



Media Contacts:

Deborah Morant, Director, Corporate Partnerships, LISC
212.455.9354, 914.980.2417 (mobile) or dmorant@lisc.org

Ben Astin, 26x26 Program Director, Lionsraw
917.873.7712 or Ben.Astin@lionsraw.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Global coalition responds to United Bid win for 2026 FIFA World Cup with
\$30M plan to build community soccer fields, empower 1 million kids
across North America**

*"26x26" will connect residents, fans, athletes, investors and philanthropic groups
in soccer-driven effort to revitalize communities in ramp up to 2026 FIFA World Cup*

NEW YORK (June 29, 2018)—The winning United 2026 World Cup bid has not only energized North American soccer fans with the promise of elite matches played in home stadiums. It has sparked a multinational community investment effort that will develop local soccer fields and support youth programs in host cities.

Known as 26x26—reflecting the 26 new and renovated fields that will be opened by the 2026 kickoff—the project is designed to transform play “deserts” and underutilized spaces into safe and accessible soccer pitches that create hubs for healthy activity and community assets. The program will expand youth outreach in underserved communities across the United States, Canada and Mexico and engage fans as volunteers to help advance local goals.

The \$30 million effort is driven by an unprecedented partnership that includes one of the largest U.S. community development organizations (LISC), a prominent British soccer philanthropy (Lionsraw), the largest soccer fan group in U.S. (American Outlaws) and a global powerhouse in children’s health (UNICEF USA). It has already attracted world-class ambassadors in American soccer stars Landon Donovan and Kyle Martino, and soccer broadcaster Rob Stone.

26x26 is expected to reach 1 million kids, ages 4-18, over 10 years and make significant contributions to local economic development efforts, focusing particularly on communities that are often overlooked for investment. Locations for full-sized fields have yet to be finalized, though there are likely to be 20 in the U.S. and three each in Canada and Mexico.

"Major sporting events like the World Cup can be a powerful catalyst for community gains that range from better health and safety to advances in education, jobs and local income," notes Maurice A. Jones, president and CEO of LISC, which has invested more than \$18 billion to revitalize U.S. communities over the last four decades. "We've seen this in our efforts all across the country: investments in sports and recreation can help improve a community's quality of life."

Each of the partners will contribute their particular expertise and experience to 26x26, which will be jointly managed by LISC and Lionsraw.

- **LISC** will work with Lionsraw to raise new capital to fund the development of fields--tapping into its 40 years of community development and investment experience, which includes more than \$1 billion in grants, loans and investments annually. This is the latest of LISC's sports-related partnerships; the national nonprofit has impacted more than 600,000 youth through ongoing collaborations with the NFL Foundation, a \$53 million partnership creating 350 quality playing fields in hundreds of communities over 20 years, and \$1 million with ESPN to create recreation spaces and basketball courts.
- **Lionsraw** will raise investment capital and catalyze sustainable soccer programming tied to youth development and social impact. To date, Lionsraw has facilitated World Cup-related community development with the construction of an education center and soccer facilities in Curitiba, Brazil, as well as a primary school in Durban, South Africa. It is organizing programming with American Outlaws and volunteers to coincide with the 2020 Euros in London. "We have developed incredible projects and facilities by mobilizing the passion of football (soccer) fans, during several World Cups," notes Lionsraw founder and U.S. Chairman Jon Burns. "We are united in our desire to see genuine transformation across many communities."
- **American Outlaws** will mobilize its 28,000 members to support local youth programs and events. "In recent years we have been pointing our army of amazing fans to make an impact where they live and when they travel," says American Outlaws co-founder Justin Brunkin. "We are going to grab this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity with both hands."
- **UNICEF USA** will connect its [Kid Power](#) program to local youth in communities supported by 26x26. The program encourages kids to get active by connecting their physical activity to local impact. "UNICEF USA is so excited that the World Cup will be coming to North America, and we are even more excited to be partnering with LISC and Lionsraw on 26x26," explains Caryl M. Stern, UNICEF USA President & CEO. "This ambitious project will have a huge hand in making the event's legacy have a positive impact on children!"

As part of its roll-out this fall, 26x26 will incorporate World Cup-related events in host cities, including youth leadership and soccer training, Kid Power, and live game-viewing parties.

"I love hosting the World cup on Fox, but to host it in the U.S. will be amazing," said Rob Stone, Fox Sports' 2018 World Cup sportscaster and an ambassador for 26x26. "I am even more excited to help 26 communities across Canada, Mexico and the U.S. experience the transforming power of soccer. I encourage others to join me to see this dream become a reality."

LISC and Lionsaw are inviting corporations, foundations and organizations to be part of the growing 26x26 project. For more information, contact 26x26 Director of Corporate Partnerships, Deborah Morant, dmorant@lisc.org; Project Director, Ben Astin, ben.astin@lionsraw.org; or Program Director, Bev Smith, bsmith@lisc.org.

About LISC

With residents and partners, LISC forges resilient and inclusive communities of opportunity across America – great places to live, work, visit, do business and raise families. Since 1979, LISC has invested \$18.6 billion to build or rehab 376,000 affordable homes and apartments and develop 63 million square feet of retail, community and educational space. For more, visit www.lisc.org.

About Lionsraw

Lionsraw delivers projects that relieve and prevent poverty through sports programs designed to alleviate and educate around root causes. Since 2010, Lionsraw has completed nine projects in seven countries, catalyzing thousands of volunteers and impacting more than 6,000 youth. Visit www.lionsraw.org

About American Outlaws

The American Outlaws is the largest organized soccer supporters group in the world, with more than 28,000 members in 197 chapters across the U.S., Mexico and the United Kingdom. AO Impact is a strategic partnership between Lionsraw and The American Outlaws. Its objective is to serve communities across the USA where members live, work and play through volunteerism. Visit www.aoimpact.org.

About UNICEF USA Kid Power

UNICEF Kid Power is a program of UNICEF USA which gives kids the power to save lives by connecting their physical activity to social impact. With UNICEF Kid Power, kids run, jump and dance to unlock funding from partners which UNICEF uses to deliver lifesaving nutrition to severely malnourished children. The more kids move, the more lives they save. With this lifesaving impact, kids become more aware of the world around them, and are empowered to solve the challenges they face in their own communities. Visit www.unicefkidpower.org