

2026 WOMEN UNITED GRANT APPLICATION FORM

Organization Information

Organization Name

Lancaster Recreation Commission

EIN

23-1352353

Project Name

Every Girl Invite a Girl

Address

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Lancaster, Pennsylvania 17603
United States

Contact Name

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Executive Director / President (If different)

Heather Dighe

Eligibility Criteria

Is your organization a registered nonprofit organization with an official letter of determination of 501c3 status from the Internal Revenue Service?

Yes

Has your organization operated in Lancaster County for at least one year (operating in Lancaster before July 1, 2025)?

Yes

Does your organization or program you are requesting funding for in this application serve primarily women and/ or teen girls?

Yes

Does your organization provide services to families at or below the ALICE threshold in Lancaster County?

Yes

Is your organization delinquent on any state or federal debt?

No

Does your organization share United Way's view of collaborative and inclusive service to the entire community, without excluding anyone on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, ethnicity, national

origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, or any other factor not relevant to a person's eligibility for service or ability to contribute?

Yes

Has your organization update your listing with PA 211 in the last 12 months?

Yes

Application Elements

Executive Summary

Lancaster Rec will launch "Every Girl Invite a Girl," an initiative supporting women's and girls' health through physical activity, connection, and healthy lifestyles in the City of Lancaster. The program will recruit women as youth sports coaches and reduce financial barriers for pre-teen and teen girls.

When a girl invites a friend to join softball, soccer, dance, tennis, cheer, basketball, volleyball or rugby, both receive a 50% discount. During challenging economic times, families often forgo recreation activities. With support from United Way of Lancaster, this initiative will keep more than 225 girls engaged in sports, building friendships and lifelong healthy habits.

Organization Description

Lancaster Recreation Commission (Lancaster Rec) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving community well-being by providing affordable, accessible recreation and learning opportunities for Lancaster residents. Since 1909, Lancaster Rec has served as a trusted community resource, offering programs that promote physical health, mental well-being, and social connection—with a core focus on serving low-income children and families in the City of Lancaster.

Lancaster Rec delivers hundreds of programs annually, including youth sports leagues, instructional athletics, after-school programs, early childhood education, and wellness activities for all ages. A central focus of our work is ensuring that children and families—especially those facing financial barriers—have access to safe, consistent opportunities for physical activity and healthy lifestyle development.

Through strategic partnerships, Lancaster Rec prioritizes equitable access to recreation. These efforts are particularly impactful for pre-teen and teen girls. In fact, according to the Women in Sports Foundation, over 43% of teen girls drop out, feeling "not good enough" compared to 24% of boys. Key barriers driving this trend include high costs, fewer opportunities, lack of safe access, and social pressures, which create significant gendered gaps in athletic participation and overall, a lower quality of health for girls in a critical time in their development.

Commitment to Equity

Lancaster Rec serves a diverse population of families across Lancaster City and surrounding communities, including a significant number of households experiencing financial hardship.

Many participants come from ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) households, where families earn above the federal poverty level but still struggle to afford basic needs and enrichment opportunities, such as youth sports. This aligns with disparities identified in the Lancaster County Racial Equity Profile, particularly related to access to health-promoting resources and extracurricular opportunities. Expanding access to sports is a critical equity strategy—especially for girls—supporting improved physical health, reduced stress, and increased confidence.

Lancaster Rec operationalizes equity by prioritizing scholarship access for ALICE households, conducting school-based outreach in historically under-resourced neighborhoods, and reducing both financial and social barriers to participation. With the help of NRPA's "Get Her in the Game" toolkit and Nike's "Made to Play" guide to get girls involved in organized sports, Lancaster Rec has been able to keep a keen focus on women and how to empower them.

As one powerful example of success, a recent ESPNW survey found that 94% of women in C-suite positions played

sports. In fact, 80% of Fortune 500 female executives surveyed said they played youth sports.

Proposal Details

Main Priority Area

Women's and/ or Teen's Health

Grant Dollar Amount Requested

\$20,000.00

What percent of the overall project budget is covered by the Women United grant?

100

Will this program/project start or continue to operate if you do not receive 100% of the funding requested?

Yes

Project Description

Lancaster Rec proposes launching “Every Girl Invite a Girl,” an initiative designed to increase participation in sports among pre-teen and teen girls across Lancaster City and surrounding communities, while recruiting women as volunteer coaches to mentor and support participants. The initiative focuses not on developing elite athletes, but a focus of giving girls the opportunity to play and thrive through social connections and reduce financial barriers for low-income families with outcomes to improve physical and mental health and wellness.

Participation in sports is a proven strategy for improving both physical and mental health outcomes for adolescent girls. Regular physical activity supports cardiovascular health, reduces risk of obesity, and helps establish lifelong healthy habits. Participation is also linked to reduced anxiety, improved mood, and stronger social connections during a critical stage of development.

The need for this initiative is urgent in Lancaster County. In a study done by the Samaritan Center, 37.3% of teens report feeling persistently sad or depressed, and 26% are identified as at risk for mental health challenges. Additionally, 36% of Lancaster households fall below the ALICE threshold, highlighting significant financial barriers to participation in structured, health-promoting activities.

While Lancaster Rec offers a wide range of youth sports opportunities, participation among girls—particularly during middle school years—declines due to loss of interest, cost barriers and lack of peer engagement. This initiative addresses both challenges through a peer-driven recruitment model. When a girl invites a friend to register, both receive a 50% scholarship, reducing financial barriers while strengthening social connection—an important factor in sustained participation and emotional well-being.

Funding from this grant will support scholarships for girls participating in Lancaster Rec programs, as well as the expansion of a girl's rugby program as a strategic growth initiative, which is a new initiative lead by a strong, highly professional female coach. Rugby offers an inclusive and empowering opportunity for girls, promoting teamwork, confidence, and physical strength, while also serving as a rapidly growing pathway for collegiate recruitment among teen girls.

The initiative will also emphasize female leadership and mentorship. Female coaches, instructors, and student-athletes will provide guidance and serve as positive role models, reinforcing confidence and belonging among participants. Coaches provide a focus on health and wellness, not winning, offering a fun, engaging and connecting community for women and girls.

To maximize reach, Lancaster Rec will implement a targeted outreach campaign, including digital marketing, school partnerships, and community promotion to ensure equitable awareness and access and to make sure EVERY girl feels

seen, valued and included.

Collaboration

Lancaster Rec will collaborate with local and national partners to implement the “Every Girl Invite a Girl” initiative.

Locally, we will continue our partnership with the School District of Lancaster to promote programs directly to students and families. Schools will serve as key sites for outreach and recruitment, ensuring equitable access across neighborhoods.

To strengthen female mentorship and leadership, we will engage organizations such as the Junior League of Lancaster to recruit female coaches and ambassadors, expanding opportunities for girls to connect with strong role models. We will also work closely with McCaskey Athletic Director Teasia Myers-Pena, a former athlete and advocate for women in sports.

Nationally, Lancaster Rec will leverage the National Recreation and Park Association’s “Get Her in the Game” and Nike’s “Made to Play” initiatives, along with resources from the Aspen Institute’s Project Play and the Women’s Sports Foundation. These collaborations bring evidence-based strategies to the local level, strengthening program design, and outreach.

Local coaches and student athletes will also play a vital role in mentoring and fostering a positive, inclusive environment for girls in sports.

Implementation Plan

Lancaster Rec will implement the “Every Girl Invite a Girl” initiative during the 2026–2027 program year through coordinated program development, outreach, and delivery. Lancaster Rec will identify participating programs and integrate the scholarship model into its registration system to ensure discounts are applied efficiently. The organization will also recruit and train coaches, with an emphasis on increasing female leadership and mentorship opportunities.

A targeted outreach campaign that will feature women and girls that represent the demographics of our community- and show real teens from Lancaster- will be launched to reach girls ages 12–18 across Lancaster City and surrounding communities. This will include digital marketing, school-based outreach, and engagement with community partners to increase awareness and participation.

Once programs begin, Lancaster Rec will provide 50% scholarships to girls who invite a friend to participate, allowing both participants to access structured, health-promoting activities. Programs will include mentorship opportunities through female coaches and older student-athletes who serve as role models.

Throughout the program year, Lancaster Rec will track participation, monitor scholarship distribution, and collect feedback to evaluate program effectiveness and continuously improve access to physical activity and wellness opportunities for girls.

Outcomes & Evaluation

The “Every Girl Invite a Girl” initiative will expand access to youth sports and improve physical and mental health outcomes for girls in Lancaster County. With grant support, Lancaster Rec expects to provide participation scholarships to more than 225 girls, increasing access to consistent physical activity and supportive peer environments.

Participation in sports contributes to improved cardiovascular health, reduced stress and anxiety, and stronger social and emotional well-being. Our goal is to provide girls and women with positive association and engagement in physical activity- teaching them sports and skills they can enjoy for a lifetime to find joy and celebration in moving their bodies in healthy ways. Lancaster Rec offers more than cardio; we offer a community for a healthy life.

Our anticipated outcomes include:

- Provide at least 225 girls with participation scholarships during the 2026–2027 program year

- Achieve a minimum of 30% new participant enrollment through the “Invite a Girl” referral model
- Increase participation in girls programming (including rugby) by 20% compared to the previous year
- Ensure that at least 50% of scholarship recipients come from low-income or ALICE households
- Expand girls' rugby participation by at least 20 new participants through targeted outreach
- Reach at least 5,000 community members through marketing and outreach efforts
- At least 75% of participants will report increased confidence, improved sense of belonging, pride in themselves, appreciation for what their bodies can do and positive impacts on their overall well-being

Lancaster Rec will track program outcomes using participation data and evaluation metrics, including total participants served, number of scholarships awarded, percentage of new participants, program enrollment trends, and demographic data. Marketing reach will be measured through digital engagement, website traffic, and program inquiries. Retention rates will also be tracked across program sessions.

Participant and parent surveys will assess changes in confidence, social connection, and overall well-being, along with program satisfaction and qualitative feedback. These tools will ensure Lancaster Rec can effectively measure both health outcomes and program impact.

Documents

Required Documents

- [UW-Women-United-Grant-Budget.jpg](#)
- [2025-Lancaster-Rec-Commission-Budget.pdf](#)
- [2026-Commission-Board-of-Directors-Roster.pdf](#)
- [Financial-Statements-for-Audit-dated-09.05.25.pdf](#)
- [IRS-Determination-Letter1.pdf](#)