

# GUIDE TO DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE ATHLETES' COMMISSION

IOC ATHLETES' COMMISSION - JANUARY 2014





# INVOLVE & INSPIRE YOUR ATHLETES WHILE IMPROVING YOUR ORGANISATION

«The IOC Athletes' Commission was created in 1981 and was a concrete step made by the Olympic Movement to strengthen the link between active athletes and the International Olympic Committee. With thirty plus years of experience now behind us, the Athletes' Commission and the IOC are continually working to improve this link for the betterment of all active athletes, the Olympic Movement and the improvement of the Olympic and Youth Olympic Games.

We continue to see an increasing number of Athletes' Commissions being created at all levels of the Olympic Movement. Their creation is a strong step forward, but just having a Commission is not enough. Each and every Athletes' Commission needs to have a role and a structure that enables it to be effective and produce achievements for the athletes themselves and the organisations within which they sit.

One of our goals, as the IOC Athletes' Commission, is to lead the way in establishing best practices so that athletes and organisations can reap the benefits.

This guide is one of the many efforts in place to support this goal. We hope it will be an inspiration to your organisation.»



**Claudia Bokel**  
Chairperson, IOC Athletes' Commission



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# DID YOU KNOW THAT 78% OF NATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEES AND 91% OF INTERNATIONAL FEDERATIONS NOW HAVE AN ACTIVE ATHLETES' COMMISSION?

## But more can be achieved!

Athletes are at the centre of the Olympic Movement and through effectively run Commissions their voices will be heard and their experiences used for the improvement of sport at all levels worldwide!

This document has been developed to assist international and national sports federations, National Olympic Committees and Local Organising Committees in creating or further developing effective Athletes' Commissions based on best practices used throughout the Olympic Movement.



Sports organisations and event organisers who wish to have more information or liaise with the IOC Athletes' Commission should contact:

[athletes@olympic.org](mailto:athletes@olympic.org)



In order to put forward a candidate for election to the IOC Athletes' Commission, NOCs must have an Athletes' Commission that meets a minimum set of conditions set out by the IOC. For more information on these conditions and how to put forward a candidate for election, NOCs should contact: [athletes@olympic.org](mailto:athletes@olympic.org)



# THE IOC ATHLETES' COMMISSION IN ACTION

## Did you know ...

- > that the IOC Athletes' Commission meets once or twice a year and is composed of 12 members elected by athletes competing at the Summer and Winter Olympic Games, up to 7 members are appointed by the IOC President and 2 ex-officio members represent the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) and the World Olympians Association (WOA) respectively;
- > that the Chair of the IOC Athletes' Commission sits on the IOC Executive Board, and that members sit on various IOC Commissions, the IPC Athletes' Council and World Anti-Doping Agency's (WADA) Foundation Board and Athletes' Commission;
- > that elected members are often active members of their National Olympic Committee's Athletes' Commissions and are put forth by their NOC to stand for election;
- > that the roles of the IOC Athletes' Commission stretches widely across the organisation, including, among other activities, being involved in:
  - the process to evaluate candidate cities seeking to host the Olympic and Youth Olympic Games and monitor the organisation of each edition of the Games;
  - the process to evaluate the Olympic sports programme;
  - the fight against doping including raising awareness and actively participating in initiatives to promote clean sport;
  - the development and delivery of the IOC Athlete Career Programme (ACP) that supports athletes while they prepare for and go through their career transition out of sport with the provision of resources and training enabling athletes to develop their life skills and maximise their education and employment opportunities;
  - the organisation of the International Athletes' Forum bringing together active and retired athletes from around the world;
  - the promotion of the Olympic Values Education Programme, an initiative to encourage the dissemination of Olympic values and history among the youth of the world;
  - the development of recommendations for other IOC Commissions such as Women and Sport, Sport and Environment, Sport for All, etc.;
  - the continual representation of athletes throughout the Olympic Movement including acting as athlete role models and being present at the Olympic Games and Youth Olympic Games to interact with athletes.

The IOC Athletes' Commission is active and working for the betterment of all athletes and the Olympic Movement as a whole.

## How active is your Athletes' Commission?



# WHAT CAN AN ATHLETES' COMMISSION DO FOR YOUR ORGANISATION?

Having an Athletes' Commission allows the athletes' voices to be heard throughout the organisation – but there are many other benefits for an organisation as well. Barriers to the creation of an Athletes' Commission can always be found; for example it will stretch resources or even interfere with the existing structure that is administering the sport. However, the potential benefits of having an active and efficient Athletes' Commission far outweighs any of these minor issues.

Cases from a variety of different sports have shown that an Athletes' Commission can:

- > Develop ambassadors who are involved in and understand the decisions being made by the sports organisation.
- > Improve decision-making by providing a sound testing ground for the impact and reaction to change.
- > Provide credibility in an era where organisations are being scrutinised in their decision-making, inclusiveness and governance.
- > Offer a fresh perspective, straight from the field of play, on the many new trends and issues that sports organisations are continually faced with.
- > Reach and communicate with athletes and their entourage on a peer-to-peer basis collecting feedback and new ideas from the field of play.

An Athletes' Commission can be as much for the benefit of the athletes as it is for the benefit of the sports organisation itself if it has an effective role and structure and communicates actively.

**Make an effective Athletes' Commission an integral part of your administration!**



# WHAT IS THE ROLE OF AN EFFECTIVE ATHLETES' COMMISSION?

An Athletes' Commission presents an opportunity for improving every aspect of your organisation, whether you are a federation, a National Olympic Committee or an event organiser. It is therefore important to ensure that the role of the Athletes' Commission within your organisation is the right one.

The most effective Athletes' Commissions are a platform where the views of athletes are represented and the voice of the athletes can be heard, however, more than that, they are also:

- > An integral part of an organisation's decision-making process, ensuring that decisions across the organisation are reflected upon and discussed by the athletes.
- > A resource for research and discussion related to new ideas and issues.
- > A point of contact for the Athletes' Commissions of other organisations (international, continental, national, multi-sport, etc.) and of athletes both active and retired.

The potential scope of an Athletes' Commission can be quite broad. However, the most effective Athletes' Commissions do not play the role of a 'complaints box' for athletes to feed complaints into the organisation, and alternatively they do not play the role of being a one-way communication channel from the organisation to competing athletes.

«Cyclists have two options in order to express themselves. Either they can grumble in public and remain aloof, or they can get around the table to discuss issues, work together and make progress.

The Athletes' Commission has definitely chosen the second option. It is now up to us to make it work.»

**Marianne Vos**

Member of the Athletes' Commission,  
International Cycling Union (UCI)



«Our commission has been active in canvassing athletes about changes to rules or competition calendars.

This has allowed us to report back to our governing bodies about our concerns and to open a dialog on these changes that has seen some of our suggestions implemented.»

**Benedict Chambers**

Member of Athletes' Commission,  
International Fencing Federation (FIE)

«For the Athletes, I feel that the existence of the Athletes' Commission has increased their trust towards our organisation.

They know that their opinions are taken into consideration in the decision making process while it also provides them with a better understanding of why and how some decisions are reached.

Our organisation has become much more transparent for them.»

**Jani Tanskanen**

President of Athletes' Commission,  
International Gymnastics Federation (FIG)





«Our Athletes' Committee is involved in many areas of the organisation, however one of the most significant aspects of the Committee's role is to assist the International Biathlon Union in ensuring that the competition calendar works.

The initial draft is prepared in conjunction with other stakeholders but it is the Athletes' Committee's role to make sure that the athletes' welfare is taken into consideration.

This feedback is critical to us to ensure that our events are successful and our athletes are happy.»

**Nicole Resch**

Secretary General,  
International Biathlon Union (IBU)



# WHAT IS THE BEST STRUCTURE FOR AN EFFECTIVE ATHLETES' COMMISSION?

The most effective structure for an Athletes' Commission is one that is balanced, representative and is an integrated and credible part of the decision-making process of the organisation.

To ensure that your Athletes' Commission develops a good structure, it is recommended that it:

- > Has a balance of male and female participants and representation from different regions and different sports or disciplines of the sport;
- > Has a minimum of five members, the majority of which have been elected by their peers;
- > Consists of active or recently active athletes;
- > Provides a minimum of a four-year term to members;
- > Has a seat on the Executive Board, the Council and the General Assembly and is actively involved in the decision-making process within the organisation;
- > Meets physically at least once a year, with continued communication between meetings – in the case of an event organised by the Athletes' Commission, the Commission should meet regularly in the lead up to, and during the event;
- > Should have a representative within the organisation that is responsible for the administration and representation of the Commission;
- > Has the resources needed to have meetings and for members to travel to major events.

Effective Athletes' Commissions often vary slightly from other Commissions as they are structured within the decision-making process of the organisation and are not simply seen as a source of information and recommendations.

In the case of many sports organisations, this will probably require a change to the constitution of the federation, which can be a major challenge. Without such a change, however, Athletes' Commissions are unlikely to become part of the decision-making fabric of the organisation.



# COMMUNICATION IS AT THE HEART OF AN EFFECTIVE ATHLETES' COMMISSION!

Having the right role and structure for an Athletes' Commission is not enough to make the commission effective. The Commission must stay in contact with current issues, on the side of both the athletes and of the organisation, and have the channels to communicate in both directions.

To facilitate this communication, the organisation needs to be actively involved in promoting the role and activities of the Athletes' Commission. This includes:

- > The top leadership communicating the value and role of the Athletes' Commission throughout the entire organisation to demonstrate that it has the organisation's full support and that it is an important and integrated part of the administration;
- > A staff member within the administration can actively represent the Athletes' Commission within the organisation;
- > For organisations with a website or an intranet, the Athletes' Commission should have a dedicated space to provide updates of their activities.

An effective Athletes' Commission, however, also needs to be in constant communication with the athletes it is representing. In order to effectively represent them the members of the commission need to understand the views of all athletes, and not just depend on their own views. To ensure this happens, the Athletes' Commission should:

- > Be accessible and visible at major events and youth events;
- > Communicate to athletes through social media, websites, newsletters, etc.;
- > Develop promotional material including athlete statements, either written or video, to promote the role, and members, of the Athletes' Commission and why an athlete should volunteer his/her time to be on the Commission or share their views with the Commission;
- > Establish an effective system for gaining athlete feedback (e.g. e-surveys).

An Athletes' Commission that stands alone will not make as strong of a difference as one that is integrated into the administration and is connected to the wider community of athletes involved in the sport, representing the country, or attending an event.



# FOR INSPIRATION!

Learn from Athletes' Commissions from around the world who are working to make a difference.

## Spotlight on :

- 1. The International Sailing Federation**
- 2. The London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games**
- 3. Oceania National Olympic Committees**
- 4. Swiss Olympic**



## 1. The International Sailing Federation

The International Sailing Federation (ISAF) created its Athletes' Commission in 2005. Members are elected by peer vote for a term of four years, with members being elected at two different times so that there is some continuity within the Commission.

Currently, there are eight members, with an equal distribution of males and females, active and recently-active athletes and no more than one member can be elected from each of the ten ISAF disciplines.

The ISAF Athletes' Commission has representation and a vote on the ISAF Executive Board, a change that came into place in 2009 and has resulted in a much more effective Commission. It meets at least three times per year and is actively involved in all areas across the organisation.

### What makes the ISAF Athletes' Commission effective?

- > Having a vote on the Executive Board and an active role on the Council created a huge sense of motivation across the Commission. However, in order to get to this position, a lot of trust and credibility needed to be built with the ISAF Council. This trust was built as a result of the leadership of the Commission which ensured that the Commission was diplomatic and kept discussions positive, whilst still applying pressure towards ISAF to better involve athletes.
- > A balance between active and non-active athletes is extremely important for an effective Commission. The non-active athletes have more time to devote to the Commission while the active athletes keep the connection to the current realities of the sport.
- > Persistence is key. The Commission does not believe in accepting 'no' as a final answer. Every change is taken to build a better future and consistency in efforts and persistence are what creates positive outcomes.



«The one thing that I think has been really important for us at ISAF is the information that the Athletes' Commission has been able to contribute across all of the areas of ISAF.

The direct and on-going connection with the athletes has enabled the organisation to keep up to date with what is going on in the world of sailing.

By keeping the organisation focused on elements that are important to the sport and being aware of arising issues has helped the organisation to grow and improve.

We keep it real for ISAF.»

**Ben Barger**  
ISAF Athletes' Commission  
Chair



[www.sailing.org/about/committees/executive/athletes\\_commission.php](http://www.sailing.org/about/committees/executive/athletes_commission.php)



## 2. The London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games

Directly following the election of London as host of the 2012 Olympic Games, the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games (LOCOG) created a Sports Advisory Group (which later became a subcommittee to the LOCOG Board) that focused on providing a stronger voice for athletes within the organisation of the Games. The LOCOG Athletes' Committee provided an important focus on ensuring that the athlete experience was central to the organisation of the 2012 Olympics.

The members of the LOCOG Athletes Committee were appointed by the LOCOG Sports Director and the Chair of the Committee, with guidance from stakeholders such as the British Olympic Association, the British Paralympic Association and the IOC Athlete Commission. Members included recently active athletes due to time commitments and various sports administrators who had experience managing elite athletes at major events. There were approximately twelve members with an equal ratio of males and females.

Anything that involved the athlete experience came in front of this group. It was a major part of the decision making process of LOCOG. The committee met every two months in the lead up to the Games, with the odd extraordinary meeting to discuss urgent matters. In addition, members of the committee were appointed to specific project groups as extra commitments to ensure the athlete perspective was fully incorporated into such projects – for example, working with caterers for the Olympic Village.



«The athlete experience at London 2012 was widely praised and that was in large part due to the time and commitment of the Athletes' Committee and its willingness to engage at a highly detailed level with all aspects of the planning for the Games.»

### What made the LOCOG Athletes' Committee effective?

- > From the very beginning, the committee was able to articulate a clear vision of why an athlete focused committee was necessary and how it was going to add value to the organisation of the Games.
- > The Committee was well positioned within the LOCOG structure to ensure that the athlete voice was heard and taken seriously.
- > The Committee make sure to prioritise its decisions and feedback recognising that compromise was an important part of the process.

**Jonathan Edwards**  
Chair of the LOCOG  
Athletes Committee



[www.olympic.org/news/fredericks-and-bokel-praise-london-s-athlete-focused-games/169998](http://www.olympic.org/news/fredericks-and-bokel-praise-london-s-athlete-focused-games/169998)



### 3. Spotlight on the Oceania National Olympic Committees

The Oceania National Olympic Committees (ONOC) created its Athletes' Commission in 2000, however it wasn't until 2005 that the Commission started to really get moving. There are a total of six representatives on the Commission; 1 from Australia, 1 from New Zealand and then one Melanesian, Polynesian and Micronesian to ensure each area is represented. In 2013, there are four female and two male representatives. One additional member is elected by their peers at the Pacific Games and this member also sits on the Pacific Games Council.

Members of the Commission are nominated by their National Olympic Committee (CNO) once every four years and then elected by the ONOC Executive Board.

The chair sits on the ONOC Executive Board as a voting member. The Commission also has two votes at the ONOC General Assembly, making the athletes voice quite strong within the decision-making of the organisation. ONOC changed its constitution so that if a National Olympic Committee does not have an Athletes' Commission they are only allowed one vote at the General Assembly instead of the normal two, plus they could not have a member on the Executive Board.

Most of the National Olympic Committees throughout Oceania have now also adapted their constitutions to reflect this. So now the Chair of the Athletes' Commission of each National Olympic Committee sits on the Executive Board of that NOC and has a vote – some NOCs even have a male and a female.

Meeting only once a year, the Commission stays in close contact via email and a closed Facebook group. The Commission works broadly across the organisation, with a particular emphasis on the delivery of an athlete education programme, through which over 5,000 athletes have now participated.



«It has taken us 8 years to get ourselves established with credibility and proven added value to NOCs, Games organisers and to the athletes themselves.

We now have momentum, plans and a culture that will continue to grow and continue to represent the athletes' voice.»

**Barbara Kendall**  
Chair of ONOC  
Athletes' Commission



### **What makes the ONOC Athletes' Commission effective?**

- > Passionate members, efficient knowledge transfer and communication have been critical.
- > Visibility at events and taking opportunities to network and present its activities has enabled the commission to build credibility and demonstrate its value.
- > The IOC Athlete Career Programme has been a crucial platform that has enabled the Commission to go into the NOCs and meet with athletes directly to explain the work of the Commission and get buy in from other athletes.
- > Having a budget has allowed the Commission to run programmes for athletes and to assist the administration, both of which have allowed the Commission to demonstrate results.
- > A post-Games questionnaire to all athletes enables the Commission to have the direct feedback from the athletes in order to ensure their work is in line with the voices of the athletes themselves across the region.



[www.sportingpulse.com/assoc\\_page.cgi?c=2-3140-0-0-0&slD=31396](http://www.sportingpulse.com/assoc_page.cgi?c=2-3140-0-0-0&slD=31396)





## 4. Swiss Olympic

The National Olympic Committee of Switzerland, Swiss Olympic, created its first Athletes' Commission in March 2003 to represent the 1,700 athletes from 83 different federations who are members of a national team.

Members of the Athletes' Commission are re-elected every year. Currently, there are nine members – seven males and two females – representing a mixture of summer and winter sports, and Olympic and non-Olympic disciplines. Two of the members are appointed to the Swiss Olympic Executive Council to represent the Commission and have voting rights.

The Commission meets quarterly, but engages with Swiss athletes year round through a private Facebook group which provides a platform for capturing the different needs and concerns of the athletes. Members of the Commission are directly involved in different committees across Swiss Olympic where they ensure the athlete voice is heard, and to further drive the development of all areas of sport in Switzerland.

Swiss Olympic has seen that athletes are vital to the development of sport in the country and believes that the more federations that invite their athletes to share their thoughts and opinions the more the federations, and sport in general, in the country will profit from the knowledge and experience of the athletes.

### What makes the Swiss Olympic Athletes' Commission effective?

- > The representation of the members across various aspects of Swiss Olympic activities.
- > Besides having an open platform for the athletes on Facebook, it is very important that each Swiss federation has an athlete representative who speaks to the other athletes about their concerns, advocates for the athlete's voice within the federation, and communicates with the Swiss Olympic Athletes' Commission.



[www.swissolympic.ch/fr/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-4135//4199\\_read-24987/](http://www.swissolympic.ch/fr/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-4135//4199_read-24987/)



«Due to the two seats of the Swiss Olympic Committee Athletes' Commission within the Swiss Olympic Executive Board, the athletes can bring in their opinion effectively and influence the decision-making process at the top level.»

**Thomas Lambert**  
President, Swiss Olympic Athletes' Commission



# DO YOU HAVE AN EFFECTIVE ATHLETES' COMMISSION?

## Share your experiences!

Send us your story at [athletes@olympic.org](mailto:athletes@olympic.org)

Follow the discussion on Twitter [#IOCAC](https://twitter.com/IOCAC)

Learn more with [www.olympic.org/athletes-space](http://www.olympic.org/athletes-space)