

START A WEIGHTLIFTING CLUB

STEP BY STEP

A practical playbook for coaches. Go from your first certification to a sanctioned club and a competing team—in a high school, on a college campus or in a gym.

A HIGH SCHOOL

B COLLEGE

C COMMERCIAL / INDEPENDENT GYM

WELCOME, COACH

WHY START A WEIGHTLIFTING CLUB

The snatch and the clean & jerk teach speed, coordination, mobility and power. Weightlifting is also a sport in its own right, with weight classes, clear scoring and a path from a local platform to national championships.

BETTER ATHLETES
A club takes the lifts your athletes already do further.

ROOM FOR EVERY BODY
Weight classes keeps compeition fair, with no pressure to be a particular size.

MEASURABLE PROGRESS
Every kilo is a PR waiting to happen.

A REAL PATHWAY
Sanctioned results count toward Youth, Junior, University and Masters Nationals.

THE ROADMAP

SIX STEPS TO BUILDING A TEAM

ADD COACHES

01
CERTIFY
Level 1, SafeSport, background screening

02
REGISTER THE CLUB & ATHLETES
Sport80, three club roles, $227/yr

03
RECRUITING
Answer concerns and build interest

04
ESTABLISH YOUR SETTING
Identify your training space, get approval, and draw athletes

05
TRAIN & COMPETE
Mock meet, then sanctioned events

06
GROW
Marketing, Workshop or Level 1 for assistants

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

If you currently have athletes and a space to train, check out steps 1-3. If you are looking to establish a training space in either a high school college, or commercial gym, check out step 4.

High School

You're a teacher or strength coach at a school.

College

You're a student, faculty or staff at a university.

Commercial

The club lives inside a commercial or independent gym.

01 GET CERTIFIED

Your certification is the minimum standard for a USAW club and the strongest point in any pitch, to an AD, a club sports office or a gym owner.

YOUR CHECKLIST

- [ ] **Individual+membership in Sport80** — $109/yr
  The coach tier. Required to take a coaching course.
- [ ] **USAW Level 1 Coach certification** — $549
  The minimum to coach a club.
  Free recertification with membership
- [ ] **SafeSport training** — Free
  Required for club directors and coaches. Keep it current.
- [ ] **USADA Coach's Advantage** — Free
  Clean sport and supplement education.
- [ ] **USAW background screening** — $37 · 2 yrs
  In addition to any screening your employer requires.
- [ ] **Your setting's own requirements**
  Often CPR/AED, a school or district background check, or an NFHS course.

COACH TIP

Save your certificates as PDFs. You'll attach them to your proposal in Step 02.

CHOOSE YOUR LEVEL 1 ROUTE

IN PERSON

A full hands-on day with a USAW instructor. Find dates on the course calendar.

ONLINE

Same certification, your schedule.
usaweightlifting.org › Coaching

HOST AT YOUR SITE

Certify colleagues in your own weight room, rec center or gym.

HOST A COURSE, EARN A REBATE

$70 per participant, up to$2,500,for hosting a Level 1 or Level 2 course. Put it toward equipment.

- **8 participants** minimum for a standard course (up to ~40)
- **12 participants** minimum for a closed course run as professional development for your staff
- Platforms, bumpers, one barbell per 3 people, a projector
- One day: Saturday or Sunday 8am-5pm. No need to close classes or give up your whole weekend.

Submit an online host request; USAW assigns the instructor.

SEE WHAT USAW COACH DEVELOPMENT IS ALL ABOUT

02 REGISTER YOUR CLUB

A registered USAW club can enter and host sanctioned meets, and its results count toward national qualification.

CLUB ROLE	REQUIREMENTS
Club Director	USAW member· background screening · SafeSport
Club Coach	All of the above +Level 1 or higher
Club Admin	Current USAW member

REGISTER IN SPORT80

01 Log in, then click **Setup Club / Add Club**.

02 Enter your school, university or gym details and fill the three roles.

03 Pay **$227/year** (or $27/month) and submit. Allow **up to 4 weeks**.

04 Renew yearly under **Account › Memberships**.

€LUB BENEFITS

- General liability insurance, applied automatically
- Host sanctioned meets and coaching courses
- Entry into the USAW Club League
- Member-athlete Sport Accident Insurance



REGISTER YOUR ATHLETES

Membership isn't needed to train. It **is** needed to compete at sanctioned meets, qualify for Nationals and be covered by club insurance.

ATHLETE MEMBERSHIP	ANNUAL	1ST YEAR	MONTHLY
Youth (17 & under)	$59	**$39**	$6.99
Junior (18–20)	$69	**$59**	$8.99
Senior / Masters (21+)	$89	—	$10.99

Prices effective May 2026.

HOW ATHLETES JOIN

01 **New:** sign up in Sport80 and pick your club.

02 **Member, no club:** click **Current › Next**, select your club.

03 **Transfer:** Actions › Transfer; both admins approve.

> **COACH TIP**
>
> Host a 20-minute registration night so athletes (and parents) finish sign-up with you.

03 ANSWER CONCERNS. BUILD INTEREST.

IF THEY ASK...	YOU SAY...
"Isn't it dangerous for teens?"	Supervised weightlifting has a low injury rate compared with many school sports. Certification, progressions and age-appropriate loads are the safety plan.
"What about liability?"	Registered clubs carry USAW general liability; member athletes are covered by Sport Accident Insurance at sanctioned activities.
"Will it pull kids from other teams?"	It makes them better: an off-season power program for football, track, volleyball and wrestling, and a home for students without a sport.
"How do weigh-ins work with minors?"	Singlet over undergarments, same-gender officials, a second adult present.

FOUR WAYS TO RECRUIT

- **Info night** for students and parents: a highlight video, the lifts, safety, schedule, costs. End with a sign-up QR code.
- **Try-it days** with PVC pipes and technique bars. A first "I did it" is your best pitch.
- **Demos** where crowds already are: pep rallies, halftime, club fairs, PE.
- **Coach referrals** from track, football, volleyball, wrestling and cheer. Gymnasts and dancers take to the lifts fast.

BRING PARENTS ON BOARD

Give them a one-page FAQ, an open invitation to watch practice, clear form deadlines and a meet-day volunteer sign-up.

RUN A MOCK MEET

- [ ] No weigh-ins: light, medium and heavy groups
- [ ] Openers every athlete can make
- [ ] 3 snatches, then 3 clean & jerks
- [ ] Volunteer loaders, timer, scorekeeper
- [ ] White / red light cards for judging
- [ ] Scoreboard, music, families invited
- [ ] Awards: best total, best PR, best effort

Consider an alternative format like Clean, Squat & Press



04 CHOOSE YOUR SETTING

USAW registration is the same everywhere. What changes is who makes decisions, where you train and how the club is paid for. Find your column, then go to your track.

	A · HIGH SCHOOL	B · COLLEGE	C · GYM
Who starts it	A strength coach, PE teacher or sport coach	Students, often with a USAW coach as advisor	The owner, head coach or a staff coach
Who approves it	Athletic director and principal	Student activities, then rec / club sports	The owner or management
Athletes	Minors, 14–18, mostly new to the sport	Students 18+, beginner to experienced	Members of any age, youth to Masters
Where you train	The school weight room	Campus rec center, often plus a partner club	A platform area or blocked floor time
How it's funded	District budget, boosters, fundraising	Member dues, club sports funds, fundraising	Membership or program fees
Biggest hurdle	Weight room time, parent buy-in	Student turnover, facility access	Space, pricing and coverage
Competition goal	Youth & Junior Nationals, state meets	National University Championships	Local meets to Nationals, every age







NOT SURE WHICH FITS?

If your athletes are enrolled students and the club carries the school's name, follow that school's track. If the club lives inside a business, follow Track C, even if most of your lifters are students.



TRACK A

A HIGH SCHOOL CLUB

Talk to administrators **before** you recruit. You need their approval to use school space, promote to families and run events on campus. Ask about one semester before you want to start; facility calendars and budgets are set months ahead.

WHO TO TALK TO, IN ORDER

01 **Athletic director.** Your champion; controls facility schedules.

02 **Principal.** Approves new activities and family communications.

03 **Facilities lead.** Weight room access, flooring, storage.

04 **District risk management.** Insurance and waivers, if your AD says it's needed.

MAKE THE ASK EASY

- **Space:** 2–3 set blocks a week when teams aren't using the room. 2–4 platforms is enough.
- **Time:** before or after school to start; a PE unit or strength elective later.
- **Budget:** existing equipment, plus approval to fundraise for bumpers and technique bars.

YOUR ONE-PAGE PROPOSAL

- **Purpose:** who it serves, how it helps other teams
- **Credentials:** Level 1, SafeSport, screening
- **Safety plan:** supervision, progressions, emergency plan
- **Coverage:** USAW club liability + athlete accident insurance
- **Space, schedule and equipment** you're requesting
- **Cost to families:** $39 first-year youth membership + meet fees
- **Interest:** a quick survey or list of students
- **Timeline:** start date and first meet

LEAVE WITH

Written approval · a room and schedule · permission to promote · your district's forms, physicals and waivers

TRY THIS OPENER

"I'm already USA Weightlifting certified, SafeSport trained and background screened. I'd like the weight room two afternoons a week for a club that makes our athletes faster and more powerful, and gives more students a sport. Here's my plan, and here's what I need from you."



TRACK B

B COLLEGE CLUB

College clubs are student-led, and you must be affiliated with the university to start one. Outside coaches help most by connecting with the rec department, promoting the sport at campus events and supporting students who want to start a team.

1 · GET CONNECTED

- **Contact your regional university representative** for help with competitions and sanctions.
- **Apply for the University Incentive Program:** 5 scholarships per region, covering club membership, coaching education or coach memberships for a year.
- **Find nearby teams** on USAW's active university club list.

2 · GET RECOGNIZED

01 **Register a student organization.** Most schools need 5–20 members.

02 **Apply for club sport status** through student services or rec. It unlocks facility time, funds and fundraising channels.

03 **Set governance:** bylaws plus a president, treasurer and secretary. Plan officer handoff every spring.

3 · FIND A COACH

- Partner with a local club coach willing to sponsor the team, **or**
- Certify a student officer, grad assistant, rec staffer or faculty advisor in Level 1.

4 · FIND A FACILITY

- Rent platforms from a local club 2–3 times a week for lifting days, **and/or**
- Reserve a set training block at the campus rec center for strength days.

STARTER EQUIPMENT

One Olympic bar, 190kg of bumper plates, a squat rack and, space permitting, a homemade wooden platform per every 3 lifters.

FUND IT. FILL IT. COMPETE.

5 · FUND THE CLUB

Set dues once you know monthly costs. About **$30/month** is a common starting point.

- Club sport funding and the university's official fundraising channels
- Restaurant nights, discount cards, concession shifts
- **Host a Level 1 or 2 course:** $70 rebate per participant
- **Host a sanctioned meet:** entry fees typically $25–$175

6 · RECRUIT

- Rec and club teams: baseball, soccer, volleyball and more
- Exercise and sports science majors
- Off-season track and football practices
- Student media, plus club Instagram tagging the university
- Try-it days and a mock meet at the rec center

THE COLLEGIATE PATH

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY CHAMPIONSHIPS

To qualify, an athlete must:

01 Be **25 or younger**

02 Be enrolled in **1+ credit hour**, or graduated within 1 year

03 Have collegiate eligibility (e.g., a transcript) on their USAW profile

04 Compete at a **National University Qualifier (NUQ)**: WSO Championships, Nationals, North American Opens and the January online qualifier all count

05 Post the **qualifying total** in the qualification period

HOST A NATIONAL UNIVERSITY QUALIFIER

Any university team can host, with a non-university club as co-host. Apply via the NUQ request form; decisions within 1 week.

ALL-AMERICAN

Athletes who meet the All-American standards at NUC earn the title, awarded each year since 2022.

WHY IT MATTERS

Every inter collegiate meet builds the participation record weightlifting needs to become an NCAA emerging sport.

Next: go to Step 03. On campus, the Club Director is usually the coach or faculty advisor; the Club Admin a student officer.



TRACK C

CLUB IN A GYM

In a commercial or independent gym, the decision-maker is the owner, and the case is a business case. A USAW club gives members a goal, gives coaches a specialty and gives the gym a reason for the community to walk in the door.

1 · MAKE THE CASE TO OWNERSHIP

- **A new member segment:** athletes, teens and Masters lifters looking for coaching
- **Retention:** meets and PRs keep members training for years
- **Revenue from events:** host courses ($70 rebate per participant) and sanctioned meets

2 · PICK A PROGRAM MODEL

- An add-on to existing memberships
- A stand-alone weightlifting membership
- A competition team fee covering coaching and meet-day support

3 · SPACE AND SCHEDULE

Start with 2–4 platforms and block set hours so lifters and general members don't collide. Add competition plates and a clock as you grow.

4 · COVERAGE & SAFETY

- USAW club general liability covers your club's sanctioned activity. Review with the gym's insurer how it works alongside your existing policy.
- Members sign the gym's waiver **and** the USAW membership waiver.
- Everyone in a club role completes SafeSport and a background screening.
- **Coaching minors?** Follow USAW's Athlete and Participant Safety Policy: interactions observable and interruptible, plus parent consent.

5 · RECRUIT & PARTNER

- Existing members and group-class athletes
- Masters lifters and returning athletes
- In-gym try-it days and a mock meet
- **Be the training home** for a nearby high school or college club (Tracks A and B)

Next: go to Step 03. In a gym, the Club Director is usually the owner or head coach; the Club Admin an operations manager.

05 TRAIN & COMPETE

Build the season toward one or two meets, and give every athlete at least one chance to compete.

WEEKS	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-8	9-10	11-12	13-14	15-16
Technique	PVC	Bar						
Strength		Build	Build	Build	Build		Build	
Compete			Mock			Meet 1		Meet 2

1 · MOCK MEET
Low stakes, real rules, in your own space.

2 · A LOCAL USAW MEET
Find one on Sport80. Local clubs welcome first-timers.

3 · HOST YOUR OWN
After a season or two ,sanction a meet so results count.

NEW TO COMPETING? TRY CLEAN · SQUAT · PRESS
USAW's grass roots event introduces school-age athletes to Olympic-style lifting with just a barbell. Great for try-it and testing days. Interest: usaweightlifting.org/clean-squat-and-press

STEP FIVE · CONTINUED

MEET DAY & RESULTS

HOST A SANCTIONED MEET

- [ ] Apply for a sanction in Sport80 as the club — $79
- [ ] Registration through Sport80 or another platform
- [ ] Certified technical officials
- [ ] Platform, bars, plates, collars, clock, scale, scoreboard
- [ ] Volunteers: loaders, marshal, announcer, check-in
- [ ] Emergency action plan and a first-aid provider
- [ ] Submit results in Sport80 afterward

RESULTS THAT COUNT

- USAW accepts **snatch and clean & jerk** results only.Adding bench or squat? Contest it last if running a Super Total event.
- Athletes qualify for Nationals by hitting the posted qualifying total at any sanctioned meet.
- Coaches tell athletes when they've qualified.

WEIGH-INS FOR MINORS
Singlet over undergarments, officials of the same gender, a second adult present, per USAW's Athlete and Participant Safety Policy.

NATIONAL TARGETS
High school: Youth Nationals & Junior Nationals
College: University Nationals
Gym: every age group, Youth to Masters

06 Market Your Club

Get the word out about your program through different oportunities and channels.

WAYS TO MARKET

- **Word of Mouth:** attend local meets, announce it to your group fintess classes, speak to parents of potential athletes
- **Activations:** organize live demonstrations at school events, host friendly unsanctioned competitions, offer free-trial classes at local community centers and gyms, develop and sell a cool t-shirt for your team's season
- **Online:** set up a club website and social media account, ask the athletes to get involved by sharing your posts and stories in their communities, share PR's and other training wins, publish a monthly newsletter highlighting the benefits of weightlifting for health, performance and social engagement. Create a Google Business page.
- **Local Outreach :** connect with local newspapers or social media accounts that promote businesses in the community. Post on local community platforms like NextDoor, Facebook, Meetup and Eventbrite
- **Seek out Sponsors :** ask companies to sponsor your team or individual athletes with eithe rmonetary or value-in-kind contrebutions
- **Flyers :** leave flyers with healthcare providers, offer discounts on classes for referrals.
- **Themed/ Special sessions:** Try women's lift nights, parent-and-teen sessions or masters (35+) nights. Each one gives you a specific audience to market to. Organize summer camps or school-break clinics
- **Host a USAW coaching course:** Coaches from across the region come to your facility, and some will refer athletes later.

USA WEIGHTLIFTING MEDIA RESOURCES

Clean, Squat & Press

Youth & Junior Weightlifting

USAW Level 1 Certification



06 GROW YOUR COACHING STAFF

One coach can start a club, but can't watch every platform. Keep every station supervised by a trained adult.

WHO TO INVITE

- **High school:** sport coaches, PE teachers, parent volunteers
- **College:** rec staff, grad assistants, alumni
- **Gym:** trainers, group-class coaches, experienced members

Anyone in an official club role also needs USAW membership, SafeSport and a background screening.

USAW WORKSHOP

WEIGHTLIFTING FOR SPORTS PERFORMANCE WORKSHOP

4 hours of professional development, learn-by-doing. **$199**, including a year of USAW Coaching Membership, a certificate and a Level 1 discount.

Learn More

Host one: education@usaweightlifting.org



BEYOND YOUR FIRST CLUB

GROW THE SPORT

Every state program, collegiate conference and regional hub started with one coach. Here's the path for each setting.

STAGE	HIGH SCHOOL	COLLEGE	GYM
1 · Club	One school	One campus	One gym
2 · Network	District league, shared calendar	Meets with nearby universities	Partner gyms and school feeder programs
3 · Organize	State federation, first state meet	Host NUQs, regional circuit	Regional hub for courses and meets
4 · Recognize	State championship, varsity application	Varsity status, NCAA emerging-sport case	A full pathway, Youth to Masters

HIGH SCHOOL

- Recruit coaches at nearby schools; your course and workshop grads are your best leads.
- Founding coaches form the first federation board and adopt IWF/USAW rules.
- Set state-meet standards, often ~85% of Junior National totals.
- After 4–5 seasons, contact your state athletic association about varsit y.

COLLEGE

- Compete against other campuses as often as you can.
- Host an NUQ once you have a season behind you.
- Keep bylaws, handoff notes and logins in a shared place.
- Ask your AD what varsity status requires.

GYM

- Host Level 1 courses and sanctioned meets on a regular calendar.
- Partner with local schools as their training home.
- Build youth, competitive and Masters groups.



EVERY PROGRAM STARTED WITH ONE COACH.

Take the first step: get your Level1 certification and bring weightlifting to your school, campus or gym.

LINKS

Start a Club	usaweightlifting.org/start-a-club
Membership & prices	usaweightlifting.org/join-usaweightlifting
Course Calendar	usaweightlifting.org/usaw-coach-development
Host a course	usaweightlifting.org/coaching/how-to-host-a-course
University programs	usaweightlifting.org › Clubs › University Programs
Qualifying totals	usaweightlifting.org › Events
Rules & safety policies	usaweightlifting.org › Governance

QUESTIONS? START HERE

usaw@usaweightlifting.org

Clubs, membership and Sport80

COURSES & WORKSHOPS

education@usaweightlifting.org

CLEAN · SQUAT · PRESS

events@usaweightlifting.org

