

national governing body for the sport of your choice, or simply calling up someone who runs a program. (Regardless of the sport, they'll know what's going on around the country and should be able to help you network.)

Another option is to start a community team or program yourself. Our sports outreach veterans say to start small, however. "If it's a good idea and it's popular, it will grow faster than you want it to," warns Zack Lehman. Lehman, 27, is the executive director of MetroLacrosse, an organization that supports lacrosse programs in 10 communities around Boston.

Lehman says anyone who is considering starting an urban sports program needs to focus on three main things: raising money, getting kids interested, and securing facilities and a competition schedule. For funding, Lehman turned to friends and relatives, got local businesses (from pizza joints to funeral parlors) to sponsor players, sold T-shirts, and had kids stand outside grocery stores soliciting money. "We had bake sales, for crying out loud," says Lehman. That first year, the collective efforts brought in \$15,000 to cover equipment costs, buses for the games, and sundry expenses. Lehman set up a 13-game schedule against prep school junior varsity teams simply by calling up the athletic directors of all the prep schools in the area and asking them to play his team. ("Don't set [kids] up with a varsity schedule where they're going to get crushed. Give them a chance to learn the game," he says.)

Like Lehman says, if you've got something good, it grows fast. "Year two we had 160 kids and 20



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coaches and a much bigger budget. We formed a board of directors, filed for tax-exempt status, incorporated, had monthly board meetings, and started a core of volunteer parents to do everything from cutting oranges for games to watching the clock," he says. The most important difference the second year of the program, however, was the addition of an educational component. Lehman and friends took over an abandoned storefront, put in

computers, hired a part-time learning center coordinator, and recruited volunteer tutors to work with kids in the program. "There aren't many things that catch kids' attention these days, and if you can find one, like lacrosse, you've got to leverage it," says Lehman. Furthermore, he says, in order to go after larger grants, you need to offer something beyond a sports program, whether it's drug and alcohol prevention or academic tutoring.

For his first three years with the program, Lehman didn't take a penny of salary. He was a third-year law student when he began the neighborhood team and later worked full-time in law while

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running the program. Only after he left his corporate law job to work full-time on replicating the program in other communities did he begin to be paid. Traditionally, Lehman explains, parents have taken on the role of volunteer coach for community sports programs, and it's never been in the spirit of the organizations to pay these people. He says, however, that the climate is changing, particularly in urban communities. "Great programs don't just come out of nowhere and last forever. You have to have someone who runs them, and volunteers get burnt out." While coaching positions may continue to draw on volunteers, there will be a growing number of paid positions for administrators in organizations like these.

If you're starting an urban sports program, any sport will be beneficial, Lehman says, "but there's something about starting this kind of traditionally suburban type sport that opens kids' eyes. They're saying, 'I can compete with those kids in the suburbs in lacrosse, maybe I can compete with them in the classroom, maybe I can compete with them in the workforce.'" And believing they can compete is half the battle. 

Associate Editor Aimée Whitenack's sports outreach efforts include bobbling a few balls on the experience.com softball team, which is hoping for better luck next year.