



## Equity in Access: Prioritizing members for virtual or in-person services

Children and families everywhere want and need support to make it through school this year. While COVID-19 has affected everyone, not all youth and families have been impacted equally. The pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated existing inequalities, putting families without adequate access to healthcare, food security, technology, stable housing, job flexibility, or safe spaces at greater risk. There's an important role for Clubs to play here in ensuring that the families and children who are most vulnerable are receiving Club support to make it through a season that will be difficult for all.

The questions that follow are intended to help you think through how and who to prioritize, understanding that this is always a difficult decision of triage, that your organization has financial needs (especially in this economic climate), and that your Clubs--like all Clubs--have limited capacity.

The driving question is: *if we can't serve all families, which families will we serve and how?*

### Step 1: Understand your capacity.

In order to understand who you can serve, you need to have a full picture of your capacity for serving youth. For example:

- Are you serving all members virtually, or can you offer services to some members at your Clubhouse? For instance, consider prioritizing youth with IEPs if they are unable to receive support from school aids to meet their needs. Please see BGCA's Disability Inclusion Sample Policy & Guidance for more information: [https://www.bgca.net/ChildSafety/ChildSafetyResourceLib/Sample%20Policy\\_Disability%20Inclusion.pdf](https://www.bgca.net/ChildSafety/ChildSafetyResourceLib/Sample%20Policy_Disability%20Inclusion.pdf).
- What alternative services, such as meal distribution or a school support hotline, are you able to provide?
- What is your current capacity in terms of staffing and space? What staffing limitations do you have? See the Program Basics During COVID for more information, <http://www.bgca.net/Programs/Back%20to%20Club%20Resources/Program%20Basics%20for%20Covid-19.pdf>.
- What opportunities do you have to partner with other local organizations, such as churches, community centers or libraries, to procure space – if space is a limitation?

### Step 2: What are your limitations?

- Are you unable to serve all members in-person or virtually due to staffing or space constraints?
- Are you staffed to cover both virtual and in-person scenarios?
- Which members are most likely to be able to access and engage virtual scenarios, based upon what you've learned in the needs assessment? Which members are not?



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- What are your financial limitations? How can you continue to serve members who “need us most” while ensuring a steady revenue stream is available to drive operations?

**Step 3: Learn about your community’s needs.**

Conduct a needs assessment to learn more about which members are most in need of live or virtual programming experiences, academic support services and social services or supports. You can find sample needs assessment documentation through the Virtual Club Planning Tool, <https://virtualclubplanner.org>.

Making the administration of this needs assessment as easy as possible to gather feedback from the families we are truly targeting. While surveys and emails may work in other settings, we may want to rely on phone calls, home visits, postcards that can be mailed back in, and make sure that materials are distributed in multiple languages as not all families speak English.

*If school is virtual or hybrid, do parents and caregivers anticipate needing:*

- Tutoring or learning supports for their children?
- Childcare during school hours?
- After school programming after school hours?
- Financial assistance for any of the above?
- Meals?
- Family assistance: filling out unemployment or other government paperwork; Resume writing or job search assistance; drop-in care while parent/guardian interviews; counseling
  - These family services mean Clubs could serve the whole family with wrap-around services, while a parent is doing any of the above their kids are also at the Club for activities

Getting to those that need us most and hearing their concerns and needs will take a lot more effort but will ensure Clubs are gather the right information that will inform their next steps. You can find a sample community needs assessment within the Virtual Club Planner, <https://virtualclubplanner.org>.

**Step 4: Consider the following:**

- Your youngest members (6-11) are the least likely to have devices, and/or to thrive in an independent setting.
- Your youngest members (6-11) are most likely to have parents who can benefit from extra childcare / support
- Your oldest members (teens) are most likely to be independent and to have devices, but may be at most risk for mental health challenges.
- Your oldest members (teens) are most likely to have the most significant life demands for access, as high school, college and work demands may require internet access
- Do you have members who have IEPs and require support?
- Serving youth in-person in family groups rather than by age group, may help you minimize potential infections.



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- Youth who qualify for free and reduced priced lunch may be most in need of meal services.
- Many of your members (perhaps as many as half) may not have internet access or device access at home. Be sure to learn about this in your needs assessment.

**Step 5: Prioritize**

- List out your audiences (who you could serve) and prioritize the ones that need your in-club services most.
- Also, consider who can benefit from Club activities but can do so at a distance. Identify how you can best support those youth and families as well.

**Step 6: Ensure equitable access to your services.**

- Offering in-person services to members first will help ensure those who need us most can access the opportunity you provide, though note that offering on a first-come, first-served basis favors those parents and members most able to respond quickly to your request but does not necessarily support those with parents who are working or unable to respond quickly.
- Offering in-person services on a lottery basis can provide access across your population of interested parents and members, but does not promote equity as it does not specifically target the youth and families that need access the most first.
- Offering in-person services on a paid basis, particularly at higher rates, can leave out parents who have lost jobs and are unable to pay. Understandably, the Club will require funding to support an even more imbalanced staff to youth ratio than usual. Be sure to approach your school districts and other partners so that all families can participate; collaboration with local partners will allow more youth to access services and support.
- Use data, both membership demographics and anecdotal information you know about youth and families, to target communication and programs to those that need it most.

**Step 7: Consider Your Broader Network**

- How can the Club best partner with school, community, and home to serve youth and families? Clubs don't need to be everything they must be part of the solution. While the variety of school partnership options is beyond the scope of this document, some relevant options include:
  - Collaboration to deliver caregiver resources and supports
  - Coordinating volunteers and mentors
  - Coordinating and offering tutoring for students
  - Operating as a virtual learning hub during the school day for students / members participating in virtual or hybrid school
- Reach out to other community entities to address issues and barriers.
- Consider collaborating with other orgs and Clubs in the virtual program space.
- Narrow your and get really good as specific things with a specific group of youth and families. Establishing priorities will allow Clubs to go deep with their services and develop a case for support down the road.



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**Example eligibility criteria**

To help you understand how to put these recommendations into practice, we have created sample language you can adopt for your situation. *Note: ages served will depend upon facility capacity and requirements, in addition to any licensed childcare requirements that may need to be met.*

Who is fortunate enough to be eligible to attend the Boys & Girls Club Learning Center? To be eligible for enrollment in the Learning Center program at the Boys & Girls Club youth need to be between the ages of 6 and 18 and meet at least one of the following eligibility requirements:

- current member of the club; and/or
- is an ESL student; or
- is eligible to participate in the national free or reduced-price lunch program; or
- is homeless; or
- is the child of an active duty member of the armed forces or military reserves,
- is in *foster care*; or
- hearing or sight impaired; or
- has no access to broad-band internet at home; or
- does not have access to a computer that has video capabilities; or
- guardian works with no other care options during the school day.