



USOPC College Sports Sustainability Think Tank

Sport structure recommendation: Olympic Sustainability Membership Category

September 15, 2021

BACKGROUND AND CHARGE: The USOPC Think Tank charged the sport structure group to reimagine the NCAA sport sponsorship structure by customizing sport engagement strategies. Since 1997, Olympic sports have been exempt from NCAA minimum sponsorship requirements, which provide schools with increased flexibility to sustain the sport in the United States. To date, several Olympic sports do not meet the NCAA sport sponsorship requirement and participate in a national collegiate championship (men: gymnastics, volleyball, water polo; mix: fencing, rifle, skiing; women: beach, bowling, gymnastics, ice hockey, water polo). The USOPC Think Tank believes schools sponsoring these low-sponsored Olympic sports need more flexibility to navigate each unique sport ecosystem to ensure sport sustainability.

RECOMMENDATION: The USOPC Think Tank recommends a pilot Olympic Sustainability Membership Category in order to allow low sponsored sports more flexibility (relaxed membership requirements, nimble conference affiliation and customized scheduling/rules, etc.). This pilot is modeled after the NCAA Emerging Sports for Women program, which has established criteria for sports entering and exiting membership. The USOPC Think Tank recognizes schools with low-sponsored Olympic sports are participating in national collegiate championships and operate in culturally niche/regionalized pockets. These sports are valuable to each school community and to the Olympic Movement, which is why flexibility is needed for sustainability. The following framework may be considered for the OSMC pilot program.

PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT	
The OSMC program seeks sport-specific flexibility in a manner that upholds NCAA Division I values; participating schools must remain committed to the collegiate model of scholastic sport participation.	
FLEXIBILITY PRINCIPLES	SPORT QUALIFICATION CRITERIA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enhance student-athlete opportunities/experiences - Ease operational efficiencies for sport sustainability - Foster a healthy and growing sport pathway 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meet national collegiate championship status (Bylaw 18.3.1) - Meet the Olympic sport exception (Bylaw 18.2.10.1) - Support letter from a majority of schools offering the sport

PROGRAM OPERATIONS: The USOPC Think Tank believes this flexible membership category could be implemented as a pilot program to test sustainability for a individual sport (men’s gymnastics) and a team sport (men’s volleyball).

- **Oversight:** The NCAA DI Board of Directors would identify an NCAA DI entity to oversee the program and measure the impact, in cooperation with NCAA/USOPC staff.
- **Legislation:** The OSMC membership category would be legislated within NCAA Bylaw 20.02 with other definitions and applications of NCAA Division I membership.
- **Request process:** Sports seeking OSMC membership would collaborate with coaches’ associations, NGBs, the USOPC and sponsoring schools to formalize a request that outlines the desired legislative flexibility. The request would be reviewed and managed by the oversight group based on adopted principles and qualification criteria. Supported sport requests would proceed through the normal NCAA legislation cycle.
- **Evaluation process:** After a 10-year period, sports operating within the OSMC membership category would be evaluated to determine if flexibility should continue. The evaluation may include analysis of collegiate sport sponsorship trends, conference and regional cohesion, financial sustainability, the student-athlete experience, elite-level sport performance, youth sport participation trends, national team contributions and coach/college leadership feedback.

***PILOT EFFORTS:** The USOPC Think Tank, in partnership with leaders of sports with low-sponsorship including the Collegiate Gymnastics Association/USA Gymnastics and American Volleyball Coaches Association/USA Volleyball, began to explore flexible membership policies in the sports of men’s gymnastics and men’s volleyball. These pilot adjustments would test the OSMC for these two sports, which are seeking legislative flexibility for multidivisional status and conference flexibility. Should these pilot efforts be successful, they could be scaled to additional low-sponsored male and female sports.

**NOTE: These pilots have been recommended for men’s gymnastics and men’s volleyball due to the number of dropped programs and impact of the dropped teams during the pandemic, which spurred leadership planning by the NGB and coaches association.*

**PROPOSED NCAA DIVISION I LEGISLATIVE AMENDMENTS
BYLAWS 18, 20: MEMBERSHIP & CONFERENCE/SCHOOL FLEXIBILITY**

20.02 Definitions and Applications.

20.02.4 Emerging Sports for Women.

20.02.5 Olympic Sustainability. The following shall be considered sustainable Olympic sports and may utilize flexible membership policies in order to ease sport operations and conference affiliation for sport sustainability purposes. The following criteria shall determine if a sport qualifies for the flexible membership status including low sponsored Olympic sport status per bylaw 18.2.10.1, national collegiate championship status per bylaws 20.8.1 and 18.3, and satisfy sport sustainability principles as set by the Board of Directors.

(a) **Team Sport Pilot:** men's volleyball.

(b) **Individual Sport Pilot:** men's gymnastics.

20.02.5.1 Additional Olympic Sustainability Sports. The Board of Directors periodically shall assess additional sports that meet the prescribed criteria and principles to be eligible to utilize flexible membership status benefits.

20.02.5.2 Removal of Olympic Sustainability Sports. A sport shall no longer be considered a Olympic sustainability sport once the sport has been established as a championship sport. Further, each sport is assessed over a 10-year period with periodic consultations to evaluate if the flexible policies aided in growth during that time.

20.8 Eligibility for National Collegiate Championships.

20.8.1 Eligibility for National Collegiate Championships. [#] Separate championships in each division are not sponsored in the following sports: (Adopted: 4/24/03 effective 8/1/03, Revised: 1/15/11 effective 8/1/11, 10/30/14 effective 8/1/15, 7/31/15)

Women's Beach Volleyball	Women's Gymnastics	Men's Volleyball
Women's Bowling	Women's Ice Hockey	Men's Water Polo
Men's and Women's Fencing	Men's and Women's Rifle	Women's Water Polo
Men's Gymnastics	Men's and Women's Skiing	

An active member institution in good standing, regardless of division, is eligible for the National Collegiate Championships if a division championship in the respective sport is not offered in its division. Such an institution normally is required to meet only the institutional and individual eligibility requirements of its division that govern the sport in question.

18.2 Criteria for Establishment or Continuation of Championships.

18.2.10 Failure to Meet Minimum Sponsorship Requirements. A championship shall be discontinued automatically at the conclusion of the academic year in which it falls below the applicable minimum sponsorship number set forth in Bylaw 18.2.3 or 18.2.4. (Revised: 1/11/94 effective 8/1/94)

18.2.10.1 Exception -- Olympic Sports. A National Collegiate Championship or a division championship in any Olympic sport shall be exempt from the minimum sponsorship-percentage requirements of Bylaws 18.2.3 and 18.2.4. The membership may adopt specific legislation to discontinue the championship in an Olympic sport. (Adopted: 1/14/97 effective 8/1/97)

18.3 Current Championships.

18.3.1 National Collegiate Championships (11). [#] (Adopted: 4/27/00, 4/24/03 effective 8/1/03, Revised: 10/30/14 effective 8/1/15, 7/31/15)

<u>Men (3)</u>	<u>Men and Women (3)</u>	<u>Women (5)</u>	
Gymnastics	Fencing	Beach Volleyball	Ice Hockey (Divisions I and II)
Volleyball (Divisions I and II)	Rifle	Bowling	Water Polo
Water Polo	Skiing	Gymnastics	