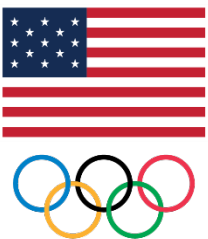


**United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee  
Certification Review Group**



**Certification Renewal Recommendation Report for USA Fencing  
March 14, 2024**



**UNITED STATES  
OLYMPIC & PARALYMPIC  
COMMITTEE**

## USA Fencing Certification Renewal Executive Summary

In March 2023, the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC) Certification Review Group (CRG), in accordance with the USOPC's NGB Certification Policy, began a certification renewal review of USA Fencing.<sup>1</sup> The CRG evaluated USA Fencing and, based on input from CRG members, as well as the results of the NGB Audit department's 2022 Compliance Audit and USA Fencing's fulfillment of compliance requirements<sup>2</sup>, recommends a certification status of Renewal in Good Standing.

The CRG's review of USA Fencing found that the organization is meeting the USOPC's NGB Compliance Standards in the five core areas of evaluation for certification: Governance and Compliance, Financial Standards and Reporting Practices, Athlete Protections and Rights, Sport Performance, and Operational Performance. NGB Audit's compliance audit identified areas where USA Fencing was not yet fully meeting the USOPC's NGB Compliance Standards, but USA Fencing took action to remediate identified issues and meet the NGB Compliance Standards by the time of the CRG's recommendation.

CRG members agreed that USA Fencing is meeting the requirements and expectations for an NGB. In its discussions regarding USA Fencing's interactions with the USOPC, the CRG did not identify any operational or cultural concerns that would prevent the organization's continued certification. Overall, in the areas in which the CRG members interacted with USA Fencing, the CRG had a favorable view of USA Fencing's operations.

As a result of this review, the CRG recommends that USA Fencing be granted a certification status of Renewal in Good Standing for a four-year certification term ending in 2027.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix for more information about the certification process, including a link to the NGB Certification Policy.

<sup>2</sup> [NGB Audit Report](#) and [NGB Audit Addendum Report](#).

## **Organizational Overview**

USA Fencing is the USOPC-certified NGB for the sport of fencing. The mission of USA Fencing is to grow and promote the sport of fencing in the United States, honor its rich traditions, and achieve sustained competitive international excellence.<sup>3</sup> USA Fencing is affiliated with the Federation Internationale d’Escrime (FIE), the international federation that oversees Olympic fencing, and World Ability Sport, the international federation that oversees Paralympic fencing. USA Fencing’s national office is located in Colorado Springs, Colorado.<sup>4</sup>

## **Certification History**

USA Fencing was originally certified in January 2021.<sup>5</sup> This is the first time USA Fencing has gone through the certification review process.

## **Certification Exceptions<sup>6</sup>**

USA Fencing did not request any exceptions from the NGB Compliance Standards during its certification review.

## **Athlete Representation Approval and Exceptions<sup>7</sup>**

USA Fencing requested that the Athlete Representation Review Working Group (ARRWG) approve additional competitions as qualifying events for 10 Year and 10 Year+ status to expand the pool of athletes eligible to serve as athlete representatives. The ARRWG approved the following competitions as qualifying events:

- FIE World Championships
- Wheelchair Fencing Senior World Championships

## **Certification Review<sup>8</sup>**

### ***Governance and Compliance***

The CRG determined that USA Fencing is fulfilling the Governance and Compliance-related responsibilities of an NGB, including adopting, and enforcing key ethics and compliance-related policies, making them publicly available on its website; and defining procedures to address violations of these policies.

In 2021, USA Fencing was the subject of two formal Section 9 complaints filed with the USOPC Dispute Resolution Unit, though it was not found to have violated any individual’s right to participate in either matter. The first complaint, filed July 2021 during the Tokyo Olympic Games, resulted in denial of the claimant’s requests. The Arbitrator determined that USA Fencing had valid authority to establish a safety plan and impose requirements on the athlete who was found

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<sup>3</sup> [About](#), USA Fencing website.

<sup>4</sup> Id.

<sup>5</sup> Refer to the Appendix for details on the initial certification.

<sup>6</sup> Refer to the Appendix for details on exception requests to the NGB Compliance Standards.

<sup>7</sup> Refer to the Appendix for details on athlete representation exception requests.

<sup>8</sup> Refer to the Appendix for details on the review standards and process for information related to the Compliance Audit.

to have violated the SafeSport Code. The Arbitrator found that USA Fencing's actions were both appropriate and proportionate.<sup>9</sup>

The second complaint, filed October 2021, was remanded to USA Fencing as one of two competitions in question did not meet the definition of a Protected Competition and the Arbitrator did not have jurisdiction to order USA Fencing to register the athlete for the competition. The other competition in question was determined to be a Protected Competition, and USA Fencing was in process of completing its selection for the team to represent the United States. Thus, the Arbitrator determined that USA Fencing maintained the authority to execute its selection procedures.<sup>10</sup>

In 2021, the USOPC conducted a Compliance investigation into USA Fencing's governance and policies regarding grievances and conflicts of interest based on concerns members raised. The investigation resulted in USOPC Compliance's issuance of recommendations consistent with the USOPC's NGB Compliance Standards. USA Fencing addressed the identified concerns, which related to operational performance and leadership best practices. USA Fencing's implementation plan included sharing information pertaining to organization-wide changes more broadly with its membership by making board agendas and meeting minutes available. The NGB also developed a succession plan for key leadership positions. USA Fencing also added a staff liaison to support the Nominating Committee in fulfilling its governance responsibilities. The implementation of these recommendations further bolstered USA Fencing's governance practices.

As a result of the 2022 Compliance Audit, USA Fencing standardized its board's practices by implementing formal onboarding for new board and committee members and conducting written CEO evaluations annually. USA Fencing updated its code of conduct, conflict of interest, and gifts and entertainment policies to meet the requirements of the USOPC's NGB Compliance Standards. Furthermore, USA Fencing strengthened controls for its conflict of interest disclosure and review process.

The CRG received positive athlete feedback regarding USA Fencing's governance. Athletes informed the CRG that the current CEO is accessible to athletes and has prioritized communication. Athletes expressed the internal AAC is functioning well, and they believe USA Fencing listens to and empowers athletes.

### ***Financial Standards and Reporting Practices***

USA Fencing meets the requirements for an NGB's Financial Standards and Reporting Practices. The organization demonstrates financial operational capability to administer its sport and is financially and operationally transparent with its membership by publishing its audited financial statements and tax forms.

As a result of the 2022 Compliance Audit, USA Fencing has improved its grant-tracking process and its document retention.

### ***Athlete Protection and Rights***

USA Fencing maintains and enforces an athlete safety program consistent with the requirements of relevant federal law, as well as with the policies and standards of the USOPC and the U.S. Center for SafeSport (the Center). The NGB maintains an anti-doping program consistent with the

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<sup>9</sup> [Hadzic v. USA Fencing](#). July 19, 2021.

<sup>10</sup> [Hadzic v. USA Fencing](#). October 25, 2021.

requirements of the USOPC and the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency. As a result of the 2022 Compliance Audit, USA Fencing updated its FenceSafe handbook to include a written process to notify the Office of Athlete Safety and included all requirements for background checks.

The USOPC is not aware of any cases it has received in the past four years concerning USA Fencing that should have been reported to the Center but were not reported in accordance with the Center's reporting requirements. For its part, the USOPC has reported all matters to the Center relating to USA Fencing that the USOPC was required to report.

On September 1, 2022, the Center conducted its most recent Administrative Audit<sup>11</sup> of USA Fencing's implementation of policies required by the SafeSport Code and the Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policies, which resulted in no findings or directions for corrective actions.

The Center conducted an Event Audit<sup>12</sup> of USA Fencing on February 17-20, 2023, for the 2023 Fencing Junior Olympics. The event audit resulted in no findings or directions for corrective actions.

### ***Sport Performance***

USA Fencing is fulfilling its obligations in Sport Performance. The organization maintains and executes a strategic plan that supports athletes in achieving sustained competitive excellence and grows the sport. USA Fencing established selection procedures and executed them effectively to name and train Team USA athletes for Delegation Events.

As a result of the 2022 Compliance Audit, USA Fencing updated sanctioning documents to include all required elements. Furthermore, USA Fencing worked with the USOPC's Paralympic department to implement the required national classification policies and procedures.

### ***Operational Performance***

The CRG determined that USA Fencing is meeting all the Operational Performance standards. The organization demonstrates managerial capability to administer its sport, keeps current insurance policies, and demonstrates financial sustainability. USA Fencing updated its grievance policy and its whistleblower and anti-retaliation policy during the audit remediation period to meet NGB Compliance Standards. USA Fencing has a Grievance and Disciplinary Committee supported by a full-time compliance manager to ensure hearings and communications are conducted in a reasonable timeframe.

USA Fencing developed a 2022-2024 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DE&I) Strategic Plan to reflect the NGB's vision for a diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible organization. USA Fencing submitted its action plan to the USOPC with sufficient detail to meet the NGB Compliance Standards. The action plan includes four overall goals and a roadmap of expected outcomes and measurements of success. The NGB's goals include increasing participation of underrepresented groups, sustain equitable and high-level sport performance, create a culture of inclusive excellence, and advance athlete/membership wellness by re-establishing trust and building sense of belonging. USOPC DE&I found USA Fencing to be one of the most engaged NGBs on DE&I matters.

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<sup>11</sup> [US Center for SafeSport Administrative Audit Report](#) – USA Fencing, September 1, 2022.

<sup>12</sup> [US Center for SafeSport Event Audit Report](#) – USA Fencing, February 17-20, 2023.

## **Conclusion**

The CRG concluded that USA Fencing is performing satisfactorily based on input from the CRG members, the results of the NGB Audit team's 2022 Compliance Audit, and the organization's remediation of identified issues. There are no outstanding areas of significant concern affecting the NGB's certification status at this time. Accordingly, the CRG recommends that USA Fencing's certification as a member organization of the USOPC be renewed with a rating of Renewal in Good Standing

## Appendix

### Certification Renewal Process

The USOPC believes in a culture of strong governance, ethics, and compliance among the NGBs that, as member organizations of the USOPC, make up the Olympic and Paralympic movement. Recent amendments to the Ted Stevens Olympic and Amateur Sports Act, which became effective in late 2020, require the USOPC to certify NGBs.<sup>13</sup> The USOPC determined that as of January 1, 2021, all member organizations would be certified, and their certifications would be reviewed for renewal on a rolling basis every four years.<sup>14</sup>

Governed by the USOPC's [NGB Certification Policy](#), the NGB certification review process is supported by a cross-functional body of professionals at the USOPC, the Certification Review Group (CRG), who interact with NGBs in their day-to-day work. These professionals evaluate an NGB's operations across multiple functional areas to provide a holistic review of an NGB's performance and culture.<sup>15</sup> In addition to enumerated standards for NGB performance described in the Act, the Bylaws, and the USOPC's [NGB Compliance Standards](#), the CRG considers departmental observations about an NGB's operations that may not be identified in a formal audit scenario but are relevant to consider when evaluating an NGB's overall performance.

### Certification Standards, Exceptions, and Review Components

As described in Section 8.4.1 of the [USOPC Bylaws](#), NGBs must satisfy certification requirements in five core areas: Governance and Compliance, Financial Standards and Reporting Practices, Athlete Safety, Sport Performance, and Operational Performance. The USOPC Implementation Guide for NGB Compliance Standards provides NGBs with specific guidance for how they will be evaluated in each of these core areas.

Section 8.4.2 of the USOPC Bylaws permits an NGB to submit a request for limited exceptions to any of the NGB Compliance Standards which, as a result of its overall structure or other extenuating circumstances, cannot or need not be reasonably met. The CRG evaluates all requests received and grants or denies such limited exceptions.

Various provisions of Section 8.5 of the USOPC Bylaws permit NGBs to seek exceptions related to minimum athlete representation requirements on boards and designated committees as well as exceptions or additions to which of its committees are considered designated committees. The Athlete Representation Review Working Group evaluates and approves or denies all requests made under Section 8.5.

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<sup>13</sup> See §220521(a) of the Ted Stevens Olympic and Amateur Sports Act.

<sup>14</sup> NGB Certification Policy, Section 1.

<sup>15</sup> The CRG uses a four-year lookback period during this review process.