Coach Sustainability Playbook for Organizations

National Level: USA Swimming, ASCA

Mental Health Partnerships: USA Swimming and/or ASCA identifies and partners with 1-2 national mental wellness providers (e.g., Meditation or counseling platforms such as Calm, Headspace, TalkSpace, and BetterHelp). This initiative ensures that the high stress nature of the professional is met with accessible, professional support, destigmatizing pursuit of mental health care.

Program Structure

- **Funded Access Codes:** Every USA Swimming and/or ASCA registered coach receives an annual access code for the chosen platform, either fully funded at the national level or partially subsidized through annual registration fees.

Implementation Roadmap

- **Pilot Phase:** Launch a 12-month pilot program in 2–3 representative LSCs. Usage is tracked via opt-in anonymous reporting to measure platform engagement and ensure the service meets the actual needs of the coaching population.
- **Minimum Viable Rollout:** Year-one implementation focuses on a "Wellness Access Portal" hosted on the USA Swimming/ASCA website, where coaches can retrieve their subscription codes and access vetted mental health resources.

Health and Wellness Access: USA Swimming and/or ASCA identifies and partners with national gym chains like Planet Fitness to provide coaches with reduced-cost or free memberships prioritizing physical health as a foundational element of coach longevity.

Program Structure

- **National Gym Partnership:** The national organization leverages its scale to negotiate universal membership rates or sponsored memberships with a major national gym chain (e.g., Planet Fitness).
- **Subsidized Membership:** Coaches receive an annual access code funded by the national body (or partially subsidized via registration fees), effectively treating gym access as a standard professional benefit.

Implementation Roadmap

- **Pilot Phase:** Roll out the program in 2–3 LSCs for 12 months. Success is monitored through opt-in anonymous reporting of gym attendance and participant satisfaction.

- **Minimum Viable Rollout:** Implementation consists of a dedicated "Health Perks" section within the USA Swimming/ASCA member portal, allowing coaches to easily redeem their gym membership credentials.

Evidence-based Coach Sustainability Framework: USA Swimming and the ASCA establish a comprehensive "Coach Sustainability Framework" to provide clubs with the tools necessary to assess and improve their internal health. By moving from intuition-based management to evidence-based metrics, the organization empowers clubs to build environments that prioritize longevity, professional growth, and staff retention.

Framework Components

- **Organizational Health Toolkit:** A centralized suite of assessment instruments, including:
    - **Burnout Risk & Workload Audits:** Quantitative tools to measure daily labor intensity and identify high-risk fatigue patterns.
    - **Staff Climate Surveys:** Periodic, anonymous instruments to gauge psychological safety, cultural health, and leadership efficacy.
    - **Benchmarking Data:** Access to national standards for salary, benefits, and retention rates to provide clubs with an objective basis for competitive compensation packages.
- **Best-Practice Implementation Guides:** Ready-to-use resources for club boards and Head Coaches, ranging from standardized onboarding checklists to institutionalized delegation models and retention strategies.

Educational Integration

- **Mandated Professional Development:** The framework serves as the foundation for a national educational curriculum. ASCA integrates modules into existing certification pathways that focus on critical soft skills: recognizing and mitigating burnout, empathetic leadership, psychological safety, and sustainable team staffing models.
- **Proactive Retention Planning:** By leveraging these educational resources, clubs are equipped to shift their management culture from reactive turnover management to proactive, long-term coach retention planning.

Implementation Roadmap

- **Development Phase:** Synthesize research and industry data to build the digital toolkit. Establish "Success Metrics" that participating clubs can use to track their progress over time.
- **Deployment:** Roll out the framework as a "Gold Standard" certification for clubs. Offer tiered incentives (e.g., enhanced promotional opportunities, preferential clinic access) to clubs that implement the full audit suite.
- **Evaluation:** Utilize the aggregated, anonymous data from participating clubs to identify national trends in coach wellness, allowing the national organization to update the framework annually based on evolving challenges and successful outcomes.

Scalable Health Insurance: USA Swimming leverages its national scale to negotiate, identify, and facilitate access to affordable health insurance solutions for clubs that lack the leverage to secure competitive coverage independently. This initiative focuses on small-to-medium-sized clubs—specifically those currently unable to provide benefits to their full-time or part-time staff—by utilizing the national membership as a mechanism to achieve institutional-level group rates.

Program Structure

- **National Negotiated Access:** USA Swimming acts as the master policyholder or broker-partner to pool regional club staff into a national aggregate, unlocking group-rate premiums and broader plan options.
- **Subsidy & Integration:** Clubs have the option to contribute a portion of premiums as part of an employee compensation package, while the national organization provides the administrative infrastructure to facilitate enrollment.

Implementation Roadmap

- **Pilot Phase:** Launch a 12-month pilot program in 3–5 representative Local Swimming Committees (LSCs) to measure participation rates, demographic needs, and carrier responsiveness.
- **Minimum Viable Rollout:** Year-one implementation focuses on a dedicated insurance enrollment portal accessible via the USA Swimming website. This portal provides coaches and club owners with a vetted list of insurance partners and pre-negotiated plans, streamlining the quote-to-coverage process for small clubs.
- **Evaluation:** Success is tracked via opt-in anonymous reporting, measuring the number of clubs that successfully onboarded staff and the resulting reduction in monthly premium costs compared to individual market rates.

LSC Level

Standardization and Professional Recognition: LSCs increase coach awareness and incentivize clubs to achieve "100% ASCA Team" status, By embedding membership into existing registration process clubs can foster a culture of professional development, professional accountability, and coaching excellence.

Program Structure

- **Integrated Membership:** ASCA membership dues are integrated directly into the annual LSC club registration process. This seamless enrollment ensures every coach on staff is automatically rostered as an ASCA member, granting them immediate access to resources, certifications, and networking.

Implementation Roadmap

- **Pilot Phase:** The LSC Executive Director initiates a 12-month pilot with 3–5 representative clubs. During this period, ASCA handles the seamless onboarding of coaches, providing personalized login credentials and welcome packets directly to the staff.
- **Localized Site Education:** LSCs host tiered (Level 1, 2, and 3) training sessions in conjunction with the House of Delegates (HOD) meetings.These sessions feature national-level experts brought in by ASCA to provide localized, high-impact professional development.
- **Minimum Viable Rollout:** Year-one implementation focuses on the integration of the membership fee within the LSC registration portal and the delivery of at least one onsite, LSC-wide coaching clinic led by an ASCA representative.

Formalized Mentorship: The LSC Coaches Committee establishes a formal mentorship framework designed to accelerate the professional growth of early-career staff by pairing them with veteran coaches. This initiative institutionalizes the transfer of technical knowledge, administrative best practices, and long-term career development strategies, fostering a stronger, more connected coaching community.

Program Structure

- **Targeted Matching:** Mentorship pairs are curated based on professional alignment, pairing coaches who have specific developmental goals with veteran mentors who possess the relevant expertise. Criteria include years of experience, specific coaching environments (e.g., age group vs. senior), and identified areas for improvement.
- **Structured Engagement:** The program operates on a 4–6 month cycle, requiring pairs to meet at least twice monthly. Meetings may be conducted virtually or in person, following a standardized curriculum of discussion topics provided by the committee to ensure consistent learning outcomes.
- **Applied Observation:** The program encourages high-level professional development through "site visits," where mentees travel to observe the mentor's club operations, practice design, and athlete management firsthand.

Implementation Roadmap

- **Pilot Phase:** Launch the mentorship program across the LSC for one cycle to evaluate match efficacy and the relevance of the provided discussion topics. Usage and satisfaction are tracked via end-of-program surveys.
- **Support & Logistics:** To eliminate barriers to in-person observation, the LSC provides mileage reimbursement for coaches traveling to meet their mentors or visiting their clubs.
- **Minimum Viable Rollout:** A standardized digital "Mentorship Toolkit" for all participants—containing the curriculum, meeting logs, and reimbursement forms—accessible through the LSC website, constitutes the year-one implementation.

Social Cohesion: Building Community through Peer Support: The LSC Coaches Committee prioritizes social cohesion to combat the isolation often inherent in the profession. By organizing dedicated social outings during championship meets, the LSC creates informal spaces for coaches to connect, share challenges, and build lasting peer support networks that extend beyond the pool deck.

Program Structure

- **Championship Integration:** Social events are strategically scheduled around major championship meets, utilizing the time when the largest concentration of coaches is already gathered in one location.
- **Facilitated Networking:** The Coaches Chair oversees the selection of venues and timing to ensure these gatherings are accessible and inclusive, moving away from formal "business" settings toward relaxed, social environments that encourage authentic peer-to-peer interaction.
- **Institutional Support:** By formalizing these events, the LSC signals that coach wellness and community-building are legitimate professional priorities, helping to reduce turnover by fostering a stronger sense of belonging.

Implementation Roadmap

- **Pilot Phase:** The Coaches Chair will host a trial "Coaches Social" at a high-attendance regional championship meet to gauge interest and gather feedback on event formats (e.g., casual dinner, off-site networking).
- **Minimum Viable Rollout:** Year-one implementation consists of at least two sanctioned social events per year, one Senior and one Age Group, clearly listed in the championship meet information packet, and a standardized process for the Coaches Chair to secure low-cost, high-impact venues.
- **Evaluation:** Success is measured through attendance numbers and post-meet surveys regarding the impact of these social opportunities on coaches' feelings of connectedness to the wider LSC coaching community.

Team Level

Transparent Compensation: The Head Coach and/or Board of Directors will implement structured, predictable compensation frameworks tied to objective annual performance reviews. This initiative removes subjectivity from salary adjustments, ensuring coaches are rewarded fairly based on clear, pre-defined metrics and professional milestones.

Program Structure

- **Performance-Linked Progression:** Compensation adjustments are transitioned from informal, merit-based requests to a formalized "Step and Column" schedule. Raises are calculated based on performance targets, certifications attained, and years of service.
- **Objective Reviews:** The annual review process focuses on quantifiable KPIs—such as team growth, swimmer retention, and administrative reliability—providing coaches with a clear roadmap for financial advancement.

Implementation Roadmap

- **Pilot Phase:** The Board of Directors conducts a compensation audit to establish industry-standard benchmarks, followed by the introduction of the new pay scale to the coaching staff.
- **Minimum Viable Rollout:** Year-one implementation focuses on the publication of a "Compensation Handbook" for staff, detailing the criteria for advancement and the timeline for reviews, ensuring all coaches understand their potential for growth within the organization.

Operational Delegation: Empowering Distributed Leadership: To prevent burnout and optimize organizational efficiency, the Head Coach and/or other leadership systematically distributes "dry-side" administrative tasks across the staff. By aligning responsibilities with individual strengths and professional interests, the team moves from a centralized model to a collaborative, shared-leadership structure.

Program Structure

- **Strengths-Based Assignment:** Administrative duties (e.g., meet logistics, travel coordination, marketing, or data analytics) are inventoried and delegated based on each coach's unique skill set rather than seniority.
- **Institutional Accountability:** Each staff member takes ownership of a specific operational pillar, reducing the administrative burden on the Head Coach and/or Team Manager and fostering a sense of agency and professional growth among assistant staff.

Implementation Roadmap

- **Pilot Phase:** Conduct a departmental audit to identify redundant or centralized tasks. Transition 3–5 core administrative responsibilities to staff members based on their specific areas of expertise.
- **Minimum Viable Rollout:** Creation of a "Staff Responsibility Matrix" that clearly defines ownership of administrative tasks, ensuring transparency and accountability across the organization.

Predictable PTO Structures: Prioritizing Coach Recovery: The team formalizes a "rest and recovery" policy that acknowledges the physical and mental demands of the competitive season. By normalizing coaches having scheduled time off, the team prioritizes long-term coach sustainability and prevents the burnout associated with continuous weekend commitments.

Program Structure

- **Post-Meet Recovery:** Implementation of a "Recovery Day", mandating that coaching staff receive a specific day off in the week following specific swim meets throughout both short course and long course seasons.

- **Wellness-First Scheduling:** Integrating recovery blocks into the annual competition calendar to ensure that time-off is treated as a foundational element of employment, not an optional perk.

Implementation Roadmap

- **Pilot Phase:** Trial the recovery day policy for the two most demanding meets on the annual calendar to assess the impact on staff morale and operational continuity.
- **Minimum Viable Rollout:** Inclusion of a "Recovery Clause" in the staff handbook that guarantees designated time off following high-stress competitive events, with clear communication protocols for coverage during these periods.

Staff Recognition: Celebrating Excellence and Longevity: The leadership team establishes a recurring recognition program that moves beyond performance-based bonuses to celebrate the human element of coaching. This initiative reinforces the value of each staff member by acknowledging their contributions to team culture, mentorship, and administrative stability.

Program Structure

- **Culture & Mentorship Awards:** Recognition for coaches who demonstrate excellence in soft skills, such as peer-to-peer mentorship or fostering positive team culture, ensuring these vital contributions are visible.
- **Milestone Celebrations:** Formal recognition and tangible rewards for coaches reaching tenure milestones (e.g., 5, 10, and 15+ years), reinforcing the value of organizational loyalty and historical knowledge.

Implementation Roadmap

- **Pilot Phase:** Introduce a "Recognition Calendar" where specific months are dedicated to celebrating staff contributions and acknowledging tenure anniversaries.
- **Minimum Viable Rollout:** Establishment of a quarterly "Team Appreciation Dinner" where milestone awards are presented, creating a formal platform to honor the history and future of the coaching staff.

Coach Resource Guide

Compensation

Wage Compensation Tool

Wage Benchmarking Tool: Compare Salaries Across All 50 States

Use this tool to research wage benchmarks in your current region or a potential relocation area. Data can support competitive contract development for you or your staff.

What the tool provides

- BLS mean annual wages by occupation across all 50 states + DC
- National benchmarks, top-paying states, and full state rankings
- OEWS-based figures for hiring, relocation, and compensation planning
- Important limitations: data reflects *means*, not total compensation, and represents a single annual survey snapshot
- Support for multi-state entity setup and compliance

PTO Structure

Types of PTO Policies

- **Accrued PTO:** PTO is earned gradually based on hours worked or tenure (e.g., 3.68 hours per bi-weekly period ≈ 10–14 days/year). Accrual often increases with seniority.
- **Front-Loaded PTO**: Full PTO allotment is granted at the start of the year or on hire date. Simple to track but may require payout of unused PTO depending on state law.
- **Fixed Allotment:** Employees receive a set number of days annually. Encourages flexibility but may lead to employees saving PTO for vacations and working while sick.
- **Unlimited PTO:** Employees may take time off as needed with manager approval. Highly flexible but requires careful staffing oversight.

Key Components of a PTO Policy

- **Accrual Method:** How PTO is earned and any caps
- **Eligibility:** Full-time/part-time distinctions, probationary periods
- **Usage Rules:** Request process, notice requirements, approval workflow

- **Carryover & Payout:** Rules for unused PTO and termination payout (state-regulated)
- **Types of Leave:** Vacation, sick, personal, floating holidays, bereavement
- **Tiered Structures:** PTO variations by tenure, department, or role

Health & Life Insurance Options

Insurance Available Through USA Swimming Membership

- **Participant Accident/Excess Medical Insurance:** Covers accidental injuries during USA Swimming supervised or sanctioned activities.
    - Beginning 2025: No deductible for uninsured individuals
    - Prior to 2025: $100 deductible if uninsured; no deductible with existing health insurance
- **General Liability Insurance:** Covers third-party claims (bodily injury, property damage, advertising injury) arising from Covered Activities. Facilities often require proof of this insurance for practice or meet hosting.
- Additional insurance summaries are available via SWIMS login. Questions: **RiskManagement@usaswimming.org**

If Your Club Does Not Offer Health or Life Insurance

Small businesses can provide coverage through group plans, HRAs, or ACA-compliant options.

Key Options for Small Business Health Coverage - (HealthCare.gov)

- **SHOP (Small Business Health Options Program)**
    - For businesses with ≤50 employees
    - Offers group plans and HRAs
    - Allows comparison of coverage options (HealthCare.gov)
- **Fully Insured Group Health Plans**
    - Offered by UnitedHealthcare, BCBSTX, Aetna
    - Fixed monthly premiums; insurer manages claims
    - Often includes medical, dental, vision, life, wellness programs
    - Bronze–Platinum tiers determine cost-sharing
- **Self-Funded or Partially Self-Funded Plans**
    - Monthly payments based on employee health trends
    - Includes stop-loss coverage
    - Potential cost savings and flexibility
- **Plan Features & Benefits**
    - Large provider networks
    - Wellness and mental health programs included - request options explicitly
    - Online enrollment and claims support
    - Customizable plan structures
- **Key Considerations**

    - Number of employees
    - Budget stability vs. risk tolerance
    - Employee needs (family coverage, dental, vision, mental health)
    - ACA compliance

Enhanced Coach Training

ASCA (American Swimming Coaches Association)

American Swimming Coaches Association

- Level-based certification system
- Online or in-person training at conferences
- Video archive for stroke development education
- Curriculum updates underway
- Membership required for access

USA Swimming Education & Certification

Structured programs supporting safe, effective, professional coaching.

Certification Pathways

- **Foundation Coach Certification:** Mandatory; includes Quality Coaching Framework (stroke fundamentals, communication, practice planning)
- **Core Certification:** Required for new coaches; builds on Foundation content
- **ADM Certifications:** Advanced coaching skill development
- **Note:** Certifications do **not** expire

Education Opportunities

- **USA Swimming University:** Self-paced online courses, including:
    - Summer League Coaching (90 minutes)
    - Officials' Education (stroke/turn judges, starters, administrative officials, referees)
- **ASCA Partnership (Nov 2026):** Redesigned certification program with modern content and flexible pathways New Coach Initiative offering cohort-based training for early-career coaches

Localized Education

Contact your **LSC** for local training opportunities. If offerings are limited, consider inviting ASCA or USA Swimming to host training at your location.

Social Cohesion

Coach Socials

Attend local coaching socials or host your own if none exist. These events build community, strengthen deck relationships, and create space for low-stress discussion of important coaching topics.

Examples include:

- Coach Coffee Meet Ups
- Regional Coaching Roundtable
- Virtual Discussion Groups
- Deck visits between clubs
- Collaborative practices
- Meet-day coach gatherings