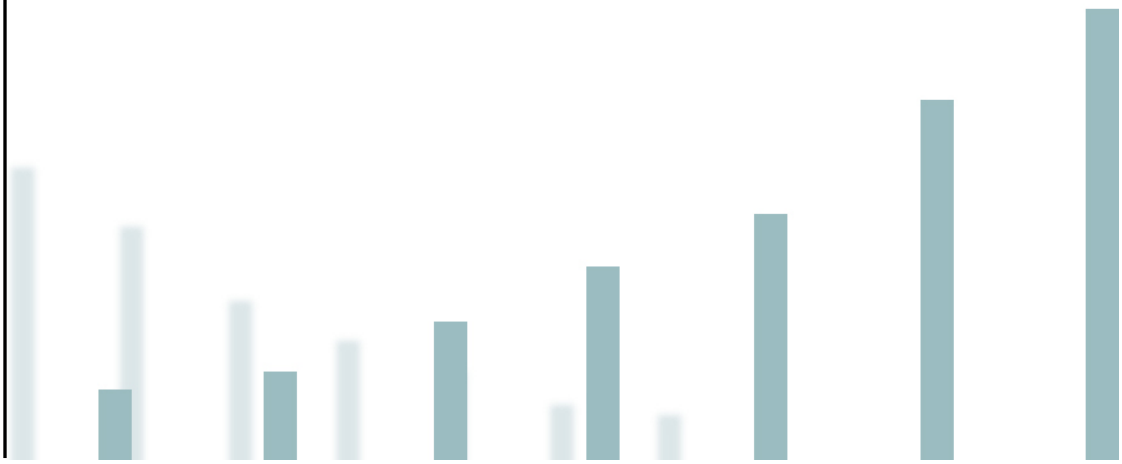
The Bridgespan Group

OCTOBER 2OO4

Citizen Schools

Creating a strong program locally as a basis for national expansion



Summary

Citizen Schools built a strong, results-oriented base in Boston before branching out across the country. It has used partnerships with schools and community-based organizations, as well as an effective site-selection and licensee structure, to expand across the country without overly stressing the national organization.

Organizational Snapshot

Organization: Citizen Schools

Year founded: 1995

Headquarters: Boston, Massachusetts

Mission: “Educating children and strengthening communities.”

Program: Citizen Schools creates activities in the after-school hours that strengthen academic skills, develop personal leadership skills, facilitate access to resources, and build community connections. Citizen Schools focuses on skill development — particularly in the areas of writing, data analysis, and oral communication — and links these skills closely to school activities and learning standards. The centerpiece of the program is an apprenticeship with “Citizen Teachers.” Young people apprentice with such professionals as lawyers, Web designers, and architects. Their apprenticeships culminate by arguing trials before federal judges, designing websites for their school, organizing public events, publishing newspapers, and more. The organization also runs Citizen Schools University to disseminate its model through national research, training, curriculum development, publishing, and policy initiatives. Since 1995, after-school slots in Boston have increased by 50 percent; Citizen Schools alone accounts for a third of that rise. From fall 2002 to summer 2003, the organization served nearly 1,400 students. Seventy-one percent of students in Citizen School programs have improved their writing skill by one full level or more, 81 percent of parents say their child is doing better in school because of Citizen Schools, and 91 percent of 8th

grade graduates from Citizen Schools gained admissions to a preferred high school with a strong pre-college program.

Size: $6.7 million in revenue; 133 employees[1] (as of 2003)

Revenue growth rate: Compound annual growth rate (1999-2003): 39 percent; highest annual growth rate (1999-2003): 80 percent in 2000.

Funding sources: Citizen Schools has a diverse funding mix, but relies most heavily on foundation funding. In 2003, foundations (including a New Profit Inc. grant) made up 59 percent of Citizen School's revenue, government 10 percent, corporations 9 percent, individuals 9 percent, and other sources (including tuition revenue, in-kind donations, and earned income) 12 percent.

Organizational structure: Citizen Schools is a 501(c)(3) organization with a network of licensees that implement the program under other organizations' 501(c)(3)s. Citizen Schools also runs a network of 10 after-school and summer campuses in Boston. Licensees receive substantial guidance and support from Citizen Schools, and operate in eight cities around the country: Houston and Baytown, Texas; San Jose and Redwood City, California; Tucson, Arizona; New Brunswick, New Jersey; and Lowell, Framingham, Worcester, Malden, New Bedford, and Springfield, Massachusetts.

Leadership: Eric Schwarz, president and cofounder; Ned Rimer, managing director and cofounder.

More information: www.citizenschools.org

Key Milestones

- 1995: Piloted the apprenticeship program; registered officially as a nonprofit organization

[1] Approximately 40 of the 133 Citizen Schools employees are part-time staff

- 1997: Began planning for national expansion
- 2000: Created Citizen Schools University
- 2000-2001: Developed a new three-year strategic growth plan
- 1999: Developed the Teaching Fellows program, with employees from other leading nonprofits spending half of their workday with Citizens Schools
- 2001: Started the 8th Grade Academy to support Citizen School participants as they prepare for success in high school and college

Growth Story

Citizen Schools began with a single pilot program that served 20 fifth-graders at Dorchester's Paul A. Dever Elementary School during the spring of 1995, offering two apprenticeships with a barebones staff of "Citizen Teachers." Eric Schwarz taught an apprenticeship in journalism, building on his experience as a Boston-area reporter. Ned Rimer taught an apprenticeship in first aid, drawing on his years running the EMT unit at the University of Vermont. Kids loved the programs.

Schwarz and Rimer were reacting to a downward spiral of youth crime, crumbling neighborhoods, and struggling public schools in Boston. Most middle school students are dismissed at 1:30 pm in the afternoon, with few structured activities to occupy their time after school. Schwarz and Rimer saw the long hours of out-of-school time as an opportunity to end this downward spiral, and to educate and inspire 9- to 14-year-olds with challenging, hands-on apprenticeships in real-world fields.

The first full program was launched in the summer of 1995, serving 63 children. Within a year, all the basic elements were in place: after-school, Saturday, and summer programs that operate out of Boston public school buildings, with apprenticeships taught by community volunteers, explorations that take kids all over their community and beyond, focused time for doing homework and working on writing and data projects, and team building activities, all designed to teach students measurable skills.

Citizen Schools received an important early boost from the public support of Boston Mayor Thomas Menino and Boston Public Schools (BPS) Superintendent Thomas Payzant. It also relied on strong relationships with principals, administrators, and teachers in the schools with which it shared buildings. What began as polite arrangements to share space have grown into enthusiastic, coordinated efforts to help individual students achieve.

As BPS began to grapple with new standardized teaching curricula and high-stakes testing, Citizen Schools launched an intense effort to align its programming with the new learning standards. Citizen Schools emphasizes writing, data collection and analysis, and public speaking throughout its curriculum, using formal rubrics and student portfolios to help kids gauge their progress. The program typically runs three to four days each week, with some programs running on Saturday, weekends or over the summer. Each Citizen Schools campus has 60 to 80 apprentices and a campus director. Teams of up to 12 apprentices work either with a full-time teaching fellow or with a part-time teaching associate. In addition, volunteer Citizen Teachers work with Citizen Schools staff to serve the apprentices in apprenticeships of about two hours, one day per week.

Citizen Schools grew initially in Boston, wanting to prove the model in Boston to establish itself as a leader in quality programming before expanding geographically. “To have impact on a huge scale, you do not necessarily need to have the dominant market share,” says Schwarz. “We need to remain a big fish in Boston, and we can then leverage those resources, ideas, and our model to other educational entrepreneurs [beyond Boston].”

In 1997, Citizen Schools convened a six-person leadership team in Vermont to look at growth models and different ways to spread its ideas. “We looked at a range of organization models and methods to grow — from Girl Scouts to YouthBuild to City Year,” says Eric Schwarz, president. “Our decision to build up to 10 campuses in Boston before going outside Boston was a very good one. That helped build a strong foundation.”

Citizen Schools grew from one site and a $150,000 budget in 1995 to 11 sites and a $2 million budget by 1999. National growth took place opportunistically as Citizen Schools experimented with models for disseminating its program. Schwarz

investigated partnerships with organizations like GEAR UP Boston, but, “the chances of success working with existing [funding and staffing] was not very high,” says Schwarz. “[Then] we started going along the path of helping places start programs without using the Citizen Schools’ brand,” Schwarz says. But he found that many organizations wanted to use their brand.

Citizen Schools started Citizen Schools University in 2000 to develop best practices; to promote state and national after-school standards and funding; to provide teaching fellowships; and to conduct research and evaluation of Citizen Schools and the broader after-school movement. The University was a way to impact the lives of many more children through a scalable program model, generating new talent, influencing policy debates at the state and national level, and leveraging increased funding from public and private sources through partnerships and advocacy with key allies.

Between 2000 and 2001, Citizen Schools teamed up with Monitor Consulting, New Profit Inc., Catalyst Alliance, Accenture Consulting, and others to develop a three-year strategic plan, laying the foundation for rapid growth along three dimensions: extending the program in Boston, developing a training program for other organizations, and expanding to other cities. “We always intended to use growth to drive larger change [in public policy and practice],” says Schwarz. “In addition to running a Boston R&D lab, running a national network of branded Citizen School programs would be an important strategy. We were still helping other organizations adapt best practices.”

Citizen Schools has opened campuses in Houston and Baytown, Texas; San Jose and Redwood City, California; Tucson, Arizona; New Brunswick, New Jersey; and Lowell, Framingham, Worcester, Malden, New Bedford, and Springfield, Massachusetts. All together, the organization plans to be in 25 communities by 2007.

And Citizen School has not stopped innovating to meet kids’ needs. In fall of 2001, the organization started its 8th Grade Academy in Boston to support Citizen Schools participants as they prepare for success in high school and college. Among other activities, youth in the 8th Grade Academy research area high

schools and colleges they might attend. This research includes analysis of high school college-placement rates and visits to 10 colleges.

Tracking outcomes has been a priority for Citizen Schools since the early days when it was solidifying its model in Boston. These performance measurement efforts have continued to develop over time, especially as the organization has ramped up operations beyond Boston. Adrian Haugabrook, director of Citizen Schools University, oversees metrics and evaluations for Citizen Schools, and his work has had a strong impact on the organization. “One of the things we did for the first time this year is campus-specific reports, utilizing what we called a quality rubric,” he says. “Now a campus director will get data at the first and second semester. It suggests areas for my team to work on, deeper interventions to be made. Another change — because we have thought a lot about evaluation and we’ve shifted the culture in the organization — is that evaluation is now seen not as an addition to the work, but a part of it.” Last year, for instance, his team found that sites had a great deal of variation in the amount of time they spent doing homework. Now sites need to spend a minimum of an hour a day on homework.

Because of its data gathering, Citizen Schools has determined that its students are promoted to the 9th grade at higher rates, they are choosing more rigorous high schools, their attendance is higher, and grades in writing and math improve as a result of the program. These results help validate the program model, as well as aid significantly in fundraising.

“We have actually seen increased quality as we grew,” says Schwarz. “Having a clear set of outcomes was important. There is a key set of inputs and a set of outcomes we’re moving towards. Being specific about both of those things helped us get better as we grew. Another part of this has to do with talent both at the home office and outside sites as we grew. It’s easy to dissipate the core as you grow, but we decided to reinvest in the core. This has allowed us to keep great people and attract great people.”

CONFIGURATION

Citizen Schools speaks of its configuration as a “national partnership” of people interested in after-school programs. Citizen Schools licenses its program to selected community-based organizations and school districts, and provides them with intensive on-going training, curriculum, and evaluation support to operate Citizen Schools programs in their communities.

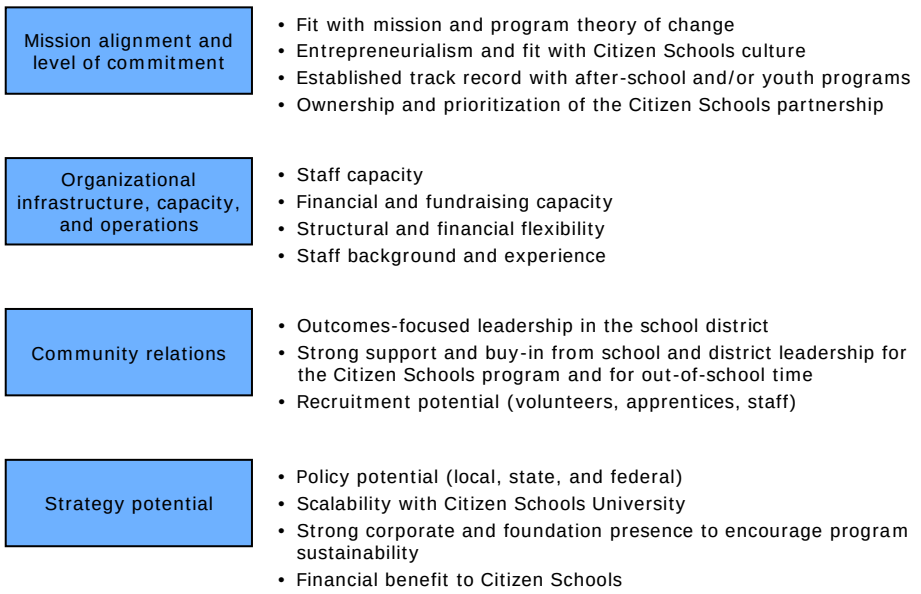
“The benefit is that it places fiscal responsibility locally,” says Schwarz, “yet it affords the appropriate amount of control and unlimited influence around program. It’s like being able to build something from scratch but grafting it onto an existing infrastructure. We hire a campus director who is an entrepreneur and paid by the local [licensee]. This model allows for much faster growth and quality maximization and as much influence/control as a company-owned network.”

Currently, almost half of Citizen School licensees are local YMCAs. All licensees deliver the program through local schools. While licensees are responsible for the program, the right school environment is also key, which is why Citizen Schools often meets with a local school district’s leaders when it is putting together an affiliate relationship.

Citizen Schools has developed a set of criteria for potential licensees. “Leadership is the No. 1 [criterion for new sites],” says Kate Carpenter, director of national partnerships. “You can test your perception of their leadership by whom they hire. If the leader doesn’t hire a great management team, that is a bad sign. We want EDs interested in cultivating and elevating people. Compatibility and shared chemistry, a shared sense of vision, entrepreneurialism are also important.” (See Figure 1 for more details of Citizen Schools licensee selection criteria.)

Figure 1

Citizen Schools selection criteria for new affiliates



Initially, the management team felt that finding the best local partners was more important than where they were based, and so they expanded to places as far away as Houston and San Jose. Now they realize the need for regional clusters of up to eight campuses, with two to three clusters in each major city. “Sites are going to die unless we are able to create regional clusters,” says Schwarz. “San Jose suffered from being the only one out there. They don’t feel like part of the network on a regular basis.”

While Citizen Schools initially planned to have loose guidelines for those interested in learning its model, several organizations approached Citizen Schools and asked for help in replicating the exact Citizen Schools curriculum. The organization developed more support for local sites, including a clearly written startup and curriculum guide that includes operations and program innovations. It holds a roundtable for school and licensee leadership, orientations for new campus directors, a summer institute for campus directors and teaching fellows, regular coaching and training visits by the Citizen Schools home office, and regional trainings that bring the campuses together. It instituted the WOW Conference (a

network-wide conference, bringing together students, volunteer teachers, and staff from all 20 campuses across the national network) in 2004 to develop more of a sense of a national network.

Within the next two years, Citizen Schools plans to open affiliate sites, which will operate as their own 501(c)(3) organization and that are not housed by a partner institution. Citizen Schools has identified the following benefits to the affiliate structure: potentially a smoother transfer and retention of brand, quality, and program integrity; staff and board solely focused on Citizen Schools; potentially more flexible and innovative than a larger licensee organization, and a useful counterweight to the licensee strategy. The organization intends to place affiliates strategically in a small number of communities.

CAPITAL

Citizen Schools has been able to build a strong base of funding from foundations. But in 2000, it began to think harder about diversifying its revenue base. To help cover its target revenue of $10 million in three years, Citizen Schools hopes to increase its funding from individual, government, and corporate sources. (See Figure 2 for Citizen School's revenue mix over time.)

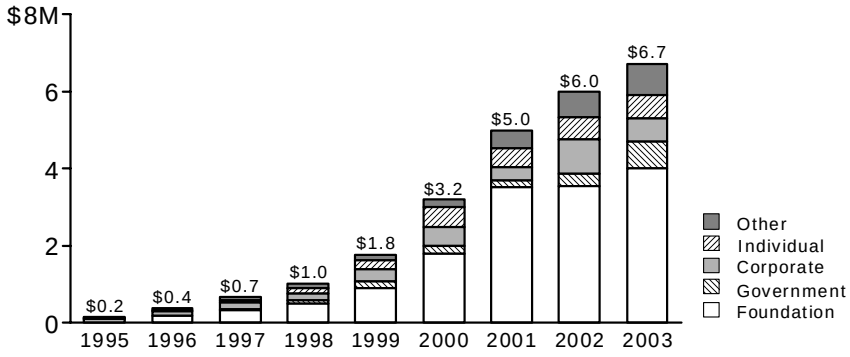
"For individuals you have to invest in the cultivation of people," says Schwarz. "Building a strong board and staff is key to raising more money from individuals. For the public sector, you need a talented person who can write great grants and do great research. You also need someone who can network. In the corporate world, a different type of networking is important. Conferences help build respect. [But] there is no silver bullet. We aim to build a range of revenue flows, each of which covers 10 percent to 15 percent of the budget."

Citizen Schools has also found unique ways of involving local corporations. "For Citizen Schools, an important part of being 'social entrepreneurs' was understanding that our relationships with the private sector could be much richer and more mutually rewarding than the standard roles of supplicant and donor," says Schwarz. The organization created a unique relationship in 1999 with leading Boston law firm Hale and Dorr, in which the firm not only made a substantial

multiyear financial commitment to Citizen Schools, but also agreed to provide Citizen Schools with legal counsel, technical support, and the time of their attorneys and staff as Citizen Teachers. “Hale and Dorr, in turn, treats the Citizen Schools connection as a corporate priority, and their employees see the chance to teach with us as an inspiring perk.”

Figure 2

Citizen Schools revenue



Annual revenue growth		149%	77%	55%	73%	80%	56%	20%	12%
Budget surplus (deficit) ($M)	$0.0	$0.0	$0.1	$0.1	$0.1	$0.7	$0.8	$0.4	$1.0

Source: Organization internal data

Over time, Citizen Schools has been able to establish a model in which its partners cover most of the startup costs for new sites. Partners cover two-thirds of the approximately $90,000 in startup costs and one-third of ongoing costs. The national Citizen School office receives $7,500 for the first site licensed in a city, and $5,000 per additional site. Operating costs total about $150,000 for each site, including the payment to Citizen Schools. Sites receive about $22,000 of that budget in the form of an AmeriCorps staffer. “We now only partner with people who already have two to three years of funding lined up,” says Carpenter.

“Overall, the funding community has said that Citizen Schools is serious and we want to stick with them,” says Schwarz. “However, we are starting to bump up against local funders who say they can’t just do general support anymore. Citizen Schools has resisted specialized support in the past. National money should be

going into the national organization, but the funding community forces us to take a piece of it to backfill locally."

CAPABILITIES

Like virtually every after-school program, Citizen Schools faced a perpetual challenge: How to attract talented, motivated staff for part-time afternoon work? Its answer was a creative "employee sharing" partnership with other leading nonprofits, including the James D. St. Clair Court Public Education Project, TERC, TechBoston, WriteBoston, Frederick Douglass Charter School, and Lesley University's Urban Teacher Training Program at the Dever School. These Citizen Schools "teaching fellows" spend the mornings working at their institution and the afternoons with Citizen Schools.

The Princeton Review has listed Citizen Schools as among the 66 organizations in "Best Entry Level Jobs." Citizen Schools was recognized for its teaching fellow and associate programs, which offer young people the chance to make a big impact on the kids and organizations they work with. The organization also conducts regular training for staff; after one year of employment all staff members have access to a professional development fund.

Schwarz notes, however, that as Citizen Schools continues to expand, it will increasingly need staff members who are willing to travel and/or relocate. "We need young people who know the program who are willing to relocate. Startup captains are usually gone for a few weeks to a full year. It might be in their third year. It is important to have a junior pool of talent that has flexibility in moving."

As president, Schwarz oversees the chief financial officer (who oversees finance, HR and IT), development, Citizen Schools University, and national partnerships. As managing director, Rimer oversees all program elements, including campus directors and teaching fellows.

In 1999, Citizen Schools created a director of finance and administration position, which became a chief financial officer role with the hiring of Emily McMann in January 2002. Also in 2002, Citizen Schools made Kate Carpenter the director of

national partnerships to manage its relationships with other nonprofits who deliver Citizen Schools programs. Schwarz thinks it was key to have someone like Carpenter who knew the organization from working her way up the ranks, who had talent in relationship building, and whose only responsibility was new site development. And in 2004, the organization created the position of national civic engagement manager, to support sites that lack capacity in programming and fundraising and to connect the sites to the national network via events.

“When you grow from a founding idea, 10 years later to a national, 100 plus-person organization, there are aspects of the culture that shift; it becomes more sophisticated and corporate and bureaucratic,” says Adrian Haugabrook. “These are not in the negative sense; many nonprofits would see these as negative words, but I think they are just what happens. And as the organization grows in scope and size, there are fewer generalists, more specialists. My areas are becoming more specialized — instead of looking for someone who can run data, I need someone who understands complex aspects of research and evaluation, for instance.”

Haugabrook remarks on the amount of change that has taken place in decision-making, as well. “A flat organization only goes so far,” he says. “You want to retain some flatness, but as functions grow, the flatness can be confusing.” Haugabrook notes that decision-making also needs to extend further down in the organization. “We essentially had decision-making in two people: Eric [Schwarz] and Ned [Rimer]. You’ve got to parcel out decision-making among good people in the organization. If you grow and decision-making is within just two people, it hampers process and innovation. But then you also have to train people to be solid decision-makers. And increase trust so that can happen.”

At the site level, the organization’s biggest needs are help with fundraising, finding volunteers year after year, and hiring campus directors who will stay for the long-term. “I think we’re pretty good at [choosing great site leaders], but the other important thing is to support them,” says Carpenter. “I think you can hire [the best people], but if you don’t support them, you’re not going to [keep] them. Nobody wants to be abandoned. Nobody wants to take a job and not get recognition.”

Jon Spack, civic engagement manager, and Carpenter agree that a few characteristics define the ideal campus director: an experienced educator with an

entrepreneurial and opportunistic mindset who can coach other teachers well. “They need to be able to coach less experienced staff on how to be good educators,” says Carpenter. “You really do become a better educator through coaching. They understand it’s their job to coach and inspire people, supervise well, and give feedback.” According to Spack, the best campus directors also understand the close connection between the program and development sides, and gain strong community involvement.

Public school principals are also an essential ingredient to success at the local level. “How good and successful the school is has a lot to do with the success of Citizen Schools,” says Carpenter. “It’s an atmosphere of caring and respect and learning. That spills over enormously into the Citizen Schools program. There needs to be a strong culture in the school about positive behavior and respect.”

Key Insights

- **Growing in a measured fashion.** Citizen Schools has carefully developed its desired level of influence. The management team has thought about a number of models to support growth and the organization has stood on the shoulders of organizations that have gone before it.
- **Balancing local ownership with national guidance.** Through experimentation, Citizen Schools has hit upon a licensee structure that leverages local funding and infrastructure while enabling the organization to grow around the country. The national office provides a high level of program, training, and fundraising support to sites in return for their licensing fees, helping to ensure high-quality results. It also chooses sites based on a thorough selection process that relies heavily on local leadership. In the meantime, a plan to build regional centers should help far-flung sites stay connected.
- **Partnering for maximum impact.** Citizen Schools has used partnerships with a diversity of sources to reach its goal of changing after-school programming across the country. It has strong relationships with the city of

Boston and the Boston Public Schools, as well as with individual principals, administrators, and teachers in the buildings it shares. The organization has also built partnerships with corporations that provide not just funding, but also Citizen Teachers for the program.

- **Linking programs with results.** Citizen Schools has created strong linkages with school districts to complement the learning that happens in the classroom, and it is able to measure its students' gains in specific skill levels. Data drives program improvements throughout the organization.