



Communication & Action Toolkit

A Resource for Afterschool & Summer Programs

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Creating a Program One-Page Overview

When meeting with potential partners, community members or policy makers it is helpful to have a document that clearly presents your program's information. This document should be different from the material you use to market your program to parents.

Putting together a one-page overview that captures these details is an effective way to communicate critical information. This document will help to highlight the opportunities available for youth, the outcomes being realized and the needs your program faces. It's also a way to communicate your program information with clarity and consistency.

You will need to collect the following information for your one-page overview:

- Types of programs offered
- Positive outcomes seen within program
- Program examples of engaged learning, school/community partnerships and family engagement
- Number of children and youth served
- Number of low-income children served
- If applicable, the number of children/youth on wait list and resources needed to serve those youth
- Resources needed to build/sustain your program
- Contact information for your program and director contact information

Tips for creating a one-pager:

- Keep each thought short and succinct
- Create headings to make it easy for the reader to skim the page and understand the main points
- Group common facts and figures together under a single heading
- Use bullet points to organize your messages
- Add a candid photo that exemplifies learning in action—don't forget to include a caption with the photo along with a photo credit when necessary (make sure to get a photo release form signed)
- Create a pie chart (or other infographic) that communicates your funding sources along with a description of your financial needs

A free "One Page Program Overview" template is available on the Beyond School Bells Toolkit Website to utilize in creating your program's document



SPARK Afterschool & Summer Program



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Our vision and goals

The SPARK program is designed to provide students with a safe, supported, and structured afterschool environment that offers a variety of academic and enrichment opportunities to students and families. Programming has met the goals of increased academic success, positive social and personal skills, and increased community and parent involvement.

Program highlights

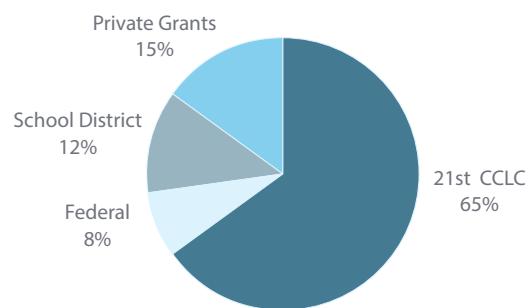
After School Program: 150 student participants

Summer Program: 120 student participants

- 71% of students receive free/reduced lunch
- 57% of elementary students participate in the program.
- SPARK provides afterschool and school half-day programming at three elementary schools and the middle school.
- SPARK offers homework assistance for the first 30-minutes of our program, followed by hands-on learning experiences through daily club activities. These clubs include robotics, gardening, knitting, drama, tae kwon do, computer programming, painting and technology.
- SPARK has seen clear academic outcomes for nearly three-quarters of those served on a regular basis around improved school skills, classroom performance, and homework completion.

Our funding

As SPARK looks to the coming years, plans are being made to sustain programming. A decrease in federal grant dollars necessitates the importance of local support. We would like to serve all youth in our community; however, we are unable to do so at this time due to our limited funding. Wait list of 50 students. We have a suggested \$50 annual program fee; payment is not required to attend. Programming costs (total cost per child for the program to operate): \$535/afterschool and \$215/summer.



Key Talking Points

Whether you only have a few minutes to give an “elevator speech” or have twenty minutes, your talking points should address:

1. Why are afterschool programs important for kids and your community?
2. How does your program address these needs?
3. What does your program do to affect positive change?
4. What does your program need to be successful?

Focus on the strengths of your program in the community and have a personal anecdote ready to share but also be willing to say what your needs are in order to achieve further success.

In addition to information that is specifically about your program, include the valuable range of benefits that research shows are offered by afterschool and summer learning programs:

Inspires Learners

Before addressing parents, principals, or employees, take a moment to map out your conversation. Keep your main points in mind, so you can control the direction of the conversation.

Helps Working Families

For most families there is a gap of 15-25 hours per week when parents are still at work and children are out of school and need supervision.

Keeps Kids Safe & Healthy

Participants are less likely to become involved in criminal activities, more likely to stay in school, see increased physical activity, and very likely to receive nutritious snacks and meals.

Supports Nebraska’s Vision for Education

Project-based, service learning, and STEM programs cultivate career awareness, build 21st century skills, and support personalized learning plans.

Find Nebraska and National data on our website at www.beyondschoolbells.org

Additional Talking Points

As a society, it is our job to ensure that the future is in good hands. That means making sure all our youth have access to a full range of opportunities throughout their childhood. *When youth have meaningful opportunities to be positively engaged in their schools and communities, they are more likely to develop into healthy and productive citizens and leaders.*

Where are our kids?

Did you know that young people in the K-12 educational system spend only 18.5% of their waking hours in a classroom setting? On average, youth spend around 1,000 hours a year in school, but 5,000 hours in their communities and with their families. How they spend this time can facilitate positive development and growth experiences, or place them at risk for negative outcomes.

Schools can't do it all alone.

We know that the time students spend out of school matters. Research tells us that youth who are engaged in constructive pursuits during their free time are more likely to develop initiative, better understand themselves in relation to others, experience optimism toward the future, and develop skills and competencies that promote a successful transition to adulthood.

ELO programs help build a strong foundation.

Quality ELO programs give youth the opportunity to explore new ways of learning, to acquire new skills, and to form positive relationships with adults in their community. Good ELO experiences literally help build a foundation that can transform a young person into a productive and engaged member of our community. When that happens, we all benefit.

We need to work together to make sure our youth are on the road to success.

Since quality ELO programs play an important role in assuring our children have the opportunities they need to be successful citizens and future leaders, we need to take collective responsibility for supporting and replicating them across the state. ELOs are based on the idea that schools working in partnership with community organizations represent a powerful force for our youth.

Tips for Successful Advocacy

Public hearings are an easy way to get your perspective out to key public officials (city council members, state legislators, school board members). It is vital to develop public testimony that is clear, concise, has emotional impact and will be heard and remembered. Here are some tips:

Be courteous. Use the individual's official title in your communications. Always remember to thank individuals for their time and interest. Write thank you notes when appropriate.

Schedule face-to-face meetings. These meetings allow for relationships to be developed, which is essential in building ongoing partnerships and support for your program. Further, you are able to provide greater insight and depth to the issues, as well as to better clarify any questions or concerns individuals may have.

Invite potential stakeholders to visit your program. Visits are a meaningful way to help stakeholders to better understand the value that your program brings to the community.

Use various means of communication. Phone calls, letters and emails are all essential to effective advocacy.

Be concise and specific. Be brief in your message by keeping it to two to three talking points. State your position simply and clearly; avoid using abbreviations and acronyms that may be confusing. Clearly state what you are asking from the elected official, business, school board, etc.

Do your homework. Know the stakeholder's interests/background. Know both sides of an issue. In regards to legislation, read legislative/advocacy alerts carefully and stay informed on what stage the legislation is in.

Give personal examples. Speak from your heart—give real examples of what the program has meant to you personally or to students, staff, parents and the community. It is much more powerful to include personal examples in your advocacy than to solely discuss data and research.

Utilize meaningful data and provide materials to leave behind. Share the most powerful and meaningful data. If possible, utilize documents that illustrate this data. Be honest, don't exaggerate the facts. Leave important materials with the individual, as well as a profile of your program.

Follow-up after meetings. Send a personal thank you note to thank individuals for their time. If you promised information, be sure to get back in touch promptly. If the person you met with offered to do something, remind them of that offer after a reasonable time and be sure to thank them.

Continue to communicate and maintain the relationship. It is important to regularly keep in touch with people after a meeting, phone call or email. Keep others informed of your progress and meetings so that follow-up action can be planned. Do not give up—advocacy is an educational process and takes time.

Tips for Successful Public Testimony

Public hearings are an easy way to get your perspective out to key public officials (city council members, state legislators, school board members). It is vital to develop public testimony that is clear, concise, has emotional impact and will be heard and remembered by public officials. Your testimony should be:

Accurate & Useful

Make certain to utilize correct and current data. Use statistics and research sparingly. Do not overwhelm your testimony with data but choose the most meaningful and powerful data.

Logical

Begin with a statement describing the issue or problem that needs to be addressed and your position on that issue. Indicate why your position provides resolution to the problem. Make a recommendation of the action that needs to be taken by the committee or board (i.e. voting in favor of a bill). Write your statement out in clear, concise language.

Dignified

Greet the board or committee appropriately and maintain that protocol throughout your testimony. If you are testifying at a legislative hearing, recognize the Chair and the committee before speaking. For example, "Thank you Senator Smith and members of the Committee for the opportunity to testify today on this important topic." Always thank the committee following your testimony.

Concise

Plan on speaking for 3-5 minutes or less. Short and well-delivered testimonies are the most effective.

Heartfelt

Powerful testimony is a combination of personal stories and accurate, current statistics. Speak from your heart. Presenting your testimony in human terms provides public officials with a better understanding of the issue. Testimony from individuals who are directly impacted by the issue is very impactful.

Engaging Parents

Why Engage Parents as Advocates?

Parents can and should be your CHAMPIONS! They can tell personal stories about how important ELO programs are to their children and family. Some parents can be the best advocates for your program because of their ability to speak passionately about the personal impact of your program on their children. Parents can also be excellent influencers, motivating others to support your program. These types of testimonials are a powerful and highly effective means of increasing public support and funding for afterschool.

How can parents help advocate for your ELO program?

It's important to let parents know that they don't need to invest a lot of time or energy in order to be a strong voice for ELO programs. Here are some ideas to get parents started advocating right away for ELO programs in your community:

- **Encourage parents to call or email...**
your city council, mayor, or state representatives. Provide parents with talking points to include in their conversation or written correspondence.
- **Circulate a petition.**
Have fellow parents, friends, neighbors and other community members sign a petition showing their support for ELO programs.
- **Host a community event at your afterschool program.**
Invite current and potential community partners to take part in a celebration/event in your ELO program. Provide an opportunity for parents to be able to speak at the event and visit with these community leaders.
- **Organize a letter writing campaign.**
Encourage parents to write letters in support of ELO programs to local elected officials, such as the mayor and the city council.
- **Set up a site visit for local elected leaders.**
Invite a few parents to be a part of this visit and allow them to speak about the importance of the program to their family.
- **Encourage parents to attend policymaker meetings.**
Provide parents with talking points to include in their testimony to school board, chamber of commerce, and city council meetings.

Media Outreach

Getting your ELO program in the public eye is an important key to running a successful advocacy campaign. Newspapers, television and radio stations provide great ways to increase visibility and to build support and momentum for ELO programs.

The following are ideas, along with some how-to information, for getting your message out to the media about the importance of Expanded Learning Opportunities. We encourage you to download the Messaging Tools available on the bsbtoolkit.com website. You may also want to visit the Afterschool Alliance Media Outreach webpages www.afterschoolalliance.org/media for examples of each of the platforms listed below.

Newspapers

Encourage your local newspaper to write an article about the importance of ELO programs and invite them to cover special events. Frequently newspaper editors need stories. There are numerous ways to engage your local newspaper, including:

- Sending a letter to the editor of your local newspaper
- Writing an opinion article
- Talking with the editorial writer of your local newspaper and encouraging them to write an article about the importance of ELO programs
- Sending news releases
- Inviting your local newspaper to events

News Releases

Also called press releases, news releases are 1-2 page reports of a newsworthy event. These can be sent to newspapers, as well as television and radio stations. News releases should have a headline and a "lead paragraph" that clearly states the news of the release, and answers the questions who, what, where, when and why. Also, don't forget to include contact information.

Local Television and Radio Stations

Invite local television and radio stations to cover any special events that are occurring in your ELO program. Send a brief media advisory to inform them of these events. If your mayor or Congressional representative is attending, make sure this is emphasized in your Media Advisory. Also, look for a local cable television interview opportunity or a local radio talk show to advocate for the importance of ELO programs.

Proactive pitching

Pitch letters are personalized letters to reporters/producers urging them to cover a particular topic or to book a particular guest. Pitch letters can also ask columnists or newspaper reporters to write about a particular issue. Send a pitch letter offering your ELO program as a unique twist on back-to-school stories or as a local illustration of a national news-making event.

Contacting Your Elected Officials

Three ways to communicate with your legislature:

1. Write a letter

- Hand-written letters are the most effective
- Express your issue/concern in as few as 3-4 sentences
- Ask your legislator for something specific, such as co-sponsorship of legislation
- Get ideas from samples, but it is always best to use your own words

2. Make a phone call

- Introduce yourself to the person answering the phone, let them know that you are a constituent
- In a few sentences, say what you would like the legislator to do and why it is important to you and your community
- Phone calls are especially effective right before scheduled votes.

3. Schedule a visit

- Face-to-face meetings are the most effective way of connecting with your elected official
- Meet them in your community when they're on recess or travel to their offices
- Share your concerns, stories, and facts regarding ELOs.
- Ask your senator or representative for something specific, like co-sponsorship of legislation or their vote in favor of an important legislative bill
- Leave time for them to ask questions of you, but know it's okay if you don't have an answer to all questions. You can always follow up with them after the meeting with more information
- Invite them to visit your program
- Bring leave behind materials—important fact sheets, visual data documents and your program information
- Always remember to send a thank you note following a visit to continue to build a relationship with your legislators

Visit Beyond School Bells website for more information.