

How Other Organizations are Retaining Officials by Ensuring Best Practices

Hockey Canada Officiating Program

- “Celebrating Scholars in Stripes” six individuals awarded the Kenneth R. Stiles Memorial Scholarships for accomplishments on and off the ice
- Articles highlighting those selected for tournaments and events, even clinics.
- Rule Book App for accessibility

Volleyball Canada

- Strategies that identify and eliminate barriers for female ref development – raise awareness and offer women-targeted opportunities.
- Identify and develop individuals who have the potential to advance into an HP ref and/or attain international certifications. The National Ref Committee has multiple sub-committees, one of which was formed for identifying refs early in their career to ensure sufficient transition time.
- Offer referee services at National Championships, Canada Games and other events (make current refs feel special as well as attempt to further recruit).
- Work to create a strategy for timely and effective communication to all referees in Canada.

Alberta Soccer Referee Development Program – Recruitment and Retention Plan

- Assign a board member of volunteer(s) to conduct the recruitment.
- Identify locations to recruit and prepare recruitment materials (print media, social media, info meetings, internet correspondence etc.)
 - o Ensure that these materials include the motivations: income, necessity, frustration, fitness, social interaction and accomplishment.
- Conduct exit interviews to find common patterns of why referees leave the game.
- Retention techniques:
 - o 1. Initial training experience
 - Establish expectations of the referee and the association
 - Have a clear referee development path
 - Include strategies for dealing with stress and conflict resolution.
 - o 2. Ensure first officiating experiences are realistic but positive
 - Provide a designated individual to assist and support new referees.
 - Provide appropriate and adequate remuneration for officiating.
 - o 3. Establish a referee community of support
 - Create a referee club
 - Identify, praise and reward referees
 - Provide incentive and rewards for its members i.e., ‘referee of the month’ selected by peers, players, mentors or coaches. Find an incentive sponsor to provide a gift for the individual.

- Implementation of a mentoring program (Web based support, Peer-to-peer support)
- Implementation of the assessment program
 - Provincial Assessment
 - Modified Mentor assessment
- Social media and community events (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube etc.)
- Develop a system of support for referees who have experienced mistreatment.
 - Mentoring
 - Establish clear procedures and a path of consequences should players, coaches and spectators become abusive
- 4. Continued follow up and record management for departing referees
 - Personalized follow up to establish why officials choose not to return

Sport Canada Retention

- Sports leagues and schools to better support officials – this means more than just paying officials on time instead of weeks/months later, it means promoting policies, in writing, addressing bad behaviour. It means providing a halftime locker room in which officials can't hear coaches and fans ranting about calls.
- Officials need to support each other – create a good welcoming system or mentorship program at the local level. “You come to the officials’ association meeting, you get welcomed and listen to the meeting, and that’s the end of it. Generally, we don’t do a good job with our own to make them feel secure and work with them.”
- Give officials a public voice - In professional and college sports, officials and leagues have mechanisms in place that allow them to defend calls and explain mistakes to the public. Creating sophisticated replay systems at the high school and youth level would be expensive and impractical. But it’s not impossible to allow officials to publicly explain themselves, or to let an administrator do that for them. If there was better education and transparency around officiating calls, maybe some fans might be less inclined to challenge them.

SIRC

- In order to recruit females into officiating there needs to be recognition that females experience the role differently than males.
- Some officials responded to what they would like to see in order to make them feel better about their role
 - Need for support
 - Communication and recognition
 - Opportunities for training
 - Mentorship and advancement
 - Development of a community / Interaction with other officials
 - **Annual evaluation system to assign, promote and determine possible increase in pay rate.**

Some out of the box ideas (outside of Canada):

Texas Association of Sports Officials – PSA about their “Students Today are Referees Tomorrow” Program (START), targeting graduated seniors (high school). The association challenges every high-school varsity head coach (men and women) to find a minimum of ONE graduating senior that cares about the game and could have a potential interest in officiating.

The NHL focuses heavily on expanding their talent pool and hockey IQ by focusing on ex-players. As a result, they host an NHL exposure combine to allow for equal opportunities.

Minnesota – Thank a Ref Campaign, promotes retention by showing officiating as a desired occupation. Their campaign includes things like: Thank A Ref night, special announcements during events, an Ad in the game program thanking the refs, press releases, small gifts of appreciation, posting to socials with #ThankARef.

NFHS Nationwide – Their key audience was college athletes (intramural focused). Promotion material includes emails to influencers, social media campaigns, and digital advertising. They released this campaign three times (months apart) with three different messages: “Get involved and stay in shape” “Get involved and be part of the team” “Get involved and make some extra cash”.

FVB Umpires – started a program to use donated equipment/apparel from current members to defray startup costs for new officials, and then built an attrition model to measure recruiting success and ability to retain information (startup costs were their biggest barrier to recruiting).