

Parent Network Guide

Athletes across the country want to play Ultimate. People are drawn to the sport because families as a whole can find enjoyment in being involved with an Ultimate program. CUSP has modified this guide, originally developed by USA Rugby, for administrators to use in establishing an Ultimate parent volunteer network. It is through the accomplishments of volunteers that competitive, safe and fun Ultimate takes place. This guide helps explain the following:

- *Importance of building a parent network*
- *How to build a parent network*
- *Roles and responsibilities of network members*
- *What administrative tools are needed*

Why build a parent network?

Parents will support their child's Ultimate club as they overcome fears associated with being involved. A single parent may start out as the head coach, chief administrator, travel coordinator and school representative requiring an overwhelming level of commitment. When faced with this insurmountable workload, parents feel they can not perform so they choose not to participate. The key to overcoming this fear is to recruit parents with clearly defined rules and responsibilities. Creating a network allows parents to feel like part of a team instead of an overwhelmed well-intentioned individual. Support from multiple organized parents provides efficient program management.

All programs rely on coaches to lead them to success. Coaches take on the burden of planning practices, game day preparation and ensuring the safety of players among many other duties. If they must attend to the tedious administrative tasks in addition to these basic requirements, they are likely to quit or refuse the job in the first place. A parent network can provide volunteer coaches with the opportunity to focus solely on the craft of coaching thereby improving the overall playing experience. Providing coaches the freedom to only coach makes parents an extremely valuable asset.

In addition to these key factors, a parent network can also:

- *Encourage players and parents to share a common interest in Ultimate*
- *Educate young people on efficient management processes*
- *Make use of skill sets beyond the reach of the head coach*
- *Provide an opportunity to network and make friends*
- *Promote Ultimate as a community game*
- *Create greater awareness of the sport*

As the number of youth Ultimate players continues to grow in the USA, so too does the need for involved parents. Without adequate parental involvement, teams will face difficulty in fulfilling their obligations. It is imperative that parents take ownership to create continuity within the program.

How do I build a parent network?

To any parent, the decision to allow their child to play Ultimate can be swayed by public opinion. The myth that Ultimate is an unorganized game played by long-haired hippies is perpetrated by the poor behavior of a few players. Administrators and coaches must educate parents about the game to dispel these misconceptions. The game itself requires physical fitness, courage and grace under pressure. Each of these traits is what parents wish to see in their children. To help portray this image of the game, club representatives must present a professional appearance to those who wish to become involved. Winning the trust and respect of parents and community members starts with organizing and conducting an official parent involvement meeting.

Planning a Parent Meeting

Parents often rely on first impressions. This first meeting is a chance to showcase Ultimate as an organized and international sport rich in tradition. Nothing turns a family away more than attending a disorganized and inefficient meeting with little to no follow through. To ensure parents have a positive first experience, club representatives should consider the following factors:

Who is the target audience?

What location and timing will work best?

How do we market and promote the first meeting?

What materials will you plan to offer and present?

What goal and objectives should be set for this meeting?

Compare addressing these key factors to solving a jigsaw puzzle. As each question is answered, they form independent pieces that fit together to achieve success. An example is if attendance at the meeting is inadequate due to lack of promotion, then discussions on goals and objectives will prove to be difficult. Answering these basic questions is the first step towards preparing a successful meeting.

Target Audience

The first step in planning a parent meeting is to decide who will be invited. A parent may be called to setup a new organizational structure versus hosting a new player recruitment meeting to generate interest in the sport. Choosing a target audience is necessary for promotion as well as setting goals and objectives. If the right group of people associated with the club are in attendance, it will greatly increase the rate of success.

Location and Timing

Once you have chosen a target audience, the next step is to assess where and when the meeting will take place. Picking a location that offers the least amount of travel and is familiar to the athletes and parents is best. Meeting at the school adds legitimacy, but other venues could include the community center or a local library. When choosing a date and time, it is best to consult with current players on school and community activities to avoid any potential conflicts. As many athletes are cross-over sport athletes, it is also smart to consult with other sport coaches on their scheduled activities. Making the first

contact can even transition into discussing how Ultimate can help athletes perform better in other sports. Community leaders such as teachers, youth group coordinators and recreational professionals also appreciate being informed and may even help promote events that encourage athletic endeavors. Based on information gathered from other organizations, an educated decision may be made on a time and place for the first meeting.

Promotion

To help insure high attendance, it is important to promote the meeting. Once decisions have been made regarding time and place, then the key is to spread the word. It is best to give at least two weeks notice to the public prior to the event. Start communicating internally with current members of the club via email or hold a short “players only” meeting. This provides an opportunity to empower current players to participate in recruiting prospective players and their families.

School bulletin boards, morning announcements and people in position of authority such as teachers and other sport coaches can be used by the current athletes and coaches to send the message. Looking beyond the school environment through the use of local newspapers, park and recreation publications and community service activities also serve to bring new people in. Having a critical mass of enthusiastic parents and players in attendance can ease the process of achieving the club goals and objectives.

Presentation

The first meeting is often rated by the quality of information provided to those in attendance. An experienced facilitator sets the tone, while proper materials support what is being communicated. Providing materials makes it simple to share necessary information and adds an image of professionalism to the event. Suggested materials include:

- Nametags/markers/pens
- Laptop/PC
- Spectator guides
- Promotional Posters
- Contact information attendance form
- Club specific promotional flyer and/or business cards
- Calendar of events (includes games, training sessions, fundraisers and other events)
- Signage directing attendants to the meeting location
- Visual presentation materials (power point, film clips, posters, etc.)
- Copies of the meeting agenda
- Refreshments

Every attendant should leave the assembly feeling informed by the materials provided and excited about taking on a new sport. Creating an itemized agenda that addresses the goals and objectives of the club helps maximize this impact.

Goals and Objectives

A discussion must take place between key members of the current coaching staff, parents and athletes themselves to develop a meeting agenda. The agenda must inform, address needs of athletes and the club as a whole and inject organization structure designed to combat any issues. A sample agenda features:

- Introduction to Ultimate: Explain what the game is in general. Help a current player prepare a brief introductory presentation on Ultimate. The USA Ultimate has outreach materials that will be helpful to communicate the basic aspects of the sport such as “Ultimate in 10 Simple Rules”. It is also appropriate to use visual aids such as game footage and samples of jerseys and discs to generate interest and enthusiasm.
- Introduction to the Club: Make it a point to have all attendants exchange greetings. Ensuring that new and current players and family members intermix provides a better overall social atmosphere. A verbal and/or visual presentation describing the history of the club, introducing the coaching staff and highlighting major accomplishments will serve to answer initial questions from parents and players.
- Competitive Season Information: A discussion on team goals and expectations for players should occur. Review the schedule of training sessions, games, meetings and other activities requiring attendance. Include dues payment information and travel requirements to ensure commitment. Also address the physical requirements of the sport and what players can do to prepare themselves to play at their best.
- Safety considerations: This is one of the most important issues addressed. Make the qualifications of the coaching staff known to all parents. Describe some proper techniques and discuss injury prevention strategies as knowledge lessons.
- Roles and Responsibilities of Parents: Making parents understand that they are a key factor in club operations must be made clear. Start by describing how saddling a coach with administrative responsibilities in addition to the technical requirements of coaching can create a negative environment. Emphasize what good a shared working environment can do in creating a positive club culture. Present a pre-approved set of positions and describe the responsibilities assigned to each role. Some suggested roles for parent volunteers include:
 - *Assistant Coach* – helps to instruct players and club members on technical aspects of Ultimate. The level on involvement depends on the individual knowledge base and level of qualification. Even a novice at ultimate can help with setting up drills. Parents may also have experience coaching other sports whose training techniques may be helpful to your team as well, particular for general fitness and agility.
 - *Executive Director/President* – leads all organization meeting and oversees club operations. Makes sure that all the appropriate roles with the team are filled and tasks are being accomplished.
 - *Vice President* – Assists in managing club operations and provides oversight in absence of the appointed leader.

- *Game Secretary* – Handles stat taking at games. The Game Secretary may also be the appropriate person to handle ordering team uniforms.
- *Secretary* – responsible for all USA Ultimate/YUC membership requirements (waivers and forms) and overall club communication.
- *Treasurer* – manages financial arrangements including club payments, purchases and revenue generation.
- *Travel coordinator* – manages functions of transportation to and from matches ranging from ground travel to accommodations. This position is especially important if your team aspires to playing in out of town tournaments.
- *Social Chair* – acts with a committee of volunteers to arrange post game functions and other off field activities.
- *Fundraising Coordinator* – creates and implements plans to raise money for the club. This can include team sponsorships or team fundraisers (bake sales, Buddy Cards, etc)
- *Spirit Keeper* – encourages behavior in line with the Spirit of the Game.
- *Media Representative* – reports match results and acts as a liaison to all local media outlets and school officials.

For smaller clubs, not all of these positions are necessary. However, an assistant coach, game secretary, secretary and treasurer are the most immediately useful.

- Committees: The general responsibility of each role listed is to ensure that the club continues to take actions in their area of expertise that provide the opportunity for players to play Ultimate. In addition to these key roles, various clubs may adopt committees to address specific needs of the club. These committees are responsible for carrying out these tasks so the end goal of Ultimate participation is achieved. Some examples of committees include:
 - *Fundraising Committee* – seek to reduce the cost of participation
 - *Recruitment Committee* – help recruit new players and families into the game.
 - *Social Committee* – organizes and communicates with other clubs on how best to create a fun off-field atmosphere especially during the post game time period.
 - *Equipment Committee* – responsible for the condition and storage of all club equipment as well as ordering team uniforms
 - *Competition Committee* – provide competition tools for coaches and players such as game film or statistics.
- Request for Volunteers: These examples of administrative positions and work groups form a strong parent network. A chart or graph outlining the organization structure as a whole will help in explaining the responsibilities of each position. Ask for volunteers and assign roles based on background information and known strengths of each individual. Use what parents do in their daily lives to help guide these assignments. Ex. A parent working as an accountant makes for a qualified club treasurer.

- Questions: Following each presentation, allow plenty of time for an open forum. Parents will have questions as they wish to ensure their son or daughter will be safe and have fun while playing Ultimate. Be patient and thorough in all explanations. Create a parent/player centered environment to ensure an adequate comfort level. An unanswered question can be the turning point in a parent/player's decision to participate.
- Call to Action: After all questions have been exhausted, take this opportunity to leave on a note of excitement. This is the final chance to show in your inflection why Ultimate is a great sport. Close by reminding everyone the date training starts or discuss a future date for the next meeting. An action-oriented statement energizes and promotes commitment and leaves club members interested in taking part in future activities.