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UNFUNDED LIST

HONOREE:

Leveling the Playing Field

Honoree Proposal Description:

Leveling the Playing Field donates gently used professional quality sports equipment to underfunded programs making sports programs possible in communities where they wouldn't be otherwise. In just 2 years they have donated over \$950,000 worth of sporting equipment to over 150 programs. Their success has been accelerated by the strong partnerships developed with equipment donors across the Mid-Atlantic.

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Organization Website:

<http://www.levelingtheplayingfield.org/>

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L P F | LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD

To whom this may concern,

I am writing on behalf Leveling the Playing Field, a DC-Based nonprofit organization working to improve the opportunity for low income families to get their kids involved in recreational activities in communities from Northern Virginia to Baltimore, MD. Our mission to bring sports to underserved kids is achieved through the donation of used and excess sporting equipment to programs and schools serving low income communities. Our donations allow programs to allocate funds saved by lowering registration fees, expanding their scholarship programs, enhancing their existing athletic program or developing new ones.

Last year, we received a \$5,000 grant from the Max & Victoria Dreyfus Foundation to help us move our operations into a 4,000 sq. ft. warehouse space. At the time that we wrote the grant, our organization had moved from our founder's basement into a donated vacant dance studio. The move occurred after experiencing rapid growth spurred by an 18 month grassroots effort to bring awareness to LPF's mission. We had begun receiving daily phone calls from organizations and families either looking to run collection drives for the organization or wanting to drop off used equipment at our "warehouse". At the same time, we had begun receiving increased demand from DC's Charter Schools and the numerous youth programs in the area that were offering affordable athletic opportunities. The word had gotten around about what we were doing and programs were consistently applying for donated sporting equipment.

When we approached the foundation last year, we did so knowing that LPF desperately needed to build its capacity to both meet the growing demand from equipment donors and potential beneficiaries. Since that commitment, we are thrilled to have moved our entire operation into a 4,000 sq. ft. warehouse space equipped with an office. This space has allowed us to not only greatly increase our ability to collect and distribute sporting equipment, but it has also allowed us to invest much more into our important volunteer program. In 2015 we were able to engage over 500 local volunteers who sorted equipment in the warehouse, ran equipment drives of their own in the community or helped us run one of our many collection drives in the community.

In addition, with the growth of our day to day operations, we were able to hire our first full-time employee to help ease the workload off of myself as the Executive Director. The result of this growth in organizational capacity was that in 2015 we collected \$525,260 of sporting equipment which allowed us to impact over 80,000 kids through the donation of \$458,028 worth of sporting equipment. These donations have allowed us to impact 64 different youth/after-school programs and 40 Title I and

Charter Schools between Northern Virginia and Baltimore, Maryland. It is because of the commitment to youth sports participation shown by the Dreyfus Foundation and our other funders that we have been able to take the next step as an organization.

Despite this tremendous growth in impact, we know that we have barely scratched the surface. That brings me to our 2016 goals and the purpose behind this letter of request. While the warehouse space and staff member have markedly increased our capacity as an organization, it has also increased once again the demand for LPF's resources. Specifically, we have seen a growing need for our resource within the State of Maryland's county school systems, DC's Charter Schools as well as the numerous out-of-school time activities being offered by youth programs across the whole DC/Baltimore area. How can we best meet this demand while continuing to grow as a business?

As a two-person organization we feel that the best way to continue expanding our impact geographically is by bringing on two additional staff members in 2016. Currently, while we operate to the best of our abilities, we are unable to run in an efficient matter because of a lack of staff. In order to best move forward we need to employ a more focused workplace. What I mean by that is as we stand today, the two of us are forced to juggle many roles and responsibilities from volunteer coordination, fundraising, resource management, client services and much more. This makes it difficult to not just continue meeting demand in an efficient manner, but equally as important it makes it difficult to find time to invest in community outreach so that we can continue growing demand for our resources.

With these growing pains in mind, our board has decided that 2016 should be based around accomplishing a strong organizational structure. Through meeting with Executive Directors from similar business model nonprofits such as Manna Food and A Wider Circle we have developed what we believe to be the correct structure for the organization. That structure means that this year we need to hire a Resource Director who will focus primarily on the supply side of our business. This individual will manage our equipment collectors and will pursue countless equipment drives with schools, youth sports leagues, local businesses and other individuals and entities looking to get involved.

Our other hire this year will be our Client Services Director who will focus primarily on the demand side of the business. This person will spend most of their time reviewing grant proposals and conducting site visits with organizations interested in donated sporting equipment. This individual will also spend a large percentage of their time conducting community outreach efforts to bring more awareness to our resource throughout Northern Virginia, DC and the State of Maryland. We believe that this investment will allow us to not just sustain the growth in demand for our services but also continue growing it to communities that at this point have never heard of Leveling the Playing Field.

For this proposal we are specifically seeking \$10,000 in funding to go towards bringing on our Client Services Director. In 2016 we want this employee to both increase our impact in Baltimore and Washington DC as well as bring awareness to schools and youth programs in counties across the State of Maryland that have never heard of Leveling the Playing Field. Specifically in Maryland, we are looking to invest more in Prince Georges County, Alleghany County, Garrett County and the numerous counties along the Eastern Shore and in Southern Maryland that struggle with high poverty rates.

Youth sports participation is so important to a child's development and unfortunately it is becoming increasingly hard for students growing up in poverty to get involved in athletics. In fact, low income youth are 3x less likely to participate in athletics. These kid's schools struggle to find the budget to offer quality and accessible sports options. Every Title I School that we meet with expresses a frustration about the lack of athletic opportunity they can provide either during PE or in after-school time. We have helped athletic directors on countless occasions offer a new sport or increase the quantity of kids they can get involved in a certain activity. For example, we recently helped KIPP Baltimore offer quality soccer programming to their kids after we donated \$8,000 worth of soccer gear to the school. We know that there are numerous schools in our community that have similar issues we can help them overcome.

By bringing on our Client Services Director we will be able to begin putting a dent in the fact that 1 in 5 underserved families do not get their kids involved in athletics because of the price of sporting equipment. It is simply too important to the child's development for us to turn the other way. Overcoming the equipment barrier is something every school has the ability to do with our help. Studies show that kids who participate in athletics are 60% less likely to drop out of school or resort to drugs and/or alcohol. These are issues that plague many of these low income communities between Northern VA and Baltimore. With the continued support from the Dreyfus Foundation we feel that in 2016 we can begin that geographic expansion so that every child in the DC/Baltimore area has the opportunity to get off the sidelines and into the game!

Thank you so much for your consideration.

Max Levitt



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