



## A Real Game Changer: Launching a Nonprofit

[Battlefields to Ballfields](#) (B2B) is a nonprofit organization Pereira founded with his sister in 2016 to address two problems he is passionate about: the plight of many veterans and the ongoing dearth of sports officials.

B2B provides scholarships for former members of the military to train as officiants for youth sports leagues, where referees and umpires are in short supply. Recruiting quality officiants has been especially challenging in recent years, in large part due to the negativity that sports officiants often face from spectators.

“I’ve been involved in officiating practically my entire life, and I can tell you, this shortage is nationwide,” says Pereira. As older officials retire and few young people join the field, school sports in many districts have been forced to schedule fewer games, eliminate intramural and junior varsity teams, or eliminate some sports altogether.

Being a referee requires thick skin, plus a number of hard-to-teach qualities, including communication, commitment, teamwork, courage, and an unwavering sense of mission.

“These are characteristics most veterans already have and that make them good candidates for officiants,” says Pereira. “The intangibles have already been taught.” Knowing that many veterans have a hard time finding their place as civilians, Pereira felt strongly that each problem offered a solution for the other.



Watch this [VESTED Voices video](#) featuring Mike Pereira to learn what inspired him to launch Battlefields to Ballfields and how he hopes it will grow in the future.

## Healing with Purpose

B2B was a lifeline for Jamaison Pilgreen, a U.S. Army veteran who served for 18 years, including six tours of duty in Afghanistan and Iraq. Pilgreen's story of trying to cope with life after retirement is all too familiar.

Pilgreen wrestled with post-traumatic stress, depression, and unstable employment, and he was self-medicating with pain prescriptions and alcohol. He felt little hope until the day he learned about B2B. The organization offered him help but also needed his help. He jumped at the chance to participate and soon received a B2B scholarship. This included a uniform starter kit, money for local officiating dues, and membership in the National Association of Sports Officials, through which officiants can receive comprehensive liability insurance.

Pilgreen says his military training equipped him well for the role, which requires split-second judgment, coolness under pressure, an eye for detail, and the ability to take complex situations in stride. He also says working with young people gave him a sense of purpose and drive that was



instrumental in helping him heal and rebuild his life in a productive way.

## Passion Meets Business

Stories like Pilgreen's fuel Pereira's drive for his work. He says founding B2B was part passion project, part small business. "It started out with just me and my sister," says Pereira. One of their first steps was hiring a web designer to create a website with an online application.

"The day we launched the website, we sat in anticipation. Would anyone apply?" says Pereira. "The first day, no one did. Day two, nothing again! But on day three, we got our first applicant, and we were euphoric."

A few weeks later, someone in Sacramento heard about the scholarships, and things began to take off. "I did an interview on the local sports news telecast, and almost immediately, we got 10 more applications," he says.

One applicant came from Omaha, Nebraska. "The newspaper in Omaha did a story on it, and the story got picked up by *The Military Times*," says Pereira. After that, applications flowed in at a rate of 30 per day.

"It overwhelmed my sister and me administratively and financially," he says. "We hadn't expected such a big response. So then we had our first Sacramento golf tournament to fundraise."

Later, the brother-sister duo was joined by their first volunteer, Melissa Washington, who now serves as B2B's executive director. "Today, the two of us are running it together, after my sister moved away," says Pereira. "We work out of our homes. We want every dollar we raise to go toward the scholarships, the vets' officiant uniforms, dues, background checks, and so on."

To date, B2B has awarded 900 three-year scholarships for vets to be trained as officiants. "We have 400 active participants right now, and we want 1,000 as a next step," says Pereira. "After three years, our hope is that they continue officiating, although at that point, they no longer receive financial support from B2B."

The organization continues to grow, now guided by a board of directors that includes people who are experienced in business, military service, and officiating. "We restructured our board and have a finance committee now," says Pereira. "Today, I met with a tech organization that will allow us to track everything in real time and respond very quickly to our applicants."

## Launch Your Own

If there is a cause that is close to your heart, starting a nonprofit is one way to make it part of the legacy you'll leave behind. Like starting a small business, one of the first exploratory steps is to do market research to find out what similar efforts are already underway in your area.

“At a nonprofit, everything you do is a labor of love,” says Pereira. “It may be hard, but it doesn’t feel like a burden because you’re doing something that makes some part of life a little bit better. The beauty of Battlefields to Ballfields is that it connects veterans who are looking to serve again with kids and communities, and each does the other good.”

However, unlike with a for-profit company, other organizations you find that share your goals aren’t necessarily going to be competitors. Instead, these like-minded organizations could offer you a route to volunteering, serving on a board, or working on initiatives that further your common objective.

When considering whether to launch your own nonprofit organization, here are four key questions to consider from the National Council of Nonprofits:

- What problems will the nonprofit solve?
- Who will it serve?
- Are there similar nonprofits fulfilling the same needs? Are they financially stable?
- What will make your nonprofit different and better?

If you find that a demonstrated need exists for your idea, the next step would be to consider who might join your initial board of directors. A board of directors is legally required and will typically consist of three members, though specific rules vary by state.

Choose people who are as passionate as you are, since these individuals will be instrumental in crafting your organization’s mission statement, recruiting volunteers, and fundraising for your cause. Board members should be energetic and committed to do the heavy lifting of creating a business plan, registering the nonprofit, and filing the articles of incorporation. These same people will be responsible for opening a bank account, applying for insurance, and filing with the IRS for tax-exempt status.

Like small businesses, nonprofit organizations are typically created under state law. To find resources specific to your state, visit the website for the National Council of Nonprofits, and click on the [map](#) to find your state association. In California, for example, the basic steps for starting a nonprofit include selecting a suitable name, filing articles of incorporation, appointing a board of directors, and drafting the bylaws of the organization, according to the [California Association of Nonprofits](#).

After that, the board must officially adopt the bylaws, set the number of directors, adopt a fiscal year, and establish a bank account. For tax purposes, an officer of the organization can apply online to get an employer identification number (EIN).

Once incorporated, the next step is to [apply to become a 501\(c\)\(3\)](#), a type of nonprofit that is tax-exempt under IRS rules because of its charitable programs and initiatives. On an ongoing basis, organizations must continually stay on top of required tax filings and compliance.

While there is a lot of work involved in founding a nonprofit, the reward lies in knowing that your



contributions can live on as part of your legacy through the organization's programs and initiatives.

"I love my job, but it's not even a comparison as to how you feel when you influence someone in a positive way like this," says Pereira. "People deny it, but really, we all think about what our legacies will be. If you go on my Wikipedia page and read the section about when I was working for the NFL, it says I changed the officials' uniforms from white knickers to long white pants. That's not what I want my legacy to be. I want to know that I made a difference in people's lives."

## **Additional Resources for Launching a Nonprofit**

- [State-by-state resources](#) from the [National Council of Nonprofits](#)
- [National Association of State Charity Officials](#)
- Information on [choosing your board of directors](#)
- IRS information on [gaining tax-exempt status](#)