

The Makings of a Strong Figure Skating Club

Running a figure skating club is not unlike running a small business. Most of the principles necessary to make a business successful also apply to making a club successful. There are some basic characteristics common to all strong clubs; mission, effective board, collaborative partnerships, member support, risk management, solid financial plan, and the most critical teamwork.

Serving on a figure skating board is not only a huge responsibility but it is also a huge privilege and one needs to remember that they are an ambassador for the sport of figure skating as well as their local club. According to nonprofit corporation law, a board member must meet certain standards of conduct and attention to his or her responsibilities to the club. These are referred to as Duty of Care, Loyalty and Obedience. Here are the definitions:

- **DUTY OF CARE** means using your best judgment and that you have exercised reasonable caution in making decisions.
- **DUTY OF LOYALTY** means putting your personal and professional interests aside for the good of the club.
- **DUTY OF OBEDIENCE** means being true to the club's mission.

Mission:

The mission defines the fundamental purpose of an organization. A mission statement should be a sentence or two that describes the essence of the organization. This simple statement tells the world what you are all about and it provides direction for the club. It should guide decision making and how a club should spend its resources. *For example: U.S. Figure Skating's mission statement is to provide programs to encourage participation and achievement in the sport of figure skating.*

Effective Board:

Running a successful club requires strong leadership. In today's busy world, many people have less and less time to volunteer, so it becomes even more critical to recruit and maintain the highest quality board possible.

Does your board follow these best practices?

1. Recruit and orient new board members
2. Job descriptions for board positions for role clarity, assess board performance
3. Strategic plan and yearly events calendar
4. Review and update bylaws annually
5. Transparency- ensure legal and ethical integrity
6. Invigorating meetings
7. Adequate representation of your membership
8. Determine, monitor and strengthen all programs and services

*adapted from the Ten Basic Responsibilities of Nonprofit Boards, Board-Source

Collaborative Partnerships

The critical partnerships that need to be developed and nurtured include relationships with rink personnel, coaching staff, officials, parents, members as well as other user groups within the facility. Trouble lies ahead for clubs that do not cultivate positive relationships with these constituents. Communication is a key ingredient to building successful relationships. It will benefit the club greatly by being a strong asset to the facility, a contributing tenant and by being ambassadors of the sport within the community.

Member Support

Members are the backbone of any organization. After all, they are your paying customers. It is incumbent on the club to keep your customers satisfied. How do you do this? By providing a safe, well structured environment where you offer exciting programs and events for members to participate in. First by creating those strong partnerships mentioned above with rink personnel and coaches. Next by spending time communicating and educating parents and adult members about your programs, schedules, events and other happenings which affect the organization. Solicit constant feedback from your members and keep your pulse on what is important to them. By understanding the make up of your membership and their needs, you can provide more satisfying opportunities to them.

Risk Management

This is often a neglected area in many organizations, but one that can put a quick end to any good club. What does risk management mean? It means if you say you are incorporated as a non-profit 501(c)3, that you actually are. It also means establishing, maintaining and updating club bylaws and policies. Making sure that you have adequate insurance, checking backgrounds of volunteers and verifying credentials of coaches. Does your club have directors and officers liability (D and O) insurance? Managing risk also means that your club finances and records are in order. Does your club undergo an independent audit each year? Does your club have prepared and easy to understand financial statements? It is the board's responsibility to make sure that sound risk management policies are established and in place at all times.

Solid Financial Plan

Does your club have a financial plan? Not simply a budget, but does your club have a plan that will not only pay your bills today but provide solid footing for the future? Does the club have adequate reserves to cover emergencies or other contingencies, such as having to pay for ice time? Does the club organize and run effective fundraising events? Having a strong financial plan in place will ensure a club's longevity.

Teamwork

Finally the most important element of a successful club is teamwork. Why? Because all of the above aspects require teamwork. Every member must know the mission and his or her role in helping the organization realize that mission. This involves putting personal agenda's aside and doing what's best for the club.

Ten Basic Responsibilities of Figure Skating Club

Boards – in more detail

1. Determine the club's mission and purpose. Each individual board member should fully understand and support it.
2. Ensure coach representation to the board. This person can either be an advisor or an actual board member.
3. Support the coaching staff as a whole and review their performance. The board should ensure that the coaches have the moral and professional support they need to further the goals of the club. The entire board should decide upon a periodic evaluation of their performance.
4. Ensure effective club planning. As stewards of the club, boards must actively participate with the coaches in establishing an overall plan and assist in implementing the plan's goals.
5. Ensure adequate resources. One of the board's foremost responsibilities is to provide adequate resources for the club to fulfill its mission.
6. Manage resources effectively. The board, in order to remain accountable to its donors and the public, and to safeguard its tax-exempt status, must assist in developing the annual budget and ensuring that proper financial controls are in place.
7. Determine, monitor, and strengthen the club's programs and services. The board's role in this area is to determine which programs are the most consistent with the club's mission, and to monitor their effectiveness.
8. Enhance the club's public standing. A club's primary link to the community, including constituents, the public, and the media, is the board.
9. Ensure legal and ethical integrity and maintain accountability. Solid policies and grievance procedures will help ensure proper decorum in this area. The board must establish pertinent policies, and adhere to provisions of the club's bylaws and articles of incorporation.
10. Recruit and orient new board members and assess board performance. All boards have a responsibility to recruit and attract strong board members with experience and the skills necessary for a "balanced" board composition. Boards must also orient new members to their responsibilities. By evaluating its own performance in fulfilling its responsibilities, the board can recognize its achievements and reach consensus on which areas need to be improved.