



## Promoting and Operating a Successful Little League Softball® Program

### 1. Structuring the Board

Little League recommends adding at least two positions to the local league board when starting or operating a softball program: a Softball Vice President and a Softball Player Agent. A league may always add additional softball board positions where it deems necessary.

#### Softball Vice President

Appointing a Softball Vice President to oversee local league operations is an important task for any league coordinating a softball program. One of the primary goals of this position is to promote the program within the local community. The Softball Vice President acts as a liaison between the league board and those involved in the softball program.

Responsibilities of the Softball Vice President include:

- Coordinate softball player, umpire, and volunteer recruitment and retention efforts in conjunction with the Marketing Manager.
- Organize and oversee education and training for managers, coaches, and umpires with the Coaching Coordinator.
- Work with the League President and District to arrange a schedule for softball teams, including interleague games within the District and with neighboring Districts, if necessary.
- Assist the Softball Player Agent with try-outs and player selection.
- Facilitate special events – Opening Day ceremonies, Special Game tournaments, [Softball Days with universities](#), etc.
- Provide the local Little League Board with updates on softball activities at each board meeting.

#### Softball Player Agent

This appointment allows for a separate Player Agent to oversee the league's softball age divisions. A Softball Player Agent conducts the tryouts, oversees player selection, reviews player eligibility of the softball participants, and operates the softball player pool. Generally, this individual would be more familiar with the softball participants, talent level, and rules and regulations.

### 2. Promoting the Program

Little League created and annually updates the [Local League Resource Guide](#), which is mailed each year to every local league. The League Resource Guide is designed to provide the local league Board of Directors guidance on improving their local league operations and assistance with marketing their league to the public. It also shares important information on local league finances, including tips on obtaining local sponsorships and driving fundraising efforts. Included inside is a list of important dates to help local leagues with Little League deadlines and to plan for the upcoming year. League can find supplemental information and customizable flyers at [LittleLeagueU.org](http://LittleLeagueU.org).

Leagues may want to consider reaching out to local media, especially if they are getting ready to offer Little League Softball for the first time. Many newspapers, radio stations, and even local TV media will be interested in picking up a story about a league's new offering and the positive impact that the softball program will have on the community. Leagues are encouraged to contact the local media through a press release, or even a phone call. [Helpful tips and customizable resources](#) can also be found at LittleLeagueU.org.

Leagues should encourage members and parents to [register for Little League newsletters](#) to allow officers, coaches, and parents to receive up-to-date information and releases.

Local leagues can utilize Little League Softball promotional resources and publications found at [LittleLeagueSoftball.org](#) for program and benefit introduction and development. Publications available for download include:

- Little League Softball Development PowerPoint
- Little League Softball Development Booklet
- Softball Development Flyer
- NFHS Rules and Regulation Comparison
- Sample Letter to High School Coach
- Expanded Special Games Guidelines

If there is a resource you think would be beneficial, but cannot find on Little League University or the Softball Promotion/Publication webpage, please email Sara Thompson at [sthompson@LittleLeague.org](mailto:sthompson@LittleLeague.org) with your suggestion.

### **3. Structuring Your Softball Program**

#### Tee Ball

Tee Ball allows local leagues to start the softball divisions from Little League's youngest age division offered and expand the softball divisions in future years. If your league already has a Tee Ball program established, you can create a Tee Ball Softball division or form teams of girls within Tee Ball Baseball. Offering Tee Ball Softball will cultivate players learning softball from the youngest age, involving their parents, and allowing players to participate with friends who will advance together in future age divisions. Please remember that Tee Ball Softball programs must use the Softball age determination date and Tee Ball Baseball programs must use the Baseball age determination date.

#### Teenage Divisions

The teenage divisions of Little League can provide another path to starting or increasing a league's softball offerings. Whether coordinating Junior League or Senior League divisions, be sure to work with the local high schools in the league boundaries to explain how Little League can provide a second season, tournament opportunities, and fall instruction for their players under similar playing rules. To maximize participation, the Senior division may be offered by local leagues or as a District-wide program. Additionally, Junior League and Senior League divisions may utilize Special Game tournament participation towards teams' 12-game Regular Season minimum.

#### Age Structures

The Little League Softball age structure allows for flexibility within the divisions to help increase participation while maintaining a safe and competitive environment. All age divisions overlap providing leagues the opportunity to utilize a 2-year or a 3-year (or 4-year when possible) age structure to allow advanced players to play up or to increase the number of available participants within a particular division. Another option leagues may want to implement, depending on participation numbers and feedback, is structuring age divisions according to school grade.

For structuring options, reference the Little League Softball Rulebook Regulation IV – The Players. For additional information about how your league can utilize Regulation IV to dual roster 12-year-olds in Majors and Juniors or dual-roster teenage players in the Junior and Senior Divisions contact Sara Thompson at 570-326-1921 or [sthompson@LittleLeague.org](mailto:sthompson@LittleLeague.org).

#### Player Pools

Throughout the season, some teams are faced with a shortage of rostered players for regular season games. In this situation, the local league may opt to create a player pool [Regulation V(c)], or a pool of players from existing regular season players that are willing to participate in extra games during the regular season (within their respective division). The Player Agent will manage the Player Pool and assign players on a “rotating basis” to specific games when teams do not have enough players. This allows a local league to play through scheduling conflicts and gives participants additional playing experience. If the local league would like to create a player pool of participants to supplement a different division (i.e. Minors to Majors), a Charter Committee waiver is necessary.

If teams are consistently short players in the Major division and above, leagues may apply Regulation IV – dual rostering – with players they have assessed capable and want to participate in additional games.

#### Combined Teams

Combined Teams is a useful option for leagues who are just starting a softball program or offering all age divisions. This allows leagues the ability to combine with other local Little Leagues (maximum of three leagues total may combine) when registration numbers are low within certain age divisions. Little League recommends offering softball programs for players ages four to 16, assessing registration numbers, and then determining which age divisions can be offered in-house and which divisions need to be combined. Under Combined Teams, local leagues retain the rights to their players from year to year. Combined Teams, for Regular Season and Tournament, is now managed and submitted through the [Little League DataCenter](#).

#### **4. Finding Facilities**

Some leagues are fortunate to have their own field space and resources, however, many leagues need to coordinate with the city and community for fields and facilities. We would recommend contacting your local Parks and Recreation department for their ‘Field Use’ policy. This will outline their allocation procedures, fees, insurance requirements, curfew, etc., and explain how your league can sign-up to use the facilities.

Another resource your league can utilize is the local school district. Many times, local school districts will allow the community and non-profit organizations to use their indoor and outdoor facilities. Since the facility use policy will differ between schools and districts, we would recommend contacting the district offices first.

NOTE: A combination of facilities sometimes works best, especially as leagues begin to grow.

#### **5. Manager and Coach Education**

There are many different avenues your league can explore for manager, coach, umpire, and parent education and training within your local community and through Little League.

Little League University – is a free online skill and drill database for Little League coaches, managers, and parents. Filled with baseball and softball articles and videos, parents and volunteers can learn the about

the basics or game situations from the comfort of their home. To access these resources, visit Little League University at [LittleLeagueU.org](http://LittleLeagueU.org).

Tee Ball Program - In 2013, Little League launched the [Tee Ball Program](#) which provides a 10-week practice plan focused on fun, fitness, and fundamentals. Whether coaches are beginners or experienced, the program offers coaches and parents a series of lessons utilizing up to 40 activities that include skills, drills, and plenty of physical activity. Leagues can access the information and the full program at Little League University or [LittleLeague.org/TeeBall](http://LittleLeague.org/TeeBall).

Organizing Coach Clinics – Local leagues are encouraged to coordinate coach clinics for their parents, coaches, and managers. Many times, leagues will have volunteers equipped with prior softball experience who can assist with teaching the basics or specific skills. Local high school and college coaches or players may also be willing to volunteer their time or instruct a clinic for a small fee. High school and college coaches have a wealth of knowledge and can be a great resource for your league. Once a relationship is established, it can also lead to other opportunities for your softball program.

Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA) – is a non-profit organization dedicated to ensuring a positive, character-building experience for young athletes. PCA provides additional educational resources and tools to Little League coaches, parents, and local volunteers about teaching life lessons through sports. Learn more about how the PCA can help your coaches at [LittleLeague.org/PCA](http://LittleLeague.org/PCA). You can also take a self-assessment of yourself as a coach [here](#).

## **6. Umpires and Umpire Education**

Little League recommends that local leagues recruit, educate, and retain volunteer umpires in a similar fashion as other positions needed to operate a local league. Many districts and leagues have found successful ways to operate volunteer umpire programs which help to defray the costs that might normally be passed onto a league.

Little League offers many umpire training materials, clinics, and seminars for training, as well as the [Little League Umpire Registry](#). The registry allows volunteer umpires to receive regular eNewsletters with rule interpretations and updates, eRulebooks, the Rules Instruction Manual (RIM), the Little League Umpire online presentation, and 60- and 90- foot Field Mechanics manuals for only \$25.

Umpires are also encouraged to visit Little League University for free, educational content and video clips on plate and base mechanics, news articles, and updated rule and regulation interpretations.

## **7. Parents and Parent Expectations**

Provide your parents with a plan. Once the league has developed a strategy for the season, update parents about everything the league is organizing, including draft procedures, facilities, game schedules, initiatives, education and training, etc., so that they will have a better understanding of what to expect. Encourage ideas and suggestions, and welcome volunteers.

Additionally, Little League University strives to provide education and information for parents by offering a one-stop, platform where they can learn rules and regulations, best practices for supporting players and the local league, and provide feedback directly to Little League International.

## **8. Scheduling the Season**

Each year, the local board prepares a regular season schedule. The number of teams within each age division will determine if the league can play their schedule in-house or if they will need to add

interleague games with surrounding Little League programs. A league may opt for a combination of the two as well.

An interleague schedule benefits small programs looking for teams to play, leagues wanting to increase excitement during the Regular Season, or programs looking to build skill level, and may improve and promote awareness of your softball program within the community. Your District Administrator (D.A.) should be able to inform you about softball programs and divisions in other leagues within the district or neighboring districts and what opportunities may exist for interleague play. A completed interleague form should be submitted prior to the start of the season via the [Little League DataCenter](#). Leagues may play any other local Little League program, in the appropriate age division, with appropriate approvals.

### Special Games

Special Games are another option for local leagues to add excitement to their season, increase competition, and allow all participants a tournament experience. Special Games may be played under Little League Regular Season rules, Tournament rules, or the Expanded Softball Special Games Guidelines. Leagues must submit a [Special Games Application](#), which needs approval by the Regional Office prior to the start of tournament. Some games played during a Special Game tournament may count towards International Tournament participation for Junior and Senior division players. Leagues should reference Regulation IX – Special Games for additional information.

Leagues may also coordinate [Special Games with non-Little League teams](#), however, they should check with their respective Regional Offices for guidelines. These Special Game tournaments must have approval from the Charter Committee and games against non-Little League teams would not count towards International Tournament participation.

Little League developed a set of modified guidelines that local softball leagues may use during some Special Games for an easier approach to organizing weekend tournaments. The [Expanded Softball Special Games Guidelines](#) allow for adjustments in game scheduling, participation, pitching rules, and team composition.

## **9. Post-Season Review**

While most leagues take a short break after their Tournament season, we would recommend the membership gather for one last meeting to review the concluding season. It's at this time that the membership should discuss everything from manager and coach training, opening ceremonies, the season, marketing, closing ceremonies, etc. and determine which aspects of the program worked well and which ones need improvement. The membership should feel comfortable giving recommendations and suggesting ideas for the upcoming season. This should allow for enough time to plan and organize committees, if necessary.