

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION



OF SPORTS OFFICIALS

# GET THE WORD OUT

A RECRUITING GUIDE  
FOR LOCAL OFFICIALS  
ASSOCIATIONS

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Successful recruiting has a lot in common with marketing. Companies advertise by pursuing the demographic with an interest in their product. Companies expand that demographic by generating goodwill and trying to make new demographics feel a need or a desire for items, which quite frankly, they never felt a need for before.

Recruiting has to be done by all members of the association. The association should pick the best salespersons from within and let the rest of the association know who they are. Admittedly, some people have recruiting skills and some don't. Even the members who aren't good at recruiting need to talk to perspective members. When it comes time for the heavy recruiting, turn them over to the salespeople that the association has selected and they can give the heavy sales pitch.

A successful recruiting program must do two things. First, it must identify and reach people who have a propensity to officiate. Second, it must increase the public's propensity to officiate. In other words, it must make more people want to officiate.

Information is the key. Associations must determine which groups of people have a propensity to officiate.

Associations could poll their new recruits and determine their age, their profession, how they found out about the association's training program and whether they were recruited through an organized association recruiting program, through contacts with an individual official, through an advertisement, through playing or coaching in a league the association serviced or through some combination of those factors.

Current members can provide vital information, too. Associations should poll

current members to find out how old they were when they first joined the association, how they got started officiating and what led them to join their current association.

Associations can use that information to determine what types of people have a propensity to become officials. Associations also can find out what types of people in underrepresented groups have a propensity to officiate. Then associations can create plans to target those types of people with a propensity to officiate, leading to more efficient recruiting.

Maybe you'll find you should target parents and people in mid-life. Indeed, many recruiting programs focus on players, former players and intramural programs. However, an association facing a shortage of officials may do well to consider pursuing older people by reaching out to parents, by recruiting business people who have some flexibility in their schedule – such as insurance agents, real estate agents and investment professionals – and even by recruiting experienced doctors and dentists (who often have some control over their schedule).

# ***5 AVENUES TO FINDING RECRUITS***

## ***1. CAMPUSES***

Be it high schools or colleges, the classrooms and athletic facilities are teeming with potential officials. Contact guidance counselors to find out if their school hosts a career day. If so, ask to be included. Set up a table or booth with registration information, educational materials and officiating equipment. During the games you officiate, you've likely come in contact with athletes

who seem to have a good grasp of the rules and understand the nuances of the game. While some of those types go on to play at the next level, far more do not. During a timeout or other break in the action, casually ask them if they've ever considered officiating when their playing days are over. Don't make a production out of it, but a brief conversation is not out of line. You might consider asking coaches for recommendations as well. Intramural programs are another possibility. Contact the director of intramurals and reach out to the students playing in and officiating those games.

## ***2. SPORTING EVENTS***

If your area has a major or minor league team, or a college that hosts sporting events, contact the public relations department for permission to set up a table or host an officiating night. As a public service, many teams will have the public address announcer read a recruitment statement you provide. Direct interested fans to the table you have stationed in the lobby or near one of the exits. An information table can also be planned in conjunction with major sporting events in cities that host bowls, playoff or tournament games. Again, be sure to check with those in charge for approval and cooperation.

## ***3. THE INTERNET AND MEDIA***

One association was pleasantly surprised by the number of responses it received after placing an ad on Craigslist. Other social media sites, if used properly and carefully monitored, can be used to make web surfers aware of officiating. The sports editor of the local newspaper and the sports directors of radio and TV stations may publicize your recruitment efforts free of charge as a public service.

## ***4. WORKOUT FACILITIES***

Health clubs, YMCAs and YWCAs are frequented by sports-minded people. And most of those who use health clubs are already or are interested in getting

into good physical condition. Managers of those facilities may be persuaded to place a recruitment announcement on a bulletin board and in the locker rooms.

## **5. STATE ASSOCIATIONS**

It is mutually beneficial for the state association to build the corps of officials. Work with the person in the state office who oversees officials to work cooperatively with your association to recruit young officials. The state association can place ads in tournament programs and play public service announcements on video boards at tourney games.

# **MAKE SURE YOU'VE LOOKED EVERYWHERE**

Your association needs to create a program that reaches out to the traditional pool of applicants as well as those who have recently begun to officiate and those who may have an interest in officiating once presented with information about the opportunity. Your association has a legal duty to not discriminate in the recruitment of officials. Your recruitment process should be open to all segments of our population. It should go further and make an affirmative effort to create opportunities for all segments of our population, including young people, women and minorities to become officials and members of your association.

## **1. CONSIDER ALL POSSIBLE CANDIDATES.**

Look beyond those persons who have traditionally been officials for a particular sport. There may be many young women who would be interested

in officiating boys' basketball and football. There is no reason they should not officiate those sports.

## ***2. GET SOME INFORMATION.***

Your association might consider convening a series of focus groups, including those segments of our population, which have been underrepresented in officiating, to determine the most appropriate methods by which to reach those segments of the population to make them aware of opportunities in officiating. It may well be that the traditional methods used by your association do not foster the flow of information to those people so that they can become aware of the opportunities that exist.

## ***3. EXPAND YOUR SEARCH.***

Your association needs to expand the places where you traditionally look for officials. Your horizons should be unrestricted and all types of community and school-based groups should be contacted, especially those that focus upon the needs and concerns of women and minorities.

## ***4. LEARN HOW THEY LOOK FOR INFORMATION.***

A study should be conducted to determine which media sources are the best to reach those segments of the population. It may well be that local newsletters, organization's bulletins and school publications that may better reach these traditionally underrepresented groups.

## ***5. TAILOR YOUR PITCH TO FIT THE AUDIENCE.***

The content of the advertisement and solicitations should be directed to the needs of, and specific benefits available to, those under-represented groups if they become sports officials. The traditional content may no longer be applicable. A fresh new approach should be considered.

# **HOW TO SELL OFFICIATING TO PROSPECTS**

Recruiting and retaining officials is a classic Catch-22 situation. Before we can keep them, we've got to find them. Veteran officials can use any or all of the following inducements to convince prospects to give our avocation a try.

## ***CAMARADERIE***

The shared experiences and teamwork result in a kinship that can be found in few other spheres of life. Officiating creates and sustains friendships that last a lifetime.

## ***STAYING FIT***

While some people have no trouble maintaining a personal fitness program, others need motivation. Officiating is hard work and those whose bodies can withstand the physical demands will benefit in multiple ways.

## ***OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL***

There is an officiating shortage in virtually every area of the country. Even in the rare spots where officials are in good supply, reinforcements are needed to replace injured or retiring officials. Moreover, officiating is open to people regardless of their gender, race, creed or national origin.

## ***SUPPLEMENTAL INCOME***

Officiating allows us to get paid for something we enjoy doing. Because you can work as much or as little as you want, you control how much extra money you take in.

## **LIFE SKILLS**

Officiating requires a unique skill set – a plethora of attributes such as communication skills, time management, dedication and teamwork – that can be called upon not only on the field or court but on the job, in school or at home as well.

## **STAY CONNECTED**

Some officials were capable players in their day. Others rode the bench but still love the game. Officials stay engaged and a part of the game they once played. The connection lasts well beyond their playing careers.

### **REAL TALK:**

# **RECRUITING INCENTIVIZES THE OREGON LACROSSE OFFICIALS**

Association (OLOA) for the first time this year implemented a Recruitment Reward Program for its members. Members who successfully recruit new members for the association are rewarded financially. Craig Poole, L2S committee chair for the OLOA, explained the new program.

**How did your Recruitment Reward Program come about?**

**Poole:** It was a discussion we had at the board level. There had been a



recruitment reward program for football officials that someone had mentioned and somebody said, “Wonder if we should try that?” That is where it came from. We didn’t take exactly what they did. We molded it to our own needs. We are giving \$50 to any member who brings in a new official. But there also some guidelines that the new officials have to follow. They have to put in an application to the league secretary and area assigners. Then the new officials pay \$30 in training materials and they are required to attend and complete the new officials training, which is a 10-week training program. They must join US Lacrosse. We have to do that to officiate. They must pass the preseason background check. They have to officiate a minimum of 10 games a season, and not just officiate 10 games, they have to be someone we want to invite back.

**Where does the reward money come from?**

**Poole:** It’s coming out of our budget, which comes from a couple different places. It comes out of association officials’ dues and dues from the teams that are playing in the league. There is a budget line item that we put there.

**Have you received any new officials as a result of the program?**

**Poole:** We got about a total of 100 officials the first year and 18 of them are new. We usually have about half that. We were a little more aggressive in what we’ve done with recruiting this year. We’ve tried to encourage people to get recruits that have officiated other sports or they’ve been prior players or coaches. The toughest thing is when you get someone in who has never played a sport, never seen it and never had a whistle in their mouth. We’ve been pretty proactive in saying what we’re looking for in new officials.

**Would you recommend a similar program to other associations?**

**Poole:** Absolutely. You've got to have a plan in place and criteria. Don't just throw it out there and see if it sticks. We talked about it at the board level for a couple different months before we decided to give it a try. Based on the success the first year, I would recommend it.

## ***PLAN FOR THE FUTURE***

### **How to Create Long-Term Officiating Prospects**

Associations must constantly work to increase the number of people who have a propensity to officiate. That work involves building goodwill and exposing people to officials and the officiating avocation. The benefits are long-term as the work will gradually increase the number of future prospects, but isn't likely to have immediate results.

The public is more likely to emphasize with a profession when it is exposed to people in that profession. Clearly, associations must expose people to officials. Associations also must take steps to humanize officials.

Associations should expose parents, coaches and players to officials away from the game. Preseason and midseason question-and-answer sessions with parents, and access to high school and even middle school gym classes are easy starters. However, officials can do more.

Associations can inform the media that the police officer who does exceptional work is also a sports official. Similarly, the lawyer on a big case, the teacher

in a classroom and the local insurance agent can be promoted. People should know that there's a real, valuable contributing member of society behind the umpire's mask or encased in the referee's stripes.

Finally, associations can use local newspapers or television programs to visibly demonstrate a local official's day, starting with her regular job and moving to her commute to the gym, her pregame session with her partner and finally to the game itself. The key to increasing the public's propensity to officiate is to expose the public to officials by marketing the special people who make up the avocation.

## ***HOW TO PREPARE YOUR ASSOCIATION TO RECRUIT***

Officials associations need to take some preliminary steps to prepare for the new recruits they hope to attract. Of course, officials associations have always done the most important work – training their new officials on sports rules, mechanics and the association's policies and procedures. That training will be more effective if associations take some steps to clean house in preparation for their new recruits.

### ***UPDATE ROSTERS BEFORE THE SEASON STARTS.***

Your new members need accurate information as soon as possible. They should never encounter difficulty reaching a veteran simply because the association waited until the season was under way to update the rosters. Don't put rosters off until your first meeting, and don't wait for your veteran officials to call you. Remember that your current members are in offseason mode. It's up to the association's executive board to do the preliminary work.

## ***PREPARE BUSINESS TRAINING.***

New officials need to understand the business environment they're working in. An association must give new officials training on liability and limited liability issues in case they're ever sued. Particular emphasis should be placed on having officials write game and incident reports.

Officials should also be informed of association insurance as well as their own individual insurance options. At the very least, an association should tell its new members about NASO insurance or other liability protections.

Finally, new officials should be given information on tax issues and independent contractor issues. An association should at least tell officials a few basics:

They are free to work when they see fit – they are not obligated to take all games offered to them; they are free to exercise their judgment as they see fit – although the association will attempt to help them improve their judgment over time; and nobody has the right to control them when they officiate a game – although they certainly will be observed and evaluated. Associations should also let new officials know that taxes will not be deducted from their pay by the association or any other entity paying them. The association should tell new officials that that generally meets the legal definition of an independent contractor and they will be treated as such.

Associations should tell their new members that their treatment as independent contractors means they will not be covered for workers' compensation or unemployment insurance. That's why they need to buy insurance through groups like NASO. Finally, new officials should be told that they have special tax obligations. All new officials should be instructed on paying self-employment taxes; an accountant should be brought in to show the new officials how to fill out Schedule C, explain what can and cannot be deducted, and give special emphasis to frequently occurring deductions such as the mileage deduction.

## **IMPROVE THAT WEBSITE.**

Recruits often have a difficult time learning who everybody is in the association; it's an intimidating process. Now, associations can scan photos of members into a website. That lets the recruits link names to faces and it lets the veterans get to know who are the recruits. Associations can also use the website to post the e-mail addresses of officers.

In addition to providing a personal connection, websites can also be used for business purposes. An association can post its constitution and bylaws online. That can be extremely helpful to new officials, as well as to veterans who seldom refer to their constitution or bylaws, and may no longer know where to find their hard copies.

### **REAL TALK:**

# **REVAMP YOUR RECRUITING TO FIT NEEDS**

Maria Kappes served as the official recruiter for the Gallatin Valley Officials Association in Bozeman, Mont. During a recruitment campaign, the association started to target individuals who were older and more grounded in the community, rather than college students.

## **1. Why are you focusing your recruitment efforts on a different demographic?**

Kappes: In our pool, you must have a minimum of five years of experience to be considered for Master (highest) status. College kids are incredibly enthusiastic,

great volunteers and have accommodating schedules. But understandably, they don't have their roots in a community yet, making them very transient. They go wherever they can find work.

Unfortunately, our pool of referees spends one to three years training new officials while they are in college, then sends them off into the work world in another community, ready for Master status. That leaves our pool aging very quickly. We need young legs, but not so young that they will run away after we've trained them!

## **2. How did the shift in recruiting strategy come about?**

Kappes: I am a marketing professional. I joined the pool about five years ago and began helping with recruitment efforts. The pool focused on getting younger adults to join and begin refereeing, which is a missing age demographic right now. Our pool is aging. They needed younger referees. It seems logical to start looking at a college with plenty of "retired" high school basketball players. My goal was to start looking at the 25-35 age bracket; that target demographic is employed here, probably has family here, and likely isn't going to leave to find their first job. They've also had time, work experiences and life experiences that build interpersonal skills, add to their communication abilities and give them better perspective on professionalism.

## **3. Would you recommend the strategy of going after "older" officials to other officials associations as well?**

Kappes: I think each pool needs to determine what its five- to 10-year outlook is, and target their marketing efforts for a type of person that will add value to the game. Where our pool began spinning our wheels was by constantly putting officials on the floor with one to three years of experience. That doesn't

advance the game in our community. Our veteran referees are excellent mentors, but we also can't ask them to feed a cycle of incessant training with little measurable progress.

#### **4. What are some of the methods you are using to recruit officials?**

Kappes: During the recruiting season we leverage Facebook and Facebook ads. Digital advertising allows for much more specific demographic targeting. The local newspaper has been very good and sees the value in letting our community know about opportunities to get involved. We've placed PSAs on radio stations. We also network through existing referees. We've done posters at high-traffic collaborating businesses like Rosauers grocery, athletic clubs and Ace hardware stores.

We used to host a welcome freshmen booth that I cancelled ... too much time for too much turnover. We still post to the college careers page – a free service – but our focus and the majority of the volunteer effort goes elsewhere.

#### **5. What advice would you give to other associations in the process of starting a recruitment program?**

Kappes: Identify your needs first. ... The people who get involved in refereeing want to make a difference. It is important that they know their specific skill set is valued. If we approach it as an "everybody can do it!" type of activity, we aren't being true to the craft. Identify what age/gender/skill/cultural background/geography/athletic ability is lacking in your pool – then show up where that person spends time, and tell that person how much they could change a young person's life as a referee.