The Susan Crown Exchange (SCE) works to prepare youth to thrive in a rapidly changing world. SCE prioritizes initiatives that promote social and emotional learning (SEL), explore the relationships between technology and society, and build critical skills through youth sports. What unites all of SCE’s partners is their commitment to creating opportunities for young people.

Through its Exchange Philosophy, SCE strives to undo the power dynamics of traditional grantmaking relationships. SCE provides avenues for mutual dialogue and learning alongside financial support in order to elevate their partners’ outstanding work.

As part of our new Youth Sports program, SCE is launching the Million Coaches Challenge. Responses to this Challenge should address the following question: How can we train one million coaches in youth development by 2025?

Background
In 2019, approximately 36 million young people participated in organized sports.

Combining physical activity, play, and collaboration, sports are a meaningful way to support youth development and build key social and emotional skills—skills like teamwork, empathy, and problem solving. These foundational skills lead to improved academic results, behavior, and long-term life outcomes. More generally, positive sports experiences are associated with a range of benefits for youth, including: higher future earnings; less smoking and drug use; decreased risk of heart disease, diabetes and childhood obesity; higher academic achievement and productivity; improved life skills; and better overall mental health and self-esteem.¹

Put simply, sports can help kids thrive both in and out of the classroom. But these outcomes are not guaranteed—especially in a youth sports culture that over-values specialization, social comparison, and winning from early ages. Only 38% of kids ages 6-12 played team or individual sports on a regular basis in 2018, down from 45% in 2008. Kids are burning out—and parents report that coaches can be the highest source of pressure.²

Much like a teacher inside a classroom, a coach plays a vital role in a child’s experience. Research demonstrates that adults significantly influence children’s social and emotional development. Young people who identify at least one supportive adult within their social networks achieve better outcomes across a range of academic, behavioral, and health indicators.³ For kids who play sports, a good coach can be a transformational figure.

However, being a caring adult is not enough. Beyond building sport-specific skills, coaching requires a nuanced skillset that is developed through ongoing training and professional development. When coaches do not have appropriate training, it can have dire consequences.⁴ For instance, a 1992 seminal study found that when coaches received training in effective communication with kids, only 5% of children chose not to play the sport again, as compared to a 26% attrition rate with untrained coaches.⁵
Life lessons are not implicit and youth don’t learn them simply by playing. Coaches must know how to embed those lessons into the activities that engage youth where they are.

**Our Call to Action**
The evidence is clear: well-trained coaches are far more likely to promote positive outcomes, while poorly-trained coaches can actually have a negative impact. So why aren’t more coaches trained?  

While most coaches recognize the key role they play in supporting youth development, they often don’t feel supported in doing so. Coaches report that existing trainings are either too costly, too time consuming, too hard to implement, or fail to incorporate youth development practices. The majority of coach training that exists is designed to win games—not necessarily to help kids thrive. In 2019, only 32.5% of the country’s six million coaches were trained in youth development practices.

This is a missed opportunity, and in the era of COVID-19, this issue is more salient than ever. As our youth cautiously return to play across the country, they emerge from what may be the most challenging period of their lives. They won’t just be eager to play; they’ll need an incredible amount of social and emotional support to recover from the challenges of the past year. From their unique position as mentors and role models, coaches must be prepared to meet this need.

So we are calling on the boldest, most innovative actors to close this gap. We envision a world in which all young athletes, regardless of their family’s income, their gender, their race, or their physical ability, have access to coaches who are well-versed in the youth development and skill-building techniques that help kids succeed on and off the field. *Our first step is to train one million coaches by 2025.*

**Opportunity**
It’s time to broaden the definition of a good coach to include youth development and social and emotional learning. Through this Challenge, we seek to support efforts that train coaches on the skills they need to support kids on and off the field. By training one million coaches in youth development over the next five years, we can ensure that millions of young athletes learn how to work together, celebrate success, manage failure, and build healthy relationships with their peers. Along the way, we hope our collective efforts will catalyze a culture change across the youth sports landscape.

Through this Letter of Inquiry (LOI) process, we intend to surface a group of potential partners who are training and supporting coaches that work with 5-18 year old athletes in organized sports settings, from whom we will request more detailed grant proposals. We expect to award grants of $50,000-$200,000 per year for up to three years. SCE may launch a second round of the Million Coaches Challenge in subsequent years, depending on the range of proposals submitted during this round.

Together, we can build a future where our kids are equipped with the skills they need to thrive.

**What We’re Looking For**
We are looking for efforts that respond to the following question: *How can we train one million coaches in youth development by 2025?*
Informed by our initial partnerships with the Aspen Institute’s Sports & Society Program and National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, Harvard University’s EASEL Lab, and Futures Without Violence, and anchored by a commitment from Positive Coaching Alliance, we seek initiatives that can help us achieve this ambitious goal.

We welcome proposals from a range of actors, including but not limited to youth sports providers, coach training organizations, intermediaries, and governing bodies. To be considered for funding, your effort must:

- **Bring training to more coaches:** In your response to this Challenge, please clearly state how you will increase the number of youth or high school coaches who have been trained in youth development. We will consider a range of strategies to accomplish this goal, including but not limited to efforts that:
  - scale existing youth development training, launch new training programs, or enhance existing trainings with new content on youth development;
  - invest in your organization’s internal capacity to train coaches, plan to partner with external training organizations, or employ a combination of the two;
  - support coaches in school-settings and/or out-of-school;
  - support coaches in competitive and/or non-competitive environments;
  - reach team and/or individual-based sports.

    Efforts must reach a minimum of 5,000 coaches over the course of the grant to be considered. *If you are unable to meet this threshold as a single entity, we encourage you to consider applying in partnership with other organizations.*

- **Employ high-quality training practices:** All forms of training—online, written, video, app-based, or in-person—are eligible. However, it must adhere to best practices for the given medium and meet high standards for quality, such as Learning Policy Institute’s “7 Elements of Highly Effective Professional Development” or the U.S. Department of Education’s “Checklist for Online Professional Learning.” Submissions for existing programs must demonstrate evidence of the program’s impact on coaches (and by extension, youth). For new trainings and/or resources, your submission must speak to the evidence base for your proposed approach.

- **Be aligned to SEL and youth development principles:** To be considered for this Challenge, your submission must lay out an overview of the training that will be provided through this initiative, describing how it is rooted in the principles of social and emotional learning and youth development. We strongly recommend that training content be informed by reputable SEL and youth development frameworks, such as CASEL’s Core SEL Competencies, David P. Weikart Center’s Preparing Youth to Thrive guide, or Aspen Institute’s Calls for Coaches white paper. We encourage applicants to identify social and emotional skill development as an explicit program outcome. Trainings may include other outcomes—such as player safety or sports-specific skill development—in addition to youth development or SEL.

- **Measure reach and impact:** We believe strongly in the power of coach training, and we are interested in supporting stories of impact with clear data around outcomes. We seek applicants with strong measurement strategies and that are open to collaborating with other organizations to refine their approaches.

While they are not required, we are particularly interested in responses that also address one or more of the following priorities:

- **Build equity:** Girls, people of color, children with disabilities, and kids in low-income communities have historically had less access to high-quality sports opportunities—and, by extension, high-quality coaching. We’re especially interested in funding efforts that work to correct this gap by serving
marginalized groups and taking the unique needs of each audience into consideration in their training (e.g. via culturally-relevant curriculum).

- **Foster innovative partnerships**: We recognize that a variety of actors—youth sports providers, national youth sports organizations, intermediaries, local governments, professional sports teams, school districts, parents, and other funders, to name a few—can play a role in addressing this Challenge. While it is not a requirement for consideration, we’re excited to see applications from organizations that leverage these other actors as partners to respond to the unique needs of their communities and/or increase the number of coaches reached.

- **Raise awareness and stimulate demand**: Submissions should describe how the effort will educate the target audience about the value of coaches who are trained in youth development. The strongest submissions will articulate how their effort will stimulate demand for high-quality resources and change the conversation about what it means to be a good coach. We are interested in learning how certifications and incentives might play a role in this.

**How to Apply**

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

- **Organization Background**: Tell us about your organization and its mission, as well any other organizations you may be collaborating with in this effort.

- **Project Summary**: Describe your current training efforts and explain how support from SCE would allow you to expand this work. Please include information about your target population and proposed measurement strategy.

- **Description of Training**: Describe the design and content focus of your training. Explain how it meets standards of high quality professional learning and how it aligns with established SEL or youth development practices.

- **Budget**: Provide your estimated total project budget, the amount you are requesting from SCE, and any other funding sources for the project.

Specific questions for each section can be found in the online application.

LOIs will be considered until the deadline of 5:00pm CST, January 29, 2021. After a review period, we will follow up with the most promising applicants to request a formal grant proposal. **Please submit your letter of inquiry via our Foundant portal.** You may direct any questions to info@millioncoaches.org.

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2. 2019 State of Play, Project Play, The Aspen Institute, [https://www.aspenprojectplay.org/reports](https://www.aspenprojectplay.org/reports)
8. 2020 State of Play, Project Play, The Aspen Institute, [https://www.aspenprojectplay.org/reports](https://www.aspenprojectplay.org/reports)