**MAXIMUS INSPIRED GRANT PROPOSAL RESOURCE**

**Created for World Wheelchair Rugby Members use to access funding to support the delivery of a Maximus Inspired Project to increase and support the development of wheelchair rugby**

**Background and General Description of Project**

*Describe the background and rationale of the project.*

**Maximus Project:**

The Maximus Project was an initiative created in 2011 that aimed to develop a wheelchair rugby network for people with disabilities in South America. The project spanned over three years and focused on developing a wheelchair rugby network amongst nine countries in South America, utilizing established wheelchair rugby programs as mentors for the developing countries to establish and/or grow their own wheelchair rugby program. Funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), participating countries were provided financial support to cover the costs of wheelchair rugby chairs, training clinics, competitions, and transportation. This project was extremely successful, not only introducing a large number of individuals with a disability to the sport of wheelchair rugby in South America, but creating sustainable rugby programs in each of the countries and increasing the overall number of South American countries who were participating in wheelchair rugby at an international level.

The impact of the Maximus Project has been significant. Dedicated staff allowed the program to flourish. In 2011 there were three countries playing wheelchair rugby today there are eight countries actively delivering the sport. Several other South American countries are in the development stage of the sport. Other benefits include:

* Investment in leadership education for administrators, officials, classifiers and volunteers
* Inclusion in the Parapan American Games
* Increased national, regional and international tournaments
* Access to sport wheelchairs
* Club development
* Selection of Officials and Classifiers to international tournaments
* And for the first time the 2026 World Wheelchair Rugby Championship will be held in Brazil.

**Wheelchair Rugby Overview:**

Wheelchair rugby was originally created in Canada in the 1970s by a group of athletes with quadriplegia who were looking for an alternative team sport to wheelchair basketball that would be tailored more to their physical functionality; allowing players with reduced arm and hand function to be able to successfully participate. The sport has since grown to be a recognized Paralympic Sport with more than 40 countries actively participating in wheelchair rugby. Combining game elements from basketball, rugby, and handball, this full contact sport is designed for participants who have an impairment that affects both their arms and legs. Typically, eligible athletes will have a spinal cord trauma, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, amputations, polio, or other neurological conditions with full or partial paralysis of the legs and partial paralysis of one or more of the arms/hands. However, grassroots level programming will typically include participants with a wide range of disabilities, as well as able-bodied friends and peers, to support the development of the sport within that region. Athletes are assigned a sport classification based on their level of impairment; teams must field athletes that have a mix of classification values, allowing players with different functional abilities to compete together.

Wheelchair rugby is one of few team sports that is co-ed; both male and female players practice and compete within the same team. Athletes compete in teams of four players with the goal of carrying the ball across the opposing team’s try line to score a point. Athletes compete using a manual wheelchair that is specifically designed for the sport – contact is permitted between wheelchairs and athletes will use their chairs to block and hold opponents. There are two types of wheelchair rugby chairs – offensive and defensive – and each are designed to withstand the continuous contact that occurs throughout a wheelchair rugby game.



Offensive Rugby Chair Defensive Rugby Chair

The rules of wheelchair rugby include detailed specifications on the equipment to ensure fairness amongst competitors, but also for safety reasons. While any manual wheelchair may be used to initially play the sport, wheelchair rugby chairs are necessary for participants to fully experience the sport in a fun and safe environment.

***Name of Proposed Project*:**

Within the *insert name of zone/*region, a similar environment exists where there are several countries with well-established wheelchair rugby programs and several developing countries who are looking to create a local wheelchair rugby program. With the support of the *insert funding name, insert organization name* would like to mirror the successful program structure of the Maximus project in the *insert name of zone/region****.*** Funding requested would be utilized towards the same expenses as the Maximus project – the purchase of wheelchair rugby chairs; transportation, lodging, and meals costs for mentors and coaches to deliver training with the developing countries; transportation, accommodation, and meal costs associated with rugby teams attending the competition circuit; and telecommunication related purchases for the developing countries.

**Needs Analysis**

*Define the need being addressed and the benefit(s) to the target audience, noting known gaps in service.*

**Health Inequity for Individuals with a Disability:**

It has been estimated that approximately 1.5 billion people worldwide live with a disability, 80% of which are in low-income and middle-income countries 4. Individuals with a physical disability experience a poorer health outcome compared to their non-disability peers, which includes increased likelihood for cardiovascular disease, obesity, anxiety, depression, and social isolation 9. The psychosocial challenges associated with a physical disability have been argued to be accentuated in developing nations, most likely due to individuals with a disability experiencing lower rates of education and employment, higher medical expenses, malnourishment, disease and poor living, as well as cultural difficulties related to negative attitudes, social stigma, and prejudice towards individuals with a disability 5. However, there is a substantial amount of research linking participation in wheelchair sports to improved physical health, increased socialization and peer connectivity, improved cognitive abilities, decreased mental health issues, and reduced number and severity of hospitalization stays post injury 3-4,7,10. Specifically, when looking at developing countries, participation in wheelchair sport has also been shown to help challenge negative cultural perceptions of disability, enhancing social integration, empowerment and self-esteem as a result 5. All of these factors contribute to improved health and overall quality of life for individuals with a disability, making it critical to prioritize offering adaptive sport programming for this population that experiences such vast health inequities.

**Lack of Program Components in Developing Countries**

There is a widening gap in representation between developed and developing countries when it comes to sport participation. This gap can be linked to a shortage of physical education and sport for all programmes; a lack of financing for sport; limited sport facilities, knowledgeable coaches and equipment; a ‘muscle drain’ to developed countries; and no capacity to host sporting events 2,8. In order to increase sport participation in wheelchair rugby in developing countries in the *insert zone/region*, there needs to be a multi-pronged approach like the *insert project name* that takes into consideration these challenges and addresses them simultaneously. This project addresses some of the key barriers outlined above, with a focus on developing core components (coaches, equipment, and practice/competitive opportunities) that will create a pathway for individuals with a disability to experience the sport and lead to sustainable programs.

**Access to Equipment:**

A large barrier to developing a wheelchair rugby program is the cost of the specialized wheelchair rugby equipment needed to participate in the sport. Currently the cost of a wheelchair rugby chair ranges from $2000 – $9000 USD plus shipping per chair; depending on which level of durability is needed for the type of programming being delivered. The importance of access to proper equipment for individuals with a disability has been researched, with results indicating that having the right equipment is likely to optimize participants’ experiences of challenge and mastery while participating in sport 1. Research has also found that increased participation will occur not only from being able to access equipment itself, but removing concerns related to safety by utilizing the appropriate equipment for the sport 6. Given wheelchair rugby is a full contact sport and one of the objectives of this project is to increase competitive opportunities through regional and zonal tournaments, it is critical to purchase wheelchair rugby chairs for the safety and positive experience of the athletes. The influx of equipment that will occur through this project will ensure that on-going participation in wheelchair rugby is possible well beyond the timeframe of this granting program.

**Project Activities & Goals**

*Describe in detail the goal(s) and activity(s) for the proposed work; include timeframes of when the activities will be delivered when applicable.*

The *insert project name* is a multi-year, multi-pronged approach to developing robust wheelchair rugby programs in *insert number* countries within the *insert name of region*. The key components of the project can be broken down into four main categories:

**Equipment:**

The goal of this component is to secure the necessary equipment needed for the developing countries to initiate a wheelchair rugby program. This will include purchasing *insert number* rugby chairs per developing country, as well as a starter program kit which includes wheelchair rugby balls, cones, gloves, tape, tubes, tires, and a pump. All equipment will be purchased immediately and will be utilized throughout the duration of the project and beyond.

**Program Delivery & Mentorship:**

The goal of this component is to provide sport-specific knowledge and guidance to the developing countries by leveraging the expertise of established wheelchair rugby programs in neighbouring countries. The continent will be broken into several zones, with one “mentor” country assigned to each region. The mentor countries will each identify a lead consultant and technical coach who will be responsible for supporting the local administrative staff and coaches in implementing their wheelchair rugby programming within their zone. The lead consultant will visit each country once a year to provide guidance to the local administrative staff on the implementation of their programming and to assist in the on-going evaluation of the project. This approach will allow for on-going advice for the developing country on how to continue successfully evolving their wheelchair rugby programming based on their current program strengths and gaps.

At the beginning of the project, the mentor technical coach will visit each of the developing countries in their region to train a group of local coaches and provide them with the basic coaching skills needed to support the athletes. Each year the developing coaches will also have access to support from the mentor coaches in developing a block of training plans that aligns with the skill level and progressions of the athletes in their program. This approach will allow the local coaches to be trained in the core skills of wheelchair rugby, while still having a sounding board with the mentor coaches to provide them with guidance on how to adapt their training programs to meet the evolving skill level of their players as they continue progressing through the project. Connections amongst the other roles within the wheelchair rugby system (referees, classifiers, equipment managers, etc.) between the mentor and developing countries will also be facilitated, strengthening the overall mentorship and growth of this network.

In addition to this localized network that will be developed through this project, an international network of wheelchair rugby volunteers will be recruited to act as remote ambassadors for the *insert project name*. This pool of ambassadors will have experience in wheelchair rugby as either a player or a coach and will be accessible via telecommunications for the developing coaches to reach out to for coaching support throughout the project. This allows for a broader range of knowledge and experiences that can be tapped into by the developing countries to continue to grow their program. These remote ambassadors will be recruited at the beginning of the project and will be utilized as many times as needed by the developing countries throughout the duration of the project.

**Competition:**

Competition is a critical component of this project as it allows the developing teams to test the wheelchair rugby skills they are learning within a competitive setting against other players at a similar experience level. In year one and two of the project, competitions will include a zonal championship where countries within the same region will compete against each other. Year two and three will include a larger championship where all countries involved in the *name of project* will compete against each other. This staggered competition structure allows the athletes and coaches to be introduced to a level of competition that is appropriate for their experience level and take key learnings back to their training environment to improve upon for the next year’s competition. The larger scale competition at the end of the season amongst all countries allows for the mentor countries to support the developing countries bench-side, providing them with guidance and real-time support in upscaling their experience around match play in a tournament setting.

**Technology Support:**

The goal of this component is to ensure that the entire wheelchair rugby network involved in this project has the basic telecommunication technology needed in order to communicate with each other and support the evaluation of the project. Each developing country will receive a basic computer at the beginning of the project to allow for ease of communication between mentor countries/coaches and to be able to access a communal platform where each member will be able to share successes and challenges and receive feedback from other members of the project.

**Outcomes and Success Measurements**

*What is the expected final result and significance of this project. Describe the outcomes of the overall project and how they will be evaluated. Include the evaluation methods, timelines and indicators (quantitative and qualitative) that will be used to monitor the success of the project.*

This project aims to promote social inclusion, empowerment, and improved quality of life for individuals with a disability in the *insert region* through the implementation of the *insert project name*. It is expected that a robust, sustainable network of wheelchair rugby programs will be created, supporting new and current participants in experiencing the physical, social, and mental benefits of sport participation. Specific outcomes will include:

* **Short Term Outcomes**
  + Increase the number of wheelchair rugby chairs to be utilized by developing countries (target of *insert number and name of rugby chairs*)
  + Increase the number of countries in the *insert region* providing wheelchair rugby programming from *insert number* to *insert number*
  + Increase the number of individuals with a disability participating in wheelchair rugby programming (target of *insert number* per country)
  + Increase the number of knowledgeable coaches in wheelchair rugby in the *insert region* (target of *insert number* per country)
  + Increase the number of competitive opportunities in wheelchair rugby in the *insert region* (target of at least 1 opportunity per year)
  + Create a network of wheelchair rugby administrative staff and coaches within the *insert region* that can provide mentorship to each other while sharing best practices and resources to support each other’s program growth
* **Long Term Outcomes**
  + Improve the quality of life for participants with a physical disability through the physical, mental, and social benefits from participating in wheelchair rugby
  + Create a robust, sustainable wheelchair rugby program in each developing country that includes quality coaching and a competitive pathway for current and new participants with a disability
  + Create a robust wheelchair rugby network that continues to cross share resources and information, supporting on-going growth of wheelchair rugby programs and opportunities within the region.
  + Increase the representation of developing countries at major international championships in wheelchair rugby

Evaluation of the project’s success will be measured using both quantitative and qualitative metrics against the outcomes listed above. These metrics will be measured annually, with a larger evaluation of the overall project occurring at the end of the project utilizing a survey with all participants involved. Data will be segregated based on the respondent’s role in the project. Specific indicators that will be tracked include:

* number of participants with a disability participating in each developing countries’ program
* number of coaches from each developing country regularly coaching participants
* number of competitions held each year, including the number of teams in attendance
* feedback from athletes with a disability on the benefits to sport participation experienced and overall impact of being involved in the project; this will be gathered in the form of testimonials and surveys
* feedback from coaches on their perceived improvement in coaching skills and overall impact of being involved in the project; this will be gathered in the form of testimonials and surveys
* feedback from lead consultants on the impact of the program for the mentor country and developing countries; this will be gathered in the form of testimonials and surveys

**Risk Management**

*Indicate any anticipated barriers to implementing your project and how they will be addressed.*

There are several challenges that could arise throughout the implementation of this project. Human resource change over (either from the mentor country and developing country) could occur, putting a strain on the ability to progress the project as planned. Multiple coaches in each of the developing countries will be trained, ensuring there is a network of local coaches to pull upon in being able to support the weekly programs. All mentor and developing countries will be required to identify at least one back up administrative staff and mentor coach to support the project, with funding payments being withheld if there is a gap in human resources delivering the project.

Another potential challenge is lower participation rates of individuals with a disability than anticipated. Countries that have been selected have already expressed their intent to be involved in the project and have identified an initial group of athletes that will be supported. On-going recruitment of new participants will occur each year, ensuring that the full number of anticipated participants is reached. Additionally, accessing facilities, transportation, and accommodations to support the competition circuit proposed may be challenging. A group of facilities within each region has been identified as potential host facilities, as well as possible transportation and accommodation options for each area. The funding secured for these costs through this application will enable the project leads to secure these amenities now, with ample notice provided to teams to ensure the competitions can run as scheduled.

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