



Together Women Rise Final Report

Grantee Name: Soccer Without Borders

Grant Report: Final Report

Project Name: SWB Nicaragua Education & Leadership Program

Grant Start Date: 8/1/22

Progress Report Content

1. Please provide the following information:
 - a. **Organization:** Soccer Without Borders Nicaragua
 - b. **Project Title:** SWB Nicaragua Education & Leadership Program (ELP)
 - c. **Grant Amount:** \$41,500 (over 2 years)
 - d. **Contact Person:** Maureen Scherrer, mscherrer@soccerwithoutborders.org
 - e. **Address:** 3700 Eastern Avenue, Baltimore, MD 21224

2. Recap briefly what outcomes the project was designed to achieve.

Through funding from Together Women Rise, Soccer Without Borders Nicaragua planned to enroll more than 275 girls in our program in 2022 providing over 100 school scholarships, and enroll more than 300 girls in 2023, providing over 130 school scholarships.

Our prior reports on this grant noted 2022 and 2023 outcomes. We have included outcomes from 2024, which this grant supports.

In addition to the enrollment goal, SWB Nicaragua had four categories for intended outcomes:

Personal Development: 80% of regular participants would record improved or sustained high outcomes in SEL competencies including self-management, social awareness, responsible decision making, and self awareness.

Academic Advancement: The participants in the ELP would maintain an academic advancement rate of over 90%. In other words, over 90% of participants who participated in the ELP would enter the next grade level the following school year.

Healthy Lifestyles: 80% of SWB's older participants (ages 12+) will attend workshops where they receive information to support healthy lifestyles with topics such as reproductive health, healthy relationships, dating violence and domestic violence.

Social Capital: More than 90% of participants will report that they trust their coach and see their coach as a role model and mentor. More than 90% of participants will also report making new friends in the program and feeling like a part of the community.

3. **What was accomplished in connection with this project? Please address each stated objective. If any project objectives were changed, please also explain the circumstances leading to the modification of the objective(s).**



The goal of the Education & Leadership Program (ELP) is to facilitate positive school outcomes through a system of financial, academic, and socio-emotional support that empowers girls to overcome barriers to success.

Enroll girls in programming

Programming participation climbed steadily during the project period. In 2022, 314 girls were enrolled, growing to 354 in 2023, and a slight decrease in 2024 to 302.

Provide school scholarships

In 2022, SWB provided 126 scholarships, 134 in 2023, and 119 in 2024. Scholarships supported primary school, secondary school, and university. Scholarships were provided for both public schooling and a growing number for private schooling, as the country's educational quality has declined.

Maintain an academic advancement rate of over 90%

In 2024, 83 percent of participants successfully completed the program criteria and were promoted to the next grade. While this is lower than our targeted percentage, the rate exceeds that across the country. We had a 100% participant graduation rate this year, with participants attending 30 schools. SWB Nicaragua continues to prioritize educational interventions to ensure girls are succeeding academically and have the support needed to advance in their schooling.

Sustain and improve SEL competencies

Our original goal was that 80% of regular participants would record improved or sustained high outcomes in SEL competencies. After administering 117 baseline and 79 endline surveys with youth in the 2024 program year, we've reached and well surpassed the goal of 80% improved or sustained outcomes in SEL competencies for youth who reported on the survey.

- *Self-Management:* 86% of survey respondents recorded improved or sustained skills in self-management from baseline to endline as indicated by their comfort speaking to family members or friends when they are sad, their ability to manage their emotions in difficult situations, their willingness to ask for help, and how they feel soccer helps them manage their feelings.
- *Social Awareness:* 95% of survey respondents recorded improved or sustained skills in social awareness from baseline to endline as indicated by their willingness to help others, how they value community involvement, how they feel whether they win or lose in sport, their respect for others who have different beliefs from them, and their feeling of acceptance in groups.
- *Responsible Decision Making:* 91% of survey respondents recorded improved or sustained skills in responsible decision making from baseline to endline as indicated by their belief that an education can help them achieve future goals and their understanding of the benefits of doing school work. Responsible decision making was also understood by their attention span during academics and how they perceive themselves as a student.
- *Self-Awareness:* 92% of survey respondents from SWB Nicaragua recorded improved or sustained skills in self-awareness from baseline to endline as indicated by their feelings



of safety at SWB and while playing on the field, how they feel their football skills have improved, and how they feel about their own qualities as a person. Self-awareness attributes are also understood by how open participants are to trying new things, their self-worth, and how comfortable they are sharing their opinions and ideas with others.

4. Have the number of beneficiaries changed? To report this please refer to the original numbers in your grant proposal under Number of women and girls directly impacted and indirectly impacted.

Our goal, through this funding opportunity, was to enroll more than 275 girls in the SWB Nicaragua program in 2022 providing over 100 school scholarships, and enroll more than 300 girls in 2023, providing over 130 school scholarships. In 2022, we enrolled 314 girls in our program and provided 126 school scholarships. In 2023, we enrolled 354 girls in our SWB Nicaragua program and provided 134 scholarships, and in 2024, we enrolled 401 girls and provided 119 scholarships.

5. What challenges did you face in connection with this project? How did you address those challenges?

As noted in our interim report, the ongoing challenges with this project are not unique to SWB Nicaragua's program, and are in large part due to the socio-political climate in the country. These challenges pertain mostly to educational quality and economic opportunities.

Educational disparities persist for girls in Nicaragua. The quality of public school education has declined over the course of the grant period. Our academic support via tutoring resources and resources afforded to participants has remained strong, however, we have found that the 'need' from participants has increased, as the gap has widened between what students should be achieving via learning outcomes versus what they are achieving. Our staff has remained steadfast in matching resources to the needs of our participants, such as through workshops, to reinforce what students are lacking in reading and writing. In addition, we increased the amount of support to private schools, to combat the declining quality of public schools.

Economic implications compelled SWB Nicaragua to increase communication between families and our program staff, including the creation of increased expectations for program attendance, which facilitated justification in the scholarship program. As families' situations changed, we experienced some fluctuations in participation, due to changing familial needs.

In our interim report, we noted that technology was an ongoing challenge. SWB Nicaragua secured funding late in 2024 that partially alleviated this challenge and were able to purchase some new computer equipment.

6. Is your organization or project situation different than presented in the approved proposal? For example, new executive director, significant project staffing changes or NGO affiliation, loss of large funding, or other significant changes?

There has been a significant change in our NGO affiliation in the country of Nicaragua. Following Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega's presidential decree in late summer 2024 that



all NGOs operating in Nicaragua must create a formal alliance with the country in order to continue to operate, SWB undertook a thorough process to review the requirements and consider the options of how best to move forward with our work in the country.

Ultimately, the SWB Board of Directors voted in December 2024 to terminate the organization's NGO status in Nicaragua. SWB remains committed to monitoring and complying with OFAC sanctions while providing a vehicle for foundations and individuals who want to commit private, restricted funding to ensure our program participants can still access soccer and education programming and academic scholarships to reach their inherent potential.

7. What were the most important lessons learned?

SWB believes "if she can see it, she can be it." What we have learned, and continue to see in action, is that girls who have exposure to and mentorship from female leaders can change the trajectory of their lives. SWB Nicaragua participants were eager to participate in programming and we had strong retention among participants. Participant families - particularly mothers - showed interest and support of their children participating, illustrating that they understand and welcome the impact that this programming has on their children and opportunities for them in the future.

8. What has changed within your organization as a result of this project?

SWB Nicaragua has been a leader across the organization as it relates to supporting under-resourced girls and young women. The hub has developed and demonstrated best practices in supporting this community, and their strategies have been elevated internally. While there was a pause in travel and SWB Nicaragua's TEAM camps due to Covid-19, activity picked back up in 2024, including reestablishing our TEAM camps, and facilitating an exchange between SWB Nicaragua and SWB Massachusetts, whereby staff/coaches from each of these locations traveled to the other location. This fostered engaged and deep learning, cross-cultural conversations, and a forum for practitioners to share their experiences. Feedback from the exchange demonstrated that SWB Nicaragua programming, including on the pitch, in the classroom, and in the community, is a model for sports-based youth development.

Furthermore, by providing a pathway for program participants to become full-time staff members and coaches, and shifting to a 100% female-led staff, SWB Nicaragua became a more supportive and resilient organization.

9. Describe the unexpected events and outcomes, including unexpected benefits.

The lowest SEL competency outcome area was around self-management. This is not totally unexpected, as youth in this program are required to manage their reactions and emotions in a challenging sociopolitical landscape. It is a continued call to action for our staff to invest in training that allows for girls to exercise skills that will improve healthy boundaries and psychological safety in their context.

10. Did you change your strategy as a result of obstacles you encountered? How will you address these challenges in the future?



The change in our NGO status necessitates a change of our strategy, with which SWB is currently underway. We will continue to engage with program staff as contractors, develop regional Latin American-based partnerships, and secure philanthropic funding from individuals and organizations that will be restricted to Nicaragua.

As noted earlier, the changing educational landscape in Nicaragua compelled a change in how we were supporting participant scholarships, and we shifted toward more support via private school support for primary school by supporting monthly fees for girls. SWB Nicaragua thoughtfully and intentionally designed how we would support private school education, recognizing that while SWB can provide scholarship support, parents are expected to make an effort to pay for supplies (e.g., notebooks). In the future, we see more support shifting in this direction. While we started with a pilot of nine girls with private school support, we aim to increase that number annually, up to 20 scholarships.

11. Approximately how many lives have been touched, both directly and indirectly, by the project?

Over the course of the grant, we reached 600 participants directly, and an additional 600 individuals indirectly. The indirect lives reached are the family members of our participants, whose lives were improved economically via scholarship support for their child and who had access to the program's store, which supplies food and goods to support basic needs.

12. What are the measurements used to monitor success and how was this information measured (e.g., surveys, observation)? Be specific and include measurable results.

These are the measurements we use to monitor success and the ways that we measure:

- We conduct real-time tracking of attendance, demographics, and participant trends with our monitoring platform Upshot and their mobile app.
- We measure coach and instructor development using a self-assessment and observation tool to assess and reflect on the implementation of our methodology and curriculum.
- We use an internally developed SWB Program site Rubric to capture outputs, process, and outcomes as well as program strengths and challenge areas, including infrastructure and child safeguarding.
- We conduct an annual Youth Survey and Youth leadership survey which inform our programming design, implementation, assessment, and adjustment process. These surveys gather information on the socio-emotional gains of our participants, and their experience within the team around themes of Belonging, Agency, Contribution, Healthy Identity, and Social Capital.
- We track relevant external data such as school grades, attendance, graduation rates, and post-secondary success.

13. If the project is ongoing, provide plans and expected results, including project timeframe.

Soccer Without Borders continues to operate in Granada, Nicaragua however in 2024 two actions impacted the way we go about serving the girls of Granada. The first was a Presidential Decree by the Nicaraguan President Ortega to require all international NGOs operating in Nicaragua to create a formal alliance with an agency of the Nicaraguan government. The



second, is related to the heightened number of US Government list-based OFAC sanctions against Nicaragua and their government agencies such as the Public Ministry and the Police.

Therefore, Soccer Without Borders is currently dissolving our official international NGO status in Nicaragua to avoid increased risk and liabilities working through the tough geopolitical environment and operating through a contractual relationship with our team local to Granada, Nicaragua.

Through restricted funders and individual donors specifically investing in Nicaragua we will be sending contractor payments and program expenses through to continue our soccer, education and girls' empowerment programming in Granada, Nicaragua.

14. Provide a detailed list of all expenses incurred during the grant cycle which have been paid for with the Together Women Rise grant.

Please see the attached detailed budget.

15. Did this grant and relationship with Together Women Rise assist your organization in obtaining other funding, partnerships with other organizations, or public recognition in some capacity?

Funding from Together Women Rise has been critical to SWB Nicaragua's programming. Through our annual reports and website, we have highlighted the deep investment of TWR, which has built credibility among other individual supporters of the organization.