Organizational Structure and Staffing for an NBA Player Engagement Department

Kyle Williams

Global Sport Leadership Program, East Tennessee State University

GSLD 7600 Doctoral Capstone

October 18, 2026

Organizational Structure and Staffing for an NBA Player Engagement Department

This assignment builds on my research paper examining Player Engagement departments throughout the National Basketball Association. With this prior research as the foundation, this assignment will take the information gathered from the prior research and apply it to create an organizational chart and define each job title that would be required to create a functional three-member Player Engagement and Family Services Department, which will assist players and their families off the basketball court.

The experience and knowledge gained through my time working in Player Engagement and Family Services has provided me insight into what type of support a player requires. A player requires someone who can understand them, communicate effectively with all individuals surrounding them, and follow-through when he or she requires additional assistance. Based upon these requirements, I feel the department must have a defined structure so that staff members may establish personal relationships with players and at the same time manage their responsibilities.

Research Foundation

My study found that 63 people were employed in Player Engagement throughout the NBA and on average there were 2.1 people per team. My study also found differences when describing positions solely as "Player Engagement" vs. those who have additional duties within their job title (Williams, 2026). The results from this portion of my study assisted in developing my proposed model. In choosing three positions I wanted to ensure that leadership, programming, and coordination had their own designated individual rather than placing the responsibility on one position/individual.

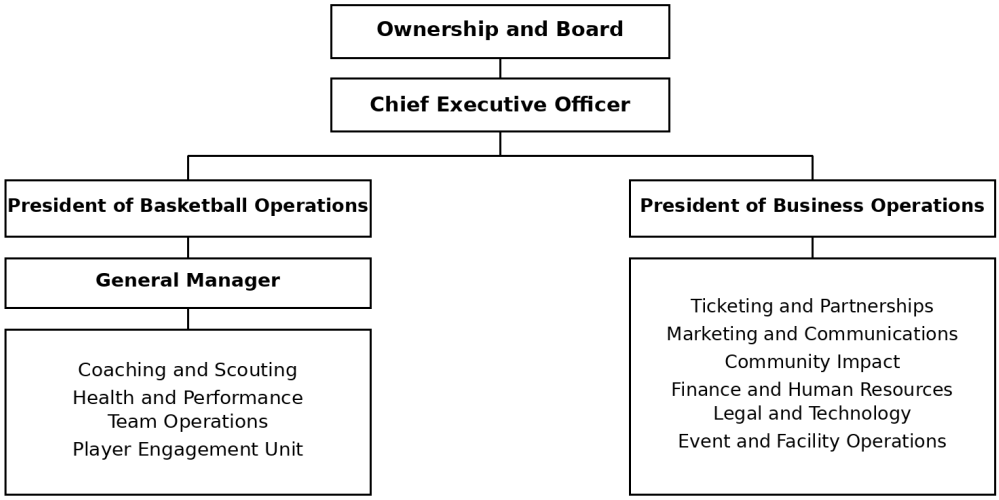
There is evidence that 71.4 percent of staff members studied did not have a documented collegiate or professional sports experience (Williams, 2026) which has been a factor in my approach to potential hires. While I believe it is beneficial to hire candidates with experience in Athlete Services, Education, Community Relations, Operations or former athletes, these studies describe the current workforce. Therefore, they do not provide evidence to support hiring three employees for every team or that a specific background will result in success.

Proposed Organizational Charts

Figure 1

Organizational Context for the Player Engagement Department

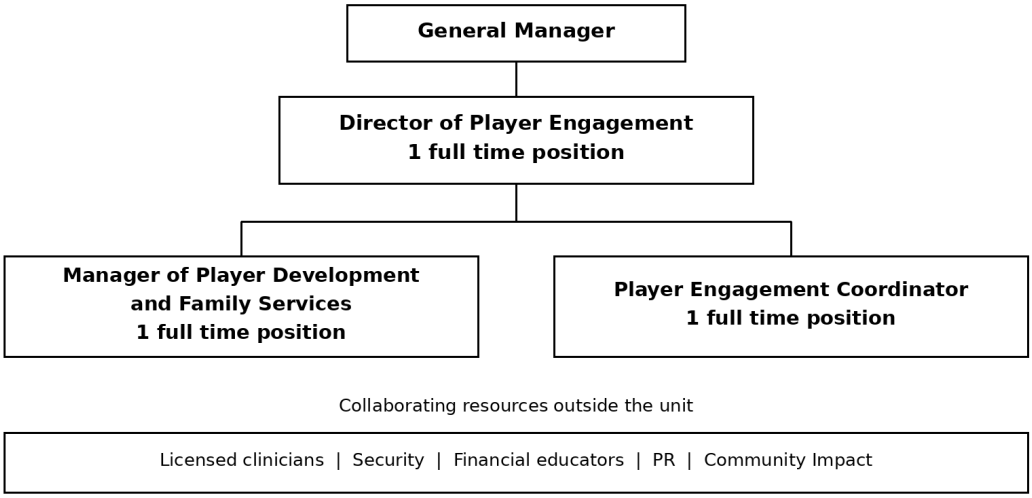
ChatGPT (OpenAI, 2026) assisted in the development the organizational charts.



Note. A proposed organizational structure of a hypothetical NBA organization. Departments shown provide context, but do NOT represent full staff rosters. I focus my detail staffing analysis on Player Engagement.

Figure 2

Proposed Player Engagement Department



Note. Solid lines indicate supervisor relationships. Collaborative/related departments are external to the 3-person department. This diagram is based on my ongoing research into NBA player engagement departments (Williams, 2026)

Justification for Staffing

Director of Player Engagement

The director will be responsible for all of the department's operations, overseeing all staff members including employees and supervisors, managing the department's budget, maintaining open lines of communication between the General Manager, coaches, front office staff and the community. The director will also work closely with player engagement programs and will work directly with the players. In addition, he/she will assist the other departments as needed when there are issues that require assistance from other areas of the organization.

As far as organizational structure, I believe that it makes sense to have the director report to the General Manager. The reason for this is that the department may need input from basketball leadership on such items as priority scheduling, resources and budget. This recommended reporting relationship is specific to the proposed organization and does not represent how all NBA teams are structured.

Based upon my research regarding job tenure at different positions within professional sports organizations, there were significant differences in average years of relevant experience among the different levels of leadership. Specifically, Vice Presidents had an average of 25.1 years of relevant experience; directors averaged 13.3 years of relevant experience; while assistants averaged approximately 6.9 years of relevant experience (Williams, 2026). Based upon these results, I based my decision to make distinctions between leadership responsibilities and support responsibilities in the chart. When determining whether a candidate has sufficient qualifications for a particular position, I recommend considering the responsibilities associated with that position rather than the average years of relevant experience required by similar positions.

Manager of Player Engagement and Family Services

The manager would oversee the on-boarding process for rookies, off-court educational opportunities, personal growth and professional development, and family related programs. He or she would find a player’s interests and needs, schedule an individual meeting time with

appropriate speakers, and check in with players and families after each session. In this model, "player engagement" is about the development of an athlete outside of playing basketball. The manager will assist athletes to develop professionally, as well as provide families with resources from the organization. Henriksen and Stambulova (2023), note the significance of coordinating development across both athletic and non-sport settings to ensure a cohesive development experience. Their study focused on youth sport, however it helps me in understanding why I have incorporated family support into my model. An athlete's life outside of competition also requires consideration. I would initially assign these responsibilities to a single manager but acknowledge that the amount of work may need to be split between two separate positions at some point.

Player Engagement Coordinator

The coordinator will oversee organizing events, managing project logistics, communicating on a regular basis, keeping track of all required documents that have been approved and monitoring the overall progress of each of our programs. Additionally, the coordinator will assist in allowing projects to continue while the director/manager is away from the office, either at meetings or working one on one with players. If there was no one to manage the day to day organization of programs (scheduling etc.), it's possible that most of the staff members' workday could be spent organizing programs rather than providing them. I believe that the position of coordinator is warranted due to the importance of follow through as part of supporting an initiative.

Strengths of the Staffing Model

This model's greatest strength is everyone in the department will clearly understand his/her areas of responsibility. The director oversees the entire department. The manager creates and executes programming, and the coordinator is there to assist with day to day functions. All parties involved (players, parents, etc.) will have an identifiable point of contact, staff members will understand which member of the team is accountable for what. A direct result of having three people working together will be better consistency in communication, as well as more consistencies in follow up. Additionally, the model will create opportunities for building trust between the department and those they serve over time.

In addition to creating opportunities for building trust between the department and those they serve, another strength of this model is that it provides an opportunity for coverage. With travel, vacation time, multiple events occurring simultaneously, it becomes increasingly challenging for one person to be consistently available. Having three employees working within the department, allows them to split responsibilities when needed. However, it is imperative to implement systems such as shared calendars, written procedures and open communication among the employees. Simply adding employees will not solve problems associated with the inability of employees to communicate effectively among themselves or when only one employee understands how to accomplish key tasks.

Additionally, Schlawe et al. (2025) examined high-performance sport environments, highlighting the importance of considering athlete needs relative to performance demands. While Schlawe et al.'s conceptual work supports viewing an organization around the athlete and establishing a model like what is proposed in this document, it did not define a specific NBA staffing model. By providing a regular means of communicating with coaches and operations personnel, the player engagement department would be able to develop programs that are relevant to the basketball responsibilities of the players, thereby reducing conflicting expectations placed upon athletes and making it easier for them to find support when needed.

Limitations of the Staffing Model

The first limitation is cost. Three full-time employees require compensation, benefits, travel, training, and other resources. The proposed department is larger than the reported average of 2.1 personnel per team, and the research does not show that a larger department produces better outcomes (Williams, 2026). The organization would need a full budget before approving the model. It would also need to review whether the additional employee improves services enough to justify the expense.

A second limitation is combining player development and family services. Both areas require time and relationships, and there will be situations where their needs overlap. For example, a rookie education session and a family event could require attention at the same time. If the manager becomes overwhelmed, players or families could receive less follow-up. The director would need to monitor this workload and adjust responsibilities before missed services became a regular problem.

Trust could also become a concern because the department reports to basketball leadership. Players may hesitate to discuss personal matters if they believe that information will influence employment decisions. The department would need to explain confidentiality boundaries and limit routine reports to information needed for its work. Clinical records would remain with healthcare providers. There would also need to be clear responsibilities across community impact, communications, and team operations so that several departments are not contacting a player about the same request.

Finally, my research used publicly available information and captured staffing at one point in time. Missing information does not mean that an employee lacks a certain qualification or experience. The franchise staffing distribution also needs reconciliation before it is used for individual team comparisons. For these reasons, the study provides a starting point for this model. Actual workload, feedback, and service quality would need to guide future decisions.

Conclusion

The organizational chart developed from my research, which demonstrated that there are differences in player engagement department staffing and roles across the NBA. I think a three-employee player engagement department provides a good starting place as it allows one employee to focus on program development/leadership while another focuses on coordinating events, and the third will be responsible for ensuring all the above occur. However, we will have to review our organizational structure as the job evolves over time and player engagement becomes a bigger topic in the NBA.

References

Henriksen, K., & Stambulova, N. (2023). The social environment of talent development in youth sport. *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living, 5*, Article 1127151. https://doi.org/10.3389/fspor.2023.1127151

Purcell, R., Gwyther, K., & Rice, S. M. (2019). Mental health in elite athletes: Increased awareness requires an early intervention framework to respond to athlete needs. *Sports Medicine - Open, 5*, Article 46. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40798-019-0220-1

Schlawe, A., Christiansen, A. V., & Henriksen, K. (2025). The high-performance sport environment: Laying the foundation for a new research topic. *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living, 7*, Article 1503199. https://doi.org/10.3389/fspor.2025.1503199

Williams, K. (2026). *The standard of player engagement in the National Basketball Association: A comprehensive analysis of qualifications, staffing structures, and pathways to the profession* [Unpublished manuscript]. Global Sport Leadership Program, East Tennessee State University.

OpenAI. (2026). *ChatGPT* [Large language model]. https://chatgpt.com/