



United States Quad Rugby Association

USQRA Strategic Plan September 2015

Executive Summary

The United States Quad Rugby Association is a 501(c)3 nonprofit which provides oversight, development and administration to wheelchair rugby teams across the United States. The USQRA recognizes the importance of promoting the sport of wheelchair rugby not only to provide competitive athletic opportunities to eligible people with disabilities but also to empower people with disabilities to reach their full potential in all areas of life.

In 2014 the USQRA was awarded a \$65,000 grant from the Craig H. Neilsen Foundation to fund existing teams and to assist with building the organizational capacity and structure of the USQRA. This plan was developed during a two day strategic planning retreat with the Executive Committee and Commissioner working with Peter McCracken of Strategic Communications. This Strategic Plan identifies goals and action items to strengthen the organizational capacity of the USQRA, increase financial stability, expand promotion and recognition of the sport, and provide increased support to current and developing teams.

Organizational Description

The USQRA is governed by a Board of Directors who make up the Executive Committee. There are five members of the Executive Committee and a Commissioner which are elected by the membership to 2 year terms at the Annual General Meeting. The Executive Committee includes the following positions:

- The President
- The First Vice President
- The Second Vice President
- The Secretary
- The Treasurer

The USQRA Governing Board is made up of the Executive Committee, the Commissioner and a Team Representative from each member team. The Governing Board meets once per year in conjunction with the USQRA National Championship. The USQRA also relies on Regional Assistant Commissioners (RACs) who help maintain contact and communication between individual teams and members and the Executive Committee. More detailed information on the governance structure of the USQRA can be found in Article VI in the Constitution and Bylaws.

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Goals and Strategies

The USQRA set forth the following goals and strategies to better position the USQRA as a financially stable organization that is able to engage and support current teams while expanding and establishing teams in underrepresented areas. The USQRA also values promotion and awareness of the sport of wheelchair rugby to the general public, potential new athletes, volunteers and funding sources.

The USQRA Board of Director has established nine goals along with accompanying strategies and timeline for achieving each goal. The plan is ambitious and broad reaching and will require involvement from USQRA members with leadership from the Executive Committee and Commissioner.

1. Hire an Executive Director

The USQRA currently operates with a six member/all volunteer Board of Directors. With approximately 40 teams across the country and over 500 athletes, managing and growing the USQRA is not realistic with a volunteer Board of Directors. An Executive Director would provide more consistent and available oversight to the USQRA and would be able to devote more time to obtaining new funding sources/sponsors. Having an Executive Director would also lend stability and credibility to the USQRA and allow the USQRA to become its own National Governing Body (NGB). The USQRA plans to obtain initial funding for a part time Executive Director by applying for a grant from the Craig H. Neilsen Foundation with the expectation that the Executive Director would be able to fundraise as part of the assigned duties.

2. Create a new website

Feedback from athletes, teams and volunteers indicate the USQRA is in need of a new website and rebrand to engage and connect current athletes and teams while also providing a fresh and engaging platform for potential new athletes, volunteers, funders and fans. With anticipation of broader Paralympic coverage in 2016, the USQRA would like to accomplish this rebrand and launch of a new website before the Paralympic Games in Sept. 2016.

As part of the “rebrand” the USQRA Board of Directors is proposing replacing the word “Quad” with “Wheelchair” which would change the name of the association to the United States Wheelchair Rugby Association (USWRA). This change would bring the USQRA into alignment with the rest of the world, including the International Wheelchair Rugby Federation and USA Wheelchair Rugby. The majority of other adaptive sports use the word wheelchair (wheelchair basketball, wheelchair tennis, etc.) so this rebranding would also better align wheelchair rugby with other adaptive sports.

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The word “quad” in the name often causes confusion when explaining the sport and puts the focus on the people who play it rather than on how the sport is played- using a wheelchair. While initially most of the athletes playing wheelchair rugby were quadriplegics as a result of spinal cord injuries the league is becoming more diverse and using the word “quad” may cause people without the typical definition of quadriplegia to think they are not eligible to play the sport.

This rebrand would be brought before the Governing Board at the 2016 Annual General Meeting to be discussed and voted on by Team Representatives. If approved, the new website would be created and launched in conjunction with the rebranding of the USQRA ideally before September 2016.

3. Focus on member engagement and team relations

For the first time in the history of the USQRA, there were not enough Team Representatives at the 2015 Annual General Meeting to reach a quorum. The Governing Board was not able to make any decisions or cast votes because there was not enough participation or engagement by teams to send a representative, designate a proxy or send in a ballot. The USQRA cannot function without active involvement and participation from its members and a key goal is to focus on member engagement to strength and grow the association. The Board has also outlined the following strategies in order to better engagement members.

Improved website: As outlined in Goal #2, an improved website will better facilitate communication and engagement with constituents which include teams, athletes and volunteers. An improved calendar, better forum space, easier file sharing will be important features that will contribute to better member engagement.

Engage RACs and team reps: The Regional Assistant Commissioners (RACs) and Team Representatives serve as important liaisons between individual team members and the Board of Directors. In the past, the RACs and Team Reps have been underutilized and the Board would like to increase their engagement and responsibilities in order to facilitate communication, transparency and involvement with the USQRA. The Team Reps play an essential role in relaying their team’s questions, concerns and needs to the RACS and the Board. Teams should select a Team Rep who is actively engaged and willing to serve in this capacity.

Promote transparency and inclusion: The USQRA is committed to being as transparent as possible about its decision making and administration processes and keeping members up to date on relevant changes and news. Starting in May 2015 the Board has been posting minutes from monthly Board calls so members can see topics of discussion and better understand the current challenges and opportunities facing the USQRA. The Board continues to seek out ways to share information and updates with members.

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Create engagement through two-way communications: The Board recognizes the importance of communicating with members as well as receiving feedback and input from members. Engaging the RACs and Team Reps, as outlined above, will provide more clear and consistent communications and contribute to transparency and inclusion.

Require engagement as a condition of membership: New teams have very few expectations as members of the association. Without team involvement the association cannot function and so engagement and participation from all teams is critical to the existence and growth of the association. Teams are currently expected/encouraged to participate in the Governing Board but it has never been a requirement. In light of the poor turn out in 2015 the Board is considering whether membership in the USQRA should entail more engagement and participation.

AGM Participation: The Governing Board (Executive Committee, Commissioner and Team Representatives) only meets once per year, in conjunction with the USQRA National Championships. Although only 16 teams participate in Nationals, all teams are encouraged to send a Team Representative to attend the AGM to discuss and vote on proposed changes and amendments. Since teams are located across the country, the Board recognizes that it can be costly in terms of time and money for teams to attend however it is critical to have representation and participation from all teams, sections and regions. The Board is considering alternative ways for Team Reps to participate in the Governing functions of the USQRA such as video, conference calls, etc.

Engage in various modalities: With membership spread across the country the USQRA needs to be creative and innovative with regard to using electronic engagement modalities to engage and connect. A new website will have enhanced interactive features and be more mobile friendly but the USQRA needs to consider how technology can be used more effectively to promote the sport and engage with constituents.

Operate with mutual respect (vs. “airing dirty laundry”): There has been frustration and misunderstanding between the Board, teams and individual athletes for quite some time. The USQRA would like to move forward toward communication that is professional and mutually respectful.

While social media and forums are an opportunity to engage with one another they are also a platform where potential new athletes, volunteers and sponsors may first connect with the USQRA. It is important that this first impression be positive and engaging and represent a professional organization. The Board and members should be aware of how our social media platforms and the content posted there reflect on the association and the sport. While disagreements will certainly arise, by channeling communication through Team Reps and RACs the Board will be better able to respond to concerns and receive feedback and input from all teams and portray a more positive impression on social media platforms.

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4. Develop and implement a marketing communications program

The USQRA has traditionally done very little to market to fans, sponsors, volunteers, new athletes, etc. With the 2016 Paralympic Games there will be more excitement and awareness around wheelchair rugby and the USQRA needs to consider how to leverage this exposure. The Board has outlined key elements of a marketing and communications program and has developed a new Committee to focus on this work. The USQRA Marketing and Communication program consists of the following elements: identifying target audiences, developing messages, determining appropriate vehicles/tactics, and acquiring necessary resources for implementation.

5. Pursue and win grants

The USQRA has traditionally relied on sponsorships and donations as funding sources. In 2014 the USQRA applied for and was awarded a \$65,000 Quality of Life Grant from Craig H. Neilsen with the opportunity to apply for additional funds in 2015. Grants provide the opportunity to obtain much larger amounts of funding from foundations and organizations that already support the activities of the USQRA. Rather than chasing sponsors for lower amounts, the USQRA is going to concentrate fundraising efforts on applying for and obtaining grant funding. The 2nd Vice President will take the lead on grant writing until an Executive Director is in place. By focusing on grants, the USQRA will also stop competing with teams for sponsorship monies.

6. Develop other fundraising activities

As a non-profit the USQRA needs to diversify its fundraising strategies in order to grow and remain financially healthy. As a short term plan the USQRA will be focusing efforts on obtaining grant funding. In the longer term plan the Board has identified the following opportunities as potential new sources of funding:

- Pursue opportunities with military/vets activities, organizations
- Planned giving program
- Endowment program
- Individual donations program

7. Grow the league

The USQRA is focused on supporting and growing the presence of wheelchair rugby in the United States. The USQRA wants to support the development of new teams and strengthen current teams in a way that is reasonable, manageable, equitable and sustainable. The Board envisions the USQRA as an organization that provides resources and support to members interested in learning coaching tips, drills and practice ideas, hosting tournament requirements, effective media outreach and fundraising strategies and ideas. As a national organization the USQRA will facilitate growth in areas where USQRA is not yet active and support and expand activities in communities where there is already an active presence of wheelchair rugby.

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8. Become National Governing Body

The USQRA would like to move forward with becoming its own National Governing Body and gain autonomy, independence, credibility as THE organization for wheelchair rugby in the U.S. Becoming a NGB requires an organization to have an Executive Director which has been identified as a top priority within this plan.

9. Develop metrics (measures of success = funder ROI)

An essential element of a successful non-profit organization is being able to demonstrate and communicate the positive impact of the organization. While the USQRA has anecdotal evidence as to the impact and benefit of wheelchair rugby there is little to no quantifiable data to support its importance to individuals, families, and communities. Most grants and funders want to know their return on investment and this can only be done through data collection and analysis. These metrics can be captured on a strictly quantitative basis (number of teams, members, volunteers, etc.) as well qualitatively measures such as satisfaction with the sport, impact on other areas of life, etc.

In order to better communicate the impact of the sport that goes beyond athletic opportunities the USQRA plans to compile individual, anecdotal success stories from athletes. These stories can be used to demonstrate to potential funders that supporting the USQRA leads to positive life changes for the athletes and volunteers.

Summary

The USQRA Board of Directors is working toward immediately implementation of this plan to achieve the goals outlined above. While some items require approval from the Governing Board or are dependent upon receiving funding, there are many steps that can be taken to prepare so when approval or funding comes through the USQRA is ready to take action. The Board believes this plan will better position the USQRA as an effective and financially stable non-profit organization that is able to facilitate growth and expansion of the sport of wheelchair rugby within the United States.

This Strategic Plan will not succeed without sustained effort and involvement from members and volunteers. The USQRA is actively seeking people who would like to get involved to bring these goals closer to reality. Together we can create an organization that will be able to grow and support wheelchair rugby athletes and teams across the United States.