

Start-Up Guide for Implementing Credit-for-Learning Programs

This guide is designed to assist individuals who are in any phase of starting their own credit-for-learning program and are working on building and maintaining relationships with partners including administrators, teachers, districts, and funders. The Afterschool Alliance interviewed credit-for-learning providers to develop a list of best practices, and readers are encouraged to adopt any practices that best fit their context. **Since each state/district/community is unique, this guide offers a general approach, broken down by stakeholder type.**



Schools

When I want to work with a school, who should I talk to first?

- ▶ Relationship building must be done before and after the credit-for-learning program ends.

“If you want to engage, you have to understand the whole school’s journey.”

Credit-for-learning provider

- ▶ Have some context about the school you’re working with, and how it is functioning:
 - Examples: being part of a school improvement team for schools going through turnaround processes, sitting on a committee, and showing up at family engagement nights.
 - If possible, require/suggest school district members sit on the board of your organization for the buy-in to go both ways.

- ▶ In some cases, it's best to start with a teacher or guidance counselor, in other circumstances a superintendent and/or district support is beneficial. This depends on the size and organization of the district or school you're working with.
 - Teachers might push back if the school administration requires everyone to work with a community-based organization (CBO) without their previous buy-in.
- ▶ Where applicable, leverage relationships with partners, such as afterschool networks. One example is the [Providence After School Alliance](#). These programs have long-lasting relationships with the school/administration and can help build a bridge for your program and negotiate on your behalf. Find a network near you [here](#).
- ▶ Conduct an introductory meeting with all partners coming to the table. This ensures everyone is on the same page.

How do I deal with administrator or teacher turnover?

- ▶ Have established relationships with the schools. The administration often changes and with it, leadership consistency.

"Though it can be challenging, just stay the course."

Credit-for-learning provider

- Turnover can mean not knowing if the program will exist longer than a year. A new administration can be more hesitant to support your program if they do not know if you'll be there in a year. Students, administration, and district representatives all need to buy into your program.



What are other ways to encourage schools to work with my credit-for-learning program?

- ▶ Your program can be eligible for private funding when working with schools. Use that to your advantage.
- ▶ This process is driven by a school’s willingness to take on community partners. Dream scenario: Working with schools that are innovative and open-minded and say “our students learn in different ways.”

How can I create buy-in from teachers for my credit-for-learning program?

- ▶ Here are a few tips to message your program to make it most appealing to teachers
 - If possible, try to commit to using the same curriculum as teachers.
 - Be kind and courteous while presenting. Possible statements include: **“We are not trying to supplant your work. We want to supplement it with co-curricular activities through out-of-school time learning.”**
- ▶ Create a clear and written statement about the responsibilities of a teacher of record when giving students credit.
 - Have all of this formalized in a good and tight Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), including and emphasizing the importance of data sharing.
- ▶ Messaging your program and developing good relationships with teachers takes time, energy, and money. Invest in your team for it to function fully. If that investment is not made early in the process, you might be unable to hold onto your members and team. Create new opportunities.
- ▶ Add value: find out what the true cost of your program is from the get-go. This is what it costs to run the program, and don’t waiver from it.

“Don’t short-change the quality of your program and the cost just so you can get your foot in the door.”

Credit-for-learning provider

How do I start the Credit-Bearing/School Accreditation process?

- ▶ Start with an understanding of the academic policy that governs their district, and then see how your current or potential program aligns to academic learning standards.
 - As much as possible, use the tools/language for speaking about a course that are aligned to what is standard within your district.
- ▶ Select the right school partners and start small.
- ▶ Create a data-sharing agreement/MOU with schools, if possible.



- ▶ If you choose to award credit by assessment, begin to create the assessment tool you'll use for students ahead of time, whether you're aligning to common core or project-based learning.
 - Determine which academic skillset aligns best with your program.
 - See [this example](#) co-created by Youth Voices and PASA.
- ▶ However, not all providers can award credit by assessment.
 - For some providers in Louisiana, for example, it is much easier to award out-of-school credit by meeting seat time requirements.

How can I promote my program for partners, funders, schools, and participants?

- ▶ Create a consistent social media presence on Twitter, Instagram, Tik Tok, Facebook, and more.
 - When possible, encourage youth to take a leadership role and make posts, run one of your social media accounts, or be featured in social media posts.
 - Use this platform to highlight partnerships, work with funders, and more.

Partnerships

How do we recruit and work with partners?

- ▶ Make these partnerships in person as much as possible. Make clear what you're offering; it is helpful to pitch these programs as a direct service you're providing.

"To build partners, all you really need is: an Excel spreadsheet, google, and a phone."

Credit-for-learning provider

Who should we reach out to?

- ▶ Reach out to community engagement folks at colleges and universities in your area. There are endless possibilities for colleges to partner with credit-for-learning programs, in areas such as pharmacy, arts, medicine, and more.
- ▶ Look around your neighborhood at industry partners and community-based organizations. See where folks could fit into your program.

Funders

How can we work with funders?

- ▶ Have constant communication with funders about what they're making possible through various types of communication, such as newsletters. Include data and student testimonials. Show funders directly what they made happen.
 - Make changes to your program from this data and student input. Funders will appreciate being aware of these changes.
- ▶ Get creative: tap into public funding opportunities, where possible, and funding that wasn't specifically for credit-bearing programs but are still aligned to funder's goals.

What should we do if we're worried about maintaining our program's funding?

- ▶ When possible, credit-for-learning providers suggest having different funding streams for sustainability. See the Afterschool Alliance's list of possible funding streams [here](#).

