



## **2026 USRowing Election - Commitment Form Questionnaire Answers**

### **Atlantic Region**

**Stephen Ciraolo**

#### **1. Briefly state why you are interested in serving on the Board of USRowing.**

I am seeking a second, four-year term as your Atlantic region representative on the Board of Directors. I believe deeply in the capacity of USRowing to steward American rowing and sculling. I have found my current Board service to be compelling, purposeful, and fulfilling. I am driven to help guide our sport to an ever better future, and in general to promote things larger than myself.

Four years ago, USRowing was in a bad place in respect to:

- results in World Championships and in the 2016 and 2021 Olympics and Paralympics;
- organizational finances and operational health; and
- strained relationships with the various communities of American rowing and sculling.

In the months before I ran in 2021, the Board had made important steps to right the ship. It had hired a new management team (including current CEO Amanda Kraus) and had established better governance practices and more careful budget scrutiny. As an active coach with a lot of experience and connections, I felt then that I could help the organization and thus could have an impact across the sport, from the juniors whom I coach to the Olympians and Paralympians preparing for Paris.

During the last four years, USRowing operations and results have improved markedly in many areas:

- More robust accounting, budgeting, and hiring practices have been established;
- Safety practices that directly affect the physical and emotional health of rowers, scullers, and coaches have been prioritized;
- The quality of insurance coverage for those clubs, school programs, and regattas that use USRowing insurance has been analyzed and improved; and the increase in premiums has been managed in an extremely challenging environment;
- USRowing's regattas have expanded in scope, in quality, and in stability given the uncertainties around staging large events on limited and publicly-owned bodies of water;

- Chief High Performance Officer Josy Verdonkschot has brought a new standard of organization and excitement to High Performance, and has delivered encouraging results in Paris, in 2025 World Championships, and elsewhere;
- USRowing has begun to invest in ways it has not done before: in systems such as RegattaCentral, in a home (finally!) for the National Team through innovative partnership with PNRA, and in evolving and robust plans for the promotion and expansion of the sport around the Los Angeles Olympics and Paralympics in 2028; and
- Central to the foregoing, the USRowing Foundation has grown beyond all initial hopes and has fueled through wisdom and through philanthropy so much of USRowing's work and investment.

As a member of the board, I have contributed through oversight and advice to some, perhaps most, of these developments. I want to continue to represent the voice of the Atlantic region and to steward the organization over the next four years.

There is much still to do! There are areas that USRowing must tackle in coming years in order to be true to its members and to its obligations to American rowing and sculling. I have put some of these in my response to Question 4 of this form.

**2. Please elaborate on your leadership experience with organizational management. Have you served on a Board of Directors or had oversight responsibilities for another organization?**

In addition to my experience of oversight and my practice of robust communication as part of the USRowing Board, from my career I have depth of understanding of how to effect outcomes and change in an interlocking professional environment. I am a teacher, dean, and coach, and director of rowing at my school:

- My managerial and oversight experience includes twenty-six years of coaching, running, developing, and budgeting high school rowing and sculling programs and thus coaching staffs;
- My chief skill is getting things done through relentless planning, organizing, and hard work—and plenty of outreach (and sometimes cajoling!); and
- I am adept at navigating situations with lots of moving parts, operational challenges, and competing interests. I listen and reflect and act.

**3. What skills would you bring to the Board of Directors, and how do you feel they would make an impact on the organization? If you have specific experience with talent management, HR, senior-level marketing and sponsorships, and/or financial management responsibility for business unit operations, please so indicate. If you have specific experience as a high-level volunteer with an organizational success, please so indicate.**

I bring to the Board:

- solid communication and networking skills; a detail-oriented approach; and a willingness to listen thoroughly to a diversity of viewpoints;
- long experience in the passionate trenches of scholastic (high school) coaching and head coaching of rowing, sculling, and racing; and
- the ability to align and coordinate with diverse stakeholders.

At present, I am the only member of the Board who is an active coach, and the only member with significant experience coaching juniors. (At present, two other directors have significant prior experience coaching at the college level.) I bring that particular voice to our proceedings.

**4. USRowing answers to many different constituencies, so prioritization will be important. What is your understanding of the purpose/mission of the USRowing Board of Directors, and how would you support keeping the board focused on its key initiatives and mission driven?**

The USRowing mission is *to champion participation and the passionate pursuit of excellence in rowing*; the primary responsibilities of the Board are

- **to invest that with meaning through the setting of strategic goals; and**
- **to provide support to the CEO and her team as they operationalize the mission. Individually and collectively the Board needs always to keep its focus on strategic goals and key initiatives and on its internal mission.**

In a nutshell, success in all areas within the sport requires of USRowing and thus of the Board enthusiastic outreach, strategic planning, and proper funding through capital and endowment campaigns.

If re-elected to serve I will be involved in all aspects of the mission of USRowing and of the Board, but in particular I will focus on:

- hard work in my committee assignments;
- adherence to good governance practices, to strategic thinking, and to budget responsibility; and
- a continuation of my intermediary role between USRowing on the one hand and both individual and organizational members on the other.

So much work remains, and a part of my motivation in seeking a second term is to tackle problems I see now or which will arise. For example:

- USRowing has a history of poor two-way communication channels with individual and organizational members, which led to stress between the organization and membership in 2024-25. The organization has taken good steps both to improving the substantive issues but also to establish channels of outreach to the scholastic, collegiate, regatta directors, and masters communities. These channels must be successfully maintained and developed;

- We will need to continue to provide in all ways competitive pathways for national team athletes and to deliver success on the water in Los Angeles 2028 and Brisbane 2032; and
- The "off-water" path to our home Olympics and Paralympics in Los Angeles will accelerate after the 2026 Milano-Cortina Winter Games, and the strategy around this has the potential to expand our sport.

**5. Service on the Board requires a serious commitment of time and talent. In addition to quarterly meetings (generally held between Friday and Sunday), special meetings are called as circumstances require. Two consecutive unexcused absences from in-person board meetings results in automatic removal of a board member under the Bylaws. Much of the Board's work is done through committee assignments that require substantial preparation. Each director is expected to serve on at least two committees in addition to Board service. Moreover, athlete representatives on the Board also serve on the USRowing Athlete Council, which is a significant time commitment. All directors must fund their travel to meetings, with travel funding provided to athlete representatives. In light of the foregoing, describe your availability and ability to commit the necessary time and resources required for service on the Board.**

I have prioritized USRowing Board work over the last four years and will continue to do that. I have attended every board meeting and have been physically present at every in-person board meeting. I have tried through email, chats at regattas, coffees, and ridealongs to stay abreast of local issues and feeling. At three board meetings, in Philadelphia and Washington, DC, I was very involved in planning and community engagements.

I have learned a great deal about the different communities and needs throughout our sport, that is, about the particular situations of programs all around the region, about the elite pipeline and National Team, and about the traditions and needs of "new" disciplines like indoor rowing (as a standalone), para-rowing, and beach sprints/coastal. And yet, for all these differences, I believe common values, interests, and needs bind all rowers together.

My committees are now:

- Governance/Ethics/Nominating ("GEN"); and
- Facilities/Capital Projects working group, formed to steer USRowing's role in the expansion of Caspersen Rowing Center.

For the last year I have been the board liaison to the Inclusion and Community Impact Committee, and through that a part of the United We Row grants program.

For my first two years I served on the Board Awards Committee which has since been folded into GEN.

Much of my overall work has been in those areas, with a lot of additional work and conversation around coaching standards and how to improve the rowing and sculling community's relationship with USRowing.

**Joe Kieffer**

**1. Briefly state why you are interested in serving on the Board of USRowing.**

I am passionate about advancing the sport of rowing - ensuring its growth, international competitiveness and accessibility across all levels. Serving on the USRowing Board offers an opportunity to contribute strategic leadership / thinking that drives programs which support athletes, clubs, and local rowing programs.

As a Board member, I would be interested in representing the many voices in our rowing community. This would be through listening closely, especially to those in the Atlantic region, and relaying on my personal experiences in rowing over the past 45 years, including as a competitor (masters, collegiate and scholastic), rowing club leadership (Fairmount & Schuylkill Navy), referee (20+ years), regatta management (Stotesbury Cup and Independence Day), coaching and being the parent of three junior / colligate rowers.

I am excited about the opportunity to contribute and improve the rowing experiences for all member organizations and athletes.

**2. Please elaborate on your leadership experience with organizational management. Have you served on a Board of Directors or had oversight responsibilities for another organization?**

I have extensive leadership experience in both a corporate environment and within the rowing community. Professionally, I have managed global, diverse teams of up to 1,500 people, overseeing complex operations and driving strategic initiatives across multiple regions. This has required putting in place strong governance, key leaders, financial oversight, and the ability to align stakeholders toward common goals.

In addition, I have served in key leadership roles on several rowing-related nonprofit boards, where I provided fiscal stewardship, strategic planning, and organizational development. These roles include:

- Officer / Treasurer – Schuylkill Navy of Philadelphia
- Vice President / Treasurer – Fairmount Rowing Association
- Board President / Treasurer – Syracuse Alumni Rowing Association
- Founder / Board President – Syracuse Men's Crew Endowment
- Board President / Treasurer – Quaker City Rowing Foundation

- Founder / President – Friends of St. Joseph Prep Rowing

These experiences have strengthened my ability to lead volunteer organizations, manage budgets and capital campaigns, and building sustainable programs. I understand the importance of governance, transparency, and collaboration in advancing mission-driven objectives.

**3. What skills would you bring to the Board of Directors, and how do you feel they would make an impact on the organization? If you have specific experience with talent management, HR, senior-level marketing and sponsorships, and/or financial management responsibility for business unit operations, please so indicate. If you have specific experience as a high-level volunteer with an organizational success, please so indicate.**

My deep expertise in talent / organizational design, financial management, program management and strategic transformation that would add significant value to USRowing and the USRowing Board. With over 25+ years as a management consulting experience, I have led global operations with P&L responsibilities for large business units, process optimization, technology deployment, and designing organizational governance. I have a strong financial acumen as I spent 15 years in GE finance and accounting operations, including leadership positions as Controller for a few business units.

Additionally, I have 20+ years of volunteer leadership experience, serving as President, Treasurer, and Founder for multiple rowing-related nonprofits, where I successfully crafted organization missions, managed budgets, fundraising, running capital campaigns, establishing endowments and strategic growth initiatives. These skills—combined with my ability to build consensus, foster innovation, motivate volunteers and maintain mission alignment—will help USRowing strengthen governance, enhance financial sustainability, and expand its reach to athletes and communities nationwide.

**4. USRowing answers to many different constituencies, so prioritization will be important. What is your understanding of the purpose/mission of the USRowing Board of Directors, and how would you support keeping the board focused on its key initiatives and mission driven?**

My understanding of the purpose and mission of the USRowing Board of Directors is that it serves as the strategic governing body responsible for setting the vision, policies, allocation of funds / resources and priorities that advance rowing in the United States. The Board ensures that USRowing remains mission-driven by promoting the growth of the sport, supporting athletes at all levels, and fostering inclusivity, safety, and excellence on the international stage. Its role is not to manage day-to-day operations but to provide oversight, guidance, resources and accountability to ensure alignment with long-term goals.

To keep the Board needs to align and work closely with USRowing leadership to focus on its key initiatives and mission, including:

1. **Support National Team(s):** Ensure the development at all levels of the US National Team and respective pipelines. Ensure they have the required resources – coaching, equipment, facilities, training, athlete care to compete and succeed on the world stage.
2. **Safety and Control:** Promote a safe environment both on and off the water. Ensure that training, awareness and controls are in place through the rowing community.
3. **Membership Obsession and Access** – at the individual, program / club and school level, have a dynamic understand of the requirements for success and how USRowing can support. Be agile and nimble to adapt to ever changing needs. Promote access by all communities to the sport of rowing.
4. **Promote Transparency:** Ensure transparency to membership, athletes, coaches on critical decisions, organization direction and policies that are in place.
5. **Communication and Membership Engagement:** Recognize the diverse constituencies USRowing serves but help the Board maintain clarity on what drives the greatest long-term benefit for the sport nationally. Seek input and promote a constructive dialogue amongst membership to shape and develop policies and procedures.
6. **Fiscal Responsibility and Resources** – Identify and secure funding to support the organization and all levels of programing for success. Ensure fiscal responsibility.

Ultimately, my approach would be to keep conversations strategic, data-informed, and mission-centric, so the Board remains focused on advancing rowing rather than being pulled into tactical distractions.

**5. Service on the Board requires a serious commitment of time and talent. In addition to quarterly meetings (generally held between Friday and Sunday), special meetings are called as circumstances require. Two consecutive unexcused absences from in-person board meetings results in automatic removal of a board member under the Bylaws. Much of the Board's work is done through committee assignments that require substantial preparation. Each director is expected to serve on at least two committees in addition to Board service. Moreover, athlete representatives on the Board also serve on the USRowing Athlete Council, which is a significant time commitment. All directors must fund their travel to meetings, with travel funding provided to athlete representatives. In light of the foregoing, describe your availability and ability to commit the necessary time and resources required for service on the Board.**

Serving on the USRowing Board would be a privilege and a top priority for me. I fully understand the time and effort required, including quarterly meetings,

committee work, and preparation. I am prepared to make that commitment, if elected. I have the flexibility in both my professional and personal life to attend all scheduled meetings and actively participate in committee assignments. Additionally, I have the financial resources to fund my own travel without issue. I view this role as an opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the sport and will dedicate the necessary time, energy, and expertise to fulfill the responsibilities of Board service.

## **Northeast Regional Referee Coordinator**

**James Dwyer**

### **1. How will you work to add relevance to USRowing through your work as a Coordinator or At-Large member of the Committee?**

How I would bring relevance to this position would be as follows. I would improve communication between the referee corps in the Northeast and the LOC running the event they are working on. Opening this communication channel will expose referees to the development of a regatta, show them how regattas are organized, and allow for their input. It will also hasten their development to become the Chief of an event. I have been fortunate to follow an excellent Coordinator in the Northeast and hope to gain insight into how to remain relevant as he has been.

### **2. *To champion participation and the passionate pursuit of excellence in rowing is the vision statement of USRowing. What particular qualifications and experience do you bring to advancing the missions of USRowing through the committee you seek to be elected to?***

As a business owner, I understand how to develop people and markets. I have spent many years as a teacher, professor, and lecturer; I will bring these skills into play as I help develop the current referees in the Northeast region. We have many fine referees, and I will do my best to develop them into fully licensed referees and clinicians. I would also like to use the existing clinicians in mentoring roles at regattas when possible.

I would also like to develop a program to track referees in the region so I can push them into milestones in their referee careers.

### **3. What added value do you bring that separates you from other candidates in shaping the future of our sport?**

I worked for one of the best companies in the Fortune 500 and started my own business 30 years ago after leaving them. So, I have benefited from seeing how large organizations can be managed, and now I see how small ones can be



managed. I find that running a small company allows me to manage regattas and referees at the regattas as well. Small businesses rely on building relationships and investing time in growing their employees. I will strive to ensure that at any time during the regatta day, every referee can perform every job at any site efficiently and professionally. I would suggest this plan to all the chief referees running regattas in the Northeast. I plan to create a program to hand to these Chief referees to develop the referees working at the event. It would need to be trackable and verifiable so that after that regatta, I could call or email all the parties to see how their training went during the event. This might not be possible, but if we develop a mindset of mentoring at all regattas, the effect will benefit everyone involved.

USRowing needs many more referees, as the current population is aging. So, part of my focus will be to bring new referees into USRowing. I think my sales skills will help in this endeavor.

**4. USRowing is comprised of many different constituencies that participate in the sport. Promoting a welcoming atmosphere while maintaining the integrity of the competition is important as the sport seeks to become more inclusive. Based on US Rowing's vision statement, as a member or coordinator of this committee, how would you support these efforts within the referee community?**

As mentioned in the previous answer to the aging of the current referees, we need to focus on developing new members. My plan will involve visiting many rowing clubs and inviting them to nominate candidates to become assistant referees. I will work as an ambassador for US Rowing in all these organizations, promoting USRowing and referee programs. This exposure to any rowing organization will help bring a warm face to the organization while explaining the tremendous need for new and diverse referees.

I will ask for help from my well-established referees to help get me the correct people at these organizations so that I might present the referee program and help them understand the process of becoming a licensed referee. This will benefit the rowing organization by having a local referee in their area or club. This also helps USRowing understand the needs of these smaller organizations in this growing sport.

**5. What is the hardest decision you have made as a referee, and how did you reach that decision?**

I was the chief of the New York State scholastic. I decided to go out on the water to help the following referees and mentor them. I followed a race of senior boys' eights vying for the New York State championship and for an immediate slot in Youth Nationals. At the finish, the second-place and third-place teams were involved in a dispute. In the last 200 meters, both teams were sprinting full speed.

The second-place team was a ½ a boat ahead. At the 50 meters, the 2<sup>nd</sup> place team crossed into the 3<sup>rd</sup> place, cutting across the lane and finishing in the 3<sup>rd</sup> place team's water. There was no possible collision; the second-place team did not slow down or the third-place team. The third-place team saw this as an opportunity to advance themselves, even though the last-minute cross did not slow them in their lane. I was forced to advance the third-place team to second place because their water was impeded. It was tough because I knew the third-place team did not deserve to advance. Rules are rules, and the mistake of the original second-place team cost them a position on the podium

## **Northwest Regional Referee Coordinator**

**Kathleen Crowe**

### **1. How will you work to add relevance to USRowing through your work as a Coordinator or At-Large member of the Committee?**

The Referees as a whole play a vital role in the overall structure and operation of USRowing by virtue of our functions at regattas, clinics, etc. However, as the *only* face of USRowing in the NW for most of the year, we have a larger role to play in the operation of our region. This is more than a one-person job.

In the past few months I've put plans in place, working with other senior referees in the region, to develop the organization we need to operate more efficiently - scheduling regattas, chiefs, and referees, planning educational clinics and seminars, etc. This will expand to include other referees throughout the region, providing support for us all, increasing our contributions to USRowing, and giving newer referees chances to move into more leadership roles.

### **2. *To steward, strengthen, and grow American rowing by championing performance and igniting new passion for the sport* is the vision statement of USRowing. What particular qualifications and experience do you bring to advancing the missions of USRowing through the committee to which you seek election?**

I've held my US license for 25 years and my World Rowing license for 18. In that time, I've worked at regattas through the USA and the rest of the world and have seen the practices that work and the levels of officiating our athletes deserve.

As a clinician I've played a role in guiding others, and as a member of the Referee Committee I've consistently advocated for more consistent and informative evaluations to provide guidance to all referees. Those are all areas that I intend to strengthen with help from the rest of the region. In particular, we'll start to see

Clinicians attend regattas specifically in their Clinician capacity, in order to provide more timely and detailed feedback.

I'm also part of a nascent effort to grow Beach Sprints in the PNW. We held our first Beach Sprints event in Seattle in May, and we're joining forces with RowBC and eventually the SW and Mexico, to build a circuit of trainings and racing opportunities on the West Coast.

This will also provide opportunities for referees in our area to learn this new aspect of our sport and gain the experience they need to work at higher levels.

**3. What added value do you bring that separates you from other candidates in shaping the future of our sport?**

I was originally licensed in the Mid-Atlantic and received my full license there; I spent 10 years in the Southwest and have been in the Northwest since 2013. I've worked regattas in all regions of the USA (as well as internationally) and have a broad understanding of the different challenges faced across the regions.

While the position of Regional Coordinator is focused on the region itself, we cannot make decisions that are completely perfect for all six regions and hope to evolve into a stronger and more consistent Referee Corps. My experiences throughout the country help me understand the give and take that we all must undergo to make us all stronger.

**4. USRowing is comprised of many different constituencies that participate in the sport. Promoting a welcoming atmosphere, while maintaining the integrity of competition, is important as the sport seeks to become more inclusive. Based on USRowing's vision statement, as a member or coordinator of this committee, how would you support these efforts within the referee community?**

Referees play a unique role in USRowing's quest for diversity and inclusivity. On the one hand, we need to build a more inclusive referee corps and ensure that USRowing's vision extends to the referee community; on the other hand, we have to embody that vision as we interact with the whole rowing community.

Building a more inclusive Referee Corps has to begin with understanding that we aren't *only* referees. All apart from our status as unpaid professionals and the time and resources we give as referees, many of us are involved with the sport as athletes, coaches, club administrators, and of course family and friends of rowers. What's more, most of us are also fully employed in other areas. To enable a broader section of the rowing community to be involved as referees we have to work harder to balance those competing priorities in a way that encourages diversity in our corps. Such things as regatta scheduling, trainings and outreach have to allow more flexibility while at the same time maintaining and increasing our standards.

Beyond our own group of referees, we also must continue to grow and evolve our understanding of various aspects of diversity and inclusion. As a board member of Seize the Oar and one of the founders of the adaptive rowing program in San Diego, I have worked to open doors to athletes of differing abilities. In the process I have learned an immense amount about how para- and adaptive athletes can be a part of the larger rowing community. As member of an under-represented minority, I know first-hand the challenges of bringing rowing to new communities. As an open and now masters rower I have seen how clubs can be more or less inclusive, and I've learned how tricky the balance between competition and camaraderie can become. As a referee and a member of the Referee Committee I've used those learnings to help guide more understanding and openness across referees, rowers, and coaches.

The biggest lesson I've learned, though, is how important it is to listen to the diverse voices in and near our rowing community. We all have pre-conceived notions of what "works" or "is best", but in order to truly improve in these areas we have to listen and understand the experiences of others.

### **5. What is the hardest decision you have had to make as a referee, and how did you reach that decision?**

Most referees with some amount of experience have had to apply the rules in ways that result in negative outcomes for some athletes. Whether it's excluding a crew that's late to the start, determining remedies for interference, managing boat weighing and its implications, there is nearly always somebody who will be affected in a negative way by an action we take. While these can be difficult circumstances to navigate, they are rarely difficult decisions to make; we carefully write our rules to minimize the amount of subjectivity in their application.

The truly difficult decisions that I've had to make have all been associated with leadership, and in many cases are not issues to be discussed outside a narrowly defined group of people. Examples of these types of decisions include: conduct and behavior issues, concerns around diminishing skills of individual referees, scheduling conflicts and inadequate staffing, etc.

One example that is publicly known: This autumn in the PNW has provided us with multiple weather challenges. We've cut short or cancelled more regattas than we've completed, and it has been frustrating and disappointing for all concerned.

I was the Chief Referee for a regatta in mid-October; we had already had a difficult weather incident the preceding weekend, races had been stopped and cancelled, and everyone was anxious to race. Going into the weekend we knew the weather was chancy, and we had already shortened the course and made our "drop list" (which boat classes get cancelled), but all the forecasts had suggested that big boats would be able to race.

When we launched for the second flight and I got on the water, it only took about 1 minute to realize that conditions had worsened. It was my call to send all the boats back to the docks, and ultimately my call to completely cancel racing.

The decision was made more difficult by the fact that *some* of the course (the finish) was

rowable. Could we re-adjust the course (again)? Could we wait out the wind? There were plenty of ideas, but in the absence of a crystal ball there were no clear answers. In the end I decided that we couldn't count on safe conditions until so late in the day that it would be reaching darkness. Very little racing was accomplished, everyone was disappointed, but everyone was safe.