



PROGRAM ASSISTANTS

ROLE OF THE PROGRAM ASSISTANT

Program assistants are an important component to any successful CanSkate program. The role of the program assistant (PA) will vary depending on the unique needs and dynamics of a club but all duties involve assisting the Skate Canada coach in the delivery of the program. The responsibilities of a PA may include:

- Assist the Skate Canada coach in delivering the program on-ice and off-ice
- Demonstrate skills and teaching progressions
- Supervise practice sessions
- Lead warm-ups and cool-downs under the direction of the Skate Canada coach
- Reinforce learned skills (follow-up on coach instruction)
- Lead circuits, drills, group activities
- Distribute awards (stickers, badges, etc.)
- Take attendance
- Be a role model for young skaters

RECRUITING AND SELECTING PROGRAM ASSISTANTS

PAs are vital to the success of any CanSkate program. Because of their important role, coaches and clubs must select the most capable individuals.

Determine the needs of your club

Before you begin to recruit and select, you will need to figure out exactly what your club's needs are.

Step 1: How many PAs will you need?

- The number of PAs required depends on the number of skaters you expect to be taking part in the program.
- You should plan for at least one PA for every 10 CanSkaters. This ratio, however, should be improved wherever possible.

Step 2: When will you need the PAs? Which days/hours?

- This depends entirely on the CanSkate schedule that has been established. Consult the club schedule before you start to recruit PAs. Refer to schedules and registration patterns from the past as a guideline.



Step 3: Determine what you need them to do?

- This may depend on the size of your program, the number of Skate Canada coaches, the number of assistants available, as well as the amount of off-ice volunteer assistance that you have.

Step 4: Write a job description

- Based on the Role of the Program Assistant above, you can write a job description for your PAs.

Step 5: Timing of recruitment and selection

(1) Announcement

Announce a call for PAs at the club in the spring. Include information regarding the minimum requirements, application deadline and the dates of the PA training sessions. Provide a sample job description as well as the benefits of becoming a PA.

(2) Recruit and select

Actual recruitment and selection of your PAs should take place in the summer or early fall, well before the program is to begin. This will allow you time to get their training started before the season opens. You may have skaters either sign a list posted on the club bulletin board or contact the skaters directly or both.

PROGRAM ASSISTANT — MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS

The club coaches are ultimately responsible for selecting and training the best PAs available to your club and for putting the best CanSkate program possible on the ice.

Candidates must demonstrate:

- A helping nature
- Patience with children
- An ability to communicate ideas clearly
- Reliability
- A sense of commitment to tasks
- Qualities of a good role model
- Ability to lead activities in a creative and enthusiastic manner

Remember that accomplished skaters, even though they may know the skills, may not necessarily be the best leaders. On the other hand, an average skater may be a dynamic PA!

Other considerations

PAs should ideally meet these qualifications:

- Be 12 years of age
- Have passed the Preliminary Free Skating Test



Remember that parents do not like to see their children guided by someone who is the same age or younger, and the CanSkaters often do not respond as well. In cases where it is absolutely necessary to use younger PAs, they should be partnered with another PA (i.e. two per group), and with those who have more experience wherever possible. Younger PAs should also have different duties with less responsibility, for example as a helper to demonstrate or run errands.

FEEDBACK AND MOTIVATION

Once PAs are in action, you will need to maintain their interest and commitment — in short, give them feedback and motivate them.

- Feedback and motivation are very closely linked.
- Positive or negative feedback and how it is delivered has a great effect on whether a person's performance improves or stays the same (or even worse — deteriorates!).
- The goal of any feedback is to motivate your PAs to become even better assistants for you and your club.

CANSKATE PROGRAM ASSISTANT RECOGNITION

Each section has their own policy on how program assistants in their section should be recognized and/or remunerated. Please consult your section for details.

Other motivators and rewards

Over and above the motivators/rewards that sections have established, these ideas may be useful:

- Recognize a PA of the month. Post his/her picture on the bulletin board or print it in the club newsletter accompanied by a brief outline of his/her hobbies and achievements.
- Recognize and present a trophy to the Program Assistant of the Year.
- Present the PAs with little surprises handed out unexpectedly during the season. Small skating related items that are for them only are well received (e.g. skater postcards, pens, posters, magnets, etc.)
- Assign special duties or tasks which have "status" as a means of recognition.
- Provide PAs with the opportunity to be featured in the carnival, ice show or demonstration day.
- Hold a Holiday and/or end of season pizza party