

New Orleans Recreation Development Commission (NORDC) Youth Athletics

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Purpose of This Report

In New Orleans, public recreational programs, like youth sports leagues, were provided through the New Orleans Recreation Development Commission (NORDC). The purpose of the project was to determine whether NORDC had sufficient internal controls to ensure teams complied with departmental policies and the law and to assess whether NORDC's controls for registration fees, money handling, and other financial issues related to youth athletics were adequate.

What the OIG Found

NORDC's policies for team management relied on authorized, community-based booster clubs to ensure money raised for youth sports was spent appropriately at parks throughout the city. The OIG found NORDC did not maintain adequate records of authorized booster clubs and did not consistently enforce its booster club policies. NORDC leaders disagreed about the number of active booster clubs. OIG evaluators also found NORDC had evidence that at least one booster club violated its by-laws through undocumented financial transactions, but NORDC did not flag the transactions or address the issue with booster club leadership.

OIG evaluators found that booster clubs were present at only five percent of the playgrounds that hosted NORDC sports teams, leaving teams at other parks with minimal guidance and oversight. A laissez faire approach permeated NORDC's management of its youth athletics teams, and NORDC lacked written guidelines for team management in the absence of booster clubs. NORDC leadership relied on what they believed were generally-understood policies and procedures, many of which were never written down or formalized in any way, resulting in inconsistent understanding among coaches about crucial issues like the right of children to participate regardless of financial hardship.

NORDC did not collect registration fees in accordance with the City Code, losing approximately \$150,000 per year that could have been used to support youth sports programming. Instead, it allowed coaches to charge internal fees as high as parents were willing to pay, which jeopardized fair competition by allowing large financial disparities between teams. Most teams did not have their own bank accounts, making it difficult to ensure money was not inadvertently misappropriated.

Finally, NORDC failed to enforce its own policies for volunteer coach background checks and spectator behavior, resulting in some participants feeling unsafe at games and NORDC being unable to verify the coaches entrusted with mentoring young athletes had not been convicted of violent crimes.

What the OIG Recommended

In order to ensure that youth sports teams are properly managed and resources invested in youth athletics are appropriately spent, the OIG made the following recommendations:

1. NORDC should develop internal controls for enforcing booster club policies, assign booster club oversight tasks to personnel with appropriate knowledge and experience, and train staff to enforce booster club policies.
2. NORDC should develop realistic, proactive strategies and written guidelines for recruiting new booster clubs and managing youth sports at playgrounds where no booster clubs exist.
3. NORDC should establish clear and enforceable fees, centrally collect a single registration fee for all teams, and adopt an electronic payment process.
4. NORDC should address pervasive deficiencies in its background check practices, create formal security protocols, and work with the City to explore ways to expand options for game security.