

Takeaways: Professional Sports Teams Investing in Chicagoland Communities

Chicago is one of only 10 North American cities to have at least one sports team from every league. These world-class teams are sources of jobs, entertainment, pride (and occasionally anguish) -- and they invest millions in our community every year through direct grants, programs, player appearances, in-kind donations, and more. On September 15, members of SR Chicago visited the stunning Cubs facilities to hear more from local sports philanthropy leaders about building community partnerships and mobilizing thousands of fans to make a difference.

Read on for more insights about what how sport philanthropies (SP) give back!

Nonprofit or Corporate Responsibility...What is SP?

- Embedded in billion-dollar organizations, SPs come under an additional level of scrutiny from the media and the public. But a team's worth isn't equal to a giving budget!
- In fact, like just about any nonprofit, many of our SPs need to engage their team's fans as *donors* in order to raise critical support for the community. SPs tap into the full range of their distinctive assets—players, fans, social platforms, and spaces—to do this work.
- In recent years, more nonprofit leaders have been brought on to lead Chicago's SPs, bringing best practices from that sector to this distinctive blend of social impact approaches. As a (positive) sign of the times, more SPs are now working to deepen their impact.

Holistic Approach to Engagement

- Volunteering can be a powerful tool for engagement. However, it's important to identify and create meaningful service opportunities and then authentically thank fans for being part of that work.
- SPs leverage mission-aligned volunteer opportunities to create a shared experience around feeling part of both the team and the community.
- With many demands on their time and energy, engaging one fundamental SP asset—the players themselves—in supporting an event or cause is not a straightforward ask. Our SPs try to start with the player's own interests and inclinations (and those of their families as well) and build from there. This can build deeper engagement rather than a one-time photo opportunity.

Measuring Impact

- As part of the shift from “confetti philanthropy” toward more in-depth relationships, local SPs are working to identify new ways of defining and measuring impact.
- Covid also catalyzed important conversations about more trust-based philanthropy and the importance of general operating support.
- While these questions continue to evolve, trust goes both ways ... and it starts with transparency. Some ways to strengthen our work together may include:
 - Inviting funders to experience in person the programs they do, or may, support.
 - Funders and partners openly discussing what is already being collected, and why.
 - Saying a respectful **no**—whether a funder *or* a nonprofit—and explaining why, if the fit is simply not right.

“The way a team plays as a whole determines its success.” (Babe Ruth)

- Collaboration is key. Much of SP draws from nonprofit and CSR approaches, but one unique local initiative is the [Chicago Sports Alliance](#).
- The Alliance was founded in 2016 in response to increasing violence. Jerry Reinsdorf brought together the owners of five other Chicago championship teams to identify and invest in evidence-based programs focused on violence-reduction work.
- \$5M in financial investments have since been distributed across Chicago to both on-the-ground organizations as well as ongoing data collection and analysis through UChicago Crime Lab. Teams have also individually supported the grant recipients through tickets, practice visits, giveaways, player meet-and-greets and more.
- Violence in our city is a significant challenge, and no one organization will succeed alone. The participating teams are committed to learning more about shaping future iterations of this comprehensive undertaking from their NPO and data partners.