

This document contains a working list of priorities that the OWTF has explored and are realistic for implementation in 2019 as we look ahead to the 2020 OW season. Associated updates and background information is included for each of the 2019 Priorities. This outline will be discussed during the July Board meeting and investments in Open Water will be included in the 2020 Budget Assumptions outlined for the Board at that time.

2019 Priorities

Open Water Results Database

- Project is nearing completion with recent sanctioned events being used for testing purposes
- Template will need to be circulated with event directors so timing companies can provide results in the format needed for upload.
- Please recommend that event directors transfer membership IDs to timing system so it may be included in results template.

One Event Registrations

Within the Open Water community, the USMS One Event registration has been a source of concern for event directors and a barrier to sanctioning with USMS to others.

There has been the view that a USMS sanction is 'too expensive' but after surveys and direct conversations with event directors, the main objection is that the cost of the OEVT registration is limiting the potential participation.

In parallel, USMS has revised its marketing approach with new database tools to build a database of potential members to which we will build target marketing campaigns.

Providing more opportunities for swimmers, whether members or not, to participate specifically in USMS Open Water sanctioned events is a goal. And with the capability to capture that information for future marketing purposes is more valuable than a higher price point for the one event fee (that wasn't driving more membership).

For comparison, USA Triathlon charges a \$15 OEVT and given the large audience of triathletes interested in our OW swims, we recommend aligning our fee between \$15 and \$20, pending outcome of budget analysis. An initial recommendation will be made at July Board meeting.

Given the work that LMSCs perform to facilitate OW swims in their regions, we want to provide incentive for LMSCs to promote OW swimming.

In parallel, there is an ongoing discussion about the concept of a Unified Membership fee structure to pave the way to be able to offer numerous desired membership products and benefits.

So, the OEVT fee recommendation also includes a percentage of the fee that will be distributed to the sanctioning LMSC. The % currently being evaluated is 20%. The

final recommendation will be determined based on the feedback from unified fee discussions.

The current thought is that we'd allow LMSCs that offer open water an opportunity to opt-in to this structure in 2020 to test the concept before making a final decision on the structure for 2021. Those that opt in will receive a % of the final OEVT fee for 2019. Those that don't can add a fee on top of the final OEVT (as has been past practice).

Because the one event fee has developed a negative connotation with Event Directors as an add-on fee, we are also recommending we guide event directors to add this fee to their standard event registration fee, and offer the combined fee as their total event fee/cost available to the general public (i.e. non-members). The event fee can then be marketed to USMS members as a \$15 discount, rather than a \$15 add-on for non-members.

Below is an example that incorporates these recommendations:

Gulf of Mexico Open Water Swim

Registration Fee: \$65

USMS Member Fee: \$50

USMS Receivable from Event Director***:

\$5 per USMS member (capped at \$1000)

\$15 per non-member (\$3 to LMSC, \$12 to National)

Marketing

- More visible and easier navigation to OW content, results, events, etc.
- Add pre-event article / paragraph that links to event page
- Event preview link on event page
- Post event wrap-up for Open Water National Championships and other large Events

New Event Recruitment

- The OWTF is compiling a list of open water events in the US to better understand existing events and to use for outreach to potential sanctioned events – Phyllis Quinn has taken the lead on this project. To ensure we have a complete list, please send any events you're aware of to Peq1ekc1@aol.com and copy events@usmastersswimming.org.
- Benefits document is being created to be able to circulate with organizers of potential sanctioned events.
- Outreach: as these priorities are implemented, USMS staff will take the lead on this, but local influence and personal connections are always appreciated

Rules

- Bob Bruce has taken the lead on this topic with the OW and LD Committees. The swimwear rule change specifically will be appealing to potential event directors to provide more flexibility within the established policies.

Added Value \$\$\$:

- USMS to cover costs of fees from registration providers (i.e. the \$1.50 that Club Assistant charges per participant), which effectively lowers the per swimmer sanction fee from \$5 to \$3.50
- Other providers (i.e. IM Athlete, RunSignUp, etc) are being explored and considered, but Club Assistant is the most immediate viable option and have agreed in principle to partnership.
- Using an API, USMS will be able to gather entry data in real time, which has several benefits:

Matching results with member records post-event.

Marketing: target/segment USMS membership better to promote OW content and upcoming races on behalf of event directors.

Simplify process of transferring sanction and OEVT funds/data to reduce administrative work for LMSC and event directors, and allow timely communications with OETV swimmers to upsell membership and participation in other sanctioned events

- Cost currently forecasted at \$15,000 with current participation levels (\$1.50 x 10k entries).
- Will be included as part of 2020 budget process.
- Cost will increase with growth of events/participation (a very good thing).
- Approximately 350 new memberships would need to be generated to offset the \$15k

- Allow registration to start before membership year that the event is held
- Opening entries early in the year gives event directors more time to market their event and when feasible capture excitement from race day to the following year (i.e. open entries for 2020 at the 2019 event).
- Club Assistant has seen success from events utilizing this strategy, already has the ability setup events over a year in advance, and can easily assist event directors with membership verification (i.e. if entries open August 2019 for an August 2020 event, membership can be verified in July 2019)
- USMS will need to communicate with LMSC sanction chairs and event directors to educate them the process and associated benefits so events can be sanctioned prior to registration opening since standard practice has been to not sanction until Nov 1 registration begins.

Sanction process adjustment

- The OWTF has found many of the issues/confusion around the sanction process are due to a delay in responses and/or inconsistent/incomplete information that is provided to event directors.
- Open Water Compliance Coordinator role to be expanded into an OW Event Coordinator and serve as a resource throughout the process rather than simply approving safety plans
- Having a dedicated person in this role will help navigate issues commonly found throughout the country, including coordination with USA Swimming to streamline the process for dual-sanctioned events.
- Coordinator will have more accountability than an LMSC Sanction Chair to ensure inquiries are responded to in a timely manner
- Coordinator will receive the application when it is originally submitted so review process can be expedited. Currently the Coordinator only receives the application after it is “approved” by the LMSC and many “approved” application lack critical details.
- LMSC will still have final approval to ensure the date works and local knowledge is utilized. However, if LMSC does not respond in a timely manner (i.e. Sanction Chair is on vacation or otherwise unavailable) the Coordinator will reach out to other LMSC leadership to facilitate approval within reasonable time frames.
- Coordinator will assist with the sales process of getting established (non-sanctioned) events to sanction with USMS and be a resource or event directors interested in starting a new event.
- David Miner has already been engaged to start working towards this new model.

Open Water Workout Guidelines

- USMS is currently working with Colorado Masters Swimming Association on a plan to implement workouts at a reservoir in Colorado. This will be used as a template to build a guidelines documents that can be used as a resource in other areas of the country. (Colorado lost over 1000 members due to the loss of one venue.)
- Lane 4 Swimming in Potomac Valley is also working to reinstate their Open Water workouts and will serve as another opportunity for best practices. (Lane 4 Swimming estimates they lost roughly 250 swimmers because they weren't able to continue their open water workouts.)

Partnerships

- USMS has had (and will continue) dialogue with USA Swimming, USA Triathlon, and WOWSA to share best practices and explore ways to partner and grow the sport
- USA Triathlon added two open water swims at two of their events:
 - Legacy Triathlon – Long Beach, CA on July 19th
 - Age Group Nationals – Cleveland, OH on August 9th
- USMS sent emails to local members to help promote the events

- Both events are owned/operated by USAT's national office. David Miner has reviewed USAT's plans to ensure they meet our safety standards.
- Support from OW/LD to help spread the word about these events is much appreciated

Next steps for 2020

- Consider the concept of an Open Water / Triathlon Membership
 - Based on outcome of unified fee discussions
 - Data driven analysis
 - Evaluate results from 2019 priorities
 - Long Distance Event Discussion
 - Participation/growth
 - Build demand from event directors
 - Focus on distances that are in demand
 - Process simplification
 - National Office / Committee Partnership – Volunteer Task Force
- Recommendations
- Legislation?
 - Education on insurance requirements and structure for Open Water workouts vs. Open Water events
 - Event Cancellation Insurance. This is currently being explored, but costs/benefits need to be confirmed before it can be recommended/implemented