



**Certification Renewal Recommendation Report for
USA Water Polo**
December 7, 2022



**UNITED STATES
OLYMPIC & PARALYMPIC
COMMITTEE**



USA Water Polo Certification Renewal Executive Summary

In April 2022, 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 Water Polo (USAWP).¹ The CRG evaluated USAWP and, based on input from CRG members and the results of NGB Audit's 2021 report², recommends a current rating of Renewal in Good Standing.

The CRG's review of USAWP found that the organization is meeting most of 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. A Compliance Audit, conducted by the USOPC's NGB Audit team in 2021, found that USAWP's bylaws and several of its policies and procedures required revisions to fully meet the NGB Compliance Standards, among other findings. During the NGB remediation period, USAWP resolved most of its findings; however, two remained open through the CRG's deadline to resolve issues within the 2022 certification renewal period. USAWP is aware of and is actively working to resolve the open NGB Audit findings, which require additional NGB Audit testing or longer-term action before they can be closed. The CRG determined that these open findings do not impact USAWP's certification status.

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

As a result of this review, the CRG recommends that USAWP be granted a certification status of Renewal in Good Standing for a four-year certification term ending in 2026.

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

² [NGB Audit Report](#) and [NGB Audit Addendum Report](#)



Organizational Overview

USAWP is the USOPC-certified NGB for water polo and is a division of US Aquatic Sports, which serves as the US member organization to the Fédération Internationale de Natation, the international federation that oversees aquatic sports. The mission of USAWP is “to grow the sport of water polo throughout the United States and win medals in Olympics, World Championships, and Pan American Games.”³ The NGB is staffed by over thirty-five employees⁴, who serve a network of more than 50,000 members and 500 clubs⁵. USAWP’s headquarters is located in Irvine, CA.⁶

Certification History

USA Water Polo was originally certified in January 2021.⁷ The CRG’s certification review was initiated based on USAWP’s scheduled quadrennial certification review. USAWP’s certification status has not been referred for review outside of the standard NGB certification review schedule.

Certification Exceptions⁸

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

Athlete Representation Approval and Exceptions⁹

USAWP requested that the Athlete Representation Review Working Group (ARRWG) approve one competition, the FINA World Championships, as a qualifying event for 10-Year and 10-Year+ status to expand the pool of athletes eligible to serve as athlete representatives. The AARWG approved the competition from 1986 onwards, citing that as it became eligible for women to participate in that year, it is important to ensure equality of opportunity for athletes of both genders to meet the criteria.

USAWP also requested and received approval of five committees to be defined as Designated Committees. These include:

- Audit and Finance
- Ethics and Judicial
- Nominating and Governance
- Competition
- Zone Assembly Delegates

The following committees were approved as Other Committees, as they do not meet the criteria to qualify as Designated Committees, but do otherwise require athlete representation:

- Diversity and Inclusion
- Masters
- Hall of Fame
- National Training Center

These committees do not involve key functions of the organization tied to governance and / or financial function of the NGB. The National Training Center Committee, of note, is charged with working on a plan to have a national training center—not the ongoing function or programming of such a center.

Certification Review¹⁰

³ [Mission, About USAWP](#), USAWP website.

⁴ [Staff Directory](#), USAWP website.

⁵ [Mission, About USAWP](#), USAWP website.

⁶ [Contact Us](#), USAWP website.

⁷ Refer to the Appendix for details on the initial certification.

⁸ Refer to the Appendix for details on exception requests to the NGB Compliance Standards.

⁹ Refer to the Appendix for details on athlete representation exception requests.

¹⁰ Refer to the Appendix for details on the review standards and process for information related to NGB Audit’s Report on USAWP.



Governance and Compliance

The CRG determined that USAWP is fulfilling the Governance and Compliance-related responsibilities for an NGB. USAWP has adopted a code of conduct, conflict of interest policy, and gifts and entertainment policy, has made these policies available on its website, and has defined procedures to address violations of these policies. In addition, USAWP has not been the subject of any complaints filed with the Dispute Resolution Unit in the last four years.

In 2021, USAWP underwent an investigation¹¹ into its governance structure and past actions, resulting in findings, requirements, and recommendations for reform. USAWP shared the results of the investigation with its members, and actively addressed areas of concern. USOPC Compliance verified USAWP's corrective actions and cited no ongoing concerns.

NGB Audit found that USAWP's bylaws, code of conduct and statement of ethics initially missed elements and content to fully meet NGB Compliance Standards. During the remediation period, USAWP updated these policies to include the missing elements and content, which NGB Audit verified meets the NGB Compliance Standards.

NGB Audit also found that USAWP's bylaws did not require an affiliate board position be added if an affiliate organization were identified. Additionally, the definition of independent perspective in the bylaws did not initially meet all the requirements. USAWP updated its bylaws to meet the requirements, which NGB Audit verified as fully compliant.

Lastly, NGB Audit found that USAWP's conflict of interest policy did not contain required elements and that the policy was not posted on its website. Furthermore, during initial testing, NGB Audit found that one of the ten individuals in the testing sample did not complete the conflict of interest disclosure form properly, and USAWP did not provide evidence of disclosure review. USAWP updated the policy and posted the revised copy on its website to remediate this aspect of the finding. During follow-up testing, USAWP provided evidence of disclosure review, although, NGB Audit was unable to verify if forms were reviewed in a reasonable timeframe or consistent with the requirements of the policy. Additionally, two of the tested disclosure forms did not contain a date of completion. USAWP has made improvements, however, this finding will remain open in 2023 for NGB Audit to re-test the disclosure review process. Although this finding remains open, it does not impact USAWP's certification status.

Financial Standards and Reporting Practices

The CRG determined that USAWP demonstrates financial operational capability to administer its sport and is financially and operationally transparent, maintaining accountability to its members and to the USOPC.

In the 2021 Compliance Audit, NGB Audit initially found that USAWP needed to include additional controls in its financial policies. USAWP updated its financial policies and procedures to include missing elements, which NGB Audit verified as meeting the NGB Compliance Standards.

Furthermore, NGB Audit found that USAWP allocated all its special project expenses to both its individual special project as well as the Women's National Team, which overstated the funded amount on the final grant report for USOPC funding. During testing, NGB Audit also found that several expenses were not approved in a timely manner. NGB Audit verified by reconciling and tying out to the general ledger that USAWP did not duplicate expenses for the most recently submitted final funding report. In review of the updated financial policies and procedures, NGB Audit identified that USAWP added timeliness for expense

¹¹ Refer to USA Water Polo's Compliance Matters description on page 11 of the [USOPC Compliance Assessment within the 2021 Impact Report](#) for details.



approvals. USAWP completed its remediation work, which NGB Audit verified as fully compliant with NGB Compliance Standards.

Athlete Protection and Rights

The USOPC is not aware of any non-compliance issues with its anti-doping rules and requirements and those of the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency. The CRG also found that USAWP 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 USOPC is not aware of any cases it has received in the past four years concerning USAWP 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 USAWP that the USOPC was required to report.

In May 2022, the Center conducted its most recent Administrative Audit¹² of USAWP's implementation of policies required by the Center's SafeSport Code and Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policies that resulted in no findings or required corrective action. USAWP met the Center's compliance standards in Education and Training, Communication and Reporting, Quality Control System, and Local Affiliated Organizations. Although USAWP received "implemented" ratings in all categories of evaluation, the Center recommended that "USAWP must consolidate language within the Quality Control System to accurately articulate all of the protocols required to ensure day-of/same-day registrants are checked against the banned/suspended list, received the MAAPP and reporting policy and, if required to be SafeSport trained, are checked for current training". USAWP updated its language in its quality control system as recommended, and the Center confirmed remediation in July 2022's Corrective Actions Update form.¹³ In November 2021, the Center conducted its most recent Event Audit¹⁴ at the 2021 USA Water Polo Kap7 Champions Cup that resulted in no findings or directions for corrective actions.

In the 2021 Compliance Audit, NGB Audit found that USAWP had to make minor updates to its background check policy to meet NGB Compliance Standards. During the remediation period, USAWP updated its policy with the missing elements, which NGB Audit verified as fully compliant.

Sport Performance

USAWP 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. USAWP established clear selection procedures and executed them effectively to name and train Team USA athletes for Delegation Events.

NGB Audit found that while USAWP's bylaws outline the event sanctioning requirements, the sanctioning documents initially did not reference the requirements. To remediate the finding, USAWP updated its event sanctioning document to reference the requirements outlined in the bylaws. NGB Audit reviewed the updated event sanctioning document and now considers USAWP compliant.

Operational Performance

The CRG determined that USAWP is meeting most of the Operational Performance standards. The organization demonstrates managerial capability to administer its sport, keeps current insurance policies, demonstrates financial sustainability, maintains grievance procedures, and enforces a whistleblower and anti-retaliation policy.

¹² [US Center for SafeSport 2022 Administrative Audit Report – USA Water Polo](#), May 12, 2022.

¹³ [US Center for SafeSport Corrective Actions Update – USA Water Polo](#), July 22, 2022.

¹⁴ [US Center for SafeSport Event Audit Report – 2021 USA Water Polo Kap7 Champions Cup](#), November 5-6, 2021.



In the 2021 Compliance Audit, NGB Audit found that USAWP needed to update its whistleblower and anti-retaliation policy, as well as its grievance policy and procedures, which were partially outlined in its bylaws, to include elements to meet NGB Compliance Standards. Within the remediation period, USAWP updated these policies and procedures consistent with the bylaws, which NGB Audit verified as fully compliant.

Furthermore, NGB Audit found that although USAWP has a strategic plan that includes athletic and organization-wide initiatives, management did not initially document periodic progress reports to the board. To remediate this finding, USAWP created and implemented a Strategic Plan Update form to document and disseminate the progress towards executing its strategic plan. NGB Audit will verify whether USAWP documents progress within the Strategic Plan Update Form and shares it with board after its next meeting. This finding remains open but does not impact USAWP's certification status.

USAWP maintains a 2021-2024 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DE&I) Action Plan that describes its DE&I vision and strategy for the coming years. USAWP submitted its action plan to the USOPC with sufficient detail, meeting the NGB Compliance Standards. USAWP's action plan contains eight objectives with specific initiatives that target diverse audiences. The action plan also includes success measures and timelines respective to each objective. The objectives range from generating funds specifically for DE&I initiatives, creating an equity ombudsman position, developing a transgender policy, as well as developing community programming to provide access to the sport for those who encounter economic or financial barriers.

Conclusion

The CRG concluded that USAWP is performing satisfactorily overall based on input from the CRG members and the results of NGB Audit's 2021 Compliance Audit. USAWP addressed the identified deficiencies that impact its certification status and continues to address the remaining open audit findings that do not impact its certification status. Accordingly, the CRG recommends that USAWP's certification as a member organization of the USOPC be renewed with a status 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.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶

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.¹⁷ 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.

¹⁵ See §220521(a) of the Ted Stevens Olympic and Amateur Sports Act.

¹⁶ NGB Certification Policy, Section 1.

¹⁷ The CRG uses a four-year lookback period during this review process.