

October 29, 2010

To: Allison Bauer and Dan Sherman, The Boston Foundation

From: Tom Mendelsohn and Julia Gittleman

Re: CHAMPS Pilot Evaluation

In conjunction with the implementation of the CHAMPS pilot program, the Boston Foundation (TBF) engaged our firm to conduct an evaluation of the pilot's impact. In addition, we were asked to provide feedback on the pilot to inform whether to pursue the program and, should it do so, how CHAMPS can be most effectively implemented in the future.

METHODOLOGY, IMPLEMENTATION AND LIMITATIONS

At outset, the foundation's representatives desired a robust, multi-method evaluation, while being cognizant of the limited budget and level of infrastructure typical of a pilot program. As a result, the original evaluation planned called for a range of data gathering methods with the foundation's representatives playing a substantial role in meeting the logistical demands of the evaluation.

The pilot was carried out with three distinct cohorts:

- East Boston –An established coalition of East Boston sports league volunteer coaches covering a broad range of sports (EB);
- Boys & Girls Clubs of Boston – A collection of club athletic directors and staff from representing multiple locations within a single not-for-profit organization in Boston (BGCB); and
- Softball/Baseball/RBI: A loose collection of Boston baseball, softball and RBI baseball leagues brought together for this project (SB/BB/RBI).

The following table describes the intended evaluation and the activities carried through to completion.

Activity	Plan	Resulting Sample
Coach Pre-Tests	Design and administer written pre-tests to all coaches at start of first training.	101 EB 29 BGCB <u>18 SB/BB/RBI</u> 190 Total Responses
Coach Post-Tests	Design and administer pre-tests online to all coaches following completion of second training.	102 EB 18 BGCB 23 SB/BB/RBI <u>11 Affiliation unknown</u> 143 Total
Parent Surveys	To survey parents on the sideline at games	Cancelled
Youth Focus Groups	To convene a single focus group of teens for each cohort.	East Boston group held Remaining groups canceled.
Observation of Trainings	To observe 4 trainings	Completed
Coach and Project Leadership Interviews	To interview 15-20 coach and league leaders and project partner leaders.	7 Coach and league interviews (across all 3 cohorts) 4 Partner interviews (all project partner organizations represented)

Mendelsohn, Gittleman & Associates, LLC

As indicated above, the full range of anticipated evaluation activities were not completed. We attribute this to the pilot's circumstances: limited foundation project staff, the logistical challenges of a first-time pilot and dependency on volunteer leaders from the participating leagues. However, based on the above, **we can report some key findings about the impact of the pilot and offer feedback to inform future program planning.**

SURVEY DATA FINDINGS

The pre- and post-test surveys tested the coach participants' reaction to statements that reflected the targeted outcomes of the program (regarding changes in attitudes and behaviors), and solicited their view of the CHAMPS trainings. The following observations are predicated primarily on an analysis of the 100 coaches responding to the post-training tests who attended *both* PCA trainings (70 EB, 16 BGCB, 24 SB/BB/RBI).

1. Change: Review of the pre- and post-test data demonstrated some impact for those coaches who attended both trainings, when comparing the mean rating scores for the pre- and post-test.

For several questions a noticeable increase was found:

- Coaches felt more prepared to help their players bounce back quickly from mistakes (increase of 6.2% in the average rating between the pre-test and the post-test).
- Coaches felt more prepared to deal with behavior problems on [their] team (increase of 5.5%).

However, in several other cases, scores went *down* after the 2 PCA trainings.

- Coaches felt less prepared to involve and manage parents to positively support the team (decrease of 13.5%).
- Coaches felt less prepared to involve their weaker players in a meaningful way (decrease of 5.8% change).

This decrease may have occurred as a result of coaches' participation in the trainings giving rise to increased awareness about these issues related to quality coaching. After the trainings, the coaches may have had a greater understanding of the range of the related issues. This type of negative change is not uncommon in evaluations that assess change in response to trainings that can raise awareness or introduce new concepts.

2. Putting the Tools to Work: Coaches put the trainings and tools to use.

- Coaches reported that they more frequently "wrote up game plans for each practice" (increase of 15.6%).
- Coaches reported that they more frequently "had a written coaching philosophy" (increase of 14.8%).
- The vast majority of coaches (83.3%) reported using the tools from the coaches' workbooks they were given at the PCA trainings.

3. Putting the Messages of the Training to Work: Coaches indicated dramatic increases in the frequency with which they emphasized the messages highlighted in the PCA curriculum. They reported that they more frequently talked with the youth about the following messages:

- Giving their best effort. (20.2% increase in frequency on a 4-point scale)
- Respecting opponents (19.4% increase)

Mendelsohn, Gittleman & Associates, LLC

- Respecting teammates (18.9% increase)
- Having fun (16.1% increase)
- Respecting the rules of the game (15.7% increase)

Coaches also showed an increase in the following behaviors sought by CHAMPS:

- Providing encouragement and positive reinforcement to their players (19.6% increase)
- Asking players for their input and suggestions (10.7% increase)

4. Coaches Approved of Trainings: In an excellent test of their overall assessment of the trainings, the coaches responded positively to statements testing the program's impact and value:

- 83.7% reported the PCA Trainings impacted them significantly; and
- 95.1% would recommend PCA Trainings for coaches.

Survey Comments: The open-ended questions provided the coaches with an opportunity to express their response in their own words. These examples (taken directly from the post-tests in the coaches' own words) reflect the themes and response of the coaches overall regarding their experience with the PCA trainings:

- *"The trainings made me think explicitly about positive reinforcement. I try to make positive comments as frequently as possible because of the 5:1 ratio that I learned about in the training. It's simply not enough to praise as much as you criticize."*
- *"After the 1st training I started talking about the ROOTS of honoring the game and the ELM tree of mastery approach at practices. They helped me focus on my behavior vis a vis the officials."*
- *"I think this was one of the most influential trainings I've attended because it really dealt with real life issues and things I have come across many times before."*
- *"I signed up to coach so that I could have a positive mentoring role with the girls, but the PCA trainings have reinforced that goal for me...and helped give me some tools to ensure that I do it."*

Coaches were also asked if anything surprised them:

- *"I had anticipated the experience to be another boring lecture yet to my surprise I went away with a very upbeat attitude and for sure a more informed coach at that. The instructor was amazing and his wealth of knowledge and delivery of key points on all aspects of sports and instruction was clearly sterling."*
- *"What surprised me was how deep this program is. When I was asked to attend, I said to myself, 'I know how to coach and I know how to treat the kids. Why do I have to go have someone tell me what I am supposed to do?' But after the first 30 minutes, I was very into it."*
- *"I was expecting teacher/student. I was glad you made it an open discussion with all the coaches. It showed the differences in the coaching styles and the more positive direction I would like to head toward."*
- *"I was pleasantly surprised at how much of the material related was applicable to real-life situations that you face as a coach."*

The coaches were asked what was most helpful from the PCA workshops:

- *"What I found helpful was when people gave their ideas on how to deal with real life situations. I think it is great hearing different ways to go about doing certain things, and I think you learn more that way."*
- *"Emphasis on how to encourage players to respect each other, and how to deal with difficult parents. Also how often its important to think about how the other team is feeling also, instead of own teams fears (especially during a game when you are playing an undefeated team)."*
- *"I truly found this whole experience helpful. It was sort of like organizing my closet. I was able to look at specific aspects of coaching and put my philosophy down on paper and organize my goals. I had an outline of my plan, but now I have a concrete plan."*

Mendelsohn, Gittleman & Associates, LLC

- *"Coming together with other coaches from across the city was enlightening and affirming. It made me realize more clearly that different leagues face different challenges based on their kids' needs off the diamond."*

INTERVIEW AND OBSERVATIONAL FINDINGS

The following are based upon direct observations and interviews with coaches, league and project leaders. (*Interview quotes are included below in italics. Interviews were not recorded. Though the quotes are not direct transcriptions, they represent the accurate sentiments and specific word choice of the interview participants.*)

THE TRAININGS:

The trainings were very positively received, well executed and the most valuable aspect of the pilot. There were, however, recurring feedback that imply substantial room for improvement (as would be expected in a pilot effort). Many coaches and leaders interviewed noted that **expectations for participants going in were relatively low. The trainings surprised them by how engaged coaches were, and how much they seemed to get out of them:**

- *I thought, "Here we go, we're going to get talked at. It was actually refreshingly surprising that it wasn't like that. I really enjoyed it and thought it was really worthwhile."*
- *"Not only me, but it empowered everyone here at our site and made us more aware of things that could happen and how to handle things that do happen. The training gave us some tools to look at what can be done."*
- *This was "one of the top 3 trainings in my experience here (in 6 years) where staff unsolicited provided feedback, thought it made sense, it was easy to understand, instructor was engaging. This was a training where all the staff, and some asked to make sure that invite went out so they wouldn't miss the 2nd training."*
- *"One of the best trainings I've ever been to, and I've been to hundreds. 75% are just a big waste of time. This one made you think about what you are doing and how you are doing it. Everyone loved it."*

Content & Themes: The central themes and thrusts of the training were excellent and well received. The Double Goal theme and its three key principles – ROOTS, ELM and 'Filling the Emotional Tank' were commented upon repeatedly and gave words to concepts that many of the league and project leaders had been struggling to express consistently to their coaches. The focus on how to respond to challenging parent situations was noted particularly frequently:

- *"It gave me words for what I've been trying to tell some of my coaches for years."*
- *"It made people think about things. If you are going to run up the score when you are winning by 60, what does it do to the opponent's little kids?"*
- *"I appreciated the discussion and rules for parents as spectators, both learning from the trainer how others deal with these parent issues...and learning from others in the class."*
- *"Loved the messages and themes. We're not about ESPN...it's a life skills component."*

Facilitator/Trainer: Overall, the participants gave the facilitator high marks. They reported that he had an excellent rapport, made good use of real world examples and anecdotes, and showed steady improvement throughout the pilot as he learned better the nuances of an urban audience. Multiple participants, however, noted that it would be good to have additional trainers who reflected the diversity of the population being trained, both in terms of race, gender and ethnicity, and in providing Spanish language instruction in particular.

- *"We have a lot of Spanish speaking coaches. They speak Spanish, but they would be more comfortable in a Spanish-speaking session."*
- *"I thought it went really well. The facilitator was excellent. He was very interactive, engaging, back and forth. I liked the real scenarios ...among ourselves and with him."*
- *"Eric clearly was also a parent and a coach. He did a nice job of getting know who was in the audience and gearing the training to them."*

Workbooks: The workbook curriculum used was also well received and participants reported liking, remembering and even going back and re-using a number of the tools and exercises

Mendelsohn, Gittleman & Associates, LLC

included. However, to some it served as a distracting focus that disrupted constructive conversation and interaction in the group, and a large number of coaches appeared to not return to the workbooks after the training.

- *“Even if you can’t get the parents to sit at the meeting, you [can] send a code of conduct home for parents to have to sign.”*
- *I “took it step by step, wrote things out, had handouts. Because I went to the trainings, and had the workbook, I had a lot more meetings with the parents about the programs.”*
- *“It’s really hard to breeze through the workbook when there’s this great dialog going on”*
- *“There was a lot of ‘trying to cover’ the workbook.”*

Interaction/discussion: The scenarios posed to the group by the facilitator, and the group discussions and interaction were repeatedly cited as particularly beneficial. **Coaches appreciated the ability to come together and share their stories and reactions, and to learn from one another.** A number of participants mentioned a desire to have had more large group discussions and suggested that small groups would have helped as a small number of individuals dominated some of the discussions with the larger class sizes.

- *“It was very interactive, engaging, back and forth. I liked the real scenarios that allowed some back and forth among ourselves and with him. He used a lot of great examples of how to handle certain scenarios.”*
- *“We could have used more time in small groups; those conversations really got you thinking.”*

INCENTIVES – EQUIPMENT AND CASH

The use of equipment and cash grants as incentives to the leagues for participation was both valued by the leagues and appears to have been an important piece of getting high participation, particularly among a volunteer population of coaches. Good Sports was an excellent choice of vendors because of their experience working with youth sports and leagues, interfacing with nonprofits and volunteers regularly, and the systems they have in place. Though the cash was nominal, it was put to good use to augment the lean budgets of the leagues.

- *“Very tangible incentives. [TBF] handled it well, equating it with attendance at the workshops, but not being heavy-handed. It was very important and valuable.”*
- *PCA’s trainer called the linkage of cash and equipment “a stroke of genius” and noted that “It’s always hard to get people” to the trainings.*
- *Organizations noted that they’d “worked with Good Sports before” and liked doing so.*

THE RIGHT FOCUS AND MIX

Most coaches, particularly volunteers, receive limited recognition and attention; most have rarely benefited from the types of training and incentives offered by CHAMPS. The modest investment in local coaches’ success by TBF was clearly appreciated by the participants. That appreciation likely compounded CHAMPS’ impact. **CHAMPS appears to have been a good investment that provided substantial return.**

- *These are people who “aren’t used to getting any attention”*
- *“I think youth volunteer coaches are tremendously under-resourced and under-appreciated”*
- *“Coaches training is a very low cost investment that can reach a lot of people with limited investment of time... and resources.”*
- *“If you were doing this as a pilot, to see if it works, it works, there’s a lot of demand and it’s relatively cheap program and a lot of bang for a buck.”*

IMPACT AND TBF’S ROLE, VISIBILITY AND REPUTATION

Many of those interviewed gave examples of how **the trainings had made a real difference, and noted that TBF received a lot of positive recognition.**

- *I “saw a difference in the way they talk to the kids and how they treat the kids now.”*

Mendelsohn, Gittleman & Associates, LLC

- *“I had this one coach who was the sweetest, most laid back JP kind of guy who stepped on the baseball field and became ‘that coach’ that makes you cringe. After the training, I could see a light go off in his head. I saw him really trying (and mostly succeeding) to contain the over-competitive coach within this season.”*
- *“Allyce worked nicely with [her contacts] at the organizations. She did a great job of representing the foundation but allowing [the league presidents] to run the show.”*
- *We’re all pretty much doing the same thing across organizations. For the most part you want to have consistent messages. This is the greatest opportunity to teach life lessons to kids who aren’t going to be a big star for when they start living life, going to work, etc. Speaks to creating a culture.*

However, though they were very understanding given the nature of pilots, participants did suggest repeatedly that **CHAMPS would benefit from a higher degree of coordination and that they would appreciate earlier notice for project activities and more involvement in planning and scheduling.**

- *“If we had heard about things sooner, we would have been able to get a lot more people there.”*
- *“We should all sit down and lay out a timeline together so that we can maximize the opportunity.”*
- *“The timing worked for some sports, but was totally off for others. It should be set up so that it is teamed with each sport’s season.”*

IMPLICATIONS & CONCLUSIONS

I. Co-Brand the Curriculum and Invest in CHAMPS to build a Double Goal youth sports culture:

A. Build a common language and culture that will standardize and popularize the concepts and habits of positive coaching, and will provide strong recognition for TBF amongst a broad range of youth, adults and organizations across Boston.

In addition to the training curriculum (see below), consider **creating visibility and CHAMPS “collateral” (English and Spanish) that will reinforce and popularize core concepts.** Much of the needed content already exists and needs to be re-purposed and re-branded for the appropriate audiences. For example:

- **Simple handouts for coaches, youth and parents** that reinforce and summarize the fundamental concepts of the model.
- **Banners and signage** to reinforce the core concepts, including simple paper signs that can hang in gyms and more heavy-duty fence signs with clips to be displayed by coaches and leagues on outside fields.
- **Palm Cards** that reinforce the concepts and can be handed quietly by a coach or league official to a coach, parent or youth to remind them of the core concepts and flag inappropriate behavior.

B. Explore ways of creating *Communities of Practice* among coaches and league presidents following the trainings, to “keep the conversation going”. Consider using convenings and events, online resource areas and listservs as inexpensive opportunities for building community.

II. Partner with PCA to Streamline and Extend Trainings

A. Simplify the materials for the training, focusing on three different types of curriculum materials, color-coded, strongly co-branded and available for inexpensive duplication and re-use:

- **Core Curriculum:** Summary sheets with the core Dual Goal concepts (i.e. ROOTS, ELM, Filling the Tank);
- **Exercises** for use in class; and
- **Forms and templates** for use/re-use by coaches.

B. Train additional trainers from the Boston Youth Sports community, propagating the core concepts further, creating a diverse and multi-lingual pool of trainers.

C. Consider venues to expose parents to these concepts such as league meetings and try to bring parent “curriculum” and “trainings” to them in practical ways. Consider creative use of public service advertisements and other community venues.

III. Strengthen and Deepen Partnership

The nascent partnership created by this pilot – with PCA, Good Sports and TBF – should be codified and deepened. Strong partnerships are characterized by regular, open and mutual communication and trust.

A. TBF should provide leadership, coordination and infrastructure, but can depend on PCA and Good Sports for expertise, and for practical planning and other assistance.

B. Engage earlier and plan schedules together with PCA, Good Sports and the leagues you will serve. Align CHAMPS programming with the sports’ seasons to increase its impact. Clear, well-thought-out schedules that are articulated and codified well ahead of time will better serve the leagues and coaches, reduce uncertainty for TBF and its partners, and increase the return on TBF’s investment in CHAMPS. There are scarce opportunities to get the focused attention of coaches, youth and parents, particularly in working with volunteers. In youth sports, “the season” drives everything: the periods of coach recruitment and registration, busy and slow times, and the optimal times for different types of programming. For example, if coaches are trained and oriented to a league together, just prior to the season’s start, recruitment will have concluded and the concepts learned will be put to use quickly, deepening their application and understanding, and building the cohort and culture as well.

By scheduling purposely and involving partners and leagues early on, TBF will be able to drive home core beliefs and raise expectations. Well-coordinated timing will also make the rewards of equipment and cash more valuable and tangible to participants, and thus will reap more benefit to TBF and the community.

IV. Invest in the TBF Infrastructure – Move beyond Pilot

TBF was well represented in the community by Allyce Najimy. However, given the stress and challenges of coordinating with largely volunteer leaders in the field, and the complexity of a pilot with three distinct and varied cohorts, the logistical demands of the trainings, equipment and cash grants and evaluation sometimes out-stripped Allyce’s ability to coordinate the project.

A. Invest in focused staff at TBF who have the time, resources and advanced notice to plan, execute and grow this program.

B. Utilize Allyce primarily for community outreach and relations, and for training the TBF staff regarding the logistical needs and demands of the program.

In conclusion, The Boston Foundation has successfully piloted a potentially powerful model and should consider investing in it and taking it “to scale”. Boston youth, families, coaches and communities stand to benefit, and TBF can have a powerful way to leave its imprint on the community with relatively small investments. By broadening their focus from the single goal of winning on the scoreboard to the dual goal of winning also in life, TBF has an opportunity to impact positively hundreds of youth coaches and thousands of youth and parents.