

Forming a Little League®

A Step-by-Step Guide

One

The first step is to determine if a Little League program already exists in your area. Sometimes, people THINK they are in Little League, but that is not always the case. If you're not sure, just call your nearest Regional Center. Remember, the boundaries from which your Little League intends to draw its players cannot encroach on another chartered Little League's boundaries.

You'll also need to limit your boundaries to a population of 20,000 or less. This Little League Regulation helps to ensure that leagues around the world are given an opportunity to be competitive. It also helps retain the notion that Little League is, in most cases, a "neighborhood" program.

If your area's population is over 20,000, and if there are factors such as a large population of elderly people, a large number of college students in the boundaries or other factors, your organization may request a waiver of the population limit in the forming of a league. For some leagues, a temporary waiver is granted until the number of participants is too large for a single league to operate.

Two

Next, answer these questions:

- a. Are there enough youngsters in the Little League age bracket (5-18, boys and girls) residing in the area?
- b. Will your league have enough dedicated volunteer support from parents and others to serve as officers, managers, coaches, umpires, etc.?
- c. Will the community provide financial support?
- d. Will the Little League have facilities (practice and playing fields) available?

Your local volunteer District Administrator can help answer these questions. The DA is your liaison with the Regional Headquarters, and is always ready to help.

If you answered yes to these questions, you are well on the way to joining the World's Largest and Most Respected Youth Sports Organization -- Little League!

Three

Now that you know you have the potential players, volunteers, capital and fields, you'll need to form a core of volunteers to get the ball rolling. This "Central Committee" will be the prototype for the Board of Directors. Members of this group could also include personnel from the local Parks and Recreation Department, police, clergy, schools, etc.

- a. Produce flyers that proclaim your intention to form a Little League program. These flyers should be distributed in schools, churches, synagogues, community centers -- anyplace where children and adults gather. The flyer should ask for interested adults to come to the next meeting.
- b. Produce a news release for the local media. Find out who, at the local paper, radio station, etc., to send the information to -- and send it. Ask that the announcement be repeated several times. The release should also let people know about the upcoming meeting. In addition, a separate news release directly from Little League International Headquarters in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, can be provided.

Four

At that meeting, introduce the "Central Committee" and explain your intentions: To form a Little League Baseball/Softball program for the benefit of ANY CHILD in the community/boundaries. It's important for people

to understand from the start that Little League -- despite its size, reputation and all the media attention -- is NOT an elite program. There is a place for everyone in Little League. Informational brochures and flyers are available from your nearest Little League Regional Headquarters.

- a. Get the people in the room to “sign on” as volunteers. Each person should fill out a form, asking what kind of “job” they want: board member, manager, coach, umpire, team parent, etc. Also, have them tell you what their occupation and hobbies are. A salesman might also be handy with a hammer. A secretary might be a whiz on computers. An attorney and a bookkeeper could become very valuable to your organization.
- b. Explain what Little League is all about.
 - Boundaries -- So there is no mistaking the area from which the league may draw its players.
 - Philosophy -- To provide a baseball and softball program for as many children as possible in a given area.
 - Services -- What Little League will do for your league. Let us know when and where to be, and a Little League volunteer official or staff member can be on hand to answer any questions. In fact, a volunteer District Administrator can assist your league in each of these steps.
- c. Set up committees, headed by members of your core group. The following committees are essential:

Field Procurement/Facility Committee -- This committee’s job is obviously critical. A new site is desirable, but not always practical. Sources such as school boards, recreation commissions, community parks, playgrounds, public-spirited land owners and many others have been very cooperative in the past. An agreement to share facilities, and upgrade them along the way, is helpful.

If fields are already available, this committee could take on more of a maintenance role. If the fields are available, but owned by another entity (city, county, church, etc.), some modifications or upgrades may be needed.

Many leagues have two “sets” of fields: one set for practices, and one for games. When possible, this arrangement is ideal in helping to schedule practices and games.

Blueprints for the Little League-size diamond (most dimensions are about two-thirds of a regulation field) and the larger traditional-size field, are available from your nearest Regional Headquarters. Little League can also help in finding affordable lighting for your ball fields, as well as equipment manufacturers who offer discounts to Little League programs.

This committee should also investigate the building or maintenance of concession, rest rooms, storage and parking facilities.

Team Sponsor Committee -- This committee is no less critical. Local sponsorship is the very backbone of many Little Leagues, helping to keep the costs to parents down. The unselfish sponsorship of teams by local businesses has been a part of Little League since its very founding in 1939.

Sponsors receive no rights in governing the league or the teams they support, or in the selection of managers, coaches or players. However, the sponsoring business could have its name imprinted on the team’s jerseys, in the annual program, and/or on fence signs. Many leagues hold Sponsor Appreciation Days during the season to honor those whose support is so needed, and provide a plaque to the sponsor for display in their business. But the overriding reason for sponsorship should always be a desire to benefit the community.

While the sponsorship fee is up to each league, most usually ask for a fee ranging from \$400 to \$600 for the first year of sponsorship, and a lesser sum in following years.

Manager/Coach Selection Committee -- Another critical area is the selection of those adults who will have the closest contact with the children. The effect a manager or coach has on a child will likely last a lifetime, and can make the difference between the child having a wonderful experience in Little League, or a miserable one.

This committee's job is to screen and qualify adults for this important position. It is not enough to be an expert on baseball or softball. In fact, some of the very best Little League managers and coaches were not very experienced when they started out.

The most important aspect of being a manager or coach is how they interact with children. A Baseball Hall of Famer might make a terrible Little League manager, while a person who never played baseball or softball could end up being your league's most prized volunteer leader.

Little League offers many ways to help your league train and qualify managers and coaches -- even the most inexperienced novices. So remember, attitude is far more important than experience when it comes to managers and coaches.

Umpire Selection Committee -- For some, it seems that being a volunteer umpire is a thankless job. For many experienced veteran Little League umpires, the best praise is when nobody notices them.

That makes this committee's job critical as well. Being a volunteer Little League umpire -- a fair and impartial arbiter -- can be as rewarding as any other position in the program.

Like managing and coaching, experience is not a prerequisite. Little League offers a variety of materials, clinics and seminars to train these important volunteers.

Equipment/Uniform Committee -- Another obviously critical aspect of the program is the procurement of equipment. Dozens of manufacturers are out there, waiting for your money. Which to buy?

It's always best to shop around for the best deal -- without sacrificing quality. Many sporting goods dealers with offer discounts for buying in bulk. Your league may also want to consider buying through a supply house.

Your league may use any authorized equipment that conforms to Little League specifications and standards for the intended division, without regard to the manufacturer. However, remember that equipment bearing the Little League name has been tested and approved by Little League, assuring your league of its quality. Many of these "Little League Licensees" offer discounts to Little League programs.

This committee also investigates the cost of outfitting the players. The committee should bear in mind that those in the instructional divisions (Tee Ball and Minor League) should be provided uniforms that are not as sharp as those in Major Divisions. This helps to provide an incentive for these players to excel, and to be placed on a Major team.

Finance Committee -- The purpose of this committee is to determine the rough estimate for what it will cost to operate the league in the coming year, and where the funds will come from.

Expenses will normally include: charter fee and tournament fee (usually less than one-twentieth of the total budget), insurance fee (generally less than one-fifteenth), equipment and uniforms, field maintenance, utilities, rent or mortgage, concession supplies, office supplies and taxes.

Income could include: sponsor fees, voluntary collections at games, advertising (fence, scoreboard, etc.), concessions, fund-raising projects, program, voluntary registration fees, etc.

Remember, there are a number of unscrupulous people who have convinced youth organizations to try gimmicky ideas for fund raising, only to be concerned solely with their own interests. Little League also offers experienced assistance in raising funds, so that more of the money your league earns stays in your community and in league hands.

Nominating/Membership/Constitution Committee -- The last step at this meeting is to set the time, date and place for the next meeting, which will include the election of the Board of Directors. Some of this committee's

duties are to ensure there are enough people willing to serve on the Board of Directors, to gather Memberships, and to flood the community with news of the new league.

(Remember, “Members” constitute the large number of people from whom the league will draw its volunteers. Not every parent of a child will necessarily be a “Member.” The Board of Directors is elected from among the Membership.)

There should be enough time between the initial meeting and the election to get the word out regarding the new league, so that any adult who wants to participate (become a Member) has a chance.

Basically, any person interested in the objectives of the program should be encouraged to become a Member and vote at the election. Nobody should be turned away.

Another job for this committee is to recommend a Constitution to the Membership. This is a lot easier than it sounds, because Little League provides a Model Constitution for your league to adopt. It spells out exactly how the league will operate, but also gives you wide latitude in deciding various issues such as quorum, notice of meetings, etc.

A member of this committee is also named as Election Chairperson.

Remember, Little League offers detailed, easy-to-understand guidance on the right way to hold an election, and the proper steps to take in leading up to it.

Five

It’s election time! But first, all the committees in step No. 4 above should make a report to the group, so everyone knows where the league stands in each critical area.

The meeting is chaired by the Election Chairperson named in the previous step. The Membership in attendance then decides by vote how many Board members to elect. Ten to fifteen are recommended.

Once the new Board of Directors is elected, the Board meets to elect officers from among its number. At a minimum, you will need a President, Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary, Player Agent and Safety Officer.

Next, the Membership (including the new Board) votes to adopt the Constitution as presented by the committee in Step No. 4. Copies of the Constitution are forwarded to the District Administrator and Regional Director for approval.

The newly-elected Board of Directors then goes to work in getting the league up and running!

Six

Like any Board, you will need to set up a bank account, if this is not already done. All the funds raised in the name of the local Little League can only be used for Little League purposes.

Other committees, detailed in the Constitution, will need to be formed.

Stay in touch with the media through these steps, so the public knows the league is driving ahead!

Stay in touch with your District Administrator, who has the experience and expertise to help in any area of concern.

Finalize your specific boundaries. A map, detailing the actual boundaries from within which the league will draw its players, is submitted to the District Administrator and Regional Center for approval.

Seven

Finally, it’s time to fill out your Application for Charter. Although this is the easiest step of all, it is also one of the biggest.

You can simply estimate the number of teams that will play in each division. By now, you should have some idea of these numbers, but your best guess is fine for now.

Once the Application for Charter is approved, your league is officially a member of Little League, and is entitled to all the rights, responsibilities and privileges of the oldest leagues in the program.

Note: Payment of Charter and Insurance fees can be deferred until after registration if needed.

Eight

Before you know it, it's going to be time for registration -- the league's first contacts with the children for who it was formed.

By now, you should have a solid "pipeline" to the media, schools, etc., for announcing league activities. If the committees have done their work, registration days should produce literally hundreds of eager children and parents.

It's best to keep fees as low as possible. High fees, even though the league will not turn children away if their parents cannot pay a fee, will keep children out of your program.

It's important to keep in mind the basic philosophy: To provide baseball and softball programs to as many children as possible in your boundaries.

This is also the time to fill the gaps in your volunteer base. Parents reluctant to come forward in the past will see that your league is well-run by dedicated, friendly people. There should always be a place for new volunteers.

This is also when you will get an idea of the number of teams in each division. Generally, a league should strive to have at least four teams in each division of play. This is another area where your District Administrator can offer assistance.

Nine

Next come the tryouts and the draft -- the first time your managers, coaches and players will be "on the field." It's important to ensure that Insurance is in effect by this time.

The first day of tryouts is very rewarding for the volunteer leadership of the league. It is the beginning of the payoff for all that work.

Any volunteer involved in this effort should be present at tryouts -- to see the littlest Tee-Ball players struggling to get their hands around a baseball or softball for the first time -- and to see the fireballing 15-year old left-hander trying to impress the admiring managers in attendance.

After the draft, final figures on the number of teams can be telephoned in to Little League Headquarters.

Ten

What's left to say?

- The fields are marked with bright white chalk.
- The smell of roasting hot dogs and grilled hamburgers fills the air, crowding out the aroma of spring flowers.
- The National Anthem has been played -- the Little League Pledge recited.
- The same thing is happening in thousands of communities around the world.
- But this one is special.
- It's Opening Day at your brand-new Little League.
- It can't be stopped, any more than the coming warmth of spring can be stopped.

PLAY BALL!