

Background Information on National Summer Learning Association

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About National Summer Learning Association:

For nearly 30 years, NSLA has worked to combat summer learning loss and close the achievement and opportunity gaps which research shows grows most dramatically between lower and higher income students over the summer months. ***Our vision is, and always has been, to ensure all young people in America, regardless of background, income, and zip-code, can participate in and benefit from a high-quality summer learning experience, every year.*** NSLA supports and collaborates with a broad and ever-growing network of 15,000+ leaders of school districts, youth serving government agencies, non-profit and corporate partners from across the country focused on improving the lives of youth. “Summer learning” is now part of our education vernacular and NSLA believes that the summer months are the most entrepreneurial time in education. ***When we discuss the importance of summer learning, we really are discussing ways to Promote Equity, Create Opportunity and Build Community*** for young people and their families. Summer learning is a unique time in education and provides funders a high return on investment because of the ***“4 I’s of Summer.”*** It is a time for:

- ***Improvement:*** for both students and staff. All summer programs double up as staff training and help adults also learn, develop, and practice new skills. NSLA promotes the strategy of “No training about kids without kids.”
- ***Innovation:*** offering safe spaces to incubate and test our new ideas before scaling. Numerous national, exemplar youth development organizations and schools now operating year-round such as Fresh Air Fund, Outward Bound, and KIPP Charter Schools; all first started out as summer programs for youth.
- ***Interconnection:*** breaking down artificial silos in education. Due to local control, education in America is highly fragmented and siloed with numerous well-intentioned but disconnected entities trying to serve the same students. Summer provides time, space, and tangible opportunities for cross-sector leaders to model and develop multi-sector partnerships which when successful can be sustained and supported throughout the school year.
- ***Impact:*** creating immediate and lasting change on people’s lives and national policy. Investing in experiential summer programs can change the trajectory of a young person’s life because, by definition, summer is a critical life transition point between grades, schools, and careers. Collectively, summer learning programs have the chance to demonstrate the power of continued investment in Out of School Time and new ways of learning and teaching.

NSLA believes that connecting all students in America to high-quality summer program is a solvable challenge in America especially with the historic \$30 billion-dollar federal investment in summer learning and out of school time programs funded through the American Rescue Plan. To meet this critical

moment in our nation's history NSLA has committed to supporting our network in five strategic priority areas, what we call our **5P's: Program Quality, Partnerships, Policy, Public Awareness, and People (Leadership Development).**

1. PROGRAM QUALITY:

When kids continue learning during the summer, they are healthier, safer, and more prepared for the school year ahead. NSLA staff and our roster of expert Field Consultants are available to help partners plan, train staff, prepare, and measure effectiveness for the coming summer. NSLA designs tailored training solutions programs and has invested in program quality through webinars, national conferences, trainings, and tools.

2. PARTNERSHIPS: Professional Summer Learning Communities and Expanded Technical Assistance & Training

Based on our highly successful, New Vision for Summer School cohort of more than 50 school districts from around the country, NSLA has leveraged our expertise and expanding our efforts to empower and equip more programs at all stages of development and create deeper partnerships through the formation of 12 Professional Summer Learning Communities (PSLCs) offering programming to students including: **School Districts and Charter Schools, Youth Employment & Internships, Libraries, Arts Education, Healthcare & STEM, College Access & Summer MELT, Health & Fitness, Public Housing, Special Populations, Environment & Outdoors, and Research & Evaluation.** This strategy is based on findings in the National Academies of Sciences Report, "Shaping Summertime Experiences: Opportunities to Promote Healthy Development and Wellbeing for Children and Youth, which found "Better collaboration and coordination among these parties (summer programs) are needed to identify and prioritize high-quality summertime experiences, with special attention to the needs of children and youth who currently lack these opportunities."

3. POLICY: Support Federal, State, and Local Education Ecosystems for Summer Learning and Out-of- School time

NSLA has worked closely with states and municipalities to develop and expand enriching summer learning opportunities to reach the young people who need it the most. NSLA collaborates with afterschool networks and summer learning programs to build capacity, promote evidenced-based practices, and support community-wide systems to create sustainable services for youth and families during the summer at the federal, state, and local level. This work greatly expanded during the pandemic as the world turned to NSLA for our seminal research and data on what happens to students when they are out of school for three months. The largest policy victory to date was the allocation of \$30 billion dollars earmarked for Summer Learning and Out of School time in the American Rescue Plan (ARP) to be spent down through 2024.

4. Public Awareness: Support expanding resources for parents and caregivers including Discoversummer.org

Summer learning programs do not happen without students enrolled in programs and since the pandemic, a growing audience for NSLA are parents and caregivers seeking to find high-quality, local summer learning opportunities for their children. Simultaneously, NSLA is hearing from local programs that there is a lack of students enrolled in eligible slots. To help bridge this gap and fulfill our vision that all children in America can access and afford to participate in a summer learning experience every year, NSLA has launched DiscoverSummer.org, a comprehensive website with a program search engine and useful resources specifically targeting parents and caregivers and created in collaboration with the largest national program providers.

5. People: Center for Summer Innovation Leadership Development Programs

Since our founding as what was originally Teach Baltimore, NSLA has focused on issues of equity in summer programming and education. Too often, leaders of youth serving non-profit organizations, government agencies, and public schools still do not reflect the students and communities they serve. In this transformative moment focusing on racial justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion, NSLA expanded our efforts to empower and equip more diverse leaders at all stages of their professional and personal journey to help influence and lead organizations and programs in our field through the newly formed Center for Summer Innovation including our:

- **Summer Learning Innovation Fellowships**, our six-month program for diverse and emerging education leaders of Color from across the US to either launch or scale an innovative summer program for low-income students. NSLA will run a competitive, national selection process and award winners will receive approximately \$20,000 in program seed funding, a personal Coach, trainings, resources and tools on program design, management and evaluation, access to additional networking opportunities and mentors to support the launch of their program.
- **National Youth Leadership Institute**, a week-long convening for delegations of diverse staff and student leaders from NSLA's 75+ Award- Winning Programs. Students and staff will have their own separate and combined leadership tracks. Each day will cover a different curriculum theme (i.e. Arts, STEM, Health and Fitness, Service Learning, Career Exploration and leadership skills (i.e. public speaking, project management, team and coalition building). Participants will have the chance to meet outside education experts and work on a team culminating project to share and demonstrate best practices from our field and their own individual organizations with policymakers.
- **Capitol Hill Internship Program**, an all-expense paid, Congressional summer internship and leadership program in Washington DC for first generation, college students of color who are graduates of one of NSLA's national award-winning programs.