From: Seth Williams, Public Financial Management, Inc.

To: Wilda Diaz, Mayor, City of Perth Amboy
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Community Development, City of Perth Amboy

Re: Initial Assessment Findings and Proposed Technical Assistance

Date: January 4, 2016

I. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

A. Overview of Perth Amboy's Request for Assistance and the National Resource Network's Direct Assistance Program

The National Resource Network (Network) develops and delivers innovative solutions to American cities that are rounding the corner on some of their toughest economic challenges. The Network works with mayors and other local leaders to identify practical solutions, sharing real-world expertise and best practices, and helps cities develop the tools and strategies they need to grow their economies and more effectively use existing federal investments. Cities that receive assistance from the Network will serve as laboratories for innovation and learning that will also strengthen federal policies and programs moving forward.

The Network delivers on the ground direct assistance to individual cities from a team of experts that works side-by-side with a city for up to 12 months. Teams assess local needs, provide recommendations, and help cities to identify and execute strategies that align with their economic recovery. Teams also work with cities to identify potential opportunities for funding and strategic partnerships with foundations, nonprofits, and local businesses to help them achieve their economic goals. The direct assistance program is based on the following principles:

- The Network prioritizes assistance to cities that demonstrate both significant levels of need and a demonstrated commitment to promoting and executing strategies to grow their economy.
- The Network provides an assessment of the City's needs, evaluating economic development, housing, land use, infrastructure, crime, schools, budget, and city operations.
- Based on these assessments, the Network proposes customized direct assistance strategies.

The technical assistance services offered by the Network are targeted for cities that have populations of 40,000 or more, and face one or more of the following challenges:

- a 2013 annual average unemployment rate of 9 percent or more, as measured by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics;
- a poverty rate of 20 percent or more (excluding students enrolled in undergraduate, graduate or professional school), as measured by the 2010-2012 American Community Survey;
- a population decline of 5 percent or more between 2000 and 2010, as measured by the U.S. Decennial Census.

Perth Amboy is eligible to apply for Network direct assistance because its 2013 annual average unemployment rate was 14.4 percent and the City's non-college poverty rate was 21.4 percent.

In March 2015, the City of Perth Amboy, New Jersey submitted a Request for Assistance (RFA) to the National Resource Network (Network), requesting technical assistance to create a workforce development program between local schools, technical programs, Middlesex County College, and Rutgers University. The unemployment rate in Perth Amboy (9.6 percent) exceeds the average for the State of New Jersey (5.6 percent) and Middlesex County (5.1 percent).[1] The City believes that there is a mismatch between available jobs and the skills Perth Amboy residents possess, exemplified by the high proportion of City residents over age 25 that has no high-school diploma (32.3 percent) and the small percentage of the population that have post-high school degrees (20.0 percent).[2] The City's application noted several possible reasons for this situation including a lack of youth mentorship or vocational training opportunities and insufficient preparation of Perth Amboy students for higher education.

Specifically, the City asked the Network to study why many Perth Amboy students do not move on to employment or higher education after completing high-school, and why a high percentage of students do not earn a high-school degree. The City proposed that – given its current educational attainment levels and academic performance – increasing youth education achievement is essential to the City's economic competitiveness in future years. As a result, the City sought to identify opportunities to address this challenge and take action to increase resident educational attainment and job readiness.

The RFA materials identified an array of fiscal, economic, and community development challenges, and noted the progress and challenges the City faced in addressing structural fiscal deficits and creating sustainable conditions for economic growth and competiveness. Following a review of the RFA application and supplemental materials, and a call with the City Manager and Director of the Economic and Community Development Office in May 2015, the National Resource Network proposed providing the City with a case study-based summary of select best practices in three cities to improve student learning and academic performance.

The revised scope – the basis for this report – highlights opportunities where the City can best take action to improve youth learning and academic performance. Although the City has no direct role in the funding or governance of Perth Amboy Public Schools as the school system is administered by an independently elected school board that has its own taxing authority, the City can still play an important role in improving student performance. There are many opportunities for the City to enhance after school programs and recreation activities in order to maximize the effect on student performance in schools. Ensuring that the outcomes of City-run after school programs are aligned with in-classroom learning objectives and programs will allow the City to have a direct impact on student learning.

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[1] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics not-seasonally adjusted data, August 2015.
[2] U.S. Census Bureau, 2013 3-year American Community Survey data.

B. City Context: Why Perth Amboy May Benefit from After-School Programs

Perth Amboy Public School District

The Perth Amboy Pubic Schools District encompasses eleven schools and an Education Center for adult education and enrichment programs. Five of the District's eleven schools are elementary schools, two are middle schools, and one is a high school. The School District serves roughly 10,500 pupils, many of whom come from minority backgrounds and speak a language other than English at home (with Spanish being the predominant language). [3] The City also operates three Early Education Centers aimed at educating the city's youngest population.

The City's educational attainment, school performance data, and poverty rates create a significant barrier to the City's overall attractiveness – both to prospective employers and to middle class families:

- The city ranks in the 24th percentile (lagging performance) of schools in the area on college & career readiness measures, meeting none of the targets set by the state
- The city ranks in the 14th percentile (significantly lagging performance) of schools in the area on graduation and post-secondary enrollment measures, meeting none of the targets set by the state
- 32 percent of City residents do not possess a high-school diploma, and only 16 percent have completed post-high school education.
- In addition to significant non-college poverty rates, 56 percent of high school students receive free-or-reduced-price lunch, often used as a proxy for poverty among students

Despite an average student to teacher ratio of only 13.5 in 2013-14, the Perth Amboy School District's academic achievement figures fall within the lowest quartile for all schools in the state, excluding Robert N. Wilentz Elementary School.[4] The District does slightly better amongst its peer group, with schools ranking the approximate middle of peer districts, again excepting Wilentz Elementary School.

Perth Amboy also faces additional challenges related to youth, including:

- Lack of sufficient recreational opportunities convenient to serve youth – including minimal offerings for the largest portion of its population (located in the south of city)
- Many residents are ineligible to receive City services due to regulatory compliance related to newly arrived immigrant populations
- The City's need to continue efforts to foster a stronger relationship with the school board.

In order to increase its overall economic competitiveness, the City needs to increase the academic achievements of its school aged children and the educational attainment of its general population. Absent direct responsibility for education of the City's children, the City can invest in more robust after-school programs to maximize the effect on student performance in school.

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[3] http://www.state.nj.us/cgi-bin/education/csg/13/csg.pl?string=dist_code4090&maxhits=650 (Accessed: June 2015)
[4] State of New Jersey Department of Education, Taxpayers' Guide to Education Spending 2014 (http://www.nj.gov/cgi-bin/education/csg/14/csg.pl?string=dist_code4090&maxhits=650) (Accessed: June 2015)

Perth Amboy School District Achievement Data

School Name	Type	Peer Percentile			Statewide Percentile		
		Academic Achievement	College & Career Readiness	Student Growth	Academic Achievement	College & Career Readiness	Student Growth
Anthony V. Ceres Elementary School	Elementary	52	90	45	11	76	26
Edward J. Patten Elementary School	Elementary	55	71	41	13	29	18
Herbert N. Richardson 21St Century School	Elementary	68	94	61	14	97	42
James J. Flynn Elementary School	Elementary	57	100	57	17	87	43
Robert N. Wilentz Elementary School	Elementary	94	97	78	28	98	47
Samuel E. Shull Middle School	Middle School	31	73	35	16	58	13
William C. McGinnis Middle School	Middle School	41	37	25	14	44	14
Perth Amboy High School	High School	37	63	34	12	38	14

Source: 2013-14 NJ School Performance Report[5]

The Role of the City

The City conducts some after-school programing from its two community and recreational centers, the Alexander F. Jankowski Community Center and the Brighton Community Center, but seeks to improve the quality of and access to offerings. During 2014, a total of 4,105 youth participated across various programs.[6] The City's 2015 budget included 15 full-time positions and nine part-time positions in the Parks and Recreation Department – which is responsible for the operation of its community centers. As of June 2015, the Department had five full-time staff positions, supplemented by eight part-time Recreation Assistants.

The City spends approximately $525,000, annually, on recreation programs – including nearly $350,000 from non-City sources. For instance, the City has historically been a recipient of grants to help offset the costs of providing such services. In 2015, the City appropriated $175,000 for recreation activities out of a total Parks and Recreation Budget of $1.5 million and a total City General Fund budget of $72.8 million.

Grant	Source	Dollar Value	Description
Summer Nutrition Program	NJ Dept. of Agriculture	$250,000	Provides summer lunches for children that are income eligible. Use of funds for food, supplies and staff.
Municipal Lines	Governor's Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse	$42,000	Provide Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs (ATOD) education that encompasses small children to seniors. Funds are used for staff, supplies, and education materials.
Recreation Opportunities for Individuals with Disabilities	NJ Dept. of Community Affairs	$22,000	Provide recreational, fitness, and creative opportunities for people with special needs. Majority of funds is allocated for staff.
Job Readiness Program	NJ Dept. of Transportation	$32,000	Focus on landscaping training for out-of-school youth, drop-outs, youth with GEDs, and unemployed youth ages 16-24.

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[5] http://education.state.nj.us/directory/school.php?district=4090&source=01 (Accessed: June 2015)
[6] Staff and participant data is based on information provided by the City. The total count (4,105) of participants is unduplicated and represents unique participants

Currently, the department partners with four organizations – the Perth Amboy Board of Education, NJ Institute of Disabilities, Raritan Bay YMCA, and the Jewish Renaissance Foundation. Each partnership offers a unique blend of opportunities to facilitate the provision of services alongside the Parks and Recreation department. Examples include:

- Perth Amboy Board of Education - Provides space and program supplies for ESL, Citizenship, Fitness, and Youth Recreation programs
- NJ Institute of Disabilities – Provides social worker/staffing for recreation programming for participants with disabilities. The department provides staff and space to supplement the effort.
- Raritan Bay YMCA – Partners with the department for programs, including: Teen Night, teen swim, and open recreation. Supply staff to match the amount provided by the City.[7]
- Jewish Renaissance Foundation –Conducts outreach events throughout Perth Amboy, including: Family Day, Harvest Fest, Halloween Celebration, and Christmas Celebration.

Although the City has shown a commitment to recreational opportunities akin to the case studies presented in this report, as demonstrated by the partnerships described above, , the City of Perth Amboy would benefit from a formalized after school program administered at the City's recreation centers and facilities. As the case studies reveal, numerous cities have had success implementing after-school opportunities by relying on space provided by recreation centers. With ample building and outdoor space, recreation centers represent a natural opportunity to host after-school programs. By incorporating an educational component, to the centers can become focal points in a community's effort to spearhead educational change and growth.

C. Benefits of After-School Programs

Absent direct responsibility for education of the City's children, Perth Amboy can invest in more robust after-school programs to maximize the effect on student performance in school.

Well-planned, well-administered after-school programs can increase academic performance, strengthen community ties, and bolster social skills in participants. Cities throughout the country have implemented various after-school programs in an effort to bridge the achievement gap and improve educational attainment among children and youth. At the forefront of this effort have often been partnerships between schools and parks and recreation departments. Where the former can provide academic support resources, the latter can offer space to facilitate the learning experience.

Studies attest to the need for structured recreational time for school-aged children. A recent study finds that approximately 40 percent of a school-aged child's week is comprised of free time.[8] How this time is utilized can have a significant impact on students' academic performance and development. Positive, learning-centered recreational activities can help young adolescents hone their reading and mathematical skills and help to develop their social skills, including positive body-image and self-esteem. Academic success, mental health, and positive social relationships

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[7] The City's contract with YMCA costs approximately $207,529 annually, and covers programs that YMCA administers out of the City's recreation centers.
[8] The Rationale for Recreation Services for Youth: An Evidenced Based Approach. National Recreation and Park Association.

are commonly cited benefits of participation in organized recreational activities during adolescence.[9]

However, it is not solely the availability of programs that bolsters academic performance. The quality of programs offered does have an impact on participants' progress. Indeed, some studies have concluded that after-school programs of low quality can have a negative impact on participants.[10] To ensure high-quality programs, cities should structure their programs around a combined academic and social focus,[11] and ensure that programs meet core components of a quality program design, which include a reflective and analytical approach to program monitoring to ensure commitment to the mission, and a willingness to change and improve in order to ensure the program's growth.[12] As the following case studies illustrate, successful cities often follow this model.

In order to reap the full benefits of after-school recreational programs, the City of Perth Amboy should aim to incorporate best-practices associated with the development and administering of such a program, including:

- Ensure the program includes both an academic and a social component
- Involve the local community, allowing for sharing of resources and best practices
- Engage committed, trained staff who model supportive, healthy relationships and who can provide an adequate level of academic support
- Encourage youth and parent input and collaboration
- Adhere to the program's mission, while allowing for growth, improvement, and change

II. CASE STUDIES

Cities such as Atlanta, GA, Chattanooga, TN, and St. Louis, MO have pursued – and in some instances started to achieve – improved academic achievement by leveraging recreation centers as key resources for learning.

The following "recreation centers as learning centers" case studies summarize the steps taken and the results experienced in Atlanta, Chattanooga, and St. Louis. The experiences and practices of other Cities – positive and negative – may help the City of Perth Amboy as it develops a policy-based approach best suited to meet its goals.

The case studies provide a varied – yet somewhat overlapping – approach to after school/recreation center programming and can serve as potential models for Perth Amboy's consideration.

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[9] The Rationale for Recreation Services for Youth: An Evidenced Based Approach. National Recreation and Park Association.
[10] Quality Guidelines for Ohio's Afterschool Programs. Ohio Afterschool Network.
[11] Can After-School Programs Help Level the Academic Playing Field for Disadvantaged Youth? A Research Initiative of the Campaign for Educational Equity.
[12] How Can I Assess the Quality of My Program? Tools for Out-of-School Time Program Practitioners.

A. Atlanta, GA

1. Setting the Agenda

From 2007 through 2009, nearly two-thirds of Atlanta's recreation centers were closed. In 2010, the City's new Mayor committed to re-open all of the shuttered recreation centers within a year. As part of the plan to re-open the recreation centers, the City sought to enhance the role of the recreation centers to include provision of significant youth development programming (academics, character building, fitness, community services, etc.) that would leverage partnerships with public entities (e.g. schools) and nonprofit entities (e.g. Boys & Girls Clubs, YMCAs, etc.) to expand the capacity and services provided to youth. The new design and model for the recreation centers was branded "Centers of Hope."

The following five pillars were and are the intended goals of the program:
- Provide character development and training
- Offer activities to reinforce academic excellence
- Support fitness activities and healthy choices
- Prepare youth with technology skills
- Engage the community with additional services and activities

To begin the work of creating financial, community, and political support, the Mayor created a task force consisting of community and business partners to help inform the program's approach. The City also reached out to peer jurisdictions to discuss proven, successful efforts, as well as to seek guidance on program execution from both non-profit entities and City leaders. This intensive background work sought to ensure that the City's funding was well spent and created sufficient community and political support.

In 2011, with the collaboration of the City and community partners, the City launched its Centers of Hope initiative to increase high quality after school programming for children. The two pilot Centers of Hope partnered with the Boys & Girls Club of Metro Atlanta for the provision of services. Prior to utilizing the Center of Hope model of services, the recreation centers that became the pilot Centers for Hope had fewer than 100 youth participating in programs. Within the first year of the pilot centers adopting the Center for Hope model, youth participation increased three-fold. Currently, the two pilot centers comprise approximately one-third of all youth currently participating in ten City-sponsored afterschool programs and each serve – on average – approximately 300-400 students each week. By the end of 2014 – the City's afterschool programming had more than tripled is participation rate from 2011 to nearly 1,700 students.

The City continues to implement and pursue a combined focus on academic achievement and developing character-building skills – including, but not limited to: academic and cultural enrichment, technology classes, health and nutrition awareness, SAT preparation support, job readiness and life skills training.

Currently, ten of the City's thirty-three recreation centers are "Centers of Hope" that employ the more robust programmatic services.

2. Program Structure and Implementation

Parks and Recreation Department staff oversee the programmatic and day-to-day operations of the program, while the City's partners – such as the Boys and Girls Club and the YMCA – are charged with program development in accordance with the City's input and vision. The City's partners – primarily non- profit entities – rely on significant volunteer resources to provide mentoring, tutoring, and other programmatic and supervisory oversight of the Centers.

In addition to partner volunteers, the City of Atlanta manages a registration site for interested individuals to register and be connected, and if approved, serve as mentors and tutors in the Centers. Volunteers are expected to commit to consistent sessions (typically one day a week), for an extended period of time (usually six months or a year).

The current ten Centers of Hope are also augmented by the City's operation of smaller, niche programs located in the remaining recreation centers. Although these programs do not offer the comprehensive programming available at Centers of Hope, they create opportunities for theme-specific (such as music or athletics) engagements for youth, as well as allow for a more geographically distributed presence in the city.

3. Funding

In 2010, the City committed $3.7 million to re-open previously shuttered recreation centers. The City's fiscal commitment leveraged nearly $3.0 million in private funding by various local and national businesses and $1.0 million of in-kind contributions; in sum creating a $7.7 million pool of funding to re-open and reimagine certain recreation centers.

In 2012, Wells Fargo committed a $1.5 million grant to expand the Centers of Hope program and Coca-Cola, another corporate funder, granted the program a $1 million. The City has also benefitted from the support of Turner Broadcasting, which has allocated one dollar from every CNN tour ticket sold to Atlanta's Centers of Hope program – yielding approximately $250,000 to $500,000 annually.

To supplement philanthropic and City funds, Atlanta also charges a weekly fee of $35 per student. Most students, however, fall under an income-based sliding-scale and are not required to pay the full amount.[13] The fee itself has also decreased since the inception of the program to allow for greater participation; initially, it was set at $65.

4. Engaging the Community

Community engagement was a key factor in helping the program expand its reach, as well as playing an integral part in funding efforts. The Mayor's visibility – both in public and political commitment to the program and to fundraising and philanthropic partnerships – were and continue to be one of the most critical elements to the growth and success of Centers for Hope.

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[13] Although the City was not able to provide a break-down of how much each participant pays on average, the number of full-paying participants is small.

Local partners were equally valuable in expanding the breadth of the opportunities and classes offered at the Centers. Through collaboration with business and civic partners, the program was able to find volunteers committed to providing classes in various areas of interest, allowing for a versatile array of options for youth to choose from, leading to increased interest in participation as well as greater opportunities for youth development and growth.

The City also partnered with recognized national leaders in youth development, such as the Boys and Girls Club, AmeriCorps, and YMCA to recruit volunteers to oversee the development of the program while ensuring it adheres to the City's vision. Affiliating with nationally recognized organizations continues to have the added benefit of increasing attention – and thereby increasing opportunities for private funding – for the program.

The City began discussions with Atlanta public schools to help encourage results-sharing and create a combined effort to ensure academic progress. The City hopes to formalize and strengthen a partnership with the schools to do more targeted work to bridge academic gaps, without duplicating efforts.

5. Challenges and Lessons Learned

In Atlanta's case, the strong mayoral support that the program received played an integral role in the program's success. The City affirmed its belief in after school programs for its youth, and by extension, for the development and well-being of its youth population, by dedicating a sizeable amount of funding to the program.

Highlights of successful outcomes of the program:
- three-fold increase in youth participation within first year,
- sizeable increase in private funding leveraged City's fiscal commitment, and
- partnership with partner private and non-profit entities to grow volunteers.

Atlanta has struggled with ensuring a proper balance between appropriating recreation centers usage across the multiple community members vying for its space. The centers – also multi-use facilities – can be reserved for use by seniors, adults, and other segments of the population. Additionally, the centers are also available for private hire, and have hosted events such as birthday and bridal/baby showers. To fit the demand, and ensure that the centers are also available for use by non-youth participants, the City takes measures to accommodate the community's needs, while offering ample space for youth participation.

The following is a list of other practices that Atlanta found important to the success of the Centers:
- Providing a hot meal – even if just in a form of a snack – has great effects on participation. Specifically, the City has found that offering nutritious options has often encouraged participation rates among siblings. To offset the costs of these meals, the City has pursued funding from state and federal sources – particularly for summer months.
- The City found that following a comprehensive, multi-pillar approach to the program helped increase participation and results. As described earlier, the City focuses on an academic component as well as character and physical growth of its participants. By focusing on the mind and body, the program aims to deliver opportunities for comprehensive participant development.

- To meet the fiscal challenges of program operations, the City has aggressively pursued outside philanthropic funding. This approach has not only allowed the City to expand on the program's reach, but has also helped to maintain the programs public support, creating positive news reports and public awareness and reinforcing the City's support of youth development.
- The City found that it is easier to recruit younger participants versus older youth. To help attract older participants to Centers, Atlanta pursued programs catering to this population, such as resume-writing workshops or SAT prep classes.

B. Chattanooga, TN

1. Setting the Agenda
In 2013, the newly elected Mayor of Chattanooga, Tennessee – Andy Berke – assumed office seeking to improve educational attainment while utilizing community resources to achieve his policy goals. One of Mayor Berke's first acts was to dissolve the Parks and Recreation Department and merge its component functions and into two newly created departments; one of which was the Department of Youth and Family Development (YFD).

The newly-formed YFD was charged with five areas of focus: education, leadership, career development, recreation, and social services – all leading toward an integrated, data-driven approach to creating smarter students and stronger families. Berke charged YFD to implement cross-cutting programming to not only provide recreational opportunities to the community but also to intently focus on opportunities to increase the educational outcomes of the City's children – even though the City has no funding or oversight responsibilities to the County-run school system.

In response, YFD launched a series of programs based out of the City's 18 former recreation centers to improve educational performance through after-school programs. These programs focus on literacy, early childhood development, and arts and technology. The literacy program uses empirically validated literacy-improving software technology and the presence of certified teachers to help ensure student academic growth.[14]

Berke required YFD to track and analyze data to ensure that the City's investment in its youth and families was yielding the desired outcomes. YFD regularly tracks such data elements as the number of people who use City programs – including how many children and adults visit locations, the number of hours logged by volunteers, and how much time residents spend on educational programs, such as the literacy-improving software. The City is in the process of working with external evaluators to measure and quantify the educational strides made by students who participate in YFD programming.

2. Program Structure and Implementation
The first phase of YFD's newly imagined implementation included selecting an approach that would have long-lasting and high-impact results on student literacy levels and that would be easily accessible to most users of the recreation centers. The City selected reading-improvement

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[14] The City of Chattanooga has chosen Lexia as their software of choice, although numerous educational software programs exist.

software, Lexia, which was installed on computers in recreation centers. Lexia was chosen based on its measurable results combined with its videogame-like quality to make learning more enjoyable for youth. To capture metrics, the City tracked indicators such as utilization rates, frequency of time spent using the program, baseline reading levels, and attainments in reading levels associated with the software.

In an effort to make the Youth and Family Development Centers welcoming, the City cleaned up and restored the former recreation centers. In doing so, the City maximized available space by converting previously unused space – such as closet space – into usable areas. Where recreation center space was limited, the City improvised by utilizing space made available by community partners. For instance, the City also operates one computer lab out of a local Salvation Army and another out of a local church, thus further expanding on previously under-utilized space while also deepening relationships with partners.

To provide academically-focused student assistance and program oversight, the City recruited, hired, and trained part time academic coaches, typically relying on certified teachers from the County school district. Academic coaches work at the recreation centers during after-school hours for 12 hours per week and provide support, homework help, and tutoring and classroom management to ensure a safe and academically-centered program for the program's participants. These Academic caches are also trained on Lexia to ensure consistent implementation across YFD.

Initially, the City reported that youth participation in tutoring and literacy-enhancement programming was lower than desired and inconsistent. As a result, YFD began requiring that youth participate in at least one hour of tutoring before being allowed to access the recreation options offered at the Youth and Family Development Center. YFD also created additional incentives for participation in tutoring and literacy-enhancement – including, youth who participate receive additional snacks and those who have steady attendance throughout the school year are invited to go on a YFD-led trip to the Atlanta Aquarium.

3. Funding
Following the dissolution of the Department of Parks and Recreation, and the creation of new departments – such as YFD – the City was able to utilize and re-designate existing funding and personnel across the newly created departments, thus negating the need for an increase in either staffing or funding.

Although the program gained increasingly more financial support from community partners, most significantly the United Way of Greater Chattanooga and the Greater Chattanooga Community Foundation, City funds were utilized to support the first purchase of software licenses and cover the salaries of the part time academic coaches. To attract quality staff, the City matched the local hourly tutoring rate and vigorously pursued high-quality teachers within the community. As the program continues to grow, the City aims to pursue increased funding from the local, philanthropic community – securing more than $200,000 in grants and contributions to complement the City's nearly $720,000 investment – which now serves nearly 2,500 student participants.

4. Engaging the Community

Community leaders and business and civic partners, expressed interest in combining efforts and offering help as the City's YFD centers and revamped programming gained momentum. The civic and business community rallied around the City's initiative, which, according to the City, was (and continues to be) a catalyst in ensuring the success of the program. Community support has ranged from organizations offering access to buildings and space to providing volunteers and fiscal support. The faith community has also been a strong partner by training volunteers, raising funds, and purchasing the Lexia licenses for church computers for disadvantaged youth to access.

The City also sought ways to create organic, mutually-beneficial relationships where opportunities arose. One such example is the relationship that was between the new YFD programming and a local technology college. The City had received a donation of approximately 400 used computers that were in need of refurbishing and the college was known for letting students practice on older, faulty equipment to gain repairing experience. A natural collaboration emerged, where the YFD allowed the college to "borrow" the computers for student practice, and once repaired, the restored computers were returned to the YFD program for use in recreation centers.

Additionally, when the City wanted to expand its quantity of software licenses for Lexia, the community partnered to help raise funds, which allowed for the purchase of additional licenses, resulting in an increase in the amount of youth who could concurrently use the program.

To maximize on community engagement, and the sharing of resources and ideas, the City also inaugurated the Chattanooga Literacy Initiative — a collaborative of education-centered community participants, as well as representatives from the County school district, who meet on a monthly basis to discuss educational challenges and innovations, exchange ideas, and combine resources — to simultaneously propel the focus on education within the City.

5. Challenges and Lessons Learned

Mayoral leadership and commitment, the engagement of the community, and the depth of existing resources had a significant impact on the success of the programming in the reimagined YFD centers. Enlisting the community in programs of this kind often creates a relationship that is beneficial to both partners, as well as the community at large. In Chattanooga's case, the local community was able to combine resources to fix outdated technology (and thus reduce operating costs), leverage economies of scale (by combining funds to purchase more software licenses), as well as create opportunities for volunteers to utilize their time with a direct impact on the needs of the community.

The following is a list of challenges and recommendations from Chattanooga:

- Engage school district leadership with program planning to ensure outcomes for students align with state standards. Teachers are more likely to support after school programing that is an extension of in-school curriculum.
- Use celebrations — in lieu of incentives — when encouraging student participation. The focus should be on rewarding students who have completed a task, rather than on incentivizing them to commence a task.

- Ensure high-quality staff by actively pursuing teachers that are esteemed for their craft. In Chattanooga, YFD tries to identify well respected teachers in the community and approach them with opportunities, rather than wait for candidates to fill vacancies.
- Share lessons learned with the greater Chattanooga community and community partners. The faith-based community and United Way also use this literacy software and benefit from learning about the challenges and changes made to improve delivery of the program at the YFD centers.
- Be prepared for criticism – even from unlikely sources. The City mentioned that some parents expressed concern about the academic-heavy use of recreation facilities. However, once the program showed promise and progress, parent support followed.

C. St. Louis, MO

1. Setting the Agenda

In 2003, St. Louis Mayor Francis Slay publicly released the findings of a report by a third party (St. Louis for Kids) indicating that only one-in-ten St. Louis youth had access to high-quality afterschool programming – while the national average was 22 percent) – and there was a need for an additional 5,600 program slots. Mayor Slay subsequently led a push to enhance programming and bolster availability of afterschool programming, creating a task force to make recommendations to address the lack of access to and provision of quality afterschool programming. Upon receipt of the task force's recommendations in 2005, Mayor Slay publicly asked two non-profit entities – St. Louis for Kids and St. Louis Area Resources for Community and Human Services (ARCHS) to develop the final strategic plan that resulted in the St. Louis After School for All Partnership (St. Louis ASAP). ARHCS handles the grant management, contract management, and much of the fundraising activities of ASAP and St. Louis for Kids tends to provide professional and programmatic development and guidance to ARCHS' service providers. ASAP measures the academic progress, engagement, and attitudes (toward education and school, the greater community, and the ASAP programs as part of its regular assessment reviews. ASAP also relies on partners for data to inform its operations and programming. For instance, SLPS collaborates with ASAP to compare the attendance rate among students in ASAP programs with attendance of non-participants. Preliminary data indicate that young people in afterschool programs attend school more regularly and have fewer instances of in-school discipline (e.g., suspensions).

The St. Louis experience highlights an operating program in a large metropolitan area – including a geographical span of three school districts – that required significant dedication and perseverance from program administrators. Success and achievement did not materialize instantaneously, but instead have been slow and hard-earned.

2. Program Structure and Implementation

ASAP has operated out of school and community center sites, fulfilling the program's mission of enhancing school success for enrolled students, while providing them with key supports and opportunities for healthy development.

In 2007, when St. Louis ASAP began operation, it issued an RFP to add 480 new slots and raised over $2 million – from public and private sources – to begin its work. By 2010, the program had

added over 2,500 new program slots through additional partnerships and funding, including from St. Louis Public Schools and the St. Louis Mental Health Board. Ultimately, the Mayor's strong public support for the programming of the St. Louis ASAP spurred public and private action resulting in an increase of nearly 3,200 slots in programming for City youth by 2011, with more than 4,000 students served each day.[15]

St. Louis largely contracts out the day-to-day operations of the program to local organizations and non-profits. Schools, along with recreation centers, serve as sites for the program. It is relatively common for a provider to expand from overseeing one site to numerous ones, allowing for an expansion of the program and the number of youth served.

To measure the program's effectiveness, ARCHS utilizes a series of surveys for completion by participants, parents, teachers and staff.[16] Most recent data highlights the successful outcomes of the program:

- 90% of teachers, staff, and parents report youth show academic improvements
- 70% of youth report:
  - Positive academic success
  - Positive life skills/choices and core values
  - They enjoy and/or are good at sports, exercise, and/or recreation
- 80% of teachers, staff, and parents report positive partnerships between schools, community/faith based providers, and families
- 80% of provider staff report increased knowledge about building capacity and improving quality of after school programs

ASAP requires significant data and quality control from its service providers. For instance, in order to receive funding from ASAP, contracted programs must maintain proper State licensure for child care. ASAP requires contracted programs to also develop an individual plan for each employed person working in an ASAP program in an effort to develop not only the youth, but the professionals working with the youth. All sites complete an annual self-assessment as part of the Missouri After-School Assessment. Sites are also evaluated externally, and those with low ratings create action plans and receive technical assistance from City-contracted organizations. The City also contracts with certain agencies and non-profits to develop professional development and coaching opportunities for staff.

The City also uses data to inform areas for prioritized service and need. For instance, the City mapped ARCHS programming locations, community centers, and recreation centers with an overlay of youth crime and academic performance that informed its preliminary targets for high-need, low-service areas of the City.

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[15] http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/after-school/coordinating-after-school-resources/Documents/Municipal-Leadership-for-Afterschool-Appendix-of-City-Profiles.pdf; http://www.stlasap.org/about/history.html

[16] The surveys administered by the program are modeled after work from Colorado Trust – a foundation that tracks and analyzes data within the state of Colorado, often by means of surveys.

3. Funding

In 2007, when St. Louis ASAP began operation and add 480 new programming slots for students, it raised over $2 million; original funders included public (state, city, public school district, local mental health board, etc.) and private philanthropic entities. In 2008, ASAP secured a dollar-for-dollar match that leveraged the State of Missouri's Department of Social Services original $400,000. The match was provide from a combination of sources, including the City and private entities (e.g. Anheuser Busch Foundation, Wachovia Foundation, etc.).Additionally, the connection between in-class and out-of-school learning helped lead to the St. Louis Public Schools (SLPS) providing ASAP with $100,000 in annual funding, bus transportation services, staff support and free use of its facilities.

ASAP has continued to create strategic partnerships that built upon its preliminary programmatic successes and attracted an array of public and private funders to help expand ASAP's mission. Additionally, ASAP partners with many community and civic entities that provide services/space to the program free of charge. By developing this network of community resources, the program has been able to meet many of its programmatic efforts at relatively low costs.

4. Engaging the Community

Since its inception – and in fact even during its inception – ARCHS has extensively leveraged community partnerships in its focus on after school educational opportunities. For instance, the relationship between ARCHS and SLPS provides the programmatic mentorship – and funding – while the SLPS schools serve as host sites for the program. The program has been embraced by the schools, which often provide transportation to and from the sites, which was identified as a major barrier to participation if adequate and safe transportation options did not exist.

ASAP prioritizes outreach and two-way communication with the families and communities it serves. To enhance this two-way communication, ARCHS has invested in a robust web presence – creating an after-school program finder on its website and actively using social media and printed materials to broaden awareness and participation. Mayor Slay's frequent mention of the program – both publicly and electronically through tweets and Facebook posts, were coupled with a robust advertising campaign to attract volunteers – resulting in nearly 200 new volunteers for ASAP activities.

5. Challenges and Lessons Learned

Since its inception in 2007, ASAP has experienced significant success in providing quality after school programming for the City's youth – crafting meaningful and sustainable partnerships and funding sources. A selection of challenges and lessons learned include:

- To the extent possible, utilize full-time positions to administer the program (whether housed inside government or at external partner entity). ASAP suggested that full-time positions helped to not only to incentivize well-qualified candidates who brought more energy, but also to reinforce the City/communities commitment to after school programming – assisting in program delivery and fundraising – a reinforcing cycle.
- Cultivating a consistent network of committed partner, providers, and funders helped ASAP operate its multi-site program. The program's large participant population and geographic span – coupled with the program's use of contracted providers to administer

the program on-site –necessitated the need for a steady network or resources. Although amassing this network was a significant (and ongoing) commitment, ARCHS credits its network building and continual evaluation with ensuring a smooth management and outcome achievements shown since its inception.

- Offer professional development opportunities for service provider staff administering the program. Even sporadic opportunities for professional development can increase retention, cultivating experience and best practices knowledge which benefits current and future participants, as well as helping to create positive connections with the program in the greater community.

- Similar to Atlanta and Chattanooga, ASAP finds that, if funding allows, providing meals/snacks for youth participants is a successful way of ensuring participation – even distributing light snacks was correlated with attendance frequency. Currently, ASAP uses state resources to offset costs of meals.

- Including a parent component in the program has shown positive results in St. Louis. Offering classes aimed at parents – such as a resume workshop – even if infrequently, helped spur parent engagement with the program alongside of reinforcing the importance of skills-building across all ages.

III. APPENDIX

Peer Contacts

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The National Resource Network (the Network) is a core component of the Obama Administration's Strong Cities, Strong Communities (SC2) initiative, and develops and delivers innovative solutions for American cities to help them address their toughest economic challenges. The Network works with local leaders to identify practical solutions, share real-world expertise and best practices, and help cities develop the tools and strategies they need to grow their economies.

Funded with $10 million from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Network is a new program that leverages the expertise, partnerships, and resources of the public and private sectors to help cities comprehensively tackle their most pressing challenges. The Network provides cities with customized tools and advice to build strategic partnerships, strengthen their economic competitiveness, and marshal public and private sector resources.

The Network is administered by a consortium selected by HUD though a national competition. The consortium works closely with HUD and the White House Council on Strong Cities, Strong Communities, which has been tasked with overseeing the SC2 initiative, to deliver services and impact federal policy.

The Network consortium consists of the following private and public sector organizations:
- Enterprise Community Partners
- Public Financial Management (PFM)
- HR&A Advisors
- New York University's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service
- International City/County Management Association (ICMA)

Note: The findings and recommendations of this study reflect the work of the research team that produced the document and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Resource Network consortium members that did not participate in the research