



United States Soaring Team Task Force

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U.S. Team Task Force

The United States Soaring Team Task Force project was approved by the SSA Board of Directors at the 2002 SSA Convention held in Ontario California. The mission of the U.S. Team Policy Review Task Force is to accomplish a fundamental review of how United States Soaring teams currently do business, solicit community input, investigate areas for improvement, develop solutions, author a report and provide implementation assistance.

The Principles

The guiding principles for the Task Force were established as: Transparency, Accountability, Competitiveness, and Sustainability.

The Purpose

The long term purpose of the U.S. Team Policy Review Task Force is to establish the U.S. Soaring Teams and the underlying organization as the most capable of all international soaring teams.

The Process

The first step of the five step process was the formation of a six member U.S. Team Policy Review Task Force. The members of this panel were Doug Jacobs, Jim Payne, John Seaborn, Jim Short, Ken Sorenson, and Tim Welles. This six member Panel was charged with accomplishing the mission stated above. The second step involved a review of how U.S. Soaring Teams currently operate and the solicitation of feedback regarding specific problems and solutions from a wide variety of participants. Third, develop solutions to the challenges identified. Fourth, author a report on findings and up-date the existing U.S. Team Funding and Selection Policies document and the U.S. Team Policy & Procedures Manual. Fifth, implement the findings of the report in concert with team management.

The Time Frame

The U.S. Team Policy Review Task Force proposal called for the preparation of a report from the Task Force which was to be presented to the SSA Directors at their January 2003 board meeting. That report has been published on the Task Force portion of the SSA U.S. Team website and is being presented to the Directors as scheduled. (http://www.ssa.org/usteam/ust_taskforce.htm)

The Results

Task force members have pushed the process to completion over the past year culminating in a final report covering thirteen sections. Each section relates to an aspect of team function.

Team Task Force Report Sections	
1) Team Policy Statement	9) Team Financial Management
2) Team Goals	10) Team Pilot Selection
3) Team Organization	11) Team Contest Preparation
4) Team Planning	12) Team Documents
5) Team Funding	13) Team Survey & Report (Ended Aug. 31)
6) Team Fundraising	Section 1 - Team Survey Executive Report (17 Pages)
7) Team Pilot Obligations	Section 2 - Team Survey Multiple Choice Report (54 Pages)
8) Team Communication	Section 3 - Team Survey Open Ended Responses (75 Pages)

These sections were developed and refined by the task force members and then, in keeping with the Task Force's commitment to transparent and accountable operations, they were announced and published for public review and comment on the Task Force portion of the SSA U.S. Team website. Periodic announcements of Task Force progress were also made to the SSA Directors so that the direction of the Task Force could be appropriately monitored.

A key element of the Task Force's effort to solicit input from the soaring community was the first-ever U.S. Team survey. This was conducted on the internet and over 220 SSA members participated. An extensive 146 page summary and analysis of the survey results was prepared and used to guide the Task Force's recommendations. A full report on the U.S. Team survey and its results is contained in Section 13 of the Task Force report available online

One of first topics addressed by the Task Force was the subject of Team USA goals. While **winning** is the obvious primary competitive goal, there are other important reasons for participating in World Gliding Championships (WGC) beyond this singular goal. These include encouraging U.S. pilots to enter competitive soaring by expanding the opportunity to participate in world contests and developing both new competition classes and the pilots within those classes. The U.S. Team's broader goals should also include attracting more pilots to soaring, encouraging cross-country soaring, training competition pilots, and training future Team members. The U.S. Team is in a unique position of influence and visibility to help grow the sport. Greater emphasis on U.S. Team "payback" to the soaring community is a fundamental element of the new U.S. Team philosophy. Section 2 of the Task Force report presents a more complete discussion of U.S. Team goals.

There has been a good deal of discussion about why Americans do not win more world soaring championships and how this ties into the team selection process. First, the situation is not as dire as some make it out to be. In 1999 Karl Striedieck came within inches of winning the 26th World Soaring Championships in Bayreuth, Germany. In 2001, Gary Ittner did the same at the 27th South Africa Championships. If things had gone just slightly differently for these pilots the world of competitive soaring would be talking about those, "Unstoppable Americans". There are many factors that contribute to the USA not winning more championships. As in most complex problems, there are several contributing factors and few easy answers or fixes. In regard to the task force effort, there are things that can be addressed and fixed within the team world and things that are more structural and can't be fixed immediately - or at all. The task force effort is trying to address the things we can fix. The current selection process provides a relatively simple, fair and unbiased manner for selecting team pilots and is considered an improvement over the voting system it replaced. There is little support for changing the selection process in any dramatic manner. Section 10 of the Task Force report presents several areas for clarification and minor improvement of the team selection process including simplification of the write-up in the "SSA U.S. Team Funding and Selection Policies" document.

A central finding of the task force was the need for U.S. Soaring Teams to develop an organizational structure capable of providing consistent long-term management support of U.S. Soaring Teams. In the past the US Team organization consisted of a very small group of volunteers who worked together with

the SSA staff to support the Team in a specific championship effort. The key volunteer positions were the US Team Manager and the US Team Captain. These two positions were often filled by the same person who organized and managed the team in preparation for the contest and then served as Team Captain during the contest. Team finances, logistics, planning and preparation were handled on a contest by contest basis by the Team Manager/Captain and the SSA staff. With the addition of several new FAI classes and multiple WGC events, a broader and deeper US Team organizational structure is required. The focus of the new US Team Organization is on volunteers. A key underlying philosophy is that SSA staff support for the US Teams should be minimized wherever possible. While some SSA staff input and support is clearly required and appropriate, the US Teams should not burden SSA's limited resources any more than is necessary. As part of this increased emphasis on volunteers, an attempt has been made to separate the many required support activities into a larger number of smaller and manageable responsibilities. This means more volunteers, but the demands on each will be limited to a level that results in a sustainable organization (i.e. don't burn out the volunteers). A critical element in the new US Team Organization is the creation of a newly defined US Team Committee (see Action Item No. 1 below). An outline of the overall U.S. Team organizational structure is provided in section 3 of the Task Force report.

The Task Force has outlined a new U.S. Team funding system. While certain details of the new system still need to be defined, basic elements of the new approach include the following: The previous "blank check" approach to U.S. Team funding will be replaced with a "defined benefit" approach. **SSA's expenses will be limited to an amount that will be specified before the WGC event.** Each pilot will be expected to contribute an amount at least equal to what they would spend attending a U.S. Nationals, regardless of available funds. Any shortfall between an individual pilot's expenses and the pre-defined funding allocation from the SSA would be the responsibility of the pilot. All FAI WGC classes will be eligible to receive SSA funding, but the funding level for each class need not be the same and will be based in part upon U.S. Nationals participation in the class. The SSA funding for all the classes at a particular venue will be combined and then distributed equally to the pilots. An exception to this will be one possible additional pilot per class who is fully self-funded, allowed at the discretion of the U.S. Team Committee. The self-funded pilot must provide his/her complete funding for the event to the SSA and would agree to attend the WGC subject to management of the U.S. team in the same manner as the SSA funded pilots. The intent is to provide an opportunity to one additional pilot per class to attend the event with no additional drain on team finances. The self-funded positions can be viewed as "developmental" positions, or as positions for an exceptionally motivated contestant who may have "missed the cut", but has the financial resources to attend without SSA funding support. The opportunity to join the team as a self-funded member would be offered to each of the top five pilots in the selection queue in sequence. Final development of the details of the new funding system will be the first major priority of the new U.S. Team Committee. Additional information regarding the new U.S. Team funding strategy is available in Section 5 of the Task Force report.

The Task Force has conducted a comprehensive review of U.S. Team fundraising. New FAI classes provide more opportunity for U.S. pilots to participate in WGCs. More international participation will require bigger budgets and increased emphasis on team fundraising. To meet this challenge, new fundraising programs that reward contributors and create entirely new funding opportunities will need to be developed and implemented by the SSA and the emerging U.S. Team Committee. At a fundamental level, fundraising efforts must better connect our soaring teams with the grass roots of the sport while providing a higher return on contributions. The five areas in which U.S. Teams can deliver a return on contributions are improved competitive performance, educational activities, promotion of the sport, consistency of programs and improved communication. Of these five, competitive performance is preeminent. The three traditional methods of making contributions to U.S. Soaring Teams now in use (general fund, team/venue/class-specific and perpetual) should be continued with funding efforts focused on building the general and perpetual funds. New fundraising programs need to be developed to augment

the traditional programs now in use. In the future, individual teams and the team organization generally will need to take on more of the responsibility for implementing fundraising programs. Section 6 of the Task Force report explores the new directions in U.S. Team fundraising.

Earning a position on a United States soaring team is not simply a reward for success at the national level. Rather, it is an opportunity to achieve at the world level. Team pilots should understand that team membership carries with it certain obligations. One of the Task Force goals was to better define specific U.S. Team pilot obligations in order to provide a clear up-front understanding of the responsibilities that come with team membership. Three basic pilot obligations were identified: 1) Full commitment to the championship effort to accomplish the team objective is a pilot's primary obligation, 2) Make a difference in soaring, give something back to the soaring community and participate in team sponsored programs to accomplish these goals, and 3) Assist the team in developing and delivering fundraising programs. By hosting the Mifflin Sports/Training Regionals and providing as first prize for the Team Sweepstakes the copilot's seat in his Duo Discus, Karl Striedieck has set an excellent example by both "giving back" and helping with fundraising. While on the team, the upcoming WGC needs to be the focus of the pilot's life. Anything less than full commitment to this effort short-changes the team, contributors and the soaring community. Team pilots need to be prepared to take the steps necessary to win at world soaring championships such as attending the Pre-worlds and attending U.S. Team practice sessions. Pilots need to understand that there is no free lunch. If they expect to be funded through contributions and represent the United States at world soaring championships there is a responsibility to the soaring community to provide honorable and fair representation. The obligations associated with U.S. Team membership are discussed in Section 7 of the Task Force report.

One of the topics studied by the Task Force was improved U.S. Team communication. Historically world soaring teams were often a black hole with regards to communication. The soaring community often had no real understanding of the team and competitive results were often delayed for days or weeks. This "distance" resulted in a disconnect between U.S. Teams and their supporters, contributors and the soaring community. The internet age has provided great opportunity for U.S. soaring teams in the area of communication. The World Wide Web and e-mail based newsletters allow the team to reach large numbers of people at little cost. The SSA U.S. Team web site provides a wealth of information on U.S. soaring teams and has become an important link between the team and the soaring community. Team communication must point in two directions, first towards the soaring community, team contributors and supporters. A constant effort needs to be made to educate the soaring community on how the team works and its importance to soaring in the USA. Timely reporting on the competitive aspect of world championships including the daily results, day reports and "you are here" online coverage are critical to the team's communication program. The second direction is toward the broader soaring community. Opportunities for person-to-person communication must be developed that allow team members to better connect with the grass roots of the sport. Club gatherings, team sponsored educational events, lectures and articles in Soaring magazine are all aspects of team communication that are critical to long term team success. Section 8 of the Task Force report addresses U.S. Team communication issues.

Historically there has been little long term planning done for U.S. soaring teams. The focus has tended to be exclusively on the next championship effort, with organization and logistics occurring rather late in the process. The new complexity of multiple teams, championships and venues turns good planning into a competitive weapon that will allow U.S. soaring teams to more effectively position themselves to achieve competitive excellence at World Soaring Championships. A more consistent planning function that "lives" within the overall emerging Team Committee will offer more consistent support to the U.S. Team. Within the new U.S. Team organizational structure, the U.S. Team planning function will develop and maintain a forward looking schedule for U.S. Soaring Teams that allows management, pilots and staff to anticipate and accomplish the tasks necessary to participate in World Soaring Championships well ahead of need. The master planning schedule will be posted on the U.S. Team Web site and maintained in the U.S. Team Binder. Section 4 of the Task Force report contains an initial pass at the Team Planning schedule.

Preparation for world soaring championships has a direct impact on the final result. Soaring teams that are well organized and ready to go on the first day of competition are in a much better position to do well and win. Section 11 of the Task Force report addresses U.S. Team preparation. A critical aspect of team preparation is access to and proper use of knowledge gained from previous efforts. One of the major accomplishments of the Task Force has been the creation, collection, and harmonizing of a wide assortment of U.S. Team-related documents. These are presented in Section 12 of the Task Force report and include critical preparation checklists, necessary U.S. Team forms, and “how-to” documents.

Finally, out of this United States Soaring Team Task Force project have come several key recommendations that require the authorization of the SSA Board of Directors to implement. The Team Task Force formally requests the SSA Board of Directors adopt the following:

Action Item No. 1 – Revise the U.S. Soaring Team Committee function and structure

As currently defined, the U.S. Soaring Team Committee is an operational body primarily focused on the effective conduct of the U.S. Team at a World Championships. A critical element of the Task Force’s vision of the future U.S. Team operation and organization is the creation of a re-purposed and newly defined U.S. Soaring Team Committee. The new committee will have a broader focus and would assume responsibility for the selection, overall management, and funding of the U.S. Team. This responsibility and authority will of course be subject to SSA Board oversight. The intent is for the relationship between the SSA Board and the U.S. Team Committee to develop into the same relationship that exists between the Board and the Rules Committee. The U.S. Soaring Team Committee would also be responsible for long term strategic planning in team affairs. The six-member committee will include the Contest Committee Chairman, the U.S. Team Chairman, the SSA president, and three members elected by the competition pilots. The procedure for selecting the three elected members would be identical to that used for the Rules Committee elections: nominations from SSA directors, SSA-conducted election by pilots on the Pilot Ranking List, and staggered elected terms with one position up for election each year. The establishment of this committee would provide some much-needed institutional continuity to U.S. Team management as individual volunteers come and go. Operational aspects of the U.S. Team will be handled by the U.S. Team Chairman and the various team captains.

Action Item No. 2. – Create the position of U.S. Team Treasurer

Another key element of the Task Force’s vision of the future U.S. Team operation and organization is the creation of the position of U.S. Team Treasurer. Doug Jacobs has agreed to fill this position during this initial formative period and was responsible for preparing the Task Force section on Financial Management which addresses the role of the Team Treasurer as follows:

Administration of U.S. Team Funds will be the responsibility of the U.S. Team Treasurer. It will be his/her responsibility to ensure that all monies are managed in accordance with the following policies. In doing so, it is critical that he/she communicates closely with the SSA office staff in Hobbs, with the U.S. Team Chairman, and with the respective Team Captains. In particular, the Team Treasurer should closely monitor each Team’s budgeted financial plan against actual experience to quickly highlight potential problems of revenue shortfall, expense overrun, cash timing mismatch, etc. Therefore it should be anticipated that the Team Treasurer would closely follow the budgeting process for each Team, and review revenue and expense reporting at least monthly.

Good financial control is critical to the fielding of successful U.S. Teams, such that the maximum number of pilots can compete in the maximum number of events without the burden of completely shouldering

the costs. It is also essential that those who support the Team know that their support will be responsibly and wisely used. We owe them an open and transparent accounting of how monies were raised and spent, as well as a full justification for each item. Good financial control and reporting, publicly available on the U.S. Team web site, will enable us to do so. Section 9 of the report outlines the Task Force's recommendations for U.S. Team financial management by the U.S. Team Treasurer in cooperation with the SSA office staff.

Action Item No. 3 – Approve U.S. Team Selection List Management

The U.S. Team Selection List has traditionally been maintained manually by the SSA staff. The nature of this process, along with the need for rapid update, makes this job increasingly difficult. John Leibacher has maintained and published an unofficial U.S. Team Selection list for many years. The internet-accessibility and up-to-date nature of Leibacher's list resulted in its widespread use, even though it was unofficial. With the universal adoption of Guy Byars's Winscore scoring program and the latest computer wizardry, John Leibacher also has the capability of semi-automatically compiling and updating the list with the scores output by Winscore. The Task Force recommends that Leibacher's list be adopted as the official list. Oversight will be the responsibility of the U.S. Team Chairman.

Proposed US Soaring Team Organizational Chart

