

GET HER IN
THE GAME



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Build a Coaching
Pipeline

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Research consistently demonstrates that girls are more likely to participate in sports — and keep playing — when they see women leading on the sidelines. Building a strong pipeline of women coaches and officials requires intentional recruitment, targeted training and meaningful support structures that reflect the lived experiences of women and girls.

Recruit With Intention

To drive recruitment, start by examining your current coach/official pool. If most coaches are men, especially in girls' programs, there's an opportunity to increase representation. Agencies can implement these strategies:

- ✓ Take an active, not passive, approach. Women are more likely to step into coaching/officialing roles when they're personally invited.
- ✓ Engage people who already have trust in the community, like recreation staff, former athletes, teachers and parent leaders who can encourage women to participate.
- ✓ Elevate athletes in the community. Targeting program alumni or reaching out to local high schools/colleges builds the pipeline of women and younger coaches/officials.



A coach provides instruction to youth participants. Photo courtesy of City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks.

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- ✓ Frame coaching as a learning and leadership opportunity and something girls and women can grow into, not something they have to be an expert on.
- ✓ Offer girls, teens and young adults a pathway from athlete to coach. Programs for junior coaches can help older girls build confidence, skills and professional experience.
- ✓ Create co-coaching models that divide coaching responsibilities.
- ✓ Invite women to be assistant coaches for a few weeks or ask them to contribute to a short activity or play day.
- ✓ Ensure marketing materials include images of women and that messages welcome and encourage women who may not have formal sports backgrounds. Use language that emphasizes mentorship, youth development and community impact.
- ✓ Address the challenges women may face that prevent them from coaching like caregiving, schedule conflicts and sport-specific confidence. Provide childcare during games and practices, offer flexible scheduling, support co-coaching models, provide stipends and equip coaches with training and mentorship opportunities that support retention.



A coach provides instruction to youth participants. Photo courtesy of City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks.

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Train Women Coaches

Too often, coach training programs overlook the unique needs and obstacles that girls may face in sports. Agencies should offer training tailored to coaching girls that covers topics like confidence building, relationship-building skills and creating a welcoming team culture, in addition to sport-specific courses. Agencies seeking to provide training focused on coaching girls should implement these strategies:

- ✓ Ask women coaches their preferences for training, and give them options to co-create a training plan, including if they'd prefer women-only sessions or to participate in existing training opportunities.
- ✓ Provide basic onboarding plus opportunities for deeper learning, whether through advanced workshops, certifications, peer learning circles or online modules.
- ✓ Be sure your training program includes instruction on league rules and any sport-specific guidance, especially for newly introduced sports (for coaches and for girls!).
- ✓ Develop a written coaching manual to share with coaches that outlines your agency's expectations.
- ✓ Ensure that your coaches and officials are supported in enforcing the rules. Support systems like clear protocols, on-site staff presence or an appointed conflict manager, and aligned communication around participant and spectator expectations help coaches and officials confidently enforce sport rules during games.



Young athletes build skills and confidence with soccer practice drills. Photo courtesy of City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks.

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Fostering Retention

Women coaches thrive in environments where they feel supported, valued and connected. Creating a sense of belonging can be the difference between a one-season volunteer and a long-term coach. Relationship building isn't extra; it's core to keeping the right people in the work and sustaining programming that reflects the community it serves. Consider these ideas for retaining coaches:

- ✓ Treat coaches as authentic partners, not providers.
- ✓ Build mentorship programs that pair new coaches with experienced ones.
- ✓ Offer continuous training opportunities throughout the season (not just at the start).
- ✓ Recognize and celebrate women coaches in newsletters, social media and award events. Directly share gratitude and appreciation for their coaching.
- ✓ Create a coaching community! Foster connection through group events or online platforms. Give women space to share ideas and support each other throughout their coaching journeys.
- ✓ Regularly ask coaches what's working and what's not, plus follow through with changes.
- ✓ Offer stipends, gift cards, reduced registration rates for their children or access to professional development as a thank you to coaches.
- ✓ Ensure coaching is not a financial burden; provide the necessary equipment, coaching uniform and practice plan resource.
- ✓ Invite women coaches to help shape future training, policies and program improvements. That way, they feel invested in the system they're helping build.
- ✓ Seek feedback through sideline observations, post-game check-ins or peer mentoring to help reinforce training, build confidence and identify growth areas.

The City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks leads the Women Coach Los Angeles (WCLA) program. The program trains young women who have aged out of youth sports programming to become coaches and referees. This keeps older girls involved in department sports programming as part-time staff members.



A coach helps a player with their shooting form. Photo courtesy of City of Menifee (California) Community Services Department.