



# Sports-Based Youth Development Playbook

Best Practices and Future Opportunities



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New Heights is a non-profit sports-based youth development (SBYD) organization based in New York City. Since 2001, New Heights has educated and empowered underserved student-athletes to be leaders and champions by developing the skills necessary for success in high school, college and life.

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# Note to Reader

The COVID-19 pandemic has upended our world across every conceivable experience, taking a toll on individuals, families, communities, and countries. Coupled with economic calamity and racial unrest, profound challenges have been presented to institutions, leaving schools, businesses, and governments to navigate through and beyond this constellation of crises. Sports-based youth development programs have not been immune to these events and, despite an incredibly difficult year and a half, are beginning to turn an eye toward the future.

The pandemic backdrop may seem bleak, but it highlights the need and the promise of sports-based youth development programs. Great programs and organizations are now poised to refocus the field on best practices, supporting and protecting youth and communities as they heal and grow stronger.

And this report, with industry leader interviews and literature synthesis completed prior to the pandemic, remains even more critical by serving as a hopeful guide to resources and practices that apply to and can be adapted for both in-person and virtual programming. While the world changed, best practices have not; they have, in fact, become more salient and useful. Despite an uncertain landscape, our findings are not. The findings we present in this report are the situations and contexts in which the people and programs of sports-based youth development excel, whether indoors, outdoors, online, or in-person.

We have worked with and witnessed programs accelerate to adapt and evolve to meet the needs of staff, youth, families, and communities in an ever-changing context. The effects of the disruption are far from over, and only through working together can we continue to build a better future through strong sports-based youth development programming.

Humbly,

A stylized signature consisting of a vertical line on the left that curves into a horizontal line extending to the right.

Joseph E. Luesse

A cursive signature with a large, looped initial 'H' and a trailing flourish.

Hiershenee Luesse, Ph.D.



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# Foreword

The sports-based youth development (SBYD) field continues to make a profound impact on youth and families and their life outcomes. As more research and data become available, the effects of sports demonstrate that there are many evolving options to traditional education. SBYD organizations across the country are able to engage young people by both meeting them where they are – developmental, emotional, economically and athletically – and creating pathways to retain and inspire their participants. As we resume in-person interactions after extended periods of isolation and inactivity due to COVID-19, young people need sports and youth development more than ever. This SBYD Playbook sheds light on many of these innovative organizations and the strategies they implement to achieve powerful results.

Through our work at New Heights, we have seen firsthand the power and impact that SBYD can have on the lives of so many young people. We can help level the playing field for underserved youth and create opportunities and access that may not be attainable through traditional channels. New Heights combines basketball with academic support, social emotional learning and college prep services to help our student-athletes achieve success on and off the court. We have seen the importance of being data driven, and creating a platform to celebrate our accomplishments and learn from our shortcomings.

This SBYD Playbook has also shown the critical need of both leadership and effective planning. Through interviews with and research on SBYD organizations across the country, the organizations that are demonstrating positive outcomes all have similar characteristics – a strong leadership team and a commitment to being data driven and having strategic metrics and benchmarks to hold themselves and their participants accountable.

I would like to thank all of the leaders and organizations that participated in this robust project. With so many creative programs and innovative ideas in the SBYD field, I feel it is essential to share these best practices and support one another as we all strive to positively impact the youth and families we serve through sports.

I would also like to thank the team at 8RES for their time, leadership and thoughtfulness throughout this project. They are shining a light on our field and the important, and challenging work that so many non-profit leaders have dedicated their lives to.

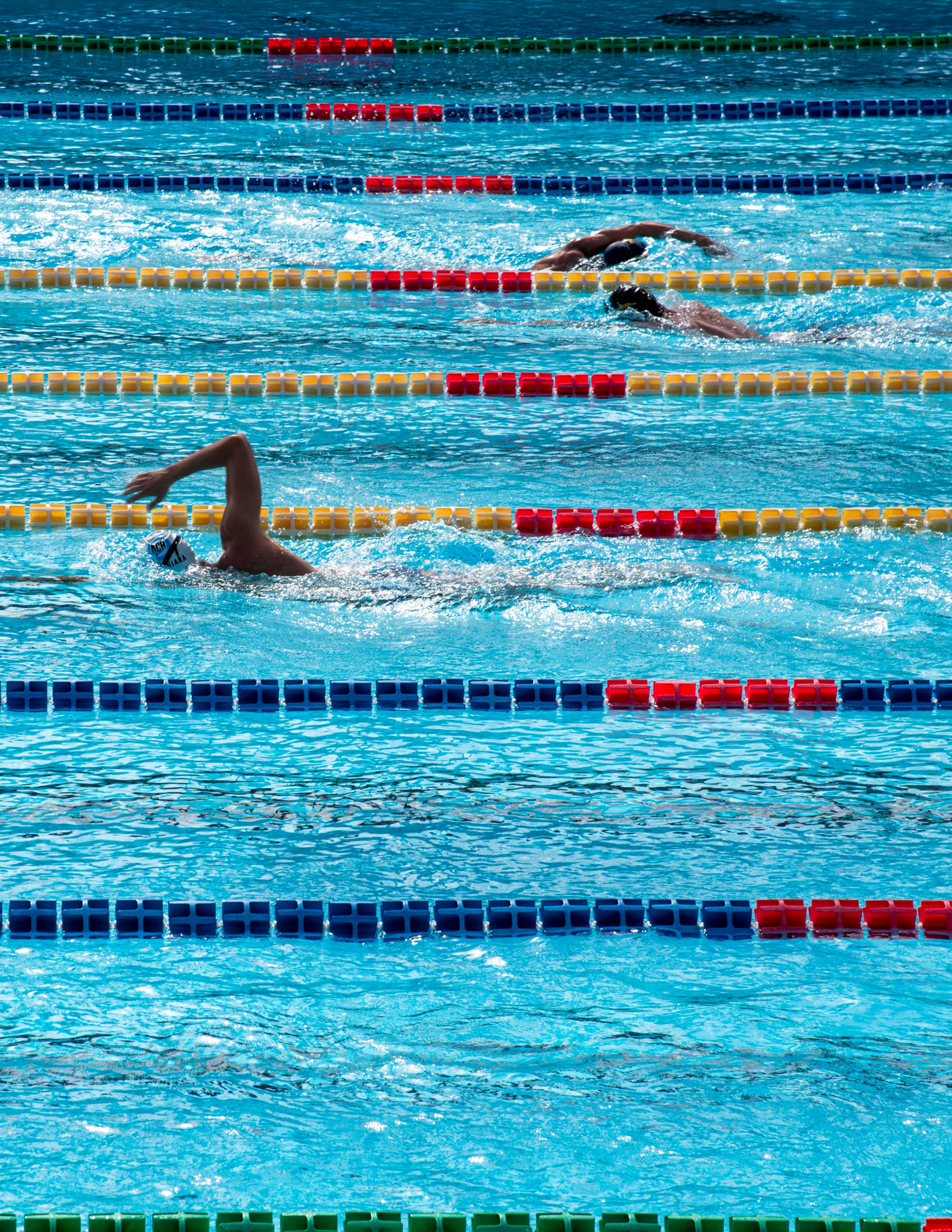
I hope this Playbook offers some new ideas, leads to self-reflection and generates thoughtful questions to help us all continue to move the field forward. With the current climate across our country, the SBYD community is needed more than ever.

In appreciation,



Ted Smith  
Executive Director  
New Heights







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# Introduction

## A Field of Many Dreams

Combining sport with interventions for social good is an increasingly popular approach to solving important problems. The last 30 years has seen rapid growth, attention, and investment in the field, which has been referred to as sport for development or sport for development and peace, positive youth development through sport, and sports-based youth development, among others.<sup>1</sup>

Sport as a change agent has proven to be very adaptable, used by programs ranging from those emerging from large scale humanitarian crises and global conflicts to programs focused on the improvement of a small group of people. The commensurate intervention outcome areas are also diverse, including, but not limited to, academics, physical health, mental health, gender equality and inclusion, cognitive skills, non-cognitive skills (i.e. motivation, conscientiousness, perceptions of self-worth, social skills), employment, positive relationships, social/community cohesion, reduced crime/anti-social behavior, etc.

While this report does not attempt to provide a unified definition of the field, it does explore how existing literature and industry leaders describe work focusing on using sport to support youth and illustrates practices and insights found across sports-based youth development (SBYD) programming. Best practices across organizational and programmatic features are presented with a focus on usability for practitioners.

## A (very) Brief History of SBYD

In the 1990s, positive youth development (PYD) shifted common views of young people from “problems to be solved” to assets in communities and resources to develop.<sup>2</sup> PYD focuses on the strengths of young people and the active promotion of optimal human development.<sup>3 4 5 6</sup>

The 1990s also saw the global rise of sport for development/good and increased involvement of international agencies, notably the UN, which published reports, passed resolutions, and opened offices dedicated to sport for good in the early 2000s.<sup>7</sup>

In America, a growing patchwork of grassroots organizations that deviated from traditional sports by combining academic and other developmental programming proliferated throughout the 1990s and 2000s. These developments converged in June 2006, when a group of out-of-school time sports programs met for a summit where the term sports-based youth development was created, providing a name for the intentional coupling of sport with PYD that focuses on youth holistically.<sup>8</sup>

## Growing Pains

The field has grown quickly. The proliferation of sport for good organizations listed on the International Platform on Sport and Development has gone from 176 in 2006 to 950 in 2019.<sup>9</sup> Theoretical models for SBYD are emerging, including a model of PYD through sport,<sup>10</sup> a conceptual model for transfer of life skills in SBYD,<sup>11</sup> and a systems theory of positive youth development through sport.<sup>12</sup> There have also been recent attempts to coalesce sport for good literature, evident by the publication of integrative and systematic reviews,<sup>13 14 15 16</sup> meta-studies,<sup>17 18</sup> and literature reviews.<sup>19</sup>

Benefits from participation in regular physical activity and sports have been well documented. They include long-term health benefits, life skill development, academic achievement, and improve well-being. Physical activity can lead to greater physical and mental health, such as cardiorespiratory fitness, stronger muscles, lower body fat, and stronger bones.<sup>20 21</sup> Favorable relationships exist between physically active youth and cognitive functions like memory, processing speed, attention, and executive function,<sup>23 24</sup> as well as improved academic performance<sup>25 26 27 28</sup> and mental health<sup>29</sup> than their less active peers. Not to mention a decrease in risk factors and the development of chronic diseases like heart disease, hypertension, and type 2 diabetes.<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, playing sports can support youth in developing higher levels of psychological well-being<sup>31 32 33</sup> and life skills such as goal setting, time-management, and interpersonal skills.<sup>34 35 36</sup> These findings, while focused on components included in SBYD, are more often focused on school sport, competitive sport, and other more general youth physical health experiences than they are on specific SBYD programs.

Despite the continued growth of and attention to developing and studying SBYD, there are not yet definitive studies that broadly prove its efficacy and impact. Not to mention the potential harms that youth sport can introduce, including injury,<sup>37</sup> eating disorders, and negative social, emotional, and psychological effects.<sup>38,39</sup>

There has been evidence of a decline in participation in team sports from youth through high school.<sup>40,41</sup> Additionally, participation reflects American inequality, with youth from wealthier and more educated households more likely to participate.<sup>42</sup> These are critical elements for SBYD leaders and communities to pay attention to, in addition to a pervasive win-at-all-cost orientation and single sport focus across many youth sport experiences. These can contribute to turning youth off from the enjoyment of participation and increasing the possibility of injury.

While negative realities exist in some competitive youth sports and formal school team participation experiences, sports-based youth development approaches can offer dynamic solutions to the myriad challenges that are presented in youth sports, communities, and societies.

## About This Report

This report emerged through the strategic planning process of a New York City sports-based youth development organization, New Heights Youth, Inc. New Heights is a non-profit SBYD and education organization. The foundation was laid in 2001 when a public middle school teacher and basketball coach began to offer students the opportunity for open gym time for youth who completed their homework. Their program has since grown and evolved, in 2005 New Heights became an independent non-profit, and now over 15 years later they feature competitive and developmental sports programming, educational supports, assistance in navigating high school and college application processes, and offering family and community activities. While the results are intended to inform the planning activities of the growing organization, New Heights recognizes the value in building and sharing knowledge for the field.

This report integrates SBYD best practices from the research perspective as reflected in empirical studies and non-empirical literature and from professional knowledge and values generated from interviews with industry leaders.

The report is comprised of three sections:

- 1. Program Best Practices**
- 2. Organizational Best Practices**
- 3. Looking Forward: The Future of SYBD**



# Methods

We began with a scan of literature focusing on programs working with youth that incorporate a combination of sports with additional programming. We also reviewed related documents including curricula, white-paper reports, and academic literature across multiple disciplines. In total, over 200 documents were reviewed to inform the report's findings.

We conducted 32, 60-minute interviews with industry leaders (practitioners, funders, researchers, and consultants) from a sample of organizations either working in or supporting sports-based youth development programs. Interviews were audio-recorded, and we took extensive notes to capture relevant information, listening to audio-recordings repeatedly as required.

We selected a purposeful sample of interviewees for wide representation across this field to illuminate and understand practices and processes from a variety of perspectives. The research team reached out to notable actors in the SBYD field and accessed their personal and professional networks. Data were collected over seven months to increase the number and variety of respondents.

These data were coded and themes were identified, highlighting a variety of best practices across the field. The findings were synthesized with results from the literature review to provide usable information that can meaningfully inform the practices of SBYD staff and leaders.

Key program areas that emerged were the model, curriculum, pedagogy, culture, and emerging trends. Key organizational areas included staffing + training, monitoring + evaluation, partnerships, and leadership + funding.







# Program Best Practices

CURRICULUM

PEDAGOGY

CULTURE

MODEL

TRENDS



# Curriculum

The curriculum is the content that is delivered in a SBYD program and the pedagogy is how the content is delivered; both are critical to success in SBYD programs. This section incorporates many established practices from Positive Youth Development, education, coaching, and youth sport fields that apply to SBYD, in addition to practices that surfaced from industry leaders.

In terms of designing content youth will receive through an intervention, several approaches should be considered to ensure programs are utilizing evidence, research, and best practices.

This report explores the following in terms of developing a quality curriculum:

1. **Developmentally and Contextually Appropriate**
2. **Informed by Research and Evidence**
3. **Designed to Incorporate Routines**
4. **Built Around the Youth Experience**
5. **Integrate Other Learnings and Feedback Loops**

## Curriculum Should Be Developmentally And Contextually Appropriate

Creating content that is based on the skills and abilities of youth will increase the likelihood that it is received well and fosters opportunities for learning and growth. Similarly, the age, sex, and cultural and family backgrounds of youth should be taken into account when determining activities, examples, and scenarios.

**“Having a culturally relevant curriculum is crucially important. One time we didn’t have time to make sure it was as culturally appropriate as it should have been and [we] were not hitting the mark. After modifying it, it was much better. Having a set curriculum to adapt is important.”**

Lindsey Blom — Ball State University



## Curricular Resources

Curricular resources are available that account for **developmental differences** and can support delivering myriad SBYD content:

### [How To Coach Kids](#)

A combined effort from the United States Olympic Committee, Nike, and the Aspen Institute's Project Play provides an excellent training trove designed for specific youth and contexts, including trainings by **age** group, by **sport** (featuring over 50 different sports), and by **audience** (girls, LGBTQIA2S+ youth, ADHD, youth with disabilities, etc.)

### [Up2Us and Adidas](#)

Up2Us and Adidas partnered to create an online curriculum, Keep Girls in Sport, that highlights practices to employ when working with girls.

### [Cal Ripken Sr. Foundation](#)

The Cal Ripken Sr. Foundation offers a free Resource Portal featuring character education and life-skills curricula modeled after evidence-based practices.

In terms of **developmental appropriateness**, there are many books and resources focused on "ages and stages" as well as easy-to-use developmental milestones chart/maps.

### [Developmental Milestones Chart](#)

Above is a link to download a developmental milestones chart.<sup>43</sup>

We present two athlete/physical activity development resources:

### [Athlete/ Physical Activity Development](#)

The American Development Model provides physical and psychological stages by age, in addition to recommendations for sport clubs, coaches, parents, and athletes.

### [Long-Term Development In Sports and Physical Activity](#)

Canada's Sport for Life Society published a guide highlighting sport and physical development differences across the life course.

We present three curricular resources focused on cultural responsiveness.

### [Rubric for Culturally Responsive Lessons/ Assignments](#)

A helpful tool that can be used to assess the **cultural responsiveness** of a curriculum is a rubric for lessons/ assignments that allows users to examine 7 criteria: Voice, Differentiation, Access, Connection, Higher Order Thinking, Social Justice, and Equity/Decolonization.

### [Culturally Responsive & Inclusive Curriculum Resources](#)

Portland State University also provides a resource page focused on Culturally Responsive & Inclusive Curriculum.

### [Culturally Responsive Curriculum Scorecard](#)

Another tool, focused on the cultural responsiveness of English Language Arts curriculum or instructional practices, is a scorecard published by The Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools (NYU Metro Center). This can either be used for ELA oriented activities or adapted for SBYD use.

There is no better resource than the program youth and community members to ensure curriculum is culturally or contextually appropriate.

## Curriculum Should Be Informed By Research + Evidence

Many organizations invest in researching and testing, either by allocating internal capacity or working with external experts to define, understand, and refine their programs. Clarity around what the program is meant to achieve, supported by a curriculum that drives towards those goals is more likely to provide a more focused and effective experience for youth. A program leader turned consultant notes:

**“Ensure that you are informed in the thematic areas that your project seeks to tackle...whether this is youth leadership, HIV prevention, mental health etc...being aware of the latest evidence or literature in these thematic areas and related fields is important.”**

Ben Sanders — Independent Consultant

Some organizations, like Doc Wayne, have invested over time in **iterative curriculum development** to ensure the program is delivering evidence-based success that is aligned to the core mission, a process that is not typically completed quickly.

**“Developing the curriculum – [we’ve] been at it for about a decade...[it is] an iterative process – not perfect all at once, but started with Susan Wayne, who conceptualized the fusion of clinical therapy and sports to best engage youth.”**

Rebekah Roulier, LMHC — Doc Wayne

Investment in developing and improving program curricula to reflect both the mission and the best information available should not be dismissed out of hand based on resources. Small, manageable chunks of a curriculum can be iterated across time – even lesson by lesson.

Also, SBYD programs should never forget that research/evidence and fun are not mutually exclusive! Fun is an essential goal that should always be embedded in the development of outcomes focused curricula.

## Curriculum Should Be Designed To Incorporate Routines

Ensuring a program includes consistent routines is an essential curricular supplement. A frequently used expression in sport is “control the controllables” and setting up consistent environments and experiences can improve youth performance, increase self-control, and decrease anxiety.<sup>44 45 46 47</sup>

Routine can effectively marshal important and limited resources: time, willpower, self-discipline, and optimism.<sup>48 49</sup> Routines are often considered functions of experience driven by autopilot; however, they can be created according to design that contribute to program goals.

Routines are not always incorporated into a program's codified curriculum, but they should be. Establishing what is done when and how it is done in each program experience builds continuity and community, can reduce stress, and contribute to program outcomes. Here is a basic routine checklist adapted from education, with key questions broken into a sequenced flow (beginning, during, and after):<sup>50</sup>

There are many variations of sport routines that can be built into a SBYD curriculum.

A common SBYD session routine includes the following:

- Consistent warm up
- Opening huddle/circle
- Ongoing feedback and adjustments
- Closing circle/debrief

## Questions to Consider When Creating Routines:

### **BEGINNING**

- How do youth enter the space?
- What constitutes being late?
- How is lateness dealt with?
- When does a session begin?
- How does the session begin?
- How are session goals introduced?

### **DURING**

- What are the conditions for youth leaving a session?
- How do youth signal a desire for help or to talk?
- How will youth get materials/use special equipment?
- How is ongoing feedback solicited and provided?
- What do students do during fire and disaster drills?

### **END**

- How are session goals reviewed/summarized?
- How does a session end?
- How are youth dismissed?

[The Aspen Institute's Project Play provides a checklist](#) outlining key routines that strong SBYD programs typically include.

The elements described are not limited to sport/physical activity (practices, training sessions, games, etc.), but should also be applied to any structured experience that the program provides. For example, a program featuring an academic component could always begin with an opportunity for participants to check in on their days/weeks and share what's on their mind, followed by a discussion of the session format and academic goals and the planned activities alongside ongoing feedback and adjustments, and closing with a reflective circle/debrief.





## Curriculum Should Be Built Around The Youth Experience

Providing space for flexibility to adapt to youth needs and interests encourages teachable moments and opportunities to better tailor SBYD experiences to youth.

### **Adapt sport activities to align to non-sport goals.**

Adjusting sport activities to the developmental needs of participants by making modifications to rules, equipment, or any useful change should be employed in the service of youth learning and growing.

The book *Re-Designing Youth Sport*<sup>51</sup> provides many novel and practical adaptations to common sport experiences are introduced across several domains of youth experience, including changing the playing area, rules of the game/league, the equipment, and participant roles. With an abundance of ideas to slow down games, speed them up, increase or decrease challenge levels or the goal of a training activity, and to foster greater learning in a targeted area of focus, this is a SBYD resource that should be on the shelf in programs across the country.

**“Design the sport to be successful ... we get caught up in with the elite Pros and design [programs] according to them. Coach/player relationships are where the power is and mimicking how it’s played on TV misses [that].”**

Lou Bergholz — Edgework Consulting

Building space for teachable moments can ensure opportunities are not missed in the service of getting through a practice plan or to maintain control or authority.

**“A new coach might be lockstep, but an experienced coach will modify based on context. Have more modules than [program] days in a season to allow for that.”**

Bethany Rubin Henderson — America Scores

Another challenge, particularly for programs with youth over multiple years, is repeating lessons, which some programs design around.

**“Allow customizability for coaches and youth so you aren’t repeating the same stuff. We have three different curricula for three levels: early, elementary, and middle school. We also provide roles for youth to lead/participate.”**

Bethany Rubin Henderson — America Scores

### **Design lessons or routines that incorporate youth roles.**

An easy way to ensure opportunities for youth engagement. Whether the roles rotate, are for groups, or not depends on the nature of the program/group. This is a common practice in school classrooms and there are several possible SBYD roles that could be considered:

- **Equipment + Set-up manager** — ensure clarity of expectations for set-up for beginning/end of sessions.
- **Transition + Hype monitor** — lead groups in transitions and provide encouragement to others.
- **Time + Story keeper** — Timekeepers for activities and scribes for recording memorable moments or learnings.
- **Translator/Modeler** — youth to “interpret + translate” coach instructions into youth-centric language and another youth to model the action.
- **Utilizing youth as peer-coaches or program consultants are particularly powerful and can be operationalized across many configurations.**

Whether using youth peer-coaching, youth-adult partnership approaches, or regular check-ins with youth as consultants, there are many opportunities to meaningfully engage participants in the program experience.

The bottom line: being intentional about how activities are designed so that what the youth experience is at the center of the plan. Intentionally incorporating several different approaches to learning within a single activity increases the likelihood that youth preferences are honored and youth are engaged.

A helpful tool for designing curriculum from education (the National Research Council <sup>52</sup>) provides a classification of different learning styles and activity types:

**Skills Based:**

Isolated drill and practice  
Contextualized practice  
Modeling

**Lecture Based:**

Oral  
Written  
Narrative Videos

**Inquiry Based:**

Cases  
Problems  
Projects  
Learning by Design

**Technology Enhanced:**

Simulations  
Electronic Tools  
Assessment Opportunities  
Communication Environments

**Individual vs. Group:**

Self Study  
Cooperative Learning  
Jigsaw Learning

## Curriculum Should Integrate Other Learnings And Feedback Loops

### Intentional Curriculum Integrates Sport with Other Learnings.

Many industry leaders commented on how critical intentionality is in developing these programs. We provide a handful of the many examples of organizations designing intentional SBYD curriculum that were shared by industry leaders:

**Play Rugby USA** seamlessly integrates their SEL value statements directly into usage in the field and during play through intentional curriculum and a collective, accessible language.

**Doc Wayne** designs and adjusts many game elements, including rules and objectives, in order to create safe environments that decrease conflict.

**Soccer Without Borders** was highlighted for providing coaches with a handbook that guides coaches through activities that combine trauma-informed care, soccer instruction, English-language instruction, and culturally responsive instruction.

**First Tee** was mentioned for featuring an established curriculum that teaches character through golf: 9 values that correspond with holes on the course.

**Waves for Change** takes youth through specific coping mechanisms within the surfing experience in order to create experiential learning in both sport and mental health.

**America Scores** builds lessons that are explicitly connected to national standards with multiple adaptation opportunities for coaches to integrate into context specific activities.

## Build Feedback Loops and Reflection Time

While there are many approaches organizations can explore to ensure feedback is incorporated into their curricular designing and decision-making, an essential element that is often neglected is providing secured time to reflect, discuss, debate ideas and results throughout the process.

**“How do you use sports to change academics? Start with intentionality and then use the feedback loops to make adjustments.”**

Paul Caccamo — Up2Us Sports

Make time to review and ensure that youth are involved in the reflection stages of curricular sense-making. Feedback loops are essential and stronger with meaningful input from those that deliver and receive the program—gather recommendations and ideas from participants and coaches when determining revisions. One organization initiates the feedback loop before delivering the curriculum to ensure coaches are prepared.

**“[We] rehearse and trial the day’s lessons and play act the training every day before they [the coaches] give it and get feedback – in train the trainer model.”**

Matt Mattila — Waves For Change



“This goes back to a strong emphasis on program culture – building it intentionally... [through] shared vocabulary.”

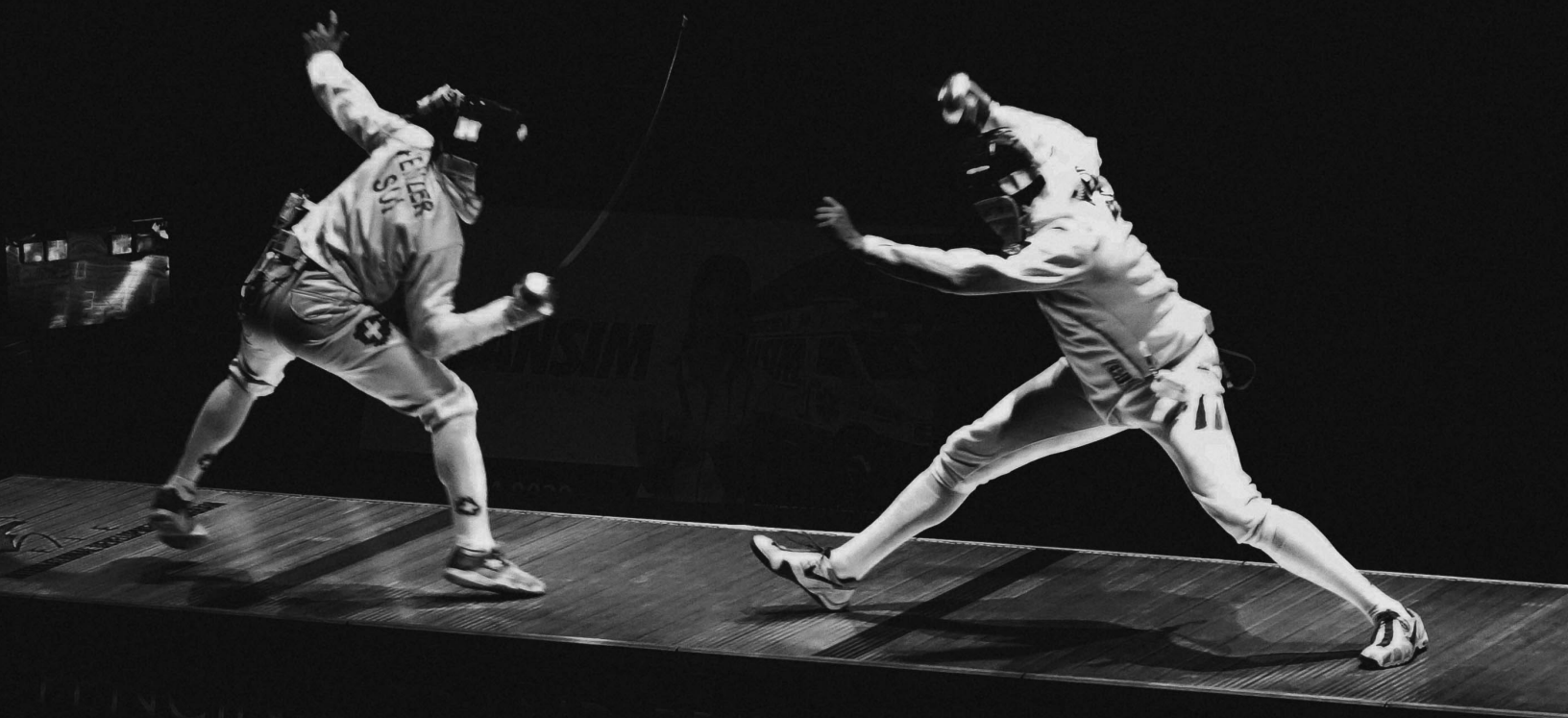
Paul Caccamo — Up2Us Sports





“We have a strict behavior code for the staff and players – which they adhere to so everybody follows and knows what the expectations are.”

Ben Sanders — Independent Consultant



# Pedagogy

The method or practice of how curricular content is delivered can be easily overlooked, but it is an essential area to develop and revise with deliberate attention.

This report explores four critical pedagogical practices:

1. **Consistent in Language and Expectations**
2. **Utilizing Goal Setting**
3. **Deliberately Fostering Caring Relationships**
4. **Active + Experiential + Fun**

## Pedagogy Should Be Consistent In Language & Expectations

**Consistent language** across a program experience is important; repetition and practice should be anchored by adults that introduce and frame experiences the same way throughout the program, and particularly across program streams.<sup>53</sup>

Building shared language can be difficult, but intentionality in staff-to-staff and staff-to-youth interactions combined with building the language into staff trainings and organizational materials can support its development.

**“This goes back to a strong emphasis on program culture – building it intentionally... [through] shared vocabulary.”**

Paul Caccamo — Up2Us Sports

**Clear expectations** are also a hallmark of strong programs, allowing parents, youth, and staff to be on the same page in terms of rules, regulations, and norms of the program.

Creating program guides that include theories of change, logic models, program timelines and routines, program specific definitions and language, best practices, and process one-sheets housed together provide a centralized resource that can, if used and iterated as a part of practice, inform and reinforce consistency across staff and youth experiences.

Also consider creating a youth guide (ideally developed by/with youth participants) that includes elements of the staff guide that can build another connection to the program’s shared language and expectations.

## Pedagogy Should Be Utilizing Goal Setting

Goal setting is a common practice identified in the literature and employed by organizations to successfully move youth towards changes. However, approaches to goal setting vary; some believe goals should be youth-generated and others believe in co-construction by staff and youth. The process for goal setting also varies, some explicitly apply the SMART goal principles (an evidence-based practice demonstrated to lead to better outcomes), while others don’t explicitly follow a prescribed goal-setting format.

### Strategies for effective goal setting:

Allowing for the goal to be self-generated by the client or co-constructed.

### Self-generated goals

Some organizations focus on youth-centered goal setting and begin by creating a prioritization strategy that allows youth to determine what is most important to them and helps them identify what they are likely to achieve. Motivational Interviewing is an effective approach taken in the prioritization strategy in youth-centered goal setting. Additionally, there is evidence that guiding individuals to come to their own answers leads to greater engagement.

Having the staff help the youth convert that goal into a SMART goal.

### SMART goals

SMART goals are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. They allow youth to create bite-sized goals that are manageable and achievable. An example of a SMART goal would be “eat 2 fruits at lunch 5 days a week,” versus “eat more fruit.”



Typical questions that accompany SMART goals:

**Specific:**

What exactly will you accomplish?

**Measurable:**

How will you know when you have reached this goal?

**Achievable:**

Is achieving this goal realistic with effort and commitment?

Do you have the resources to achieve this goal?

If not, how will you get them?

**Relevant:**

Why is this goal significant to your life?

**Time-bound (or Timely):**

When will this goal be achieved?

**Ensure coaches are providing consistent follow up.**

Strategies include using solutions-focused goal setting approaches (a form of appreciative inquiry that starts by affirming past and present goal success) that illuminates the positive elements of the goals and outcomes versus starting with the trouble areas.

Problem Solving

- Identify challenge areas/problems to solve
- Analyze the causes of the problems
- Develop plan to treat the problem

Appreciative Inquiry

- Identify current successes and strengths
- Identify factors enabling success; envision desired future
- Plan to build more support for factors enabling success

**A SBYD approach to goal setting** is highlighted in the Up2Us + Adidas Keep Girls in Sport's individual Success Plan. It is comprised of 6 steps:

1. Use one-to-five to get a sense of where you're starting.
2. Start the goal-setting process. What are the wishes and dreams you and the player have for her behavior?
3. Identify one skill at a time. It might be tempting to try more, but it's easiest to go one at a time.

4. Create a plan. This is where your creative teaching comes into play! What are activities or tasks that can help the player develop?
5. Reinforcement. How are you going to help them succeed with the goals?
6. Enlist others. Who are your allies? Don't forget other kids can be your helpers in this, along with other adult stakeholders.

### Pedagogy Should Be Deliberately Fostering Caring Relationships

The importance of relationships is a universal theme recurring across the SBYD literature and interviews. Leaders and coaches who create caring relationships: listen intently, model caring behaviors, offer experiences that elicit caring relations, and provide for open-ended dialogue with their youth and between youth peers.<sup>54</sup>

Learning in a caring context provides the psychological safety, security, and connection needed to fully develop unique capabilities and strengths.

**“It’s really relationships. Ultimately, it’s [the] people involved – great curriculum, facilities, and opportunities are important – but the people are the ones driving it and you need great people to build relationships with young people.”**

Danielle Pulliam — The Pinkerton Foundation

There are many frameworks and models that highlight key relationship elements. We explore two versions for SBYD:

#### Caring across SBYD literature

Features of a caring climate are described in several articles and chapters focused on caring climate in sport.<sup>55, 56, 57, 58</sup> We outline several program staff actions that demonstrate caring in sports programs:

- Support youth trying to achieve a goal.
- Initiate conversations about uncaring behaviors exhibited by others and discuss ways to act that are more caring.
- Model respectful behaviors to athletes and provide a safe and welcoming environment to feel accepted.

- Spend time checking in with youth
- Engage in activities that actively facilitate getting to know the youth.
- Encourage cooperative games and action to foster mutual respect and community.
- Nurture caring in team members by listening to and learning from one another.
- Provide incentives and praise to youth who engage in caring behavior throughout the day.

Specific strategies and tactics to encourage relationships in SBYD settings can be applied across most youth programs.

#### Strategies

- Pair participants together for a session or season. Peer and near-peer connections can increase persistence,<sup>59</sup> self-reliance, and positive relationships.<sup>60 61</sup>
- Facilitate opportunities for participants to be the focus of attention among their peers.
- Modify elements of games to ensure making connections is an objective.

#### Tactics to Create Prosocial Connections

- Use grouping strategies that randomize partners — finding someone wearing similar shoes, lining up by birthday, or counting off by number.
- Assign warm-up partners who normally wouldn't work together.
- Use coach knowledge of players to assign partners with similar interests.
- Use grouping strategies that deepen existing relationships. Let the youth choose a friend to pair up with and have a conversation.

**“It goes back to the caring adults. If the youth have developed strong relationships, they are more likely to trust that the experience will help them learn and grow because of that relationship.”**

Lindsey Blom — Ball State University

Another program that did not develop specific curriculum or frameworks to drive relationship building noted they focused on the nature of coach/youth interactions at specific points of the program (beginning, end, transitions), noting the importance of how staff greet, engage with, and give feedback to youth.

#### Noddings' caring practice

Noddings conceptualizes caring as a relation between a caregiver and a care-receiver that involves recognition of subtle verbal and nonverbal cues and the ability to identify the motivation and intentions of those involved. Noddings identifies four dimensions of caring.<sup>62 63 64</sup>

First, caring for someone requires attention or being open and receiving another in a bias free manner.

Second, the notion of non-selectivity suggests that a caregiver is nonjudgmental and does not attempt to shape the care-receiver.

Third, caring embodies motivational displacement. Motivational displacement refers to being seized by the needs of the care-receiver, having concern, and displaying empathy for the individual.

Lastly, caring is characterized by giving priority to the needs of the receiver of care.



## Pedagogy Should Be Active + Experiential + Fun

**“Sport is the most important thing that doesn’t matter. It engages body, heart, and mind.”**

Kip O’rourke-Brown — DREAM (Formerly Harlem RBI)

As much as is possible, SBYD program activities should involve movement and action, avoiding extended periods of passive/lecture experiences — whether sport focused or not.

**Experiential** activities typically include leaning while doing, incorporating reflection within a socially constructed learning environment.<sup>65</sup> The combination of experiential coaching and intentional curriculum can lead to purposeful, outcomes-oriented program experiences for youth.

**“Be intentional about the sport experience. Plan through your formal and informal time to ensure that you are creating moments of connection and development...[] look for standing vs. moving. What percentage of practice are youth moving versus standing?”**

Ben Schornack — Laureus Foundation USA

The Coaching on the Wave model includes six steps that facilitators use to help youth “ride” or navigate sports’ ups and downs in order to learn and grow. The order of steps within the process is not prescriptive, but flexible to adapt to specific contexts and individual youth needs.<sup>66</sup>

### Coaching on the Wave model:



Examples of strategies, techniques, and practices from

### Coaching on the Wave Model include:

- Collectively develop a team culture with youth and YSLs
- Identify comparisons, metaphors, and analogies
- Match the coaching and facilitation strategies needed

- Encourage active participation + youth feedback
- Provide cues, feedback, positive reinforcement
- Engage youth in the debriefing process

The Aspen Institute recommends the following tried-and-true teaching tactics:

**The IDEA Method** (Tell, Show, Do) is an easy framework with 4 components:

1. Introduce the skill
2. Demonstrate the skill
3. Explain the skill
4. Attend to players practicing the skill

**Whole Part Whole Method** (Break It Down) is a common educational approach that includes teaching the entire action first, then exploring components in ordered pieces, and then the pieces are put back together. This could easily be applied to any process, whether it is a play or steps in a mathematical formula.

To learn more [Whole Part Whole Method](#).

### Cooperative learning works.<sup>67</sup>

Essential cooperative learning strategies include:

[Think – Pair – Share](#)

[Peer instruction](#)

[Cooperative learning groups](#)

Strong pedagogy makes learning visible by highlighting youth processes rather than just conclusions. Expertise is also modeled in order to explicate the techniques and processes involved in high level skills and thinking.

This pretty much speaks for itself: **SBYD programs should be fun for youth (and staff!).**

Regular temperature checks (formal or informal) help in documenting and understanding patterns of enjoyment by program activity type, staff, or grouping. Also, program quality observations should incorporate some element of youth/staff enjoyment. A sense of joy or fun should be something any observer can plainly see and every staff member works to create. [The Fun Comes First Playbook](#) from Laureus Sport for Good USA and GoGo squeeZ, and created by New Heights’ own Julia Leitermann, provides recommendations on building fun into SBYD experiences.



“If it’s not fun they won’t want to come back.”

John Engh — National Alliance For Youth Sports





“Culture is number one...always.”

Rich Berlin — DREAM (Formerly Harlem RBI)





# Culture

Culture consists of a program's shared values, symbols, behaviors, and assumptions. It is revealed through the reality of how things happen and can, ultimately, create a sense of shared community.

We explore several areas of and around culture that are useful for organizations to consider. SBYD culture should be:

1. **By Design**
2. **Fostering Safety, Skills, + Maturing**
3. **Integrated with the Brand**

## Culture Should Be By Design

While there is a prevailing sense that culture cannot be built, there are opportunities to introduce and foster habits, rituals, and ceremonies to an organization.

**“Bricks are the components of a program; the mortar, holding it all together, is the culture...although culture will form no matter what, intentionality around culture is important. It’s best to identify how you want the program to be ... how it flows. Don’t let it form and then react to it.”**

Peter Feldman — Laureus Foundation USA

Attaching program values and rituals to those of the daily routines and life youth experience can inform habit creation, as well as offer strategies for program engagement and efficacy. Adding a specific organizational twist to common experiences can create powerful associations – whether it is a recurring meal, reflection, a team song or chant, warm up routine, a playful internal competition, or special occasion gear, among countless others.

These recurring activities can take on the unique personalities of a program or team and foster a spirit of community while providing a stable experience that remains when the natural ups and downs of life occur.

Some rituals and ceremonies mentioned by industry leaders and literature included the following:

## Annual Events

**“[Annual events] are treasured in the community—like a tournament or school facing event or end-of-season celebration. Teams come up with names for themselves.”**

Megan Bartlett — The Center for Healing and Justice through Sport (CHJS)

## Roles for Youth

**“Every youth athlete in our program can earn patches or bracelets for demonstrating our core team values of teamwork, leadership, and commitment. We also encourage coaches to create opportunities for all youth athletes to take on leadership roles throughout each season.”**

Bethany Rubin Henderson — America Scores

## Branded Gear

Another opportunity is in branded merchandise, which builds connection to the organization as well as the community.

**“Being part of a team [provides] community and identity. Kids lose their minds when the gear is passed out.”**

Kim Sabo-Flores — Algorhythm

The method by which gear is distributed can be ritualized and combined with any number of program objectives.

## Travel Routines

Many sports require traveling to tournaments or events, which introduces infinite opportunities for unique rituals for youth and staff alike.

**“We get Airbnb’s rather than hotels and cook together.”**

Mary Mcveigh Connor — Soccer Without Borders

## Silly / Surprise Start

Providing a structured and safe activity that allows adults and youth to let go and be silly or provide surprise/novelty can set a tone of comfort and positivity while building trust. Demonstrating balance in work with youth – a coach that can be focused and serious as well as playful and light creates a more dynamic environment in which openness is valued. Please note that staff modeling is key. We’ve included several examples in the Appendix, not to mention the infinite resources on the internet.

### Rewards Program

You may have a coffee card that gets punched with every purchase leading to a complimentary morning Joe. Or have a credit card that accrues points towards rewards. SBYD organizations can consider applying similar strategies to their context. Programs can offer points that can be redeemed for gear, time away from particularly grueling practice activities, or any other program specific reward.

### Culture Should Be Fostering Safety, Skills, + Mattering

**“[In terms of mental and social safety] It’s so important to set the tone and to create an environment where kids feel safe and can take risks and grow”**

Peter Feldman — Laureus Foundation USA

There are different aspects of safety to consider for youth in SBYD programs that primarily fall within physical and emotional categories. Physical safety has been defined as a **“space for play [that] is free of health and safety hazards, is clean, and has easily accessible drinking water”** and emotionally safe programs as those where **“the emotional climate of the session is predominantly positive (supportive, relaxed, mutually respectful, characterized by camaraderie and inclusiveness) with a lack of negative behaviors.”**<sup>68</sup>

There are many resources programs can use to ensure they are aware of common athletic injuries and provide a baseline of physical and emotional safety. This is in addition to fostering an environment of belonging/relationship building described in pedagogy above. We provide some resources at the end of this section.

**“Barriers in relation to gender and sexuality prevent children and youth from engaging in sports, particularly for females and the LGBTQ+ population. This must be a focus of SBYD programs.”**

Meredith Whitley — Adelphi University

If a program faces incidents of bullying or an unsafe mental/social environment, Up2Us has created a [toolkit](#) to address bullying with activities designed to foster understanding and prevent future incidents to create and keep spaces safe.

The Aspen Institute created the [Call for Coaches resource](#), which focuses on SEL in SBYD, but also includes several excellent resources to support an organization’s creation of a safe space, including: bullying prevention, a kit for being an ally to LGBT students, and Futures Without Violence, among others.

SBYD programs should be oriented around learning and improvement rather than success in winning competitions; self-improvement should drive student motivation and confidence.

**“Bringing different groups together to be inclusive by intentionally creating space for different individuals to engage is vital...We must remember that sport is not inherently positive. It can be macho and hyper-masculine and deter girls, LGBTQ youth, the disabled and other groups.”**

Ben Sanders — Independent Consultant

Youth should be given the opportunity to meaningfully engage in the program and make a difference in their social worlds.

Perkins & Noam mention that this:

**“Might include helping each other during a sporting event and engaging in community service activities that extend beyond the sporting event, such as cleaning up the sports field and helping young children play a game. Youth engagement in meaningful tasks is most fruitful when the benefits extend beyond the individual and link him or her to the surrounding community.”**<sup>68</sup>

### Culture Should Be Integrated With The Brand

How the program and organization are branded can play a role in the perception of and reception by youth. Youth want to be involved in something that matters and that they can be proud of. A strong and consistent brand identity also benefits staff and fundraising efforts.<sup>69</sup> We recommend ensuring organizations have a style guide to ensure uniform brand quality throughout all organizational activities. Here are two free online resources: [A Nonprofit Branding Guide](#) and a curated list of inspiring [Style Guide Examples](#).

A key component of brand building in business literature is offering customers value and effectively translating that into practice — this is a lesson that SBYP organizations could utilize more effectively.

How well are the benefits of participation, both tangible and intangible, described and delivered to youth, families, and communities?

**Collecting and telling more stories** should be a fundamental element of any program culture — and the infinite approaches to doing this offer opportunities for organizations. People connect to people. Youth connect to youth. Opportunities to focus on team and individual youth stories that define and explain the brand or experience (particularly those who embody and reflect the organization's values and priorities) should be front and center of how the program is shared with both external and internal stakeholders.

Get personal — allow platforms for youth and staff to share their stories (beyond just the superstars in promotional videos and speaking at a fundraising gala). Meaningful staff and youth voice in organizational communications introduces authenticity and opportunities that can make youth feel special.

A team identity can also achieve this, so don't be afraid to highlight groups as well, but also include opportunities for individual youth to feel important — birthdays, milestones, rotating rituals, or achievements are all examples.

Invest in Community Building by building greater trust and connection to the organization — this applies to youth, staff, and invested external stakeholders.

**“Sports is a great unifier – a majority of people love sports, it really brings people together.”**

Danielle Pulliam — The Pinkerton Foundation

**Invest in Community Building** by building greater trust and connection to the organization — this applies to youth, staff, and invested external stakeholders.

The development of community bonds through events (formal + informal) and social media can create seamless connections between the program and youth and staff (as well as other external stakeholders).

Hosting or participating in events or campaigns that are beyond the typical scope or activities of a specific program can foster engagement and connection. For example, a community festival can encourage the linking of alumni, staff, youth from across all programs, and others that are not youth-facing to broaden the community and deepen existing connections.

## Culture Resources

Nike [Made to Play](#) Coaching Girls Guide

The [U.S. Center for SafeSport](#) is focused on ending all forms of abuse in sport.

Creating a safe environment for girls in sport: [Girl Centered Checklist](#) from Aspen, Team USA, Nike

viaSport provides excellent [LGBTQIA2S+ resources, including this Inclusion Readiness Checklist](#).

NAYS provides several checklists for programs to be proactive in terms of mitigating risk in coach hiring and meeting fundamentals of quality. [Sports Program Quality Checklist](#)

A [Safety Checklist](#) is available from The National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) and the North American Booster Club Association (NABCA) to help make sense of physical safety.

[Canadian Women in Sport](#) and [Coach.ca](#) provide an abundance of practical resources - we recommend exploring the Tools they offer.

[Stories Worth Telling: A Guide to Strategic and Sustainable Nonprofit Storytelling](#)

[The Nonprofit Storytelling Field Guide & Journal](#)



“Engage kids and keep them engaged over a long period of time. We know that retention plays a role in social and emotional development over time.”

Roderick Jenkins — The New York Community Trust



# Model

There are many ways in which organizations configure their program features to achieve specific goals, typically defining a model through some combination of the following elements: target population, intervention approach, staffing and partnership structures, and scope of target outcomes. While many programs begin organically and evolve over time; all programs benefit from exploring opportunities to refine and improve their model.

Organizations that root their program designs in theory, evidence, and testing over time across the model elements actively set themselves up for success.

There are many SBYD models. The Sport plus approach is the most common and identifiable in SBYD; it takes sport and adds elements to the participant experience to provide more holistic development opportunities and experiences for youth. It is typically oriented around the sport rather than the population being served, and often includes organizations that couple sport with Science Technology Engineering Math (STEM), Health, Social Emotional Learning (SEL), Academics, etc.

No single model will guarantee success, however many themes we uncovered suggest there are a set of elements or anchors that strong organizations incorporate deliberately into their program model, notably:

1. **Dosage**
2. **Staffing + Partnerships**
3. **Intervention Focused**
4. **Skills + Competition**

## Model Anchors Include Dosage

Programs are not always designed explicitly with dosage in mind. However, industry respondents consider dosage (time in program) an essential feature of successful SBYD models. They believe that when program planning intentionally accounts for intensity and duration, it will lead to better outcomes. We describe two approaches found in SBYD: Longitudinal years and participation levels within a program cycle.

### Longitudinal Dosage

A program model designed with the expectation that youth participate in the same program/organization across multiple years focuses on longitudinal dosage to achieve program outcomes.

- Several afterschool programs work with the same youth from elementary school through high school.
- One program places youth in cohorts with a three-year participation commitment with the same staff person.

**“I think our long-term investment in kids is a successful practice. There’s a lot of pressure to serve huge numbers of kids, but that may prevent you from really becoming a steady presence in a young person’s life over time. We are there for our participants, year-round.”**

Mary McVeigh Connor — Soccer Without Borders

### Discrete Dosage

A model designed with the expectation that youth spend a substantial or prescribed amount of time in a program within a program cycle is another approach to dosage. We describe this as discrete dosage, which encompasses the expected contact or participation required to achieve outcomes during a single defined program experience, whether it be a program cycle or single activity or event. Two versions of this approach emerged, one that focuses on dosage intensity through the time youth spent in the program (typically measured by sessions attended or total time) and another on touch points.

- A program leader described a model where the average time with youth in a program year is thousands of hours, meeting year-round, weekly for up to 5 days a week (and sometimes more).
- A program that focuses less on the number of sessions delivered and attended or the total time spent, but instead focuses on the number of meaningful touch points between staff and youth (including conversations, texts, emails, non-program events attended, meetings, interstitial one-on-one moments during program activities).

## Model Anchors Include Staffing + Partnerships

When formally designing a program, it is important to take into consideration how staff and partnering organizations facilitate program success. Models designed around staffing and partnerships emerged, including those that build a program around specific configurations with partners and those that build a program around specific staff roles.

### Partnership Models

Partnership models include those designed to explicitly incorporate another organization outside of the SBYD program to support program goals.

For example, a program that utilizes a school partnership can create continuity throughout a youth's school and out-of-school experience to ensure youth receive consistent language, rituals, and support throughout their entire day.

Programs using partnerships like these are typically built in two ways:

- Programs where non-school OST staff are in classes during the day and transition to work with youth after school.
- Programs that are driven by teachers who teach youth in the day and also lead/deliver afterschool programming.

Other configurations also exist including:

- Programs working with professional sports leagues to provide guest facilitators to co-deliver the program.
- A SBYD program and Human Services agency that creates a "field" office that combines the youth sport program with clinical group and individual therapy.
- Several organizations incorporate tutoring services from formal partners that are a key component of the program.

### Program Models Built Around Staffing

Two clear versions of program models with intentional staffing structures emerged:

1. Hiring and incorporating local/representative leadership and/or the use of program alumni to deliver and lead.

The deliberate inclusion of local community members or alumni in a program model not only provides powerful role models for youth to connect to, but also creates a talent pipeline.

A program leader shared their rationale for this approach:

**"All of our staff live in the community we serve. It's not just about helping underserved populations... we are directly impacted by the work we do. [It] is not just for kids but our neighbors...It's not just something we do and go home—we are in the community and directly impacted by our own work."**

Rob Castaneda — Beyond The Ball

A funder noted the value of programs that build space for alumni involvement:

**"You see a lot of young people coming back to the organization to work in some capacity. I like to see that – it says they got something out of it and want to give back and gives a pipeline to the youth."**

Danielle Pulliam — The Pinkerton Foundation

2. Specifically trained staff are built into the program model.

While many SBYD organizations accept volunteers or hire staff that are asked to "figure out" how to deliver more technical aspects of programs, many organizations explicitly incorporate specialized staff into their program model and organizational chart.

These models are built around licensed social workers, certified teachers, and other credentialed experts who are essential components to the program's design and organizational chart.

## Model Anchors Include Intervention Focused

In terms of specific intervention components, building a program for meaningful youth/community voice into program design and decision-making and building programs around a specific target population were highlighted as successful SBYD model components.



Models Built Around Program Leadership by Youth/Community Organizations have used some of the following methods to meaningfully incorporate youth/community voice into their model:

- The inclusion of youth/community committees or elected youth/community liaisons that participates with organization leaders in decision-making meetings as a part of the program.
- One progressive approach is building youth voting representation on the organization's Board of Directors (or a Board comprised completely of youth/community members).
- A program's model is built around the co-design of program curriculum and lesson plans by youth and staff.
- Youth ownership of activity delivery so that youth train and, for all intents and purposes, run the program.

**“A hallmark of youth development more broadly is when young people are involved in some way in the delivery of the work, which gives [them] ownership and passes on culture.”**

Rich Berlin — DREAM (Formerly Harlem RBI)

### Models for Specific Target Populations

Identifying a specific target population is often an early step in program development that allows an organization to develop interventions that are contextually and developmentally appropriate.

Continually revisiting the relationships between interventions and the population receiving them is a useful practice and can shape what the program is.

Industry leaders provided many examples of successful SBYD programs with a model built explicitly to address the target population, below we provide examples.

**Soccer Without Borders** works with refugee, asylee, and immigrant youth and employs the popular global sport as a tool to mitigate challenges of coming to a new country.

**Mathare Youth Sports Association** works with community

youth in slums for community improvement through a no-stakes sports experience that allows youth to engage with the program at their own pace and on their own terms.

**Girls at Bat** developed a first nations baseball program for girls that spent over a year of research before entering the community, conducting cultural audits, interviews with the target population, and meetings with elders before introducing the program where older girls work with younger girls.

**Doc Wayne** works with youth with social, emotional or behavioral challenges by providing on-the-field counseling by coaches with formal social work/trauma training/ backgrounds.

**Beyond the Ball** works with intergenerational members of communities in dangerous neighborhoods to reclaim safe public spaces through visible, welcoming sporting events for youth and families in the community.

**“An ability to engage kids on very personal level - [knowing their] struggle and finding ways to deal with the specific challenges that youth and families face.”**

Max Levitt — Leveling The Playing Field

Two of the organizations briefly described above also incorporate a **collective impact model** to their programs. Mathare Youth Sports Association and Beyond the Ball not only aim to change the lives of their participants, but they also explicitly design their programs to transform communities. These types of models are intentionally created to create long term, large scale change.

Rob Castaneda of Beyond the Ball, explains:

*“When you look at traditional sport in places with high levels of violence, it happens in spaces where the access is controlled. There’s a lot of investment in our communities – but it’s not always visible. I believe in multiple levels of impact with our programming. [W]e take public play areas (parks) where young people hang out unsupervised...public spaces are systemically disinvested in—so we asked how can we create spaces where young people and families can go to without having someone unlock it for them...To get the benefits of being physically active requires access, but that’s not enough...when you think about the exposure to violence our community has faced, we can’t do one-off interventions. Someone gets shot. It’s not fair to say only that person is affected—families, neighbors, and the community are impacted and are dealing with chronic stress and trauma...you need a diverse audience or target population for a public space to be safe.”*

Four key elements to designing models that drive positive systems change for youth and communities include:

- (1) embodied physicality and competition,
- (2) change in youth-environment interactions,
- (3) developmentally-focused sport environment, and
- (4) positive community development.<sup>20</sup>

There are organizations that effectively build models to also **access secondary populations**. Row NY has developed rowing programming not only for teenagers (their core population), but the model also includes programming for elderly individuals, veterans, and the disabled. These services are used to foster a larger row community and create an inclusive culture.

Another interesting model that explicitly incorporates secondary populations is using the popularity of attendance at the youth sport event to deliver programming to the audience/families to access the wider community.

Other elements of models in SBYD that were mentioned included designing programs around different grouping approaches (by cohort year, sex, skill, etc.) that build a strong peer support network, as well as configuring youth experiences around varying multi-site program configurations.

## Model Anchors Include Skill And Competition

The degree to which competition and sport skill building are essential to SBYD were explored in interviews. Competition is an essential feature of SBYD programs and was unanimously acknowledged across industry leaders, while winning was generally considered unimportant.

**“Competition is critically important – no competition and we are not SBYD. Sports IS competition. Life is competition. Out of it comes all sorts of skills – we have to embrace it and use it to teach.”**

Paul Caccamo — Up2Us Sports

**“Competition can be an extremely useful tool for allowing young people to practice responding to stress in an environment that has (relatively) low stakes.....[it] can be a double-edged sword if there is no parity...blowouts and uneven skill matchups pose challenges to motivation and engagement. In SBYD we strive for ‘healthy competition’.”**

Ben Schornack — Laureus Foundation USA

There exists a spectrum of how focused the program is on competition and the development of sport-specific skill. The focus in SBYD, according to industry leaders, is more on growth and improvement than winning. The inherent opportunities for growth in sport are fundamental to building useful knowledge and skills.

**“Competition has value — it all needs to be done in context. It’s not win-at-all costs; it needs to be a level playing field. Novices shouldn’t be playing against highly skilled kids, unless it’s a fun learning experience and the intensity is planned to not lead to a negative experience. As long as it contributes to PYD, [competition] has a place.”**

Nolan Ortiz — LA84 Foundation

Such initiatives must include:

- (a) diversified activity involvement,
- (b) training with high amounts of deliberate play,
- (c) healthy competition environments focused on enjoyment,
- (d) supportive relationships, and
- (e) the systematic inclusion of opportunities for life skill development and transfer.<sup>71</sup>

**“Students need to feel competitive ... starting the season with the idea that you can be competitive helps build motivation to participate. The better the youth development aspect of the program is, the less important the competition is.”**

Rachel Cytron — Row New York

**“There’s something about competition, it can drive you to get better...you can’t fake the pecking order”**

Kim Sabo-Flores — Algorhythm

Each SBYD organization deals with the tension that competition in sports introduces differently, and the clearer the organization’s philosophy and approach is to staff, youth, and families, the more intentional and stronger the program will be.

### **Elite Sports and SBYD**

Oftentimes high-level and elite-competition sport focuses on talent identification and development, and less so on PYD.<sup>72</sup> There were no clear recommendations from interviews concerning relationships between high-level competition and PYD outcomes from industry leaders.

There is not a robust body of research to confidently recommend specific practices to SBYD organizations interested in combining elite sports and PYD in a single program, however we present some literature that begins to explore these intersections below:

- Elite sports and skill development programs can be combined with life skills successfully.<sup>73 74 75 76</sup>
- One study suggested different sporting experiences (competitive vs. community) produced different outcomes in cognitive and goal setting skills.<sup>77</sup>
- Several studies focusing on high-level sport and PYD found that successes and failures were largely connected to coach practices and actions.<sup>78 79</sup>
- A qualitative study identified three key elements in providing PYD in elite sport settings:
  - (1) Training environments that incorporate deliberate and safe practice and play, opportunities to compete, and clear expectations around the demands of training.
  - (2) Intentional opportunities for physical, personal, and social skill development.
  - (3) Supportive sport and non-sport interactions.<sup>80</sup>

**“Our program serves kids whose talent levels range from recreational to elite. There’s a notion that elite athletes must come from a certain path. At some point, talented youth may need additional intensive skills training. But far too often, the conversation on coaching for technical skills development and on coaching for youth development are treated as two separate things.”**

Bethany Rubin Henderson — America Scores





“Taking [youth] through coping mechanisms (breathing, empathy, goal-setting, and trust exercises)... each week [participants] go [through] a skill reinforced with a mentor the next week...with the surfing experiences, they learn to stay calm in the ocean when they get anxious.”

Matt Mattila — Waves For Change



# Trends

Two trends emerged across the literature review and in interviews which have become even more salient after the disruptions of the last year including a global pandemic, racial unrest and political turmoil:

1. **Trauma Informed Practices**
2. **Social Emotional Learning**

## Trends Include

### Trauma Informed Practices

The relationships between sport and trauma have been emerging for many years and are increasingly becoming an area of practice for SBYD organizations. Sport offers a unique opportunity to create a safe space to explore mental health and trauma, though research suggests that this work is not to be engaged in casually or without careful planning and training.<sup>81,82</sup>

A practitioner described Waves for Change, a surfing program for healing.

**“Taking [youth] through coping mechanisms (breathing, empathy, goal-setting, and trust exercises)... each week [participants] go [through] a skill reinforced with a mentor the next week...with the surfing experiences, they learn to stay calm in the ocean when they get anxious.”**

Matt Mattila — Waves For Change

The controlled environment of sports allows youth to practice coping and healing in a safe, guided experience.

**“Developing the curriculum – [we’ve] been at it for about a decade...[it is] an iterative process – not perfect all at once, but started with Susan Wayne, who conceptualized the fusion of clinical therapy and sports to best engage youth.”**

Rebekah Roulier, LMHC — Doc Wayne

The guide *Playing to Heal: Designing a Trauma-Sensitive Sport Program*, created by Edgework Consulting in 2013, provides usable techniques for youth work, skills to cultivate in youth that mitigate stress and trauma, and supportive program practices and design principles. Updated information is discussed in a 2016 article in the *Journal of Infant, Child, and Adolescent Psychotherapy*: Creating trauma-informed sports programming for traumatized youth: Core principles for an adjunctive therapeutic approach.<sup>83</sup>

We review key highlights for the program, coach, and player levels from *Playing to Heal: Designing a Trauma-Sensitive Sport Program*.

### Program Practices

- Practice Positive Traditions
- Coach in Pairs
- Change the Game
- Commit to Consistent Practice Structure
- Focus on Skill Development
- Create a Clear Behavior Code
- Plan for Intentional Connectivity
- Make Regular Time for Reflection
- Create Contribution Opportunities

### Coaching Techniques

- Lead with C.L.E.A.R. Communication
- Zero in on ONE Skill at a Time
- Encourage Expression
- Offer Opt Outs and Opt Ins
- Ask Review and “Looking Back” Questions
- Focus on Progress not Performance
- Coach the Bench, Praise the Play
- Connect within 60 Seconds of a Substitution
- Design an Individual Competition Schedule
- Seize on Situations that Merit Reframing
- Be Available for Informal Time
- Support Good Stress, Stop Bad Stress
- Invite Youth Input on Improving Experiences

### Player Skills

- Mindfulness (and Reflection)
- Coming to Play
- Checking Yourself
- Recognizing and Making Choices
- Speaking Your Truth
- Taking Breaks from Bad Stress
- Staying in the Game with Good Stress
- Playing to Strengths
- Reframing
- Self-Coaching
- Being a Friend
- Making Community Contributions

Recent publications from Up2Us/Edgework Consulting and We Coach provide useful practices for staff working with youth to promote healing.

The Up2Us | [Edgework workbook sport & trauma playbook](#) identifies 9 aspects of sport that can be introduced to promote healing. The report provides a practical guide for how to apply trauma-sensitive modifications to typical SBYD routines (transition, warm-up, play, cool down, and transition) that feature more intentional checking in with increased opportunities to celebrate, practice repetition, slow down, modify games, and reflect during program activities.

Similarly, [We Coach's White Paper](#) Why Trauma-Informed Sport is Vital highlights practices that support trauma-informed SBYD programming: creating consistency and predictability, regular positive coach feedback, development of deeper relationships, and strategically managing sport competitions to support youth healing.

[Gurls Talk](#), an online community for young women to discuss issues such as education, mental health, depression, sexuality, selfcare, relationships, problems, etc., partnered with Nike to create a coping kit, which includes resources for maintaining mental health and emotional well-being. Coaches/facilitators can use the question cards to spark meaningful conversations.

The adidas + Up2Us KEEP GIRLS IN SPORT curriculum provides information about the impacts of stress and shares examples of behaviors to keep an eye on, as well as some tips on how to support a girl who has a lot of stress.

#### **Behaviors to Watch for**

- Shutting Down
- Violent outbursts
- Low sociability
- Emotional dysregulation (or impairment)
- Lack of self-awareness
- Disengagement and unwillingness to participate

#### **Supporting Stressed Youth Athletes**

- Coach with a Growth Mindset.
- Practice: Do it over and over.
- Recognize that she isn't here to ruin your day; she's doing her best.
- Be patient: Know that change takes time.
- Leverage what you can: your relationships, your safe space.
- Calming questions that take the focus off of a player and away from potentially triggering or stressful circumstances can be useful.

By shifting focus you can help youth calm down, feel safe, and resume thinking critically. The goal of these questions is to momentarily remove the player from a stressful situation and place her mind and attention on a more calming and neutral topic.

One organization guides coaches in how to regularly check in with youth using a "one-to-five" check-in method, similar to the common "fist of five" that allows youth to connect with, reflect on, and rate their current emotional state and rate how they are feeling. This approach introduces opportunities for discussion and additional supports that are easily embedded in program activities.

Another strategy used by the organization is to develop a calming and positive association between youth and a chosen object from the program in order to use the object outside of the program as a tool to mitigate stress, sadness, or anger.

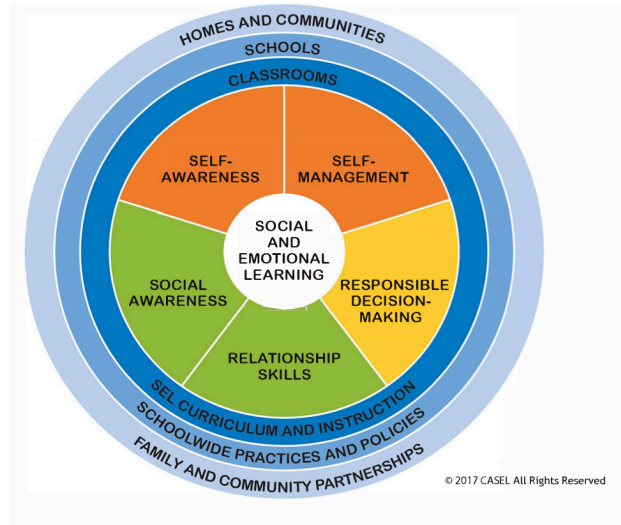
While there is movement in the field towards training coaches in practices that support healing, leading organizations continue to apply **rigorous staff standards and trainings to support youth with trauma**. For instance, Doc Wayne operates clinical therapy sessions integrated into sport that use Dialectical Behavior Therapy as well as a Attachment Self-Regulation Competency framework in a curriculum that has been tested and revised for over a decade.



## Trends Include Social Emotional Learning

Another area that has gained substantial attention in recent years is Social Emotional Learning. SEL is defined by field leader CASEL as the “process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.”

Creating an appropriate context is crucial for fostering community youth development. When youth work collectively with other peers and adults to achieve a common goal, they also practice problem-solving and decision-making skills. Such opportunities enable young people not only to build cognitive and social competencies that they can apply to other areas of their life, but also to foster the development of initiative or intrinsic motivation. The competencies included in the CASEL framework are outlined in the graphic on the right.



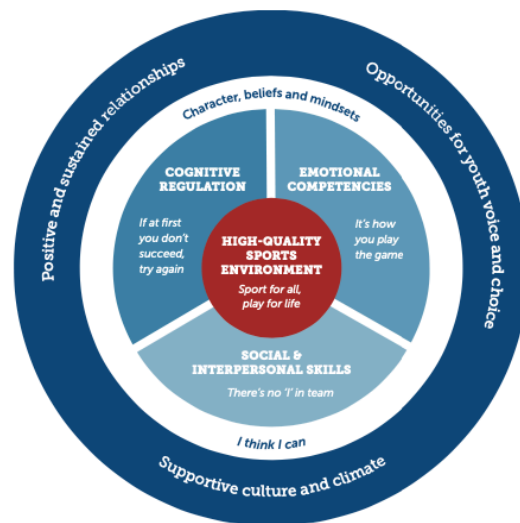
**“[SEL has] got to be at the center of the work you’re trying to do. SBYD can impact soft skills, goal setting, confidence, self-efficacy, and can power things in other parts of life. When you talk with folks in the field, even if they don’t know the language or the research – it’s still embedded in what they are trying to do.”**

Peter Feldman — Laureus Foundation USA

While the CASEL framework is the industry standard for SEL generally, a sports-specific framework has recently been introduced by the Aspen Institute.<sup>84</sup> The framework contains more direct PYD language as well as integrating traditional sports phrases (there’s no “I” in team) and while there is not yet literature that examines the framework in practice, it may provide a more straight-forward entry point for many SBYD practitioners.

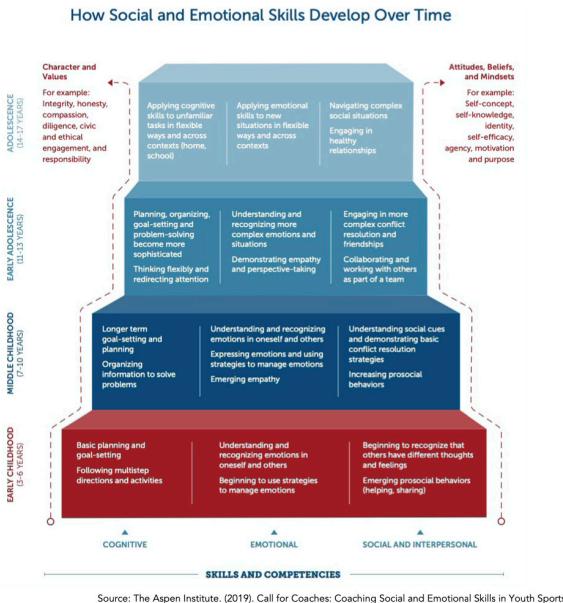
The competencies that SBYD Industry leaders identified as most connected to sport were teamwork/relationship skills, self-management, and self-efficacy.

## Aspen Sport SEL Framework



2019 The Aspen Institute

The Aspen Institute created a helpful graphic illustrating age-graded SEL aligned to their sport-focused framework.



### SEL Best Practices

#### Explicit Language and Consistent Practice

Industry leaders universally commented on the importance of programs being explicit in terms of language, experiential actions, and rituals (greeting, huddle, debrief) that relate to SEL. The experiential nature of sport leads many to simply state that sports *IS SEL*.

**“[SEL] is the core of what we do. Sports is a tool but SEL competence is the outcome...our entire curriculum is built around SEL...it’s why we exist.”**

Bethany Rubin Henderson — America Scores

**“[SEL is] integral – it’s what SBYD programs teach: compromise, persistence, competition, collaboration, and sportsmanship.”**

Roderick Jenkins — The New York Community Trust

Using the same SEL language consistently and across program experiences and providing opportunities for youth to practice the skills is a critical SEL practice. Creating an environment that supports SEL success – through the intentional and consistent application of the SEL approach requires staff training and support alongside ongoing reflection.<sup>85</sup>

**“A soccer coach is clear about where to kick a ball – are they equally clear around any of the SEL skills? Do they define what a good sportsman is and name the set of practices that they are broken down into? [SEL language] has [been] left open for programs to do.”**

Jennifer Brown Lerner — The Aspen Institute

**“Coaches are teaching [SEL] as part of practice. Kids [are] seeing a situation on the ballfield that could deal elsewhere in their lives and trying to align it to how they might deal with it off the field.”**

Chuck Brady — The Cal Ripken, Sr. Foundation

**“[SEL] should be infused into SBYD...SEL should be integrated into all of the program components. However, SEL is not going to work unless staff are properly trained in and model it. That must be a priority.”**

Meredith Whitley — Adelphi University

### Holistic Versus À La Carte + Measuring SEL

There is not consensus around whether or not SEL should be integrated holistically into SBYD programs or whether to focus only on specific competencies. There is not yet any research pointing definitively towards a best approach.

Additionally, there is not yet a standard measurement of SEL, which further makes defining and implementing SEL challenging for programs. Hello Insight was mentioned most frequently as a promising SBYD SEL measurement tool (note that the Hello Insight founder was among the sample interviewed for this report). Other tools mentioned were PEAR, The Search Institute, Ruler, Weikart, and those created internally (typically self-reported youth surveys).

### SEL Best Practices in Out of School Time

A report and resource guide entitled [The Art & Science of Creating Effective Youth Programs](#) focuses on four SEL best practices in OST settings:

#### 1. Prioritizing Youth Engagement

- Focus on staff/youth relationships.
- Provide youth choice in the What and the How of programs.
- Hold high expectations for youth.

#### 2. Facilitating Peer-to-Peer Engagement

- Programs rooted in group/team learning work/processes.
- Create safe spaces for youth risk, reflection, and sharing.

#### 3. Coaching youth through Goal Management

- Staff support youth goal setting and management and provide feedback throughout the process.
- Encourage growth mindset so challenges become learning opportunities.

#### 4. Staff Engagement

- Staff interest shapes programs and professional development.
- Create safe spaces for staff risk, reflection, and sharing.
- Matching staff with others to learn from.
- Create a culture of learning and data use.

A guide from physical education literature that directly connects SEL to activities found in SBYD programming is Hellison's Responsibility Model.<sup>86,87</sup> It uses physical activity as a vehicle for positive change by attempting to treat adolescents as individuals, empower their decision-making capabilities, and give priority to their emotional safety and providing caring adult supervision. There is a progression of 5 levels:

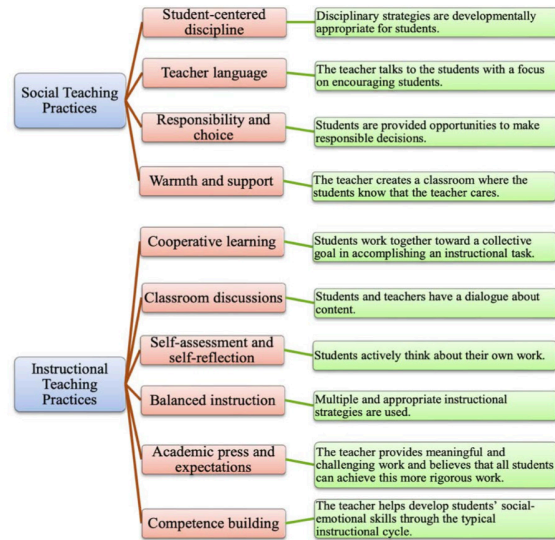
- (1) Self-control (control of one's body and temper);
- (2) Teamwork (full participation by all team members);
- (3) Self-coaching;

- (4) Coaching another team member; and
- (5) Applying skills learned in the program outside the gym to school, home, and neighborhood.

Strategies to support youth as they progress include supporting goal setting, encouraging youth to become more reflective in their decision making, conducting awareness talks, group meetings, and providing them with a "voice" in which to express their opinions, interests, and feelings in reflection and counseling time.<sup>88</sup>

### Teaching Practices to Adapt for SBYD

The Center on Great Teachers and Leaders at American Institutes for Research created a toolkit with resources focused on SEL in school settings. The practices and tools can be easily applied to SBYD settings, particularly the 10 teaching practices that support SEL.<sup>89</sup> See figure below:



The [resources](#) also include a facilitator's guide, workbook, and facilitator SEL assessment, which is available (along with the rest of the Toolkit).



### Immediate SEL: Asking Youth Questions

Understanding and supporting youth often occurs through conversation. There are many resources that provide questions and conversation starters that are oriented around developing social emotional learning. We present three:

1. Lou Bergholz recommends a single question for coaches to ask and return to again and again, a question that promotes reflection and growth.<sup>90</sup> **“How did you do that?”**
2. Growth Questions. Examples include: How do you feel? What do you see out there on the field? What were you thinking when you made that choice? What are your options? What other options do you have? What would you do next time? How did you do that? **Note that open-ended questions are not asked in a way that feels judgmental or leading.**
3. There are several SEL card games available, one called 52 Essential Conversations is designed according to the CASEL framework and includes increasing levels of difficulty. The questions could easily be used in or adapted for SBYD programs. Below are examples of competency areas and questions:

#### Responsibility

- What is a new responsibility that you want to have?
- How can you show that you are ready?
- Think of something that you are expected to do.
- What can you do to broaden it into an even bigger responsibility?

#### Asking for Help

- Describe a time when you needed help. Did you ask for help right away? If not, what happened when you tried to do it without help?
- Describe a time when you were embarrassed to ask for help. What can you do next time to get the help you need?

#### Identity

- How would you describe yourself?
- What makes you who you are? How are other people similar to and different from you?
- Think of three people. What do they have in common and what makes them unique?

#### Stress Management

- What do you say to yourself when you make a mistake? How can you be kinder to yourself? Describe something that happened that made you sad or scared. What can you do to calm your body and mind?

#### Mastery

- Name a skill that you are working hard to improve. How do you know when you have mastered it? If there were no grades, then what can you do to prove that you've learned something?

#### Impulse Control


- Describe a mistake you made because of rushing into something without thinking. How can planning help?
- Think of a time when you got mad at or hurt someone. What can you do next time to calm your feelings before reacting?

#### Inclusion

- Why is it important to continue to make new friends, especially with those who are different from you?
- Why is intentionally leaving someone out a form of bullying?

#### Recognizing Emotions

- Make faces of five different feelings and have other people name them. Why is it important for you and others to be able to name the emotions that you are feeling?

A woman wearing a red hard hat is shown in profile, looking out over a construction site. The background is a bright, hazy sky with a large, dark, curved structure, possibly a bridge or a large pipe, in the foreground. The overall tone is blue and white, with the red of the hard hat providing a focal point.

“High quality coaches that are responsive to individual and environmental factors - if kids come in despondent after being in lockdown, how does the program respond to this context? Coaches set the culture, climate, and intentionality of the space, we can’t underestimate the role coaches play in that. Staff training and intentionality are the most important in creating a quality experience.”

Jennifer Brown Lerner — The Aspen Institute

# Organizational Best Practices

STAFFING + TRAINING

MONITORING + EVALUATION

PARTNERSHIPS + COLLABORATIONS

LEADERSHIP + FUNDING





“The good organizations start with recruiting well and training well.”

Alisha Greenberg — Rounding Third



# Staffing + Training

Across industry interviews, the importance of youth and adult relationships was repeated over and over again. Alongside this recurring theme was the importance of hiring, training, and retaining high-quality staff to develop and maintain those relationships. Many practitioners shared the sentiment that any program or curriculum is only as good as the staff who are implementing it. We explore three areas within staffing:

1. **Talent Pipelines**
2. **Purposeful Hiring**
3. **Ongoing Support**

In terms of staff pipelines and hiring, a reliance on a volunteer and part-time workforce to deliver critical programming emerged as a prominent feature of and challenge for the SBYD field. Staff retention is another challenge area, a consultant noted the average tenure for a SBYD staff person is two years. We explore some strategies for hiring strong candidates and keeping them.

## Staffing + Training Includes Talent Pipelines

### Building Staff Pipelines

There is not a widely available, robust, and formal professional pathway for SBYD — we discuss nascent happenings in the Future of SBYD section of this report.

**“There is not a degree or formal training, outside of playing a competitive sport for SBYD.”**

Kip O’rourke-Brown — DREAM (Formerly Harlem RBI)

### So, where do SBYD professionals come from?

While PYD programs often tap into pools of education program graduates, there is not a clear traditional institution or program that SBYD leaders can look to for trained staff. That being said, there might be opportunities to build relationships with gatekeepers from the following institutions and programs.

- Education + social work programs at colleges/universities (particularly former athletes)
- Recreational sports leagues (staff and participants)
- Competitive sport program (staff and participants)
- Teachers and support staff in local schools
- AmeriCorps
- Program volunteers

### Succession Networks, Programs, and Events.

Social networks are always an excellent source of talent, and one practitioner that utilizes local schools for candidates mentioned a promising practice to consider: Having current staff identify and recruit replacements.

**“If a coach moves [to another] school – we ask them to hand pick their replacement and help get them on board.”**

Bethany Rubin Henderson — America Scores

A potential exercise for organizations is to have staff submit connections that they believe would be a good fit for their role or others in the organization.

Building a database of potential staff to include in newsletters and opportunities can act as a multiplier, reaching to networks beyond those internal to the organization. We advise that these sorts of exercises are kept light and friendly with staff choosing to opt-in (though incentives are recommended).

Events (cocktail parties, game nights, group youth shadows) that invite these potential successors/candidates and their staff friends to experience and enjoy the culture can create direct and indirect organizational benefits (positive word of mouth, potential volunteers/donors or future employees, etc.).

Competitive internship programs are another solution raised by industry leaders as a way to bring in qualified candidates.

Offering trainings in areas of organizational expertise for other organizations/interested professionals/students can also increase awareness of your organization and the number of potential staff.

### Organizational Brand + Culture

Building an attractive brand can foster a strong word-of-mouth reputation. A strong reputation can bring candidates to an organization rather than the organization having to go out to find candidates. If you are running or supporting a SBYD organization, can you name the descriptors that define the program—is it innovative and entrepreneurial? Is it like family? Is it competitive, etc.?

Furthermore, a positive culture can be a powerful selling point for prospective staff and typically includes staff who are already positive promoters of the organization. The experience for youth should be fun, engaging, and rewarding — so too should the culture be for staff.

**“We actively work to make sure we create the same inclusive environment for our staff as we do for our participants. I think the culture and the passion for this work has helped us keep our retention of program staff high.”**

Mary Mcveigh Connor — Soccer Without Borders

Becoming a known entity with a known culture can lead to stronger pipelines of candidates that may already be a good fit. Clarity in culture and role expectations will allow for easier matching. Questions to consider concerning new/open roles:

- Is there a well-crafted job description that articulates the specific performance expectations and tasks that will lead to success in the role?
- Are the benefits/realities of the culture conveyed clearly through the job description?

In addition to recruitment fairs and posting on the typical job boards, another activity to consider is revisiting promising applicants from previous staff searches that may unearth candidates for roles other than those that they originally applied to. Also hosting trainings/events, as previously mentioned, can build organizational reputation and widen the scope of potential applicants.

A final note on pipelines, despite a substantial degree of obviousness: social media contains popular and proven tools to build and connect with prospective staff. There are many virtual approaches that convey culture:

- Online meet and greets
- Virtual office tours
- Video (live or pre-recorded) program experiences
- Live video conference Q+A sessions

## Staffing + Training Includes Purposeful Hiring

Hire Alumni, Community, and Internal Candidates. Across all groups interviewed, recruiting from the community that is being served was regarded as a practice that can lead to deep connections and commitments. Getting this key audience in the game is good for the youth, organization, and broader community.

**“It is important for coaches/direct-service staff to be representative of the community that they are working. However, it might be even more important for this representation to spread through the Board, Executive, and Mid-Level staff. Our sector is strong in representation amongst direct-service staff, but falls woefully short beyond that and must make a concerted effort to address it.”**

Ben Schornack — Laureus Foundation USA

**“It’s critical to have mentors and managers who look like you and live in the neighborhood. They interact with the participants and when they [participants] want to bond with people from their community who provide a pathway toward a better life.”**

Matt Mattila — Waves For Change

**“Our coaches are not volunteers. We intentionally recruit, pay, and train adults from the youth’s communities to coach. We don’t rely on volunteers from outside the community – we primarily recruit teachers and staff from school buildings and train them in sport, PYD, and pay them for their time to ensure quality control.”**

Bethany Rubin Henderson — America Scores

**“Always hire within the community – locals understand the needs!”**

Alisha Greenberg — Rounding Third

When hiring, two practices have stood out:

### 1. Conducting a Standard Process for all Staff

Creating and conducting a systematic process for all staff interacting with youth is critical for SBYD organizations to ensure quality/best fit staff are interacting with their youth.



Clarity in role expectations starts during recruitment and hiring; several funders noted that hiring is more about just passion, underscoring the importance of focusing on hiring candidates that understand and demonstrate alignment with organizational values and priorities.

Three common practices that SBYD organizations should incorporate are:

- Include rigorous screening
- Interview against a checklist
- Administer a performance task/project

**“Communicate what the purpose is clearly – and only hire/retain those coaches. Then provide structure to support these coaches.”**

Nolan Ortiz + Anne-Marie Jones — LA84 Foundation

**“Can those coaches give themselves over to the kids? Sometimes coaches almost ‘make it about themselves’ when it has to be 110% about the kids. Don’t bring your whole self, bring your best self – you owe it to the kids.”**

Amanda Kraus — USRowing

Often the process for volunteers and part-time staff can be a shortened version of a traditional process.

## 2. Conduct Trial Periods

Intense **trial periods** can weed out poor coaches or new hires that are a bad cultural fit. Similar to a traditional 30-60-90 found for full-time professionals, this practice provides a safeguard for SBYD organizations to ensure that the best possible staff are part of the team and interacting with youth.

**“The ‘we just want him back next year’ is frustrating... for bad ones [it should be] established how to deal with challenges ahead of time – which sets up conversations between administrators and coaches.... transparency and communication are essential.”**

John Engh — National Alliance For Youth Sports

However, saying no and making hard choices emerged as a key practice in successful SBYD hiring and re-hiring. This can be especially difficult when coaches are well-liked or there is a seemingly thin pool of replacements.

**“First and foremost, it helps to be able to say no to coaches if they’re really bad. If you have someone that’s not skilled you’re going to lose kids.”**

Rich Berlin — DREAM (Formerly Harlem RBI)

## Saying No to Bad Coaches/Staff

The scarcity of great coaches with combined sport and PYD knowledge/skill, can often lead organizations to “settle,” particularly with re-hires.

## Cultural Fit + Trainable > Sport Knowledge + Experience

The prevailing sentiment is finding someone who is a good cultural fit that can be trained is preferable to a potentially toxic or misaligned coach with an abundance of sport knowledge and experience.

## Hiring the Expert

A solution to staffing challenges for organizations with specific missions and models is to hire staff with the credentialed expertise and training that is needed to successfully execute the mission. Doc Wayne hires LMHCs, LSCSWs, and LCSWs that fit a specific profile, and work to:

**“Breed a whole new type of social worker or mental health worker – they have to think out of the box and want to challenge the norm. They all have an entrepreneurial mindset.”**

David S. Cohen — Doc Wayne

Another practitioner noted that:

**“Youth workers can’t be expected to adequately support everything that happens in a young person’s life so it’s essential that organizations have someone professional that can. Suicide, DV [domestic violence], homelessness, violence, etc. as well as the less typical like sexuality – might not be a core competency of a youth worker. You have to make sure you’re addressing that well. Social workers are generally good at that.”**

Rachel Cytron — Row New York

Similarly, programs that combine academic supports often dip into local pools of credentialed teachers or professional tutors to provide academic programming in order to mitigate the substantial training that would otherwise be required. An honest appraisal of staff skills against program needs can create a very particular profile that requires specialized experience and credentialed training.

Even bootstrapped organizations require clarity and ownership across key organizational roles. Employing HR, operations, finance, development/communications, and M+E staff who are experienced and skilled will mitigate mistakes and ensure critical organizational operations are running effectively.

## Staffing + Training Includes Ongoing Support

Formal coach/staff training and support are essential for high quality SBYD programs.

A concern raised for the field across all industry groups was a general lack of professionalism in the SBYD field. Robust training would go a long way in correcting that concern. There is consensus around the need for coach/staff training in safety and developmentally appropriate approaches. Additionally, coach/staff should be trained in the program model and specific organizational practices. These may include training in SEL, trauma, case-management, relationship building, leadership, inclusion, and culture building in addition to any sport specific needs (running a practice, sport strategy, etc.).

The bifurcated reality of SBYD training was effectively explained by a funder, who described two components to that training:

**“[Upskill staff to] understand the content (effective and quality tactics for coaching the sport content) and prepare them to establish the right tone (sportsmanship, positive reinforcement, etc.)”**

Anne-Marie Jones — LA84 Foundation

The ability of a coach to deliver a quality experience for youth is largely dependent on the training and support an organization provides – and while there are coaches with talent and natural abilities to connect with youth and provide a positive experience, there is no coach that could not improve with additional training and support.

### Staff from Sport

There remains a pervasive sense that the primary qualification to be a coach is previous involvement in competitive sports. This idea was echoed by funders and practitioners alike:

**“You aren’t credentialed to be a teacher because you were a good student – but so many coaches are [coaches] because they were good at the sport. Our sector has made an excuse for that. The best organizations have intentional trainings and specific trainings.”**

Ben Schornack — Laureus Foundation USA

Despite a history of athletes staffing SBYD, the landscape of sport for youth is changing; industry leaders were quick to point this out.

**“One of the challenges is that most/many adults now were coached by folks that weren’t youth developers and they don’t have the model for it. Many were coached by performance-oriented coaches and not someone focused on the holistic well-being of the young person – so they may not have those skills.”**

Rachel Cytron — Row New York

**“When I grew up, I got the tough love, the Bob Knight approach, it was just how it was done. If you messed up, there was a punishment. Laps or lines. That doesn’t fly anymore. Research has shown that restorative practices can be a more effective method for coaches to shape player behavior and performance.”**

Nolan Ortiz — LA84 Foundation

**“SBYD is such an interesting and unique place. We recognize coaches have a pedagogy of their own – and then when you bring in educators ... How do the educators teach the coaches and how do the coaches teach the educators?”**

Kim Sabo-Flores — Algorhythm

### Consistency in Staff Training Experiences

A standard experience for staff across program streams and components ensures there is a clear baseline of expectations that should be met across an organization. Even when employing differentiated modules, training and support experiences should remain consistent in quality and language.

**“Training must be consistent...having a standardized training is a strategy to make sure minimum requirements are met. We use a 4-step process with (1) orientation, (2) screening, (3) training, and (4) accountability. Volunteers are not paid employees but should be treated as though they are.”**

John Engh — National Alliance For Youth Sports

Bringing in experts adds variety to training experiences and ensures that the information and practices should be high quality—so that if an organization does not feel equipped to successfully train in PYD, Trauma, Equity, or SEL, they can provide someone who does.

Two organizations were consistently referenced throughout interviews and in the literature scan as external providers of useful SBYD trainings were [Up2Us](#) and the [Positive Coaching Alliance](#). Another organization, [We Coach](#), was also recommended for trainings focused specifically on trauma-informed SBYD programs.

### **Train Relationship Cultivation**

The primacy of relationships as the vehicle for achieving success in SBYD programs is clear. Across industry leaders, relationships between staff and youth was repeatedly highlighted as a key, if not the key, element to program success — and formally supporting the knowledge and skill development of coaches/youth-facing staff in this essential component of SBYD is critical.

**“I studied mentoring for my PhD and one thing that really struck me is that the demographics of people didn’t impact mentoring success. Context didn’t. Relationships predicted mentoring success. I learned early on that if we can better train coaches and other adults to approach youth and mentees in ways that are building and fostering relationships, everything else will be successful.”**

Andrew Macintosh — Rise

Some organizations are developing clear trainings and PDs that get at how to “do” relationships.

**“When teaching staff to build relationships, we teach micro skills in how to be a good listener, validate feelings, and how to respond to people in a way that makes them feel heard and respected. Teaching micro skills – leaning forward, nodding your head, asking if you heard someone correctly, and summarizing. Most coaches are not provided this training and supervised practice. Micro skills are the small game changers that help kids trust and open up.”**

Rebekah Roulier, LMHC — Doc Wayne

The Search Institute created a useful framework for supporting staff in understanding elements and actions involved in cultivating relationships with youth. Their 2017 relationships first report provides practical tips for organizations that can be incorporated into ongoing trainings and supports, including an example of a relationship’s progression and 55 ideas for deepening relationships.<sup>91</sup> The framework’s 5 elements and their key actions are below.

### **Search Institute’s Developmental Relationships Framework**

#### **Element #1: Express Care**

*Show youth that they matter to you*

#### **Actions:**

- Be dependable — be someone the youth can trust.
- Listen — really pay attention to youth when together
- Believe in youth — make youth feel known and valued.
- Be warm — show youth you enjoy being with them.
- Encourage — praise youth for efforts and achievements.

#### **Element #2: Challenge Growth**

*Push youth to keep getting better*

#### **Actions:**

- Expect the youth’s best — expect youth to live up to potential.
- Stretch — push youth to go further.
- Hold youth accountable — insist youth take responsibilities for their actions.
- Reflect on failures — help youth learn from their mistakes and setbacks.

#### **Element #3: Provide Support**

*Help youth complete tasks and achieve goals*

#### **Actions:**

- Navigate — guide youth through hard situations and systems.
- Empower — build youth’s confidence to take charge of their life.
- Advocate — defend youth when they need it.
- Set boundaries — put in place limits to keep youth on track.

#### **Element #4: Share Power**

*Treat youth with respect and give them a say*

#### **Actions:**



- Respect youth — take youth seriously and treat them fairly.
- Include youth — involve youth in decisions that affect them.
- Collaborate — work with youth to solve problems and reach goals.
- Let youth lead — create opportunities for youth to take action and lead.

#### **Element #5: Expand Possibilities**

*Connect youth with people and places that broaden their horizons*

##### **Actions:**

- Inspire — inspire youth to see possibilities for their future.
- Broaden horizons — expose youth to new ideas, experiences, and places.
- Connect — introduce youth to more people who can help them grow.

#### **Customize + Differentiate Trainings**

An approach some organizations take is customizing trainings for specific organizational needs, including modified versions of train-the-trainer approaches and differentiated module-building. Whether staff are training youth to lead program elements, staff are training parents and volunteers to deliver programming, or an organization is creating internal trainings for different levels of experience, SBYP programs are being responsive to individual and environmental factors.

A program leader shared a differentiated staff and parent training approach:

**“When it comes to younger ages, we utilize parent coaches, and are intentional with the coaches helping them recognize that it’s not about winning but about working together to create a positive experience with the kids. Our staff take learnings from Up2Us and passes them along to parents.”**

Rob Castaneda — Beyond The Ball

Conducting one-off sessions or bespoke support for an individual that occurs beyond the planned and scheduled training is one method several industry leaders mentioned to ensure essential skills and knowledge are fully translated. Technology can facilitate individualized training opportunities

that can be cost effective. A program leader mentioned moving towards a differentiated learning platform that allows coaches at different levels to receive PD on their time.

#### **Intentionality in Trainings**

Coach/Staff Intentionality in staff training and ongoing support ensures high quality experiences for youth and can strengthen explicit connections between coach/staff practices and program outcomes. Intentionality, like relationships, was identified by industry leaders as essential to high quality SBYP.

**“Most are trained in physical safety and age appropriate development of physical skills; now most require training in abuse and neglect. The role of coaches has not been framed as that of educator, which includes setting culture, climate, and intentionality of the space. Coaches are often blissfully unaware of these roles.”**

Jennifer Brown Lerner — The Aspen Institute

**“There has to be intentional training that is built to achieve the outcomes that are desired. If it’s mental health, are the staff trained in it? If it’s literacy, do the staff actually know the literature and best practices? Untrained staff deliver poor outcomes.”**

Paul Caccamo — Up2Us Sports

**“Training coaches on how to work with kids and how to run practices and how to organize the team and the activities; it is so important ... you can see those that take it seriously and are well-trained are the programs that tend to shine.”**

Chuck Brady — The Cal Ripken, Sr. Foundation

Intentionality is key to training, curriculum, and program experiences for program participants and staff. Coach/staff training and support should be planned and executed similar to the program for youth; where staff growth and development is attended to with attention and deliberateness to produce meaningful outcomes, especially because staff knowledge/skills, attitudes, and behaviors can influence youth-level outcomes.

**“Champion your outcomes for adults as much as you do for youth. The staff have more exposure to the program and [treating] staff development as an outcome, e.g. counting coach training hours, behavior change, and where they end up, can have profound results.”**

Lou Bergholz — Edgework Consulting

### Make Training Easy

Another important element to consider when connecting staff training to the program's mission is to make it easy. Train to checklists, rubrics, frameworks, metaphors, axioms, or anything that distills the essence of the program's values and goals into the coach/staff experience.

Providing a clear rubric or framework provides coaches with a clear reference point to understand and gauge success.

**“Soccer without Borders created an acronym/rubric that was easy to remember and ensured practices around skill building, commitment, etc. It acts as both an accountability tool and a performance tool.”**

Kip O'rourke-Brown — Dream (Formerly Harlem RBI)

**“We use a program matrix that guides staff training and behaviors that we expect staff to exhibit. From that framework we have coaches report in on how they are doing.”**

Megan Bartlett — The Center for Healing and Justice through Sport (CHJS)

A handy reference list or guide that provides common language for the expected actions and practices for staff is a valuable tool for any SBYD organization. We provide information for three SBYD tools.

[The Program Quality Assessment in Youth Sports](#), is a sports-based youth development tool that has been tested for validity and reliability and that incorporates PYD and sports-specific variables.<sup>92</sup>

A [2016 evaluation of Up2Us by LPHI](#) (a public health institute) applied a **coach skill measure** to quantify positive coach characteristics and behaviors and to examine the relationship between these coach skills and positive changes in youth. The coach skill measure assessed:

- **Relationships** – youth report on their relationships with coaches.
- **Confidence** – coaches report on their confidence in their coaching abilities.
- **Behaviors** – staff observe coaches during programming.
- **Attributes** – coaches report on High Impact Attributes (primarily SEL).

- **Priorities** – coaches report on their priorities when working with youth.
- **Knowledge** –test coaches on retention of materials learned in training.

8RES has developed a brief [one-page Program Quality tool](#) that supports understanding and improvement across critical SBYD and PYD domains.

### Provide Ongoing Assessments, Reviews, + Supports

Staff training should not begin and end with a single event. Excellence is not built in a single monolithic training session. Ongoing assessments, reviews, and training + supports should be provided to regulate and refine the youth experience. Quality programs assess the strengths and weaknesses of coaches that can then be converted into professional development plans and supports. Knowing where coaches are in terms of skills also creates opportunities for meaningful pairing and mentoring.

**“Create a dashboard of metrics, not just to tweak programs, but also to understand what PD is needed for coaches. You can have coaches train each other, which also builds teamwork and other SEL skills, because some are good at one and not another.”**

Sammy Politziner — Arbor Brothers

**“We host monthly coaching round tables with guest speakers and honest conversations. Then we do “ride alongs” and tailor PD for each coach. Meet them where they are and figure out what supports are needed.”**

Amanda Kraus — USRowing

The frequency of assessing and supporting coaches/staff is likely dependent on the time and resources of an organization. Some align these to their staff performance management cadence and others are more seasonal – differentiating to the schedules of the program.

**“Throughout the year the staff working with kids have clinical supervision – and that group has group supervision weekly. [It's important] to step back, regroup, and adjust.”**

David S. Cohen — Doc Wayne

**“Our job as program operators is to support coaches in the field. We try to get boots on ground to observe and support as much as possible, and also use data metrics to understand quality. We maintain program quality standards and weekly examine everything from how coaches interact with youth (e.g. are they yelling) to daily attendance. We provide struggling teams direct support and high-performing teams opportunities to celebrate together”**

Bethany Rubin Henderson — America Scores

Build in **time and space** for coach/staff reflection, sharing, and growth opportunities, individually and collectively. Providing a platform for coaches to revisit, reflect, and identify successes and challenges in their performance with youth through mentorship and peer staff supports can foster improvement, trust, and create greater connections to the program. Individual coach journaling or keeping a program *bright ideas book* can ensure successes are not lost. Similarly, sharing reflections with other coaches can introduce successful ideas, solutions, and practices that can be applied elsewhere by others while also building stronger connections across coaches.

**“By having more senior people mentoring younger staff, observations become a function of the organization having career paths.”**

Danielle Pulliam — The Pinkerton Foundation

**“Coaches get a lot of authority without much oversight. Organizations can model coaching and build credibility in program leaders when coaches know they are being watched in a positive way.”**

Lou Bergholz — Edgework Consulting

### **Connect to Peers In + Beyond the Program**

Many industry leaders noted the value of peer-to-peer supports that partner weaker coaches with stronger coaches. Another exercise mentioned by many leaders is providing opportunities for staff to visit and experience other SBYD organizations to learn different approaches and practices. Guest speakers are another common support that allows organizations to provide ongoing development that can be tailored to the current program or coach.





“[The Best Programs] work on fidelity in programs. We need to be more responsible from logic model standpoint... so we can answer ‘How is it that your program works? Did the program do what it was supposed to do?’”

Andrew Macintosh — Rise



# Monitoring + Evaluation

**“Measurement and evaluation are important...if you’re truly looking to have an impact.”**

— Beyond Sport

Industry leaders expressed both the importance of and a general lack of investment in monitoring and evaluation (M+E). M+E is critical for programs to understand, test, improve, and allow organizations to make claims about what works. Three areas of importance emerged:

1. **Cover the Basics**
2. **Build + Develop Capacity**
3. **Address Concerns in SBYD**

## M+E Should Cover The Basics

### Guiding M+E Documents

A good starting point for organizations is to establish/review their Theory of Change (TOC), Logic Models, and Data and Reporting Processes. Ensuring each program has a clear model or road map that defines and outlines the relationships between these organizational documents and an approach to collect data and use the results is critical. Investing in and developing M+E tools and processes can be technical and require research and strategic efforts, but the results can be felt across organizational activities.

**“There is so much in youth development that you can’t control; what you can control is what resources you put in, the quality of your program delivery, and the consistency of that quality. We try to quantify and measure this process to help us iterate, improve, and capture feedback.”**

Mary McVeigh Connor — Soccer Without Borders

**“The best SBYD organizations have a connection between MEL [monitoring, evaluation, and learning] and practice, especially when there is organization-wide awareness and dialogue about current practices - what’s working, what’s not working, and what could be changed to improve the experiences and outcomes for all.”**

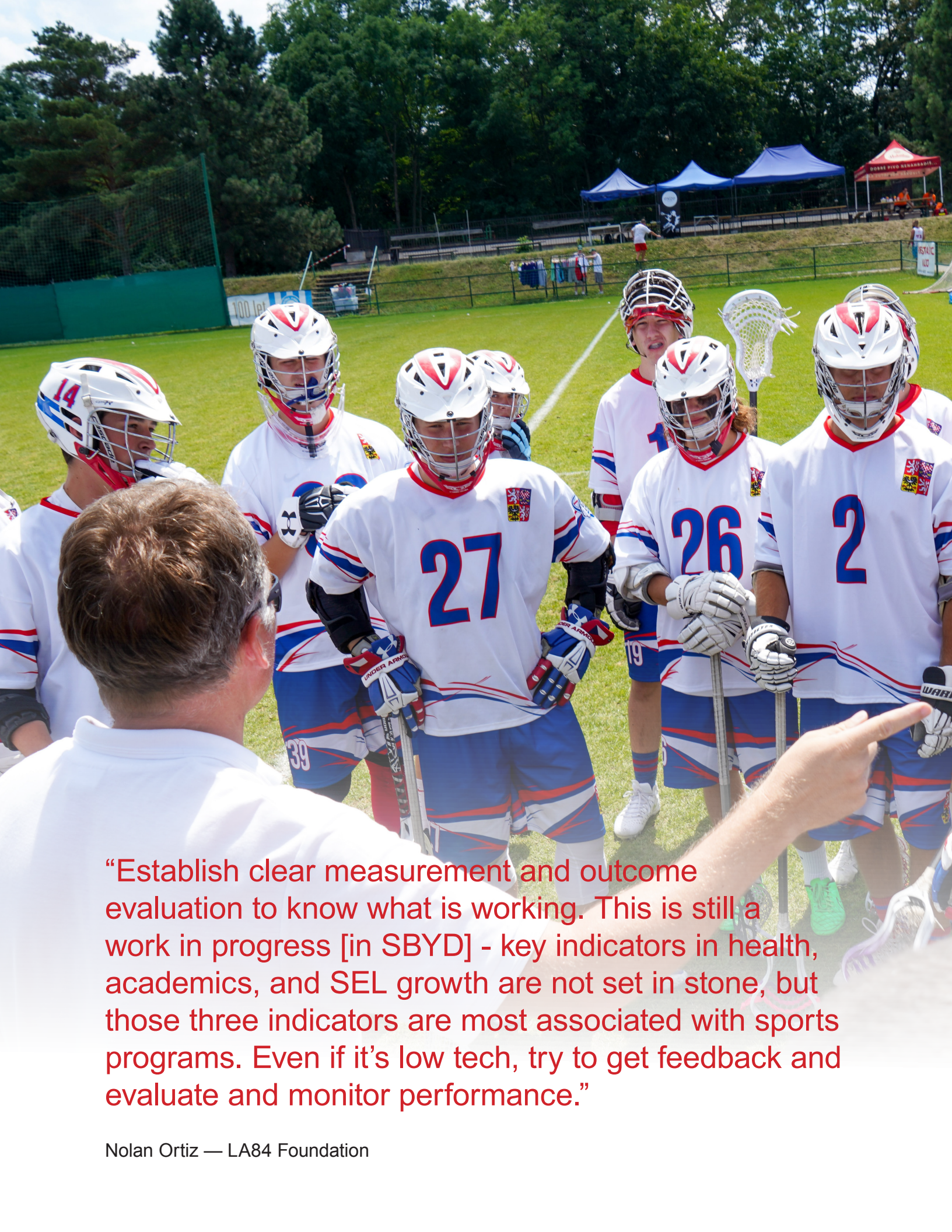
Meredith Whitley — Adelphi University

**Theories of Change and Logic Models** are useful tools for ensuring program clarity, efficiency, outcome-driven program management, and in telling the story to external stakeholders. Thoughtfully linking inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes is an essential step in executing an effective SBYD program. Building a culture that cares about relationships between inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes fosters continual focus on how success occurs through engagement with the program. These documents should be connected directly to the actual work happening on the court/field/etc. and act as drivers for the staff leading and executing the work. If coaches and staff clearly understand the causal connections across the program experience and how their goals connect to these different elements, there is a greater likelihood that the program can achieve its desired outcomes.

We recommend, particularly for organizations with nascent or emerging M+E skills and knowledge, to keep theories of change and logic model simple, with clear connections between elements that present a linear story that is easy to follow and easy to measure.

A theory of change explains how the activities undertaken by an intervention (such as a project, program or policy) contribute to a chain of results that lead to the intended or observed changes/ impacts. Basically it explains who a program works with, what a program does, and the change that the program makes - detailing the causal links between these elements. These can be constructed as complex, often research-based conceptual frameworks, but we often recommend starting with a detailed IF—THEN statement that crystallizes what the program objectives are and how the program helps youth get there. Note that these tools are iterative and flexible, and they should not be considered rigid and immutable (though guidance from skilled experts should be undertaken when possible). [8RES](#) has provided links to additional resources for your consideration.





“Establish clear measurement and outcome evaluation to know what is working. This is still a work in progress [in SBYD] - key indicators in health, academics, and SEL growth are not set in stone, but those three indicators are most associated with sports programs. Even if it’s low tech, try to get feedback and evaluate and monitor performance.”



Developing a **framework for data and reporting processes** should start with the Theory of Change (TOC)/logic model. A solid model, however, is not enough. We present key elements that support strong M+E work (note that many of these elements can be developed concurrently):

#### **Develop Clear Indicators with Definitions**

These measures of progress/accomplishment report the status of key program elements - typically for each prioritized element and key process in the logic model (outcomes, some critical inputs and outputs, and other data connected to program quality).

#### **Identify the Specific Data Needed to Report on the Indicators**

- It is important to match the type of data collected with how the indicator will be reported.
- It is recommended to document the sources for all data.
- This step may also require the listing of several data sources that contribute to the indicator.

#### **Determine + Document how to Measure that Data for Reporting**

- Providing a formula for how a statistic is calculated removes confusion across stakeholders that encounter the result.
- Ensure trust, continuity, and reliability across reporting over time.
- This step may also require the formula that combines several data sources into a single result.

#### **Map out the Frequency of Data Collection and the Ownership Structure**

- Knowing how often information is collected, even specifying specific dates or date ranges, and who is responsible for the information creates accountability.

#### **Define/Establish Targets/Benchmarks for Indicators**

- In order to know what a data/indicator result means, either create internal targets against existing program baseline/trend data or compare against benchmarks from existing literature or standards.
- Cultivating networks with other SBYD organizations to develop collective metrics and sharing agreements, when possible, is a powerful opportunity for collective understanding.

#### **Establish Schedules and Templates for Key Reports and Review Meetings.**

We recommend combining all of the M+E documents (TOC, Logic Models, definitions, processes, calendars, etc.) into a single guide or manual. This tangible resource is useful across organizational departments for training and ongoing use.

#### **M+E Should Build + Develop Capacity**

A working monitoring + evaluation infrastructure is essential for high-performing organizations. There are several approaches to building capacity and laying the groundwork for effective monitoring and evaluation (M+E), rooted in the development and implementation of the guiding documents and processes already mentioned.

**“Even smaller groups that aren’t doing hardcore evaluations still want to know how their program is doing. Even if it’s low tech they try to get feedback and evaluate and monitor their performance; organizationally they are also interested in how they are doing and how to improve.”**

Anne-Marie Jones — LA84 Foundation

#### **Feasibility First**

Before undertaking an M+E journey, identify resources available for the project, in terms of organizational time and needs, staff capacities, and available finances. Given these resources, identify which approach to makes the most sense:

- Hire an internal evaluator.
- Partnering with evaluators, consultants, experts, and researchers who can lead the work or guide the organization through the process/es.
- Utilize existing staff for internally-led capacity building.
  - Retain the use of an experienced evaluator to review documents and processes to provide feedback and recommendations. Costs can prohibit working with dedicated or experienced M+E supports, although pro-bono help is worth looking into.
  - Work with peer organizations/staff that are operating similarly in terms of M+E and partner with them in learning and building guiding documents and key processes.
  - Resources in the appendix can help guide or define key M+E approaches and processes – note that they are general and not sport-specific.

Several industry experts warn against collecting too much data or simply adapting other tools to a different SBYD context and experience. Falling into a data rabbit hole or overcomplicating M+E should be avoided. Any data being collected should be used to understand essential information that helps support the achievement of the program's goals.

**“[Do] not try to measure more than you're ready for. Less is more! ... Identify three outcomes and go get them so you can focus on what you have power over.”**

Lou Bergholz — Edgework Consulting

***A simple rule of thumb is: if you're not meaningfully using the data, don't collect it.***

#### **Build, Review, and Iterate M+E with Staff + Stakeholders**

If possible, utilize staff and stakeholders in M+E. Tailoring M+E to your program and youth can ensure there is trust in what is collected and that reports speak to key stakeholders in a language they understand. Review information with staff/stakeholders throughout the process of developing, implementing, and iterating to increase buy-in, build stronger stories, and develop program improvements that are more likely to matter to those experiencing them.

The process rarely feels linear, so plan for twists and turns. While program structures, tools, and capacities can be built systematically, the nature of M+E is a flexible and adaptive one.

Meetings to review key program data for decision-making and program improvement — as well as revising documents and processes is critical. These data meetings/program review sessions can lead to surprises — organizations have discovered there are not always clear connections between program activities and the desired outcomes. For instance, an organization that plans to improve math state test scores without any academic enrichment or math tutoring activities in their model.

Regular meetings should be conducted to review and adjust M+E processes and findings to better align the mission and goals of the program to the actual work and expectations.

**“SBYD needs to engage critically within the field and commit to continuous growth and learning; you're never at the finished product. Use research and M+E to improve and get that learning not just for funders or as policing tools, but to improve.”**

Ben Sanders — Independent Consultant

#### **General M+E Tips**

Several industry leaders shared their M+E tips and tricks, including:

- Personalize reports for each staff person so that they receive an individualized “baseball card” type report of their own data.
- Create M+E incentives through friendly staff competitions, whereby points are awarded for timely data submissions across program operations (% applications complete, on-time, attendance, surveys completed, etc.) and receive bonus points for any extra professional development or learning.
- Utilize current app technology to support M+E efforts so that staff can enter data on their phones during program activities, easing data entry burdens.
- Build easy to use dashboards that allow for comparisons across teams, programs, and staff.

A recent [article focusing on M+E in SBYD](#) in the Journal for Sport Development highlights many useful tips for practitioners, funders, policymakers, and researchers: Insights on the funding landscape for monitoring, evaluation, and research in sport for development.

## M+E Should Address Concerns In SBYD

A lack of M+E investment described by SBYD industry leaders focused on programs too often being dictated by funders and too few sector-specific standard metrics and studies.

### Funder Directed

An issue that was raised by practitioners and SBYD support leaders was a reality that many programs create their M+E around funder preferences more than their mission/TOC. A concern is that misalignment occurs when cash-strapped organizations accept, along with the much-needed money, outcome expectations that are not necessarily a good fit for their program. This can lead to burdensome and costly efforts by organizations to report information to funders that may not be directly connected to the most important program work.

**“Often a hurdle is many funders require data and info but won’t pay for monitoring and evaluation. This makes it hard for non-profits as we have limited resources.”**

David S. Cohen — Doc Wayne

Funders are typically looking to maximize their impact by supporting powerful programming that fits their priorities.

**“As a funder, I look towards more objective measures of success. High School graduation is no longer a bar, neither is college matriculation. Looking for dosage, leadership, balance, etc.”**

Sammy Politzner — Arbor Brothers

There remain opportunities for greater funder investment in monitoring and evaluation.

**“There’s not enough funding to measure these programs to find out how well they’re are working...we need more funding for outcomes and more collaboration to conduct the research. We need to go to funders and let them know we want research!”**

Paul Caccamo — Up2Us Sports

### Too Few SBYD Metrics and Studies

There are few, if any, SBYD specific standard metrics or benchmarks available to organizations to make sense of their work. There exists a need for more formal evaluations of SBYD outcomes, particularly longitudinal studies.

Standard definitions and methods that clearly identify what and how programs happen as well as how the data are collected would allow for greater understanding across the sector of what is working and what can be improved.

Specific areas lacking in the field are around physical activity and sports-oriented social emotional learning capacities. M+E offers an opportunity to develop, report, and use metrics that are distinct from PYD programs, however, there has been little collaboration or innovation in creating SBYD-specific measures that have been applied broadly across the sector.

While there are tools available to assess these areas, they are often too complicated or time intensive, too internally oriented, or not administered consistently enough to provide reliable information. The SEL tool Hello Insight represents an emerging and promising SBYD tool and 8RES is testing a physical activity app.

**“The day-to-day record keeping is not typically strong enough to support external evaluation. The use of technology to support evaluation or to produce publishable work is not there. It’s also difficult to get monitoring and evaluation funding.”**

Rebekah Roulier, LMHC — Doc Wayne

**“Reliable data and what most of us collect could be more robust. [We need] more rigor, better training, and standardization...there should be common metrics and sharing. Few of us are incentivized to benchmark, but we all collect the basically the same thing. [We need] better alignment between research and sector. They are pretty separate – academia and the operational part of program. By the time studies are published the program is totally different or the report is written in a way that doesn’t resonate with the sector.”**

Matt Mattila — Waves For Change





“Often A Hurdle Is Many Funders Require Data And Info But Won’t Pay For Monitoring And Evaluation. This Makes It Hard For Non-Profits As We Have Limited Resources.”

David S. Cohen — Doc Wayne

# Partnerships + Collaborations

Industry leaders value partnerships and collaborations as an approach to increase the breadth and quality of services that foster greater organizational efficiency and ensure program sustainability.

A major challenge of partnerships is bringing diverse contributions together, however, thoughtful partnerships can increase access to knowledge and people by drawing from a wider pool of experience. This can reduce resources expended by sharing costs, delivery systems, and by avoiding duplication. Achieving greater efficiencies can increase the sustainability of a program.

Partnerships and collaborations tend to focus on:

1. **External Partners**
2. **Internal Connections**

## Partnerships + Collaborations Utilize External Partners

Some organizations utilize external collaborations and expertise to develop or improve programs and organizational functions and capacities. These opportunities for collaboration are evident across the for-profit and non-profit sectors and include shared trainings and the creation of robust referral networks. External partners can include other nonprofits across the nonprofit sector, institutions, and for-profit organizations.

### Equipment, Space, and Event, & Resource Sharing

Equipment sharing is an interesting approach to collaboration for general program supports and to bring programs, that could not otherwise, to greater scale. Whether it is space, jerseys, balls, or nets, the cost of sports can be a prohibitive factor—and partnerships can help to mitigate these challenges.

**“We don’t have the money to get the equipment to let our kids play and this partnership can help knock that off the budget line. Collaborating with other nonprofits – there might be 10 soccer nonprofits doing similar work and they are competing – collaboration would be more effective.”**

Max Levitt — Leveling The Playing Field

Some organizations that own athletic spaces (fields, workout facilities, etc.) allow other SBYD groups to use their facilities or rent them with considerable discounts. Furthermore, when an

organization is growing, leaning on other established and better equipped organizations can support the process.

An interesting partnership opportunity that is more common as a 1:1 with for-profits, but could be applied successfully with several SBYD organizations, is shared events—particularly if they are anchored with a mutually beneficial goal (e.g. uniform drives, fundraisers, same-sport friendly tournaments etc.). These sorts of events can create greater incentives and excitement for donors while minimizing individual organizational investment in development and execution.

SBYD organizations working together can create powerful synergies and efficiencies, whether through one-off projects or larger collectives. Organizations can work in partnership to create, share, and/or administer trainings, curriculum, and other resources.

**“Partnerships helped our methodologies reach 50 other countries – partnerships and sharing. You can’t be everywhere, but you can work with others...sharing curriculum and methodology.”**

Ben Sanders — Independent Consultant

**“At times, it seems like we are all competing for resources and reinventing our own industry independently. In envisioning a stronger future SBYD world, if an organization needs basketball training they would reach out to the expert in that work to gain collective strength and be better together to create more change.”**

Rebekah Roulier, LMHC — Doc Wayne

### Coalitions and Funder Cohorts

Professional associations that create spaces for SBYD organizations to interact, plan, and build the field are emerging. Several funders noted the value of larger collaborations, either through the funding agency or independent of it.

**“VITA set the field off on this path. How do you get this sector recognized? Work within collaborations?”**

Roderick Jenkins — The New York Community Trust

Foundations and other funders with SBYD portfolios we spoke with regularly host or support convenings to share practices and allow opportunities for networking and mutual support.

These are powerful supports to foster collaboration and to evolve the field, however, their very inclusive nature (most typically for portfolio organizations) prevents these events from acting as greater vehicles for growth and mutual support across SBYD more broadly.

While a handful of non-funder driven groups had been mentioned (SportandDev.org as an information resource, the Youth Sports Collaborative Network as a growing SBYD association, VITA Sports was a collaborative workspace), an enduring and essential industry hub known across the SBYD sector has yet to emerge. There is not yet a formal, recognized SBYD Association.

Ongoing and stable collaboration groups remain a compelling opportunity for the field.

#### **Institutions: Government, Religious, Academic**

Institutions offer many valuable opportunities to partner, whether it is as a pipeline for talent, support in critical organizational functions, help in building organizational or program elements/capacities, or working together to achieve similar goals.

SBYD organizations working in tandem with government agencies to alter policies and programs is an exciting area of partnership. A compelling example is the effort to transform the structures of juvenile justice.

**“There are really cool partnerships with juvenile justice centers...Girls in the Game and Chicago Run in Chicago are doing work with detention centers to run programming for youth in the system or have the ultimate goal of offering their program as an alternative sentencing. I’m most familiar with Chicago, but I know that there are other programs across the country that are doing similar work.”**

Ben Schornack — Laureus Foundation USA

Other interesting opportunities involve the use of public space. SBYD organizations have worked with public parks and recreation agencies to develop programs to create safe places and provide access to sports space. In New York City, a

collaboration between the Mayor, the Mayor’s Fund to Advance NYC, the U.S. Soccer Foundation, the New York City Football Club, Etihad Airways, and Adidas created a public-private partnership that builds, maintains, and provides programs on 50 mini soccer pitches in underserved neighborhoods across the five boroughs that includes use for SBYD programs.

Schools and religious centers have proven to be excellent partners for SBYD programs for sharing of space, talent, and novel mission-aligned opportunities, among others. A Sport-Based Youth Development Fellowship connects university students to local SBYD organizations, which cover their tuition over 2 years. Several industry leaders noted the excellent opportunities schools offer SBYD organizations looking for talent.

**“We have strong relationships with local universities, and we see interns from schools all over the country.”**

David S. Conway — Doc Wayne

**“We don’t rely on volunteers from outside the community – we primarily take teachers and staff from school buildings and train them in sport.”**

Bethany Rubin Henderson — America Scores

Funders work with universities and other providers to invest in research and M+E efforts. Many interviewees noted the value that partnerships with universities (and consulting firms – see below) can provide in terms of supporting SBYD testing and improvement.

**“We conducted a study with the University of Michigan around a program we offer. The report came back, and we are making an impact on relationships.”**

Chuck Brady — The Cal Ripken, Sr. Foundation

**“We’ve made pretty big strides working with The New School Trauma and Affective Psychophysiology Lab to develop innovative and cool stuff to track and test.”**

Matt Mattila — Waves For Change

#### **Traditional For-Profit Collaborations**

There is an enormous ecosystem surrounding sports and with it, a multitude of opportunities to explore potential partnerships. While many relationships are oriented around either general



funding support or the specific sport area, there are other meaningful opportunities that can advance both corporate and SBYD missions.

**“Strong partnerships with sports organizations, like Nike, or Sports teams can support funding and help them scale and be sustainable. Cross sector collaboration is important, not just partnering with Boys and Girls club, but think about all levels ... government, corporate, nonprofit.”**

Alisha Greenberg — Rounding Third

We illustrate traditional sport partners through a basketball program example. Here are partners to consider (adapt to local context):

- A professional/college/local basketball league
- A professional basketball team
- A professional basketball player (currently active or retired)
- Basketball stadiums
- Basketball specific companies
  - Shoemakers
  - Basketball equipment and gear makers
  - Basketball memorabilia makers
  - Basketball video game makers
  - Basketball toy makers
- Basketball sports marketing companies
- Basketball skill/training companies

### **Beyond Traditional**

There are likely elements of a program beyond the sport that could identify other potential partners. Many SBYD organizations also incorporate health and wellness, academics, and leadership into their programs. These each represent professional worlds to explore, as there is no shortage of companies focused on different elements of health and wellness, academics, and leadership.

A mapping exercise to walk through the program related actions of the day/week from participant and staff perspectives can reveal interesting possible collaborations – A funder noted an excellent example:

**“Our community work introduced me to a program that has a partnership with a laundromat, and they get clothes (game and practice jerseys) washed at no cost.”**

Jennifer Brown Lerner — The Aspen Institute

### **Partnerships + Collaborations Utilize Internal Connections**

One large organization with many satellite programs utilizes their network of internal sites and teams to work together to inform program offerings and innovations. Similar to the peer supports already discussed, the internal collaboration across organization divisions ensures that multi-disciplinary input shapes their programs. Irrespective of the size of a SBYD program, bringing in perspectives of different staff to generate ideas can produce efficiencies and improvements.

**“Partnership is a huge thing. Where one is less strong, they can utilize the strengths of others.”**

— Beyond Sport

Also creating meaningful opportunities for youth to partner with leadership or families to partner with program leaders can yield exciting projects and improvements to programs.



“We are seeing [SBYD] organizations thinking outside the box about who they should work with.”

— Beyond Sport





# Leadership + Funding

**“Measurement, storytelling, sustainability, and leadership. [There is] almost a lack of knowledge or funding to do these things.”**

Alisha Greenberg — Rounding Third

Industry leaders identified leadership as a critical organizational area requiring attention in SBYD. Many organizations are started by passionate former players, fans, or longtime volunteers. These are not always people who have management training with knowledge or experience in education or social work, thus there exists a steep learning curve around practices that have to be learned. While elements like board governance are critical to running a successful SBYD organization, we found four key takeaways from industry leaders concerning SBYD leadership.

1. **Process + Operational Management**
2. **Sharing the Stage**
3. **Measuring + Communicating Vision**
4. **Managing Fundraising**

## Leaders Are Skilled In Process + Operational Management

Interviewees noted that leaders of successful organizations manage towards process and operational excellence. Organizations that cannot pay bills or staff on time, frequently cancel activities, and provide unplanned programs with untrained staff for youth face a crisis of leadership. Hiring competent staff and ensuring that the basics are covered is ground zero for any leader. Doing fewer things better was another area of process management mentioned again and again.

**“While SBYD is about how to provide and teach positive sports to kids, effective nonprofit management is equally important to a program’s success.”**

Rob Smith — Youth Sports Collaborative Network

The ability of leaders to course correct, notably through the willingness to fire bad coaches/staff and make difficult decisions, was mentioned by several industry leaders as a critical capacity of management.

**“The program director/administrator/manager should be the coach behind the coach to guide and course correct, keep an eye on the system.”**

Lou Bergholz — Edgework Consulting

**“[Leaders need] organizational skills – programming requires a great deal of logistics – to be able to do things in a consistent manner.”**

Andrew Macintosh — Rise

## Leaders Are Skilled In Sharing The Stage

**“People are motivated when they feel competent and have decision-making power.”**

Lindsey Blom — Ball State University

Leaders of SBYD organizations who create a culture where staff and youth are meaningfully involved in conversations was identified by interviewees as evidence of strong leadership. Allowing for many voices to inform an organization’s identity and direction can introduce new ideas and increase engagement.

**“Really strong leaders are connected to and listen to and involve the participants...empower[ing] the youth to make such a difference.”**

Alisha Greenberg — Rounding Third

## Leaders Are Skilled In Measuring + Communicating Mission

Leaders are at the forefront of preventing mission drift. They do this through guiding and supporting an organization towards its goals through investments in measurement and storytelling.

**“[SBYD leaders] need to be better at telling their story and showing numbers that encourage more support for the field.”**

Rob Smith — Youth Sports Collaborative Network



Robust monitoring and evaluation systems and processes alongside communications and development staff that can effectively translate findings into a story need support from leadership with a clear sense of the social good that is being produced. The focus for these efforts is on outcomes that matter to the program improving and succeeding rather than to funders, renown, or growth for growth's sake.

**“Some folks think their story is generalizable enough to meet the needs of all the people they serve and might be unintentionally lazy about the connection to outcomes.”**

Sammy Politziner — Arbor Brothers

## Leaders Are Skilled In Managing Fundraising

A persistent challenge mentioned for SBYD organizations was challenges in terms of funding and resources. Leaders work to ensure that programs have the resources to thrive.

While every organization will have their own alchemy for financial success, here is a checklist for you to see how many different streams an organization utilizes (how creatively they are executed depends on the leader/organization):

### Money in Many Ways. A Nonprofit Funding Stream Checklist

#### Individual Donors

- Major
- Regular
- Crowdfunding (online)
- Peer-to-Peer (online)
- Direct Mail
- Door-to-Door
- Phone Solicitations

#### Government Grants

- Federal
- State
- Local

#### Foundation Grants

- Private + Family
- Public Charity
- Federal
- Community
- Planned Giving

#### Corporate

- Philanthropic
- Event Sponsorship
- Donor Matching
- Cause Marketing
- In-Kind Donations

#### Selling Goods + Services

- Rental (space, equipment)
- Fee for Service
- Sell Trainings + Products
- Branded Gear
- Membership

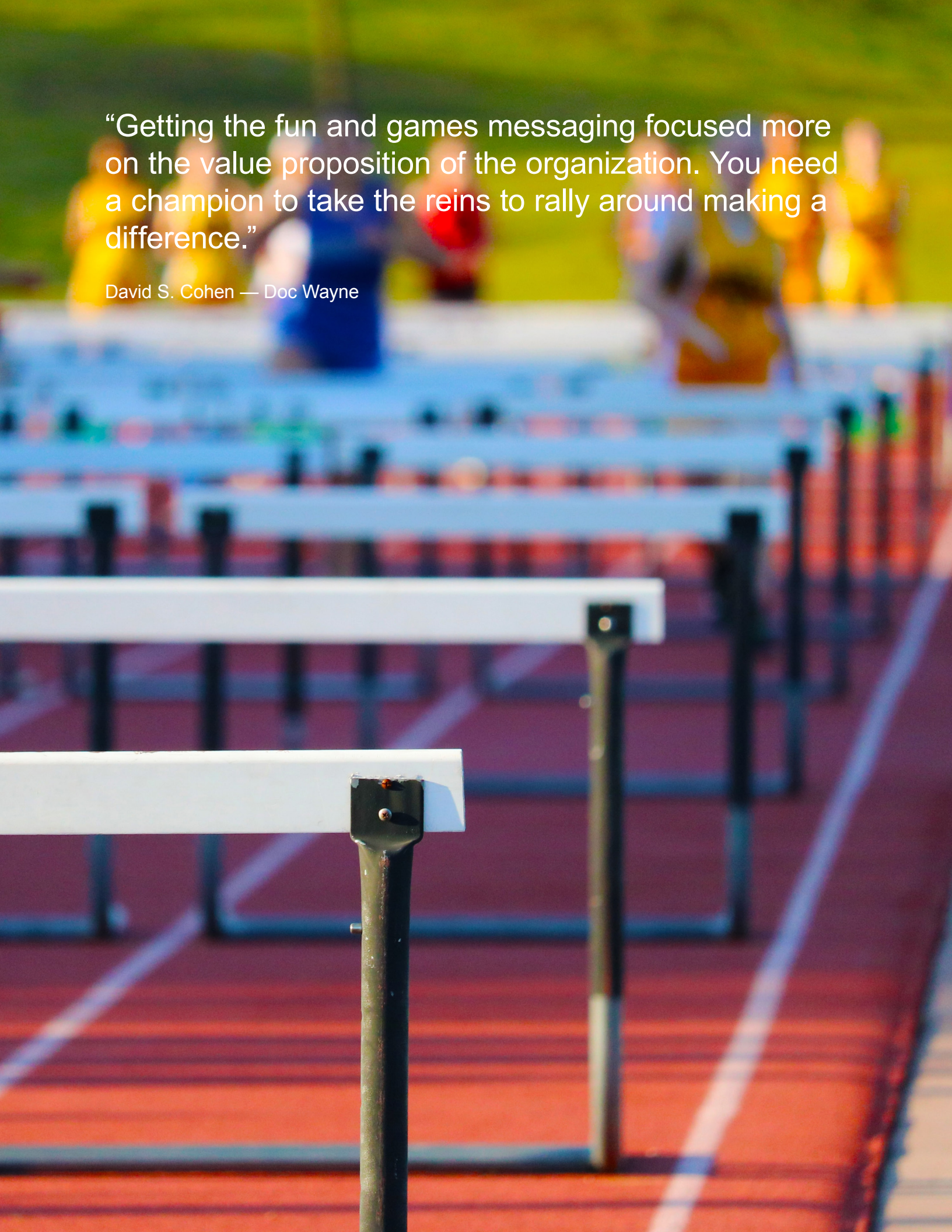
#### Earned Income

- Events: Auctions, Galas, other ticketed experiences

Industry leaders introduced several creative approaches to executing some of the strategies above. For instance, tournaments are a logical event for a program to host. The partnerships already discussed above can include professional athletes or leaders in the specific sporting field, as well as name-brand corporate partners, which can be adapted across funding streams, so that a well-known individual donor might also be included in the execution of an event at the stadium of another partner, or a major donor may provide several checks on the list.

A strong leader would be aware of these approaches and be able to articulate a particular blend of streams that comprises their SBYD organization's funding strategy.





“Getting the fun and games messaging focused more on the value proposition of the organization. You need a champion to take the reins to rally around making a difference.”

David S. Cohen — Doc Wayne

# Looking Forward

INNOVATION  
DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION  
THE FUTURE



# Innovation

There are many innovative practices that exist within the SBYD field. Most industry leaders discussed four areas:

1. **Partnerships**
2. **Multi-lesson Integration Within Sport**
3. **Science + Technology for Improvement**
4. **Youth Power + Other Improvements**

## Innovation Fosters Partnerships

Partnerships within the field and across vastly different sectors offer a multitude of opportunities. The nature of sport programs being coupled with health and wellness introduce broad potential collaborations. Several SBYD-adjacent companies offer promising opportunities, including:

- Health food brands.
- Caterers, Restaurants, + Chefs.
- Juice Bars.
- Gyms, Health Coaches, + Trainers.
- Bloggers, Podcasters, and influencers.
- Yoga studios + Wellness centers/retreats.
- Health + Wellness tech. Or any company within the exploding wellness industry.

Similar to partnerships mentioned previously, engaging with many of these companies may require disciplined discussions concerning brand identity and organizational ethics prior to developing any strategic connections.

**“Connecting SBYD with MyPlate or food health to serve the whole child...so that you’re looking beyond academics in school and also at other barriers (housing authorities, local providers in health spaces).”**

Jennifer Brown Lerner — The Aspen Institute

Other interesting partnership approaches (like the laundromat partnership mentioned in the partnerships section) include:

- Alternative policy options with government agencies.
- E.g., Partnerships between juvenile justice centers and SBYD programs to create alternatives to sentencing.

- Partnering to bridge social mobility gaps and segregation.
- E.g., Inner City Weightlifting brings corporate clients together with formerly incarcerated participant trainers for high quality training + fitness programs.

- Programs can deliberately integrate racially and socio-economically diverse participants.

Public-private partnerships and joint-use agreements.

- These are solutions that bring together and serve the interests of multiple stakeholders, typically around infrastructure or development.

For example, DREAM (formerly Harlem RBI), built a multi-purpose building providing affordable housing, a school, a SBYD program, and community space that was created through a partnership comprised of public, private, and community organizations.

Tailoring the work of specific corporations to a program need.

- A program partnered with United Airlines to fly global participants to a SBYD leadership program in the United States.

Partnering with researchers for programming.

- E.g., Youth work with research experts/sport scientists to explore the mechanics and science behind their program experience.

Deep partnerships blurring school + out of school time distinctions.

- The point at which school ends and SBYD programs begin is becoming harder to locate with many programs that include participant teachers in afterschool programming and coaches and SBYD curricula during the school day.

## Innovation Fosters Multi-Lesson Integration Within Sport

While many strong SBYD organizations are already embedding outcomes within the sport experience, the sophistication and depth with which it occurs is increasing.

The incorporation of behavioral economics, emerging educational practices, and brain-science in SBYD are creating activities that combine several learnings within a single sport activity. Similar to a triple bottom line in business, intentional program planning might include simultaneous attention to social-emotional, life, and sport skills along with knowledge goals within a single session.

A lesson that includes a teamwork goal, a sport knowledge/skill goal, and an individual decision-making goal would be an example. Applying this level of thoughtfulness and complexity to quality SBYD programming is an exciting and challenging component for the field's evolution.

Creating SBYD curricula that integrates sport with other skills leads to more experimentation around what sport looks like, with revised rules, equipment, and player configurations. Programs that seamlessly couple sport experiences with academics or health have the potential to inform/transform other sectors, so that education and health systems adopt sport practices.

This will be unlikely, unless there is more evidence of what works and what doesn't. Applying rigorous science to interventions can validate the benefits and accelerate the advancement of SBYD.

### Science + Technology For Improvement

The areas of trauma-informed programming and SEL, particularly advances in measuring it, were mentioned as key innovations for the field. As these areas continue to be tested and improved, they will likely evolve as cornerstones of SBYD best practices.

Technology provides new and interesting methods to engage, measure, and connect SBYD work. The following were specifically mentioned:

#### Virtual and augmented reality

- Connect youth in experiences regardless of geography.
- Use virtual reality to remediate sport skills for interested beginners.

#### Applying science to program elements

- Trauma informed practices utilize current science.
- Cortisol swabbing to test for stress.

#### Apps for Sport

- Apps to support increased efficiency and quality in data collection and use.
- A multitude of apps exist that promise to remove some managerial/logistic burdens from staff. Examples

include TeamSnap, Wooter, Volt, LeagueApps, SportsEngine, TeamSideline, UpActive/Metrics. Similarly, Hello Insight was noted as a technological solution for SEL measurement.

### Innovation Fosters Youth Power + Other Improvements

#### Meaningful Youth Power + Choice

Innovations noted by funders included radical involvement and leadership of youth, as well as increases in youth choice options. These move far beyond the youth leadership committee that may get to plan an activity or event here and there. Examples of youth power included:

- Youth serving on the SBYD organization Boards.
- Youth completely running nonprofit SBYD programs.
- Youth co-construction of a program's scope and sequence, with active decision-making involvement throughout the program design process.

An example of an innovative approach to increasing youth choice, which also gets at the issue of SBYD programs not typically allowing for sport-sampling, is the development of programs with large menus of programming. The program offerings may not be through a single organization, but through a collective SBYD "class pass" where a coordinated partnership structure creates more opportunities for youth and shared resources.

#### Open Access Resource Sharing + Novel Funding Streams

Open access resource sharing, whereby organizations publicly share their curricula, practice plans, culture strategies, M+E processes, and other internal documentation, presents the opportunity to introduce greater sharing within the field and to support the acceleration of knowledge and improvement.

Novel funding streams were mentioned, which included examples like the following (among others):

- SBYD funding partnerships – e.g. building a coalition with other SBYD organizations to apply for grants in partnership.
- Direct payment — e.g. online donation platforms or charging modest fees for participation.
- Organizations operating other businesses (a hotel was mentioned) to fund programs.
- Hosting for-profit sports to support non-profit work.



“It’s amazing to think about young people using their bodies and being strong and having fun and being part of a team. There are so many terrible things in the country and world, but this is a space of joy and strength and positivity.”

Amanda Kraus — USRowing





# Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

2020 was a year of reckoning. Social justice took center stage, and activism became a part of more and more people's lives, and in the workplace it often oriented around diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). There are many areas in which SBYD organizations can engage in DEI, including staffing, operations, policies, programs, performance evaluations, and culture. The SBYD commitment to DEI, broadly, eschews lip service and token actions in order to focus on meaningful organizational change through impactful, systemic efforts. We highlight common and promising DEI practices and activities including:

1. **Understand the Organizational DEI Landscape**
2. **Representation**
3. **Talent Processes**
4. **Embedded DEI Accountability**
5. **Organizational Culture**

## DEI Areas for Engagement Understanding the Organizational DEI Landscape

A good place to start is conducting an organizational DEI audit/assessment that captures the cultural and operational climate, highlighting DEI strengths and opportunities. This step can build awareness of the status and types of diversity within the organization and the context in which DEI is experienced by individuals, teams, and the organization. If launching a separate DEI audit/survey is not feasible, incorporate questions into your existing staff survey. The results can help identify priority areas for DEI investments and establish organizational baselines for DEI efforts. The process can also reveal motivations, barriers, and existing pain points that could impact program and policy initiatives.

### Develop Formal DEI Strategy/Vision/Statement

Creating formal DEI statements/policies that are published on the nonprofit's website, in the employee handbook, or otherwise shared publicly is a common method for SBYD organizations to demonstrate their commitment to DEI. Note that DEI statements written on a page are not authentic until they are demonstrated by an organization's actions. There are many resources that organizations can use to support their DEI strategies and statements: [crafting DEI statements](#), [DEI statement examples](#), [developing organizational DEI](#), [DEI toolkit](#) and [practical tips](#).

Also, DEI committees can be created, both for discrete projects

and as enduring features of an organization. These groups can manage and hold organizational DEI strategies to account and provide greater commitment to efforts. A good place to start is reviewing [best practices in starting DEI committees](#).

### Conduct DEI Workshops

Workshops designed to challenge and empower staff to create openness, build collective solutions, and acknowledge and begin to remove barriers to meaningful social change are common. Sessions can include:

- Identifying Knowledge Norms – developing and aligning around DEI definitions/terms
- Internal Dictionary or Guidebook - Many organizations find that it's helpful to explore terms and definitions. In addition to fostering conversations about how staff individually interpret and experience discrimination, defining terms can align how staff collectively make sense of key DEI terms.

-There are many glossaries for social justice and DEI terms. A Google search for "DEI Glossary" will quickly reveal a multitude of resources.

Creating a safe space where people feel vulnerable sharing is important to facilitate long-lasting trust and organizational change. The collaborative creation of a contingency plan/guidebook with insights gained from the DEI audit outlining how to respond when people make themselves vulnerable can be a useful tool in an organization's SBYD journey.

- Analyzing Power and Privilege – conduct activities and conversations exploring power and privilege across individual, institutional, linguistic, and cultural domains/experiences.
- Recognizing Bias - internalized, organizational, systemic - a recent [HBR article](#) provides some insight and practical tips.
- DEI Action Planning – how to develop anti-racist practices in your work.

We provide a small sampling of DEI workshop resources.

- Non Profit Learning Lab provides many [free workshop resources](#).
- Free online DEI workshops: [Coursera's Diversity and](#)

[inclusion in the workplace](#), edX's [Inclusive Leadership Training](#) and Microsoft's [Unconscious Bias eLesson](#).

- A few notable paid DEI training providers: [Undoing Racism](#), [Center for Safety and Change](#), [Anti-Racist Alliance](#).

There is a growing trend of organizations moving from compliance-driven, monolithic “sensitivity” trainings to ongoing and interactive skills-building training programs. These are characterized by refreshing manager trainings or onboarding programs to include DEI values and mapping inclusive leadership competencies directly into their learning and development programs.

### DEI Areas for Engagement Representation

Representation of the population the SBYD organization serves being reflected in staff was a common refrain among stakeholders and across the literature. Avoiding tokenistic and astroturfed optics delivers a message that funders, staff, participants, and communities can trust. Representation is important across external communications and all staffing levels but is particularly critical to have in visible decision-makers and leaders. Gaps exist in leadership-level staff diversity, particularly among the most senior executive staff. This racial leadership gap exists across the nonprofit sector and within afterschool organizations.

- If a SBYD organization lacks diversity but is seeking greater representation, be up front about deficiencies rather than ignoring the obvious truth. Address the issue head on through a simple, direct statement.

### DEI Areas for Engagement Talent Processes

Recruiting, hiring, and supporting talent should reflect and create norms and act as levers for organization-wide change. Centering DEI within systems and practices related to staff recruiting, hiring, and promotion can ensure bias is reduced. Examining employee development practices and embedding supports and ongoing training can promote, maintain, and retain a diverse, high achieving staff. Talent processes can create norms and shape an organization's culture.

Invest in building and retaining a diverse staff. We review some best practices in recruiting, hiring, promotion, and providing ongoing support.

#### Recruiting

Language is a good start for recruiting efforts. Acknowledging and embracing diversity, which can be embedded in recruiting practices. Intentionally including DEI language in postings, job descriptions, and using inclusive forms of communication can integrate an organization's DEI values seamlessly into potential candidates' initial interactions.

For example, utilize inclusive language in job descriptions by avoiding the bias of gender-coded words and complicated terminology. Instead, focus on what a candidate gains by becoming part of the team (paternal leave, flexible hours, remote work, sick leave and mental health supports). Proofing tools (such as Ongig's Text Analyzer) or web crawler software (such as Entelo.) can help identify words or phrases that may subconsciously discourage candidates of certain backgrounds from applying to the job.

Widening the pool is another recruiting practice to consider. When an organization is hiring for an open position, it often selects candidates based on a particular set of qualifications and processes. While helpful, there is a chance to miss a strong candidate that has less experience or a different degree. In addition to downplaying expectations around credentials, geography is another area where opportunities exist, particularly where remote work is possible. It's important to look beyond the typical networks and channels when looking for new talent. If your organization uses the same search consultant or websites for all hiring, consider hiring a firm from a different market or accessing new websites/apps to tap into new pools of talent.

#### Hiring

Blind resume reviews - removing unnecessary information from resumes and CVs can help to avoid discrimination and make the hiring process more efficient. Removing information about applicants' gender, educational institutions, and nationality. Avoid tech solutions that utilize AI or promises efficiency through electronic selection technology - these are:

- Include Diverse Voices - It's also best if the hiring

team is diverse and consists of people from different backgrounds. Incorporating and empowering multiple stakeholders, including participants, direct service staff, and community members in the process (especially interview panels and debriefs) can ensure that there is a greater likelihood that every candidate has an equal chance of being hired.

- **Utilize Pre-Hire/Pre-employment Tests and Assessments** - Pre-employment tests are objective, standardized ways to screen and gather information on candidates during the hiring process that can be more useful, and less biased, than resume reviews. Typically focusing on skills, personality, and aptitude, they often include: Job knowledge tests, Integrity tests, Cognitive ability tests, Personality tests, Emotional intelligence tests, Skills assessment tests, Physical ability tests.
- **Interview Protocol** - Interviews should utilize non-personal questions and follow a structured protocol. Good interview questions are designed to help find the most suitable candidate for a position by allowing every potential worker to demonstrate their abilities.

It's best to use gender-neutral questions and ask about personal experience. While there are many biases to pay attention to, there are several that are particularly useful for Talent staff to pay attention to during recruitment and hiring processes:

- **Affinity bias**  
When hiring staff share similarities with a candidate, they may focus on the personal more than skills or experiences. Avoid candidates who share similar or likable traits to the hiring staff, but do not have the actual qualities or skills required for success in the role through group discussions with diverse stakeholders.
- **Confirmation Bias**  
Sometimes when hiring staff likes a candidate they may overlook challenges and issues and, instead focus on areas that confirm or support their preferences. Asking skill-based questions is key. Questions that talk about the candidate's characteristics and knowledge help each interviewee to stand out.
- **Negative Emphasis / Beauty Bias**  
Judging a candidate negatively or positively on personal, irrelevant features, like height, weight, hairstyle

- **Attribution Bias**  
Judging or drawing conclusions too quickly can end up in discrimination. If a candidate is late or nervous, it's better to ask questions to clarify the situation instead of assuming they have no work ethic.
- **Halo/Horn Effect**  
When a single perceived positive impression or a single perceived bad quality colors the whole perception of a candidate. Using a rubric to gauge qualities across domains and multiple areas can help to mitigate these biases.
- **Conformity Bias**  
Collecting personal opinions of every recruiter is an excellent way to avoid conformity. Each member of the recruiting team needs to have a chance to express their point of view.

### **Promotion**

Audit compensation data and compare across staff demographics. Examine whether there are trends or relationships between specific groups and starting salaries, promotion timelines, salary increases, and performance against promotion.

Another increasingly important practice is creating transparency across titles, roles, and salaries. Standardized levels and pathways are a strong approach for SBYD organizations to ensure promotions are minimizing bias. There are several resources that can support the development of organizational role/salary amounts / tiers / bands, including Guidestar, Nonprofit New York, PNP, and the MIT Living Wage Calculator, among others.

### **Ongoing Support**

Ongoing support is also explored in the Staffing + Training section. Building and maintaining a pipeline of a diverse, high-performing team requires investment in supporting and developing staff. Applying a DEI lens to ongoing professional support can ensure fairness in access to on-the-job learning and key assignments and selection for training or leadership experiences. We highlight practices to support diverse staff.

Coaching, Mentoring, and Sponsoring - Provide access to leaders that can support and guide the careers of diverse staff.



Unconscious bias or systems of power can prevent equitable access to resources and leaders who help navigate towards growth experiences and provide support during inevitable challenges. The role of manager as a natural mentor is critical, as they can ensure all their direct reports are heard, provided with useful feedback and support, and offered opportunities.

Employee Resource Groups or Affinity Groups - Formally providing space for historically marginalized employees to build community and contribute to workplace change can be a powerful support. In addition to peer supports, these groups can contribute to/support talent processes, organizational culture building, and extend supports beyond the organization.

-Consider paying particular attention to the leaders of these groups - as burnout and retention challenges from the additional uncompensated work can take a toll. Compensation to the leaders of the groups could go a long way in creating robust groups, preventing burnout, and in doing the right thing, paying for additional work.

Also ensure that supervisors of group leaders understand the importance of the work and are not penalizing team members for their investments. Rather, they could encourage and support leaders in seeking self-care resources and load management.

Here are a handful of readings to begin exploring DEI and Talent further:

- Chun, E., & Evans, A. (2013). *The New Talent Acquisition Frontier: Integrating HR and Diversity Strategy in the Private and Public Sectors and Higher Education*. Stylus Publishing, LLC.
- Cross, R., Oakes, K., & Cross, C. (2021). Cultivating an Inclusive Culture Through Personal Networks. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 62(4), 33-37.
- Daubner-Siva, D. (2021). It's not Either/or, It's Both-And: The Paradox Between Exclusive Talent Management and Inclusive Diversity Management. In *The Routledge Companion to Talent Management* (pp. 253-264). Routledge.
- Frost, S., & Kalman, D. (2016). *Inclusive talent management: how business can thrive in an age of diversity*. Kogan Page Publishers.
- Gallardo-Gallardo, E., & Collings, D. G. (2021). *Talent Management for the Future of Work*. In *New Directions in*

the Future of Work. Emerald Publishing Limited.

- Hunt, V., Layton, D., & Prince, S. (2015). *Diversity Matters*. McKinsey & Company, 1(1), 15-29.
- Hunt, V., Prince, S., Dixon-Fyle, S., & Dolan, K. (2020). *Diversity wins*. McKinsey.
- Rakesh, A., & Chandran, N. (2021). The Promise of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in 2021 and Beyond. *NHRD Network Journal*, 14(3), 314-316.

### DEI Areas for Engagement Embedded DEI Accountability

Connect DEI to goals and objectives. Accountability to DEI should be observed through a commitment across operational and programmatic functions that formally embed racial equity into systems and processes. Two promising approaches include (1) regular and transparent reviews/evaluations of DEI efforts and results and (2) Integrating DEI into individual goals/performance management processes.

DEI strategies or plans, and achieving their objectives, should be owned by executive leadership. Invest in systems and processes to support and measure DEI success. Creating specific evaluation criteria around DEI creates accountability and action beyond just lip service. Similarly, Executive leaders and the Board should be accountable to DEI strategies. Nonprofit leaders must target real, specific and tangible outcomes in order to see real progress in their organization's DEI initiatives. Ensure every major DEI initiative has an executive sponsor.

Building a budget line for DEI efforts is another strong organizational practice for sustainable, meaningful investment in the work. While there are no established benchmarks around DEI in SBYD, organizations can consider reviewing and adapting the following: [Handbook on Diversity and Inclusion Indices](#).

## DEI Areas for Engagement Organizational Culture

SBYD organizations can examine the practices and policies that create the structures for how work gets done; consider unspoken norms, scheduling, networking opportunities, and work arrangements.

Build Time for Honest Feedback and Staff Voice - Encourage honest sharing of everyday experiences. Provide regular reminders that language is important and celebrating successes like recognition of employee values that address diversity and inclusion can build a supportive culture. Proactively soliciting employees' feedback will go a long way toward modeling inclusion while also improving operations. Reviewing the work across departments with a DEI lens can reveal opportunities for improvement - for instance, procurement processes on contracts that are awarded to minority- and women-owned businesses.

Meetings - Another area that is promising is in meetings. There is an approach called progressive stack that reduces historic bias in organization by actively creating a list of speaker volunteers and those with less privilege or more intersecting identities were offered the chance to speak first. The "stack" is the list of names being recorded and adjusted. Another strategy for meetings is to appoint an "inclusion advocate"—a person with permission to note if a person's comment has been ignored or to make sure everyone is given time to speak.

### Programmatic

We review program elements (like cultural responsiveness) in the Curriculum section of the report. It's important to highlight that SBYD program staff can intentionally embed DEI in youth engagement and programming by tailoring programming to integrate equity.

1. cultivation of youth leadership so that youth voice is present and given authority at all levels of planning and execution of programming,
2. engaging young people from diverse backgrounds in youth advisory councils, and
3. creating various opportunities for youth from diverse backgrounds to mentor others.

## DEI Resources

[Overcoming Racial Equity Fatigue](#)

Bridgespan's [How to Integrate Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion into Everyday Operations](#)

[National Council of Nonprofits, DEI Resources](#)

Resources from [Nonprofit Leadership Center](#)

[RISE](#) provides resources including a Glossary, Videos, digital modules, and discussion plans.

[The Chronicle of Philanthropy](#)

[Free DEI books from Candid](#)

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in the Nonprofit Sector- [Essential Resources for Nonprofit Professionals](#)

[Annie E. Casey Foundation](#)

Free PDF from Western Michigan University: [Bias Free Hiring](#) - Quick Reference Guide

Platts, C. (September 16, 2020). Hiring bias: 16 types of bias (and how to prevent them). [Thrive Map](#).

[Test Gorilla](#),

Pedulla, D. (2020). Making the cut: Hiring decisions, bias, and the consequences of nonstandard, mismatched, and precarious employment. Princeton University Press.

Bogen, M. (2019). All the ways hiring algorithms can introduce bias. *Harvard Business Review*, 6, 2019.

Cappelli, P. (2019). Your approach to hiring is all wrong. *Harvard Business Review*, 97(3), 48-58.





Collective Responsibility

Communication

Everyone wears a mask and social distances.

You have notes for a classroom when they are in your desk to tell if they are sick and you add every time.

Your friend texts you and shares a meme with you that they find funny.

NEW HEIGHTS NYC  
NEW HEIGHTS CHECK-IN 11/20 - 11/21

- SIGN-IN ON THE ATTENDANCE SHEET.
- ON ONE INDEX CARD WRITE ONE FACT ABOUT YOU THAT YOU DON'T THINK ANYONE ELSE WILL KNOW.
- DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME ON IT (Others will try to guess who the fact is about later!).
- WRITE UP TO TWO TO THREE FACTS - EACH FACT ON A NEW INDEX CARD!



# The Future

Industry leaders were asked to peer into their crystal ball and predict the future of SBYD. Three main themes emerged concerning the possibilities of SBYD:

1. **Professionalization + Standardization**
2. **SBYD as Part of the Solution to Big Problems**
3. **Increased Innovation**

## The Future Holds SBYD Professionalization + Standardization

**“There is a lot of program diversity in the SBYD community and most SBYD nonprofits are unaware what other nonprofits are offering, what’s working and what’s not. It’s part of the reason I am trying to put this association network together -- so they can learn from each other.”**

Rob Smith — Youth Sports Collaborative Network

SBYD leaders shared that professionalization is key to the field’s future. While there is no single professionalization recipe, the following were elements that were shared as key to the legitimization of SBYD as a distinct field.

**Standardization of Terms, Best Practices, and Outcomes.**  
Currently any program including sport can label themselves as a SBYD organization, irrespective of the nature of the work occurring with youth. For example, all programs focusing on social emotional learning likely do not share the same terms for capacities/competencies, definitions, or outcomes to be easily compared across different programs/organizations. By whom, when, and where the standard terms, definitions, and processes will coalesce remains unclear, however standardization will be a first step in the creation of a unified SBYD field.

A strong, centralized SBYD-specific association that can regularly bring together key stakeholders (practitioners, funders, researchers, consultants, etc.) will go a long way towards increasing the professionalism and standardization of the field, including the language and metrics that guide it.

**Increased Evidence of SBYD Benefits, Values, Outcomes.**  
Alongside standard language for practices, is the importance of testing and documenting SBYD outcomes. Rigorous testing to demonstrate the long term SBYD value against counterfactuals

is hard to come by. Even within individual organizations there is scant sophistication in evaluation to make a strong case for impact. Growth in the volume, quality, and replication of public testing and reporting of SBYD organizations will help make a strong case for the field as well as provide baselines of quality and accountability.

One specific future practice that was mentioned was audits for annual reports, conducted similarly to current accounting/financial audits that provide partners and donors an approach for meaningful comparison. Similarly, a centralized SBYD clearinghouse with organization and sector information and results was mentioned as a valuable resource and case-statement for the field.

### SBYD Career Pathways

Creating formal career pathways that are explicitly and uniquely linked to SBYD program roles would help to clarify and define what the field offers professionals. The emergence of “Sport Curriculum Integrators” and “Life+Sport Movement Managers” (or your preferred future SBYD title) that are indispensable to the operation of a quality SBYD program could provide a career map for talented prospects.

Three universities offer formal sports-based youth development courses of study.<sup>93</sup>

- The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
- The University of Connecticut
- Adelphi University

These programs are evidence of emerging professional legitimization by offering formal, credentialed training in SBYD.

There are informal career pathways that offer connections to the field and support in developing SBYD skills and competencies. Completion of trainings, which can range from single sessions to more involved sequenced curricula, are the most prevalent. More structured trainings are harder to come by, however a small group of organizations like Up2Us, NAYS, and the Positive Coaching Alliance offer programs.

Other experiences, while limited, that exist for SBYD practitioners are professional convenings and membership opportunities. The current avenues for presenting, networking,

and learning is more or less through education, OST, PYD, and sport conferences. A legitimate SBYD future will provide options for staff to connect with myriad SBYD professional groups, literature, and conferences.

### The Future Holds SBYD As Part Of The Solution To Societal Problems

There are no shortages of societal problems, and industry leaders make a compelling case for SBYD being well positioned to contribute to the solutions for many: Poverty. Obesity. Mental health. Racism. Equity and inclusion. Educational disparity. Loss of community.

SBYD can offer communities, regions, nations, and the globe an adaptable and popular format in which interventions can be embedded. While the degree to which SBYD would be integrated into institutions like the education system, the health system, or the justice system has yet to be realized, there remains the undeniable power of sport and a belief in its ability to support growth, healing, and improvement.

The methods mentioned that could contribute to SBYD becoming a lever that is utilized across broad societal improvement programs include:

1. Institutional Adoption of Practices in Education, Health, and Justice.
2. Increased Government Involvement in the Field through Policy.
3. Increased Connections between SBYD and the Broader Sports World:
  - Increased partnerships with professional sports teams and leagues
  - Integration into competitive amateur sports
4. The Development of SBYD as a Tool and Bridge for Work:
  - Building teams + leadership

**“We must all embrace systems thinking, recognizing that youth experiences and outcomes in SBYD programs are multi-dimensional, with individual, family, community, and environmental determinants grounded within an ecological framework.”**

Meredith Whitley — Adelphi University

### The Future Holds Increased Innovation

The innovations mentioned in the previous section, particularly those focused around SEL, trauma, and technology and program design, are likely to become areas of increased investment and growth.

COVID-19 accelerated trends that were already emerging and shifted the mindsets of how relational work can happen on and off the court. Technology will continue to reinvent and define the world SBYD programs live in, and they will invariably adapt and modify their work to better serve youth.

# Appendix:

## SBYD Resources

### Free Sports Equipment

Leveling the Playing Field puts used sports equipment in the hands of those who need it so every kid gets a chance to play: <http://www.levelingthefield.org/>

Good Sports gives all kids the lifelong benefits of sport and physical activity by providing new equipment, apparel and footwear to those most in need: <https://www.goodsports.org/>

### Space Issues

Shared use agreements—also known as joint use agreements, memoranda of understanding, and contracts — allow public and private property owners to broaden access to their underutilized facilities for community use.

Change Lab Solutions has Joint Use Agreement Resources: <https://www.changelabsolutions.org/product/model-joint-use-agreement-resources>

### Parent Checklists by Age Group

The Aspen Institute's Project Play provides parent checklists for kids ages 0-5, kids ages 6-12 who play sports, and kids ages 6-12 not playing sports: <https://www.aspenprojectplay.org/projectplayparentchecklists>

### SBYD HR Screening Resources

NAYS provides Sports Screening Background Screening Guidelines: <https://www.nays.org/default/assets/File/NAYS%20Background%20Screening%20in%20Youth%20Sports%202019.pdf>

### Coach Training + Support

How to Coach Kids from the United States Olympic Committee, Nike, and the Aspen Institute's Project Play: <https://www.howtocoachkids.org>

Up2Us provides coach training, certification, and other coaching resources: [up2us.org](http://up2us.org)

The Positive Coaching Alliance - also has resources that can be filtered by category: [positivecoach.org](http://positivecoach.org)

Aspen's Project Play Call for Coaches Resources including a coach checklist: [Calls For Coaches](http://callsforcoaches.org)

NAYS provides resources for coaches as well as program logistics/administration: [nays.org/resources](http://nays.org/resources)

Doc Wayne provides the Champions Network, a virtual training portal for coaches, clinicians and teachers to use sport to improve mental health for all: [docwayne.org/our-curriculum/](http://docwayne.org/our-curriculum/)

### SBYD Program Resources:

The Aspen Institute's Project Play has many resources for SBYD organizations: [aspenprojectplay.org](http://aspenprojectplay.org)

Sportanddev.org is an international resource with a multitude of information: [sportanddev.org/en](http://sportanddev.org/en)

The Youth Sports Collaborative Network sends a free newsletter focused on SBYD: YSCN SBYD NEWSLETTER Link: <https://www.youthsportscollaborative.org/yscn-update>

### Monitoring + Evaluations Resources

Better Evaluation: [https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/start\\_here](https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/start_here)

Evaluation Toolkit from the Pell Institute: <http://toolkit.pellinstitute.org/evaluation-101/>

W.K. Kellogg Foundation Evaluation Resources: <https://www.wkkf.org/resource-directory/resource/2006/02/wk-kellogg-foundation-logic-model-development-guide>

Two free books that provide helpful tips in performance management and outcome management: <https://leapofreason.org/get-the-books/>



American Evaluation Association: [eval.org](http://eval.org)

Barca Foundation and Unicef recently published [Playing the Game](#): A framework and toolkit for successful child focused sport for development programmes that includes several useful approaches and practices with illustrative case studies.

### Activities and Exercises

We provide a list of select activities that can be used to energize, connect, and have fun at the beginning, during, or at the conclusion of programming. Please note that this list includes those that can occur in-person or virtual.

Additional activities and exercises are available here: ACTIVITIES and here is a resource with a multitude of conversation prompts: [conversationstartersworld.com](http://www.conversationstartersworld.com)  
<http://www.8res.org/resources/activities/>

### 20/21 Questions

Someone volunteers or a youth is randomly chosen to be the first person to answer the 21 questions. One person thinks of something, and everyone else has 20 yes or no questions to try to guess what it is. If someone guesses correctly before the 20th question, that person is the winner and goes next. If no one figures it out, the person answering has won and goes again. The group can choose whether follow questions to their answers count towards the total. Optional - the youth can pass on two questions. To choose the next person to answer the 21 questions there are several options. The person who just finished answering the questions can nominate the next person, a person can volunteer, or a random person can be chosen.

### Never Have I Ever

Everyone holds up 5 fingers and takes turns naming something they haven't done ("Never have I ever mowed a lawn", "Never have I ever been to Wyoming"). Whoever folds all their fingers first loses.

### Superlatives

Take turns coming up with real and imagined high school superlatives like "Most likely to succeed" "Most likely to fall in love with a rock star" "Most likely to grow up and become a dolphin trainer" and everyone in the car must point to the person who the title fits most closely.

### Would You Rather?

Ask youth questions with a choice between two options – with a moment to decide with their hands down or behind-their back. After a moment count to three and each reveals their selection and can see similarities and differences with the group. Either discuss or keep going. Questions: <https://www.signupgenius.com/groups/would-you-rather.cfm>

### Categories

This can be good for reviewing previous topics. Facilitator calls out a category and students must identify relevant items that fit. These could include Sports gear, rules of the game, examples of a social emotional skill, or more general categories like the parts of the body, foods, musical instruments, sports.

### Catch

Youth ask another student a question around a theme introduced by the facilitator – they "catch" it by answering it and get to throw a question to another, different student in the group. Continue until all youth have responded to a question. Tongue Twisters. Simple but effective way of practicing pronunciation. Provide a single or several tongue twisters and have youth say them. Here is a site with many examples: <https://www.bkacontent.com/25-tongue-twisters-every-family-needs/>

### Did You Hear?

A facilitator or youth volunteer try to fool the others in the group. They start by asking, "Did you hear that \_\_\_\_\_ happened?" Another youth can either say, "That didn't happen," or, "Tell me more." If they guess correctly they get the mic and try to fool others – the goal is to see how many others/how long one youth can fool others.

### Fortunately/Unfortunately

This game allows all youth to provide alternating perspectives for a situation. One youth starts by saying "Fortunately" and mentioning something fortunate, the next youth has to follow by saying something unfortunate about the previous situation. Move through the group switching between fortunate and unfortunate situations. This game can end with everyone speaking once or as an elimination game, where if somebody stumbles, they get a strike - three strikes, they are out until there is only one youth left.

### **The Counting Game**

See how high the group can collectively count without any order. A random youth begins with the number one, then another youth follows at random with the next number. If two youth say the same number at the same time, you start over. If there is more than a five-second pause, you start over. The goal is to get to the number 20 Synonyms and Antonyms// Rhyme Time. Pick a word. Each youth must provide a synonym or antonym for the selected word – which can be something related to a program theme/goal. This activity can also substitute synonyms/antonyms for words that rhyme with the original.

### **Gossip on the Bus or Once Upon A Time**

Tell youth that they are all passengers on a bus. They are to take turns to speak, building on what the previous person has said, to create a piece of made up gossip. (Note that this is to be made up, and not to use the names of others). Or begin a story with the classic Once Upon a Time and go from there. Take a volunteer after each youth has contributed to try to retell the gossip. It's nice to have youth stop mid-sentence.

### **Cheesy Pizza!**

A good fun way to encourage youth to think of questions. One youth is in the hot seat. Others must ask questions, but the youth being questioned may only reply with the answer “cheesy pizza.” They cannot laugh, smile, or give a different reply. When the student laughs / smiles, or after two minutes have elapsed, a different youth takes the hot seat and a different answer word chosen. This generally leads to really creative questions, to laugh at the answer they know they will receive.

### **What is the question?**

Youth create answers and peers must up with the correct questions. This can be as basic or advanced as the level or preference of the group. The questions can be any question, as long as they are sensible questions which would elicit the given answer.

Examples: 14 years old (How old are you?); 6am (What time did you wake up?); Doctor (What do you want to be when you are older? Sausage and Black Olives (What are your favorite pizza toppings?), etc.

### **Rapid-fire Q+A**

Particularly good with teenage youth. Allow youth to ask facilitator any question (within reason!) and answer quickly. Be sure to provide plausible answers. This can also be applied for youth volunteers. The structure can be altered by preference (maximum number of questions, only questions within a topic, popcorn approach, etc.).

### **The Longest Smile**

Everyone in the group smiles his or her biggest, cheesiest smile at one another; and facilitator starts laughing. Waving is allowed – see how long it takes until the group is all laughing together. A variation is If You Love Me Baby Smile: Everyone sits in a circle, and one youth goes up another youth and tries to make them smile by saying, “if you love me baby, smile” without touching the person at all. They may make funny faces or movements. The recipient tries not smile or laugh and replies, “I love you baby, but I just can’t smile”. And if the person succeeds, the person they made smile moves on, and if they lose, they have to go to another person.

### **Superhero/Movie Star/etc.**

Any variation that asks youth what superhero they would be or who should be cast to play youth in a movie

### **Celebrity**

One youth selects and plays the character of a famous person and answers questions as if they were that person. Whoever guesses correctly first wins.

### **Where Were You**

Write a different year on slips of paper and mix/put into a vessel. Youth pull one out and describe something they were doing/“where they were” that year. If there is a year prior to memory, share something (real or imagined) from the year.

### **Bad Movie Plot**

A youth or facilitator thinks of a movie and then explains the plot in a way that is both factual but also terrible. Inspiration: #ExplainaFilmPlotBadly. The other youth have to guess. If they guess correctly, they get a point. If they don't, the speaker gets a point.





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