



**SKI &
SNOWBOARD**

The Athlete Project

July 2019



Why did U.S. Ski & Snowboard undertake this project?

U.S. Ski & Snowboard has a storied history of training world class athletes. We've achieved leaps in athletic performance, winning over double the average number of Olympic medals over the three Games from 2010-2018 as compared to 1998-2006. We are seen as an incredibly successful NGB within the Olympic movement, with strong clarity on mission and vision.

We celebrate our wins and simultaneously acknowledge that there is always room to improve. Given the transition in Board leadership from Dexter Paine to Kipp Nelson, the Board and Management Team saw this as an opportune time to revisit our strategy and align on a focused set of priorities for the full organization and our stakeholders to drive as keys to future success. This document outlines the process, findings, and specific initiatives the organization commits to focusing on going forward.

Scope and approach

The Athlete Project considered all areas of our organization and prioritized the one that we believe will have the greatest impact on our ability to achieve our mission of supporting athletes in achieving excellence: The athlete experience.

This work engaged over 70 stakeholders, including athletes, Foundation Trustees and commercial partners to understand what is working well today and identify the biggest challenges preventing a best-in-the-world athlete experience. From this broad input, we synthesized the key pain points and identified ~20 potential initiatives, which were prioritized based on potential impact and feasibility. We workshopped top ideas with members of the organization and a diverse focus group of stakeholders to ultimately recommend a short list of initiatives for near-term implementation.



Main findings on areas of opportunity

Athletically, performance has plateaued since the 2010 Olympics and we have a disconnect with many athletes. Athlete feedback highlights that athletes feel they have a transactional relationship with U.S. Ski & Snowboard in which the organization doesn't value or support all athletes.

Key recommendation to address areas of opportunity

Embody a culture of continuous improvement across the athlete experience by developing best-in-class processes to address key pain points in the athlete journey, building tools to regularly track our progress, and hiring, training and incentivizing coaches accordingly.

Our goal is to challenge ourselves to be better every day, at everything we do, at every level of the organization. We believe that this initiative is a strong start to addressing the organization's most acute pain points. Recognizing that we can be better partners with our athletes and teams, we see a huge opportunity that can be realized through changes in attitude, awareness and the suggested initiatives that address the findings of the Athlete Project.

We also believe a culture of continuous improvement is the key to creating an athlete experience on par with our "best in the world" vision. Through relentless pursuit of the right process, culture, and athlete experience, we can achieve successful athletic outcomes.



The Athlete Project incorporated broad input across U.S. Ski & Snowboard stakeholders

The Athlete Project engaged a broad range of stakeholders

Grounded in U.S. Ski & Snowboard's vision/mission and Strategic Plan, we designed a process to build complementary initiatives that involved:



72 Interviews, including:

30 Athletes across Alpine (7), XC (7) Freestyle (6), Snowboard (5), Freeski (3), and other (2) totaling 14 active and 16 alumni^{1,2}

16 Foundation stakeholders³

13 Commercial partners and industry leaders

6 Agents and **5 Coaches**

2 Other stakeholders⁴



19 Athlete experience initiatives



39 internal leaders engaged across:

4 Working sessions, with subject matter experts

4 Management Team meetings to workshop content

3 Working sessions, with a core group of Trustees

2 Rounds of Athlete Advisory Committee (AAC) input by calls and email

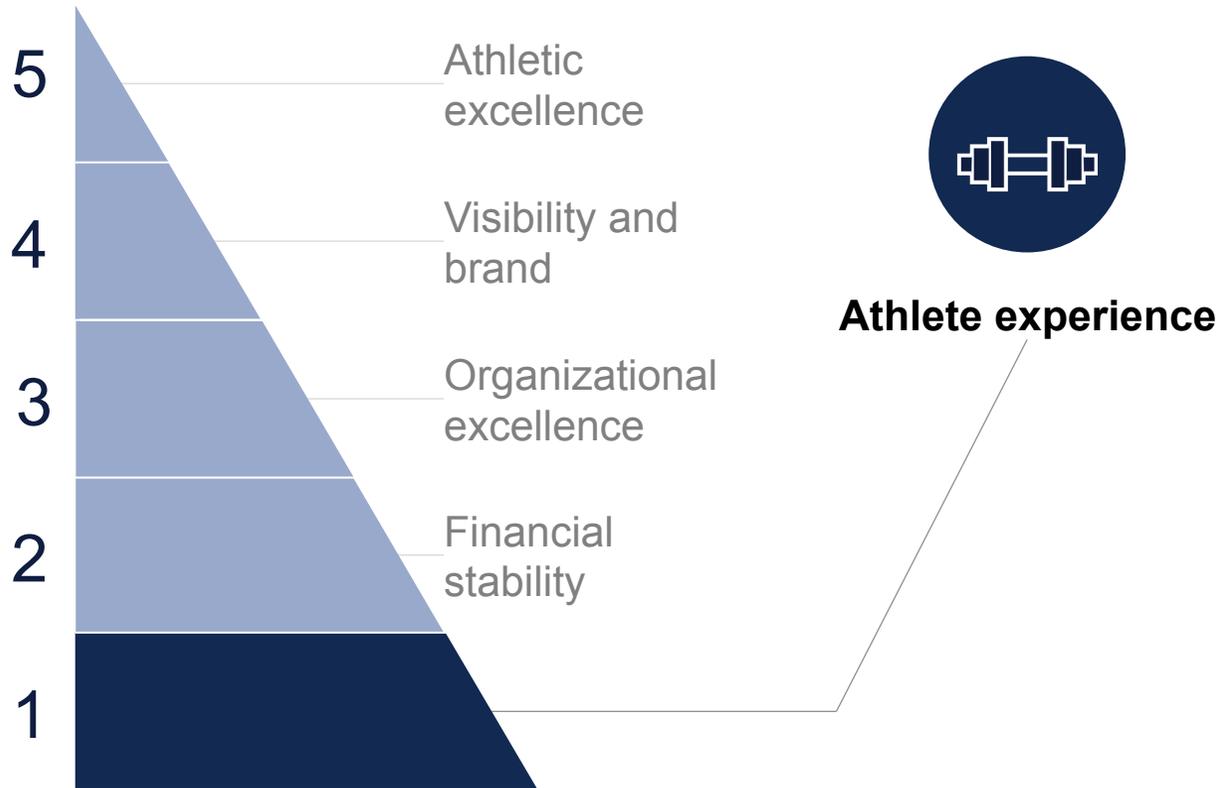
1 Steering Committee email/call

¹ Others: Snowboardcross and Nordic combined || ² Including rookies, tenured and cut athletes || ³ Including Trustees and Ambassadors || ⁴ Others with a view on athlete experience (e.g., rookie parents)

The Athlete Project focused on athlete experience as the primary building block for our long-term goal of being “best in the world”

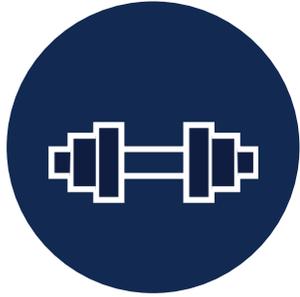


“The vision of U.S. Ski & Snowboard is to make the United States of America the Best in the World in Olympic skiing and snowboarding”



Why we believe it matters

- A positive culture allows athletes to focus and perform their best while trusting the overall process
- Improved engagement with the Team helps the commercial business and our ability to fund athletes
- When athletes retire, they leave as ambassadors for the sport and the Team, shaping the next generation of athletes



Athlete experience

Strategic initiatives

Embody a culture of continuous improvement across the athlete experience

- Focus on robust processes to address critical pain points in the athlete journey: First touchpoint, communications and mentorship, and exit
- Build tools to monitor progress and create accountability
- Align coach incentives, goals and hiring practices accordingly

Enablers

- Identify funds to support Athlete Project initiatives
- Permanently address the athlete funding gap



- **Detailed findings**
- Next steps

+ Recent wins: The 2018/19 season was successful for both resources and results

Culture and resources

- Reduced the athlete funding gap for FY20 by an additional \$1M over FY19 with the continued support of Trustees and Ambassadors, and designed a plan to address an additional \$400K of the remaining gap through commercial sponsor and athlete support
- Several efforts launched to improve athlete experience:
 - Initial efforts underway to address 5 of 6 recommendations from the 2018 Bluestone Edge exit interviews.¹ Specific initiatives underway include: Establishing team culture frameworks, starting a biannual athlete experience survey, creating an Athlete Liaison program to enhance communication and feedback, and launching an Elite Team Coach Code and development program with a USOPC-provided consultant team. These have been supported and informed by other initiatives such as the high performance work with Jack Jeffries²

Athletic results

- Won 136 podiums across all teams and divisions in 2018/19 season (an increase of 6 podiums over 2017/18)
- Second most successful nation in 2019 World Championships, when totaled across all events
- Top nation across Junior World Championships, winning most Hodler Cup points when totaled over all events
- Top athletes incredibly successful on world stage: Chloe Kim won 83% of events she entered, while Mikaela Shiffrin set the single skier record for most World Cup victories (17) and prize money (\$885,000) in a season for any man or woman

¹ Exit interview project with external consultants from Bluestone Edge (August 2018) || ² High Performance consultant



Over the last year, U.S. Ski & Snowboard has eliminated \$1M of the athlete funding gap and identified levers to address the remaining \$400K

We made real progress on the funding gap in FY19...

- Based on continued support from our Trustees and Ambassadors we are able to reduce the athlete funding gap for FY20 by an additional \$1M over FY19
- Increased funding for A, B, C Teams for Alpine, XC and Freestyle
 - Maximum D Team costs capped at \$10K, a reduction of over 50% relative to previous years¹
- Increased funding for Snowboard and Freeski Pro A/B Teams by \$0.2M over FY19 from core budget allocation

...with plans to address much of the remaining issue

- We plan to further fund the Snowboard and Freeski Pro A/B Teams through two sources of revenue:
 - **Sponsorship:** Secure commercial partners through the quad, contingent on athlete support for branded neck gaiters
 - **Fundraising:** Create annual fundraisers with athletes and supplement with targeted multi-year or restricted gifts
- This would cap Rookie Team costs at \$17K as well²
- Ultimately the \$20M Beattie Travel Fund will provide a \$900K draw in perpetuity to help support athletes

While we have a lot to celebrate, we are committed to solving the funding gap permanently for all athletes³

¹ Includes preparation season and international competition || ² Includes both camps and competition) || ³ Rookie and D Team athletes would still be expected to contribute to some share of costs



At the same time, there is a perception among athletes and alumni that U.S. Ski & Snowboard culture does not value or support all athletes...

| Theme | Details | Quotes |
|--|--|--|
| Athletes and alumni feel the relationship with U.S. Ski & Snowboard is transactional | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Athlete perception is that they are only called on when they can help the organization generate revenue (events, fundraisers, etc.) ▪ Current exit experience leaves sour taste for most athletes | <p><i>“Performance drives sentiment towards the team. When you are performing well, you get attention, people care and you feel better. When you’re injured, communication from the team drops off and makes coming back a nightmare”</i></p> |
| Almost all athletes believe communication between athletes, coaches and the organization is poor | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Perception that info isn’t disseminated effectively to athletes ▪ Coaches are often the means of communication, however many stakeholders believe they are hesitant to share information for fear of coming across as the “bad guy” ▪ Athletes highlight injury and team selection as key lapses | <p><i>“One of the biggest issues with the team is communication. Many decisions are made where we just don’t understand the rationale”</i></p> <p><i>“Communication of tough decisions is unacceptably poor”</i></p> |
| Most athletes do not feel engaged with U.S. Ski & Snowboard and have little understanding of its role or operations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ While many athletes feel engaged with their pod, they feel disconnected from the broader organization due to lack of exposure and communication | <p><i>“I feel very engaged with my immediate group, people I ski with, and very, very little engagement with the office or people in the organization”</i></p> <p><i>“When I think about the team, I think about my individual team, I don't think about the U.S. Ski Team”</i></p> |
| Many athletes do not feel adequately supported by the organization | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Athlete funding gap is a significant source of friction across teams and funding allocation is a pain point for newer sports ▪ Little connection to team sponsors and perceived opportunity cost to being on the team (in terms of sponsorship, etc.) | <p><i>“The biggest thing is creating an atmosphere that is inviting, supportive...if the athletes aren't feeling like they're being supported, it's a poor reflection on U.S. Ski & Snowboard”</i></p> <p><i>“You don't want to have to put yourself into financial jeopardy to pursue your dream”</i></p> |



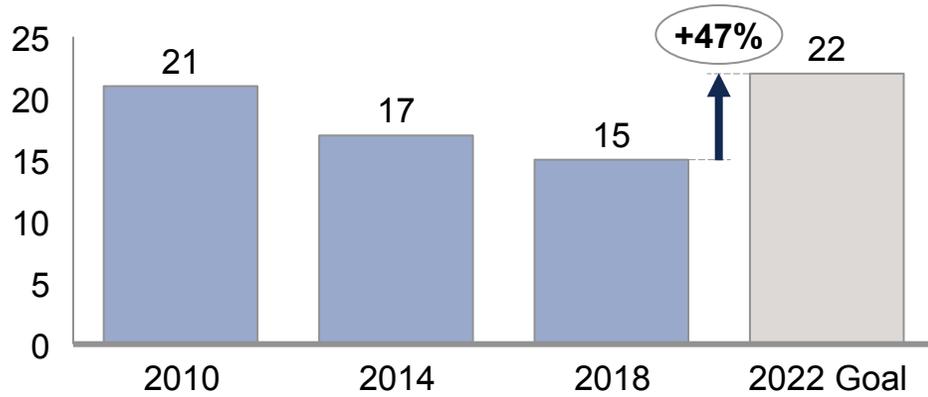
...and Olympic performance has steadily declined while World Championship performance has plateaued

■ Medals won ■ Goal ● % won

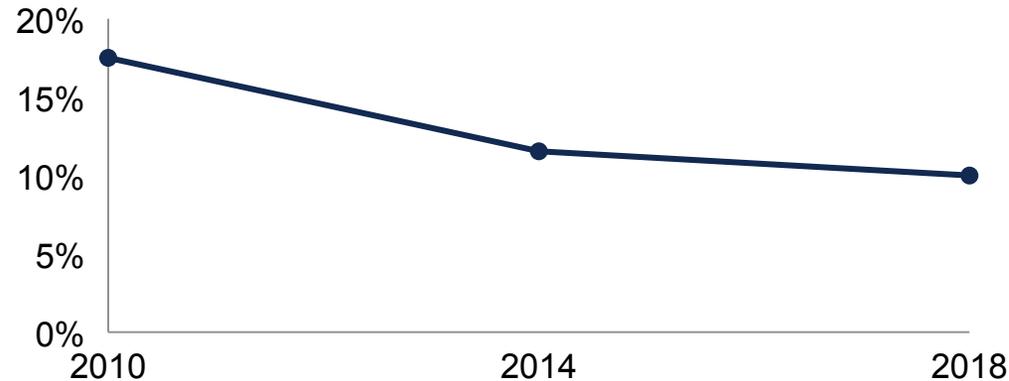
Olympic performance has fallen since the 2010 Games¹

U.S. Ski & Snowboard medals won, absolute and % of possible

Olympic medals



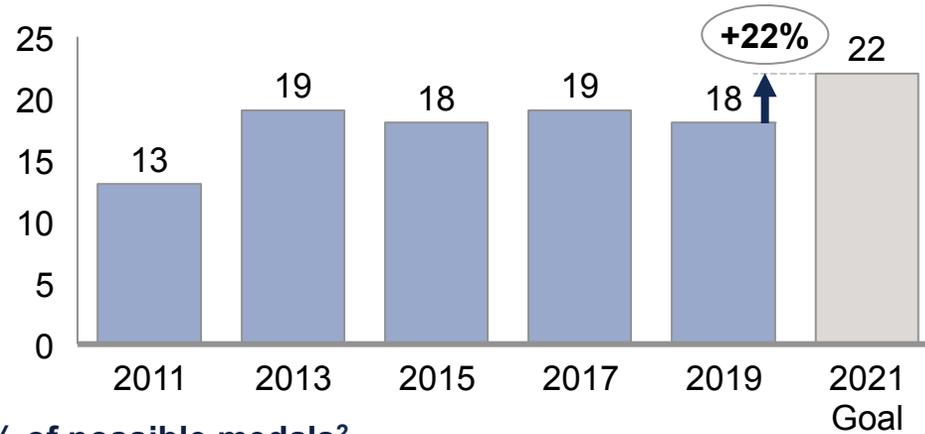
% of possible medals²



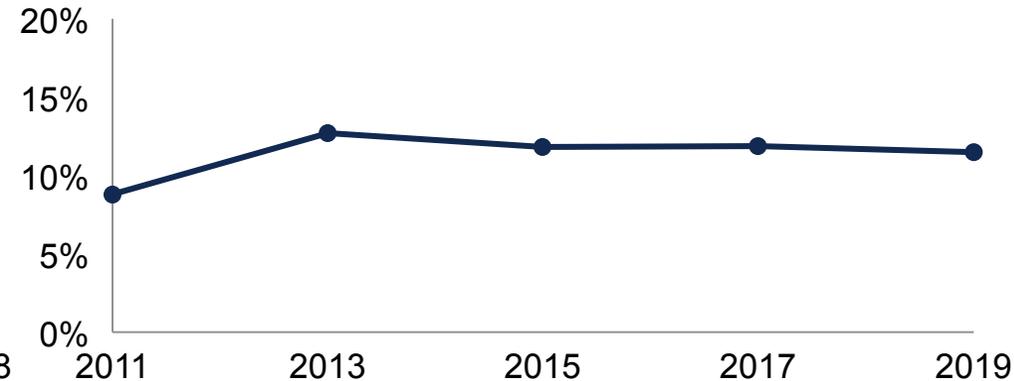
World Championship performance has plateaued

U.S. Ski & Snowboard medals won, absolute and % of possible

World Championship medals¹



% of possible medals²



We need to make fundamental shifts to bend the performance curve and hit our 2022 goals (22 medals, with best in the world requiring 28 medals)

¹ Snowboard and Freeski participation was low in World Championships from 2011-2017 || ² The number of medal events increased over this timeframe

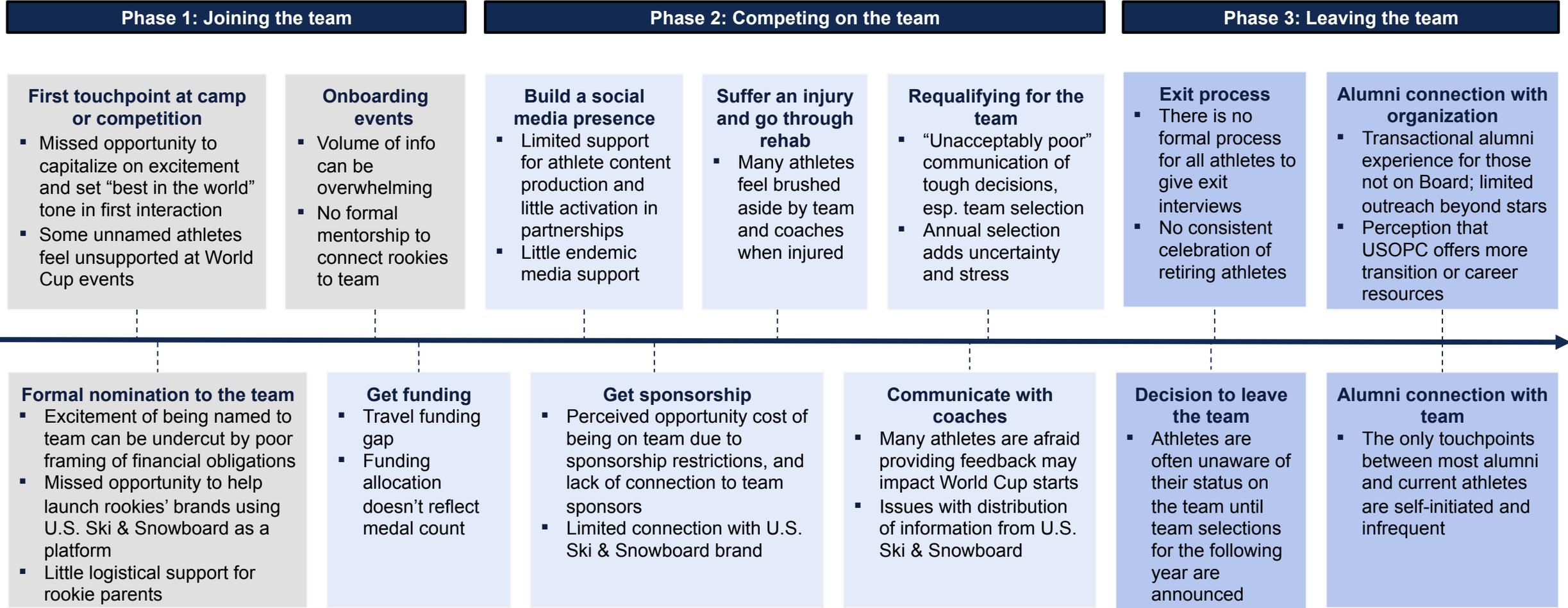


NOT EXHAUSTIVE

There are many pain points across the athlete journey likely affecting our overall outcomes

Pain points across the athlete journey

By journey phase and key touchpoint





The Athlete Project proposes a start to addressing these pain point through three initiatives

Create targeted plans to address pain points

- **Initial focus:** Implement 5 changes that address pain points at critical junctures with U.S. Ski & Snowboard to help build a culture that values all athletes
- **Impact:** Improve pain points at key touchpoints and start shifting culture

Implement Team Barometer to regularly track progress

- **Initial focus:** Design a short (5-8 question) mobile survey to create a real-time pulse check on athlete experience so that we can measure progress and create accountability
- **Impact:** Improved response rates and real-time window into experience; forum to celebrate positive culture and ensure escalation of issues

Hire and incentivize coaches accordingly

- **Initial focus:** Update coach hiring process to select for leadership skills and link compensation to clear athlete experience targets
- **Impact:** Create accountability to ensure the organization is supporting and applying USOPC training to change culture and athlete experience



NOT EXHAUSTIVE

While all pain points must be addressed, a subset have been prioritized for immediate action

Intended focus of starting initiatives

By journey phase and key touchpoint

- ✓ Focus of targeted changes
- ✓ Focus of Team Barometer
- ✓ Focus of hiring and incentives
- ✓ Focus of other initiatives

Phase 1: Joining the team

First touchpoint at camp or competition

- Missed opportunity to capitalize on excitement and set “best in the world” tone in first interaction
- Some unnamed athletes feel unsupported at World Cup events

Onboarding events

- Volume of info can be overwhelming
- No formal mentorship to connect rookies to team

Build a social media presence

- Limited support for athlete content production and little activation in partnerships
- Little endemic media support

Suffer an injury and go through rehab

- Many athletes feel brushed aside by team and coaches when injured

Requalifying for the team

- “Unacceptably poor” communication of tough decisions, esp. team selection
- Annual selection adds uncertainty and stress

Phase 3: Leaving the team

Exit process

- There is no formal process for all athletes to give exit interviews
- No consistent celebration of retiring athletes

Alumni connection with organization

- Transactional alumni experience for those not on Board; limited outreach beyond stars
- Perception that USOPC offers more transition or career resources

Formal nomination to the team

- Excitement of being named to team can be undercut by poor framing of financial obligations
- Missed opportunity to help launch rookies’ brands using U.S. Ski & Snowboard as a platform
- Little logistical support for rookie parents

Get funding

- Travel funding gap
- Funding allocation doesn’t reflect medal count

Get sponsorship

- Perceived opportunity cost of being on team due to sponsorship restrictions, and lack of connection to team sponsors
- Limited connection with U.S. Ski & Snowboard brand

Communicate with coaches

- Many athletes are afraid providing feedback may impact World Cup starts
- Issues with distribution of information from U.S. Ski & Snowboard

Decision to leave the team

- Athletes are often unaware of their status on the team until team selections for the following year are announced

Alumni connection with team

- The only touchpoints between most alumni and current athletes are self-initiated and infrequent



Double click on addressing pain points: Implementing five changes can start improving experience at key touchpoints

Create targeted plans to address pain points

| Potential change | Touchpoints impacted | Pain points impacted | Details |
|---|--|---|---|
| Create consistent messaging for first touchpoint with unnamed athletes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> First touchpoint at camp or competition | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some unnamed athletes feel unsupported | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre-competition comms and expectations Day-of communications and support Post-competition follow-on messaging |
| Create communication protocol for injured athletes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suffer an injury and go through rehab | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many injured athletes feel brushed aside by team and coaches | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting cadence with coaches and messaging timeline from Athletics Dept. Assigned injury mentor Engagement guidelines with Team during rehab |
| Define overall communication framework for active athletes and Team | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate with coaches | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Issues with distribution of information from U.S. Ski & Snowboard | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communications channels by message type Long-term suggestions around intranet |
| Develop an athlete mentor program that uses alumni and/or veteran athletes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Onboarding events Alumni connection with org Alumni connection with team | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No formal mentorship Transactional alumni experience Few touchpoints with the org | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program set-up and support Resources and expectations Program feedback |
| Rethink and formalize the exit process | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exit process | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No formal process for all athletes to give exit interview No consistent celebration of retiring athletes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communications process resourcing and next steps with ACE¹ Opportunity to share athlete story Ongoing communications and engagement plan |

These plans are a starting point for the goal of continuous improvement across the athlete journey

¹ Athlete Career & Education



ILLUSTRATIVE

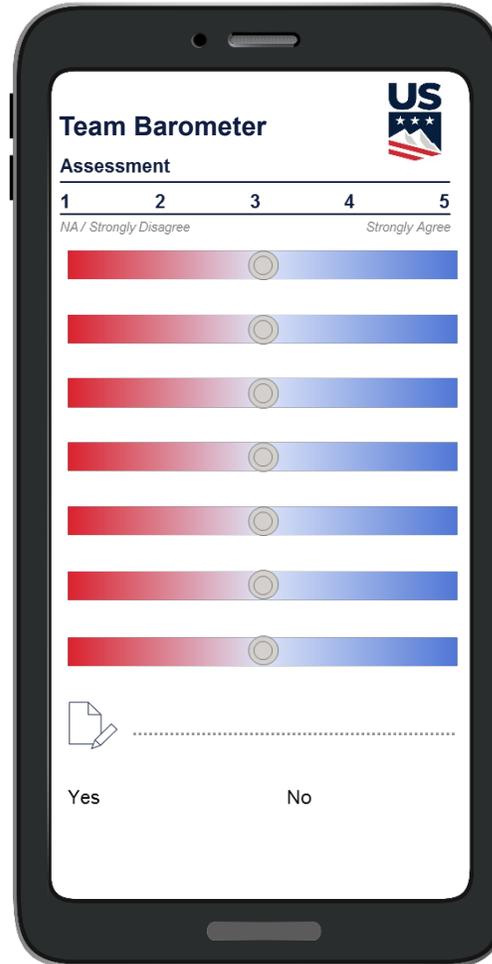
Double click on tracking progress: Team Barometer provides insights into team experience every other week

Description

- 5-8 question anonymous mobile survey, pushed to athletes every two weeks
- Goal is a standalone application, but will likely launch through an online platform
- Teams receive aggregate results by email
- Coaches expected to encourage completion
- Monthly emails highlight teams with best scores

Goals

- Provide real-time feedback on experience to complement twice annual athlete survey
- Create flagging mechanism to ensure issues are recognized and addressed immediately
- Increase response rate with simple mobile app
- Celebrate positive team culture and coaches who get it right



Bucket

Question

Team sentiment

- The team is a positive environment for me
- I am excited to be on the team

Communication

- I feel supported by the coaching staff
- I have been able to communicate issues to coaching staff and management
- There has been sufficient communication between athletes and coaches

Athletics

- I feel connected to the broader U.S. Ski & Snowboard organization
- I am making progress towards my athletic goals

Other comments

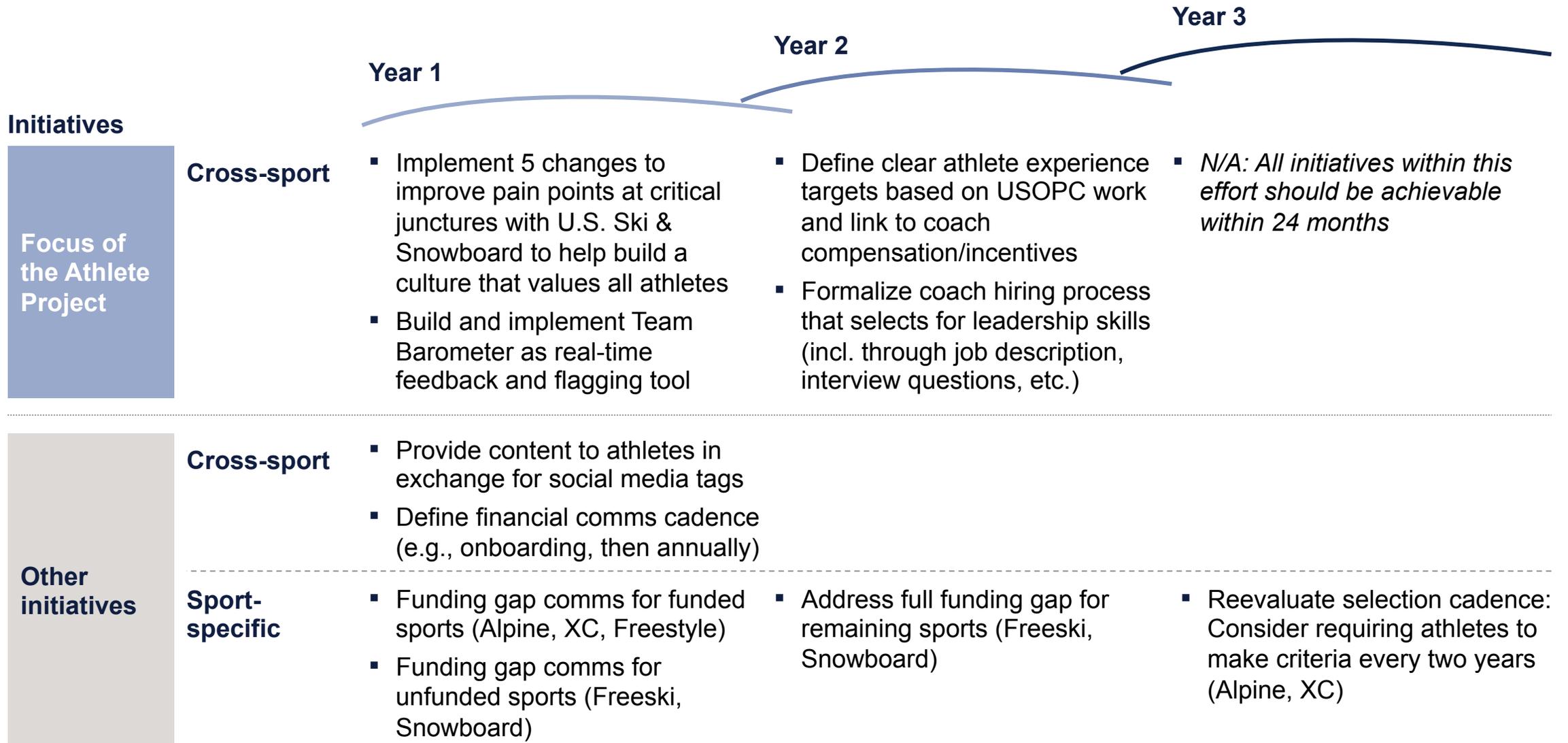
- Do you have any other comments?

Team culture

- Are you, your teammates and coaches creating a culture that values all athletes?



It will be important to phase Athlete Project initiatives over the next three years, along with other ideas that can help address remaining touchpoints





- Detailed findings
- **Next steps**

- **Align Management compensation** with target outcomes of Athlete Project
- **Align Management and Athletics staff's personal goals with initiatives**, including Athlete Liaison program, mentor programs, communications overhaul, Team Barometer launch, training programs, injury protocol revision, onboarding changes, content for athlete use and other components recommended by the Athlete Project findings
- **Prioritize investment across initiatives** to begin planning and execution
- **Build out operational executive dashboards** to track progress against goals
- **Implement initiatives** and report back on milestones