



What is Podium Level USSA Club Certification?

Podium Level Certification is a rigorous process designed for the clubs that want to perform a comprehensive organizational assessment in order to **verify** and **demonstrate** their understanding of the **best principles** and implementation of **best practices** of their club. *Note: A Podium Candidate must have a current USSA Club membership.*

Clubs that are not yet ready to engage in the certification application process or are not sure if they have the capacity to start, can still benefit greatly from reviewing and discussing the materials and exercises related to the process. It will give them tools to understand best principles and practices and how they can improve as a club, as well as give them a realistic idea if they have the structure and resources in place to initiate the certification process.

What Will Certification Do for Our Club?

USSA club certification will validate your organization in the eyes of the parents, the resort and the community. Your athletes and families will experience focused, effective and efficient athletic programming that will result in attracting more young people and keeping them in your club longer. Your club will develop assessment tools to track and evaluate club progress that will facilitate short and long term planning. Experts from your region and USSA employees will provide resources and actively help in this process for certified clubs. The Club Certification Program will enhance your club's operations and ensure business sustainability.

At any level of certification, your club will be recognized as a progressive and innovative organization with professional athletic programs that are concerned and attentive to the health and welfare of the athletes. By engaging in the club certification process your club will dramatically increase the opportunity to benefit in the following areas:

- ✓ Creating vision
- ✓ Inspiring leadership
- ✓ Increasing funding and sustainability
- ✓ Motivating, attracting and retaining quality staff
- ✓ Enhancing the athletic experience
- ✓ Attracting and retaining athletes
- ✓ Realizing improved athletic performance
- ✓ Experiencing better business operations
- ✓ Stimulating advocacy among the parents
- ✓ Reinforcing identity, reputation and credibility

What is the Club Certification Process?

Club certification is a process of self-assessment, peer-evaluation, certification committee review and organizational improvement. This process will be supported with on-going club development resources and opportunities. The process of certification is a partnership between the USSA and the individual clubs. It is not an examination; rather an effort by the USSA to assist its clubs through assessing club leadership, operations and athletic programming and performance. Through the process of club assessment, the USSA will determine areas of need and provide additional resources and teaching modules to the clubs individually, regionally and nationally. Any comments, suggestions or recommendations made during the certification process, a peer interview/visitation or by the certification committee are offered constructively with the above in mind.

What are the Levels of Podium Certification and What do they Mean?

1. **Bronze Clubs:** Bronze level of certification is intended for established clubs with full programming that have the ability to complete a long and involved certification and application process. This level of certification verifies that the club has all the basic elements in place for organizational and athletic success. This application and certification process will require the club to designate a club certification team (including at least one representative from staff leadership, board of directors and club community) to participate in the self-assessment process and required interview. While less involved than the application for Silver/Gold club candidates, the Bronze level certification process involves a comprehensive organizational assessment and will put clubs on the path of continual improvement. Bronze certification is intended and appropriate for approximately 70% of podium clubs.

2. **Silver Clubs:** This level of certification is intended for well-established and highly functioning clubs (both organizationally and athletically) that have the ability to complete an involved certification process. These clubs may serve as a model both organizationally and athletically, have high levels of financial sustainability, and have consistent and long-standing track records of organizational and/or athletic success. This level requires the club to designate a club certification coordinator and a board member to host a required visitation. In keeping with the idea of partnership, this process is intended to be both a verification of certification requirements, as well as a way for the USSA to better understand what the leading clubs are doing, and how they are doing it, that contributes to their continued success. This information will be very helpful in identifying what the USSA can provide in the way of educational and development resources to best serve our partner clubs. Silver Certification is intended and appropriate for approximately 20% of podium clubs.

3. **Gold Clubs:** Gold level certification is intended for clubs that are truly Best in the World. These clubs serve as a model both organizationally and athletically, and are potential resources for both the USSA and other member clubs. Further, these clubs will have high levels of financial sustainability and consistent and long-standing track records of organizational and/or athletic success. This level requires the club to designate a club certification coordinator and a board member to host a required visitation. In keeping with the idea of partnership, this process is intended to be both a verification of certification requirements, as well as a way for the USSA to better understand what the leading clubs are doing, and how they are doing it, that contributes to their continued success. This information will be very helpful in identifying what USSA can provide in the way of educational and development resources to best serve our partner clubs. Gold Certification is intended and appropriate for approximately 10% of podium clubs.

Can Clubs without High Levels of Athletic Performance (i.e. National Team Placements) Reach Podium Level Certification?

Yes. While the certification process certainly considers and rewards specific athletic performance and success, it also recognizes organizational performance and success. Further, certification is intended to be an assessment of the organization's self-stated goals and objectives. Therefore, if the stated goals are to place athletes on the National Teams, and the club has not, that is an unmet organizational goal, but if the stated goal is to be the best developmental program in the country and the club is, then it is reaching its goals. The Bronze, Silver and Gold certification levels will identify clubs that are truly part of the Olympic pipeline at any level – and these clubs will be recognized as podium clubs. The certification process is designed to recognize all the elements that lead to success with organizations, parents, athletes, volunteers, staff, funding and athletic results.

It should be noted that the bar is set very high for Bronze certification such that it may take some time for a club to reach this level. As a Bronze Club you are on the podium and we all know what kind of commitment and mix of required elements it can take to get there. Therefore, Bronze does not indicate 'satisfactory' performance - it is not a "C" - it is verification that you are a club deserving medal status. With this said, Gold and Silver certifications will be reserved for those clubs that are going above and beyond the required elements and can demonstrate performance in all areas over time.

So What?

Podium Certified Clubs are **more**:

1. Attractive to parents and athletes
2. Legitimate in the eyes of funders and donors
3. Rewarding and professional places to work
4. Connected to something greater than the local club experience
5. Tuned in to USSA resources
6. Focused on success in all areas: organizationally, athletically and in character, culture and mission.

What are the Steps to Certification?

STEP 1 - Contact the USSA Club Development Manager to "register" your club as a "candidate for podium certification" and confirm level of certification process (Bronze OR Silver/Gold)

STEP 2 – Designate your club certification team consisting of (1) Staff Leader Representative, (1) Board/Ownership Leader Representative, and (1) Club Community Representative

STEP 3 – Coordinate and begin your club self-assessment

STEP 4 – Gather and compile required submittals and complete worksheets

STEP 5 – Draft self-assessment final report and submit entire packet to USSA

STEP 6 – Schedule club interview (Bronze) or visit (Silver/Gold)

What are the Required Submittals?

Bronze required submittals checklist

- ☐ Staff and Board Responsible for Certification
- ☐ History and Organizational Structure
- ☐ Verification of Legal Entity
- ☐ Verification of Club Insurance
- ☐ Annual Budget
- ☐ Primary Budget Reports
- ☐ Mission, Vision, Values
- ☐ Primary Job Descriptions
- ☐ Staffing *Worksheet – provided by USSA*
- ☐ Facilities *Worksheet – provided by USSA*
- ☐ Athletic Performance *Worksheet – provided by USSA*
- ☐ Training Phases *Worksheet – provided by USSA*
- ☐ Volunteer *Worksheet – provided by USSA*
- ☐ Podium Club Certification Self-Assessment Standards *Workbook – provided by USSA*
- ☐ **Current S.W.O.T. Analysis and Summary – *Template provided by USSA***

Silver/Gold submittals checklist

- ☐ ALL OF THE ABOVE, plus:
- ☐ Current Bylaws
- ☐ Board Matrix
- ☐ Strategic Objectives
- ☐ Strategic Plan
- ☐ Description of Feedback Practices
- ☐ Board Policies
- ☐ Resource Development Plan
- ☐ Annual Report
- ☐ Development and Fundraising Materials
- ☐ Code of Conduct and Due Process
- ☐ Parent Education and Involvement
- ☐ Athlete Education and Career Information
- ☐ Awards and Recognition
- ☐ Marketing and Communications Plan
- ☐ Staff Manual
- ☐ Professional Development Program
- ☐ Staff Evaluations
- ☐ Program Curriculum Description
- ☐ Emergency Action Plan
- ☐ Written Agreements with Partners/Resort
- ☐ **Club Self-Assessment Final Report**

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The certification process and materials provide a summary for a self and peer-assessed inventory and evaluation of these important areas of operation:

Leadership and Governance
Finance and Funding
Fostering Club Culture
PR, Marketing and Communications
Human Resources
Athlete and Child Safety
USSA Club Programming
USSA Club Logistics

All certification applications will be processed on a first-come, first-served basis. Only complete applications will be considered for final review.

Who is involved in the Certification Process?

It is important to involve key constituents at the board, staff, athlete, parent and community levels in this process. Not only will this help to divide and conquer with regards to the tasks of the process itself, but this will also foster more engagement of all club constituents. The club's lead staff and an officially designated board member accountable to the certification process are required to participate in the interviews and visitations and the certification process will require the club to take stock of all constituents involved in the organization, which makes it a good time to check in with them directly.

This will also allow the club to make the most out of this process. The entire club community should be aware of the club's certification candidacy. Further, the club can benefit from some exciting public relations, marketing and club engagement opportunities related to this process.

Involvement is the key to realizing the true benefits of the certification process, as opposed to it being a more invisible administrative process.

What is the Purpose of the Interview or Club Visit?

The purpose of the club interview or visit is to:

- Assess the accuracy of the Certification Application and materials
- Provide an internal and external peer review
- Engage club leaders (staff and board) in an organizational assessment
- Identify and discuss club strengths and weaknesses / opportunities and threats
- Determine what additional resources the club needs to continue Club Development and improve performance
- Help determine appropriate level of certification

To represent the partnership between the club and the USSA the Club Certification Visiting Team will consist of:

- (1) Visiting Team Chair: Club Expert Consultant as local to the region as possible. USSA employee (Club Development Manager, Regional Manager, Sport Education Director or

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other). Of the above visiting team members, one may focus on organizational performance and one/others may focus on programming and athletic performance.

(1) Visitation Host: Must be a current or honorary club board member

(1) Club Community Member (Delegated by the club/unbiased/someone with a broad perspective and the best interest of club in the forefront)

(1) Club Executive Staff Leader (Executive Director, Head of School, Program Director, etc.)

What is a Typical Club Visit agenda?

This is a mock agenda and may be modified as needed to accommodate the needs of the club, the visiting team and programming considerations. This may include multiple visits. If modifications are made, all elements of the visitation as described below will still be implemented.

Day 1

AM: Visiting team arrives

12:30 p.m. Lunch with visiting team (hosted by club). – Chair gives overview of certification process and visitation objectives Chair and USSA employee will address questions regarding the same.

2:00 p.m - 5:00 p.m. Review of organizational performance.

5:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m. Dinner with parents, community members, other board members and other constituents as arranged by the club (hosted by club). Informal discussion facilitated about club culture, parent involvement, student-athlete life and career performance and volunteer performance. Student-athlete and parent or community presentations (informal and brief) welcomed.

Day2

Note again: This day may be modified for programming accommodations.

8:00 a.m. -11:00 a.m. Visiting team observes program in action. Team should gain exposure to as many program elements as possible.

Noon Lunch with coaches and athletes.

1:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m. Review of programmatic performance. Should include entire coaching staff (or key coaching staff).

4:00 p.m. - 4:30 p.m. Visiting team wrap-up. Discuss next steps, delegate roles and responsibilities, and map out tasks and timeline to complete certification process.

5:00 Visiting team departs.

A club interview (for Bronze level) will follow a similar but significantly amended structure. Club

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interviews will typically take four to six hours over two days.

What Happens after the Club Interview or Visit?

The Club Certification Committee will conduct a final review of all materials add comments and recommendations to the final report.

Recommendation for Bronze, Silver and Gold levels of certification will be based on:

Bronze

Quality of application
Data in submitted worksheets
Completion and verification of the scores and comments in the Certification Standards Workbook
Interview report and assessment

Silver/Gold

Quality of application
Data in submitted worksheets
Completion and verification of the scores and comments in the Certification Standards Workbook
Visiting team report and assessment
Assessment of athletic performance

Certification Timeline

Once a club is engaged in the certification process, they will be recognized in the USSA Club Directory as a “Podium Candidate”. The application timeline is primarily driven by the club and the resources dedicated to the process. **Once all required materials have been received, interviews with bronze candidates will be arranged within 60 days. Club visits with silver/gold candidates will be arranged as soon as possible, but may take up to six months to complete.**

For bronze certification, the time between the interview and the final award is usually about 30 days. For

All certifications will be issued and announced at the USSA Club Excellence Conference in May of each year. All podium clubs will receive recognition, marketing materials, and other resources at the Club Excellence Conference in May for use in off-season to generate support, recruiting and other benefits for the upcoming season.

What are the Guidelines for USSA Podium Club Certification Renewal or Advancement?

Certification RENEWAL (Every 4 years):

The USSA Club Podium Certification Program is designed to be a dynamic process. The basis of the initial application is a team driven, in depth self-assessment conducted by the USSA Club, including submittals, worksheets, a standards scoring sheets and a self-assessment final report, followed by a USSA interview (Bronze) or site visit (Silver/Gold). The assessment is a holistic look at the organization, and addresses an extensive set of standards within the following eight (8) key domains:

- Leadership and Governance
- Finance and Funding
- Fostering Club Culture
- PR, Communications and Marketing
- Human Resources
- Child/Athlete Protection
- USSA Club Programming
- USSA Club Logistics

The outcome of the initial certification process provides the Club and the USSA Club Certification Committee with a clear knowledge and understanding of the Club's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. This information can then be incorporated into the Club's planning processes and short and long term strategic objectives.

Every four (4) years, Podium Certified Clubs are required to renew their certification. They may choose to stay at their current level (Bronze, Silver or Gold) or to apply for advancement to the next level (Bronze to Silver or Silver to Gold).

The application for renewal will be similar to the initial application process. It will allow the Club to apprise the Certification Committee of any major changes in areas such as leadership, staffing, resort relations, etc. and verify that all principles and practices reported in the initial application remain in place, as well as improvements have been made in areas identified as needing them. Once that verification has taken place, there will be a more in depth look into the Club's demonstration of programming philosophies, principles and practices, followed by a final report drafted by the Club and submitted to USSA. This report, along with required submittals, worksheets and standards scoresheets, will be reviewed by the USSA Certification Committee the club will be notified of the outcome within 90 days from date of submission.

How Can I Move from One Level Certification to the Next?

A USSA Club that has been awarded a Podium Level Certification may apply for advancement from Bronze to Silver, or Silver to Gold level certification no less than 12 months from the date of initial certification or during the regular recertification application cycle. Requests should be submitted in writing to the Club Development Manager eadams@ussa.org. The USSA Certification Committee will work closely with the applying Club to ensure that the Club meets or exceeds the criteria for the desired level and that any and all areas of concern identified through the initial certification process have been addressed and there is a plan in place for sustained improvement in those areas. Once all necessary documentation, including requested submittals, worksheets and self-assessment report is in place, a site visit or conference call will be scheduled and a final report generated within three (3) months of the visit/call.

Certification Renewal or Advancement

FINAL REPORT GUIDELINES

When applying for certification renewal (every 4 years), or advancement (no less than 12 months after previous certification) the final report is the last step.

This report will include the following:

- Summary of the self-study and assessment findings
- Description and demonstration of the steps that have been taken in specific areas that were identified as needing improvement during the previous certification process
- A basic plan/statement for how organizational and athletic performance will be measured moving forward and major benchmarks for the next 4-year review
- Recommendation and justification for new certification level

This report, along with required submittals, worksheets and standards scoresheets, will be reviewed by the USSA certification team and the club will be notified of the outcome within 90 days from date of submission.

Who do I contact for more information?

Ellen Adams, USSA Club Development Manager, eadams@ussa.org.