

USA WRESTLING

2022-2028 Strategic Plan

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Letter from President and CEO

“Strategic planning is the process by which the guiding members of an organization envision its future and develop the necessary procedures and operations to achieve that future and determine how success is to be measured.” - Goodstein, Nolan, & Pfeiffer

USA Wrestling’s strategic plan for 2018-2024 has been instrumental in providing a path that has served to strengthen this sport and our pursuit of excellence as the National Governing Body. Using the strategic plan as a framework, we have been able to challenge the status quo and chart a direction that will serve USA Wrestling in the coming years.

In that vein, we are pleased to announce that USA Wrestling has once again partnered with the United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee (USOPC) to review and update this plan through 2028 and the Olympic Games in Los Angeles. This updated plan continues to focus on what USA Wrestling can do to help strengthen our sport and our organization as we move forward to a greater and sustainable future.

This plan builds upon the prior plan, with the ultimate goal of putting our mission into action. This updated plan is tied directly to what we do across the country and within the wrestling community. In light of the recent pandemic, and all that has happened in recent years, this is clearly the time to reflect on our strategic achievements and consider the future challenges, to the maximum extent possible.

Our 2022-2028 Strategic Plan continues to build upon our five strategic priorities: Athlete Support & Well Being, Collaboration & Strategic Partnerships, Customer Experience & Engagement, Women’s Participation, and Organizational Excellence. Each strategic priority contains a set of updated objectives that are important to delivering on our mission.

Once again, on behalf of USA Wrestling, we wish to thank our staff and the Long Range Planning Committee for their work in the development of this plan. In particular, we are grateful for our partnership with the USOPC, and the outstanding facilitation provided by Avery Wilson, Director of Strategic Planning, along with David Patterson, Associate Director, NGB Governance, and Katie Grunik, of NGB Services.



Rich Bender
Executive Director
USA Wrestling



Bruce Baumgartner
President
USA Wrestling

Mission

USA Wrestling, guided by the Olympic Spirit, provides quality opportunities for its members to achieve their full human and athletic potential.

Vision

USA Wrestling will strive to be the world's best sports organization

Values

We commit to the following guiding principles to direct our Mission decisions and behaviors:

Responsibility. Fulfilling all functions, tasks, duties and assignments with trust and credibility on behalf of USA Wrestling by honoring promise and pledges.

Integrity. Being true to self and the mission of USA Wrestling, while discerning right from wrong and acting on it.

Dedication. Dedication to carrying out the mission and goals of USA Wrestling with the highest degree of sacrifice and discipline.

Honesty. Being truthful and upright with people on issues in furthering the mission of USA Wrestling.

Accountability. Providing answers and reasons to others for actions and behaviors intended to support the mission of USA Wrestling.

Respect. Recognizing the absolute dignity in every human being, with a sense of compassion, caring and concern for the well-being of other people.

Diversity. Creating a culture that welcomes members of all races, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and ethnicities; embracing equity, inclusion and multicultural awareness that helps to affect lasting, meaningful change.

Organizational Pillars

USA Wrestling continues to build organizational strength around four key business pillars.

- **Sustained Competitive Excellence**
- **Grow the Base**
- **Build the Brand**
- **Connect the Community**

Emerging Trends

USA Wrestling is committed to continuing to advance its mission and elevate the sport of wrestling domestically and internationally. To this end, the Long Range Planning Committee of the board convened in June 2018 and June 2022 to refresh USA Wrestling's strategy to take advantage of new opportunities and adjust to new realities.

There are emerging trends that warrant attention and action.

- Declining participation among high school boys
- Disparities in some demographics of the U.S. population compared to the wrestling community
- Opportunity to expand female wrestling, especially on high schools and college campuses
- Harness modern marketing and communication techniques and technology to benefit wrestling

- “Big Data”: Using of data and analytics in more purposeful and sophisticated ways to drive better business decisions
- Decline in U.S. competitiveness in Greco-Roman wrestling and changing rules in the style that are better for both athletes and fans
- Rise of improved athlete development models incorporating best practices from youth physical development research
- Focus on ensuring safer sport environments to protect athletes from abuse and physical harm

Success by 2028 in Los Angeles

Additionally, the Los Angeles Games in 2028 offers a unique opportunity to rally the American wrestling community to showcase our sport and amazing athletes. Long range success by 2028 is envisioned as:

Healthy Growth, Especially with Youth and Women

- Paris and Los Angeles Games legacy strategy has lasting results; Olympic athletes are stars on and off the mat, resulting in:
 - Sustained sport participation among males and females
 - A large, passionate fan following
- NCAA/collegiate programming
 - Women’s wrestling is a varsity sport at all collegiate levels
 - Leveraging the 2028 Olympics to get programs established at USC and UCLA and in Southern California
 - Strong coordination with RTCs (regional training centers) to build mutual benefit with colleges

Equipped for Excellence and Setting the Standard

- Member retention rate (year over year) averages 60%
- Most diverse and inclusive NGB
- 500K total members, at least 100K are female
- \$30 million per year budget with sufficient cash reserves

- High functioning board of directors
- NGB leader in SafeSport
- Regular, national broadcast/media exposure
- Leaders in the international movement
- Leaders in the Olympic movement for athlete services
 - Stipends
 - Training support
- Endowments ensure competitive success, e.g. funding for athletes, coaches and programming

Peak Performance

- Strategically host more key international events/competitions/camps (ie. World Cups, Continental Championships, Qualifiers, World Championships)
- 40 medals across all styles and ages
- Increase the number of Greco-Roman World medals at all ages

Wrestling Community is Connected, Engaged, and Enthusiastic

- Robust, successful and organized alumni program
- High fan engagement, at events and through variety of platforms
- Numerous partnerships ensure wrestling is wildly popular and thriving in the United States at all levels and all ages

Strengths, Opportunities, Weaknesses and Threats

STRENGTHS (Internal)

- Fiscal Stability
- Leadership and management (national office and grassroots)
- Commitment to SafeSport by coaches, athletes, and parents
- Scholastic base with market leadership in membership
- History and association as an Olympic sport
- Competitive Performance
- Respected NGB, domestically and internationally
- Digital media and strong internet presence
- Fan and spectator engagement
- Growth in Female wrestling on all levels

WEAKNESSES (Internal)

- Participation dropping in high schools with turnover to other sports
- "New blood" and diversity on board (status quo thinking)
- Lack of flexibility
- Health Issues (weight, skin, concussions, blood, ears)
- Communicating the value and benefits of membership
- Greco Roman struggles
- Lack of diversity along with differing experiences & perspectives
- Innovative technology and data-driven decisions
- Succession planning for staff and volunteers

OPPORTUNITIES

- Leverage association with Olympic brand; "Touch the Rings"
- Continued expansion of women's wrestling
- Build-up to the LA28 Games and afterglow with membership and donors
- SafeSport education with athletes, coaches and parents,
- Growing youth membership
- Turning competitors into partners
- Increase marketing, branding, and value proposition efforts
- Increase corporate sponsorships monetization
- Creative formats or new disciplines to add fun at all levels
- Beach wrestling
- Raise consistency with State infrastructures and coaching development
- Fan & Alumni Engagement through Athlete storytelling and marketing

THREATS (External)

- Potential negative impact of overall NGB SafeSport violations
- Loss of volunteers; protection and support of volunteers, refs, etc
- NCAA schools dropping wrestling from their athletic programs
- Perception that wrestling is not seen as a mainstream sport
- Competition with other sports
- Competitor Aggressiveness (NuWay, AAU, etc.)
- Economic uncertainties
- NCAA / RTCs, Preparing for change, and NIL impact
- Regulatory burdens of compliance and SafeSport
- National health crises

Strategic Priorities Overview

To effectively advance its mission, vision and business pillars, and position the organization for future success, USA Wrestling continues to prioritize its strategic focus in the following five areas:

ATHLETE SUPPORT & WELL-BEING. Increase opportunities for athletes to achieve their highest potential in a safe environment, through coaching support, training, competition, financial support and other activities.

COLLABORATION & STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS. Unify the sport through building and strengthening relationships, bringing partners and other organizations together for the greater good of the sport with all groups.

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE & ENGAGEMENT. Grow and retain members and fans with opportunities to learn, compete, and support the sport and USA Wrestling.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION. Positively influence further development of female wrestling at the grassroots, elite and leadership levels to increase athlete recruitment, retention, and talent development.

ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE. To effectively lead the sport and better serve a diverse community, invest in people, technology, and communications to develop them as core competencies.

Athlete Support & Well Being

Increase opportunities for athletes to achieve their highest potential in a safe environment.

Objectives:

- 1) **Athlete Resources Enhancement.** Expand direct and indirect services and compensation for athletes to support training and competition ambitions. Raise awareness and access to enhanced resource offering.

- 2) **Safe Sport and Healthy Environments.** Articulate clear standards, business practices and reinforcement systems to ensure the physical, emotional and mental well-being of USA Wrestling members.
 - a) **Regulations and Standards.** Establish and enforce consistent rules, procedures and standards of expected behavior to prevent harm to athletes.
 - b) **Health & Wellness Best Practices and Resources.** Identify and disseminate best practices and resources that promote athlete health and wellbeing (e.g., sanitation techniques, concussion research, headgear recommendations, etc.).
 - c) **Culture of Safety & Well-being.** Communicate and educate athletes, coaches, parents, officials, event organizers, leaders and staff about standards and expectations, how to recognize and respond to abuse or misconduct, and reduce the risk of injury, infection or mental/emotional distress.
 - d) **Coaching/Training Techniques.** Adapt athlete training approaches to better comply with safe culture intents and requirements; incorporate approaches into coach education, training resources.
 - e) **Safe Sport Value Promotion.** Articulate the benefits of a focus on safety and well-being such that wrestlers, parents, coaches, officials, staff and volunteers embrace the value and preferentially seek to participate in USA Wrestling-sanctioned programs and events.

- 3) **Pathways Clarity.** Ensure that athletes and those that strive to be elite are aware and knowledgeable of athletic pathway opportunities, what it takes to succeed for a given pathway, as well as the types of support available and how to qualify.

- 4) **Greco-Roman.** Assess factors affecting decline in pipeline of competitive athletes, e.g., rules/requirements to compete, financial challenges and incentives, quality coaching, access to training programs, etc. Formulate and implement strategy to regain and sustain international success.

Measurements of Success

- Measure awareness and understanding of resources available and every athlete knows how to access them
- Meet or exceed every aspect of SafeSport compliance as per U.S. Center for SafeSport
- Members perceive value of SafeSport (survey metric)
- Educational resource kit launched; access/usage measured at the local level with centralized reporting system
- Host Greco-Roman planning summit with strategy developed
- Achieve 12 Greco-Roman medals across all weight classes and world championship/Olympic Games levels

By 2028:

- Increased athlete sentiment and satisfaction
 - Overall
 - With health/well-being
 - With safe sport
- Podium performance in Paris and in LA
- Performance target for Greco-Roman

Collaboration & Strategic Partnerships

Unify the sport through strengthening and building relationships, bringing partners and other organizations together for the greater good of the sport.

Objectives:

1) **Middle/Junior and Senior High School Retention and Expansion.** Work with administrators, such as parents, key influencers and others to enhance and expand programs to attract and sustain participation.

2) **Collegiate/NCAA Focus.** Encourage sustainability of collegiate programs, by rallying institutions to value wrestling and support the opportunity to be a talent pipeline for Olympic disciplines.

a) **Value Recognition.** Promote program sustainability by articulating a mutually beneficial value proposition for varsity wrestling; leverage relationships with NCAA and other collegiate institutions to gain buy-in and commitment to long-term support.

b) **Program and Pipeline Growth.** Continue to generate increased interest and support for existing and new collegiate wrestling programs, emphasizing the link to the Olympics, as well as explore other options for college-age athletes in support of elite ambitions and talent development.

c) **RTC Enhancement.** Seek ways to elevate and sustain the quality of collegiate-affiliated regional training center (RTC) programs nation-wide in support of student-athletes and elite talent development.

3) **Resource Growth.** Increase sport interest, marketability, and expanded diversity of funding and services for USA Wrestling through collaboration and engagement of key stakeholders.

a) **Media/Broadcast.** Leverage emerging media channels and sponsor/partner relations to expand opportunities for new and existing audiences to enjoy viewing the sport of wrestling and generate additional revenue for USA Wrestling. Increase exposure and build value in major media markets.

b) **Fan Engagement.** Connect improvements and innovations in media to cultivating an avid fanbase for the sport of wrestling and who also have high affinity and appreciation for USA Wrestling's brand (shared objective with Customer Experience & Engagement).

c) Other Monetization Opportunities. Seek ways to monetize organizational assets (e.g., licensed merchandise, certification programs, digital site(s), etc.). Explore new and unique revenue-generating opportunities, e.g., legal sports betting, gamification, etc.

d) Sponsorships. Identify opportunities to bring new sponsors into the wrestling family as well as expand activations with existing sponsors to increase support for strategic priorities, core operations and enhanced services/benefits for members.

e) Donors. Expand the focus on private donor support by creating engagement opportunities and connect individuals directly to the mission of USA Wrestling.

4) **Community Growth.** Enhance relationships with other wrestling or sport organizations (e.g., Black Wrestlers Association, Wrestle Like A Girl, MMA, Jiu Jitsu, WWE and other combat sports, etc.) through creative, mutually beneficial collaborations to reach and inspire new audiences and generations of wrestling participants and supporters.

Measurements of Success

- Achieve a positive growth rate among high school participation
- Grow total collegiate programs by 20%
- \$1.3M in sponsor revenue per year
- \$5M in donor revenue per year
- Increase total viewership of USA Wrestling events by 20%
- Increase presence and value in major media markets
- Enhance relationships with all organizations conducting wrestling programs in the USA

By 2028:

- Increased participation in wrestling overall and by age groups
- Growth of collegiate and/or college-aged wrestling programs
- High partner satisfaction
- Increased revenue

Customer Experience & Engagement

Grow and retain members and fans with opportunities to learn, compete, and support the sport and USA Wrestling.

Objectives:

1) **Youth.** Establish a youth development pathway that encourages and supports age- and skill-appropriate participation, increases athlete and parent satisfaction, and fosters a long term physically active lifestyle. Incorporate the following as core elements of an athlete development pathway:

a) **For younger ages** (e.g., Under 11 years of age): Emphasize physical literacy (basic motor coordination, agility, etc.) Incorporate fun into the training environment and skill building exercises Focus on more than winning i.e. building confidence and character

b) **Embrace and encourage participation in other sporting activities**, especially those with complementary physical characteristics (e.g., speed, dynamic strength, stamina, etc.) with the goal of retaining current athletes, combating burnout and recruiting new members.

c) **Ensure opportunities for entry-level at all ages**

d) **Membership**, Grow youth membership in states with lowest levels of membership.

2) **Culture.** Foster a welcoming, diverse, and inclusive environment within the wrestling community that promotes lifelong love of the sport, emphasizing fun as well as winning, fairness and safety as well as toughness and physical fitness, and create consistently positive and rewarding experiences at all levels of athletic endeavor and involvement, e.g., as wrestlers, parents, coaches, officials/referees, volunteers, administrators, etc.

3) **Events.** Improve the experience of wrestlers, officials/referees, coaches, volunteers, parents and spectators at events, driving increased satisfaction and positive perceptions of USA Wrestling. Streamline and enhance the consistency of a positive and rewarding event experience for all involved. Explore opportunities to design event formats that support the cultural shift to be more welcoming, inclusive and promote a lifelong love of wrestling.

4) **Fan Experience.** Increase the fan base and their support for athletes and USA Wrestling with focused marketing efforts, experiential opportunities, avenues to express their enthusiasm, and pathways to contribute financially. Utilize partners to improve fan

connection and storytelling around premiere USA Wrestling events (shared objective with Collaboration & Strategic Partnerships).

5) Alumni Engagement. Enlist senior/retired elite wrestlers to increase sport awareness and advocacy, be “brand ambassadors” for USA Wrestling, and share time, talent and expertise to advancing athlete development, connectedness with the sport and the organization, and a culture of giving back to future generations.

Measurements of Success

- Youth development pathway(s) in place
- Youth participation and parent satisfaction is at all-time high, determined by supporting data
- Launch mobile friendly engagement solution
- “Single sign on” is utilized and functionality is associated with high satisfaction.
- Increased engagement with alumni which results in increased donations and support
- Grow membership by 50% in ten states with lowest membership rates

By 2028:

- Increased membership
 - Overall
 - Younger age groups
- High member satisfaction
 - Overall
 - Parents
 - Coaches
 - Referees
 - Alumni

Women's Participation

Positively influence the continued growth and development of female wrestling at the grassroots, elite and leadership levels to increase athlete recruitment, retention, and talent development

Objectives:

1) **Women in Leadership.** Bolster opportunities to increase the number and effectiveness of women as influential promoters of – and contributors to – the sport of wrestling generally, and women's participation in wrestling more specifically.

2) **Program Expansion.** Invest resources and build relationships to expand the presence of female wrestling programs in schools and clubs.

a) **Youth (14 and under).** Increase the number of club-based programs available for females to be introduced to the sport.

b) **High Schools.** Increase the number of varsity and state sanctioned school programs available for females to grow competitive talent.

c) **Collegiate Expansion & NCAA Recognition.** Increase number of collegiate programs and develop an influencing strategy for women's wrestling to become a recognized varsity sport by the NCAA, NAIA and NJCAA.

3) **Female-Friendly Competitions/Events.** Identify best practices to enhance consistency in delivering a positive and productive experience for female participants.

4) **Female Coaches & Officials.** Grow the number and skill level of female wrestling coaches and referees.

a) **Coach & Officials Development.** Improve education targeted at training and development of women as coaches and officials/referees, and the coaching and officiating of women's wrestling.

b) **Recruitment & Retention Focus.** Remove barriers to entry and retention of female coaches and officials/referees.

c) **Athletes as Coaches and Officials/Referees.** Increase targeted recruitment and mentorship of female athletes to become coaches and officials/referees.

Measurements of Success

- Female members – From 13K to 30K Success
- College programs – Achieve NCAA emerging sport status and increase from 45 programs to 75. Measures: By 2024
- State recognized High School programs – From 10 to 18
- Female coaches –25% increase
- College head and assistant coach positions – From 35 to 50

By 2028:

- Increased female participation & membership
 - Athletes
 - Coaches
 - Referees
- Increased # women in positions of wrestling leadership
- Female performance (Paris, LA)

Organizational Excellence

Effectively lead the sport and better serve a diverse community, invest in people, technology, and communications and develop them as core competencies.

Objectives:

1) **USAW Human Resources.** Re-evaluate short-term and long-term talent and diversity and inclusion needs; develop succession planning and talent acquisition and retention strategies to close identified gaps. Have a focus on developing staff and leadership, including volunteer leadership.

2) **State Association Optimization.** Elevate the consistency of state associations' effectiveness through sharing of operational best practices, including staff development and professionalization.

3) **Technology.** Optimize platforms and processes to support strategic priorities, especially the communication objectives, and facilitate more data-informed decision-making.

a) **Data & Analytics.** Enhance data and analytical capabilities to enable deeper understanding of business process drivers, customer satisfaction and strategic impact; leverage data as a key organizational asset, regularly using data-informed insights in corporate decision-making.

b) **Social/Digital.** Increase USA Wrestling's social/digital presence and maximize engagement of members and fans with enhanced information exchange and connection to athletes through superior content and storytelling.

4) **Communication.** More effectively engage and inspire stakeholders.

a) **Sport and Brand Excitement.** Communicate the value of involvement with USA Wrestling through compelling content and inspiring storytelling, celebrate athlete accomplishments in sport and life and leverage the rings and Olympic association to drive extraordinary interest, enthusiasm, connectedness, and support for wrestling, for athletes and the LA 2028 Games.

b) **Culture & Connectedness.** Enhance internal and external communications that support culture shift to be more welcoming, inclusive, diverse, fun, and rewarding.

5) **Marketing Advancement & Activation.** Build competencies in the latest marketing methods, channels and technology and utilize in support of communication plans and associated narratives to advance strategic plan priorities and achieve desired outcomes and impact.

Measurements of Success

- D&I staff position
- Total social media following of 2M Measures: By 2024
- Organizational audit completed, and action plan developed
- Stakeholder satisfaction baseline set with resulting increase by 25%
- Brand strength measurement baseline set with resulting increase by 25%

By 2028:

- High staff and volunteer satisfaction
- High staff retention
- Increased brand recognition/strength/positive sentiment

Shared with other priorities:

- *Increased revenue*
- *Increased member & partner satisfaction*

Working Group Participants

Board/Committee (Executive or Strategy)

Van Stokes – Chair, Long Range Strategic Planning Committee

Bruce Baumgartner – President of USA Wrestling and Chair of Board of Directors

Rob Cate – Committee Member

Heather Lawrence – Committee Member

Wynn Michalak – Committee Member, Athlete Representative

Don Reynolds – Committee Member, JOWC Representative

Katherine Shai – Committee Member, Athlete Representative

Pat Smith– Committee Member, Athlete Representative

Angie Taylor – Independent Board Member

Staff

Rich Bender – Executive Director

Les Gutches – Chief Operating Officer

Laura Peeters – General Counsel / Director of Safe Sport and Compliance

Gary Abbott – Director of Communications & Special Projects

Megan Ball – Executive Assistant

Cody Bickley – Director of National Teams High Performance

Tony Black – Director of State Services

Steve Fraser – Chief of Donor and Alumni Relations

Pete Isaias – Director of National Events

David Matthews – Director of Application Development

Morgan Rabine-Benham – Manager of Corporate Partnerships

Meredith Wilson – Director of IT, Digital Content & Marketing

Facilitators

Avery Wilson – Strategy & Business Consulting, USOPC

David Patterson – NGB Services, USOPC

Katie Grunik – NGB Services, USOPC