

THE STATE OF CLUB RUNNING



The State of Club Running 2019 Report

The State of Club Running was established in 2019 to assess the development of collegiate club running within the United States.

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Authors' Notes

In May of 2019, the idea for this project was formed after a run between two club leaders in Boulder, CO. The basic premise was to connect the problems that many younger and less developed running clubs experience with the successful practices evolved by older and more developed clubs. So many of the issues that clubs face are universal, and we hoped to find some universally applicable solutions to combat them. Soon after its inception, the report expanded its focus to include an assessment of the state of club running and of NIRCA. Still, this report is primarily by and for the clubs: in it we recommend better practices for club finances, membership, leadership, and growth.

The first step taken to understand the state of club running was to send out a questionnaire to every running club we could find. Many of the conclusions and proposals made in this report are directly based on the data and testimonies provided in the responses to this survey. Moreover, you will find a dozen club-written blurbs that feature teams who excel in particular developmental aspects, where they explain how other clubs can learn from their successes.

Overall, we are excited for you to read this report and consider how our suggestions and observations can serve your team. Do not feel obligated to read each part: we tried to make each section that speaks to clubs self-contained. However, we do ask you to share this document with anyone you know in the club running community, including club leaders, members, coaches, advisers, and beyond. We designed this report to be useful to just about anyone involved in a running club.

It is difficult to describe the full impact of club running; it is truly a multifaceted activity. Club running has the power to fulfill athletic dreams, unite a group under a common purpose and shared pride, foster lasting friendships across classes, achieve massive fundraising and volunteering feats, produce strong and inclusive leaders, and promote health and wellness to many communities. What club running has provided to countless students and athletes is exactly why a report like this exists: to better equip this awesome community to welcome future generations of club runners.

Please enjoy the following report, and feel free to contact us with any suggestions, questions, follow-ups, clarifications, criticisms, or otherwise.

—Raymond Friend & Brendan Warren
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Mission Statement

The mission of the State of Club Running is to promote the development of collegiate running clubs across the United States. Through data collection and direct communication with existing collegiate running clubs, the State of Club Running is able to assess the current conditions facing running clubs, as well as highlight various clubs' solutions to common problems.



Statement of Limitations

There are numerous reasons why the following report is limited in its ability to achieve its full mission. While producing this report, our goal was always to minimize the effects of these limitations.

Our report is partially based on data received in a questionnaire sent to every club contact we could find during the Summer of 2019. Because not all clubs chose to respond, only about a quarter of all clubs are directly represented within our data. We leave any effects of response bias as an implicit limitation throughout the rest of this report. Moreover, each quantitative or Boolean data field will have at most 43 entries.

The authors of this report, along with many of the authors of the club features, come from some of the largest, most successful clubs in the nation. Any opinions, interpretations, or suggestions are then born from some level of privilege. While this report is meant to elevate the words of our colleagues leading their respective teams, we cannot deny our own biases. For full transparency: Raymond Friend, an author of this report, was the President of Penn State Club Cross Country in 2018, while Brendan Warren, another author of this report, is a Social Chair of the University of Michigan Running Club in the 2019-2020 academic year.

Not all clubs are born equal. Circumstances such as the overarching student population, local attitudes towards running, local geography and infrastructure, availability of finances, proximity to NIRCA competitions and conferences, and much more can greatly impact a club's development. No two teams will experience the same circumstances, making the task of speaking to the experiences of all of these clubs almost impossible. However, it should be understood that this project does its best not to assume a certain level of luck: it tries to offer strategies to maximize a club's success given its circumstances. Indeed, it is ultimately up to the members and leaders of each running club to judge the feasibility of implementing any of the suggestions provided in this report.

The boundary separating this report from NIRCA (the National Intercollegiate Running Club Association) keeps us from utilizing much of NIRCA's resources, manpower, and authority within the club running world. Our data collection and historical insight is also limited by whatever data is made publicly accessible by NIRCA. However, without the oversight of NIRCA, we hope that we can more honestly suggest how club running can evolve through the actions of clubs and their governing body.



Methodology

Data and quotes for this report were collected in three manners:

1. Through a questionnaire sent to every club contact we could find during the Summer of 2019;
2. From various resources available on the internet; and
3. By directly interviewing multiple clubs who excel in certain developmental aspects.

The questionnaire was sent to an estimated 140 clubs, 43 of whom responded. The questionnaire asked teams to describe aspects of their demographics, finances, membership, leadership, practices, and more. Appendix A contains the precise prompts asked within the questionnaire. Teams were given two months to respond to the questionnaire, with at least one formal reminder within a week of the due date. Data was aggregated in an SQL database, with which we were able to perform numerical and categorical analyses of clubs' responses. Clubs were given the option to request anonymity; and because some chose to remain anonymous, we will respect their privacy by limiting the precision of our reported statistics. All quotes derived from any club's questionnaire response will be kept anonymous regardless of the club's anonymity preferences.

Luckily, we do not have to rely on only our questionnaire responses in order to analyze the state of club running: multiple online resources exist that proved helpful for this report. For example, the NIRCA website has data about which clubs joined in certain years, as well as a great deal of results from previous years of competitions [1]. Moreover, many existing leagues to other collegiate club sports have websites with their own materials to which NIRCA may be compared [2, 3, 4, 5]. Analyses of college athletic demographics and other relevant topics are also widely available. All sources utilized in this report are cited in the Bibliography chapter.

Combining the knowledge derived from external resources with the results of our questionnaire, we were able to generate a list of clubs who we wished to feature within our report based on their successes in certain developmental aspects. For example, based on our questionnaire responses, we were able to pinpoint clubs like Mizzou Club Running and Maryland Club Running for their exceptional grasp of their team finances or their relationship with their school's overseeing departments, respectively. Each club identified in this process was individually contacted and provided a prompt related to their exceptional qualities.

The 43 clubs recorded accounted for about 3450 athletes: 2080 being male, 1370 being female; and 3290 being undergraduate students, 160 being graduate students. Fortunately, the average location of all of the clubs who participated in the questionnaire landed in central Indiana, within 50 miles of the true center of all NIRCA clubs ($39^{\circ}07'N, 85^{\circ}50'W$). The average age of all clubs sampled was 9.2 years, with average roster size 80.3 and average regular practice attendance 21.4 athletes. Out of the 43 clubs sampled, at least 39 compete in cross country meets, 35 compete in track & field meets, and 36 compete in road races at some point in their seasons. All confidence intervals or statistical significance is calculated with a uniform alpha level of 0.05. While the high average age of our respondents suggests our data might not represent younger clubs well, the testimonies provided by these older clubs helped us to gather proven strategies for success. Regardless, it should be noted that with this small of a sample size of teams, our statistics are prone to having large errors.



Chapter 1

Current State of Club Running

1.1 Overview of Collegiate Running Clubs

The purpose of our questionnaire was to gain an understanding of the current state of club running across the United States. We learned that running clubs come in many forms, and primarily vary on their financial situations, recruitment and retention strategies, leadership structures, and competitive opportunities. Some of these differences are purely environmental, based on their school's policies and financing opportunities, their student population, or their location in the country relative to other running clubs. But other differences come from diversity in purpose or internal organization. Much of this variation is addressed in the following chapters.

We begin this section by providing some demographic data from our sample.

We are aware of at least 167 collegiate running clubs across the nation. Teams that responded to our sample acquired 81.5 roster signups throughout the year on average, with a large standard deviation of 63.1 signups. A naive estimate of the number of club runners in the nation, then, might be the product of the number of clubs and the average number of team signups per club: about 13,600 total athletes. More likely, the actual number of club runners is probably closer to half of this number: 6,800 total athletes (based on retention rates, and the possibility that we mistook some inactive clubs as still existing). At a normal practice, teams averaged 21.4 attendees, with a large standard deviation of 18.0. Because of the apparent skew, we provide box plots in the following Figure 1.1 of each statistic.

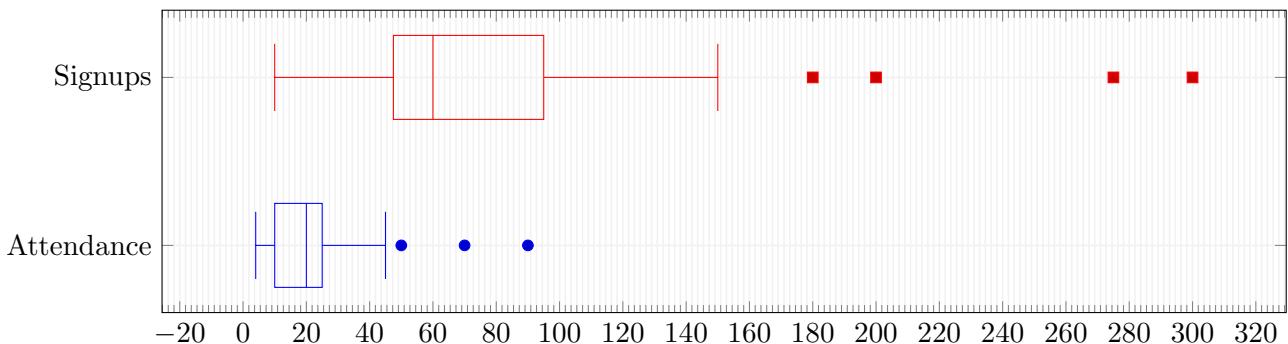


Figure 1.1: Boxplots illustrating the sample distributions of signups (throughout the year) and attendance (at a normal practice). The median signups was 60 individuals, while the median daily attendance was 20 athletes. The difference between the third quartile and median for attendance is small because of the number of outliers on the right, so we still may describe attendance as right-skewed.



The right skew in the signups and attendance distributions illustrates that while there are a few particularly large running clubs, a majority of clubs get less than 100 students to register on their roster, and less than 25 members to attend a normal practice.

Over 95% of clubs' leaders utilized announcements at practice to communicate with general members, while three quarters of clubs spread information through Email, Facebook, and GroupMe. Under 25% used other platforms like their website, Snapchat, text blasts, or Instagram to share announcements.

About 70% of clubs in the sample possessed a dedicated website. During our analysis, we identified that having a website is a good indicator of high recruitment. Indeed, a difference of mean hypothesis test showed a significant relationship between the number of signups in the beginning of the year and having a website. Teams with a website reported average signups around 96.6 individuals, while those without a website reported average signups around 42.7 individuals. While club age might seem like a good candidate to explain the correlation between having a website and having higher signups, a regression test showed that only about 30.4% of the variation in signups was explained by its linear relationship with club age.

Teams were generally composed of both undergraduate and graduate students. Graduate students comprised 5.0% of their membership on average, with standard deviation 5.1%.

The sample proportion of male athletes on running clubs was $60.0 \pm 1.6\%$ nationally (and female membership was 40.0%). Table 1.1 below shows the sample proportions of male athletes stratified by region.

| Region | Sample Proportion of Male Athletes |
|--------------|------------------------------------|
| Northeast | $69 \pm 3\%$ |
| Mid-Atlantic | $62 \pm 5\%$ |
| Southeast | $59 \pm 6\%$ |
| Great Lakes | $63 \pm 4\%$ |
| Great Plains | $53 \pm 4\%$ |
| Heartland | $50 \pm 13\%$ |
| Pacific | $60 \pm 6\%$ |

Table 1.1: Sample proportions of male athletes found in clubs, binned by region.

The Northeast had the highest sample proportion of males, while the Great Plains and Heartland seemed to be the closest to even. However, basically every region has more men than women.

Each running club competes in a multitude of competitions. Below in Figure 1.2 we show the relative sample proportions of teams participating in certain kinds of competitions.

In order to travel to competitions, 76.7% of clubs reported that they regularly rely on personal vehicles, while 10% of clubs fly at least once a year, and 60% of clubs rent buses or vans at least once a year. In Section 3 of this chapter, we will discuss travel issues for many clubs across the nation.



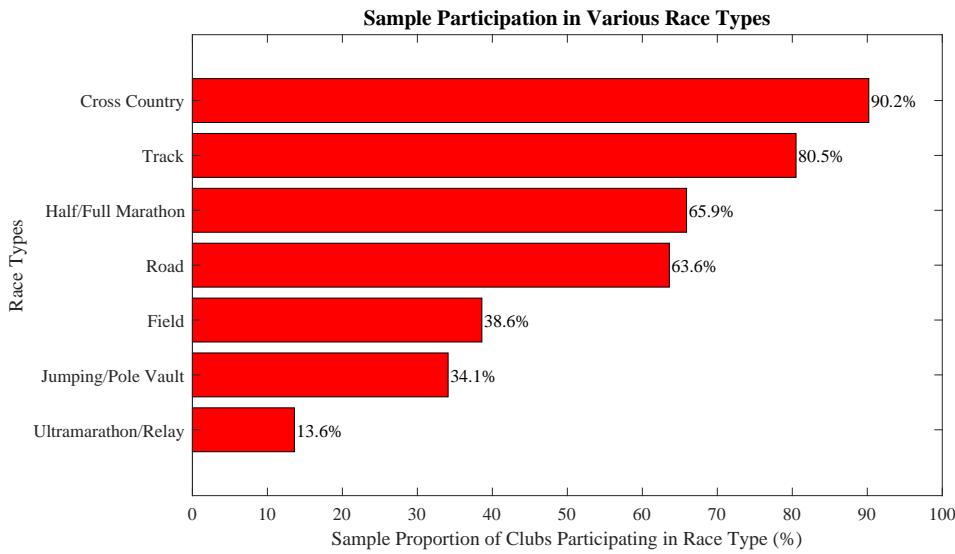


Figure 1.2: An inventory of how many clubs compete in each type of competition. These numbers are tallied from 43 club responses.

For the remainder of this section, we wish to highlight some of the overarching goals indicated by clubs in our questionnaire. Figure 1.3 presents a chart of how many clubs expressed interest in each of the listed goals.

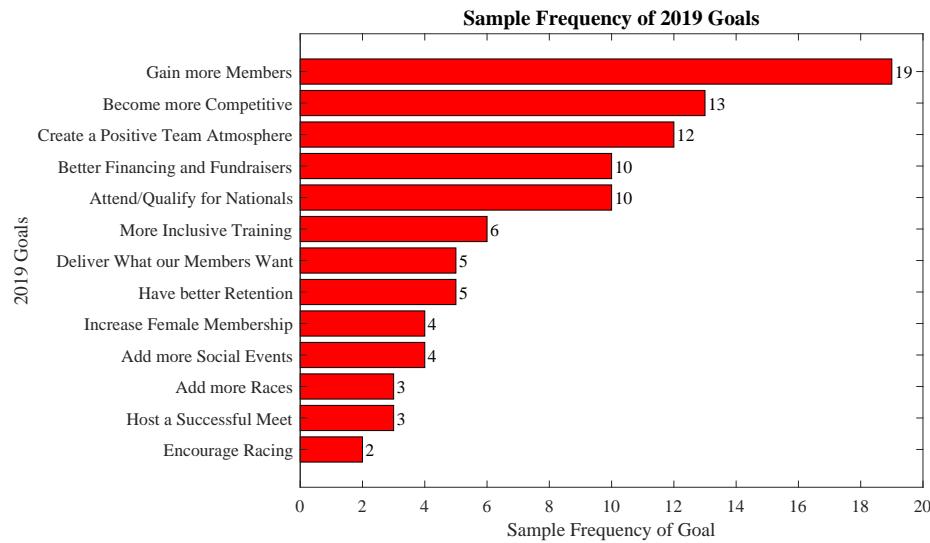


Figure 1.3: An inventory of how many clubs expressed certain goals for 2019. These numbers are tallied from 43 club responses.

Clubs have a wide range of interests and ultimate goals in 2019: many are competitive, while even more are social and communal. Some goals were more common depending on the developmental stage of the club. For instance, many smaller and younger clubs wished to become larger and more competitive, whereas larger and older clubs tended to focus on nuanced social aspects. We have written the following chapters in part to offer strategies towards achieving these goals for any type of running club. However, a complete assessment of the



state of club running would be remiss to exclude club running's beloved competitive league: NIRCA.

1.2 NIRCA's Past

In the spring of 2006, leaders from a few running clubs congregated to create a governing body for collegiate club running in the United States [6]. This organization was named NIRCA: short for the National Intercollegiate Running Club Association (a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization). The goal of NIRCA was to "promote running at a collegiate level in a relaxed, fun environment," and its founders hoped that, through NIRCA, teams could "share ideas by being part of this organization, and improve and expand their respective clubs." NIRCA has always been staffed by volunteers who work full-time jobs as well, adding to the organization's unique charm, flexibility, and personality.

NIRCA has greatly evolved throughout the last fourteen years, typically relying on guidance from clubs and their leaders to set its course for the future. Ever since (at least) 2010, NIRCA has been hosting annual Winter Conferences (known earlier as the bi-annual All-Club Conference) with the goal of improving NIRCA and connecting club leaders across the nation for the upcoming year.

Fifteen clubs joined NIRCA for its first Fall season in 2006, and over 150 more have joined since. NIRCA has chosen to split the country into seven geographic regions resembling those of the NCAA: the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Southeast, Great Lakes, Great Plains, Heartland, and Pacific regions. The following charts in Figure 1.4 illustrate NIRCA's aggregate growth: both nationally and regionally, since its inception.

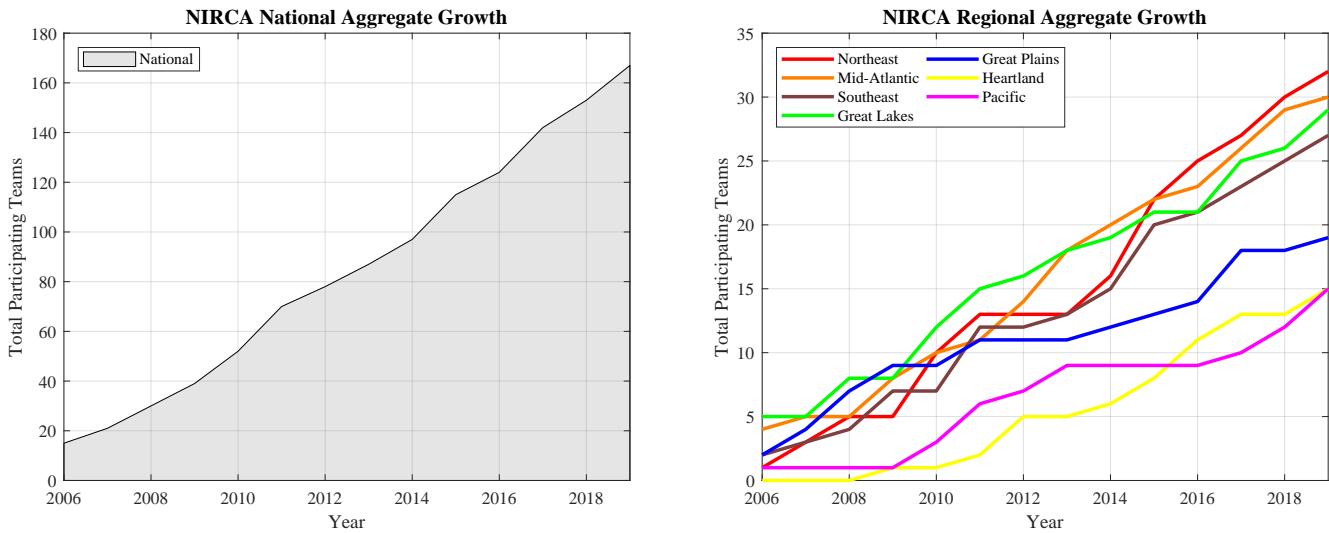


Figure 1.4: Aggregate growth of NIRCA and its regions since NIRCA's inception. This does not take into account clubs that have dissociated from NIRCA.

Based on Figure 1.4, NIRCA's growth seems to have been relatively steady, with the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Great Lakes, and Southeast regions growing fastest. In order to better understand growth over time, it may help to see the rate of growth nationally and regionally each year. See Figure 1.5 on the following page.



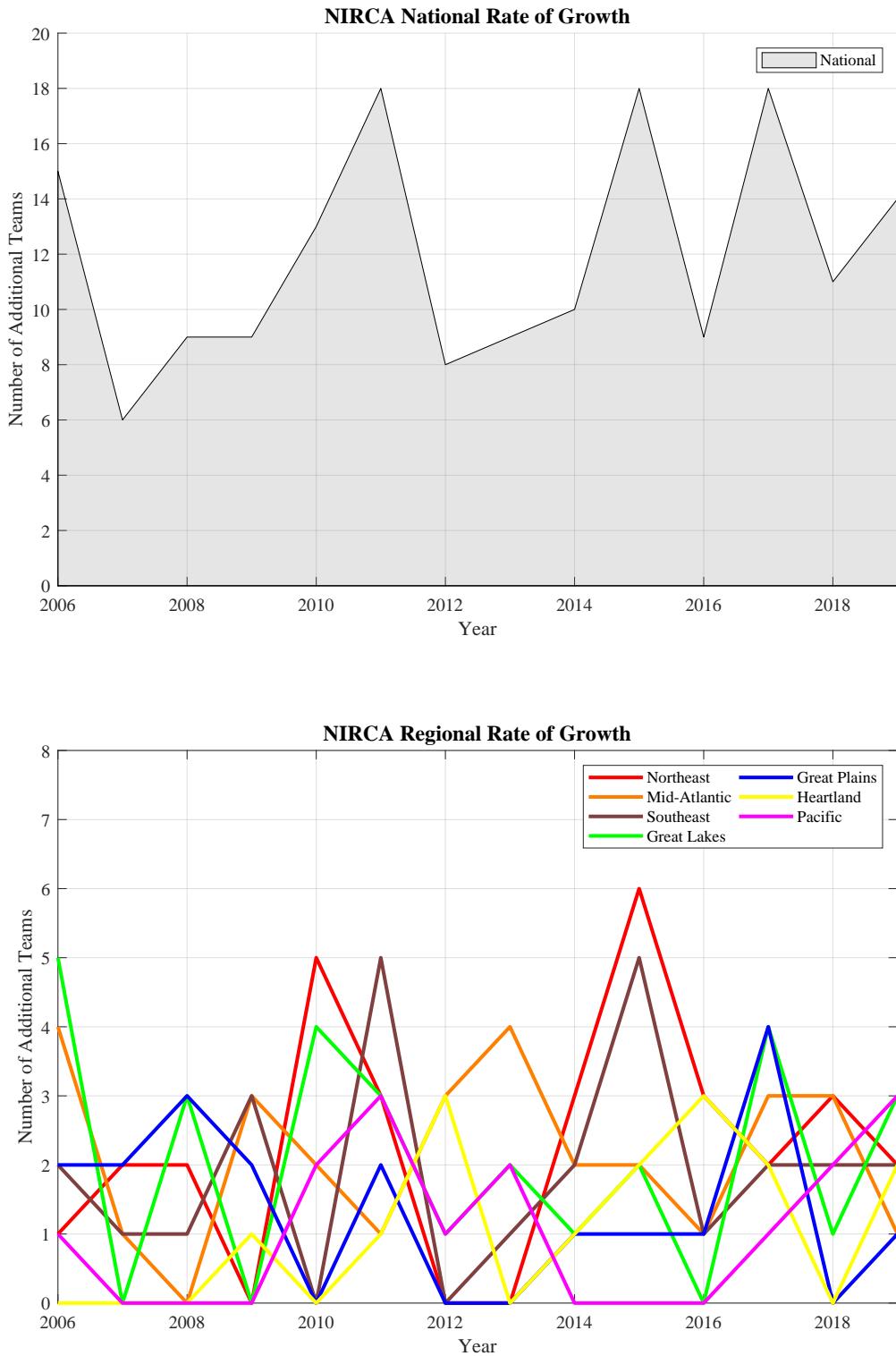


Figure 1.5: Rate of growth of NIRCA and its regions since NIRCA's inception. This does not take into account clubs that have dissociated from NIRCA.

Based on Figure 1.5, NIRCA experienced three major growth spikes in the past decade: gaining 18 new clubs in each of 2011, 2015, and 2017. In 2019, NIRCA gained 14 new running clubs across the nation, most coming from the Pacific and Great Lakes. However, it should be noted that this data was taken from NIRCA's website, where not all inactive clubs have been removed from its list of member clubs. This means we have not taken into account all of the clubs that dropped out of NIRCA at some point.

We can further assess the growth of each NIRCA region individually:

- The Northeast has the most teams of any NIRCA region, and was traditionally the nation's fastest growing region, maxing out with 6 new teams in 2015. But it has begun to slow its growth ever since.
- The Mid-Atlantic has the second highest number of teams, and has experienced steady growth for many years, maxing out with 4 new clubs in 2013.
- The Great Lakes region has one less team than the Mid-Atlantic, but has been the least consistent region for growth. This region has seen a large influx of teams most recently in 2017.
- The Southeast had two large peaks in growth in 2011 and 2015, and has been consistently growing.
- The Great Plains trails behind the four largest regions with only 19 teams, and hit an isolated growth spurt of 4 new teams in 2017.
- The Pacific peaked in its growth in 2011, without much activity again until 2018. This region has a lot to offer, and is beginning to outpace historically fast growing regions.
- The Heartland experienced three solid years of growth between 2015 and 2017, and has much to offer. However, several of these clubs have since become inactive or left NIRCA due to lacking competitive opportunities and financial issues.

As NIRCA has grown in membership, it has evolved to host a few important club competitions and events each year:

- Fall Regionals (in each region besides the Heartland),
- Fall Cross Country Nationals,
- Fall Open/Alumni Race,
- Winter Conference,
- Spring Track & Field Nationals, and
- Spring Half Marathon/Road Nationals.

The locations of each of these events are of great importance to this report. Below in Table 1.2 is a list of locations where NIRCA has hosted some of its largest national events.

As a summary: NIRCA has hosted Fall Nationals seven times in the Great Lakes, seven times in the Mid-Atlantic, and once in the Southeast (North Carolina, 2011). Winter Conference has occurred mostly in the north. And NIRCA Spring Nationals held a constant location in Bloomington, IN for eight years until switching to Oxford, OH for the foreseeable future.



| Year | NIRCA Fall Nationals | NIRCA Winter Conference | NIRCA Spring Nationals |
|------|----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 2006 | Lock Haven, PA | — | — |
| 2007 | Bloomington, IN | — | — |
| 2008 | State College, PA | — | — |
| 2009 | Ypsilanti, MI | — | — |
| 2010 | Bloomington, IN | — | — |
| 2011 | Charlotte, NC | — | Bloomington, IN |
| 2012 | Hershey, PA | — | Bloomington, IN |
| 2013 | Hershey, PA | Columbus, OH | Bloomington, IN |
| 2014 | East Lansing, MI | Boston, MA | Bloomington, IN |
| 2015 | Lexington, KY | Pittsburgh, PA | Bloomington, IN |
| 2016 | Hershey, PA | Philadelphia, PA | Bloomington, IN |
| 2017 | East Lansing, MI | Boston, MA | Bloomington, IN |
| 2018 | Lexington, KY | Indianapolis, IN | Bloomington, IN |
| 2019 | Richmond, VA | Pittsburgh, PA | Oxford, OH |
| 2020 | Richmond, VA | Ann Arbor, MI | Oxford, OH |

Table 1.2: A list of all locations where NIRCA has hosted Fall & Spring Nationals, as well as Winter Conference, since NIRCA's inception.

Due to course restrictions, NIRCA has offered two types of races during its Fall Nationals events: Championship (A) and Class (B) races. Ever since 2016, Class races have been broken into Freshman/Sophomore and Junior/Senior/Graduate students for each gender. In 2017, NIRCA made clear that it was struggling to fit a top-seven from each of the schools attending Fall Nationals in one Championship Race. With the guidance of clubs attending the 2017 Winter Conference, NIRCA employed a system of qualification standards for the Championship Race that placed an emphasis on each Regional meet, allowing for both deserving teams and individuals to qualify for the Championship Race. The following charts in Figure 1.6 present attendance at some previous NIRCA National and Regional events, both nationally and regionally.

Each of the above plots can help illustrate different trends.

- Fall Nationals A Race Attendance might help to analyze which clubs are being represented in, and competing well enough to qualify for, the Championship Race. However, due to the newer qualifying standards, this plot does not necessarily represent who all is interested in coming to Fall Nationals.
- Instead, Fall Nationals B Race Attendance might do a better job at gauging growing interests in cross country racing, as well as illustrating how the location of Fall Nationals can affect attendance from each region, since all teams may enter into the B races. Some teams prefer to only attend Fall Nationals if they have qualified for the A races, though, so this chart might under-represent interest from far away or financially-limited clubs.
- Fall Regional Attendance reflects changes in competitiveness over time within each region without the limitations of traveling very far. Location is less influential on this scale because each Regional race is necessarily held within the corresponding region.
- Spring Nationals Attendance reflects attendance in just Track & Field Nationals due to lacking Half Marathon data. Because the location of Spring Nationals was held constant for so long, it is a more controlled indicator of growing interest in track and field events over time. Moreover, the sudden switch to Oxford, OH could serve as an experiment to see how a change in location affects attendance (although the move was not very drastic in this case).



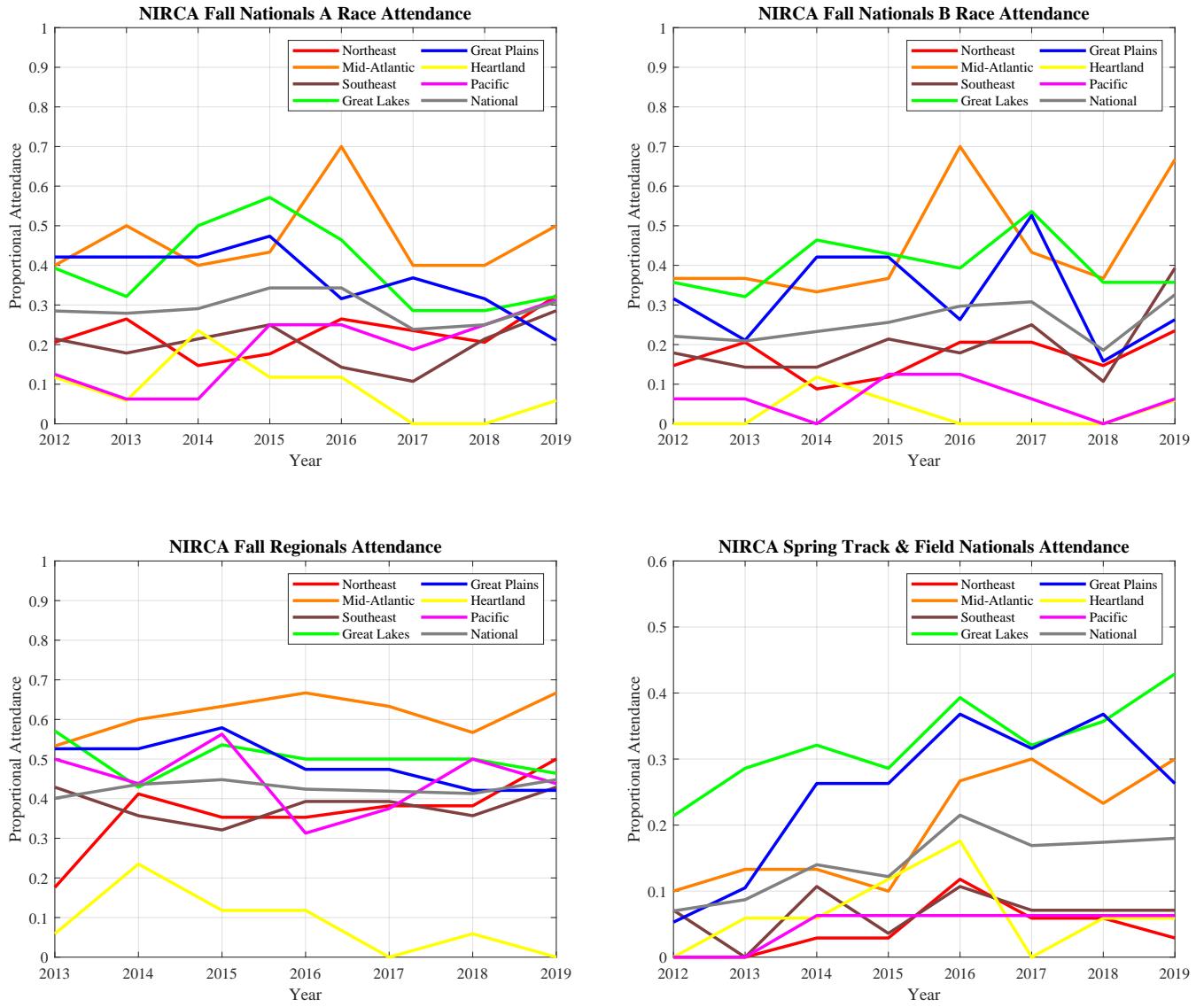


Figure 1.6: Proportional attendance at each of Fall National A, Fall National B, Fall Regional, and Spring National events, categorized by nation and by region. Note that by “proportional,” we are showing what proportion of all current 2019 teams attended the event in that year. So, for instance, teams nonexistent in 2018 were counted as “not attending” 2018 events. This method of counting was chosen to show the relative growth of each event without letting base growth distill attendance.

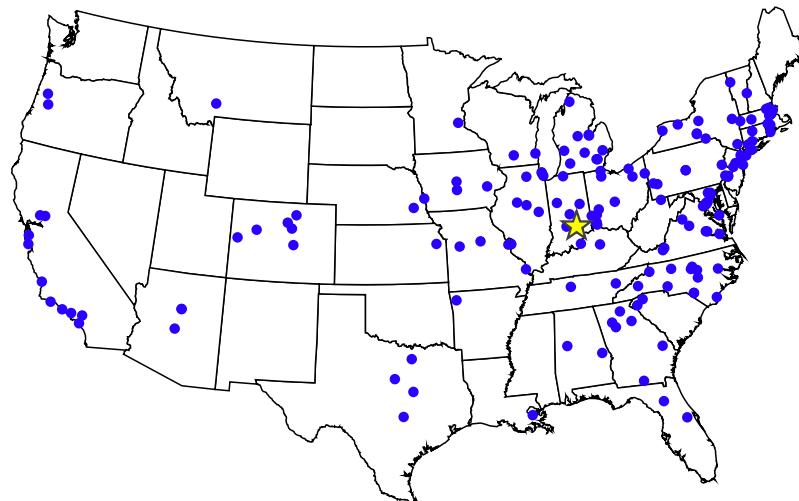
Now that we have summarized NIRCA’s evolution, we can start to analyze the current state of NIRCA.

1.3 NIRCA’s Present

One particular area of interest for this report is to understand the current presence of NIRCA within the US. In the following Figure 1.7, we accomplish exactly this, but even more: we compare NIRCA’s national distribution to those of other existing collegiate, club sports leagues. Namely, we compare NIRCA Club Running to NIRSA Club Soccer, USTA Club Tennis, NCBA Club Baseball, and NCLL & MCLA Club Lacrosse [1, 2, 3, 4, 5].

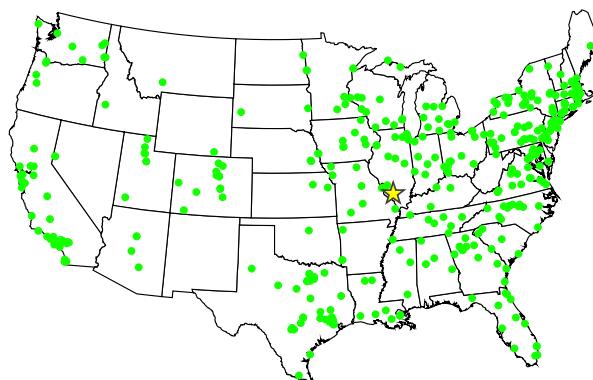


Distribution of NIRCA Running



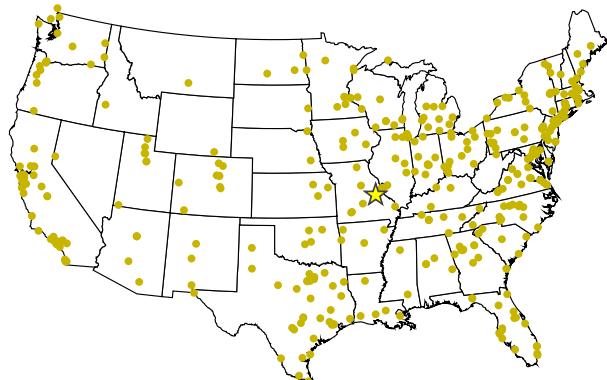
(a) NIRCA Running Distribution in 2019: average location ($39.1^{\circ}N, 85.8^{\circ}W$), and approximately 165 clubs.

Distribution of NIRSA Soccer



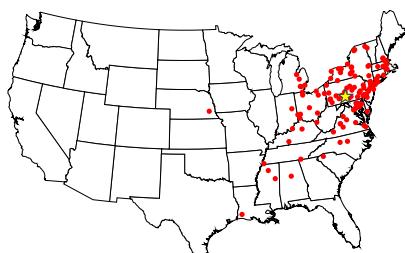
(b) NIRSA Soccer ($38.2^{\circ}N, 89.5^{\circ}W$), 430 clubs.

Distribution of USTA Tennis



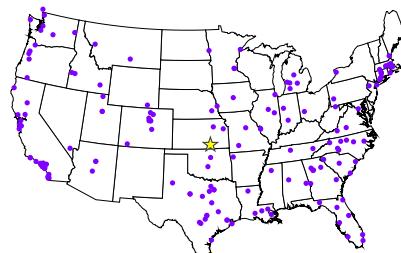
(c) USTA Tennis ($38.2^{\circ}N, 91.1^{\circ}W$), 410 clubs.

Distribution of NCLL Lacrosse



(d) NCLL Lacrosse ($40.3^{\circ}N, 77.9^{\circ}W$), 135 clubs.

Distribution of MCLA Lacrosse



(e) MCLA Lacrosse ($37.4^{\circ}N, 97.0^{\circ}W$), 170 clubs.

Distribution of NCBA Baseball



(f) NCBA Baseball ($38.3^{\circ}N, 94.0^{\circ}W$), 140 clubs.

Figure 1.7: Distributions of NIRCA teams, and other collegiate sports leagues across the contiguous United States. Each dot represents a single participant club.



We can make a few observations: first notice that NIRCA's (unweighted) mean club location lies in Indiana. This reflects that NIRCA is most concentrated in the northern and eastern sides of the country. Besides NCLL Lacrosse (an eastern league), NIRCA has the most northern and eastern average location of these leagues. Next, we see that NIRCA is certainly present on the west coast too. Compared to both NIRSA Soccer and USTA Tennis especially, NIRCA seems to fail to engage much of the middle of the country, as well as many existing schools in already dense areas. While NIRSA and USTA have participating schools from 47 and 48 of the 48 contiguous states, respectively, NIRCA is not present in 11 contiguous states, primarily from the Heartland and Pacific regions. Finally, we notice the sheer size difference in these leagues. While club soccer and club tennis are able to attract over 400 club sports programs across the country, club running has not yet found its foothold to get to that level. While soccer is naturally a popular recreational sport in the U.S., it is difficult to fathom an explanation for the 250-club discrepancy between club tennis and club running only based on interest. It should be noted, though, that many of these organizations have different scopes than NIRCA. For instance, USTA serves a larger recreational tennis audience as well, not just collegiate club tennis [2]. Additionally, NIRSA acts to improve collegiate recreation programs in a multitude of ways beyond organizing competitive leagues [7].

Continuing in our effort to interpret the distribution of NIRCA within the country, we can investigate the varied experiences of teams within each of the seven NIRCA Regions. By counting how many teams are in each region and dividing by the total land area of the region, we can assess each region's "density" of teams. Moreover, if we take the average distance between schools within each region, we can estimate the average time it would take for a club to drive to a competition with another school from its region. In Table 1.3, we do just that.

| Region | Number of Clubs | Total Land Area (mi ²) | Density of Clubs (teams/mi ² · 10 ⁴) | Average Driving Distance (mi ²) | Average Driving Time (hr:min) |
|--------------|-----------------|------------------------------------|---|---|-------------------------------|
| Northeast | 32 | 126,000 | 2.54 | 176.3 | 2:56 |
| Mid-Atlantic | 30 | 136,000 | 2.21 | 198.2 | 3:18 |
| Southeast | 27 | 354,000 | 0.76 | 345.7 | 5:46 |
| Great Lakes | 29 | 203,000 | 1.43 | 372.2 | 6:12 |
| Great Plains | 19 | 353,000 | 0.54 | 273.6 | 4:34 |
| Heartland | 15 | 1,307,000 | 0.11 | 644.5 | 10:45 |
| Pacific | 15 | 642,000 | 0.23 | 507.5 | 8:28 |

Table 1.3: Average density of clubs in each region, as well as the average distance and driving time between two clubs in the respective region. Driving times were calculated at an average speed of 60mph. Both of these are measures of presence and connectedness of clubs within each NIRCA region.

In some respects, these results are not surprising: it is common knowledge that the middle of the country is less dense than the coasts, and that the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic are generally the most densely populated areas. However, what we learn from the density and average driving time columns above is that competitive opportunities through NIRCA in the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, and Great Plains are much more accessible and repeatable occurrences than those in the Heartland and Pacific. This means that traveling to dual-meets, invitacionals, and even Regionals can take double or triple the time in these regions compared to others. Past a certain threshold, a team must consider booking hotel rooms, renting vans or buses, or even flying just to attend a club or NIRCA competition. Competitions are also less likely to be hosted when few competitors can attend. Just these two factors alone make it almost impossible for clubs in sparser regions to fill their schedules with NIRCA competitions. To them, attending a NIRCA competition may be seen as a treat rather than a staple.



In 2017, NIRCA introduced its XC Championship Race Qualification Standards that build a roster for the Championship Race based on team and individual performances at each Regionals event. Here is a brief overview of these qualification standards:

- Each region is given X teams to qualify, and Y individuals to qualify.
- A team qualifies if it is one of the top X teams at their Regionals event.
- An individual qualifies if both:
 - They are one of the top Y individuals at their Regionals event, and
 - They are one of the top 7 finishers on their team.

Notice that with this system, athletes from qualifying teams are not removed from the pool of individuals who can qualify individually, so it is possible for an individual to both qualify with their team and as an individual, effectively taking 2 qualifying spots. This scenario happens more often than one might think: Table 1.4 below shows just how prevalent “double-qualifying” was in Fall of 2019.

| Sex | Women | | | Men | | | |
|--------------|-----------|------------|------------------|-----------------------------|------------|------------------|-----------------------------|
| | Region | Team Slots | Individual Slots | Qualifying Individuals 2019 | Team Slots | Individual Slots | Qualifying Individuals 2019 |
| Northeast | 5 | 15 | | 6 | 6 | 15 | 3 |
| Mid-Atlantic | 9 | 25 | | 7 | 10 | 25 | 3 |
| Southeast | 3 | 10 | | 1 | 4 | 10 | 2 |
| Great Lakes | 7 | 20 | | 1 | 7 | 20 | 1 |
| Great Plains | 6 | 15 | | 2 | 6 | 15 | 0 |
| Heartland | 0 | 0 | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Pacific | 5 | 10 | | 5 | 6 | 10 | 0 |
| Total | 35 | 95 | | 22 | 39 | 95 | 9 |

Table 1.4: The prevalence of “double-qualifying” in 2019 [1]. Team Slots and Individual Slots are decided by NIRCA as maximum entries into the Championship Race. However, only a small number of the awarded individual slots are awarded to individuals whose teams have not already qualified.

First, we notice that “double-qualifying” actually explains the majority of individual qualifications for the Championship Race. In fact, only 9 men who earned an individual slot actually needed it: because the other 86 individual slots were earned by individuals whose teams were already qualified for the Championship Race. Similarly, only 22 women who earned an individual slot actually needed it. The table above also makes obvious a curious fact: that men are allowed 95 individuals and 39 teams to qualify, whereas women are only allowed 95 individuals and 35 teams, a difference of 28 athletes permitted to race during the Championship Race. Note that the numbers in Table 1.4 above only signify individuals and teams who *qualified* for the Championship Race, not necessarily who *attended* the Championship Race.

NIRCA is responsible for hosting multiple championships in cross country, track & field, and the half marathon, which are events that attract numerous athletes. In 2019, NIRCA's Track & Field Nationals involved around 1,938 individual races or performances (35% female), yet many athletes may have competed in multiple events, making the number of individuals competing significantly lower [1]. That same weekend, NIRCA's Half Marathon Nationals welcomed a humbler 161 athletes (41% female). Later in the year, NIRCA's



Cross Country Nationals involved 1,432 runners across six races (38% female).

NIRCA offers online information and services through its website: ClubRunning.org [1]. One of the key features of this website is to host registrations for many club competitions: both invitationals hosted by clubs, and NIRCA Championships such as Nationals or Regionals. In the Spring of 2019, NIRCA's website hosted 21 club invitationals, while NIRCA organized its annual Track & Field Nationals in tandem with Half Marathon Nationals. In the Fall of 2019, NIRCA's website hosted 24 club cross country invitationals, granting 21 of them NIRCA Qualifier status. That same season, NIRCA organized six regional meets as well as Cross Country Nationals in tandem with an open 6K race.

NIRCA also offers a few resources meant to instruct club leaders on how to utilize their website, satisfy eligibility and registration requirements, and operate with NIRCA. Most notably, the *NIRCA Club Leader Guide* explains officer transitions, updating rosters, renewing club membership, paying NIRCA dues, eligibility criteria, race management, and the Athlete Code of Conduct [8, 9]. Their website offers occasional articles, information about member clubs, and some introductory steps for new clubs [10].

NIRCA is certainly a multifaceted organization that has had 14 years to develop into what it is today. This chapter was meant to summarize the state of club running and NIRCA to provide some context for the remaining five chapters. For analysis and advice pertaining to running clubs, consider reading through any of Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5. To see how we convert all of our observations into recommendations to NIRCA, look to Chapter 6.



Chapter 2

Club Finances

2.1 The Cost of Running a Running Club

Financing was the single most difficult aspect of operating a running club found in the responses to our questionnaire. While the act of running may require little equipment or facility space compared to other sports, there are numerous costs associated with running clubs throughout the year.

As an extreme example, one large running club reportedly spent over \$40,000 in the 2018-2019 academic year. About \$30,000 of that was paid for by the members through dues, merchandise sales, or various smaller payments. But the other \$10,000 was sourced from alternative fundraisers. That same club even raised over \$65,000 that year for a charity.

A large majority of running clubs are interested in joining NIRCA for its unique and well-established competitive opportunities. Membership in NIRCA requires payment of NIRCA dues, as well as race entry fees, of which there are four options, labeled Options 1, 2(a), 2(b), and 3 [11]. The NIRCA Dues & Entry Fees structure in 2019 is summarized in Table 2.1 below.

| Option | Option 1 | Option 2(a) | Option 2(b) | Option 3 |
|-------------------------------|----------|-------------|-------------|----------|
| Upfront Dues | \$300 | \$850 | \$850 | \$1,350 |
| XC Regionals fee per athlete | \$25 | \$10 | \$25 | \$10 |
| XC Nationals fee per athlete | \$25 | \$25 | \$25 | \$25 |
| T&F Nationals fee per athlete | \$25 | \$25 | \$10 | \$10 |
| Half Marathon fee per athlete | \$40 | \$40 | \$40 | \$40 |

Table 2.1: NIRCA dues and entry fees options offered [11]. Note that Options 2(a) and 2(b) are both labelled as “Option 2” by NIRCA.

When deciding which dues/fees option to select, your club (especially the Treasurer) should estimate the number of athletes interested in each of the listed competitive opportunities and anticipate which option will be the least expensive. We have drafted competition appearance breakdowns for some example clubs in Table 2.2, and computed the cheapest dues/fees option for each as a reference in Table 2.3.



| Club Type | #Athletes at XC Regionals | #Athletes at XC Nationals | #Athletes at T&F Nationals | #Athletes at Half Marathon |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Small Running Club | 7 | 7 | 7 | 1 |
| Mid-Sized Running Club | 30 | 25 | 30 | 5 |
| Mid-Sized XC Club | 35 | 25 | 7 | 15 |
| Mid-Sized Track Club | 3 | 0 | 35 | 2 |
| Mid-Sized Marathon Club | 5 | 5 | 0 | 25 |
| Large Running Club | 70 | 70 | 60 | 20 |
| Large XC Club | 80 | 70 | 7 | 35 |
| Large Track Club | 7 | 7 | 70 | 7 |

Table 2.2: Example club competition appearance breakdown. These numbers were created to model existing clubs and how many athletes they bring to each of the charged NIRCA competitions. There may be large variations between these example clubs and your own; so use the following calculations as inspiration, not instruction.

| Club Type | Option 1 | Option 2(a) | Option 2(b) | Option 3 | Cheapest Option | Minimum Cost |
|-------------------------|----------|-------------|-------------|----------|-----------------|--------------|
| Small Running Club | \$915 | \$1,310 | \$1,310 | \$1,705 | Option 1 | \$915 |
| Mid-Sized Running Club | \$2,675 | \$2,725 | \$2,725 | \$2,775 | Option 1 | \$2,675 |
| Mid-Sized XC Club | \$2,625 | \$2,600 | \$3,020 | \$2,995 | Option 2(a) | \$2,600 |
| Mid-Sized Track Club | \$1,380 | \$1,835 | \$1,355 | \$1,810 | Option 2(b) | \$1,355 |
| Mid-Sized Marathon Club | \$1,600 | \$2,025 | \$2,100 | \$2,525 | Option 1 | \$1,600 |
| Large Running Club | \$6,150 | \$5,600 | \$5,750 | \$5,200 | Option 3 | \$5,200 |
| Large XC Club | \$5,675 | \$4,975 | \$6,070 | \$5,370 | Option 2(a) | \$4,975 |
| Large Track Club | \$2,730 | \$3,125 | \$2,180 | \$2,575 | Option 2(b) | \$2,180 |

Table 2.3: Cost to example clubs to compete join and compete with NIRCA for each dues & entry fees option. From the four options, the cheapest NIRCA Dues & Entry Fees option is identified for each example club. Notice that each of the options is the cheapest for at least one example club.

Using Table 2.3, we can see how much each example club would expect to pay NIRCA through combined dues and entry fees into the four types of NIRCA championships. Each of the four NIRCA Dues & Entry Fees options are cheapest for at least one example club.

Selecting to pay a dues/fee option that is not the cheapest can be a rather costly mistake to your club. In other words, there is value in determining which option will be the cheapest for your club. In Table 2.4, we have calculated the cost of making a mistake and choosing only the second cheapest option for each example club from before.

Given the cheapest dues options for each example club, we can then compute how much the average athlete costs at a typical NIRCA competition (see Table 2.5).



| Club Type | Second Cheapest Option Cost | Total Cost of the Mistake | #Athletes Competing* | Cost of Mistake per Athlete |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| Small Running Club | \$1,310 | \$395 | 11 | \$35.91 |
| Mid-Sized Running Club | \$2,725 | \$50 | 45 | \$1.11 |
| Mid-Sized XC Club | \$2,625 | \$25 | 35 | \$0.71 |
| Mid-Sized Track Club | \$1,380 | \$25 | 37 | \$0.68 |
| Mid-Sized Marathon Club | \$2,025 | \$425 | 25 | \$17.00 |
| Large Running Club | \$5,600 | \$400 | 100 | \$4.00 |
| Large XC Club | \$5,370 | \$395 | 80 | \$4.94 |
| Large Track Club | \$2,575 | \$395 | 77 | \$5.13 |

Table 2.4: The total cost to a club that chooses the second cheapest NIRCA Dues & Entry Fees option, as well as the cost per athlete. Think of these costs as incentives to calculate the best dues & fees option for your club.

*: The approximate number of athletes competing was calculated in the following way. XC-specific clubs were assigned all of their XC Regionals attendance. Track-specific or Marathon-specific clubs were assigned the sum of their T&F and Half Marathon Nationals attendances. General running clubs were assigned the sum of their XC Regionals attendance and half of their T&F Nationals attendance. This system for counting was designed to be reasonable and avoid double-counting athletes, but this could be refined.

| Club Type | Total Athlete Appearances | Average Cost per Athlete Appearance |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Small Running Club | 22 | \$41.59 |
| Mid-Sized Running Club | 90 | \$29.72 |
| Mid-Sized XC Club | 82 | \$31.71 |
| Mid-Sized Track Club | 40 | \$33.88 |
| Mid-Sized Marathon Club | 35 | \$45.71 |
| Large Running Club | 220 | \$23.64 |
| Large XC Club | 192 | \$25.91 |
| Large Track Club | 91 | \$23.96 |

Table 2.5: Average cost breakdown per athlete to attend a NIRCA competition for each example club.

Notice that smaller clubs pay more for their athletes to attend NIRCA competitions, despite bringing proportionally fewer members to the most expensive race (Half Marathon Nationals). Within each type of club (i.e. “Running,” “XC,” and “Track”), cost per athlete appearance significantly decreases as the number of athletes on their club competing increases. You may interpret this as larger clubs having a discount for their large volume, but one can just as easily see this inequity in price as smaller clubs subsidizing NIRCA competitions for larger clubs.

Cross country specific clubs will likely pay more in total to NIRCA to compete per year than their track & field counterparts, as they must pay entry fees to both a regional and national meet, rather than just a national meet. Multiple clubs reported having trouble affording NIRCA Dues & Entry Fees, causing them to suspend their memberships indefinitely. Other clubs found it difficult to pay NIRCA dues depending on the deadline for payment and when their school years began. While many clubs can simply request for their school to fund their league dues through some sort of allocation process, other clubs need to actively fundraise to maintain their memberships in NIRCA.

Admittedly, entry fees and NIRCA dues might not compare to the money spent traveling and lodging for



these competitions. For instance, a typical hotel room fitting four athletes might cost \$100, while the cost of traveling to an event can range from being fully-reimbursed by the school to costing thousands of dollars to bus or fly each member there. These costs heavily depend on the financial circumstances imposed by your school, your location relative to competitions, and the number of competitive members on your club. Regardless, most teams report travel expenses being their largest out-of-pocket cost throughout the school year. Moreover, there is only so much a club can do to minimize these costs without sacrificing the number of people attending each event.

There are many other costs beyond NIRCA dues, entry fees, travel, and lodging for running clubs to afford. These may include hosting team dinners, accessing certain training facilities, hosting races, and renting banquet halls, to name a few.

Through our analysis, we identified two significant indicators of financial troubles. First, older clubs experienced significantly less financial worries than younger ones. The average age of a club that felt comfortable in its financial state was just under 10 years old. This makes sense: older clubs are likely to have settled on sufficient fundraisers, competitive schedules, and dues structures to fit their needs; and some younger clubs that never found satisfactory financial plans may not have survived for very long. Older clubs may also benefit from having more established club sports programs with better resources at their schools. In the same vein, a team's typical practice attendance also correlated with financial success. The average attendance at a normal practice for a club that felt comfortable in its financial state was 25 members, compared to under 14 members for teams less satisfied with their finances. Intuitively, having more members constantly involved might suggest stronger participation in team fundraisers and more members finding donations or funds for the club. While we have no means to conclude any sort of causal relationship, we just want to stress that financial worries seem to significantly disappear as we look at older and more highly participated clubs.

The uniqueness of each club's financial situation prevents us from identifying a universal solution to generating sufficient funds for everything your club wishes to afford, but we have compiled some useful principles for financing and many widely-applicable fundraising ideas for your consideration in the following sections.

2.2 Role of the Treasurer

Having a strong Treasurer position within your club's leadership is vital for financial success. Your club's ability to do the things it wishes to do is limited by its finances. Therefore, in essence, the Treasurer should be ensuring that the team has the means to accomplish all of its goals. We encourage each club Treasurer to consider which of the suggestions provided in this chapter might be applicable to their club's finances.

A Treasurer might be expected to maintain detailed records of club expenditures and incomes, while also being the primary handler of the club's money. A Treasurer should be using their records to project future costs, anticipate budget shortfalls, develop plans for future spending and fundraising, and inform other club leaders of the club's financial situation. A strong, communicative relationship between the Treasurer and, say, the President, will help ensure that all future decisions will respect the club's financial interests. A similarly strong and communicative relationship between the Treasurer and whatever leader oversees team merchandise orders will prevent the club from spending money it does not have. The Treasurer should be notified about all financial items; yet the Treasurer should regularly update all club leaders about the state of their club's finances.

There is value in being open about club finances with general members. Members generally appreciate transparency from team leadership, especially when they are asked to annually invest money into the club. The Treasurer should be willing to discuss why certain decisions were made, answer how they plan to responsibly



use club funds, and develop a resilient fiscal plan that benefits everyone equitably.

A Treasurer should be thinking toward the future: not only are they the handler of money for the year, but they are also responsible for bracing the club to be able to do what it would like to do for years to come. Perhaps the way they accomplish this is by reserving a certain amount of surplus that carries over to future years, meant to offset particularly expensive items without noticeably crippling the club. Any poor decision made by your club's current or future leaders has the potential to negatively impact the club's finances for years to come, which is why it is important to prepare for unintended costs. As a disclaimer: your club members may not appreciate being charged double the costs of meet entries and merchandise simply so the club can have some extra cushioning. Try to grow a surplus through means that does not unnecessarily burden your members.

A proactive Treasurer may not only care about funds balancing in the end: they may also care about providing swift service. Perhaps another set of goals for a Treasurer would be to deliver team merchandise, travel expense reimbursements, etc. in a timely manner. It is important to collect dues and other debts from your members quickly. Doing so allows your club to afford merchandise, NIRCA dues, meet entry fees, etc. as soon as possible. And as a Treasurer, knowing your club's income from dues and uniform orders helps your club leadership understand how much money your club has available for planning future activities, and judge whether or not you will need to employ more fundraisers during the year.

2.3 Dues

We define club dues in this report as a mandatory payment system connected to club membership and involvement. Dues have the potential to be one of your club's largest sources of income, and can thereby determine what kinds of opportunities will be available to your members.

There are two main dues structures commonly employed by running clubs: either a one-time flat fee, or on a per-meet basis. On one extreme, the flat fee asks members to fund their year of all possible competitions, social events, and/or merchandise upfront. This option can be modified depending on whether or not a member wishes to compete. On the other end, some teams prefer to have each member pay only for what they want to do or receive. But the most common dues structure is to have some combination of these two systems.

A mixed dues structure will ask for upfront dues plus possible fees or payments for optional things. For instance, it may make sense for your club to ask members for upfront dues that fund things available to all members like team shirts and pasta parties, but still ask members to pay for optional events like certain races or merchandise. Having a one-time flat fee might make more sense for established clubs with high participation in competitions from its members. For clubs who must bus or fly to regional or national meets, or possibly limit their travel team due to finances, they could choose to only ask for money from the traveling members for those events. Most clubs choose to have dues cover or subsidize a combination of the following things:

- Meet entries
- Lodging
- Travel
- Food/team dinners
- Renting facilities
- Various social events
- Uniforms and team merchandise
- Purchasing equipment

We encourage your club to make an informed decision on what dues structure and fees would make sense given your financial situation. Obviously, there is a danger in imposing prohibitively expensive dues. Moreover, individually collecting payments for each meet or event may prove exhausting to both your Treasurer and



members. Ideally, dues should be spent on things that directly benefit your members. We do not suggest for your club to invest any of its dues income on exclusive (or 21+) events. Members will rightly expect their dues to be funding vital team functions.

As a gauge on what other clubs actually charge their members, we found from our sample that the median/average cost of dues on teams that charge one-time dues to competing members is \$50/\$65 respectively. Those for non-competing members average around \$20 each. The highest upfront dues we encountered were \$250 per year. Alternatively, clubs with a primarily per-meet dues structure may charge \$30 upfront and \$15 per meet on average. Take these numbers lightly, though, as our data is not very representative, and no team's financial situation is exactly identical.

2.4 Alternative Fundraising

If there is anything you should take away from this section, it is that there are many creative ways to generate funds for your club that you may not have considered. These opportunities extend beyond the typical dues/fees and merchandise offered to your members. We can classify these opportunities into four categories:

- 1. Services:** Working for money is one of the most straightforward and reliable ways of generating funds every year, and it has the potential to be a significant source of your club's income. There are likely many opportunities to staff events in your area, especially large events like athletics or concerts. Some running clubs choose to make one or two of these events mandatory for their members to attend per year, justifying their work by asking for lower dues. Always look for opportunities that will pay you well for your efforts!

Examples

- (a) Selling concessions at a sporting event.
- (b) Cleaning up a stadium after a sporting event.
- (c) Staffing local high school or professional races.
- (d) Staffing security or ushering at concerts.

- 2. Campaigns:** Campaigns require some creativity and team-wide participation to be successful. Campaigns can ask for donations directly from friends, family, and alumni; they can involve partnering with local businesses to receive small cuts of their sales; or they can be in the form of sponsorships. Campaigns may not be repeatable every year, but they have the potential to reach many people outside of your club. When performing a campaign, it may help to advertise your club, its mission, and how it plans to use the funds. Many clubs find a lot of success in campaigning to their alumni.

Examples

- (a) Events to encourage alumni to return and reinvest in the club.
- (b) Restaurant partnerships: obtain a portion of all sales for a night.
- (c) Donation campaigns with a monetary goal and social media coverage.
- (d) Local companies may be willing to sponsor/donate to your club.
- (e) Selling merchandise to people outside of your club (like alumni and parents).

Check out this feature from Robert Morris University Club Cross Country & Track Team about how their club has benefited from a company sponsorship.



“

The Robert Morris University Club Cross Country & Track Team formed over the course of the Spring 2019 semester with the idea of bringing running back to our campus as we had previously lost our DI Men's Cross Country and Track Team a couple years ago. Vincent Capozzolo, Jay Olu-Wehuje, and I, Tyler Slaney, coordinated with our Club Sports Director to formulate a plan to start our all-inclusive club in the following Fall 2019 semester. We hosted an information session on what we expected our club to provide potential members and gathered interest across the campus to see who would be willing to join if we successfully created the club team.

Over summer, we stayed in contact with our Club Sports Director and eventually found out that P3R, the organization who coordinates the Pittsburgh Marathon, expressed interested in supporting our club and developing a partnership. Oddly enough, the CEO of P3R, Troy Schooley, was a former student and alumni at Robert Morris University and wanted to offer a helping hand to start our running club. They have since provided us with our custom-made uniforms, a tent for our meets, check-up visits from one of Troy's assistants at practices, and other small odds and ends as our first season came to its conclusion. The stipulations to this partnership include completing volunteer hours through P3R at their annual EQT 10-miler event in Pittsburgh to honor our partnership. In less than a year, our partnership reshaped the future of our club team for the better and we have ultimately established ourselves on our campus.

As for looking for sponsorships/partnerships, we were fortunate enough to have an alumnus who had the ability to help our club team at the right time, but the advice that I would give to other clubs looking for possible sponsorships/partnerships would be to try contacting any alumni that may be willing to give back and building a network with them. I would also look towards running-related businesses that could possibly partner with a club team to branch out their company to other runners that see these partnerships at meets. My last bit of advice would be to offer to give back to any organization that partners with your club. It is a two way street and if done properly, your partnership can be a vital asset to your club's long-term development and its overall success!

Written by Tyler Slaney

Robert Morris University

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You can check out more about Robert Morris University's unique partnership with this press release from P3R [12].

3. **Awards:** Awards may be the most underutilized of options available to your team to generate income. Specifically, your school may offer many funds of which you are unaware. While some of these funds may require a small, convincing presentation to be awarded, they are essentially free money. Just a little organizational work by your club leadership can earn your club hundreds or thousands of dollars. Albeit, some funds are meant to accomplish specific things, like pay for equipment or facility spaces. Your campus recreation department may also allocate money to your club each year. Treat all of these opportunities seriously so that you can spend less time worrying about money, but more time doing great things with it! Try to discover new funds available to your club by asking around to other club leaders, your student government, your campus recreation staff, or staff involved with more general student affairs.



Examples

- (a) Your student government may have awards specifically meant to redirect students' tuition to student organizations.
- (b) Your school may match any donations or fundraising you do for your club.
- (c) Your school may reward community service with financial compensations.
- (d) Your campus recreation department or student government may offer funds that subsidize facility use (especially useful for renting tracks or cross country courses).

Before presenting the final category for alternative fundraisers, we suggest you check out how Mizzou Club Running strategically handles it finances using many of the principles discussed in this chapter.

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Mizzou Club Running has several main funding sources. These include member dues, race fees, professional sponsorships, and allocation money from our university's Club Sports organization.

We collect dues from each member at the beginning of the school year. The past two years this has been \$45 for the entire year. Official members of our club receive a t-shirt, the ability to enter races with us, 10% off at two local athletic shops, and access to an athletic trainer provided by our university's Club Sports organization. As we attend races throughout the year, we charge each participant anywhere from \$5-\$40 to go based on the race entry fee, location, and travel expenses.

Our Club Sports organization also provides us with a set amount of allocation money each year. The amount each club receives is based on a tier system that is determined by number of competitions attended, number of members, and association with a national sport organization (like NIRCA!). This year we received \$2,500.

We try to sell some sort of team gear every year or two. Typically, this is sweatshirts with our club logo on them. This year we also gave members the option to purchase a jersey. For each of these, we make the prices high enough that the club gets a \$5-\$10 profit off each item.

One of our greatest funding sources comes from sponsors. Each summer we reach out to businesses around Missouri and neighboring states that we believe may be interested in donating to our club. We use a spreadsheet that we created to keep track of business names, contact information, and sponsorship interest. We are usually able to obtain a couple thousand dollars through this method. We have had the most success with getting funding from track clubs, athletic stores, and businesses with a personal connection to one of our members. We also try to contact alumni who may be interested in donating to the club. By doing this, we have received monetary aid, discounts from local running stores, and discounts on team gear. In exchange for their support, these organizations get their company logo advertised on our website, Facebook page, and the back of our t-shirts. We also volunteer at local races hosted by track clubs as a thank you for their donations.

Written by Sally Heil

University of Missouri

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4. **Events:** Your club may find it advantageous to not only staff existing events, but to create events of its own! For a running club, the most obvious option is to host a race. There are numerous clubs in NIRCA who host their own cross country or track & field invitationals. And some clubs host local, open races. Obviously, the more registrants you have, the greater your income will be from the event. But in order to maximize your profit, you want to find a balance between a quality experience for your participants and an inexpensive setup. Unfortunately, the success of your event may depend heavily on extraneous circumstances beyond your control, such as the weather, your distance to other club teams, the availability of facilities or fields, the attitude towards running in your area, etc. Regardless, if you decide that hosting an event makes sense for your club, then give it your best shot, and prepare your successors to host an even better version of the event next time. Be sure to start planning events far in advance, because they will almost always require a lot of work.

Examples

- (a) If hosting a race yourself isn't feasible, consider reaching out to nearby running clubs to co-host an event (splitting costs and responsibilities).
- (b) For clubs that aren't able to attract many other collegiate running clubs, hosting a local 5K or similar can be a great alternative.
- (c) Your first few years hosting a race may not be particularly profitable; the goal is to establish the event and discover what works best.
- (d) Consider applying for NIRCA Qualifier status to attract more clubs interested in qualifying their athletes for NIRCA XC Nationals.

For an encouraging example of how an existing running club makes the most of its situation to host a successful cross country meet, check out this feature from Princeton Running Club.



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The Princeton Running Club hosts the NIRCA qualifying Princeton Invitational every October. We usually work closely with our university's campus recreation department to reserve the space, as well as set up equipment/course markings and reserve an ambulance for the day of the meet. First and foremost, we try to host our meet the day after the varsity cross country teams' invitational; this way, much of the equipment: course markers, finish chute, tents, and portable restrooms are all left in place from the day before. If this isn't possible (as in 2018), we search and contact nearby parks (shout-out to Rutgers Running Club for helping us out here) for information on whether they would be willing to host us for our meet. Once we reach an agreement, we establish that the necessary facilities are available, particularly bathrooms, trash cans, tables, course markers. We bring whatever the park does not have: in 2018, we bought stakes/flags and spray paint to mark the course a few days in advance, as well as a few extra tables from campus recreation.

In terms of timing, we always use electronic chip timing via a local timing company, finding them via Google search and contacting them directly.

In terms of communication, we send an email blast to most Mid-Atlantic and Northeast NIRCA teams in mid-July, when teams start planning their fall season, as well as well as a few weeks leading up to the meet to remind teams to sign up.

We also like to provide bagels and bananas, done via Panera Bread's catering service and Wegmans (if you call in advance, they will set aside large boxes of bananas from storage).

Finally, prizes — these vary but we try to go the creative route. We've usually done rubber ducks, but see if someone on your team can whip up some interesting prizes (this year, we had a member who 3D printed our trophies!)

For us, the most important feature of a well-planned meet is preparedness — we rely on a tried and true checklist each year to make sure we've hit all the major points. Let us know if you're planning a meet and might want our checklist for reference! Close communication with our campus rec department is also key; it helps to delegate tasks so we know everything is accounted for.

Written by Catherine Song

Princeton University

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We encourage you to be creative with your fundraisers, as well as resilient when faced with any failures. On your journey towards financial security, you may be surprised to discover how having more funds can open many doors for your club that you used to consider impossible.



Chapter 3

Club Membership

3.1 Recruitment

As a running club, you might not be scouting at local high schools to buy new talent. But recruitment is still essential to the continued success of your club. Having more members allows for better financial stability, more friendships, improved competitiveness, and better chances of recruiting more members in the future. And sometimes less-calculated efforts like word of mouth or presence on campus can be enough to attract new members.

There is one factor that is arguably the most influential to recruitment: having a team website. Based on the sample from our questionnaire, we found a statistically significant, positive relationship between having a team website and the number of signups to a running club in the beginning of the year. Teams with websites each welcomed nearly 97 prospective members in the beginning of the year, while those without websites attracted around 43. Obviously this difference isn't totally explained by having a website, since larger clubs are also more likely to have websites. However, multiple clubs reported a large number of their newest members crediting the team website for positively introducing them to the team. Offering the following aspects on your team's website can significantly improve your club's ability to recruit:

- **A mission statement:** so prospective members can understand the purpose and goals of your club.
- **Leadership contact information:** so prospective members can contact particular leaders with any questions.
- **Leadership personality blurbs:** so prospective members can get a sense of the attitude for running and the club from some of its most committed members.
- **Running routes:** so prospective members can get excited about learning the area with your team.
- **Registration information:** so prospective members can understand the process for becoming a member,

Try to advertise the aspects that make your club fun, rewarding, and healthy throughout your website.

When interacting with prospective members in person, whether that be at practice, at an involvement fair, or elsewhere, you will want to tailor your pitch to the person. Depending on the goals of your club and the goals of the inquiring member, you will want to advertise the corresponding activities and accomplishments of your club. Make sure they know why this club is the right fit for them.

While we believe increasingly more high schoolers are hearing about the opportunities offered by collegiate running clubs, there are still many high school athletes that think varsity athletics is their only option to continue competing in college. Perhaps it just takes one email or visit to express to high schoolers the joys of club running. And you can always link to your club website to let them learn more on their own time.



We have compiled many strategies for recruitment below based on responses to our questionnaire:

- Having a team website.
- Tabling at Involvement Fairs (or events for specific groups of students, such as first-year, graduate, international, transfer, or honors students).
- Meeting and running on-campus for visibility.
- Asking current members to tell their classmates, friends, and old high school teams.
- Hanging flyers or posters around campus (dining commons, recreation buildings, residence halls, educational buildings, bathrooms, etc.) or even on public transportation.
- Emailing high school coaches to ask them to share your club's information with their athletes.
- Traveling to big high school meets to inform high schoolers about club running.
- Having a presence on social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter.
- Wearing team merchandise around campus.
- Holding a general, introductory meeting at the beginning of the year.

Keep in mind that building a larger team takes more than simply finding prospective members: you also want to give them a reason to stay. Check out this feature from Ithaca College Running Club, a team that has successfully employed some strong recruitment strategies in its first few years as a club.



Ithaca College's Running Club was founded in Spring 2017 by Meghan Beahan. It's been fully functioning as a club since Fall 2017.

In the past three years we have seen a lot of growth when we welcome incoming freshmen. In the club's third year, we are still lacking a lot of senior members, but we have a solid showing from juniors, sophomores and freshmen who were all aware of the club going into their first year. We believe we have less seniors because the club wasn't around in their freshman year and most people join clubs that they become heavily involved in in their first year of college. By next year, we should have a well-rounded club with plenty of committed seniors, juniors, sophomores and freshmen. The key to getting a lot of involvement in that first year so the student will continue with the club in this way is having a lot of first contacts with them as early as possible. We attend first year organization fairs (organization fairs specifically for first year students) and the organization fairs open to all students. We also table at admission events so we can talk to students before most of them have even committed to it. Our club sports director kept tabs of the students who were interested at the admission events (usually occurring in the Spring) and we reach out to them over email in the summer to let them know about our interest meeting and the organization fair dates so they can officially sign up for the club.

The most important part of getting people involved and keeping them involved is outreach. It includes that initial outreach. And, once we have them in the club then we do plenty of team bonding events. If we have students who are coming to practice not only to run (because they can do that on their own) but coming because their best friends are on the club, then we can be sure they won't stop coming to practice.

Written by Ashley Stalnecker

Ithaca College



3.2 Retention

One of the most commonly identified problems with membership on running clubs found through our questionnaire is retention. While your club may be able to attract many new members each year, it may struggle to engage them consistently throughout the year. How well your club can retain its members depends on the kinds of opportunities being provided to them. If you are on a club that wishes to welcome members of any ability or competitiveness, then there may be two competing (but not mutually exclusive) interests between your members:

- *Athletic*: chances to compete and train; and
- *Social*: chances to interact and have fun.

It can be difficult to strike a proper balance between these two interests, especially when every member has different definitions of what qualifies as athletic or social enough. Leaders should be thinking about what kinds of activities will cater to all of their members, and try to introduce more of those activities throughout the year. We have compiled a list below of some successful activities (beyond practices and official races) that may help your team's retention. Try to think about how certain activities could simultaneously satisfy the athletic and social needs of your members.

- Balanced “athletic” and “social”:
 - Themed holiday runs;
 - Destination long runs;
 - Intrasquad meets offering serious and less-serious events; and
 - Scavenger hunts during practice.
- Leaning “athletic”:
 - Optional running workouts;
 - Cross-training or activities like hiking, rock climbing, swimming, basketball, ultimate frisbee, etc.;
 - Retreats or running camps during breaks; and
 - Food-related races.
- Leaning “social”:
 - Pasta parties and team dinners;
 - Dinners after practice at dining halls;
 - Banquets or formal events;
 - Spirit weeks with daily themes;
 - Community service as a team;
 - Assassins or manhunt games;
 - Attending sporting events together; and
 - Bow-making before races.

This should go without saying, but no running club should be employing, encouraging, implying, or overlooking any means of hazing. Hazing is generally defined as “any action taken or any situation created intentionally that causes embarrassment, harassment, or ridicule and risks the emotional and/or physical harm to members of a group or team, whether new or not, regardless of the person’s willingness to participate” [13]. Hazing is



highly punishable by your school, and goes against the *NIRCA Athlete Code of Conduct* [9]. As a leader, you should not subject members to hazing just to be part of a running club; and as a member, you should not standby or accept hazing to take part in a running club. Use your school's campus recreation, student affairs, and/or counseling resources to report anything you perceive as hazing.

Check out this feature from Penn State Club Cross Country: a team with over 300 signups and at least 125 committed members each year, about their recruitment and retention successes.

With our school being so big, many incoming freshmen already know about the opportunity that our club offers, so they are proactive and email us for more information. One method that we rely heavily on is the Involvement Fair that happens at the start of every Fall and Spring semester. Each club brings their respective posters, flyers, candy, giveaways, all sorts of things. As people walk by, we try and recruit them to run with us! This is one of our most substantial means of recruiting new members. Even now as a senior, I can fondly remember who "recruited" me my freshman year. Another kind of silly thing that we do to recruit new members is that if we see people casually running by, we scream to them "Join Club XC! 4:30pm, Rec Hall." It seems very ineffective, but we have gotten some members that way!

I think the most common way people find out about our team is through social media (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram exclusively) and through our website. I think another way members find out about us is through word of mouth. As big as this campus is, members bring their friends, while current members welcome old teammates from their high school cross country teams.

I think something that keeps our members coming back are our events that we offer outside of practice. Things such as Dessert Night (for the ladies) and Meat Fest (for the guys). And more, like eating dinner together at the dining halls each night, pasta parties before races, and frisbee-Fridays, helps new members to form bonds and make lasting friendships. I also think one aspect of our club that keeps most of our members returning is the fact that we have a competitive and non-competitive membership option. While this is quite self-explanatory, I think that this is an amazing way to keep people on our team. It shows that we are not just a super competitive team, but that we welcome all runners of all abilities. Overall, I think that we have such good member retention because of how low intensity our team is. Our members can come whenever they want, whether it's every day or not at all. We suggest runs, but our members can run whatever they'd like, and our workouts are completely optional. Competitive members can decide which meets they attend, and our members ultimately decide how much they put into the team.

We also have great retention because our members are literally the best in the country.

Written by Caroline Cappello

Penn State University

Every club will have its own way of catering to its members, so take some time to identify the elements that make your club worth returning to, and then build more opportunities for your members using those elements.



3.3 Team Atmosphere

Retention also heavily depends on the perceived team atmosphere. A new member's experience, especially during their first few practices, can determine whether they return. Try to establish a shared responsibility between all members to welcome and pursue new members wholeheartedly. Meeting teammates gives a new member immediate friends, while meeting team leaders gives them a source to answer any questions or fears about the team.

Team atmosphere can be burdened by the existence of cliques. For example, multiple clubs reported splits between their distance runners and sprinters. Regardless of how they form, cliques have the potential to exclude members, place internal stress on club decisions, and fracture the overall team dynamic. Leaders of a club experiencing cliquiness should devote themselves towards building bridges across friend groups, as well as pursue social activities that promote inclusivity and meeting new people. Club leaders should understand their shared responsibility to unite all members under one team and serve all members equitably, not just their closest friends.

Check out this feature from Binghamton Running Club on how they maintain a positive team atmosphere.



Binghamton Running Club strives to be more than just another sport team for its members. In fact, we like to believe that we help create a second home of sorts for our athletes. We cater our practices to our team members instead of expecting them to conform to our expectations. Every practice consists of everyone choosing what kind of run they want to do that day, ranging from eight mile hard runs to three mile jogs. Whenever a new member arrives, we make sure that they are not running alone, even if that means a veteran member has to sacrifice their planned workout for the day. Even on "Workout Wednesdays," where multiple people go down to the track as opposed to the typical runs in the neighborhood, people are running a variety of different workouts; on top of that, there are a large number of people who choose to bypass the workouts entirely and do a more leisurely run elsewhere. By allowing individuals to determine their own level of training, we attract people from a wide variety of experience and skill.

We also keep members around by making sure that we do more than just run together. Every day after practice, a large portion of our team goes for a group dinner in a campus dining hall. During a practice just this Fall, most of us ran to a nearby swimming hole and took a team dip. Past activities have included lakeside barbecues, apple picking trips, and cereal eating contests. By spending so much time together, many of us have found our best friends through our club.

We do everything in our power to make new team members feel welcome; in fact, we have a whole e-board position largely devoted to it. In theory, the Sophomore Representatives serve as liaisons between the upper- and underclassmen; in practice, they also go above and beyond to make our new team members feel welcome. They make sure that they not only know about all of our team bonding events, but feel personally invited to all of it. Our running club keeps so many of our members because we are not only a group to run with, but a family to come home to.

Written by Austin Pizzella

Binghamton University



Team atmosphere can be strengthened by a shared sense of responsibility and accomplishment. Perhaps there is an athletic or social goal that many of your members wish to achieve. Try to build a team atmosphere that encourages accountability and shared purpose, as well as supports each member in their personal goals.



Chapter 4

Club Leadership

4.1 Leadership Structure

Club leaders are typically responsible for a wide range of defined roles, including handling club finances, discovering competitive opportunities for members, satisfying all requirements imposed by their school, and organizing club events. But there is more to leadership than just completing a job: club leaders actively think about the direction of the club, how the club could better serve its members, and the implications of all club decisions. In short, leading a running club is a tall order.

Not all leadership structures are equally capable of succeeding; but the particular structure that will serve your club best depends on many factors. In this section, we will discuss common approaches to leadership found within collegiate running clubs, and good leadership practices that can apply to just about any structure.

The two most common positions found within a running club's leadership are its President and Treasurer. While the Treasurer is likely to have a well-defined role (discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2), the President's role may be innately nebulous. It is often expected that the President be ultimately responsible for all things related to their club. As such, the President is not just the leader of the club, but also the leader of the club's leadership. Beyond these two positions, clubs choose to divide other responsibilities in a multitude of ways across a variable number of other leaders.

For general theory on leadership structure, we turn to the revered Social Change Model, which “encourages highly participatory, non-hierarchical leadership” [14, 15]. The model is based on the following premises:

- Leadership is socially responsible;
- Leadership is collaborative;
- Leadership is a process, not a position;
- Leadership is inclusive and accessible to all people;
- Leadership is value-based; and
- Community involvement and service is a powerful vehicle for leadership.

When applied to collegiate running clubs, the Social Change Model presents a framework in which to view club leadership as collaborative, inclusive, principled, and socially responsible. This model would encourage leaders of running clubs to consider:



- How self-awareness can aid decision-making;
- How to establish common purpose to enhance collaboration; and
- How to actively engage your members and the running community.

Based on these suggestions from the Social Change Model, we believe the single most important step towards fostering a successful leadership structure is for every leader to regularly communicate and identify their values and feelings with other leaders. Awareness of these underlying thoughts helps groups of leaders to efficiently, respectfully, and unanimously reach solutions. Unanimity is vital to ensure that your leadership can explain its decisions to the rest of the club. Moreover, sharing your leadership's core values with general members can help them trust and understand the process behind various decisions. One way to put this idea into practice, for example, might be to compile a list of principles, values, or goals shared by your club leaders at the beginning of their terms. Make that list easily accessible so that you can reference it whenever you are making difficult decisions in the future.

In order to maintain strong communication and accountability, it is important for your club's leaders to meet on a regular basis. For most clubs, we would recommend meeting weekly. As you deliberate and converse, make sure that everyone involved has shared their thoughts and ultimately consents to the final decision.

Based on our questionnaire, we see that roughly 63% of the variability in the number of club leadership positions is explained by its positive, linear relationship with average attendance at practices. More precisely, for every 20 additional members attending a normal practice, the average running club has 3 more leaders. This statistic makes sense: clubs with fewer members require fewer people fulfilling team duties, while larger clubs have both the need and manpower to fulfill more specific roles. For example, while a smaller club may be able to combine the duties of planning runs, workouts, and races into a single role, some larger clubs split those duties across multiple leaders. Specialization is a key quality to larger leadership structures, taking advantage of the strongest skills of each of its leaders.

But having more leaders is not necessarily better: many clubs already struggle to fill their current positions, and communication can become more difficult across larger groups of people. For leaders struggling with consistently negligent co-leaders, we encourage you to be both transparent and proactive with them. Give your co-leader a chance to improve after talking with them, and be understanding to their situation. You can be proactive by establishing shared expectations for every leader in the beginning of their terms, such as expectations on attendance at meets or practices, timeliness in fulfilling their duties, leading by example, or acceptable behavior.

A leadership structure that depends on the President or some other leader to do a majority of the work without much hope of delegation is neither healthy nor fair. Each leader should be able to freely request help from their concurrent leaders, and each leader should conversely be willing to reciprocate that kind of help when needed. We suggest your club's leaders consider themselves as a team rather than a hierarchy, and their roles as processes rather than positions. Such a symbiotic relationship thrives when your club leadership has established a sense of common purpose and responsibility toward serving the club. In the event of a co-leader exceptionally failing to fulfill their duties even after having been confronted, turn to your club's constitution for permissible procedures. Depending on the situation, a motion for their impeachment may be the club's best option. If your club has not yet developed its constitution in a way that aligns with your current values, consider submitting formal revisions that better reflect your principles. Try to draft rules for future groups of leaders that promote the values of the Social Change Model while still allowing for drastic measures such as impeachment or resignation. You can find many resources for writing useful constitutions from your school's student affairs departments, other clubs at your school, or other running clubs.



Our questionnaire also taught us that many clubs are thinking outside the box when it comes to leadership structure. For instance, because the role of President can be so daunting, multiple clubs have chosen to drop their President-Vice President pairing in exchange for a co-President system that recognizes two equal leaders of the club. Other clubs have created a position whose sole purpose is taking extra work off of particularly busy leaders. We should also mention that not all responsibilities need a formal position: sometimes allowing smaller roles like photographing, planning long runs, cross-training, etc. can be left to the general members to accomplish. Overall, do not feel confined to the traditional roles when structuring your club's leadership.

For a taste of how one running club fulfills many of the qualities encouraged by the Social Change Model with its leadership structure, check out this feature from MRun (Michigan Running Club).

“ On MRun, our leadership is structured so that we have a President and Vice President who oversee all activities happening within the club, work with the university and Club Sports as well as alumni and team sponsors. We have a Treasurer to handle all money matters, Distance and Sprint Training Chairs to make specialized training plans for the team, a Travel Coordinator to manage all our travel to meets, a Marketing/Fundraising Chair to get the word out there about our club, a Community Service Chair to help MRun be more involved in the community, two Social Chairs to make sure we always have fun and inclusive events, a Webmaster to manage our website, as well as a SWAG Chair to make sure we look good while doing all of it. All our positions are elected by the greater population of MRun at the end of each year.

This kind of leadership structure works for us because it gives members the chance to step up to be leaders in a variety of positions that people can bring their specialized skills to. It also helps to have a variety of positions that way people can focus on their specific tasks and put all their efforts into that one area, instead of someone being overloaded having too many responsibilities. The expectations for each student leader is to be open to getting to know the members of the club as well as listening to their ideas on important issues. We expect our leaders to be present at most events, and to set an example of the kind of respect and hard work we value on MRun.

I think a club can encourage this kind of leadership by advertising to its members that anyone can be a leader. With open elections, it allows any club member who wants to be more involved to step up and help bring their unique perspective in to making the club even better. Letting your members know they are highly valued and their input to club operations is critical in not only making people feel important and getting them to continue with the club, but also in gaining new insight that might not be discovered if leadership positions were not accessible to everyone.

Written by Anna Piccione

University of Michigan

A developing club may still be searching for a suitable leadership structure for itself, while an older club has likely already adopted its preferred leadership structure. One leader of a younger club remarked in our questionnaire that they “feel confidently that we have chosen the right leadership and it is working well for us. We have dedicated members who care a lot about the team. We have a lot of fun together. But there are always new things to work out as we are a new team. There’s a lot of adjusting. And we are growing quickly so these tactics might need to change as we grow.” Regardless of the club’s age, we encourage every club leader to be critical of their typical procedures and consider how certain changes could potentially improve their club.



4.2 Selecting New Leaders

Responses to our questionnaire revealed two key variables in selecting new leaders: when selections occur, and who gets a say.

Clubs tend to initiate new leaders into their year-long positions at the end of their Fall or Spring seasons. Many clubs refresh their leadership after their primary season, if they have one. For example, if you are a club primarily focused on cross country races in the Fall, it may make more sense to have leaders renew before the Spring, as the new leaders will have time to learn their positions well before their most intensive season. Oppositely, a club focused on track and field events in the Spring may benefit from selecting new leaders after their Spring season. An added benefit to rolling over leaders in the middle of the academic year is that old leaders will be around to train or advise new leaders for a while. There can obviously be restrictions placed by your school on when new leaders may be switched or trained; but if you have the choice, consider which time period for electing new leaders makes the most sense for your club. Currently, about 60% of clubs change over leaders at the end of the Fall, and the rest do so in the Spring.

Even more important is to discuss how new leaders are selected. Some clubs have expiring leaders either wholly or partially select their successors under the basic premise that they will be the most qualified to judge which candidate would make for the best replacement. While this logic has some merit, it is important to also consider the interests of the general membership. First, inherent biases and friendships can prevent adequate diversity and representation from appearing in the next set of chosen leaders. Additionally, the values shared by one board of leaders might not align with the values of the younger classes. You must ask: in what other ways can general members place checks and balances on the club's leaders if they are unable to fully pick their leaders? If leaders are left unaccountable to the club, they will struggle to form a trusting team atmosphere with their teammates. The great benefit to having general members mostly decide their next set of leaders is that they can feel that their interests were represented with their votes.

The majority of clubs choose to rely on a fully democratic election with the most voted-for candidate receiving the respective position. Admittedly, democratic elections are not innately perfect; many clubs reported their elections have degenerated into popularity contests. An election that is decided by the popularity of candidates will inevitably fail to represent the best interests of the club. Voting based on popularity will also perpetuate marginalism on your club by obstructing any marginalized individuals from leadership positions. Another potential problem with elections is their inclination to reselect incumbent leaders. The argument, "I have been a leader before, and I know what it takes to fulfill the duties of this position," is hard to refute, especially by a challenger with no prior experience leading the club, even if they are more qualified or committed.

As a club leader preparing for elections, there are many measures you can take to avoid your election collapsing into a popularity contest or an immediate promotion for returning leaders. Some of these measures may belong in your club's constitution, while others are less formulaic:

- Every member's vote should count equally.
- Voting should be restricted to club members.
- Members who cannot attend elections should be provided absentee ballots with a description of each candidate's pitch.
- Candidates should have an equal chance to address attendees. No candidate should receive special treatment or support that was not also offered to the other candidates.
- Running for a position should be accessible. Perhaps you choose to allow anyone interested to run, or only members who have fulfilled a certain amount of basic requirements.



- Explicitly preface the election as a means of preparing the club to succeed in the following year, not just to vote in your friends.
- Ensure your ballots and order of speeches do not implicitly favor certain candidates.
- Have each candidate meet with the current leader in their desired position to gain an understanding of the associated expectations and responsibilities.
- Allow each member to understand the amount of work that it takes to be a leader throughout the year to illustrate why it does matter that their vote goes to the most qualified candidate.
- Holding elections well before the end of the year and integrating newly elected leaders into the current leaders' meetings allows transitions between leaders to happen more smoothly, diminishing the value in voting for a returning leader simply because of their experience.

We highly recommend adopting a primarily democratic system for selecting your next set of leaders, as it has the highest potential to elect qualified and generally trusted leaders, while promoting the creation of newer and bolder ideas through friendly competition.

4.3 Leadership and Wellness

It often occurs that the President of a running club is seen as the individual with the ultimate responsibility of overseeing all club functions. Or it can happen that a leader is held to an impossible standard when judged by others. Unrealistic expectations imposed by others or yourself can have negative effects on your well-being, and hence impact your ability to lead.

As a leader, it may be very easy to relate to the maxim: “If you want something done right, do it yourself.” Of course, it takes more time and effort to delegate or oversee than to just do the work yourself. As a leader, there are situations where taking on more work than usual makes sense. But this practice can easily erupt into a poor leadership dynamic. One of the most commonly cited problems with clubs’ leadership structures was the problem of the President doing a large majority of the work without being able to delegate tasks to, or adequately trust, their concurrent leaders. It is imperative that as leaders, you all establish a cohesive leadership structure on your club that promotes sharing ideas and feelings openly. You should also work to build trust between each other so the desire to ask for help or delegate can come more naturally.

Regardless of how well your leadership unit performs at delegating tasks, you are still going to be subjected to some amount of work and stress through your leadership responsibilities. Moreover, while you may be someone who regularly exercises (seeing as you are on a running club), your physical health can still be compromised by failing to get enough sleep, failing to adequately rest between workouts, or not eating well. Of course, these stressors will only compound with your already demanding student life.

Your ability to lead and communicate will greatly depend on your overall wellness. Notice that better wellness has a two-pronged benefit to your leadership: it empowers you to act as a stronger and more charismatic leader, while also setting a better example for other members and leaders to emulate [16]. Practicing self-care will be integral to maintaining your leadership capabilities.

Self-care is a method of improving your emotional, physical, and social wellness through healthy behaviors [16]. Healthy behaviors include sleeping well, exercising regularly, eating a balanced diet, and managing stress with positive coping skills. Self-care can also involve becoming more emotionally intelligent.



As a leader you should strive to understand both your teammates' and your own emotions. Experts explain that you can accomplish this by engaging in your own emotional intelligence [17]. According to an article by ASBMB Today, “a leader needs a robust and nuanced emotional vocabulary to communicate effectively,” and so should “be aware of the need for wellness in the organization, and work to embrace wellness programs that promote the well-being of the team” [18]. For more information about emotional intelligence, research “The Wellness Wheel,” which is a resource that can help build your emotional vocabulary and identify any gaps in your overall wellness [17]. And obviously, utilize the resources provided by your school for counseling and wellness. Make sure your teammates are also aware of their options for psychological and wellness services.

To conclude, you should understand that your leadership responsibilities can affect your wellness, while your wellness can in turn affect your ability to lead. Build a leadership and team dynamic that encourages emotional vulnerability and emotional intelligence. If that is too difficult to introduce on your own, try to invite staff at your school involved in health or wellness to speak to your club and perhaps spark a change. There is no shame in practicing self-care.

4.4 Coaching

Our questionnaire revealed that about a fifth of all running clubs choose to pair with a non-student, head coach, while the remaining clubs fulfill any coaching or training duties through their student leaders. In this section, we wish to compare the strengths and weaknesses of training with or without a non-student coach.

A coach can fulfill a multitude of roles: sourcing workouts, organizing practice schedules, finding competitive opportunities, providing advice for races or performances, networking with other individuals or groups in the running world, representing your team to local companies or facilities, and more. Having a coach who has connections to local high schools can benefit your recruitment efforts as well. Some clubs even believe having a coach offers a sense of legitimacy in the eyes of prospective members.

If you are considering finding a coach for your club, ensure you find someone who will match your team’s values, strive to create a positive team atmosphere, and be willing to work alongside your leaders and athletes. We highlight this point, because your coach will be acting as an extension of your club leadership. However much responsibility or power you give to your coach is completely up to you.

Check out this feature from a club whose head coach has a strong presence on their team: the University of Oregon Running Club, where they discuss how to find a coach. This was written as part of their *Starting a new club?* document from 2009 [19].



“Finding and keeping a coach can be a serious challenge. If you have strong leadership, maybe by mature club members who are willing to subordinate their running for the welfare of the club, you don't need a long-lasting coach. For continuity in workouts, though, finding a good coach and keeping him/her around for several years is valuable. If that person is a wise counselor, or an interested friend or a teller of stories, so much the better.

So, how to find a coach? A volunteer coach? Try to find a retired, local coach and make it easy for him/her to do the job. Offer to do all the peripheral tasks and let the coach take as much responsibility as he/she wants and your Club Sports program allows. Contact local high school coaches to find out who's retired or who's still teaching but not coaching in school.

You, the runners, might actually be the “hook” that will get a retired coach interested in donating time and effort. Your interest in running for its own merits might be reward enough to “net” a retired coach. Investigate your campus' department of physical education, human physiology, recreation, psychology. There might not only be candidates there...There might be a way to arrange credit or practicum experience for coaching. There might be a majors program on campus that could provide a graduate student coach (maybe with collegiate running experience, if you're lucky) who can work with you for a year or two.

Or, look for faculty members on campus who run. You might find a professor who is a thoughtful, experienced runner. Start with a short term commitment and see what happens. It could end up being long term because it's fun and rewarding for the professor. At Oregon there is a “noon group” of professors who run. A similar group on your campus might be fertile ground for finding a coach or getting a good contact.

You might find a graduate student within your growing group who would like to write workouts for you. Large universities have grad students with running experience at high levels. They might be short on time, but they'll bring their own running experiences and maybe a willingness to give your group some guidance.

Your coach can simply be someone who writes, and perhaps administer your workouts, or he/she can be much more involved...can even be the glue that cements the club together.

Written by Coach Tom Heinonen

University of Oregon



Not all clubs have the desire to find a non-student coach. Many clubs derive a strong sense of pride from being fully student-run. Other clubs recognize that moving from high school to college running can be somewhat intimidating, especially for athletes graduating from an overly-competitive or toxic coaching experience. Advertising your club as free from any coaches or pressure from adults can be immensely relieving for younger athletes looking to enjoy running or competing again.

Even without an affiliated coach, your club can still find ways to source training and racing advice from other qualified people. Some teams cooperate with local track clubs to workout together or receive training advice. Others have found that their varsity programs are willing to share advice, personnel, equipment, or facility space. The same can be said for local running companies or the friends and families of club members.

Many clubs thrive under total student leadership; many of the most consistently competitive clubs in



NIRCA have no non-student coach. Instead, these clubs often have students filling their training roles. Some clubs choose to call these students: “coaches,” while others prefer to separate their training-related leaders from the demanding connotations of a “coach.”

Check out the following feature from Illinois Cross Country Club on how they have built themselves a strong, student-led training program.

“

[Julia]

Our club, like almost all others, was built by students, for students, and we have never veered far from this ideology. There is something special about a 9 person executive board full of already busy college students putting in all the time necessary to get over 55 people to Virginia for only \$45!

In my opinion, having a student coach presents one main challenge: establishing training ethos. When you are being coached by a student, you are probably less likely to completely buy into the training plan than if the exact same training plan was made by somebody who is a decade older. The older person may appear more knowledgeable, but realistically college students are equally as capable of producing an extremely well-planned and rigorous training schedule. We have been very fortunate in the last few years to have student coaches who are knowledgeable and are always willing to learn. All the upperclassmen are also very used to having a student coach, and sometimes it may be a bit weird for freshmen coming off their high school cross country experiences, but they get used to it quickly. It makes the coach more relatable and part of our friend groups as well. If anything, having a student coach only strengthens the team’s relationship with the goals of club running.

[Riley]

I have been a member of the Illinois Track Club for four years now, and to say it has been an experience that has shaped my life is an understatement. There is something truly pure about club running; we are students who run solely for the love of running, where our coaches are our peers and our clubs are self-sustaining.

This past year, I have been had the honor to serve as the Gender Minority Captain, a position designed to provide a voice specifically for the women of the club. Numbers on the women’s side of the team have always been low, so having a GMC is beneficial when addressing training plans and create a cohesive unit amongst us. My responsibilities are two-fold: work with the coach to create women-specific training plans that align with our goals and needs, as well as social encouragement. For example, on the training side of things I would reach out to the women to see how they were feeling on a weekly basis to further assess if the training in motion was beneficial rather than detrimental. Additionally, I would plan social events for solely the women and would do cute things to encourage their training goals such as writing letters, providing them with bows to wear during their races and cookie baking events.

Written by Julia Schultz & Riley Maloney

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

”

Training is inherently subjective and variable, so simply having a coach or a member leading workouts will not adequately cater to each of your members’ needs without also providing an appropriate level of care and



flexibility. However your club wishes to fulfill its training responsibilities, ensure that the needs of your members always come first.

4.5 Interacting with your School

It is vital that the leaders of your running club cooperate with your school's overseeing departments. The amount of requirements imposed by one's school varies greatly from club to club, but the majority of clubs must be in constant communication with their school's departments in order to maintain a good standing.

Numerous clubs reported having to meet certain quotas throughout the academic year in order to reach certain financial and categorical standards. Quotas could involve a number of competitions in which the club participated, a number of community service hours or events completed, an amount of money raised through alternative fundraising, a number of social events offered to club members, or a number of approved clinics or sessions attended by the club.

Our questionnaire revealed that a majority (64%) of clubs have difficulty accessing or receiving finances from their schools. Just under half (43%) of clubs have trouble accessing facilities such as indoor or outdoor tracks to accommodate their practices or competitions. About 41% of clubs struggle with risk management, or getting permission to do the things they would like to do, while 38% find communication with their school's staff particularly difficult. While some departments can be receptive to criticism by club leaders, others can be quite obstinate or quick to punish. It is important that your club leadership represents itself well by satisfying the current requirements, while advocating for improvements in the system. Sharing your concerns with other club leaders at your school, holding meetings with staff to discuss your concerns, and reporting issues to employees higher up than your immediate staff can all be effective ways to improve the system.

Check out how Maryland Club Running approaches its relationship with its school's Recreation and Wellness Department in the feature below.

There is value in developing a strong relationship with your school's overseeing departments. Staff in campus recreation will be trained to handle many kinds of situations that may arise during the year. They are likely very knowledgeable about the processes for renting facility space, requesting vehicles for rental, or uncovering who at your school might know the answers to some of your questions. Ultimately, they are the people responsible for approving your club's activities, so a better relationship will improve your chances of getting to do more of the things you would like to do as a club.



At the University of Maryland, all club sports are overseen by a department called Recreation and Wellness (RecWell), or more specifically the Club Sports Office housed within RecWell. Beyond that, all student clubs, not just sports clubs, can apply annually to be recognized by the Student Government Association (SGA), which opens doors for extra funding, reservable meeting places on campus, and advertisement channels. UMD Club Running interacts far more with RecWell than with SGA but understands the importance of maintaining a healthy relationship with both.

We only interact with SGA when we need to apply for our annual recognition and funding and when we need to reserve space for an on-campus event, like our annual formal. SGA requires us to meet certain requirements in order to be officially recognized; we need to ensure that all of our members are registered officially on their website and we need to send our Treasurers to an annual meeting in which they learn how to fill out an SGA recognition and budget request for annual funding. In order to be recognized, SGA also requires us to provide a club constitution that includes a non-discrimination clause, a non-hazing clause, and, notably, excludes any mention of mandatory dues or membership fees. SGA recognition provides us with valuable resources. We have reminders and bylaws in place to ensure that we never fail to meet their requirements (general operations are difficult without SGA funding, which is contingent on annual recognition), but otherwise, our relationship with SGA is uneventful.

On the contrary, we interact with RecWell daily. We submit mandatory weekly reports to RecWell summarizing club activities, we have a mandatory meeting with RecWell supervisors every time we travel for competition, and we have specific supervisor who is assigned to be the point of contact between our club and RecWell. They help us plan home events, order apparel, manage budgets, and essentially are willing to help us with anything to keep our club running smoothly. Our club works well with Recwell for two reasons:

1. We train our officers between administration transitions to meet RecWell's logistical needs, such as registering rosters on their websites, submitting reports and forms on time, managing budgets, and more; and
2. We have a friendly, face-to-face relationship with our RecWell supervisors in the Club Sports Office.

We speak with them multiple times a week and we know that they are willing to help us grow our club. This personal relationship also lends to the supervisors being more responsive to our needs and being more accountable when we ask for their help. Having a supervisor who is supportive of your club is immensely helpful, as it not only makes general operations more pleasant, but it can also help you bypass bureaucracy when needed, and it can enable you to pursue the riskier club goals that can help your club grow, like hosting a race. Thus, make sure that you and your group of officers nurture the relationship with the head of whatever department you deal with the most, and make absolutely sure to introduce your new officers to this person while you are transitioning between administrations.

Written by Colin SyBing

University of Maryland



Chapter 5

Diversity and Growth

5.1 NIRCA's Inclusion Policy

As a member of NIRCA, a running club must familiarize itself with NIRCA's inclusion policies [9]. As a summary: the current policy gives priority to an athlete's preferred gender identity when registering for races. Moreover, any "bullying, homophobic, and transphobic" sentiments are "strictly prohibited." These rules exist to encourage fair treatment of all athletes, and ultimately make NIRCA a more inclusive community for club runners. NIRCA does have the power to impose sanctions for any code of conduct violations, and they will likely communicate with your school in the event of a violation.

Your school will have its own policies related to inclusion. However, most schools do not go to great lengths to enforce these policies until something is reported. So it is up to your club to establish its own goals, policies, and practices that can foster a more inclusive environment for its current and prospective members.

5.2 Collegiate Athletics and Inclusion

In lieu of the varieties of people and backgrounds that your club may welcome, this report challenges your club to devise its own inclusion policy and honor code. For instance, the NCAA's publication: *Champions of Respect* (pp. 54-60) has a section called "Resources for Allies" that details the specific actions a collegiate sports team can make to support LGBTQIA+ members [20]. In particular, it discusses

- How homophobia affects both homosexual and heterosexual members;
- How to stop homophobia;
- How to create an LGBTQIA-inclusive team honor code; and
- How to respond to anti-LGBTQIA language.

Despite that document's intended audience being coaches and leaders of varsity athletic teams, these lessons may be easily repurposed for running clubs. We see merit in properly defining an honor code that works to make homophobia and any other discriminatory actions or language (e.g. based on race, sex, gender identity, religion, ability, body size) "against the very identity of [the] team." We would suggest that, when drafting such an honor code, your club:

- Ensures it satisfies the NIRCA Inclusion Policy;
- Considers allowing any of its members to offer ideas to be addressed by the policy;
- Clarifies that this code is to be upheld by members and leaders alike;



- Hosts it prominently on your team website or online pages;
- Consults its campus recreation department for ideas and guidance; and
- References the samples provided on page 56 of the *Champions of Respect* document.

In February of 2019, NIRSA published a document: *Equity, Diversity & Inclusion*, geared towards the leaders of campus recreation programs with a self-contained approach to addressing social justice within collegiate club/recreational sports [21]. The document helps to define common practices that impede on equity, diversity, and inclusion, and it provides advice for campus recreation leaders handling oppressive or discriminatory situations. We must note that our search for resources directly speaking to members of clubs returned empty-handed. This current lack of written advice designed for leaders of club sports emphasizes the value in having a strong relationship with your school's campus recreation staff: they are trained to guide situations for which your club's leaders may not feel qualified (see Chapter 4, Section 5).

Finally, we implore your club and its leadership to seriously consider how it can promote equity, diversity, and inclusion. While running may not be known as a particularly diverse sport, that is no excuse for your club to not equally embrace all of its members. Try to imagine all of the ways in which a new member can feel isolated or different from everyone else. Furthermore, recognize that their experiences will be dictated by both the explicit and implicit ways in which your team operates. So try to structure your leadership, practices, social events, competitions, and trips in a way that treats everyone equitably; and promote social practices that pursue all new members with open arms. Removing elements like seniority, similarity, and popularity from team decisions in favor of merit, fairness, and representation can be a good first step towards accomplishing this.

5.3 Title IX and Women's Participation

Title IX is a piece of legislation that seeks to, in particular, prevent discrimination based on sex within any educational program. The full legal statement is as follows:

No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance [22].

In principle, this anti-discriminatory statute broadly applies to many opportunities found at colleges and universities. However, according to a paper produced in the NIRSA Recreational Sports Journal in 2016, Title IX discussions and policies in higher education have primarily only addressed varsity athletics, “failing to consider the unique aspects of club” sport programs [23]. As campus recreation programs gradually implement new measures to ensure that their funds, facilities, staff, and opportunities are equitably distributed between men and women, it is vital that we, as collegiate running clubs, begin to understand Title IX and its effects.

Title IX passed in November, 1972. Between 1971 and 1976, the number of women participating in club sports across the United States increased by 55%, or from 16,400 to 25,500 athletes [23]. This statistic shows how some of the simplest and most immediate measures taken in line with Title IX had a large effect on women’s involvement in athletics. Albeit, there are still measurable disparities between men and women in terms of participation today.

There are many reasons to be mindful of Title IX as a leader or member of a collegiate running club:

- You should know your rights: if you experience or witness discrimination based on sex, there is at least one professional, known as a Title IX Coordinator, at your school who can help.



- The preceding paragraph suggests that there is hope for any club team to increase their women's membership by making some simple, more inclusive alterations.
- Your funds are subject to scrutiny. Funds should be equitably available and dispersed between the two sexes. Your school is obligated to ensure this.
- Your overseeing departments will inevitably introduce increased measures that will be quick to penalize violations of Title IX.

In Figure 5.1 below, we illustrate the distribution of male membership found on running clubs who responded to our questionnaire versus their club's age.

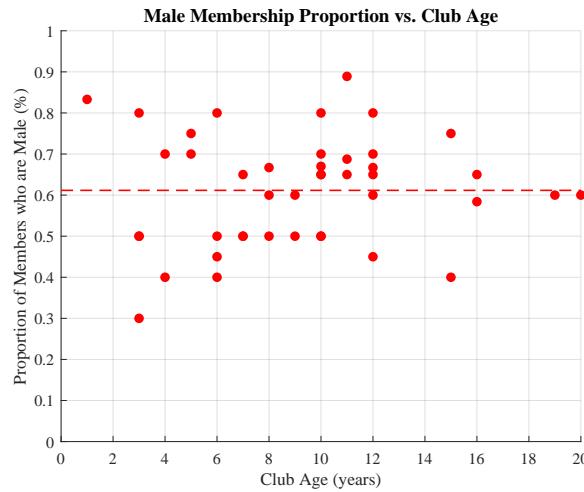


Figure 5.1: A plot depicting the relationship between club age and a club's proportional male membership. The sample mean male proportion is just over 60%, and most clubs have more men than women.

There is no significant relationship between proportional male/female membership and club age: showing that clubs of any developmental stage can struggle engaging women. Our sample proportion of female athletes on running clubs was 40% nationally (compare this to the 54% of NCAA athletes who are female) [24]. According to the Postsecondary National Policy Institute, about 57% of undergraduate students in the US are female [25]. Comparing this fact to our membership data, we see that women are massively underrepresented across the majority of collegiate running clubs, comprising only 40% of all collegiate club runners.

This statistic about membership translates to the demographics of active competitors within NIRCA: for instance, the proportion of all athletes competing in any one of the Championship or Class races at NIRCA Fall Nationals who were female was 38% in both 2018 and 2019, and 35% in NIRCA Track & Field Nationals in 2019 [1]. So disproportionately low female membership on clubs coincides with the disparity in number of competitors between the sexes at NIRCA events. We should note, though, that factors such as one's high school experience or one's perceptions about running clubs can impact a club's female membership.

Beyond the measurable factors addressed by Title IX, the social factors of your club can greatly impact female membership. Generally, the way your club makes decisions, communicates with its general members, operates its practices and meets, chooses new leaders, advertises itself, and behaves each have the potential to favor men or deter women. It takes some forethought, care, and communication to actively dismantle discriminatory patterns and make for a more equitable and enjoyable team dynamic. No co-ed club should be devoid of female leadership. Any co-ed club should provide the same opportunities to women as it does to men.



When considering some of the underlying factors that may keep women from joining or sticking with your team, it is important to consult the women in your club. However, survivorship bias may prevent you from hearing what factors pushed some women away. We have heard anecdotally that a highly competitive high school experience can make women wary of club running. Moreover, while it is likely that a slower man on your team will still have other men or women to run with at their pace, it is less likely that a slower woman will have as many people to fall back on. Therefore, if your club is one that wishes to welcome runners of all abilities who may or may not wish to compete, we suggest that you advertise your club as such. Moreover, making active attempts to teach every runner your team's common running routes, for instance, can ensure that each member is given a fair shot to participate in practices.

For a better idea on how one running club approaches inclusion towards women, check out this feature from Duke Club Running.

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For the past two-plus years that I've been a member of DCR (Duke Club Running), the club has always had strong female representation and has generally been more competitive than our men's team. What's remarkable is that as far as I know, our club has never done anything explicitly to try to encourage more participation by women, but simply tends to have a solid core of female runners who both compete and attend practice regularly.

An aspect of DCR that I think helps in encouraging an equal opportunity environment is our lack of expectation in terms of level of involvement or commitment. We have some members who only practice occasionally and don't attend meets, some who only attend meets, and some who attend both. We don't really force our members to be involved in any particular way unless they want to be, and I think that's helped foster a community of runners who truly love running and want to compete without feeling the added pressure of expectation or all-out commitment.

In terms of gender representation, I'm actually not sure our club has ever had a female President, but there is usually at least one woman in an executive position (Vice President, Treasurer, Social Chair, etc.). In general, there has always been female leaders on our team, and in a well-represented club, there always should be female leaders. As a co-ed sports club, it's really important to have representative leadership, because club leaders are generally the people welcoming new members to the team and having male and female leaders will help in welcoming new members from both genders.

In general, I think the most important step in fostering strong female representation on your team is making sure your team's female leaders play an active and integral role on that team. I think DCR is living proof that there's no lack of women wanting to run and compete at the club level, but perhaps not every club team has figured out exactly how to encourage those women to join. I'd advise those teams to not only promote leadership from their female members but to look at their team's culture and decide if their attitudes and social environment are just as welcoming to men as they are to women. Something as small as holding team dinners after practice (which we do once a week) can really help foster community and bridge gaps between the men's and women's teams, who often don't practice together and might not interact all that much otherwise.

Written by Jack Ellwood

Duke University

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5.4 Supplemental Competitive Opportunities

Running clubs compete in a wide variety of competitions. Our questionnaire revealed that over 90% of participating running clubs compete in cross country races. Over 84% compete in track events. About 39% compete in field events, and 34% in jumping and/or pole vault. About 64% compete in road races, and 66% compete in half or full marathons. About 14% compete in ultra-marathons or extended relays.

One primary source for competitions available to collegiate running clubs is through NIRCA. Many running clubs advertise their invitationals on NIRCA's website, and clubs can even apply for NIRCA Qualifier status for their cross country meets. Registration and results are included in their online services. NIRCA also hosts relatively competitive regional and national meets throughout the year.

Clubs not as concerned with achieving NIRCA Qualifier status or with using NIRCA's resources might choose to host their registration and results on independent websites. A popular alternative, especially for track and field, is to use DirectAthletics.

We must mention that for many clubs, the competitive opportunities provided by NIRCA and its member clubs are inadequate. Realistically, clubs in the sparest regions like the Heartland, Pacific, and Southeast can struggle to find enough reasonably close NIRCA competitions to fill out their seasons. Check out Chapter 1, Section 3 for a more complete description of how NIRCA can fail at providing ample competitive opportunities to many current and prospective member clubs. In the next section, we will discuss how your club can proactively help initiate more running clubs at other schools in your area. In Chapter 6, we will discuss how NIRCA can address its growth and provide better opportunities for its member clubs to compete. In the meantime, any club lacking in nearby NIRCA competitions should scout for alternative competitive opportunities.

One popular option is for clubs to join in on varsity cross country or track & field meets. Local DII or DIII teams will often welcome club teams competing at their invitationals. A varsity meet is likely to attract good competition and provide a more professional experience. Reach out to the coaches of local varsity teams to inquire about their meets and policies.

Another unique source for competitions is USATF (USA Track & Field). USATF is open to basically all ages and types of runners, and offers a wide variety of events. While we cannot say how applicable local USATF competitions might be to your club, we identified at least one running club that is a member of both NIRCA and USATF. Membership in USATF as a "Competitive Club" offers multiple competitive benefits, including the opportunity to enter relay teams and have athletes represent your club at various USATF Championships and competitions [26]. USATF also provides event insurance for free to member clubs, which can help if your school does not already provide that service. Fees for club membership in USATF vary depending on your location (a.k.a. "Association"), but they generally seem to cost around \$50 a year. Most often, though, in order to compete in a USATF meet, your members will also be expected to have an individual membership to USATF: costing \$30 a year. These costs do not include possible meet entry fees. Try to collaborate on a meet-to-meet basis with race officials to strike a cheaper deal, especially if your club only wishes to participate in a select few USATF events per year.

There are many other ways to supplement your club's competitive schedule: attending local races, branching out to other types of competitions like half marathons or triathlons, or holding your own events like community 5K's or intrasquad meets. Consider contacting local running clubs (collegiate or otherwise) who may be aware of more races happening in your surrounding area. While club running is far from becoming self-sufficient in terms of providing ample club competitions to fill their race schedules, there are numerous supplemental opportunities to compete worth considering.



5.5 Cross-Club Collaboration

One way to improve the competitive and social atmospheres for club running in your area is to help the development of newer or smaller clubs at nearby schools. This could involve offering developmental support to existing clubs, sparking students at other schools to start new running clubs, or collaborating to organize an event between your schools. Clearly, starting a club from scratch is a slow and demanding task, but the value added to your competitive opportunities and local club running community will justify the work you each will have put in.

Having nearby clubs can open possibilities that are otherwise unrealistic. For example, in the Mid-Atlantic, clubs have been known to share bus space when traveling to Regionals or Nationals, splitting costs and allowing more of their members to attend these races than if they had not collaborated on transportation.

For an exceptional case of one club that has been civically engaged by fostering a stronger club running community in their area, check out this feature from Florida Running Club.

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I run for the Florida Running Club, based out of Gainesville, Florida. For NIRCA races like Southeast Regionals, we typically would have to drive to North Carolina, usually a 7 or 8 hour drive each way. That just isn't feasible for us to do regularly. We realized other running clubs in Florida, even non-NIRCA ones, probably felt the same sort of isolation. Our answer to the problem was to put on our first home meet, the Florida Running Club Invitational. We reached out and invited clubs from all over Florida in the hopes that they would be encouraged to become more connected to other clubs. It would be nice for all of our Florida clubs to be able to race closer to home, as well as to be able to see more Florida clubs at races in the midst of all the colleges.

For some of the newer Florida clubs, one challenge that we faced was that a club might not be as active anymore, or might be struggling for members. Recruiting was definitely a harder challenge for new clubs than retaining members or expanding on a preexisting base. A few of us knew runners at these schools who wanted to start the clubs up, so we offered advice regarding recruiting and retaining members — including providing a balance of options at practices for both recreational and competitive members, fostering a social aspect of the club, and giving plenty of opportunities to workout and race.

Written by Sean Doherty

University of Florida

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If you plan to offer advice to other developing running clubs, consider referencing *The State of Club Running 2019 Development Guide*. We designed the Development Guide to be a resource for developing running clubs that provides quick explanations and suggestions on many of the topics addressed in this full report, including advice on starting and developing new clubs.



Chapter 6

NIRCA Recommendations

6.1 What to Continue

In order to qualify our recommendations in later sections, we should first take some time to identify the elements of NIRCA that we love. NIRCA aims to provide a fun and competitive environment for club runners year-round, and it accomplishes that in many respects.

When NIRCA hosts its various events, especially Nationals, it finds creative ways to cover the events through its social media accounts, publish photos and videos from the events, and offer concessions or merchandise at the events. For instance, we particularly enjoyed the *2019 NIRCA XC Nationals HYPE* video published on their Facebook page the week of XC Nationals. The video featured competitors of all levels, spectators, top runners, friendships, celebrations, and the general positive vibes of competing with NIRCA. NIRCA produces in-depth race previews, race recaps, live video coverage, event playlists, and more all to heighten the quality of their events.

NIRCA's website has received significant facelifts throughout its existence. Adding better resources for clubs, information on events, options for viewing results, and more have each made ClubRunning.org more functional and user-friendly.

Through its annual Winter Conference, NIRCA wishes to provide essential information to club leaders about upcoming events and deadlines, as well as involve many club leaders in guiding the future of club running. While numerous clubs are represented in person at the conference, many more are unable to send members to attend. That is why NIRCA recently opened up much of its conference proceedings to online viewers, allowing members to learn and interact with the conference by providing comments and questions through a chat. We believe adding an online stream was an important step towards welcoming the ideas of clubs that traditionally struggle to send representatives to these important conferences. Hopefully, discussions at Winter Conferences will continue to be more representative of member clubs and not punish clubs who cannot afford to attend by excluding them from vital information and deliberations.

One of the trademark aspects of NIRCA that can be too easily overlooked is how accommodating their events are. We love that NIRCA sets up its events so that runners of all abilities are able to compete at whatever intensity they wish. On one end, NIRCA makes its best attempt to cater to its most competitive athletes by employing proper signage, measuring its courses, posting precise results, and offering awards to top individuals and teams. And these athletes do not have to be the fastest to still receive a reasonable opportunity to perform well. On the other end, NIRCA allows for just about anything to fly for athletes who wish to have more fun. The number of costumes worn, foods eaten, and funny actions displayed during a NIRCA competition



are beyond our statistical capacity to analyze. Many find that club running offers a distinctive charm in how it subverts normal racing culture common to high school and varsity programs; and NIRCA competitions help to amplify club running's best qualities.

The staff at NIRCA is fully comprised of volunteers who dedicate significant portions of their spare time to allow college running clubs to compete and grow. The volunteers at NIRCA are often very personable with their responses and solutions. Within the last year, NIRCA has even revamped its efforts to assist new clubs entering the league with new positions and staff. This accommodating quality to NIRCA is quite unique and something to cherish. As a consequence of its staff being fully volunteer-based, the amount of money circulating through NIRCA is quite small for an organization of its size. NIRCA makes its best effort to use its limited funds responsibly, which is why it is heartbreaking when clubs take advantage of NIRCA's trust to steal signs or merchandise. When things as simple as signs can cost hundreds of dollars to replace, we should show our appreciation to NIRCA and its volunteers by respecting their property.

6.2 Financial

In this section, we will directly build from our findings discussed in Chapter 2, Section 1. By calculating the typical costs associated with example running clubs (e.g. "Small Running Club," "Mid-Sized Track," or "Large XC Club"), we uncovered that the average cost of having an athlete compete at one of the four NIRCA Championship events (XC Regionals, XC Nationals, T&F Nationals, or Half Marathon Nationals) significantly drops as team size increases. In particular, within each of the categories: "XC Club," "Track Club," and (general) "Running Club," the cost for each member to compete is smallest for the largest clubs.

In essence, smaller clubs seem to be paying more to have their athletes participate in the same competitions as larger clubs. You may interpret this as larger clubs having a discount for their large volume, but one can just as easily see this inequity in price as smaller clubs subsidizing NIRCA competitions for larger clubs. We believe that the average cost of athletes should be much closer to equal within each of the categories of running clubs. In order to accomplish this, we should reconsider the structure of the NIRCA Dues & Entry Fees options.

Our observed trend can be mostly attributed to NIRCA's upfront dues prices. Similar to team price caps (which set a ceiling on the price that a team will pay to enter all of its athletes into a race), NIRCA's current upfront dues encourage larger clubs to bring larger turnouts for cheaper prices. We see no financial reason for NIRCA to prefer having an extra athlete from a large club compared to another athlete from a small club, so we would hope to find a better dues and entry fees structure that can equally incentivize attracting more athletes from each club. Having individuals from smaller clubs pay more on average than athletes from larger clubs for the same events poses an unjustified barrier for newer and developing clubs from becoming established in NIRCA, and is thereby a deterrent to NIRCA's growth. In order to reduce the disparity in expected costs per athlete between clubs of different sizes, we suggest that NIRCA consider a more variable dues and entry fees structure: one that avoids upfront dues that only benefit larger clubs.

We should note two things. First, NIRCA does in fact allow new member clubs to not pay dues for their first year in NIRCA, which we think is a great step towards integrating new clubs into NIRCA [11]. But the average new club does not reach financial security within its first year.

Second, when planning events like Cross Country or Track & Field Nationals, NIRCA must be able to pay many costs for facility space, equipment, staff, timing, signage, and more before the event occurs. Hence, upfront dues primarily exist to help NIRCA fund many of its big events before clubs pay their entry fees. NIRCA is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, meaning its aim is to fulfill its purpose without the intent to make money. However,



according to NOLO, it is a myth that a nonprofit cannot make a profit: meaning it may acquire more money than it spends to conduct its activities [27]. Saving some funds for a contingency plan is perfectly legal and can all be tax exempt. So NIRCA absolutely has the legal capabilities to consider building a profit that can afford events even without asking for upfront dues from its clubs.

Any restructuring of NIRCA's Dues & Entry Fees options should be discussed thoroughly between NIRCA and its constituent clubs. Such a discussion should try to address the needs of NIRCA, the needs of running clubs, and the potential impacts on NIRCA's development. Furthermore, a new dues and entry fees structure should be tested with a similar set of example clubs to ensure that smaller clubs are not needlessly subsidizing larger clubs.

We implore NIRCA to offer such a topic at its 2020 NIRCA Winter Conference, or as soon as possible. We have learned that the NIRSA Championship Series (for club soccer) is very transparent with its proposed budgets for each upcoming year: each NIRSA Region requires a representative from each of its participating clubs to approve the proposed budget during an annual, mandatory regional conference. While the logistics of formally having a mandatory conference in each region every year with unanimous consent on budget proposals may be unnecessarily difficult or inconsequential, there is value in having more discussions between NIRCA and its clubs about how club dues and entry fees are used, and how they should be structured. If NIRCA exists for the benefit of club running, there should be some ability for running clubs to accurately judge and direct the future of financing NIRCA. The extent to which running clubs should be aware and involved with NIRCA's finances could be another productive discussion topic at the upcoming Winter Conference.

6.3 Transparency

NIRCA utilizes its Winter Conferences to address many upcoming or relevant topics to NIRCA and running clubs. This year, many clubs have expressed interest (by voting on a poll in a Facebook group for NIRCA club officers) in learning about improving membership and finances, considering whether to have a coach or club position for training, and working on club leadership and race management. These qualities have all been discussed within the previous chapters of this report.

However, some of the particular issues relevant to 2019, including "Why did NIRCA choose to host XC Nationals in Virginia again in 2020," "How are NIRCA dues spent," or problems specific to particular events are difficult for this report to tackle on its own. Moreover, throughout our questionnaire responses, we found multiple issues brought up by clubs having to do with eligibility requirements to race, an inability for some athletes to perform at their top level at Track & Field Nationals, and safety concerns at a particular regional event. Clubs further complained about lacking contingency plans for poor weather during competitions, timeliness of results, distances of courses, scheduling of events, and the route for the half marathon course. While we cannot speak to how NIRCA approaches these issues, we would encourage two things:

1. Clubs or athletes with concerns should contact the appropriate volunteers in NIRCA to communicate their thoughts.
2. NIRCA should legitimately consider and respond to the issues brought up by its participating clubs and athletes.

While transparency has been effectively rendered a buzzword, we still ask that both club athletes and NIRCA consider how they can more transparently communicate with the other to identify and resolve various problems. NIRCA should strive to be able to explain how it has made its decisions and how a particular idea has been (or will be) considered. For large issues that affect many clubs, NIRCA should also strive to include some time during its annual Winter Conference to inform and hear from everyone.



6.4 National Growth

Access to NIRCA competitions is not ubiquitous. This fact both explains why supplemental competitive opportunities are necessary to consider, and impels us to grow NIRCA's peripheral regions.

In Chapter 5, Section 4, we discuss how running clubs can identify competitions beyond NIRCA to fill their competitive schedules. However, it should also be the goal of NIRCA to find ways to expand the competitive opportunities available to its constituent clubs. While NIRCA only hosts a few championships per year, and while the remaining competitions on NIRCA's website are all voluntarily hosted by clubs, there is still some room for NIRCA to connect clubs with more competitions. For instance, establishing a more formal relationship between NIRCA and other running organizations such as USATF could potentially open local competitions for many running clubs. Such deals could especially assist existing clubs in the least dense areas in the Pacific, Heartland, and Southeast.

Having greater competitive opportunities outside of NIRCA will also help grow NIRCA. Competing outside of NIRCA competitions would promote club running at the collegiate level to a fresh audience, perhaps sparking new clubs and more club running participation overall. Moreover, newer clubs will benefit from a greater opportunity to compete. Having more competitions can help member retention for developing clubs, letting them get off the ground and stay active for multiple years. We have already seen multiple clubs in regions like the Heartland become inactive after years of struggling to find appropriate competitive opportunities within their financial capacities.

NIRCA has room to grow. We saw evidence for this in Chapter 1, Section 3 by comparing the national distributions of NIRCA and other club sports leagues. Large leagues like NIRSA Soccer and USTA Tennis are testaments to the numerous schools across the country with active club sports departments, where club running has yet to develop. In order to further witness NIRCA's potential for growth, we will perform a simple calculation.

We identified the largest college from each contiguous US state, and checked whether they already participated in NIRCA. For each largest-school-in-the-state without a NIRCA club, we attempted to calculate the expected number of athletes who might wish to compete in NIRCA if there was a running club at their school for them to join. We found that 17 states do not have their largest school participating in NIRCA, totalling just under 500,000 students altogether [28]. We estimate that a typical, established running club at a school with 20,000 students may have 50 competing members throughout the year, for a ratio of about 0.25% of the student population in the club. Extrapolating on this example ratio, we would expect NIRCA to gain roughly 1,250 new athletes if it were to gain the participation from running clubs at the remaining 17 states' largest schools. While the goal is not necessarily to pursue only the largest schools, we would expect that establishing a running club would be easiest at some of the largest schools.

Growing NIRCA does not necessarily imply that NIRCA's championship events will drastically grow as well: because of the sheer size of the country and because traveling for running clubs is expensive and typically self-funded, we do not expect that adding a dozen teams on the west coast will greatly increase attendance at an east coast championship event. Growing NIRCA should not be seen as a logistical nightmare: it should be welcomed as a clear solution to struggling participation in NIRCA's periphery.

While existing running clubs can play a big role in helping develop nearby running clubs (as discussed in Chapter 5, Section 5), NIRCA has a unique position of influence to expand club running. As the host of the country's largest club running competitions and the central league to most running clubs, NIRCA has at its disposal certain resources, knowledge, and decisions that can help with this effort.



6.5 Championship Locations

In Chapter 1, Section 2, we examined the history of locations for each national event hosted by NIRCA, including its Fall and Spring Nationals. While a more sophisticated analysis might try to evaluate exactly how the location of each Nationals affected who and how many clubs attended, we can see from our data that schools closer to Nationals are more likely to attend. The most common way for clubs to travel to a Nationals is to drive, usually in rental cars/vans, buses, or personal vehicles. This is no surprise: obviously driving is much cheaper than flying when it is a feasible distance, but also NIRCA Nationals has always occurred in locations where the majority of clubs are within a feasible driving distance of the event. Having NIRCA Nationals be centrally located amongst its clubs makes some sense, because it puts the least total financial burden for clubs to attend, and makes the most number of clubs happy. However, with NIRCA's current strategy towards choosing locations for its Nationals events, their attachment to hosting in the center consistently prioritizes the Mid-Atlantic and Midwest over all other areas.

A tenth of schools responding to our questionnaire reported having to fly at least once a year to attend a competition. Almost all such schools are doing so to attend one of Fall or Spring NIRCA Nationals, and almost all are from the Pacific, Heartland, or Southeast. Clubs from these regions (or from parts of these regions) are tasked every year with finding ways to afford getting to Nationals, typically having to only send their top athletes because of how prohibitively expensive flying and lodging can be. Still, the majority of clubs from these regions have little hope to even qualify for or attend Nationals, accepting that "NIRCA is more of a northeastern thing." It does not help, for instance, that the Heartland does not have an XC Regionals event. Alternatively, clubs from the most populated regions are unlikely to ever consider flying throughout the year, as they are accustomed to having Regionals, Fall Nationals, and Spring Nationals all within a 10 hour drive, and sometimes much less.

NIRCA has no immediate incentive to switch its current strategy. Choosing the most convenient locations for the most number of teams is unlikely to garner heavy criticism, especially when some of its largest and most influential clubs are delighted by their proximity to Nationals. However, their current strategy fails to promote national growth and often comes across as tone deaf. Consistently burdening teams outside a 10 hour driving radius of Ohio and its nearby states is not an effective strategy for inviting new clubs to attend Nationals or promoting club running across the nation.

We are not NIRCA, so we are not totally aware of all of the factors and their relative weights considered by NIRCA when choosing its locations for Fall and Spring Nationals. Obviously there are stipulations it must satisfy, such as required facilities and equipment, capacity, proximity to airports and hotels, and affordability. However, we would hope that NIRCA also considers how their choice of location will impact the future of club running. Before mentioning our suggestions, we should stress that the criteria and process used for selecting Nationals locations should be a topic at an upcoming NIRCA Winter Conference, because it is important to hear from real clubs how various decisions will affect them. Our report does not reflect everyone's beliefs or experiences, so our proposal should only be considered as one possible solution to better promote club running and equitable access to competing in NIRCA Nationals.

We hope that at least one of Fall or Spring Nationals can begin to occur at a greater variety of locations, occasionally reaching areas that typically lie farther from traditional Nationals locations. Venues in Charlotte, NC, Kansas City, MO, or even eventually in the Bay Area of California might qualify as useful locations for future Nationals competitions. While we are not calling for a large proportion of Nationals to lie far from the geographic center of NIRCA, we believe that occasionally hosting in unconventional locations like these could serve multiple purposes. First, for clubs closer to the Mid-Atlantic, Northeast, or Great Lakes regions, new and interesting locations could seem like exciting travel destinations rather than just burdens to get to.



Second, and more importantly, many athletes closer to these venues will finally have the chance to attend a nearby Nationals along with their teams. Experiences like these are great tools for strengthening team bonds and introducing more clubs to each other. Moreover, having the experience of attending a Nationals can foster a stronger commitment to training and greater appreciation for NIRCA from peripheral regions. For instance, even if Nationals were to only branch out from its typical locations once every four years, that would allow a typical undergraduate student in a peripheral region to attend Nationals at least once during college. Such members could go on to prioritize attending Nationals or other NIRCA competitions in future years as well. Overall, there are many positive influences that having a closer Nationals can achieve for teams who are typically excluded.

Greater total variation can be achieved by combining strategies for locations of both Fall and Spring Nationals. While there are many clubs and athletes who only attend one of these National events per year, a great majority of clubs might be willing to attend either one given the right circumstances. Having at least one of Fall or Spring Nationals nearby to your club can have basically the same positive effects, so a good strategy might try to offer variation in both Fall and Spring Nationals at different times and places. For instance, both Fall and Spring Nationals could each branch out once every four years, but they could be offset by two years so that a unique Nationals location can effectively occur once every two years.

We do not wish for increased variation in location to burden clubs financially or logically. Clubs need to be aware of the upcoming Nationals locations at least a year in advance in order to prepare for the imminent costs and logistics involved with attending. Having more variation in location does not have to mean decisions are unpredictable: a well-communicated rotation or general plan for the upcoming few years will allow for clubs to weigh the pros and cons of attending Nationals well in advance.

Naturally, having any variation from the most populated area will be controversial, especially because such a plan would ask for a greater number of teams to pay more to travel to the event. While this is not the goal, there needs to be a way to balance the current strategy which asks the same few clubs to pay enormous amounts in travel and lodging costs to attend Nationals every year. And having Nationals located far from the center will invariably risk fewer clubs attending that particular year. While having a smaller attendance would be briefly disappointing, it would be well worth the investment being made into the future of club running in that area. In order to maximize that investment, NIRCA should heavily advertise that Nationals as a chance to finally compete at the national level for clubs that traditionally choose not to.

Having more variety in Nationals locations is purely an investment into the future growth of NIRCA and club running across the nation. We highly suggest that NIRCA reconsider their current strategy towards selecting Nationals locations and listen to the ideas of club leaders from each of its regions in order to understand how certain changes could affect their clubs.

6.6 Qualification Standards

During our analysis, we noticed how the system for qualifying for the Championship Race at NIRCA Fall XC Nationals may be misleading us on just how many individuals and teams get to participate. In Chapter 1, Section 3, we fully detail the current structure and rules for qualifying for the Championship Race, uncovering that in 2019, only 22 women and 9 men qualified as individuals out of the 95 women's and 95 men's possible individuals slots. The rest were awarded to individuals who were on clubs that already qualified as teams. Per Regional event, an average of 1.5 men qualified for the Championship Race as individuals in 2019, and less than 4 women. NIRCA's current rules avoid "fancy counting," and are particularly inflexible when it comes to filling the theoretical open slots.



If NIRCA really does have the capacity for 39 top-7's and 95 individuals in the Championship Race, then they are racing with significantly fewer athletes in the Championship Race than they could. Such a race would have to hold 368 athletes per gender. But a more typical attendance in the Championship Race is around 250 men, and 210 women. Less naively, we expect that NIRCA is aware of frequent "double-qualifying" and that not all qualifying teams and individuals attend Nationals, so when they say "39 teams and 95 individuals at most," they may only expect around 250 athletes to actually compete. However, it is hard to find an explanation for why only 35 women's teams are accepted for the Championship Race as compared to the 39 men's teams. That is a difference of 28 fewer athletes, each missing the opportunity to compete in the Championship Race. While general attendance tends to be lower for women than men at Nationals, there is no reason for NIRCA to claim its capacity is somehow lower for women on the (approximately) same course as the men's race.

NIRCA had to introduce qualifying standards in 2017 because its Nationals courses did not have the capacity to fit top-7s from all interested clubs. However, restricting participation or failing to fill open slots in the Championship Race at Fall Nationals for reasons beyond capacity is hurtful to clubs. A large proportion of clubs are able to apply for championship funding, which are grants from their schools to help subsidize trips to large competitive events like Nationals. But most schools stipulate that the championships should offer a chance to "win" or compete at the highest national level. Effectively, many schools only count the "Championship Race" at Fall Nationals as worth receiving championship funding. When fewer clubs are permitted into the Championship Race, fewer clubs will be subsidized to attend, and so fewer clubs are willing to attend at all. This can be particularly difficult for clubs on the edge of qualifying as individuals or as a team: having only two or three weeks between Regionals and Nationals makes it difficult for those clubs to apply for the proper funding. Finally, smaller and younger clubs rely more heavily on individual qualification slots because they lack as much depth, so having so few spots actually awarded contributes to the large barrier keeping out less developed clubs from competing with NIRCA.

We noticed further that out of the 39 men's teams who qualified in 2019, only 34 were present in the Championship Race. For women, that number was 26 teams out of 35. It seems that not all slots are even being utilized by the qualifying teams and individuals. We believe that NIRCA should structure its qualification standards to more closely meet the capacity of the course (without sacrificing safety or the ability to race well) so that more athletes have the chance to compete in one of NIRCA's greatest and most competitive races.

In lieu of these problems, we believe that NIRCA should edit its qualification standards in four specific ways:

- Allow for just as many women's individuals and teams to qualify for the Championship Race as men's.
- Adjust the numbers of individuals and teams who may qualify to more accurately represent the capacity of the Championship Race.
- Allow for "fancy counting" (i.e. removing qualifying teams from the pool of athletes able to receive an individual slot) at Regionals in order to have a more consistent number of individuals qualify for Nationals.
- Consider allowing individuals and teams to accept or reject their qualifications so that NIRCA may offer unused slots to runner-up teams and individuals within the same region.

Our idea in the final bullet would obviously involve some logistics, because having a system of accepting or rejecting a slot would need to be fast and able to track down responses from every qualifying team and individual. Having a form present at the end of the race that allows teams to circle "Accept" or "Reject," and/or opening only a 24-hour period to accept or reject (say, through clubrunning.org), could help with promptness. However, for a trial run, we might suggest a system that only addresses qualifying teams and that is opt-out only, meaning if a club does not communicate that they are rejecting their qualification, they are assumed to



have accepted their slot in the race. Such a system would take any rejections and swiftly offer them to the teams with the next highest team scores in the region. Tracking down clubs is likely easier than individuals, and not requiring formal acceptances would avoid teams losing their slots over a misunderstanding or miscommunication.

Overall, the qualifying standards for the Championship Race at Fall Nationals unnecessarily restrict clubs from competing in NIRCA's highest level of cross country racing. Make qualification standards (for both XC and T&F Nationals) a topic at the 2020 Winter Conference.

6.7 Investing in the Future

In our final section, we wish to identify some ways in which NIRCA can invest in the future of club running in the United States.

NIRCA's website is powerful in many aspects: it has years of competitive results, information about member clubs, and many announcements from NIRCA. However, it can be quite hard to find much else, like the *NIRCA Club Leader Guide*, or answers to certain eligibility or deadline questions, in a consistent location. Clubs would benefit from having this basic information available more immediately from NIRCA's homepage. Some pages and documents like the FAQ page are out of date and contain deprecated links. Overall, it would help for NIRCA's volunteer team to invest some time into improving the NIRCA website soon.

NIRCA has had its fair share of problems during some of its recent race management, including when Regionals races turn the wrong way, when inclement weather cancels races and distorts event schedules, or when the location of Nationals is changed months after being announced. Obviously, these are unintentional mistakes, and they can often be beyond the control of the race management staff. However, a multitude of club leaders expressed in our questionnaire that they wished NIRCA could establish better contingency plans, prepare better course markings, or at least be more considerate of the smaller details that can go wrong. Because there are many athletes at each NIRCA event that are coordinated by just a few volunteers, things are bound to happen. But we can only progress as an organization and league if we push to perfect our events.

One issue that typically draws controversy within club running is the seriousness of NIRCA competitions. We expressed earlier in the report that we appreciate the balance that NIRCA is regularly able to accommodate very competitive athletes while also accepting and encouraging having fun. Some responses from our questionnaire called for increased seriousness at NIRCA competitions. Ideally, a more serious competition would strive to at least give each athlete a fair chance to perform at their best level. We agree: not only does each athlete deserve the chance to do their best, but without this quality, NIRCA races will become indistinguishable from any other club event, just more expensive. This problem seems to be most prevalent during both Track & Field and Half Marathon Nationals. Increased seriousness might also ask for more field events like pole vault or javelin in NIRCA T&F Nationals to better meet the expected variety of events befitting a track & field competition. However, whether NIRCA should pursue something beyond that level of seriousness is less clear. From our perspective, we enjoy that everyone can get what they want out of NIRCA club running events. Too often running can be notoriously toxic and stressful, but club running through NIRCA really seems to have gathered a community of supportive and mostly healthy runners. It would be unfortunate if, in an effort to impress some external organization like the NCAA or a high school running league, NIRCA sacrifices its encouraging and empowering atmosphere.

The power of this report and our Development Guide is primarily derived from the information and testimonies provided to us by existing running clubs. However, we are a team of just two authors, and we have only gathered data from a small portion of all running clubs. This severely limits our ability to create useful



resources for the teams. We hope that NIRCA will take a look at our work, consider what aspects are worth replicating or adding, and try to create resources of its own than can supersede ours. We especially wish for NIRCA to consider how it can assist the development of its newest and smallest clubs found in peripheral regions. NIRCA has more data, a higher capacity to gather information from clubs, and years of combined experience from its volunteers that all convince us that they could create a better Development Guide than us. Additionally, we would encourage NIRCA publish more of their available and future data so that determined individuals can run more analyses in the future.

Finally, we encourage NIRCA to always find ways to improve club participation in important deliberations that will impact the future of club running. One of the most useful opportunities that NIRCA has already developed is its annual Winter Conference. It is a perfect opportunity to educate club leaders, have club leaders consider new ideas or questions, and introduce club leaders to each other. While many clubs might be content maintaining just a competitive relationship with other running clubs, there is a lot of value in encouraging more conversations between constituent clubs. Let this report be a testament to the power of cross-club collaboration. Many of the issues being requested for the 2020 NIRCA Winter Conference may be better addressed as conversations between clubs than presentations from NIRCA to clubs. NIRCA should also take the proper precautions to recognize which clubs and what kinds of clubs are not being represented in any deliberation. The Winter Conference, like any other NIRCA event, will invariably happen far from many NIRCA clubs. We imagine that if a club has to decide between sending five athletes to Nationals or five leaders to the Winter Conference, they will decide in favor of their athletes. So it is bound to happen that many running clubs will not be represented at the Winter Conference, especially those with less expendable income or those who are farther away from the typical Winter Conference location. NIRCA should continue to invest in providing many of the same resources and deliberative abilities available at the Winter Conference online to teams who cannot physically attend.

We hope that NIRCA will carefully consider how its current and potential procedures will impact its member clubs, and we hope NIRCA chooses to invest in a more diverse, empowering, and successful future for collegiate club running across the United States.



Chapter 7

Conclusion

Club running at the collegiate level has existed and grown for decades, especially with the advent of a central league called NIRCA. In this report, we attempt to discuss the current state of club running across the nation, current problems felt by developing running clubs, possible solutions to those problems, and some ways in which NIRCA can improve its operations to bring club running into a brighter future in the 2020s. We stress that the feasibility and applicability of our recommendations to teams should be judged by each club individually, and that all of our recommendations to NIRCA should be opened to a larger crowd for deliberation and scrutiny.

We hope to see a future where clubs can confidently develop using proven strategies for growth and gradual improvement. We hope to see a future where running clubs can freely communicate with one another to ask questions or collaborate. We hope to see a future where new running clubs are embraced by nearby teams and by NIRCA. We hope to see a future where NIRCA and its member clubs can provide equal competitive opportunities all across the country. And finally, we are hopeful that club running continues to offer a healthy and empowering way to experience the sport of running while in college.

Club running is a special thing that many more generations of students and athletes deserve to experience. To borrow the words of one of this report's featured club leaders: Riley Maloney of the Illinois Cross Country Club: "club running to me is something that those who are coming from a high school running program should look into. It is an experience unlike any other club or organization you could be a part of. We travel to amazing places to race, spend quality time together during and outside practice, and create forever connections amongst one another. These are your best friends, your roommates, your running buddies. Club Running will always be a defining point in my life. Live, Love, IXC" (or whichever club that is for you!).



Acknowledgements

We would like to express our gratitude to the following individuals and groups.

- Thank you to the following running clubs and leaders for submitting their wonderful and informative features (listed as they appeared):
 - Robert Morris University Club Cross Country & Track Team — Tyler Slaney
 - Mizzou Club Running — Sally Heil
 - Princeton Running Club — Catherine Song
 - Ithaca College Running Club — Ashley Stalnecker
 - Penn State Club Cross Country — Caroline Cappello
 - Binghamton Running Club — Austin Pizzella
 - Michigan Running Club — Anna Piccione
 - University of Oregon Running Club — Coach Tom Heinonen
 - Illinois Cross Country Club — Julia Schutlz & Riley Maloney
 - Maryland Club Running — Colin SyBing
 - Duke Club Running — Jack Ellwood
 - Florida Running Club — Sean Doherty
- Thank you to each of the 43 running clubs who carefully responded to our questionnaire and provided their club's information for the benefit of future running clubs.
- Thank you to Matthew Beyerle for his numerous contributions and edits within our financial sections.
- Thank you to Domenic Feola for creating all of the designs for The State of Club Running 2019.
- Thank you to Grace McStravock for her suggestions and editing on inclusion.
- Thank you to Erin Raupers for providing current research on self-care and leadership.
- Thank you to Sean Doherty for his encouragement and work to promote creating new or assisting younger clubs.
- Thank you to Stephen Day and Cybbi Barton for providing advice on finances.
- Thank you to Joseph Wanat and Joseph Clark for their help in data collection and presentation.
- Thank you to Jigar Gosalia for his assistance with identifying features.
- Thank you to Martin Klanchar for his advice on USATF membership.
- Thank you to Brendan Morgan for his advice on communications.
- Thank you Caroline Cappello for her advice on our questionnaire.
- Thank you to the NIRSA Recreational Sports Journal for providing a lot of insights into policy for club sports, and for its groundbreaking work funding research relevant to recreational sports [29].



- Thank you to McKenzie Peterson of UGA Club Cross Country for her words of encouragement towards helping the Southeast region.
- Thank you to Alex Dantzler from Texas Running Club for his encouragement, inquiries on balancing member interests, and suggestions on peripheral regions' struggles.
- Thank you to Max Petrosky for providing some historical NIRCA results and analyses.
- Thank you to the University of Oregon Running Club for paving the way for supporting developing running clubs across the nation.
- Thank you to Patrick Kenney for being a very helpful resource to this project.
- Thank you to Caelan Denley for helping inspire this project.



Further Reading

1. Along with *The State of Club Running 2019 Report*, we have produced a shorter document called *The State of Club Running 2019 Development Guide*. The Development Guide's intended audience is any club leader or member that wishes to develop certain aspects of their club. The suggestions are based on common, successful practices utilized by current collegiate running clubs. This document is meant to be readable for a range of people: whether that be someone trying to begin a new running club at their school, or an officer of a 5 year old running club that wishes to improve their club's finances, recruitment, etc.
2. In 2009, NIRCA provided a grant to the Running Club at the University of Oregon to create a document titled *Starting a new club?* Their document outlines the steps and decisions involved with creating a new running club [19]. While the document is over a decade old now, many of its lessons are still applicable. The document is written from the perspective of a team with a heavily-involved, non-student head coach from a club in the early Pacific region. In many respects, *Starting a new club?* is a predecessor of this project, especially the *State of Club Running 2019 Development Guide*.



Appendix A: Questionnaire

* — means a response is required

The State of Club Running Questionnaire

1. School Name*
2. Name of Club (e.g.: “Texas A&M Running Club”)*
3. Your Name*
4. Your Position in the Club*
5. Your Email Address*

General Club Information.

If a question does not apply to you, feel free to leave the question blank.

1. How many members do you typically have at a normal practice?*
2. How many members do you typically have registered for your club throughout the year?*
3. About what proportion of your members are male/female?*
4. Do you allow for graduate students to become members? If so, what proportion of your team is comprised of graduate students?*
5. About how many years has your club existed for?
6. In what types of races/meets do your club participate?*
 - (a) Cross Country (5k, 6k, 8k, 10k, ...)
 - (b) Track Races (springs, hurdles, distance, ...)
 - (c) Jumping Events and/or Pole Vault
 - (d) Field Events
 - (e) Road Races
 - (f) Half/Full Marathons
 - (g) Ultra-Marathons/Relays
 - (h) Other (fill in)
7. Does your club ask its members to pay on a per-meet basis? If so, do members pay their race entry fees in full?
8. How often does your club practice?
9. Is there another club at your school that offers running or field-events training?
10. Does your club have a website?*
11. Which types of communication does your club utilize to give announcements to its members?*



- (a) At practice
- (b) Email/Listserv
- (c) GroupMe
- (d) Snapchat
- (e) Physical announcement boards, etc.
- (f) Text blasts
- (g) Website
- (h) Other (fill in)

12. Does your club have a constitution?

- (a) Yes
- (b) No
- (c) Other (fill in)

13. Does your club host any races/meets? Please provide the type of race/meet, who is allowed to sign up, and how important each race is to fundraising for your club.*

14. About how many races does your club compete in every Fall and Spring?

15. For how many meets per year does your club fly?*

16. For how many meets per year does your club take a bus or rental vans?*

17. How often does your club use the personal vehicles of its members to travel?

Leadership.

If a question does not apply to you, feel free to leave the question blank.

1. Please briefly describe how student-leadership looks on your team. For example, give the number and types of officers/execs and other leaders, how duties are split between them, and anything relevant to leadership on your team.*
2. Does your club have a non-student coach or adviser? If so, what kinds of responsibilities do they handle?*
3. How are officer/exec positions decided on your team? (e.g. democratically, by application, chosen by old leaders, etc.)
4. When do new officers/execs start their terms?
5. Have you found any pros or cons from the way your team has chosen to set up its leadership?

Interaction with your School.

If a question does not apply to you, feel free to leave the question blank.

1. If your club is overseen by a department or government within your university or college, please provide the name of that office.
2. If your club is overseen by such an office, which aspects of your team have been particularly difficult or frustrating when interacting with that department?
 - (a) Finances
 - (b) Access to Facilities
 - (c) Communication
 - (d) Reliability (i.e. competency, helpfulness)



- (e) Risk Management (i.e. flexibility in doing the activities you do)
 - (f) Requirements to maintain active club status
 - (g) Relationships with the staff
 - (h) An underdeveloped Club Sports program
 - (i) Other (fill in)
3. Are you satisfied with your club's relationship with its school? How do you maintain good relationships?
 4. In what ways does your university supply or guarantee equipment/facilities for your club?
 5. Does your club have its own bank account (whether that be within the university or in some external bank) that carries its balance over each year?

Interaction with NIRCA.

If a question does not apply to you, feel free to leave the question blank.

1. Does your club intend to participate in NIRCA in 2019-2020?*
 - (a) Yes
 - (b) No
 - (c) Other (fill in)
2. How often does your club attend NIRCA Nationals in the Fall and Spring?
3. How often does your club attend NIRCA Regionals?
4. If you do attend NIRCA Nationals in the Fall or Spring, how many members do you typically bring?
5. If you do attend Spring Nationals, which events do you participate in?
 - (a) Track and Field Nationals
 - (b) Half Marathon Nationals
6. How many NIRCA-Qualifying meets does your club typically attend each Fall? (Regionals counts!)
7. Does your club regularly have issues with attending either Regionals or Nationals? These could include financing, traveling, timing, qualifying, etc.
8. Will your team be applying to host a NIRCA Qualifier this year?
 - (a) Yes
 - (b) No
 - (c) Other (fill in)
9. When considering your team's race schedule for an upcoming Fall season, are you more likely to attend a race if it has been given a NIRCA Qualifier status?
 - (a) Yes
 - (b) No
 - (c) Other (fill in)
10. Does your club typically have any problems affording NIRCA dues?
11. Are there any overarching problems that you seen within NIRCA?

Membership.

If a question does not apply to you, feel free to leave the question blank.



1. Does your club charge dues to its members? How does that work, and what do dues generally cover?*
2. Are members required to compete?*
 - (a) Yes
 - (b) No
 - (c) Other (fill in)
3. Does your team make any ability-based cuts?*
4. Are members asked to fulfill certain volunteering, attendance, or fundraising requirements?
5. What are some effective ways in which your team recruits new members?
6. Are you satisfied with how well your club does at recruiting new members? Why so?
7. What kinds of social activities does your team (officially) do together? For example: themed holiday runs, beach trips, bowling nights, pasta parties, etc.

Club Finances.

If a question does not apply to you, feel free to leave the question blank.

1. Does your university provide any financial support to your club? Is this support guaranteed every year, or something you must apply for?
2. In what ways does your club make money? Fundraisers, hosting meets, donations, dues, merchandise, etc.?*
3. Do you typically feel comfortable about the state of your club's finances? Why so?

Volunteering.

If a question does not apply to you, feel free to leave the question blank.

1. In what ways does your club participate in community service?*
2. Is your club required to participate in a certain amount of community service?*
3. Do you typically feel comfortable about the state of your club's community service involvement? Why so?

Running.

If a question does not apply to you, feel free to leave the question blank.

1. Does your team have a public list of running routes?
2. How are daily runs decided by your club? How many run options are offered per practice?
3. Are workouts offered to your members?
4. Do your members have free access to any trainers or emergency services?

Final Questions.

1. Overall, what is/are your club's largest goal(s) for this upcoming year? e.g. more members? better finances? better social atmosphere? something competitive?*
2. Do you permit the reviewer of your entry to use your club's name when presenting the findings of this survey?*
 - (a) Yes, feel free to attach our school's name to the information.
 - (b) No, please keep my school's responses anonymous in the report.



- (c) Other (fill in)
3. This survey is by no means comprehensive nor nuanced-enough to gather all of the relevant information about any running club. If you would like to talk to me (Raymond Friend) in a more personal way like by phone, text, email, FaceTime, etc., you can select “Yes,” and I will reach out to you! Otherwise, feel free to select “No.”*
- (a) Yes, I would like to talk further.
- (b) No, I am satisfied with my responses and don’t need to talk further.
- (c) Other (fill in)
4. Are there ANY other things you would like to provide in order for us all to understand your club better?



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