

**Recommendations, Guidelines and Best Practices
for
Baltimore County Recreation/Nature Councils**

Updated 04/17/2019

Purpose

The document contains a list of best practices and recommendations for recreation and nature councils in Baltimore County. The list was compiled by the Baltimore County Board of Recreation and Parks and garnered from a combination of processes and procedures from both County Government and successfully operating councils, as well as from situations and issues that have been shown to be problematic or areas of concern.

The Board urges you to review this list with all of the members of your council, while paying particular attention to those items that the Board specifically recommends or **strongly** recommends.

This list is a living document that can be updated as needed. The Board invites you to submit your recommendations or processes for future updates.

The Board recognizes and sincerely appreciates the work and dedication of all its volunteers like you, who share the Department's commitment to provide quality recreational and leisure activities to the citizens of Baltimore County.

Baltimore County Board of Recreation and Parks

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Section I - General Council Best Practices and Requirements

Background Checks

- **Baltimore County Government requires background checks for all volunteers who participate in Recreation and Nature Council, Therapeutic, PAL and other County-sponsored recreation programs.***
- This program is a preventive measure. It is not meant to take the place of parental involvement and participation. It is meant to work in partnership with parental efforts to ensure that their children and all constituents enjoy programs and activities in a safe environment
- The background investigation will include a review of each applicant's criminal history and the development of an Investigative Report. The results of the investigation will determine each volunteer's eligibility to volunteer in Recreation and Parks programs
- **Baltimore County Government requires background checks for the following:***
 - Board of Recreation and Parks Members
 - Recreation/Nature Council Board Members
 - Recreation/Nature Council Chairpersons
 - Head and Assistant Coaches
 - Instructors and Assistant Instructors
 - Volunteers who have care, custody or control of children
 - Volunteers who have access to confidential information (example: registration forms, financial information)
- Any person found guilty of offenses in the following categories listed below will not be approved:
 - Inclusion on the National Sex Offender Registry
 - Child Abuse
 - Felony Assault (within the last 5 years)
 - Possession of a controlled substance with intent to distribute (within the last 5 years)
 - Indecent Exposure (within the last 5 years)
 - Misappropriation of Funds
 - Statutory Rape
 - Rape
 - Felony Robbery
 - Assault-First Degree Felony
 - Vulnerable Adult Abuse Physical Injury –Felony
 - Abuse/Neglect of a Vulnerable Adult- Custodian
 - Murder
 - Attempted Murder
- **All volunteers are required to complete and pass the background check application and verification process annually***
- There is no cost to volunteers for the application process and background investigation
- Any volunteer that does not pass or does not complete a background check will not be permitted to volunteer with Recreation and Parks in any capacity

* Required of all recreation/nature councils by the Board of Recreation and Parks

Executive Board Liability Insurance

- Liability insurance for a recreation/nature council board, often called Errors and Omissions Insurance can be purchased by the council from its general fund, from any insurance carrier the local council chooses
- The insurance is designed to indemnify or hold harmless the council's board in the event of legal action brought against them for alleged wrongful acts and/or negligence
- The insurance may cover the cost of attorney's fees, settlement or judgment expenses, bond premiums, and other court costs, up to the limits of your policy
- The cost of E&O insurance depends on the size of your council, its revenue and other factors.
- For additional protection the following insurance should also be considered:
 - General Liability – covers monetary damage in the event the council is obligated to pay because of an accident that causes unexpected, unintended bodily injury, property damage, or personal injury to someone else.
 - Directors and Officers – provide protection for wrongful act of the board.
- The Board of Recreation and Parks recommends that councils obtain E&O insurance for their board

Bonding

- Dishonesty Bonding
 - This type of bond protects your council's funds from loss due to dishonesty, forgery and theft
 - It provides protection to the council in the event of embezzlement by council member involved in managing the council finances
- With an increasing amount of misappropriation of council funds, many councils are obtaining Bonding Insurance
- Establish the following procedures to mitigate the risks of embezzlement:
 - Require two signatures for the issuance of checks
 - Conduct periodic audits by a licensed accounting firm
 - Rotate volunteers who handle financial transactions
 - Have the reconciliation of bank accounts be performed by someone not authorized to deposit, withdraw funds or prepare checks
- Councils using independent accountants or CPA's may find that this person or firm is already bonded, removing the need for this additional expense
- The Board **strongly** recommends at a minimum that the council's Treasurer be bonded and further recommends bonding for any persons that routinely handle council monies. The Board further recommends using the highest amount of the last twelve months of bank statements to establish the bond amount

Section II – Recreation/Nature Council Board and Officers Recommendations

The council's Board of Directors serves as a liaison between the citizens of the community, the members of the recreation/nature councils and the Baltimore County Board of Recreation and Parks. The council board holds regular meetings and advises and consults with members of the recreation/nature councils on matters affecting recreation and parks programs, policies and procedures. The Board of Recreation and Parks **strongly** recommends that members of the council board not be related to one another to prevent any appearance of conflict of interest.

President

- Schedule and lead all council meetings and Executive Board meetings, if applicable
- Set an inspiring tone for the meeting. Think carefully about how to open the meeting to bring the right energy and inspire others
- Adopt zero tolerance for bad behavior. Establish ground rules for how to respectfully disagree with one another
- Ensure that all program chairpersons understand their duty to have all volunteers within their program complete the County's background check. The program chairperson should sign off to ensure their understanding of this duty.
- Ensure that the entire board has completed the County's background check
- The Board recommends the use of *Robert's Rules of Order* as a standard to conduct all meetings
- Conduct effective and informative meetings
- Adopt a learning mindset by encouraging collaboration and creativity. This will inspire others to do the same
- Value all other Board and council members and respect their input
- Create a culture that promotes active involvement, accommodates different points of view and promotes mutual respect
- Know your weaknesses and share them with transparency
- Foster inclusivity among all members and encourage creative ideas and suggestions

Vice President

- Support the President outwardly on all matters. Disagreements should be discussed and handled privately
- Assume responsibility for leading a meeting when the President is not present or unable
- Provide appropriate oversight and evaluation of the President
- Provide strong support of committees and chairpersons as required
- Remain flexible and ready to pitch in, not only in the President's absence but in whatever capacity that can contribute to help keep things operating smoothly

Secretary or Recording Secretary

- Be an active conduit for communication by giving proper notice of any meetings and timely distribution of materials such as agendas and meeting minutes
- Create an agenda that includes financial reporting, program updates, community involvement and progress reports from each standing committee
- Keep track of attendance at meetings. This is particularly important when a determination of who is eligible to vote per the council's bylaws
- Provide advice and resources to the board on topics such as governance issues, amendments to the bylaws, past votes on various topics, etc.

- Assist the council in meeting any legal requirements such as annual filing deadlines

Bookkeeper or Treasurer

- The Board **strongly** recommends having the treasurer and/or bookkeeper **bonded** to insure against losses. Use the highest amount of the last year's bank statements to establish the bond amount
- The bookkeeper and/or treasurer should **never** hand out blank checks
- Separate bank accounts for individual programs should **never** be opened
- The Board recommends that only one person have access to the checkbook.
- The Board **strongly** recommends that two signatures be mandatory on all checks. This policy should be confirmed with your financial institution.
- Have an outside auditor perform the council's financial review
- Monthly bank reconciliations should be performed by someone *without* check signing authority.
- The Board **strongly** recommends that all reimbursements and expenses be paid via check. The amount of the check must match the check request form that was submitted
- ATM cards should **NEVER** be issued to council members. They should be **destroyed or returned** if issued by the bank
- Credit cards should **never** be applied for or issued in the council's name
- The Treasurer should provide an itemized, written Treasurer's report at each general meeting. The income and expenses for each activity and program of the council should be itemized in a format that shows how each program is performing against its approved budget

Program Chairpersons

- Treat your program like a business that reports to the council. The Chairpersons are ultimately accountable for everything related to their program
- Know when and where the council meetings are held and that you or a representative is expected to attend and report the status of your program
- Obtain the contact information of your entire Executive board along with their positions
- Know how to contact the local County Supervisor. Some examples of when to contact the County Supervisor include:
 - Request space / facility permits
 - Provide list of your teams along with when and where they practice (in case parents call the rec office for information)
 - Provide notification when practice and games are canceled or postponed
 - Request help when field leader does not show at a site
- Keep a list of available facilities (fields, gyms, etc.) for your program to utilize that includes any special rules or guidelines for each
- In order to reserve County facilities, program chairs **must** provide schedules in advance to County Supervisors per Department policies*
- Obtain and familiarize yourself with the council's bylaws
- The Recreation and Parks Board **strongly** recommends requiring every program chairperson to submit a budget that must be approved by the council's board prior to any registrations being scheduled

*** Required of all recreation/nature councils by the Board of Recreation and Parks**

- The program chairperson is responsible to ensure that all coaches, assistants, and volunteers have completed the County's background check

- All chairpersons **must** abide by the council's requirements and guidelines for handling money and invoices:
 - The Board **strongly** recommends that all monies be turned into the Treasurer with appropriate receipts and/or deposit slips
 - The Board recommends that a check request form be completed for all reimbursements and expenses associated with your program
 - You are responsible for collecting all fees and required Baltimore County Code of Conduct forms
- Follow the council's policies regarding program registration:
 - The Board recommends that no registration dates be approved before the program's budget has been approved by the council's Board.
 - The Board recommends no one be allowed to participate in a program before registration is paid in full. Review any council policies for financial assistance / hardships if available
 - The Board **strongly** recommends your program provide receipts for all monies received
 - The Board **strongly** recommends the use of online registration whenever possible. Accepting cash for any program fees is NOT recommended unless absolutely necessary
- Follow Baltimore County's policies regarding concussion training protocol
- Know how the council handles first aid and emergency situations and how to complete an incident report
- Be familiar with the Baltimore County Inclement Weather Policy
- Know the rules of conduct for any facilities used by your program and the consequences of violating those rules

Chairperson Liaison

- Consider electing or appointing a person to the position of Chairperson Liaison. This person would serve as the conduit between the council's board and each program chair. This allows issues to be brought forward, discussed and resolved without waiting for the next council meeting
- The Chairperson Liaison would ensure committee and program chairpersons have the information and resources to do their jobs effectively
- Provide new chairpersons with the council bylaws and review the most pertinent parts with them
- Provide program chairs all appropriate forms the council uses
- Consider creating a 'chairpersons packet' that would be signed for by the chairperson acknowledging they understand their expectations and provide an opportunity to ask questions
- The best way to ensure successful programs is to periodically reach out to each Chairperson, new and old to ensure they and their programs are running smoothly and assist them wherever possible

Section III - Council Bylaws and Policies

Bylaws

- The council's bylaws are its internal manual for how it will operate
- Bylaws should be used, changed when needed, and examined often. Don't let them gather dust on a shelf somewhere. Make them a working document
- Changes to a council's bylaws must be reviewed and approved by the Recreation and Park Board before they are enacted.
- While there is no required format for bylaws, all council's bylaws should, at a minimum contain the following:
 - The name and address of the council
 - The mission of the council
 - The geographic boundaries of the council
 - The officers of the council and each one's roles and responsibilities
 - Process for nominating and electing the officers
 - Voting rights and requirements to maintain voting rights
 - The frequency, location and format of council and special meetings
 - The council's financial policies that follow best practices recommended by the Board of Recreation and Parks
 - The requirement that each volunteer must complete the County's background check
 - Formal procedures to address grievances
 - Procedure for updating the bylaws and frequency of updates
- Additional items can be included in the bylaws at each council's discretion. These could include, but are not limited to:
 - List of standing committees and their purposes
 - When and how special meetings can be called
 - Composition of the Executive Board, if applicable, its purpose and when it will meet
 - The format of the agenda for council and board meetings
 - Criteria or requirements for council membership
 - Officer term limits
 - Any other operational or policy items specific to the council