



# The USET Foundation & USEF

by Leslie Potter



The USET Foundation focuses exclusively on fundraising for international competition in the seven FEI disciplines, including dressage.

**As the National Governing Body for equestrian sports in the United States, USEF is tasked with a wide array of responsibilities, from promoting the sport at an entry level to taking teams to the Olympic and Paralympic Games. US Equestrian serves the interests of the 28 breeds and disciplines that fall under its governance.**

The USET Foundation (formerly the United States Equestrian Team) is focused exclusively on fundraising for international competition in the seven disciplines recognized by the FEI: combined driving, dressage, endurance, eventing, jumping, para dressage, and vaulting.

“The USET Foundation was formed in 2003 to be 100% a fundraising organization in support of USEF’s high-performance programs and pathway,” said Bonnie Jenkins, Executive Director of the USET Foundation. “So while we are a separate organization, our mission and our purpose is exclusively to support those programs of the Federation.”

Both the USET Foundation and USEF are 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organizations, but Jenkins explains that there are advantages to keeping high-performance fundraising separate from NGB functions.

“One of the advantages is that we’re very focused on our role, which is fundraising and philanthropy, and the Federation is very focused on its role, which is sport governance and programming,” she said. “It’s nice to have that independence when we’re raising money for programs so there is no perceived or real conflict. People make gifts [to the USET Foundation] because they want to support the United States and our teams. There is no influence from these gifts on team selection or anything along those lines.”

USET Foundation grants make up about half of the funding for US Equestrian high-performance programs, and the programs also receive some funding from the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee. A significant portion of USEF revenue comes from sponsorships tied to high-performance teams

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and programs, while membership fees and investments, among other sources, make up the balance of the high-performance budget.

“Of the \$8.66 million that will be allocated to sport this year, some \$4.89 million will come from outside the Federation, and the USET Foundation is contributing \$3 million of that amount,” said Will Connell, Director of Sport at USEF. “The sport programs are not just high-performance, but also, for example, safety programs in eventing and some support to the development of licensed officials.”

### What is High-Performance?

To put it simply, the goal of high-performance programs is to send teams to represent the U.S. in international equestrian competition and bring home medals. But reaching that goal is more than physically transporting athletes to overseas events. High-performance funding is what creates the pathway programs that help identify up-and-coming equestrian athletes in the international disciplines, provides training opportunities, and supports them through their development into world-class competitors.

“The Federation dictates what high-performance is, not the USET Foundation, and that certainly has evolved over the years, because programs have expanded, which is wonderful,”

said Jenkins. “The programs have been able to expand because the funding has increased, so what once was high-performance was just the elite level, and that is no longer the case. High-performance is now the pathway, which starts at the emerging level to the development level and up to the elite level. The support that the USET Foundation provides is helping all of those opportunities along the pathway.”

“High-performance includes everything from horsemastership clinics to the FEI World Championships that will take place across seven disciplines in 2022,” said Connell. “The pathway for high-performance consists of emerging, development, and elite. We also support coach development.”

Examples of high-performance programs funded in part by USET Foundation grants include:

- Talent scouting and evaluation of horses and athletes with high-performance potential for inclusion in the sport pathways through the emerging lists
- Coaching for athletes at the emerging, developing, and pre-elite/elite levels
- Travel grants for FEI competitions
- European tours for youth and developing teams

USET Foundation grants help to fund educational opportunities for young and developing riders, such as the Robert Dover Horsemastership Clinic Week and Horsemastership Training series. These clinics are also available for all USEF members to audit on USEF Network.



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- Competitions such as the North American Youth Championships, Talent Search Finals, and U.S. Dressage Festival of Champions, which help prepare athletes for international competition
- Horsemastership Training sessions for young athletes
- Training and educational opportunities for coaches



USET Foundation grants provide a large percentage of the funding that brings teams to international competitions to represent the U.S. on the world stage.

### The Process

“Funding for USET Foundation grants comes from wonderful, generous individuals and family foundations,” said Jenkins. “The Federation handles marketing and corporate sponsorships, so we manage gifts from individuals and family foundations.”

Jenkins explained that donors to the USET Foundation will often pledge a certain amount to be given incrementally over a period of years. Those multi-year commitments, along with projected funds from any benefits planned for the year ahead, help the USET Foundation plan ahead in determining the grant amounts it will be able to pledge to USEF.

“We’re now able to forecast what the USET Foundation can contribute to the Federation based on historic giving results,” said Jenkins. “It does vary from year to year based on our pledge base and fundraising activity, as well as what the Federation sport program is that year.”

“We pledge a grant amount to the USEF at the beginning of the year, much like our donors do. Last year it was \$4 million, which

was our largest grant ever. This year it will be \$3 million, and we will pay that amount to the Federation over the course of the year. We don’t pay it in one lump sum because we still have a lot of that to raise when we make the pledge. It is a misconception that when we make a grant, we have \$3 million sitting in a bucket here and we can hand it over. Some has been pledged already and will come in throughout the year. We have to go out and raise the balance. As we have funding available, we send it over to the Federation in increments, and by the end of the year we’ll have fulfilled our grant commitment.”

Donors to the USET Foundation can opt to direct their gift to a specific discipline or they can donate an unrestricted gift to be used as needed for any sport program.

“An unrestricted gift is the best gift, because if the funds are needed one place or another in a particular year, the Federation has the discretion to do that,” said Jenkins. “When we make the grant, we let the Federation know, based on donor restriction, what percentage needs to go to each discipline and what percentage is unrestricted.”

The USET Foundation and its donors are committed to equestrian sports and U.S. team success on the world stage. In the previous quadrennial, the USET Foundation’s “Raising the Bar” campaign raised \$42.3 million from 2017 through 2021 with the postponement of the Tokyo Olympic Games. Of that, 71% goes to high-performance programs, 23% to the USET Foundation Endowment, and 6% as planned gifts. Along with founding contributors, there were more than 12,000 donors to the campaign, illustrating widespread support for the U.S. equestrian teams.

“Now more than ever, the Federation and the USET Foundation are in lockstep, and I know the Federation appreciates what we’re doing,” said Jenkins. “Every year, we go out there and make sure that we’re supporting the programs and the teams. We are so fortunate to have an equestrian community that really believes in the pathway programs, believes in our teams, and wants to support them. It’s something that we are very committed to and excited about doing each year, and we rely on the generosity of people in the equestrian community. Without them, our work would not be possible.”

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