



**MARYLAND STATE**  
YOUTH SOCCER ASSOCIATION

## **MSYSA Scholarship and Grant Programs: A Review of the First Years of Giving (2021-2024)**

November 26, 2024

### *Executive Summary:*

The Maryland State Youth Soccer Association (MSYSA) serves as the highest administrative authority for the amateur youth sport of soccer within Maryland and the District of Columbia as recognized by the National Governing Body for the sport of soccer in America, the United States Soccer Federation (U.S. Soccer). MSYSA's mission is to grow the game of soccer and to use the game to transform the lives of all who participate. One way of helping to grow the game, in addition to positively impacting the overall community, is by awarding scholarships and grants designed to help reduce the overall cost of participation and increase access. Since 2021, MSYSA awarded nearly \$174,000 in scholarships and grants which directly helped more than 300 players, coaches, and referees to participate in the beautiful game in addition to helping nearly 90 member clubs continue offering quality soccer opportunities to thousands of players. During these years of giving, player registrations and the number of licensed referees increased 91.8% and 33.4% respectfully. Collectively, it is estimated that these awards equate to a broader socio-economic social return on investment (SROI) of somewhere between \$522 thousand and \$21.5 million.



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## Introduction and Background

The Maryland State Youth Soccer Association (MSYSA) was founded in 1976 to serve member clubs and leagues who collectively provide soccer participation opportunities to amateur youth soccer players. For nearly 45 years, MSYSA provided insurance coverage for participants, offered statewide tournaments, delivered coaching education, oversaw the State Referee Committee, and administered the local Olympic Development Program (ODP). Collectively, MSYSA registered roughly 45,000 players with US Youth Soccer and U.S. Soccer each year. Given the nature of its business, the majority of MSYSA's operations fall within the Physical Activity and Sport (PAS) field which encompasses all aspects of physical movement, to include sports like soccer, and looks to examine health, well-being, and additional socio-economic benefits of participation. Soccer is a form of physical activity due to the physical movement required and the energy that is subsequently spent (Caspersen, Powell, and Christenson, 1985).

Beginning in 2021, MSYSA began to think differently about the local soccer landscape and the various ways that MSYSA was serving members and all who participated in the beautiful game within Maryland and the District of Columbia (i.e., MSYSA's jurisdiction). While MSYSA's mission is to grow the game and use the game to transform the lives of all who participate, as a 501(c)3 non-profit, MSYSA also desired to positively impact the local communities within its jurisdiction.

MSYSA built upon the knowledge that playing soccer has been shown to have a positive effect on physical and mental well-being (Thornton et al., 2016) and that sport participation has been shown to contribute to stronger communities, gender equality, and youth empowerment (UNESCO, 2023). Additionally, Clemente et al. (2022) reported that playing recreational soccer has been shown to improve markers of physical health. To put it simply, the positive impact that participating in sport can have on individuals and the community are significant.

Combining MSYSA's mission with the knowledge that for every \$1 invested in sport participation between \$3 and \$124 in value is generated (Gosselin, Boccanfuso and Laberge, 2020) contributed to the decision to make a significant financial investment to increase access by reducing the known barrier of cost to increase participation within MSYSA's jurisdiction. Participation extends beyond amateur youth players and includes coaches, referees, and administrators.



Innovative programs were created and implemented designed to bring soccer to more communities than ever before. Let's Play!, Community Pick-Up Soccer, and Growing, are a few examples of programs being offered alongside U.S. Soccer's Coach for Community (please see Appendix A for more details pertaining to these programs). In addition to these innovative programs, comprehensive scholarship and grant programs were established by the MSYSA Board of Directors designed to directly invest tens of thousands of dollars to help bring soccer participation opportunities to more communities within MSYSA's jurisdiction while helping to reduce the known barrier of cost. A detailed analysis of the scholarship and grant awards from inception through 2024 follows.

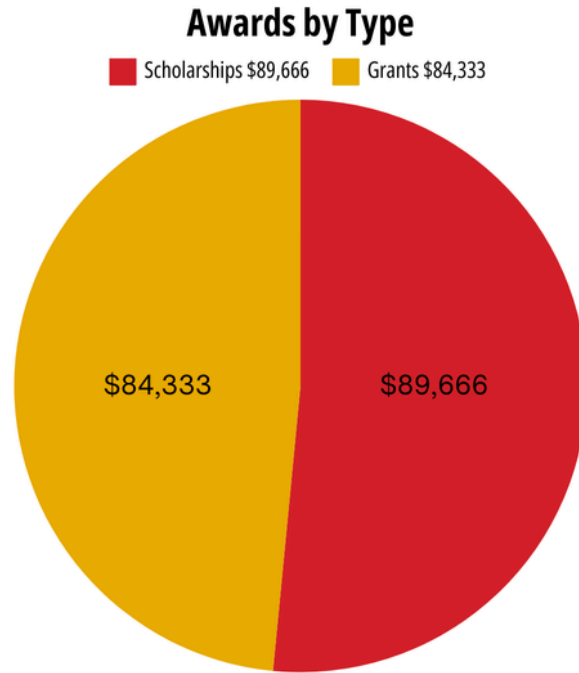
### **Scholarship and Grant Programs**

Since initially launching the Presidential Scholarship and Affiliate Grant programs in the spring of 2021, MSYSA has proudly awarded a total of \$173,999. In 2024, the Scholarship program was renamed the Heffelfinger Scholarship program. This total investment has been split each year between the Heffelfinger Scholarship and the Affiliate Grant awards. While the exact split is not prescribed, Affiliate Grant requests are typically fewer in number but receive a larger award amount. Additionally, the Grant program has an opening and closing date each year while the Heffelfinger Scholarship is offered on a rolling basis. It is important to note that the Scholarship and Grant programs are not need-based and utilize a simple application form which is able to be accessed, completed, and submitted online using the GotSport solution.

The total funds allocated each year for the Scholarship and Grant programs are roughly assigned and are then moved between each 'bucket', as needed. Additionally, if necessitated by the total number of applications, additional funds are requested by the MSYSA Scholarship and Grant's Committee to be approved by the MSYSA Board of Directors. The Scholarship and Grant's Committee reviews all applications and makes final award decisions. Please see the following chart (Figure 1) showing the awards by program type.



Figure 1. MSYSA Scholarship and Grant Awards



To highlight the fluidity of how the total fund allocations change, the total award amounts have been broken down by year. Scholarship award totals have fluctuated from \$14,555 (21/22 seasonal year) to \$31,327 (23/24 seasonal year) while Grant awards have fluctuated from \$9,000 (22/23 seasonal year) to \$28,500 (Spring 2021). Please see the following table (Figure 2).

Figure 2. MSYSA Scholarship and Grant Awards by Year

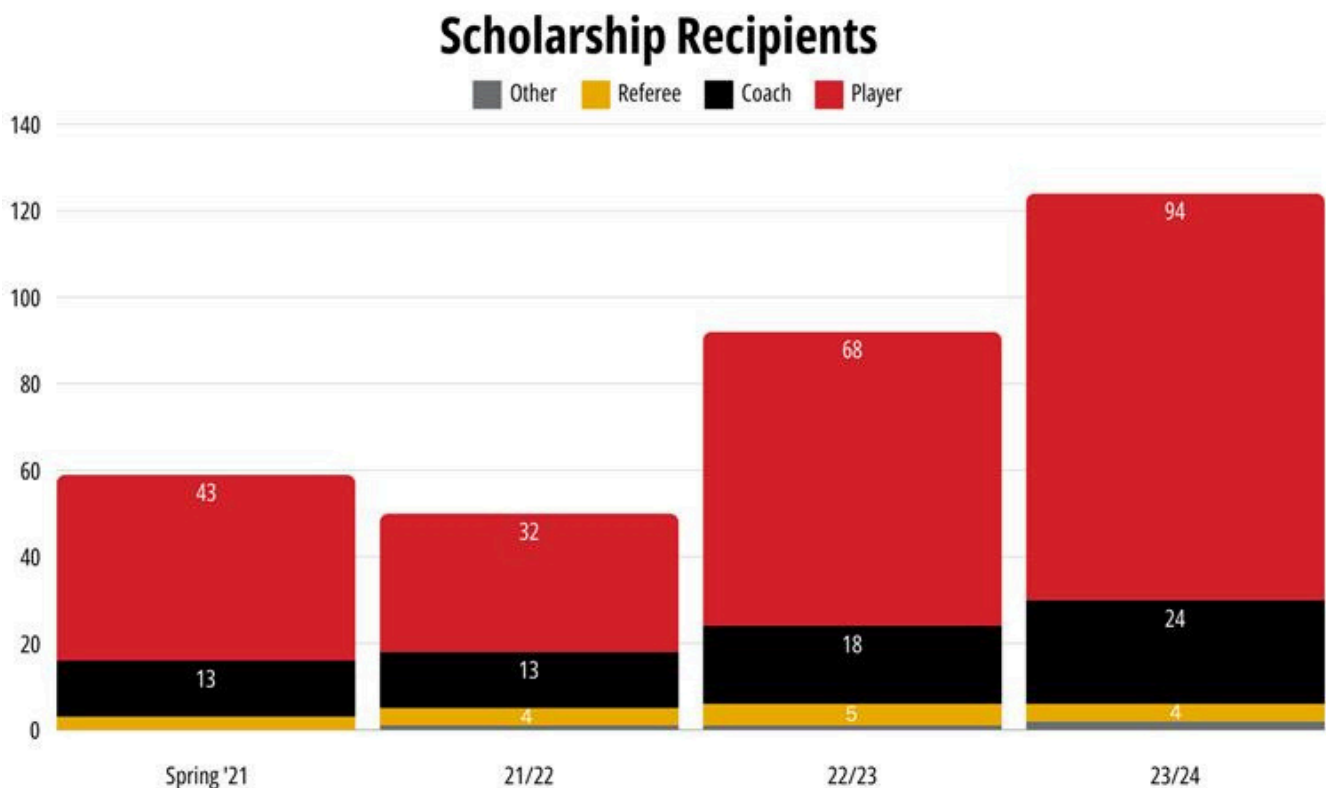
| Scholarships | Award Amounts   | Grants       | Award Amounts   |
|--------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------|
| Spring 2021  | \$16,428        | Spring 2021  | \$28,500        |
| 21/22        | \$14,555        | 21/22        | \$25,933        |
| 22/23        | \$27,356        | 22/23        | \$9,000         |
| 23/24        | \$31,327        | 23/24        | \$20,900        |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>\$89,666</b> | <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>\$84,333</b> |



## Scholarships.

Within the Heffelfinger Scholarship program, awards are provided to individuals to include players, coaches, and referees. While the total number of individuals within each of these categories may change slightly each year, during the timeframe covered by this report (2021-2024), the average total counts were 65,000 players, 6,000 coaches, and 1,850 referees. Please see the following graph (Figure 3) showing the total number of awards by recipient type.

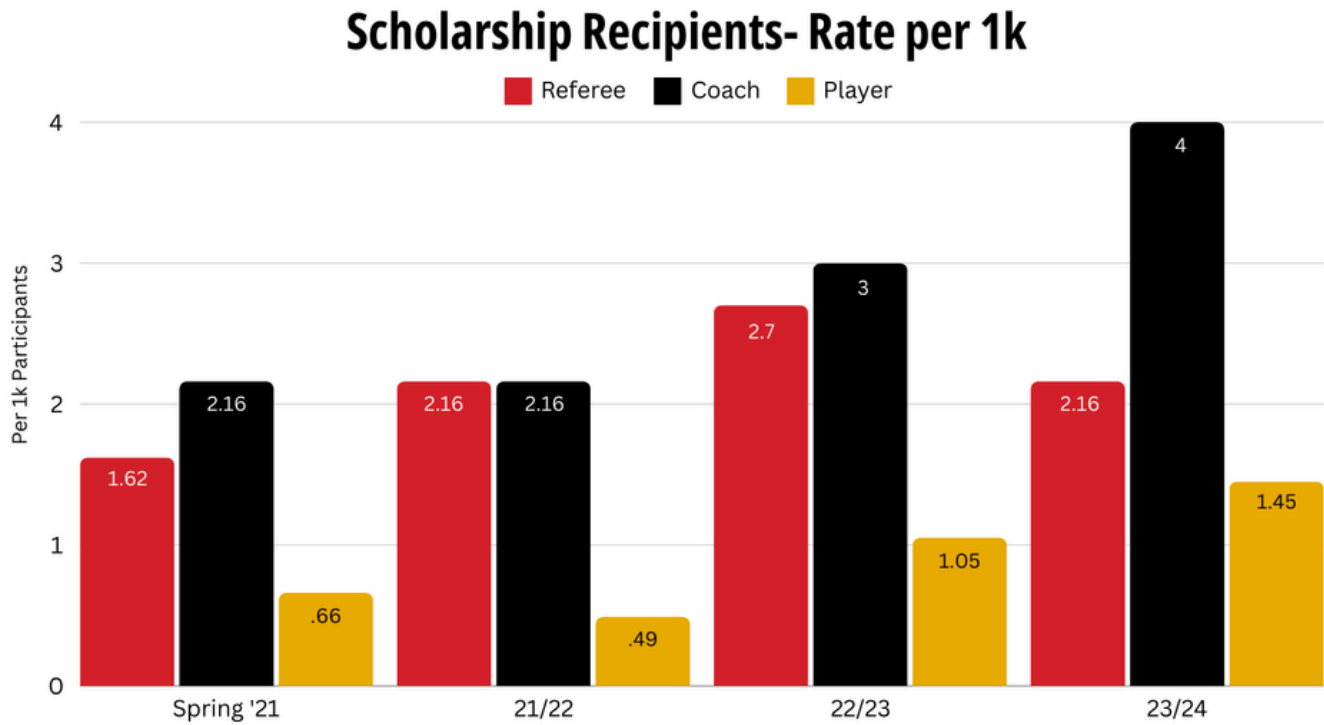
Figure 3. MSYSA Scholarship Recipients



At first glance, it may appear that many more players, when compared with coaches and referees, receive Scholarship awards each year. However, when presented as a rate, a clearer picture emerges showing a more balanced awarding of Scholarship funds with coaches receiving slightly more awards, on average. To establish a rate, the total number of player, coach, and referee awards were divided by the average number of individuals within each category. For example, player awards of 43 were divided by 65,000 resulting in a rate of 0.6 per 1,000. The “Other” recipient group was removed from this analysis as it did not have a defined total number of participants. Please see the following graph (Figure 4).



Figure 4. MSYSA Scholarship Recipients- Rate per 1k

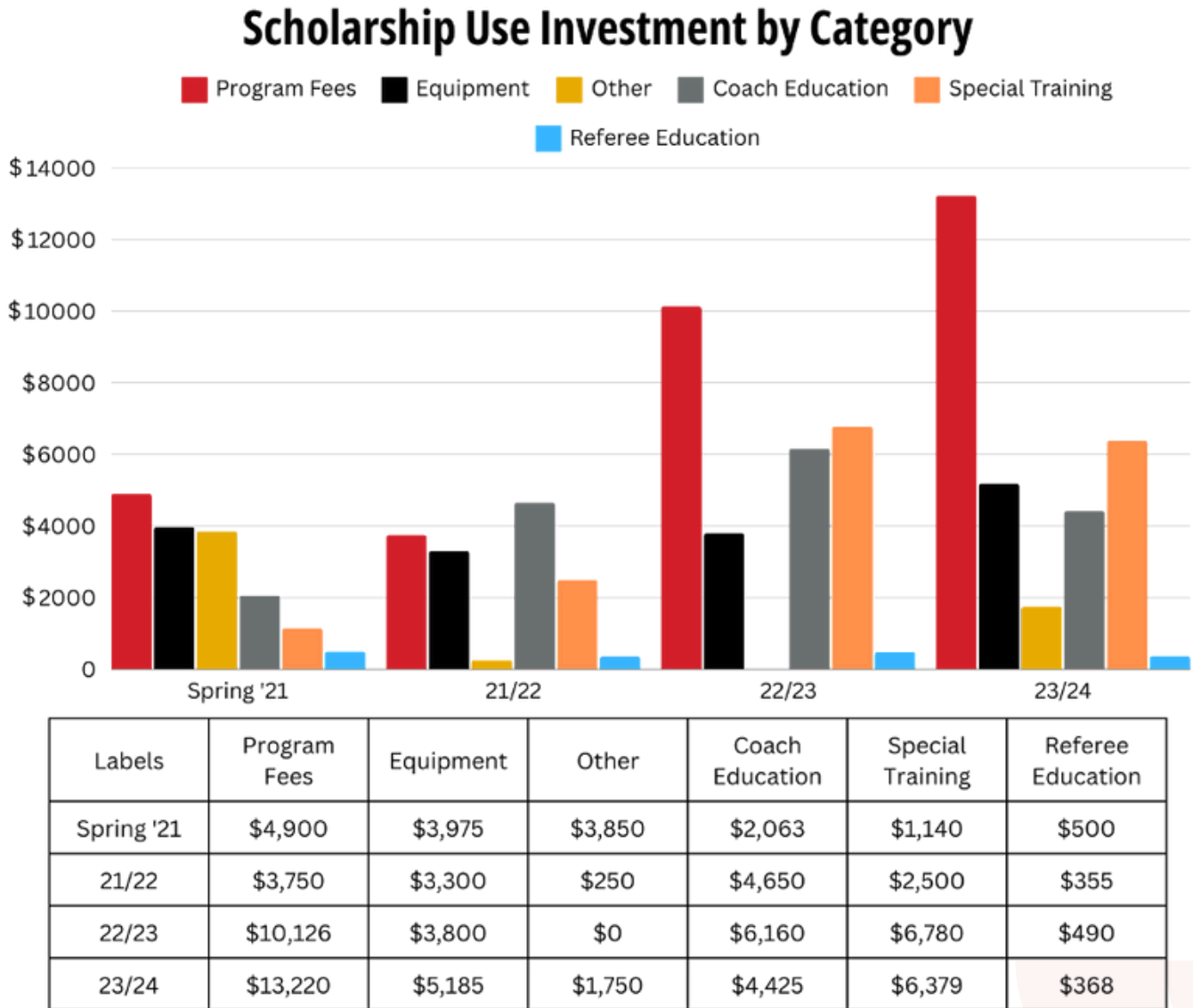


As part of the Heffelfinger Scholarship request application, applicants are required to provide a description of how the requested funds intend to be used. While applicants can list anything within the open text box, a few themes emerged. The following graph shows the various use categories, along with the total amount awarded, for each of the Heffelfinger Scholarship awards by year (Figure 5).





Figure 5. MSYSA Scholarship Use Investment by Category



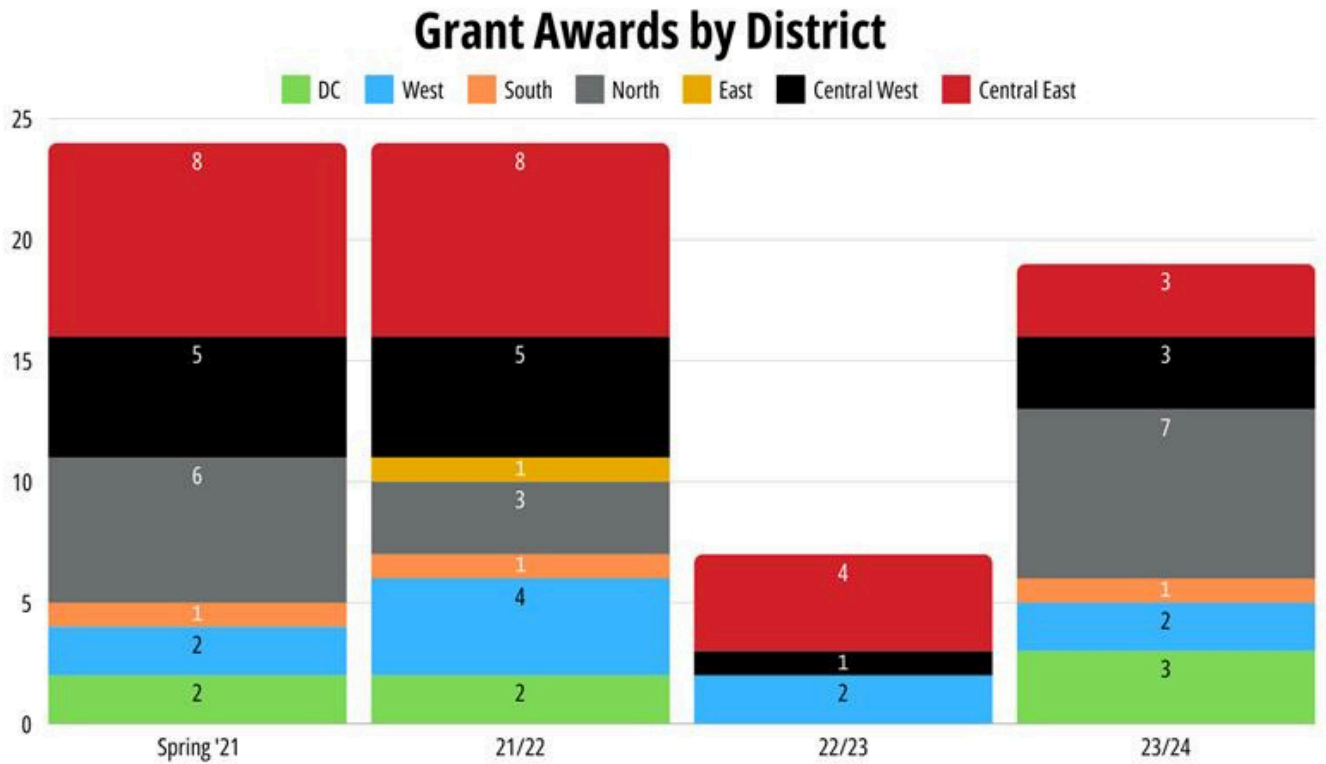
Inflation rose 20.67% from January 2021 through October 2024 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024), and wage growth has not yet caught up (Foster and Kahn, 2024). Furthermore, the 2022 State of Play published by the Aspen Institute (2022) reported that inflation (32.6%) was the primary reason why parents are paying more for youth sports. This information may have contributed to the fact that “Program Fees” and “Equipment” were the primary categories requesting financial support via the Heffelfinger Scholarship program. The additional category of “Education” was also common for both coaches and referees. This may be due to the additional costs that formal education can present which may create a barrier for some to continue participating in the game.



## Grants.

Affiliate Grants were provided to affiliate member clubs and leagues to further grow the game of soccer within Maryland and the District of Columbia and were designed to help cover the costs of equipment required to start or maintain a soccer program and to help cover the costs of field rental usage fees. MSYSA's jurisdiction is divided into seven (7) districts. Each district has any number of affiliate member clubs and or leagues and each district elects a representative to serve on the MSYSA Board of Directors. The following graph (Figure 6) shows the Affiliate Grant awards by district each year.

Figure 6. MSYSA Affiliate Grant Awards by District



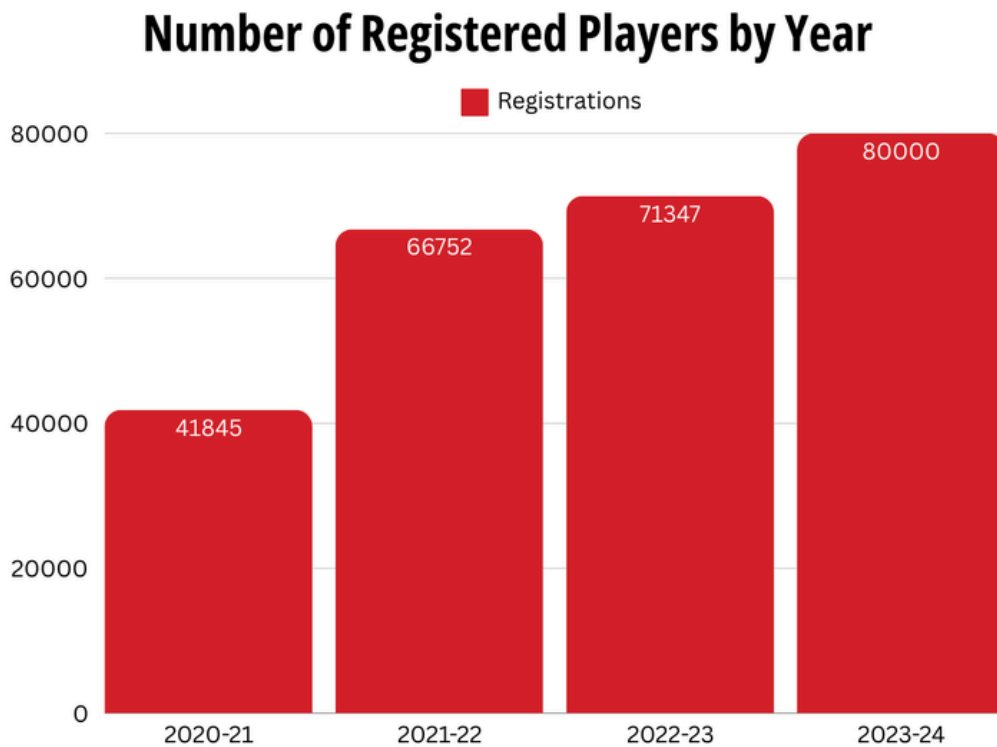
Based on the information provided by the applicants, 53% of all awarded Affiliate Grant funds were to help secure needed equipment. Equipment typically included cones, pinnies, and soccer balls. Some requests also included goals and benches.



## Increased Participation.

Increased participation was a contributing factor to MSYSA choosing to make these funds available. During the years that the Heffelfinger Scholarship and Affiliate Grant programs have been in operation, total player registrations increased 91.8% from 41,845 to 80,000. Please see the following graph (Figure 7).

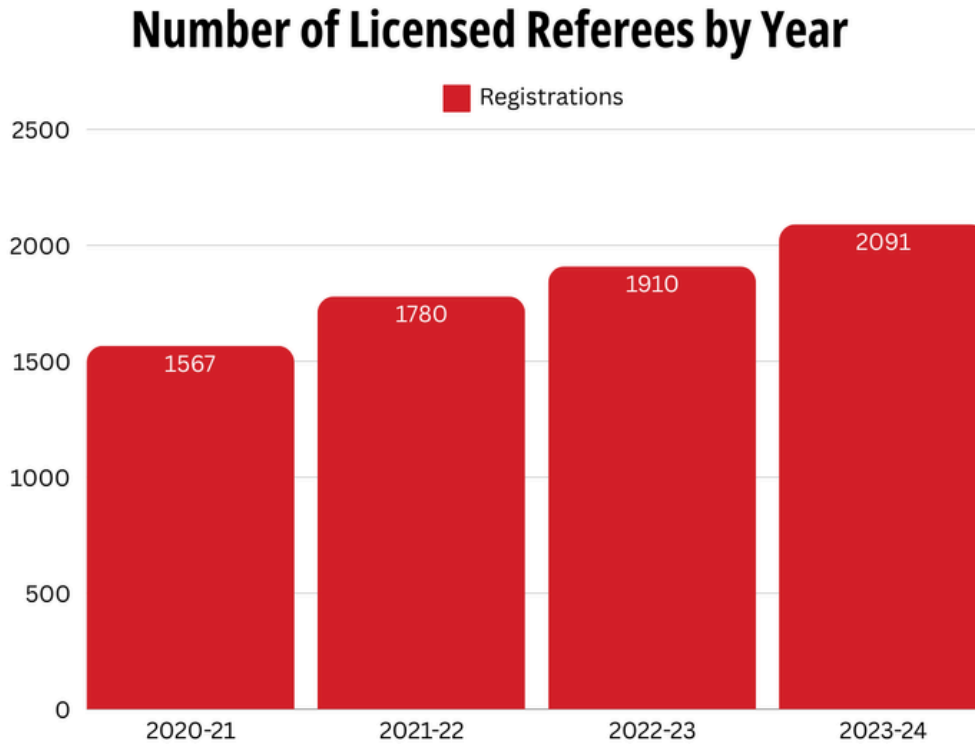
*Figure 7. Number of Registered Players by Year*



Similarly, licensed referees increased 33.4% (from 1,567 to 2,091) during this timeframe. Please see the following chart (Figure 8).



Figure 8. Licensed Referees by Year



### Impact and Conclusion

The nearly \$174,000 that was awarded in scholarships and grants over the past few years directly helped more than 300 players, coaches, and referees to participate in the beautiful game. This money was used to help cover the cost of club and league fees, equipment costs such as cleats, shin guards, and soccer balls, and helped coaches to pursue formal coach education as well as referees to become licensed and secure the necessary uniform kit. Additionally, nearly 90 member clubs received grant awards which helped them to continue offering quality soccer opportunities to possibly thousands of players. During the timeframe that this financial investment was being made, MSYSA saw total player registrations increase by 91.8% (n= 38,155 players) and licensed referees increase by 33.4% (n=561 referees).



Within the PAS field, Social Return on Investment (SROI) is a framework that has received increased attention over the past few years as it can be used to help understand, measure, and report the social value created by an investment in the form of a program, policy, or an intervention (Gosselin, Boccanfuso and Laberge, 2020). Social value can include someone's well-being, improved relationships, increased confidence and self-esteem, in addition to their overall health, and can even extend to crime reduction and educational achievement (Taylor et al. 2015).

For a number of the Scholarship recipients, it was specifically noted that receiving the award was the difference between them being able to afford to participate, or not. The following is an example of the impact that these investments are having:

*"I won't take much of your time but wanted to share with you my kids during their opening tournament this season. I shared with the committee last year that we were in dire financial condition because of chronic medical conditions that limit our ability to provide our children with opportunities such as playing soccer. If it wasn't for you and MSYSA they wouldn't have the opportunity to play and words can never describe the gratitude I have in my heart. Thank you for your continued support and being part of my children's journey."*

Collectively, it is conservatively estimated that more than 5,000 players, coaches, and referees have had their soccer experiences improved by having greater access to newer equipment, greater coaching education, and referee development. Furthermore, this number is expected to continue growing each year as the coaching education knowledge learned and the referee development opportunities will stay with those individuals forever and as some of the equipment purchased is able to be used year after year. Lastly, with some Affiliate Grants being used to purchase AED's, the entire participation experience will now be even safer.

In accordance with research published by Gosselin, Boccanfuso, and Laberge (2020), it is estimated that these awards equate to a social return on investment (SROI) and overall sustainable development impact over the coming decades of anywhere from \$522 thousand to \$21.5 million.



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This report was produced by:



**MSYSA Soccer Lab**  
*Shifting the anecdotal to empirical*



## Appendix A. Grassroots Programs



- **Let's Play!** is an after-school initiative designed to transform the lives of participants by providing a safe, character building, community supported program that helps to teach social and emotional skills while fighting obesity and related illnesses. Let's Play! is designed to reduce negative behavior, improve mental health and well-being, and improve educational and academic achievement all while growing excitement around the beautiful game of soccer!



- **Community Pick-Up Soccer**, presented by the Washington Spirit, offers a chance for people of all ages and skill levels to play soccer and promote physical activity. This opportunity fosters a healthier and more vibrant community by encouraging social inclusion, improved physical health, and improved community spirit.



- **Growing** provides a half-day or full-day soccer camp experience to children at or near their school to maximize convenience for parents. Offered on one or more days during the year when school closes early or is closed entirely (e.g., teacher professional development day), participants play fun, camp-style soccer games where skills are learned and improved upon with an emphasis on fun, belonging, and overall participation.





**COACHING  
EDUCATION**  
COACH FOR  
COMMUNITY

- **Coach for Community** is a special program providing free education and resources to coaches, with an emphasis on reaching new coaches in underserved communities across America. In partnership with MSYSA, Coach for Community delivers in-person learning sessions and access to online grassroots licenses – at no cost to participating coaches.

