

North Carolina Interscholastic Cycling League

Coach & Team Road Map

So, you want to be a North Carolina NICA coach or start a team? We created this document to guide coaches and teams who are getting started with the North Carolina Interscholastic Cycling League (NCICL). It lays out the steps you should be completing as you work towards becoming a coach, helping to start a team, or planning to work with student-athletes in the league. These steps include useful links to additional resources and presentations, and explanations of each task. They are in suggested order - but do not have to be completed in the order in which they are presented. These steps are the nuts and bolts of the "how" - but you should also have a strong sense of "why" you want to be a NICA coach. **The "why" is most important to your success as a coach and the success of the student-athletes you will be involved with.**

Your NCICL leadership is here to help!! Please use us as a resource and reach out with questions as you proceed. Thank you for your interest in helping to get more kids on bikes across North Carolina!

1. Register with the North Carolina Pit Zone website (registration resets and opens each Fall - for the 2025 season registration will open up on 9/3 for coaches and 10/1 for student-athletes)

- a. PitZone is our NCICL registration platform and is where all coaches, student-athletes, and team volunteers register. Coaches and student-athletes use PitZone to pay fees, upload proof of training (such as training completion certificates, first aid and coach training certificates, etc), and track continuing education units and fieldwork hours. More information on all these requirements can be found at the national site under [Coach Licensing](#)
- b. There are two ways to get onto PitZone:
 - i. IF YOU ARE JOINING AN EXISTING TEAM - reach out to the team's Team Director or Head Coach and they will be able to send you an invite to register with the team (after September 1)
 1. Coaches can be invited to as many teams as they want using the same email address. Make sure they use the same email address for each invite, then they can use a single Pit Zone login to manage all their coach profiles. They will need to complete "registration" for each team separately, but Pit Zone will autofill all the data they enter after the first one so it will literally take a minute to complete. Also, they won't have to duplicate their background check or coach fees. This will allow coaches to be affiliated with more than one team and act as "floating coaches" who may work with multiple teams.
 - ii. IF YOU ARE STARTING A NEW TEAM - simply email NCICL Director of Coaching and Team Development [Shawn Moore](#) and request an invitation - you'll get a link by email (after September 3) and click the link to begin the process - it's that easy!

1. The person setting up the team in PitZone will become the Team Director by default - don't worry! All this means is that you are the point person for making sure the team is set up in PitZone and ensuring that team fees are paid. You can change the team director role to another person - this step is explained on the [PitZone FAQ page](#)

2. Become a Level 1 NCICL Coach (All requirements to become a Level 1 Coach can be completed online! This process is smooth and easy to follow. The link to access your annual trainings and license requirements is through your coach profile in the Pit Zone)

- a. There are a few steps to this, but it can be done in under two hours.
 - First, follow the [PitZone](#) link to coach training from Pit Zone using the "Access Coach Courses" button and complete NICA Coach License Level 1.
 - You will also need to complete the NICA Philosophy, Safety, and Risk Management (Required Annually) training.
 - Next, the CDC Heads Up Concussion Training (Required Annually) is now housed within the system and will need to be completed.
 - After that, complete the Athlete Abuse Awareness Training - this is required training that you will need to do every two years.
 - Almost there - you will also need to complete the background check by clicking the link through PitZone. For more information about the background check, please see the national website [HERE](#)
 - After that, just sign the waivers and Code of Conduct and pay the required fees in PitZone.

Once you have completed all of the required trainings and registration you will see "Licensed Level: Level 1" on your coach profile in the Pit Zone and you are now a full fledged Level 1 Coach - you can now start working with student-athletes! *(If you see License Level: None still listed, that means you missed something, or the background check process has not yet been completed and you will need to ensure everything is completed and you are showing as Level 1 before joining the team for practices/rides)* [Here is the PitZone FAQ's page](#) from the national NICA site.

3. Recruit some other adult coaches/volunteers

- a. By now you have a solid understanding of the risk management practices of NICA and can talk a bit about the programming. You should spend a little time working on networking with other interested adults and recruiting some help to run the team. Many hands makes for easier work! Make sure you communicate clearly what you are asking for - there is no minimum time requirement, but you want people who will follow through on their commitment to being a coach. It is more important to find a reliable, trustworthy, and solid role model than it is to find a great mountain biker. Remember this is about youth development!
- b. [Tasks associated with running a team](#)

4. Get together and figure out the “vision” for the team

- a. Hopefully you have identified some other adults interested in helping out in a coaching capacity. Meet for an informal ride, or go out for coffee or lunch, or just grab a drink out together and talk about what you want the team to look like, what the overall vision or concept is. Put some notes down on paper. You will need to start defining your team culture from the first time you get the kids together, so have a plan going into it. **The most successful teams put an emphasis on participation, camaraderie, and group goals, not performance or individual achievement.**
- b. One of the decisions to make during this step is **whether you will be a school based team or a composite team**. Composite teams cover all of the schools within a geographic area and are meant to be temporary until school based teams can be formed. School based teams are the goal for NICA as having a team at a school opens the door to so many new riders. Having a team at a school allows for students to find a new niche and way to be part of the school community. With the goal of getting #morekidsonbikes and creating life long cyclists, schools provide the greatest access to youth across our state and help them see mountain biking as an available option for them!

5. Develop a practice plan

- a. Work on a schedule for your team - **don't forget to track your hours anytime you are working with your student-athletes!**
 - i. Preseason: From October 1st to November 30th teams are limited to 6 activities or practices. For coaches, preseason activities count towards the field work hour requirements for Level 2 and Level 3 Licenses. These events can include: flat tire repair classes, team building social functions, easy group rides on pathway systems, fundamental skills practices (as learned in On-the-Bike Skills 101), or even just information meetings for students and parents that include discussion of future practice venues and times. **We don't recommend going on group trail rides yet - you will want time to thoroughly assess your student-athletes and get to know each of them personally.**
 1. For more ideas, check out: [Preseason Activities - examples](#)
 - ii. After December 1, teams should plan to start getting together more regularly and holding on-the-bike practices. Practices can be made up of:
 1. [Stretching](#)
 2. [Strength work](#)
 3. Fundamental skills instruction (taught in On-the-Bike Skills 101)
 4. [Bike games](#)
 5. [NICA Short Course](#) is the basic structure to help student-athletes safely develop and work on their skills before hitting the trails.
 6. [Relays and Mock Races](#)
 7. Race prep - like group starts
 8. [Off Bike/Indoor games](#)

- iii. Once you have become a Level 2 Licensed Coach and have gotten to know your student-athletes (their skill level and goals), start thinking about leading some introductory trail rides. Remember to never take a group on trails you haven't ridden multiple times yourself so that you know what to expect and are aware of emergency access points and turnaround/bailout options.

6. Begin recruiting interested kids and their parents

- a. You can use [this program overview](#) to communicate to parents and student-athletes, and this [overview is great for school administration](#)
- b. [Here are some links](#) helpful for holding a parent/student interest meeting
- c. Remember that NICA is not talent development - it is the *point of entry* for kids to find mountain biking and provides *opportunities for developing youth* that good coaches can make the most of. This should be central to your recruiting message!

7. Identify the roles and duties for your team, and ask parents to get involved - also, set up communication

- a. [Check out this presentation](#) on getting parents involved and building team community
- b. Think about [Team Snap](#) or [TEAM App](#) for setting up a way to communicate with your team. ***The league pays for an annual Team Snap subscription so using this app is free to you and your team!*** Make sure that parents are included in communications too. Creating a team facebook page or instagram account is another great way to build community & team identity and keep people in touch with one another.

8. Develop a fundraising plan

- a. [Link to fundraising presentation](#)
- b. [Guide to opening a team checking account](#) - School teams please contact your school as they may maintain accounts for all clubs (*this will also make fundraising easier as donations/sponsorships will be made to the school on behalf of the club*)
- c. Build a relationship with your local bike shop - their support may not come in the way of financial support, but they may be able to connect you with customers who own/work for local businesses that may want to sponsor your team!
 - i. Ask if you can leave a team flyer or info sheet for customers to take, or for employees to reference when working with families with middle school/high school students or customers who may be interested in sponsoring the team
 - ii. Here's a [version](#) you can modify for your use.
- d. Identify the costs associated for the student-athlete and for the team. Build a budget and then breakdown your sponsorship levels so that each sponsorship level can be easily tied to actual costs for the student or the team.
- e. Develop a proposal that provides information about the team, costs associated, and the varying sponsorship levels with exactly what the sponsors will get in return (logo placement on a jersey or banner, social media shout outs, etc)
 - i. We recommend NOT putting sponsor logos on team race jerseys to avoid families from having to potentially buy new jerseys each year. Instead put logos on banners to be displayed at the team tent and/or put them on

tech-tees that can be worn frequently at practices/rides and carry a lower cost for families/the team.

9. Think about your team identity and jersey design

- a. [Podiumwear](#) - NC League sponsor and provider for hundreds of NICA teams
- b. Recruit the student-athletes for logo ideas, jersey designs, and additional items to have branded with your team identity. Knit caps, ball caps, socks, wristbands, lanyards, hoodies, riding gloves, let your imagination go wild.

10. Identify interested kids with equipment needs

- a. You will see the [deals offered in Pit Zone](#) - they are for registered student-athletes and coaches only please!
- b. Use your local bike shops as a resource - they would love to earn your business and be affiliated with youth teams!
- c. NCICL has limited resources to offer [scholarships](#) and [loaner bikes](#) to families in need.

Raise your arms in victory - you have started a youth mountain biking club or team in the North Carolina Interscholastic Cycling League!

Other things to keep in mind:

Take lots of photos! You will want to document the birth of the team and the progress of your student-athletes, lots of photos will help you do this and they'll come in handy for website, social media, end of year review, to share with sponsors (or potential sponsors), etc.

This guide will get you started and provides lots of good tools.

However, here is our caveat paragraph, be aware that this is a project requiring a level of commitment (that can vary widely and is up to you) and there is continued input required with items such as practice activity and injury reporting for the NICA safety study, registering preseason events and other team activities, maintaining coaching certifications (good for 2 years) or pursuing higher coach licensing, first aid certifications, etc.

All of these things are possible for someone from any background, and your NC League is here to help, and the payoff will be huge, but we want to make sure that folks understand the commitment being asked of them.

The most important thing is establishing trusted relationships with the student-athletes, and honoring the commitment to showing up for them is critical.

Other useful links!

[Preseason Activity Approval Form](#)

[NICA Handbook](#)

[NICA/NCICL Insurance FAQ document](#)

For more information on NICA First Aid Requirements, please visit the [NICA First Aid Webpage](#).