

GROWING OUR LEAGUES



SESSION OBJECTIVES

- Discuss strategies to expand access to Little League, enabling local programs to grow participation.
- Provide an overview of the tools necessary to conduct an evaluation of access to the Little League program in your district.
- Discuss strategies for expansion by onboarding new leagues.

DECLINING PARTICIPATION IN YOUTH SPORTS

There are a number of factors affecting participation that are beyond our control, including:

- Declining U.S. Birth Rate
 - In 2017, there were half the number of births per 1,000 women as there were in 1960^[1]
- Increased Focus on Sport Specialization
 - Increasing trend of choosing one sport at younger ages at the expense of participation in other sports
- Other activities (outside of sports) compete for kids' time, including screen time
- Parents are starved for time
 - $\frac{2}{3}$ of parents of current players are employed full time (according to a 2015 Little League Parents Committee Survey)

EXPANDING ACCESS TO LITTLE LEAGUE

To counteract trends that have resulted in decreased participation, we need to focus on opportunities to expand the Little League experience to more participants through expanded access and decreased barriers to participation.

- Community-related areas of focus:
 - Boundaries as a tool to provide access
 - Providing access for new leagues

THE TRADITIONAL ROLE OF LEAGUE BOUNDARIES

- When you think of the purpose of boundaries in Little League, what words come to mind?
 - Parity
 - Population
 - Restrictive
 - Eligibility
 - Waivers
 - Enforcement
 - Policing
 - Tournament

EXPANDING ACCESS: BOUNDARIES

- A new way to think about boundaries:
 - Boundaries are a tool to provide access to the Little League program to any individual who can reasonably participate in a league
 - Deemphasis of items such as population, arbitrary limits, etc.
 - Maximize coverage to encompass as many potential participants as possible
 - Focus on factors such as the area a league can reasonably service based on location, facilities, volunteer base, etc.

BOUNDARY EXPANSION UPDATE

Using data from the League Finder, we've focused on expanding boundaries to encompass League Finder misses.

- Phase 1: Eliminating “Donut Holes”
 - 98 of 157 donut holes closed or partially closed
 - 1,225 of 2,311 square miles closed
 - 756 League Finder misses from 2019 now covered



BOUNDARY EXPANSION UPDATE

Using data from the League Finder, we've focused on expanding boundaries to encompass League Finder misses.

- Phase 2: Expansion Zones
 - 285 of 1,259 expansion zones covered or partially covered
 - 4,863 of 105,834 square miles covered
 - 2,484 League Finder misses from 2019 now covered

EVALUATING BOUNDARIES IN YOUR DISTRICT

To determine the opportunity to increase access via boundaries in your district, conduct a three-step evaluation:

Step 1: Evaluate Boundary Coverage

- Evaluating uncovered areas
- Expansion vs. New Programs

Step 2: Relevancy

- Potential issues to address:
 - New developments
 - New schools
 - Commute times
 - Shifting demographics/communities

EVALUATING BOUNDARIES IN YOUR DISTRICT

To determine the opportunity to increase access via boundaries in your district, conduct a three-step evaluation:

Step 3: Service Level

- Service is more than coverage
- Access by sport/age group
- Free resources to assess league service

EXPANDING BOUNDARY ACCESS IN YOUR DISTRICT

- Expansion Strategies
 - Expansion of Existing Boundaries
 - Sport Adjustments
 - Boundary Adjustments (between leagues) – Adjustments to provide more convenient access to the Little League program
- Considerations when expanding:
 - Ability to service
 - Parity
 - Future Growth Opportunities

EXPANDING BOUNDARY ACCESS IN YOUR DISTRICT

Despite expansion of access, situations will still arise where a home league option may not exist, in such cases consider:

- Combined Teams
- Waivers
- Boundary Adjustments
- Log requests and look for long-term solutions to accommodate all interested players

PROVIDING ACCESS FOR NEW LEAGUES

In cases where boundary expansion will not provide convenient access to most potential participants, the opportunity to convert existing programs to Little League should be pursued.

Items to consider:

- Marketing to non-Little League groups
- Working with non-traditional organizations
- Reducing transition related pain points
- Providing a great first experience

MARKETING TO NON-LITTLE LEAGUE PROGRAMS

- Traditionally, we have waited for organizations to approach us and have focused efforts on where interest originated
- Tools and resources are under development that will expand our efforts to include actively marketing to organizations in areas where expansion is possible
- Initial efforts will commence in advance of the 2021 Little League season

WORKING WITH NON-TRADITIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

To expand access as broadly as possible, we must consider how to allow non-traditional groups to become a part of the Little League program:

- Parks and Rec Departments
- YMCAs
- Boys and Girls Clubs
- Tee Ball-only programs (run by churches, community centers, or any of the above organizations)

REDUCING TRANSITION RELATED PAIN POINTS

Non-Little League programs will not have a history of following all rules, regulations, and policies of Little League.

- Strive to make the affiliation process as turnkey as possible
- Work with Little League International to provide accommodations to allow for a smooth transition to the Little League program
- Differentiating between critical areas of compliance and areas where a transition period is acceptable

PROVIDING A GREAT FIRST EXPERIENCE

- More leagues leave Little League after their first year of affiliation than any other year in the program
- Tips for providing a great first Little League experience
 - Communicate key items to expect during year one
 - Check in regularly throughout the year
 - Provide additional support during the tournament season
 - Ensure all necessary waivers are in place to prevent first year tournament eligibility issues

FEEDBACK

- List the top 3 specific actions that you can take tomorrow to expand access in your district.
- What tools and resources do you need Little League to provide to most effectively market to non-Little League organizations?
- What are some non-traditional organizations in your district that you could work with to establish:
 - Little League Tee Ball Programs?
 - Little League Baseball/Softball Programs?

QUESTIONS?

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