

USA HOCKEY OFFICIATING PROGRAM



OFFICIATING ASSIGNOR HANDBOOK

INTRODUCTION

In the administration of ice hockey as regulated by USA Hockey, there are several levels of management. At the top of the ladder are the USA Hockey Board of Directors and National Staff hired to implement the overall program.

Game management responsibility lies primarily with the on-ice officials, all of whom will be registered at the appropriate level within the USA Hockey Officiating Program. How these officials are selected to work a contest usually requires a team, league, or an officials association assignor.

The purpose of this publication is to establish some ground rules and best practice advice for the assignment of officials to contests for a team, league, or local officials association. It is critical that great care and thought be used when assigning officials, not only for a particular game, but throughout the season and an official's career. A constant balance must be struck between the teams (customer) and the official (game manager). The team or league must feel they are being supplied with a product that is competent and capable, while the official must feel satisfied and rewarded, yet challenged to improve in his/her development.

It is also essential to understand that this is an educational publication written through the joint effort of representatives from the Officiating Program and local grassroots officials who participate in some part of the game assignment process. It is not a binding document on any assignor within USA Hockey, nor is it intended to create a concept of legal relationship between an assignor or any team, league, or officials association, or even the existence of either or both types as legal entities.

Application of this document is by recommendation only, based on experiences and input compiled by the "Officiating Assignor [Ad Hoc] Committee", local assignors and other grassroots officials involved in the game assignment process.

Committee Members

Matt Leaf
Dave Labuda
Tony Mariconda
Bob Cunningham

Chris Milles
Owen Thompson
Steve Tatro

Sub-Committee Members

Pat Dyer
Duane Battisti
Brett Klosowski
Nick LaFave

Adam Shadiow

Who should benefit from this publication?

Future game assignors...this will allow new assignors information to get started on the right foot.

Existing game assignors...this will give current assignors information needed to analyze their methods and consider modifications.

All Officials...this will expand the spectrum of your development by having an assignor looking toward your future as well as filling assignments.

All Games/Teams...this publication will suggest guidelines to put the best officiating product on the ice.

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THIS IS USA HOCKEY

What is USA Hockey?

USA Hockey, Inc., is the National Governing Body for the sport of ice hockey in the United States. Its mission is to promote the growth of hockey in America and provide the best possible experience for all participants by encouraging, developing, advancing and administering the sport.

USA Hockey's primary emphasis is on the support and development of grassroots hockey programs. In January 2009, the organization launched the American Development Model, which - for the first time ever - provided associations nationwide with a blueprint for optimal athlete development.

While youth hockey is a main focus, USA Hockey also has vibrant junior and adult hockey programs that provide opportunities for players of all ability levels. The organization also supports a growing disabled hockey program and maintains an inline hockey program to provide structure and support for their growth across the nation.

Beyond serving those who play the game at the amateur level, USA Hockey has certification programs for coaches and officials to ensure education standards are met that coincide with the level of play. Furthermore, a large focus is put on parent education with equipment needs, rules of the game and parental roles in youth sports among common topics.

Members of the organization are entitled to many benefits, including a subscription to *USA Hockey Magazine*, the most widely circulated hockey publication in the world; excess accident, general liability and catastrophic insurance coverage; access to USAHockey.com; and opportunities to participate in USA Hockey National Championships, as well as player development camps.

USA Hockey is the official representative to the United States Olympic Committee and the International Ice Hockey Federation. In this role, USA Hockey is responsible for organizing and training men's and women's teams for international tournaments, including the IIHF World Championships and the Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. Closer to home, USA Hockey works closely with the National Hockey League and the National Collegiate Athletic Association on matters of mutual interest.

USA Hockey is divided into 12 geographical districts throughout the United States. Each district has a registrar to register teams; a referee-in-chief to register officials and organize seminars; a coach-in-chief to administer education program for coaches; a risk manager to oversee liability and safety programs; and a skill development program administrator to facilitate learn-to-play programs for youth players and their parents.¹

¹ USA Hockey Annual Guide, 2009-10, "What is USA Hockey?" Page3.

USA Hockey Structure

Nearly 600,000 individuals comprise USA Hockey. This includes players, coaches, on-ice officials, league administrators, Affiliates, Districts, and the national staff. With the exception of the national staff, the organization is clearly volunteer-driven.

The affairs of USA Hockey are governed by a Board of Directors. The composition and representation of this Board of Directors can be found in the most current USA Hockey Annual Guide.

Teams are responsible to a “local governing body,” which is the immediate organization regulating such matters as scheduling, playoffs, and discipline. This might be as numerically small as a travel organization, or as broad as a league affiliate association or the league itself.

Continuing up the ladder, the “local governing body” is then responsible to a USA Hockey Affiliate, which by rule is limited to one such entity per state. Some Affiliates encompass multiple states, or even the entire USA Hockey District. This determination is left to Affiliate decision, but each such Affiliate must sign to and conform to a USA Hockey Affiliate Agreement.

The 12 districts mentioned in the previous section are not entities in the USA Hockey administrative structure, but exist primarily as geographic entities to coordinate selection of teams competing in USA Hockey play downs and the selection of players to USA Hockey sponsored events. District Directors to the USA Hockey Board are, as previously stated, elected on a team basis within the Affiliates comprising the district. National appointees previously mentioned are assigned on a district basis, and thus perform services to all Affiliates in the district.

The National Office staff is the only USA Hockey entity which consists of paid professional employees. USA Hockey administration is their job. As in any business, each person has a title and a specific area of involvement. Titles include Executive Director, Controller, Senior Director, Director, Manager, Coordinator, and the like. Executive Committee Directors (President, Vice Presidents (6), Athlete Representatives, Director Representatives, Secretary, and Treasurer) are volunteers.

Philosophy of the Officiating Program

The objective of the Officiating Education Program is to supply each official with the knowledge and skills of the game that will equip them to do the best job possible.

Instructional and support material have been developed on a progressive step-by-step basis so that the official can improve his/her ability and effectiveness over a period of time, be confident that he/she has received the training to do a good job and be recognized for his/her accomplishments. Four levels of achievement have been created for this purpose: Level 1, Level 2, Level 3 and Level 4.

Twelve District referees-in-chief utilize trained regional instructors to conduct instructional seminars dealing with topics like on-ice mechanics, rules interpretation and advanced theories of officiating. All registered officials are required to attend one seminar annually.

Each summer, development camps are conducted. These camps are designed to further the education of selected officials on all levels using the latest educational methods and techniques. Instructors include National Hockey League officials and educators.

A full complement of instructional materials, including manuals and videos, has been developed for educational purposes.²

Officials register with the USA Hockey Officiating Program on an individual basis directly through the National Office. The National Office takes care of distribution of materials (rule book, exams, registration card, officiating crest, and any intermediate notification of status). Each Officiating Program registrant who applies for on-ice status must pass an open book rules exam and attend an officiating seminar each season. This activity primarily occurs between August and November, inclusive. For purposes of on-ice work, the “season” is December 1 through November 30. The start of the “season” actually begins on the date the official receives card and crest, indicating successful completion of the registration process.

Registration is thus a USA Hockey function, and not that of a District, Affiliate, local governing body, or local officials association. That is, an official is not limited to working only within local/affiliate/district territorial boundaries.

Officials associations with game assignors generally exist, legally, as organizations comprised of people with common interests regarding ice hockey. Individual assignors often create themselves as a Limited Liability Company (LLC). These associations and assignors do not take on the same status as unions. Since USA Hockey officials are considered “independent contractors,”³ there is no such entity in the United States as a union of independent contractors. But such associations and assignors, if properly administered, can be essential assets to the Officiating Program, and to the team-based associations. This involves such areas as seminar scheduling, assigning, on-ice evaluations, distribution of earnings, and continuing education.

² USA Hockey Annual Guide, 2009-10, “OFFICIATING EDUCATION PROGRAM” Page29

³ USA Hockey Rules and Regulations, REGISTRATION, Section VI - B

ROLE OF THE ASSIGNOR

The overall general role of the assignor is to work closely with local youth/adult hockey associations and the officials' organization to provide qualified officials for the participants and maintain a viable developmental path for officials.

In communicating with local youth/adult associations and the officials in your local organization it is important to always maintain a professional and courteous relationship.

A majority of the assignor's role is working with the officials and in this there are three main areas of focus:

1. Help assimilate new officials into the organization and make them feel welcome.
2. Aid in the development of all officials through the games you assign them.
3. Aid in the retention of officials through game distribution – this may include both the number of games and the level of games assigned each official.

A good assignor develops acceptance by leagues, teams and officials. This acceptance is gained through accountability in using the best officials possible and giving new officials the opportunities to work games. Ideally an assignor should not be included in the pool of officials to be assigned. However, if the assignor is working while assigning, that assignor must be considered one of the best officials at the level assigned and only assign himself/herself to games that he/she is clearly qualified to handle. ⁴

Qualities for a good assignor include: ⁵

- Knowing your officiating pool
- Knowing the geography of the rinks you assign
- Being approachable
- Being a good communicator and firm with officials
- Promptly returning all calls and e-mails
- Keeping up with technology

The significance of your role as assignor cannot be overstated, because the decisions you make can affect the safety of the participants on the ice, impact the development of the officials, and affect the retention rate in your local organization.

4 *Referee* - "When You Assign in Your Area," February, 2010, pg. N9.

5 *Referee* - "Assigning Responsibility," March, 2009.

THE ASSIGNMENT PROCESS

Establishing the Schedule

The first step in the assignment process is establishing a game schedule. As the assignor, you or the organization you serve, have to establish how you are going to receive games from your area associations. In small domains it may be as simple as a phone call, e-mail or letter. In large populations you may need the assistance of computerized programs. There are several software programs from which to choose or you may simply use a spreadsheet to formulate a schedule. Some software programs require a spreadsheet in order to enter games into the system. In these cases a spreadsheet template can be created to include the association, location, date, time, level of play and opponents. Associations simply fill them in and send their games to you via an email attachment for entry into the program.

Officials Qualifications

The determination of officials' qualifications is provided by USA Hockey. Your local organization may develop an additional guideline system to assist you in what levels to assign officials.

Following the assignment guidelines of USA Hockey with any combination of systems used, the process can be affected by things like the supply of available officials, quantity of games to be covered, and development of officials. In any event, these guidelines form the foundation that determines recommended levels for the officials to be assigned.

Availability of Officials

Availability of officials can be collected in several ways. It may simply be taken in person at your organization's meetings or by phone. With the advance of the internet it may be done via email. Some organizations have purchased software programs already mentioned which include the collection of officials' availability to streamline the entire process.

Priorities of the Assignment Process

Once the game schedule, officials' availability and qualifications have been established you can proceed in prioritizing the assignment process. Below are some suggestions to assist in this process.

- Prior to the assignment process the assignor will be responsible for establishing a scheduling timeline. This would involve a specified time period for the games being played with corresponding deadlines for the youth/adult associations to submit their games, for officials to submit their availability, and for you to send the assignments out.
- Arranging the games – this first and foremost is done by date so all the games on a given day are listed. After that there are several options, but rink location with corresponding times for the day seems most practical. Software programs are designed to do this for you.

- Within a multi-surface building, it is best to align back-to-back games on the same surface for ease in assigning. This works better than listing all the games in one building chronologically but without regard to ice surface.
- Arranging the officials – those same programs provide a similar function to match qualified officials with their appropriate level, and the times of those games with their availability. Depending on how the program functions, there can still be limitations requiring some additional methods to organize the officials available.

Assigning Games

When it is time to assign officials, the assignor matches the availability of the official, the game or games to assign, and the guidelines for the official's appropriate level. In general, a top to bottom approach is used when assigning officials. The highest level games are filled first, down to the lowest levels last. Officials with limited availability are filled first, down to the officials with the most availability. This helps ensure that the more experienced officials are working the higher level games, and officials with limited availability are not forgotten. Keeping in mind your commitment to assimilation, development, retention, and for other reasons explained later, this cannot always be followed. Some other factors that you may experience can make this process a little more complex.

- 1) Age of the official – it is recommended that the officials working the game be older than the age level they are officiating. Pairing a younger or an inexperienced official with an experienced adult official is important. Also, check into your state laws regarding minors officiating youth sports programs. For example, a state may require that under a certain age that official must be paired with an adult as defined by your state.
- 2) Supply and Demand – the supply of available officials and the demand of games to be filled can fluctuate throughout the week.
 - a) When the supply of officials exceeds the number of available games, you may think this is the ideal situation as an assignor. However, this means there are available officials not working. If this happens in a season with any frequency, your game distribution method could impact retention of officials in your area.
 - b) When games exceed supply of officials, the challenge is scheduling all the games and striking a balance of enough qualified officials at the various levels. As you look at the games and the officials available, you may wonder just how many games each official needs to work in order to make that balance happen. The average number of games per official can be determined mathematically. This will also assist you with game distribution and indicate if you need to solicit additional availability.
- 3) Some individual requests and restrictions may also need to be addressed.
 - a) Officials may request to work only a certain number of games in a given day. This usually will be the organization's older and very experienced officials and utilizing them is extremely valuable.

- b) Some software programs provide an option to the officials to restrict rink locations. If the organization has this option and the officials in it are defined as independent contractors, this allows them to work where they want in addition to when they want (availability). At the same time, encourage officials to work at multiple rinks. This helps prevent them from being labeled as “homers” at one particular rink.
- c) A limitation of some software programs is how it collects availability in daily time increments. If the time block an official checks off as available in a specific day is too long, then it is important to offer specialized availability. For example, if a time block is noon – 6:00 p.m. and the official has to be off the ice by 4:00 p.m. it is best to have him check that time slot as being available and make a side note of it. This allows you to maximize use of these officials.
- d) Another item related to availability is how you view the assigning period. If your method is to view it one day at a time, fill those games, and move on to the next day you risk missing officials who may have limited availability. To avoid this, devise a method that allows you to view each official’s availability for the entire assigning period. Also, tell officials of the importance of communicating limited availability, especially if it is consistent from week to week. That will help you achieve a more equitable game distribution.

Assignment Notification

Notifying officials of assignments depends on the method and system at your disposal. As mentioned earlier, assignments can be delivered at the organization’s meetings, delivered by phone or e-mail. If the organization utilizes scheduling software, both notification of the assignments to the officials and confirmations from them that their assignments have been received is an efficient function of those programs.

Assignment Changes

Changing of assignments, also referred to as replacements, is discussed in detail under “addressing concerns – from officials” but here are delivery mechanisms to accomplish this.

- 1) An official needing a replacement contacts the assignor.
- 2) An official needing a replacement may just call someone they know to fill in for them.
- 3) If email addresses are provided by the organization a mass email distribution list can be used for finding a replacement. The official can then select a qualified candidate from those that respond.
- 4) Some organizations may take this one step further with their own web site’s mass e-mail link of all their officials that can be used in seeking a replacement.
- 5) Whatever method the organization provides, it is important for the official seeking a replacement to notify you, the assignor, of this replacement so you can make or record the change, and can notify the proper officials.

DEVELOPMENT OF OFFICIALS

The game assignor has a major role in the development of the officials within their geographic area of responsibility. The assignor affects both the development of each official's individual skills as well as the official's development in relation to the two accepted officiating systems recognized by USA Hockey.

Development of Individual Skills

The game assignor needs a strong understanding of the influence they can have on an individual official's development, and the impact they can and will have on the local officiating pool for the short and long term future.

The best way for the game assignor to positively affect the development of inexperienced officials is to assign them games at the appropriate levels with an experienced partner. This provides that official with an excellent opportunity to learn while simultaneously providing protection from potentially negative situations. As the USA Hockey Officiating Program has emphasized for a number of years, this type of mentoring is critical to the immediate, short term development of the official, and improving the opportunity for long term retention.

As for officials who have previous experience but are new to your organization, discuss with them what levels they have previously worked. Assign them with an experienced partner at an appropriate level and have that experienced partner gather performance feedback to determine if the level worked is truly appropriate for the new official.

In order for the game assignor to maximize the impact on an individual official's development, as much performance feedback must be gathered as possible. Generally, this type of feedback is obtained through an informal evaluation process outlined in the previous paragraph. The strength of informal evaluations is their frequency since experienced officials are usually eager to share the different strengths and weaknesses of newer officials.

Assignors also need to cultivate their relationship with the local USA Hockey Evaluation Coordinator as this individual can provide more detailed feedback on individual officials than what can be attained through the informal evaluation process. This performance feedback is also important to the organization or area the game assignor services. In fact, some organizations may choose to set up a panel or committee to gather this information and then inform the assignor on any decisions made regarding individual officials and their abilities. This is advantageous in organizations with an additional internal guideline system for what levels officials can work. This type of system provides several benefits to the organization and the individual officials.

- 1) It provides the organization with a diversified method for making performance based determinations on what levels individual officials can work.
- 2) It provides a process for the official should there be a disagreement on what levels may be restricted for that individual to work.
- 3) It provides a buffer between the individual officials and the game assignor as it relates to disputes on what levels the official is allowed to work.

If an assignor's organization has an established internal performance guideline system that provides opportunity during the season for changes based on formal and informal feedback, a convenient way for keeping track of this information is a spreadsheet with all of the officials' names and corresponding levels.

Another challenge in officiating development for a game assignor is determining a process for individual officials to challenge themselves by working the next level of game along their ladder of progression. If a panel or a committee is used to determine internal levels, that information needs to be conveyed to the assignor. This is where deviation from the top to bottom prioritization approach must occur in order to accomplish this very important goal. A list, a document, or a spreadsheet to statistically monitor each official's current developmental level, along with the next level needed to progress to, would be beneficial.

Providing opportunities to an official occurs by assigning an experienced official with a new or younger official, or by assigning an official to games that carry a little more pressure, such as a game between two intense rivals or a championship game in a local tournament. By working closely with the local USA Hockey referee-in-chief, assignment opportunities can be provided for the district and regional playoff games awarded to your local district.

Development of Officials within the 2-Official and 1-Referee/2-Linesmen systems

The game assignor can also impact the development of individual officials within the context of the two recognized USA Hockey officiating systems. As previously stated, assigning new or inexperienced officials with a seasoned, veteran official can assist in the development of those less experienced officials in the 2-referee system.

In the 1-Referee/2-Linesman system, the game assignor can impact the development of officials in both the referee and linesman positions. For his/her first few games, a newer official to this system will most likely be assigned as a linesman. The game assigned should be at the lowest level possible where this system is used. Ideally, the other linesman should be an official with a strong understanding of the overall duties and performance parameters of working as a linesman in this system. In assigning less experienced people to games in this system, you must try to avoid having more than one inexperienced official working the same game at the same time at either the referee or linesman position.

Deciding when an individual is prepared to handle the responsibilities of refereeing in this system is another challenge altogether. But, once that determination has been made, the assignor should schedule the first time referee with two experienced partners who will be able to guide and coach that individual if necessary.

In summary, the game assignor will maximize the affect on an individual official's development by utilizing the most thorough scheduling practices available. This will allow for on- ice mentoring to occur as frequently as possible, whether as a referee in the 2-Official system, or as linesman or referee in 3-Official system. Managing this responsibility takes time and a true commitment to both the development and long term retention of all of your officials. But, if done properly, the game assignor can have a greater impact in these areas than almost any other individual in the officiating community.

PAYMENT OF OFFICIALS

The Organization

Payment methodology and the required complexity of the payment process depend upon the structure of the organization paying officials. With increasing scrutiny from taxing authorities focusing on sports associations, a higher level of organizational development must be applied to ensure an acceptable level of protection against organizational audits. It is important that payment to officials be made through a lawfully registered organization.

There are many different ways to achieve this. For some organizations, payment is made through a third party that manages the finances of the officials (*i.e. city of Townville, Townville Amateur Hockey Association, Townville Independent School District, etc.*). In this situation, the organization should ensure that officials are being paid in a timely manner and work with the administrating party to negotiate rates and payment schedules.

More commonly, however, the organization accepts the burden of managing the entire process from solicitation of assignments, to final payment and meeting reporting obligations. In this case it is highly recommended that the organization go through the process of establishing itself as a not for profit 501(c) 3 Tax Exempt Organization. This process will be different for each organization and vary from state to state. A good instruction outline can be found at: <http://www.ncstac.org/content/materials/501c3.pdf>.

This type of organization method has been used by many officials associations throughout the USA Hockey system, generally organized as an educational foundation with the development and education of ice hockey officials as the primary focus. This process can be completed by the organization on its own; however, it is highly recommended that the organization consult an attorney and an accountant during the process to ensure that all requirements (*local, state & federal*) are met.

Independent Contractors or Employees

It is critical that the organization correctly identifies whether the official is an employee or an independent contractor. The obligations of the organization change greatly depending on which classification the officials fall under. Normally, you must withhold income taxes, withhold and pay Social Security and Medicare taxes, and pay unemployment tax on wages paid to an employee. You do not typically have to withhold or pay any taxes on payments to independent contractors. If you subcontract assignments to others, you will want to review the information available from the IRS on this topic.⁶ This decision will vary from organization to organization, but each should consult an attorney, an accountant and IRS form SS-8 to ensure that the organization complies with all local, state and federal laws.

The USA hockey model (*USA Hockey Junior Development Program*) has established an independent contractor relationship with its officials. This model distinctly separates the

⁶ **Independent Contractor (Self-Employed) or Employee**
<http://www.irs.gov/businesses/small/article/0,,id=99921,00.html>

contractor and independent contractor to comply with all local, state and federal laws. Each official must agree to and sign an independent contractor agreement (*contract*) prior to the assignment of contracts. The contracting process is as follows:

- League requests officials through the officials organization
 - Officials organization accepts
 - Officials organization offers assignment to independent contractor
 - Independent contractor accepts
 - ❖ A contract is complete
 - Independent contractor declines
 - ❖ The independent contractor returns offer to the organization
 - Officials organization declines
 - Organization returns request to the league

The independent contractor agreement should outline the contractual parameters under which the relationship will operate. This may include expectations, acknowledgements, and representations to be fully understood by both parties. The legal aspect of this agreement is such that consultation with an attorney is highly recommended to ensure that the agreement complies with all local, state and federal laws. An example Independent Contractor agreement is attached in Appendix 2.

Establishing a Billing Schedule

Critical to ensuring that game fee payment is made in a timely fashion is the establishment of a billing schedule that provides enough time between the date assignment bills are sent to the league and date the organization has agreed to pay its officials. There will almost always be situations where a league is late on payment or needs to hold meetings to authorize payment. This is why it is critical to communicate expectations with the league not just in the league agreement, but in e-mail, telephone and in-person communications. For many organizations it is very difficult to make payments to independent contractors without collection from the league first. The league is a partner in the timely and consistent payment of officials. This schedule should be attached as an appendix to the league agreement.

Establishing a Payment Schedule

It is important to communicate to officials the dates they can expect to receive payment for the assignments they were contracted to perform. Ensure that this payment schedule coincides with the billing schedule for the reasons previously discussed. In the event that any changes to the payment schedule occur, the organization should communicate this to the affected officials as soon as it is reasonably possible. This schedule should be attached to the Independent Contractor Agreement as an Appendix.

Payment Methodology

Payment methodology can be managed in a variety of forms. The options available to the organization include: check writing, check printing, contracting with an outside agency for processing of payments, Automated Clearing House (ACH), and other paperless payment systems. Each option has its own benefits and should be researched by the organization to determine the most effective payment solution. Payment to officials should, at a minimum, notate services, dates, and the amount associated with the payment. Other data including year to date, social security information, address of contractor, contractor ID, and more may also be relevant depending on the organizational structure.

The organization should not use cash payments to officials. This method does not provide for a tracking system for resolution of disputes regarding the payment (or lack thereof) to an independent contractor. If cash payments must be made and there is no other amenable solution, then a cash payment receipt should be used. The independent contractor should sign a receipt form acknowledging payment for cash received, the amount received, and when the services were performed.

Reporting Obligations

The local, state and federal reporting requirements will differ for each organization. It is highly recommended that the organization consult with an attorney and an accountant to determine the reporting obligations specific to the organizational structure. This includes, but is not limited to, W-2 reporting for employees and 1099-MISC reporting for independent contractors. While IRS regulations state that the organization is only required to complete 1099-MISC reporting for independent contractors that bill for services in excess of \$600, many organizations choose to complete 1099-MISC forms for every independent contractor regardless of the amount they billed the organization. It is also important to note that even not for profit, tax exempt organizations, must file a corporate tax return every year.

ADDITIONAL PROGRAMS

Throughout the USA Hockey Officiating Program, there are many programs that help to educate and develop officials their entire career. As an assignor, your ability to coordinate game assignments in conjunction with these programs is critical to their success. Below is a brief synopsis of some of the programs that exist.

Mentoring Program

As an assignor, the new or inexperienced official will usually seek out the assignor in his or her area. This is a great opportunity to suggest that he/she work through the first season with a mentor and offer an experienced official willing to mentor that individual. If the officials' association has a mentoring program coordinator then it is important for the assignor to notify the coordinator of a new or inexperienced official to be mentored.

The assignor's role in a mentoring program can be the difference between a good program and a great one. He/she can sometimes be a liaison between the two in coordinating on and off-ice opportunities. A memo to the mentor and official to coordinate their schedules for future games is the catalyst to pairing up the two. One of those two officials must then make the assignor aware that they are hoping to work together on a particular day. This by no means guarantees that the assignor can accommodate this request. Should scheduling allow the two to work a game together, that opportunity would foster the relationship between the mentor and the official. Giving the younger official a chance to work shoulder-to-shoulder with an experienced referee would provide immediate feedback in a non-evaluation setting.

Shadowing

Some officials' associations coordinate with their local youth associations/teams using what is known as a shadowing program. The Illinois Hockey Officials Association, an affiliate of USA Hockey, has an excellent short video demonstrating how one should work. This program involves an additional official to actually be on the ice with those working the game. The role of this official is not to call infractions of the rules but to coach the official that is being worked with. If the officials' association that you serve has such a program, your responsibility would be to ensure that through the assigning process you would notify the shadowing official that their official has been scheduled a game. The first step would be to have the officials' association identify those officials needing to be shadowed along with those experienced officials who would like to serve as an on-ice coach. From this point it would simply involve matching the availabilities of these officials for the appropriate level of game and with the league or teams that agreed to participate in this officiating program. Shadowing opportunities fit well when game demand is lower.

Evaluation Program

Most evaluation programs utilize officials that are still active on the ice and working games. A copy of the master schedule should be provided to the evaluation coordinator for distribution to all evaluators. The assignor can strategically assign evaluators to officiate games that precede or follow games in which a new or inexperienced official is going to be evaluated.

Combining evaluations with a mentor program is easily accomplished. Every mentor would be responsible for doing one formal evaluation on each of their mentees throughout the season. Ideally, it would be two (one at the beginning of the season, one at the end). Mentors often times mentor multiple officials, and are busy working their own games. Consequently, even the best of intended evaluation programs can get choked off due to these time restraints and the challenges the hockey season can present. As the assignor, you have an opportunity to streamline this process. You can facilitate this if the evaluation program generates the schedule of games of the official needing an evaluation. Otherwise, it could be as simple as the official telling their mentor when they have a game, and the mentor making a point to attend that game.

Continuing Education

Finally, an assignor can be an asset with continuing education for the new or inexperienced official.

Much of our learning is done through a visual experience. Officials often try and emulate another official. The assignor may take the extra step and notify an official of any games that he or she may be able to view when they are not working, or when it precedes or follows a game they have just worked. These view games need to be officiated by high caliber officials who demonstrate correct USA Hockey mechanics and display proper judgment in accordance with the USA Hockey penalty standard.

The assignor will also want to keep a new or inexperienced official's schedule open at times when special educational meetings are held or at mandatory association meetings so they can take full benefit of situations discussed during the meeting. Many associations devote time to ongoing education during these mandatory meetings.

ADDRESSING CONCERNS

Addressing Concerns from Officials

As the face of an association, the assignor is often the first individual to receive complaints from officials that they were mistreated. Unfortunately, mistreatment of officials is far more common than it should be and the assignor is placed in a position where he/she must assist those officials. In this case, it is paramount that the assignor listens to the official and takes careful notes. Often, emotions are high and good listening skills can soften these emotions to a more rational point. Once emotions are in check, the assignor must be prepared to refer the official to the appropriate party for follow up. It is highly desirable that the assignor not engage in follow up, as a dual role could create a perception of conflict of interest on both sides of the fence. Officials' concerns are numerous; the following details the most common.

USA Hockey studies have indicated the dominant complaint from officials, especially young officials, is not working enough games. The assignor should maintain records that will allow for a detailed accounting (e.g. position, level of games, location of game, etc.) of each official's schedule. In addition, the assignor should have readily available a list of games or levels that any particular official is eligible to work. The third portion of the triad is to have said official's submitted availability for reference at all times. Carefully constructing this triad will allow the assignor to explain the assignment process to any official posing questions. The assignor who is contracted to various associations must be in constant contact with these associations. The association may be responsible for determining what level of game an official can work as the assignor may not know individual officials. In this case, the assignor must address an official's concerns but be prepared to refer the concern to the appropriate party in a professional and friendly manner. Ultimately, the assignor must convey that the fair assignment of all games to all officials is a top priority.

High on the list of an official's concerns is the amount of money they are paid for a game. There will be variability in the amount of input an assignor has in the game fees for officials. Regardless of the input, an assignor must strive to have a current fee schedule and be familiar with all nuances of the fee schedule. By devoting attention to the smallest of details regarding game fees, the assignor will be able to immediately answer many questions from officials. An assignor who is contracted with an association to assign games will often be compensated for his/her services. In some cases, officials may see assignor compensation as taking monies away from the officials. An assignor must convey the general scope of the financial arrangements to officials who ask and avoid lengthy, detailed discussion of these arrangements. The contract between an assignor and individual association is between those two parties.

Of great importance for the assignor is a thorough knowledge of the assigning system and the ability to convey this knowledge to the officials. From the most complex computerized system to the basic pencil and paper system, there are deadlines by which availability must be submitted and deadlines by which officials must know their game assignments. The assignor must realize that assigning games is a dynamic process. Officials' commitments change, teams change their plans, injuries occur, officials themselves are often players and weather always seems to play some type of role in the hockey season. It is the duty of an assignor to help officials understand that changes are inevitable and what process will be followed by both the assignor and the official when things change.

Addressing Concerns from Teams/Leagues

An assignor is often the point person charged with coordinating between the leagues and officials. This can be challenging because team and league officials have many things on their plate and it becomes easy to lose sight of a game or series of games. It is paramount that the assignor develops good relations with all teams and leagues which are serviced. As with officials, teams and leagues also have concerns which the assignor must be prepared to address.

A major concern expressed by teams and leagues is control of expenses, in particular game fees paid to the officials and the assignor. Game fees paid to the official are usually beyond the control of the assignor although the assignor may be the entry point for complaints regarding game fees. It is important that the assignor know the local officiating association's legal structure and refer questions regarding game fees to the appropriate party. The assignor may have direct or indirect control over assigning fees. Direct control is a contract with a team or league to provide assignment services. Indirect control is a contract with an officials association and/or third party payment system that bill for the games and pay the assignor. The assignor does not negotiate the assignment fee—that takes place between the third party and the team/league. The assignor is paid according to contractual obligations with the third party. In either case, the assignor must be prepared to provide an overview of the structure and fees to those who inquire. If detailed information is requested the assignor must be prepared to directly address the issue or refer the issue to the most qualified individual based on the type of assigning structure which has been developed.

Assignors are asked to assign the “best” or “most qualified” officials on a regular basis. There are a variety of reasons for this. Hockey organizations often fear that perceived substandard officiating will cause teams to drop out of their tournaments and create a loss of revenue. Teams, even at the youth level, request officials based on the perceived importance of the game. Teams and officials may have had a bad experience with each other. The list can go on and on. The role of the assignor in youth hockey is to distribute games in a fair and equitable fashion—allowing qualified officials to maintain competence at all levels while at the same time encouraging the development of officials. It is important that the assignor explain this philosophy of youth hockey officiating to all teams and leagues that are serviced. This must be done in a non-confrontational fashion which encourages the teams and leagues to support officiating development.

As previously noted, assigning is a dynamic process and the only certain thing is that things will change. Teams and leagues expect assignors to handle changes on very short notice and very quickly. While there are many reasons for these occurrences, it is more important for the assignor to have a process to take care of these situations. This process must be clearly communicated to all involved including the fact that there is a point where it will be impossible to honor a request. Proactive development of a policy and communicating that policy to teams and leagues prior to the season will reduce the number of short notice changes and/or eliminate the failure to honor a request.

Officials who are late for a game assignment or simply fail to show up for a game assignment reflect negatively on the assignor. While those officials are often out of direct control of the assignor, a well constructed policy set by an association and clearly communicated to all parties is the best defense against these unfortunate occurrences. This policy must be enforceable and strong enough to deter late arrivals or missed assignments by officials. A good rapport between teams/leagues and the assignor will minimize the impact of this infrequent situation.

How does an assignor solicit feedback?

Major concerns of officials, teams and leagues have been highlighted to this point. Clearly the key in addressing all of these concerns is COMMUNICATION. Knowing the best way to contact the league, and an alternative method, is imperative to successful feedback. The various forms of communication available to the assignor are as follows.

First on the list is face to face communication. In the electronic age, it is easy to sit back and quickly send an e-mail. While this has its place, nothing beats face to face communication. This is critical for the assignor who is facing many challenges. The assignor must make it a priority to meet with each constituent served, especially clients who are not high volume users. It is this group that often falls through the cracks—be it an official who does not get any games or a team that schedules three games per year and is not assigned officials for one of them. Face to face often takes the form of appearing at association, team or league meetings. Certainly this is a good start that should be followed up with individual or smaller group meetings addressing all concerns. The frequency of meetings will be dictated by individual circumstances. A minimum of three contacts is recommended: once prior to the season, once approximately mid-season, and a wrap up meeting at the end of the season.

Electronic communication is evolving. Prior to the advent of e-mail (remember, not everyone today has e-mail), the phone conversation was the next best thing to face to face conversation. Although e-mail seems to dominate today's landscape, the telephone is still one of the assignor's best friends. It is highly preferable to hold a phone conversation or a text conversation because these modes of contact provide immediate feedback and/or the ability to leave a message. Of course, parties must be cognizant that a message may not be received in a timely fashion if one of the parties does not answer the phone.

E-mail is a valuable tool for the assignor when used as an adjunct to face to face communication or a phone conversation. A follow up e-mail to reinforce face to face discussion ensures all parties are on the same page and delineate projects or tasks which may have been assigned. E-mail is also a valuable tool in communicating changes but must be used with discretion in short term situations.

Web based feedback functions are very similar to e-mail. However, web based feedback is typically based on a form where the individual expressing concern is required to fill out certain key information. An advantage of web based feedback is that it can automatically be routed via e-mail to selected individuals. Web based feedback systems can also send automated responses to the sender which may include confirmation of receipt, a thank you, and comments on how the process will proceed.

Model Feedback System

A good model feedback system is one which incorporates all types of feedback and strives to solicit the facts surrounding an event versus an individual's opinion.

When an event occurs, the easiest thing to do is pick up the phone and call the individual who assigned a game. A phone call usually gets a fairly immediate response and the individual knows that he/she has been heard. That being said, feedback should never be limited to a phone conversation. An individual providing feedback by phone should be asked to state their feedback in e-mail or through the use of a web based form. Asking an individual to express comments in writing forces an individual to think carefully about what they want to say. It is best to have feedback come from a club/team representative to the association and/or league, and not have

feedback come directly from parents and coaches. Going through a club/team rep usually causes people to put their feedback in a clearer context. In addition, it is appropriate to ask the individual not to respond for 24 hours. A cooling off period allows emotion to subside and will generally result in more thoughtful input from the respondent. Finally, putting things in writing eliminates the “he said, she said” or the “I have been misquoted...” that can result from a conversation where only two parties are present.

When requesting electronic feedback, certain basic information should be required. This includes the date, time, location, level and teams involved in the game. The names of all game officials should be included. Contact information for the individual providing the feedback must be obtained. Based on this information, the individual providing feedback needs to receive a prompt response. The most important part of the response begins with “thank you.” It does not make any difference whether the feedback is criticism or praise. It is important to the individual taking their time to provide feedback, and that individual needs to be thanked for taking their time! A response should also include a general comment on the process. The assignor may not be the person who will be conducting the follow up. In that case, the assignor should thank the individual and let them know who will conduct the follow up along with that person’s contact information. If the assignor will conduct the follow up, that information with a time frame should be passed along as well.

If the feedback requires any further action, the individual providing feedback should be updated periodically. At the conclusion of any event, the individual should be provided a final summary of the event regardless of the outcome. A crucial part of this final summary is to once again thank the individual for providing feedback.

Feedback does not stop when the respondent has been provided with a final summary. Feedback is a great opportunity for officiating organizations. Share positive feedback with the individual official privately. Positive feedback should also be shared with all members of an association in a generalized fashion illustrating how the event supports local, affiliate and USA Hockey Officiating Program goals. Negative feedback supported by investigation of the events provides an opportunity to positively impact an official and an officiating organization. The official in question must be counseled in a positive fashion and perhaps even given goals to demonstrate improvement. Events of this nature should be used as a general teaching tool at organizational meetings or at seminars. Using “negative” events as a teaching tool should be carefully thought out and constructed so as not to vilify an individual and to create a positive learning environment for everyone involved.

In conclusion, remember that the assignor may not be involved in every phase of the feedback process for every feedback event. It is important to note that the assignor will often be the intake point for feedback and must be well versed in the entire feedback process used by any group which he/she serves. It is equally important for an assignor to develop a feedback process for the services he/she performs.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this publication is to establish some ground rules and best practice advice for the assignment of officials to contests for a team, league, or local officials association. We hope it will shed some light on common areas that affect all assignors.

As you can see, the assignor is possibly the most important link between satisfied customers (teams/leagues) and the official's development. The effort needed to be an effective and capable assignor is rigorous and quite complex at times, but very rewarding when you see the smiles on players from a great game to the achievement of officials who have advanced because of the games and guidance you have given them.

APPENDIX 1 – AVAILABLE RESOURCES

AVAILABLE RESOURCES THROUGH THE USA HOCKEY OFFICIATING PROGRAM

The following items are currently available through the USA Hockey Officiating Program. Many of these items are furnished free of charge upon request.

1. Local Officials Association/Affiliate Handbook

Available free of charge through your USA Hockey Affiliate or the National Office.

2. USA Hockey Off-Ice Officials Handbook

Available free of charge through your local hockey organization or the National Office, upon request.

3. Officiating Mentor Program Manual

Available free of charge through your District Referee-in-Chief or the National Office, upon request.

4. Evaluation Program Manual

Available free of charge to all USA Hockey-trained evaluators through your District Evaluation Program Coordinator.

5. How To Become An Official Brochure

Available through your District Referee-in-Chief or National Office. Additional copies can be produced to meet local needs. Also this information is found on Affiliate web-sites.

6. Basic, Intermediate, Advanced Officiating Manual Series

Available to all registered officials based on level of registration; can also be obtained through seminar attendance or your Local Supervisor of Officials. Available for purchase to non-registered officials through the USA Hockey Merchandise Program.

7. USA Hockey Official Rules and Casebook

Sent to all registered officials through the registration process. Available for purchase through the USA Hockey Merchandise Program.

8. USA Hockey Official Playing Rules Book

Distributed to coaches and teams through the local organization or District Registrar. Available for purchase through the USA Hockey Merchandise Program.

9. Miscellaneous Resources

- Rule Change Video
- Fundamentals of Skating
- Penalty Guidelines Video
- Body Contact Video
- New Line of Enforcement I & II

APPENDIX 2 - INDEPENDENT CONTRACTOR AGREEMENT

Nothing in this Agreement shall be interpreted as a guarantee of assignments. This Agreement shall govern only the event that the organization assigns the undersigned to games assigned by the organization for various area leagues. The representations and acknowledgement contained in this Agreement are a prerequisite to working games assigned by the organization. This Agreement incorporates all written directives concerning protocol and procedures in relation to assignments accepted by the undersigned independent contractor, receipt of which is acknowledged by the undersigned's signature below.

You have expressed a desire to become a member of the organization and to perform duties as an official for indoor amateur ice hockey games. The organization may from time to time assign the undersigned to supply non-exclusive off-ice or on-ice officiating services for games scheduled and conducted by various amateur hockey leagues.

In order to obtain assignments, the undersigned makes the following representations:

1. The undersigned does not consider officiating hockey as his/her primary means of employment.
2. The undersigned receives all on-ice training from USA Hockey, its affiliates, or other associations. The organization is not responsible for any training.
3. The undersigned receives on-ice officiating assignments from persons or entities other than the organization or that the undersigned independent contractor is able to make his/her services available to other persons or entities.
4. The undersigned has procured major medical insurance coverage or relies exclusively upon the insurance provided by USA Hockey, Inc. and will not look to the organization for compensation as a result of injuries sustained while working games which the organization assigned.
5. The undersigned understands that game fees will be disbursed through the organization from the contracting party based entirely on the assignment information within its assignment software. The official understands that he/she is paid on a per game basis.
6. The undersigned purchases or obtains all necessary on-ice officiating equipment from sources other than the organization.
7. The undersigned acknowledges that once they have accepted game assignment(s); it becomes the undersigned's responsibility to find qualified replacements in the event that need arises. Furthermore, in the event of a "no-show", the organization policy (-ies) provide for discipline including but not limited to fines and suspensions.
8. The undersigned acknowledges that all replacements for an assigned game must adhere to the organization Internal Level Policy to the greatest degree possible.

The undersigned further acknowledges:

1. The undersigned serves as an independent contractor and not as an employee of the organization with respect to any assignment accepted. The undersigned is responsible for any and all income or self-employment tax(es).

2. The undersigned holds the organization, its officers, directors, and affiliated amateur hockey associations harmless for all assignments accepted.
3. Any assignment is subject to cancellation by the organization when such cancellation is deemed to be in the best interest of the association.
4. The organization assigns officiating assignments as an accommodation to various area leagues and receives an administrative fee for this service. The organization does not establish game times, game rules, officiating protocols or other aspects concerning the conduct of the games to which it assigns officials.
5. The organization is neither employed by nor acts as an agent for any area league, District, State Affiliate or USA Hockey.
6. This agreement does not constitute an employment contract or a guarantee of pay or assignments.
7. The undersigned will adhere to all association rules and regulations that are listed in the organization Constitution, By-Laws, Policies and Procedures.

Because of the nature of officiating, it is important to have flexibility in the assignment of officials. The sport of hockey is characterized by considerable body contact that can escalate into undesirable violence if not controlled by high quality officiating. To ensure adequate control, it is necessary for officials to be in good physical and mental condition. In addition, it is necessary for officials to have confidence and respect of coaches and players.

ACKNOWLEDGED AND ACCEPTED:

Official's Printed Name: _____

Official's Signature: _____

Parent or Guardian's Signature (if applicable): _____

Social Security Number: _____ - _____ - _____