



Athlete commission guide to effective advocacy and the Code of Integrity for Sport and Recreation

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About this guide

Elite sport brings opportunity but also risk. Pressure, dependency and power imbalances can leave athletes vulnerable to harm. Safeguarding is not about limiting excellence, it is about making sure performance is never achieved at the cost of safety or dignity.

The Integrity Code is designed to make sport and recreation safer and fairer for everyone.

This guide supports athlete commissions to advocate for safe sport in the high-performance environment and to ensure athlete voices are heard in the implementation of the Code of Integrity for Sport and Recreation (Integrity Code) by their national sporting organisation (NSO).

This guide has been developed as part of the Wāhine Toa Leadership Programme. It is not an official publication of the Sport Integrity Commission Te Kahu Raunui (Commission). However, it has been informed and supported by the Commission. For official guidance and information on integrity topics, athlete commissions should refer directly to the Sport Integrity Commission.

How to use this guide

This guide is designed to help athlete commissions engage confidently and effectively with their NSO in the adoption of the Integrity Code. If your NSO has not yet adopted the Integrity Code, this guide can also be used to help advocate for its adoption and influence a sporting culture that reflects strong integrity principles.

The best time to use this guide is before or at the early stages of adoption, ensuring athlete voice is embedded from the beginning.

This guide should be read alongside the Commission's Guidance on Adopting the Code of Integrity for Sport and Recreation, particularly the five-step adoption and implantation process:



Figure 1: Sport Integrity Commission: Guidance on adopting the Code for Integrity in Sport and Recreation
<https://sportintegrity.nz/assets/integrity-code/guides/code-adoption-guide-2025-interactive-1751344280.pdf>

This guide follows the same stages outlined in that process. At each stage, it will:

- Explain what is happening
- Clarify the goal for athlete commissions
- Provide key questions to ask
- Suggest practical actions

Why the Integrity Code is important for athletes

The Integrity Code sets minimum standards for NSOs to:

- Keep people safe
- Provide clear complaint handling
- Prevent abuse, bullying and discrimination
- Ensure fair processes and accountability

Adoption directly affects athletes. This is an opportunity to ensure the Integrity Code works in practice, not just on paper.

What Integrity Code adoption means for NSOs

Adopting the Integrity Code is more than agreeing to it. It requires practical change, documented processes and ongoing oversight. Your NSO must:

- Update policies and complaint processes
- Communicate clearly with members
- Provide role-specific education
- Implement protections and safeguards
- Review and improve over time

Athlete commissions should act as proactive partners. This means:

- Asking to be consulted during policy drafting
- Requesting key documents and timelines
- Ensuring responsibilities are clearly assigned
- Securing involvement in ongoing oversight

Where athlete commissions can be involved

This section outlines how athlete commissions can have meaningful engagement with the NSO at each stage of adoption. This section follows the Sport Integrity Commission's Guidance on Adopting the Code of Integrity for Sport and Recreation five-step adoption and implantation process:



Please note, this guide combines the Adopt and Grow stages into one step for athlete commissions.

Stage 1: Understand

At the early stage of adoption, the focus is on awareness and engagement. This is about understanding:

- What the Integrity Code is
- Why your NSO is considering adopting it
- What the timeline is
- When and how athlete voice can be included

Your goal at this stage is simple: make sure athletes are informed early and involved at the right time.

Key questions

- Have athletes been told that adoption is being considered?
- Has the NSO explained in plain language what the Integrity Code is?
- Has the NSO explained why it matters for athletes, for example safety, fairness?
- Does the NSO understand the minimum standards under the Integrity Code?
- Has the NSO identified the main integrity risks in the sport?

Practical actions for athlete commissions

- Request an early briefing from your NSO on:
 - What the Integrity Code is
 - Why adoption is being considered
 - What it could mean for athletes
 - The expected timeline
- Share your athlete commission's insights on current integrity risks.
 - For example, what behaviours cause concern? Where do athletes feel unsafe or unsupported?

You do not need to design solutions at this stage, just make sure athlete realities are visible from the start.

Stage 2: Plan

At this stage, the NSO is deciding how it will adopt the Integrity Code. This includes

- Reviewing current policies
- Identifying gaps
- Setting timelines
- Assigning responsibly

Your goal at this stage is to ensure athlete voice is built into the plan and not added at the end.

Key questions

- Is there a clear plan and timeline for adoption?
- Who is responsible for the work?
- When will athletes be consulted and what is the consultation plan?
- Has the NSO identified gaps in the current policies?
- Are athlete welfare risks included in the planning?

Practical actions for athlete commissions

- Ask to review the adoption plan or road map. When reviewing consider the following:
 - Is there a clear timeline?
 - Are there scheduled points where athletes can give input?
 - Is there a plan to test whether athletes understand the new processes?
 - Is someone clearly responsible for delivery?
- Request involvement in reviewing draft policies before approval. When reviewing consider the following:
 - Is this easy for an athlete to understand?
 - Do flowcharts or diagrams make sense?
 - Are protections such as confidentiality and no retaliation clearly stated?
 - Where will these policies be located, and will athletes know how to find them?
- Ask how and when athletes will be consulted. Consider:
 - How will athletes be consulted? Surveys, meetings, written feedback?
 - How will feedback be recorded and considered?
 - Will athletes see the final version before approval for publication?

At this stage your role is to help shape the plan, policies and processes to reflect real athlete experiences.

Stage 3: Implement

At this stage, your NSO is putting the plan into action. This includes:

- Finalising and approving policies
- Communicating changes
- Training staff and members
- Introducing new complaint or reporting processes

Your goal at this stage is to make sure the Integrity Code works in practice, not just on paper.

Key questions

- Have athletes been clearly informed about what has changed?
- Are policies easy to find and understand?
- Is the reporting process clear and accessible?
- One of minimum Integrity Code standards is the prohibition of retaliation or victimisation in relation to complaints and dispute resolution. Are there protections against retaliation if an athlete makes a complaint?

Practical actions for athlete commissions

- Ask for a plain-language summary of key changes for athletes
- Request a walkthrough of the complaints or reporting process
- Look for retaliation and victimisation information and clauses
- Encourage information sessions or education for athletes
- Gather feedback from athletes on whether the new processes feel safe and usable

At this stage, your role is to check whether the system is practical, accessible and trusted by athletes.

Stages 4 and 5: Adoption and growth

Adoption is not the end of the process. At this stage the NSO should have the Integrity Code operational but also should be reviewing how it is working in practice and making improvements over time.

Your goal at this stage is to ensure the system is monitored, trusted and continually improved for athletes.

Key questions

- Is the NSO reviewing how the Integrity Code is working in practice?
- Are athletes being asked for feedback?
- Are integrity risks reviewed regularly?
- Is there transparency about what has improved or changed?

Practical actions for athlete commissions

- Ask for an annual integrity update. This could be a summary of policy changes, improvements or statistics where appropriate.
- Gather athlete feedback and share with your NSO. Consider seeking information about the following:
 - Do athletes understand the process?
 - Would they feel safe using the process?
 - Are there any new concerns?
 - Share themes of your findings with your NSO

At this stage, your role is to ensure that athlete voice is not forgotten after adoption, athlete input is maintained and trust and integrity grow with the sport.

Athlete checklist

Use this checklist to bring the guide into action.

It supports athlete commissions to move from awareness to influence, ensuring the adoption of the Integrity Code leads to safer environments, stronger accountability and genuine athlete trust.

Stage 1: Understand

- Athletes know that adoption is being considered
- The Integrity Code is explained in plain language
- The timeline for adoption is clear

Stage 2: Plan

- There is a clear adoption timeline and plan
- Athletes are included in the consultation plan
- Draft policies are provided to the athlete commission
- Policies are easy for athletes to find and read

Stage 3: Implementation

- Athletes know what has changed
- A plain-language summary is available
- Reporting pathways are clearly explained
- Complaint process is tested for clarity and accessibility
- Athletes have shared feedback

Stages 4 and 5: Ongoing review

- Athletes are regularly asked for feedback
- Emerging integrity risks are discussed
- An annual integrity update is provided
- Themes from athlete feedback are shared with the NSO
- Improvements are communicated transparently