

November 14, 2022

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE TRAIL AND ULTRA RUNNING COMMUNITY

Trail running is a sport home to nature enthusiasts and dirt lovers, adventure seekers and rock scramblers. The “Trail Community” is in constant high praise, often described as strangers who quickly become best friends, competitors who will always stop to help, and races that become chosen family reunions. From the top of mountains, down into canyons, from volcano to sea, athletes give their all to this sport. Through grit and determination, our bodies can do incredible, often seemingly impossible, things! Despite this welcoming culture, non-binary athletes have yet to be included in the community. As non-binary athletes, we call upon the trail and ultra running community to formally recognize and incorporate non-binary athletes into all aspects of the sport.

The non-binary experience is complex, and no two journeys will be the same. Non-binary is an umbrella term for the many genders that are not exclusively man or woman. Some individuals exist between the gender binary of men and women, while others exist outside of the gender binary, or have no gender at all. Society is increasingly recognizing those who are non-binary; many states offer a nonbinary-inclusive gender marker of X, and the Department of State allows X gender markers on passports. Despite this legal recognition outside of the running industry, non-binary athletes are still forced to select between two divisions that do not represent who they are. For some, having to choose an identity that doesn’t align with their own can feel dysphoric, triggering, or unsafe, and is a burdensome weight to carry when participating. For others, it may be holding them back from registering at all.

In the larger running industry, road racing has made recent progress towards the inclusion of non-binary athletes. Philadelphia Distance Run and New York Road Runners have been leaders in this change; and as of 2022, five of the six World Major Marathons have announced the addition of a non-binary division. As we acknowledge and celebrate that progress, along with the work that trail and ultra companies such as Aravaipa Running, The Active Joe, Leadville Race Series, Bolton Valley, and Go Beyond Racing have accomplished, it’s important to also recognize there’s still more that needs to be done.

WE CALL UPON REGISTRATION PLATFORMS, TIMING COMPANIES, AND RACES THAT MANAGE THEIR OWN SYSTEMS to prioritize updating code to include non-binary athletes in the registration process and results. Companies such as RunSignup, Race Roster, Haku, and RunReg have all made notable changes to allow race organizers to opt into creating non-binary divisions. UltraSignup does allow non-binary athletes to change their gender on their athlete profile, with plans to display the new gender division in results sometime in 2023. In the meantime, to register and participate in a race, non-binary athletes are still forced to choose between the existing “male” and “female” divisions.

Additionally, it’s time for the industry to shift away from using male and female as labels for gendered divisions, and instead use men, women, and non-binary. Divisions based on sex assigned at birth increase opportunities for harassment and harm, especially for transgender and non-binary athletes. As coding is updated, we suggest that male, female, and non-binary be updated to men, women, and non-binary, using M, W, and N respectively.

WE CALL UPON RACE ORGANIZERS to make your events inclusive of non-binary athletes. We ask that you seek education on the non-binary experience and include non-binary perspectives when making decisions for your event. It's imperative you also create inclusion policies that state gender will be accepted at face value and require no supporting evidence (such as legal or medical documentation). Once created, make sure to communicate your event's support of those who exist beyond the gender binary clearly and openly.

As non-binary athletes, we also affirm that events need to have a transgender policy in place that ensures non-binary transgender people and binary transgender men and women can compete in the division that aligns with their gender. A non-binary division should in no way be used to exclude binary transgender athletes from participating in men's and women's divisions.

As already mentioned, if your registration and timing platforms include non-binary as an option, know you may have to manually opt in for it to be visible to athletes. If you are anticipating adding a non-binary division to your 2023 event as soon as your platform(s) allows the option, please make those intentions known now, as athletes are planning for next season and want to know which events will offer them the opportunity to participate in a non-binary division. We'd also appreciate you encouraging the teams working on updating your platforms to make it a high priority.

With the addition of non-binary divisions, it's important to recognize that adding a registration option is only the beginning. Many races have yet to offer equitable awards and prizes, effectively creating a "non-competitive" division. This forces non-binary athletes to choose between two inaccurate gender divisions to compete with their peers or to run the same distance but not be eligible for awards and prizes. Building out equitable non-binary divisions requires the same amount of attention and detail given to the existing men's and women's divisions. Awards and prize money, finishing tapes, social media coverage, etc. are all important components. For more information regarding equitable non-binary divisions, please see the *Guide to Non-Binary Inclusion in Running* available at nonbinaryrunning.com.

WE CALL UPON VENDORS AND SPONSORS to offer gender expansive products and services. Consider the ways in which apparel and shoes are gendered. Even picking out a shirt at a race is often gendered - consider replacing the question of "men's or women's shirt?" with more descriptive language, such as "straight cut" or "fitted/tapered/contoured cut." Allow people to choose their size and cut, without imposing gendered assumptions about who should wear which style. It's also important to remember that colors don't have a gender, so women's products don't always need to be pink and men's products blue.

Please be aware of who you are featuring on websites and in marketing campaigns. Representation is important, and company marketing should include non-binary athletes. Add your voice to normalizing diversity within the trail and ultra running community.

WE CALL UPON PARTICIPANTS AND SPECTATORS to refrain from making assumptions about a participant's gender based on their name, appearance, or experience. Try replacing gendered language, such as "*guys, ladies and gentlemen, or sir and ma'am,*" with more open language, such as "*participants, athletes, volunteers, friends, or spectators.*" When meeting new people or introducing yourself to others, normalize the sharing of pronouns, even if you're not non-binary or transgender. This helps create a space where others feel comfortable sharing their pronouns too. Finally, if you're an ally and want to help, educate yourself and then speak up when you encounter a race that hasn't built space for non-binary athletes. Ask the race organizers why they haven't done so and invite them to consider doing so. Provide them with resources, like this letter.

We are eager to see races openly and equally welcome non-binary athletes into their midst. We want to see the trail and ultra running community grow, especially with the arrival of Gen Z, in which 12% of young people are non-binary or transgender. We look forward to the day when everyone will feel welcome and included at any and all running events. And while meaningful change can bring feelings of uncertainty, we are confident that with the integral trail and ultra running tenets of community, courage, and kindness, we can all work together to create events that incorporate and celebrate non-binary athletes.

Sincerely,

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they/them

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nonbinaryrunning.com/runbeyond