



## **We are Stronger Together! ACA Strategic Plan for 2023-2028**

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### ***Why a Strategic Plan?***

*As both a national non-profit organization and the National Governing Body for Olympic Sport in the U.S., the ACA is uniquely positioned to advance paddlesports. The overarching purpose of this strategic plan and our work over the next five years is to promote the fun of paddling, include all who are interested, build community, support excellence in instruction and competition, foster stewardship, and save lives.*

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People are the heart of paddling and the heart of the ACA. Working together and collaborating toward common goals, ACA clubs, instructors, competitors, volunteers, and staff are keys to embracing and delivering this strategy. Together, we can and will advance our common goals for paddlesports and the ACA.

Our mission, vision, and core values define the ways we seek to accomplish these goals.

#### **ACA's Mission**

**We build inclusive paddling communities, support excellence and foster safety and stewardship through education, competition, and recreation.**

#### **Our Vision**

**Engage millions of paddlers with safe and healthy opportunities for challenge, learning, service, and enjoyment.**

## Core Values

Every paddler has the right to define their path on the water, from close-to-home recreation to remote exploration and from entry-level to high-performance activities. To that end, we share these core values:

- **Enjoyment:** We develop programs, events, and education that provide satisfying and rewarding experiences.
- **Safety:** We create programs, policies, and procedures to ensure safety is a top priority for all paddlers.
- **Inclusion:** We promote a culture and atmosphere of integrity and camaraderie. We maintain an environment of respect, fairness, and kindness and embrace the value of diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives.
- **Teamwork:** We work collaboratively with our members, clubs, and partner organizations. We nurture connections throughout the paddlesport community.
- **Excellence:** We enthusiastically support the pursuit of excellence at the individual, club, team, and organizational levels. We strive to provide our members and the paddling community with the best possible service.

## Strategic Pathways

Six cross-cutting pathways guide the ACA's future, each with an important and unique focus of achievement. While each pathway is defined separately, they join, overlap, intercept, and interact to strengthen the fabric of the greater ACA community. We believe each pathway is vital to achieve our vision.

Presented in alphabetical order, the strategic pathways are:

- Community Leadership and Development ..... page 4
- Competition ..... page 6
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) ..... page 9
- Education ..... page 11
- Governance and Organizational Leadership ..... page 13
- Stewardship and Public Policy ..... page 15

Goal Statements with Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and beginning Tactics are presented for each strategic pathway. Additional Tactics and SMART Goals will be added as part of the operational planning and implementation process.



**We are Stronger Together!**

# Community Leadership and Development

**Together, we will connect paddlers from diverse communities and disciplines to paddling resources and the experiences paddling offers, and to meaningful opportunities for collaboration and community-building.**

## Key Performance Indicators



### **1. Prioritize a welcoming and inclusive approach to community leadership across the paddling community. *(Top Board Priority)***

#### Year 1 Tactic:

- Develop outreach goals (to include a visual tool) to market and communicate ACA community opportunities for new members (e.g., education options, club opportunities, networks for paddling, water trail resources, the range of ACA activities, public education).

### **2. Support club development, growth, and retention. *(Board Priority)***

#### Year 1-2 Tactics:

- Identify the needs and pathways to support paddling clubs, including membership in clubs, how to support new clubs, how to retain membership, etc.
- Develop a resource toolkit for Paddle America Clubs (PACs) and share with PAC leaders by end of 2024.
- Hold series of PAC Customer Support/Resource webinars in 2023.
- Develop a pricing model for PAC membership that allows ACA to compete with insurance brokers who are charging an annual premium and requiring little or no waiver management, reporting, fees or paperwork.

### **3. Maintain and grow participation in Regional Activity Council (RAC) and state-level volunteers. *(Board Priority)***

#### **Year 1 Tactic:**

- Implement the newly established Regional Activity Council, including procedures and membership.
- Support and guide the development of local and regional coalitions to focus on local initiatives and to expand our network beyond ACA members (e.g., document at least five coalition initiatives that combine ACA members and non-members in the state/local/regional paddling community to accomplish something related to instruction, competition, recreation, stewardship or inclusion).

### **4. Determine how ACA can reduce incidents and save lives.**

#### **Year 1-2 Tactics:**

- Annually analyze data on paddlesport incidents nationwide.
- Identify opportunities for community-based, grass-root initiatives to address paddlesport incidents.
- Increase the number of states with partnership initiatives between ACA State/Regional Leaders and State/Local/Federal government agencies related to safety, education and instruction by end of 2024 (e.g., state parks, state wildlife agency, Coast Guard Auxiliary).

### **5. Reward initiatives that connect different paddling communities.**

#### **Year 1 Tactic:**

- Plan and implement programs to recognize and increase the visibility of partnership initiatives across multiple organizations or communities.

### **6. Communicate club, member, and partner successes.**

#### **Year 1 Tactic:**

- Inspire growth in and retention of ACA membership by gathering and nationally publishing news articles detailing local success stories (e.g., at least five feature items from regional, state, local or club-oriented

success stories published in ACA newsletter; at least 20 social media posts celebrating state and local volunteers or club initiatives on ACA national social media channels.)

## Competition

**Together, we will establish and strengthen our system for identifying, training, and supporting athletes at all levels and disciplines, including high-performance athletic development for paddlers competing in national, international, Olympic and Paralympic events. \***

### Key Performance Indicators



**1. Develop a financial mission/vision to support the pursuit of competitive athlete excellence. (*Top Board Priority*)**

#### Year 1-5 Tactics:

- Provide sponsorship and marketing support for athletic competition:
  - Develop a plan to fund U.S. Athletes placing in the top-eight of world sport performance.
  - Explore the potential to provide fundraising support at multiple levels. This includes including hiring a professional fundraiser, providing fundraising training for volunteers including an athlete's family.
  - Provide media training for high-performing athletes to promote themselves and the National Governing Body/ACA.
- Secure sponsors and partners:
  - Leverage the fact that the Olympics will take place in the U.S. in 2028, and that the reigning Sprint K1W Gold Medalist is a U.S. paddler.
  - Look for connections and low-hanging fruit. Research companies that would create a good, endemic fit for a partnership, such as a carbon fiber sponsor to provide race boats.

- Educate ACA membership about competition disciplines, where competition money comes from, and how it is used.
- Provide athlete marketing/fundraising training, such as training provided by the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic program.
- Consider partnering with U.S. Military programs that pays athletes to train (e.g., U.S. Navy Sports Program; U.S. Coast Guard Sports Program).

**2. Develop and implement, by discipline, plans for programming, infrastructure, and outreach to effectively recruit, instruct, train, retain, and provide competition opportunities for athletes.**

Year 1-5 Tactics: *(Note: These are not independent items for development, but a simultaneous set of items for athletes, leaders, recruiting, equipment, creating competition events, etc.)*

- Import the sprint coaches' International Canoe Federation (ICF) program for education and certification onto the Safety Education and Instruction Council (SEIC) reporting platform for certification management and cross-pollination of information.
- Create a coaching education framework for all other disciplines or build on the existing framework.
- Create and implement "How to Start a Competition Club" for all disciplines.
- Make any existing programming available to all disciplines.
- Identify official suppliers for equipment, uniforms, paddles, etc.
- Create an ongoing local/regional Youth Event Series in multiple disciplines.
- Expand the base of those involved in competition. Support and create clubs in all disciplines. Work with Regional Activity Council (RAC) to:
  - Encourage existing Paddle America Clubs (PACs) clubs to offer a competition program;
  - Encourage programs within new whitewater parks (including creating new clubs); and,
  - Reinvigorate old clubs.
- Increase the number of Coaches. Establish goal for adult leaders to help create coaching.

### **3. Identify high-performance goals and the system that sustains and improves competitive athletes' performance at the highest level for each discipline.**

#### **Years 1-5 Tactics:**

- Increase the number of paid national team coaches.
- Develop new external funding sources to pay for national team expenses.
- Update criteria for the national team and high-performance athletes.
- Pursue equipment innovation through support from the U.S. Olympic Committee (USOC).
- Heighten representation for non-Olympic disciplines.
- Pursue physical testing and mental health/sports psychology for high-performance athletes.
- Provide and encourage access to the USOC *Athlete 365* program, which provides guidance for athletes to pursue future careers.

### **4. Expand recreational competition opportunities, both within and outside of ICF disciplines.**

#### **Year 1 Tactic:**

- Identify a task team to review the potential of kayak fishing tournaments, citizen races, such as indoor pool slalom, general downriver races, Swiftwater rescue competitions, etc.

#### **\*Disciplines:**

- Olympic
  - Canoe Sprint in Canoe and Kayak
  - Canoe Slalom in Canoe and Kayak
  - Extreme Slalom (Kayak Cross)
- Paralympic:
  - Kayak and Va'a
- International (International Canoe Federation Disciplines)
  - Freestyle
  - Wildwater
  - Marathon
  - Canoe/Kayak Polo
  - Ocean Racing (Surfski)
  - Dragon Boat
  - Stand Up Paddling (SUP)
- National (ACA recognized disciplines)
  - Canoe Sailing
  - Rafting
  - Va'a
  - Whitewater Open Canoe Downriver
  - Whitewater Open Canoe Slalom



# Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

**Together, we will ensure the ACA core values are reflected in every facet of the organization, and will create and deliver programs and policies that encourage representation and participation of diverse groups of people.**

## Key Performance Indicators



### **1. Grow programs and paddler engagement inspired by the Leadership Exploration and Development (LEAD) Initiative. *(Top Board Priority)***

#### Year 1 Tactics:

- Support previous LEAD participants to grow the program organically, making the program available to more audiences.
- Request information from Instructor Trainers (ITs)/ Instructor Trainer Educators (ITEs) and different groups to field/sponsor at least one LEAD event.
- Develop a process for members to indicate interest in the LEAD Initiative.

### **2. Gather and report membership data to achieve greater diversity of membership demographics. *(Board Priority)***

#### Year 1 Tactic:

- Create YM (ACA member survey tool) gender question.
- Provide an annual ACA membership profile.

### **3. Develop and provide consistent DEI training opportunities for all ACA Board members, staff, instructors and volunteers.**

#### Year 1 Tactics:

- Implement/complete DEI Training for Board of Directors.

- Determine/consider the resources needed to implement DEI training for clubs.
- Develop and implement DEI Training for ITEs.
- Develop DEI modules for IT Development Workshops and Updates.

#### **4. Communicate the value of DEI to all ACA members using communication methods best suited to their programs.**

##### **Year 1 Tactics:**

- Interview Board members and coaches regarding the importance of DEI to the ACA.
- Ensure DEI information is organically addressed in ACA monthly newsletters. Communicate why/how DEI is important to the ACA mission in each program area, including the importance of cognitive diversity and abilities (adaptive).

#### **5. Diversify the ACA Board, staff, and volunteers at all levels.**

##### **Year 1 Tactic:**

- Actively seek and recruit candidates and volunteers to diversify representation at all levels of the organization.

## Education

**Together, we will establish and strengthen the ACA Safety, Education, and Instruction program as the leading resource in paddlesports.**

### Key Performance Indicators



#### **1. Create new pathways and delivery systems for entry-level paddlesports education and certification. *(Top Board Priority)***

##### Year 1 Tactics:

- Continue to explore new entry-level courses and pathways to address public education needs with scouting organizations, Coast Guard Auxiliary, and others.
- Explore systems for online courses, including courses in various languages. Choose an online learning platform to create and publish online courses for members and the general public in collaboration with members of Safety Education and Instruction Council (SEIC).
- Document the value of entry-level certificate courses to recognize new paddlers as our community's future and ACA's biggest value. Clarify and communicate the different pathways through which entry-level paddlers can enter and pursue education and training within the ACA.
- Promote one-day ACA workshops to provide entry-level experience, training certificates/credentials.
- Communicate the value of community as one of ACA's biggest benefits.

#### **2. Increase certified Instructor retention through improved and accessible renewal processes. *(Board Priority)***

##### Year 1 Tactics:

- Connect with the Regional Activity Council for regional IT/ITE updates. Implement regional updates run by ITs and ITEs (target is 4-5 regional updates).
- Document the methodology to determine instructor retention baseline data. Use this method to establish the baseline for year one.

- Publish the framework for renewal options, including: how to host your first class; how to report classes; and, steps to renew.
- Consider how to conduct some portions of Instructor updates online or virtually.

### **3. Continue to grow Instructor Trainer Educator (ITE) and Instructor Trainer (IT) engagement within the ACA and their respective communities (e.g., offering mentorship training and community leadership).**

#### **Year 1 Tactics:**

- Encourage ITs/ITEs to assist Regional Chairs and/or State Directors to find Instructors/ITs/ITEs to contribute to educational opportunities.
- Facilitate ITEs service on committees across the ACA to ensure cross-pollination and sharing of information.

### **4. Develop more pathways to communicate with Safety, Education and Instructor Council (SEIC) membership, including ACA members who have completed assessments and leadership certificates, such as Paddlesport Safety Facilitator (PSF), or Community Paddlesports Leader (CPL).**

#### **Year 1 Tactics:**

- Identify opportunities to provide bridges between SEIC and the PSF and CPL communities.
- Develop and share resources for members who have the PSF and CPL to stay engaged and receiving benefit from the training.
- Consider Slack thread/data/information to identify future IT/ITE development.

### **5. Strengthen productive partnerships in paddlesports safety.**

#### **Year 1 Tactics:**

- Form volunteer teams to research ways to enhance partnerships for coaches and judge training (Olympic and non-Olympic disciplines), and education (youth development, scouts, Coast Guard Auxiliary, kayak angling communities, etc.).
- With partners, ensure ACA is poised to offer entry-level boating safety classes to avoid/address state paddlesport mandates.

- Ensure active and ongoing communication with ACA partners to identify and deepen pathways of mutual benefit via newsletters, social media sharing, meetings, meetups, etc.

## Governance and Organizational Leadership

**The ACA will demonstrate effective governance practices, with leadership from the Board of Directors and staff, and input requested from club and volunteers engaged in committees, Councils and working groups.**

### Key Performance Indicators

Strong and effective governance will be demonstrated by meeting objectives in five key performance areas:



**1. Communication - ACA will develop, publish and follow communication guidelines governing the frequency of communication with members and partnering organizations. This includes surveys of member satisfaction, publication of Board records, and development of opportunities to share new ideas, welcome dialogue, and provide transparency at all levels of the organization. (Board Top Priority)**

Year 1 Tactics:

- Develop communications guidelines and volunteer handbook.
- Update the website to make it more user-friendly, ensuring it reflects all major policy, organizational and competition news as is available through members and partners.
- Evaluate the addition of a members-only forum/message board.

**2. Branding and Marketing – ACA will develop and implement a strategic branding and marketing plan to expand ACA’s membership and positioning and awareness within the paddlesport community. (Board Priority)**

Year 1 Tactics:

- Research and select a resource to develop a marketing and branding plan.
- Identify an official ACA clothing and branded gear supplier.
- Grow/leverage our Olympic position, especially regarding youth development.
- Develop and implement a customer service/member service plan to address unexpected situations and events.
- Brand and communicate pathways that paddlers can follow to meet their goals with the ACA, whether that is getting certified, a community leader, or a recreational paddler who wants safety info and tips.

**3. Leadership Training and Customer Service - ACA will implement training to help strengthen our leadership (board, council, committee leaders, coaches, and staff) and better engage our members. *(Board Priority)***

Year 1 Tactics:

- Define leadership training requirements. offer training opportunities as part of, or prior to, the 2023 fall membership meeting.
- Develop an onboarding and succession plan process for the Board. Request that all councils and committees also create processes for onboarding and succession planning.

**4. Policies and Procedures - ACA will develop policies and procedures to ensure the Association's activities are consistent with current non-profit best practices.**

Year 1 Tactic:

- Inventory all policies and procedures to identify gaps and outdated documents.

**5. Member Leadership Opportunities - ACA will implement methods to increase opportunities for members to participate in leadership activities.**

Year 1 Tactic:

- Develop and publish a volunteer page on the website with volunteer opportunities, volunteer guidance, and a handbook.

# Stewardship and Public Policy

**Together, we advocate for fair and equitable policies regarding paddlesport regulations and promote the preservation and stewardship of paddling resources.**

## Key Performance Indicators



### **1. Develop and publish core paddling policy statements. (*Board Top Priority*)**

#### Year 1 Tactics:

- Develop policy statements regarding: PFD wear; mandatory education; user pay/user benefit models (such as excise tax); registration; and access restrictions/right to navigation.
- Develop a process to identify and track state and national legislative initiatives related to paddlesports and paddling resources.

### **2. Communicate policy and stewardship activity to our members. (*Board Priority*)**

#### Year 1 Tactic:

- Collect and publicize data and information from competitors, coaches and officials; clubs, ITs/ITEs and general members.
- On the ACA Website, add resources and updates on items on which the ACA is working.
- Create/address stewardship in the membership welcome video/join letter.
- Share Stewardship information with other ACA committees.

### **3. Create stewardship resources for clubs, members, ACA staff, and others.**

#### Year 1 Tactics:

- Develop a Membership Community pathways tool.
- Develop and implement ACA Regional Contacts resource tools.

**4. Support and collaborate with like-minded partners on policy and stewardship issues.**

**Year 1 Tactics:**

- Continue to support the Outdoor Alliance initiatives as a member of its steering committee.
- Identify additional partners for collaboration at the national, regional, state and local levels.

**5. Create opportunities that enhance the visibility of paddlers to policymakers.**

**Year 1 Tactic:**

- Promote and support “meet your legislator” initiatives.



### ***About this plan....***

This five-year plan is a blueprint, not a mandate. Goals, KPIs and tactics will be reviewed and analyzed annually by the ACA Board of Directors and Staff to measure overall results, and reconsider, reset or re-direct resources to attain the overall vision for the organization. The process for development of the next Strategic Plan should begin no later than 2027 for implementation 2029 - 2034.

***We wish to thank everyone who contributed to this plan.***

***We are Stronger Together!***

***Questions?*** Contact the ACA Strategic Plan Committee at [feedback@americancanoe.org](mailto:feedback@americancanoe.org).

**2022-23 ACA Strategic Plan Committee Members:** Pamela Dillon (Chair), Dave Lumian, Scott Mann, Brandon Slate, Anna Levesque, Suzanne Britt, Jerry Dunne, Risa Shimoda, Trey Rouss, Andrea White, Beth Spilman - Executive Director, and Robin Pope – 2022 ACA President.

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