



World Sailing

Project Graeal Mentoring Programme Case Study

sport / nature / technology





Introduction

Projeto GraeL is a non-profit social initiative founded in 1998 by Olympic sailing champions Torben and Lars GraeL, together with Marcelo Ferreira, in Niterói, Brazil. The project was born from the belief that sailing and nautical education can be powerful tools for social transformation. It provides free access to sailing (Optimist, Dinghy, Windsurf), swimming, and canoeing for children and youth aged 9 to 29 from public schools, promoting inclusion through sport.

At age 18, participants can transition into vocational training through hands-on workshops in areas such as naval carpentry, fiberglass, diesel and outboard engine mechanics, and electrical systems for boats. These programs are designed to prepare them for employment in the maritime industry and related sectors.

In addition to sports and technical training, Projeto GraeL also offers a library and environmental education classes, reinforcing its commitment to comprehensive, sustainable education. The initiative empowers young people with skills, confidence, and opportunities—helping them chart a new course for their lives through the power of sport.



Our mission

Projeto GraeL is committed to transforming the lives of children and youth in socially vulnerable situations by democratizing access to nautical sports and using them as effective tools for education, social inclusion, and professional preparation. The project believes that sportslike sailing can go beyond recreation—they can teach discipline, resilience, teamwork, and leadership.

Through its programs, the initiative promotes the development of socio-emotional skills such as autonomy, empathy, cooperation, adaptability, leadership, and a sense of belonging. In parallel, it provides technical and vocational training in nautical professions and encourages physical and mental well-being, preparing participants for both the labor market and responsible citizenship.

A key objective of Projeto GraeL is to challenge the elitist image of sailing in Brazil and position it as a transformative and inclusive educational platform. By doing so, it empowers young people with the tools and confidence to build better futures—both personally and professionally—while fostering a deeper connection with the environment and their communities.



The route

Founded in 1998 by Olympic medalists Lars Grael, Torben Grael, and Marcelo Ferreira, Projeto Grael began its social mission on the beach of Charitas, in Niterói (Rio de Janeiro). What started as a dream of using sailing as an educational and inclusion tool soon gained national and international recognition for its transformative impact on youth.

In 2000, aiming to expand and professionally structure its social and educational initiatives, the Instituto Rumo Náutico (IRN) was created—a non-profit civil organization headquartered in Niterói, responsible for managing, supporting, and improving Projeto Grael's activities.

Throughout its journey, the organization has built a legacy of excellence, innovation, and social commitment, using nautical sports and vocational training as means to promote education, environmental awareness, and citizenship. The main campus, located in the scenic Jurujuba cove since 2004, serves as the operational base for all programs and activities.

In 2022, the organization expanded to Mangaratiba, further broadening its reach. In 2024 alone, 1,225 young people benefited from its programs.



Sails raised for success

Projeto Grael is the only initiative supported by Brazil's Lei de Incentivo ao Esporte (Sports Incentive Law) that integrates all three key dimensions: **Sports, Environment, and Workforce Inclusion**. This unique approach forms the foundation of our success and long-term impact and meaningful transformation.

We believe in the power of social inclusion through nautical sports, guided by the principle that sport can be a pathway to socialization, education, and professional development for children and youth. Our work is based on a human-centered approach that values listening, dialogue, and continuous feedback to refine our practices and strengthen decision-making. Sailing is the flagship sport at Projeto Grael, chosen for its strong educational potential and its power to teach values such as teamwork, responsibility, and resilience.

Our environmental program promotes a deep connection between nautical activities, technology, maritime heritage, and ecological awareness—particularly focused on Guanabara Bay and the removal of floating waste. The program emphasizes sustainability and a sense of responsibility for marine ecosystems.

Today, one-third of our team is made up of former students, a testament to the strength of our educational journey and the long-lasting impact the project has on each individual's life. Over the years, more than 85 companies have supported our mission, helping us reach and empower over 20,000 students since our founding.



Student voices

"These are life-changing opportunities. You can actually make a living from this, just like the teachers who were once students in the Project. It's something you learn - and then pass on."

"Especially for those of us who live in favelas, it teaches things that protect our minds! Advice from the teachers - even from the sailors - sticks with you."



How to get involved

FOLLOW PROJETO GRAEL ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Stay connected and follow our journey on Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn: @projeto-grael

BECOME A VOLUNTEER

Join our cause and contribute your time, skills, and energy to support nautical education, environmental awareness, and youth empowerment. Volunteers play a key role in strengthening our impact.

SPONSOR A CREW MEMBER

We offer boat owners the opportunity to team up with a dedicated group of current and former students, trained to serve as crew members (proeiros) in sailing events.

DONATE & SUPPORT
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