

## **Neil Rackham Foundation Award Application**

### **SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN / FUNDRAISER**

June marks the beginning of “pride month” across the world. Sheffield University Volleyball Club (SUVC) wanted to create a campaign to raise awareness for LGBTQ+ individuals, especially in sporting communities - where homophobic and discrimination against LGBTQ+ people is widespread. We had four targets we wanted our campaign to achieve: for it to be meaningful, educational, relevant, and to have an impact in creating real change. With the ongoing civil rights, and black lives matter (BLM) movement, SUVC’s core committee decided to combine both Pride and BLM elements, which became the catalyst for our “Pride X Black Queer Voices” initiative. Our initiative was created to highlight pioneering black queer voices who were at the forefront of the gay liberation movement of the 60s and 70s.

Our team included core members of SUVC’s committee: The Vice President, the Treasurer, the Secretary, and the Inclusions officers. As the campaign developed and evolved, input was provided at stages by all seventeen current (2020/21) committee members. Furthermore, the seventeen (2019/20) committee members also participated and offered helpful advice throughout the process. Our campaign has been interactive, and thus we encouraged club members and club alumni, who are not a part of the committee, to take part in our weekly “challenges”, that are posted on social media. After Sheffield University Rowing Club (SURC) contacted SUVC, we sprang into action and began our collaboration. Each core member of SUVC committee has a specific role: advertisement and communications, design creation, challenge leads, and campaign management. We “met-up” through virtual online rooms, such as Zoom and Google Hangouts. We aimed to schedule these meeting every other evening, but in reality, attempting to find a time that suits everyone, often meant we held meetings every three days. In these meetings we discussed the progress made and tackled any unforeseen challenges. We adopted a “sharing is caring approach” to make sure the work is equally distributed. However, if someone was more comfortable taking on extra work, or on the other hand, if someone was a bit busy, we agreed from the outset that this was okay. As long as no-one felt overwhelmed, and everyone was happy to contribute their parts and were able to speak out if they had any issues, we we’re all happy.

Some core questions we had to answer before we began our campaign where “what charity would we choose to fundraise for?” Several potential choices were discussed, and we found the fairest way to choose one was to vote from a set list everyone agreed upon. Black Lives Matter UK was chosen through anonymous google-form voting. Although this choice was selected by democratic choice, there were concerns that the chosen charity was not relatable enough to our original Pride campaign. However, instead of seeing this as an issue, through adapting and integrating both the current civil rights, and black lives matter movements, with our original pride month campaign and idea, we were able to enhance our initiative. There were also concerns that changing the structure and design of our campaign just days before we launched would be too drastic. I suppose this is true, it was, but we all believed in our vision and knew that we were able to support each other in whatever decisions we made, in order to make our project a success. There are no right or wrong answers when working in a group, and this is no different when working remotely. Often it can seem intricate and finicky working online, but seeing the project unravel and develop, it felt very special - don’t be afraid to take risks!

We initially decided on randomly selecting days to post information on. However, after speaking with SUVC's 2019/20 charity and volunteering officer, and the campaign management team, we decided to go for a more structured approach. After playing around with various ideas we settled on creating four weekly posts throughout the month. We then had to decide on what social media platform we would use to maximise our engagement rates. We created another google form for voting purposes and included sections for voters to give feedback to the campaign management team. Setting up a meeting with the design team we discussed our options and chose both Instagram and Facebook. The former, it was decided, was an excellent platform for visual posts, and is widely used among university students. The latter is used by a wider age range and is a great way to connect graduated club alumni members with our campaign. The challenge leads team were created to make our campaign interactive. For a month-long initiative, one of our largest concerns was keeping momentum going, and to avoid audience fatigue. By posting once a week, with a variety of information, we hoped to maintain engagement. To further engage our audience, the individuals leading the design front of the campaign invented the "Right Now" section to be included in each post. This section sheds light on contemporary situations that are circulating the internet, media, and news. For example, we have discussed BAME individuals being disproportionately affected by Coronavirus, how black trans women are being murdered in an epidemic with their average life expectancy being just 35 years, or the need for primary and secondary school education to be decolonised. At the end of each week we collate the responses from our challenges and do a "round-up" post. This has been a way for us to showcase the creativity of our participants and was used as a tool to encourage others to engage with our campaign. By combining all of these components, we were able to make our initiative meaningful, educational, relevant and impactful.

Working collaboratively, we have learnt that there is strength in numbers as there also is in direction. However, leading the team, I knew that for as much direction and delegation that would be required, so too was a certain level of understanding and empathy for everyone involved in the campaign. Students have faced an awful lot of uncertainty and disruption this year with both the strikes and the global pandemic. Adopting an attitude that was both kind and forgiving was necessary for this project to succeed – as it is in all projects. The best work comes from those that know that they are valued and are encouraged to achieve great things. Working remotely as a group will always present itself with challenges. Nevertheless, there is so much that we can use at our disposal to create effective change. First and foremost, as cliché as it may sound, "x" number of heads are better than one. Remember that the beauty of working in a group is that you can share and discuss ideas with those around you. Make sure you set up a comfortable working environment, whether that's your immediate workspace, or through group chats or online video calls. You want to feel comfortable and, in an environment, where people are valued and able to share their ideas. Be confident and bold in your abilities, this can take you far. No suggestion is silly, and only you can bring the uniqueness of your ideas to the table – without "you" there is no "us". For those in leading positions, my advice would be to strike a balance between being disciplined, fostering a creative and safe pace, and allowing room for reflection. Don't overpower. You want others to share your passion for whatever it is you are trying to accomplish - on their own terms. Take joy in what you are doing, and don't be afraid to make mistakes, or to take new directions!