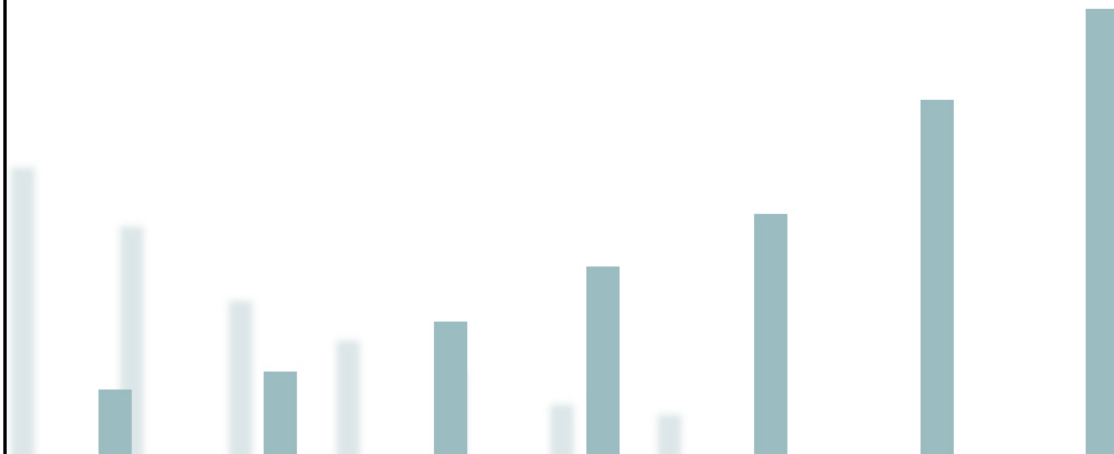


OCTOBER 2004

## **After School Matters**

**Managing rapid local expansion as  
a young organization**



## Summary

Founded in 2000, After School Matters has worked hard to expand after-school options for Chicago teens. The organization has developed a rich array of programs by leveraging partnerships with government agencies and private sources for facilities, staff, and other resources. ASM is now working to diversify its funding base. The young organization is also putting in place financial systems, evaluation processes, and organizational infrastructure to support its rapid growth.

## Organizational Snapshot

**Organization:** After School Matters

**Year founded:** 2000

**Headquarters:** Chicago, Illinois

**Mission:** “To create a network of out-of-school opportunities for teens in underserved communities.”

**Program:** After School Matters offers Chicago teens after-school apprenticeships and club activities that provide positive relationships with supportive individuals, skills that translate to the workplace, and exposure to career and educational opportunities. Apprenticeships are hands-on, interactive activities in the arts, sports, technology, and communications, providing teens with opportunities to explore different career paths and to develop marketable skills, such as teamwork and problem solving. Apprentices receive a \$15-per-day stipend for their work, and attendance is required. Teens apply online and interview for the apprenticeships just as they would if they were interviewing for a job. Many teens have opportunities to expand their skills over the summer as employees or interns in their communities. Club activities range from book clubs to sports and fitness programs. ASM now serves approximately 10,000 students each semester (10 percent of Chicago’s high school enrollment), making it the largest after-school initiative of its kind in the country.

**Size:** \$18.5 million in revenue (in the fiscal year running from July 2003 through June 2004); 34 employees, excluding contracted program instructors (as of 2003).

**Revenue growth rate:** Compound annual growth rate (CY2001-FY2004): 48 percent.<sup>1</sup>

**Funding sources:** In fiscal year 2004 (July 2003 through June 2004), 29 percent of ASM's funding came from government grants and 51 percent came from government in-kind donations (such as facilities and salaries) and from public partners including the City of Chicago, the Chicago Public Schools, the Chicago Park District, and the Chicago Public Library. The remaining 20 percent came from a combination of foundation, individual, and corporate funding, ranked in order of decreasing size.

**Organizational structure:** ASM is an independent 501(c)(3) that operates in 35 neighborhoods and 55 community-based organizations (CBOs) across Chicago during the school year. The organization works with 135 CBOs during the summer.

**Leadership:** Founder and board chair Maggie Daley and Executive Director Nancy Wachs work hand-in-hand to lead the organization.

**More information:** [www.afterschoolmatters.org](http://www.afterschoolmatters.org)

## Key Milestones

- 1990: Gallery 37 created
- 2000: ASM founded, launching in three Chicago neighborhoods
- 2001: Served six neighborhoods in the spring and 12 in the fall

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<sup>1</sup> 2000 data excluded from the growth rate calculations, given that ASM began operations in November of 2000.

- 2002: Served 18 neighborhoods in the spring and paused at that level in the fall; welcomed Wachs as executive director
- 2003: Launched its first major summer effort, serving 3,000 teens in 135 community-based organizations, 20 Chicago Housing Authority developments, and 24 parks; served 24 neighborhoods in the spring and 30 in the fall; switched program staff from a content area focus to a regional focus, creating 6 regional teams
- 2004: Served 35 neighborhoods in the spring; instituted a site visit monitoring tool

## Growth Story

The origins of After School Matters date back to 1990 and the creation of Gallery 37, an arts-related job-training program for 14- to 21-year-olds. Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley had asked all city departments to offer ideas about how to best use Block 37, a vacant city block in the heart of downtown. Daley's wife, Maggie, and city commissioner Lois Weisberg of the Department of Cultural Affairs proposed converting Block 37 into an outdoor art studio where Chicago high-school students could learn and work as apprentices with professional artists.

Young people flocked to Gallery 37. Based on this success, After School Matters (ASM) was created in 2000 as a public/private partnership, and Maggie Daley expanded the job-training program into sports, technology, and communications, creating programs called sports37, tech37, and words37 within ASM.

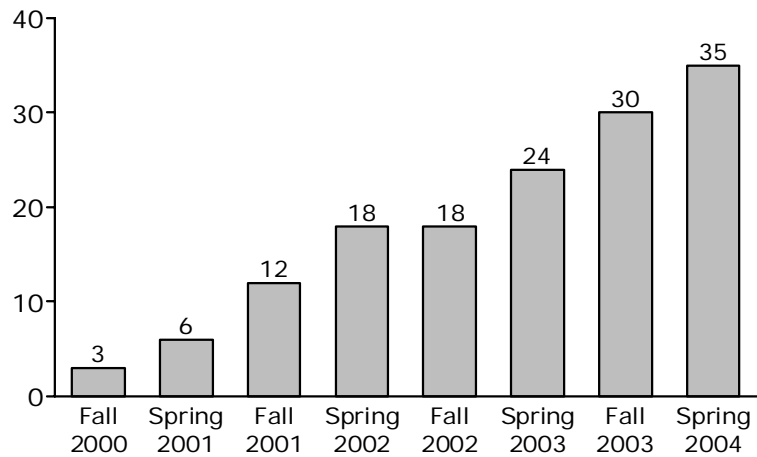
"Chicago has a lot of great physical and human infrastructure [such as] the parks and libraries," says Executive Director Nancy Wachs. "We saw an opportunity to leverage that, so we worked hard with our school, park, and library partners and kept expanding geographically and programmatically. In Chicago, people don't sit around planning a lot — we get things done."

In fall 2000, ASM launched in three Chicago neighborhoods. By fall 2001, it had grown to 12 neighborhoods, and was working with 18 neighborhoods by spring

2002. In spring 2003, ASM expanded into 24 neighborhoods. Kristin Buck, director of marketing, recalls, “We grew really quickly when I got here [in 2002], but there was one semester where we didn’t go into new schools, and we were able to focus on refining our processes and strengthening things that were working well.” (See Figure 1 for ASM’s neighborhood expansion.)

Figure 1

Number of neighborhoods served by ASM



After School Matters has grown largely because of the lack of programming for teens, the need for teens to develop marketable skills, and Maggie Daley’s commitment to the teens of Chicago. “The city pushed us hard last year to keep on expanding, and demand from our teens made it our priority as well as the mayor’s.” Wachs says. Mayor Richard Daley’s 2002 State of the City address declared it a city priority, “to provide more high-quality after-school and summer programs so that more of our children can participate in a meaningful alternative that engages them and keeps them away from gangs, guns, and drugs.”

Teens in Chicago overwhelmingly needed ASM’s services. The Chicago public schools offered few after-school options, leaving teens with little to do after school.

And while the national agenda for after-school programming provided opportunities for primary school-aged children, teenagers largely were being left out.

Once ASM started, long waiting lists developed for both students and schools that wanted to participate. Buck thinks the program could grow even more to fill the need. “We’re doing fine on recruitment,” she says. “We can only let half of the kids that apply into apprenticeship programs. So we’re at capacity there. The next challenge is with the drop-in clubs, and pumping up volume there.” Clubs offer a variety of activities to engage teens in environments where they can have fun, meet new friends, and get involved. ASM has also found its clubs to be a good place for teens who need a more flexible structure than its apprenticeship program allows.

The organization now reaches 10 percent of all Chicago public high school students, but its aim is to eventually engage more than half of all Chicago teens. Wachs envisions that this growth will take the form of not only expanding to more schools but also more fully saturating the schools where ASM already has a presence, as the organization is presently in 35 of the 48 high-need schools in Chicago.

With so many programs and locations that have grown so quickly, ASM’s need is acute for site-evaluation systems to maintain program quality. “The challenge has been developing the tools to really measure these types of things,” says David Sinski, senior director of programs. “We took for granted how difficult this would be, especially getting our staff used to being evaluators versus program operators. It also has helped to put some logistical things in place, to ensure consistency, like starting and ending all programs at the same time and having consistent application processes.”

To ensure quality apprenticeship instructors, ASM uses a rigorous screening process. “We use [requests for proposal] to vet instructors and people that want to lead programs,” says Sinski. “As for club instructors, the proposal process is streamlined, but all instructors are brought on for a semester at a time.”

Measuring outcomes has been a bigger challenge for the young organization. “We need to do more with evaluations,” says Wachs. “We need more proof and fewer

anecdotes. We need a longitudinal study with control groups, to figure out what impact the program has on teens, but not a huge one because they're long and costly. We've got to get someone to fund it. Some people on our board are shocked by how much it would cost." Wachs estimates that it would cost over \$1 million over four years to generate outcomes data that stand up to social-science-level scrutiny.

Rachel Klein, director of research and evaluation, was brought on in 2002 to develop a comprehensive set of metrics. Klein has rebuilt the existing database so that it tracks kids from semester-to-semester. "When we have that populated, we can really start evaluating, looking at grades and tests scores and attendance and retention of our kids, compared to others," Klein says. "We are currently going through the strategic planning process, and that will tell us exactly what outcomes data we want to have, to prove the model. We have an idea, but we just need to put it down on paper. We can't double in size every year without knowing what impact we're having."

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has so far made ASM's program evaluations possible. RWJ's original grant to ASM included funding to work with the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago. Chapin Hall is now tracking program participation and working to better understand the program's impact and participant satisfaction. Already, the data ASM collects is suggesting that more time in a program leads to greater impact.

ASM's commitment to outcome measurement and program quality runs deep, extending even beyond its relationship with Chapin Hall. The organization currently is working with Robert Halpern from the Erikson Institute to further its understanding of the impact its programs have on youth. And in spring of 2004, ASM instituted a site visit monitoring tool to ensure quality across sites. This monitoring tool complements existing training sessions ASM staff conduct at the beginning of every program term.

Wachs has been cautious to not overextend the organization. "We did actually slow down this year," she says. "We have pushed back, and that's fine. The mayor doesn't want us to have lousy programs, so we have to make sure that we are delivering high-quality programs."

## CONFIGURATION

After School Matters is a standalone 501(c)(3), with its own board that oversees the operation.

## CAPITAL

With strong support from the city and its partners, one would expect funding to be relatively straightforward for After School Matters. But with recent budget cuts across many departments, city funding has not kept up with demand for the program. “We have a lot of support, but it is not always smooth,” Wachs says. “The city has been pushing us to grow faster, and they are helpful, but it is not always enough. And right now the parks have a big deficit, and the schools are having budgetary problems. Our programs are not in jeopardy, but the system is a bit precarious.”

In addition to direct funding from the city of Chicago, ASM partners with other municipal agencies like the public schools, the parks, and the libraries, who largely pay for facilities and for the salaries of apprentices and of some instructors.

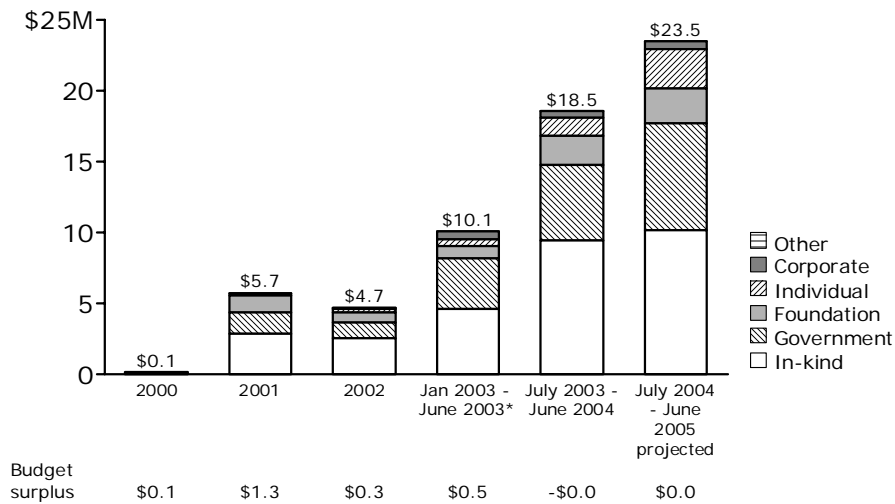
“We’re challenged with growing at the rate the city wants us to grow,” says Charles Draper, senior director of finance and administration. ASM’s budget calls for revenue of \$23.5M in FY 2005, a 27 percent increase over FY 2004. (See Figure 2.) “We’re looking at this growth, and we know that there are a lot of costs associated with it, and we’re going to need to raise money to cover those costs. The money will come from fundraising efforts and private grants.”

ASM has moved into foundation and individual giving to counter its reliance on government money. Foundation giving has been largely dependent on a multi-year \$5 million grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation that matches funding from the city of Chicago. But the grant will run out in the next year, putting pressure on ASM to replace this funding source. “We want to reach out to foundations, but we just started that about a year ago,” says Wachs. “Individuals too. But I doubt we can get more than 30 percent [of our total funding from] private contributions in any year. The rest will need to come from government in some form or another.”



Figure 2

After School Matters revenue



\* ASM converted from the calendar year to a July – June fiscal year midway through 2003;  
Source: Organization internal data

At a recent event, a dinner at the 50 yard line of the newly renovated Soldier Field, ASM raised \$3 million from private donors and corporations. Businesses have seen the value of ASM’s programs. “The city of Chicago is doing really well, so businesses have money again,” says Barbara Carney, senior director of development. “And we send the message to them that these kids are their future employees and customers. The businesses actually came forth a few years ago with a report saying they were disappointed with the skills of the youth that were entering the workforce.”

“Development has not been all that easy,” says Wachs. “We developed a strategic development plan and we’re beginning to implement it. We just hired a grant writer and we’re working to pull our donor databases together.”

Sustainability of funding continues to be the focus. “Funding is always tenuous and could change any minute,” says Wachs. “To think that we would have to retract from some of these schools just makes me sick to my stomach. This program is a lifeline for a lot of these kids.”

Regardless of the funding situation, Wachs does not want to cut the students' stipends. "We get questioned a lot about the kids' stipends from some foundations, but they don't understand the environment. Funders often want us to tailor or programs to their desires, but you have to stay focused."

## **CAPABILITIES**

Since it is a relatively young organization, ASM is still in the process of adding the people and systems it needs. ASM has been severely understaffed, but recent efforts to increase investment in non-programmatic positions have offered some relief. "What was key to me was getting finance people in and really developing those systems," says Wachs. "And we also needed development people, and evaluations, and more administrative people. My fear was that without this support, the whole thing would implode and we couldn't support the programs. We're still lean though and people work hard. I'm worried about burnout. So we have added several things to alleviate burnout, such as staff outings, staff appreciation days, and monthly staff breakfasts."

Partnering with various entities throughout the city has enabled the organization to achieve results beyond what its lean staff could otherwise support. In early 2000, Maggie Daley called together the heads of the Chicago public schools, the parks, and the public libraries to create the partnership that would become the basis for ASM. This partnership gives the organization the capabilities of a unified infrastructure, even though it is tapping into resources owned by partners. The city has provided playing fields, gyms, pools, and courts for sports programs; computers and lab space for technology programs; and performance spaces for art programs.

The mayor put his director of human infrastructure, B.J. Walker, in charge of the partnership between the three city agencies. Despite Walker's influence over city agencies, ASM finds it challenging to manage a relationship that involves so many partners, many of which are not necessarily paid by the organization.

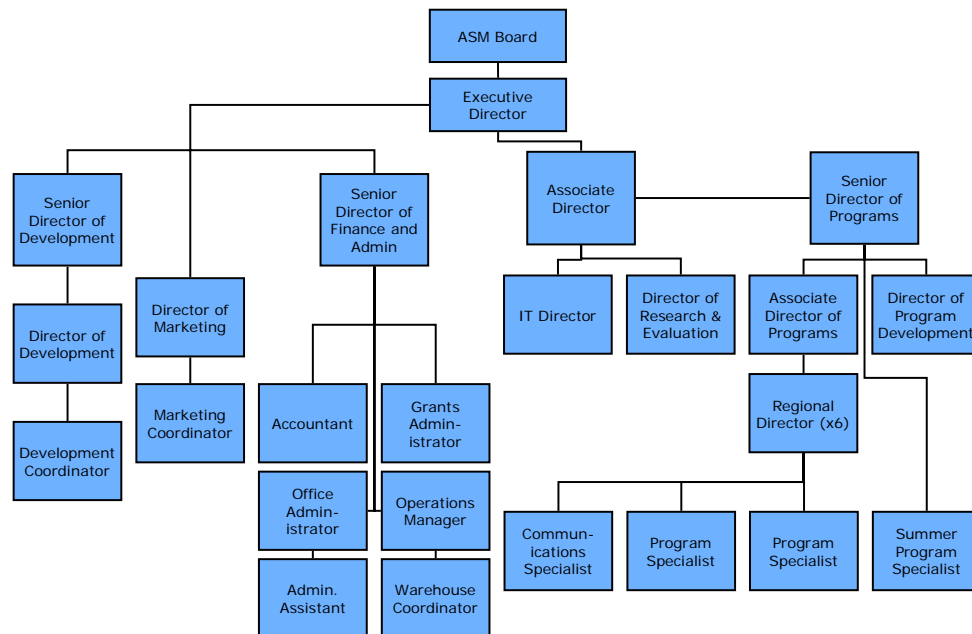
Most ASM administrative staff additions have come in the past two years. "When I came two years ago," Wachs says, "we had a much smaller organization: three

small teams running programs, an associate director, a marketing director, two people in finance, an administrative assistant, and an executive director. Fifteen people in total, more or less.”

The senior director of finance was brought on in late 2002. “When I arrived, the finance was all on a cash basis — there was no accrual accounting; there were no cost centers,” says Draper. “It was basic. It wasn’t really functional. There was little infrastructure. We’ve changed that.”

In the beginning, ASM was organized by program (art, sports, technology, communication). In 2003, ASM switched to a regional structure, due to its growth and current size. Wachs believes this new structure allows ASM to provide better service, as having dedicated staff at each site focusing locally and spatially allows them to better understand the neighborhoods and to establish strong relationships with the CBOs. (See Figure 3 for ASM’s 2003/2004 organizational chart.)

Figure 3  
After School Matters organizational chart (2003/2004)



Finding the right instructors to serve as “masters” of the apprentice programs has been challenging. The masters have to be good with adolescents, and be able to plan and carry out an activity that fills a semester. They also have to be available from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. three days a week. Finding enough adults to work with the 35 high schools they are currently serving is hard enough, let alone the additional schools that need to be served.

Wachs thinks the board is strong, in terms of the number of quality people on the committees, and the financial contribution of many members. “They are good advisors and fundraisers, and they attract many people to events,” she says. ASM board members include such well known people as Joan Cusack and Ernie Banks.

## Key Insights

- **Collaborating with evaluation experts.** ASM has collaborated with multiple evaluation experts to advance its understanding of its program’s impact and participant satisfaction. Specifically, Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago and Robert Halpern of the Erikson Institute have joined forces with the organization.
- **Maintaining quality during rapid growth.** ASM has worked hard to maintain quality, using several different levers to ensure that its programs are implemented in a consistent, high-quality fashion across sites. The organization has developed a manual, established consistent site processes, invested heavily in staff training, and instituted a site visit monitoring tool.
- **Leveraging partnerships.** ASM’s partnerships with other city agencies offer the organization essential resources like facilities, instructors, and computers. But these partnerships also add complexity, as the organization must manage resources it doesn’t control.
- **Adapting the organizational structure.** Not tied to its original program-based structure, after three years in operation ASM made the switch to a regional structure. The organization saw the shift as a means to provide better service at the local level.

- **Navigating a government-heavy funding base.** Government funding and resources served as a creative way to expand the organization's impact. ASM has pulled this off with deft political skills and connections. But this reliance on government funding sources could threaten the organization when the economy or administration changes. ASM is now diversifying its funding with foundations, individuals, and corporations.