A management information system is not, primarily, a technology project. It is a process of aligning the goals and resources of a great number of afterschool stakeholders, where technology plays an important supportive role. The first rule of management information systems, then, is not to begin any discussion by talking about management information systems.

**Common Vision**

Instead, many city and nonprofit leaders begin by convening people who care about youth to discuss how afterschool programs could be expanded and aligned to support other community objectives, such as reducing youth violence and improving college and career readiness. Cities that can articulate clear goals for expanding their afterschool systems are more successful at building the infrastructure that can accomplish that expansion, though the “right” alignment of these goals may vary substantially between cities and is likely to evolve over time.

**Right People at the Table**

Broadening this initial interest group to add seats around the table for all of the other key community players who have the resources, concern, and clout to pursue that vision is often a crucial second step. Rather than describing the purpose of a “comprehensive data system,” these conversations present an opportunity to discuss priorities and explore how better information could help providers solve problems or help policymakers answer key questions. They also offer city leaders a chance to expand the resources available to them and form the “policy” group that develops a vision for afterschool investment, establishes common standards, negotiates information sharing relationships, and oversees the implementation of the work.

**Coordinating Entity**

A third step for this systems-building effort is the creation or designation of an executive body or coordinating entity to manage it and a series of ancillary decisions about how to govern and fund the effort. Though this entity is often a government office or a nonprofit organization, some cities have developed more decentralized and collaborative approaches to staffing their afterschool work.
NLC’s Institute for Youth, Education and Families has developed a series of resources – available at http://www.nlc.org/iyef – that explore each of these steps in more depth. In particular, NLC’s strategy guide on *Strengthening Partnerships and Building Public Will for Out-of-School Time Programs* highlights cities that have engaged a broad range of local partners, kept afterschool on the public agenda, and led collaborative efforts to establish a common set of outcomes and a shared vision for afterschool. NLC’s research report, *Municipal Leadership for Afterschool: Citywide Approaches Spreading Across the Country*, includes profiles of 27 highly advanced citywide afterschool systems, including descriptions of the coordinating entities that support these system building efforts.

City leaders who are just getting started in their efforts to enhance local afterschool programs can refer to NLC’s *Action Kit for Municipal Leaders on Expanding Afterschool Opportunities*. The *City Platform for Children and Families* offers city leaders a broader framework for taking action on behalf of the children, youth and families in their communities. Finally, NLC’s report on the *State of City Leadership for Children and Families* explores innovations and trends in city leadership for afterschool and other topic areas.
More than one city has compared the process of building its afterschool partnership to making “stone soup,” in reference to the well-known fable. The analogy is apt: citywide afterschool initiatives need policy experts, technologists, analysts, trainers, and champions. Rarely does a single organization have the skills broad enough (or pockets deep enough) to provide all of these elements. Instead, successful initiatives recruit help from an array of organizations that share their mission and vision:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAKEHOLDER</th>
<th>REPRESENTATIVES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City</td>
<td>Mayor’s offices, city councilmembers, city managers and the heads of agencies such as parks and recreation, libraries, human services, police, any office of youth or education if one exists and the workforce investment board. City leaders can leverage and align valuable resources in support of afterschool programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools</td>
<td>Superintendent’s offices and any relevant institutional research staff from the public schools, especially if many of the afterschool programs in the community are school-based or if academic information is important to the evaluation of afterschool programs. Nearby colleges and universities can also serve as a resource for research and evaluation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funders</td>
<td>United Ways, local and national foundations, and local philanthropists. Funders are often allies in setting quality and data standards for providers not directly funded by the city. They may also take a more direct managerial role in developing and piloting an MI system, as in Grand Rapids, Mich., and Winston-Salem, N.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statewide Afterschool Networks</td>
<td>The 39 statewide afterschool networks funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. These networks foster powerful statewide partnerships to impact state policy on afterschool, increase funding and improve the quality of programs. They are frequent advisors to citywide systems-building efforts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonprofits</td>
<td>Major providers such as the YMCA and Boys &amp; Girls Clubs. These providers are likely to have MI systems that need to be accommodated, and may contribute their expertise. With smaller budgets and more limited capacity, smaller nonprofits have a separate set of needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>The faith and business communities. Faith-based organizations provide afterschool care in nearly every city surveyed by NLC, while chambers of commerce representatives and other business leaders play an important role in many citywide systems.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Any number of commercial or self-built MI technologies can be the right fit for a city’s afterschool system. Some cities, such as Denver, Colo., and Boston, Mass., are designing citywide systems to accommodate afterschool providers who have already invested in
applications to track attendance and outcomes at the program level. Others, such as Fort Worth, Texas, were able to start nearly from scratch and provide a single system to their school-based providers. Several cities, such as Omaha, Neb., and Philadelphia, Pa., are interested in using MI systems and data warehouses to evaluate their afterschool investments against a broad array of education, health and human services data. Others, such as Providence, R.I., have tended to emphasize direct youth development outcomes, attendance, and surveys of students and parents. These very different business cases are supported by differently-configured MI systems.

The vendors described in Section Four of this report can accommodate all of these strategies to varying degrees, and each has received very favorable reviews from municipal clients interviewed by NLC. It is equally true, however, that without a deliberate and inclusive process for selecting and implementing a system, these same technologies will disappoint.

Successful cities have generally taken each of the following steps:

1. **Conduct a self-inventory.** City leaders may first ask what information systems and reporting relationships already exist. It is increasingly rare that any city is in a position to create a management information system from scratch. Many afterschool programs already use one or more reporting systems and are committed to certain technologies. Large and small nonprofits, community-based organizations and faith-based providers may have very different constraints and concerns even within the same city, and these are important inputs into the decision-making process. In fact, many citywide systems develop through a process of evolution rather than revolution.

2. **Develop shared measures and outcomes.** The information afterschool programs collect to manage their programs and meet reporting requirements is often just as diverse as their operational constraints and information systems. By creating a “data dictionary,” establishing common benchmarks, and harmonizing reporting requirements, city leaders create more efficient afterschool systems that are better aligned with citywide strategies for youth development.

3. **Describe the high-level business requirements.** City leaders rarely complain that their specification for a major technology purchase was too detailed. It is not uncommon, however, for cities to realize late into the procurement process that they require user roles, case management functionality, or grant management features that they had not initially envisioned or for which they had not contracted. A description of how each of the participants in a city’s afterschool network – administrators, agencies, providers and evaluators – will need to use it provides city leaders with both the criteria for selecting a vendor and a system specification to guide that company’s work.

4. **Design the network and establish information sharing agreements.** An MIS is built from several key elements that may be located within different organizations from city to city, depending on the afterschool partnership and the resources
of each member. Decisions about where to host, link and aggregate data, what role schools or external consultants play in evaluation, and who administers the software can lead cities to design very different “network architectures.” These decisions also raise legal and privacy concerns, which must be negotiated in advance (see Section Three of this report on Data Stewardship).

5. **Pilot the system.** To troubleshoot the inevitable glitches, build trust, and win advocates, city coordinating entities often opt to pilot MI systems with a limited number of their most enthusiastic providers.

6. **Expand and regularize.** Many of the challenges uncovered during the pilot stage, such as an ongoing need for training, inconsistent definition of basic terms like “attendance,” and varying levels of data quality among providers, lead cities to explore different strategies for expanding their network and creating mechanisms for continuous improvement.

Cities interviewed by NLC have been able to move through these steps at different speeds, but sourcing and implementing a management information system takes time. The need to engage and consult partners within city government, schools and throughout the community, in particular, requires patience. As the director of student programs in the Denver Mayor’s Office of Education and Children, Maxine Quintana, said:

> “We’re not going to build this data system and then ask people to participate in it. Community-based organizations representing a wide variety of afterschool programs have been part of the system-building conversation from the beginning to help build this system. Their participation in the decision-making process is a huge benefit. What I will say is that an inclusive engagement process takes a ton of time.”

**SELF-INVENTORY**

Dozens of nonprofit and community-based programs, schools, city recreation departments, libraries, faith-based organizations and others provide afterschool services in most cities. City coordinating entities oversee substantially less than half of these organizations, and do not necessarily know how the other programs are tracking and using information on their participants.

A first step toward implementing a citywide MI system, then, is to find out as much as possible about existing programs. In some cases, cities undertake this self-inventory as part of a general survey of afterschool program capacity. For example, in 2006, the Omaha mayor’s office contracted with the University of Nebraska to prepare a Youth Afterschool Needs Assessment (available at www.nlc.org/afterschoolmis) that guided the creation of the city’s Middle School Learning Center Initiative (MSCLI). The study included a survey of parents, an inventory of afterschool program providers, and a geospatial analysis of underserved areas.

While a clear sense of the overall mix of existing afterschool programs and capacity of the local providers offers important context, developing a citywide MI system requires more detailed information about the collection and use of program data. Key questions include:
Bridgeport After School Network providers are concerned that they will be asked to enter information into yet ‘one more’ data management system. Therefore, whatever we do develop here in Bridgeport must draw from current data management systems to avoid duplication.”

~ Tammy Papa, Lighthouse Program Director, City of Bridgeport, Conn.

**What Information Systems are Already in Use by Providers?**

A city’s larger providers such as Boys & Girls Clubs and the YMCA may already have purchased a MI system or developed their own system. The variety of existing systems across the city will have to be accommodated by any new citywide system, with an aim to consolidate rather than multiply the number of information systems that afterschool providers have to manage. In addition, identifying local experts in one or more of the leading MIS products can be a great asset to cities.

**What Compliance Reporting Relationships and Needs Exist at each Program?**

Providers describe having to use as many as five – and in one case nine – information systems to fulfill all of the reporting and compliance requirements associated with operating their programs. These systems may include grant management, finance and MI applications preferred by each of their funders, including other city departments. “Compliance fatigue” can be a major obstacle to implementing any new citywide system. City leaders may look for ways to reduce this by consolidating systems, harmonizing reporting requirements among funders, or assuming some of the responsibility for compiling and distributing these reports.

**With Whom do Providers Share Information?**

Access to academic information is particularly important for programs receiving 21st Century Community Learning Center funds. Sites may receive information directly from teachers, principals or parents, through their evaluators, or as part of a more formal data sharing agreement with the local school district(s). Some sites collect written permission from parents to share their children’s information with partners for a limited set of purposes, others do not, and not all programs understand or follow best practices in this regard. Standardizing these permissions processes and facilitating the exchange of information among afterschool providers and schools is a prominent way for a new citywide MI system to add value.

**How are Providers Using Information? Are They Interested in a More Integrated Data System?**

Most programs have specific procedures for using information that – while not always sophisticated – are integral to the way they manage sites, evaluate their performance, and
comply with requests from partners, sponsors and funders. Negotiating how to support, modify or abandon each of these procedures is a key part of expanding the citywide system and determining where professional development might be appreciated.

In addition, bringing providers on board involves addressing the “what’s in it for me” factor, as Laura Hansen of Metro Nashville Public Schools put it, “for every single partner. People are not just going to give something away without expecting something in return.” The afterschool self-inventory is an opportunity for the coordinating entity to assess where providers are frustrated or limited and to use these “pain points” to develop a sense of how an MIS can meet the operational needs of youth-serving organizations. It is also an opportunity to identify which organizations have the capacity, expertise, and enthusiasm to help build that new MIS, and which are likely to need extra persuasion and professional assistance. As Rebecca DeJarnatt, coordinator for the City of Louisville Office of Youth Development, says, “It’s always a mixed bag. There are always some agencies that are saying, ‘Yeah, that’s what we need to do – I’m on board, I want to be in the pilot.’ And then there are others that raise their hands and ask, ‘How much is this going to cost us? What’s the return on my investment for this?’”

**Do Sites Have the Skill and Equipment to Implement an MI System?**

Program staff may need assistance overcoming specific challenges related to new information systems. Some sites lack computers and Internet connections. Employees’ computers skills may vary widely between programs, and typically high rates of staff turnover can make training an ongoing challenge.

**Are the Majority of Students Served by Providers Located within Schools or by Community-Based Organizations Without Strong School Affiliations?**

In some communities, public school districts are strong sponsors of afterschool systems-building, providing leadership, technology, and research and evaluation resources. (For examples, see the Negotiating the Network Architecture section on page 29 and the description of the Nashville After Zone Alliance on page 35.) In others, networks of public agencies and community-based organizations have found it desirable or necessary to establish these resources independent of the schools.

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**CITY EXAMPLE:**

**FROM DIVERSE ACTIVITIES, COMMON OUTCOMES IN BOSTON**

Chris Smith moved from the Boston Private Industry Council to run Boston After School & Beyond (Boston Beyond) in late 2008. As executive director, he was interested

(Continued)
in better aligning Boston Beyond’s work with the city, funders, and the schools, increasing his organization’s support of the city’s approximately 700 afterschool providers, and focusing providers’ attention on measurable youth development results. One of the chief problems, said Smith, was that “there was no coherent data collection and sharing strategy.”

The results of a survey his office issued in 2010 described several of the challenges in greater detail. While a few programs used the Boston Public Schools-based MIS, most providers used Microsoft Excel or had no electronic system at all. Few programs had access to information from the Boston Public Schools or collected permission from parents to obtain that information. Those providers that gained access to student information had mostly done so by developing personal relationships with individual principals and schools.

There was, however, great interest from providers in being part of a Boston Beyond-led process to solve these problems and contribute to a common outcomes database. “We realized,” said Smith, “that what we really wanted to do was address the barriers to a common data collection and sharing system.” The additional attention afterschool programs began to receive as a priority of the mayor, the superintendent of the Boston Public Schools, and funders underscored this need for a citywide data system.

To begin, Boston Beyond created a data collection pilot with five of the city’s biggest and most enthusiastic providers. “Even among these five organizations,” said Smith, “we saw very different approaches to data collection and saw different agreements with schools guiding how they got data.” Together, they developed a set of data standards – a limited data dictionary – and a new set of expectations around sharing information.

To extend participation to a larger cohort of the 700 providers, Boston Beyond is exploring a “federated” system that uses an online database of providers co-managed by Boston Beyond and the City of Boston as a portal through which providers can upload their program results in spreadsheet form. This model may be adapted even further to serve the city’s Promise Neighborhood and a Wallace Foundation-funded arts expansion initiative. Boston is succeeding in using this citywide tool to serve a number of purposes without trying to be the primary enrollment system for each afterschool provider.

The result, says, Smith, is that “providers can be more intentional” and speak directly to outcomes rather than processes:

If we can identify and measure the factors that really influence student success, then your typical middle school provider doesn’t say “I run an afterschool program and we do arts – drawing on Tuesdays and painting on Thursdays” – and then finally get to the punch line and say “and through that we build teamwork skills.” I want to create a discussion where they say “I am an afterschool provider and we build communication and teamwork skills through the arts, and here’s how we do it. We lead with the skills that we want to develop.”
The self-inventory described above often reveals an incredible diversity of practices around tracking, recording and using information among afterschool providers in each city. This diversity reflects underlying differences in the type and quality of programming across sites: a mentoring program may think very differently about attendance than a drop-in recreational program, for example. Those two programs are also likely to find very different types of demographic and activity information useful to their evaluation and management routines, and therefore to track relatively few items in common. Exacerbating these differences may be additional variation in reporting requirements from multiple funders, each of which has slightly different rules for how the programs they support ought to measure, aggregate, and segment this information.

In order to take advantage of their investment in an MI system to develop common approaches to improving program quality, measure outcomes across sites, and identify strategies that are effective and cost-efficient, cities generally find that they and their many local providers need to agree on a common language and common measures for speaking about and evaluating afterschool activities.

Create a “Dictionary” of Data Definitions

A key aspect of establishing common measures is for all afterschool system participants to develop shared definitions for important activities and outputs. It is crucial for program evaluation, for example, that a city’s programs have developed a syntax in which they are not only using the same language, but using the same language to describe the same phenomena. Through an iterative process, cities tend to discover inconsistencies in how different members of the network record their progress and, over time, align outcome measures so that they are able to speak more confidently about the impact of specific interventions.

As part of this process, some cities also develop a “taxonomy” to describe the types of afterschool programs they fund and support. Organizing the multitude of local programs into specific categories allows policymakers to quickly assess how many youth are attending arts-based afterschool programs compared with academic enrichment programs and to distinguish between outcomes in school-based and community drop-in programs.

Establish Common Measures

It is difficult to have a citywide conversation about improving program quality if providers have not agreed to a uniform set of quality standards. Establishing those standards requires a consensus-building process around what cross-program indicators would look like, as well as how they would respect and accommodate agencies’ particular needs.

The experience of the Hartford Connects initiative is common, as described by Rachel Botts, the city’s former program performance manager:

In the beginning, we just wanted everyone to buy into this so much that we said yes to everybody and to everything. We caused ourselves a headache, quite honestly. Because
this agency wanted this tweak, and that agency wanted that tweak, and this agency wanted three tweaks and a bucket. And the next thing you know, we were managing an enterprise where there’s not enough alignment – where we thought there would be (for more on the impressive progress of the Hartford Connects initiative, see page 42).

“Data runs in herds,” as Results-Based Accountability founder Mark Friedman writes, and many citywide systems only gradually narrow their focus to a manageable set of variables that can serve as effective proxies for the rest. These indicators commonly include city-level outcomes related to financial sustainability, program-level outcomes around staff ratios and parental involvement, and youth-level outcomes that might include sustained afterschool attendance, on-time grade promotion, and pro-social indicators of confidence and character.

**Harmonize Reporting Requirements**

Ideally, local funders of afterschool programming such as city agencies, United Ways and community foundations will lead this process by revising their reporting requirements to better correspond with one another and with the newly-developed citywide standards. Not only does this allow for a better comparison of program activities and results across systems, but it can also sharply reduce the administrative burden on program operators, many of whom receive multiple sources of support.

**Describe the High-Level Business Requirements**

Each member of a management information system network – on-site staff, program managers, city administrators, evaluators and others – has a specific set of requirements from an afterschool management information system. Exploring and documenting these uses is a painstaking and collaborative process, but the result is a well-defined set of specifications that become the basis for a city’s request for proposals and implementation plan. Defining these “use cases” is often the bulk of the work.

**Chart 4. Reporting Capabilities and the Ability to Protect Data are the Top Two MIS Needs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Somewhat Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reporting capability</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security and privacy of data</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customizable user interface</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer support</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ease of migration</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration with other city/school systems</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability for IT staff to customize</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnkey Product</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: 2011-2012 survey of city leaders by NLC*
Each network’s system specification will be different. Sometimes, the system requirements are driven by the priorities of the city leaders and/or coordinating entity that funds and builds the MIS. In other cases, the challenges and opportunities identified by the system partners through a self-inventory play a larger role. Ideally, these two sets of needs correspond to one another and are further developed through conversations with MIS vendors and other experts.

Below is a checklist of many of the common functions that cities contract with MI system vendors to provide. A version of the request for information (RFI) developed by NLC to compare six commercial MIS vendors is available online at www.nlc.org/afterschoolmis. We encourage city leaders to download the model RFI and adapt it as part of their own procurement process.

### MIS FUNCTIONALITY CHECKLIST

**ENROLLMENT, ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION**
- Enroll and register youth in programs
  - Create printed rosters
  - Track attendance using a computer or mobile device
  - Track attendance using a card reader or scanner
- Track activity participation (dosage)
- Attribute participation data to specific grant-funded programs for reporting purposes
- Group family units (i.e., affiliate youth with parents or siblings)
- Option to import enrollment/attendance information from other MI systems

**CASE MANAGEMENT AND REFERRALS**
- Record individual youth service plans and milestones
- Record staff interactions and communication
- Facilitate referrals across organizations that do/do not participate in the MI system

**AGENCY, SITE AND STAFF INFORMATION**
- Record site and organization characteristics such as program quality ratings, program location, services, presence of bilingual staff, and transportation options
- Record information on staff such as credentials and years of experience
- Associate staff with programs and program sites
- Publish an online provider directory

**SURVEY AND EXAM ADMINISTRATION**
- Administer surveys and assessments to youth (such as the Survey of Afterschool Youth Outcomes or the Search Institute’s Developmental Assets Profile)
- Administer online surveys to others (e.g., parents, teachers, or instructors)
- Vendor has preloaded survey and youth assessment instruments
- Enable local administrators to create custom surveys
- Enable vendors to implement new survey instruments for the city (and include information on cost/terms of delivery)

(Continued)
REPORTING
- Provide built-in compliance report templates (list any required, such as 21st CCLC)
- Pre-build stock reports for administrators, agencies, and programs
- Enable local administrators to create new reports
- Enable vendor to create new reports (and include information on cost/terms of delivery)
- Integrate with business intelligence applications (such as SAP/Crystal Reports)
- Offer advanced reporting features (e.g., an RBA Scorecard, dynamic reports with Microsoft Live, a management dashboard)

INTEGRATION WITH OTHER DATA SYSTEMS
- Provide an API or another kind of interface that allows third-party applications to extend the functionality of the software
- Aggregate information from third party afterschool MI systems
- Link to school student record databases
- Provide afterschool sites with information on individual students (alternative: aggregate information only)
- Provide afterschool sites with real-time student information (alternative: periodic or annual)
- Provide sufficient user roles and suppression of private data to avoid violating FERPA

TRAINING AND USER SUPPORT
- Provide training to sites, agencies, administrators (list requirements)
- Make training available from vendor or user group thereafter (including information on cost/terms of delivery)
- Make customer service available (including information on cost/terms and medium of delivery)

This checklist is not meant to be comprehensive. More information on each of these functionalities is available through the vendor comparison in Section Four. Cities may require additional features such as grant management or longitudinal data on participants that are not part of a “core” afterschool MI system, or may have very specific needs around connecting youth activities and case management services with particular funding sources for billing and reporting purposes.

Often, the process of defining business requirements and identifying the best way to meet them is an iterative one. Afterschool providers will express their specific needs and limitations around technology, training, and information for generating grant requests and reports. School districts and other informational partners may suggest a path for negotiating privacy concerns or raise objections to a city’s evaluation plans. Vendors, once they have a fairly clear sense of a network’s needs, can provide invaluable consultation around what strategies have worked in other cities. This is a “rolling process of discovery,” as one major vendor described it, and city leaders should not expect to single-handedly draft an RFP and issue a contract. Most cities should, however, consult with multiple vendors about their needs.
SELECTING A VENDOR IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

In 2008, the DC Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation, a nonprofit intermediary that plays a key afterschool coordinating role in the District of Columbia, had an incumbent MI system that they felt the organization had outgrown. Keith Watson, a former Trust employee and president of Kairos Management, was hired to manage the process of replacing it. He and Natasha Harrison, the Trust’s grants management and training consultant, began by thinking backwards from the result they sought:

What data are we going to need to get out of the system at the end point? If you imagine some future state where the system’s been in use for a couple of years, what kind of data do we want to be able to pull out? What kind of reports? How do we want to manage performance? What statements do we want to be able to make to stakeholders about who we served and what outcomes we’ve achieved?

Watson mapped out the roles of each of the Trust staff and their grantees and charted how they might interact with a new system to track student attendance, review management information and manage grant cycles. This detailed work is crucial, said Harrison. “You have to make it very clear to everybody – and to your vendor – what you need. Customizing sounds great, but the lesson we learned is to be very specific and be sure what you are getting will [work when it is first implemented].”

With this system specification roughed in, Watson issued a 14-page request for information. A lot had changed, he said, since the Trust had selected its first system. They wanted to understand the state of the art, to get smarter about the market, and to get a better sense of what kind of money they might have to spend.

The Trust’s request for proposals, issued several months later, reflected everything the organization had learned. It was tighter, its demands were more specific, and Watson was confident in the rubric he had designed for an internal committee to score and rank the responses. Several vendors were invited to make presentations, and two were clear favorites. While an external group of grantees tested both systems and provided feedback, the Trust negotiated a final offer price with both companies. One of the lessons of this process, said Watson, was that “having multiple vendors competing under a formal negotiation process made a big difference.”

conducted by the University of Nebraska at Omaha in 2006 provided a foundation for understanding the city’s existing afterschool landscape and led the partners to focus on providing high-quality programs as part of a new Middle School Learning Center Initiative (MSLCI).

A new and relatively small organization, Collective for Youth (CFY), was created as an intermediary to oversee these programs, with the Omaha Community Foundation serving as its fiscal agent. Though CFY worked very closely with the mayor, the partners decided that the initiative had a better chance of being sustained over time if it was embedded within the community.

Mayor Jim Suttle succeeded Mayor Fahey in 2009 and, shortly after taking office, Mayor Suttle issued a proclamation recognizing afterschool programming as a city priority. With his office’s support and the support of the Omaha Public Schools, CFY began negotiations in 2011 to expand beyond MSLCI to manage 18 of the school district’s 21st Century Community Learning Centers for elementary students, with a goal of eventually managing all of the district’s afterschool youth development programming. In mid-2011, CFY received its nonprofit designation from the IRS. Concurrently, Building Bright Futures, in partnership with the Sherwood Foundation, Avenue Scholars, and the local United Way, started to explore options for a management information system that could support this expanded scope of work and to replace the Microsoft Excel spreadsheets that would soon be insufficient.

Building Bright Futures led an inclusive MIS selection process with a “data collaborative” consisting of representatives from United Way of the Midlands, major afterschool providers such as the Boys & Girls Club, community-based organizations, and nonprofits operating mentoring programs that extend beyond traditional afterschool. As described by CFY’s executive director, Megan Addison, the collaborative “looked at all of the data that we needed to collect and created a data dictionary so that all of us would be entering the same information consistently. For example, if we need to create reports for evaluation or reporting purposes, one group isn’t defining race in a way that’s incompatible with the way another group is doing it – so that was all figured out.”

Four MIS companies presented their products to stakeholders in early 2011, and members of the collaborative ranked each of the applications individually, ultimately selecting the proposal from nFocus Solutions. By August 2011, several MSLCI afterschool sites were actively using KidTrax, the nFocus data management tool.
for tracking individual program participation. Building Bright Futures began helping additional partners implement the KidTrax system. An “attendance collaborative” and an academic support and reengagement program are currently using the MI system’s case management features. A mentoring group and a teen and young parent program will begin using KidTrax in early 2012. In addition to KidTrax, a vitally important aspect of Omaha’s collaborative is the eventual ability to aggregate attendance and outcomes information from different providers using the nFocus Solutions Community Server platform.

“One key to the relatively smooth rollout,” says Addison, “was Omaha’s good fortune in having a person familiar with the nFocus MIS within our community. Boys & Girls Clubs also used nFocus, and Building Bright Futures and CFY were able to borrow their system administrator for nearly a year to get each of the pilot sites up and running. Each site’s interface was customized to accommodate their unique application, but with attention paid to ensuring that all sites tracked the fundamental data elements required by the partnership to allow comparison of outcomes across programs.”

Not all of the work has been this straightforward. Using an MIS to store student academic data raised new privacy concerns for the Omaha Public Schools. It required more than a year of negotiation to establish a new memorandum of understanding with the district that allows selected student records to be matched against youth development outcomes. Said Addison, laughing, “It was a long, drawn out process! But in the end, it got us the buy-in before the system was even purchased, which I think was key.”

Cities can build management information systems in a number of ways, depending on their requirements and the resources available to them. Choosing a design requires answering several key questions (and options for addressing each question are illustrated by the city examples that follow):

**Who Owns the Information?**

An early and important action for city leaders, having brought the right people around the table, is to begin discussing the conditions under which these partners may be willing to share their data. As the Urban Institute’s National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership describes in detail in their online guide to data sharing, patience, respect, organization, and knowledge of the relevant state and federal regulations are all crucial to a successful negotiation.

For most cities, establishing an information sharing relationship with the public schools is the most difficult challenge – in many cases taking more than a year. Section Three of this report describes the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the federal
law most often cited as a barrier to sharing information between schools and afterschool providers, and the main components of a memorandum of understanding. Several excellent resources are additionally available to city leaders:

- The Master Data Sharing Agreement (MDSA) developed between the Grand Rapids Public Schools, the Community Research Institute at Grand Valley State University, the Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation and Calvin College’s Center for Social Research is available by request through an online form at http://www.cridata.org/b2bmdsa/.

- An article describing the development of Grand Rapids’ MDSA was published in November 2011 by the Johnson Center for Philanthropy at Grand Valley State University in Volume 3, Number 4 of The Foundation Review (see pp. 14-33).

- The Urban Institute’s National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership online guide to data sharing is available at http://www.neighborhoodindicators.org/library/guides/nnip-lessons-local-data-sharing.

### Who Will Administer the MI System Database?

In some cities, such as Nashville, Tenn., the afterschool enrollment and participation database is an extension of the school district’s student record system and is hosted by the district. In other cases, as in Denver, Colo., afterschool enrollment and attendance information is recorded in an independent database purchased and managed by a coordinating entity such as the United Way or a municipal office. In at least one case (Grand Rapids, Mich.), a university research center administers the MI system.

### Where and How is the Link between Academic Records and Afterschool Enrollment and Attendance Made?

Students’ afterschool participation and academic outcomes are most often tracked in at least two separate databases by two or more separate institutions. To allow these multiple systems to communicate with one another, each student’s record must be linked against its corresponding record in the other database(s). Two strategies are available:

- **Common ID**: If the databases share a unique identification code for each student, such as a student identification number, records can be easily matched and transferred between them. In the case of the Nashville After Zones, for example, the school district creates every afterschool provider’s roster, which includes a code so that each student’s information can be easily matched with academic outcomes stored in the district’s data warehouse.

- **Probabilistic matching**: Often, however, MI systems must use information such as student first and last name, date of birth, and family address to make an educated guess about which records in two or more databases correspond to the same youth. This algorithm-driven process, which is never 100 percent accurate, is known as a making a “probabilistic” match.
Again, this match can be made in real-time within an MIS hosted by a school or coordinating entity, it can be made in a data warehouse, or in other cases the information may be linked offline by an external university evaluator who receives separate files of academic information from the schools and afterschool participation from the coordinating entity.

**What Organization is Responsible for Analyzing the Information?**

Very often, schools are the ideal place to analyze afterschool data, as they have much of the relevant data and are not constrained by FERPA when analyzing data internally. In Bridgeport, Conn., for example, the city’s Lighthouse program provides its afterschool participation information to the public schools for analysis, and the Mayor’s Office of Education and Youth Services receives back aggregate reports organized by a predefined list of demographic and program characteristics. On the other hand, says Boston Beyond’s Chris Smith, “Districts – and especially their research offices – tend to be overwhelmed with data requests. So that’s not always the best way to go.” Nor does it provide great flexibility to afterschool staff to run more complex analyses if they find themselves on the wrong side of the FERPA “firewall” (see Section Three for several possible strategies). Instead, coordinating entities may negotiate the resources and access to do the work themselves or designate a third party researcher.

**BUILDING TRUST WITH A QUALIFIED EVALUATOR**

Leaders in cities such as Bridgeport, Conn., Fort Worth, Texas, and Jacksonville, Fla., made a special effort to describe how important it is for afterschool program coordinators to have access to an evaluator who “really understands the work,” and has evaluated afterschool programs over a long period of time.

To Miguel Garcia at Fort Worth After School (FWAS), which has a longstanding relationship with faculty at Texas A&M University, it is valuable to have a partner that is scientific minded and that can be honest about the evidence – “what correlations are real, which are spurious” and how FWAS ought to talk about its impact.

Jacksonville’s evaluator has been working with the Jacksonville Children’s Commission for a decade, and also works closely with the school system. Said Dolly Dillin, director of grants administration for the commission, “she’s just an expert. Not everyone can understand this information.” So strongly did the commission feel about its evaluator’s expertise that it continued to rely on her even after she relocated to Boston. “She understands Jacksonville, and that’s important because each community is just so different,” said Dillin.

What this comes down to, according to Bridgeport, Conn., Lighthouse Program Director Tammy Papa, is trust. The 2011-12 evaluation of Lighthouse conducted by its evaluator, MRM, will be the company’s tenth.

City leaders must be aware that choosing a single company or software platform to serve several agencies and programs does not, by itself, guarantee that each of those agencies’ systems will be able to communicate with one another. It is not unusual for the same product to support multiple agencies independently within the same city or for the same product to
be used by both the state department of education and a local citywide system. In these cases, program providers may find themselves entering information more than once into two or more versions of the same software package for different funders. **Having the city’s providers use the same product for managing their information is not the same as coordinating the city’s providers through one system.** The difference is in the design of the network.

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**CITY EXAMPLE:**

**A FEDERATED MIS IN DENVER**

Denver’s Lights on After School (LOAS) initiative was created in 2003 and has directed more than $7 million to serve more than 10,000 students annually. LOAS has also offered professional development to more than 100 staff each year. The Mayor’s Office of Education and Children, the Denver Public Schools (DPS) Department of Extended Learning and Community Schools, the Denver Public Schools Foundation, and the Mile High United Way are all close partners in a new citywide effort, the Denver Out of School Time (OST) Alliance, which is being supported by a new round of investments in citywide afterschool systems-building by The Wallace Foundation. The technology partner to this group is CiviCore, a company formed in 2000 with close ties to Denver’s Piton Foundation and a large footprint in the city’s nonprofit community.

Rather than build a ground-up application to track youth afterschool enrollment and attendance, CiviCore and the Denver OST Alliance are focusing on two areas of particularly high value to the partnership:

1. **Online program directory:** Denver has no complete inventory of the city’s afterschool providers, and CiviCore is developing a platform where community programs can self-populate with information on the scope of their services. This platform will include information about program locations, with which schools programs are partnering, the number of students they serve and high-level program outcomes – all arranged within a “taxonomy” of program types that include academics, arts/culture, leadership, life skills, recreation and technology.

2. **Common data tracking:** Developing a shared school-afterschool database is crucial for Denver’s partnership. Currently, DPS is overwhelmed with requests from community providers for academic data, and no unique ID exists to track youth participants between programs or over time. CiviCore is working closely with school officials to develop a protocol whereby afterschool programs are likely to use the DPS student ID for each of their participants and will use CiviCore’s Community Partnership System to share participation data and retrieve academic information.

Through this “federated” model of afterschool information sharing, providers will continue to use the systems they prefer to track enrollment and participation – whether (Continued)
Building Management Information Systems to Coordinate Citywide Afterschool Programs

spreadsheets or other software applications. The citywide system is coordinating this at a high level, so that policymakers have as complete and accurate an inventory of afterschool programs as possible, have unduplicated counts of participation across the city, and can pool data to begin to draw conclusions about the scope and effectiveness of these services. In the process, the Community Partnership System is addressing two “pain points”: the need for DPS to reduce the overwhelming number of individual requests for student information, and the need for community organizations to have a straightforward protocol for receiving academic outcome information on the youth they serve.

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a systems-design standpoint, it has several interesting features. A university partner, the Community Research Institute (CRI) at Grand Valley State University, hosts the MI system. CRI is designated as an Agent of GRPS for the purposes of FERPA compliance, and as such is permitted to receive identified student information. CRI makes the link between student academic records and participation information sent to them through an nFocus KidTrax MI system. KidTrax assigns B2B participants their own internal unique ID, and CRI maintains a crosswalk file to match these identifiers GRPS student IDs. Using this system, CRI collects the following information:

- **Management information:** When parent permission has been granted, CRI sends individual student academic information into the MI system, where it can be accessed by designated afterschool staff.

- **Evaluation information:** CRI staff send the DeVos Foundation, which is funding the initiative, and evaluators at CRI, Calvin College, and Basis Policy Research complete but de-identified information for comparing the outcomes of afterschool participants to nonparticipants.

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To assist the schools in this partnership, the DeVos Foundation funds a full-time position at GPRS. Local leaders in Nashville are also considering this strategy as they expand the city’s afterschool system beyond school-based providers. The progress of Grand Rapids’ B2B initiative is the result of collaboration and support by a very active foundation, DeVos, two academic institutions as research partners, CRI as the data management partner, GRPS, and the company nFocus as a technology provider and consultant.

More information on the development of this partnership and its ongoing governance is provided on page 52, with a link to a journal article written by CRI and DeVos Foundation staff that describes the process on page 30.
The Nashville After Zone Alliance (NAZA) is a partnership among the school district, city agencies and youth-serving organizations modeled on the Providence (R.I.) After School Alliance’s (PASA) “AfterZones.” The first two of six planned zones were launched in 2010 and 2011, each with its own oversight agency, which contracts with local programs to offer a mix of academic and youth development activities for several hours after each school day.

NAZA’s management information system is built from three elements, two of them hosted by the Metro Nashville Public School District (MNPS) and the third developed by the Information Technology Services Department of the Metropolitan Government of Nashville (Metro ITS). These elements include:

1. **The MNPS student unit record system**: The school district’s core student database is used to generate rosters for each after-school program offered through an After Zone. District staff who have access to the school database carry out this work in collaboration with NAZA, which helps to oversee program enrollment.

2. **The NAZA database**: MNPS exports these rosters nightly and sends them outside of the district’s firewall and into NAZA’s database, which is developed and maintained by Metro ITS. Only FERPA-compliant directory information on each student – student contact information, grade level, and a unique district student identification number – is made available to after-school programs. The NAZA database has a simple, web-based interface for tracking program attendance and an administrative screen that allows NAZA leaders and coordinators to monitor the attendance taking process, manage user passwords, and do basic reporting on student program participation rates.

3. **MNPS data warehouse**: The school district’s fast-developing data warehouse receives these two streams of information separately – one from the student unit record system and one from the NAZA database – and uses the student identification number present in both sets of records to link the information for reporting and analysis.

Nashville’s Mayor, Karl Dean, and the superintendent of the Metro Nashville Public Schools, Jesse Register, have both committed significant resources to this systems-building effort. Concrete results of the partnership include:

- **The reporting and compliance burden on NAZA’s after-school programs has been greatly reduced.** The MNPS data warehouse provides all of the attendance, behavioral and academic information necessary for most evaluation reports. Site managers no longer have to ask students for their report cards to get information on grades and attendance.

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Providers receive a program “dashboard.” This dashboard allows site managers to track their performance against key benchmarks and to identify participants who may need additional assistance due to school behavioral issues, absences, or academic challenges.

NAZA will be able to evaluate system-wide outcomes, comparing afterschool participation against a full range of performance benchmarks from MNPS, year-over-year for the same cohort of students.

The district’s sponsorship of this information system means that the informational “link” between participants at MNPS and the NAZA afterschool programs is seamless. Analysis and reports on system-wide outcomes can be produced by the data warehouse and the district’s Research Assessment and Evaluation Department without fear of violating FERPA restrictions.

Conversely, the district’s role in managing afterschool program rosters from the student information system imposes a possible limit on the scalability of the MI system to include afterschool providers in Nashville who are not affiliated with NAZA. According to Hansen, “The real limit is setting up the program rosters in the school’s student management system, because that is behind the firewall – so program providers can’t create those rosters directly. They have to have a school liaison.” One possible solution being investigated is to use a common external data system to manage their programs and link that single system to the MNPS data warehouse. This method will be piloted in the Nashville Promise Neighborhood, which will use Social Solutions’ Efforts to Outcomes platform as the service provider system.
BUILD OR BUY?

Approximately one-third of the cities surveyed by NLC in 2011 elected to build their own afterschool MI systems rather than purchase a commercial product. Cost was a motivating factor in many of these decisions. As Laura Hansen, who assisted with the creation of the MI system for Nashville’s “After Zones,” describes her decision-making process:

We really wanted to maximize the funds that were going toward programming (as opposed to administrative costs) and we didn’t have large sums of money to do this. It fit with the approach of the Mayor’s Office of Children and Youth to look at resources we already had available to use, and encourage collaboration. Both the city and the district technology departments agreed that there was value in working together and using our existing technology and talent rather than investing in another external information system.”

In other cases, the availability of local information technology resources encouraged city leaders to keep the work in-house. Miguel Garcia, the director of Fort Worth After School, had already developed a preliminary afterschool tracking application when he recognized an opportunity to partner with the Fort Worth Independent School District to create something much more sophisticated:

When we talked to our technology department, they said, “Look – we’ve got the man hours. If you’ve got the money in your budget, we have individuals that are capable of creating a reliable, multi-faceted data gathering system.” It’s not a purchase order to an outside organization.

The school district’s new chief of technology had recently bought new servers, brought on a couple of new programmers, and was willing to support the application “for as long as Fort Worth After School is around.” The application they developed together now serves as one of the templates for the system utilized by the 21st Century Community Learning Center program at the Texas Department of Education.

There are, however, risks associated with this approach:

- **Self-developed systems may be less flexible than commercial products** and therefore more difficult to bring to scale. Cities that opt to build an MI system as an extension to a school district’s student record database, for example, may find themselves very closely tied to that district’s students and programs. It may be difficult to provide access to programs serving students in other districts or to community-based organizations that lack a formal relationship to the district. Local agencies that opt to build an afterschool MI system as an extension of a much bigger product – such as a city’s Homeless Management Information System or social services platform – may find that they have little influence over the product’s development path, and that updates regularly interfere with its usefulness to afterschool providers.

- **The MI system may be “orphaned” by its developer(s).** Several cities have found that product features developed by city staff or local volunteers, at some point, ceased to function. The online program directory crashed or the

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software bridge that linked afterschool program data to school records broke. In such cases, the programmer who wrote (but did not document) the application has frequently moved on. In several cases, cities endured prolonged down time while they decided whether to rewrite the application from scratch or contract for services with a commercial MI system vendor.

• **Unique MI systems evolve slowly.** In most cases, the relatively large installation base of commercial MI system providers allows them to benefit from these economies of scale to innovate more quickly and provide more comprehensive customer support. Larger user groups mean that solutions to many challenges – such as the integration of a new youth assessment or a niche need like biometric identification – have already been developed and can be more easily adapted for local use.

Cities that have developed MI systems that successfully meet the needs of their afterschool coordinating entities and their networks’ providers usually exhibit most, if not all, of the following characteristics:

• **Strong internal IT capacity:** This capacity may be provided by the city, the school district, or a third entity, but having IT capacity within the partnership – as opposed to available on contract – is crucial to both making smart design decisions and then supporting the application over time.

• **Dedicated funding:** MI systems require ongoing development and customization to accommodate new needs and new partners. Dedicated funding allows the partnership to plan ahead for these needs and to adapt. For example, the Jacksonville Children’s Commission is one of seven Children’s Services Councils in Florida that partnered with each other to build their own MIS, the Services and Activities Management Information System (SAMIS), in 1999. Between 2005 and 2008, these councils used SAMIS to allocate more than $1 billion in funding to afterschool programs and other social services. Each council contributes an annual fee to the maintenance and development of the system, which amounted to approximately $125,000 in 2011.

• **Close partnership between the city and/or its intermediary and the school district:** Most self-built afterschool MI systems leverage schools’ investment and expertise in student data systems. Nashville city leaders developed this relationship incrementally, including the school district as a partner from the very beginning of the city’s exploration of an afterschool MI system. According to Laura Hansen, “Having someone on the outside, or an intermediary, do that visioning independently and then arriving at the schools to say ‘all we need you to do is give us this’ is not a great way to do it, in my experience.”

• **Clear system specification:** Even if self-built MI systems are not as flexible as their commercial alternatives, they can be tailored effectively to the needs and technologies present in the community. Where the coordinating entity has a very clear sense of the network’s needs and can define these needs without the benefit of consultation with a commercial provider, they are often successful.
Many cities opt to pilot their new MI system before deploying it more widely. They may reach out to volunteers identified in the “self-inventory” phase of work, and screen for organizations that seem to have the capacity and enthusiasm to be active thought partners. For example, Saint Paul’s Sprockets network – which provides no funding – solicited interest from the city’s nonprofit providers in participating in a pilot of the city’s new Cityspan data system. The network selected only 11 of the 16 organizations that volunteered.

This phase of work is important. Major features of the software, such as its integration with other systems and the usefulness of its reports, will need to be customized and trouble-shot. The overriding goal here is simplicity, as Juan Ruiz, the SAMIS senior administrator in Jacksonville, explains:

> All the time we are spending on administration is time we are not spending with the kids. Our programs do not have money to hire a bunch of additional administrators. So our job (as system designers) is to make this as simple as possible.

Jacksonville went as far as to create a stripped-down, simplified desktop application outside of the normal SAMIS interface for some of its providers to enter attendance information. To get accurate data from staff, ease of use was more important than total uniformity of the interface.

Boston After School & Beyond’s pilot included just five of the city’s largest providers, all of which were interested in learning how to contribute to and receive the benefits from a shared afterschool data system. Over 18 months, they identified and fixed problems with individual programs not collecting student IDs, developed an initial set of common data definitions, and settled on an information architecture that looks more like Denver’s “federated” MI system than a soup-to-nuts unified enrollment and tracking system. The pilot established a foundation for expanding the system and inviting a greater number of Boston’s estimated 700 afterschool providers to participate.

Finally, a pilot phase allows cities to estimate more accurately the amount of initial and ongoing training the MIS is likely to require. The amount and type of training needed varies across communities. One city provides training every week, year-round. Other cities have implemented similar “train the trainer” models and negotiated with commercial MI system providers to take advantage of periodic online webinars and customer support. Even so, several cities noted that there is a limit to what managers can expect of some afterschool organizations, with particular frustration expressed about underequipped and skeptical city agencies. Overcoming this resistance is easier if the coordinating entity is not stretched by commitments to too many sites.

Even a successful pilot will tend to multiply, rather than diminish, the number of questions facing MI system managers from providers and policymakers. Success breeds more enthusiasm to do more with the available resources. It also tends to bring to the foreground several...
challenges that have been outlined in this report already, including the ongoing, iterative process of identifying common measures and updating the “dictionary” of data definitions.

In addition, city leaders often exit the pilot with a mandate to “think big” about improving their program evaluation and integrating a more diverse set of youth support programs into the system.

**Improve Reporting and Evaluation**

Ideally, an MI system is flexible enough to create management reports that are responsive to provider needs and the questions of policymakers. Structuring queries and running reports is an ongoing process of inquiry.

All commercial MI systems offer “canned” reports that will meet a variety of city needs, and most companies include in their initial consultation an opportunity to customize and create new reports that are better targeted to individual needs. Over time, these needs tend to expand, and software packages vary in their ability to provide administrators with flexible “report building” tools to meet these demands. (See Section Four for a comparison of commercial MI systems.)

Ultimately, however, most sites develop a limited set of reports and dashboard utilities that are aligned with common benchmarks such as program attendance and certain youth outcomes and that become the touchstones of ongoing performance management. Though these may change modestly as citywide priorities for afterschool are realigned, the standard for good reporting remains relevance, concision, and timeliness.

Formal program evaluation, on the other hand, is a more complex undertaking. Once an MI system is online, providers are trained, and information is being shared between afterschool programs and other youth-serving agencies, data will accumulate at an astonishing rate. The distinction between “data” and “knowledge” becomes crucial here, as several city leaders interviewed by NLC admitted they had five or even 10 years of longitudinal data that were parked on a server, unanalyzed. “We’re sitting on a ton of information,” said one city representative, “and we just don’t have the dollars to do anything with it.”

This state of affairs is more the rule than the exception. While we know from longitudinal studies of programs like After School Matters in Chicago that high-quality afterschool is effective, relatively few local studies can demonstrate this impact with any rigor. Ideally, city leaders would prefer to be able to report to their funders, their mayor, and their public that their afterschool system is effective. The Public/Private Ventures report on Providence’s PASA initiative is an excellent recent example of such a report.

Several cities are creating the capacity to conduct at least limited evaluation studies within their afterschool coordinating entity. Boston After School & Beyond recently hired a data manager, for example, and Chicago Allies for Youth Success has a senior systems analyst. More often, cities find external partners:

- The Providence After School Alliance is negotiating with the city’s major data intermediary, the Providence Plan, to link afterschool outcomes with the K-12, postsecondary and health data already hosted by the intermediary’s integrated data system.
• Fort Worth uses a Texas A&M University-based evaluator with a decade-long relationship with Fort Worth After School to write their annual outcomes report.

• Bridgeport, Conn., contracts with a private evaluator, MRM, Inc., to track the academic progress and social and emotional well-being of students who participate in afterschool programs. Bridgeport associates afterschool participation data with reductions in crime rates and examines reading, writing, and math scores by ethnicity in an annual evaluation of afterschool program impact.

• Jacksonville’s private evaluator provides simple, consistent outcome measures for a host of local programs including “TEAM UP” afterschool and special needs programs, case management, mental health and mentoring programs, and other social services (all tracked in the city’s MI system, SAMIS).

Cities are exceptionally careful about making extravagant claims about the value of afterschool programs. As Miguel Garcia, director of Fort Worth After School, reported:

Of course being down here, you have a lot of people who will say the reason for a kid’s success is four-fold: school, family, community programs, and church…When we look at the data we think, “Man we’ve got to be careful about how we lay this argument out.” A lot of these [successful kids] had good parental support. It can be hard to control for all of the factors that we know, intuitively, that we ought to.

This concern is well-founded: A decrease in neighborhood crime that occurs simultaneously with the expansion of local afterschool programs may be suggestive, but it is not close to a causal relationship. What MI systems allow cities to do is track individual student activities, characteristics, and outcomes. To a degree much greater than has been taken advantage of, to date, this enhanced data capacity will allow skilled evaluators to control for many of the environmental factors mentioned by Mr. Garcia and to make a much stronger claim for afterschool’s value to youth.

Integrate More Data

A growing number of cities are beginning to merge information from multiple agencies and service systems outside of education and youth services, and to use the insights gained from the analysis of this linked information to create more effective program interventions, make smarter policy, and improve the care provided by educators and social workers.

These so-called “integrated data systems” directly support the mandate for public managers to provide more coordinated care by including information from health and human services departments, workforce investment boards, and juvenile courts when making decisions about young people.

• In Philadelphia, a majority of city-funded afterschool providers use a self-built MIS, the Provider Contract Attendance and Performance System (PCAPS), operated by the city’s afterschool administrative entity, currently the Philadelphia Health Management Corporation. The potential exists to link both PCAPS and data from the School District
of Philadelphia with the city’s developing data warehouse, CARES, which includes youth and family case management information from Philadelphia’s social service agencies.

- In Antioch, Calif., the Youth Intervention Network partnered with AJW, Inc., and the city to conduct a study of youth ages 13-18 using cross-agency data to identify at-risk students and provide a variety of wraparound services. Youth truancy and student disengagement were the top two indicators of likelihood to commit or become victims of violence. Among the results of this initiative was a 79 percent reduction in truancy.

NLC will provide a number of resources on integrated data systems throughout 2012 and through our website at www.nlc.org/iyef. For a useful overview of this topic, see the publication, Connecting the Dots: The Promise of Integrated Data Systems for Policy Analysis and Systems Reform, developed in 2010 by the Intelligence for Social Policy initiative at the University of Pennsylvania at www.ispc.upenn.edu.

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**CITY EXAMPLE:**

**HARTFORD CONNECTS AT-RISK YOUTH WITH SUMMER EMPLOYMENT**

The Hartford Peacebuilders initiative is a “boots on the ground” violence intervention program that uses a risk assessment to identify young people who are likely to either perpetrate or be a victim of violence. These youth are, as closely as the programs that work in Hartford’s neighborhoods can determine, the ones who are most likely to be catalysts for trouble – the “shot callers.”

Increasing the number of these youth who apply for and receive summer employment through the Capital Workforce Partners (the local workforce investment board) has been a multi-year priority for the city’s Office of Youth Services. Both Capital Workforce Partners and the Peacebuilders are members of Hartford Connects, the city’s multi-agency integrated data system.

In 2010, the Office of Youth Services sent 400 applications for summer employment to the Peacebuilders to be distributed to the youth with whom they worked. That fall, city staff used the Hartford Connects database to match the Peacebuilders case files against the city’s summer employment program records and estimate what percentage received a job. This was “great information to have,” said Rachel Botts, the city’s former program performance manager, and led to a focused conversation. “We need to improve this figure next year. We really need you guys to make a push. What are the barriers to your kids getting a job?” Botts asked her partners at Peacebuilders.

There were some barriers, it turned out. In early 2011, the Office of Youth Services hosted an “employability day” where they opened up city hall to local youth seeking work. Youth services staff negotiated with the Hartford Public Schools to have district staff present to print out transcripts. The Hartford Bureau of Vital Records modified its requirements so that as long as youth could bring a photocopy of their parent’s ID with
their parent’s signature on an application, they could receive a birth certificate and Social Security card. The youth on file with the Peacebuilders received a flash drive with these applications and résumé templates months in advance, along with access to the summer jobs application several days in advance of the rest of the community.

That fall, the Office of Youth Services again debriefed the Peacebuilders. This time, they used Hartford Connects to gather information on the success of each individual Peacebuilders case to analyze how many of the initiative’s youth were eligible for summer employment, how many applied, and how many of the applications were complete – by name and by case worker. The information helped them answer questions about what challenges affecting those specific youth made it so difficult to get them a summer job and how next year could be different.

Moving forward, the Office of Youth Services, now integrated into Hartford’s Department of Families, Children, Youth, and Recreation, is working with Capital Workforce Partners to go even a step further: to notify Peacebuilders every time one of the youth on their case files submits an incomplete job application, while there is still time to fix the problem.