

# **Coordinating Quincy's Kids**

A Plan To Streamline Quincy's After School Activities

by

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## Overview

In July of 2006, a group of stakeholders concerned with Quincy's youth began meeting to discuss issues affecting the children of the city. The group consisted of representatives from Quincy Public Schools, city officials, local and regional police, elected officials, non-profits, the clergy, parent groups, local citizens and private business.

This group became known informally as the Quincy Youth Concerns Discussion Group.

One recommendation of this group was that an effort be made to better coordinate the after school activities and programs offered in Quincy. Recent research by participating groups also showed that parents are concerned that they are not aware of after school programs, and that many of the ones of which they are aware are not accessible to their children (financial reasons, program requirements, etc.)

This paper discusses how a coordinated online system can be used to create more opportunities for Quincy's youth, without requiring any programs to add personnel or increase funding. This online tool would then be used to compliment the efforts of after school program providers, and network those providers together with regular, formal meetings.

Members of the discussion group have done some preliminary research that will be used to assist in the success of this effort.

The project is estimated to take a year from approval until it is online and available to the city. Direct expenses are estimated to cost about \$25,000, and do not include personnel time.

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# Need & Purpose

## THE NEED

Even with many citywide youth programs available to Quincy's children, many have seen declining numbers. Efforts like the YMCA's Teen Center report much lower numbers than in the past, and programs such as Koch Club closed down due to low numbers after almost sixty years of service.

To compound this issue, police have noted the numbers of youth loitering the streets have significantly increased. The Wollaston section regularly sees numbers bordering on mob-like, especially behind the Wollaston Manor building on Clay Street.

What may start as simple loitering quickly escalates as the police respond to complaints and are forced to ask the children to move along. Doing so only displaces the problem, and when the children return, the police are forced to take tougher measures. Loitering becomes disobeying a police officer, and children are eventually arrested.

## THE PURPOSE

Getting the kids off the streets and into available after school programs and centers would help solve this problem. Currently, there is no citywide coordination to ensure that the available programs cover the maximum amount of time possible. For example, two programs may be open on Wednesday night, but neither open on Thursday. Having one move to Thursday would increase the number of nights children would be able to participate.

Additionally, parents and city residents have noted that they are not aware of all of the programs available to their children. Linda Stice's "Purple Book" is a great resource for information on programs for younger children, but a more encompassing effort is needed. Printed materials are expensive to update, and a real-time online system is timelier.

The purpose of this paper is to recommend an online system that will allow program directors to coordinate activities, maximize the amount of program time available to children, and to make it easier for parents and concerned citizens (such as teachers) to become more aware of these programs.

## GOALS

The goals for this online system and coordinated effort are as follows:

1. Maximize the amount of time available to children for after school programs.
2. Encourage after school programs to network and coordinate their efforts in ways that maximize their resources, and potentially reduce expenses.
3. Make parents and children more aware of programs, and give them easier access to important information regarding participation.

# The Online Resource

## WHY ONLINE

The Internet is one of the most important information resources today. Over half of all American homes have broadband Internet access, and almost all places of employment are connected to the Internet. Both Quincy Public Schools and the Thomas Crane Public Library offer Internet access. In addition, mobile phone providers are increasing the number of plans that offer Internet access.

An online system for coordinating programs and disseminating information would allow a central, easy point for all stakeholders to participate, and provide the ability to update program information instantly.

## A CONTENT MANAGED SYSTEM

The online after school coordination resource will be a content managed system (CMS) with different user permission levels. When after school program managers log in they would have access to menus not available to the general public. Program managers would be able to edit information about their programs through their web browsers, and that information would then be available to all users.

For example, a program manager for the evening basketball program at Sacred Heart School's gymnasium could log on to the site and modify the phone number to contact the program. That new number would instantly be available to parents looking to enroll a child in the program. Parents wouldn't be able to modify that phone number because they would not have permission on the site, nor would they be presented the menu options to even access the back end of the system.

Due to the robust nature of CMS systems, program managers would not be able to modify the information for programs to which they are not authorized.

## FACILITATED CONVERSATION

Another helpful aspect of a CMS is the ability to offer online discussion areas where key stakeholders can easily interact. Currently, many after school program managers aren't aware of all of the other programs in the city. Being able to reach each other online through a discussion board will connect these programs in a way that maximizes their limited time. In addition, it allows the use of time shifting, or the ability to have a delayed conversation where one person asks a question, and the other answers it when they go online. These conveniences will make it easy for program managers to interact more frequently.

## CHILD SAFETY

The online resource will at no time display private information about any children. A set of rules governing the usage of the site will be made available to help after school program managers monitor and manage the site so that child safety procedures are enforced.

# The Process

## TOOLS NEED RULES

No online resource solves all problems simply by existing, and that's why part of this project will involve regular meetings with key stakeholders. In addition to the online discussions the site will foster, key stakeholders will be invited to regular meetings similar to the discussions started by the Quincy Youth Issues Discussion Group.

## PROJECT OWNERSHIP

The system would best be served by having one city department ultimately responsible for hosting and administration. A central authority (such as the Recreation Department) already has processes in place to facilitate this effort, and has the resources and contacts within the city.

## CROSS-PROGRAM COORDINATION

The centralization of after school program information and coordination encourages positive program interaction. Programs will have easier ways of communicating and coordinating, thus potentially providing new ways to share resources, volunteers, and other key aspects of successful programs. Perhaps a citywide behavior code could be developed so that children have one set of rules to follow across all city programs. Such coordination would encourage the participation of children citywide, as one program could naturally port participants to other programs on other nights.

## Expenses And Timeframe

### PERSONNEL

The most important aspect of this effort is that it is a city-run project. Coordinating it through the recreation department makes sense because Quincy Recreation is already the biggest after school program provider in the city. Personnel in place to manage after school programs will simply be asked to shift some of their time from traditional and print channels to online efforts – something Quincy Recreation has already begun doing by making their print materials available online.

### DEVELOPMENT COSTS

There are many low -cost (and free) CMS systems that will work well for this effort. The largest expense will be in designing and coding the web site. There are many local web development companies that can provide a competitive quote for this service. A development cost of \$20,000 is a reasonable price for a project of this magnitude.

### EQUIPMENT AND HOSTING COSTS

The city has servers to host the site, and the Internet access necessary to make it available to the public. If the city Information Technology department determines that a new server is necessary, a cost of \$5,000 is reasonable for a new web server. This price may be significantly lower if the software necessary to run it is already available due to existing license agreements.

## TIMEFRAME

From start until launch, this project will take approximately one year. The saying “measure twice, cut once” is especially applicable to web-centric information resource efforts. Coordinating all of the programs, involving personnel in the process, and obtaining information and input will take months. A realistic timeframe is presented below:

Phase Name	Explanation	Time Required
Discovery	Recruiting all after school program managers. Hosting regular meetings to learn more about program schedules, requirements, locations, and additional key information. Involving all key stakeholders in the process and discovering information vital to the project.	4 months
Information Architecture	Assembling the information into a logical site map, complete with wire frames of each site page. Developing user flows to map site usage.	3 months
Design & Copy	Designing a graphical layout of the site, and creating the copy deck.	2 months
Development	Coding the layout and copy deck into a web site using the information architecture materials as a blueprint. Testing the system once coded for web browser compatibility and potential errors.	2 months
Population	Populating the site with after school program information.	1 month
	total	12 months (1 year)