

Alternative & Nontraditional Meet Formats

How alternative event formats, scoring, venues and audiences can lower barriers and reach swimmers standard meets miss

Beth Nymeyer — Minnesota Masters Swim Club, Minnesota LMSC

Kenny Brisbin — Long Beach Grunions, Southern Pacific LMSC



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Presenters



Beth Nymeyer

USMS Level 3 Coach

Grown-Up Swimming League Director

Meet Director Swim Into Summer LCM Meet

Fitness Event Coordinator: Yoga for Swimmers, Break the Clock Challenge

Middle School Teacher



Kenny Brisbin

Chair, Southern Pacific LMSC

Vice President of Community Services, U.S. Masters Swimming

Captain, Long Beach Grunions

Experienced Masters Meet Director and former SPMS Sanctions Chair

USMS volunteer leader supporting coaches, clubs, events, and LMSC development

Experienced Pool Event Director

Developed and supported new Masters meets, clinics, and community events

Works with clubs and event hosts on funding, facilities, promotion, and event growth



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Who Are We Missing?

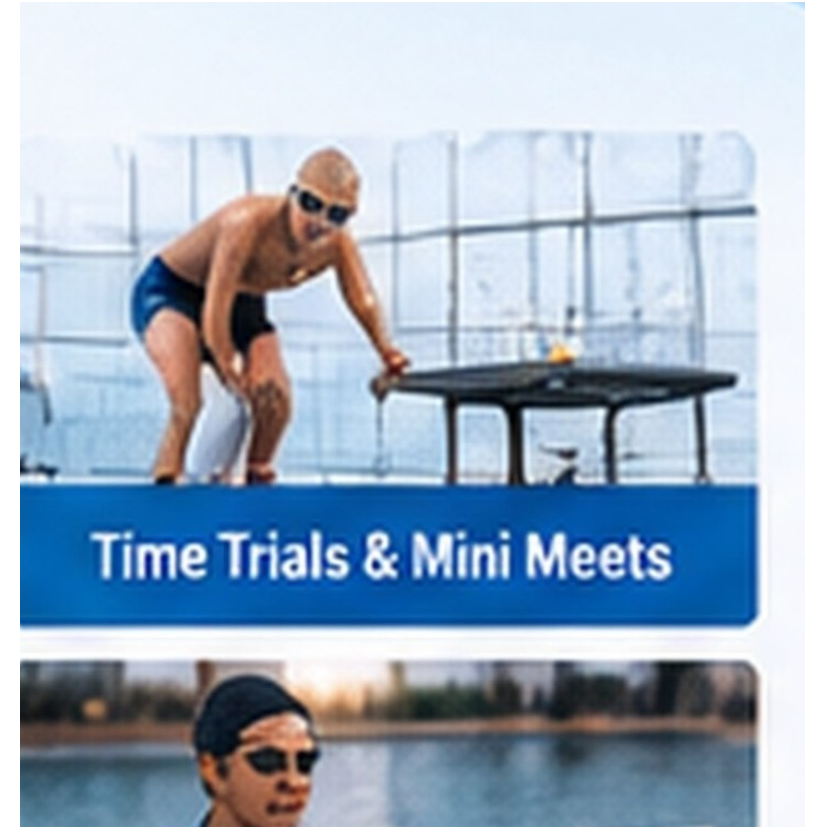
- Fitness swimmers who do not race
- First-time competitors and adults returning to swimming
- Busy adults, small clubs, and swimmers who cannot travel
- Ask: What stops people in YOUR club from entering events?



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Change the Format

- 60-minute mini meet: 25s, 50s, and one relay
- Relay carnival: mixed-ability teams, kickboard and novelty relays
- Personal-best time trial or distance challenge
- Pentathlon, charity swim, or open-water adventure
- Start with one new event—not an entire new meet.



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Change How You Score

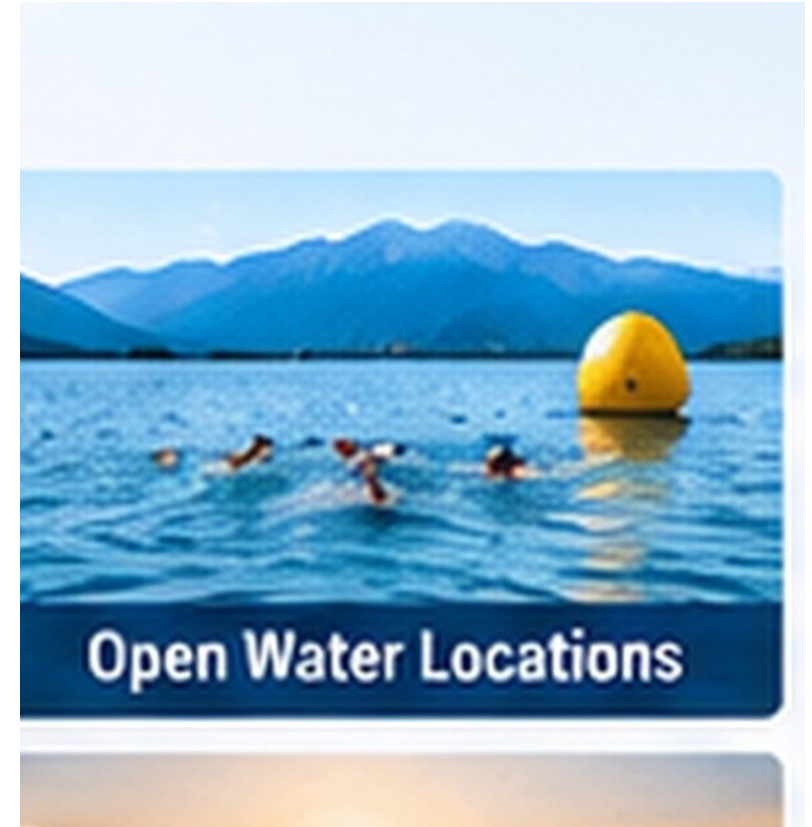
- Traditional times and age groups can remain an option
- Personal improvement: progress from a baseline
- Participation: completing an event or trying a new stroke
- Team challenge: points for everyone who contributes
- Recognize first-time entrants, consistency, and team spirit



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Change the Venue and Timing

- Use existing practice time for a short challenge
- Partner with a community pool or nearby club
- Offer a virtual event across multiple local pools
- Use a suitable open-water venue with safety support
- Reduce travel, facility costs, and time away from home



Real Formats Already in Use

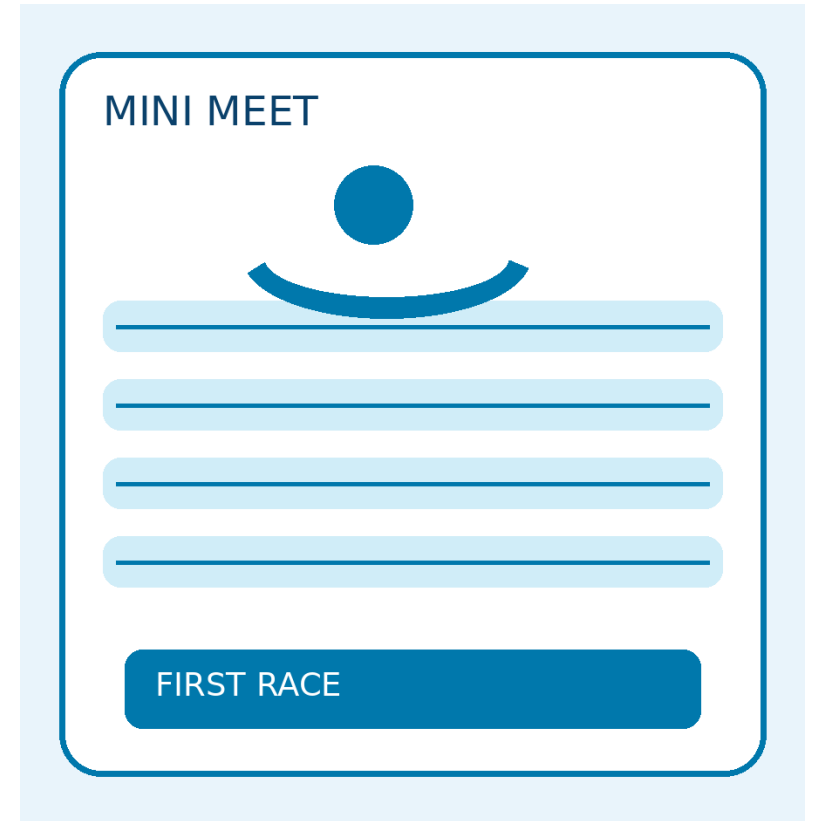
- USMS 1-Hour Virtual Championship: swim at your own pool
- USMS Go the Distance: track cumulative distance
- USMS Fitness Series: workout-based monthly challenges
- Grown-Up Swimming: short races, relays, and social events
- Local examples: pentathlons, charity meets, novelty relays



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Mini Meets and First-Time Races

- 25m and 50m races, short relays, and a clear finish time
- Offer a first-meet orientation: check-in, heats, starts, and turns
- Pair new swimmers with a coach or experienced teammate
- Measure success by first-time entries and swimmers who return



Relays That Bring Teams Together

- Mix speeds, ages, clubs, or experience levels on teams
- Try kickboard, pull, or novelty relays as informal activities
- Let every participant contribute to a team result
- Make the social gathering part of the event plan



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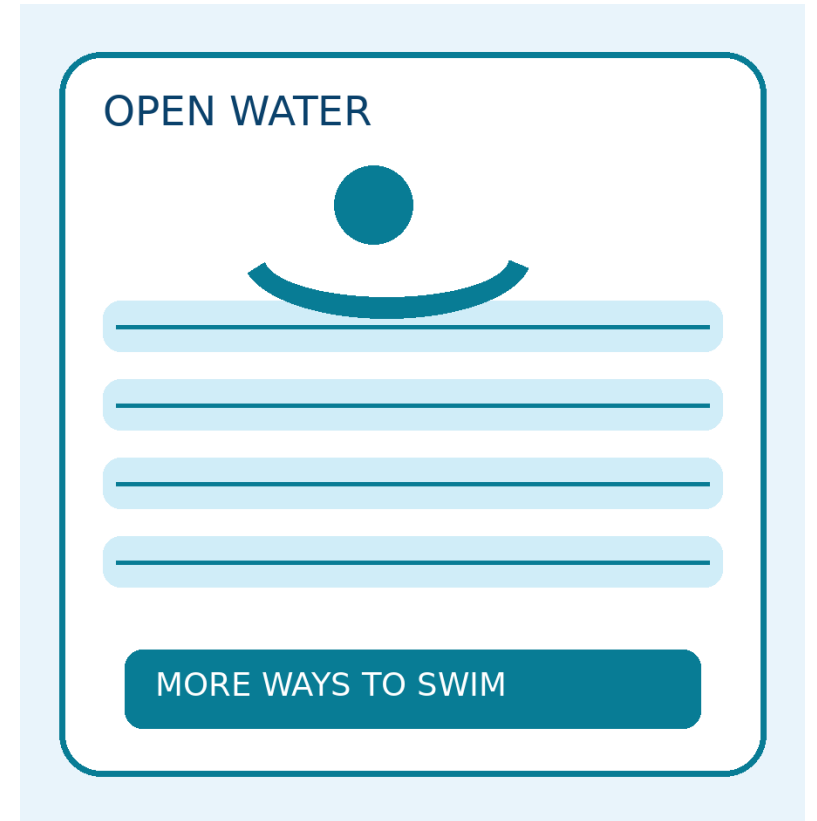
Fitness and Virtual Challenges

- Complete a common distance or timed swim during practice
- Track total team distance or improvement over four weeks
- Let multiple pools take part without traveling
- Share progress and celebrate completion — not only speed



Open Water and Community Events

- Offer supported short and long distance options
- Add a charity swim or community partner to broaden appeal
- Plan water conditions, lifeguards, course marking, and access
- Invite triathletes and recreational swimmers to participate



Pilot, Learn, and Repeat

- Start with one club, one pool, and a simple event format
- Track entries, first-timers, volunteer time, and actual costs
- Ask who participated—and who still could not attend
- Share the event plan with other clubs and repeat what worked



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Build an Event People Can Attend

- Choose one audience and one barrier to remove
- Set a simple goal: participation, return visits, or new members
- Budget pool time, entry fees, equipment, and volunteer hours
- Plan registration, promotion, accessibility, and safety
- Confirm sanctioning and insurance for nonstandard activities

EVENT PLAN

- ✓ AUDIENCE
Who is it for?
- ✓ FORMAT
What will they do?
- ✓ VENUE
Where and when?
- ✓ BUDGET
What will it cost?
- ✓ SAFETY
What support is needed?



What Can an LMSC Do?

- Share sample event plans, budgets, and promotion materials
- Connect small clubs to pool space and experienced directors
- Help coaches recruit volunteers and first-time participants
- Promote an event calendar that includes nontraditional options
- Measure attendance, new participants, and repeat participation



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Group Exercise: Design Your Event

- 5 minutes: pick your audience and their biggest barrier
- Choose a format, scoring method, venue, and date
- Identify the pool, people, budget, and safety needs
- 5 minutes: share one idea and one realistic first step
- What would make your swimmer say: “I would do that”?



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Take One Idea Home

- Pilot one small event with a clear target audience
- Ask participants what worked and what kept others away
- Repeat or adjust the format based on what you learn
- Success can mean more swimmers participating — not only faster times
- More ways to swim. More reasons to belong.



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Wrap Up / Q&A

Don't be afraid to ask. If
you're thinking it, someone
else is too!



Thank You!

Slides, Resource Links, and
Panelist Bios will be posted
on the USMS website