2027 National Competition Advancement Policy

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Applicable Competition: 2027 USAD National Competition

Key terms used in this policy are defined in **Appendix A**. A condensed overview of the 2027 advancement framework, including the team field, guaranteed team allotments, team wildcards, individual quota, unused team capacity, and individual reapportionment rules are listed in **Appendix B**.

This policy applies only to the 2027 National Competition unless expressly extended, revised, or superseded by USAD.

1. Purpose and Scope

This policy establishes the team and individual advancement framework for the 2027 USAD National Competition. It preserves a team-first structure, maintains five divisions, reserves a predictable capacity for eligible individual qualifiers, and gives USAD limited discretion to balance competitiveness, representation, and field completion.

Final numbers will be confirmed after USAD determines venue capacity and State Directors accept or decline invitations under the published advancement timeline.

This policy is issued pursuant to the 2026-2027 USAD State Charter Agreement and Annual Program Addendum and shall be read together with all applicable USAD eligibility, registration, and National Competition requirements. In the event of a conflict, the USAD State Charter Agreement shall control. Where the Charter is silent, the Annual Program Addendum shall control over this policy.

All advancement opportunities, guaranteed allotments, wildcard opportunities, and individual allocations established by this policy remain subject to any participation restriction or corrective action imposed under the USAD State Charter Agreement.

2. Policy Objectives

This policy is designed to provide a predictable National Competition advancement framework that balances state representation, competitive performance, participation opportunities, and efficient use of available competitor capacity. The framework preserves guaranteed state access while providing limited mechanisms for national wildcard selection and individual advancement.

3. Guiding Principles

- Team advancement remains the foundation of Academic Decathlon.
- The National Competition should maintain five divisions of roughly similar size whenever feasible.
- Approximately 90% of maximum competitor capacity should be used for teams, with approximately 10% reserved for individuals.
- Stakeholders should be able to forecast advancement opportunities from a clear formula rather than ad hoc decisions.
- Program bands should be based on the total number of schools participating in each state.
- Individual and wildcard allocations should encourage participation by high-performing decathletes and programs that have traditionally had limited National representation.

- The team field, guaranteed team allotments, team wildcards, and individual quota are components of the 2027 advancement framework and are subject to review after the 2027 National Competition.

4. Relationship Between Teams and Individuals

Schools that qualify to attend the National Competition and invited decathletes are separate eligibility categories.

4a. National-Qualifying Teams

When a school qualifies to attend the National Competition as a team, its competitors participate through the school's National team roster. A decathlete enrolled at a school that qualifies for the National Competition is not eligible to be separately invited as an individual, even if they are not part of that school's National team roster. This rule prevents a school qualifying for the National Competition from receiving both a team slot and additional individual spots outside the team structure.

4b. Invited Individuals

Individuals may be considered as eligible only if all of the following are true:

- The decathlete has an official Round 3 score.
- The decathlete's school did not qualify to attend the National Competition as a team.
- The decathlete is otherwise eligible under all applicable state and USAD rules.

5. Team Advancement

Table A: Team Field		
Component	**Number**	**Purpose**
Guaranteed team allotment	64	Predictable team advancement opportunities through state program-band allotments
Team wildcard slots	6	Limited national discretion to complete the field and recognize eligible teams outside guaranteed allotments.
Total team field	70	Target of 14 teams per division in a five-division National Competition.

5a. Program Band Sizes and Guaranteed Team Allotment

For the 2027 National Competition, states are assigned to the program bands shown in Table B, based on the average number of participating schools from 2022 through 2026. Band placement sets the guaranteed team allotment available before any national team wildcard consideration. A guaranteed allotment is available only to a state that conducts an eligible qualifying competition and otherwise satisfies USAD requirements for advancement during the applicable competition year.

Table B: Program Bands			
Band Sizes	**Participating Schools**	**State(s)**	**Guaranteed Team Allotment**
Extra Large (XL)	101 or more	California, Texas	6 teams each
Large (L)	40 to 100	Arizona	4 teams
Medium (M)	31 to 39	Georgia, Nebraska, New Jersey, Wisconsin	3 teams each
Small (S)	5 to 30	Alaska, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Massachusetts, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Utah	2 teams each

Table B: Program Bands			
Band Sizes	**Participating Schools**	**State(s)**	**Guaranteed Team Allotment**
Extra Small (XS)	1 to 4	Colorado, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Florida, Hawaii, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, Missouri, New Mexico, New York, Tennessee, Virginia, Wyoming	1 team each

5b. State Certification and Hybrid In-State Advancement

State Directors shall certify advancing teams for their guaranteed allotment slots according to applicable state competition results, USAD eligibility rules, and the state's published advancement procedure. Each state with more than one guaranteed team allotment shall publish its advancement procedure before its qualifying competition. The procedure shall identify how placement, score, and any permitted representation factors will be applied in filling the state's guaranteed allotment. States with multiple guaranteed allotments shall use the following hybrid advancement framework:

- The state champion shall receive the first guaranteed team slot.
- The top 50% of a state's guaranteed allotment shall be filled by placement alone, using the rounding method identified in the state's published advancement procedure.
- Remaining guaranteed allotment slots shall be awarded to the highest-scoring eligible teams not already qualified, with consideration for enrollment and/or educational system diversity when doing so does not substantially weaken the competitive field.
- Diversity may be considered, but shall not require a state to advance a materially weaker team over a stronger eligible team solely because the stronger team is in the same category as another qualifier.
- If a guaranteed slot is declined, left unfilled, or assigned to an ineligible team, USAD may return that slot to an at-large pool so the team field can remain as close as possible to 70 teams.

6. National Team Wildcards

USAD may award up to six national team wildcard slots in 2027. Wildcard invitations shall only be awarded to eligible teams. A team selected as a wildcard remains subject to the total team field limit, but does not change that state's guaranteed allotment.

Before State Directors certify advancing teams, USAD shall publish the wildcard process for the 2027 National Competition, including the timeline, documentation requirements, recommendation process, and general selection criteria.

In awarding team wildcard slots, USAD may consider the following factors:

- Competitive performance, including state competition score and ranking;
- State Director recommendations, if requested as part of the published process;
- Ability to meet National Competition registration, roster, and travel deadlines;
- Effect on five-division balance and overall field composition;
- Historic, geographic, and educational system representation; and
- The need to fill the 70-team in-person field without undermining guaranteed allotments.

If a team wildcard invitation is declined or the team becomes ineligible, USAD may offer the slot to the next eligible team under the published process, provided the field remains within the team field limit.

7. Individual Advancement

The individual advancement framework reserves National Competition opportunities for eligible decathletes from schools that do not qualify as National teams and provides for initial state allocation, supplemental apportionment, discretionary allocation, and reapportionment of unused capacity.

7a. Individual Planning Number and Capacity

The individual planning number shall initially equal approximately 10% of total competitor capacity. For the 2027 baseline of 700 competitors, the initial individual planning number is 70 positions after accounting for 630 team roster positions. The individual planning number may increase if approved venue capacity exceeds 700, if teams attend with fewer than nine decathletes, or if team slots remain vacant after reasonable replacement efforts. USAD may convert unused team capacity into additional individual seats under the published advancement timeline.

7b. Phased Individual Allocation

Only decathletes who meet the eligibility requirements detailed in **Section 4b** may fill individual spots allocated under this section. Individual spots shall be allocated within the published individual planning number through the following phases:

1. Initial state allocation. Each participating state with at least one eligible individual decathlete shall receive an initial allocation of one individual spot, subject to available capacity. If final capacity allows additional initial-state allocations before supplemental apportionment, USAD may increase the number of initial spots available to eligible states.
2. Discretionary holdback. The National Advancement Committee may hold back up to six individual spots for discretionary apportionment. Priority may be given to the host state and to Extra Small (XS), Small (S), and Medium (M) programs when doing so supports participation growth and eligible decathletes are available.
3. Band-based supplemental apportionment. After the initial state allocation and any discretionary holdback, remaining individual spots shall be distributed through a proportional supplemental allocation process based on the 2027 program-band structure. Extra Large (XL) and Large (L) programs shall collectively receive the largest share of supplemental individual spots, Medium (M) programs shall receive the next-largest share, and Small (S) and Extra Small (XS) programs shall receive the remaining share. USAD may exercise reasonable discretion within those allocations to support access for smaller and historically underrepresented programs.

7c. State Certification of Individual Competitors

Once individual spots are allocated to a state, the State Director shall certify eligible individual competitors based on official Round 3 scores and any additional state-level procedure published before the state competition.

Unless USAD approves or publishes a different procedure, individual selections shall be made in descending order of official Round 3 overall scores among eligible decathletes whose schools did not qualify to attend the National Competition as a team. State Directors may consider HSV category, school representation, or other state-specific factors only if those factors are part of a published state procedure and are applied consistently.

A decathlete may be certified as an individual only if the decathlete meets the eligibility requirements in **Section 4b** and can satisfy all applicable USAD registration, travel, and competition deadlines. State Directors shall submit certified individuals, alternates if requested, and supporting score information according to the published advancement timeline.

7d. Individual Reapportionment

If individual spots remain after the initial allocation, discretionary holdback, and band-based supplemental apportionment, or if allocated spots are declined or cannot be filled by eligible decathletes, the National Advancement Committee may reapportion those spots under the published individual advancement timeline.

Reapportionment decisions should consider available capacity, HSV category balance, eligible decathlete performance, registration deadlines, travel feasibility, and the goal of encouraging participation growth among smaller and historically underrepresented programs.

If additional individual seats become available within two weeks of the National Competition, USAD may prioritize the host state before broader reapportionment, provided eligible decathletes are available and the decision does not disrupt published registration or competition deadlines.

8. Capacity, Team Size, and Unused Capacity

A complete National Competition team is calculated at nine decathletes for capacity purposes. A 70-team field creates 630 team roster positions. Together with the initial individual planning number of 70 positions, this baseline framework accommodates a total of 700 decathletes.

If a team notifies USAD that it will compete with fewer than nine decathletes, USAD may convert unused team roster positions into individual qualifier spots according to published deadlines. If a team invitation remains vacant after USAD has exhausted reasonable replacement efforts under the annual timeline, USAD may add the unused decathlete capacity to the individual qualifier pool to preserve the overall participation target.

Table C: Competitor Capacity Scenarios

Scenarios	Team Competitors	Individuals	Total	Result
Baseline	630	70	700	70 teams, target 14 teams per division, plus 10% individuals
715 competitor capacity	630	85	715	15 added spots go to individuals unless USAD expands the team field
Two teams enter with seven decathletes	626	74	700	Four unused team roster positions convert to individual qualifier capacity

9. Order of Operations

To administer team and individual advancement consistently, USAD will generally apply the following sequence for the 2027 National Competition:

1. Confirm the National Competition maximum competitor capacity and the team field limit.
2. Confirm the number of guaranteed team allotment slots, using the state program-band schedule.
3. Publish the team wildcard process, individual planning number, individual holdback process, and reapportionment timeline.
4. Receive State Director certifications for guaranteed team allotments.
5. Award national team wildcard slots, up to the identified limit.
6. Publish final qualifying team division assignments.
7. Confirm team roster sizes and add unused capacity to the individual pool, if applicable.
8. Allocate individual spots through the phased individual model.
9. Reapportion declined, unused, or unfilled individual spots according to the published timeline.
10. Publish final individual qualifier division assignments.

10. Implementation, Publication, and Review

USAD may publish annual operating procedures to implement this policy, including certification forms, score reporting requirements, documentation requirements, procedures for declining team invitations and individual allocations, and final advancement deadlines.

10a. Annual Implementation Procedures

To support State Director planning, USAD shall publish the following information as early as practicable in the advancement cycle:

- The maximum competitor capacity and team field limit;
- The guaranteed team allotment schedule, including each state's program band and the 64-slot guaranteed allotment calculation;
- The team wildcard timeline, documentation requirements, State Director recommendation process, and general selection criteria, consistent with **Section 6**;
- The annual individual planning number, including any approved capacity above the 700-competitor baseline;
- The individual allocation process, including any holdback process, proportional or band-based supplemental allocation method, State Director certification requirements, and any permitted state-level selection procedures;
- The individual-decline deadline by which states must notify USAD if they do not intend to use some or all of their individual allocation;
- The deadline after which unused team roster capacity may be converted into individual spots; and
- The reapportionment timeline for declined, unused, or unfilled individual spots.

10b. Post-Competition Review

Following the 2027 National Competition, USAD shall evaluate the operation of this policy before determining whether to continue, revise, or discontinue the advancement framework for subsequent years. The review should include:

- State Director feedback on rule clarity, timing, and any implementation burden;
- Whether the team field supported balanced five-division competition;
- Whether the guaranteed team allotments and wildcard slots produced an equitable and competitive field;
- Whether the individual allocation process produced approximately 10% individual participation and was predictable for State Directors and competitors;
- How many unused team roster slots were converted to individual qualifier capacity; and
- Whether discretionary and reapportioned individual spots improved representation for high-performing students from smaller or historically underrepresented programs.

Appendix A: Key Terms Used in Policy

Term	Meaning for this Policy
State	Any USAD-recognized state or jurisdiction that conducted a qualifying Round 3 competition and is eligible to send teams and/or individual competitors to the National Competition.
National Advancement Committee	The USAD committee or designee responsible for discretionary advancement decisions, including team wildcard recommendations, individual quota apportionment, individual holdback decisions, and individual reapportionment. References in this policy to decisions by USAD may be exercised by the National Advancement Committee or another designee authorized by USAD.
Guaranteed team allotment	One of the team slots assigned to states through the annual allotment process.
Program band size	For the 2027 National Competition, an allotment classification based on the average number of schools participating in a state from 2022 through 2026.
Team wildcard slot	One of the team slots awarded outside the guaranteed state allotment schedule.
Team field limit	Maximum number of team invitations authorized under this policy.
Individual planning number	Initial number of competitor positions reserved for invited individuals for planning purposes, subject to adjustment under this policy.
Individual quota	The total number of positions authorized for eligible decathletes advancing to the National Competition as individuals rather than as members of qualifying school teams.
Maximum capacity	The total decathlete capacity approved by USAD for the National Competition.

Appendix B: Summary of Policy Requirements

Rule Area	2027 Core Rule
Team field	70 teams.
Guaranteed team allotments	64 team slots allocated to states through five program bands.
Team wildcards	Up to six, awarded only to eligible teams.
Team competitor capacity	Nine decathletes per team with 70 complete teams creates 630 team roster positions.
Individual planning number	At the 700-competitor baseline, the initial individual planning number is 70 positions. The planning number may increase if approved venue capacity exceeds 700, teams attend with fewer than nine decathletes, or team slots remain vacant after reasonable replacement efforts.
Program bands	For the 2027 National Competition, program bands are based on the average number of schools participating in each state from 2022 through 2026.
State certification	State Directors certify guaranteed-allotment teams under applicable competition results and eligibility rules. States with multiple guaranteed allotments shall publish and use the hybrid advancement procedure required by Section 5b.
Unused team roster spots	USAD may convert unused team roster positions into individual qualifier spots, according to published deadlines.
Invited individuals	Individual advancement is available to eligible decathletes whose schools do not qualify to attend the National Competition as a team. For 2027, the initial planning number is 70 individual seats, with additional seats available if approved venue capacity, partial team rosters, or unused team slots create additional capacity. Each participating state with at least one eligible individual decathlete receives an initial allocation of one individual spot, subject to available capacity. The National Advancement Committee may hold back up to six individual spots for discretionary apportionment, with priority consideration for the host state and XS, S, and M programs. Remaining individual spots are distributed through the 2027 band-based supplemental allocation process, and declined or unfilled spots may be reapportioned under the published timeline.
Individual reapportionment	Remaining, declined, or unfilled spots may be allocated by USAD under the published reapportionment process.