



# Getting to Know Your Afterschool “Customer”

Growing. Learning. Leading.

**H**ave you ever had a chance to provide your opinion about a product, service or program that was interested in obtaining your business? Before you can effectively meet your youth customers’ needs you must first know what they want! Here are three simple methods to identify your students’ interests:

## #1. Surveys

**Surveys** are a very useful approach to obtaining feedback and ideas from your students. Develop different pointed questionnaires that you can administer formally and/or informally. Some examples of content are as follows:

- List a diverse selection of specific offerings in all of the following areas: sports, arts and crafts, technology, leadership, performing arts, STEM, etc. and have kids rank them according to personal interest.
- You could also have kids rate on a likert scale, possible offerings, field trip destinations, events, or incentive and rewards for participation.
- Find out what your students are doing or have planned for Summer or Afterschool. For those reluctant consumers this will help to shed light on what your biggest competition is in their out of school time. Take the initiative to incorporate what you learn into your program design. (e.g. sports, trips to top attractions, video games, dance, camping, etc.)



**Quick Tip:** For school-based programs, get the pulse by surveying the whole school at least annually, and your actual program participants regularly, to inform program design and maintain satisfaction levels. Great programs offer “kid tested-kid approved” content..

A less formal option: Graffiti Wall activities are great at lunchtime, school release, or any time and space where large numbers of students are going to be clustering. Have kids contribute their thoughts and ideas about activities, classes or club experiences that are engaging when school is out in public places, with social media, and using return mailers.

A low maintenance but continuous high visibility option is a **Suggestion Box**, which can also be an excellent means to obtain anonymous feedback about your program from every level of stakeholder. (Parents, Teachers, etc) Set a suggestion box up in the school office.

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## #2. Focus Groups

**Focus Groups** can be facilitated in a variety of ways, but the goal is to give the kids an opportunity to have their **voice** heard on programmatic decisions. Remember, a child is more likely to sign up for—and less likely to leave a program—that they helped build.



When deciding on a new logo, t-shirt design, staff hire, class idea or schedule change make every attempt to run it by a select group of student leaders. Perhaps you have a built-in youth leadership team that could serve as your special "advisors" on such key decisions.

A really low maintenance and moderately low tech way to get feedback on your schedule of offerings is to develop a quick PowerPoint/slideshow presentation with pictures and descriptions of each activity in the lineup. Loop the slideshow along with tunes in the cafeteria at lunchtime while the kids are eating. You can opt to gauge student reactions (casually) or distribute a selection form to formalize the process.

## #3. Polls and Petitions



Peer-to-peer **polls and petitions** take advantage of that base of loyal participants that are ready, willing and probably best able to get you the scoop on what the kids want. Call them your "**street team**" or lend it some alternately catchy title that adds exclusivity and puts them in charge of implementing your guerilla-based recruitment & marketing strategy.

For instance, before making an important decision on contracting with a new vendor for services or rolling out a new enrichment offering, mobilize your street team with an interest petition and set a minimum threshold for students that would take advantage of the new service or offering before pulling the trigger and encumbering the cost.

**Remember, it's not just if you build it...they will come! But if they build it...they will come and they'll tell a friend!**

**Final Tip to be SUCCESSFUL:** Don't be afraid to use the increasingly forbidden "F" word when working with your kids, staff and partners to allocate the necessary resources to design and facilitate quality youth programs and activities, make it **FUN!**