

Structuring Grantees for Community Context



WHAT TYPE OF ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE WOULD BE MOST CONDUCTIVE TO BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE, INTEGRATED SERVICE DELIVERY SYSTEM?

One of the unique attributes of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program is that a wide array of organizations are eligible to apply for and receive 21st CCLC grants. As part of the 21st CCLC Integrated Service Delivery Survey (see box for additional information), the research team at the American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) explored how the type of organizations serving as 21st CCLC grantees can have a bearing on efforts to develop **more integrated service delivery systems** in a given community.

By “integrated service delivery,” we mean intentional efforts on the part of 21st CCLC program staff to coordinate 21st CCLC service provision with other services, programs, or supports provided in the school or the community writ large that may be of benefit to students and families served through the 21st CCLC program.

As part of the study, we found that a variety of **grantee structures may encourage a more effective service delivery system in terms of stability and coordination**. Depending on community context, being a community-based organization (CBO) or school district may better enable grantees to provide close coordination and continuous communication with other service providers to support enhanced service provision to the students and families they serve.

With funding from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) is conducting the **21st CCLC Integrated Service Delivery Study**, a 3-year project designed to:



Identify 21st CCLC programs that are integral parts of broader systems characterized by the coordination of multiple programs, activities, and services



Document strategies and approaches that support the coordination and integration of services; and



Explore how students and families may benefit from integrated and coordinated service delivery

AIR is conducting the study in collaboration with state education agencies in the states of Illinois, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, and Washington. This brief summarizes early findings from the study based on a series of interviews completed in the fall of 2022 with 21st CCLC project directors and site coordinators associated with 30 centers in the five states enrolled in the study.

In this brief, we provide a series of examples of how different grantee structures help 21st CCLC program directors and site coordinators bring people and priorities together in their particular communities to support the development of stable service delivery systems. **One of the main takeaways from this brief is that communities that are interested in using 21st CCLC funding as a platform for developing more integrated service delivery systems should be intentional about selecting what organization should serve as the 21st CCLC grantee.** In this brief, we provide examples of when having a community-based organization or a school district serving as the 21st CCLC grantee facilitated efforts to develop a sustainable integrated service delivery system. In each case, we think there are potential approaches that can be replicated more broadly in communities with 21st CCLC grants to provide more integrated and coordinated service delivery systems.

The AIR team obtained the examples provided in this brief from a series of interviews with 21st CCLC program directors and site coordinators conducted in the summer and fall of 2022 selected based on results from a survey administered in spring 2022 to 21st CCLC programs in the five states enrolled in the study: Illinois, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, and Washington.¹ Centers were selected to be interviewed if their survey results seemed to suggest the presence of more integrated approaches to service delivery.

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We are also our own 501(c)(3), where most 21st Century programs are not. They're either a program of the district or they have a parent, like a larger parent organization. Again, our founding fathers were very, very, very methodical about what their plans were about sustainability, and being a 501(c)(3) standalone has helped us. And that is an actual strategy that we used very early on, continue to use because **it's important to attract other dollars to leverage funds for 21st Century dollars.**

— Program Director

EXAMPLES OF WHEN A CBO AS THE 21ST CCLC GRANTEE SUPPORTS INTEGRATED SERVICE DELIVERY

In some communities, there are specific advantages to having a CBO serve as the 21st CCLC grantee. For example, some school districts continue to struggle with post-COVID-19 pandemic challenges related to staffing, resource availability, and frequent principal turnover. In this type of climate, having a CBO serve as the grantee may provide stability and consistency in leadership needed over time. CBOs may also help build and develop the processes and relationships required to coordinate 21st CCLC activities and services with other supports available within the school and across the community more broadly. Some of the ways that CBOs acting as the 21st CCLC grantee can support integrated service delivery are highlighted in the sections that follow.

Some CBOs created to serve a particular school district or community have been able to build increased capacity and stability, creating a foundation for greater coordination. One of the grantees we interviewed was an independent nonprofit with its own board that had been created specifically to serve as the 21st CCLC grantee for a specific school district. In this instance, the sole mission of the organization is to serve the school district, but it still maintains a separate leadership and organizational structure apart from the district. Having this structure has allowed the organization more flexibility and fundraising capacity, which has proven to be conducive to the stability and continuity needed to develop a more integrated service delivery system. For example, this structure allowed the organization to add additional contracts with the school district to provide school-day social and emotional support to students and additional adult education services and opportunities to the district's families. In this case, the 21st CCLC grantee has been able to expand its mission to provide students and families with a broader array of opportunities and support than just those that can be supported through the 21st CCLC grant.

Having a **Community-Based Organization** serve as the grantee may provide stability and consistency in leadership needed over time.

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We are so heavily embedded in [our school] . . . that if you walked in the door, you would not know the difference between me being as a [center] employee . . . and your high school teacher. You wouldn't notice that. I think that the biggest strategy that we use is the fact that we're school based. That I remain school based, even as the executive director, like my office is still in the school . . . And really that's just the way it is, because we feel having that presence in the schools gives us the opportunity to really get the information that we need to design our programs, to provide information to families, to work far more collaboratively than other programs would have the ability to do. — *Program Director*

This structure also provides for a high degree of integration with the schools they work with through the various supports and services they provide, making them a seamless component of the school's operation, helping them identify students and family needs, recruit teachers to support programming, and foster buy-in from school principals. As the program director noted, who has their office directly in one of the schools they serve through the grant.

In another community, the CBO serving as the 21st CCLC grantee also functions as an afterschool intermediary within the community, which has helped ensure the programs it administers, as well as others in the community, have access to quality frameworks, professional development, and models for service planning and delivery that facilitate program implementation and coordination. By serving as an afterschool intermediary, the organization is able to pull providers together in the community, supporting a greater degree of coordination and collaboration in the provision of supports and opportunities to students and families and ensuring alignment to a common vision for program quality.

Some CBOs are able use 21st CCLC funding to provide greater access to services and supports they already provide. Some CBO staff we interviewed indicated that their parent organization gave them access to important organizational resources that facilitates their ability to implement the grant and support activities related to service integration and coordination. These key organizational resources include access to:



Grant-writing support, fundraising mechanisms, and additional sources of funding to expand service provision



Professional development



Additional staff dedicated to supporting the design of afterschool programming and quality practice adoption across multiple sites



Board member expertise, which further deepens ties with other community service providers that facilitate joint planning and coordination efforts around service provision



Access to other social service programs that may be of benefit to students and families served by 21st CCLC

CBOs with these resources available may be conducive not only to 21st CCLC implementation generally but also in supporting the development of more integrated service delivery systems. One manager responsible for a variety of programs including 21st CCLC described how their organization takes steps to provide services in a more integrated fashion through the 21st CCLC program.



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We're sharing intelligence and information with each other all the time to figure out how we can strengthen what we're doing and maybe have some new opportunities. [For example, the 21st CCLC program director] has family service coordinators that are funded through the school and our department of education and some of my other staff are going to train them to be able to dig in deeper with the families to do applications for various benefits and whatnot. Why does 21st CCLC staff have to refer to another team? They're the ones with the relationships with families, **so let's build their capacity to have the conversations and support the families from soup to nuts.**

We're doing a lot of work around . . . kindergarten readiness, school readiness in general, and we have a bunch of different programs under the Family Development umbrella that do a piece of that. But now we've built a team across multiple departments that meet regularly, they're a team in and of itself, the three Health Equity Zones, someone from Head Start, someone from each of the two Family Visiting programs. And now we've got one of two staff working under 21st CCLC that are now doing this work learning from the other departments that are already doing and developing some joint programming.

My role is a lot like a matchmaker, like, *"Oh, why don't you go talk to them? Why don't you come to this meeting?"* Or, oh, *"We just had this conversation with this team. You're having the same conversation."* Like, ***"Let's not do this in a fragmented way. Let's do this in an integrated way."***

— CBO Manager

Some CBOs can allow for a regional approach to service delivery and service coordination that enhances access to activities and services. Some CBOs serving as 21st CCLC grantees we interviewed were founded to serve a broader region than just one district, city, or community. For some of these organizations, the respondents we interviewed described there being advantages to using this structure to allow for cross-pollination of effective practices and being able to offer a more diverse array of programming and resources because of better economies of scale. For example, one organization we interviewed was founded to serve a largely rural region of a state comprising several school districts. This grantee structure allowed the organization to bring additional resources to each community and cultivate partnerships with larger partners, such as the state's flagship university, to serve the region in a more holistic fashion.

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We are a program that is inclusive of all 10 schools. They each have a personality, [and] everyone has access to everything that everybody gets. So [the center] isn't better or worse than any of the others. It's not left out. Any services that we have, we share with everybody.

— Program Director

In another example, a grantee with a more regional orientation—given its role as an intermediate educational service agency—has been able to develop a cross-site, cross-community partnership with [Communities In Schools](#) to enhance the services provided at each of the 21st CCLC–funded sites, to include the provision of more intensive case management services for participating youth.



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Communities in Schools was newer to the area at the time, and so I saw what they were doing at some of our partner schools and some of our schools had them, and I learned more from a site coordinator when I went to do site visits, and I'd be like, *“What does your job entail? What does that look like?”* I'm like, *“I'm not trying to grill you, I'm just trying to get information.”* Then from there I spoke with the directors and just like, *“Hey, I think this will be a great partnership, especially most of the kids you serve come to program. How can we get students that come to program that maybe are off your radar, how can we get them into your services?”* — Program Director

EXAMPLES OF WHEN THE SCHOOL DISTRICT AS THE 21ST CCLC GRANTEE SUPPORTS PROGRAM INTEGRATION AND COORDINATION

Some of the grantees we interviewed shared that having the school district as the grantee served to support service integration and coordination. For example, one grantee described how their district adopted a [community schools](#) framework, which helped provide both an underlying philosophy for service coordination and an infrastructure that is being leveraged to support the integration of 21st CCLC programming into schools. Community schools are a nationally recognized strategy to support students, their families, and the broader school community through cross-sector partnerships with community agencies and providers. Through this support, community schools advance whole-child development and help transform learning in ways that provide supports and opportunities informed by community voice and decision making. A community schools principal who views the 21st CCLC program as part of the greater school community can serve as a connector to other program providers.



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Our principal did a wonderful job to bring on a team of coordinators (both 21st CCLC and community school) to work towards a vision that she believed was the best version of the district's stated vision of the Community Schools model. Of course, the district has a lot of other concerns they need to consider, and they're not day-to-day working with the families from our school and observing their needs or assets. So I think there's always an inherent distinction between what a district's vision is and what a coordinator on the ground or a principal knows is needed based on the interactions they are having directly with students and families, like getting that call from a parent who's not going to be able to take care of their kid that night. The coordinators work hard to make sure that we are working cooperatively and complimenting each other with what we were doing and not making it confusing for families.

— Community Schools Coordinator

At their best, community schools function as service hubs for their community and bring stakeholders together in ways in which everyone's voice matters and where shared and authentic decision making is the norm. One community schools coordinator that works closely with the 21st CCLC coordinator in their school discussed how they are taking steps to ensure their school's families have opportunities to provide meaningful input into the types of supports and opportunities provided at the school. Districts and schools that are open to these types of events are in a better place to develop more integrated forms of service delivery.



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We have a pretty high Spanish-speaking community

as well as a fair amount of immigrants, and so that creates an interesting dynamic as far as building new rapport and trust within our school community and relationships with our families. Our families want their students to be successful, but it is harder for them to interact with the school because of their immigration status and being less familiar with the education system in the United States. We want families see the value of having a voice and input into how our school caters to their desires for their child as far as what sort of activities are available, what content is being discussed, future pathways, and so we offer family events that address these issues. But families feel like *“The school has asked me to give my opinion, but I’m not used to doing that.”* I think families sometimes felt like they are almost an imposter in that space, that they aren’t worthy of expressing what their desires are because the system can feel so unwelcoming at times. To address this, we specifically have parent voice night where we very explicitly want to really hear from families about how our school could be better. And I think we had about 30 to 40 families or parents and guardians show up, and it was a beautiful night of workshopping and really going through and having parents express all their hopes and setting priorities for improvements.

— Community Schools Coordinator

In other cases, individual school principals and superintendents with a vision and commitment to service coordination and provision have been important in helping develop a more coordinated service delivery system that includes 21st CCLC.

Key to these efforts is a willingness and understanding of how to effectively braid funding to provide a more comprehensive and sustainable set of supports and opportunities.

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So we are very rich in grant resources other than 21st century. That’s just a tradition that started here, I don’t know, with a particular person probably 25, 30 years ago. And so, we have about 33% of our budget is made up of federal sources. Some of that’s like Title I, Title VI, that kind of stuff, SPED money, but a lot of competitive grants. So **we really braid funds** from many different sources to be able to make that kind of thing happen and meet needs.

— Superintendent

Finally, staff from one grantee—a superintendent’s office—characterized their structure as key to their center’s success. The superintendent’s office is an active participant in managing the grant and is involved in helping coordinate services, facilitating the ability of the center to more easily access resources and diverse funding streams to operate and expand programming beyond what can be provided through 21st CCLC funding, including bringing in external partners as vendors, hiring, and scheduling programs. For some district leaders, this work is deeply personal and is grounded in personal experience and genuine desire to fill important service gaps in their community.

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We know there was a need, and we wanted to figure out how to address it. And some of us had personal experiences. Like me, for example, I was a student that went here, and I had some really rough things happen in my life, and I fell through the cracks. And I wanted services for our kids and families that would not let that happen to them because it happened to someone like me who most people probably didn't even know was going on. So, I think again, just the beginning of an afterschool program in this area, the beginning of that was really the right people in the right places with the right heart, and we've built on that. So we created an outreach center that houses some of our grant staff and because we braided all these funds to do these things, some of our grant staff

that work on multiple different grants are housed in that center, but it's open every day to the public year round. We have people come in there to learn how to enroll or we help them through enrollment, we help them through SNAP assistance. There's a washer and dryer, there's a food pantry, there's a clothing closet. They go there when they need any of that. It's become a hub for how we can meet any need someone might possibly have. But not just give them stuff always because we want to change the cycle. If we just hand out free stuff, they're going to continue the cycle of poverty and we want that to change. So it's about meeting basic needs, but it's also about how do we help them get out of this cycle by being there to accompany them. — *Superintendent*

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An afterschool program in this area . . . was really the **right people in the right places with the right heart**, and we've built on that.



STEPS FOR DEVELOPING MORE INTEGRATED SERVICE DELIVERY SYSTEMS

Potential 21st CCLC grantees can capitalize on the flexibility afforded by the program in terms of the types of organizations that can apply for grants in the following ways:

Potential grantees should be intentional in adopting a grantee structure that will both facilitate stability over time and allow for the enhanced coordination of service provision, both within schools and across the community more broadly. Some advantages that can be associated with different types of grantees that we identified as part of the study include the following:



Some CBOs have been **created to serve a particular school district** or community and as a result, have been able to build increased capacity and stability for greater coordination.



Some CBOs can **allow for a regional approach to service delivery** and service coordination that enhances access to activities and services.



Some CBOs are **able to use 21st CCLC funding** to provide greater access to services and supports they already provide.



Some school districts **have invested in other frameworks**, like community schools, that support efforts to coordinate and integrate service delivery.



Some school districts have more **developed strategies for braiding funding** to enhance the supports and opportunities that can be provided to students and families in an integrated and coordinated fashion.

State 21st CCLC coordinators should foster this type of intentionality by considering the addition of components to their requests for proposal that require 21st CCLC grant applicants to outline how the grantee structure they have adopted will be conducive to cultivating key relationships with both school staff and representatives from key partner organizations. Again, the goal here is to help communities decide what type of grantee structure is most likely to support the capacity of 21st CCLC programs to be part of, and potentially lead, more integrated forms of service delivery.



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