

# Recruiting and Retaining Older African American and Hispanic Boys in After-School Programs

What We Know and What We Still Need to Learn

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Significant achievement gaps between socioeconomic and racial groups persist across the United States. For instance, in 2006, high school students living in low-income families were four-and-a-half times more likely to drop out than their peers from high-income families (9 percent versus 2 percent). In that same year, 11 percent of African American youth and 22 percent of Hispanic youth between the ages of 16 and 24 had not earned—and were not working toward—a high school diploma, compared with only 6 percent of whites in the same age group (Laird et al. 2008). Such disparities in educational achievement put youth at risk of lower future earnings and of a higher likelihood of being unemployed in adulthood (US Census Bureau 2007; US Department of Labor 2006).

Minority males are particularly vulnerable. African American and Hispanic males between the ages of 16 and 24 have historically been more likely to drop out of high school before earning a degree than their white peers. Most recently, in 2007, while only 6 percent of non-Hispanic white males had dropped out of high school, 8 percent of African American males and nearly one quarter (24.7 percent) of Hispanic males in this age range had (US Census Bureau 2007). Similarly, the median incomes in 2007 for African American and Hispanic males were only \$35,652 and \$29,239 respectively, compared with the \$50,139 earned by non-Hispanic white males (Bishaw and Semega 2008). Although the same pattern in educational attainment and earnings exists among women, the size of these disparities is generally smaller.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, African American and Hispanic males between the ages of 10 and 24 are also more likely than their white peers to be involved in violent crime. In this age group, murder is the number-one cause of death for African American males and the second

leading cause of death for Hispanic males. Homicide rates for African American males (62.2 per 100,000) and Hispanic males (21.5 per 100,000) far exceed those of non-Hispanic white males in the same age group (3.4 per 100,000) (Center for Disease Control 2009).

Consistent and persistent participation in high-quality after-school programs may be one mechanism for addressing these achievement gaps and health disparities. Research has found an association between extended participation in these programs and a host of positive outcomes, including better school attendance, greater self confidence, increased civic engagement, improved academic achievement and decreased delinquency (George et al. 2007; Durlak and Weissberg 2007; Fredericks and Eccles 2006; Gottfredson et al. 2004). Participation in after-school programs may yield these benefits as a result of core developmental and academic skills taught to youth both directly and indirectly through program activities or because of the sheer fact that youth are spending more time in safe settings with adult supervision (Durlak and Weissberg 2007).

Participation in structured out-of-school-time activities declines with age, and providers often find it challenging to engage and retain older youth in the after-school hours.

Importantly, with many studies finding that benefits accrue only after consistent participation for one year or more, programs need to successfully attract and retain participants for an extended period of time to foster sustained impacts (Fiester et al. 2005; Walker and Arbreton 2004). Unfortunately, research also

shows that participation in structured out-of-school-time activities declines with age, and providers often find it challenging to engage and retain older youth in the after-school hours. As youth mature, they have more choices about—and more demands upon—their time, including jobs and family responsibilities, socializing, sports and other extracurricular activities.

In addition, youth from minority and low-income families have historically demonstrated lower rates of participation in various types of out-of-school-time programs.<sup>2</sup> The Harvard Family Research Project (2006), for instance, found that Hispanic adolescents are less likely than both white and African American youth to participate in after-school programming.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, youth from high-income families are more likely to participate, both in terms of the number of programs in which they are enrolled and the duration of their participation. These differences can be explained in part by the dearth of programs available to low-income families, as well as by obstacles these families often face that inhibit youth's participation, such as lack of transportation or inability to pay programming fees (Wimer et al. 2006).

Although prior research has explored how successful after-school programs recruit and retain older participants, less is known about how effective strategies may differ by gender and race (Arbreton et al. 2009). What works for adolescent boys may vary drastically from what works for girls, particularly during a developmental period when gender differentiation becomes increasingly prominent. Similarly, the issues that influence the after-school participation of older minority youth may differ from those affecting older nonminority youth. Given gender and racial/ethnic disparities in high school graduation rates and subsequent economic and health outcomes, it is critical to identify strategies that are effective for recruiting and retaining older

minority boys in these programs. Such information could help strengthen positive program impacts and reduce program costs by (1) focusing recruitment and retention efforts on strategies with a proven track record of success, (2) refining program content and structure to better engage these youth and (3) ultimately improving program reputations and increasing demand within communities.

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With funding from the Collaborative for Building After-School Systems (CBASS)—through support from The Atlantic Philanthropies—Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) conducted a small study to begin identifying promising strategies currently used by after-school programs to recruit and retain middle- and high-school-aged African American and Hispanic males.<sup>4</sup> The purpose of the study was (1) to learn the strategies most commonly used by programs with high rates of recruitment and/or retention of older minority<sup>5</sup> boys and (2) to make further suggestions and recommendations based upon this initial study to advance the after-school field's understanding of how to effectively reach this population.

Our research included a review of relevant literature as well as interviews with leaders from 10 programs CBASS intermediaries identified as successful in recruiting and retaining middle- and high-school-aged African American

and Hispanic males. This *Groundwork* brief summarizes the results of our work. We begin by describing key findings from past studies. We then discuss themes that emerged from interviews with the after-school programs' staff and summarize the recruitment and retention strategies they perceived to be effective with older minority boys. We conclude by providing recommendations for programs, intermediaries and researchers in the after-school field.

## Literature Review

The literature examining recruitment and retention for middle- and high-school-aged youth in after-school programs is limited and generally does not disaggregate programs' recruitment and retention strategies by race/ethnicity or gender. Researchers suggest that effective strategies for increasing participation in after-school programs among older youth *in general* may include (Lauver et al. 2004; Deschenes et al. 2010):

- Providing leadership opportunities, such as volunteer or paid work;
- Ensuring staff stay well informed about youth's lives inside and outside the program;
- Creating opportunities for youth to develop strong relationships with staff;
- Providing opportunities for youth to develop and nurture relationships with peers;
- Centering activities within a community-based organization;
- Targeting youth who live near the program location;
- Serving a large (more than 100) youth population;
- Having regular staff meetings to discuss programming;

- Providing opportunities for skill-building, such as academic or employment support;
- Offering a wide range of activities from which youth can choose;
- Allowing a flexible participation schedule;
- Rewarding good attendance with incentives like special field trips or paid stipends;
- Serving participants' younger siblings; and
- Conducting a needs assessment to better understand the interests of both youth who participate in the program and those who do not.

Most of the research to date, however, has relied primarily on asking staff which practices *they* believe to be most instrumental in recruiting and retaining older youth. There has been relatively little empirical testing of the true relationship between program practices and recruitment or participation rates. The Harvard Family Research Project and P/PV (Deschenes et al. 2010) have recently released a study that quantitatively links program practices to retention rates and found four distinguishing features of high-retention programs. Specifically, programs that were more successful at retaining at least half of their participants for 12 months or longer: (1) were staffed by individuals who stayed well informed about the youth, (2) provided leadership opportunities, (3) had regular staff meetings to discuss program issues and (4) were housed in large community-based organizations.

While the research on after-school program participation among youth more broadly is limited, even less has been published about recruitment and retention strategies for older minority boys. Some reports *have* showcased programmatic components designed to increase cultural relevance and sensitivity—which could likely impact recruitment and retention of minority participants and their parents.

For instance, Resnicow et al. (2000) suggest that programs can enhance their cultural sensitivity through either their surface structure or their deep structure. “Surface structure” refers to superficial aspects of a program that involve the way materials are presented and delivered to the target audience, such as the language used (e.g., translating materials for parents into their native language) or the location where programs are offered (e.g., in the target population’s neighborhood) (Diversi and Mecham 2005). “Deep structure” refers to aspects of a program that address cultural, social, psychological, environmental, socioeconomic and historical factors that are unique to the target population and may influence participants’ behaviors (e.g., living on tribal land, dealing with poverty or discrimination). As such, some researchers emphasize the need for programs to focus on “the special needs of minority populations” and to “reflect...the everyday realities of [racial and ethnic minority] youth” (Tucker 1985; Schinke et al. 1989).

After-school programs that address both surface and deep structural characteristics relevant for older minority boys may be particularly successful in recruiting and retaining this population.

In an effort to accomplish this, programs may hire staff with backgrounds similar to the youth they serve. Programs may also train staff about issues—such as immigration, acculturation and ethnic identity—that affect youth of specific minority backgrounds. After-school programs that address both surface and deep structural characteristics relevant for older minority boys may be particularly successful in recruiting and retaining this population.

Important insights may also be gleaned from needs assessments conducted by after-school intermediaries—especially those that include input from residents of communities in which they plan to offer programs.<sup>6</sup> These assessments have identified, among other things, the barriers parents and youth perceive to enrolling as well as what factors impede their ability or desire to stay enrolled. Program obstacles may include: an inconvenient location and/or lack of transportation, high program fees, safety concerns, insufficient openings, inadequate adult supervision, uninteresting program focus and competing responsibilities during after-school hours (e.g., caring for younger siblings). In response to this kind of community feedback, programs have been able to modify their structure and offerings to address such barriers to participation.

## Interviews With Program Staff

To improve the field’s knowledge about effective recruitment and retention strategies for middle- and high-school-aged minority males, we embarked on a series of interviews with staff at 10 after-school programs in 8 cities.

## Program Selection and Limitations

We worked with CBASS intermediaries to identify 10 programs that were viewed as successful in recruiting and retaining representative numbers of minority male participants relative to the demographics of their geographic regions.<sup>7</sup> These programs were located in select Midwestern and East Coast cities. While they all served primarily low-income African American and Hispanic youth, the programs varied in many ways, including their goals, content and demands on participants. For more information about the programs, see Table 1 on the next page.

**Table 1. Program Profiles**

<i>Program Name &amp; Location</i>	<b>Alchemy, Inc.</b> Akron, OH	<b>Academy of Success</b> Baltimore, MD	<b>After School Matters' Culinary Arts Program</b> Chicago, IL	<b>Hyde Square Task Force</b> Jamaica Plain, MA	<b>Team Providence</b> Providence, RI
<i>Program Goal</i>	To provide a safe environment and sense of community to participants through storytelling.	To provide services, training and skill-building that can contribute to self-sufficiency in adulthood.	To provide inner-city high school students with culinary skills to broaden their employment opportunities after high school.	To develop leadership skills of youth through community-building and youth development activities.	To introduce youth to careers in sports and business by combining sports leagues with academic enrichment.
<i>Years in Operation</i>	4 years	10 years	Several years	21 years	10 years
<i>Program Schedule</i>	The high school program runs during the school day. The middle school program meets twice a week for 22 weeks after school; there are also occasional meetings during the summertime.	Occurs every day after school from 2:30 to 8:30 p.m. and daily during the summer months from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.	During the school year, two 10-week cycles (one fall, one spring) meet three days a week for three hours; during the summer, one six-week cycle meets five days per week.	The center is open daily from 3 to 8 p.m. during the school year and all day during the summer.	The enrichment season extends from September to March, providing academic services twice a week. The sports season runs March to July and meets an additional two days a week for practice.
<i>Program Setting</i>	School-based	Two locations: one school-based, one community-based	School-based	Community-based	Community- and school-based
<i>Population Served</i>	Middle- and high-school-aged African American males	Elementary- to high-school-aged youth, mainly low-income and African American	High school youth, currently 60% male and predominantly minority	Elementary- through high-school-aged youth, all minority, half male	Middle- and high-school-aged males, mostly minority and low-income
<i>Program Size</i>	33 youth	120 youth	30 youth per session	305; 75 in the high school program	80 (only 50 play in the sports league)
<i>Participation Rate*</i>	80% of participants attend each day.	Daily attendance is around 100 youth. Most attend the program four days a week.	Very high attendance rates; participants are only allowed to miss three classes.	High school students participate 10 to 15 hours per week during the school year; most attend every day.	50% rate for tutoring; 98% rate for sports. During enrichment season, the minimum attendance is two hours per week.
<i>Program Retention</i>	Participants typically attend for multiple years. (Program goal is from sixth through twelfth grades.)	Participants typically attend for multiple years, occasionally for more than three years.	Participants typically attend for multiple sessions.	High school participants typically attend for two years; most attend between two and four years.	Youth typically participate for more than one year, with a majority participating from seventh grade until high school graduation.
<i>Stipends</i>	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
<i>Staffing</i>	Three staff (one full-time, two part-time). Two of the staff have experienced the curriculum as participants.	Eight staff (three full-time, five part-time).	Director and part-time assistant during school year; both have culinary arts experience.	16 full-time staff, 11 of whom are direct service staff. All live in the neighborhood or surrounding area.	All staff are volunteers.
<i>Types of Evaluation</i>	External evaluation	Parent surveys and youth focus groups	Youth feedback	Yearly reviews of student progress; goal-setting	Parent and youth surveys

\* Note: Although our interviewers asked the same "participation rate" question of all 10 programs, respondents may have interpreted this question differently. Data in this table directly reflects what was reported and, as such, may reflect varying types of participation—including a program's average daily participation rate, individual rates of participation (e.g., how often an individual youth attended the program) and minimum requirements for participation. These data should not be used to make comparisons across programs.

**Table 1. Program Profiles *continued***

<i>Program Name &amp; Location</i>	<b>After-School Education Apprenticeships (The After-School Corporation)</b> New York, NY	<b>The Comic Book Project</b> New York, NY	<b>Progressive Sports and Entertainment Alliance</b> Washington, DC	<b>Life Pieces to Masterpieces</b> Washington, DC	<b>Pleasant City Beacon Center</b> West Palm Beach, FL
<i>Program Goal</i>	To train high school students with skills and knowledge that equip them to work in after-school settings.	To enhance youth's literacy, social development and community involvement through the process of creating comic books.	To prepare high school students for executive positions in the sports and entertainment fields through coursework and job placements.	To engage African American boys in creative expression through relaxation exercises and academic supports.	To create an environment for youth in which they can develop social skills, build self-esteem and gain work experience.
<i>Years in Operation</i>	3 years	5 years	3 years	12 years	10 years
<i>Program Schedule</i>	Two sessions (one each semester) run five days a week from 3 to 6 p.m. and twice a month on Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.	Program typically meets one to two days per week for one to two hours. Generally does not meet in the summer.	Summer coursework runs weekdays from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.; during the school year, youth are placed with teams or events to utilize the skills learned in the summer.	Runs weekdays until 8:30 p.m. and from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturdays during the school year and summer. Youth are required to participate for 12 hours a week.	Weekdays from 3 to 7 p.m. and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.; operates during the school year and the summer.
<i>Program Setting</i>	Community-based	Generally school-based	School- and community-based	Community-based	School- and community-based
<i>Population Served</i>	High school youth, mainly minority, approximately one third male	Mainly minority youth of all ages; the site interviewed in New York served male, high school minorities	High school youth, all African American, half male	African American boys in low-income neighborhoods; half middle- and high-school aged	Middle (80%) and high school (20%) youth, all lower-income African American; 40% male
<i>Program Size</i>	400 youth a year	New York: 25; nationwide: 12,000	150 youth a year	65 boys in central program	120 youth
<i>Participation Rate</i>	Around 50% participation rate.	In New York, 80% of youth attend both days each week.	80% participation rate required. Most attend four days a week.	50% attend each day.	Four days a week expected and generally met; high school students attend less.
<i>Program Retention*</i>	87% retention rate of two cohorts in program year.	70% attend for multiple years.	60% of those who start in ninth or tenth grade participate for multiple years.	65% attend for multiple years.	70% participate for multiple years.
<i>Stipends Offered</i>	Yes	No	No, but youth receive payment for working events.	No	No, but employment opportunities are offered through summer program.
<i>Staffing</i>	One full-time coordinator, four AmeriCorps staff and paid trainers	Varies by program, nearly all are younger, part-time staff	Summer program: 2 full-time, 7 part-time staff; school-year program: 16 full-time staff	7 full-time staff, 4 part-time staff and 12 regular volunteers	4 full-time staff and 10 part-time staff (25% are teachers in the host school)
<i>Types of Evaluation</i>	Internal evaluator; staff and youth evaluations	Youth and staff interviews	Youth evaluations	External evaluation; youth and teacher focus groups	Parent and youth surveys

\* Note: Although our interviewers asked the same "participation rate" question of all 10 programs, respondents may have interpreted this question differently. Data in this table directly reflects what was reported and, as such, may reflect varying types of participation—including a program's average daily participation rate, individual rates of participation (e.g., how often an individual youth attended the program) and minimum requirements for participation. These data should not be used to make comparisons across programs.

It is important to note that the qualitative data collected from these interviews reflect only the opinions and perspectives of program staff, not the opinions of youth or their parents. Although staff are likely to have valuable insights born of their experiences, they may also be biased due to their roles in the program or make generalizations based on the small group of youth with whom they have worked. In addition, though the recruitment and retention strategies identified by staff may make intuitive sense, it is important to remember that they may not all be supported empirically.

Further, while the information collected from these interviews may point to preliminary recommendations for the field as well as areas in need of further study, it was gathered using a small sample that may not be representative of all programs effectively serving African American and Hispanic middle- and high-school-aged boys. Nonetheless, this research provides a useful first look at promising strategies for recruiting and retaining this underserved and at-risk population.

## Findings

Interestingly, the strategies identified as successful in our interviews do not diverge from those identified as important for adolescent youth more broadly, regardless of participants' race or gender (Metz et al. 2008; Raley et al. 2005).

### Why Were These Programs Able to Recruit Older Minority Boys?

Our interviews with staff suggest that older minority boys joined these programs for several reasons:

- **Programs encouraged enrollment via *peer networks*.** Six programs capitalized on the peer networks of their current participants to recruit new youth, primarily through word

of mouth. Older boys may have become interested in joining a new program because they knew it already held the interest of their friends or peers.

- **Programs were easily *accessible*.** Six of the 10 programs offered their activities in the schools in which youth were enrolled, allowing participants to remain on school grounds; other programs were located either directly in the participants' communities or near public transportation routes, making it easy to get to and from the program.
- **Programs were *affordable*.** All of the programs served youth from low-income families and either did not charge a fee or waived the fee for those who could not afford to pay. This practice made it feasible for youth from economically disadvantaged families to participate.
- **Programs directly met a *financial need*.** Economically disadvantaged high-school-aged youth must often forgo their interest in after-school programming because they need to work (often contributing financially to their family). By paying youth a stipend for their participation, which 3 of the 10 interviewed programs did, older youth are able to supplement their incomes while engaging in enriching after-school activities—many of which directly help to prepare them for life after high school through job training.
- **Programs exposed older youth to topics and activities that are *fun*.** Most of the programs in this study (9 out of 10) attracted youth by offering activities that interested them, like sports and entertainment; creative endeavors, such as art and writing; or other recreational activities. Although these activities were important for initial recruitment, they were supplemented by educational and/or productive life-skills training.

### Why Were These Programs Able to Retain Older Minority Boys Over Time?

Although getting youth in the door is a critical first step, retaining them over an extended period of time is equally important, as sustained participation is central to achieving positive impacts (Arbreton et al. 2009). Our interviews with program staff suggest that some of the features that initially attract older minority boys are also likely reasons they return. Staff also identified several other programmatic features that seem to influence retention among this population:

- **Programs were *relevant* to older minority youth in terms of interest, cultural issues and economic needs.** Many of the programs involved in this study provided the “fun factor” through their focus on sports and entertainment, creative endeavors or recreational activities. However, all of the interviewees felt that programs must also possess both “surface” and “deep” characteristics that are personally relevant to youth both in content and structure. For example, programs that tailored deep structural characteristics to meet the needs of their target population included those that countered negative stereotypes surrounding males of color by providing role models for academic success and creative expression. These programs also sought out staff to whom youth could personally relate. Although program staff felt participants’ ability to relate was often associated with similarities in race and gender, shared experiences and expertise in the program’s focus area were ultimately deemed more important. Finally, because many of the youth participating in the study’s programs came from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and resided in areas in which job options were limited, program staff felt that acquiring skills

relevant for gaining employment or learning about career options were seen as especially valuable by participants.

Although getting youth in the door is a critical first step, retaining them over an extended period of time is equally important, as sustained participation is central to achieving positive impacts.

- **Programs were *flexible* in their participation requirements while maintaining their expectation for youth’s consistent participation.** Although most of the programs required a minimum threshold of participation, they also recognized the importance of allowing youth to engage in other opportunities and pursue different interests, particularly during adolescence, when exploration is critical. For instance, though 9 of the 10 programs had explicit minimum requirements for participation, staff from 5 programs noted flexibility in the extent to which they acted on poor attendance, making allowances to balance family issues and other opportunities competing for youth’s time. This did not detract from programs’ ultimate goal of retaining their participants for an extended period of time. Giving youth the freedom to explore other opportunities may be an attractive quality in an after-school program and may ultimately contribute to greater participant retention over time.
- **Programs *rewarded* youth.** Over half of the programs (6 out of 10) positively reinforced consistent and high participation with a variety of rewards. Some programs distributed prizes based on a point system. Others

rewarded youth by offering special opportunities, such as working the most popular events, attending special workshops or camps, or getting first “dibs” on reenrolling in the program for the following session.

- **Programs empowered youth.** In addition to providing youth with a fun place to go, all 10 programs empowered youth by giving them responsibilities and opportunities to lead. Eight of the 10 programs also gave youth a sense of ownership by soliciting their feedback and using it to guide future programming. Staff reported that doing so increased youth’s investment in the program—so much so that some participants eventually transitioned into staff.
- **Programs provided nurturing environments.** All of the programs created nurturing environments by making youth feel they were cared for and valued in a variety of ways. This was accomplished, in part, by efforts to empower youth (i.e., respecting their opinions and contributions, trusting them to take on responsibility, etc.). Another important mechanism, however, was to hire highly dedicated staff who demonstrated their commitment to youth outside the program—for example, by attending participants’ other extracurricular activities (e.g., sporting events) or by being active members of participants’ neighborhoods and schools.

## Recommendations

Several recommendations for after-school programs, intermediaries and researchers emerged from this review.

### Recommendations for After-School Programs

Through their staff’s direct contact with youth, programs can take several steps to increase recruitment and retention among

older minority boys and to further the after-school programming field’s understanding of effective practices.

- **Conduct a needs assessment of the target population.** To ensure that youth not only join but also consistently return, programs must meet the needs of their constituents. A needs assessment—involving focus groups or surveys with both youth and their parents—could prove valuable in identifying what older minority boys are seeking from after-school opportunities, as well as potential barriers to participation. Programs should ascertain, for instance: whether youth need transportation to activities; how much (if anything) they can afford to pay to participate; whether stipends are necessary; what other opportunities and responsibilities are competing for their time; what topics they find interesting or fun; what skills they want to develop; and how much free time they really have to spend in after-school programs. This type of information will help ensure that programs are relevant for their target population.
- **Demonstrate cultural competence.** Culturally competent programs incorporate policies and practices that make their services more accessible and relevant to diverse populations. Youth are diverse not only in terms of their demographic characteristics (such as race, culture and gender) but also in their life experiences (such as poverty and discrimination). One way in which programs can cultivate cultural competence is to hire staff whose backgrounds reflect those of their youth participants.
- **Document program practices as they relate to recruitment and retention.** Our interviews revealed that program staff had strong beliefs about why older minority boys join their programs and why they continue to participate

regularly. These staff were also open to learning more about effective practices that other programs employ to recruit and retain underserved youth. Unfortunately, our literature review suggests that few programs have publicly documented the lessons they have learned. Programs should improve their methods for documenting best practices so that others working with similar populations can benefit from this shared knowledge.

### Recommendations for After-School Intermediaries

Intermediary organizations are uniquely positioned to address common challenges after-school programs encounter, despite the fact that these programs may serve diverse populations and provide a wide range of activities. Unlike individual programs, intermediaries can use a systemic approach to address challenges, such as recruiting and retaining older minority boys, by working with multiple stakeholders simultaneously:

- **Issue a call for action.** Intermediaries can push programmatic and research agendas within their fields. As they work to help multiple programs acquire funding and other resources, intermediaries can foster learning communities focused on key issues. They can also encourage after-school programs to document basic information that may advance understanding of successful recruitment and retention strategies. For instance, programs should document their data by age, race/ethnicity and gender so that this information can be readily disaggregated. Some intermediaries may already possess these data and can work with researchers to conduct empirical analyses.
- **Disseminate best practices and inform policy.** As programs document the elements of their promising strategies, intermediary

organizations can help disseminate these best practices. Intermediaries have the ability to bring together and encourage collaboration among various stakeholders, enabling them to share ideas for serving older minority boys. Intermediaries can convene meetings, conferences and networking events for after-school staff, funders and policymakers; develop trainings and curricula; create regular newsletters to share research and best practices; and develop requests for proposals that apply best practices as standards for winning grant awards. Ultimately, these best practices should inform improved policies, and intermediaries should be collecting and disseminating findings with this as a key goal.

- **Work with funders to support efforts specific to older minority boys.** One of the key roles intermediaries play is to identify important programmatic and research agendas within the after-school field. In this role, intermediaries can encourage funders to target grants to effectively serve particular populations, such as older minority boys. A first step is to advocate for greater funding to track and document successful program strategies and to publicize this information among after-school providers.

### Recommendations for Future Research

Researchers can play an important role in identifying, testing and disseminating best practices within the after-school field:

- **Identify successful strategies used by a large number of programs serving a broader range of participants.** Our review found that literature on recruitment and retention strategies for older minority boys in the after-school field is underdeveloped. Although our interviews yielded valuable information, the results are based on a limited sample: 10 programs that were selected by CBASS

representatives, were located in select Midwestern and Eastern cities, and served primarily low-income African American and Hispanic youth. Our study, therefore, is only a first look at strategies that may be effective with older minority populations. Further research should be conducted with a larger sample of programs, particularly those that are more representative of geographic regions, ethnic minority groups and economic backgrounds.

- **Identify *unsuccessful* strategies used by programs.** Knowing what works is only part of the process of identifying effective strategies for recruiting and retaining older minority boys. Of equal importance is understanding what strategies have not been effective and examining why. For instance, one program interviewed for our study initially based its recruitment efforts on flyers and brochures. When this approach was met with poor results, the program's staff redirected their strategy to include more community outreach.
- **Solicit input from youth and parents in addition to program staff.** This report reflects only the perspectives of program staff, not the opinions of youth or their parents. Program staff—particularly those who have a long history with the program (as most of those interviewed for this report did)—typically have great insight into what does and does not work. However, these views may be generalizations based on the subsample of youth they have worked with over the years, or their beliefs may be biased as a result of loyalty and commitment to their program. Youth and their parents likely have unique perspectives that may be vital to program improvement.
- **Evaluate the *effectiveness* of high-participation programs.** The interviews we conducted provide a *preliminary* understanding of what seems to work to recruit and retain older

minority boys. While these programs may be successful in attracting and retaining youth, we do not know how successful they are in yielding benefits for their participants. Although indicators of youth participation—such as recruitment and retention rates—are markers of quality programming, the actual quality of these programs was not assessed in this study, nor were youth outcomes. It will be important to gain a better understanding of how and why older minority boys choose to regularly participate in programs, but ultimately the kinds of impacts those programs produce also need to be rigorously tested.

Given the importance of successfully recruiting and retaining older minority boys in after-school programs and the limited information currently available, the field will certainly benefit from further research in this area.

## Conclusion

This study represents a preliminary look at what strategies may be effective for recruiting and retaining older minority boys in after-school programs. Our comprehensive literature review pointed to several promising approaches, including incorporating increased cultural sensitivity into program offerings and conducting targeted market research informed by a needs assessment. Further, our interviews with executive staff from 10 after-school programs suggest the practices that may be effective for recruiting and retaining older minority boys largely overlap with those commonly used among after-school programs for adolescents more broadly, regardless of participant race or gender.

However, the programs have tailored these general strategies in various ways—for instance, by paying stipends to address youth’s needs to contribute to their family income or by providing positive role models who counter negative racial stereotypes. Given the importance of successfully recruiting and retaining older minority boys in after-school programs and the limited information currently available, the field will certainly benefit from further research in this area—and our interviews have shown that program staff are eager to learn.

## Endnotes

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- 1 Among females ages 16 through 24, the high school dropout rate in 2007 was 4.5 percent for non-Hispanic whites, 8.8 percent for African Americans and 18 percent for Hispanics (US Census Bureau 2007). The median income in 2007 among females was \$36,398 for non-Hispanic whites, \$31,035 for African Americans, and \$25,454 for Hispanics. Data reflect full-time, year-round workers aged 16 years and older with earnings (Bishaw and Semega 2008).
- 2 Out-of-school-time programming includes programs, activities and opportunities available to youth during nonschool hours, including before and after school, weekends and summers.
- 3 Although African American and white youth do not significantly differ in after-school program participation overall, there are differences by type of after-school program. For instance, based on the 2002 Panel Study of Income Dynamics, white youth were more likely to participate in community-based programs than African American youth (34 percent compared with 15 percent).
- 4 To address this lack of effective program models for older minority youth, a partnership of after-school intermediaries across the country—the Collaborative for Building After-School Systems (CBASS)—is working to ensure that high-school-aged youth have access to high-quality services. CBASS comprises nine after-school intermediary organizations dedicated to increasing the availability of quality after-school programming by building citywide systems and addressing shared challenges in achieving this vision. To that end, CBASS partners are interested in understanding markers of program quality, specifically for programs serving older minority boys. In particular, CBASS members are interested in understanding factors associated with program recruitment and retention of diverse student populations to improve programs' ability to reduce the achievement gap experienced by youth in most need.
- 5 Although we recognize that "minority" encompasses many different races and ethnicities, we use the term here to refer specifically to African Americans and Hispanics, as they were the focus of this study.
- 6 These intermediaries include Boston After School and Beyond, DC Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation, and the Providence After School Alliance. Needs assessments were conducted by Market Street Research in 2006 for all three cities.
- 7 CBASS encompasses leaders from nine after-school intermediaries around the country: Partnership for Children and Youth (California), Baltimore's Safe and Sound Campaign, The After School Institute (Baltimore), Boston After School and Beyond, After School Matters (Chicago), DC Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation, Prime Time Palm Beach County, Providence After School Alliance and The After School Corporation (New York City). The names of the CBASS representatives involved in the collaboration with P/PV on this research study are listed in the Acknowledgments.

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