

Game Changer Project Paris 2024



Increasing sports participation
for women and girls

Contributing to the Olympic Values

The Olympic Games symbolize connection and inspiration through the power of elite sport. This is not only through the competitions themselves, but especially through the core values they represent: respect, friendship, and excellence.

NOC*NSF aims to contribute to the implementation of these core values. One way we do this is through the [Game Changer Project](#), which is carried out in the host country during the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The goal of the Game Changer Project is to give something back to the local community and to increase sports participation and enjoyment among groups with less access to sports. With the Game Changer Project, we are helping to build a sporting world free of discrimination, where values such as mutual understanding, friendship, solidarity, and fair play are central.

So far, NOC*NSF is the only National Olympic Committee to initiate a social contribution in the host city of the Games through such projects. The Game Changer Project was first implemented in [Rio de Janeiro 2016](#) and continued at [Tokio 2020](#), and now [Paris 2024](#).



Respect



Friendship



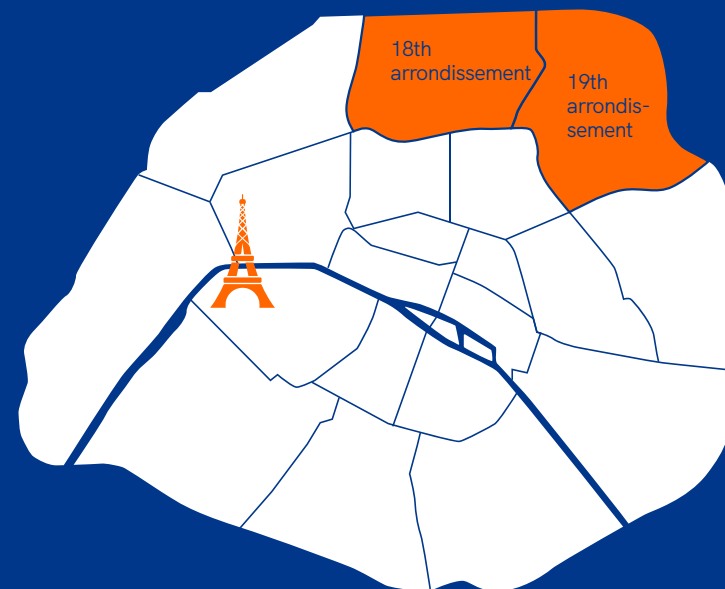
Excellence



The focus

Despite Paris's vibrant sports culture, there are neighborhoods where sports participation lags behind particularly among women and girls. In collaboration with the City of Paris (Ville de Paris), an assessment was conducted before the launch of the Game Changer Project to identify which neighborhoods would benefit most from additional support. The 18th and 19th arrondissements emerged as priority areas.

In these districts, only 59% of women participate in sports on a weekly basis, compared to a citywide average of 69%. The main reasons identified for this disparity include unsafe sports facilities and limited financial resources.



"In developing the Game Changer Project in Paris, it was essential to understand the local needs and to collaborate with existing networks."

- Sjors Metz projectlead Game Changer NOC*NSF

The two projects in Paris

The Game Changer Project Paris focused on two initiatives: District Spot and Vélo École. Both projects aimed to address various barriers and target groups that girls and women face when it comes to participating in sports. These include issues such as mobility, safety, and availability of opportunities.



District Spot

Targets

- Activating girls and young women (ages 12–25) to participate in sports activities through a community-based approach
- Strengthening the local District Spot as a safe and accessible place for sports

District Spots are local sports and meeting spaces “for and by young people”, offering a wide range of high-quality sports activities tailored to youth in the neighborhood. This approach ensures that the offerings align closely with the needs of local residents, increasing the likelihood of higher sports participation. NOC*NSF has already implemented this approach in various locations across the Netherlands and saw potential for a similar project in Paris.

In Paris, the District Spot focused on girls (ages 13–20) from the 18th and 19th arrondissements, who often drop out of traditional sports clubs. This can be due to a lack of safe spaces, negative experiences with coaches, or difficulty connecting with peers. The District Spot offers free, open-access sessions featuring various sports, without requiring memberships, an approach that may better suit this target group.

Vélo École

Targets

- Improving mobility and independence for women (25+ years) through bicycle skills

La Vélo École is a social initiative by the organizations Regie de Quartier and Rosa Parks, offering cycling lessons for women in Paris’ 19th arrondissement. Although cycling infrastructure in Paris is improving, many still find it intimidating to navigate the busy city traffic. That’s why Vélo École provides free cycling lessons in enclosed areas, along with guided rides through the city.

By offering these lessons, the project supports women in becoming more self-reliant, enabling them to travel farther and more safely, and to participate more fully in society. Vélo École has successfully engaged a hard-to-reach group of women aged 55 and older. NOC*NSF chose to further support this project to increase its impact and reach.

The power of collaboration

Collaboration with local partners played a key role in the success of the Game Changer project. The Dutch Embassy in Paris acted as a connector in shaping the project. The City of Paris helped identify which neighborhoods and target groups would benefit most from additional support. Various NGOs were also crucial to the collaboration.

Futbol Mas played a major role in the local implementation of the District Spot. For Vélo École, NOC*NSF joined an existing local initiative led by Regie de Quartier and Rosa Parks. Support from the IOC particularly through the Olympic Solidarity program was essential in bringing the Game Changer project to life.

Thanks to these joint efforts, local organizations have gained more capacity, which has led to:

- A more stable network of sports coordinators in the 18th and 19th arrondissements.
- Improved collaboration with schools and youth services, which support the low-threshold sports approach.
- Increased attention to safety and accessibility, for example by securing sports fields with fencing and better lighting.
- Two community centers have since launched their own sports projects, inspired by District Spot.
- A blueprint of the cycling project has been developed for other districts, enabling more women to learn how to cycle.
- Thanks in part to the Game Changer Project, the organizations have gained greater visibility with local authorities.



More than 200 women and girls on the move

What made the difference?



The use of role models was a decisive factor for the success of the District Spots. Local women and teenage girls took the lead as coaches, making the District Spot a strong example of a community-based approach: by the neighborhood, for the neighborhood. By involving the right people as trainers and mentors, new participants felt safer and more supported, and potential barriers were more easily overcome. Beyond the sports activities, this also created space for meaningful conversations and personal development. A large number of the girls reported increased self-confidence and greater enjoyment of sports as a result of their participation. The role models have expressed their commitment to staying involved at the District Spot, as they've built strong relationships with the girls who come to play.

"I always thought sports clubs weren't for me. Now I see I can keep up just fine and I really feel seen."

– Participant in the District Spot program

- The average age of participants was 15 years
- The most popular sport was football
- Two organized socio-cultural outings outside of Paris

The District Spot project received one of the #BeInclusive EU Sport Awards on May 12 2025. The awards, presented by the European Commission, recognize the most inspiring projects and individuals who promote inclusion, diversity, and equality through sport.



Cycling together built a community. During the Vélo École lessons, new friendships and social connections naturally formed as the women cycled together. Over time, a close-knit community of women emerged one that continues to support each other. Participants also reported feeling more independent after the lessons, gaining a better understanding of their neighborhood, and noticing improvements in their physical health.

"Now that I can ride a bike, I'm more willing to try other new things too. I feel freer and more independent."

– Participant, Vélo École

- The average age of participants was 56 years
- 12 women took part in a DIY bicycle repair workshop
- NOC*NSF donated 39 bicycles to women who successfully completed the course

Key outcomes

Sports participation

65% of District Spot participants continued to engage in sports after the program, often through local initiatives or sports clubs.

70% of Vélo École participants reported feeling confident enough to cycle independently, even in busier neighborhoods.

50% of the women in the cycling groups regularly joined group rides three months after completing the course.

In the 19th arrondissement, there has been a measurable increase in the number of girls and young women signing up for sports and physical activity programs at community centers.

“The growing self-reliance and confidence of female participants directly contributes to social cohesion in the neighborhood.”

–Fútbol Más France

Social and community development

Self-confidence:

Through sports, participants are encouraged to push their boundaries, which strengthens them not only physically but also mentally.

Relationship building:

By cycling or playing sports together, bonds are formed that go beyond the activity itself.

Challenging norms:

By involving role models at the District Spot, traditional views on women’s participation in sports were challenged. Girls now feel more confident joining regular sports clubs or participating in activities outside their own neighborhoods.

“By training people from the neighborhoods themselves and offering them a network, we’re laying a foundation that will last long after the Games.”

–Fútbol Más France

Key learnings

Local collaboration and sustainable embedding

A strong local network and mutual trust are the foundation for lasting impact. Success doesn't come from short-term efforts, but from long-term collaboration with partners, volunteers, and participants who feel connected to and perhaps even ambassadors of the project. When local organizations take ownership and are supported through training and guidance, this ensures continuity.

The power of role models

The presence of relatable role models was essential to the success of the Game Changer Project Paris. These role models peers, who closely reflect the lives of the target group, lower the threshold for participation, especially for girls who may feel excluded in mixed-gender sports environments. This was evident not only in the District Spot but also in the cycling project, where female role models played a leading role, with a clear positive impact on motivation and engagement.

Flexibility and accessibility

The target group, often with little prior experience in sports, benefits from low-threshold, accessible opportunities. Flexible scheduling and a safe environment encourage participation and help build a consistent group of active girls. The program actively responded to this need, which proved essential in fostering long-term engagement.



Conclusion

The Game Changer Project Paris has demonstrated the unifying power of sport. The most crucial question remains: What impact has truly been achieved, and how sustainable is that impact in the long term? At this stage, definitive answers are still pending.

For the realization of this project, NOC*NSF would like to sincerely thank the following organizations for their valuable collaboration and commitment: the Dutch Embassy in France, Ville de Paris, Olympic Refugee Foundation, Fútbol Más France, Regie de Quartier, and Rosa Parks. Thanks to their dedication and networks, we were able to create meaningful impact together and give expression to the Olympic values during the 2024 Games.

Reflections:

- Not all challenges in Paris have been solved through this project, but successful blueprints have been developed that the city may build upon in the future.
- The lives of the women who participated have been positively impacted. This personal transformation is of immeasurable value.





Kingdom of the Netherlands

