



Athletics Nova Scotia Club Development Model

A Framework to Build a Successful Athletics Club

Contents

Introduction	3
Community Assessment	4
Club Philosophy and Safety	5
Coaching and Programming	8
Club Management and Governance	11
Conclusion	17

Introduction

The idea of forming an athletics club in the community may seem like a daunting task, but the purpose of this document is to act as a reference and a guide to the best practices of starting a club. The document will cover information from determining the needs of the community, to developing club programming, to managing the club to ensure long-term growth and success.

Clubs have a long-standing history within the sport of athletics, with all levels of clubs providing countless benefits to community members. Well established clubs provide access to organized sport at the community level, provide opportunities within the provincial and national network of sport, and provide the sport with permanency in the region by not depending on individuals.

This document will cover information based on an ideal model of a club, realizing that not all steps will fit the context of every club or community in the beginning. This model is there to provide a framework for decision-making in the early stages of forming the club, and its operation.

If at any time there are questions that arise or clarifications needed, please contact the Athletics Nova Scotia Technical Director for more information.

Community Assessment

The first step toward taking the club from the idea stage to reality is determining if there is a need in the community for a new club. Some aspects to consider when assessing the needs of the community would be:

- Where is the nearest club that already exists? Are members of this community already participating in that club? Would those community members be better served with an organization that is closer?
- What is the current population and demographic of the area? (number, age, economic status, etc.) Is that profile expected to change?
- What percentage of that population is already participating in the sport?
 - What aspects of athletics are they involved in? Track and field, road racing, marathon running, etc.
- Are suitable facilities (outdoor and indoor) available at a reasonable cost? Are they accessible?
- What are the means of transport in the area of the facilities the club would be operating in?

A key aspect in determining the viability of a newly formed organization will be the proximity to already established clubs. Particularly in rural areas, proximity to existing clubs is likely to cause the dividing of resources that are better off shared between groups. Consolidating resources - potential members, facilities, coaches, volunteers, potential sponsors, and general finances - is a likely determinant of a club's long-term success, and leads to betterment of the sport as a whole.

A successful best practice in the community assessment phase is the inclusion of a community meeting. Community meetings may be called to help determine the local interest of track and field in the area and to aid in the recruitment of key volunteers and coaches. Athletics NS staff can be available to assist in providing information to the community in such meetings.

Club Philosophy and Safety

Philosophy and Values

A club philosophy statement is an opportunity to provide the club with a sense of identity and give your current and future members a picture of what the club's purpose will be. A club may choose to focus on certain age groups, event groups, or offer programming to all ages and events.

Some factors to consider in developing a Club Philosophy statement are:

- Who is the club trying to reach?
- Does the club have an event group focus?
- Does the club have an age group focus?
- Will the club be geared towards performance, participation, or both?
- What is the overarching goal of the club?

Values are core beliefs about how the club will operate and make decisions. Values are the principles that the club will not compromise on and can be a tool used to show the community and potential new members what the club stands for.

Examples of values that may be relevant to a club are:

- Accessibility
- Accountability
- Dedication
- Excellence
- Enjoyment
- Integrity
- Leadership
- Teamwork

When choosing which values are important, it is recommended to limit selections to 3-4 values and create a statement to provide insight on what each means to the club.

When developing a philosophy statement and selecting core values of the club, it is important to note that they will guide the foreseeable future of the organization. Time should be taken to ensure they outline the desired pathway for the club. It can also be a valuable exercise to include members of, or the entire club, in this process; including athletes, coaches, and volunteers to ensure the members are creating a shared vision of the future of the club.

Both the philosophy statement and core values should be prominently displayed on the club webpage and regularly communicated and referenced within club communication and actions.

Club Safety

Providing a safe and supportive environment for all participants must be a club's highest priority. This applies to not only safety of athletes, but coaches and administrators as well. There are many steps to ensuring the safety of all individuals involved within the club. From background screening of coaches and volunteers, to formalizing club policies. Safety measures should be in place at every level of the organization.

Safe Sport

All clubs are required to adhere to Athletics Nova Scotia's Safe Sport Policy, but may also adopt a policy of their own that requires additional items. The Athletics NS Policy requires that all coaches and administrators of clubs submit to background screening in the form of a vulnerable sector check and a child abuse registry check. Athletics NS is able to supply a letter stating that these checks are required for volunteering in the sport.

The Policy also requires coaches and administrators to participate in the online Safe Sport and Rule of Two NCCP modules. All coaches are also required to have achieved "Trained" status in at least one NCCP Athletics coaching context.

For more information on these requirements, visit the Safe Sport page of the Athletics NS website.

Emergency Action Plan

Planning ahead is an essential part of being prepared in case something goes wrong. One of the measures that clubs and coaches should have in place is an Emergency Action Plan (EAP). This one page document should have all of the information needed in case a major injury or incident happens.

The EAP should outline who the Charge Person (stays with injured person and assesses the situation) and Call Person (contacts the emergency line and guides them to the scene) are, the location of medical documents, location of nearest hospital and directions to the current location. All coaches are trained by the NCCP in how to create EAPs.

There should be one EAP created for every location that the club will use. If the club rents a facility, that facility will likely have their own emergency action plan for events. For a free template version of an EAP, contact the Athletics NS Technical Director.

Accessibility

There are two different types of accessibility to consider in the context of forming a club; physical accessibility from a geographic and facility perspective, and financial accessibility.

Accessibility is a large consideration in newer facilities that are being built, but if the club will be training in an older facility, there are many things to consider when it comes to all potential participants being able to use the facility. For athletes who may be daily wheelchair users, will the facility the club is going to train in have ramps or elevators if needed? Paved or solid surfaces for chairs to access the track or field? Tie down rails for seated throws? All of these questions and more should be considered. If a club has questions on accessibility, or Becoming Para Ready, the Athletics NS Technical Director can provide resources for clubs to implement.

Geographic accessibility refers back to many of the questions that should be asked during the community assessment. Where is the training facility of the club located in relation to the membership? Where is the training facility located in relation to public transportation? These things are important to consider as some prospective club members may not have access to reliable transportation. Not being able to access public transportation close to the facility may be a large barrier to participation for some potential members.

Financial accessibility involves both the geographic aspect in terms of the transportation cost that will be incurred by travelling to train with the club, combined with the membership and competition registration fees that will need to be paid in order to participate. While athletics or track & field are a fairly accessible sport from a cost perspective, some potential members may not have the financial status to be able to participate. Will the club have policies to be able to help those who may not be in a position to pay membership fees immediately? Are the membership fees set appropriately for the product being delivered? There is more information on policies and membership fees later in this document.

Coaching and Programming

Training and Certification

As part of the Athletics NS Safe Sport Policy, all coaches are required to reach “Trained” status in at least one NCCP context for Athletics. It is recommended that each club has a policy on coaching requirements for anyone working within the club with guidelines in place to help new coaches meet those requirements in a timely manner.

There are multiple ways that a coach can enter the NCCP pathway, and each is dependent on the context in which they are coaching. The different contexts (age and development levels) that a coach can begin their training pathway in are outlined below:

- Under 12 athletes - **Run, Jump, Throw, Wheel (Community Sport)**
- U14-U16, or multiple event groups - **Sport Coach (Instructor-Beginner)**
- U16-U18, individual event groups - **Club Coach (Competition-Introduction)**

It is highly recommended that all coaches aim to achieve the “Certified” status in the context in which they are coaching. In order to become certified, coaches go through a competency-based evaluation where coaches must show they are able to display the skills they were trained in during the coaching workshops.

Becoming certified not only helps coaches become better at what they do, it is also a selling feature for the club by being able to promote quality training and that all coaches meet the standard set by the NCCP.

Coaching Roles

Head Coach

The Head Coach of a club will be responsible for overseeing the training and coaching structure, as well as the competitive activities of the club. This includes the division of training groups and assignment of coaches to each of those groups.

Coach development is also a critical part of the Head Coach’s role. This includes ensuring coaches meet the requirements of the club’s policies, encourage or organize professional development opportunities, and act as a mentor to new coaches.

Other general responsibilities of the Head Coach include, but are not limited to:

- Recruitment and training of coaches
- Ensure programs are in line with the philosophy and values of both the club and Athletics Nova Scotia
- Develop a plan for succession
- Act as a member of the board of directors for the club, or report to the board on program updates and costs

Staff Coaches

The role of Staff or Assistant Coaches is to lead the groups to which they have been respectively assigned. These coaches will be responsible for developing and implementing training plans, and being the main point of contact for athletes within the group. Staff Coaches work alongside the Head Coach to ensure the values of the club are being exhibited by all participants.

The recruitment and retention of Staff Coaches is vital to the success of an organization. These coaches can impact dozens to hundreds of athletes over the course of their career, so investing in their development and recognizing them for their time is essential to the growth of the club and the sport as a whole.

Questions for the Head Coach and Board of Directors to ask in relation to Staff Coaches include:

- Do we have a coach for every event group that we advertise that we offer?
- Do we have someone able to work with a U12 age group to develop fundamentals?
- How many athletes per coach do we have in each group? Is this a reasonable number?
- What are our methods of recruiting more coaches?
- Are these coaches available for all practices, or only part time?
- Is there a backup plan in case a coach is suddenly not available?
- What kind of honorariums or stipends can we offer our coaches?
- What kind of development or financial support for development can we offer our coaches?
- Do our membership fees reflect the quality of coaching and the recognition we plan to offer in the previous questions?

Training Groups

The organization of training groups will vary greatly between different clubs due to many factors including the event groups that are being offered, number of athletes, ages and skill levels of athletes, and coaching availability.

Among most clubs, the U12 athletes begin in a Run, Jump Throw, Wheel program, while U14 and possibly U16 athletes are recommended to spend time in a Development Group in order to gain experience with and exposure to all event groups. These two groups are designed to teach fundamental skills of movement to developing athletes before specializing in one sport or event group.

Older athletes are then typically divided by both age and event group (ie. U16-U18 endurance group vs U20-Senior endurance group). Dividing athletes by age, and sometimes skill level, allows for a Daily Training Environment (DTE) that better fits within the Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD) model.

Training Structure

When developing a training structure for a club, it is important to understand the demographic that will be within the club. The training structure should be based on the LTAD stage of the athletes within the group, and all ages and event groups may not necessarily follow the same training structure.

Some key questions to ask when determining the training structure of the club as a whole are:

- **Who are the athletes within each group?**
 - Age, skill level, single or multi sport
- **What is the availability of the coaching staff?**
 - Is it seasonally dependent?
- **What is the facility access like?**
 - Indoor vs outdoor

The number of training sessions per week can vary by club and by training group. Most clubs hold training sessions 2-4 times per week, but some programs may be seasonally dependent. Run Jump Throw Wheel programs for example may only operate during certain weeks of the year, and may only be one session per week. For more information on appropriate training volumes, consult the Athletics Canada LTAD model to learn more about the best DTE for the group in question.

Competition Structure

The timing of competitions may vary greatly between different groups within the club. Different ages and skill levels will require different competitions in order to qualify for things like Provincial Teams, National Championships or even National Teams. Many other factors may need to be considered, such as geographic location of both the club and most common competition venues.

Items that are important for the Head Coach and Board of Directors to determine when a club is forming are:

- **How will athletes register for meets?**
 - Will athletes register individually and pay all fees?
 - Does the club include meet entries in fees, and one person will register all athletes?
 - Is there a mix of both depending on the meet?
- **Does the club coordinate travel and accommodations for events that this is required?**
- **Does the club promote out of province competitions?**

If the club is arranging travel to competitions, Safe Sport Policies of both the club and Athletics NS must be adhered to. This includes both male and female chaperones available, coaches not travelling alone with athletes, and all communication between coaches and athletes remaining open and observable.

Club Management and Governance

Club Registration

In order to receive the benefits of insurance coverage, national ranking eligibility, club updates, and voting rights at the Athletics NS Annual General Meeting, all organizations must be registered clubs with Athletics NS. This also includes following the annual renewal process for previously established clubs. Clubs may contact the Athletics NS Executive Director to assist with the setup of an online registration page. A full club registration process is required and one on one technical support can be available upon request.

Each club should have a registrar who is responsible for registering and renewing the club membership online. The registrar is also responsible for ensuring all athletes, coaches, and volunteers are registered members of the club in order to receive insurance coverage and other benefits. If a member requires financial assistance that the club is unable to accommodate, contact the Athletics NS Executive Director for assistance.

Volunteer Structure and Roles

An often overlooked aspect of a successful club is having multiple volunteers sharing the operational workload of the club. If this workload falls on a small group, or even one volunteer or coach, it can lead to burnout and high turnover which is not sustainable for building a successful program. If the workload falls onto a coach, it will greatly take away from their time spent on developing the athletes in front of them and can lead to performance suffering.

The scale of responsibility for different roles will vary. This allows for a wide range of people to give back to the organization without overwhelming those who are keen to help. If the responsibilities and possible time commitments are outlined, it will become easier to find someone to fill that role. Some possible roles and responsibilities outside of the Board of Directors that a club may want to consider include:

- **Volunteer Manager**
 - Responsible for organizing the club's volunteers and ensuring each has a clear role and responsibility. Likely will also play a role in recruiting new volunteers, especially for club-hosted events.
- **Registrar**
 - Responsible for ensuring all participants (athletes, coaches, volunteers) are registered members of the club, and therefore members of Athletics NS.
- **Social Media and Communications**
 - Responsible for running the club's official social media accounts to both promote the club and provide valuable information to followers and members. Also responsible for sharing updates and relevant information to members that are not communicated by the Head Coach.

Board of Directors

The responsibility for a Board of Directors of an athletics organization is to provide a structure of governance. The Board is elected to represent all members of the club and to keep the best interests of those members in mind when making decisions for the future of the organization.

A Board of Directors can look different depending on the size of the club it is representing, but the ideal scenario would be that the board positions are occupied by volunteers who are interested in growing the sport, or very often keen parents looking to be more involved. Ideally these positions are not held by active participants such as coaches or athletes within the club (outside of the Head Coach or an Athlete Representative position). This is in the hope of avoiding possible conflicts of interest, or individuals looking to make changes to serve their own interests.

Each member of the Board of Directors will occupy a different role, and those roles and responsibilities shall be written into the bylaws of the club to allow for succession of duties. There is more information on bylaws in the next section. A Board of Directors can grow with the club over time, but a new club should, at minimum, start with the following positions:

- **President**
 - Chair of all general and Board meetings, chair of executive committee, work with each Director to oversee all aspects of operations. The President will act as a signing officer for the organization
- **Registrar/Secretary** - May be different positions
 - Ensure all participants, including coaches and volunteers, are registered members of the club
 - Ensure all proceedings of Board meetings, general meetings, etc. are recorded
- **Treasurer**
 - Oversee the financial operation of the organization and ensure the financial policies are being adhered to. The Treasurer will also act as a signing officer for the organization
- **Head Coach or Coaching Representative**
 - Provide updates on programs, training and competitions within the club and be a representative for assistant coaches.
- **Athlete Representative(s)**
 - Represent the views of all athletes within the club
- **Director(s) at Large**
 - Assist in policy development, serve on working committees and take on other responsibilities as required

While each member of the Board of Directors will have a specific role outside of meetings that they will report on, the Board as a whole is responsible for:

- **Defining Philosophy and Values**
- **Strategic Planning**
 - Developing the organization's vision for the future and laying out the pathway to the end goal
- **Policymaking**
 - Drafting, editing and approving all policies that are to be implemented in the club. These policies need to cover all aspects of the operations of the club including coaches, athletes and administrators.
- **Reporting and Oversight**
 - Each Director on the board is responsible for overseeing the operation of their sector of the organization. This can sometimes involve meetings with staff, coaches, or committees
 - Each Director should have a report prepared for regular meetings with any updates, tasks that need to be completed, or any support that may be needed from the Board

Bylaws

Bylaws are broad rules that cannot be adopted or changed without the approval of the membership of the organization at a general meeting, typically an Annual General Meeting (AGM). The bylaws are often related to the functioning of the Board of Directors, such as job descriptions of board members, voting rights, and budget processes. These bylaws are submitted to and approved by the Registry of Joint Stocks.

Because bylaws are typically broad in their descriptions, they rarely need to be revised. However, If a bylaw is being amended or a new bylaw is being instated, it will need to be voted to be approved by the membership, as well as reported to and approved by the appropriate government department.

After deciding what legal structure will best fit the needs of the organization, clubs should look to reserve their legal name and register with the Registry of Joint Stocks. A step by step guide to the Nova Scotia Registry can be found online. Athletics Nova Scotia staff are available to assist with this process

All published Athletics Nova Scotia bylaws have been vetted by the provincial government of Nova Scotia and can be adapted and modified to fit the use of a club. These bylaws can be found on the Athletics NS website.

Policies

Policies are written rules that the organization must follow during day to day procedures. Unlike general bylaws, policies are much more detailed and focus on specific areas of the organization's operations. Policies do not require a vote from the general membership, and are therefore more flexible to be adapted as needed over time by the Board of Directors.

At a minimum, the policies that a club should establish and publish include:

- Code of Conduct, Safe Sport, and a Complaints Procedure
- Coaching requirements
- Travel and weather policies
- Compensation and funding policies
- Financial management and budgeting practices
- Written roles and responsibilities of all Board of Director and coaching positions

The policies of Athletics Nova Scotia are published on the organization's website and can be adopted by clubs or modified to fit the use of clubs of different sizes and contexts.

Insurance

Every registered member of Athletics Nova Scotia will be covered under the Athletics Nova Scotia liability insurance. A portion of the fees collected by Athletics Nova Scotia every season are allocated towards liability insurance coverage. Therefore, it is essential that every athlete, coach, volunteer, associate or board member within the club must be registered in order to receive coverage.

The Athletics Nova Scotia liability insurance covers all *sanctioned* training and competition at sites that clubs have legal or contracted use of. A copy of the Athletics Nova Scotia liability insurance certificate is available to clubs or rental facilities upon request from the Athletics Nova Scotia Executive Director.

Equipment is not covered under the Athletics Nova Scotia liability insurance. All clubs that own their own property or equipment should purchase their own equipment insurance to cover the replacement cost of lost, stolen, or damaged items. This insurance can be purchased from any insurance agency.

Financials

Ensuring that the financials of the club are in order at all times should be high on the list of priorities for a Board of Directors. It is highly recommended that each Board has a Treasurer position that provides monthly financial reports to the Board. These reports can help the Board determine the financial health of the organization and ensure that all financial activities are accounted for.

For any movement of money coming into the club, or for any spending that is taking place, there should always be a record or receipt of the transaction. It is highly recommended that a club avoids handling cash at any time. All funds should be securely transferred by cheque, debit/credit, or electronic transfer. Any funds being sent by electronic transfer to a club should always go to a club email linked to the organization's account and never to the personal email of a member or administrator.

Membership Fees

Membership fees are generally the largest source of annual revenue that a club will receive. Setting the club membership fees appropriately is important to the growth through both accessibility for new members, and the ability to financially support current and expanding programs.

There is a longstanding dogma of track and field having very low, or zero cost. While from a financial perspective, it is a very accessible sport for most people, membership fees are necessary in order to provide value to programs that are being offered and provide stability for the future.

By having appropriate membership fees, the club will be able to support and retain coaches who will in turn be more motivated to provide a better service for club members. When members see the value that the club is providing, they are more likely to return as members and recommend the club and sport to others. Year over year, this will create a positive upward cycle of growing value in the programs that the club provides.

Considerations when assigning membership fees, and the signs of a financially healthy club include:

- Covering all operational costs
 - Facility rentals, equipment purchases, upgrades and insurance
- Providing a stipend or honorarium to coaches
- Providing support for professional development of coaches
- Growing and expanding program and event offerings
 - Training groups growing
 - Adding more coaches
 - Offering new programs or club events
- The club is able to support members who may need financial assistance to participate

All members of clubs affiliated with Athletics NS must be Athletics NS members. It is generally recommended to have the Athletics NS membership fees built into the cost of club registration.

Meet Hosting Opportunities

Each competitive season, Athletics NS will call for bids to co-host provincial level meets with clubs across the province. Provincial level meets are typically well attended and if a club has the resources and capacity to host one, it is an opportunity for the club to generate significant revenue during the season.

The two biggest barriers to hosting events are facilities and volunteer capacity. In order to host a provincial level meet, the facility must be accessible with accommodations nearby and also have the necessary specifications and equipment to host all events that would be offered. Beyond the facility, the largest requirement of the club in hosting duties is to be able to provide a sizable number of volunteers and officials to cover as many roles as possible. This is where having the role of Volunteer Manager within the club can be beneficial. Having someone who is in charge of recruiting parents and volunteers can provide a big return to the club when hosting events.

When hosting a provincial level event, the club will sign a Memorandum of Agreement with Athletics NS that will detail responsibilities of each party, as well as the cost/profit sharing at the end of the event.

Another opportunity for a club to generate revenue during the competitive season is by hosting twilight or mini-meets. These are small scale meets that typically have a fewer number of events offered compared to a full-weekend provincial level meet. They can be offered during a weeknight, or a half-day on a weekend.

Because these meets are smaller, the volunteer requirement is typically much lower, so these meets may be more accessible for smaller clubs to run. These events could be a one-off meet, or they could be part of a series of meets throughout the competitive season.

Revenue generated from hosting events can total in the thousands of dollars depending on the level of meet you are hosting and how frequently the club is willing to run them. These funds can go a long way in strengthening a budget and is an option worth exploring for any established club that has access to adequate facilities.

For more information on meet hosting requirements and opportunities, including information on renting equipment, please contact the Athletics NS Technical Director.

Conclusion

This document was created to be a general guide of best practices for creating and growing a club within Nova Scotia. Not all aspects of this model will be applicable to every club being established within the province but the information of this document was intentionally written as generalities to leave room for context-dependent differences.

This document was written to have clubs be in line with what Athletics NS would consider a model club. To see how an already established club compares to a model club, contact the Athletics NS Technical Director to inquire about the Club Development Chart. This series of self-reflective questions will identify both where the club currently stands in all aspects of the organization, as well as making it easy to identify target areas for growth and improvement.

To conclude, if this framework is adopted by new or previously existing clubs in the province, with the support of Athletics NS, it greatly increases the likelihood of establishing an organization that will be a staple of the community far beyond the career of any one member or coach within the club.