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**TO:** USMS House of Delegates  
**FROM:** Dawson Hughes  
**SUBJECT:** **2020 CEO Report to the USMS House of Delegates**

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The U.S. Masters Swimming community has stepped up to address unprecedented challenges in 2020. The year started with more excitement than usual because of the planned 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary fanfare and a ramped-up marketing campaign around the 2020 Olympics. During the 2020 Annual Meeting, we had hoped to be wrapping up a year of 50th Anniversary celebrations with positive news about interest and growth in Masters Swimming participation. Yet, we find ourselves navigating unique circumstances which have found most of us out of the pool for some period of time while learning new social norms and safety guidelines.

Despite these challenges and this year not going as intended, USMS has much to celebrate. The ongoing response to COVID-19 and the proactive planning that's happening throughout USMS has been remarkable. The foresight and wisdom of our financial and Board leadership has put USMS on strong financial footing with which to navigate the short-term challenges and rebuild for the future. USMS doesn't often pivot mid-year but we have collectively worked to adapt in nearly every area for the long-term health of USMS.

In March, it became clear that significant adjustments to this year's strategy were necessary. The Finance Committee and the Board reviewed revenue forecasts and expense recommendations along with short-term strategy changes to weather pool closures and event cancellations. Hope remained that the challenges would last only a few months, but plans were conservative in the event of prolonged closures and event cancellations.

USMS immediately turned attention to supporting our members efforts to stay healthy and fit both in and out of the water, fostering social connections despite a lack of club activities for many, and helping our clubs to return to regular activities as soon as possible. Members, coaches, and volunteers around the country jumped into action to help with club communication, virtual happy hours, dryland expertise, and webinars. Members provided needed input and suggestions to share best practices on how to work with aquatics facilities and local governments to safely reopen pools. Those efforts continue nationally and in many local areas today. Below is a brief overview of what we've accomplished since March.

**For Members:** USMS produced numerous informative and human-interest [articles related to COVID-19](#), as well as multiple dryland workout options for members who didn't have an opportunity to swim because of pool closures and lack of open water opportunities. As pools began to reopen in some areas, we released our revamped [Workout Library](#), which provides members with an easier way to access and customize workouts and have them delivered directly to their inbox or smartwatch. We launched the [2020 Toyota USMS Virtual Championships Powered by Swim.com](#) in August. 1,500 swimmers took advantage of the opportunity to participate in a fun event. We also added a dryland option to allow participants to complete the 2020 SmartyPants [Vitamins USMS Summer Fitness Challenge](#)



in case they didn't have access to a pool or body of open water. We also worked with our partners to provide discount codes to our members.

From a recent survey of USMS membership, 87% of respondents have the same or increased interest in swimming since the start of the pandemic. This is encouraging data and indicates we should continue to focus our efforts to get pools re-opened and support clubs' efforts to secure lane space for Masters swimmers.

**For Clubs:** With clubs facing revenue losses caused by pool closures, we created the USMS COVID-19 Relief Program [for Clubs](#) to support their efforts to restart when safe and appropriate in their areas. The program matches funding provided by each club's LMSC and a combined amount of up to \$500,000 is available to help clubs navigate headwinds from the pandemic. USMS has raised nearly \$35,000 for this effort from registration and donations from the 2020 Toyota USMS Virtual Championships Powered by Swim.com and the SmartyPants Vitamins USMS Fitness Series. Club Relief fundraising includes \$7,550 from the online auction conducted by our USMS SSLF Board of Trustees. We also provided clubs a restart guide containing the steps necessary to get their programs going again despite the many challenges they're facing because of the pandemic.

**For Coaches:** We provided our coaches with [resources](#) to help them navigate their clubs through the pandemic. The Coaches Committee began a monthly webinar series to provide best practices, tips, and tricks for coaches across the country, and we beta tested a free virtual Level 1 coach certification course as part of our vision for the future of USMS coach and club development.

**Volunteers:** We released [Volunteer Central](#) which provides easier navigation to volunteer information and added the [COVID-19 Volunteer Hub](#) to supply USMS volunteers with [information](#) to help them communicate with the members, clubs, and events in their areas. and worked with the volunteer leadership at the LMSC level to establish the framework of the USMS COVID-19 Relief Program for Clubs. Following the cancellation of this year's USAS Convention, we also created a [virtual annual meeting](#) for our volunteers to meet to discuss important rule changes, conduct elections, review business plan assumptions, and more, via Zoom. Trainings have taken place with committee leadership and to the House of Delegates members for the last several months to prepare for a seamless transition to virtual meetings.

**Events:** With in-person events canceled during the pandemic, we created the 2020 Toyota USMS Virtual Championships Powered by Swim.com to provide members an opportunity to compete and continued efforts to conduct the SmartyPants Vitamins USMS Summer Fitness Challenge and the USMS 5K/10K ePostal [National Championships](#). We also created the new [Open Water Central](#) to streamline open water resources and information into an easily navigated section of usms.org. We've also created a sub-committee to evaluate how to progress with events and create best practices to return to events

**Prospective members:** To provide prospective members with a clear pricing option, we created, in conjunction with our LMSCs, a modified Year-Plus membership that allowed prospective members to join through Dec. 31, 2021, for a flat fee of \$60. Since the promotional offer began in late May through September 12, USMS registered 4,200



members. While that's only two-thirds of the registrations during the same period in 2019, the volume of interest is positive given the multitude of pools that are still closed and the lack of USMS events since March.

**Facilities:** USMS has joined 30-plus water-safety and competitive water sports organizations nationwide to form the [Aquatics Coalition](#). This group is continuing to develop direction and tools to advocate for a safe return to purpose-driven, instructional aquatics. including resources and education for local swimming facilities and programs to create guidelines for their pools and petition their local governments to allow them to safely re-open. I encourage you to visit the Aquatics Coalition website, follow them on social media, [sign the petition that the group is currently circulating](#) and share the resources the group has developed for a safer return to the water.

The [Roadmap of Projects Completed and Upcoming Deliverables](#) was circulated to the Board of Directors several times since the summer Board meeting to provide regular updates on accomplishments and future initiatives. The roadmap and the outline above aren't comprehensive but should provide insight into the volume of tasks that have been undertaken on top of the typical high-level of service for USMS members, while remaining fiscally responsible.

Before turning attention to 2021, there are three major initiatives worth a deeper discussion. The modified Year-Plus and the COVID-19 Relief Program for Clubs are great examples of the flexibility required in today's environment and the collaboration between various volunteer groups and staff to implement new initiatives quickly. And the 2020 Toyota Virtual Championships powered by Swim.com became the marquee event of the year in August, despite beginning planning only a few months earlier.

**Modified Year-Plus:** The [unified fee concept](#) that's been under consideration for several years and made the adjustment to the modified Year-Plus rather seamless. 46 LMSCs agreed to participate in this program which offered USMS membership through 2021 for \$60. LMSCs waived their membership fees for the remainder of 2020 and will receive \$12 of the \$60 fee in January. The national fee was also waived for 2020. This program aligned well with the unified fee early adoption program in which 31 LMSCs, representing 65% of the USMS membership, took part in 2020. This program allowed USMS to jump start membership registration in late May by providing an offer for those who had the opportunity to return to the water to become members through 2021. Forecasts in April contemplated no more than 45,000 USMS members and a 25% decline in membership for 2020. Due in part to the modified Year-Plus campaign, USMS will end the year with over 50,000 members, a decline from 2019 of approximately 13%.

**COVID-19 Relief Program for Clubs:** During the spring and early summer, it became clear that many USMS clubs were going to need support from their members, LMSCs and/or USMS to weather pool closures and remain viable to be able to restart operations when able. Because USMS moved to a virtual annual meeting and LMSC operations were limited, funds were freed up at both the LMSC and national levels. Providing financial support to clubs to address costs associated with new social distancing guidelines was a logical place to start so the [COVID-19 Relief Program for Clubs](#) with a [matching grant framework was created](#). To date, 17 LMSCs have created grant programs for their clubs, with matching grant monies being provided from national funds.



The SSLF Board of Trustees quickly adjusted the focus of fundraising to support the Club Relief initiative and helped raised \$7,550 through an online auction in addition to over \$25,000 raised as part of the Summer Fitness Challenge and the USMS Virtual Championships in August.

We strongly encourage LMSCs that haven't yet created a grant program for their clubs to do so.

**2020 Toyota Virtual Championships powered by Swim.com:** USMS-sanctioned events haven't taken place since March. However, with integration that had previously started with Swim.com, USMS was able to pivot and provide a fun new event with the Virtual Championships. Combining traditional pool races with open water distances, this event had something for everyone. 1,500 members participated in over 5,500 races, totaling more than 1,800 miles. The Virtual Championships provided a fun and flexible way for members to participate in an event and stay connected with the Masters Swimming community around the country. This first-of-its-kind event was a successful experiment which can be fine-tuned for the future.

One final comment on 2020: it's important to recognize the amount of time that's been volunteered over the last six months to prepare plans, communicate changes, and adjust to new and unforeseen circumstances. Thank you to all who took part in budget planning, calls to consider the modified Year-Plus, helped build a USMS position on social injustice and trainings on diversity and inclusion, planned and hosted webinars for coaches, volunteers and members, and prepared relief funding plans for clubs. USMS could not function at the level it does without your involvement and support.

Furthermore, USMS owes the Board communication working group a debt of gratitude. This group of Board members volunteered countless hours over the last two years to hear comments from LMSCs on challenges and suggestions from their local areas, and to discuss the unified fee, modified Year-Plus, and club relief funding. Their efforts have improved dialogue between the Board and LMSCs throughout the year and the approach to communication is something on which we'll continue to build. Thank you, Teddy Decker, Maddie Sibilia, Carrie Stolar, Dan Cox, Ed Coates, Jeff Strahota, and Chris Colburn, for your time, energy, and expertise.

## **What's on tap for 2021?**

USMS has been fortunate to be able to focus on membership growth through long-term strategic initiatives in recent years. Those long-term efforts must continue but will need to be placed in priority behind addressing short-term challenges and unknown factors outside of our control. 2021 will continue to present challenges, including some likely not yet identified. An underlying assumption is that USMS can and will return to pre-pandemic membership levels in 2022. But we'll first need to successfully navigate the headwinds that will remain in 2021.



You'll note when reviewing the 2021 budget assumptions, we're forecasting a wide range of possible outcomes and planning accordingly. Forecasts are tough to pinpoint and adjustments will be ongoing.

USMS could see a return to regular events, including National Championships, and interest in swimming could be bolstered with the U.S. Olympic Team Trials and the Summer Olympics in Tokyo, now scheduled for 2021. In that scenario, we have plans to operate in a manner similar to that which was planned in 2020. However, USMS and its clubs will continue to navigate changing pool guidelines, limited lane space, and need to be creative in efforts to return to competitive meets and swims. The length of pool closures and the long-term impacts remains to be seen but will continue to be closely watched. It's also a possibility that many facilities may remain closed for extended periods or areas that have re-opened could again be impacted with increased cases of COVID-19, which would clearly impact USMS membership.

Much remains out of our control, but the next four months will bring more clarity to USMS's 2021 financial picture. Traditionally 70% of USMS members have registered by the end of January. So, our end-of-year renewal and new-member marketing efforts will play a considerable role in how we decide to approach the remainder of 2021.

Currently, we plan to continue to provide a high level of service from the National Office, respond to external factors and proactively plan for rebuilding efforts when the time is right. We'll continually evaluate our budget as more information becomes available with plans for a complete analysis before the end of the first quarter of 2021. Current planning includes the following:

**For Members:** USMS will continue to provide quality content online, through SWIMMER magazine, and *Streamlines* to keep swimmers informed and connected to the water, even if they remain out of the water. Our long-planned release of the revamped My USMS members-only section of USMS is scheduled for a late 2020 launch. This will provide easier access to USMS membership info, discussion groups, content, and more. We will also be evaluating an improved version of the digital version of SWIMMER magazine. Should the unified fee legislation be adopted, we will begin to prioritize steps to streamline the membership registration process (e.g. automatic renewals, multi-year membership, etc.) and explore potential promotions for the future with the simplified fee structure. The future possibilities are outlined in the [Unified Fee Memo from the 2019 USMS Annual Meeting](#).

**For Clubs:** There are two months left for LMSCs to submit Club Relief Funding plans for approval. This is the best way to support USMS clubs by providing them needed funds to address immediate challenges. We will continue to listen to our clubs needs and evaluate the timing for targeted marketing to USMS clubs to help rebuild club membership, as lane space allows. This planning happens through surveys and reviewing the information gathered during club registration. Updated club information is imperative to provide a roadmap. Support for clubs will continue through the USMS Club and Coach services department. The future structure and strategies for Club and Coach Development is in development. More on that below.

**For Coaches:** In addition to providing relief funding for clubs, the USMS Coaches Committee, Board of Directors, and staff have ongoing discussion on future efforts to recruit, train, develop, and recognize coaches. New resources are being developed,



including a monthly webinar series to provide best practices and tips from peer and mentor coaches across the country. USMS is evaluating the most effective ways to deliver coach certification curriculum and coach networking, with a combination of virtual and in-person training, mentorship, and on-deck experience. Coach support will continue through the Club and Coach Services Department and through the revamped LMSC Coaches Chair role description, that was developed by the Coaches Committee and is making its way to LMSCs through the LMSC Development Committee. And we'll be looking for a time to reschedule the 2020 National Coaches Clinic with the hope it can be done in the second half of 2021. The same evaluation will take place for Adult-Learn-to-Swim instructor certification and the possibility of rescheduling the 2020 ALTS Summit.

**Volunteers:** USMS will recap our first virtual annual meeting and discuss plans for the future with no USAS convention planned from here forward. We will be evaluating the feasibility of an in-person 2021 LMSC Leadership Summit or an alternative approach for this bi-annual, best practices event. Should the unified fee be adopted, the national budget will absorb hotel costs for delegates at the USMS annual meeting. This adjustment is designed to provide additional funds for LMSCs to focus on supporting local events, clubs, and coaches as they rebuild participation.

**Events:** A task force of the Board is currently reviewing options to provide guidelines on how best to safely return to tradition pool and open water events. USMS will also need a holistic approach to virtual, fitness, and e-postal events and how they fit within the annual USMS events calendar. This will be a topic of discussion as we begin to plan the 2021 calendar and evaluate the feasibility of large-scale gatherings. The [open water strategy](#) that was initiated at the 2019 USMS Annual Meeting will be restarted as soon as open water events begin to be sanctioned again.

**Prospective members:** USMS will need to fully evaluate the needs of adult swimmers in the U.S. and provide value and benefits to address them. USMS clubs and on-deck coaching will continue to be the core of USMS. In order to be the premier resource for adult swimmers, USMS must consider the needs of those that swim independent from a USMS club or coach (as a preference, necessity, or as a result of new pool safety guidelines and scheduling). We will continue to build our database of adult swimmers and work towards partnerships (e.g. College Club Swimming, USA Swimming, USA Triathlon) to ensure our value and benefits are seen by future Masters Swimmers.

**Facilities:** USMS will continue to work with the [Aquatics Coalition](#) to advocate for a safe return to purpose-driven, instructional aquatics. Although this effort was born from the COVID-19 pandemic, the goal is to continue advocacy efforts into the future.

**Swimming Saves Lives Foundation:** The current plan is to return fundraising focus to Adult-Learn-to-Swim grants on November 1 to coincide with the start of 2021 membership registration. In coordination with the SSLF BOT and the ALTS Operations Committees, we are considering a rescheduled and shortened 2021 grant application early in 2021 before returning to the typical grant cycle timeframe for 2022 grant applications during the spring and summer of 2021. We are also evaluating the best way to manage our SSLF operational needs with reduced staff resources available.



When circumstances change, particularly when they are as significant as 2020, it is prudent to review strategy and adjust, as needed. The USMS strategic plan has been in place for 4 years. It was originally contemplated to last for 5 years so USMS President Peter Guadagni and I have been discussing how and when to begin a strategy discussion with the Board in the coming months. This review is likely to be a refocus of short-term priorities while fine-tuning long term strategies rather than an overhaul of the strategic plan. While some of the themes in the current plan are likely to remain, USMS will need to determine the best way to deploy both volunteer and paid resources and expertise to support USMS members, clubs, coaches, and events.

One thing is clear, USMS must be prepared to adjust to the unknown. We have collectively done remarkably well thus far in 2020. Plans for 2021 will be finalized as we evaluate early returns from our membership registration campaign beginning November 1. The two pathways outlined in the [2021 business plan assumptions](#) will continue to be fine-tuned and as we approach the start of the second quarter of 2021, when a more clear path for the remainder of the year will be visible.

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

During times like these, USMS needs volunteers, coaches, and staff to step up in coordination to meet the challenges of the day. I am proud of our initial response to the pandemic. The passion and resilience of the USMS community has been on display thus far. We will continue to be nimble and financially responsible as we proactively plan to rebuild. In parallel, USMS will continue the volunteer and staff collaboration on longer term strategic initiatives.

I look forward to working collectively with you to meet the challenges that lie ahead.