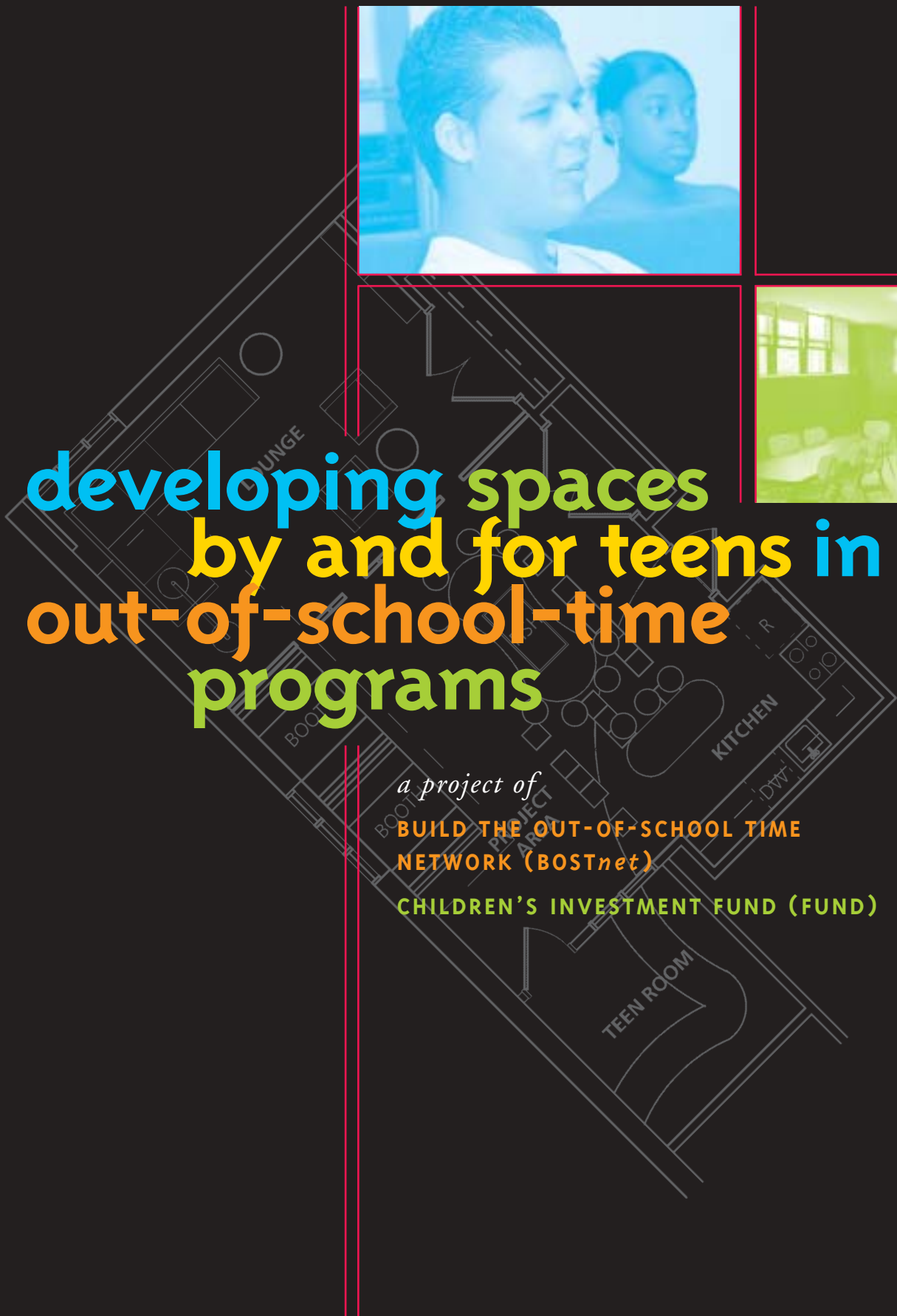


developing spaces by and for teens in out-of-school-time programs

a project of

**BUILD THE OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME
NETWORK (BOSTnet)**

CHILDREN'S INVESTMENT FUND (FUND)



developing spaces by and for teens in out-of-school-time programs

*based on lessons and practices from ten years of
the Facilities Initiative of Children's Investment
Fund and Build the Out-Of-School Time Network*



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contents

About the the Facilities Initiative • 2

Acknowledgements • 3

Introduction • 4

Teen Voice • 6

Feasible Planning and Design • 10

- ▶ **PROJECT DESIGN** • 11
 - Functionality • 11
 - Location • 11
 - Furnishings, Fixtures, and Equipment • 11
 - Layout • 12
 - Adult Space • 14
- ▶ **THE DESIGN PROCESS** • 15
 - Building Your Project Team • 16
 - Selecting an Architect and Other Team Members • 17
 - Other Design Factors to Keep in Mind • 18
 - *Creating a Realistic Timeline* • 18
 - *Securing Community and Leadership Support* • 19
- ▶ **UNIVERSAL DESIGN** • 19
- ▶ **GREEN DESIGN** • 20
- ▶ **BUDGET AND FUNDING** • 21

Leadership Commitment to Completion • 22

Conclusion • 24

Appendices • 25

Resources • 30

References • 31



about the Facilities Initiative

ABOUT BUILD THE OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME NETWORK (BOSTnet)

Build the Out-of-School Time Network's (BOSTnet) mission is to enhance the quality and increase the capacity of the out-of-school time field and ensure that all families have access to a rich network of out-of-school time opportunities that challenge, reward, and inspire children and youth.

For twenty years, BOSTnet has linked families, program providers, and policy makers to build a network of resources that support increases in the quality and accessibility of out-of-school time opportunities for all children and youth, regardless of income or abilities.

BOSTnet's annual *Guide to Boston's Before and After School Programs* is the leading information resource for families who need to find out-of-school time services in their neighborhoods. **For more information, visit www.bostnet.org, or call 617.720.1290.**

ABOUT CHILDREN'S INVESTMENT FUND

Children's Investment Fund (Fund) was founded to ensure that children and youth have the opportunity to learn in safe physical environments designed to support their healthy growth and development. The Fund offers loan and grant financing and technical assistance to non-profit providers planning a facilities project. It supports the improvement and expansion of facilities for early education, out-of-school time, and youth programs. Over the years, the Fund has become known for working hand-in-hand with program directors to realize their vision of attractive, child-friendly and functional facilities. **For more information, visit www.cccif.org, or call 617.727.5944.**

MORE ON THE FACILITIES INITIATIVE

BOSTnet and the Children's Investment Fund established the Facilities Initiative in 1997, to address the absence of capital and planning support for out-of-school time program physical spaces. For a decade, the Initiative has supported renovations and construction projects for out-of-school time program providers throughout Boston. Both extensive field experience and research convinced BOSTnet and the Fund that the physical environment retains a powerful influence on improved youth development and education in out-of-school time programs. The Facilities Initiative combines capital grants with technical assistance on how to successfully complete a capital project as well as assistance in understanding the role of the physical environment in improving program quality.

The Initiative also provides funds for planning, which allows providers to hire architects or conduct feasibility studies to better prepare for a renovation or construction project. Furthermore, most Facilities Initiative projects have been able to use Facilities Initiative grants as seed money to leverage additional resources from other sources—nearly \$2.75 for every dollar invested by the Facilities Initiative. In nine funding cycles, the Initiative provided \$3.4 million to over 100 providers in Boston—programs of every size in community-based and faith-based organizations, schools and other public buildings.



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introduction



THERE IS ONE CRITICAL DIFFERENCE between space developed for teen programs and space designed for younger children. *If you build it, they won't necessarily come.* Teens and older youth have more autonomy and independence regarding how and where they spend their out-of-school time. Their parents no longer transport them. There may be limited school or program-sponsored transportation—or they may choose not to use it. Experienced teen program personnel know that the key to attracting and sustaining teen participation is to involve them in all aspects of program design.

This includes planning and developing the space where the program operates. *Developing Spaces By and For Teens* grew out of the work of the Facilities Initiative—a ten year collaboration between BOSTnet and the Children's Investment Fund in Boston, Massachusetts. The Facilities Initiative was launched to expand the availability of out-of-school time care in Boston. Originally we worked with organizations starting, expanding or improving programs for elementary and middle school children. Several years ago, in response to inquiries from organizations working with older youth, we expanded the Facilities Initiative to include funding and technical assistance to teen programs.

This guide is written to share information and lessons learned from helping finance, design and develop high quality space for programs for teens and older youth.

- ▶ We include general guidelines applicable to most programs.
- ▶ We present strategies and models for building or enhancing teen program space.
- ▶ We share tips from architects experienced at working with teens on design teams.
- ▶ We show how the Facilities Initiative has been influenced by current research that helps shape program content and an understanding of trends in the field—research that confirms that high quality space leads to higher staff engagement, which in turn leads to better outcomes for teens.

And throughout this guide, we include voices from programs that designed and developed high quality spaces with teen input—for the most important lesson is that involving teens and youth in planning, designing, raising funds, and advocating for their vision is critical to the success of your facility project. We remember—and urge you to remember as well—the motto of a group of teens in Chicago: **"Nothing about us, without us."**

Lessons from the Facilities Initiative

Several key principles emerged from successful Facilities Initiative projects for older youth. These include:

1. A recognition of the critical role of the teen voice in shaping successful projects,
2. An understanding that planning and design processes require extended periods of time and attention,
3. The importance of a strong commitment to completion among program leadership and other stakeholders.

INCLUDE TEENS IN PROJECT PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

Designing space for older youth is different from similar projects for their younger peers because teens have a greater say in how and where they spend their time, both in and out of school. It is imperative to consider this increased autonomy from the initial planning stages and to develop strategies for building teen engagement into the process of planning your project. For example, one Boston area program, Zumix, developed an educational component integral to their design process. They paired teen council members with their architect to conduct site visits to other teen centers and community centers. There they examined the elements of good design and also noted where the design might have been improved. This component was built into the planning timeline and was one factor in architect selection.

Other projects have used the artistic talents of their teen participants to help shape the “look and feel” of their renovated space. The Blackstone Community Center Teen Program, for example, supports the artistic talents of their teen participants while improving the interior of their renovated space. With wall space dedicated to mounted writing and art display surfaces, their interior spaces incorporate both flexibility and an ongoing venue for teen input.

ALLOW SUFFICIENT TIME FOR PLANNING AND DESIGN

The Facilities Initiative projects are varied in size and history. Yet, in every case, the program has needed to assess its organizational capacity and goals before pursuing a renovation or construction project. Planning is crucial and is too often overlooked or given little attention. Before launching a building renovation or a major furnishings purchase, there are a number of critical steps:

- ▶ Reflect on your current program capacity;
- ▶ Examine your program mission and its related activities;
- ▶ Assess how to meet the needs of participating teens, staff and volunteers.

In our experience, a small program with part-time staff that operates in shared space is unlikely to be able to support a

major capital campaign. Similarly, a program that services a wide variety of community needs, yet has not developed a strong out-of-school time program, may not have the necessary experience to effectively consider its space needs. Even a national organization's affiliate with some degree of fundraising support must analyze staff capacity in order to find time and energy to manage tasks related to a renovation.

Two examples from recent Facilities Initiative projects that illustrate the need for early planning:

- ▶ One program found that time spent pursuing municipal permits and approvals disrupted the project's timeline and staff members' focus on the building project.
- ▶ In another case, planning discussions identified noise and distraction issues in a multi-purpose space used for out-of-school time programming. The space was “big enough” and yet poor acoustics interfered with program activities.

SECURE A COMMITMENT TO COMPLETE THE PROJECT

We found high levels of staff turnover in many out-of-school time and teen programs. With this in mind, we recommend building a broad level of support to ensure project continuation should any part of the team leave his/her job. Simply, a facilities renovation is not a short-term project. While a few individuals may spearhead it, the project needs broad support from program personnel, community members, and teen leadership in order to withstand setbacks that may occur should there be staff attrition.

The Facilities Initiative often requires an express commitment from not only the program director or agency executive, but also from other relevant stakeholders. A successful capital project requires reaching a critical mass of supporters, which may be program directors, school principals, community members, pastors, and the school district to ensure that everyone supports the capital project.

References to these core principles will be repeated and further developed throughout this guide. We believe they influence project planning, implementation and completion and urge you to consider them as you examine and plan your own project.



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