



Advancing State-Level Work to Support Youth Sport Coaches

LESSONS FROM SEVEN STATES CONNECTED TO THE MILLION COACHES CHALLENGE





Youth sport plays a central role in the lives of millions of young people, offering opportunities to build skills, form relationships, develop confidence, and experience belonging. Yet the coaches who shape these experiences most directly typically have to operate without consistent preparation or support. Moreover, the various environments in which they coach—schools, community organizations, and locally operated programs— can have differing structures, expectations, and pressures. Strengthening youth sport therefore requires greater coordination across systems. It requires aligned, system-level approaches that make high-quality coach development pathways accessible, aligned, and sustainable.

This brief examines how seven states connected to the Million Coaches Challenge (MCC)—California, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Maryland, Ohio, and Washington—are taking on this challenge. Drawing on the experiences of the MCC Partners that have supported and coordinated work at the state level, this brief examines how efforts took shape, how organizations navigated different starting points, and how approaches evolved over time.

Despite their distinct entry points and contexts, states exhibited consistent patterns in how their work advanced, and **four cross-cutting themes consistently characterized progress**: the central role of partnerships and coalitions, the use of data and evidence to guide decisions, the importance of iterative and evidence-informed design, and the influence of system alignment, governance, and feasibility on what could be sustained.

At the same time, these experiences point to **a set of practical steps that can help states move systems-level efforts forward**.

While not linear or prescriptive, they reflect how efforts often begin and build over time:

- ① Anchor the work in a trusted organization or group
- ② Convene partners to align around shared priorities
- ③ Use data to understand needs and build momentum
- ④ Start where implementation is feasible and expand over time
- ⑤ Align training with existing systems and initiatives
- ⑥ Use policy, funding, and infrastructure to support scale



Together, these lessons and steps provide both a lens for understanding how state-level efforts have unfolded and a starting point for others seeking to build more coordinated youth sport systems. The sections that follow unpack these patterns in greater detail, showing how they play out across states and what they suggest for future work.

Why State-Level Action Matters

Within the broad landscape of youth sports, coaches are asked to take on increasingly complex roles, often without the preparation or support needed to maximize their important role in supporting the development, well-being, and safety of young people.

Because youth sports in the United States are fragmented, no single organization can meaningfully improve coaching quality at scale. State-level collaborations are uniquely positioned to convene partners, align systems, embed training, and establish policy within existing structures. The MCC, a national initiative launched in 2021, created momentum for this work by bringing together 18 youth sport organizations to develop, deliver, and expand access to evidence-aligned coach training. In 2025, the initiative surpassed its goal of training 1 million coaches.

About This Brief

The MCC was funded by the [Susan Crown Exchange](#). The American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) led an implementation study of the MCC from 2021 to 2026. The study was designed to track coaches trained throughout the challenge and elevate lessons learned by MCC Partners along the way. Specifically, the implementation study sought to elevate MCC Partners' insights, document their MCC journeys, unpack their training offerings, and explore the influence of those trainings on coaches.

This report was developed in partnership with a subset of organizations participating in or working alongside the MCC at the state level. We are especially grateful to our partners for participating in interviews and convenings, co-writing content, and joining in collaborative sensemaking throughout the development of this brief. Their leadership, expertise, and ongoing work at the state level and throughout the research process made this brief possible. Rather than presenting a single model to replicate, these MCC Partners shared lessons learned and helped identify patterns that can assist states in determining where to begin, how efforts typically unfold, and which supports are needed to build coordinated youth sport ecosystems.



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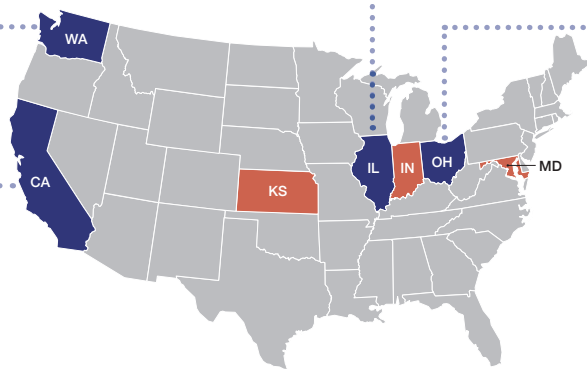
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We also recognize the broader network of state and local partners—the coaches, athletic leaders, policymakers, and community organizations—whose efforts continue to shape the development of more coordinated youth sport systems across the country.

The State of State Work: Seven State Snapshots

Across seven states connected to the MCC, organizations are advancing this work in different ways—shaped by their partners, systems, and starting points. In each context, efforts began from a different entry point and developed over time, but shared building blocks such as partnership, data use, training delivery, and alignment with existing systems consistently emerged. The overview below provides a snapshot of how efforts are currently taking shape across contexts. Additional information about each state is provided in the last section.

State Snapshot Overview



OHIO



KEY PARTNERS | LiFEsports at The Ohio State University and the Ohio High School Athletic Association (Co-Leads); *Coach Beyond* Ohio state team composed of school district, youth sport organization, and university leaders



WHAT THEY DID | Audited Ohio's coach training requirements; Conducted first-ever statewide coach survey (5,600 coaches) to inform *Coach Beyond* training content and needs; supported Ohio legislation mandating mental health training for all Ohio school-based coaches; rolled out coach, athlete, and caregiver trainings, resources, and tools reaching 100,000+ stakeholders nationwide; published eight articles and three research/policy briefs on coach education and youth sport policy

Ohio is supporting a state learning cohort that includes Indiana, Kansas, and Maryland in replication of statewide systems-level improvement processes

CALIFORNIA



KEY PARTNERS | Governor's Advisory Council on Physical Fitness and Mental Well-Being; Center for Healing and Justice Through Sport; Positive Coaching Alliance; Play Equity Fund



WHAT THEY DID | Statewide activity occurred along two parallel efforts that operated independently. Through a statewide advisory council and public-private partnership model, CA launched the 25 x 25 California Coaches Challenge to train 25,000 coaches across the state by the end of 2025 (training ~30,000 coaches in total). The Play Equity Fund led a separate policy effort to establish a Blue Ribbon Commission on the Development of a California Department of Youth Sports (AB 749: Youth Sports for All Act).

ILLINOIS



KEY PARTNERS | Laureus Sport for Good Chicago



WHAT THEY DID | Grew a Chicago-based coalition to secure ~\$15 million in state funding; led establishment of the Illinois Youth Sport Commission

WASHINGTON



KEY PARTNERS | University of Washington Center for Leadership in Athletics; Washington Interscholastic Activities Association (WIAA); National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS)



WHAT THEY DID | Integrated coach training into interscholastic systems via WIAA and the NFHS platform; aligned delivery, tracking, and policy requirements

INDIANA | *Coach Beyond* State Learning Cohort



KEY PARTNERS | Ball State University (Lead); *Coach Beyond* Indiana state team composed of school districts and youth sport organization leaders



WHAT THEY DID | Leveraged a university-based training pipeline and secured state-level approval for *Coach Beyond* trainings to count toward educator professional growth points (PGPs; educator professional development licensure credits)

KANSAS | *Coach Beyond* State Learning Cohort



KEY PARTNERS | Wichita Public Schools (Lead); Greater Wichita Athletic League (GWAL); Kansas High School Activities Association



WHAT THEY DID | GWAL embedded a 20-minute *Coach Beyond* mental health training into a league requirement; integrated *Coach Beyond* trainings and resources into statewide coaching school

MARYLAND | *Coach Beyond* State Learning Cohort



KEY PARTNERS | University of Maryland (Lead); *Coach Beyond* Maryland state team composed of school district, youth sport organization, and university leaders



WHAT THEY DID | Expanded *Coach Beyond* trainings, county by county, within a locally controlled system and thought partner in implementation of mental health training requirement now in effect in the state

Lessons Learned Across States

01 | Partnerships and Coalitions Were Essential Levers for Progress

Across all seven states, partnerships enabled coordination across organizations that may have otherwise operated in isolation, and this coordination drove progress. The partnerships took different forms—university-anchored efforts, community-rooted coalitions, and state-endorsed collaborations—but they all created the conditions for aligned action across sectors. In many cases, a single organization or team acted as the group anchor or central organizing hub, providing continuity, technical support, and a shared point of reference for the work.

Anchors shared two intertwined characteristics:

- **Credibility** with coaches and athletic directors, school districts, community organizations, and policymakers
- **Capacity** to convene stakeholders, align priorities, and sustain coordination over time

Coalitions were strengthened when they bridged sectors such as education, youth development, health, recreation, and sport—combining their social capital (relationships and trust) and institutional capital (organizational authority and reach). Relationship-building often preceded visible outcomes, with early phases focusing on trust-building, shared learning, and smaller-scale coordination.

“When we sat in the first meeting of the Sport for Good Chicago Leadership Council, we said that we wanted to think about the unique opportunities where collectively we can do something that we can’t do individually ... around awareness-building, quality standards, connection, advocacy. ... Our Phase 1 was all about trust-building, and basically building a foundation for collective action. We probably hosted 35 in-person events in those first few years, multiple trainings each month—it was just like, how can we build trust?”

—Ben Schornack, Laureus Sport for Good USA Executive (previously the Director in Chicago)



Laureus Sport for Good Chicago coalition members gather and share successes at a town hall.

Examples of Anchors in State Work



California

State government-supported
(25x25 California Coaches
Challenge)

Public charity partner and
intermediary nonprofit
organization (AB 749:
Youth Sports for All Act)



Illinois

Coalition-based



Ohio

University in partnership
with state high school
athletic association



Washington

University in partnership
with state high school
athletic association

Sustaining momentum required ongoing communication—including regular touchpoints, coordinated messaging (particularly about the importance of leveraging sport as a context for youth development), and multiple channels for reinforcing training opportunities. Across multiple states, partners pointed to the benefit of having visibility through statewide platforms and engagement from recognized leaders as mechanisms for maintaining awareness and participation. Partners that invested in long-term relationship-building described their work as more durable and better positioned for scale.

In Ohio, for example, a partnership between LiFEsports at The Ohio State University (OSU) and the Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA) was formed in response to the MCC and supported the creation of the *Coach Beyond* State Team (a statewide advisory group). What began with seven school districts has expanded to 17 and [continues to grow](#). Over the past 5 years, this group has convened quarterly to drive statewide innovation and systems change in youth and school sport.

“We’ve used a state team to be the advisory group guiding our work. ... And that entity is not mandated to be there. They come willingly and they drive. They are the voice from coaches and administrators in Ohio about what the needs are around training and resources and public messaging—and that’s never really existed. So that’s something that, over the 5 years, certainly looks different than when we started.”

—Dawn Anderson-Butcher, LiFEsports at the Ohio State University



Coaches, athletic leaders, and partner organizations convene at Ohio Stadium at The Ohio State University for a Coach Beyond learning and collaboration event focused on strengthening youth sport.

02 | Data and Evidence Were Catalysts for Credibility and Influence

Data played a central role in nearly every state. Partners used statewide surveys, needs assessments, asset and inequity mapping, and structured tracking systems to:

- **Demonstrate** need
- **Guide** training design
- **Strengthen** credibility with decision-makers
- **Inform** policy conversations

Examples of Data Use



Ohio

Ohio's efforts began with outreach and research done as part of Ohio State University's LiFEsports initiative, which serves approximately 800 youth annually through sport camps and clinics. LiFEsports and the OHSA partnered to collect local data as part of the Central Ohio State of Play report (facilitated by the Aspen Institute) which then expanded to [statewide data collection](#) efforts, including two waves of the [Ohio Coach Survey](#) (2022 and 2026) alongside the first-ever [National Coach Survey](#). The Ohio team also audited Ohio's mandated coach training requirements to understand what coaches were required to do, when, and at what cost. These findings supported legislation (HB 492) requiring mental health training for school-based coaches and it made improvements in the broader pupil activity permit process.

With support from the OSU LiFEsports team, Indiana, Kansas, and Maryland have also launched statewide needs [assessments](#) to identify needs and priorities within each state around coach education and leveraging sport beyond the X's and O's.



Washington

The University of Washington Center for Leadership in Athletics (UW CLA) leveraged the King County State of Play report (facilitated by the Aspen Institute) and other national coach surveys. UW CLA collected statewide baseline data about coaches' attitudes toward sport as a setting for skill development, physical and psychological safety, autonomy support, mastery, balancing fun with intensity, modeling and regulation, coaching effectiveness, job satisfaction, and professional development. They also continue to do extensive research on their training programs, starting with focus groups early in the development process, student-athlete-to-student-athlete interviews when building course content, and pre-post testing to understand coach and athlete outcomes feedback.

In some states, **quantitative data** (e.g., survey data, publicly available community data) **influenced policy conversations explicitly**, reframing coaching and coach training as a matter of youth well-being rather than a sport-performance issue, shifting conversations from whether action was needed to how it should proceed. **Partners also drew on broader forms of evidence**—coach feedback, practitioner insights, and community perspectives—to refine training, implementation, and policy efforts.

“ When we took the LA report [statewide to cover California](#), we found [many of the same trends we saw locally]. Girls were participating at a lesser rate. Black and Latina girls were particularly the lowest participating among all demographics. We saw income as one of the largest indicators of whether or not a child will play sports. We saw all the different reasons why kids are dropping out, including cost, transportation, and the lack of fun. Once we had that 2024 statewide data, we were super confident that we had a new baseline, so we began to present that information to stakeholders across the state. ... We made a lot of noise, a lot of buzz with the data. ”

—Fernando Ramirez, Play Equity Fund



Youth sport leaders, policymakers, and community members gather for a briefing to inform statewide efforts to strengthen youth sports systems in California.

03 | Iterative, Evidence-Informed Design Strengthened the Work

Training, implementation, and policy evolved together through cycles of testing, feedback, and refinement. Across states, Partners:

- Piloted training and adjusted content based on coach feedback
- Adapted delivery models to local conditions
- Used data to refine implementation strategies
- Allowed policy to emerge from practice rather than precede it

This iterative approach ensured that training remained relevant, user-friendly and aligned with system needs. It also helped Partners navigate tensions between voluntary, relationship-driven approaches and more formal mechanisms needed for scale.

Examples of Iterative Development Processes



California

The Center for Healing and Justice Through Sport (CHJS) and Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA) delivered training to nearly 30,000 coaches in California through the 25x25 California Coaches Challenge. Both organizations drew on their own established, evidence-aligned frameworks, while continuing to refine their delivery through ongoing feedback and implementation experience. CHJS trainings are customized based on need, with the goal of meeting coaches where they are—especially as it pertains to a coach’s understanding of where and how sport can help young people thrive. Similarly, PCA emphasized delivery approaches that align with how coaches already access training, including in-person sessions and integration within existing education and certification platforms to expand reach and reduce barriers to participation.



Ohio

The OSU LiFEsports and OHSA team, along with school district partners across Ohio, developed and refined *Coach Beyond* trainings using continuous data collection, coach feedback, and [implementation experience](#). Following the iterative creation process, this team conducted a [randomized study](#) funded by the Ohio Department of Behavioral Health to evaluate the impact of coach training on coach and student-athlete outcomes. Efforts in Ohio are now expanding to reach community-based coaches, and *Coach Beyond* is also being scaled and implemented through state partnerships in Indiana, Kansas, and Maryland, where partners are drawing on statewide needs assessment data to inform training delivery in alignment with their state-specific contexts.



Washington

UW CLA embedded iteration throughout the development and delivery of its coach training courses. Early-stage focus groups, ongoing participant feedback, and outcome data have informed continuous refinement of course structure and content over multiple years, allowing the training to evolve alongside both research insights and practitioner needs.

“The course was designed to be highly interactive, lightly dosed, and user-friendly. And people like the course! The quality of the course is what is helping it to move forward. The time we spent upfront [developing it] and getting input has really helped with coaches liking and using it.”

—Julie McCleery, University of Washington Center for Leadership in Athletics

04 | Readiness and Context Shaped What Was Possible

Across states, efforts unfolded within distinct governance structures, system conditions, and levels of readiness. Three sets of contextual factors influenced which strategies could take hold.

1. **System alignment.** Where training was successfully embedded into existing systems, uptake tended to be higher and resistance lower. In Ohio and Washington, for example, partnerships with athletic associations and school systems allowed training to align with familiar structures, supporting feasibility and scale. Efforts operating outside established systems often required sustained coordination and relationship-building to promote buy-in and maintain participation, even when training quality was high.
2. **Governance and capacity.** Structural factors—including organizational authority, staffing, and coordination capacity—influenced progress. In some cases, promising approaches stalled due to unclear ownership or competing priorities. In others, windows of opportunity, such as leadership transitions or increased attention to youth well-being, accelerated movement.
3. **Feasibility at scale.** Cost structures, platform integration, and administrative requirements shaped what could be advanced or sustained. Implementation infrastructure (tracking systems, communication mechanisms, verification processes) was as important as training design.

Partners described a recurring **tension between expanding access to training and aligning with existing financial models and resource constraints**. In some states, efforts to embed or scale training raised questions about cost structures, platform integration, and the implications of shifting from fee-based to freely accessible models. In others, analyses of the financial and administrative burden placed on coaches informed policy and system changes aimed at streamlining requirements and reducing redundancy. Other states paired their training efforts with new funding streams or appropriations to support implementation. Across contexts, progress often depended not only on stakeholder alignment or evidence of need but also on whether approaches could be supported within existing—or newly developed—funding and incentive structures.

Implementation infrastructure also shaped what was possible across states. In Ohio, Partners aligned coach-training requirements with certification renewal cycles and built systems to track completion and reduce administrative burden. In Washington, efforts to embed training required decisions about learning management systems and integration with platforms already used by athletic associations. Indiana's introduction of professional growth points required the development of verification and tracking processes to ensure that coaches could receive credit for participation. In Kansas, partners adopted train-the-trainer models to scale reach across the state and required local coaches to complete a brief online training module to mitigate access barriers.



Sam Brown, UW CLA Associate Director of Coaching Initiatives and Strategy, engages coaches during a leadership workshop and networking event at Husky Stadium in Seattle.

State-level policy efforts developed through different pathways depending on starting conditions, stakeholder structures, and opportunities for action. California and Illinois illustrate two distinct trajectories.



California

In California, statewide activity unfolded through two parallel efforts that operated independently within the same broader landscape. One pathway was anchored in an existing statewide effort focused on improving the holistic health of all Californians. The California Governor's Advisory Council on Physical Fitness and Mental Well-Being was established in 2021, followed by the launch of the Move Your Body, Calm Your Mind campaign in 2023. Through this platform, California joined the MCC and partnered with CHJS and PCA to launch the 25x25 California Coaches Challenge, a statewide effort to train 25,000 coaches in principles of positive youth development, trauma-informed practices, and culturally responsive coaching by the end of 2025.

“There is a real power in joining a national effort—it brings energy, momentum, and alignment that is hard to generate on your own, which increases impact. What made the Million Coaches Challenge valuable was the ability to tap into that momentum while still tailoring the work to California's needs, which made the program both ambitious and sustainable.”

—Francesca Schuler, Council Member,
California Governor's Advisory Council on Physical Fitness and Mental Well-Being

At the same time, a separate pathway led by the Play Equity Fund and partners focused on research, advocacy, and policy. Building on the LA County Sports report, this work expanded to a statewide Play Equity Report in 2024. Findings were disseminated through briefings, coalition-building efforts, and organizing in partnership with PCA. This work included an informational hearing with the California Senate Education Committee in 2024 and culminated in the passage of AB 749: *Youth Sport for All Act*, which established a study bill requiring the state's Department of Public Health to convene a Blue Ribbon Commission to assess the feasibility and need for a centralized youth sport entity at the state level. Although these two efforts occurred within the same timeframe, they operated as distinct pathways within California's broader youth sport ecosystem.



Illinois

In Illinois, statewide policy development was rooted in grassroots coalition-building. Laureus Sport for Good USA launched in Chicago in 2018 and began convening youth sport organizations across the city. During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, this work expanded to include a virtual space for executive directors to coordinate and respond to immediate challenges as sport shut down. As conditions stabilized, conversations shifted toward longer-term visioning—focused on how sport could “be waiting for young people on the other side” of the pandemic. This led to the launch of Chicago's Comeback, a coalition-driven campaign to advocate for increased investment in youth sport from government, foundations, and private partners. The coalition subsequently pursued a formal advocacy strategy, securing state budget allocations for youth sport (approximately \$1 million to \$5 million annually), and contributing to the launch of the Illinois Commission on Youth Sports in 2025.

“We built a coalition to build a collective strategy for addressing the systems that prevent young people from benefitting from sport and take action, and this was the collective action the coalition told us they wanted us to take.”

—Ben Schornack, Laureus Sport for Good Foundation USA Executive
(previously the Director in Chicago)



Advancing State System Building

States advanced this work through different pathways, but several steps consistently supported progress. **For states just getting started, early steps often focus on building relationships and understanding needs, while more advanced efforts tend to emphasize alignment, integration, and scale.**

- **Anchor the work in a trusted organization or group.** States consistently began with a trusted organization—like a university, coalition, or athletic association—that could convene partners and drive coordination. In Ohio, for example, a partnership between LiFEsports at The Ohio State University and the OHSAA enabled statewide coordination and engagement, and this laid the foundation for support from the Ohio Department of Behavioral Health.
- **Convene partners to align around shared priorities.** States brought people together across sectors to build relationships and define shared starting points and end goals, often through advisory groups or coalitions. In Illinois, for example, a Chicago-based coalition supported by the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation brought together youth sport organizations and stakeholders, laying the groundwork for coordinated statewide advocacy and action.
- **Use data to understand needs, define goals, and build momentum.** States used surveys, needs assessments, policy analyses, and perception data to identify gaps, guide design, and strengthen credibility with stakeholders and decision makers. In Washington, for example, UW CLA used student-athlete interviews, focus groups, systematic observations, surveys, and [formative evaluation data to shape training design](#) and support system integration while also using quasi experimental designs to [examine program effects](#).
- **Start where implementation is feasible and build from there.** Rather than launching statewide efforts immediately, many states began their efforts within a specific sector or system and expanded over time. In Indiana, for example, the work began through Ball State University's training pipeline. In Kansas, meanwhile, implementation started within the Greater Wichita Athletic League before expanding outward.
- **Align coach training with existing systems and initiatives.** Where possible, states embedded training into existing structures—partnering with athletic associations, linking with credentialing systems, adding in new professional development pathways—to increase uptake and support sustainability. In California, for example, training was delivered in partnership with the Governor's Advisory Council platform and aligned with broader statewide initiatives.
- **Use policy, funding, and infrastructure to support scale.** As efforts matured, states leveraged policy and funding opportunities alongside implementation infrastructure like tracking systems and communication mechanisms to expand their reach. For example, state policy and system alignment were used to embed mental health training requirements in Ohio, whereas in Maryland training expanded through counties as partners aligned efforts with evolving statewide policy requirements.

In practice, states moved through these steps in different ways, often revisiting and building on earlier efforts as conditions evolved. Rather than a fixed sequence, **these steps reflect common entry points and pathways for growth depending on a state's starting conditions.**

Conclusion

Across seven states, efforts to strengthen youth sport systems did not follow a single model or sequence. Instead, they developed in response to existing conditions—through different combinations of partnerships, data use, training delivery, and policy engagement. In some cases, work began with coalition-building and shared learning; in others, it advanced through existing systems or policy opportunities.

These experiences suggest that progress depends less on replicating a fixed approach and more on understanding where the work currently sits, what conditions are in place, and which next steps are feasible. While the pathways varied, a consistent pattern emerged: states made progress by building on what already existed and expanding outward over time.

Reflection Questions

For states or organizations exploring this work, the following questions may help clarify starting points and next steps:

- Where does youth sports currently live and how is it coordinated? Is there an organization or group that could serve as a credible anchor for convening partners across the youth sport ecosystem?
- What existing state and/or local systems can you build from? Are there structures—such as athletic associations, school systems, or community networks—where training could be integrated rather than added on?
- What do you know about coaches' needs in your state? What data, experiences, or perspectives could help shape a clearer understanding of gaps and opportunities?
- What feels most feasible right now? Is the next step to bring people together, pilot a training, align existing efforts, or explore policy and funding opportunities?
- What would meaningful progress look like in the near term? What early action could build momentum and create a foundation for future work?



First Partner of California Jennifer Siebel Newsom, members of the Governor's Advisory Council on Physical Fitness and Mental Well-Being, and state and local leaders celebrated California coaches and building a positive youth sports culture at the 2026 Connecting in Community: Move Your Body, Calm Your Mind event.

State Snapshots

State Pathways Matrix

The lessons presented in this brief highlight the common elements that shaped progress across states. To show how these dynamics played out in practice, the table below summarizes the pathways taken by each of the seven states. The matrix highlights each state's starting conditions, anchor organizations, primary strategies, and the system features that shaped what was possible. As a whole, it reflects the diversity of approaches and the shared building blocks that underpinned progress across contexts. In-depth state profiles are provided on the pages that follow.

State	What This State Illustrates	Entry Point/ Starting Conditions	Anchor Organizations	Primary Strategy	System Alignment	Data Use	Policy / Funding Levers
California	Statewide visibility and policy windows can accelerate scale “along parallel paths”	Existing statewide health/well-being infrastructure; active policy environment	Governor’s Advisory Council; CHJS; PCA Play Equity Fund	Statewide campaign 25x25 CA Coaches Challenge + parallel policy effort	Statewide council and visibility platforms	County and statewide reports on participation and equity	<i>AB 749: Youth Sports for All Act</i> ; statewide visibility
Illinois	Grassroots coalitions can generate political will and funding	Long-standing Chicago coalition; strong local relationships	Laureus Sport for Good Chicago	Coalition driven advocacy and coordination	Coalition bridging local and state actors	Coalition-informed needs and landscape data	~\$15M in state funding; Illinois Youth Sport Commission
Indiana	Educator licensure pathways can anchor coach training	University based training pipeline; educator-focused system	Ball State University	Licensure aligned coach training with community engagement	Integration with educator licensure	Statewide needs assessment (with OSU support)	Professional Growth Points approval
Kansas	Starting with a single league can create early traction	League based entry point; limited local capacity	Greater Wichita Athletic League; Wichita Public Schools	League requirement + train the trainer expansion	Alignment with league and statewide coaching school	Needs assessment requirement (with OSU support)	League approval for new training requirement
Maryland	Local control systems can scale through county pathways	Local control governance; county-driven systems	University of Maryland	County by county expansion	Alignment with statewide policy requirements	Statewide needs assessment (with OSU support)	Mental health training policy
Ohio	Data can drive system alignment and policy change	Strong university + athletic association partnership	OSU; OHSAA; Coach Beyond State Team	Statewide data collection + streamlined requirements	Strong alignment with interscholastic systems	6,500+ coach survey; requirement audit	Mental health training policy; streamlined requirements; voices from the field
Washington	Platform integration supports consistent delivery and tracking	Established interscholastic association platform	UW CLA; WIAA; NFHS	Platform integrated training	Integration with NFHS and WIAA systems	Baseline data; ongoing evaluation	Platform decisions tied to policy alignment



CALIFORNIA | Partner-Led Training Within an Evolving State Landscape

California's work reflects a partnership-driven approach to expanding coach training through the 25x25 initiative, taking place within a broader and evolving landscape of youth sport activity and policy in the state.



Milestones

- Established the [California Governor's Advisory Council on Physical Fitness and Mental Well-Being](#) (2021) as a statewide platform to elevate physical activity and mental well-being and launched the [Move Your Body, Calm Your Mind](#) campaign
- Move Your Body, Calm Your Mind collaboration with the MCC to launch the 25x25 California Coaches Challenge, with a goal of training 25,000 coaches across the state by the end of 2025
- Delivered training through partnerships with [Positive Coaching Alliance \(PCA\)](#) and the [Center for Healing and Justice Through Sport \(CHJS\)](#), collectively reaching nearly 30,000 coaches



How the Work Took Shape

The 25x25 California Coaches Challenge developed through a partnership between the Governor's Advisory Council and training organizations, rather than through a single coordinated statewide system.

The Council served as a convening and visibility mechanism, bringing attention to coaching as a lever for improving youth outcomes. Within this structure, PCA and CHJS led the design and delivery of training, drawing on existing curricula and adapting formats to increase accessibility. Partners emphasized shorter, modular formats to reach coaches who might not otherwise participate in longer or more intensive trainings.

The approach emphasized reach and awareness, using the Council's platform to elevate the importance of coaching and connect with partners across the state. At the same time, partners noted that training alone was not sufficient to establish a consistent or enforceable standard across California's diverse youth sport landscape.

Independent of the 25x25 California Coaches Challenge, separate work in the state has focused on youth sport access and equity. The [Play Equity Fund](#) expanded its long-standing LA County Sports Report into a [statewide data effort](#), identifying disparities in participation across race, gender, and income. These data were used to engage stakeholders and inform policy conversations, contributing to the advancement of [AB 749: Youth Sports for All Act](#). The bill requires the California Department of Public Health to assess the statewide youth sports landscape and evaluate the feasibility of establishing a centralized coordinating structure, such as a commission or dedicated entity.



What's Next

- Continue delivering training through partner organizations while exploring opportunities to expand reach and maintain engagement
- Monitor the implementation of AB 749 and the outcomes of its study process, particularly as they relate to future statewide coordination or infrastructure
- Explore whether and how training efforts could align with emerging statewide structures if they are developed



Illinois's work reflects a progression from local coalition-building to state-level coordination, funding, and the establishment and framing of a statewide youth sports governance structure.



Milestones

- Launched [Laureus Sport for Good Chicago](#) (2018) and began convening youth sport organizations across the city to build a coalition
- Expanded coalition engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic, creating a virtual space for organizations to coordinate, share information, and problem-solve
- Shifted toward longer-term strategy through efforts such as [Chicago's Comeback](#), advocating for youth sport as part of recovery and future investment
- Secured state-level funding for youth sport organizations, including appropriations totaling approximately \$15 million over 4 years, through coordinated advocacy and positioning
- Crafted and passed legislation to establish the [Commission on Youth Sports](#) (2025)
- Established the commission as a functioning statewide body despite the absence of direct state funding, with Laureus serving as an advisor to the Illinois Department of Human Services



How the Work Took Shape

The work in Illinois began with a focus on coalition-building at the local level. Laureus convened youth sport organizations in Chicago, creating a space for shared learning, coordination, and collective problem-solving. Over time, this coalition developed into a mechanism for aligning organizations around common goals and representing their shared interests.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the coalition became a central infrastructure for communication, allowing organizations to navigate disruptions and maintain connection. As immediate needs stabilized, conversations shifted toward longer-term questions about the role of youth sport in recovery and how it could be more effectively supported through policy and funding.

As the coalition matured, partners began to engage more directly with state systems. This included advocating for funding and identifying opportunities to connect youth sport to broader public investments. Through coordinated outreach and relationship-building, the coalition positioned itself as a credible intermediary capable of translating the needs and experiences of local organizations into policy-relevant terms.

A key development in this process was the activation of the Commission on Youth Sports. Legislation establishing the commission had previously been passed but had not been implemented due to lack of funding and staffing. Partners identified this as an opportunity and made the case for the commission to be re-established, with Laureus offering to serve as a third-part advisor to ease capacity constraints within state government.

Because the commission was created without dedicated state funding, Laureus and its partners assumed a supportive role in guiding the overall goals of the commission and working with the Illinois Department of Human Services around agendas and goals. This arrangement created a functioning statewide body in practice, even as questions about long-term structure and sustainability remain.



What's Next

- Continue building out the structure, role, and function of the Commission on Youth Sports as it works toward initial objectives. This includes delivering a set of recommendations to the governor, legislature, and state agencies about how to improve access, increase quality, and promote youth development through sport
- Identify sustainable funding mechanisms to support the commission's operations beyond volunteer and privately supported efforts
- Maintain and expand state-level funding streams for youth sport organizations
- Continue using the coalition as a mechanism to inform policy, represent stakeholder interests, and support implementation of state-level priorities



Indiana's work reflects a university-anchored approach, using higher education systems and educator credentialing structures to expand coach training.



Milestones

- Launched the [Coach Beyond initiative](#) through faculty leadership at [Ball State University](#), leveraging its broad reach within the state's educator workforce
- Conducted a statewide needs assessment with approximately 300–400 coach responses
- Delivered training through in-person sessions, webinars, and university-based coursework, primarily within Ball State's College of Health Sciences
- Reached approximately 1,200 coaches through training efforts
- Secured approval of all 1-hour *Coach Beyond* training courses to count for Professional Growth Points, allowing educators to apply participation toward professional development credits, licensure, and career advancement
- Developed an administrative tracking and verification system to support credentialing requirements
- Initiated partnerships with schools, local systems of care, Muncie Sports Commission, and other sports organizations



How the Work Took Shape

The work in Indiana developed through a higher education entry point rather than a statewide athletic system. Faculty at Ball State convened partners, launched the effort, and used the university as both a training hub and a pipeline for pre-service coaches.

A key lever was the integration of training into educator credentialing systems. Approval for Professional Growth Points created a direct incentive for participation and required infrastructure for tracking, verification, and quality control.

In the absence of a centralized statewide mechanism, adoption has expanded through relationships, partnerships, and targeted outreach, with continued growth supported by institutional connections and word of mouth.



What's Next

- Expand capacity to meet growing demand for training across counties
- Continue aligning training with evolving state policy requirements and mandated content areas
- Strengthen university and district partnerships to support sustained implementation
- Continued broad-based community engagement to raise program awareness and promote access to trainings across the state



KANSAS | District- and League-Level Action Anchored in Wichita Public Schools

Kansas's work reflects a district- and league-centered approach to coach training, anchored in [Wichita Public Schools](#) and the [Greater Wichita Athletic League \(GWAL\)](#), with growing connections to statewide systems.



Milestones

- Engaged leadership within Wichita Public Schools and GWAL to advance coach training focused on student-athlete mental health
- Built alignment with the [Kansas State High School Activities Association \(KSHSAA\)](#) and its Sport Medicine Advisory Committee
- Conducted a statewide needs assessment with 1,000+ coach responses, reinforcing mental health as a priority area of training for coaches
- Delivered training and prepared local facilitators (athletic directors, coaches, and regional leaders) to support implementation
- Integrated *Coach Beyond* training into the statewide Kansas coaching conference held by KSHSAA
- GWAL required a 20-minute *Coach Beyond* mental health training, reaching approximately 550 coaches
- Implemented online delivery and tracking systems, including direct communication and completion monitoring



How the Work Took Shape

The work began in Wichita Public Schools, where local leaders identified growing needs among coaches and student-athletes following the COVID-19 pandemic. Early adoption was driven by school and athletic leaders, with parallel alignment to state association structures.

Statewide data reinforced mental health as a priority, while capacity constraints and geographic spread shaped a distributed implementation model using local facilitators and blended delivery.

A key step was the GWAL vote to require a short training module, creating a clear mechanism for reaching coaches at scale in the absence of state policy. Implementation has been supported through online access, communication strategies, and school-level incentives.



What's Next

- Sustain and monitor the GWAL training requirement, including participation and completion rates
- Expand implementation of *Coach Beyond* outside Wichita as interest grows across the state
- Strengthen alignment with statewide systems while addressing ongoing capacity constraints



Maryland's work reflects a county- and district-centered approach shaped by local control, evolving policy requirements, and [university-based leadership](#).



Milestones

- Identified key system challenges, including that 50-70% of coaches were not educators (classified as Emergency/Temporary Coach) and lacked preparation in areas such as positive youth development and student-athlete mental health
- Established a state-level team (Coach Beyond State Team) including representatives from the University of Maryland's Athletic Department, the National Center for School Mental Health, advocacy organizations, and school and recreation leaders
- Delivered training across various counties, reaching more than 1,000 coaches
- Built county-level implementation infrastructure, with outreach and adoption occurring through established district pathways in a local-control system
- Embedded training content within the University of Maryland's coaching education programs and expanded to Towson University's programs thereafter
- Increased momentum through engagement with athletic administrators, including leadership within large districts such as Harford County
- Established communications and tracking systems (e.g., e-newsletters, administrative dashboards) to support implementation



How the Work Took Shape

The work in Maryland has been shaped by local control, with implementation occurring primarily through counties and school districts rather than a centralized statewide system. This structure is reflected in the Maryland Public Secondary Schools Athletic Association (MPSSAA), which operates under the direct purview of the Maryland State Board of Education and has a small full-time staff, placing administrative responsibility on district and county education leaders. Large district structures and political complexity influenced both the pace and pathways of adoption.

State policy created both urgency and constraint. Multiple statewide policy efforts (e.g., SB 638 Elijah Gorman Act, SB 165 Mental Health Training) introduced new training requirements across multiple, specific topic areas, which both taxed the readiness and created pathways for uptake of new initiatives as this work rolled out. As a result, implementation approaches by county and school district varied and influenced how training was scaled.

Within this context, progress has been driven by targeted relationship-building—particularly with influential athletic administrators—and by integration into university-based training pipelines preparing future coaches.



What's Next

- Expand capacity to meet growing demand for training across counties
- Pilot a complimentary participatory athlete development training model through partnership with OSU to further involve coaches, athletic administrators, partners and caregivers
- Continue aligning training with evolving state policy requirements and mandated content areas
- Strengthen university and district partnerships to support sustained implementation



Ohio's work reflects the development of a coordinated, statewide approach to coach training that integrates data, training design, system alignment, and policy change.



Milestones

- Built upon foundational efforts in developing Central Ohio's State of Play report which provided early evidence to support the need for coach training related to PYD and youth sport participation and access.
- Developed a consistent state-level, and now national, identity and brand for the work and the importance of leveraging sport for positive youth development and mental health—now known as [Coach Beyond](#)
- Completed a statewide audit of coach training requirements, identifying redundancies, gaps in needs for supporting athlete development, misaligned timelines, and costs exceeding \$300 for new coaches
- Conducted statewide Ohio Coach Surveys, reaching more than 5,600 coaches in 2022 and 6,300 in 2026, and contributed to a [national coach survey](#) effort; results elevated insights that continue to highlight needs and drive priorities in the state related to coaching “beyond the X's and O's”
- Identified key system challenges, including that approximately 50–70% non-educators lacked preparation in areas such as positive youth development and student-athlete mental health
- Designed and implemented a statewide coach, athlete, and caregiver training model through a participatory development process involving coaches, athletes, athletic administrators, and partners
- Supported the passage of state legislation requiring coach training related to student-athlete mental health for all school-based coaches
- Aligned and streamlined existing training requirements, including renewal cycles and administrative processes
- Secured ongoing funding from state agencies, foundations, and contracts to support and expand the work
- Disseminated eight peer-reviewed articles, three policy and research briefs, and more than 20 national conference presentations to share findings, lesson learned, and innovations from the work, with these now informing and assisting other states and entities to go “beyond the X's and O's”



How the Work Took Shape

The work in Ohio began with a focus on understanding the system. Early and replicable data collection—starting with the Central Ohio State of Play report and expanding to statewide surveys—provided a clear picture of the coaching landscape and its gaps.

These data were paired with a detailed review of existing training requirements, which revealed fragmentation, redundancy, and cost burdens for coaches. This combination of evidence helped reframe coaching as a systems-level issue and created a foundation for both training design and policy engagement.

Training development was iterative and participatory, with ongoing input from coaches, athletes, athletic administrators, and partners throughout the state. Over time, these efforts aligned with policy opportunities, resulting in legislation and system changes that embedded training within existing structures and reduced barriers to participation.



What's Next

- Continue refining and expanding the statewide and national training model based on ongoing data and feedback
- Maintain alignment across systems and stakeholders to support consistent implementation
- Sustain funding and infrastructure to support long-term integration and scale

As part of this work, the team from LiFEsports at The Ohio State University launched a multi-state learning community in 2024 and has since provided ongoing technical assistance and support to three partner states—Indiana, Kansas, and Maryland—as they adapted and implemented *Coach Beyond* approaches within their own contexts.



Washington's work reflects an effort to integrate coach training into existing interscholastic systems, supported by strong technical design and alignment with statewide athletic infrastructure.



Milestones

- Developed coach training courses through the [University of Washington Center for Leadership in Athletics \(UW CLA\)](#) using extensive focus groups with coaches and student-athletes
- Engaged a statewide representative sample of hundreds of coaches and athletes in course development, testing, and refinement, including pre- and post-assessment to guide improvements
- Partnered with the [Washington Interscholastic Activities Association \(WIAA\)](#) to explore integration of training into statewide school sport systems
- Integrated training into the [National Federation of State High School Associations \(NFHS\) learning platform](#), enabling broader access and alignment with existing coach education infrastructure
- Built systems to support training delivery, tracking, and alignment with existing administrative requirements
- Leveraged curriculum from online courses to drive a cohort-based, hybrid training program for women and nonbinary coaches across the state



How the Work Took Shape

The work in Washington began with a strong emphasis on co-design and technical quality. UW CLA developed training content through an iterative process that incorporated direct input from coaches and student-athletes, ensuring that materials were grounded in practitioner experience and responsive to real-world needs.

From early in the process, partners focused on embedding training within existing interscholastic systems. This included working directly with WIAA and aligning training with the structures and expectations that govern school-based athletics. Integration with the NFHS learning platform provided an additional pathway for delivery, allowing training to be housed within a platform already used by coaches nationwide and connected to existing certification and education processes.

Advancing this work required ongoing coordination across multiple entities, including universities, athletic associations, and school systems. Efforts focused on identifying pathways to align new training content with existing requirements, timelines, and delivery systems. Rather than introducing entirely new structures, partners worked within established systems to increase feasibility and uptake.

Implementation also required attention to infrastructure. Decisions about platforms, data tracking, and system compatibility shaped how training could be delivered and how participation could be monitored. These operational elements were central to determining how training could scale within a complex, statewide system.



What's Next

- Continue aligning training with WIAA requirements and Education Committee strategic priorities
- Continue the ongoing partnership with NFHS to build more courses and expand reach nationally
- Refine training content and delivery based on ongoing feedback and evaluation
- Strengthen infrastructure for tracking participation, compliance, and system integration

Learn More About The Million Coaches Challenge

To learn more about the MCC, visit millioncoaches.org. A [comprehensive report on the MCC implementation study](#) is available online.

Additional resources from the MCC are also available:

- 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.
- AIR released a [brief with preliminary findings](#) from the MCC implementation study in 2025 that highlights early lessons learned.
- The MCC Partners released a [policy analysis](#) that provides a comprehensive mapping of laws, governance, and oversight of school-based sport in the United States.
- AIR released a [coach practice guide](#) on behalf of the MCC that elevates 12 core coaching strategies to support positive youth development, drawing from the MCC Partner trainings.
- The MCC Partners released a [Calls to Action statement](#) that identifies systemic barriers to quality coaching in youth sport and offers pathways forward.