the process off their lists and move on, not recognizing the time commitment necessary to achieve sustainability.
- Leadership styles and lack of buy-in from key stakeholders, school principals in particular, created barriers to success as well. As with any collaborative process, strong personalities created barriers to achievement of true collaboration and partnership in the 21st CCLC sustainability planning process. Creating buy-in from stakeholders and LST members required the creation of a meaningful role, and inclusion of many voices and opinions, which was difficult to achieve when program directors struggled to relinquish control of program actions. Additionally, without buy-in from key stakeholders, and community leaders, i.e. Principals, Superintendents, Mayors, etc., sustainability planning was not successful. In some 21st CCLC communities true buy-in from these individuals was difficult to establish, creating barriers to success in sustainability planning.

Sustainability Plan Implementation: Year Two

Of the fourteen communities working with OregonASK, twelve completed the process and accomplished the task of writing a sustainability plan. Nine of these sustainability plans were completed during the first year of the project, and OregonASK has worked with seven of these programs on the implementation of these plans. The seven districts that completed two years of sustainability planning were assisted in the implementation of plans by their assigned VISTA. Districts and VISTAs alike found that implementation, like planning, looked different in each community and had varying degrees of success.

Woodburn’s Local Sustainability Team (LST) decided to stop monthly meetings in an effort to utilize volunteer time for fundraisers, outreach, and event planning. Siuslaw School District continued monthly meetings to plan and discuss outreach materials, strategy, and presentations around the community. Although each district carried out plans differently, OregonASK found one commonality between the districts: LST members, including program directors, had too little time or capacity to carry out all the strategic actions of their plans.

Implementation Challenges

Lack of time and capacity to devote to sustainability plan implementation, lack of community infrastructure and resources, lack of administrative support, and a continued misunderstanding of what it takes to create true partnerships and long-term sustainability created barriers to success for many 21st CCLC programs. Here are some of their stories.

In a rural, unincorporated community spread across 120 square miles, the Mapleton LEAF 21st CCLC program struggled to create significant support for the program before the expiration of grant funds in June 2013. Despite continued work at grant writing by the program director, the LEAF LST was unable to create other movement toward sustainability. Although sustainability team members were passionate about keeping kids safe, LST members and program leadership found the difficult task of building wider program recognition throughout the community more time consuming than their capacity allowed.

Mapleton is not alone in facing the challenges a lack of time, capacity and community resources pose. Many 21st CCLC communities struggle to overcome deep-seated barriers like generational poverty, remote locations, lack of social services and lack of community resources. In communities that cannot afford to support high quality afterschool programming without continued public funding, the sustainability planning process was extremely valuable in helping create community conversation around the value of afterschool programming. Although fiscal resources were not always identified, creating a conversation and bringing attention to the issue was a first step toward creating sustainability for many low-income communities.

A surprising struggle sprang up early in the implementation year with the Springfield district. Springfield had gone through the Year One planning process and developed a citywide approach to combine school district efforts with currently existing parks and recreation programs. But the leadership team quickly found that they had missed gathering community feedback while designing the plan. Additionally, the collaborative effort included a city administration which became sidetracked with more politically pressing matters. Without community interest or administrative presence to push for a local levy stream of funding, Springfield found that a citywide plan was not going to be immediately successful. The groundwork had been laid and partners agreed to continue the conversation in the future, but sustainability team leaders concurred that the community could not be pushed until it was ready.

Implementation Successes

During the first year of the sustainability process, teams had to find time to meet and complete strategic planning based on what they knew of the community and their program. However, the second phase of the process allowed for a more flexible commitment of time based on each individual plan. The most successful districts each had their own approach to managing their limited time and capacity. Most plans included outreach strategies, such as:

- Making contact with potential donors, sponsors, or partners within the community;
- Presentations to local service organizations;
- Written or verbal communication with local businesses;
- Increased education of stakeholders; and,
- Constant communication with current partners, parents and staff about supporting future efforts.

The Eugene program director recognized that the current sustainability team did not have the capacity to fulfill group expectations, so they looked for an alternative resource. Eugene School District utilized an Opportunity Grant from the Oregon Department of Education intended for program sustainability, to contract with a part-time community liaison. Eugene's community liaison worked through the team's identified outreach strategies alongside the Eugene Education Foundation, and reached out to local donors as the sustainability team continued spreading the word to stakeholders around the community. Even with an added person and relationships with local philanthropists, Eugene was only able to raise \$50,000 in private gifts and \$140,000 in partner contributions, less than half of the \$500,000 needed to fill the 21st CCLC grant gap.

The Falls City Program, FACES, utilized its partnership with the school district to arrange partial future funding (\$30,000 of \$90,000) from the city levy funds collected to support out-of-school-time activities in Falls City. In this rural community of less than 1,000 residents, sustainability team members enthusiastically embraced their additional role and named themselves FACES Forward. Although the committed team of five or six volunteers worked diligently to find additional support, they did not have the capacity to implement all aspects of their plan: to design and widely distribute materials, find private donors, cultivate business

sponsorships or apply to local foundations. Falls City's remote location and small number of advocates severely limited their opportunities to connect and build strong relationships with significant individual or corporate supporters that are more prevalent in metropolitan areas. Their longstanding partnership allowed the program to continue, but these limitations hindered sufficient funding for their program.

The Woodburn After School Club (WASC) began the sustainability planning process when they were only in their third year of funding; allowing their program director and sustainability team to work on implementation for two years before funding was scheduled to end. During the first year of sustainability planning, WASC re-evaluated their fee structure, and created a multi-tiered structure, which advertised the true cost of the program, allowing families that could pay more to do so. WASC also held a parent forum, detailing the true cost and value of the program to parents. Additional community events and partnerships allowed WASC to increase the diversity of their funding, and decrease their reliance on 21st CCLC funds. Despite this great success, WASC still relies on 21st CCLC funding for half their costs, and with the approaching expiration of funding will be looking, in a small rural community, for ways to fill this gap.

In these highlights of moderate success across the state, each district utilized strong community partnerships to leverage funding from alternative sources. However, none of the districts were able to find enough funding to keep programs at their peak or necessary performance for the low-income communities they serve. These three communities, and their sustainability planning successes, exemplify the difficulty low-income communities face in maintaining programs – despite commitment, passion and hard work to achieve sustainability, low-income communities with limited resources cannot maintain high quality afterschool programs without public funding support.

Evaluation of Sustainability Planning Process

Although the majority of programs encountered considerable struggles along the way, the districts that continued through the process and utilized OregonASK and its VISTAs effectively, found great success in what they took away from the project. Despite the fact that few programs found sufficient funding to continue operating without 21st CCLC grants, over 75 percent of participants found the overall process valuable to their program. The following list describes the top three valuable components, according to a survey of project participants:

- 1) One-on-one support from OregonASK – the facilitation and organization of the process, including communications with Local Sustainability Teams, meeting notes, and helping the group (and Program Leader) stay on track.
- 2) Local Sustainability Team – assistance in developing and maintaining the LST.
- 3) Communication materials and community events: program flyers; sustainability updates; surveys; and organizing and facilitating community or program events.

Other responses from a number of program directors reflected how helpful it was to have a VISTA working directly with them to guide them through the process, keep notes organized, help with project tasks, and motivate the team to continue working. Participants were able to see the benefits of sustainability work, the tremendous amount of time and the commitment needed to be effective, and what a crucial role it plays in the success of any program. With overall feedback on the sustainability process positive, OregonASK plans to utilize the process and the tools in future work to support afterschool programs in Oregon.

Policy-Level Barriers to Achieving Sustainability

Following nearly two years of intense work with 14 programs representing 16 of Oregon's 31 21st CCLC grantees, OregonASK has identified four policy-level barriers that inhibit 21st Century Community Learning Center programs from achieving sustainability:

- Funding distribution
- Oversight procedures
- Matching funds or partner contributions
- Lack of clear sustainability role and requirements

Funding distribution plays a large role in programs being unable to find viable alternative funding. The 2013 Oregon 21st Century Community Learning Center Request For Proposal (RFP) is written for sub-grantees to apply for an arbitrary amount between \$100,000- \$500,000 per year. Funds are disbursed, not based on the number of students served, but rather on the proposed budgets submitted by grantees. If programs were given a specific cost-range per student districts would know what gaps to fill and what reasonable, quality care costs. Without clear parameters, program budgets can often become significantly inflated, resulting in an ineffective and inequitable use of funds.

An example of this funding disparity is the Woodburn community, which serves roughly 600 students per day at seven sites, and has received over \$400,000 per year to run their program as compared with the Sheridan 21st CCLC program, which serves approximately 80 students per day at two sites with a similar funding level. Extraneous budget items and a lack of clarity around the use of funds account for this disparity, and shine a light on the need for more effective oversight. OregonASK staff observed how a lack of supervision of the use of 21st CCLC funds, including insufficient and confusing reporting procedures and lack of clear understanding on the use of funds, exacerbates the opportunities for misuse of funds by programs.

Partnerships – a key component of establishing program sustainability and community involvement – are difficult to create and maintain due to inadequate guidance or support and large grant awards with no community-match requirement. The application and RFP for 21st CCLC funds lacked a clear definition of the elements of true community partnership, allowing organizations to claim partnerships where there was no mutual collaboration. When large amounts of grant funding are given to low-income communities without a match requirement, 21st CCLC programs often build fee-for-service relationships, which dissolve once funds are decreased or expired. A true partnership should be defined as all parties contributing resources and service in pursuit of one similar mission. Without a clear definition of partnership, programs will face challenges in creating and maintaining true partnerships and will instead develop unsustainable fee-for-service relationships.

Sustainability is a broad, inclusive term that requires further description and emphasis within the grant for the benefit of programs. Currently, there is no clear depiction of the role a program director must play in achieving sustainability in order to be successful. The lack of clarity in program expectations and collaborations make the type of organization (non-profit entity or school-based) that holds the grant a key factor in whether programs even have the capability to create sustainability. School-based programs often do not have the supports, know-how or decision-making authority to create formal community relationships, fundraise, and establish funding structures and policies that would assist in achieving sustainability following the expiration of 21st CCLC funds. Non-profits on the other hand, understand dynamics and the need for sustainability-creating actions, and have the decision-making authority to implement them.

Findings and Recommendations

As OregonASK assessed the work, progress and success of 21st CCLC programs towards achieving sustainability, we found one thing to ultimately remain true: **low-income communities need public funding support for high-quality before school, afterschool and summer programs.** While grant writing, parent fees and local community partnerships and contributions provide valuable resources for programs; in low-income communities these sources are not enough:

- The threshold for parent fees seems to be around \$350 or \$375 per year per student based on one community's experiences with finding the right amount to charge, and it is critically important that fee structures include scholarship options so that no student is turned away. We recognize programs will not survive on fees alone, making grants, community and business contributions and partnerships critical.
- Community and business partnerships in low-income communities are often challenging, as the need is high, while resources are low. Often, successful businesses or organizations are completely drained of resources by the many needs in their community.
- Grant writing often does not lead to sustainability for a number of reasons:
 - Steadily increasing competition for decreasing grant funds;

- High levels of administrative burden make applying for and implementing grants challenging and costly to programs; and
- Grants do not create long-term sustainable, stable funding, but rather act as supplemental funding for an already existing program.

These challenges highlight the difficulties low-income communities face in creating programs that are solely reliant on community resources, and stress the necessity of public support for before-school, afterschool and summer programs. State and federal level public funds do not need to be, and should not be, the sole source of funding, yet they play a critical role in supporting programs in low-income communities. Just as dedicated federal and state investments in early learning have created stable, sustainable programs such as Early Head Start, Head Start, Healthy Start, and Oregon PreK, dedicated funds for out-of-school time programs would assist communities across Oregon with sustainability planning for the long-term.

This need should not be considered a public burden, but rather a golden opportunity to support the success of our schools, families, communities and most importantly students for a cost-effective \$1,500 per student per year. It is, and will continue to be, the responsibility of Oregon policy-makers and policy-implementers to ensure the efficient, effective, and equitable use of public funds to achieve positive, well-documented and results-oriented outcomes for students, families and communities.

In order to achieve this goal, OregonASK **recommends** the following changes to the distribution policies and processes for Oregon's 21st CCLC funds:

1. 21st CCLC funds should be distributed based on a per-pupil amount, with the requirement that programs continually (annually or bi-annually) report the number of children served to the granting entity. This policy would eliminate the need for arbitrary grant minimums and maximums.
2. 21st CCLC programs should be required to identify and contribute match funds in addition to the 21st CCLC funds. This match would:
 - Decrease the program's reliance on a single funding source.
 - Increase the need for, and motivation to form, true partnerships (versus total fee-for-service) relationships.
 - Encourage investment and support for the program, so community stakeholders and sustainability are easier to establish and maintain.
 - Be a ratio of 50 up to 100 percent based on a set of criteria.
3. 21st CCLC programs should be required to implement a fee structure (could also be considered match funding) that includes a sliding-scale scholarship option so that no child or family is turned away. This requirement would:
 - Encourage families to contribute financially to the program, while not turning families and students away.
 - Connect the value and real-cost of providing programming to those who are utilizing services.
 - Create income for the program, therefore contributing to sustainability.
 - Decrease the reliance on a single funding source and increase earned-income.
4. 21st CCLC programs should be required to complete detailed financial documents in order to accurately track spending, and provide a tool for fiscal analysis of programs.
 - These detailed financial documents should include budget item assumptions, and be completed for individual sites in addition to the administrative and overall budget.
5. 21st CCLC programs should be required to form and maintain a community stakeholder group or advisory board in order to encourage community input, buy-in and support.
6. 21st CCLC programs should be required to complete a sustainability planning process before full grant funds are distributed in order to encourage programs to think about and plan for sustainability

before it is too late. Granting entities could offer program-planning grants to support this requirement.

It is critical that Oregon, and its policy makers, support working parents, increase student success and keep kids safe during critical hours after school and during the summer. In order to do so, Oregon needs to extend its early childhood efforts and create a continuum of care via an out-of-school-time policy platform for dedicated state funds. Unfortunately, a lack of institutionalized support leaves out-of-school-time programs, stakeholders and ultimately children overlooked and alone after school and during the summer.