



Operational Planning

Get Ahead of the Games

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To help clubs capture interest, retain new members, and prepare their club for the change that comes with an Olympic year, USA Curling has prepared this planning guide. It is the product of conversations with club volunteers at events, leaders at club council and town hall meetings, and experiences from previous growth opportunities. We hope that resources like this make your lives easier, improve your conversion rates, and inspire new ideas that help your club grow.

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Get Them Interested

- Engage communities with **overlapping interests** through Facebook advertising. Many curlers are fans of other sports or local teams, enjoy activities such as chess and board games, or follow the Olympic movement.
- **Host Watch Parties** in both popular, busy establishments, and your home club.
 - Find a local bar or restaurant that will show Olympic curling on some—or all—of their televisions. Before the Olympics, you can show past games on YouTube. Chances are, they will have more enthusiasm for Olympic curling after seeing their customers react to games from past seasons. This is a great way for arena-based clubs to let people know the sport is available in the community.
 - Start before the Games with the Olympic Team Trials for Curling—all qualifying games will be streamed live on Peacock, playoff games on Saturday and Sunday will be on USA Network, and action from the Wheelchair Mixed Doubles Team Trials will be broadcast. It's over seven consecutive hours of curling coverage on Saturday and Sunday.
 - Promote your Watch Party as a public event that is open to all, whether it's at your club or at another venue. Inform media and potential attendees that curlers will be on hand to explain the sport—there is no shortage of people who are fascinated by our sport but don't understand what it's all about. Consider offering a discount on a bar purchase or a Learn-to-Curl registration. Make sure you have some members who can talk about their own journey in the sport—those who are relatively new to it can be great ambassadors.
- Run Internal Watch Parties or use a Street Curling setup at times your club has **leagues with multiple openings**.
 - If you have room in your Wednesday league, an event on a Wednesday night will self-select potential curlers who have Wednesday nights free.
 - If your Monday league needs more sign ups, folks who show up to a Friday night event may not be available when you have time for them to play
- Take advantage of **USA Curling templates** to generate **social media content** around the Olympics. These materials can be found in *Our House* in the Group called *Get Ahead of the Games*
 - Templates
 - “Stock” photos
 - Social Media Calendar
- Consider **direct mail** campaigns.

- For example if there are apartment buildings nearby, new residents (and existing ones!) may not know you're in their backyard.
 - More information is available in our Every Door Direct Mail (EDDM) guide and templates are available under "Printable Media" in Our House
- Check out our **Marketing Tips** guide for information on how to **engage with local (and social) media** to promote your club
 - Remember, journalists want to tell **human stories**.
 - Pitch stories about how curling is a **positive force in a community**, or how a local team trained to earn a spot at a National Championship
 - More information is available in *Our House*, details are below
- Review your **search engine** appearances
 - Use an "incognito" tab to search "Curling near me" and make sure your club is at the top of the list. If not, there are some things you can do to improve your club's appearance in search results
 - Make sure to include the full **physical address** of where curling happens (not just a mailing address or facility name) on your website
 - Ensure your club manages the Google Maps/Apple Maps entries for your club
 - Update the **meta descriptions** on your website using address-phrases near your club. E.g.: add names of nearby towns where you may draw members from, even if the town name is different than your club's town.
 - **Search** for your club specifically and make sure the results are what you expect.
 - Try other search phrases on various search engines to see what interested potential might use to find you and might see as their **first impression** of your club.
- Double check your club's entry on the USA Curling **[Find a Club Map!](#)** USA Curling Member Clubs are entitled to an entry on the map. If your entry is missing or needs to be updated, please reach out to memberservices@usacurling.org

Get Them In The Door

- First, decide on a **goal** for building on Olympic interest
 - Is your club trying to increase overall membership?
 - Across all leagues or just specific times?

- As with off-site/off-ice events above, consider LTCs/Instructional Leagues during league times you're trying to fill. Hold a LTC on an open sheet in a partially-filled league.
 - Make sure you have place to put people after the introductory/instructional sessions
- Are you trying to capitalize on the Olympic interest but don't have the capacity to significantly increase general club membership?
 - Consider open houses where participants spend a few minutes learning how to slide, throw a stone, and then enjoy a refreshment while watching curling on TV.
- Use this goal to guide your planning and decision-making when marketing your club
- Cater the front page of your **website** to non-curlers/potential curlers (see Digital Planning guide in the Get Ahead of the Games Group in *Our House*, more information [below](#))
 - Your website may be their first impression of your club
 - If it looks welcoming and informative, they'll think your club is too! Be careful of having an exclusive, bare, or challenging website
- After a Learn to Curl, don't forget to **invite them for broomstacking!** Here are some ideas to help entice potential curlers to stay for the full social experience
 - Include a drink ticket or snack coupon in their Learn to Curl Registration to encourage post-even socializing that's so important to our sport
 - Offer exclusive stickers or small tokens to participants who choose to hang out after their Learn to Curl
 - **Socializing and the community is one of the best parts of curling. Don't forget to showcase that while you have them in the building!**

Get Them To Come Back...Again and Again

- Try not to ask them to marry you on the first date
 - ***We* know curling is great.** That's why we play it! That's why we're involved in our clubs and our communities and trying to share our love of the sport
 - **Newcomers don't know that...yet.** Having multiple options and levels of commitment available to potential members allows them to explore the sport and learn about the community without having to dive in to a 3-6 month commitment and potentially hundreds of dollars

- **Pick up games:** allows them to play when they want without the commitment of a full league/membership
- **Olympic/trial membership:** consider temporary or short-term membership options. Encourage full membership with discounts for new members or applying these membership dues to full dues when they join. Allow these members to join certain leagues where growth is needed and give them a chance to really fall in love with the game
- **Bring a friend:** new things are less scary with friends. Offer discounts or referral benefits when someone brings a friend on a second visit
- **Lesson series/short leagues:** players are passionate when they feel they have an opportunity to be successful. Give them the tools to meet their goals by offering opportunities for hands-on education through lesson series and learner leagues. Short leagues focused on introducing the basics can be less intimidating to join than a 20 week full season.
- Decorate the club for the championship season!
 - Use **Red White and Blue** to support Team USA
 - Be mindful of **trademarks** when using external images, logos (such as the Olympic Rings), and mottos in and around your club and marketing materials.
- Include a drink ticket or other incentive to be **redeemed at a later time** in their Learn To Curl registration.
 - Invite LTCers to come back to watch a league game with a free drink or snack and a person in the warmroom to help them understand the strategy
 - Host curling watch parties at your club or a local bar or restaurant and invite LTCers to watch the pros. Now that they've tried it, they'll have a greater appreciation of what they see on TV
- Have space for them!! **Have a plan for league access** after any instructional or introductory league/clinics.
- Explore **creative league structures**
 - If your ice availability allows, consider **learner leagues** or instructional leagues
 - Gives new curlers more confidence to join without worrying about losing every game if they're bad
 - Gives the club an opportunity to educate new curlers on curling! And also etiquette and club traditions
 - **Shorter leagues** are easier to join than longer commitments
 - Allowing new curlers to "ease" into a full league might improve commitment and retention

- If your schedule can't accommodate shorter leagues, consider building some **flexible pools** or groups within longer leagues
(see Appendix below for sample leagues).
 - Regular members can still sign up for their regular leagues but some teams might have transitions in players part way through.
 - Consider having at least 1 experienced player on each new team and/or having “Coaches” on the ice during their draws.
 - New members get a shortened regular league experience, and get to meet and play against experienced players, while focusing on developing their new skills
 - Experienced/regular league players maintain a mostly-traditional league with some minor accommodations for new players.
- Byes or alternating weeks can help leagues look **less intimidating** to new curlers (and increase capacity!)
- Bonspiels are a great way to set the hook and turn new members into **lifetime curlers**.
 - An atmosphere of development in the club and willingness of experienced members to bring new members to their first bonspiels helps build strong new members
 - New Member Bonspiels are great ways to give new members opportunities to experience the bonspiel atmosphere without the pressure of having to “perform” well on a more experienced team
 - Consider having 1-2 “coaches” per sheet to help guide skips
 - Coaches should try not to interject and should try to wait until skips ask for assistance
 - Having a coach can also gently help encourage quicker play
 - Encourage teams to rotate positions each game to give everyone a chance to skip in a low-pressure environment
 - Consider 6 end games (new skips will play slower). Coaches can help keep the game moving, but short games might also give opportunities for coaches to discuss interesting situations with the whole sheet (limit 1 per game!)

Prepare Your Club and Members for Change

- Prepare your current, experienced members for the influx of new members.

- Encourage experienced players to participate in instructional leagues
- **Build up additional back-end players**, particularly skips, so the new members have skips available to lead them
 - If your club currently has a **skip-shortage**, or only as many skips as you have teams, growing your skip pool ASAP will help make sure new teams have viable skip options
 - Encourage skipping through clinics, strategy sessions and discussions, and maybe through novel leagues like sturling or triples where each player gets opportunities to call ends and dip their toes in the skipping pool
 - Encourage existing skips to mentor new skips by playing at the vice position and supporting new skips
 - It will likely be difficult to count on gaining skips directly from the new members in the first year. New skips will likely need to come from existing, experienced players.
- Build up your **instructor base** with Level 1 and 2 Instructor Certifications
- Host mixers or social events for **new and existing members to meet**
- **Ensure that the club leadership and the club membership are aligned** on Olympic expectations, and that the membership are understanding and supportive of the board's goals.
 - Incentivize **mentorship** with tangible benefits
 - Offer rewards or bonuses to members who help train, educate, and mentor new curlers. Free drinks or snacks after a Learn to Curl, discounts or priority league registration, free practice ice, etc.
 - Some members may bristle at reduced league games to accommodate learner leagues or Try Curling sessions. Make sure there's enough support for these growth opportunities to make them viable **without alienating existing members**.
 - **Be aware of burnout**
 - Understand the **capacity** of the volunteers and members supporting your club. Demand for Curling during the Olympics can be overwhelming but make sure the dedicated volunteers also come back next season.
 - Material tokens of appreciation are important, but so is ***genuine* gratitude**. The Olympic season is an exciting time for clubs, but it can also be extremely busy and stressful. It can be easy to forget to say "Thank you" and "I really appreciate you took the time to help me

today” in the fray. Setting a positive tone in the club can help everyone remember why we all fell in love with curling in the first place.

Every club is different and has unique needs and opportunities for growth. This is not intended to be a one-size-fits-all guide, but a collection of ideas to help you find the best path for your club during the Olympics. Pick, choose, and adapt the things that would benefit your club. We’d love to hear what works, what doesn’t, and if you have other ideas to share. We will be continuing the Olympic cycle discussion throughout the season at Club Council meetings and Town Halls, so keep an eye out for opportunities to share ideas and feedback with other clubs.

Appendix

Two Pool League Examples

6 Sheet League (1 6-sheet draw or 2 3-sheet draws)

- 12 team league
 - 8 teams in the “regular” pool members
 - 4 teams are in a “developmental” or “flex league” pool.
- 10 week league
 - Each regular pool team plays
 - 7-game full round robin
 - 1 crossover games with the flex pool (half play mini season 1 teams, half play mini season 2 teams)
 - 1 rematch or “fun” night
 - 1 league final
 - The flex pool is broken into 2 “mini” seasons, 5 weeks each.
 - 3-game full round robin (x2)
 - 1 crossover game with the full league (x2)
 - 1 mini league playoffs games (x2)
 - After 5 weeks, players can choose to continue and new players can be added if mini-season 1 players don’t return.

Sample Draw:

	Sheet 1	Sheet 2	Sheet 3	Sheet 4	Sheet 5	Sheet 6
Week 1	R1vR2	R3vR4	R5vR6	R7vR8	D1vD2	D3vD4
Week 2	D2vD3	D1vD4	R2vR3	R1vR5	R6vR8	R4vR7
Week 3	R4vR5	R1vR6	D2vD4	D1vD3	R2vR8	R3vR7
Week 4	D1vR3	D2vR2	D3vR6	D4vR5	R1vR7	R4vR8
Week 5	Regular Pool Rematch + Dev Pool 1 Finals					
Week 6	R1vR8	R2vR4	R3vR5	R6vR7	D1'vD2'	D3'vD4'
Week 7	R5vR8	D1'vD3'	R2vR7	D2'vD4'	R4vR6	R1vR3
Week 8	R1vR4	R3vR8	D1'vD4'	R5vR7	D2'vD3'	R2vR6
Week 9	R3vR6	R2vR5	D2'vR1	D1'vR4	D3'vR7	D4'vR8
Week 10	Regular Pool Finals + Dev Pool 2 Finals					

(If this is applied to a 3 sheet club, Sheet 4 becomes Sheet 1 in the second draw and so on. Please note that all match ups are represented here, but sheet assignments/draw times (for 3 sheets) have not been balanced.)

8 Sheet League (1 8-sheet draw or 2 4-sheet draws)

- 16 teams
 - 10 teams in the “regular” pool
 - 6 teams in the “developmental” or “flex” pool
- 12 week league
 - Each regular pool team plays
 - 9-game full round robin
 - 1 cross over game with the dev/flex pool (half play mini season 1 teams, half play mini season 2 teams)*
 - 1 rematch/fun game
 - 1 league final
 - The dev/flex pool is broken into 2 “mini” seasons, 6 weeks each.
 - 5-game full round robin
 - 1 cross over game
 - After 6 weeks, players can choose to continue and new players can be added if mini-season 1 players don’t return.

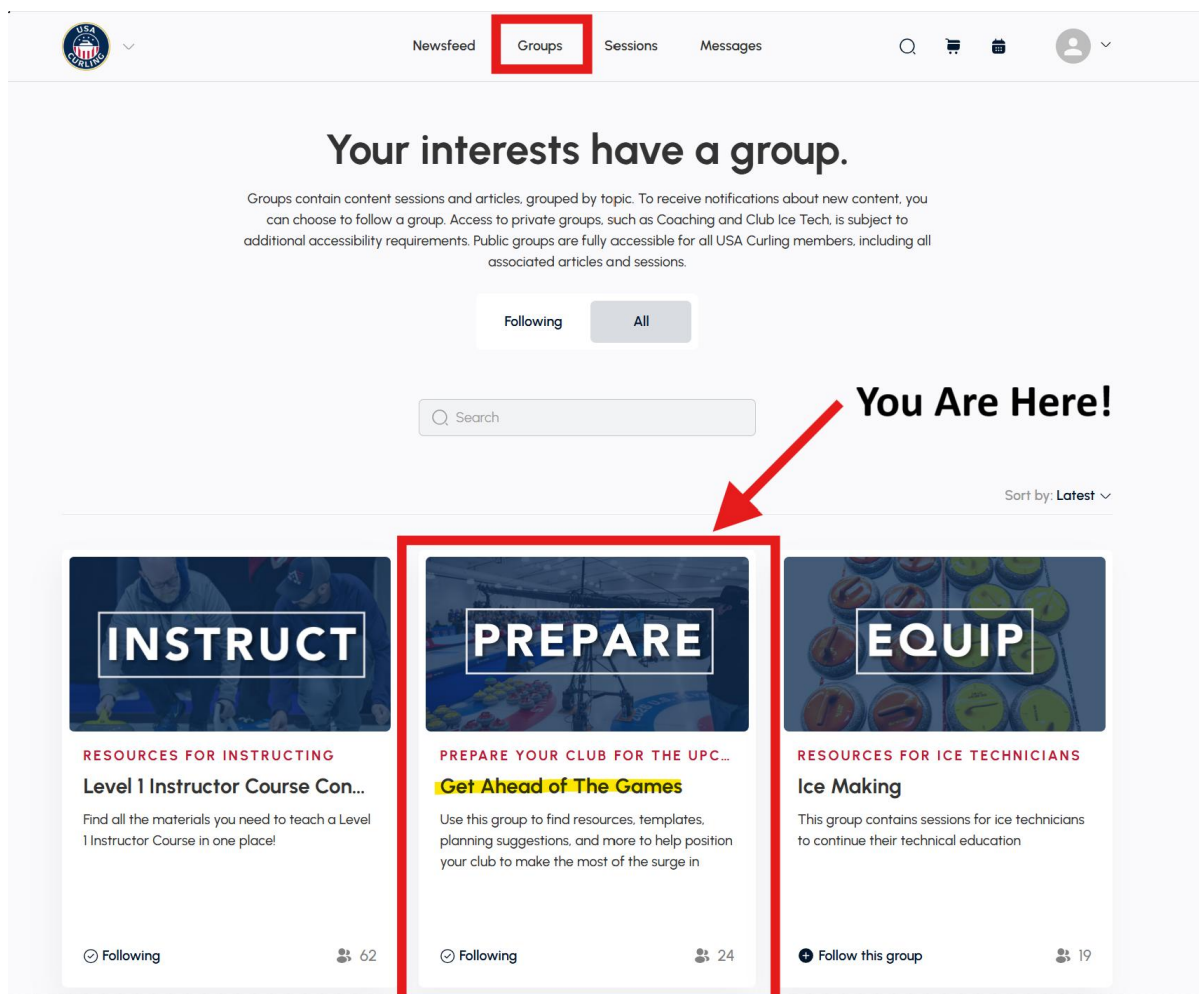
**One “regular” team will play 2 cross over games and 0 rematch/fun games*

(Appendix continues below)

Other Resources in Our House

[Our House](#) is the digital content platform for USA Curling resources. It is hosted by SLOCOACH (so you may have seen the [usacurling.slocoach.com](#) link) and managed by USA Curling Staff.

We recommend users make use of “[Groups](#)” to guide you to the resources most applicable to you and your club:



If you're reading this document, you've probably already found the [Get Ahead of the Games](#) Group! This Group has 3 sub-sections or “sessions” at the time of publication, each containing a number of other resources:

Operational Planning

Explore Content Sessions.

Each session includes one or more documents on a range of topics. Click a session to explore its contents.

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Operational Planning

English

Content only Purchased

Resources from USA Curling to help your club prepare to make the most of the upcoming Olympic Wave

USA Curling 4.0 (3 ratings)

Free Go to session →



Printable Media

English

Content only Purchased

USA Curling has produced a number of customizable and printable media items. Clubs can use tools like Canva (which has free upgraded plans for 501(c)(3))

USA Curling 4.0 (3 ratings)

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Digital Planning

English

Content only Purchased

How to update your website to target new curlers and fast track them to becoming members of your club. This session includes:

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- Operational Planning Guide (this document)
- A Guide to the USPS Every Door Direct Mail (EDDM) Service
- Olympic Season Marketing and Communication Tips

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- New Curler Webpage Template with FAQs
A PDF with recommended content and FAQs to help answer questions new curlers might have about your club
A pre-built template of this page is available for Warm Room Hero subscribers.
[Warm Room Hero](#) generously offers a discount to USA Curling Member Clubs. If you're

interested in updating your website to a new platform, don't hesitate to reach out: memberservices@usacurling.org or <https://curling.club/>

- **Curling Pathways**
An interactive digital guide showing how new curlers can get involved in club operations, volunteering, and competition
- **Stock Photos for USA Curling Member Clubs** to use in their marketing and social media

Printable Media

Explore Content Sessions. View all sessions →

Each session includes one or more documents on a range of topics. Click a session to explore its contents.



OPERATIONAL PLANNING

English

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MEDIA TEMPLATES

English

Printable Media

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How to update your website to target new curlers and fast track them to becoming members of your club. This session includes

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- **Templates for customizable and printable brochures** to hand out at Learn To Curls
- **Every Day Direct Mailer (EDDM) templates** (5 front options and 1 back/info side option)