



SPERLING CENTER
FOR RESEARCH
AND INNOVATION



HARNESS THE POWER OF OST PROGRAMS

5 Strategies to Maximize Your Impact

Families nationwide look to local community providers for a range of afterschool, expanded learning, and out-of-school time (OST) youth activities. However, in a post-COVID world, providers are navigating a challenging and increasingly competitive environment that may require innovative ways to harness the unique value of their programming.

As a trusted advisor to a variety of OST providers, SCRI's commitment to innovative strategies rooted in data provides a unique perspective on how to maximize your impact. These 5 recommended strategies result from years of client partnerships maximizing their data, implementing effective strategies to achieve impact, and co-creating organizational plans to realize their growth.

COVID's Lingering Impact

While most of our economy has returned to some degree of normalcy, many OST providers are still struggling to adapt and grow in a post-pandemic world.

Increased competition to attract families, offer cost-effective programming, and retain staff are just some of the challenges faced in today's OST market.

Tough decisions to survive

For many OST providers, the majority of their budget is fueled by programming fees or funding sources. Over the past few years, SCRI has seen the dramatic drops in funding and family participation drive a number of tough decisions to ensure sustainability, such as:

- Staff layoffs
- Program and initiative reductions
- Sale-leaseback plans or facility closure
- Alternative funding sources, such as philanthropy

These decisions greatly impact local families, especially those who rely on community-based childcare services and youth programming.

Increasingly competitive landscape

As providers seek to harness the power of their OST programming, understanding their unique value and offerings in the community can continue to build brand reputation amongst a growing competitive field.

Planning for the Future

OST program providers are navigating multiple business challenges—tough labor market, financial constraints, decreased family participation, and intense competition in communities they have served for decades.

Maximizing community impact requires innovative strategies rooted in actionable data and unique solutions.

Focusing on these 5 strategies can not only maximize impact, but sharpen how OST providers position the value of their programming to enable sustainable growth.

5

Strategies to Maximize Your Impact



QUANTIFY AND AMPLIFY YOUR IMPACT



OBSESS ABOUT YOUR FAMILIES



KNOW YOUR COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE



INVEST IN TALENT



COMMIT TO YOUR STRENGTHS



1. Quantify and Amplify Your Impact

Many OST providers need to diversify their revenue sources, such as securing government and philanthropic grants.

These sources often require rigorous reporting of programmatic outcomes and impact—far beyond the usual activity measures of number of participants and attendance. This shifts the focus to the result or *impact* of the offering on the participant.

Developing a strong and comprehensive measurement strategy enables you to:

- **Align specific outcomes** to gauge your progress with strategic goals, such as academic interventions and boosts
- **Fulfill grant requirements** and shape future funding goals
- **Market your results** to attract new families and revenue sources
- **Foster a strong data culture** that drives continuous quality improvements in both how you manage your programming staff, as well as the experience of the youth and families you serve



2. Obsess about Your Families

Cultivating a deep understanding about what your families and participants care about, their behaviors and expectations needs to be a top priority for you and your staff.

Driving a regular data collection cadence of family and participant surveys, focus groups, and staff feedback can yield powerful insights to inform your decisions. This will allow you to:

- **Analyze family and staff satisfaction and the quality** of their experiences
- **Examine participant feedback** to gain perspective on your programming
- **Elevate community awareness** of your offerings
- **Shape pricing strategies** by aggregating key data insights
- **Identify potential gaps** in your programming or amenities
- **Collect family feedback** on engagement with staff
- **Drive family engagement** and reduce churn by analyzing predictive factors



3. Know Your Competitive Advantage

Families have so many options for their youth programming. It is critical to not only understand the local competitive landscape, but to confidently differentiate the value of your programming.

As an example, SCRI's recent analysis of YMCA member surveys clearly demonstrates a consistent theme that aquatics and fitness are one of the most important and sought after amenities in the community. This insight can drive a marketing strategy to increase awareness of their full range of offerings, thereby increasing retention and revenue.

Family surveys and deeply analyzing participation data can uncover both predictive factors that drive retention and loyalty, as well as those that can cause disengagement and churn.

Thoroughly understanding the 'why' behind family choices, as well as your unique value in the community fuels the ability to position your programming as the best choice for families and their children.



4. Invest in Talent

Every day and with every family and youth interaction, your staff serve as brand ambassadors shaping your reputation in the community. Recruiting and retaining high-quality, professional staff requires strategic upfront investment.

Many OST providers find their highest impact professionals are those leading their youth development and childcare offerings. Understanding your most strategically valuable positions to drive participant growth and family retention can guide how to invest wisely in staff.

These upfront investments reap many rewards, such as:

- **Increased family and participant retention** given strong and lasting relationships with staff
- **Higher staff retention** given competitive pay and benefits
- **Lower ongoing costs** of recruiting and onboarding
- **Fewer program reductions** or facility closings due to insufficient staff
- **Reduced instances** of program and/or senior staff needing to 'fill in'



5. Commit to Your Strengths

Given the potential opportunity to competitively position and harness the impact of OST programming, many OST providers need to take a critical look at their current portfolio of services and programming. Consider the questions in the box as you begin to critically examine your portfolio of offerings.

- Which offerings are **most valuable to families and participants** and why?
- Which offerings **drive the greatest revenue**?
- Which services and/or programs have **narrow margins** given cost to operate?
- Are there portfolio areas that will **face decreased utilization** in the future?
- Are there **offering gaps** that can create competitive advantage?
- Which **offerings need to be re-imagined** to reach a broader audience?

Want More?

Looking to differentiate your value and maximize your impact in your community?

We can help!



 sperlingcenter.org

 info@sperlingcenter.org