A Giant Look Back: Detailing the Success of the Last Nine Years for a Large-Scale Applied Research Partnership

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During the most successful ten-year period in the history of the San Francisco Giants, a period that saw the organization’s baseball team win three World Series titles on the field, equivalent success was being experienced off the field by the Giants Community Fund. In an era in which community and sports-based youth development has flourished, the Giants Community Fund has set the standard in earning Major League Baseball's Commissioner's Award for Philanthropic Excellence in 2015, ESPN's Sports Humanitarian Team of the Year in 2016, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Sports Award in 2017.

Junior Giants, the flagship program of the Giants Community Fund that was founded in 1991, is an eight-week summer program that brings free non-competitive summer baseball and softball to nearly 24,000 youth who may not be able to afford to play in traditional leagues. The holistic positive youth development-centered curriculum employed by the Junior Giants utilizes baseball as a medium to promote character development, education through summer reading and STEM engagement, health/nutrition, and bullying prevention.

In 2011, the leadership of the Giants Community Fund with support from the Board of Directors commenced a partnership with Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo and co-created a program evaluation research study that has grown into a large-scale annual project promoting quality control for the 80-85 leagues engaged in the program throughout the Giants footprint. The study includes mixed-methods triangulation through an innovative approach that now annually employs 80-100 Ambassadors who assist in data collection efforts and provide critical support to league organizers.

For the entirety of the 9-year time period of the partnership (with the third of three phases completed in 2019), approximately 85,000 surveys have been collected from parents/guardians and coaches/team parents while another 25,000 structured interviews have been conducted with youth participants over age 8. For the 6-year period (2014-2019) marked by an expansion of the project to include data collection from all leagues, annual averages for surveys and interviews have been as follows: 10,760 parent/guardian surveys, 3,056 coach/team parent surveys, and 4,055 participants interviews. In addition, the last three years have also involved 4-5 case studies being developed annually as a means to enhance best practices among the leagues.

The presentation will involve insight into the co-creation, management, and methodology of this large-scale applied research study. Study highlights and details will include: the evolution of the Junior Giants Ambassador program, management of big data, employment of technology to engage on a large scale, the role of undergraduate research assistants, league ratings and process for development of 80-85 annual league reports, and a look at the future of the study. Participants will be empowered to develop their own sports-based youth development partnerships and leverage technology as a means for promoting research-based solutions to quality control in a large-scale study.