



# **Athlete Career, Education and Life Skills**

## **Working Group**

### **Recommendations to the USOC Board of Directors**

**December 5, 2012**

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I would like to thank the members of the Working Group for their enthusiasm, hard work, friendship and advocacy for our Olympians, Paralympians and hopefuls. Their expertise, creativity, inclusiveness and open dialogue over the last six months have resulted in this report, and an increased focus on holistic athlete development within the USOC and NGBs. The Working Group is grateful for the opportunity to provide insight and support to this effort, and is hopeful that its efforts will result in a lasting legacy that benefits American athletes.

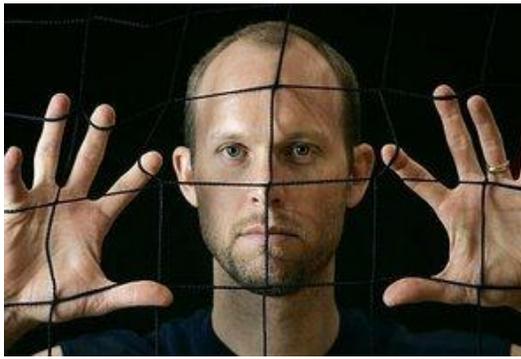
*Luke Bodensteiner, Working Group Chair*

***“We as athletes feel overwhelmed about a transition and where to turn. The reality is that most athletes only think about a career after sports; faintly while they are playing....The problem with being an Olympic athlete is you finish your career after 10 years and you look back at your resume and see no work experience and you are in your 30’s.”***



### **- Gabe Gardner**

- Olympic Gold Medalist (2008)
- Two-time Olympian
- Graduate of Stanford University
- Fluent in three languages
- Played professional volleyball
- Owned own sports marketing company
- Worked at The Home Depot through USOC’s former Olympic Job Opportunities Program
- Works at GE through USOC’s current Team USA Career Program



## **Executive Summary**

### *Purpose, Objectives and Perspectives of the Working Group*

The purpose of the USOC Athlete Career and Education Working Group is to evaluate the role of athlete career and education development in supporting the mission of the United States Olympic Committee (USOC), and to propose recommendations to the USOC Board of Directors and Chief Executive Officer to integrate athlete career and education development into a focused organizational strategy.

Over the course of its work, the Working Group focused on three objectives:

- Assess the relationship between athlete career programs and competitive success.
- Make recommendations, within existing budgets and resources, for a focused career and education strategy.
- Present options for programs that could be implemented given incremental program resources.

The working group examined the topic of athlete career and education development with the following perspectives:

- The USOC has been a global leader in the establishment of an athlete career and education program, having provided resources in this area for more than 20 years.
- The USOC has been highly effective in developing athlete career and education resources through strategic partners.
- Having recently achieved international competitive excellence at the highest level in Vancouver and London, improvement and expansion of holistic athlete development would provide a unique opportunity for the USOC to further differentiate itself as an Olympic sports organization and thereby provide resources that could improve sport performance among American athletes.

### *Key Findings*

- Little clinical evidence exists to validate the relationship between athlete career, education and life skills programs and competitive success. However, anecdotal evidence regarding this relationship abounds.
- Only in rare instances has athlete career, education and life skills development been fully integrated into the performance programs of elite athletes.
- Currently USOC athlete career, education and life skills programs are offered as non-integrated services, made available on an as-available and as-requested basis.
- The USOC currently acts as an aggregator of career and education resources, which are then distributed to athletes and NGBs upon request.
- While not mutually exclusive, integrating elite sport with education, career and life skills development requires management, counseling, easy access to tools, and educated support from the individuals involved in the management of the athlete – namely parents, coaches, teachers, employers, mentors, performance psychologists, and management personnel.

- Other non-Olympic professional sports organizations that were interviewed indicated that their main impetus for establishing athlete career and education development programs was to address negative behavior and character issues in an effort to strengthen brand image.
- Integration of athlete career, education and life skills development will improve athletic performance, enhance Olympism within the USOC, and contribute to a positive organizational image through the following:
  - Enable longer athletic careers
  - Improve athletes' focus on athletic performance
  - Provide athletes with a balanced lifestyle
  - Reduce the stress of injury
  - Improve athletes' understanding of how to manage a professional athletic career
  - Increase parent engagement
  - Address negative behavior
  - Provide role models to athletes
  - Increase likelihood of athletes giving back
  - Increase athlete advocacy
  - Brand enhancement

In addition to the above key findings, which provide strong rationale for increased engagement in and integration of athlete career, education and life skills development, the Working Group quickly identified and unanimously agreed that – based on the level of sacrifice that the USOC demands of its Olympians, Paralympians and hopefuls in pursuit of its organizational mission - focused engagement in the area on behalf of elite athletes is ethically and morally **the right thing to do**.

*The Role of the USOC and its NGBs in Athlete Career, Education and Life Skills Development*

The Working Group views the activity of athlete career, education and life skills development to be within the scope of the USOC and recommends that the USOC play a leadership role in integrating this activity into the strategic framework of developing elite performance and positive organizational image.

Additionally, NGBs play an essential role in the endorsement and implementation of athlete career, education and life skills development.

In that NGBs are responsible for implementation of athlete programming, NGBs stand to gain from USOC leadership and establishment of a culture that values athlete career, education and life skills as an integrated performance and positive organizational image strategy.

*Recommended Actions*

The Working Group's assessment of this issue has resulted in the following recommendations for consideration by the USOC Board of Directors and CEO.

- ***The USOC should lead by establishing a culture that values athlete career, education and life skills development as a performance enhancer, and that values successful athlete transition away from elite sport.***

The Working Group recommends that the USOC Board of Directors seize the opportunity to further differentiate itself as a professional sports organization by:

- Developing "athlete career, education and life skills pipelines" that complement existing athlete development pipelines.
- Emphasizing holistic athlete development through its programs and partners.
- Highlighting athlete success stories of integration of elite athletics and career/education/life skills.
- Creating and emphasizing unique offerings for athletes that will enhance their sport performance, blunt the difficulties associated with transition away from elite sport, and provide them with guidance and tools that will enhance their entire lives.
- Encouraging and allowing NGBs to identify and establish minimum requirements of athletes within the pipeline, such as attendance at a Rookie Orientation program, completion of a high school degree, or counseling with an academic or career counselor.

- ***The USOC should further evaluate the role that athlete career, education and life skills development plays in athletic performance.***

In order to better quantify and understand the relationship, the Working Group recommends that the USOC further examine the link between athlete career, education and life skills development and athletic performance by:

- Undertaking a scientific study to examine the link between athlete career, education and life skills development and athletic performance through its Sport Performance Division or in partnership with U.S. universities or international partners.

- ***The USOC should re-organize and reinforce its program management structure to further enhance the promotion and deployment of its athlete career, education and life skills development services.***

Commensurate with foreseeable NGB demand for these services now and in the future, and to address the current challenges of limited athlete awareness and NGB uptake, the USOC should consider increasing the available manpower to work directly with NGBs by:

- Equipping the Sport Performance teams with personnel trained in and knowledgeable of athlete career, education and life skills development and its role in athlete performance, who can (a) work with a single position of responsibility within USOC for the overall implementation and evaluation of the program; (b) work with the NGBs on planning, program resource allocation, and further resource development; (c) work directly with athletes as recommended by and necessary to the NGBs (including the areas of

professional goal-setting and maintaining balanced lifestyles); (d) review NGB performance versus established accountabilities.

- Establishing within each NGB either (a) a staff or former athlete experienced in career, education and life skills programming dedicated to athlete career, education and life skills development, or (b) assign the duty of coordinating athlete career, education and life skills planning and resource distribution to an existing staff or athlete liaison.

- ***The USOC should lead its NGBs in the integration of athlete career, education and life skills development into its performance planning.***

To reinforce the role that athlete career, education and life skills development plays in athlete performance, and to create day-to-day integrated activity within the NGBs, athlete career, education and life skills planning must be a function within the NGBs' overall performance plans. It is crucial that NGBs plan their athlete career, education and life skills development programs within the context of their other athlete performance priorities.

- ***The USOC should work with NGBs and the Athletes' Advisory Council (AAC) to develop customized NGB and athlete accountabilities surrounding the integration of athlete career, education and life skills development.***

Establishing the culture required for integration of athlete career, education and life skills development will require adoption by the NGBs, and therefore the USOC should:

- Establish athlete accountabilities in partnership with the AAC, requiring athletes to take advantage of programs aimed at helping them prepare for life as a stipulation of receiving financial support from the USOC, as is supported by the athletes themselves through the 2012 USOC Harris Interactive survey and conversations with AAC members.
- Establish customized NGB accountabilities established in partnership with the NGBs, minimally to include:
  - Annually assessing the education status of each of their incoming rookie national team athletes.
  - Periodically informing their national team athletes of the resources provided to them by the USOC and/or NGB.
  - Annually offering educational information to parents of national team athletes regarding the role of athlete career, education and life skills development and available resources.
  - Including athlete career, education and life skills metrics in their annual report and/or high performance plans.
  - Attending training in athlete career, education and life skills development
  - Host a "Rookie Orientation" program developed and deployed by the USOC and/or USOC partners focused on life skills, professional development, and career and education program awareness.

- Informing the USOC Career and Education Department when elite team athletes retire from sport to facilitate transitional programming.

- ***The USOC should actively educate its NGBs about the role of athlete career, education and life skills development in elite performance, and the resources available to facilitate it.***

Periodic seminars and forums for NGB coaches, high performance directors, and career, education and life skills personnel should be established. Anecdotally, the resources currently available for athlete career, education and life skills development are not widely understood by the athletes. The Working Group feels that the coaches and parents of athletes are the key advisors to and influencers of the athletes, and should therefore be educated in the role that athlete career, education and life skills development plays in athlete performance development, how to best guide and support the athlete, and in the resources available to support that development.

- ***The USOC should expand the type of athlete career, education and life skills development services offered.***

The USOC currently offers high-value athlete career and education development resources including access to college and graduate courses (DeVry University), career consultation, job placement assistance and career development seminars (Adecco). As the USOC implements the recommendations set forth above, there will likely be a marked increase in demand for both increased quantity and type of services offered.

Job placement assistance is considered – by far – the most valuable program to active Olympians. Accordingly, job placement services have the highest potential to positively impact athletic performance, and the USOC should aggressively pursue expansion of its job placement services.

#### Required Resources

The Working Group recognizes that the implementation of these recommendations will require increased manpower and expertise, and believes that deployment of resources for athlete career, education and life skills programs are appropriate within the overall context of the USOC's mission.

The Working Group is also sensitive to the reality that expanding this programming may divert resources away from other more basic or more impactful athlete performance programming if not approached carefully. Therefore, the viewpoint of the Working Group is that required additional resources can and should be generated specifically through partners and donors operating in the areas of career, education and life skills who can engage with the USOC in their area of specialty, or who can derive additional value through engaging in career, education and life skills programs, as has largely been the case to date.

Additionally, it is the view of the Working Group that expanded and effective use of appropriate technology will allow the program to scale effectively.

- ***Conclusion of Executive Summary*** -

## **Purposes, Objectives, Perspectives and Activities of the Working Group**

The purpose of the USOC Athlete Career and Education Working Group is to evaluate the role of athlete career and education development in supporting the mission of the United States Olympic Committee, and to propose recommendations to the USOC Board of Directors and Chief Executive Officer to integrate athlete career and education development into a focused organizational strategy. Additionally, the Working Group added an evaluation of life skills development to its scope.

The Working Group consisted of a diverse set of members, which included individuals with personal experience in integrating career, education and life skills into elite athletic performance, making the transition away from elite sport, and in providing career, education and life skills tools and leadership to Olympians, Paralympians and hopefuls. Working Group members included the following individuals:

1. **Luke Bodensteiner**, Chairman - two-time NCAA Champion and cross country skiing Olympian and Executive Vice President, Athletics, US Ski & Snowboard Association
2. **Bob Berland** – two-time judo Olympian, Silver Medalist, Olympic Coach, Entrepreneur and Motivational Speaker
3. **Joe Castiglione** – Vice President for intercollegiate Athletics Program and Director of Athletics, University of Oklahoma
4. **Benita Fitzgerald-Mosley** – two-time track and field Olympian, Gold Medalist and Chief of Sport Performance for USA Track & Field
5. **John Hereford** – Founding Member and Partner, Oak Leaf Energy Partners
6. **Jon McCullough** – two-time soccer Paralympian, Vice Chair of the USOC’s Athletes’ Advisory Council and Deputy Director of Man Up
7. **Matt O’Connor** – Senior Vice President for the US Staffing Business and Software Solutions, Monster.com
8. **Sharon Thomas Parrott** – Senior Vice President, External Relations & Global Responsibility, DeVry Education Group
9. **Joyce Russell** – President, Adecco Staffing U.S., Adecco Group North America
10. **Darrin Steele** – former Olympic Job Opportunities Program athlete placed with The Home Depot, two-time bobsled Olympian and current CEO, USA Bobsled & Skeleton Federation
11. **Nikki Stone** – Olympic Gold Medalist in freestyle aerials skiing, Inspirational Speaker and Sports Psychology Consultant

### *Working Group Objectives*

Over the course of its work, the Working Group focused on three objectives:

- Assess the relationship between athlete career programs and competitive success.
- Make recommendations, within existing budgets and resources, for a focused career and education strategy.
- Present options for programs that could be implemented given incremental program resources.

### *Working Group Perspectives*

The working group examined the topic of athlete career and education development with the following perspectives:

- The USOC has been a global leader in the establishment of an athlete career and education program, having provided resources in this area for more than 20 years.
- The USOC has been highly effective in developing athlete career and education resources through strategic partners.
- Having recently achieved international competitive excellence at the highest level in Vancouver and London, improvement and expansion of holistic athlete development would provide a unique opportunity for the USOC to further differentiate itself as an Olympic sports organization and thereby provide resources that could improve sport performance among American athletes.

### *Working Group Methodology*

The Working Group addressed the topic of athlete career and education through the lens of athlete performance and successful transition away from elite sport. Additionally, the Working Group conceptualized an "athlete career and education pipeline", which could be integrated with existing athlete development pipelines to holistically deliver personal and performance development to athletes. The concept of a pipeline led the Working Group to add "life skills" to its analysis and overall approach as the three areas overlap and are often intertwined.

Through the framework of a pipeline, the Working Group was able to analyze the assets and programs currently in place to address the topic, as well as the components that would be desirable to offer to athletes in their development. The Working Group was also able to use the framework to develop strategies that would lead to an integrated organizational approach, involving both the USOC and the NGBs.

The Working Group identified three main areas of focus in its process, which required deeper analysis and were therefore assigned to three sub-groups for development:

- Development and analysis of the athlete career, education and life skills pipeline

The athlete career, education and life skills pipeline group worked to determine an optimal progression of career preparation programs that could and should be deployed around athletes within the context of the demands required by elite sport preparation and competition, and with the objective of optimizing elite athletes' ability to successfully make the transition away from elite sport when that time comes. The goal of this group was to organize existing resources into a progression, which could be entered into at any point by athletes, and to identify critical areas which are currently resource deficient.

- The role of accountabilities in creating the required culture

A sub-group consisting of NGB leaders worked to determine the requirements necessary to facilitate a culture within the USOC all 48 of its NGBs that would both value effectively address the implementation

of performance-enhancing integration of career, education and life skills programming (as defined by the pipeline), and increase the likelihood of successful transition from elite sport.

- Optimization of existing resources and development of additional required resources

The resources group focused on the athlete career, education and life skills pipeline, developing and evaluating specific solutions to populate the pipeline with the required programming and resources. The group also assessed the additional manpower, technology and organization required to effectively raise the awareness of the program and scale its deployment.

Throughout the process, the Working Group sought data and feedback from multiple sources and stakeholders. The Working Group's input process included: (a) historical perspectives of past and current USOC programs in this area; (b) past and current surveys of U.S. Olympians; (c) survey of activities and best practices in over 20 National Olympic Committees worldwide; (d) review of international studies regarding the topic of elite athlete transition and NOC policy; (e) panel discussion with the USOC's Athlete Advisory Council and NGB Council; (f) individual experiences of athletes facing career challenges while active as elite athletes and experiences of athletes who have experienced and successfully dealt with transitional challenges; (g) interim reviews with key USOC executive, organizational development, athlete performance, communication, marketing and fundraising staff.

## **Key Findings**

### *Assessing the Relationship between Career, Education and Life Skills Development, and Competitive Success*

While the USOC has had athlete career and education programs in place for at least 20 years, and the International Olympic Committee and at least 20 other National Olympic Committees currently offer athlete career, education and life skills programming of their own, little evidence exists to validate the relationship between such programs and competitive success. To the best of the knowledge of the Working Group, no studies have assessed the performance effects of a career and education development strategy.

Additionally, other external professional sports organizations - such as the NFL - have operated career, education and life skills programs. And while they have also attempted to correlate career and education development to athlete performance, they have not been able to validate such a relationship.

Nevertheless, the Working Group is unanimous in agreement that integrating career, education and life skills development into elite athlete performance programming will create two significant benefits, namely:

- Improved athletic performance
- Enhance Olympism within the Movement and nation contributing to a positive organizational image for the USOC.

### *Improved Athletic Performance*

USOC and NGB experience demonstrates that establishing elite athletic performance is a complex task, requiring strong leadership and management, and the integration of a multitude of activities and services including technical coaching, physical conditioning, performance psychology, nutritional management, effective training recovery, medical support, training venues, technology, media management, logistical support, etc.

Only in rare instances, however, has athlete career, education and life skills development been fully integrated into the performance programs for elite athletes. And in cases where that integration has occurred, that has only been a recent phenomenon and those programs have not been established for a sufficient period of time to assess the relationship between integration of athlete career, education and life skill development and performance. Currently, athlete career, education and life skills programs are offered as non-integrated services, made available on an as-available and as-requested basis.

***“The USOC’s Team USA Career Program has impacted my life in so many positive ways. Less than one year ago, I was considering retiring from sport because of financial constraints and the lack of work opportunities that would accommodate a very demanding training schedule. I was blessed with a job opportunity at General Electric which provided financial and intellectual stability that eliminated superfluous stress allowing me to channel my energy more efficiently and surpass personal records in my sport that I never dreamed I could reach.”***



- ***Emma Preuschl, two-time Paralympian and 2008 Paralympic Silver Medalist (rowing)***

Elite athletes can generally be categorized in two ways; those who are personally motivated to advance their education and professional careers despite the training demands placed on them as elite athletes, and those whose education and professional career development is relegated in order to focus solely on their athletic careers. The performance implications for the athletes falling into the first category are more easily identifiable:

- Elite sport, career, education and life skills development are all demanding activities, requiring time, energy, commitment and focus. While not mutually exclusive, integrating elite sport and education, career and life skills development requires management, counseling, easy access to tools, and educated support from the individuals involved in the management of the athlete – namely coaches, teachers, employers, mentors, performance psychologists, and management personnel. Additionally, the book "The Global Sporting Arms Race" found that in a sample of six nations, athletes who make the decision to engage in sport as their profession often do so at the detriment of a longer-term career after their elite sport has ended. Without this integrated and educated support, all aspects of the athlete's life are at risk of suffering.

The performance implications for the athletes falling into the latter category are less easily identifiable. However, the Working Group identified the following possible performance benefits associated with the integration of career, education and life skills development:

- Longer athletic careers – athletes do not need to make the choice between pursuing elite sport or career, education and life skills development. If taken as an integrated approach, athletes can use a long athletic career to fully prepare themselves to enter the workforce when the time is right for them, alleviating the perceived need to finish university studies in four years, enter the workforce at a typical age, etc.
- Improved focus on athletics – when career, education and life skills development are effectively integrated into an athlete's performance plan (in a way that does not compromise the athlete's performance), a sense of confidence and wellbeing about the future after elite sport can alleviate the stress and anxiety associated with the uncertainty of what happens after elite sport. A 2001 Monster.com survey of over 400 Olympians and hopefuls revealed that 67% fear an emotional letdown following their elite athletic career due to concern that their athletic commitment delays their long-term career aspirations and advancement. This fear is not unfounded – the survey also reveals that 43% of those athletes actually experienced trouble entering the workforce following their athletic career. Additionally, a 2003 study submitted to the IOC entitled: "Facilitating the Development of the Elite Athlete: an Analysis of Elite Athletes' Needs and the Role of the National Olympic Committee" noted that the most common needs of elite athletes to maximize "personal and performance development were maintaining balance in life, career and education opportunities". Eighty-five percent of those interviewed for the study cited the importance of career and education programs for elite athlete development.
- Balanced Lifestyle – at certain points of each year, and within each Olympic cycle, elite athletes have time to do something outside of sport. Providing athletes with education or career development can refresh an athlete's motivation for sport.
- Reduce the stress of injury – when an athlete confronts a major injury, they may be left with significant unoccupied time, which can be productively filled with education, career and life skills development, thereby reducing the stressors of lost time and worry about recovery.
- Better understanding of how to manage a professional athletic career – the demands of a professional athletic career require excellent time management, networking and speaking skills, and evaluative skills which, if enhanced by career and education development, will provide for more fruitful athletic careers.
- Family engagement – parents and spouses are naturally concerned about their child's/spouse's future. Oftentimes family members may view career, education and life skills as being more important than elite sport. This can often lead an athlete to an "either – or" decision, or lead them to dedicate a shorter period of their lives to elite sport. If family members are re-assured that career, education and life skills development can co-exist with elite sport, they may be more likely to encourage their children's/spouse's participation in sport both at the grassroots and elite levels. Furthermore, some studies correlate physical exercise and learning ability, meaning that active athletes are more capable of effective learning while they are training than after they stop (Spark, Ratey, John J., MD).

***Upon entering the Athlete Career Program, I was able to develop the necessary skills that would allow me to meet both my athletic and professional goals, through the many hours of one-on-one coaching I received. I now know that I am in the best possible situation as I get ready for Beijing.***



***Keeth Smart, Three-time Olympian and 2008 Olympic silver medalist (fencing) who benefitted from the Athlete Career Program after contemplating retirement from sport in 2007.***

### *Enhanced Olympism within the USOC contributing to a positive organizational image*

Other non-Olympic professional sports organizations that were interviewed indicated that their main impetus for establishing athlete career and education development programs was to address negative behavior and character issues. These organizations have found that the largest benefit that they derive from these programs comes in the form of establishing a positive organizational image through their athletes. While the USOC currently enjoys a very positive organizational image, the behavior of a single athlete can positively or negatively affect that image as a role model in their community. Therefore, the Working Group shares the belief that career, education and life skills development programs will enhance *Olympism* within the USOC contributing to a positive organizational image:

- Addressing negative behavior – career, education and life skills programming that is integrated with elite sport programming is an effective use of an athlete's time not dedicated to sport, and can divert them from negative behavior and environments.
- Role models – mentors, teachers, networks and employers can all serve as positive role models for athletes, reinforcing standards of behavior, and in some cases providing accountability for behavior.
- Giving back – athletes are perceived as being more likely to stay engaged with and give back to the USOC and the NGBs if they are assisted through their transition from sport, and if they have been given the tools to succeed in life after athletics.
- Athlete advocacy – athletes prepared to make the transition away from elite sport are believed to be more likely to retire when the time is right (rather than hanging onto sport after their elite performances are behind them), and athletes forced into early retirement through injury or non-selection are believed to be more likely to appreciate the USOC and their NGB if they are more prepared to enter into the new phase of their life. Additionally, athletes in career and life skills development programs are trained to market themselves, network and communicate positively, enhancing the image of the Olympic movement and creating multiple personal connections.
- Brand enhancement – The USOC is responsible for the well-being of America's men and women, boys and girls who comprise Team USA. Athletes successful in all aspects of their lives enhance the USOC's brand image and inspire Americans as well as future generations of athletes.

*I would like to thank you for the lead. I'm glad to see the USOC has my best interest at heart.*



- *Kevin Young – two-time Olympian and Olympic Gold Medalist (400m hurdles – 1992) upon receiving information about the Global Olympic Marketing Opportunity the USOC created with Coca-Cola Global through the Athlete Career Program*

### **The Role of the USOC and its NGBs in Athlete Career, Education and Life Skills Development**

The USOC currently acts as an aggregator of Career and Education resources, which are then distributed to athletes and NGBs upon request. To the knowledge of the Working Group, the distribution and activation of resources has never been part of an integrated USOC organizational strategy.

Deriving the benefits of enhanced athletic performance and positive organizational image through the integration of athlete career, education and life skills development will require leadership by the USOC, and a commitment to a culture that values successful athlete transition and the development of athletes' career and education alongside- and as part of - the development of their athletic performance. The Working Group views this activity to be within the scope of the USOC and recommends that the USOC play a leadership role in integrating athlete career, education and life skills development into the strategic framework of developing elite performance and positive organizational image.

NGB engagement in athlete career, education and life skills development currently varies widely across the NGBs surveyed. In rare cases, athlete career and education development is integrated into an overarching organizational strategy. In many cases, it is a more informal function, and in others the activity is non-existent.

NGBs play an essential role in the implementation of athlete career, education and life skills development. NGBs manage the quadrennial, annual and day-to-day performance planning for athletes, and are the closest point of connection to the athletes. NGB accountability includes athlete development, performance and behavior. In that NGBs are responsible for implementation of athlete programming, NGBs stand to gain from USOC leadership and establishment of a culture that values athlete career, education and life skills as an integrated performance and positive organizational image strategy.

### **Recommended Actions**

The Working Group assessed the topic of athlete career, education and life skills development from the standpoint of USOC leadership, NGB implementation, athlete experience and desire, and resource development and provision, and has developed seven key recommendations for consideration by the USOC Board of Directors and CEO.

**1. *The USOC should lead by establishing a culture that values athlete career, education and life skills development as a performance enhancer, and that values successful athlete transition away from elite sport.***

The Working Group recommends that the USOC Board of Directors seize the opportunity to further differentiate itself as a professional sports organization by emphasizing holistic athlete development through its programs and partners, highlighting athlete success stories of integration of elite athletics and career/education/life skills, and by creating and emphasizing unique offerings for athletes that will enhance their sport performance, blunt the difficulties associated with transition away from elite sport, and provide them with guidance and tools that will enhance their entire lives.

Whereas the USOC, in partnership with its NGBs, have created "athlete development pipelines" to define the performance development pathways and the resources and programs necessary to successfully move athletes through those pathways, the USOC should work in conjunction with each NGB to develop "athlete career, education and life skills pipelines" that define the resources and programs to be deployed around the athletes at the various stages of athletic development. Fusing the athletes' sport development with the career, education and life skills pipelines at the NGB level will reinforce for NGBs the imperative of athlete career, education and life skills development within athletic performance, and ensure delivery of athlete career, education and life skills programs early and often throughout their athletes' careers.

An athlete career, education and life skills pipeline should express the sequential order to all career, education and life skills resources available to the athlete and the NGB. As with an athlete development pipeline, entry into the various programs should be facilitated at any step along the pipeline. However a sequential building of skills that starts early in an athlete's elite career and is a constant function of their development will facilitate the most effective progression toward the eventual progression away from elite sport.

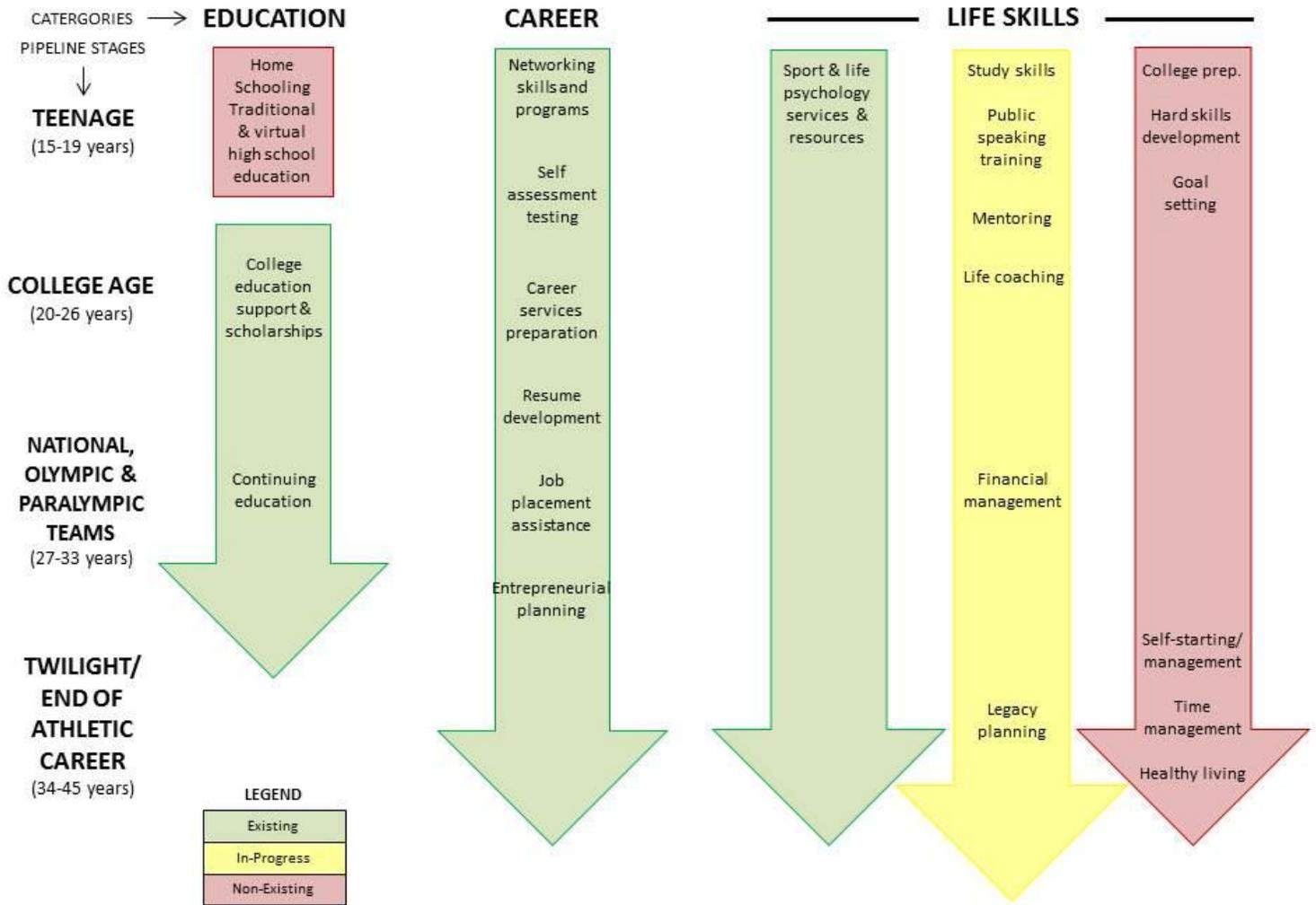
A well-designed pipeline will also help the USOC to determine the amount of resources required at each stage of development, evaluate efficiency of deployment of existing resources, identify new resources which should be developed, evaluate the efficacy of new resources, and track the organizational effectiveness of the program.

A well-designed pipeline can serve as a leadership and education tool for the USOC and the NGBs when conceptualizing, building and evaluating plans and programs.

Additionally, the USOC Board of Directors may take the additional step of encouraging and allowing NGBs to identify and establish minimum requirements of athletes within the pipeline to further reinforce the notion that, to be effective, preparation for transition out of elite sport must occur early in an athlete's career, and that preparation is a continuous process that must be delivered often to the athlete throughout his or her elite sporting career. Examples of requirements may be attendance at a Rookie Orientation program, completion of a high school degree, or counseling with and academic or career counselor.

An example of an Athlete Career, Education and Life Skills Pipeline is included here to provide a starting point:

### HOLISTIC ATHLETE DEVELOPMENT PIPELINE



**2. The USOC should further evaluate the role that athlete career, education and life skills development plays in athletic performance.**

The Working Group was unable to locate any studies worldwide that have attempted to draw a correlation between athlete career, education and life skills development and athletic performance. In order to better quantify and understand the relationship, the Working Group recommends that the USOC – through its Sport Performance Division or in partnership with U.S. universities or international partners such as the University of Salzburg or the IOC – undertake a scientific study to examine the link

between athlete career and education development and athletic performance. The Working Group understands that this is a long-term project, but through the collection of data starting now and continuing through the quad, the results will provide context for the integration of programs into NGB performance evaluations and planning.

Additionally, a number of surveys have been conducted with American athletes regarding the topic (Monster.com/Harris Interactive, 2001 and USOC/Harris Interactive, 2012), and these have provided anecdotal evidence of the positive effect of athlete career, education and life skills development on athletic performance, and conversely the negative effects of not engaging in such programming.

These surveys have provided the following information:

- a. 67% of elite athletes report to having a fear of an emotional letdown after transition from elite sport, and 61% reveal that they actually experience such a letdown.
  - b. 43% of elite athletes experience trouble entering the workforce after transition.
  - c. The average age of retirement from elite sport is 28.6 years old, significantly later than the typical age of entering the workforce. Nearly 60% of Olympians retired from elite sport before the age of 30.
  - d. 78% of Olympians cited financial reasons, injury, non-selection to the national team and wanting to start a family or career as reasons for retirement from sport.
  - e. Approximately one quarter of retired Olympians were extremely or very concerned about life after elite sport.
  - f. 43% of retired Olympians say they would have continued with elite sport if they had a better sense of what they would be doing after their elite sport careers.
  - g. Some of the biggest barriers to transition from elite sport as reported by Olympians are education, timing, money and experience. Nearly 60% reported that they would do something different to prepare for their transition away from elite sport, notably finishing school, networking more, working in a career field, and trying to plan ahead.
  - h. Approximately one third of Olympians feel it is psychologically extremely hard or very hard to transition from elite sport, and 38% reported that they were unprepared mentally to make the transition. This lack of preparation is tied to early retirement due to injury, and not being prepared for what to expect in life after elite sport. 40% of Olympians retired from elite sport earlier than they had expected, and more than half of those were unsure about what to expect next.
- 3. *The USOC should re-organize and reinforce its program management structure to further enhance the promotion and deployment of its athlete Career, Education and Life Skills development services***

Currently, the USOC's athlete career, education and life skills development program is managed by three USOC staff, all in different divisions, who also have multiple responsibilities in addition to athlete career, education and life skills services.

Happily, the 2012 USOC/Harris Survey shows that nearly twice as many current Olympians are aware of the USOC's Athlete Career program as retired Olympians. However, 20% of current Olympians are not aware of the programs. And despite increased awareness, uptake of the available programs has not increased. Among current Olympians, nearly six-in-ten fail to take advantage of the program, which is the same rate for retired Olympians. This is likely a function of insufficient promotion and a lack of variety in resources within the program, lack of a technological solution to allow the programs to easily scale, as well as the relative absence of a culture that values career, education and lifestyle development as a performance enhancer, and one that values successful athlete transition.

Commensurate with foreseeable NGB demand for these services now and in the future, and to address the current challenges of limited athlete awareness and NGB uptake, the USOC should consider increasing the available manpower and broad-based technology to work directly with NGBs in the development of resources, promotion of programs, establishment of the culture both internally and within the NGBs, integration of NGB performance planning, education of NGB personnel, counseling of NGB personnel and/or athletes, and to review NGB accountabilities to the program and the established culture.

The Working Group recognizes that the CEO of the USOC will want to establish his own staffing structure, roles and responsibilities. To assist the CEO, the Working Group suggests that the Sport Performance teams be equipped with personnel trained in and knowledgeable of athlete career, education and life skills development and its role in athlete performance, who can (a) work with a single position of responsibility within USOC for the overall implementation and evaluation of the program; (b) work with the NGBs on planning, program resource allocation, and further resource development; (c) work directly with athletes as recommended by and necessary to the NGBs (including the areas of professional goal-setting and maintaining balanced lifestyles); (d) review NGB performance versus established accountabilities.

The Working Group also recognizes that having a constant presence within the NGBs and around the athletes in the area of athlete career, education and life skills development makes a critical difference in athlete engagement in the program, and the cultural development within the NGBs. Therefore, the Working Group recommends that the USOC work with each NGB through the context of their strategic plan to either (a) establish a position (staff or former athlete experienced in career, education and life skills programming and acting as liaison) dedicated to athlete career, education and life skills development, or (b) assign the duty of coordinating athlete career, education and life skills planning and resource distribution to an existing staff or athlete liaison. The Working Group feels strongly that creating a single point of responsibility within each NGB will facilitate the development of the required organizational culture, thorough and disciplined planning to achieve effective resource deployment, direct connection with the athletes, a mechanism to review and evaluate effectiveness of the programs at the athlete and NGB level, and in some cases direct consultation with the athletes.

As a benchmark, international colleagues at the 2012 IOC Athlete Career Program Forum revealed that the international ratio of staff to athletes engaged in Athlete Career, Education and Life Skills programming is one staff per eighty athletes.

**4. *The USOC should lead its NGBs in the integration of athlete career, education and life skills development into its performance planning.***

To reinforce the role that athlete career, education and life skills development plays in athlete performance, and to create day-to-day integrated activity within the NGBs, athlete career, education and life skills planning must be a function within the NGBs' overall performance plans. The Working Group recognizes that athlete performance development is a complex and multifaceted process, and NGBs will have varying views about the relative importance of the resources required to facilitate athlete career, education and life skills development.

Therefore, it is crucial that NGBs plan their athlete career, education and life skills development programs within the context of their other athlete performance priorities, and prioritize athlete career, education and life skills resource requests within the context of all other NGB performance requirements. Such planning will require close connection to the NGB athletes to determine resource requirements, and the USOC should treat allocation of its career, education and life skills resources in the same way it treats all other performance resources (grants, performance personnel, VIK, OTC resources, etc.). Individual athletes requesting USOC resources should be routed through the NGB designee.

**5. *The USOC should work with NGBs and the AAC to develop customized NGB and athlete accountabilities surrounding the integration of athlete career, education and life skills development***

Establishing the culture required for integration of athlete career, education and life skills development will require adoption by the NGBs. The 2012 USOC/Harris Interactive survey reveals that only about one-in-six Olympians say that while competing did they invest time in preparing themselves for their career after elite sport, and that 20% of retiring Olympians say they are not at all prepared for transition away from elite sport. And in hindsight, nearly all of the surveyed retired Olympians say they would have used the USOC Athlete Career program if they were aware of it and if it were available to them.

The athletes themselves support accountabilities intended to pro-actively prepare athletes for transition away from elite sport. Over half of the surveyed athletes feel that they should be required to take advantage of programs aimed at helping them prepare for life after elite sport before becoming eligible to receive financial support from the USOC.

The Working Group believes that accountabilities are a part of establishing the culture and recommend at a minimum, NGBs should be required to (a) annually assess the education status of each of their incoming rookie national team athletes; (b) periodically inform their national team athletes of the resources provided to them by the USOC and/or NGB; (c) annually offer educational information to parents of national team athletes regarding the role of athlete career, education and life skills development and available resources; (d) include athlete career, education and life skills metrics in their Annual Report and/or high performance plans; (e) attend training in athlete career, education and life skills development; (f) host a "Rookie Orientation" program developed and deployed by the USOC or USOC partners focused on life skills, professional development, and career and education program

awareness; (g) inform the USOC Career and Education department when elite team athletes retire from sport to facilitate transitional programming. Additionally, the USOC should track all athlete career, education and life skills development activities to further analyze and guide NGB programs, ensure service delivery to athletes in need of it, and assess the future development of the program.

**6. *The USOC should actively educate its NGBs about the role of athlete career, education and life skills development in elite performance, and the resources available to facilitate it.***

Anecdotally, the resources currently available for athlete career, education and life skills development are not widely understood by the athletes. The 2012 Harris Interactive survey found that athletes themselves feel that a better job can be done of educating the athletes about the challenges involved with transition from elite sport, and the resources available to prepare for it.

These athletes most readily suggested that more be done to educate the athletes and broaden their perspectives about potential transitional opportunities, create awareness of available career, education and life skills programs early on in their elite careers, exposing them to a wide range of professional opportunities that might be of interest to them, provide career-oriented work experience, and facilitate meeting with other athletes and mentors to learn about career and transition.

The Working Group feels that the coaches and parents of athletes are the key advisors to and influencers of the athletes, and should therefore be educated in the role that athlete career, education and life skills development plays in athlete performance development, how to best guide and support the athlete, and in the resources available to support that development.

Notably, the 2012 Harris Interactive survey shows that less than 20% of Olympians felt that their coaches helped them think about their professional career after elite sport. However, 75% of Olympians say their coaches are (or would have been) supportive of their participation in a program designed to help them prepare for their professional career. Nearly two-thirds of Olympians said their coaches would be supportive of their participation in such programs for over five hours a week.

Periodic seminars and forums for NGB coaches, high performance directors, and career, education and life skills personnel should be established to discuss the role of athlete career, education and life skills development in athlete performance, share best-practices and outcomes, and guide the further development of the program and NGB performance plans. These seminars should also reinforce the role and responsibility of the NGBs within the culture established by the USOC.

Additionally, athlete career, education and life skills personnel in NGBs or Sport Performance teams should be trained specifically by the USOC or USOC partners in career, education and life skills development, and capable of working in concert with certified consultants from partner companies.

**7. The USOC should expand the type of athlete career and life skills development services offered to elite athletes.**

The USOC currently offers high-value athlete career and education development resources including access to undergraduate and graduate courses (DeVry University), career consultation, job placement assistance, and career development seminars (Adecco).

However, as the USOC implements the recommendations set forth above, there will likely be a marked increase in demand for both increased quantity and type of services offered. A systematic approach to the deployment of athlete career, education and life skills development will aid in creating awareness of the programs and their performance benefits, and will create a demand for the sequential building of more robust and sophisticated education, career and life skills progressions.

The USOC Board of Directors should consider that, according to the 2012 USOC/Harris Interactive survey, job placement assistance is considered – by far – the most valuable program to active Olympians. Education services, career planning, and life skills programs are grouped well behind job placement assistance among the surveyed active Olympians. Accordingly, it is our viewpoint that job placement services have the highest potential to positively impact athletic performance. Therefore, the specific recommendations focus primarily on job placement assistance and are placed as the highest priority.

However, it should also be noted that among the surveyed retired Olympians, life skills programming is considered to be the most important resource, slightly outranking job placement service. Education and career planning services are again ranked well behind job placement as well as life skills among retired Olympians. Accordingly, it is our viewpoint that life skills programs have the highest potential to enhance the USOC's positive organizational image. Therefore, the specific recommendations focus on life skills programming as the second-highest priority.

Finally, anecdotal evidence portrays the psychological difficulties that elite athletes face when preparing for the final phases of transition away from elite sport, and during that transition. As a tertiary recommendation, the USOC should consider expanding the scope of its sport psychology program to make psychologists more readily available to transitional athletes. This recommendation can also be satisfied if career and transitional counselors are added to the Sport Performance teams. This recommendation is not expanded upon below.



***At my first Olympics, an older Olympian warned me about “post-Olympic blues” which got me thinking about the depression I was experiencing. But how many people could understand me? I had won an Olympic silver medal and was being celebrated, when, in truth, I felt like a loser! I was there to win, not to take second. This was confusing and isolating for me, as a teenager at the time.***

**- Greg Louganis, four-time Olympian, five-time Olympic medalist (four gold, one silver) in diving.**

Resources the USOC Board of Directors should consider developing and/or expanding include:

1. Expanded job placement services

According to the 2012 USOC/ Harris Interactive survey, 60% of Olympians held a job while training for their sport. This had both positive and negative consequences.

- On the positive side, Olympians reported that working while training provided them with the money they needed to survive, a needed mental break from training, gave them something constructive to do during non-training times, gave them discipline, allowed them to concentrate on something other than sport, and removed worry about their future.
- On the negative side, Olympians reported that working while training, didn't allow them as much time to train as they would have preferred, work could be exhausting, it interrupted their training schedules, prevented them from fully focusing on their sport, and prevented them from traveling to where their sport was most active.
- Additionally, 44% of Olympians felt that the job they did while an elite athlete was not a career-focused job.

The USOC is in a unique position to help athletes balance the requirements of elite sport with career-oriented work, and to make work both viable for elite athletes as well as a positive influence on athletic performance.

The USOC's recently created Team USA Career Program has been successful in placing Olympic and Paralympic hopefuls into jobs and internships with USOC partners, including career-oriented positions and jobs with flexible schedules that can accommodate the demands of elite sport. Recognizing the success of this program, we recommend that the USOC Board of Directors consider ways to enhance this program by:

- i. Expanding the USOC's athlete job placement strategy with USOC partners, using successful job placement partnerships as a model (GE, Hilton, P&G, etc.).
- ii. Demonstrating the USOC's commitment to its athletes by working to expand the job placement commitments of its sponsors.
- iii. Exploring the development of mechanisms to recognize non-sponsor companies that make a commitment to the hiring and professional development of Olympic and Paralympic athletes.
- iv. Partner with professional associations (such as Center for Association Leadership or ASAE) to develop career-oriented employment situations for athletes, customized around their training and competition.
- v. Providing post-Olympic transition seminars or events that may feature a job fair, internship placements and networking opportunities using both USOC partners and non-partners alike.
- vi. Establishing a platform that will promote the unique skills and attributes of Olympians and Paralympians both collectively and individually to employers. Leading online

global career site Monster.com assessed these unique capabilities as discipline, work ethic, ability to perform under pressure, and team spirit – all skills that can lead to success in the workplace and which may be particularly attractive to prospective employers.

- vii. Educating elite athletes in translating their unique skills to the workforce, and assisting them in expressing those unique attributes.
- viii. Establishing regular and credible communications with both partner and non-partner companies' HR departments around the country by partnering with organizations of Human Resource professionals such as the National Human Resources Association, Society for Human Resource Management, or Professionals in Human Resource Management.
- ix. Establish educational modules exposing athletes to the demands of professions identified by athletes as of interest (for example broadcast, coaching, medicine, sports administration, management, etc.). The NFL should be viewed as a potential partner in this area.
- x. Facilitating professional networking with Olympic and Paralympic alumni.

The working group also discussed the similarities between military re-assimilation into the workforce, and the re-assimilation of elite athletes. However, given time constraints, the group did not sufficiently explore the similarities and differences. Nevertheless, organizations such as Hire Heroes USA and the White House's Joining Forces initiative can be considered examples for further exploration.

## 2. Implementation of Life Skills development

- i. Implement financial literacy education for athletes. According to the 2012 USOC/Harris Interactive survey, roughly half of all active Olympians work while training with roughly half of them working at least 20 hours a week on average. Nearly half of those working athletes earn less than \$6,000 annually, and only 15% earn more than \$25,000 annually. Therefore, the ability to handle finances effectively is viewed as important in reducing the stresses associated with personal finance, and in preserving the funding that many athletes need to finance their elite athletic careers. The Working Group recommends that the USOC look to its corporate partners (such as Citi, DeVry, Liberty Mutual, TD Ameritrade, Visa, etc.) to engage in athlete financial literacy education.
- ii. Provide guidance and motivation to athletes wanting to give back in the form of philanthropy, through the expansion of the USOC's Team for Tomorrow program and/or partnership with Athletes for Hope or similar organization to assist in developing career-oriented and life skills development, as well as the development of character and personal values.
- iii. Formalize mentoring opportunities involving Olympic and Paralympic alumni and professional volunteers. Identify former athletes who had had post-athletic career success, and who could form an initial core of a more formal mentoring program focused on athletes in their former sports, or by professional potential. Additionally,

- seek to develop a formal partnership with professional trade organizations such as Young Presidents' Organization (YPO) to develop mentoring opportunities. Develop program guidelines and clearly identify expectations and goals of the program.
- iv. Implementation of life skills training program both as a service to athletes, and a possible career track for athletes.
  - v. Provide public speaking training through a partnership with Toast Masters or similar organizations, and media training through existing channels.

### **Required Resources**

The Working Group recognizes that the implementation of these recommendations will require increased manpower and expertise, both within the USOC and in the NGBs. Therefore, the recommendations to the USOC Board of Directors are laid out sequentially in order to afford the USOC Board and CEO the opportunity to scale the program commensurate with NGB and athlete uptake. Additionally, it is the view of the Working Group that expanded and effective use of technology will allow the program to scale the provision of leadership and education, information sharing, and promotion of the available resources.

The Working Group is also sensitive to the reality that expanding existing athlete career, education and life skills programming may divert resources away from other more basic or more impactful athlete performance programming if not approached carefully. We do believe that deployment of resources for athlete career, education and life skills programs are appropriate within the overall context of the USOC's mission and that the recommendations set forth in this report are important and impactful on athlete performance and will enhance Olympism within the USOC contributing to a positive organizational image. However, the viewpoint of the Working Group is that required additional resources can and should be generated specifically through partners and donors operating in or focused on the field of career, education and life skills who can engage with the USOC in their area of specialty, or who can derive additional value through engaging in career, education and life skills programs, as has largely been the case to date (DeVry, Monster, Adecco, Team USA Career program partners, individual donors, etc.).

We also believe that many of the recommendations would only require a limited amount of investment to derive the intended benefits, and that the USOC currently has the capabilities required to implement many of these strategies in a timely manner if so inclined.

Additionally, proper planning by the NGBs is required to fully assess the need of their individual athletes in the area of career, education and life skills, and to accurately assess the level of impact such programs will have on overall organizational performance.

## Conclusion

The demands that the USOC and its 48 National Governing Bodies place on Olympians, Paralympians and hopefuls requires an immense sacrifice on the part of the athletes who, more often than not will pursue elite sport at the detriment of their future success after elite sport. An integrated and expanded organizational approach to dealing with these challenges will not only facilitate more successful careers for athletes after elite sport, but will also improve athletic performance during an elite sport career, and increase athlete engagement with the USOC, the NGBs, future elite athletes, and Olympic and Paralympic sport after transition from elite athletic careers.

We believe that the USOC is ideally positioned to lead a culture that values and addresses successful athlete transition from elite sport, and differentiates the USOC as an elite sport organization by developing the whole athlete for performance and success now and for the rest of their lives. We believe this to be consistent with, complementary, and in fact essential to the mission of the organization.

Having recently achieved the highest levels of athletic performance in Vancouver and in London, there will never be another time more ideally suited to seizing the opportunity to further develop and differentiate the USOC in this way.

Upon the completion of our six month review on the topic of athlete career, education and life skills, the Working Group believes that the USOC should play a leadership role in the establishment and expansion of such programs within an integrated overall organizational strategy, and lead the development of a culture that values holistic athlete development and successful transition from elite sport. We recommend that the USOC implement the seven recommendations outlined in this report as a starting point for such integration and cultural development. We also recommend that the USOC continue to work collaboratively with NGBs, the AAC, partners and donors to evolve the pipeline and program for the long-term benefit of the athletes, the NGBs and the USOC.



***“The big issue is the black hole that athletes enter when they are done competing. When they retire, a huge part of their identity vanishes.”***

***- Andrew Johnson, two-time Olympian – cross country skiing***