



MEMORANDUM

TO: USMS House of Delegates
FROM: Dawson Hughes, Chief Executive Officer
DATE: September 11, 2026
RE: 2026 CEO Report to the USMS House of Delegates

2026 has been a year of steady delivery on our mission and real progress on the initiatives that will shape the next decade of USMS. For the vast majority of our USMS members, College Club Swimming members, Grown-Up Swimmers, coaches, volunteers, and officials, the organization did what it has always done well: support their swimming, day in and day out. Behind that consistency, the USMS staff and our volunteer leaders completed a series of long-planned projects and laid the groundwork for two priorities that I believe are central to our future: the USMS Knowledge Network and a new, more proactive approach to club development.

This memo highlights the successes of the past year and then focuses on those two priorities. Additional financial detail is provided in the 2027 Business Plan assumptions posted with the annual meeting materials.

Delivering the Mission

USMS will support the adult swimming goals of more than 100,000 adult swimmers in 2026, roughly 73,000 of whom support USMS financially, a 2% increase over last year. Traditional membership is projected to finish the year near 58,700, up about 1.5%, and the network of clubs and events built and operated across the country by our coaches, event directors, and volunteers remains the most valuable benefit we offer. Members continue to take advantage of robust insurance, geographically targeted marketing, education and grant programs, and everyday benefits like the Workout Library and our expanding digital content.

Just as encouraging as the top-line number is retention. Our renewal rate is projected to hold above 70% for the second consecutive year, the first time in our history we have achieved back-to-back years at that level. For an organization that has historically replaced roughly one-third of its membership every year, sustained retention is one of the clearest signs that the club and member experience are delivering on the mission.

College Club Swimming registered a record 229 on-campus clubs and nearly 9,400 swimmers in the 2025–26 season, with four regional championships and another



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sold-out TYR CCS Nationals. CCS continues to introduce thousands of young adults to a swimming community they can carry into USMS membership and/or Grown-Up Swimming after graduation, and work continues to make that transition as seamless as possible.

Grown-Up Swimming has grown quickly, expanding to 36 markets and more than 6,000 swimmers, roughly a 50% increase over last year. Grown-Up continues to reach a younger, more casual adult swimmer that USMS has historically struggled to attract, and it remains on track to deliver a return on our investment as the leagues mature. Approximately 75% of Grown-Up Swimmers are not USMS members so we are attracting new adult swimmers. For those that are members, they are getting another opportunity to swim.

Events remain a cornerstone of participation and revenue. USMS sanctioned 481 events in 2025, a 5% increase, drawing more than 15,000 unique participants and are on track for similar numbers in 2026.

Adult Learn-to-Swim continues to grow. Our partnership with USA Swimming and the USA Swimming Foundation keeps expanding the reach of both organizations, and our ALTS grant program awarded \$150,000 across 42 programs this year to help roughly 6,000 adults learn to swim.

Taken together, these programs sit at the center of an adult swimming ecosystem we now estimate at roughly \$50 million in annual activity, with total economic impact approaching \$100 million when club, event, facility, and related spending are considered. USMS is a \$5–6 million national organization with brand, governance, and risk responsibilities across a system many times that size, and that reality increasingly shapes how we think about where to invest.

Operational and Governance Progress

A significant amount of behind-the-scenes work reached completion this year, much of it aimed at making USMS faster, more reliable, and easier to work with:

A new consolidated event sanctioning system and swim locations database launched, integrating the marketing behind our Calendar of Events with the sanctioning and approval process and the measured-pools database, built in close collaboration with our volunteer experts and event directors.

Club registration was modernized, including a secure club membership dashboard and an optional bulk-registration path that gives clubs a simpler way to register their swimmers as members.



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Sanctions and results admin have begun an overhaul through piloting regional sanctions and results administrators in two zones while working on a significant upgrade to the results administration processes to reduce longstanding bottlenecks and errors.

We upgraded how we communicate, rolling out new tools through Slack and retiring the unreliable @usms.org email aliases, and we published new LMSC information and contact pages so members and volunteers can find local leadership quickly. My Account functionality now lets members manage club transfers, upgrades, and mid-year changes on their own.

We've supported the Board's efforts to evaluate current governance practices and determine areas that can be modernized to better support the membership services and business functions of USMS.

We also began planning a more focused approach to developing Masters clubs and the next generation of coach education — the two initiatives covered below.

The USMS Knowledge Network

One of the most important initiatives underway is the USMS Knowledge Network, our unified learning and leadership development system. It is designed to modernize coach development, strengthen clubs, and support volunteer, event, and governance leaders, all through a single shared platform rather than the separate, siloed programs we previously offered.

The Knowledge Network will be built around short, practical, stackable learning modules of 15 to 45 minutes that combine pathways across four tracks: coach and club development, program and operations leadership, event leadership and management, and governance and organizational leadership. Because a module on a topic like communication or safety serves coaches, club leaders, and volunteers alike, content will be created once and reused across the organization, where appropriate.

Just as importantly, the Knowledge Network shifts us away from the traditional coaching certification ladder toward an ongoing credential model with on-demand training, mentorship, and in-person connection. Our initial launch centers on a lean set of core modules rolled out in waves to build momentum, with an 18-month roadmap to expand and then maintain and improve from there. It is paired with in-person "Regional Relay Weekends" held on deck at aquatic facilities, where coaches and volunteers train together on stroke and clinic instruction, ALTS instruction, event operations, and running a workout for mixed-ability groups, among other potential topics. Over time, Knowledge Network access will be delivered to coaches as part of their club's relationship with USMS, tying our education directly to the clubs.

A New Focus on Club Development



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Clubs have always been the foundation of USMS membership, and this year we took a hard, data-driven look at the state of that foundation using live data from our systems. The picture is clarifying. USMS has more than 1,275 registered clubs, but the roughly 415 clubs with 25 or more members account for 84% of all club-affiliated membership. At the same time, we can identify hundreds of active programs where swimmers participate but never register, more than 1,250 lapsed club locations that once hosted a program, and tens of thousands of swimmers training with USMS clubs who are not members. We have also scored the national inventory of pools, prioritizing facilities where the infrastructure for a strong program already exists.

For decades we have tried to grow membership largely by encouraging others to start and sustain clubs, with training, consulting, marketing, and grants. Those efforts created awareness and some new clubs, but they have not moved traditional membership off its long-standing plateau, and honestly acknowledging that is what makes a different approach necessary.

Rather than a single new program, we are organizing this work as one coordinated portfolio of five pathways:

- 1) continued grant and marketing support for the coaches and volunteers already willing to start or grow a club
- 2) engaging USA Swimming clubs that have a facility but no USMS program, and recruiting their coaches
- 3) reactivating lapsed programs, where the hardest assets — a pool, a coach, and former members — once existed
- 4) a USMS Club Incubator that funds and operates a new club through a development phase before handing it off to independent operation
- 5) aquatics facility relations — the connective layer that feeds the other four by selling facilities on the value of hosting USMS

The refocused effort will require disciplined focus and is the best way to invest in the one thing most likely to grow the number of adults USMS empowers to swim.

Looking Ahead

USMS is healthy, and we are engaging more adults in swimming than ever before. The traditional membership and demographic challenges that have persisted for decades are real, but for the first time we are pairing that honesty with concrete, well-scoped initiatives: a Knowledge Network that modernizes how we develop coaches and leaders, a coordinated club development portfolio aimed squarely at capacity, the Board's work to modernize governance, and continued growth in College Club Swimming and Grown-Up Swimming. Each of these is designed to meet current and



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future swimmers where they are, rather than expecting them to adapt to how we have always done things.

None of this happens without the coaches, event directors, officials, and volunteer leaders who deliver our mission every day. On behalf of the entire USMS staff, thank you for your dedication to USMS and for taking part in the 2026 Annual Meeting. I look forward to the work ahead together.