

GET HER IN  
THE GAME



NATIONAL RECREATION  
AND PARK ASSOCIATION



Change Policies and  
Practices

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To build more inclusive youth sports programs, park and recreation agencies should assess and revise policies and practices to better serve girls.

## Assess Current Conditions and Implement Solutions

Assessing current conditions to identify gaps in access, resources and representation allows you to establish a baseline, set measurable goals for improvement and track progress. An assessment can help you identify gaps and design solutions to address them:

- ✓ **Participation Data (Youth and Coaches):** Collect and regularly review participation data across all sports and age groups, including coaches. Make sure to track who signs up again in future programs to understand potential retention challenges. Tracking participation and engagement by gender makes gaps visible and helps agencies identify focus areas, set measurable goals, allocate resources more fairly and hold themselves accountable.
- ✓ **Facility Access and Quality:** Assess existing practices for how your agency allocates facility space (known as permitting). Use findings to improve and establish a fair permitting process. The process should create clear and transparent criteria for space allocation that prioritize girls and boys fairly, as well as new organizations and emerging programs.



Park and recreation leaders huddle together at a coach training event. Photo courtesy of City of Los Angeles (California) Department of Recreation and Parks.

- ✓ **Facility Improvements:** Assess how resources have been allocated to facility improvements historically – who has benefited and who has not? Use data to establish new practices and policies that redirect resources to new facilities or facility enhancements fairly. Whether it's updating locker rooms, rethinking field layouts, or improving lighting and safety, park improvements are a chance to ensure that girls have the same opportunities to play.
- ✓ **Fee Structures:** Assess the cost of programs. Who is most impacted by those costs and how is financial support provided or distributed? New practices, like developing sliding fee scales, creating scholarship programs and fee waivers, incentivizing participation with discounted rates for coaches and siblings, and providing equipment, uniforms or transportation at no cost can increase participation.
- ✓ **Uniform Policy:** Uniform policies significantly impact whether girls feel comfortable, confident and included in sports. Uniform policies should be developed in partnership with girls and parents/caregivers and provide choices to fit a range of body types and to accommodate cultural needs.
- ✓ **Equipment:** Girls' programs should receive the same quality and quantity of equipment as boys' programs. Whether it's balls, pads, mouthguards, helmets, nets or practice gear, investment in high-quality equipment for girls reinforces their participation is equally valued in your sports programs.
- ✓ **Community Engagement:** Girls and women should be active contributors in shaping policies to ensure that programs reflect lived experiences, cultural context and actual needs rather than assumptions. Agencies can formalize this engagement through advisory councils, leadership opportunities and community-led program design.
- ✓ **Safeguarding:** Safeguarding refers to policies and practices that ensure a safe physical and psychological environment for kids in youth sports programs. Agencies should establish clear safeguarding policies that address codes of conduct, screening and training of all volunteers, educating youth, parents and caregivers, and reporting concerns.



A young gymnast performs a floor routine during a competition. Photo courtesy of City of Columbus (Ohio) Recreation and Parks.

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## Create an Action Plan

Once you identify opportunities to modify policies and practices to better support girls in your programs, develop an action plan with specific activities and clear timelines. An action plan helps agencies dedicate resources, maintain accountability and track progress toward goals. Defining objectives using the SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time bound) acronym is a helpful way to identify actions that advance youth sports goals and establish clear targets and timelines.

### Sample SMART Objectives:

- ✓ By 2027, we will establish baseline participation rates across all priority demographics. We will assess participation rates in all youth sports programs on a quarterly basis and publish an annual progress report through 2030.
- ✓ By 2027, 10 percent of the youth sports operating budget will be dedicated to coach recruitment and training to ensure all volunteer coaches have the skills they need to support youth.
- ✓ By 2028, we will develop and launch a targeted coach recruitment campaign to increase the number of female coaches by 20 percent by 2030.
- ✓ By 2028, we will establish a youth sports advisory council, with at least 75 percent of participants representative of the priority populations (including youth). This advisory council will have decision-making authority over youth sports practices, policy changes and resources/investments.



Coaches serve as leaders and role models for youth across many different sports in Los Angeles County. Photo courtesy of City of Los Angeles (California) Department of Recreation and Parks.