USA SWIMMING ANNUAL SUMMIT REPORT
September 23-26, 2026 - Verónica Hernández, Administrative Vice Chair

I attended the USA Swimming Annual Summit in Denver with several members of our Board of Directors. On Wednesday I spent most of my time in the sessions on access, growth and retention, which fit closely with our DDEI work. On Thursday I attended the LSC Task Force discussion and the State of the Sport general session, and on Friday a session on how USA Swimming is using data to support performance. I also took part in the Western Zone meeting and the USA Swimming House of Delegates. Lehla Irwin, Phil Grant, Alex Cleveland and Cindy Rowland have reported in detail on Aligning for Impact, the national membership numbers, officials and governance, so I have kept any overlap brief.

Wednesday, 23 - Travel & Access, Growth and Retention Sessions

- Expanding Access: Closing the Sports Opportunity Gap - A workshop led by Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA) trainers, with a USA Swimming staff member presenting swimming data.
    - The "sports opportunity gap" is the unequal access to youth sports faced by underrepresented and marginalized kids. One statistic stood out: in a 2021 American Red Cross study, the top three reasons kids do not swim were transportation, finances and, the number one reason across all racial groups, an unwelcoming environment.
    - We compared equality, equity and removing the barrier altogether. The example that stayed with me: if registration is "open to everyone" but only available online, who are we missing?
    - Key indicators to watch: how we allocate scholarships, equipment and facility time; tracking participation across demographic groups, including families who start registering and never finish; coach training; and collecting feedback from inside and outside our programs.
    - USA Swimming's TEAR model for community engagement: **T**arget your audience, **E**ngage with that community and ask what they need, **A**ctivate based on what they tell you, and **R**etain the kids once they are in the water.
- Investing in Coaches as a Growth Strategy - A case study with Paris Jacobs, owner of Machine Aquatics in Potomac Valley, moderated by a member of USA Swimming's education staff.
    - The club treats coach education as a core budget line, alongside pool time and staff pay, and explains it to parents as professional development. It sent six coaches to USA Swimming's Coach Development Academy, and most of its 60 coaches are full-time with benefits.
    - Many LSCs budget for coach education, but the money often goes unused because coaches do not feel they can miss practice. Setting expectations with parents and covering practice plans makes it easier for coaches to go.
    - Education does not have to mean travel: in-house staff learning counts, and USA Swimming Team Services can join an LSC coaches' Zoom at no cost. She credits this approach for very high staff retention.
- Growing the Sport Through Collaboration -
    - The message was to move from a scarcity mindset to an abundance mindset. Our competition is not the club down the street; it is every other year-round sport competing for families' time and money.
    - The presenter noted that tennis grew after redesigning competition for its youngest players (smaller courts, bigger balls) and asked what that shift could look like for swimming, including shorter meet formats offered alongside traditional meets.
    - Ideas for clubs and LSCs: bridge programs with swim schools, local club and high school partnerships, established clubs mentoring emerging ones, welcoming parents in as volunteers, and measuring programs by their impact on retention, capacity and access. We also need to tell a more human story about what swimming gives kids.

Thursday, 24 - LSC Task Force & General Session

- LSC Task Force Discussion: No Decision Yet - Cindy summarized the Task Force findings in her report. A few additional points I took away:
    - Kevin Ring opened by stressing that no decision has been made. The guiding question is the most efficient way to deliver the sport and what is best for swimming, and any changes will come through a thoughtful, methodical process. The Task Force was commissioned in January and has met with 49 LSCs.
    - A history review showed that studies in 2001 and 2016 and a 2014 article raised the same issues we hear today: no uniform role for LSCs, a need to shift toward service to clubs, and outdated geographic boundaries.
    - USA Swimming staff shared how widely LSCs vary, mostly from 2023 Form 990 data (approximate): volunteers from 35 to 450, about 20 LSCs with no payroll, revenue from about $14,000 to $1.3 million, and sanction lead times from 18 months to a single day. The USA Swimming share of an athlete membership is $70, and LSC add-ons explain why families see different prices.
    - Wisconsin is piloting a streamlined sanctioning tool with USA Swimming, using a “build, test, learn, then scale” approach. The Task Force emphasized choice for LSCs and asked for continued feedback.
- State of the Sport - Cindy noted that there was no transcript of Kevin Ring’s address. I recorded it, and these are the highlights:
    - LA28 is meant to be a launching point, not a destination. The four pillars remain: grow the sport, strengthen the organization, achieve competitive success, and inspire members and fans.
    - New data shows that when athletes compete more, they stay in the sport longer. Block Party offers a low-barrier first racing experience, and the community swim team program is at an all-time high.
    - USA Swimming added 11 new corporate partners, Foundation giving reached record levels, and the national team won 50 medals at Pan Pacs.
    - The new member app and Data Hub are on a multi-year roadmap, and member feedback is shaping them.

Friday, 25 - Data & Performance Session and Western Zone Meeting

- Data-Driven Approach to National Team Performance - Presented by a member of USA Swimming’s national team data and sports science staff.
    - Staff film races at national meets and return video and race metrics to athletes and coaches. A 2024 Olympic Trials race stats booklet will be published, with a Pan Pacs version in progress.
    - Research now drives decisions. National team criteria moved from top six to top five in most events, and the medal standard used to select the team for a May meet in London is based on the average bronze-medal time across recent Worlds and Olympics.
    - Medaling is a pattern, not a moment: medalists race their events more often and race a wider range of events, and margins are tiny.
    - For clubs, a USA Swimming Club Excellence study found the number of long course meets was the biggest single factor, not club size, and coaching experience also ranked high. IMX scores were more predictive than expected.
- Western Zone Meeting
    - Pacific Swimming’s Monica Warren named the Western Zone Junior Athlete Representative. Scott Shea (Coach Director) and Lisa Vetterlein (Secretary/Treasurer) were both re-elected, running unopposed.
    - DART will host the 2027 Age Group Zones at North Natomas Aquatic Center, August 4-7, 2027, followed by Elk Grove in 2028 and Mt. Hood, Oregon in 2029.
    - Other future sites: Senior Zones in Las Vegas (2028), Mesa (2029) and Boise (2030); Long Course Zones in Clovis (2028 and 2029); and Open Water in Coeur d’Alene (2028).

- The 2027 Western Zone DEI Select Camp and Summit will be held June 24-27, 2027, at the University of Nevada, Reno. Each LSC sends two athletes and two non-athletes, and the camp has room for 40 athletes.

Saturday, 26 - USAS House of Delegates

- USA Swimming House of Delegates
  - USA Swimming now has 57 LSCs, since Ohio and Lake Erie have merged, as have Maine and New England.
  - Tom Dolan and Tom Ugast were elected to the USA Swimming Board as At-Large members. The credentials report counted 331 eligible voting delegates out of 350.
  - The legislation was not controversial, and most items followed the Rules & Regulations Committee's recommendations. R-1 (the 12 and under backstroke turn exception) was referred to the Age Group Development Committee, while R-2 and R-7 passed with amendments.
  - The Foundation report highlighted grants for swim lessons for children and adults, national team support through the Donor Athlete Partnership Program, Community Impact Grants and HBCU grants.

What This Means for Pacific Swimming

- **Access:** Look at our programs and registration through the "who are we missing?" lens and consider tracking who starts but does not complete registration. A welcoming environment matters as much as cost.
- **Coaches:** Encourage clubs to budget for coach education and make it easy to use, including free options like a Team Services Zoom. Coach longevity showed up in two separate sessions as a driver of retention and results.
- **Competition and retention:** Racing more, especially long course and a variety of events, is linked to retention and performance. It is worth keeping in mind as we plan meet formats.
- **Task Force:** No decision has been made yet. This is a good time for us to review how our own sanction, fee and policy requirements compare and to keep sharing feedback.