Last year at its annual summit, the National Association of Sports Officials (NASO) held a session on recruiting officials. The session was moderated by PAVO board member, Joan Powell.

The session featured a panel focused on recruiting and getting more people interested in officiating. Here are some of the suggestions discussed during the session.

How They Got Their Start
The panel discussed how they got their start in officiating and offered suggestions on ways to get others to “catch the officiating bug.” The panel shared their personal stories with enthusiasm and excitement. Some started in college, while others started much younger including one panelist who began officiating with this father to spend more time together on weekends.

Reaching Out to the Young Crowd
The panelists talked about the need to reach out to the twenty-somethings and perhaps younger folks to consider officiating. Personalizing officiating is important – such as sharing your story on how you got started. Let people know that officials are an important part of the game—just like a coach or a player. The game needs someone to enforce the rules—that is why officials need to be part of the game.

Younger people may also be interested in a few extra dollars if they are just getting out of college or needing to pay bills. Officiating can provide some additional income to cover some of those expenses.

Also, use twenty-somethings to help recruit young officials. Recruiting should not come solely from retired officials—add some variety and people they can relate to.

Get the Message Out
It’s all of our jobs to recruit more officials. Recruit officials from other sports. Recruit friends and youth in your area.

Make sure you make them feel welcome. That means training them and providing a mentor. Don’t just send them to court 37 all day and expect they will survive. Use the people in your area that are interested in teaching and training.

Some of the best recruiters of officials are officials themselves. Younger officials who have been officiating for a few years and enjoy officiating can be great ambassadors for officiating.

Other Target Groups
Where else should we look for new officials?

Former players are a natural group to turn to for new officials. Players naturally love being on the court playing. Officiating provides the opportunity to be on the court in a different role.

Parents can offer another potential group of officials. Parents have some life skills to contribute to the game and have been part of watching their children compete as athletes.

Advice to New Officials
The session ended with the advice for new officials. One of the key suggestions included being patient. Officiating takes time to learn. Also, don’t focus completely on advancement. Take time to learn and enjoy officiating along the way. If you hit a plateau in your career, especially if you are always used to achieving, don’t let that be a deterrent. Remain positive in all your officiating.

We all need to get the word out that officiating is cool—come join us.