



**Networking and Development for
Stronger Youth Services:
The Philadelphia Youth Sports
Collaborative**

**A Comprehensive Look at the Foundation,
Practices and Future of PYSC**

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NOTE: The author's perspectives, and the interviewees' responses, do not necessarily reflect the opinions of all PYSC members, partners, advisors and stakeholders.

INTRODUCTION

The Philadelphia Youth Sports Collaborative (PYSC) was founded in 2009 as a means of uniting and providing resources for the city's many youth sports organizations, particularly those aimed at underserved youth populations. Growing from three initial member organizations to fifteen, along with eight partner organizations, the Collaborative has become a great asset to the non-profit organizations it serves. PYSC provides invaluable networking opportunities and professional support through seminars on topics such as staff training, seeking financial assistance for programming, and managing situations with youth both on and off the playing field. The organizations that PYSC represents address a multitude of intersectional youth issues. By engaging area youth in physical activity, educating them about the importance of nutrition and fitness, and encouraging individual growth by focusing on life skills, mentorship and academic support, these organizations are doing their part to guide their participants towards successful outcomes and bright futures in the face of often dismal statistics.

Although PYSC has only been around for a few years, it has done a great deal to put Philadelphia's youth sports organizations in conversation with one another, engendering strong working relationships in which they share promising practices, resources, and ideas. PYSC's three most important functions to date are networking, hosting seminars and staff training, and securing grants to fund a number of collaborative projects. This report outlines

the practices that have contributed to the collaborative's successes, determine the factors that have contributed to the termination of some ventures, and present a comprehensive view of the collaborative's future and the steps it can take to enhance its current scope of services.

The following work is based off of a diversity of sources compiled over the course of two months. Personal interviews with PYSC directors and member/partner organization leaders, support from comparative literature and scholarly articles on youth issues related to the scope of PYSC services, and background research into PYSC's compilation of its own documents and communications were all included in hope of presenting a multi-dimensional, comprehensive view of the collaborative.

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN PHILADELPHIA AND BEYOND

The youth sports programs that PYSC supports serve a diversity of young people along racial, class, and gender divides. These programs place the bulk of their emphasis on working with youth from underserved populations, making PYSC unique among most other collaborative sport-based youth programs across the nation. While a number of US cities and towns have youth sports advisory boards or collaborative efforts that aim to increase participation from underserved youth in established programs, PYSC is perhaps the only example of a collaborative in which working with underserved populations is a core ethos of each member organization.

Philadelphia's vast array of out-of-school time youth programs, aimed at improving the outcomes of the children and teens whose lives they touch, suggests both the abundance

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of committed non-profit leaders and volunteers and a dearth of programming and opportunities offered to these youth by their schools as a result of underfunding¹. The sentiment ‘it’s a shame that we have to exist,’ expressed in a number of interviews with organizational heads, perhaps best illustrates this state of affairs. Unfortunately, immense budget deficits for city schools—this year, stated to be over \$250 million²—prevent them from offering effective programming to the children and teens under their jurisdiction. With a combined focus on athletics, health and nutrition, as well as teaching social, life and team building skills, the youth sports organizations of Philadelphia—and PYSC—are attempting to combat this decrease in school-time support.

Among some of the behaviors these programs are working to prevent are childhood (and later-life) obesity. The Philadelphia Department of Public Health’s 2010 report on obesity states that “obesity has become a norm and a public health crisis in Philadelphia. In 2008, 64% of adults and 57% of children 6-11 years of age were overweight or obese. Remarkably, nearly 70% of children are overweight or obese in North Philadelphia. Nationwide, the prevalence of obesity has tripled in the past 20 years, and obesity-related medical expenditures totaled \$147 billion in 2008.”³ Behind these troubling statistics lie a number of contributing elements. For one, widespread sedentary lifestyles play a major role in America’s weight problem. Philadelphia is no different, as the Philadelphia Department of Public Health notes, “one-quarter of children [are] not getting sustained physical activity (30 minutes) even once a week and nearly half of adults [exercise] less than 3 times per week.”⁴ While every youth sports organization involved in PYSC operates on a different schedule, all participants generally meet at least two to three days a week for a couple hours at a time. By

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not only engaging youth in regular physical activity but getting them enthusiastic about playing and moving, these programs impart habits that will help tackle weight issues in the present and hopefully stay with these youth well into their adulthood.

In addition to getting young people physically active, many PYSC programs work to provide them with information about health and nutrition that directly applies to their lives. Underfunded communities tend to lack resources for healthy *and* affordable food. Often, there are a large number of fast-food and takeout options available, but no grocery stores within the range of a neighborhood. This ‘food desert’ phenomenon⁵ is a major factor in the obesity epidemic, although it has only recently become a part of the national conversation about eating habits and health. Healthiness, as a concept and a lifestyle, is overwhelmingly marketed to Americans with the assumption of wealth and means as a prerequisite. This often ignores the privilege inherent in being able to choose between a healthy option and a fast-food option, and between purchasing organic produce and more affordable alternatives. By working from the community level to construct ideas of healthiness and discussing unique strategies for accessing healthy meal options, many of PYSC’s organizations^{6,7} dedicate time and resources to this crucial task, working to translate the physical and mental benefits of participating in athletics to other areas of young people’s lives.

Finally, PYSC organizations concentrate a great deal of their programming on providing academic support for their youth, and stressing the importance of education. While Philadelphia graduation rates have been slowly rising, the numbers are still bleak: according to a recent article from CBS, “the School District's on-time graduation rate climbed 3 percentage points last year to 61 percent, the first time in memory that more than

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six of ten Philadelphia students have graduated on time.”⁸ PYSC’s member and partner organizations offer a wide range of resources to help youth reach successful outcomes in school. From having structured homework time built into their programming, to providing tutoring and even access to SAT prep classes, these organizations do their best to help their students achieve academic success. Several of the organizations keep track of data such as attendance rates, attitude toward school, and grades in order to monitor the kinds of outcomes to which their programming contributes. One remarkable example is SquashSmarts, which reports a 100% graduation and college acceptance rate for all students who stick with its rigorous programming from elementary through high school⁹.

THE BIRTH OF PYSC

Key Players

While it took a great deal of effort from many dedicated people to get PYSC off the ground, it was initially conceived by three individuals whose backgrounds and combined passion for athletics, for working with youth, and for community involvement were a perfect fit for such a unique venture. Networking has been a vital part of the collaborative from the beginning; indeed, Nancy Peter and Wendy Palmer, PYSC’s two Co-Directors, first met several years before the collaborative was founded on the board of Starfinder (one of its founding members). Nancy, a self-proclaimed “baseball mom” and head of University of Pennsylvania’s Out-of-School Time Resource Center (OSTRC), became interested in the sport-based approach to youth development through supporting her own son in his athletic pursuits. She expanded upon her own experience by writing a research paper on parental

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involvement in youth sports. It was a timely topic, as national interest in athletics was also piquing due to increased focus on health, fitness, and obesity prevention. Wendy called Nancy three years after her time on the Starfinder board to propose the idea of a youth sports collective, and Nancy now serves as the “point person” for PYSC¹⁰. Using her wealth of knowledge and resources in the Philadelphia youth development community, Nancy plans networking events and seminars about a myriad of relevant topics for PYSC Members and Partners, and works hard to move the collective from project to project and into the future.

For sixteen years, Wendy Palmer served as Executive Director of Philadelphia Youth Tennis, which owned the Arthur Ashe Youth Tennis Center. After her long tenure, she went back to school for her Masters in counseling. From there, Wendy took a position in The Palmer Group to develop and implement a scholarship program for American Education Centers. Since then, she has worked on independent education-focused projects to benefit under-resourced Philadelphia youth and families. Wendy engineered the Guiding Youth to Careers mentoring program, which paired college and high school students to provide guidance and support through all aspects of the college application project¹¹.

Jason Wingard, senior fellow of the Wharton Sports Business Initiative (WSBI), joined the PYSC project offering WSBI’s support, resources and connections, as well as offering for WSBI to serve as a fiscal agent in the event of future funding. Jason, a lifelong athlete, was involved with both national and local sports organizations and non-profits through his work at WSBI. He was inspired to give back to his community by engaging with local sports-based non-profit youth organizations, and hoped to channel his connections in the sports and business worlds to directly benefit Philadelphia youth¹². . Although WSBI no

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longer serves as PYSC's fiscal agent, Jason remains integrally involved as Senior Advisor to PYSC. In his current position as Vice Dean of Executive Education at the Wharton School, Jason continues to be a strong ally to the collaborative and to provide support, resources, and opportunities.

Initial Meetings

In March 2009, to gauge their interest in collaboration with similar youth sports organizations, Wendy met individually with the heads of SquashSmarts (Stephen Gregg), Arthur Ashe Youth Tennis and Education (Kenny Holdsman), Ed Snider Youth Hockey Foundation (Scott Tharp) and The Starfinder Foundation (Heidi Warren). As all expressed interest in meeting, she hosted a lunch for those individuals on April 7. At Kenny's suggestion, Wendy then contacted Jason Wingard and Nancy Peter, seeking their help and involvement in launching the collaborative. Nancy, Wendy and Jason gathered at the Palmer Group to further brainstorm the idea. They suggested other potential collaborators, and all contacted parties expressed enthusiasm for the idea of collaborating and were eager to connect with peers in their field. On May 14, 2009 the first PYSC official meeting was held at SquashSmarts' new Lenfest Center, attended by the heads of ten Philadelphia youth sports organizations. The group recognized that there was much to be gained from like-minded individuals sharing ideas and promising practices with one another.

Membership and Partnership

The initial criteria for membership dictated that all eligible PYSC organizations must have be a 501c3-status non-profit organization or have formal affiliation with a 501c3 organization; must work with populations from low-income/under-resourced communities; must provide sport-based development programs for children and youth; and must serve children and youth throughout the city of Philadelphia. Originally, they included an additional mandate that the sports provided were to be uniformly ‘non-traditional.’ However, this was eventually eliminated, as the connotations of the idea ‘non-traditional’ had to be unpacked. ‘Traditional’ sports were taken to mean baseball, basketball, and football; games that are widely popular and that most young people can easily access. The term ‘non-traditional,’ however, was found to be too exclusive for a number of reasons, the foremost being that it carried with it suggestions of classist and prejudiced attitudes. The non-traditional sports being offered were typically upper-class, suburban sports like golf, squash, rowing, and riding. Some felt that by limiting membership to only these types of organizations, PYSC would be promoting the unspoken belief that these are somehow more character-building than the sports traditionally accessible to urban youth. Other than this omission, the original membership criteria remain the same. Membership responsibilities were defined as attending leadership meetings, functioning as the ad hoc PYSC executive board, and being involvement in PYSC decision-making. Perks and privileges include having right to first refusal on funding opportunities/projects, enjoying prominent listing on the PYSC website, with link to the member organization’s own website, and posting organizational news/highlights on the PYSC website. Members were and are expected to

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provide timely responses to PYSC inquires/requests, have agency leaders attend PYSC meetings, and have agency leaders and staff participate in Networking Seminars (described in subsequent sections of this paper).

PYSC decided not to apply for 501c3 status and to cap membership at fifteen organizations, as Members wanted to keep the collective's size and scope of services in a manageable range. Due to the number of organizations that wished to join, Nancy suggested with idea of "partnerships" to circumvent this membership cap. Partnerships were and are intended to function as an "overflow parking lot" for Members. Partners in PYSC enjoy many of the same benefits and responsibilities as Members, with the stipulation that heads of partner organizations cannot serve on the PYSC leadership committee or have final say in collaborative decision-making. The clause was also added that Partner organizations could become Members if and when a membership position was vacated.

Finding a New Home

An important event in developing PYSC was its move from Wharton Sports Business Initiative to the Out-of-School Time Resource Center. Initially, WSBI was home to PYSC, and the collaborative used WSBI's facilities and refreshments for its events. In addition, WSBI offered advising services and offered an undergraduate student team to do research on corporate giving in Philadelphia. In 2011, WSBI and Wharton also provided PYSC with pro bono professional counsel to revisit whether PYSC should pursue 501c3 status. This option

was again rejected, for the perceived additional bureaucracy it would generate and the inability of most parties to commit to a formal governance structure.

The move to the OSTRC happened in October 2011, for a number of reasons. At the time, the PYSC project was not advancing at the rate that either PYSC or WSBI had expected when they originally agreed to team up, and a change was necessary for the project to progress. The OSTRC was considered a better fit as a home for the collaborative, as the Center is directly related to youth services and out-of-school time programming; and able to provide, in turn, a wealth of youth development resources to PYSC organizations. WSBI provided the collaborative with an immense service by acting as an incubator for the fledgling PYSC, and continues to be an ally. For example, the Wharton School provided funding for the PYSC summer intern that authored this paper.

MEMBER AND PARTNER ACTIVITIES

Several of PYSC's more intensive activities, services, and projects are exclusively targeted at its Members and Partners. These efforts are listed below.

Wharton Undergraduate Research Project, 2011

On January 20, 2011, Steve Baumann of Starfinder, Kenny Holdzman of Arthur Ashe, and Wendy Palmer attended Ken Shropshire's (WSBI) Sports Ventures and Social Impact undergraduate class, where they presented PYSC's background, organizations, and

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needs. Wendy and Steve went on to supervise a team of three students who, over the course of the spring semester, researched the corporate giving landscape in Philadelphia. PYSC hoped that the student group would reveal real and viable funding opportunities for PYSC and/or its member organizations. Unfortunately, the project did not result in substantial usable data that related to its initial goals. Future joint ventures with the collaborative and student interns/researches should keep this experience in mind. For this type of project to truly succeed, students need to be invested in the work and supervisors need to issue and adhere to rigorous guidelines.

CiviCore Project, 2010

Another Member-exclusive project involved developing a database that could be customized for each organization to best record and monitor participant data and, from that, be able to analyze youth outcomes. In 2010, The Samuel S. Fels Fund awarded PYSC a \$5,125 grant for this project, in which any and all PYSC members could participate. By working with CiviCore, a company that develops technologies for non-profits and public sector foundations, each organization could—at minimal cost to them—create a way of filing data about students' participation, school attendance and grades, and development within the program, in order to best understand the impact of their programming on this children. Of the fifteen Members and numerous Partners, three organizations utilize this database system today: Philadelphia City Rowing, LEAPS Lacrosse, and Starfinder, all of whom report high satisfaction with their systems.

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The fact that only three groups took advantage of this opportunity was a frustration to some Members of collaborative. To best represent PYSC to the public and seek grants, in addition to performing at their own peak capacity, each organization needs to have a measurable way to evaluate their own performance. However, many organizations declined to participate in the CiviCore opportunity because they already had a functioning method of data collection and analysis, or had neither the time nor desire to create a new filing system. It would certainly be useful for all PYSC organizations to have similar data collection methods so that practices and outcomes might be easily compared, contrasted and presented to the public. However, it is important to note that this opportunity—while useful to some—was inconvenient for others, contributing to the high rate of declined participation.

IT Initiative, 2011

In the summer of 2011, Heidi Warren, from Starfinder, initiated a discussion about collective IT support. Sal Sandone, the leader of Zhang Sah, referred Heidi to DataTime (DT) Consulting, which was very interested in exploring and developing an IT package for the collaborative. In July 2011, Wendy Palmer put together a survey of technical needs for interested PYSC organizations. After initial conversations between PYSC and DataTime, Richard Wright of DT offered a comprehensive group consulting proposal in February 2012, with rates corresponding to the scale of the organizations: there were three tiers determined by annual revenue streams. DT needed five low-tier, five mid-tier and two high-tier organizations to provide this discounted package. The need for high participant numbers

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made this project unfeasible; however it illustrated the considerable group-buying power of PYSC.

Like the minimal response to the CiviCore proposal, the lesson to be learned from this project is that PYSC, in its current state, can only offer so much to its Members and Partners. To reap the benefits of these opportunities, Members and Partners need to take initiative in their implementation. This could also speak to the main issue with the CiviCore proposal in that many organizations may have already had IT solutions that worked for them, or may have lacked the time and resources to invest in developing a new one. Either way, the results of these PYSC-exclusive projects illustrate the difficulties in reaching across-the-board results or consensus in a group of organizations, each dealing with their own unique operating styles and internal issues.

Transportation Solutions, 2011-Present

There have been a number of conversations about PYSC Members' transportation issues and difficulties getting youth from their schools and neighborhoods to program hubs. There was a transportation meeting on June 15, 2011 at Starfinder, with representation from Zhang Sah, Playworks, Cadence Cycling, Starfinder, BWSF, SquashSmarts, and The First Tee; Wendy Palmer also attended. The meeting was facilitated by Sal Sandone from Zhang Sah, whose organization has a comprehensive and effective transportation system in place. Zhang Sah was willing to work with other organizations to figure out how to implement a larger scale version, or to share their resources. The group originally discussed five

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approaches : 1) lobbying SEPTA for discounted tokens/passes; 2) developing a PYSC transportation system with their own vehicles and mapping out mutual geographic pick-up/drop-off zones; 3) advocating with the school district to extend the free Transpass program to all PYSC Members; 4) working out an arrangement with one transportation company to serve most/all PYSC organizations for a group rate; and 5) initiating small group collaboration between organizations that work in the same areas and/or serve the same schools. In July, Wendy Palmer sent an email to all other organizations regarding this subcommittee and included a survey about transportation needs and practices. In December 2011, PYSC applied to the Fels Foundation for a summer intern to address transportation issues. This proposal was accepted and the Foundation issued a \$6000 grant. The Fels intern, Aaron Searson, is currently working to develop a way to facilitate transportation for the largest possible number of organizations.

Partnership with District Attorney's Office, 2011-Ongoing

An exciting PYSC project under current development is a partnership with the US Attorney's Office of Pennsylvania and the Philadelphia Juvenile Probation Department. This pilot program was created as a response to the US Attorney's Office Violence Prevention Initiative, and research demonstrating that many adults in the justice system did not have access to youth programming, positive peer groups, or athletic activity as children. Robert Reed and Michael Blume, from the US Attorney's office, reached out to PYSC in hopes of collaborating on a project to place young non-violent offenders into programs that

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provide a combination of athletics, mentoring, and academic support. The first roundtable/open discussion about this potential partnership took place on November 1st, 2011. Several PYSC organization leaders expressed concern about issues of safety associated with introducing youth offenders into regular youth programming. These concerns included the idea of the young offenders being disruptive or acting as bad influences on other children, and the logistics of implementing such a program. In the end, a small number of PYSC programs chose to participate in the pilot partnership: Beat the Streets, Black Women in Sport Foundation, The First Tee, Philadelphia City Rowing, SquashSmarts, and LEAPS Lacrosse. A meeting took place on March 2nd, 2012 at the Lenfest Center with Robert Reed, Bennie Price (the Deputy Director of Juvenile Probation), Nancy Peter of PYSC, Terry Dougherty from PCR, and Stephen Gregg from SquashSmarts. The goal of this meeting was to discuss the logistics of the partnership and what all parties wanted out of the relationship. The group identified a number of guidelines, which included: 1) Children participating in programs would be non-violent offenders with a strong potential for success within the selection of PYSC programs; 2) Family courts would help by offering enrollment in one of the volunteering PYSC programs as a condition of probation; 3) There would be training from a third-party organization for PYSC staff, in regard to dealing with adjudicated youth; 4) The integration process would involve meetings with the children's probation officers, parents/guardians, and the children themselves; 5) Participating children would not be identified as offenders within the program; and 6) Participating children could continue their involvement with their PYSC organization if both the organization and the child agreed to this. Probation officers and the leaders of participating organizations met at the Juvenile

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Courts on March 28th. The PYSC representatives also witnessed a court session, to gain a better understanding of the juvenile probation system and the experiences of adjudicated youth. Before programming was to begin, the Boston-based organization Up2Us and Greg Morgan, local director of youth outreach and prevention education for HEALING, held a training seminar on Sport and Trauma, “The Healing Power of Sport Training,” at the US Attorney’s Office Building on May 24th 2012. The training session focused on educating PYSC administrative and direct-service staff, as well as probation officers, on effective ways to coach and interact with youth who have dealt with trauma in their homes and communities.

In personal interviews, there was a distinct commonality between the outcomes each participating executive director hoped to attain from this partnership. Mainly, they all expressed a desire for the participating youth to remain anonymous within their programs, demonstrate a high level of commitment and perseverance, and hopefully stick with their programs past the end of their court-related involvement. Both PYSC administrators and the executive directors of the participating programs hope that the success of the pilot will encourage other PYSC organizations to join in, and for similar community-based reform initiatives to be implemented across the city. This response to juvenile crime is fairly novel, in terms of the rest of the country, but in similar pilot programs has proven to be a successful and useful approach. In Richard Mendel’s 2003 paper *Youth, Crime and Community Development: A Guide for Collaborative Action*, he argues for the efficacy of such an innovative response to youth violence and delinquency:

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“[Community based organizations] can play a role in efforts to support young people and steer them away from delinquency and crime towards healthy futures. Many CBOs maintain good relations with police departments and community-policing officers, and a small number of promising partnerships are underway. However, the nonprofit community development sector has not emerged as a core participant in the movement to mobilize community responses to crime and delinquency. Similarly, few neighborhood youth-serving agencies fully recognize or act upon the connections between their work and the work of community development and crime prevention. Supervised after-school programs, youth centers and mentoring programs do reduce delinquency. However, few youth-serving agencies go the important next step of integrating their programs with community development resources and initiatives. Yet, a growing body of research and experience demonstrates that young people have both the desire and the capacity to make a contribution to their neighborhoods.”¹³

By participating in this kind of pilot program, PYSC is undertaking just the kind of ‘promising partnership’ that can help lead the rest of the city, and hopefully the nation, by exploring a more community-based and integrated, holistic way of dealing with youth crime.

Mantua in Action Project, 2012-Ongoing

The Mantua in Action (MIA) project is a current venture whose success speaks to the considerable networking and planning strengths of PYSC. MIA is a partnership between PYSC, Drexel University, Philadelphia Parks and Recreation, the We Are Mantua community planning effort, Mantua Community Improvement Committee, and Mantua’s DB4 youth task force. Coordinated by CustomED (a nonprofit that designs and implements programs to address needs and deficits in education, training and outreach), MIA is designed to bring long-term summer and after-school programming to middle school children in the Mantua area of West Philadelphia. The summer pilot version of this program launched on

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June 25th 2012 and ran through August 10th 2012. It offered a variety of youth sports options, as well as an intensive playwriting class. Options included tennis with Legacy Youth Tennis and Education (formerly Arthur Ashe), fencing and lacrosse with the Black Women in Sport Foundation, squash with SquashSmarts, wrestling with Beat the Streets, and long-distance running with Students Run Philly Style. Program participation was free and meals were provided. In return, all students were expected to adhere to excellent behavior standards. Students were able to try each activity over the course of the first week and attend health/nutrition workshops. After this preliminary period, they picked one activity to stick with over the next six weeks. Each individual program had different scheduling, but students attend 2-3 days a week on average. The pilot program was aimed at 4th-8th grade students, and utilized facilities at Drexel, James L. Wright Recreation Center, Miles Mack Recreation Center, and area tennis courts. The summer MIA pilot will serve as the basis for a proposed multi-year afterschool program for the area.

Summer Interns, 2012

Over the summer of 2012, PYSC hired several interns to conduct research projects on a variety of topics, demonstrating a vested interest in future development and growth. Karen Okigbo, a master's student at the University of Pennsylvania's School of Social Practice and Policy, worked on two projects: a special project for Starfinder, analyzing their highly diverse immigrant population and assessing how best Starfinder can serve these youth; and an evaluation plan for the pilot PYSC/US Attorney's Office program. Aaron

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Searson, a doctoral candidate at the University of Delaware, was hired through a grant from the Fels Foundation. Aaron was brought in to address the collaborative's aforementioned transportation issues. Lauren Artiles, an undergraduate student at Muhlenberg College, was hired by the Wharton School to author this retrospective paper, helping to shape the narrative of PYSC's early years and gather information on future suggestions and directions.

PUBLIC ACTIVITIES

Many PYSC's activities and services are designed for and open to the public, which includes sports-specific programs as well as those that have (or would like to have) a youth sports component.

PYSC Website

The OSTRC's Communication Coordinator, Angel Hogan, created and regularly maintains a professional and engaging PYSC website. Along with historical and current information about PYSC, all Member and Partner organizations are listed with links to their respective websites. The site also provides links to relevant research articles as well as events, news, and highlights from PYSC and Member/Partner groups.

Hunting Park Event, 2009-2010

A planned ‘Big Event’ in Hunting Park was intended to be a combination showcase and networking opportunity for PYSC organization Members and the community at large. Planning for the event was initially very enthusiastic, beginning in October 2009 and continuing through that winter. The event was slated to take place in July or August 2010 at Hunting Park in North Philadelphia. For the event to be held, a number of factors had to come together: the group needed in-kind donations, vendors, guaranteed community, and a great deal of help with event planning.

Unfortunately, an event of this scale turned out to be too large of an undertaking for the fledgling collaborative, for many reasons. Smaller organizations didn’t have staff to spare for planning and participation. Every organization suggested a different outcome for the event, be it gaining funding, learning best practices, or gaining exposure/members. Transportation, perhaps the biggest logistical headache, was a major issue, with youth from other parts of the city having no way to get from their neighborhoods to the event, and organizations lacking any kind of endogenous transportation system to make the trek any easier. The failure of this venture carries with it some important lessons, demonstrating to the PYSC its own ‘problem areas’ in the lack of extra staff and navigating transportation issues.

PYSC Seminars, 2009-Ongoing

To date, PYSC has held a number of educational and networking seminars for the youth sports community, out of which have sprung a true network of peers that share promising practices, ideas, and resources. Some of the seminar topics have included Data Collection /Measurable Outcomes, Professional Development, Nutrition in Youth Programming, Managing Competition in Youth Sports, and Financial Support for Youth Sports Programs. These seminars attract an average of 40-60 attendees per event, and are open to the public. While many of the attendees are staff and leadership of PYSC organizations, other area youth sports and youth development programs are represented as well. These events are extremely valuable in that they provide helpful staff training enrichment with up-to-date research and strategies in youth development. The seminars have also proven to be an invaluable resource to young, grassroots organizations. The networking opportunities born out of PYSC's meetings are truly remarkable, be it agency leaders using connections to assist their peers with organizational issues of their own; combining programming to offer more opportunities to youth (like LEAPS Lacrosse and Ed Snider Youth Hockey teaming up with Black Women in Sport Foundation to offer lacrosse and hockey programming to BWSF's participants); or allowing peer organizations access to one another's facilities.

THE FUTURE AND LESSONS LEARNED

In its brief early years, PYSC has created a model for forging not only impressively strong working relationships and bonds between a number of Philadelphia’s youth sports organizations, but also solid partnerships with public and private institutions. PYSC is a valuable resource for youth sports organizations looking to connect with peers in the field of youth development. Initiatives like Mantua in Action and the District Attorney’s Office partnership are cause for excitement on both the local and national level. Not only do they promise innovative new solutions for serving Philadelphia youth, but their success within the city should and hopefully will serve as an inspiration for other cities to replicate across the country. The ‘PYSC model,’ as far as such a thing is chartable and replicable, can be seen at work here. PYSC is using the combined power of many organizations that share similar goals, and working in conjunction with other public institutions—in this case, law enforcement, universities and local recreation facilities—to realize those goals on a greater scale. The seminar ‘model’ of PYSC’s networking practices, another organizational success, is also something that can be put into practice by anyone who wishes to start a PYSC-like collaborative in their own community. The strength of a collaborative venture, as the PYSC model demonstrates, is linked closely with its ability to communicate and share among itself. Networking and communication are the heart and soul of PYSC, and the collaborative’s greatest strength.

Governance Structure

As PYSC continues to develop relations among its current Member organizations, attract new Partner organizations, and engage the youth sports field as a whole, its nature becomes somewhat paradoxical. The potential of such a unique collaborative effort is at once both hypothetically limitless and realistically limited by the amount of time and energy its small staff can afford to contribute. A frequently voiced desire among the heads of PYSC's Member and Partner organizations is for the collaborative to use the clout of all its aggregated forces in the world of youth development and community building to advocate for youth-related issues and youth-based initiatives in Philadelphia. While this kind of effort seems to be the most logical and beneficial direction in which to move, as the collaborative ages and expands, PYSC's ability to act as a force of advocacy, or as a substantial financial resource for its Members and Partners - another wish unanimously expressed among all organizations - is complicated by the fact that the collaborative is an informally run organization. Early debate over whether or not to apply for 501(c)(3) status and turn PYSC into its own autonomous non-profit organization resulted in a strong case against such a move, which would have required a kind of governance, hierarchical organization, and level of commitment that most key players were neither willing nor able to offer at the time the decision was made. There was a great deal of concern about the redundancy, inefficiency, and 'excessive bureaucracy' of creating a new non-profit to house and serve so many existing non-profits. In addition, with everyone involved in PYSC having their own organizations and jobs on which to focus, there was—and remains—no one to staff this new non-profit. As collaborative projects develop and evolve, PYSC may again revisit applying for its own

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501c3 status. Unfortunately, there are no available funds to pay these hypothetical employees without the greater grant-getting power that non-profit status would afford, so no new individuals can be simply ‘hired’ to fill this need.

This Catch-22 is commonly cited by Member organization heads as a reason for PYSC’s perceived stagnation or failure to move past the structure that has organically evolved from initial discussions and decisions. To address the issue in full, some other solutions must be explored. If PYSC is to move forward, another alternative to applying for 501(c)(3) status that would achieve the same ends (a cohesive, concrete collaborative entity) must be implemented. Whether this is a joint-partnership agreement or another legally-recognized but less-binding way to establish the relationship between all parties that comprise PYSC, some kind of hard decision needs to be made. There are a myriad of changes that can be implemented for the collaborative to improve its current function as a more-or-less symbolic entity that provides support, resources and valuable networking opportunities for youth sports programs. For PYSC to *evolve*, though, and function in any of the ways that the leadership of its member organizations have spoken about in our interview sessions—as a substantial financial resource or powerful advocate for youth, for example—its informal governance style needs to change.

There have been well-reasoned cases for and against this kind of move. Stronger governance seems to be recognized across the board as a necessary step for PYSC’s expansion, with some executive directors enthusiastic about the prospect and some wary. Those heads of member and partner organizations that are resistant to such a step, but still eager for a broader scope of PYSC services, must re-examine their priorities. If they are

indeed unwilling to tackle the headache of more bureaucracy and governance, they have to accept that the larger undertakings they've suggested for PYSC's future will be extremely difficult to realize in full.

Marketing and Promotion

For PYSC to maximize its potential, it needs to engage in more aggressive self-promotion/marketing. Be that on the Internet, in print, or by simply ensuring that PYSC has a presence at relevant public events and a working relationship with the city's various youth-related advisory councils, any increased effort is going to require more manpower than PYSC currently has at its disposal. While one certainly can't throw interns at every situation where a larger staff is needed, such a solution could do a lot to get the ball rolling. Even a semester-long project could help lay the groundwork for what an advertising 'campaign' might look like and require in the future. Having a reliable group of individuals who are both knowledgeable and invested enough to attend events and council meetings, on the other hand, might be better addressed by seeking out lower-level staff members of PYSC-affiliated organizations that have direct experience working with youth and an ability to speak to the issues and difficulties their own organization faces. Anyone involved in a PYSC affiliated organization that has the time and energy to devote to such networking should be encouraged to do so.

Cultivating Partnerships

PYSC could further maximize the connections between Member and Partner organizations. While interviewing the heads of these organizations, it became clear that many of the individuals to which PYSC is connected have developed excellent connections of their own. For example, the director of Neighborhood Bike Works suggested that PYSC reach out to the Philadelphia Urban Food and Fitness Alliance, a collaborative that focuses on changing education, policy and systems relating to the distribution of healthy, affordable food and safe public spaces within the city's schools and communities. Their similar collective structure and goals make them an ideal candidate for some kind of working relationship; at the very least, it would be productive to have a discussion with them about best practices. Neighborhood Bike Works also had an excellent suggestion to help alleviate transportation issues. If a grant was secured to pay for the necessary resources, all children and teens who participate in PYSC programming could, if they wish, obtain their own bike through NBW's "Earn a Bike" program.

These kinds of creative applications of funding, where a smaller-scale grant could be implemented to achieve a unique solution for larger problems within the collaborative, should be explored as much as possible. Joe Kelly of Playworks, a Partner organization, had a creative idea for another potential grant. In his interview, Joe discussed the challenges of seeking volunteer help. It costs a substantial amount for any potential volunteer to be background-checked, and the cost of vehicle insurance that would cover drivers transporting any amount of young children—a major obstacle in the transportation discussion—is extremely prohibitive. A grant could be sought to help pay for background checks and/or

insurance for PYSC vehicles, allowing a greater number of volunteers to help out with programming and alleviating the issues

Additional Suggestions

As it is, PYSC provides a much-needed service in forging and facilitating strong connections between youth sports organizations and their peers in the field, and it will no doubt remain a valuable resource to those unfamiliar with the landscape of sports-based youth development, or those just getting their own organization off the ground. For Member and Partner organizations to reap the more tangible benefits they desire, however, they need to commit to the reality of carrying out those ideas by responding in a timely manner to surveys and inquiries, and doing the work that needs to be done within their own organizations to optimize results. Several additional ideas and strategies for advancing PYSC include:

- Raise initial funds to pay staff members that work *solely* for PYSC.
- Seek a team of student interns from University of Pennsylvania and other city universities who are well-versed in social media and could handle tasks that are too time-consuming for the current staff.
- Enhance PYSC's Internet presence to help expand the reach of PYSC's scope of services, such as a PYSC Twitter account, Facebook page, up-to-date Google Calendar, and a more youth-friendly website. This would expand PYSC's community presence and get the word about youth sports programming out to kids who might

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not have friends involved in such programming or any way to connect with it through their school.

- Engage in aggressive self-promotion/marketing. A semester-long project with interns could help lay the groundwork for what an advertising ‘campaign’
- Host seminars on a number of Member-suggested topics
- Arranging seminars by scope of organization so that smaller-scale Members and Partners can benefit directly by sharing promising practices with their peers instead of big-name and big-budget organizations whose practices greatly differ from their own
- Host public panels on youth-development and on running non-profits for the Philadelphia community so that members and partners can use their experience to educate others who’d like to be involved in the field but don’t know where to begin.

The PYSC model, as it stands, can serve as an excellent example to any other city or town that would be interested in replicating such a collaborative structure. Its effective practices of networking and deep commitment to serving the youth of Philadelphia to the best of its ability are truly remarkable, and will always remain the core of the collaborative no matter what practical changes are made in the future.

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