PARTNERING WITH COMMUNITY ARTS ORGANIZATIONS

A PATHWAY TO A HIGH-QUALITY CLUB EXPERIENCE
PHASE I: Setting the Stage for Success

1. Create a vision for the arts at your Club.
2. Commit to funding arts programs consistently, not solely based on acquiring arts-specific grants. Your arts partnership will likely bring resources to your Club, so funding may not be as big an obstacle as you think.
3. Initiate conversations with potential arts partners - don’t just wait for them to come to you.
4. Be open to possibilities and to figuring out aspects of programming along the way.
5. Prioritize quality in your arts programs - this will support youth engagement, retention and outcomes.

PHASE II: Structuring a Partnership

6. Design the partnership so that it meets the needs of both your Club and your arts partner.
7. Designate a point person at the Club and one at the partner organization who are fully informed about the partnership.
8. Clearly communicate expectations, roles and desired outcomes. Maintain open dialogue throughout the partnership.
9. Co-create programs with arts partners.
10. Consider offering low-commitment programs to encourage initial participation.
11. Enroll members in the art program.
12. Engage parents and caregivers to support their young person’s participation.

PHASE III: Sustaining the Partnership

13. Steward your community partners, thanking them often and finding ways to demonstrate that you value the relationship.
14. Share moments of impact and positive outcomes with partners so they can share in the success and see they are making a difference.
15. Share the credit for success with your partner.
16. Bring the Club arts to the community.
17. Tap into the arts community for connections and resources.
INTRODUCTION

Boys & Girls Clubs of America’s Great Futures 2025 plan is focused on creating positive youth outcomes through higher quality programming. More and more Clubs recognize the value of high-quality arts programs for both creative expression and engagement and retention. That, in turn, leads to positive outcomes, including social and emotional development and academic achievement.

For Clubs seeking to improve the quality and range of arts offerings without significant capital or operating expense, a proven strategy has been to form partnerships and collaborations with community arts organizations. The basis for partnerships and collaborations with community arts organizations is simple: In addition to the resources and arts expertise these organizations offer, they should bring a commitment to positive outcomes for youth while honoring and valuing Clubs’ youth development expertise.

These partnerships enable Clubs to expand arts program offerings and improve their overall quality. As a result, more kids get involved and stay involved. The benefits go beyond developing artistic skills. Youth participants in these programs gain an enhanced positive self-image and sense of belonging, heightened critical thinking skills, and important life skills such as leadership, teamwork and communication.

So how can a Club get started in establishing partnerships with community arts organizations? As a Movement, what we have learned along the way can be shared to help Clubs optimize and sustain these partnerships, and know what to avoid.

This report shares insights on how three Boys & Girls Clubs cultivated, structured and sustained strong community arts partnerships. Whether your Club is just beginning to think about the possibilities of arts partnerships, is developing a new partnership, or is actively engaged in one or more partnerships, this report’s best practices and proven strategies will support you in your work.

We interviewed leaders at three Clubs, and their partners, to understand how arts partnerships work from both sides of the table. The Clubs represent different communities and types of Clubs. The Boys & Girls Clubs of Cheyenne is in a small city set within a largely rural area in Wyoming. The Club has a membership of 550 youth and a $1.2 million annual budget. The Boys & Girls Clubs of Dorchester outside of Boston has 4,500 members and a $4.6 million budget. Right in the heart of San Francisco’s arts district is Boys & Girls Clubs of San Francisco, with 5,800 members and a $12.7 million budget. These three Clubs have different populations, budgets and partners with whom to collaborate, and each had valuable insights and advice on how other Clubs can build effective partnerships.

These Clubs, as well as others throughout the Movement, have successfully identified receptive arts partners. Many arts organizations include community outreach as part of their mission, and partnerships with Clubs help fulfill this aspect.
Additionally, a key component of these partnerships is teaching artists – practicing, professional artists who combine artistry and artistic technique with skills as educators and, increasingly, youth development professionals. The number of teaching artists is increasing nationwide, and many skilled teaching artists are working within and through arts organizations to support Club-community arts partnerships.

“There is growing awareness of the role that arts can play in youth development. The arts bring enormous benefits to youth in terms of social-emotional learning and critical thinking and creativity,” says Elizabeth Brodersen, Director of Education & Community Programs at American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco, one of Boys & Girls Clubs of San Francisco’s partners. “The word is getting out to Clubs and to the youth development field. The arts community is thrilled about this and is eager to partner.”

Clubs that are interested in pursuing partnerships to strengthen and grow their arts programs can find enthusiastic partners in community arts organizations. Clubs can also take advantage of the best practices for partnerships outlined in the following three sections: 1) Setting the Stage for Success 2) Structuring a Partnership 3) Sustaining a Partnership. These sections provide clear steps, ideas, tips and additional resources.

### Comparison of Partnership Success Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>BOYS &amp; GIRLS CLUBS OF CHEYENNE, WYO.</th>
<th>BOYS &amp; GIRLS CLUBS OF DORCHESTER, MASS.</th>
<th>BOYS &amp; GIRLS CLUBS OF SAN FRANCISCO</th>
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<td>Fine arts, music, digital arts</td>
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PHASE I: SETTING THE STAGE FOR SUCCESS

This section is designed to help you form a strong foundation for a partnership. You will find steps to get started, a discussion of how these steps contribute to forming partnerships, and real life examples from the three Clubs.

Steps include:

1. **Create a vision** for the arts at your Club.

2. To achieve the vision, **commit to funding the arts programs consistently**, not solely based on acquiring arts-specific grants. Remember, your arts partnerships will likely bring resources to your Club, reducing your need for funding.

3. **Initiate conversations with potential arts partners** – don’t wait for them to come to you.

4. **Be open to possibilities** and to figuring out aspects of programming along the way.

5. **Prioritize quality** in your arts programs – this will support youth engagement, retention and outcomes.

CREATE A VISION FOR ARTS

Successful partnerships between Clubs and arts organizations often begin with the Club setting an ambitious vision. Creating a vision for the arts will put your Club on track to make progress toward positive youth outcomes. The Boys & Girls Clubs featured in this report all agree that high-quality arts programs support youth engagement and retention and help youth thrive, and thus view arts as integral to their program mix. Committing to a future with high-quality arts programming sets a framework for pursuing and evaluating the right types of partnership opportunities.
Sometimes a Club’s vision for the arts is prompted by youth interest. However, the widespread lack of arts education in schools and prohibitively high cost of private camps and lessons means that many Club youth have not had the opportunity to participate in high-quality arts programs and therefore haven’t identified their interest in the arts. The Clubs featured in this report have strong levels of participation in their arts programs, including participation among older youth.

Rob Connolly, president of Boys & Girls Clubs of San Francisco, sees the link between quality arts programs and the San Francisco Club’s achievement of youth outcomes. “We know that youth want a voice, especially when social issues affect them or confuse them,” says Connolly, “Art is a fantastic way for youth to positively express themselves.”

Connolly’s experience is that arts programs support positive youth development and solve challenges in communities. He has also seen that arts are a way to engage and retain youth, including older youth. Leaders of other Clubs have expressed interest in learning about the success of the Club in San Francisco in using arts programs as a way to engage teens. Connolly adds, “Our art programs are one of the clearest and most inspiring ways that we see our teenagers build skills and progress year-to-year.

“When we can point to an eighth-grader who got into their preferred high school because of the arts, or when the arts are the reason that a high school senior is going to college, we understand that high-quality art instruction can be a very effective youth development tool.”

The arts are featured prominently in the Club’s strategic plan, which discusses how youth participation in arts programs builds or enhances several of the Search Institute’s Developmental Assets for Youth®, a guiding framework for the San Francisco Club’s programs. Indeed, the San Francisco’s Club has a strategic plan that articulates its bold vision for the arts with explicit goals, strategies and metrics.

Boys & Girls Club of Cheyenne’s vision for its arts programs grew out of a strategy to enhance the Club’s visibility and reputation in the local community as it prepared to launch a major capital campaign. “We needed to raise funds for a new facility. Before we could do that we knew we’d have to achieve quality impact and raise awareness of the quality of our programs,” says Chief Professional Officer Rolinda Sample. At the time people in the local community either didn’t know about the Club or were uninspired by a place they perceived to be about keeping youth safe but not offering meaningful programs.

“So our first order of business was to establish a positive presence in the community,” she says. “We felt that art was one solid way to do that.”

To achieve their vision for arts programming, Clubs will need to make a budgetary commitment that is not contingent on receiving grant dollars. “We make a real investment in our arts programs and we do it consistently,” says San Francisco’s Connolly. “Sometimes this happens with grants, but often we’ll fund arts programs with the Club’s general operating funds.”

Clubs that bring clear purpose and intention to their arts programs are well positioned to share their visions with partners and engage in fruitful arts partnerships. In doing so, many Clubs have cultivated partnerships with community arts organizations to expand their resources, capacity and expertise.
PARTNERSHIPS WITH COMMUNITY ARTS ORGANIZATIONS

INITIATE THE CONVERSATION

Club program staff and leadership suggest that the Clubs should start with a strong presence in their communities, and initiate conversations with potential partners, connectors and funders. Networking in the community and at arts community events is one way to identify potential partners. Club staff can also contact the education or outreach departments of an arts organization to see whether the arts organization is willing to schedule a telephone conversation or a meeting. One way for Clubs to fast-track connections is to determine whether any of the Club’s board members have relationships with arts organizations that could result in an introduction. Clubs can also seek the advice of their local arts council or city arts agency to identify potential partners. [See “Identifying Potential Arts Partner Organizations.”]

The Clubs profiled in this report didn’t wait for an arts organization to approach them, although sometimes that also happens. “People would be surprised at how many arts organizations would love to help out with the Boys & Girls Club. By reaching out to them, we open the door to exploring potential partnership and collaboration,” says Boys & Girls Club of Cheyenne Art Coordinator Tes Burns.

In planning for these early exploratory conversations, a Club might include the following on its agenda:

- Communicating its ambitious vision for the arts;
- Articulating what the Club offers that could be relevant to the potential partner (such as youth participants for programs);
- Discussing what the Club is willing to do (such as provide space, manage communications with families, or assist in program supervision);
- Signaling openness to exploring possibilities (see “Cultivate an Innovation Mindset” in the next section).

“If you don’t ask, the answer is always, ‘No,’” says Sample of the Cheyenne Club. “We have asked people to do amazing things to help us, including join us in partnerships, and they have come through.”

As in any good conversation, listening plays an important role in forging relationships in the arts community. “Making yourself available and being an active listener can pay off in enabling you to identify opportunities for collaborations that could benefit your membership,” says Mike Joyce, vice president of programming at Boys & Girls Clubs of Dorchester. In fact, across all three Clubs in the report, arts partners cited the Clubs’ listening and communication skills as being among the primary reasons they saw the Clubs as excellent partners.

CULTIVATE AN INNOVATION MINDSET

Partnerships are often new territory for both parties, making it hard to foresee what will or will not work, even with clear and frequent communication. Being open to possibilities is key.

At the Walter Denney Youth Center of Boys & Girls Clubs of Dorchester, a culture of innovation is reflected in a “try-anything-once attitude,” says Unit Director Queenette Santos. “We can’t predict what the next thing will be that our members are looking for,” she says. “Music is a great example. Who could have known that we would start out with this very small music room and grow to the amazing music program we have now? A lot of this has happened through partnerships.”

“It’s essential to be open to the idea of collaboration,” says Dorchester’s Mike Joyce. “A Club may not feel ready to take on a partnership, but if they do their research and talk to the potential partner, they may learn about additional resources the potential partner can bring.” The San Francisco Club echoed this point in sharing how the San Francisco Ballet purchased portable barres to enable the Don Fisher Clubhouse to offer ballet classes.
In Cheyenne, some three-quarters of the Club’s 550 members participate in instructional arts programs. What drives such an extraordinarily high rate of participation?

“I’d say it’s partnerships, and, in particular, our historic willingness to experiment with partners who can expand and enrich our offerings,” says Rolinda Sample. “I’m essentially game for anything. If the staff comes to me and says, ‘Hey, we want to do this, I usually say, ‘Go for it.’ It’s almost always worth giving it a try - you never know what other great things are going to come out of something.”

Clubs like Cheyenne recognize that there is often a significant upside and limited downside to piloting new approaches, provided, of course, that the programs are implemented in a way that ensures safety and positive youth development. They are willing to experiment and explore possibilities even when the exact destination is unknown. They see no need to wait until a program is polished to perfection before implementing it; they are willing to make adjustments to programs along the way.

Club staff and their arts partners in San Francisco and Dorchester share that successful partnerships are often a byproduct of a shared commitment to “see where this goes” rather than precise planning.

**START WITH QUALITY AND GO DEEP**

If there is a common theme to successful community arts partnerships, it’s the Club’s commitment to quality. Part of the rationale is that by “going deep” in one or more art forms, a Club can establish that its members are capable of mastering artistic techniques and creating great art. To be sure, a trade-off may be required: Rather than offer a vast buffet of options, a Club might decide to proceed more slowly and focus on fewer art forms. These Clubs understand the need to counter the common misperception that Boys & Girls Clubs only do basic arts and crafts with evidence that what they really do is help youth build skills and express themselves creatively.

Demonstrating a commitment to quality is a lynchpin in gaining the interest of teaching artists and enlisting arts organizations as partners. “A potential partner will see the studio and the number of kids making quality art and say, ‘Wow, this is really something legitimate. Okay, let’s go deeper with our engagement,’” says Rob Connolly of the San Francisco Club.

Rob Worstell, head of community and studio art at the Museum of Fine Arts Boston (MFA Boston), describes how Boys & Girls Club of Dorchester’s existing arts programs piqued MFA Boston’s interest in a partnership: “We visited several Boston neighborhoods, looked at different programs and did a lot of interviews. We saw that the Boys & Girls Club had a great art program and felt that we could add things to it and that they could be a really strong partner.” Worstell notes that the fact that the Club in Dorchester has an arts program director on staff gave MFA Boston confidence that the Club would be able to support the partnership in ways that a smaller organization without an arts director could not.

That initial positive impression has led to a multi-faceted partnership that includes instruction from the museum’s arts educators, as well as opportunities for Club members to exhibit their work at the renowned MFA Boston and experience the thrill of prestigious community recognition.

Worstell too, is a firm believer in the importance of quality as a foundation for building enduring arts programs and partnerships. His advice to Clubs: “Start small and do pilot work first. Evaluate the results so you can then show what your success is and what you are learning. That will help you gain the momentum and support you need to move forward.”

When a Club has identified an arts organization that is willing to partner, which may largely be due to the Club’s commitment to quality arts programs, it is ready for the next step: Structuring a partnership and developing the programs it will support.
KEY INSIGHTS:

- Quality arts programs support Clubs in achieving desired youth outcomes.

- Awareness of quality arts programs at your Club enhances your Club’s image in the community.

- Many community arts organizations include outreach as part of their mission, especially to new or future audiences, which often includes youth.

- Arts groups are often open to partnering with Clubs, so don’t be shy about reaching out. Education and outreach departments are a good place to start.

- Clubs can pilot partnership-based arts programs to see what works.

- It is better to start smaller and provide a better quality experience than to go big from the beginning without being ready to provide a high-quality program.

- Quality not only drives youth engagement and retention, it also makes the Club a more appealing partner to arts organizations.

- Exploratory conversations with potential partners can lead to identifying available resources Clubs will need to implement programs, so it’s important to get the conversation going and allow these possibilities to emerge.
IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL ARTS PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

Looking to identify potential community arts partners?

One way to do so is through your local arts agency (Arts.gov/artistic-fields/local-arts-agencies), which works with community arts organizations. There are more than 4,000 such agencies across the country.

If you can’t find your local arts agency through an online search, contact the Director of Local Arts Services at Americans for the Arts at (202) 682-5400.

Staff at your local arts agency may be able to refer you to a potential arts partner who can offer an art form that is of interest to your members, such as drumming, photography or dance. The local arts agency may also help direct you to arts partners who are strong operationally and artistically and whom they would recommend as good potential partners.

What to look for in a partner:

Rather than rushing into partnerships, Clubs should be thoughtful about how potential partnerships can contribute to program quality and youth outcomes. The right partner for your Club will be based on your unique situation. Some criteria and considerations include whether an organization:

• Offers art forms of interest to your members.

• Upholds high standards of artistic merit. Because you want to provide your members with a high-quality experience, it is essential to partner with an organization of artistic excellence. This may be obvious with some potential partners, such as those with long histories and solid reputations for their artistry. For other organizations, you might want to visit an exhibition, see a performance, or ask the staff at your local arts council to get a sense of artistic merit;

• Is financially and administratively stable. Choose a partner that will support conditions for success in the partnership. An arts partner with a major budget deficit is probably not the best choice. If you aren’t sure about the stability of a potential partner, check out their Charity Star rating or their IRS form 990 (both available online) and ask staff at your local arts council or at a local foundation that funds arts organizations.

These are just basic criteria. Once you begin to engage with potential partners, you can further evaluate them based on their interest in your goals and priorities, as well as their own; the alignment of expectations between your organizations; and their degree of responsiveness and communication.
PHASE II: STRUCTURING A PARTNERSHIP

Now that you’ve identified an arts partner, you are ready to get into the work of crafting the partnership. This section provides information and important considerations for setting up your partnership.

Basic concepts include:

1. Design the partnership so that it meets the needs of both your Club and your arts partner.

2. Designate a point person at the Club and one at the partner organization who are fully informed about the partnership.

3. Clearly communicate expectations, roles and desired outcomes. Maintain open dialogue throughout the partnership.

4. Co-create programs with arts partners.

5. Consider creating trial programs to encourage enrollment.

6. Enroll members in the art program.

7. Engage parents and caregivers to support their young person’s participation.

FORGING PARTNERSHIPS THAT MEET EACH PARTY’S NEEDS

The strongest partnerships are ones that are mutually beneficial. Reciprocity and compatibility are important because they provide the necessary motivation for each partner to do the work of establishing and maintaining the partnership.

One way that partners can provide mutual benefit is when each partner is able to fill in what’s missing from the other, resulting in a symbiotic relationship. The partnership between Boys & Girls Clubs of Dorchester and Berklee College of Music provides an example. “No single organization has the whole solution,” says Club Music Program Director Ayeisha Mathis. “In our case, we had the space and the kids – but in the beginning stages, we didn’t have the staffing. So Berklee gave us the staffing and some of the equipment. It took humility on everyone’s side to say, ‘At the end of the day you have what we need to make this work.’”

“It’s all about creating win-wins,” says Rob Connolly of the San Francisco Club. “If only one of the partners is getting all they want out of the collaboration, the partnership simply won’t be sustainable. So it’s critical to have those honest conversations early on – to set expectations and ensure that both parties feel it is bringing them the wins they want.”

PARTNERSHIPS WITH COMMUNITY ARTS ORGANIZATIONS
For Clubs, the most promising partnerships may be with arts organizations whose missions include community outreach and youth audience development, so that Clubs’ youth membership is the missing asset that helps partners deliver on community goals. This was the case with San Francisco Ballet, a partner with Boys & Girls Clubs of San Francisco. Andi Yannone of San Francisco Ballet states, “We wanted to be part of the community and have the community be part of San Francisco Ballet. Having the Boys & Girls Club as a partner feels very organic.”

Several of the community arts partners cited in this report said that gaps in arts education in the regular school day were a motivating factor for seeking partnerships with Clubs. Indeed, Clubs are often located in the very neighborhoods that community arts partners wish to reach. For example, the City Studio program of the San Francisco Art Institute, another program partner with the San Francisco Club, targets underserved neighborhoods such as the Tenderloin, the Mission and the Excelsior, as well as East Oakland, according to City Studio Director JD Beltran. “We focused on those neighborhoods because they all had youth who were probably attending public schools that didn’t have arts programs.”

Community arts partners recognize and value Boys & Girls Clubs’ youth development expertise as well as the range of support services Clubs provide to their young members. Boys & Girls Clubs’ strong brand recognition is another draw: Potential partners extol the positive affiliation and visibility they gain through partnership with Boys & Girls Clubs.

“It’s really good to be connected to a well-respected organization,” says Kathy Vreeland, director of Ballet Wyoming, an arts partner that the Cheyenne Club features in its annual gala. “It’s given us great exposure and helped us reach an audience we ordinarily might not have had access to.”

In particular, linking with Boys & Girls Club of Cheyenne has broadened Ballet Wyoming’s socioeconomic outreach. “Art shouldn’t just be for the privileged few,” says Vreeland. “It should be for everybody.” In fact, access to the arts is a high priority - and a strong incentive to partner with Clubs - for many leaders, administrators and teaching artists of community arts organizations.
COMPLEMENTARY ASSETS:
What Clubs and Arts Organizations Can Bring to the Table

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<th>CLUBS</th>
<th>COMMUNITY ARTS ORGANIZATIONS</th>
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<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>Teaching artists with expertise in artistic techniques and instruction</td>
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<td>Relationships with families</td>
<td>Ideas for program content and approaches</td>
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<td>Knowledge of local communities</td>
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<td>Staff support (general)</td>
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<td>Transportation for field trips</td>
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<td>Ideas for program content and approaches</td>
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<td>Opportunities to make a difference in the lives of young people</td>
<td>Commitment to supporting positive outcomes for youth</td>
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<td>Ability to reach underserved areas and youth populations</td>
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COMMUNICATING EXPECTATIONS, ROLES AND DESIRED OUTCOMES

Effective partnerships are grounded in a clear understanding of what each party brings to the table and what each is responsible for so that each organization can fulfill what is expected of it. Organizations enter into partnerships with good intentions and high hopes. Being specific and clearly communicating what each partner will do and when allows everyone to be a good partner. Both parties can follow through and minimize missteps stemming from lack of communication, which leaves each partner more satisfied with the partnership overall. At both Clubs and community arts organizations, leadership and staff emphasized that frequent, honest communication is indispensable to partnership success and longevity. To support strong communication, each partner should clearly designate a point person – a go-to contact who is fully informed about the partnership.

Boys & Girls Clubs of San Francisco clearly communicates what they want out of a partnership, which includes ongoing opportunities for youth involvement and skill-building. “We start by clarifying what it is that we’re trying to accomplish [with our success equation for youth],” says Rob Connolly. “While we are open to possibilities in program design, we emphasize program sustainability in our discussions with arts organizations. A partnership is much more interesting to us when we know we’ll be in it for the long-term.”
Because the Club in San Francisco is intentional in its approach, it is selective in its choice of partners. But the partnership must be a good fit for its partners too. Consider scheduling, a topic that invariably comes up in partnership discussions. Simply stated, some organizations will accommodate a Club’s drop-in culture; others will not (see sidebar Scheduling and Participation).

That said, as Clubs work toward providing a high-quality Club Experience, it is worth noting that youth become more engaged when programs are led by practicing, professional artists who set clear expectations around attendance and participation. This argues, perhaps, against a strictly drop-in approach, which may not support the skill building that teaching artists provide.

“What I tell kids is that if they want to go onstage one day and do a performance, they have to show up,” says Kay Weber, fine arts director at the Club in San Francisco. “It’s a commitment. If you want to be an artist, regardless of the field, you have to train and practice. You cannot just decide, ‘I have soccer practice this week, but I’ll come next week.’”

That’s not to suggest all arts organizations will balk at working with Clubs on a less formal basis. But regardless of the approach partners choose, early, candid discussion can go a long way toward creating goodwill, preventing problems and ultimately helping programs succeed.

In the beginning, communication between partners is best established through in-person meetings and conversations, with additional exchanges via telephone, email and text messaging. “Creating a long-term relationship is about making time for face-to-face conversations,” says Elizabeth Brodersen of American Conservatory Theater (A.C.T.), an arts partner with the San Francisco Club. Brodersen also notes, “Staff turnover is inevitable, so it’s important to have touch points with multiple people at each partner organization.” By including community arts partners in Club staff meetings and events, Clubs help facilitate multiple points of connection and smooth working relationships.

In addition, each partner should be clear about who is responsible for which elements of the partnership: “In our Saturday ballet class, the ballet teacher is responsible for the kids in her class,” says Yannone. “My assistants and I are responsible for communicating with Nitty Dupree Thomas (performing arts coordinator at the Don Fisher Clubhouse in San Francisco), who is in charge of communicating with the parents. So we are all clear on the chain of communication and lines of responsibility.”

“At City Studio,” says JD Beltran, “[The Club] takes the lead in enrollment and recruitment of students; we provide the teaching artists and materials.”

As a program launches, planning ahead for partner debriefs following the first few program sessions can help address any initial concerns and allow each partner to be informed and feel supported. These early conversations are crucial to establishing a spirit of the partnership as a shared endeavor and to getting the partnership on a good course.

Once a partnership is up and running, ongoing dialogue between organizations is essential. “By keeping the conversation going, we’re able to see what’s working and what isn’t, and make adjustments accordingly,” says Yannone.
PARTNERSHIPS WITH COMMUNITY ARTS ORGANIZATIONS

**SCHEDULING AND PARTICIPATION:**
**FINDING POSSIBILITY VIA FLEXIBILITY**

1. **Enroll members in the art program.**

   “We have found that participation is more consistent when we enroll kids in our art program with MFA Boston rather than running it on a drop-in basis,” says KatyAnn Farrar, art director of Boys & Girls Clubs of Dorchester. As part of the enrollment process, the Club keeps families in the loop about the schedule, expectations and planned events such as a field trip or final performance. This information is typically conveyed in a flyer or email and reinforced with in-person reminders when parents pick up their kids.

2. **Set clear expectations with partners.**

   Every Club is unique, and while all strive to offer a high-quality Club Experience, approaches and cultures vary. Some partners will readily adapt to a drop-in attendance model; others will balk at the idea, but may help cultivate a group of young people who become regular attendees because they are drawn by arts programs. What’s critical is that both partners are on the same page.

3. **Talk to partners about challenges affecting attendance.**

   Kids sometimes face real-life difficulties, such as issues at home, that may get in the way of attendance. When partners understand these challenges, they’re likely to be more flexible and open to finding ways to make programs work.

4. **When attendance lags, follow up with kids and families.**

   “We try to engage regularly with kids’ families,” says Ayeisha Mathis, music program director at the Club in Dorchester. “We’ll chat with the parents when they come in to pick up their child, or call them to remind them of an upcoming event. And when kids don't show up for music lessons, we call home.”

5. **Offer a mix of programs that require increasing commitment.**

   Setting high expectations around participation is a time-honored way to bring out the best in young people, especially in partnership-based arts programs. Many community arts partners note that they partner with Clubs on a range of programs, including some designed for young people ready to commit to rising levels of participation over time.

6. **Consider creating trial programs to encourage enrollment.**

   For young people, a first-time opportunity to try out a new art form can be appealing. The trial program may be in the form of a mini-camp or other short-term offering. “We made a commitment to host a one-week dance camp for Club youth,” recalls Andi Yannone, director of education and training at San Francisco Ballet. “We’re generally not used to working with drop-in programs, which makes skill progression and readiness to perform a challenge. But we put our heads together and helped the kids understand that you can’t just show up to perform, which is what everybody wanted to do. You have to learn something and work as a team. In that way, you can create a dance and perform it together at the end of the week.” That pilot effort was a resounding success, Yannone says, and is now in its third year.
While communications between partnering organizations is crucial, Clubs find that internal communications related to partnerships are

**KEY TIPS**

- Seek your CEO’s support, sharing the benefits you see for the Club and for youth.
- Inform your CEO about the partnership’s progress and success. Invite your CEO to see the program in progress and to attend culminating events such as performances.
- Share information about the partnership with your peers and other colleagues so people are aware of the partnership and programs.
- Talk with your facilities staff about space needs to conduct programs and storage needs for supplies.
- Check in with your CEO or human resources staff to coordinate background checks for your partner’s staff who will work with Club youth.
- Tell your front desk staff to expect partners to come on site, so they are ready to welcome and direct them.
- Share progress and success during staff meetings.
- Let your Club’s marketing and communications person know about your arts partnership so that it can be featured in Club communications. Take photographs of youth participating in arts partnership programs and provide them for the website, newsletter, social media or annual report.

**CO-CREATE PROGRAMS WITH ARTS PARTNERS**

Artists and arts organizations reasonably expect to draw on their own knowledge and expertise in working with Clubs to develop programs. Clubs need to keep that expectation in mind.

“Some years ago a [non-Club] youth organization approached me with an idea they had developed for a dance program,” recalls Dave Urquidez, owner of Dance Spirit Dance Studio in Cheyenne. “I knew from prior experience, both as a dancer and from working with kids, that their idea wouldn’t work. The problem is that they weren’t open to my input, and consequently, I bowed out. Ultimately, the program was discontinued.”

In fact, none of the successful partnerships cited in this report were formed to implement a solely Club- or BGCA-designed curriculum, nor would arts organizations likely agree to such an arrangement. “One of the great things about our relationship with Boys & Girls Clubs of San Francisco is that it is mutual,” notes Elizabeth Brodersen of American Conservatory Theater. “Each group has its own goals, and we work together to achieve them. Neither takes priority over the other.”

In contrast, Brodersen recalls a large, multi-site after-school program that A.C.T. tried partnering with. “They’d imposed restrictions on virtually every aspect of the program and offered us little opportunity to design an original program,” she says. “But teaching artists won’t work that way.”
They’ll do it for a short period, and then they’ll say, ‘I’m sorry, this is not interesting to me.’ They want to be creative and responsive in their work with young people. They don’t want to be viewed as unpaid staff assigned to implement an off-the-shelf program.”

**THE “THIRD PARTNER”**

Family engagement matters enormously in any out-of-school time program, and in arts programs it is essential. It stands to reason: Kids need to participate regularly in order to build artistic technique, gain life skills and complete projects. Parents and caregivers function as a “third partner,” providing the permission, encouragement, direction and support children need to commit and stay with arts programs.

Many programs have culminating events, such as exhibitions or performances. It’s important that family members or caregivers show up for these program focal points. But it’s also up to them to ensure that their children make it to arts program sessions so they’ll be ready to perform or exhibit and have a positive experience doing so. For their part, Clubs must keep families informed regarding events, schedules, program changes and other matters. Absent adequate communication, parents may arrive too early to pick up their child, disrupting the program and truncating the young person’s experience.

When inviting families to culminating events such as performances, Clubs can use invitations to indicate that the event is important and to clearly provide all of the details. Clubs should seek to understand families’ preferred methods of communication and to use them, whether that means email, text messaging, flyers or some combination. Club staff and partners strive to make personal connections with families and to talk with them about the arts program and about upcoming events.

Arts partners also value family engagement. One way they keep parents involved is by conveying to them how their child benefits from participating. “We want parents to know that the arts are about fostering their kids’ creativity, helping them develop problem-solving skills, and instilling the kind of self-discipline that leads to tangible improvement over time,” says JD Beltran, director of City Studio in San Francisco.

With strong, ongoing communication, a shared set of expectations, and supportive families, partnerships can thrive, yielding myriad benefits for youth. Nothing is more disappointing to a young person than having a passion ignited in them only to be deprived of the opportunity to continue to pursue it. To nurture the talents and interests of youth through ongoing programs, Clubs not only partner with arts organizations, they take steps to make sure the partnerships last.
PHASE III: STRUCTURING A PARTNERSHIP

Approaches include:

1. **Steward your community partners**, thanking them often and finding ways to demonstrate that you value the relationship.

2. **Share moments of impact and positive outcomes with partners** so they can share in the success and see they are making a difference.

3. **Share the credit for success with your partner.**

4. **Bring the Club arts to the community.**

5. **Artists often respect, and respond well to, other artists.**

PLAN FOR THE LONG GAME IN BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Clubs with successful partnerships often take a long-term view of ties with individuals and organizations, and nurture these relationships on an ongoing basis. In fundraising, this is referred to as stewardship of donors. The Clubs in this study take a similar approach, stewarding community partners. They make a point of thanking partners often and in a variety of ways, including publicly. They demonstrate interest in their partners, showing up at events to signal support, sometimes when it’s not even expected. For example, Rolinda Sample of Boys & Girls Club of Cheyenne attended the ribbon-cutting ceremony for Ballet Wyoming’s new building, to the delight of the Ballet’s staff and board. This simple act, performed in the spirit of “friendraising,” evidenced the Club’s commitment to its partnership with the ballet and its conviction that the relationship was built on a foundation of mutual support.

These Clubs are adept at maintaining a balance between managing the operational details of their program partnerships with a big-picture, long-term take on what is good for youth and for the Club overall. “Our goal for these partnerships was never about dollars, it was about reaching new people,” says Sample. “We expanded our network to include folks who had never touched the Boys & Girls Club before. Ultimately, these partnerships helped us raise funds and serve more kids with better programs.”
SHARE THE OUTCOMES

When Clubs share moments of insight into the impact of an arts program on the life of a child, the resulting satisfaction and goodwill are oxygen for partnerships – essential and sustaining. Humanity informs these partnerships, where big-hearted arts community members want to make a positive difference for kids – and they feel great when they do.

“I really enjoy hearing how a certain aspect of the programming has brought a child out of his or her shell and made a difference in their life – how the child has grown because they participated in the program,” says Abria Smith, associate director, community affairs and campus engagement at Berklee College of Music, a Boys & Girls Clubs of Dorchester partner.

It is also powerful when partner organization leaders see for themselves the impact of arts programs on youth. “You know what it is when you see authentic joy,” says Andi Yannone, recalling a performance she’d seen by Club youth. “The kids were incredibly happy and clearly felt a sense of accomplishment.”

Successful partnerships with community arts organizations don’t feel transactional. Rather, they are about ongoing relationships, investment and commitment. Successful Clubs take the time to help their partners understand that they are a direct part of young people’s success and connect with youth on a deeply human level that is both inspiring and motivating. So when it comes time for that partner to evaluate the partnership and consider whether to re-up their investment, they’re going to want to continue because they are seeing and hearing how kids are benefiting.

SHARE CREDIT FOR SUCCESS

Partnerships depend on the willingness of people to give freely of their time, talent and resources, but partners also like receiving credit for their efforts. This was born out in interviews with arts organizations of all sizes and types. All confirmed that they placed a high value on being acknowledged for their support from their Club partner. It’s hardly surprising: It feels good to be noticed, and positive recognition, whether communicated personally or publicly, facilitates smooth-running relationships.

YOU ROCK!
WAYS TO THANK YOUR PARTNERS

1. List your partner as a sponsor of your annual fundraising gala.
2. Honor your partner with a partnership award, including something that can be displayed at their organization, such as a young person’s artwork, with an accompanying placard.
3. Thank your partner during public remarks.
4. Display a banner from your partner at your gala or other public event.
5. Credit your partner on your website and in your annual report.
6. Visibly acknowledge your partner inside your Club.
7. Email the director of your partner organization, thanking the organization overall and specifically noting the efforts of your staff contact.
8. Have Club members write thank-you notes to your partner organization.
9. Share anecdotal stories with your partner about the partnership’s positive effects on a young person, thanking them for their role in this life-changing work.
BRING THE CLUB ARTS TO THE COMMUNITY

Gaining visibility in the community, by performing at a Chamber of Commerce event, for example, or exhibiting artwork at a community library, enables young people to achieve public recognition, builds awareness for Clubs, and generates support for partnerships. The Club’s existing partnerships, along with its members’ artistic achievements, can showcase the Club in a positive light and draw the attention of potential new partners.

As part of an overall effort to raise awareness of the Club and enhance its image, Cheyenne’s Rolinda Sample chose to host a youth art exhibition at a public venue in the community. As a result of heightened awareness and positive perception in the community, the Cheyenne Club’s roster of partners has mushroomed over the past several years, as has the Club’s overall operating budget, growing from $400,000 in 2008 to $1,590,000 in 2017.

Partners are often eager to host Club members at their facilities to help broaden young people’s experiences. “When we had a luncheon at City Hall followed by a performance of the Nutcracker by our professional company at the nearby Opera House, we invited Club members and their families,” says Andi Yannone of San Francisco Ballet. “Most had never been inside City Hall or the Opera House, both of which are a stone’s throw from the Clubhouse. We felt strongly that there is so much to experience in our region, from performances to museums and parks, that they should have opportunities to be exposed to them.”

ARTISTS KNOW OTHER ARTISTS

Clubs can tap into the artist community by hiring and partnering with organizations that hire practicing, professional artists. Artists have a high regard for Clubs that hire practicing artists, rather than hobbyists without formal arts training; they see it as an important indicator of commitment to quality programs. Elizabeth Brodersen of A.C.T., a partner of the Tenderloin Clubhouse of Boys & Girls Clubs of San Francisco, reflects, “Kay Weber is a working artist who has been at the Tenderloin Clubhouse for a very long time, and he is very committed. Having Kay on staff at the Club is a structural piece of our partnership that makes it possible and that makes it work.” Besides the fact that a quality program is more likely to be successful and thus to garner the ongoing support of community partners, the signaling effect to other artists can make the Club more attractive as a place to work.

Artists are resourceful, often out of necessity but also as a manifestation of their creativity. To connect with the arts community at the organizational and individual level is to reach into a source of all manner of potential resources, from shared kilns to contributed materials to master classes with artists in town for another gig. So working with artists and the arts community can have exponential impacts and benefits, and these benefits have further enabled Clubs to offer rich and quality experiences to members.

CONCLUSION

High-quality arts programs drive engagement and retention and, in turn, support positive outcomes for youth. Partnerships with community arts organizations are one way for Clubs to expand arts offerings and improve program quality. With vision, commitment and communication – and the steps and best practices discussed in this report – Clubs can create and sustain successful partnerships. When these partnerships flourish, Clubs and partners benefit, and our youth are the biggest winners of all.
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

1 Creative Youth Development National Partnership
   CreativeYouthDevelopment.org

2 Engaging Adolescents: Building Youth Participation in the Arts
   NationalGuild.org/ngCorporate/MediaLibrary/Publications/EngagingAdolescentsGuide.pdf?ext=.pdf

3 Learning in 3D: Arts and Cultural Programming in Afterschool

4 Something to Say: Success Principles for Afterschool Arts Programs from Urban Youth and Other Experts
   This report features a set of 10 principles and best practices that have informed the design of afterschool arts programs throughout the United States. A unique aspect of the report is that the researchers interviewed more than 200 young people and their families, approaching them as consumers, regardless of income, to find out what youth, actually want. They then integrated these findings with views from leading arts programs, researchers on adolescence and afterschool time, and other authorities on effective afterschool arts programming. The report’s principles for developing effective, high-quality afterschool arts programming include:
   • Arts program instructors are practicing, professional artists;
   • Programs take place in welcoming spaces that are designated for arts experiences;
   • Youth have a hand in shaping the programming.

5 SPARKS: How Parents Can Help Ignite the Hidden Strengths of Teenagers
   This book and related works are by Peter Benson of Search Institute, creator of the developmental assets widely used in the field of youth development.
   TED Talk on SPARKS
   YouTube.com/watch?v=TqzUHcW58Us

6 Teaching Artists Guild Website
   TeachingArtistsGuild.org/
ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Denise Montgomery is director of the Creative Youth Development National Initiative. She is founder and principal of CultureThrive, a consulting practice providing services for arts and cultural organizations and for youth organizations. CultureThrive is a strategic affiliate of Next Level Strategic Marketing Group. Denise is co-author with Peter Rogovin and Neromanie Persaud of “Something to Say: Success Principles for Afterschool Arts Programs from Urban Youth and Other Experts,” commissioned by the Wallace Foundation. She wrote the “The Rise of Creative Youth Development,” published in Arts Education Policy Review Journal, and is contributing a chapter, “The Arts and Youth Development,” to the forthcoming undergraduate textbook Youth Development Principles and Practices in Out-of-School Time Settings, to be published in 2018 by Sagamore/Venture Publishing.

Peter Rogovin is founder of Next Level Strategic Marketing Group. As a strategist and researcher, he has consulted for many mission-based, not-for-profit organizations, including museums, foundations, service organizations and professional associations. As a co-author of a Wallace Foundation-published research report on youth arts engagement, he has spoken to audiences of arts and afterschool educators and practitioners across the country. His research has been covered by Youth Today, NPR and other youth development publications. He has provided strategic support and project management for the Boys & Girls Clubs of America’s Youth Arts Initiative pilot project.
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National Headquarters
1275 Peachtree Street NE
Atlanta, GA 30309
BGCA.org