Recruitment and Retention Ideation for LSC Officials Chairs

2026 USA Swimming Summit

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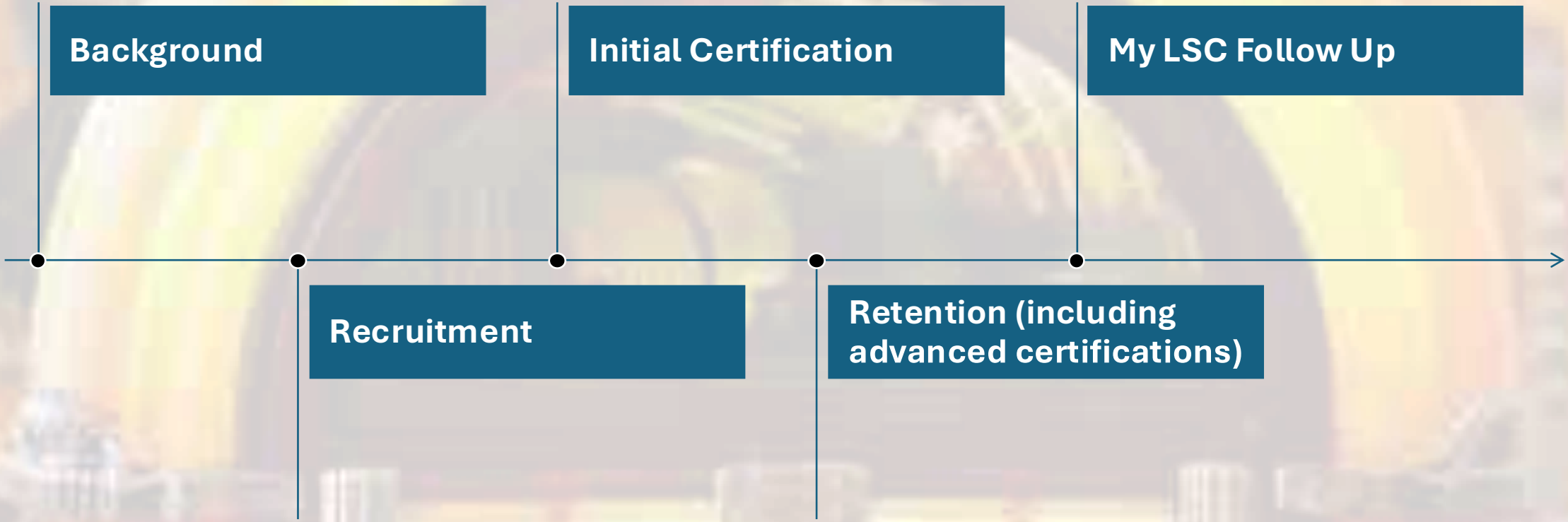
Ideation – The creative process of generating, developing, and communicating new ideas (Wikipedia.org)

Play List


Background
Initial Certification
My LSC Follow Up
Recruitment
Retention (including advanced certifications)

Setting the Stage –

With respect to the recruitment and retention of officials in my LSC

True/False

- The environment in which we recruit and retain officials has become more challenging in the last 5-20 years

Multiple Choice

- We do a great job
- We do a good job, but could do better in some areas
- We try, but it often feels like a losing battle

Guiding Principles of Recruitment and Retention

- Hope is not a strategy
- Active beats passive
- You can’t improve what you don’t measure

- Priority
  - Leadership
  - Resources
- Purposeful
  - What are you specifically trying to achieve?
  - What is your strategy for getting there?
- Partnership
  - Volunteers
  - Clubs
  - LSC Officials Committee

Partnership Pyramid

How Many Officials Are Enough?

LSC Size

- Number of swimmers
- Geographic footprint

Meet Dynamics

- Number of meets
- Concurrent meets
- Number of sessions per meet
- Single course vs dual course
- Chase starts

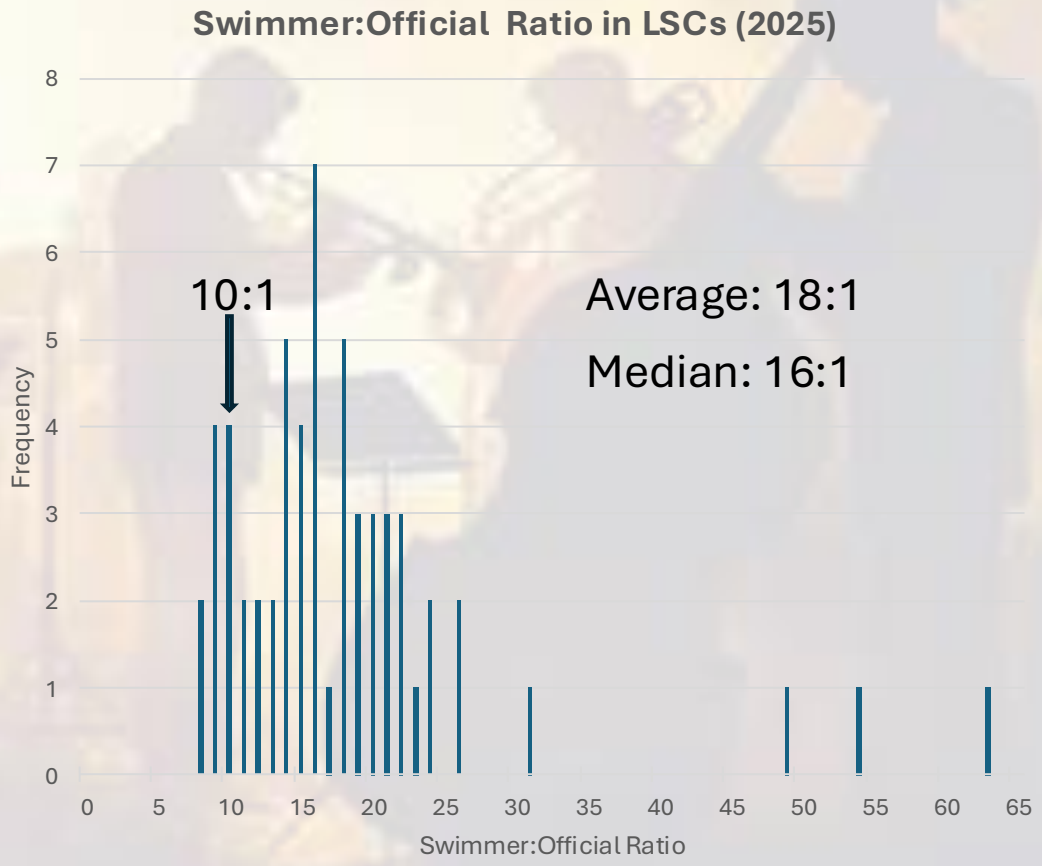
Characteristics of Officials

- Average life-span of an official
- Average number of sessions worked per official
- Rulebook minimum staffing or something more

Officiating Numbers Across our LSCs

LSC Demographics

Statistic	Swimmers	Officials
Total # (smallest)	272	32
Total # (largest)	18,236	724
Average #	4,854	275
Median #	3,644	241



Source: 2025 USA Swimming Membership Demographics Report

If You Don’t Have Enough Officials to Cover Your Meets is it Because Your . . .

- LSC doesn’t have enough officials – recruitment issue
- Officials have a short officiating lifespan – retention issue
- Officials work only enough sessions to recertify or meet club volunteer hour requirements – culture issue
- Plenty of wet-deck officials but not enough dry-deck officials – mixed bag?
- . . .

You cannot improve what you don’t measure

Challenges to Recruiting New Officials

Challenges to Recruiting Junior Officials

- LSC – Is becoming a junior official in your LSC an option?
- Swimmers –
  - Don’t know that it is an option
  - Even when known, not viewed as a priority
- LSC Officials Committee –
  - Has not given it any real thought
  - Does not see the value of junior officials and either does not promote the position or actively downplays the position
  - Has thought about it, but can’t figure out how to effectively recruit junior officials
- Coaches –
  - See the position as unnecessary and do not promote it
  - May even downplay the position as a distraction

Challenges to Recruiting New Officials

Demographic Challenges Involving Adults

- First births are occurring later in life
  - Women: 1970s: 21 y.o.; current: 28 y.o.
  - Men: 1970s: 27 y.o.; current 31y.o.
- Parents of a single swimmer have 8-10 years of overlapping availability
- Swimmer demographics (2025)*
  - Total premium and outreach athletes: 286,526
  - Athletes registered 5 or more consecutive years: 64,923 (22.7%)
  - Athletes registered 10 or more consecutive years: 13,820 (4.8%)

** Source: 2025 USA Swimming Membership Demographics Report*

Challenges to Recruiting New Officials

Characteristics of Adult Volunteers

- Career stage
- Workdays (include Sat/Sun?)
- Work-life balance
- Single-parent vs two-parent family
- One or both parents working
- Number of competing siblings and sports

- Generational differences
  - Silent generation (1928 – 1945; 81- 98)
  - Baby boomers (1946 – 1964; 62 – 80)
  - ***Gen X (1965 – 1980; 46 – 61)***
  - ***Millennials (1981 – 1996; 30 – 45)***
  - Gen Z (1997 – 2012; 14 – 29)

Challenges to Recruiting New Officials

Millennials – A Challenge or an Opportunity?

- *Digital natives:* Grew up as the internet, computers, and mobile phones became mainstream
- *Value-driven:* Seek meaningful work and social impact rather than just a paycheck
- *Collaborative:* Enjoy teamwork and cooperative environments
- *Growth-focused:* Eager for constant feedback, training, and clear career progression paths
- *Open-minded:* Highly inclusive and accepting of diverse cultures and lifestyles

Challenges to Recruiting New Officials

Perceptions of the Recruit – Real or Imagined

- Officials are seemingly expected to work every session of every meet their children attend and even work at meets their children don't attend
- There's no room for me – those old gray-haired folks won't make room for new blood
- I must not be needed – no one has asked for help

Are we communicating messages we don't wish to send?

Challenges to Recruiting New Officials

Lack of Support at the Club Level

- Clubs can have cultures that either encourage or discourage volunteering as an official
- Not seen as important if not a meet host

Lack of Support at the LSC Level

- Officials Committee not providing leadership or resources

Creating an Effective Recruitment Strategy

Who is Responsible for Recruitment?

- Club president
- Club volunteer coordinator
- Club officials chair
- Club officials
- Club coaches
- LSC officials chair
- LSC Officials Committee
- LSC district/regional chairs
- LSC recruitment/training officers

Creating an Effective Recruitment Strategy

Where Do We Find Volunteers?

- Mostly, already involved with swimming
- 16-17 swimmers (Junior Officials)
- Parents of swimmers
- Existing adult volunteers
  - Board members
  - Timers
  - Runners
  - Marshals
  - Hospitality workers
- Swim officials from other organizations
  - Summer leagues
  - YMCA/AAU clubs

Creating an Effective Recruitment Strategy

How Do We Make Active Contact With Volunteers?

- One-on-one contact at practices and meets
- Beginning of the season parent orientation (introductory talk, information table)
- Timers' briefings
- Coaches provide introduction

How Do We Make Passive Contact With Volunteers?

- Club newsletters
- Club websites
- Flyers posted at pool
- LSC website
- USA Swimming website

Active beats passive

Table Breakout – Defining and Overcoming Recruitment Challenges

- What are your top recruitment challenges?
- How do you effectively overcome these challenges?

Ain’t No Mountain High Enough
(Marvin Gaye & Tammi Terrell)

If you need me, call me, no matter where you are
No matter how far, don't worry, baby
Just call my name, I'll be there in a hurry

Challenges to Initial Certification

Knowing Our Starting Point

- How many volunteers said “yes” to training as an administrative official or stroke & turn official?
- What fraction of those saying “yes” completed the requirements to begin their on-deck training?
- What fraction of those saying “yes” completed their apprenticeship and become certified?

You cannot improve what you don’t measure

Challenges to Initial Certification

Just Completing the Off-Deck Requirements Can Be a Challenge

ST Requirements (1998)

- Attend clinic and take test as a group
- Complete registration while at clinic
- Obtain training card at clinic and leave ready to train

ST Requirements (2026)

- Create an account on USA Swimming website
- Register as an apprentice official (valid for 60 d) or non-athlete member
- Complete APT, BGC, and CPT
- Complete “Foundations of Officiating” course
- Complete “Stroke and Turn Judge Clinic” or “Administrative Official Clinic”
- Obtain training card

Challenges to Initial Certification

Remember What It Was Like When You Began Training and the Questions You Had

- How do I identify training opportunities at meets (website, meet announcement)?
- What should I wear?
- When do I need to get to the pool (nobody told me about the briefing)?
- Where do I go when I get to the pool?
- Who do I talk to when I get to the pool?

Challenges to Initial Certification

Are We Welcoming?

- Do we recognize new faces?
- Do we make introductions?
- Do we answer questions?
- Do we create a sense of community?

Do We Provide Mentoring?

- Do mentors have a depth of knowledge?
- Do mentors relate to the trainee?
- Do mentors provide needed feedback?
- Do we provide even the simplest of training to our trainers?

Challenges to Initial Certification

Financial Burden

- Registration fee
- Background check fee

Logistical Challenges

- Help with childcare during training
- Help with transportation of swimmer to/from the session and to/from lunch/hotel

Challenges to Initial Certification

Mandates – Helpful or Hindrances?

- LSC policy on minimum ratio officials to registered swimmers or officials to number of participating swimmers at a meet/session
  - Does it help?
  - Are there penalties and are they enforced?
  - Does it create unintended consequences?
- Club minimum service hour requirements
  - Does it help?
  - Does it create unintended consequences?

Table Breakout – Promoting Initial Certification

- What are the top barriers between saying “yes” and becoming certified?
- What would you put in place to help overcome these barriers?

Volunteers

(Jefferson Airplane)

We are volunteers of America
Oh yeah, we're volunteers of America, ah
We're volunteers of America, volunteers of America
Volunteers of America, volunteers of America

Retention of Officials

Retention Basics

- Cradle to grave
  - Set the hook at “yes”
  - Ends at retirement

Bridging Junior Officials to the Future

- Bridging the college years
- Bridging the years without children

Retention of Officials

Reasons for Leaving (Outside Our Control)

- Most officials volunteer to help out when their children are participating in the sport – when their children are done, they are done
- Family circumstances (self-health, spouse-health, ageing parents, etc) have a greater call on their time than does volunteering
- Work has a greater call on their time than does volunteering

Retention of Officials

Reasons for Leaving (Within Our Control)

- Poor communications
- No “thank you”
- Lack of recognition
- Lack of respect
- Not fun
- Lack of mentorship
- Lack of continuing education
- Lack of advancement opportunities
- Financial/logistical burden
- Be Aware of Unintended Consequences

Open Mic

With a Little Help From My Friends

(The Beatles)

. . . Oh, I get by with a little help from my friends

You've Got a Friend

(Carole King)

You just call out my name

And you know, wherever I am

I'll come running'

To see you again

Retention of Officials

Communicate Things

- Upcoming meet dates, sessions, times
- Dress code
- Jurisdictions and protocols
- Continuing education opportunities
- Meet applications
- Thank you

Communicate Successes

- A well-staffed deck
- New trainees
- Newly certified officials
- 5/10/15/20/25 years service

Retention of Officials

Say “Thank You”

- Hearing “thank you” from the meet referee and chief judges should be routine and not come as a surprise; hearing “thank you” from the meet director, coaches, and swimmers is a bonus
- Good hospitality goes a long way
- Water/treats brought to officials on deck, especially during long sessions, and super especially when outdoors in hot weather
- Meet shirt for working “X” sessions at a meet
- Gift cards for working “X” sessions at a meet
- Thank you at club annual banquet

Retention of Officials

Provide Recognition

- New S&T or AO: LSC logoed white polo shirt and name badge
- Chief judge: clipboard
- Starter: bell
- Deck referee: whistle and lanyard
- 5/10/15/20/25 years of service: pins, name badges
- Official of the year (club, district/zone/section, LSC)
- Officials Excellence Award (national; six per year)
- [Logoed merchandise (shirts, hats, jackets, etc) for purchase]

Whatever is done should be consistent and in a timely fashion

Retention of Officials

Be Respectful

- Don’t waste officials’ time
- Don’t bait and switch when staffing a meet
- Match your expectations to the level of the meet and the experience level of the officials attending the meet
- Recognize the need for relief positions, especially when session length and heat are factors
- Don’t prohibit shorts when the weather says otherwise
- Recognize that questions aren’t (necessarily) a challenge to authority; sometimes questions are simply a desire to understand

Retention of Officials

Keep it Fun

- Fun, but professional
- Develop relationships
- Beginning or end-of-year social functions
- Hawaiian shirts, bowling shirts, Santa hats, shamrock necklaces

Retention of Officials

Provide Informal and Formal Mentorship

- Train the trainer
- Formal one-on-one pairing of an experienced official with a newer official

Retention of Officials

Promote Advancement (Chief Judge, Starter, Referee, Administrative Official-P/F, Administrative Referee, Meet Referee)

- Encourage those with the ability to progress to new positions
- Don’t view self-identification for advancement as an automatic red flag – it just might be part of a carefully considered plan

Retention of Officials

Create Opportunities

- Create opportunities for newer chief judges, starters, referees, and administrative officials to gain experience in position and at progressively higher-level meets
- Give experienced referees the opportunity and mentorship needed to serve as a meet referee at progressively higher-level meets

Retention of Officials

Provide Continuing Education

- Swimposium
- Advanced clinics to help develop deeper knowledge in position
  - AO/AR at prelims/finals meets
  - Chief judging at OQM meets
  - Saying “yes” to meet referee
- Resource material
  - Professional documents
  - Situations and resolutions
  - False start scenarios

Retention of Officials

Provide Financial Assistance

- Annual registration fee
- Background check fee
- Travel/lodging assistance for LSC meets (eg, MR for Senior Champs)
- Travel reimbursement funds for attending national meets

Logistical Assistance

- Help with children while officiating

Retention of Officials

Be Aware of Unintended Consequences That Result in the Loss of an Official

- Recruiting too early – overwhelmed by the responsibility leading to an early exit
- Pushing an individual to certify in positions at which they are not comfortable working – and they then begin avoiding meets
- Taking on leadership roles before an individual is ready – can lead to a loss of confidence
- Taking on more and more meets or sessions – can lead to burnout

Recruitment and Retention in My LSC – Prompts for Next Steps

- What is the status quo of recruitment and retention in my LSC?
- What information, if any, do I need to gather to help drive decisions?
- In what areas, if any, do we need to improve?
- Who can I partner with to develop and implement a purposeful recruitment and retention strategy?