

ALBERTA SOCCER  
REFEREE  
DEVELOPMENT  
PROGRAM -  
RECRUITMENT &  
RETENTION PLAN



## Introduction

Officiating is important to all sports. A soccer game without referees is really just a practice, but the officials are often not given the recognition or consideration that they deserve. It is a difficult job and their skill, importance and commitment is not always appreciated.

The enjoyment of any sport is affected by the performance of the referee. But how do we obtain good referees? Like any skilled trade or profession, it is necessary to:

- Recruit candidates
- Educate candidates by teaching skills
- Provide an opportunity to develop and practice their skills
- Provide them with incentives to improve
- Ensure that as many officials as possible remain with the program

## Referee Recruitment Plan

The purpose of this plan is to provide Alberta Soccer's district members a method for recruiting and retaining referees in their referee program. By providing a consistent plan, Alberta Soccer can provide help to its members in a clear and effective manner.

### Goals and Objectives

1. To meet the demand for soccer referees for each member district as their program needs change.
2. Improve the level of performance and competency in the referees.
3. Promote a safe, fun, and rewarding experience for the referee and the players.

### Referee Needs Assessment

A recruitment plan begins with understand the role you are trying to fill. To identify the needs of the district, it is recommended that an evaluation of needs be assessed. Set targets and goals so that each district has the appropriate amount of qualified referees for each skill level. There are several ways to track these levels, find one that works best for your district.

### Appointment of the Recruiter

Recruitment begins with the recruiter. It is recommended that member districts assign a board member or volunteer(s) to conduct the recruitment. A part-time paid position may be required. The skills of a recruiter can be summarized to have the following characteristics:

- Knowledgeable in the requirements of officiating
- Positive and outgoing
- Relatable to the age group or demographic being recruited
- Have the ability to travel and meet people



## Identification of Candidate Locations

The second step is identifying where candidates for the referee program can be found. General target areas include:

- Soccer associations' player address database
- Player registration
- Coaches pre-season packages and meetings
- Tournament packages
- Academic institutions, Junior and Senior high schools
- Soccer academies
- Employment boards and media advertisement
- Fitness centers
- Community associations
- Other referee associations such as basketball, football, baseball, and hockey

## Preparation of Recruitment Material

Recruitment material can take many forms such as print media, social media, information meetings and internet correspondence. The material needs to address the motivation for individuals to become referees.

1. Income
2. Necessity – when there is no one else
3. Frustration – spectators or coaches who believe that they can do a better job
4. Fitness
5. Social interactions
6. Accomplishment

Keep the message as visual as possible.

## Meeting with Candidates

Meeting candidates in person is always preferred over email and phone calls. In many cases it is not possible to meet everyone. Even in today's electronic environment some people are not connected via email. Encourage all candidates, young and old to get an email address and establish a way to regularly check for communication and ultimately game assignments. Do not let too much time go by between the initial contact and the instructional session. If that happens, the candidate may lose interest. Find ways to keep them engaged such as email reminders.

## Following up and Record Management

Keeping good records and communication practices with all participants will help with the following:

- Measuring successes and failures.
- Allows for transition from one recruiter to another.
- Maintain professional relationships with other organisations so that they continue wanting to work with you.



## Referee Retention Plan

The purpose of this Guide is assist Alberta Soccer and its district members in developing referee retention programs for its referees. To be successful in retaining referees, we must clearly identify why referees leave the program AND why they stay.

### Identify why the referee left the program

Detailed records and follow-up using an exit interview is very important to ensuring we make every reasonable attempt to keep the referee in the program. In most cases, it is more cost effective to try to address a trained and experienced referee than have to train a new one. The following are examples of why referees leave the program, in no specific order:

- Not receiving enough game assignments
- Difficulties and the realities of facing up to negative behaviour by players, coaches and spectators
- Finding that they are not suited to the role of a game official
- Pressure to perform with a high level of efficiency from the start
- Personal circumstances change
- Negative interaction with other officials
- Injury or ill health
- Poor support mechanisms in place to nurture and educate officials

### The Exit interview

When a referee leaves the program, it is important to have a clearly defined strategy and process to track why they are not returning. A combination of surveys and personal communication will help with this identification such that they may return in the future.

### Identify why the referee remains in the program

Equally important to why referees leave the program is understanding why they stay. This knowledge can ensure the positive incentives remain.

Draw from the positives and build on the reasons why referees remain in the program. These reasons will most likely be universal to all referees and provide incentives to continue refereeing. Every job has challenges, however if the advantages outweigh those challenges, the referee will stay in the program and you will have achieved your objective.

### Retention techniques

There are no limits to retention methods. Referees are independent contractors to the district associations and the following steps have demonstrated to be effective in similar working relationships:

1. Initial training experience
  - Establish expectations of the referee and the association
  - Have a clear referee development path
  - Emphasize the importance of fitness
  - Include strategies for dealing with stress and conflict resolution



2. Ensure first officiating experiences are realistic but positive
  - Provide a designated individual to assist and support new referees
  - Provide appropriate and adequate remuneration for officiating
3. Establish a referee community of support
  - Create a referee club
    - Identify, praise and reward referees
    - Provide incentive and rewards for its members i.e. 'referee of the month' selected by peers, players, mentors or coaches. Find an incentive sponsor to provide a gift for the individual.
  - Implementation of a mentoring program
    - Web based support
    - Peer-to-peer support
  - Implementation of the assessment program
    - Provincial Assessment
    - Modified Mentor assessment
  - Social media and community events
    - Facebook, Instagram, YouTube
  - Develop a system of support for referees who have experienced mistreatment
    - Mentoring
    - Establish clear procedures and a path of consequences should players, coaches and spectators become abusive
4. Continued follow up and record management for departing referees
  - Personalized follow up to establish why officials choose not to return

There is no perfect solution which will address the issues of recruitment, retention, education and training of officials. This document simply poses the question: Are there changes that can be made to improve the development of officiating at all levels?

The suggested strategies will have little or no impact without:

- Genuine commitment by Alberta Soccer and its member districts to address the issues
- Designated personnel to drive the programs
- Allocation of resources to adequately deal with the issues
- Appropriate support structures in place
- Most importantly, a clear message from Alberta Soccer and its member districts that they care about the recruitment, training, education and retention of their officials.

## Summary

To succeed, the Recruitment and Retention plan should focus on the following:

- Ensure that sufficient numbers of officials are recruited each year to meet the needs of the program
- Provide quality training and education to ensure that all officials are 'the best that they can be'
- Implement strategies to retain as many officials as possible every year, so that the program grows

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