



DATE: September 21, 2021
TO: USMS House of Delegates
FROM: Dawson Hughes
SUBJECT: **2021 CEO Report to the USMS House of Delegates**

The USMS community continues to show resilience in the face of the organization's most significant challenge. For 17 months, change has been the norm. Clubs and events have continued to adjust to changing pool availability and health guidance. Volunteers have continued to contribute virtually to the governance and operations of the organization. Clubs and coaches have learned to navigate lane reservations and pool availability limitations to provide opportunities to swim. Events have implemented COVID-19 safety measures and participation restrictions. And volunteer and staff leadership have regularly adjusted to external challenges to best serve USMS members.

In times like this, it's more important than ever to remain focused on the mission.

USMS Mission: to promote health, wellness, fitness, and competition for adults through swimming.

This memo will cover success in meeting our mission in 2021 and an overview of what to expect in 2022. The [2022 business plan](#) is in its early stages and will take shape as we prepare the final budget in November. In the coming months, we'll be creating a new strategic plan for USMS with plans to release it in the first half of next year. And all of that will build toward [Relay 2022](#), where we'll gather for the first time since the 2019 annual meeting. The board chose the theme of club development for Relay 2022, with a focus on building more, and more robust, clubs to increase opportunities for adults to swim.

I encourage you to keep the USMS mission top of mind in your volunteer roles and duties. Keeping members swimming and attracting new adults to swimming for fitness and competition is the priority as you address challenges with your club, hosting an event, with your LMSC, in your role on a national committee, and during the annual meeting.

2021 Success

USMS planned for a 20% decrease in membership and corresponding revenue declines, as the effects of the pandemic caught up with our annual cycle in 2021. Delegates may recall that USMS was fortunate in 2020, with 75% of budgeted membership for the year already registered before COVID-19 shut down pools throughout the country. Moving into 2021, we budgeted for 40,000 members and few sanctioned events to be held. At the start of the year, we planned for a \$550,000 draw on reserves to maintain services and weather the effects of the pandemic, while hoping for some return to normalcy. Our financial management and strong reserves provided confidence in this approach for the short term. However, it was established that a multiyear stretch with this level of subsidy was not sustainable.

By March 2021, it was clear that some normalcy was returning, and our outlook improved from our original forecast. The horizon seemed brighter with vaccinations becoming available, clubs in many areas returning to the water, and events looking more possible. Staff worked with the [Finance Committee](#) and [board](#) to develop a revised plan that returned to hosting national championship



events and added back the Try Masters Swimming marketing campaign, among other adjustments. Resources were reevaluated and ultimately increased to levels needed to carry out the new plan and for a longer-term membership growth effort.

Starting in the 2nd quarter, membership forecasts were increased to 42,500, and the new plan was implemented. The results thus far have exceeded expectations. By the end of the 2nd quarter, membership forecasts were again increased to 48,500 and have improved further since then.

Ultimately, it's likely USMS will have 50,000 members, positive net operating revenue, and the highest ever level of reserves as 2021 concludes. But the financials don't reflect our mission.

Nearly 34,000 members renewed their commitment to swimming, 5,500-plus re-engaged with swimming after a break of at least one year, and over 10,000 adults will have participated in USMS programs for the first time. More than 1,200 clubs (including workout groups) provided the opportunity for adults to swim regularly, and over 200 events will have been sanctioned, providing training goals, motivation, and competitive opportunities for USMS members.

The National Office has continued to execute on a robust communication and content calendar to provide members, coaches, clubs, volunteers, and event directors with information, updates, and swimming-related content. We implemented the new [My USMS](#), which provides seamless access to online benefits and membership information. The new Workout Library and Community were implemented, and members now have more ability to self-manage their account than ever before. USMS and USA Swimming continue to combine our cause-marketing efforts under the USA Swimming Foundation, which will take the lead in the upcoming 2022 Adult Learn-to-Swim grant cycle. We've continued to enhance club registration to provide clubs as much direct marketing support as possible. Work continues in the background to transition our membership database to a new modern platform, so we may continue modernization of our digital capabilities to operate efficiently and cost effectively. That transition will happen in 2022.

Almost 600 LMSC and national volunteers met with their committees regularly to discuss how best to meet our mission and serve our members. Various groups have helped in a multitude of ways over and above the typical annual work of committees. The Coaches Committee has supported the restart of the Masters coach certification, with Level 1 certification moving to a virtual format. The Championship Committee has helped navigate an ever-changing COVID-19 landscape to safely host a pool national championship in July and prepare for another in several weeks. Task forces have made recommendations on the transition to Relay 2022, a future vision for our national committee structure, and how to improve upon the virtual format for the annual meeting. The ALTS programming committee has continued to engage with certified ALTS instructors through webinars, and ALTS Instructor certification courses have resumed. And the Long Distance Committee has weaved through various hosting challenges and cancellations to provide opportunities for members to compete in the open water and via ePostal Championships. Volunteers have also received ongoing communication and updates on the Try Masters Swimming campaign, sanction guidelines, and annual meeting updates, among other topics. Beyond our national volunteer structure, coaches and volunteers have navigated their local health recommendations and facility restrictions to get their swimmers back in the water, officials have dusted off their white polos so events could be held, and LMSCs have discussed how to grow their local Masters Swimming communities and provide more opportunities for adults to swim.



Very few of us would have forecast we'd still be in the midst of the pandemic at this point. Fewer still (including me) would have envisioned reaching 50,000 members in 2021. Collectively, we've provided a safe outlet, despite the pandemic, for 50,000 adults to stay healthy and fit, to compete, and to interact with their local and regional masters swimming communities. These efforts represent the successes we've had in fulfilling our mission in 2021 and should be celebrated.

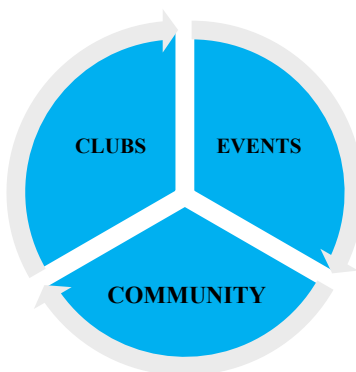
Looking forward to 2022 and beyond

We live in a complicated time that doesn't show signs of moving back toward simplicity soon. Involvement in USMS leadership can add to the complexity, with our 170-page rule book, 600 LMSC and national volunteers, many more who volunteer to officiate and operate their clubs, 52 LMSCs, and a significant web of communication.

The reality is that USMS is simpler than it may seem and for our members, swimming can be a remedy for the complexities we all face. USMS's value lies in its clubs, events, and community. Clubs and events drive the day-to-day motivation to maintain a swimming routine, and the community they foster keeps members returning year after year. As USMS leaders, we must keep the simplicity and joy of swimming in mind as we navigate the opportunities we have before us.

COVID-19 will continue to be a factor in our planning and operations. Unexpected societal issues will undoubtedly present challenges. Unforeseen accidents and issues will continue to be navigated. And inquiries from swimmers about non-swimming related problems may need to be addressed. Despite matters that may be distracting at times, USMS must foremost remain a place for adults to gather with the common passion for swimming and the desire to take advantage of the health and fitness benefits it offers.

With the value of clubs, events, and community in mind, we've worked on how to better explain where USMS should focus and to help channel efforts toward the priorities we should be working together to address. This messaging will continue to be refined in the coming months and in the lead-up to Relay 2022.



Clubs, including the coaches who are the catalyst for any high-performing club, provide day-to-day value for most USMS members. In 2019 (pre-pandemic), nearly 70% of USMS membership affiliated with a club with 30 or more members. Those clubs represented about 30% of our total



USMS clubs. (70% of members were supported by 30% of USMS clubs.) In fact, nearly half of the USMS membership in 2019 affiliated with a club with over 75 swimmers. This means providing support for clubs to start up, to grow to these levels of ongoing membership, and to remain viable for the long term, will be a priority. Club growth provides greater flexibility in the number of workouts offered and allows the facility to utilize more lane space and benefit from the corresponding revenue. More regular swimmers mean more opportunities to attract them to an event. Growth at the club level drives mission success and must be the priority for USMS.

Although USMS evolved from an event-driven membership organization, approximately 30% of USMS members participate in USMS-sanctioned events today. Events continue to serve as an outstanding motivational tool for coaches to keep swimmers engaged. They are rewarding and fun. Meets and open water competitions provide the social and competitive element that swimmers enjoy, and they help develop the wider Masters Swimming community. Events are also valuable USMS offerings that help meet our mission with a significantly higher percentage of event participants renewing annually. LMSCs have a strong event support structure in place, but we must continue to work to create an event schedule that matches where we were before the pandemic and start new events where feasible.

The Masters Swimming community is the reason many members continue to participate in swimming year after year. The opportunity to see teammates weekly, socialize with other swimmers at events, engage with in-person and online community discussions, and attend clinics, LMSC meetings, and national gatherings to share a common passion for swimming is the intangible (and priceless) value that makes Masters Swimming a lifelong endeavor for many USMS members. Community can be tough to explain, but once members feel they are part of it, they are more likely to volunteer at their club, learn more about LMSC volunteer roles, and turn swimming from a fitness choice to a lifestyle. The community starts on the pool deck but extends to coaching, event hosting, officiating, and LMSC and national volunteer roles. A robust community at each of these levels ensures a strong future for USMS.

In the coming months, we'll be talking about these three themes regularly. Clubs have the greatest day-to-day impact and will get the top billing as the theme of [Relay 2022](#). From each of our roles within USMS, we can have an impact on one, or all, of these areas. We each have examples of positive swimming and social experiences from our club, from events, and within the swimming community that we can work to recreate for another member. We must challenge each other to focus our volunteer, staff, and financial resources to build more robust clubs, host quality events, and foster the community for USMS members.

USMS National Office Focus in 2022

We will continue to strive to provide a suite of benefits like *SWIMMER* magazine, the Workout Library, and virtual events to supplement and enhance the local membership experience. We will continue to manage the infrastructure necessary to operate registration, provide insurance, host a results database, market USMS clubs and events, and recognize member achievements. And we will continue to manage USMS financials responsibly and invest in the future of the organization.

Several significant projects will be undertaken and implemented in 2022. Behind the scenes, USMS will be transitioning our membership database of record to a new platform. This transition is



currently targeted for the 3rd quarter with months of planning already completed to ensure a smooth transition.

The online version of *SWIMMER* and our digital content will receive an upgrade to provide a better online experience for those who wish to view USMS features and articles regularly.

We will continue to refine our marketing campaigns to connect interested swimmers with their local clubs, and additional support for direct event marketing will be added.

We will continue to enhance communications. The [new email preference center](#) will allow members to personalize the USMS communication they receive. *STREAMLINES for Volunteers* will be sent monthly (beginning in October 2021) to provide more timely strategic updates. It will be combined with the monthly president and CEO updates and will provide more opportunities to highlight local volunteer efforts. And the online community will continue to grow into a central hub for swimming discussion, information sharing, and engagement.

2022 will see the implementation of the new USMS+ add-on option for USMS members. USMS+ will include USMS virtual national events (e.g., fitness series, epostals, virtual meet), an upgraded member welcome kit, motivational webinars and a donation to the USA Swimming Foundation in support of ALTS program grants. This package will be available during 2022 registration and net proceeds (i.e., after expenses) will be split with LMSCs in the same manner as membership fees. This new offering will be a great opportunity for members to bundle all of the virtual national events they participate in annually and access other exclusive benefits.

Most important, the National Office will be rolling out a revamped club development effort. This program will fine-tune already established initiatives like the coach certification and coach mentor programs. We will focus on recruiting coaches with potential to grow a Masters club and will provide start-up and marketing funds for clubs that wish to grow membership. This will be combined with a more focused effort to start new programs at facilities that should have a Masters club. We'll be looking for LMSCs to partner in this program, much like we did with the [COVID Covid-19 Relief Program for Clubs](#). Stay tuned for more information on this program in October and in the lead up to [Relay 2022](#).

LMSC Focus

Nearly all LMSCs have more funds available than prior to the pandemic. The unified fee added resources for some, and all have saved expenses typically assigned for travel and accommodations to attend the annual meeting. Furthermore, the national budget will absorb more of the costs associated with attending [Relay 2022](#), as part of the commitment made during the transition to the unified fee.

Despite a business plan that contemplates a negative bottom line for 2022 as we continue to build back from the effects of the pandemic, USMS will have approximately \$300,000 in operating surplus. The difference between the negative national budget and that surplus is approximately \$600,000 in funds that will be distributed to LMSCs in 2022. In most LMSCs, those funds have not been committed to any initiatives other than travel to Relay 2022.

We are asking LMSCs to put their resources to work with a focus on clubs, events, and community. A dynamic document was created as part of unified fee discussions to provide a menu



of ideas for LMSCs to use their funds to provide member benefits and value at the local level. This document includes LMSCs that have implemented these programs as a resource. The [LMSC Focus of Resources](#) has been updated with ideas that can help develop clubs, events, and community. I encourage your LMSC to consider investing in one or more of the concepts that are outlined.

As mentioned previously, we'll have a program to support club growth and club creation that may be an option for your LMSC. More information will be made available in October. Many LMSCs offer stipends or scholarships for coaches to attend training. Some LMSCs have events that may not have resumed after a pause from the pandemic. If so, it may be beneficial to provide financial support to get them restarted. Or maybe an opportunity to fund a new event is possible.

Your LMSC may prefer to focus on community by investing in social or networking events for swimmers or coaches. You may also consider ALTS programming or a USA Swimming Foundation fundraiser, in support of ALTS grants, as a community-building initiative.

Perhaps your LMSC can select an initiative from all three areas to try.

[Relay 2022](#) attendees will receive new ideas, and it's suggested that LMSCs remain flexible with 2022 budgeting in the event you decide to try something new.

If you've made it this far into my update, you've noticed a common theme: clubs, events, and community. The emphasis in 2022 will be on clubs and the facilities, coaches, and administrative tasks that support them. USMS will rely on LMSC representatives to discuss and implement the best approach to support these critical USMS elements in your area. Please set aside time at an upcoming LMSC meeting to discuss how to best use your resources in 2022 to provide value for USMS members in your area.

One year ago, I wrote, "USMS will come out the other side of these challenges stronger, with new ways of thinking and operating. Our tried-and-true traditions will remain, with new concepts created to address COVID-19-related issues perhaps becoming part of the USMS tradition."

We aren't through the pandemic yet, but we are certainly stronger and new concepts like [Relay 2022](#) and the revamped club development effort are coming to fruition.

You should be proud of our collective response to challenges of the past 18 months and the continued strength of the USMS community. You should also be proud of the Board of Directors and their leadership. They have been outstanding stewards of USMS in addressing challenges never contemplated when they volunteered for their roles. They should be commended for the countless hours of personal time they've committed, above the regular meeting schedule, to keep USMS in a strong position for the future

On behalf of the National Office staff, thank you for all your efforts through the year supporting USMS members. We look forward to continued teamwork as we return to proactively planning for the future with more USMS clubs and events and a more robust Masters Swimming community.