

Expanding the Pool of Available Resources



WHAT STEPS CAN PROGRAMS TAKE TO EXPAND THE RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT A MORE INTEGRATED SERVICE DELIVERY SYSTEM?

For 25 years, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program has played a vital role in providing afterschool and summer enrichment and learning opportunities to millions of youths residing in communities experiencing poverty. These programs predominately rely on federal grants from the 21st CCLC grants to finance their activities. However, the constraints created by these grants, such as their limited size and federal restrictions on allowable funding, pose challenges for programs in fully addressing the diverse needs of the communities they serve. In response to these limitations, many 21st CCLC programs have adopted two key strategies for strengthening and expanding their programs and services: (a) identifying and braiding external funding and (b) leveraging partnership to bring additional programming and supports to the table.

As part of the 21st CCLC Integrated Service Delivery System Study (see box for additional information), the research team at the American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) explored how 21st CCLC programs in this study strategically integrated services and activities funded by 21st CCLC with other services and activities provided within the school and the community more broadly.¹ AIR's series of interviews with 21st CCLC program directors and site coordinators revealed several promising

With funding from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) is conducting the **21st CCLC Integrated Service Delivery Study**, a 3-year project designed to:



Identify 21st CCLC programs that are integral parts of broader systems characterized by the coordination of multiple programs, activities, and services



Document strategies and approaches that support the coordination and integration of services; and



Explore how students and families may benefit from integrated and coordinated service delivery

AIR is conducting the study in collaboration with state education agencies in the states of Illinois, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, and Washington. This brief summarizes early findings from the study based on a series of interviews completed in the fall of 2022 with 21st CCLC project directors and site coordinators associated with 30 centers in the five states enrolled in the study.

approaches related to **expanding the pool of available resources through identifying and braiding funding and developing new partnerships.**

In this brief, we elevate and expand on the following observed approaches and strategies for resource expansion:

-  **Combining (or braiding) funding** from two or more sources into a single initiative
-  **Identifying independent funding sources** through fund development activities
-  **Effectively leveraging** a center's relationship with either the school or the district to provide additional funding for the CCLC
-  **Cultivating new relationships** in the local community
-  **Leveraging partners** beyond program provision

After expanding on each of these strategies, we conclude this brief by providing some recommendations that 21st CCLC project directors and state coordinators can consider toward identifying and integrating funding sources and partnerships to create a more integrated service delivery system.

STRATEGIES FOR IDENTIFYING AND BRAIDING FUNDING

Efforts to obtain additional funding beyond 21st CCLC is a key strategy for supporting the expansion of programs and services available to students and families served by 21st CCLC programming. Some centers interviewed identify and integrate external funding in efficient, seamless, and sustainable ways. We highlight some of those promising approaches here.

Combining (or braiding) funding from two or more sources into a single initiative. To effectively braid funding for certain programs, centers report collaborating with and pooling resources together from different partners with similar goals. In all cases, these initiatives required an **initial alignment of program goals** as well as an **intentional and ongoing coordination of activities** that ultimately resulted in the expansion of supports and opportunities for students and families. Centers involved in these activities often discussed the importance of first **assessing needs** and setting **relevant shared goals** and thereafter having **frequent, continuous conversations** about what different partners can contribute. One center, for example, reported working with community-based organizations (CBOs) to implement a summer learning academy.

“

But our summer program is a perfect example of how I think we have probably four or five different sources of funding that support that. We have some money from the district, some from Title I money. We have money from the Title III, which supports our English language learners. We have this . . . Partnership for Families money, Summer Learning Initiative money. **And it all kind of is pulled together to support our needs for the program.**

— Project Director



Another site coordinator described collaborating with their center’s school site so that students can receive both the expanded learning program provided by the school’s Title I funds and the enrichment provided by 21st CCLC–funded activities. Other centers pooled their funds with other youth- and family-serving organizations to provide joint family engagement activities or events.

Identifying independent funding sources. Centers that reported actively pursuing independent funding streams demonstrated an ability to financially sustain their programming even after the 21st CCLC grant runs out. Project directors from these centers reported engaging in **fund development activities** such as fundraising, applying for grants, building long-term relationships with donors, and creating comprehensive plans for sustainability. Centers that excelled at these fund development activities elevated the importance of forming **strategic relationships** with donors and other CBOs that share the same or a **similar mission and vision** as that of the center. For example, one project director described applying for grants in collaboration with several CBOs:

“

And it’s not unusual for us to apply for a grant opportunity with maybe two, three other community-based agencies. We might sit down and apply for a federal grant together, or we work with our local United Way and try and raise [funds] . . . and **work with them and helping to identify our needs.**

— Project Director

In some cases, project directors attributed their program’s sustainability to their organization’s status as an independent nonprofit, which benefited from preexisting sources of funding and an established presence in the community. Some centers also reported leveraging the **financial expertise of their existing partnerships**. For example, some centers reported leaning on staff in partner agencies who had more experience with fundraising, grant writing, and/or maintaining relationships with local donors.

To effectively braid funding for certain programs, centers report **collaborating with and pooling resources** together from different partners with **similar goals**.



Effectively leveraging a center's relationship with either the school or district to provide additional funding for the CCLC. Some centers situated in a school or district described using their district's existing financial resources to strengthen and embed their programming within a broader integrated service delivery system. Some centers interviewed reported working with school and district leaders to secure additional state or federal grants and generally **collaborating on ways to sustainably finance programming outside of the 21st CCLC grant.** For example, whereas several centers discussed at least partially funding their programming through federal grants, one project director talked about actively collaborating with district administrators on grant opportunities:

“

A lot of grant opportunities now include an afterschool component. So, what has been happening recently is that a lot of funding that the school will get to implement some school-day programming will also have some afterschool component that goes with it. So, I work with admin a lot to find out exactly how that afterschool part of that money for the school is going to be structured. — *Project Director*

Other centers described receiving funding directly from their school district, including one case where the district matched the 21st CCLC grant by a minimum of 30% each year. In all instances, these centers highlighted district and school administrators who acknowledged the **intrinsic value of having partners present within their schools** and who demonstrated **a commitment to supporting students and families** in ways that extend beyond conventional education.

STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING NEW PARTNERS

Since its inception, partnerships have been a critical component of the 21st CCLC program. Although 21st CCLC programs commonly develop and maintain external partnerships to expand the resources available for 21st CCLC program and service delivery, some centers identified promising strategies for courting and elevating partners that support a broader system of integrated service delivery.

Cultivating new relationships in the local community. By actively engaging with their local communities, some centers strengthened their capacity to form **meaningful partnerships** and



ultimately better serve the needs of students and families. These centers relied on staff members who either had preexisting connections within the community or possessed the ability to cultivate new relationships, such that community members, companies, and organizations could become partners in programming and provided additional resources to the center. Several centers described building relationships within the community through activities such as hosting communitywide events or volunteering at community events such as sports games and parades. Centers described these events as opportunities **to increase their visibility in the community and recruit additional students, families, and partners interested in programming.** For example, a site coordinator mentioned collaborating with CBOs to host a communitywide wellness fair:

“

There’s an organization . . . [that] is a great organization for Spanish[-speaking] families here. They came in, and that organization itself asked, ‘Hey, I have these two other partnerships. Can we ask them if they want to join for this wellness fair?’ So doing this, we were able to create new relationships that hopefully . . . can still go on for the future.

— Project Director

Leveraging partners beyond program providers. Centers that strategically identify and elevate key partners can expand their own pool of resources to better support students and families. Some centers reported engaging in strategic collaborations with other providers involving **joint grant applications, regular data sharing, and/or**



participation in shared governance structures. In notable cases, centers described operating as part of broader **collective impact initiatives**, where a backbone organization played a pivotal role in orchestrating fundraising campaigns, facilitating collaborative decision-making processes and structures, and mobilizing resources toward ensuring the sustainability of the initiative.² Another promising example involved centers designating a lead partner in their program who took an elevated role in designing and implementing programming. For example, a project director at one center reported that their school’s lead partner actively engages in **fundraising and grant writing** to supplement 21st CCLC–funded programming. Another center described relying on its lead partner to review needs assessment data and make informed programming decisions.

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STEPS FOR DEVELOPING MORE- INTEGRATED SERVICE DELIVERY SYSTEMS

Based on findings from the interviews we conducted with 21st CCLC program staff, there are some concrete considerations and actions that individuals working at different levels within the 21st CCLC program can take to identify and braid funding and partnerships to create a more integrated service delivery system.

State 21st CCLC coordinators: Consider delivering training to and sharing resources with 21st CCLC grantees on other possible funding streams that may facilitate efforts to develop a **more sustainable and expansive integrated delivery system**. Potential funding strategies could include collective impact approaches like [Promise Neighborhoods](#) and [community schools](#), whereas other funding streams in areas like college and career readiness, adult education and career development, and violence prevention could expand the domains of supports and services that can be provided to students and families.

21st CCLC project directors: Consider how to develop key **cross-sector and cross-site partnerships** to expand the domain of activities, services, and supports available to students and families participating in 21st CCLC programming. Developing processes for **referrals and information sharing** with these partners, including opportunities to submit joint grant proposals to enhance the service delivery system in a given community, would help in the development of more-integrated service delivery systems within communities served by the 21st CCLC program.



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