

MIA SUNDSTROM

Denver, Colorado

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PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY

Mia is CEO of the National Institute for Play. She's a play science expert pioneering frameworks that bridge neuroscience research with practical application to transform culture in education, workplace, athletics, and more. As a granddaughter of Dr. Stuart Brown, Mia is leading the next generation of play-based interventions for human flourishing. Mia combines passion for play with her background as an NCAA division I coach and former elite athlete to drive measurable outcomes across diverse industries.

EDUCATION

University of Denver, Joseph Korbel School of International Studies

Master of Public Policy | Graduated June 2023

University of Denver, Daniels College of Business

Bachelor of Science in Business Information and Analytics, Marketing Minor | Graduated June 2021

- Magna Cum Laude
- Thesis: "The Social Impact of Machine Learning Algorithms"
- Distinctions & Honors: 6x Hornbeck Scholar; Recipient of Daniels College of Business Essence of Commitment Award; Recipient of Business Analytics Department Good Citizenship Award; DU Business Olympics Silver Medalist

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

CEO of the National Institute for Play

January 1st, 2026 – Present

- Leading organizational vision and strategy to reach 10 Million people with play by 2030
- Implementing new organizational structure, board of directors, fundraising strategy, and product design among other organizational transformations to ensure future success
- Speaking around the world and across all industries about the science and impact of play
- Developing new play frameworks and products to help people make play a habit in their life

Professor, University of Denver

September 2026 – Present

- Teaching the *Science of Play: Unlocking Human Potential* to a class of 15 in DU's College of Professional Studies

Director, Character Dimension, University of Denver

September 2023 – Present

- Designing and launching the Play Fellows program to activate play activities and research across campus
- Developing and deploying a comprehensive play-based character workshop series for courage, compassion, resilience, integrity, and curiosity for DU student population
- Conducting play research in partnership with the University

Director for Play Transformation, National Institute for Play

October 2024 – December 2025

- Delivering keynotes and workshops about play around the world (3+ times per month) about the power of play to diverse audiences
- Producing comprehensive Play Styles and Play Portals frameworks, assessment, report, and workshops to sell and license
- Building Global Play Network group and facilitating quarterly meetings to exchange knowledge among play practitioners worldwide and grow a collaborative community
- Partnering with and consulting for organizations looking to leverage the power of play for business success
- Creating survey instruments to measure workshop and keynote outcomes
- Preparing for leadership transition by developing a strategic succession plan

Assistant Coach, University of Denver Gymnastics

September 2023 – June 2025

- Coached and mentored 15 D1 athletes, applying play science principles to athletic and personal development to achieve high performance
- Co-developed training plans and patterns to optimize health and performance for floor exercise
- Contributed to program growth initiatives, including developing a marketing plan that helped break record attendance two consecutive years, securing top recruits for the class of 2026, assisting with donor engagement to produce a record fundraising year in 2024, and analyzed ticket data to improve fan experience

Advanced Analytics Intern, Avanade

June 2022 – August 2022

- Provided documentation for internal data engineering processes and managed project flow for advanced analytics team

RECENT SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

**Not including webinars and routine workshops conducted at the University of Denver*

Osborn Consulting Shareholders Retreat

October 2026 | Seattle, WA

- Delivered The opening keynote for landscape architect shareholders to expand their use of play in the workplace.

THINQ Media

October 2026 | Nashville, TN

- Delivered a 9-minute keynote on the science of play for an audience of 3,000 people.

SourceWell Early Education

October 2026 | Minneapolis, MN

- Delivered a 60-minute keynote and two 60-minute breakout workshops to deeply integrate play into curriculum design for early childhood educators.

TEDx Temecula

September 2026 | Temecula, CA

- Delivered a TEDx talk on the science of play for one of the most well established TEDx events in the world

Audacious Foundation Retreat

September 2026 | Santa Barbara, CA

- Delivered the opening keynote for a group of non-profit executive directors working in the outdoor play access space

IMUA Family Services Retreat

August 2026 | Maui, HI

- Delivered a community keynote for teachers, therapists, and educators in the Maui community

City Clerk Conference

July 2026 | Fort Collins, CO

- Delivered the closing keynote for City Clerks Association of the Rockies

Playposium

June 2026 | Exeter, UK

- Delivered the opening keynote for the global Playposium conference for play practitioners

AllState Thrive Talk

June 2026

- Delivered a presentation to AllState employees about the power of play at work through their HR Thrive series

Edu Trends Luxembourg Ministry of Education

June 2026 | Luxembourg

- Delivered the opening keynote for the annual Luxembourg Ministry of Education annual gathering

Transformative Power of Play Conference

May 2026 | New York City

- Delivered the opening and closing keynote for an audience of educators

Stanford's Health Aging Longevity Conference

May 2026 | Palo Alto, CA

- Participated on a panel about the role of play in healthy aging and longevity at Stanford

Accelerate Conference, Mindful Philanthropy

April 2026 | Scotts Valley, CA

- Lead an interactive and immersive play session and spoke on a panel about the role of play in sports for a group of 100+ mental health philanthropists

SPEC Voices of Beauty Conference

April 2026 | Tampa, FL

- Delivered a 90-minute mainstage interactive presentation about play for beauty industry leaders.

A4LE Landscape Architecture Conference

March 2026 | Seattle, WA

- Presented in front of 100+ landscape architects and playground designers to share the science of play and playful design principles.

Rocky Mountain Psychological Association Conference

March 2026 | Boise, ID

- Presented in front of 600+ psychology students, therapists, faculty, and more about the science of play for well-being, and facilitated a Play Styles workshop.

BOAT Super Yacht Design Festival

February 2026 | Kitzbuhel, Austria

- Presented in front of 600+ super yacht designers at their annual conference and facilitated a play styles workshop and contest for all attendees.

Aspen Country Day Workshop Series

September 2025 | Aspen, CO

- Facilitated teacher workshop and delivered parent keynote about the power of play for learning in the K-8 setting.

A Breath of Fresh Air Conference (BoFA)

September 2025 | Ottawa, Canada

- Delivered a keynote about the neuroscience of play and the positive impact of outdoor education

World Expo 2025

September 2025 | Osaka, Japan

- Spoke on a panel about the power of play for the future of urban living in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia pavilion

NCAA D1 Team Kickoff Meeting

September 2025 | Denver, CO

- Facilitated a workshop for a D1 team to leverage the power of play to set goals and expectations for the year

Chancellor's Cabinet Retreat

August 2025 | Red Feather Lakes, CO

- Led a multi-day play-based retreat for the University of Denver Chancellor's cabinet at the Kennedy Mountain Campus to facilitate value alignment heading into a new academic year

Aspen Ideas Festival

July 2025 | Aspen, CO

- Participated on a roundtable about the power of play in youth sports and introduced Dr. Brown in a panel about the neuroscience of play

Playposium Conference

June 2025 | Red Feather Lakes, CO

- Participated in a Q&A about the neuroscience of play with Dr. Stuart Brown

The FiLL Conference

May 2025 | Austin, TX

- Delivered a mainstage keynote about the neuroscience of play and two 90-min workshops about leveraging play in the workplace for effective leadership, retention, innovation, and productivity

RECENT MEDIA

Article Features

- NPR's 1A *Are we having fun yet?* Segment alongside Catherine Price
- *How to bring more playfulness into everyday* by VOX
- *Why Playful Adults Help LEGO Build an Empire at Christmas and Beyond* USA Today
- *People Who Say "Yes" To Play in Their Daily Lives* Shondaland
- *Why We Should All Play More* Aspen Institute Newsletter
- Sophia Laurenzi Substack article series

Podcasts

- Guest on *Positivity Matters*
- Guest on *Flourishing*
- Guest on *Create Magic at Work*
- Guest on *Play Well*
- Guest on UK's Audible Podcast
- Guest on *Inspired Entrepreneur*
- Guest on *Play to Win Audible*
- Guest on *The Playful Lens*
- Guest on *The Achieve*
- Guest on *Roll with the Punches*
- Guest on Mya's *Beyond the Technique*
- Guest on *Institute for Child Psychology Podcast*
- Guest on *Dr. Phil Stieg's Podcast*
- Guest on *Tommy Thompson's Space for Life Podcast*
- Guest on *Playful*
- Guest on Qnity's *Lightbulb Moments*

Power of Play Webinars

- Qnity for Schools
- Qnity Leadership Circle
- Foster Adopt Minnesota
- Arc Lights Foundation Nigeria

CORE QUALIFICATIONS

Public Speaking: 40+ major domestic and international speaking engagements, workshop and keynote design and facilitation, consulting integration

Organizational Leadership: Strategic vision and goal setting, mission alignment, organizational structure and function, talent acquisition management

Research & Analysis: Qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, program evaluation, data analysis

Assessment Design: Creating and coding psychometric assessments

Technical: Microsoft Office Suite (Excel, PowerPoint, Word, Access), Power BI, Python, SQL, Tableau, R Studio, VBA, Adobe Creative Suite

LEADERSHIP

Captain of the University of Division I Denver Gymnastics team

June 2017 - June 2022

- Led team huddles, meetings, goal-setting, vision, accountability systems, and work-ethic expectations for 15 teammates
- Demonstrated grit, composure under pressure, and a high standard of excellence, acting as role model for the community
- Operated at high level of detail and consistency while training 20 hours per week
- Contributed to team score on all four apparatus in 2019 NCAA D1 National Gymnastics Championship Finals
- 5x Academic All American (2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022)
- Awards: Freshman of the Year (2018), Scholar Athlete of the Year (2019, 2022), Spirit Award (2019, 2022)

President of the Student Athlete Advisory Committee, University of Denver

President | June 2021 - June 2022

- Oversaw executive board of four and 50 SAAC representatives; worked closely with Denver Athletics Senior Staff and head coaches
- Established connections with groups across campus including USG, FSL, Club Sports, and Student Affairs
- Created five new SAAC subcommittees aligned with DU 4D experience and Athletics values
- Implemented Student-Athlete led unity groups to foster DEI and Green Bandana project to address mental health, catching the national news attention

Daniels Ethics Fellow

September 2018 - June 2019

- Graduated as MVP from service-based course on community engagement and ethics
- Served as Ethics Boot Camp Leader (2018, 2019, 2020)
- Participated in Bill Daniels Ethics Consortium as student representative of DU (2019, 2021)