

Starting from Scratch

It may seem a daunting task to start a CTA from scratch, but chances are your community already has some of the elements in place. By looking at the hundreds of CTAs already in operation across the U.S., we've identified some common components that played a vital part in their initial successes. Based on these components, here are six basic steps to get your CTA going in the right direction.



BASIC STEPS FOR STARTING A CTA

Step 1: Identify and Recruit Local Leaders and Key People

Recruiting potential local leaders for your CTA is the first key to success. No one person can do it alone. Think of a CTA as a symphony orchestra with sections of strings, woodwinds, brass, and percussion. Although the conductor is essential to manage the group, it is impossible for one person to perform a symphony alone. If you rely too much on one or two people to lead your group and they tire of their roles or move away, your CTA may falter.

An enthusiastic group of local citizens joined with recreation professionals is the most effective combination to found and operate a CTA. A willingness to share expertise, local contacts, and access to tennis facilities are characteristic of an effective group of leaders.

Where should you look for leaders? One idea would be to invite people from all avenues of the community (including league players and current members) to an hour-long CTA Interest Meeting that describes the benefits of a CTA and where a CTA fits in within the USTA family, and that gives them ideas of what they could do to start a CTA in their local community.

At that meeting, have people sign up and indicate their level of interest. Options might range from becoming a board member, to serving on one of your CTA's committees, to volunteering for one-time events. Be sure to invite individuals representing all segments of your community to attend the meeting and ultimately become a part of the CTA. A diverse group of individuals working together will ultimately increase the power and influence of your CTA.

Where To Look for CTA Leaders

- Start with tennis players of all types and ages. Parents of young players often take the lead, as do senior players who may have more time to volunteer.
- Professionals in your schools, as well as in your parks and recreation department, are important to include. They hold access to kids in schools and public tennis facilities owned and operated by schools or parks departments.

- Tennis experts in your town, such as teaching professionals and coaches of school or college teams, are another vital link. They will help build feeder programs to their programs to ensure strong programs and teams year after year.
- Finally, look for others to round out your leadership team who have specific skills to contribute (e.g., a tennis-playing attorney who can help with legal advice, an accountant who can assist with financial matters, or a local media person who can help with publicity).

Step 2: Select Your Board of Directors

The board of directors is the leadership group comprised of individuals who represent the interests of your CTA. The directors are responsible legally, financially, and morally for the management and operation of your not-for-profit CTA. Selecting your board of directors will be one of the most important decisions you'll make when developing your association.

The board should be made up of a diverse group of people who are interested in and committed to your association's mission, and who have skills that will contribute to its management. For example, you might seek individuals with legal, financial, and marketing backgrounds, someone with not-for-profit experience, or someone with influence in the local community who has an established network of support. Within the tennis community, active tennis players, parents of young players, teaching professionals, tennis manufacturers' representatives, and tennis facility owners are good potential prospects for board members because they are involved in tennis on a regular basis.

Political or government leaders and representatives of the media usually have invaluable connections. School leaders, parks and recreation staff, and other representatives in community-based organizations (e.g., the YMCA and YWCA, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, Boys' Club and Girls' Club, and the Police Athletic League) may be key to gaining support for tennis programs for youth.

Having a diverse group of individuals with an array of knowledge and skills will help you make informed decisions regarding your association's activities. For more information on selecting and organizing your board of directors, see Chapter 4.

Step 3: Assess Your Community's Tennis Needs, Assets, and Key Organizations

Before you go any further, take a look at the basic tennis needs of your community. Determine the characteristics of residents in your community and how they relate to the potential goals of your CTA. Before doing an independent analysis, you might want to contact your USTA section or district office (Appendix E) to see what information/data they might already have regarding the area.

What are the basic tennis needs of your community? For example, do you need more public facilities or are your existing facilities in need of repair? Do you have adequate programming or opportunities for competitive play? Determine the characteristics of residents in the community and how they relate to the potential goals of your CTA. You should consider demographic information (i.e., age, income, gender, education, and ethnicity) and current trends (e.g., the growth and distribution of the population, and projections for the future).

For example, if the majority of residents are at or near retirement age and the trend seems to be toward an increase in this population segment, a major goal of your CTA probably would not be to run highly competitive tournaments. Rather, the emphasis might be better placed on fitness and social activities.

An analysis of community tennis needs and desires could entail a three-pronged approach:

- Identifying the current participation rates of community residents in existing tennis programs
- Surveying, through questionnaires or telephone calls, a random number of citizens to obtain their input on a variety of potential tennis programs and directions
- Holding several public meetings to allow interested citizens to express their desires

It is also a good idea to find out what potentially helpful organizations already exist in your community. Who can help you deliver tennis to those in your community? What groups in your community could benefit by including tennis in their program offerings?

Think of your CTA as the nucleus for delivering tennis within your community. A successful CTA will have many partners and supporters. Create a prospect list of key groups and individuals in the community to gain support for your association. Include the schools, parks and recreation department, YWCA/YMCA, tennis teaching professionals and enthusiasts, media contacts, service organizations (e.g., Rotary, Kiwanis, Junior League, Chamber of Commerce), club owners/managers, and college/high school coaches. Think of others in your community since this is by no means a comprehensive list. Present your association's ideas and plans and ask how they could become involved.

Here are some additional questions you may wish to consider when identifying key organizations in your community that can serve as partners in delivering tennis:

- Is there an existing patrons group, tennis foundation, or civic association? If so, bring your ideas to its leadership. Do not duplicate efforts, but coordinate and cooperate.
- Does the local school system have tennis in the curriculum and/or varsity teams? You might consider working to add no-cut, middle school and after-school programs. Also, has the local school system participated in the USTA Schools Tennis program? (Your section or district office would have that data.) Does the school system need a support group, money, and equipment to initiate or expand its programs?
- What facilities, services, or programs are being offered by the parks and recreation department? Does the parks and rec department already offer tennis programs? If so, what programs does it offer? Would it like to start a new program? If it already has programs, would it like new program ideas, expanded offerings, funding, or equipment?
- Are there other recreational organizations in the area that may be interested, such as the YMCA, YWCA, Boys' Club, Girls' Club, and/or Police Athletic League?
- Would youth organizations such as the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts be looking to enhance their sports programming?
- Commercial or private tennis facilities are often a source of expertise. If their facilities are not being used to capacity, they may prove to be a potential source for court time (and you a source for revenue for them).
- Have any of these groups applied for grants to help with their tennis programming?

All of these organizations can be of great value in starting or improving a CTA. Even groups not immediately interested in becoming involved may provide an endorsement, which can be important for recognition and future cooperation as the town's tennis activities multiply.

Find out what tennis services are currently available to the public. Try not to duplicate activities; rather, supplement or improve what already exists. For example, are there group lessons in the summer? How about leagues or ladders? Does any group sponsor tournaments? If these activities are available only at private clubs, at least there are people in the community knowledgeable about such activities. Include them in the planning stages. Seek their advice and expertise. They are an important support group in any successful CTA.

Step 4: Develop a Mission Statement for Your CTA

A mission statement indicates the highest level of planning. A CTA expresses its purpose or reason for being in its mission statement. It is this statement that tells the world what the CTA is about. It answers the question, "Why are we doing what we are doing?" It expresses the deepest, heartfelt, inspired vision for existence as an association.

In January 1995, the USTA adopted a new mission statement that simply states the reason for its existence: "To promote and develop the growth of tennis."

To create a mission statement, answer the following questions:

- Who are we?
- What do we do?
- Why do we do what we do?

To evaluate and refine a mission statement, answer these questions positively.

- Does the statement express the members' passion and inspiration?
- Would fulfilling this mission lead the members to realize their full potential?
- Is the statement growth-oriented or self-limiting?
- Is the statement realistic or too far-fetched to ever be attainable?
- What are the implied or stated returns on investment?
- Does the statement address the members' purpose?
- Is the statement understandable, brief, and concise?
- Does the statement capture the unique qualities, capabilities, and potential of the members?

Below are examples of mission statements of existing CTAs that may assist your association in the development of its mission statement.

“To promote interest in the game of tennis, support the USTA League in the Charleston area, and maintain the rules of play and high standards of sportsmanship.”

—*Lowcountry Tennis Association, Charleston, SC*

“To promote and nurture the game of tennis in Center City Philadelphia, specifically via tennis courts located at Seger Playground.”

—*Seger Park Tennis Club, Philadelphia, PA*

“To encourage, promote, and enhance playing experiences to every tennis player—experienced, novice, and in between.”

—*Treasure Valley Tennis Association, Boise, ID*

“To promote and develop the growth of tennis in the Greater Dallas Community.”

—*Dallas Tennis Association, Dallas, TX*

“To promote Growth of Tennis in Lee County, Florida.”

—*Lee County Tennis Association, Cape Coral, FL*

To promote the game of tennis throughout the Central Ohio Area”

—*Greater Columbus Tennis Association, Columbus, OH*

“To use tennis as an instrument for mentoring and community building in Brooklyn, New York”

—*Kings County Tennis League, Brooklyn, NY*

Step 5: Develop an Organizational Structure, Incorporate as a Not-for-Profit Corporation, and Establish Tax-Exempt Status

To develop and grow your CTA, you must start with a framework that will allow for future growth. Raising funds to support your tennis activities requires that you will eventually need to become a tax-exempt corporation.

Incorporation as a not-for-profit association is regulated by individual states, and the content and format of certain incorporation documents vary from state to state. Because of this, it is important that you contact your secretary of state to obtain official incorporation forms and information.

A not-for-profit corporation or association is a legal entity that enables a group of people to pool together time, energy, and money for not-for-profit activities. The association acquires legal status after complying with a state's incorporation procedures and laws. This corporation is then treated as a separate "entity," distinct from the people who manage or operate it.

Incorporation as a not-for-profit association does not in itself confer tax exemption. To achieve tax-exempt status, the corporation must convince the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) that it is organized to operate exclusively for one or more of the tax-exempt purposes defined in the Internal Revenue Code (IRC).

Tax-exemption for a not-for-profit tennis association or foundation is possible under the IRC. In making this determination, the IRS relies heavily on the specific not-for-profit purposes stated in the corporation's Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws. Both of these documents are submitted to the IRS when your association applies for its federal tax-exempt status.

While it's possible to take care of the bulk of the work associated with incorporating and applying for tax-exempt status, we think it makes sense to have an attorney experienced in not-for-profits take a look at your incorporation material. Also, having a not-for-profit attorney or tax advisor review your federal tax exemption application may be a good idea. As your association grows and expands, you'll be able to consult with these professionals for ongoing legal and tax issues. Forming a not-for-profit corporation will bring your association one step closer to meeting your goals, and your CTA will be more prepared to face the future challenge of fundraising.

For more detailed information, see Appendix B.

Step 6: Design a Strategic Plan that Includes a Budget, Goals, and an Implementation Plan with Timelines

Strategic planning is an essential step for the success of your CTA and an integral part of management and leadership. It is not an activity or exercise to be completed and then abandoned. It should guide the day-to-day management of your association toward achieving its ultimate vision. Strategic planning requires time, teamwork, and enhanced communication with association leaders.

There are many models or methods used in strategic planning. One such model is the S.W.O.T model of strategic planning. In this process, participants identify internal influences (“Strengths” on which the association can capitalize; “Weaknesses” which require action) and external influences (“Opportunities” for change; “Threats” to the association’s well-being). A sample worksheet is shown below using a SWOT analysis for a CTA just starting its planning process.

Sample Worksheet

Background

A Community Tennis Association has just begun planning its activities and services. It has decided to examine its internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats to help make decisions and plans for the future.

Internal Strengths

- Enthusiastic, diverse group of volunteers
- Good relationships with the school system and the parks and recreation department
- Experience in conducting a tennis tournament

Internal Weaknesses

- Lack of start-up funding
- No defined mission statement
- The association is neither incorporated nor tax-exempt

Potential External Opportunities

- The mayor plays tennis regularly with one of our active volunteers
- There are several community service organizations in town looking for assistance with starting tennis programs
- The only tennis club in town has expressed an interest in working with the CTA

Potential External Threats

- Their community’s soccer program is the largest youth sports program in town.
- The town tennis courts are in need of repair
- The high school is thinking of dropping its varsity tennis teams

After completing the SWOT model, ask yourself how your CTA can use its strengths to take advantage of the opportunities and overcome the threats. Similarly, ask what your CTA needs to do to minimize its weaknesses so it can take advantage of the opportunities and overcome the threats.

PREPARING A BUDGET

Budgeting is a process whereby resources are allocated so that the association can achieve its goals and objectives and carry out its mission. A good budget is critical to your association's success. Your association needs a way to link the strategic plan with your actual activities, and the budget is the tool you'll use to create this link. Below is a sample budget showing the types of income and expenses a CTA might incur on an annual basis.

Sample CTA Budget			
Income		Expenses	
Source	Amount	Item	Amount
USTA Support District Section National	\$1,500	Salary & Wages	\$3,000
Membership	\$500	Professional Fees	
User Fees	\$3,000	Insurance	
Local Sponsorships	\$1,000	Mileage	
In-Kind Support	\$1,500	Scholarships	
Fundraising Events	\$1,500	Advertising/Promotions	\$3,500
Other Grants	\$1,000	Awards/Gifts	
Government Grants		Office Expenses	\$1,500
Foundation Grants		Equipment	\$1,000
Corporation Grants		In-Kind Expenses	
Other		Training Expenses	\$1,000
		Other	
Total Income	\$10,000	Total Expenses	\$10,000

First, review the mission of your organization. From that mission statement, develop a strategic plan to fulfill the mission. Then select programs and activities to achieve your goals. Once you have selected your programs and activities, you can begin to put together a budget.

Your board of directors has ultimate responsibility for the association's financial situation. Once the board has determined programs, timelines, and basic costs, those responsible for implementing the programs will develop the budgets needed to get the job done.

Most budgets will cover a period of one year. You'll find that some associations budget for a two-year period. We encourage your association to spend time on the budget process. Put together a written budget policy so that all board members and staff understand the process. Be sure to include a budget timeline for your budget period.

To prepare a budget, we recommend your association speak with similar organizations about how they've developed their budgets. You may contact your USTA Section or District office to be connected to other CTAs in your area.

10 CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL CTAS

Leaders of CTAs across the country were asked for their opinions of the most important characteristics for success. Here is their Top 10 list:

1. **Recruit effective leaders.** A CTA needs not just one but several effective leaders who bring different talents and skills to the group and ensure an ongoing operation not dependent on one person. Have rotating term-limits for officers so that everyone does not rotate off the board at the same time.
2. **Develop a clear mission statement.** It should explain simply what you plan to accomplish. Add some specific goals to your planning that are based on your local community needs.
3. **Establish an organizational structure.** Incorporate to protect your people, seek not-for-profit status for fundraising, and organize your group to operate effectively and efficiently.
4. **Recruit and train a diverse group of leaders and volunteers.** Seek out people with different skills, motives, opinions, and contacts. Provide training and education for their role, and reward those who do their jobs well.
5. **Develop and adopt a strategic plan.** You need to chart the way for immediate priorities and predict future direction for growth. Your CTA will sharpen its focus if a clear plan is in place. Utilize the entire CTA in developing your plan so there is buy-in across the organization (and it is not the dream of just one or two individuals).
6. **Build relationships or partnerships with other community organizations.** Explore the possibilities of joining with other groups with similar missions that will support your mission. Community-based groups for youth are interwoven into the fabric of every town and can provide access for you to their members. Utilize the expertise of staff members from your USTA section and/or district office.
7. **Maximize your fundraising capabilities.** Growth and expansion will require more dollars raised through grants, events, donations, and/or user fees. Set up your CTA at the start with the structure and expectation of raising funds to support your mission.
8. **Design a plan for marketing, public relations, and communication of your CTA's mission and goals and programs.** Help people in your community understand what you hope to accomplish and how they can assist.
9. **Add professional staff positions over time.** Most CTAs eventually turn to a paid staff—at least on a part-time basis. Teachers of tennis, program organizers, administrative staff, and financial staff are typical employees of a mature CTA. Include job descriptions for each of the positions on a CTA board.
10. **Start with a Single-purpose CTA.** Keep your focus clear and sharp to start, but put an organization together that can evolve into a multiple-purpose or an umbrella-type CTA.