

# Winning Beyond the Game

Preliminary Findings From the Million Coaches  
Challenge Implementation Study



The American Institutes for Research<sup>®</sup> (AIR<sup>®</sup>) developed this brief to elevate preliminary findings from the Million Coaches Challenge implementation study. This brief provides early insight into key lessons learned from the MCC through December 31, 2024. The MCC is ongoing through 2025 and a full technical report from the implementation study is forthcoming. Additional publications from the MCC are available online at [www.millioncoaches.org](http://www.millioncoaches.org).

## Introduction

**Research demonstrates the power of youth sport in promoting positive outcomes for young people, both within sport and in life beyond sport** (Anderson-Butcher & Bates, 2022; Eccles et al., 2003; Jones et al., 2017). Youth sport participation has been linked to the development of positive social relationships, motivation, leadership skills, improved mental health, and better academic performance (Anderson-Butcher & Bates, 2021, 2022; Jones et al., 2017; Riley et al., 2017). Research also reveals that the relationship between participation in sport and positive development is contingent on the right context and characteristics being in place (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Ewing et al., 1996; Petitpas et al., 2005; Smith & Smoll, 2002). In other words, sport participation alone is not enough to yield benefits, but rather a combination of multiple factors, including the sport climate, youth engagement, and the sport activities themselves, influence the youth experience and subsequent outcomes (Holt, et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2017; Newman et al., 2021). **Many of these factors are influenced by the youth sport coach** (Newman et al., 2021; Petitpas et al., 2005; Whitley et al., 2019); yet the vast majority of coaches may lack training—and therefore confidence—in key practices that are essential for youth development.

To address the gap between what the field needs and what coaches currently have access to, the Susan Crown Exchange launched the [Million Coaches Challenge \(MCC\)](#) in 2021, with the ambitious goal of training one million coaches by 2026. **The MCC brings together a coalition of leading youth sport organizations committed to developing and implementing training programs that equip coaches with the knowledge and skills needed to foster positive youth outcomes, both on and off the field.**

### About the MCC Implementation Study

The MCC implementation study is led by the [American Institutes for Research](#)® (AIR®) in collaboration with the MCC Partners. The study was designed to track coaches trained through the MCC while elevating Partner insights, documenting their journeys, analyzing training offerings, and exploring the influence of trainings on coaches. The implementation study uses a mixed-methods approach, with multiple methods and data sources, including analysis of Partner training participation and demographic data, a coach perception survey, annual interviews with MCC Partners, and a comprehensive document review of Partner training materials.

## Preliminary Findings From the MCC Implementation Study

The findings from the MCC implementation study reveal several contextual factors that influence coaching and coach development. The study highlighted a fragmented youth sport landscape, lacking a formal system to guide coach development. Despite this challenge, prior research (e.g., Anderson-Butcher & Bates, 2022; Li et al., 2025) and emerging evidence from the implementation study suggests that coach training can meaningfully support coaches by boosting their confidence, knowledge, and skills. Some coaches trained through the MCC also reported benefits for their athletes, reinforcing the potential value of coach training. As momentum builds, the MCC is supporting Partners in their efforts to shape the youth sport landscape. Partners are coalescing around broader visions for the field as they continue working toward the ambitious goal of training one million coaches.

## Youth sport coaching operates in a fragmented landscape, shaped by the absence of a formal or structured system to inform coach development.

Findings from annual interviews with MCC Partners and attendance at MCC Partner meetings reveal several persistent challenges that currently limit the effectiveness of youth sport coaching and the broader youth sport ecosystem in the United States, including but not limited to the following:

- absence of a formal or structured youth sport system in the United States;
- individual coach and organizational capacity issues;
- lack of buy-in to youth development and related ideas;
- a dominant culture and mindset that sport is about winning; and
- a general lack of agreement about what the priorities in the field of youth sport are.

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*“Until we start paying coaches who can start making a living and incentivizing them to receive more training so that they’re prepared to keep achieving and have that growth mindset, we’re going to still run into these time and money barriers...”*

– MCC Partner

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Unlike in other countries where youth sport systems are often organized through national or regional ministries and credentialing systems, **the United States operates a largely fragmented system, leading to inconsistent standards for coach development and the lack of a unified vision for youth sport.** The absence of structure contributes to variability in coaching quality, inadequate resources for coach education, and varied access to sport opportunities. When coaches—many of whom are volunteers—coach within organizations that lack the necessary infrastructure to properly support coach training and development (e.g., staff, funding), these issues are exacerbated.

## Coaches who participated in MCC trainings reported positive influences on their confidence, development of knowledge and skills, and changes in coaching practice related to youth development.

Findings from the *MCC Coach Perception Survey* align with prior research that has established a link between coach education and shifts in coach confidence, knowledge, and behaviors (Anderson-Butcher & Bates, 2022; Falcão et al., 2012; Li et al., 2025). **The majority of coaches (~93%) agreed or strongly agreed that the training had an influence on building their confidence, followed by the development of new knowledge and skills.** This finding was consistent across coach practice outcome areas that focused on athlete development, creating an environment where all athletes feel safe, fostering positive relationships, and supporting athlete mental health in relation to their participation in sport. Moreover, most coaches (~94%) agreed or strongly agreed that **all coaches would benefit from having foundational knowledge and skills across these areas.**

Coaches who reported that they had changed their practice shared more about what they are doing differently. This subset of coaches described the following:

- Connecting with athletes by asking questions and listening
- Recognizing different athlete backgrounds and contexts
- Creating team-building activities
- Creating a positive environment for youth
- Changing how they communicate with athletes
- Providing positive encouragement to athletes
- Becoming aware of mental health

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*“I took this training last summer and was really impacted by what I learned about how important it is for young people to feel loved and welcomed when they come into a space. It caused me to be way more intentional to greet students and truly focus on them as soon as they enter our building, and to put down whatever task I’m working on to be with them and show gladness that they are there.”*

– Coach survey respondent

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These insights align with the coach practices we documented through our review of MCC Partner trainings (page 5). **The strong training focus in the trainings on relationship building and athlete empowerment is visible in reported practice changes, for example, coach descriptions of how they are connecting with athletes on a personal level and providing positive encouragement.**

Overall, coaches largely reported positive outcomes as a result of participating in the training. **Eighty-eight percent of coaches reported that they believe participating in the training made them a better coach.** Coaches shared that they learned valuable information or skills from the training, had positive experiences with the training or MCC Partner organization, and learned how to better support athletes.

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*“[The training] has given me the opportunity to think of coaching from different perspectives. The most important [perspective] has been from the player’s point of view. [The training] has allowed me to connect with players.”*  
– Coach survey respondent

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### Some coaches reported positive influences of their training on athlete outcomes.

Extensive research documents the influence of coach training on a variety of athlete outcomes in and outside of sport, including but not limited to improved social skills, stronger relationships, greater enjoyment of sport, improved mental health, reduced athlete burnout, and increased athlete retention (Anderson-Butcher, 2019; Bean & Forneris, 2016; Gould & Carson, 2008; Li et al., 2025; Super et al., 2017). Some coaches perceived that their participation in training had already led to observable youth outcomes, with coaches reporting that they had observed athletes experiencing more joy in their sport (67.1%) and athletes developing stronger relationships with other athletes (63.4%), for example. **Seventy-one percent of coaches believe that their participation in training positively influenced athlete retention and made athletes more likely to return overall.** When respondents reported they had already observed athlete outcomes, they also had the opportunity to share more about what they had observed. Coaches described the following outcomes for the athletes they coach:

- Building friendships
- Enjoying the sport
- Exhibiting confidence
- Wanting to continue the sport
- Offering each other positive encouragement
- Exhibiting more joy
- Exhibiting a positive attitude
- Improving athletic skills
- Exhibiting teamwork and collaboration

These findings align with the athlete-centered approach emphasized through the trainings and coach-reported practice change. **When coaches employ an athlete-centered approach, it is reasonable to expect that athletes will experience and engage in positive relationships and feel more joy in their sport, as indicated in the survey.**

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*“By mixing up the partnerships at practice with kids who don’t typically spend time together or partner up together, they get to know others more in depth. I have seen multiple new friendships grow between kids who wouldn’t normally partner up and are even friends now in school.”* – Coach survey respondent

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The MCC is supporting Partners in their efforts to shape the youth sport landscape by not only defining what it means to be a “good” and a “trained” coach but also making progress toward training one million coaches.

### Defining what it means to be a “good” and a “trained” coach.

In consideration of the myriad contextual factors elevated by MCC Partners, they grappled with what it means to be a “good” coach and a “trained” coach and to what extent they should take on this issue in the field. What we found through our interviews and document reviews, however, is that Partners *are* taking on this issue through the development and implementation of trainings that prioritize youth development and related areas. Partners coalesced around the idea that a **“trained” coach is one who is trained in the practices that make them a “good” coach**. Partners agreed that training alone is not *the* answer and that simply taking any training is not sufficient to make one a “good” coach; however, they recognized that trainings like the ones propelled by the MCC are an important start to a larger conversation in the field.

During Partner interviews, we discussed what it means to be a “good” coach. Partners agreed that coaches should

- have the knowledge and practices to help youth build sport-specific, social, and/or personal skills;
- create safe spaces;
- meet athletes “where they are”;
- prioritize their own personal growth and well-being as coaches;
- show up as caring adults;
- make sport fun and enjoyable;
- support the whole athlete; and
- prioritize relationship building.

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*“You parent the way you were parented, you teach the way you were taught . . . [Coaches] sort of say, ‘I had a coach who screamed at me and then we won a championship.’ . . . I think that’s a really big challenge that we [face with] coaches and their perception of what it means to look like, act like, and be a good coach.”*

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– MCC Partner

In our exploration of the Partner training content, specifically, we took a deeper dive into coach practice. The trainings we reviewed covered many different topics but also had a great deal in common. We identified a set of 12 core practice themes that at least seven of the 10 MCC Partners included in at least one of their trainings (Exhibit 1, next page). In addition to identifying the explicit coach practice themes, we observed, in our review, that the trainings often *framed* the content in a few different ways. Many trainings incorporated content about mental health and stress management, often drawing on interdisciplinary evidence to frame the *why* and *how* of explicit strategies for creating safe and supportive sport environments. Several trainings emphasized fostering a growth mindset and moving beyond wins and losses to create a mastery climate, tying explicit coaching practices to this overarching goal. Additionally, many trainings highlighted the importance of coaching, using activities to build camaraderie and demonstrate the significant role coaches play in youth development.

**Ultimately, Partners agreed that the trainings provide support for the notion that a “good” coach should foster both skill development and personal growth in athletes by creating safe and inclusive environments, prioritizing relationship building, and modeling positive behaviors while maintaining their own well-being. When trainings emphasized these principles, they focused on building trust, showing empathy, creating a mastery climate, and empowering athletes. Coaches were encouraged to focus on continuous self-improvement, regulate their own behavior, and model youth development practices to ensure athletes feel valued, supported, and motivated to grow both in and outside of sport.**

**Exhibit 1. Twelve Core Coach Practice Themes from MCC Partner Trainings**

| Practice theme                              | # of Partners | # of trainings | Description   |
|---|---------------|----------------|---|
| Building trust and developing relationships | 10            | 20             | Involves highlighting the importance of relationships or key ingredients for healthy relationships, fostering strong coach–athlete connections, and/or fostering strong relationships among athletes                                      |
| How coaches “show up”                       | 10            | 21             | Encompasses (a) being predictable and consistent, (b) having empathy and validating athlete emotions and expressions, (c) giving athletes full attention and presence, and (d) showing athletes they are valued and cared for             |
| Mastery climate                             | 10            | 14             | A motivational environment created by coaches and athletes that emphasizes improvement, effort, and skill development rather than focusing on winning   |
| Athlete empowerment and agency              | 9             | 14             | Brings together multiple constructs related to athlete voice, choice, leadership, and autonomy  |
| Belonging and inclusion                     | 8             | 12             | Ensuring all athletes feel included, and/or creating an environment in which athletes feel like they belong (Some trainings also highlighted belonging and inclusion for specific populations such as girls and youth with disabilities.) |
| Coach modeling and accountability           | 8             | 12             | Adopting an approach wherein coaches hold themselves accountable to the athletes and/or work to model the behavior they expect from athletes  |
| Coaching and instruction                    | 8             | 18             | Describes the myriad ways trainings provided guidance to coaches about how to coach or provide instruction to athletes  |
| Athlete safety                              | 7             | 14             | Inclusive of physical, emotional, and psychological safety—ensuring proper equipment, rest, and age-appropriate activities while fostering positive, empathic spaces for athletes   |
| Coach regulation                            | 7             | 10             | Describes how coaches should manage themselves in their role, including handling stress and pressure, protecting mental wellness, and regulating emotions and behaviors   |
| Coach personal growth                       | 7             | 9              | Broadly describes the different ways coaches should continue learning, seeking and implementing feedback, and being open and adaptable  |
| Running practices and scrimmages            | 6             | 9              | Related to the theme of coaching and instruction but focused specifically on practices and scrimmages (e.g., <i>how</i> to structure practices or scrimmages, having a plan for practice, or using specific strategies during practices)  |
| Rituals                                     | 6             | 9              | Having specific routines coaches and athletes can use for a variety of purposes during practice, scrimmages, games, or competition  |

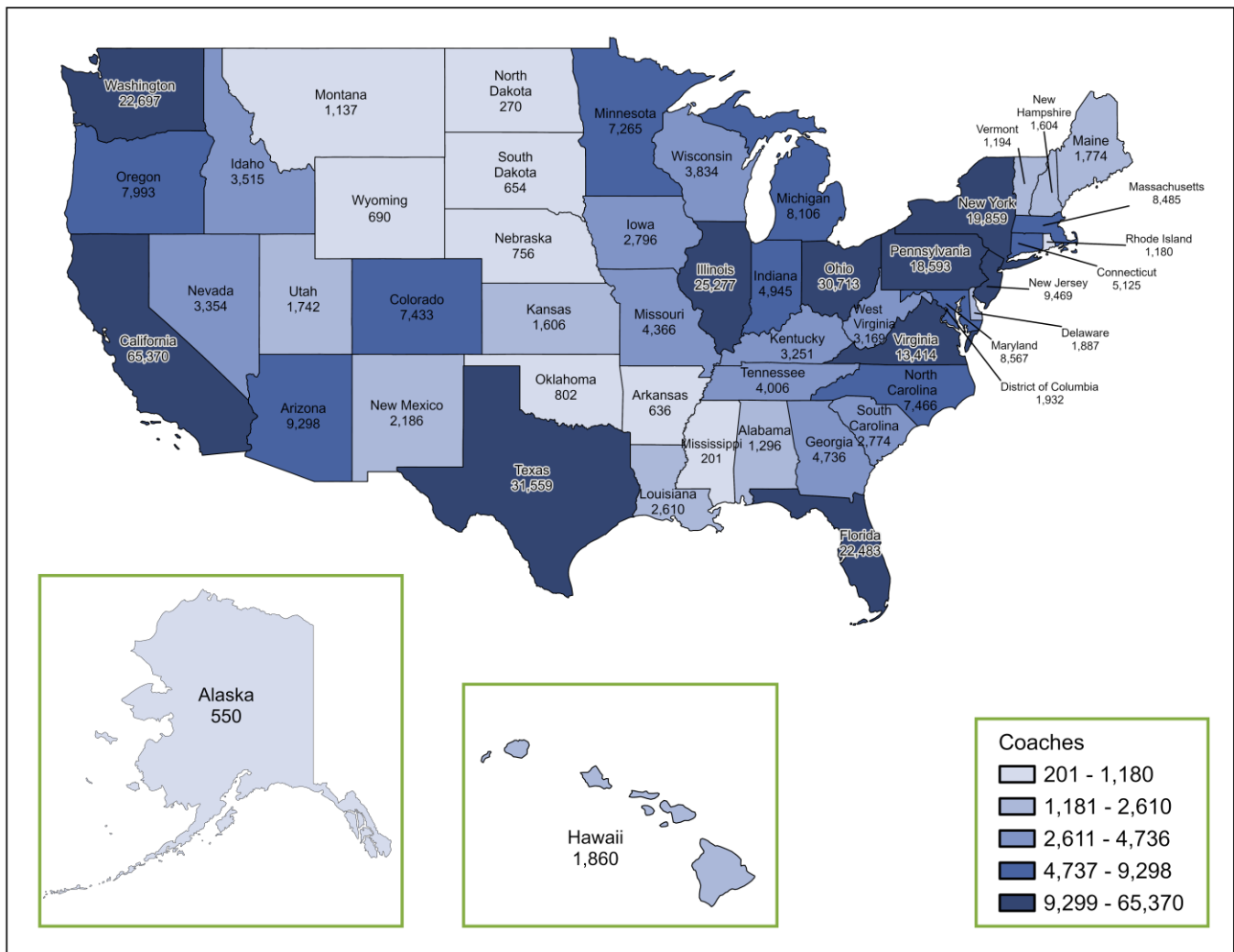
## Making progress toward one million.

Findings from the analysis of coach training participation and demographic data submitted by the MCC Partners indicate that the **MCC Partners trained 730,985 coaches as of December 31, 2024. The Partners are 269,015 coaches away from achieving their goal of training one million coaches by December 31, 2025.**

MCC Partners shared demographic data for a subset of coaches trained (180,989 coaches, or 24.8%, of the 730,985 coaches trained across the 12 Partner organizations that shared data with us). The majority of those 180,989 coaches trained during the MCC to date identified as White (64.5%,  $n = 79,572$ ); identified as female (62.3%,  $n = 80,087$ ); were between the ages of 18 and 50, split across three different age brackets (18–30 years old: 31.7%,  $n = 29,561$ ; 31–40 years old: 27.5%,  $n = 25,704$ ; and 41–50 years old: 25.5%,  $n = 23,810$ ); and coached baseball or softball (36.0%,  $n = 65,225$ ) or running (35.2%,  $n = 63,793$ ) as their primary sport.

We received location data for 400,093 coaches (54.7%) trained during the MCC (Exhibit 2). Those coaches were located across the country, with greater concentrations of coaches trained on the east and west coasts and in the south – with the most coaches trained, to date, in California ( $n = 65,370$ ), Texas ( $n = 31,559$ ), Ohio ( $n = 30,713$ ), Illinois ( $n = 25,277$ ), and Washington ( $n = 22,697$ ). Rural states in the Midwest and central United States had lower levels of coaches trained—a trend that was maintained when accounting for youth-level population density.

### Exhibit 2. Mapping Total Coaches Trained Through the MCC



Note.  $n = 400,093$ .

Although all MCC Partners collected and shared training participation and demographic information for the coaches they trained, the data they collected, how the data were reported, and overall level of completeness varied significantly. For example, the variation in demographic information and sport coached is, in some part, due to the focal areas for some Partners. For example, Little League trains its baseball and softball coaches and Girls on the Run comprises primarily female athletes and coaches focused on running. We must reconcile the findings presented herein against other available data. Findings from the [National Coach Survey](#) drew from a sample that was largely male (74%), white (79%), and coached soccer (40%), baseball (33%), or basketball (35%) amongst 35 other sports, for example (Anderson-Butcher & Bates, 2022).

It is also important to note that we were only able to map slightly more than half of coaches trained through the MCC. Moreover, coach location is, in some part, due to where some Partners are located or if they have a specific geographic focus. UW CLA has focused on Washington, for example, and LiFEsports at The Ohio State University is working in partnership with the Ohio High School Athletic Association. Bearing these considerations in mind, it is important to interpret these demographic and location data with caution, given issues with inconsistent and missing data. **The data limitations we experienced through the implementation study highlight an important need to improve data collection norms and processes to gain better insight into the coaching population more broadly.**

## Take Five: Recommendations for the Youth Sport Field

The MCC implementation study highlights the complex landscape of youth sport, coaching, and coach training in the United States, revealing barriers to progress while also presenting opportunities for growth and improvement. In this section, we elevate a set of recommendations based on insight from the MCC Partners that span research, practice, and policy. It is crucial to recognize the interconnectedness of research, practice, and policy, which are deeply interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Research informs practice, practice drives policy changes, and policy provides the structural support necessary for effective practice and subsequent research. Addressing the opportunities and challenges identified through the implementation study requires coordination across all areas.

### 1. Define, operationalize, and adopt a minimum standard or framework for what it means to be a “good” coach in the United States.

The study highlights a lack of consensus on what defines a “good” youth sport coach, with philosophical differences shaping coaching priorities. To address this barrier, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers should focus on defining and operationalizing what it means to be a “good” coach by articulating a comprehensive minimum standard, framework, or set of competencies. The youth sport and coach development fields may draw on and build from similar efforts in other youth-serving fields such as early childhood education (e.g., [National Association for the Education of Young Children Program Standards](#), [Early Childhood Environment Rating Scales](#)), K–12 education (state learning standards, the [Danielson Framework for Teaching](#)), and out-of-school time (National Afterschool Association [Core Knowledge, Skills & Competencies](#), [statewide afterschool network quality standards](#)).

A structured national coaching standard that is inclusive of the youth development principles and practices elevated through the MCC could provide consistency in training, resources, and expectations across the United States. Although implementation at scale presents challenges, identifying responsible entities and aligning priorities would help ensure all coaches—regardless of location or socioeconomic context—have access to high-quality training and support, which, in turn, could promote a more uniform youth sport system, offering all children access to skilled and well-prepared coaches.



## 2. Review trainings available in the field to ensure they reflect what it means to be a “good” and “trained” coach.

Findings from the document review indicate that many available trainings cover some but typically not all of the practice areas that Partners indicated make one a “good” coach. Without a minimum standard or framework for coaching practice that elevates and prioritizes the youth development practices described herein, it can be challenging for coach developers (e.g., the MCC Partners) to make decisions about coach training content or for coaches to determine what they need training and support in. With a minimum standard, however, it becomes possible to revisit training content to determine whether, how, and to what extent different trainings align and are ensuring coaches receive comprehensive training across important areas of practice.

The MCC Partners also elevated the need to provide comprehensive supports for coaches. As one Partner shared, “Training is not *the* answer—it is the start of the answer.” Partners offered expanded ideas of what makes a “trained” coach, stating that coaches should have opportunities for experiential learning, a mentor or community of practice to learn from others, and additional learning resources that include “actionable tips and tricks” and reference information they can have “on hand” to help them implement best practices in the field.

However, findings from our document review indicate that trainings were typically time limited and did not provide the sustained learning opportunities that Partners reported that coaches need. We did not observe that the MCC trainings provided many opportunities for ongoing experiential learning and support, mentorship, communities of practice, or feedback loops, for example. This makes sense, given the goals and scope of what the MCC was designed to do, and, the Partners have acknowledged that more could be done to support coaches. Future training efforts can and should build from the foundation the MCC Partners and others in the field have already created. The youth sport field may consider systems used in other fields (e.g., teacher preparation) that include initial learning, practical field work, credentials, and continuing education opportunities.

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*“[Coaches] are working in systems that don’t value or don’t support them, so [training alone] doesn’t matter. They’re going to burn out. They’re going to drop out . . . We cannot talk about [training] without thinking about the ecosystem around [coaches] and what those critical support mechanisms look like systemically for them to be successful and to become quality trained coaches.” – MCC Partner*

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## 3. Expand access to high-quality, comprehensive training.

The MCC was launched to increase the quality of and access to coach training in positive youth development and related areas. The MCC Partners are on their way to achieving this goal; however, Partners agree that this work is only the beginning. Future efforts should continue to focus on increasing access to high-quality training programs that emphasize athlete-centered, youth development–focused, holistic coaching.

In addition, we note that there may be issues of access to coach training, particularly for coaches in rural areas. To increase access, organizations that train coaches may explore leveraging online platforms, offering flexible and affordable training options, and ensuring that training is available in communities with limited resources. Training programs should be grounded in research on what constitutes effective coach development and designed to meet coaches at various levels of experience and expertise across the myriad sport contexts.

## 4. Invest in coaches.

Preliminary findings from the study suggest that there are multiple ways to invest in coaches—build capacity for policy implementation, professionalize coaching, and change the narrative about coaching youth sport. These steps are not linear and can be taken on simultaneously to mutually reinforce the changes that are needed to create a more supportive and cohesive environment for coaches.

- **Build capacity for policy implementation.** Inconsistent youth sport policies hinder effective implementation. To address this challenge, MCC Partners recommended that policymakers should invest in training, resources for local organizations, and professional development for individuals overseeing programs. Strengthening local capacity ensures national or state policies are not just adopted but are effectively applied. Findings from MCC Partner interviews suggest that a key step is recognizing the vital role of coaches in youth development and allocating resources accordingly, for example, as tax incentives or stipends for volunteer coaches, funding for comprehensive training programs, and support for initiatives that promote quality coaching.
- **Professionalize coaching.** A clear, nationally recognized coaching pathway with aligned training has the potential to bolster the youth sport field. Findings from the MCC Partner interviews suggest that new or refined systems are needed to professionalize coaching, making it a more viable career, with opportunities for advancement. Establishing widely recognized coaching credentials or certifications could signal the importance of quality coaching to coaches, parents, and organizations. However, the MCC Partners cautioned that these systems must be supported by policy, funding, and resources to be effective.
- **Change the narrative about coaching youth sport.** Youth sport has historically prioritized winning over holistic athlete development, potentially limiting buy-in from coaches and stakeholders while reinforcing narrow coaching norms. Findings from the MCC Partner interviews suggest that efforts to reframe coaching as a role that supports athlete growth—not just competitive success—will be important. Notably, this approach is not at odds with winning but instead lays the foundation for sustained athletic performance and long-term success. During the interviews, Partners described how shifting this perspective could enhance coach recruitment, retention, and satisfaction while creating clearer coaching pathways, including professional development, leadership opportunities, and recognition for contributions to youth development.

## 5. Develop a shared research-practice agenda and prioritize systematic, shared measurement efforts to understand the coaching landscape and document coach development and effectiveness.

All Partners elevated different challenges related to measurement and evaluation in their work. These issues were evident during the implementation study as we worked across different Partner data collection and management systems, navigating issues of data quality and missing data. More work is needed to strengthen data collection efforts such that coach development and training organizations can collect data on coaches systematically. In addition, strong research–practice partnerships should do the following:

- **Continue to explore the influence of trainings and support on coach practice.** Through the implementation study, we identified common areas of interest across organizations that train coaches; however, more work is needed to explore the implementation of such practices and aligned outcomes rigorously and in context. Research grounded in context will be essential, as will efforts that explore the internal and external factors that influence coach practice.
- **Investigate the effectiveness of online training for youth sport coaches.** While virtual training is expanding, more research is needed to determine when and how it yields positive outcomes. Partner interviews highlight online training's benefits—broader reach, flexible pacing, and bite-sized content—along with its limitations.

Some Partners found success with hybrid models, combining structured online learning with live follow-ups to reinforce skills. As virtual training scales, research should identify optimal formats, delivery methods, and content, comparing effectiveness with in-person training and refining best practices for engagement and ongoing support.

- **Examine the broader youth sport workforce, including volunteer and part-time coaches, to better understand their professional identities, needs, and challenges.** This research can help inform workforce development strategies and ensure that coaches receive the necessary training and support to succeed in their roles.
- **Develop and implement robust tools to evaluate the effectiveness of coach training programs.** This work includes examining the content, dosage, and support mechanisms that contribute to positive outcomes for coaches and youth participants. Research should extend beyond self-reported data from coaches and incorporate objective measures of coach practice, as well as longitudinal studies to track how improvements in coach practice translate to athlete outcomes.

## Conclusion

The MCC has brought together a coalition of leading youth sport organizations committed to developing and implementing training programs that equip coaches with the knowledge and skills needed to foster positive youth outcomes, both on and off the field. To date, 18 MCC Partners have come together around the shared belief that coaches trained in evidence-based youth development and skill-building practices are essential for creating quality sport experiences that meet young people’s physical, mental, and emotional needs. This brief has highlighted key findings from the MCC implementation study through December 31, 2024. Through the study we sought to track coaches trained throughout the challenge and elevate lessons learned by Partners along the way.

### Learn More About the Million Coaches Challenge

**The MCC has already released two statements about this important initiative:**

- The MCC Partners released a [Belief Statement](#) in 2023 that summarizes what is driving the work of the MCC Partners.
- The MCC Partners released an [Impact Statement](#) in 2024 that draws on MCC Partner program evaluation data to provide examples of the potential outcomes that are possible through coach training in youth development.

**Additional publications are forthcoming in 2025 and 2026:**

- AIR will release a comprehensive technical report on the implementation study
- The MCC will share more information about the Partners through a series of blog posts that profile their work.
- The MCC Partners will release a Call to Action Statement to improve youth sport by addressing systemic barriers to quality coaching.
- AIR will release a coach practice guide that provides a more nuanced exploration of the training practices identified through the document review.

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## About the Million Coaches Challenge

The Susan Crown Exchange launched the [Million Coaches Challenge \(MCC\)](#) in 2021, with the ambitious goal of training one million coaches in youth development techniques by 2026. **The MCC brings together a coalition of leading youth sport organizations committed to developing and implementing training programs that equip coaches with the knowledge and skills needed to foster positive youth outcomes, both on and off the field.** These trainings focus on various aspects of youth development, including supporting holistic athlete development, creating a positive sport climate, and promoting physical and mental well-being. Ultimately, the MCC aims to ensure that all young athletes, regardless of their backgrounds, have access to well-trained coaches who can help them thrive. By addressing the gaps in coach training and support, the MCC seeks to build a future where youth sport is a powerful tool for positive development.

To date, 18 MCC Partners have come together around the shared belief that coaches trained in evidence-based youth development and skill-building practices are essential for creating quality sport experiences that meet young people's physical, mental, and emotional needs. By fostering a positive environment through these practices, coaches can enhance youth enjoyment, learning, and growth and their desire to continue playing sport. Since its inception in 2021, the participating organizations of the MCC have worked together not only in an effort to train one million coaches but also to elevate the work of MCC Partners that are filling in crucial gaps in training and coach education, specifically related to PYD. In working together, the MCC Partners aim to create a future where every coach has the support they need to coach effectively and every young athlete benefits from the guidance of well-trained, supportive coaches.

### Who's In?

Eighteen Partner organizations currently participate in the MCC, which is ongoing through the end of 2025. Each Partner set goals related to training development and how many coaches the Partner would train. In addition, a team of four coordinating partners facilitates the work of the MCC.

### MCC Partners

The [California Governor's Advisory Council on Physical Fitness and Mental Well-Being](#) launched *25x25: The California Coaches Challenge*, which aims to train 25,000 coaches in positive youth coaching across California by the end of 2025. Through the council's Move Your Body, Calm Your Mind campaign, MCC Partners Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA) and the Center for Healing and Justice Through Sport (CHJS) will spearhead a statewide effort to instill the principles of PYD, social and emotional learning, healing-centered practices, and culturally responsive coaching in youth coaches.

The [Center for Healing and Justice through Sport \(CHJS\)](#) works with coaches to better utilize sport as an intentional strategy to support healing, build resilience, and address issues of systemic injustice. CHJS engages with sport at every level, from community centers and juvenile detention centers to major college athletic conferences and professional leagues. Coach trainings are available live in person or online and focus on topics such as sport-based youth development, healing-centered sport (relationships, resilience, regulation, reflection), and coaching girls.

[Girls on the Run](#) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to creating a world where every girl knows and activates her limitless potential and is free to boldly pursue her dreams. Girls on the Run

inspires girls to be joyful, healthy, and confident using a fun, experience-based curriculum which creatively integrates running. Girls on the Run coaches build relationships; create a positive, inclusive environment where all youth can be themselves; and establish safe environments with an awareness of sexual abuse prevention best practices. Drawing on research and insights from the field, the Girls on the Run approach combines online asynchronous and in-person training to prepare all coaches to implement the curriculum. Trainings focus on the Girls on the Run curriculum, policies, and procedures and topics such as recognizing everyone's story; building relationships; creating a positive, inclusive environment; and mastery climate.

[How to Coach Kids](#), inspired by the Aspen Institute's Project Play and co-developed in 2018 by Nike and the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Committee, is a free, 30-minute online course introducing the fundamentals of coaching kids. Its companion course, Coaching Girls, focuses on creating inclusive environments where girls feel valued and supported in sport. Both asynchronous trainings cover key topics such as planning practices, ensuring safety, engaging parents, fostering a girl-inclusive culture, and managing stress. These courses are designed to empower coaches, both new and experienced, to create positive sport experiences for athletes by integrating quality coaching principles foundational to the American Development Model, which promotes age-appropriate, holistic development, and quality coaching.

[Laureus Sport for Good Foundation USA](#) is a grant-making, nonprofit organization that supports the growth and deepens the impact of programs that use sport for social change. In four "Sport for Good" cities—Atlanta, Chicago, New Orleans, and New York—Laureus and its partners take a collective impact approach to training and providing resources for thousands of youth sport coaches to learn more about sports-based youth development and social and emotional learning. The Laureus training partnerships focus on nonprofit organizations, professional league and team networks, and other local sport and youth agencies. Trainings are available in person and online in partnership with CHJS. Trainings focus on topics such as sports-based youth development; and healing-centered sport.

[LiFEsports](#) at The Ohio State University is a model for sport-based positive youth development, providing quality, sport-based positive youth development programming; preparing and training coaches, youth development and mental health practitioners, and others across the state; and leading policy and research efforts to discover and share best practices. LiFEsports, in partnership with the [Ohio High School Athletic Association](#), leads [Coach Beyond](#) . . . , a statewide agenda designed to ensure coaches, athletic directors, and other stakeholders are ready to "coach beyond . . . the X's and O's" and teach life and leadership skills through sport. Coach Beyond trainings, webinars, and other learning opportunities are offered in person, through facilitated online training sessions and/or as asynchronous courses. Trainings focus on topics such as fostering a positive team environment, improving mental strategies for athletic performance, supporting student athlete mental health, developing leaders, promoting life skills in student athletes, promoting positive behavior and engagement, managing stress and pressure as coaches, building a community of support, and perfecting practice.

[Little League](#) is focused on ensuring children have a positive, well-rounded experience on and off the field. Founded in 1939, Little League provides baseball and softball programs for children around the world, promoting teamwork, sportsmanship, and community involvement. It is one of the largest organized youth sport programs globally, with millions of participants across various age divisions. The course is available online asynchronously. Trainings focus on topics such as impact of coaches; social and

emotional learning; supportive team culture; celebrating effort; skills; being a role model; being coachable; and working with other coaches, families, and community.

The [MCC State Learning Cohort](#), facilitated by LiFEsports at The Ohio State University, in partnership with the Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA), includes three states: Indiana, Kansas, and Maryland. Teams from these states engage together in a learning cohort, launched in 2024, that is guided by lessons learned from LiFEsports' [Coach Beyond . . .](#) and based on LiFEsports' and OHSAA's efforts to train 15,000 coaches and inform state-level policy improvements.

[National Governing Bodies](#) (NGBs) are organizations that govern and manage all aspects of their individual sport within the United States, including training, competition, and development for their sport, as well as for nominating athletes to the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic teams. USA Weightlifting led the development of coach-training modules available online asynchronously and through a facilitated learning community for coaches and coach developers. USA Fencing and USA Triathlon, along with many other NGBs, have partnered to offer these learning opportunities. Topics focus on coaching Generation Z, creating a culture of belonging, partnering with parents, coach self-awareness, and emotional intelligence.

The [National Recreation and Park Association \(NRPA\)](#) is dedicated to building strong, vibrant, and resilient communities through the power of parks and recreation. Through its focus on environmental resilience and health and well-being, NRPA supports park and recreation professionals as community impact leaders, driving investment in parks and recreation as critical community infrastructure while advancing system-level solutions across seven dimensions of well-being. NRPA provides training to park and recreation agencies and their youth sport partners across the country. Trainings are available in person and virtually through four MCC Partners: CHJS, How to Coach Kids, PCA, and the U.S. Soccer Foundation. NRPA is also facilitating a learning community of park and recreation agencies to foster peer-to-peer learning focused on coach recruitment, training, and building the long-term coaching infrastructure to ensure youth sport programs thrive.

[Positive Coaching Alliance's](#) mission is to change the culture of youth sport so that every child, regardless of social or economic circumstance, has access to a positive youth sport experience. PCA's work focuses on providing a positive and accessible youth sport experience for all communities across the country. Through partnerships with schools, youth sport organizations, and community-based organizations, PCA offers in-person, virtual, and self-paced online coach-training courses for coaches across the country, with close to half of those coaches working in under-resourced communities. PCA also works alongside community stakeholders to close the gap in access to sport by launching coalitions across the country to help remove barriers to play and providing more opportunities for youth to participate in sport.

The [United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee's \(USOPC\)](#) serves as both the National Olympic Committee and National Paralympic Committee for the United States. The USOPC is focused on serving America's elite athletes and is responsible for fielding U.S. teams for the Olympic, Paralympic, Youth Olympic, Pan American and Parapan American Games. USOPC also serves as the steward of the Olympic and Paralympic Movement in the United States. Trainings are available as asynchronous online courses and focus on topics such as coach emotional intelligence, connecting with athletes, and emotion management.

The [University of Washington Center for Leadership in Athletics \(UW CLA\)](#) conducts research, delivers academic programs, and facilitates training for coaches and athletics leaders. Using the Ambitious Coaching™ framework as a foundation, the UW CLA team shares a common goal of using leadership to promote unity and inclusivity in sport. Courses are available online and may be completed asynchronously. In-person training opportunities are also available. Trainings are crafted for a variety of audiences and focus on topics such as building skills through sport, fostering physical and emotional safety, creating an environment for learning, modeling positive behavior, and adolescent development.

The [U.S. Soccer Foundation](#) provides underserved communities access to innovative play spaces and evidence-based soccer programs that instill hope, foster well-being, and help youth achieve their fullest potential. The U.S. Soccer Foundation builds coaches' capacities to create lasting, positive connections with youth by teaching coaches how to also serve as mentors through its Soccer for Success, Just Ball, Safe Places to Play, and Coach-Mentor Training programs. Trainings are facilitated in person or virtually, and asynchronous online courses are available for select programs. Trainings focus on topics such as coaching growth mindset, social and emotional learning, voice and choice, physical and emotional safety, team culture, connection building, and trauma and mental health.

## **Coordinating Partners**

A team of four coordinating partners work together to support the MCC Partners in achieving their individual and collective goals. The coordinating partner organizations provide funding, strategic, technical, and research support for the MCC.

The [Susan Crown Exchange \(SCE\)](#) works to prepare youth to thrive in a rapidly changing, highly connected world. SCE primarily supports organizations that operate in out-of-school time, prioritizing initiatives that promote social and emotional learning, explore the relationships between technology and society, and build critical skills through youth sport. What unites all SCE's partners is their commitment to creating opportunities for young people. As part of the MCC, SCE is funding a cohort of organizations to bring critical training to coaches across the country.

Launched in 2013 by the Aspen Institute Sports & Society Program, [Project Play](#) develops insights, ideas, and opportunities to help stakeholders build healthy communities through sport. Project Play produces reports that take the measure of the state of play at the national, regional, and city levels, with exclusive data and insights, and creates frameworks and tools that stakeholders can use to grow access to quality sport. Through the MCC, Project Play is committed to sharing resources that improve the quality of coach training and change the conversation about what it means to be a good coach.

[Collaborative Communications](#) is a woman-owned small business dedicated to finding collaborative solutions to education, workforce, and community challenges. Collaborative Communications Group works with its partners to help them tell their stories, shape public and policy conversations about core issues, and develop strategies for sustained success. Collaborative Communications Group provides strategic communications, including messaging updates, storytelling, media and public relations support, digital engagement, design, and content development to elevate the MCC's impact and visibility.

The [American Institutes for Research® \(AIR®\)](#) is a nonpartisan, not-for-profit organization that conducts behavioral and social science research and evaluation and applies the evidence through individualized technical assistance. The AIR team leads the MCC implementation study and produced this brief.





# Meet Our Partners



Advancing Evidence.  
Improving Lives.