The Sports Philanthropy Project

Technical assistance helped sports organizations promote better health in their communities

SUMMARY

From 1998 to 2010, the Sports Philanthropy Project (SPP) worked with professional sports teams, team foundations and athletes to leverage their financial resources, popularity and credibility to bolster health and health care programs in their communities. As part of the project, sports teams promoted programs sponsored by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) to extend health insurance to uninsured people, particularly children.

Key Results

In reports to RWJF, SPP staff cited the following results:

- Sports organizations used technical assistance from SPP to create coalitions and develop programs to promote better health in their communities, particularly by tackling childhood obesity. These efforts included:
  - The Active Kids Initiative of the Chicago Fire (Major League Soccer), a school- and community-based effort to promote physical activity and good nutrition in and out of school
  - The Healthy Youth Partnership between the St. Louis Rams and the Greater St. Louis Community Foundation, which addresses childhood obesity through a coalition of more than 70 local groups
  - The Maricopa Council on Youth Sports and Physical Activity, a coalition of sports teams, philanthropies, businesses and youth groups fighting childhood obesity, physical inactivity and poor nutrition in the Phoenix area

- Some 38 professional sports teams promoted two RWJF national programs designed to provide health insurance to more people: Cover the Uninsured Week and Covering Kids & Families®. The teams’ efforts included public service announcements and appearances by athletes, cheerleaders and mascots at health fairs and press conferences.
• SPP created the Steve Patterson Sports Philanthropy Award and presented it to eight professional sports organizations or athletes from 2005 to 2009.

**Funding**

RWJF awarded seven grants totaling more than $7.8 million to three organizations that served sequentially as fiscal agents for the Sports Philanthropy Project.

**CONTEXT**

Owners of professional sports franchises and individual athletes are often generous philanthropists. However, they may be unaware of the value to both their communities and their teams of targeting their philanthropic efforts toward strategic goals, particularly those related to health and health care.

Professional sports teams can help solve such challenges through:

• Their financial resources
• Their ability to forge public and private partnerships with stakeholders ranging from community foundations to corporations
• Their influence on policies related to public health and community development
• Their ability to convey persuasive messages through various marketing, media and community channels, both locally and nationally

Through work with professional sports organizations, RWJF staff recognized opportunities to help them direct their considerable resources toward solving public health challenges.

**RWJF Strategy**

RWJF has worked with professional sports teams to solve public health problems since the mid-1990s. Such efforts include:

• **Major League Baseball National Spit Tobacco Education Program**, which sought to educate players and fans that spit tobacco is not a safe alternative to cigarettes. The campaign worked through Major League Baseball, the Major League Baseball Players Association and the Professional Baseball Athletic Trainer Society. See [Program Results](#) on ID# 047853 and others.

• **Smoking Is an Offensive Foul/New Jersey Nets Anti-Tobacco Media and Education Program**, a media and public education campaign with the New Jersey Breathes coalition, composed of public health and medical organizations working to reduce tobacco use among youth. See [Program Results](#) on ID# 033175 and others.
• **Partnership with the Jacksonville Jaguars Foundation**, to discourage tobacco and other substance use among young people through media-based and in-stadium messages, community programs and public policies. These grants also supported the foundation's public health efforts through staff development. See Program Results on ID# 035816.

RWJF’s growing experience with professional sports philanthropy led staff to consider ways to build on those efforts with other teams.

**THE PROJECT**

RWJF launched the Sports Philanthropy Project (SPP) in July 1998, tapping Greg Johnson, former head of Harvard College's Phillip Brooks House, which addresses local needs, and founder and director of the Stride Rite Scholars division, which supports youth organizations, as its executive director. SPP aimed to help sports teams, team foundations and professional athletes promote health and health care in their communities.

Early in the project, SPP staff worked on-site at team facilities for up to six weeks to help sports franchises design and implement targeted philanthropic programs. Project staff assessed each team's existing programs, explored the interests of owners and executives, interviewed representatives of team foundations and their grantees and talked with community leaders about local needs and perceptions of the team and its philanthropy.

SPP staff then guided the teams in creating programs that:

- Focused on clearly defined community needs and audiences
- Measured progress through specific benchmarks
- Could be easily understood and recalled by community stakeholders

Organizations receiving this assistance included:

- Buffalo Bills (National Football League)
- Cardinals Care (Major League Baseball)
- Carolina Panthers (National Football League)
- Chicago Blackhawks (National Hockey League)
- Chicago Bulls (National Basketball Association)
- Cincinnati Reds (Major League Baseball)
- Dallas Burn (Major League Soccer)
- D.C. United (Major League Soccer)
- FC Dallas (Major League Soccer)
- Golden State Warriors (National Basketball Association)
- Jacksonville Jaguars (National Football League)
- Miami Dolphins (National Football League)
- New Jersey Nets Foundation (National Basketball Association)
- Ravens Foundation for Families (National Football League)
- St. Louis Rams Foundation (National Football League)

Although SPP eventually shifted away from providing such intensive assistance, RWJF Senior Program Officer Joe Marx said the consultations "built credibility in the sports world" and "reputational capital" for SPP.

In 2005, SPP began creating partnerships between sports organizations and RWJF-sponsored programs promoting health insurance and community health. SPP also sponsored conferences on effective philanthropy for sports organizations and athletes from 1999 to 2005.

For more on the results of all these efforts, see Results.

**Building a Strategic Plan**

In 2005, using funds from the Foundation's grant, SPP retained Development Resources of Arlington, Va., to develop a business model to sustain the organization. A July 2005 report concluded that although SPP "had grown and evolved over its first six years, its communications and development operations had not kept pace with what is required in today's competitive and challenging philanthropic environment."

To build on its successes, the report recommended that SPP:

- Establish and build an engaged board
- Build visibility through activities such as issuing press releases, researching and developing white papers and increasing speaking opportunities for staff
- Hire skilled staff to build a fund-raising and communications infrastructure
- Develop informational materials based on a defined strategic direction (e.g., brochures, marketing materials for service offerings and an expanded website)
- Expand funder, donor and prospect cultivation and solicitation activities
- Establish tracking and other performance systems
In response, SPP incorporated as a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization in 2006, established a governing board and created marketing materials to pursue projects with and funding from public health organizations, private foundations and businesses. By 2008, however, SPP staff, its board and RWJF determined that the changes necessary to sustain SPP as a nonprofit organization were significant, and that the best course of action was for SPP to satisfy its terms of agreement under its existing RWJF grant. The SPP board dissolved and SPP continued as a grant program of RWJF until May 2010.

**Funding**

Over the course of its creation of and support for SPP, RWJF awarded seven grants totaling more than $7.8 million to three organizations that served sequentially as fiscal agents for the Sports Philanthropy Project. The organizations were:

- The National Community Service Trust (ID#s 034260 and 037486)
- Civil Society Institute (ID#s 038221 and 038135)
- Third Sector New England (ID#s 045229, 050912 and 055483)

The first shift in fiscal agent occurred when the National Community Service Trust transferred its assets to the Civil Society Institute. The second shift in fiscal agent occurred when a hoped-for synergy with the Civil Society Institute's other programs did not occur.

SPP also received a $3.5 million grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. In addition, it received supplemental funding for its conferences from the Civil Society Institute ($75,000 for the 2001 conference) and the Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation ($10,000 for the 2002 conference). The Kellogg Foundation was the sole funder of the 2005 conference.

**RESULTS**

In reports to RWJF, SPP staff cited the following results:

- **Sports organizations used assistance from SPP to create coalitions and develop programs to improve community health, particularly by tackling childhood obesity.** Examples include:
  
  — The Active Kids Initiative, a school- and community-based effort of the Chicago Fire (Major League Soccer) designed to prevent childhood obesity by promoting physical activity and good nutrition both in and out of school. The initiative works in three Chicago communities:
    
    - South Shore (African American)
- South Lawndale (Hispanic)
- Bridgeview (home community of the Chicago Fire)

  — The **Healthy Youth Partnership**, an effort of the St. Louis Rams and the Greater St. Louis Community Foundation that addresses childhood obesity through a coalition of more than 70 local groups. The organizations create fitness programs at area schools and promote awareness and policies supporting healthy lifestyles.

  — The **Maricopa Council on Youth Sports and Physical Activity**, a coalition of sports teams, philanthropies, businesses and youth groups fighting childhood obesity, physical inactivity and poor nutrition in the Phoenix area. Council funding resulted in:

    - Grants totaling $365,000 annually to 26 organizations serving more than 9,000 youth throughout Maricopa County
    - A geographic information system that helps local organizations apply for grants to upgrade sports and recreation facilities and helps funders and researchers evaluate their proposals and results
    - The Arizona Cardinals All Kids Can Club, a partnership among the Arizona Cardinals (National Football League), a local YMCA and a health center that educates children and families on healthy lifestyle choices, including nutrition and physical activity

For more on the launch of the Maricopa Council, see the **Appendix**.

- **Working with SPP, RWJF, Patterson Sports Ventures (dedicated to cause-related marketing), community groups and GMMB (a communications firm), professional sports teams promoted two RWJF national programs designed to extend health insurance to more people:**

  — In 2004, a total of 25 sports teams promoted the Back to School Campaign of **Cover the Uninsured Week**, which aimed to raise awareness of the need to seek solutions for the nearly 47 million Americans who lack health insurance. The Back to School Campaign took advantage of this event to conduct outreach to enroll children in Medicaid and the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP).

  — In 2005, a total of 10 Major League Soccer teams promoted **Covering Kids & Families**, a national initiative to enroll children and adults in Medicaid and children in CHIP through outreach and simplifications to the enrollment and renewal processes. All 12 league teams participated in 2006, and all 13 teams (including one new team) participated in 2007.

These two efforts included:

— Public service announcements produced and aired by teams
— Handouts and Jumbotron announcements at stadiums

— Appearances by athletes, cheerleaders and mascots at health fairs and press conferences

— Fund-raising auctions

— Information sent to sports fans through listservs

**Sports teams and foundations shared information on their philanthropy at six annual conferences hosted by SPP from 1999 to 2005.** Attendees included team owners, coaches, athletes, staff members of team foundations and community relations departments, agents and representatives of other foundations. The conferences covered:

— Legal aspects of team philanthropy

— Establishing philanthropic programs and objectives

— Measuring the business value of philanthropy

— Communication strategies and branding

— Innovative fund-raising strategies

In 2008, SPP and Columbia University co-sponsored a two-day philanthropy training and program development seminar in New York.

For more on all these events, see the Bibliography.

**In 2008 and again in 2010, on behalf of Major League Baseball, SPP formally evaluated the philanthropic efforts of 30 Major League Baseball teams, as well as those of the Commissioner's Office and Reviving Baseball in the Inner Cities, a youth development program.** SPP also helped develop a Commissioner's Award for Philanthropic Excellence. For information on the outcome of this work, see **Afterward.**

**Assisted by the firms Kintera and Antharia, SPP created a website** that provides information on best practices, conference summaries, case studies in sports philanthropy and links to information on childhood obesity.

The site also includes seven webinars on topics such as "Nonprofit Law for Sports Organizations" and "How Do Your Programs Measure Up? (Evaluation)." The webinars are available online. For more information, see the Bibliography.

**SPP established the Steve Patterson Sports Philanthropy Award to recognize leadership in the field.** The award honors a former pro-basketball star and coach at Arizona State who died of lung cancer in 2004. Through his firm Patterson Sports Ventures, Patterson helped SPP and teams promote Cover the Uninsured Week and Covering Kids & Families. Award recipients include:
— The Philadelphia Eagles Youth Partnership (2005), for its Eagles Eye Mobile Program, which provides free eye exams and glasses for thousands of underserved children in Philadelphia

— The Jacksonville Jaguars Foundation (2006), for supporting organizations and initiatives that empower young people

— The Memphis Grizzlies Charitable Foundation (2007), which donated more than $18.5 million to nonprofit groups and schools, with in-kind support exceeding $2 million

— The Moyer Foundation (2007), created by major league pitcher Jamie Moyer, which helped raise more than $10 million to support some 120 nonprofit groups assisting children in physical, emotional or financial distress

— The Steve Nash Foundation (2008), which serves children in Arizona, British Columbia and Paraguay

— The San Francisco Giants Community Fund (2008), which donated more than $9.5 million to support local education, health, violence prevention and youth development

— The Marvin Lewis Community Fund (2009), created by the head coach of the Cincinnati Bengals (National Football League), whose projects include an annual clinic for youth and high school football coaches and a campaign to spur women to get mammograms

— The Red Sox Foundation (2009), which invested more than $28 million in programs such as the Dimock Center, which delivers health and human services to 30,000 very low-income families, and a scholarship and academic enrichment program for low-income students

LESSONS LEARNED

1. **Nurture startup programs under the auspices of a partnering nonprofit organization or independent fiscal agent.** Such partners helped SPP get off the ground. As a project matures, however, it must develop the structure and capability to handle its own administrative and financial affairs. (Project Director/Johnson)

2. **Target sports philanthropy toward children and youth.** "We learned in this project that the best fit for SPP was anything having to do with kids—obesity, getting kids insured," said David Colby, Ph.D., RWJF vice president for research and evaluation. Projects with political implications—insuring adults, for example—were a "harder sell."
AFTERWARD

RWJF funding for SPP ended in 2010. Since then, SPP's revenues have come from contracts for technical assistance provided to professional sports organizations.

In November 2010, SPP staff presented a report on philanthropy in Major League Baseball at an industry meeting in Orlando. SPP also conferred the first Commissioner's Award for Philanthropic Excellence on the Boston Red Sox, citing the depth of the team's charitable programs and the impact of the Red Sox Scholars program.

RWJF took over the Steve Patterson Award for Excellence in Sports Philanthropy in 2010. Award recipients that year were:

- The U.S. Soccer Foundation, for awarding more than $51 million to groups across the country to develop 1,100 soccer fields and create free after-school programs for at-risk urban youth.

- The Dikembe Mutombo Foundation, which has distributed more than $24 million, mostly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the home country of the organization's namesake. Mutombo, who established the foundation in 1997, played in the National Basketball Association until 2009.

More information on the 2010 award is available online.

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RWJF Team: Enterprise Level
APPENDIX

Launching the Maricopa Council on Youth Sports and Physical Activity

(Current as of the time of the grant; provided by the grantee organization; not verified by RWJF.)

In November 2000, Arizona voters approved Proposition 302 creating the Arizona Sports & Tourism Authority, charged with expending $73.5 million in public funds on youth and amateur sports projects and programs over 30 years, among other responsibilities.

A year and a half before his death, athlete and entrepreneur Steve Patterson invited SPP's Executive Director Johnson to give the welcoming address at the authority's first annual youth and amateur sports summit. Johnson encouraged his listeners to urge the authority to use its funds wisely.

Recognizing that it could best serve as a grants administrator rather than a program implementer, the authority invited SPP to help it channel its funds to fight obesity. Assisted by SPP staff, the authority established the Maricopa Council on Youth Sports and Physical Activity to address childhood obesity, physical inactivity and poor nutrition in Maricopa County, home to Phoenix, Arizona's capital and largest city. The council includes:

- Local corporate philanthropies
- Private philanthropies
- Sports team philanthropies
- Health care providers
- State and county public health officials
- Universities

To launch the council, RWJF provided $75,000 under a grant fund for "communications assistance for grantee activities"\(^1\) to the Arizona Community Foundation, which served as the council's fiscal agent and funding partner. The Arizona Cardinals of the National Football League and the authority each matched the RWJF grant. SPP staff also provided more than six weeks of on-site technical assistance to help the council assess local needs and set priorities.

RWJF and SPP staff members also visited local stakeholders to brief them on the Foundation's obesity goals and determine what kind of technical assistance they might

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\(^1\) ID# 048897.
need. Both SPP and the Foundation provided assistance on communications and evaluation.

Programs funded by the council include:

- The Summer Youth Program Fund, which in its inaugural grant year (2007) distributed $365,000 in grants to 26 organizations offering summer programs for more than 9,000 youth throughout Maricopa County

- A geographic information system, designed by the Institute for Social Science Research at Arizona State University, that combines demographic, census and other information to help local groups apply for grants to upgrade local sports and recreation facilities, and to help funders and researchers evaluate those proposals and results

- The Arizona Cardinals' All Kids Can Club, a partnership among the Arizona Cardinals, a local YMCA and a Phoenix health center that educates children and their families on healthy lifestyle choices, including nutrition and physical activity.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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**Communications & Advocacy**

**Webinars**


"Box Score: How Do Your Programs Measure Up?" Boston: Sports Philanthropy Project. Available [online](#).


"Understanding the New IRS Form 990 Reporting Requirements for Tax-Exempt Organizations." Boston: Sports Philanthropy Project. Available [online](#).
**World Wide Websites**

[www.sportsphilanthropyproject.com](http://www.sportsphilanthropyproject.com). Created as a resource for professional sports foundations, and to provide information to media and the public. Boston: Sports Philanthropy Project.

**Meetings and Conferences**


