



2024

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# Best Practices Guide

Growth and Retention  
for 10&Us



# Hello & Welcome



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## Understanding This Best Practices Guide

Over the past decade, the U.S. and several countries have seen an overall decline in organized youth sports. Reports from the Aspen Institute and Sports & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA) indicate that fewer kids are playing sports especially in the 6-12 age group. While USA Swimming has experienced this decline as well, there is good news: we have clubs across the country experiencing success in attracting and retaining 10-and-under (10&U) athletes and families.

USA Swimming staff interviewed over 30 of these clubs that are thriving, all of which have demonstrated above average 10&U retention rates over the past 10 years. This guide is designed to assist USA Swimming Clubs and Local Swimming Committees (LSCs) in growing and retaining membership for athletes aged 10&U by sharing their best practices. The insights provided in this guide were gathered from USA Swimming teams of varying sizes, geographic locations, and settings across the country,



# What We Know

2022 and 2023 were two of USA Swimming's five highest new membership years, but with lower-than-average retention rates. We surveyed parents of children who did not return to their club to understand their experience:

## What Do Parents Say

**The factors that parents listed as the most positive aspects of the experience with a USA Swimming Club:**

- Healthy Exercise
- Quality of the Coach
- Peer group

**When asked about aspects that led them to not return to their club the three highest rated factors were:**

- Meet Costs
- Time Commitment
- Did not enjoy the experience/Not Fun

**When asked what factors would influence them to return to the team:**

- More convenient/Lower time commitment/Shorter Competitions
- Lower cost
- If more friends joined the team

**Parents ascribed a Net Promoter Score of 28 to their club experience, which is favorable (Scale= -100 to +100)**

Top-3 reason they would recommend their club to another family:

1. High Quality Coaches
2. Team Culture/Atmosphere/Well run
3. Healthy Exercise/Fun

**Top-3 reasons they would not recommend their club to another family:**

1. Low Quality Coaches
2. Expense
3. Time Commitment





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# 10&U Growth and Retention Case Study



## AT A GLANCE:

Team: Greenbrier Valley Aquatic Center

Location: Lewisburg, WV

LSC: West Virginia Swimming (WV)

Size: 41 athletes

Club Type: Facility owned/ institutional

Head Coach/CEO: Samantha Gray

Multi-site: No

Coaches on Staff: 1 full time/0 part time

Website: [Click here](#)



## CONSIDER THIS

*"It is okay to start small and that should not deter you in a smaller rural area. Your team will grow one athlete at a time if you are patient and persistent. We are proud of meeting athletes where they are when they join the team. Our goal is to instill a love for the sport."*

## GROWING GVAC

GVAC is a new and small team in rural West Virginia. Their main source of athletes is lesson providers in the surrounding area. The Head Coach is also a teacher in the school system and works with the them to advertise the program.

## GETTING STARTED

Lessons in the area focus learning to swim for safety, not competitive strokes. Athletes come with very limited skills but with enthusiasm to be competitive swimmers. As a result, requirements are very low. To join the team, athletes are only required to swim 25yds on their front and back, without going vertical. The team is built from the ground up. The next group up requires aptitude in freestyle and backstroke, and teaches breaststroke and butterfly.

## FEES AND EXPENSES

GVAC moved to bulk registration fees this year and recently adjusted them. 10 & under groups are typically \$50/month and are required to have an aquatic center membership. When starting the team, GVAC studied other youth activity offerings in the area and these fees are in line with other local opportunities. Scholarships are available.

## PARENT AND FAMILY EXPERIENCE

September 2024 marks the team's first parent education meeting and the introduction of the New Parent Handbook. The biggest hurdle with family experience is the geographical distance families typically need to travel to competition.

## LEARNING TO COMPETE

For GVAC 10 & under swimmers, meets are a huge challenge. There are no USA Swimming teams close by, so the team has to travel and pay large invitational fees which limits participation. GVAC does provide "exhibition" meets on occasion but the times don't count. They also do dual meets with a YMCA close to them, but they are not a USA Swimming team. GVAC will host their first Block Party meet in November 2024 and are hosting a team from Logan, West Virginia.

# 10&U Growth and Retention Case Study



## AT A GLANCE:

Team: Amarillo Swim Team

Location: Amarillo, Texas

LSC: West Texas (WT)

Size: 90

Club Type: 501(c)(3), board run

Head Coach/CEO: Clay Smith

Multi-site: No

Coaches on staff: 0 full time/3 part time

Website: [Click here](#)

## CONSIDER THIS

*"As a head coach, I work hard to make the team somewhere that I would want to have my kids swim."*

## GROWING AST

Most swimmers join the team after doing private lessons and through word of mouth from parents on the team. AST does not have a typical feeder system like a summer league program or an internal learn to swim program to pull from.

## GETTING STARTED

AST uses the try-out time to talk with the family about expectations, group placement, fees, and practice times. To join the team the swimmer must be able to complete a 25yd freestyle and 25yd backstroke comfortably without assistance. "One thing I like to do is invite a family to visit and watch a practice or a meet. This helps if a swimmer or parent is feeling overwhelmed about joining."

## FEES AND EXPENSES

Fees are due monthly and pretty low, around \$60 for the 10&U groups. The team also works to keep meet fees low for families, while also ensuring that the parents understand what costs are associated with the team beyond the monthly dues.

## PARENT AND FAMILY EXPERIENCE

AST works to connect every swimmer and every family. For example, they will eat together as a team at meets. The staff also takes time to talk with the parents, letting them know the coaches are approachable and available for questions. A goal of the program is to create a space where the parents feel welcomed, and the kids feel special.

## LEARNING TO COMPETE

The team plans a meet schedule that offers one meet a month. As a smaller team, they focus on attending meets that the entire team can go to. A big focus for the program is looking offer opportunities for home competition and encouraging families to attend.

# 10&U Growth and Retention Case Study



## AT A GLANCE:

Team: Asheville Jewish Community Center  
Location: Asheville, NC  
LSC: North Carolina (NC)  
Size: 98  
Club Type: 501(c)(3), institutional  
Head Coach/CEO: Wendy Lawrence  
Multi-site: N  
Coaches on Staff: 1 full time/4 part time  
Website: [Click here](#)

## CONSIDER THIS

*Head Coach has an education background and was not a swimmer. She is also the Aquatics Director and recruits her coaches from the college team down the street. She likes to do cool programming and empower young girls. She did a clinic around women & sports day in 2024 using experts in the area, not just swimming. Kathleen Prindle and Abbie Fish participated in the swimming section.*

## GROWING AJCC

Ashville JCC has grown its team by working alongside the JCC day care and swim lesson program. The after school program is the main draw for the JCC, and they capitalize by having a swim lesson program. From there, kids want to join the swim team which is also a part of the “after school” programming that the JCC provides. Families do not have to be Jewish to become a member.

## GETTING STARTED

AJCC provides a great community asset with their after school programming for families. Families must be members in order to partake and sign up for the swim lessons. From there, lessons are “bridged” into stroke development group that attends 1x per week for 45 min. The session runs for 10 weeks. They also have a small summer league that they partner with to market and grow the year round program. Once they join AJCC, the 12&Under athletes come 2-3 days per week for 1 hour.

## FEES AND EXPENSES

The Bridge - Developmental group is \$20 for 10 weeks (\$200)  
AJCC 12&Under - \$150 monthly tuition + \$175 for initial fees.

## PARENT AND FAMILY EXPERIENCE

AJCC works with the social coordinator at the Center to drive social content and constantly update the website. They make sure their team handbook is updated every year with clear expectations on what to expect. Each family has a SPORTS U APP account and they communicate and share to build community. <https://sportsyou.com/>

## LEARNING TO COMPETE

On average, the 10& Unders compete 1 time a month for 1 day. No more than a 30 min drive to meets for new families.



# 10&U Growth and Retention Case Study



## AT A GLANCE:

Team: Hudson Explorer Aquatic Team

Location: Hudson, OH

LSC: Lake Erie (LE)

Size: 204

Club Type: School District

Head Coach/Director of Community Aquatics:

Matt Davis

Multi-site: Yes, 2 locations

Coaches on Staff: 1 full time/8 part time

Website: [Click here](#)



## CONSIDER THIS

*“For HEAT, being connected to the school helps provide us with the ability to find a place for any swimmer who wants to be part of the program.”*

## LEARNING TO COMPETE

On average, Junior HEAT offers a mock meet every 10 weeks in house. They also offer more dual and tri meets to provide more opportunities for athletes to compete. For any new swimmer, regardless of group, they offer a sanctioned “Jump Right In” meet at the end of September with just HEAT swimmers to introduce them to competition.

## GROWING HEAT

HEAT finds its athletes from the summer league in their local area and through the school system where they offer a 10 week program. Since HEAT is part of the school district, it has access to their pools. They also run Junior HEAT, a pre-competitive program one time per week that feeds into Level 1, HEAT’s first group of competitive swimming. Included in Junior HEAT is a mock meet and team t-shirt.

## GETTING STARTED

HEAT Level 1 offers practice from 7:30-8:30am for 3rd-5th graders 3x per week since one of their pools is in a middle school. This frees up their afternoons to do other activities and gives parents an option for earlier drop-offs in the morning. This has helped their team with retention. They also offer practice in the evenings 2-3x per week. Evening practice sessions are similar in format to what they offer in the morning. For more advanced kids that come in the morning, there is an option to come to one session in the evening to get a 4th practice in for the week.

Junior HEAT requirements are one length free and back. Skills beyond this (e.g. flip turns, beginning fly or back) are placed in Level 1.

## FEEES AND EXPENSES

Junior HEAT fees are \$150 for 10 weeks. HEAT Level 1 fees are approximately \$400-\$500 for the school year or approximately \$75 per month. Pool fees are low because it’s part of the school district. In addition families are required to purchase their own fins and snorkel.

The LSC has a need based grant up to \$200 per athlete that HEAT matches that can be applied to any part of the team’s fees or dues.

## PARENT AND FAMILY EXPERIENCE

HEAT provides education for new families and is scaled to the level and involvement of the groups so that information is not overwhelming. HEAT sends out 1 email weekly, usually on Sunday night, to the full team. Group coaches can also send communication to the families as needed. HEAT also hosts an in person HEAT 101 and a HEAT 201 (meet entries, time standards, championship meet info, etc.) via Zoom at the beginning of the season. Parent resources can also be found on the website.

# 10&U Growth and Retention Case Study



## AT A GLANCE:

Team: Cougar Aquatic Team

Location: Montclair, NJ

LSC: New Jersey Swimming

Size: 275

Club Type: coach owned

Head Coach:

- Eric Harse (Owner)
- Rich Palm (Head Coach)
- Jon Seigel (Head Age Group Coach)

Multi-site: Y, 2 locations

Coaches on staff: 3 full time/14 part time

Website: [Click here](#)

## GROWING CAT

CAT recruits new 10 & under members via four primary sources: parent referrals, local summer league programs, a robust social media effort, and 5 Learn to Swim (LTS) programs in their area. They regularly collaborate with the LTS programs to transition swimmers to the team when they are ready. Current team parents are provided flyers to hand to prospective parents.

## GETTING STARTED

8 & under swimmers need to be able to do a 25 free and a 25 back to join the team. 9-10yo swimmers typically have an idea of all four competitive strokes even if they are not completely legal. CAT has a stroke clinic for 10 & under swimmers who need more stroke refinement to be ready for the team. Once a 10 & under athlete is on the team CAT does not have requirements and encourages a multisport environment for 10 & unders. "If it is raining and soccer is cancelled, come swim!"

## FEES AND EXPENSES

Entry level group for year round swimming is \$1450 annually, or \$121 per month, and the top level 10 & under year round group is \$2000 annually, or \$167 per month.

## PARENT AND FAMILY EXPERIENCE

CAT coaches are extremely accessible to parents and provide a personal touch. Full time coaches are expected to communicate with parents regularly. Returning CAT parents have younger athletes, so they have often act as parent mentors for new parents.

One of CAT's moms is the team's volunteer parent coordinator. She has done it for the last 9 years (with three kids on the team, two of whom have already graduated). She helps run hosted meets and helps guide new parents. Previously, her sister was the volunteer parent coordinator who held the position for almost 10 years. This is an example of the lasting investment from the families in the success of the team.

## CONSIDER THIS

*"Our athletes and families are our customers, so we think deeply about their experiences with the team at practice and meets and their perceived value of belonging to our program long term."*

## LEARNING TO COMPETE

CAT uses Block Party meet formats regularly. The LSC allows these times into LSC competitions. 10 & under swimmers are in and out of a meet in 2 hours or less and they stay close to home.

# 10&U Growth and Retention Case Study



## AT A GLANCE:

Team: Greater Somerset County YMCA Storm

Location: Basking Ridge, NJ

LSC: New Jersey Swimming

Size: 430

Club Type: YMCA

Head Coach: Mary Korey

Multi-site: Yes, 4 locations

Coaches on staff: 4 full time/25 part time

Website: [Click here](#)

## GROWING GSCY

Most GSCY team members join because the family is a YMCA member. Family members of current team members also want to join the team. Swimming is also the dominant sport at the YMCA. Positive reviews about the team spread through word of mouth and increase interest, especially due to the success of the older kids on the team. GSCY has two sites with 20 8 & under swimmers who are not registered with USA Swimming that feed the program once they are 9.

## GETTING STARTED

GSCY tryouts are two days long. Day one is a practice, and the observers are looking for skills like taking direction and listening skills. Day two is a mock meet.

10 & under swimmers must have knowledge of competitive strokes, but time is taken to refine and make the competitive strokes legal.

## FEES AND EXPENSES

Fees include YMCA membership (for athlete or family), program fees, USA Swimming fees, and meet fees.

The "Summer Sizzle" meet, a NJ LSC meet at Rutgers, costs more to attend than Olympic Trials, a reflection that venue costs in NJ are inflated.

## PARENT AND FAMILY EXPERIENCE

GSCY provides a season opener meeting for parent education.

## LEARNING TO COMPETE

10 & under swimmers do 3-5 dual meets and 1-2 YMCA or USA Swimming meets per month. GSCY athletes do not participate in NJ Swimming or Eastern Zone meets because formats are long. 10 & under swimmers do YMCA dual meets with faster, older kids Oct to Dec. This encourages the younger kids to be like the big kids.

## CONSIDER THIS

*"Our main goal is to build strong relationships and instill life skills through the arena of competitive swimming. Our coaches building and maintaining relationships is our number one priority."*



# 10&U Growth and Retention Case Study



## AT A GLANCE:

Team: Seattle Metro Aquatic Club

Location: Seattle, WA

LSC: Pacific Northwest (PN)

Size: 600

Club Type: 501(c)(3), board run

Head Coach/CEO: Ken Spencer

Multi-site: Yes, 10 locations

Coaches on staff: 6 full time/19 part time

Website: [Click here](#)

## CONSIDER THIS

*"In our area there are a lot of activities for kids to engage in. When we show great value, we become the activity of choice and get amazing family and swimmer buy-in."*

## LEARNING TO COMPETE

On average, SMAC offers in house meets 6x per calendar year.

## GROWING SMAC

SMAC finds its athletes from many different sources. Swimmers come from a combination of external swim lesson providers, some city and local pools, country clubs and summer leagues. Approximately 55% from lesson programs, 40% from summer leagues, and 5% from transfers. Building and leveraging relationships with key players in the aquatics community such as lessons and facilities coordinators, summer league coaches and families who are involved in summer league teams is a key to their success.

## GETTING STARTED

SMAC provides video examples on their website for new families to reference. These serve as guidelines for what stroke technique requirements are needed for swimmers coming in. Swimmers must be able to complete 25 yards freestyle with side breathing and a continuous 25 yards backstroke. There are no breaststroke or butterfly requirements. Practices are offered 3x per week x 1 hour plus meet opportunities.

## FEES AND EXPENSES

Financial assistance and scholarships are available on a need base. up to \$50k per year - funded by 50% of their Swim-a-thon proceeds - are dedicated to this assistance. SMAC is also sponsored by TYR and as part of their contract, TYR provides training suits, caps, goggles and t-shirts for their scholarship athletes. SMAC's Get Wet outreach summer program is in partnership with Sigma Gamma Rho, a historically black sorority that partners with USA Swimming and others to increase community access to swimming.

SMAC operates as a flat rate monthly fee of \$147 per month with fundraising and volunteer requirements scaled for each group. Swimmers also need to purchase fins and a kickboard.

## PARENT AND FAMILY EXPERIENCE

SMAC hosts an annual open house featuring informational booths parents can visit to find out about swim team related topics. It is offered two different times to reach more parents. Parent orientation for the novice group is another way to onboard new families. Additionally, there is also an FAQ on the website parents can refer to whenever needed. Finally, every group is required to also have 1-2 parent meetings per year to address their specific needs.

# 2 - Growing Your Team

Where have successful teams looked for new members to grow their programs, and what strategies do they use to attract them? Attracting families is a ***crucial aspect*** of ***building and expanding*** your team, and there are ***various approaches*** teams can use to gain new members and draw them in.



## Where to Find Families

### 01.

#### Lesson Programs: Internal & External

##### Internal

This is often the most seamless way to attract swimmers to the team. Developmental or bridge programs that are priced similarly to lessons and for shorter commitment periods, six to eight weeks or on a month-to-month basis, rather than for an entire season have yielded positive results.

##### External

Many teams do not have the capacity or ability to offer their own lesson programs, leaving them without a natural feeder. Partnering with local swim providers and/or direct advertising to this audience is key. Lesson providers then have options for older swimmers, as partnering with a swim team can create ways to make those upper levels more successful and the transition to your team seamless.

### 02.

#### Schools & Districts

Partnering with schools and school systems can create a pathway to bring new swimmers over to the competitive team or lessons program. Many areas have programs specific to school-aged kids, especially for teams that swim in school district pools and community centers. If your team can become the aquatic program provider for the district/school, you can leverage school promotions and potentially reduce pool costs.

### 03.

#### Summer Leagues

The teams in the research group emphasized the importance of building relationships with their community rec programs whether municipality based or neighborhood pools, country clubs and summer leagues.

### 04.

#### Word of Mouth & Referrals

Arguably, this is the most powerful avenue that relies on parents organically sharing information about your program.



# 2 - Growing Your Team

## The How

### 01. Word of Mouth Advertising

### 02. Partnerships

### 03. Getting Families and Athletes Started

#### 01. Word of Mouth Advertising

Delivering exceptional programming and service is a key driver to effective word-of-mouth advertising. Happy parents will naturally talk about their great experiences. To ensure your club exceeds customer expectations for parents and athletes:

- **Ask for Reviews:**

- Ask new and veteran parents to leave reviews on Google, Yelp, or industry-specific sites.
  - Make sure to engage your most excited parents in growth.
  - Ask them why they love the team and their child's experience so you know what they are likely to share.

- **Showcase Testimonials:**

- Display positive testimonials on your website and social media.
- Showcase where your athletes are attending college.
- Highlight more than just club accomplishments. Highlight their academic, high school swimming, and college swimming achievements.
- How does the club play a positive role in developing great people?

- **Create Shareable Content on Instagram and Facebook**

- Sharable, engaging, high-quality content like videos or infographics are most effective.

- **Leverage "Influencers" and Brand Ambassadors**

- Partner with alumni "Influencers" who align with your club to promote your team to their followers.

- **Referral Incentives**

- Offer incentives, such as discounts or free products to families who refer others to your club.

- **Engage in Community and Networking Events**

- Host, participate in, or sponsor local events to increase your team's visibility in the community. Ask the parents on your team what events they attend when making decisions.

- **Cultivate a Strong Brand / Team Identity**

- Create a compelling team brand story that resonates with your club and makes them want to share it (e.g. donating proceeds from a meet to a local charity).



# 2 - Growing Your Team

## The How

### 02. Partnerships

#### 02. Partnerships

Building partnerships within your community can significantly help grow your club by increasing visibility, attracting new members, and gaining support. Here's a step-by-step guide to building these partnerships:

- **Lesson Programs- What to do when you don't have your own program**
  - Develop a bridge program with a local lesson provider for the families in their top-lesson groups.
    - Co-develop literature with the lesson program outlining the skills they gain by going through the full lesson program and how that will prepare them for success on your team.
    - If your local afterschool programs provide lessons, can you provide staff or share pool space?
    - Provide referral bonus for the lesson program when they send families to your club.
    - Pay for advertising in their lobby, or links within their digital mailing list.
- **After-School Programs & PE Classes**
  - Partner with schools to offer swim classes or pre-competitive groups as part of their after-school programs or as part of their Physical Education (PE) curriculum.
  - Offer competitive swim lessons/fitness PE classes to local home-school groups.
- **Local Businesses**
  - Sponsorships, promotional partnerships, and/or joint events are ways to engage with local businesses. Sponsorships in exchange for ads at meets, on team uniforms, or on promo materials are other ways to get support from local businesses and secure signage/advertising in their business.
- **Collaborate with Community Centers and Gyms**
  - Teams can use these facilities for practice or competition, offering facility member discounted swim team fees and discounted gym memberships to swim team families. Cross-promotions in newsletters and social media can be options too, for greater exposure.
  - Highlight how your team can help them attract and keep families using your retention data.
- **Engage Local Media on Community Swim Education**
  - Build relationships with newspapers, radio stations, and local TV channels for broader press coverage and pitch stories for community spotlights highlighting how your program helps kids achieve college dreams, etc.
- **Collaborate with Non-Profits and Youth Organizations**
  - Offer swimming as an activity to youth outreach programs, partner with non-profits to provide scholarships, or join or host community events to promote water safety.
- **Engage with Parents and Alumni**
  - Parent committees, alumni networks, and family events are great places to tap for help with fundraising, new swimmer referrals, or recruit volunteers.
- **Organize Community Events**
  - Offering Open Houses, Open Swim Days, or Free Swim Clinics are great ways to drive new business to your team. Invite local businesses and other community serving groups.



# 2 - Growing Your Team

## The How

### 02 Partnerships

#### 02. Partnerships- Summer and Rec Leagues

Club coaches that collaborate with summer swim leagues can enhance the overall experience for swimmers, improve the league's success, and create a source of athletes for your club.



- Using your expertise, how can your club help the summer league reach it's goals?
  - Serve as the "General Manager (GM)" for the League
  - You and your staff offer to coach in some capacity for the league
  - Provide training and education for new coaches in the summer league
  - Bring in a guest coach to speak to your staff and the summer league staff at the beginning of the summer league
- Offer Summer League Prep Opportunities
  - 4-week mini-session at the end of the school year, before the summer league starts to get kids ready.
  - Multi-week one-day clinics , or stand alone weekend clinics:
    - "Starts and Turns"
    - "Breaststroke Day"
- If summer league is important in your community, encourage participation
  - Select a few meets for the coaches on you staff to attend and support the athletes on your club
  - Volunteer as timers, or become certified to officiate

**All of these allow parents to become familiar with your club's coaching staff and the great culture of your team!**



# 2 - Getting Started

## The How

### 03 Getting Families and Athletes Started

There are different ways to be successful when onboarding families and kids. The theme for teams that are successful at attracting and retaining age group swimmers is ***a low barrier to entry, with the element of choice and a high level of education and communication.***

## General Principles

### Flexibility

Keep commitments flexible. Strict requirements to join the team are not conducive to attracting new families. Layer in developmental education on what to expect as their child moves through the program. Emphasize that swimming is healthy and fun to start!

### Minimal Skill Requirements

Keep survival and water safety in the swim lessons program, while stroke development is coached at the entry levels of the team.

### Recommendations, not requirements

Many of the successful teams we spoke to have no attendance requirement and no volunteer requirements in their beginning groups:

- Swimmers can attend as few or as many practices as they would like.
- Recommendations for frequency can be provided, but are not required.
- Often a single flat monthly fee is charged, regardless of how many times per week a practice is attended (for simplicity and ease).



# 2 - Getting Started

## Skill Level Requirements

Many teams in the research group defined a transition phase from the end of swimming lessons to the start of swim team. Some programs had distinct bridge programs to transition athletes from pre-team levels in lessons to the swim team. Others included these bridge programs as part of the overall swim team progression and structure.

Regardless of whether the bridge program was separate or part of the swim team structure, a distinct focus on **teaching progression** towards more advanced skills was **universal**, and the **most common requirement** to move up was some **combination of 25s and 50s**.

### Examples

- 25-yard freestyle (with or without side breathing) and backstroke
- 50-yard freestyle (with side breathing) and backstroke
- 50-yard freestyle and 25-yard backstroke
- 2 legal strokes

When moving **from the bridge program** or pre-team **to the swim team**; or from the **entry levels** of the swim team to a **more intermediate** swim team level, more skills are required:

### Examples

- 12.5 or 25-yard breaststroke and butterfly
- 50-yard backstroke with a flip turn
- Freestyle flip turn
- 50 through 200-yard freestyle with flip turns
- Forward dive
- Willingness to try the skill, not mastery is the important sign of readiness



# 2 - Getting Started

## Frequency Requirements

Frequency requirements from the teams in the research group did not exist at the entry levels, though recommendations were offered. Successful 10&U teams promoted **multi-sport** or **multi-activity participation**. Some teams only offered practices **during the week** or **before school** to allow families flexibility on the **weekends** or **after school**. Others offered practices **up to 6x per week** speculating that families had more time to give during the weekends. Practice times ranged from **30-60 minutes**.

During the **summer months**, some teams offered more **flexibility** to allow for more family time, such as vacations. Others offered more structure to assist working families that need a more **consistent** summer schedule.

## Examples

- 30 min sessions, 2x per week, through 60 min, 3x per week
- Choice of 3 x 45 min sessions, 3 x 60 min sessions, or 3 x 90 min sessions with most entry level choosing the shorter sessions
- Practice offered 4-6x per week (families typically choose 2-3x)
- For some teams, offering 6x per week is not cost effective, but can work for larger teams.
- 45min sessions (15min out of the water, 30min in the water)
- We saw session lengths anywhere from 4-12 weeks in the cohort



# 2 - Getting Started

## Considerations

When discussing requirements with the research group, the following additional factors were discussed in tandem. Even though they are covered in different sections of this report, mentioning them here provides greater **context** as you navigate this topic.

- Coaches also served as lifeguards.
- No meet participation requirement, even though many teams offered opportunities at least once per month.
- Minimal equipment required, if any. Kickboards and fins were the most common responses.
- Some teams offered additional clinics or camps for this level of athlete, sometimes instead of standard sessions.
- Most teams emphasized the fun of competition.
- Communication to parents and athletes throughout their experience is critical. Parents want to know about requirements, expectations, move-ups, recommendations versus requirements during certain phases of development, and the benefits of participation in swim meets.
- The average cost per month for entry level offerings ranged from \$75-\$125.



## Now What?

This section outlined common requirements in skill development, frequency of practice, flexibility, and a minimalist approach. Now what?

First, remember to communicate about progress, competition, and recommendations for next steps on the team.

- ✓ Determine what makes sense as an entry point for your program.
- ✓ What are you feasibly able to offer in terms of frequency and entry level skill development?
- ✓ Determine staffing needs and pool availability. Are you able to meet these needs?
- ✓ Prioritize what to add or implement first.
- ✓ Decide how you will measure success.



# 3 - Fees & Expenses

When families involved in swim programs perceive value for their money, retention rates tend to increase. These fees typically cover **1-5 practices per week**, along with enjoyable competition opportunities for both athletes and their families. **Annual costs for entry-level groups** generally range from **\$400 to \$600 per year**. The **average cost per month is \$75**, though *costs can vary based on location and facility expenses*.

According to Project Play and the Aspen Institute, this pricing is competitive and sometimes lower when compared to sports like soccer, basketball, gymnastics, and ice hockey. This can be an appealing factor for families considering various sports options for their children who are also gaining a lifelong form of exercise and a lifesaving skill.

## FEE STRUCTURES

### 01. Flat Rate

The most common fee model is a flat-rate structure based on group levels. The advantage of this model is its consistency and predictability for both the club and families. However, the downside is the lack of flexibility, as it doesn't accommodate varying needs or preferences among members. While families may initially feel comfortable with the cost, concerns may arise if the perceived value does not justify the fees over time. This disconnect between cost and value can lead to dissatisfaction.

### 02. Flexible Fee

Some programs in the study utilize a flexible fee structure based on the swimmer's commitment level, allowing the swimmer to pay according to their specific usage or practice times. This flexibility is highly customizable but depends on the club's financial stability.

If the pool is owned by the school district or the club and is fully paid off, there is greater financial freedom for the athletes, families, and club.

### 03. Sliding Scale

Some programs in the study utilize a sliding scale model, where fees adjust based on the number of practices attended each week, similar to an "à la carte" approach. This model allows participants to only pay for the services they use, providing greater flexibility for families.

Additionally, a sliding scale can also be used to adjust fees according to a family's ability to pay, making the program more accessible to a wider range of participants. Teams that adopt this system can cater to a diverse group, but it presents challenges in terms of administration as the team needs to manage financial oversight, assess eligibility, and ensure fairness.

This approach can be labor-intensive and potentially cost-prohibitive for teams. They must have the financial stability to accommodate reduced fees while maintaining program quality. Before implementing such a fee structure, it is crucial to evaluate the financial impact and potential effects on member retention, ensuring it supports both families and the long-term sustainability of the team.



# 3 - Fees & Expenses

## Additional Fees: Program & Meet Fees

There are additional fees for teams and families to consider when joining the team for the first time. Swim meets add extra costs, with average splash and entry fees ranging from \$75 to \$90 per child per meet. These additional fees are often split between the LSCs and the team. Can you include a base-level number of meet entries in their entry-level experience?

Teams and LSCs that utilize one-day meets, substitute meets for practice time, or offer similar concepts help reduce facility and meet fees incurred by families and can also create revenue for the team.

Many programs manage billing through an escrow account. For instance, starting at \$250, ongoing charges are automatically billed to a credit card on file after each meet. Alternatively, some programs use a third-party vendor system, where families keep a credit card on file for any additional fees that arise throughout the season. Understanding these processes can help families plan their finances accordingly.

Many teams in the research group required new team members to register with USA Swimming. USA Swimming membership for the 2025 season is \$70, with each LSC adding fees. Families can expect to pay an additional \$7 to \$40 for their LSC registration. *Flex, Seasonal, and Outreach Memberships are ways of reducing initial costs for new swimmers. The Block Party Pilot Program can add value to the Flex Membership.*

## Cost Savings

### 01. Discounts

- Offer discounts to athletes transitioning from lessons and development programs to the competitive team to encourage retention.
- Many programs offer discounts to multiple siblings enrolled anywhere within the program.
- Discounts to teachers, first responders, and military families are also common.



### 02. Rewards

- Referrals are an easy way to encourage word of mouth advertising from the families already enrolled in your program. Teams offer a discount on next month's fee or an account credit for any referrals that join the team.
- Some teams award finders fees if families connect the team with sponsors or partners.
- Ask your suit partner to sponsor a quarterly tech suit raffle to families who have referred new members. Your growing team is good for them and your team dealer.



# 3 - Fees & Expenses

## Cost Savings - continued



### 03. Payment Models

- Discount paying fees or dues upfront for the year, as opposed to a higher monthly payment.
- Some programs are all-inclusive, eliminating separate meets fees. While this may not offer a cost saving, it can create a convenience for the families throughout their time in the program.

### 04. Financial Assistance

- Many teams offer outreach and reduced rates based on family income or need.
- Scholarships are also a common offering teams can provide, usually on a limited basis.



## Considerations

### Region/Location

Venue expenses can significantly impact the total cost for families, leading to regional variations in fee structures. In some areas, the club and LSC charge a registration fee in addition to the yearly membership to USA Swimming.

### Facilities

Clubs are continually exploring ways to optimize facility usage and reduce facility-related expenses. These efforts can help lower costs for families, enhancing the overall value the club provides.



# 3 - Fees & Expenses

## Now What?

This section outlined a variety of fee structures, additional fees, and ways teams can offer discounts and incentives to reduce costs, keeping in mind the regional and facility considerations that can impact these numbers. Now what?

- ✔ Conduct a full audit of your teams' overall budget including a comprehensive profit and loss review. Involve a financial expert to assist if needed.
- ✔ Determine expenses and required revenue to offer these entry-level groups, factoring in profit margins at different price-points.
- ✔ Balance the concepts of flexibility, choice, and ease of entry for your families with what your team can offer.
- ✔ Implement programming in stages/phases to best track results.
- ✔ Decide how you are going to measure success.



# 4 - Parent & Family Experience

This section shares ideas that teams in the research group have found to improve the experience of families in their club and the sport. Clubs know that the experience for new and returning families with young swimmers is essential in retaining their members.

Through trial and error, the teams were open to listening, assessing, and experimenting with what works best based on their and their families' needs.

- Teams must proactively create a positive experience for the swimmers and parents
- Teams must acknowledge current challenges and make an ongoing commitment to improvement
- Communication, education, and connection are critical to a positive experience for the swimmers and their parents.

## 5 Key Areas to Positive Parent & Family Experience

### 01. Team Integration and Orientation

The beginning of the season, or when new families join throughout the year, is crucial to welcome families and swimmers to the program. Teams in the research group took this time to introduce important information, develop team culture, and create a sense of belonging for the members. Some ideas shared were:

- Distribution of team caps, shirts, and equipment bags
- Annual family meet and welcome event in September
- Emphasis on low-key activities with a focus on inclusivity (e.g., lots of kicking, an activity in which everyone can participate)
- Pool party to kick off the season and encourage socialization among families
- Find a parent representative for each group to help organize activities (e.g., holiday party or monthly birthday celebrations)
- Introduction of all coaches to new families during social events



# 4 - Parent & Family Experience

## 02. Communication and Education

Consistent communication and proactive education were a common theme among all teams in the study.

### Examples:

- Mandatory parent meetings at the beginning of the season
- Education for new families scaled according to their level of participation
- Simplified parent education to avoid overwhelming new families
- Continued parent education opportunities throughout the season
- Find a Group Coordinator or Parent Representative for each group to help with communication
- Explanations to parents such as meet procedures and what their child learned in practice
- Use of weekly emails and newsletters to keep parents informed about practices, meets, and other relevant information

## 03. Fostering a Positive Culture

To create a family-friendly team and positive culture, teams were proactive, discussed culture often as a staff, and noticed when an issue needed to be addressed. The goal of the teams in the research group was to create a place where the swimmers, coaches, and parents felt they belonged and felt part of something bigger than themselves.

### Examples:

- Emphasis on maintaining a welcoming environment, keeping the potential challenges for new families in mind
- Encouragement of staff and experienced families to be open and supportive
- Efforts to create a formal pathway for information sharing
- Educating parents to see swimming as training for life, not just for sport



# 4 - Parent & Family Experience

## 04. Balancing Multi-Activity Participation

Coaches were flexible with swimmers who wanted to participate in other activities. Clubs were supportive in recognizing that when young swimmers are involved in other sports and activities, it can foster growth in the pool and help develop life skills.

### Examples:

- Understanding and accepting that many families are involved in other activities outside of swimming
- Positioning swimming as a manageable after-school activity
- Striving to maintain a balance between swimming commitments and other activities

## 05. Events and Social Activities

The section on Team Integration and Orientation shared that the teams in the research group incorporate events and social activities to help introduce families to the season. Additional events throughout the season continue to build team culture and connection between swimmers, coaches, and parents. Activities can be team-wide or group-specific.

- Holiday social functions
- End of season awards banquets (include awards that are not performance based- things like leadership, teamwork, and personal growth)
- Group Coordinator or Parent Representative is responsible for organizing activities and working with coaches
- Activities like obstacle courses on water to engage families



# 4 - Parent & Family Experience

All teams reported various challenges with parent interactions. The key takeaway was to avoid shying away from the issues. The teams faced problems head-on and worked to find solutions.

## Challenges

### Struggles with parent onboarding

- Issues with pushing information to the website, which is not user-friendly
- Acknowledgement that families need more personalized guidance
- Difficulty in recruiting volunteers and engaging parents in mentorship roles

## Solutions

### Efforts to improve

- Open house events with booths providing all necessary information
- Parent orientation sessions to help new families navigate the club
- Encouraging coaches to have conversation with parents, not just rely on electronic communication

## Now What?

With so much to consider, balance, plan for, and prioritize this “Now What?” section provides you with a series of questions to ask your LSC and a series of questions to ask about your team. These questions will assist in your reflection, processing, and planning. Now what?

### Questions to ask about your team

- ✓ What is the experience like for families on our team?
- ✓ What does our ‘welcome to the season’ feel like to returning swimmers, new swimmers, and parents?
- ✓ What social events can the team and groups coordinate to engage swimmers and parents?
- ✓ What is the commitment (practices, meets, social events, etc.) for swimmers and parents to be on team? Does this help create a family and swimmer friendly experience?
- ✓ Do we have a season long communication plan for swimmers and parents?
- ✓ What education do our parents need throughout the season and how will we provide that information?

### Questions for the LSC

- ✓ When hosting an LSC sponsored event (camp or meet) what can we do to engage the parents in a positive way?
- ✓ What can we learn from teams in the LSC that are doing a great job of parent and family engagement? How can we provide this information to others?
- ✓ How do the meet opportunities provided in our LSC support a positive parent and family experience with our sport?



# 5 - Learning to Compete

10&U competition serves to connect the athletes and their families to the team. Competing allows athletes to implement the skills they have been working on in practice each week. Socially, competition connects athletes and families in team attire, team cheers, teamwork, and volunteering.

## Best Competition Type for 10&U

### In House & Local Meets

Teams are looking to solve meet hosting challenges in several ways:

1. Increasing meaningful internal competition
2. Including more dual and tri meets with local clubs
3. Utilizing Block Party or similar initiatives

Teams with successful 10&U retention rates currently host about one meet per month specific to these athletes. These meets are primarily in-house and are short. Many YMCA teams host quick dual meets with the older and younger swimmers. They felt that exposure to older swimmers created a feeling of “I want to be like them when I grow up” and increased enthusiasm and retention.



# 5 - Learning to Compete

## Competition Best Practices

### 01. Short

Keeping meets 1-3 hours, including warm-up, will significantly increase the chances of a positive meet experience for athletes and parents as this puts meets in the same duration as other youth sports. Shorter meets also positively impact coaches who are often at meets on consecutive weekends during the season, coaching multiple groups of kids.

### 02. Close to Home/In House

Many teams expressed frustration with limited access to USA Swimming teams nearby. Meets should typically be within 90 minutes of the home facility with no overnight stay. A few clubs plan at least one special “team travel” meet where families do have an overnight stay and they arrange a hotel block, team dinners, and team events outside of the meet.

### 03. Fun

There are endless ways to create a fun learning environment during competitions. Teams can involve challenges, bounce houses, gamification, meet themes, or “silly” but meaningful rewards like ducks or a treasure box hunt.

### 04. Age/Developmentally Appropriate

Teams mentioned the current heavy reliance on travel to meets is not considered appropriate for developmental swimmers. Clubs also highlighted exorbitant invitational fees. Coaches felt that long meets, traveling long distances to meets, and the cost of meets were all detrimental to long-term athlete development for new swimmers. Most clubs surveyed provided mini meets and dual meets to 10&U swimmers. Some clubs took it further and provided separate 8&U competitions.

### 05. Frequent

Most clubs in the surveys had a goal of 10&U competing 1-2x per month. One club of note started hosting meets every Thursday during practice.



# 5 - Learning to Compete

## Considerations

Facilities post pandemic

- Hosting and accessing appropriate 10&U competitions post pandemic has become more challenging because facility access remains more limited than it was pre pandemic, and facility costs are escalating quickly.

Block Party

- USA Swimming Block Party is a program that makes swimming more accessible to new members by offering easy-to-run, family-friendly meets. The program is a collaboration between USA Swimming and Reimagine Sports, a consultancy firm that works with youth sports stakeholders.
- The Block Party program includes:
  - A one-day sanctioning fee to USA Swimming and meet fees that go directly to the clubs
  - A streamlined process for parents and coaches to become certified as officials
  - The Block Party meets are intended to be short, fun, and easy for clubs to host.

## Now What?



**LSCs and teams** work together to

- Provide resources to help teams find a balance between competition frequency and accessibility with the needs of young swimmers and their families in mind.
- Make concerted ongoing efforts to find creative solutions to meet hosting and participation challenges.
- Collaborate to host five meets a year with events tailored to younger swimmers, allowing teams to select meets that are close to home and family friendly.
- Continuously evaluate meet formats and strategies to better serve 10&U swimmers.
- Continue exploring ideas to increase attendance at meets.



**Teams**

- Consider choosing meets that are appealing to families, such as those near beaches or college campuses for “destination meets.”
- Consider running in-house meets that are short and sweet
- 





# Thank You



ABQ Dolphins  
Ad Astra Area Aquatics  
Amarillo Swim Team  
Asheville JCC  
Bellingham Bay Swim Team  
Bellevue Club Swim Team  
Canyons Aquatic Club  
Clovis Swim Team  
Connecticut Swimming LSC  
Cougar Aquatics (IE)  
Cougar Aquatic Team (NJ)  
Fox Chapel Killer Whales  
Greater Pensacola Aquatic Club  
Greater Somerset County YMCA  
Greenbriar Sea Dragons  
Hudson Explorer Aquatic Team  
King Marlin  
Lake Oswego Swim Club  
Mansfield Aquatic Club  
Mason Manta Rays  
New Jersey Race Club  
North Baltimore Aquatic Club  
Pikes Peak Athletics  
Rapids Swim Team  
Schroeder YMCA  
Seattle Metro Aquatic Club  
Slip Stream Aquatics  
Steel Aquatics  
Wahoo Aquatic Club  
YOTA