

Team USA Council on Racial and Social Justice Recommendations for Antiracism and Acts of Discrimination

In October 2020, the United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee (USOPC) commissioned Team USA Council on Racial and Social Justice (the Council). The Council was charged with focusing on four areas: (a) right to protests and demonstrations; (b) athlete expression and advocacy; (c) institutional awareness and cultural change; and (d) acts of racism and discrimination. Following its charge, the Council has published [recommendations on IOC Rule 50/IPC Section 2.2](#) on December 10, 2020, calling on the International Olympic Committee/International Paralympic Committee, USOPC, and National Governing Bodies to no longer sanction athletes demonstrating for racial and social justice as well as to provide institutional support for athletes' leadership in driving positive social change. On May 19, 2021, the Council shared its [recommendations on athlete expression and advocacy](#) to center “athlete expression in all decision-making, support services, procedures, practices, and policies of the organizations that help govern the athlete experience.” Most recently, on Oct. 7, 2021, the Council released its [third set of recommendations](#), focused on “increasing institutional awareness about racial and social injustice; promoting cultural change; and creating more opportunities for athletes to advocate for and work toward implementing impactful change.” Our work concludes with turning to a fourth area to promote racial and social justice across the Olympic and Paralympic community: promoting antiracism and preventing acts of discrimination across the movements.

It is important to acknowledge that the Council was formed at a time in which both the U.S. and the global community were witnessing increased calls for racial justice and systemic change. The horrific murders of Black Americans at the hands of law enforcement – Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Philando Castile, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd, among others – have pushed into our consciousness the importance of continuously scrutinizing how structural racism and other social ills continue to systemically disadvantage, exclude, and marginalize members from minoritized populations. We know that such reflection can be challenging and uncomfortable, and we want to thank the USOPC, the NGBs, and the members of the Olympic and Paralympic community for their trust in our work and their continued commitment to racial and social justice.

This recommendation outlines how the USOPC and NGBs can serve as collaborative leaders in eradicating systemic injustices, including structural racism, that lead to acts of discrimination. We draw from the definition of *structural racism* provided by the National Museum of African American History and Culture: that is, an “overarching system of racial bias across institutions and society.” Fighting structural racism is crucial because such racism continues to silence and demean people of color and reinforces the various inequities faced by members of historically minoritized racial and ethnic groups such as Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) and Latina/o/x individuals. More specifically, such groups often face microaggressions, neglect and lack of

consideration, harassment, hyper-surveillance, tokenization, exploitation, and disparate treatment by fellow participants, their fans, coaches, officials, and administrators. Structural racism also disguises and perpetuates white supremacy, a term which scholar Frances Lee Ansley defines as the “political, economic and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings.”

Finally, the Council’s recommendations represent a call for anchoring a commitment to antiracism in our approach to Olympic and Paralympic sport. Antiracist leadership acknowledges that no institutional policy, practice, or procedure is neutral. Rather, existing policies, procedures, and practices either promote or deflect efforts for racial and social justice. Therefore, we use Ibram X. Kendi’s definition of *antiracism* as “supporting an antiracist policy through [one’s] actions or expressing an antiracist idea.” An *antiracist policy* is “any measure that produces or sustains racial equity between racial groups,” while an *antiracist idea* refers to “any idea that suggests the racial groups are equals ... that there is nothing right or wrong with any racial group.” These definitions can be extended to other forms of systemic injustice and discrimination, including ableism, sexism, heterosexism, and other persistent social ills. Thus, while focused on racism and the experiences of Black athletes here, it is important to note that the Council explicitly and consistently considered equity for all minoritized athletes.

After consulting with Team USA athletes and alumni, as well as representatives from NGBs, the Council provides the following recommendations for anchoring antiracism and preventing acts of discrimination in the Olympic and Paralympic movements:

1. **Acknowledge the Organization’s Role in Perpetuating Racial Inequities:** The first step in creating antiracist environments devoid of discrimination is to acknowledge that the organizations that make up the Olympic and Paralympic community are expressive of structural racism and other social ills.
 - a. **Demonstrate the Value of Black Athletes Beyond the Field of Play:** Black athletes have shared repeatedly that they do not feel they are valued within the Olympic and Paralympic community – particularly at the elite level. To demonstrate that Black members are valued in the Olympic and Paralympic movements, the USOPC and NGBs should collaborate to develop programs and initiatives that demonstrate their organizational commitment to racially minoritized groups and the value these groups bring to the movements, with a particular focus on the elite level. While we draw from the experiences of Black athletes here, it is important to note that athletes from other minoritized groups – such as athletes with disabilities or LGBTQ+ athletes – should feel equally valued within the movements.

- b. **Conduct a Racial Equity Audit:** Following a call from [Color of Change](#) in the organization’s open letter to the USOPC, we encourage the USOPC and NGBs to conduct an external racial equity audit to examine the following key questions (list is not exhaustive):

 - i. How do current practices, procedures, and policies disproportionately impact members from BIPOC groups?
 - ii. What is the demographic make-up of the governing bodies (e.g., USOPC, NGBs), units (e.g., Athletes’ Advisory Council, Board of Directors) and stakeholder groups (e.g., coaches, NGB membership) that make up the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic movements? What groups are overrepresented, and what groups have historically been excluded from accessing and thriving in each of these organizational settings?
 - iii. How do the organization’s internal operations (e.g., hiring practices) and external engagements (e.g., locations of events) negatively impact or affect BIPOC communities?
 - iv. How can the organization support BIPOC-owned businesses?
 - v. What additional support does the organization provide for its BIPOC members (and members of other minoritized groups)?
 - vi. Who are the gatekeepers hindering the organization from achieving racial equity and equity in other areas?
 - c. **Facilitate the Creation of a Report on Achieving Racial Equity in the Olympic & Paralympic Movements:** While it is important to acknowledge one’s role in perpetuating racial inequities, acknowledgment alone is not enough and must be followed by action. Therefore, a racial equity audit must provide specific action steps that the audited organization can take to eliminate barriers to racial equity within the organizational practices, policies, and procedures. We applaud the work of the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, which recently released its [Achieving Racial Equity in College Sports](#) report, and recommend the USOPC provide resources for a similar report to be created focused on driving racial equity across the Olympic and Paralympic movements.
 - d. **Make Racial Equity Part of Social Responsibility:** Organizational commitments to access, diversity, equity, and inclusion should explicitly include statements on racial and social justice. These commitments should be accompanied by a series of specific strategies in which the organization will continue to advance racial and social justice goals.
2. **Counteract the Dehumanization and Exploitation of BIPOC and All Minoritized Members of the Olympic and Paralympic Community:** Over the past year, Black Olympic and Paralympic athletes have shared with the Council powerful and brave stories about navigating structural racism and white supremacy within the USOPC and NGBs. At

the heart of these stories was the perception that athletes are often reduced to the athletic value they bring to the organization rather than be seen as humans with various intersecting identities. One expression of structural racism is the dehumanization of members from minoritized groups, and an antiracist framework for change prompts us to counteract such racist tendencies.

- a. **Invest in Programs that Promote Belonging:** To provide a stronger sense of belonging for minoritized individuals in the Olympic and Paralympic community, the USOPC and NGBs should work collaboratively to create programs that nurture a sense of belonging for these individuals. These programs can include identity-based support groups, opportunities for exchange and networking for members of minoritized groups, and educational events that feature speakers from racially minoritized groups. Particular attention should be paid to implementing these programs at the grassroots level, where barriers to racial equity often manifest first. The Council recommends the creation of caucuses committed to providing space and elevating the voices of minoritized groups within the movements (e.g., Black Caucus, LGBTQ+ Caucus, Disability Caucus).
 - b. **Provide Authentic Visibility for Minoritized Athletes Beyond Their Sport:** A recurring theme in the Council's recommendations has been to embrace athletes' authentic selves beyond the playing field. We recommend that the USOPC and NGBs give increased focus in their strategic communication efforts to the lives of athletes from minoritized groups (e.g., athletes of color) outside of their sport. Such communication efforts should be more substantial in nature and must go beyond posts for cultural heritage months (e.g., Black History Month) toward strategic communication efforts that (a) celebrate the unique experiences of minoritized athletes continuously and (b) identify specific actions that can be undertaken to improve those experiences.
 - c. **Educate Members of the Community on the Impact of Racism:** Racism is dehumanizing, and the responsibilities to educate members who are not experiencing it must not rest on the shoulders of those who have experienced racial trauma. While antiracism training by itself is not enough, the USOPC should provide educational resources focused on the impact of racism on racially minoritized populations. Such education is needed for all members of the organization, but is particularly important for those who do not experience racism (i.e., white members of our community). Resources should be set aside to teach members of the organization how to combat racist behavior, unconscious bias, and microaggressions. For example, anti-racism and cultural sensitivity training could be implemented into the onboarding of athletes, coaches and staff.
3. **Increase Protections for Minoritized Populations:** Athletes' safety and well-being (physical, psychological, and emotional) are of utmost importance when it comes to

changing systems of oppression. Oftentimes, athletes from racially minoritized groups and other minoritized groups do not feel safe to call out discrimination. Additionally, over the past months physical threats have been disproportionately directed at minoritized Team USA athletes. Indeed, threats to the physical safety of athletes are often directed at members from minoritized groups. Therefore, a commitment to antiracism includes increased protections for members of minoritized groups.

- a. **Extend Definitions of Abuse to Include Racial Discrimination (and Other Forms of Discrimination):** Discrimination (e.g., racial discrimination) is a form of abuse and should be treated as such. The USOPC and NGBs have systems in place (e.g., SafeSport) to protect athletes from sexual abuse and misconduct, yet rigorous systems do not exist for victims of identity-based discrimination. The Council recommends extending the work of the U.S. Center for SafeSport to include identity-based discrimination, emotional discrimination, and racial abuse. This may require the hiring of staff with expertise in those areas. If the protection described here cannot be provided by the current systems in place, resources must be devoted to creating institutional protections for those who are the target of identity-based discrimination and abuse.
- b. **Enhance Trust in the Ombuds:** The USOPC and NGBs must create spaces for athletes from minoritized groups to report instances of discrimination and racist treatment without fear of retaliation. This may require a re-envisioning of the structure of the Office of the Athlete Ombuds to best represent and serve the interests of minoritized athletes. To best serve the interest of Black athletes, for example, the USOPC and NGBs should provide opportunities for Black athletes to develop a relationship with the Ombudsperson that is rooted in trust and transparency. These opportunities should include information on the roles of the Ombudsperson and the responsibilities of the athletes when reporting issues to the Office.
- c. **Increase Legal Support for Athletes Filing Discrimination Cases:** A program currently exists that connects NGBs with law firms who do pro-bono work on discrimination cases. The Council recommends strengthening this program by (a) providing increased visibility of the program to make it more available to athletes in need of support and (b) giving institutional support and guidance to NGBs that may need help in handling instances of discrimination due to lack of expertise of resources. In general, the Council recommends the USOPC provide more guidance for NGBs on how to navigate identity-based discrimination, as athletes have disclosed that NGB processes handling such discrimination seem arbitrary at times. Protocols should be put in place that map out clearly what will happen if discrimination occurs, including: (a) clearly outline steps taken should discrimination be reported, (b) make the process as transparent as possible while protecting the identities of those involved, (c) educate members of the Olympic and

Paralympic community about the processes to file discrimination cases, and (d) the consequences faced for discrimination.

- d. **Improve Communication About Available Resources/Services:** The USOPC has resources and services available that protect members of the community, including those from minoritized groups. However, athletes have shared that they are often unaware of existing programs. The Council recommends that the USOPC and NGBs review where such resources are located and develop a communication plan that increases exposure of the resources/services, particularly to members from minoritized groups.
4. **Create Cultures of Accountability & Transparency:** A lack of proper communication channels, accountability, and transparency often help reinforce racial inequities. A commitment to antiracism embraces a culture of accountability and transparency, components of which constitute the following:
- a. **Establish & Communicate Policies for Individuals to Speak Up and Report Discrimination and Abuse:** Systems must be created to make it safe for minoritized members of the organization to come forward and confront discriminatory and abusive practices within the USOPC and NGBs. In addition to the accountability policy mapped out in the Council’s recommendation on institutional awareness and cultural change, the Council recommends creating a “speak up policy” that allows individuals to come forward safely, identifies specific ways in which they can share concerns, and protects them from retaliation. The policy should be reviewed regularly and outline clear ways for individuals to learn from discriminatory incidents. If such a policy is already in place, it should be communicated more clearly to all stakeholders. In addition, policies should be created (or more clearly communicated if already in existence) requiring individuals to testify should they be accused of abuse/discrimination.
 - b. **Improve Confidential Communication Channels for Reporting Discriminatory Practices:** The USOPC currently provides an online integrity portal that serves as a confidential and anonymous reporting system outside of the athletes’/individuals’ home units. The Council recommends that the portal include a stand-alone option to report discrimination occurring within the Olympic and Paralympic community.
 - c. **Include Discrimination as a Violation in the Code of Conduct:** Further, the USOPC and NGBs should revise their code of conducts to make more explicit that racial discrimination (and other identity-based discrimination) constitutes a violation of the code of conduct.
 - d. **Strengthen the Voices of Athletes From Minoritized Groups Across the Movements (e.g., in AAC):** To further strengthen the voice of Black athletes, and athletes from other minoritized groups (e.g., LGBTQ+ athletes, athletes with

disabilities), the Council recommends the USOPC and each NGB increase representation of BIPOC athletes (and those from other minoritized groups) on their internal athlete councils and other governing entities with athlete representatives. The representation of minoritized athletes on these councils should reflect (and be proportional to) the nation's diversity. Diversifying boards/councils may require an adjustment of bylaws to allow for these representatives to be included.

- e. **Provide More Nuance in the Diversity Score Cards:** To better understand the unique experiences of different racial and ethnic groups, the Council recommends that the existing diversity score cards include a breakdown of the specific groups that have historically been grouped under the “people of color” descriptor.
5. **Provide Structural Support for Antiracist Efforts:** To be effective in driving antiracist efforts and counteract discrimination across the Olympic and Paralympic movements, the USOPC and NGBs must provide structural support for initiatives targeting racial and social inequities. This should include:
- a. **Incentivize the Hiring and Retention of BIPOC:** Following the last Council recommendation (see recommendation from Oct. 7, 2021), the USOPC should incentivize the hiring and retention of Black, Indigenous, People of Color, especially when it comes to leadership position. In addition, the USOPC and NGBs should review create pipeline programs for members of minoritized groups to enter the talent, coaching, and referee pipelines (e.g., strategic partnerships with HBCUs).
 - b. **Foster Leadership that Facilitates Antiracist Environments:** Antiracism must be modeled by the leaders of the organization, including the CEOs, Board of Directors, and senior leadership teams. Regular antiracism training should be required of staff leading the USOPC and NGBs (see previous recommendation).
 - c. **Collect Empirical Data on Barriers to Access, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at the Grassroots Level:** The Council recommends that each NGB conduct empirical surveys that provide data on what barriers exist at the grassroots level that prevent members of minoritized groups from accessing, developing a sense of belonging, and feeling valued in their respective sport. Given NGBs may not have the means to facilitate comprehensive data collection, the Council recommends the USOPC set aside resources to aid NGBs in collecting this data.
 - d. **Center Antiracism in the Organization's Strategic Planning:** All access, diversity, equity, and inclusion strategic planning should include efforts that center antiracism. Strategic planning should include short- and long-term goals for transforming the USOPC and NGBs into antiracist spaces, guided by metrics that hold each organization accountable in driving antiracist progress.

To close, this document represents a fourth set of recommendations developed by Team USA Council on Racial & Social Justice to remove systemic barriers to racial and social justice, empower athletes in driving societal change, and anchor a commitment to access, diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice in our organizational policies, practices, and procedures. While the work of the Council in its current form may conclude, we want to close by underlining that this document does not represent the finish line for our work. Rather, this recommendation ought to represent the starting point of a life-long institutional commitment to antiracist advocacy and a continuous commitment to matters of racial and social justice. Embracing diversity, nurturing belonging, promoting inclusion, and facilitating antiracist efforts leading to racial and social justice must become cornerstones of the Olympic and Paralympic movements, so that members of Team USA – and the systems that nurture the movements – can reach their full potential as their true, authentic, and fully embraced selves both in- and outside the arena of sport.