

CASE STUDY – STRATEGIC & EXCEPTIONAL GROWTH

GIRLS ON THE RUN MINNESOTA

OVERVIEW

Girls on the Run is focused on transforming the lives of girls across the country. Since our inception, we are proud to have served 2.25 million girls and are committed to providing programming to participants from all communities and backgrounds across the United States and Canada. The overall council network has focused on building back to pre-pandemic numbers and by the end of FY23, 33% (or 53 councils) exceeded their girl-served numbers compared to 2019.

One of our organization's marathon goals is for our council network to be strong and positioned for growth. This case study showcases Girls on the Run Minnesota's tactics and considerations in executing their council's **intentional and successful growth strategy** since their council's inception to the current day.

COUNCIL QUICK FACTS – GOTR MINNESOTA

GOTR Twin Cities (2012)	GOTR Minnesota (Today)
Spring 2012 - first season serving the metropolitan Twin Cities area	Tier 5 and 12 years old
24 girls served in their first season	28,500+ girls served since inception
Hired two full-time staff between 2013-2014	Eight paid staff in collaboration with governing board & associate board
Spring 2016 - reached 1,000 girls seasonally	Served 4,600+ girls in CY23
2018 - expanded to serve the Rochester area	2021 - expanded to serve the entire state of Minnesota
50% scholarship rate	56.7% scholarship rate (FY23)
2014 Staff Model (2 FTE): Executive Director (FT) & Program Director (FT)	2023 Staff Model (8.5 FTE): Executive Director (FT), Program Director (FT), Operations Director (PT), Development Director (FT), 3 Regional Program Coordinators (3 FT), 1 Operations Manager (FT) & Development Coordinator (FT)

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OPPORTUNITY

Since GOTR Minnesota's first season in Spring 2012, their council's culture and mindset has been to build a sustainable, inclusive infrastructure that will allow as many girls and communities to participate as possible. Now as a tier 5 council with over 199,000 girls aged 8-13 in their community, they are experiencing **high interest in programming**, and the council board and staff wanted to meet that demand. From the start, the council was focused on building the **infrastructure** needed to grow into a strong council with solid, quality programs.

Their ideal future for their council was to be *a healthy and thriving organization that is recognized as a leader in how all girls, regardless of background, can build their ability to lead with an open heart, supported by caring coaches and engaged community partners.*

COURSE OF ACTION

#1 Build the Infrastructure:

To build the **infrastructure**, their board decided to invest in hiring full-time staff immediately. In 2013, their first paid staff member (Executive Director) was hired, and then in 2014, the second paid staff member was hired (Program Director). There was a shared responsibility from the start to grow the council in a way that was smart, efficient, and sustainable.

By investing in full-time paid staff members immediately, they were able to intentionally strengthen their operations and continue to grow. Similarly, they were focused on dreaming big and casting the vision early. They would ask questions, such as:

- “Is what we are doing now with 20 sites something that will work when we have 200 sites?”
- Is how we recruit and train 100 coaches something that will work when we have 1,000 coaches?”
- We have 500 people at our 5K now, but soon we will have 5,000 – how can we lay the foundation for that now?”

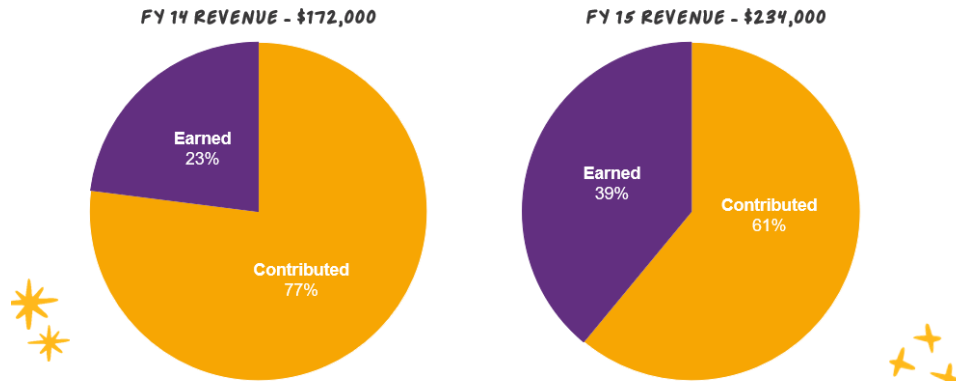
#1a Support the Infrastructure:

As you can see from the pie charts below, to support the investment of staff the council needed to increase council revenue, with a focus on **diversified revenue streams** and a balance of earned/contributed income.

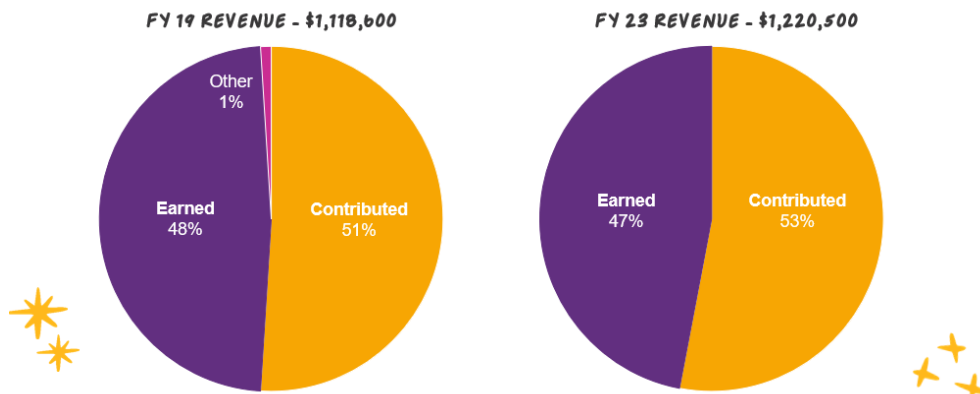
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FY14 & FY15 Revenue Ratio – Increased Revenue Due to Adding Staff



FY19 & FY23 Revenue Ratio



#2 Strategy:

Strategic growth was an early focus. They used **strategic planning** to create sustainable operations and practices, knowing that the council would outlast all current staff and board members.

To achieve this, the staff and board focused on:

- Accessibility (including generous, confidential, and automatic financial aid)
- Building a site recruitment and retention strategy
- Leveraging connections & building authentic partnerships
- Identifying "danger zones" or vulnerabilities that might grow as they scaled

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- Learning about staff capacity and people power needed for growth
- Creating efficiencies (i.e.: site onboarding, communication tactics, etc.)

#3 Tactics:

1. **Building on Past Success:** Early on, the council was very focused on staff capacity, meaning how many sites/coaches/participants one staff member can serve effectively based on their time, resources, and job responsibilities. For the executive director to focus their time and energy on strategy, board development, and key fundraising partnerships, they decided that the program director would oversee all programming, including program coordinators who worked directly with sites/coaches/participants. This helped prevent a bottleneck at the executive director level while ensuring high-quality program implementation remained a top priority.
2. **Data-driven Decisions:** The US Census Data was the most popular report utilized early on in GOTR Minnesota's history. They were able to understand their council's population, determine areas of the community to focus on, and utilize this information to make intentional and thoughtful decisions about site, coach, and participant recruitment.

Other Resources Utilized:

- Adult and girl diversity data
- Socioeconomic status data
- Public and private school lists
- Territory landscape
- Funders in community

Data Points Reviewed Frequently:

- Girls served growth year over year
 - Saturation and opportunities in unserved areas or low-served areas
 - Site and coach retention
 - Staff capacity/ratio for success
 - Demographics
 - Scholarship rates
 - Revenue – contributed & earned
3. **Simple Strategies to Implement:** The council was focused on the “work smarter, not harder” mentality and always looked at ways to increase efficiency. Some ideas to recruit sites and coaches include:
 - Prospective ‘Site Info Nights’
 - ‘Coach Recruitment Toolkits’ to share with sites and partners
 - ‘Season Kickoff Open House’ (site liaisons pick up recruitment materials, get questions answered, etc.)
 - Building authentic relationships, focused on collaboration and partnership instead of a one-sided request (i.e.: “Together, we can do this...”)
 - And more!

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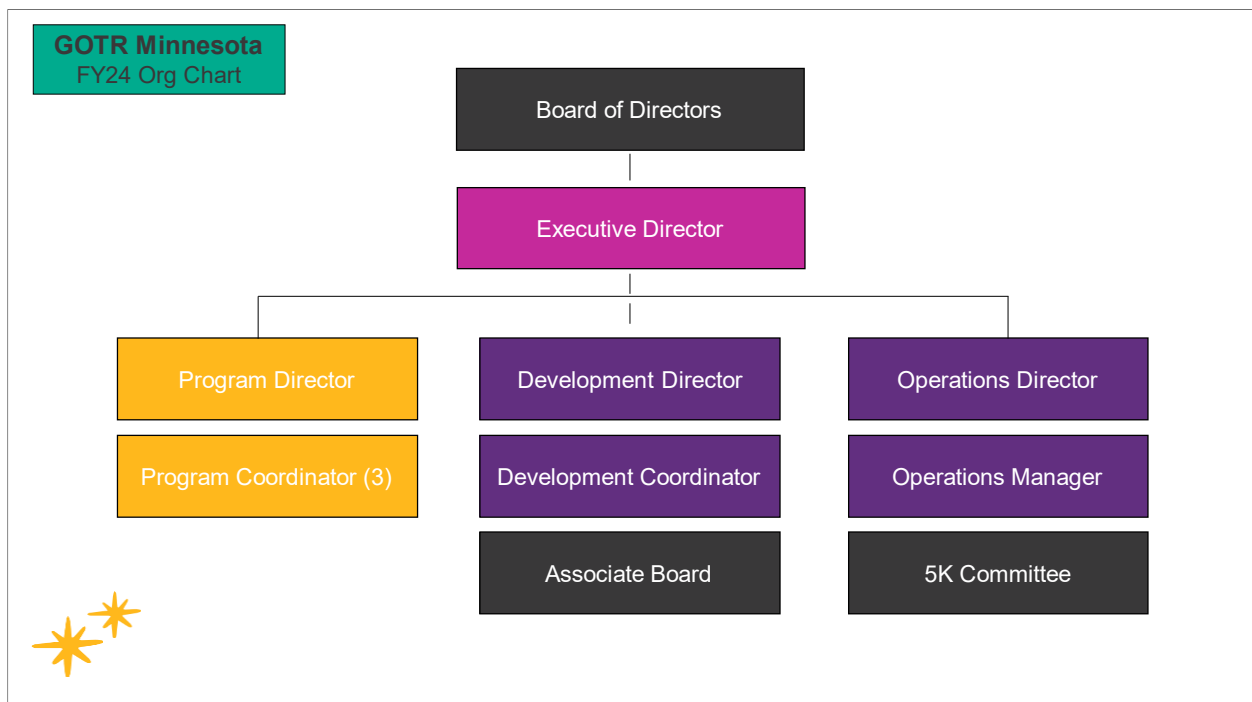
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4. Growth Considerations:

- How are we going to scale this?
- What sites/coaches/families do we want more or less of?
- Do our volunteers and participants reflect the diversity of our broader community? If yes, how can we maintain that? If not, what needs to change for us to better reflect our vibrant community?
- What is this volunteer (or site) doing well?
 - How can we replicate that?
- Where are we vulnerable right now?
 - What tactics do we need to implement to mitigate this?
- How can we streamline this task or project?
- Does something need to be course-corrected now, before it gets significantly worse?
- Are we using our time and resources to the best of our ability?
- Does this align with our strategic plan?

5. **Evaluation of Progress:** Annually, the council tracked progress made with girls served, coaches trained and retained, and revenue raised.

6. **Adapt New Staff Models:** The council created a regional program staff model to strategically serve more youth throughout Minnesota and to keep staff capacity at the top of their mind. For example, one program coordinator covers all the sites in the North Metro, and another program coordinator covers all the sites in Southern Minnesota, etc. All program staff report directly to the program director, and each program coordinator directly supports 30 – 60 sites each season. Here is a recent organization chart:



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OUTCOMES

There were two intentional pathways to the council's significant growth: Early investment in full-time staff and strategic planning.

1. **Girls served doubled year over year** with the investment of a program director in the early days of the council.
2. **More staff** leads to strategic growth. Two full-time staff in 2015 led to 2,000+ girls served in CY 2016. Eight staff led to 4,600+ girls served in CY 2023.
3. **94% build back** – 4,632 girls in CY 2023 compared to 4,934 total girls in CY 2019
 - a. **98% build back** – 3,061 in spring 2023 to 3,120 in spring 2019
 - b. **75% build back** – 1,361 in fall 2023 to 1,814 in fall 2019

Investment in full-time staff = girl growth increased each year

CY 2014	CY 2015	CY 2016	CY 2017
415 girls served	1,022 girls served	2,138 girls served	3,518 girls served
1 FTE	2 FTE	3 FTE	5 FTE

Strong build back to 2019 with key staff:

CY 2019	CY 2021	CY 2022	CY 2023
4,934 girls served	2,231 girls served	4,341 girls served	4,632 girls served
7.5 FTE	4.5 FTE	7 FTE	7 FTE

CHALLENGES

- With the increased number of sites/participants, more challenges can arise.
 - Be sure to have contingency plans.
- Turnover is going to happen.
 - This includes staff, volunteers, sites, etc. Plan for the inevitable by investing in systems, calendars, manuals, shared knowledge management, and more. Having excellent evergreen templates has been a lifesaver.
- Keep scaling logistics in mind.
 - With an increase in numbers, what does this mean for supplies, storage, distribution, the GOTR 5K, etc.?

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- Operationalize everything when possible!
 - Keep steady program registration opening dates (i.e. February 1 for spring and August 1 for fall), steady coach appreciation parties (i.e. always the Thursday after the 5K), send a weekly Friday email to all coaches, etc.
 - Building a sustainable seasonal communication plan (i.e. week 5 is mid-season survey distribution, week 7 is when the invite to the coach appreciation party goes out, etc.) helps new program staff and coaches to know what to expect each week and allows for new program staff to step into leadership without needing to start from scratch.

SUCCESSES & BEST PRACTICES

- Be realistic about what your council will and will not do and be careful not to overpromise.
- Even with increased numbers, keep volunteer/site retention top of mind. Keep that person-to-person relationship, make people feel special, etc.
 - This is where the magic happens! GOTR Minnesota found a successful ratio for them - one full-time program coordinator can support up to 1,000 girls and about 300 coaches. The council works to make sure each coach is known personally by at least one staff member and to sprinkle in more fun as they grow (i.e., coach awards, site visits, other touchpoints that become more important over time, etc.).
- Create an invested and engaged team of staff and board members.
- Utilize volunteers in various ways (i.e. help with site visits, program materials delivery, training small groups, etc.)
- Leverage your networks with a call to action based on program implementation needs, creating actionable next steps – “We are a moving sidewalk, jump in!” For example:
 - December/January: site and coach recruitment
 - February/March: participant recruitment is in full swing and coach training ongoing
 - April: program implementation and site visits
 - May: fall site recruitment and Camp preparation
 - June: 5K + coach appreciation
 - July: Camp GOTR, and fall preparation
 - August: fall registration opens
 - September/October: program implementation and site visits
 - November: 5K and coach appreciation
- Make a list of your 10 biggest headaches NOW & make strategies for each so that your problems don’t grow with you.
- Each year, have non-negotiables that must happen for successful seasons. For example, GOTR Minnesota doesn’t open girl registration for a team until at least three coaches have been secured. They are flexible about lots of things, but the infrastructure needs to be in place first.
- Make room to fail – and learn from it! Build in time to reflect after each season – what will we keep? What will we change? Who wasn’t here and should be? How will we learn from what just happened?