



Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Development Guide

USA Ultimate is dedicated to broadening the impact ultimate can have on underserved communities. The goal of this guide is to provide practical solutions and guidelines for new and existing urban ultimate programs, allowing them to contribute to their communities and increase their long-term ability to succeed.

Increasing access to and participation in the sport of ultimate, particularly among youth of color, leads to a wider talent pool, new perspectives and increased innovation. While the information in this guide should be helpful to all organizations, references to certain aspects of EDI work that may be unique to ultimate programs are included.

Section 1: Getting Started

To get started, you will need to commit time and energy to prioritizing equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) efforts. This is also step one in [USA Ultimate's EDI Action Plan](#). Increasing representation in ultimate is intentional work that takes time, dedication and a willingness to be open, reflective and invested in community engagement. Broaden your perspective about where your organization can look for new participants. Have difficult conversations. Get comfortable with being uncomfortable when connecting with underrepresented communities. Taking the initiative to reach out shows that you are making an intentional effort to be more inclusive. Below are some things to do and consider before getting started:

- Acknowledge areas for growth within your organization. Acknowledging your deficiencies in equity, diversity or inclusion can be difficult. Plan and implement relevant changes.
- Discuss with your leadership and members how increasing representation benefits your organization.
- Work to develop [cultural competency](#), and consider any implicit biases that may exist before beginning the work of increasing representation. This work should focus on your board, organizers and coaches.
- Work to become knowledgeable about the community to which you are reaching out. Consider things like local culture, economic conditions, social networks, political and power structures, norms and values, demographic trends, and general history.

- Determine your organization's EDI goals. Reach out to Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) community members, so their voices are a central part of the strategic planning process.
- Identify an outreach coordinator to create a plan to reach out to underrepresented communities. The plan should include when to reach out, where to go, demographics of the area and why the plan will work.

Section 2: Building Relationships

A critical step when growing a new sport in a community is building relationships. Relationship building happens when you identify the group(s) and individuals you'd like to prioritize within the community. Cultivating relationships with the people and groups is critical for building trust within the community and growing the sport at a steady rate.

The first thing you should do is identify the decision-makers in your community. Doing so is key when establishing a solid foundation for your ultimate program, especially anything that involves youth.

Prior to meeting with community decision-makers, keep in mind the following:

- **Goals:** Ensure everyone in your organization has a clear understanding of the goal of your outreach efforts and create a relationship with the leader.
- **Uniqueness:** Distinguish yourself from other traditional youth programs by highlighting the unique aspects of ultimate and your specific program and connecting others to your organization's mission and values.
- **Commitment:** Emphasize your commitment to diversity, [life enrichment](#) and physical activity. Outlining your program's particular goals will heighten your appeal to parents, players, donors and coaches.

Reach out to schools, after-school programs and community centers. Existing youth-serving organizations (YSOs), such as parks and recreation departments, Boys and Girls Clubs, and YMCAs are potential places to begin your search for partnerships. Consider religious organizations and any other local non-profit organizations that serve youth in different capacities in your area. Learn about both the successful and unsuccessful efforts of other groups in engaging this community in new programs. Research and understand the organizations with which you are seeking to partner so that your program's goals align with the partner's goals.

Partner with other sports teams and leagues. It is common for a child to be involved in more than one sport, and studies have shown that this helps with their athletic development. Since ultimate often shares facility space with other field sports, it's important to engage with leaders from those other sports (i.e., soccer, field hockey, lacrosse, etc.). By establishing a relationship

with other field sites and sports with more participants, you are opening a door for forms of off-season training for non-ultimate players.

Be intentional in designing your program to ensure it addresses the whole child. Ultimate offers leadership and social skills kids can carry with them to school and with their families. Consider developmentally appropriate activities that are fun and inclusive, yet provide engaging instruction and thoughtful skill development.

Questions to ask when building community relations:

- Are your offerings flexible?
- Can you change what you offer, or are you only able to offer specific activities because of equipment, staffing, timing, location, etc.?
- What can you offer, and where you can be flexible or adapt to alleviate disappointment or confusion?
- Do they need sports equipment (cones, discs, etc.) or money to cover transportation or field costs?

Work with your community partners to decide the ultimate program that works best for both of your organizations. Possible formats include:

- *Clinic* - Series of skill-building ultimate activities, usually used to either introduce the sport or as a recruitment tool leading up to a larger ultimate event.
- *Team* - School-based or non-school-based group that meets regularly for practices and competitions.
- *League* - School-based or non-school-based group that meets for recreational games that take place at regular intervals over the course of multiple weeks.

Section 3: Budgeting and Fundraising

The work you are doing should be deeply rooted in your organization's mission and vision. Suppose your local disc organization's mission and vision are focused on running local leagues and tournaments. You should identify and lay out how programming in low-income or diverse neighborhoods supports that mission and vision. Your budgeting and fundraising efforts for EDI programming should also be rooted in your mission and vision.

Budgeting

When developing your EDI outreach programming, consider the budget required to run the program. In order to lower barriers to entry, consider:

- Minimal to no registration fees,
- Financial aid, or
- A pay-what-you-can, sliding fee, which gives players the option to choose how much they pay for the program.

Financial aid is a program expense. One way to fund the program is to designate some or all of the revenue from an adult program or fundraiser to cover the cost of the financial aid opportunities for underserved populations.

Grants

Ultimate programs in underrepresented communities may rely heavily upon the generosity of donors for some or all of their funding, so it is important for you to develop a clear, focused message in order to sell your program and its mission. Grants are one of many different forms of financial assistance that may be available to support your program.

Applying for a grant is a labor-intensive process. Federal, state and local foundations or donors may fund your ideas and projects to provide public services and stimulate the community. A good way to discover what grants are available, along with processes for applying, is to explore online. You can call your state commissioner to learn about local grants. Your local ultimate community may include someone with grant-writing experience who can help with the process.

Before you apply for any grant, make sure you thoroughly research it, the organization that sponsors it, and your eligibility to receive it. Foundations award funding based on what matters to them. If the way you plan to spend the grant money doesn't match the foundation's mission, your application will not succeed. Your grant proposal has to demonstrate that you have a good plan for using the money, one that also aligns with the foundation's areas of focus. Be clear and specific as to how you will spend the money. Make sure your proposal's expenditures are allowable under the terms of the grant.

Also, be aware that grants may (or likely will) have record-keeping requirements. Someone will need to be in charge of this aspect of the grant's implementation.

Here are some grant links to get you started:

- Every Kid Sports: <https://everykidsports.org/>
- Grants.gov Youth Funding Opportunities: <https://youth.gov/feature-article/grantsgov-youth-funding-opportunity-grants>
- Sports Matter by DICK'S Sporting Goods: <https://www.sportsmatter.org/funding/>

Fundraising Events

Another common option for increasing your program's revenue is through local, state and national fundraisers. Fundraising efforts are a great way for programs to interact directly with the communities they serve while raising the money they need. A successful fundraiser is often a great way to involve your program's family and friends and is also a fantastic way for your program to recruit new participants. Here are some key points for successful fundraisers:

- **Know your donors:** Having a good knowledge of your donors and their contributing habits is key to persuading them to donate their money.
- **Educate your donors:** Make sure you educate your supporters about your program and its impact. You must be able to tell your program's unique story and sell your organization. Education builds trust and assures your supporters they are bringing about positive change. Send them brochures and updates with pictures, stories and testimonials to show the impact of their support.
- **Focus on your current support base:** It costs more time and energy to solicit a donation from a new donor than from an existing one. Refer and update contact and donation information, and keep communication flowing to keep your donors engaged.
- **Advertise aggressively:** The way you advertise will depend on the audience you're trying to reach. Make an interesting social media campaign for your event, and create memorable flyers, posters or invitations that complement the type of event you're having.
- **Make giving fun:** When your program can help people find fulfillment through charity work in a fun and meaningful way, they will be more willing to jump on board to help your cause. Come up with creative and compelling ways to show the need for donations and support.

Here are a few examples of ideas that have worked for various organizations and individuals to increase their annual revenue:

- Create an online fundraising campaign for your team or program (e.g., Gofundme.com).
- Host a fundraising event (e.g., auction, gala, dinner parties, golf outing).
- Have players and parents sell a team product (team shirts, store discount cards, baked goods, etc.).
- Host an ultimate clinic or a tournament for local teams.
- Create a pledge drive (pledge cards, phone calls, etc.).
- Plan an equipment drive and invite local colleges, high schools, youth programs and retailers to donate new equipment for your season.
- Look into your [local grocery store](#) to add your organization as an option for people to support while making everyday purchases.

Minimizing Your Costs

USA Ultimate offers programs to offset costs for players and programs:

- *New Start Grant Kit:* This kit provides equipment, educational resources and materials to support the creation of new ultimate programs, teams or leagues:
usaultimate.org/programs/new-start
- *Girls' Team Startup Project:* Three-year program offering free equipment, uniforms, and memberships, plus a coaching stipend, to significantly lower the barriers to entry for a new or developing high school girls' team:
usaultimate.org/programs/high-school-girls-team-startup

- *Play it Forward*: Provides membership support for youth from underserved communities: usaultimate.org/programs/play-it-forward
- *Delrico Johnson Fund*: Provides free affiliate-level memberships for BIPOC players: theultimatefoundation.org/donor-spotlight-delrico-johnson

Learn about additional USA Ultimate programs and services at usaultimate.org/programs.

Section 4: Program Logistics

Participants and their parents are more receptive to a sports program when the daily structure, routine, schedule and expectations have been clearly laid out, so they can plan accordingly. Significant volunteer time and energy go into the planning, organization and logistics of creating and sustaining a successful ultimate program in an underrepresented community. It is critical to stay on top of all of the moving parts to keep programming running smoothly. Here are some tips for effectively preparing for each season:

- *Program Calendar*: Your programming plans should be laid out on a shared calendar, so your entire organization - staff and volunteers alike - are aware of the schedule. Be sure to keep the calendar up to date. Add events that are open to the public onto your website as soon as possible, so players and parents can make plans to participate.
 - Compare your event dates with holidays, school-year calendars and other sports programs to avoid conflicts that could prevent players from participating in your programs.
 - Design your outreach and recruiting efforts so they align with upcoming playing opportunities. If you recruit players in the fall and there isn't another opportunity to play or compete until the spring, your new players will most likely lose interest fairly quickly.
- *Logistics*: Consider all necessary logistics, including field permits, staffing, uniforms, game scheduling, transportation, medical support, and equipment.
- *Activity Layout*: Balance your heavier competition seasons with your non-ultimate-specific activities. Consider which types of events work best depending on the season and which activities will take up a significant amount of time. Be proactive in planning your schedules based on availability, funding and other general logistics.
- *Competition Schedule*: Create a league play and game schedule that makes sense for your program. Avoid scheduling a game against opponents who easily outmatch the skill level of your participants and situations that can create a transportation issue for your players and their families. Consider which opportunities are most productive and appropriate for your program.
- *Plan for the next quarter and beyond*: At the end of each quarter, sit down with your staff and map out the programming you plan to offer for the following year. Secure dates in your calendar for your major ultimate-specific events (tournaments, outreach and/or skill

development clinics, launch dates for each season/series, etc.) and non-ultimate specific events (fundraisers, board/staff meetings, social events, etc.).

Transportation

A major challenge facing many programs is ensuring participants have reliable transportation to and from practice, games, and other team activities and events. Participants with transportation barriers are at a disadvantage in their ability to successfully participate in your program if they cannot access the location. Be conscious of any transportation challenges players in your program may face and consider how you can help mitigate those challenges. Understanding how, and from where, your participants travel to your programs is important to keep in mind when planning where games and practices will be held. Some parents may not have cars or the ability to leave work and take their child to your event, so you will need to consider scheduling start times for practices and games around the local bus/transit schedule and daylight.

Programs have ensured participants have access to transportation through a variety of mechanisms:

- Partner with transportation companies or transit authorities to provide/donate bus passes or train tickets for your participants.
- Contract for shuttles and buses for away games or tournaments outside of the city.
- Facilitate parent carpools for participants who live in close proximity to each other.
- Select a central field location, if possible with “walkable” neighborhoods—one that has sidewalks, crosswalks, and leisure destinations for kids who need to walk home or to the bus stop safely.

Budget anticipated transportation costs into annual operating budgets. Rental costs can add up quickly, so make sure to budget accordingly.

Field Space

Securing field space is crucial when starting an ultimate program; however open space - such as parks or other large, grassy areas - in urban environments can be minimal. Consider the following when deciding how much space you'll need for your event:

- the number of players and teams,
- the age of the players, and
- the type of event you intend to accommodate.

USA Ultimate's field size and player recommendations, based on the age of the participants, can be found in the [Youth Rules Adaptations](#). If your program is school-based or catering to students in a specific school district, explore opportunities to develop partnerships with a centrally located school for the use of their fields. School property can serve as a valuable resource for recreational space before and after school hours. If you can't find field space, try reaching out to a local gym, rec center, or outdoor tennis or basketball court for your event.

When looking for field space, it is important to choose a location that is friendly and welcoming for your participants and provides them with physical and emotional safety. The space can serve as a refuge for your participants, so providing a safe, supportive, and inclusive environment is key. Ensure it's free of hazards and has easy access to water, bathrooms, and other necessary resources to run your program successfully.

If you're running a league, you could change the location of the league from session to session to accommodate people from different parts of the city. You could also shift away from a large league with all games happening concurrently that require many fields in one large space. Consider an alternative like running the week's games across multiple days, which would allow you to use smaller field sites that are more likely to be available in urban areas. Alternative formats, like 4 v. 4, can make it easier to run programming using smaller spaces.

Most fields will also require that you show proof of insurance or have a field permit. Refer to USA Ultimate's [Event Sanctioning program](#) for additional information about insurance and liability, and be sure to review the [USA Ultimate Tournament Director Guide](#) for procedures and best practices regarding effective event programming, safety, and responsibility.

Section 5: Developing Inclusive-Minded Ultimate Coaches and Organizers

Well-trained and inclusive-minded coaches are critical to successful player recruitment and retention. To keep kids engaged, coaches should strive to make the program fun and player-centered with activities like small-sided games and free play, with an emphasis on developing skills and confidence with age-appropriate activities. Good coaches can positively impact a child by focusing on youth development and leadership skills while building a love for ultimate. Inclusion should be part of your program's fabric and be present in everyone's mind all the time. Programs where players of all backgrounds feel a sense of belonging will experience a high degree of player buy-in and commitment. Consider the following:

- High-quality coaches get the most out of their players and other members of their coaching staff by practicing inclusive leadership. Inclusive leadership involves creating an environment where people feel valued for their unique identities and feel a sense of belonging and connectedness to the group. A team culture of acceptance, awareness, accountability, and open communication must be established from the beginning. Slurs, casual put-downs, and incivility should never be tolerated.¹

¹ USA Lacrosse. *Cultural Competency*. (n.d.). <https://www.usalacrosse.com/cultural-competency>

- Inclusive language should be modeled by everyone, and responses to issues should be consistent across all members and participants of your team/organization.²
- Develop and implement effective strategies for handling inappropriate behavior and managing conflict in order to maintain a positive, welcoming, and safe environment. It takes a strong character to stand up for our teammates and fellow coaches when we notice something is wrong, but supporting each other and practicing unity is just as important.
 - Brainstorm intentional tactics for dealing with intolerance. Things to consider that are helpful for implementing these tactics include being aware of the tone of voice used when addressing the intolerance, building out a list of responses to hurtful language and behaviors, and practicing role-playing scenarios to prepare everyone to handle incidents of intolerance, should they arise.
 - Take advantage of teachable moments to remind all team members of the culture and expectations, and also use those moments as a tool for developing empathy.³
- Identify coaches who reflect the culture and experiences of the participants. Kids identify with adults who look like them and/or come from similar backgrounds. Reach out to members in your community with this goal in mind.
 - Encourage coaches and players to get to know each other's cultural backgrounds and interests outside of the sport. Finding commonalities amongst one another is a great way to foster an inclusive environment.⁴
- Some of your coaches may not have experience coaching in a diverse setting. Be sure to address any concerns a coach may have about leading diversity initiatives for their team.
 - Prioritize educational sessions about cultural awareness, diversity issues on and off the field, and cultural competency (such as implicit bias or microaggressions). Bringing in outside experts to speak can help with tackling these topics in an appropriate and productive manner.⁵

² Hughes, H., Brandt, T., Devine, C., Rubin, J., Bethany Bonura, K., & Galli, N. (2007). Diversity and Inclusion in Sport. *SportPsych Works*, 5(1), 1–2.

<https://www.apadivisions.org/division-47/publications/sportpsych-works/diversity-inclusion.pdf>

³ Beard, H. (2020, October 27). *Responding to Racism i*

⁴ Hughes, H., Brandt, T., Devine, C., Rubin, J., Bethany Bonura, K., & Galli, N. (2007). Diversity and Inclusion in Sport. *SportPsych Works*, 5(1), 1–2.

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⁵ Hughes, H., Brandt, T., Devine, C., Rubin, J., Bethany Bonura, K., & Galli, N. (2007). Diversity and Inclusion in Sport. *SportPsych Works*, 5(1), 1–2.

<https://www.apadivisions.org/division-47/publications/sportpsych-works/diversity-inclusion.pdf>

- Particularly because ultimate is a predominantly white sport, players of color may feel like they have to become over-competent and master the sport to overcome societal constraints and challenge stereotypical perceptions.⁶
 - Coaches could consider implementing self-assessments for their players to track their improvement over the course of a season, and communicate positive, personalized encouragement to help build their self-confidence and strengthen their perception of their own competence within the sport.
- Use your veteran coaches to serve as experts within your program, so institutional knowledge can be passed on to new coaches who will likely have the greatest need for additional learning and support.
- Be sure all coaches have current USA Ultimate certifications, and waivers, have completed athlete protection training (SafeSport), and have received a green light on their NCSI background check.
- Encourage coaches to watch the free Coach Membership videos in their [USA Ultimate member account](#) and have a current CPR/First Aid certification.
- If your coaches transport the team to an event, make sure they have a current license with no major traffic violations. Also, make sure they comply with SafeSport best practices when transporting minors.
- Host an annual coach education clinic or workshop that couples on-field instruction with urban youth development training for your staff.

Lastly, reward high-quality coaches and volunteers. A public acknowledgment or simple gift shows appreciation for their efforts and can help improve your program's long-term retention efforts at both the participant and leadership levels.

For coach education opportunities, check out the [USA Ultimate Coach Development Program \(CDP\)](#). USA Ultimate also offers scholarships for women and minority coaches via the [Representation and Diversity \(RAD\) Grant Program](#).

Section 6: Player Recruitment and Retention

When developing a long-term plan for your youth program, setting and tracking player recruitment and retention goals is key.

Player Recruitment

Player recruitment and retention present a constant challenge for programs, especially those in new and underrepresented communities. Program participation may fluctuate throughout the

⁶Ahrens, A. D., & Chu, T. L. A. (2021). Motivation Is Not Always Black and White: Attending to African American Athletes' Psychological Needs for Sport Involvement. *Strategies*, 34(2), 9–12. https://www.shapeamerica.org/uploads/2021/publications/strategies/Motivation-Is-Not-Always-Black-and-White_Attending-to-African-American-Athletes-Psychological-Needs-for-Sport-Involvement.pdf

years or even during a season; how you evaluate your program and adjust to issues will determine your program's success with recruitment and retention. Bringing new kids into your program often requires ongoing dedication and persistence along with flexibility and patience. Be creative in your thinking, and be prepared to develop new recruiting strategies based on the current landscape of your local community. Player recruitment should be an ongoing focus throughout the year, with strategies carried out intentionally, especially when reaching out to underrepresented communities. Every program is unique, so successful recruiting initiatives may look different from program to program. Here are a few helpful tips:

- Kids from some underrepresented communities may be pushed toward certain sports, such as basketball and football due to the sport's availability in the areas near them, but also because of racial assumptions about innate abilities tied to ethnicity.
 - Connect ultimate to the similarities it shares with other, more visible sports like football, soccer, basketball, and others.
 - Remember to sell the sport to parents and administrators differently than you will with kids. Parents and administrators will likely be most interested in the character development and life skills that ultimate offers. Kids are most likely to be interested in the sport because it's fun and an opportunity to spend time with their friends.
- Have future playing opportunities such as another upcoming clinic or league already set up and promote it to your new participants, so the kids can keep playing this great new sport. Too much lag time between your initial contact and the next available program opportunity may mean losing a potential participant's interest.
- Encourage current participants to share your program via word of mouth.
 - Provide kids an incentive to bring a friend or sibling to practice, a social event, or games. Reward all parties with a piece of merchandise, discounted memberships, etc.
- Have a dedicated social media presence to share your content, along with encouraging your participants to share program posts with their networks. Be creative and use hashtags, filters, and videos to showcase your program and players.

Player Retention

There are unique retention challenges for players from underrepresented communities. The reasons kids aren't sticking with ultimate may not always be as easy to solve as some common complaints, such as high registration costs or bad coaching. There could be new family responsibilities or a lack of availability due to family work schedules. It's important to stay connected with your participants to understand their challenges and changing needs in order to be able to support them. Keep these things in mind when addressing retention:

- Ensure that you've successfully planned and organized all aspects of running a program that were addressed previously in this manual: building relationships, fundraising and budgeting, program logistics, and developing inclusive-minded coaches and organizers.
- Take time to engage parents on the sidelines, before or after an event to build relationships and receive more personalized feedback and a better understanding of participant satisfaction.
- Track and review your attendance, retention, and new participant numbers, so you have a benchmark to compare the current state of the program with the previous year. Review this information throughout the year and complete an annual end-of-year analysis to address areas for improvement and set new goals.
- Celebrate any increases in participation. Recruitment efforts in underrepresented communities can take time to show results, especially when introducing a new sport or activity. Make sure to consider retention beyond just a number or percentage.
- Remain engaged with your participants throughout the course of the year. When these engagement opportunities are offered regularly throughout the year, participants and families begin to think of the program as a long-term commitment rather than just a seasonal program. They then invite their friends and siblings, and soon ultimate is seen as a communal activity instead of just a sport.
 - Make sure athletes and parents are a part of the planning and decision making for social activities.
 - Include a post-activity survey, so you can understand what went well and where you need to improve to increase recruitment and retention. This can also be a place to share more about your local ultimate community, your values, and how they intersect with the community you're trying to engage.

Section 7: Family Engagement

Cultivating relationships with parents is key to keeping players engaged with ultimate once you've piqued their interest. Keep in mind that work and home life look different in every household. Provide parents with different opportunities to be involved, and explain how it helps their children achieve more on and off the field. Seek out ways to communicate effectively with parents by giving them space to ask questions, provide feedback, and share ideas. Below are some tips for effective parent engagement:

- Ask your players about their families and their backgrounds before calling home. It's important to know the primary language spoken at home or who the primary caretaker is for each individual player. Some participants may only have one parent or may not reside with either parent. If you are unsure, ask for a guardian or caretaker to make sure you are aware of each child's situation.
- At the start of the season, your program should provide participants, parents, and guardians with a clear set of guidelines and team rules. Ensure that the information

outlines the expectations of the programs while offering guidance on how they are involved via team volunteer roles. If they are new to ultimate, share resources that can help them better understand the sport (e.g., [USA Ultimate Spectator Guide](#)).

- Take five minutes to talk to a parent after practice, before a game, or during a youth clinic. Doing so can open up the lines of communication toward a more meaningful parent-coach or parent-organizer relationship. Some of the best connections with parents come from impromptu meetings or conversations.
- Host parent meetings or a 'Get Involved Night' throughout the season that provides families and friends the opportunity to engage with the program. Examples include coordinating team snacks, ordering jerseys, and managing registration.

Conclusion

USA Ultimate is dedicated to growing the sport of ultimate among youth. Our goal is to work with all stakeholders to ensure proper program implementation, diverse competition spaces, and long-term growth in diverse communities. We hope this guide serves as a helpful reference as you grow the sport in your community.

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