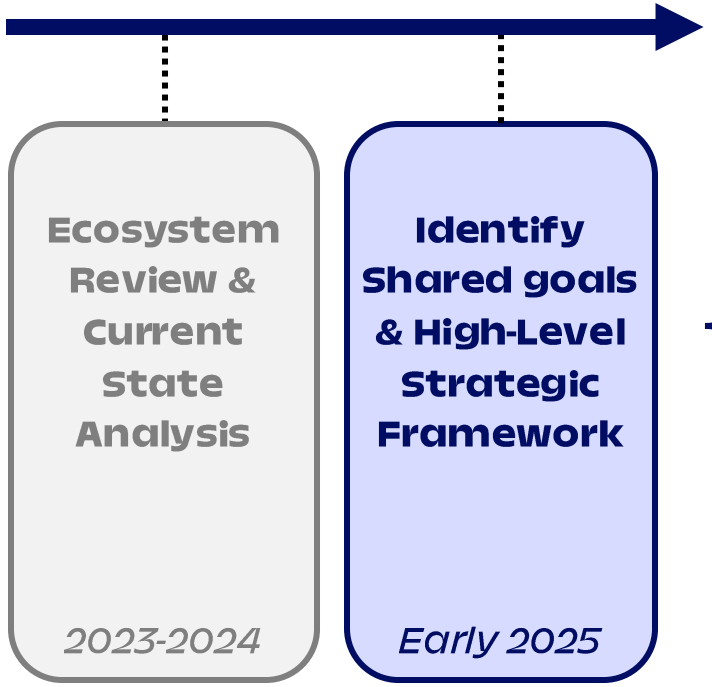
THE PATHWAYS STRATEGY OVERVIEW

Our Journey

U.S. Soccer has been intentionally working with members to co-author shared outcomes that will guide the future of the game and strengthen the experience for everyone



Examples of workstreams undertaken thus far in 2025

- **Councils**: Ongoing brainstorming and discussions with Councils – thus far the Adult Commissioners, DSO Committee, Athletes Council, MAC, and Youth Council – on the ecosystem shared goals
- **Professional League Engagement**: Established regular meetings with each league to discuss shared strategies and progress
- **Referees**: Initiated analyses to understand (1) shared outcomes for the full refereeing landscape, (2) needs at the professional level of play, and (3) operational models to address misconduct against referees
- **State-by-State Analysis**: USYS engaged U.S. Soccer to conduct a high-level analysis of its support to the State Associations, working hand-in-hand with the State Associations on their needs
- **Soccer at Schools**: Conducted a large-scale analysis to better understand community-based soccer, specifically honing in on bringing soccer to schools as a basis for growing participation

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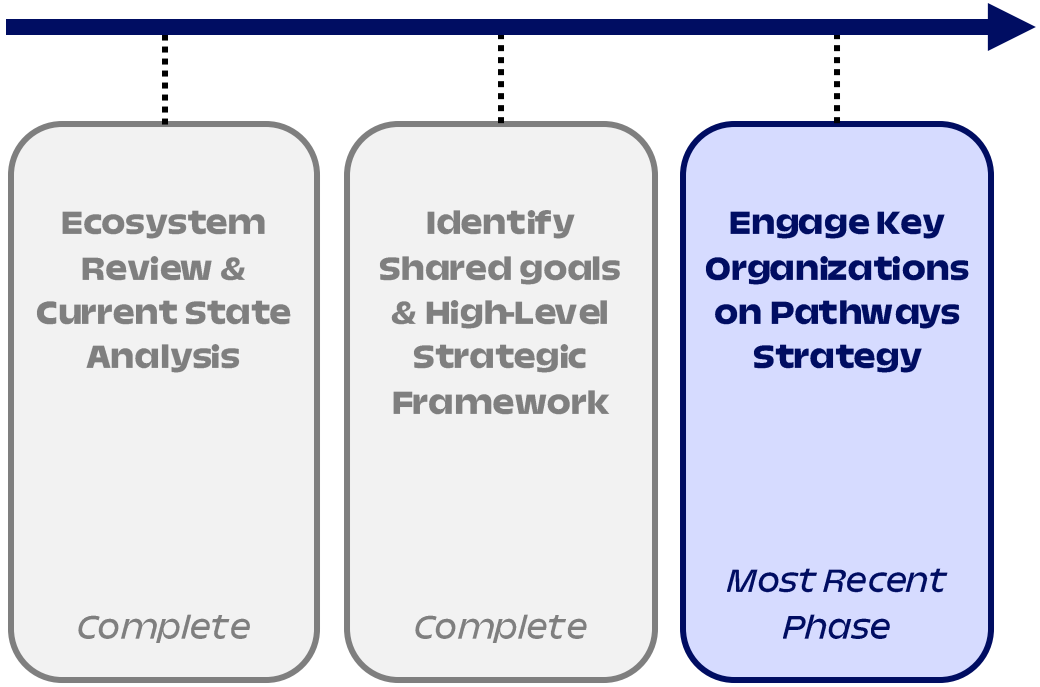
Our Path Forward

It is now time to turn these broad themes into action plans – to make this transition effectively, we have realized we need a more structured way to engage the ecosystem



Pathways Strategy Overview

- To engage members in a structured way as we progress from co-creating shared outcomes to driving action, U.S. Soccer is proposing the creation of the “Pathways Strategy”
- The Pathways Strategy is a collaborative effort focused on designing and implementing a national pathway strategy
- To structure the effort, the Pathways Strategy will be broken up into segments – likely Men’s Pre-Pro, Women’s Pre-Pro, Competitive, Recreational, and Adult Amateur
- The Pathway Strategy stakeholders will lead design and delivery across several core workstreams, such as:
  - **Competition Architecture:** National, regional, and local competition formats aligned with player development needs specific to each division
  - **Professional Development:** Segment learning system offering education, mentorship, and career growth for soccer leaders at all levels
  - **Soccer Services:** Value-add shared services such as digital platforms, registration safeguarding

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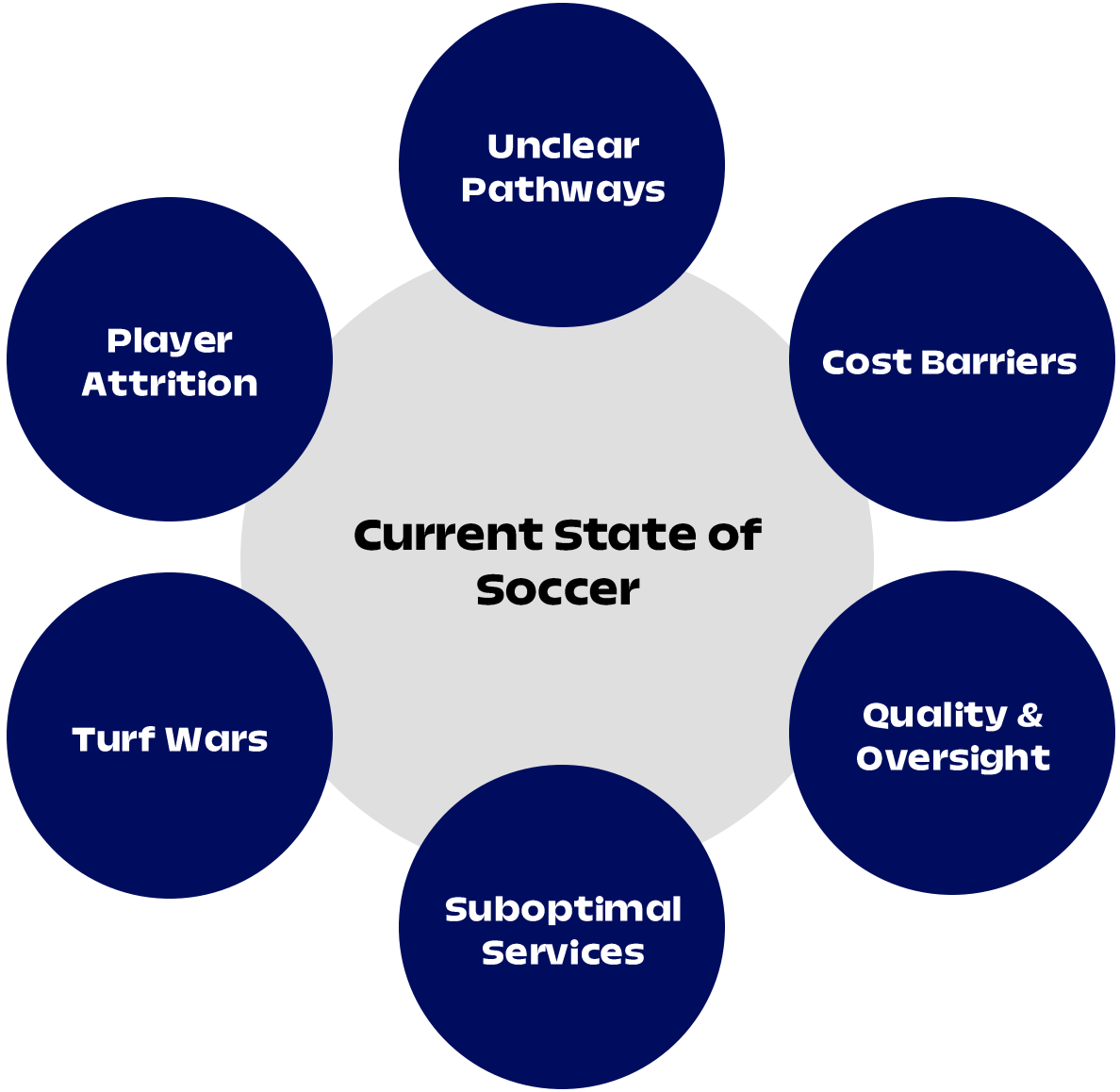
Focus Areas We'll Address

From our Ecosystem Review, our members highlighted six themes holding the game back – this will be the core focus of our effort.

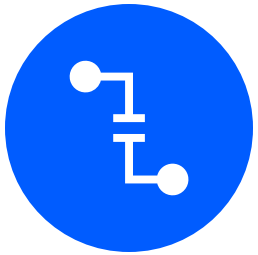


These challenges have led to negative impacts on and off the field

Dilution Of Competitive Environments At All Levels

Decline in Local League Competitiveness and Access to Quality, Low-Travel Games

Inconsistent & Limited Standards Across Platforms



Added Administrative Burden Across The Ecosystem

Increased Financial Costs For Participants And Organizations

Risk Management Issues Across Clubs, Coaches, And Players (Reduced Accountability)

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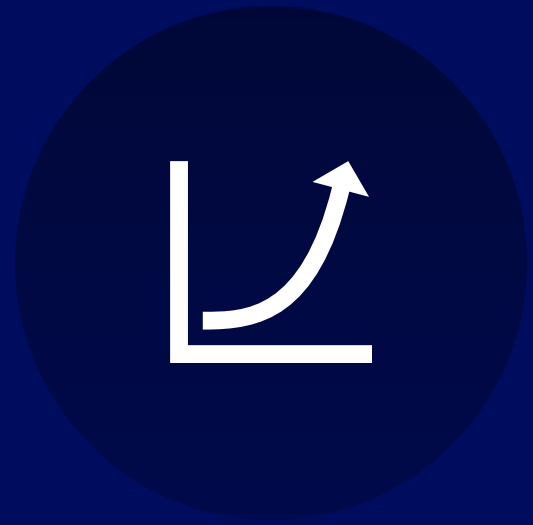
Looking ahead, we are prioritizing three main themes

LOWERING COSTS

IMPROVING THE SOCCER EXPERIENCE FOR EVERYONE



GROWING PARTICIPATION AND ACCESS

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THE PATH FORWARD:
The Pathways Strategy

Our Pathways Strategy helps us bring these goals to life

The Pathways Strategy creates a cohesive national pathway that links every level of the game

We've Set the Stage

Now, We're Moving Toward the Future

- **5 Pathway Groups – From Pre-Pro to Recreation**
- **10 Workstreams to Co-Design a National Pathway**
- **Pathway Groups to Kick Off in Late 2025**
- **Managed by our Cross-Functional Soccer Solutions Group**
- **Anticipated Pre-Pro Implementation Fall 2027; Competitive/Rec Fall 2028**

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You have told us where soccer should go

MORE PARTICIPANTS | **MORE QUALITY EXPERIENCES** | **REDUCED FINANCIAL BURDEN**

FROM: The world today		TO: Desired future state
Decentralized, unclear, inconsistent competitions & experiences	→	**Clear, aligned** tiers that enhance **experiences & support participant development**
Disconnected governance and **confusing landscape to navigate** for families and players	→ ★★★	**Consistent expectations** and **strong oversight** that foster **safe, high-quality** experiences
Strained resources consumed by programs & admin tasks	→	**Greater investment** in **community programs** and **growing the game**
Rising costs and **excessive travel** misaligned with value	→	**Sustainable, balanced formats** that **reduce costs** and **minimize travel**

We have the opportunity to align our pathway efforts and shape the future of American soccer.

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Pathway Groups | What you told us on: Where they are now and where they need to go

Women's Path-to-Pro	Men's Path-to-Pro	Competitive	Recreation	Adult Amateur
FROM				
• Club- and college-driven system with limited pro integration • Investment is significant but oriented toward college	• Heavily funded, pro-driven ecosystem • Leagues and clubs compete for top talent rather than collaborate	• Bridge between pre-professional and recreational • Offers many levels of play but a disconnected, confusing system	• Foundation of U.S. soccer, driven by families and volunteers • Access and community prioritized over player development	• Affiliated participation is declining • Disconnected competition structure
TO				
• A modern, tiered pathway is key to global success • Talent must be identified and developed collaboratively • Regionalization, affordability, and consistency ensure sustainability		• Align competition with player needs • Support clubs in player development and experiences • Reduce travel	• Grow participation through local soccer • Equip families, coaches, and referees with resources • Reduce costs and barriers to entry	• Grow participation through small-sided / innovative game format • Align competition structure, Incorporate non-member groups

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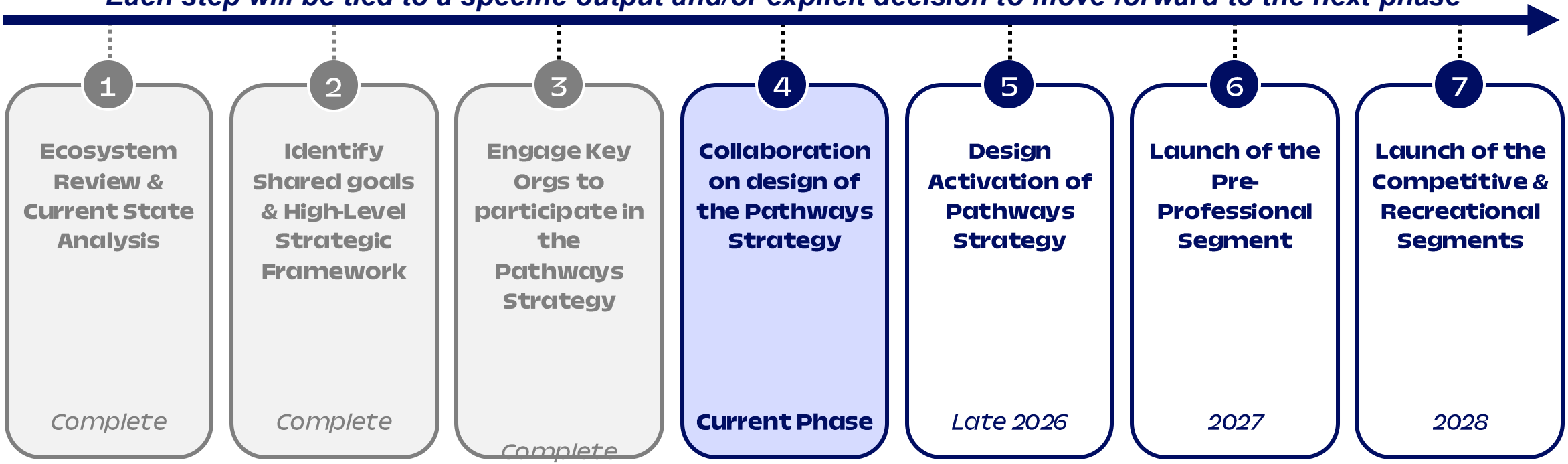
Our shared Pathways Strategy will be implemented step by step process to ensure alignment and progress

Each step will be tied to a specific output and/or explicit decision to move forward to the next phase



Note: We are working with the Disability Soccer Organization (DSO) Committee on disability soccer considerations across this work.

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We will initially focus on the following workstreams

Divisions Definition & Strategy

Tiered competition structures across segments with clear standards and player experiences at each level

Outcomes:

- Definitions and descriptors for each division of play
- Objectives for participants across each division

Standards & Best Practices

Age and stage specific guidelines and best practices for optimal player experiences / development

Outcomes:

- Recommended competition standards by division
- Roadmap for upleveling ecosystem to achieve standards by segment

Competition Architecture

National, regional, and local competition formats aligned with player development needs specific to each division

Outcomes:

- Guidelines for formats and structures across divisions
- Preliminary scoping of division participants

By June 2026, we anticipate formalizing draft recommendations for division definitions and guidance on standards of play across the pathway

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What the Pathways Strategy is and is not

WHAT THIS IS

- Working side-by-side with other members / key stakeholder groups to co-create the future state
- Embracing that it's time to change, which means we can't look back and must look forward
- Endorsing this effort publicly and demonstrating we're all on the same page to drive large-scale, long-term impact
- Sharing data and information that will make this an evidence-based effort
- Driving to intentional and methodical decisions and actions

WHAT THIS IS NOT

- Focusing on other members and key stakeholders as competitors
- Eliminating business models – as we re-imagine the ecosystem, some roles or business models may evolve to better align efforts where they add the most value
- Action for action's sake – we will take actions when the analysis demonstrates we're ready as an ecosystem to do so
- Withholding feedback, inputs, data, etc. that will move us productively forward – our MOU is meant to embody trust and commitment to one another and to the ecosystem

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Thank you