



**Referee Committee Meeting (1/14/2026)**

**DRAFT MINUTES - TO BE REVIEWED BY COMMITTEE MEMBERS FOR EDITS**

**Committee Members Present:** Letcher Ross, Eric Chiang, Liz Jenista, Jess McAlear, Bruce Doak, Jim Dwyer, Michael Murphy, Blake Ebright-Jones, Kathleen Crowe, Bryan Fraser

**Committee Members Absent:** Elaine Roden

**Assistant Regional Coordinators Present:** Gudi Bigga

**USRowing Present:** Sarah McAuliffe, Chris Bak

**Guests:**

[0:00:02] Letcher: There we go. Well, welcome everybody to 2026.

[0:00:11] Letcher: Without further ado, I'm just gonna go ahead and turn it over to Sarah.

[0:00:18] Sarah: Amazing. Thanks, Letcher.

[0:00:21] Sarah: All right, sorry, guys, bear with me for a second.

[0:00:28] Sarah: Awesome. I have everything pulled up. Okay, cool. Well, happy 2026! I hope everybody had a good and restful break. I've talked to a couple of you recently, so I feel like we are up to speed on the referee world. Thanks for all your work in 2025 and in prepping us for 2026. I'm excited for what's to come. I attended Murph's clinic and saw many of you at the clinicians clinic, which were run by Mary Bush, Andy, and Liz. Thank you for your efforts there.

Regarding the new agenda format for 2026, I sent out a calendar invite and follow-up email.



From now on, meeting invites will be via calendar far in advance; agendas will be sent one week before each meeting with Letcher's input. Please continue to send items for the agenda. If we can't fit something in, we may hold it for the next meeting.

For committee meetings, expect calendar invites through December 2026. Agendas go out one week before. Chris will develop meeting minutes using recordings and AI notes, posting them within two weeks on Ref Corps/USRowing.

Let's pause for questions on these housekeeping items.

(no questions)

### **USRowing Updates:**

Jumping into the First Data Call Update, Chris did a great job sending reminders to the corps, and many are up to date. Regional coordinators should confirm updates—level changes, retirements, LOAs—by end of the week.

[Summary: Chris sent a follow-up email to regional coordinators to review data before the deadline. A process is underway to close this by the weekend.]

[0:04:53] Eric: Process wise, there'll likely be many who didn't meet requirements for 2025. In the past, we were lenient, but we'll need a formal process—if someone gets an exception, it should go through the committee for transparency and consistency.

[0:06:07] Mariah: The data call info provided to coordinators contains two different 2026 recommendations—one just regatta days and clinics, one also includes “positions worked.”

[0:07:17] Sarah: So, is it fair to say regional coordinators follow up with Chris for any inaccurate info by end of weekend, and in our next conversation, we discuss any cases that need committee input?



[0:07:38] Letcher: Yes, and sharing those ahead of time would be good.

[Brief discussion ensures all coordinators know where to find their data files and how to access or request help.]

[0:09:00] Sarah: Next topic: Travel policy.

Sarah: provides a summary of travel improvements:

- Single occupancy will be available for all US Rowing-owned regattas and National Championships.
- An increased number of referees for Youth Nationals (4 additional referees) and Row Fest (~10 additional referees) events for better shift opportunities.
- For travel, continuing with Sanditz travel, but proposing one event uses Ramp Travel (similar to Google Flights) on a trial basis. Ramp Travel is more self-service; concerns are raised about lack of customer support. Will test for one regatta such as Youth Nationals or Beach Sprint Nationals.
- Volunteers are asked to try the Ramp pilot; committee's opinion is requested to pick regatta and testing new system.

Kathleen: Does the new travel system mean we would not have a travel agent to go to in case of support?

[0:15:05] Sarah: Responding to Kathleen's question: Yes, Ramp Travel is “book it yourself”—you’ll work with the airline directly.

[0:15:23] Bryan Fraser: How fast can we get the updated documents? We have a clinic this weekend.

[0:15:37] Sarah: Documents will be sent out within 12 hours after the meeting.

Further follow-up questions:

Eric: Are checked bags included in the travel policy this year?

Sarah: Checked bags are not covered in new policy and referees are advised to use per diem.



Eric: Have regatta days been adjusted to calendar days?

Mariah: Yes regatta days have been adjusted to calendar days.

- The group discusses which event should be used for the Ramp pilot (suggestions: Youth Nationals, Beach Sprints).
- Timeline and communication for documents and policies are addressed.

[Topic shift—Ref Corps platform upgrades and tech support needs:]

Sarah: introduces Meg Gaba, who will lead development for platform upgrades to RefCorps, gathering feedback.

[0:24:15] Kathleen: Advocates for each region to have a designated “tech specialist” for first-line support, rather than relying on Mariah, Chris, and Meg for basic support; also urges training for regions to run their own clinics so there are not last minute requests for clinics.

[0:26:50] Sarah: The Regional Coordinator Manual in development will help clarify these roles and expectations of regional coordinator responsibilities.

Eric: Do you think this technical specialist role will be difficult to fill or do other coordinators already have individuals in mind?

[Discussion summary:]

- Some regions already have assistants handling clinics and tech support.
- The upcoming manual should standardize processes for retirements, reporting, etc.
- Mariah and others highlight ongoing FAQ resources; more tech-savvy delegates are encouraged.

Sarah: Presents USRowing working documents that will be sent out and asks for feedback on “job descriptions” to be used as a leveling guide



Second document will be a regional coordinator document to standardize the experience amongst regions

2025 referee feedback form will be released soon for review.

[Transition to World Rowing IOP reforms:]

[0:36:14+] Jim, Kathleen, and others present a high-level review of the IOP history, current opacity in processes, and their reform proposals:

- 2015-2017 changes established a liaison position and multi-tier candidacy, but these remain opaque.
- Major recommendations include:
  - Reestablishing committee oversight and transparency in candidate selection and career management.
  - Implementing clear progression, career tracking, and role definitions.
  - Ensuring all decisions and plans are documented and accessible.

Kathleen provides a detailed walk-through of historical issues and solutions, emphasizing the need for visible governance so umpires can plan their careers.

### **Key Findings and Issues:**

Policy and procedural changes impacted umpires licensed before vs. after those changes.

The review identified three main problem areas:

**Language:** Policies are vague, use outdated/imprecise terms, and do not clearly define roles or standards—leaving room for ambiguous interpretations and weakening governance.

**Governance:** There is no mandated committee oversight of key roles (like the World Rowing liaison); processes sometimes happen last-minute without broad review, and lines of authority are unclear.

**Transparency:** Poor documentation, missing records, and opaque career tracking make it difficult to manage or plan umpire careers effectively.



### **Ground Realities:**

There is no secret list preventing any U.S. umpire from being selected for World Rowing juries; World Rowing strives for fairness and diverse representation (region, gender, age).

Aging demographics require proactive planning to bring new (not just young) umpires into the advancement pipeline.

### **Proposed Reforms:**

**Candidate Advancement:** Streamline and increase transparency, replacing the current three-tier advancement with two (prospect and candidate). The referee committee itself should directly review and approve candidates, with input from experienced umpires.

**Career Management:** Formalize a career planning process (including updating quadrennial plans), allow early and fair planning of international assignments, and introduce supporting subcommittees as needed.

**Roles, Responsibilities, and Documentation:** Clarify the World Rowing liaison's role, ensure committee oversight, and introduce better documentation/tracking systems so all career and process information is accessible.

**Overarching Goal:** Make advancement and assignment decisions transparent, fair, and committee-driven, enabling better planning and eliminating ambiguity.

[0:55:18+] Kathleen: Candidate Advancement and Nomination:

After fulfilling all preparation requirements, candidates are reviewed and nominated by the referee committee (possibly aided by a subcommittee).

Recommendation to make World Championships attendance optional (rather than mandatory), as it has been a financial/logistical barrier—especially for younger or less-resourced candidates.

**Referee Committee Authority:**

The referee committee (not a separate, opaque body) holds final authority for applications and career progression decisions.

**Career Management Reform:**



The current system of career plans is ineffective and creates bottlenecks at major regattas (e.g., World Cup, World Championships).

The recommendation is to split umpires into two cohorts:

**Career Progression Phase:** Begins ~12–16 years before retirement (i.e., before a planned culminating event like Olympics or Senior Worlds), where umpires move through a set series of events in preparation.

**Early Career Phase:** For umpires with more than 16 years to retirement (or <8 years seniority); focus is on non-progression events (e.g., coastals, Pan Am, youth events), building skills and experience.

Career plans should map an umpire's path to their concluding event (like Senior Worlds/Olympics), ensuring everyone has a fair shot at major assignments if they follow the progression.

**Assignment and Oversight Structure:**

A new subcommittee system is proposed:

The Work Plan Review Subcommittee (with staggered rotating terms) coordinates and aligns career plans.

Assignment Subcommittee (selected yearly from the above).

Both are chaired by someone on the referee committee (who is not a World Rowing umpire).

The process is transparent: criteria and assignment matrix are visible to all, and plans are updated and reviewed each cycle.

Priority for major events is based on career phase; exception cases get considered individually.

**Process Predictability:**

Sets a clear quadrennial (four-year) cycle for nominations, career plans, and assignment review.



Regular early review lets the committee foresee who should be scheduled for which events, minimizing last-minute adjustments.

#### Goal:

Empower the referee committee to manage umpire advancement and assignments with transparency, fairness, and predictability—ensuring all processes are well-documented and open to review.

#### Formal, Transparent Communication:

All candidate communications (about advancement, assignments, etc.) must be formal and written, so candidates understand exactly what is happening and why.

#### World Rowing Liaison Term & Role:

The liaison position will become a non-renewable 4-year term (aligned with the Olympic cycle).

The liaison's role is specifically to facilitate communication, distribute information, and provide logistical support—NOT to make independent selection or advancement decisions.

#### Assignment Selection Process:

Assignments must be evaluated by the referee committee using standard, well-defined criteria.

The referee committee—not any individual or secret subpanel—holds the authority and responsibility for assignment decisions.

#### Committee Authority Clarified:

The committee's authority and responsibilities are being reaffirmed (per the IOP policy document), correcting past practice where the liaison may have exercised more autonomous control.

#### Transparency in Governance:

There is a need to move away from secret decision-making panels for assignments.



Secrecy is only “needed” if the process is vague and open to pressure/influence; transparent, criteria-driven processes eliminate this problem.

Shared Ownership and Involvement:

All umpires should be engaged in the process: they should have visibility, provide input, and see career plans/progressions openly.

Summary/Intent:

The reforms aim to restore true authority and transparency to the referee committee, ensure all umpires are informed, and eliminate secrecy or ambiguity in assignment/career decisions.

Documentation Will Follow:

All these principles will soon be formalized in new policy documents that will be circulated for review.

Kathleen: asking for feedback and edits to IOP

— Committee is encouraged to review documents when released and provide feedback.

[Later topics, summarized:]

- Florida background check updates shared; impact mainly for in-state referees.

Sarah will send out summary of Florida background check specifics.

- Discussion on how beach sprint scheduling may compress the national championship referee selection window. To be determined if Beach Sprints jury selection will be included in general communication or sent separately.

- Suggestions to send out solicitations for other championships even if beach sprint specifics are pending.

- Committee meetings to be posted on RefCorps for general referee members and guests to join meetings.



- Slides for clinicians clinics to be distributed promptly planned end of January.

[1:20:39+] Letcher: Motion to adjourn. (Motion to adjourn passes.)