

Middle School Bowling Guide



HELPFUL IDEAS TO START
MIDDLE SCHOOL BOWLING IN YOUR AREA!

Interscholastic bowling continues to drive more students to bowling centers. Students are being introduced to bowling at the younger grade levels through the Bowler's Ed/ In-School Bowling initiative, and 48 states offer bowling on the high school level, both varsity and club.

However, bowling tends to lose the interest of some students during the middle school years. During this time, students are getting their first experience to represent their school in a sport. Without a bowling program to bridge this gap, students are less likely to bowl at the high school level.

The solution? **MIDDLE SCHOOL BOWLING**

Bowling can provide middle schools a sport program that allows any and all to participate, regardless of gender, size, strength or ability. Bowling allows all students the opportunity to represent their school and achieve success both individually and as part of a team.

To help support this initiative, we have developed a guide to help centers and volunteers create a middle school program in their area. This guide will offer tools and suggestions to help you create the structure of your program, develop a program cost and approach the schools in your community.

The goal of USBC Youth is to make bowling available to these students during this crucial development time, eventually making bowling a varsity sport at the middle school level. We believe this guide offers the tools to help states create and develop a program that could keep these students in the participation channel, with the intent of increasing high school, collegiate and lifelong bowlers.

By combining this resource with your ideas, we can create quality and competitive bowling programs at the middle school level that will help secure A Future For The Sport.



**A Future FOR
THE Sport**

THE PURPOSE OF MIDDLE SCHOOL BOWLING:

What is the purpose of creating a middle school program at your local center? Will it really help increase your youth numbers? The question you should be asking is, "What do I have to lose?"

Every opportunity your center has to keep bowling on the minds of today's youth increases your odds of having them participate and invest in bowling. Historically, the middle school-age group tends to get involved with other sports and activities through their school, causing bowling to be further from their minds.

By offering bowling as a middle school program to these students, bowling at least has a chance of being selected as opposed to being completely eliminated from the conversation.

Centers will be able to bring in youth who can transition into their current youth program, or another program specific to this group, becoming a destination for these students and their families for years to come.

WHY SHOULD I SUPPORT MIDDLE SCHOOL BOWLING?

- **DEVELOPS THE NEED AND WANT FOR HIGH SCHOOL BOWLING**
 - More youth programs in your center
 - Elevates the level of your high school bowling program
- **BUILDS COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS**
 - Creates a relationship with those who may not be involved with your center otherwise
 - Increased opportunities to get others bowling in your center
 - School Staff
 - Family
 - Friends
- **KEEPS KIDS INVOLVED IN YOUR CENTER**
 - Leagues
 - Coaching
 - Scholarships
- **LANES ARE BETTER "ON" THAN "OFF"**
 - Having kids bowling is always good for your center
 - Give them a memorable experience and they will be back

THE OPPORTUNITIES

A middle school program can create many opportunities for the centers that choose to activate the program. Whether you are looking to grow youth league participation or prepare the upcoming group for your competitive high school program, middle school bowling can facilitate those needs.

- **DEVELOPMENT “FEEDING” PROGRAM**

- A middle school program can help prepare these student-athletes to compete on a competitive high school bowling team.
- If there is not a high school program, creating a middle school program will develop a need for a high school program.

- **MARKETING**

- Student participants could be new to bowling and your center
- Provides increased center exposure
 - Your leagues
 - Your events
 - Your programs
- Exposes parents/school staff to your center
 - Your leagues
 - An option for a family activity
 - An option for a work activity

- **REVENUE GENERATOR**

- Food/beverage
- Pro shop
- Game room
- League awareness for students/parents
- Create new events and tournaments to keep youth involved
 - Scholarship tournaments
 - Middle school-specific leagues during offseason
 - Middle school coaching clinics
- Build a relationship with the school
 - School field trips
 - PE classes
 - Faculty team building event
 - School fundraiser night

PROGRAM FORMAT

The format used for the middle school program should be easy for all to understand. Remember, you will have kids, parents and faculty alike who may be unfamiliar with league/match play.

Before trying to create a format from scratch, we suggest you do a bit of research. If there are other local middle school/high school teams in your area, review their format to see if it could work for your conference. The more consistent and uniform the format, the better chance the participants, parents and faculty have of catching on and enjoying the program.

If there is not a local conference format established in your area, be sure to see if a state format is present. Remember, there is strength in numbers. The greater participation you can show, the more likely schools are to support the program. Also, this provides you a network of coaches, proprietors and conference coordinators to help you develop and grow your program.

If this is a pioneer league, take the time to sit down and write the rules and bylaws. Look to other league rules as guidance. Remember, do not overcomplicate things. It is important to have an administrator for the program to enforce the rules, available for coach communication and a liaison to the middle school athletic coordinator. Much like the role of a tournament director, this person will be the point person to ensure the quality of the program.

HELPFUL HINT: Include rules regarding grade eligibility. Talk with the school to come up with an acceptable rule that is consistent with other school sports and encourages kids to excel in the classroom.

If you are starting from scratch and creating a unique format is difficult for you, we suggest using the USA Bowling format. The IBC Youth Department has extensive information on how to create and execute a USA Bowling program at your center. This program can easily serve as your middle school format if you are having difficulties forming your own. USA Bowling has formats for both local and regional competitions, depending on the available opportunities for your middle school program.



While we encourage you to include elements specific to your program, we do suggest that these elements below be included in the format:

- **ALL INCLUSIVE**

- Middle schools push that no one is cut; all make the team
- Have more than one team per school
- Ex. Anderson Middle School Boys Team 1, Team 2, etc.

- **COACH PER TEAM**

- Every other sport has this per team
- Instructional and encouraging

- **DEDICATED PRACTICE DAY**

- Every other sport includes this
- More time for a kid to be in your center
- More time for kids to improve and enjoy bowling

- **BAKER GAMES**

- An exciting format
- Keeps bowlers/parents engaged
- Showcases the team aspect

- **USBC-CERTIFIED MEMBERSHIP**

- Ability to earn an average
- Ability to bowl in youth tournaments; maintaining involvement

- **SCRATCH**

- Simplified format
- Understandable to students, parents, school administrators
- High school and college is scratch; maintains consistency

HELPFUL HINT: Commit to multiple seasons. Give the program a fair chance to develop and grow.





MEMBERSHIP COMPONENT:



Incorporating USBC Youth membership into your program can be a great selling point.

USBC Youth membership can offer opportunities that could be enticing to students and parents. For instance, the various youth scholarship opportunities made available by having a USBC membership and certified average.

Additionally, adding the USBC membership component to your program does much more for not only that bowler but you, your center, the industry and a future for the sport.

The USBC membership gets those bowlers into a collective database. It allows us to communicate with these individuals and provide opportunities for additional participation. Otherwise, we never know they exist, making efforts to recruit and retain these specific participants more difficult.

In an initiative to create a more affordable USBC Youth membership, national youth dues are \$4. This price allows even more youth to reap the rewards of being a USBC member.

Including USBC Youth membership is just another step to getting that student into more leagues in your center. Once they have a membership, why not ask them to bowl another league later in the year?

CHALLENGES TO CONSIDER:

There are many challenges to consider when planning your middle school bowling program. By recognizing these challenges early, you can better adapt your program to make it as efficient and effective as possible.

We have asked proprietors around the country operating similar programs what their challenges have been starting a program. While every center and situation is unique, these are the most frequent challenges provided to IBC Youth:

•TRANSPORTATION

- Unlike many of the high school bowlers, middle school students cannot drive.
- This leaves these students at the mercy of their family and school to provide the transportation for the program.
 - What are ways you can solve this? Do you have transportation? Can you help with school transportation cost?

•SEASON PLACEMENT

- If your center has a high school program, putting middle school during the time slot could cause lane availability issues.
- Those who volunteer or coach the high school program would not be able to volunteer with the middle school program if they were during the same time.
 - Look at your season timing. Talk to your coaches and talk to the school to decide on a season time that benefits all.

•GRADE PARTICIPATION RESTRICTION

- Based on a sixth, seventh and eighth grade model, many states only allow seventh and eighth graders to participate on school teams.
 - What about the sixth graders?
 - If only seventh and eighth graders can have teams, create a learn to bowl/development program for sixth graders. Keep them included and engaged. Keeping them excited and developing their skills will keep middle school bowling an option when they move to seventh grade.

•COACHING

- Coaches could be volunteer based or a faculty member from the school (or both).
- What if the coaches are from the faculty, like a math teacher or basketball coach, with little to no bowling experience?
 - Apply for a free USA Bowling Coaching Clinic or purchase a USA Bowling Coaching Clinic for the coaches in your program.

COST STRUCTURE:

What should a program cost? Who does the burden of cost fall to? Funding in the education system continues to diminish, resulting in various student activities cut every year.

What does that mean to those looking to create a middle school program? It means opportunity and sacrifice.

OPPORTUNITY:

- The chance to replace a more costly school program with a more economic program.
- Offering a healthy, affordable option that ALL students can participate in.
- A program that school officials only have to approve; not run.
- The opportunity to become a community partner; develop community relationship.

SACRIFICE:

- Money/immediate return on investment
 - This program can become profitable, but maybe not at first.
 - Remember, this is an investment. Some investments take time to yield a return.

Cost structure is going to be the “make or break” element of a middle school program. It is vital to remember that this must NOT be marketed as a business transaction, but as a partnership between two community members.

Consistent with the Bowler’s Ed/In-School Bowling philosophy, the message of helping to elevate, educate and encourage students will open many more doors in the scholastic universe.

The burden of cost can fall on any of the following parties:

- Proprietor/Local USBC Association
- School
- Parent/Student

Some proprietors choose to front all the costs for either an entire team or an entire conference in their area. This can be a great way to get a program started in your area, especially with the funding of schools continuing to diminish. You will make up some revenue in food/beverage and hopefully return visits. Plus, it validates the message that you are serving as a community partner.

HELPFUL HINT:

- **If you choose to offer the program free of charge at first to the schools, set a time frame.**
- **For example, free to the school as a three-year agreement.**
- **This way you could eventually charge the school at a later date, giving the school time to prepare for those costs.**
- **The cost usually is based on the participation numbers and experience.**
- **Provide the schools an experience they see value in.**

Asking for free is asking for a lot. While it might open many doors, we don't want that commitment to close the doors to your business. It is perfectly acceptable to charge something. Just do so with a partnership mindset; not a transactional mindset.

If you are not fronting the cost, then the school or parent will be. That means you should make it affordable and simple. Remember, these people may not be the "typical league bowler."

SUGGESTIONS:

• SIMPLIFY

- Have a one-time cost that would cover the costs of the entire season at your center.
- Example: \$30 a student.
- This is consistent with other youth sport pricing models.

• AFFORDABLE

- Know your bottom line.
- What can you afford to offer?
- Separate yourself from other sports in a positive way.
 - This doesn't mean free. Find the positives to justify the costs.

• VALUE

- When charging parents or schools, know what makes that cost valuable.
- Is it coaching? The experience? A safe and social environment?
- Know and showcase your value. This will justify what you are charging.

POSSIBLE PITFALL:

• TRY AND AVOID CHARGING LIKE A NORMAL LEAGUE

- Payments should not be weekly.
- A per-game cost can be confusing to non-bowlers.
- This could lead to less investment and attendance issues.

POTENTIAL EXPENSES:

• COACHING / FACULTY SPONSOR

- Though you may have volunteer coaches available to coach each team, most schools usually require a faculty sponsor to be present during the practice and matches.
- USA Bowling Coaching Clinic or Training (previously mentioned)
- Might have to offer a small stipend
 - Doesn't always mean money
 - Could be three free games a week
 - Special pricing (league pricing, staff, etc.)
 - Food/beverage deals
 - Any form of a "thank you" is always appreciated

• TRANSPORTATION

- This previously was mentioned in the "Challenges" section.
- It will be difficult to avoid with the middle school demographic.
- Cut a deal with school/district.
 - Work with the school or district to split cost.
 - The school takes care of transportation, while you take care of bowling.
 - Talk with the school and work together to find a solution.

• UNIFORMS

- T-shirts or polo shirts
- Uniforms could belong to school and be reused or ordered as needed each year.
- If you can help afford to do this, it could be a great marketing tool for your center.
- Kids love shirts
 - Will wear around; tell their friends; be excited to belong.
 - Shirts could include center logo or possible sponsors.
 - Be sure to speak with the school about the possibility of having outside sponsors on the shirt.

• TROPHY

- Consider league and district size.
- Award a trophy to the league / district winner.
 - Boys Team
 - Girls Team
- Make sure there is a trophy for each division and/or gender.
 - This provides something for the school to display.
- No need for individual awards at this time; promote the school/team award.
 - This is consistent with other middle school sports.
 - Individual awards can come later.

When in doubt, see what your high school program does (if existent). Make the process something schools, parents and students can recognize and remember through their interscholastic bowling career at your center. This will ensure a smooth and pleasant experience that ALL will enjoy. Ultimately, you want the cost of the program to be quick and painless, rather than the difficult and confusing part. This gives you the ability to showcase the experience of bowling, coaching, development and having fun as the core elements to your middle school bowling program.

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS:

Having the support of nearby centers could help with many of the potential challenges that face the creation of a middle school bowling program.

QUICK REASONS FOR CENTERS TO JOIN YOUR INITIATIVE:

- New demographic of kids
 - Will want to get better and practice more in center
- Students will bring friends
- Students will bring family
- Food/beverage sales
- Pro shop opportunities
 - If you do not own the shop, this could be a way to engage their help.
- Increased community awareness for your center

For instance, the more centers in the area willing to pull together to create a conference means more funding for teams, increased marketing efforts and creates a greater opportunity for middle school participation. Whether this means financial contributions to fund teams or recruiting volunteers from the participating centers to help with the program, any assistance can increase the chance of success for your program.

Having more centers involved in one program could also help in creating lane availability options. An example would be similar to a travel league. This would be a great way to gain exposure for all centers involved and adds excitement for the student-athletes by allowing them to bowl in different centers.

STEPS TO ORGANIZE AND ENGAGE PROPRIETORS:

- Call/write proprietors in your area. Do your best to include everyone in the area.
- Schedule and conduct a meeting
- Assign duties and create a task force
- Discuss rules and policies for both the program and leadership group
- Look into fundraising ideas
- Contact schools to gauge interest
- Meet with schools
- Set a practice and match schedule for season

Task force duties should include:

- Help develop policies/ rules
- Determine financing needed for program
- Marketing and communication structure
- Reach out to schools/remain in communication with school officials
- Drive interest in community and their center

Remember, the ultimate goal is to grow bowling participation by creating a middle school program. By creating and growing a program with middle schools, you are introducing these students, parents and school administrators to the centers involved, and importantly, the sport of bowling.

- HELPFUL HINTS:**
- Stress that return on investment may not be initial. ROI may occur in many different areas over time.
 - Schools are drawn to community partnerships. By partnering with elementary, middle and high schools, you are sending a message to school administrators that you are working together with them to create a quality program meant to enhance, educate and elevate their students.

REMEMBER: PARTNERSHIP > TRANSACTION.



PREPARE TO SELL:

Now that you have the program format, cost structure and center support for your middle school programs, you need one last thing: The middle schools!

There are many ways to try and promote this program to middle school students, parents and schools. Truth is, there is no perfect way of getting into the schools to promote your program. However, there are certain tactics that have proven effective.

• DETERMINE THE INTEREST LEVEL IN YOUR COMMUNITY

- Ask the youth members in your leagues for help promoting the program.
 - What do they think?
 - This gives them a reason to ask their friends about bowling.
 - Best marketing for your program: the students.
- Ask the parents and adult bowlers in your center about the program.
 - An active parent can be a huge advocate.
 - You never know what connections these parents have in the community.
 - Your league bowlers could be teachers or work for the school.
- Ask the schools about the program.
 - What does the school think?
 - What do the coaches/teachers think?
 - How can you help them create a program for their students?

• CREATE A MIDDLE SCHOOL TASK FORCE

- Identify the leaders of this initiative.
 - Parents
 - Coaches
 - Involved youth
- Who will meet with the schools?
 - Answer questions about program
 - Advocate program
- Who will create and enforce the rules?
 - Who will serve as commissioner/liaison for the school?

HELPFUL HINT: Do not pitch the program to the schools until you have a firm foundation on the program structure. You want to be able to answer any and all questions with confidence.

SCHOOL AUDIENCE:

Before any meeting with the schools, first take a moment to put yourself in their shoes. Imagine you are a school administrator. You want to provide quality experiences that enhance the lives of your students. However, you know you have a tight budget that can heavily restrict your decisions on what experiences the students can or cannot receive.

QUICK REFERENCE TO UNDERSTANDING SCHOOLS:

- Put students first
- Want to see student interest in potential program
- Want faculty participation (as a sponsor)
- Not much money to invest in programs that do not generate revenue

Now that you have an idea of their mindset, how would you want to be approached?

Schools and administrators are in a jam, and bowling can be the hero. We can offer them an inexpensive activity that ALL students can participate in. And there lies the key, ALL students can participate. Bowling does not discriminate based on age, strength, size or gender. Take advantage of this huge selling point.

Besides having information about the format and cost of the program, the schools really want to hear what's in it for the students. Luckily for you, bowling has plenty of benefits.

- Allows ALL students the ability to participate
- Builds confidence and improves teamwork
- Introduces students to a healthy, lifelong activity
- Creates the opportunity for a new family activity
- Potential scholarship opportunities in high school and college

With these benefits in mind, and thinking with your administrator hat on, you can begin reaching out to various schools and administrators.

Remember to use your resources to find out the best contacts at the schools. Look online, ask involved parents, or even call the administrative office to ask who would be the appropriate contact.

HELPFUL HINT: Finding the contact and speaking with the contact are two different things. These individuals are busy, so understand that it might take time to fit into their schedule. Having an involved parent on your task force that has a good relationship with the school can help this issue. No matter what, you CANNOT get discouraged. Just keep trying.

SELLING THE PROGRAM:

When you meet with the school officials, have all information complete and ready. Being prepared and efficient makes you credible and your program legitimate, in their eyes. It seems so simple, but presentation is crucial.

HELPFUL HINT: The league administrator and center proprietor should meet together with the schools. Be sure to wear something business casual. This means no jeans, shorts or t-shirts.

Remember, you planned this meeting with the school administrator in mind. Now you need to speak to them as a community partner, which in reality, you are!

While you are a business, don't approach the schools as such. Schools tend to naturally have their guard up when dealing with for profit businesses, potentially putting you at a disadvantage before the meeting has even taken place.

- Be sure to have your information organized in the order you prepare to discuss and present with the school.
- Be prepared to answer questions about alcohol and tobacco.
 - Be confident in your answer.
 - These are both prohibited during youth programs, including this one.
 - What would make them more comfortable?
 - Blocked off bar
 - Extra signage
- Be prepared to ask THEM questions.
 - What can we do to make this work?
 - What are your concerns?

There are two points of communication when selling a program. You have your talking points, and you have your informational points. The talking points are meant to captivate, engage and interest the school officials during the meeting. The informational points are designed to reiterate and strengthen your talking points from a more statistical and detailed way.

TALKING POINTS:

- The benefits
 - All can participate
 - Lifelong activity
 - Improves confidence and teamwork
 - Etc.
- Program overview
 - Format from a 50,000-foot level
 - Talk about the Baker format
 - In terms of excitement and the team aspect
- Opportunities
 - High school bowling
 - Collegiate bowling
 - Scholarships

HELPFUL HINT: Don't be afraid to let your passion show. You are trying to introduce a fun and rewarding experience to the students. Remember, excite; don't overwhelm. Choose information and details carefully.

INFORMATIONAL POINTS:

- The benefits
 - All can participate. Bowling becomes an equal playing field in terms of age, size, ability and gender. This allows all to be able to enjoy this sport. Did you know that bowling is one of the most participated sports in the Special Olympics? Etc.
 - Lifelong activity. Bowling is a sport that uses 134 muscles during a four-step approach. Three games equal a mile of walking. A weight-bearing exercise that can be done for years and years with little concern for injury. Etc.
 - Improves confidence and teamwork. The social aspect of bowling is powerful. Students will make more friends and learn how to communicate with peers to help achieve the best results on the lanes. The Baker format makes every student important in the game. It builds camaraderie and confidence among peers. Etc.
- Program overview
 - The format. The bowlers will bowl five to a team. They will bowl one individual match-play game and two Baker games. The bowlers get one hour of practice every Tuesday, with matches taking place on the following Thursday. Etc.
 - Baker Format. The Baker game consists of each bowler throwing a frame in sequential order. This format is exciting and truly encompasses the team aspect of bowling. This format is used for high school and collegiate competition across the country. Etc.

- Opportunities

- High school bowling. High school bowling is a great way to continue being involved and improve your game. Did you know there are national scholarships available for high school bowlers, including The Dexter All-American Team? Etc.
- Collegiate bowling. There are 250-plus colleges that offer bowling programs across the country, including NCAA schools. Many of these universities offer scholarships and tuition assistance, especially to female athletes. Etc.

Be sure to be conscious of the time frame you were given to present and meet with the administrators. These individuals can be very busy. Do not abuse their time. Instead, make the most of it.

Once you have completed your informational and “selling” portion of the presentation meeting, gauge their interest. Ask what their thoughts are on having a program. See if they have any questions that you could answer for them.

HELPFUL HINT: If they ask a question that you are unsure of the answer, write it down and tell them you will investigate and get back to them. This will show your willingness to help, as well as giving you another point of contact.

Based on their interest, you might be able to see if they are looking to make a commitment to having the program in their school. If they do not commit, that isn’t a bad thing. Most times, the administrators will need time to process and discuss the information further. See what their interest level is, and make it aware to them that you are available to discuss the program at any time.

Thank them for the opportunity and leave your contact information with them, indicating you intend to follow up with them at a later time.

HELPFUL HINT: Make sure the contact information you leave is up-to-date and a preferred method of contact for you. Meaning the phone number you can be easily reached at, and the email account you check most often.



FOLLOW UP:

Regardless of the outcome, the follow up to the meeting is extremely crucial. You need to stay committed to communicating and helping the administrator as they guide themselves and other colleagues through the information regarding the program.

Even if they say no, do a follow-up call and thank them for the opportunity. Keeping a good relationship and open line of communication might lead to another opportunity later.

DO NOT contact them immediately, unless they had specific questions that they needed answered regarding the program. It is OK to give them a week to dissect and digest all the information you have provided before you follow up. However, still send them a thank you letter or email for the opportunity to speak to them. It is a nice gesture and will keep the conversation top of mind.

Once you give them the week, begin to contact them again. Thank them again for the meeting and see if they have had a chance to look over the materials. Offer that you are available to answer any questions they could have from the information. If they have not looked over it, kindly encourage them to look over the information, and ask them when a good time would be to contact them back regarding their thoughts and questions on the material.

Always keep them engaged. Always remind them of your willingness to help.

Remember to stay positive and encouraged, even if they decide not to participate in the program. If the answer is no, find a way to still be a partner with the school. Offer fundraising nights, teacher team builders, etc. Show them your willingness to maintain a relationship. You never know how that relationship may build into the middle school program you want.

Don't forget that USBC is here to assist you before, during and after your middle school bowling initiative. Thank you for your commitment to youth bowling and providing a Future for the Sport.

