

Tips for starting or expanding an OST program in your community:

1. **Find a driver.** To be successful, there needs to be someone willing to take on and stick with the effort required to get a program going. It can be a single, dedicated individual or small group of like-minded individuals with a shared vision and commitment.
2. **Find a space.** The children and youth need a safe place to be for your program(s). It doesn't have to be a dedicated facility, by any means. Consider your local library, schools, churches, museums, and youth centers... any organization with a vested interest in supporting and improving your community is a candidate for housing an afterschool or summer program.
3. **Start small, but start.** You don't have to hit the ground with a fully-formed and funded program in place. Consider low cost activities using volunteer facilitation and donated, recycled materials. Things like craft or maker activities using materials like cardboard, plastic bottles, tin or aluminum cans, and newspaper dropped off by members of the community; sports activities using volunteer coaches, and donated or shared equipment; borrow board games or materials for role playing games and host youth who want to play. There are lots of possibilities. Get creative and get started.
4. **Look on-line.** There are lots of web sites with suggestions for program activities, best practices, funding opportunities, and on-line training for program facilitators. You can start with the NMOST web site's repository of resources (<https://nmost.org/> - look for the resources tab on the menu), but don't stop there. Do some general searches for program activities, and look for local or nearby events, resources and opportunities. Check into whether or not there is a local or regional program like Main Street America (<https://www.mainstreet.org/home>), which can provide resources, education and/or technical services to help with a strategy for community building. Your local chamber of commerce may be able to help you determine whether or not a program like that exists for your area.
5. **Make full use of local resources.** Find out what materials or activities are available through your local county extension office. Contact 4H and see what programs or materials they may have that can be borrowed or offered at low or no cost. Consider older youth as facilitators for programs for younger age groups. Also, ask for youth input and suggestions for activities and programs goals. You can do surveys with local sports teams and other youth organizations, in person or on social media, to find out what young people would like from an out-of-school program.
6. **If you build it, they will fund.** There are a lot of options for sources of funding, especially once commitment to building the program has been demonstrated by early, persistent effort. Talk to local businesses about sponsorships, or donations of materials and/or expertise. In particular, think about industries specifically tied to the region by available resources, like mining, gas & oil, forestry, and agriculture. These industries often have a vested interest in supporting the community or region to improve employee satisfaction and to grow their future workforce. Talk to local banks or other financial institutions, local tech companies, and local or regional foundations or non-profits. The local chamber of commerce or tourism board might also find ways to help, financially or otherwise. Check with larger chains in the region, like Lowe's or Home Depot, Wal-Mart, etc. Many of these larger companies have a public outreach component. If they don't have available funding, they might be a source of materials for a facility improvement project using volunteer labor and plans or supervision donated by a local contractor, for example.