

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 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, Obedience and Transparency.

DUTY OF CARE means using your best judgment and exercising 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.

DUTY OF TRANSPARENCY means boards have an obligation to ensure that their club is appropriately transparent in its operations.

Mission:

A club's mission defines the fundamental purpose of the organization. A mission statement should be a sentence or two that describes the essence of the club. This simple statement tells the world what you are all about and 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 "We create and cultivate opportunities for participation and achievement in 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. Update board position job descriptions for role clarity
3. Continually assess board performance
4. Keep a strategic plan and yearly events calendar
5. Review and update bylaws annually
6. Transparency — ensure legal and ethical integrity
7. Hold invigorating meetings
8. Keep adequate representation of your membership
9. Determine, monitor and strengthen all programs and services

Adapted from "Then Ten Basic Responsibilities of Nonprofit Boards," BoardSource.org.

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Collaborative Partnerships

The critical partnerships that need to be developed and nurtured include relationships with rink personnel, coaching staff, officials, parents, members and other key user groups within the facility. Trouble lies ahead for clubs that don't cultivate positive relationships with these individuals. 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 ambassadors of the sport within the community.

Member Support

Members are the backbone of any organization. After all, they are your paying customers. To the club needs keep its customers satisfied. How do you do this? By providing a safe, well structured environment where you offer exciting programs and events for members. This happens first by creating those strong partnerships mentioned above with rink personnel and coaches. Then by spending time communicating with and educating parents and adult members about your programs, schedules, events and other happenings. Ask for constant feedback from your members and keep your pulse on what is important to them. By understanding the makeup of your membership and their needs, you can provide them with more fulfilling opportunities.

Risk Management

What does risk management mean? If you say you are incorporated as a nonprofit 501(c)3, it means establishing, maintaining, updating club bylaws, abiding by all SkateSafe® policies and procedures. Make sure that you have adequate insurance, check backgrounds of volunteers and verify coach credentials. 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 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 agendas 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 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 work with the coaches to establish 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 the club with adequate resources 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, follow the SkateSafe® Program 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.

Valuing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The demographics of skating in the United States are going to change; either the sport will shrink or become more diverse. Survival and success of the sport – and your club – will require an evolving skillset needed to embrace diverse cultural backgrounds and view them as new customers. Research has proven that businesses that value and demonstrate action toward promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) tend to outperform their competitors and achieve greater profits.

However, DEI is about more than “feel-good fairness” and it also is not about simply recruiting diverse skaters. It is equally about working to develop a business philosophy along with best practices that allow you to clearly communicate, engage, and support all members from a variety of communities. By developing and implementing a solid diversity and inclusion approach, you help to create a shared sense of belonging amongst your skaters and promote a positive rink culture where all involved can achieve their highest potential. Conversely, by not valuing DEI, over time you may lose business as demographics continue to change, new markets emerge, and young skaters (and their parents) expect coaches and the rinks they skate in to embrace diversity and adopt equitable and inclusive approaches to community building.

Below you'll find 5 Best Practices using U.S. Figure Skating DEI Pillars to help you achieve your club's DEI goals:

Moving from Aspiration to Action

1. Dedicated DEI Committee
 - Recruit members from diverse positions, skating disciplines, and racial/ethnic backgrounds to ensure an inclusivity and equity throughout your club
2. Data Collection

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- Collect demographic data to identify who is underrepresented at various levels in your club
- 3. Education
 - Establish ongoing opportunities for DEI related training for all members
- 4. Representation & Visibility
 - Continually assess your club content with an equity lens to ensure all people and programs are represented equitably
- 5. Outreach & Support
 - Develop or seek support to build a culturally competent approach to outreach to underserved and underrepresented communities