



TURNING YOUR COMMUNITY INTO A SUMMER PLAY PROGRAM

*A Practical Guide to Planning, Operating and
Growing a Successful Summer Play Program.*

INTRODUCTION

Whether you're looking to start a new Summer Play Program or enhance an existing one, this toolkit is designed to support you through every stage of planning and delivery.

From budgeting and hiring to registration, safety, programming and evaluations, you'll find practical information and ideas that can be adapted or reworked for your community.

Throughout this toolkit, you'll also find ideas of including your community in the Summer Play Program. Discover how to utilize the people, places, organizations and resources in your community. By building partnerships and utilizing local assets, you can create a memorable summer that children will remember for years to come.

Note: Templates are also available on our website as a separate download.



Disclaimer: *This toolkit is intended to provide general information, ideas, and best practices for Summer Play Programs. Communities and organizations should adapt the information to meet their unique needs, resources, policies, and local regulations. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information at the time of publication, requirements, guidelines, and best practices may change over time. Program providers are responsible for ensuring compliance with applicable legislation, safety standards, insurance requirements, and organizational policies.*

GETTING STARTED

Why Summer Play Programs Matter

Summer play programs are about more than just keeping children occupied during the summer months. They provide opportunities for children to learn about play, build friendships, explore their community, and create lasting memories in a safe and welcoming environment.

For families, a summer play program offers affordable, reliable programming that supports working parents and caregivers all while giving children opportunities to stay active, engaged and connected throughout the summer.

Communities also benefit. Summer play programs bring people together, showcase local parks, facilities and local businesses plus encourage children to develop a sense of pride towards their community. They create partnerships, strengthen connections, and introduce families to local services they might not know about.

Whether your community has offered a summer play program for years or is just starting out, these programs are an investment in your local community.



A Summer play program is sometimes the first introduction to sport, culture, volunteerism and recreation for a child. By creating a positive environment and meaningful connections, these programs can build healthier, more active and more connected communities.

Where Are You Starting From?

Every community is different. Some communities and organizations are creating a summer play program from the beginning, while others might be looking to rebuild or enhance what they're currently offering.

Starting Something New

If you're just getting started, focus on:

- Understanding what families and children need
- Identifying community spaces, resources and people who can help
- Building partnerships
- Starting small and growing over time

You do not need a large budget or a perfect plan when getting started. Many successful programs start with the help from the community and simple opportunities to play.

Bringing Something Back

If your community or organization has offered a summer play program before, take some time to reflect on what positive changes or enhancements you can make:

- What worked well?
- What challenges did you experience?
- What has changed in your community?
- Who can be involved this time?

Rebuilding does not mean starting over. It means enhancing or changing things up a bit in your program.

No matter where you are starting from, begin by looking at the strengths, spaces and people within your community that would be a positive addition.



Planning Timeline

Whether you're starting out or making changes, timing for getting things started and completed is everything!

Sometimes as an employer you'll be kicking off the work involved in a summer play program and setting your summer staff up for success so they'll be able to come in and start the planning itself.

A simple timeline could be as follows:

6 Months Before:

- Determine if there is community interest.
- Secure a location.
- Identify funding opportunities (this is based off deadlines!)
- Build a rough budget

3 – 4 Months Before:

- Apply for grants (this should be done based off of deadlines!)
- Recruit staff
- Contact community partners
- Develop registration forms

1 Month Before:

- Create program plans
- Purchase supplies
- Finalize schedule
- Train staff
- Promote the program

1 Week Before:

- Confirm registrations
- Prepare activity bins (if applicable)
- Review emergency procedures
- Contact community partners

Keep in mind, this is a rough outline and will change depending on community, staff and programming dates.

Budget & Funding

A summer play program does not need a large budget to be successful – a modest budget can provide fantastic programming.

Before applying for grants (date/need dependent) or seeking sponsors, take time to identify your major expenses and resources that you already have available. For many communities, partnerships, borrowed equipment, donations, and volunteer support can significantly reduce expenses.

Step 1: Estimate Your Costs

Sample Summer Play Program Budget

Expense Category	Estimated Cost
Staff Wages	\$500
Program Supplies & Activities	\$400
Equipment	\$300
Snacks & Refreshments	\$200
Promotion & Printing	\$100
Estimated Total	\$1,500



Your largest expense will be staffing. Keep in mind, available grants to help cover this cost typically open and close during the winter months.

Step 2: Identify Resources You Already Have

Think:

- What facilities can be used at little to no cost?
- What equipment can be borrowed?
- Which organizations may contribute supplies or volunteer time?
- What activities can be delivered through community partnerships instead of purchased programs?

Creating a similar template to the one above will help further break down your expenses.

Step 3: Close the Gap

Use existing resources first

- facilities, equipment and partnerships already available in your community

Seek small local support

- Business donations, service clubs and community groups

Apply for Grants

- Use grant funding to fill remaining gaps or to expand the program



Coordinator Tip:

Start a program that you can confidently deliver then look to expand as support grows. A simple well-run program that utilizes existing community assets is often more sustainable than an ambitious program relying on uncertain funding.

Insurance & Risk Management

Before launching your summer play program, confirm that your organization has the appropriate insurance coverage in place. Insurance will vary depending on the organization, location, and activities being offered. It is very important that you review your insurance coverage or speak with your insurance provider.

Consider confirming:

- General liability coverage
- Coverage for staff and volunteers
- Off-site activities, walking, excursions
- Use of community facilities or partner locations/buildings
- Any higher-risk activities you might have planned
- Whether additional participant consent or assumption of risk forms are required for your program

Funding Sources

Government & Public Funding

- Community Initiatives Fund – Summer Grant Program
- Canada Summer Jobs
- SPRA – Framework in Action Grant
- Young Canada Works

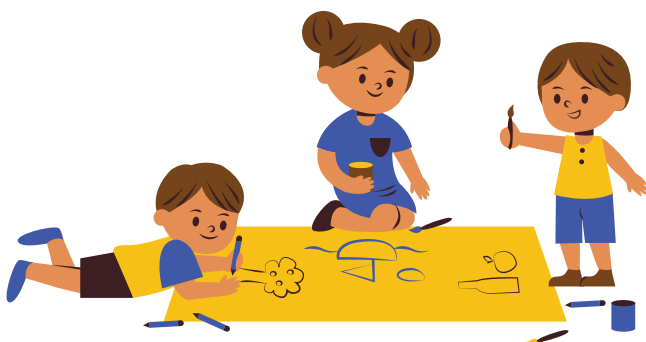
Local & Community Support

- Local Businesses
- Service Clubs
- Community Foundations
- Financial Institutions
- In-Kind Donations

Family Access Supports

- Program fee subsidies
- Sponsored participant spaces
- Creative Kids (arts and culture)
- Canadian Tire Jumpstart (physical activity and sport programs)

Be sure to contact your local Sport, Culture and Recreation District Community Consultant for help sourcing new funding streams. Sometimes the funding might not be labeled as summer play program but aspects of the program might be covered under different funding streams.



BUILDING YOUR TEAM

Recruitment

Sometimes a Recruitment Strategy might be tough in rural Saskatchewan as there's only so many people applying for your available position, but here are a few tips to help attract potential employees.

Instead of focusing on finding the “perfect” candidate, it can be more effective to look for the right qualities and build support around them. Things like reliability, enthusiasm, and a willingness to engage with kids often matter more than direct experience.

You can also think creatively about where you recruit: local high schools, recent graduates, community members, or even individuals looking for part-time summer work.

When posting the position, try online websites, social media, post-secondary job boards or spread the word around town. Approach student councils or work with your local high school and daycares.

Hiring

Once applications are received, focus on selecting individuals who demonstrate the qualities needed to create a positive experience for participants.

Look for:

- Enthusiasm and energy
- Reliability
- Communication skills
- Creativity
- Ability to work as part of a team
- Patience and professionalism
- Experience working with children (as asset but not always required)
- Those WANTING to work with children or starting a career in working with children

**Coordinator Tip:**

You can teach someone how to lead a craft or organize a game. It's much harder to teach enthusiasm, patience and a positive attitude.

Onboarding

A successful summer play program starts by setting your employees up for success. Here are a few things to consider once you've hired.

Setting clear expectations, keeping programming simple and providing basic guidance can go a long way.

Things like orientation – which will help introduce your workers to the organizations and what is expected of them. This helps to make them feel comfortable. This can include:

Supervision: Who they ask for support and get clarification from

Logistics & Daily Routine: What tasks are their responsibility and what can they usually expect

Policies and Procedures: For the organization but also the summer play program. Do they need to create these or have you already thought them through

Support: Who they can go to when they need help



Training

With training, think of what information is specific to your Leaders role as a Summer Play Programmer. The goal is to help your leaders succeed.

SPRA Play Leadership: A 7.5 hour workshop that focuses on the benefits of play for children and youth. The training is available online and covers a substantial number of policies, safety and programming.

Rule of 2: Through the Coaching Association of Canada. Even though it's sport-focused, the principles of protecting children and staff apply to any youth programs.

First Aide/CPR: At least one Leader, preferably all, should be trained.

Respect in Sport for Activity Leaders: Training is conducted online through Sask Sport. Participants will learn about child protection, boundaries, bullying and Duty to Report.

Young Worker Readiness Certificate: For 14 and 15 year olds looking to enter the workforce.

There might be a cost associated with taking some of the training mentioned above. Grants and funding might be available to help cover any costs.

Be sure to contact your local Sport, Culture and Recreation District for other training, workshops, webinars or networking opportunities that your Leaders can take.



Staff Expectations

Summer Play Program leaders play an important role in creating a safe, welcoming and positive experience for participants. While activities and games are important, things like enthusiasm, leadership and attitude of staff can have the greatest impact on kids.

Setting clear expectations of staff right from the beginning can help them feel confident in their role and contributes to a successful program.

Professionalism

Staff are representatives of your organization and community. Expect staff to:

- Arrive on time and ready to participate
- Dress appropriately for active and outdoor programming
- Wear clothing or identification that makes it easy to recognize and know they're leaders
- Be respectful with one another, participants, families, etc.
- Use appropriate language at all times

Supervision

Children should always know where staff are, and staff should always know where children are. Staff should:

- Actively supervise participants
- Avoid distractions such as personal cellphones
- Be aware of attendance throughout the day
- Never leave children unsupervised
- Follow the organizations safety and supervision policies

Positive Leadership

Leaders set the tone. Encourage them to:

- Be enthusiastic
- Participate alongside children
- Encourage inclusion
- Celebrate effort by participants
- Model kindness and respect



Coordinator Tip:

Encourage leaders to not just lead the activity – but be part of the activity. Kids remember leaders who participate with them and joined in.

Staff Expectations: Continued

Communication

Leaders should communicate respectfully with:

- Children
- Parents
- Coworkers
- Community partners

If they cannot answer a parents question, it's okay for them to say "I'm not sure, but let me find out for you."

Safety

Leaders are responsible for creating a safe environment. This includes:

- Following emergency procedures
- Reporting emergencies immediately
- Completing incident report forms when required
- Watching for hazards
- Following sun safety and hydration practices

Other expectations can include, but are not limited to: teamwork, building relationships, social media and phone policies.

Everyday when a child leaves your program, they should feel:

- ☒ Safe
- ☒ Included
- ☒ Encouraged
- ☒ Respected
- ☒ Active
- ☒ Proud of something they did or created
- ☒ Excited to come back tomorrow



RUNNING YOUR PROGRAM

Registration

Registration is an important part of your program. This is where you get the details about every participant attending your program and ensure you're prepared for their needs.

A well designed registration form does more than collect name and phone numbers. It helps staff provide a safe, organized and enjoyable experience for all participants. It also gives parents an opportunity to share important information that will help staff support their child throughout the summer.

Each community's registration process will look different, but the following information should be considered.

Participant Information

Collect the basic information needed to identify each child.

- Child's name
- Preferred name or nickname
- Date of Birth
- Age
- Grade completed
- Home Address

Parent & Emergency Contact

Ensure staff know who to contact if needed.

- Parent/guardian names
- Phone numbers
- Email address
- Emergency contact (someone other than parent)

Medical Information

Help staff prepare for health related situations. Consider asking about:

- Allergies
- Medical conditions
- Medications required during program hours
- Dietary restrictions
- Any additional medical information staff should know about

Registration

Supporting Participants

Every child is different. Asking a few extra questions will help staff create a more positive experience. You may wish to ask:

- Can your child use the washroom independently?
- Does your child require assistance when washing their hands?
- Water activities
- Sunscreen reminders or assistance
- Emergency medical treatment
- Participation in special activities

Including these questions on the registration form can reduce the need for multiple forms throughout the summer.

Pick Up & Departure

Clearly identify how children will leave the program each day.

Consider asking:

- Who is authorized to pick up your child?
- Is anyone not authorized to pick up your child?
- May your child walk home independently?
- If yes, at what time?



Coordinator Tip:

Keep your registration form comprehensive but not overwhelming. Ask only for information that will help you safely support participants and communicate effectively with families.

Don't Forget!

Many summer play programs will ask about allergies but a few other practical questions (if you wish) can make a huge difference.

Examples include:

- Washroom independence
- Swimming ability (if applicable)
- Authorized pick-up arrangements
- Photo/media consent
- Behavioral or sensory considerations
- Fears or anxieties (dogs, bugs, loud noises)
- Anything that helps staff support the child successfully



Policies & Procedures

While planning exciting activities is one of the most enjoyable parts of running a Summer Play Program, having clear policies and procedures in place is what helps ensure the program is safe, organized, and enjoyable for everyone involved.

Taking the time to establish expectations before the first day can help staff respond confidently to everyday situations and unexpected challenges. Many municipalities or organizations may already have policies in place, while others may be creating them for the first time.

The following topics are intended to help you review the areas you should consider before your program begins.

Policy/Procedure

Why It Matters

Registration & Emergency Contact Forms	→	Ensures you have the information needed to contact parents or respond to medical situations.
Attendance Sign In/Sign Out	→	Helps account for participants throughout the day and ensures kids leave with authorized individuals.
Behaviour Expectations	→	Creates consistent expectations for participants, staff and families.
Medical Info & Allergies	→	Ensures staff are aware of health concerns and know how to respond if needed.
Emergency Procedures	→	Prepares staff to respond to accidents, severe weather, fire or other emergencies.
Sun Safety & Hydration	→	Encourage regular water breaks, sunscreen use and shade during hot weather.
Inclement Weather	→	Establishes when activities should be modified or cancelled due to heat, smoke, lightning or severe weather.
Incident Reporting	→	Provides a consistent process for documenting accidents or significant incidents.
Staff Code of Conduct	→	Sets expectations for professionalism, communication and appropriate interactions with children.
Photography & Media Consent	→	Clarifies how participant photos will be used and ensure parental permission has been obtained

Parent Communication

Why it Matters

Clear and consistent communication helps families feel informed, builds trust, and contributes to a positive Summer Play Program experience. By setting expectations early and keeping parents updated throughout the summer, staff can reduce confusion, respond to concerns more effectively, and create stronger relationships with families.

Communication doesn't need to be complicated – simple, regular updates can go a long way.

Before the Program Begins

Help parents feel prepared by sharing:

- Program dates and hours
- Location(s)
- What to bring each day (extra clothing, swimsuit, indoor shoes, lunch, etc.)
- Program expectations and behaviour guidelines
- Pick up and drop off procedures
- Contact information of staff
- Any required forms or permissions

During the Program

Keeping families informed by communicating:

- Weekly schedules or themes
- Special guests or community visits
- Field trips or excursions
- Weather-related changes
- Reminder notices (special clothing, water days, etc.)
- Celebrations or end of summer events

Simple updates through social media, email, or a communication app can help parents stay connected during the program.

When to Contact Parents

Parents should be promptly contacted when:

- A child becomes ill or injured
- There is a behavioural concern that requires follow up
- Program schedules change unexpectedly
- An emergency affects the program
- Additional information or permissions are required



Parent Communication: Continued

Sharing Successes

Communication isn't only about problems. Celebrate the positive moments by sharing:

- Photos (with permission)
- Children's artwork or projects
- Highlights from the week
- Fun stories or accomplishments
- Upcoming activities

Sharing these moments help families feel connected to their child's experience.



Coordinator Tip:

Establish one primary method of communication at the beginning of summer and use it consistently. Whether its email, Facebook, a communication app, etc. families appreciate knowing where to look for updates.

Building Positive Relationships

Encourage staff to:

- Greet parents and children each morning
- Share one positive comment about a child whenever possible
- Be approachable or willing to answer questions
- Address concerns privately and respectfully
- Follow up if a parent raises an issue

Those simple interactions can make a huge difference.

A parent who hears **"Emily helped another child today"** is more likely to trust that staff member than just hearing about a problem.



*Think of parents as another partnership in the success of your summer play program. Keeping them informed and involved creates a positive experience for everyone **PLUS** works as marketing for your program as parents will share their experience.*

Planning Your Day

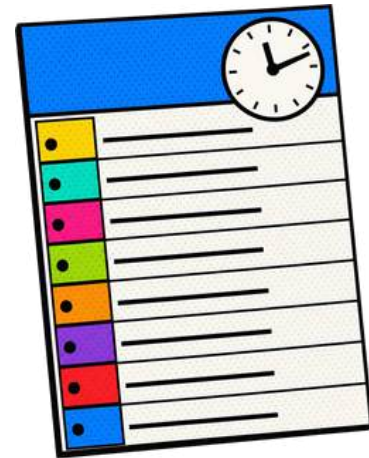
A well planned day helps kids know what to expect while still allowing time and space for flexibility. While every Summer Play Program is different, keeping to a schedule of consistent activities can help create structure for kids.

Remember: it's okay to make adjustments based off of the weather, energy levels or unexpected opportunities that come up.

Build a Balanced Day

Try to include a mix of:

- Active play
- Art/Crafts
- Outdoor exploration
- Community experiences
- Snacks and hydration
- Free play
- Quiet and downtime



Kids do not need to be consistently moving. It's okay for rest periods or unstructured activities. Try having a timeslot where the kids pick one of three activities they want, allowing them to have say into their day.

Tips:

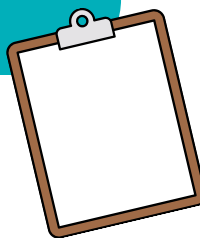
- *Not every activity will go as planned – have backup ideas for if it rains, an activity ends early, if kids lose interest or a community partner cancels.*
- *Alternate active and quieter activities based on energy level of participants*
- *Plan water breaks*
- *Allow time for clean-up and transition to next activity*
- *Don't forget about free time – it allows participants to make friendships and decide for themselves what they want to do.*

Make time for Community

Try to include one community-based experience each week. This could be:

- Visiting a local business or organization
- Inviting a community member to share a skill
- Exploring a local park or trail
- Completing a community service project
- Participating in an event already happening in your community

Kids remember these experiences and it helps to grow pride and awareness in their community.



Behaviour Management

It's normal for disagreements, frustrations, or challenging behaviours from participants. The goal of behaviour management isn't to punish, but to create a safe, respectful and inclusive environment for everyone.

By setting clear expectations, responding consistently and building positive relationships, some of these challenges can be prevented before they even begin.

Set Clear Expectations

Children are more successful when they know what is expected from them. At the beginning of the program and each new week, review simple expectations:

- Be kind and respectful
- Include everyone
- Keep your hands and feet to yourself
- Help take care of equipment and the space
- Have fun!

Keep expectations positive whenever possible.

For example: Instead of saying ***"Don't run."***

Try: ***"Please use your walking feet inside."***

Focus on Positive Behaviour

Children respond well to encouragement. Look for opportunities to:

- Praise effort
- Recognize kindness
- Celebrate teamwork

Sometimes a simple "Thanks for helping cleanup" can encourage the same behaviour from other children.

Know When to Involve the Parents

Most behaviour concerns can be managed within the program, however there could be exceptions when parents need to be contacted. They could include:

- Safety becomes a concern
- Behaviour is repeated despite staff support
- A significant incident occurs
- Additional support might be helpful

Approach conversations respectfully and focus on working together to support the child.

Remember:

- *Being consistent can help children thrive. Ensure same expectations for everyone.*
- *Work together as a team*
- *Address challenges early*
- *Give clear, simple directions*
- *Stay calm and listen before reacting*
- *Behaviour is a form of communication: kids could be tired, hungry, frustrated, nervous, etc.*

**Coordinator Tip:**

- Redirect rather than argue
- Give children choices whenever possible
- Focus on behaviour – not the child
- Stay calm – even when the child isn't
- Reinforce positive behaviour more often than correcting negative behaviour
- Remember, every day is a fresh start!

Conflict Between Children

When conflict occurs:

1. Ensure everyone is safe
2. Listen to each child without interrupting
3. Help them explain how they're feeling
4. Encourage them to think of a solution together
5. Follow up later to make sure the issue has been resolved

The goal isn't to decide who was 'right' but help children learn respectful ways to solve problems.

Daily Safety Reminders

The safety of participants should be a top priority. Taking a few minutes each day can help prevent incidents and ensure staff are ready to respond.

Before each program day:

- Ensure emergency contact information is easily accessible
- Check first aid supplies are stocked and available
- Complete head counts throughout the day especially before and after outings
- Inspect activity area and equipment
- Encourage regular water breaks, sunscreen use and time in the shade
- Monitor weather conditions
- Carry a cell phone and emergency contact list when offsite
- Document and report incidents or injuries based off of your policies and procedures.



Coordinator Tip:

Encourage staff to do a quick 'safety scan' before each activity. Looking for hazards and checking equipment only takes a few minutes and can prevent many common injuries.

Evaluation

One of the best ways to strengthen your summer play program is to take time to reflect what went well and what didn't.

Gathering feedback from participants, families, community partners and staff and identify hits and misses while also recommending improvements for next year.

Consider gathering feedback from:

Participants

- What was your favorite activity?
- What was something new you tried?
- What activity would you like to do again?
- If there anything you would change?

Evaluation: Continued

Parents and Guardians

- Was communication clear throughout the program?
- Did your child enjoy attending?
- Was the program good value?
- What did you like the most?
- What suggestions do you have for next year?

Staff

- What activities worked well?
- What challenges did you experience?
- Were there enough supplies and resources?
- What recommendations do you have for future programs?



Coordinator Tip:

Do not wait until the last day to reflect. Throughout the summer, keep a notebook handy and document things as they occur. This way changes can be made instantly if needed while also making planning for next year easier.

MAKING YOUR COMMUNITY A PROGRAM

Community as a Program

You really don't need to reinvent the wheel to keep kids engaged during a Summer Play Program.

One of the most effective things you can do is use what already exists in your community.

There are a few reasons this works so well.

- It's often more cost-effective.
- It helps you build partnerships with local businesses and organizations.
- It really highlights what your community already has to offer.

And **it doesn't have to be complicated.**

A visit to the fire hall can turn into a safety and water day. The library can become a story time and scavenger hunt. A seniors centre can create opportunities for intergenerational connection. Even a local shop can offer simple, hands-on learning experiences.

So instead of always bringing activities in, think about how you can send kids out into the community—especially to places that are within walking distance.

Asset Mapping

Asset Mapping is identifying the facilities, people, places, organizations, skills, and resources that already exist within the community and finding creative ways to incorporate them into your Summer Play Program.

Community assets can include:

People:

- Artists
- Gardeners
- Seniors
- Musicians
- Firefighters
- RCMP
- Coaches
- Business owners
- Parents and volunteers

Places:

- Parks
- Trails
- Museums
- Libraries
- Community Halls
- Swimming pools
- Greenhouses
- Sports fields
- Local businesses

Organizations:

- Service clubs
- Schools
- Churches
- 4-H Clubs
- Sports organizations
- Arts councils
- First Nations

Skills:

- Fishing
- Photography
- Indigenous teachings
- Baking
- Painting
- Carpentry
- Yoga



Coordinator Tip:

- Break down the list to what might be within walking distance of where your summer play program will mainly be hosted. Also for those willing to travel to your camp base.
- Don't focus on what your community doesn't have. Focus on what it does have. Every community has unique people, places, organizations, and experiences that can help enhance a Summer Play Program.

Community Engagement

When we talk about community engagement, it's easy to think it just means taking kids out into the community.

But the real difference isn't where you go – it's how kids are involved when they get there.

A lot of programs focus on visits or presentations where kids are mostly watching or listening. What really makes an impact is shifting that into participation.

Instead of just visiting a place, get kids involved in something hands-on. Instead of someone talking to them, the community is interacting with them.

It also doesn't have to be the obvious partnerships. Some of the best engagement comes from unexpected people, places, and experiences.

And when possible, giving kids a way to contribute—even in small ways—helps them feel like they're part of the community, not just visiting it.

This isn't about adding more to your program, it's about approaching what you're already doing a little differently.

And these are just a few simple examples of what that can look like.

Remember:

The goal isn't to do more, it's to do things differently!

Building Successful Partnerships

Partnerships do not always require financial support. Some organizations are happy and able to provide support in other ways like their time, knowledge, facility, or resources.

Successful partnerships are built on communication, appreciation and mutual benefit.

Tips for Building Partnerships

- Reach out as early as possible
- Explain your program and its goals
- Be clear on what you're asking for
- Be flexible and open to ideas
- Respect your partner's time and availability
- Recognize and thank your partner

Partnership Ideas

Community Partner	How They Might Contribute
Library	Storytime, summer reading, crafts
Museum	Tour, scavenger hunt
Fire Department	Fire safety demonstrations, touch a truck
RCMP	Bike safety or community policing
Greenhouse	Planting activity
Rescue Society	Dogs, cats brought in
Seniors Centre	Board games, crafts, storytelling



Coordinator Tip:

A successful partnership doesn't have to be large. A one-hour visit from a local artist, gardener or firefighter can make a significant impact.

Cost Reduction Ideas

Keeping costs low isn't always about spending less—it's often about using resources differently.

Sometimes the best budget strategy is borrowing, partnering, sharing, or building around what already exists.

Borrow: Create a "community lending list" (sports gear, wagons, tents, lawn games). Ask organizations to loan items for one day. Share equipment with a neighboring community.

Micro Sponsors: Instead of asking one business for major support, ask several for one small thing. Example: one provides freezies, one donates cardboard, one lends buckets or hoses, one hosts a stop on a walking route. Typically, smaller asks get more yeses.

Experience Donations: Ask: "Would you give us 30 minutes of your time?" instead of "Would you sponsor our program?" Time and expertise are often easier to give than money.

Loose Parts Play: Collect donated everyday materials. Examples: PVC scraps, fabric remnants, milk crates, tires, wood offcuts (safe and clean). These open ended play materials can go a long way.

Build Around Events: Piggyback on things already happening. Examples: Farmers Market, library events, ball tournament weekend, community BBQ. Don't create more, instead attach to what exists in your community, then rotate in special days. It helps to spread out effort and costs.

Wish List Wall: Post specific needs and see about getting donations from the public. Examples: sidewalk chalk, old sheets, buckets, recyclables, etc. People often give when they know exactly what is needed.

Stretch Grant Funds: Use grant dollars for things that unlock multiple uses. Examples: equipment used all summer, supplies reusable year after year, materials that support multiple age groups

Program Ideas

Ideas can be endless and really it's about what works for you and in your local community. Below are a few different categories to help get your gears turning.

Behind the Scenes: Take kids on tours of your town office, the backroom of the rink, visit local shops like the hardware store where they can cut keys, mix paint, etc. Hidden places could be the water treatment plant, butcher shop, spa, etc. Kids **LOVE** seeing behind the scenes.

Learn from your Community: Invite community members to your summer play program and have them teach kids new skills like knitting, gardening, or tying fishing knots. Try to stay away from presentations, but instead have a more casual hands-on sharing where kids learn a new skill.

Build & Give Back: Keep things simple where kids adopt a small space (park corner or flower bed) and have them take care of it over the summer by planting flowers or a garden. Try small kindness projects like writing cards for seniors or leaving positive chalk messages around town. What's important here is that kids can see the impact of what they've done and can walk by later and say, ***"we helped with that."***

Create and Experience: Another important piece of a strong program is creating opportunities for kids to experience things they might not normally have access to. This could be creative activities, but it goes a bit beyond just crafts.

For example, instead of just doing an art project, you might invite a local artist to create something alongside the kids. Or instead of just visiting a museum, you turn it into an experience—through games, scavenger hunts, or interactive activities. Even something like a simple performance, music, dance, or theatre, can become a memorable part of the program.

These kinds of experiences give kids a chance to try new things, build confidence, and discover interests they might not have otherwise. And often, they're the moments kids remember most at the end of the summer.