

## Headline 4.4 Representativeness and participation of athletes

### 1. Definition

The representativeness and participation of athletes within sports organisations refer to the fundamental right of athletes to be involved in the decision-making processes that affect their careers and the broader sporting environment. This concept goes beyond mere inclusion; it ensures that athletes' voices are actively considered and integrated into the organisational framework. A crucial strategy to achieve this is by establishing a robust Athletes' Commission with its own Terms of Reference in the statutes of the organisations. This Athletes' Commission serves as the primary platform for athlete representation. The Commission should be composed of members elected by their peers, ensuring that it truly reflects the athletes' community. Additionally, to ensure diverse perspectives, there should be a balance in terms of gender and representation of various sports disciplines. The roles, responsibilities, and terms of office for these representatives should be clearly defined and aligned with the guidelines set by larger governing bodies such as the IOC.

In practice, representativeness means incorporating Athletes' Commission members into key organisational bodies like the General Assembly and the Board, providing them with equal voting rights to influence decisions. This integration helps to ensure that athlete viewpoints are not only heard but are also pivotal in shaping policies and strategies. Regular consultations and feedback mechanisms should be established to continuously gather athlete input on various topics. Furthermore, the organisation should actively promote the Athletes' Commission on its platforms, encourage social media engagement by its members, and provide guidelines for effective communication. Collaborative efforts should be made to secure funding for athlete-related projects, co-designing initiatives that align with the needs and aspirations of the athlete community.

### 2. Ideal scenario

The organisation has established an Athletes' Commission and actively supports the functionality of this Commission through human resources and finances. Most of the members of the Athletes' Commission are elected by peers for a four-year term, which can be renewed. The Athletes' Commission aims to represent both sexes and, where applicable, maintain a balance between summer and winter sports, different disciplines of a sport, aligned with the IOC guidelines.

The Commission's role is clearly defined in the organisation's statutes, with open and objective eligibility criteria to facilitate athlete representation. The Commission is represented at the General Assembly by at least two elected members, who have voting rights, and within the organisation's Board by at least one elected member, also with voting rights. This ensures that the Athletes' Commission plays an active role, engaging effectively with its constituents and participating in decisions affecting athletes. Furthermore, at least the Chair of the Athletes' Commission is a full member of the Board.

### 3. Risks

- Lack of support for decisions by athletes/lack of ownership/lack of trust.
- Decisions are being taken that negatively affect athletes.
- Inability to take the voice and needs of athletes into consideration.
- Negative public image.
- Legal procedures initiated by athletes versus the organisation.
- No awareness of the existence of the athletes' commission.

### 4. Instruments and key elements

<i>Instruments</i>	<i>Key elements</i>
<b>Athletes' Commission</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear composition of Commission: elected and appointed members.</li> <li>• Fair and democratic election process for selecting elected members.</li> <li>• Role of Athletes' Commission included in the statutes/constitution of the organisation.</li> <li>• Clear procedures on candidates for membership.</li> <li>• Clear procedures on how the Athletes' Commission is included in the internal decision-making process of the sport organisation (e.g. voting rights in GA /participation in Board/ participation in Commissions).</li> <li>• The Commission meets at least once a year.</li> <li>• Encouragement of diversity and gender equality in the Commission as well as fair representation of different sports (e.g. winter vs summer sports) or disciplines.</li> <li>• Clear communication arrangements (internal and external) including the use of the organisation's website and social media as well as a dedicated webpage and social media.</li> <li>• Support by sports organisation for Athletes' Commission (e.g. administrative and financial support for preparing and hosting meetings).</li> </ul>
<b>Athlete representatives in governing bodies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Representation of athletes in governing bodies included in statutes/constitution of the organisation.</li> <li>• Representation of athletes in the General Assembly (including voting rights).</li> <li>• Representation of athletes on Board (e.g. Chair of Athletes' Commission).</li> <li>• Representation of athletes in further relevant Commissions.</li> <li>• Structural support provided by the sport organisations for the participation of athletes.</li> </ul>

## 5. Good practice examples

### Example “Athletes’ Commission”

**Organisation:** International Olympic Committee (IOC)

**Description:** Established in 1981, the IOC Athletes' Commission is comprised of up to 12 athletes elected by Olympic athletes during the Games for an 8-year term, up to 11 appointed members to ensure gender, sports, and regional balance, and 2 ex-officio members from the International Paralympic Committee and the World Olympians Association. The Commission operates under well-defined election procedures outlined in "The IOC Athletes' Commission Election Procedure" and is supported by the IOC Administration, particularly the Director of the Athletes' Department. It is involved in various activities and is also included in the Olympic Charter (Bye-law to Rule 21), with its members becoming IOC Members themselves for an 8-year term, thereby enhancing the Commission's profile and influence. Additionally, the IOC, in collaboration with its Athletes' Commission, promotes the establishment of Athletes' Commissions within National Olympic Committees and Federations through its "Guide to Developing an Effective Athletes' Commission." This guide provides recommendations for ensuring effectiveness, such as maintaining diverse membership, enforcing a minimum 4-year term, holding regular meetings, and securing representation on the Board and in the General Assembly. It also emphasizes the importance of effective communication both internally among athletes and within the organisation and externally through social media and other channels.

**Further information:**

[IOC Athletes Commission - Athlete Involvement in the Olympic Movement \(olympics.com\)](https://olympics.com)

[Guide to developing an effective Athletes' Commission \(olympics.com\)](https://olympics.com)

[Topics | IOC Athletes' Commission \(olympics.com\)](https://olympics.com)

### Example “Athletes’ Commission” and “Athletes’ representatives in governing bodies”

**Organisation:** National Olympic Committee of the Netherlands (NOC\*NSF)

**Description:** The NOC\*NSF boasts a highly active and well-established Athletes' Commission comprising up to 12 members, including the Chair, who also serves on the NOC\*NSF Board. The Commission plays a significant role in various advisory bodies within the NOC\*NSF and engages with external partners to ensure that athletes' perspectives are considered in discussions on elite sports issues. To support its activities, the NOC\*NSF designates a staff member as the Commission's secretary. The Commission meets monthly, with regular communication maintained through email and social media between meetings. It operates several social media accounts, including X, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram, with both public pages and private groups for athletes. A primary focus of the Athletes' Commission is not only to represent athletes within the Olympic Committee but also to enhance athletes' roles in decision-making bodies across Dutch sports and to collaborate with athlete representatives from the IOC, EOC, and international sports federations and organisations.

**Further information:** [Athletes' Commission - NOCNSF](https://nocsf.nl)

### Example “Athletes’ Commission” and “Athletes’ representatives in governing bodies”

**Organisation:** National Olympic Committee of the Czech Republic

**Description:** The Czech Athletes’ Commission, known as "Komise sportovců," comprises 15 athletes, including the Chair, who represent a broad spectrum of sports, encompassing both winter and summer disciplines as well as individual and team sports. The Commission's primary role is to support the development of athletes and enhance Czech sport overall. Its responsibilities include participating in seminars on various topics like Dual Career, engaging in discussions with the Czech Olympic Committee on current issues, addressing Olympics-related matters such as equipment communication and flag bearer designation, and organizing the voting for the best athlete election. The Commission maintains regular contact through several meetings per year. According to the 2024 statutes of the Czech Olympic Committee, up to five athletes from the Commission have voting rights at the General Assembly, and one representative, typically the Chair, serves on the Board, ensuring direct representation of athletes' interests in the organization's governance.

**Further information:**

[Komise sportovců ČOV | Český olympijský tým \(olympijskytym.cz\)](https://olympijskytym.cz)

[Stanovy ČOV | Český olympijský tým \(olympijskytym.cz\)](https://olympijskytym.cz)

### Example “Athletes’ Commission” and “Athletes’ representatives in governing bodies”

**Organisation:** National Olympic Committee of Canada

**Description:** The Athletes’ Commission works to advocate for Olympians by lobbying sport administrators, publishing position statements representing Canadian Olympians, negotiating with team officials, and providing insights to Olympic family sponsors and COC staff from the athlete perspective. Additionally, the Commission connects with international counterparts to share best practices, updates national sport federations on athlete news, and supports national sport federation athlete councils. It also surveys athletes on relevant issues to ensure a fair, supportive, and transparent environment within the Canadian sport system. Operating impartially and confidentially, the Commission adheres to a strategic plan, updated after each Summer Games, and is guided by its vision, mission, and values. Comprising 10 elected and 2 appointed members, the Commission meets four times a year in person and seven times via teleconference. It capitalizes on opportunities to engage with athletes at national championships and training camps, led by a chair, vice-chair, and first officer, with logistical support from COC staff. Leveraging technology, the Commission effectively plans, meets, executes, and evaluates its goals across Canada.

**Further information:** [Athletes' Commission - Team Canada - Official Olympic Team Website](https://www.teamcanada.ca/athletes-commission)

### Example “Athletes Committee”

**Organisation:** World Aquatics

**Description:** The Athletes Committee is comprised of twenty athletes elected at the World Aquatics World Championships, six athletes appointed by the World Aquatics President with the approval of the World Aquatics Bureau, six Honorary Members similarly appointed, and all athletes from any Aquatics discipline

who are members of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) Athletes Commission. The Committee elects one delegate per discipline to attend the World Aquatics Congress. Its responsibilities include representing athletes' perspectives to World Aquatics, particularly in organizing competitions and events, collaborating on technical rule proposals and amendments for each discipline, gathering and conveying athletes' feedback from competitions, and ensuring that a representative with relevant personal experience participates in each Technical Committee's meetings. Additionally, the Chair of the Athletes Committee serves as an ex officio member of the Bureau and the Executive, with the primary role of ensuring that the athletes' viewpoint is adequately represented in discussions.

**Further information:** [Athletes committee \(worldaquatics.com\)](https://worldaquatics.com)

#### Example "Athletes' Rights"

**Organisation:** World Taekwondo

The Athletes Committee represents athletes within the Taekwondo Movement and upholds the rights and responsibilities of the athletes in accordance with the WT Athletes' Declaration. The Committee shall engage with WT's Commissions, Committees, and Member National Associations, to help develop athlete-centered programs, and conduct educational training for and on behalf of athletes. Elected members shall have a four-year term. The Committee members shall elect from among themselves two Co-Chairs (one male and one female). Co-chairs of the Athletes Committee are part of the Council and should attend the General Assembly.

**Further information:** [World Taekwondo ABOUT WT Commissions And Committees](#)

#### Example "Athletes' Rights"

**Organisation:** ISSF - Athlete rights, education and guidelines

The Athletes Handbook outlines comprehensive guidance for athletes on various aspects of their careers and personal development. It provides athletes with important insights into physical and mental well-being, injury prevention, and nutritional planning. The handbook delves into professional growth, covering contractual matters, financial planning, career management, and maintaining professional integrity. Additionally, it provides insights into participating in international competitions, leveraging opportunities offered by the IOC, and strategic goal-setting for long-term success. The emphasis throughout is on empowering athletes with the knowledge and resources to thrive in their sport and beyond.

**Further information:**

[International Shooting Sport Federation \(issf-sports.org\)](https://issf-sports.org)

[ISSF Athlete's Handbook](#)

## 6. Steps to the next level

To level 2 ★★ “Emerging”	To level 3 ★★★ “Developing”	To level 4 ★★★★ “Established”	To level 5 ★★★★★ “Embedded”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek possible ways to strengthen direct contact with athletes.</li> <li>• Discuss within the Board the need to formalise the interaction with athletes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish the Athletes’ Commission within your organisation by drafting clear regulations or Terms of Reference for the commission approved by the organisation’s Board.</li> <li>• Decide on and set out clear procedures to elect the members of the Commission through peers. Include the Athletes’ Commission as a body within your statutes.</li> <li>• Encourage diversity and gender equality in the Athletes’ Commission as well as fair representation of sports and disciplines by enshrining it within the regulation or Terms of Reference.</li> <li>• Explore possible ways in which the organisation can support the Commission (e.g. financial or organisational support).</li> <li>• Provide voting rights and representation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actively support the Commission by providing organisational support through your staff members and by organising regular meetings (e.g. athletes forum).</li> <li>• Actively promote the Athletes’ Commission (e.g. separate subpage on your website) and encourage members to be active (e.g. speak at conferences and seminars).</li> <li>• Actively pursue the view of the athletes by including them in advisory and ad-hoc commissions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actively promote the Athletes’ Commission on the organisation’s platforms and encourage its members to engage on social media, providing them with guidelines for effective use.</li> <li>• Ensure full integration of athletes in organisational decision-making by providing them with equal voting rights and representation within the General Assembly and Board. This includes not only the Chair or another representative of the Athletes’ Commission but also additional athlete representatives on various committees and sub-committees, ensuring their voices are heard at all levels of governance.</li> </ul>



	<p>possibilities for athletes within the General Assembly of your organisation through the regulation and Terms of Reference. Include as a minimum the Chair or another representative of the Athletes' Commission as a member of the Board.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include members of the Athletes' Commission in various bodies of your organisation (General Assembly, commissions, Board etc.) and enshrine this in the organisation's statutes.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement systems within the Athletes' Commission to capture feedback and athlete viewpoints on various topics and conduct regular consultations with athletes.</li> <li>• Apply for and utilise available funding for athlete activities and projects jointly with the Athletes' Commissions.</li> <li>• Co-design and deliver projects collaboratively between the Athletes' Commission and the organisation.</li> <li>• Facilitate the Athletes' Commissions' involvement at a strategic level of the organisation.</li> </ul>
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