Minding the Gap: Changing Systems to Improve Program Access for Underserved Teens

Melissa Mister, Chief Program Officer
Our Mission

**Vision:** After School Matters provides teens with opportunities to discover their potential and find their future.

**Mission:** To provide Chicago public high school teens opportunities to explore and develop their talents, while gaining critical skills for work, college and beyond.
About Us

• After School Matters provides teens with quality after school programming in content areas such as arts, communications and leadership, sports, and STEM.

• We focus on project-based learning, primarily through various levels of apprenticeships.

• We partner with independent instructors and community providers to offer program opportunities across the city of Chicago.

• Teens earn a small stipend for their participation in our programs.
Our Program Components

- Advocate for teens and youth development
- Build opportunities for teens through partnerships
- Engage teens in skills development for work and higher education
- Showcase teen accomplishments
- Disseminate research and best practices about out-of-school time for teens
Supporting Systems: Our Providers

- Government relations
- Advocacy
- Capacity building
- Teen stipends
- Program supplies and resources
- Program model
- Recruitment support
- Data systems and reporting
- Partnership opportunities
- Volunteer support

- Teen showcase opportunities
- Standards setting
- Quality coaching
- Technical assistance
- Professional development
- Mentorship opportunities
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Dissemination of research
Supporting Systems: Our Partners

- City of Chicago
- Chicago Public Schools
- Chicago Public Library
- Chicago Housing Authority
- State of Illinois

- Corporations
- Foundations
- Individuals
- Universities
- Research centers
- Collective impact groups
Local Context – Chicago Public Schools

• Less than 25% of students overall now go to their local neighborhood high school, where they are guaranteed a spot. Chicago Public Schools (CPS) is moving to a new application that tries to better match the choice system and the competition that comes along with it.

• Enrollment in CPS is down by nearly 10,000 students from a year ago.

• The district has experienced instability in both budget and leadership in the last several years.
Local Context – Population Trends

• The Chicago metropolitan area as a whole lost 19,570 residents in 2016, registering the greatest loss of any metropolitan area in the country.

• More than 9,000 black residents left Cook County between 2014 and 2015.

• The Chicago area's population will continue to decline in the coming years, for reasons such as high taxes, the state budget stalemate, crime, the unemployment rate and weather.

• Gentrification debates remain in Chicago, especially for Chicago's historically Latinx or black neighborhoods.

• Hispanic/Latinx is the second largest ethnic group in the city.
Local Context – Violence

• 4,368 people were shot in and 783 homicides occurred in Chicago during 2016. The city’s violence disproportionately affects males of color.

• African American men between the ages of 15-34 were overrepresented in these figures, making up 50% of the homicide victims while only accounting for 4% of the population.

• 19% of these victims were between the ages of 10-19.

• Organizations like ASM play an important part in prevention as they offer teens a safe space during the time of day when victimization is at its highest, between 2:00pm and 6:00pm.
Comparing Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>After School Matters</th>
<th>Chicago Public Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latinx</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Addressing Gaps

In order to ensure that the After School Matters teen population was more representative of the Chicago Public High School population, the organization began to strategically think about the following ideas:

• Availability
• Accessibility
• Acceptability
Steps to Improving Access to Underserved Youth

1. Identify underserved populations.
2. Assess youth needs.
3. Engage all staff to drive the work.
4. Implement systems and process improvements.
5. Use data to evaluate and monitor progress.
Guiding Assumptions

• Teens know what they need and want
• Systems and processes are and should be drivers of change
• There is always room for improvement
• There is evidence (data, research) that can guide our thinking
Identify Underserved Populations
Identifying Underserved Populations

- System’s history, vision, mission, and values
- Goals, objectives, and strategic initiatives
- Board members and other key stakeholders
- Funding streams
- Organizational operations
- Relevant media coverage
- Internal stakeholders, such as youth, providers, and staff
- Partners, competitors, and opponents
- Local and national context
- Population statistics and issues they face
- Relevant legislation and advocacy
- Relevant research on your system
- Relevant research on the population you serve or the problem you address
## ASM Example: Why this population?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Why this population?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Males                 | • Mission to serve Chicago Public High School teens  
                        • Large discrepancy in the percentage of males being served by ASM (~39%) compared to CPS (~50%)  
                        • Young males disproportionately affected by violence in the city  
                        • Funding investments for young males and violence prevention/intervention programs |
| Hispanic/Latinx        | • Mission to serve Chicago Public High School teens  
                        • Discrepancy in the percentage of Hispanic/Latino teens served by ASM (~29%) compared to CPS (~45%)  
                        • Increase in Hispanic/Latino population in Chicago  
                        • Teen and parent requests for Spanish-language materials |
| Diverse Learners (special needs) | • Increase in the number of programs devoted to diverse learners  
                        • Staff and provider requests for more appropriate evaluation tools |
ASM Example: Why this population?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Why this population?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homeless Youth</td>
<td>• Almost 25,000 Illinois youth experience homelessness each year, and about 9,000 of them are in the Chicago area&lt;br&gt;• Teen feedback indicated that questions within the application were creating a barrier to teens without a permanent address</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rising Freshmen</td>
<td>• Freshmen year seen as pivotal year to keeping Chicago students on track to graduate, thanks to metrics such as freshmen on track&lt;br&gt;• Focus on summer programs to help orient students to the high school experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Identity</td>
<td>• 5% of youth are LGBTQ in Illinois, and 32%-40% of homeless youth are LGBTQ&lt;br&gt;• Youth are at greater risk for depression, suicide, substance use, and sexual behaviors increasing risk for STDs&lt;br&gt;• Students were 140% more likely to miss school because of safety concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial and Ethnic Identity</td>
<td>• US Census is working to revise racial and ethnic category options for Middle Eastern or Northern African people to help people more accurately report their identities&lt;br&gt;• Teen feedback from Middle Eastern or Northern African teens and their providers indicated confusion about how to report their identities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Identify Underserved Populations

1. What is your system’s mission?
2. Who is your target population?
3. Are there any subgroups of youth that are underrepresented in your population?
4. How do you know?
Assess Youth Needs

What we found was that people respond much better to our customer service survey when we didn’t contact them 27 times about our customer service survey.
Strategies Used to Assess Youth Needs

Secondary Research
Surveys
Interviews
Focus Groups
# ASM Example: How did we assess youth needs?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Secondary Research</th>
<th>Surveys</th>
<th>Interviews or Focus Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latinx</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diverse Learners</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless Youth</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Rising Freshmen</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Gender Identity</td>
<td>✓</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial and Ethnic Identity</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## ASM Example: What did we learn?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>What did we learn?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Males                 | • Male-to-male recruitment through peers and adults was important  
                          • Males had more schedule conflicts during the school year  
                          • Males were more preoccupied with expenses of getting to and from program as well as their pay  
                          • Perceptions of masculinity prevented some males from joining programs |
| Hispanic/Latinx youth | • Teens highlighted the importance of parent engagement  
                          • Cultural visibility plays a big role in participation; teens need to see themselves in the programs, want programs that fit in with their culture, and want materials provided in Spanish  
                          • Real life work experience, such as job and college preparation or skills development were a main factor in joining  
                          • Competing family and school responsibilities  
                          • Program location is key – issues in safety, transportation, proximity to home and school |
| Diverse Learners      | • Not all items on our quality assessment tool easily lend themselves to diverse learner programs, where teens’ abilities vary widely  
                          • Some items need special consideration or notes, such as youth interaction or youth choice  
                          • The teen survey needs to be pencil/paper, very short, with few response options and pictures |
### ASM Example: What did we learn?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>What did we learn?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homeless Youth</td>
<td>• Teens without a permanent address were unable to make it past the application because the process required a permanent home address</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Rising Freshmen            | • Rising freshmen were unaware that they are able to participate in programs the summer before they begin high school  
• Their principals were also unaware                              |
| Gender Identity            | • There are several options for gender identity and disagreement on the options that should be included  
• Not all teens understand the difference between gender identity and sexual orientation |
| Racial and Ethnic Identity | • Teens who identify as Middle Eastern and North African did not have a way to categorize themselves in the application  
• Teens had to choose both a race and an ethnicity in the application, and not all teens identify with both |
Strategies to Assess Participant Needs

1. What do you think are the barriers to participation for the youth in your programs? How do you know?

2. What strategies might you use to determine the needs of underrepresented youth?

3. Will you need to use different strategies for different groups? Why or why not?

4. Who can help you assess participant needs?
Engage All Staff to Drive the Work
Engaging All Staff

Improving service to an under-represented population is not just the work of the direct service providers. **Make it a part of everyone’s work!**

- Create a cross-departmental or provider working group to focus on issues of accessibility, availability, and acceptability for teens.
- Provide progress meetings at all-staff and leadership meetings, but also provide opportunities for non-program staff to identify opportunities for them to get involved in the initiative.
- Establish shared responsibilities and specifically spell out what each team’s role is in reaching an underserved population.
ASM: How did we engage staff in the work?

• Initiative specific committees
  • The Male Initiative
  • The Latino Access Council

• Integration with other existing committees
  • Teen Application and Selection
  • Program Life Cycle
  • Diversity and Inclusion
ASM: How did we engage staff in the work?

- Recruiting board and advisory board members that are representative of our teens
- Hiring staff and contracting with providers that are representative of our teens and our priority populations
- Hiring alumni as full-time staff and recruiting alumni as providers
- Providing professional development to staff and providers on immigrant youth, males, diverse learners, and LGBTQ youth
- Engaging youth as leaders and thought partners in equity improvement through youth councils
- Engaging staff and providers in discussions about equity and creating solutions to address issues of equity
Engaging All Staff

1. What other teams within your system need to be involved in improving access for your priority populations?
2. What are some examples of ways these teams can be involved?
Implement Systems and Process Improvements

WE’RE HIRING A DIRECTOR OF CHANGE MANAGEMENT TO HELP EMPLOYEES EMBRACE STRATEGIC CHANGES.

OR WE COULD COME UP WITH STRATEGIES THAT MAKE SENSE. THEN EMPLOYEES WOULD EMBRACE CHANGE.

THAT SOUNDS HARDER.
Implement Systems and Process Improvements

Plan
- Identify a problem you want to address

Do
- Implement the solution on a small scale

Study
- Use data to analyze the solution

Act
- Determine what modifications are needed
ASM: What strategies did we implement?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Males</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Secured funding to study male recruitment and retention in our programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Held application sessions specifically for males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Analyzed start/end times of application and whether application was completed by gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increased gender-specific programming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Prioritized male-only programs in Request For Proposal process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Added culminating events that highlight male-only programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Revised program names and descriptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Developed partnerships with all-male schools and other male-focused youth programs to recruit teens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provided professional development to providers on implicit gender bias and recruitment/retention strategies for males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Strategized with individual program providers to increase male enrollment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Hispanic/Latinx

- Created Spanish language application and directions, webpage, hotline, recruitment, and enrollment materials
- Translated all confirmation and notifications to Spanish
- Prioritized programs geared toward Latinx teens in the Request for Proposal process
- Moved Social Security Number request in application to the end of process and made it optional
- Hosted application sessions at high schools with high population of Latinx teens
- Provided professional development to providers on working with immigrant youth
**Diverse Learners**

- Partnered with schools that specialize in diverse learners to provide daytime programming
- Provided a professional development to staff on diverse learners
- Hired sign language interpreters and began an outreach program to deaf students
- Changed language on application to be more appropriate (updated taxonomy for accommodations)
- Updated evaluation processes to be more appropriate for diverse learner programs, including a revised quality assessment and teen survey
- Provided professional development to providers on how to work with diverse learners
## ASM: What strategies did we implement?

### Homeless Youth

- Removed require of permanent address (removes shame or reporting status)
- Developed a resource guide for providers to help refer youth to services as needed

### Rising Freshmen

- Hosted application sessions for 8th graders at their schools during their spring semester
- Adjusted age guidelines for program participation to match school guidelines
- Created a college and career spring break immersive program to target freshmen and sophomores
### Gender Identity

- Creating more options for gender identity (still to be determined)
- Allowing teens to share preferred names in addition to legal names
- Professional development for providers on working with LGBTQ youth, such as asking all youth in the program for their preferred pronouns, creating an emotionally safe space for all teens, etc.

### Racial and Ethnic Identity

- Added Middle Eastern or North African as an option on the teen application
- Removed requiring teens to select both race and ethnicity
Implement Systems and Process Improvements

1. What ideas do you have for strategies that might help improve access for your priority populations?
2. Where else might you look for examples of strategies that could work?
3. Who can you partner with to test different strategies?
Use Data to Evaluate and Monitor Progress

WHEN IT COMES TO DATA ANALYSIS

I EXCEL
Using Data to Evaluate and Monitor Progress

Data can help you at every step of the process:

• Identifying underserved populations.
• Assessing the needs of underserved populations.
• Engaging staff in the work.
• Implement systems and process improvements.
• Monitoring and tracking progress.
• Identifying challenges to address and successes to celebrate.
### Using Data to Evaluate and Monitor Progress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal Setting</th>
<th>Regular Reporting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• How do you define success?</td>
<td>• What data points do you have access to?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How will you measure it?</td>
<td>• Who are the primary users of the data?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Over what period of time?</td>
<td>• How will you make the data actionable to them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How often will you share the data and in what format?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Staff</th>
<th>Branch</th>
<th># Prgs</th>
<th>% Enrolled</th>
<th>% Opps Filled</th>
<th># Programs &lt; 80% ADA</th>
<th>ADA Rate</th>
<th># Prgs Missing Att for Last wk</th>
<th>% Teens Verified 12/06</th>
<th>Survey Completion Rate</th>
<th>% Male Enrollees</th>
<th>% Latinx Enrollees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manager 1</td>
<td>North</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>100.2%</td>
<td>105.7%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>95.5%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>98.9%</td>
<td>82.8%</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist 1</td>
<td>North</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>97.8%</td>
<td>101.0%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>91.3%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>99.2%</td>
<td>84.0%</td>
<td>51.1%</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist 2</td>
<td>North</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>110.1%</td>
<td>115.5%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>103.9%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>97.9%</td>
<td>83.1%</td>
<td>49.3%</td>
<td>42.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist 3</td>
<td>North</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>97.0%</td>
<td>104.6%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>93.6%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>98.6%</td>
<td>75.1%</td>
<td>40.3%</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist 4</td>
<td>North</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>95.7%</td>
<td>101.3%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>93.8%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>89.2%</td>
<td>41.3%</td>
<td>48.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>99.9%</td>
<td>102.8%</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>94.5%</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>98.5%</td>
<td>80.5%</td>
<td>43.0%</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Last Week</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>100.3%</td>
<td>102.6%</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>94.7%</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>98.5%</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>34.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Using Data to Evaluate and Monitor Progress

1. What data do you need in order to be able to determine your system’s current situation and set a goal?

2. Do you have access to these data points? If not, how might you go about getting these data points?
Questions ASM Continues to Consider

1. What is an appropriate goal for the population (i.e., raw number or percentage)?

2. As we increase the focus on serving certain populations, how do we make sure we are not perpetuating stereotypes (e.g., males only want sports programs)?

3. How do we better serve one group without disadvantaging another?

4. How do we address these same issues for our board, leadership, staff, and providers?
Reflection

1. What did you learn that you want to implement in your community?
2. What questions do you still have?
Questions?

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