

ABOUT THE WISCONSIN POLICY FORUM

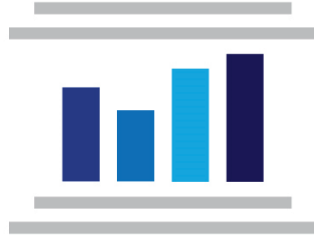
The Wisconsin Policy Forum was created on January 1, 2018, by the merger of the Milwaukee-based Public Policy Forum and the Madison-based Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance. Throughout their lengthy histories, both organizations engaged in nonpartisan, independent research and civic education on fiscal and policy issues affecting state and local governments and school districts in Wisconsin. The Wisconsin Policy Forum is committed to those same activities and to that spirit of nonpartisanship.

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report was undertaken to paint a clearer picture of the youth sports landscape in the city of Milwaukee: what options are available to kids and their families, what are the characteristics of these programs and how are they supported financially, and what are some of the primary challenges facing the city's youth sports organizations. We hope that this research will help guide youth sports leaders, funders, and policymakers.

Report authors would like to thank the representatives of youth sports organizations who shared information by responding to our survey, as well as key informants who provided additional insight. In addition, we are grateful to members of the advisory committee convened to guide this report for generously providing their time and expertise; and to representatives from Milwaukee Recreation for taking the time to provide us with important information about the unique role they play in Milwaukee's youth sports landscape.

Finally, we wish to thank the Milwaukee Youth Sports Alliance for spearheading this initiative, and the Milwaukee Bucks and Bader Philanthropies for their contributions that helped make this research possible.



ABOVE THE RIM

*A high-level scan of Milwaukee's youth sports
landscape*

April 2020

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INTRODUCTION

The benefits of participation in youth sports have been touted by academic researchers and advocates for years. For example, in addition to promoting physical fitness, youth sports supporters argue that a child's or adolescent's participation in organized sports can promote better academic outcomes; healthier decision-making (including rejection of smoking and drug or alcohol use); greater aptitude for teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving; boosted self-esteem; and enhanced respect for authority and rules. Additionally, developing healthy relationships with trusted adults can be a protective factor for a youth's mental health.

Some have argued that exposure to youth sports and these associated benefits is particularly important for disadvantaged youth who live in poor neighborhoods. They argue that participation provides a safe and healthy activity during out-of-school hours and a disincentive to inappropriate behavior like skipping school or joining gangs. Another benefit may include the positive effect that exercise and sports can have for youth who have been exposed to adverse childhood experiences and high levels of stress.

Despite these potential benefits, research also has found that youth sports participation has declined in recent years. According to the Aspen Institute's "Project Play," the percentage of children ages 6 to 12 nationally who played a team sport on a regular basis decreased from 41.4% to 37.0% from 2011 to 2017. The decline was similar for individual sports, with involvement dropping from 52.9% to 49.3% over the same period.¹ Among the theories offered for this decline are rising costs, shortages of volunteers, and greater affinity for video games.

Closer to home, the Milwaukee Public Schools' (MPS) annual Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that in 2018, 21% of MPS middle school students and 28% of MPS high school students reported that they had not participated in 60 minutes of physical activity on any of the previous seven days.

Additionally, Milwaukee's high levels of poverty (26.6% poverty rate according to latest U.S. Census figures); poor educational outcomes (second-lowest scores nationally among urban districts in fourth grade math and reading and eighth grade math proficiency); and troublesome public health indicators (Milwaukee County is 71st out of 72 Wisconsin counties in health outcomes) dictate a need for enhanced understanding of the youth sports landscape in Milwaukee.

Greater knowledge about the range of youth sports providers, participation levels, and funding could initiate informed discussion about potential initiatives to increase youth sports participation and ensure that there is a robust set of affordable youth sports offerings available to the more than 86,000 children and adolescents living in the city of Milwaukee. Consequently, in this report, we seek to shed greater light on the characteristics of Milwaukee's youth sports landscape.

With the support of the Milwaukee Youth Sports Alliance, as well as the Milwaukee Bucks and Bader Philanthropies, Inc., we explore the following questions:

- What is the breadth of organized youth sports offerings in Milwaukee, and who offers them?
- How are Milwaukee's youth sports offerings supported financially?

¹ <https://www.aspenprojectplay.org/youth-sports-facts/participation-rates>



- Who is eligible to take part in these offerings and what are the potential barriers?

Our focus is on organized sports activities that are offered within the city of Milwaukee and that are led by either a coach or other instructor, as opposed to informal recreational activities like playground or general after-school enrichment programs.

Also, because we seek to inform potential philanthropic funders about the gaps that may exist in *outside-of-school* youth sports offerings, our analysis does not include consideration of Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association (WIAA) high school-level sports. We similarly exclude any sports or related activities organized by schools during the school day.

We do include and provide an overview of Milwaukee Recreation, the publicly-funded citywide recreation department that is housed within MPS. In light of its significant breadth of offerings, it is impossible to consider the outside-of-school youth sports landscape without taking into account the programming that Milwaukee Recreation is providing. Also, while Milwaukee Recreation does rely on public funding, it experiences many of the challenges faced by private youth sports organizations.

Overall, the purpose of this analysis is to provide broad insights on the state of outside-of-school youth sports in Milwaukee and identify steps that might be taken to expand the availability of youth sports offerings. While our data sources were limited and only allow us to provide a general overview of the city's youth sports landscape, we hope our findings will be informative and instructive to stakeholders and funders and will allow them to build upon recent efforts to identify and resolve barriers to participation.



METHODOLOGY

A primary source of data for this report was a survey sent to a list of 71 youth sports organizations identified by the Milwaukee Youth Sports Alliance (MYSA), a group of youth sports providers and their leaders coordinated by the Milwaukee Bucks. Suggestions from an advisory committee of youth sports stakeholders formed to guide our research and additional online searches also rounded out our list. Ultimately, we received 31 unique responses.

We acknowledge that this is not an exhaustive and complete list of youth sports organizations in the city of Milwaukee and that the 44% response rate – while relatively healthy for a survey of this nature – does not constitute a fully representative sample. Consequently, survey findings detailed in this report should be viewed as insightful (but not definitive) context.

Two slightly different versions of the survey were created and used to reflect important distinctions between youth sports organizations that offer a single-sport (such as Beckum-Stapleton Little League) and those that offer multiple sports (such as the Boys & Girls Clubs).

The survey was designed to be answered by leaders or administrators at youth sports organizations as part of our effort to gather information about programs offered, youth served, funding, and challenges. Additionally, it asked about perceived barriers to participation for youth and families. The survey was not sent to youth sports participants, coaches, or families, however.

Another key source of data – used to gather insight on how youth sports organizations in Milwaukee are funded – was federal Form 990 tax forms of local foundations. These forms were mostly from 2017, the most recent year publicly available, and were gathered using ProPublica’s Nonprofit Explorer tool or the foundation’s website. (Note: This methodology may not include grants to groups that received multiyear grants covering 2017 that were distributed in previous years.)

Our review of Form 990 data centered on the largest local foundations that were found to have recently conducted grant making that involved youth sports. Organizations with youth sports programs were identified from the list of grants in the 990 forms from each of those foundations, and the amount and purpose of the grant (if provided) was noted. For many foundations and grants, the purpose was listed as “general operating support.” This method cast a wide net, and it includes grants to organizations that may operate youth sports programming as a component of broader community programs and offerings. As we explain in a later section on funding, often we were not able to determine if grants to such large organizations were specifically earmarked for youth sports, as opposed to other activities or general operations.

As an additional data collection method on youth sport funding, survey respondents were asked to identify local foundations from which they had received grants.

Finally, our research involved a series of “key informant” interviews with youth sports stakeholders identified by our advisory committee and other knowledgeable individuals. Those stakeholders included representatives from organizations, coaches, and parents and guardians of youth sports participants, as well as representatives from Milwaukee Recreation, the publicly-funded city recreation department that is housed within MPS.



YOUTH SPORTS OPTIONS

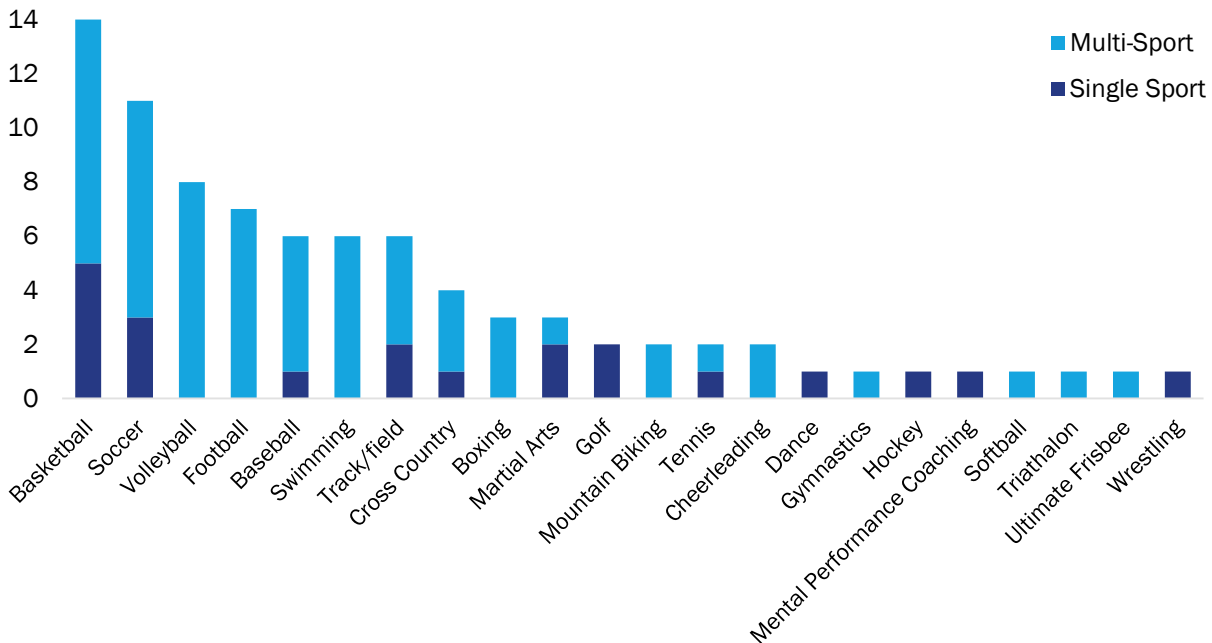
Our effort to shed light on Milwaukee’s youth sports landscape identified 71 unique organizations offering youth sports opportunities in the Milwaukee area. It is important to note that some of these organizations conduct multiple activities related to youth development or the broader community (e.g. the Boys & Girls Clubs), while others solely offer youth sports.

Among the 71 organizations, we found 14 offering multiple sports (we refer to these as multi-sport organizations throughout this report). For organizations offering one sport (referred to as single-sport organizations), we found 11 basketball programs, 8 soccer programs, 6 baseball programs, and 4 dance programs; three each offering track, golf, hockey, and martial arts programs; and two each offering field hockey, gymnastics, and volleyball programs. Single organizations were found offering programs in boxing, Gaelic football, running, acrobatics, football, hurling, speed skating, tennis, and wrestling. Many of these sports were represented within the multi-sport organizations as well.

Several of our key informants stressed the importance of having a wide variety of sports options available to Milwaukee youth. Not only does such variety provide exposure to new activities that may not be offered in school physical education programs or other venues, but it also helps to ensure that participants can find a sport that is suitable for them, as some are not interested in popular traditional sports like basketball or soccer.

Of our 31 survey respondents (listed in Appendix I), organizations offering opportunities for basketball (14 total organizations) and soccer (11) were plentiful. As shown in **Figure 1**, more of these opportunities were provided by multi-sport organizations. Volleyball (8) and football (7) were also well-represented, with the vast majority of those opportunities provided by multi-sport organizations. Some sports that require specialized equipment or environments, such as gymnastics and hockey, had fewer opportunities.

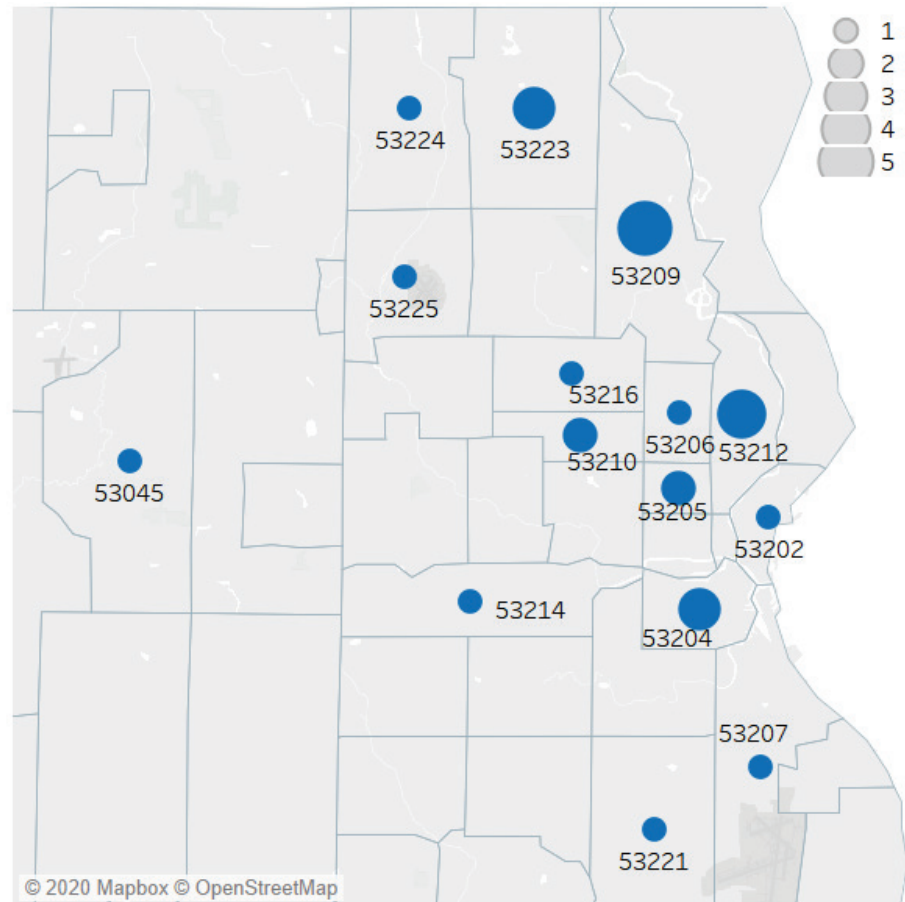
Figure 1: Youth Sports Offered by Survey Respondents



Multi-sport organizations tended to have larger enrollments, with all respondents but one indicating enrollment of at least 100 participants, and more than half reporting enrollments of 500 or more. There was a much more diverse enrollment range for single-sport organizations of 10 to 6,500 participants. More than two thirds of the single-sport organizations had enrollments under 500, and about 40% had enrollments of 100 or less.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of our 31 respondents by ZIP code, with larger dots showing greater numbers of youth sports organizations in that ZIP code. ZIP codes on the north side of the city had more youth sports organizations among our 31 respondents; 53209 topped the list with five programs operating there. The next highest was 53212 with four youth sports organizations. Also on the north side, 53223 had three youth sports organizations among our respondents, as did 53204 on the near south side.

Figure 2: Survey Respondents by ZIP Code



When asked about their enrollment capacity, only one single-sport

organization reported that its program was full, and it did not have a waitlist for families. Two multi-sport organizations reported that at least one sport they offered was full, and one organization had waitlists available to families. Seven single and three additional multi-sport organizations said they had programs that were nearly full. Sports that were nearly full included baseball, basketball, cross-country, football/flag football, hockey, soccer, swimming, and tennis.

It is important to note that the survey question regarding program capacity did not take into account potential latent demand. For example, one key informant noted that a lack of coaches and available playing fields may discourage certain programs from soliciting more participants, which could reduce the number of “full” programs but would not necessarily reflect actual demand for the program.



Most opportunities for middle schoolers, co-ed teams the norm

The most common age group served by both single-sport and multi-sport organizations responding to our survey was 11-14 year olds. Children ages 6-10 and 15-18 had the next most opportunities, though more multi-sport organizations offered programs for the 6-10 age group, while single-sport organizations had nearly equal numbers of options. This could be because single-sport organizations are likely to offer more competitive, specialized leagues that attract older athletes.

Among single-sport organizations that responded, the vast majority offer their program to children of all genders, with two exceptions: one girls' track and field program and one boys' basketball program. Similarly, all but one of the multi-sport organizations offered several sports that were co-ed, but most also said they offered gender-segregated sports as well.

Fifty-eight percent of all respondents reported that more than half of their participants are Black or African American; a higher proportion of multi-sport organizations said that was the case. Three organizations reported serving mostly Hispanic or Latino athletes.

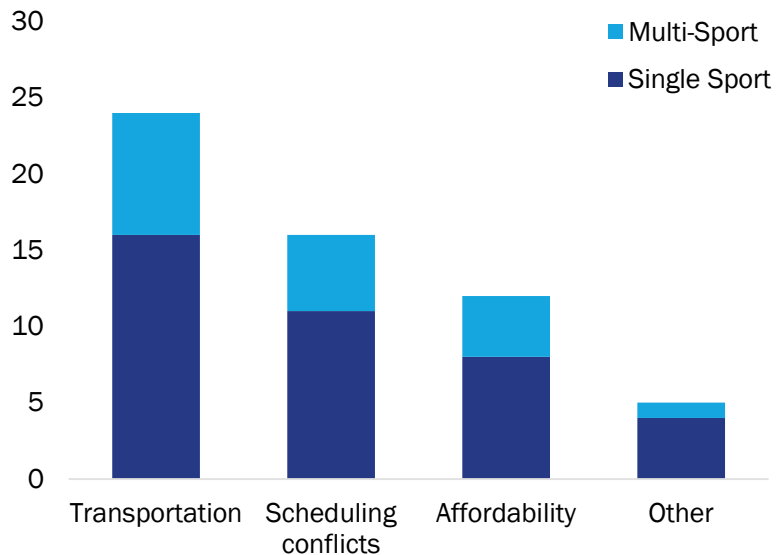
Most organizations noted that they accept athletes of all abilities. Many expressed a willingness to provide accommodations as needed, and five respondents noted that their organizations have programs specifically designed to accommodate athletes with disabilities. A larger portion of single-sport organizations mentioned these specialized programs.

Transportation is a key barrier

We asked youth sports organizations to identify perceived barriers to participation for youth and their families. As shown in **Figure 3**, transportation was cited as an issue by more of our respondents than any other barrier. This is true for both single and multi-sport organizations.

Our key informants offered several explanations for transportation difficulties. One was practice times that conflict with parents' or guardians' work schedules (particularly for practices that start before 5pm or for parents and guardians who work different second or third shifts or who have multiple jobs). Transportation also may pose a challenge for families who do not own automobiles, whose vehicle is not reliable, and for those who share a vehicle. Our interviewees also pointed out that while public transportation may be an option, many families may be uncomfortable with their children using that option on their own.

Figure 3: Barriers to Participation for Families



Scheduling conflicts and affordability were the next most commonly cited barriers, with a third or more of respondents citing each. We asked single-sport organizations about the timing and frequency of practices, and found that most organizations held practices 1-3 times per week, and that they most often took place on weekdays after 5pm. When asked the same questions about games, we found that the most common response was 1-3 times per week, and often on weekend afternoons (weekend mornings and evenings came in second). Other perceived barriers listed included family responsibilities at home, competition for participants with more competitive or elite teams, parent or guardian trust, and lack of knowledge of programs' existence.

Responses to questions related to the cost of participating in youth sports programs provide insight into the affordability issue. Nineteen respondents charge a fee to participate in their youth sports programs (an additional two charge for some sports but not others), while nine do not charge families. Among the 19 organizations that do charge fees, 10 vary their fee amounts based on factors such as children's age or the level of competition, while the rest charge a flat fee.

The fees ranged widely, from \$15 to more than \$2,000. Higher levels of competition were associated with higher costs (e.g. competitive basketball teams), as were sports with specialty equipment (e.g. hockey). Several organizations mentioned sliding scales or waived or reduced fee opportunities for youth who help out in areas like setup or cleanup. When asked what fees cover, single-sport organizations cited operational overhead costs most commonly, followed by equipment and uniform costs and payments to referees/umpires. Similarly, multi-sport organizations cited equipment, operational, and uniforms or footwear costs followed by referee/umpire payments.

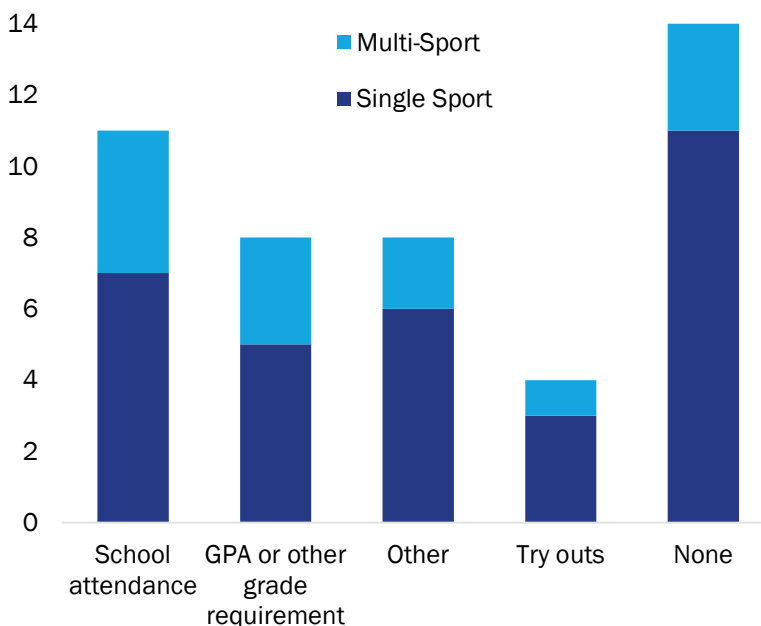
Most of the multi-sport organizations who responded said that families did not need to pay for anything other than the initial fee in order to participate in their programs, but more than half of single-sport respondents said families might need to pay additional costs for uniforms (not covered by many of their participation fees), special footwear, hotel or other travel costs, tournament fees, and special equipment.

Based on the responses we received, the total cost to families could range from \$0 to more than \$5,000 per year. Six organizations cited potential costs of greater than \$1,000, while 11 estimated that their families pay \$100 or less (including those that charge nothing).

Participation requirements and reasoning for them vary

Youth sports advocates often cite improved grades and school attendance as benefits linked to youth sports participation, particularly when programs have requirements related to school

Figure 4: Requirements for Youth Participation

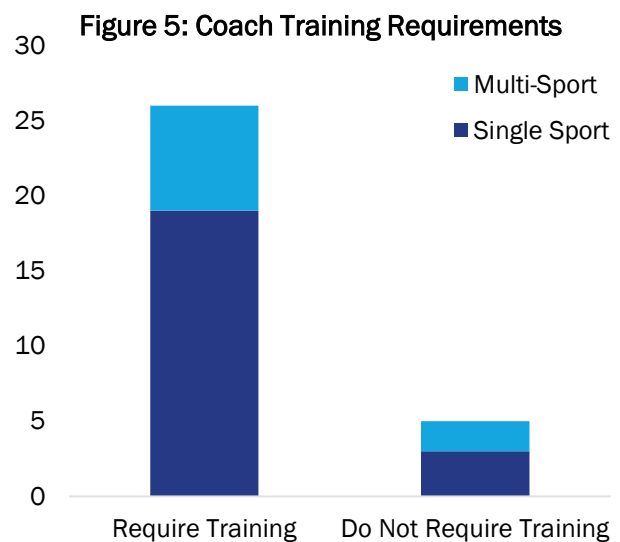


performance. As shown in **Figure 4**, however, among our survey respondents only eight had GPA or other grade requirements for participation and 11 had school attendance requirements. Eleven out of 21 single-sport organizations and 3 out of 10 multi-sport organizations reported that they do not have any requirements for their participants. Some organizations that do have requirements have multiple requirements.

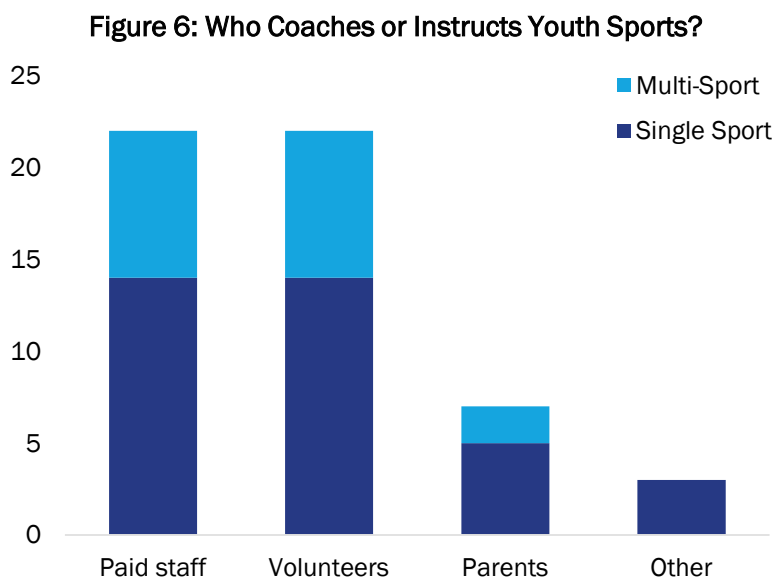
Per our key informant interviews, supporters of strict requirements say they foster responsibility and discipline because athletes know they cannot participate if they are not meeting specific guidelines. On the other hand, some programs without these requirements argue that all kids should have a place to belong, and those who struggle to meet the requirements might benefit most from having a caring adult and teammates who can encourage them to improve.

Most orgs require some training for coaches, actual content varies

A commonly cited challenge for youth sports organizations of any size or sport is recruitment of coaches and other adult leaders, particularly when there is no pay involved and if training requirements are steep. Among our survey respondents, the vast majority say they require training for coaches or instructors, as shown in **Figure 5**. But when asked to describe the type of training required, answers varied considerably. Many trainings are “in-house” (provided by the organization) or through the sport’s governing body. The range included safety or First Aid training, background checks, sport-specific skills, trauma-informed care, and how to coach.



While some organizations required multiple trainings, others were satisfied with the basics. Among the key informants we interviewed, each had a story to tell about the importance of “good” coaches – who they define not in terms of wins and losses, but rather with regard to their success in promoting a positive youth sports experience for their participants. We also specifically heard about the detriments of failing to ensure that coaches receive the training they need to be successful. Among those negative outcomes are would-be



referees choosing not to officiate and families considering pulling their children from participation.

Some also cited the negative experiences that poor coaches may cause for coaches from other teams, who may then be less likely to return the following year. Several of our informants emphasized that while a good coach can be an important mentor and role model, an adult who has not learned those skills can have the equally powerful effect of tearing kids down instead of building them up.

Contributing to the difficulty in finding or training *good* coaches is the perception that there is a shortage of coaches overall. In fact, the ability to find enough coaches was cited as one of the biggest challenges that youth sports organizations face in running their programs.

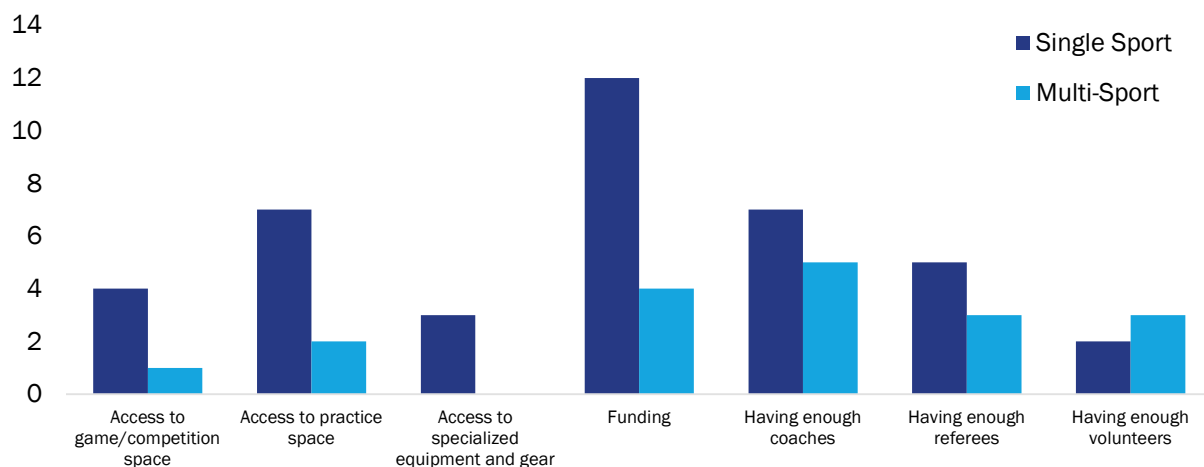
Perhaps related to this challenge, our respondents indicated that many organizations are able to pay their coaches or instructors, but a similar number use volunteers (some use both). The distribution of those who rely on paid versus parental or volunteer coaches or instructors is shown in **Figure 6**.

Among those organizations that answered “other,” respondents indicated that coaches or instructors included experts who donate their time (or charge reduced rates) and older teenage athletes helping out with younger teams. The practice of enlisting older teen athletes to coach younger participants could be seen as exacerbating the coaching problem by introducing young and inexperienced coaches. However, this practice also could be seen as a way to enhance the coaching pipeline.

Funding and coaches top the list of challenges

When we asked survey respondents about major challenges facing their organizations, funding was cited most often as either the top or second-highest challenge by single-sport organizations (see **Figure 7**). Funding for youth sports organizations often comes from participant fees but must be supplemented by other sources of revenue. Among our respondents, nearly two thirds rely on some combinations of donations, fundraising, and grants for half or more of their funding. Meanwhile, 12 organizations say they receive at least half of their funding through participant fees, including three who are entirely reliant on them. Single-sport organizations were more likely to say they relied on participant fees to fund their programs.

Figure 7: Top Challenges Cited by Respondents
(Number of Organizations Ranking Each Challenge as #1 or #2)



Other top challenges for single-sport organizations included having enough coaches and access to practice space. We were surprised to learn that over half of single-sport respondents did not consider having enough referees or having access to game or competition space to be challenges.

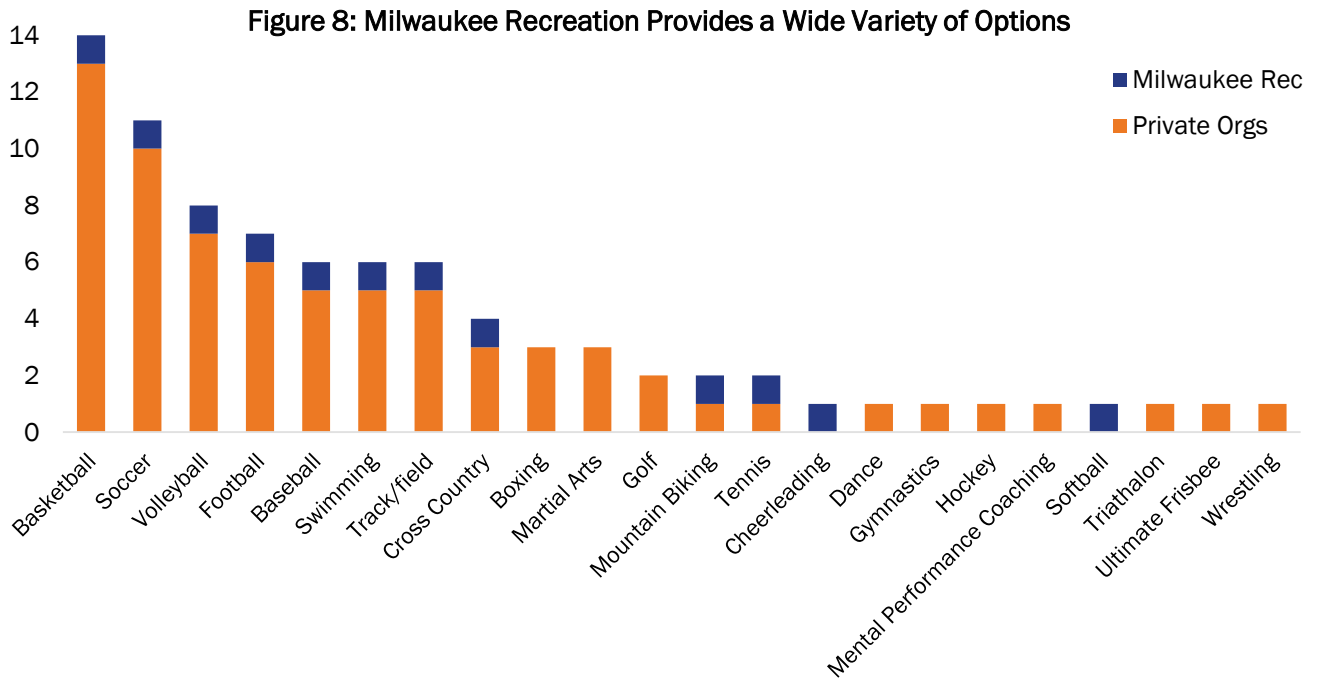
Meanwhile, the highest-ranked challenge for multi-sport organizations was having enough coaches, followed by funding and referees. Respondents were split on access to practice space, with 20% of respondents listing it as their number one challenge, while 30% said it was not a challenge for them. Thirty percent of respondents also said that access to game or competition space was not an issue.



MILWAUKEE RECREATION

While the focus of this report is the youth sports landscape in Milwaukee that falls outside of schools, we felt it was important to include an overview of Milwaukee Recreation in light of the breadth of that entity’s youth sports offerings. As noted earlier, Milwaukee Recreation is the city’s community recreation program and is embedded in Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS). Milwaukee Recreation has been providing recreational opportunities to both adults and youth in Milwaukee since its inception as the Milwaukee Public Schools Department of Recreation & Community Services in 1911.

The organization hosts more than 700 teams (and more than 9,000 youth) each year across a wide variety of sports activities. As shown in **Figure 8**, there is considerable overlap between the sports offered by Milwaukee Recreation and those offered by our private survey respondents.



Most of Milwaukee Recreation’s programs involve school-based teams (including public, private, and charter schools), rather than community-based teams. That means, generally speaking, that members of the team must attend the school where the team is based. Exceptions include elementary basketball and middle school baseball leagues. Additionally, there are typically allowances for up to three children who do not attend the school to join each team. Often, this happens because the school attended by a student who wishes to participate in a particular sport does not have a team for that sport.



Milwaukee Recreation's operations are largely similar to those of private organizations

Many of the youth sports that Milwaukee Recreation organizes have counterpart private leagues with their own governing bodies, such as Little League Baseball, that dictate rules and regulations for the sport. Milwaukee Recreation often uses those as a guideline, but will sometimes make changes based on the needs of their program, schools, or participants. These changes may include modifying grade or attendance requirements or the length of the game.

Middle school programs run by Milwaukee Recreation have academic requirements, and leaders at Milwaukee Recreation note that because their teams are school-based, coaches and instructors can more easily access information related to students' grades and attendance. This helps them stay on top of issues that might jeopardize students' participation, and encourages students stay on top of their academics.

Operating as a league organizer, Milwaukee Recreation charges each team (school) a fee to participate. These fees cover the cost of Milwaukee Recreation program staff, supplies, and officials. Whether and how these fees are passed on to participants (students) is up to each school. Some schools charge participants the fee, others may have booster clubs for particular sports that eliminate or reduce fees, some may use school funds to cover all or part of the fee, and a few have PTOs that raise money to pay the fee. Because of this, students at different schools (or students in different sports at the same school) may experience different costs and different potential barriers to participation.

Participant fees do not cover the full cost of operating the programs, however, and Milwaukee Recreation is heavily subsidized by property tax revenues levied by MPS. Each year, MPS' budget includes a property tax levy for its Community Service Fund (also known as Fund 80). State law allows school districts to establish such funds to recoup costs for non-education services (like community recreation) that are used by the broader community. The property taxes levied by the district for Fund 80 fall outside of state-imposed revenue limits that apply to MPS' school operations budget.

In fiscal year 2019, Milwaukee Recreation spent around \$796,000 to run its youth sports programs, including expenditures on salaries for full-time staff, support staff (including officials, sports coordinators, and monitors), and supplies. About \$138,000 of the budget was generated by team and participant fees, with the remaining \$658,000 subsidized by MPS. For fiscal year 2020, the budgeted amount is \$792,252. This budget allows Milwaukee Recreation to administer a comprehensive range of recreational services but, as noted above, does not allow for full subsidization of participant costs and is still not sufficient to spare Milwaukee Recreation from some of the financial and organizational challenges facing private youth sports providers.

Milwaukee Recreation faces similar challenges, but with unique twists

One unique challenge facing Milwaukee Recreation is that because its leagues typically are comprised of teams that are affiliated with specific schools, it relies on "champions" within those schools to start or maintain teams or even entire programs. These are often teachers or other school staff. If they leave the school, it can jeopardize that program's existence at the school, which also could impact students' ability to participate in specific sports.



Like many of the community sports organizations we surveyed, Milwaukee Recreation has academic requirements for participants, which can make it easier for Milwaukee Recreation coaches to verify that students are meeting the requirements because of their close relationship with the schools. This can be a double-edged sword, however, as in some cases academic requirements mean schools do not have enough eligible players for a game or even to form a team.

As is the case with privately-organized youth sports teams, setting these requirements can be a balance between maintaining appropriate academic standards for athletes and ensuring that those who might benefit from youth sports participation are able to do so. However, in this case, there is the added complication that if too many potential participants are disqualified for academic reasons, then their peers' ability to participate can be impacted, as well.

Finally, similar to many private sports organizations, stakeholders from Milwaukee Recreation cited difficulty in finding enough officials and coaches. They attribute this both to a general decline in adults interested in devoting time to youth sports (which has also impacted private organizers) and funding challenges.

In addition to lacking desired levels of funding to pay coaches and officials (resulting in lower rates), Milwaukee Recreation leaders cited their complicated payment process as a possible barrier. Coaches and officials for Milwaukee Recreation must be registered as part-time employees of MPS and are paid through the school district's payroll processes and procedures. Conversely, private organizations are able to provide payment more immediately and flexibly, which may be more appealing to prospective coaches and officials. Because of these shortages, Milwaukee Recreation says that parents and teachers often must step up to fill these roles.



YOUTH SPORTS FUNDING

The final component of our scan of the youth sports landscape in Milwaukee was deeper exploration of the sources and amounts of philanthropic funding dedicated to private youth sports organizations. As discussed above, youth sports organizations often are not able to fully cover their costs with participant fees, which makes many reliant on grants and donations. Enhanced understanding of the funding landscape is important, therefore, in assessing the current state of youth sports offerings.

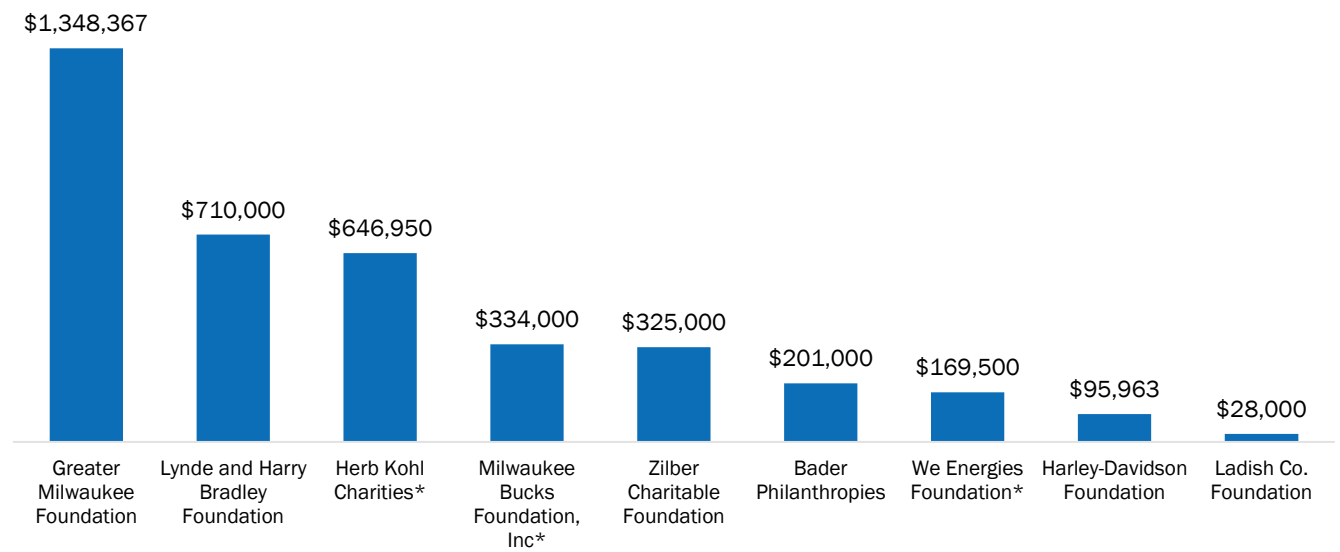
Unfortunately, there is no central source of data that we could draw upon to gather a precise assessment of philanthropic support for youth sports in Milwaukee. As noted earlier, we instead relied upon federal Form 990 tax forms prepared by local foundations, focusing on the largest local foundations that were found to have recently conducted grant making that involved youth sports.

Unfortunately, this approach also had its limitations. The foremost of those is that it often was not possible to determine from the tax forms whether grants made to organizations that administer youth sports programs were specifically dedicated to that purpose, as opposed to other activities conducted by the organization or for general operating support.

This limitation particularly applies to larger organizations that provide a wide range of youth-related services, like the Boys & Girls Clubs and United Community Center. We know these organizations are youth sports providers, **but we could not determine whether and in what amounts certain grants provided to them were specifically earmarked for youth sports.** Consequently, while we are able to shed light on the amounts of philanthropic support received by organizations that provide youth sports, we cannot discern the amounts specifically allocated to youth sports.

With those caveats in mind, we honed in on nine local foundations that we were able to determine – through their Forms 990 – had contributed more than \$20,000 in grants to organizations that provided youth sports in 2017 (or the most recent year for which data were available). Total grant amounts for each are shown in **Figure 9.**

Figure 9: Donations by Foundation to Organizations Providing Youth Sports, 2017



* Reflects 2016 donations, which was the latest year for which donation data were available

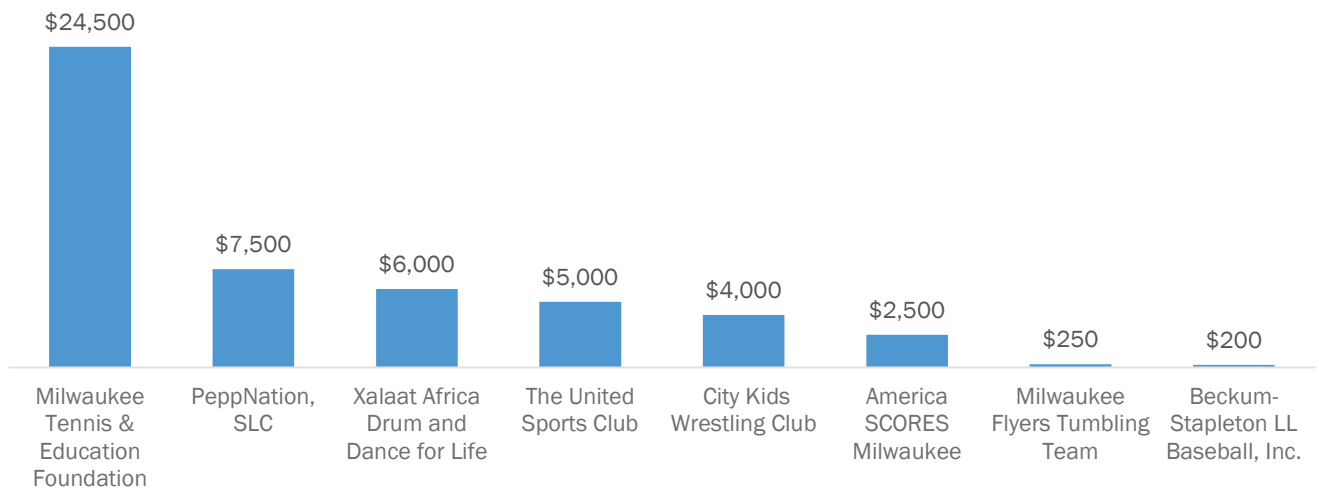


This analysis suggests that major foundations in Greater Milwaukee contribute significant amounts to organizations that are involved with youth development (including youth sports), with a total of more than \$3.8 million contributed by the nine foundations in the most recent year for which data are available. However, our analysis also suggests that the bulk of those dollars are going to larger organizations that provide a range of youth development activities, and not to organizations that are solely dedicated to youth sports.

For example, we found that the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee received \$1.3 million in grants from these foundations, while Running Rebels received \$651,000 and the YMCA of Metropolitan Milwaukee received \$323,000. Other such organizations receiving more than \$200,000 included COA Youth & Family Centers, Silver Spring Neighborhood Center, and United Community Center.

When we looked at smaller organizations dedicated solely to youth sports, we did not find substantial support from the nine foundations we examined. In fact, as shown in **Figure 10**, we were able to find only eight organizations dedicated solely to youth sports (per the definition used in this report) that received funds from any of the nine foundations. Also, those total contributions consisted of relatively small amounts, ranging from \$200 to \$24,500.

Figure 10: Youth Sports Organizations Receiving Funds from Local Foundations



These findings do not necessarily convey a lack of interest from large Milwaukee foundations in supporting small organizations dedicated solely to youth sports. Indeed, many of those organizations likely do not seek contributions from large foundations, but instead rely on smaller donations from individuals and corporate sponsors. Moreover, the fact that Milwaukee-area foundations are providing substantial support for large youth development organizations that provide a range of programs and services – including youth sports – should be seen as a positive element that is helping to ensure a wide variety of youth sports offerings in the community.

Still, our finding that smaller organizations dedicated solely to youth sports are not widely benefiting from the generosity of local foundations suggests a possible opportunity for foundations who may be seeking to enhance youth sports programming to make a difference, as well as an opportunity for those smaller youth sports organizations to tap into a resource that is currently largely untapped.



CONCLUSION AND POLICY INSIGHTS

Our broad scan of the youth sports landscape in Milwaukee found there is a wide array of organizations operating in a largely fragmented fashion throughout the city. Through our survey, we identified several key challenges and barriers facing organizations and families. Encouragingly, we also identified opportunities to improve the youth sports landscape and a consensus that enhanced collaboration among providers and stakeholders could improve the youth sports experience for all.

Foremost among our specific key findings and the key needs we identified were the following:

- Because *communications about the various offerings are fragmented and limited*, it is difficult to know the true extent of options for kids and their families when it comes to youth sports in Milwaukee. Beyond online searches or word of mouth, the next best option is Milwaukee Recreation's seasonal guide, which is mailed to homes in the area.
- The *recruitment of quality coaches* is essential for the success of youth sports programs, but training requirements for coaches vary widely. Our survey responses indicate there is no common requirement for coaches among the different organizations, as requirements ranged from basic safety or sport-specific skills training to learning how to effectively work with young athletes. In our discussions with key informants, we repeatedly heard how lack of training for coaches can have a negative impact on participants.
- The youth sports organizations that responded to our survey cited **funding, particularly from philanthropic and other non-user sources**, as a top challenge. Many rely on grants or donations for large portions of their budgets, and several expressed concern about their ability to continue receiving adequate outside funding.
- Survey respondents and key informants repeatedly cited *transportation as a key barrier* to participation in youth sports. We were unable to uncover any solutions from our key informants and other stakeholders, but follow-up research with youth and/or their families and identification of best practices from other communities may be beneficial.

As noted throughout this report, these findings do not reflect an exhaustive analysis of the challenges facing youth sports organizations in Milwaukee. However, they do produce the following policy insights and options that should be considered by youth sports stakeholders:

- **Build upon efforts to centralize information about youth sports options.** The challenges we faced in assessing the youth sports landscape reflect how difficult it must be for families to gain knowledge of their range of youth sports options. The efforts of the Milwaukee Youth Sports Alliance to create a database of providers is a good start, but that could be expanded to potentially create a website including basic information about each organization, specifics about their offerings (e.g. age ranges and fees), and how to sign up. The website also could provide information intended to address barriers to participation cited in this report, including available transportation options and opportunities for scholarships or fee waivers.

Milwaukee Recreation provides similar information in its printed guidebook and hosts lists of offerings by age on its website, but a searchable and more widely publicized database of offerings and organizations could be a valuable addition. Such an effort could include both



private sports organizations and Milwaukee Recreation and could be hosted by either a public or private entity, with funding support also potentially derived from both public (i.e. Milwaukee Recreation) and private sources.

- **Enhance collaboration among youth sports organizations.** It is not surprising that the numerous private youth sports organizations in Milwaukee operate in a fragmented nature given the different characteristics and needs associated with different sports. Nevertheless, there are areas of commonality among all providers that might benefit from greater collaboration. For example, joint training for coaches and referees in commonly needed areas like First Aid and trauma-informed care could allow distinct organizations to share costs. Pooling resources among multiple organizations for background checks also could produce cost efficiencies and relieve individual organizations from an administrative burden.

Collaboration in these areas might also lead to establishment of common training requirements for coaches or referees, which might be enforced by making adherence a condition for being listed on the common website cited above. Such requirements also might be enforced by potential grant providers as a condition of receiving or renewing funding.

- **Encourage collaboration among youth sports funders and among organizations pursuing funding.** With so many youth sports organizations relying on grants and fundraising, the survival of many programs depends both on the generosity of donors (large and small) and the organizations' ability to maintain staff or volunteers to write and administer grants. It may make sense to establish an alliance among major youth sports funders to coordinate funding priorities and perhaps centralize the grant application process (i.e. organizations could submit one application for consideration by several foundations instead of multiple applications to multiple funders). A potential model is the Community Development Alliance, which provides a mechanism for foundations that support community development efforts to strategically pool their resources and mutually assess funding needs and opportunities.

It might also be appropriate to consider resurrecting a concept similar to the former Milwaukee County Youth Sports Authority. That entity was created and funded by Milwaukee County government but was terminated about a decade ago. It typically provided \$50,000 per year to a nonprofit facilitator that solicited small grant requests (typically under \$5,000) from youth sports organizations to fill funding gaps for items like uniforms, coach/referee payments, and minor facility or information technology needs.

While public sector support for a new fund like the former Sports Authority might not be realistic or appropriate, such a concept might allow private funders to pool their support for youth sports and direct their grant making to mutually identified priorities across the spectrum of youth sports offerings. For example, given the emphasis on transportation as a barrier to participation among our survey respondents, this may be an area the philanthropic community could tackle jointly through grants provided by a Sports Authority-type entity.

We hope this report provides helpful insights to those looking to improve the breadth of youth sports offerings in Milwaukee and to encourage greater numbers of the city's youth to participate. Hockey great Wayne Gretzky once said "You miss 100% of the shots you don't take." We commend those who commissioned this research for their desire to consider several "shots" to enhance the city's youth sports programming and we look forward to monitoring their progress.



APPENDIX I - LIST OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Single-Sport Organizations

- America SCORES Milwaukee
- Beckum Stapleton Little League
- City Kids Wrestling Club
- Cream Skills Inc.
- Girls on the Run of Southeastern Wisconsin
- HeartLove Place
- Inbounds Training Center
- J.K. Lee City Youth Martial Arts Program, Inc.
- Legacy Basketball Academy
- Milwaukee Area Youth Golf Academy
- Milwaukee Kickers Soccer Club
- Milwaukee Mustangs Track Club
- MISPIBO Fitness
- MTEF
- Murphy's Community Life Skills & Martial Arts Academy
- Notre Dame Don Bosco Basketball League
- Running Rebels
- SHAW
- The First Tee of Southeast Wisconsin
- Wings of Glory Track Club
- Xalaat Africa Drum and Dance

Multi-Sport Organizations

- Above and Beyond the Playground
- Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee
- COA Youth & Family Centers
- Journey House
- Milwaukee Buccaneers Youth Sports Inc.
- Milwaukee Recreation
- PEAK Initiative
- Purposeful PLAY
- Special Olympics Wisconsin
- United Community Center



APPENDIX II - PROJECT ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Special thanks to our advisory committee members for lending their time and expertise to this project.

- Eric Ashley, Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee
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