

MUNICIPAL SUPPORT OF **Out of School Time Programs**

As the landscape of the Out of School Time (OST) field - including afterschool and summer learning programs - has evolved over the past 20+ years, so too has the involvement of municipalities in this space; city leaders, including mayors and city councilmembers, have emerged as critical partners in this work. While some school districts and community-based organizations may see city leaders as “atypical” partners,

mayors are extremely invested in the success of their communities, which center around thriving young people and families. With voter support of OST programs [higher than ever](#) and addressing top-of-mind issues of improving public safety, workforce development, and child care access, mayors are increasingly recognizing how OST programs can help meet a wide range of municipal priorities.



8 in 10 voters say afterschool programs are an absolute necessity, **significantly higher** than previous polling (81% in 2022 vs 73% in 2018)



8 in 10 voters voters want newly elected federal, state, and local leaders to **provide more funding** for afterschool programs

67% of voters who said “yes” [to providing more funding] are willing to do so **even if it means they would pay more in taxes**

Support for afterschool funding is **consistent across the political spectrum**



How to Use this Resource

This resource was created to inform and guide city leaders on the importance of OST programs in their communities and

provide practical examples of how cities are supporting these programs across the country.



The Importance of OST Programs

For years, afterschool programs have kept youth safe, inspired them to learn, provided enriching opportunities, and helped working families. Today, these programs are needed more than ever - according to the recent [America After 3PM](#) report, unmet demand for afterschool programs has skyrocketed. For every child in an afterschool program, 3 are waiting to get in - this equates to over 25 million youth across the country. Despite this high need, many youth don't have access to high-quality afterschool programs, particularly those living in underserved communities.

Research indicates that youth attending high-quality afterschool programs show gains in academic performance, school day attendance, behavior, and mental health. This can, in turn, impact high school graduation rates, post-secondary degree attainment, career opportunities, community health and wellness, and financial well-being.

City leaders have a vital role to play in helping their community's youth thrive, and supporting high-quality OST programs can pave a path forward toward a promising future for all residents.

Roles of Mayors

Mayors can have a significant role in increasing access to OST programs in their communities. NLC has found mayors to be ideally positioned to:

- ◆ Lead or contribute to a landscape analysis and identify high-needs communities and “service deserts”
- ◆ Convene a broad set of potential partners, such as community-based organizations, school districts, and city departments
- ◆ Act as a funding entity
- ◆ Provide access to program space in community spaces including recreation centers and libraries
- ◆ Facilitate data sharing agreements between cities, community-based organizations, and school districts
- ◆ Assist with transportation needs for expanded access to OST programs
- ◆ Increase public awareness and sustain public attention through initiating media coverage, facilitating awards programs for OST program youth and/or staff, issuing proclamations, and visiting programs
- ◆ Align programs with key public priorities
- ◆ Partner on city-led programs, such as Summer Youth Employment Programs, and citywide events, such as community-wide back to school events

Mayors can also play a role in facilitating a citywide OST system, [defined by NLC](#) as “a coordinated effort with strong cross-sector leadership that maps a city’s afterschool program locations overlaid with poverty and crime data to determine neighborhoods of greatest need and reduce duplication, trains afterschool providers to improve program

quality, and creates a data system to measure the impact of the programs collectively across the community.” Within a municipal structure, citywide systems can be housed in a mayor’s office or other city department, a non-profit intermediary organization, or a city-school district partnership.

Cities as Service Providers

Over the years, cities have often facilitated OST programs through their established Parks and Recreation and/or library departments; this approach may be regarded as the preferred mode of service delivery for smaller-sized municipalities with limited resources. Many cities are now recognizing the opportunity to expand and enhance their more traditional forms of afterschool

programs, transitioning from conventional sports-centric models to more holistic programming frameworks. Collaborations with Statewide Afterschool Networks have further enriched these endeavors, facilitating the establishment of program quality standards, robust monitoring mechanisms, professional development initiatives, and access to increased funding opportunities.

City of Tempe, AZ

Many cities also play the role of direct service provider through a comprehensive OST-specific department, such as the City of Tempe’s (population ~200,000) licensed and accredited [Kid Zone Enrichment Program](#). The program was founded in 1986 and currently serves approximately 1300 PK-8 youth through 15 school-based program sites. The City of Tempe general funds support approximately \$5m of the program’s annual budget, with supplemental funds provided by the State Department of Economic Security and participant registration fees.

While Kid Zone is a sliding scale fee-based program, City of Tempe staff work to ensure that no family is turned away from services due to income. The programs are located in low-income communities and Title 1 schools, and flyers advertising the programs include information about student scholarship options so families are not deterred from registering due to an inability to pay. When a caregiver inquires about the program, city staff meet with them to review their situation and to determine the most appropriate path to enrollment. Free/Reduced Lunch (FRL)

letters are accepted as proof of eligibility for low-fee or free registration, and full-time city staff help families navigate the qualification and registration process. If families do not qualify for FRL but express financial hardship, the city looks to other internal funding sources to support each student's enrollment.

Kid Zone Enrichment Program sits within the Community Health and Human Services Department, under the office of Education, Career and Family Services, and receives strong support from the mayor, city manager,

and city council. The mayor hosts an annual awards ceremony to recognize students in front of the city council. The mayor and city manager conduct site visits, host students at City Hall for events, review program curriculum, and act as thought partners to review strengths, challenges, and new ideas for programs. Officials are also invited to Lights On Afterschool Events and regularly share how the programs impact the youth in their communities.

City of Aurora, CO

The city of Aurora (population ~400,000) has a longstanding relationship with Aurora Public Schools and combines city and school district resources to provide comprehensive OST programming. The [Community of Many Providing After School Success](#) (COMPASS) program serves 6 elementary schools, with city staff providing enrichment programming, and school district staff, often teachers, providing academic programming. The COMPASS program sits in the city manager's office within the Parks, Recreation, and Open Spaces Department. Aurora's city council has shown strong support for the COMPASS programs through funding allocations, and the mayor and city manager are kept abreast

of the programming and visit program sites.

Programming is partly supported by one-time funding such as mill levy money or youth services allocations from the city, which require a certain percentage of participants to qualify for Free/Reduced Lunch. ESSER funding was used to expand into 2 middle schools, but these programs were discontinued when the ESSER funding was spent down; current plans are in place to again expand into middle schools pending availability of additional funds. Youth are accepted into the COMPASS programs using a needs-based system, with the school district selecting youth based on factors such as income level and academic need.

City of Roanoke, VA

The City of Roanoke (population ~100,000) facilitates OST programs through its Parks and Recreation Department and local libraries. In response to challenges posed by the pandemic, the city leveraged \$400,000 of its ARPA State and Local Fiscal Recovery (SLFR) funds to expand existing OST initiatives, specifically targeting underserved communities. Through community-based partnerships, the city provided mental health support, tutoring, and mentoring services for youth enrolled in these OST programs. The remainder of the program cost has been funded by city general funds, and when ARPA funds are depleted, the city will continue the programs using additional general funds.

Beyond the traditional sites of community centers, libraries, and parks, the city coordinates an afterschool trauma response and gun violence reduction program known as [Rapid Engagement of Support in the Event of Trauma](#) (RESET). Composed of community mentors and city staff,

including public safety officers and elected officials, RESET teams visit neighborhoods affected by traumatic events and/or areas continuously affected by ongoing criminal activity, particularly in low-income, underserved communities. The city prioritizes hiring RESET mentors with lived experience as former offenders. RESET staff also provide referrals to both city-led and community-based OST programs if this is a need for a particular family, and subsidizes associated costs for these programs.

Roanoke has a council-manager form of government, and their OST programs have the support of the city manager in addition to the mayor. The city council has also been integral to the success of the city's programs, allocating funding, advocating, and visiting program site. While Roanoke may not have the amount of financial resources as larger cities, the city clearly demonstrates promising strategies for addressing their residents' needs through coordinated OST programming.



Cities as Convenors

City leaders can leverage their bully pulpit - their influential platform and position - to bring together stakeholders from various sectors to collaborate on developing and implementing effective OST initiatives. This

can involve organizing meetings, task forces, and networking opportunities to exchange ideas, share best practices, and coordinate efforts.

City of Houston, TX

The City of Houston, Texas (population ~2.3m) partners with the Houston Endowment, the County Department of Education, and United Way of Greater Houston to support the citywide [Out 2 Learn](#) (O2L) program. Initiated in 2018, O2L works to address the OST service deserts in high-needs and/or low-income communities. Partners work towards expanding access to high-quality OST services through a coordinated, youth-centered approach to professional development, community investment, and community awareness of the importance of quality services and youth voice. The Mayors' Office of Education and Youth Engagement employs a full-time staff member to coordinate the program with the support of a program director, and the city provides approximately \$495,000 in city general funds in addition to funding from the Houston Endowment.

O2L consists of a program finder tool identifying and describing OST programs providing services across the greater Houston area, in addition to city-run OST

programs. O2L hosts quarterly meetings for OST professionals to discuss program quality, trends, best practices, and opportunities for providers to network and collaborate. O2L also conducts outreach throughout the greater Houston area to raise awareness of the importance of OST.

O2L prioritizes incorporating youth into program design and decisions. In 2022, O2L piloted the Youth Leaders Project (YLP), providing \$500 stipends for young people in grades 8th through college to update the OST program database. The YLP brought together youth committed to promoting equity and increasing accessibility to OST programs for all Houston families. Participants were able to identify 277 program entries needed to be added or edited to the database, as many programs changed, opened, or closed as a result of the pandemic. Due to the success of the YLP, program partners elected to continue the project beyond the pilot phase and continue to recruit youth and acquire funding to host future cohorts.

Cities as Intermediaries

Compared to cities acting as convenors, cities acting as intermediaries often have a deeper reach and impact, typically including program quality monitoring, providing grant funding

opportunities, facilitating data sharing and analysis, and more extensive professional development such as credentialing programs.

City of Madison, WI

The [Madison-area Out of School Time initiative](#) (MOST) employs a full-time coordinator jointly housed in the Community Development Division and in the local school district. This structure provides the benefits of shared funding, easier access to school-day data, a strong connection with the school district, and access to multiple streams of public funds. MOST is a collaboration between the City of Madison (population ~270,000), Dane County, Madison Metropolitan School District, and over 45 Madison-area youth-serving organizations, funded by the city, the school district, and local foundations. The mayor plays a significant role in MOST's work, from facilitating annual staff awards, to site visits and calls to action, to advocating for funding

both at the local and state level.

Similar to Houston, MOST has a program finder tool. The initiative also supports professional development offerings and an effective practices guide, and of particular note is MOST's data sharing agreement between the district, the city, and OST providers which facilitates data sharing between 130 locations in real time. This data is used to determine program effectiveness and areas of improvement. Additionally, MOST has implemented workforce initiatives that have increased retention of the workforce, has successfully advocated for and received more than \$10m in funding, and significantly increased the participation of students who qualify for Free and Reduced Lunch in summer learning programs.



Cities as Agenda Movers

In the landscape of city governance, the role of cities as agenda movers is crucial in shaping policies and programs that directly impact the lives of their youngest residents. Central to this work are Children's Cabinets, specialized bodies established within municipal structures to prioritize youth-centric initiatives and foster collaboration across various sectors. Children's Cabinets

can be facilitated at the state level, but many cities have seen advantages of housing a Cabinet within the mayor's office. NLC has found these local-level cabinets to be particularly impactful at identifying gaps in the city's OST landscape and determining funding strategies to most effectively address these gaps.

City of Albuquerque, NM

The City of Albuquerque's (population ~560,000) Children's Cabinet is an appointed body of content experts and community partners that work to improve access to youth opportunities and outcomes across the city. The mayor created the [One ABQ Kids' Cabinet](#) to bring together key partners from the public and private sectors to identify service gaps, leverage resources and drive initiatives. The work is funded by city general funds, and the mayor supports the work by advocating for youth at all levels of government, including the legislature, and promotes youth opportunities through newsletters and social media.

The Cabinet works alongside the [Mayor's Youth Advisory Council](#) and [Youth Connect](#), a group of city departments that provide youth programming. The city offers no- and low-cost cradle-to-career services, including

early childhood, before school, after school and summer programs, career exploration, internships, and employment opportunities. Through the city's budget, the administration ensures that low-income families can access social services, hot meals, and safe places for youth when they are not in school.

The One ABQ Kids' Cabinet has three areas of focus - public safety, early learning, and OST. The OST committee began their work by conducting a [landscape analysis](#) in order to identify gaps in services across the city. Through the city's leadership, summer youth programs in 2023 took place in 306 locations and had an [increase of 13%](#) in program registration. In 2024, the Kids' Cabinet is focused on attendance and re-engagement, violence prevention and intervention, and elevating young voices through a school-based podcast.

Conclusion

The evolving landscape of OST programs has seen municipalities stepping up as critical partners in fostering youth development and addressing community needs. As demonstrated by the various models and initiatives discussed, mayors and other city leaders play a pivotal role in driving

investments, facilitating partnerships, and advocating for OST initiatives. As municipalities continue to prioritize OST programming, it becomes increasingly evident that effective city leadership is essential in shaping the future of youth development and community well-being.

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