

## Promising Practices in Afterschool

NIOST is one of six national organizations across the country that has been funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation to collect promising practices in afterschool. Each organization collects practices from different geographic areas and program auspices.

NIOST's focus is identifying system building and infrastructure practices from the 20 cities across the country participating in the Cross-Cities Network. Practices are collected on an ongoing basis and are submitted to the AED Center for Youth Development and Policy Research where a review team evaluates the practices to ensure they are valid. Once practices pass successfully through the review process, they are posted to the [www.afterschool.org](http://www.afterschool.org) web site so that others may learn from them.

To learn more about the Promising Practices Initiative or to submit your own practice, please visit [www.afterschool.org](http://www.afterschool.org)

Or

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# Promising Practices

## Creating Infrastructure to Support Volunteer Involvement

### Hands on Atlanta and Atlanta's Afterschool Programs

Hands on Atlanta (HOA) is a non-profit organization that enables individuals and families, as well as corporate and community groups, to volunteer at more than 400 service organizations and schools in the Atlanta community. One of the largest impacts HOA has made on Atlanta has been in the arena of afterschool programming. Starting 14 years ago, HOA set out to create a system of school reform through volunteer civic engagement by providing occasions for direct citizen involvement with local schools. Initially, the hope was to assist local schools with tutoring and the implementation of afterschool programs. Today this assistance is provided to students in 32 schools throughout Metropolitan Atlanta. HOA manages the largest group of AmeriCorps volunteers in the Southeast with 100 members who serve as teaching assistants, tutors, mentors and volunteer coordinators at 24 elementary schools, six middle schools and two high schools in the Atlanta community. It is with this tremendous amount of support that HOA is able to provide two major afterschool programs that serve approximately 1,200 youth in the Atlanta metro area.

### Discovery Program

The Discovery Program, with 14 years of history servicing Atlanta's youth, is the longest running out-of-school time program developed by HOA. On Saturday mornings throughout Atlanta, the Discovery Program provides many children extra opportunities to receive assistance with their reading and math skills. Children from low-income communities in Atlanta are able to participate in enrichment activities that work to promote both higher levels of self-confidence and greater aspirations. In order for this time to be beneficial, HOA elects a Grade Captain for every grade who meets with the school liaison, generally a teacher, in order to ensure that there is a thematic focus between the current classroom curriculum and that of the Discovery Program. As one director with HOA stated, "<Discovery Program> has been a serendipitous relationship...adults show up and kids show up and great things happen."

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The statements made and views expressed are solely the responsibility of the author.

# CityWorks

## Reading Adds Up

Reading Adds Up is the result of a recent partnership between HOA, the Atlanta Public Schools and Project GRAD Atlanta. By committing to as little as one hour a week during afterschool hours, volunteers are able to assist both elementary and middle school students who are either reading below their grade level or struggling with math concepts. Reading Adds Up volunteers not only succeed in improving students skills, but they also help to increase each participating child's confidence and chance of academic success. Upon completion of Project GRAD, over 50% of students were achieving at the same academic levels as other students in their grade!

HOA recognizes the importance of aligning all afterschool programs with the state mandated standards. This means reviewing the current curriculum to make sure that HOA's afterschool programs are addressing all the key areas. This is often made easier through the presence of AmeriCorps volunteers. AmeriCorps members are at the schools all day, from 9:00-6:00 P.M. and can serve as a liaison for ensuring that HOA's programs are linking to the school improvement plans.

## Support from Atlanta Public Schools & Business Community

Part of what enables HOA to be so successful in its assistance to the Atlanta Public Schools (APS) is its one-size does not fit all approach to programming. By partnering with schools, HOA is able to tailor both their afterschool programs and trainings for volunteers, in ways that meet the needs and align with the priorities of each community. HOA's ability to accommodate community needs helps gain support from local principals. Also, in order to receive the endorsement of the APS, HOA afterschool program workers fill out a lengthy proposal expressing their hopes and priorities for

their projects. In exchange for the proposal the APS will provide some funding and assistance in outlining program components and suggestions for interacting with parents and the local community.

Having Atlanta's Superintendent of Public Schools as a champion of HOA and its school program has placed them in a position to obtain financial support from local foundations and corporate sponsors.

Contributors are able to see their assistance as an added value; an investment in the school system. Additionally, corporations view HOA as an outlet for employee volunteerism. With the increasing desire for corporations to get employees out in the local community helping others, HOA is a perfect venue for such participation and support. In fact, 37% of HOA's current volunteers are employees of their sponsoring corporations and foundations!

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## HOA Organization Structure

In 1989, 12 individuals living in Atlanta sought out opportunities to give of their time for the betterment of their city. However, upon seeking out occasions to volunteer they discovered that Atlanta lacked a cohesive structure for coordinating and organizing opportunities for its citizens to engage themselves through volunteerism. So, this group of 12 took it upon themselves to form an organization that would do just that.

Much to the surprise of the initial 12 founders, 100s of Atlantans showed up for HOA's first orientation in 1989. Today, only 14 years later, that couple of hundred has grown exponentially with HOA now working with 25,000 of Atlanta's citizens.

All of HOA's frontline workers servicing Atlanta's 32 public schools in out-of-school time activities are volunteers. Each site has anywhere from one to four AmeriCorps volunteers working as a team with one of the volunteers serving as a team leader.

Coordinating operations for the leaders and their teams are the Program Managers, who are also volunteers. Assisting the Program Managers is the Director of School Programs, who reports directly to the Executive Director of HOA.

## Strategies for Sustaining Community Involvement in Atlanta's Afterschool Programs

Another one of HOA assets is its ability to keep volunteers interested and eager to help. With 25,000 volunteers actively participating in events, HOA has created a number of ways of keeping participants engaged:

1. Volunteers play a large role in HOA's structure and organizational direction. HOA provides volunteers with an opportunity to have a stake in one of HOA projects as well as the sense of ownership felt by volunteers who choose to make a positive impact on Atlanta. HOA views all forms of volunteer leadership as critical. Each school that works with HOA has a captain that works to represent HOA while building crucial relations with school faculty and staff.
2. HOA manages 100 AmeriCorps volunteers who make a ten-month commitment to the organization to work both during the school and afterschool hours. Having such a substantial base staff with a long-term commitment provides a great deal of stability to afterschool programming.
3. Additionally, part of what keeps these individuals around is HOA's thorough project planning, orientation and on-site infrastructure. Tutoring and assistance to volunteers is seen as a system priority: if you want to make a difference through volunteerism, you will be supported.

HOA provides a comprehensive and stable infrastructure for volunteer service to support Atlanta's children and youth in out of school time.

### Pull Quote

## Resources:

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