Soaring Beyond Expectations

Topic Guide 5
Identifying and Developing Partnerships

After reading this guide, you'll be able to…

✓ Identify community partners.

✓ Collaborate with local agencies to support students with disabilities and their families.

✓ Work with state-level partners.

Tools in this guide include…

✓ An action planning checklist, with links to selected resources.

Partnerships: Where to Start

This guide provides ideas for developing collaborative partnerships between 21st CCLC programs and local and state organizations to strengthen support for students with disabilities and their families. Potential partners include local businesses, cultural and faith-based organizations, libraries, health care organizations, government agencies, colleges and universities, and associations that focus on special education or disability issues. Such organizations can often provide information, materials, services, expertise, volunteers, and training or networking opportunities for educators and families. They can also provide authentic experiences for students to participate in projects and activities that help them explore new interests, build on their strengths, and learn new skills. These types of activities create conditions that support meaningful inclusion.[1]

For ideas on working with families, community members, schools and districts, see topic guides 6 and 7 ("Engaging Families and Communities to Support Inclusion" and "Working with Schools and Districts to Support Inclusion").

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All *Lessons From the Field* guides on inclusion, as well as other professional learning and technical assistance tools for 21st CCLCs, are available on the U.S. Department of Education's You for Youth (Y4Y) website at https://y4y.ed.gov.

To build your program's overall capacity for developing and sustaining valuable partnerships, take advantage of the Strengthening Partnerships materials on Y4Y (https://y4y.ed.gov). There you will find online learning experiences, along with tools and resources to support staff training and day-to-day activities.

Identifying Community Partners

Every program has a distinct identity that reflects the unique make-up of its community. In turn, every community has resources that can help 21st CCLC programs support and include all students. To match the interests of community partners with those of your program, the best approach might be to identify

> ### Think About It
> ### Leveraging Community Partnerships to Support Inclusion
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> *Described below are three partnerships between 21st CCLC programs and community partners. If the site directors asked your advice on how to leverage these partnerships to support inclusion, what suggestions would you offer?*
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> - In Massachusetts, the Wareham afterschool programs partnered with local cranberry businesses to build a cranberry bog on the high school grounds. The bog provides opportunities for project-based learning.
> - One Gardner Pilot Academy partner is Boston College, which provides the BC Science Club. BC undergraduates from the elementary education department facilitate small groups of 21st CCLC students as they conduct hands-on scientific activities and experiments.
> - Eagle View Elementary serves many students from the Ute Tribe. To strengthen community connections, Eagle View partners with the Tribe and the Bureau of Indian Affairs to offer culturally relevant activities to support and engage the American Indian students.

program needs (see topic guide 1 for ideas) and to "cast wide, then deep" to identify potential partners.

You might first examine current partnerships for untapped potential relevant to inclusion. Maybe a business partner who owns a bakery and employs people with disabilities would be willing to host a field trip to the bakery so that students can see what inclusion looks like in the workplace.

Don't overlook informal partnerships. For example, a 21st CCLC program in Rapid City, South Dakota, has established a solid relationship with the Down syndrome community — a close-knit group of families in the area. The program's informal partnership with this community has helped the program build relationships, trust and expertise in serving students with Down syndrome. Perhaps "lessons learned" from such partnerships could be identified and discussed among program staff to inform outreach to other community groups.

To identify new partners, look for opportunities to join existing networks. For example, Utah's Promise South Salt Lake Education Council holds monthly meetings where community stakeholders can network and collaborate. Representatives from local universities, youth development organizations, and Promise South Salt Lake then form subcommittees based on the populations they serve. Members share ideas and resources and brainstorm about ways to collaborate. The 21st CCLC site coordinator of the Historic Scott School Neighborhood Center participates on the council's subcommittee on afterschool programs.

Another path to identifying potential partners is to ask students (and their families) what they enjoy about their community and what types of activities interest them. Their input can help program leaders find partners whose expertise matches student interests. When students see their interests reflected in program activities, they are more likely to participate. Regular attendance can lead to the development of friendships, increases in self-esteem and opportunities for students to see their differently abled peers in a positive light.[2]

Collaborating With Local Agencies to Support Students With Disabilities

Many local organizations and governmental agencies have deep knowledge of the community as well as expertise in a particular issue relevant to inclusion. Public health agencies often serve as a "resource and referral" hub for information and services related to physical and mental health. A vocational rehabilitation agency might offer information on local volunteer and job opportunities for people with disabilities. Local chapters of national organizations can also provide specialized information and networking opportunities relevant to issues such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism, cerebral palsy, dyslexia and speech or language impairments. If such agencies offer free workshops for the public, consider attending — and inviting other program staff or parents to go with you.

Or you might partner with local agencies to host a community event to educate families on a topic or to provide access to resources. For example, the local health department might welcome an opportunity to hold vaccinations or health screenings at your site. Partnering with local chapters of advocacy and disability rights agencies (e.g., Easterseals UCP, The Arc, the Autism Society) is another way to offer additional support for students with disabilities and their families. The Historic Scott School Neighborhood Center's connection to Salt Lake City's Zoo, Arts, and Park program resulted in a grant opportunity to make the historic structure of the building compliant with the *Americans with Disabilities Act* by adding ramps and doors for individuals with disabilities.

Some families of children with disabilities receive case management and personal care attendants through local agencies. In the same way that 21st CCLC practitioners can be invited to join a student's individualized education plan (IEP) or Section 504 plan team (see topic guide 8), they can also be a part of a team convened by a case manager to discuss community-based supports. It may even be possible to arrange for the personal care attendant to attend the 21st CCLC site with the student during program hours.

Working with local agencies in this way sends the message to families that your program is interested in their children's experiences and needs. It also signals that you are a willing partner in making the community inclusive.

Working With State-Level Partners

Ongoing communication among program directors, site coordinators and 21st CCLC state coordinators is important for a variety of reasons. First, it keeps programs informed about state-level opportunities and resources. Second, it paves the way for programs to share information about resources and practices that can support improved outcomes for students with disabilities. Third, when programs tell state coordinators about specific needs, state coordinators can establish or facilitate strategic partnerships.

In Utah, two inquiries from the field to the state coordinator led to training developed by a multiagency system of statewide professional development on inclusion. The first inquiry came from a site coordinator concerned for the safety of a student with a disability who kept leaving her activities in the afterschool program. The second inquiry came from a program director who said a school principal was trying to keep students with behavioral issues out of the 21st CCLC program and thought she could do so because of a lengthy waiting list. Several agencies combined efforts to create statewide training to address these and other inclusion issues. Partners included the Utah Office of Education and 21st CCLC program office, Utah Afterschool Network, Utah Education Policy Center at the University of Utah, Utah Department of Human Services at Westminister College, and Utah Office of Child Care. The Special Education Services team continues to provide training to specialists at the Utah Afterschool Network, and the specialists support 21st CCLC sites.

Sometimes, state-level partnerships can lead to supplemental funding for grantees. That happened in Massachusetts, where the state coordinator established a partnership with the state education department's Special Education Policy and Planning Unit. The partnership provides support and additional funding to make programs more inclusive.

In Maine, questions from program directors prompted the state coordinator to reach out to the Assistant Attorney General's office for answers to legal questions about students receiving special education services and their participation in 21st CCLC programs. State coordinator Travis Doughty explained, "We first developed a guidance document to answer frequently asked questions from the perspective of 21st CCLC programs. Later I thought, *Why not expand it to other programs that support special populations?* So I pulled in colleagues who oversee the state's special education, *Title I, Title III* and English learner programs. The result was a more comprehensive guidance document that's helpful for those in the field who've said historically that the 21st CCLC program isn't meant for special education students. It created a bit of culture shock, so to speak, but it opened dialogue between the state education department and our colleagues in the field."

> ## Examples of State (and National) Partners
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> ★ State education agency offices (e.g., special education office)
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> ★ State professional development providers
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> ★ State afterschool network
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> ★ State child care resource and referral office and early education network
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> ★ Universities with education and human services programs
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> ★ National groups that focus on specific issues, such as supporting students with particular disabilities or helping teen students transition from high school to postsecondary education, training and career (some groups have state or local chapters)
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> ★ Federal agencies, including the U.S. Department of Education (e.g., its You for Youth initiative offers technical assistance and professional development resources for 21st CCLC programs; ready-to-use resources are available 24/7 at https://y4y.ed.gov; the state coordinator coordinates technical assistance for programs)

Programs Reap Benefits of a State-Level Partnership

Karyl Resnick, State Coordinator, Massachusetts

The relationship between the Special Education Policy and Planning Unit (SEPP) and 21st CCLC programs in Massachusetts is what Karyl Resnick calls a "real example of what true partnership looks like." SEPP provides funding to enhance the capacity of current 21st CCLC programs to include students with IEPs in an array of activities that complement their school-day programs, advance student achievement, and provide opportunities to socialize and participate with peers with and without disabilities. In Massachusetts, 21st CCLC programs can apply for up to an additional $10,000 per site to hire additional qualified special education staff, hire special education facilitators and liaisons, and provide professional development on inclusive practices. The funding opportunity was initiated by a call to Karyl from Carolyn Rocheleau, a 21st CCLC program director in Lowell. Carolyn had received many referrals from teachers of students with IEPs, and she was finding it difficult in the context of her budget to meaningfully include the students. Her programs needed additional staff supports, training and specialized transportation services. Karyl responded to Carolyn's need by partnering with SEPP to conduct a small pilot of SEPP grant funding for the summer program. Data gathered from the pilot were used to justify continued funding. Students with IEPs at sites that receive the funding have shown improved test scores, and grant recipients have expanded access to 21st CCLC programs for students with disabilities and their families.

Action Planning Checklist for 21st CCLC Programs
(With Selected Resources)

Identifying Community Partners

☐ **Consider how potential community partners can bolster support for students with disabilities.** Ask: What demographics are reflected in our enrollment? What do we need to improve our services to all students, and to individual students with disabilities? What resources and expertise exist within the community?

☐ **Consult students.** Find out about their special interests, what they enjoy or want to explore about the community, and where the two intersect.

☐ **Partner with local colleges and universities.** Teaching candidates and college students in other disciplines often need to complete required volunteer hours, internships and/or hands-on learning experiences, and they might be able to earn credit while supporting your program.

Collaborating With Local Agencies to Support Students With Disabilities

☐ **Create deliberate links with and among community agencies.** Explore two-way collaborations that support inclusion in your program and in the community. Join mailing lists to learn about events, and explore opportunities to host joint events.

☐ **Join community councils or task forces that serve youth.** For example, 21st CCLC sites in California might connect with the Special Education Local Plan Areas, which develop regional delivery systems. In Massachusetts, 21st CCLC sites might partner with the Coordinated Family and Community Engagement Council.

☐ **Seek permission to join students' case management, IEP and Section 504 teams.** Being part of the team can help your program support students' individual plans and goals.

Working With State and National Partners

☐ **Consider the state afterschool network as a resource.** Link to information about your state network at http://www.statewideafterschoolnetworks.net.

☐ **Establish feedback loops among site coordinators, program directors and state coordinators.** Communicate about areas in which help is needed to support all students so that partnerships can be established at the local, program and state levels.

☐ **Consider national teaching organizations and campaigns that promote inclusion:**
  ☐ *Kids Included Together* provides resources on including children and youth with and without disabilities: http://www.kitonline.org.
  ☐ *Teaching Tolerance* has an ability awareness curriculum that includes lesson plans and activity ideas; select the "ability" topic at http://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources.
  ☐ *I Am Norm* is a national campaign that promotes inclusion: http://iamnorm.com.

Interested in checklists on other inclusion topics? All *Lessons From the Field* topical guides on inclusion contain checklists like this one. The guides are available at https://y4y.ed.gov.

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Notes

[1] H. L. Kleinert, S. A. Miracle, and K. Sheppard-Jones, "Including Students With Moderate and Severe Disabilities in Extracurricular and Community Recreation Activities," *Teaching Exceptional Children* 39 no. 6 (2007): 33–38.

[2] M. Sapon-Shevin, "Learning in an Inclusive Community," *Educational Leadership* 66, no. 1 (2008): 49-53; and S. Odom, J. Vitztum, R. Wolery, J. Lieber, S. Sandall, M. J. Hanson, P. Beckman, I. Schartz, and E. Horn, "Preschool Inclusion in the United States: A Review of the Research From an Ecological Systems Perspective," *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs* 4, no. 1 (2004): 17–49.