

International
Paralympic
Committee

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Paralympic Committee

Athletes' Council

Guide to creating and establishing an effective Athletes' Council





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Welcome and Introduction

“At the Heart” is the IPC Athletes’ Council four-year Strategy which has the aim of actively working to increase collaborative opportunities between International Federations (IFs), Regional Organisations (ROs) and National Paralympic Committees (NPCs) and their athletes to create a strong and effective athlete voice in the decision-making process and governance of each Organisation.

This document is one of a series of documents, tools and templates that have been produced to assist and guide IFs, ROs and NPCs, as well as current and future athlete representatives in creating a framework to support the development of an effective athlete voice within their Organisations.

This document uses the IPC Athletes’ Council bylaws as a guideline for IFs, ROs and NPCs to follow (click here to view IPC Athletes’ Council bylaws), which we strongly recommend for Organisations to consider using as a guideline. We understand and appreciate the differences that exist among each Organisation in terms of governance, resources, size, demography, participation at major Championships and culture, to mention a few. As a result of the above, we are aware that there is no one size fits all model as far as athlete representation is concerned.

We encourage you to utilize these tools and templates to guide you through the process of creating a model that works for your Organisation and your athletes and we remain at your disposal if you have any questions or queries throughout the process.



Chelsey Gotell
IPC Athletes’ Council Chairperson





IPC Athletes' Council meeting, June 2018, Bonn

What is an Athletes' Council?

An Athletes' Council is a group of athletes whose purpose is to represent fellow athletes in decision-making. An Athletes' Council ensures that the voices of athletes are represented in a collaborative, professional and effective manner and that their viewpoint remains at the centre of the Paralympic Movement. This group of athletes also supports athletes on and off the field of play. An Athletes' Council plays a critical leadership role by being a conduit between the leadership and the athletes. An Athletes' Council assumes an advisory role within its organisation.

Represent



Support

“By working together and putting athletes at the heart, we can all make the Paralympic Movement even stronger”.

Andrew Parsons, IPC President.

Why is it important to have an Athletes' Council?

Championing, facilitating and encouraging athlete-centeredness is at the heart of the IPC and the whole Paralympic Movement. An athlete-centred approach focuses on involving athletes in decision-making within sports organisations. An Athletes' Council provides a channel for athletes' voices to be heard and experiences used for the improvement of sport and promotion of good governance. As an Athletes' Council represents athletes, this facilitates factual views of athletes by athletes.

Who can an Athletes' Council learn from?

There is a wide network of Athletes' Councils and athlete representatives across the world and these include the following:

- International Sports Federations (IFs)
- Regional Organisations (ROs)
- National Paralympic Committees (NPCs)
- World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA)
- Organising Committees for the Olympic and Paralympic Games
- International Olympic Committee (IOC)

Some Athletes' Councils are more developed and at more of an advanced stage than others. A prospective Athletes' Council can reach out to other sports organisations with established Athletes' Councils to learn from their experiences. A few case studies are provided towards the end of this document. In addition, the IPC Athletes' Council is available to share any learnings and experiences.

It is also important for Athletes' Council members to learn from their organisation's leadership. As experts in sport and business, each organisation's senior leadership team and Governing Board have incredibly valuable skills and knowledge to offer our athletes beyond the operational planning for their success on the field of play. As our athletes strive to pursue excellence in the boardroom, it is imperative that we provide them with guidance and opportunities to thrive in their new role.

This learning opportunity goes two ways – just as much as an athlete representative can learn from their organisation's leadership, organisations who implement an effective Athletes' Council and voice within their governance structure also learn, evolve and expand on their knowledge as leaders, creating a win-win-win environment between the athletes, our leaders and the long-term success of the organisation.

The IPC Athletes' Council can make these links among and between IPC member organisations and between Athletes' Councils to share best practices, expertise, knowledge and mentorship opportunities.

The IPC Athletes' Council aims to bring together this network of Athletes' Councils together to discuss current and key subject matters. The IPC Athletes' Council does this through its Athletes' Forums, World Championship outreaches, Paralympic Games interaction and other online platforms.

The benefits of an Athletes' Council

Having an Athletes' Council is one of many ways to demonstrate that an organisation is athlete-centred, committed to good governance and understands that the athletes' viewpoint is important in the decision-making process.

Several benefits are listed below but the list is not exhaustive:

- Leadership who foster a culture that supports the implementation of athlete representation and an athlete voice within the decision making not only benefits the athletes but creates a stronger organisation as a whole, leading to greater success on and off the field of play.
- Being an active participant in the process that supports and builds strong athlete leaders will set the Paralympic movement up for leadership success for generations to come as our athlete leaders become future sport governance, business and community leaders.
- Giving Paralympic athletes experience and a voice at the decision-making table will help breakdown barriers and the stigma associated with persons with a disability in leadership positions, leading to the organisation and its athletes contributing and creating a more inclusive society.
- Athletes' perspectives are taken into consideration when decisions are being made for the good of the organisation.
- Provision of a formal and systematic mechanism between the athletes and the organisation's leadership.
- An Athletes' Council acts as a conduit between the athletes and the leadership and therefore organisations have direct input from the field of play to the Board room.
- Strengthening links with athletes through peer-to-peer communication.

Where do you start? – step by step

You've now decided that creating an Athletes' Council or an athlete representation model will positively benefit your organisation's governance and success of your athletes on the field of play – now what? The IPC has developed a toolkit with resources and templates that will assist you in developing an Athletes' Council. This toolkit consists of guidelines for IFs, ROs and NPCs (appendices to this document) and templates that will assist you in developing your Athletes' Council. The templates are available on the Athletes' Council website.

The following steps should be considered when developing an effective Athletes' Council or representation model:

1. Build support throughout your organisation (IF, RO, NPC) for an Athletes' Council, including from high-level leadership to the athlete community and administration. It is imperative to get buy-in from key figures within the organisation in order for success to follow.

2. The next step is to determine the role the Athletes' Council will play within your organisation. Some key questions to work through answering include;

- a. How will the Athletes' Council fit within your governance structure?
- b. What changes need to be made to your constitution to ensure an Athletes' Council is as effective as possible? We highly recommend ensuring the Chair of the Council has a voting seat on your Governing Board;
- c. How will an Athletes' Council fit within the organisation's strategic plan? We recommend enlisting a small group of athletes to help develop these plans to ensure the outcome serves both the organisation and the athlete community.

3. Define the Athletes' Council's mission, vision and strategy as well as resources required such as administrative support and IT requirements and budgets for Council activities.

4. Identify potential members, a calendar of activities and events for the Athletes' Council to facilitate and attend.

5. Gain approval from Governing Board of organisation.

6. Plan for and organise an election to finalise members.

Key ingredients for a successful Athletes' Council

Structure

An Athletes' Council is a key stakeholder in its organisation and should be understood as a credible part of decision-making. It must be fully supported by both the top leadership and administration of your organisation.

The IPC recommends the following key considerations to ensure effectiveness, diversity of ideas and balance where possible:

Balanced Composition

- Male and female athletes
- Different disability categories
- Variety of sports and/or disciplines
- Regions or countries (for IFs or ROs)
- Competing and recently retired athletes

Size

- Minimum of five members
- Majority of elected members, minority of co-opted members (to fill potential gaps in structure such as gender, disability, etc.)

Term

- Minimum of four-year terms for elected members.
- Minimum of two-year terms for co-opted members.
- Elections should take place near to and before the organisations' elections.
- Staggered elections to ensure continuous transfer of knowledge between members.

Vote

- The Athletes' Council Chair has a vote within the organisation's highest decision-making body, such as the Governing Board.
- Only elected members of the Athletes' Council are voting members. The co-opted members are non-voting members who have speaking rights

Communication

An Athletes' Council has a structure in place for communication and knowledge sharing among all athletes. The structure allows for communication in a supportive and healthy environment. A two-way communication between an Athletes' Council and its athletes is a key ingredient to ensure that athletes' views are understood, captured and communicated effectively. An effective Athletes' Council is available for its athletes and pays attention to the views they have, not focusing on their own individual views. In addition, the IPC recommends that an Athletes' Council creates a database of contact information of its athletes to ensure maximum reach.

An Athletes' Council has different options of communication with its athletes to ensure their views are shared. These can include the following methods:

- Face-to-face interactions with athletes during events such as national/international championships, athletes' forums, athletes' workshops etc.
- Communication using different media, for example newsletters, social media, group emails, phone calls, websites etc.
- Develop promotional materials to share with athletes, for example flyers, banners, pamphlets etc.
- Surveys, questionnaires, focus groups, interviews etc.

It is good to have a dedicated Athletes' Council's space on your organisation's (IF/RO/NPC) website.

It is also important to heed the data privacy laws and platforms used by the specific organisation. Ask questions and ask for help should this be required.



Desirable qualities, attributes, and characteristics of successful Athletes' Council member

Just like any leadership role, it is recommended that Athletes' Council members have some of the following attributes.

Trustworthy

Dependable

High ethical standard

Leadership

Good communicator

What are some of the things an Athletes' Council can discuss and provide feedback on?

An Athletes' Council can discuss and contribute in the following topics. The list below gives an example of topics, but it is not exhaustive:

- Athletes' elections
- Sports rules and regulations
- Athlete welfare and safe sport
- Athletes rights and responsibilities
- Classification
- Games sports programme
- Athletes agreements and policies
- Games' team selection and operations
- Education and development
- Athlete career programmes
- Anti-doping

What an Athletes' Council can expect from its organisation

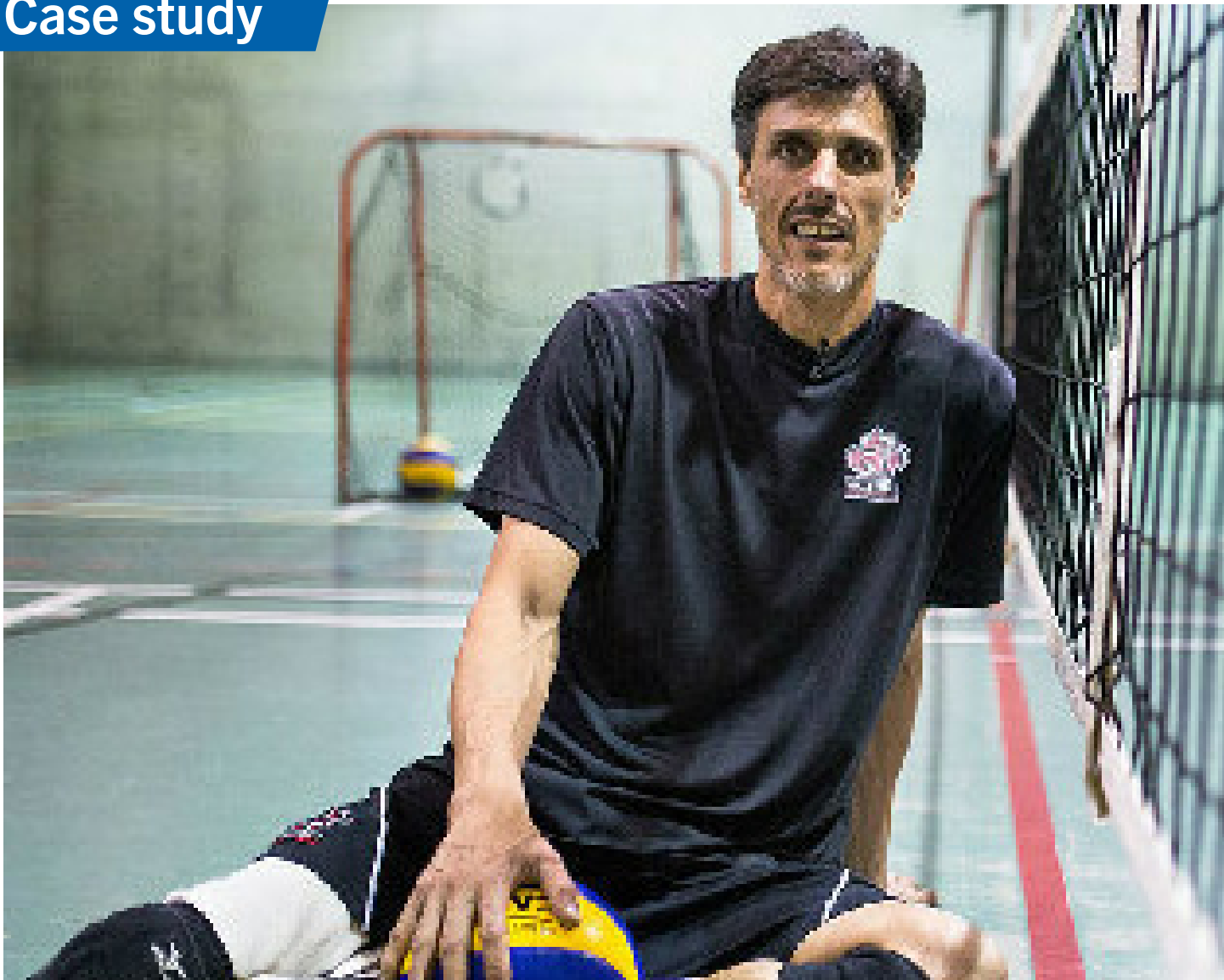
The IPC recommends that an IF/RO/NPC organises an orientation programme for its Athletes' Council. The orientation programme can cover topics such as the following:

- History and governance structure of the organisation including where the Athletes' Council fits within, the role of the Athletes' Council, expectations of members, etc.
- The who is who within the organisation and how they link with the Athletes' Council
- The organisation's constitution and strategy.
- It may also be beneficial to link the Chair of the Athletes' Council or athlete representative to a member of the Governing Board or senior management team who are well aware of the history of any decisions that have been taken so they can better engage in discussion.

As an Athletes' Council is a voluntary group of an organisation, it works closely with its organisation's administration to support its activities. An Athletes' Council can expect the following from its organisation to ensure its effectiveness:

- Day-to-day implementation of its strategy.
- Budget allocation for its activities.
- Identified administrative support and a connection to a member of the senior leadership/management team.
- Support in organising and arranging its meetings.
- Information sharing of relevant topics.
- Administrative support in organising its elections.

Case study



José Rebelo

World ParaVolley (WPV) Athletes' Council Chairperson

Quick facts

7

Members



4

Men



3

Women



6

Active



1

Retired

*Accurate as at May 2019.



“At the General Assembly in 2018 it was resolved to appoint two athletes – one male and one female to the World ParaVolley Board of Directors as voting members. The Board decided to revitalise the structure and management of the Athletes’ Council, and in consultation with athletes devised the pathway to elect the members of the Athletes’ Council.

In early 2019, world-wide elections were held to choose the members – four zone elections followed by one global election to elect the fifth member. The overall level of athlete engagement was very high as member nations were asked to submit candidates and their eligible voter lists, resulting in 25 candidates and 317 eligible voters from across all four World ParaVolley zones.

The primary objective of our Athletes’ Council is to represent the voices all the athletes involved in para volleyball. It requires to be on the lookout for information, trends and opportunities for the sport, take initiatives that will permit the development of the athletes in their sport.

We are still in our beginnings right now. Our first objective is to get ourselves organised and develop our strategy and set our goals. We believe that once our strategy and goals are in place, we will move forward and make impactful progress. I really want to get everyone involved, engaging and reach out to the athletes to get their opinions”.

Case study



Jeongmin Lee

Asian Paralympic Committee (APC) Athletes' Council Chairperson

Quick facts

5

Members



3

Men



2

Women



3

Active



2

Retired

*Accurate as at May 2019.



“Our Athletes’ Council is the link between the leadership and the athletes, it is the voice of the athletes to provide input at the decision-making table and make sure that the interests of all athletes are considered in all aspects of APC’s activities. As the Chairperson of the Athletes’ Council, I have a seat and a vote on the Governing Board, this is a good demonstration that APC is athlete-centred and includes athletes in decision making.

Inspired by the IPC Athletes’ Council’s strategy, we are working on developing our strategy for the period 2019 – 2022. I am happy with the level of engagement of our Athletes’ Council despite the differences in location, languages and culture”.

Case study



Vladyslava Kravchenko

Malta Paralympic Committee Athletes' Council Chairperson

Quick facts

6

Members



5

Men



1

Woman



5

Active



1

Retired

*Accurate as at May 2019.



“The Malta Paralympic Committee (‘MPC’) was formally established in July 2018. Our NPC is new and so is our Athletes’ Council.

Our Athletes’ Council is the collective voice of athletes, acting as a consultative body providing advice, feedback and support to the Executive Committee of the MPC, ensuring that the interests of athletes are placed at its epicentre. The Athletes’ Council aims to meet on a regular basis to discuss the challenges and opportunities for para-athletes and to propose solutions.

We started the process about a year ago. We established our Athletes’ Council’s by-laws and held a number of meetings, where athletes contributed towards the strategy of our NPC for the coming years.

Being the first Athletes’ Council, our main focus is to be as effective as possible in engaging with other athletes and to keep the Council members motivated”.

Case study



Tony Walby

Canada Paralympic Committee Athletes' Council Chairperson

Quick facts

7

Members



4

Men



3

Women



5

Active



2

Retired

*Accurate as at May 2019.



Canadian Paralympic Committee | Comité paralympique canadien

“Our Athletes’ Council exists to enable athletes to have a voice and advocate at the organisational and Government level. We have a seat on the NPC board as well as sitting on multiple working groups at the athlete and Government levels. We have had it written into all terms of reference for our NPC board of directors committees to allow for an athlete representative on each committee. Furthermore, we have sat on Government of Canada working groups to help frame the sports Canada high-performance strategic plan. We have created a strategic framework that includes a communication plan to allow us to disperse information to all athletes.

We receive tremendous support from the Canadian Paralympic Committee staff. As we are an Athletes’ Council that represents them they work with us to ensure our voice and our feedback is heard.

The Canadian Paralympic Committee Athletes’ Council is very lucky to have such a strong connection with the Board of Directors and staff. Our strategic plans are aligned, we feel part of the process.”

Contact us

Website: <https://www.paralympic.org/athletes-council>

E-mail: athletecouncil@paralympic.org

Facebook: [@ParaAthleteClub](https://www.facebook.com/ParaAthleteClub)



Paralympic.org

International Paralympic Committee

Adenauerallee 212-214
53113 Bonn, Germany

Tel. +49 228 2097-200
Fax +49 228 2097-209

athletescouncil@paralympic.org
www.paralympic.org/athletes-council

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