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Recognizing the Role of Research and Evidence

# What can afterschool and summer programs do to leverage this historic opportunity?

1

2

3

Guide 4

Guide 1 of this series demystified key terms (research, evidence, evidence-based practice), and Guides 2 and 3 expanded what we know from research and evidence about afterschool and summer programs. In this final guide, we offer strategies for afterschool and summer programs that bring the guidance together.

**The American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ARP ESSER) fund** presents a historic opportunity to support young people during the hours they are out of school. [Reopening guidance released by the U.S. Department of Education](#) (ED) highlights a set of cross-cutting considerations for addressing lost instructional time and accelerating learning through comprehensive afterschool and summer programs. ED recommends that programs do the following:

- Partner with families and make sure programs are free, inclusive, and supportive of family needs.
- Remain flexible to increase access.
- Offer a “tangible benefit” for young people.
- Focus on relationships.
- Include enrichment activities that foster social, emotional, and academic development.
- Leverage existing programs that have demonstrated results, especially community organizations that have a history of offering programming for youth.
- Build in frequent assessment and evaluation to support continuous improvement.

**Now is the time for afterschool and summer programs to reflect and refine their programming to ensure that it (1) reflects the context, assets, and needs of youth, families, and communities; (2) is grounded in the research on quality programming; (3) integrates evidence-based practices; and (4) aligns with guidance from ED and state and local agencies.**



## Start with a strong foundation: stakeholder voices, an understanding of local needs and assets, and existing programs.

Programs should meet the needs and leverage the assets of their local communities. To do that, programs can and should (continue to) elevate the voices of young people, families, and the community to ensure that programming and services are aligned and enable the community as a whole to build back better. In addition, many programs will not be starting from scratch, and this is a good thing! Use existing program materials, resources, and tools as a starting point.



## Use high-quality research to ensure programs are comprehensive and support a well-rounded education.

Programs should leverage the decades of research to reflect on their program plans, practices, and offerings. Guide 1 in this series provides a synthesis of what matters most to ensure that all youth thrive and how afterschool and summer programs can meet those needs. (Here's a hint: an evidence-based academic curriculum alone will not be enough to support the social, emotional, academic, and mental health needs of all young people.)



## Move program planning in the direction of the evidence.

Federal guidance recommends evidence-based practices and comprehensive programming, which includes creating safe and healthy learning environments that support a well-rounded education. Programs can (and we would argue *should*) create a logic model to ensure programming is comprehensive and integrates what we know works best based on research and evidence. **For funding that requires alignment with the ESSA tiers of evidence (see Guides 1 and 3 in this series), developing a logic model is an essential step in meeting the requirements for the fourth tier.** Programs can also identify whether and how evidence-based curricula and/or practices will be implemented in their program (see box) to strengthen their activities.

Many policymakers and education leaders are prioritizing academic instruction and supports for social and emotional learning in their efforts to accelerate learning. The activities section of a logic model is where much of the skill-building work happens. Programs may collaborate with education leaders and other partners to identify an evidence-based program or practice that meets a higher standard for evidence.

A [practice guide](#) is a publication that presents *practical* recommendations for educators to implement with young people. Practice guides are based on reviews of research, the experiences of practitioners, and the expert opinions of a panel of nationally recognized experts. The WWC and other reviews (like [this review of afterschool programs](#) or [this review of summer programs](#)) identify evidence-based interventions and programs that may be integrated into program planning if this is a priority. Programs should make sure this integration aligns with the other elements of the logic model.



## Talk to partners in the community.

Now is the time for collaboration. Programs can work in partnership with education leaders and other service and support providers to ensure that afterschool and summer programming meets the needs in their community. Programs can ground their discussions in the research and in their program's logic model, if they have one (see the tool on the next page). The logic of a logic model is that programs should be able to demonstrate what goes in (context, inputs, activities) and what comes out (outcomes). Afterschool and summer program leaders can work with their partners to identify priorities and demonstrate where and how those priorities can (or will) fit into the logic model.



## Refine the plan and focus on continuous improvement.

Programs should continue to make adjustments based on their conversations, partnerships, and implementation. It is important to keep the logic model grounded in the research while ensuring that it reflects local context, assets, perceptions, and experiences. The work of planning is most effective when it is ongoing and continuously improving.

# Ensure Programs Are Well-Designed, Well-Implemented, and Aligned With Research and Evidence by **Creating a Logic Model**

**A logic model is a visual representation of a program's resources and activities and the outcomes the program is expected to achieve.**

When done well, logic models can be useful tools that drive program planning, implementation and management, communication, evaluation, and continuous improvement. Logic models should clearly demonstrate the rationale for *how* a program will achieve its intended outcomes, and the elements of the logic model should be specific, measurable, and grounded in rigorous research. Creating a logic model is best done collaboratively while using existing materials and resources. Programs should do the following:

- Convene a team to work on this together—include staff, youth, and families.
- Leverage existing program materials and resources such as policies and procedure manuals, guidance from funders, and other requirements that drive programming.
- Use what we know, as a field, about the research and evidence on afterschool and summer programs.
- Align best practice with the program's context, youth and families served, specific inputs, activities, and outcomes.

**Programs can use the table on the next page to do the following:**

1. Think through each logic model element and the guiding question.
2. Consider what we know works best for afterschool and summer learning programs based on decades of research (using Guide 2 in this series).
3. Integrate their specific practices and programs into the model, making sure that the design is backed by research and evidence (citations help to demonstrate the research and evidence base, and we have provided them in this guide!)

With this information in one place, programs can create a new logic model for their program (see the blank template on page 9) or refine one that already drives their work. Programs should also plan to describe data-gathering and continuous improvement practices: What data will they collect and when? How will they understand how implementation is going?



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Logic Model Sections	Guiding Question	Important Elements to Consider and Describe (Grounded in the Research and Evidence)	
<b>Mission/Vision/Goal Statement</b>	What do you hope to change, for whom, and how? What is the need? What is the bigger picture?	<b>Consider and Describe</b> Many programs already have a mission, vision, and/or set of goals that drive the program. (If not, this is a great time to convene key stakeholders to think it through!) Use these aspirations along with the information in the sections that follow to create a comprehensive logic model that aligns with program goals.	
<b>Context and Conditions</b> (e.g., Osher et al., 2018; Anderson-Butcher, 2010)	What elements of the current climate may impact program implementation and outcomes?	<b>Consider</b> Individual, family, and community context because this is an important driver of personal and social development. Context should inform decisions about assets, inputs, and resources that are needed to ensure activities are relevant, aligned, and grounded in context.	<b>Describe</b> A description of the context that drives the rest of the logic model. Contextual factors to consider and reflect throughout the logic model include, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture</li> <li>• Language</li> <li>• Who is being served</li> <li>• Barriers to access</li> <li>• Other community norms</li> </ul>

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Logic Model Sections	Guiding Question	Important Elements to Consider and Describe (Grounded in the Research and Evidence)	
<p><b>Assets, Inputs, and Resources</b> (e.g., Deutsch, 2017; Eccles &amp; Gootman, 2002; Garst et al., 2019; Jennings &amp; Greenberg, 2009; Mahoney &amp; Warner, 2014; Newman, 2020; Starr &amp; Gannett, 2017; Vandell &amp; Lao, 2016)</p>	<p>What are the program’s assets and what resources are needed to implement the program?</p>	<p><b>Consider</b></p> <p>There are essential elements of infrastructure, management practices, and policies that contribute to a high-quality program.</p> <p>How will the program be funded and are the funding sources varied and sustainable?</p> <p>What are the supports for implementation and how will the program engage families and foster community partnerships?</p>	<p><b>Describe</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The funding structure and sources for the program</li><li>• Supports for implementation like ongoing training, high-quality instructional materials, and quality improvement tools to ensure all educators are well-trained and prepared</li><li>• Resources and practices to meet basic human needs for safety, food, and water such as meal services and transportation</li><li>• Practices to engage families, like learning events, youth-led events, and workshops</li><li>• Community partnerships that support the program, such as food services, connections to physical and mental health providers and services, and other organizations that offer enrichment programming and academic services</li></ul>

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Logic Model Sections	Guiding Question	Important Elements to Consider and Describe (Grounded in the Research and Evidence)	
<p><b>Activities</b></p> <p>(e.g., American Institutes for Research, 2019; Darling-Hammond et al., 2019; Durlak et al., 2010; Eccles &amp; Gootman, 2002; National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, 2017; Osher et al., 2018; Perkins et al., 2018; Risisky et al., 2019)</p>	<p>What services will the program provide with its assets, inputs, and resources?</p>	<p><b>Consider</b></p> <p>The program climate (the “vibe,” “energy,” overall environment) and the activities and services the program provides must be carefully planned to meet the needs and support the goals of the program.</p> <p>How will the program create a safe space for learning and development?</p> <p>What practices are in place to foster relationship-building and belonging?</p> <p>Will activities promote learning and, if so, what knowledge and skills are the focus? This is the place to carefully consider how the programming aligns with school-day instruction.</p> <p>How will the program ensure that the opportunities for learning meet the needs of the whole child while honoring the fun, creative, and engaging spirit of afterschool and summer?</p>	<p><b>Describe</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practices that ensure the safety of all staff and young people</li> <li>• Strategies to create warm and welcoming environments for learning and development</li> <li>• High-quality instructional materials, evidence-based curricula, and practices in priority learning areas. Describe what these are and the activities that will be offered to youth. Alignment with state and local requirements and school-day instruction is essential here.</li> <li>• How opportunities are developmentally appropriate through their scope and sequence. Younger youth will need more staff-driven activities that are hands-on and creative, whereas adolescents need more autonomy, opportunities for leadership, and shared decision-making.</li> <li>• Opportunities for social and emotional learning and development that support young people as they learn more about themselves and their peers, foster healthy relationships, and learn to make decisions</li> <li>• Principles of youth development that are the hallmark of afterschool and summer programs, including opportunities for voice, choice, interaction, engagement, identity development, leadership, and creativity</li> </ul>

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Logic Model Sections	Guiding Question	Important Elements to Consider and Describe (Grounded in the Research and Evidence)	
<p><b>Outputs</b></p> <p>(e.g., Goerge et al., 2007; Huang et al., 2007; McCombs et al., 2020; McCombs et al., 2017; Naftzger et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2012)</p>	<p>What is the measurable evidence of program activities that help to increase understanding of implementation and fidelity?</p>	<p><b>Consider</b></p> <p>Are there guidelines for program implementation and associated metrics to ensure that the program is being implemented as intended, and in alignment with the logic model? Are there essential elements of the logic model that should be monitored, with goals to be achieved, that are critical to reaching goals and outcomes? For example, if positive outcomes are more likely and stronger based on attendance and engagement then it stands to reason that measures of these key variables should be in place. How will you monitor, sustain, and improve youth attendance, for example? What are key metrics (e.g., at least 60 days for afterschool or 20 days for two consecutive years during the summer) that the program has in place? If youth are attending, are they engaging and is participation in certain activities essential to achieving outcomes? Many programs have resources that they use to drive their programs (e.g., state standards, quality assessment tools). Programs should leverage these resources when developing the logic model and thinking through the activities and outputs.</p>	<p><b>Describe</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Plans and/or key metrics related to implementation, staffing, and other elements of the logic model</li><li>• Attendance processes, metrics, and goals</li><li>• Activity participation requirements and/or goals</li><li>• Retention requirements and/or goals</li><li>• Program quality</li></ul>

# Ensure Programs Are Well-Designed, Well-Implemented, and Aligned With Research and Evidence by Creating a Logic Model

Logic Model Sections	Guiding Question	Important Elements to Consider and Describe (Grounded in the Research and Evidence)	
<p><b>Outcomes and Impact</b></p> <p>(e.g., David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality, 2019; Durlak et al., 2010; Lauer et al., 2006; McCombs et al., 2019; Naftzger et al., 2013; Naftzger et al., 2020; Vandell et al., 2007; Vinson et al., 2019)</p>	<p>What short- and long-term changes occurred because of the program?</p> <p>What is the ultimate impact of the program on youth, families, and the community?</p>	<p><b>Consider</b></p> <p>There is extensive evidence that afterschool and summer programs, when implemented well, may support a variety of outcomes including in social and emotional learning and development (e.g., improved social skills, reduced behavior problems) and school-related improvements (e.g., increased engagement in school, improved school-day attendance, fewer unexcused absences, fewer disciplinary referrals, improved academic performance).</p>	<p><b>Describe</b></p> <p>The outcomes the program is uniquely positioned to impact based on the context, inputs, assets, resources, and activities</p> <p><b>Remember:</b> You get out what you put in. What will the program do and how does that support goals and outcomes?</p> <p><b>This is the logic of a logic model!</b></p>





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## Ensure Programs Are Well-Designed, Well-Implemented, and Aligned With Research and Evidence by **Creating a Logic Model**

### A Tool for Creating a Logic Model.

Using this template, afterschool and summer programs can create a logic model that clearly articulates the rationale for why and how the program is likely to achieve its desired outcomes based on existing high-quality research. This research-based logic model can then be used to drive ongoing evaluation and continuous improvement.

#### Mission/Vision/Goal Statement

Context and Conditions	Assets, Inputs, and Resources	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes and Impact
Plans for Ongoing Assessment and Improvement				

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