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SPERLING CENTER
FOR RESEARCH
AND INNOVATION

ENRICHMENT PROGRAMMING

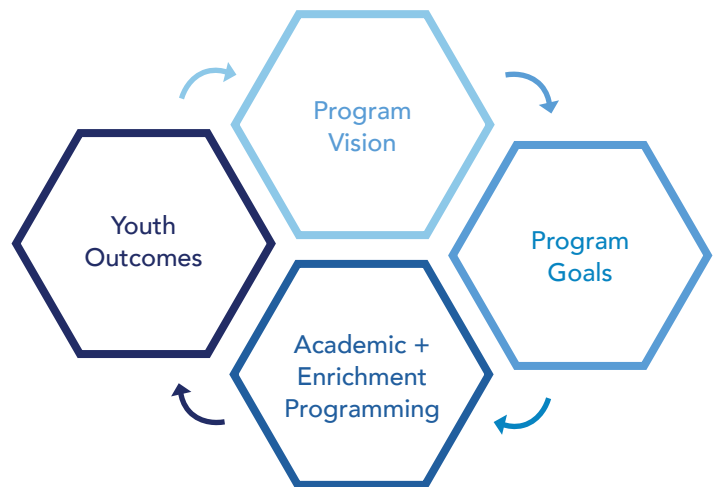
PLANNING FOR SUCCESS

If programs are to provide engaging enrichment experiences for students, they must be as well-planned and as high quality as academics.¹

WHY NOW? SCRI'S CALL TO ACTION

Expanded Learning

Studies have shown that well-designed summer programs that concentrate on broadening learning opportunities can offer significant advantages in math, reading, and social-emotional development, particularly for struggling youth. To guarantee that these programs are executed smoothly, it is essential to plan early and comprehensively. Success relies on having a clear vision, understanding the interests and developmental needs of the young people being served, committing to high-quality programming, assembling a team of skilled instructors and staff, and establishing a positive climate and culture that promotes learning and growth.



At the Sperling Center for Research and Innovation (SCRI), we understand the crucial role of enriching experiences in shaping the trajectory of out-of-school time (OST) programs. Having collaborated with OST initiatives nationwide, and as practitioners ourselves, we've seen firsthand the transformative impact of early and comprehensive planning in providing participants with not just academic rigor but also engaging and high-quality enrichment experiences.

Why prioritize engaging enrichment? Experts agree that OST programs significantly enhance young people's academic and social-emotional skills. Moreover, studies highlight that OST programs that deliberately incorporate high-quality enrichment can offer even more profound benefits. These range from fostering new interests and exploring new activities like music, sports, and STEM to building positive peer relationships, encouraging physical activity, fostering community, and boosting confidence.⁸ According to a 2020 study by the Afterschool Alliance, high-income families "spend more than five times as much on OST activities per year than families in the lowest income bracket, spending roughly \$3,600 annually versus \$700."² At the same time, we know that enrichment activities, such as art, music, sports, and STEM, provide youth with opportunities to develop skills, connect with academics, and elevate satisfaction for all involved.

One study on the inclusion of arts-focused enrichment activities found that these types of programs offer "unique environments for learning," in which students who might struggle in a traditional academic setting find new

opportunities to build confidence, strengthen and deepen what they learn in their school day, and expose them to new areas of interest in which they can excel.³

OST programs provide a distinct opportunity to offer enriching activities, especially bridging gaps where access might be limited. By integrating intentional, high-quality enrichment activities, these programs not only break down access barriers but also pave the way for youth success. These enriching experiences contribute to a vibrant and engaging learning environment, fostering consistent attendance and becoming effective recruitment tools for future OST endeavors.

However, despite the well-established benefits of high-quality enrichment, the guidance on how to create and implement such programs in the OST landscape remains limited. Factors like resource accessibility, program capacity, and the diverse contexts of OST offerings contribute to this gap. At SCRI, we are committed to addressing this nationwide void by offering insights into the essential elements of high-quality enrichment programming. Our stance is reinforced by the feedback we've received from stakeholders in BellXcel-partner programs, underscoring the immense value of thoughtful and deliberate enrichment programming. Our ultimate goal is to elevate the quality and impact of youth-serving organizations' and schools' by empowering them to design enriching experiences that parallel academic rigor.

Stakeholder Feedback 2022: *Enrichment as a Favorite Part of Program Experience*

"I like making new friends and trying new things. My favorite part of every day is enrichment."
(Youth engaged with programs powered by Arly by BellXcel)

"I enjoyed teaching enrichment and getting to do all of the lessons and activities that I can't do during a typical school year." *(Staff engaged with programs powered by Arly by BellXcel)*

"Watching the excitement on kids' faces when we got to do a science experiment that got messy. Pure joy!" *(Staff engaged with programs powered by Arly by BellXcel)*

WHAT WE MEAN BY ENRICHMENT

Enrichment is often the favorite part of a program experience for youth and adults teaching the program, since enrichment programs offer unique opportunities to engage in educational activities beyond the traditional academic subjects of English, math, social studies, and science. Enrichment programs cover a variety of topics including, but not limited to art, music, health and fitness, technology, and foreign languages, all of which are essential elements in our approach to programming.

At SCRI, we understand the importance of planning for enriching programs that are as impactful and engaging as academic courses. To ensure success, it is vital to plan early and comprehensively. This involves having a clear vision, understanding young people's interests and developmental needs, committing to culturally responsive high-quality



programming, assembling a skilled team of instructors and staff, and establishing a positive climate and culture that promotes learning and growth.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR HIGH-QUALITY ENRICHMENT PROGRAMMING

Courses are aligned with the program's vision and goals.

Incorporate enrichment activities into structured courses with sequenced units and lessons to achieve maximum impact. Each enrichment course has a content focus, objective, scope, and sequence of unit plans, lesson plans and activities.

Activities are organized and cohesive.

Practitioners should focus on lessons that are connected and part of an enrichment focus. This process includes finding a content area, deciding on a course name, and then creating written lesson plans that are clear, organized, and include sequenced activities. Consider following the SAFE model: sequenced, active, focused, and explicit.⁶

Activities are active and engaging, aligned with youth interests and culture.

Enrichment courses for youth must be engaging, culturally relevant, tailored to their interests, and include hands-on experiences, real-world activities, and cooperative learning.⁴

Encourage high engagement.

Include enrichment learning activities that engage a majority of students so that all students are continually active during most of the structure period, rather than activities that solicit engagement from only a few students at a time. Establish a climate and culture based on high expectations for youth and leverage the opportunity enrichment affords to make learning engaging and fun.

Hire experienced staff.

For maximum engagement and high participant satisfaction, hire staff who have experience and relevant content knowledge. Ensure that enrichment learning staff have the skills to facilitate your program's activities and provide an engaging experience.

Establish clear methods of assessment.

When planning youth programming, consider the academic and non-academic outcomes you hope to achieve. To ensure feasibility, assess the interests of the youth, map out available program assets, and determine if you have the organizational capacity to provide the programming.

"I love watching the "ah-ha" moments when a scholar understands something they didn't before. One of my favorite things about the program is seeing the kids' faces light up when they make a "connection" during an enrichment activity that ties in with something from academics earlier in the day." *(Staff engaged with programs powered by Arly by BellXcel)*

"I truly enjoyed watching the scholars learn how mathematics and science can also become art." *(Staff engaged with programs powered by Arly by BellXcel)*

“My favorite part was the youth excitement when they carried out an experiment and realized how it applied to their everyday life.” (Staff engaged with programs powered by Arly by BellXcel)



As an organization that focuses on expanded learning and out-of-school time, we believe that it's time to move beyond the "silo approach" to offering one-off enrichment activities. Instead, we should aim for a comprehensive and intentional model that emphasizes quality and aligns with the interests of young people. It's essential that programs design enrichment activities with trained instructors who have strong content

knowledge in the programming they provide so that they can deliver impactful experiences. The quotes from Bellxcel stakeholders in this paper highlight the incredible benefits of such activities for everyone involved - from the youth to families and staff. We hope that programs will start to design enrichment programming with greater intentionality so that we can continue to impact our communities positively.

Are you looking to improve the quality of your youth programs? Interested in tips on hiring and retaining effective staff? Looking to strengthen data collection and outcomes reporting?

LET'S CONNECT:

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