

**USA KARATE
POLICY MANUAL FOR USA KARATE OFFICIALS**



*Member
United States Olympic Paralympic Committee*

Effective January 1, 2026

USA KARATE REFEREE COMMITTEE VALUES STATEMENT

- Transparency
- Accountability
 - Integrity
 - Supportiveness
- Commitment to JEDI (Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion)
 - Pursuit of Excellence

USA KARATE REFEREE COMMITTEE VISION STATEMENT

Be the world's most prestigious leader in sports officiating.

SECTION 1.

USA KARATE REFEREE COMMITTEE DUTIES & RESPONSIBILITIES

Section 1.1. Duties & Responsibilities

The USA Karate Referee Committee has the duties and responsibilities listed in the USA National Karate-Do Federation, Inc (USA-NKF or USA Karate) Policies and Procedures for USA Karate Committees (PPKC), as amended herein. These duties include:

- a. The recruitment and education of referee corps members, including the development and implementation of educational programs, materials, and activities to provide members with access and opportunity to achieve knowledge and skills with competence, confidence, and professionalism.
- b. Maintain and publish on the website standards for referee certifications and participation on the local, national, and international levels and administer the same.
- c. Provide, when necessary, a draft of the USANKF Rules and Regulations for competitions for board approval, including updates as necessary upon consultation with other committees as outlined in these policies.
- d. Develop and administer Referee certification exams.
- e. Bring matters of concern of the referee corps to the board's attention.
- f. Provide an annual report of all activities to the Board of Directors by March 1st of the succeeding year.

Section 1.2. Member Requirements, Selection, and Removal

- a. The Referee Committee members, including the Committee Chair, are appointed by the USA Karate Board Chair upon approval by the Board of Directors, per USA Karate By-law Section 8. The Referee Committee Chairperson is also the Chief Referee of the USA (Chief Referee), as described in Appendix I.
- b. The Referee Committee compensation policy is per USA Karate PPKC, page 8.
- c. The Referee Committee and task force members, policy for resignation, removal, and vacancies is that of USA Karate by-laws Section 8.3 and PPKC, page 4.
- d. The Referee Committee meetings policy shall reflect the USA Karate PPKC, Rules for the Operations of Committees, pages 6-7.
- e. Does not currently represent another National Federation in any official national capacity.

SECTION 2. GENERAL RULES AND REQUIREMENTS FOR USA REFEREES AND JUDGES

Section 2.1. Requirements for USA Officials

- a. Current USA Karate Membership.
- b. Current Safe Sport Training (annually).
- c. Current Background Screening (valid for two years).
- d. Review and sign the Official's Code of Conduct (annually).
- e. Review and sign Conflict of Interest Disclosure (annually).
- f. Written tests are via USA Karate online resources unless otherwise indicated below or announced. Online test scores must be passed within 30 days before a new certification date to be valid. The written test constitutes 10% of the total evaluation score.
- g. Officials testing to elevate their certification at a Signature Event may not coach at that Signature Event. They are required to attend the entire event each day, which includes the initial and daily briefings.
- h. Any official testing for a certification at a Signature Event must stay until the debriefing at the end of the event, unless there are extenuating circumstances that emerge during the event, and they are excused by the Chief Referee. If they leave the signature event early, with no approved excusal, they will not pass their exam, and their attendance at the signature event is not complete and will not have met the Signature Event attendance requirement.

Table 2.1. Certification Categories for USA Karate Officials

USA KARATE KATA CERTIFICATION	USA KARATE KUMITE CERTIFICATION	
Kata Judge A, B, C, D, E	USA Karate Kumite Judge A, B, C, D	USA Karate Kumite Referee A, B, C, D

Table 2.2. Age, Rank, and Testing Requirements for USA Officials

Certification	Age	Rank	Written Exam % Requirement	Practical Exam
<u>Kumite</u>				
USA Karate Kumite Referee: A	18+	Shodan/Black Belt	90% at a Signature Event	At Signature Event
USA Karate Kumite Referee: B	18+	Shodan/Black Belt	90% at a Signature Event	At Signature Event
USA Karate Kumite Referee: C	18+	Shodan/Black Belt	90%	Pass

USA Karate Kumite Referee: D	18+	Shodan/Black Belt	90%	Pass
USA Karate Kumite Judge: A	18+	Shodan/Black Belt	90%	Pass
USA Karate Kumite Judge: B	18+	Shodan/Black Belt	90%	Pass
USA Karate Kumite Judge: C	16+	1 st Kyu/Brown Belt	80%	Pass
USA Karate Kumite Judge: D	14+	1 st Kyu/Brown Belt	80%	Pass
Kata				
USA Karate Kata Judge: A	18+	Shodan/Black Belt	90% at a Signature Event	At Signature Event
USA Karate Kata Judge: B	18+	Shodan/Black Belt	90% at a Signature Event	At Signature Event
USA Karate Kata Judge: C	18+	Shodan/Black Belt	90%	Pass
USA Karate Kata Judge: D	16+	Shodan/Black Belt	80%	Pass
USA Karate Kata Judge: E	14+	1 st Kyu/Brown Belt	80%	Pass

Section 2.2. Participation and Recertification - Annual Requirements

- a. Officials with USA Karate Referee “A” or “B” certifications must attend one Signature Event referee seminar annually and participate as an official in at least one Signature Event yearly to maintain their certification level. This includes all officials with a current or expired PKF and/or WKF certification.
- b. Signature Events are the USA Karate National Karate Championships and the USA Karate US Open/Junior International Cup for this requirement. Attendance at a Signature Event includes the initial briefing the day before the competition days, post competition debriefing, daily briefings, and the entire day until officials are officially dismissed at the end of the day. Officials who fail to attend the whole event or leave a Signature Event before the final dismissal will not have met the Signature Event attendance requirement, unless there are extenuating circumstances or excused by the Chief Referee. Permission to leave an event early does not constitute an approved Absence Exception Request, though it may be retroactively approved.
- c. To maintain their current certification status, all other officials, USA Karate Referee “C” and below, must attend at least one in-person referee seminar annually given by a USA Karate certified instructor. The official must participate in at least one tournament, utilizing USA Karate Rules of Competition, as an official each year and with a USA Karate certified instructor in attendance at the same competition, signing the official’s USA Karate passport. Alternatively, the chief referee at the competition, if at least a USA Karate certified Referee A, may document the participation of the USA Karate official.
- d. If an official fails to meet the above requirements, they may recertify at their prior level by attending the appropriate seminar and passing the written and practical exams.
- e. All officials are required to comply with the Officials’ Code of Conduct.
- f. Failure to comply with these requirements may lead to suspending the official’s certification or other corrective action.

Section 2.3. Participation and Recertification Exemptions

Exemptions to attend all or part of a USA Karate Signature Event are available to those officials who are engaged in conducting authorized business for USA Karate or as otherwise provided by the terms of this policy.

a. Officials with WKF/PKF Certification

- i. Officials with WKF/PKF certification must actively support USA Karate Signature Events, among other considerations set forth by the Referee Committee. Eligibility of USA Karate officials for international competitions and events, World Karate Federation (WKF) or Pan-America Karate Federation (PKF), includes the appropriate level USA Karate certification and participation in the two USA Karate Signature Events in the 12 months immediately prior, among other possible considerations by the USA Karate Referee Committee, subject to the exemption policy.
- ii. Failure to participate as a referee or judge in a USA Karate signature event that an official with WKF/PKF certification attends may result in the forfeiture or suspension of the individual's USA Referee/Judge certification or other corrective action.
- iii. An official whose USA Karate certification is not current or in good standing is ineligible for USA Karate financial support to participate in WKF or PKF competitions or events.
- iv. Fine for Referee/Judge No-Show at WKF Events is the responsibility of the individual involved. If USA Karate receives an invoice from WKF for a "No-Show", they will then invoice the responsible Referee/Judge. The referee will be suspended from participating in any USA Karate Sanctioned Event, Training or Signature Event until the invoice is paid. Failure to pay the invoice can result in the loss of USA Karate Membership and/or other administrative actions.

b. Attendance Exception Request

- i. Attendance exception requests for the "Participation and Recertification - Annual Requirements" section must be submitted in writing and received by the USA Karate Referee Committee no later than 30 days before the subject USA Karate Signature Event.
- ii. The applicant must submit the Absence Exception Request Form to the USA Karate Referee Committee Secretary and send a copy to the Director of Sport with supporting documentation.
 - a. Failure to provide supporting documentation may result in denial of applicant's request.
 - b. USA Karate's Referee Committee, Director of Sport, the CEO, or the Board of Directors may request other specific documentation.

- iii. For an exception to be approved and issued, the majority of USA Karate Referee Committee members, including the Chief Referee, must agree and support the applicant's request, providing a written response to the applicant.
- iv. If an official is unable to attend or fully participate in a Signature Event due to circumstances that arise within thirty (30) days of the event, or due to circumstances that could not reasonably have been known or addressed before the thirty (30) day submission deadline, the official must submit the Absence Exception Request Form to the Chief Referee as soon as reasonably possible.

Such circumstances may include, but are not limited to, a medical emergency, death or serious illness in the immediate family, natural disaster, unavoidable travel disruption, significant personal emergency, or an unplanned employment demand.

The request must include a written explanation of the circumstances and any available supporting documentation. Upon receipt, the Chief Referee shall forward the request to the Chief Executive Officer, or designee. The Chief Executive Officer, or designee, may consult with the Director of Sport before making a decision regarding approval or denial of the exception.

An exception granted under this section does not waive any other USA Karate membership, SafeSport, background screening, Code of Conduct, Conflict of Interest, certification, or good-standing requirements.

Section 2.4. Officials' Review and Evaluation Process

- a. The USA Karate Referee Committee is responsible for reviewing and evaluating the performance of all officials participating in the USA Karate Signature Events. The Referee Committee shall collect feedback from the designated Tatami Managers and will also collect information through their direct observations of officials' performances during the Signature Events. If the USA Karate Referee Committee deems that an official's performance should receive a personal evaluation, the USA Karate Referee Committee Chairperson, along with at least one other member of the Committee, shall meet with the official in a private location to discuss any comments or concerns. At their discretion, the USA Karate Referee Committee members who met with the official in question may submit a written recommendation to the USA Karate Referee Committee as a whole, for review and perhaps a reassessment of the official's certification or the requirement for additional training or testing to maintain their status.
- b. The USA Karate Ethics Committee is responsible for evaluating an official's compliance with the USA Karate Officials' Code of Conduct. The Ethics Committee may recommend sanctions against an official found violating the USA Karate Officials' Code of Conduct. The USA Karate Referee Committee and the USA Karate Board of Directors will evaluate such recommendations for action.

Section 2.5. Conflict of Interests

In compliance with the Officials Code of Conduct, all officials with USA Karate National Kata Judge A or Kumite Referee A, PKF, and WKF certifications may not serve as a coach at the USA Karate Signature Events.

Section 2.6. USA Karate Officials Participation in non-USA Karate Competitions

- a. USA Karate referees and judges may not wear the official USA Karate badge indicating certification as a USA Karate referee or judge, including any badge indicating certification as a referee or judge with the Pan-American Karate Federation or World Karate Federation, at non-USA Karate, Pan-American Karate Federation or World Karate Federation sanctioned events. This includes competitions that use USA Karate, or World Karate Federation, based Rules of Competition, but are not sanctioned by the above organizations. Exceptions must be pre-approved by USA Karate in writing.

- b. USA Karate referees and judges in an USA Karate official position of leadership including Referee Committee members, USA Karate Regional Lead, and Assistant Lead Referees, and referees and judges with Pan-American and World Karate Federation certifications:
 - i. May not participate as a referee or judge, or any capacity of officiating, at non-USA Karate competitions that do not use USA Karate Rules of Competition, if those competitions represent the equivalent of a sanctioned event by another organization not using USA Karate Rules of Competition,
 - ii. May not participate as a referee or judge, or any capacity of officiating, at non-USA Karate competitions that do not use equivalent safety equipment protections as prescribed in the USA Karate Rules of Competition. Examples include (but only) mouthguards, male groin protection, shin/instep protection, and external body protectors and helmets for children under 14 years of age.

SECTION 3. WKF CERTIFICATION UPGRADE TEST PRIORITY LIST ADVANCEMENT PROCESS

Section 3.1. When an official receives their first World Karate Federation (WKF) certification, either Kata Judge B or Kumite Judge B:

- a. The official cannot upgrade their certification again in the same calendar year.
- b. The official is then at the last position on the USA Karate Officials Certification Upgrade Test Priority List (Priority List). The official will be eligible to upgrade the year after receipt of their first WKF certification.

Section 3.2. USA Karate will submit ALL eligible names on the Priority List. The WKF will either confirm the officials or reject a portion of the officials on the Priority List.

- a. If an official passes their certification examination/evaluation, they remain on the Priority List at a priority level based on their new certification level. Higher certified officials have priority over officials with a lower certification.
- b. If an official is allowed to test and fails, they are at the bottom of the Priority List. Their seniority date is the date of the failed test.
- c. If an official cannot test due to WKF quotas, they will remain in the same position on the Priority List.
- d. If an official declines to test, they will be placed at the bottom of the Priority List. Their seniority date is the date of the tournament not attended.

Section 3.3. Officials with a WKF Kata Judge A or WKF Kumite Referee A certification are no longer on the Priority List for the respective certification for which they have the highest WKF certification.

- a. Officials with a WKF Kata Judge A or WKF Kumite Referee A certification must maintain their renewal license fees (PLR) every four years, per WKF requirements.
- b. Failure to maintain a certification in good standing places an official at the bottom of the Priority List if they want to renew their certification. The official will progress up the List the same as other candidates.

Section 3.4. Maintaining an official's status on the Priority List is dependent on current good standing with USA Karate, including:

- a. Attendance and participation at two USA Karate Signature Events in the 12 months immediately before participating in a WKF or PKF event.
 - i. Per USA Karate's Attendance Exception policy, one of the two required Signature Events may be waived.
- b. Current USA Karate membership.
- c. US Olympic and Para-Olympic Committee SafeSport compliance.
- d. Authorized Background Check.
- e. A current and signed Conflict of Interest and Code of Conduct forms.

Section. 3.5. If the number of test slots available for a WKF testing opportunity is insufficient to accommodate all officials eligible on the Priority List, priority starts:

- a. At the top of the Priority List.
- b. PKF officials with PKF Kumite Referee A and Kata Judge A are top priorities.
- c. Each official's priority ranking is by the date they received their PKF A certification for that Priority List, kata or kumite. Secondly, those with PKF Kata Judge A or PKF Kumite Judge A will be considered also based on the date they received their respective certification.

Section 3.6. If more than one official receives their PKF certification on the same date, the priority for selection goes to the candidate who earned their USA Karate National A certification for Kata or Kumite first, as applicable.

- a. If a tie still exists, then, in this order, the tie is broken.
 - i. The earlier date that the official earned both of their USA Karate Kumite Referee A and Kata Judge A certifications.
 - ii. The earlier date that the official earned both of their PKF Kumite Referee A and Kata Judge A certifications.

- iii. The USA Karate Referee Committee will decide the order.

SECTION 4. REQUIREMENTS FOR USA KARATE REFEREES AND JUDGES RE PAN-AMERICAN KARATE FEDERATION (PKF)

Section 4.1. Pan-American Categories for Kata and Kumite Certifications

Table 4.1

PKF Kata	PKF Kumite	
<u>Judge</u>	<u>Judge</u>	<u>Referee</u>
Judge A	Judge A	Referee A
Judge B	Judge B	Referee B
Judge C	Judge C	

Section 4.2. General Requirements

- All PKF officials must comply with all requirements for USA Karate officials, as noted above.
- An official whose USA Karate certification is not current or in good standing is ineligible for USA Karate support to participate in PKF competitions or events.
- USA Karate officials who have a USA Karate National Kata Judge “A” certification or their USA Karate National Referee “A” certification are eligible to test for PKF certification.
- PKF officials must be at least 21 years of age and have a USA Karate rank of 2nd Dan in Karate or per PKF minimum age and rank requirements.
- Upon passing or recertifying for any PKF certification, the official must send a photocopy of the certificate (passing test) or entry in their Karate Passport (recertifying) to the USA Karate Referee Committee Secretary.
- Subject to the Absence Exception Policy, USA Karate officials must have participated as an official in the two USA Karate Signature Events in the 12 months immediately prior, before participating in a PKF event.

SECTION 5. REQUIREMENTS FOR USA KARATE REFEREES AND JUDGES RE WORLD KARTE FEDERATION (WKF)

Section 5.1. World Karate Federation Categories for Kata and Kumite Certification

Table 5.1

WKF Kata	WKF Kumite	
<u>Judge</u>	<u>Judge</u>	<u>Referee</u>

Judge A	Judge A	Referee A
Judge B	Judge B	Referee B

Section 5.2. General Requirements

- a. All WKF and PKF officials must comply with all requirements for USA Karate officials, as noted above.
- b. An official whose USA Karate certification is not current or in good standing is ineligible for USA Karate support to participate in WKF competitions or events.
- c. USA Karate officials who have PKF Kata Judge “A” certification or PKF Kumite Judge “A” certification are eligible to test for a WKF certification.
- d. All WKF officials must be at least 25 years of age and have a USA Karate rank of 3rd Dan in Karate or per WKF minimum age and rank requirements.
- e. Upon passing the Kata or Kumite test or recertifying, officials must send a photocopy of the certificate (passing test) or entry in the Karate Passport (recertifying) to the USA Karate Referee Committee Secretary.

Subject to the Attendance Exception Policy, USA Karate officials must have participated as an official in the two USA Karate Signature Events in the 12 months immediately prior, before participating in a WKF event.

SECTION 6. SELECTION OF OFFICIALS FOR USA TEAM TRIALS

The USA Karate Selection Committee will give the procedures to select officials for these events.

SECTION 7. REFEREE COMMITTEE MEMBERS ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

Section 7.1. All USA Karate Referee Committee members are required to attend the following and other additional requirements that may arise:

- a. Anti-Retaliation Training
- b. Conflict of Interest Session

SECTION 8. COMPLAINTS REGARDING CONDUCT OF OFFICIALS

The Complaint and Hearing Procedures posted on the USA Karate Website shall address a complaint alleging a violation of the USA-NKF Articles of Incorporation, By-laws, Code of Conduct, Conflict of Interest Policy, Gift Policy, Whistleblower Policy, SafeSport Policy, USA-NKF Minor Athletes and Officials Abuse Prevention Policies, USOPC By-laws, Ted Stevens Act, or any other USA Karate rule.

SECTION 9. NATIONAL REFEREE PROGRAM

Section 9.1. To accomplish the mission, requirements, and responsibilities of the USA Karate Referee program the National Referee Program is established as described in USA Karate document “[National Referee Program – Structure 2025.](#)”