

Two Clubs Become One - Choosing to Merge

By combining strengths, two clubs can create an entity that is more powerful than the original parts. A merger may increase two clubs' reach and allow them to accomplish more with a unified front. By combining efforts, they can increase their membership base, buying power, volunteer pool, and ice time usage improving the overall conditions for their collective members.

Before deciding to merge, each entity must be convinced that this is the right solution for all. Merging two clubs has a major impact on the boards, coaches and members they serve. The newly formed club may look very different from the original or may simply become a more expanded or enhanced version that is able to function more efficiently and reach more people.

If you answer yes to any of these questions, a merger may be the answer:

- Have you worked hard to increase membership and still have low membership numbers?
- Struggling to find enough Board Members and/or volunteers?
- Decreased ice time? Having trouble paying ice costs?
- Lack of officials in your area or are you paying high costs of bringing in officials?
- Do you have a lack of qualified coaches?
- Are you having trouble working with rink management?
- Were you formerly part of another club and were there personality conflicts at the time that your club formed that caused discord that are no longer involved?

Who makes the decision to merge?

The decision to merge is a process and can be thought of as a marriage of two organizations. The first thing that the leadership of one club needs to do is make the decision to explore a merger. The President and Executive Committee will meet and decide that a merger could be in the best interest of their club. If the leadership decides that it might be a solution to their club's issues then the next step would be to have an informal meeting with the leadership of the second club. This can be as informal as sitting down for a cup of coffee and floating the idea by the leadership of the second club. At this getting to know you meeting(s), you talk about the pros and cons and see if it is going to be a good marriage of the two organizations. If it looks plausible then both sides need to involve their Executive Committee and their Board of Directors – remember transparency. Committees will be set up to deal with various aspects and meetings will take place between the clubs.

Even if the board makes the final decision to consider and to seal a merger, this decision should never be made in isolation. Too much is at stake. After having evaluated all the options and come to a conclusion to move ahead with a merger, the board votes on the issue. In a membership organization the members usually need to approve the board's decision. Before making any final decisions to merge, the board needs to review its bylaws to see what the process is and whether or not a merger is allowed. This would also be a good time to hire an attorney who can guide you through the process and whom is familiar with nonprofit organizational laws in your State.

Benefits and Challenges of Merging

Benefits:

- Immediate larger membership base
- Increased number of volunteers/leadership
- Increased buying power
- Expansion of programs and opportunities
- Starting fresh, with a new look, new ideas and positive energy
- Being able to resolve past issues or problems

Challenges:

- Getting started – overcoming strong personalities or naysayer
- Is the mission of both clubs compatible?
- Rebranding - Name/Logo/Club merchandise
- Merging of boards – which leadership will survive?
- Deciding which programs will survive
- Merging of finances
- Deciding which IRS designation to retain
- Designation of home rink and secondary locations
- History

Housekeeping to-do list

- Seek professional assistance (legal or financial) to form new organization and comply with IRS requirements
- Contact state for specific requirements- contact the Secretary of State's office to amend documents
- Appoint or elect board members from each board to serve – should be 50/50 representation if possible
- Contact U.S. Figure Skating to update club profiles
- Upload a new copy of the bylaws, e-mail a copy of minutes from the meeting when the merger is finalized for your club file at U.S. Figure Skating
- Get your collective membership involved in creating a new name and logo
- Create a new website and register for social media accounts (i.e. Facebook, YouTube)

For more information, please contact Member Services at memberservices@usfigureskating.org or call 719-635-5200.