



**CANADA SOCCER
APPLICANT'S GUIDE - CLUB LICENSING PROGRAM**



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The Canada Soccer Club Licensing Program is an essential part of the member organisation (club and academy) development and recognition process at Canada Soccer. With club licensing becoming a requirement of every member organisation through the Canada Soccer Rules and Regulations, by the end of 2024, it will influence every club in the country, approximately 1200 communities where soccer is taught, experienced and enjoyed.

Monitoring and evaluation is an ever-expanding field at Canada Soccer and certification programs are getting designed to be more comprehensive and clear in terms of what and how they measure. This guide is a resource to all those participating in the Club Licensing evaluation process. Whether you are an evaluator or an applicant, it is critical that we all share the same starting point.

In this guide you will find:

- An overview of goals for the Club Licensing Program.
- An outline of the overall evaluation process.
- A big picture breakdown of the different assessments involved.
- A more detailed review of the measurement criteria for each specific assessment.

CLUB LICENSING PROGRAM

The Canada Soccer Club Licensing Program is designed to guide member organisations (clubs and academies) throughout the country toward best principles for organisational development both on and off the field. Member organisations play an essential role in the development of players, coaches, and officials and provide both the daily playing environment and primary contact for participants. By raising the standards of member organisations, both the daily playing environment and participant experience are enhanced; thereby improving the overall soccer system in Canada.

The primary goals of the Canada Soccer Club Licensing Program are to:

- Set clearly defined standards and expectations for member organisations;
- Recognize excellence in the soccer community;
- Raise the level of all soccer organisations throughout Canada; and,
- Drive change in the soccer system.

The Club Licensing Program outlines best principles for member organisations across the pillars of Governance, Administration, Infrastructure, and Technical and provides support and guidance in achieving them. By meeting the licensing criteria, member organisations demonstrate their commitment to excellence; while participating players (and their parents), coaches, officials, and organisers can have confidence in the quality of the organisation within which they participate.

In Canada, there has been a call for strong leadership in the development of a more standardised soccer system and consistent, actively enforced, standards throughout. The Canada Soccer Club Licensing Program is designed to serve this purpose and guide member organisations to enhanced levels of achievement.

To achieve the goals outlined above, the Canada Soccer Club Licensing Program takes a principles-based approach. Principles provide direction but not detailed prescription, allowing organisations to develop and select the methods by which they will operate based on their available resources and unique situation and context. The principles of the Canada Soccer Club Licensing Program are grounded in the values being established for the Canadian soccer community to guide the behaviour of all organisations and can be utilised to inform choices, establish impacts, and drive outcomes.

The Canada Soccer Club Licensing Program Principles are as follows:

1. Prioritise Fun
2. Emphasise Physical, Mental, and Emotional Safety
3. Provide Developmentally Appropriate, High Quality Programs
4. Maximise Attraction, Holistic Personal Development, Progression, and Long-Term Engagement
5. Focus on Participant-Centred Decision Making
6. Foster Accessible, Inclusive, and Welcoming Environments
7. Act as a Good Corporate and Community Citizen

Launched in 2019, the Canada Soccer Club Licensing program currently recognizes more than 400 clubs from across the country in four categories. The Club Licensing Program presents a roadmap for clubs to provide quality soccer programming designed to attract, retain, develop and progress, and transition players into other meaningful roles in the game and sets standards for recognition for all clubs in Canada. For more information and resources on the program in general, please visit [the following link](#).

The Evaluation Process

Evaluation is the process of making judgements based on evidence-based criteria, whereas assessment refers to the specific tasks that clubs are asked to complete in order for Canada Soccer to be able to effectively evaluate their performance.

As mentioned above, monitoring and evaluation is an ever-expanding field at Canada Soccer and certification programs are getting designed to be more comprehensive and clearer in terms of what and how they measure. Even though assessment criteria can be very specific, the evaluation process is nuanced, and each Club demonstrates their identity in unique ways. The goal at Canada Soccer is to engage in an online dialogue between experienced evaluators and applicants to set clubs up for success in the application process.

There is one cumulative artefact that each Club is evaluated on, and that is their application. The goal of **The Application** is to provide each Club with the opportunity to demonstrate that their organisation meets the requirements of each of the standards outlined within. Applications are comprehensive documents that include additional information and documentation which are uploaded to the online platform. What follows is an attempt to provide more information in terms of what is expected from applicants when it comes to some of these additional components, as well as the overall application itself.

While different components of the application are evaluated using different criteria, what follows are a common set of principles that Canada Soccer and their evaluators abide by during the evaluation process.

- ▶ **Relationship Building:** The rapport that gets cultivated between the evaluator(s) and the applicant supports a better understanding of the evaluation process in general and helps to open lines of communication and build connections that will set the applicant up for success in the long run.
- ▶ **Dialogue & Discourse:** The conversations that take place between the evaluator(s) and the applicant are an essential meaning-making process. It is through this continued communication that any misunderstanding related to what is expected of an applicant or what are the responsibilities of an evaluator, get addressed and resolved.
- ▶ **Iterative Development:** The evaluation process is set-up to support the applicant. By leveraging the established communication channels and engaging in meaningful discussions with the evaluator(s), there is always room for growth and improvement along the way.

- ▶ **Mixed Methods Approach:** The feedback that an applicant will receive over the course of the evaluation process, will include both quantitative numbers (e.g., a mark or score based on levelling criteria) as well as qualitative comments (e.g., suggestions for improvement). This mixed methods approach ensures that applicants are able to view their scores in the context of specific performance comments.
- ▶ **Transparency:** The expectations and instructions related to this evaluation process must be clear and easy to understand and interpret. This guide is a resource in that process, including the overview of the general process, rationale for each assessment and the detailed descriptions of measurement criteria to follow.

The evaluation process around the application helps to ensure that standards are safeguarded, and the value of the licence is maintained. The mission of Canada Soccer is to provide leadership in the pursuit of excellence in soccer, nationally and internationally, in cooperation with its members and stakeholders, so it is in the organisation's best interest to work together with applicants to develop their submissions.

The Assessment Process

This section will take you through an overview of the application itself and expand on some of the key components within it that ask for supplementary documentation. The information provided below is not representative of an exhaustive list of all the characteristics under examination but will provide applicants with clear guidelines to focus their attention and energy on when working to complete their applications.

THE APPLICATION

WHAT IT IS & WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

The Application is an organisation's submission of information and documentation against the standards of the Licence. As a standards-based program, the Club Licensing Program sets a series of standards for each category of recognition across the pillars of Governance, Administration, Infrastructure, and Technical. The application provides an opportunity for organisations to be assessed against each criterion of the licence by responding to a series of questions within an online system.

Applicants should consider the following when completing The Application:

- **Complete the application in its entirety** - questions that are skipped or completed with place holders will be considered as below the required standard.
- **Read the questions and supporting information carefully** to respond appropriately - many questions include additional information to guide the response or direct the applicant to a resource. Please use the additional resources provided.
- **Be clear and concise** - While the platform allows for the addition of documents and/or links, more information does not necessarily mean a better application and it can make assessment more challenging. If the response is within a larger document, please highlight the appropriate section for clarity.
- **Provide personalised information** - Links to or uploads of generic documentation from governing bodies is challenging to assess. Whenever possible submissions should speak specifically to the actions of the organisation. If information from an external source is being used, ensure it is relevant and complimentary.
- **Write to the target audience** - All documentation developed and submitted as a part of the Club Licensing Program is meant to be useful to the organisation. It should be written for the target audience (e.g., players and parents, coaches, etc.) as opposed to being written for the reviewer as a response to the question.
- **Ensure the information that you submit is available** - All documentation developed and submitted as a part of the Club Licensing Program is meant to be useful to the organisation and should be available to its membership. Documents should be displayed publicly with a link submitted as verification. If a document is not publicly available, a comment describing how it is shared is required.
- **Be transparent and accountable in the application** - Applications should present what the organisation does and how it does it rather than what the organisation believes the reviewers want to see. Documentation needs to be consistent between what was submitted and what is posted. If certain standards are not in place at the time of application, be honest in the application. It is much better to create an action plan to address any gaps required to obtain the licence rather than presenting standards that are not in place during or after the review process.

Additional Documentation

The following 3 key planning documents are amongst the most important elements of the application. The Strategic Plan, Operational Plan, and Technical Plan are an organisation's primary guiding documents and tell the story of who the organisation is, why they exist, what they do, and how they do it. While the **Strategic Plan**, **Operational Plan**, and **Technical Plan** are submitted as a part of the application, they are assessed independently.

THE STRATEGIC PLAN

WHAT IT IS & WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

The Strategic Plan is an organisation's highest level guiding document. It presents the organisation's vision, mission, and values, sets its strategic direction over a longer period of time (typically 3-5 years), and articulates its goals. As the highest order guiding document, the Strategic Plan guides the development of the subsequent Operational and Technical Plans through the strategic direction set and goals articulated. It serves to allow the organisation to allocate resources appropriately to achieve its desired outcomes and underpins decision making at an organisational level.

Applicants should consider the following when completing The Strategic Plan

- **Look** - as a public-facing document, the Strategic Plan is a representation of the organisation and should be professionally presented. This doesn't mean that the organisation needs to have the plan professionally designed, but it should be visually appealing (e.g, have consistent fonts, avoid typos, etc.).
- **Structure** - the Strategic Plan should provide the following Club information:
 - Background - *how did you come to be?*
 - Vision, Mission, Values - *what makes you unique?*
 - SWOT/Analysis - *what is your value proposition?*
 - Desired Outcomes - *what are you here to achieve?*
 - Strategic Pillars - *what are your foundational principles?*
 - Strategic Priorities/Goals for each Pillar - *what are your key areas of focus?*
 - Tactics to Achieve Strategic Priorities - *what is your action plan?*
 - Measures of Success - *how will you know you've met your goals?*
- **Content and Level of Detail** - as the document that is designed to guide organisational decision making, it is important that the Strategic Plan includes sufficient detail in each of the areas identified above but does not overwhelm. When drafting, consider questions like "Have I said this already?" and "Is this essential?".
- **Connection to Operational and Technical Plans** - as the highest-level guiding document, the Strategic Plan lays the foundation for the Operational Plan and Technical Plan. Each subsequent document should articulate and present details that can be directly traced back to achieving the desired outcomes of the Strategic Plan (e.g., connecting tactics, approaches, initiatives, programs, and services...).

THE OPERATIONAL PLAN

WHAT IT IS & WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

The Operational Plan presents specific operational initiatives designed to achieve the goals of the Strategic Plan. It is typically developed by management to operationalize the organisation's strategy over a shorter period of time (typically 1-2 years). The Operational Plan should also assign responsibility for each action, a timeline for completion, resources (typically human and financial, but could include others), and measures of success.

As the means by which the strategic priorities will be achieved, the Operational Plan is essential to organisational success. In a well-structured organisation, the Operational Plan ensures that the goals of the Strategic Plan are achieved, drives the development of the budget, deployment of human resources, and creates the outcomes for board reporting by which the performance of management can be tangibly assessed.

Applicants should consider the following when completing *The Operational Plan*

- **Look** - while the Operational Plan is an internal working document for the organisation, it remains important that it be professionally presented. Typically presented in a spreadsheet or table format to more easily organise information, the Operational Plan is a primary means for management to report to the board of directors and the document should be presented accordingly.
- **Structure** - the Operational Plan should provide information that connects to the Strategic Plan, including:
 - Operational Activity - *what are the specific activities the organisation will undertake?*
 - Person Responsible - *who is responsible for these activities?*
 - Timeline - *when will these activities be completed?*
 - Resources Required - *what resources will be needed to complete them (consider human, financial, and other)?*
 - Measures of Success - *how will you know an activity has been successful?*
 - Status - *how are you tracking the organisation's progress?*
- **Content and Level of Detail** - Of all the guiding documents, the Operational Plan is typically the most detailed, but we still don't want to provide information that is redundant or unnecessary. When drafting, consider questions such as "Did I fully answer the who, what, where, and when of each of the listed activities?", "Have I included all relevant activities of the organisation?", or "Have I explained how I will be measuring success for each of the organisation's operational activities?".
- **Connection to Other Supporting Plans and Strategies** - the purpose of the Operational Plan is to operationalize the Strategic Plan; hence clear connections are essential. In addition, the Operational Plan should present high-level operational activities that continue to be developed in more detailed supporting plans (e.g., Marketing and Communications Plan, Financial Development Strategy, Facility Development Strategy, Community Engagement Strategy).

THE TECHNICAL PLAN

WHAT IT IS & WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

The Technical Plan is very important, as it presents the on-field goals of the Strategic Plan, overall technical philosophy of the organisation, specific programs and services details (what you do), and approaches to technical operations - how you do what you do!

The Technical Plan is the primary means by which the organisation can describe to current and potential members what differentiates it from other soccer organisations. It also presents the desired outcomes of technical programs and services, which should connect to the strategic plan, and creates the measures of success for technical staff, programs, and services provided. It is thus an invaluable reporting tool for executive leadership.

Applicants should consider the following when completing *The Technical Plan*

- **Look** - The Technical Plan is a public-facing document which should be professionally presented and visually appealing.
- **Structure** - the Technical Plan should provide information including:
 - Background - *who are you as a Club?*
 - Staff and Responsibilities - *who does what at your Club?*
 - Desired Outcomes - *what does success look like for you as a Club?*

- Club Ecosystem (Diagram) - *how are the programs you provide connected?*
 - Program Descriptions - *describe all programs (outdoor/indoor, seasonal) and consider what specific program details need to be provided?*
 - Player Management Processes - *how do players access / move between programs?*
 - Program Delivery - *how do you execute / implement programs?*
 - Playing Philosophy - *what are the core playing values at your organisation?*
 - Training Methodology - *what guides training (e.g., approaches, rules...)?*
 - Coaching Strategy - *what are your core values and how are they actualized?*
 - Sports Science & Medicine Plan - *how do you use sport science and medicine to support player development?*
 - Technology Support Plan - *how will technology support player development?*
 - Measures of Success - *how do you know the programs are successful?*
 - Timeline - *when will these activities be completed?*
- **Content and Level of Detail** - this plan should be written for its target audience, current, potential players, and their parents. Additional supporting documentation will include more details like the Game Model and Coach Strategy, written for a more technical audience like coaches and technical staff. On average this plan is between 15-25 pages. Please avoid repetition and unnecessary jargon.
 - **Connection to Other Supporting Plans & Strategies:** The Technical Plan should articulate how the on-field goals of the Strategic Plan will be achieved. While some information is similar to the Operational Plan, this plan is structured differently and has a different target audience. This presents high-level summaries that are further developed in plans that follow (e.g., Coach Strategy, Game Model, Yearly Training, Sport Science and Medicine, and Technical Support).

While the aforementioned 3 key planning documents are amongst the most important elements of the application, there are additional pieces of documentation that also need to be submitted as a part of the application, and they will be considered next.

CODE OF CONDUCT TO PROTECT CHILDREN

WHAT IT IS & WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Code of Conduct to Protect Children is of paramount importance to soccer clubs as it safeguards the well-being and safety of young athletes under their care. It reflects the club's commitment to creating a secure and nurturing environment, shielding children from harm, and ensuring they can enjoy the game without fear of abuse or neglect. By adhering to this code, soccer clubs not only fulfil their legal and moral obligations but also maintain their reputation, earn the trust of parents and the community, and contribute to the healthy development of future soccer talents.

Applicants should consider the following when completing the Code of Conduct to Protect Children

- **Use the template provided** - *to ensure consistency and efficiency.*
- **Ensure the template is personalised for the organisation** - *replace organisation name and "club designate" with individual name and contact information for primary liaison for child protection.*
- **Make sure reporting infrastructure is in place and contact information is made available** - *for clarity and ease of access.*
- **Ensure that information is accessible to your membership** - *the Code of Conduct to Protect Children should be posted and the process for distribution and building awareness should be described.*

RULE OF TWO GUIDELINES

WHAT IT IS & WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

A part of the Coaching Association of Canada Responsible Coaching Movement and integral to ensuring a safe sport environment, the goal of the *Rule of Two Guidelines* is to ensure all interactions and communications are open, observable, and justifiable. Its purpose is to protect participants (especially minors) and coaches in potentially vulnerable situations by ensuring that a coach is never alone with an athlete. The health, safety and well-being of all participants is foundational to the principles of the Club Licensing Program and essential to the provision of a quality soccer environment.

Applicants should consider the following when completing the Rule of Two Guidelines

- **Use the template provided** - to ensure consistency and efficiency.
- **Ensure that information is accessible to your membership** - the *Rule of Two Guidelines* should be posted and the process for distribution and building awareness should be described.

ANTI-BULLYING POLICY

WHAT IT IS & WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

An *Anti-Bullying Policy* is created to prevent bullying, protect athletes and encourage them to seek assistance if they are being bullied. It is crucial for soccer clubs to foster a positive and inclusive environment for all participants. Bullying can harm young players both emotionally and psychologically, negatively impacting their enjoyment of the sport and their overall well-being. By implementing and enforcing an anti-bullying policy, clubs send a clear message that harmful behaviours will not be tolerated, creating a safe and supportive atmosphere where athletes can develop both as players and individuals. Such policies not only protect the club's reputation but also promote fairness, respect, and camaraderie among players, coaches, and parents, ultimately enhancing the overall soccer experience.

Applicants should consider the following when completing the Anti-Bullying Policy

- **Clearly define bullying** - include various forms of bullying as well as the environments that they might occur (e.g. cyberbullying).
- **Include anti-discrimination** - in addition to providing an environment in which all individuals are treated with respect, consider naming specific anti-discrimination areas, including body type, physical characteristics, athletic ability, age, ancestry, colour, race, citizenship, ethnic origin, place of origin, creed, disability, family status, marital status, gender identity, gender expression, sex, and sexual orientation.
- **Clear reporting process** - how and to whom do individuals report bullying?
- **Ensure there is a process in place to address complaints** - if a complaint is received, how is it investigated and what are the potential consequences?
- **Include help for victims of bullying** - consider naming specific resources available.
- **Consider anti-bullying training within your organisation**
- **Ensure that information is accessible to your membership** - the policy should be posted and the process for distribution and building awareness should be described.

EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION (EDI) POLICY

WHAT IT IS & WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

An *Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Policy* is essential for soccer clubs because it demonstrates a commitment to fostering an inclusive and equitable environment for all participants regardless of their backgrounds. Such a policy promotes fairness, diversity, and equal opportunities, ensuring that individuals of varying abilities, genders, ethnicities, and orientations are welcomed and respected within the club. An EDI policy helps eliminate discrimination and bias, allowing for broader participation in the sport. It also enhances the club's reputation, attracts a more diverse talent pool of players, coaches, and volunteers, and contributes to the overall growth and strength of the club by reflecting the values of inclusivity and social responsibility.

Applicants should consider the following when completing the EDI Policy

- **Clearly define Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion** - for clarity and cohesion.
- **Consultation** - Ensure to engage diverse groups when developing the policy.
- **Clear reporting process** - how and to whom do individuals report discrimination?
- **Ensure there is a process in place to address complaints** - if a complaint is received, how is it investigated and what are the potential consequences?
- **Ensure that information is accessible to your membership** - the policy should be posted with a clear process in place for distribution and building awareness.
- **Training** - include training requirement for the board, staff, and volunteers.

COACH TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION REPORT

WHAT IT IS & WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Coach training and certification are vital for soccer clubs as they ensure the highest standards of coaching quality and player development. Coaches with appropriate training and certification have the knowledge and skills to teach the game effectively, enhancing player performance and skill progression. Moreover, they are equipped to create a safe and supportive training environment, preventing injuries and promoting player well-being. Certification also demonstrates a commitment to professionalism and ethical conduct, instilling trust in parents and players.

Applicants should consider the following when indicating Coach Training and Certification

- **Use the template provided** - to ensure consistency and efficiency.
- **Complete coaches list** - Ensure that all staff and team personnel who interact with players are included in your submission, including competitive, recreational / community, and grassroots coaches.
- **Align to the Canada Soccer Safe Sport Roster** - each requirement of the Safe Sport Roster should be reflected in the coach and team personal list.
- **Share via a link** - to allow for live updating, consider providing your coaches list as a cloud link (Dropbox, SharePoint, Google Drive, etc.). If a link is not shared, an updated list should be provided with each action plan report.

COACH STRATEGY

WHAT IT IS & WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Coaches are often the face of an organisation and have the most frequent interaction with players and parents. In addition to developing players, the quality of a coach is also heavily connected to player enjoyment and retention. The organisation is responsible for the behaviour of its coaches. A robust and intentional development strategy is essential to supporting the success of coaches. The *Coach Strategy* should present an organisation's approach to recruiting new coaches, ensuring they have the appropriate training and certification for the role, supporting their development outside of formal workshops, retaining coaches and recognizing / evaluating their work and contributions.

Applicants should consider the following when developing the Coach Strategy

- **Structure** - the Coach Strategy should provide information including:
 - Short- and Long-Term Desired Outcomes - *what are you specifically trying to achieve?*
 - Coach Profiles - *what do you look for in coaches across different programs?*
 - Recruitment Processes - *how do you identify and recruit new coaches?*
 - External Coach Education - *what are the training and certification expectations of coaches? How are these supported by the organisation?*
 - Internal Coach Development - *what does the organisation do to improve its coaches outside of formal coach education?*
 - Mentorship Program - *is mentorship available and what does it look like?*
 - Performance Planning and Evaluation - *is there a documented coach planning and evaluation process? How does it work and who is responsible?*
 - Recognition and Retention Strategies - *what does the organisation do to keep coaches involved and recognize their contributions?*
 - Transitions of Players into Coaching Roles - *what intentional approaches are taken to transition players into coaching roles?*
 - Women in Coaching - *what intentional approaches are taken to engage and develop more women coaches (e.g. She CAN Coach)?*
 - Measures of Success - *how do you know the programs are successful?*
 - Timeframe - *when will activities, goals, and outcomes be achieved?*
 - Budget - *what is the coach education and development budget?*
- **Content and level of detail** - *this plan should be written for its target audience, current and prospective coaches, and should outline what coaches can expect from the organisation as well as what is expected of them.*

GAME MODEL

WHAT IT IS & WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

The *Game Model* presents an organisation's vision or idea on how it wants its team to play the game from a tactical perspective. It expands on the playing philosophy to present detailed information around pitch geography, moments of the game (attacking organisation, attacking transition, defensive organisation, defensive transition), principles and sub-principles, playing formations, positional responsibilities and overall positional profiles. This document guides how a club will train and develop its players and is an important tool for club development as it ensures all coaches are implementing a standardised approach.

Applicants should consider the following when developing the Game Model

- **Both visual representation and verbal descriptions** - *for comprehension.*
- **Game models for small-sided playing formats** - *Begin with the 11-aside game, but adapted game models for small-sided playing format that build toward the full Game Model will ensure alignment across all programs.*
- **Training methodology** - *how will you train to execute your Game Model?*
- **Content and level of detail** - *develop for a coaching audience with significant detail but consider how it is presented to other audiences to ensure it is effective but not overwhelming. Consider how the Game Model looks for the grassroots program vs. the YD or SPP - how does one scaffold on one another?*

YEARLY TRAINING PLAN

WHAT IT IS & WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

A *Yearly Training Plan (YTP)* is a tool that maps out training and competition using periodization to set the type, intensity, and duration of training throughout a training year to produce peak performance. It should consider all levels of programming (grassroots, competitive, development (youth), performance (senior)) and be public facing. The YTP allows an organisation to set performance goals and develop a plan to best achieve them. It also guides coaches toward focuses for individual training sessions based on an overall development plan.

Applicants should consider the following when developing the Yearly Training Plan

- **Develop the YTP in conjunction with the Integrated Support Team (IST)** - *periodization can be a complex topic and engagement with experts in this area will ensure appropriate loading to support development. A YTP must consider a full year of programming, not only the primary playing season.*
- **Start with the competition calendar** - *often the calendar is outside of the organisation's control but preparation for key events is critical to developing a YTP.*
- **Consider macro (year), meso (phase), and micro (weekly) cycles** - *for clarity.*
- **Include sport science and technology sessions** - *for well-rounded content.*
- **Consider players in multiple environments** - *if players participate in multiple programs within or outside the organisation (regional/provincial programs, school sports, multi-sport, etc.), how this is supported should be reflected in the YTP.*
- **Content and level of detail** - *the YTP should be adjusted to match the complexity of the program. For a grassroots program it may be as simple as the training and competition schedule, while a youth development or senior performance program would require a more robust approach to periodization.*

SPORT SCIENCE AND MEDICINE PLAN

WHAT IT IS & WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Sport Science and Medicine are essential supports to a holistic approach to athlete development focused on physical, mental, and social/emotional development as well as health and wellness. The *Sport Science and Medicine Plan* should describe why the organisation provides sport science and medicine, what training and support is provided, how it is delivered, who is responsible, and when and where it occurs. The provision of Sport Science and Medicine support can be a differentiating factor in a high-quality program.

Applicants should consider the following when developing the Sport Science & Medicine Plan

- **Develop in conjunction with the Integrated Support Team (IST)** - see above and ensure integration into the Yearly Training Plan.
- **Connect to other plans** - like overall training and technical plans through the Yearly Training Plan.
- **Consider holistic development** - supporting physical, mental, social and emotional.
- **Consider access to additional individual support** - athletes may need additional support in areas like mental skills training or nutrition and this should be viewed in the same way that supplemental training is provided to athletes in technical skills. Support for high potential players should also be considered.
- **Content and level of detail** - this plan should outline what is provided / available in terms of sport science and medicine support but avoid unnecessary detail / jargon that may not be understood by the target audience (players, coaches and parents).

TECHNOLOGY SUPPORT PLAN

WHAT IT IS & WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

The use of technology to support athlete development can improve program quality. Tools may include match recording and analysis as well as more robust sport science supports like heart monitors, GPS tracking, and performance analysis software. The *Technology Support Plan* should describe why the organisation provides technology support, what is provided, how it is delivered and supports player development, who is responsible, and when and where it occurs.

Applicants should consider the following when developing the Technology Support Plan

- **Consider the core purpose** - how does each specific tool improve program quality?
- **Define your objectives** - what do you hope to gain from the use of technology?
- **Consider the learner** - how will the technology help in player / coach development.
- **Connect to other plans** - like overall training plans through the Yearly Training Plan.
- **Content and Level of Detail** - this plan should be written for its target audience, players and parents and coaches and should outline what is provided and available in terms of technology support and be suitable for use as a public-facing document.

MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

WHAT IT IS & WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

A *Marketing and Communication Plan* is a strategic-operational document that guides how you communicate with both internal and external audiences. It helps you clearly align your messaging, channels, tactics, and budget with marketing and communications objectives. By sharing key messages about your products and services with a target audience, people will better understand the value of what you provide, and thus help the club to attract and retain customers and partners more effectively and efficiently.

Applicants should consider the following when developing the Marketing & Comms Plan

- **Situational analysis** - consider tools like a *SWOT analysis*, competitor analysis, customer analysis, and market research to gather relevant data and insights on your target audience (potential customers and partners) and products and services (value proposition and comparison to key competitors).
- **Review current marketing and communications activities** - consider marketing mix (value proposition), brand identity, current strategies and approaches.
- **Set goals** - these should align to your overall strategic and operational plans and goals, reflect your situation analysis and use a *SMART framework*.
- **Overall strategy and supporting tactics** - how will you achieve your goals?
- **Ensure appropriate resourcing** - who is responsible for achieving the goals (human resources) and what is the associated budget (financial resources)?
- **Evaluation** - How will you evaluate the success of your plan?

FINANCIAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

WHAT IT IS & WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

A *Financial Development Strategy* is integral to an organisation's strategic plan. It sets out how the organisation plans to finance its overall operations to meet its objectives now and in the future. A Financial Development Strategy summarises targets, and the actions to be taken over a three-to-five-year period to achieve the targets. It also clearly states key policies which will guide those actions.

Applicants should consider the following when drafting the Financial Development Strategy

- **Current financial position** - where are you now financially?
- **Future needs** - what resources will you need to achieve all your strategic goals?
- **How will you get there?** - what actions will you take each year to finance the strategic plan and achieve the financial targets identified?
- **Supporting policies** - what policies do you need to guide the strategy (e.g. reserves policy, investment policy, etc.)?

FACILITY STRATEGY

WHAT IT IS & WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Access to suitable facilities that meet the minimum requirements of the organisation's programs is foundational to the success of a soccer club. While facility needs may vary between organisations and from program to program, the quality of programming can be compromised without adequate facilities that are safe and accessible. The *Facility Strategy* examines present and future facility needs, identifies gaps, and presents strategies and supporting tactics to ensure appropriate facilities are always available to support the delivery of programs and services.

Applicants should consider the following when developing the Facility Strategy

- **Current status** - *organisations will have unique stories to tell here, depending on their stage of execution of their strategy. If a club has a recently built facility, for example, they may be focused on its operational demands, whereas another club may be focused on earlier stages such as fund development, facility planning, or building partnerships and land agreements.*
- **Facility development and operation** - *while facility ownership and operation have benefits, it is not a requirement of the Club Licensing Program as access to facilities that meet current and future needs can be achieved in other ways.*
- **Current and future needs** - *what are the current facility requirements and, based on the technical and strategic plans, what are your future needs?*
- **What are the gaps and how will you overcome them?** - *what actions will you take to ensure the facilities available meet your current and future needs?*
- **Supporting policies** - *what policies do you need to guide the strategy (e.g. facility procurement, facility development or improvement fee or reserve, etc.)?*

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

WHAT IT IS & WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Soccer organisations should be viewed as more than just community providers of soccer programs. The best organisations are integral to the fabric of their community and contribute to its health and well-being. The *Community Engagement Strategy* presents a plan to build such connections. It describes a consistent and intentional approach to engagement with the community and how the organisation will contribute to the betterment of its members. Organisations committed to giving back outside of simply providing soccer programming can build a greater connection to the community, which can lead to positive relationships with community leaders, partnerships, and a greater level of support for the organisation's initiatives.

Applicants should consider the following when drafting a Community Engagement Strategy

- **Current engagement initiatives** - *what, if anything, does the organisation do currently to engage with its community?*
- **Community needs** - *each community is different, what are the needs of the community where your organisation operates?*
- **Set Community Engagement Goals** - *what are you hoping to achieve with your community engagement initiatives?*
- **Develop an overall strategy and supporting tactics** - *how will you achieve your goals? Be specific and intentional.*
- **Ensure appropriate resourcing** - *who is responsible for achieving the goals (human resources) and what is the associated budget (financial resources)?*
- **Evaluation** - *How will you evaluate the success of your strategy?*

OPERATIONAL POLICIES AND PROCESSES

WHAT IT IS & WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Operational Policies and Process are the guidelines and rules that govern the daily operation and administration of an organisation. They help to ensure consistency, efficiency, quality, and compliance with relevant laws and regulations as well as clarity and transparency for members. Policies guide the overall decision making of the organisation.

Applicants should consider the following when developing Operational Policies and Processes

- **Presentation** - *Operational Policies and Processes should be presented in the form of a Policy and Procedures Manual and posted either as a collective or individually on the organisation's website.*
- **Content** - *while the standards of the Club Licensing Program require Compliance with Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA) Registrations, Refunds, Collections, Procurement, and Investments, the Operational Policies and Processes should include many other elements.*

HUMAN RESOURCE POLICIES

WHAT IT IS & WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Human Resource Policies are guidelines that organisations set for employee relations in the workplace. They are a standardised set of rules that ensure consistency by outlining acceptable behavioural standards, employee expectations, disciplinary procedures, and organisational obligations. These are essential for organisations to reflect workplace culture and values, detail the rights and obligations of employers and employees, provide the framework and process to evaluate employee actions and performance, and ensure the organisation is accountable and compliant with standing regulations.

Applicants should consider the following when developing Human Resources Policies

- **Presentation** - *Human Resource Policies should be presented in the form of a manual or handbook for employees.*
- **Content** - *while the standards of the Club Licensing Program require only provision of employee responsibilities and behavioural standards, employee agreements, and performance management, the Human Resources Policies should include many other elements.*
- **Provide templates or samples** - *if a standardised template is used as a part of a Human Resource Policy (e.g. Performance Reviews), share the template as a part of the application.*

GOVERNANCE POLICIES

WHAT IT IS & WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Governance Policies are a specific guiding document that define the relationships between the board of directors, the administrative lead, the judicial bodies, and the organisation's stakeholders. Governance Policies are approved by the board and support its by-laws while providing more detail around board operations. Governance Policies become particularly important as a board of directors' transitions toward becoming a 'policy board', which is focused on setting strategic direction and governing the organisation, while staff are responsible for the day-to-day management and operations. Good governance is vital to effective and efficient operations and begins with clarity of roles, responsibilities, and processes, which are outlined for the board of directors in its Governance Policies.

Applicants should consider the following when developing Governance Policies

- **Content** - numerous criteria of the Club Licensing Program are reviewed and evaluated through the Governance Policies. The governance-related requirements should be reviewed as the Governance Policies are developed.
- **Executive Limitations** - Executive Limitations identify where management is prohibited from making decisions. Once these limitations are identified, management is given the freedom, within the framework of the law and the requirements of the organisation's by-laws and strategic plan, to direct the organisation's operations.

DISCIPLINE AND MISCONDUCT POLICY

WHAT IT IS & WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

The *Discipline and Misconduct Policy* describes the process that an organisation will follow when there is an alleged breach of its policies, rules, regulations, code of conduct, and/or the Laws of the Game. It also delineates responsibility for the administration of discipline and lays out disciplinary measures and sanctions that may be imposed. Strong processes in the administration of discipline must be in place in advance of the occurrence of an incident and are essential to avoiding the potential for decisions being overturned on appeal on procedural grounds.

Applicants should consider the following when drafting the *Discipline and Misconduct Policy*

- **Contexts** - consider the administration of breaches of policies, rules, and codes of conduct both on and off the field.
- **Scope and jurisdiction** - clearly define the policy, to whom it applies, and when.
- **Responsibility** - define who is responsible for discipline and, in the case of a committee or judicial body, how that group is formed.
- **Process** - clearly articulate how discipline will be administered, including timelines, complaint processes, responsibilities of a committee, chair, or judicial body, review processes (may include review by documentation and/or review by hearing), etc.
- **General principles** - ensure discipline, as an operational function, is independent of the board of directors, confidential, and accounts for potential conflicts of interest.

DISPUTE RESOLUTION POLICY

WHAT IT IS & WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Unfortunately, disputes are common in soccer organisations. Most are minor in nature and can be addressed through informal means; however, more serious disputes may require a formal resolution process. The *Dispute Resolution Policy* outlines the processes by which the organisation will manage and resolve disputes, including techniques such as negotiation, facilitation, mediation, and arbitration.

Applicants should consider the following when developing the *Dispute Resolution Policy*

- **Contexts** - consider policies around both formal and informal dispute resolution
- **Scope and Jurisdiction** - clearly define the policy, to whom it applies, and when.
- **Responsibility** - define who is responsible for dispute and, in the case of a committee or judicial body, how that group is formed. Consider exploring external bodies that may be engaged to provide this function on behalf of the organisation.

- **Process** - ensure the process by which dispute resolution will be administered is clearly articulated, including timelines, complaint processes, responsibilities of a committee, chair, or judicial body, dispute resolution processes, etc.
- **General principles** - ensure discipline, as an operational function, is independent of the board of directors, confidential, and accounts for potential conflicts of interest.

APPEALS POLICY

WHAT IT IS & WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

An appeal is intended to review whether a decision made by the organisation or one of its representatives was fair and consistent with its written policies and process. The *Appeal Policy* outlines the processes by which appeals will be administered. An appeal process is an important element of procedural fairness and provides an opportunity for decisions to be amended or reversed should they be found to be unjust.

Applicants should consider the following when developing the Appeals Policy

- **Scope and jurisdiction** - clearly define the policy, to whom it applies, and when, as well as defining what decisions are final and which are subject to an appeal.
- **Responsibility** - define who is responsible for appeals and, in the case of a committee or judicial body, how that group is formed.
- **Process** - ensure the process by which appeals will be administered is clearly articulated, including timelines, complaint processes, responsibilities of a committee, chair, or judicial body, appeal processes, etc.
- **General principles** - ensure discipline, as an operational function, is independent of the board of directors, confidential, and accounts for potential conflicts of interest.
- **Referral to governing organisations** - if permitted, consider referring decisions on appeals to your governing organisation to ensure independence. If appeals are being referred, include a link to the appropriate policy of the governing organisation.

Application Timelines

Submission dates for these materials are not standardised, and based on the category of recognition, province or territory. Some have ongoing open processes, while others have very specific timelines. Make sure to check the specifications in your member association in advance or at the time of application. Our interest is to set you up for success (e.g., with this guide and relationship building with your evaluator), but should it be required, there are avenues available for re-application.

Application Scoring Method & Evaluation Guidelines

The application and its various components are most often scored on a scale of 0 - 3.

A score of zero represents the absence of something. For example, in the strategic plan, the evaluators will be looking for the Strategic Pillars of the organisation. Should a plan be submitted without this information, then that would be scored as a zero. Should a plan be submitted with this information, then the evaluator would score the quality of that submission as either a **1** - *falls below the standard we are expecting for this criteria category*, a **2** - *some elements of the standard are in place, but there are noticeable exceptions or omissions that prevent the submission from being considered as fully meeting expectations*, or a **3** - *fully meets or exceed expectations*.

As evaluation is a nuanced process, it's important that applicants remember that evaluators are subject matter experts in their field and make scoring decisions based on not only their own experiences but are informed by the experiences and expectations of other seasoned evaluators within the Club Licensing program. Scoring

is an intentional and purposeful process that evaluators undertake with great diligence and responsibility. As discussed below, relationship building between the evaluator and the applicant is a central tenet of the licensing process.

Reviewers should consider the following when evaluating The Application:

- **Act as a critical friend** - evaluators are there to guide organisations toward success, but also to tell them what they need to hear rather than what they want to hear. That said, feedback should always come from a place of support.
- **Ask clarifying questions** - if there is any uncertainty with an organisation's submissions, ask for more information to confirm that the criterion is being met. Be specific with the questions that you ask to ensure an appropriate response. Avoid generic or general statements like, "Please provide more information", as they provide limited guidance on what more may be required.
- **Provide quality feedback** - A balanced approach should be taken when providing feedback against responses that are of a high quality as well as those that require development. In both cases, be specific in the feedback provided and avoid generic or general feedback like, "Good job" or "Needs improvement". What specifically is good or what needs improvement?

The Canada Soccer Club Licensing Program is an essential part of the member organisation (club and academy) development and recognition process at Canada Soccer. Member organisations play an essential role in the development of players, coaches, and officials and provide both the daily playing environment and primary contact for participants.

By raising the standards of member organisations, both these environments and experiences are enhanced; thereby improving the overall soccer system in Canada.

Monitoring and evaluation is an ever-expanding field at Canada Soccer and certification programs are getting designed to be more comprehensive and clear in terms of what and how they measure. While the information provided in this guide is by no means exhaustive, it is a comprehensive set of key considerations to help set clubs up for success as they prepare to effectively and efficiently complete their applications.

Hopefully this guide will prove to be a valuable resource to all those participating in the Club Licensing evaluation process. Whether you are an evaluator or an applicant, it is critical that we all share the same starting point.

Please don't hesitate to reach out for more information on the Club Licensing Program at:

Alex Valerio, Manager of Club Licensing

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OTHER USEFUL RESOURCES, INCLUDING:

- Canada Soccer Club Licensing Information Manual
- National Youth Club Licence Standards
- National Youth Club Licence Support Manual
- Member Association Youth Club Licence - Level 2 Standards
- Member Association Youth Club Licence - Level 1 Standards
- Guide to Governance
- Guide to Management and Operations
- Guide to Safety
- Guide to Accessibility and Inclusion