## Legal Risks of Golf Course Directors

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In today’s litigious society, golf course directors need to have a sound understanding of legal issues as part of their management competencies. Whether directors operate private, semi-private or municipal golf courses, issues of law will be inextricably woven into their managerial responsibility. Though many researchers have described legal aspects as one of important management competencies in a variety of sport/recreation contexts, there have been few research efforts to specify and clarify legal competencies for golf course directors. Thus, it is necessary to examine a profile of legal competencies for golf course directors who manage different golf environments such as different types of golf courses, different populations served, and year-round/seasonal golf facilities. The purpose of this study was: (1) to identify the differences in the perceived importance of legal competencies among golf course directors in disparate types of golf courses (private, semi-private, and municipal) in the United States; and (2) to identify differences in response toward the importance of legal competencies among golf course directors in diverse regions of the United States.

A total of 393 PGA certified golf course directors who were in a golf operation position participated in this study. Regarding the sampling method, judgment sampling was used to measure different golf environments including year-round and seasonal golf facility, different populations served, the researcher’s familiarity with different regions, and/or directors’ willingness to provide directories for sample regions. Among the Association’s 14 Districts, four Districts (District 2, 11, 12, and 13) were chosen from the PGA Membership and Golf Directory. Through reviewing literature in management competencies of recreational sport managers, Choi’s (2005) Competencies of Golf Course Directors (CGCD) instrument was chosen with modification.

Statistical analyses indicated that the importance of perceived legal competencies differed among golf course directors at disparate types of golf courses in diverse golf environments. The importance of legal competencies as rated by golf course directors at private, semi-private, and public golf courses differed \( \lambda = .738, F(70, 616), p = .014 \). Directors at semi-private and municipal golf courses considered administering a facility reservation system and an equipment lease and purchase system \( F(2, 376) = 5.85, p = .003 \) as part of facility/equipment management to be a more important legal liability than did directors at private golf courses. Both directors at semi-private (M=2.70) and municipal facilities (M=2.83) rated administering a facility reservation system and an equipment lease and purchase system higher than did directors at private golf courses (M=2.49). Meanwhile, directors at municipal golf courses regarded conducting routine inspections of facilities and equipment \( F(2, 377) = 4.86, p = .008 \) and providing input into strategic planning for facility development \( F(2, 375) = 3.63, p = .027 \) to be a more important part of facility/equipment management than did directors at private golf courses.

Both semi-private and municipal golf courses are maintained by daily fees, funds from municipalities or recreation districts while private golf courses depended on membership fees, golf-shop sales, restaurant and bar trade, and golf cart rentals. In terms of business procedures and source of revenue, directors in private golf courses might consider equipment leases and purchase systems differently than do directors in semi-private and municipal golf courses. Directors at semi-private and municipal golf courses agreed that administering a facility reservation system and an equipment lease and purchase system required important legal competencies. Directors at municipal golf courses (M=3.25) may have regarded facility/equipment maintenance and facility development more strongly as requiring legal competencies than did directors at private golf courses (M=2.93).

Regarding the importance of perceived legal competencies among golf course directors in diverse golf environments, there were significant differences found \( \lambda = .637, F(105, 929), p = .004 \). Golf course directors in District 13 (Florida and Georgia) and District 12 (New Mexico and West Texas) regarded facilities/equipment management \( F(3, 341) = 4.67, p = .003 \) and legality/risk management \( F(3, 341) = 6.30, p = .000 \) as more important than did directors in District 2 (New York, New Jersey, and Philadelphia). Since legislation within each state differs, the importance of legality and risk management may vary depending upon each District. Directors in District 12 (M=3.25) and 13 (M=3.31) regarded establishing a safety program to prevent injuries and accidents, coordinating training for staff on
legal and safety issues (e.g., first aid training, ADA, OSHA, etc.), and exercising effective decision making in dealing with accidents as more important legal liabilities than did directors in District 2 (M=2.88).

Concerning facilities/equipment management, differences between District 2 (M=2.54) and 13 (M=3.02) occurred. Directors in Florida and Georgia regarded administering a facility reservation system and an equipment lease and purchase system, conducting routine inspections of facilities and equipment, providing input into strategic planning for facility development, and designing strategies/policies to prevent misuse of facilities and equipment as more important precautions against legal liabilities than did directors in New York, New Jersey, and Philadelphia. This difference could be due to the presence of many resorts in Florida. In the responses by disparate types of golf facilities, 26 directors in Florida reported that they were employed at resorts. It is believed that directors in resorts may have regarded facilities and equipment management to be more important managerial competencies than did directors working at stand-alone golf courses. Additionally, issues of hospitality might have influenced directors’ opinions on the managerial competencies of facilities/equipment management in resorts. Directors in resorts appear to have different job duties including the need to evaluate short-term guests for repeat visitation in resort settings.

Other than the aforementioned significant differences regarding legal competencies between different types of golf courses in diverse regions, there were no other significant differences found. Therefore, it appears that directors who are employed at private, semi-private, and public golf courses shared perceptions of important legal competencies for golf course directors. The findings of this study represented the existing perceptions of legal competencies among golf course directors in the United States. These findings underlined an understanding of the theoretical and foundational areas important to the legal aspects in golf, including facilities/equipment management, governance, legality/risk management, and event management. This study provided golf course directors with important information regarding adequate development of legal competencies for golf course directors.