

STARTING A PROGRAM

Starting your own afterschool program is an important and exciting undertaking. There is much to consider—is your program enrichment-oriented? Do you want to become licensed? Typically, there are six critical stages of the program planning process:

Philosophy and Goals: Develop a mission statement. This philosophy forms the parameters under which your program will operate.

Needs Assessment: Conduct a needs assessment to find out what types of programming could benefit your community. It should involve researching what programs currently exist. Outreach to parents, youth, and educators to find out what needs are *not* being met in the community. From this outreach, decide what the goal(s) of your program will be.

Strategic Plan: Planning and development vary according to the nature of each program, but with afterschool programming the following steps should be taken before you get started: (1) licensing requirements and liability insurance needed to operate your program ([RIDCYF](#)); (2) creating an operational budget as well as looking for additional funding support; (3) securing age-appropriate, engaging, high-quality resources for program activities.

Program Implementation: Once you have secured funding, materials, a location, and support, there are several steps necessary to guarantee that your program runs smoothly:

- **Staffing:** Develop job descriptions for both paid and volunteer staff. Recruit the board/planning committee to assist with interviews and the hiring process. Before officially hiring an individual, a thorough training process must be implemented to ensure that staff and volunteers are comfortable with their roles when they start.

- **Budgeting:** Now that your program is in effect, you will have to spend the resources made available to you. Design a budget to reflect not only what you must spend on the program itself, but on overhead as well. If funders allow, design your budget to consider the future. Budgeting can be time-consuming (and difficult, if numbers are not your forte). This is a time when it might be helpful to recruit the assistance of a board member or a volunteer who has a strong background in financial planning.

Self-Assessment: Honest assessment of your program should be an ongoing effort and demonstrate your commitment to self-improvement. In order to provide the highest quality care for the children and youth you serve, frequent self-assessment—of both program and staff—is important, as is periodic evaluation from an outside, neutral source.

Evaluation: Assess whether your program is effective and efficient, and whether or not it has any impact. The evaluation process is indispensable to the success of any program and serves three main purposes: Performance Monitoring, Decision Making, and Feedback.