

# ADVISOR



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## SEVEN STEPS TO GROW AN ASSOCIATION

By Donald C. Collins

**H**ow do you move from a few officials having an idea to forming a real group? Here are seven legal and organizational tips for the growing association.

### 1. Provide a Quality Service

When you're starting out — and as you continue to grow — always remember to meet your clients' needs. Remember, the association's product is putting out well-trained, competent officials to service games. The customers are the leagues, schools and teams you serve. Whether you're a small group servicing sixth grade CYO games or if your client is the best high school league in the state, you have to meet the clients' needs.

### 2. Remember It's Business Even When It Doesn't Seem Like Business

No matter how small and informal your association is, always remember that business is business.

You have contracts even if you don't write things down. Remember, a verbal agreement is a contract. However, one day you might need to enforce those contracts. It is best to start writing them down.

Start addressing contingencies even when your association is small. Your officials and the client schools, teams and leagues need to know how to handle no-shows, canceled games and other contingencies where it's not clear

who owes whom what, and how much they owe them.

You have obligations to provide trained officials. You better find a way to make sure they're trained even if you're small. By the time

SEE "SEVEN STEPS" P. 6

## SHOW YOUR MEMBERS THEY MATTER

By Tim Sloan

**I**work in quality assurance and regulatory affairs in my real life. A tenet I've always held is the wise organization doesn't pay anyone to solve problems; it pays them to prevent them; once the virus is out of the lab ... With that in mind, I'm not going to regale you with nifty anecdotes about various dragons I've seen slain over the years. Instead, we'll address one key, underlying "root cause" that drives us, our association members, the public and others around us nuts trying to remediate. If we can be forever on the lookout for and campaigning against this one ogre, in all its forms and even in its illusion, officiating will become easier to operate because we'll create fewer problems for ourselves.

Nepotism. In other words, the practice among those with power or influence of favoring friends (in the case of officials associations), especially by giving them jobs.

Officiating is supposed to be about impartiality; truth versus lies, fact against fiction, integrity countering gamesmanship and mastering our avocation being the gateway to greater pastures. All of us want to see the hero get the girl and the white hat win the showdown, but we spend too much time addressing cases where the wrong character wins — seemingly not because of what they know, but who they know in several senses of the notion. Let's think of some things we as officiating leaders can put our efforts into pushing back upon to make life better for officials, with the effect of making sports better for everyone to enjoy.

SEE "MEMBERS" P. 7

## DOES YOUR ASSOCIATION HAVE A RAINY-DAY FUND?

By Jason Palmer

Things happen in life. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought that reality to bear for many associations who are now feeling the financial crunch due to the loss of members or members who cannot afford to pay their dues. This could lead to the association not being able to pay for liability insurance and other important financial aspects. Yet the association itself must continue to go on, which means it needs money. Maintaining a nest egg can ensure your association's long-term financial health. Yet recent reports from Bloomberg News suggest many nonprofits do not have enough saved in their operating reserves.

An operating reserve is an unrestricted fund balance set aside

to stabilize an organization's finances for unexpected cash-flow shortages, expenses or losses, according to Propel Nonprofits, a Minneapolis-based company that provides accounting services for nonprofit organizations. These might be caused by delayed payments or economic conditions.

Reserves should not be used to make up for income shortfalls, unless the organization has a plan to replace the income or reduce expenses in the near-term future. In short, reserves should be used to solve timing problems, not deficit problems.

The Nevada Small Business Association recommends organizations have a separate account from their operating expenses so that when times are good, organizations can put what they can into the account and help it grow over time. This can also be done setting up automatic transfers from the operating account to the savings account.

A rule of thumb reserve goal is 3-6 months' expenses. At the high end, reserves should not exceed the amount of two years' budget. However, each nonprofit should set its own reserve goal based on its cash flow and expenses. Organizations that have contracts or fees with regular and reliable payments may not need as much in cash reserves as organizations that rely on periodic grants, fundraising events or seasonal activities.

Disasters like the COVID-19 pandemic are just one thing that could fall into the category of an unexpected event. You could have a sudden loss of membership. There could also be an unexpected rise in fees. Regardless of the circumstances that cause the event, being able to "weather the storm" will depend on how well your association has been saving.

The underlying concept of a budget stabilization fund is straightforward: When finances are healthy, money is saved for use when the economy has a downturn or some unexpected event takes place. The structure of your rainy-day fund can vary.

### Deposits

They can be done on a monthly or yearly basis but should come from excess revenues. For example, let's say an association hosts a clinic. There is money left over from the clinic. That can go into your rainy-day fund.

### Withdrawals

When an organization needs to tap into these funds, the board should notify the membership of when, why, how much and what the funds will be used for. This can be done via a list serve or during a meeting of the entire body. Making a printout available on a regular basis to show just how much is remaining in the account after the withdrawal is also a good idea.

### Repayment

After these funds have been used, an association should make every effort to replace the funds, according to the National Council of State Legislatures, which gives advice to states across the nation on

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## BYLAW BIT

Too much detail in the bylaws can lead to unnecessary conflict over such details, thereby distracting board members from the real purpose of the organization.

their rainy-day funds. An association may decide to only replace the funds once the economic crisis is over. An association may also decide to replace the funds at the end of the fiscal year. Whatever the association decides in its bylaws, it is important to replace the funds.

Every organization needs to determine how much it requires for operations and how much income is expected to properly get an idea on

how much it needs in reserves, and what can be dedicated to mission-focused initiatives. The answers to these questions are, of course, "It depends." However, making sure there is a process and cash flow available could be the difference between an association thriving, surviving or dying.

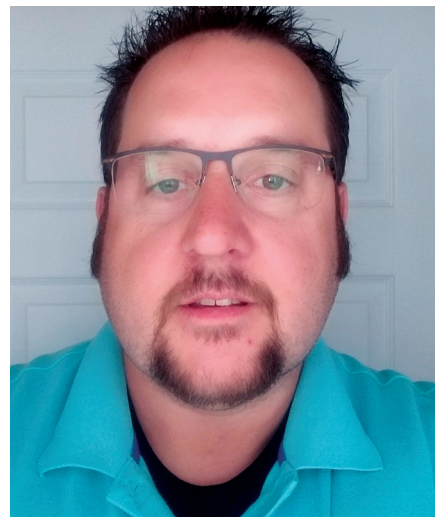
*Jason Palmer officiates high school, collegiate and USAV volleyball and is a freelance writer from Bristol, Wis. ■*

## Straight Talk: ED EARLEY

### JAOA Creates Scholarship to Honor One of Its Own

The Jackson Area Officials Association (JAOA) in Michigan lost one of its own this past April. Kerry Lehman, a beloved basketball and football official, died due to complications from COVID-19 after a month-long fight against the virus. The 62-year-old Lehman, who was a sports official in the Jackson area for 16 years, was well liked in the community, and after his passing, the JAOA wanted a way to honor him. With the help of Lehman's wife, Jan, the JAOA created a scholarship. The legacy scholarship will go toward the education of a college-aged student and will aid those for whom Lehman tirelessly worked. The plan is to roll out the scholarship next fall as the JAOA works with the Michigan High School Athletic Association for final approval. Association members will wear a patch on their jerseys this season to honor Lehman. NASO spoke to JAOA President Ed Earley about the newly created scholarship.

**NASO:** Can you describe the kind of person Kerry Lehman was



and what he meant to the community?

**EARLEY:** Kerry was just that guy, he loved officiating, loved being around the kids. He enjoyed doing the youth stuff all the way to the varsity level. He was the guy, when you got new officials who needed training and someone to look up to, he loved being that mentor for them. He was a great guy. He loved the avocation of officiating in general. He was there for anyone that needed help. What really showed it to me was when we started this with his family — they came to us and said they wanted to do this — the fact that we got donations from school districts and leagues, that showed the character of the man. It was pretty impressive.

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## THE PULSE

LOCAL ASSOCIATION NEWS NATIONWIDE

### Former Association President, Official Inducted in NYSPHSAA Hall of Fame

Ed Goetz of Saranac Lake, N.Y., was a longtime basketball and football official of more than 35 years before retiring in 2012. He also served three terms as president and interpreter of the Northern New York Girls Basketball Officials Association, and he was president of the New York State Girls Basketball Officials Association from 2007-09. For his dedication and achievements, Goetz was part of the 2020 class inducted into the New York State Public High School Athletic Association's (NYSPHSAA) Hall of Fame.

During his career, Goetz officiated nine seasons in the NYSPHSAA state football tournament, which included three years refereeing the state championship finals. He worked the girls' state basketball tournament for 13 seasons.

### Amarillo Basketball Officials in Need of More Referees

The Amarillo Basketball Officials, a local chapter of the Texas High School Basketball Officials Association, was trying to recruit approximately 40 basketball officials in October to fill a gap going into the season.

"The average age of referees continues to increase and continues to get older each year and some people are retiring, some people are moving away, have other things come up with life," said Jack Harper, vice president of the Amarillo Basketball Officials.

With qualified referees needed to cover basketball games in this area, coaches and schools have been posting on social media to spread the word along with the chapter.

### MVBOA in Ohio Holds First-Year Officiating Course

The Mahoning Valley (Ohio) Basketball Officials Association held courses for new referees in October and November. Most of the courses were held online via Zoom, but the training also included in-person scrimmage/floor mechanics sessions. The first-year officiating course was offered to get rookie referees ready for the 2020-21 basketball season.

SOURCES: ADIRONDACK DAILY ENTERPRISE, ABC 7 AMARILLO, WFMJ 21

**NASO:** How did the idea of the scholarship come about?

**EARLEY:** It was kind of a collaborative (between the JAOA and the Lehman family). Jan, his wife, and his kids thought this would be good to do it in his name. A scholarship for younger officials, kind of in that college age group, and help out with some of the money issues and some of that stuff. That's how it came about. We are just kind of holding it for them. Holding it together, making it happen for them. It's something Jan didn't need to worry about. She didn't need to worry about it; she had enough to worry about.

**NASO:** What will the scholarship be used for?

**EARLEY:** It hasn't been nailed down yet. It's not 100 percent

nailed down whether it will be one scholarship or two. We haven't been able to sit down and figure it out (due to COVID-19).

**NASO:** What has the reception been like since the scholarship was announced?

**EARLEY:** It's really been amazing to me to see where the donations have been coming from. From actual school districts to leagues that Kerry worked for, other JOAO members – a lot of guys he was very close with and officiated with – family members and friends from all over the country. It's really been interesting. Shows what a wonderful person he was and how many people he touched with (donations) coming from all directions. ■

## SURVEY SAYS ...

### HOW IS YOUR ASSOCIATION CONDUCTING MEETINGS AMID THE PANDEMIC?

IN-PERSON WITH SOCIAL DISTANCING AND OTHER SAFETY PRECAUTIONS  
4%

ONLINE MEETINGS  
60%

WE HAVEN'T BEEN HAVING MEETINGS  
36%

SOURCE: NASO CLICK POLL WITH 80 RESPONSES.



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## HOW TO ...

### MANAGE CROSSOVER OF SEASONS

Due to the pandemic, the spring sports landscape will look quite different in much of the country. Officials will have to decide which sports they are willing to work. There may be plenty of officials who don stripes for a Friday night football game, only to return to action some 12 hours later in plate gear for a baseball or softball game.

As such, association leaders and assigners will face more pressure to make sure assignments go smoothly. Adhering to a few tips can help you navigate the process more effectively.

#### Communicate down.

With officials being asked to wear several hats – now quite literally – those responsible for leadership and assigning have to maintain constant contact with their charges to put them in the best position to succeed.

#### Communicate laterally.

Multisport association leaders as well as leaders in different groups need to be talking with one another about how they are going to handle things. Everyone will want to protect their own turf and make sure “their games” are covered. But remember the golden rule. Work together to make sure officials and games are taken care of to the best of everyone’s abilities.

#### Use pencil, not pen.

Flexibility is key. Be prepared to make changes, and even more important for your officials, when it happens, show understanding and empathy. This spring is not the time to be the hard-line, gruff assigner who isn’t willing to adapt. Roll with the punches and be an example to your charges.

#### Know your roster.

Understand your membership. Play to their strengths. Have an official who is a star on the football field but just a body on the softball diamond? Tailor his or her schedule to be heavier with football assignments and save important softball games for an official who is better suited for them. Have trouble finding enough officials to work one sport versus another? Finalize scheduling for the trouble sport first.

### SEVEN STEPS (CONTINUED FROM P. 1)

you grow, you’ll have established a culture of training.

You can get sued whether you’re small or big. Consequently, you should have liability insurance for your association, and you should find out whether you need a separate line of insurance for your leadership team.

### 3. Create Professionalism When You’re Small and It Will Be There When You Grow

Let your officials know what’s expected even if you’re small. They need to be trained, professional and punctual. They need to know the playing rules, and they need to know safety rules and protocols. They also need to know if you have any rules or penalties for things they do that might not comply with your expectations or the expectations of the client schools, leagues and teams.

Your small association also needs to make it clear it will evaluate officials – even if its small size precludes a team of evaluators; there’s always coach and partner feedback. The association also needs to make it clear that evaluations link to assignments and that training is taken seriously. Finally, let the officials know whether there are any penalties for breaches of rules.

Your small association should also make sure the officials know you’re not a dictatorship. Let the officials know they can inquire or challenge evaluations. They can ask the reasoning behind assignments. Establish a culture of due process.

### 4. Get Formal Before You Think You Need to Get Formal

The time to start writing your governance rules is now – before you think you’ll be big enough to need them.

If you’re a small association and you wait to start growing, one day you’ll get a wake-up call. You’ll look at your roster or you’ll be in a

meeting, and you’ll realize you no longer know all of your officials. The officials will perceive you as a boss – not as their colleague.

So, if you want to incorporate, do it now. If you’re an unincorporated group that needs bylaws, write them down now. Make it clear what the governance structure is, what the rules are, what the association’s obligations are, what the members’ obligations are, how the leadership team is selected, how long the leadership team serves, how the leaders and members can be penalized, removed, replaced and challenge their penalties, removal or replacement.

### 5. Educate Association Members on Business Matters

Your association will be better – and less litigious – if you share information with them. Walk through parts of the bylaws with them at meetings. Review contracts and business issues with the members. Make sure they see association minutes and are up to date on association finances.

### 4. Don’t Become the Good Old or Young Boys

We always hear of the good old boys: They’re vested in an association, have leadership roles and slant power, prestige and game assignments toward themselves well past the point where their abilities merit it.

## QUICK TIP

### BOARD MEMBER REFRESHER

Invite all veteran board members to attend each board orientation to provide a refresher for them to get caught up, and also to reinforce a culture of continuous learning.

When you grow, you've got to watch out for the good young boys. They're well-intended founders, but they have similar backgrounds. As their groups grow, people who don't have those backgrounds grumble – it's a common complaint in the dotcom industry. These well-intended people are good young boys.

The problem with the good young boys is the problem of resentment and cultural exclusion leading to internal disputes and even lawsuits. People stop believing in the evaluations, training and the organizational mission. Once the trust is lost, the system bogs down.

As you grow, seek to expand your viewpoints. Put some of the people who aren't in your cultural group on your committees. Don't think of your cultural group in

terms of race or gender. Think of it as the outsiders. Identify them, and bring them in.

### 7. Establish a Culture of Compliance

Officials associations have a lot of hoops to jump through. State associations have demands. Clients have demands. Make it clear your association is going to meet its legal and administrative obligations and make that clear before you grow.

If you follow these seven tips, you may avoid some common pitfalls and become a better association.

*Donald C. Collins is the commissioner of the San Francisco Section of the California Interscholastic Federation. He is a longtime basketball official and lawyer. This article is for informational purposes and is not legal advice. ■*

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### MEMBERS (CONTINUED FROM P. 1)

Let's begin in the state office and the selection process for playoff assignments. Many states have a concerted plan in place: Officials apply to be evaluated and their results are factored into an analysis where the better candidates are identified; they then get further review and some veteran people, who should know better, drive the selection of the best available for the biggest assignments. These systems even go so far as to prevent the people selected from being chosen too many times or in consecutive years; that paves the way for healthy renewal.

Elsewhere are states that use the input of coaches and administrators or assigners to recommend people for assignments. The problem is these groups often don't have the same standard for picking the best as the state body has for preparing them. The result can be the same people returning year after year and a bias toward well-known officials over up-and-

comers. Association leaders should be ready to work with their state bodies at developing and supporting programs that dynamically identify the best officials; when it's working best, it grows the number of officials available because they believe their efforts will be objectively rewarded with better assignments.

In our own associations, we want to avoid the impression that nothing ever changes. If you keep being elected president and the same individual presents the oncourt clinic every year, two bad things happen over time: First, growth becomes stagnancy and, second, your members begin to think the organization has no bandwidth. If you aren't actively cultivating new voices and viewpoints from within your group, it becomes a cardboard cutout rather than a living thing. You and Sally may indeed have forgotten more about officiating than many in your audience know, but you're failing the group if you

don't let them believe they can contribute to leadership, too. Think about having term limits for executive positions; regularly reach all the way to the back row for participation during group sessions. Know everyone on the roster and, thereby, the ones who might be good candidates for leadership positions – then direct them into the mix. Don't create the impression everyone's there for you; it's the other way around.

Finally, throw away your participation trophies. The people we officiate have the goal of winning something – or, at least, have a parent who does. We officials, meanwhile, try to be equal-opportunity employers. If you have superstars coming up through the ranks, make every effort to promote them. Tout their abilities to people who might be

able to use them. Make sure your membership understands what the best and brightest are doing to set themselves apart and offer possession of those qualities as an objective for the rest to pursue. If, on the other hand, someone is really having problems, don't kid them; offer them a plan on how to improve, if they want to, or keep them away from the rest if they're bent on being problem children. Ultimately, you should be able to look them all in the eye at the end of another season and give them a frank assessment of their pros and cons, ups and downs. If you can't or won't, you should really be questioning why you're bothering to collect money from them if you can't define their measure of success or yours. In fact, if you don't have a strong opinion about a member, or your kid, or your spouse,

doesn't it imply that you don't care that much? Without a tangible process, nepotism becomes the suspect in many ventures.

The key to success in building any strong organization – be it an officials' group or my quality department – is regularly demonstrating their activities are being monitored, their successes acknowledged and their failings remediated. Nothing is ever met with silence or insincere attaboys. Keep the group vibrant by soliciting contribution and rewarding it when you get it.

Once people understand that they do matter, nepotism dies on the vine. We can control this. *Tim Sloan, Davenport, Iowa, is a high school football, basketball and volleyball official, and a former college football and soccer official. ■*

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