



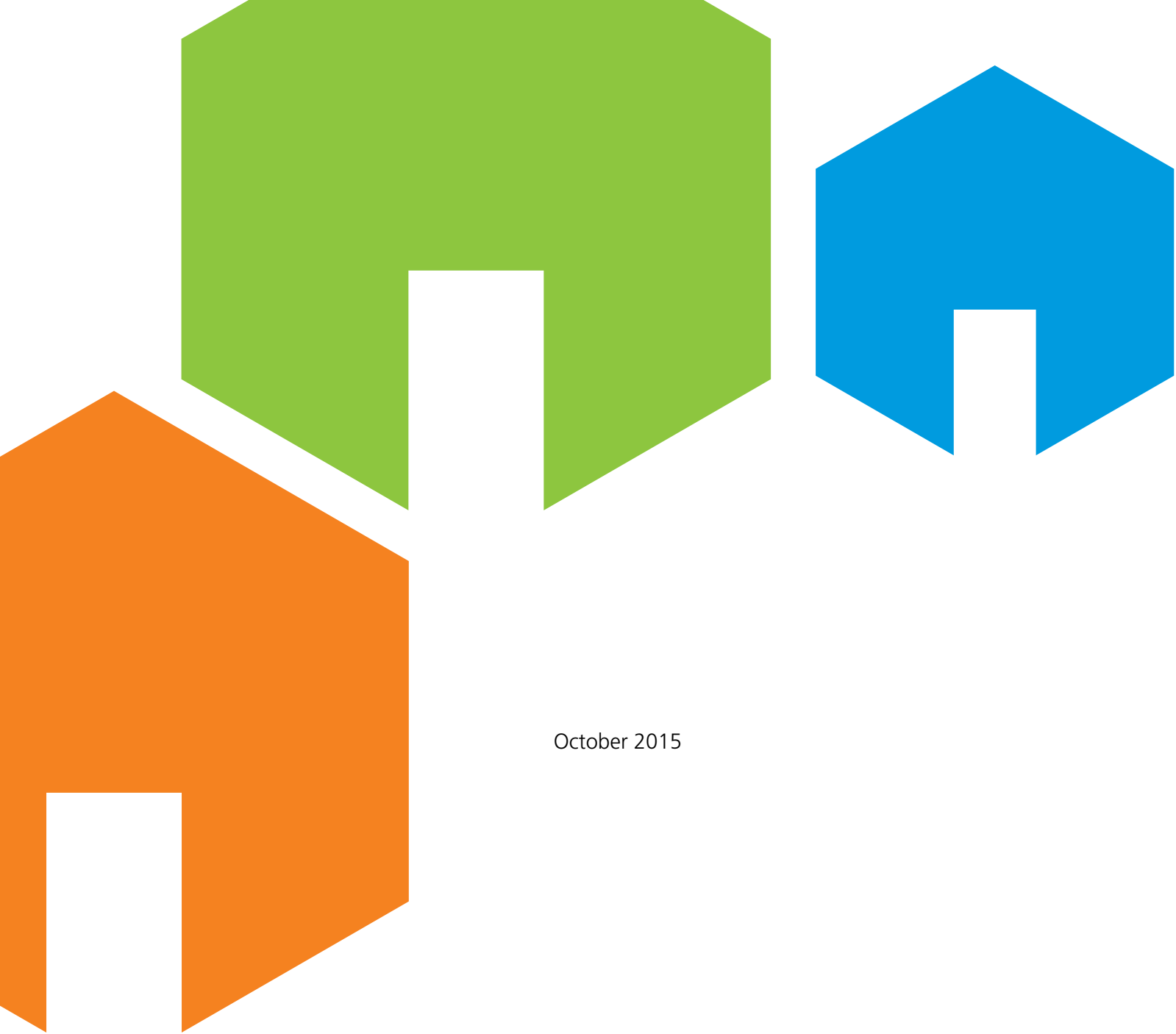
Community Use of Schools

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Guide to Foster and Support Best Practices

October 2015





October 2015

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The guide cannot be used for commercial purpose.

For more information, or to contact the CUS Committee, please email: office@OASBO.org

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Community Use of Schools - Best Practices Resource Guide

Mentorship At Its Finest

As we celebrate the tenth anniversary of Community Use of Schools (CUS) it is clear that the involvement and support of communities, schools and school boards are key to its success.

The Ontario Association of School Business Officials (OASBO) CUS committee established a sub-committee and retained WoodGreen Community Services to develop a handbook of best practices that will help Outreach Coordinators (OCs) in their role of ensuring the effectiveness of CUS, including the Priority Schools Initiative (PSI) and related initiatives such as Focus on Youth (FOY). The guide will support the OCs in the role of managing the implementation of community use of school space through activities such as community outreach and engagement, implementation of school board policy, data collection and coordination with the Ministry, school boards, local schools and the local community.

Throughout this entire process, we experienced mentorship at its finest. School boards were enthusiastic to share practices that are working well at the local level. This guide is evidence-informed, experienced-based, and developed through primary research into current effective practices. Research was conducted through broad consultation that included responses from all 72 school boards in Ontario, each one unique. The practices noted within the guide are not intended to be a 'one size fits all' approach, but a resource designed to be a starting point to generate ideas and provide examples of best practices that can be tailored to build on current practices and enhance the value of CUS in local communities.

As you read through this document please be reminded that Community Use of Schools and its staff are making a difference. CUS is comprehensive in scope and serves as a prime example of community members coming together in diverse ways to support children, their families and the broader community. School boards are the stewards of valuable assets that are available for use by community partners. Ultimately, the positive impact that CUS has in communities in Ontario supports student achievement and well-being. CUS staff play an important role in facilitating the many relationships and opportunities that support this community development.

CUS is enriched by effective school board teams, respectful community relationships, and open communication. We trust that this guide will provide tools and strategies to boost the success of CUS in each community across the province.

Sincerely,

The Resource Guide Task Team (RGTT)
OASBO CUS Committee





What is Community Use of Schools?

"Ontario's schools are community hubs where all people can gather to learn and participate in a range of activities supported by



Schools in Ontario play a key role in their local communities. Schools provide a place to come together, volunteer, build skills, access community programs, become physically active and build strong and healthy communities. The idea of 'schools as hubs' continues to be a strong guiding principle for Community Use of Schools.

Ontario's Ministry of Education provides funding to all school boards in Ontario to increase affordable access for not-for-profit groups to both indoor and outdoor school space at reduced rates outside of regular school hours.

2015 is an important anniversary of Community Use of Schools (CUS) - it celebrates the tenth year of funding. With a strong foundation grounded in five program principles, combined with committed and experienced staff and program leadership, there has been tremendous growth and evolution since its inception ten years ago.

Principles include:

1. Support and promotion of healthy, active lifestyles for youth.
2. Fair and equal access to school space at affordable rates for community purposes, outside of regular school hours.
3. Respect amongst CUS partners and stakeholders for each other's roles, responsibilities and obligations.
4. School activities, including extra-curricular activities and parent involvement activities, have priority use of school space.
5. After-school hours user fees for school facilities are affordable for not-for-profit users.

CUS "connects
the board to the
community."

CUS Outreach Coordinator



The Ministry provides funding through three different funding mechanisms:

- **Base Funding** - base funding is provided to all school boards to offset costs associated with use of space, outside of regular school hours, by community groups. This funding serves to make the space both available and more affordable - to reduce (or even eliminate) the fee or charge that would normally be paid by the not-for-profit community group to use the space.
- **Outreach Coordinator Funding** - funding is provided to all school boards for Outreach Coordinators to support community access to schools. Outreach Coordinators are key to the success of CUS.
- **Priority Schools Initiative** - The Priority Schools Initiative (PSI), a component of CUS, supports the provincial Poverty Reduction Strategy. Not all school boards receive PSI funding. The identification of Priority Schools is based on census data provided by Statistics Canada and in consultation with district school boards. Some of the factors that are taken into consideration include socio-economic status, communities where youth face high risk, and areas where there are significant gaps in after-school programming or no access to facilities. The funding provided offsets operating costs associated with keeping the schools open at no cost to the user, seven days a week, throughout the year. The initiative works as an after-school strategy, focused on fairness and equity of access to activities that promote healthy living.

PSI benefits are many:

- Giving stakeholders the opportunity to expand their programming at no additional costs;
- Focusing on building active, vibrant and healthy communities;
- Providing children and adults alike with a place to gather and participate in a safe, familiar environment;
- Offering a variety of space options to community user groups;
- Promoting schools and boards as active community partners;
- Acting as a continuum of care as students transition from the school day;
- Supporting overall student achievement.

Community Use of Schools Best Practices Guide

The Guide is informed by evidence and examples that were collected by the project team and is firmly grounded in the experience of CUS staff. The Guide highlights best practices related to the following:

1. CUS Coordinator role, focus and reporting
2. CUS funding
3. Internal, school board relationships
4. Community relationships and partnerships
5. CUS local policy
6. CUS local practices and procedures

What is a Best Practice?

This Guide is called a 'best practices' Guide, but what do we mean by 'best practice'?

A best practice is defined as a CUS policy, process, or method that is practice-informed, adaptable, sustainable, builds capacity and has outcomes that consistently demonstrate positive results.

Best practices are context specific. They relate to a school board, its internal environment including structure, funding and leadership, as well as to the broader external community.

Best practices are affected by the size, scale and culture of the school board and community. For example, smaller school boards may have very different internal processes and external relationships than larger boards. Rural boards and school boards that are geographically dispersed over large areas may face different challenges and have different practices than urban boards. It is recognized that scalability of best practices is about making adaptations that work within local contexts.

In this Guide, a best practice is defined as one that:

- Makes school space more accessible to the community;
- Improves upon past practice and maintains success;
- Improves efficiencies;
- Improves communication;
- Helps promote school boards as active partners in community development;
- Promotes awareness of CUS;
- Increases supports for student achievement and student and community wellness.

Some of the criteria may be mutually exclusive. For example, CUS is working to make space accessible and equitably available within communities as well as to use CUS resources and budget most efficiently. There may be good practices that relate to the efficient use of limited resources that do not promote the objective of access to space as strongly as other practices.

Practices can also be described as promising, effective and successful. The use of these terms represents an effort to move away from the position that there is one 'best' way of doing something and suggests that we can learn from a range of good and effective practices within a framework of continuous improvement.

This Guide identifies a number of practices that may be considered 'best' practices from different perspectives, and which reflect the diversity and uniqueness of school boards and their communities across the province. We will use the term 'best' in the broadest context in this Guide - to identify good, promising and effective practices within the Ontario CUS context.

Why are we interested in learning about successful and best practices?

Identifying and understanding 'best' practices is an important step in program learning and knowledge exchange among the CUS staff in Ontario's 72 school boards. The Guide encourages discussion about CUS policy and practice, highlights the good work being done by Community Use of Schools Outreach Coordinators in Ontario, and informs potential next steps.

Learning from the best practices described in this Guide will contribute to the ongoing development of CUS and build on the existing high level of commitment to CUS. The Guide provides an important resource for CUS staff in school boards. In particular, it can serve as an orientation for new staff and help ensure sustainability of the most successful practices developed over time.

The Guide will also be useful for decision-makers in school boards across Ontario and the Ontario Ministry of Education by providing insight to effective practices that optimize the implementation and success of CUS.

"Many experienced CUS Outreach Coordinators have a wealth of information in their heads – this Guide will serve to highlight 'best practices' for new/incoming CUS staff as well as promoting overall sustainability of the program."

CUS Outreach Coordinator



How was the Guide developed?

The Community Use of Schools Committee of OASBO (Ontario Association of School Business Officials) established the Resource Guide Task Team (RGTT), a sub-committee of OASBO, to develop this Guide. This sub-committee developed the Terms of Reference for the Guide and retained WoodGreen Community Services to prepare the Guide in September 2014.

The project Terms of Reference included a range of goals for the Best Practices Guide related to learning, practice, outreach and collaboration, and support for the strategic goal to establish and maintain school-community partnerships. Specifically, the Guide was seen as a tool developed to help Outreach Coordinators:

- Increase the use of school space outside of school hours and address the programming needs of the local community;
- Align and implement local school board CUS program and policy frameworks with the provincial vision and strategic goals;
- Share best practices that maximize access to space;
- Identify and address barriers to Community Use of Schools;
- Employ active outreach strategies to help ensure community support at the local school level;
- Work with area schools to determine community and school capacity to deliver and manage programs;
- Coordinate the development and implementation of all the components of CUS including the Priority Schools Initiative (where applicable), and other related programs such as Focus on Youth;
- Support initiatives that promote school and community partnerships.

The project started in October 2014 with a meeting of approximately 30 members of the OASBO CUS Committee. The committee members provided valuable input about potential CUS best practices as well as practices where capacity could continue to be built. This input helped the project team with the design of the next stage of the process, an electronic survey (French and English) of the 72 school boards in Ontario. The survey asked for general information about the school board, CUS resources and staffing as well as information about best practices and challenges. There was a 100% response rate to the survey.

Survey respondents were then invited to talk to the project team consultants during an individual interview in either French or English. An overview document, including the interview questions and a summary of the best practice criteria, was shared with CUS Outreach Coordinators in advance of the interviews. Telephone and/or face-to-face interviews were completed with CUS representatives from 47 school boards. In addition, interviews were conducted with 21 school board and community partners including custodians, community groups, principals, trustees and directors of education.

The project team also reviewed program documentation and supporting materials. The team analyzed the survey and interview findings and prepared a draft 'best' practices guide outline for review and comment by the RGTT.

The final Guide, in French and English, was completed and submitted to the RGTT in the fall of 2015.

1

Community Use of Schools Outreach Coordinator



This section of the Guide looks at the role and scope of the Outreach Coordinator position and where it is situated within the school board.



Role

The Ministry of Education defines the Community Use of Schools Outreach Coordinator's role as including:

- Increasing usage of school space outside of school hours through community outreach and engagement and supporting programming needs of the local community;
- Implementing local CUS program and policy frameworks within the Ministry of Education's vision and goals;
- Assisting schools in implementing the school board's policy;
- Overseeing program implementation, and working with the local school board and the Ministry of Education;
- Working with Priority Schools, where applicable;
- Supporting Priority Schools, where applicable, in order to maximize availability for community use;
- Identifying prospective Priority Schools if the school board is eligible for Priority School funding;
- Working to eliminate barriers to CUS;
- Coordinating with school principals, custodians and community user groups;
- Managing CUS data collection, reporting and liaising with the Ministry of Education.

While there is variation in the roles played by OCs in different school boards, it is clear that there is an overarching dual focus:

- **Inward** - CUS OCs have an internally oriented role related to the management of CUS permits and other day-to-day operational issues within the school board.

Many OC roles include the processing of permit requests, basic coordination with school principals and custodians, and the overall administration and management of community access to available space. Most CUS Outreach Coordinator roles also include information sharing and more active program management including liaison with custodians and other staff within the school board.

- **Outward** - OC roles are also externally focused on the community to inform, engage, build relationships and support CUS. OC roles include outreach to communities to share information about the program and to encourage use. In some school boards, the CUS OC represents the school board and contributes to action-oriented, community-based committees.

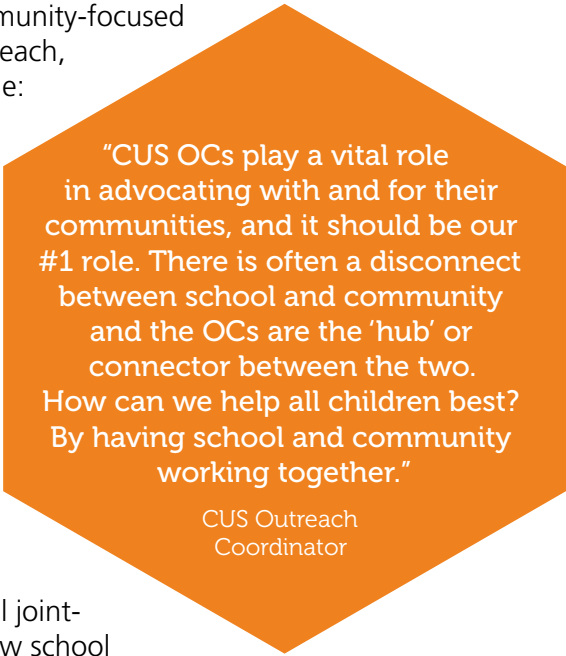
A smaller number of school boards have CUS OC roles that include proactive community development, including matching school needs for programming with community service providers and groups and vice versa. One interviewee described this role as 'intentional' outreach.

"Key role? Building capacity and helping groups... understand the system, use it successfully etc."

School Board Administrator

Some school boards define the CUS OC role through a community-focused lens in an effort to provide as much time as possible for outreach, engagement, and community development. Examples include:

- Funding part-time administrators/clerks to manually process permit applications;
- Using online permit systems to process and manage CUS bookings;
- Dividing the role into permit administration and outreach and assigning the two functions to different staff;
- Delegating permit bookings to school administrators in large geographically disperse boards and using the OC to support the administrators, manage risk and oversee policy.



In many school boards, the CUS staff also plays a role in negotiating and administering formal reciprocal and informal joint-use partnerships, including child care lease agreements. A few school boards have separated responsibility for formal reciprocal and informal joint-use agreements. In those boards, CUS focuses on community relationships and not on the institutional partnerships that affect or enable the availability of space.

CUS OCs play a strong and proactive role in Priority Schools (PSI) to match the needs of the community and school for programming with available space. The CUS OC's role includes collaborating with community partners and playing a stronger role communicating with, and liaising between, the school, community users and the broader community.

And finally, the use of specific program software and automated systems and the splitting of administrative and program roles can support the important program and community development role of CUS OCs and is considered a best practice.

The role of the OC can therefore best be described as a range:

ROLE

Permit	Permit +	Outreach	Community Development
Processing permits, booking space, managing payments process.	Role in sharing information and more actively managing the program within the school board.	Role in promoting CUS, active external communication and outreach. Role in CUS procedures and policy development. Working to develop facility partnerships.	Actively connecting communities with school space to meet local needs and their common interests.

In addition to the formal roles, the OC plays increasingly important roles in three key areas:

- **Bridge builder/navigator** - Some CUS OCs also help communities and community groups access supports and connect with other functions in the school board. The CUS OC bridges the boundaries between the school board and the community and contributes to a positive relationship that goes beyond the CUS program.

One interviewee also recognized the value of bridge builders in other organizations. The school board had been unsuccessful at negotiating a reciprocal agreement with a local municipality until the municipality established a position similar to the OC role, with an external and internal orientation.

- **Internal liaison** - CUS OCs have the potential to play a unique role as liaison and connector between different school board departments and programs. Using the opportunity to link CUS with other board programs and to actively connect across board departments with schools, maintenance and custodial, administration, policy, and trustees is a best practice.
- **Troubleshooter/point person** - The CUS OC position plays an important role in proactively addressing issues and resolving conflicts that may arise between community groups, the board and/or schools, as well as acting as the designated point person for contact with community members and groups in some school boards.

"The dual focus of the role means the CUS Coordinator often knows school staff, students and community members, staff at the board office, including facilities personnel, and people come to them first for all sorts of support/help/information, not just CUS."

School Board
official

"... communities... learn quickly that schools are safe, welcoming places with lots of resources and information - the 'go to' place."

Principal

Broader and more expansive CUS OC roles, which include outreach and community development, are most consistent with CUS 'best' practices. Broad roles promote accessibility, improve communications, pursue active partnerships, and increase awareness and supports for student achievement and student and community well-being.



Reporting Relationships

While reporting relationships may vary from board to board, the CUS OC function is most often part of the facilities or business departments at the school board level. Some boards manage the administration and financial impact of the program by placing it in the finance and/or administration departments. Other boards align the function with the school facilities and plant functions, recognizing the close relationship between CUS and facilities. In some boards CUS will jointly report to two departments, often administration and facilities/plant. This results in shared ownership of the program and a coordinated approach to operations and administration.

In a few cases, CUS is housed in a community program department to support stronger and more integrated relationships with other community programs offered by the board.



There are advantages and disadvantages associated with each type of formal reporting relationship as illustrated in the chart below:

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Plant, Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Strong connection to custodians. ● Facilitates communication about equipment and space and management of space. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Internal focus on facilities and equipment aspects of CUS. ● Requires clear reporting lines for custodians between CUS OCs and facilities supervisors.
Finance, Business or General Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Strong connection to administrative and financial systems. ● Tends to be a centralized department which may support relationships with operating departments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Internal focus on administration and financial aspects of CUS. ● May be arm's length from the front line (i.e., the school principal, administration and custodians).
Community and/or Academic Programs - such as school effectiveness, public affairs and community relations, programs, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provides a more integrated approach to relationship with communities. ● Connects to other community-oriented board programs and supports schools as hubs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● May be arm's length from the front line (i.e., the school principal, administration and custodians).
Joint Reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recognizes and connects the distinct functions to the most appropriate department. For example, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● permit processing with the facilities/plant department and outreach and community development with the programs department; ● splits OC functions between facilities/plant and business potentially resulting in improved coordination. ● Joint reporting can lead to two departments advocating for the program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Could lead to conflicting priorities. ● Development of an ongoing working relationship may take time. ● Communications between departments may take additional time.

As mentioned earlier, best practices are influenced by goals and priorities, the size of the board, level of resources, as well as the overall stage of development of the CUS program. It is difficult to identify one best practice in terms of the CUS reporting relationship, however survey findings suggest that reporting relationships to community programs or dual reporting is preferred. In small boards where 'everyone knows each other' the role connects across all areas of the board regardless of the home department.

Some programs may be best served by initial reporting relationships to administration/finance where they can develop necessary systems and processes (administration) or in facilities where they can develop the necessary facilities-based relationships.

More important than the formal reporting relationship, is the need for the reporting relationship to create a strong sense of CUS program ownership and accountability across the school board.

A reporting relationship to a program department seems most compatible with the overall community focus of the position, either singularly or jointly with another department. This practice may be more appropriate for more established programs and is consistent with a strong focus on outreach, community engagement and community development.

A joint reporting relationship takes more effort and may be less clear than a direct report, but it can bring other significant benefits including enhanced internal support, awareness and communication and, as such, can be considered a good practice.



Program Philosophy

A number of school boards have developed a statement of the CUS mission or philosophy. These range from 'want to make space available', and, 'schools will be open', to statements related to equity of access and community building. These statements help communicate the program intent and serve as a guiding vision and set of values for CUS staff and others involved in supporting the program.

The development and communication of a program philosophy or statement is considered a best practice and should be formulated in a consultative fashion with input from other board staff and community interests.



2

Community Use of Schools Funding



Different boards have different practices and approaches to how funding is used to support CUS to meet local needs.

This section of the Guide explores a range of practices and identifies some good practices related to program resourcing.



Types and Sources of Funding

The Ministry of Education provides all school boards with base funding for CUS programming and additional funding for the CUS Outreach Coordinator position based on the number of schools in the school board.

There are a variety of other funding sources that school boards utilize including:

- **Program fees** - These include rental charges, fees for custodial staff overtime, as well as fees related to permit processing, no-shows and permit alterations.
- **Equipment fees** - One school board asks schools to list equipment available to CUS groups. Rental costs are assigned to each piece of equipment and fees are collected and tracked as part of the permit and rental process. Monies from rental fees are returned to the appropriate schools twice a year to compensate for wear and tear of the equipment.
- **Allocation of funding from other school board funding envelopes** - Some school boards choose to allocate additional resources to CUS from other funding envelopes.
- **External funding** - CUS activities and initiatives may be eligible for support from foundations and external funding sources. One CUS OC secured nearly \$80,000 in two-year funding to focus on poverty reduction and prevention and bring together CUS partners to promote and support enhanced CUS, including community gardens, homework clubs, and recreational programs. Another community group benefited from an external grant secured by a reciprocal agreement partner and was able to operate an after-school program for local youth.
- **Provide support to not-for-profit groups to identify grants and other sources of funding** - Many not-for-profit groups struggle to secure adequate funding, and sometimes can't afford to run additional programs in local schools even if the space is free or at minimal cost. One OC 'searched out' grants and other sources of funding and shared that information with local not-for-profit groups.

It was noted earlier that there is a need to develop a stronger awareness and understanding of the CUS program within the school board and in the community. This should include an understanding of the sources of CUS funding and funding levels.

Grant applications take significant time to prepare, often require formal community partners and include ongoing reporting and accountability expectations. However, the application for external grants can be instrumental in supporting the development of local programming by community members and more established not-for-profit groups. On balance, the strategic pursuit of additional funding to support local group use of space is considered a best practice and helps smaller and/or newer local groups develop skills and build capacity.

3

School Board - Internal Relationships



This section of the Guide looks at the many positive relationships within school boards that support CUS.

It includes a discussion of the relationship with custodians, school administrators, officials, trustees and inter-board networks, and identifies promising and best practices.



Custodians

Strong internal relationships and communications with all staff, and, in particular, with the front line and supervisory/management staff involved in custodial and facilities roles is important to the success of CUS.

Good relationships with custodial staff are a key element in the success of local CUS programs and include:

- Communication** - Both CUS OCs and school custodians noted the importance of open and ongoing communications - in person, by phone and through email. Some OCs make regular and drop-in visits to schools to build relationships and check-in with custodians. OCs support custodians by trouble-shooting and addressing issues in a timely way.
- Training** - Many CUS OCs are involved in custodial in-service training. OCs may attend a custodian training session or they may provide content and messages for the custodial supervisors to communicate to the custodians. This training is an important vehicle to communicate procedures and expectations and to develop a shared ownership of CUS.
- Clearly defined roles and expectations** - Clear roles and relationships are important to the success of any program. They are especially important for programs like CUS that involve staff from different parts of an organization as well as external users. One school board has developed written staff guidelines that set out the roles and expectations of CUS staff, principals and administrators, custodians and user groups for both evening and weekend CUS. The guidelines also document procedures for no-shows and address questions related to after-hours or weekend CUS.

"I have a strong relationship with the OC who always keeps me 'in the loop' ... The relationship with the OC is one of mutual respect for each other. Good communication [is] important."

Custodian

"CUS OCs have an excellent relationship with custodial staff and problem solve with them."

School Board Administrator

Many school boards have custodial staff on site during community use, both to provide support to the groups and to reduce the risk to the school board.



There is a range of practice among school boards regarding the provision of custodial supports for CUS related activities:

- **Custodian schedules** - Many, but not all, school boards use online permit systems which include schedules that are accessible to principals and custodians in the schools. In school boards that do not have automated systems, this work is done manually. The online permit systems have many advantages, including reduced CUS OC time in scheduling of school based custodians, and should be considered a best practice for all school boards.
- **Allocation of custodians** - Some school boards have developed ratios that they use to support the allocation of custodial staff for CUS.
- **Dedicated CUS custodians** - A few boards have a dedicated CUS custodial staff contingent who work to support CUS in the evenings and weekends as part of their regular shifts.
- **CUS supervisor** - A few school boards have identified a dedicated supervisor for evening and weekend CUS use. This position helps promote consistency in the use and supervision of CUS custodial support and provide the opportunity for a stronger relationship with user groups and the CUS OC.
- **On call and/or after-hours support** - Boards without CUS supervisors often designate an after-hours supervisor to respond, as needed, to CUS related issues in the evenings or on weekends.
- **On site communication** - Some school boards provide CUS users with walkie-talkies so that they can communicate during their rental time with the on-site custodian. This reduces risk in cases of an emergency and provides accessible help particularly in larger schools where it may not be easy to locate the custodian.

"Some will tell you they don't like CUS because it creates mess...we don't care about "mess" because that's why we're here, to clean up after the community has used the space...it's not our school, it's the community's."

Custodian

Best practices are those that support an effective and strong CUS program, including orientation and training, clearly defined roles, use of technology to support communication about approved permits and a process to allocate and schedule custodial staff. Best practices also include responsive supervisory support for both permit holders and custodial staff and regular communication with the OC.



Principal/School Administrators

Principals are an important part of the CUS team and positive relationships with principals and school administrators are important.

The elements of a successful relationship with school administrators include communications, training and clarity of roles.

CUS OCs build positive relationships with principals and school administrators through:

- **Information sessions** - CUS OCs frequently facilitate or provide information sessions for principals, vice-principals and school-based administrative staff. This is particularly important in school boards where school staff process permit requests or where they are involved in the permit approval process.
- **Providing orientation** - This can include participating in the orientation program for new principals and providing an overview of the CUS program, expectations, and relationships.
- **Developing strong relationships** - OCs often meet individually with principals, vice-principals or other school staff to discuss the program and the school's involvement in CUS.
- **Brokering connections** - OCs organize visits and orient new community users to a school and to introduce them to the principal, administrator and custodial staff.

"Principals and vice-principals who champion CUS are key to the success of program; if they do not support CUS, we might as well remove their schools from the list."

Community organization

The CUS OC can also act as a bridge between the school and the community.

The OC responds to requests from a principal by looking for a particular type of user that the school has identified will meet local needs, and connecting the user and the school. Some OCs play a more proactive role by introducing groups to the principal when they think there will be good fit to an unmet community need.

"Support from the ground up is key... the Director trusted the CUS OC's word (as staff person who knew both the Board and the school community) and, coupled with support from school principal, the project was successfully launched on a permanent basis within the school."

School Board Administrator

Relationships that promote communication, understanding of the program, as well as engender support for the program are important program practices. CUS practices that connect the school and community and proactively and responsively address local needs are considered best practices.

School Board - Officials, Trustees and Inter-board Networks

A number of CUS OCs are working within their school boards at both the senior staff and trustee levels to develop relationships that improve the understanding and raise the profile of the program.

- **Senior board staff and trustees** - Some CUS OCs commented on the strong level of support they receive from senior board officials for CUS including statements like, “[the] senior team (from the Director of Education down) is very supportive of CUS”.

A number of CUS OCs are working to deepen understanding and awareness of CUS at the board and trustee level. Some examples of this include:

- **Regular reports** - A few OCs submit monthly, quarterly or semi-annual reports to a standing committee of the Board of Trustees on CUS activities, issues and opportunities. These reports usually go to the full Board as part of the committee report.
- **Annual program reports** - This report provides a description of the program and program priorities, statistics on community use of schools over the year, and a discussion of accomplishments. Reports like these also serve as an accountability mechanism.
- **Community tables and networks** - Some OCs sit on committees and contribute to networks in the community, often with school board trustees. In addition to providing an opportunity to promote broad understanding of CUS, these networks provide the opportunity to develop a relationship with board trustees.
- **Advisory committees** - At least two OCs have established CUS advisory committees to provide input and advice to the board regarding CUS priorities, policies and practices. The advisory committee, composed of community members, is often co-chaired by a board trustee. This provides an important opportunity for the trustee to develop a strong appreciation of the program and to be in a position to champion CUS at the board level. (Note: the role of CUS committees will be discussed further in the next section of the Guide.)

CUS OCs
 “facilitated many opportunities for parent engagement across our diverse school communities.”
 School Board Trustee

“Whatever the school community, whatever the parent need, Community Resource Facilitators worked with Summer Learning Teams, Better Beginnings For Kids educators and community partners to provide a wide range of parent engagement opportunities to 778 families this July.”
 CUS Newsletter (2014)

- Board program and supports** - CUS OCs have relationships with other internal school board departments and programs which may include:
 - Accessing internal supports** - These vary and can include partnerships with the board communications department to push out CUS tweets and build a following on Twitter and Facebook to promote and develop the program.
 - Making connections between programs** - Some CUS OCs develop mutually beneficial relationships with other board supported programs like Best Start, Student Nutrition, Focus on Youth and Our Children Our Future, as well as other programs that are externally and community oriented.
 - Consolidating externally focused community programs** - Community programs, including CUS can be integrated in one unit where staff share a common focus on inclusive and accessible schools.
 - Forming partnerships** - CUS partners with other departments to facilitate access to space for service providers that operate after school hours and on weekends to respond to school and community needs.
 - Participating on internal program/project teams** - CUS can contribute to internal projects to connect and integrate the range of externally focused programs that broaden the use of schools in the community.
- Inter-board relationships** - Boards of Education have relationships with other school boards through network organizations like OASBO. OASBO has established a CUS standing committee, which recognizes the importance of the program in the school program environment. Networks and committees provide an opportunity for information sharing and learning about different practices that serve to strengthen programs, including CUS, and are an important best practice.

"[We] need to develop a system approach... and have integrated teams in a neighbourhood approach to schools as hubs."

School Board
Trustee

Provincial meetings "bring new ideas to all school boards. They provide the opportunity to develop interesting relationships and opportunities for learning."

School Board
Trustee

The "OASBO Community Use of Schools group is a great resource to CUS Outreach Coordinators, especially new or isolated ones. [It] provides great networking opportunities."

CUS Manager

There is evidence of efforts to develop strong internal relationships between CUS, senior board officials and other department managers. These serve to increase understanding and awareness of the program, improve efficiency, and connect internal programs so that they can support student achievement, strong communities and the overall goal of schools as hubs. Other best practices include associations like OASBO and the CUS Committee which promote learning and continuous program enhancement as well as providing leadership and mentorship for CUS staff across the province.

4

Community Relationships



The previous section focused on internal relationships within school boards.

This section shifts the focus to externally oriented relationships with local institutions, organizations and community members.



Relationships with Municipalities and Other Organizations in the Community

Relationships with external groups and organizations are important to the success of CUS and have gained attention as part of the discussion of school-community hubs.

- **Informal** - CUS OCs have a range of informal relationships with other school boards, municipalities and community groups including:
 - Informal cooperation and communication between CUS OCs;
 - Collaboration on programs and working to coordinate strategies and activities including promotion and communication;
 - Development and sharing of common local CUS policy frameworks between boards;
 - Harmonization of CUS practices in coterminous boards;
 - Establishment of groups such as a “municipal recreation coordinators’ group” to discuss common issues, explore standardized use of space agreements and pursue other opportunities for collaboration.

“We have a great relationship with both the public and Catholic boards.”
Community organization

Collaboration with coterminous school boards and municipalities regarding space should be encouraged as a standard practice for every CUS program. Benefits include increased accessibility and use of public assets by the community, consistency of practice and strengthened relationships among institutional partners.

School boards need to “work more closely with their coterminous boards... Some do it now, but it should be done everywhere.”

Community organization

- **Formal** - There are a range of formal relationships between school boards, local agencies, institutions, municipalities, and community organizations. These include:
 - **Negotiated program partnerships** - Program partnerships with other school boards and institutions include both the provision of space and the delivery of services to the community. One school board has a partnership with a coterminous board and local municipality for a program for children from 3 to 6 p.m. The school board provides space in a shared use school and the municipality provides the staff to run the program that serves 3,000 children.
 - **Joint use agreements** - School boards partner with local municipalities to secure capital funding for the construction of shared gyms, rinks, and auditoriums. An agreement setting out joint use provisions for the new facility is negotiated between the parties.
 - **Reciprocal agreements** - Reciprocal agreements generally relate to shared use of playing fields, swimming pools and high school gymnasiums owned by school boards or municipalities.

Formal agreements generally include defined terms and conditions for access to, and use of, space and set out responsibilities for maintenance of the space and for the disposition of user fees related to the space. They also include a requirement and process for regular meetings between the signatories.

While many school boards are positive about the agreements, considerations such as control over school facilities, access to reciprocal facilities and waived user fees should be taken into account when developing the terms and conditions of the agreements.

It is "very important to have an institutionalized framework that defines the relationship and use of space."
School Board Trustee

Carefully developed, actively monitored and managed reciprocal agreements are considered a best practice.

- Joint lease, shared school or facilities, co-builds** - Joint leases, shared school buildings or facilities and buildings that are purposely built to house different uses and institutions are part of the facilities that are available through CUS. Arrangements are generally negotiated on a building-by-building basis regarding availability for CUS use and to determine which of the partner organizations is responsible for managing community use of the space.
- Joint venture or consortium** - Two school boards in Ontario have entered into a unique formal agreement to establish a joint venture to provide student transportation, child care services, energy management and CUS for both boards. This means that all school rentals and CUS are managed seamlessly in a consistent and integrated way and that services are provided as efficiently as possible - a true one-stop shop for CUS and a unique best practice. The boards share school rental policies, procedures, pricing structure, software and one rental office.

The joint venture is "user friendly, saves money and is a brilliant solution for smaller boards."
Community organization

Formal relationships between school boards and/or other institutions are good practices. CUS users benefit from consistent rates, policies, practices and from efforts by partnering boards to formally work together to facilitate access for all users. Efforts like the consortium partnership, described above, suggest a higher level of integration and are considered best practices.



Relationship with the Community

The CUS OCs play an important role in sharing information about the program in the community and building positive community-school relationships.

- **Communication** - A number of strategies are used to ensure information is available to the community including:
 - **CUS websites** - Websites hosted as part of a school board platform are a popular way of making information available without significant ongoing staff time or program investment. The sites should be accessible within two clicks and include information on CUS policies, permit process, fees and details on how to access space. Some CUS websites also include access to floor plans and listings of available space.
 - **Social Media** (i.e., Twitter)
 - **Newsletters** - CUS OCs often produce paper or electronic newsletters while others promote CUS as part of regular board communications, school newsletters and flyers that go to parents and local communities.
 - **CUS brochures and other print items** - One OC promotes CUS by providing school board vehicles with bumper stickers using the CUS Twitter handle.
 - **Participation in community fairs, school events, conferences**

OCs also share information about the impact of CUS in their local communities. One CUS OC provided comparative information, including the number of permits granted, number of schools involved, funding, program income and expenses for a five-year period to users and community groups so that they could better understand the important role CUS played in the local community.

- **Relationship building** - CUS OCs build community relationships through CUS focused committees and participation in external networks and community based committees.
 - **Formal or informal CUS committees** - At least two school boards have established committees to provide advice and support to the CUS program. These committees are advisory and may include permit holders, community members and school board trustees. They provide input and support to CUS and consider issues including permit fees, permit categories, and customer service. A number of interviewees commented that CUS advisory committees are an excellent practice to support direct feedback and advice to CUS staff about community needs. The committees “keep communication open - everyone is on the same page”.

“Communities need to have at least an understanding of what goes on in schools during the day in order to understand the ins and outs of CUS in the evening and on weekends. For example, if a secondary school focuses on athletics and has lots of teams and sporting activities, the school’s gyms may already be fully booked for student use. If the community does not understand this, they may feel ‘shut out’ of the school when this is not the case.”

School Board
Administrator

“No staff or trustee could have fulfilled this mandate on their own – the CUS Advisory Committee is a best practice for this board.”

School Board
Trustee

- **Networks** - Some CUS OCs build relationships with communities through active participation on community networks and committees related to broad issues like anti-poverty, youth/children at risk, or local community issues. One school board official talked about the opportunity to open a dialogue between community groups and the school board through CUS. Participation in these collaborative networks promotes CUS and helps build community connections to service providers and policy makers.

OCs also connect families and enable relationships within communities. One principal commented that, "CUS outreach into the community matters", particularly if a family is marginalized or new to the community.

CUS programs are good at communicating the program essentials - the how, where, and what about the program. However, the CUS OC role also includes the development of strong relationships with local communities. A number of best practices were identified regarding active and ongoing CUS connection and engagement within the broader community.

Relationship with CUS Permit Holders

CUS OCs sustain strong and respectful relationships with CUS permit holders that promote understanding of the program vision, policies and practices as well as clarify roles, relationships and expectations. One school board official commented that, "they aim for a holistic relationship where everyone has a stake in CUS", and where there is "mutual responsibility and respect."

CUS works towards building and sustaining relationships with permit holders using a range of tools and approaches:

- **User guides or handbooks** - CUS manuals include policies, practices and frequently asked questions that are shared with users and potential CUS users.
- **Information and/or orientation sessions** - CUS OCs host regular group information and new user orientation sessions. In addition, many OCs meet with new CUS users at the school and introduce them to the principal and custodian. Some CUS OCs provide emergency training for CUS users as part of a broad risk management strategy.
- **Posted communications** - CUS OCs report that they frequently post policies and rules of use in gyms and other community use spaces.

"We make it simple and whatever you need, we're here to help. We can walk you through the process from start to finish."
CUS newsletter

"CUS OCs play a big part in helping to inform and educate regarding roles and responsibilities within [the] CUS program, and manage expectations."
School Board Administrator

- **Direct communication** - Communication with CUS permit holders is clear, ongoing and consistent and can include both email updates and newsletters. Some OCs hold annual meetings with CUS permit holders.
- **Supporting CUS user activities and events** - One OC posts details about CUS permit holder programs, events and activities in a 'what's happening' section of the CUS webpages.
- **Supporting CUS permit holders** - Some OCs provide advice, information and support to permit holders regarding funding sources, writing funding proposals, and recruiting volunteers.
- **Drop-in visits** - Many OCs drop in occasionally on permit holders, to reconnect and to confirm the user is using the space according the CUS policy and the permit.
- **Advisory committees** - CUS permit holder advisory committees represent a formal and structured relationship for CUS users to engage in, and contribute to, the program.

"The CUS OC and our group have a great working relationship - we've never even met, but she's really good to me, so she must be good to everyone else."

Community organization

Advisory committees "allow permit holders to have their voices heard and to influence decisions."

School Board Trustee

CUS OCs develop good, ongoing relationships with permit holders, and share information, orient users, and deal with problems on a regular basis. Some CUS programs are developing enhanced relationships that more directly engage and support groups through advisory committees and other support structures. These promising practices will improve awareness and accessibility, support the sustainability of the community programming and promote additional 'collaborative' best practices.



5

Community Use of Schools Local Policies



A clear policy framework is an important foundation of the local implementation of CUS. It promotes understanding, contributes to consistency and supports the CUS goals.

This section focuses on best practice processes to develop, monitor and review local CUS policy as well as examples of local CUS policies that have been adopted in school boards.



Local Policy Development and Review

Many of the CUS programs have a set of local policies that they use related to CUS including both formal (written) policies and informal policies (practices).

- **Communication** - OCs use various strategies for communicating CUS policies including posting them on CUS webpages, preparing policy manuals, including policies in program handbooks and circulating them to user groups with approved permits.
- **Regular review and update** - Local CUS policy frameworks should be reviewed and updated at least every three to five years.
- **Engaging communities and permit holders** - Local communities should be consulted before boards change policy or procedures or develop new CUS policies. Two examples illustrate best practices for engaging local communities:
 - One CUS OC was challenged by no-shows and low participation bookings which resulted in unnecessary program costs for the board. The OC engaged community and user groups in a series of consultations to get input on the issue, and later pilot tested a preferred option before recommending a new policy. In their words, they tried to “make the process as transparent and engaging as possible” for the community and CUS users.
 - Another CUS program meets once a year with CUS user groups to review the policy framework. Minutes of the meeting are sent to all users and issues are added to a list for follow up in the regular policy review cycle.

“Best practice’ rolls out of the fact that [the board’s] policy and operational procedures are very clear and detailed, facilitating good communications and fair processes.”

School Board
Administrator

CUS should “consult with groups and users before implementing something that will impact on their use of community space, including policies, costs and fees”.

Community
organization

The development and active management of a local CUS policy framework is a key best practice. Other best practices include regular opportunities to engage with the community regarding CUS policies, and a policy review and update process that includes community input and dialogue. The use of pilot or demonstration projects to assess the impact of a new policy or policy change is an effective way of testing proposed program change(s).



Types of Policies

A number of boards have developed clear policy frameworks to guide the operation and management of the CUS program. These formal policy documents are generally grounded in a statement of program purpose or vision and a set of program values. They include policies on all aspects of operations such as application processes, timing, use of space, types of users, and priority users.

It is important to have "coherent policies regarding CUS program engagement with the community."

School Board
Trustee



Highlighted below are examples of good policies in place in Ontario school boards that guide CUS.

- **Community engagement policy** - This policy commits the CUS staff to engage community members and sets out guidelines and expectations regarding community input into CUS.
- **Access to space** - Many CUS OCs are challenged by high demand for limited space. Access policies can clearly identify priority groups, activities and users within a framework of fair and equitable access across all schools.
- **Safe school policy (locked doors)** - Locked door policies communicate the terms and conditions related to user access to schools. Some school boards open their doors 15 minutes before and after the rental period, after which the user group must monitor the door for latecomers. Other policies state that it is the responsibility of the group to watch the doors and let in members of their group. Safe school policies minimize disruption to custodians and are part of an overall risk management framework.
- **Field policy (sports fields)** - One board has developed a policy, modeled after a municipal policy, that relates to user group use of school fields. The policy works because it protects the schools' interests in maintaining their sports fields in good condition while facilitating community access. User groups are familiar with the policy from their use of municipal fields.
- **No-show clauses** - Some CUS policies have no-show clauses that include notification from staff in the case of the user group's first no-show, a fine/fee plus associated rental costs if there is a second no-show, and a cancellation of the permit on the occasion of a third no-show. Some CUS policies will not allow groups with a history of no-shows to re-apply as an existing user or will not allow the group to re-apply for a full permit.

Best practice CUS programs are grounded in policy frameworks that are based on program values and priorities, guided by experience and evidence, and informed by internal and external stakeholders. These policies are clearly communicated, accessible and are used to inform decision-making.



6

Community Use of Schools Practices and Procedures



This section of the Best Practices Guide focuses on the internal program practices and procedures that contribute to an effective, strong and sustainable CUS program.



CUS Permit Procedures and Processes

- **Written CUS procedures** - School boards get a wide variety of enquiries for CUS and it is useful for staff to have a reference document for handling requests. A number of CUS OCs report that they have formal, written permit procedures and processes. In addition to helping guide staff regarding occasional or atypical requests for space, the procedures are important for day-to-day program management and for succession planning (e.g. staff absences or retirements), because, as one CUS OC reflected, “when experienced staff [leave] they often take the department history and best practices with them.”
- **Permit processes** - Permit processes are either paper based or electronic, using one of a number of different online systems. CUS programs that have transitioned to an electronic system describe the system as a ‘brilliant’ best practice that integrates permit processing, booking, billing, reporting functions and communications. It was noted that one-time funding was provided in 2009/10 from the Ministry of Education to support the transition to an electronic system.
- **Permit approval processes** - There are a range of centralized and decentralized permit approval protocols:
 - **Centralized approvals** - Some boards delegate responsibility to CUS staff to approve permit requests based on program policies and guidelines. School principals and custodians are informed of the approvals. This process is simple, quick, and easy to administer. It requires a strong policy foundation that is understood and accepted by school and CUS staff. It also requires a trust-based and open relationship between the CUS OC and the schools.
 - **Decentralized approvals** - Decentralization to the school level can support local ownership and management of the program in circumstances where the board is very large or the local school has the best knowledge and understanding of the local community environment. This approach can lead to lengthened processing time as the request must be processed and approved by both the CUS OC and the school. To counterbalance the potential for delays, some CUS processes include stated maximum timelines for decisions on permit requests.
 - **Hybrid or variable approvals** - A range of variable approaches to permit approvals remove the requirement for principal/school approval during defined periods or situations including:
 - September - a busy student re-entry period.
 - March Break programming.
 - Ongoing, returning users. One CUS OC only consults with principals and custodians regarding requests from new users to ensure that the group is a ‘good fit’ and that the time and space requests can be accommodated.
 - Bookings after 6 p.m. or on weekends, except if specialty rooms (like the drama room, library or cafeteria) are requested. Principals are consulted if space is requested before 6 p.m.

Approval processes that are based on clear policy foundations and administered consistently are preferred to those where there is scope for variability and uneven decision-making processes regarding CUS requests. Efficient, timely, consistent and centralized processes are better practices than those that require multiple levels of approval. School ownership of CUS can be promoted through other means such as ongoing communication and engagement that is facilitated by the OC. It is recognized that in large or geographically dispersed school boards, it may be appropriate for greater local school involvement in the process.

Fees, Rates and Payments

The Ministry of Education provides base funding to all school boards to support Community Use of Schools. The Ministry also provides funding to help a set of schools in high needs communities provide eligible not-for-profit groups with free access to school space after-hours.

● Rates and categories

The Ministry of Education states that, “District School Boards, where feasible, should ensure that after-hours user fees for school facilities in their district are affordable for Not-For-Profit community users.”

It is important that local CUS programs develop a formula for calculating the full or actual cost of space and then determine the appropriate subsidy rate to the community users. This allows the CUS OC to both communicate and justify decisions regarding fees to community users.

The rates, fees and payments practices vary from program to program. Boards set their fees based on local circumstances. Fees are generally tied to ‘rates’ for different categories of use, which may, for example, distinguish between different types of CUS and separate them from leased school space, such as full day programs that are delivered by third-parties.

The main approaches to calculating CUS rates for use of space include:

- **Rate per square foot** - multiplied by the number of hours of use.
- **Room based charge** - determined based on the type of room requested. Can include a flat fee for use of the room or a fee that varies based on hours of use.
- **Flat fees based on per person/per year** - per person/year fees will vary for use of different types of school space, including classrooms and the gymnasium.

Fees may also be charged related to:

- **Custodial services** - based on the amount of time required to support the user.
- **Minimum rental charge** - based on one hour of use during the week and two hours of use on the weekend.

A number of boards use an actual cost formula or facility operating cost recovery approach to calculate the full cost of CUS. These models incorporate all costs associated with CUS, including a percentage of costs associated with the principal, administrative assistant, custodian, and CUS OC time incurred in the oversight, upkeep and cleaning of the space, etc. Some boards develop a universal cost for use of space in any school within the board, although others customize the model to calculate a school specific cost. One CUS OC commented that they also use the model to create cost scenarios for decision-makers.

Some programs apply other administrative-related charges including:

- **Standard permit fee**
- **Cancellation, no-show, and other charges**
- **Equipment fees**
- **Damage deposit**

The actual cost of space is reduced by a CUS subsidy. Many programs determine the appropriate level of subsidy based on the following factors:

- **Purpose of the activity**
- **Board priorities** - For example, some boards may subsidize youth related community programs.

Some CUS programs charge the full cost, as determined by the board, and subtract the appropriate CUS subsidy. Other CUS programs set the user cost at a proportion, say 20%, of the cost. Invoices are produced for CUS users that include the full cost of the rental as well as the amount CUS program subsidy/funding providing both awareness and transparency of costs incurred for use.

● **Fee review**

There are a range of practices related to the review and update of fees charged by school boards. These reviews do not automatically result in fee increases; some CUS OCs report that their fees decrease or remain the same following a fee review. Some boards review the rates for space rental on an annual basis; others review them every few years.

● **Method of payment**

Methods of payment for CUS include cheques or credit card payments. There are advantages to the credit card payment method that include ease of use, particularly with an online permit application system and greater efficiency by limiting CUS time required to manage payments.

There appears to be increasing use of systems to calculate actual or full costs of school space. The systems provide important information for the management of CUS and can directly support decision making, through the calculation of different scenarios, on how to administer the CUS grant equitably to community users. Understanding the full costs of space enhances transparency of the program within the school board and in the broader community.

A regular process for the review of CUS related fees is a good business practice. Input from the community through an advisory committee would make it a best practice.

Best practice suggests the need for flexibility in the method of payment, but with a clear preference for efficient methods like online credit card payments. Consideration should be given as to whether accepting only credit card payments may serve as a barrier for some users.

Equipment

It is important to support the maintenance of facilities and equipment of schools that experience wear and tear from community use after school hours and on weekends.

School boards are developing ways to make school equipment available to CUS groups and to fairly compensate schools for wear and tear. Some practices include:

- **Equipment survey** - Some OCs survey CUS schools to identify equipment that can be made available to user groups.
- **Equipment specific fees** - Some school boards assign fees to each piece of equipment. Equipment related revenues are collected and tracked and funds are returned to the applicable schools on a regular basis.
- **Percentage of CUS rental fees** - Other school boards return a percentage of school rental fees to the schools as discretionary funds to be used to repair/replace equipment as needed. For example, one CUS returns between 40-60% of the CUS rental fees to the school as discretionary funds. This promotes local autonomy and is particularly important in high usage schools.
- **Per user funding** - Some CUS programs provide participating schools with an amount per user/per year to cover equipment and wear and tear.
- **Block funding** - Block funding gives a set amount of funding to each school annually. A couple of CUS programs have a rotating approach, with the amount of funding for equipment and wear and tear varying over a four-year cycle.

"Space needs to be equipped for use."

Community organization

Best practice includes a process that builds in additional funds for regular, planned maintenance, repair and an equipment replacement program related to CUS use.

Insurance

There is variation in practice among school boards regarding insurance coverage for user groups.

School boards require users to provide proof of insurance, however, if community users cannot provide proof, some boards offer users the option to purchase insurance from a third party insurer.

Insurance coverage is a requirement to access space. While insurance can be a significant cost for CUS permit holders, it should not be a barrier to use of space. Insurance rates vary based on terms and conditions and are beyond the scope of this Guide.

Proof of Not-for-profit Status

Some school boards require proof of a group's not-for-profit status in order to receive the reduced CUS rates. Proof of status may include a charity's registered charitable number (for charities), a copy of an organization's registered not-for profit status and other sources of documentation such as a signed declaration or waiver to confirm that the group is a not-for-profit and that there will be no intended profit made from their permitted use of space.

It is a good practice to ask for proof or an appropriate declaration of not-for-profit or charitable status in order to ensure that limited CUS program funding is properly targeted to priority not-for-profit groups. It is important however, that the process allow for both incorporated and unincorporated not-for-profit groups to provide the proof without additional cost or significant effort that may marginalize small or new groups with limited human or financial resources.

Building Access

There is a wide range of practice regarding access to schools after-hours and on weekends. A number of school boards provide self-regulated access to the schools through swipe cards, keys and security codes. One or two school boards reported that they were moving away from this type of trust-based access to scheduling custodians or using security firms to provide access to the buildings.

A number of CUS OCs, however, commented that access within their region is based on the 'trust your neighbour' principle and that there are few problems. Given the lack of alternatives and the community demand for the school space, it is considered an acceptable practice risk.

Best practice related to risk minimization and protection of assets requires access facilitated through a school board employee. Best practice related to the objective of access to community space supports other modified approaches including self-regulated access to confirmed CUS users based on orientation and training, clear communication of expectations to the user regarding security, and trust.



Tracking and Monitoring Use

A number of CUS OCs reported that they actively track use of space in schools to help them manage the use as well as to inform future decisions regarding permits through the following:

- **Ongoing monitoring** - Includes regular monitoring and follow-up on incidents and no-shows, application of penalties including charges, restricted/reduced permits and the cancellation of permits under certain circumstances.
- **End of use walk-through** - One board requires a security walk through the space with the permit holder after the community use to confirm that there are no unresolved issues (i.e., equipment left out or property damage).
- **Program visits** - CUS OCs make occasional, unscheduled visits to observe programming and check-in with users.

"No-shows are a problem; permits are booked, but groups don't come... this is frustrating for users."

Community organization

Regular monitoring and management of use is part of a good CUS program and the development of internal systems and processes to track use is a best practice.

Managing Use

There are two types of CUS users, historical users, often sports or recreation programs that have used space for a long time, and newer groups that are trying to establish themselves and access space for local community programming. The challenge is to operationalize fair and equitable access in local environments and to balance the interests and demands of both groups with the available space. Many CUS OCs refer groups to their coterminous board(s) if they are unable to provide space as requested.

- **Fair and equitable access**
The Ministry of Education states that schools should be "welcoming and inclusive and offer parent groups, community organizations and other citizens fair access to use of school space at affordable rates for community purposes in non-school hours."

School boards are trying different practices to promote broader and more equitable access to school space such as:

- **Permit Approval Process** - Some boards approve all permits on a first come, first served basis. Other boards have a window for the renewal of historical permits after which time the space becomes available to others. Yet other boards give priority to returning permit holders during the week but open up weekend bookings on a first come, first served basis.

"There is a greater openness now with the CUS program; a lot of rural communities wouldn't have a lot of access to space otherwise."

School Board Administrator

- **Usage caps for frequent users** - Some CUS programs place limits on large users including a maximum number of days a week (i.e. two days) that space can be booked or a maximum number of schools that can be booked to help ensure access for various community organizations.
- **Trial permits** - At least one CUS program offers reduced access or time limited trial permits for new groups so they have a fair chance to access much sought after space. One program moves groups who have had problems related to past permits (including no-shows or problems with damage or other issues) to a use-restricted and time limited trial permit.
- **Local residency requirement** - A large school board requires that 80% of any permit group must live within that community ensuring that programs are community-based and driven.
- **Tracking denied requests** - One CUS program keeps a list of requests that are not approved because of lack of space and tries to accommodate the request the following year.

• **CUS program priorities**

School boards also manage community use through clearly articulated program priorities that:

- **Identify schools and their activities as the first priority** - Schools are the first priority for use during or after the regular school day, including school related activities, extra-curricular activities and parent involvement activities organized or administered by the school or school board.
- **Support a clear understanding of the need for, and benefits of, CUS** - It is important to have support at the school level by principals and staff to manage school schedules and accommodate community use. This includes cooperation regarding the early identification of school need for space throughout the school year to minimize scheduling conflicts and impact on approved community users.
- **Identify board and school priorities** - Some boards identify priority communities or types of use and protect blocks of time for these programs. For example some programs prioritize users that promote student well-being and achievement, programs targeted at children and youth, or assign priority to groups or organizations that serve newcomers.

It is
"important to keep
space available
for those who
need it the most."

CUS Outreach
Coordinator



● Restrictions on use

School boards try to limit the restrictions on CUS as much as possible. However restrictions related to school closures, maintenance and renovations and other school specific blackout periods are necessary from time to time.

Restrictions on access also appear to be driven by efforts to achieve efficiencies and reduce costs through consolidating use in larger or higher demand schools while balancing community accessibility and demand for space. Some strategies being implemented at school boards include:

- **Consolidate summer use** - One school board consolidates use into a group of 26 schools in the summer months.
- **Consolidate weekend access** - Another board reduces weekend CUS use to large secondary schools only.
- **Monitor CUS use of schools** - One school board actively tracks CUS use and considers whether to remove low and infrequent use schools from the list of schools available for CUS.
- **Family of schools** - One board considers community demographics and the geography of the board to identify locations that are most accessible and identifies a secondary school in each family of schools to host CUS on weekends.
- **Restrict use of school equipment** - Some boards require users to bring their own equipment such as volleyball nets and balls.

It appears that many community groups know about and can access the permit application process. CUS needs to build on this foundation and consider additional practices that support more equitable access to space in schools, delicately balancing the needs of existing and new users and the increasing number of requests for the limited amount of space.

Developing practices that do not favour existing versus new users, or enable the monopolization of the available space by existing users, but support access to space for new users, are considered good practices.

School boards need to clearly state priorities related to community use of space in their board. CUS OCs need to encourage collaboration with school staff and confirm school bookings early in the process so that community groups are aware of school-related limitations or restrictions on access.

Good practice is to maximize the type and location of space available to support the fullest range of possible community activities after school, on weekends, and during school break periods.



CUS Data and Metrics to Support Decision-Making

Initiatives are being undertaken to use data to support program decision-making. For example, at one school board, the OC was interested in pursuing community partnerships to fill vacant school space. The needs of the community were noted, research was conducted on not-for-profit groups, and the OC mapped out potential partnerships. While this example relates to more formal relationships with groups, it can be applied to schools which are underused or where CUS groups do not appear to be meeting the needs of local communities. Mapping of existing CUS use, community demand and need is a useful tool to support CUS planning and priority setting.

Another CUS OC used data analysis and environmental scanning to inform the development of a model identifying community needs and potential CUS groups for schools in high need and priority schools.

It is important that CUS programs have accessible records/systems of service users and access to school or community based socio-economic and demographic data so that they can support CUS policy and program decisions with program metrics and analysis. This needs to become a best practice.



7

Building on the Community Use of Schools Foundation



This final section of the Best Practices Guide looks briefly at some other program initiatives that build on the Community Use of Schools program.

These programs build on and extend the foundation established by Community Use of Schools.



Focus on Youth

The Focus on Youth (FOY) program is a partnership between the Ontario government, select school boards and local community agencies in disadvantaged urban inner city neighbourhoods that offers free use of school space for organized community-based programs, and provides employment opportunities and leadership activities for the youth of these communities.

Focus on Youth hires youth to provide high quality summer programs in schools for children. The program helps reduce barriers to youth employment by providing skills, experience, training and mentoring to youth from schools in the Priority Schools Initiative (PSI), and other at-risk communities. Some school boards provide additional leadership programs and employment skills development for youth throughout the year.

Program delivery varies among school boards; some school boards use not-for-profit organizations to deliver the programs and other boards play a more hands-on role with programming.

Like CUS, the success of Focus on Youth lies in the commitment of community partners, school boards, local schools, principals and custodians, and the community to engage and support at-risk youth by creating safer communities and better opportunities for them.

An Outreach Coordinator can be a key point of contact for Focus on Youth. The CUS Outreach Coordinator's role in Focus on Youth may include:

- Outreach to community organizations to promote the free use of space;
- Recruiting and facilitating the training of student camp counsellors;
- Monitoring camps to ensure high quality standards are met;
- Creating an equitable opportunity for students to access and participate in the program.

While the FOY budget and funding is separate from the CUS program, some school boards integrate the two programs and combine the FOY Coordinator role with the CUS OC role to create one position. Other school boards provide the programs separately, through staff in different departments. One FOY Coordinator commented that, even though the programs were in separate departments in the board, the staff worked closely together.

"I love it!
It is very, very
rewarding. We are
currently calculating
the graduation rate of
kids in the program and
beyond to postsecondary
education - it's exciting!"

CUS OC/FOY
coordinator



Outreach and Performance Plus Schools

One CUS OC developed a unique initiative to designate 19 schools in the school board as 'Outreach Schools'. Each school's designation is based on a review and analysis of demographic and socio-economic data, input from community networks of service providers and policymakers serving families, children and youth. The CUS OC works with the designated schools to link and develop relationships with grassroots and community organizations, to bring programs and activities offering parent supports, family engagement and food security, through the use of space during and after school. The groups go through a modified permit process, coordinated by the OC, with no fees for the space. Planning and implementation is undertaken in partnership with the principal and is included in the School Improvement Plan.

An administrator 'messages' to any reluctant staff that the school is "vibrant and dynamic" with the addition of community members, groups and outside agencies.

School Board
Administrator

Neighbourhood Teams

One CUS OC is part of a system of 'neighbourhood' collaboratives of not-for-profit service providers. These informal neighbourhood teams are responsible for addressing local needs and interests and contributing to the goal of creating stable families. The teams include commercial partners and volunteers who coordinate and support events and activities for the families, children and youth in the neighbourhoods. The teams use demographic and socio-economic data, and input from the families, children and youth to inform and support their work. The CUS OC is an active member of four 'neighbourhood teams', each of which includes a designated priority school. The OC plays an important role in communication, sharing input from the school's perspective, coordinating the use school space, and participating in activities. There are no fees for the use of school space.



Poverty Reduction Initiatives

A number of CUS OCs have proactively engaged with other community groups in poverty reduction networks and other community based inter-agency groups. This has led to some interesting and unique uses of school space.

One CUS OC used an interest in access to nutritious food to support community members and groups to develop proposals for community gardens. The OC makes communities aware of the opportunity for local community gardens on school property and liaises with the group and the school to ensure the location is suitable and the proposal is acceptable to the principal. The CUS OC provides a permit for the garden. The community assumes full-time responsibility for care and maintenance of the garden as well as the distribution and use of the organically produced food.

These examples highlight the potential for CUS programs to develop further best practices related to engagement with the community, planning and use of data to inform decision making, and innovative and integrated responses to schools partnering with their communities.



Looking Ahead

“The Community Use of Schools program allows us to fulfill what it means to be community.”

CUS Outreach Coordinator



Next Steps

The goals of this Guide include documenting and showcasing the amazing work being done through Community Use of Schools across Ontario and supporting its continuous development and improvement. The first goal has been achieved with this collection of Community Use of Schools' practices from across the province.

The documentation of best practices in this Guide is the foundation to support further learning and program improvement. All school boards contributed to the Guide and all school boards and CUS Outreach Coordinators can learn from the varied practices. It is important that opportunities be created for CUS staff to discuss, understand and support each other through the learning and program-building processes. Workshops, conference calls, websites and support materials should supplement and reinforce the messages in the Best Practice Guide.

Best practices are not static. Practice continues to evolve and respond to changes in the policy, funding, school board and community environments. The best practices described in this Guide will need to be updated and enhanced over time through regular sharing of practices at meetings, workshops, and other learning events as well as through formal updates to this document.

Reflections and Opportunities

The research and preparation of the Guide has provided a unique opportunity for reflection on CUS and its practices, policies and processes. In particular, are there key themes that were observed in the process of distilling the best practices? Are there opportunities that could be highlighted to build on the existing program foundation?

The opportunities fall into two main areas:

- Practice related opportunities
- Relationship opportunities
 - Internally, within boards of education
 - Externally, with community stakeholders and service providers

The Guide describes the wide range of CUS practices, policies and processes that are in place in school boards in Ontario. While it is understandable that CUS goals have been applied flexibly to meet the needs of the diverse schools boards and local environments, there are opportunities to strengthen the foundation and support greater consistency of practice. This Guide provides the information to support a conversation, that could be led by the CUS Committee of OASBO, about core program practices and expectations.

As was noted in the Introduction to this Guide, CUS is celebrating its 10th anniversary in 2015. It started small and has developed over time and with available program funding. Understandably, the early focus was on the program operations: how it would work, defining the role(s), developing internal working relationships, and beginning to develop relationships with users. This strong operational focus was evident in the best practices shared by CUS staff and program stakeholders.

Some of the CUS programs shared details of their efforts to collaborate with other school board programs on shared community goals. They also described a number of successful internal partnerships that supported the school community and the overall goal of schools as hubs. Each of these programs had the CUS fundamentals in place including well-developed program practices, policies and processes that allowed them to focus on the development of internal relationships and partnerships. As the CUS programs mature, there are real opportunities to put greater emphasis on internal collaboration and programming and less on the operational or program fundamentals. CUS alone cannot achieve the broad goal of schools as community 'hubs'; it needs to engage and partner with other school programs as part of the next phase of development.

It is "key that there are inclusive policies, processes that drive CUS and bring communities into schools as well as schools out into their communities."

Community organization

The CUS Committee has "served as a mentoring and support group for new staff."
CUS OC



In addition to the development of internal program relationships, some CUS OCs are developing strong external relationships with other service providers and with stakeholders in local communities. Similar to the opportunity to shift the balance from operations to program relationships within a school board, there is an opportunity to shift more resources and attention to the development of external, community relationships and to shift emphasis from CUS users to CUS partners. Greater emphasis will be needed on outreach, engagement and community development. Consideration should also be given to local structures, like a community advisory committee, to provide external advice, input and support to the CUS program.

The discussion of opportunities to develop stronger internal and external relationships to further CUS goals does not imply a fundamental change in the Outreach Coordinator role. Instead it suggests a rebalancing of the existing multi-layered role. An enhanced role in internal and external partnerships will be possible because the existing operational and program foundation can support a rebalanced role, i.e., less time is needed for the day-to-day because of the systems, processes and practices that are already successfully in place.

A greater attention to external relationships will also support efforts to integrate service delivery in the community. It will connect school boards with other policymakers and service providers in the community and provide opportunities for future partnerships. It will directly strengthen the potential for schools as hubs in local communities by providing opportunities for integration, collaboration, partnerships and increased understanding of local communities.

And finally, there are other external groups in Ontario that are active in community use of space. These coalitions and networks have valuable perspectives on community use of space and can effectively contribute to the continued development and strengthening of the program. There may be opportunities to forge informal relationships with these groups at the CUS Committee and/or local level.

We hope that the examples and discussion in the Guide have made you interested in exploring ways to apply some of the best practices in your school board.

Mentorship has been, and will continue to be, one of the strengths of the CUS Committee. Outreach Coordinators and CUS staff are encouraged to work with the Committee to continue to develop the CUS program and to identify, share and celebrate best practices.

Resource Guide Task Team
of the CUS Committee of OASBO



WOODGREEN

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