



“Aligning for Impact: Delivering Early Positive Experiences at Scale” Roundtable Summary

Over the past year, the Aspen Institute's Project Play has begun to reimagine youth sports in America in a form that serves all children and all communities. A series of roundtables have established the value of anchoring our disjointed sports system in the principles of age-appropriate play, of training volunteer coaches in the basic competencies to deliver an early positive experience, and the need to grow sport participation rates among the most vulnerable populations. Now, how can stakeholders deliver scalable progress in each of these channels?

On March 12, 2014 at the Aspen Institute offices in Washington D.C., the Sports & Society Program convened more than 30 national leaders to discuss the roles and opportunities of foundations, corporations, government, and health care sector organizations in this space. The event title was “Aligning for Impact: Delivering Early Positive Experiences at Scale,” and the group was welcomed to the Institute by Aspen Institute CEO Walter Isaacson, who lauded the important work of Project Play in engaging leaders across sectors to grow access to sport and physical activity for all kids.

OUTCOMES

At the roundtable, several opportunities were embraced as holding great promise in this space:

- Quality program design, as a tool of justifying investment in sport for underserved kids
- “Social Impact Bonds” and crowd-funding, as tools of recruiting new investment funds
- Health care and other industry incentives, as a means of encouraging healthy behaviors
- Anti-discrimination laws, to promote equitable allocation of government resources

AGENDA AND STIMULUS MATERIALS

The agenda and conversation was structured around four key areas of potential investment:

- Leveraging Existing Resources: How Can Grant-Makers Align for Greater Impact?
- Unlocking New Resources: How to Bring More Players into the Game?
- Beyond Title IX: What’s the Role of Government?
- Beyond Tobacco: What’s the Role of the Insurance and Health Care Sectors?

Each agenda item was introduced with a summary of the available research or background on those topics, as prepared in a report delivered by Professor J.O. Spengler from the University of Florida Sport Policy and Research Collaborative (SPARC).

In addition, participants received an excerpt from *Designed to Move: A Physical Activity Action Agenda* called “Designing for Early Positive Experiences.” This document outlines a set of seven design filters—elements that experts agree must be built into youth sports programs’ designs to ensure that children have experiences that encourage them to continue to pursue sports and physical activity. Many of these are referenced in discussants’ insights, but they are also outlined here as background. The seven filters are:

1. *Universal access*: A focus on excluded populations including girls, low-income kids or those with disabilities, among others.
2. *Age appropriate*: Designed for the physical development and emotional needs of the specific kids in the program.
3. *Dosage & duration*: Inclusive of the right types of movement, at the right intensity and length to ensure maximum benefit.
4. *Fun*: So programs can effectively compete with the sedentary options that vie for kids’ attention. (And to keep kids coming back for more.)
5. *Incentives & motivation*: Simple rewards (high fives, cheers) that celebrate every kid.
6. *Feedback*: Team and individual goals that are realistic and tracked so kids know how they’re doing.
7. *Coaches*: Development of quality coaches (whether paid or, more likely, volunteer) through training, mentorship and ongoing professional development.

TOPLINE FINDINGS AND SELECT OBSERVATIONS

Following is a brief summary of the key themes observed in each of the specific areas:

Leveraging Existing Resources: How Can Grant-Makers Align for Greater Impact?

Making use of existing resources requires an understanding of the funding model for youth sports in America. Programs are often provided by city leagues, nonprofits and private clubs, which range from low levels of competition to highly competitive “select” teams.

Sources of funding vary. Not surprisingly, parents are the most consistent sources. The structure of costly select teams prices many families out, even if the child is skilled enough to compete at a high level. Grants and subsidies, such as funds made available through Olympic Games surpluses, are an important source of community sports funding, but are not often available. Sponsorships by local businesses are more common. Federal, state, and city governments also provide support through funds that defray the cost of local recreation programs and by constructing community athletic facilities.

Discussants shared the strategic models they are currently using to fund youth sports opportunities. Broadly speaking, these emphasized a strategic commitment to transformative change—more so than past funding has stressed. Given this emerging emphasis, participants agreed that funding could be aligned around key priority areas—specifically vulnerable populations, children (ages 0-12), and quality implementation models.

Vulnerable populations/issue-based funding: Sharon Roerty, Senior Program Officer at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, said that investments by the foundation in this space fit within its Childhood Obesity portfolio. They are one piece of improving health outcomes. “We have a concentration on young children, (ages) zero to eight, zero to 10. (We’re interested in) engaging parents and communities in helping to create these experiences and social networks. We don’t look specifically at sport activity. We look at prevention, in terms of health. We look at food policy and we look at creating environments where kids can be more active, more physically fit on a regular, daily basis.”

Daria Teutonico, Network Developer, Council on Foundations: “How do you connect this work to a foundation’s mission? You have foundations where it’s clearly related to their mission whether it’s health, or health and safety, or youth development. When they say, ‘we don’t do sports,’ you need to connect the dots and say ‘this work is really important to economic development, safety, youth development, and here’s why.’”

Nancy Hogshead-Makar, Senior Director of Advocacy at the Women’s Sports Foundation, acknowledged that many companies are interested in STEM, and for groups making the case that kids will benefit academically from sports, “cracking that nut has been difficult.” But she argued the connection easily can be made. “There’s actually a causation element that (economist and University of Michigan professor of public policy) Betsey Stevenson showed through great research. When you look at something that’s going to give a boost to education outside of socioeconomic factors, sports is it – more than any other factor, more than being in student government, being on the debate club. Women in particular are much more likely to go into STEM fields if they’ve had a sports experience; 96 percent of C-suite executives had a sports experience. If they’re interested in STEM, they’re interested in sports.”

Wayne Wilson, Vice President of Communications and Education at LA84 Foundation, encouraged broad thinking in making the case for sport as a tool of health. “My cautionary note would be hanging your health hat on obesity or obesity alone. Some of the sports (kids) play don’t burn a lot of calories. There are other ways of looking at the health issue. One of them is: by playing sports, what bad behaviors aren’t you engaging in? You can make a case around teen pregnancy, drug use, smoking and so on.”

Jim Whitehead, EVP and CEO of the American College of Sports Medicine echoed the opportunity. “There’s enough agility within sports if we define it broadly as it is in other parts around the world, that you arguably would find common interest with almost any funder—‘sports as a platform to achieve x.’ That just isn’t the case here.”

Quality implementation models: Nathan Plowman, Partnerships Director for Nike's Access to Sport, described a shift in recent years toward program quality. "Nike's invested in youth sports activity for about as long as the brand's been in existence. I'll highlight two things: one is focus and the other is commitment to quality. For decades, Nike brand has funded sport teams through product donations, shirts, rebuilding fields, and donations. I don't think we were entirely clear of the cumulative impact of these decades of (contributions). So the first piece, the focus piece, over the last two years or so we have really focused our effort on the 0-12 age. That window is really important because kids' preferences, their physical abilities and mental triggers are being locked in. So it's a critical window for impact.

"The second part is a commitment to quality. All of the benefits that accrue from being physically active—the emotional, social, academic, health benefits only accrue if children stay active. And they will only stay active if they enjoy the experience and have the right kinds of experience. We're starting to use these seven design filters specifically as grant criteria in our own funding and looking at how these can be used as criteria by other grant-making organizations. And we're also developing tools that will help programs. We're investing in technical assistance and tools to help programs evaluate themselves and better deliver the experience"

Matt Geschke, Director of the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation, explained how a focus on quality contributes to lasting change. "We invest in those small community-based organizations with the idea that if you build capacity within those organizations around curriculum development and board development, you're going to build a community of strong, resilient organizations that last for a long period of time."

He also noted an opportunity to leverage the design filters to improve programs. "We've just gotten grant money to go into New Orleans and we'll be doing a grant there over the next three years, working with five to seven programs as well as the recreation department to expand their impact. What we're going to do with the monitoring and evaluation is take those seven design filters and the two (Designed to Move) asks (create early positive experiences for children, and integrate physical activity into everyday life) and incorporate those into the reporting back from programs. So starting to aggregate it against the design filters and figure out where the success points are, where the gaps are, is what we need to continue to invest in."

Ryan Shadrick Wilson, Chief Strategy Officer and General Counsel for Partnership for a Healthier America, explained how her organization is working with companies to align against the seven design filters. "We engage with the corporate sector, and align with corporations and negotiate meaningful commitments with companies. That comes in two different forms. For some companies, we sit and talk about looking inside themselves. What can they change in their own business practices? That's mostly the food companies. On the physical activity side, it falls mostly in the second bucket: investment. The categories of people, places, and programs... Within the last year,

we've also gotten into this space of trying to launch media and marketing campaigns. We've found power in putting these three things together. Have companies look inside themselves and figure out what they can do to impact this issue, so companies can figure out where they might be able to invest in this issue for impact. Then change the way we're culturally talking about this issue. We're trying to be a partner in aligning corporate commitments to the Designed to Move Framework."

Caitlin Morris, North America Executive Director at Nike's Access to Sport: "If we're going to try to make that stronger linkage between health and sport, the quality or the impact of the sporting experience is intrinsically linked to program design. If a lot of people are standing in line waiting their turn, if you measure that program, we're not getting a good case at all. We have to focus on program design to be successful."

New partnerships as a catalyst for change: Several participants stressed the need to align entities around a common goal.

Dave Tyahla, Sr. Government Affairs Manager of the National Recreation and Parks Association: "We are a catalyst and an opportunity to connect individual parks and rec agencies. We are state and local park and rec agencies. We provide grants directly through partnerships whether it's corporate sponsors or the federal government. There are lots of great programs out there, (for instance) mentoring. Look at the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Millions of dollars go out for mentoring programs and now they're starting to use sports as a vehicle to get mentoring done."

Kathlyn Mead, EVP and Chief Operating Officer at The California Endowment: "How do you find funding through strange bedfellows? (For instance) exer-gaming and working with the Entertainment Software Association. One key partnership has been with Dance Dance Revolution in schools. We identified ways where we can bring exer-gaming into schools where they may not have teachers who are funded to provide PE every day." She highlighted the value of partnering with professional sports teams and leagues to support, for instance, late-night hoops. "We've begun to try to identify ways that sports can have an impact on safety and communities, which brings to the table not only parks and recreation, but also safety, police, fire, etc., which are beginning to look at how you keep kids off the streets and in gyms."

The discussion also turned toward non-financial existing resources, specifically technology and influential voices as agents of change.

Technology: Jayne Greenberg, District Director of Physical Education and Health Literacy, Miami-Dade County Public Schools argued, "We live in a mobile, digital world. We want to bring that to PE. So we ask ourselves, 'In Miami, how can we develop an elite snow skier?' Technology can do that."

Brandon Pollack, the Director of Global Affairs for 1776, said, "[Video games are] such an unbelievable tool to use in schools. You talk about the lack of funding at the local

level. Utilizing video games in schools, in gym class, because they have resources that are cut and that might be a cheaper way. I'm very bullish on where we're headed and how you can engage major startup funds and other tech leaders to promote sport."

Influential voices: Ivan Blumberg, CEO of Athletes for Hope, described the importance of leveraging powerful voices (e.g., high-profile athletes) and connecting them to meaningful opportunities. "We were founded by 12 of the most famous/impactful athletes out there, a whole group of athletes that have a strong belief in the role that professional and Olympic athletes can have in community service. We have developed a series of workshops that we conduct with almost all of the leagues. We educate professional and Olympic athletes about the importance of community service. By far, the issue that would jump off the page as the number one thing that professional and Olympic athletes care about most is children. It's the topic they're most comfortable talking about, so there's no question that exercise and play would jump off the page."

Kathlyn Mead of The California Endowment sees a similar opportunity. "When we initially thought about this [Active Alliance](#) (partnership with California's four NBA teams to build healthier communities), we thought about engaging all of the sports teams so there would be consistent activity throughout the year (depending on sports seasons). We've focused a lot on this power of celebrity. In each of these partnerships, we have required that they bring 50 percent of the money to the table. What we've found is they've brought other key partners and networks."

Unlocking New Resources: How to Bring More Players into the Game?

In terms of identifying new resources, discussants focused exclusively on two areas: 1) the importance of building awareness of the benefits of sports, and 2) innovative funding models.

Raising awareness: Participants were united in their perception that there is a lack of awareness among key audiences about the value of sports.

USA Today reporter Dan Shanoff said, "The dominant story is concussions, mostly in American football. You almost get the sense that there's an opportunity for a correction in the next year; that there's this moment that's about to peak where there's an appetite for 'Well, wait a second. Yes, absolutely concussions are an issue, but let's set that aside for now. What else should we be talking about?' And then it's a matter of, what's the appropriate story to be telling? Is it 'This is the way to solve the larger obesity issue?' Or is it a socioeconomic or equality issue? The piece of this that is underreported and probably lost in the football concussion narrative is where are these other acute problems? Negative coverage isn't necessarily a bad thing. It's under-indexing around where the real issues are that are the real pain points."

Daria Teutonico, from the Council on Foundations, highlighted the cost of a lack of awareness of these issues among non-sports entities. "Public-private partnerships [are a

huge opportunity.] If you're looking at intractable social challenges that many philanthropies, foundations, and grant-makers are working on it's all about systemic change. No organization, no one foundation is going to be able to do that on their own – public sector, private sector, corporations, they all need to work together. If you're looking at it in a more strategic way in terms of investment in this particular model, a lot of it is raising awareness that it even exists. Honestly, before I got the invitation I didn't know it existed. So one, is the scope of the problem, and two, is ways to address it."

Shellie Pfohl, Executive Director of the President's Council on Fitness, Sports and Nutrition, agreed. "What strikes me is the confluence of all the different activities that are going on. At first blush it looks like there are all these things going on, and as funders you don't know what to fund and what not to fund. What I see now is much more of a confluence, where we're creating more of an umbrella. We're not taking away from anyone's brand." She cited Let's Move! Active Schools as an example. "So many organizations are at the table. We're all hammering the same nail. Those types of things give me hope. We can come together and check our egos at the door. It's about creating a culture of health and systemic change. It's about 'active kids do better.' The messaging is coming to the forefront."

Innovative funding: David Mosse, SVP-Chief Strategy Officer and General Counsel for Dick's Sporting Goods, described his company's approach to addressing the funding barrier. "We know that 60 percent (of students) have to pay a fee in order to play sports at school. One study suggests that by 2020, 27 percent of schools will have eliminated sports programs, which is pretty scary. Today the [Sports Matter](#) program's focus is on this funding crisis. What we've committed to do is help match funds for teams and organizations that either have lost funding or have been unable to get funding. The innovative aspect of it is that we're using a crowd-funding platform to help these kids raise the money. So there's an element of this that's teaching them how to fish."

There is also interest in better understanding the potential role of Social Impact Bonds. Daria Teutonico of the Council on Foundations said, "There's a lot of conversation about social impact bonds. There's a lot of energy, a lot of momentum. California's doing a lot on that. It's a way for foundations to increase their impact beyond the grant-making that they're already doing."

Kathlyn Mead, EVP and Chief Operating Officer at The California Endowment, clarified the potential her organization sees. "Social impact bonds are not bonds. They are actually 'pay for success programs' that look at evidence-based information that gets applied in the form of an intervention. That intervention yields results, and those results yield savings or earnings. So the most important thing is to begin by asking who's spending the most money today and who has the opportunity to save money? So, the other important element is the metrics. Are the (bonds) to reduce BMI? Are they to reduce or increase the number of minutes a student is playing?" She noted that the U.S. is only starting to recognize the potential of these bonds. "I'm going to London next week because there are 14 social impact bond opportunities that are taking place

around recidivism, nutrition, childhood development, and athletics. In the United States, we only have a couple of models. We're funding pre-development social impact bonds, readying the stage for a social impact bond opportunity. The concept I've had in my mind lately is if schools can reduce absenteeism. Everyone knows about the complicated formulas, how schools are paid based on kids whose butts are in the seats. If (bonds) can actually reduce absenteeism through exercise, an investor will invest in that. We don't have social impact bonds in place in California because we don't have a mechanism to capture the investment opportunities."

Deborah Slaner Larkin, Founder of the Center for Research on Physical Activity, Sport and Health, reacted to the idea of looking at who stands to benefit as the target investor. "If we were able to add program design and to compare that to those that don't have the agreed upon program design, it could help scale up quickly."

Beyond Title IX: What's the Role of Government?

Professor J.O. Spengler of the University of Florida's Sport Policy and Research Collaborative described three critical milestones in government funding of sports programming:

1. Land & Water Conservation Act, which provides matching grants for states' recreational planning. The federal program has provided matching grants to build more than 40,000 athletic fields, most of them between 1965 and 1980, when funds began to get cut.
2. Urban Parks & Recovery Act, which provides matching grants and technical assistance to economically distressed urban communities. This program has gone dormant.
3. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, prohibiting gender-based discrimination in education, which the courts have determined includes athletics. Since then, girls' sport participation in schools has grown at an exponential rate, though gaps between boys and girls still exist.

Credits and appropriations for the two acts fluctuate, with support falling off over the past decade. Meanwhile, discussants acknowledged the influence of Title IX as both a tool in driving participation opportunities at the school level and as a catalyst to apply anti-discrimination laws at the community sports level.

One key is enforcement of Title IX: Nancy Hogshead-Makar, Senior Director of Advocacy at the Women's Sports Foundation, said, "Title IX is an anti-discrimination law. It's not a pro-sports or pro-anti-pregnancy or less-sexual violence law. All it entitles girls to is whatever the boys have. In some states, if you live in Maine or Nebraska, Title IX is really powerful. If you live in Florida or Washington, D.C., not so much because they don't really have very much.

"Because of the way our country is set up with education being the entry point to the rest of their lives, Title IX is probably the most important piece of civil rights legislation after women getting the right to vote. You'll see substantial gaps still exist between men

and women (in college and high school) in the 40 years of Title IX. In Title IX cases, unlike others, there's really no issue of facts. It is 'here's what the girls have, here's what the boys have.' There's really no issue of law anymore. We've settled all that. And yet, we have these enormous gaps (between athletic participation opportunities for girls and boys) – 1.3 million at the high school level, thousands at the college level. I'm fascinated by what it would mean for this country, economically, health wise, if we just have Title IX enforced."

Anti-discrimination laws at the community level: Hogshead-Makar pointed out that in some places there are laws that speak to equitable use of publicly funded athletic fields, but that their application presents challenges. "There are public accommodation laws. California has a really good statute that looks at community programming and says communities have to fund those on an equal basis. (But) you're putting the onus on the six-year-old's family to be sophisticated enough to know that there is a cause of action. Last year, the Department of Education issued (school-based) guidelines on kids with disabilities in two ways: one is having kids with disabilities be able to participate on the same teams as other kids that already exist, and two is creating separate teams that would allow them to create their own teams. Folks with disabilities get very sophisticated really quickly. I wish women's groups were as good at being advocates as folks with disabilities."

Laurie Whitsel, Director of Policy Research at the American Heart Association, pointed to the need to think about sport in the context of existing laws. "There's opportunity to position this issue against issues we don't traditionally think of – in this case, anti-discrimination. Is there a role in immigration law? Where can we position this issue? We need to think in a very visionary way. And we think about legislation, but we should also think about the regulatory environment because you can accomplish a lot. There's big 'P' (policy), legislation and regulation, and then there's also the small 'p' (policy), organization policy, school district-level policy. The great thing about policy is it has a way of reaching large populations in a systemic way. And this is why we tend to prioritize it. But you really have to have a lot of resources. It's long-term. It takes a long time to see policy implemented. And implementation is key."

For some, it is simply a matter of being aware that laws exist. J.O. Spengler, Professor at the University of Florida's Sport Policy & Research Collaborative, highlighted laws that encourage school and communities to share facilities. "The AHA has been very active in shared use legislation so kids can play," he said. "The Minnesota legislation passed a law a year and a half ago. We went in to investigate. Fewer than 40 percent of administrators knew about it. We conducted training and it really changed things."

Beyond Tobacco: What's the Role of the Insurance and Health Care Sectors?

Discussants reflected on how to integrate sport into the national health care conversation, particularly as it relates to incentives and disincentives. The discussion centered largely on the role of insurance providers as key systems beneficiaries.

The case for insurance companies and other private sector players: Gary Hall Jr., Leadership Board Member, National Youth Sport Health & Safety Institute, argued for the connection to non-communicable diseases. “Everyone agrees the health care system is overburdened currently. Right now, the total cost of obesity on the health care system in the United States is \$190 billion a year. Type 2 Diabetes (that which is related to obesity) accounts for 90 to 95 percent of diabetes costs and that total is \$245 billion annually. This is mostly a preventable disease. We can cut into those figures tremendously. It would be in the health care and insurance industries’ best interest to take a look at this. We can create a substantial link between participation in physical activity and sport. Potentially you could have a deduction if someone is proactively preventing obesity and Type 2 Diabetes, perhaps a discount to an insurance policy. This could mobilize the masses. There seems to be a willingness, particularly among forward thinking organizations and integrated health care delivery systems that are both an insurance company and a chain of hospitals. They’re really seeing the long-term benefits of preventing obesity.”

Laurie Whitsel, of the American Heart Association, expanded on the opportunity. “There are a couple of touch points. There’s the final Medicaid rule that allows for a physician’s referral for reimbursement for community health providers. We’re trying to position (health fitness providers) in that space – ‘exercise is medicine.’ We want that exercise as a prescription to happen. When you step on your scale at home, who’s looking over your shoulder? Is it your health care plan and the incentives you have? Is it your employer? Is it your primary care physician? The technology now exists that you can link a scale back to your primary care physician. There’s a lot happening in this space with community systems of care and integrating with employers. Employers can look at the whole family (including children). We’ve been pushing for physical activity to be assessed. Employers push back because they say ‘we don’t have effective tools.’ ”

The role of incentives: Kathlyn Mead, of the California Endowment, pointed to the need for individual incentives. “There is a lot of data that exists that shows the small amount of investment that an incentive has to be before someone takes it up. So you could, as an insurance company, offer an opportunity for somebody to get a discount or even 100 percent pay for a gym membership, but the take up rate in and of itself is fairly low. But when you couple that with a cash incentive, and it’s a very low cash incentive, the cost savings go way up. From an insurance company perspective, it ends up being a very small amount of cost for a large amount of return in terms of health benefit.”

David Mosse of Dick’s Sporting Goods noted that his company is exploring incentives for sport participation. “We have a loyalty program called Score Card. We reward people for buying. What we’ve flirted with is rewarding people for participation. There’s tremendous momentum behind measuring our own performance right now, through

personal tracking devices. Everybody wants the technology. There is an opportunity here if you can bring people together and create a common platform for measuring activity whether it's with kids or adults and conveying that information to health care companies for insurance premiums or rewarding kids for what they're doing."

Jim Hunn, Senior Creative and Research Advisor at KaBOOM!, talked about the effectiveness of incentives for kids: "KaBOOM'S been experimenting with Zamzee, which is an accelerometer that interfaces with a video experience with two of our partners. We gave them out to all the kids in the school. What they do is the more points they earn on the video game interface, the more soft and hard incentives they get. The jury's still out, but the preliminary results are huge increases in physical activity in one all-boys school. The boys just became addicted to earning points and were running between classes."

NEXT STEPS

The group saw an opportunity to come together and determine how to package and promote messages in four key areas:

1. Aligning on funding criteria, so the main players who are funding youth sports can get behind an implementation tool for all programs.
2. Making a case for physical activity within a broad set of funders with an interest in youth and community development.
3. Developing a policy matrix with the people/programs/places – essentially whoever can institute a policy, and what would be asked of them.
4. Unlocking the billions in the health care industries with three simple asks: provide exercise as medicine, reward healthy behaviors, and invest in physical activity.

SUPPORTING MATERIALS

Research report by Bradley Fawver and J.O. Spengler from the University of Florida's Sport, Policy and Research Collaborative: "Funding for youth sport: learning from the past and aligning resources for the future"

Full list of participants and other materials can be found on the [Project Play microsite](#).

The Sports & Society Program thanks Nike for its support of this roundtable series and the University of Florida for its research report.

Contact: sportsandsociety@aspeninst.org