

Added content 8-24-21

This list is not intended to be all inclusive and by all means if anyone has ideas to put forward please send them to me and I will add them to this list and maybe we can make it somewhat of a living document for future generations and future ideas.

I am adding a few more ideas that have surfaced over the last year. Some of these ideas are/were influenced by Covid but the ideas are stand-alone as well:

1. Some organizations have ran cross-ice mites games on either end of the rink and used the neutral zone for those kids that are out to try hockey for free. This way these little kids can kind of experience the excitement of being near the game while they are out on the ice.
2. Some organizations have used another strategy of actually using try hockey for free in a team type scenario and creating several teams and having them play like 3-4 "games" or have several "practices". The interesting thing about this strategy is that if your rink is in shut-down mode for "open skating" due to having no way of contact tracing due to COVID, this would give you some amount of control over who is actually on the ice and when.
3. Keep in mind that try hockey for free can happen locally at any time, Because I am not a registrar I will not pretend to have all of the finite details but your registrar can work with USA Hockey and they will waive the fees if you can put together the event, it does not have to be at the same time as the national event. This has been repeated multiple times at our meetings. Also, try hockey for free does not have to be a one-time event.
4. Grace Hoene, in Missoula brought up another very effective measure for her organization as follows: RETENTION CALLS, her organization calls all players regardless if they are try hockey for free or if they are registered members and have been for years. Her experience has been that they didn't get tons of call-backs during COVID but generally it does serve as a reminder that hockey is around the corner and that people just needed the nudge. (thanks Grace)
5. Set goals within your organization for the number of NEW kids that they recruit.
6. Don't forget that growth is growth, Think about a "hockey is for everybody" drive. You may pick up adults or older youth who want to try hockey but are simply looking for the right opportunity.

There are a few Buzzwords and programs through USA Hockey that should be explored and followed:

1. Girls Excellence Weekend /Girls Hockey Weekend (October 15th to the 17th 2021)
2. Hat Trick Girls
3. Welcome Back Week (September 19th to the 25th 2021)

Dave Weaver: (Bozeman)

In Bozeman we started a new program last season that we are calling "Learn to Play Hockey for Free." It is a 4 lesson program (once a week for a month) that we run in October. We supply 60 players with free gear and do not charge for the clinic. Parents put down a \$100 deposit on the equipment. If they enroll their child into one of our regular programs (Termites/Mites/Mountain League In House program) then they can keep the equipment and rent it from us for the \$100 for the season.

As a result of this program, our Termite and Mite program went from around 80 in 2017/2018 to 125 in 2018/2019. Our Mountain League program went from 25 non travel players to 66.

It took me 3 years to get this program off the ground, because it we needed to raise money to purchase the equipment. We were so fortunate that we had a single donor step up and donate \$15 thousand dollars for equipment, and then we worked with the local Play It Again Sports for the equipment. To keep the supply of equipment going, we earmark all the dollars we raise in parents renting our gear to purchase more gear.

I recognize that this is not easy to have a donor step up to the tune of \$15 grand, however the results of offering hockey for free with the gear for free is unreal. Clearly cost is a major issue keeping kids from trying our sport.

Russ Barnett: (Glasgow)

Mites:

Each mite gets a "buddy" who is a HS aged player. Several times throughout the season the HS aged player joins that mite in their practice and just spends some time with them. Once at the end of the season that mite or two mites, however the numbers work out, gets introduced along with their HS buddy at the beginning of a HS game. (brings lots of grandparents and parents who may not normally be at the rink) Taking this one step further we had an end of year banquet for the HS team and the mites joined in and each HS player had their photo made as a "players card" and the mites got to go around and have their cards signed. There were lots of smiles on little kids faces. We did this same exercise for young girls at the mite age level and had HS girls play with them and followed through the same process. Again the kids loved this process and the older kids were invaluable.

Seniors:

All of the seniors, boys and girls, get a large high quality banner made and it hangs in the rink throughout the year.

All Players:

While it may not benefit us in hanging banners from the ceiling it does benefit individual growth, our organization and hockey in general, if you are signed up for hockey, you will get to play the game regardless of talent level.

Do radio spots with players, talk to schools, advertise locally, take part in local parades...

Al Bloomer: (MAHA/USA HOCKEY)

Thanks for including me in your note.. Although I am not currently affiliated with an Association, based on previous experiences and also observing ideas from other associations around the country, I can offer some ideas. I am sure you have recognized that there are associations within the state that are showing good growth while others are stagnant or even in some decline. The overall growth area seems to be in the western part of the state. In the past I always believed that there should be a correlation between School District size and Youth Hockey Registration. The larger school districts should have the larger association registration.

Some ideas that have worked in the Past:

1. Work with local Boys & Girls Clubs -- create a skating activity for members and introduce the boys and girls to the game.
2. Work with local Boy and Girls Scout organizations - create a skating badge or patch.. Get kids in the rink and on the ice.
3. Several years ago we created a working relationship with youth soccer... Encouraged our skaters to play soccer in the spring and summer. Likewise the soccer folks pushed hockey in the winter. Shared contact information.
4. Work with local Youth Church Groups - they are always looking for fun activities for their youth.
5. Some areas of the country are have targeted minority groups and created a skating opportunity just for them.. Once kids got on the ice and enjoyed the experience, they were recruited into "learn to play programs".
6. Again, several years ago we did a " Moms and Tots" program for Moms and pre-preschoolers. Got kids in the rink with there Mom on ice....
7. Put information in local Chamber of Commerce offices.
8. Publish things to do in your Community newspaper -- include local ice rink and youth skating activities.
9. If you have the funds or access - create youth hockey public service announcements.
10. Of course the use of social media is a given.....Quality posting, video clips and promotions. FUN! FUN! FUN!
11. Finally, we did a growth promotion where current or previously registered players got a significant discount in fees when they brought new player to to the program. It was graduated in that the more they brought the greater the discount.

Bottom line the program does what it can to be visible and benefit to youth. Get kids in the building, the fun and activity will sell the program. It is always very important that rinks are a welcoming environment, especially for first time visitors..It does not have to be fancy.. well lighted, someone to greet them with a smile and be helpful, brochures and posters available, etc..... It is about marketing the sport and the product.

Finally, I think we can do a better job of selling our game. We can do much better building girls programs.

Al Bloomer
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Cost Savings:

Cost always seems to be the first thing brought up. I believe that the idea we will be looking at this evening, 8-17-20, of having full towns attend per weekend is a great idea. If Bozeman plays Glasgow, then bring all the teams. This may save families tons of money. I know there were times in the past where I was paying for three motel rooms in one weekend because my three kids were in three different locations. This also emphasizes the point that Al made earlier about it needing to be FUN- this way parents are not torn. Glasgow vs Havre and Glasgow vs Miles City has been done this way, (to the extent possible), in the past with great results. Again, this has a tendency to pull in people who may not normally attend a game.

Gear donation, while some gear is flat worn out and others is like new,,, it seems like it is usually worth virtually nothing at re-sale. Consider having lists of available gear for coaches at each age group for those players who may be struggling. I know that most folks are pretty generous in this regard, but it may be helpful if a coach knew of available gear. This can go along with Dave's earlier notes concerning the needed gear to get his program up and running.

Sidney:

Sidney has an event scheduled in the year "the GALA" where they put their seniors up for auction, people can bid on them to do some chores for a few hours and they make a donation to the rink. This is more of a "grow your organization measure".

Schools:

It would be fantastic to have some help nationally at the High School level. How cool would it be to have USA Hockey representatives visit the administration or athletic directors of the high schools? I think it is grossly understated that hockey does not have awesome representation in Montana with the schools. I know we try to follow very closely to the standards set forward to other HS sports but the point I am trying to make is that many athletic directors look at hockey as a distraction that is removing some very capable athletes from their coffers. I cannot say enough how important it would be to have a presence to help us in educating and working with the schools.