

FINANCING AND SUSTAINING AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMMING: LA'S BEST



Promising
Practice Profile

SUMMARY

LA's BEST (Better Educated Students for Tomorrow) After School Enrichment Program (LA's BEST) was established in 1988 as a partnership between the Los Angeles Office of the Mayor and the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). Today, LA's BEST is one of the largest afterschool programs in the nation, serving 28,000 high-need students in 180 LAUSD elementary school sites. The mission of LA's BEST is to provide a safe and supervised afterschool education, enrichment and recreation program for elementary school children ages 5 to 12 in the City of Los Angeles. In 2009, LA's BEST's total operating budget was almost 40 million.

This promising practice profile focuses on LA's BEST's organizational and fiscal practices that have resulted in a successful and innovative approach to afterschool enrichment, in part due to the partnership with the city and LAUSD. The LA's BEST partnership model makes it eligible for funding streams that would otherwise be unavailable, allows it to share administrative costs and ensures that quality afterschool programs remain a priority on the city's education agenda.

LA's BEST is unique in that its administrative functions take place in the Office of the Mayor while its program operations are located in LAUSD. Combined, these partnerships allow LA's BEST to leverage resources to successfully maximize public and private funding. For example, LA's BEST receives 79% of its funding from local, state and federal government sources, the majority of which consists of state After School Education and Safety Program (ASES) grants and federal 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) grants, which are funneled through LAUSD. LA's BEST has also been successful in leveraging private funding which accounts for 7% of its budget. Additionally, LA's BEST reduces its administrative expenses because LAUSD provides the school sites and insurance for the site-based programming and the city provides the office space for the corporate office. LA's BEST has been able to maintain these partnerships through their strategic location in the Office of the Mayor and LAUSD, their early establishment of a public-private partnership, and their unique co-management leadership model.

BACKGROUND

Former Mayor Tom Bradley created LA's Best in 1998. Concerned about the growing number of children and youth living in Los Angeles neighborhoods plagued by gangs and poverty, Mayor Bradley proclaimed that the city place a priority on creating afterschool programs in these communities. Bradley established a 55-member Education Council consisting of leaders from the government, child-care, business and community sectors and tasked it with launching an afterschool system in Los Angeles. Bradley facilitated strong cooperation between LAUSD and the city government, and formed LA's BEST as a pilot project at 10 elementary school sites. The Mayor committed \$2 million from the Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency for the first two years of the pilot phase. However, predicting that LA's BEST could not rely solely on government funding, the Education Council implemented a public-private partnership and sought private support for the initiative.

In 1988, the Education Council became a 35-member Governing Board, and LA's BEST applied for and received 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status. Twenty-two years later, LA's BEST is one of the most nationally-recognized programs of its kind. LA's BEST currently serves 28,000 students in 180 elementary school sites and has effectively leveraged its partnerships with the City of Los Angeles and LAUSD to grow its operating budget to nearly \$40 million.

The goals set for LA's BEST in 1988 remain the same: provide children with a safe environment, enhanced educational opportunities, recreational activities, and enrichment activities to supplement the regular school program, as well as develop participants' interpersonal skills and self-esteem. The majority of students are Latino (77%) and African American (11%). The remaining 12% are Caucasian, Asian American and other ethnicities. Of the 28,000 students, 88% qualify for a free or reduced-price lunch and all sites reside in communities with a high population of gangs and gang violence. LA's BEST selects all sites based on low test scores, low socio-economic profiles, geographic distribution, high gang activity and high crime rates.

IMPLEMENTATION

Effective Management Practices

The LA's BEST management structure is unique because the corporate office is housed within the Office of the Mayor in City Hall and the operations office is housed in a LAUSD administrative building. The President/Chief Executive Officer oversees the corporate staff, which is responsible for corporate administration, fundraising, communications and finance. The Chief Operating Officer leads the operations staff, which is responsible for day-to-day program operations, staff development, and training and curriculum development. While all operations staff are managed by LA's BEST, most are employees of LAUSD. Through its dual office structure, LA's BEST is able to position itself as a key partner of both LAUSD and the Mayor's Office. Additionally, because employees of the corporate office work in the Office of the Mayor, they receive first-hand knowledge of city affairs and have access to the city's resources.

LA's BEST has successfully maintained its partnership with the city over many years because of a combination of strong leadership and its ability to ensure that education and children's safety remain high on the city's agenda. In part due to LA's BEST's effective programmatic results, the city leadership recognizes the benefit of supporting the program. In fact, since the program's inception, all four city Mayors have championed LA's BEST. The partnership with LAUSD, while beneficial in many respects, requires an increased focus on accountability and effective management practices. For example, as part of Beyond the Bell, an LAUSD umbrella organization for all before and afterschool programs, LA's BEST must abide by policies implemented by LAUSD such as hiring processes and furloughs.

LA's BEST is overseen by a Governing Board of Directors and supported by an Advisory Board. The Governing Board is responsible for the oversight and strategic planning of LA's BEST, including the creation of a diverse and sustainable funding base. The Advisory Board is a steward of the program and is responsible for assuring the program's quality and representing the views of the diverse community and constituents that it serves. Additionally, LA's Best created a BEST Friends Network, overseen by the BEST Friends Board of Directors, to engage young professionals in fundraising, marketing and volunteer initiatives.

Strategic Financing Approach

LA's BEST accesses a wide variety of revenue sources including federal grants, state grants, city grants and private funding. The partnership with LAUSD has helped LA's BEST become eligible for major government funding pools allocated to school-based afterschool programs, including 21st CCLC grants and state ASES grants. Similarly, because LA's BEST's is a part of the Mayor's Office, LA's BEST has been integrated in the city's general budget since 1988.

Federal Funding

LA's BEST's federal funding sources include the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (Community Development Block grant), U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Justice (Edward Byrne Memorial Discretionary Grants Program). In addition, LA's BEST received \$3.2 million in 21st CCLC grant funds, which are funneled through the State of

California. Without this partnership with LAUSD, LA's BEST would not have been eligible for 21st CCLC funds.

State Funding

The majority of LA's BEST's funding comes from state grants by means of ASES, which are channeled through LAUSD. ASES funding comes from the ballot-based initiative Proposition 49 (Prop 49). Prop 49 increases state grant funds available for school-based before/after school programs, providing tutoring, homework assistance, and educational enrichment in California. LA's BEST received grants in the amounts of \$21.6 million and \$2.8 million (LAUSD is the fiscal agent).

City Funding

Aside from providing office space, the city also provides LA's BEST with General City Purposes funds. In 2009, LA's BEST received over \$2.3 million from the city. The Corporate Office's location in City Hall also gives it access to the facilities and resources in the Mayor's Office.

Private Funding and In-Kind Donation

Approximately 7% of LA's BEST budget is a mix of corporate, foundation and individual contributions. LA's BEST has effectively secured major donations from both corporations and foundations including The Broad Foundation, LA84 Foundation, The Wasserman Foundation, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, The Hauptman Family Philanthropies, Kraft Foods and The Riordan Foundation. LA's BEST has also effectively used the in-kind donations of corporate and government partners to ensure eligibility for ASES funds by meeting the 33% match required by the State Department of Education. Overall, in-kind support accounts for \$5.2 million (13.5%) of the budget.

EVALUATION

Since 1990, an outside evaluator, the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST) at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), has conducted research to assess the effectiveness of LA's BEST. Early evaluation results have shown that students feel safer in LA's BEST than they do in their homes or neighborhoods.¹ Most recently, the U.S. Department of Justice asked CRESST to assess the effectiveness of LA's BEST's ability to reduce juvenile crime. Results demonstrated that LA's BEST participants were 30% less likely to commit juvenile crime than non-participants.² Additionally, in a CRESST evaluation completed in December 2005, LA's BEST participants were 14-20% less likely to drop out of school, particularly those participants with low-income status.³ CRESST's evaluations found that the LA's BEST unique staffing structure correlated to better relationships between staff and students.⁴ In turn, these relationships motivated students to attend the LA's BEST program on a more regular basis, which lead to better student outcomes.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

- ✓ The partnership with LAUSD has allowed LA's BEST to compete for large federal and state funding streams. In addition, it allows LA's BEST to minimize its expenses by providing school sites and insurance.
- ✓ The two-decade long partnership with the city has not only provided critical funding but also increased public awareness of the importance of quality afterschool programming for youth. The city also provides valuable office space for the corporate office.

¹ UCLA Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing. *Evaluation Report March 1, 1990: LA's BEST After School Enrichment Program*. March 1990

² Huang, Denise, et al. *The Long-Term Effects of After-School Programming on Educational Adjustment and Juvenile Crime: A Study of the LA's BEST After-School Program*. UCLA Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing. June 2007

³ Huang, Denise, et al. *Keeping Kids in School: An LA's BEST Example A Study Examining the Long-Term Impact of LA's BEST on Students' Dropout Rates*. UCLA Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing. December 2005.

⁴ Huang, Denise, et al. *Exploring the Intellectual, Social and Organizational Capitals at LA's BEST*. UCLA Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing. July 2006.

- ✓ LA's BEST's use of a balanced co-management model allows each office to maximize the city's or LAUSD's resources and positions LA's BEST as a key partner in helping the city meet its goals for education reform.
- ✓ LA's BEST's diverse funding portfolio allows for the flexibility to sustain program operations while allotting the majority of funds to direct program services. Partnerships with the Mayor's Office and LAUSD have helped LA's BEST attract multiple private donors and establish itself as a model for afterschool programs both locally and nationally.

RESOURCES

- LA's BEST After School Enrichment Program, www.lasbest.org
- *Keeping Kids in School: An LA's BEST Example A Study Examining the Long-Term Impact of LA's BEST on Students' Dropout Rates.* UCLA Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing, www.lasbest.org/what/publications/Keeping_Kids_in_School_Exec_Sum.pdf
- *The Long-Term Effects of After-School Programming on Educational Adjustment and Juvenile Crime: A Study of the LA's BEST After-School Program.* UCLA Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing, www.lasbest.org/what/publications/LASBEST_DOJ_Final_Report.pdf
- UCLA Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing, www.cse.ucla.edu

Laura Martinez, grants manager at LA's Best wrote this profile for The Finance Project. This profile is part of a series of resources developed by The Finance Project to provide information and tools on financing and sustaining youth programs, policies and systems. The Finance Project has not conducted program evaluations of the initiatives profiled and does not officially endorse particular policies, practices, or programs. This Profile was developed under a grant from Underage Tobacco Prevention: Philip Morris USA, an Altria Company. For more information, visit <http://financeproject.org/index.cfm?page=31>.