



This strategic plan provides the overall direction and the general framework for the Maryland State Youth Soccer Association (MSYSA) over the next five (5) years. This plan does not provide the answers to every question or choice that will emerge over the coming years, but it does provide guidance and a foundation from which to aid in the decision-making process to ensure that decisions are being made in line with the direction of the Association.

# MSYSA

501(c)(3) non-profit educational organization  
Member of the U.S. Soccer Federation & US Youth Soccer



Membership organization with more than:

- 240 member clubs and leagues
- 85,000 players
- 12,000 coaches, administrators, and volunteers
- 2,500 referees, assignors, mentors, and coaches

### Mission:

Grow the game of soccer by educating, promoting, supporting, and providing

### Vision:

Provide an opportunity for everyone to participate in the game of soccer

### Why:

We transform lives!



EDUCATE	PROMOTE	SUPPORT	PROVIDE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Coaching Education</li> <li>*Communicate policies/procedures for programs, player registrations etc.</li> <li>*Disseminate info from US Soccer, US Youth Soccer and East Region</li> <li>*Parent Education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Affiliate Club spotlights</li> <li>*Affiliate Coach Spotlights</li> <li>*Player Accomplishments</li> <li>*Recognize players, teams, coaches, and referees with annual awards</li> <li>*Highlight talented players that make National level pools and teams</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Issue Grants</li> <li>*Award scholarships</li> <li>*Club Leadership Webinar Series</li> <li>*Offer technical and administrative expertise</li> <li>*Provide resources to expand recreational opportunities</li> <li>*Serve as a repository for ideas/ initiatives for benefit of all members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Insurance coverage</li> <li>*Issue Certificates of Insurance</li> <li>*USYS Carding and rostering</li> <li>PROGRAMMING               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*ODP</li> <li>*Goalkeeper Training</li> <li>*Presidents Cup</li> <li>*State Cup</li> <li>*Summer Soccer Academy</li> </ul> </li> <li>*Strategic Partnership and Sponsorship benefit affiliates</li> </ul>

## Summary

This strategic plan offers guidance, support, direction, and vision to the soccer community within Maryland and the District of Columbia. The Maryland State Youth Soccer Association leans on our pillars of educating, supporting, promoting, and providing, and our mission of growing the game to guide our numerous progressive initiatives designed to best serve our soccer community.

Our vision is to use the beautiful game of soccer to positively impact the lives of participants, to create opportunities, and to strengthen communities. We have created this roadmap to help us navigate to our common destination while providing confidence that we can move soccer forward and help to shape the future of the game we love for generations. We look forward to continuing to work together to achieve these important goals.

Sincerely,

Mark Cantor  
MSYSA President

Greg Smith, Ph.D.  
MSYSA Executive Director

*Photo: MSYSA Girls' Play*





Photo: MSYSA Presidents Cup



## Definitions

- Health & Safety
  - Protecting physical and mental well-being via resources and initiatives
- Development
  - The process of growing, changing, or becoming more advanced
- Equitable Access
  - Striving to reduce known disparities

Photo: MSYSA AGM



These definitions are provided to ensure that readers of this strategic plan know what is meant by each. Readers who may have additional questions are encouraged to contact the MSYSA state office (410-768-5401).



MSYSA has numerous constituents ranging from players, to schools, and to elected officials. Each constituent group has unique desires, interests, needs, and communication styles.

MSYSA serves each constituent group in various ways based on their characteristics and their specific needs. For example, the way that we serve players is different from the way that we serve partners and sponsors. Players are served by providing programmatic opportunities, access to gear and equipment, and exposure via our marketing and social media, while partners and sponsors are served by providing exposure and brand awareness in exchange for value-in-kind (VIK) and/or financial contributions. Understanding the intrinsic variations and meeting our constituents where they are is fundamentally important to achieving our goals.

Accomplishing some of the goals identified within this strategic plan will require partnering and collaborating with a number of these constituent groups in addition to other entities within the local community. Our ability to successfully collaborate will directly impact our ability to achieve our goals.



MSYSA aspires to improve the lives of participants while creating opportunities for personal growth and development. Doing this successfully will positively contribute to strengthening communities. These aspirations will be accomplished by implementing the strategies outlined in this plan.



Our strategic priorities create the parameters within which our goals exist to maintain a laser focus. Our strategic priorities are engagement, inspirational brand, and participation growth.

- **Engagement** is necessary to build relationships, increase understanding, and to truly serve. It is through engagement that MSYSA will have the desired positive impact on the lives of participants, and this impact will help to keep them in the game.
- An **inspirational brand** is an outcome, or an effect of the work being done, and the decisions being made. One does not simply decide that a brand is now inspirational, but rather it is built over time. MSYSA must work every day to establish and then maintain that it is an inspirational brand with value and stature.
- The mission of MSYSA is to grow the game. This ultimately means that we want **more people participating**. This will happen in many ways to include through strategic partnerships and outreach.



Photo: USSF Referees, Maryland





This purposefully simplistic SWOT Analysis captures some of MSYSA’s most current, significant strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

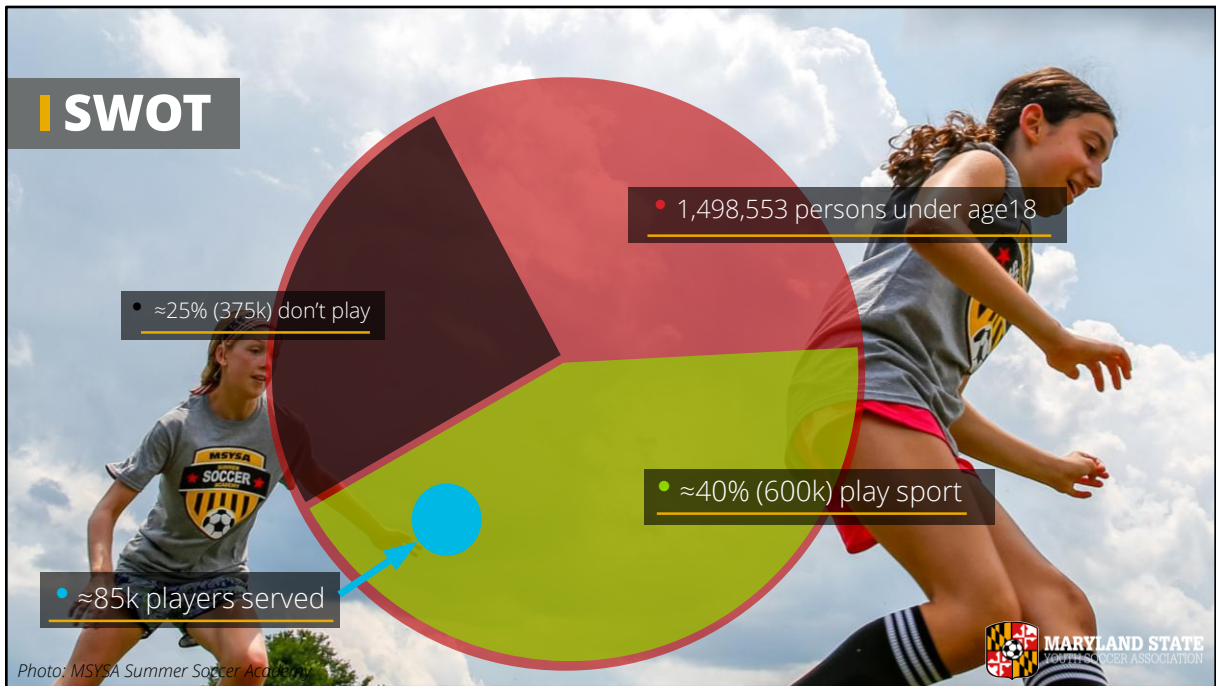
**Strengths** include our people (on the Board, in the office, and within the community), our programs that positively impact the lives of so many nearly every day, the education that we provide through coaching education and through every interaction that we have with our affiliates and others (e.g., registration, policies, sound business practice, etc.), and the way that MSYSA advocates for the game, for our affiliates, for the creation of additional places to play, access to those facilities, and for the fair and equitable treatment of all people.

**Weaknesses** include our current ability to fundraise (or lack of fundraising), the fact that our jurisdiction stretches from the beaches of the Eastern Shore to the hills of Cumberland, and from the Potomac River to the Susquehanna River. Additionally, scarcity affects our ability to further our mission. Scarcity in terms of facilities (i.e., safe spaces to play and at a reasonable proximity and at a feasible price point), dollars (everything costs money), and people (more volunteers are needed). Lastly, individual personalities, each shaped by a range of traits, can present organizational challenges. Many traits are beneficial in balance but may become counterproductive when taken to an extreme. As MSYSA continues to grow, managing an increasingly diverse set of personalities will be necessary to avoid

potential operational disruptions.

**Opportunities** include; offering increased development opportunities to more communities than ever before via partnerships with community groups, businesses, and local/state government, continuing to grow and leverage our social media presence to engage and increase excitement for the sport. Additional opportunities include collaborations with scholastic institutions to bring programming and expose more children to the beautiful game, and the fact that USA is hosting the 2026 FIFA World Cup, the 2028 Olympics, and the 2031 Women's World Cup as excitement for and around the game will be at an elevated level as we get closer to, and beyond, these major events.

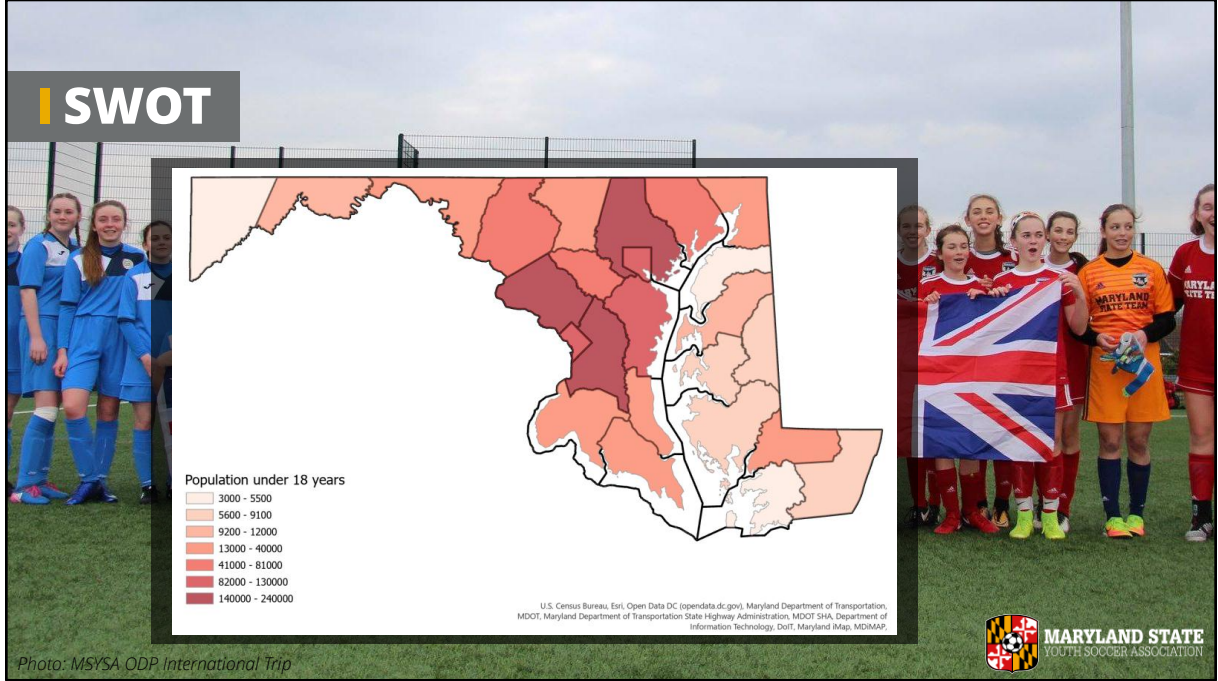
**Threats** include Federal laws (e.g., SafeSport Act, AED requirements) that we must comply with and that have a direct and significant impact on our operations; landscape interconnectivity in that decisions made by one organization (e.g., USSF or USYS) influence MSYSA and the clubs and leagues with which we partner. Pay-to-play as it continues to be one of the largest hurdles hindering the growth of the game of soccer. Lastly, competition represents a significant threat as clubs compete for coaches, facilities, and opportunities, along with league and tournament providers continually emerging and promising to be the next best thing. This competition can influence poor decision making and can tear at the seams of our community.



According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are 1,498,553 persons under the age of 18 who live within the state of Maryland and the District of Columbia (i.e., our jurisdiction).

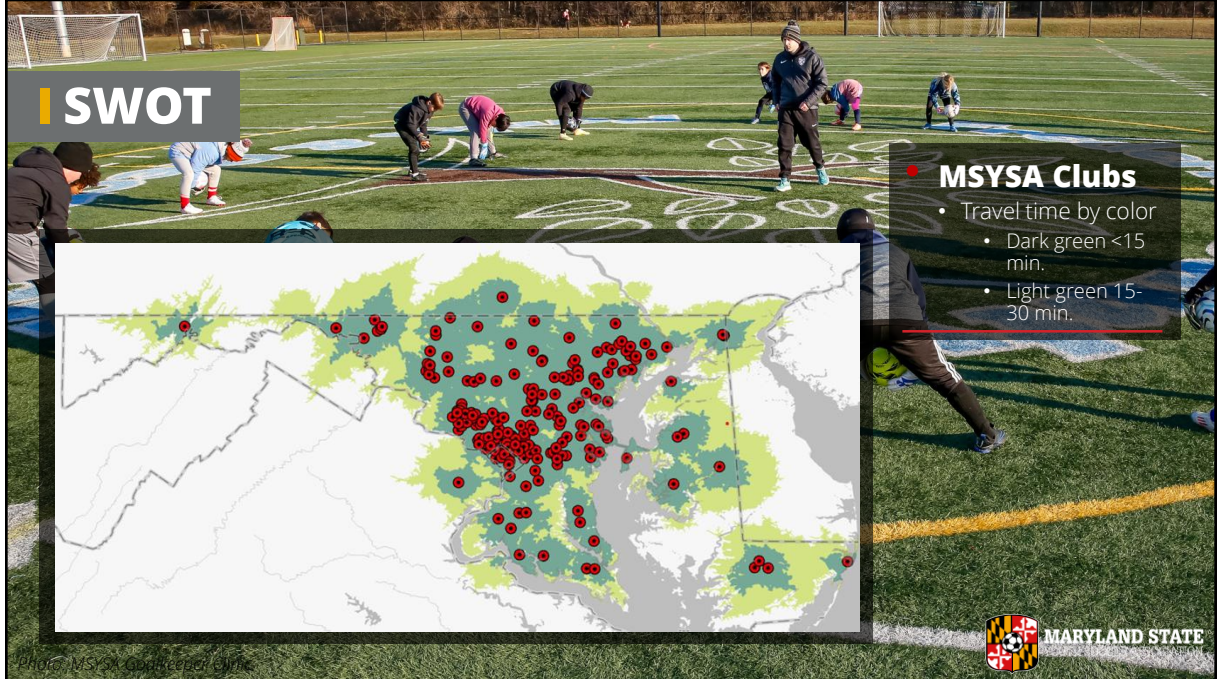
The Aspen Institute’s Project Play (<https://www.aspenprojectplay.org/youth-sports-facts/participation-rates>) reports that an average of 17.1% of children ages 6 to 12 engage in no sport activity during the year (2018). This is 33.4% for households with an income under \$25k and 24.5% for households with an income between \$25k and \$49.9k.

Even if only 40% of children play sport, there remains a tremendous opportunity for growth as MSYSA, through our Affiliate clubs, collectively serves roughly 85k players (the blue dot). This is a very small number in comparison with the total number of children who are believed to be playing sport within MSYSA’s jurisdiction and an infinitesimal number when compared with the entire pie (i.e., the entire population of persons under age 18 (1.49M)).



This map shows the distribution of persons under the age of 18 (i.e., where the nearly 1.5M persons under the age of 18 live within MSYSAs jurisdiction).

The largest three (3) counties based on number of persons are: Baltimore, Montgomery, and Prince George's (each with 140,000 to 240,000 persons under the age of 18). The smallest three (3) counties are: Garrett, Kent, and Somerset (each with 3,000 to 5,500 persons under the age of 18).



This map shows the MSYSA affiliated clubs (red circles) as of April 2026. There is a noticeable correlation between where persons under the age of 18 live and where member clubs are located.

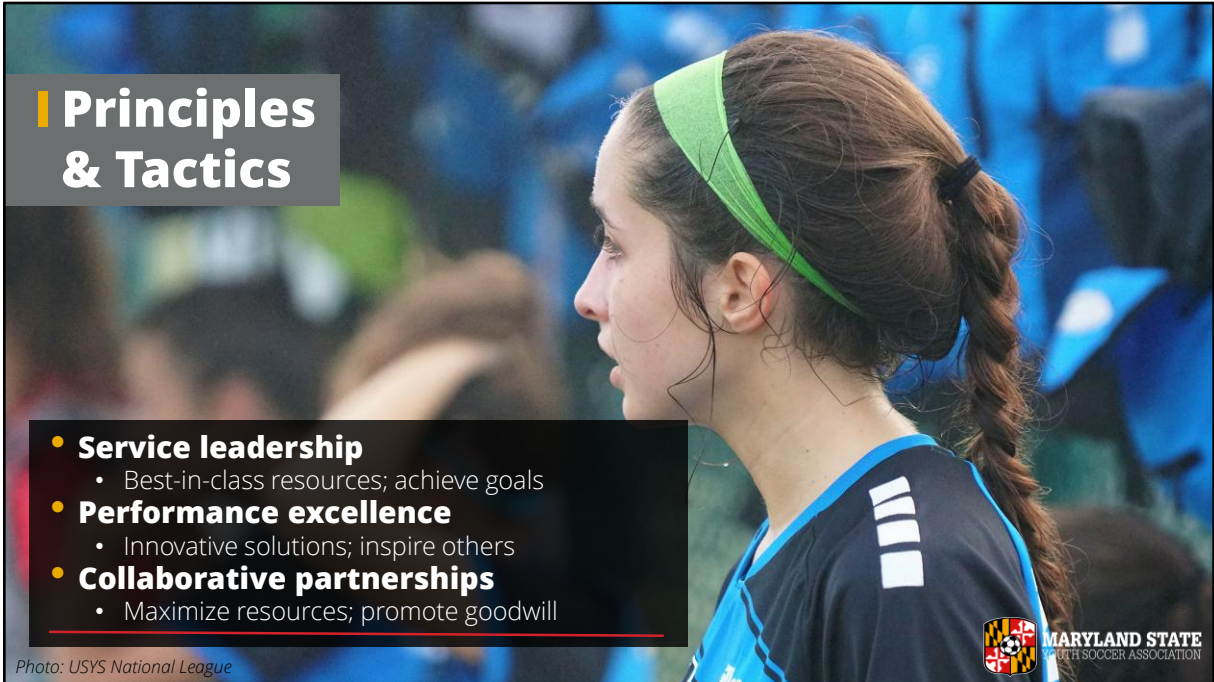
The area shaded in dark green represents a 15 minute, or less, travel time by automobile around each club. The light green shading shows a travel time of 15 to 30 minutes.

Based on this map, the vast majority of persons under the age of 18 who live in Maryland and DC has at least one MSYSA-member club within a 30-minute drive. However, proximity alone does not equal accessibility. MSYSA is proudly offering numerous programs, benefits, and services designed to reduce the equity gaps that exists but recognizes that much more work is needed going forward and by many more members of the community.



Photo: MSYSA Coach for Community





The principles and tactics being employed to guide this strategic plan include service leadership, performance excellence, and collaborative partnerships.

At the center of everything we do must be **service leadership**. Doing so will help to keep us grounded as we strive to offer best-in-class resources while achieving our stated goals. **Performance excellence** is a nod to the fact that we must strive every day to provide the best solutions while inspiring others to do the same. And lastly, **collaboration** is king, and it is essential for MSYSA to establish and maintain great partnerships locally and nationally to best accomplish the goals that have been established within this strategic plan. Doing so will serve to maximize our resources while increasing synergy and promoting goodwill.



Our strategic priorities (engagement, brand, and growth), centered by our principles and tactics (service leadership, performance excellence, collaborative partnerships), are executed through our core business lanes of **health and safety, equitable access, and development**. It is no coincidence that our core business lanes align so perfectly with our fundamental pillars of educate, promote, support, and provide. This is how we deliver and execute against who we are.

The specific goals and strategies pertaining to each of these core business lanes will be further articulated over the next few slides.

## Goals & Strategies

- **Health & safety:**

- Goals

- Provide access to health and safety information
- Increase access to life saving equipment
- Enforce related policies and competition rules

- Strategies

- Increase the number of facilities with accessible AEDs and provide training
- Provide prehab and mental health educational resources
- Encourage safeguarding officers within partner programs

*Photo: USSF Referees, Maryland*

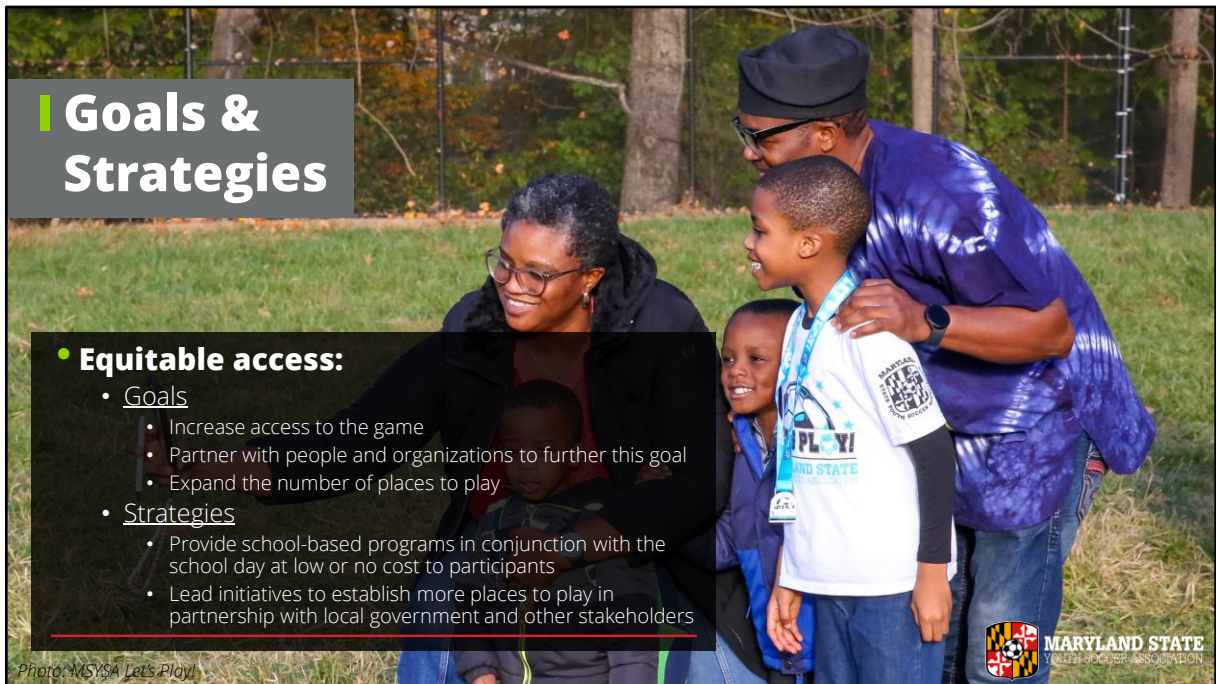


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The **health and safety** of all participants is paramount for MSYSA. Physical, emotional, and psychological health can all be improved upon by creating more access to more resources.

This will be accomplished in many ways including, but not limited to:

- Making AEDs available at more facilities across our jurisdiction and by providing training on proper usage
- Providing access to resources focusing on mental health and prehab techniques and recommendations
- Enforcing policies (e.g., SafeSport and Referee Abuse Prevention) and competition rules to help promote positive environments for all to participate



## Goals & Strategies

- **Equitable access:**

- Goals

- Increase access to the game
- Partner with people and organizations to further this goal
- Expand the number of places to play

- Strategies

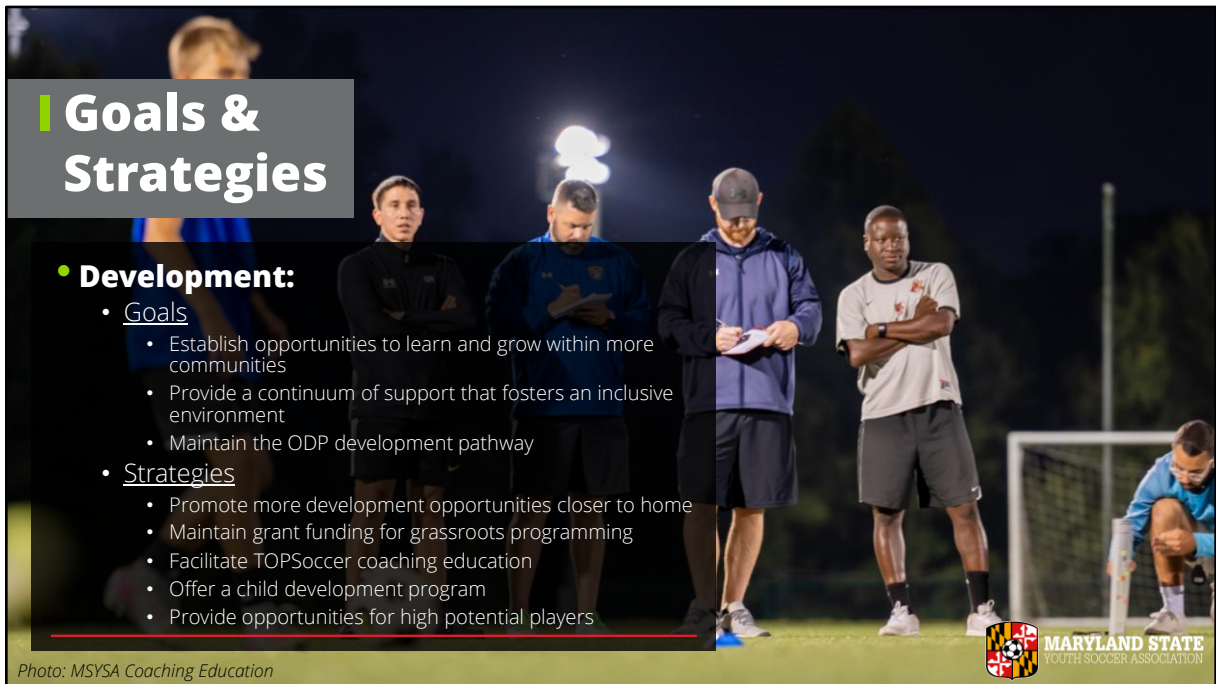
- Provide school-based programs in conjunction with the school day at low or no cost to participants
- Lead initiatives to establish more places to play in partnership with local government and other stakeholders

Photo: MSYSA Lets Play!

**Equitable access** is vital to furthering MSYSAs mission.

Accessibility has numerous components to include, but not limited to; geographical proximity to programmatic offerings, availability of various transportation modalities, total cost (measured in both time and dollars), ability level of the prospective participant, available capacity driven by the overall scarcity of facilities and the quantity and quality of coaches.

Creating more opportunities for more people to participate in the beautiful game is not only the right thing to do but is essential for growing the game. This will require many more partnerships and may require a willingness to more fully embrace non-traditional spaces and soccer programming.



**Development** is the impact that MSYSA has on participants over time.

Our development-related goals pertain largely to players, coaches, and referees and will be achieved by pursuing the strategies noted. While some of these strategies will be implemented immediately and with relative ease (e.g., maintaining grant funding for grassroots programming), others will require a multi-step approach and a significant amount of planning (e.g., offering a mobile development center or launching a child development program). Providing a continuum of support that fosters an inclusive environment will be anchored by a purposeful, concerted effort to view all that we do through a **diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)** lens.

As noted on slide #1, this strategic plan does not provide the answers to every question or choice that will emerge over the coming years, but it does provide guidance and a foundation from which to aid in the decision-making process to ensure that every day, every decision is being made in line with the direction of the Association.



Photo: MSYSA Summer Soccer Academy

## SMART Goals

- MSYSA uses SMART Goals to provide a sense of direction while helping to organize and reach our goals:
  - **S**pecific
  - **M**easurable
  - **A**ttainable
  - **R**esults-oriented
  - **T**ime-determined

*Photo: MSYSA ODP International Trip*



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## I Deliverables

- **By 2031:**
  1. Secure 100's of AEDs
  2. Provide 100% of participants with access to mental health and other resources
  3. Provide 100k+ development opportunities
  4. Establish 100+ new spaces to play
  5. Invest \$100k in grants & scholarships annually



Each of these deliverables are SMART in that they are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-oriented, and Time-determined. Each will be articulated more fully over the next few slides.



**Deliverables**

**1. Secure 100's of AEDs:**

- **Overview:**
  - Many facilities do not have AEDs
  - Collaborate with others to secure
  - Provide CRP/AED training each year
  - Maintain each AED each year

Photo: MSYSA Let's Play



An AED (Automated External Defibrillator) is a portable, user-friendly medical device used to treat sudden cardiac arrest by analyzing the heart's rhythm and delivering an electrical shock if necessary to restore normal function. It provides voice prompts to guide bystanders through the rescue process.

## Deliverables

### 1. Secure 100's of AEDs:

#### • Statistics:

- ~500 facilities in MD & DC do not currently have an accessible AED
- AEDs increase the chance of survival from 9% to as high as 60%

#### • Key considerations:

- Laws are requiring AEDs
- AEDs are expensive
- Partnerships are key
- Initial investment and ongoing maintenance costs

Photo: <https://www.shutterstock.com>

More than 15% of Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrests (OHCAs) occur in a public location; over 60% occur in high school athletics often during competition or intense practice.

Sudden Cardiac Arrest is the leading cause of death in young athletes, responsible for roughly 75% of athlete related fatalities.

Children over age 8 can be treated with a standard AED. Immediate use of an AED, combined with CPR, can double or triple survival rates. 9 in 10 cardiac arrest victims who receive a shock from an AED in the first minute live.

Public access AEDs and community training have a large role to play in early defibrillation.



Mental health awareness is critical to reducing stigma, encouraging early intervention, and improving access to care for those living with mental health conditions. It promotes understanding of symptoms, fosters empathy, creates supportive communities, and encourages, which can prevent suicide.

## Deliverables

### 2. Provide Access to Mental Health and other resources:

#### • **Statistics:**

- ≈20% of people in the United States suffer from mental illness
- Millions of athletes get injured each year, with children and teens being most affected

#### • **Key considerations:**

- Mental health affects participation
- Prehab has been shown to help keep people in the game longer
- Many great resources exist but are not readily available
- Connecting participants with these resources is paramount

Photo: Coppermine Soccer Club

Mental illnesses affect 19% of the adult population, 46% of teenagers, and 13% of children each year.

## Deliverables

### 3. Provide 100k+ development opportunities:

#### • Overview:

- All participants can benefit from additional development opportunities
- Bring opportunities into each community
- Market the opportunities and encourage participation

Photo: MSYSA ODP Invitational

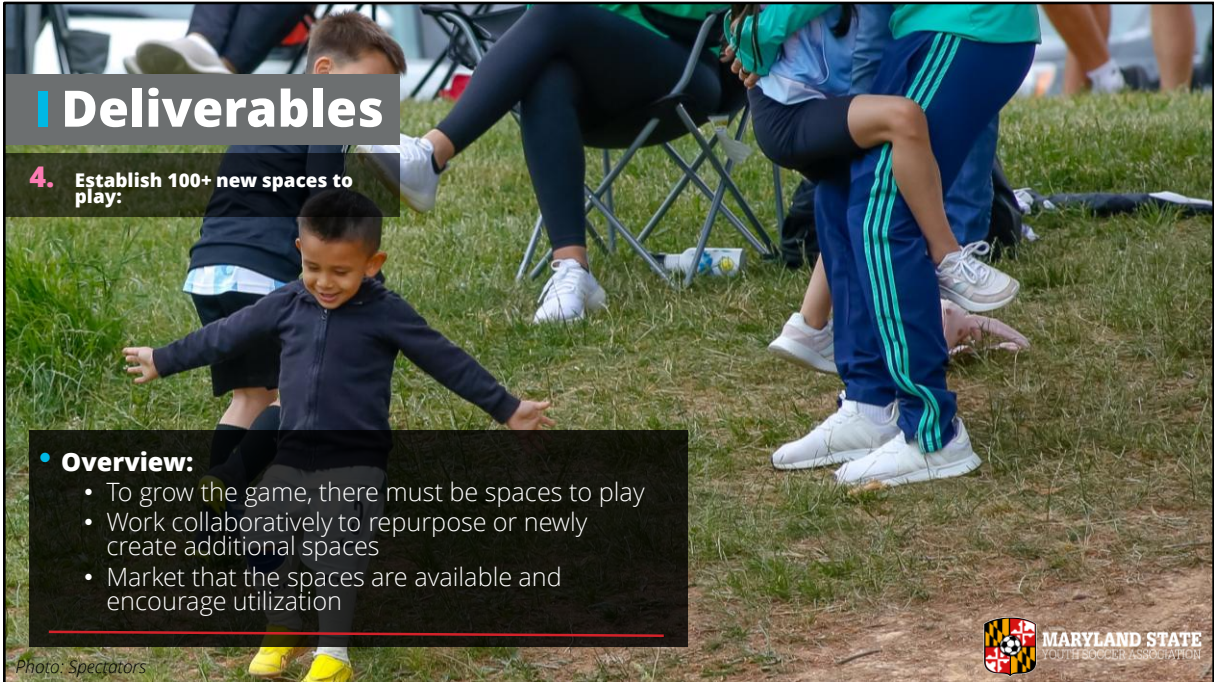


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Development is essential for fostering growth, enhancing quality of life, and ensuring long-term sustainability across personal, economic, and social spheres. It drives innovation, creates economic opportunities, improves health, and enables individuals to reach their full potential.



Additional development opportunities will look to be provided by expanding current offerings in addition to implementing a mobile development center (a temporary facility that is erected in a community for a period of time before moving to another community). In this way, the mobile development center will bring access to development opportunities closer to home than ever before. This should result in more members of the community being able to participate!



## Deliverables

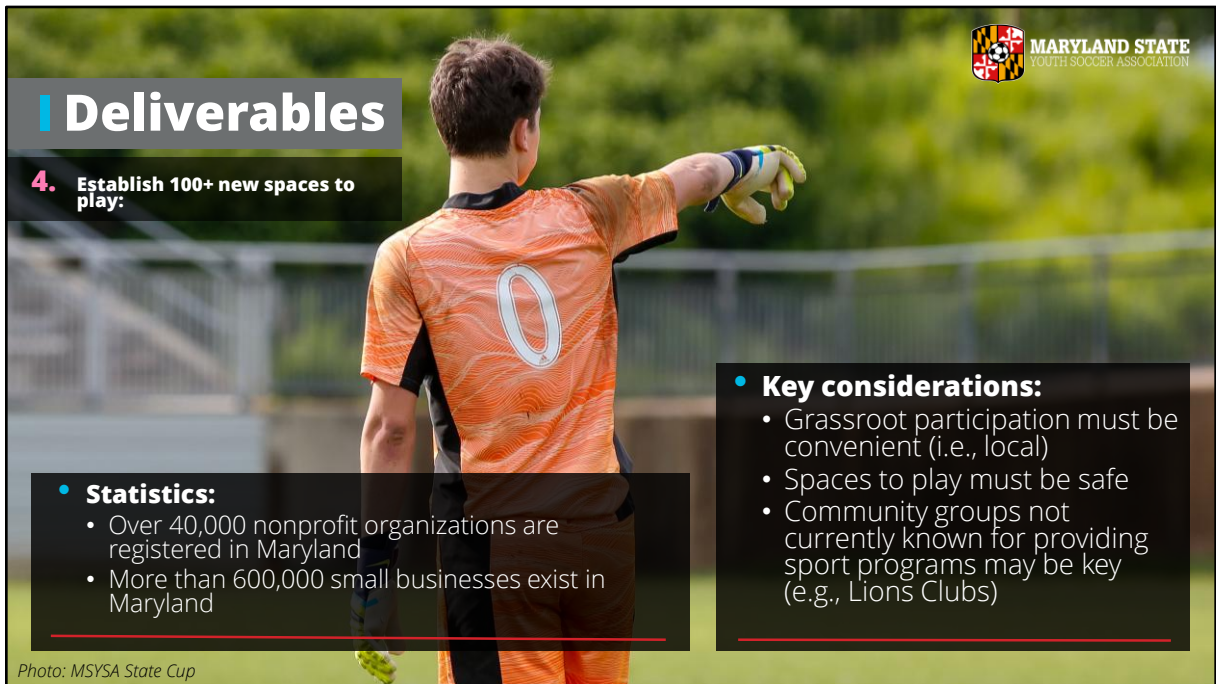
### 4. Establish 100+ new spaces to play:

- **Overview:**

- To grow the game, there must be spaces to play
- Work collaboratively to repurpose or newly create additional spaces
- Market that the spaces are available and encourage utilization

Photo: Spectators





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## Deliverables

**4. Establish 100+ new spaces to play:**

- **Statistics:**
  - Over 40,000 nonprofit organizations are registered in Maryland
  - More than 600,000 small businesses exist in Maryland
- **Key considerations:**
  - Grassroot participation must be convenient (i.e., local)
  - Spaces to play must be safe
  - Community groups not currently known for providing sport programs may be key (e.g., Lions Clubs)

*Photo: MSYSA State Cup*

Partnering with organizations that may not currently offer soccer programming (e.g., Lions Clubs) and who may have access to safe spaces to play (e.g., a relatively flat back yard) could greatly increase the overall opportunities to play while at the same time increasing the places to play.

## Deliverables

### 5. Invest \$100k in scholarships and grants annually:

#### Overview:

- Cost remains a barrier to participation
  - Helping to reduce this barrier will help to further grow the game
- Collaborate to make more funds available
- Educate participants and encourage them to apply for Scholarships and Grants

Photo: MSYSA Let's Play!



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## Deliverables

### 5. Invest \$100k in scholarships and grants annually:

- **Statistics:**

- 6.7M residents in MD (2.4M households) & DC (324k households)
- 39% of households in MD live below the ALICE threshold
- 33% of households in DC live below the ALICE threshold

- **Thoughts:**

- Underserved and under resourced communities exist
- Soccer improves lives
- Participation may improve local communities and society as a whole
- This is intertwined with our mission

*Photo: DC Soccer Club TOPSoccer program*

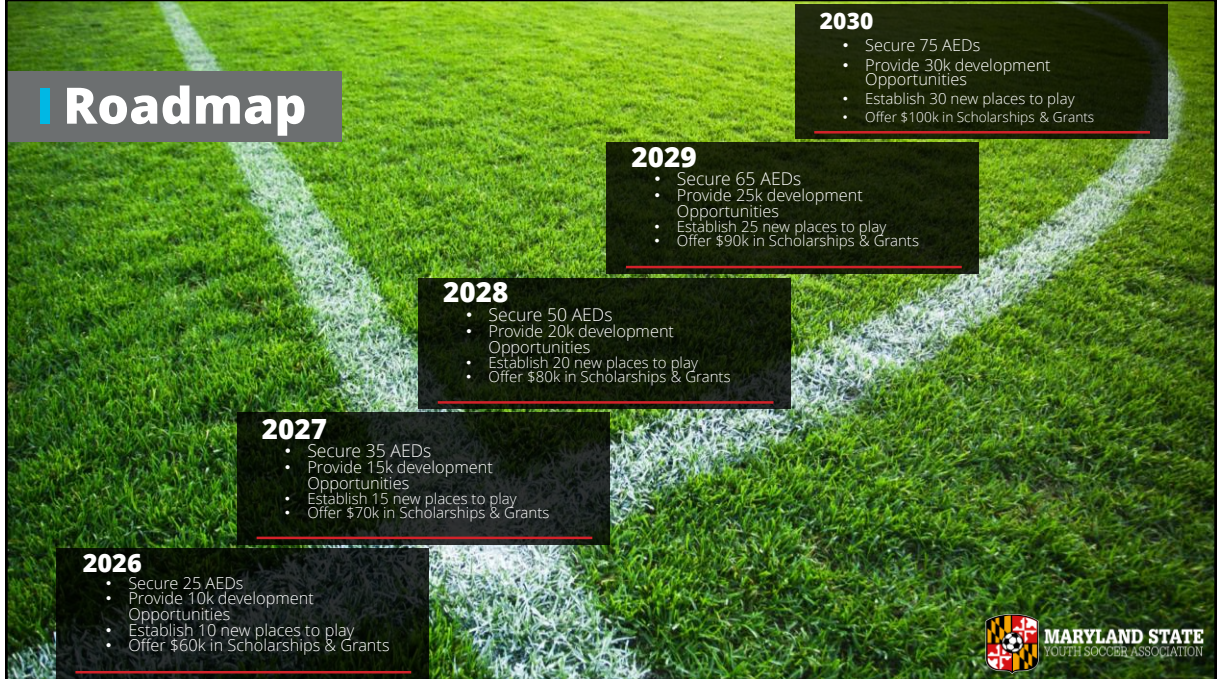
ALICE is an acronym for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed. ([unitedforalice.org](http://unitedforalice.org))

Based on the percentage of people within our jurisdiction who live below the ALICE threshold, there is tremendous need to invest at least \$100k each year by 2031.



Photo: MSYSA State Cup





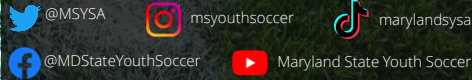
This roadmap provides the target goals for each year. While the various targets might not be reached precisely according to this path, every reasonable effort will be made to meet or beat these targets each year so that by 2031 we are in a much-improved place than where we are today. This roadmap provides the yearly benchmarks and serves as the metrics by which success will be measured.

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**MSYSA Strategic Plan**  
2026-2031

