



Sports ETA
SPORTS EVENTS & TOURISM ASSOCIATION

Sports Commissions 101

A Guide to Establishing a Sports Commission



Thinking about starting a sports commission but don't know where to begin?

If this sounds familiar, welcome to the exciting world of sports, events, & tourism! Many communities have faced the same dilemma, wondering how to tap into the transformative power of sports. Over 30 years ago, a group of innovative leaders recognized the need for a unified effort to promote sports and events across the United States. This collaboration led to the establishment of the Sports Events & Tourism Association (Sports ETA) in 1992, which has become the leading resource and advocate for the sports events and tourism industry.

Why Do We Need a Sports Commission?

The evolution of sports commissions mirrors the broader development of community promotion. Historically, chambers of commerce handled all promotional efforts, but as specialized markets like tourism and industrial development emerged, independent organizations were created to address these needs. Sports commissions are a natural extension of this trend.

Across the United States, communities are discovering the immense economic and public relations value of hosting sporting events. Sports commissions serve as the dedicated bridge between community resources and the sports industry, leveraging local assets to attract events, visitors, and investment. A sports commission can transform sports into a major force for economic development and revitalization when supported by passionate volunteers and skilled professionals.

If your community has the facilities, people, and ambition to serve the sports industry, establishing a sports commission is a critical first step to harnessing this potential.

How Should the Commission Be Organized?

The structure of a sports commission should align with your community's goals and resources. There are three common organizational models:

1. Independent Nonprofit Organizations
2. Divisions of Local Convention and Visitors Bureaus (CVBs)
3. Government Agencies (City, County, or State)

Many commissions start as part of another entity, such as a CVB, and later evolve into independent organizations. While this path may not suit every community, the key is to focus on your ultimate goal: hosting more sporting events in your area. Build the alliances necessary to achieve your vision, and choose the structure that best aligns with your objectives.

Organizational structures are not set in stone. A sports commission can adapt over time, but it's crucial to involve all stakeholders in these decisions. Establishing well-crafted bylaws tailored to your needs is essential. Examples and guidance are available through Sports ETA.

What Kind of Board Should We Have?

Effective governance is vital to the success of a sports commission. Board sizes typically range from 5 to 150 members, with most commissions finding success with boards of 15 to 30 members. For larger boards, an executive committee is often necessary to handle day-to-day decision-making.

While large boards help establish community consensus and visibility, especially if they include prominent business leaders or sports celebrities, ensure you have a core team of engaged members to handle operational tasks. Balance is key—combine the “go-getters” with the “show-stoppers” to maximize your board’s impact.

Where Do We Get Our Funding?

Securing a steady and dependable source of funding is critical. Common revenue sources for sports commissions include:

- Membership sales
- Corporate sponsorships (cash and in-kind contributions)
- Grants
- Hotel and tourism taxes
- Event management (e.g., hosting tournaments, awards banquets, or conferences)



To attract funding, focus on understanding and fulfilling the needs of potential donors. A compelling value proposition—providing something your donor wants—is far more effective than simply pitching your needs. Successful fundraising begins with research and relationship-building.

What Do We Have to Offer Sports Organizations?

Before attracting events, assess your community's sports assets. This includes:

1. An inventory of sports facilities and their availability.
2. A local volunteer base and qualified officials to support events.
3. An understanding of your community's sports strengths.

Start with what you know. If your area excels in softball, for instance, prioritize hosting softball tournaments. Over time, expand to other sports and diversify your offerings.

Next Steps

A sports commission is your community's gateway to economic growth, enhanced visibility, and strengthened community pride through sports events. For further guidance or support, contact Sports ETA at 513.281.3888 or info@SportsETA.org.

By leveraging the resources and expertise available through Sports ETA, your community can confidently navigate the path to establishing a successful sports commission.

