



Annual Report for USATF NE Cross Country: Sep 2021 - Sep 2022

There was another great year of competition and community at USATF NE supported Cross Country events in 2021. The previous year (it's name shall not be spoken) was plagued by COVID restrictions, and no one knew what to expect in 2021. But our Association harriers answered the clarion call of roots, rocks, and running to take up the challenge. It was, indeed, time. Time to stride. Based on our member's response last season, with the road to recovery complete, we are poised for a strong cross country season and Grand Prix in 2022.

The 2021 USATF NE XC GP featured a slate of five races, eerily similar to 2019 and 2022. Locations stretched north to the New Hampshire / Massachusetts border (Race #5 - Rachel's Run in Tyngsboro) and south to the Rhode Island / Massachusetts border (Race #2 - Brown Bear in Attleboro). Our western most location was the kickoff event, the Greater Boston Track Club Invite in Carlisle. With limited Open Cross Country events available compromising our current options, in upcoming years we will work with clubs and directors in the Horace Greeley areas of the Association to stage a race that is reachable to the majority of our members.

Overall, our participation numbers last season were healthy considering the circumstances, but up against a strong benchmark of 2019. That year was the culmination of refocus, direct outreach, and the strong pull of National Club Cross at Lehigh University. A very enjoyable bus ride that was! For comparison, our 2019 Grand Prix stalwarts who raced in at least three races, qualifying for that sweet swiggity swag, numbered 103; in 2021 there were 73 warriors, nearly on par with 2018's 78. Consider 2021 the bedrock upon which we rebuild our house. Whose house? Our house, the house of harriers.

Early trends look promising. The recently competed GBTC Invite, again the opener for the 2022 XC Grand Prix, featured 175 registrants with 167 crossing the line. That is a 30% increase over last year, and only 9% off the 2019 gold standard. We welcomed several new clubs to the GP at Great Brook Farm, and many returnees have pledged to run the full slate. This year's women's Open race fielded seven scoring teams, and the men were not far behind with five teams in the Open and another five in the Masters. Big increase from the previous year that had four Women's Open Teams, four Men's Open, and two in the Men's Masters and essentially in-line with 2019. As Martha Stewart said, "... and that's a good thing".

As 2021 rolled along and we emerged out of our COVID caves, participation numbers progressively increased at each chapter of the XC GP. Earlier cross country races showed reductions of up to 30% from 2019, rebounding to only 17% down by the annual Association Championship at historic Franklin Park, better than the National and Regional trend¹. With our new enthusiasts and the complete return to action of our previous devotees, 2022 should be a banner year for cross country. We truly appreciate the vigor and intensity of our Association's XC champions.

In 2021, we supported our members with improved communications, both en masse and individually, delivering the appropriate attention our constituents deserve. An increased web and social media presence was enabled by Association Board resources. Timely scoring and posting of the Grand Prix results were critical, keeping us foremost in the minds of all interested parties. This was augmented by insightful and humorous (hopefully) recaps and out-of-focus pictures of the Grand Prix races sent directly to the participants. USATF NE was enthusiastic and present at the races, urging on our harriers, fielding inquiries, and resolving issues. We will redouble this effort in 2022.

Please stay in touch with USATF NE Cross Country by subscribing to our Instagram and Facebook accounts. Complete information for all things XC can be found on our web pages <https://runsignup.blog/2022/02/04/how-much-was-race-participation-impacted-by-covid-in-2021/> and the Grand Prix specific <https://newengland.usatf.org/events/2022/2022-usatf-ne-cross-country-grand-prix> Direct and confidential inquiries may be directed to cwargo@usatfne.org , your Cross Country Chair, always willing to listen.

¹ How Much Was Race Participation Impacted by COVID in 2021?, RunSignUp Blog January 2021, <https://runsignup.blog/2022/02/04/how-much-was-race-participation-impacted-by-covid-in-2021/>