

An Initiative to Start a Free After School Lacrosse Program in an Underserved Community to Encourage Teamwork and a Sense of Community



**Submitted by Aidan Bender
On Behalf of the Wilshire Athletic
Association**

USA Lacrosse Charitable Organization

Aidan Bender – Program Coordinator
abender@umass.edu 508-902-7155
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USA Lacrosse Charitable Organization
2 Loveton Circle
Sparks, MD 21152

Dear USA Lacrosse board members,

Please consider this letter as the beginning of the formal USA Lacrosse Grant Application on behalf of the Wilshire Athletic Association in Springfield, Massachusetts. The Wilshire Athletic Association is a not-for-profit organization that offers recreational sports leagues to youth in Springfield ages four to sixteen. At this time, the organization offers baseball, softball, basketball, and soccer to these kids, and the USA Lacrosse Grant Application would be used to start a free of charge, after school lacrosse program through the Wilshire Athletic Association.

The organization states that through the sports programs they offer, they strive to “strengthen confidence and build self-esteem in youth... and through the development of team spirit and sportsmanship, we hope to build unity between diverse communities.” Lacrosse is a sport that could help achieve exactly this goal, and with rapid growth and increased popularity in recent years, this grant would allow us to make the game accessible to a wider audience as well as diversify the sport even more.

We are seeking a \$17,000 grant that would supplement the entirety of equipment costs for both boys’ lacrosse (which includes helmets, shoulder pads, elbow pads, gloves, and sticks), and for girl’s lacrosse (which includes protective eyewear, gloves, and sticks). The funds would be used to purchase exactly 30 sets of boy’s equipment and 30 sets of girl’s equipment. The grant would also be used to purchase lacrosse balls, lacrosse nets, jerseys, and pay referees. Any funds left over after the purchase of these initial necessities would be saved for the use of replacing any equipment that may break in the future. All coaches within the Wilshire Athletic Association are volunteers, and with the help of USA Lacrosse, background checks and coaching education will be administrated to ensure the safety of participants.

If you have any questions about the proposed program, grant application, or would care to arrange a meeting, feel free to reach out to me through the email or phone number above.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Aidan Bender
Program Director

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Statement of Problem

Cost of Playing Lacrosse

Lacrosse is one of the most expensive sports to begin playing a young age, mostly due to the cost of equipment. At a minimum, a beginner lacrosse stick, composing of the head of the stick and the shaft, can cost around \$60, and more advanced sticks can cost as much as \$300 dollars. This is only the first piece of equipment that is required to begin playing. The protective equipment that is necessary for a lacrosse player requires additional expenses. Helmets can range from \$300 to \$400, and shoulder pads, elbow pads, and gloves are usually around \$50 a piece. Girls protective eye gear can be as much as \$100.

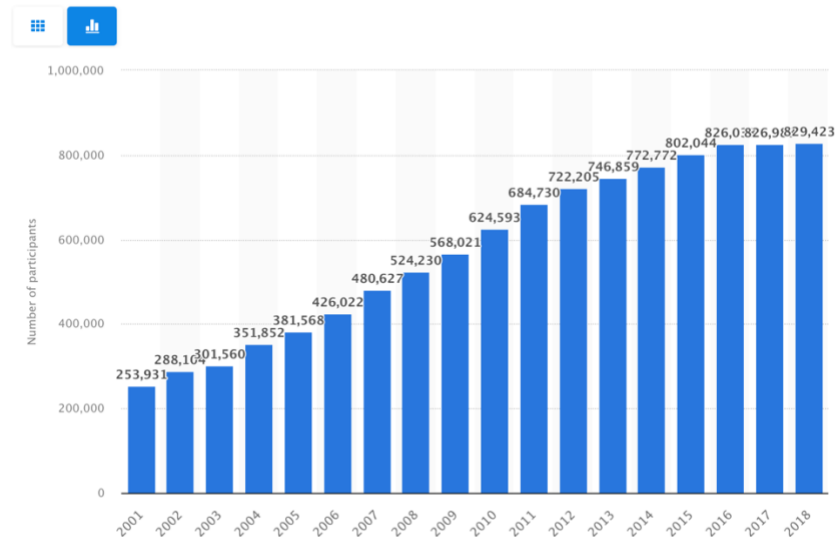
Fortunately, nearly every lacrosse equipment supplier offers beginner “starter kits” where all this protective equipment can be included in one package for each individual player. Buying equipment in such a way can reduce costs to about \$300 a player for boys and \$150 a player for girls.

All things considered, these costs are often too much for many parents to supply for the kids, especially when it is considered that equipment will have to be repurchased or traded in if the equipment were to break or kids outgrow the original sizes purchased. While there are many programs throughout Western Massachusetts that offer kids an organized environment to play the sport and receive coaching, very few if any provide the equipment for players free of charge. This program will use these grants to do this to grow the sport, increase diversity within lacrosse, and offer the game to a wider audience. Through the Wilshire Athletic Association, the program will cater to the youth of Springfield, Massachusetts as an additional sport to the ones the program already offers.

Lack of Diversity in Lacrosse Despite Increased Popularity

Lacrosse has become increasingly popular over the last 20 years, and participation throughout the United States is currently at an all-time high.

Total number of participants in lacrosse in the United States from 2001 to 2018



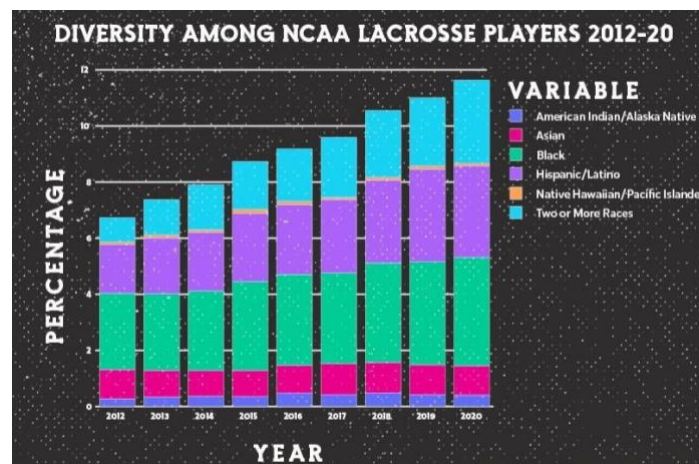
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Total number of participants in lacrosse in the United States in 2018, by level and gender

Characteristic	Male Players	Female Players
Youth	276,305	165,461
High School	186,335	145,882
College	25,588	17,640
Post-College	7,070	4,692
Pro	270	180

As can be seen from the chart above and the breakdown of the numbers by level of play (Statista Research Department), the sport of lacrosse has greatly increased in popularity since 2001. Even with this increased popularity, lacrosse is a sport that lacks diversity. Inside Lacrosse reported last year in a 2020 NCAA Demographic Survey that measured the demographic breakdown of college lacrosse players. The headline for the article reads: “Lacrosse Is 40% more diverse than

in 2012” (Inside Lacrosse). While the data does support this headline, a closer look at the data reveals that there is still considerable room for improvement when it comes to diversity in the sport of lacrosse. The demographic breakdown of all NCAA athletes across sports in 2020 was that 55% were white, 21% African American, 5% Hispanic/Latino, 2% Asian, with other demographics making up the rest of the percentage. The demographic breakdown of NCAA Lacrosse players in 2020 was 83.34% white, 4% African American, 3% Hispanic/Latino, 1% Asian, and smaller percentages of all other demographics than the makeup of all the NCAA in its entirety (Inside Lacrosse, NCAA Demographic Survey).



The clear disparity that comes when comparing the demographic breakdown between all NCAA athletes and NCAA Lacrosse athletes represents the overall lack of diversity in the sport throughout the United States. While there has been a trend of increased diversity in the sport over recent years, continued effort is required to keep this trend going in the proper direction. Programs such as this proposed program with the assistance of the Wilshire Athletic Association that offer youth the opportunity to play free of cost, without the expenses of equipment, will offer the opportunity to play lacrosse to a much wider audience. This will help continue this trend of increasing diversity within the sport of lacrosse while offering youth team building opportunities and a greater sense of community.

Statement of Request

We are requesting a “full team equipment” grant of \$17,000 from USA Lacrosse to purchase equipment, pay for referees, and potentially access to facilities under the not-for-profit organization of the Wilshire Athletic Association. This program will abide by all the necessary characteristics required by USA Lacrosse as outlined by the charitable organization. These include helping the community as a whole through player collaboration and team building, a commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion, being operated by a committed and experienced local governance, emphasizing supportive services that are transformative in the lives of athletes, believing in giving every child the opportunity to play and enjoy lacrosse, and finally through a willingness to build and grow a relationship with USA Lacrosse. This proposal also aligns with the preferences of USA Lacrosse including offering programming for both boys’ and girls’ lacrosse and demonstrating the ability to reach participants in underrepresented and diverse communities as the Wilshire Athletic Association has done for many years. The Wilshire Athletic Association also has a 501(c)(3) designation as is a preference of USA Lacrosse. The program will meet the eligibility requirements of USA Lacrosse including serving youth between ages 6-19. The goal is to establish 2 teams for each gender, ideally an under 15-year-old team and an under 11-year-old team, but this can be adjusted based off of registration numbers. The program will offer consistent and structured opportunity for lacrosse play to large groups of children, delivering programming through experienced and committed leadership, delivering more than 6 weeks of lacrosse programming, following the USA Lacrosse Anti-Harassment and Discrimination Policy as well as complying by their best practices and recommendations.

Description of Proposed Program

Timeline for Program

This program is aiming for an initial launch in early March 2024. The program, working under the Wilshire Athletic Association, will follow the process and timeline to seek funding from USA Lacrosse. This means that in early August 2023, the application will be submitted to USA Lacrosse through the application portal for review. The USA Lacrosse Internal Review will take place from mid-September until the end of the month, with notifications being released in mid-October. Upon hopeful approval of the equipment grant for the lacrosse program, the Wilshire Athletic Association will agree to the grant and its terms and conditions before the end of the month. The grant will then be expected to be fulfilled in November of the same year. As the program director, I will spend the winter months recruiting players coaches, referees, and other volunteers to assist in the practices and games that will take place during the lacrosse program. My connections that have been made through playing on the club lacrosse team at UMass Amherst will make allow this process to avoid difficulties. I will also assist the Wilshire Athletic Association in purchasing the proper equipment for the program, which will consist of sticks, protective equipment, balls, and nets.

Aside from preparation work for the program, the actual program will begin when registration starts on January 1st of 2024. Practices for the program will start on March 1st of the same year, and games will commence after a full month of practicing, on April 1st, 2024. Games will continue for the next 2 months, going throughout the months of April and May. Multiple practices will be held every week, expectedly 2-4 practices, and the teams that are established will play other youth lacrosse from neighboring towns, and potentially each other if multiple boys' and girls' teams are established within the program.

Equipment Needed

This program will require at least 30 sets of equipment for boys, and at least 30 sets of equipment for girls. All the equipment will be purchased from either Lacrosse Unlimited or Lacrosse Monkey, both established equipment providers for lacrosse gear. The following price points are based on options from the two suppliers. The first piece of equipment that any lacrosse player needs is a lacrosse stick. While advanced and intermediate sticks can cost as much as \$300 a piece, beginner sticks are much less expensive, typically starting around \$60. For this program, the STX Crux 100 Girls Complete Lacrosse Stick will be a good fit, and this stick is \$50 before shipping and tax. For the boys' program, the Warrior Burn Next Complete Lacrosse Stick will be a good fit, which costs \$55 before shipping and tax. With 30 kinds of each stick being required, the total budget that will be allocated for the program's lacrosse sticks comes to a total of \$3,150 before shipping and tax. With shipping and tax, it will cost an estimated \$3,300 in total to receive the necessary sticks for this program.



STX Crux 100 Girls Complete Lacrosse Stick



Warrior Burn Next Boys Complete Lacrosse Stick

30 Girls Lacrosse Sticks	\$50 per stick	\$1,500 total
30 Boys Lacrosse Sticks	\$55 per stick	\$1,650 total
Combined total		\$3,300 grand total with shipping and tax

Boys protective equipment will be necessary for the launch of this free after school program. This protective equipment consists of a helmet, shoulder pads, a pair of elbow pads, and a pair of gloves. An advanced helmet can cost as much as \$400, but youth helmets are typically far less expensive. Boys shoulder pads typically cost about \$50 at any age, as does a pair of elbow pads and gloves. Thankfully, nearly every lacrosse equipment provider offers beginner “starter kits” which consists of a complete set of protective equipment for youth players introducing themselves to the game. These “starter kits” are far less expensive than purchasing the protective equipment pieces themselves. For this program, the 4 Piece STX Lacrosse Starter Set will be a good fit. This package costs \$225 before shipping and tax.



4 Piece STX Boys Lacrosse Starter Set / STX 4 Sight+ S Youth Lacrosse Goggles / STX Strike Women's Lacrosse Glove

For girls' lacrosse equipment, a starter set is not provided, but the rules of the game require and allow far less protective equipment than the boys game. Girls' lacrosse requires protective eyewear and protective gloves. For this program, the STX 4 Sight+ S Youth Lacrosse Goggles will be a good fit, as will the STX Strike Women's Lacrosse Gloves. Both pieces of equipment cost \$50 each, for a total of \$100 being required for girls' protective equipment before shipping and tax. This brings the total of protective equipment required for field players in the program to a total of \$9,750 for 30 sets of both boys and girls protective equipment required for

the program. Estimated shipping and tax brings the total cost of the protective equipment required for field players in the program to \$10,000.

30 Sets Boys Protective Equipment	\$225 per set	\$6,750 total
30 Sets Girls Protective Equipment	\$100 per set	\$3,000 total
Combined total		\$10,000 grand total with shipping and tax

Goalie equipment is entirely different than both the sticks and protective gear that is required for the field players in boys and girls lacrosse. However, this equipment is the same for both boys and girls, meaning that the program will require 4 sets of goalie equipment for both genders. This will allow teams to scrimmage each other full field while having both having a goalie in net. For goalie sticks, the STX Shield 100 Complete Goalie Lacrosse Stick will be a good fit, which costs \$90 before shipping and tax. For chest protectors, the STX Shield 200 Goalie Lacrosse Chest Protector will be a good fit, which costs \$80 a piece before shipping and tax. For goalie gloves, the STX Shield Goalie Lacrosse Gloves come at the inexpensive price of \$110 a pair, and this will work for the goalies in the program. The goalie pants that will be purchased for the program are the STX Youth Goalie Pants, which cost \$50 a piece. Lastly, a throat guard is required to be attached to a goalie's helmet, which is the same as a standard field player helmet. These throat guards will be the Cascade Lacrosse Goalie Throat Guard, which cost \$40 a piece. All of this goalie equipment comes to a total \$1,480, and then a grand total of \$1,600 after shipping and tax.

4 Goalie Sticks	\$90 each	\$360
4 Chest Protectors	\$80 each	\$320
4 Pairs Goalie Gloves	\$110 each	\$440
4 Goalie Pants	\$50 each	\$200
4 Throat Protectors	\$40 each	\$160
Total		\$1,600 total after estimated shipping and tax



STX Shield 100 Complete Goalie Lacrosse Stick



STX Shield 200 Goalie Lacrosse Chest Protector



STX Shield Goalie Lacrosse Gloves



STX Youth Goalie Pants



Cascade Lacrosse Goalie Throat Guard

The last remaining pieces of equipment that will be needed for the lacrosse program are balls, nets, and jerseys. A case of 120 lacrosse balls will be needed for the program, which costs \$120 before shipping and tax. 2 nets will be needed for the program, which cost \$180 a piece, or \$360 a set. Jerseys will be reversible pinnies that cost \$5 a piece, and a total of \$120 for a set of 60. The total cost for balls, nets, and jerseys will be an estimated \$650 after shipping and tax. The total cost of all equipment needed for the program to operate as a free of charge program for the youth is broken down below.

Combined Cost of Boys and Girls Sticks	\$3,300
Combined Cost of Boys and Girls Protective Equipment	\$10,000
Total Cost of Goalie Equipment	\$1,600
Total Cost of Balls and Nets	\$620
Total Cost for Program Equipment	\$15,550

Additional funds will be used to purchase equipment in future years that may be broken or need replacing, paying referees, as well as potentially helping to reserve field time within the city.

Facilities

The facilities that the program will utilize are found within Springfield, Massachusetts. The same fields that are used for the Wilshire Athletic Association Soccer games can be used for the Lacrosse games in a different season. If funding is necessary to reserve this field time, grant money will be used for this. If no money is necessary to reserve field time, then this money will go back into the program to purchase extra equipment for players in case of damage or if replacement is necessary.

Personnel

Referees, coaches, administration workers/general volunteers who will most likely be parents will all be required personnel for this program. Referees will be the only paid employees from this program, as they will separate and unbiased participants in the program. These referees will be the same certified and trained referees that work the local youth lacrosse games in the area. These referees are all certified by USA Lacrosse and trained to know the game and protect the players. As other teams pay the referees to come to their games, this programs' teams will do the same, as is it would not be feasible to expect one team to take all the costs of a having referees in a game. Funding for referees will be from the USA Lacrosse Charitable Grant. All other personnel in the program will be volunteer, including the coaches. USA Lacrosse offers certification programs that will be required for any coaches in this program. At least 3 coaches will be needed for each team, but as many as 6 are welcome to participate. These coaches may consist of parents, or any other people who are interested in growing the game of lacrosse. I will utilize contacts I have made as a player on the UMass Amherst Club Lacrosse Team to find coaches who are qualified and willing to take the USA Lacrosse certification course. Administration personnel will help assist in signups, handing out jerseys, and field preparation.

Summary

Objectives

The objectives of the proposed lacrosse program under the Wilshire Athletic Association are to offer a free of charge lacrosse program with all equipment provided to players so that the sport will be offered to a wider and more diverse population than it otherwise would. The program aims to make a positive impact in the community through the lacrosse program by allowing a team building and confidence building opportunities to youth participants. The goal for the program is to have 2 complete boys teams established, 2 complete girls teams established, and to have them participate in the local youth lacrosse leagues by playing against both the other towns and potentially other team of the same gender within the program. This will grow the game to a diverse population and continue the trends of increased popularity and diversity within the sport of lacrosse.

Benefit to USA Lacrosse

The approval of this grant, and the eventual success of the program would be beneficial for USA Lacrosse in many ways. As outlined above, the program would follow all the advice and practices of USA Lacrosse, and work to build a lasting relationship with USA Lacrosse. The program would also help achieve the goal of the charitable organization of “fueling the sport’s growth” by bringing lacrosse to a community that is currently very limited in their participation and offering the sport to a wider and more diverse audience. The free of cost aspect of the program emphasizes that the program will set out to achieve the goal of USA Lacrosse: that the organization “strives to break down barriers to participation” and the organization wishes to “give every child the opportunity to play lacrosse.”

Measurement of Success

The success of this program will be able to be measured in numerous ways. If the program can field at least one team of each gender in the inaugural season, that will be seen as a massive success since it would signify that it allowed a youth lacrosse team to participate against others that otherwise would not have. This will provide them the opportunity to build relationships, develop friendships, and gain confidence through this sport. Whether or not the players enjoy the sport enough to come back for a second season will be another measure of success. One of the objectives of the program is to grow the game of lacrosse and continue the trend of increasing popularity of the sport. The number of players attempting to register in both the first and hopefully second seasons of the lacrosse programs will be a metric by which the program can measure its success.

End Matter

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