

VSI CLUB OFFICIAL'S CHAIR (COC) GUIDE



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1. Introduction:

The goal of this document is to help guide Club Officials Chairs (COC) with their important role with recruiting and retaining Virginia Swimming Officials.

This is a living document meaning nothing is written in stone and it can be modified at any time with fresh ideas and concepts

The VSI Officials Handbook provides the primary responsibilities for a COC. Mainly they are responsible for recruiting, mentoring, staffing club hosted meets. The key ingredient to success is effective communication. Not only communication between yourself and the officials on your club, but also potential officials on your club, your governing board (whether your club is coach-owned managed by a Board of Directors), other VSI COCs, your district Chair and the LSC Officials Committee. By working together, we can minimize the work while maximizing our ability to provide “fair and equitable standards of competition” for our athletes across the LSC.

Ideally a COC, should be an official that has been certified for at least one year.

Recruiting

Expressing the need for officials

- Do your homework, what will attract volunteers?
 - Club volunteer hours? Comparable?
 - Does your club pay for registration & BC?
 - What else can your club/Coach offer?

- Does governance understand → Board/Owner



Recruiting for swim officials can also be defined as an expression of need. By rule, swim times cannot be validated without officials. Simply put, no officials equal no swim meets. Each year the need is always constant, some officials leave volunteering for a variety of reasons, a swimmer no longer competes, their athlete may graduate or new priorities enter their personal life.

2. How to get started as a club chair?

The first step as a COC is to gather a list of all your officials and their certifications. A rule of thumb is that if your team has 400 athletes, it is best to strive for 40 officials, or 10 percent of your membership.

Also, make sure you are listed as the point of contact on the Team Chair listing. This can be found at <http://www.virginiawimming.com/vsi/Official/Information.html> under the heading Team Chairs. If not, send an email to the VSI Officials Database Coordinator with the applicable information at vsi.officials.rosters@gmail.com

The second step is to generate a spreadsheet listing all of your officials and their certifications. Updating and retaining this list in a format (similar to the one shown below) provides a snapshot of where your club stands with officials. Keeping this document updated allows for an easier transition your replacement if you decide to step down from your role. You can add other columns such as registration, dates they started training for a new position, contact info etc.,

Name	S&T	CJ	Starter	DR	AO	TEO	Recorder
James Dean	Y	Training					
Sue Swimmer	Y						
Janey Carpool	Training					Y	
Joe Bingo							Y
Sam Lane	Y	Y	Y	Y			
Julie Timer	Y	Y	Y				

If you need assistance with obtaining your officials certifications, contact your district chair or the VSI Officials Database Coordinator, either can provide that information to you.

Ideally, if you club is hosting meets you should be able to staff each session with at least four (4) stroke and turn, a timing equipment operator and a recorder.

When this is completed, find out what separates' officials from other club volunteers. For instance, does your club reimburse the officials for registration and/or background checks? What about volunteer hours? For an official to remain certified, the must work a minimum of 8 sessions per year. That roughly equates to 32 hours. Is that more or less than what your club requires from the membership?

Does your club owner, Board of Directors, Head Coach and volunteer coordinator understand the need and your ultimate goal? It is best to keep all of these leadership roles in the loop as they can assist you reaching these goals. Your Board of Directors, Head Coach or owner should be viewing your help as an asset to the team aiding them to run quality swim meets.

3. Recruiting Officials

Recruiting

How to attract officials

- Club registration packets
- Parent meetings
- Flyers and word of mouth
- Club newsletters
- Coaches
- Club volunteer coordinator
- Former club Swimmers



The most successful recruiting approach is usually one on one contact. In addition to the items listed below, there is a variety of recruiting information on USA Swimming website at:

<https://www.usaswimming.org/utility/landing-pages/officials/recruitment-retention-and-reciprocity>

Does your club mail out club registration packets prior to the start of the swim season? If so, why not have them include information about volunteering for officiating that outlines the training process, points of contact and applicable websites.

Are you a presenter at parent meetings? Normally these are held in early September and is a great venue to find new parents who might be interested in officiating.

Another recruiting method is to enlist your current group of officials. More than likely they are involved in carpools and are networking with other parent who are looking for volunteer positions within the club.

Posting of flyers at your practice pool helps as well

If your club publishes a periodic newsletter to the membership, inquire if they will post information about officiating. If the Head Coach has a section, having he or she promote the need for officials will definitely add weight to your message.

Have you been in touch with your club volunteer coordinator? More than likely they will be receiving emails from parents asking how they can reach their volunteer hours. Provide them with your contact info and some basics of our training process.

Are there any former club swimmers looking for community service hours or those that want to give back to the sport? Coaches can help with this avenue. Some swimmers maybe looking for extra money to work high school meets when they are in college or if their job allows them the time.

4. Recruiting Impediments



Recruiting
Beware of impediments with recruiting

- Relying on those who will naturally seek a role in officiating
→ **Mental trap**
- Parents who have no idea where to start
→ **You're their guide**
- People reluctant because they never been trained
→ **Not required - emphasize our training program**
- Others who do not like to disqualify swimmers
→ **Whole group of officials who verify times**

There will be some new parents who may have officiated in a summer league capacity and will volunteer to start training as a USA Swimming Official. However, you have to remember that number will be very low. Having a mindset that parents will naturally seek out a role in officiating is a mental trap. More than likely most of your parent membership will not have a background in swimming, so how would they even know where to begin? This is where you come in to explain the training process, the need and the benefits of officiating.

Your benefits could be that the club will reimburse the registration and background check fees, their bingo requirements (if your club runs a bingo game) are less, your club provides gift cards as a token of appreciation if they work X number of sessions for a club hosted meet. Do not forget to mention that their travel expenses to away meets could qualify as a tax deduction.

Some parents may be hesitant because they have no knowledge of swimming. Those are the best to train because they are starting out fresh. Stress our training program, we will make sure

they are comfortable with their position before we have them “stand on the island” by themselves.

Other parents may not like the idea of disqualifying swimmers. Let them know we have a whole group of officials who operate the timing system, enter and verify times and they are not involved with disqualifying swimmers.

5. Setting Up Clinics for New and Current Officials:

Clinics

New Officials

- Communicate with your district chair
- Set them up - the earlier the better
- Best to have dates prior to parents meeting or when you send out emails for interest



Prior to the start of short course season, sometime in August, think about setting up clinic dates. For your club you can pencil in one or two dates, secure a meeting place and time. Send a note to your district chair so you can have your clinics on their schedule. They will create the flyer and have it posted on the VSI Swimming website. More than likely they will send this information out to other COC's in your area for maximum participation. Another method is to reach out to the other COC's in your area and coordinate clinics with them as well.

Once the clinic date is approved, have your team administrator post this information and the link to the VSI webpage for the clinic to your membership.

Setting up the clinics prior to your parent meeting is key. There is wealth of information that is usually communicated at these meetings and having these dates on hand helps parents with scheduling their time.

Promote for Retention

- Promote your officials
 - Who wants to obtain other certs?
 - Talk to you District Chair about other clinics
 - Evaluate your teams need, gather best times to hold them from your volunteers
- CJ or Starter's Clinics
- Admin clinics – Recorder, TEO, AO

Setting up clinics for your current officials is needed as well. Though the attendance may be smaller, query your current roster and find out who is interested in training for a new position. The document Succession Plan for VSI Officials can be found <http://www.virginiaswimming.com/vsi/Official/OfficTrainings/TrainingInfo.html> . This provides guidance for officials showing them the projected path for training at other positions on deck. Clinics for the administrative table positions are usually conducted on deck, however, if you desire to set up a specific clinic this can be arranged for any position. Your district chair can help set up these clinics.

For other wet deck positions such as Chief Judge or Starter your district chair can also help you set these up. To start training in another position your district chair will need to issue a training card to that official(s).

While turnover is expected, the COC can be proactive in retaining officials once they have completed initial certification. Early in the short course season is a great time to assess your officials, find out who wants to train a CJ, AO, Recorder, TEO and even Starter. Provide those names to your district chair and we will get them started.

We constantly have to look for new officials, and also look to develop and advance officials from their current roles. I am sure all of you can attest, there are way too many meets where a lot of officials on deck no longer have a swimmer in that age group or if they have a swimming at all. We never want to consider the possibility where we have an exodus of those folks and suddenly, we have a gaping hole where our deepest talent used to lie. We want to leverage the talents and work with those newly-ascending officials into larger roles

Some officials may be perfectly contempt with working for an example as stroke and turn. They have no desire to work as a CJ, starter or any dry deck position. That is all fine, however we still have to ask them.

Additionally, there are those that have the capability, but just need to be pushed a little from their “comfort zone”. Just letting them know they have what it takes, may be enough to start training for other positions. Additionally, you can explain your need as a COC to have more people qualified at various positions to host your meets.

It cannot be stressed enough, that the additional clinics help with retention and allow more folks to become engaged. These clinics are probably more important than the initial clinics for new officials.

6. Mentoring:

Mentoring

- Certification process
 - Stay in touch/track apprentices
 - Simple encouragement, personal contact
- Additional Certifications
 - Encourage officials to expand their capabilities
 - Additional certifications = more engaged
- Recognition
 - A simple Thank-you costs nothing!



Mentoring starts with leading by example like volunteering not only for the meet your club hosts, but also at meets in which your club participates. Work all the positions at which you are certified not just the ‘highest’ level at which you are certified. Your leadership in this endeavor will pull along your other officials and soon they will be working meets other than what your team hosts.

After each clinic is completed, you should be receiving a list of attendees from your club and the position they are training. If you are not, please shoot an email to your district chair asking them for this information. Add the individuals to your spreadsheet in order to stay in top of their progress. Historically, about ½ the individuals who attend a clinic will actually finish the

training. The big question is why? As the Team COC you are a lot closer to these officials than your district chair or the LSC Officials Committee. By reaching out to them periodically and asking about their progress will help either raise the completion rate or we will find out a gap in our program. If it is the later, please let your district chair know and the LSC Officials Committee will start working on a solution.

Virginia Swimming does provide recognition for years of service, which are distributed at Swimposium each year. However, maybe your club would support an end of the year party for officials recognizing their efforts. Or maybe the head coach has the senior class send a thank you note to the officials for working meets. A simple thank-you goes a long way and costs nothing!

7. Staffing Club Hosted Meets:



Organizing Officials for Meets

- Process begin 2-4 weeks out from meet
 - Email visiting clubs COC & unattached officials
 - LSC Team Chairs/Roster info
- If your team is hosting, visiting officials should have 1st choice in positions
- Encourage your officials to support club in any meet you participate
- If you receive a request from another COC, fwd ASAP
- Assist with your trainee scheduling with the other COC
- Changes to COC, email VSI Database Coordinator so distribution list stays accurate

This process should start 2-4 weeks out from the start of the meet. The first email should go out to the COC of the teams that have been invited or are coming to the meet. Also, do not forget to include the unattached officials in your area. If you need a list of those, ask your district chair and they should be able to provide you that information. For a list of email addresses for the other COC's, that information can be found at <http://www.virginiawimming.com/vsi/Official/Information.html> under the heading Team Chairs.

The information you will need from the other COC's and unattached officials are their certifications, session availability and desired position they want to work. When creating the line up the host club should give the visiting officials first choice in their positions. Think of it as

Southern hospitality and welcoming the official to your meet! The same should be reciprocated when you supply officials to an away meet.

For your officials, you should encourage maximum participation so other team officials are not working all of the positions at your hosted meet. There are exceptions to this practice, especially if your team is new and you are in process of building or rebuilding your official's roster.

The Tuesday before the meet, send the initial roster and line to the Meet Referee. They will review and tweak, if needed. Once they acknowledge send it out to all who responded (visiting team COC's and unattached officials) so they know where they are working.

If there are trainees on your team that need to work certain positions let the Meet Referee aware so they can arrange for the training.

This process is basically the same for the away meets, except you do not have to send out the invite to the unattached officials.

8. Transferring Officials from or to another LSC:



Transfers

- VSI Handbook
 - Name and contact info of transferring official
 - Listing of any certifications
 - Name of LSC in which they are currently certified
- VSI Officials Chair
 - Contact the LSC Chair of the transferring official
 - Notify transferring official, district chair and COC for any conditions placed on transfer i.e., additional training
 - Provides current certifications, good standing and all training has met minimal standards set forth by USA Officials Committee

If you are notified that you have an official who has either transferred from another LSC or a current official who is transferring to another LSC, the process is fairly simple.

Provide the name of the official and their certifications to the VSI Officials Chair. In turn they will contact their counterpart in the other LSC and ensure they are in good standing. The VSI Officials chair will advise the applicable district chair if any additional clinics or training is required.

For officials transferring to another LSC, the same info noted above should be sent to the VSI Officials Chair and again, they will contact their counterpart and provide them an introduction.

We want to make a great first impression with these officials and welcome them wholeheartedly.

9. Where to find an answer to the questions.

Summary

➤ A mentor for their questions



- New Officials are coached to keep you in the loop
 - Can you answer these questions:
 - ❖ Can they train outside of the LSC?
 - ❖ Can the train at a Masters meet?
 - ❖ Can the train at a High School or Summer League meets?
- Send you and district chair copy of completed training card
- Receipt of shirt, name tag, badge and pouch, if not who do they contact?
- Where can the buy more shirts or name tags?

New as well as seasoned officials have questions. There is a lot to learn, not only about swimming but also officiating. At the clinics, officials are coached to do their part and keep you in the loop. Some questions that may come up as are as follows:

- a. **Can I train outside of the LSC?** The short answer is not exactly. Let say your team is traveling to Potomac Valley for a swim meet and you have someone who wants to train. If that is the case, send an email to the VSI Officials Chair with all of the info. They will contact their counterpart and inquire and respond to you accordingly. Some other LSC will allow it to happen, but it may only be in “observation” capacity. They may not use our training card, or they may, just depends on their policies.
- b. **Can they train at Master’s meets?** Yes, we allow a maximum of two training sessions at Master’s meets.
- c. **Can they train at High School or Summer League meets?** No, the meet must be sanctioned by USA Swimming.

- d. **Can they train at intrasquad meets?** Yes, as long as the meet is sanctioned and the events include all four strokes and not just distance. For starters, we allow them to train at distance meets to practice counting and bell ringing.
- e. **What do they do once their training card is completed?** Have them make a copy and email it to your district chair for final approval.
- f. **How do they receive their shirt and name tag?** When they complete the training and the district chair signs off on their certification, the district chair will send that information to the Officials Database Coordinator. The information they provided at the initial clinic includes their shirt size and home address. About once a month, depends on the number of recently certified officials, the Officials Database Coordinator will send out the order and their shirt and name tag will be drop-shipped to their home address.
- g. **What about the USA Swimming Officials badge, pouch, registration holder, pen, pin and lanyard?** Your district chair keeps a supply of these on hand and should be able to provide those to the official.
- h. **Where can they buy more shirts?** Have them go to <http://www.virginiawimming.com/vsi/Official/Information.html> and click on Virginia Swimming Officials Apparel/Equipment. On the top left they can order more shirts.
- i. **What if they have lost their name tag?** Same as above. Virginia Swimming will buy the first name tag, after that they will have order one.

Summary

➤ Responsibilities after completed initial training

- * Maintain current technical and philosophical understanding of the rules
- * Work at least the minimal # of sessions per year
- * Fulfill any education requirements – MAAPP, concussion training
- * Maintain current registration & background check

- When are certifications renewed and by whom?
- Requirements to be certified or re-certified?

- National Certification program



- j. **What do they need to do each year to maintain their certification?** Maintain current technical and philosophical understanding of the rules, work at least 8 session per year, fulfill any education requirements such as Athlete Protection Training or concussion training and currently registered as a Non-Athlete Member with USA Swimming.
- k. **Who updates the certifications each year?** For any position other than Deck Referee, your district chair updates the certification. For Deck Referees, the VSI Officials chair will update. Normally, these take place in the mid-December time frame.
- l. **What is the difference between registration and certification?** The VSI Registrar processes registration with USA Swimming. Certification is handled by the district and Officials Chair.
- m. **What is the National Certification Program and why is the beneficial for an official?** The program was started around 2005 and the mission of the program is to develop officials who are competent, current and consistent from the LSC level meet the highest level in our sport through a progressive training program based on an accumulation of experience. One way to view this program is to think of it as method of validating LSC certifications by National Evaluators. Through this process, it not only validates an official's ability at a certain position, it also helps officials hone their craft in the position they have been certified. Additionally, as these officials return to work in their LSC's, their experience is shared with other officials resulting in standardization of officiating throughout the United States and attracting additional officials to become National Certified. Whether an official has aspirations of working National level meets or not, it is strongly encouraged that if an official has an opportunity to participate in the National Certification program -they should. The more you learn, the better you become. As Benjamin Franklin once said "Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.'