

What's Next to Rowing 2026

Coaching, inclusion and practical solutions for a stronger Rowing ecosystem

A dynamic morning of exchange, ideas and action brought together Member Federations, Continental Confederations, World Rowing Council and Commission members and staff to explore how Rowing can grow globally—while becoming more inclusive, sustainable and connected. The programme focused on three linked priorities: strengthening coaching pathways, promoting Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (GEDI) with the expansion of opportunities in Para Rowing.

A clear shared ambition: create a thriving Rowing ecosystem for all, with Member Federations and the five Continental Confederations actively contributing to the continued development of the sport.



From discussion to action

The 2026 *What's Next to Rowing* workshop was designed as a working session rather than a series of presentations. Participants examined strategic priorities, considered research and practical examples, and worked together to identify solutions that can be adapted within their own Federations.

GEDI: progress with purpose

Jacomine Ravensbergen, Chair of the GEDI Cross Commission and a member of the World Rowing Council, opened the strategic discussion with an update on progress in gender equality, diversity and inclusion.

The presentation highlighted upward trends in women's participation across athletes, umpires, coaches and leadership roles. Women now represent 30% of Member Federation Boards and 31% of Congress delegates. Gender balance among International Technical Officials has reached 32%, while representation at National Technical Official level has grown to 39%.

World Rowing has also been recognised by the IOC as a featured International Federation in the Women Coaches Good Practices initiative. This recognition reflects the organisation's progress and provides a platform for sharing practical approaches across sport.



The next priorities

The discussion also underlined that progress is not automatic. The 2026/2027 objectives include scaling development pathways for women officials and coaches, addressing drop-offs in women's representation in governance, and deepening the focus on women in high-performance coaching.

Other priorities are to improve data quality and reporting, embed GEDI across commissions and events, and ensure that inclusion remains a shared responsibility throughout World Rowing.

RECRUIT

- What motivates her?
- How do we market coaching to her?
- Open Proactive Transparent Recruitment

DEVELOP

- Providing and Promoting Support Networks
- Providing Accessible and Flexible Learning Opportunities
- Ensure the Organisational Culture Values Women in the Coaching Workforce

RETAIN

- Develop and Support
- Raise the profile of Women Rowing Coaches
- Create Role Models

Women in coaching: from evidence to implementation

Rosie Mayglothling, Head of Coaching Education at World Rowing, presented the [World Rowing Women's Coaching Toolkit](#) and research linked to it. The toolkit supports the **identification, recruitment, development and retention** of coaches, recognising that women remain under-represented in coaching—and that representation generally decreases at higher coaching levels.

A shared glossary helped establish a common understanding before participants explored the reasons behind the toolkit and the conditions required for women coaches to succeed.

The emphasis then shifted from information to implementation. In the first collaborative conversation, participants considered whether they had already used the toolkit, what challenges they had encountered and how those challenges could be addressed within their own Federations.

Collaborative conversations: turning experience into action

The first discussion focused on the World Rowing Women's Coaching Toolkit and the collaborative conversations gave participants the opportunity to move beyond broad commitments and discuss the practical conditions needed to strengthen women's coaching.

Working in groups, participants recorded their experiences on flipcharts and selected three practices to share with the wider workshop. The ideas were then gathered into a collective "wall of best practices"—a visible record of approaches that can be explored and adapted by Member Federations.

The exercise created space for honest discussion, while keeping the focus on solutions and practical next steps. While a limited number of participants had already used the World Rowing Women's Coaching Toolkit, either fully or in part, the dominant message was that awareness remains limited. Many participants had not yet encountered the toolkit, underlining the importance of stronger communication, visibility through Federation channels and practical support for implementation.

Flexibility, visibility and pathways

A recurring theme was the need for greater flexibility in coaching systems. Participants stressed that frameworks, roles and development opportunities should recognise family life, work commitments, and differing personal circumstances. Rather than expecting individuals to adapt to inflexible structures, Federations were encouraged to build flexibility into programmes from the outset and to support the wider culture change that this requires.

Participants also highlighted the value of visible role models and successful stories. Women sharing their own experiences, peer-to-peer coaching and case studies can make coaching more tangible and achievable for others. Examples of athlete-to-coach transitions, including Imogen Grant and Jack Dryden, showed how Federations can create clearer pathways for athletes who are approaching retirement or considering a new role in the sport.

The groups proposed that development programmes should offer retiring athletes opportunities to gain coaching experience, while Federations should actively create and promote coaching pathways for female athletes.

Awareness workshops, clear mission statements, communications requirements and allyship were also identified as practical ways to embed this work across the rowing community.



Para Rowing: building sustainable pathways

The second major focus of the workshop was the development of Para Rowing. Participants explored how Federations can build sustainable programmes, work effectively with National Paralympic Committees, and increase meaningful participation opportunities for athletes with disabilities.



Annamarie Phelps, World Rowing Vice President, joined a conversation on the realities of developing Para Rowing programmes. The discussion highlighted that participation depends on more than attracting athletes once. Sustainable programmes need environments in which athletes can be identified, developed, supported, retained and given opportunities to compete.

Start where you are, build on your opportunities

A key message was that Federations do not need to begin with a complete Para Rowing programme. Progress can start with understanding the local context, identifying potential athletes and partners, building knowledge, creating appropriate opportunities and developing step by step.

World Rowing is working to support this process by supporting Federations at every stage of this journey. Priorities include expanding education and training, strengthening education and support mechanisms, increasing access to competition and classification opportunities, and exploring a network of Continental Para Rowing Hubs to provide more consistent pathways for participation and progression. The ambition is to create sustainable pathways that enable more athletes to discover Rowing, develop performance, and access meaningful opportunities at national, continental and world level.

From ideas to recommendations

In the second collaborative conversation, participants regrouped to discuss what is required to start and sustain a Para Rowing programme and what would work in their particular contexts.

The strongest ideas were practical, adaptable and rooted in the realities of Member Federations.

Each group developed two flipcharts: one outlining the foundations of a programme and another capturing ideas that could be implemented locally. Participants then moved around the room, discussed the proposals and used stickers to vote for the ideas they would consider taking forward.

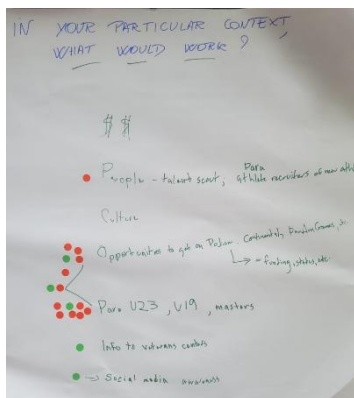
This format turned the room into a marketplace of solutions. It connected different experiences, made local knowledge visible and helped identify actions with potential beyond the workshop itself.

Participants agreed that inclusion needs to be visible in everyday practice: Para rowers should be included in coaching, peer-to-peer learning and leadership opportunities, and should be recognised as role models for others considering the sport.

Groups also called for stronger cross-sport collaboration. Dialogue with Paralympic and disability-sport organisations, as well as connections between winter and summer sports, can help Federations identify athletes, share coaching knowledge and widen the routes into rowing. Participants noted that recruitment should draw on competitions, para-athlete networks and other community partners, rather than relying on a single pathway.

Build capacity—and listen locally

The discussions made clear that a sustainable Para Rowing programme requires more than ambition. Capacity must be built through trained coaches, accessible facilities, appropriate equipment, funding, and better access to classification. Participants also emphasised the importance of ensuring that people and Federations in smaller countries can be heard, seen and supported in ways that reflect their local context.



Several practical ideas emerged: exploring new boat classes such as PR3 single sculls and PR2 single sculls; creating more competition opportunities, including time-handicapped formats inspired by the UK Masters model; and considering regional cooperation, including the potential for a South American championships. Para U23, Virtus International Athletics (VIA) and Masters pathways were also identified as areas where participation opportunities could grow.

The key message was to take a tailored approach. Federations should work with athletes, partners and allies to understand local needs, balance sport with work and family life, and offer meaningful opportunities for people to enter, remain and progress in rowing.

A shared direction

The workshop closed with a summary of the discussions and reflections on the ideas generated during the morning. Jean-Christophe Rolland, World Rowing President was invited to reflect on the conclusions of the two collaborative conversations before participants continued their exchange over lunch. He conveyed the message on the important work done, thanking the participants for their input and constructive conversations.

The morning was dense, dynamic and constructive. It combined strategic direction with direct experience and gave participants the opportunity to move from shared challenges to possible solutions.

The message to take back to Federations was one of collaboration: Rowing's future will be shaped by the willingness of Member Federations, Continental Confederations and World Rowing to learn from one another and act together.

Looking forward

The *What's Next to Rowing* workshop was more than a review of current priorities. It was an invitation to shape what comes next—to build coaching systems that are stronger, create opportunities that are more inclusive, and develop a rowing ecosystem that can thrive in every region.

Key takeaways

1. Progress needs measurement: Data can help identify progress, reveal gaps and direct resources where they are most needed.
2. Pathways must be accessible : Women officials and coaches need structured routes into development, supported by appropriate regional, national and continental entry points.
3. Inclusion is shared work: GEDI principles should be integrated into commissions, events, rules, safety standards and development programmes.
4. Para Rowing can grow progressively: Federations can begin with local partnerships, knowledge-building and realistic opportunities before developing a complete programme.
5. Conversation creates momentum: The collaborative exercises showed the value of bringing people together to exchange challenges, share practices and identify actions that can be implemented.

Rowing means working together: sharing what works, confronting what holds us back and turning collective ambition into practical action