A COMMUNITY-FIRST PLAYBOOK

How to Start a Run Group

Turn a weekly meetup into a welcoming community—one step, connection and finish line at a time.



PLAN	HOST	GROW	PARTNER	RACE
Launch with clarity	Run with care	Spread the word	Build local value	Make memories

WELCOME

The run is only the beginning

A practical field guide for people who want to build connection through movement.

> *The route brings people together.*
> The welcome makes them stay.

START SIMPLE

Begin with one consistent meeting time, one safe route and a clear promise: people of different abilities will be welcomed and supported.

BUILD FOR BELONGING

A successful crew offers more than mileage: friendship, accountability, neighborhood pride and opportunities to give back.

What you will build with this guide

A REPEATABLE RUN

Clear pace options, check-in and safe route planning.

A RECOGNIZABLE BRAND

Marketing and messages that turn interest into attendance.

A PARTNER NETWORK

Coffee shops, local businesses and nonprofit allies.

A WIDER COMMUNITY

Social, service and learning events beyond running.

STARTER RECOMMENDATION • 1 weekly run • 3 pace options • 1 monthly social

This booklet is general organizational guidance, not medical, legal, insurance or professional event-management advice. Verify applicable requirements with land managers, local officials and insurers.

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Your field guide

Use this as a sequence, or jump directly to the worksheet you need.

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THE GUIDING PRINCIPLE

People first, pace second. A welcoming, predictable club is more valuable than a polished launch that cannot be sustained.

USE THESE PAGES

Print the worksheets, share the race links, and adapt the sample language to your community. Replace all placeholders before posting.

01 / FOUNDATIONS

Create your club promise

A great run group answers one question clearly: Who is this for, and how will they feel?

Write your one-sentence mission

TEMPLATE

"We bring **[people/community]** together through **[type of movement]** at **[place]**, so everyone can feel **[specific benefit]**."

AUDIENCE

- All abilities; walk and run/walk welcome
- Neighborhood residents or an affinity community
- Beginners preparing for a first 5K
- Runners looking for friendly social miles

NONNEGOTIABLES

- Say hello to newcomers by name
- Make pace and distance options explicit
- Publish details early and consistently
- Keep consent and safety at the center

Example mission — inspiration, not a claim about OURLOOP

COMMUNITY-CENTERED RUN CREW

"We create a joyful weekly space for neighbors to walk, run and connect without pressure to be fast, fit or experienced."

QUICK EXERCISE What should someone say about the group after three visits?

Our group exists because

Everyone should feel

What makes us different

01 / FOUNDATIONS

Choose a simple club model

Decide what participation means before you recruit.

MODEL	BEST FOR	NEEDS
Free social crew	Low-barrier weekly meetups	Leads, simple communications, coverage review
Training-focused group	Couch to 5K, 10K or race build	Progression, qualified coaching if needed
Formal running club	Year-round memberships and events	Governance, policies, insurance, finances
Employer / campus group	Staff, affinity or student community	Host approval, accessibility, operating rules

LAUNCH OFFER

Recommended: free or low-cost participation, one dependable weekly session, optional monthly social and no pressure to buy gear or enter races.

OPERATIONS TO DECIDE

- Name, contact email and social handle
- Public vs RSVP-only attendance
- Adult-only vs family-friendly policy
- Photo permissions and data handling
- Volunteer responsibilities and backups

Organize before you scale

A small group can begin informally, but growing attendance, paid programs, youth participation or public events may require a more formal structure. The RRCA offers a useful start-a-club guide.

The RRCA recommends considering formal organization when a group has more than ten people attending regularly throughout the year. That is guidance, not an automatic legal threshold.

01 / FOUNDATIONS

Build your starter leadership team

One person can spark a group. Several clear roles make it sustainable.

LEAD HOST
Own the weekly plan, communications and final go/no-go decision.

ROUTE LEAD
Map, inspect and communicate route options; brief intersections and turns.

PACE LEADS
Support each advertised pace or distance; adjust for participants.

SWEEPER
Bring up the rear and communicate with the lead; no participant disappears unnoticed.

WELCOME LEAD
Greet newcomers, collect opt-in sign-ins and answer first-timer questions.

COMMUNITY LEAD
Coordinate partners, post-run connection and monthly social programming.

A lean first-month setup

MINIMUM OPERATING TEAM

Two–four reliable adults with a designated lead, a sweep, and a backup can support a small, straightforward route. Larger attendance or multiple pace groups require additional trained helpers. Never advertise more pace options than you can staff.

> **RECRUITMENT IDEA** **Ask for a 4-week volunteer commitment, not an indefinite promise.**

Review training such as the RRCA RunLead Badge and maintain a basic incident/communication process. Leading a run is a safety responsibility, not just a promotional role.

01 / FOUNDATIONS

Launch in 30 days

Start with a pilot, collect feedback, then make the calendar public.

01 **WEEK 1 • Clarify**

Name your audience and mission. Walk two routes. Decide schedule, pace options and lead roles.

02 **WEEK 2 • Build**

Confirm venue/land rules, risk management, contact channel, sign-up and photo-consent wording. Run a leader-only rehearsal.

03 **WEEK 3 • Invite**

Launch a flyer, personal invitations, partner posts and countdown. Ask friends to serve as early welcoming faces.

04 **WEEK 4 • Pilot**

Host a small first run; check in everyone, debrief, survey first-timers and announce the next four sessions.

LAUNCH TARGETS (ILLUSTRATIVE)

- 2–4 trained/reliable leaders
- 1 clearly marked starter route
- 2–3 supported pace options
- 10–20 initial RSVPs, not a requirement

PILOT DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- Could newcomers find us easily?
- Did every pace group return safely?
- Was check-in simple and voluntary?
- Would members come again next week?

Consistency beats a large first turnout.

02 / YOUR WEEKLY RUN

When should the group run?

Choose the time people can repeat—not just the time that sounds exciting.

WHEN	WHY IT CAN WORK	WATCH OUT FOR
Weekday early AM	Before-work routine; cooler summer hours	Darkness, travel time, family schedules
Weekday evening	After-work social energy	Traffic, sunset, weather, busy routes
Saturday morning	Accessible for many work schedules; post-run coffee	Other family/work commitments; event congestion
Sunday morning	Relaxed weekend vibe; long-run option	Religious/community commitments and recovery needs

Suggested starter rhythm

ANCHOR RUN

Saturday • 8:00 AM (example only)
30–45 minutes of walking/running; finish together; 20-minute social.

OPTIONAL SECOND TOUCHPOINT

Wednesday • 6:30 PM when daylight/safety permits
Easy 20–35-minute meetup; maintain a virtual check-in if conditions are poor.

Weather-adjustment policy

- Publish by a fixed deadline whether a session is on, shortened, relocated or canceled.
- Use cooler hours in hot weather; move indoors or cancel for lightning, unsafe ice, hazardous air or severe alerts.
- Check weather, sunrise/sunset and air quality the night before and again before departure.

Local temperature, heat index, air quality, storm risk and lighting matter more than a universal start time. Consult NWS lightning guidance and AirNow.

02 / YOUR WEEKLY RUN

Choose a route people trust

Safety, clear directions and reliable amenities matter more than scenery.



START / TURN / RETURN

Use a simple out-and-back or loop. Choose a clear meeting landmark, turn point, and regroup location.

WALK THE COURSE FIRST

- Sidewalk or separated path where available
- Minimal complicated crossings or blind turns
- Good lighting, surface and sightlines
- Transit access, parking, bathrooms, water
- Low conflict with other path users

MAKE IT EASY TO JOIN

- Post a map pin and photo of the entrance
- Give a public transit / parking note
- Offer 1-, 2- and 3-mile distance choices
- Publish terrain, hills and stroller access
- Have a bad-weather alternate location

Quick route scorecard • 0 = poor, 1 = workable, 2 = strong

LIGHTING	CROSSINGS	ACCESS	SURFACE	AMENITIES
__ / 2	__ / 2	__ / 2	__ / 2	__ / 2

A high score does not override permission requirements. Check with park owners or land managers before advertising an organized event; rules vary by jurisdiction and location.

02 / YOUR WEEKLY RUN

Make every pace belong

A participant should never have to apologize for their pace.

WALK
Comfortable social walking; same welcome, photo opportunities and finish.

RUN / WALK
Simple time intervals or short jog segments; ideal for first-time runners.

EASY RUN
Conversation-pace jogging; stop and regroup according to the route plan.

EXTENDED RUN
Optional longer loop only with appropriate lead coverage and published expectations.

Three inclusive route formats

FORMAT	HOW TO USE IT
Time-based out-and-back	Everyone goes out 12–18 minutes, turns and returns; differing speeds share a common end time.
Short-loop course	Repeat a 0.5–1-mile loop so members are visible and can stop early if needed.
Clearly supported groups	Assign a lead and sweep to each supported route/pacing option as size permits.

“No one gets left out of the invitation.”

PACE PROMISE
Do not promise “no-drop” without sufficient trained volunteers to deliver it. Clearly state route, duration, support level and who to contact if leaving early.

02 / YOUR WEEKLY RUN

Host a run people want to repeat

A predictable run-of-show helps your team look organized and feel welcoming.

TIME	HOST ACTION	MEMBER EXPERIENCE
48–24 hrs prior	Confirm route, weather, leads; post reminder	Know exactly where/when to arrive
30 mins before	Mark meeting point, inspect hazards, assign roles	Easy to find the crew
0–10 mins	Check-in, newcomer welcome, optional photo consent	Feel noticed, never singled out
10–15 mins	Warm-up and short route / safety briefing	Understand paces and turnarounds
15–50 mins	Run/walk with leads, sweeps, check-ins	Move at a supported effort
50–70 mins	Regroup, water, partner hangout, next-event invite	Connect and know what comes next

Example 45-second opening script

HOST SAYS

"Welcome! Whether you walk, run/walk or run, there is space for you here. We have **[routes]** and **[pace leads]**. Stay on the published route, follow traffic signals, and tell a lead if you need help or plan to leave early. We will regroup at **[place]** and would love to see you at **[next event]**."

Use a sign-in process and obtain any waivers your insurer or event requires. Collect only necessary personal details and give participants a clear privacy notice.

02 / YOUR WEEKLY RUN

Build a safety-first routine

Safety is a system of planning, trained people, communication and response.

BEFORE DEPARTURE

- Confirm permits and insurance applicability
- Identify leaders, sweeps and emergency contact process
- Check course hazards, weather and AQI
- Confirm everyone knows their route and return plan
- Keep a first-aid kit and charged phone accessible

DURING THE RUN

- Obey signals and use sidewalks/trails
- Do not obstruct roads or other path users
- Track known participants and check in at the finish
- Pause or stop for illness, injury or dangerous conditions
- Leave room for walkers, strollers and other users

WEATHER / EMERGENCY DECISIONS

Lightning: get into a substantial building or hard-topped vehicle; wait at least 30 minutes after last thunder before resuming.
Heat: reduce exertion, use shade and hydration; stop for dizziness, weakness or concerning symptoms.
Serious illness: call 911, provide location, follow dispatcher instructions; use trained first-aid/CPR support.

Based on RRCA Safe Group Run Guidelines, CDC Heat and Athletes, and NWS lightning safety.

02 / YOUR WEEKLY RUN

Make belonging intentional

A welcoming culture comes from consistent actions, not just an inclusive slogan.

FIRST-TIMERS
State clearly: “All paces welcome, including walkers.” Have a designated welcome volunteer.

COST
Offer a no-purchase option; do not require a branded shirt, app or paid race to belong.

ACCESSIBILITY
Describe surface, stairs, transit, bathrooms, route length and available adaptations.

PRIVACY
Get consent before posting recognizable photos; allow opt-out without explanation.

RESPECT
Prohibit harassment, unwanted touching, discriminatory conduct and aggressive pace pressure.

FEEDBACK
Provide a private contact method to report concerns and a defined follow-up process.

Starter code of conduct

POST IT IN YOUR SIGN-UP AND EVENT DESCRIPTION

We respect each other, share the path, follow traffic rules, ask before taking/posting photos, keep private information private, welcome different abilities, and let leaders know about safety concerns. Leaders may ask participants to leave for unsafe or harassing behavior.

Belonging means everyone can participate without performing.

02 / YOUR WEEKLY RUN

Design the first-timer experience

A newcomer decides whether to return long before the run ends.

01 **BEFORE • Remove uncertainty**

Send map pin, arrival time, route distances, pace options, parking/transit, weather policy and the name of their welcome contact.

02 **AT ARRIVAL • Offer a personal hello**

Introduce the pace lead and where to put belongings. Avoid making a new member give an uncomfortable speech.

03 **DURING • Make the promise real**

Check that they understand the route and have a supported pace. If they choose to stop or leave, confirm they know the regroup point.

04 **AFTER • Close the loop**

Thank them, offer post-run conversation, share a photo only with consent and invite them to the next event.

05 **NEXT DAY • Make it easy to return**

Send a friendly one-question follow-up: “What would make your next visit even better?”

FIRST-VISIT COMFORT

Assign a “buddy by choice” — never force pairing. Encourage the member to opt into future group messages.

TWO EASY FEEDBACK PROMPTS

“Did the run feel welcoming and safe?”
“What would make the timing, route or pace options better?”

03 / BRING PEOPLE IN

Marketing that creates connection

Promote the experience, not just the distance.

DISCOVER → RSVP → SHOW UP → RETURN → INVITE A FRIEND

Ten inexpensive ways to grow

IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

- Flyers with a QR code at coffee shops or gyms
- Community bulletin boards and neighborhood lists
- Personal invitations from founding members
- Co-host a trial meetup with a partner
- Invite a local coach or speaker to visit

ON YOUR PHONE

- Post a weekly schedule graphic, not just a reel
- Share a newcomer FAQ and route preview
- Feature volunteer leads and member stories (with consent)
- Create a reusable “bring a friend” post
- Share short post-run highlights and the next date

The five facts every promotion needs

CLARITY CHECKLIST

WHO: all paces / intended audience **WHAT:** walk, run/walk and run **WHEN:** date + time + time zone
WHERE: precise public landmark / map link **HOW:** RSVP and contact instructions

Do not imply a sponsor, employer, park or charity officially endorses your crew unless an agreement exists. Credit images and obtain consent for member stories.

03 / BRING PEOPLE IN

A 4-week launch promotion plan

Mix familiar faces with new channels—and repeat the details often.

WHEN	CONTENT	CHANNEL / OWNER
Day −28	Announce mission, date, distance choices, RSVP	IG + community forums / lead
Day −21	Route walk-through: entrance, terrain, map, restrooms	Carousel + email / route lead
Day −14	Introduce volunteer leads and beginner pace option	Reel + partner repost / welcome lead
Day −10	Drop flyers; reach out to gyms, shops, ERGs and libraries	Local outreach / partnerships
Day −7	Share FAQ: “Am I too slow? What do I bring?”	Story + feed / lead
Day −2	Weather and last-mile details; send RSVP reminder	Text/email / operations
Day 0	Friendly welcome + photo with consent + next date	On site / leads
Day +1	Thank-you, useful recap and next-run link	Email + social / community

LEAN TEST BUDGET • OPTIONAL

Prioritize free channels. If spending is available, a sample first-month promotional allocation could be **$25** print flyers, **$25** snacks and **$50** local paid social test. Adjust to your means.

MEASURE WHAT MATTERS

Track reach → RSVPs → first attendance → second attendance. Ask new members how they heard about the group to identify the best channels.

03 / BRING PEOPLE IN

A repeatable content engine

One run can generate a week of helpful, non-repetitive community content.

01
The invite
What/when/where and pace options

02
First-timer FAQ
Exactly what arrival feels like

03
Route preview
Short map, surface and landmarks

04
Volunteer spotlight
Introduce a lead or sweep

05
Why we move
Community mission and benefits

06
New member reminder
Walking is always welcome

07
Post-run recap
A consent-based group moment

08
Local partner love
Celebrate a real in-kind contribution

09
Member milestone
First 5K, consistency, comeback

10
Race countdown
Your team's chosen upcoming event

11
Off-run event
Coffee, volunteering or learning night

12
Weekly calendar
Make the next session unmistakable

RECOMMENDED RHYTHM **2 helpful posts + 1 weekly invitation + 1 post-run recap.**

Use clear alt text, readable contrast and captions. Rotate faces and body types, reflecting the people you actually serve; do not imply AI imagery shows real members.

03 / BRING PEOPLE IN

Copy-ready marketing templates

Replace every bracket before publishing. Keep the tone inviting and specific.

INSTAGRAM / COMMUNITY POST

We're building something good, one step at a time.
Join **[RUN GROUP NAME]** on **[DAY, DATE] at [TIME]** at **[MEETING LANDMARK]**. Choose walk, run/walk or easy run. All experience levels welcome. Bring comfortable shoes, water and a friend. **RSVP:** [LINK]. Questions? [CONTACT].

SHORT TEXT / GROUP CHAT

Hey! I'm helping start a welcoming run/walk group in [NEIGHBORHOOD]. Our first meetup is [DATE/TIME] at [LANDMARK]. There will be walk and run options, plus time to hang out after. Want the details? [LINK]

FLYER HEADLINE

YOUR PACE. YOUR PEOPLE.
Free community walk + run
[DAY] • [TIME] • [PUBLIC MEETING POINT]
Walk | Run/Walk | Run • Scan to RSVP • [SOCIAL HANDLE]

AFTER-RUN THANK-YOU

Thanks for showing up for each other today. If you joined for the first time, we're glad you were here. Our next meetup is [DATE/TIME/PLACE]. What should we improve? Reply with one idea. Photos: [OPT-IN ALBUM LINK].

04 / PARTNERSHIPS

Find partners already serving your people

Strong partnerships exchange genuine value—not just logos.

PARTNER	POSSIBLE GIVE	POSSIBLE RECEIVE
Coffee shop / café	Discount or gathering space	Post-run visitors and promotion
Running retailer	Shoe demo, staff knowledge	Authentic product trial and foot traffic
Gym / yoga studio	Warm-up, mobility class	New community awareness
Physical therapist / dietitian	Education by qualified professional	Relevant referral visibility; no medical promises
Nonprofit / mutual aid	Service project or beneficiary	Volunteers and awareness
Employer / campus / library	Community outreach or venue support	Wellness and local engagement
Race director	Group registration info, volunteer openings	Committed participants and volunteers

Three partnership rules

CREATE A CLEAR WIN

Propose one small activation with an obvious benefit for both sides.

KEEP AGENCY

Do not make purchasing or donating a condition for belonging.

PUT IT IN WRITING

Confirm responsibilities, dates, permissions, cancellation, image rights and costs.

04 / PARTNERSHIPS

Reach out with a simple proposal

Make it easy for a potential partner to say yes to a pilot.

COPY-READY PARTNERSHIP EMAIL

Subject: Community run partnership idea for [BUSINESS]

Hello [NAME],

I lead [RUN GROUP], a welcoming neighborhood run/walk community meeting [FREQUENCY] in [AREA]. We'd love to explore a small collaboration with [BUSINESS] that brings people together and supports local wellness.

Would you be open to [ONE SPECIFIC IDEA: post-run coffee meetup / raffle item / 20-minute mobility clinic] on [POSSIBLE DATE]? We can share the event with our members and acknowledge your support in agreed promotional materials.

Could we schedule a 15-minute conversation? I can send a one-page overview with our plans and audience.

Thank you,
[NAME] | [CONTACT] | [WEBSITE]

Your one-page partner overview

INCLUDE

- Mission and neighborhood
- Audience description, not inflated claims
- Run schedule and expected capacity
- One specific proposed activation

CLOSE WITH

- How each party benefits
- What you need from the partner
- What you will provide in return
- Point person and decision date

FOLLOW-UP **Send one respectful follow-up after 5–7 business days; then move on.**

04 / PARTNERSHIPS

Turn partnerships into real moments

Start with a practical experience, then expand only if it works.

WELCOME PARTNER
A café offers a reserved post-run table; the group buys individually, with no required purchase.

EXPERT PARTNER
A qualified trainer leads a short, optional mobility clinic with clear scope and disclaimers.

GEAR PARTNER
A retailer hosts a demo without pushing members to buy or implying clinical benefit.

COMMUNITY PARTNER
A food bank identifies a volunteer shift with a clear sign-up and capacity limit.

Three support levels (examples, not prices)

LEVEL	IN-KIND / FINANCIAL HELP	AGREED ACKNOWLEDGMENT
Friend of the crew	Water, raffle item, a meeting space	One thanked partner post
Monthly partner	Repeated space, expertise or logistics	Co-branded event announcement
Race-day supporter	Event costs or approved supplies	Signage/recognition per written agreement

> **PARTNER QUALITY CHECK** **Accessible? Relevant? Ethical? Safe? Clear on deliverables?**

Avoid exclusivity clauses or sponsor logos on the OURLOOP mark without brand permission. Capture all image, trademark and use rights in the agreement.

05 / BUILD COMMUNITY

Keep the community moving off the route

Connection grows when members have low-pressure reasons to gather.

01
Coffee & conversation
15–30 minutes after a run

02
Book or podcast circle
Movement, identity or wellbeing

03
Volunteer shift
Food pantry, cleanup or race support

04
Mobility & recovery
Optional instructor-led workshop

05
Budget-friendly brunch
Accessible café with flexible ordering

06
Nutrition demo
Practical fuel ideas without diet rules

07
Hike / nature walk
An alternate low-impact route

08
Vision-board evening
Goals beyond pace or body size

09
Local business crawl
Support community-owned shops

10
Mental wellbeing chat
Facilitated, nonclinical discussion

11
Games / trivia
Indoor gathering in poor weather

12
Race cheer station
Celebrate runners without racing

13
Movie or sports watch party
A social-only touchpoint

14
Family-friendly picnic
Bring your support network

15
Community service day
A cause chosen by members

16
Guest speaker
Running safety or financial wellness

17
Skill-share swap
Members teach something useful

18
Weekend race trip
Travel planning with budget choices

Participation in social events should remain optional. Consider dietary accessibility, mobility needs, transportation, alcohol-free choices, childcare needs and event fees.

05 / BUILD COMMUNITY

A year of connection

Pair one signature run with a different social or service event every month.

MONTH	OFF-RUN IDEA	EASY ALTERNATIVE
JAN	Goal-setting walk + vision boards	Indoor goals café
FEB	Bring-a-friend brunch	Community game night
MAR	Volunteer cleanup day	Donation sorting shift
APR	Local business discovery walk	Neighborhood panel
MAY	Mental wellbeing conversation	Guided reflection circle
JUN	Summer sunset picnic	Indoor potluck
JUL	Hydration + heat safety workshop	Virtual expert Q&A
AUG	Back-to-school supply drive	Donation pickup
SEP	Fall race expo / cheer squad	Race recap social
OCT	Costume walk or themed route	Game / trivia evening
NOV	Gratitude community service	Warm beverage meetup
DEC	Year-end member celebration	Photo slideshow + awards

MAKE IT SUSTAINABLE

Give each event a volunteer owner, a simple budget ceiling, an accessible venue, a backup plan and a 15-minute debrief. Ask members which ideas actually interest them.

05 / BUILD COMMUNITY

Give members a reason to return

Growth is not just new faces. It is people feeling that they matter.

THE FIRST 3 VISITS

- Visit 1: greeting + route support + next invite
- Visit 2: name remembered + optional buddy
- Visit 3: invite to a social or small volunteer task

RETENTION RITUALS

- Weekly calendar always posted on the same day
- Monthly newcomer celebration
- Recognize consistency, service and first races
- Offer role rotation so leaders can rest
- Check in gently with members who opt in

Feedback without making it a survey job

QUESTION	WHAT IT REVEALS
“What made this feel easy to join?”	Onboarding strengths
“What almost stopped you from coming?”	Timing, safety or access barrier
“What would you like beyond running?”	Programming opportunities
“Would you invite a friend?”	Trust and advocacy

Make every member feel seen—not measured.

Use opt-in communication lists and accessible unsubscribe options. Avoid publishing location histories, emergency contacts or health information.

06 / RUN TOWARD RACE DAY

Choose races that fit your crew

A shared finish line can strengthen a group, but race participation should stay optional.

START WITH APPROACHABLE CHOICES

- Free weekly 5K community events
- Local charity 5K with walk option
- 10K with generous course cutoff
- Trail event for members seeking variety
- Destination races for advanced planning

USE A RACE-SELECTION SCORECARD

- Travel, parking and transit cost
- Entry fee and team discount availability
- 5K/10K/half options and cutoff times
- Terrain, weather, safety and accessibility
- Charity or community mission fit

Choose a balanced calendar

RACE ROLE	WHEN	GROUP BENEFIT
Welcome race	First 2–3 months	Friendly 5K or walk-run introduction
Community service day	Between race events	Volunteer at a local race
Stretch goal	After consistent training	10K/half for interested members
Celebration outing	End of season	Recognize all participants and helpers

> **IMPORTANT** **Avoid one race distance becoming the definition of membership.**

Race offerings, eligibility, fees, dates and cancellation policies change. Always confirm directly with event organizers before making a club commitment.

06 / RUN TOWARD RACE DAY

Where to find races across the U.S.

These live directories help groups search by state, distance, date or event type.

Running in the USA

National race search by state, distance and date.

runningintheusa.com

RunSignup

Search road races, walks, virtual and community events.

runsignup.com

Race Roster

Find U.S. 5Ks, longer races and fundraising events.

raceroster.com

parkrun USA

Free community 5K events, commonly held Saturday mornings.

parkrun.us/events

Scan the QR code or click the text link in this PDF.

Directory listing does not guarantee a race is open, accessible, permitted, or appropriate for your group. Verify the organizer, location, entry rules and official event page.

06 / RUN TOWARD RACE DAY

Race calendars worth bookmarking

Use these organizers and series as regional starting points, not a fixed race schedule.

REGION	OFFICIAL ORGANIZER / EVENT	GOOD FOR
Northeast	New York Road Runners	NYC races and community events
Mid-Atlantic	Marine Corps Marathon events	DC / Virginia race options
Southeast	Atlanta Track Club	Georgia races, including 5K and beyond
Florida	runDisney race calendar	Themed destination races
Midwest	Twin Cities In Motion	Minnesota distances and programs
Mountain West	BOLDERBoulder	Colorado community-oriented 10K
Nationwide series	Rock 'n' Roll Running Series	Multi-city race weekends
Track / sanctioned	USA Track & Field events	Road, track, cross-country and more

A smart way to shortlist three choices

LOCAL AND LOW-COST

Use a distance-specific directory and ask current members for favorite neighborhood races.

DESTINATION AND COMMUNITY

Look for inclusive course policies, team registration and opportunities to volunteer.

A race's status and schedule may change annually. Do not rely on a generic listing for the final event date, refund terms or eligibility.

06 / RUN TOWARD RACE DAY

Make race day a team experience

Participation is stronger when there is a role for runners, walkers and supporters.

08 **WEEKS OUT • Pick the event**
Poll interest, review fees/cutoffs, accessibility and travel; confirm a leader for race logistics.

06 **WEEKS OUT • Share choices**
Offer event links and multiple distance options; emphasize registration is an individual choice.

04 **WEEKS OUT • Build the weekend**
Arrange optional pre-race meetups, pickup locations, travel info and volunteer/cheer roles.

02 **WEEKS OUT • Check the details**
Confirm bib pickup, start corrals, weather policy, parking, aid stations and accessibility.

00 **RACE DAY • Celebrate everyone**
Meet at a safe legal location, honor different paces and establish a regroup point after the finish.

RACE-DAY JOB LIST

- Logistics lead and backup
- Cheer / supporter captain
- Post-race gathering coordinator
- Consent-based photo volunteer

QUESTIONS FOR ORGANIZERS

- Team/bulk registration offered?
- Official pace cutoff and walk option?
- Accessible parking or transit?
- Volunteer spots or charity partners?

07 / HOST AND SUSTAIN

Host a run—or organize a race?

These are different operating commitments. Choose the right one.

FORMAT	WHAT IT IS	PLANNING LEVEL
Weekly social run	Recurring group movement on an approved route	Route, staffing, policies, insurance/permission check
Free community fun run	Special outing or celebratory noncompetitive event	More participants, outreach, risk and land-use review
Organized public 5K	Open registration, measured course, timed results or road controls	Permits, insurance, emergency plan, volunteers, possibly traffic support

When to partner instead of producing

BEST FIRST STEP

Join an existing race as a group, volunteer together, or co-host a practice session with an established insured club.

WHEN HOSTING MAKES SENSE

You have a clear mission, identified event director, reliable partners, funding and written confirmation of venue, permit and coverage requirements.

REQUIRED DUE DILIGENCE

Land managers and municipalities set their own rules. Some parks require permits even for organized, noncompetitive runs; do not assume “free” or “small” means exempt. The NPS National Mall guidance is one example. Confirm locally.

07 / HOST AND SUSTAIN

Your first hosted 5K: a planning timeline

Treat a public race as an event-management project, not an oversized weekly meetup.

LEAD TIME	CRITICAL WORK
16–12 weeks	Select organizer and date; obtain written venue/route guidance, required permits and coverage plan; build budget.
12–10 weeks	Map route; request traffic/parking guidance; identify medical and first aid requirements; appoint key leads.
10–8 weeks	Create volunteer plan, registration terms, waiver and accessibility information; seek partners.
8–4 weeks	Publish official event only after approval; recruit marshals, water teams, check-in and cleanup crews.
4–2 weeks	Brief every volunteer; confirm emergency communications, supplies, course signs, toilets and waste plan.
7 days	Reconfirm permits, vendor timelines, weather contingencies, radios, checklists and public information.
Race day	Install safe permitted route, brief crews, monitor participants, manage incidents, clean site and close roads per authorities.
Within 72h	Thank participants and volunteers, reconcile expenses, collect feedback and document incidents.

People and assets you may need

PEOPLE

Race director, route/traffic liaison, volunteers, medical/first-aid providers as required, registration team, communications and cleanup captain.

ASSETS

Permits, insurance certificates, portable signs, aid stations, accessible facilities, check-in equipment, course maps, incident forms and contingency plans.

Event-scale safety and legal requirements are location-specific; use competent local professionals and the land authority. RRCA offers club and event leadership guidance.

07 / HOST AND SUSTAIN

Create a budget that can breathe

Never let the member experience depend on last-minute purchases.

Illustrative monthly meetup budget

LINE ITEM	LOW-COST APPROACH	SAMPLE AMOUNT
Promotion	Digital-first; occasional printed flyers	$20
Water & light supplies	Bring-your-own water; small emergency stock	$15
Welcome and signage	Reusable meeting-point sign	$25
Social activity	Free venue / pay-your-own meal	$0
TOTAL • EXAMPLE	Before permits, insurance or special events	$60

Amounts are examples, not vendor quotes. Insurance, permits, coaching, venue costs and local requirements vary; do not assume they are included above.

Budget equation for paid events

CASH PICTURE

Revenue: sponsorship + entry fees + donations (if applicable)
Costs: permits + insurance + route services + registration/timing + medical + supplies + facilities + vendor fees + contingency
Net: revenue − all costs. Plan conservatively and include an emergency reserve.

FUNDING IDEAS

- In-kind refreshments or venue help
- Small business contribution for specific item
- Optional apparel pre-orders with clear fulfillment terms
- Grant/donation only when eligible and approved

FINANCIAL SAFEGUARDS

- Keep receipts and 2-person review
- Avoid personal money mingling
- Document sponsor deliverables
- Set refund/cancellation terms in advance

07 / HOST AND SUSTAIN

Measure the health of the community

Numbers help you improve, but the human experience is the real outcome.

SIGNAL	HOW TO TRACK	EXAMPLE QUESTION
Reach	Visits, shares, referrals	How did you hear about us?
First attendance	Opt-in check-ins	Was finding us straightforward?
Return rate	Second visit within 30 days	Would you come back?
Representation	Anonymous opt-in accessibility feedback	Do our options work for you?
Safety	Route / near-miss incident log	What needs to change?
Partner value	Attendance at activation / partner feedback	Was this useful for both sides?
Volunteer health	Hours, handoffs, backups	Are leaders supported?

90-day leader review

KEEP DOING

- Our strongest activity
- The most effective invitation
- The part people appreciate

CHANGE NEXT QUARTER

- One safety / access improvement
- One partner to approach
- One new social idea

A healthy group can stay small. Sustainable belonging beats vanity metrics.

08 / MAKE IT YOURS

Worksheet: your run-group charter

Print, complete and use as your first team alignment document.

Our group name

Neighborhood / city

Our mission in one sentence

Who we are welcoming

Our weekly day / time

Primary meeting point

Route and distance options

Our sign-in and communication channel

Our photo-consent approach

Emergency protocol owner

Lead host + backup

Next 30-day goal

READY-TO-LAUNCH REVIEW

☐ The route has been walked and checked ☐ Lead and sweep assignments are covered
☐ Venue/land rules and insurance have been reviewed ☐ Every promotion includes all five essential details
☐ A beginner can explain the next meetup after reading one message

08 / MAKE IT YOURS

Worksheet: run calendar and route check

One usable page for your next four group meetups.

WEEK	DATE / TIME	ROUTE / DISTANCE	LEADS / SWEEP	WEATHER BACKUP
1	_____	_____	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____	_____
3	_____	_____	_____	_____
4	_____	_____	_____	_____

Route walk-through

ROUTE BASICS

- Start landmark
- Turnaround / loop
- Surface and crossings
- Restroom / water access
- Accessible alternatives

OPERATIONAL CHECKS

- Permissions / permit contact
- Insurance / waiver check
- Emergency access point
- Weather cancellation channel
- Photo / privacy reminder

RUN-DAY REMINDER **Arrive early, announce paces, obey traffic controls, use leads and sweeps, regroup safely, and welcome every finisher.**

08 / MAKE IT YOURS

Worksheet: partners and content

Keep growth intentional with one outreach and one weekly content tracker.

Partnership tracker

BUSINESS / CONTACT	SPECIFIC IDEA	OWNER	NEXT STEP
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Four-week content board

WEEK	HELPFUL POST	COMMUNITY STORY	NEXT-RUN INVITE
1	_____	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____
3	_____	_____	_____
4	_____	_____	_____

YOUR NEXT SMALL STEP

Ask one person to come, one person to help, and one partner to say yes to a modest first activation. Repeat what works.

08 / LINKS & REFERENCES

Resources to keep close

Live links and official guidance. Last reviewed: October 2026.

RRCA • Start a Club
rrca.org/services/start-a-club/

RRCA • Safe Group Runs
rrca.org/education/for-club-leaders/safe-group-run-guidelines/

RRCA • Find Clubs
rrca.org/clubs/

RRCA • Insurance
rrca.org/services/rrca-insurance-services/

Running in the USA
runningintheusa.com/race/list/

RunSignup
runsignup.com/

Race Roster
raceroster.com/search?q=5k&t=upcoming

parkrun USA
parkrun.us/events/

USA Track & Field
usatf.org/events

NYRR • Races
nyrr.org/run/events-calendar

Atlanta Track Club
atlantatrackclub.org/updated-events-programs-calendar

Marine Corps Marathon
marinemarathon.com/events/

Twin Cities In Motion
tcmevents.org/alleventsandraces

RunDisney • Race Season
rundisney.com/race-season-calendar

NPS • Organized Runs & Permits
home.nps.gov/nama/planyourvisit/organized-foot-races-and-runs-and-bike-events.htm

CDC • Heat and Athletes
cdc.gov/heat-health/risk-factors/heat-and-athletes.html

AirNow • Air Quality
airnow.gov/

NWS • Lightning Safety
weather.gov/safety/lightning

OURLOOP

MOVE TOGETHER. GROW TOGETHER.

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