BEST PRACTICES: PARTNERSHIPS
Updated January 29, 2016

A partnership model is one way to plan, manage, and/or improve a summer program. Partnering can serve different functions – it can increase programmatic capacity, increase administrative efficiency, serve as a program delivery model, or serve as a way for various community stakeholders to jointly pursue common goals.

The Boston Summer Learning Community brings together non-profit organizations, schools, researchers, and philanthropy to plan for summer year-round. The Community featured nearly 80 summer sites in 2015, with a variety of program models, jointly pursuing three goals: increasing student access to summer learning, improving the quality of programs, and scaling and sustaining best practices. All sites define, implement, and measure program quality consistently – implementing a common set of program quality measurement tools during summer to pursue continuous improvement together. Based on shared data, sites work together year round to identify strengths, share best practices, and jointly prepare for the ensuing summer. This focus on program quality sets the conditions for students to develop the knowledge, skills, and experiences for success through summer programming.

The Summer Learning Project is the flagship initiative of the Summer Learning Community; it represents 16 of the 79 total sites. Since 2010, the Summer Learning Project utilizes a partnership delivery model to manage and implement programming. Community non-profit staff and certified academic teachers co-develop, co-manage, and co-deliver academic and enrichment experiences to high-need students. This approach weds the best of youth development with top-notch academic instruction.

Boston's citywide approach to summer learning is built upon partnership.

## A. Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

Outlining goals and responsibilities in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is one best practice for organizational partnerships. Check out a **sample MOU here**, used to facilitate the Boston Summer Learning Community citywide coalition.

Some items to consider including in an MOU:
- Name of participating organizations, the date, and the partnership's outcome goals
- Responsibilities of each organization (examples: collaborate with teachers, paraprofessional and other school employees; staff of the nonprofit partner; and other relevant individuals in the design and delivery of summer programming; implement common program quality measurement tools and participate in a year-round learning community)
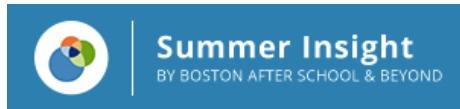
- Acknowledgement of planning guides, work plans, program documentation, etc. (these items should also be attached to the MOU as exhibits)
- Signature page
- *If applicable*:
  - o Data sharing and publication (i.e. what, if any, data is shared, which party owns the data, and which party has authority to publish the data)
  - o Funding (including disbursement amounts, distribution calendar, and benchmark requirements that must be fulfilled to receive the funding)
  - o Indemnification and limited liability

B. Program Work Plans

When partnerships require parties to co-develop and co-deliver programming, program work plans are essential to delineating roles/responsibilities; ensuring implementation meets outcome goals; and identifying areas for technical assistance in advance of program start.

Need some sample questions to get your program work plan template started? Check out **this resource here**.

When developing your program work plan template, consider these items:
- Clearly spell out goals/requirements and ask program leaders to detail their implementation approach
- Content areas of focus include: Daily Schedule, Program Content, Student Registration & Retention (attendance, engagement, etc.), Staff Hiring (including asking for detailed job descriptions), Training/Coaching (detailing required attendance at centralized training sessions, plus how leaders plan to provide additional training and technical assistance to staff on their own), and Calendar of planning activities.
- Detail how partnership programming will be evaluated and have staff agree to these protocols in advance of start date.
- Include a deadline for submission and signature page. Consider having multiple rounds of submission to prioritize certain questions for review before full implementation occurs. Consider having representatives from each partnering party sign the submission (example: a community non-profit staff person and a school principal)
- Have a small leadership group review the work plans and provide feedback to program sites before summer programming begins. This group should have a guide for assessing the work plans, like this **one**.

C. Centralized Consent Form

A centralized consent form for parents/guardians of program participants is another important practice for partnerships.

Below is an outline of topics to include in the consent form and an **example form is available here**. Consent form content should be explicitly aligned to the type of partnership implemented, and undergo approval by any necessary evaluators/researchers/key program partners (like a school district).

When developing your own consent form template, consider including:
- Names of organizations in partnership and their roles (i.e. management, program delivery, etc.)
- Program details (including cost, number of weeks, attendance policy)
- Permission for data acquisition and sharing
- Permission to photograph or videotape child in program and to use image in print, online, etc.
- Permission to contact parent/guardian for feedback
- Signature page (including emergency contact information for parent/guardian to input)

## D. Monitoring and Continuous Improvement

Partnerships evolve over time, and working together requires coordination and communication. Data can serve an important role in informing continuous improvement.

Here are some steps to take during and after summer to monitor and improve partnerships from year to year:
- Throughout programming, **collect operational data**, including student attendance and staff hours. If possible, consider surveying parents and students for feedback on program delivery and overall satisfaction.
- At the end of programming, **collect data from leadership staff**, especially on program quality. Six key inquiry areas for continuous improvement are as follows:
    - Please detail any best practices you utilized in student recruitment.
    - What strategies did your site use to promote consistent student daily attendance?
    - Please detail a few best practices your site utilized for high quality, effective programming.
    - Please detail any strategies you used to engage with student families, before and/or during summer.
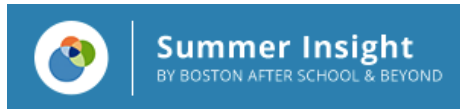
- o   Please detail a few content areas of programming in which your site struggled. (to inform future professional development)
  - o   *If applicable:* What ideas or feedback does your site have about the pre-summer trainings? Professional development offerings? Year-round learning communities?
- Through the Boston Summer Learning Community, all participating sites receive a **PRISM (Program Report for Improvement and System Measurement)** each fall. This report summarizes each site's program quality ratings from the prior summer (based on common implementation of the same tools), and benchmarks each site's scores across the 79 participating sites. This helps leaders identify strengths and consider improvements. The PRISM serves as the backbone of year-round learning community meetings, where site representatives, researchers, and philanthropy discuss and share best practices.

Visit **here** to view a sample PRISM and the data collected through the Boston Summer Learning Community over the past several summers.