

HIGH SCHOOL START-UP MANUAL

Guide to Starting a
New High School
Program



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

How to Start a Team	4
Gauge Interest Level	4
Create a Budget	6
Recruiting Volunteers	6
Parents/Guardians.	6
Securing Facility Space	7
Coaches	8
Insurance	9
Recruiting Fencers	9
Used Equipment.	11
Finding High Schools to Compete Against	12
Fundraising	12

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The United States Fencing Association (USA Fencing), also known as and referred to herein as USA Fencing, is a nonprofit corporation under the laws of the State of Colorado. The Internal Revenue Service has recognized the Association as a 501(c) (3) tax-exempt organization and contributions qualify as charitable deductions for the donor to the extent permitted by law. USA Fencing is the recognized NGB for the sport of fencing in the United States.

As the governing body of Fencing in the United States, USA Fencing’s Mission is to grow and promote the sport of fencing in the United States, honor its rich traditions and achieve sustained competitive international excellence. Our vision is to inspire a lifetime enriched by fencing.

HIGH SCHOOL START-UP MANUAL

This manual is designed to guide you through the process of establishing a new fencing team at the high school level. In addition to this guide, the USA Fencing website (www.usafencing.org), headquarters staff, and local volunteers are available to assist you.

Be sure to tap into the knowledge resources of USA Fencing and our local divisions. You will find the local USA Fencing community to be an invaluable resource when it comes to experience with beginning and sustaining new high school fencing programs.

To find local contacts in your community, go to our Division Overview page, found [here](#).

Your local USA Fencing network can provide with the following tools:

A list of local resources and contacts who have experience in starting new teams

- Volunteer support
- Invaluable advice and guidance
- Website promotion for your new team
- Support with fundraising efforts
- Potential local grant programs

The manual will be updated periodically on the basis of recommended corrections and/or modifications. Revisions will be noted by the date provided.

The High School Start-Up Manual is due to the efforts of high school fencing experts from across the country:

George Janto (New Jersey), Ann Jones (Illinois), Carrington Ward (Connecticut), Greg Schiller (California), Jim Beihold (California), Kurtis Fetchmeyer (Minnesota), Griffin MacBrien Downs (New York) and Andrew Gauzza (New York).

Suggestions to enable this manual to be more user-friendly are welcome and can be forwarded to information@usafencing.org

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HOW TO START A TEAM

To help you most efficiently execute the process of forming a new team, you will first need to answer a few questions about what kind of team you are trying to form:

1. What level of play are you facilitating? Club or Varsity?
2. Are you interested in joining an existing league with your new team? Are you establishing your own league within an existing high school athletic conference?
3. Will you need to pitch your vision to a school board or academic administration?

In this section, you will find general keys to success and starting points for starting a High School Fencing Team.

CHECKLIST

some of these may not apply depending on where your initial interest is coming from

- Gauge interest level and identify target group of potential participants.
- Create a budget and determine how the team will be financed.
- Recruit others (parents, volunteers, community support) to help you with the administration of the team or league.
- Secure facility space
- Recruit committed coaches and officials and connect them with training opportunities.
- Confirm insurance for the organization, athletes, coaches, and officials.
- Establish a risk management plan.
- Recruit Fencers.
- Secure equipment for fencers if they don't have their own.
- Find other schools to play.
- Secure financial support and fundraising.

GAUGE INTEREST LEVEL

Identify the target group of Participants

Before launching a new high school fencing team, it's essential to gauge interest among potential participants to ensure there is sufficient enthusiasm and commitment. Consider the following steps to identify your target group of participants:

Define Your Target Audience:

- Determine the demographic and geographic characteristics of the students you aim to serve. Consider factors such as gender equity, school type (private vs. public), and location (urban, suburban, rural).
- Assess whether there are specific groups within the student body who may be particularly interested in fencing, such as experienced fencers or those seeking a unique athletic opportunity.

Gender Equity Considerations:

- Strive to create a welcoming and inclusive environment that promotes gender equity in fencing participation. Ensure that opportunities for involvement are accessible and equitable for all students, regardless of gender.

School Type and Location:

- Recognize the unique dynamics and preferences of students from different school settings (private vs. public) and geographic locations (urban, suburban, rural). Tailor your outreach and programming to align with the needs and interests of your target audience.

Volunteer vs. Staffed Approach:

- Consider whether your fencing program will be primarily volunteer-driven or staffed by dedicated coaches and instructors. Assess the availability and qualifications of potential volunteers or staff members to support the program effectively.
- Paid staff, including coaches and armorers, should be included in the budget proposals.

Methods for Assessing Interest:

- Conduct surveys among the student body to gauge interest in fencing and gather feedback on potential program offerings, scheduling preferences, and logistical considerations.
 - Host exploratory meetings or informational sessions to introduce students to the sport of fencing, outline the benefits of participation, and gauge interest levels first-hand.
 - Identify experienced fencers among the student body who can serve as ambassadors for the sport and help generate interest and excitement among their peers.

TIPS ON GAUGING INTEREST:

Once you have determined your target audience, format, and mission, consider holding informational meetings after school at the local high school.

- Talk to attendees about your purpose and mission.
- Use the Fencing in Schools PowerPoint presentation template and resources from <https://www.usafencing.org/highschool>

CREATE A BUDGET

Starting a high school fencing program team requires an investment of time and money. Money is one of the quickest and most effective routes to program acceptance. Since schools and community organizations may not have the start-up costs for new sports, be prepared to gather funds before making your pitch. Remember that long-term planning – for more than just one or two seasons – is critical for the program’s success and sustainability.

HIDDEN COSTS

Financing a new team can be challenging. Hidden costs may include rental fees, transportation expenses, coach payments, officials fees, practice equipment, tools, equipment, and marketing and promotional initiatives.

EQUIPMENT COSTS

Sample Budget can be found at <https://www.usafencing.org/highschool>

BUDGET/ACCOUNTING

Remember to share financial information (needs, costs, donations, expenditures, etc.) with athletic departments, parents, and other interested parties. Disclosing general financial information helps to maintain a professional environment and reassures participants and their families of the use of appropriate and ethical fiscal procedures.

RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS

Many high school programs have been started by the efforts of a single individual, but the most successful long-term programs have a strong support team. Surround yourself with helpers from the very beginning.

PARENTS/GUARDIANS

Parents and Guardians of the fencers you are recruiting are your strongest allies. Their participation must go beyond fundraising and competition attendance. Parents and guardians should strive to be connected with the fencing team and maintain high standards of behavior. Parents are also frequently willing to volunteer as core members of your support team.

PARENT/GUARDIAN AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TIPS

- Identify two or three key parents or guardians who are proven leaders and engage them. Suggest that they invite other interested parents to an informal gathering where you and other volunteers can discuss fencing and how a team might be established. Have facts at hand, like the cost of equipment, possible field space details, and information about neighboring teams or clubs. Identify parent/guardian volunteers and give them specific tasks and action items.
- A booster club should be formed by the parents/guardians of your team members. If utilized properly, the club can be a useful means of gaining exposure, members, and support.
- Identify people in your area who have fenced and involve them in any of the above activities - this will be a bonus for your core group.
- Select players to give presentations before booster clubs and PTA or community service organizations.

SECURING FACILITY SPACE

Securing facility space is crucial for establishing a safe and conducive environment for high school fencing activities. This entails not only ensuring the physical security of the locations but also addressing logistical concerns such as transportation and insurance.

On-Campus Facilities:

- Identify suitable on-campus spaces such as gymnasiums, multipurpose rooms, or unused classrooms that can accommodate fencing activities.
- Coordinate with school administration to reserve these spaces for fencing practice sessions and competitions.
- Ensure that these spaces are securely locked when not in use to prevent unauthorized access and safeguard equipment.

Off-Campus Locations:

- Explore options for off-campus locations if on-campus facilities are limited or unavailable.
- Secure agreements with local community centers, recreation facilities, middle school gyms, or fencing clubs to host practices and competitions.
- Coordinate transportation arrangements for athletes to these off-campus locations, ensuring they have safe and reliable means of travel.

Insurance Considerations:

- Verify whether students are covered by the school's insurance policy when participating in off-campus fencing activities.
- If not covered, explore options for supplemental insurance or waivers to ensure athletes are adequately protected against injuries or accidents.

Equipment Storage:

- Designate specific areas within the facility where athletes can safely store their fencing equipment during the school day.
- Install secure lockers or storage racks to prevent theft or damage to the equipment.
- Educate athletes on the importance of properly storing their gear and maintaining accountability for their belongings.

By addressing these aspects of securing facility space, the high school fencing program can create a supportive and secure environment that fosters the growth and development of its athletes.

COACHES

Recruit committed coaches and connect them with USA Fencing-related training opportunities. An essential part of starting a fencing program is finding qualified coaches and officials. Coaching credentials for high schools may vary depending on the state's coach requirements. For information about coach credentials go to the high school athletics organization for your state, additional information can be found at <https://nfhslearn.com/home/coaches>

Fencing Specific Certification may be required. In these cases, the [US Fencing Coaches Association](#) provides opportunities to train coaches in the high school and/or school district.

TIPS FOR RECRUITING COACHES

Recruiting dedicated and experienced coaches is essential for the success and development of a high school fencing program. Here are some tips to help you in this endeavor:

Tap into Alumni Resources:

- Reach out to former students who were involved in fencing during their high school years. Alumni often have a strong connection to their alma mater and may be enthusiastic about giving back by coaching.
- Alumni coaches bring a unique perspective and understanding of the school culture, which can enhance the coaching experience for current athletes.

Leverage Local Fencing Clubs:

- Research and connect with local USA Fencing Member Clubs in your area. These private clubs often have experienced coaches who may be willing to assist in the development of your high school program.
- Collaborating with fencing clubs can provide access to coaching expertise, training resources, and networking opportunities within the broader fencing community.

Engage Local Referees:

- Identify local referees who are actively involved in officiating fencing competitions in your area. These individuals possess a deep understanding of the sport and may have a keen interest in coaching at the high school level.
- Referees bring valuable insight into the rules and technical aspects of fencing, which can benefit both coaches and athletes in the program.

By employing these strategies to recruit coaches, you can build a strong coaching team that is committed to nurturing the skills and talents of your high school fencers. This collaborative effort will contribute to the growth and success of the fencing program, both on and off the strip.

INSURANCE

Insurance is important for the safety and liability of all fencers, coaches, officials, and program administrators and it is often a prerequisite to using facilities. Insurance through the High School is the preferred and easiest way to ensure you are covered. If you cannot gain insurance coverage through the school, General Liability, Excess Liability, and Accident Medical and Catastrophic Medical insurance is a benefit for each coach, official and player member of USA Fencing. Additional insurance such as Directors & Officers Liability, Equipment Insurance, and Crime Insurance can also be purchased through the USA Fencing insurance program.

After establishing your high school team, remember to register your program with USA Fencing. Registering your team with USA Fencing allows the program administrator to manage their roster, validate membership, and secure a Certificate of Liability.

RECRUITING FENCERS

Demonstrating that you have a significant amount of interested participants will be required, regardless of the level of play you are establishing. Not only will you win support from possible sponsors and support staff, but the enthusiasm, dedication, and excitement generated by participants and their coaches will spark interest in others and ensure the future of your team. Convincing others to involve themselves in a new sport can be a challenge and an ongoing process. Your patience, determination, and drive will be vital in forming a new team.

TIPS FOR RECRUITING FENCERS

Engage with Physical Education Classes:

- Collaborate with the school's physical education department to introduce fencing to students during PE classes. Hosting introductory sessions or demonstrations can pique the interest of potential fencers and encourage them to join the program.

- Highlight the physical and mental benefits of fencing, such as improved agility, focus, and discipline, to attract students who are seeking a unique and challenging sport.

Host Recruitment Events:

- Organize or participate in school-wide recruitment events or open houses where interested students can learn more about the fencing program and try out basic fencing techniques under the guidance of coaches and experienced fencers.
- Showcase the excitement and camaraderie of fencing through interactive activities, demonstrations, and testimonials from current team members.

Utilize Social Media and Online Platforms:

- Leverage social media platforms and online forums to promote the fencing program and engage with potential recruits. Share photos, videos, and success stories to showcase the achievements and activities of the team.
- Create informational posts and advertisements targeting students who may be interested in fencing or who have expressed an interest in other individual or combat sports.

Collaborate with Middle Schools and Community Groups:

- Establish connections with local middle schools and community organizations to identify young athletes who may be interested in transitioning to high school fencing.
- Offer introductory workshops or after-school programs at middle schools to introduce fencing to students and generate interest in joining the high school team.

Establish Summer Camps:

- Sponsor one or two week summer programs either as part of the school's summer camp offerings or through a local park district. These can either target middle school age students, or be expanded to attract high school age students who want to explore fencing before committing to a team.

Securing Equipment:

- Contact local retailers and inquire about overstocked equipment. Ask about their interest in sponsoring a team.
- Buy in bulk and inquire about bulk-purchase discounts. See USA Fencing Partners, Absolute Fencing, Blue Gauntlet and Leon Paul for bulk-purchase discounts.
- Considering applying for a USA Fencing Grant through Fencing the Gap. To learn more about the grant process and upcoming offerings go to <https://www.usafencing.org/deib>

USED EQUIPMENT

When considering the use of used equipment for fencing activities, it's essential to prioritize the safety and well-being of the athletes. While used gear may offer a more cost-effective option, it also presents potential hazards that must be carefully assessed. Here are some important considerations:

Safety Concerns:

- Used equipment may not fit properly, leading to discomfort or compromised protection during fencing bouts.
- Wear and tear on used gear can result in structural weaknesses or damage that may increase the risk of injury during play.
- It's crucial to thoroughly inspect any used equipment for signs of damage, such as frayed fabrics, dents, or loose components, before allowing athletes to use them.

Compliance with Safety Standards:

- USA Fencing mandates that all participants adhere to current and accepted rules of play, including using equipment that meets established safety standards.
- Used equipment must meet these safety standards to qualify for insurance protection in the event of accidents or injuries during sanctioned events or practices.

Risk Mitigation Strategies:

- Prioritize the purchase of new or certified refurbished equipment whenever possible to ensure compliance with safety regulations and minimize the risk of injury.
- If using used equipment is unavoidable, ensure that it undergoes thorough inspection and any necessary repairs or maintenance before being used by athletes.
- Educate athletes and coaches about the importance of proper equipment care and maintenance to prolong the lifespan and effectiveness of their gear.

Encourage Proper Equipment Fitting:

- Emphasize the importance of proper equipment fitting to athletes, coaches, and parents to mitigate the risk of injury and ensure optimal performance during fencing activities.
- Consider offering equipment fitting services or resources to help athletes select gear that suits their individual needs and preferences while adhering to safety guidelines.

FINDING HIGH SCHOOLS TO COMPETE AGAINST

High Schools offering varsity fencing programs can be found on <https://www.usafencing.org/highschool>

USA Fencing staff are available to connect you with local contacts to find competition opportunities in your area.

TRANSPORTATION

All transportation to and from fencing events should be in accordance with USA Fencing's Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policies found here <https://www.usafencing.org/fencesafe>

COLLECTING HIGH SCHOOL TEAM DUES

Team dues may be necessary to support your team. Dues are a way to ensure interest and commitment from fencers and parents. Keep dues as low as possible. High dues will limit your audience, interest, and will create a barrier. After outlining your budget, determine if team dues will cover all expenses or if you will need to plan for other fundraising to cover the difference.

FUNDRAISING

Fundraising will be vital to the success of your team. You will need to market and promote your team and your fundraising efforts.

HOSTING A FUNDRAISING EVENT

The key is choosing a suitable fundraiser, establishing a sound organization, and plenty of participation by team members, parents, and boosters. Fundraising events are a great team bonding exercise. People who are excited and passionate about the team will make these fundraisers successful.

Special Considerations:

- Establishing as a club team first is a strong step towards a future varsity program. A club team that is well maintained by coaches and fencers demonstrates that this is a worthwhile sport to sponsor.

- Committed interest from students and parents must be demonstrated for the school to recognize your efforts. Schools tend to listen to multiple parents voicing the same opinion. Identify the largest number of involved parents (PTA members, trustees, recent large donors, influential alumni, etc.). These individuals can aid in accessing and communicating with the administration more easily. They are oftentimes the most effective in making progress.
- Meet with the school principal to propose an informational meeting in a gym, cafeteria, or library after hours. Principals may have more interest in new programs than athletic directors, who may be hesitant to add another sport they have to manage without additional resources or facilities. If the informational meeting is successful and there is significant interest, propose a follow-up meeting with the principal to move forward.
- It is common for schools to lack a budget for new clubs or varsity sports. It is important for you to draft a detailed budget and determine the expense for participants and the sponsoring school.
- Ask a teacher to serve as a team sponsor or school contact. This will aid in establishing positive ties that will be invaluable when establishing a varsity team.
- Make it easy for the school to say yes. Be organized and professional. Finding other schools to fence, facility space, equipment, and other necessities will alleviate some the headaches the school is anticipating. If the school is impressed by your organization, dedication, and ability to get people interested, then they are more likely to look at your proposal favorably. Work patiently with the administrators to clarify concrete issues, concerns, needs, and opinions so you can move forward with resolutions.
- Be persistent, but patient. Getting a sport sanctioned by a school may take years. Set long term goals. It takes planning on your part and the school's part to ensure that the team is established properly, is financially stable, and successful.



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