



What Do You Want in an Afterschool or Summer Program?

A Note On Public Agenda's Choicework Guides

Public Agenda **Choicework Guides** support dialogue and deliberation on a wide variety of issues. They have been used in thousands of community conversations and classrooms, by journalists and researchers, and by individual citizens looking to gain perspective on public issues.

Each guide is organized around several alternative ways of thinking about an issue, each with its own set of values, priorities, pros, cons and tradeoffs. The different perspectives are drawn both from what the public thinks about an issue, based on surveys and focus groups, as well as what experts and leaders say about it in policy debates.

Customizing to fit your situation

Note that the Choicework Guides are meant to help people start thinking and talking about an issue in productive ways—they are not meant to rigidly restrict thinking or dialogue. The perspectives described are not the only ways of dealing with the problem, nor are the viewpoints mutually exclusive in every respect. Many people would mix and match from different perspectives, or add additional related ideas.

Additionally, users of these guides have the option of providing various kinds of nonpartisan information along with them as context for a conversation.

Public Agenda's Community Conversations Model

Public Agenda often uses these guides as discussion starters for community conversations as part of a larger program of community dialogue and action. Such conversations are frequently a solid first step toward new partnerships and initiatives.

Public Agenda's approach to community conversations involves several principles and guidelines that can be flexibly applied to different settings:

- Local, nonpartisan sponsors/organizers
- Diverse cross-section of participants, "beyond the usual suspects"
- Small, diverse dialogue groups with trained moderators and recorders
- Nonpartisan discussion materials that help citizens weigh alternatives (Choicework)
- Strategic follow-up to connect dialogue to action

If you would like to learn more about Public Agenda's approach to public engagement, or to see a full list of our **Choicework Guides** (including print, Spanish and video versions), please visit the Public Engagement section of our web site at www.publicagenda.org.

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What Do You Want in an After-school or Summer Program?

Introduction

We know that life moves pretty fast today and that you have a lot going on. You have responsibilities with school, homework, friends, family and work. Plus, you might also be thinking about what you're going to do after you finish high school. Do you see yourself going to college or into a career training program? Or do you plan to get a job and get trained on the spot? No matter what, you're going to need a certain set of skills called "21st century skills" to be successful.

We know that to be successful you'll need to be good writers, problem solvers and communicators, and you'll need to be able to work as part of a team and deal with lots of different kinds of people. We also know that most of the high-paying jobs will require a strong background in science, technology, engineering and math (even those that don't require a 4-year college degree). All of these skills are called 21st century skills, and they are the tools that you will need to get good jobs after high school or college. These jobs are in lots of different fields from nursing to auto mechanics to architecture and the arts.

Unfortunately, your schools and teachers have a hard time teaching you all the skills you need, because classes are so big and time is so limited. So, it's really important to find ways to make sure you have the education and tools that you will need to succeed in life. One of the places you can get those skills and experiences are in after-school and summer programs. But what should those programs be like? What kinds of activities are you looking for in an after-school or summer program?

This conversation is about what kinds of things would make you want to be involved in different types of after-school or summer programs.

To help you and your friends talk about this, we have four different approaches for you to discuss. These choices will probably have some ideas that you like and some that you don't. But, we need to start somewhere. Which ideas do you like the best? Why?

Approach A: Programs that will help you catch up or stay ahead in school

You know that your teachers are busy; your parents are too. And, you might need help in subjects like math or science that your friends and parents don't know how to give you. But you know that math and science are important and you could use some one-on-one help in a different setting outside of school. You think that after-school and summer programs should help you with these subjects to make sure that you are able to keep up or stay ahead in class. You would go to a program that:

- Had people who understand how different students learn differently and can give you focused one-on-one tutoring time in the subjects you're struggling with
- Gave you low-pressure chances to take practice tests and then had people there to help you figure out the test results and identify your strengths and weaknesses in key subjects
- Gave you a quiet place to focus on homework and had people on hand to offer some help when you need it

If you would like a program like this, you might say:

"I try really hard in school, but sometimes I need more help. I want to get good grades, so I would like to have extra one-on-one help with the subjects I'm struggling with the most."

If you wouldn't like a program like this, you might say:

"I get all the tutoring support I need during school hours, but school isn't preparing me for life. What I need are some experiences that get me ready for handling the responsibilities of life after high school."

Approach B: Programs that will teach you life skills

School is fine, but you just want to graduate, get a good job and start taking on the responsibilities of being an adult. You really want a program that will teach you the skills to be successful in life. You want to learn how to be independent, and you really want to get out there and work in the real world to get the kind of experiences that will help you get a good job. You would go to a program that:

- Taught you life skills like how to interview for jobs and manage your personal finances
- Let you practice some teamwork and leadership skills by working on real community-improvement projects in your neighborhood or city
- Connected you to a mentor from your community who has the kinds of skills you'd need for success in a job

If you would like a program like this, you might say:

“I need some help getting ready to take on the responsibilities of being an adult, and I want to be around people who can teach me the things that I’ll need to know to get a good job and succeed in life.”

If you wouldn't like a program like this, you might say:

“I don't need help learning how to manage my finances or interview for just any job. I want some help connecting the dots between subjects I study in school and the interesting, high-paying career options that exist for me if I do well in school and continue my education.”

Approach C: Programs that offer a safe place to have fun and get some exercise

With all the testing and pressures in school, there's very little time for you and your friends to have healthy fun. Afterschool ends, most kids are pretty much on their own without anything to do, and that's a recipe for bad decisions. Without anywhere safe and fun to go, kids either sit around eating junk food and playing video games or are out on the streets getting into all kinds of trouble. What you most want is a safe place where you can have some fun and be active. You'd go to a program that:

- Wasn't structured around learning, but just created an inviting space for you to hang out with their friends and listen to music
- Gave you a chance to try out different kinds of physical activities like dancing, karate or yoga
- Made it possible for you to play different informal team sports like soccer, volleyball or tennis (but that didn't come with all the pressure or demands of being on a school sports team)

If you would like a program like this, you might say:

"We're getting pushed all the time to study more, learn more and think more about our future. I want a place where I can go and have fun!"

If you wouldn't like a program like this, you might say:

"I get plenty of time to have fun with my friends, but there aren't many chances to get exposed to the world outside of my high school bubble. I need programs that will help me think about my future in a more creative way."

Approach D: Programs that make learning relevant

Too much time in school is spent sitting and listening to teachers telling you what you need to know for the test, but almost nobody is telling you why it matters and there are almost no opportunities to see how what you're learning applies in the real world. What you're really looking for are opportunities to see what kinds of cool jobs are out there for people with all those skills everyone says you need. You'd go to a program that:

- Made it possible for you to interact with people who have interesting, high-paying careers (like videogame designers) to learn what it's like to have those careers
- Allowed you to visit different companies and job sites to connect what you're learning in school to the real world (like recording studios, architecture firms, construction sites)
- Connected you to older students in colleges and career training programs who'd help give you interesting, hands-on, project-based learning opportunities you couldn't get in school

If you would like a program like this, you might say:

"I don't need help doing my homework; I need help understanding why my homework matters. Show me how what I'm learning will matter later in life and make what I'm learning in school relevant."

If you wouldn't like a program like this, you might say:

"I can already see the connections between what I'm learning and what my life will be like after high school. I'd rather spend my time afterschool and during the summer playing sports and getting some exercise."

Summary

Approach A: Programs that will help you catch up or stay ahead in school

You want programs that:

- Provided you one-on-one tutoring time with talented tutors in the subjects you're struggling with.
- Gave you low-pressure chances to take practice tests and support to help you identify your strengths and weaknesses in key subjects.
- Gave you a quiet place to focus on homework and had people on hand to offer some help when you need it.

Approach B: Programs that will teach you life skills

You want programs that:

- Taught you life skills, like how to interview for jobs and manage personal finances.
- Let you practice some teamwork and leadership skills by working on real community-improvement projects in your neighborhood or city.
- Connected you to a mentor from your community that has the kinds of skills you'd need for success in any job.

Approach C: Programs that offer a safe, fun place to relax and get some exercise

You want programs that:

- Aren't structured around learning, but just create an inviting space for you to hang out with your friends and listen to music.
- Gave you a chance to try out different kinds of physical activities like dancing, karate or yoga.
- Made it possible for you to play different informal team sports like soccer, volleyball or tennis (but that didn't come with all the pressure or demands of being on a school sports team).

Approach D: Programs that make learning relevant

You want programs that:

- Made it possible for you to interact with people who have interesting, high-paying careers (like videogame designers) to learn what it's like to have those careers.
- Allowed you to visit different companies and job sites to connect what you're learning in school to the real world (like recording studios, architecture firms, construction sites).
- Connected you to older students in colleges and career training programs who help give you interesting, hands-on, project-based learning opportunities you couldn't get in school.

Using this Guide in a Community Conversation, Discussion Group or Classroom Setting

After discussing the choices on the previous pages, you may wish to consider and talk through the following questions.

Summarizing a Choicework Conversation

These questions are a good way to summarize a Choicework dialogue, prior to considering more action-oriented questions.

1. In our conversation so far, have we discovered any common ground? What do we agree on or have in common?
2. What were our important areas of disagreement—the issues we may have to keep talking about in the future?
3. What are the questions and concerns that need more attention? Are there things we need more information about?

Bridging from Dialogue to Action

These questions can help you move from deliberation and dialogue about the issue at hand to actions that can help address the issue.

1. How can we work together to make a difference in our community on the issues we discussed today?
Note: if this question generates a long list of potential actions, they can be prioritized by asking each person to list his or her top three ideas
2. Is there anything that you, as individuals, might do, or do differently, as a result of today's conversation?
3. What would you like to see happen to follow up on today's conversation? What should the immediate follow-up steps be?

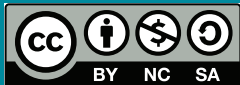
About Public Agenda

Public Agenda is a nonpartisan, nonprofit research and public engagement organization. We work to ensure that the public has the best possible conditions and opportunities to engage thoughtfully in public life and that decision-making by leaders is well-informed by people's values, ideas, and aspirations. Our programs aim to inform public policy, strengthen communities, and empower citizens.

Want to Learn More?

Want to find out more about Public Agenda's distinct approach to improving public life? Interested in connecting with other citizens to address critical issues? If so, you can check out our online community and sign up to find out about activities that bring people together to strengthen their communities. Email us at publicengagement@publicagenda.org. You can also keep in touch by becoming a fan on Facebook or by following us on Twitter @PublicAgenda.

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