

TRENDS & OPPORTUNITIES

*DRIVING CHANGE FOR
WOMEN SPORT COACHES*



for Research on Girls & Women in Sport

#SHECANCOACH

THE TUCKER CENTER



The Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport at the University of Minnesota is an interdisciplinary research center leading a global effort to accelerate change for girls and women in sport and their families and communities. We accomplish this through our three-fold mission.

WHAT WE DO

Our Vision

To be a thought leader and catalyst of systems change for girls and women in sport and physical activity.



Our Mission

Conduct solution-based research and translate knowledge.

Offer undergraduate and graduate education, internships and fellowships

Engage in outreach in local, regional, national and global communities.

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Trends surrounding women sport coaches need illumination in order to create systems change. This document identifies **ten trends** and provides suggestions and opportunities for improving the sport landscape for women who coach. Changes at every level of the system are needed for women to feel valued and supported when pursuing a career in sport coaching. Based on decades of research, women coaches face many barriers and challenges at all levels of the system (individual, interpersonal, community, societal) their male counterparts do not. Barriers are compounded for women with intersecting and multiple identities such as race, age, parental status, social class, sexual identity, gender identity, and are continually marginalized due to sexism, racism, homophobia, gender bias, maternal bias, ableism, and ageism which are ingrained into the sport system.

Much work remains and systems change will only occur by creating awareness of the opportunities through letting data tell the story, along with intentionality, consistency, perseverance, creativity, and collaboration. Each trend is followed by suggested opportunities for change, and examples of changes that are occurring.

A majority of the examples herein are US-based. We know a lot of good work is being done for women in sport coaching around the world that we cannot possibly keep track of! **We invite you to send us** your women coaches organization, event, initiative, or program so that we can compile and share. No good work is done alone and the more we work together, the faster the change will occur. Reproducing the wheel is ineffective. We are stronger together. We hope this document spurs some additional change and sharing of best practices.

Email Nicole M. LaVoi, PhD director of the Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport at nmlavoi@umn.edu with resources, comments, your program, and feedback.

TREND #1: ON THE RISE



The 2024 *Women in College Coaching Report Card* indicates the percentage of women head coaches at the NCAA Division I level is rising, with the rate accelerating over the last four years (see p. 5). However, progress varies with only 11 of 28 NCAA sports having 50% or more women head coaches for women's teams (see p. 6). Very few institutions earn A grades (see p. 7). Some Athletic Directors argue the talent pool of qualified women coaches is limited.

OPPORTUNITIES

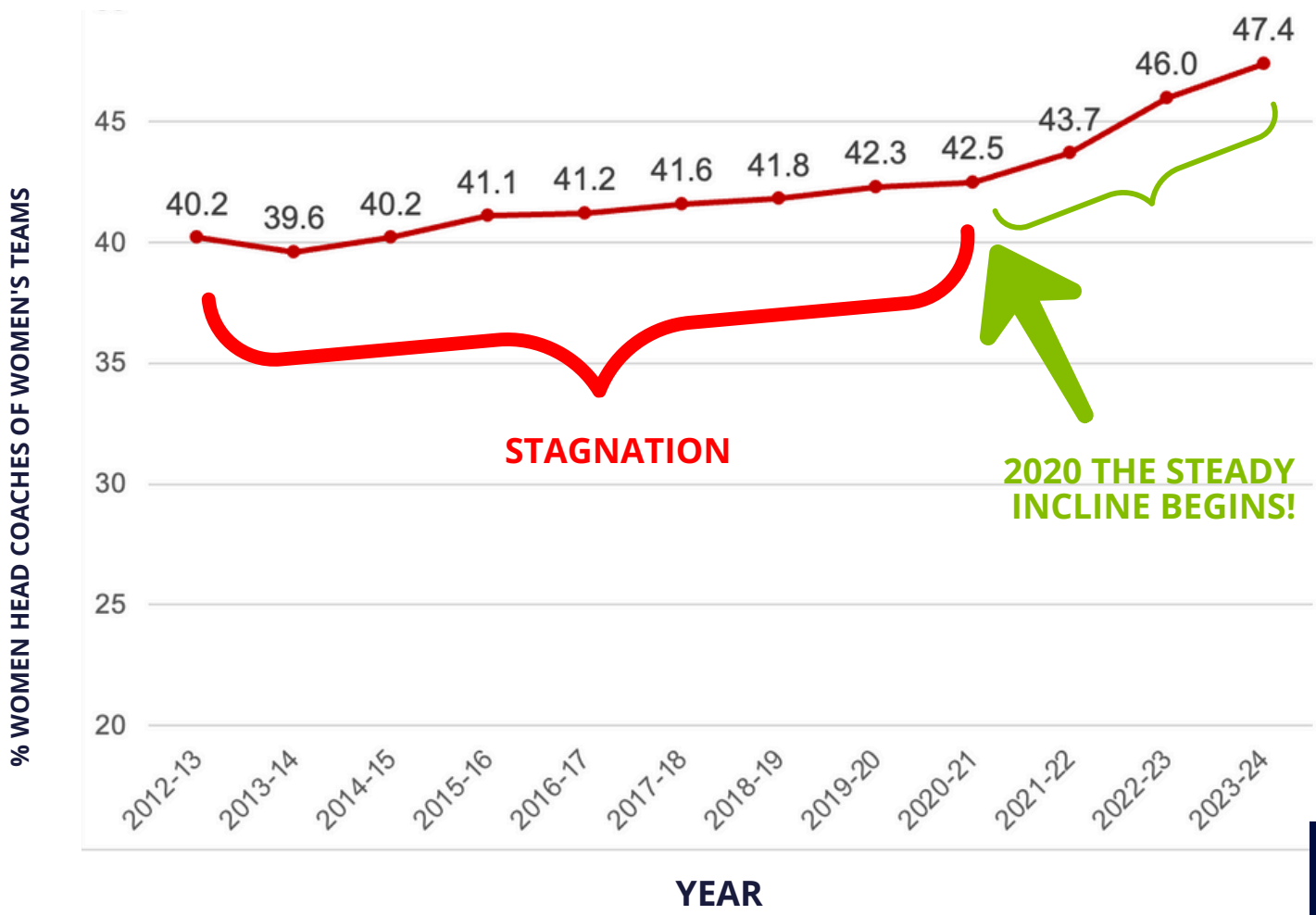
- Achieve 50% of women head coaches of women's intercollegiate teams in all sports at all NCAA levels by 2028.
 - Intercollegiate coaching associations for women's sports benefits from having a talent development program designed specifically for women coaches.
 - **Example:** The WBCA's "So You Want To Be A Coach" program assists women collegiate basketball players who are interested in pursuing a career in coaching women's basketball. Currently 67.8% of women's NCAA D-I basketball teams are coached by women.
 - Every professional women's sports league (i.e., PWHL, NWSL, WNBA, AU) or association (i.e., WTA, LPGA) should have a talent development and pipeline program designed specifically for women, and retiring women-identifying athletes who want to coach.
 - **Example:** The WTA Coach Inclusion Program (est. 2022) aims to break down barriers and provide opportunities for women looking to enter coaching at the professional level.
 - **Example:** The LPGA's Teacher Education Program (TEP) provides comprehensive training for those aspiring to become certified LPGA Professionals.
- Achieve 50% women coaches at the LA 2028 Summer Olympics
 - **Example:** WISH – the Women in Sport High-performance pathway program, initiative of the IOC.

HEAD COACHES OF WOMEN'S TEAMS: SELECT SEVEN



The select seven sample consists of 1051 head coach positions of women’s teams from 94 institutions. The percentage of women's teams with women head coaches in select seven NCAA D-I institutions went up to 47.4% in 2024, and **increased 1.4%** from 2023 (46%). The percentage has increased for the last 11 years and increases since 2020 have surpassed 1% each year. A steady incline is evident, and if increases continue at this rate, achieving 50% of women head coaches of women’s teams is possible within 2-3 years! See visual graphic below.

LONGITUDINAL PERCENTAGE WOMEN HEAD COACHES OF WOMEN'S TEAMS IN THE SELECT SEVEN NCAA D-I CONFERENCES



GRADE BY SPORT

The percentage of women head coaches in 28 sports varied greatly from acrobatics & tumbling (100%) to track & field (19.6%) (see table below). Less than half (11 of 28, 39.2%) of NCAA sponsored sports had 50% or more women head coaches. Many of the sports receiving F grades are notably 'co-ed'; meaning that the men's and women's teams commonly train together. The low percentage of women head coaches for co-ed teams may reflect gender bias and reluctance of Athletics Directors to hire women to coach male athletes and/or mixed and men's teams.

PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN HEAD COACHES OF WOMEN'S TEAMS BY SPORT

A	Acrobatics & Tumbling (100%), Lacrosse (+92.9%), Equestrian (+90.5%), Field Hockey (-82.7%), Softball (+73.7%), Rugby (-72.7%), Gymnastics (↑ 71.4%)
B	Basketball (+67.8%), Golf (61.8%), Ice Hockey (↑ 55.2%)
C	Wrestling (50.0%), Volleyball (+49.7%), Rifle (+47.4%), Triathlon (↓ 45.5%), Water Polo (↑ 42.9%), Bowling (-41.7%), Tennis (↑ 39.4%)
D	Beach Volleyball (↓ 39.7%), Nordic Skiing (↑ 33.3%), Rowing/Crew (↓ 32.6%), Soccer (+32.5%), Diving (↑ 25.1%)
F	Swimming (+23.9%), Fencing (+20.7%), Alpine Skiing (+20.0%), Squash (20.0%), Cross Country (-19.7%), Track & Field (+19.6%)
[+/-] indicates percentage increase/decrease. [↑ / ↓] indicates grade level increase/decrease	

INSTITUTIONAL GRADE EARNED BY PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN HEAD COACHES OF WOMEN'S TEAMS HIGHEST PERCENTAGE TO LOWEST 2023-2024



Institutions in select seven NCAA D-I conferences: American, ACC, Big East, Big Ten, Big 12, Pac-12, SEC

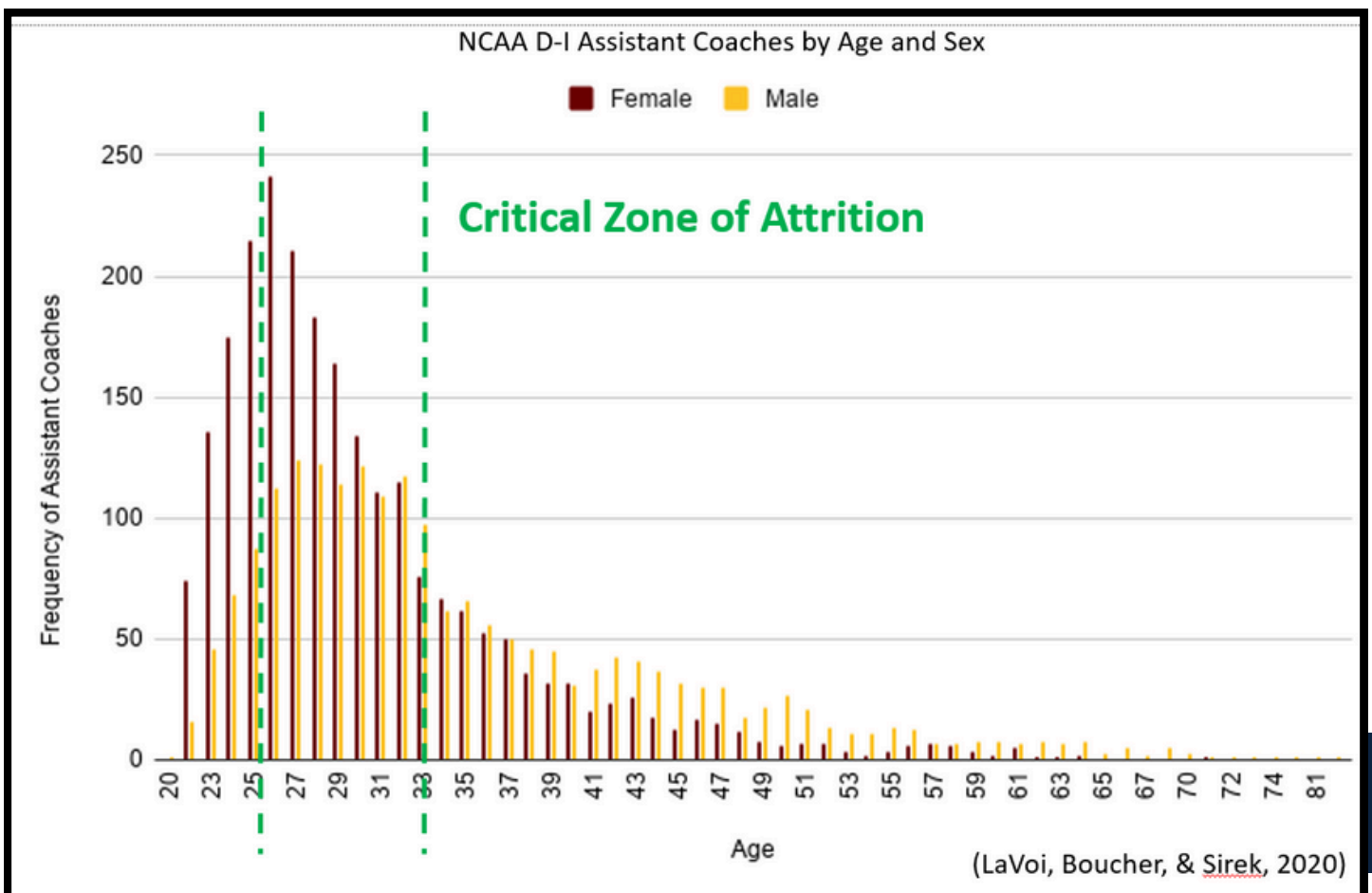
TREND #2: ATTRITION



A critical zone of coach attrition is apparent as women move from the assistant to head coach position between the ages of 27-33 based on data from the *Women in College Coaching Report Card*.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Create specific programming, mentorship, and support for women in the critical zone of attrition to help them remain and thrive in sport coaching.
 - **Example:** Intercollegiate Women's Lacrosse Coaches Association (IWLCA) ASPIRE Program, to develop assistant coaches by cohort
 - **Example:** High Performance Women in Coaching Mentorship Program which is part of Sport Canada's Women in Coaching program
 - **Example:** Women in Sport High-Performance (WISH) Pathway Program supported by the IOC
 - **Example:** WBCA Next Generation Institute is a high-level education program for experienced assistant coaches who aspire to become collegiate head coaches.
 - **Example:** The WeCOACH Mentor Program



TREND #3: IDENTITIES MATTER



Women with intersecting and multiple identities by race, age, parental status, class, sexual or gender identity, are under represented and marginalized due to sexism, racism, homophobia, gender bias, maternal bias, ableism, and ageism ingrained into the sport system. In the *Women in College Coaching Report Card* only 8% of head coaches are women of color and very few (<1%) are openly LGBTQ+ in their online coach biographies.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Mandate all organizational leaders, the executive management team, and governing boards who are part of hiring processes undergo bias training.
- Diversify coaching staffs so the workforce is representative of the athletes. Same identity role models and leaders matter to athlete experience.
- Develop same-identity support, affinity and development groups.
 - **Example:** The Game Changers program by [VCPM Inc.](#) aims to recruit more women of color as certified running coaches.
 - **Example:** [WeAMPLIFY](#) is a connection, an action, and a promise to amplify the voices, visibility, experiences, and value of women coaches of color.



TREND #4: MEN'S PRO SPORT



The number of women coaching in men's professional sport leagues has increased over the last decade. Women coaching in the most competitive, visible, popular and prestigious leagues for men helps challenge gender stereotypes about women and leadership. Women are qualified, but need to be given the opportunity. A similar trend of women coaching intercollegiate men is currently *unrealized* and has been stagnant for decades at ~4%.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Niche organizations such as **Catbird Seat**, dedicated to empowering women coaching in men's sports, are needed!
- Every professional men's league around the world has the opportunity to establish a talent development program specifically for women. When possible efforts should be coordinated with the professional women's league (e.g., NBA & WNBA, MSL & NWSL).
 - **Example:** In 2013, the NFL launched the Women's Community to grow, strengthen, and develop opportunities for women in football. In 2017 Sam Rapoport, NFL Senior Director of Diversity and Inclusion, started the NFL Women's Forum, to increase the participation of women in football, particularly in coaching, scouting, and other front-office roles. To date 250+ women have participated and many are employed in football positions around the league, 15 of which are full-time coaches — a league record and the most for any male professional sports league in the world.
 - **Example:** The MLB Take The Field initiative started in 2018 to help women pursue careers in baseball operations, including roles like scouting, player development, and coaching.
 - **Example:** NHL Coaches Association (NHLCA) Female Coaches Development Program launched in 2020 to develop women hockey coaches across all levels of the game. In 2024 the Seattle Kraken hired Jessica Campbell as the first assistant head coach of an NHL team.
 - **Example:** The NBA has multiple initiatives that support the growth of women in coaching, front-office roles, and leadership positions within the league including the NBA's Assistant Coaches Program (ACP, est. 1988), which provides a pathway for former NBA, WNBA, and NBA G League players to transition into coaching roles and the NBA Coaching Development Program (CDP).
 - The MLS does not have development programs for women.

TREND #5: USA IS BEHIND



The US is falling behind other countries in developing women sport coaches due to a lack of a national governing body, federally sponsored sport organization, lack of resources and structural support that result.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Fund a national-level sport federation that would develop and administer women sport coach developmental programming.
 - Te Hāpaitanga is a holistic coach development initiative enabling more women to pursue and maintain careers in high performance coaching in New Zealand (HPSNZ).
 - Female Coach Mentorship Model, of the Coaching Association of Canada (CAC) is designed to enhance advancement of women in coaching. It has been evaluated extensively.
 - The Australian Institute of Sport (AIS), under the Australian Government and Australian Sports Commission, is funding the Women in High Performance Coaching Project (WiHPC) to address to create a more diverse and successful coaching ecosystem by 2032. AIS in collaboration with National Sporting Organisations and National Institute Network partners, launched the **Gen32 Coach Program**, by investing over \$11 million to support women in coaching and aims to attract, support, and retain female coaching talent, creating a sport system reflective of society.
 - UK Women Who Coach toolkit is designed to encourage and inspire more women to get into coaching and improve career development opportunities for female coaches.
 - Strengthening coaching with the objective to raise equality' (SCORE) is a European project supported by the Erasmus+ Programme, led by the European Non-Governmental Sports Organisation (ENGSO), which promotes equal opportunities, namely gender equality in coaching, and focuses on increasing the number of employed and volunteer women coaches at all levels of sport, as well as enhancing knowledge on gender equality in coach education.

TREND #6: FILLING GAPS



Private investment, industry support, partnerships, sponsorships, and foundation involvement are increasingly addressing the needs of women coaches by covering gaps like childcare, pay, professional development, fellowships, scholarships, fee waivers, and health insurance caused by gender inequities. However, women coaches who work part-time, in private clubs, or for small organizations (fewer than 50 employees) are not protected by US laws like Title IX or the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which ensure gender equity and postpartum care.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Provide support for mother-coaches with clear policies (e.g., they can travel with child and/or provide caretaker support on the road), flexible work schedule, day-care stipend, on-site daycare, and a private space for breastfeeding and pumping.
 - **Example:** The Alex Morgan Foundation announced the Coaching Moms Initiative to provide moms who coach with a community who cares, childcare resources, and more.
- Industry partners, brands, foundations and/or social community impact teams have resources to invest and support women coaches with creative and collaborative initiatives when doing so aligns with their strategic goals.
 - **Example:** The Women's Sports Foundation Tara VanDerveer Fund for the Advancement of Women in Coaching provides grants, paid fellowships and mentorships for aspiring women coaches.
 - **Example:** The FIFA Coach Education scholarships aim to increase the number of qualified women coaches working in the game.
 - **Example:** The **Trail to Gold Coaching Grant** started in 2022, is a collaborative initiative aimed at empowering American women coaches and technicians by providing them with immersive, international-level experience alongside the U.S. Ski Team. This program is a joint effort by the National Nordic Foundation (NNF), the Women's Ski Coaches Association (WSCA), and the U.S. Ski Team.

TREND #7: WOMEN-FOCUSED



Women-led, women-only or women-focused groups have emerged outside traditional structures to address organizational and systemic gender equity gaps. Based on the data, women-focused entities tailored to the challenges women face are critical for recruitment and retention, and for women to feel safe, valued, and supported.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Women, along with male allies and sponsors, can develop organizations and programs to meet the specific needs of women locally, regionally, nationally and/or by sport.
 - **EXAMPLES OF WOMEN-FOCUSED ENTITIES**
 - WeCOACH (founded in 2003 as the Alliance for Women Coaches, rebranded as WeCOACH in 2018)
 - Wisconsin Track Coaches Association (WISTCA) Women4Women (est. 2018)
 - Wisconsin Women's Soccer Advisory Council (WWSAC) (est. 2018)
 - Women's Ski Coaches Association (est. 2019)
 - Women's Coaching Alliance (es. 2020)
 - Minnesota Track Coaches Association Women4Women (est. 2023)
 - Nebraska Women's Athletic Leadership Alliance (est. 2023)
 - Global Community of Women in High School Sports (est. 2020)
 - Female Coaching Network (est. 2014, UK)
 - Women Coaches Symposium-annual event hosted by the Tucker Center
- Organizational leaders can dedicate and commit to funding and supporting long-term women-focused initiatives.
 - **Example:** A handful of the 17 United States Tennis Association (USTA) sections are holding Women's Tennis Leadership Summits (e.g., Southwest, NoCal)



TREND #8: RECRUITMENT



Nearly every organization, at every level, in every sport is struggling to recruit women coaches.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Communities need to work together to create local strategies that encourage more women to become youth and developmental level coaches.
- A coordinated, collaborative national media campaign is needed to increase awareness, and market and promote sport coaching to engage women of all ages. Research and insights are needed to determine which appeals entice and engage different audiences of women to enter coaching (e.g., high school girls, college women athletes, retired professional athletes, mothers, grandmothers).
- A national media campaign can be initiated with investment by brands, sport properties and industry partners.
 - **Example:** #SHECANCOACH is a campaign of the Tucker Center.



BE THEIR **ROLE MODEL.** #SHECANCOACH



TREND #9: RETIREMENTS



Many women coaches are reaching the age of retirement which means their collective and institutional wisdom is at risk of being under-leveraged or lost.

OPPORTUNITIES

- All sport organizations need to leverage, involve and continue to engage legacy women coaches in recruitment, mentorship, fundraising and programmatic efforts. Legacy women have vast knowledge, time, resources and willingness to give back.
- Due to retirements, jobs will become available for younger women, but they must be well prepared, ready to step into open positions AND be given the opportunity.
- Communities, organizations, and NGBs need to develop a coaching pipeline development for girls and women.
- Research the lived experiences of legacy women sport coaches and use this knowledge and wisdom to create programming for NextGen Coaches.



(L to R) Carol Hutchins, U of Michigan Softball Coach, Muffet McGraw, Notre Dame Women's Basketball Coach; Dr. Nikki Franke, Temple Women's Fencing Coach
All three coaches are currently retired and examples of Legacy Coaches.

TREND #10: DEVELOPMENTAL



Awareness and efforts to recruit, develop, engage, mentor, and retain and women coaches have grown significantly over the past decade, predominately at high-performance levels. Same-identity role models at developmental levels can help keep girls in sports, challenge gender stereotypes, and inspire more girls and young women to become coaches. While some initiatives are highlighted in this report, it is not exhaustive—we welcome your input!

OPPORTUNITIES

- Efforts to recruit and develop girls, young women, and women at developmental levels and fill the pipeline is needed.
 - **Example:** Women's Coaching Alliance -WCA's signature training and development program "Coach Today, Lead for Life" serves young women athletes in their formative years (ages 15-26) and builds their foundational leadership skills and confidence through coaching youth sports. Even better, by increasing representation of female coaches in youth sports, a virtuous cycle begins, inspiring the next generation.
- Programs must be evaluated for impact and efficacy! So that learnings can be scaled and modified around the world.



INVEST IN & SUPPORT THE TUCKER CENTER

To remain positioned as a global thought leader, we need additional investments to help ensure sustainability and long-term growth.

Investing in Tucker Center is a value-based strategy, with low risk and a high level of proven impact. The Tucker Center team has a proven track record of excellence, thought leadership, producing a high volume of impactful work with a small team, transforming lives through evidence-informed educational programming, and accelerating systems change with data, and education.

We are inviting new investments in the Tucker Center so we produce can additional reports and much-needed research to create systems change for women sport coaches. To support the Tucker Team, [click here](#).





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