



WHY BLOCK PARTY?

USA Swimming boasts an age-blended retention rate of over 65% and a retention rate for athletes 13 and over of nearly 70%. That stands in stark contrast to the 30% national retention rate* for athletes 13 and older. However, our opportunity for growth is shrinking, as fewer families are interested in core sports participation (defined as more than one day a week), fewer school-age children are participating in sports, and greater competition emerges from other sports. In a 2018 study of membership trends by USA Swimming, families indicated that they were looking for an early-stage athletic experience that was four hours or less per week, inclusive of competition. Flag football, lacrosse, soccer, basketball, and other sports all have introductory experiences that meet the expectations of these parents.

Most of USA Swimming's sanctioned competitions are multiday formats with session lengths of 3-4 hours, and heavy reliance on large numbers of parent volunteers. Due to the disparate nature of USA Swimming's decentralized meet sanctioning process, the majority of USA Swimming Clubs do not have access to an easy-to-sanction, low-cost, low-personnel, and single-meet format that lasts less than two hours. In many cases, clubs also pay significant fees to their Local Swimming Committees to obtain a sanction. Using USA Swimming's proprietary SWIMS platform, Block Party meets take minutes to sanction, have a fixed, low-cost sanction fee, and have creative flexibility to meet the clubs' needs for their membership.

PHASE TWO PILOT REPORT

The tried-and-true competitive experience of USA Swimming is essential to retain and build upon, but we also need to compete with other sports and activities for a smaller population of school-age children whose parents have changing expectations for their children's experiences. We must develop a new product that onboards families to the benefits of USA Swimming while providing a value proposition that exceeds those offered by our competitors.

BLOCK PARTY HIGHLIGHTS:

- Sanction the meets through SWIMS for a \$175 flat fee
- Single day meets with a fully flexible format
- Teams sanction, recon, and upload results directly in SWIMS
- The two meet limit for Flex members does not apply to Block Party, creating a true learn-to-compete opportunity
- Block Party meets are officiated with the same position requirements as Intersquad, Dual, and Developmental Meets (minimum 3), and can be officiated by USA Swimming Certified Officials, USA Swimming Non-Athlete members certified by another swimming governing body as officials, or USA Swimming Coaches
- Meets officiated by USA Swimming Officials count towards sessions in the USA Swimming Officials Tracking System (OTS), helping onboard and develop new officials/ volunteers in their "home" pool in a low-pressure environment.

**According to the National Alliance for Youth Sports*



PHASE TWO PILOT REPORT

BLOCK PARTY PILOT TO DATE

PHASE 1 GOALS

- Ensure the technology functioned properly
- Develop a customer profile
- Finalize a working cadence and structure with our implementation partner, Reimagine Sports Co.

Recruiting for Phase 1 of the Block Party Pilot Program launched in April 2024 with 34 clubs across various LSCs. Phase 1 participation grew to 70 clubs by the beginning of June 2024. These clubs varied in size and structure, ranging from small, coach-owned teams to larger, institutionally backed organizations. The diverse nature of the clubs provided an essential cross-section of USA Swimming's membership base. Summer 2024 welcomed the first sanctioned Block Party meets, with a positive reception to the technology and an appreciation for the simplicity of the sanction process.

PHASE 2 GOALS

- Scale the Block Party initiative to 200-300 participating teams
- Solidify its role as a growth and retention driver for USA Swimming

By addressing the challenges of Phase 1 and building on its early successes, the program is poised for a long-term positive impact on the sport, benefiting athletes, clubs, coaches, officials, LSCs, and swimming families.

PHASE 1 AND 2 DATA (AS OF 9/14/2025)

- Total Number of Meets: 987
- Host Clubs: 271
- Athlete Participants: 32,223
 - Representing 300 clubs
 - 7,033 participated in their first meet through Block Party
 - 44% of those swimmers subsequently participated in an LSC sanctioned meet

FEEDBACK FROM PHASE 2

Survey Highlights

- Net Promoter Score (NPS): 94
- *How positively has the Block Party program impacted swimmer retention and engagement at your club? (on a scale from 1 to 10)*
Avg Score: 9.175
- *How much did the Block Party program help recruit or retain volunteers? (on a scale from 1 to 10)*
Avg Score: 7.3
- *Compared to traditional USA Swimming meets, how would you rate the ease of planning and running a Block Party Meet? (on a scale from 1 to 10)*
Avg Score: 9.7





PHASE TWO PILOT REPORT

OPEN-ENDED FEEDBACK

"Since starting Block Party meets, I've found it much easier to secure officials. They all enjoy the short sessions. I've also found it easier to recruit more parents to volunteer and become officials because of the shorter sessions."

- Jimmy Parmenter, Head Coach,
Brownell-Talbot, Midwestern LSC

"I honestly wish we could film it start to finish - from me sitting down and figuring out what event format to offer, getting on meet manager and creating the meet, emails and signups, hype, the meet, how it flows, how much fun everyone has."

-Keith Ryan, Head Coach,
Coastal Machine Aquatics, So Cal LSC

"I want to express my gratitude to USA Swimming for launching this program. As a small team operating out of a small learn-to-swim facility, we previously faced significant hurdles in hosting meets due to limited resources. This initiative has been a game-changer. It has empowered us to provide more opportunities for our 50 registered athletes to compete and achieve their full potential. 10-12 10&Under swimmers (20% of my team) would not have otherwise been USA registered. They have been able to pull times each month and will now have the excitement of participating in their first USA Meet this January. This program has not only expanded our team but is also contributing to the growth of the sport that I've cherished since childhood."

-Galen Ziegler, Head Coach,
Aquaculture, MD LSC

"Please keep this program. USA meets take so long for the youngest swimmers to get started and are so much more intimidating. We want to grow the sport and this is a great way to compete with other sports as far as a game time commitment."

-Nick Anziano, Head Coach,
Team Vortex, Colorado LSC

"Thank you for offering this pilot program and for looking into ways we can help our sport evolve with the times in our to continue providing the best possible experience for young athletes. The future of our sport depends on the next generation, and it will take innovative new ideas like Block Party to keep up with and beat out other youth sports that provide low-cost, accessible competition on a regular basis. Thank you for considering my feedback!"

-Kevin Virnig, Head Coach,
Arroyo Grande Aquatics, So Cal LSC

"USA Swimming's willingness to embrace a new format and allow teams to experiment has been awesome. We know kids love Summer League. We know they love high school. This allows us to take advantage of flexibility in formatting. Through Block party & flex membership, USA Swimming has allowed us to take the best parts of Summer League, High School, and AAU and put them all under the USA swimming umbrella. Our team is nearly an hour away from the closest teams of our size. Block Party has made year-around swimming accessible in our community in a way that is embraced by everyone and affordable to our families."

-Sean Barry, Head Coach,
Tiger Sharks, South TX LSC

"This is the direction we should be heading to build the base in USA Swimming. This is a great program. Recently our 12 and under athletes were able to race a 400 IM. They swam great and are enthusiastic about swimming it again! Prior to each race we announced how they should approach the race... we added an educational component to the meet."

Mike Cody, Head Coach,
Trident Aquatics, So Cal LSC



PHASE TWO PILOT REPORT

“They like that it has given them a chance to try out events they were maybe they were scared to try before in a more comfortable environment before going to a big meet to swim. My older swimmers will often ask me to put them into an event they know they’ll be swimming soon at a normal meet that they either never have or haven’t in a long time and they want a lower pressure situation to feel it out. Families and swimmers enjoy getting to try events they might still get DQ in, but in the lower pressure environment and only in front of other swimmers also trying the same things. It doesn’t feel embarrassing, they don’t panic the same way if at all, and they feel so much more empowered and ready for the normal meet if at our meet they did finally successfully swim their event. They can lean on these experiences at Block Party and conquer events easier at normal meets because of it.”

**-Renee Schomburg, Head Coach,
Lifetime, Midwestern LSC**

“Five words: It’s just a swim meet. We set up our pool, get the pads in, turn the scoreboard on, make sure the strokes are legal, and we have ourselves a meet. Block Party is definitely a step in the right direction. Thank you”

**-Mike Koleber, Head Coach/Owner,
NITRO, South TX LSC**

“What’s been especially rewarding is that even swimmers who typically only attend traditional, sanctioned two-day meets with 500+ athletes are now embracing the Block Party format. They’re more open to trying new events and, surprisingly, performing better—likely because the environment is more relaxed and fun. We’re even turning a profit at these meets, which allows us to reinvest directly into our team and swimmer development. It’s been a game-changer for community, performance, and sustainability.”

**Tarrik Daou, Head Coach,
Daland Swim Team, So Cal LSC**

BLOCK PARTY GROWTH

We currently sanction approximately 5,300 meets annually. The goal of Block Party is to add approximately 6,000 additional meets annually by the end of the LA Quad. This is an ambitious goal, but to fully capitalize on a home Olympic Games and grow membership, we need a scalable solution that welcomes people into our sport and creates a better experience for all.

Requirements for Growth

- Build broad consensus around short and fun competition as a vehicle for retention and growth. This is our flag football; the NFL supports both tackle and flag, the easier and more accessible version of the game, to build participation and fans. USA Swimming can support both large traditional meets, and small localized competitions to become a sport of choice in communities across the country. Block Party is not a threat to USA Swimming’s historic model, just as flag football is not a threat to traditional tackle football.
- Times need to count, including for LSC Championship Meets. Parents should see their child’s performance in SWIMS and on the leaderboards.
- Build growth/economic models for LSCs around leagues and championship events for Block Party participants.
 - USA Swimming provides technology, reporting, and meet announcements.
 - LSC organizes leagues and adopts strategies for onboarding teams and building officiating ranks.
- Consistent messaging around growth objectives
 - Grow the Sport: Onboard more teams to host competitions and increase the overall number of athletes participating. Onboard families and swimmers to competition in a family friendly experience.
 - Increase Retention: Enhance athlete retention by offering clubs a resource to provide more frequent, fun, engaging, and low-cost competition.
 - Compete with Other Youth Sports: Position USA Swimming as an attractive option compared to other youth sports by offering all the benefits of swimming with a new, unique, and engaging competition model.



PHASE TWO PILOT REPORT

ROLLOUT STRATEGY

By implementing a comprehensive internal and external marketing strategy, USA Swimming can effectively promote the Block Party program, increase engagement and participation, and position itself as a competitive option among youth sports. Continuous evaluation and adaptation of marketing efforts will ensure the program's success and sustainability.

Communications & Marketing Strategy

Internal Engagement

- Conduct workshops and training sessions to ensure stakeholders understand the goals, benefits, and implementation details of the Block Party program.
- Identify staff, coaches, LSCs, and committee members as Block Party Ambassadors who can promote the program within their teams and communities.
- Share success stories and testimonials from pilot clubs to build excitement and confidence in the program.
- Host regular meetings with key committees (Age Group Development, Club Development, National Officials, LSC Development, etc.) to ensure alignment and gather feedback.

Digital Marketing

- Launch targeted social media campaigns on our platforms to raise awareness of the Block Party program.
- Publish consistent updates in Coaching Connection, LSC, and Officials newsletters. Highlight the why, how they can contribute, and the benefits of the Block Party program.
- Create a dedicated section on the USA Swimming website with detailed information, resources, and registration links for the Block Party program.

Community Engagement

- Partner with a USA Swimming club to promote the program in local newspapers, radio stations, and TV channels.
- Collaborate with an LSC to showcase how they are using Block Party for growth and retention.
- Integrate pro athletes into Block Party events at a TYR Pro Series, around Golden Goggles, etc.
- Feature USA Swimming Block Party logo prominently on USA Swimming website, press releases, etc.

Direct Outreach

- Conduct phone campaigns to potential clubs and LSCs.
- Distribute dedicated email campaigns with updates on progress and data around the program as it relates to growth, retention, and other programming milestones.
- Add Block Party to coach network webinars to share best practices and resources.

LSC & Club Engagement

Identify New Clubs

- Use data from phases 1 and 2 of the pilots to identify various club types (personas) that have successfully implemented Block Party.
- Use persona lookalikes to identify similar clubs for direct outreach/recruitment.

Club Onboarding Plan

- Develop onboarding plan specific to club type that offers a repeatable and scalable onboarding experience.
- Provide ongoing support and training for clubs and LSCs to ensure successful implementation.

Club Check Ins

- Develop alerts in SWIMS for Block Party meets (*a positive opportunity to connect one-one with clubs will reveal other needs and ways to support our clubs*).
- Meet Directors Webinars.

Publish a Recurring Comprehensive

Block Party Impact Report

- Impact on the number of sanctioned meets.
- Increase in the number of teams hosting meets.
- Retention rates of athletes participating in Block Party meets.
- Overall increase in athlete participation and meet frequency.

LSC Membership Retention and Financial Growth Models

- New Member Projection
- Retained Member Projection



PHASE TWO PILOT REPORT

CHALLENGES & SOLUTIONS

Resource Constraints

- Challenge: Smaller clubs may lack the necessary resources (volunteers, equipment, facilities) to host Block Party meets.
- Solution: Provide financial assistance or grants for resource-limited clubs. Offer shared resources like timing systems, touchpads, and meet management software through partnerships.

Volunteer Scarcity

- Challenge: New swimming families may be less willing to volunteer, preferring to pay for services instead.
- Solution: Shorter meets improve volunteer experience. Develop a volunteer appreciation program to recognize and reward volunteers.

Technological Barriers

- Challenge: Smaller teams may struggle with the technology required to host meets, such as timing systems, results uploads, and meet recon.
- Solution: Provide comprehensive training and support through online tutorials, webinars, and one-on-one coaching sessions. Partner with technology providers to lease or share equipment. Partner with LSCs to deliver support on meet recon and time uploads.

Officiating Shortages

- Challenge: A shortage of certified officials may limit the ability to host OTS-eligible meets.
- Solution: Recruit and train more officials through targeted campaigns within the Block Party program. Utilize Block Party meets as low-pressure environments to onboard and develop new officials. Incentivize LSC Officials Chairs to build a plan around recruitment and training with Block Party meets.

Communication Gaps

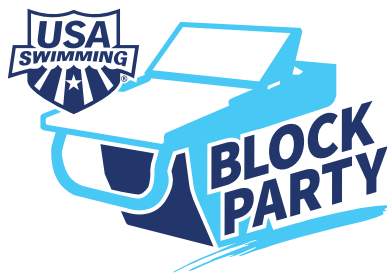
- Challenge: Misunderstandings and lack of clear communication with clubs and LSC leaders may hinder program success.
- Solution: Implement a robust communication plan with regular updates, clear outlines of Block Party benefits, and detailed guides for participating clubs.

Adaptation to Flex Membership

- Challenge: Transitioning Flex members to Premium memberships might be challenging.
- Solution: Create a clear value proposition for upgrading to Premium memberships, including access to more meets, exclusive events, and additional benefits.

Consistency in Implementation

- Challenge: Ensuring consistent implementation across different regions and clubs may be difficult.
- Solution: Develop standardized guidelines and resources to ensure consistency but also encourage adaptation and flexibility. Conduct regular audits and provide feedback to participating clubs.



CASE STUDY:



“Kids leave sports because it costs too much and takes too long. Block Party fixes that.”

— MIKE ASHMORE, SANTA MARIA SWIM CLUB

The Power of Creative Flexibility

OVERVIEW

Located on the outskirts of Southern California’s swimming landscape, Santa Maria Swim Club serves a geographically isolated and financially diverse community. Under Head Coach Mike Ashmore’s leadership, SMSC has transformed its engagement strategy by embracing the flexibility of the Block Party pilot program. The result: a revitalized sense of purpose, expanded competition access, and measurable growth across all athlete levels—especially novices and late starters.

THE CHALLENGES

1

A high percentage of “free or reduced lunch” families, making traditional meet costs a major barrier

2

A lack of nearby swim meets, with the closest teams 25–30 minutes away

3

Shortages of available officials and high meet sanctioning costs

4

A growing population of late-start athletes, including 12–14-year-olds new to swimming

5

An outdated competitive model that failed to meet families’ needs for affordability, convenience, and fun

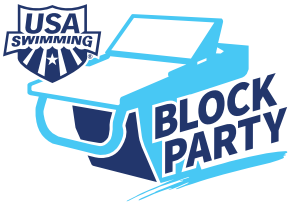
THE SOLUTION ►

Rather than treating Block Party as just another meet type, SMSC used it as a flexible platform for innovation.

Key adaptations:

- **Hosting Block Parties during regular practice times** to avoid rental fees
- **Using assistant coaches as officials** to reduce staffing costs and accelerate coach development
- **Zero meet fees** to remove cost as a barrier
- **Creative community-building events** like festive holiday meets and dual-meet-style Blue vs. Gold showdowns
- **Running multiple short meets** tailored to different populations, including:
 - Long course “first-timer” meets for middle-tier age groupers
 - Pop-up meets for late-start teens
 - Mini-meets for novice swimmers—three in a single day!





CASE STUDY:



"If you haven't read USA Swimming's best practices retention report for 10 & unders, read it. Then ask yourself why we're still doing the same thing. Kids leave sports because it costs too much and takes too long. Block Party fixes that."

— MIKE ASHMORE
SANTA MARIA SWIM CLUB

THE RESULTS

1. RAPID GROWTH IN PARTICIPATION

- Added over 100 unique competitors to their roster in Fall alone
- Saw growing demand from families asking when the next Block Party would be held
- Created summer programming where each team runs local meets, culminating in a community-wide championship

2. INCREASED ACCESSIBILITY

- No entry fees and minimal travel opened the door for all families
- Athletes new to swimming were able to compete immediately in low-stress environments
- Late-start 13-year-olds found a path to swim at high school and even junior college levels

3. ELEVATED STAFF ENGAGEMENT

- Assistant coaches gained confidence and new skills by officiating
- Senior swimmers led meet setup and mentorship
- Coaching staff used Block Party meets to drive development and tailor training cycles

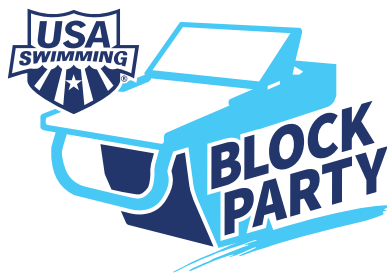
4. CULTURAL SHIFT TOWARD FUN AND BELONGING

- Meets were short (often under 90 minutes), festive, and fun-focused
- Younger swimmers watched senior athletes race in the same backyard, building inspiration
- Events built community, trust, and a deeper sense of belonging among families

5. STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT WITH BROADER GOALS

- Increased participation in sanctioned travel meets
- Expanded visibility into time standards and performance benchmarks
- Built retention through engagement, not obligation





CASE STUDY:



THE CHALLENGES

1

Declining participation among younger athletes, especially 8-and-unders

2

Intimidating and expensive traditional meet formats for new families

3

Limited race experiences for part-time or new swimmers

4

A need to train new coaches, volunteers, and officials in a low-pressure environment

OVERVIEW

Rochester Swim Club (MN) embraced the Block Party pilot program during the 2024 swim season as a tool for developmental athlete engagement. Under the leadership of Head Age Group Coach Tom Walsh, the program not only ignited participation among beginners but reshaped the club's culture, meet structure, and volunteer engagement. This case study captures how Block Party became an essential platform for growing the sport of swimming from the grassroots up.

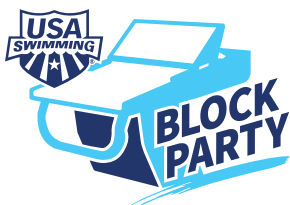


THE SOLUTION ▶

Starting in September, RSC hosted monthly Block Party meets, structured as short, fun, Friday night events.

Key adaptations:

- Offering 4x50s, 100 Free, and 100 IM events to slow the pace and increase enjoyment
- Using the meets as training opportunities for new coaches and volunteers
- Leveraging Block Party as a low-stakes, high-fun introduction to competition
- Open registration for all 12-and-under swimmers, regardless of experience
- Incorporating awards, prizes, and themes to make the events exciting and memorable



CASE STUDY:



THE RESULTS

1. INCREASED ATHLETE PARTICIPATION

- 8-and-unders competing in meets grew from 5 to 27 athletes – a 400% increase
- Over 2,000 total splashes, with 1,600 from first-year racers
- Participation in state-level meets rose by 15% over the previous year

2. ATHLETE EXPERIENCE & CULTURE SHIFT

- Block Party became a desirable meet option even for advanced swimmers
- Peer-to-peer racing among teammates built intra-squad camaraderie
- Children reported higher motivation, enjoyment, and sense of achievement

3. FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

- New parents learned how to time, officiate, and support larger meets
- Block Party served as a “bridge” to understanding USA Swimming events
- The fun-first format helped remove barriers to entry and encouraged more families to stay in the sport



4. STAFF & VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT

- Part-time coaches rotated through real meet responsibilities
- Officials used the format to train new starters and AOs in a low-pressure setting
- Block Party became a feeder for skilled volunteers and future leadership roles

5. REVENUE & SUSTAINABILITY

- Meets charged \$18/athlete, yielding \$200–\$400 in profit per meet
- Events were held during normal practice hours to save on facility costs
- Budget was reinvested in awards, prizes, and coach development

KEY TAKEAWAYS

► CREATIVITY WORKS

The freedom to design events around *team culture* led to better engagement than rigid, traditional formats.

► BLOCK PARTY AS A PLATFORM

It was more than a meet—it became a training ground for athletes, coaches, and volunteers.

► FAMILIES DEMAND FUN

Families consistently preferred Block Parties over standard age group meets due to their energy, simplicity, and value.

ROCHESTER & SANTA MARIA SWIM CLUB'S BLOCK PARTY SUCCESS proves that *fun, creativity, and community-building* can drive measurable retention and performance gains. By removing pressure, simplifying logistics, and celebrating every swimmer, the clubs created meet environments that not only trained the next generation—but inspired them.