

USA Ultimate Affiliate Program: 2025-2026

Background

The USA Ultimate Affiliate Program was established in 2013 as a means to create stronger connections between the national governing body and local disc organizations around the country, in an effort to grow grassroots ultimate. Through a more formal partnership, USA Ultimate can provide support to local disc organizations to help grow the sport in a sustainable, supported way.

The state-based organization (SBO) model was introduced in 2015. SBOs were charged with growing ultimate and helping regulate ultimate within their state or territory, acting as an extension of USA Ultimate and creating an additional governance layer between the national organization and local disc organizations. SBOs were provided with startup grant funding, in addition to membership rebates from all active participants in their state or territory.

2024 Restructure

The 2024 optimization plan moves USA Ultimate's national infrastructure model from the current, two-pronged state-based organization and affiliate model to a combined, tiered structure. All existing SBOs and affiliates have the opportunity to migrate into one of the three new tiers in the Affiliate Program.

Tier 1

Tier 1 includes organizations most closely associated with USA Ultimate. It includes the most benefits as well as the most requirements. Tier 1 is designed for local disc organizations that are willing and able to integrate most fully with USA Ultimate by sanctioning all events, running outreach programs, hosting USA Ultimate events and more.

Tier 2

Tier 2 organizations are those that are willing and able to partner with USA Ultimate in a less consistent fashion than those included in Tier 1. Tier 2 organizations will sanction all their youth programs with USA Ultimate and run a small number of outreach programs annually. They are not required to sanction non-youth events.

Tier 3

Tier 3 organizations are those that want to be associated with USA Ultimate but are not able or willing to fully partner with the national body on all programs. They may sanction certain events with USA Ultimate but are not required to sanction them all. Tier 3 organizations are required to run a limited number of USA Ultimate programs. They also receive the fewest benefits from the national organization.

New partner organizations will select their tier for the current two-year term. They can elect to move up or down, or remain in their current tier, at the end of each two-year cycle. The first cycle will be 2025 through 2026. Organizations that join the affiliate program in late 2025 or 2026 will be committed to the

current set of benefits and requirements established for the current two-year cycle, despite not being in the program for the full two-year cycle.

The affiliate program is designed to provide useful, cost-saving and resource-heavy benefits, with associated requirements that are flexible but provide some strategic priorities for local disc organizations and advance the strategic goals of USA Ultimate. The benefits and requirements associated with the program and each tier will be regularly reviewed and evaluated. Updates or revisions may be released as often as every two years.

Benefits	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
Heavily discounted affiliate memberships for local sanctioned events	✓	✓	✓
Participation-based rebates from sanctioned events	✓	✓	✓
Qualification for youth growth rebate	✓	✓	
Free event insurance: general liability and athlete accident insurance for sanctioned events	✓	✓	✓
Annual D&O insurance premium covered by USA Ultimate	✓	✓	
Free Organizer Convention registration for up to 2 representatives	✓	✓	
Reduced annual license fee for use of USA Ultimate league management system	✓	✓	✓
Discounted fees for staff and board for continuing education programs (coaching education, etc.)	✓		
Free TDCP certifications for sanctioned event managers	✓	✓	
Event bid priority for USA Ultimate-owned events	✓	✓	✓
Access to quarterly meetings with USA Ultimate membership, competition and youth staff	✓		
Free membership to relevant state non-profit association	✓		
Annual \$500 grant for use of professional services (accountant, lawyer, etc.)	✓	✓	
Priority access to Grassroots Grants, with higher possible dollar maximums	✓	✓	
Bonuses for outreach programs run with partner youth-serving organizations	✓	✓	✓

Requirements	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
Sanction all events	✓		
Sanction all youth events	✓	✓	
Attend annual Organizer Convention	✓	✓	✓
Host 2+ youth-specific programs, including one youth club program, annually OR donation (or VIK) to support local, youth-specific programming	✓	✓	✓
Host 1+ outreach program annually	✓	✓	✓
Host or bid to host 1+ USA Ultimate event annually	✓		

Grow unique participation in local organization programs annually	✓	✓	
Grow unique youth participation in local organization programs annually	✓		
Host 1+ woman/girl-matching-specific program annually	✓	✓	✓
Maintain current D&O insurance year to year	✓	✓	✓

Financial Model

All partner organizations will be awarded membership rebates using the same financial model beginning in 2025. Rebates will be determined by unique participants in sanctioned events run by the partner organization. USA Ultimate-owned events run by the partner organization, excluding series events (conferences, sectionals and regionals), will be included in the organization's rebate-qualifying events.

- Tier 1 organizations are eligible to receive 7% of the total membership revenue of the unique participants in their events during the calendar year.
- Tier 2 organizations are eligible to receive 4% of the total membership revenue of the unique participants in their events during the calendar year.
- Tier 3 organizations are eligible to receive 2% of the total membership revenue of the unique participants in their events during the calendar year.

Youth Growth Bonuses:

In order to incentivize youth programming and growth, partner organizations in Tiers 1 and 2 will be eligible for annual youth growth bonuses:

- Tier 1 and 2 organizations whose unique youth participation growth exceeds 10% year over year will receive an additional 1% of total membership revenue from their organization's participants.
- Tier 1 and 2 organizations whose unique youth participation growth exceeds 15% year over year will receive an additional 2% of total membership revenue from their organization's participants.

Example: A Tier 1 organization that increased its unique youth participation by 17% year over year will receive 9% of the total membership revenue from their participants for that calendar year (their baseline 7% + 2% growth bonus).

USA Ultimate-owned events that are awarded to local disc organizations through an annual bid process will not be considered when calculating youth growth bonuses, even if they are eligible for membership rebates.

Benefits

USA Ultimate provides real benefits that support the work local disc organizations are doing to grow the sport across the country. With the new tiered model, benefits are tied to tier status, with more benefits provided to higher-tier organizations that fulfill more requirements.

Affiliate Memberships

All affiliated organizations, regardless of tier, will have access to heavily discounted memberships: affiliate memberships. The memberships which will be valid for participants in any local events hosted by the affiliate organization, including leagues, recreational tournaments and more.

Affiliate memberships do not cover participation in college or club regular-season events; college, club or masters series or postseason events; high school state championships; or youth club regional or national events.

Participation-Based Rebates from Sanctioned Events

As described above, affiliate organizations will receive annual membership rebates based on participation in their sanctioned events. Rebates will be calculated by the USA Ultimate membership director after the financial close of each calendar year. For example, after all 2024 events are closed out through the sanctioning process (rostering is complete, all outstanding membership fees are paid, etc.) in early 2025, participation reports for all 2024 events will be evaluated. Any event sanctioned directly by an affiliated local disc organization will be included. Unique participants will be identified, along with their membership status for the appropriate year (i.e., 2024 membership status held during 2024 event participation), along with the current membership fee rate for that membership.

- Tier 1 organizations will receive 7% of all membership revenue, based on unique participants in sanctioned events.
- Tier 2 organizations will receive 4% of all membership revenue, based on unique participants in sanctioned events.
- Tier 3 organizations will receive 2% of all membership revenue, based on unique participants in sanctioned events.

For purposes of this calculation, rostered players, coaches and chaperones and their membership fees will be included. Team managers, team support personnel, etc., will not be included in the calculation.

In addition to events sanctioned directly by the local disc organization (i.e., leagues, tournaments, clinics), certain USA Ultimate-owned events will be included in the membership rebate calculations. Participants in major Triple Crown Tour events, high school state championship events and sanctioned youth club regional events hosted by the partner organization will also be included in rebate calculations.

College conference and regional championship events, club sectional and regional championship events, and masters regional events will not be included in the rebate calculations.

Qualification for Youth Growth Rebate

Growth bonuses will be awarded to Tier 1 and Tier 2 organizations when and if the local disc organization's youth participation, determined by unique participants in events' youth divisions, exceeds the organization's youth participation from the previous calendar year.

Youth growth that exceeds 15% year over year will earn a 2% growth bonus of the total member rebate earned for that calendar year. Tier 1 organizations will recoup 9% of the total membership revenue from their participants, compared to the typical 7%. Tier 2 organizations will recoup 6% of the total membership revenue from their participants, compared to the typical 4%.

Youth growth that exceeds 10% year over year will earn a 1% growth bonus of the total member rebate earned for that year. Tier 1 organizations will recoup 8% of the total membership revenue from their participants, compared to the typical 7%. Tier 2 organizations will recoup 5% of the total membership revenue from their participants, compared to the typical 4%.

Free Event Insurance: General Liability and Athlete Accident Insurance

Any event sanctioned by an affiliated local disc organization will have all applicable sanctioning fees waived, providing free general liability insurance for their events.

Any rostered participant at a sanctioned event, by virtue of their USA Ultimate membership, also gains access to free participant accident insurance. The athlete accident policy provides secondary insurance and covers up to \$25,000 per incident in medical fees.

Annual D&O Insurance Premium Covered by USA Ultimate

Best practices for any organization, particularly non-profit organizations, includes holding directors and officers insurance, which protects the organization's staff and board of directors in the event of legal action against the organization.

Free Organizer Convention Registration for up to Two Representatives

Each year, USA Ultimate hosts an Organizer Convention – a multi-day event concerned with the interests of anyone involved in organizing ultimate at the local level. The convention includes learning sessions on topics ranging from strategic planning; board best practices; diversity, equity and inclusion; fundraising; marketing; league structures and fees; and much more. Times for networking with fellow organizers are also highly prioritized, to allow participants to get to know and learn from each other.

USA Ultimate will cover the registration fee for representatives of affiliated organizations to attend the Organizer Convention each year. One registration per organization will always be free. As part of ongoing USA Ultimate initiatives to increase the diversity of ultimate, including amongst its organizers and coaches, a second representative's registration will be covered, as long as one of the attendees identifies as either non-male and/or BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color).

Travel rebates, for in-person convention years, are decided on a per-year basis. If applicable, travel rebates will only be available for Tier 1 organizations.

Reduced Annual License Fee for Use of USA Ultimate League Management System

New in 2025, USA Ultimate's event management system will include the functionality necessary to manage league formats, as well as tournaments. Organizations will have the ability to view and manage their registrations, participants, fees and more.

Discounted Continuing Education Fees

Tier 1 organizations will have discounted, or free, access to USA Ultimate's many education programs.

Organizers of Tier 1 organizations' events will have free access to the Tournament Directors Certification Program for tournament directors of any events owned by the partner organization. Tournament directors for any sanctioned USAU events are required to maintain the certification.

Organizers of Tier 2 organizations' sanctioned events will have access to two free TDCP certifications per calendar year.

Event Bid Priority

USA Ultimate aims to award event bids to, and run its major events with, strong local organizations who show partnership with the national governing body. One of the considerations when evaluating event bids is that level of partnership. Affiliated organizations will receive additional consideration in the evaluation process, as one of the criteria examined when reviewing event bids.

State Non-Profit Association Membership

USA Ultimate will cover the annual membership fee to the appropriate state non-profit association for interested Tier 1 organizations who have and maintain non-profit status with the IRS.

State non-profit associations provide access to program discounts, board and governance training, subject-matter educational webinars and more to their member associations.

Professional Services Stipend

Tier 1 and Tier 2 organizations will receive an annual stipend (\$500 annually as of 2024) to assist with the retention of professional services needed to support a non-profit organization. The stipend may be used to assist in filing tax returns, seek legal counsel, develop marketing or branding materials, or other organizational-development tasks.

The stipend will be included alongside membership rebate dollars, distributed in Q1 of the calendar year.

Grants Access

Youth Grassroots Grants are funded by the Ultimate Foundation and distributed biannually to organizations that are working to create opportunities for youth and groups underrepresented in the ultimate population, including girls and women, people of color, elementary-aged players and more. Organizations partnered with USA Ultimate through the affiliate program will have priority access to grant funding. Organizations in Tiers 1 and 2 will have access to higher maximum amounts of grant funding.

Bonuses for Youth-Serving Organization Partnerships

Organizations actively working with local youth-serving organizations (YSOs) to run ultimate programming are eligible for financial bonuses. These types of programs often do not result in additional USA Ultimate members, so participants will not be reflected in traditional membership rebates for the local disc organization. However, the programs are incredibly important to the growth of the sport.

- Partner organizations that run between zero and three programs with a local partner YSO will have an additional \$500 included along with their annual membership rebate.
- Partner organizations that run between four and seven programs with a local partner YSO will have an additional \$1000 included along with their annual membership rebate.
- Partner organizations that run eight or more programs with a local partner YSO will have an additional \$1500 included along with their annual membership rebate.

Programs that qualify for the additional financial bonuses will be reported by the local disc organization to USA Ultimate at the end of each calendar year and verified by USA Ultimate staff.

Requirements

Event Sanctioning

The most direct and important path of partnership between USA Ultimate and local organizations comes from the sanctioning of events. The event sanctioning program allows USA Ultimate to ensure participants experience high-quality events, by creating consistency with competition, safety, and other requirements.

Sanctioning events with USA Ultimate also provides local organizations with access to A-rated general liability insurance coverage for their events. It also provides all rostered participants with access to athlete accident insurance.

All participants in USA Ultimate-sanctioned events must be USA Ultimate members. Local organizations can work with USA Ultimate staff on the best way to collect membership fees and apply them for participants.

Tier 1 organizations are required to sanction **all** their events with USA Ultimate. Tier 2 organizations are required to sanction at least all their youth events, as well as youth divisions of multi-division events. Tier 3 organizations are required to sanction the programs used to fulfill their annual requirements: two youth-specific programs, one outreach program, and one female-matching program. Tier 2 and Tier 3 organizations may also elect to sanction other events they host.

Sanctioning fees are waived for any events sanctioned by USA Ultimate partner organizations in all three tiers.

Membership rebates provided to affiliated local disc organizations are based solely on events sanctioned with USA Ultimate.

Organizer Convention

All affiliated organizations are required to have at least one representative attend the annual Organizer Convention.

USA Ultimate will cover the registration fee for up to two (2) representatives of affiliated organizations in Tiers 1 and 2 to attend the Organizer Convention each year. One registration per organization in Tiers 1 and 2 will always be free. As part of ongoing USA Ultimate initiatives to increase the diversity of ultimate, including amongst its organizers and coaches, a second representative's registration will be covered, as long as one of the attendees identifies as non-male and/or BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color).

Youth Playing Opportunities

All affiliated organizations must host at least two youth-specific playing opportunities annually, including at least one youth club (non-school-based) event.

USA Ultimate is committed to increasing youth participation in the sport and recognizes that most youth play happens at the local level. As such, partner organizations are expected to host youth playing opportunities each year. Suggested formats include youth leagues (club or school-based), youth tournaments or hat tournaments, or a series of clinics.

One of the best ways to reach new participants, particularly new youth participants, is to partner with a local youth-serving organization (YSO). USA Ultimate highly encourages partner organizations to explore YSO programming to fulfill the youth playing opportunity requirement. As USA Ultimate continues to build relationships with YSOs, as much as possible, we will look to connect these organizations with affiliates first.

Examples of programs with YSOs that fulfill the requirement are clinics with a local Boys and Girls Club, league or event with a local parks and recreation department, clinics or leagues run with a local Jewish Community Center or Catholic Youth Organization, and ultimate events with a local Boy Scout or Girl Scout Troop.

Events or programs run with a partner youth-serving organization, where their insurance and waivers are utilized to cover the program, do not need to be sanctioned with USA Ultimate. All other youth programs meant to fulfill the youth programs requirement must be sanctioned with USA Ultimate.

Organizations unable to host youth-specific programming may fulfill this requirement by supporting youth ultimate programs run through a partner organization. Suggested methods of support are donations of \$1,000 or more or value in kind (VIK) contributions that equate to approximately \$1,000. VIK options include disc donations, equipment grants, volunteer hours, etc.

Other programs or contributions not explicitly listed here may also fulfill the requirement, at the discretion of USA Ultimate.

Outreach Programs

Tier 1 and Tier 2 organizations are required to run at least one USA Ultimate outreach program in their geographic area each year. Examples of current outreach programs that fulfill the requirements include, but are not limited to, Learn to Play clinics or leagues, GUM clinics or leagues, in-person coach certification clinics, observer certification clinics, and Boys and Girls Club clinics. Other programs not explicitly listed here may also fulfill the requirement, at the discretion of USA Ultimate.

It is important that these outreach efforts be connected to other affiliate programs that provide opportunities for players newly introduced to the sport to continue playing. The goal is to eliminate “one-off” clinics which have no opportunity for continued play and have a limited impact on long-term youth participation.

USA Ultimate Event Hosting

Running events with established local disc organizations typically yields higher-quality experiences for participants. As such, all Tier 1 organizations are required to host, or bid to host, at least one USA Ultimate event in each calendar year. USA Ultimate events available for bidding include college, club and masters series and postseason events; Triple Crown Tour events, including the U.S. Open/Youth Club Championships; Middle or High School State Championships; and Beach Championships. Hosting or co-hosting National Team tryouts, training camps or Talent ID Camps will also fulfill the requirement.

Participation Growth

The growth of ultimate happens largely at the local level and through the work of local disc organizations. Affiliated organizations are expected to increase participation in their geographic area year over year. Tier 1 and Tier 2 organizations are expected to increase participation overall, year over year. Tier 1 organizations are expected to increase both overall participation **and** youth participation, year over year.

Woman-Matching Playing Opportunities

To encourage growth of the sport amongst woman-matching players, Tier 1 and Tier 2 organizations are required to host at least one program specific to woman-matching and/or girl-matching athletes each year. Examples of programs that would fulfill the requirement include a woman-matching league, tournament or hat tournament; a women’s only coaching clinic; and a GUM clinic or league. Other programs not explicitly listed here may also fulfill the requirement, at the discretion of USA Ultimate.

Directors and Officers Insurance

All affiliated local disc organizations must maintain directors and officers insurance. USA Ultimate will cover the premium for the annual insurance, up to \$800, for any Tier 1 and Tier 2 organizations who obtain the coverage through USA Ultimate’s insurance broker. All policies obtained through USA Ultimate and its broker are underwritten by an A-rated insurance carrier.

Annual Reporting Survey

Each affiliated organization must complete an annual USA Ultimate reporting survey, to be distributed by USA Ultimate late in the calendar year. The survey is an important means of communication and feedback gathering for the local organizations and USA Ultimate. The survey will also provide a means of reporting on non-sanctioned-event activity, including partnerships and outreach programs run with other youth-serving organizations that can result in additional funding for affiliated organizations.

Penalties for Unmet Requirements

Upon joining the affiliate program, organizations agree to complete the annual requirements chosen with their partnership tier. If those requirements are not met, membership rebate funds will be withheld. Each unmet requirement will incur a 5% penalty of the total eligible annual membership rebate.

** New affiliate organizations who join in the second half of the year are exempt from meeting all requirements in their first year. Any events required to be sanctioned, based on the affiliate tier, that begin after the organization's joining date must be sanctioned.*