

**UNITED STATES OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC COMMITTEE
CERTIFICATION REVIEW GROUP**



**Certification Renewal Recommendation Report for the
American Canoe Association**

March 16, 2023



**UNITED STATES
OLYMPIC & PARALYMPIC
COMMITTEE**



American Canoe Association Certification Renewal Executive Summary

In May 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 the American Canoe Association (ACA).¹ The CRG evaluated the ACA 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 the ACA found that the organization is meeting 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 the third quarter of 2021 identified areas where the ACA was not yet fully meeting the NGB Compliance Standards, but the ACA took action to remediate the identified issues and meet the NGB Compliance Standards.

CRG members agreed that the ACA is presently meeting the requirements and expectations for an NGB. In its discussions of the ACA'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 CRG members had interacted with the ACA, the CRG had a generally favorable view of its operations.

As a result of this review, the CRG recommends that the ACA be granted a certification status of Renewal in Good Standing for a 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

The American Canoe Association (ACA) is the USOPC-certified NGB for paddlesports (sprint, slalom and paracanoe) in the United States and the U.S. member of the International Canoe Federation. The ACA has over 15,000 members and 300 paddling clubs and affiliated organizations.³ The ACA's mission is to "[provide] paddlesports leadership, structure, and instructional resources to promote [the] sport's many health and social benefits to fuel membership growth and enrich the experience of all participants."⁴ The ACA is headquartered in Fredericksburg, Virginia.

Certification History

The ACA was originally certified in January 2021.⁵ The CRG's certification review was initiated based on the ACA's scheduled quadrennial certification review. The ACA's certification status has not been referred for review outside of the standard NGB certification review schedule.

Certification Exceptions⁶

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

Athlete Representation Approval and Exceptions⁷

The ACA requested that the Athlete Representation Review Working Group (ARRWG) approve three additional competitions as qualifying events for 10 Year and 10 Year+ status to expand the pool of athletes eligible to serve as athlete representatives. The approved expansion of the athlete pool includes athletes who competed at ICF World Championship and World Cup Events and athletes who were 'A' Finalists in US Olympic and Paralympic Trials. In addition, the ACA requested and received approval to classify several committees⁸ as Other Committees for the purposes of athlete representation.

Certification Review⁹

Governance and Compliance

The CRG determined that the ACA is fulfilling the Governance and Compliance-related responsibilities of an NGB. The ACA has adopted a code of conduct, conflicts of interest policy, and gifts and entertainment policy; has made these policies publicly available on its website; and has defined procedures to address violations of these policies. NGB Audit found that these governance-related policies required updates to fully meet the NGB Compliance Standards; ACA revised the policies and NGB Audit was satisfied that they are now compliant.

In addition to the findings with the policy, NGB Audit's testing found that the ACA's conflict of interest disclosure process did not include sufficient review of disclosed conflicts, including for board members. ACA revised its processes and NGB Audit retested the conflict disclosures process in September 2022. NGB Audit did not identify any additional concerns and the finding was considered remediated.

³ [About ACA.](#)

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ Refer to the Appendix for details on the initial certification.

⁶ Refer to the Appendix for details on exception requests to the NGB Compliance Standards.

⁷ Refer to the Appendix for details on athlete representation exception requests.

⁸ Refer to the Appendix for a list of the ACA's approved Other Committees.

⁹ Refer to the Appendix for details on the review standards and process for information related to NGB Audit's Report on the ACA.



Finally, the ACA's bylaws were missing several significant elements required by the NGB Compliance Standards. The ACA amended its bylaws to include all of these elements and the bylaws amendments were approved by a membership vote in November 2022.

Financial Standards and Reporting Practices

The ACA meets the requirements for an NGB's Financial Standards and Reporting Practices. The organization demonstrates financial operational capability to administer its sport and is financially and operationally transparent, while maintaining its accountability to its members and to the USOPC.

In the 2021 Compliance Audit, NGB Audit found that the ACA's financial policies and procedures were missing components required by the NGB Compliance Standards, including contract requirements, cash management and banking processes, and expense approvals. The ACA revised its Financial Controls Manual to include these missing elements and NGB Audit reviewed the updated policies and procedures to validate that the findings were resolved.

Athlete Protection and Rights

The USOPC is not aware of any non-compliance issues with its anti-doping rules and requirements or those of the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency. The ACA maintains and executes 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 the ACA 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 the ACA that the USOPC was required to report.

In 2021, the Center conducted its most recent Administrative Audit of the ACA's implementation of policies required by the Center's SafeSport Code and Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policies.¹⁰ The audit resulted in required corrective actions. Specifically, the ACA was required to "require and track that staff and Board are SafeSport trained on an annual basis regardless of whether they are participating in ACA activities," "identify, require, and track all individuals required to be SafeSport trained," and update its SafeSport Handbook and online reporting form to explicitly include reporting procedures for MAAPP violations and include explicit mention of the reporting policy in its direct communication of the policy to all members. The ACA took corrective action to resolve the Center's findings and the Center confirmed the ACA's full compliance as of February 2022.¹¹

NGB Audit found that the ACA's bylaws, anti-doping policy, and athlete code of conduct did not include the specific anti-doping language required by the NGB Compliance Standards. The ACA amended its bylaws and revised its anti-doping policy and athlete agreement to include the correct language and fully meet the NGB Compliance Standards.

NGB Audit also found that the ACA's background check policy was missing elements required by the NGB Compliance Standards. The ACA revised and published its background check policy to include the required elements. In addition to the missing policy elements, NGB Audit's testing identified multiple individuals who had not received background checks as required by the policy. After the remediation period and the ACA's policy updates, NGB Audit retested the ACA's background check execution and found that all tested individuals were background checked in accordance with the policy, resolving the finding.

¹⁰ [US Center for SafeSport 2021 Administrative Audit Report – American Canoe Association](#), June 2, 2021.

¹¹ [US Center for SafeSport Corrective Actions Update](#), February 25, 2022



Sport Performance

The ACA is fulfilling its obligations in Sport Performance. The organization maintains and executes on a strategic plan that supports athletes in achieving sustained competitive excellence. The ACA established clear selection procedures and identified selection trials competitions for Delegation Event qualification.

NGB Audit found that the ACA did not have Paralympic classification procedures and its event sanctioning documents were missing elements required by the NGB Compliance Standards. The ACA adopted the US Paralympics National Classification Policy and revised its event sanctioning documents to resolve these findings.

Operational Performance

The CRG determined that the ACA demonstrates the managerial capability to administer its sport and maintains adequate insurance to manage its risk, fulfilling its Operational Performance obligations.

NGB Audit found that the ACA's whistleblower and anti-retaliation policy and grievance procedures were missing elements required by the NGB Compliance Standards. The ACA revised these documents to include all missing elements and the ACA's Board of Directors approved the updated versions in July and August 2022, respectively, to resolve these findings. Additionally, the ACA's criteria for USOPC-funded stipends and Elite Athlete Health Insurance were not published online or in an athlete handbook, as required by the NGB Compliance Standards. The ACA published its criteria, which were already defined, on its website in March 2022 to resolve this finding.

NGB Audit also found that the ACA's strategic plan did not include sufficient measurable outcomes for organization-wide initiatives and its approval was not documented in board meeting minutes. To resolve this finding, ACA created a Strategic Planning Committee that is working on a substantive plan with much greater scope than the previous strategic plan. While the finding remains open, it is considered a marginal deficiency and was not considered a condition of this certification.

The ACA maintains a 2021-2024 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DE&I) Action Plan that describes its DE&I vision and strategy for the coming years. The ACA's action plan contains several objectives for the organization, including to build a culture of awareness of unconscious bias, emotional intelligence, and barriers to DE&I; diversify marketing materials; train, develop, and mentor people from underrepresented groups in leadership and provide representation in paddlesports; establish a DE&I data collection process, and expand financial support of the ACA's DE&I initiatives. This is the ACA's first DE&I Action Plan, but the organization is laying the foundation for DE&I work to make a meaningful impact for ACA athletes.

Conclusion

The CRG concluded that the ACA is performing satisfactorily based on input from the CRG members and the results of the NGB Audit team's 2021 Compliance Audit and there are no outstanding areas of concern affecting its certification status at this time. Accordingly, the CRG recommends that the ACA's certification as a member organization of the USOPC be renewed with a rating 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.¹² 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.¹³

Governed by the USOPC's [Certification Renewal 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.¹⁴ 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.

ACA Other Committees

These committees focus on recreational elements and / or pathways in the sport and are not involved with core governance of the ACA or affect its elite athletes.

- Safety Education and Instruction
- Introduction to Paddling
- Universal Paddling
- Canoe Touring
- Paddle America Club Committee
- Coastal Kayaking
- Prone Paddling
- Rafting
- River Canoeing
- River Kayaking
- Medical Advisory Committee
- Properties Committee
- Safety and Rescue
- Stand Up Paddleboarding
- Surfski
- Surf Kayaking
- State Director Committee

¹² See §220521(a) of the Ted Stevens Olympic and Amateur Sports Act.

¹³ NGB Certification Policy, Section 1.

¹⁴ The CRG uses a four-year lookback period during this review process.

