



**Alberta Orienteering Association**

**Strategic Plan  
2024-2026**



### THREE YEAR STRATEGIC CYCLE

The 2024 – 2026 Alberta Orienteering strategic plan builds on the efforts of the previous plans to develop orienteering as a life-long activity for Albertans that provides opportunities for orienteers at all levels of the sport. Our priorities for these next three years are:

- Increased awareness of orienteering.
- A strong and unified orienteering community.
- A seamless sport delivery system.
- Organizational excellence.

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## INTRODUCTION

Development of the Alberta Orienteering Association's 2024 – 2026 strategic plan built on the previous 3-year strategic plan as many of the challenges and opportunities for developing the sport of orienteering in Alberta have remained the same. However, several external factors (societal, environmental) have changed, and so we needed to evaluate these changes in light of how they might affect the growth of the sport of orienteering in Alberta.

The plan was influenced by the recently developed Orienteering Canada's (OC) strategic plan with input from a survey of the board members of the two main orienteering clubs in Alberta, the Edmonton Overlanders Orienteering Club (EOOC), and the Foothills Orienteering Club (aka Foothill Wanderers Orienteering Club; FWOC). The plan took into account an evaluation of performance data such as membership levels, participation, programming, finances, and competition success from previous years.

We envision a future where orienteering is:

- Recognized by Albertans as a rewarding outdoor activity for all ages;
- Full of opportunities for all, from competitors to recreational participants;
- Continues to be a welcoming, active, and inclusive community.

## AOA VISION

**Our vision:** Albertans of all ages and abilities recognize and embrace orienteering as an enriching outdoor sport that promotes lifelong physical and mental well-being.

## AOA MISSION

The AOA is committed to leading the growth and development of orienteering in Alberta by:

- coordinating provincial initiatives,
- representing Alberta orienteers nationally,
- advocating for the sport, and
- hosting orienteering events.

## AOA ROLE

The AOA's role is to co-ordinate provincial initiatives, provide resources, and facilitate technical development, with the overall aim to further the development of orienteering in Alberta. On behalf of the local clubs, Alberta Orienteering:

- Is the voting member for Alberta orienteers in Orienteering Canada.
- Through the AOA's executive director, provides support to local clubs and outreach to areas without established clubs.
- Coordinates training of officials and coaches utilizing Orienteering Canada's certification courses.

- Links the insurance coverage under Orienteering Canada’s insurance policy to the events sanctioned and supported by the AOA and hosted by the local clubs.

## AOA VALUES

Since our founding in 1974, the AOA’s aspirations and actions have been guided by core values drawn from the sport of orienteering and the orienteering community. In particular, we value:

- fairness,
- volunteerism,
- fostering an inclusive community,
- respect for each other and the environment.

The AOA remains dedicated to fostering true sport values in the orienteering community.

## BACKGROUND

Orienteering is a sport that requires navigational skills, using a map and compass to navigate from point to point in diverse and usually unfamiliar terrain, and normally moving at speed. It is traditionally performed outdoors in natural settings and provides a stimulating blend of mental and physical challenge.

Founded in 1974, the Alberta Orienteering Association (AOA) is a non-profit sporting organization that leads the development of the sport of orienteering in the province of Alberta. An elected, volunteer board of directors governs and manages its affairs. The Association is a member of Orienteering Canada, which is recognized by the International Orienteering Federation as the national governing body for orienteering in Canada.



In Alberta, there are two orienteering clubs, one each in Calgary and Edmonton, that have about 1100 members and over 12,000 participants between them (2023 figures). However, the membership numbers have not yet recovered to those of the pre-COVID-19 pandemic period.

The clubs run weekly local events from April to October in city parks and river valleys, and on selected weekends, in the forests and prairies of Alberta. The AOA and its subsidiary clubs have also organized the Alberta Provincial Championships each year and hosted national orienteering championships (1985, 1995, 2002, 2012, 2016, 2022) and international championships (World Cup 1990, Asia Pacific Orienteering Championships 2002, North American Orienteering Championships 1990 and World Masters Orienteering Championships 2005). In addition, Alberta orienteers filled key

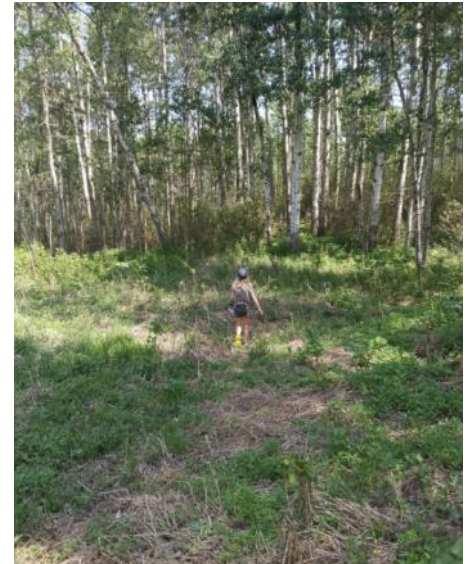
roles for national and international events hosted by neighbouring provinces – Canadian Orienteering Championships in Saskatchewan (2007) and North American Orienteering Championships in British Columbia (2010) and in the Yukon (2018).

## CURRENT STATE

### ***Challenges and Opportunities***

There still exists the perennial competition with other activities, whether other sports, recreational activities, attraction of electronics (games, social media), to which has been added challenges to acquiring permissions to access the land for our events, and the impacts of the changing climate such as increased forest fires (and their impact on air quality), and drought or floods (that can radically alter our maps).

However, the sport of orienteering has a unique opportunity in the light of recent research that has demonstrated the benefit of this sport for both old and young participants. A study by Waddington and Heisz (2023)<sup>1</sup> showed that “... orienteering may be an effective intervention to prevent age-related cognitive decline in spatial navigation and memory”. At the other end of the age spectrum, the Canadian Pediatric Society, released a position statement in 2024 that risky play is necessary for healthy childhood development. Of the eight categories of risky play they advocate, one is: “Play with risk for disappearing or getting lost. Exploring play spaces, neighbourhoods, or woods without adult supervision, or in the case of young children, with limited supervision”<sup>2</sup> ... a perfect definition of the sport of orienteering.



The challenge is how the AOA can leverage these findings to further develop the sport of orienteering in Alberta.

### ***Local Clubs***

The two orienteering clubs in Alberta independently develop sport and recreational opportunities for their members and the general public. They have also built robust junior and school programs. They organize events locally, provincially (Alberta Orienteering Championships), and nationally (Western Canadian Orienteering Championship, Canadian Championship), the latter two with the support of the AOA. These local orienteering programs are strong and independent, but also collaborate with the AOA to support



<sup>1</sup> “Orienteering experts report more proficient spatial processing and memory across adulthood”, Waddington and Heisz, accessed from <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36662692/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://cps.ca/en/documents/position/outdoor-risky-play>



initiatives such as coaching and officials training, training camps and policy development in support of external and internal requirements.

### **Membership and Volunteers**

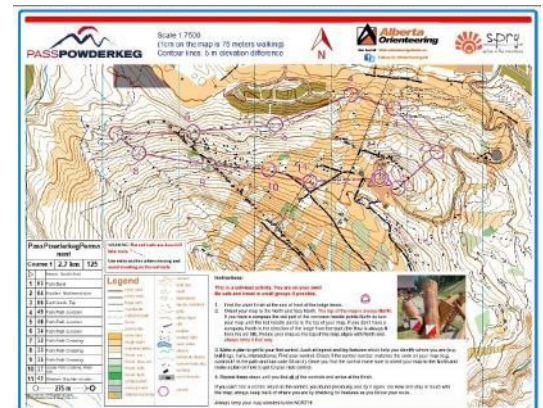
The orienteering community in Alberta is comprised of many long-time members who are passionate about orienteering. These people include founding members, former national champions, former club presidents, AOA past-presidents, national board members and highly qualified orienteering officials. Over the past fifty years, these individuals have selflessly volunteered tens of thousands of hours. It is imperative that the knowledge and experience of these volunteers be passed onto others in the volunteer ‘workforce’.



We have a cadre of very able and experienced officials in Alberta, but their average age is steadily increasing. While some members have been trained in the past few years, they are still mostly entry-level officials: we need more officials qualified at the higher levels that are necessary to host major competitions. We will continue to use Orienteering Canada’s revised officials training program, providing an opportunity to reinvigorate officials training in the province. It is crucial that we act soon to capitalize on the knowledge and expertise of retiring officials.

### **Maps**

Orienteering maps are the foundation of our sport but destruction of terrain by off-road vehicles or forest fire, declaration of environmentally sensitive areas by governments, difficulty in accessing grazing areas, obtaining permits in the Bow Corridor, and landowner issues have restricted access to our mapped areas. It is important that we not only lobby for continued access to our forest maps, given the recent trend of provincial departments and land stewards to deny access for our events but also seek out new areas where access is easier.



### **Programs**

Junior training, and school programs (elementary to high-school) are provided by the local clubs while Orienteering Canada delivers the high-performance program for athletes vying for positions on the national team. What is missing is more national-level local competition and international event experiences for high-performance and pre-high-performance athletes.

While school and junior programs have become increasingly successful, it has highlighted the gap in participants between juniors and adults: thousands of children

have participated in orienteering events in Alberta annually, as compared to hundreds of adults who have participated in orienteering events.

We hope to address these issues in this strategic plan.

## STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

### 1. INCREASED AWARENESS OF THE SPORT OF ORIENTEERING

We are proud of our sport and seek to celebrate it whenever possible. We work to increase and maintain a positive profile and enhance public awareness of our sport, our clubs, and the AOA. We offer a welcoming environment to people as they engage in our sport.

### 2. SEAMLESS SPORT DELIVERY SYSTEM

We work with our clubs and outreach programs to develop, deliver, and promote programs and services that provide positive experiences for our members at all levels of participation. We provide an inclusive and seamless sport delivery system in the province that will increase the membership and participation numbers in orienteering.

### 3. A STRONG AND UNIFIED ORIENTEERING COMMUNITY

We support existing and developing clubs to increase capacity and engagement of more Albertans in active living. We support and encourage orienteers as they strive to attain their individual goals. We have valued partnerships that build capacity and sustainability at the local and provincial level.

### 4. ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE

We work to ensure organizational excellence through the continued development of an effective governance structure and organizational leadership that will contribute to increased long-term stability and sustainability of the AOA and orienteering clubs in Alberta.



## STRATEGIC PRIORITY #1: INCREASED AWARENESS OF ORIENTEERING

We are proud of our sport and seek to celebrate it whenever possible. We work to increase and maintain a positive profile and enhance public awareness of our sport, our clubs, and the AOA. We offer a welcoming environment to people as they engage in our sport .

### A. Offer more opportunities to increase the awareness of orienteering

#### Key Tactics:

- Offer more and regular “Try It” events and neighborhood rambles with a map.
- Promote our events by advertising to neighborhood or community associations and community newsletters.
- Create more permanent courses with QR codes in outreach locations.
- Use “wearable” staff or volunteer shirts to increase approachability at events.
- Keep collaborating with schools and other organizations to introduce the sport of orienteering.
- Post videos and statistics on social media about school programs

### B. Support the capacity building of existing and new clubs

#### Key Tactics:

- Maintain sustainable membership growth in a minimum of four zones in Alberta by providing support to existing clubs and outreach programs.
- Work with clubs to help with their unique needs and challenges when requested (e.g. FWOOC and SOGO programs).
- Explore opportunities to fund club programs and staffing needs.
- Run more beginner-focussed programs for adults, as well as children (especially in outreach programs).
- Coordinate meetings on adult training in orienteering, for leaders and coaches in order to collaborate on best practice.



### C. Improve the profile of the sport through internal and external communications

#### Key Tactics:

- AOA communications are professional-looking, up-to-date, and provide information that is relevant for clubs and partners.
- AOA works to increase media awareness of both the sport of orienteering and key individuals in the sport.

- Increase presence in social media. Explore opportunities with clubs to collaborate and on how to improve our social media presence. (e.g. hiring internship student). Have specific people who do media relations and communication to help boost social media presence.

#### ***D. Celebrate our people and our history***

*Key Tactics:*

- AOA regularly recognizes its movers and shakers through a combination of consistent informal recognition, and nominating orienteers for appropriate volunteer recognition opportunities.
- AOA celebrates the successes of AB clubs, orienteers and shares stories with media.
- Plan an AOA 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration in 2024.
- Plan annual, meaningful, volunteer celebration events.

#### ***E. Maintain outreach programs***

*Key Tactics:*

- Maintain membership growth in well-established zones (3 and 6...refer to section B. map) and focus on building more membership through the existing clubs in adjacent zones (2 and 5)
- Help create new orienteering clubs where communities have established a successful outreach program (Red Deer, Airdrie, Cochrane).
- When people from a new area approach the AOA expressing interest in developing an orienteering program, every effort will be made to provide support, but without taking resources away from existing outreach areas.

## STRATEGIC PRIORITY #2: SEAMLESS SPORT DELIVERY SYSTEM

We work with our clubs and outreach programs to develop, deliver, and promote programs and services that provide positive experiences for our members at all levels of participation. We provide an inclusive and seamless sport delivery system in the province that will increase the membership and participation numbers in orienteering.

### **A. Develop and Support Officials**

#### *Key Tactics:*

- Support O200/300 Officials training by supporting their attendance and participating in organizing events needed for their certification.
- Support clubs with O100 course delivery as needed.
- Develop active mentorship system and focus on major events to help complete officials certifications.
- Send an annual notice to officials to provide relevant information and reminders to update their credentials.



### **B. Develop and Support Coaches**

#### *Key Tactics:*

- AOA offers and supports ongoing development for new and experienced coaches through NCCP coaching courses and learning opportunities.
- Orienteering coaching courses are offered across the province on a regular basis.
- AOA creates and facilitates a strong network for coaches to share ideas and best practices and support each other.
- Collaborate with clubs to support first aid certification for coaches.
- Clarify and communicate requirements for first aid certification for events and programs.



### **C. Develop and Support Mappers and Maps**

#### *Key Tactics:*

- Coordinate mapping projects with clubs to meet the need of the sport.
- Support outreach mapping projects to be able to expand outreach events and programs.

- Organize or subsidize mapping courses to help mappers develop.
- Facilitate bringing in foreign mappers for big events if needed.
- Develop new mapping/ map sharing policies.
- Collaborate with Orienteering Canada (OC) regarding Canadian Orienteering Festival 2025 events, to put on courses for officials and mappers.



***D. Support orienteers of all ages in pursuing their personal level of excellence with diverse competition opportunities.***

*Key Tactics:*

- AOA helps clubs provide a pathway for athletes to develop from novice through podium performance, guided by OC established long-term athlete development (LTAD) stages.
- Fill the gap between junior programs and adult training. For example, the AOA will support clubs that provide junior programming with ways to keep young orienteers engaged with the sport and potentially pursuing participation in the OC Team Canada program.
- Consult with other clubs to determine best practices that could fill the gap between juniors and adults.
- Support and promote high performance involvement by supporting athlete group events and training camps.
- Provide grants to Alberta Team Canada athletes for international travels.
- Create more opportunities and facilitate social connection building at orienteering events.
- Create more diverse events for all participants such as more forest training and social events
- Develop and facilitate creating a “sport training” guide (coaches guide) to help orienteering beginners transition to more technical orienteers.
- Focus more on communication and invitations reaching out to the clubs’ newcomers. Use newsletters and event invitations and more face-to-face conversations at events to help people feel welcomed.

### STRATEGIC PRIORITY #3: A STRONG AND UNIFIED ORIENTEERING COMMUNITY

We support existing and developing clubs to increase capacity and engagement of more Albertans in active living. We support and encourage orienteers as they strive to attain their individual goals. We have valued partnerships that build capacity and sustainability at the local and provincial level.

#### ***A. Foster a collaborative, aligned, and engaged orienteering community***

*Key Tactics:*

- AOA is a “point person” to initiate or support collaborative meetings and projects
- within the province and as part of the wider orienteering community.
- Continue to connect and collaborate with other organizations from the sport, education, recreation, and health sectors to increase orienteering profile.



#### ***B. Support volunteers and staff***

*Key Tactics:*

- The AOA is a lead in initiating or supporting collaborative meetings and projects within the province and as part of the wider orienteering community.
- Continue to connect and collaborate with other organizations from the sport, education, recreation, and health sectors to increase orienteering profile.



#### ***C. Ensure a diverse and inclusive organization***

*Key Tactics:*

- Provide support programs for underrepresented groups.
- Develop policies and programs that reinforce an inclusive culture, and practices that embrace, respect, and value differences in people regardless of gender, age, racial background, Aboriginal background, disability, or sexual orientation.
- Continuously review policies for a robust Safe Sport framework.
- Maintain and promote the recreational categories at orienteering events as a means for new orienteers to become involved with competition, as well as welcoming the LGBTQI2S community with non-gender-based categories.

## **STRATEGIC PRIORITY #4: ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE**

We work to ensure organizational excellence through the continued development of an effective governance structure and organizational leadership that will contribute to increased long-term stability and sustainability of the AOA and orienteering clubs in Alberta.

### ***A. Ensure great governance***

#### *Key Tactics:*

- Conduct policy reviews to ensure that the AOA has current, transparent, effective and efficient governance.
- Develop and maintain the AOA Board of directors' skills, and develop succession plans.
- Maintain up-to-date risk management policies and practices.
- Maintain existing financial management protocols and practices.
- Keep up to date staff and volunteer role descriptions and management policies.
- Maintain executive director - paid staff position - to support AOA operations.

### ***B. Increase and Diversify Revenue Sources***

#### *Key Tactics:*

- AOA actively pursues funding sources such as government funding, grants, and other fundraising opportunities.
- AOA invests in outreach and programs that can contribute to revenue that can then be used to advance the sport in under-served areas.

### ***C. Use the best organizational processes and ensure they align with related organizations, but especially our funder's (SPAR, AGLCC) requirements***

#### *Key Tactics:*

- Keep up to date with federal and provincial sport initiatives.
- Create partnerships and collaborations to support the Canadian Sport for Life movement and align with SPAR Accountability Framework and Orienteering Canada's strategic priorities.
- Maintain good communication with SPAR sport consultants and provide outstanding annual accountability reports.



## THE AOA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S ACTION PLAN FOR SPRING 2024

<b>Club conversations:</b>
Organize follow up meeting regarding new grants.
Encourage regular Wednesday night Try it events. Schedule events for spring to start the season with new members engagement
Reach out to clubs regarding collaboration hiring social media support person.
Continue conversation and FWOC board support by regular follow up meetings throughout the year regarding club support.
Organize zoom meeting for coaches regarding adult training
Collaborate with clubs to support first aid certification for coaches.
<b>Communication:</b>
February deadline for nomination of Alberta volunteers to OC hall of fame
Newsletter quarterly- once events are established
<b>AOA major events</b>
Help organize summer training camp with FWOC
ED and AOA board start planning the 50 y anniversary celebration event.
Support AOC plans and organization
AB team travel accommodation and AOA events campgrounds booking
Apply for permits as necessary
<b>Sport Development</b>
Ask clubs about – NCCP workshops as needed.
Track O100 classes run by clubs.
Follow up regarding O400 course at COF 2024.
Organize zoom meeting for coaches regarding adult training
Clarify and communicate requirements for first aid certification regarding events and programs.
<b>Outreach</b>
Outreach membership registration set up
Outreach programs in schools
Set up programs in Airdrie and Red Deer focus (find coaches)
Ask FWOC about potential Canmore program support.
Collaboration regarding RD Sport Hall of Fame display activity set up.
Follow up with Crowsnest Pass outreach possibilities.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to all the members of the AOA Board of Directors and the Alberta orienteering community who took the time to review the plan and provide feedback. We greatly appreciated it.

The Alberta Government Sports, Physical Activity and Recreation (SPAR) ranch Association Development Program, and Orienteering Canada's strategic plan formed the foundation of this plan. Thank you for our sport consultants at SPAR and Orienteering Canada for the continuing support.



## REFERENCES

Active Alberta Policy (see pages 18-23):

<https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/b9c193cf-9dc3-4e15-8ed9-8c8961e9ad21/resource/e22bfd29-f397-4e34-8306-796526397ee8/download/5641678-2012-activealbertapolicy.pdf>

Orienteering Canada (OC) Strategic Plan:

<https://orienteering.ca/learn/about-us>

Orienteering Canada LTAD:

<https://skills.orienteering.ca/LTADStage/Intro#:~:text=Orienteering%20Canada's%20LTAD%20model%20has,stages%2C%20and%20Active%20for%20Life>



## APPENDIX A—IMPORTANCE OF MAPPING

Orienteering cannot happen without a map. An orienteering map is a specialized map that indicates not only contours or roads, but also the nature of the vegetation, small trails, and fine contour detail, that one would not get on a hiking-style topographic map. It takes many hours to first produce the base map, and then weeks of field-checking by highly specialized mappers who add the detail, based on what they see as they walk the area.

### Importance of a map database and version control

An orienteering race can be lost or won based on the smallest of details, so the maps have to be accurate and up to date to ensure a fair competition. Trails are created, trees grow or fall, and stream paths change. When the course planner for a new event checks the terrain, they may notice changes that are not on the current map. With the new software and technology available, it is possible for anyone to then make corrections to the map. But critical issues are: whether they were qualified to make a change and if their change was accurate, whether someone else made other changes, which map file is the most recent, and so on. It sounds trivial, but with a volunteer-based organization, without oversight or policies in place, map versions multiply, not all corrections get added to each version, and soon one does not know which the most accurate map is. This can lead to many lost volunteer hours, as well as a compromised competition.

AOA is currently collaborating with the clubs to create map version controls to protect and keep up-to-date with the mapping database in our province.

