



Grand Prize Submission

Vancouver Female Ice Hockey Association



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Tell us about your hockey association.

Vancouver Female Ice Hockey Association (VFIHA) strives to provide the opportunity for female youth players to enjoy recreational and competitive levels of hockey in a fun, safe, and inclusive environment.

VFIHA was formed in 1972 as the Killarney Girls Ice Hockey Association to provide girls in hockey greater opportunities to play and has grown to encompass all of the City of Vancouver.

Through its free Come Try Hockey events, equipment loan & financial aid programs, and Indigenous outreach programs, VFIHA encourages participation in female hockey by removing barriers and finding ways to include players of all abilities and backgrounds.

The VFIHA has a set of core values that have been communicated to all members of the Association, and publicly, as a way of guiding all decisions and providing a general vibe/environment to operate in. They are:

- Respect
- Community
- Fun
- Inclusion
- Growth



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How would you describe your community?

The community VFIHA serves is nothing short of amazing. There is strong and growing support for female hockey in Vancouver, inspired in part by the legacy of hosting the 2010 Winter Olympics and the continued success of the Canadian Women's Hockey team. There's never been a better time for female hockey in Vancouver.

Some of the most meaningful stories come from VFIHA's Come Try Hockey events. These events invite the community to try hockey in a free, no pressure environment, often for their first time. This includes local Indigenous nations, as we connect with our local communities through our Indigenous focused Come Try Hockey events, which help to strengthen relationships and expand the sport.

Participants are fully equipped with gear and supported on the ice by Vancouver female players and coaches, creating a fun and encouraging introduction to the game. Many that register with us will return as volunteers, helping inspire the next generation of players.

These events show what's possible when a virtuous circle of community momentum takes shape, strong connections are built between the Association and the greater community, while volunteerism & mentorship are fostered. In fact, more than 85% of our players & parents contribute in some way. Younger participants get a chance to see role models they can relate to, which gives them something to aspire to. These events fill without formal advertising, relying mainly on word of mouth. Clear evidence of the community's demand.

What role does hockey play in your community?

Vancouver Female Ice hockey provides opportunities for a historically under-represented group, girls aged 5-20 years old, to play a sport they or their parents may not have otherwise considered. It provides opportunities for volunteers on & off the ice, enabling mentorship between experienced and new players, and community engagement through providing ways to try hockey in a welcoming environment.

Having the chance to play a team sport that has a rich history in Canada helps build lifelong friendships and connections from a young age. While also developing character and building confidence. It is the Association's hope that players continue to play hockey well into adulthood, and to come back and mentor the next generation of hockey players through volunteering with younger teams as on-ice helpers or coaches.

We've spoken to parents who immigrated to Canada and wanted to give their children the 'Canadian experience', so they signed up for hockey. These parents did not grow up with hockey themselves, but they've given their children the chance to experience it. This is something we hear often and see as a meaningful reflection of hockey's role in our community.



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What challenges exist in your community that keep kids from playing hockey?

Access to local facilities remains the number one issue female hockey faces today. With the success of the Canadian Women's National Team, and the introduction of a local Professional Women's Hockey League team, Female hockey has never been more popular and culturally relevant. However, as a historically underrepresented group, female hockey does not receive nearly as much ice time or attention as boys' hockey.

Local awareness remains a key challenge, as many parents did not grow up with hockey as an option for girls. Hockey has been traditionally viewed as a 'boys sport'.

Player participation from under-served communities, such as local Indigenous nations, and other minority groups remains lower than other communities within the Association's boundaries.

Cost is also a persistent issue, as registration fees and equipment costs remain higher than other youth sport options. Fees, equipment, and ice rentals continue to rise in recent years, as inflation affects all sport-related activities.

An interesting challenge that came out of Association surveys of new-to-hockey parents is simply navigating hockey equipment in general. What they need, how should it fit, and how to properly size it, was one of the top reported challenges by new-to-hockey parents.

Finally, time commitment can be a challenge for some families. Hockey schedules can be demanding with busy family schedules, with away games taking place across Metro Vancouver including Whistler, the Sunshine Coast, and even Western Washington.



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What is your hockey association currently doing to overcome these challenges?

The Association works continuously to address the challenges of limited ice availability and rising costs. To meet growing demand, we secure as much ice time as possible both within and outside our municipality. Despite these efforts, demand still significantly exceeds supply. To bridge the gap, we purchase private and external ice, even though it comes at a much higher cost, it's an essential step to meet our programming needs.

We focus on growing hockey through our popular “Come Try Hockey” events. These free sessions provide a welcoming, pressure-free environment for new participants. Each event typically attracts over 90 new skaters, giving families an opportunity to see their daughters take to the ice with big smiles and growing confidence.

To reduce financial barriers, the Association offers two assistance programs:

- The Cheryl Clark Access Fund
- The Ola “Izzy” Bailey Access Fund

These programs, funded through donations and member support, can cover up to 100% of costs for families in need. Applications are simple and confidential. In addition, we provide a hockey equipment loan program, allowing players to access a full set of gear for the season. We also offer reduced registration fees for U7 and U9 age groups to keep costs comparable to other local sports.

Our commitment to inclusion is reflected in initiatives such as the Annual Female Indigenous Jamboree, which brings together Indigenous players from across British Columbia for games, cultural workshops, and community-building activities. We also host Indigenous focused “Come Try Hockey” events in partnership with local Nations. Our Indigenous crest, designed by Musqueam artist Debra Sparrow, is proudly worn throughout the season.

Our Spring 4x4 League offers a recreational, low-commitment option from April to June. This program emphasizes fun and sportsmanship, attracting players from across BC and Washington State.

Ultimately our Association operates with a mindset of finding solutions, we want reasons to say yes! Our focus is on removing barriers, creating opportunities, expanding access and making hockey more accessible to as many players as possible. We live this value in all our decision making.



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Please share the association's vision for using the \$75,000 Grand Prize to encourage more kids to play hockey by developing solutions that look to remove barriers in the game of hockey and make the game more accessible, inclusive and equitable for everyone?

With the Kruger Big Assist donation, the association will look to expand ways to reduce barriers to participation in female hockey, including:

- Partner with a local hockey shop to offer free equipment for younger players who register, reducing the equipment barrier
- Expand current financial assistance programs - providing a pathway for more families to play hockey
- Outreach to the Vancouver High School Female Hockey League - offer reduced registration & equipment for players who are interested in joining
- Outreach to local minority groups & Indigenous nations to provide low commitment options to try hockey in safe, supported, and inclusive environment
- Purchase equipment to expand our equipment loan program, and for use at Come Try Hockey events

The association would love to think big with some other ideas as well, including:

- Fund a new arena in Vancouver to help address the rink access issue (boys hockey with more ice time than girls hockey). This is a much larger project than any other item listed, and would require much more time/effort involved. The result would be incredible.
- Start an off-ice Spring/Summer ball/gym program, to encourage new players to try hockey without full equipment and skating requirements
- Creation of an intramural development league with a set schedule, lower registration fees & commitment, and focusing on participation & fun
- Expand our Spring 4x4 League - This is a relaxed, low commitment recreational league focused on friends & fun
- Purchase more ice around Metro Vancouver to help meet the demand for girls hockey

Note: there are more proposed programs listed than funds allocated. These are all available options and thoughts, with the final list to be determined if the Association wins the Grand Prize. We wanted to present all options to describe what's possible - we like to think big!

Also, any organization or management costs to administer these programs is effectively \$0, and would be covered by volunteers.



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Budget Summary and program launch timeline

	Month 0-3	Month 3-12	Month 13 - 18	Total
Partner with local hockey shop				
Free equipment sets available with registration	15,000			15,000
New Player Equipment Loans				
Purchase equipment, available with registration	10,000			10,000
Expand Financial Assistance Programs				
Fund Access Programs to accept more players	10,000			10,000
Outreach - Indigenous & Minority Groups				
Extend offer of low/no cost registration, fund Indigenous Jamboree		20,000		20,000
Outreach - High School Program				
Extend offer of low/no cost registration		20,000		20,000
Total				75,000



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Budget Summary and program launch timeline

	Immediate (Month 1-3)	Month 3-12	Month 13 - 18	Total
Other Possible Big Ideas				
Create Intramural Development League				
Purchase ice, create schedule, accept players			50,000	50,000
Purchase Ice to Meet Girls Hockey Demand				
Purchase ice, accept more players		50,000		50,000
Create Off-Ice Ball/Gym Program				
Purchase facility space, organize league, accept players			30,000	30,000
Expand Spring 4x4 League				
Purchase facility space, accept players		25,000		25,000
Build New Garage-Style Rink				
Organize & Run Fundraising Campaign				
Apply Funds Raised to Build Project			75,000	75,000



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