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Board and Committee Members
City of Muskogee Foundation
120 N. 3rd Street
Muskogee, OK 74401

Dear Board and Committee Members:

What a difference your investment is making in the youth summer programs of Muskogee! After spending time with each director, observing each program and hearing about the programs through several focus groups, I can confidently say your funding is getting a strong rate of return through this group of grantees.

I have included my final report, which consists of:

1. Project objectives and grantee list
2. Summary and recommendations
3. Individual site survey responses (self-reported)
4. Aggregated site survey summaries

Several reoccurring topics emerged from this project and addressing each of them could make significant improvements in already strong programs: transportation, communication and collaboration.

It has been a pleasure to work with a group making such a significant difference!

Creatively,

molly

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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CITY OF MUSKOGEE FOUNDATION PROJECT OBJECTIVES

This evaluation project was designed to answer three primary questions:

1. How effective are the current summer youth programs in Muskogee? What can we do better?
2. What are the appropriate outputs and outcomes to measure and track to ensure the optimal results for the children, families and the community?
3. Are there other opportunities needed to best serve Muskogee youth and families?

2017 SUMMER YOUTH PROGRAM GRANTEES

- Band Pride
- Community Treasures Summer Youth Camp
- Learn.Create.Share Tech Camp at The Library
- MLK Summer Camp
- Night Hoops
- Project Transformation
- Rougher Summer Pride
- Youth Volunteer Corps of Muskogee

PROJECT TIMELINE AND ACTIVITIES

- May-August 2017
- Review of related documents, past evaluations, and other relevant documentation
- Introductory meetings with committee and key leaders
- Clear definition and agreement of goals, objectives and expected outcomes from the committee and leadership
- Surveys and stakeholder interviews
- Community discussions

- Onsite observations

QUICK ANSWERS

1. How effective are the current summer youth programs in Muskogee? What can we do better?

The current summer programs (grantees) offer diverse activities, quality programming, safe environments and excellent academic/extra-curricular options for the youth of Muskogee who can attend them. The staff, volunteers and curriculum/activities are exceptional. (Please see other sections for detailed observations/recommendations specific to each program)

In nearly all cases, the programs do some pre- and post-testing to track outcomes and ensure that they are delivering measurable results. The directors are actively engaged in continual improvement and working to serve their children and families at a high level.

Overall, the Foundation can encourage collaboration among its grantees and promote improvement in several key areas to be discussed in the RECOMMENDATIONS section. As a primary funder of these programs, the Foundation can use this smaller group as a test to possibly encourage others in the community to expand some of the solutions to include more programs, at some point in the future.

2. What are the appropriate outputs and outcomes to measure and track to ensure the optimal results for the children, families and the community?

For these programs specifically, appropriate outputs and outcomes include:

- Enrollment
- Attendance
- Improvement in key areas (depending on the program)
- Results of satisfaction surveys (these can be very simple/short)
- Results of staff surveys

3. Are there other opportunities needed to best serve Muskogee youth and families?

- Full-time, all-day care or programming of some type seems to be an issue for working parents
- Transportation to and from programs is a roadblock for some
- Improved communication of what is available is an opportunity to serve more
- Stronger partnerships among programs would be good for kids
- Better communication to teachers/churches so they can help promote within their areas of influence

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Create a TRANSPORTATION TASK FORCE with objectives/deadlines

Because transportation was universally reported as a chief issue in reaching and serving children, addressing it in some significant way is the primary recommendation. The key objective is to solve the issue (to the extent that is possible) for the most children/families for the summer of 2018.

Start with the programs funded by the Foundation and work to solve for those. Invite those program representatives, along with community leaders and interested stakeholders (including parent representatives) to create a plan that will serve the most possible children.

For example, not everyone can be served, but maybe by setting up a bus route that stops at area schools/parks on a set schedule and drops off at programs, then runs several other times during the day to drop off and pick up, more children could have access to certain programs.

Select someone to be the CHAMPION for this and give him/her the authority to call meetings, encourage progress and make recommendations to the funding or governing body. This person will also be responsible for communicating progress in way that keeps stakeholders informed and makes the process as transparent as possible.

Set a deadline for action and invite all those who might be able to help to participate but proceed with those who are available. Get consensus from the beginning that this is a start and agree that you will evaluate as you go, adjusting as needed, and then evaluate at the end of the

program to see how the solution can get even better. Some programs might need to adjust start/end times. Parents would need to understand the buses must run on time and cannot wait for late arrivers. Liability, supervision, and responsibility will have to be discussed.

Possible participants: school representatives, Ministerial Alliance, bus drivers, parents.

2. Select a COMMUNICATION COORDINATOR and build/implement a plan

Programs need help getting the word out and parents need one place to go to get correct and complete information. Find someone/someplace who will be the disseminator of this information and who can post it all on one website—maybe the Foundation, the Chamber or the City. Require that all programs provide updates at least quarterly and keep the information current, with links/proper contact details for more information.

Invite all area programs to participate to make this especially useful.

Establish a simple “push out” plan to share this through print media, radio, social media and word of mouth in the spring as it is time to begin summer planning.

Once this single point of information is available, you could work on a more collaborative method of building a comprehensive marketing plan.

3. Hold COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS at least three times a year

People learn from each other and this was especially apparent through the community focus groups and parent discussions during this project.

By scheduling Community Conversations three times per year, The City of Muskogee Foundation would be inviting people to come together to share ideas and learn from each other.

These conversations would be most helpful if they were loosely structured to promote conversation among attendees, but also

facilitated to keep participants on topic. Programs/sponsors could set up information tables to share with parents before and after.

Consider holding them at the MLK Center, using tables in the largest room to focus discussion on certain topics and have a note taker at each table. Rotate tables several times during the 60-90-minute meeting. Invite a wide selection of people and take RSVPs but allow drop-ins as seats allow.

Suggested schedule:

(This could be adjusted around grant cycles or other community activities)

- February—to help plant the seeds and gather ideas/input
- April—to promote programs and encourage registrations
- September—to check-in and get feedback for the next year

BUDGET

The project came in under budget, including travel expenses, food for meetings, and printing costs.

NOTES

Based on the total enrollment of the two primary school districts and some estimated addition of the attendance at the summer programs, one group quickly determined the clear majority of Muskogee children do not participate in any of these summer activities. *I'm not sure we adequately answered where the children are and what they do with their time.*

It was noted through observation and through several comments in community discussions that the Hispanic population may be under-represented at these programs. This could be a result of lack of communication with these communities, a language barrier, more family support at home or other reasons. *This topic could probably use further study.*

Many children in Muskogee struggle with food insecurity. Programs staff mentioned this was an ongoing challenge.

SUMMARIES: FOCUS GROUPS TO DISCUSS SUMMER YOUTH PROGRAMS

Conversations were held with three target groups:

1. Community members (approx. 30)
2. Parents (19)
3. Children (20), plus incorporated comments from children onsite at programs

This summary captures the anecdotal conversations, but is not weighted nor “official data.” I have sorted alphabetically and added an * to those that were mentioned multiple times or were especially noteworthy.

1. What is your favorite thing about Muskogee?

Community Members/Business Leaders

A lot to do

*Easy to feel involved

Easy to get involved or help others

Embracing and welcoming community

Employers encourage volunteerism

*Good schools

Hospital

It's a “small, large” community

It's home

Just the right size

Law enforcement, friendly with all

Location

Neighborhood

Not cliquish

*Not much traffic

Relationships with people

Safe city
Strong schools
Variety
Waterpark
You always know someone at Walmart

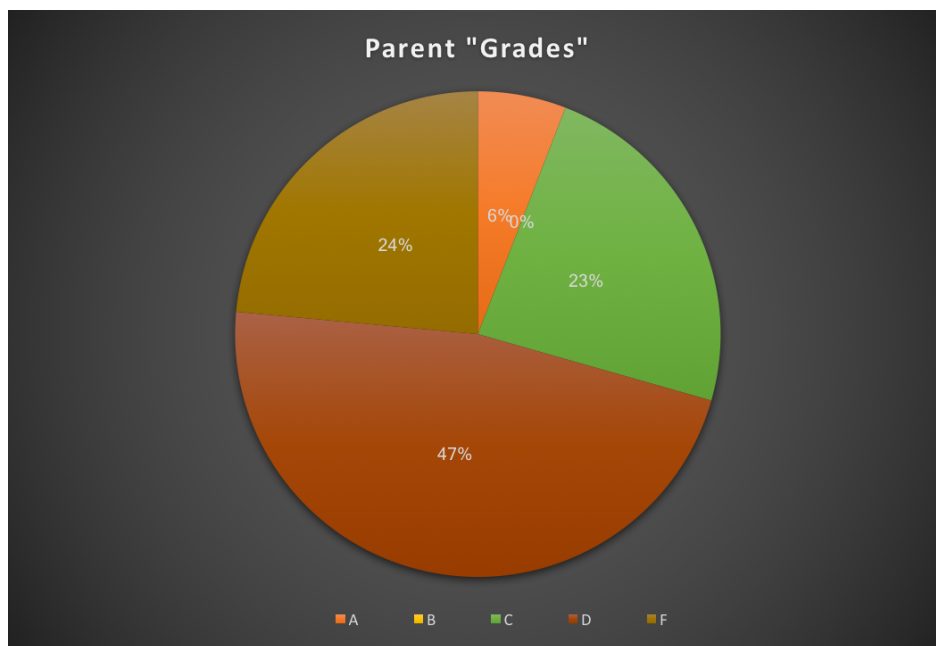
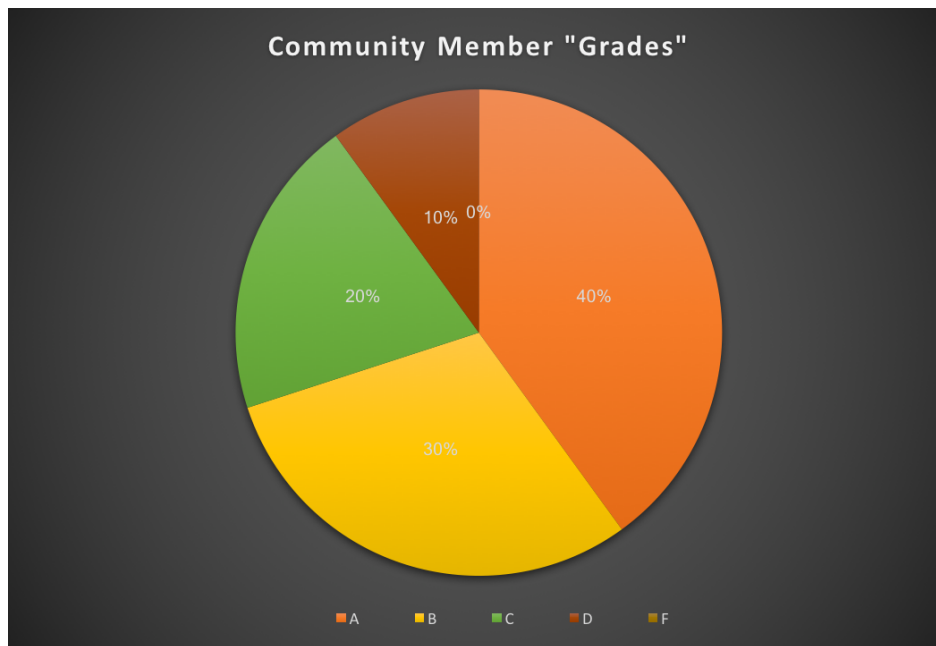
Parent Groups

Big city in a small town
Close-knit community
*Diversity
Everyone knows each other
Family matters
Feels like home, even though I haven't lived here long
*It feels personal—people know you
MLK programs
Muskogee values children and invests in them
*Nice community
One big family
People come together in crises
People work together here
Positive policing
Small town
The community is always trying to address needs

Children

Small city
Safer than big towns
Being close to my friends

2. If you were just able to give a letter grade, what letter grade would you offer when you think about the variety and availability of programs for youth in the summer in Muskogee?



3. What are some of the strongest and most successful programs and why do they come to mind?

Community Members

Camp Roxie

*Community Treasures

*Library Programs

*MLK programs

Muskogee Little Theatre

*Project Transformation

Smart School

*Summer Pride

Summer School

*Youth Volunteer Corps

Parents

*Band Camp

Bridges out of Poverty

Civil Air Patrol

Community Action

*Community Treasures

First Baptist Kidville

Habitat for Humanity

Headstart

Library

*MLK

NBN

*Night Hoops

*Project Transformation

Summer Pride

*Youth Volunteer Corps

Children

Library

*MLK

Summer Band

Summer Pride

*YVC

4. If you had a magic wand and could do one thing to improve community life for kids in Muskogee in the summer, what would it be?

Community Members

Bring back Mission Muskogee
Collaborate and don't duplicate efforts
Encourage more work opportunities for older kids
Expand the service program to be city-wide
Give them a safe place to be all day
Have a summer playground leader program
Keep school facilities open for use all summer
Keep them off the streets
Make sure they have food
Offer an evening summer program (Little Rock has "Operation safe LR")
Provide transportation to all programs
Put everything in one place
Remove illegal drugs
Replicate Project Transformation for every child

Parents

Build a community swimming pool
Build soccer fields that are free and open to all
Encourage more child-centered entertainment options
Expand camp opportunities and make them available to all
Expand Roxy program
Have a children's museum
Have a high-functioning YMCA
Have indoor basketball courts, open extended hours
Increase the children's section and programming at the Library
Increase volunteer options (or communicate what we have better)
More programs for young girls in dance, music, gymnastics
Offer an indoor playground, year round
Offer better public transportation
Offer more arts programs
Offer more for children ages 12-19
Offer sports opportunities for children with disabilities
Provide a full-service Wellness Center, including nutrition
Provide programs for school holidays throughout the year
Reignite Big Brothers, Big Sisters

Children

A chocolate fountain
Amusement parks
Free counseling
More restaurants

More swimming pools
Rides in the park
Water park

5. In your opinion, where are there gaps in summer programming for youth?

Community Members

Arts exposure
Centralized list of all programs available, community- and county-wide
City WIFI
Collaboration among funding seekers
Funding—there is never enough money
Junior high programs
Missing care for 3-4 year olds
MLK and Camp Roxie both fill up...
Parent awareness of what is available in Muskogee
Parent engagement
Parent engagement with the programs, as well as with their children
Technology, in terms of the perception that it is a draw for kids and program should offer more as one way to entice and encourage interest
Timing, both in terms of “all day” and for those who need evening activities to attend either as daycare, extra-curricular or as families
Transportation
Waiting list for day cares for those who need full-time care, especially

Parents

Art and acting programs
Big gap for junior high and high school kids
Communication—how do find out what is offered? Can we get it all in one place?
Dance is a gap. Many travel out of town. If you can't afford that, you don't get dance.
Gap for young children (3-4)
Help with transportation!
Hours of daycare and availability of quality daycare is a problem.
Latino community is underserved
Swimming opportunities
Timing of programs—impossible to have FT care at a reasonable price
Too long of wait lists and too many, both at daycares and other programs.
We miss the YMCA
What can be done about Late Start Wednesday? We need something for working parents.

Children

Learn more languages

More free field trips

More playground equipment at our programs

More soccer equipment for us to play with

Soccer camps

6. Among program leaders, transportation has come up as a roadblock for reaching some youth. Were you aware of that and do you have suggestions or creative solutions that might help serve more children?

Most were aware of the problem. Several of the community members suggested walking as an option. Parents in the group jumped in to say that most parents won't allow their children to walk, even a few blocks.

Solutions and Ideas

Community Members

- Partner with the school system and use their buses, finding a funder to cover gas and driver costs
- Uber?
- Be early adopters for driverless cars
- Use the community parks or the schools as the bus stops
- Coordinate routes to run several times a day to pick up and drop off, even adjusting start/end times of programs if necessary to fit the transportation schedules so the most kids could be served.
- Work with ministerial alliance and see if churches would share their buses.
- Hold a transportation forum, including all interested parties/voices, to discuss and offer a solution to this challenge.
- Start with providing transportation to Foundation funded programs as a beta test and then expand it after the first year
- Partner with CareerTech to train more bus drivers
- Work through the Bridges out of Poverty, Transportation Committee
- This can ONLY serve youth. Please do not mix with elderly or other adults. Too many parents would have safety concerns.

Parents

- Children cannot walk, especially if there are not sidewalks
- Several parents said they would not let their children walk any distance.
- Savannah has a free shuttle in the city. Could we have that?
- Could we ask churches to help?

- Could we expand the Summer Pride bussing?
- They like the idea of using schools as bus stops if there is a bus run for children.
- Public transportation is “too creepy” with other adults riding it for children to use.
- If children have their own public transportation, the rules are different for children under five.
- Could Bridges of out Poverty help in some way?
- We need more discussions like this!
- Having a bus route, with the right stops

7. As you see it should programs charge or should they be completely underwritten by others? Or do you have another creative idea?

This question had the most diverse opinions and the least consensus.

The community group seemed to feel ok about offering a nominal charge to all, as long as there was liberal financial aid offered. Most liked the idea of allowing parents to volunteer or help in lieu of payment if that was an option.

Some felt very strongly that all should pay something. Others were adamant that the community should provide free care for all.

Several comments:

- Please don't make it a policy, the children in the community have such a need.
- Everyone should pay something. We are building too much entitlement and expectation of everything being free.
- The audience is not my kids, it's the kids who don't have a damn thing.
- How can we help those who don't even seem to want to help themselves?
- Charging makes things appear unequal
- Paying something is an investment and helps families value the program
- Any cost will be a deterrent to some.
- Free means just a drop-off (some said that didn't matter)
- Cost differences sort kids in a bad way
- There should be some cost for all (from a parent who shared she makes \$9/hour)
- Give option to volunteer or trade out for payment
- Could there be an option to pay in several installments?

What else?

- How can the community get people more engaged and involved?
- We need more buy-in and better communication of what we have.
- Several thought we need more programs—that we are lacking enough to serve even a substantial portion of the kids. Maybe do a more data-driven evaluation to really examine capacity.
- Where are the rest of the children and what are they doing in the summers?
- I sense our groups could collaborate better, sharing ideas and working together to get funding from outside of Muskogee.
- Can the Foundation encourage more partnering?
- Muskogee needs stronger Boy Scout/Girl Scout programs
- We do a lot of things well but can always be better
- Muskogee also has a gap with elder services. Could these two be solved together? (Several said “no way” but this was an idea.)
- Should we be doing summer feeding at parks to reach more children?
- Junior high and high school students need more to do in Muskogee. A community-wide emphasis on work opportunities might be a good investment for both employers and students.