

# **WOMEN'S SPORTS FOUNDATION**

## **THE BOSTON GIRLS SPORTS & PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PROJECT: FINAL REPORT TO THE BARR FOUNDATION**

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## INTRODUCTION

The main goal of the three-year Boston Girls' Sports & Physical Activity Project (BGSPAP) was to create an integrated and sustainable network of community-based programs that use sports and physical activity to favorably influence the physical, psychological, and social development of urban girls. The BGSPAP aimed to provide economically disadvantaged urban girls with opportunities to participate in sports and physical activity. The BGSPAP also aspired to upgrade sports and physical activity programming for girls in order to overcome gender biases built into the Boston schools and community programs. The number and quality of sports and exercise programs for Boston girls were not at par with those of Boston boys (National Women's Law Center, 2004; Harvard School of Public Health, 2002).

The BGSPAP was motivated by the larger vision that urban girls need integrated organizational support and program resources that not only grab their interest and allegiance, but also help them instill the character and skills to cope with risk factors ranging from obesity and diabetes to substance use and school dropout. This vision builds on sports and physical activity as a key component of healthy youth development. Within this context, BGSPAP programming is consistent with a view of youth services as

“a way to move adolescent development away from pathology and risk. From this perspective, young people are viewed as active and productive participants in their social worlds; they are treated as societal assets demonstrating strengths such as resilience, initiative, and commitment... Youth development further suggests a focus on the strong need of youth to belong to a peer world and to engage in significant relationships with adults” (Noam, 2003).

The BGSPAP has now completed its initial funding cycle. Some of the main evaluation findings are discussed below. The report begins with an overview of how sports and fitness can contribute to healthy youth development. Second, the philosophy and methods used by the evaluation team are summarized. Third, a variety of findings associated with connectivity and network development are introduced and discussed. Next we discuss a variety of evaluation research findings within the broader framework of youth development. The following subsection lays out a distinction between “enrollment programs” and “developmental programs” within the BGSPAP. The role “gender sensitive programming” within the BGSPAP is then discussed, followed by a summary of the main evaluation processes and outcomes. The report ends with conclusions and policy recommendations.

## THE BGSPAP AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Chris Lynch, director of the Boston Youth Sports Initiative, and evaluation director Don Sabo once spent thirty minutes discussing ways that the BGSPAP contributes to youth development. We experienced difficulty, however, when we tried to actually define what we meant by “youth development.” We agreed that youth development was “one of those phrases that everybody uses but that nobody is sure just exactly what it means.”

## **Defining Youth Development**

The concept of youth development basically generally refers to the social and psychological aspects of young people’s experiences that inform the construction of their identities and behavior across childhood, early adolescence, and adolescence. Youth development often also includes discussions of physiological maturation or the acquisition of different levels of physical skills or abilities such as “moving through infancy,” “developing hand-eye coordination,” or “amassing upper-body strength.”

Traditional views of learning and identity development portrayed the children as “conditioned” by their social experiences and interactions with adults or other children. A child’s experiences in the family, school, or youth sports were said to “impact,” “shape” or “determine” her or his identity development. More recent and less deterministic ways of thinking about youth development, however, portray the child as an active rather than passive participant in the social worlds they inhabit. Children are said to actively interact with the people in their lives, and as they grow older and more astute, they pull together and mold interpretations of culture and institutions that help them to construct identities that work for them. Sport sociologist Jay Coakley (2004) puts it this way.

“We actively interpret what we see and hear, and we accept, resist, or revise the messages we receive about who we are, about the world, and about what we should do as we make our way in the world. Therefore, socialization is not a one-way process of social influence through which we are molded and shaped. Instead, it is an interactive process through which we actively connect with others, synthesize information, and make decisions that shape our own lives and the social world around us.” (p. 98).

It is this latter way of thinking about youth development (i.e., an “interactionist perspective”) that is useful for understanding BGSPAP girls. This process-oriented view is consistent with a report to the Barr Foundation, *Re-conceptualizing and Recreating Youth Sports in Boston*, (Siegel, 2003). On one hand, this view takes into account the influence of external forces on urban girls’ lives. We know, for example, that they face a formidable array negative institutional and social forces that life chances. Compared with their suburban counterparts, Boston girls contend with greater levels of poverty, higher rates of

violent crime, a larger threat from gangs, substantial marital and familial upheaval, and depleted school systems. Many are new to American culture and about 48% may be born outside the U.S. and/or living in the U.S. for four years or less (Fact Sheet: 2004 Boston Youth Survey Highlights). Compared with their suburban counterparts, there are fewer physical spaces and facilities for urban girls to pursue physical activity. Suburban schools also offer more school-based sports programs at both the high school and middle school levels than Boston schools, and the disparities in opportunity are greater for girls than boys. We suspect that there is less gender equity in urban school athletic programs than in suburban schools.

And so, in one context, we can think about the lives of BGSPAP girls *unfolding against* an array of institutional forces or “barriers” that impinge upon their lives. But we also have learned that many BGSPAP girls are bright, ambitious, confident about their abilities and bodies, optimistic about the future, and pursuing meaningful life goals. Their participation in the sports and physical activity with the BGSPAP programs provided life lessons that often empowered them to make decisions and pursue new goals. A young girl in the Cape Verdean UNIDO community soccer program, for example, developed the athletic skills and personal confidence to test herself on a new soccer team from outside the neighborhood. She worked with program staff to “make it happen” and negotiated getting her goals met with her family, which originally, had qualms about their daughter leaving the community. (Her story connotes a Boston version of the film *Bend It Like Beckham*.)

In the interview excerpt below, program head Ana Almeida gives another example of the experiences of BGSPAP girls in the Hyde Park dance program informed their personal and social development. Her anecdote provides insight into how girls’ experiences within the program are linked to the development of “self-confidence” and personal empowerment.

“The middle school girls first come in and we tell them that there is an expectation that they will be performing, that they’ll be in front of an audience, and that there will be a celebration of their performance. There will be hundreds of people there in the audience. And they respond, ‘I can’t do that.’ They’re very shy. But then over time they learn the routine, they get used to it, they learn they’re not going to be up there alone, and that they’re with their peers that they have learned to trust in. They get up there and perform and it’s a big self-confidence boost for them. Obviously, the whole process that gets them to and through the performance unfolds over time.... With the high school girls, I’d say the same thing, except that when they get into dancing, they already know the expectations. They may be just as anxious at an audition, just as nervous as some of the younger kids, but they already know they want to do it and that they need someone to push them to do it.... They’ve learned that they thrive in the spotlight and that they amaze people.”

When Ana Almeida uses the phrase “the whole process” above, she in effect refers to a *developmental process* in which girls are at once being taught and guided, but at the same time, they are actively envisioning and constructing a self-image and set of body practices that are intended to culminate in a dance performance. Through dancing for others, they are dancing for their “selves.”

### **Where Does Youth Development Happen?**

Our evaluation taught us that youth development is not strictly located within the individual girl. Our analysis of what we labeled as “development” among the BGSPAP girls led us to ask the following questions. Just where does youth development occur within the BGSPAP? Where is development “sited”? Does youth development happen within the identities and bodies of the girls? Or does development occur inside program activities themselves; e.g, inside a Hyde Park dance class, a Lena Park basketball or double-dutch program, or a Cape Verdean UNIDO’s soccer program? Are youth developmental dynamics better seen as weaving across the complex intersections among each girl’s subjective experiences, what she is taught by others and what she personally aspires to accomplish, and her interactions with other girls and the program staff? Does youth development stretch across the BGSPAP network, spanning the interfaces among the program itself, family, school, and the wider urban landscape? The evaluation team concluded that “youth development” happens in all these “places.” Furthermore, we learned that development just does not just happen to girls, but that they actively make use of aspects of their experiences with sports and physical activity in other facets of their identities and lives.

### **Programming and Networking for Youth Development**

The above view of development is consistent with the vision of physical activity and sport as a developmental tool and public health asset for girls (Siegel, 2003; Sabo, 1997). The BGSPAP is a fledgling network that fits Roth & Brooks-Gunn’s definition of “youth development programs” that “strive to influence an adolescent’s developmental path toward positive outcomes” and focus on “skill and competency development” (2000, p.4).

The BGSPAP network comprises an emerging and loosely interconnected web of social and cultural intersections where urban girls interact with one another and with caring adults in mutually supportive ways. The girls run and play, practice and compete, and they learn about themselves and competition. Depending on program duration and the type of activity, they develop different levels of cardiovascular endurance, strength and flexibility, confidence in their physical skills and ability to try new things, and have fun at the same time. The girls behave in both passive and active relation to program experiences and content. They twist to the tune of the instructors and they bring their own “twists” to the activities and lessons learned from adults. And finally, the developmental

“processes” that unfold within each BGSPAP girl and program also ripple across the girls’ families, schools, the “street” and community.

## **FACILITATIVE EVALUATION: PHILOSOPHY AND METHODS**

Facilitative evaluation was the right choice for organizing and implementing the evaluation within the BGSPAP. Facilitative evaluation occurs when the researchers work closely and cooperatively with stakeholders in order to describe, measure, and analyze mutually agreed-upon program processes and outcomes. Another key component of facilitative evaluation is for teaching and learning to occur between evaluation researchers and staff within the community organizations being studied. Facilitative evaluation is consonant with the principles and practices of community-based participatory research (Israel, 2004).

### **Methods Used in the Evaluation**

During Year Three we used multiple methods to gather observations within or across the BGSPAP network.

1. Survey research. Youth Athletic/Fitness Survey was administered in eleven programs.
2. Focus group interviews. Five focus groups were conducted by Teen Empowerment and an additional three were developed and conducted by the BGSPAP evaluation team in consultation with program heads.
3. Interviews with leaders. Formal interviews were conducted with all BGSPAP program heads as well as leaders within the BGSPAP management. (N = 15).
4. Interviews with key influencers. Six interviews were conducted with six persons who worked directly with the girls in BGSPAP programs; e.g., coach, staff.
5. Content analysis. Analysis of about 3,000 BGSPAP girls’ written comments about their preferences with regard to sports and exercise as well as their experiences in programs.
6. Site visits. Thirteen site visits were completed.
7. Assessment of individual program evaluation components. Evaluation director reviewed and discussed Year Three evaluation plans for each program.
8. Participant observation. Involvement of evaluation team within BGSPAP program and network activities.

### **The Focus Group Educational Component**

Focus group interviews were a major component of the BGSPAP evaluation. One prime aim was to use focus group interviews as a vehicle to gather data and insights about BGSPAP girls’ experiences in the programs, what they thought and felt about sports and physical activity, and what they need from adults to help them pursue their future goals. However, a second aim was to use



the focus group interview component of the evaluation as a teaching vehicle for the BGSPAP program heads and staff. Our goal was to teach them about the methodological mechanics of focus group method and how it can become a valuable asset within their individual program evaluations.

The focus group evaluation educational component was implemented in four stages across the span of the BGSPAP's organizational life.

1. Year One: Spurred forward by sponsorship from the Barr Foundation, the evaluation team developed a working relationship with Teen Empowerment (TE), a local non-profit with a rich history working with urban Boston youth. The BGSPAP evaluation team worked closely with staff at TE to identify key questions and concerns that could be explored through the focus group format.
2. Year Two: Don Sabo did a presentation on focus group interviews at a cluster meeting that summarized how the method worked, the kinds of information it generated, and why program heads might choose to integrate the method into their overall program evaluation. He also announced the partnership with TE and asked any program heads who might want to conduct a focus group to contact him. He followed up with phone contacts as well, providing motivation and details; e.g., "you can learn about the method," "your girls will have fun," "we'll provide the refreshments," and "once you learn the method it can be part of your ongoing evaluation process."
3. Year Two: TE conducted five focus groups and prepared its final report *Boston Girls Sports and Physical Activity Project: Learning from Young Girls How to Effectively Reach, Engage, and Involve Urban Girls in Sports and Exercise Programs* (March 2006). The evaluation team also planned and staged a panel discussion during a cluster group meeting among the program heads and staff. The panel was quite successful and it drummed up more interest in focus group method within the BGSPAP.
4. Year Three: The evaluation team recruited and worked with three additional program heads in order to create new focus groups. Don Sabo worked with staff to tailor a focus group interview guide for the event, and Janie Ward served as moderator. The interviews were audio-taped for the program heads as well as providing additional data for the evaluation team.

### Educational Outcomes

The experience of designing, implementing, and analyzing the results of the focus groups directly increased the evaluation capacities of eight BGSPAP programs. Presentations and the panel discussion at cluster group meetings

also reinforced learning among participating BGSPAP staff and indirectly involved other program heads who had not staged focus groups of their own. For example, Flavio Daveiga at Cape Verdean Community UNIDO reported that the focus group enabled him to “hear what was on the girls’ minds” and to “get a better understanding” of their experiences in the program and the community. He had worked with Don Sabo and Janie Ward to develop the focus group content.

The results of the focus group interviews are discussed in a subsequent section. The findings from other components of the evaluation follow under appropriate subheadings.

## **FINDINGS: CONNECTIVITY AND NETWORK DEVELOPMENT**

The BGSPAP began in winter of 2004 as a disconnected group of community programs that had successfully secured grants to provide or expand girls’ sports and exercise programs. There was no shared history or collective identity. During Year Two of the program, a majority of the program heads regularly attended BGSPAP cluster meetings and there were some indications of inter-program connections and network development. In September 6, 2005 mid-year report to the Barr Foundation, I indicated that network integration had been minimal but that there appeared to be a “tipping toward network development” near the end of Year Two; i.e., that there were some signs of increased connectivity among BGSPAP programs and, additionally, that some collaborations were happening between BGSPAP programs and non-BGSPAP programs that also focused on the needs of urban girls. The analysis and evidence discussed below supports the inference that the “tipping” trend has continued during Year Three. At the same time, incipient trends toward greater connectivity and network integration have unfolded at a slow pace.

### **Shifting Conceptual Models for Developing the BGSPAP Network**

In this subsection, I discuss how Barr Foundation, WSF and BYSI leaders have perceived and thought about connectivity and network development within the BGSPAP. Philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche observed, “We are prisoners of metaphor.” While metaphors may be inescapable in our thinking, they are not necessarily confining. Metaphors facilitate much theoretical modeling in endeavors ranging from program planning to quantum physics. With regard to the BGSPAP, metaphors and conceptual models have helped us think about network development, connectivity and integration. Four models are discussed below. Moreover, it is important to recognize that the thinking about network development within the BGSPAP has evolved across the three-year span of the BGSPAP. Simply put, what we now know and think is different from what we initially knew and thought. To make matters even more complex, how we think about network development influences the processes and outcomes that constitute network development. The summary below, therefore, is a “product

moment” within the ongoing evaluation of strategies for fostering greater network integration within the BGSPAP.

1. *The Community Organization Model.* This model basically advocates for a “build the network from the ground up” strategy. This is a “one handshake at a time,” “develop one organizational link at a time,” and “one workshop or collaboration at a time” approach to developing an integrated organizational network. Information and resources are brought to individuals in order to mobilize their interests, participation, and allegiance with the wider vision and interest of the network.

This model was implemented in several ways within the BGSPAP. The Barr Foundation’s fiscal and human resources were channeled toward linking individual program leaders through the BGSPAP apparatus, providing information and resources; e.g., announcements at cluster meetings, e-mail exchanges, launch and delivery of the BYSI e-newsletter, provision of access to Logic Model training. Chris Lynch also enacted a key informant and influencer role as BYSI Coordinator who interacted with BGSPAP programs as well as youth sports programs throughout Boston. Similarly, the Women’s Sports Foundation (WSF) dispersed information and resources through provision of educational materials, sharing experience with the development of girls’ athletic programming, and staging the quarterly cluster meetings. Finally, the WSF contracted with Don Sabo who enacted a “facilitative evaluation” process which, in part, aimed to develop trust, collaborations, and networking synergies across the BGSPAP programs.

It can be argued that some of the network formation initiatives envisioned within the community organization model produced increased connectivity and network development across the BGSPAP. Consider, for example, the role of the cluster meetings across the lifespan of the BGSPAP. On the negative side, attendance at the cluster meetings was uneven and the different formats or topics evoked varied reactions among attendees. For example, some program heads enjoyed a panel discussion about coaching girls, but others were more interested in exercise. Although a few program heads found the information on sharing legal, management, and facility resources relevant to their goals, representatives from the smaller programs that are firmly rooted in their local communities considered this information irrelevant. With this said, however, BGSPAP program heads often stated during interviews that the cluster group meetings were one of the few opportunities they ever had for regularly spending time with other professionals involved with sports and physical activity programs for girls. The cluster group meetings also fostered communication among participants and, in several instances, relationships that were set in motion at a cluster meeting evolved into collaborations. Ellen Minzer met a representative from Healthworks at one of the earliest cluster meetings, which led to an enduring relationship with G-Row. Anne Strong had read about a grant opportunity in the BYSI Newsletter that required partnering with another agency.

Two days later she met Flavio Daveiga at a cluster meeting and approached him about the partnership opportunity. (This grant to fund summer soccer for Citykicks and Cape Verdean Community UNIDO was eventually funded for summer 2006.) Finally, Sandy Wells of Cambridge Youth Hockey found the cluster meetings useful for a variety of reasons including:

“One of the benefits is that, by meeting people at the clusters, we were able to learn about a wide spectrum of organizational and fund-raising activities. We also saw programs outside the BGSPAP. We learned, for example, about MetroLacrosse. It made us more open-minded and we learned more innovative approaches. So beyond the BGSPAP funding, and the funding was crucial, the exposure to other organizations through the meetings was very valuable.”

*2. The Top-down Facilitation Model.* This strategy calls for the development of a “web-based community” or “online community” which, at first, serves as a conduit for disseminating information and notifications about potential resources to groups of likeminded individuals or multiple organizations that are presumed to have something in common (e.g., an interest in providing sports and exercise programs for urban girls). Once established, participation in the online community is preferably interactive, creating information and communication flows from both top-down and bottom-up directions as well as across the web-based network. The operating assumption is that people with similar personal and organizational interests will gravitate toward and utilize the portals and communication processes provided by the web-based site, thereby, fostering greater cross-network awareness, interaction among members, and collaborations that promote network development.

This model was introduced to the BGSPAP by the WSF early in Year Two in connection with its larger launching of the GoGirlGo Campaign web site. At this time, Marj Snyder pointed out, “Our strategy for the development of an online community within the GoGirlGo cities was basically an experiment. And this experiment has achieved only limited success on the ground. We have pulled way back on relying on the web as a driving force for creating networks in Atlanta, Chicago and Boston.” The results of interviews with program heads during both Year Two and Year Three of the BGSPAP showed that program heads make only minimal use of the Internet and that there was very little interest or visits to the WSF’s GoGirlGo website. The evaluation team also found that the main use of the Internet among BGSPAP program staff is e-mail and the primary motive is communication.

Finally, some elements of the Top-down Facilitation model informed Chris Lynch’s early conceptualization of the *BYSI Newsletter*. The vision was that an online newsletter would generate a progressively larger readership and, indirectly, foster network development. In effect, the newsletter was to be distributed through (or down from) the Barr Foundation-based BYSI coordinator

to program heads. At the same time, packaging information in e-mail messages was seen as a more direct and grassroots mode of communication than a website-based mode of communication. The more recent strategy and expectations surrounding the *BYSI Newsletter* are that youth sports program staff do not generally make extensive use of web-based communications vehicles. As Chris Lynch explained, “Virtual communities sprouting up in youth sports programming world just don’t happen. It may be that these kinds of day-to-day practices do happen a lot among some networks but I don’t think they’re common in youth sport circles.” The evaluation research team’s interviews with BGSPAP program heads confirmed Lynch’s impression. We found that when BGSPAP program heads do use Internet-based communication, it usually pertains directly to program functions or communication purposes. When asked how often they use the Internet for their work with the BGSPAP, these responses were typical.

“I use it in my work but not so much with the BGSPAP.”

“When I get e-mails I do check the site or follow up. But I need to be prompted.”

“Just for e-mail so I can connect with individuals or other organizations. I also field notices or e-mail messages from others.”

“I use it pretty much everyday, but more for e-mails than looking for resources on the web. I already know what the resources are.”

“Not a lot. We use e-mail but not the Internet.”

“The main uses are periodically I look at Chris’s site and I also look for funding opportunities. For example, we learned about Good Sports from his page. And we got an equipment grant from Good Sports last year.”

“I have to use it a lot. I do a lot of tournaments during February through end of July. I have a web site that they can go into and look at the schedules and events. I also e-mail people a lot.”

Most recently, the *BYSI Newsletter* is distributed as a one-click e-mail message; i.e., as an information resource packaged as an e-mail message. Recipients discover the newsletter text immediately upon opening the e-mail message. However, the newsletter is no longer strategically linked with a “top-down” strategy for information dispersal and network development (i.e., out of BYSI and sent down to community-level programs), but rather, as part of a larger process of “network weaving” (discussed below in point 4).

3. *The Fusion Model.* This model mobilizes images of nuclear fusion in which elements are combined in such a way that the resulting reaction releases energy

in such a way that expands capacity (outcome). Marion Kane presented a strategy for enabling collaborations that consequently increase girls' participation in sports and exercise as well as expanding the capacity of organizations to deliver services. One example was the Barr Foundation's one-time investment in the SPARK program through which an outside organization trains personnel to more effectively deliver physical activity programming for girls. When SPARK completes its intervention, the program capacity for delivering and expanding services for girls is thus expanded. Another example cited was the The First Tee, in which the national organization is mobilized in Boston by the Barr Foundation to do trainings in a variety of nonprofit settings. Girls' participation in golf thus increases, a variety of organizations get involved, and some collaborative synergies issue within the larger Boston area. In both examples, management of the interventions does not come to rest on the initial funding agency. The Fusion Model capitalizes on tapping delivery systems that already exist, briefly suffusing them with skills and knowledge, at least temporarily increasing girls' participation, and optimally enhancing the program's longer-range capacity to provide services for girls.

The Fusion Model was not widely articulated or deployed within the BGSPAP network, yet it is clearly a viable strategy for increasing both girls' athletic participation and program capacity. It is less clear how the fusion model facilitates network building or network weaving.

4. *The Network Weaving Model.* This model began to be discussed within the BGSPAP circles during Year Two and it has become a prevailing framework for understanding network development within the Barr Foundation and BYSI. Krebs and Holley (2002) lay out the basic conceptual framework behind network weaving this way. During the earliest stages of network development, there is a person who functions as a "network weaver" who looks for commonalities among individuals and organizations. The network weaver also takes steps to promote connections among these individuals and organizations. In this early stage of network development, the network weaver functions as a kind of "hub" for the incipient organizational network. Spokes of connectivity emanate from the "hub" and, across time, the network weaver monitors the emerging structure of the web of group affiliations taking shape. When possible, the network weaver also nudges and facilitates connections and communications across the emergent network of organizations within the network. In subsequent stages of development, the "hub and spokes" structure of network formation processes gives way to the formation of discernable clusters of individuals (and organizations) who are aware of one another, identify common interests, and pursue collaborations or partnerships. Eventually a "core" may take shape as well as additional clusters on the periphery that become an identifiable structure of wider and sustainable connections within the network. The general direction of developmental movement is from "hub and spokes" to the emergence of a "core and periphery" structural process in which "small clusters" and "small worlds" resonate within the emerging weave of the total network.

The concept and strategies associated with the Network Weaving Model were not an overt part of the Barr Foundation's original articulation of the BGSPAP. The BGSPAP's roots were planted more in soil supplied by the Play Across Boston report and Don Siegel's report, both of which called for action across the wider Boston community but did not specify network development strategies. There was no mention of "networker" or "weaver" in the job description when Chris Lynch came on board as Coordinator of the BYSI in November of 2004. In short, connectivity and network development were certainly "on the agenda" but the "network weaving" conceptual model and concomitant planning strategies had not yet evolved. Barr Foundation leaders began to reference network weaving during Year Two (2005) of the BGSPAP. Midway through Year Three, network weaving had permeated discussions about the future of the BGSPAP and Barr's current philosophy and strategies with regard to network development. Donna Lopiano and Marj Snder were introduced to the concept in June 2006 by Marion Kane during a meeting to discuss the future of the BGSPAP and potential interfaces with the WSF's GoGirlGo Campaign.

In a similar manner, the Women's Sports Foundation had designed and implemented the national GoGirlGo Campaign in Atlanta and Chicago in order to address the formidable health concerns of urban girls. There were strategic goals and strategies to elevate awareness about girls' needs for sports and exercise in the GoGirlGo communities, and on-the-ground personnel and resources were hired to build networks of girl-serving organizations within specific urban environments. However, there was no overarching or guiding theoretical model that informed, guided, and made explicit for the strategies for designing, monitoring, and measuring network building processes and outcomes in Chicago, Atlanta. The WSF moved forward more with ideals and vision and less with a conceptual roadmap to guide network development efforts. In contrast, the processes for fostering network development and integration were much more prominent with WSF's work in Boston—work fueled by and in collaboration with the Barr Foundation. The Network Weaving Model is currently on the table and under discussion as leaders from Barr Foundation and WSF for collaborate around GoGirlGo and BGSPAP in Boston.

### **Connectivity and Network Integration within the BGSPAP**

The summary below is a descriptive account of trends and outcomes associated with connectivity and network integration across the lifespan of the BGSPAP. The description is based on field notes and transcripts of interviews with program heads and key influencers within the network.

Year One. At this time, the BGSPAP was a hodge-podge of highly disparate programs that had little in common except that they were grant winners who provided services to urban girls that used some type of physical activity or sport.

During Year One program representatives met at the four cluster meetings and had infrequent and looseknit connections with one another. There was no shared history or collective identity. The primary orientation of program heads toward the BGSPAP and cluster meetings was “ego-centric” rather than “network-centric”; that is, each viewed attendance as necessary to receive funding, and each felt they might discover information that could benefit their own program.

Year Two. During Year Two of the program, a majority of program heads regularly attended BGSPAP cluster meetings. There were some signs of connections forming across programs and, hence, a degree of network development. After the second round of grants was awarded to the original members of the BGSPAP network, program heads seemed to move into a kind of passive cruise control. They looked to cluster meetings mainly as a vehicle to be supplied information or opportunities for their programs. The perceived “suppliers” of information or opportunity were the WSF, BYSI, and the Barr Foundation. However, some program heads also began to see the cluster meetings as “networking opportunities.” They began talking with one another about mutual interests and a few collaborations were formed among BGSPAP members.

Later during Year Two, WSF leaders began to discuss “the future” of network and what would happen when the upcoming Year Three funds disappeared. The impetus for raising this issue was partly motivated by a felt need to try to move the program heads toward thinking more about their collective future. At this time, under the bannerhead of the “grant for the grantwriter” initiative, the WSF staff and the evaluation director introduced the idea to collectively develop grant initiatives across the entire network or among multiple BGSPAP programs. Segments of several cluster meetings were devoted to “brainstorm” about identifying what kinds of partnerships could be formed across the BGSPAP network that would attract funding. In order to provide some organizational momentum for this vision, Don Sabo formed a “grant for the grantwriter” committee, which was composed of the evaluation director, three BGSPAP advisory board members, Chris Lynch, and Marj Snyder.

The “grant for the grantwriter” initiative ultimately failed to muster enough collective energy among program heads to move the agenda forward. It was a near-right idea that never got off the ground. What caused the failure? The initial strategy was to light a small fire under the BGSPAP program heads that would motivate them to think about and discuss partnerships and to develop network strategies for creating new resources. Although the BGSPAP program heads were interested in exploring the idea, they did not act beyond the setting of the cluster meetings for two reasons. First, the committee was seen as “something extra” for program heads by the Evaluation Director. So rather than recruiting program heads, Don Sabo sought out BGSPAP Advisory Board members for the committee. This meant that BGSPAP program heads were only



indirectly involved. Second, the basic strategy was to develop and secure a grant that would hire either a part-time or fulltime grantwriter who would work with BGSPAP program heads in order to develop “partnership grant initiatives,” i.e., grant initiatives that involved several BGSPAP programs and/or programs outside the BGSPAP network. In committee, however, the concept expanded to seek grant money to hire a “grantwriter and network developer” who would simultaneously seek funds and attempt to weave collaborative synergies across and beyond the BGSPAP network. The committee’s ability to deliver on its deliberations further shifted from enjoining program heads to correctly anticipating the direction of collaboration between the Barr Foundation and the WSF. In short, the inability to predict the direction and timing of a future confluence between the Barr Foundation and WSF became a “stone in the road” of moving the committee’s deliberations forward. And third, there was not enough of a grassroots mechanism formed to enjoin program heads in the initiative. The task had been basically “sent upstairs” to a committee composed of the evaluation director and BGSPAP Advisory Board members, and in effect, the BGSPAP program heads were put in a reactive and expectant mode. Put another way, the energy and responsibility for pushing the initiative forward did not directly engage the BGSPAP program heads.

The “grant for the grantwriter” concept did excite many BGSPAP program heads. Their participation in the cluster meeting brainstorm was animated and genuine. Some program heads did speak with one another inside outside of cluster meetings about the initiative. However, the process did not evoke active collaborations or decision-making outside the immediate confines of the cluster group meetings. No collective action by BGSPAP program heads at the grassroots level occurred.

The evaluation director’s decision to abandon what became the “grant for the grantwriter & network developer” initiative became final when WSF and Barr Foundation began to discuss the prospects of Boston becoming a site for the GoGirlGo Campaign. If GoGirlGo were to come to Boston, the WSF would hire two fulltime staff members “on the ground” who would perform similar functions to the “grantwriter & network developer”; i.e., to work cooperatively with the Barr Foundation, BYSI, the BGSPAP, and other Boston girl-serving organizations in order to amass greater resources and to create a larger network of girl-serving organizations that use sports and exercise to enhance the lives of urban girls. (These discussions are currently in progress.)

Year Three saw the “windfall initiative” unfold within the BGSPAP. The main lesson learned from the failure of the “grant for the grantwriter” initiative was that the energy and commitment that would impel network development and collective action among program heads would somehow have to come directly from the program heads themselves and not WSF staff, the Barr Foundation leaders, or the BGSPAP advisory board. A new strategy was born. First, at the outset of Year Three, WSF leaders began to push the BGSPAP members to

think about where the BGSPAP would be going “when the funding ran out at the end of the year.” WSF staff informally encouraged members to think about devising strategies to sustain and growing their girls’ programs. Formal discussions at cluster meetings were created to raise awareness and coax forth collective thinking and strategies. Second, WSF staff and the evaluation director redirected some budget resources and designated a sum of \$25,000 as a “windfall” for the BGSPAP. Program heads were challenged and empowered to decide how best to spend the windfall money in a manner that would benefit a majority or all of the BGSPAP programs and help to sustain the future of the BGSPAP. A committee of BGSPAP program heads eventually took shape that met outside BGSPAP meetings to explore the issues and potentials. The windfall committee arranged for a special meeting of network programs in which various strategies were identified and debated. Windfall committee leaders also met, telephoned, and e-mailed outside formal BGSPAP cluster meetings.

The windfall committee deliberations and efforts represent an escalation of connectivity within the BGSPAP. A subgroup of BGSPAP program heads has spearheaded the committee efforts, but many other program leaders are also involved with the process. There is also evidence that several program heads are moving toward more of a network-centric orientation toward the BGSPAP rather than thinking solely about their own program needs and opportunities. When program heads spoke at cluster meetings during Year One and Year Two, their language reflected an ego-centric orientation toward the BGSPAP; e.g., they talked about “my girls” or “my program” or “my challenges or problems” with funding or transportation or retention. Since the unfolding of the windfall committee initiative, however, there was a discernable shift in program heads’ language with reference to the BGSPAP. They used phrases such as “our network,” “we need to think about,” and “if we’re going to grow.”

Ultimately, the windfall committee decided that they wanted to do a group project that would enable all twelve organizations and the Women’s Sports Foundation to promote awareness and increase long-term sustainability options for each member of the group in order to enhance programs and potentially increase program participation of those after-school and out-of-school programs. The group specifically decided to limit membership to the original 12 BGSPAP programs and not accept new members in the first year.

The WSF staff made a concerted effort to “empower” the group to make decisions on it’s own and served primarily in the role of fiscal agent and group member during the planning phase. The WSF also agreed to assist with mailings and provided additional funding. The windfall committee created an RFP to hire a consultant, interviewed several candidates and hired Barry Lewis, a former development officer at Lena Park, to carry out the project. The project culminated in a donor showcase event on September 19, 2007. Below is a discussion of the progress against the goals.

Project Goal #1: Re-name the BGSPAP and develop a new logo for new marketing and branding opportunities with the foundation, corporate and major donor community.

The name of the Boston Girls' Sports Physical Activity Project went through a survey process through the members of the BGSPAP in order to re-brand their name as well as develop a mission and vision statement, and a tagline associated with the new name of the group.

There was lively discussion about how to best represent the identities of all the group members since some are sports-identified while others are not (i.e. Jambastics). In the end there was a consensus that the words "sports" could represent the group if there was also an accompanying logo and a tagline that were more inclusive. The group voted to become the Boston Girls' Sports Coalition (BGSC). A graphic designer developed an abstract logo and to the Coalition with a specific color type that would bring life to the logo. Additionally, Lewis developed a tagline with feedback from the Coalition that would accompany the logo -- "Generating Opportunities in Athletics and Leadership".

Project Goal #2: Hold the first of what is hoped to be an annual donor showcase event for 300. The original financial goal was to raise \$100,000 in sponsorship and night of event funds while identifying and cultivating new and existing donors that may have interest in BGSC organizations.

The event raised \$9,118 in pledges of which \$7,625 were derived from six contributors and sponsors (Laduma Sports Group, Cabot Creamery Cooperative, Boston Red Sox Foundation, Boston Public Health Commission, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts, and the Comcast Corporation).

It's encouraging to note that each organization shared its donor list with the group in order to cast the widest possible net. Donor lists are traditionally kept confidential by individual organizations so this sharing is certainly a measure of the trust the group members had built up over the first three years of the project.

There were about 120 attendees at the event, including community leaders, governmental officials, girls from Coalition programs, champion athletes, and a few donors. Each coalition member had the opportunity to showcase it's program and there was a dance and gymnastics demonstration by two of the groups. On the bright side, the new Superintendent of the Boston Public Schools, Carolyn Johnson, attended. She saw the energy of the programs, heard the word that girls sports are important, and understood that there needs to be more PE/PA in the schools. The girls were excited to meet the champion athletes and the venue, Fenway Park, was also well-received by all. The most disappointing part of the event was the lack of donors.

Starting in February 2007, over 3,000 donor contacts were made by email and phone calls regarding the Boston Girls' Sports Coalition and the Annual Showcase in order to: (1) educate the Boston philanthropic community regarding the individual programs provided by members of the Boston Girls' Sports Coalition, (2) solicit funders regarding sponsorship or restricted gift opportunities for the Boston Girls' Sports Coalition and/or its members, and (3) develop marketing collateral that may entice donors to forward contributions for the Coalition in order to achieve self-sustaining operations post-event or their own individual programs.

In the end, each coalition member probably needed to do more than just provide their donor lists to the consultant. They needed to actively participate in the process of recruiting attendees. The coalition is planning a debriefing and evaluation conference call for early November.

Project Goal #3: Complete companion catalogue highlighting BGSC organizations and their activities in an effort to develop marketing collateral for each organization and their unique BGSC program.

A 24-page companion catalogue, including sponsorship advertisements, a center-fold picture spread and front and back covers, was completed on September 15, 2007. The companion catalogues were available at the Showcase and were picked up by the Women's Sports Foundation and members of the Boston Girls' Sports Coalition. Additionally, a PDF version of the catalogue has been emailed to each organization of the Coalition, as well as the Women's Sports Foundation.

Project Goal #4: Complete the development of a BGSC website for information dissemination, branding and marketing purposes for each BGSC organization.

The group determined early-on that it should focus on the donor showcase and the website should be postponed until a later date.

Project Goal #5: Develop marketing powerpoint presentation materials for each BGSC member while working with organizational point person/s in order to provide marketing presentation assistance, if needed.

Each organization within the Coalition, from February through September, had been asked on numerous occasions regarding the need for any presentation materials that would aid their efforts in engaging donors and program participants regarding their efforts. Unfortunately, no organization requested a power point presentation. Instead, a powerpoint presentation was developed for the entire Coalition as a part of the Showcase marketing before and during the event from the hundreds of pictures that were taken by Barry Lewis and the information that had been gathered over the course of eight months.

Project Goal #6: Raise public awareness by:

- (1) Developing a Showcase Honorary Committee consisting of area dignitaries representative of the Boston & New England area who are leaders in the physical activities, athletics and/or sports
- (2) Creating and marketing a new website intended to market BGSC programs,
- (3) Inviting new donors and cultivating existing donors
- (4) Promoting and highlighting the efforts of BGSC to the media
- (5) Honoring a member of the Boston community for their work in the area of youth development through physical activity and sportsmanship.

The Boston Girls' Sports Coalition was successful in raising public awareness in several ways. A seven-member Honorary Committee that was representative of the political, media, education and non-profit community was established.

It was able to achieve an important goal to invite new donors and cultivate existing donors regarding the Coalition and the Showcase. In addition to making over 3,000 phone calls over a 7-month period, over 2,300 invitations were mailed to existing potential donors and sponsors. The database was then shared with all Coalition members post-event.

We received support from WEEI-FM and WHDH-TV, Channel 7, which offered the Boston Girls' Sports Coalition an opportunity to discuss its programs and achievements through an episode of Urban Update. A phone interview was conducted by WBZ-AM radio with Barry Lewis for its' "Parents & Program" segment to introduce the Boston Girls' Sports Coalition and its' efforts in the greater Boston community.

Finally, each Coalition member was invited to submit a nominee from their organization for consideration of the Community Award that was presented at the Showcase. From this request, three organizations submitted nominees (Jam'Nastics, CVC UNIDO and CityKicks). We honored Ms. Alexandra Ferdinand and the legacy she left with Jam'Nastics and enMotion.

Certainly, the Coalition showed some promise but in the end, the windfall project was unsuccessful on several fronts. It may be that the consultant was not the right person for the job, the WSF may have needed to exercise more oversight, and the coalition members needed to take more ownership of the process. It is hoped that the evaluation meeting will yield additional insights.

### **Accelerated Connectivity and Networking During Year Three**

Whereas no partnerships or collaborations emerged among BGSPAP programs during Year One, the Year Two evaluation revealed that some

programs were “tipping toward network development.” The evaluation team further observed that the key synergies among some of the programs were facilitated by BYSI staff (via Logic Model training), WSF staff, and the BGSPAP advisory board members. The evidence suggests that the “tipping” trend was a precursor of accelerated networking during Year Three.

- The number and variety of collaborations has increased both inside the BGSPAP network and with organizations outside the BGSPAP network.
- Almost all the program heads and many staff are thinking more about connecting or partnering with other organizations. In short, a shift from ego-centric organizational thinking to network-centric thinking appears to be issuing within the BGSPAP.

When asked to identify partnerships or collaborations during Year One, most BGSPAP program heads were hard put to create a list (either because they were not involved with collaborations or that they did not perceive some inter-program relations as constituting partnerships or collaborations). When interviewed this summer (2006), program heads were much more likely to recognize and be able to list existing or developing partnerships/collaborations. Examples follow.

- **Bird Street Community Center** listed Junior WNBA, Vine Street Community Center, Bowdoin Street Health Center, local colleges (involving women basketball players), discussions about potential collaboration with Sportsman’s Tennis, Boston Youth Sports Initiative, Boston Harbor Middle School.
- **Citykicks** increased the number of schools it collaborates with to nine. They also identified United Way Logic Model training, G-Row, BYSI, Cape Verdean Community UNIDO, Boston Teamworks.
- **G-Row** pointed to the United Way Logic Model training, Citykicks, Boston University’s Institute for Coaching Excellence, Harvard School of Education, Healthworks, Boston Centers for Youth & Family, Wheelock College, and BYSI.
- **Boston Centers for Youth & Families.** Larelle Bryson sent Don Sabo a list of more than 35 community organizations that BCYF has contacted with regard to motivate with regard to girls’ programming.
- **Wang YMCA** cited neighborhood middle-school and high school, local hospital, Boston Freemasons Women’s Volleyball, Chinatown Volleyball League.
- **Jamnastics** referred to Fletcher Maynard Academy (school), local youth centers, Lena Park, and MIT (use of gymnasium).
- **Cambridge Youth Hockey** identified Charlestown hockey league.
- **Cape Verdean Community UNIDO** pointed to Bowdoin Street, Boston University (for computers), Citykicks, Jorge Fidalgo Tournament, Hyde Park (at exploratory stage), Boudoin Street Community Center, and the Hyams Foundation and Center for Immigrant Organizers.

- **Hyde Square Task Force** reported a “strong partnership” with Girls LEAP and conversations about collaborations with some other “girl-serving agencies in our area of the city.”
- **Sportsman’s Tennis** linked with Pinehurst College and is exploring collaborations inside the BGSPAP with Cape Verdean Community UNIDO in connection with Boudoin Street Community Center. Mercedes Thompson identified several collaborations with non-BGSPAP programs including Metro Lacrosse, Urban Dreams at a local health center, and the Boys and Girls Clubs.

In summary, the capacity for networking and collaborations has increased during Year Three. Most BGSPAP heads now tend to think more about the advantages of networking and partnerships than they did during Year One. At the same time, some BGSPAP programs remain isolated, more locked into ego-centric organizational thinking and a localized identity. Finally, as discussed above, the “windfall committee” initiative has been an impetus for network development and collaborative energy within the BGSPAP. Many BGSPAP program heads are actively engaged with the committee—some as leaders (G-Row, Citykicks, Sportsman’s Tennis) and others as active participants. The windfall committee initiative shows many signs of being a successful catalyst for further network integration within the BGSPAP.

### **Program Capacity Increased During Year Three**

In keeping with the spirit and objectives of the BGSPAP mission, the programs increased their capacity to provide programming for girls during Year Three. Some examples follow.

- Noah Chrismer and Shawanda Brown at **Lena Park** built directly on the success of the BGSPAP girls’ basketball teams to secure additional funding for a competitive double-dutch program which runs from September to June. The team has 24 members (19 girls, 5 boys).
- Steve Wong indicated that they have hired a program coordinator “sensitive to girls’ needs and interests.” **Wang YMCA** has also purchased additional equipment used by girls as well as offering more classes for girls in swimming and volleyball. He also described how the creation of the girls’ programs at **Wang YMCA** has led the staff to recently partner with a local middle school and high school. Wang YMCA will be offering their physical education programs in its facilities. This will expand the schools’ capacity for provision of physical activity as well as helping Wang YMCA “to recruit more effectively as a result.” He added that the expanded contact might help them “recruit girls for G-Row and MetroLacrosse.”
- Christine Hurson believes that program quality and outcomes have been enhanced at **Jamnastics**. She explained, “Where the BGSPAP grant money really helped us was to enhance the teams’ performance. It

helped us to pull the program together. There are lots more meets (competitions) now and the girls are attending many more events, which means they're interacting more with girls from outside the program. They love it. And the coaches love it too. There's lots more response and enthusiasm."

- Since the inception of the BGSPAP, **Cambridge Youth Hockey** has increased the number of girls in its program, enhanced the quality of coaching and training, and expanded its operating domain to include Charlestown. Sandy Wells reports, "We've worked heavily with Charlestown. We've operationally partnered with them. We have no contractual relationships and neither one of our organization's by-laws mentions the other organization. But we pool coaches from both towns, and both towns now contribute ice access and league fees. The big achievement is that we pool all the girls, so this expands the total pot for making teams in both towns...We've gotten beyond thinking as individual towns. Now we can create better teams by pooling or partnering."
- **Citykicks** and **Cape Verdean Community UNIDO** secured a grant to expand their soccer programs to include summer sessions during 2006. Citykicks also hired a new fulltime Program Manager.
- The **Boston Centers for Youth & Families** Girls Sports & Fitness Initiative played a unique role within the BGSPAP network. The chief goal has been to raise awareness about the need for more girls' sports programs in Boston, and to increase sports and fitness opportunities for girls at community centers across Boston. Larelle Bryson has been a messenger, advocate, and networker on behalf of girls' sports. The summer program has attracted progressively more girls each year, and she is currently planning to survey the girls' sports interest in order to subsequently link them to programs throughout the city that reflect their athletic interests. She plans to rely on the BGSPAP network and the BYSI print directory of sports programs (soon to be issued) as vehicles for routing these referrals in the future. This strategy may increase BCY&F's capacity to get more girls involved across the city. Larelle Bryson also reported expanding basketball leagues (regional basketball) in community centers in Rosbury, East Boston, Jamaica Plain, Charlestown, and Hyde Park. Finally, BCY&F recruited and hired a fitness instructor with demonstrated effectiveness with reaching and motivating girls.
- **Jamnastics** expanded its "Come Into the Gym" recruitment efforts
- **G-Row** continues to unfurl its capital campaign. They were also able to dedicate staff to conduct internal evaluation and to appoint an academic coordinator.
- **Bird Street Community Center** added six hours of physical activities (some competitive basketball, some noncompetitive basketball, some self-defense training, some kickboxing). They are attempting to meeting growing interest in double-dutch and hip-hop dancing.

## The Cluster Meetings



Cluster meetings had formal and informal dimensions. Some cluster meetings dealt with topics or issues that were relevant to all the participating program representatives. Recruitment and retention are important goals within all the BGSPAP programs. Almost all the BGSPAP program heads were interested in learning about what funders prefer to see in an effective grant proposal. Concerns about teaching or coaching effectiveness also spanned the entire BGSPAP network. However, the agendas at other meetings had less attraction for certain program heads. For example, there was the meeting that BostonTeamworks and a consultant presented the benefits accrued by sharing office space and legal services. For program heads who work within closely defined communities, the idea of picking up and leaving the community in order to share space and lower costs was not an option. In short, to paraphrase Abraham Lincoln, the BGSPAP members were pleased with cluster meetings some of the time but not all the time.

Cluster meetings were also an event in which BGSPAP program heads gathered with others who shared their interests and general program goals. Several program heads appreciated that the BGSPAP was the only grant program that included regular meetings among participating agencies. Others observed that some cluster meetings raised relevant issues while others were disappointing. One program head saw the incongruity this way. She shared,

“We now have a research base. We’ve seen how the clusters work and don’t work. It would help if the designs could be done inside Boston and better reflect needs and concerns here. This would make the learning clusters have much more impact. The design for most of the clusters was done in New York. We hope that the WSF opens a Boston office because this would gear the learning clusters much more closely to Boston.”

Networking did occur at cluster meetings. Information was shared, announcements were made, and interactions among individuals and groups occurred. Sometimes networking was done directly where, for example, Chris Lynch would discuss opportunities for Logic Model training with an individual program head. Marj Snyder and Monica Garrett arranged for financial planning resources to be brought to bear with a particular program experiencing difficulty. Random networking also issued; e.g, Ellen Menzer ran into a Healthworks representative at an early cluster meetings and they have been partnering since. Anne Strong tells the story about discovering a grant opportunity that required the applicants to partner as a prerequisite to submission. She saw Flavio Daveiga two days later at a cluster meeting. They talked, they applied, they were funded. As a result of cluster group meetings, several program heads sought out Don Sabo to learn more about the use of discussion groups or focus groups for their own program evaluations.

One lesson learned from the cluster meetings is that network building is both conscious and unconscious, planned and spontaneous, on or behind the radar screen. Network formation flowed as much from familiarity as it did from strategy.

### **Impacts of Program Heterogeneity on Networking Capacity**

At the outset of the BGSPAP program, a committee was formed in order to evaluate the grant applications from a wide array of community organizations. The committee was composed of some BGSPAP Advisory board members and WSF staff. The committee formulated several inclusion criteria that would produce a desirable cross-section of programs within the BGSPAP.

1. The group wanted a variety of programs in the network; i.e., some sport-based and others activity-based, ranging from specific sports (like rowing or soccer) to activities such as dance.
2. There were some "political" considerations at play; e.g., to include CSSS because of its reputation in the Boston sports community and Boston Youth & Family Services because of its moorings in city government.
3. The committee wanted variety in program size and type.
4. The committee looked for quality of programming (staff, facilities, and dosage) and the potential to do effective evaluation.

From the beginning the evaluation team observed major differences between the programs that comprised the BGSPAP Network.

- **Fiscal Resources.** Some programs have solid organizational and fiscal resources such as G-Row, while others run on small budgets and inhabit minimal infrastructures such as Cape Verdean Community UNIDO.
- **Single Sport Programs.** There are programs that revolve around single sports; e.g., Cambridge Youth Hockey, Cape Verdean Community UNIDO (soccer), Citykicks (soccer), G-Row (rowing), Hyde Square (dance), Jamnastics (gymnastics), or Sportsman's Tennis (tennis). The success and popularity of Lena Park's girls' basketball team led them to add double-dutch for Year Three of the grant cycle.
- **Multiple Sport & Physical Activities.** Other programs provide an array of sport and physical activities for their girls, such as Wang YMCA and Bird Street Community Center, and East Boston.
- **Community Location.** Some programs are based solely in a specific community and are highly identified with that community (e.g., Cape Verdean Community UNIDO, East Boston), while other programs are freestanding (e.g., Citykicks, G-Row).

- **Program Duration.** Some BGSPAP operate programs across several months of the year and require substantial time and energy commitments from participants (e.g., Cambridge Youth Hockey, G-Row, ....) while others engage girls for smaller increments of time (e.g., East Boston, Wang YMCA, Bird Street Community Center).
- **Diversified Program Content.** There are differences in how much additional educational content is integrated with the specific sport or physical activity; e.g., tutoring, homework time, nutrition classes, cooking demonstrations, discussion groups of special topics such as sexual harassment or self-defense.

Finally, we identified several problematic outcomes that were linked to the high heterogeneity of programs within the BGSPAP.

- The marked heterogeneity among the BGSPAP programs often made it more difficult for network building to unfold and progress.
- It is probable that the extensive differences among programs slowed down the ability for program heads to identify and explore commonalities and mutual interests with others in the network.
- Variation in program activities, resources, curricular content, the length of the program, and the extent of girls' involvement with the program made it very difficult for the evaluation team to assess processes and outcomes across the entire BGSPAP network.
- The BGSPAP programs are spread throughout Boston, which can create transportation challenges for getting members of all the programs together in the same place. The benefits of proximity are evident in Cambridge Youth Hockey's collaboration with its neighbor, the Charlestown hockey league. Also, during Year Two, Citykicks moved its offices into Boston Teamworks. Anne Strong summarized the outcome this way. "We mix communication logistics a lot easier with people down the hall rather than across town."

In conclusion, network development within the BGSPAP increased in scope and pace during Year Three. At the same time, however, one lesson learned since the creation of the BGSPAP in January 2004 is that network development occurs slowly. Individual community-based programs function first and foremost in relation to meeting the needs of their immediate constituencies and in accordance with their own self-interest. A chief motive for collaboration is that it will benefit the parties involved. Within the BGSPAP network, program leaders increasingly began to realize that program isolation would erode their capacity for growth. They heard the "networking" message proffered in various forms through the BGSPAP and, increasingly, they took steps to reach out rather than "stay in" their community programs. Most program heads have especially looked for collaborations outside the BGSPAP network, and this may be partly due to the fact that extensive program heterogeneity across the BGSPAP eroded the overall capacity to perceive and build on commonalities inside the BGSPAP.

Finally, across the BGSPAP, there is solid evidence for increased organizational capacity to bring more effective programming to more girls. To an extent, some of the strategies for increasing program capacity were linked to the formation of collaborations within and outside the BGSPAP network. There is a synergy at play that is bound up with the underlying processes of network development within and across the BGSPAP. Energy and growth within programs is dynamically linked with energy and growth outside programs and beyond the formal confines of the BGSPAP network itself.

## **FINDINGS: YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES WITHIN THE BGSPAP**

A rather long list of evaluation findings are discussed below within the overarching framework of youth development. The results and interpretations are categorized under appropriate subheadings.

### **Testing for Developmental Synergies within the BGSPAP: The Correlation Findings**

The evaluation team wanted to know whether a pattern of interrelationships existed among key social and psychological aspects of the BGSPAP girls' involvement and interest in sports and exercise. Within the conceptual framework of youth development, for example, we wondered if higher self-ratings of athletic/fitness ability were related to body esteem, interest in sports and exercise, and athletic identity per se. Would girls with greater interest in sports and exercise report higher levels of encouragement from others? Did girls who reported facing more obstacles to sports and exercise also experience lower body esteem?

#### Youth Development Theory

These questions are important theoretically. Existing research findings led us to expect that the BGSPAP girls' involvement and interest in sports and exercise would be linked to positive psychosocial outcomes. Research findings suggest that the greater the extent to which sports and exercise are present in girls' lives, there would also be less proneness to depression, lower risk for suicide, more positive body image, and higher self-esteem. In our study, we focused on body esteem specifically. In American culture, images of perfect bodies are rife in advertising and concerns about body image are common among younger women (Richards, 2003). About 59% of fifth- to 12-grade girls expressed dissatisfaction with their bodies (Field et al., 1999). Both girls and boys with negative body images are more likely to turn to other risk behaviors in order to lose weight (Marcus, 1999). Athletic participation and exercise enhance female body image (Fox, 2000), and teenage female athletes generally have

more positive body images than their non-athletic counterparts (Sabo, Miller, Melnick & Heywood, 2004).

But how are we supposed to interpret or understand the ways that participation in sports and exercise might influence the development of body esteem among the BGSPAP girls? Should body-esteem be seen simply as a component of a girl's psychological makeup, a dynamic within her personality? Or is body esteem better understood as an outcome of a variety of intersecting social-psychological and institutional processes? In an effort to articulate the complex ways that sports and exercise girls' development, Sabo (1997) stated,

“Physical activity and sport are not simply things young girls do *in addition* to the rest of their lives, but rather, they comprise an interdependent set of physiological, psychological, and social processes that can influence, and, in varying degrees, sustain girls growth and development” (p. xxi).

Consistent with the theoretical discussion of youth development at the outset of this report, therefore, we hypothesized that significant correlations would emerge among the body esteem of BGSPAP girls, their level of interest in sports and exercise, the extent to which they identified as athletes, their athletic ability, the encouragement they received from adults, and the degree that their peers were also involved with sports and exercise.

## Results

We generated correlations and t-tests to see if synergies emerged among key social and psychological factors related to athletic and fitness activity. The following significant findings emerged.

1. Girls who were involved with a greater number of sports teams were more likely to report higher athletic/fitness ability ( $r = .26, p < .05$ ) and greater interest in sports and exercise ( $r = .26, p < .05$ ).
2. Compared to girls with low levels of athletic identity, girls with greater athletic identity reported more athletic ability ( $r = .52, p < .00$ ), higher degrees of interest in exercise and sports ( $r = .44, p < .00$ ), higher body esteem ( $r = .49, p < .45$ ), and more encouragement for being involved with sports ( $r = .43, p < .00$ ) and exercise ( $r = .41, p < .00$ ).
3. As expected, if girls reported receiving higher levels of encouragement for being involved with sports (e.g., from parents, peers, teachers/coaches, and BGSPAP program staff), they also reported getting more encouragement to be involved with sports ( $r = .80, p < .00$ ).
4. We expected to find a positive relationship between peer involvement in sports and peer involvement in fitness activity. Here the premise is that when girls have

more friends involved with sports and fitness, they themselves are more apt to be involved. The correlation confirmed this expectation ( $r = .50, p < .001$ ).

5. Compared with girls who reported fewer obstacles in the way of their involvement with sports and exercise, girls with more obstacles had lower levels of body-esteem ( $r = -.40, p < .002$ ). (Obstacles included lack of family finances to support sports involvement, perceived bias against girls sports in school, lack of interesting sports in the school, parental concerns about safety, burden of family responsibilities, and transportation problems.) Also, as expected, girls who reported facing more obstacles also indicated that less of their peers were involved with fitness activities ( $r = -.27, p < .05$ ).

6. When we broke out the correlates of body esteem, we found that greater body esteem correlated with higher levels of athletic/fitness ability ( $r = .42, p < .004$ ), greater interest in sports and exercise ( $r = .34, p < .01$ ), higher athletic identity ( $r = .49, p < .002$ ), and greater levels of encouragement to be involved with sports ( $r = .35, p < .01$ ). (And as noted above, body esteem was also negatively related to higher numbers of obstacles girls faced in relation to sports participation ( $r = -.40, p < .01$ ).

These findings provide modest evidence for developmental synergies among BGSPAP girls' athletic interest and identity, body esteem, athletic ability, and the amount of interpersonal and institutional support for their involvement in sports and exercise. The overall pattern of interrelationships suggests that the BGSPAP functions as an institutional nexus around and through which favorable developmental outcomes are issuing. Within our design, it is impossible to isolate whether these positive interrelationships occurred strictly because of the girls' involvement in program.

The selectivity factor looms large in that longitudinal research designs have not been used to test key hypotheses. A host of other variables are also likely to be related to the developmental outcomes such as age, the extent of their athletic involvement inside and outside the program, a family's socioeconomic status, and the duration and quality of the programming itself. However, the correlation findings are also consonant with interview data, content analysis findings, and what we learned through the focus groups. The correlation findings are also consistent with much existing research on girls' involvement with sports and exercise. For example, a recent Policy Studies Associates, Inc. review of youth development research on out-of-school-programs that use sports and physical activity in urban environments found a variety of outcomes including health gains, reduced risk for obesity, positive identity formation, self-efficacy, and enhanced educational achievement (2006).

We conclude that a pattern of favorable developmental processes and outcomes are issuing within the BGSPAP programs.

## Uncovering Meaning and Experience among BGSPAP Girls: The Focus Group Results

Seven focus groups were conducted in order to address the following research questions.

1. What are the most effective ways to recruit and retain girls in the program?
2. What do BGSPAP girls like and dislike about their program?
3. What factors make it easier or more difficult for girls to get involved and stay involved in programs?
4. What are some of urban girls' visions of an ideal sports and physical activity program?

The key findings from the focus group interviews are listed below.

- Making new friends and sustaining friendships is extremely important to the BGSPAP girls.
- Many girls really enjoy it when they can participate in discussion groups and opportunities to talk or chat amongst themselves. They want to express themselves and they want to be heard.
- BGSPAP girls look to other girls in their program for social and emotional support.
- The girls want to be “fit” and “healthy” so that they can get better at sports and exercise, but also, so they can better cope with the stress in their lives.
- Sports and exercise programs help girls “fight boredom” and to “feel better” about themselves.
- Many girls learned from their relationships with staff and the older girls in the program (if older girls were part of the program). These relationships helped them feel more self-confident and to pursue higher goals in school.
- Girls' immersion in the culture of sports and exercise influences their thoughts and feelings surrounding “feminine” identity and how girls and women are expected to think and act. Some program settings help girls construct effective ways to be “girls” within the wider culture.
- The girls are aware of the realities and potential for violence in their communities and, in varying degrees, they look to their BGSPAP program as a safe place in their lives. Moreover, the program offers them a space where they not only feel physically safe, but also emotionally safe (i.e., an environment where they can explore new interests and take emotional risks trying new tasks or forging new relationships).
- Girls are especially attentive when they have the opportunity to interact with older peer leaders.
- Many girls want to “look good” and they like the idea of uniforms and “cool” jerseys and outfits (even though uniforms are not available in most BGSPAP programs).

- The emotional needs, social goals, and attitudes toward sports and exercise vary a good deal between preteen girls (12 year-olds and under) and teenage girls (13 and older).
- BGSPAP girls are receptive to talking about culture and racial/ethnic issues of race when given the right opportunity to do so.

An eighth focus group is currently being planned with staff at Cape Verdean Community UNIDO. In addition to the results and interpretations that have been already generated, transcripts and audiotapes will allow for future analysis and reporting.

### **What BGSPAP Girls Like Best about Sports, Exercise and Their Programs: The Content Analysis Results**

Our evaluation revealed that many BGSPAP girls derive favorable physical, psychological, and social gains from the involvement with programs. Two basic research questions that were addressed in the evaluation were: What do urban girls like most about sports and exercise? and What do urban girls like most about the Boston Girls' Sports & Physical Activity Project (BGSPAP) programs? The data were important to collect because not much is known about urban girls' preferences for sports and exercise activities or what they enjoy about programs that offer athletic and fitness activities.

The girls in the BGSPAP community programs filled out the Youth Athletic/Fitness Survey (YAFS). Open-ended questions were included in the pretest and posttest questionnaires during the 2005/2006 program year. At pretest, the girls were asked to write two things that they "like most about sports and exercise." At posttest, girls were requested to write two things they "liked best about the program" they were attending. The girls' comments were transcribed and analyzed, and fifteen (N = 15) common themes were identified.

Most girls wrote one or two responses to the open-ended questions on the pretest and posttest surveys. Some wrote 3 or 4 comments. All the comments were analyzed and categorized. The results below show the rank order and percentages of the girls' written comments by category *for the top five most frequently expressed themes*. (See Tables 1 and 2. below.)

**Table 1. What BGSPAP Girls Like the Most about Sports and Exercise**

<b>All Girls</b>		<b>Preteens</b>		<b>Teens</b>	
1. Fun	44%	1. Fun	50%	1. Fun	40%
2. Fitness	20%	2. Fitness	18%	2. Fitness	21%
3. Social	16%	3. Social	14%	3. Social	17%



benefits  
 4. Health gains 14%  
 5. Enjoy 9%  
 competition

N = 659

benefits  
 4. Health gains 12%  
 5. Enjoy 12%  
 competition

N = 319

benefits  
 4. Health gains 16%  
 5. Physical 10%  
 empowerment

N = 327

**Table 2. What BGSPAP Girls Liked Most about their Program**

All Girls		Preteens		Teens	
1. Social benefits	39%	1. Social benefits	37%	1. Social benefits	39%
2. Fun	31%	2. Fun	31%	2. Fun	31%
3. Love sports & exercise	11%	3. Love sports & exercise	10%	3. Learn new skills	10%
4. Learn new skills	9%	4. Learn new skills	8%	4. Feel that others care	8%
5. Enjoy competition	7%	5. Enjoy competition	8%	5. Love sports & exercise	7%
N = 226		N = 104		N = 107	

The Psychosocial Shift

For this report, I have combined the above findings with the evaluation team’s interview data and site visit field work to distill an analysis. The data suggest that many girls who enter BGSPAP programs experience a “psychosocial shift” in their orientation to sports and physical activity that also influences their personal identity development and social relationships. First, many urban girls first approach sports and exercise with expectations that they might have fun and, in the process, improve their fitness level. We learned from the focus groups that included BGSPAP girls that fitness equated to feeling “healthy,” “being in shape,” and feeling confident and positive about their bodies. In a related manner, when urban girls join a new program, their search for fun and fitness may also be linked to a social expectation that they may be able to find and explore new friendships. At the outset, however, we suspect that it is the “fun” and “fitness” they associate with exercise and sports that propels them into the physical activity itself. They get to move and play, and they also begin to feel stronger and more physically capable. In many BGSPAP programs, younger girls also have the chance to observe older girls who are able to run, dance, shoot, and able to use their bodies with greater skill. The younger girls catch glimpses of their futures from the older girls, and these role models exhibit greater degrees of physical ability and athletic interest. At the same time, younger girls observe other girls who are not all that physically adept or who

mess up without too accruing too much social damage. In effect they learn to take chances and keep trying. They also understand that the physical skills associated with exercise and sport take time to “get good at”.

Second, urban girls’ initial perceptions of physical activity as “fun and fitness” increasingly spill over into their efforts to establish friendships and a sense of belonging. For both preteen and teenage girls, while fun and fitness expectations may initially attract them to a community-based program, they soon see the program as a venue for making friends. In short, girls’ curiosity and motivations in relation to sports and exercise emerge and develop within the web of social relationships that the program offers. The girls assess and reach out to program staff, instructors or coaches, older girls who may serve as role models, but most importantly, to other girls who promise to become friends or teammates. Partly for this reason, we believe that while programs ostensibly offer girls engaging activities, it is their informal social relationships that solidify their investment in staying with a program. This contention is also supported by recent research on sports and exercise programs for urban girls (Cooky, 2006).

We believe that urban girls highly appreciate the “social benefits” or “friendship building” opportunities that are part of the program experience. These “best practices” were evident in many of the BGSPAP programs, particularly those located on the “developmental” end of the “enrollment/developmental continuum.” Entry-level sports or exercise programs usually tout activities designed to recruit girls and capture their interest. If girls find that activities are engaging, they are likely to stay with the program. Effective programs that seek to achieve developmental goals also provide girls with opportunities to explore and create friendships among their peers. They set up discussion groups that allow girls to listen to one another and to share aspects of their views and values. They provide opportunities and space for girls to interact spontaneously and informally with one another. They also teach girls how to get along with one another, to talk through and patch up differences, to show respect, to avoid bashing, and to get along. Sometimes staff and older peer counselors reiterate these more social messages.

When community-based sports programs are effectively organized and capable of fostering ongoing participation among urban girls, social-psychological synergies emerge among physical skill development, personal growth, and social outcomes. Stated simply, as girls “get better at” their sport, they are apt to feel better about themselves and to take steps to forge friendships or to be receptive to being sought after as a friend by other girls. Stated another way, effective sports and exercise programs help girls move through the “psychosocial shift.” It is not participation in soccer or dance or double-dutch that, by itself, produces these personal and social “developmental outcomes.” Sport and exercise are not “medications” that, once ingested, produce behavioral and emotional transformations. They do not automatically transform girls’ bodies and identities. But rather, sports and planned physical activity provide urban girls with an

experiential vehicle to actively create their own lives and identities both individually and socially. Girls rethink their identities in relation to the body practices associated with exercise and sport. Exercise or athletic participation inform a girl's body concept and here, generally, the research shows that body esteem positively correlates with protracted involvement with sports and exercise. A shy or withdrawn girl might translate feeling more confident about her physical strength or ability into joining a team or reaching out to a potential friend.

### Applications of the Psychosocial Shift in the Real World

Moving through the psychosocial shift helps some urban girls meet real world challenges in school, youth cultures, family, and the community. Urban girls, who are disproportionately poor and girls of color, often face formidable obstacles. More than half (57%) of BGSPAP girls live in single-parent families that are often impoverished where mothers work one or more low-paying jobs to make ends meet. Almost two-in-five moms have a high school degree or less, and 38% can be considered working-class or poor. Many BGSPAP girls do not look to their schools for athletic opportunities, and 43% believe that their school "does not have the kinds of sports that interest them," while 37% think that their school "cares more about boys' sports than girls' sports." Racism and economic disadvantage are also part of the real world that many BGSPAP inhabit and cope with daily. Violence is often a palpable concern and 81% of BGSPAP girls reported that their parents worry about them moving around the city. The focus group participants also expressed concerns about violence and they pointed to their BGSPAP program as a safe place to be. We suggest that the developmental gains that many urban girls accrue through their involvement with sports and physical activity programs help them cope and excel within the larger urban milieu.

There are both traditional and nontraditional messages associated with girls' participation in sports and exercise. Elements of sports and fitness culture remain tied to traditional definitions of femininity that emphasize attractiveness and beauty. One set of messages beckon girls to get buff, get beautiful, and attract men. But increasingly the images of the contemporary female athlete meld beauty with personal health, individual empowerment, and competitive zeal. However, little is known about how these cultural themes in sport and fitness resonate with and play out among urban girls or color. The evaluation team periodically heard about instances when girls' experiences in their BGSPAP program helped them meet challenges in "real world" of family, school, community, and street. For example, one Latina was attempting to "eat better" after attending nutrition workshops offered by her BGSPAP program. Her efforts to cut back on carbohydrates and to eat more vegetables were met by resistance from her mother. She talked about the problem with a supportive BGSPAP staff member and they discussed tactful ways for her to talk about food and nutrition with her mother.

A poignant illustration of how psychosocial empowerment within the BGSPAP has impacted the real world occurred at Hyde Square Task Force. With support and guidance from program personnel, the girls created a community initiative to stop sexual harassment in the street. Ana Almeida explained how the initiative got started.

“Basically what happened was that we would have girls, both middle-school and high school girls, who would be walking to and from school, minding their own business. And they were being harassed by boys and men on the street. I saw this happening myself and at one point confronted one of the boys. With the input of our girls we decided to launch the sexual harassment campaign. We let the people in the street know that if you’re making a girl on the street feel uncomfortable, then that’s sexual harassment.”

The Hyde Square Task Force staff worked with the girls to produce fliers and information that were then distributed in the neighborhood. They contacted local media and staged a march through the streets in order to raise awareness and respect. A second phase of this initiative took the program to the schools where they distributed questionnaires. Ana Almeida explained, “Through the survey we had a press conference and labeled the problem not only in the street but in the schools.” Finally, Hyde Square Task Force developed a “strong partnership” with Girls LEAP for the past year that teaches girls physical and social self-defense skills. (Hyde Square Task Force recruits the girls and provides the space and Girls LEAP delivers onsite 8-week trainings in both spring and summer.) In summary, within the framework of youth development discussed in this report, we can see how girls learned from a larger psychosocial process that involved merged interactions with friends and staff at the program, people in the neighborhood, the school, and the media.

### Interfaces between Family Life and the BGSPAP

The evaluation team has forged some observations about the interface between family life and developmental processes at play within the BGSPAP programs. These views are based mainly on site visits and interviews with key influencers and program heads.

1. Families Face Reduced Resources. Consistent with most urban environments, Boston’s schools offer reduced physical education classes due to budget limitations. Urban public schools offer fewer organized sports programs than suburban schools and we suspect that the disparities here may be more marked for girls than boys.

2. Transportation Challenges are Formidable. Transportation to and from after-school sports activities is often lacking. Some parents do not own automobiles and cannot provide their own transportation in the manner of “soccer moms” or they find the challenges of getting around in the city are too formidable. Some BGSPAP parents work two or more jobs and cannot transport their children during work hours. Other parents worry about their girls’ safety on the street and forego involvement with sports in favor of security.

3. Family Needs Can Come First. Our Year Two data analysis revealed that the mothers of teenage girls were significantly less likely to encourage their daughters’ involvement with sports than the mothers of pre-teen girls. We suspect that this was because the older girls were needed at home to cook or care for younger siblings.

4. Uneven Attendance at Events and Varying Degrees of Involvement. Attendance and family involvement are staples of successful youth athletic and fitness programs. The evaluation team suspects across the BGSPAP network, family attendance and involvement are not as extensive as in suburban communities. The latter enjoy more abundant institutional resources; e.g., more teams, greater access to physical spaces and facilities, coaching assets, and more available equipment. However, parental involvement within the BGSPAP did appear to vary. Family involvement is a key component of the Cambridge Youth Hockey program. As Sandy Wells explained,

“We’re at the family end of the spectrum of community sports programs. Hockey teams foster closeness and family members hang around the rink for practices and games. Quite a few of our parents, both the dads and moms, also played hockey themselves. Many “little sisters” also grew up with older siblings who played hockey. This adds to the community atmosphere and the girls fit into this atmosphere.”

Some BGSPAP staff also reached out to family members in order to get them involved with program events or day-to-day activities. Certain sports also had a history of cross-generational involvement that nurtured parental interest; e.g., longstanding cultural interest in soccer exists within the Cape Verdean community; the cultural legacy of basketball among urban African-Americans helped to motivate interest in Lena Park’s Lady Dolphins basketball program.

5. Parental Attitudes Vary. Parental attitudes varied from program to program. One perception appears to be “I’m giving you my child to care for and you do a good job, but don’t involve me.” In other programs parents assume more responsibility to show up at games or performances or to take a child to practice or a game.

6. The Program as Family and Community. Several BGSPAP programs were described as a “family” or “community” in which girls can feel cared for, safe and

supported. Many facets of the “HEY Sisters” program at Sportsman’s Tennis are designed to fill the girls’ familial needs. Nadine Houston discussed one program that was coordinated with Pinehurst College in which Sportsman’s Tennis girls discussed the meaning of family and being a “family member.” The girls decided that family is “not necessarily about biology but who they could depend on to give emotional support, sometimes financial support, someone you could confide in and trust, someone who gives good advice, and someone who spends time and helps you to be the best that you can be.” She recounted another incident that got handled in “a family way.” Nadine told this story. “One girl came to me and said, ‘Miss Huston me and my friend aren’t friends anymore.’” She talked the interpersonal issues through with the girl, advised her how to handle the situation, helped her to successfully renegotiate her friendships. Here Nadine was showing how “Tennis is the nucleus of something larger,” an extension of family values and nurturance.

## **ENROLLMENT PROGRAMS & DEVELOPMENTAL PROGRAMS**

BGSPAP programs vary in the extent that they fulfill their girl-serving goals. Differences exist between “enrollment programs” (that recruit girls to participate in specific activities for shorter time periods) and “developmental programs” (that design program activities across longer time periods in order to meet a variety of girls’ psychosocial needs in addition to providing athletic/fitness participation opportunities).

The evaluation team found it useful to think about the different kinds of programs within the BGSPAP along a continuum between “enrollment programs” and “developmental programs.” Enrollment programs are designed to get girls to participate in a specific activity such as double-dutch or volleyball for a limited time. There may be some minimal introductory instruction associated with these activities and there is a specific time frame that participants devote to the activity (e.g., two one-hour classes per week for 6 weeks). A typical goal is to introduce girls to a new physical activity and/or to increase their participation in physical activity. A “drop-in” program is a type of enrollment program in which kids or families sign up for short period of time (say two weeks or a month). Another type of drop-in program may be offered for six months and a girl may choose to attend one day but not others, or a parent may drop her daughter off for a few weeks and then stop for a month and then begin again. Another girl might drop in midway through a program and attend sporadically until it ends. In enrollment programs there is no or little expectation that a girl comes to all the events or classes. Finally, there is little or no programmatic agenda to create an enduring core group of girls who are expected to develop friendships with other girls to have close relationships with staff.

Developmental programs typically stretch across longer time periods (several months to a year or more) and demand more commitment from girls

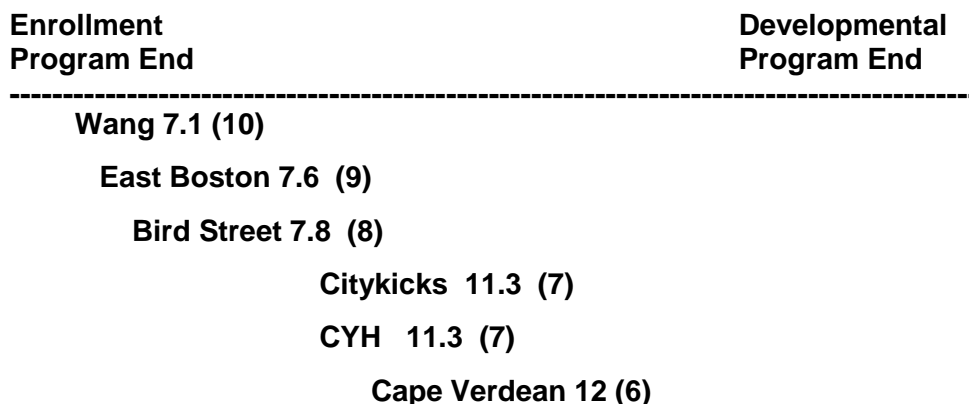
while they are participating in the program. There are ample opportunities for self-expression, for girls to talk informally with one another, and to forge meaningful relationships with supportive adults (e.g., staff, coaches, instructors, or volunteers). In addition to its featured sport or physical activity, developmental programs provide instruction in areas such as nutrition, homework tips, tutoring, dating, or racial or cultural issues. Finally, developmental programs are more likely than enrollment programs to be girl-centered or girl-sensitive, that is, there is a conscious effort among staff to think about girls' personal, social, educational, and/or health needs in addition to their physical progress in the sport.

In order to explore and describe how the BGSPAP programs fit within a continuum between enrollment programs and developmental programs, the three members of the evaluation team independently filled out a brief questionnaire with standard Likert-type response alternatives. The five questions (or indicators) were:

1. Estimate of the total amount of time girls devoted to the program.
2. Extent of girl-to-girl interpersonal communication and opportunities for self-expression.
3. Extent of opportunities for girls to develop meaningful relationships with adults; e.g., staff, coaches, instructors, or volunteers.
4. The extent that educational experiences are included in addition to the sports and physical activity; e.g., tutoring, homework, nutrition instruction, discussions about dating.
5. The extent to which the program is consciously girl-centered, that is, specifically designed to meet the developmental needs of girls.

The scoring range for each item was between 1-4, and the total scores therefore ranged between 5 and 20. Results were calculated and the respective programs were arranged along a continuum. See Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1 PLACEMENT OF BGSPAP PROGRAM ALONG AN ENROLLMENT PROGRAM AND DEVELOPMENTAL PROGRAM CONTINUUM\***



**Sportsman's 15 (5)**

**Jamnastics 15.2 (4)**

**Lena Park 17.7 (3)**

**Hyde Square 17.9 (2)**

**G-Row 18.9 (1)**

\*The number after the program name is the average score assigned by the evaluation team for five Likert-type scales. The number in parentheses refers to rank order of respective programs along the continuum. No hierarchy of program quality or effectiveness is meant to be implied in this diagram.

## **GETTING AT GENDER SENSITIVE PROGRAMMING**

The terms "girl-centered" or "gender sensitive" is used by some BGSPAP program heads. But just what is girl-centered or gender sensitive programming? What does it look like? To what extent does girl centered programming exist within the BGSPAP?

To begin with, the term could mean almost anything one wants it to mean. In one situation, "gender sensitive program" might mean doing what the girls want to do, whether these actions are in the girls' best interest or not. Another girl-centered approach might start where girls' interests reside and then figure out ways for programs to address a larger array of behaviors, values, and challenges. In short, "gender sensitive" need not presuppose a particular philosophy or programmatic approach; it merely suggests a basic attention being paid to gender or the idea that girls are somehow different than boys. Thus, you can envision someone creating what they refer to as a "gender sensitive program" simply by adding a girls' volleyball team to an existing roster of boys' volleyball teams.

Another approach to "gender sensitive" programs focuses on the individual girl as a site of change. Rather than helping girls of color or low-income girls to address their collective social, cultural, and economic marginalization, a "gender sensitive" program would aim to induce change in individual girls (Ward & Benjamin (2004). Developing self-esteem in this model, for example, is offered as a developmental panacea for girls' problems, while institutional forces are put in the background. In addition, if a girl fails to build self-esteem or make other personal changes, it is the girl who fails and not the model. In summary, when program goals are defined in terms of individual change, these kinds of psychological approaches make sense. However, if urban girls are viewed in relation to their collective relationship to social inequalities or community violence, then individualist-psychological approaches fall short of being girl-serving or "girl-centered."



The meaning and practice of gender sensitive or girl-centered programming and coaching was a focus of two cluster meetings during Year One. Many BGSPAP program heads have explored what girl-centered programming means, what it entails, and how to do it better within their own programs. The Girls' Coalition of Greater Boston (Wheeler, et al., 2004) identified a wide array of characteristics of "gender sensitivity" programs including (a) efforts are made to assess the needs of girls, (b) a safe and supportive space is created, (c) girls share responsibility and decision-making power, (d) mentoring relationships are common, (e) staff reach out to families and the wider community, (f) girls learn skills and knowledge that traditionally have been available to males, (g) there is some gender-sensitivity and diversity training for program staff, and (h) collaboration with other gender-sensitive programs.

The evaluation team found that the degree of gender sensitivity varies across BGSPAP programs. Some programs exhibit most or all of the key elements of a successful gender-sensitive programming detailed above, while others enact only a few. We also believe that, generally, those BGSPAP programs that fall more on the "developmental" end of the enrollment/developmental program continuum (discussed in the previous section) provide more of the assets associated with gender-sensitive programming.

Below find three examples of gender-sensitive programming in action within the BGSPAP.

Lena Park's Lady Dolphins. During a site visit, Janie Ward asked questions about diversity on the Lady Dolphins basketball team. She wondered about the two white girls on the team. Coach and BGSPAP program head Shawanda Brown explained that the two white girls traveled into the city from the suburbs in order to play with the Lady Dolphins. They wanted to "play at a more competitive and aggressive level" that was not being offered at their schools. Coach Brown coached and mentored the girls in ways that helped them to explore racial and city-and-suburb differences, to build an appreciation for racial diversity, and to build team spirit and unity. The girls learned to integrate competition and athleticism with their self-images as young women. Coach Brown also consciously used the team bonding experience and friendships that stoked girls' confidence on the court to encourage them to pursue their educational goals.

Cambridge Youth Hockey. Sandy Wells and Derek Rayside took some advice given during a BGSPAP cluster meeting that, more so than with male athletes, female athletes like to have an opportunity to discuss some of what is happening on a team. Indeed, "shared responsibility and power" and participating in leadership opportunities are earmarks of gender-sensitive programming according to the Girls Coalition of Greater Boston (Wheeler, et al., 2004). They decided to consult the girls and have them vote on the design and color of new team uniforms. Animated discussion ensued and, as Derek Rayside recounts

below, four groups of girls emerged. His summary of their viewpoints illustrates how the discussion was a conduit for the construction of gender identity on the team.

One group argued, 'We want to wear the same colors that the boys' team wears because we're serious hockey players and that's what serious hockey players wear.' Then there was a second group that basically said, 'We want to wear black with pink trim, because we want to assert our femininity, and we're different than boys.' Here it's not so much about hockey, it's more a gender issue.' Then similarly there was a third group that wanted "any uniform that doesn't have pink because we're hockey girls not girly-girls.' Now understand that these are two different groups...the ones who say we're hockey girls and the ones who say we're hockey players. For the ones who say they're hockey players, they're saying it's not a gender issue. They're saying 'I'm an athlete' first. For the ones who say they're hockey girls, they're splitting hairs with other groups of girls on the team. And finally, there was a fourth group that just saw pink as a color without any kind of political or gender preferences attached to it.

Cape Verdean Community UNIDO. Flavio Daveiga reported learning more about how to effectively communicate with parents in the Cape Verdean community with regard to their girls' involvement with soccer. He sometimes will recommend that a male soccer player move "up" to another club team, go on a field trip, or attend a special event. He'll send word home with the boy and begin to make arrangements. With girls, however, he has learned to speak to the parents first in order to describe the situation and assure them that their daughter will be safe and accompanied by an adult "that they know and trust."

## **EVALUATION PROCESSES AND OUTCOMES**

The main components of the evaluation are discussed below. Please note that the results of the Year Three survey will be reported in a subsequent report.

### **Evaluation Knowledge and Practice in the Programs**

Observations and interviews with program heads across the three years of the BGSPAP revealed several outcomes regarding the evaluation.

1. Shift in Attitudes toward the Evaluation Team. Initially most program heads perceived the evaluation team with a degree of distrust or as outsiders. There may have been early concerns about unwanted transparency or that a poor evaluation would result in withdrawal of funding. Across the years, Don Sabo worked with program staff reacting to and helping them modify their evaluation designs. For more sophisticated programs, recommendations were minimal. Other program heads, however, needed examples of surveys, counsel about

how to write up program goals and objectives, what measures to deploy, or when or how to use focus groups. Several modules were created for cluster group meetings through which the evaluation director would illustrate methods and findings in order to demonstrate evaluation procedures. Don Sabo also interfaced with Claudia Lach in her work with Logic Model training of several BGSPAP programs. Trust and cooperation grew across the years and it is fair to say that BGSPAP program staff got more comfortable and knowledgeable with the evaluation process.

2. Increased but Uneven Evaluation Capacities. The evidence shows an overall increase in evaluation capacities within BGSPAP programs. A good deal of this increase is owed to BYSI's sponsorship of several BGSPAP programs in the Logic Model Training. Some program heads said that Logic Model Training was "painful" and "hard work" but that it was worth the effort. In addition, program directors who went through Logic Model training talked with other BGSPAP about the positive outcomes for their programs. Meanwhile, facilitative evaluation added impetus to the growth of evaluation skills in BGSPAP programs. The evaluation director worked with individual program leaders assessing evaluation plans, making recommendations for methods or indicators, and providing some measures. The cluster meetings were also used to convey rationales and procedures for evaluation. We planned and conducted a variety of evaluation modules such as a general meeting on "program evaluation—what it is, how to plan and do it, and why it's important." We staged other cluster group sessions on focus group method, survey method, the benefits and pitfalls of pretest/posttest designs. In short, the evaluation team consistently implemented a "preach it and teach it" approach with the BGSPAP program heads.

When recently asked, "Have you made improvements in the way you view and use evaluation in your program?" the responses from program heads below were typical.

"We're vastly improved. I think we've learned a lot about how evaluation fits into writing proposals. We know more about how to think about making something measurable in the future. I feel like I learned quite a bit and useful stuff. Also, it was useful to hear at the one cluster meeting how the funders themselves see evaluation and what they expect to see in a proposal." Sandy Wells, Cambridge Youth Hockey

"Oh my god, yes but we still have so far to go. The population we serve is a moving target and evaluation is a big challenge. Like you (i.e., Don Sabo), we found out that pre-and posttest studies are not easy to do. We're rethinking about just how much quantitative data we should collect. We're leaning more toward qualitative data collection." Anne Strong, Citykicks

“Yes, I think we’re more aware of it, more aware of the need for it, and we now try to get better at it. We also have to ask the question of how do we manage evaluation when we’re such a small staff. There’s only three of us to do everything. . In the past we didn’t have any clear idea of how evaluation fit in, and now we do. So it’s become more a logistical problem of figuring out how to fit it in without overwhelming ourselves.” Denise Gonsalves, Cape Verdean Community UNIDO

“I know I have improved. The first year I did evaluation I was not proud of the result. I knew I could get better at it. We liked the survey that you provided and we plan on using the focus groups in the future. We’re better able to look at how different surveys add to our program evaluation.” Shawanda Brown, Lena Park

Several program heads and staff still appear to approach evaluation with reluctance. The attitude is something like “do what you need to in order to get by or get funded.” It is also the case that program staff do not have the training or educational prerequisites to enable them to understand the logistics or evaluation design and measurement. Two programs demonstrated no increase in their evaluation capacity across the span of the BGSPAP program. They did not ostensibly devote any extra awareness or effort toward changing their “baseline” evaluation practices beyond doing enough to secure funding and to basically get by. When the evaluation director offered to answer questions or provide extra feedback regarding the evaluation component of their program, they expressed interest and appreciation but never followed up. We concluded that their operating strategy is to produce the appearance that evaluation is being done within the program in order to secure funding and that a sincere or more professional commitment to evaluation is missing. Staff resources that were capable of designing and implementing a solid evaluation were not evident.

### **Development and Use of the Youth Athletic Fitness Survey (YAFS)**

The evaluation team completed its development of the YAFS at the outset of Year Three. Some of the scales were retooled in order to enhance content and statistical reliability. The YAFS is designed to provide program heads, coaches, or instructors with basic information about the girls in their programs. The YAFS is a practical four-page questionnaire that contains 27 distinct measures of girls’ backgrounds, behaviors, interests, attitudes, and identities. When used effectively, the YAFS can be a valuable component of a program evaluation.

Consistent with the practice of facilitative evaluation, the evaluation team has consistently educated BGSPAP program heads with regard to survey data can be folded into an overall program evaluation. We also emphasized using survey results to foster discussion and planning among staff and leaderships within a program. Finally, we encouraged program heads to integrate survey

results into their year-end reports and future grant proposals. Some program heads appear to have studiously ignored our educational messages, but many did appear to get the message. For example, Noah Chrismer at Lena Park reported,

“I imported a lot of the survey results you provided into two grant proposals and the prospective funders really appreciated the information. We also let them know that we’d be using these measures in our evaluation. Two of the grants got funded.”

Ellen Minzer from G-Row indicated that learning more about the YAFS “definitely” influenced their thinking about the survey component in this way.

“Yes, we have some sophisticated aspects of our evaluation at G-Row but we also realized that we were winging it with our surveys. We learned from your survey questions, which used more standardized language that was clearer. Plus the questions were less intimidating for the girls.”

Don Sabo and Phil Gray also created *The Youth Athletic/Fitness Survey (YAFS): A Guide for Program Heads, Coaches & Instructors* which is being made available this fall 2006. This easy-to-read-and-use guide contains an overview of the Youth Athletic/Fitness Survey (YAFS). We lay out the rationale for using the YAFS as part of a program evaluation. We discuss its strengths and weaknesses as a measurement tool. We list 27 concepts that are measured in the YAFS and point to where to find them in the questionnaire. We provide instructions for administering the YAFS and, once the data are gathered, some guidelines for analyzing it. Finally, copies of the questionnaire are included in both English and Spanish language versions.

We hope that our educational efforts eventually encourage all the program heads to pay more attention to the YAFS as an evaluation tool rather than just passively hearing or receiving reports from the evaluation director. After two years of working with program heads, we are getting more cooperation with regard to administration of the tool in program sites. Program heads are also exhibiting more interest in findings. We have conducted some initial analyses of survey data for this mid-year report, but the final data analysis and report will be done when all programs have completed their third-year cycle.

### **Production of Individual Program Reports**

If enough girls in a BGSPAP completed the YAFS, the evaluation team offered to produce an individual report tailored to the program. Four programs took advantage of this option. The evaluation team produced these reports in order to (1) provide program-based data analysis and results, and (2) to demonstrate to program heads the use and value of survey data for evaluation.

Three program heads said they appreciated the individual report and discussed the results with staff. Two of them incorporated some of the results into subsequent grant applications. One program head did not read the individual report. See Appendices C and D.

### **Abandoning the Pretest/Posttest Model**

A common approach for assessing the viability of youth development programs is to use test-retest designs that help researchers to discern significant changes in developmental outcomes occur between the beginning and end of the program. During Year One and Year Two of the BGSPAP, we identified increased problems with the use of pretest/posttest designs across the network. One set of obstacles stemmed from the tremendous variation among the kinds of community organizations that comprise the BGSPAP, the types of programming provided, the duration of programs, and the quality of instruction provided. We also observed a wide range of ability among program staff to understand the basic logic of experimental design and the need for measurement of desired outcomes.

Below we list a number of program conditions and problems that eroded the efficacy of using pretest/posttest designs across the BGSAP during Year Three.

1. Many community-based programs in the BGSPAP work with small numbers of girls; e.g., 25 to 35 girls. If a total subject N is too low, this often erodes the possibility of testing for statistically significant differences in scores (e.g., self-esteem scale) between pre- and posttest survey administrations.
2. Often there is erratic participation among the girls between the pretest and posttest measurements. A lot depends on the program; e.g., whether girls attend regularly, whether staff members are motivated to track them down and effectively administer the questionnaire. The type of program structure can also be problematic. One program may run with the same girls for 4 months, while another program may have 25 girls in four different 4-week modules (and the girls aren't exactly the same 25 girls in all four modules). And in this regard, there is the perennial methodological problem of dropout; i.e., if the dropout rates are too steep, then the pre- and posttest statistical comparisons are undermined or destroyed.
3. More "academic" scales or measurement tools have lots of items. A self-esteem scale may have 40+ items. At the program level, just one scale may eat up 2 pages of a survey. If the researchers or program staff have less time for survey administration, or if their girls' dedication and interest in filling out a questionnaire is strained by a lengthy questionnaire, then the efficacy of the data

is compromised. Whereas lengthy (i.e., greater #'s of items) scales drive up statistical reliability and capture more subtle variations in the phenomenon (e.g., self-esteem again), the length may not be practical when it comes to getting girls to respond effectively and attentively. Some of the variation here can depend on the types of subjects being surveyed/tested. Those who are used to testing probably would be better suited to address lengthier, multi-item questionnaires. But many urban girls, like the girls in the BGSPAP, have English as a second language and their educational experiences vary.

4. If program staff decide not to use lengthier and more academic measures/tools to assess discrete concepts (or outcome measures), then we might recommend that they use shorter scales or indexes to get the job done. This makes some sense, but scales with less items often do not have the same statistical reliability as their lengthier counterparts. They end up being solid on validity but weak on reliability.

5. The variation among girls in program can also be an independent factor that can complicate (and thereby undermine the validity) of pretest/posttest measurement in some programs. Girls vary by age, cultural background, comfort with English language, family resources, motivation, nutrition and health, acceptance of staff, schooling, and comfort with testing. These factors may enter into dynamics associated with the pre- and posttest design and administration themselves thereby, in research terms, producing both internal and external threats to the validity of the experimental design itself. Few research designs can control for the host of variables that operate within urban programs or the lives of urban girls.

6. It is difficult to assess the extent to which the length of a program (and its intensity) can be expected to produce certain outcomes. For example, if you are simply teaching several mathematical formulae or a physical skill or strength-building technique, then it makes sense that you would be more likely to successfully measure hypothesized differences between pre- and posttest "moments" in the design. But what if you're measuring developmental outcomes like hypothesized increases in self-esteem, self-confidence, cooperation, interpersonal skills, or body image? These kinds of phenomena are less likely to occur during short durations; e.g., self-confidence is a developmental outcome and is seldom established in a day, or week, or month. If a program like G-Row, however, attempts to measure these kinds of outcomes, it makes sense because G-Row has lots of girls returning year after year, and they work together for many months each year. CityKicks, however, has a good deal of contact and program length, but comparatively, not as much as G-Row. Finally, the Cape Verdean soccer program has a less intense and protracted program duration, so here the expectation of being able to measure (or capture empirically via survey method) developmental outcomes would be dampened.

7. Ideally the same researchers should administer the survey or make observations across all the programs in a network of community-based programs. However, this kind of professional effort takes a substantial amount of money to get done. This means, in effect, that surveys are often administered by program staff with varying levels of understanding of research logistics and administering surveys. There was one instance in which a very bright and sophisticated executive director for one of the programs wanted to “help out” the BGSPAP evaluation team by including additional girls from another program in her agency in order to increase the number of surveys she provided us. She did not grasp the logistics of the pretest/posttest experimental design.

There are other methodological and statistical issues associated with unfurling pretest-posttest designs and outcomes measurement procedures within a community-based program. I’ll add to the list at a later date. But, for now, let’s ask the questions: Where does this leave us? Where does this leave program evaluators who are working in various community-based programs? Where does this leave staff who are designing indicators that allow them to observe, assess or test for expected outcomes?

One guideline is to use more direct survey-based measures of outcomes that a high on face validity rather than relying on lengthy multi-item scales. Another guideline is to consider measuring certain outcomes (e.g., hypothesized developmental effects) across years rather than after 3 months or 7 months of programming. A staff might measure self-esteem at beginning of a program, at end of the program, and if there is good retention during year two of a program, conduct a retest and make comparisons across the two-year time frame. This latter strategy, however, depends on whether the program has adequate retention across years—which is probably not the case for most community-based programs that serve urban girls.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

The BGSPAP has made substantial progress toward increasing the number of girls participating in sports and exercise in Boston. Program capacity has improved markedly in most programs and moderately in others. Individual programs have succeeded at developing strategies for promoting physical activity programs for girls. The trend toward growing connectivity that issued during Year Two has continued during Year Three and, while the pace has been slow, there are observable sings of network integration. Finally, a majority of program heads is projecting the vision of the BGSPAP into the future and endeavoring to sustain the network.

The BGSPAP program staffs are learning about and succeeding at creating programs that use sports and physical activity to enhance the development of urban girls. The results of our evaluation show that these Boston-based programs are favorably impacting girls’ development in ways that



earmark effective community-based programs. A report by the Policy Studies Associates, Inc. (2006) describes these program outcomes this way.

“A large, consistent body of research attests to the value of high-quality out-of-school time programs in promoting positive youth development. These programs provide environments where young people can engage in academic enrichment, building meaningful relationships with responsible adults and peers, nurture new interests, and develop the social and life skills they will need to mature into well-informed, productive citizens.”

## **Policy Recommendations**

The following policy recommendations are presented as a touchstone for discussion and planning among the stakeholders.

### For the Barr Foundation and Women’s Sports Foundation

1. The BGSPAP has been the site of what may be the most in-depth and protracted observation and analysis of a social experiment to build an integrated urban network that expands girls’ interests and opportunities in sports and physical activity. A number of stakeholders and key influencers have been directly or indirectly involved with the BGSPAP experiment including Barr Foundation leaders, BYSI, the WSF, the Harvard School of Public Health, city government officials, network development consultants, and specialists such as Claudia Lach. I recommend that the Barr Foundation and/or WSF organize a day-long symposium in order to discuss and identify the key learnings from the BGSPAP experiment. The symposium would aim to produce a blueprint for planning future program directions and network development strategies for expanding girls’ participation in sports and fitness activities in Boston and other cities.
2. That the Barr Foundation extends funding for a second three-year cycle in order to expand the BGSPAP through a second three-year cycle, locating the network management and evaluation functions within Boston. If a three-year funding extension is unfeasible or undesirable, a one-year extension is recommended in order to help the BGSPAP network to transition more effectively and consciously toward sustainability.
3. That the Barr Foundation and WSF continue to support the BGSPAP “windfall committee’s” initiative.
4. That the Women’s Sports Foundation launch a GoGirlGo Campaign initiative in Boston.
5. That the WSF explores the utility of network weaving (conceptually and with regard to measurement and evaluation) in relation to (a) coordinating its efforts to

interface the GoGirlGo Campaign with the Barr Foundation and BYSI's girl-serving initiatives, and (b) adopt the network weaving model in relation to its GoGirlGo operations in Atlanta, Chicago, San Jose, and possibly, Boston.

### Changes in Grant Application and Award Process

1. Applications for future grants should require thorough documentation of previous evaluation activities and results; e.g., documentation of participation and retention numbers; inclusion of attendance rosters; copies of evaluation tools.
2. A multi-tiered grant award process should be considered that build collaboration into the process. First-tier applicants could apply for funding for a single program. Second-tier applicants, however, would only be eligible for funds that support a partnership initiative involving additional agencies/programs that deliver sports and exercise to girls.
3. A three-stage payment schedule for all BGSPAP grants will be put in place. The conditions for receiving each payment will be based on fulfillment of basic performance criteria; e.g., evaluation results and documentation should be submitted before receipt of final grant allocation.
4. The overall rationale or selection criteria for determining the optimum array of programs within the BGSPAP that would given funding should be re-examined. Rather than maximizing program heterogeneity across the BGSPAP, for example, it may be productive to identify homogeneous groups or subgroups of programs. Future selection of grant recipients, for example, might be based on location or identifying affinities such as basketball programs, soccer programs, dance and/or exercise programs, enrollment programs, or developmental programs. The selection of homogeneous programs or affinity groups would probably facilitate networking and hub formation.

### Cluster Meetings

1. Future cluster meetings will be organized and coordinated by BGSPAP program heads. Responsibility for organizing and conducting a cluster meeting would be written into the grant agreement from the outset of the application and award process.
2. Programs must send at least one representative to a cluster meeting or lose a portion of the next grant payment.
3. If desirable, create a model for the cluster groups that meshes with the principles and strategic goals of network weaving.

4. If appropriate, ask BGSPAP program heads to designate leaders who will form a conscious hub that, in part, liaisons among the Barr Foundation, BYSI, and (if appropriate) the Boston-based representatives of the GoGirlGo Campaign.

#### For the Evaluation Team

1. Complete the Year Three data gathering and analysis of report the findings to the stakeholders.
2. Teach the program heads how to independently use the Program Head and Coach Guide to the Youth Athletic/Fitness Survey.
3. Communicate the evaluation findings to the program heads. Use the cluster meetings to report findings.
4. That the evaluation researchers empirically examine whether differences in processes and outcomes occur between BGSPAP “enrollment programs” and “developmental programs.”
5. That individual survey reports be produced for cooperating BGSPAP programs.

#### General Recommendations

1. A new name should be developed to replace the Boston Girls Sports & Physical Activity Project. A shorter, more marketable name would foster recognition of the network by outsiders, which would also cement in-group identity among network members and participating girls.

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