

USRowing Youth Series Age Categories & Definitions – Comment Period

For Membership Review – Comment Period Opening December 1, 2025

Over the past two years, USRowing has worked closely with Youth Program Coaches, Youth Councils, and community stakeholders to evaluate the most effective and equitable way to define age categories within the Youth Series. Throughout this process, our goal has remained clear: to create eligibility standards that are fair, consistent, and fully inclusive for every athlete nationwide.

To ensure transparency and the opportunity for broad community input, USRowing is releasing this proposal into the formal comment period (December 1 –31, 2025) before finalizing a transition planned for 2027.

2026: No Changes to Eligibility Definitions

To maintain stability and allow programs adequate time to prepare, the 2026 Youth Regionals and National Championship series will use the same eligibility definitions as the 2025 season.

2026 Categories

- **U15 (only at regional regattas):** A Competitor may compete in the U15 category until December 31 of the year of their 14th birthday.
- **U16:** A Competitor may compete in the U16 category until December 31 of the year of his or her 15th birthday.
- **U17:** A Competitor may compete in the U17 category until December 31 of the year of their 16th birthday.
- **Youth:** A Youth is a Competitor who in the current calendar year does not attain the age of 19, or who in the current calendar year does not attain the age of 20 and has been continuously enrolled in secondary school as a full-time student seeking a diploma. A Competitor thus ceases to be a Youth after December 31 of the year of their 18th birthday (U19), or upon completion of the 12th grade of secondary school, having been a full-time student within the year of their 19th birthday (U20). Athletes older than U20 are never eligible to compete as Youth.

2027: Transition to a Full Age-Based (U) System in 2027

The primary reason for the proposed shift is fairness and integrity of competition. The current hybrid definition of “Youth”—which relies on both age and “continuous enrollment” in secondary school—has become increasingly difficult to verify fairly and consistently across all programs. School documentation varies widely between public, private, charter, homeschool, online, hybrid, and alternative education systems, making national verification impractical and inconsistent. This variation has created a potentially compromised system in which compliance depends heavily on local interpretation rather than uniform standards. Transitioning to a fully age-based model resolves these challenges by establishing a single, clear, universally verifiable criterion: an athlete’s date of birth.

Beginning in 2027, USRowing proposes adopting standardized age-only “U” categories, consistent with global rowing norms and common youth sports structures.

2027 Categories

- **U15 (only at regional regattas):** A Competitor may compete in the U15 category until December 31 of the year of their 14th birthday. (Same as 2025)
- **U16:** A Competitor may compete in the U16 category until December 31 of the year of his or her 15th birthday. (Same as 2025)
- **U17:** A Competitor may compete in the U17 category until December 31 of the year of their 16th birthday. (Same as 2025)
- **U20:** A Competitor may compete in the U20 category until December 31 of the year of their 19th birthday and cannot be listed on a collegiate rowing program roster.

Next Steps: Comment Period & Communication Plan

- **December 1 – 31, 2025:** Members to submit all comments into the Entry Packet Comment Period, [here](#).
- **January 2026 :** Review member feedback; outline the 2027 age-based structure; USRowing to host webinar with next steps
- **Spring 2026:** Final 2027 eligibility definitions published, along with implementation resources for programs

For additional questions, please email Competition@usrowing.org