

Accessing Local Resources for Youth Development: Municipalities and Counties

Local governments can be a key partner for youth development programs. This collaboration can be in the form of funding, space, materials, and even programming. Funding opportunities are not limited to legislative bodies; other local taxing districts such as parks and libraries are ripe for partnership.

Ins and Outs of Municipalities and Counties

There are 39 [counties](#), 281 incorporated [cities and towns](#), and even more [special government and taxing districts](#) across Washington state. While each operates a bit differently depending on population, history, and structure, there are many commonalities much like those found across school districts. Each locality has elected officials responsible for making funding and other decisions, as well as departments (although in some areas it may be a department of one) that implement and make other types of decisions for the jurisdiction. Most localities in Washington have a calendar year budget and the budget process kicks off in late summer or early fall and concludes in November or early December with a budget enactment date of January 1st. It's important to note that while technically a budget year may begin in January, local agencies may have to develop rules, create an implementation plan, and even hire new agency staff before a funding stream or new policy is fully implemented.

Overview of Youth Development

Youth development is a strength-based approach that inclusively engages children and youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families in a manner that is culturally responsive. High quality youth development programs recognize, utilize, and enhance young people's voice and leadership strengths. And they promote positive outcomes by providing equitable opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support for young people to reach the future they envision.

For the purposes of this document, youth development program types include mentoring, school-based wrap-around support, and expanded learning opportunities (afterschool and summer programs and school-age child care). Some programs are nationally known, such as the Boys & Girls Clubs, Big Brothers, Big Sisters, and Communities In Schools. There are also many small, single site providers that may focus on a particular group of students (ex. culturally-based, LGBTQ+, foster youth, adjudicated youth) or content-specific (STEM, arts, leadership, etc.).

Example: Local Governments and Youth Development Programs Working Together

The COVID-19 pandemic catalyzed many creative partnerships between providers, intermediaries, and local governments. A [great example](#) was in Pierce County where the [Expanded Learning Opportunity Fund](#) was created using federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars to fund summer learning and engagement for 2,100 children and youth across 28 summer programs. Pierce County officials saw the challenges facing children and youth with lack of social engagement, mental health challenges, and a decrease in formal learning time and prioritized youth development. The Foundation for Tacoma Students managed the funding to the programs, which is an effective intermediary mechanism to reach programs - and ultimately students - faster and using a community-based approach.

For more information about this and other collaborations, please reach out to David Beard at School's Out Washington at dbeard@schoolsoutwashington.org.

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Tips to Collaborate and Move an Issue

- Provide specificity and clarity on the goals and youth engagement strategies from all parties.
- Focus on a community challenge and a solution that involves youth in planning and advocacy in addition to creating the programming being proposed.
- Relationships are key at all levels of advocacy, particularly at the local level. Get to know those you are working with and trying to influence. Elected officials often have a public biography and other avenues to learn more about their interests. Share yours.
- Identify and include unlikely supporters including leadership in business, schools, community based organizations, police/sheriffs, and/or religious institutions.
- Ensure the concept speaks to various segments of the community including garnering support from those that do not have children or youth in the home.
- Provide disaggregated data in addition to stories directly from youth and other supporters.

Funding Options

New funding is always a challenge, but it can be particularly tough at the local level. This is due to a range of factors including potentially lower tax base, more restrained views on the government's role in supporting residents, or a lack of collaboration on a specific issue. But there are also amazing examples of how local governments support youth development programming and understand the critical nature of this work. Below are some funding options at the local level:

- **City and County Budgets:** Annually, cities and counties pass budgets for the following year. Depending on the population size, economy and tax base, and politics of any given jurisdiction, these budgets may or may not have available funding for new programming. However, leveraging public funding with other privately raised funding – and creating an advocacy strategy that signals strong support from local leaders and residents – can increase the likelihood of success. One thing to note is the restrained nature of local tax revenue options is often more challenging than at state or federal levels.
- **Local Levies:** Voter-approved local levies (usually for some type of operating expenses) and bonds (usually for capital/physical plant expenses) are tough to get passed, but can also be an effective strategy for dedicated revenue. While more populated areas often have slightly less difficulty passing tax levies and bonds (ex. [Tacoma Creates](#) and [King County Best Starts for Kids](#)), it still takes a strong collaborative effort. There are a lot of laws and limitations regarding levies and bonds; to learn more [see this report](#) by the Association of Washington Cities. You do not need this level of knowledge to proceed with a levy plan, but it is helpful.
- **Joint Funding Requests to Public and Private Entities:** There are some other public private funding sources that local governments, or collaboration with them, are able to secure. One option is grants from local, regional, or national foundations, or competitive public state or federal funding. Local governments may not always be aware of these grants, so research may be needed. Another option is partnering with a school district on their funding and/or district levy. This could be an avenue to supporting children and youth in and out of school and include local governments and school districts in planning and voter outreach to maximize success, particularly on levies which can be difficult to pass in some jurisdictions.