

Team USA Council on Racial and Social Justice

Recommendations for Athlete Expression and Advocacy

In the recommendations on IOC Rule 50/IPC Section 2.2 released on December 10, 2020, Team USA Council on Racial and Social Justice committed to “identifying ways in which we can remove systemic barriers to racial and social justice, empower athlete voice in driving societal change, and anchor a commitment to fairness, equity, and justice in our organizational policies, practices, and procedures.” A recent survey, conducted by the Council, found that 92% of the athletes who completed the survey had an awareness of racism and social justice (from aware to somewhat aware and fully aware) and 67% of the athletes agreed with the statement “using my voice to support a social justice cause in a public way is important to me.” However, 67% of our athlete respondents expressed some fear of retaliation. Our commitment to systemic change must start with the centering of athlete expression in all decision-making, support services, procedures, practices, and policies of the organizations that help govern the athlete experience. A sincere commitment to the empowerment of athlete expression, particularly those from historically underrepresented, marginalized, or minoritized populations, requires continuous and systematic efforts to create an environment in which athletes’ expression has the power to make meaningful change. It is imperative that entities and individuals within the United States Olympic and Paralympic community engage in athlete-driven discussions, receive athlete-driven content and feedback, establish trust, and provide transparency and safety as daily axioms of their work.

The strength of Team USA lays within the diversity of voices (spoken and unspoken) shaping an Olympic and Paralympic community in the image of its constituents. Athletes are complex humans that hold various identities, abilities, personalities and backgrounds, yet too often they are reduced to their athletic accomplishments as their primary source of value to the organization. In this document, we center athlete expression as a powerful platform that goes beyond the field of play and is complex and multifaceted, finds its strength through trust and transparency, and deserves respect and celebration in the Olympic and Paralympic movements – particularly for groups whose expression and advocacy has historically been silenced, marginalized or minoritized.

As articulated by the United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee (USOPC), our Council is charged with addressing “the rules and systems in the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic movements that create barriers to progress” for those historically been silenced, marginalized or minoritized and with “working collaboratively to provide solutions and recommendations with the aim of eradicating social injustice and cultivating change through strengthened athlete voices.” We see these two charges as necessarily overlapping and working together to address racial and social injustice. Given the Council’s commitment to racial and social justice, this charge translates to two primary objectives related to athlete expression and advocacy: (1) advance racial and social justice through strategic athlete expression and advocacy at individual, communal, and institutional levels, and (2) elevate the expression and advocacy of athletes from historically silenced, marginalized, or minoritized groups within the Olympic and Paralympic community specifically.

To follow our charge and meet the objectives outlined above, and after consulting with Team USA athletes and alumni, as well as representatives from NGBs, Team USA Council on Racial and Social Justice provides the following recommendations for centering athlete expression in the Olympic and Paralympic movements:

Recommendation 1: Increase Support Services for Athlete Development

Currently, the USPOC provides services to Team USA athletes “in the form of training facilities, sports medicine and science, coaching education, health insurance, promotional opportunities, education and career services, outfitting and travel, safe sport and anti-doping programming.” While the current services are robust, they are general and largely related to athletic preparedness and performance. The push here is to advance services that are specific to advancing racial and social justice and/or elevating the expression or advocacy of athletes from historically silenced, marginalized, or minoritized groups within the Olympic and Paralympic community. Athletes within the Olympic and Paralympic structure have articulated that they feel unprepared for their life after sports, ultimately continuing a strictly transactional relationship between members and the USOPC. Providing resources to athletes for their journey after sports turns a transactional relationship into a transformational one, thus increasing the success of Team USA athletes upon retiring from competition. To foster athlete expression and advocacy, support services must go beyond athletic development toward development as athletes as humans first. The USOPC and those organizations and people affiliated with the USOPC who serve Team USA athletes must be educated on the needs of diverse athletes. And, all athletes must know that their value is not connected to their performance exclusively, but rather that their value is innately connected to the respect they deserve as humans with various experiences, identities, and perspectives. Action items for this recommendation center the humanity and dignity of athletes and shall include:

- I. Provide legal support for athletes facing discrimination and/or harassment in and beyond their athletic career. Legal support services need to reflect the diversity of the athlete population.
- II. Develop an institutional focus on post-sport transitional services that includes offerings to assist athletes with career training, professional development, and/or mental health services as needed (this list is not exhaustive). Given the unique barriers these groups face, such services should include programs/resources tailored specifically to athletes identifying as members from historically silenced, marginalized, or minoritized groups.
- III. Launch programs focused on career development, such as networking services and alumni support, with a particular focus on programs that allow athletes from historically silenced, marginalized, or minoritized groups to network. For instance, this can include quarterly networking events that intentionally match athletes with businesses in their field of interest to build their network in order to prepare them for post-competition life by providing real-world work experience. Intentionally leveraging relationships with sponsors to provide internship opportunities is another strategy that can provide invaluable professional development for members of the Team USA community.
- IV. Provide financial literacy workshops to support a sustainable life for athletes after their playing career, with a particular focus on financial literacy for individuals from historically silenced, marginalized, or minoritized groups.
- V. Create a pipeline for alumni to connect with current athletes and provide guidance on their post-sport journey. This program should have three tiers that participants can be a part of: pre-national team, national team, and post-national team.

Recommendation 2: Increase Communication for Athletes Internally & Externally

Historically, the practices, procedures, and policies of the USOPC and NGBs have not allowed for athletes to use their expression for advocacy for social and racial justice. Such advocacy can and should occur both internally and externally. Protecting the athletes' external communication means providing them with a platform to be a part of national and/or global racial and social justice movements. Internal communication allows athletes the freedom to express grievances, conflicts, and complaints about things that jeopardize the organization's integrity and trustworthiness. Action items for this recommendation communicate athletes' perspectives, particularly those from historically silenced, marginalized, or minoritized groups, and shall include:

Internal Communication:

- I. Develop an organizational statement that acknowledges various leadership's (USOPC, NGB, AAC) commitment to racial and social justice and, as a result, an intolerance to all forms of discrimination, clearly referencing historically silenced, underrepresented, marginalized or minoritized populations.
- II. Develop a confidential and/or anonymous reporting and feedback mechanism that allows athletes to comment on practices, procedures, and policies of the organization as well as provides a tool to report violations of the non-discrimination policies. Input from athletes via this reporting and feedback mechanism should be invited on a regular basis (e.g., quarterly).

External Communication:

- III. Provide resources for athletes to be trained in using their platform as athletes strategically to advance racial and social justice (e.g., media trainings).
- IV. Give visibility in organizational communication materials (e.g., media campaigns) to the experiences of Team USA athletes and alumni from historically silenced, underrepresented, marginalized or minoritized populations. Communication plans at the organizational level should be developed with attention to the diversity represented in such materials.
- V. Athletes from historically silenced, marginalized, or minoritized groups often struggle for visibility. The USOPC, NGBs, and other stakeholders should provide consulting services for these athletes specifically to identify ways in which their athlete brand can be advanced and provided with more visibility. This can include training with sponsors or working with consultants focused on the marketing of individuals historically silenced, marginalized, or minoritized groups.

Recommendation 3: Create Programming on Athlete Expression & Advocacy

Current and former Team USA members often feel unprotected by the institution because there are no outlets for them to use to express themselves free from retaliation. These findings are deeply concerning and are in direct opposition to a sincere commitment to empowering athlete expression, particularly those from historically silenced, marginalized, or minoritized groups. Creating spaces that allow for athletes to be seen and heard shows the athletes that they are valued and that their perspectives drive the everyday practices of the organization. Action items for this recommendation provide a platform for athlete expression, particularly those from historically silenced, marginalized, or minoritized groups, and shall include:

- I. Establish and promote a living exhibit that features Team USA members (current and former) who have used their expression and advocacy in service of racial and social justice, especially those athletes from historically silenced, underrepresented, marginalized or minoritized populations. This will educate Team USA members so they can see using their voices as valued within the US Olympic and Paralympic community.
- II. Develop specific programming, such as a quarterly lecture series, a podcast, or town hall meetings, for athletes to address issues they are facing and/or ideas on how to improve the organizational structure as it pertains to the experiences of historically silenced, underrepresented, marginalized or minoritized populations. This should focus on racial and social justice and be done in partnership with other stakeholders in the Olympic and Paralympic community (e.g., NGBs). Such programming can, for example, include a quarterly event series focused on topics related to equity, diversity, and inclusion in and beyond the Olympic and Paralympic movements. Particular attention should be paid to insure a diversity of perspectives; athletes and individuals from historically silenced, underrepresented, marginalized or minoritized populations should have the strongest presence here.
- III. Ensure Community Ambassador meetings are an ongoing platform to engage in dialogue and learning about racial and social justice with athletes, the USOPC, NGBs, and other stakeholders in the Olympic and Paralympic community.
- IV. Provide a platform for athletes from historically silenced, underrepresented, marginalized or minoritized populations to connect with peers holding similar identities (e.g., athlete affinity/engagement groups). Such groups will provide a collective voice to advocate for racial and social justice within the Olympic and Paralympic movement and beyond.
- V. Establish a strategic plan for the continuous collaboration with organizations on programming that promotes diversity, equity, inclusion, and/or racial and social justice in sport (ex. Voice in Sport, Advancement of Blacks in Sports, etc.). Whenever possible, this programming should include experts in the field to provide context to the barriers to racial and social justice that continue to exist in the USOPC, NGBs, and among other stakeholders.

Recommendation 4: Provide Educational Opportunities Featuring Athlete Perspectives

A lack of accountability within the Olympic and Paralympic community, most notably when it comes to persistent social ills such as systematic sexual misconduct and systemic racism, has historically silenced the expression and advocacy of athletes. A commitment to athlete expression and advocacy, therefore, needs to make education on such ills a priority for all members of the Olympic and Paralympic community. Equipping athletes, coaches and administrators with education on harmful, inappropriate, and/or otherwise dangerous behavior creates a no-tolerance expectation for such behavior and facilitates an environment in which athletes' expression is centered, welcomed, and empowered. Action items for this recommendation focus on providing education about the experiences of athletes, particularly those from historically silenced, marginalized, or minoritized groups, and shall include:

- I. Require mandatory diversity trainings for athletes, coaches, USOPC representatives, and NGB staff that address topics such as systemic racism, social injustice, bias, and/or microaggressions (list is not exhaustive). This training should occur on a regular basis, at least twice a year.
- II. Require additional sexual, emotional, and physical violence training that should be made mandatory for all individuals operating within the Olympic and Paralympic structure.
- III. Require onboarding for athletes, coaches, staff, and outside consultants upon entry into an entity within the Olympic and Paralympic structure that includes diversity, equity and inclusion training with components specific to racial/social justice (e.g., policies related to IPC Rule 2.2 and IOC Rule 50) and clarity on channels to express their perspectives.
- IV. In order to enhance the mental health services provided, programs should be created to specifically address issues related to race-based traumatic stress, sexual/emotional/physical abuse, and other issues as shared by the athletes.
- V. Because decisions related to education should be data-driven, annual culture and climate surveys, as well as off-boarding, should be conducted to capture athletes' experiences in terms of expression and advocacy, particularly as it may inform educational needs on issues of racial and social justice.

Recommendation 5: Develop a Strategic Plan to Center Athlete Expression in Inclusive Excellence

On its website, the USOPC states that the governing body welcomes “individuals from every background and creating equal opportunities for historically underrepresented groups” and “will continue to build a diverse team of strong role models to inspire future generations of Olympians and Paralympians.” Creating equal opportunities, welcoming diverse backgrounds, and allowing individuals from historically underrepresented, marginalized, or minoritized populations to develop a sense of belonging within the Olympic and Paralympic community is the foundation of inclusive excellence. A commitment to inclusive excellence means embracing the perspective of athletes in the development and implementation of protocols, policies, practices, and procedures. Action items for this recommendation focus on developing strategy to center athlete expression and advocacy in inclusive excellence. They shall include:

- I. Review existing non-discrimination policies with particular emphasis on including language that protects historically silenced, underrepresented, marginalized or minoritized populations. Any revisions to the policy should include repercussions to players, coaches, outside consultants, and administration who violate the non-discrimination policy. NGBs should also have in place a non-discrimination policy meeting the criteria outlined above.
- II. Non-discrimination policies, and procedures of their enforcement, must be shared on an annual basis and/or be included in the onboarding training provided to all within the Olympic and Paralympic movement.
- III. Conduct an internal review with the goal of identifying ways in which transparency of processes, decision-making, practices, and procedures can be increased.
- IV. Increase athlete representation on all committees, with particular attention paid to athlete representation from historically silenced, underrepresented, marginalized or

- minoritized populations generally and athletes of color specifically. Clear standards and expectations for inclusion on such committees need to be provided.
- V. Increase involvement of athletes in hiring processes, particularly for athletes from historically silenced, underrepresented, marginalized or minoritized populations. This can be achieved by increasing athlete representation on hiring committees or providing similar, equally impactful opportunities for athletes to provide input on hiring decisions.
- VI. Document, and update on an annual basis, racial and social justice strategic planning, protection and equal treatment of athletes, and achievement of established diversity/equity/inclusion metrics.

Recommendation 6: Protect Athlete Expression

We want to conclude our set of recommendations with one that is at the core of many of the previous ones: the need to be more intentional in protecting athletes, particularly those from historically silenced, underrepresented, marginalized or minoritized populations, from retaliation and other harmful practices that represent barriers to athlete expression and advocacy. The Council's survey reveals that 58% of Team USA respondents answered: "I felt the minimum was done," or "I felt completely unsupported, unprotected, and devalued after reporting." The Council maintains that one athlete feeling these ways is too many. Assessment of the aforementioned recommendations is an essential step in the process of providing a supportive and safe environment for athletes to express themselves, develop a sense of belonging, and advocate for the causes they are passionate about. Team USA Council on Racial & Social Justice urges all stakeholders in the Olympic and Paralympic movements to focus on creating a culture that prioritizes athlete protection. Action items for this recommendation provide safety to athlete expression, particularly those from historically silenced, marginalized, or minoritized groups, and shall include:

- I. Create a no retaliation policy for instances of discrimination, abuse, harassment, and/or harm. In addition, eliminate any language included in policies and protocols that allows for the retaliation of athletes freely expressing concerns or reporting instances of discrimination, abuse, harassment, and/or harm.
- II. Some athletes do not feel sufficiently heard or protected by the current mechanism for reporting racial and sexual abuse, homophobic and ableist microaggressions. Thus, the USOPC should establish a parallel mechanism outside of SafeSport to which reports can be made and sanctions can be issued (or, if not possible, expand the current ethics and enforcement procedures/practices to include independent individuals/entities). This mechanism would create greater protections for athletes, improve transparency and tracking of reports, and give athletes an additional option for resolution.
- III. Create accountability mechanisms with the necessary weight to respond to, penalize, and counteract discriminatory acts and sentiments as well as protect athletes from harm, abuse, or harassment. The accountability mechanism must apply to coaches, staff, NGBs, other athletes and all affiliated and/or regulated by the current Olympic and Paralympic structure. Further, greater accountability metrics need to be established to protect athletes, particularly those from historically silenced, underrepresented, marginalized or minoritized populations.

- IV. Strengthen the platform of AAC representatives by providing support and resources that allow the representatives to more efficiently express their views, impact policies and procedures within the USOPC and NGBs, as well as report instances of discrimination, abuse, harassment, and/or harm at both individual and institutional levels.
- V. For all practices, policies, and procedures that are aimed at protecting historically silenced, underrepresented, marginalized or minoritized populations, develop clear and effective dispute resolutions that center the safety and well-being of athletes.

Recommendations for Athlete Expression & Advocacy for Upcoming Trials & Games

While the recommendations outlined above represent long-term initiatives for centering athlete expression and advocacy in the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic community, we recognize the importance of utilizing the platform provided by the upcoming Games to promote racial and social justice and elevate the expression and advocacy of athletes from historically underrepresented, marginalized, or minoritized populations specifically. To elevate national and global movements for racial and social justice, and the athletes operating as driving forces within these movements, action items for athlete expression and advocacy during the upcoming trials and Games shall include:

- I. Call attention to the continued impact of racial and social injustice on members from historically underrepresented, marginalized, or minoritized groups. This can be done, for example, by incorporating moments of silence for victims of police brutality into the trials and Games.
- II. Allow athletes to provide visibility to the victims of racial and social injustice (e.g., by providing space to do so on trials badges).
- III. Provide resources – such as apparel – for athletes to call attention to racial and social justice movements (e.g., “Black Lives Matter” apparel, Olympic Project for Human Rights buttons worn by Team USA and other athletes in 1968 Olympic Games).
- IV. In all communication strategy surrounding the trials and Games, create space for athletes to amplify their efforts for racial and social justice. This can include video series/marketing campaigns showcasing athletes’ expression and advocacy for racial and social justice and/or strategic partnerships that elevate the voices of athletes from historically underrepresented, marginalized, or minoritized populations (e.g., with sponsors).
- V. Because athletes from historically silenced, marginalized, or minoritized groups often struggle for visibility (see recommendation 2.V), provide training for such athletes to strengthen the reach and impact of their efforts during the trials and Games. This may require outside consulting services with specialized knowledge on social justice marketing and communication strategy.

While these short-term goals will support our overarching objectives, we want to reiterate that Team USA Council on Racial & Social Justice is committed to identifying ways in which we can remove systemic barriers, empower athlete expression in driving societal change, and anchor a commitment to fairness, equity, and justice in our organizational policies, practices, and procedures. The fostering and advancement of a supportive and safe environment in which athlete expression and their advocacy is maximized is both central and critical in achieving this mission.

In addition, the Council will continue to prioritize and elevate athletes' experiences and expression, whether verbal or non-verbal; cultivate a new, trusting relationship between Team USA and the USOPC; and create institutional change that addresses racial and social injustices.