GOING FOR THE GOLD

# How the NCAA scaled Olympic marketing by 4x with Asana





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Foreword by Brian Higgins

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## Leveling up our game

A foreword by Brian Higgins, Senior Vice President of Business Performance, NCAA When I joined the NCAA team, two things were clear: we had incredibly talented people working tirelessly on behalf of our student-athletes, and our collaboration as an organization wasn't keeping pace with the demands of our growth goals. Our people were proud of their own work, but felt disconnected from other teams, and couldn't connect their work to the goals of the larger organization.

From the start, it was evident that our operations needed to evolve. While our teams were doing incredible work within their own areas of expertise, we needed to find better ways to connect, align, and collaborate across departments. We needed to modernize our processes—not just to improve efficiency, but to unlock the full potential of our people and meet the demands of our industry.

That was my focus: bringing every part of our organization together to improve our ability to execute across teams and unite our people around a shared vision.

This transformation—streamlining and modernizing the way we work—was a top priority for our new leadership team. We brought on Asana to provide the structure and functionality needed to drive this change. With Asana, we brought teams together and created a clearer, more connected way of working. Now, teams that were once siloed can collaborate seamlessly to achieve our goals. It's truly changed how we operate as an organization.

For the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, our communications team created a small but focused campaign that celebrated Olympians and Paralympians with student-athlete ties. As our communications leadership looked ahead to the 2024 Paris Games, they set an ambitious goal for content production—one that we needed to be as efficient as possible to achieve.

With Asana as the backbone of the campaign's operations, our communications team brought together internal and external collaborators to reimage how the campaign could come to life. They stayed connected across time zones, worked in sync, and overcame challenges as the campaign scaled.

What followed wasn't just a successful campaign—it was a defining moment for our organization. Our team turned leadership's ambitious vision into a reality: producing content on a scale we've never attempted before, surpassing our original goals by fourfold, and ultimately earning recognition as Asana's Best in Class Work Innovation Award winner.

The success of the campaign was a powerful reminder of how far we've come as an organization—and offered a glimpse of the potential we can unlock together in the future.

Brian Higgins

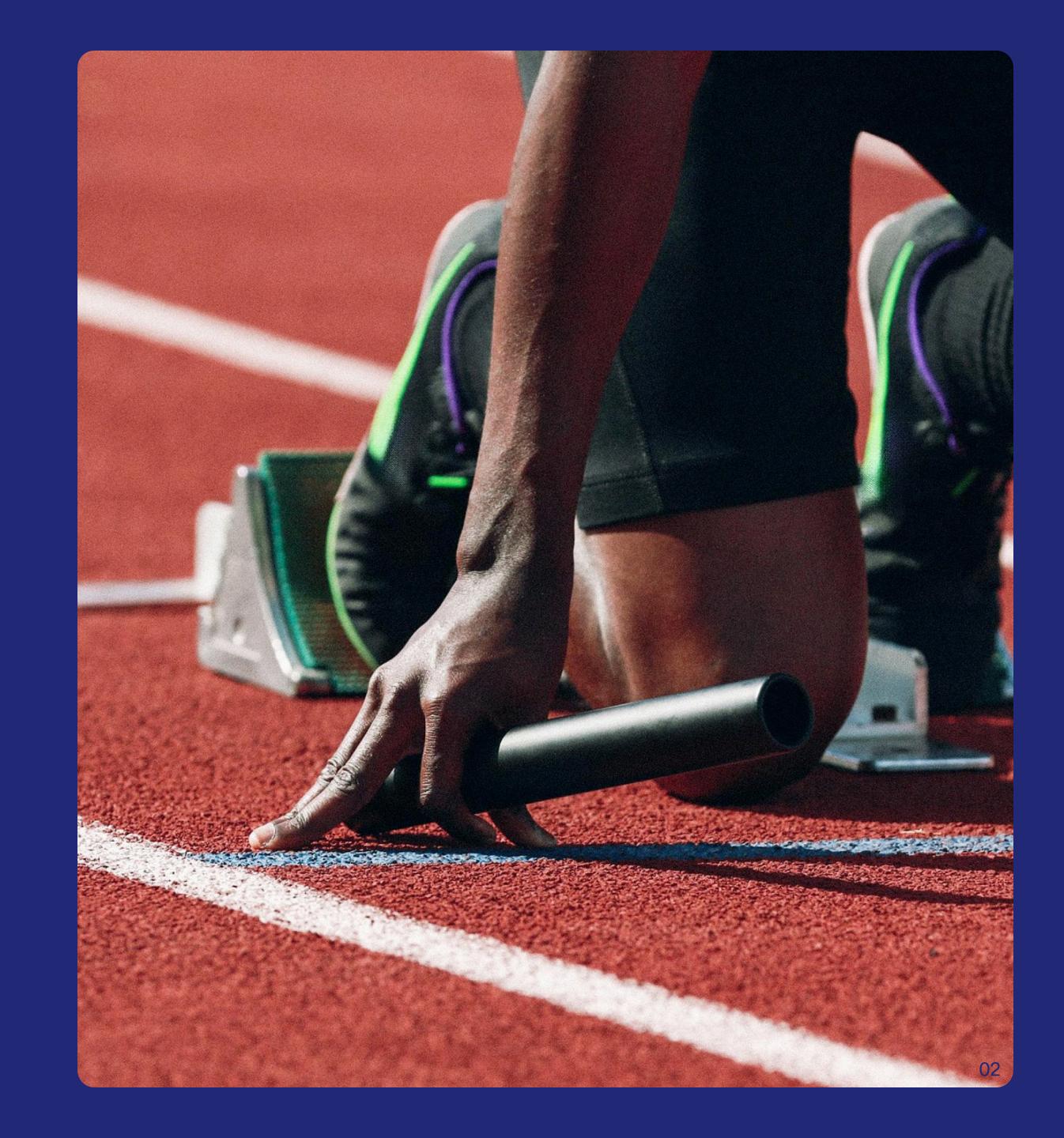
Senior Vice President of Business Performance, NCAA



### LIGHTING THE TORCH

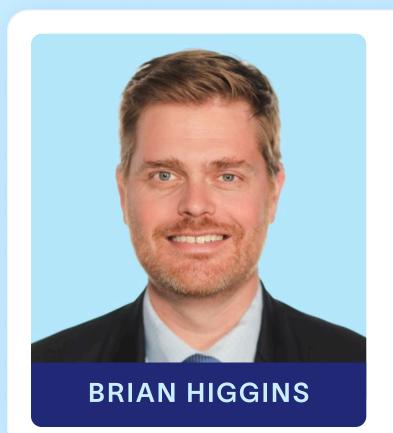
# Building the foundation for Paris 2024

As the NCAA set out to scale their *Olympians & Paralympians Made Here* campaign for the 2024 Paris Olympics, they set an ambitious goal: execute a campaign that triples content consumption over their 2020 Tokyo campaign. Here's how they laid the groundwork for that growth.



## The NCAA starting lineup

Meet four key players who, along with a larger team working behind the scenes, helped bring the campaign to life. Follow along as they share tips and tricks from the NCAA's journey to scale operations and output.



### **POSITION**

Senior Vice President of Business Performance

YEARS AS AN EXECUTIVE

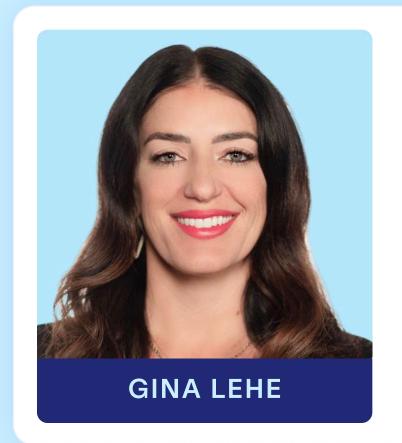
**HOMETOWN** 

8 years

Cape Cod, MA

**FAVORITE MARKETING PLAY** 

Give the ball to the experts and let them cook



#### **POSITION**

Vice President of Communications

YEARS AS A MARKETER

**HOMETOWN** 

24 years

Pebble Beach, CA

### **CAREER HIGHLIGHT**

Launching the biggest Olympics campaign in NCAA history



#### POSITION

**Director of Digital Communications** 

YEARS AS A MARKETER

**HOMETOWN** 

20 years

Hebron, CT

**PAVORITE NCAA TEAM** 

**UConn Huskies** 



#### **POSITION**

**Associate Director of Communications** 

YEARS AS A MARKETER

**HOMETOWN** 

5 years

Minneapolis, MN

**CAREER HIGHLIGHT** 

Transitioning from being an NCAA student-athlete to shaping the organization's voice

## Setting the pace for Paris

When the Olympic torch was extinguished following the Tokyo Games, the NCAA faced an exciting—but complex—opportunity: scale their Olympic communications campaign for the 2024 Paris Games.

Since 2019, the *Olympians & Paralympians Made Here* campaign—a collaboration with the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Committee (USOPC) Collegiate Advisory Council—has celebrated Olympic and Paralympic athletes with collegiate roots. For the 2020 Tokyo Games, the campaign was small but impactful—producing twelve compelling feature stories that highlighted the achievements of current and former student-athletes.

As the spotlight shifted to Paris 2024, the message from the top was clear: Go bigger. NCAA leadership set a bold goal to triple content consumption over the previous campaign and expand storytelling to elevate the brand and its athletes.



But scaling up raised new questions and challenges—how could the communications team manage the campaign's complexity without stifling its creative spark? To succeed, they needed a way to:

- Coordinate their global content team
- Empower collaboration across time zones
- Improve operational efficiency to manage the campaign's complex work
- Ensure alignment on goals and priorities
- Increase the production of innovative content
- Elevate the brand on a global stage

With this in mind, the NCAA turned to Asana to scale production in service of a campaign that would amplify their message and spotlight athletes during the Games and beyond.



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This time, we challenged the team to really show us what they could do—to blow the campaign out of the water.
And they took that challenge to heart.

Gina Lehe
Vice President of
Communications



#### ON YOUR MARK:

## Creating an operational strategy

Scaling the campaign wasn't just about producing more content—it was about improving collaboration, execution, and delivery. To meet their growth goals, the NCAA developed a unified strategy from the ground up, aligning every department and team member around a shared purpose.

The team set four goals to take the campaign to the next level and elevate the NCAA on the global stage. With Asana as their operational backbone, they transformed these ambitions into measurable results.



Scale the campaign 3x

Triple NCAA content consumption over the 2020 Tokyo Games.

Elevate the brand

Showcase the NCAA as the training ground for the elite athletes competing in the Games.

Create compelling content

Share inspiring, athlete-centered stories that connect audiences to the Olympic and Paralympic journey.

Expand promotion and distribution

Reach broader audiences, taking NCAA messaging beyond traditional platforms.

PROM THE FIELD

66

There was no operational strategy at the beginning. To build the foundation we needed, we wanted to start from zero. We decided to completely reimagine the way we worked.

Chris Dion
Director of Digital
Communications



PARIS 2024:

## By the numbers

2 agencies

4 time zones 6 teams 50 cross-functional partners

1,314
athletes with NCAA ties

Colorado

California



Paris, France



"When managing a large-scale campaign like this one, centralize all your work in one platform. That way every team member, no matter their location, can easily see what task is coming next and who's responsible for it."

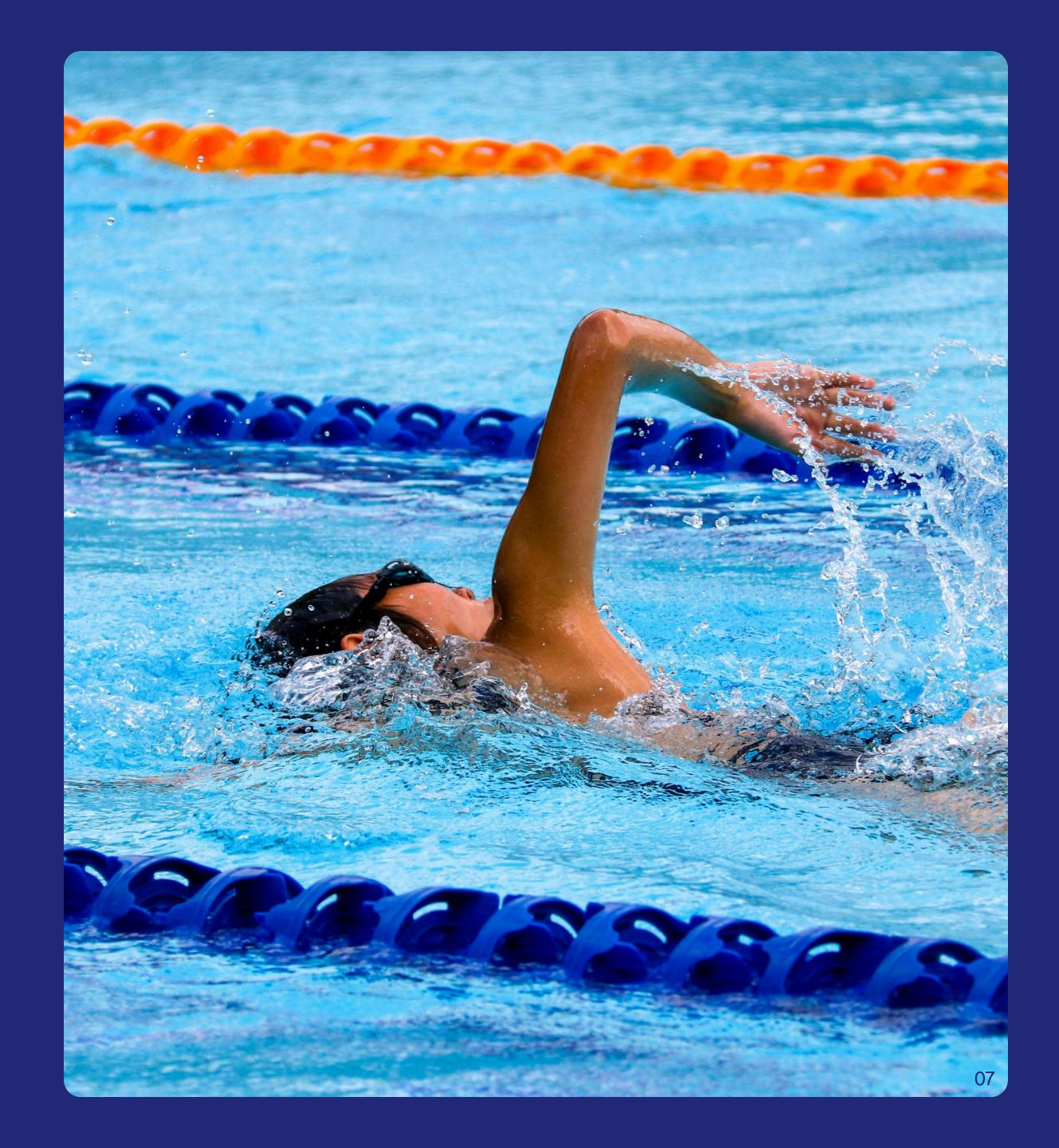
Jaelyn Arndt
Associate Director of
Communications



**GAME ON** 

# Bringing the campaign to life

With the strategy in place and the team aligned, it was time to move from vision to execution. Bringing the campaign to life meant turning ideas into action—capturing story concepts, scaling content creation, and keeping every piece on track. Here's how the NCAA built a workflow that made it possible.



# Capturing athlete stories

The NCAA's campaign highlighted remarkable athlete stories—and the foundation for creating these stories was the first step in their workflow: the story submission process.

Using an automated Asana intake form, the NCAA gathered story ideas from team members, external partners, and schools in one centralized hub. This process ensured every idea—no matter where it came from—was captured, organized, and ready for action.



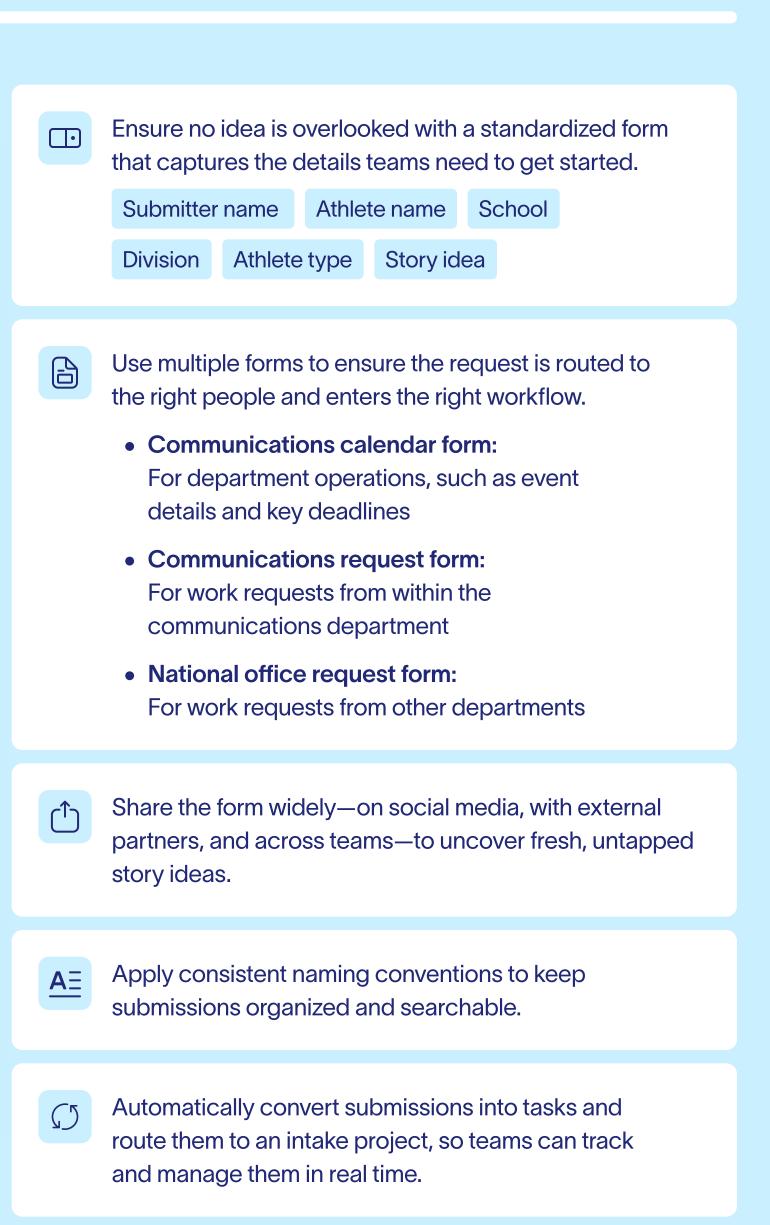
"By setting up the intake form to capture all important story information upfront, we were able to quickly review submissions and kick off work without delay."

**Chris Dion** 

**Director of Digital Communications** 



### Olympic and Paralympic story submission request Name of athlete \* Is this story about an Olympian, Paralympian, or International Student-Athlete? \* Choose one... ~ School \* Please select division \* Choose one... ~ Submit form



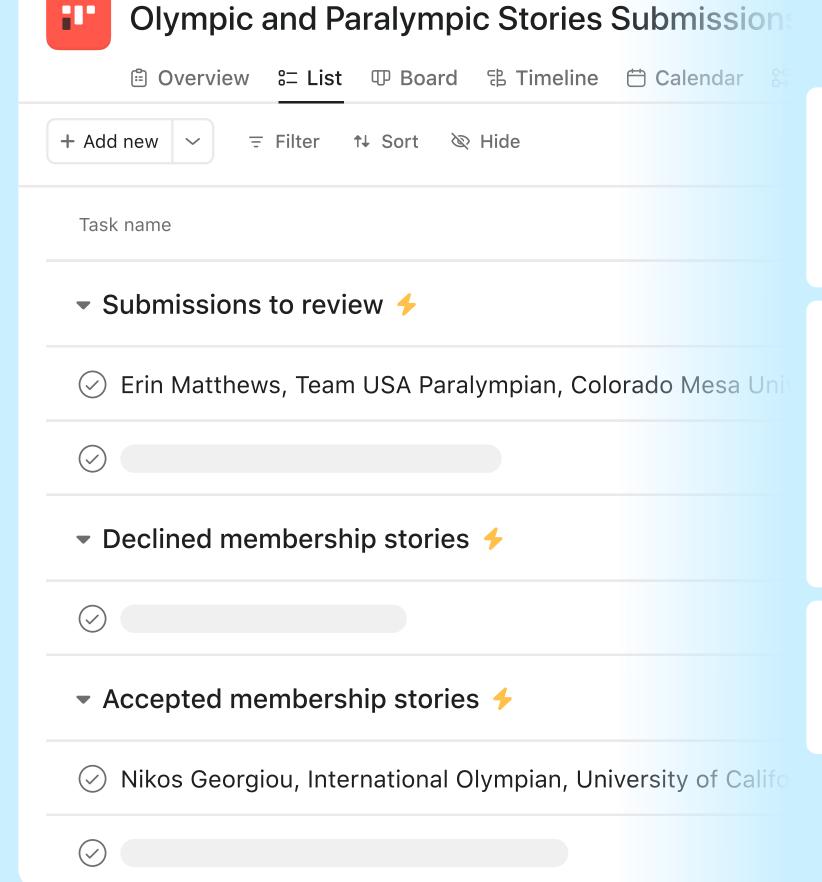
# Organizing and approving submissions

With story submissions flowing in, the next step was turning ideas into action. The NCAA used an Asana project with automated workflows to organize and review submissions, ensuring the most compelling stories took center stage.



"The intake project helped us catch and prioritize content we might have missed otherwise. For example, when a submission highlighted an international athlete, we could quickly check our research and flag any gaps—allowing us to spotlight more international athletes in our coverage."

Jaelyn Arndt
Associate Director of Communications





Build a Smart workflow in Asana Al Studio to simplify setup.

 Create rules automatically using natural language prompts



Use those rules to route submissions through the workflow automatically.

- Assign reviewers to new submissions
- Add due dates to keep tasks on track
- Move ideas to sections based on approval status
- Alert reviewers about overdue tasks



Integrate with Slack to notify team members instantly when new submissions are added without interrupting their flow.

# Creating compelling content

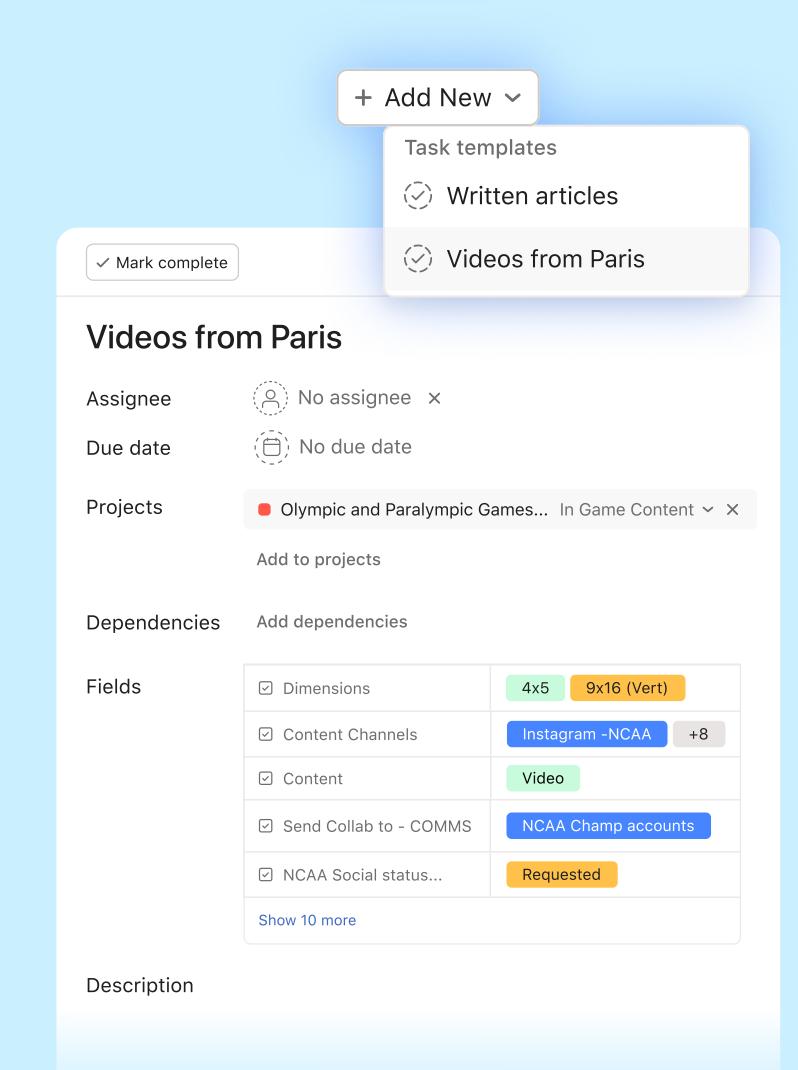
With an automated pipeline of approved story submissions in place, the NCAA used task templates to standardize content creation. Prefilled with key details—like required information and collaborators—these templates ensured every content type followed a repeatable process for every content type, no matter who picked up the task.

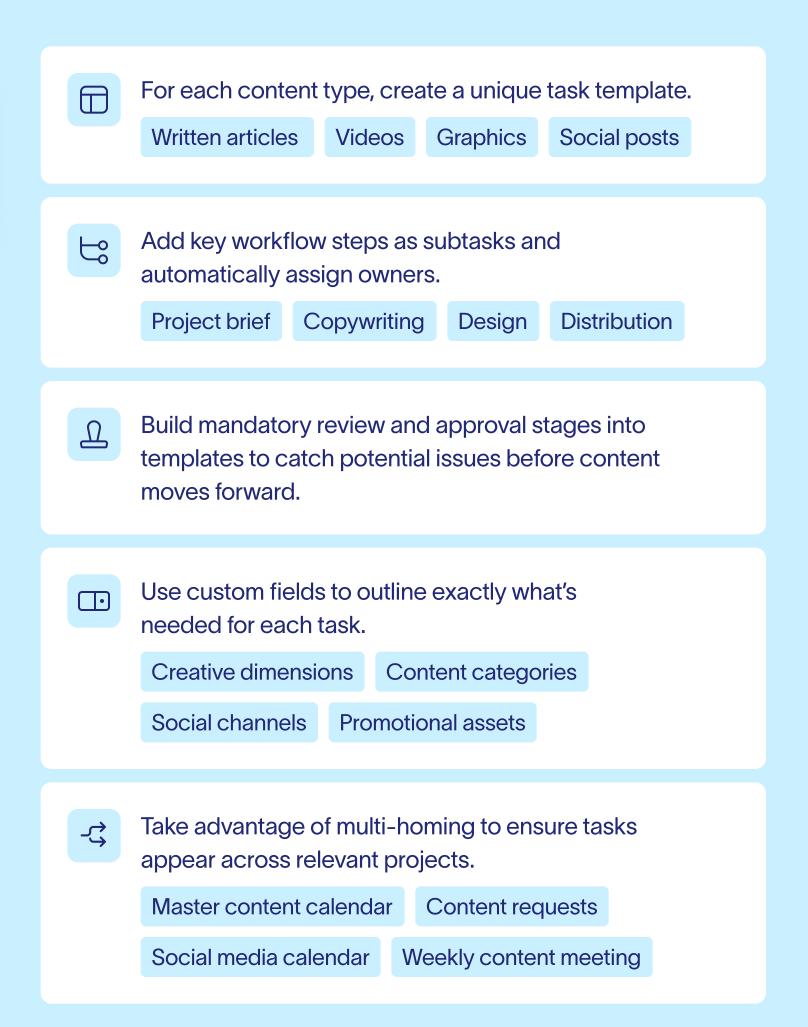


"Standardizing workflows in templates made a big difference, especially during live production. Whether it was a video from Paris or a medalist graphic, every task followed a structured process —allowing anyone, from editors to external agencies, to seamlessly pick up work."

### Jaelyn Arndt Associate Director of Communications







# Managing and tracking work

The campaign crossed departments, time zones, and communication channels, making a clear content management plan essential. Teams used Asana as a central hub to track every piece of content across pre-game, in-game, and post-game phases. Approved ideas were automatically routed into the plan, giving the communications team real-time oversight to adapt to changes, fill gaps, and stay aligned with their biggest goals.

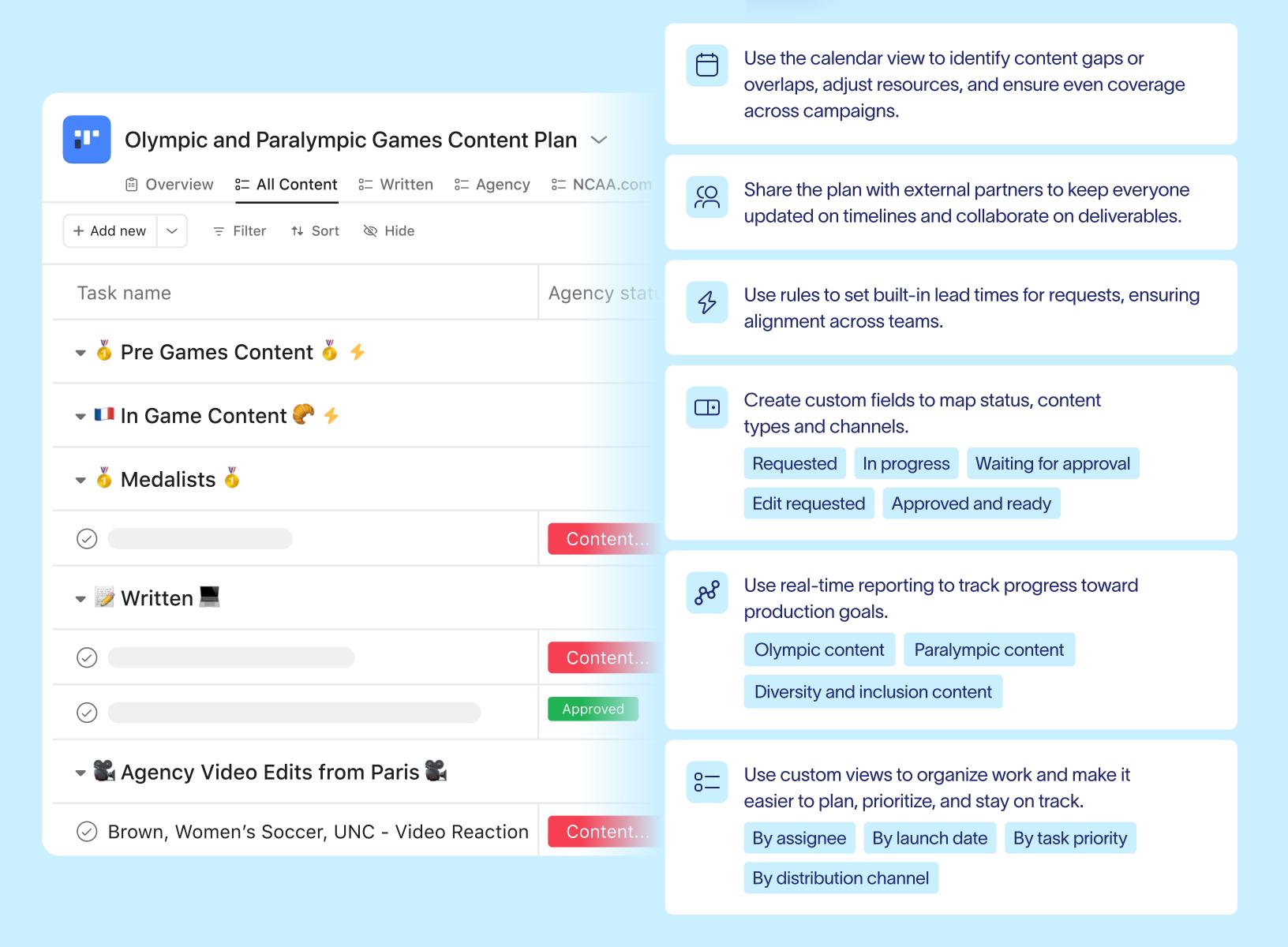


"Creating and saving custom project views helps everyone focus on the work that matters most to them. Whether it's filtering by upcoming publish dates or setting a view for the social team or an external agency, these views make sure everyone sees exactly what they need to stay on track."

### Chris Dion

Director of Digital Communications







# How visibility helped the NCAA scale campaign content

"Before everyone had visibility into our upcoming content, we'd write, edit, and post an article—and that was it. We were missing opportunities to expand. Now, publishing an article is just the beginning."

Chris Dion
Director of Digital Communications



During the campaign, the NCAA used Asana to create their campaign roadmap, track what content was completed or coming next, and identify new opportunities to amplify their efforts.

A copywriter submits a story about the men's US 3x3 basketball team.

The editorial team publishes a feature article, which lives as a task in the master content plan.

The social team spots the article and creates posts using key snippets.

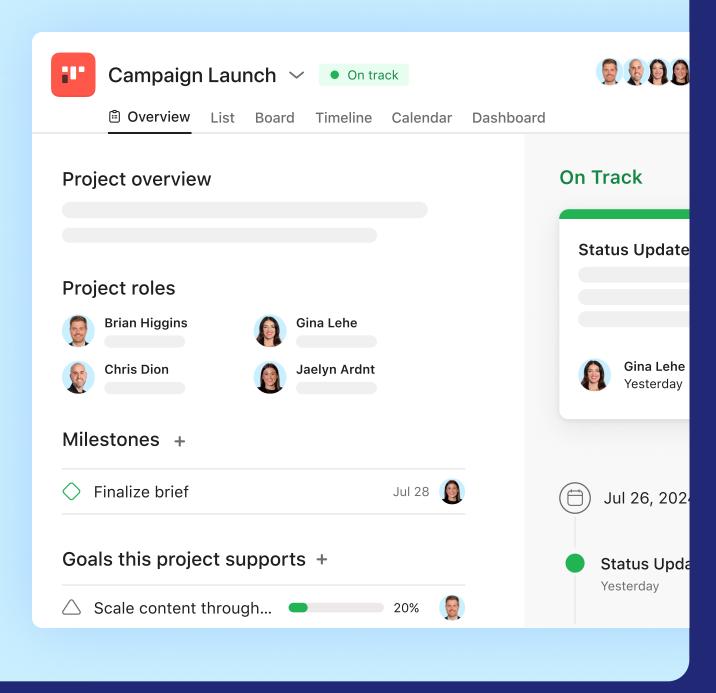
The creative team develops additional assets to support multi-channel campaigns.

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The paid team selects high-performing posts, allocating ad dollars to extend reach.

### More than just a workflow

Asana's centralized view helped teams go beyond their individual tasks, working together to get the most out of every piece of content. Whether it was turning an article into social content, boosting a high-performing post with paid media, or creating new videos and graphics, Asana gave the NCAA the visibility they needed to make each asset go further.



# Connecting the campaign

With so many moving pieces, the communications team needed a way to bring everything together. Their campaign portfolio became the control center for all contributing projects, streamlining visibility across teams, simplifying coordination, and ensuring the entire campaign stayed on track.

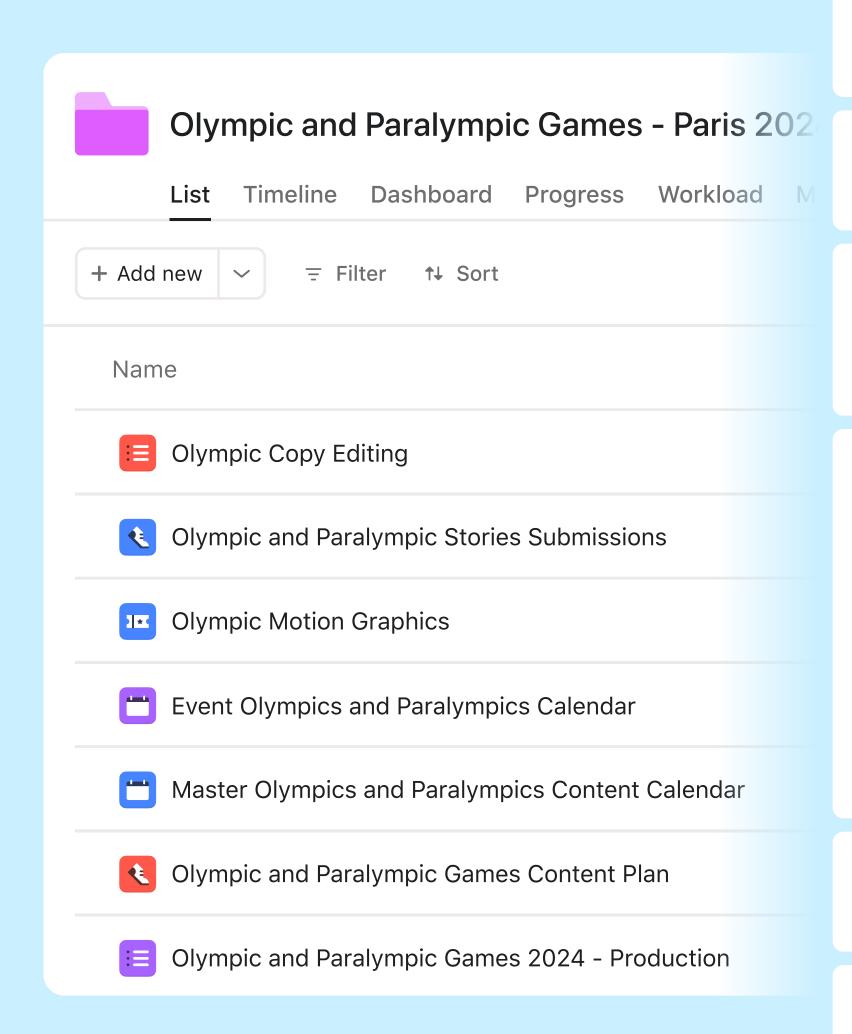


"Visibility is so important to leadership. When you have clear insights into progress, blockers, and key milestones, it's easier to guide teams effectively. The right reporting doesn't just inform, it drives meaningful conversations and better decision-making."

### **Brian Higgins**

Senior Vice President of Business Performance









Add labels to each initiative to sort projects and find what you need at a glance.

Priority Type Progress

- Assign roles at different levels to ensure the right visibility and oversight.
  - **Project owner:** Assign one clear owner to each project to maintain oversight
  - Portfolio stakeholders: Add stakeholders at the portfolio level for high-level visibility
  - Project collaborators: Add team members as collaborators at the project level for more detailed, task-level insight
- Share recurring status updates to surface highlights, blockers, and upcoming milestones across projects.
- Use Smart status to draft comprehensive updates faster with AI.

### CROSSING THE FINISH LINE

# Reflecting on a winning campaign

With Asana, the NCAA didn't just scale storytelling—they transformed how the the *Olympians* & *Paralympians Made Here* campaign came to life. Standardized workflows and a central collaboration hub helped them quadruple content output from their Tokyo campaign and lay the groundwork for future initiatives. Now, with a proven playbook, they're expanding these processes across departments.



### The scoreboard

2020 TOKYO OLYMPICS 🔼 VS. 2024 PARIS OLYMPICS 💵

331

**SOCIAL POSTS** 

4,331

12

**FEATURE STORIES** 

117

126K

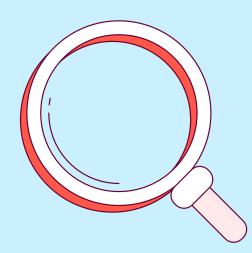
**VIDEO VIEWS** 

20M



+2,929%

INCREASE IN TOTAL SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS



+1,867%

INCREASE IN TOTAL SOCIAL MEDIA IMPRESSIONS

### The final score

117

**FEATURE STORIES** 

475+

TOTAL ATHLETES FEATURED

11,449

**EMAILS** 

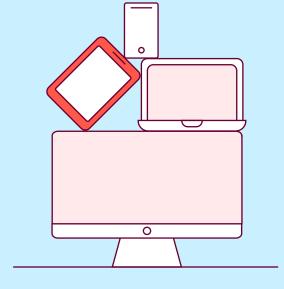
**SOCIAL MEDIA** 

4,331

**POSTS** 

20M+

**VIDEO VIEWS** 



4.3M
ENGAGEMENT

+M08

**IMPRESSIONS** 

20,241

#OLYMPIANSMADEHERE #PARALYMPIANSMADEHERE HASHTAGS

**WEB** 

230K

NCAA.ORG PAGE VIEWS

274K

NCAA.COM PAGE VIEWS



### FROM THE WINNER'S PODIUM:

# Looking ahead

The success of the NCAA's transformation extends far beyond a single campaign. Going forward, Asana will continue to play a key role in modernizing how the organization works and collaborates. From running efficient championships to streamlining workflows across departments, Asana is helping the NCAA create a more proactive, connected, and efficient way of working.

As the NCAA looks to scale these practices to more teams, they plan to leverage advanced features like capacity planning, dashboards, and Asana Al. By connecting people, processes, and priorities in a central platform, they're positioning the organization to elevate the experience of student-athletes and celebrate their stories on every stage.

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The NCAA is a deeply connected organization, but one that's operated in silos for years. Asana has transformed that. Now, it's time to build on that transformation by continuing to connect teams and creating a culture where collaboration thrives.

Brian Higgins
Senior Vice President of
Business Performance



The

The success of the Olympic campaign showed our broader team the value of clarity and coordination: When you get the incoming workflows right, the outgoing results are more impactful. Without Asana, that success wouldn't have been possible.

Chris Dion
Director of Digital Communications



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The Olympians & Paralympians campaign was the first step in uniting our internal and external stakeholders into a content hub. It showed us what's possible when everyone is aligned and using the right tools. Now, we're excited to refine our workflows and tell even more inspiring stories.

Jaelyn Arndt
Associate Director of Communications

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The Paris 2024 campaign was a turning point for our team—it pushed us to think bigger, work smarter, and elevate our storytelling.

Asana helped us bring our vision to life while keeping the focus on what matters most: celebrating the incredible student-athletes who inspire us every day.

**Gina Lehe**Vice President of Communications

# asana