



February Scheduled Board Meeting Minutes

USA Fencing (United States Fencing Association, Inc.)

2/15/2025 6:00 PM MST

Attendance

Present:

Members: Donald Alperstein, Peter Barton, Emily Bian, Jade Burroughs, Lauryn Deluca, Marie Donoghue, Jackie Dubrovich, Andrey Geva, Molly Hill, Kat Holmes, Mike Joo, Selina Kaing, Damien Lehfeldt, Andrea Pagnanelli, Maria Panyi, Scott Rodgers, Abdel Salem

Guests: Phil Andrews, Tabitha Chamberlin, Glen Hollingsworth, Christina Pachuta, Brad Suchorski

I. Zoom Access Information

Zoom Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89597906700?pwd=1bbUEpf1edT38jbDGleEyhuSbAamaK.1>

Password: 447724

II. Call to Order (Presenters: Damien Lehfeldt)

- Roll Call
- General Announcements
- Opening Remarks - Chair
- Moment of Remembrance
 - Dave Micahnik OLY
 - Edwin "Buzz" Hurst II
 - Yves Auriol
 - Marcel Miernik
 - Jeffrey Alan Checkes OLY
 - Losef Vitebskiy
- Conflict of Interest Declaration

Kat Holmes, on behalf of the USA Fencing Athlete Commission, read the following letter: First of all, we would like to emphasize that FFO does not speak for, nor represent, USA Fencing's membership, but rather an unspecified subsection. We, the Athlete Council, were elected by the athletes of USA Fencing. In this statement, we speak for the athletes of USA Fencing who disagree with FFO, yet whom FFO claims to speak for.

USA Fencing's 2024-2028 Strategic Plan clearly states that expanding and growing the sport is a central focus for this quad. In line with this strategic goal, most programs coming out of the DEIB office are geared towards doing just this: expanding the sport of fencing while actively supporting underserved communities. The largest element of DEIB in a membership organization such as USA Fencing is simple: expanding belonging to the organization, expanding retention, and expanding opportunities to be involved in fencing. It should also not be forgotten that DEIB ranges from ethnic diversity all the way

through making fencing accessible for deaf or blind individuals and increasing the presence of women in our sport. Furthermore, The USOPC requires each NGB to have a DEIB “Champion” and requires each NGB to submit a DEIB action plan as part of their funding requirements each year. There also seems to be a misconception regarding the funds that are spent on DEIB. Contrary to the figures being floated, the net expenditure on DEIB is only \$17,000 – a drop in the bucket of USA Fencing’s overall budget.

Re: Anti-DEIB policies

The Athlete Council is united in the belief that USA Fencing should neither comply with, nor is obliged to comply with, the executive order signed by the Trump administration regarding DEIB positions in institutions. USA Fencing is neither a federally funded organization nor an educational institution. As such, it has autonomy over the rules and standards that apply to its members. Furthermore, this is an issue of operations and not governance and, as such, the Board of Directors has no purview over such matters. We would also like to add that we are appalled that the motion to abolish USA Fencing’s DEIB office and National Office position invoked our fellow athlete, the late Peter Westbrook. To equate and dishonor his name by associating him with the dismantling of so much of his life’s work is reprehensible.

Re: Anti-trans policies

The Athlete Council is united in the belief that USA Fencing neither should comply with, nor is obliged to comply with the executive order signed by the Trump administration regarding trans athletes in sport. As previously stated: USA Fencing is neither a federally funded organization, nor an educational institution. As such, it has autonomy over the rules and standards that apply to its members. Furthermore, there is a paucity of literature examining the impact of gender reassignment, either hormonally or surgically, on performance in the sport of

fencing. Until the time at which peer-reviewed scientific evidence is published on this matter or USA Fencing is required to comply with rule or regulation set forth by the USOPC or the FIE, the Athlete Council will remain firm on this stance.

The Athlete Council represents a body of members that come from various walks of life, that have benefited from such efforts to promote their belonging and advancement in the sport. To stop said efforts is to majorly affect the next generation of fencers.

III. CEO, Operations & Financial Reports (Presenters: Phil Andrews, Tabitha Chamberlin)

 [Operations Update - Phil Andrews.pdf](#)

IV. Committee, Resource Groups, and Task Force Updates (as applicable) (Presenters: Damien Lehfeldt)

- Parents Council Meeting Notes
- Paralympic Development Resource Group Report

- Audit Committee Report
- Coaches Committee Report
- USA Fencing Domestic Assignments Report
- International Relations Committee Report
- Tournament Committee Report
- SEMI Committee Report

 [Parents Council Meeting Notes.pdf](#)

 [Paralympic Development Resource Group - Board Report 1.29.25.pdf](#)

 [USA Fencing Audit Committee Report - January 31 - 2025.docx](#)

 [Coaches Committee Report.docx](#)

 [US Fencing Domestic Assignments Bod Report 1302025.docx](#)

 [International Relations Committee Update 2025-01.docx](#)

 [Tournament Committee Report - January 2025.docx](#)

 [SEMI Report Feb 2025.docx](#)

Motion:

Motion to Accept the Reports

Motion moved by Damien Lehfeldt and motion seconded by Lauryn Deluca. Result:
Passed by voice vote

V. Consent Agenda (Presenters: Damien Lehfeldt)

1. That the Board of Directors appoint Briggs Kofford as Auditor for the 2024-25 season by recommendation from the Audit Committee.
 - o **Rationale:** Briggs Kofford have been the Outside Auditor of USA Fencing for over a decade and have done an outstanding job, it is highly recommended to stick with our current audit firm at this time.
2. Approval of the minutes from the December 14, 2024 Board of Directors Meeting

 [December Special Board Meeting Minutes \(4\).pdf](#)

Motion:

Motion seconded by Lauryn DeLuca. Result: Passed by Voice Vote

VI. New Business

A. Hall of Fame Ballot (Presenters: Abdel Salem)

Motion: To approve the 2025 Hall of Fame Ballot for the May 2025 Elections.

Finalized 2026 Ballot Recommendations

Olympic Athletes (3 to be inducted):

- Steve Kaplan
- Tom Losonczy

- Herbert Cohen
- Tim Morehouse
- Kelley Hurley
- Dagmara Wozniak
- Race Imboden
- Ibtihaj Muhammad
- Nicole Ross

Veteran Athlete (1 to be inducted):

- Julie Seal
- Elizabeth Kocab
- Jennette Starks Faulkner
- Anne-Marie Walters

Coach (1 to be inducted):

- Gill Pezza
- Gary Copeland
- Laurie Schiller

Contributor (1 to be inducted):

- Mark Masters
- Leon Auriol
- Gerrie Baumgart
- Peter Harmer
- Jon Moss
- Andy Shaw

Rationale: The sole election in 2025 will be the Hall of Fame Elections. Each year, the HoF Committee sends the Board the slate of candidates for approval.

Motion:

Motion Withdrawn (Abdel Salem).

B. Hall of Fame - Automatic Inductions (Presenters: Abdel Salem)

Motion: To automatically induct any athlete and coach into the USA Fencing Hall of Fame who wins an *individual* Olympic gold medal.

Rationale: The Hall of Fame Committee has offered this recommendation to celebrate the successes of our Olympic gold medal winning legends to ensure they do not potentially crowd out candidates on the cusp of getting in.

Motion:

Motion Withdrawn (Abdel Salem).

C. Hall of Fame Charter (Presenters: Abdel Salem)

Motion: To approve the Hall of Fame Committee Charter as attached.

 [Hall of Fame Charter.pdf](#)

Motion:

Motion Withdrawn (Abdel Salem).

D. Member of Honor Award (Presenters: Damien Lehfeltdt)

Motion: To bestow the “Member of Honor” award for Donald Alperstein, Special Board Member.

Rationale: The Member of Honor Award was created in 2024 as a means to honor exceptional volunteers for career service to USA Fencing.

Donald Alperstein has served as President of USA Fencing. He was legal counsel for 18 years, received the award for service to clubs and divisions, and also got the Jack Baker Award for Service to the USFA in 2013. He's been an At-Large Director for multiple terms, now serving as a Special Board Member. Donald has played a critical role in building the USFA's governance infrastructure including the development of our amended bylaws. Donald has represented the USA on various FIE Commissions, served as an FIE referee, and represented the USA at multiple FIE Congresses.

For his career service to USA Fencing, the movant believes that Donald Alperstein is worthy of being the first person to be inducted as a Member of Honor.

Movant's Note for the Board: Member of Honor requires 2/3 Board approval. Only two persons may be inducted as a Member of Honor per fiscal year.

Motion:

Note: Donald Alperstein stepped out of the room for the discussion on the motion.

Motion seconded by Maria Panyi. Result: Passed by secret ballot vote.

E. President to Board Chair Transition (Presenters: Abdel Salem)

Motion: That USA Fencing issue an acknowledgement that the manner in which Peter Burchard was removed as Chair of the Board (during new business without being placed on the agenda), was mishandled and caused confusion to the membership and distress to Mr. Peter Burchard acting Chair.

Rationale: This will help to clarify and increase the Board transparency to the membership regarding the processes of the Board of Directors. The acting chair at the time, David Arias, has publicly made a similar statement, in a video meeting https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zYK_nbj2Eyg

Motion:

Motion (Abdel Salem) and Second (Maria Panyi) withdrawn during Executive Session.

Motion:

Motion to move to Executive Session

Motion moved by Maria Panyi and motion seconded by Lauryn Deluca. Result: Passed by voice vote

F. Conflict of Interest (Presenters: Abdel Salem)

Motion: Any person that the ethics committee determines has a moderate conflict level should not serve in any position of leadership within the USA Fencing organization, until such time as the conflict is removed or lowered to "Very Minor" or "No Conflict".

Rationale: During the review process the main factor the Ethics Committee looked at was if an individual was in a position in which they could have direct financial gain or some sort of personal benefit from USA Fencing. The committee placed members into one of three categories, noted in the Ethics Committee Report.

If the committee enumerates three levels of conflict, and members with the most significant level of conflict are still allowed to hold leadership positions, then it makes no sense to perform this review at all. If we are doing this conflict check, then it must be meaningful, otherwise it would become another PR gesture that will lead to more membership distrust in our process.

***The Ethics Committee has provided the following response:**

The Ethics Committee notified the Board in their December 14, 2024 report of 5 individuals that the Committee considered to have what were termed as “Moderate Conflicts”. The Committee defined that to include those directly involved in a business or company that may engage or currently does engage with USA Fencing in a financially mutually beneficial way. The Committee does not see these as being conflicts that should prevent these individuals from participating in a meaningful way in their respective roles. The disclosed items are ones that the Committee believes need to be shared with the Board so that the Board can take these considerations into account in its decision-making process. In other words, the Ethics Committee views the identification of this level of potential conflicts as requiring their flagging for Board consideration rather than requiring a mandatory recusal. The Committee is aware that these persons provide important services to USA Fencing, that their other fencing-related interests often gives them additional insight into the world of fencing, and believes that a common-sense conflicts of interest policy that flags potential conflicts of interest for Board consideration, rather than imposing mandatory recusal requirements for these types of potential conflicts, best balances the need for open and transparent decision-making and the need to encourage members of the fencing community to provide their expertise to benefit USA Fencing. The Ethics Committee thanks these individuals for the services they provide to USA Fencing and its members, which are essential to administrative and event operations. The Ethics Committee recommends, as an alternative to the proposed motion by Mr. Salem, that: (1) the requirement that individuals who fall into the “Moderate Conflicts” category should be reported to the Board be memorialized in writing as an appropriate response of the Ethics Committee; and (2) the “Moderate Conflicts” category be memorialized as requiring formal notification to the individuals so categorized of their obligation to recuse themselves from being involved in decisions or discussions in which they have a potential conflict of interest or the appearance of one.

Motion:

Motion seconded by Andrey Geva. Result: Defeated by roll call vote (For: Geva, Salem. Against: Burroughs, DeLuca Donoghue Dubrovich, Hill, Holmes, Lehfeldt, Pagnanelli, Panyi, Rodgers).

G. Y8 Tournament Format (Presenters: Damien Lehfeldt)

Motion: To approve the amended Y8 Competition Format, per the joint recommendations of the Coaches’ Committee and Tournament Committee.

Under this new format:

- Fencers may have the option to compete with either a #0 or #2 sized blade. #0 Blades are optional, but not required. Fencers and coaches may make the developmentally appropriate decision as they see fit.

- Field of play: Y8 competitors will use the full strip length by default. However, per the USA Fencing Operations Manual, local organizers may shorten the field of play so long as that field of play remains in compliance with those outlined in Chapter 3 of the Operations Manual.
- Tournament format can be determined by the tournament organizer (e.g. pools to DE's, two pool, or any other approved format from the athlete handbook), as long as it is published beforehand. The default would be a single round of pools followed by 10 touch eliminations.
- There will **not** be a Y8 national championship, nor will points be tracked at the regional or national level.

Rationale: We, the Board, made an error in prematurely approving the Y8 format in the July 2024 meeting. In the September 2024 meeting, Dr. Abdel Salem motioned to reconsider the approved format and have the Coaches' Committee and Tournament Committee (TC) work in concert to develop a new format. The above recommendations have been vetted and approved by both the TC and Coaches' Committee, and the movant wishes to thank those committee members for their collaboration to come up with a better solution.

Motion:

Motion seconded by Maria Panyi. Result: Passed by voice vote

H. Complaint and Hearing Procedures Update (Presenters: Damien Lehfeltdt)

Motion: to amend our Complaint and Hearing Procedures with new guidance around our informal resolutions process as outlined in the attached document.

Rationale: In order to provide more clarity to our informal resolutions procedure, the G&DC in concert with USA Fencing's compliance manager have made updates to make roles and responsibilities, sanctions, and rights of all parties more transparent.

 [Complaint and Hearing Procedures - Draft Revision - 2-14-25.pdf](#)

Motion:

Motion seconded by Molly Hill. Result: Passed by roll call vote. (For: Burroughs DeLuca, Donoghue, Dubrovich, Hill, Holmes, Lehfeltdt, Pagnanelli, Panyi, Rodgers, Salem. Abstain: Geva).

I. Updated Board Assignments to Committees and Resource Groups (Presenters: Molly Hill)

MOTION: To approve updated assignments for Board members to Committees, Resource Groups, and Councils for the 2024-25 season as detailed in the attached document. In said attachment, removals are noted in red and additions are noted in green. No changes are being made to committee Chairs or Ex-Officio members.

Rationale: In December the Board had a changeover of new Directors (Marie Donoghue, Jade Burroughs, Jackie Dubrovich OLY, and Dr. Scott Rodgers PLY). With the departure of their successors, new assignments to both committee and liaison positions needed to be made. The changes outlined give Ms. Donoghue, Ms. Burroughs, and Ms. Pagnanelli two assignments each and Dr. Rodgers and Ms. Dubrovich three assignments each. Mr. Lehfeltdt, Ms. Hill, and Mr. Salem only have one assignment each but this gives greater flexibility for Task Forces and projects while allowing for involvement by our newest Directors. Ms. Panyi has also accepted a

third assignment bringing her wide range of expertise to the Parents' Council which needs strong support in its first year.

 [2024-2025 Committee & Resource Groups.xlsx - Jan 2025 Changes.pdf](#)

Motion:

Motion seconded by Damien Lehfeltd. Result: Passed by voice vote

J. International Relations Commitment (Presenters: Damien Lehfeltd)

Motion: To reaffirm USA Fencing's position that Canada, Mexico, and all 23 sovereign nations in the North American continent are welcome at USA Fencing events and are valued partners in promoting a spirit of unity, sportsmanship, and excellence in the sport of Fencing. USA Fencing will continue to support and facilitate the participation of North American athletes in its events, ensuring a fair and inclusive environment for all competitors.

Rationale: In light of current events, Canadian Veterans have made the decision to boycott all NAC's starting in the 2025-2026 seasons. USA Fencing must take a public position welcoming our North American neighbors and make it crystal clear that the North American Cup model has worked for decades and will continue to be a critical part of our high-performance development.

Motion:

Vote on motion as amended.

Motion seconded by Scott Rodgers. Result: Passed by voice vote

Motion:

Motion to Amend: To reaffirm USA Fencing's position that Canada, Mexico, and all 23 sovereign nations in the North American continent *as well as athletes from all nations recognized by the FIE and World Ability Sport* are welcome at USA Fencing events and are valued partners in promoting a spirit of unity, sportsmanship, and excellence in the sport of Fencing. USA Fencing will continue to support and facilitate the participation of North American athletes in its events, ensuring a fair and inclusive environment for all competitors.

Motion moved by Scott Rodgers and motion seconded by Maria Panyi. Result: Passed by voice vote

K. Coaches Committee Charter (Presenters: Andrey Geva)

Motion: To adopt the Coaching Committee Charter as outlined in the attached document.

 [Coaches Committee Charter DRAFT.docx](#)

Motion:

Motion (Geva) and Second (Salem) Withdrawn.

L. Bylaw Amendment - Coaches Committee (Presenters: Andrey Geva)

Motion: That the following amendments to the USA Fencing Amended and Restated Bylaws effective as of September 15, 2024 (“Bylaws”), be approved for publication pursuant to Bylaw Section 14.2.a, and that they be considered for adoption at the next meeting of the Board following the required comment period.

To amend section 12.14.b of USA Fencing's Amended and Restated Bylaws as outlined in the attached document.

Rationale: I believe we need a wider representation on the Coaching Committee. It will give more value and trust to the committee if we add some top names from the coaching community.

I understand that not all ten members could be available for each meeting. However, we can email meetings' minutes to those who couldn't attend and post it on social media for comments and discussions.

Our first and most important priority, in my opinion, is to attract and involve as many coaches as we can into the committee's discussions, so we can understand their needs and how we can help. This way we will be able to effectively represent and advance the interests of USA Fencing's coaching community and address any questions or issues.

***The Coaches Committee is opposed to Mr. Geva's proposed bylaw amendments as written.**

 [Bylaw Amendment - 12.14.b.pdf](#)

Motion:

Vote on motion as amended.

Motion seconded by Abdel Salem. Result: Defeated by roll call vote. (For: Geva, Salem. Against: Burroughs, DeLuca, Donoghue, Dubrovich, Hill, Holmes, Lehfeldt, Pagnanelli, Rodgers. Abstain: Panyi).

Motion:

Motion to Amend to adjust the athlete representatives from three to four in accordance with USOPC requirements.

Motion moved by Damien Lehfeldt and motion seconded by Abdel Salem. Result: Passed by voice vote.

M. National Anthem (Presenters: Andrey Geva)

Motion: Delegate to the Tournament Committee the responsibility of creating a policy of singing/playing the U.S. national anthem prior to the start of events on each day during of the National Championships and North American Cups

I understand that this is the operational matter, however, we still don't have a policy in place.

Rationale: We used to have the tradition of singing/playing the national anthem. However, it was put on hold due to the COVID-19.

Currently, the bout committee makes their own decision about the national anthem. At some tournaments they sing/play it, while at others they don't.

We need a clear policy in place.

We live in the U.S. and should be proud of it. The fencing community is very diverse and are mostly immigrants from all over the world. The national anthem unites them.

Playing the national anthem is a long tradition among all other sports in the U.S.

Motion:

Motion seconded by Maria Panyi. Result: Passed by roll call vote (For: DeLuca, Donoghue, Dubrovich, Geva, Hill, Holmes, Lehfeltd, Pagnanelli, Panyi, Rodgers, Salem. Against: Burroughs).

N. DEIB (Presenters: Andrey Geva)

Motion: To amend the USA Fencing bylaws to dismantle the DEI office and replace it with the Peter Westbrook Foundation model in big metropolitan cities.

Rationale: The current executive order is to eliminate all DEI offices within the federal government and encourage all private sectors to do the same because DEI is against Civil Rights laws and it is inconsistent with the merit based system mandated by the federal government. The USA Fencing has a great impact on collegiate fencing. The USAF's nonprofit status is based on its charitable and educational characteristics. USFA does sanction educational activities. As such, USFA is covered by the executive order regarding Title IX. More importantly, the Attorney General of the DOJ indicated that DOJ will promulgate new rules against DEI and possibly prosecute any organization that promotes DEI.

<https://www.justice.gov/ag/media/1388501/dl?inline>), https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2025/02/pam-bondi-trump-doj-memo-prosecute-dei-companies.html?utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=traffic&utm_source=article&utm_content=facebook_share#).

Therefore, it is time to reconsider the organization's DEIB (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging) policy outlined in the 2024-2028 Strategic Plan.

As my previous motion stated, the following concerns have been identified:

Mission Drift:

The primary focus of USA Fencing should be the promotion and development of the sport on the basis of merits at all levels. DEIB initiatives risk diverting financial and human capital away from our core mission: "To grow and promote the sport of fencing in the United States, honor its rich traditions, and achieve sustained competitive international excellence."

Fencing is a combative sport. Therefore, a merit based system should be the one and only system. By definition, DEIB does not have a place in any merit based system.

Unintended Exclusion:

A focus on specific preferences of demographic groups can inadvertently lead to the exclusion among those outside the preferences groups and may not necessarily reflect the will of the broader membership.

Questionable Impact:

To date, the DEIB office has not demonstrated a measurable impact on increasing membership diversity.

Possible violation of the law and risk USA Fencing's federal funding and NGB status.

Proposed Solution:

1. Promote the Peter Westbrook Foundation ideas by establishing similar foundations in the big metropolitan cities
2. Redirect funds previously allocated to the DEIB office toward grassroots support for minority fencers, akin to the efforts of the Peter Westbrook Foundation.

3. Focus on serving all members, as the fencing community naturally represents many minority groups, without giving special consideration to any particular group as required by Civil Rights law. This way, USFA will uphold a strong commitment to the principles outlined in the DEIB vision statement: "To increase participation of all individuals regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, culture, religion, sexual orientation, gender expression, age, or disability"

4. Emphasize a decentralized approach, empowering individual clubs and divisions to promote grassroots fencing growth and serve underprivileged communities. This would shift responsibility from the national office to localized efforts that are better suited to address specific community needs.

Motion:

Motion seconded by Abdel Salem. Result: Defeated by roll call vote. (For: Geva. Against: Burroughs, DeLuca, Donoghue, Dubrovich, Hill, Holmes, Lehfeldt, Pagnanelli, Rodgers, Salem. Abstain: Panyi).

Motion:

Motion to Table to send to a working session to include all appropriate stakeholders.

Motion moved by Maria Panyi and motion seconded by Andrey Geva. Result: Defeated by voice vote

VII. Good and Welfare

Next meeting of the Board is scheduled for June 7, 2024 via Zoom.

VIII. Reporting History of Committees and Resource Teams

 [Reporting Dates of Committees of Resource Groups - 2-15-25.pdf](#)

IX. Adjourn to Executive Session (as needed)

Motion:

Motion to recess to Executive Session

Motion moved by Damien Lehfeldt and motion seconded by Molly Hill. Result: Passed by voice vote

X. Executive Session

XI. Adjournment

Motion:

Motion to adjourn Executive Session and resume regular meeting.

Motion moved by Damien Lehfeldt and motion seconded by Kat Holmes. Result: Passed by voice vote.

Motion:

Motion to adjourn regular meeting

Motion moved by Damien Lehfeldt and motion seconded by Lauryn Deluca. Result: Passed by voice vote.