



INTELLISPORT
ANALYTICS

January 2026



FY25 USA SWIMMING PULSE SURVEYS FINDINGS



OVERVIEW

In July of 2025, IntelliSport Analytics delivered to USA Swimming the first of four annual studies examining the experiences of key stakeholders within USA Swimming.

The FY2025 study considered how coaches, Local Swimming Committee (LSC) representatives and officials perceived the value of LSCs and USA Swimming. “Value” was defined as the usefulness and importance of the work the LSCs and USA Swimming delivers to its stakeholders.

Among other findings, the study indicated the following:

- Four key concepts were consistently challenging the operation of clubs and LSCs, including:
 - Membership Growth and Retention
 - Pool Access and Facilities
 - Coaching and Staff Retention
 - Financial Sustainability
- A cluster of 15 LSCs were identified as having limited access to advanced coaching knowledge and it was unclear what barriers prevent them from developing local capacity.
- Coaches with five or fewer years of experience indicated a need for professional growth and development, and pathways to building a support system.

In November of 2025, IntelliSport Analytics led three additional “pulse” surveys to examine each of these findings to better understand how USA Swimming can best support its coaches, clubs, officials and the LSCs.

How we did this research 

SECTIONS

» **MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS FACING CLUBS AND LSCS**

» **LSC EXPERTISE AND RESOURCE NEEDS**

» **EARLY CAREER COACH DEVELOPMENT & SUPPORT SYSTEMS**



MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS FACING CLUBS AND LSCS

The FY25 USA Swimming Satisfaction Study revealed there were specific challenges facing clubs. This analysis found membership challenges centered primarily around:

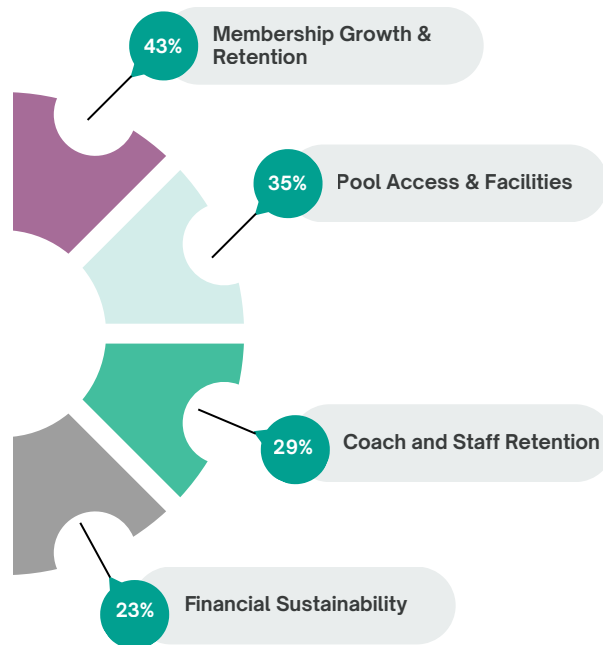
- *Membership Growth & Retention*
- *Pool Access & Facilities*
- *Coach and Staff Retention*
- *Financial Sustainability.*

These core issues appear to be interconnected, with facilities constraints and financial pressures likely impacting clubs' ability to retain members and quality coaches.

The first of the three pulse surveys leveraged this data to ask USA Swimming's members to provide additional insights why these four core issues persistently challenge the operation and success of clubs and LSCs.

FY25 Study: USA Swimming Members Ranked the Most Disruptive Factors When Operating a Club

% ranking of the most important factors impacting clubs.



MEMBERSHIP GROWTH AND RETENTION

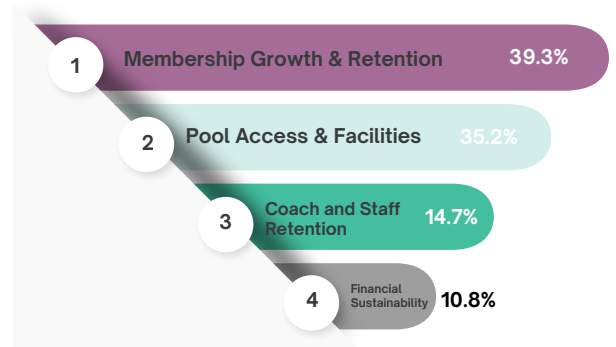
Nearly 40% of respondents ranked **Membership Growth and Retention** as the most critical factor. This suggests stakeholders view membership as foundational to organizational success. Participants discussed the importance of keeping existing members, preventing attrition, and maintaining long-term participation.

“Because other sports are doing a great job with their marketing, and new programs are emerging, the marketplace is becoming increasingly saturated. We need to stay competitive and proactive, ensuring we don’t overlook the efforts of other sports in their recruitment and retention campaigns.”

Stakeholders consistently describe membership as the foundational element that triggers a cascade of consequences.

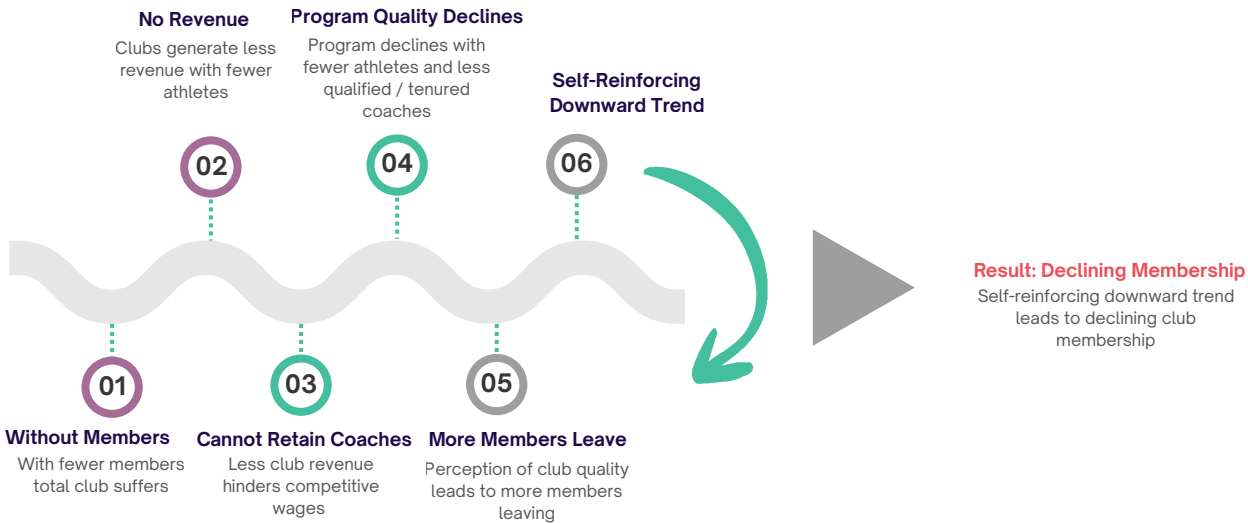
Stakeholders Rank Membership Growth & Retention as Primary Concern

% ranking of the most important factors impacting clubs & LSCs.



Membership Growth and Retention is the Top Priority Due to a Cascading Effect

Club sustainability is inherently linked to membership because it drives revenue.



“Membership growth and retention are the foundation of a sustainable and thriving swim club. The challenges we face today are multifaceted – increased competition from other youth sports, higher facility costs, staffing shortages, and shifting family priorities all directly impact our ability to attract and retain swimmers long-term.”

The **financial health** of clubs and LSCs are put at risk when the sport loses members. The loss of membership coupled with rising facility costs and coach compensation requirements demand larger membership bases. Clubs operate on thin margins where small membership fluctuations can threaten viability.

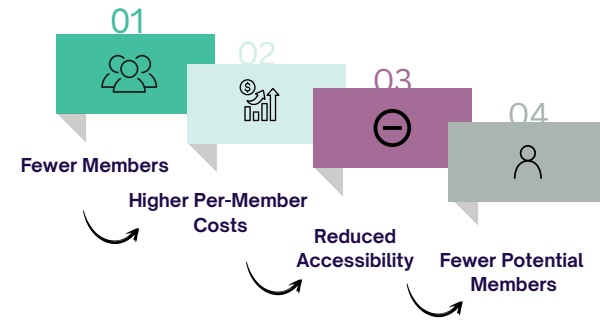
“Our numbers fluctuate throughout the year. We are always working on having a strong and stable base of 12 & under swimmers. We retain our older swimmers but are always looking to find ways to bring in more young swimmers to continue to “feed the pipeline”. Consistent growth and retention helps solve the financial situation and promotes consistency in the competitive side and the culture of the team.”

The evolution of year-round sport options have multiplied, creating **competitive pressures in the youth sport marketplace**. The sport of swimming competes for limited family time and sport specialization trends conflict with swimming's demanding schedule. As a result, some families are increasingly choosing more "convenient" activities with less travel and time commitment. For some, swimming is "not at the top of the list" for multi-sport families.

“Growth has been a bit stagnant. Due to limited summer league to draw on. Selling competitive swimming to young families is challenging. The negative view of swimming being an all encompassing youth sport is tough to sell if we can't get them in the door. Once we get them they see the big picture, but getting them in the door and past sticker shock is tough.”

Financial Viability is Intrinsicly Tied to Membership Retention & Growth

Club financial model is uniquely tied to maintaining or growing a team.



Competitive Pressures in Youth Sport Marketplace Have Intensified, Shifting to Convenience & Specialization

Club membership is under-threat as families consider alternatives or prioritize other needs.

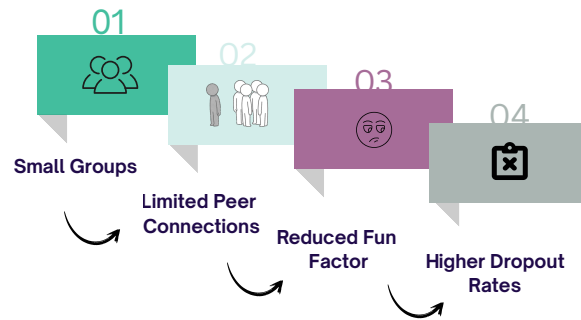


Teams need a critical mass of athletes to create engaging, age-appropriate training groups. It is noted that **positive team culture and social bonds** are primary retention factors for clubs. In the absence of quality team dynamics membership retention and growth suffers.

"Having larger groups for more kid-kid connections helps keep kids engaged."

Quality Team & Athlete Social Dynamics Require Sufficient Membership Numbers

In the absence of quality team dynamics, clubs lose members.



Membership Growth and Retention Insights:

Stakeholders explained that membership is not simply one operational metric among many, but rather the foundational element that determines organizational viability. The high percentage of **multi-themed responses (74.9%)** indicates recognition that membership challenges require comprehensive, multi-faceted solutions.

Strategic Implications:

- *Holistic Solutions Required:* Single-point interventions unlikely to succeed; comprehensive strategies addressing multiple factors simultaneously are needed.
- *Investment Priority:* Resources directed toward membership initiatives likely to have multiplier effects across all operational areas.
- *Early Intervention Critical:* The cascade nature of membership decline suggests early intervention is far more effective than crisis management.
- *Cultural Shift Needed:* Responses suggest need for swimming to adapt to modern family lifestyles and youth sports landscape rather than expecting families to adapt to traditional swimming models.
- *Recovery Focus:* Post-COVID recovery remains incomplete; targeted strategies for re-engagement may be necessary.

ACCESS TO POOLS & FACILITIES

Stakeholders view pool access not merely as one priority among many, but as the **existential prerequisite** upon which all other aspects of club operations depend. Without pools, competitive swimming programs cannot exist. Access to pools is complex, as issues related to availability, ownership, control and geography drive access challenges.

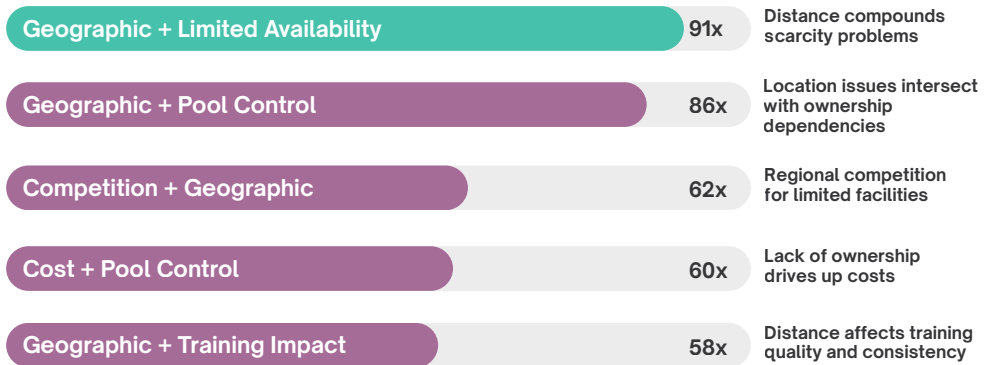
Pool access is a complex, systemic issue that is attributable to multiple factors. **75.9% of responses explaining access to pools contain multiple interconnected themes.**

Stakeholders View Pool Access as a Complex, Systemic Issue with Interconnected Challenges

75.9%

of responses contain multiple interconnected themes. This high co-occurrence rate suggests stakeholders understand pool access as a complex, systemic issue.

Top Theme Combinations Mentioned



“Community Pools (like HS facilities) do not see partnering with community teams as a valued service to the community. They only focus on the HS as athletic directors are not empowered to do more in rentals, programming, etc to offset costs. Also, new facilities of competitive nature (like 50M Tanks) are not a community priority. We need to build and share the case for community partnership that breaks through the preconceived notions and highlights the values of competitive swimming on the community!”

Stakeholders prioritize "Access to Pools & Facilities" because they share a fundamental belief that a swimming program cannot exist without water to swim in. All paths to organizational health, competitive success, and community service go through solving the pool access crisis first. When there is limited water access, this trigger impacts all levels of club and LSC outcomes.

"In the [name of] LSC there is very little water available for teams. My team practices out of two university pools and pays a premium for late/little pool time. We've grown as much as our lane space will allow. If we had more pools/ access to additional pools we'd be twice the size we are now. We're limited by our access. We're financially stable, have retained good coaches and are growing at a rate where we're turning people away."

Limited Pool Access Triggers Cascading Obstacles Across All Factors that Impact Club and LSC Function

Pool access acts as the master constraint on all other factors.



Unpredictable access to pools for some clubs represents external dependency beyond club control. Club teams can lose access to pools as other programs are prioritized ahead of their needs.

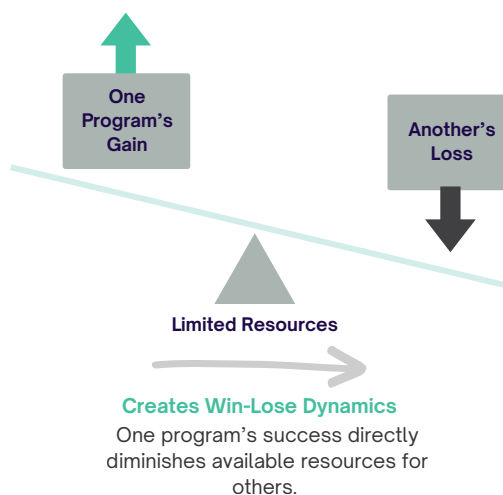
"If I have pool space, I can fill it with swimmers / lessons. Pool space is very expensive in my LSC and there is a lot of competition for time from other activities like leisure swimming, recreational swimming, open swim, masters, water polo, water aerobics, etc."

Zero-Sum Competition Creates Win-Lose Dynamics Where One Aquatic Program's Gain is Another's Loss

Clubs compete with:

- School Teams (often prioritized)
- Recreational Programs (public swim, lessons)
- Other Aquatic Sports (water polo, diving)
- Adult Fitness Programs (lap swim, water aerobics)

The Zero-Sum Dynamic



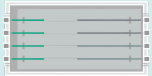


Pool Access and Facilities Insights:

Pool access is essential because it acts as the master constraint on all other factors. Solutions must address the systemic nature of the challenge. Not addressing how clubs access pools will limit the impact of other strategic initiatives.

Predictable and Consistent Access to Aquatics Facilities Will Help Clubs Maintain Programming and Allow for Long-Term Planning

Four pillars of action must be addressed: infrastructure, access, cost and long-term planning.



Infrastructure Investment

- New facility development critical
- Partnership models for pool construction
- Advocacy for public aquatic infrastructure



Access Innovation

- Creative scheduling solutions
- Shared facility agreements
- Technology for efficiency optimization



Cost Mitigation

- Collective bargaining for pool rental
- Subsidies for clubs in underserved areas
- Alternative funding models



Long-Term Planning

- Infrastructure assessment and forecasting
- Geographic gap analysis
- Sustainability planning for existing facilities

COACH RECRUITMENT & RETENTION

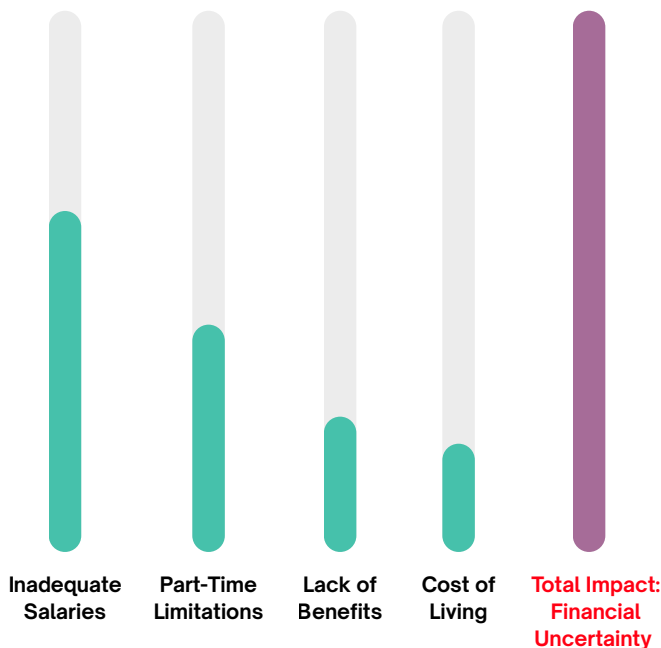
USA Swimming stakeholders view coaching as the fundamental human infrastructure that determines organizational viability. The human element of coaching is essential for delivering technical expertise, building relationships with athletes, and ensuring programs are built on safety. 81.7% of responses ranking “coaching recruitment and retention” as the most important factor impacting clubs and LSCs contain multiple interconnected themes demonstrating a sophisticated understanding of coaching challenges.

We believe that retaining good coaches is directly correlated to long term performance as a club. Finding coaches that work well together and have good on-deck energy is hard, and always a constant battle. I also believe that we will end up having a coach shortage in a handful of years due to the lack of younger full time coaches being in the sport or leaving the sport.

Inadequate salaries, part-time limitations, lack of benefits, cost of living challenges, and financial sustainability are consistent barriers for coaches and prevents long-term commitment to coaching.

Sustainable Coaching Careers are Hampered by Inadequate Compensation

Inadequate salaries, part-time limitations, lack of benefits, and cost of living are primary concerns.



47.9%*

of responses indicated compensation and pay issues were the most significant challenge to long-term commitment to coaching.

“First, finding a good coach is hard to come by. Someone that knows the sport, can relate to and mentor the kids, formulate workouts, take direction, implement various strategies and techniques. When you do find a coach like this, providing the compensation is a challenge for smaller teams.”

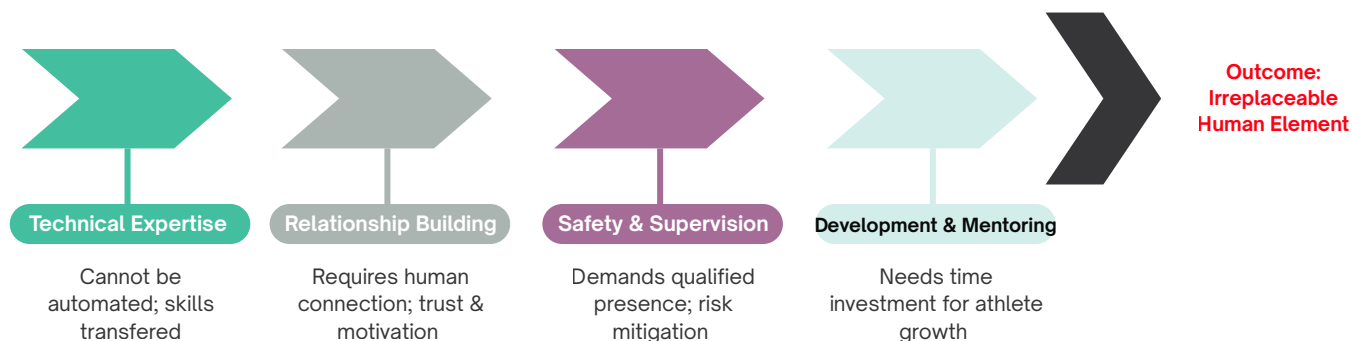
* These percentages are calculated within each factor chosen (ie; Coach Recruitment & Retention v. Membership Growth & Retention) separately, not as parts of a whole. Meaning, of those participants who chose “Coach Recruitment & Retention,” 47.9% stated compensation and pay issues were most significant.

Stakeholders consistently frame coaching not as a staffing issue but as the **fundamental human infrastructure** upon which all swimming programs depend. It is difficult for programs to replace expert coaches and quality programs are the result of quality coaches. Program viability hinges on coaches who act as an operational lynchpin.

“We believe that retaining good coaches is directly correlated to long term performance as a club. Finding coaches that work well together and have good on-deck energy is hard, and always a constant battle. I also believe that we will end up having a coach shortage in a handful of years due to the lack of younger full time coaches being in the sport or leaving the sport.”

Swimming in the United States is Built on Human Infrastructure; This is Not Easily Replaced

Unlike facilities or equipment, coaches provide the irreplaceable human element essential for swimming program success.

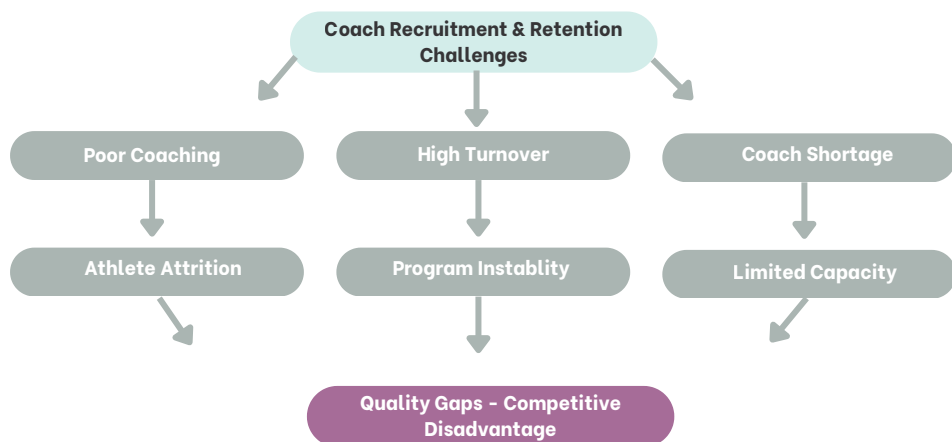


The threat of losing technically trained and committed coaches can trigger failures across clubs. The **loss of coaches** impacts athlete retention, program viability and the capacity to grow programs.

“Having good coaches is the foundation to everything below it in the priority list. Good coaches typically lead to good recruitment and retention numbers and those typically lead to financial stability.”

Coach Recruitment and Retention Challenges Trigger Failures Throughout Clubs

A domino effect from staffing issues leads to significant quality gaps and competitive disadvantage in youth sports.

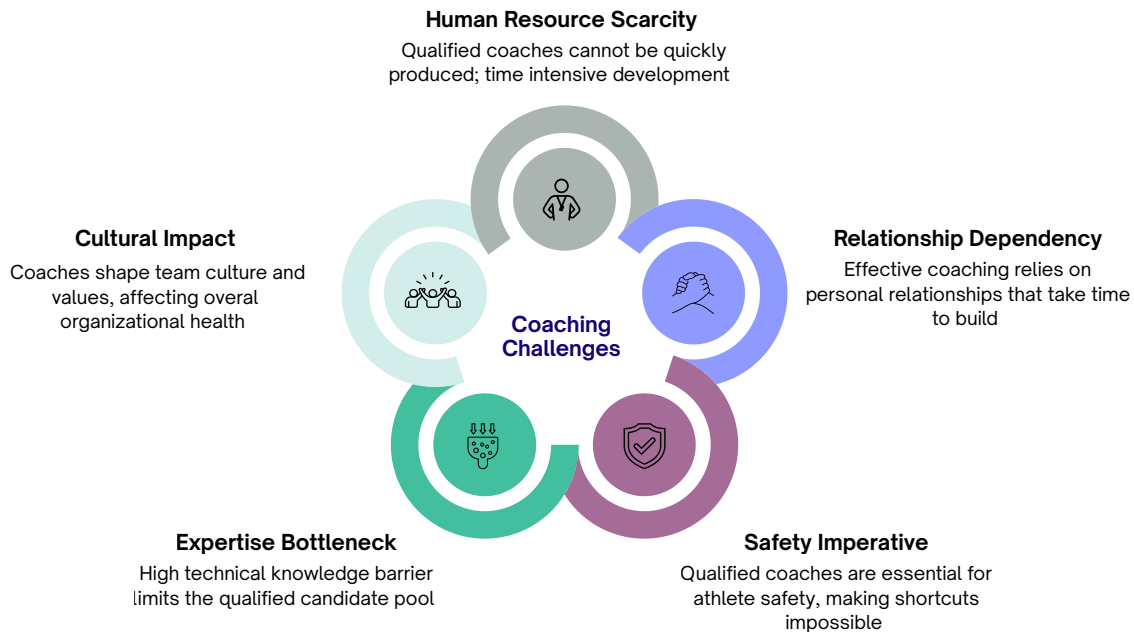


Select participants believe that the **challenges facing coaches are distinct** from other organizational challenges. The challenges facing the coaching profession can determine organizational capacity, program quality, and long-term sustainability.

“We have a bigger club and it’s a hard lifestyle. Retaining a staff of 13 has just proven to be the most challenging issue currently. “

Coaching Challenges Are Distinct Factors Influencing Organization Function

Five unique factors create specific constraints and dependencies that differ from the three other organizational challenges.



FINANCIAL STABILITY

Unlike the previous three factors (Membership Growth & Retention, Pool & Facility Access, Coach Recruitment & Retention) that can be addressed incrementally, **financial stability operates in a zero-sum environment.** Programs either have sufficient funds to operate or they don't.

Financial crises operate on immediate timelines:

- Bills must be paid monthly
- Payroll must be met weekly/monthly
- Facility rentals require immediate payment.

This urgency makes financial stability a pressing priority, as other challenges can be deferred but financial obligations cannot.

Stakeholders recognize that external economic forces beyond their control (inflation, recession, cost increases) can destroy even well-managed programs. This vulnerability makes financial stability feel precarious and requiring constant attention.

The high percentage of multi-theme responses (83.8%) and the highest average themes per response (3.38) demonstrate that stakeholders understand financial stability as a complex system rather than a singular issue. They recognize that solving financial stability requires addressing multiple interconnected factors simultaneously.

"This economy is very scary. We have a smaller club in a rural area. It's the smallest town that has a USA team in our LSC. How do we reflect our community needs, while trying to be somewhat successful at the performance level and remain affordable? It feels impossible. Every small increase in price, impacts smaller clubs disproportionately. We have to travel further to compete. Larger teams host internal meets meaning they travel less and do not bring their entry fee dollars to smaller meets. "It's not worth their time. It's too far away." Yet they want you at every one of their meets. It's difficult."

Participants explain clubs and LSCs are experiencing increasing operational expenses, inflation impacts, rising facility costs, insurance premiums, utilities, and general cost pressures that outpace revenue growth. This leads to challenges related to generating sufficient income through membership fees, fundraising, sponsorships, grants, and maintaining/growing membership numbers to support financial needs. There is a **fundamental tension between needing more revenue and the constraints on how much families can pay**, coupled with declining or stagnant membership trends.

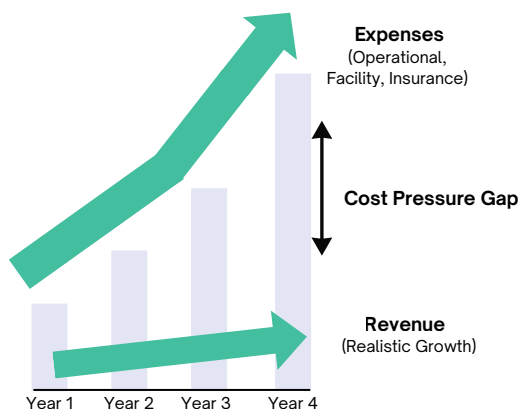
“I am seeing a bit of declining enrollment which has an impact on the budget. We are an outstate club with a limited population. If enrollment continues to fall and USA Swimming costs continue to rise, I will be forced to cut staff and revamp the way we operate.”

Rising Costs and Inflation + Declining or Stagnant Revenue and Membership Create Operational Imbalance

Rising operational costs are outpacing revenue growth, while membership income is constrained by family affordability.

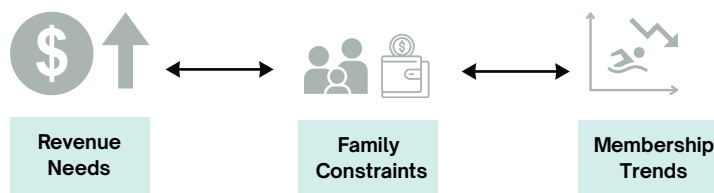
Rising Costs & Inflation

All cost categories face upward pressure, outpacing revenue capabilities.



Revenue & Membership

Tension between revenue requirements, family payment constraints, and membership stagnation impacts program sustainability.



Participants describe how financial pressures impact the club and LSC model from multiple dimensions – including internal (paying for quality, operational costs), and external (lower cost alternatives, greater economic pressures, affordability). Each of these differently impact how swimming programs operate.

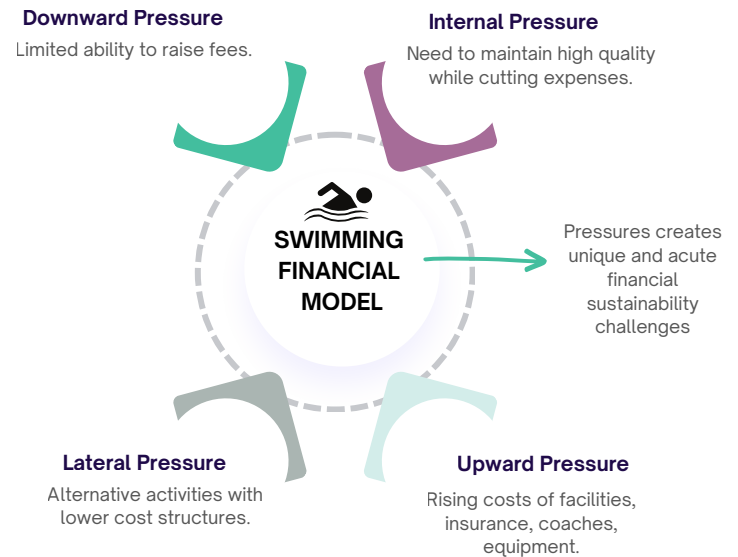
“We currently offer a lot of opportunities for very little cost. We noticed that the last two seasons we've had an unprecedented increase in swimmers who desist from the sport and subsequently are no longer members at our club or any other club. This has forced us to be tighter with budgets and question investments in new programs that would otherwise get more kids swimming at surrounding facilities or in an alternative program under our organization. Financial stability is one of the prongs in this issue.”

The stakeholders of USA Swimming understand the scale and interconnectedness of the economic forces that impact club and LSC operations. Stakeholders recognize that external economic forces beyond their control (inflation, recession, cost increases) can destroy even well-managed programs. This vulnerability makes financial stability feel precarious and requires constant attention.

Financial Stability emerged from this analysis not merely as one priority among others, but as a prerequisite that determines organizational existence. While other priorities affect program quality and growth, financial stability determines whether programs exist at all. This reality elevates financial stability from important priority to a prerequisite, making it a "master lever" upon which other organizational capabilities depend.

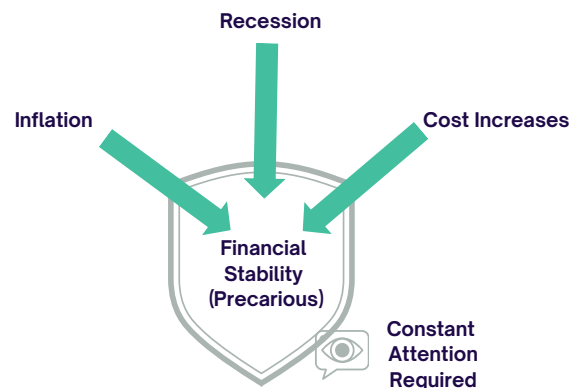
Swimming Programs Experience Multi-Directional Financial Pressure Threatening Operation

Stakeholders face simultaneous upward, downward, lateral and internal economic forces threatening operational sustainability.



Clubs are Vulnerable to Uncontrollable Economic Forces that can Undermine Well-Managed Programs

The stability of clubs is perceived as perpetually fragile due to economic conditions.



“In order to meet long term growth or goals. Financial stability is key to having safe and accessible facilities, quality staff and programming. Those three elements must be in close sync to meet the demands and expectations of the sport. If the finances are not kept in reason these three basic fundamentals of a successful program are not being met. While we are financially stable at the moment. I feel this is always a top priority for any team. Big, small, or successful.”

REVIEW & STRATEGY: MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS FACING CLUBS AND LSCS

Stakeholders consistently described the challenges facing clubs and LSCs not as isolated issues but as complex, interdependent systems where weakness in any area triggers cascading effects across all operations. In fact, **66.1% of responses addressed multiple interconnected themes**, with 22.0% of responses connected to three of the four primary factors.

Emergent Themes Across All Analyses:

- **The Four Pillars Reinforced:** Membership, Facilities, Coaches, and Finances consistently emerge as foundational to operation
- **Cascade Consciousness:** Stakeholders across all analyses recognize domino effects that disrupt operation
- **Competition Context:** External pressures appear in every analysis
- **Sustainability Anxiety:** Long-term viability concerns permeate all responses
- **Systems Sophistication:** Stakeholders demonstrate a nuanced understanding of the complexity of the swimming ecosystem

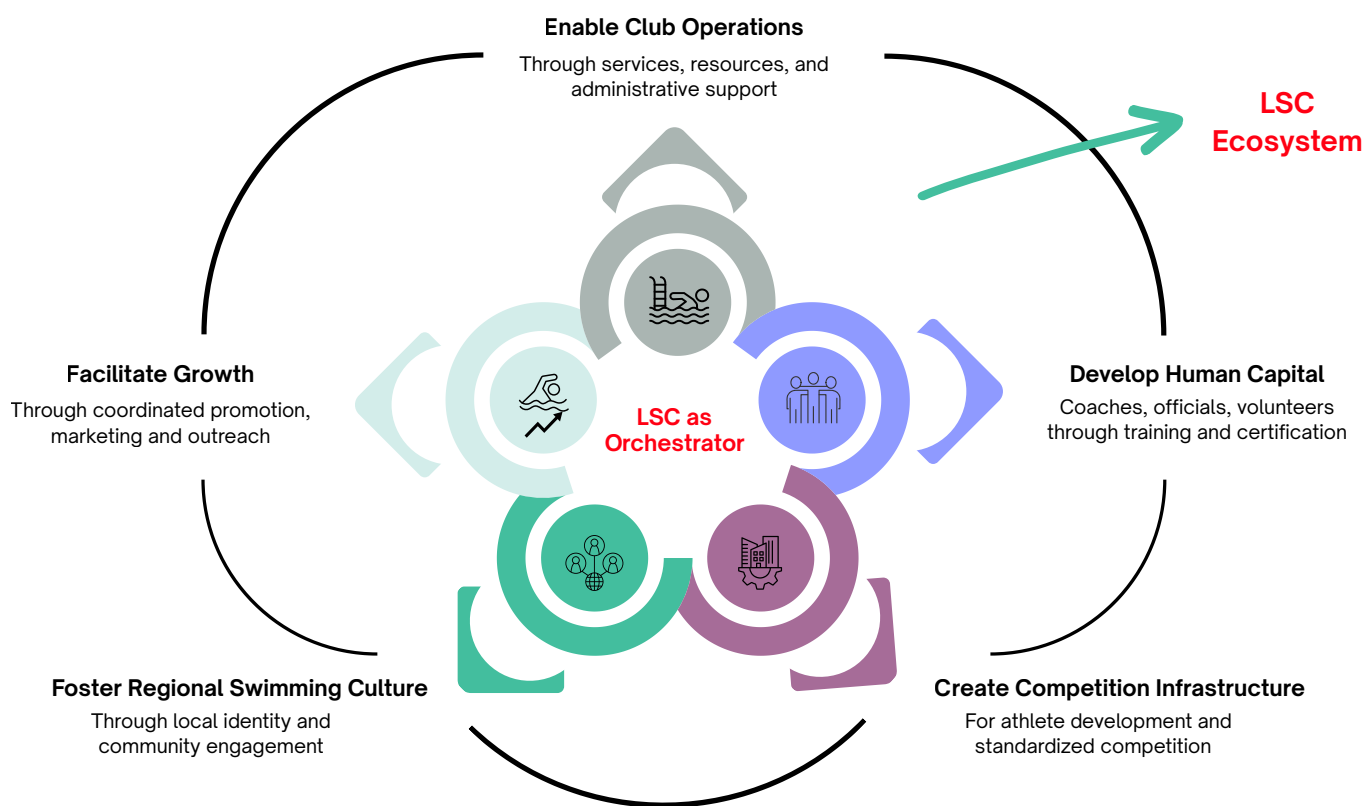
“All four of these challenges are deeply interconnected and directly affect each other. Limited pool access and rising facility costs restrict our ability to expand programming, which in turn limits membership growth and overall financial stability. When a club can’t secure enough affordable pool time, it becomes difficult to offer diverse training groups or accommodate new swimmers — leading to stagnation or even loss of members. Financial pressure also makes it harder to recruit and retain quality coaches. Compensation rarely reflects the workload or time required to operate a successful program, which leads to burnout and turnover. When staffing becomes inconsistent, athlete development and retention suffer, and families begin to question the value of their investment. Ultimately, these issues create a cycle — limited facilities strain finances, finances limit staffing, and staffing challenges impact the experience for swimmers and families. Without strong collaboration, shared resources, and targeted support from the LSC and USA Swimming, it’s difficult for clubs to sustain long-term growth and stability.”

Stakeholders believe the purpose of an LSC is to be a **service-oriented organization that enables competitions** and **supports the broader swimming ecosystem**.

The study revealed an expectation that LSCs should primarily serve as support organizations (73.3%) and competition facilitators (58.2%), with significant correlations between perceived purpose achievement and specific organizational focuses. Notably, 57.8% of respondents believe their LSC's purpose is being achieved, with success strongly associated with administrative clarity, regional focus, and comprehensive service delivery.

LSCs Can Act as Key Operational Stakeholder that Enable Swimming Ecosystem to Function Effectively

Stakeholders view LSCs as instrumental in the operation of the swimming ecosystem that facilitates holistic success.



Themes Associated with LSC Achieving its Purpose (Yes or No)*

	Yes%		No%	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Administrative & Governance	26.3%	18.7%	7.1%	12.5%
Geographic/Regional	28.3%	20.8%	2.7%	6.1%
Support & Services	76.6%	69.7%		
Financial Management				
Collaboration & Partnership				

* These percentages are calculated within each group (yes/no) separately, not as parts of a whole. (ie: of the participants who selected "yes," LSCs achieve their purpose, 76% stated LSCs deliver "support and services." The inverse is true for those who selected "no.")

Solutions offered by participants emphasize **collaborative approaches** and **shared responsibility** across all organizational levels.

The most frequently offered solutions were related to Financial Strategies (35.7%) and Official & Volunteer Development (34.3%).

The future of sustainable aquatic programming lies in moving beyond isolated efforts towards integrated, collaborative ecosystems that leverage shared resources and collective strength.

Stakeholders Propose System-Level Interventions to Help Clubs and LSCs Rather than Isolated Fixes

Top strategic solutions for intervention and investment.



Financial Strategies & Support

Definition: Solutions involve funding mechanisms, revenue generation, cost management, and financial assistance programs.

- Grant acquisition and fundraising initiatives
- Sponsorship development and corporate partnerships
- Scholarship and subsidy programs for families
- Revenue diversification strategies
- Cost-sharing and efficient improvements



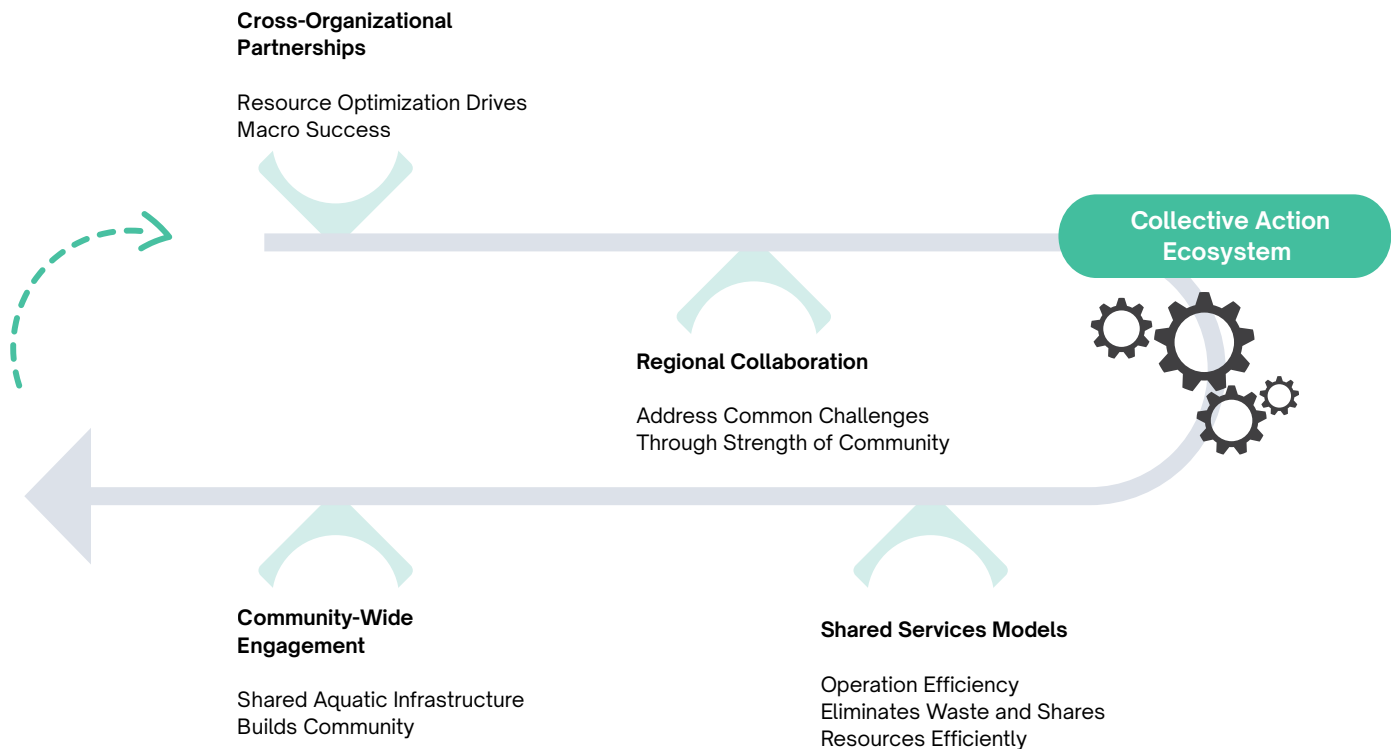
Official & Volunteer Development

Definition: Strategies for recruiting, training, and retaining officials and volunteers essential for meet operations and club governance.

- Simplified certification process for officials
- Volunteer recruitment and recognition programs
- Parent engagement and education initiatives
- Board and committee development
- Creating sustainable volunteer pipelines

There is a Shared Responsibility and Requirement for Collective Action to Achieve Systemic Change

Solutions emphasize cross-organizational partnerships, community engagement, shared services and regional collaboration.



The solutions offered by participants highlight how a multi-pronged approach will help to address systemic challenges:

Shared Responsibility Model: Solutions emphasize distributed responsibility between all stakeholders:

- Local clubs innovating program delivery
- LSCs providing coordination and support
- USA Swimming enabling systemic change
- Communities investing in infrastructure
- Families engaging as partners

Innovation vs. Tradition Tension: Addressing tension between preserving swimming's traditions and necessary evolution will lead to positive change:

- Calls for competition format reform
- Program flexibility vs. traditional models
- Technology adoption vs. established practices
- New revenue models vs. traditional funding

Resource Optimization Focus: There is a strong emphasis on maximizing existing resources in a resource constrained environment:

- Collaboration and sharing arrangements
- Efficiency improvements in operations
- Volunteer workforce development
- Technology for administrative efficiency

Solution Themes by Priority Area Alignment: Mapping Solutions to Identified Challenges

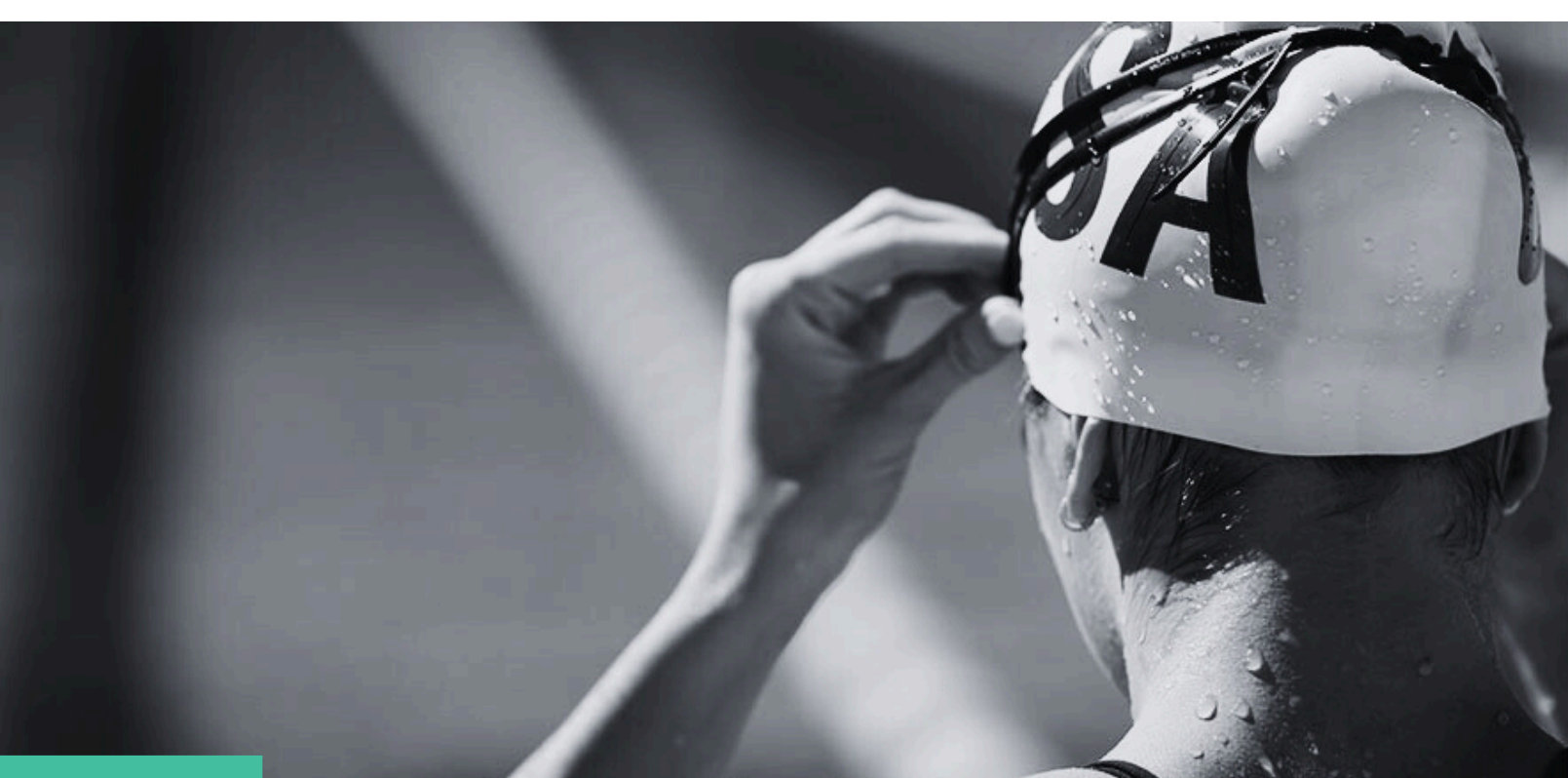
Strategic mapping reveals the primary and secondary solution themes addressing key club and LSC challenges.

Challenge Area	Solution Themes	
	Primary Solution	Secondary Solution
Membership Growth & Retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Engagement • Program Flexibility • Meet Reform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication & Technology • Strategic Planning
Access to Pools & Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facility Solutions • Community Relations • Schedule Optimization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration & Partnership • USA Swimming Support
Recruiting & Retaining Coaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coaching Solutions • Financial Strategies • Strategic Planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program Flexibility • USA Swimming Support
Financial Stability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial Strategies • Volunteer Development • USA Swimming Support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration & Partnership • Program Innovation

“Our LSC needs to work with local municipalities to open facilities for additional meet opportunities outside of county programs. That severely limits competitions in one large area of the LSC. I also think that the LSC could help in establishing public/private partnerships, like those in other areas of our country- that have built massive facilities that benefit everyone, not just USAS teams.”

Our club works hard to offer training to as many coaches as we can financially support, and help our newer ones find work at summer league teams or lessons to supplement their income. We try to work closely with local counties/schools to help them understand how we benefit each other, and how our knowledge of pools and programming can help make their site a success- we just wish the bureaucracy wasn't so hard to work through.”

“USA Swimming needs to be more closely involved with supporting LSCs. There was too much language in this year's survey results that seemed to place the onus on LSCs when, in reality, you've got a limited staff member 95% focused on admin and not equipped to do the level of marketing, community outreach, politicking, etc., to really manage the growth of the sport in their area. At the USA-S level, hire people who are actually experts in marketing, social media, membership growth, business partnerships, etc - just because someone's been a coach for a long time doesn't make them qualified to help guide an LSC. I think marked experience in these fields is far more important than someone who's been lucky enough to train an Olympian or go to the Olympics.”



LSC EXPERTISE AND RESOURCE NEEDS

In the FY2025 study, a cluster of 15 LSCs were identified as having limited access to advanced coaching knowledge but it was unclear what barriers prevent these LSCs and its members from developing local capacity. A follow-up survey was sent to these participants to better understand what barriers exist that prevent coach development.*

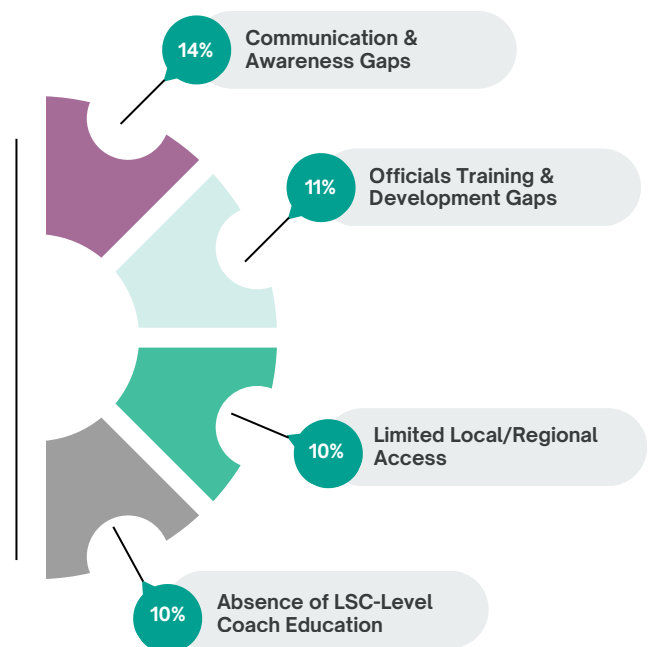
87%

of respondents perceive meaningful deficiencies in current LSC technical education services.

*The identity of the 15 LSCs was shared with USA Swimming's leadership to ensure these LSCs are appropriately highlighted for the specific purpose of diminishing the barriers to coaching development. The LSCs are intentionally not listed here out of courtesy and respect to the stakeholders who work to provide the best experiences possible for their membership.

Coaches and Officials Ranked their Most Significant Technical Education Concerns

% ranking of the most significant technical education concerns.



Members Both Cannot Discover Resources and Access them Locally, Creating Significant, Interconnected Hurdles

The information - access cycle creates compounding barriers for rural and small-club populations.



The dominant finding is an **Information-Access Cycle** where members both cannot discover what resources exist and cannot access them locally. This creates compounding and significant barriers, particularly for rural and small-club populations.

Members don't know what resources exist, how to access them, or where to find information. This is related to poor information distribution, unclear certification pathways, siloed knowledge. Additionally there is a lack of locally available clinics, training programs, or educational opportunities. Ultimately members of these LSCs must travel long distances for education. Solutions must address both discovery (how members learn about resources) and delivery (how members access resources) simultaneously.

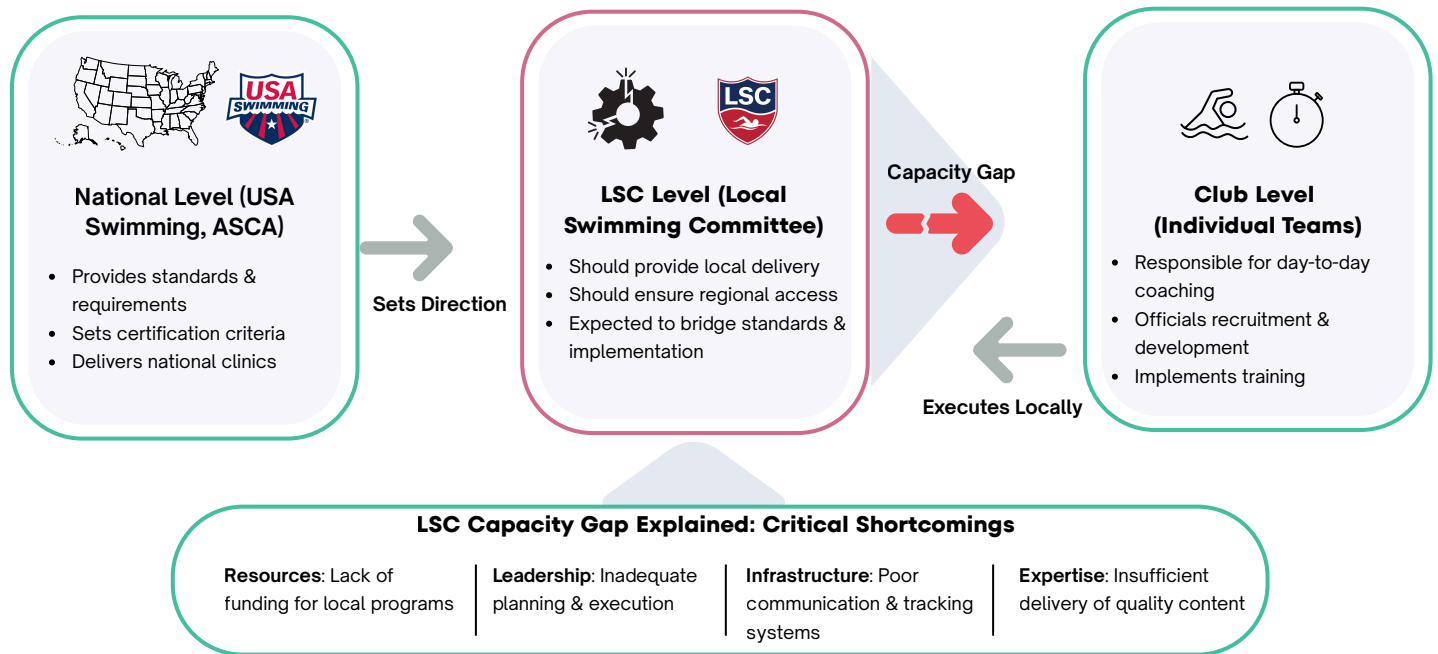
"I think in our LSC we lack the technical expertise that is needed to help our kids continue to grow and thrive on a level comparable to other LSC's. Part of that is lack of initiative from some coaches, and part of it feels like a lack of communication from USA Swimming on what is available to people."

"The resources are in place but are not taken advantage of. Specifically the coaches seem to be treading water and just keeping their heads above water instead of being strategic and communicative about growth and advancement as professional coaches. The officials are similar, in that 90% of them are just parent volunteers looking to help, but do the minimum required to be helpful. The officials' side of the equation seems reasonable given their volunteer status. The coaches are paid, maybe not paid much, but paid and they need to step up their game."

The data indicates a structural **"missing middle" at the LSC level**, where national resources fail to translate into local delivery. While officials face quality issues with existing programs (short apprenticeships, unclear pathways, lack of high-level experience), coaches often face a complete absence of LSC-level education altogether.

The LSC is the "Missing Middle" in the USA Swimming Education Ecosystem

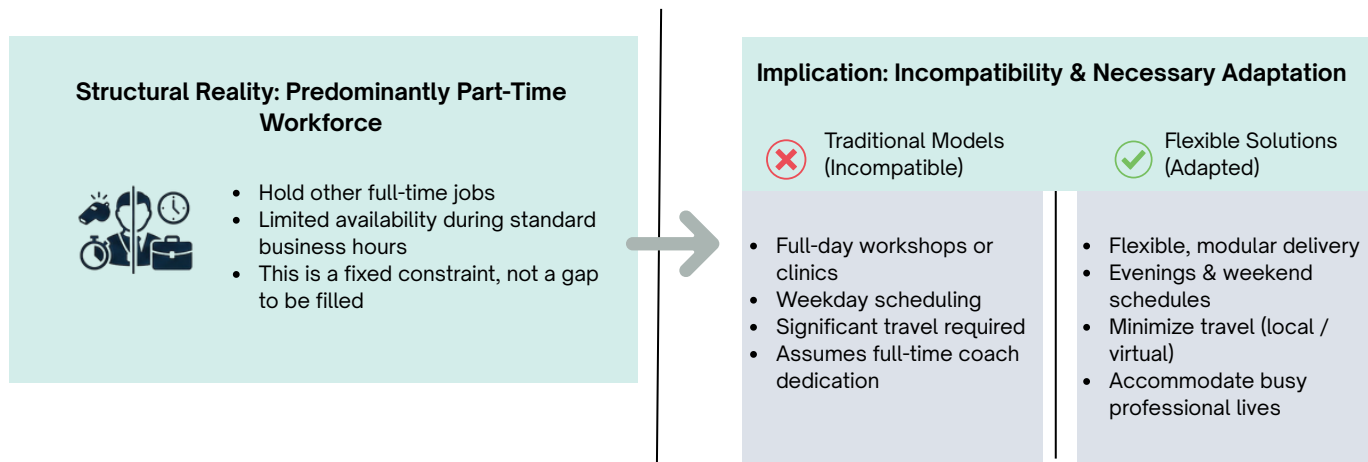
The data indicates a structural gap where LSCs are expected to bridge national standards with local implementation but lack the necessary capacity.



The data initially pointed to system-level gaps, where barriers threatened coaches and officials access to technical information. The findings also revealed **individual-level access constraints**, specifically, the structural reality that the swimming coaching workforce is predominantly part-time with full-time employment elsewhere. This constraint requires solutions designed for coaches who are unavailable for traditional training methods.

The Coaching Workforce is Predominantly Part-Time, Requiring Flexible Education Delivery

Traditional professional development models are incompatible with the reality of coaches holding full-time jobs elsewhere.



Virtual delivery functions as a potential "unlocking mechanism" that could transform the current low-engagement of coaches by addressing the structural barriers preventing support access. Effective virtual delivery will allow for:

- Elimination of geographic and travel barriers
- Reduced cost barriers that compound access challenges
- Scalable reach to underserved LSC populations
- Potential to unlock the 30% showing low engagement with both channels

The 31.5% selecting "Other (please specify)" express conditional acceptance, revealing important implementation considerations. **"Edge learning phenomenon"** – the engagement and learning from coaches outside of structured learning suggests virtual solutions must incorporate structured networking components, not just content delivery.

Majority of Stakeholders Accept Virtual Delivery of Specialized Services, with Some Caveats

94.4%

of respondents indicated that virtual delivery can meet their needs.

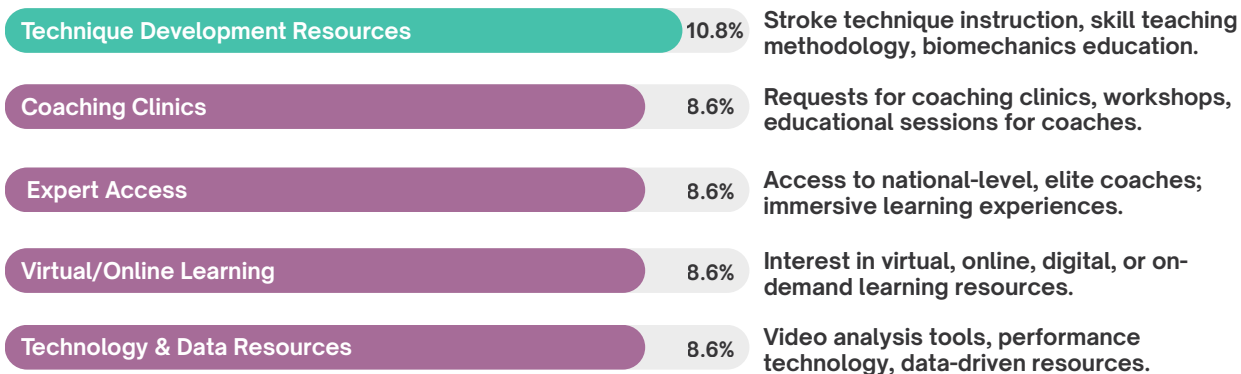
Would virtual delivery of specialized services meet your needs?



Participants shared the resources and/or technical developmental services that are most critically needed for their growth. The top themes split evenly between **content** needs (technique, technology, training plans) and **delivery** needs (virtual, in-person, local access). Members simultaneously require quality technical content (technique, technology, training design), and accessible delivery mechanisms (virtual, in-person, local). These two dimensions must be addressed together.

Members Require Quality Technical Content and Accessible Delivery Mechanisms

Top Themes Mentioned:



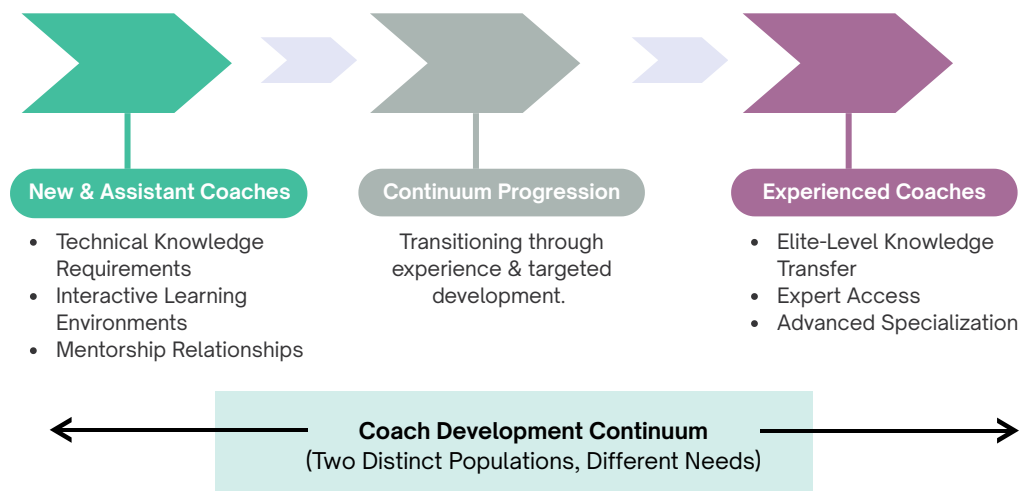
I think starting with a complete listing of technical services list and resources list complete with a detailed description and purpose for each service would help. I've seen directories and services but hope to see more details and provisions of the service.

New and assistant coaches represent an acute need population—they require technique knowledge, interactive learning environments, mentorship relationships, and eventually expert access. New coaches explicitly state they need "interaction, not some video and test at the end." The coach retention challenge identified in the gaps analysis begins here.

While new/assistant coaches lack targeted support, **experienced coaches** seek expert access. New/assistant coaches need basic education while experienced coaches seek elite-level knowledge transfer. This represents two distinct populations with different needs along the same continuum.

Developing the Coaching Pathway Requires Addressing Distinct Needs from Entry to Elite

New coaches require foundational and interactive support, while experienced coaches seek elite-level knowledge transfer & access.



⋮ *I see many of our young coaches who are not familiar with teaching technique, especially injury prevention.*

⋮ *There should be a pathway for coaches to have travel costs subsidized for continuing education and championship-level events. If we want higher quality outcomes, we need to invest in the people on the deck delivering that daily work.*

Coaches and officials indicated they have different priorities and needs to develop expertise. Coaches are primarily focused on improving technical knowledge and skills, whereas officials are more focused on building on training and certification. Despite these differences, both stakeholder groups point to an overall need to build expertise for high level coaching and national-level officiating.

Overall, analysis showed coach education is often absent at the LSC level while official training exists but has quality issues.

Coaching and Officials Needs Reveal Distinct Strategic Priorities and Resource Requirements

Coaching focuses on technical development and content delivery, while officials require better recruitment and certification pathways.

Coaching Needs

52%

of all responses



Primary Theme: Technique Development



Development Stage: Need content and delivery solutions



Expert Access: High demand for elite coach learning

Officials Needs

7%

of all responses



Primary Theme: Training & Certification



Development Stage: Need recruitment and advancement pathways



Expert Access: Need national-qualified official clinics

REVIEW: LSC EXPERTISE & RESOURCES NEEDS

The analysis of stakeholder responses from the selected 15 LSCs reveals a fundamental misalignment between how USA Swimming and LSCs' professional development ecosystem is designed and how it actually needs to function. Three interconnected structural realities, not isolated problems, explain why traditional approaches to coaching and official education have struggled to reach these 15 LSCs when compared to other LSCs.

- **Communication & Awareness is the #1 Gap** — The most frequent gap identified isn't a missing resource but a discovery problem. Members struggle to know what resources exist, where to find them, or how to access them. This suggests that service availability and service awareness are disconnected.
- **The "Missing LSC" Phenomenon** — LSCs are expected to bridge national standards with local implementation, but many lack the organizational capacity (resources, leadership, infrastructure, expertise) to fulfill this role. This creates a structural gap in the USA Swimming education ecosystem.
- **Part-Time Workforce Constraint** — This represents a fundamental structural reality where part-time coaches have limited time to develop their skills. Traditional professional development models (multi-day conferences, weekday workshops, travel-required clinics) are incompatible with a workforce that has full-time employment elsewhere, evening/weekend coaching hours only, and limited discretionary income.



EARLY CAREER COACH DEVELOPMENT & SUPPORT SYSTEMS

In the FY2025 study, **coaches with five or fewer years of experience** indicated a need for professional growth and development. A follow-up survey was sent to these participants to better understand what barriers exist that prevent their growth and development.

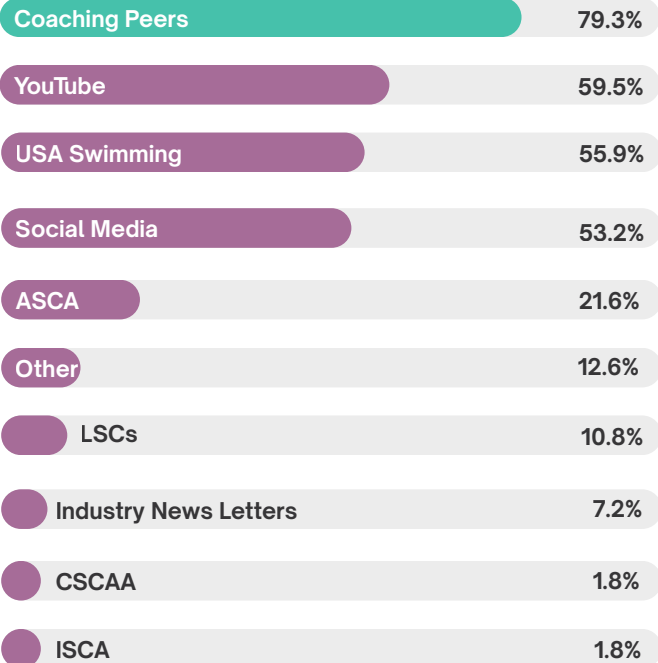
The survey considered the following:

- The resources coaches currently access to build advanced technical knowledge
- Satisfaction with mentorship opportunities in LSCs
- Satisfaction with coach development opportunities in LSCs
- Indication of the most valuable services an LSC could provide to coaches

Coaches Prioritize Peer and Informal Channels for Advanced Technical Knowledge Over Formal Organizational Resources

Survey results indicate a fragmented learning ecosystem, with high reliance on peer and digital platforms.

Top Themes Mentioned:



Coaches detailed their **specific needs to develop skillsets and achieve relative success** for their career and programs. The data revealed early career coaches feel isolated, under-resourced, and eager for practical guidance, with mentorship and accessible knowledge emerging as the most critical needs.

The analysis identifies a fundamental tension: early-career coaches express strong desire for hands-on, practical training over theoretical coursework, yet they simultaneously recognize gaps in their foundational coaching knowledge. This suggests a need for learning approaches that bridge theory and practice through mentorship and real-world application.

Coaching Workforce is Isolated and Under-Resourced, Requiring Mentorship and Practical, Hands-On Guidance

There is a fundamental tension between practical application and theory; early career coaches need support to fill this foundational gap.

Theme	Percentage Mentioned	Definition
Mentorship & Peer Support	30.2%	Need for formal or informal mentorship programs, peer connections, guidance from experienced coaches, and opportunities to learn from others
Access to Knowledge & Resources	25.6%	Need for centralized, accessible, and up-to-date information on coaching techniques, training methods, and best practices
Practical/On-Deck Training	14.0%	Desire for immediately applicable, hands-on training focused on deck work, drills, technique teaching, and practical coaching skills
Current Techniques & Methods	14.0%	Access to latest research, stroke techniques, training advances, and evolving coaching methodologies
Foundational Coaching Skills	14.0%	Basic technical foundations for age group coaching, appropriate skill scaling, and fundamental coaching competencies

Mentorship emerged as the single most requested resource, appearing in 30.2% of responses. Coaches consistently describe feeling isolated and disconnected from experienced mentors:

- New coaches describe veteran coaches as "gatekeeping" information and forming exclusive networks
- Geographic isolation compounds this problem, especially in small towns and underserved regions
- Coaches explicitly request formal mentorship programs with assigned mentors outside their own clubs
- Need for mentorship spans both technical coaching skills and navigating organizational/cultural dynamics

Coaches also express strong preference for practical, immediately applicable training over theoretical coursework:

- Repeated emphasis on "on-deck" training, clinics, and hands-on learning
- Frustration with "more classes" and certification requirements that feel disconnected from daily coaching needs
- Desire for specific tools: how to write workouts, teach technique, plan seasons, and scale skills appropriately
- Request for video demonstrations, short-form content, and concrete examples over lengthy theoretical materials

"A mentorship program would be great, as most tenured coaches 'gatekeep' information and hang out with the more experience coaches, and vice-versa."

"Mentorship and time with peer coaches, not more classes."

REVIEW: EARLY CAREER COACHES

In the FY2025 study, coaches with five or fewer years of experience indicated that barriers existed which prevented their professional growth and development. The subsequent pulse survey targeted this population to explore these barriers, revealing a fundamental gap between how coach development systems are currently structured and how early-career coaches actually learn and grow. Four interconnected realities explain why formal support structures have struggled to meet the needs of the early-career coaching workforce.

- **Coaches Prioritize Peer and Informal Channels for Advanced Technical Knowledge:** Early-career coaches turn to informal channels for technical knowledge, with coaching peers (79.3%) and YouTube (59.5%) outpacing formal USA Swimming resources (55.9%). Notably, LSCs serve as a knowledge source for only 10.8% of coaches, suggesting a significant missed opportunity for local support structures.
- **Full-Time Coaches Report Significantly Higher Dissatisfaction with Support Systems:** Full-time coaches, despite having made swimming their career, demonstrate significantly higher dissatisfaction with both mentorship and coach development opportunities. This suggests that those most invested in the profession have the greatest unmet needs.
- **Coaches Prioritize Local, Hybrid Learning Models as Most Valuable:** When asked which services would be most valuable from their LSC or local swimming community, coaches identified a clear preference hierarchy favoring in-person and hybrid learning opportunities.
- **Coaching Workforce is Isolated and Under-Resourced:** Coaches detailed their specific needs to develop skillsets and achieve relative success for their career and programs. The data revealed early-career coaches feel isolated, under-resourced, and eager for practical guidance, with mentorship and accessible knowledge emerging as the most critical needs.

METHODOLOGY

IntelliSport Analytics used a mixed methodological approach, applying quantitative (rating questions) and qualitative (open-ended responses) methods. The survey was built to examine the beliefs of each stakeholder and the findings were tested for statistical significance between the multiple stakeholder groups in study. The surveys were available for completion from November 3rd to November 14th, 2025. Stakeholders were invited to participate in the study via email by IntelliSport's survey platform.

DEMOGRAPHICS

USA Swimming provided to IntelliSport, coach, LSC representatives, and officials demographic data to support the analysis of the questions in this study. Due to privacy requests, USA Swimming did not provide the age or race/ethnicity of the participants.

In total, 7,570 coaches, LSC representatives, and officials were invited to participate across the three available surveys. In total, there were 1,282 total participants who completed the surveys.

IntelliSport Analytics conducted these three studies on behalf of USA Swimming to better understand the critical challenges facing member clubs, coaches, officials and Local Swimming Committees (LSCs). This analysis examines stakeholder perspectives on organizational priorities, the interconnections between challenges, LSC effectiveness, challenges of early career coaches (<5 years experience) and practical solutions for strengthening the competitive swimming ecosystem. For the analyses, IntelliSport surveyed stakeholders from November 3rd to November 14th, 2025 . Respondents included club administrators, coaches, LSC officials, and other organizational leaders who were invited to participate via databases provided by USA Swimming. The survey was administered via IntelliSport Analytic's 3rd party survey platform.

PARTICIPANTS DEMOGRAPHICS: MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS FACING CLUBS AND LSCS

	INVITED	PARTICIPANTS
TOTAL	5299	1055 (20%)
SPECIFIC ROLES*		
LSC Staff		53
General Chair		25
Vice Chair		34
LSC Board Member (Administrative)		171
LSC Board Member (Athlete)		9
Official		155
Full-Time Coach		605
Part-Time Coach		256

*Specific roles equate to more than the total number participants due to participants being able to self-identify as more than one role. Quantitative and qualitative analysis only measured participants for one-role.

PARTICIPANTS DEMOGRAPHICS: LSC EXPERTISE & RESOURCE NEEDS

	INVITED	PARTICIPANTS
TOTAL	742	118 (16%)
SPECIFIC ROLES*		
LSC Staff		7
General Chair		3
Vice Chair		5
LSC Board Member (Administrative)		15
LSC Board Member (Athlete)		1
Official		21
Full-Time Coach		44
Part-Time Coach		29
Other		7

*Specific roles equate to more than the total number participants due to participants being able to self-identify as more than one role. Quantitative and qualitative analysis only measured participants for one-role.

PARTICIPANTS DEMOGRAPHICS: EARLY CAREER COACH DEVELOPMENT & SUPPORT SYSTEMS

	INVITED	PARTICIPANTS
TOTAL	1529	111 (7%)
SPECIFIC ROLES*		
Full-Time Coach		37
Part-Time Coach		70
Other		9

*Specific roles equate to more than the total number participants due to participants being able to self-identify as more than one role. Quantitative and qualitative analysis only measured participants for one-role.

This report was researched, designed and prepared by IntelliSport Analytics. IntelliSport Analytics is an organizational change research and consulting firm partnering with sports leaders. IntelliSport uses mixed-methods data analytics to provide sports industry leaders with information they need to make informed organizational decisions. IntelliSport unlocks insights that drive highly functioning and data-informed organizations and teams.

DESIGNED FOR DATA INFORMED LEADERS

ART & SCIENCE UNLOCKS INSIGHTS

