

Assessment & Recommendations
for a
BC Soccer Club Charter

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ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

Capitis Consulting has been commissioned to investigate the viability and 'sensibility' of establishing a Club Charter¹ of BC Soccer, with a view to placing greater structure around the development of BC soccer clubs, and the associated developmental services BC Soccer offers to achieve this.

To consider the viability of such a program, Capitis Consulting has examined three other peer Canadian provincial programs, together with the Canadian Soccer Association's current and legacy activities in providing a national framework for club development. The three provincial programs studied are:

1. Soccer New Brunswick's Club Qualification Program
2. Ontario Soccer Association's Club Excellence program
3. Saskatchewan Soccer Association's Club Excellence program

All three programs take different approaches to the development of a club charter system, but have the same fundamental goal of strengthening club capabilities to develop the game. Saskatchewan Soccer Association (SSA) have just launched their program, and have taken an outsourced approach. Soccer New Brunswick (SNB) have used their program to classify their entire club membership for competition eligibility purposes as well as development purposes. Ontario Soccer Association (OSA) have a mature opt-in program that is being used as a key tool by its grassroots development staff to focus club development and now also important early-stage LTPD requirements, with considerable success.

In all three cases, while staff capacity is required to manage the program, direct handling costs are relatively low. Instead, existing club charter programs are effectively used as a tool by governing bodies' existing soccer development staff to be more effective in their actions. Common to all cases examined, however, is the commitment of professional staff to support the program, that appears necessary to genuinely leverage program benefits.

Furthermore, the introduction of a standards-based culture at grassroots level in the game is complimented by broader initiatives being implemented by the Canadian Soccer Association (CSA) in its new strategic plan. In this plan, the CSA has mandated the development of regional standards-based competition and is also establishing a national-level club charter that is expected to be cascaded to provincial level in the years to come.

In summary, the case studies examined all show significant benefits to the adoption and development of a club charter system and none appear to exhibit risks or challenges that would prohibit BC Soccer from establishing its program.

¹ The term 'Club Charter' refers to a system of quality classification of clubs, based on standards criteria that clubs must meet in order to receive a certain status level. Such programs are also referred to as Club Excellence or Club Qualification programs, but will be referred to as a Club Charter program for the purposes of this report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The introduction of a Club Charter for BC Soccer appears well timed for the following reasons:

1. The CSA will be imposing club standards on provincial club membership with the next year or so.
2. BC Soccer has ambitious strategic targets around grassroots clubs development that are best implemented through a Club Charter system.
3. BC Soccer has established the staff capacity to implement a Club Charter program at grassroots level around the Province.
4. New technical leadership at BC Soccer is a proponent of an expansive system of standards-based club development that extends to basic LTPD-related technical standards.
5. A club standards-based program is already in place in BC Soccer in the form of the BC SPL.

To that end, Capitis Consulting recommends the immediate design and implementation of a Club Charter that, if designed and executed properly, has the potential to provide multiple value-adds to the Association and its club affiliates.

Reasons for establishing a BC Soccer Club Charter are:

1. There is clear evidence from comparable projects underway in peer Canadian provincial jurisdictions that a Club Charter system can be an extremely effective tool in developing grassroots soccer through club capacity.
2. There is a clear movement in the broader Canadian soccer environment to mandate basic club standards and BC Soccer is well-served to pre-empt this mandate with the development of a strong, effective system as soon as possible.
3. There is evidence that a Club Charter system makes grassroots soccer development staff (be they technical or organizational) more productive and effective in the soccer community.
4. A Club Charter appears to be the best system through which to implement some of BC Soccer's ambitious grassroots strategic goals.
5. A Club Charter is an effective tool through which to drive a strong foundation of technical capability in the province's club base.
6. A Club Charter is an effective and visible way to demonstrate value-adding member service benefits to BC Soccer affiliates.

In designing and implementing a BC Soccer Club Charter program, Capitis Consulting has the following recommendations.

1. Set Program Goals In Line With Broader BC Soccer Strategic Goals

Capitis Consulting recommends that any Club Charter program initiated is clearly seen as a tool through which to execute pre-existing soccer development strategic goals, through activation of BC Soccer's affiliate club base. To that end, the program should assume targets and goals directly from the BC Soccer strategic plan and avoid developing unique and potentially unrelated targets.

2. Establish a BC Soccer-specific Club Charter program, similar to the OSA's Club Excellence Program

Capitis Consulting recommends the pursuit of the Club Charter model that is developed and run by BC Soccer itself, rather than through an outsourced model. The development of a club accountability framework similar to where the OSA's Club Excellence program has evolved to appears to be a strong fit with BC Soccer's grassroots strategic goals and capacity structure.

3. Establish Clear BC Soccer Staff Resources And Operating Budget To Lead Club Charter Development

It is clear from comparative case studies that the most advanced and effective Club Charter programs are driven by robust and well-structured staff support. Capitis Consulting recommends that BC Soccer design the framework for staff accountability for the program early and ensure it is properly written into associated job descriptions. An appropriate operating budget should be clearly deployed from BC Soccer's grassroots development budget.

4. Ensure Standards From The CSA's Club Licensing Program Are Met At A Minimum

Needless to say, it is essential that BC Soccer's Club Charter program at a minimum meets standards that are issued in the six categories of the CSA's emerging club license program. To that end, close liaisons with the CSA should be maintained to fully understand these emerging standards and any changes that may occur in them.

5. Build A Club Charter That Includes Organizational And Technical Standards

Given the new technical leadership is a proponent of standards-based soccer system development, Capitis Consulting recommends developing a Club Charter that extends to include technical club standards. These standards should be designed by the BC Soccer technical department and inherently drive club behaviour that fosters good grassroots technical practice, in line with appropriately-staged LTPD.

6. Engage Clubs Early

Comparable peer programs have achieved important buy-in and success by engaging in clear consultation with their club affiliates in developing their Club Charter and associated standards framework. Capitis Consulting recommends this important step is taken before any definitive

program is announced, and is driven through the Grassroots Committee, with strong support from BC Soccer development staff.

7. Create a Low Base Level To Ensure All Club Affiliates Can Get Onboard

Club Charter programs are intended to be motivational to clubs, to incentivize them to improve themselves and qualify for higher standards of recognized excellence. However, if the program is too onerous or sophisticated for many clubs, it will only disenfranchise BC Soccer's core club base and be seen as an elitist program for the Association's large clubs only. To that end, Capitis Consulting recommends commencing with modest requirements for base level entry to the program to ensure as many clubs as possible can join.

8. Make The Program Opt-In Initially, Moving To Compulsory At Base Level

Although it would ideal for all BC Soccer clubs to be accredited under a Club Charter, Capitis Consulting recommends commencing the program on a voluntary opt-in basis, but moving it to compulsory at base level, in line with the forthcoming CSA club licensing program.

9. Start The Program Small, Focusing On Core Club Standards

One of the biggest risks with the implementation of a Club Charter is over-committing to a large and administration-heavy program that cannot be sustained and is rejected on account of poor execution. Capitis Consulting recommends taking a phased approach to the development of a BC Soccer Club Charter, commencing with a manageable number of core standards that have been identified as being impactful and expanding the program based on experiences therein.

10. Keep Standards Limited To What Is Required Of Clubs In BC Soccer's Strategic Plan

Whilst some of the case study Club Charter programs are impressive, it is Capitis Consulting's view that some have some poorly-designed standards that:

- a. are overly bureaucratic in nature and unnecessarily onerous to submit
- b. do not necessarily drive good practice in club management
- c. are not properly linked to any strategic requirements of clubs

To that end, Capitis Consulting recommends ensuring that standards are examined critically and only requested of clubs if they support a clear strategic purpose.

11. Coordinate The Emerging Club Charter With BC SPL Standards

Whilst the two programs will not be mutually inclusive, Capitis Consulting recommends ensuring that standards in the highest level of Club Charter status are also required of BC SPL franchises.