



NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP
FOR *Student Success*



CREATED BY:
The NPSS Hub

DISTRICT ENGAGEMENT BEST PRACTICES FOR NONPROFITS

partnershipstudentsuccess.org

DISTRICT ENGAGEMENT BEST PRACTICES FOR NONPROFITS



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DISTRICT ENGAGEMENT BEST PRACTICES FOR NONPROFITS



Nonprofit organizations across the country are eager to partner with school districts and return to or expand upon their pre-pandemic partnerships. Yet, they have found that school partners do not necessarily operate the way they used to. Many districts paused external partnerships entirely while other districts asked nonprofits to shift their focus and change to a virtual delivery model. Supporting Pk – 12 students post-pandemic, whether as in-school or out-of-school partners, has required nonprofit organizations to adopt a new orientation to the work—one that has relied on a shared understanding of student needs in a specific community and one that has required districts to streamline and prioritize nonprofit partnerships that are best positioned to provide support.

As school districts look to address the needs of their students and seek community partnerships to increase the number of caring adults to serve as [tutors, mentors, student success coaches, student support coordinators, and/or post-secondary transition coaches](#), nonprofits must be ready to build and sustain partnerships at both the school and district level. ***This resource is designed to provide nonprofit organizations with strategies to communicate how they are an indispensable asset to districts. It offers a list of best practices to consider for building relationships with school districts that will position them to sustain partnerships over time.*** The target audiences this resource was created to support include affiliates of national youth development organizations, community-based nonprofits anchored in the people-powered needs of its community, AmeriCorps grantees and partners, organizations that place older adults or college students in P-12 student support roles, and more.

The National Partnership for Student Success (NPSS) is a public-private partnership between the U.S. Department of Education, AmeriCorps, and the Johns Hopkins Everyone Graduates Center. The NPSS works collectively to bring more people into high-impact student support roles as tutors, mentors, student success coaches, postsecondary transition coaches, and wraparound/integrated student support coordinators through collaboration and capacity-building efforts with schools, districts, nonprofits, intermediaries, and state and local government agencies.

DISTRICT ENGAGEMENT BEST PRACTICES FOR NONPROFITS



The following is a list of the common themes that surfaced from a series of conversations with community-based organizations, NPSS Supporting Champions, and school districts that value community-based partnerships and understand firsthand the complexities of sustaining them.

Nonprofit organizations serving youth can consider the following strategies and best practices when communicating with districts and sustaining program partnerships.



RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT: STRATEGIES & BEST PRACTICES

IDENTIFY CHAMPIONS:

Enlist a cadre of champions within the district with which to partner—at least one at each partner site but ideally more—who can speak to the value of the partnership. Champions may reside in the school-based leadership team, grade-level or content area chairs, or staff that coordinates out-of-school time programming. Losing a champion can disrupt a partnership, so it is critical to have more than one. School champions offer insight into program quality and direct student impact; they know how the program delivery model operates at the school-level and what factors best support the day-to-day for students. As important, school-based champions can advocate to the school leader and speak to the direct impact in classrooms or in an out-of-school time setting.

Equally critical, it is important to establish or re-establish a district point of contact. A district champion can advocate for the program with decision-makers and provide support to navigate the nuances of any district approval processes.

The size of the district may determine which team or department manages partnerships for the district. Community engagement or external partnerships may reside within the superintendent's office. That said, school champions are the best link to make the necessary district introductions, either directly or through the school principal.



RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT: STRATEGIES & BEST PRACTICES



PROVIDE CHAMPIONS WITH TIMELY TALKING POINTS:

One-page program overviews and actionable impact reports can be helpful tools to support champions in their advocacy efforts. Educator testimonials can also be helpful, particularly those that speak to student impact as well as the structures of support that make the partnership effective and efficient. Finally, a district champion who is willing to serve as a reference for other prospective district partners is a powerful tool and a testament to the time invested over year(s) of a successful partnership.

ALIGN TALKING POINTS WITH DISTRICT STRATEGIC VISION:

Know the strategic priorities of the district and customize the proposal and talking points to align. Where relevant and appropriate, use the language the district uses when articulating their priorities, and be sure that proposals and requests of the district are anchored here. For example, if addressing chronic absenteeism is a district priority, how does the student support(s) help students feel a sense of belonging and connectedness to school and help to address chronic absenteeism? Beyond that, show what unique value volunteers or staff bring to a school district. For example, if the program engages older adult volunteers such as AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers, they are likely to serve for many years at the same location.

IDENTIFY A NONPROFIT SINGULAR POINT OF CONTACT:

Make sure the nonprofit organization has a single point of contact for the district and any school partners. It is also helpful to utilize the district's preferred method of communication—most often, it will be email. Identify individuals that should be included on any communication with the district. Include the nonprofit's primary point person's contact information on the talking points provided to school and district champions. Ensure that email requests are consistently sent from the organization's point of contact, even when other members of the organization might be cc'd on the emails or referenced. An introductory email sample is available in Appendix I.

RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT: STRATEGIES & BEST PRACTICES



COMMUNICATE EARLY & OFTEN:

District budget season typically begins in the winter, and budgets are finalized by the school board and district leaders in early spring for the upcoming academic year. Staffing decisions also begin during the prior academic year. For these reasons, it is best to plan any scaling or partnership expansion well in advance.

More districts are streamlining volunteer and partnership processes at the district level. There may even be a program application or request form, along with a centralized process for volunteer background checks. If the initial relationship is established at the district level, identifying schools as program sites and school-based staff to support the partnership may not be solidified by early fall. That said, communicating early and often can mitigate going into the new academic year with sites unknown.

Once key district contacts and agreements are in place, communicating early and often will support the development of trust and strengthen the relationships in place; these communication strategies can sustain the partnership, even when challenges arise that could otherwise threaten the relationship. Consider sending a uniform, regular email update utilizing a template to build consistency and transparency. For example, include updates to share school-based program data, staffing updates (challenges and successes), program attendance, promising signs of success, and more.



RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT: STRATEGIES & BEST PRACTICES



COMMUNICATE PROGRAM TIMELINE & EXPECTATIONS:

While program delivery is where the magic happens for young people, the opportunity to make an impact can be negatively or positively affected by the structures established to build shared timelines and shared expectations with school and district points of contact. These opportunities create space to help partners understand the nonprofit's mission, gather feedback, and fully deliver on the student needs identified by the district. Critical structures include:

- **Onboarding:** Share a presentation that reiterates the project goals and helps to identify project roles and staffing structures. This is also a good time to finalize alignment on district needs, especially as the academic year gets close and student enrollment is solidified. During this time consider asking for a week or even a date for the beginning of the year that is best to avoid disrupting the first days of the academic year.
- **Beginning of the Year (BOY):** Consider a virtual or phone meeting with school-based champions or program points of contact. This should largely be a listening meeting for members of the nonprofit organization to learn from district and school staff about early progress. Nonprofit organizations should also consider sharing an agenda and questions in advance of the meeting and build in time to focus on both celebrations and challenges.
- **Midyear:** Data and program surveys and any unanticipated staffing changes may best be addressed at midyear. This is also the time to make decisions to shift program delivery, as needed, for the second half of the academic year (if feasible) and begin the conversation about the continuation of the partnership for the following academic year.
- **End Of Year (EOY):** This meeting is a good time to discuss quantitative and qualitative data. However, the coordination of end-of-year program evaluation data and any early findings, should all be collected in enough time to use this meeting for a conversation grounded in these data points.

RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT: STRATEGIES & BEST PRACTICES



- **Ongoing:** Invite school and district staff to join the organization's newsletter. Include a targeted email blast to share highlights, testimonials, and a look ahead, particularly around any deliverables, data, and evaluation.

Additionally, many nonprofits have a program agreement, Memorandum of Understanding or Agreement (MOU; MOA), or data sharing agreement with school districts. Depending on a district's policies and practices, that agreement may need to be sent through a formal approval process that could include input from legal counsel, and, in some cases, require a vote from the district's school board or governing body. A formal agreement provides:

- An explicit version of shared goals for the scope of work,
- District responsibilities or agreements,
- Nonprofit responsibilities or agreements.

Sample components of an MOU can be found in Appendix I.

A SPECIAL NOTE FOR AMERICORPS STATE & NATIONAL AND AMERICORPS SENIORS PROGRAMS:

To meet obligations as a federal grantee, programs may need to include specific roles, responsibilities, or practices within any agreement reached with the district or school. Check relevant AmeriCorps requirements to identify information related to volunteer training and support, program implementation, and data collection, and map those requirements to a timeline that accommodates the district's needs while allowing the nonprofit organization to uphold its responsibilities.

RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT: STRATEGIES & BEST PRACTICES



- **Show Impact:** Districts rely heavily on data—academic data, attendance and engagement data, intervention and growth data, and much more. Nonprofit organizations should develop a resource that highlights the organization’s successes, particularly any data and testimonials directly from school-based staff, families, and students. Amplify success stories using social media.
- **Focus on Equitable Access:** Whenever possible, nonprofit organizations should identify areas where there is the greatest student need and provide equitable access to people-powered support. Equitable access might include targeting a specific grade span across multiple districts (e.g. 8th to 9th grade transition), identifying schools within a district that are serving a majority of students furthest from opportunity, or partnering with a school that has been hard to staff. Community foundations and youth advocacy groups can provide additional data when an organization is conducting a needs assessment to match with prospective districts and schools.
- **Acknowledge & Celebrate District Partnerships:** Nonprofit organizations can acknowledge and celebrate district partners in numerous ways, both big and small. Annual reports create opportunities to do both. Blog posts and social media provide small yet more frequent ways, and making space at events to invite and acknowledge district partners is also important. Consider these when building an annual calendar for events and content development and build intentionality around how best to do this during important programmatic milestones, such as annual stakeholder events, volunteer appreciation, teacher appreciation, and more.
- **Don’t Give Up:** If a nonprofit organization doesn’t succeed the first time when making contact with a district, it should consider the unique challenges a district may be facing and the timing of the partnership request—that doesn’t mean giving up. Nonprofit organizations should consider the best way(s) to engage, even asking the district for feedback. If the timing is challenging, reassure the district the opportunity for partnership will be available when the timing is better. The nonprofit can schedule a time to reconnect, even checking with the district if this would be helpful. Yet, communications should balance persistence with flexibility. See Appendix I for an example.

ENGAGING OLDER ADULTS: SHOWCASE QUALITY PROGRAMS WITH DISTRICT PARTNERS



Older Americans are some of our nation's most engaged citizens. AmeriCorps Seniors grantees, including those operating Foster Grandparent and RSVP programs, provide volunteer opportunities across the nation. They provide pathways for more than 140,000 caring adults to serve their communities, including in support of youth. AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers serving with the Foster Grandparent program serve in the same school for an average of six years, building strong bonds with their school, educators, and students. AmeriCorps funds many national, regional, and community-based programs that offer training, placement, and support to provide older adults an opportunity to engage with young people in their communities.

And yet, the return on investment when engaging older adults might go unnoticed if nonprofits are unable to showcase the incredible benefits of intergenerational learning. Making the case on the potential for both the young people and the older adults who serve isn't always as easy as it sounds, so below is a list of tips to consider.

- **Interview program members and share the content** on the organization's website and in social media. Links to examples and even an interview template to customize can be found in Appendix I.
- **Share retention data**, at the national and local levels, and showcase the bright spots in the data around the mental health and academic benefits of intergenerational learning.
- **Celebrate the wisdom of older adults** and encourage them to show vulnerability and to build relationships with the young people they support.
- **Make the case for how grandparent figures can support the social and emotional well being of students** through mentorship in recruitment and promotional materials. [Intergenerational programming](#) is beneficial to both older adults and the young people they support.

ENGAGING OLDER ADULTS: SHOWCASE QUALITY PROGRAMS WITH DISTRICT PARTNERS



- **Highlight the power of older adults in local communities.** Older adults are often anchored in their communities and have been for many years, even decades. Districts can often access additional community resources from the connections that an older adult has already established. Whether it's to recruit additional volunteers (e.g. through older adults' connection to a faith-based organization or senior center) or identify and secure wraparound resources (e.g., food pantries and clothing drives), older adults bring abundant resources to their service.
- **Engage older adults as champions.** Older adults became another group of champions a district can count on to support schools in their communities. At a time when teachers and other education professionals often feel overwhelmed, it is critical that as many people in the community as possible recognize how challenging their jobs can be and make the case for providing educators with additional tools, resources, and other support.



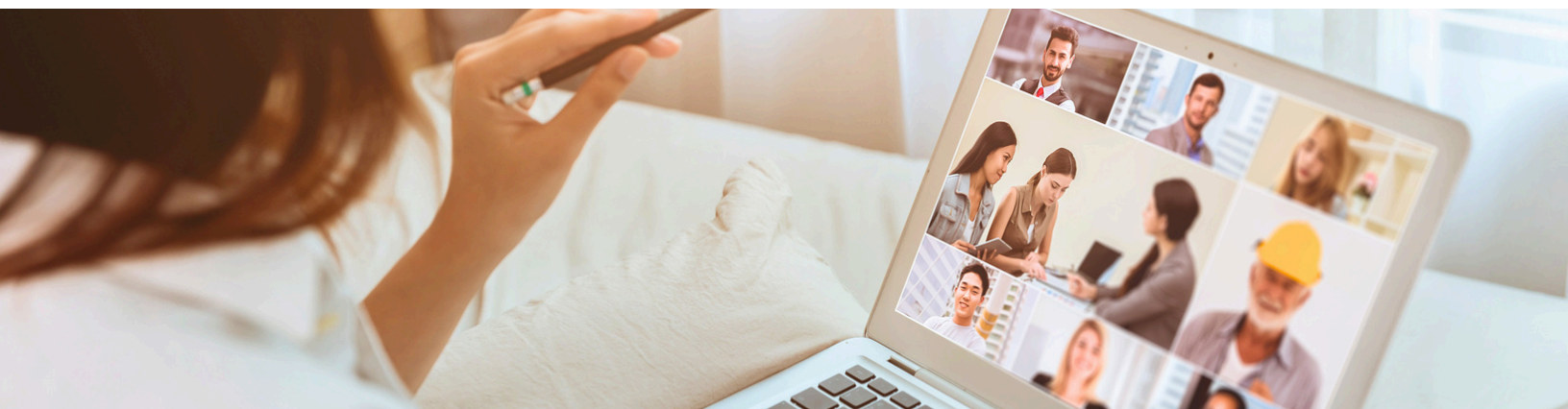
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR LEARNING MORE

The NPSS Support Hub located at the Everyone Graduates Center provides technical assistance and has also curated and/or developed several other [resources](#) to support partnerships between districts, schools, and nonprofits, institutes of higher education, and government. These include:

- [NPSS Support Hub Voluntary Quality Standards](#)
- [District Partnership Toolkit](#)
- [Leveraging National Service in Your Schools](#)
- [Key Resources for Schools & Districts to Increase Capacity in Student Support Roles](#)
- [Planning Toolkit for Collaborative Goal-Setting Events](#)
- [Digital Backpack: Resources to Address Chronic Absenteeism in Your Community](#)
- [Districts Addressing Chronic Absenteeism \(Spotlights\)](#)
- [Higher Education Partnership Toolkit](#)

CHECK OUT THESE RESOURCES ALSO DESIGNED TO SUPPORT NONPROFITS IN PARTNERING WITH DISTRICTS TO SUPPORT YOUTH:

- [Leveraging National Service in Your Schools](#), by AmeriCorps
- [Build Forward Together Conversation Guide](#), by The Readiness Project
- [School and Community Partnerships Toolkit](#), by the Youth Development Executives of King County



APPENDIX I: SAMPLE COMMUNICATION TEMPLATES & CONSIDERATIONS



SHOWCASING IMPACT:

- Promotional videos with actual program members provide opportunities to showcase programs for multiple audiences, including district partners.
 - [Grandma Ginny](#) is a fantastic example of such an interview. She and her 7th grade students have been creating memories together for over four years in Madison, WI.
 - [Sharon's Story](#) as an AARP Foundation Experience Corps is another testimonial which also showcases impact data embedded into the promotional video.
 - [Bill](#) is an older adult AmeriCorps member who serves with AARP Foundation's partner program Literations in Boston, Massachusetts. For the past 18 years, Bill has not only helped students learn to read but also connected with them to strengthen their social and emotional skills.
- Program member interview questions to consider:
 - Why do you choose to support young people in your community? *Encourage the member to highlight program name, the programs' unique qualities that increase engagement, and outcomes.*
 - How do you support young people in your community? *The program member should include more details about the role, the time commitment, and what the support entails.*
 - What kind of training or support program provide so you feel prepared to support young people? *Members share more about the training and ongoing support provided by the program.*
 - How do you know you are making an impact? *A version of this question helps program members share progress they see in the young people they support and when possible, growth/achievement data too.*

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- How is the program experience impacting your life? Highlight the reciprocal nature of the benefits of the program to its members.
- How important is tutoring in schools today? *Share the impact of tutoring, especially today while schools recover from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.*
- Sample Social Media & Website Content:
 - [Instagram presence](#) can be a helpful tool to share images that “show don’t tell” the impact an organization has in its community.
 - [Website content](#) is important to reference for district partners. Posting bite-sized content gives prospective partners an understanding of the organization’s value, impact and testimonials.
 - Creating a [one-pager](#) that can anchor an email or an introductory conversation also makes for a great “leave behind” to share, either virtually or in person.
 - Another special note for AmeriCorps State & National and AmeriCorps Seniors programs: AmeriCorps’ recruitment toolkit is designed to help grantees tune their program messaging and showcase the impact of national service members in communities. Find PSAs, social media shareables, graphics, communications toolkits, and more. Learn more here: <https://socialpresskit.com/chooseamericorps>
- Email Templates:
 - For a new partner introduction, consider having a school-based champion make the e-introduction. Offer to provide some additional information for the content of their email or immediately follow up the introductory email with a request to schedule a chance to meet.

APPENDIX I: SAMPLE COMMUNICATION TEMPLATES & CONSIDERATIONS

- Sample language: <Organization Name> partners with school districts to increase the number of caring adults in the lives of young people. We are proud of the impact we've had in more than XX schools/communities, serving XX students, and we welcome the opportunity to share more about our impact and how we might partner with <District Name>. Please let me know if you have time to meet virtually or in person in the next two weeks to discuss partnership opportunities. Additionally, <Organization Name> created this one-pager to share more about our work. Thank you in advance for your time, and I look forward to meeting with you soon.

PARTNERSHIP ESSENTIALS: [SAMPLE MOU, MOA FOR SCHOOL/DISTRICT AND LEAD PARTNER](#), BY THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

- Potential content for MOU to consider:
 - Nonprofit/school information
 - Start date and end date
 - Program details:
 - [Partnership Goal]
 - Implement agreed upon deliverables including:
 - [deliverable 1]
 - [deliverable 2]
 - [deliverable 3]
 - Requirements for background checks
 - Payment terms and grant information (if applicable)
 - Reporting requirements

WE APPRECIATE SUPPORT FROM THESE CONTRIBUTING ORGANIZATIONS



- [Background Checks](#) best practices curated by MENTOR
 - Background checks processes are dictated by district protocol. Consider how the organization might streamline processes to collect information and submit to the proper authorities.
- [Interest Forms](#) are helpful tools to collect initial interest as well as maintain consistent information across prospective partner districts. It is also a highly effective passive way to always be open to partnership.

This resource is a publication of the National Partnership for Student Success Support Hub at the Johns Hopkins Everyone Graduates Center.

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- KP Catalysts
- Senior Adults for Greater Education (SAGE)
- School's Out Washington (SOWA)
- Throughline Learning
- Youth Development Executive of King County

Have an example you wish to share? Please email jenlopiccolo@jhu.edu and include a link as well as a brief explanation of how the resource could be used to communicate with districts and sustain program partnerships.

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