

CREATING A PRE-COLLEGE PHILOSOPHY PROGRAM



Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization



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Learn how to successfully start a program that engages students of all ages in philosophy
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PROGRAM MODEL OPTIONS

Everyone can enjoy and benefit from a philosophical education. At the core of PLATO's mission is to make philosophy programs available to all pre-college students. There are a variety of ways to bring philosophy into schools and classrooms, and one of the most successful approaches is to create a pre-college philosophy program.

Pre-college philosophy programs come in various forms and you should choose the structure that works best for you. If you currently work at a college or university, then consider creating a pre-college philosophy program hosted by your institution. You could also choose to start a nonprofit organization. If you currently work at a private or public school, you should consider offering a philosophy class or creating an after school program (for more information on how to do this, see our pages on after-school programs and teaching elementary, middle school & high school philosophy).

Whatever you choose to do, it is important to remember there are benefits and challenges to all of these approaches.

Creating a nonprofit pre-college philosophy program offers the benefits of allowing you to apply for grants while also soliciting and accepting tax-deductible donations. The challenges to the nonprofit model include following the legal requirements for establishing and maintaining nonprofit status,

NON-PROFIT MODEL
+ apply for grants + solicit & accept tax-deductible donations - follow legal requirements for establishing & operating a non-profit organization
UNIVERSITY OR COLLEGE MODEL
+ access to university resources (funding revenues, student workers, networks) + school affiliation - follow institutional policies & structures

and operating without the institutional support of a college or university. An example of a successful nonprofit created specifically to support pre-college philosophy programming (although it later became part of a university) is the University of Washington Center for Philosophy for Children:

<http://depts.washington.edu/nwcenter/>

Alternatively, starting a pre-college philosophy program at a college or university affords the advantages of increased resources such as: department funds, school affiliations or networks, philosophy and education students, and grant development support. Remember, however, that working within a college or university requires that you abide by particular policies and work within particular structures, which can make the job more difficult at times. You will be required to follow college or university protocols for hiring and many other administrative matters including grant applications.

Several colleges and universities host pre-college philosophy programs (see our map on PLATO's homepage), including:

☞ University of Chicago
<http://civicknowledge.uchicago.edu/winningwords.shtml>

☞ University of Hawaii
<http://www.p4chawaii.org>

☞ University of Memphis
<http://www.memphis.edu/philosophy/philhorizons.php>

Why should I start a pre-college philosophy program?

- + Demonstrate the value & relevance of philosophical education to everyday life
- + Enrich the educational experiences of students
- + Provide a public service by volunteering in your community
- + Offer teaching and resource support to local schools & educators

PRE-COLLEGE PHILOSOPHY PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT



Who should be involved in designing a pre-college philosophy program?

When designing and implementing your pre-college philosophy program, you should consider how the following stakeholders can be supportive:

☞ **Your colleagues and other institutional staff**

Potential Roles: Board members, advisors, program staff, networking to establish partnerships

☞ **Teachers and educators**

Potential Roles: Partners, curriculum design, networking to establish partnerships

☞ **Key members of your institution’s leadership and administration**

Potential Roles: Board members, advisors, program staff, networking to establish partnerships

☞ **Undergraduate and graduate students**

Potential Roles: Program Staff (including: philosophy teachers)

☞ **Parents and community volunteers**

Potential Roles: Board members, advisors, program staff, networking to establish partnerships

☞ **Your partner’s administration and leadership**

Potential Roles: Partners, networking to establish partnerships

CREATE A PROGRAM STRUCTURE

1 Form a Board of Directors or Advisors

Who will be your program's sounding board?

Once you determine whether your pre-college philosophy program will be hosted at a college or university or if it will be run by a non-profit, the next step is to form a board of advisors or directors.



A board serves as a key support network during the designing, planning, implementation and evaluation stages of a program.

Board members can help you navigate institutional structures, find and write grants, network to help you find and develop partnerships, as well as help brainstorm solutions when challenges arise.



You should aim to have about 6-10 people on your board, with each person offering a unique set of skills to support your program.

The board should include key members of your institution as well as people whom you know will be involved in the day-to-day operation of the program, and a K-12 teacher or two. For example, if your program is hosted by a college or university, professors can give you good teaching advice, help you comply with departmental and institutional rules, and help ensure continuity of the program over time. You might also want to consider a university/college administrator as well as someone with program development expertise.

2 Create a Mission Statement

What are the goals of your program?

Now it is time to hold a board meeting where you develop the goals of your program.



There are numerous goals that a pre-college philosophy program can have, including what type of population you wish to serve and what type of outcomes or results you aim to see.

For example, one goal of your program could be to offer an enriching educational experience to underprivileged students. This goal would then help inform your program offerings (a future step in this process) as well as dictate what types of partnerships you choose to pursue.



We recommend that you establish modest goals, at the beginning. Focus on the strengths of you and your board and develop goals around these.

If you are new to teaching philosophy, you may find working with high school students an easier transition (while high school is different from college teaching, it is still more continuous with it than the lower grades are). On However, it is often easier to gain access to elementary schools, since classroom teachers often teach the same group of students all day and can be more flexible with their schedules.

IDENTIFY PROGRAM STAFF

3 Find a Program Coordinator or Director

Who will organize and run your program?

Once you have a mission statement, it is then time to identify a program coordinator or director.



The Program Coordinator or Director is in charge of the day-to-day operations of the program.

While board can define the job description, the general roles and responsibilities should include:

- ☞ Hiring and managing program staff
- ☞ Overseeing program implementation
- ☞ Cultivating and maintaining partnerships
- ☞ Managing program budget

We recommend that you formally interview for the position, instead of allowing for volunteers, as this will help ensure you hire a committed individual. Since this position can be a demanding job, it is helpful to consider:



How will you compensate (monetarily, teaching relief, academic credit, service hours) the position?



How will you sustain the program over the years? Can the program coordinator or director serve in this position on a long-term basis?

4 Find Program Educators

Who will teach in your programs?

The success of your pre-college philosophy program relies heavily on the strength of your program coordinator and the people you pick to teach in your program.



Philosophy teachers will be leading classes, activities and other philosophy events for your program.

There are various strategies for identifying your program's teachers. Non-profit pre-college philosophy programs often rely on current staff or committed community volunteers. University and college hosted pre-college philosophy programs generally rely on undergraduate and graduate students to be philosophy teachers. Whoever you hire to be your program's teachers will need training.



Program teachers should express a strong passion for working with students and have some background in philosophy.

The expectations you have for your program educators will vary based on your program structure and goals. However, we highly suggest that you consider how to evoke a firm commitment from your program staff, as they will be essential to maintaining a positive experience for your partners and their students.

5 Train Program Staff

How will you ensure your staff knows what to do?

Once you have identified all of your program staff, training is essential to ensure your program's success!



Training is a vital element of a successful educational program.

Learning how to philosophize with students can take time, but we promise you that it is a rewarding experience! It often helps to read literature on different philosophy teaching approaches (see our "Philosopher's Toolkit") and to hear from people who have experience leading philosophy classes.



Arranging a site or classroom visit (once you have identified your partners)

Here are some key tips:

- ☞ Keep your teaching interesting & hands-on
- ☞ Class management strategies for your age group are super helpful!
- ☞ Don't underestimate children's ability to philosophize

PUBLICITY AND OUTREACH

6 Develop Website

How will you publicize and legitimize your program?

Now that you have the basis of a pre-college philosophy program, it is time to let the world know about what you have to offer! Websites help the community learn about your program, and have the additional bonus of making your program appear legitimate and established.



Websites are an easy way to advertise your program and can be very helpful when networking to find partners.

If you are not able to create a website, consider creating a flyer to advertise your program. However, you choose to publicize, it is important to have the following items on your website or outreach materials:

- ☞ Mission statement
- ☞ Benefits and outcomes of doing philosophy with students
- ☞ Program offerings (list of activities, events, classes)
- ☞ Staff (if a website: list names with pictures & biographies)
- ☞ Contact information (email, phone, address)

Here are a few examples of pre-college philosophy program websites, to serve as inspiration:

- ☞ <http://philosophyforchildren.org/>
- ☞ <http://philosophy.unc.edu/outreach>
- ☞ www.montclair.edu/iapc



If you are part of a college or university, your program website should be hosted on your existing institution's website to maximize the appearance of legitimacy.



Colleges and universities often have designated staff for web page management. See if they can create one for your program!

7 Identify Partnering Schools & Organizations

What schools and organizations will your program serve?

Since a pre-college philosophy program does little good without people to serve, this step is crucial. It can often be difficult to get your foot in the door at a school or local organization



Use your programming goals and offerings to help you decide what schools and organizations you reach out to.

Often the best way to make progress with a local school or organization is to leverage your personal contacts.



Network your personal contacts, and see if anyone knows:

- ☞ Target school or organization's leadership
- ☞ Target school's teachers
- ☞ People who work with your target audience in other capacities

As you reach out to potential partners, it is useful to have a plan for what you are going to say. We recommend that you use the publicity items you developed in the previous step, as well as share our article "Why Philosophy? Why Now?" (this is available on the PLATO website), which explains the value and importance of bringing philosophy to students.



Try networking both using the top-down and bottom-up approach

- ☞ Can someone introduce you to a school administrator, who once interested can suggest teachers at the school who might be interested in having philosophy in their classrooms?
- ☞ Can someone introduce you to a teacher who would be interested in having philosophy in his or her classroom?

ESTABLISH PARTNERSHIPS

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Arrange Partnership Meetings

How will you secure partnerships for your program?

Once you have found one or more schools and/or organizations to work with, it is now time to arrange a meeting to establish how you and your new partner(s) will work together to provide philosophy programs. In order for a partnership to develop in a sustainable way, it needs to be mutually beneficial.



Use your meetings to set a programming plan and timeline that meets both you and your partner's needs and wants.

We recommend that you should attempt to have all of the key individuals involved in the partnership at the meeting, where you will develop ideas on the structure of the philosophy programming and the partnership:

- ☞ School or organization's leadership
- ☞ Pre-college philosophy program coordinator or director
- ☞ One philosophy program teacher
- ☞ Partnering organization's interested teacher, or individual who will host your program's staff

During the meeting, try to remember to be differential. You might know a lot about philosophy and perhaps you know a lot about teaching philosophy to college students. But you don't know much about teaching philosophy to pre-college students yet. Nor do you know your partner's particular needs and interests. So, instead of saying "Here is what you need, and here is how we're going to provide it," say "We are interested in teaching philosophy at your school, and while we have some ideas about how we might do that, we are open to new ideas and are eager to work with you to develop a plan that makes sense for your school."



Come to your meeting prepared. Do your research about the organization with which you hope to work and bring a list of programming ideas with a schedule.

If you approach the meeting in this way, you are likely to have a successful meeting and develop a strong partnership.

9

Get ready to program

What will your program look like on the ground?

Now that you have established a partnership or two, and held meetings to outline programming ideas, it is now time for you to get ready to implement your program. With your program's mission statement in mind and the program coordinator or director in place, design your program offerings. Some pre-college philosophy programs do everything from demonstration classes and one-time events to class series with grades.



Use your program goals to inform your program offerings.

For example, if your goal is to serve students in low-income communities, then your program should be appropriate and relevant for that population. Do the needs of these students include after-school programs? If so, then perhaps your pre-college philosophy program should focus on providing after-school classes and activities.



We recommend that you start off small, and scale up over time.

As you and your partners become more familiar working with each other and with philosophizing with pre-college students, you can expand your program offerings and scale up. There are a lot of philosophy for children resources available online.



Check out our "Philosophers Tool Kit" and Resources page for philosophy lesson plans and activities.

Remember, you can create more lesson plans once you have started your program and are more familiar with the students and your partnering organization. While it is always important to have lesson plans, in philosophy it is equally important to be flexible and open to changing those plans based on student contributions and interests.

10 IMPLEMENT YOUR PROGRAM

Congratulations, you have created a pre-college philosophy program!

Now that you have an up-an-running pre-college philosophy program, remember to have your program coordinator or director monitor the program by checking up with partners, program teaching staff, as well as with students and their families.



Ensuring open communication and a constant flow of feedback will help you make your program stronger.

Here are some useful ways your program coordinator can gather feedback about your program:

- ☞ If you have someone onsite observing your class or event, ask them for constructive criticism and advice.
- ☞ Encourage your program teachers to keep notes about the successes and challenges of each philosophy session.
- ☞ Make sure you hear directly from those implementing the program about what is working and what is not.
- ☞ Check in with your partners periodically.

We recommend that you keep a record of all of your feedback (the good and the bad), so you can use it in the future. Written feedback is useful to put into annual reports for your board and donors, and to include in grants where you are establishing the impact of your program.

11 GROW YOUR PROGRAM

How can you sustain and grow your pre-college philosophy program?

Now that you have implemented your program, it is now time to think about sustaining and developing it. This is where your board comes in: hold a meeting to review what you've accomplished and then to engage in strategic planning for the future. You will want to discuss expanding existing programs, finding new partners, and identifying additional funding revenues such as individual and corporate donors, grants and sponsorships.



Happy partners, participants, and personnel make successful programs. Make sure to thank people and acknowledge their work.

Don't forget to update your website and publicity materials to reflect your current programs. You may want to include a section that highlights your current partnerships and programs. We are excited that you have embarked on this important journey to bring philosophy into students' lives. Please feel free to reach out to us with any questions or ideas you would like to share, by emailing us at: info@plato-philosophy.org.