

Intermediaries in Youth Development and Out-of-School Time

A Literature Review

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Learning in Communities / Providence

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TO: Learning in Communities / Providence Leaders
FROM: RI KIDS COUNT and Community Matters
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RE: Intermediaries in Youth Development & OST Literature Review

This memo is a companion to the PowerPoint slide deck detailing the key lessons learned and most promising practices regarding intermediaries serving the youth development/out-of-school time field.

Why have intermediary organizations?

The youth development/out-of-school time field is extraordinarily complex. It is composed of diverse organizations that serve various populations and focus on an array of outcomes. Despite this heterogeneity, youth-serving organizations face a number of common challenges.

Intermediary organizations are uniquely positioned to address these challenges. Using a systemic approach, intermediary organizations can:¹

- Convene and engage relevant stakeholders
- Serve as brokers and facilitators between youth-serving organizations and a growing body of knowledge, contacts, and resources
- Provide a unifying vision for the field
- Build the capacity of youth organizations
- Foster collaboration and trust across agencies, programs, professions and sectors
- Develop standards, materials, and processes to enhance and expand OST services
- Garner funding and support for youth-serving organizations
- Enhance the field's recognition, functioning, and effectiveness

A collaborative approach brings together stakeholders to address common challenges, share ideas, and build upon existing assets and resources within a given community. Intermediaries frequently are more effective than individual organizations pursuing a variety of fragmented, disconnected initiatives. Consequently, intermediaries are able to effect sustainable change that supports a number of youth-serving organizations and the field as a whole.

Intermediaries can help address a variety of challenges facing the OST field and youth-serving organizations.²

- **Absence of a Clear Mandate** – Youth-serving organizations serve a variety of purposes and populations. Due to this heterogeneity, there is often no agreement on the primary responsibilities, roles, and outcomes for which organizations should be held accountable. Meanwhile, changes in the workforce and growing concerns over academic achievement lead to increased pressure on youth-serving organizations. The lack of a clear, distinct mandate subjects youth-serving organizations to unrealistic expectations and inconsistent, insufficient supports.
- **Lack of Program Standards** – Despite numerous efforts to create local and national standards, there remains little agreement on what constitutes quality. As a result, programs, families,

¹ Wynn, Joan. *The Role of Intermediary Organizations in the Youth Development Field*. Chicago: Chapin Hall Center for Children, February 2000. This paper includes a review of existing literature and an analysis of interviews with directors and staff at seven local intermediaries, policy makers, funders, and evaluators.

² Much of this section comes from Wynn's *The Role of Intermediary Organizations*, February 2000.

fundors, and policy makers have no common foundation on which to assess performance and improvement. Furthermore, existing standards often differentiate between programs serving younger and older youth, making it more difficult to create a common language and understanding across the spectrum.

- **Variation in Program Quality** – Out-of-school time programs vary greatly in terms of staff skills and consistency, facilities, activities, family engagement, partnerships with schools and community organizations, and financing, all of which impact program quality. Consequently, there are often significant gaps between program standards and actual practice.
- **Difficulty in Recruiting & Retaining a Stable, Skilled Workforce** – Research overwhelmingly concludes that the presence of consistent, qualified staff is a key determinant of program quality and youth outcomes. However, low salaries, minimal benefits, limited advancement opportunities, and the part-time nature of the work make it difficult to recruit and retain a qualified workforce. The absence of a comprehensive professional development system and associated career ladder present challenges in accessing relevant training opportunities and motivating staff to attend them. As a result, turnover in OST programs averages 35% each year and poses additional strain on the children, youth, families, and remaining staff.³
- **Inadequate Facilities, Equipment, and Supplies** – The physical space in which programs are housed often limits program size and stability and restricts the types of activities programs can offer. Many programs operate in shared or borrowed space which makes it difficult to invest in facility enhancement or arrange space in a way that supports youth activities.
- **Lack of Dedicated, Sustainable Funding** – The actual cost of providing high-quality OST care is much higher than is commonly understood. Most existing funding resources support direct services for children and only buy access to OST programs, rather than support overall program quality. The costs of most OST programs are greater than the combined revenue of parent fees and government subsidies, resulting in a funding “gap” for many OST programs. Programs must piece together fragmented, unreliable revenue sources and continually seek new funding streams. The lack of financing stability threatens programs’ fiscal viability, staff retention, and program quality.⁴
- **Unidentified Outcomes and Accountability Methods** – Across the field, there is no agreed-upon set of expectations regarding outcomes for young people participating in OST programs. Aside from scattered individual initiatives, there are not widespread program evaluation and monitoring practices. Youth-serving organizations face increasing pressure to demonstrate their outcomes in order to attract additional funding and support from donors, foundations, and policy makers. Without identified outcomes and accountability methods, programs may be asked to use existing measures (e.g., standardized test scores) to demonstrate their impact.
- **Lack of Recognition** – Despite a recent surge of interest in OST, policy makers, funders, and the public frequently do not recognize or understand the importance of the youth development/OST field and youth-serving organizations. As a result, it can be difficult to fund, implement, and sustain programmatic and systemic change.

³ *Creating Better School-Age Care Jobs: Model Work Standards*. Washington, DC: Center for the Child Care Workforce, 2001.

⁴ Halpern, Deich, & Cohen. *Financing After-School Programs*. Washington, DC: The Finance Project, May 2000. and Wechsler, Kershaw, Ferish, & Bundy. *Meeting the Challenge: Financing Out-of-School Time Programming in Boston and Massachusetts*. Boston, MA: Parents United for Child Care, February 2001.

Although individual organizations have implemented a number of innovative strategies to address these issues, these continue to be the core challenges facing the entire OST field.

What are the key lessons?

Intermediaries play a critical role in supporting the development of individual organizations and the OST field as a whole. They serve several core functions for the field including:⁵

- Convening and Networking
- Knowledge Development and Dissemination
- Information Sharing
- Collaboration and Trust Building
- Standards Identification and Setting
- Training Development and Coordination
- Provision of Technical Assistance and Consultation
- Management Assistance
- Raising and Re-Granting Funds
- Accountability
- Advocacy and Representation

Intermediaries are most effective when they implement a capacity-building approach. In practice, intermediaries that strengthen youth-serving organizations and exhibit respect for field expertise tend to be more successful than intermediaries that use a more externally driven, didactic approach. The first approach aims to develop leadership and capacity – the “knowledge, skills, connections, self-reflection, and power to carry out planned change efforts at the local level.” Intermediaries that use a capacity-building orientation “distribute power horizontally (rather than vertically)” through “the formation of networks among those with common purposes or common affiliations.” To successfully implement this approach, intermediaries must recognize and reinforce local expertise. Cahill suggests engaging in “intensive two-way interaction and learning that both acknowledges and builds leadership within the field while also bringing research and knowledge from external sources.”⁶

Intermediaries’ agendas must reflect the priorities of organizations in the field. Intermediaries that develop their priorities, approaches, and agendas based on providers’ preferences are more likely to enjoy the buy-in, support, and participation of organizations in the field. When the agenda is imposed or disconnected from providers’ realities, intermediaries are much less effective.⁷

Intermediaries lack a regular source of funding. Intermediaries raise money from four main sources: foundation grants and contracts, membership dues, client fees, and government funding. Many funding sources, however, are aimed primarily at direct services for children and youth, leaving intermediaries without stable financing streams. Some funders provide seed money to start system-building work, but when initial funding runs out, it may be difficult to engage other funders who were not involved in conceptualizing the initial agenda. Much like the youth organizations they serve, intermediaries continually struggle to address sustainability. The lack of core operating support limits intermediaries’ ability to build their organizational infrastructure, innovate, and plan strategically for the long-term.⁸

⁵ Adapted from Wynn, 2000. For more information on these functions and associated strategies, see the section on promising practices.

⁶ Wahl, Cahill, & Fruchter (1998) in Wynn, 2000, p. 21.

⁷ Wynn, 2000.

⁸ Halpern et al., 2000. Wechsler et al., 2001. Wynn, 2000.

The organizational structure of intermediaries presents both advantages and limitations.

Intermediaries take several forms: government agencies, private non-profits, divisions of larger nonprofit organizations, and membership organizations. Each structure has associated benefits and constraints:⁹

Structure	Advantages	Limitations
Government Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Steady source of income ▪ Ability to serve as internal advocates within funding and policy process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Public accountability & oversight – accountable to elected officials and public while serving youth organizations ▪ Subject to political process, shifts in elected leadership, and “hot issues”
Private Non-Profit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Independence in governance and funding ▪ Independence may increase effectiveness as a convener and facilitator – not viewed as being tied to particular politicians or organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Competition with constituency for funding ▪ Lack of stable financing
Division of a Larger Non-profit Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased organizational support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Administrative support so intermediary can focus on particular function ○ Collegial support ○ Oversight & assistance during transitions ▪ More protection from fluctuations in cash flow ▪ Increased credibility & contacts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Overhead contributions & cost – need to contribute money to parent organization diverts funds from intermediary’s focus ▪ Operational constraints – options can be limited as part of a larger organization ▪ Fundraising capacity reduced by internal competition with other projects within the organization
Membership Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Accountability – representatives from member organizations sit on board of directors and make intermediary directly accountable to membership ▪ Offset problem of competition for funds between intermediary & constituency because funding comes from organizations rather than common outside funders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Organizations may be unable or unwilling to pay membership fees ▪ Membership fees may not cover all operating costs

What challenges face intermediaries?

Intermediaries face programmatic and organizational challenges that affect their ability to institute sustainable change.¹⁰ These challenges are interrelated and affect one another. Programmatic challenges revolve around 1) defining effective practice regarding intermediary roles and relationships with other stakeholders and 2) clarifying the outcomes for which intermediaries are responsible and designing associated accountability processes. Organizational challenges include 1) establishing the appropriate

⁹ Adapted from Wynn, 2000.

¹⁰ This discussion stems from Wynn, 2000.

structure and funding to support the work and 2) hiring and retaining informed, effective leadership and staff.

Programmatic Challenges:

- **Orientation Toward Assistance** – In setting their agendas and action plans, intermediaries must determine the relative weight they will give to their own knowledge and priorities vs. those of the organizations with which they work.
- **Role Tensions** – Intermediaries play multiple roles and must continually assess potential conflicts of interest. In working with youth-serving organizations, intermediaries must determine whether their various functions are compatible. For example:
 - Grantmaking and capacity-building – Youth-serving organizations may find it more difficult to honestly disclose their strengths and weaknesses and seek assistance from intermediaries that also serve as funders.
 - Coordination and control – Intermediaries may feel a tension between coordinating and actively engaging stakeholders on one hand and feeling a desire to control and determine the agenda, priorities, and work on the other hand.
 - Standard setting and monitoring – When creating standards, intermediaries must balance input from the field and those from external stakeholders (e.g., funders, policy makers, schools). Once standards are in place, intermediaries must determine their role in using privileged knowledge gained through monitoring.

Furthermore, intermediaries fill a unique role positioned between youth-serving organizations and external stakeholders (e.g., funders, policy makers). Youth-serving organizations may view intermediaries as competitors for funding. Turf issues may arise when organizations and intermediaries both seek to gain credit for achievements. In addition, organizations may view intermediaries as inhibiting their direct communication and access with key contacts and resources. Successful intermediaries find ways to interact with all players without damaging existing relationships.

- **Responsiveness & Accountability** – Intermediaries must determine the extent to which they are accountable to the interests and agenda of organizations in the field, to their own funders, or to other stakeholders. Intermediaries need to balance being responsive to funders and policy makers with making sure that these stakeholders understand 1) which resources are necessary to pursue certain goals and 2) the likely timeframe to accomplish certain goals.
- **Defining and Demonstrating Outcomes** – Intermediaries need more clarity and agreement on the outcomes for which they are accountable. They also need effective processes to demonstrate their impact on field practices and performance in terms of improved programs and increased opportunities for youth.

Organizational Challenges:

- **Structure** – As they assess the benefits and constraints of a variety of organizational structures (see chart above), intermediaries face the challenge of adapting existing structures and developing new ones that build on the community's assets and respond to its most pressing needs.
- **Funding** – Sustainability is a continual challenge for intermediaries. Intermediaries need to seek and obtain dependable sources of ongoing funding that cover systemic initiatives as well as organizational overhead costs and core operating support.

- **Staffing** – It is difficult to find and keep qualified staff who possess a unique mix of knowledge, skills, and personal traits. The necessary combination of skills includes: capacity to build relationships, ability to work with multiple stakeholders, appreciation for practice and those who actually do the work, ability to apply theory to practice, ability to transmit knowledge and skills to others, and commitment to not take undue credit or compete with practitioners for visibility. In addition, effective intermediaries seek and retain staff who represent the constituencies served (in terms of race, ethnicity, and culture).
- **Leadership** – Leading an intermediary organization is intense and demanding. Intermediaries face challenges in recruiting leaders with the necessary skills and attributes, providing training and support for those leaders, and smoothly transitioning to new leadership.

What are the promising practices and innovative strategies?

There are many promising practices in each of the core functions intermediaries serve:¹¹

- **Convening and Networking**
 - Host regular, monthly meetings for networking and professional exchange among practitioners and youth-serving agencies. This strategy has been implemented with great success in a number of cities around the country.
 - Convene funders, policy makers, executive directors, practitioners, youth, families, and other stakeholders to discuss opportunities and obstacles common across programs and inform thinking about useful strategies for addressing systemic constraints.
 - Host regular meetings for executive directors to explore management topics in-depth. Between meetings, have participants implement new practices and bring back ideas and challenges to share at the next meeting.
- **Knowledge Development and Dissemination**
 - Help shape a vision and framework that defines the field.
 - Develop training, curricula, assessment tools, and other materials and make them broadly available.
 - Write position statements about major issues in the field and distribute broadly.
- **Information Sharing**
 - Broker access to existing resources (e.g., funding, technical assistance, training).
 - Create regular newsletters to share latest research, best practices, and available resources.
 - Establish resources (e.g., guides, hotlines) to help youth and families find available programming.
- **Standards Identification and Setting**
 - Work with youth, families, practitioners, and other stakeholders to identify best practices, relevant staff competencies, and resulting outcomes for youth.
 - Host community forums to gain widespread input.
 - Hold focus groups and/or interviews with key funders and policy makers to incorporate their ideas.

¹¹ Ideas come from multiple sources including Hall & Harvey, *Building and Sustaining Citywide Afterschool Initiatives*. Wellesley, MA: National Institute on Out-of-School Time, November 2002; Wynn, 2000; and a series of conversations with OST leaders from six cities, the Achieve Boston Summit on Citywide Professional Development Systems, July, 2003.

- Adapt existing standards from national organizations or citywide initiatives to local needs and interests.
- **Training Development and Coordination**
 - Identify existing professional development opportunities and link organizations and practitioners with these opportunities. Establish a guide or website that includes trainings for practitioners of all levels and experience.
 - Share materials from national youth development and OST intermediaries.
 - Develop and provide trainings and materials. Trainings may include conferences, periodic forums, ongoing seminars, or workshops.
 - Work with higher education institutions (including community colleges, four-year universities) to develop for-credit, classroom-based training and degrees.
 - Host trainings of trainers to develop leadership within the field and expand the cohort of trainers.
- **Provision of Technical Assistance and Consultation**
 - Link technical assistance to trainings and/or funding to help organizations implement new ideas and strategies.
 - Provide consultation as needed based on individual program requests.
- **Management Assistance**
 - Provide regular information on funding opportunities.
 - Host a website where organizations can post information about their programs and services (or create a link to organizational websites), track data on client use, etc.
 - Perform management functions (e.g., payroll, accounting, legal assistance).
 - Provide organizational development assistance (e.g., board development, financial, facilities management, and information technology).
- **Raising and Re-Granting Funds**
 - Create a Request for Proposal process to disseminate funding.
 - Engage practitioners and stakeholders as members of the review committees.
- **Accountability**
 - Help develop assessment guides (both for self-assessment and external evaluators).
 - Develop monitoring processes.
 - Participate in program documentation.
 - Provide evaluation oversight and management.
- **Advocacy and Representation**
 - Represent the field's contributions and needs to government, private funders, and other stakeholders on issues including funding, policy formation, legislation, and partnerships.
 - Sponsor a public campaign to raise awareness about the field.
 - Work with radio, television, and newspapers to keep relevant stories and issues in the press.

Intermediaries have also implemented successful strategies to address common intermediary challenges:

- **Role Tensions**
 - Grantmaking and capacity-building – Use re-granting and Requests for Proposals as a way to inform practitioners, disseminate new information or standards, and engage organizations in specific improvement efforts.

- Standard setting and monitoring – Help funders, providers, and the public understand what resources are needed to help programs meet standards.
- Competition with constituency – Engage youth-serving organizations in the work. As more youth-serving programs and organizations buy in to the intermediary’s work and feel ownership for its agenda, the intermediary will both attract more funding and reduce potential feelings of competition and resentment.
- **Defining and Demonstrating Outcomes**
 - Specify the nature and magnitude of intermediary impacts with associated time frames
 - Use a number of indicators to demonstrate net added value:
 - Performance Options – number and types of events or processes intermediary provides (trainings conducted, network meetings organized)
 - Participation – measure of agency and staff engagement (e.g., number of agencies involved, youth workers trained)
 - Penetration – measure of intermediaries’ reach (e.g., counts and percentage of field engaged by intermediaries)
 - Representation, Advocacy, & Policy Impact – advocacy & policy functions (e.g., securing increased funding, legislative initiatives)
 - Impacts on Field Practices & Performance – measure of capacity-building (e.g., organizational stability, quality of programs, percentage of youth reached)
- **Funding¹²**
 - Increase program grants to youth-serving organizations by a percentage designated for use for training, technical assistance, or other forms of intermediary assistance.
 - Encourage funders and policy makers to reserve a percentage of grants typically used for direct service to instead support intermediary organizations.

Resources For More Information

Hall & Harvey, *Building Sustainable Citywide Afterschool Initiatives*. Wellesley, MA: National Institute on Out-of-School Time, November 2002. http://www.niost.org/publications/cross_cities_brief8.pdf

Tolman, Pittman, Yohalem, Thomases, & Trammel. *Moving an Out-of-School Agenda, Task Brief #1: Coordination, Collaboration and Networking*. Takoma Park, MD: The Forum for Youth Investment, 2002. <http://www.forumforyouthinvestment.org/grasp/taskbrief1.pdf>

Tolman, Pittman, Yohalem, Thomases, & Trammel. *Moving an Out-of-School Agenda, Task Brief #6: Leadership and Political Will*. Takoma Park, MD: The Forum for Youth Investment, 2002. <http://www.forumforyouthinvestment.org/grasp/taskbrief6.pdf>

Wynn, Joan. *The Role of Intermediary Organizations in the Youth Development Field*. Chicago: Chapin Hall Center for Children, February 2000. http://www2-chc.spc.uchicago.edu/ProjectsGuide/action.lasso?-database=publications&-layout=allfields&-response=publication_detail.lasso&publication_id=SP-01&-search

¹² More detailed strategies are included in the memo on financing.