

Creating Multi-Sport Venues

This document is a resource for any provider of programs that wants to foster multi-sport participation among youth. It highlights U.S. entities that are exemplars in encouraging multi-sport play and have developed successful innovations or models that could be scaled. The resource includes a brief overview of each organization, its breakthrough strategy or tactic, and its financial structure. It also offers step-by-step guidance for organizations in creating their multi-sport programs from scratch.

Who is this resource for?

- Single-sport clubs
- Multi-sport clubs
- Camps
- Parks and recreation departments
- Any provider that aims to provide each participant a chance to sample sports.

Why is multi-sport play important?

Research shows that children who play more than one sport have more complete athletic development, fewer injuries and are less likely to experience burnout. By developing a wide array of skills and movements, multi-sport play enhances also physical literacy and physical activity, promoting sport participation into adulthood.¹ But children are under growing pressure to specialize early in one sport; in 2015, U.S. youth ages 6-17 played an average of less than two (1.89) team sports, continuing a downward trend in recent years.²

How was this document created?

A 12-member Project Play work group of representatives from national sports governing bodies, academia advised the Aspen Institute in drafting its content. Through surveys, research and interviews, hundreds of organizations were analyzed to find the most innovative clubs, camps, programs and departments in their fields.³

More on Project Play: www.ProjectPlay.US

¹ Sagas, Michael. "What Does the Science Say About Athletic Development in Children?" (2013). *University of Florida Sport Policy & Research Collaborative*. 3 – 5.

² Sports & Fitness Industry Association data, supplied to Aspen Institute Project for its *State of Play: 2016* report

³ TJ Buchanan, Tom Farrey, Skip Gilbert, Jeremy Goldberg, Risa Isard, Brian Krill, Will Kuntz, Ben Reid, Dave Ridpath, Jenny Ryan, Robert Sundermeier, Meg Weagley

Five successful models by type of venue

Multi-Sport Club with Facility

Club that promotes multi-sport programming at a facility that it owns or operates

Competitive Edge Sports, King of Prussia, PA

<http://cesports.net>

The basics:

- Two programs are offered: East Coast Power Volleyball and East Coast Power Basketball, which operate separately but collaborate with other program to ensure that kids who want to play both sports have the opportunity to do so
- The clubs share a 6,000-square foot facility with multi-use courts
- Serves 400+ children annually between the ages of 10 and 18

Innovation and/or special features:

- Competitive Edge Sports hires only sport directors and coaches who are committed to promoting multi-sport play, within and beyond the program
- The directors and coaches of each sport work with their counterparts to avoid schedule conflicts. For instance, volleyball practices and games may be planned around a basketball tournament, depending on the season.
- Coaches encourage children to play the other club sport, and work with their counterparts in that other sport to find the appropriate squad based on their skill set (teams are offered at levels one through four)
- Each club offers speed, agility and quickness training, fostering the physical literacy for youth to engage in a wide range of activities

Financial structure:

- For-profit club with annual revenue of \$250k-\$500k and staff of six (owner/director, two assistant directors, strength and conditioning, marketing, logistics coordinator)
- Cost per participant is based on level of play, ranging from \$2,200 to \$3,600 per year. Teams offered at up to four levels in each age group.
- Scholarships offered to 40-50 players each year who need financial support. Teams work with a local non-profit to raise funds. Scholarship recipients are also offered jobs at the facility and its snack bar.

Multi-Sport Club without Facility

Club that promotes multi-sport programming but uses others' recreation space

NXT Sports, Philadelphia, PA

<http://nxtsports.com/>

The basics:

- Offers six sports in the form of camps, leagues and elite clubs
- NXT Sports specializes in lacrosse and hosts big events, tournaments and recruitment sessions. The club's growth has prompted the introduction of more sports, including field hockey, soccer, basketball, football and water polo.
- There are eight week-long skills camps that allow participants to learn an individual sport in an easy-going and recreational manner
- Serves 47,000+ participants between the ages of 4 and 16 through events, camps and clubs. All fundamental skills camps accommodate about 900 participants.

Innovation or special features:

- Through database management, a registration for a fundamental skills camp in one sport leads to the promotion the same camps in other sports within the organization.
- Skills camps promote an atmosphere where skill development, not games, are the focus. If children are interested in further participating in the sport, they are encouraged to join NXT-organized recreational leagues or club teams. The registration table at the weekly practice contains promotional materials for the participants to try other fundamental sports clinics.
- The coaches are trained to instruct a wide variety of participants at every age and level. They are taught to make every child feel like they are having success in their sport, giving each participant a fair chance at enjoyment of the sport.

Financial structure:

- Fundamental skills clinics cost \$375, leagues start at \$140. Club teams are more expensive.
- NXT Sports believes that all participants should have the ability to play regardless of their financial background and awards around 30 scholarships to club and recreational players every year. Scholarships come "in-house" from that individual sport's collective fund and are not dictated by skill level.
- NXT Sports has 32 full-time employees in six sports. While lacrosse is the biggest and most developed, the newer sports aim to emulate the structure and success of the lacrosse program.

Multi-Sport Camp

Camps that promote or introduce multiple sports to participants

2-4-1 Sports, West Hartford, CT

<http://241sports.com/>

- Offers two week-long summer camps at its flagship location, as well as in Colorado.
- 2-4-1 introduced PLUSS programming (Physical Literacy Using Sport Sampling) in schools and community centers. The program, geared towards 3 to 8-year-olds, stresses the importance of physical literacy and allows participants to experience multiple sports.
- Serves 5,000+ kids and adults through camps, programs, and pick-up leagues.

Innovation or special features:

- Participants choose three sports each day from a list of ten. The sports available are baseball, basketball, “2-4-1 crossover fitness and wellness,” field hockey, flag football, lacrosse, soccer, tennis, volleyball or “2-4-1 universal sports.” The flexibility allows participants to follow their curiosity and cultivate their athletic interests.
- 2-4-1 Sports is well-connected with the surrounding community and recruits local school coaches and players to be instructors. The organization creates and maintains partnerships with schools and government entities to use facilities for camp programs.
- A “train-to-train” platform provides curriculum to instructors, coaches and teachers.

Financial structure:

- The cost of attending the flagship camp is \$421 for one week, with discounts applied to multiple kids or multiple weeks. As the camp expands, the pricing varies by location.
- 2-4-1 Sports sponsors kids who cannot afford the cost of programming through public and private funding. Through local municipalities, organizations like Growing Great Schools, and other local partners, children are not turned away because of costs.

Single-Sport Club

Club that promotes skills and abilities learned through other sports

Tahoe XC, Tahoe City, CA

<https://www.tahoexc.org/tccsea/>

The basics:

- Club offers seasonal, year-round and after-school programming that focuses on cross-country skiing but introduces other sports into the activity. Programming for younger children focuses on fundamentals, with team-based competition starting at age 14.

- Tahoe XC is two separate organizations: the management of the physical ski area and the non-profit that organizes youth programs. The two have the same board of directors and work closely with one another, enabling the youth club to use the trails for free.
- Serves participants ages 5 to 18, reaching around 45 youth in the summer, 25 in the winter and 200+ kids in winter after-school programs.

Innovation or special features:

- Tahoe XC continually introduces other sports into the training regimen, in part to prevent burnout. Nordic ski training is intermixed with hiking, paddle boarding or running to a field to play soccer or basketball.
- The club encourages its participants to continue playing other sports and works closely with the nearby schools to accommodate conflicting schedules. It is commonplace for athletes to participate in more than one sport until the complete race age of 14.
- Tahoe XC gives students and teachers in surrounding schools a free one-trial day to introduce them to the sport. The program includes free equipment rentals and helps remove the barriers to entry for the sport.

Financial structure:

- Competitive and racing programs cost between \$400 and \$1,800 depending on the duration and age, generating annual revenue of about \$55,000.
- The basic eight-week winter program includes rentals of ski equipment in the \$90 fee. This prompts participants to practice their skills and explore the 65 km of Tahoe XC's facilities on the other days of the week at no cost.
- Tahoe XC is operated by a director and two full-time, paid coaches. The director also serves as the ski-area manager and reports to the same board of directors.

Parks and Recreation Department

Municipal entities that offer or promote multi-sport play

Sylvania Parks and Recreation, Sylvania, Ohio

<http://playsylvania.com/>

- Serving Sylvania and its surrounding townships, the department provides recreational opportunities in 13 sports at its publicly owned spaces and facilities.
- The department works closely with the Sylvania School District in order to obtain additional facilities and use their network for promotion.
- Offers town-based travel teams in baseball, soccer and softball starting at age nine
- Serves 3,000+ children ages 4 to 8 through recreational leagues, accumulating an aggregate of 7,000+ youth sport registrations.

Innovation or special features:

- Offers “Sportzone,” a free, hour-long session that allows children from kindergarten to second grade experience a different sport. The program occurs once a month and give participants a chance to try the sport before making an 8-week commitment. These accessible classes are run by the parks and rec staff and attract 15 to 35 children each month, many of whom join the organized leagues of the sport offered in that session.
- Recreational leagues are coordinated to accommodate participants playing multiple sports. If a participant plays recreational baseball and soccer during the same season, practices and games occur on separate days. Coaches are instructed to not punish or limit playing time of a participant who missed a practice for a game in another sport.

Financial structure:

- The athletic programs are completely self-sufficient and operate on a yearly budget of \$1 million. Sylvania Parks and Recreation receives money from local tax revenues that is strictly used for the operation and maintenance of the city’s parks and facilities.
- Most 8-week seasons cost between \$45 and \$65, with football and lacrosse costing \$85 to \$90 with equipment rentals provided at no cost.
- Scholarships run parallel to the school’s lunch program, giving discounts to those receiving a half-lunch and fully waiving individuals with free lunches. About 60 to 70 individuals receive \$9,000 in financial support, many of whom played on multiple teams.
- Sylvania Parks and Recreation has 16 full-time employees. The director reports to a seven-member board from the city, township and school district. All coaches, except three in club baseball, are volunteers and are screened through background checks.

Getting started

- Start with a camp: Camps are effective in introducing multiple sports to youth. Because of the low level of commitment in time and money for the participant, kids will be able to experience new sports in a recreational setting. Organizationally, it is an easy way to add to existing camp models with current staff or partners in the community.
- Establish relationships with other sports programs: Through an open dialogue with other coaches and organizations, cross-referencing athletes creates a mutual benefit for both staff and the athlete. This dialogue can also help mitigate scheduling conflicts and dramatically improve one’s access to multi-sport participation.
- Introduce other sports in training: Find create ways to mix up traditional training techniques with other activities and sports that offer the athletes different movements and a wider range of motion.
- Give each sport a fair shot: Introduce sports with the best training methods and positive instruction. A child’s experience with a new sport should not be hindered by the quality of instruction or disposition of the coaching staff.