



# Leading Summer Learning Programs

## Tips for Training High-Quality Summer Staff

Investing in staff development makes sense. Competent, confident staff members are more likely to do a good job, offer kids a quality learning experience, and return the following year. Staff training includes providing specialized information, instruction, or skill development in an organized way to practitioners and other key staff members within the program.

Staff members who receive quality training are better equipped with the skills that will enable them to plan and implement a successful summer program—so you need to think strategically and plan your staff development opportunities early.

The National Center for Summer Learning interviewed program providers from across the country to find out what they do to train staff for summer programs.

Contributors include:

- Karin Hostetter, Director of Enrichment for Summer Scholars, Denver, CO
- Barry Sims, Director of Curriculum and Development for Oasis Children's Services, New York, NY
- Tobi Swartz, Director of Bridges to a Brighter Future at Furman University, Greenville, SC
- Karen West, Director of Redhound Enrichment, Corbin, KY

This resource will offer several tips designed to help providers support summer staff before, during, and after the program ends.

### How do you assess the needs of your staff?

Before you can fully determine your staff development needs, consider the skills and expertise they already possess. Start by asking:

- What are our staff's current skills, knowledge, and abilities?
- How are those skills aligned with the goals of our summer program?

The best way to assess the skills and expertise of your staff is to ask them!

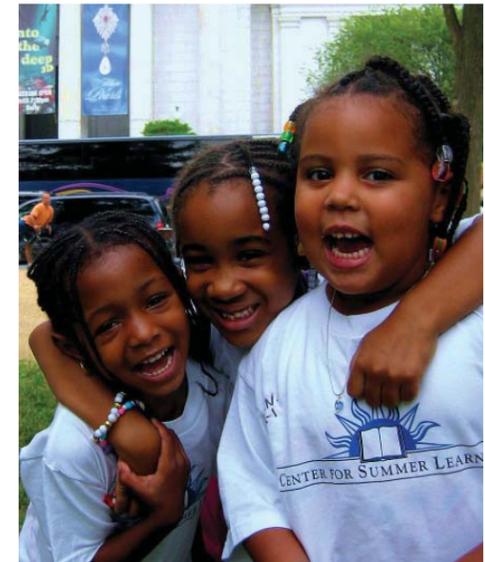
### Staff Assessment Strategies:

- Focus group
- Questionnaires
- One-on-one interviews
- Surveys

Once you're ready to sit down with staff and cooperatively assess their needs and capabilities, where can you start?

### Consider the following assessment questions:

- What staff development topic(s) or content would most benefit your work this summer?
- What are your interests or hobbies?
- What previous experience do you have working with young people (volunteer or paid positions)?
- What are your professional goals?
- How do you learn the best?
- Do you have any areas of expertise that you would like to share with other staff? If yes, please describe.



### Additional Resources:

The following links provide a wealth of resources for out-of-school-time learning, and specific research and best practices concerning training of OST staff.

- Afterschool Alliance  
[www.afterschoolalliance.org](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org)
- Bridges to a Brighter Future  
[www.furman.edu/bridges](http://www.furman.edu/bridges)
- Child Trends  
[www.childtrends.org](http://www.childtrends.org)
- Denver Summer Scholars  
[www.summerscholars.org](http://www.summerscholars.org)
- National Staff Development Council  
[www.nsd.org](http://www.nsd.org)
- National Training Institute for Community Youth Work  
[www.nti.aed.org](http://www.nti.aed.org)
- National Youth Development Information Center  
[www.nydic.org](http://www.nydic.org)
- Redhound Enrichment  
[www.redhoundproductions.com/enrichment](http://www.redhoundproductions.com/enrichment)
- Oasis Children Services  
[www.oasischildren.com](http://www.oasischildren.com)

### Notes:

1. Allison J. R. Metz, Mary Burkhauser and Lillian Bowie, *Training Out-of-School Time Staff: Part 2 in a Series on Implementing Evidence-Based Practices in Out-of-School Time Programs: The Role of Frontline Staff* (Washington, DC: Child Trends, 2009), [http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child\\_Trends-2009\\_02\\_11\\_RB\\_StaffTraining.pdf](http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child_Trends-2009_02_11_RB_StaffTraining.pdf) (accessed June 4, 2009).
2. Allison J. R. Metz and Mary Burkhauser, *Using Coaching to Provide Ongoing Support and Supervision to Out-of-School Time Programs: Part 3 in a Series on Implementing Evidence-Based Practices in Out-of-School Time Programs: The Role of Frontline Staff* (Washington, DC: Child Trends, 2009), [http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child\\_Trends-2009\\_02\\_11\\_RB\\_StaffCoaching.pdf](http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child_Trends-2009_02_11_RB_StaffCoaching.pdf) (accessed June 4, 2009).

### Staff development planning process:

- Assess the current state of your staff development options.
- Assess the skills and expertise of your staff.
- Determine the skills and expertise your program needs.
- Choose staff development topics based on those needs and determine who will conduct the workshops.
- Create a staff development calendar.
- Plan and implement effective staff development.
- Ask for feedback and use the information to inform future staff development.

### Effective Staff Development:

- Builds on staff members' current responsibilities by teaching them new subject content or strategies that will help them perform their jobs more effectively
- Is continuous and provides opportunities for staff to practice new skills
- Builds trust and collegiality among staff members and,
- Is supported by all levels of program staff, and program directors and managers encourage staff members' professional growth.

### What topics do you typically cover?

Common staff development topics:

#### General

- Program policies and procedures
- Overview of a typical day or week
- Staff responsibilities

#### Safety

- Onsite and field trip
- CPR and First Aid
- Reporting child abuse

#### Program planning and implementation

- Activity planning
- Content
- Creating a positive learning environment

#### Supporting youth and families

- Group management strategies
- Mediation/conflict resolution
- Confidentiality
- Working effectively with families

### Who conducts the training?

Many of the staff development topics generated through the survey process lend themselves to workshop sessions or two- or three-day classes. The question, then, is who will present these sessions? No matter who conducts the trainings, make sure you meet with the trainers in advance and clearly articulate the goals of the session(s). Consider the following options for finding high-quality trainers:

#### Internal staff

- Use the staff questionnaire to determine if any of your staff members have the expertise you need and an interest in conducting training themselves.
- Ask current experienced staff members to design, present, or co-present trainings on their particular area of expertise.
- Seek out your top-notch staff from previous years. Even if they are unable to work in the summer program this year, they may be willing to come back to present a half-day workshop to your current staff.
- Ask senior staff from your organization. Program or project directors from your organization may have skills or expertise that they could contribute, even if they are not directly involved with your summer program.

#### Community partners

- Community-based organizations (CBOs) may have staff they are willing to share to conduct training for your staff. Find the "expert organizations" in your area to conduct training on specialized topics. For example, contact the Red Cross for CPR and first aid training. At Summer Scholars, they partner with Denver Parks and Recreation to deliver some training because they employ the same type of staff.
- Contact a local university. For example, a professor in the education department may be able to present on multiple intelligences or thematic teaching.

- Local schools and libraries may have staff who can present training on academic topics, instructional strategies, and strategies to teach literacy or math.
- Ask around in your local afterschool community. Many programs have staff development opportunities throughout the year, and your staff may be able to participate.
- Call in the experts. For training specific to the content of your theme, invite local experts to conduct training for your staff.
- Contact local parent and family organizations. For training on subjects such as drug use, violence, or child abuse, seek out the assistance of parent and family organizations in your community.

#### External trainers

- External trainers can cost more than internal staff or community partners, but they are sometimes necessary in order to address your program's needs effectively.
- To find external trainers, ask for recommendations from the local school district office and community-based organizations.

### Five Methods for Effective Training

1. Present background information, theory, philosophy, and values of the new program or practice to staff.
2. Introduce and demonstrate important aspects of the new practice or skill.
3. Provide staff with opportunities to practice new skills and receive feedback in a safe training environment.
4. Provide staff with ongoing support and follow-up training.
5. Allowing sufficient time for training

Source: Child Trends Data Bank, 2009

### How and when does training occur?

Often, when program managers think of staff development, they think of one-day workshops offered just before the program begins. Although they have some benefits, one-shot workshops do not have the same impact as sustained staff development. Actually, staff development can occur through different venues for the duration of the program. Depending on your staff structure, your program can offer multiple levels of staff development in addition to workshop sessions.

#### Staff Development Approaches Prior to the Start of Your Program

- Reading assignments
- Visiting model out-of-school time and/or thematic programs
- Collaborative writing and planning thematic curriculum
- Conferences
- Workshops
- Classes
- Conference calls
- E-mail listservs
- Online discussion boards

At Bridges to a Brighter Future, counselors experience both off-site and on-site training during their five-day staff development experience. During the off-site adventure retreat, counselors work to build self esteem, leadership skills, and teamwork. When they arrive back on-site, training topics include mediation and conflict resolution and designing a personal development plan.

Redhound Enrichment connects with new staff on a one-on-one or small group basis to set expectations, learn program policies, and to develop a professional development plan. These intimate sessions send a clear message to staff to let them know what is important and that they are seen as valuable employees with skills that are worth investment, not merely seasonal employees.

### Staff Development Approaches During the Program

- Workshops
- Program director observations
- Mentor or peer coaching
- E-mail listservs
- Collaborative planning
- Staff meetings
- Online discussion boards
- Journaling or reflection
- Interest or study groups

Coaching is one approach that research has found to be very effective when working with summer staff. Coaching staff is an ongoing process that allows continuous support so that staff are focused on how to use the new knowledge or skill effectively. Through coaching, staff are less likely to revert to a familiar, less desirable way of doing something. During the summer program, Oasis Children's Services utilizes the "one-minute manager" coaching strategy, where a staff member is pulled away from a particular situation, given guidance, and then sent back to handle the situation.

Summer Scholars uses weekly staff meetings to assist with immediate issues and celebrate successes. Staff members are given time where they can reflect on their skills as well as receive help and recommendations on how to improve.



### Think through the practical aspects of delivering staff development to your summer staff.

- Do we have a budget line specifically for staff development? How much can we spend? Is there time to write staff development into the budget?
- Do we require all staff members to participate in staff development as part of their jobs?
- Do we link staff development and performance evaluation? Do we recommend staff development opportunities? Do we count participation in staff development as a "plus" for performance evaluation?
- What training content and schedule do we already have in place? What has already been scheduled? What training components from previous years do we want to repeat?
- Who are our full-time staff? How many year-round staff are available? How many are full-time seasonal staff? When are they available for staff development?
- How many seasonal staff will be new? How many returning? When are all staff available for staff development?
- What methods have worked well to deliver training to our staff?

### Staff Development Approaches After the Program

Classes

E-mail listservs

Conference calls

Online discussion boards

Once the summer program has ended, Oasis provides continued support to their staff through social networking sites and a paid college course, "Group Leadership in Youth Programming," for which staff can earn four college credits.