

ATHLETE COUNCIL GUIDE





CREATING AN ATHLETES' COUNCIL



THE FUNDAMENTALS

Athletes' Councils (ACs) are one of the most effective mechanism by which athletes can influence change and champion athlete rights in high performance sport at the national team level.



By providing information to the Board of Directors (BOD), coaches and the leadership team of a National Sport Organization (NSO), ACs ensure that the voices of athletes at all levels and disciplines are represented in a collaborative, professional and effective manner.

BENEFITS OF AN ATHLETES' COUNCIL

- Establishes a recognized and valued voice by staff, board members and coaches
- Gathers direct feedback from the athletes through a formal mechanism
- Invests in the holistic development of athletes by fostering leadership skills development
- Presents a responsible and informed voice at the decision-making table from the athlete perspective
- Provides the ability to represent the diverse interests of multi-disciplined sports
- Fosters collaboration, knowledge transfer and an “us” approach

KEY DELIVERABLES OF AN ATHLETES' COUNCIL

- Provide an Athlete Report to the BOD and management
- Representing the athlete voice at the AGM of your NSO
- Represent a vote for board member elections on behalf of the athletes
- Provide input prior to approval on key documents/policies/topics directly affecting athletes within your sport including, but not limited to Athlete Agreements, Team Selection, High Performance training and competition, coaching, etc.
- Build leadership succession and skills within the athlete community



KEY CONSIDERATIONS ON STRUCTURE

- Is your sport centralized or regionally structured?
- Is your sport fully integrated with both para and able-bodied sport disciplines?
- What groups within your sport should be represented on the council?
 - Junior, Development, Senior, event based and/or discipline specific groups?
- Will you engage active and/or retired athletes?

BUILDING AN ATHLETES' COUNCIL

There are a number of steps to take to ensure that the creation of an AC is transparent and representative of your athlete community. AthletesCAN recommends the following procedure when creating an AC:

1. Get a group of interested athletes together and determine whether or not your sport needs an AC. You'll need to consider the following areas to better define your objectives:
 - a. What will the Council try to do for athletes?
 - b. What are some of the issues facing athletes in your sport?
 - c. Which athletes will be included through this representation? (e.g. gender, ability, discipline, etc.)
 - d. How will a Council function? (Structure, communication, working with other parts of the organization)
2. Notice should be sent to the athlete community of the intention to form an AC, including the steps that will be taken to create the AC and an invitation to participate in the process. Your NSO should also be an active party to the creation of the AC and provide a staff/board liaison to ensure communication between the AC and NSO is established and ongoing.
3. An AC could function on an informal basis and not be officially recognized by the sport, however, your influence and resources may be limited and the athletes will have to meet at camps, by phone or e-mail. To be formally recognized by the NSO, the Council should be included in the NSO Bylaws or in policy. Ideally, you want the NSO to recognize the Council as the voice of the high-performance athletes, with the Athlete Representatives (ARs) as its ambassadors at board and/or committee meetings in addition to a budget that would allow your group to meet at least once a year face to face and host regular conference calls. You will need your NSO's BOD to approve this, so work with your NSO staff to add your proposal to the next Board meeting agenda.
4. Request any previous documents, reports, policies surrounding athlete representation within the organization. Determine whether this has been attempted, what worked, what did not, and if you're able to rework a previously created structure. Re-inventing the wheel is NOT always the answer. Learn from the past, and make change now to build the future you want to see in your sport.



- 5.** Build an AC Terms of Reference (TOR) using the AthletesCAN template resource to outline the expectations of the Council. The TOR would cover items including but not limited to purpose, responsibilities, composition, meetings, authority, communication, etc. An election process, term limits and eligibility for the AC must be formally drafted as well. The proposed AC structure should be circulated to the broader athlete community and NSO for feedback. A revised AC structure can be created based on this feedback and included in the TOR under Composition. Within the TOR, you will describe how the AC will function.
- 6.** A cross section of athletes representing all areas of the sport (gender, discipline, level, etc., where applicable) should collaborate in the creation of a mission and vision for the AC.
- 7.** The AC TOR, mission and vision should be voted on at an athlete meeting with a majority of athletes from all of the sport's disciplines represented. This can be done via conference call if a physical meeting is logistically prohibitive.
- 8.** Between formal meetings, communicate informally at events, on the phone, or electronically to keep all athletes well-informed about issues. As funding for meetings is always an issue a good alternative is to meet electronically through a message board for athletes (password protected) on the NSO website or through Skype.
- 9. DEVELOP SOLUTIONS!** From day one, the AC should endeavour to be "solution oriented". It is one thing to find a situation or issue about which you are not happy – it is more difficult but also more productive to develop solutions and recommendations to address those issues. Following an Issue identification Framework can help with this process.
- 10.** Develop a communications strategy for the Council. Different components of the plan should cover internal communication amongst the athletes; formal communication with the Board and committees through the Athlete Representatives (including the determination of which committees should have Athlete Reps sitting as members); and informal communication (with key messages) for meetings and events.
- 11.** Figure out how to get your point across!

 - a. Ask your sport organization's BOD to extend two positions to allow for two ARs (male and female) to ensure greater opportunity for your message to reach the appropriate decision makers.
 - b. Ask the Board to support these ARs by making sure they understand how the board makes decisions.
 - c. Ask for ARs on the committees of the Board (e.g. national team committee, high performance, finance, personnel, coaching, selection, etc.) – this is usually where the real decisions are made.



IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS IN FORMING AN ATHLETES' COUNCIL

Although the shape and distribution of responsibilities of Councils will vary from sport to sport, AthletesCAN strongly recommends that the following areas be formally addressed when establishing an AC:

- **INCLUSIVITY** – Ensure that all athletes in your sport are well represented on the AC including senior national, junior and development teams, women, men, able-bodied and para, and the different disciplines your NSO governs.
- **ACCOUNTABILITY** – The AC should be formally recognized by the NSO and included in the bylaws or policy of the organization. Being established in bylaws and policies ensures that the AC's voice must be considered in applicable NSO decision-making processes.
- **BUDGET** – Establish a defined budget to ensure the AC is able to follow through on its objectives. This could include communicating to the athlete membership or travelling to NSO meetings. This budget should come from the NSO.
- **RESPONSIBLE VOICE** – The goal of an AC should be to work with the NSO to find solutions to obstacles facing athletes in their sport. An AC should not be adversarial to NSOs, but rather should endeavour to be collaborative, proactive and respectful while working together to help both the organization and athletes succeed.
- **FAIR AND ETHICAL** - An AC should hold elections and create a TOR for its members and stakeholders to provide transparency and deliver a democratic representational voice to constituents.
- **REPRESENTATION** – Members of the AC should ensure at least one (1) representative of the Council is available to attend your sport's AGM and all applicable committee and board meetings to help shape and build the NSO. Ultimately, this broad-based representation will foster an athlete-centered environment that fuels performance both on and off the field of play.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

What if I have questions along the way?

In an effort to help athletes build effective Athletes' Councils, please find additional resources on our website to guide you and your fellow athletes through the process.

AthletesCAN is here to support you in this process – please contact us should you have any questions along the way!

ATHLETES' COUNCIL TERMS OF REFERENCE TEMPLATE



[Download Template](#)

[Name of Athletes' Council] Terms of Reference

Name	<i>[NSO] Athletes' Council</i>
Purpose	<p><i>General statement of the Athletes' Council's purpose or role.</i></p> <p><i>Example: The Athletes' Council will be the collective voice of all [NSO's] high-performance athletes, regardless of discipline, and will assist the organization in the fulfillment of its mission and the pursuit of its vision.</i></p>
Key Duties / Responsibilities	<p><i>Specify the activities the Athletes' Council will undertake in a general sense, without setting out the detailed process the Athletes' Council will follow.</i></p> <p><i>Examples:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Participate in the decision-making of [NSO];</i> • <i>Provide athlete representation to the Board of Directors of [NSO];</i> • <i>Ensure to the greatest extent possible that [NSO's] policies and programs meet the needs of athletes;</i> • <i>Provide input prior to approval on key documents/policies/topics directly affecting athletes, including but not limited to: Athlete Agreements, Team Selection, AAP Nomination Criteria, High Performance training and competition plans, Own the Podium criteria, coaching, etc.</i>
Authority	<p><i>Establish the boundaries of the Athletes' Council's responsibilities, including scope of authority.</i></p> <p><i>Example: The Athletes' Council will exercise its authority in accordance with the bylaws, policies of [NSO], in addition to the provisions set out in this Terms of Reference.</i></p>
Composition	<p><i>Identify the composition of the Athletes' Council.</i></p> <p><i>Example: A male and female representative will be elected to fill two (2) Athlete Representative positions OR a male and female representative from each discipline will be elected to fill Athlete Representative positions.</i></p>

Nomination and Election Procedures	<p><i>Identify the nomination and election process.</i> <i>Example: Election of the Athletes' Council position(s) will take place in the 1st and 3rd year of the quadrennial. An electronic election will be held with the names of the eligible nominee(s) that have accepted their nominations. Eligible Members hold one (1) vote each. Eligible Members and/or Eligible Alumni Members who receive the most votes will be appointed to the available Athletes' Council position(s).</i></p>
Term	<p><i>Identify the term of membership.</i> <i>Example: Athletes' Council members shall be elected for a two (2) year term, with a maximum of three (3) terms.</i></p>
Governance	<p><i>Identify what will constitute a quorum (i.e. minimum number of representatives) for meetings.</i> <i>Example: Quorum requires the attendance of at least one voting representative from each discipline.</i></p>
Meetings	<p><i>Identify the frequency and manner of meetings.</i> <i>Example: The Athletes' Council shall meet annually in-person and at minimum once per quarter by teleconference.</i></p>
Resources	<p><i>Specify if budgetary resources have been allocated to the Athletes' Council.</i> <i>Example: The Athletes' Council will be allocated the budgetary resources required to meet the key duties as outlined in this document.</i></p>
Reporting	<p><i>Specify how the Athletes' Council reports (if not defined in the sections above), and/or indicate how minutes will be circulated.</i> <i>Example: The Athletes' Council will report to the members semi-annually at the AGM and SAGM.</i></p>
Approval	<p><i>These Terms of Reference were approved by [NSO] Athletes' Council on [date] and [NSO] Board of Directors on [date].</i></p>
Review	<p><i>The Athletes' Council will review these Terms of Reference on an as needed basis and will make changes as necessary.</i></p>



ATHLETES' COUNCIL ORIENTATION PACKAGE



An orientation package provides an easy way to on-board new members of an Athletes' Council (AC). It should provide the individual with all the information they require to understand how the group communicates and operates. This document outlines what information should be included along with examples of practices for running an effective AC.



INTRODUCTION

This section provides a background on the AC and should include:

- Mission, Vision, Values
- History of the AC and Athlete Representation in your NSO
- Purpose and Objectives of the AC

ONBOARDING

This section provides the initial steps new members should take to integrate into the AC and may include or instruct on:

- Providing contact information to the Chair of the AC
- How to access previous documents and meeting minutes via Dropbox, Google Drive, etc.
- Downloading instant messaging app (WhatsApp, Slack, etc.) utilized by the AC and accepting the invite to the group conversation
- AC Terms of Reference (TOR)
- Logistics on AC meetings, communication, etc.
- Key Dates for major decisions and regular meetings

CURRENT COUNCIL

This section should include the following:

- List of current AC members and contact information
- Succession plan matrix which outlines current member information on gender, discipline, geographic location, language, skill set, experience, term number, and remaining time on AC (see Table 1 below)
- Executive and member roles/positions (ex. on NSO committees, working groups, etc.) (see Table 2 below)
- Open roles/positions in the AC executive or on NSO committees/working groups



NSO STRUCTURE

This section provides a background on the NSO and should include:

- Organizational Chart
- AC Liaison contact information
- Contact information for important staff and board members
- List of all board committees/working groups and their TORs
- Sport System 101

CURRENT PROJECTS

This section should include the following:

- List of all projects or items AC is currently working on
- Instruction on how to access documents
- Open roles for current projects
- Call for initiatives or issues the new member would like to champion

Table 1 – Sample Athletes' Council Matrix

Member	Gender	Discipline	Language	Geographic Location	Team Experience	Skill Set	Term
Jane Doe (Chair)	Female	Distance	French/English	Quebec	8 Years National Team	Communications	2nd (ends 2021)
John Smith (Secretary)	Male	Para-Throws	English	Alberta	5 years NT	Finance	1st (ends 2022)

Table 2 – Sample Athletes' Council – NSO Committee Positions Chart

Committee	AC Rep 1	AC Rep 2	AC Proxy 1	AC Proxy 2
Human Resources	Athlete A		Athlete D	
Financial	Athlete B		Athlete A	
National Team	Athlete C	Athlete D	Athlete B	Athlete E
Governance	Athlete E		Athlete C	
Equity and Access	Athlete D	Athlete A	Athlete B	Athlete C



DRAFT EMAIL FOR SCHEDULING AN ATHLETES' COUNCIL MEETING

[Download Template](#)

The template below provides a starting point for an email you could use to schedule an Athletes' Council meeting. This task typically falls under the responsibility of the Secretary or Chair. Take advantage of helpful meeting schedule platforms like Doodle Poll or Calendly to schedule your meetings¹.

To: Athletes' Council Members

Subject: Upcoming Athletes' Council Meeting

Hey team,

I am looking to schedule the next meeting for the Athletes' Council. **Please fill out the doodle poll below with your availability by [date]:**

Doodle poll: <https://doodlepoll.com>¹

As a reminder, the action items from our last meeting were:

1. [Action Item 1]
2. [Action Item 2]
3. [Action Item 3]

Attached you will find the agenda for our meeting.

Let me know if you have any questions!

Sincerely,

[NAME]

[NSO] Athletes' Council Secretary/Chair

YOUR VOICE MATTERS

¹ See this link for how to create a Doodle Poll: <https://doodle.com/make-a-poll>; or follow this link for a guide on Calendly: <https://calendly.com/>.



MEETING AGENDA TEMPLATE



[Download Template](#)



[NSO] Athletes' Council Meeting Agenda

[Meeting Date] - [Meeting Time]

[Call-in/Joining Details]

1. Call to Order

Council Chair will call the meeting to order and commence. Attendance is recorded, quorum determined, and the Secretary will record Minutes of the meeting.

2. Approval of Agenda

Agenda for the meeting will be put forward. These are the specific subjects to be discussed, which should include motions rather than just headings. Council Chair will ask if any items need to be added to the agenda, and the Council will vote that the proposed agenda is satisfactory.

3. Declaration of any Conflict of Interest based on approved agenda

Council members who have conflicts with specific agenda items will identify themselves and will be excused for that section.

4. Team Check-in

Roll call for Council members. May consist of each member sharing a quick personal update.

5. Approval of Minutes (Time)

Council Chair will ask if any changes to previous minutes are needed, and the Council will vote to approve the previous meeting minutes.

5.1. *[Date of Previous Council Meeting] Athletes' Council Meeting Minutes for approval*

6. New Business

This portion of the meeting consists of the main items up for discussion by the Council and any reports that need to be delivered to the Council members.

6.1. [New Business Item 1] (Time)

6.1.1. *[Agenda Detail 1] (Name of Council Member Presenting) (sub detail as necessary)*

6.2. [New Business Item 2] (Time)

6.2.1. *[Agenda Detail 1] (Name of Council Member Presenting) (sub detail as necessary)*

7. Hot Button Items (Time)

This portion of the meeting is set aside to cover items outside the regular agenda. This is meant for pressing or urgent items that would impact the AC, and of which members should be aware.

8. In Camera

This session will deal with confidential matters, whereby conflicted members or guests will depart. The Secretary will continue to take minutes, but these will be separate from the main meeting minutes. If key decisions are made in Camera, they should be recorded in the main minutes.

9. Next Meeting: [Date of Next Meeting]

Previously scheduled meetings and potential changes confirmed by the AC.

10. Adjournment

Chair will inquire whether there is any further business to attend to, and if not, they can adjourn the meeting.



HOW TO TAKE MINUTES AT A MEETING



What are Minutes?

Meeting minutes (minutes) are notes that are recorded during a meeting. They highlight the key issues that are discussed, motions that are proposed or voted on, and activities to be undertaken. The minutes of a meeting are usually taken by a designated member of the group, typically the Secretary. Their task is to provide an accurate record of what transpired during the meeting.

Why are Athletes' Council Meeting Minutes Important?

- They serve as a reminder aid for the Athletes' Council (AC).
- They record which AC member will do what and when.
- They are the starting point for the following meeting.
- They are helpful for those absent to know what was discussed and what decisions have been made.
- In case of conflicts, they are useful to know what agreements were made.

HOW TO TAKE MINUTES AT A MEETING



STEP 1: Prepare for the Meeting

- Review minutes from previous meeting.
- Use the agenda as a guide for taking notes and preparing the minutes.



STEP 2: Take a Record of the Meeting

Generally, meeting minutes usually include the following (see Word template):

- Date of the meeting.
- Location of the meeting (i.e. address, virtual platform, teleconference).
- Time the meeting was called to order.
- Names of the meeting participants and absentees.



- Acceptance or corrections/amendments to previous meeting minutes.
- Decisions made about each agenda item, for example:
 - Actions taken or agreed to be taken.
 - Next steps.
 - Voting outcomes.
 - Motions taken or rejected. This can be written as follows:

Motion to approve the [*item to be approved*] by
[*AC Chair Name*]. All in favour. None opposed.
 - Items to be held over.
- New business.
- Next meeting date and time.
- Time of adjournment.



STEP 3: Write the Meeting Minutes

- Edit the record so that the minutes are succinct, clear, and easy to read.



STEP 4: Share Minutes

- Make sure the minutes have received the appropriate approval by the Council before sharing in print or online.

Helpful Tips

- Check off attendees as they arrive, or have the names pre-written and shift to present or absent list as needed.
- Write times beside the agenda items to stay on track.
- For In-Camera or sessions dealing with confidential matters make sure to keep separate minutes, unless a major change is decided upon.
- Ask for clarification as necessary.
- Write clear and brief notes – not full sentences or verbatim wording.
- Maintain the same verb tense.
- If minutes were taken by hand, type the minutes as soon as possible after the meeting while everything is fresh in your mind. If typed, immediately after the meeting review the notes and make any necessary adjustments.
- Minute templates exist on mail servers like Microsoft office, or in the Microsoft Word template library.



MEETING MINUTES TEMPLATE



[Download Template](#)



[NSO] Athletes' Council Meeting Meeting Minutes

[Meeting Date] - [Meeting Time]

[Location]

Present: [Names of Athletes' Council Members present]

Regrets: [Names of Athletes' Council Members absent]

1. **Call to order** [time]
 - Quorum¹ present.

2. **Approval of Agenda**
 - Motion to approve the meeting agenda by [AC Chair Name]. All in favour. None opposed.

3. **Declaration of any Conflict of Interest based on approved agenda**
 - [record if any conflict of interest was declared]

4. **New Business**
 - a. [agenda item]
 - b. [agenda item]
 - c. [agenda item]
 - Record who delivered the report or item and if any action items resulted from the discussion of each.

5. **Next meeting date:** [date]
 - Adjournment at [time meeting was adjourned]

¹ Quorum: the minimum number of members of an assembly or society that must be present at any of its meetings to make the proceedings of that meeting valid.



ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER:

A Brief Guide To Effective Meetings

Robert's Rules of Order is a book that was first published in 1876 by US Army General Henry Martyn Robert that provides a structure of how to run effective meetings. Some of the main aspects of Robert's Rules are set out below:

Agenda – Meetings should follow a strict agenda, which ensures structure and consistency.

Minutes – Meeting minutes are a documented summary of the meeting. Typically, the Secretary takes minutes throughout the meeting, and will later distribute them to both the attendees and absent invited members. Robert's Rules requires that only the main motions are documented in the minutes, though some organizations will go into more detail. The minutes of a particular meeting are approved at the next meeting as part of the formal agenda.

Motion – Motions are used to discuss a new item of business, such as an action to be taken or a decision that should be made by the organization. For example, "Can I get a motion to approve the minutes from the previous meeting?" Motions are introduced on the agenda or can be introduced at the meeting. Motions must be made ("put forward") by one person, and seconded ("supported") by a different person. Thereafter, the entire group can debate or discuss the motion, and then vote on it. If there is no second (i.e. no support for the motion), then the matter is dropped.

Postpone Indefinitely – This move is taken if a motion will not be discussed further during the current meeting, though it may be reintroduced at a later meeting. The decision to postpone indefinitely must be seconded and voted on.

Table – This action is used to postpone discussion of an item until later in the meeting or at a later date. Again, the decision must be seconded, and voted on.

Question – This can be used to stop a debate, so that a motion can be voted on. As with all of the other actions, it needs to be seconded by a different person. Directly after a question is posed, a vote is held, and a two-thirds majority is needed for it to pass. In the case of the vote passing, the motion is then voted on directly.





Amend – Sometimes, an action or item needs to be changed after it has been debated on. A member might suggest an amendment, and in this case, it must be seconded to be voted on. If accepted, the amendment stays. For example, a debate might lead to a change in the minutes (noticing of a discrepancy, or a simple spelling error). In this case, the motion would be changed to say, “Motion to approve the minutes subject to the amendments proposed.”

Commit – One step that can be taken with motions is to have them researched further by a separate committee, who will then file a report at the next meeting. This job might be assigned to an existing or a newly organized committee. It must be seconded and be passed by majority vote for this action to occur.

Adjourn – At the end of the meeting, someone will typically make a motion to end the meeting, or “adjourn” it. Once again, this motion must be seconded and followed by a vote to adjourn the meeting. The agenda helps to set a time and schedule and usually the chairperson will call to end the meeting. If applicable, a follow-up meeting should be scheduled.



Athletes**CAN**

For more information please contact:

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