



# **International Rafting Federation**

## **Strategic Plan**

**2019-2022**

# Background

International rafting sports were developed after the first international rafting competition was organized in 1989 by a small group of USA rafters in cooperation with Russian rafters who created a peace initiative called 'Project RAFT'. 'RAFT' was an acronym for *Russians and Americans For Teamwork*, and rafting competition was used as a vehicle to bring rafting athletes from the USA and the Soviet Union together - along with more than 50 teams of rafters from other nations around the world - to demonstrate how rafting sport could serve to unite nations in a way that government leaders had not. The first competition was held on the Chuya River in Siberia, with subsequent Project Raft competitions being held in on the Nantahala River, USA (1990), Reventazón and Pacuare Rivers, Costa Rica (1991) and Çoruh River, Turkey (1993).

In 1993, *Project Raft* was discontinued after the Turkey event, primarily because of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the resulting economic collapse, which left the growing international movement without an organiser. In 1994 the participants decided to organise a world rafting championship, and Italy offered to host the event on the Dora Baltea River. Unfortunately, the Italian organisers surprised competitors with an unexpected aberrant competition format and judging. This unwelcome development, and the loss of a formal organising body, caused many key participants to realise the need to form a democratic international organisation to develop a common set of race rules and objectives that represented the interests of the majority of international rafting athletes.

In 1995 and 1996 the idea of creating an international federation dedicated to rafting sport continued to be discussed, and took hold when international rafting competitions fell under the sponsorship banner of the Camel (RJ Reynolds) Tobacco Company and became known as the Camel White Water Challenge (CWWC). During this time a formal set of disciplines and race rules were created.

Rafting sport's first organising Congress was held in Augsburg, Germany in May 1987 where the first Bylaws (Statutes) were adopted and a board of directors was elected. It was decided to call the new organization the International Rafting Federation (IRF). The original written proposals, submitted by Ms. Lee Porter of the USA who became the IRF's first President, outlined the general governance framework for the new federation. The IRF was legally incorporated in the state of Idaho, USA where it obtained its 501(c)(6) not-for-profit status. CWWC races in 1998, 1999, and 2000 were designated as IRF World Rafting Championships.

Strategic restructuring of the IRF took place in 2001 under President Peter Micheler of Germany when the CWWC was discontinued after laws were enacted that prevented tobacco sponsorship of sporting events. In the meantime, the IRF continued with steady growth without a major sponsor as more national federations were formed and accepted as members. In January 2006, the first revision of the IRF statutes was made to simplify statute articles to reflect how the IRF was actually being managed. Rapid growth continued until the global economic crisis began in 2008. In 2007 a five-year Strategic Plan was adapted under President Rafael Gallo of Costa Rica to help guide the IRF, however the unexpected economic downturn during this period prevented many goals from being achieved. Over the next several years the IRF experienced a period of slow growth and stagnation, as did all sports unaffiliated with the Olympic movement, due to a lack of available financial resources.



The next pivotal strategic dialogues took place in 2014 when new strategies were introduced by President Joseph Willis Jones of USA/Chile and Secretary General Sue Liell-Cock of South Africa. These were frank discussions and an admission by the officers and BoD of the IRF that the limited financial resources of the IRF (that at that time had a total budget of only around US\$10,000) and total reliance on an all-volunteer staff was a major obstacle for further development. The outcome of these debates resulted in a consensus to grow IRF's financial resources by increasing membership fees and World Championship competition fees in order for the organisation to have the additional funding needed to fulfil the expectations of member nations and athletes. An Extra-Ordinary Congress was called at the 2014 World Rafting Championships in Foz do Iguaçu, Brazil, and the Congress voted overwhelmingly to restructure membership and competition fees accordingly.

Further strategic changes were voted into action by the overwhelming majority of voting members at the 2015 Congress, and again at the 2017 Congress, when major changes to the IRF Bylaws were introduced by President Jones to help modernise, professionalise, and streamline the operating structure of the IRF. Key changes included (among others) the creation of an Executive Committee, an Athletes Committee, an Independent Ethics Committee governed by a formal Code of Ethics, and the restructuring of the BoD and various administrative committees.

As the world economy slowly improved, the IRF focused on achievable objectives, based on one-year, tightly focused strategic plans that were used primarily as internal guides and informative statements. These plans provided short-term roadmaps leading to the creation of a draft strategic plan by the Executive Committee in October 2017 and again in January 2018 prior to applying for GAISF membership. The resultant final strategic plan is detailed here. It is the intention of the IRF Executive Committee to revisit and revise this strategic plan every four years.



# Objectives

This four-year strategic plan was developed primarily by the IRF President and Secretary General, in close consultation with members of the IRF BoD and various IRF Administrative Committees, and input from key individuals active in IRF activities around the globe. It spells out our vision and values, our core strategies, and the tactics for achieving them.

As consensus developed, it became clear that the IRF's underlying theme was to grow the global rafting family beyond the traditional strongholds, strengthen and professionalise internal procedures, adapt and incorporate widely accepted sports protocols (such as the WADA anti-doping protocols) for all major IRF races, and pursue additional sources of income - particularly through the growth and wider acceptance of the GTE (Guide Training and Education) Program and by securing major commercial sponsorships.

Key elements include continuing to improve the quality of our events and activities for both elite and grass roots athletes, and seeking greater recognition of the IRF within the international sports family. We shall focus on increasing the public face of rafting sports, making them more engaging on the world stage. Central to these goals, we will continue to maintain a commitment to the rafting culture values that began with *Project RAFT* and have helped to make rafting sports unique and grow so rapidly: friendship and comradery between competitors and nations, a focus on athletes, the inclusive nature of all participants, and a healthy mix of serious competition with good fun.

It was also decided to double our efforts towards strengthening all of areas of the IRF necessary to gain recognition by GAISF/SportAccord and thus give rafting greater recognition as a legitimate and mature sport by the international sports community, and to continue with a renewed effort to take rafting to the Olympic Games.

The IRF Executive Committee, BoD, Administrative Committees and staff will be using this strategic plan to guide our decisions over the next four years leading up to the 2023 IRF Congress. We see it as a document that will help us make explicit decisions about our activities, program investments, and priorities based on strategic considerations within the context of our limited resources. We are hopeful that the IRF and our member organisations can continue to flourish and provide the showcase that, in the long term, will benefit everyone in rafting sports.

## Social, Physical and Economic Benefits

Rafting is a form of exercise that promotes well-being and wholesome physical development. Adults and youth alike benefit socially from rafting activities, providing them opportunities to meet and build relationships with others. Participating on a rafting team helps members to form lasting friendships with people who share their passion.

Children are especially drawn to rafting activities: it allows them to explore their environment, develop muscle strength and coordination, and gain self-confidence. It also increases flexibility, fine and gross



motor skills and is related to the development of a wide variety of physical skills, including those involved in other sports. A growing phenomenon that is fully supported by the IRF are rafting competitions that are used in a number of places around the world to uplift disadvantaged and troubled youths. Rafting competition helps to give these young people purpose and a "family", and the success of such efforts has been remarkable. For example, the 2013 Youth Men's World Rafting Champions were a team composed of Russian orphans; and, a company that sponsors the uplifting of troubled youths through rafting stepped up to be the hosts of the 2018 European Rafting Championships.

Rafting contributes to the economy of many regions, which in turn may contribute to the protection of rivers from exploitation by hydroelectric power generation, diversion for irrigation, and other destructive development. Additionally, white water rafting trips can promote environmentalism, having the potential to develop greater awareness of the importance of environmental stewardship and general environmental behaviour.

Of particular interest is the fact that in many rural regions that contain rivers suitable for tourism, the major source of income for local residents is work as river raft guides. The IRF is very active in these areas by providing opportunities for low cost training and certification. In some particularly hard-hit areas, the IRF has provided these services for free as was done for river guides in Nepal after the devastating earthquake in April 2015 destroyed the rafting tourist industry and left them without an income.



# Participation

The 2017 *Topline Report on Outdoor Recreation Participation* conducted by the USA based Sports and Fitness Industry Association (SFIA), reports that there was an annual average of 4.02 million persons in the USA who participated in rafting sports between 2007 and 2016. This greatly exceeds annual participation in similar sports during the same time period that are already on the Olympic programme such as white water kayaking (1.86 million) and surfing (2.59 million), and compares favourably to sport climbing (4.59 million).

Although there is no similar survey to the SFIA survey conducted on a world-wide basis, the IRF conservatively estimates that rafting sports are currently enjoyed by more than 20 million people world-wide each year.

## Mission Statement

### What do we want to achieve over the next 4 years?

- Rafting to attain wider recognition amongst all sports bodies and sports observers.
- To continue to reach as broad an audience as possible with our sport.
- To be accepted as a member of GAISF/SportAccord.
- To ensure that the IRF is suitably funded so that all our projects achieve and exceed high quality expectations.
- To support and promote the global advancement of rafting sport.

### The International Rafting Federation (IRF) seeks to:

- Serve as the undisputed international governing body of all rafting sport, with responsibility for sanctioning world championships and other international rafting events, establishing uniform rules of competition, setting standards for and recording of world records, and representing rafting sport within the Olympic sports movement;
- Promote rafting throughout the world and foster the establishment of new national rafting associations, advising them on all rafting activities and general management;
- Promote and raise public awareness of and lobby for official recognition of rafting as sport; and
- Provide an international forum for discussion of all aspects rafting sport.



## Values of the Organisation

- **Continuum** - A lifetime of the rafting lifestyle. The IRF believes that rafting sports are accessible over an entire lifetime, proven by countless real-life examples.
- **Passion** - Rafters have a passionate enthusiasm for the sport. Whitewater rafting is especially popular among adventure seekers, but is enjoyable for general outdoor lovers as well. It generates excitement, exhilaration, emotional attachment, and a sense of belonging to the natural world.
- **Community** - There exists a lifestyle aspect and culture that is embraced by the global rafting community. Rafting offers a unifying spirit that leads to lifelong friendships, camaraderie, teamwork and loyalty which transcends cultural, geographic, political and religious differences.
- **Inclusiveness** - The IRF requires that its Member associations be open to participation without regard to race, religion, national origin, gender, or sexual orientation, and that there be a democratic process for governance of such associations.



# SWOT Analysis:

## Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threats

### Strengths

- The IRF is widely recognised as the world governing body for rafting by the rafting sport global community.
- Rafting is an attractive, exciting, enviro-friendly sport with high visibility as a tourist and recreational activity.
- Athlete participation demonstrates a strong gender balance.
- The IRF offers a well-developed schedule of international competitions with World Championship and World Cup events already fully funded and scheduled for 2019 and 2020.
- Rafting sport offers a special attractiveness to young people.
- Rafting is a relatively new sport, with a fun and cool image.
- Rafting is easy to participate in at all ages.
- Rafting enjoys a broad familiarity of most people due to the popularity of recreational rafting.

### Weaknesses

- Little public relations presence or serious contact with international sponsors or major sports media.
- Extremely limited financial resources.
- Public perception of rafting as a purely recreation pursuit or tourist activity rather than a serious sport.
- Perception that rafting is a high-risk activity only suitable for adrenalin junkies.
- Lack of spectators or viewing audience outside of the core racing community.
- Not all IRF Members have institutionalised governance or recognition through their NOC or NSA.
- Struggle to maintain consistent professional management and communications based on limited financial resources and the global dispersal of key personnel.
- Disparity of resources between largest and smallest member organisations.
- Developing nature of many member organisations (especially outside of Europe) makes it hard to respond to a growing need for engaged volunteers at the international level.

### Opportunities

- Many possible ways for the IRF to support member organisations.
- Recognition by GAISF/SportAccord to open up doors for government funds to our members, assist in building organisation credibility, and grow networking opportunities with established international federations.
- The commercial aspects of ROC (Rafting Outfitter Certification) market remain virtually untested.



- Networking with the massive recreational and tour rafting industries, and equipment manufacturing industries around the world.
- Networking with river conservation and environmental organisations around the world.
- Position rafting sports as an outstanding vehicle for teaching life skills as well as athletic ones.
- Continue to position the IRF GTE program as the global standard for rafting guide certifications.
- Continue to grow rafting sport participation by both youth and senior athletes.

## Threats

- A small minority of members have grown impatient by the hindered movement in getting IRF rafting recognised by the IOC and the perceived national funding that might accompany this recognition. This impatience was recently exploited (Jan 2018) to form a rafting organisation in direct opposition to the IRF which has caused a destructive division within rafting sport, fostered confusion and disruption, and taken valuable time away from unified progress towards constructive tasks and development.
- World and Continental Championship venues must be hosted at quality locations, be backed by experienced organisers, and receive adequate financing to ensure their success. This combination of factors is often difficult to assemble, making very few bids for these events acceptable.
- A very competitive market for international sponsorship, and a general lack of interest in broadcasting non-mainstream sporting events, makes it difficult to gain exposure and increase financial resources through conventional means.

# IRF's Vision of the Future: 2019 and Beyond

- General public believes that rafting sports and activities are a lifetime pursuit and lifestyle across age/gender/race/geography/skill levels/disciplines.
- IRF becomes a full member of GAISF/SportAccord.
- IRF gains acceptance and recognition by the International Olympic Committee.
- There are 70+ countries with active rafting sports participation and a stable governance structure recognised by their NOC or NSA.
- IRF develops additional co-operative working relationships and partnerships with national and international organisations that share similar ideas and goals.
- IRF regularly sanctions popular national, continental, and world “Rafting Festivals” around the globe.
- IRF has acquired one or more global sponsors.
- IRF has a steady revenue stream sufficient to hire and retain talented staff and fund approved projects.
- IRF rafting sports become a part of mainstream broadcast media like Eurosport, Sky and ESPN.
- IRF continental rafting championships are regularly organized and hosted on all continents.
- IRF regularly receives a plethora of viable world rafting championship bids to choose from, especially for venues on established artificial courses and world-renowned white water rivers.
- IRF maintains a full calendar of IRF sanctioned competitions and a central registration system for all IRF competitors.
- IRF maintains a successful central registration system for GTE workshops, rivers, certified guides, trip leaders, instructors and assessors.
- Most national government regulatory bodies accept the IRF GTE program as the ‘gold standard’ for certifying commercial raft guide qualifications.
- IRF is a serious candidate in discussions regarding participation in the IOC Summer Program of the future.
- IRF develops, funds, and manages a successful Rafting Outfitters Certification (ROC) program and similar programs.
- Most raft equipment manufacturers share an IRF information brochure in their equipment packaging.



# International Rafting Federation's

## Five Strategic Goals

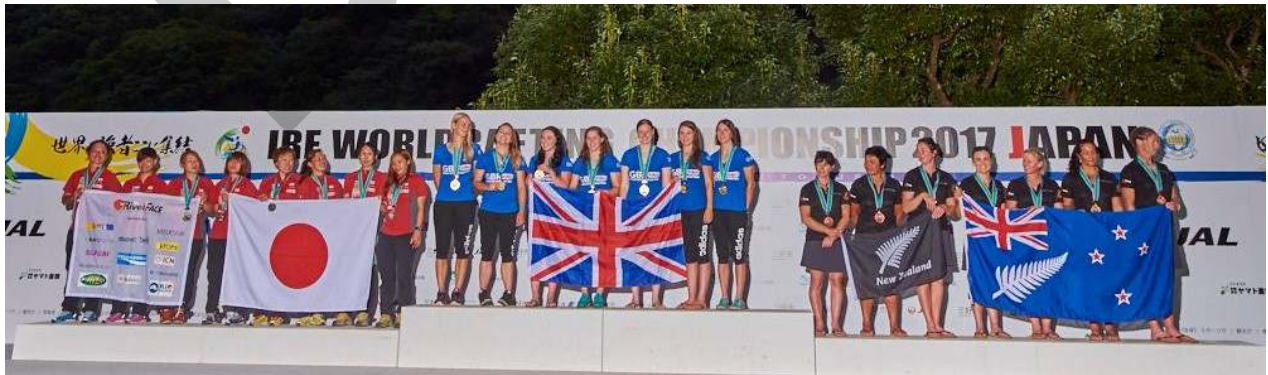
The pivotal goals for the IRF for the next four years are specific in nature, easily measured, actionable, achievable within existing financial restraints and defined timeframes. In essence, the IRF's strategic goals will progressively take the IRF to its next level of performance and keep it there.

1. Strengthen position as the only legitimate global rafting federation.
2. Support member organisations more fully.
3. Expand media exposure of Rafting.
4. Enhance event attractiveness.
5. Create a stronger financial position.



**STRATEGIC GOAL #1**  
**STRENGTHEN POSITION AS THE ONLY LEGITIMATE**  
**GLOBAL RAFTING FEDERATION**

OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	TASKS
<p><b>Acquire greater recognition within the sports world.</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Seek membership in sport federation umbrella organisations.</li> <li>2. Fully leverage unique qualifications.</li> <li>3. Increase visibility of IRF.</li> <li>4. Introduce rafting sport to influential persons.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Obtain GAISF/SportAccord recognition.</li> <li>2. Expand the GTE program to all countries and areas where commercial rafting occurs. Pro-actively offer expert advice and services to government and not-for-profit organisations in need of such help.</li> <li>3. Submit IRF articles and posts to trade and sports publications that reach our target audience.</li> <li>4. Invite high profile sports officials to IRF events.</li> </ol>



## STRATEGIC GOAL #2

### SUPPORT MEMBER ASSOCIATIONS MORE FULLY

OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	TASKS
<b>Engage strategies that will help National Federations meet common goals.</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Improve National Federation funding possibilities.</li><li>2. Help developing National Federations meet NOC or NSA recognition requirements.</li><li>3. Establish Associate member relations with organisations that will be beneficial to National Federations.</li><li>4. Help underperforming national teams by providing access to expert resources.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Obtain GAISF/SportAccord recognition. Introduce to possible sponsorship contacts.</li><li>2. Provide guides/templates with governance and fiscal/financial advice on best practices.</li><li>3. Pro-actively contact suitable organisations in member nations.</li><li>4. Develop available coaches pool and publicize.</li></ol> <p>Identify key people for rafting sports in all countries.</p> <p>Create educational materials (videos and documents).</p>

**STRATEGIC GOAL #3**  
**EXPAND MEDIA EXPOSURE OF RAFTING**

OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	TASKS
<p><b>Develop media exposure (both TV and Online) that can attract larger audiences to the sport.</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Maximize rights holder advantages.</li> <li>2. Strategic competition structure and dates that support high quality content for consumption.</li> <li>3. Build global platforms for content distribution.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Explore territory by territory media agreements. Determine territory exposure and strategic showcasing of rafting. Balance exposure of sport with commercial value.</li> <li>2. Strategically position all events to maximise media exposure. Determine a hierarchy of importance of events. Sell a logical story of events to media outlets.</li> <li>3. Obtain long-term agreement with media partners that ensure good exposure and reliability for the sport. Promote own channels of distribution of content. Explore other partners involvement in IRF media strategy plan (eg. Suppliers, manufacturers, sponsors, private events etc).</li> </ol>

<p><b>Improve the visibility of rafting sport worldwide and promote rafting systemically by effective channels of communication.</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Build uniform brand identity at events.</li>   <li>2. Consistent timing of events and regular content production that allows to build a story and regular news for spectators.</li>   <li>3. Enhance level and consistency of reporting at events and build the IRF brand as a recognised and reputable Rafting content source.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Invest in content creation teams at events. Determine online strategy and TV strategy for consistent messaging and operations.  Connect NF and Organiser's Media personnel with IRF and build global network for sharing and distributing content.</li>   <li>2. Formalise competition scheduling and timing to maximise Rafting exposure. Regular programming across the months should be the key objective.</li>   <li>3. Resource more staffing to ensure consistent quality content at each IRF event. Outline IRF Media operations plan for all IRF events.</li> </ol>
--	--	---

**STRATEGIC GOAL #4**  
**ENHANCE EVENT ATTRACTIVENESS**

OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	TASKS
<p><b>Improve/redesign the current selection of R4 disciplines with an eye on future inclusion into the Olympic Programme.</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Development of events for Olympic Games and Paralympic Games.</li> <li>2. Ensure IRF targets exceed the IOC measurements for Olympic inclusion.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Target events in all disciplines that could be considered for Olympic and Paralympic Games.</li> <li>2. Determine roadmap for achieving IOC measurements for each event.</li> </ol> <p>Obtain IOC template for measuring Olympic Sports performance. Meet with IOC technical staff regarding assessment of Olympic Sports.</p> <p>Draft plan to tackle measurements where IRF requires further work.</p>





<p><b>Organise World Rafting and Continental Championships to the highest quality and standard.</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Re-examine the requirements for events.</li> <li>2. ICF Contract revision.</li> <li>3. Enforce quality control of events delivery.</li> <li>4. Pro-active bid solicitation.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Assess previous events and determine good practices for each organizational area. Determine financial plans and event costs to enable realistic bidding budget forecasts.</li> <li>2. Redraft the IRF Contract showing obligations and include Event Delivery Manual.</li> <li>3. Assessment of event and monitoring processes to be strictly adhered. Draft contingency plans for all eventualities.</li> <li>4. Create sales package that presents the IRF product, highlighting the advantages of hosting an IRF premiere event. Research possible venues options. Make contact with venue controllers to present IRF package and negotiate terms.</li> </ol>
---	--	--

<p><b>Develop Event Delivery Manuals for IRF Events.</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Draft Event Delivery Manuals for Organisers.</li>   <li>2. Make manuals legally binding in bidding process for events.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Collate all applicable technical rules, organizational procedures/protocols and completion timelines for all disciplines and event levels. Liaise and discuss requirements with successful organisers of past events. Format, draft and produce Event Delivery Manuals.</li>   <li>2. Publish Event Delivery Manuals.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Develop new formats and/or disciplines to showcase Rafting.</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Roll out different exploratory formats and/or disciplines (eg. R2, Rescue Race, Raft Cross, Buoy Slalom).</li>   <li>2. Identify promising format and/or disciplines for development.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Test new competition formats. Research spectator experience of current Rafting events. Develop new rules for the new formats. Host events.</li>   <li>2. Determine budget and select one or two exploratory events for development. Set goals for participation and for media exposure for these events. Implement plan. Quantify the success/failure of the project.</li> </ol>



**STRATEGIC GOAL #5**  
**CREATE A STRONGER FINANCIAL POSITION**

<b>OBJECTIVES</b>	<b>STRATEGIES</b>	<b>TASKS</b>
<p><b>Search for additional sources of funding.</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Acquire a global sponsor.</li> <li>2. Expand and modernize the GTE program.</li> <li>3. Online merchandise sales.</li> <li>4. New certification and/or licensing programs.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Research demographic market and platform. Create a contact list of sponsorship possibilities. Create a great sponsorship proposal. Make contact with the decision maker. Follow up leads.</li> <li>2. Grow the instructor base by actively recruiting suitable instructor candidates. Create systems that make it easier for instructors to host workshops. Expand the publication and distribution of the GTE workshop calendar to reach more guide candidates. Launch an online database system.</li> <li>3. Contract with online distribution company. Create and license merchandise.</li> <li>4. Create rafting outfitter and equipment manufacturer certifications.</li> </ol>