

Community Successes Following Aspen Institute Report

Project Play Southeast Michigan and Project Play Western New York

The multiyear initiatives, spanning 15 counties, were born out of each region's State of Play report and are supported by the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation (RCWJRF) in partnership with the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan and the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo. As a result of Project Play's analysis and continued support, the initiatives have:

- Guided the grantmaking of the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation, which has approved over \$250 million in grants for youth sports and recreation, parks and trail systems. This includes building new skateparks and playgrounds in the region.
- Convened 400 community members at public events that identified Reintroduce Free Play, Train All Coaches, and Encourage Sport Sampling as the top priorities and subsequently formed working groups to design new initiatives.
- Free Play Days and Free Play Zones were created at local festivals, where attendees received Project Play-branded decks of cards that highlighted free play activities.
- A program was developed for introducing lesser-played sports in schools, increasing access to sports such as volleyball, tennis, squash, lacrosse and rowing.
- Support has been provided to partners to develop satellite programming, including She Can Coach events, the Project Play Western New York Summer Track Series, and SportPort (an equipment library to foster sport sampling and free play).
- Project Play Western New York mobilized youth sports providers to support legislation to allocate a share of mobile sports betting revenue to youth sports nonprofits.
- Detroit City FC adopted a \$1 fee on tickets to support local youth soccer. Funds go to the club's nonprofit arm, Detroit Sporting Coalition, which runs Detroit City FC City Youth. In 2022, the team sold 75,000+ tickets in 26 matches. Our *State of Play Southeast Michigan* report recommended Detroit's pro sports teams dedicate 1% of their annual revenues to support youth and school sports programs.
- In 2024, four Buffalo elementary schools planned to add new or expanded playgrounds. An impetus for this effort stemmed from Buffalo Schools' role in the coalition that produced the *State of Play Western New York* report in 2017.

More information:

projectplaysemi.org projectplay.org/communities/southeast-michigan

projectplaywny.org projectplay.org/communities/western-new-york

State of Play Seattle-King County

The project was in partnership with the University of Washington and King County Parks, along with the YMCA of Greater Seattle, Seattle Mariners, Kaiser Permanente, the Bezos Family Foundation, evo, and Seattle Children's Hospital in an effort to prioritize equal access to youth sports.

- The University of Washington formed the [King County Play Equity Coalition](#) to support and improve equitable access to safe, fun physical activity for all King County youth. Every Seattle pro sports team joined and financially supported the group, including the Mariners, Seahawks, Sounders, Storm and Kraken. The group meets monthly and uses findings and

recommendations from the report to guide a collective action process to increase the rate of youth meeting the CDC's physical activity guidelines.

- King County Play Equity Coalition successfully advocated for passage of [one of the strongest recess laws in the country](#). The coalition surveyed 580 elementary and middle school parents across 16 counties in 2022. 75% of parents believe their child does not receive enough recess time.
- Seattle Children's Hospital received a \$400,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services through its Youth Engagement in Sports program, which identifies effective collaborations that improve physical activity and nutrition.
- The report's recommendation to strengthen shared-use agreements and make public facilities more accessible was studied by a Governor's Task Force, which established [a number of recommendations](#) for new state policies.
- In 2022 under the Youth Sports & Outdoor Recreation Relief Fund, King County Parks partnered with the King County Play Equity Coalition to center communities most impacted by racism and the pandemic, developing solutions to invest with a racial equity lens. The goal of a safe reactivation of youth sports and outdoor recreation was established with a priority on centering youth of color and organizations led by people of color with deep partnerships in communities across South King County. More than 50 community members across South King County served as first-round reviewers, 84% of which were people of color. In total, 45 nonprofits will receive \$4 million in funding to increase equity of youth access to sports and recreation.
- King County provided \$110 million in new grant funding for categories such as urban parks and open spaces, targeted equity, and aquatics. The funding prioritized that grantees implement recommendations from the *State of Play Seattle-King County* report.

More information:

kcplayequity.org

projectplay.org/communities/seattle-king-county

State of Play Central Ohio

The report was released in partnership with the Columbus Foundation, Lindy Infante Foundation and Columbus Youth Foundation.

- Members of the *State of Play Central Ohio* task force launched the Central Ohio Youth Sports Collaborative to ensure continued coordination among key providers, including greater collaboration between schools, parks and recreation departments and community providers.
- The Columbus Youth Foundation made significant investments in youth sport providers aligned with the findings in the report. Investments included the Boys and Girls Club, YMCA, Chica Sports and Fitness Camp and Niños en Acción summer youth soccer programs.
- Ohio State University's LiFEsports conducted a regional coaches survey to learn more about the background, experiences, and coaching philosophies of the adults coaching youth sports. This effort helped result in the National Coaches Survey, which surveyed more than 10,000 coaches.
- In light of the need for more sport sampling, Greater Columbus Sports Commission launched a weeklong youth camp with 16 sports to provide equitable opportunities for kids ages 6 to 12 to sample. The camp leverages many providers, including pro sports teams and universities.
- Ohio State University's LiFEsports, in partnership with the Ohio High School Athletic Association, was awarded a grant through the Million Coaches Challenge to create Coach Beyond. It's a series of 10 education sessions designed to ensure coaches and athletic directors are ready to "coach beyond" X's and O's and teach life and leadership skills through sport. Offerings include in-person and online trainings, free webinars, and community events

on topics such as supporting athlete mental health, fostering a positive team environment and managing stress.

- Findings from the *State of Play* report were used in testimony to support Ohio’s legislation to receive funding from sports betting for youth sports.

More information:

projectplay.org/communities/central-ohio

State of Play Greater Rochester and the Finger Lakes

The report, in partnership with the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation, supports the Rochester Area Foundation in New York as it activates in Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Seneca, Wayne and Yates counties.

- The Rochester Area Foundation has distributed \$650,000+ in grants from the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Legacy Fund for Youth Sports, and supported the implementation of Built to Play grants, including the Play Everywhere “Corridor of Play” and the Roc City Skatepark, as featured in the *State of Play Greater Rochester & the Finger Lakes* report.
- The foundation committed to using [Project Play’s Teamwork Toolkit](#) to mobilize local organizations for collective action.
- As part of its Project Play Champion commitment, the City of Rochester Department of Recreation and Youth Services (DRYS) pledged to integrate the How to Coach Kids course into all annual coach training for the 15 community centers in the city, reaching 350 certified coaches annually. This training will provide new and novice coaches (including parent coaches) with an introduction to coaching logistics, as well as sport-specific tools and techniques. In addition, all DRYS athletic programs will integrate the Project Play framework into their programming.
- Through PlayROCs, children, families and neighborhood organizers rallied together throughout Rochester to raise awareness for safe and accessible play spaces for every child. The effort is part of the organization’s commitment to increasing access to quality sport and play activities for all.

More information:

projectplay.org/communities/greater-rochester

State of Play Oakland

The report analyzed youth sports in Oakland, California, in partnership with Stephen and Ayesha Curry’s Eat. Learn. Play. Foundation.

- [Eat. Learn. Play. announced in 2023](#) it will raise and invest \$50 million to support Oakland students by 2026. The movement includes transforming 25 schoolyards and helping to revitalize school sports programs. The strategy draws from Aspen’s report, which included prioritizing schools as hubs where kids can have access to safe and equitable places and opportunities to play.
- Project Play is working with Positive Coaching Alliance’s Sport Equity and Access Coalition to create a directory of youth sport providers and build their capacity to partner with Oakland Unified Schools and increase sports opportunities for elementary and middle school youth.
- [Watch a message](#) from NBA star Stephen Curry on *State of Play Oakland* and future activations.

More information:

projectplay.org/communities/oakland

Project Play Baltimore

Our first model initiative, Project Play Baltimore facilitated opportunities for leaders to grow the quality and quantity of youth sport opportunities in a two-square mile-area of East Baltimore. Significant contributions have occurred since the initiative, which was a partnership with Under Armour.

- [Under Armour's Project Rampart initiative](#) has overseen the physical renovation of Baltimore City school gyms and outfitted every varsity athlete with uniforms. Project Rampart has connected athletes and their coaches to tools and experiences that promote skill and personal development. Under Armour partners with the Baltimore Ravens and Positive Coaching Alliance for all school coaches and athletic directors to receive leadership-based coaching every season.
- Then-Baltimore City Council President Brandon Scott (and future mayor) introduced a budget to open all city recreation centers on the weekend for the first time in decades. As mayor, Scott's "Rec Rollout" campaign committed \$41 million of American Rescue Plan Act funding to recreation, with rollouts of renovated rec centers and playgrounds. Scott was a member of the advisory group that guided the findings in *State of Play Baltimore*, which highlighted the significant decline of rec centers.
- Leveling the Playing Field opened a warehouse in Baltimore to provide donated equipment to sports providers. Since then, \$4.8 million of sports equipment has been distributed to the greater Baltimore community. About \$823,000 worth of equipment has gone into East Baltimore, the focus area of the 2017 *State of Play Baltimore* report.
- USA Lacrosse partnered with USA Field Hockey for Stick2Sports, a dual-sport clinic for boys and girls to try both sports at one price (\$50). The two-hour introductory clinic includes field hockey and lacrosse sticks and balls, as well as a one-year membership to both USA Field Hockey and USA Lacrosse. Also, USA Field Hockey teamed with the Living Classroom Foundation and other leaders for clinics to introduce field hockey to local children.
- USA Swimming Foundation and Baltimore City Recreation and Parks collaborated to teach youth swimming skills and water-safety. BCRP is now a Make a Splash Local Partner of the USA Swimming Foundation, making them eligible for grants up to \$15,000 to support their swimming needs.
- The National Fitness Foundation partnered with Baltimore City Public Schools to support PE programs with training and up to \$50,000 in grants.
- Banner Neighborhoods Community Corporation developed sports leagues and became a recipient of the city's Children and Youth Fund, leading to a \$290,000 grant.

More information:

projectplay.org/communities/baltimore

Project Play Harlem

Project Play Harlem, a multiyear initiative supported by the Mount Sinai Health System, Harris Family Charitable Foundation, and Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund, aimed to grow access to and participation in quality sport opportunities available to East Harlem youth.

- Inspired Madison Square Garden to conceptualize a hockey program in East Harlem that introduces students to floor and street hockey through schools. MSG acted in 2019 after reading the *State of Play Harlem* report, in which hockey was identified as one of the top five sports that kids want to try. NHL and Madison Square Garden worked with the Department of

Education and Columbia University to design, pilot and evaluate a hockey PE curriculum for East Harlem schools in 2019.

- Garnered support from Congressman Adriano Espaillat (NY-13), who called for collective investment to grow the quality and quantity of youth sports in East Harlem to improve community health outcomes.
- Connected community partners to educate children and families on ways to get kids active in a variety of sports at the New York Road Runners 2018 Summer Jamboree.
- Supported DREAM in their Project Play Champion commitment to expand sport options for children based on their expressed interests. A new, full-time staff member has been dedicated to programs for elementary-school age children and will introduce up to five programs that are not currently offered.
- Facilitated the creation and outreach support of an East Harlem Community Sport Program Portal with NYC Sports Connection, a citywide sports listing platform.

More information:

projectplay.org/communities/harlem

State of Play Tacoma-Pierce County

The report was released in 2023 in partnership with the Names Family Foundation to assess the state of youth sports and physical activity in Pierce County, Washington.

- The Names Family Foundation increased grantmaking for Tacoma-area youth based on report findings and relationships built during the State of Play process. For example, the foundation is supporting the purchase of a new turf field at Sprinker Recreation Center. Turf fields were identified as a local need.
- Pierce County Parks and Recreation’s current development strategy includes a new \$16 to \$20 million sports complex in partnership with Bethel Schools to open between 2027 and 2029. To determine what will be built with Bethel, a joint concept planning and cost estimating study will occur in 2025. Our report identified the need to invest in new public sports facilities in Bethel.
- In fall 2024, Pierce County Parks and Recreation will launch the South Pierce Active Kids Coalition with Bethel Schools. This will be a collaborative group of providers and advocates who will support and expand active engagement resources (parks, outdoor adventure, sports) to the South Pierce County/Bethel area to promote the benefits of play and exercise. The coalition plans to use *State of Play Tacoma-Pierce County* findings and recommendations to evaluate progress made.

More information:

projectplay.org/communities/tacoma-pierce-county

State of Play Mobile County

The report was released in partnership with the Community Foundation of South Alabama, the Jake Peavy Foundation, and the Caring Foundation of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alabama.

- The Community Foundation of South Alabama partnered with Good Sports to provide \$20,000 in equipment, footwear and apparel to economically disadvantaged kids, through the foundation’s “Closing the Opportunity Gap” initiative.

- The community foundation partnered with the U.S. Sports Academy to launch the Lower Alabama Youth Sport Initiative, aimed at helping connect the youth, coaches and parents of Lower Alabama with sport-related, community resources and events.

More information:

projectplay.org/communities/mobile-county

State of Play Hawai'i

The report landscaped youth sports in the entire state, in partnership with the Lili'uokalani Trust, a private operating foundation for the benefit of orphan and destitute children with preference given to Native Hawaiian children, or Kamali'i.

- The Lili'uokalani Trust, which aims to serve Native Hawai'ian youth, committed to building the next iteration of the leadership task force to address gaps and recommendations identified in the report.
- In 2025, the Lili'uokalani Center will open as a world-class healing space in urban Honolulu, providing spaces for sports, arts, entrepreneurship and technology.

More information:

projectplay.org/communities/hawaii

State of Play Camden

The report, in partnership with the Sixers Youth Foundation, offered a snapshot of well adults in the city of Camden, New Jersey are serving youth through sports, recreation and other physical activities.

- The Sixers Youth Foundation [provided a \\$75,000 grant to Up2Us Sports](#), which will work with local nonprofits to identify sports that have not been offered and provide more options for local youth. The foundation also [gave \\$50,000 to the Greater Philadelphia YMCA](#) for its "Soccer for Success" program.

More information:

projectplay.org/communities/camden