



2026 USA SPIRIT NATIONALS GUIDELINES



TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 19

Competition for High School Game Day Cheer divisions (excluding Crowdleader™ Teams)

10:00 am – 7:00 pm

Anaheim Convention Center

FINAL AWARDS

Preliminary and finals competition for High School Group Stunt Advanced and Group Stunt Intermediate divisions

4:00 pm – 10:00 pm

Anaheim Convention Center

ANNOUNCEMENT OF FINALISTS AND FINAL AWARDS

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 20

Preliminary competition in all High School Show Cheer, Non-Tumbling, Crowdleader™ Teams, and Mascot divisions

8:00 am – 11:00 pm

Anaheim Convention Center

ANNOUNCEMENT OF FINALISTS

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 21

Finals competition in all High School Show Cheer, Non-Tumbling, Crowdleader™ Teams and Mascot divisions and Exhibition of 1st place performances in High School Group Stunt Advanced and High School Group Stunt Intermediate divisions

8:00 am – 7:00 pm

Anaheim Convention Center

FINAL AWARDS

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 22

**Preliminary Competition for all High School Song/Pom, Song/Jazz, and Pep Flag/Short Flag Divisions
Competition For High School Song/Pom Game Day Division**

8:00 am – 11:00 pm

Anaheim Convention Center

ANNOUNCEMENT OF FINALISTS

**Competition for all Junior High/Middle School/Elementary Cheer, Song, Group Stunt and Game Day Divisions
Competition for all Rec Divisions**

8:00 am – 2:00 pm

Anaheim Convention Center

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 23

Final Competition for all Song/Pom, Song/Jazz, and Pep Flag/Short Flag Divisions

8:00 am – 3:00 pm

Anaheim Convention Center

FINAL AWARDS

Please note the information above is a tentative schedule of events and is subject to change depending upon final enrollment for Nationals and facility requirements. **High School Game Day cheer divisions that competed on Saturday in 2025 will compete on Thursday in 2026.**

All High School divisions (including Crowdleader™ Teams) have the potential to advance to finals, excluding Group Stunt and stand-alone Game Day divisions.

Group Stunt Finals take place on Thursday.

Announcement of finalists will take place for specific divisions during awards ceremonies scheduled a few times per day or only at the end of the day. This is subject to change depending upon event operational needs.

NEW!!!! – Percentage of teams advancing from prelims to finals has increased for majority of divisions, with a minimum of **3** teams per division advancing. See below for details.

For ALL Show Cheer Novice (including Show Cheer Non-Tumbling Novice), Song/Pom Novice and Song (Jazz) Novice divisions, **30%** of the division will advance to finals with a minimum of three (3) teams advancing.

For ALL Show Cheer Non-Tumbling Intermediate divisions, **35%** of the division will advance to finals with a minimum of three (3) teams advancing.

For ALL Show Cheer Intermediate (excluding Show Cheer Non-Tumbling Intermediate), Show Cheer Non-Tumbling Advanced, Song/Pom Intermediate, Song (Jazz) Intermediate, Crowdleader™ Teams, Pep Flag, and the Mascot divisions, **40%** of the division will advance to finals with a minimum of three (3) teams advancing.

For ALL Show Cheer Advanced divisions (excluding Show Cheer Non-Tumbling Advanced), Song/Pom Advanced and Song (Jazz) Advanced divisions, **50%** of the division will advance to finals with a minimum of three (3) teams advancing.

Please note the percentage of teams advancing to finals is subject to change pending final enrollment for Nationals. Any changes made will be noted no later than the posting of the first draft performance schedule.

The USA reserves the right to combine, split, delete, and/or add divisions for Nationals and to adjust the percentage of teams advancing to finals based upon competition enrollment. The USA reserves the right to adjust days of performance, performance venues, and/or times of competition for all divisions based upon final competition enrollment and the facility requirements.



GENERAL EVENT INFORMATION

QUALIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

NFHS Credentialing (All High School Divisions)

High School Show Cheer, Group Stunt, Game Day, Song/Pom, Song/Jazz, and Pep Flag Divisions: It is required that at least 75% of the members competing at 2026 USA Spirit Nationals must have completed the Varsity Spirit/NFHS Squad Credentialing Program.

Regional Score (All Divisions)

All Divisions, including Game Day - Prior qualification through a USA Regional competition or other sanctioned event/process is required to attend Spirit and Junior Nationals in any division.

Bids to Nationals are awarded to teams receiving 80% of total possible points for all cheer, group stunt and game day cheer divisions and 75% of total possible points for all song/pom, song/jazz, pep flag, mascot, and game day song divisions, regardless of any penalties received.

USA CHEER – CHEER COACH, STUNT COACH DANCE COACH OR PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP

In a continuing effort to better protect athletes and coaches Varsity Spirit has partnered with USA Cheer, the USA Federation for Sport Cheer. A USA Cheer Coach, STUNT Coach, Dance Coach or Professional Membership is required for all school coaches, choreographers, and personnel attending a Varsity Spirit cheer or dance competition to gain access to the warmup, backstage or coaches' box areas. **Each registered cheer team/program must have at least one coach with a Cheer Coach membership and must accompany the team at every competition. Additional coaches can choose to have either a STUNT Coach, Dance Coach or Professional Membership. The USA Cheer General Membership is not an acceptable membership for restricted area access.**

HOTEL INFORMATION

USA works with our housing partner, Team Travel Source, to provide hotel arrangements for your team. Although it is not a requirement to go through Team Travel Source to attend the event, we highly recommend this as they are experts in working with teams to meet your housing needs.

Please [CLICK HERE](#) to book hotel rooms through Team Travel Source.

DISNEY TICKETS

Additional information will be sent separately to schools registered for Spirit Nationals once it is finalized.

EVENT ADMISSION – PARTICIPANTS AND COACHES

All participant credentials will be included in the team's registration packet.

All coaches attending the event must be on a team roster. Proof of the Cheer Coach, STUNT Coach, Dance Coach or Professional Membership is required to gain access into the warmup/backstage area. A USA Cheer General Membership is not valid for access to the restricted areas. Up to two (2) complimentary event Coach/Advisor credentials per squad will be provided.

Additional coaches above the two complimentary per squad need to purchase a coach credential as part of the team registration. All coaches will check in at the Coach Check In and show proof of USA Cheer Membership to receive their wristband.

All personnel wishing to have access to the warmup, backstage, or coaches' box will need to check in, provide a photo ID and show proof of a USA Cheer Coach, STUNT Coach, Dance Coach or Professional Membership at event registration. **The general membership from USA Cheer does not meet this requirement.**

EVENT ADMISSION – FAMILY AND GUESTS

No cash admission purchases will take place on-site during the event. Admission **must be** pre-purchased for spectators. The link to purchase Spectator tickets will be available on the USA website Spirit Nationals page once we get closer to the event start date. Additional fees for online ticket purchases may apply. Please either print a copy of your confirmed admission purchase or have your smart phone available for scanning. We highly recommend pre-purchasing your admission to the event, as purchase on-site by cash is not available and electronic purchase the day of may not be available and/or may delay your entry.

PERFORMANCE ORDER/SCHEDULES

Typically, performance order is based on the registration date. The first registration entered will be the last to perform in that division and the last registration entered will be the first to perform in that division. Adjustments may be necessary due to division/team conflicts.

If payment is not received by the deadline, then performance order will be affected and determined by when payment is received.

All teams will be given an assigned check-in and warm-up time prior to competition. Warm-up areas will vary depending on the competition location.

The contact on the registration will be emailed a tentative line up with performance times at least 2 weeks prior to the competition. These times are subject to change. The final schedule will be available on the BAND app or by checking usa.varsity.com after 5:00 PM (PST) the Wednesday prior to the competition. As of this day, performance times usually remain the same regardless of scratches. **It is the advisor/coach's responsibility to check the schedule for accuracy of divisions, team size, etc. prior to the day of competition.**

PERFORMANCE AREA

All School and Recreation Show Cheer, Crowdleader™ Teams and Mascots will perform on a carpet bonded foam mat measuring 42' (front to back) x 54' (side to side). All stunts and/or tumbling must be **completed** on the mat surface. There will be a three-point deduction off your final averaged score for each infraction of this rule. Group Stunt teams will perform on carpet bonded foam mat, measuring at least 28' (front to back) x 42' (side to side) – four (4) strips. Song/Pom, Song/Jazz and Pep Flag categories/divisions will perform on a Marley, parquet, basketball court, or similar surface measuring at least 42' x 42'. Performance areas may change as a result of final registration. Warm up surfaces may differ.

SAFETY RULES/ PENALTIES

Routines at all USA competitions must follow the 2025 - 26 NFHS Spirit Rules Book (cheer), 2025 - 26 USA High School Show Cheer and Group Stunt Division Limitations (cheer), 2025 - 26 USA Song/Pom and Pep/Short Flag General Safety Rules, the 2025 - 26 USA High School Teams Song/Pom Division Limitations, 2025 - 26 USA Junior and Rec Teams Show Cheer and Group Stunt Limitations, and USA Jr. Competition Information (school-based) available on-line at usa.varsity.com.

Points will be deducted from the final team average for violations of safety rules, division limitations, and/or time limits.

For specific safety rules for divisions, as well as time restrictions, skill restrictions, and other rules, please refer to the USA website at usa.varsity.com.

MUSIC

One or several selections of music may be used in the music portion of the routine. Music rules are being followed at all USA and Varsity Brands events. Competition music must be properly licensed, and a team must be able to provide proof of licensing at any event where the music is used. If a team cannot provide proof of licensing immediately upon request, the team may be disqualified from the event. **Music downloaded from a subscription service (Apple Music, Spotify, Youtube, etc.) is not allowed.** For future details visit varsity.com/music-guidelines.

Music is defined as any recorded sound amplified through the competition sound system or live music played by band members with instruments for a routine.

A sound system will be provided. Speed control is not available. Music checks on the main sound system are not permitted. A representative must be present at the sound system at the time of performance. Advisors/coaches are asked to hold onto their own music until the time of performance and to take music back following the performance.

All teams must provide their own MP3 device (or smart phone if necessary) for use on the event provided sound system. Music must be recorded at the correct tempo. Although it is not recommended due to interference that may be caused during a routine, a smart phone may be used for playing music. No cover may be on any MP3 player or smart phone so that a patch cord may be easily inserted into the device. Please ensure that jacks are clean and free of any debris which may impact connectivity. You must ensure that your device has a jack into which a patch cord may be inserted. Note that you will need to acquire an adapter in advance if your player does not have a headphone jack. One or several selections of music may be used if they follow the music licensing rules.

FINALS – HIGH SCHOOL GROUP STUNT

High School Group Stunt finals will take place on the same day as the preliminaries. If either High School Group Stunt category has 10 or more entries for preliminaries, then finals will take place with 25% of that division advancing. If either category reaches 40 entries or more for preliminaries, the category will be randomly subdivided into two groups for preliminaries (A and B or A, B, and C, etc.). 25% of each subdivided group will be selected to perform again in finals.

FINALS – HIGH SCHOOL TEAM DIVISIONS

All High School divisions (including Crowdleader™ Teams) have the potential to advance to Saturday (cheer/mascot)/Monday (song/jazz/pep flag) finals, excluding Group Stunt and stand-alone Game Day divisions.

NEW!!!! – Percentage of teams advancing from prelims to finals has increased for majority of divisions, with a minimum of **3** teams per division advancing. See below for details. For ALL Show Cheer Novice (including Show Cheer Non-Tumbling Novice), Song/Pom Novice and Song (Jazz) Novice divisions, **30%** of the division will advance to finals with a minimum of three (3) teams advancing. For ALL Show Cheer Non-Tumbling Intermediate divisions, **35%** of the division will advance to finals with a minimum of three (3) teams advancing. For ALL Show Cheer Intermediate (excluding Show Cheer Non-Tumbling Intermediate), Show Cheer Non-Tumbling Advanced, Song/Pom Intermediate, Song (Jazz) Intermediate, Crowdleader™ Teams, Pep Flag, and the Mascot divisions, **40%** of the division will advance to finals with a minimum of three (3) teams advancing. For ALL Show Cheer Advanced divisions (excluding Show Cheer Non-Tumbling Advanced), Song/Pom Advanced and Song (Jazz) Advanced divisions, **50%** of the division will advance to finals with a minimum of three (3) teams advancing.

Please note the percentage of teams advancing to finals is subject to change pending final enrollment for Nationals.

HIGH SCHOOL AWARDS

At the conclusion of the Group Stunt divisions, awards will be presented to the top teams. The teams receiving first place in both Group Stunt Advanced and Group Stunt Intermediate will be invited to present an exhibition performance during finals on Saturday.

At the conclusion of the Game Day divisions (excluding Crowdleader™ Teams), awards will be presented to the top teams. Trophies will be presented to 50% of the teams competing in each division. For teams placing 1st, 2nd, and 3rd, individual medallions will be given to each participant. First place teams will also receive a Nationals banner. No additional Champion gifts are awarded to individual performers for Game Day divisions. **Individual performers for 1st – 3rd for Game Day divisions place receive medallions only.**

At the conclusion of all other divisions, preliminary awards will be presented based on scores for the preliminary performances and finalists will be announced. The number of teams in the various divisions will determine the number of teams chosen to participate in the finals. Changes in the number of teams performing in prelims, up to and including the day of prelims, will impact the number of teams advancing to finals. These teams will compete again for final placement and awards. **Preliminary scores will not count toward final placement, rather they will only be used for advancing teams to finals. All finals scores will count 100% for final placement.** Scoresheets will be made available following the performances each day. A ranking of teams will be available to view following preliminaries at the event.

For the 2026 USA Spirit Nationals competition, trophies will be presented to 50% of the teams competing in each division. For teams placing 1st, 2nd, and 3rd, individual medallions will be given to each participant. First place teams will also receive a Nationals banner and each individual team participant will receive a National Champions gift. Game Day divisions (with the exception of Crowdleader™ Teams) are excluded from individual National Champion gifts, except for the first-place medallion.

JUNIOR HIGH/ELEMENTARY/REC DIVISION AWARDS

At the conclusion of each section of the competition, awards will be presented to the top teams in each division. Scoresheets will be made available following the competition.

Game Day Divisions - Awards will be presented to the top teams. Trophies will be presented to 50% of the teams competing in each division. For teams placing 1st, 2nd, and 3rd, individual medallions will be given to each participant. First place teams will also receive a Nationals banner. No additional Champion gifts are awarded to individual performers for Game Day divisions. **Individual performers for 1st – 3rd place receive medallions only in Game Day divisions.**

For all other divisions at the 2026 USA Junior Nationals competition, trophies will be presented to 50% of the teams competing in each division. For teams placing 1st, 2nd, and 3rd, individual medallions will be given to each participant. First place teams also receive a Nationals banner and each individual team participant will receive a Champion gift. Game Day divisions are excluded from individual National Champion gifts, except for the first-place medallion.

ROSTER

All teams will complete a team roster. Rosters will need to match the number of athletes registered. Coaches will need to be listed on the roster and show USA Membership for entry into designated backstage areas. Rosters can be submitted digitally one week prior to the event.

TEAM PHOTOGRAPHERS

Team Photographers must be listed as Personnel on the roster and pay the admission fee. They need to check in a Team Check in and complete a form. Team Photographers are not allowed to video/record/photograph in the warmup area.

RELEASE FORMS

The 2026 USA Spirit Nationals Digital Release forms need to be submitted on or before **January 28, 2026**. **All participants and any adult with a USA Cheer Coach/Dance/Professional Membership must submit a 2026 USA Spirit Nationals Digital waiver.**

REGISTRATION PACKETS

Registration packets will be available for pick-up by the authorized team representative only for those teams competing on **Thursday, February 19, 2026**, on **Wednesday, February 18** from **5:00 PM – 8:00 PM**. Registration is open for all teams starting on **Thursday, February 19, 2026**, at **6:00 AM**. Packets will not be mailed in advance. Individuals are not allowed to pick up portions of the registration packet. This ensures that all contents are received and accounted for by the school representative.



2026 USA SPIRIT NATIONALS PRICING/DEADLINES

HIGH SCHOOL ENTRANCE FEES

High School Competitor Entrance Fees (all competitors/alternates must purchase a competitor's entrance fee)

1st Performance (Including Crowdleader™ Teams and excluding Group Stunt and Game Day) **\$179.00 per person**

2nd Performance (Group Stunt and Jazz divisions) **\$35.00 per person**

High School Game Day Divisions **\$398.00 per division/team fee**

(Including Crowdleader™ Teams when it is the 2nd performance after Show Cheer)

The team fee for the Crowdleader™ Division needs to be manually added by the USA office. For registration purposes, an Alternate is an individual team member not taking the floor and competing in any division, unless called upon unexpectedly to do so.

Extra Coaches Admission **\$60.00 per person**

Each Squad will Receive Two (2) Complimentary Coach Wristbands.

JUNIOR HIGH/ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AND REC TEAM ENTRANCE FEES

Junior High/Elementary School and Rec Team Competitor Entrance Fees (all competitors/alternates must purchase a competitor's entrance fee)

1st Performance (excluding Group Stunt and Game Day) **\$105.00 per person**

2nd Performance (Group Stunt) **\$27.00 per person**

Junior High School Game Day Divisions **\$390.00 per division/team fee**

Extra Coaches Admission **\$30.00 per person**

Each Squad will Receive Two (2) Complimentary Coach Wristbands.

DEADLINES

- **December 1, 2025** – All Spirit Nationals registrations must be entered online.
- **December 15, 2025** – to secure performance order, \$350 per team registration deposit or payment in full must be received.
- **January 19, 2026** – Deadline for division and roster changes. No refunds for participant/team cancellations after this date and full competition fees will still be due. **There are no division or roster changes after January 19, 2026.** Deadline is subject to change.
- **January 28, 2026** - The 2026 USA Spirit Nationals Digital Waiver must be submitted on or before this date.
- **February 4, 2026** – Final balance due