



**Certification Renewal Recommendation Report for the
US Equestrian Federation**

September 14, 2022



**UNITED STATES
OLYMPIC & PARALYMPIC
COMMITTEE**



US Equestrian 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 the US Equestrian Federation (USEF)¹. The CRG evaluated the USEF and, based on input from CRG members and the results of NGB Audit's 2021 report², recommends a certification status of Renewal in Good Standing.

The CRG's review of the USEF 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. NGB Audit's 2021 Compliance Audit identified areas where the USEF was not yet fully meeting the USOPC's NGB Compliance Standards, such as missing elements in the organization's bylaws and other policies, but the USEF resolved the identified issues to meet the NGB Compliance Standards by the time of the CRG's review.

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

As a result of this review, the CRG recommends that the USEF 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

The USEF is the USOPC-certified NGB for equestrian and the United States' national federation recognized by the Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI, or the International Equestrian Federation), the international governing body of equestrian sports. The USEF's mission is "to provide access to and increase participation in equestrian sports at all levels by ensuring fairness, safety, and enjoyment."³ The USEF trains, selects, and funds the U.S. Equestrian Team and licenses equestrian competitions of all levels across the U.S. each year.⁴ The USEF is headquartered in Lexington, Kentucky.

Certification History

The USEF was originally certified in January 2021⁵. The CRG's certification review was initiated based on the USEF's scheduled quadrennial certification review. The USEF's certification status has not been referred for review outside of the standard NGB certification review schedule.

Certification Exceptions⁶

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

Athlete Representation Approval and Exceptions⁷

The USEF requested that the Athlete Representation Review Working Group (ARRWG) review the following competitions as qualifying events for 10-Year and 10-Year+ status to expand the pool of athletes eligible to serve as athlete representatives. These competitions are:

- FEI World Equestrian Games
- FEI World Championships
- FEI World Cup Finals
- Driving National Championships
- FEI Nations Cup (4 and 5-Star Events Only)
- FEI CPEDI (3-Star Events and Higher)

The ARRWG approved all competitions except the Driving National Championships. This competition does not involve representation of Team USA as it is strictly a national level competition without international participation.

In addition, the AARWG reviewed and approved the following competitions as pathways to become eligible as an Actively Engaged USEF member:

- Any FEI Sanctioned Event
- Any US Equestrian National Championship
- Any National Championship by a US Equestrian Recognized Affiliate

Certification Review⁸

Governance and Compliance

³ [Our Vision and Mission](#), USEF Website.

⁴ [About USEF](#), USEF Website.

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 details on the review standards and process for information related to NGB Audit's Report on the USEF.



The CRG determined that the USEF is fulfilling all the Governance and Compliance-related responsibilities for an NGB. The USEF has adopted and enforces a code of conduct, conflict of interest, and gifts and entertainment policies, has made these policies publicly available on its website, and has defined procedures to address violations of these policies.

The CRG received athlete feedback as it related to athletes' interactions with members of the USEF management. In general, athletes expressed the ability to speak up about their concerns, and while some concerns put USEF management in a difficult position, the organization addresses situations to the best of its ability and in a fair manner. Overall, athletes have a positive working relationship with the organization, citing optimal communication and resolutions to their concerns.

NGB Audit found that the USEF's bylaws and conflicts of interest policy were missing some elements required by the NGB Compliance Standards. USEF management took immediate action to update the documents, and upon approval from both USEF's Governance Committee and Board of Directors, revised versions of the bylaws and conflict of interest policy were published in November 2021. Several complaints (Sections 9s and 10s) were brought to the USOPC's Dispute Resolution Unit (DRU). Some of the complaints were dismissed under a Motion to Dismiss but have since been appealed to the American Arbitration Association. As of the date of this report, the USEF has not been found to be out of compliance.

Financial Standards and Reporting Practices

The USEF 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 USEF's reports to account for USOPC funding did not match its general ledger. The USEF provided NGB Audit with corrected funding reports and created a subset of general ledger accounts to automatically track USOPC funding allocations as a control to prevent future inconsistencies. NGB Audit also noted that the USEF did not initially publish its audited 2020 financial statements within the timeframe required by the NGB Compliance Standards due to COVID-19 pandemic-related issues. The USEF posted and submitted its audited 2020 financial statements upon completion in October 2021 and affirmed its commitment to meeting future deadlines.

Athlete Protection and Rights

The USEF 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). It also maintains an anti-doping program consistent with the requirements of the USOPC and the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency.

The USOPC is not aware of any cases it has received in the past four years concerning the USEF 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 USEF that the USOPC was required to report.

In 2019, the Center conducted its most recent Administrative Audit of the USEF's implementation of policies required by the Center's SafeSport Code and Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policies. USEF received ratings of "Fully Implemented" in all areas of evaluation and there were no findings or corrective actions required by the Center. In 2021, the Center conducted its most recent Event Audit for the USEF at the U.S. Dressage Federation Finals, resulting in minor findings and direction for corrective actions. Specifically, the USEF was required to "update its written policy and implement effective procedures to ensure that all event participants, including vendors and media personnel, receive the MAAPP and reporting protocol prior to an



event/competition.”⁹ Furthermore, the USEF was required to “ensure that all event participants...are not banned and/or suspended by the NGB and/or the Center” prior to and at a competition.¹⁰ The USEF took corrective action to resolve the Center’s findings and the Center confirmed the USEF’s full compliance as of April 2022.¹¹

NGB Audit found that the USEF’s background check policy was missing a minor element required by the NGB Compliance Standards. The USEF revised its background check policy to explicitly list an additional applicable party required to receive a background check, which brought its policy in line with its practices and fully met the requirements of the NGB Compliance Standards.

NGB Audit also found that the USEF’s athlete agreements did not list criteria to obtain services or outline the additional services and commitments that the organization provides to athletes as required by the NGB Compliance Standards. The USEF amended its athlete agreement to include these elements and the revised athlete agreement now fully meets the NGB Compliance Standards.

Sport Performance

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

NGB Audit found that the USEF’s Paralympic national classification policies and procedures were missing minor elements required by the NGB Compliance Standards. The USEF revised its national classification policies and procedures in October 2021 and is now fully compliant.

Operational Performance

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

During the 2021 Compliance Audit, NGB Audit found that the USEF’s grievance procedures and whistleblower and anti-retaliation policy were missing elements required by the NGB Compliance Standards. The USEF revised these policies and procedure to include all missing elements and reached full compliance in the fourth quarter of 2021.

NGB Audit also found that the USEF’s strategic plan did not have sufficient measurable outcomes for organization-wide initiatives as required by the NGB Compliance Standards. The USEF incorporated additional numerical key performance indicators into the strategic plan, and the USEF Board of Directors approved the updated strategic plan in November 2021 to resolve this finding.

The USEF also 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 USEF submitted its action plan to the USOPC with sufficient detail, meeting the NGB Compliance Standards. The USEF’s action plan contains three objectives to advance DE&I in equestrian through its people, policies, and practices with specific initiatives, target groups, timelines, and success measures. The action plan includes initiatives such as programs, funds, campaigns, and educational resources that will be available to marginalized populations; training and refresher courses to hold leadership accountable to continuing education in DE&I; and a comprehensive

⁹ [US Center for SafeSport Event Audit Report – United States Dressage Federation Finals](#), November 10-11, 2021.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ [US Center for SafeSport Corrective Actions Update](#), April 8, 2022



marketing plan, internship program, best practices guide, and a Spanish translation option for critical information to leverage the interest and inclusion of marginalized groups.

Conclusion

The CRG concluded that the USEF is performing satisfactorily overall based on input from the CRG members and the results of NGB Audit's 2021 Compliance Audit. The USEF addressed all identified deficiencies and there are no outstanding areas of concern affecting its certification status. Accordingly, the CRG recommends that the USEF'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.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.

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.