

THE OKLAHOMA SPORTS OFFICIALS WORKFORCE CASE STUDY

Compensation, Training, Background Screening & Accountability in Youth Sports

Preliminary Comprehensive Executive Summary
September 2026

CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTION

What does Oklahoma actually require - and pay - for the people entrusted to officiate youth sports?

Purpose. This preliminary case study uses 12 Oklahoma Indeed job announcements supplied for review as a documented labor-market comparison group. It examines publicly advertised compensation alongside stated responsibilities, training, screening, safety, and supervisory requirements, and places those findings beside the tournament-officiating questions developed in the broader Hidden Valley research.

Important limitation. The postings do not prove that hourly employees are more qualified than tournament umpires, nor do they establish a statewide prevailing wage. They support a testable comparison of workforce structures and institutional controls.

Executive Summary

The initial evidence identifies two structurally different ways sports labor can be organized in Oklahoma. The first is a formal employment model represented in this sample by colleges, universities, county government, nonprofit recreation organizations, and private youth-sports employers. These postings publicly define duties and, in several cases, specify training, certifications, background screening, safety responsibilities, incident reporting, and supervision.

The second is the tournament officiating model examined in the broader Hidden Valley research, where baseball and softball officials may be compensated on a per-game basis. Historical research has used approximately \$40 per game as a modeling baseline, with recollections of lower early-period rates and higher contemporary rates. Those tournament figures should not be treated as hourly wages without accounting for game duration, pregame time, travel, waiting time, equipment, certification, insurance, and other uncompensated costs.

The central finding at this stage is therefore not that one workforce is overpaid or underpaid. It is that the formal job market provides observable documentation of the relationship between compensation and institutional requirements. The next research phase can test whether comparable controls exist in tournament officiating and document them where they do.

Documented Compensation in the Initial Sample

Employer / Position	Location	Pay	Selected documented requirements
Redlands Community College - Game Day Worker	El Reno	\$16/hr	Basketball knowledge; role-specific experience; institutional background-screening process
Tulsa County - Seasonal Basketball Referee	Tulsa	\$14.44/hr	Rules knowledge; communication; criminal background check
University of Oklahoma - Intramural Official	Norman	\$12.25/hr	Rule enforcement; sportsmanship; fair play; background check
i9 Sports - Sports Official/Referee	Norman/Moore	\$10-\$14/hr	Sports experience; safety role; national criminal background check
YMCA - Gym Monitor	Bethany	\$10/hr	Annual compliance training; CPR/AED/O2/First Aid; emergency duties
YMCA - Sports Official	Norman	From \$10/hr	Officials training; CPR/AED/O2/First Aid; recurring training
Eastern Sports Management - League Marshal	Lawton	\$10/hr	Safety; incident response; eligibility; conflict management

Several additional YMCA postings in Midwest City, Oklahoma City, Edmond, Chickasha, and Shawnee reinforce the same broader themes, although not every supplied posting displays a wage.

What the Announcements Document

Training and certification. YMCA postings include officials training, annual compliance training, and/or CPR, AED, O2, and First Aid requirements. The Norman YMCA posting starts at \$10 per hour while requiring officials training and recurring safety-related credentials.

Background screening. Tulsa County expressly requires a criminal background check. OU makes hiring contingent upon a background check. i9 Sports requires a National Criminal Background Check. Redlands describes an institutional background-screening authorization process.

Responsibilities beyond making calls. The postings describe safety oversight, emergency action plans, incident reporting, equipment and facility responsibilities, sportsmanship, instruction, communication with parents and coaches, eligibility issues, conflict management, and customer service.

Organizational accountability. Many roles are embedded within a chain of command. Workers report to program directors or supervisors, follow organizational policies, document incidents, and perform duties within a formal employment structure.

The Core Comparison: Wage vs. Game Fee

A direct comparison of '\$10 per hour' with '\$60 per game' would be misleading. A game fee is not an hourly wage. A defensible study should convert tournament compensation into multiple measures and explicitly state its assumptions.

Per-game compensation	Game-time equivalent	Total-time effective rate
Amount paid for one assignment.	Game fee divided by estimated contest duration.	Game fee divided by game + required arrival + waiting + other assignment time.

Illustration only: a \$60 game fee for a 1.5-hour contest produces a \$40 game-time equivalent hourly rate. If required pregame presence and between-game time increase the assignment to 2.5 hours, the effective rate becomes \$24 per hour before travel, equipment, insurance, certification, or other expenses.

Preliminary Research Finding

The preliminary evidence demonstrates that Oklahoma organizations are publicly recruiting sports officials and closely related game-day personnel at approximately \$10-\$16 per hour in the wage-disclosing postings reviewed, while attaching documented training, safety, supervisory, screening, and/or organizational requirements to several positions. The next phase should determine whether comparable requirements exist for higher per-game tournament officiating compensation and, where they do, document them.

Four Research Dimensions

- 1. Compensation.** Record hourly wages, ranges, per-game fees, minimum guarantees, travel reimbursement, and other compensation. Preserve both original game fees and time-adjusted equivalents.
- 2. Qualification and training.** Track sport-specific experience, certification, rules testing, officials training, continuing education, CPR/First Aid, and performance evaluation.
- 3. Child and participant protection.** Track criminal background screening, safety training, emergency procedures, incident reporting, supervision, and policies governing interaction with minors.
- 4. Financial and organizational accountability.** Where records permit, document worker classification, payroll versus contractor treatment, method of payment, recordkeeping, assignment procedures, chain of command, and the entity responsible for the officiating workforce.

Recommended Living Dataset

Each newly collected job announcement or tournament source should become one standardized observation. This will allow the project to move from a qualitative collection of examples toward a reproducible statewide dataset.

Field	Purpose
Employer / operator	Organization responsible for the workforce
Municipality / facility	Geographic and public-facility comparison
Position / sport	Officials, monitors, marshals, scorekeepers, etc.
Posting date	Time-specific labor-market evidence
Compensation	Hourly wage, range, game fee, or other structure
Employment structure	Employee, seasonal employee, contractor, unknown
Training / certification	Rules training, CPR, First Aid, compliance training, etc.
Background screening	Required, described, not stated, or unknown
Safety / incident duties	Emergency response, reporting, facility safety
Supervision	Program director, supervisor, assigner, operator, unknown
Source record	Posting, policy, contract, invoice, payment record, interview

Research Cautions

The initial 12-posting collection is a purposive sample, not a random statewide survey. Some positions are direct officials; others are adjacent game-day or facility roles. Several YMCA postings do not display compensation in the supplied copy. Job advertisements describe employer expectations but do not independently verify actual working conditions, hours worked, employee performance, or the qualifications of tournament officials.

Likewise, tournament compensation should not be characterized as 'cash' or 'receiptless' for a particular operator or assignment unless a source specifically documents that payment method. The study should distinguish documented facts, modeled estimates, interview recollections, and unresolved questions.

Next Phase

As additional Oklahoma job announcements are collected, the executive summary can be updated with a larger wage distribution, geographic comparisons, employer-type comparisons, training and screening prevalence, and direct sport-by-sport comparisons. Parallel collection of tournament-official policies, assignment requirements, certification standards, background-check policies, payment records, and game durations would permit a substantially stronger comparison of the two workforce systems.

The long-term value of the study is not simply a wage comparison. It is an examination of how Oklahoma youth sports values, prepares, screens, supervises, protects, and compensates the people entrusted with administering competition.

Source Base

Prepared from 12 Oklahoma Indeed job-announcement PDFs supplied for review in September 2026: Redlands Community College (El Reno); Tulsa County; YMCA postings in Shawnee, Bethany, Midwest City, Norman, Oklahoma City, Edmond, and Chickasha; University of Oklahoma; Eastern Sports Management (Lawton); and i9 Sports (Norman/Moore). This report is designed as a living executive summary to be revised as additional source records are added.