

PROJECT PLAY

SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN



playbook



Project Play: Southeast Michigan

We envision a community in which children are more active through sports, play, and recreation regardless of race, income, ZIP code, or ability. Project Play: Southeast Michigan is driven and funded by the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation's Youth Sports & Recreation focus area, in partnership with the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan and the Aspen Institute Sports & Society Program. Project Play serves seven counties in the region: Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, Washtenaw, St. Clair, Monroe, and Livingston.

The following Playbook outlines Project Play's three-year (2022-2024) sports, play, and recreation strategy.



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**“Fun, innovative
play spaces
encourage kids to
step into their own
imagination and use
creativity and play
to embrace the joy
of being a kid.”**



Huddle Up!

*In *The Power of Play: A Pediatric Role in Enhancing Development in Young Children*, the American Academy of Pediatrics notes that there is growing consensus that play is “an activity that is intrinsically motivated, entails active engagement and results in joyful discovery.”*

Through play, children test boundaries, experiment, and learn to take risks.¹

Through play, children progress from dependence to independence, and learn crucial 21st-century skills such as problem-solving, collaboration, and creativity.

Through play, we know that children learn best when they are actively engaged and the content is meaningful, socially interactive, and fun.



Project Play: Playbook

Simply put, for Project Play: Southeast Michigan, hearing jubilant sounds and unbridled squeals from children in motion lets us know that **Irresistible Play** is in progress.

Despite the well-documented benefits of play, under-resourced schools and communities offer fewer opportunities for daily access to recess, physical education, and low-cost in-town recreation leagues. As a result, physical activity levels for many children in the region fall well below the Center for Disease Control's recommendation of one hour of free play per day. In addition, children with disabilities often do not have enough affordable programming to support physical activity. Girls are dropping out of sports at two times the rate of boys. And for economically challenged families, competing pressures make it harder for parents not only to find time to play with their children; they also have less access to safe, quality public spaces and recreational facilities.

The global health crisis has magnified the systemic barriers and cultural shifts that jeopardize children's participation in high-quality youth sports, play, and recreation. Although we are still navigating the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 virus, some findings suggest that children raised in low-income households or who are ethnic or racial minorities may be at particular risk for exercising less and sitting more because of the pandemic.²

At Project Play, we envision a community where every child has equitable access to play regardless of their ZIP code or the circumstances of their birth.

From 2017 – 2021, the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation has generously supported Project Play and our collective belief that all children should receive a daily one-hour dose of **Vitamin P** – the necessary ingredient for long-term physical, social-emotional, and cognitive health.

The Foundation's financial and leadership commitments have bolstered youth sports and recreation community engagement opportunities and resources, expanded the reach of traditional and nontraditional sports, and widely distributed play and recreation equipment. Through philanthropy, we are building momentum toward a more just youth sports, play, and recreation ecosystem by addressing systemic issues behind disparate access to quality play.

Project Play: Playbook

The following Playbook outlines Project Play's three-year (2022-2024) sports, play, and recreation strategy. Working alongside community partners and stakeholders who tirelessly touch the lives of children and families through sports, we are building a bold post-pandemic agenda grounded in an equitable approach to the Aspen Institute's 8 Plays and the 8 Children's Bill of Rights in Sports.³

While honoring and celebrating the diversity of our region, Project Play will pursue four goals over the next three years:

1

Build a movement comprised of youth sports, play, and recreation stakeholders (The Coalition) to advance positive youth sports development in southeast Michigan.

2

Expand access to a variety of sports, play, and recreation opportunities that are nearby, affordable, and widely available by leveraging The Coalition's offerings for children aged 5-13.

3

Facilitate high-quality engagement for children aged 5-13 participating in sports, play, and recreation by emphasizing variety, safety, and developmentally sound experiences.

4

Strengthen the organizational capacity of The Coalition through programs, initiatives, and trainings that sustain positive youth sports development in southeast Michigan.

We stand at a critical moment for prioritizing healthy children and healthy communities. Southeast Michigan is our home and we are all on the same team. We look forward to building a brighter tomorrow.

In play,



Alana M. Glass
Director, Project Play: Southeast Michigan

The 8 Plays

In the *Sport for All, Play for Life* report, the Aspen Institute’s Project Play identified eight strategies (“plays”) that stakeholders can use to get and keep more children playing sports.

<p>PLAY 1 Ask Kids What They Want</p>	<p>PLAY 2 Reintroduce Free Play</p>
<p>PLAY 3 Encourage Sport Sampling</p>	<p>PLAY 4 Revitalize In-town Leagues</p>
<p>PLAY 5 Think Small</p>	<p>PLAY 6 Design for Development</p>
<p>PLAY 7 Train All Coaches</p>	<p>PLAY 8 Emphasize Prevention</p>

Children’s Bill of Rights in Sports

Developed by the Aspen Institute through its Project Play initiative, the Children’s Bill of Rights in Sports identifies eight rights:

- 1. To play sports.** Organizations should make every effort to accommodate children’s interests to participate, and to help them play with peers from diverse backgrounds.
- 2. To safe and healthy environments.** Children have the right to play in settings free from all forms of abuse (physical, emotional, sexual), hazing, violence, and neglect.
- 3. To qualified program leaders.** Children have the right to play under the care of coaches and other adults who pass background checks and are trained in key competencies.
- 4. To developmentally appropriate play.** Children have a right to play at a level commensurate with their physical, mental and emotional maturity, and their emerging athletic ability. They should be treated as young people first, athletes second.
- 5. To share in the planning and delivery of their activities.** Children have the right to share their viewpoints with coaches and for their insights to be incorporated into activities.
- 6. To an equal opportunity for personal growth.** Programs should invest equally in all child athletes, free of discrimination based on any personal or family characteristic.
- 7. To be treated with dignity.** Children have the right to participate in environments that promote the values of sportsmanship, of respect for opponents, officials, and the game.
- 8. To enjoy themselves.** Children have the right to participate in activities they consider fun, and which foster the development of friendships and social bonds.

**“Public spaces
are the sandbox
for thriving,
collaborative
communities.”**

- ADVANCING MACOMB



Home Plate: Organization Background

The Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan is a full-service philanthropic organization leading the way to positive change in the region. As a permanent community endowment built by gifts from thousands of individuals and organizations, the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan supports a wide variety of activities benefiting education, arts and culture, health, human services, community development, and civic affairs. Since its inception, the Foundation has distributed more than \$1 billion through nearly 66,000 grants to nonprofit organizations throughout Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, Monroe, Washtenaw, St. Clair, and Livingston counties.



Project Play: Playbook

In 2016, the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan and the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation formed a partnership aimed at improving opportunities for youth in southeast Michigan. The following year, both foundations – joined by the Aspen Institute Sports & Society Program (Aspen Institute) – released a comprehensive scan of youth sports in the seven-county region of southeast Michigan. Called “State of Play,” the scan looked at barriers that exist to “building communities in which all children have the opportunity to be active in sports.” The report noted that there are over one million youth living in the southeast Michigan region, but only 13 percent of the region’s young people get one hour of daily physical activity as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. By gender, this equates to 11 percent of girls and 15 percent of boys.

By September 2017, the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan and the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation announced a continued three-year partnership. They formed Project Play: Southeast Michigan (Project Play) to share and apply the State of Play framework in the region to identify, shape, and move forward key initiatives that can help create systemwide change and access for youth.

Sports sampling and free play emerged as Project Play’s key initiatives in 2019. Through the support of the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation, Project Play launched a year-round equipment sharing pilot project called SportPort.

SportPort benefits children aged 5–13 in 15 communities throughout southeast Michigan. Participants can access more than 5,000 pieces of equipment, experience over 45 traditional/nontraditional sports and play activities, and develop or re-energize their love of play and teamwork. All equipment and programming are offered at no cost to participants through mobile and stationary sites in the community.

In March 2020, COVID-19 hit Michigan and Project Play faced a new challenge: keeping children and families active in the middle of a global health crisis. Because of the pandemic, many youth sports leagues, practices, and competitions were canceled. What’s more, the model behind SportPort – borrowing sports equipment in the same way one would borrow library books – was difficult to sustain during a pandemic.

Project Play: Playbook

In response, Project Play developed take-home Play Kits that included basketballs, soccer balls, sidewalk chalk, and other equipment, to encourage at-home recreation. Thanks to corporate financial supporters and generous donations by the Detroit Pistons, Detroit Lions, Detroit Football Club, Playworks Michigan, Detroit Tigers, and Detroit Red Wings, nearly 12,000 kits were distributed in the region in just four weeks. A second phase of the project — supported by ESPN and the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation — helped distribute an additional 12,000-plus kits.



Looking ahead, Project Play's primary goal is to harness the energy and enthusiasm of community-based organizations and other key stakeholders in the region to elevate **sports-based youth development** as a movement that functions as a catalyst for positive change. We recognize that sports, play, and recreation, when done well, are uniquely positioned to help children learn and grow.⁴

Through a collective impact framework, Project Play seeks to connect and strengthen southeast Michigan's youth sports, play, and recreation community, and to empower leaders to use sports-based youth development to advance quality participation for youth aged 5-13. We believe in an ecosystem where youth have equitable access to high-quality sports, play, and recreation programs that contribute to their overall physical, social-emotional, and cognitive development, with the ultimate goal of enhancing the quality of life in southeast Michigan through play.

**“Recreation is
the enrichment
that creates
healthy
communities.”**

- HAZEL PARK RECREATION DEPARTMENT



Scouting Report: Situational Analysis

Givens: A summary of the facts and external forces/factors Project Play is working to address

The Market's Potential

From any number of perspectives, southeast Michigan is one of the most diverse regions in the United States.⁵ It covers broad swatches of rural, suburban, and urban neighborhoods. The region is also home to both affluent and low-income neighborhoods. Half of the state's population lives in metro Detroit, which is home to families of many ethnicities – African-American, Arab-American/Middle Eastern, Native American, Hispanic/Latino, whites, and many others. The region is also home to 17 Fortune 500 corporations, world-class universities, and professional sports teams in four of the major sports leagues.

The region features more than 2,300 riverfront and inland parks covering 214,000 acres. Throughout the region, parks and recreation opportunities are accessible within a 10-minute drive of nearly every household.

The Market's Challenges and Needs

- According to the 2020 U.S. Census data, 1.034M youth (ages 0-17) live in southeast Michigan (Washtenaw 68,325; Macomb 180,015; St. Clair 32,908; Oakland 260,994; Livingston 41,558; Wayne 417,045; Monroe 32,801). Thirteen percent of these youth live in households with annual incomes below the federal poverty level, and this number increases significantly in several of the region's largest cities: Detroit 30.8%; Pontiac 27.6%; Ann Arbor 17.7%.
- Five percent of youth in southeast Michigan have a disability and require assistance to participate in sports.
- While 89% of households in the region have access to a park within a 10-minute bike ride, more significant gaps exist for both walking and transit access, with approximately 42% of households within a 10-minute trip.
- On a regional scale, southeast Michigan parks have more playgrounds than any other amenity, but access for key travel times is relatively low. Living within a 10-minute walk is a common benchmark for community assets like playgrounds, but that is only possible for 28% of southeast Michigan households.
- As noted in the *2017 State of Play Report: Southeast Michigan*, overall, few children in the region are getting the one hour of play per day recommended by the CDC: 15% of boys, 11% of girls; 14% of Black children, 12% of White children, 8% of Hispanic children.

The Southeast Michigan Youth-Serving Sports, Play, and Recreation Community

While more than 2,000 sports facilities and over 34 sports are offered in the region, youth sports, play, and recreation programs are under-utilized as a solution for youth and community development in the larger social impact ecosystem. Disparities in financial resources compound the issue, resulting in limited access to quality programs for those with limited financial resources and limited choices for those in low-resourced communities. Many youth sports and recreation organizations are under-resourced and could serve more children more effectively with additional funding, training, programming, and equipment.

Select Barriers to Sports, Play, and Recreation Engagement

- **Reduction in Funding for Physical Education Programming:** Deficits and constraints in school districts have resulted in the reduction or elimination of physical education and sports programming. In response, many sports programs have been eliminated or reinstated with user fees, which create participation barriers for low-income families.
- **Safety and Transportation:** For many students, a longer distance between home and school prevents high-quality and consistent engagement in after-school activities, including sports.
- **Increased Privatization of Youth Sports:** Privatization has resulted in reduced access for low-income families and reduced choices in under-resourced communities.
- **'No Time to Be a Child':** Black and Hispanic girls are more likely than white girls and their male counterparts to shoulder caregiving responsibilities at home.⁶
- **Too Few Role Models:** When women coach youth sports, they serve as much needed role models for girls, not only inspiring them to play – but to keep playing, and stay physically active throughout their lives.⁷
- **COVID-19 Pandemic:** The pandemic brought known health and income disparities to the forefront and disproportionately impacted traditionally underserved communities. We have yet to understand the long-term impact on children's physical and mental well-being resulting from the closing of schools and recreational facilities, limits on the size of gatherings (even outdoors), and financial pressures on families, governments, and youth sports and recreation organizations.
- **Regional Diversity:** The incredible diversity within the region results in a wide range of barriers preventing children from engaging in sports, play, and recreational activity. As we strive to leverage commonalities, we must do so in a way that respects the customs and norms within individual communities.

Guiding Assumptions: A summary of the beliefs and parameters guiding Project Play's work

- Long-term impact and success will require collaboration across a broad coalition of community 'players': nonprofits, corporations, municipalities (i.e., legislators, parks and recreation departments, school districts), colleges/universities, professional sports teams, coaches, parents, and children (with a focus on 5-13-year-olds).

While collaborations exist across the region, there is an opportunity – and, more critically, a willingness – to better serve children and families in southeast Michigan through increased collaboration among sports-based youth-serving organizations.

- Activating, elevating, and aligning youth sports and recreation organizations around the 8 Plays and 8 Children's Bill of Rights will be central to maximizing individual and collective impact aspirations across the region.



This work is systems change work, requiring us to:

- Build the case for the importance of play
- Engage local voices and local organizations
- Embrace an iterative approach: learning and adapting as our goals, strategies, programming, and partnerships evolve, and
- Ensure the sustainability of our collective efforts through advocacy and capacity-building (generating awareness, fundraising, ensuring quality coaching, prioritizing social/emotional development, etc.).

Target Population and Benefits

- Youth-serving organizations offering sports, play, and recreation programs are Project Play's primary partners. These organizations include, but are not limited to, community-based grassroots associations, youth sports and recreation providers, sports-based youth development programs, school districts, and local governments/parks and recreation departments. Children (aged 5-13) and families are the primary beneficiaries of the collective work.
- Social-emotional learning, physical health, and cognitive benefits are central to our mission and critical to achieving our desired long-term impact; sports, play, and recreation are the delivery mechanisms.
- We will leverage existing research, tools, materials, and programming to drive efficiency and impact.

“For children with special needs, play and exercise are critical to their physical and mental well-being.”

- TEAM GUTS



The Game Plan: North Star, Mission, Values, Theory of Change, Goals, Strategic Framework

The work of Project Play: Southeast Michigan is grounded in the body of research which has emerged over the past decade and has established the myriad of benefits of physical activity: greater cognitive function, positive mental health, better educational outcomes, and lower health care costs in adulthood. A virtual cycle of positive and lasting impact gets unleashed, especially if children can be engaged in regular sports activity before the age of 12, and if they wait until age 12 or older to specialize in one sport.⁸



North Star

Children in southeast Michigan are more active through sports, play, and recreation regardless of race, income, ZIP code or ability.

Mission

To dramatically enhance the capacity of youth sports and recreation organizations in southeast Michigan to provide equitable, accessible, high-quality sports-based youth development programs to children in every community.

Universal Values

- Actions embrace the region's rich diversity and are relevant to children and families living in all seven counties of southeast Michigan.
- Short-term investments show movement toward impact and sustainability.
- Initiatives help identify, develop, and utilize best practices.
- Youth voices are embedded throughout the work.

Project Play: Southeast Michigan Theory of Change

North Star

Children are more active through sports, play, and recreation regardless of race, income, ZIP code, or ability

Goals

1

Build a movement to advance positive youth sports development.

2

Expand access to a variety of sports, play, and recreation opportunities that are nearby, affordable, and widely available.

3

Facilitate high-quality engagement in youth sports, play, and recreation by emphasizing variety, safety, and developmentally sound experiences.

4

Strengthen the organizational capacity of youth sports and recreation providers through programs, initiatives, and trainings that sustain positive youth development.

Strategies

- Build awareness of the importance and long-term benefits of sports, free play, and recreation.
- Promote and invest in programs aligned with the 8 Plays and 8 Children's Bill of Rights in Sports.
- Create a diverse, broad-based, multi-county, cross-sector coalition to create lasting change.
- Leverage the experience and knowledge of local organizations and the resources and support of the Aspen Institute, the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation, and the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan to drive progress by integrating and elevating individual efforts.

Short-Term Outcomes

- Growing awareness of the importance and long-term benefits of sports, free play, and recreation.
- Growing application of the 8 Plays, and support for and internalization of the 8 Children's Bill of Rights in Sports.
- An increased number of coaches exposed to and embracing the 8 Children's Bill of Rights in Sports and the importance of social-emotional learning.
- More places for a variety of sports, free play, and recreation activities within easy walking/biking distance.

Long-Term Outcomes

- More children are active in sports and free play recreation (for one hour per day).
- More children have a foundation of life-long social-emotional skills.
- Increased public demand for quality youth sports and recreation programming aligned with 8 Plays and the 8 Children's Bill of Rights in Sports.
- Improved alignment and collaboration between youth sports, play, and recreation organizations (e.g., supporting each other's work, sharing best practices, collectively advocating for policy changes).

Impact Areas



Health
& Well-Being



Educational
Outcomes



Employment
Preparedness &
Opportunities



Community Strength
& Viability

Strategic Framework

GOAL 1

Build a movement comprised of youth sports, play, and recreation stakeholders (The Coalition) to advance positive youth sports development in southeast Michigan, grounded in the 8 Plays and the 8 Children’s Bill of Rights.

STRATEGIES

- Drive systems change within the youth sports, play, and recreation ecosystem with an appreciation of the diversity of the people and counties of the southeast Michigan region.
- Identify common needs among stakeholders and align efforts to partner.
- Identify gaps within the region and opportunities to fill them.

POTENTIAL ACTIVITIES

- Building upon past community surveys conducted during the State of Play regionwide scan, Project Play will resurvey the region to comprehensively map the sports, play, and recreation ecosystem and identify stakeholders.
- Develop a vision for, and engage regional partners in, creating a youth sports, play, and recreation coalition using collective impact as the framework. Socialize and optimize the vision through local market visits and conversations with stakeholders.
- Create a Partnership Team to guide Project Play’s collective impact initiative through cross-sector partnerships that engage the public, as well as private and philanthropic institutions.
- Host 2-3 forums for youth sports and recreation organizations featuring impactful content to build awareness, drive interest, and begin building a database of youth sports and recreation organizations and sports-based youth development programs.
- Deepen engagement with the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation’s Built to Play grantees, Legacy Fund grantees, and other youth sports and recreation-related grantees; establish Communities of Practice (learning communities).
- Pilot regional working groups for addressing high-priority issues and opportunities to further 8 Plays/8 Rights.
- Create compelling messaging that underscores the importance and benefits of sports, play, and recreation, and celebrates local success. Introduce storytelling as part of the 8 Plays/8 Rights, Project Play activities, in local events, and among stakeholders (e.g. The Coalition, Built to Play, and Legacy Fund grantees).
- Identify high-priority advocacy opportunities for permanently embedding youth sports, play, and recreation in the region.

INTENDED OUTCOMES

- A closer-knit and more aligned sports, play, and recreation community focused on the long-term physical and social-emotional development of youth within southeast Michigan.
 - Increased impact within the region resulting from collective efforts and focus.
-

GOAL 2

Expand access to a variety of sports, play, and recreation opportunities that are nearby, affordable, and widely available by leveraging The Coalition’s offerings for children aged 5-13.

STRATEGIES

- Increase equitable usage of shared facilities, public spaces, and programming.
- Continue to support the creation of sustainable play spaces.
- Expand efforts for equipment distribution and access.
- Remove financial barriers to participation.

POTENTIAL ACTIVITIES

- Increase knowledge of, and support for, the activation of public spaces by youth sports and recreation organizations. Support the creation of tools and resources dedicated to accessing and activating existing parks, outdoor learning environments, and play spaces (including schools); develop a resource with easily accessible information on parks and play spaces.
- Provide the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation’s Built to Play initiative and other public spaces efforts with guidance on areas of opportunity for new spaces within the region.
- Expand access to, and awareness of, Legacy Fund and Built to Play grants focused on 8 Plays/8 Rights.
- SportPort: Continue to support grantees to ensure availability of sports and play equipment, and evaluate future expansion opportunities.
- Create messaging promoting 8 Plays; continue to support The Coalition’s efforts to remove barriers to participation and increase the affordability of youth sports, play, and recreation.
- Engage with existing after-school advocacy networks.
- Create and implement a mechanism for evaluating access across and within the region.
- Leverage the data to identify the greatest areas of need and focus for upcoming work/programs, including broader Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation efforts.

INTENDED OUTCOMES

- Facilities and play spaces that are operating closer to capacity for all Coalition partners, but especially those located in historically underfunded communities.
 - Increased participation in sports, play, and recreation programming by beneficiaries of all Coalition partners, but especially those located in historically underfunded communities.
-

GOAL 3

Facilitate high-quality engagement for children aged 5–13 in sports, play, and recreation by emphasizing variety, safety, and developmentally sound experiences.

STRATEGIES

- Encourage sports sampling and exposure to new and nontraditional activities.
- Elevate the focus on positive youth development within the youth sports coaching community.
- Close the gap between parent/guardian’s interest and child participation.
- Support mechanisms that encourage youth voice – *Ask Kids What They Want*.

POTENTIAL ACTIVITIES

- With an eye toward sustainable models, pilot new programs and continue to support existing programs through Legacy Fund and Built to Play grantees, members of The Coalition, and professional sports teams.
- Establish a framework to evaluate Legacy Fund grantees’ alignment to 8 Plays/8 Rights across the region (e.g. plays, county, number of youth served).
- Build the case for the importance of positive youth development within coaching, and begin sharing with youth sports and recreation organizations. Compile and share resources and information on SafeSport and concussion protocols.
- Develop and package a regional coaches training program grounded in social-emotional learning diversity, equity, and inclusion that supports qualified and educated coaches. On an ongoing basis, collect and share a list of ‘best-in-class’ coaches training across the region.
- Engage with community-based youth-led initiatives that uplift the voices of youth in sports, play, and recreation. (e.g. Generator Z, Youth Advisory Council and Urban Neighborhood Initiatives).
- Working in alignment with the Michigan Taskforce on Women in Sports, leverage the 50th anniversary of Title IX to engage youth sports and recreation organizations in addressing barriers to sports participation for girls, and recruiting/retaining women in youth sports coaching. Potential activities include developing events in collaboration with grassroots youth sports organizations like Girls on the Run and PAL.
- Pilot or inspire programs that support year-round physical activity, especially those that result in increased exposure to new and different activities, as well as nontraditional sports.

INTENDED OUTCOMES

- Create and support developmentally sound sports, play, and recreational environments in which children thrive.
-

GOAL 4

Strengthen the organizational capacity of The Coalition through programs, initiatives, and trainings that sustain positive youth sports development in southeast Michigan.

STRATEGIES

- Work closely with youth sports and recreation organizations to ensure consistent development and delivery of high-quality programming.
- Strengthen leadership capabilities within The Coalition.
- Advocate for technical assistance programming and resourcing at a scale commensurate with community needs.

POTENTIAL ACTIVITIES

- Engage an evaluator to help establish metrics for measuring impact, and ensure collective efforts are aligned.
- Survey The Coalition to understand the region's greatest sustainability needs.
- Establish a micro-grant program to support capacity-building and encourage engagement in the work of The Coalition.
- Leverage the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation's efforts to advance southeast Michigan's nonprofit talent pipeline.
- Engage the youth sports and recreation organizations, professional sports teams, and funders within the network to identify key opportunities and barriers to overcome to drive maximum impact.
- Invest in capacity-building by creating a digital Knowledge Center that offers technical assistance for youth sports and recreation organizations, and offers opportunities for sharing and developing best practices, resources, and ideas; training and learning programs; and evaluation methods. Possible partners include Co.act Detroit, the Youth Development Resource Center, the Michigan AfterSchool Association, the Michigan Nonprofit Association, and Michigan Community Resources.
- Update Project Play's website and digital presence to best serve the market's needs.

INTENDED OUTCOMES

- Nonprofits focused on sports, play, and recreation are healthy, nimble, connected, and sustainable.
 - Knowledge is leveraged to advance and sustain impact beyond the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation's sunset period.
 - Play and physical activity are widely recognized within the youth sports culture as critical social-emotional learning tools for youth development, rather than emphasizing competitive play and early specialization.
-

**“Connection and
teamwork build
confident and
resilient girls.”**

- GIRLS ON THE RUN SOUTHEASTERN MICHIGAN



The Roster:

Coalition of Youth Sports and Recreation Organizations, Regional Partners, and National Thought Leaders and Funders

Project Play is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion through our mission and values, and by bringing together diverse stakeholders who reflect the community we serve. We also recognize that colleagues like the YMCA, the Boys & Girls Club of Southeastern Michigan, the Police Athletic League, and many other grassroots youth-serving organizations have operated in the sports, play, and recreation space for decades. Their work has been meaningful and impactful, and continues to drive permanent positive change in our region.

Project Play: Playbook

The work we see for Project Play is **connectivity** – serving as backbone support and bringing together the various stakeholders to support what drives our work: ensuring that the youth of southeast Michigan have **equitable access to high-quality sports, play, and recreation programs that contribute to their overall physical, social-emotional, and cognitive development**, with the ultimate goal of enhancing the quality of life in southeast Michigan through play.

The creation of a multi-county, cross-sector coalition is central to Project Play's work. Together, The Coalition, convened and supported by Project Play:

1. Supports the fulfillment of the 8 Plays/8 Rights,
2. Drives impact by identifying best practices,
3. Shares resources, funding opportunities, and trainings,
4. Develops a common voice, sets community standards, and create systems change,
5. Captures data used to measure success, and
6. Fosters mutually reinforcing actions by member organizations.

The Coalition includes the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation's Built to Play grantees, Legacy Fund grantees, and regionwide youth sports and recreation organizations. By connecting youth-serving organizations and eliminating silos across the youth sports, play, and recreation ecosystem participants will engage in facilitated discussions grounded in improving program quality, advancing youth sports culture change, and building organizational capacity. As Project Play progresses, a community of practice and working groups will also evolve by either gradually winding down or adopting new functions.

Youth Sports, Play, and Recreation Ecosystem

Catalysts: The Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation, Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan, and other philanthropic funders, regional and national thought leaders, The Aspen Institute Sports & Society Program, and other national sports-based youth development organizations.

Convener: Project Play: Southeast Michigan

Amplifiers: Regional and local media outlets, corporations, minor and major league professional sports teams, and colleges and universities.

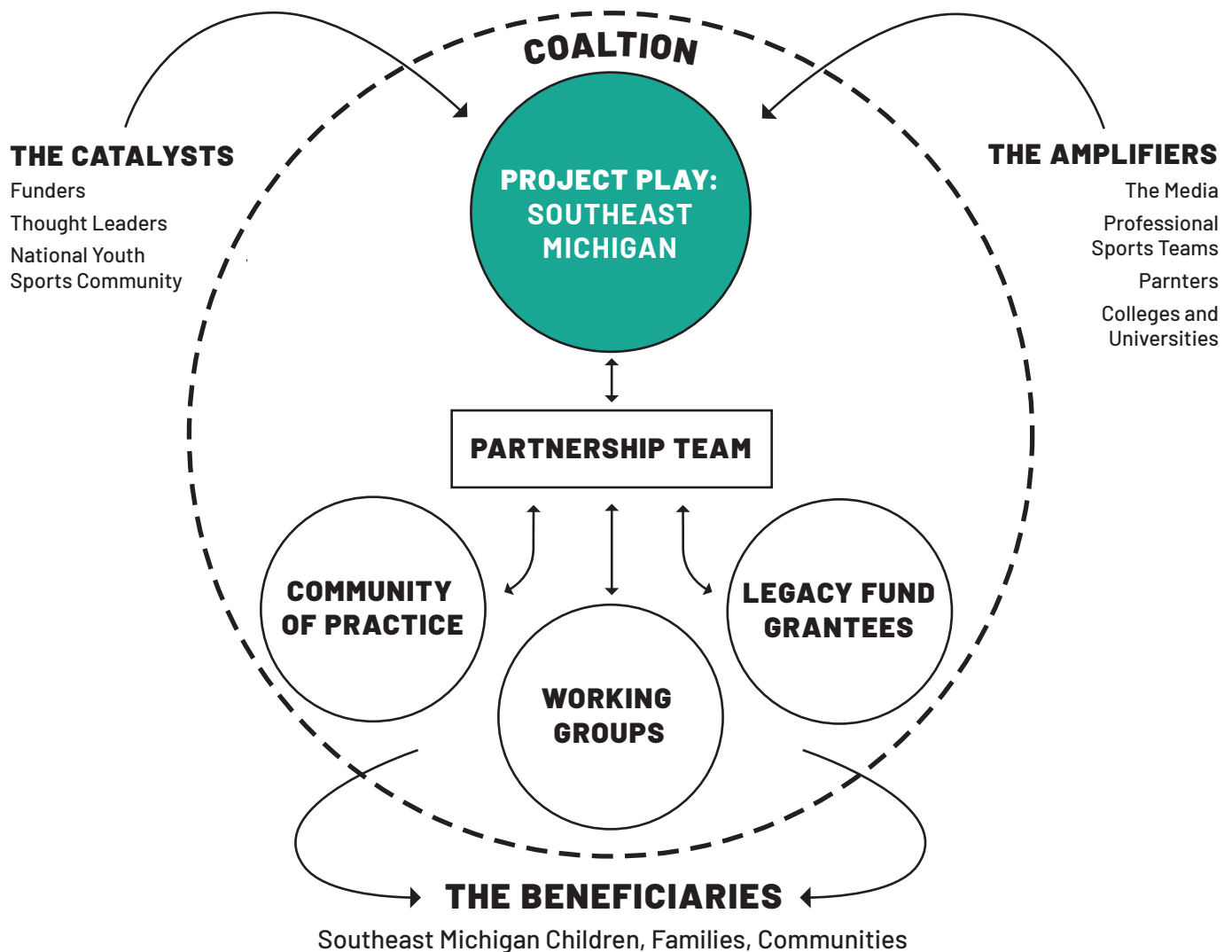
Partnership Team: Diverse leaders throughout southeast Michigan who serve in impactful roles within youth sports and recreation organizations, sport-based youth development organizations, or after-school programs. This hyper-localized team of community stakeholders will guide the implementation and direction of Project Play's three-year goals and strategies. Partnership Team advisors are compensated for their participation.

Project Play Coalition: A collaborative of nonprofit and community-based youth sports and recreation organizations, sports-based youth development programs, school districts, and local government/city agencies (parks & recreation, etc.) representing a full spectrum of sports, play, and outdoor recreation.

Community of Practice (CoP) and Working Groups: CoPs and working groups bring together professionals who share a purpose and common set of challenges. Together, they collaboratively problem-solve and learn from each other on an ongoing basis.

Supporting Team: Consultants ranging from strategy to facilitation to communications/digital who support Project Play, the Partnership Team, and The Coalition.

Beneficiaries: Southeast Michigan children, parents/guardians, families, and, ultimately, communities.



**“Play provides
children with
opportunities
to grow and
families with
opportunities
to bond.”**

- HARTLAND'S CROMAINE LIBRARY



Scoreboard: Evaluation

Project Play will seek independent third-party evaluation services to develop a three-year plan to track and measure the impact, effectiveness, and implementation of its youth sports, play, and recreation goals and strategies. Further, the work includes understanding and identifying areas where progress is made, and isolating sectors and communities that require greater investment. Last, the evaluator will help Project Play define “long-term” success in relation to its North Star: all children having equitable access to high-quality sports, play, and recreation regardless of race, income, ZIP code, or ability.

**“The Opportunity
Center inspires
youth to explore,
play, and learn.”**

- MONROE COUNTY OPPORTUNITY CENTER

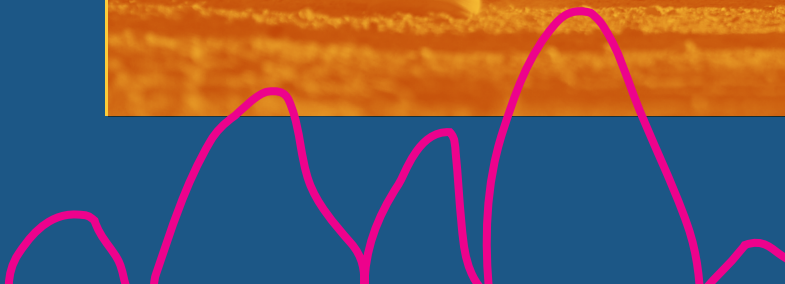


Training Camp: Sustainability

The central focus of this Playbook involves creating a solid Coalition of youth sports and recreation organizations that will come together to create greater connectivity within the region and fulfill the goals outlined in this three-year plan. The sustainability of this work requires the expansion of Project Play's staff to include two additional full-time team members. The Project Play staff will leverage the knowledge and efforts of The Coalition to develop compelling and impactful messaging to be shared throughout the community; convene the organizations and gather information to enable knowledge sharing; focus on implementing the 8 Plays and 8 Rights throughout the seven counties; strengthen capacity-building efforts; deliver grants to support the work; and drive philanthropic efforts.

**"Sports are
meant to break
barriers, not
create more."**

- LK ST. CLAIR SOCCER



The Stats: Appendices

Project Play: Southeast Michigan SWOT Analysis

Strengths

(INTERNAL)

- Funding/support of the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation and Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan.
- Access to Aspen Institute research, expertise, and reach.
- State of Play analysis and recommendations.
- New Project Play leadership.

Weaknesses

(INTERNAL)

- Loss of momentum resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Opportunities

(EXTERNAL)

- Disparate impact learnings and sense of urgency coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Presence of professional sports teams, colleges, and universities.
- Sports-based youth development network, and youth sports and recreation organizations.
- Michigan Task Force on Women in Sports and 50th anniversary of Title IX.
- Coaches' training programs (Michigan State University, MHSAA).
- Public space revitalization efforts (Hamtramck Stadium, Joe Louis Greenway).
- Aspen Institute Project Play 2024 roundtable.

Threats

(EXTERNAL)

- Large territory; variances by county.
- Inconsistent access to sports, play, and recreation.
- Financial barriers to sports, play, and recreation participation.
- Youth sports culture: pressure to specialize versus sampling; focus on winning versus social-emotional learning; unskilled/untrained coaches.
- Safety and limited transportation options create obstacles to participation in after-school programs.
- COVID-19 impact: heightened financial constraints (individuals, organizations, municipalities).

Endnotes

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3. Aspen Institute Sports & Society, "The 8 Plays," 2015, <https://www.aspenprojectplay.org/the-8-plays>;

Aspen Institute Sports & Society, "The Children's Bill of Rights in Sports," 2021, <https://www.aspenprojectplay.org/childrens-rights-and-sports>.

4. The term "sports-based youth development programs" is coined and defined in the context of the community youth development framework. Sports-based youth development programs are out-of-school-time programs that use a particular sport to facilitate learning and life skill development in youth.

Perkins, Daniel F. et al. "Characteristics of sports-based youth development programs," *New Directions for Youth Development*, Fall 2007.

5. Aspen Institute Sports & Society, "State of Play: Southeast Michigan," 2017.
6. Gupta, Alisha Haridasani, "No Time To Be A Child," The New York Times, September 25, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/25/us/young-girls-caregiving-covid.html>.
7. Women's Sports Foundation, "Keeping Girls in the Game," 2020, https://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/articles_and_report/keeping-girls-in-the-game.
8. State of Play Report: Southeast Michigan, 2017.



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