

GEAG Meeting Summary with USA Ultimate

November 14, 2016

[Section #1: Gender Equity Policy:](#)

[Section #2: Transparency](#)

[Section #3: Diversity and Representation](#)

Structure: 8a - 1p Monday, Nov. 14.

1. Tour of office
2. Introduction and sharing of intentions
3. Discussion of:
 - a. Gender Equity Policy
 - b. Transparency
 - c. Diversity and Representation
4. Closing reflections with a partner and sendoff

Attendance:

- **GEAG:** Chip Chang, Jimmy Mickle, Leila Tunnell, Rohre Titcomb, Russell Wallack
- **USAU:** Andy Lee, DeAnna Ball, Julia Lee, Stacey Waldrup, Tom Crawford, Will Deaver

Ground Rules:

1. Indicate desire to speak with a "thumbs up." Russell, as moderator, will add you to the queue for speaking.
2. Do not interrupt each other.
3. This meeting is an opportunity to grow our relationships, and it is the first of many conversations on these topics.
4. Assume best intentions. We have shared aims and varying perspectives.
5. GEAG will focus on representing and honoring the feedback we received from our whole group, not just our own.

Note: We decided to organize our notes in a manner such that readers can follow the flow of the conversation. Our goal is for you to easily see the questions and feedback we raised, followed by the responses we received from USAU. Please note that the response from USAU sections are not direct quotes, nor are they official USAU stances--they're the summary of comments made by USAU representatives in an open-ended discussion.

Section #1: Gender Equity Policy:

Our feedback: The wording of the GE Policy - we want to change "(USAU will) *encourage outside partners and vendors to achieve gender equity in their coverage of and marketing to Ultimate*" to "USAU will require outside partners and vendors to achieve equity in their coverage of and marketing to Ultimate." We would also like the policy to be re-worked to include the

mixed division (especially considering that there are as many women competing in the mixed division as there are in the women's division).

USAU response: We believe that our Gender Equity policy is out of date and needs to be re-worked. [The Equity and Diversity Working Group](#) was put into place partly to address this. We need to do more outside research to figure out what is the best wording of the policy for our sport's current iteration. Any future policy will be broadened to address not only gender, but also other protected classes, including race, color, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, and physical/mental disability. We are also actively working to include transgender and non-gender binary identifying people into the policy as well as a greater emphasis on diversity as a whole.

Our feedback: There should be a mandated system and timeline for regularly revisiting and reviewing the Gender Equity¹ policy so that it does not fall out-of-date as the current policy has and to ensure that it is continually meeting the needs of our community. What is the process and expected timeline for re-working the current Gender Equity policy?

USAU response: Measuring and quantifying success is very challenging. Every year, USAU is implementing more programs that grow the number of women playing ultimate and offer additional resources and support for female athletes ([GUM](#), [Girl-focused Volunteer Structure](#), [Girl's Team Grant Program](#), [Women's Coaching Rebate](#)). There is a level of patience and trust which is required for these programs to move forward, and throwing up hard lines and metrics could actually set us back. Players need to have trust that the organization is moving in the right direction and an understanding that these changes take time.

Our feedback: When is gender equity negotiable? How is equity weighed in broadcast negotiations and when is it worth sacrificing our values for exposure and visibility? Who is making these decisions? We believe that having an organization-wide policy around equity which is reflected throughout all decision making processes would help build player trust.

USAU response: Gender Equity is hugely important to the organization as a whole. We brought in Janet Judge, an equity and diversity expert who was recently appointed to the USAU board of directors, to run a retreat and discuss equity as it pertains to several topics, including media. Equity in media and broadcasting is not mentioned in Title IX because national sports organizations and athletic departments do not have control over what media partners choose to broadcast. USAU is actively trying to sell the sport to broadcasters and sponsors. We are pushing the envelope in terms of which games are produced and distributed in order to better achieve equity during this process.

Our feedback: So what are the things we can control? How and why are we making the choice to enter into partnerships that do not represent our community's values around equity? Many

¹ The Gender Equity policy will be reworked and renamed the Equity & Diversity Policy

elite players have expressed that being on ESPN3 is not important to them and that they would be happy to give up that visibility in order to achieve greater equity in coverage.

USAU response: We are continually weighing these difficult choices. One major concern is that if USAU were to pass on a broadcasting partnership, then the only ultimate which would be appearing on non-endemic platforms would be professional league games, which would only showcase men's-only, refereed ultimate. This would be a major step backwards for both Spirit of the Game and gender equity.

Additionally, the goal of having elite club and college broadcast and streamed on ESPN's linear television and digital platforms is not to reward the top athletes, but rather to increase the visibility of the sport overall. Having the sport on ESPN has made other people (non-ultimate players) aware of the sport and increased awareness of ultimate and its emphasis on Spirit of the Game as a value-added alternative to traditional sports culture. Even if players are willing to give up their personal visibility on ESPN, we still have to question whether we as a community are willing to give up the opportunity for growth which ESPN affords us. Many of our current members, and the ultimate community at large, care a lot about being able to see the sport via broadcast and digital media across divisions and genders. The opinions of those members and fans are also very important to consider.

Our Feedback: Despite exclusion of a media clause in Title IX, female athletes who are playing in professional leagues and in large college and university programs which are covered under Title IX have greater access to resources and funding to advocate for themselves than women's and mixed ultimate teams do. This is why we need USAU to be fighting for us. We also do not necessarily believe that ESPN3 is creating that much more visibility for the sport. Their website is not accessible, games are hard to find and TV programming is becoming more and more obsolete. Are non-ultimate players really watching ultimate on ESPN3? What efforts have been made towards looking into other broadcasting partners? Does ESPN3 give us the amount of visibility and accessibility to non-ultimate players which warrants sacrificing our values?

USAU response: USAU does not have the negotiating power with ESPN that it does relative to other media partnerships. Negotiating power comes with leverage. With other ultimate broadcasting companies (Ultiworld, Ultivillage, NexGen, etc), USAU has/used to have all of the leverage because those business depend(ed) on USAU events for content. Therefore, we were able to leverage those companies into going from streaming zero women's and mixed games to having an equal number of women's and men's games streamed (and significantly more mixed). We feel confident that USAU will eventually get to a point in their relationship with non-endemic broadcasters where we will be able to mitigate the existing inequities and have more negotiating power as the value of our content increases.

Measuring visibility and growth due to our ESPN partnership is challenging. We do know that viewership numbers of ESPN games are much higher than games streamed through other

media partners. (Between 5 and 55X higher depending on variables like the division and importance of the game.)

We are also actively looking to partner with other media entities to provide additional exposure for our sport, and in particular female athletes. A good example of this is the funding we provided to Fulcrum Media this past September in support of a women's-specific video project at our National Championships. Looking forward, we've put additional funding in the budget in 2017 to support similar projects as part of a more aggressive investment in digital marketing/media.

Our feedback: We believe that there is a conflation of visibility with ESPN3 and that perhaps ESPN3 is not actually the best channel for achieving that goal. Other channels for achieving visibility include the All-star tour, clinics, Fulcrum Media, community outreach, etc. Additionally, it is important to take into consideration that the ESPN viewership numbers may also be higher because ESPN has exclusive rights to more important games and generally take place in more desirable time slots which would automatically draw more viewers.

Would USAU sacrifice self-officiation in order to achieve an ESPN contract? If Gender Equity is such an important cornerstone of the organization, then why is it being set aside, even temporarily?

USAU response: In a media partnership it takes a long time to build trust and establish that there is sufficient interest in the product. It takes a long time to get to the point where visibility numbers actually begin to increase. In the big picture of visibility, WFDF values media partnerships very highly and we would not have achieved recognition from the USOC or the IOC were it not for USAU's ESPN partnership. From a strategic perspective, there are many high-level things at play which lead to the importance of this contract.

We have made a big attempt to get this information out there to the player base and we think we have made some changes moving forward which will help, but there needs to be a level of trust between the players and the organization that they are making decisions based on what is best for the sport.

There are systems in place, such as the board of directors, which exist to establish that kind of trust.

The equitable division and allocation of streamed games in the club division is more complicated because of having three divisions, which creates odd effects and a difficult number of games to work with. Event logistics and timing make working with 3 divisions much more complex than 2, when trying to create equitable treatment of showcase opportunities.

Our feedback: We agree that trust is essential and we need to acknowledge that there has been some level of trust breakdown between the players and USAU which we need to rebuild

and revisit. We also want to clarify that we are not here simply because of the inequities which exist in the partnership with ESPN - there are so many other ways in which women in ultimate experience inequitable treatment / marginalization. We also want to challenge the idea that there are so many “high-level strategic decisions” which are taking place which we don’t / can’t know about or understand - we want to learn about these things and we as players also bring a ton of experience to the table as life-long athletes, organizers, business-owners, coaches, and activists.

Section #2: Transparency

Our feedback: There is a clear lack of communication between players and USAU, and a lack of understanding of both sides. While including feedback from other elite athletes, we’ve discussed different ways to increase transparency and therefore trust between players and organization.

- Release board member votes, transparency leads to accountability. The people that are representing me have my voice in mind
- Allocation of funding
- Communication with membership base beyond existing formalized channels
- How do we include more player representation?

We think some of the discontent stems from players not understanding steps that were taken to reach a conclusion. For example, **why** were we willing to sacrifice gender equitable streaming for the ESPN deal?

USAU Response: Transparency is always something that can be improved upon, and there is a disconnect that needs to be addressed. Obviously there are limits to transparency because of practical things like contractual agreements, confidentiality and NDAs, but also because our employees can’t spend all day communicating all of the details of their work. That would compromise our ability to be productive in our work. We need to find a balance between information that is released and the ability for USAU to continue operate effectively and efficiently. Sometimes it’s a challenge. Whenever we put out brief, easily digestible information, we get criticized for not providing enough detail. Whenever we put out long, detailed explanations about things, we get criticized for providing too much information that nobody will read through. We do release our audited financial statements, produce an annual report, publish board minutes, issue surveys, send out weekly updates to our members and communicate constantly through our many distribution channels. Our volunteer structure of athletes and community members is also incredibly robust. The athletes council is part of the club working group, which is one of 26 working groups that include more than 150 players, they have voices. We also have an additional 367 active volunteer roles that serve as a conduit between HQ and our members in a variety of capacities.

Our feedback: We understand the equity and diversity working group has been formed and work has started, but as people concerned with these issues there isn’t much information

regarding the work that committee does. The working group needs to find better footing in work that needs to be done, and find a communication method, maybe including notes on the website. How do we as players bring up issues that we care about deeply and get your attention?

USAU Response: Everyone gets passionate about an issue, gets involved and cares. After some time, it dies down and people get fired up about another cause. How do we create a way to properly engage people and solve problems before they get to this point? It's a constant battle to try and engage with different forms of communication, so many different channels to communicate through now, not sure which ones are the best. Obviously players have rallied around this cause, and we think some of that has to do with the fact that it is player run and organized. It went "viral". We need players help spreading word and passion about everything that goes on in our sport. The good stuff, as well as the stuff that people are frustrated about. Hearing about the good stuff, from sources other than the organization's official channels, helps spread the word and build trust, which in turn helps with handling the more challenging/frustrating issues.

Our feedback: We find that some the issues surrounding trust and transparency stem from a lack of personal interaction with USAU. We get our information from "official" releases from USAU, it doesn't feel very personal, it feels corporate. We understand the need for professionalism but it's gotten to the point where we don't actually feel connected to our governing body. We've heard information about more town hall meetings and face to face conversations and we find this kind of discussion to be very valuable. We understand the challenges that are presented because of bandwidth required for those interactions but we think it's really important to start to repair trust. The organization needs to be more personalized, perhaps multiple USAU voices not just "USAU". Informal conversations really help create trust.

USAU Response: We get that feedback a lot, and it's something we are looking at. We want to have more face to face interactions but evaluating if it can happen. Informal, one-on-one conversations with our members and other stakeholders about a variety of topics occur on a daily basis, but don't get reported. As an NGB we have an obligation to issue formal, informational news releases. We were really impressed by the passion behind this Gender Equity Group. Obviously people are more willing to engage in "player run" gender equity forums and movements than ones led by USAU. How do we inject a USAU voice into these conversations without taking it over? We are hiring a new digital marketing manager who will work on making content more engaging.

Our feedback: Forums that have been organized by USAU at tournaments are good but difficult for a number of reasons. They are often in locations away from the field and require transportation to and from which makes players reliant on teammates. Often in the evening during dinner times and team meetings. Especially as captains of teams it's hard to plan around, it would be nice to have GE forum in tournament schedule that's sent out to teams. Serving dinner at the forum could help increase attendance. We have attended GE forums before and

felt like the conversation focused on topics that all the players in the room weren't engaged or passionate about. Example: 2015 US Open, lots of players showed up with hopes to talk about ESPN deal and equity in broadcasting, the whole conversation was about the college mixed division. We are grateful that this space was created to talk openly about gender equity, but we would love to see a more structured facilitation of this conversation where player feedback is solicited before the meeting in future forums.

USAU Response: That's good information to have. We would like to work with players before these forums to come up with an agenda to help accomplish the most in limited communal time. We can look into serving dinner, and maybe having talks at the field. Obviously people are interested in these topics, your GE forum at nationals had a great turnout even though it was cold/dark/rainy. We would like to be part of these conversations but not necessarily lead them.

Our feedback: We really think that board votes should be published, we think it will lead to more trust with our elected officials so that we know that they are voting with our interests at heart. It's hard to blindly trust candidates we don't know much about, and there is no accountability for board members to follow along with campaign promises. If we are voting for someone up for reelection, how do we know what they stand for? How do we know our vote matters if we don't know how they vote on specific policies? If full vote transparency isn't possible right now, maybe a middle ground of information released to help understand pros and cons of votes that go to the board.

USAU Response: Lack of transparency wasn't an issue 15 years ago, why is it now when the non-disclosure of board votes has remained constant? We can have a discussion about why they aren't public if you would like. We like the idea of middle ground and adding transparency to the difficult decisions that get made. Over the years the issue of vote transparency has come up and been voted down multiple times. The people that are on the board are well-respected leaders of our community and we need to trust that they have the best interests of the community at heart. It all comes down to trust, these are people you should trust.

Section #3: Diversity and Representation

Our feedback: How can we increase the number of female voices who are actively involved in the decision making process? Conversations about gender equity is not just about media, but the systems of organization and organizational structures and who is being served. In addition to a GE policy, it is also important that women are at the table, such as in media negotiations, to help ensure that they are a part of the decision-making process, as opposed to only being represented.

USAU response: As an organization, we do not feel that systemically, there's been a lack of female voices in the organization. At any given time you can take a snapshot of the organization and claim an inequity, but it's important to look at the history of the organization. The current ratio

of the organization with regards to men to women currently exceeds that of the membership. From a leadership perspective, it's important to note that 2 of the last 3 (and 3 of the last 5) chief executives have been female, 4 of the last 5 board presidents, and 2 of the last 3 board vice presidents have been female. Up until very recently (from 2009 to 2015), 50% of the senior-level directors on staff have been female. Current board composition is more than 40% female (5 of 12) and 4 board-level committee chairs are female. The chair of the marketing committee (the primary board committee that works with staff on broadcast partnerships) when the initial ESPN deal was negotiated was female. The senior-level content acquisition executive at ESPN that we interface with day-to-day is female. There has traditionally been very strong female representation in leadership roles at USAU and in the broadcast negotiations. The staff is good at valuing voices. Though there are times it's clear we need to reach out and find more voices, however, it is challenging. One example is the applicant pool where a lot of men apply, but fewer women. There are also legal constraints of hiring (or not hiring) someone based on gender.

Our feedback: This issue of female representation involves more than having men represent female voices. Equity is about actively seeking women in a sport culture where women aren't always welcome. To uphold gender equity, we need to be intentional and take meaningful actions towards equity as ultimate continues to grow. So while people may feel that there is equity and diversity among the Board and Staff, both are still lacking. For instance, the appointed positions are occupied mostly by men and in terms of the staff, Julia is currently the only director who is a woman, the other three are men. DeAnna is the only female USAU representative involved in the strategic plan. And overall, the perspective of current elite athletes is limited as staff members aren't allowed to compete as elite athletes. We suggested potential staff policy changes that will lead to more equity and diversity in the workplace and confront larger cultural challenges that we face. Likewise, now that Heather Ann has a new position, has USAU thought about embedding GUM into USAU?

USAU response: The effort to push for gender equity is there. For instance, Robyn Wiseman announced Club Nationals on ESPN3. And women are taking more roles within the various program structures of USAU, such as at the youth, college, club, and masters levels. There are more female volunteers, per female member, representing these groups and we have quite a few women's coordinators running men's divisions. There are also positions within these divisions that have an equal representation, if not, a disproportionate representation leaning towards female voices, that doesn't reflect the broader membership gender ratio (70:30, men:women). We just put more money into the budget for GUM. Mike Lovinguth, in his role as our youth outreach manager, started the task force and creative process for a USAU, girls'-specific outreach program, which through working with amazing and passionate volunteers (mostly female) evolved into GUM. Currently, it is Dan Raabe's role. We need to scale it and work on evolving the volunteer structure. Our goal is to have it run like other programs at USAU and have staff, accountability, and growth.

Our feedback: These are great steps, but again, these are volunteer positions that women hold. Currently, the lionshare of the work has been done by female volunteers.

USAU response: The main role of the Equity and Diversity Working Group, which didn't exist 3 years ago, serves to address gender equity concerns. It started as a task force and is now a working group. We still need to figure out what the make-up of this group is going to be and how we can make this group more effective. We don't want to compartmentalize the group within USAU. We should consider the possibility of including non-board or staff representation on the equity and diversity working group. It's important to plug thoughtful and passionate people into existing structures that already address specific areas, instead of creating additional structures with more overlap.

Our feedback: It isn't enough to ask a working group to come in and do all the labor. They can't be an external force to operations, rather it's about getting an internal lens. If we want to successfully fight this battle, then we need to make advances internally. In other words, we can't rely on the Equity and Diversity Working Group be the only ones who have this lens towards equity, everyone needs to adopt it.

Editor's notes:

- We intended to include discussion of the semi-pro leagues in this meeting, but we did not get to that topic in our agenda. We believe that this is a necessary portion of the gender equity conversation, but one that should primarily be directed at AUDL and MLU leadership.
- In addition, specific discussion of how the mixed division factors into these issues was not addressed to the degree that we would have liked. We endeavour to bring this piece of the conversation more to light moving forward.