



YOUTH CLUB STANDARDS

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The US Club Soccer Youth Club Standards document is designed to be a tool for youth soccer clubs to assess their programming and operations, and to generate ideas for areas of improvement and expansion within the organization. The document is designed to provide a process for self-assessment and guidelines for critical internal review, and is not intended to be used as a public rating mechanism. The document may be adapted by individual clubs and leagues, provided that the US Club Soccer logo is not used on any adaptation. When the US Club Soccer logo is displayed on the document, no modifications of any kind are allowed without the prior written consent of US Club Soccer.

Background: One of the primary goals of US Club Soccer is to elevate the standard of the sport in the United States, specifically through improving the structure, operation, and programming within youth soccer clubs. In this sense, US Club Soccer endeavors to provide a path and process to improve the quality of the daily player experience by raising standards in club structure, organization and operation, and in coaching development and education. Clubs that are better structured, organized, and led will generally develop better players than those that are not; as such, the identification, establishment and elevation of club standards is critically tied to the player development process.

These *Youth Club Standards* are developed with the advice and assistance of U.S. Soccer technical staff, technical leaders from clubs throughout the country, and the US Club Soccer Board of Directors and staff. The standards will continue to grow and evolve over time, reflecting the changes, growth and improvement of club soccer in the United States.

This document outlines expectations for clubs in areas as diverse as facilities, operations, coaching education, and more. Furthermore, the document provides standards for three different levels of clubs:

Minimum Requirements: These are the basic minimum expectations a club should meet to qualify as a youth soccer club under US Club Soccer. These standards are set out as minimum requirements, without which it is virtually impossible to operate as a true soccer club.

Base Club Standards: These are standards that should be met, or be within the scope of the strategic growth plan, for the majority of youth soccer clubs across the country. The base club standards will cover a wide spectrum of clubs of various competitive levels. Differentiations between these clubs will not only be reflected in their size and mission, but also in the number of these standards met, the degree by which they are met, and the quality of the service or resources provided by the club and its staff within each standard.

National Premier Leagues (NPL) Standards: These are the standards that should be met by the top developmental clubs in the country in order for these organizations to truly be considered professional talent development organizations, and are supplements and additions to the Base Club Standards. Within US Club Soccer, top clubs participate in the National Premier Leagues (NPLs); for this reason, these standards are referred to as NPL Standards.¹ These standards are considered when reviewing applicants to the NPL and in the on-going evaluation of current member clubs in the NPL. NPL clubs are expected to meet all minimum requirements and basic club standards, and make consistent progress in achieving new NPL standards each year.

Except for the minimum requirements, these *Youth Club Standards* are designed to be aspirational guidelines that reflect specific areas or platforms that clubs and club leadership should be targeting for growth, change, and improvement. The standards are categorized into the following three areas:

¹ The United States Soccer Development Academy (USSDA) and the Elite Clubs National League (ECNL) also have minimum standards for member clubs. The standards of the USSDA and ECNL may be similar to or even higher than the NPL Standards.

- 1) Technical: Staffing, Curriculum, Training, Additional Resources
- 2) Structural / Administrative: Organization, Structure, Finance and Member Management
- 3) Facilities: Training, Competition, and Corporate Facilities

Generally, the more standards that a club meets, the more successful that club will be in developing top level youth soccer players and fulfilling their club mission statement. However, standards provide only a baseline concept; the quality of the club leadership and staff (and its selection, training, and oversight), and the manner in which a program is executed, will ultimately set the ceiling of success for any club.

The future growth of the game, and improvement of the quality of the game in this country, will largely be a function of the standards to which clubs and coaches are held, or to which they hold themselves. The best clubs constantly evolve to expand and improve their structure and operations on and off of the field. These *Youth Club Standards* will hopefully help to provide a roadmap for doing so.

These standards should be reviewed on an annual basis by all clubs to identify new programming and operational ideas, changes and areas of growth for the future.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS TO QUALIFY AS A CLUB

Every club must:

1. Have a Director of Coaching charged with technical oversight of all teams and coaches within the club.
2. Be a registered corporate entity, either for-profit or not-for-profit, in good standing according to federal and state law, and have a club logo.
3. Have a mission statement identifying the primary purpose for the club's existence and its goals in player and personal development of its players. The mission statement should be realistic based on the club and community resources.
4. Have either a formal governance board or an advisory board to provide guidance and assistance in financial, legal, real estate, and other general business matters.
5. Have a conflict of interest policy that addresses the recusal of board members that have children in the club in situations that directly involve their children.
6. Have a clear, hierarchal organizational chart with all staff and their responsibilities, with job descriptions for all full-time staff.
7. Background checks must be conducted on all coaches and on any adults that will interact with players on a regular basis.
8. Have a minimum of three teams in the same gender to be considered a "club" for that gender of players.
9. Have a player and parent code of conduct.
10. Have a coach's code of conduct emphasizing that high degrees of professionalism, personal integrity, and maturity are required from all staff.
11. Have an annual player registration process managed by a club registrar / administrator.

The above standards provide the platform from which a properly functioning youth soccer club can be built. The absence of any one of these standards in a youth soccer organization significantly impairs its chances of long-term success. When these standards are in place, additional programs, operations, staff, and resources can be created and deployed to improve the club's ability to successfully maximize the development of its youth soccer players.

TECHNICAL STANDARDS:

Staffing, Coach Licensing² and Coaching Education:

- **Director of Coaching:**

12. Base Standards:

The Director of Coaching should:

- 12.1. Hold a U.S. Soccer “B” license, an NSCAA “Advanced National” license or international equivalent.
- 12.2. Have successfully completed the NSCAA/US Club Soccer Director of Coaching Diploma Course.
- 12.3. Have a collegiate degree.

13. NPL Standards:

The Director of Coaching should:

- 13.1. Be a full-time position, and the Director of Coaching should hold a U.S. Soccer “A” license, an NSCAA “Premier” license or international equivalent.
- 13.2. Be actively involved in regional or national coaching networks or professional coaching organizations.
- 13.3. Be actively involved in national talent identification and development programs.
- 13.4. Have experience coaching at different levels of the game, indicating a more comprehensive understanding of the player development path. Experience in two or more of the following levels is ideal: youth, collegiate, semi-professional / amateur, professional, youth national team.

- **Technical Leadership:**

14. Base Standards:

- 14.1. All coaches at U-10 and above should hold a U.S. Soccer or NSCAA license, or international equivalent.
- 14.2. Any parent coaches involved in the youth program should be supervised and trained by a full-time, professional soccer coach. While coaches may often have children in the club, no coach should coach their own child above the age of U-12.

15. NPL Standards:

- 15.1. Every club should have Technical Directors or Program Directors charged with technical oversight of specific age groups or programs within the club. For example: a U-15 through U-18 girls director, a U-15 through U-18 boys director, a U-11 through U-14 director, etc. The specific staffing model may vary based upon the size of the club, but should reflect age-specific programming and staffing.
- 15.2. All Technical Directors or Program Directors should be full-time, paid positions (ideally as employees, not independent contractors) with individuals that hold a U.S. Soccer “B” license, an NSCAA “Advanced National” license, or international equivalent.
- 15.3. All Technical Directors or Program Directors should be actively involved in regional or national coaching networks or professional coaching organizations.
- 15.4. All coaches at U-10 and U-11 should hold a minimum of a U.S. Soccer “D” license, an NSCAA “National” license, or international equivalent.

² Coaching licensing standards satisfy two purposes. First, they indicate the ability of a coach to pass certain minimum levels of performance within educational and assessment programs. Second, and perhaps most importantly, they demonstrate a coach’s commitment to their own professional education and development. While there are quality coaches without the highest level of coaching licenses, and attainment of the highest license does not guarantee elite coaching or professional integrity, full-time professionals within the sport should be expected to have, or be on the path to achieving, the nation’s highest coaching licenses.

- 15.5. All coaches at U-12 and above should hold a U.S. Soccer “C” license, an NSCAA “Advanced National” license, or international equivalent.
- 15.6. Every club should have a specialist goalkeeping coach or goalkeeping staff that trains goalkeepers in every training session. All goalkeeping staff should hold a goalkeeping license from U.S. Soccer, the NSCAA, or international equivalent.

- **Coaching Education:**

- 16. Base Standards:**

Every club should:

- 16.1. Have annual funding for external coaching education and development of its staff.

- 17. NPL Standards:**

Every club should:

- 17.1. Have regular, at least monthly, meetings of full-time technical staff to review, discuss, and assess technical topics and the success of current training sessions, methodologies, and plans.
- 17.2. Have a formalized self-assessment program combined with a peer-feedback program to allow for ongoing learning and development of full-time staff.
- 17.3. Have an internal coaching education and development program that provides 5-10 hours of in-house coaching development to its full-time staff each year.
- 17.4. Have an internal coaching education and development program that provides 3-5 hours of in-house coaching development to its part-time staff each year.
- 17.5. Have a coaching mentoring program allowing young staff the opportunity to observe and learn from senior staff within the training and competition environment.
- 17.6. Have a club library or resource center with books, videos, and other informational resources regarding coaching methodology, training sessions, etc.

- **Curriculum and Methodology:**

- 18. Base Standards:**

Every club should:

- 18.1. Have a written, age-appropriate, developmental curriculum outlining the skills and concepts to be taught at every age group from U-6 through U-18 that is reviewed on an annual basis to identify areas for change and improvement.
- 18.2. Ensure its curriculum is consistent with U.S. Soccer’s recommended training curriculum, and has individual player development, not team development, at its heart.
- 18.3. Have a training curriculum for Zone 1 players (ages 6-12) that focuses predominantly on individual technical development per U.S. Soccer guidelines.
- 18.4. Provide regular free-play opportunities during the year for players of all age groups in the form of futsal or other small-sided competitions.
- 18.5. Incorporate small-sided games in training curriculum and competition sizes in each age group per U.S. Soccer guidelines.

- 19. NPL Standards:**

Every club should:

- 19.1. Have written “self-training” or “soccer homework” for players at U-10 and below to facilitate individual training and parental education regarding development of young players.

- 19.2. Have an Annual Training Plan for each team at U-11 and above, identifying training focus, intensity, and frequency throughout the year, and with periodization for pre-season, competition, and transition segments of the season.
- 19.3. Complete an Annual Technical Report for each team at U-11 and above at the conclusion of each year including: (i) a summary of the training sessions throughout the year; (ii) a summary of the growth of the team technically and tactically throughout the year; (iii) a summary of the mental and psychological growth and performance of the team throughout the year; and (iv) individual player evaluations.
- 19.4. Have an annual club assessment meeting to review the annual technical reports for all teams and identify areas for improvement and change for the future.
- 19.5. Create an in-house Zone 1 competition program to maximize flexibility and minimize travel for these age groups.
- 19.6. Have a review and assessment process for its coaches every year to determine whether players are progressing through their development appropriately, whether concepts are being taught and retained by players, and whether the curriculum is being successfully implemented.
- 19.7. Maintain a player database for tracking of players at every age group, their development, and the depth of the player pool.
- 19.8. Have a consistent style of play and vision of the game across all teams within the same gender.
- 19.9. Have a testing program to measure baseline and growth in the physical attributes of speed, strength, power, and agility at relevant age groups.
- 19.10. Have a testing program to determine technical proficiency of players in basic technical skills at relevant age groups.

Training and Development:

- **Training Ratios:**

20. Base Standards:

Every club should:

- 20.1. Have a minimum training-to-game ratio of 2:1 for teams at U-11 and above, with trainings that range from 60-105 minutes.
- 20.2. Provide regular training frequencies 10 months of the year, with approximately two periods of 3-4 weeks each of mandatory “break” for each player to allow recovery and rejuvenation. One break should be provided after the completion of the fall / winter competitive season, and one break should be provided after completion of the spring / summer competitive season.

21. NPL Standards:

Every club should:

- 21.1. Have a minimum training-to-game ratio of 3:1 for teams at U-11 and U-12, with trainings that range from 60-105 minutes.
- 21.2. Have a minimum training-to-game ratio of 4:1 for teams above U-14, with trainings that range from 60-105 minutes.
- 21.3. Limit the participation of their teams at U-14 and above to competitions with only one game per day.
- 21.4. Have a specific technical and tactical functional training program for each position at U-14 and above.

- **Training and Competition Environment:**

22. Base Standards:

Every club should:

- 22.1. Have regular access to high quality training facilities with the following minimum standards for teams at U-13 and above: at least half of a full-sized field per team, at least two portable goals per team, and at least one ball per player.

23. NPL Standards:

Every club should:

- 23.1. Have a full-sized field for training top teams in each age group at U-15 and above.
- 23.2. Have standard training apparel for teams to promote a professional atmosphere within the training environment.
- 23.3. Have a standardized, dynamic warm-up for each program within the club.
- 23.4. Provide regular opportunity for top players at younger age groups to train with players in older age groups, and where appropriate, to compete with teams in older age groups.
- 23.5. Limit parental presence at trainings to create a professional educational environment.
- 23.6. Have protocol and procedures for team travel (logistics, appearance, behavior, itinerary, etc.)

- **Talent Identification:**

24. Base Standards:

Every club should:

- 24.1. Participate in the scouting and recommendation process for US Club Soccer's id² National Player Identification and Development Program, and encourage their top players to participate in this program or other national player identification programs.

25. NPL Standards:

Every club should:

- 25.1. In addition to participation in the id² Program, assist in the organization and facilitation of US Club Soccer Player Development Programs (PDPs) to provide further identification, scouting and development opportunities for top players.
- 25.2. Cooperate with U.S. Soccer Technical Advisors and scouts and should recommend top players for consideration in U.S. Soccer Training Centers.
- 25.3. Have a program to identify the top players within their local markets at every youth age group.

- **Player Evaluation:**

26. Base Standards:

Every club should:

- 26.1. Provide written annual evaluations to assist players in identifying areas of strength and weakness.

27. NPL Standards:

Every club should:

- 27.1. Provide post-match written evaluations identifying areas of strength and weakness, and areas for future focus and training emphasis.
- 27.2. Provide quarterly player evaluations to assist players in identifying areas of strength and weakness, especially in technical areas, and areas for future training focus.

- **Additional Educational Resources:**

- 28. Base Standards:**

- Every club should:*

- 28.1. Provide education and assistance to its members regarding the college recruitment and selection process.

- 29. NPL Standards:**

- Every club should:*

- 29.1. Provide players and parents access to resources regarding proper nutrition, hydration and rejuvenation of athletes.
 - 29.2. Integrate age-appropriate strength, agility, and coordination training into their annual training plans for all teams.
 - 29.3. Provide video analysis of matches for teams at U-15 and above throughout the year to enhance development and learning.
 - 29.4. Have a relationship with local physical therapy organizations and orthopedic groups to provide quick access to treatment or diagnostics for their players.
 - 29.5. Provide an international trip for players at U-15 and above to aid and enhance development.

STRUCTURAL / ADMINISTRATIVE STANDARDS:

Entity / Organization:

- **Operations:**

- 30. Base Standards:**

- Every club should:*

- 30.1. Have at least one part-time administrative staff member to serve as a registrar and operate the club. Administrative staff should be in the office a minimum of four hours per day, five days per week.
 - 30.2. Have a formal review and evaluation process for all full-time staff every year.

- 31. NPL Standards:**

- Every club should:*

- 31.1. Have a strategy or program to identify, hire, and retain new coaches and staff, as well as lateral hires of experienced coaches and staff.
 - 31.2. Have an annual strategic planning and goal-setting meeting to determine direction and focus for the future of the club, short-term and long-term.
 - 31.3. Have a 5-year strategic plan outlining the goals and objectives of the club in player development, facility development, and coach development. This plan should be reviewed and assessed annually.
 - 31.4. Have a full-time Executive Director or Business Manager to manage finances, logistics, and other business tasks of the club. This position may report to the Director of Coaching or directly to the Board of Directors depending upon the club and the skills of the individuals involved.
 - 31.5. Have an Executive Director / Business Manager with a college degree in business administration, sports administration, or something similar.
 - 31.6. Have full-time administrative staff to operate the club.

- **Team Structure:**

- 32. Base Standards:**

- Every club should:*

- 32.1. Be structured as a pyramid, with a broad base of players and multiple teams in each age group at young age groups, narrowing to fewer teams at the senior age groups.
 - 32.2. Have a U-20 through open adult program, consisting of former youth club players and others, to provide “member for life” programming.
 - 32.3. Have a recreational program, with emphasis at U-6 through U-10. The best players within this program should be encouraged to “move up” to more selective programs as appropriate by their ability.

- 33. NPL Standards:**

- Every club should:*

- 33.1. Be vertically integrated with boys and girls teams at every age group from U-6 through U-18.
 - 33.2. Have training pools that regularly allow the top players from multiple age groups to train together.
 - 33.3. Have an on-going player evaluation process allowing flourishing players from second teams to train at some regular interval with the top team in the age group as dictated by the player’s performance.

- **Finance:**

- 34. Base Standards:**

- Every club should:*

- 34.1. Have an annual, centralized budget and financial account through which all coaching salaries, player registration, facility payments, and other major financial obligations are managed.
 - 34.2. Have a system of financial and accounting controls and policies to manage assets and to prevent theft or embezzlement, including an annual accounting review.
 - 34.3. Have a basic fundraising program to help minimize costs of participation for all players.
 - 34.4. Have a scholarship program to reduce or eliminate costs of participation for players with significant financial need.

- 35. NPL Standards:**

- Every club should:*

- 35.1. Have a fundraising or sponsorship program to reduce or eliminate costs of participation for elite, national-level teams and players.
 - 35.2. Have a marketing and sponsorship program designed to attract corporate and other sponsors to defray costs of participation or to provide funds for capital projects.

- **Member Management and Communications:**

- 36. Base Standards:**

- Every club should:*

- 36.1. Have written policies outlining player expectations, player commitment expectations, and player release procedures.
 - 36.2. Have annual member meetings with its players and parents, either as an entire club or on a per-team basis, to clearly outline expectations and standards at each age group.
 - 36.3. Have a volunteer recruitment and development plan to engage all members in club activities and to defray costs of operation.

- 36.4. Have a clear communications plan to ensure that messages from US Club Soccer, U.S. Soccer, and other peer clubs are promptly and efficiently distributed to relevant staff and membership, and that staff members are responsive to inquiries within these communications in reasonable timeframes.
- 36.5. Have a website for dissemination of information regarding the club, its players, its leagues, and other relevant information to the public. This website should be updated at least every 48 hours.
- 36.6. Have a newsletter or other publication, electronic ideally, released at least quarterly updating membership on news and accomplishments of the club or its members.
- 36.7. Have a website that serves as a functional tool for player registration.
- 36.8. Have an annual social event to promote inter-club relationships and club culture.
- 36.9. Have an alumni program to keep former players and coaches connected with and engaged in the club.
- 36.10. Have a community outreach program to promote volunteerism and to engage club members in their community

37. NPL Standards:

Every club should:

- 37.1. Have a parent education program designed to educate parents regarding soccer and the development process of soccer athletes, particularly for elite athletes, and parents' role within it.
- 37.2. Have a mentorship program for senior players to serve as role models and mentors for players in the younger age groups.

FACILITY STANDARDS

- **Playing Facility:**

38. Base Standards:

Every club should:

- 38.1. Have access to at least one high quality competition field that allows the ball to run smoothly which is appropriately lined per FIFA rules with benches for players and restrooms or port-a-potties. Turf or natural grass is acceptable.

39. NPL Standards:

Every club should:

- 39.1. Have a dedicated training facility that is owned or leased by the club with at least 2 training fields with multiple goals of varying sizes on each field.
- 39.2. Have access to a stadium-like facility for high profile games, including locker rooms, signage around the field, electronic scoreboard, and bleachers or stands for spectators.

- **Offices and Clubhouse:**

40. Base Standards:

Every club should:

- 40.1. Have a club office with dedicated phone, fax, and email.

41. NPL Standards:

Every club should:

- 41.1. Have a club-house with individual offices for all full-time coaching staff, including conference rooms for team and player meetings.
- 41.2. Own or have access to facilities allowing speed, strength, and power training for its elite athletes.
- 41.3. Have a training room to house on-site trainers or medical professionals, with medical supplies and equipment, including without limitation recovery pools and other rehabilitation tools, to allow pre-training / pre-game preparation and post-training / post-game rejuvenation and recovery.