

Empower Every Coach

A \$1 Million Funding Call to Dismantle Systemic Barriers to Quality Coaching in the United States

BACKGROUND

Sports can do what few other systems can: foster belonging, resilience, joy, and mental health for *millions* of young people in communities across America. A great coach lies at the center. Whether in local recreational leagues, schools, or high-performance teams, the nation's 6.5 million coaches are everyday mentors and often the most trusted adult for the 40 million kids who participate in sports each year. They shape not only on-field performance but mental and emotional health.

The problem? At least 2/3 of coaches don't have the tools, training, or support to bring those outcomes to life. Like teachers, they make or break the experience, but despite their desire to show up for their athletes, most coaches report feeling unprepared to meet their emergent needs (National Coach Survey). For instance, fewer than 20% of coaches feel confident reducing performance anxiety, identifying off the field stressors, linking athletes to mental health resources, or helping them navigate the pressures of social media.

That's why the [Million Coaches Challenge](#) (MCC) exists. Launched in 2021 with funding support from the [Susan Crown Exchange](#), MCC is a collective of public and private partners from across Youth Sports with a shared goal to equip the next generation of coaches with approaches that help young people thrive on and off the field. The MCC believes that quality coaching – at every level – fosters positive youth development in addition to health, safety, and sport-specific skills. In the Fall of 2025, MCC reached a critical milestone: one million coaches trained in youth development and mental health. While an achievement, the true power of this milestone is in what comes next: How can we empower every coach in America?

THE NEED: TURN CALLS INTO ACTION

To empower every coach, leaders across Youth Sport must answer a new question: ***How might we build the system that turns individual wins into new norms?***

We are not alone in asking that question. Promising efforts have recently emerged, including new statewide commissions for Youth Sports in Illinois and California and the MOVE Fund, a new collaborative funding effort to support collective action in cities across the U.S. And in 2024, the Commission on the State of U.S. Olympics and Paralympics called for bold changes to modernize Olympic, Paralympic, and grassroots sports.

The [partners](#) of the Million Coaches Challenge also answered the call. The 18 MCC partners collaborated to identify systemic barriers to quality coaching and released the [MCC Calls to Action](#) (CTAs) in the Fall of 2025. The CTAs draw upon findings from the American Institutes for Research which articulate how coordinated, systems-level action across four key domains is necessary to scale and sustain progress in Youth Sports. These domains are Insights, Narrative, Organizational Practice, and Policy. Ultimately, the CTAs are a long-term vision for coaching, with sector-wide priorities and a series of immediate opportunities in each domain that will move the ball forward. The CTAs call for public policy that backs coach development, organizations that share standards, research that drives action, and stories that help people understand the human impact of coaching.

Our Calls to Action

Taken together, these sections explore what's working, what needs to change, and how we can make quality coach training the rule, not the exception.

 Insights Getting Best Practices to Coaches Start Here	 Narrative Changing the Way the World Sees Coaching Start Here	 Org Practice Raising the Bar on Coach Training Start Here	 Policy Closing the Policy Gap in Youth Coaching Start Here
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FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

It's time to dismantle the systemic barriers to quality coaching in the United States. With funding support from the Susan Crown Exchange, **Million Coaches Challenge is launching a \$1 million funding opportunity** to turn the Calls to Action into reality. Through this Letter of Inquiry (LOI) process, we intend to surface a group of potential partners who are leading high-impact, system-level projects. We will then request more detailed grant proposals from the most promising applicants.

We anticipate funding ~6-8 projects, including at least one within each of the four CTA categories (Insights, Narrative, Organizational Practice, and Policy). **Applicants may seek \$100,000-250,000** over a grant period of 12-18 months. If your project has a budget greater than \$250,000, you will be required to identify outside funding to complement the MCC grant amount.

WHAT WE'RE LOOKING FOR

We welcome LOIs from a range of actors, including but not limited to Youth Sports providers, coach training organizations, intermediaries, and governing bodies. We are especially interested in supporting efforts that include underserved communities as a primary audience. To be considered for funding, your effort must meet the following requirements:

1. Alignment to MCC Calls to Action

- Projects should be clearly aligned to one or more Calls to Action. [See here for more information about the CTAs.](#) A brief summary of each domain is below.

Call to Action Domain	Summary	Goals
Insights: Getting Best Practices to Coaches	Actions that prioritize coaching frameworks that support kids' development and well-being, improve coaches' access to resources, advance the body of research, and translate academic evidence into real-world coaching practices.	Build Shared Understanding Strengthen Research Impact Ensure Quality Learning
Narrative: Changing the Way the World Sees Coaching	Actions that change people's perceptions of coaching through powerful stories, recruiting more coaches, celebrating impact, and giving coaches the tools, support, and recognition they deserve.	Change How People See Coaches Enhance Coach Recruitment Improve Coaching Experience
Organizational Practice: Raising the Bar on Coach Training & Development	Actions that help organizations connect coach training and development to their values, prioritize affordability and easy access, and ensure coaches are well-prepared to create safe, positive experiences for kids.	Create Systems that Enable Coach Training at Scale Provide Quality Education for Coaches Remove Barriers for Coaches
Policy: Closing the Policy Gap in Youth Coaching	Actions that call for stronger state and national systems to support Youth Sports by requiring coach training, aligning with public health goals, funding local programs, and using shared standards to ensure all kids have access to safe, well-coached experiences.	Advance Public Policy and Oversight Make Youth Sports a Public Health Issue Develop New Financing Levers

2. **Catalytic and Systems-Focused**
 - Projects should be a high priority for the Youth Sports sector. That is, they should be oriented towards changing the system, have field-wide implications, and unlock future progress for your organization and others.
3. **Concrete, Systems-Level Impact within 12-18 Months**
 - We understand that systems-change takes time, but the moment is now. This funding is designed to support initiatives that are ready to make a concrete impact within the next 12-18 months. Applicants should be able to answer, "What systems-level change was achieved as a result of this project?" In turn, we will assess opportunities based on their readiness and potential impact.
4. **Quality Coaching as a Primary, Explicit Goal**
 - Systems-focused projects are often intersectional. Competitive submissions must center quality coaching as a core priority and outcome. Additionally, your definition of quality coaching *must* include positive youth development, athlete-centered coaching, or another similar concept.
5. **Partnerships and Collaboration**
 - Million Coaches Challenge believes deeply in the power of collective action. The CTAs are a representation of the collective voice and wisdom of the 18 MCC partners. We are especially interested in initiatives that leverage the power of partnership and collaboration.

Additional Considerations

- We invite submissions from applicants that are working in various parts of the Youth Sport ecosystem. For instance, we welcome LOIs that are working in recreational-, school-, and/or performance-based sports, in different geographies, and across various age ranges.
- We invite submissions from current MCC organizations and those outside of the MCC cohort. We hope to grow the MCC community through this opportunity.
- We will consider the long-term financial sustainability of a project as we evaluate initiatives. This funding is a one-time grant for 12-18 months. Applicants should have plans for how to sustain this work after the grant period.
- What We're Not Looking to Fund
 - Coach training initiatives that do not include a systems-change component
 - Program evaluation or measurement efforts that primarily benefit one organization or program (e.g. used for internal learning or continuous improvement)
 - Efforts that do not include positive youth development as a key outcome (e.g. an initiative that is only designed to enhance health and safety protocols)
 - Scaling programs (e.g. helping a program scale from 10 schools to 100 schools)
 - Planning grants or early stage systems-change efforts

WHAT TO EXPECT IF YOU RECEIVE A GRANT

In addition to receiving funding to execute your project, your organization will become a member of the Million Coaches Challenge community. This means you will:

- Participate in a Learning Community that meets virtually each quarter to share progress, barriers, and coordinate where possible. We strongly encourage more than one leader within your organization to participate.
- Serve as a collaborative thought partner for other organizations.
- Be a champion for the Million Coaches Challenge and the need for systems-change. Partners may be invited to participate in thought leadership opportunities.
- Share formal interim and final reports with the Susan Crown Exchange team.

HOW TO APPLY

We invite submissions from 501(c)(3) organizations. If you are applying in partnership with other organizations, please submit one LOI on behalf of all organizations. LOI submissions should address the following topics.

- **Organization & Project Background:** Tell us about your organization and its mission, as well as any other organizations you may be collaborating with in this effort. Please also include descriptive information about your proposed project (e.g. geographic scope, population served).

- Project Summary: In 1-2 pages (single spaced), describe your initiative and explain how it will make a catalytic impact on the Youth Sport sector. Please include information about your target population, your goals, and proposed measurement strategy. In addition, please describe which MCC Call to Action(s) you are aligned with and how.
- Budget: Provide your estimated total project budget, the amount you are requesting, and any other funding sources for the project.

We will use criteria aligned with the “What We’re Looking For” section to evaluate each LOI.

Please submit your Letter of Inquiry via Susan Crown Exchange’s [Foundant portal](#). There you will find the specific questions for each section. LOIs will be considered until the deadline of 5:00pm CST, February 17, 2026. After a review period, we will follow up with the most promising applicants to request a formal grant proposal.

KEY DATES

- January 21, 2026: LOI opens
- February 17, 2026: Submission deadline for LOIs at 5:00pm CST
- March 11, 2026: Semi-finalists will be invited to submit a full grant proposal
- April 9, 2026: Full proposals due at 5:00pm CST
- April 24, 2026: Finalists will be invited to the interview round
- April 29-May 12, 2026: Interviews with finalists
- May 19, 2026: Decision date
- July 2026: Grants disbursed

Please direct questions to info@millioncoaches.org. You may also review our [FAQs](#).

About Million Coaches Challenge

The Million Coaches Challenge is a national initiative launched by the Susan Crown Exchange in 2021 to transform Youth Sports by training one million coaches in evidence-based youth development practices. Backed by 18+ partners, including the Aspen Institute’s Project Play and research led by the American Institutes for Research, the Million Coaches Challenge is transforming Youth Sports by equipping coaches with the information and tools to create positive, inclusive environments that help young people build confidence, belonging, and life skills through sport. Learn more at www.MillionCoaches.org.

About the MCC Calls to Action

The MCC [Calls to Action](#) identify systemic barriers to quality coaching in the United States and recommend priorities for the Youth Sport field. The CTAs were created by the 18 [partners](#) of the Million Coaches Challenge and the result of a collaborative, year-long process.

About Susan Crown Exchange

The [Susan Crown Exchange](#) (SCE) is a grantmaking foundation with a mission to prepare youth to thrive in a rapidly changing world. SCE primarily supports non-profit organizations that promote social and emotional learning and youth well-being, explore the relationships between technology and society, and build critical skills through Youth Sports. What unites all SCE’s partners is their commitment to creating opportunities for young people.

