Guide to holding an Athletes’ Commission election

IOC Athletes’ Commission
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Athletes’ Commissions are key to ensuring that the voice of athletes from around the globe is heard across all levels of the Olympic Movement.

Thomas Bach
IOC President
What is an Athletes’ Commission?

An Athletes’ Commission is a group of athletes, whose mission is to:

- **Represent** the athletes’ viewpoint in decision-making.
- **Support** athletes to succeed in their sporting and non-sporting career.
The benefits of an Athletes’ Commission

Having an Athletes’ Commission is a clear demonstration of an organisation’s commitment to good governance, benefiting both the athletes and the organisation.

The IOC’s mission is to place athletes at the heart of the Olympic Movement. Athlete involvement in decision-making is a core component of good governance in sports organisations.

An Athletes’ Commission enables athletes’ voices to be heard and their experiences used to improve sport. As the athlete representatives, an Athletes’ Commission can inform an organisation’s decision-making process, strengthen good governance, and help safeguard the credibility of sport and the Olympic Movement.
The structure of an Athletes’ Commission should have the following:

**Balanced composition**
- Male and female athletes
- Sports and/or disciplines
- Regions or countries
- Active and recently retired athletes

**Size**
- Minimum of five members
- More elected members than appointed members

**Term**
- The term of office should be four years, which may be renewed
- Staggered elections to ensure a continuous transfer of knowledge between members

**Vote**
- The Athletes’ Commission Chair has a vote within the organisation’s highest decision-making body, such as the Executive Board or Council
**Important**
Refer to the relevant IOC Guidelines on creating a compliant Athletes’ Commission:

- [IF Guidelines](#)
- [NOC Guidelines](#)

Available on Athlete365

**Support**
- From the top leadership of the organisation (e.g. NOC or IF)
- From the administration to support day-to-day activities

**Resources**
- Sufficient resources, admin support and budget for regular meetings, communication and for members to attend major events
- Dedicated space on organisation’s website or intranet to communicate to athletes and provide updates on activities
Why hold an Athletes’ Commission election?

- It is a clear demonstration of an organisation’s commitment to good governance, benefiting both the athletes and the organisation.
- It fosters credible and legitimate policies placing athletes at the heart of sports governance.
- It ensures that athlete representatives feel a strong sense of responsibility to raise the athletes’ (their constituents’) voices.
Key roles and responsibilities

Preparation is key. The AC should work closely with the administration to organise the elections:

**Role of the administration**

- Organise and provide logistics for the election.
- Prepare a welcome package for newly elected members with relevant documents (e.g. statutes, past minutes, organisational chart) to bring them up to speed.

**Role of the current Athletes’ Commission**

- Make use of your network of athletes to spread the word about the upcoming elections.
- Advise interested candidates on the scope of responsibilities, time commitment and challenges.

**Promotion of candidates**

- If there is promotion of candidates by the IF / NOC, all promotional activities should be equal.
- Clear guidelines should be given to candidates about how they can canvas and promote themselves during the election.
- Goodies can be given by the organiser of the election to encourage athletes to vote.
- Gifts should not be given to athletes by candidates themselves to persuade an athlete to vote for them.
The timeline of holding an Athletes’ Commission election can be broken down into four steps.

1. **Planning**
   - Start planning the election procedure and process
   - Together with the administration and AC, including a communications plan to inform the wider athlete community about upcoming election.
   - Start contacting potential candidates who are determined to make a difference for fellow athletes.
   - Promotion of candidates and establish rules for the candidates’ own promotion.
   - Area for voting at the event you have picked.
   - Ballot papers and secure boxes to cast the vote.

2. **Launch**
   - Raising awareness to the athlete community
   - Use relevant communication channels to raise awareness among wider athlete community.
   - Give sufficient time to interested candidates to contemplate on and put forward their candidacy.
   - Advise interested candidates on scope of responsibilities, time commitment and challenges.
   - Think about an easy and athlete-friendly mechanism to collect applications.
   - Check eligibility of applicants, summarise and showcase candidate profiles online.
3 Election
The election itself and voting of the candidates

Give candidates the chance to hold a short election speech before voting begins.

Be clear about your proposed vision.

Convey key messages for constituents to remember.

Use an athlete-friendly tone and vocabulary.

Conduct secret and in-person vote.

Announce newly elected members.

4 Meeting
The meeting and next steps

The first meeting of the newly composed AC should be attended by at least one member of the previous AC outlining the major achievements and upcoming activities/challenges to ensure a smooth transfer of knowledge.

Make sure all new AC members are equipped with relevant documents (e.g. statutes, past minutes, organisational chart) to bring them up to speed.

Discuss the goals of the AC and new projects.
When to hold an election

It is a good idea to hold an Athletes’ Commission election at an event such as an Athletes’ Forum, World Championships or World Cup race as a great way to engage athletes.

The timing of the Commission member and Chair elections is recommended to be within the same year as the election of the respective Executive Board (or equivalent highest decision-making body in the respective organisation’s structure).

**Recommendation**

It is recommended to hold staggered elections (e.g. every two years to elect half/part of the Athletes’ Commission membership) to ensure a continuous transfer of knowledge between members.
Top Tip

• At the same time as another event: e.g. Athletes’ Forum or Championship
• Great to engage athletes
• Same year as any EB election
Candidates: Who is eligible?

Not everyone is eligible to be on an Athletes’ Commission. Here is an overview of the criteria needed to be considered for membership of an AC, according to the respective IOC guidelines:

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<tr>
<th>For an NOC Athletes’ Commission:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Over 16 years of age</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Nationals of the NOC</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Active athletes (last 8 years)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• National level or higher</td>
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<td>• Olympic programme sport</td>
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<td>• No WADA Code violations</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>For an IF Athletes’ Commission:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Over 16 years of age</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Active athletes (last 8 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• International level or higher</td>
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<tr>
<td>in a sport/discipline of the IF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No WADA Code violations</td>
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<table>
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<th>For a Continental Association Athletes’ Commission:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Over 16 years of age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• National of an NOC in the respective continent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Competed at Olympic or Continental Games (in the last 8 years)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• No WADA Code violations</td>
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Voting: Who can vote?

Additionally, not everyone is eligible to vote for candidates in an Athletes’ Commission election:

**For an NOC Athletes’ Commission:**
- Over 16 years of age
- Nationals of the NOC
- Active athletes (last 8 years)
- National level or higher
- Olympic programme sport

**For an IF Athletes’ Commission:**
- Over 16 years of age
- Active athletes (last 8 years)
- International level or higher in a sport/discipline of the IF

**For a Continental Association Athletes’ Commission:**
- Over 16 years of age
- National of an NOC in the respective continent
- Competed at Olympic or Continental Games (in the last 8 years)
- Two delegates from each Continental NOC, including the NOC AC Chairperson
Athletes’ Commission election procedure

Once candidatures have been received, it is important to analyse each one before the election to ensure the candidates are eligible and suitable.

- Has the athlete had any WADA Code violations?
- Has the athletes had any NOC / IF / NF Code of Ethics violations?

It is also important to pre-determine the number of candidates to be elected to the AC and the number of candidates you will ask athletes to vote for:

- The number of votes should be dependant on the number of vacancies on the AC to be filled. (Eg: 4 votes per person if for 4 vacancies to be filled)

For the election itself, athletes must vote in person and through a secret ballot

- No proxy is allowed
- Completed ballot slips to be put in a locked ballot box
Important
The number of appointed members must be fewer than the number of those elected

The process of voting must be under supervision at all times to ensure fairness

- It is best practice to appoint an Election Committee to oversee the process
- It should include the current AC Chair plus two scrutineers (e.g. head of legal and administrative staff)

Additional appointments:

Once the election has been completed and the winners announced, additional appointments may be made. This is to maintain a balance in the AC of:
- Genders
- Sports/Disciplines
- Regions

For NOC ACs, the following are ex officio members of the Commission in their respective NOCs and have the right to vote at the meetings of the Commission:
- Members of the IOC Athletes’ Commission; and
- Members of the Athletes’ Commissions of the NOC Continental Associations
Electing the Chair

Now that the full AC has been established, it is time for the Chair and Vice-Chair to be elected.

Only AC members can vote

Only members who were elected to the AC are eligible for the position of Chair. Interested members are invited to put themselves forward.

Secret ballot

The voting must be done through a secret ballot, and only the current AC members are able to vote.
Electing the Chair
New AC in place: What next?

**Hold first meeting**
- Establish a plan, roles and goals for the AC

**Check out the IOC Guide to becoming an effective AC**
- For best practice and tips

**NOC AC Activity Grant applications**
- Up to USD 10,000 is available for every NOC AC, each year to run projects and activities!
For more information on the IOC Athletes’ Commission, please contact: athlete365@olympic.org

If you would like to share the experience of your Athletes’ Commission, please send your story to: athlete365@olympic.org

Follow us on social:

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