

Commissioner Sheila J. Poole
New York State Office of Children and Family Services
52 Washington Street
Rensselaer, NY 12144

January 25, 2022

Dear Commissioner Poole,

On April 6th, 2021, the New York State government approved its annual state budget, which included the legalization of mobile sports betting and the earmarking of a portion of these revenues to support a new Sport Activities and Education Grant Program:


“In the first fiscal year in which mobile sports wagering licensees commence operations and accept mobile sports wagers pursuant to this section, the commission shall pay one percent of the state tax imposed on mobile sports wagering by this section to the general fund, a program to be administered by the office of children and family services for a statewide youth sports activities and education grant program for the purpose of providing annual awards to sports programs for underserved youth under the age of eighteen years; provided however, that such amount shall be equal to five million dollars for each fiscal year thereafter.”

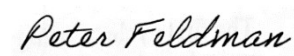
Sport for Good NYC and Project Play Western New York are place-based collective action collaboratives focused on increasing the quality of and access to youth sports for all young people. The Youth Sports Collaborative Network is a national association for sports-based youth development program providers and their supporting organizations. We are a collection of practitioners, coaches, program leaders, funders, policymakers, researchers, and advocates; all of us believe in the power of sport, when used intentionally, as a powerful tool for youth and community development.


We applaud the leadership of lawmakers like Assemblymember Monica Wallace and others who helped champion the creation of this new fund. As we look forward to this new grant program impacting young people who need it most through quality youth sports programming, we respectfully submit the attached recommendations to the New York State Office of Children and Family Services.

We welcome the opportunity to further engage with the Office on these recommendations, the grant program, and the power of sport to positively impact young people.

Sincerely,


Daycia Clarke
Director, Project Play WNY
Community Foundation for
Greater Buffalo


Peter Feldman
NYC Program Officer
Laureus Sport for Good
Foundation USA


Rob Smith
Founding Executive Director
Youth Sports Collaborative
Network

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation #1: Multi-Year, General Operating Funding with focus on Programming Costs

Grant awards are for multi-year, general operating dollars. Line-item reporting should focus on programming costs, such as:

- Coaches/instructors/direct service staff/mentors (including training/professional development)
- Educational Programming costs
- Facility, field, and/or space cost
- 15-20% for admin/overhead allowed

Additional Context: General operating dollars give programs flexibility to efficiently allocate resources for quality programming. For line-item reporting, those that focus on program related costs, like coaching and professional development, will ensure dollars go to support quality programming. In many underserved areas, facility space can be a large pain point, whereas items like equipment can often be found at low cost or donated. Multi-year funding provides financial stability, allows program leaders to plan sustainably, and reduces administrative burden.

Recommendation #2: Offer a Range of Grant Awards to support a variety of Program Types Disbursed Equitably Across the State

Grant Amounts in the \$5,000 - \$25,000 range can meet the needs of the variety of programs across the state, from grassroots, community-based programs serving dozens of youth to established, larger non-profits serving hundreds or thousands. There should be equitable distribution of funds across the state.

Reporting requirements should be based on the same intended outcomes, with applicants submitting baseline and projected outcomes according to the target population. Certain priority outcomes could unlock additional levels of funding, allowing programs to apply for different amounts.

Additional Context: Grants on the smaller end can be crucial to small, grassroots operations but it is important to offer larger grants as well to help sustainably support more established organizations. Small grants with onerous reporting requirements are not equitable as they can burden programs with limited staff capacity and larger organizations may not find them worth the work. An equitable distribution of funds across the state is vital to supporting all youth, not just a few regions.

Recommendation #3: Consider simple verification and rely on Intermediaries who know the field when possible

What constitutes a program working with “underserved youth”? Consider simple indicators, such as:

- Working in or recruiting youth from schools with a high percentage of Free or Reduced Priced Lunch; OR
- Working in or recruiting youth from public housing; OR
- Working in Opportunity Zones or neighborhoods/counties/areas deemed “low-income” via externally available tools like the Census, USDA income eligibility, etc.;

AND

- Working with marginalized communities or groups with higher barriers to sport (i.e. youth with disabilities, girls)

Place-based intermediaries with experience and networks in the field—such as the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation USA (backbone of Sport for Good NYC) and the Community Foundation of Greater Buffalo (backbone of Project Play Western NY)—can be useful partners to ensure funds are going to high quality programs working with underserved youth.

Additional Context: Not all programs have capacity for intake that include accurate measures of family income; already existing indicators that capture economic needs for broad areas reduce administrative burden. Place-based intermediaries with grantmaking experience and a knowledge of the field are well-positioned to make sure funds go to verified, trusted programs where it's needed most.

Recommendation #4: Include Basic Eligibility Requirements

In order to be eligible to apply, programs should meet the following requirements:

- Be a 501(c)(3) certified non-profit or have a fiscal sponsor
- Demonstrate stable operations, with at least 3 years of 990s reporting or operation
- Have a Child Protection Policy in place
 - This can include adherence to local city, agency, school district, or state child protection guidelines

Additional Context: Non-profit compliance and child safeguarding are necessary but not sufficient elements of quality youth programming. Along with demonstrating stable operations, these criteria can filter out opportunistic, “pop-up” programs seeking funds.

Recommendation #5: Ask Applicants about how they intentionally use Sport for Youth Development

The application should have a question about how the proposed programming includes elements of high-quality sports-based youth development. A definition should be provided: “Sports-based youth development programs are out-of-school-time programs that use a particular sport to facilitate learning and life skill development in youth.”

We encourage a wide, flexible definition of sport that makes room for organized activities with movement and physical fitness, such as yoga, hiking, dance, etc.

Application should ask how organizations train their coaches/mentors/instructors

Additional Context: There is a wide berth of quality youth sports and fitness programming in the United States. These funds should be reserved for high quality programs that use sport to intentionally achieve positive youth and/or community outcomes. Elements of high-quality sport-based youth development programs include well-trained coaches, a focus on both sport and life-skill development, intentional programming, safe, positive and inclusive team cultures, and high youth retention rates. Allowing programs to demonstrate this on an application can help filter out programs that fall prey to the worst elements of youth sports programs in the United State: win-at-all-costs attitudes, poorly trained coaches, unsafe environments, and high youth drop-out rates. Experienced, place-based intermediaries will also be helpful here in identifying high quality programs. Place-based intermediaries can help host training/information sessions to ensure applicants can craft programming that aligns with published best practices.

Recommendation #6: Set target goals around Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

Set a target goal, such as percentage of funds or organizations, allocated to organizations led by People of Color and people with disabilities, and make that target public. Target goals can be met via preference points applicants can earn towards the overall grant score.

Additional Context: BIPOC and people with disability led organizations earn proportionally far fewer grant dollars than peers.

Recommendation #7: Consider Reporting Requirements that can speak to the impact of the field

Basic indicators can be collected on 1-year grants, but long-term outcomes need multi-year funding.

Examples of more technical Indicators:

- # of youth served, # of additional youth served via this grant, average annual programming hours per participant (1-year grant)
- Social Emotional Learning Outcomes via evidence based, validated tools like Hello Insight (multi-year grant)
- Educational metrics (school attendance, grade promotion, graduation, matriculation) (multi-year grant)

Reporting requirements should balance not overburdening programs with the chance to aggregate impact data that makes the case for the power of these programs at the state level.

APPENDIX

About Sport for Good NYC: Sport for Good NYC, a program of the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation USA, is a coalition of 41 organizations, made up of 800+ staff and 3900+ volunteers, serving 57,000+ youth directly and 28,000+ youth indirectly through 25 different sports. Roughly 72% of the youth we serve are low-income, 76% identify as BIPOC, and 9% are youth with a disability. We work for a future where all young people in New York City experience sport and play where they connect, contribute, and grow.

Sport for Good NYC Organizations

AboutU • Active Plus • America Scores NY • Beat the Streets Wrestling NYC • Bronx Lacrosse • CityLax • CitySquash • Dancewave • DREAM • Dot Dot Org • Fencing in the Park • Figure Skating Harlem • Gallop NYC • Girls on the Run NYC • Groove with Me • Harlem Junior Tennis & Education Program • Harlem Lacrosse • Harold Hunter Foundation • Hi Five sports Metro • HOOD Organization • Hudson river Community Sailing • I Challenge Myself • Kids in the Game • Kings County Tennis League • League Apps • Legacy Volleyball Club • Minority Voices Prosper (MVP) • New Heights Youth • PeacePlayers • Play Rugby USA • PowerPlay • Row New York • Run4Fun • South Bronx United • Squash + Education Alliance • StreetSquash • Uptown Soccer • Urban Dove • Volo Kids Foundation

About Laureus Sport for Good Foundation USA: Laureus Sport for Good Foundation USA (Laureus USA) is a 501(c)(3) foundation whose mission is to improve the lives of youth and unite communities through the power of sport. At Laureus we believe in the power of sport to change the world, as proclaimed by our Founding Patron, Nelson Mandela, at the 2000 Laureus World Sports Awards: *“Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope where once there was only despair.”*

About Project Play Western NY: Project Play WNY is driven and funded by the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation’s Youth Sports & Recreation focus area in partnership with the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo. Project Play WNY was formed to inspire the community to take actions that will re-engage kids in youth sports. It is a collective impact model that includes 200+ community individuals from over 50 organizations who are focused on ensuring all WNY kids have the opportunity to be active through sport.

Project Play WNY Community Partners

Algonquin Sports for Kids, Inc. - BestSelf Behavioral Health – Boys and Girls Club of WNY – Buffalo City Swim Racers – Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy – Buffalo Bills – Buffalo Police Athletic League - Buffalo Sabres – Cradle Beach – Confident Girl Mentoring - Daemen College – Girls on the Run - Hasek’s Heroes – Healthy Buffalo – Lockport Ice Arena - Native American Community Services – Niagara University – Rural Outreach Center – Say Yes Education– Seneca Babcock Community Center – Skating Association for the Blind and Handicapped, Inc. – Special Olympics - The Champion Project – UB Center for the Advancement of Sports - United Athletics –

United Way of Buffalo & Erie County - Victory Sports Global Outreach, Inc. - Wegmans – West Side Rowing Club, Inc. – Willie Hutch Jones Educational and Sports Program – WNY Amateur Football Alliance – YMCA Buffalo Niagara – YMCA of the Twin Tiers – 716 Squash

About the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation. The Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation is a grantmaking organization dedicated primarily to sustained investment in the quality of life of the people of Southeast Michigan and Western New York. The two areas reflect Ralph C. Wilson, Jr.'s devotion to his hometown of Detroit and greater Buffalo, home of his Buffalo Bills franchise. Prior to his passing in 2014, Mr. Wilson requested that a significant share of his estate be used to continue a life-long generosity of spirit by funding the foundation that bears his name. The foundation has a grantmaking capacity of \$1.2 billion over a 20-year period, which expires on January 8, 2035. This structure is consistent with Mr. Wilson's desire for the foundation's impact to be immediate, substantial, measurable, and overseen by those who knew him best.

About the Youth Sports Collaborative Network: The Youth Sports Collaborative Network (YSCN) is the national association for sports-based youth development program providers and their supporting organizations. YSCN connects SBYD organizations across the country to share and learn about successful SBYD practices while providing collective advocacy on the benefits of SBYD programs before foundations and local, state and federal government agencies and legislatures.

Youth Sports Collaborative Network New York Organizations

Our national network of SBYD providers includes the following members from New York – Algonquin Sports for Kids, Back to Basics Outreach Ministries Inc, Buffalo City Swim Racers, Confident Girl Mentoring Program, Inc., Daemen College Center for Allied and Unified Sport and Exercise, Devastation Dance Company, Greater Buffalo Adaptive Sports, Project Play Western NY, Victory Sports, Total Package Sports Inc., The Wellness Institute of Greater Buffalo & Western NY / Youth Advantage Buffalo, and WNY Lacrosse Foundation.

What is Sport-Based Youth Development (SBYD)?

“The term "sports-based youth development programs" is coined and defined in the context of the community youth development framework. Sports-based youth development programs are out-of-school-time programs that use a particular sport to facilitate learning and life skill development in youth. Community youth development programs use a community youth development approach to create opportunities for youth to connect to others, develop skills, and use those skills to contribute to their communities. This, in turn, increases their ability to succeed.”

-Perkins DF, Noam GG. Characteristics of sports-based youth development programs. *New Dir Youth Dev.* 2007 Fall;(115):75-84, 8-9. doi: 10.1002/yd.224. PMID: 17924435.

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17924435/>

“As for intervention design, the following features were identified as variables influencing youth experiences and outcomes: (a) climate (e.g., safety, sense of caring/support, trust, stability); (b) leadership (e.g., support, adult-youth relationships, training/education); (c) youth engagement (e.g., youth leadership, ability to practice life skills); and (d) activities (e.g., fun, novelty), including engagement outside the intervention itself (e.g., community service, ability to practice life skills, connections to broader life/community outcomes).”

-Whitley, M.A., Massey, W.V., Camiré, M. *et al.* Sport-based youth development interventions in the United States: a systematic review. *BMC Public Health* 19, 89 (2019).

<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-019-6387-z>

Sports Based Youth Development (SBYD) is an increasingly validated model of youth development that uses the delivery of sport intentionally and primarily to achieve positive non-sports-based outcomes. These outcomes include increased social emotional learning; critical pro-social relationship skills such as fair play, playing by the rules, respect for your opponent and teamwork; better academic performance and educational attainment; and improved health and wellness.

-Definition from that Youth Sports Collaborative Network,

<https://www.youthsportscollaborative.org/>