



Competition Architecture

U.S. Soccer AGM

February 22, 2026

Why Now

Many across the membership are looking to U.S. Soccer for leadership, clear direction, and a shared understanding of where the landscape is headed.

A clearer competition structure is foundational to delivering better experiences, broader access, and long-term system health



Creates a shared understanding of how competitions are structured and how different levels of play fit together



Aligns competitive environments with participant goals and developmental needs at each stage



Supports entry, movement, and choice across the system without forcing a single pathway



Establishes baseline expectations that scale appropriately with level of play to support positive, safe experiences



Reduces disconnection and overlap by clarifying roles and relationships across the ecosystem

This competition architecture will continue to be refined collaboratively with membership as part of the pathways strategy

How We're Refining the Initial Competition Architecture

Ways We're Making Progress

**DIVISIONS DEFINITION &
STRATEGY**

**TRAINING / GAME STANDARDS
& ENVIRONMENT BEST
PRACTICES**

COMPETITION ARCHITECTURE

Today's
Focus



- Engage membership segments through MOUs and working sessions
- Identify defining characteristics of each segment
- Validate segment definitions with Pathway groups / members

- Build a three-pillar, research-backed, standards framework
- Co-develop player-first standards with USSF Sporting, aligned across segments
- Pressure-test and refine standards to support a unified player pathway

- Synthesize standards and segment definitions into a future-state structure and divisions
- Socialize the initial model with stakeholders and refine based on feedback

Work is progressing toward a June 2026 vision that converts today's strategic direction into concrete future-state models and pathway recommendations

This Competition Architecture Delivers Improved Experiences

Designed to deliver better outcomes across the system through clarity, connectivity, and purpose

MORE PARTICIPANTS

- Clear and accessible entry points at multiple levels, lowering barriers for new participants to join the system
- Structured pathways that allow participants to progress or shift levels without leaving the ecosystem
- Tiering that reflects intent and readiness, not just results or resources
- Feedback-informed mobility, allowing participants to move within the structure without penalty
- Lower cost and complexity at introductory levels, supporting retention and long-term engagement

MORE QUALITY EXPERIENCES

- Purpose-driven tiers that align competition intensity, training expectations, and outcomes
- Clear pathways between levels informed by performance and readiness
- Best-on-best environments at higher tiers, supported by aligned and integrated competition models
- Greater emphasis at younger ages and broader tiers, prioritizing development, enjoyment, and safety
- Clear expectations and accountability for quality, safety, and experience across all tiers

REDUCED FINANCIAL BURDEN

- Clear tiering based on objective criteria, reducing costly league hopping and unnecessary travel
- Localized and regionalized competition within tiers to minimize travel and time burden
- Tiered standards that right-size investment while protecting top-tier quality
- Defined connectivity between levels that reduces duplicative fees and re-entry costs
- Reduced duplication of products and services through clearer system roles and integration



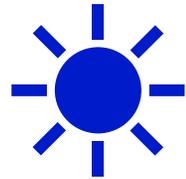
Defining Environments, Not Organizations (WITH YOU)

Guiding Principles of the Competition Architecture



OUTCOMES FIRST

Together, we're defining the outcomes & needs at each level of play **before** addressing roles, responsibilities, or structures



CLARITY ENABLES CHOICE

Clear expectations create flexibility – once “what needs to be true” is understood, **organizations can determine how best to align, partner, or deliver** against those expectations



YOU DETERMINE YOUR HAT(S)

Organizations may contribute in **one or more parts of the pathway** when they opt in by meeting the standard and commit to delivering what that level of play requires

What This Competition Architecture Is And Is Not

WHAT THIS IS

- A national organizing framework that brings clarity to how we believe competitions should be structured across local, regional, and national levels
- A system that aligns competition environments to participant goals, from broad-based play through pre-professional pathways
- A shared language and set of expectations that helps reduce disconnection while preserving diversity of models
- A framework that supports member-led competition delivery with clearer relationships between tiers and segments
- A foundation for alignment and accountability, designed and expected to reduce, and not add, cost, complexity, or administrative burden

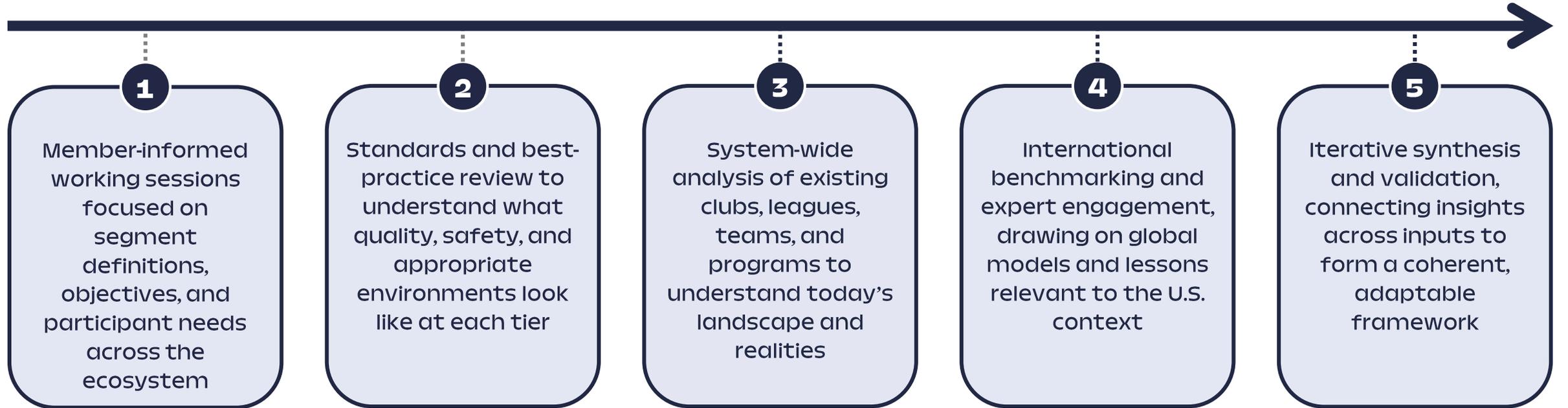
WHAT THIS IS NOT

- Not an attempt to dictate where any specific organization sits within the current structure
- Not a change to present-day governance, sanctioning authority, or member responsibilities
- Not a mandated pathway, ranking system, or promise of advancement
- Not a one-size-fits-all model that ignores local or regional realities
- Not a mandate that requires organizations to participate above the level they are ready or resourced to support



Competition Architecture, Developed Collaboratively

Built through collaboration, analysis, and global perspective through input with the Pathway Group, grounded in the realities of the U.S. Soccer ecosystem

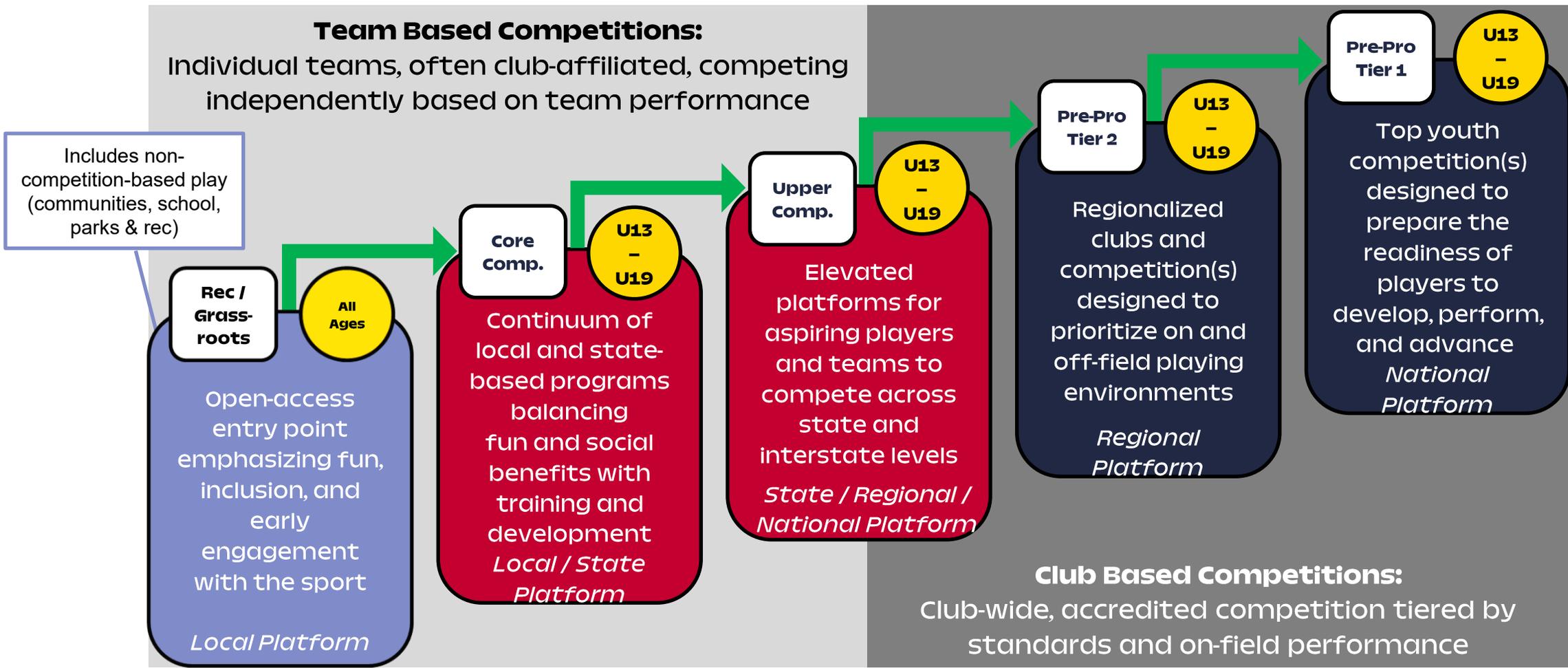


Pathways Group participants including, but not limited to:



U.S. Soccer Proposed Competition Architecture

Clear pathways from grassroots entry to professional development across five competition tiers with opt-in participation based on standards



Competitive & Recreational Segments

From high-performance competition to introduction to the game, primarily focused on team-based formats

Recreational / Grassroots **All Ages**

Key Stats	<p>PLAYERS: Open-access grassroots entry emphasizing fun, inclusion, and participation</p> <p>COMPETITION: Community based play, small-sided games (U3 – U12), festival formats over standings,, everyone plays philosophy</p>
3-5 Months	
1-2x per Week	
8-15 Games	
Local Play	

Core Competitive **U13 – U19**

Key Stats	<p>PLAYERS: Enjoyment focus, social experience primary, multi-sport & casual participants with structure</p> <p>COMPETITION: Local league play, state tournaments, minimal travel, weekend-focused schedule, community events & festivals</p>
6-8 Months	
2-3x per Week	
12-20 Games	
State & Local Play	

Upper Competitive **U13 – U19**

Key Stats	<p>PLAYERS: College aspirations, balancing soccer with other activities, well-rounded development priority</p> <p>COMPETITION: Regional play, invitation pathway to pre-pro showcases, highest level of team-based play, merit-based promotion/relegation</p>
6-9 Months	
2-3x per Week	
15-25 Games	
Regional & State Play	

EXAMPLE STANDARDS CATEGORIES

- Safeguarding & player safety
- Minimum Playing Time Requirements
- Match Day Roster Size Limits
- Coaching Licenses
- Documented Training Programs
- Consistent Coaching Curriculum
- Player Retention Models
- Player Development Philosophy
- Squad Size Limits



Pre-Professional Segment

Players on the pathway to Professional and Division 1 College Soccer participating in a club-based format

Pre-Pro Tier 2 **U13 - U19**

Key Stats	PLAYERS: High-level, college-oriented development emphasizing recruiting exposure
6-9 Months	
3-4x per Week	COMPETITION: Regional focus, 2-3 national showcases/year, structured leagues with playoffs, training prioritized over travel
30-40 Games	
Regional Play	

Pre-Pro Tier 1 **U13 - U19**

Key Stats	PLAYERS: Pro/D1 pathway, professional academies & top amateur youth clubs
10+ Months	
4-5x per Week	COMPETITION: National play with regional concentration, best-on-best weekly, 10+ month calendar, strategic showcases
35-50 Games	
Regional Play	

EXAMPLE STANDARDS CATEGORIES

- Coaching Licenses
- Minimum Playing Time Requirements
- Match Day Roster Size Limits
- Individual Development Plans
- Documented Training Programs
- Consistent Coaching Curriculum
- Player Retention Models
- Player Development Philosophy
- Squad Size Limits



Programs & Services across the Pathway

Improving alignment of roles and responsibilities across the ecosystem is foundational to strengthening support for participants at every level

Administration	Operations	Development
Focuses on rules, policy, compliance, risk mitigation, and the official processing of membership data.	Includes logistics, day-to-day delivery of soccer programs.	Focuses on improving the quality of the game, educating participants, and increasing participation numbers.
Competition Sanctioning	Competition Management	Coaching Education
Safeguarding & Risk Management	Facilities	Referee Education & Development
Player Registration	Talent Identification Programs	Grassroots & Recreational Programming / Support
Member / Club Services & Support	Marketing & Comms	Community Engagement / Building



What This Could Look Like In A Future State

Central to this is evolving services and support to better align what is best delivered locally, regionally, and nationally

Future State Areas for Exploration

- **Club development & accreditation program management** requiring local oversight & support
- **Local competition sanctioning paired with cup competition operations** for all players within a territory
- **Aligned Talent Identification programming** connecting local to national player identification across all tiers of play
- **Growing the game through community-based efforts**, including grassroots and school partnerships
- **Participant registration with an efficient fee-allocation model** that supports local delivery of services such as coaching education, talent ID, safeguarding, and community programs.

Our priority is partnering with you to shape how these concepts come to life in ways that best serve participants



Participant Experience Across the Competition Architecture

Clarifying shared expectations across players, coaches, and clubs

	PLAYERS	COACHES	CLUBS
STATE / LOCAL	Participate in age- and level-appropriate competition while demonstrating commitment to learning, effort, and sportsmanship	Deliver developmentally appropriate training and match environments that prioritize player well-being and a positive experience	Operate programs aligned to local needs and levels of play with clear communication to players and families
REGIONAL	Compete in increasingly challenging environments and demonstrate readiness for higher-intensity play	Adapt training to elevated competitive demands while supporting player progression and feedback	Align programs to regional competitive expectations and operate responsibly within the broader ecosystem
NATIONAL	Compete in best-on-best environments aligned to long-term goals while representing the game with professionalism and accountability	Meet elevated national standards while advancing long-term player development principles	Align operations to defined segment and tier expectations while supporting transitions to collegiate, professional, and national pathways



From Competition Architecture To Role Clarity Across The Ecosystem

Areas of Emphasis

Refine Competition Architecture

- **Clarify divisions & definitions by tier** (player, parent, coach experience)
- Detail **recommended competition standards** by tier
- Highlight **recommendations for formats & structures** across divisions

Define the support needed (Services)

- **Outline the services required** to deliver the experiences by tier
- **Define the elements behind each service** (activities, tools, capabilities)

Determine where & how services are delivered

- **Local** where proximity & relationships matter
- **Regional/National** where scale, consistency, or risk requires it
- **Hybrid** when standards are shared but execution is local

Establish roles & responsibilities across ecosystem organizations to achieve our shared goals:

- More participants
- High quality participant experiences
- Reduced financial burden

Today's Takeaway: No Decisions are Made, Your Input is Needed, and We're on Track to Deliver a Future State Vision in June

