



# A GUIDE TO: STARTING A SOFTBALL LEAGUE/ASSOCIATION



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## A GUIDE TO STARTING A SOFTBALL LEAGUE/ASSOCIATION

This guide will help you understand the first steps to take as you begin the process of starting up a softball association/league.

Some questions to consider:

- Does your community already have a softball league/association?
- Is there a need for a softball league/association in your community?

### LEARNING ABOUT YOUR COMMUNITY

#### What Demographics Tell Your Association

- Demographic data adds value to your association by providing information that is useful for marketing, membership, and organization growth.
- Demographics provide you with information about:
  - population age groups in your community that help determine needs of that particular demographic category. For example, demographics of a community could represent age groups such as:
    - Children ages 4-10
    - Youth ages 10-19
    - Adults ages 19-35
    - Adults ages 19+
- Age demographics can further tell you about the needs of the people within a particular community. For example, the type of softball that will be most appealing:
  - Slo-Pitch - played by Adults age 19+
  - Fast Pitch - played by youth ages 10 -19 and adults ages 19-35
  - BlastBall & Learn to Play - played by children ages 4-10
- Demographics can define when and where your programs and events are offered and price point:
  - adults ages 19+ - optimum scheduling later evening or weekends
  - children ages 4-10 - optimum scheduling earlier in the day or weekends
  - youth ages 10-19 - optimum scheduling avoid Friday nights and weekends
  - diamonds - close to home for children and youth
  - registration fees - match to age and income demographics
  - social interaction - match to age, income demographics

#### Choose Which Softball Genre to Offer

- There are three versions of softball played in Ontario and each is identified by pitching style.
  - Fast pitch popular with youth and adults
  - Slo-pitch popular with youth and adults; often played by elementary and secondary school teams
  - Orthodox popular with adults; sometimes referred to as modified softball
- Once you have determined your Target Market, the type of softball that would be offered most successfully is often self-evident.
- Because some styles are popular with more than one age group, surveying for the preferred type of softball is advisable.



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Note: More information on the specific rules of each type of softball is available in the Official Softball Canada Rulebook, which can be purchased through Softball Ontario.

### **Select a Facility**

- An important part of learning about your community is awareness of the facilities your association could potentially use for your programs - games, practices, special events.

### **Where to find information**

- Private facilities are increasingly more available:
- Facilities are often well maintained since they are on private property and users expect higher quality
- Cost of renting a private facility may be more expensive than public but discounts are sometimes available and worth exploring
- Renting practice facilities, including indoor batting cages and practice areas, is popular with competitive teams who take advantage of the facilities to work out during the off-season.
- Parks and Recreation Departments are the primary resource for your association to research public facilities in the community.
- They can provide information on rental fees, facility quality, availability, reservation deadlines, park features, etc.
- Some communities offer sports fields to youth associations free of charge.
- An invaluable resource and may lead to discovering facilities you may not have found on your own.
- These facilities are in high demand so it is advisable to begin research well in advance of your needs.

## **WHAT ARE THE BASICS?**

There are many aspects to starting up a softball league/association including administration, officials, coaches and players.

## **ADMINISTRATION**

All softball leagues/associations require the below criteria to 'have your house in order'. There are many policies and procedures your association should follow in order to **protect** your association from liability.

- [Become an incorporated non-profit](#). Refer to the document "[Incorporation for Non-Profit Organizations](#)" for more information and the benefits of incorporating.
- Elect a Board of Directors with defined roles and hold an Annual General Meeting each year
- Establish Policies and Procedures for your Association:
  - Develop a Constitution and By-laws
  - Code of Conduct (for parents, coaches, players)
  - Conflict of Interest Policy
  - Operating Rules (competition rules)
  - Financial Management Policies
  - Harassment Policy
  - Team Travel Policies
  - Discipline Policy
  - Appeals Process Policy
- Secure Liability Insurance
- Obtain insurance through one of Softball Ontario's Member Associations: [Ontario Amateur Softball Association \(OASA\)](#), [Ontario Rural Softball Association \(ORSA\)](#), [Provincial Women's Softball Association \(PWSA\)](#) and [Slo-Pitch Ontario Association \(SPOA\)](#)
- Build a budget and establish fees

Softball Ontario has developed Policy templates & best practices that your Association can use!

**[CHECK THEM OUT!](#)**



- Develop/Launch a website or Facebook page where parents and players can get up to date information and find out how to register (there are many free platforms that are easy to use such as Weebly or Word Press).
- Advertise your Association/League
  - Put an ad in your local newspaper, develop a relationship with local schools in your community, host community events
  - Use social media (Facebook and Twitter) once you have a following to promote registration and community events
- Find and train volunteers. Establish a training plan.
- Ensure financial security and transparency
- Document Policies and procedures
- Provide recognition for volunteers
  - This can be as simple as having a year-end pizza party to thank your volunteers for a successful season.

Consider reaching out to local softball leagues/associations to share best practices.

## OPERATIONS

- Book permits for diamonds
- Collect registrations
- Buy uniforms
- Buy equipment
- Assign teams
- Develop schedules

## OFFICIALS

An important aspect of your league or association is game play. Using Softball Ontario Registered Umpires ensures that your league/association is using insured (accident & liability), trained officials that know the game. The term 'Carded', means that the Softball Ontario Umpire is Registered (insured) and has completed the Softball Canada National Umpire Exam. Carded officials are required at any Member Association (OASA, ORSA, PWSA, or SPOA) Qualifying and Provincial tournaments.

### How does your league/association find umpires to officiate league games?

Softball Ontario has designated 11 regions, called "Zones" for fast pitch and 9 Zones for slo-pitch. Each Zone is assigned a "Zone-Umpire-in-Chief (ZUIC)". This representative can help you find umpires to assign to your Association.

You can assign a position on your Board to be an Umpire-in-Chief to liaise with the ZUIC of your Zone to help you assign umpires to local games.

There are a number of clinics that Softball Ontario offers to help develop your local umpires (junior, intermediate and above). For more information, visit [www.softballontario.ca](http://www.softballontario.ca).

## COACHES

Coaches are another important aspect as they interact with the players and parents and represent your league/association at games.

Your Association may want to develop a job description and put out a job call for coaches and start recruiting volunteers for each team your Association has.



Anyone who coaches probably knows how to throw, hit, run the bases and the other skills of the sport. Coaching is not about doing the skills but teaching the skills and correcting errors. It is also about being a positive influence in the lives of young people. These are the skills taught at Softball Ontario's coaching clinics. Coaches can complete National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) training to receive information and techniques on how to coach. Training that your coaches would benefit from are "Learn to Coach" and "Community Coach". For more information on coaching clinics, please visit: [www.softballontario.ca](http://www.softballontario.ca).

## PLAYERS

How will you promote your league/association to your community?

What age groups and type of softball ([fast pitch](#), [slo-pitch](#), [orthodox](#)) will your association play?

## TAKE YOUR LEAGUE/ASSOCIATION TO THE NEXT LEVEL

### **..BY PAYING THE LOCAL SOFTBALL ASSOCIATION/LEAGUE SERVICES FEE!**

This fee allows your Association to host clinics, take advantage of community event kits, and have your Association information promoted on Softball Canada's League Finder and on the Softball Ontario website and so much more! For more information on program, [click here](#). To view a list of Local Softball Associations on the Softball Ontario League Finder, [click here](#).

### **..BY ACHIEVING A SAFE STAR RATING!**

SAFE Star is a quality assurance program designed to promote best practices in Softball Association management and administration. For more information on the SAFE Star program, [click here](#)! A SAFE Star Rating can help promote your league/association by showing parents and players that you are committed to providing quality softball programs for your community.



### **..BY GETTING TRAINED!**

Softball Ontario offers the Certified Softball Administration Program (CSAP) training which was developed by softball administrator for softball administrators. There are different workshops that include: generating revenue, marketing and promotion, risk management, conflict management and much more. For more information on this program, visit [www.softballontario.ca](http://www.softballontario.ca).

