

## **The First “Step” Towards a Climbing Wall: Writing a Proposal**

1 Climbing has experienced a dramatic change from an original outdoor hobby to  
2 today’s indoor profession. Simple concrete indoor walls with single, unmovable holds  
3 were created to accommodate the climbers desiring to train during the winter months.  
4 Indoor walls have advanced from the walls of the 1960's in England to the X-Games of  
5 the present time (Mittelstaedt, 1997). The French reinvented the indoor wall’s system by  
6 utilizing interchangeable handholds allowing for various climbing routes (Mittelstaedt,  
7 1997). Climbing walls are now seen indoors and outdoors, permanently fixed and  
8 transportable, hosting national and international competitions in which America is  
9 enthusiastically involved.  
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11 While many people enjoy climbing competitions, others want to climb for both  
12 fun and fitness (Jacobs, 1992; Wescott, 1992). Indoor climbing has transformed from an  
13 outdoor hobby to an exciting indoor hobby advancing into a “World Cup sport with  
14 proposed Olympic status” (Hyder, 1999, p. 32). Teachers recognized this movement and  
15 were quick to see the many benefits related to climbing such as strength and flexibility  
16 development. Numerous schools have taken the first steps by researching and building  
17 climbing facilities at their schools. Articles have provided information regarding topics  
18 such as curriculum ideas (Hyder, 1999), constructing walls (Steffen & Stiehl, 1995), and  
19 research (McNeal, 1995). The idea of building a climbing wall is sure to intrigue many  
20 teachers, however, the risk management considerations and lack of general knowledge of  
21 a relatively new sport may make the concept intimidating. Regardless, research strongly  
22 supports the safety consideration related to climbing in school settings (Hinson, 1998,  
23 Steffen & Stiehl, 1995) and curriculum strategies are becoming more defined (Gordon,  
24 1998, Hyder, 1999). Also, more qualified instructors are being developed with the rapid  
25 growth of climbing walls in the public and private sector. With the public becoming  
26 accepting of climbing in general, teachers will take the first steps needed to construct a  
27 climbing wall at their school. Typically, the first step in a project like this would be to  
28 write a proposal to school administrators. Writing a proposal for a topic that may be  
29 unfamiliar to many teachers will more than likely to be met with resistance. This article  
30 provides teachers interested in building climbing walls five basic components needed to  
31 write a successful proposal.

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2 **The basic components needed to write a wall climbing proposal include:**

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(1) A purpose statement,

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(2) A description of the project's goals and objective,

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(3) A review of literature,

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(4) The project procedure or methodology,

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(5) The budget.

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### **Purpose**

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*The purpose to your students and community related to building a climbing wall might seem obvious to any physical education teacher. Principals and other school administrators with a lesser background in components of skill development and fitness principals will want to know all of the details. They will want a clear picture of exactly how wall climbing will enhance student learning in a positive way. An example of the Purpose/Benefit section may include but is not limited to the following:*

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Teachers involved in climbing confirm that indoor rock-climbing allows them the chance to challenge their students by having them think about the next step, leading the child to progressively take responsibility for his or her own security. Therefore, climbing is a unique and stimulating pedagogical tool highly important to the creation of a myriad of learning activities and pedagogical experiences. The philosophy to climbing enhances the recognition of an individual's strengths and weaknesses without focusing on typical winning and losing activities (Steffen & Stiehl, 1995).

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Students can directly experience opportunities to bring together and integrate many learning domains and aesthetic aspects of their personalities (Webster, 1978). Climbing not only builds personal stamina, flexibility, muscle strength, and self-discipline and confidence, it also educates and involves students in a sport not easily naturally accessible. Climbing undoubtedly has become an exciting alternate source for reaching physical fitness. The physical benefits include the following:

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- 1 • Muscular endurance: Climbing is a sport composed of multiple and various small  
2 moves never requiring a singular maximal burst. With experience in climbing, an  
3 individual will gradually acquire the ability to achieve more and more moves  
4 along a wall.  
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- 6 • Flexibility: Constant stretching and reaching requires the body to be able to  
7 maneuver over distance. Well-rounded fitness and training programs including  
8 flexibility exercises reduce one's risk of injuries.  
9
- 10 • Muscular strength: A climber moves and adjusts himself with and against gravity  
11 with every move along the wall. Transferring and manipulating the body weight  
12 adds resistance to the muscles building the strength in an inviting and enjoyable  
13 fashion, without mundane lifting, allowing for dynamic "crux," a push-up-style or  
14 pull-up-style: moves including great demands on the leg muscles.  
15
- 16 • Cardio respiratory fitness: New aerobic competitions in climbing stress speed, a  
17 highly entertaining and possible change to regular movements (Mittelstaedt, 1997).

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2 **Project Goals and Objectives**

3 *Clear and concise goals and objectives are essential and need to be consistent*  
4 *with the rest of the proposal. The goals and objective established in this section need to*  
5 *be supported in the rest of the proposal. Reviewers will be confused if sections of the*  
6 *proposal become unrelated. The goals and objectives do not need to be long and drawn*  
7 *out, but rather short, clear and to the point. This section of the proposal may include the*  
8 *following example:*

9

10 **Goal**

11 The Physical Education Department at Rock Climb Elementary School  
12 proposes to build a traversing climbing wall for their students, faculty and  
13 staff.

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15 **Objectives**

- 16 1. Build a 40-foot wide by 8-foot high traversing wall on an inside wall of  
17 the school.
- 18 2. Develop a climbing wall curriculum to include grades 3-5.
- 19 3. Develop a climbing wall wellness program for faculty and staff.

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## 2 **Review of Literature**

3 *This section gives the teacher the opportunity to support the project with prior*  
4 *related research. School administrators will be primarily concerned with issues related*  
5 *to risk management because of society's tendency to bring civil action against schools*  
6 *(Mittelstaedt, 1997) and cost (Hinson, 1998). Reviewers also like to see a pattern of*  
7 *successfully implemented climbing walls (including pictures) at other similar schools.*  
8 *JOPERD has published many articles related to wall climbing that include numerous*  
9 *references and resources that address almost all of the concerns (Andres & Rees, 1979,*  
10 *Hyder, 1999, Kascenska, Dewitt, & Roberts, 1992, Mittelstaedt, 1997, Steffen & Stiehl,*  
11 *1995). A sample of this section may include the following:*

12 Fesko (1992) stated that building climbing wall represents "one of the  
13 hottest trends in the fitness industry" (p. 43). With children naturally inclined to  
14 climbing, their interest in climbing walls has soared (Mittelstaedt, 1997). Several  
15 elementary schools in the Worthington Ohio area and around the country have  
16 successfully incorporated climbing walls into their physical education programs at  
17 a relative low cost (Mittelstaedt, 1997). One of the benefits of constructing a  
18 climbing wall to established facilities is the low cost (Rew, 1996).

19 Mittelstaedt's philosophy that "through participation and practice, a  
20 climber will develop a unique combination of fitness that includes strength and  
21 power, endurance, flexibility, and mental tenacity" (Mittelstaedt, 1997, p. 28).  
22 AAPHERD supports and encourages many of the goals in the activity of sports  
23 climbing, such as "muscular strength, flexibility, and endurance" (Steffen &  
24 Stiehl, 1995, p. 44). The feature "High Adventure Leisure Pursuits and Risk  
25 Recreation", published by AALR/AAPHERD, points out "an increase in  
26 professional interest in this subject is due primarily to the rising popularity of  
27 recreational endeavors which include elements of excitement, challenge, thrill,  
28 adventure, and danger" (Meier, 1978). The perceived danger associated with  
29 climbing may be an element related to its' rise in popularity, however, Hinson  
30 (1998) suggests the risk of climbing on a traverse wall apparently produces fewer  
31 injuries than playing on the playground.

1                   Climbing is often referred as the merger of gymnastics and ballet  
2 rehearsed over and over (Waterman, 1994). Nevertheless, novice climbers with  
3 the skills only necessary to use a ladder can enjoy the sport as much as a skilled  
4 climber (Steffen & Stiehl, 1995). Climbing will enhance one's problem-solving  
5 skills while trying to negotiate through routes (Mittelstaedt, 1997). Walker (1997)  
6 states "by following or choosing a route or path in a climbing gym, you will be  
7 strengthening your mind, both halves of the brain, by using logic, spatial  
8 awareness, problem solving skills, ingenuity and imagination, all under physical  
9 exertion" (p. 2). Traditionally, physical educators teach sport and game skills to  
10 improve student health and well-being. Climbing encourages the focus to  
11 individual needs without the emphases on competition (McNeill, 1994).

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**Procedure/Methodology**

3           *The procedure/methodology section gives the writer the opportunity to answer all*  
4 *of the who, what's, when's, and where's. A detailed plan of attack with pictures needs to*  
5 *be articulate so the reviewers can easily follow the proposed steps of building the project*  
6 *from beginning to end. The first steps in this section are to identify what kind of climbing*  
7 *wall you want. This may be determined by the amount of space you have, indoor or*  
8 *outdoor, money available, and if you want a vertical wall or a more user-friendly*  
9 *traversing (i.e. horizontal or bouldering) wall. Elementary and middle schools typically*  
10 *lean towards the traversing wall due to the relatively simple construction and few safety*  
11 *aids needed for usage. Risk management concerns will also need to be addressed in this*  
12 *section. Concerns regarding climbing wall construction procedures, durability,*  
13 *maintenance, and security will need to be answered. A detailed blueprint of your design*  
14 *may be needed for approval and clarification (see Figure 1). Below is an example of a*  
15 *procedure section.*

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**Location**

18           The traversing wall will be located on the south and west walls inside of  
19 the gymnasium. The wall is made of cinder block and reaches a height of 15 feet.  
20 The length of the traversing wall will be a total of 32 feet extending 16 feet from  
21 the southwest corner in each direction. The height of the traversing wall will than  
22 8 feet. There is ample space to install foam matting under the wall for student  
23 safety.

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## **Construction**

The traverse wall will be made out of 4' X 4' climbing panels made out of plywood covered with GymTex, a colorful textured finish, specially design for climbing wall. The panels each have 32 holds placement, to allow for a maximum flexibility and adjustability when installing the climbing holds. The holds will be ordered to reflect a traversing wall course that will be consisting of different shapes and colors holds, specially chosen for the school. A traversing wall 32 feet long and 8 feet high will require a total of 16 panels and 102 holds. The holds will be placed so the highest a student can climb is 2 to 3 feet from the ground. The installation of the panels and holds will be installed according to the " Sketches of installation for climbing panels" (annex # 1). Construction is scheduled to take place on August 3.

## **Maintenance**

A traversing wall has low maintenance with proper assembly. All equipment utilized by the students is made of stainless steel or concrete. A weekly checklist will be sufficient in maintaining the wall. A simple checklist will consist of the following:

- Tightening loose handholds
- Cleaning all handholds
- Checking for loose T-Nuts (anchors for climbing holds)
- Check for worn foam matting

## **Security**

The gymnasium area has always been an area that is off-limits to unsupervised activities. The gym door is always locked and entry can only be obtained with the presence of a teacher. Students will also be reminded that the wall is only to be used with proper supervision. There is a safety curtain that can be installed in less than 10 minutes.

1 **Budget**

2 *School administrators will want to know all of the costs associated with the*  
 3 *building of the climbing wall. A detailed budget will need to be drawn to describe all of*  
 4 *the costs for the building and upkeep of the wall. Administrators will frown on added*  
 5 *cost down the road that was not foreseen prior to building. It is always best to ask for a*  
 6 *little extra upfront rather than asking them for additional funding later in the project.*  
 7 *However, don't get greedy. Reviewers of the proposal may reject it if they feel the budget*  
 8 *has been inflated. Justify all requests clearly and completely. Reviewers also like to see*  
 9 *if there are matching funds available. This will strengthen your case if you show*  
 10 *opportunity to see a team effort.*

11 *A description and cost of climbing wall hardware can be found in almost any*  
 12 *physical education equipment catalog. By calling these suppliers or using local rock*  
 13 *climbing experts, a detailed budget can be designed to fit the needs of your design. The*  
 14 *following is an example of a budget for a traversing wall:*

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16 **Budget**

17 <u>Quantity</u>	<u>Item</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Supplier</u>
19 16	4X4 climbing panels	152 each	2432 \$	Passe Montage
21	Transport:		135 \$	Yellow freight
23 <b>Total</b>			<b>2567 \$</b>	

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26 The physical education and school maintenance departments will provide  
 27 the labor.

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## **Odds and Ends**

Once the proposal is finished and fine-tuned, there may be other forms to fill out. Administrators will probably want a “Request for Playground Equipment” or a “Building Maintenance” request form to be filled out. While the climbing wall really isn’t playground equipment, it may be categorized in this manner. The forms may need to be approved by your principal and the county administrators responsible for physical education, risk management, school plant planning, and the maintenance department. A plan for the evaluation of the project may also be needed to address whether the climbing wall will do what it is intended to do (see Purpose section). This can be accomplished by skill and fitness assessment tests along with student surveys.

## **Summary**

Building climbing walls has become one of the hottest trends in adventure education. Schools around the country are quickly seeing how climbing walls can enhance their physical education programs. Writing a climbing wall proposal addressing the five basic components may be the first “Step” needed to enhance your program. Putting together a strong proposal will give the administration the confidence needed to support a relatively new activity. Furthermore, the five basic components of writing a climbing wall proposal can be used as a general outline for any activity the teacher may need to request. Before you know it, your students will be enjoying the fitness, skill, and problem-solving benefits related to climbing.

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