

## 2026-28 RAF Sport Association Planning

# Process Guidance

**Owner(s):** Grants and Programmes Manager (RAFCF) and Deputy Director RAF Sport (DRS)  
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### Contents

1.	Introduction .....	1
2.	2026-28 Sport Association Planning Process .....	2
3.	Completing the Form .....	4
3.1	Strategy .....	4
3.2	Resources .....	5
3.3	Engagement .....	5
3.4	Activities .....	6
3.5	3YR Budget .....	7
3.6	Desirable Projects .....	7
3.6.1	Capital/Fixed Assets .....	7
3.7	Reporting .....	8
4.	Addressing Financial Shortfalls .....	8
4.1	RAF Central Fund – Sport Association Funding .....	8
4.2	Third Party Funders .....	8
4.3	Commercial Sponsorship .....	8
5.	Key Contacts .....	9

### 1. Introduction

Sport makes a significant contribution to the delivery of operational capability, personal and collective development and resilience. It is a core activity<sup>1</sup> that cannot be considered discretionary, but notwithstanding this and the multiple benefits that accrue for Defence, it is considered non-core for funding in large part<sup>2</sup>. As such, the delivery of recognised<sup>3</sup> sport in the Service is dependent upon non-public money.

To deliver varied and engaging programmes, Sport Associations rely on several income sources such as membership subscriptions, commercial sponsorships, occasional trading activities, charitable grants and donations. As of 2024, the majority of RAF Sport

<sup>1</sup> JSP 660, Sport in the UK Armed Forces, Pt 1, Chap 1, Para 1.

<sup>2</sup> Public funding is restricted to Category 1 and 2 sports, within tightly defined criteria, restricted to some infrastructure and travel.

<sup>3</sup> Defined in JSP 660, Chap 1, Annex E. Recognised sports are categorised as Category 1, 2, 3 or 4 which determines their eligibility for public funding and duty status.

Associations sit within the charitable construct of the RAF Central Fund, benefiting from layers of charitable governance that remove the legal responsibilities that come with being an independent charity trustee of an RAF Sport Association.

The Directorate of RAF Sport, together with the RAF Central Fund, provide a network of support to assure and enhance the delivery of RAF Sport. Working collaboratively with Sports Associations, planning is conducted to a 3-year cycle that aims to support best use of available resources from all sources.

## **2. 2026-28 Sport Association Planning Process**

### **Overview**

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The joint process for Sport Association Planning aims to build a picture of strategy, resources, engagement and activities of Sport Associations, giving context to a projected 3-year budget of essential activity.

All recognised RAF sports are required to participate in the Sport Association Planning Process for the period of 2026-28.

This information will go on to inform the screening process for allocating funds of the RAF Central Fund Sports Association Funding programme for the same period.

#### **Stage 1: Planning form completed by Sport Associations**

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- Share: Strategic plans and known/anticipated resources
- Establish: Core/essential engagements and activities, and associated costs (3-Yr Budget)
- Indicate: Desirable content above and beyond essential/core programme

#### **Stage 2: RAFCF funding allocations/grants are established**

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- Grants Department screenings and funding recommendation
- Recommendation reviewed by RAFCF & DRS
- RAFCF Committee reviews and final Board approval

#### **Stage 3: Addressing remaining shortfall(s) / desirable 'Wishlist' activity (BAU)**

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We will then continue to work with sports throughout the 3-year cycle to effectively manage and steward additional sources of funding (charitable and commercial) to meet as many of the remaining requirements as we can.

### **Timeline**

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The process for the 2026-28 planning cycle launches at the end of January 2025.

To be considered for funding, Sport Associations must return a completed form to [sportsfunding@rafcf.org.uk](mailto:sportsfunding@rafcf.org.uk) **no later than 1700 on Friday 4 April 2025.**

Submissions received after this date will not be considered for funding.

The RAF Central Fund Board will review and approve a funding recommendation in the summer of 2025, following which all sports will be notified of confirmed funding for 2026, and indicative levels for 2027 and 2028.

## Directorate of RAF Sport

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As we position the RAF as an exemplar in the provision of wholly inclusive and competitive sport, RAF Sport recognises that sporting systems should not be viewed in isolation. To flourish, they must exist within a healthy, connected and integrated sporting 'eco-system', increasing participation and competitive success by doing so. The RAF Sport Associations are at the heart of this system, driving and influencing its key components.

Your association strategy is the key start point for this, taking its lead from the RAF Strategy and the RAF Sport Strategy, both agreed by CAS. Your strategy should have a line-of-sight from both of these and be cognisant of the opportunity sport can offer in retaining people in the Service, attracting people too, and a vehicle for Defence Engagement (which may attract public funds) and wider engagement in society. The strategy tab allows you to codify your intent against all of these areas and add elements specific to your sport (your key objectives, issues and challenges) and illustrate the impact your strategy will have on the Whole Force.

RAF Sport will work with the associations to monitor and review the progress to provide evidence of the collective and individual value of sport, in parallel to providing improvements in the delivery of inclusive activity at all levels. We will also work to contribute to the wider UKAF and UK sporting system through athlete development and NGB pathways, to provide sporting and physical activity opportunities for all.

## RAF Central Fund

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The RAF Central Fund (the Fund) deliver annual funding to Sport Associations as part of a charitable mission and vision for RAF Serving Personnel to develop their full potential through sport and physical activity. This is delivered through a charitable allocation (merged) or grant award (non-merged) that funds recognised sports to deliver an engaging programme of activities.

The Fund's primary beneficiaries are serving RAF personnel. Support towards costs for non-serving Association members is only acceptable where expenditure is fundamental to Association activities or in irreducible spare capacity.

The Fund considers funding in line with the following priority levels:

1. Legal or Regulatory Requirement.
2. New Member Engagement.
3. Support of Development Level.
4. Support of Representative Level.
5. Desirable Support.

Within the 3-year funding cycle, an annual review of Sport Associations outcomes and impact will be undertaken before confirming the following years funding to ensure monies are being spent in line with the Fund's charitable objectives.

Whilst the Fund would like to support all reasonable Association funding requirements, with limited resources there can be no guarantee of funding.

The Fund will not support any items of expenditure that can be wholly funded at public cost, however it will consider support to part-finance an item or activity that attracts some element of public funding.

The Fund is unable to provide funding for any staff employed directly by an Association, including wages, insurance and travel. The hire of external coaches and officials is not considered as staff costs, unless the coach is a paid employee of the Association.

### 3. Completing the Form

#### Top tips

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- Grey cells are locked/protected and are either requests for information, have been pre-populated and/or contain formulas that will automatically update as you move through the form.
- White cells are open for data entry.
- Most tabs have a locked format and we recommend that any supporting narratives are as concise as possible.
- Should you need to expand certain sections, we have enabled the ability to 'add rows' in the Resources and Desirable Projects tabs.

**Sport Associations with sub-disciplines are to complete and submit a single form, articulating a prioritised summary requirement of all disciplines.** Any 'working copies' of the form provided by your sub-disciplines can be included as additional supporting information however these will not be actively reviewed within the screening process.

#### 3.1 Strategy

Whilst the vision has been pre-populated to ensure that Sport Associations align to a common purpose, we have left the Mission open for sports to update independently. We are keen to see how each sport interprets their contribution. Please provide a single succinct sentence to articulate the mission of your Sport Association.

#### RAF Sport Directives

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Please highlight how your Sport Association contributes to each theme as outlined in the RAF Sport strategy.

Context is outlined within the statement from the Directorate of RAF Sport at item 2.

#### Additional Section: Strategic Themes and Objectives

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Please provide headline insights to any established values, strategic themes, objectives and deliverables that your Sport Association is working towards.

Objectives and deliverables are important because they convert visions and missions into clear-cut measurable targets that can be tracked throughout an operating cycle. Understanding your outcomes and impact helps to demonstrate the value and contribution of your sport to the wider RAF Sport vision.

Whilst playing to the strengths of your sport, we broadly expect to see content aligned to the following outcomes:

- Association drives year-on-year improvements in participation, competitiveness, winning and value, through inclusive sporting programmes and activities.
- Members can participate in the sport at an appropriate level and access suitable competition, coaching and development support from their association.
- Increase in sport and physical activity participation and engagement at unit, station and representative level via a progressive development pathway.
- Through participation in RAF sport and physical activity, service personnel are better equipped mentally and physically to perform their RAF duty.

- Association is sustainable, efficient and effective and able to consistently recruit and retain new members and volunteers.

Where available, please also include any management/action plans to aid delivery as supporting document(s) alongside your submission.

### 3.2 Resources

Understanding the resources available to your sport against the requirements of your core/essential programme helps to articulate risks and dependencies, and will effectively highlight and evidence any financial shortfall.

Please share your current value in **reserves** and pop a note in to add context and/or justification for this number. Please also reference your **2023 total expenditure**. The remaining greyed out cells will populate automatically against content of your 3-year budget.

#### Context of projected income.

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Please detail all confirmed income, and any projections or in-progress opportunities that hold a higher than 50% likelihood of fruition at time of completion. This data should also be entered as total income in your 3-year budget.

**Please do not project or anticipate levels of funding provided by the RAF Central Fund.**

#### Physical Assets – Pooled kit and equipment.

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Please list any currently owned pooled kit and equipment (not capital by definition) that is well-used and likely to need replacing or refurbishing within the next 3-5 years.

- **Item:** can be a broad description i.e. 'Rep-level competitive kit' or 'NME/Grass roots kit/equipment'
- **Purchase value:** anticipated cost to replace or refurbish
- **Current value:** estimated re-sale value (if any)

Please do not include items consumable in nature that are relatively low cost and would only last a season or two. Please also consider the environment when purchasing and/or disposing of any kit and equipment.

Where appropriate and easily available, please attach a wider asset register alongside your submission.

Any intended purchase of new pooled kit and equipment considered essential to the delivery of your sport that does not replace an existing resource should be articulated as a Desirable Project in tab 7.

#### Capital/Fixed assets.

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Please list all currently owned items that are capital in nature (definition available at 3.6.1).

Where possible, provide context to their original purchase, current value, condition and anticipated lifespan.

### 3.3 Engagement

Detail your current **membership, volunteering, coaching and official** cohorts and any target levels for the end of the next 3-year cycle. When setting targets, consider natural attrition set against the scope of new member engagement initiatives.

**New Member Engagement (NME).** Increasing the number of serving personnel who take part in sport and physical activity remains a fundamental objective for the Fund, and therefore new member engagement remains a high strategic priority in the allocation of charitable funds.

Estimated budget for NME initiatives should reflect the total cost of hosting or facilitating attendance at the event. A short summary of requirement may include costs relating to:

- Coaching, officials and medical provision mandated by the NGB
- Entry fees and venue hire (where MoD facilities are not suitable or available)
- Consumables (bought recurrently and regularly, such as shuttlecocks and balls) and essential clothing and equipment, where purchased specifically for these initiatives.

Where part of an existing event or activity, such as the RAF Champs, please indicate what % of the overall event/activity is dedicated to generating new members and participants.

Further details can be found in the Fund's Sports Association Funding Policy, linked at 4.1.

**Development Pathway.** Please outline how the Association recruits new members and provide a breakdown of the Athlete/Coach/Official development programme (incl. what activity, when, for who and how often).

**Team Narratives.** Please give a summary of recent performance, any successes and your aspirations at each level of competition over the next 3-year cycle.

### 3.4 Activities

Please document your planned core programme of activity for the period of 2026-28, including estimated overall costs and a supporting narrative of intended outcomes.

It is anticipated that your core activities will consist of interservices, RAF Championships and other fixtures/events that are considered essential to your programme.

Non-core/essential activity should be articulated as a desirable project.

#### **Overseas Visits (OV's) and Training Camps (TC's).**

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With OV's and TC's subject to review and approval by the Directorate of RAF Sport, please consider the strategic relevance of your intended overseas activity both in terms of location and competition level.

Where possible, sports will be provisioned to deliver one OV or TC activity per year, per representative team. Calendar year placement is determined by the departure date of a tour. Participants will be limited to the maximum numbers as noted in JSP660. Any charitable funding (whether home or abroad) will be based on a per person rate up to a maximum of £225 with a minimum 20% Personal Contribution required per participant.

UKAF events are not applicable for charitable support through the Fund. Further details can be found in the Fund's Sports Association Funding Policy, linked at 4.1.

Please ensure this section reflects core/essential activity only. Additional content can be articulated as a Desirable Project.

### 3.5 3YR Budget

Detail the anticipated income and core/essential expenditure of your Sport Association between 2026-2028.

Cost centres directly align to those available in the accounting system. Please document content within the year that the activity takes place i.e. for a fixture taking place in January 2027, all relating costs should be entered in 2027, not brought forward into 2026.

Content should be placed according to source, and in line with the following categories:

	Merged	Non-Merged
<b>Designated (D)</b>	Self generated funds and reserves	N/A
<b>Restricted (R)</b>	External funding	External funding
<b>Unrestricted (U)</b>	CF Allocation	Self generated funds and reserves
<b>Trading Company (TC)</b>	Sponsorship activity	Sponsorship activity

Please remember that invoices cannot be split between charitable and trading sources. Policy of the Fund's Sports Association funding programme can be found linked at item 4.1.

For guidance on capital expenditure, please refer to 3.7.1.

Short narratives by line and by year should provide context to outlined requirements. Reasoning, such as '*extraordinary costs for hosting interservices*' or perhaps '*strategic focus on new member engagement*' should be reflected and referenceable throughout your form.

### 3.6 Desirable Projects

Desirable projects are additional activities that fall outside the scope of essential/core activity and are **not** included in the 3-Year budget.

See further information at 4 regarding possible funding streams.

#### 3.6.1 Capital/Fixed Assets

Capital projects relate to significant purchases fundamental to the delivery of your sport and do not attract support from public resources. Lack of available funds from the MoD is not an acceptable justification for support being provided by a charitable source.

An item of equipment is deemed to be a Capital/Fixed asset where it:

- has expected life of over a year; and
- is valued at over £5k.

**Capital projects should be entered as a 'desirable project' and not reflected within your 3-year budget.**

Due to the scale of capital projects, these should be mapped to a 10-year timeframe. It's acknowledged that costs are likely to be indicative at this stage.

## 3.7 Reporting

### Annual Reporting

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**Merged** sports are required to complete summary data and a short supporting statement in contribution to the RAF and RAF Central Fund's 2024 Annual Reports.

As independent charities or companies, **non-merged** sport associations are to produce a Trustees Annual Report (TAR) and Financial Statements, as required by the Charity Commission. Either the TAR or a concise narrative report on association activity is to be submitted annually to inform reporting and records.

### Future Impact Reporting – All Sports

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We would love to work more closely with Sport Associations to better understand the impact your activity has on RAF serving personnel. As a Committee, please complete the online wellbeing questionnaire on behalf of your sport. Those with recognised sub-disciplines are requested to submit one response per discipline.

### 2025 Requirements of Funding – All Sports

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Alongside planning for the 2026-28 cycle, a review is underway to determine how the Fund can provide better support to Sport Associations, to assure proactive application of funding across the year. We also be looking to extend our understanding of outcomes and impact achieved through charitable funding. We'll be in touch separately to discuss this further.

## 4. Addressing Financial Shortfalls

Any requirements articulated by Sport Associations that cannot be met through 4.1 will be logged centrally as reference material for wider opportunities.

### 4.1 RAF Central Fund – Sport Association Funding

A supporting policy, updated annually, is available here: [Sports Association Resource Hub](#)

### 4.2 Third Party Funders

RAF Sport provides a broad range of challenges that support and connect people, whilst making a significant contribution to the delivery of operational capability, personal and collective development and resilience.

Where activity overlaps with charitable aims, additional funding opportunities can be explored through charitable partners. The Fund stewards charitable funding from a variety of sources, including the annual allocation for sport and physical activity provided by Nuffield Trust for the Forces of the Crown.

### 4.3 Commercial Sponsorship

The network of commercial support for RAF Sport is growing. Whether part of a direct sponsorship, or an outcome of our wider work in this field – desirable projects articulated by Sport Associations will help us continue to drive and shape these opportunities.



## 5. Key Contacts

General enquiries should first be directed to: [sportsfunding@rafcf.org.uk](mailto:sportsfunding@rafcf.org.uk).

Claire Bunten  
Deputy Director RAF Sport  
RAF Halton

[Claire.bunten100@mod.gov.uk](mailto:Claire.bunten100@mod.gov.uk)

Hannah Booth  
Grants & Programmes Manager  
RAF Central Fund

[hbooth@rafcf.org.uk](mailto:hbooth@rafcf.org.uk)

Each RAF Sport Association has designated ambassadors from both the Directorate of RAF Sport and the RAF Central Fund. A list is available in the [Sports Association Resource Hub](#).