



MINNESOTA
SWIMMING

GENERAL CHAIR REPORT 2016 HOUSE of DELEGATES

[Please refer to the Minnesota Swimming STRATEGIC PLAN adopted 6/18/13 by the Board of Directors and affirmed by the House of Delegates on 4/26/14. The STRATEGIC PLAN can be found at MNswim.org.]

As I look back at the past year for MNswim, a number of the elements of that STRATEGIC PLAN come to mind:

CULTURAL IDENTITY

Define and publicize the cultural identity of MSI as a community committed to the values of integrity, sportsmanship, and the pursuit of excellence.

There has been continuing promotion of the “We are MNswim” and the “Core Values” efforts. Particularly noteworthy was a review and an addition to the “Core Values” – the importance of FUN! In September 2015, a USA Swimming facilitated a daylong strategy workshop. It was quickly recognized by the participants, perhaps especially the athletes in attendance, that we all do this because we enjoy it. The importance of remembering that “FUN” is critical to retaining our current members and attracting our future members needs to be clearly visible. I hear the occasional comment as to “why is effort being expended on things like ‘We are MNswim’ or ‘Core Values’ or other similar initiatives...” I have a couple quick responses. First, we all as a collective body have endorsed a strategic or long-term plan. The board has an obligation to work to implement that plan until the plan changes. Not every implementation tool will be successful – but that doesn’t mean we don’t try to fulfill that plan. Second, I fundamentally believe that our “collective” strength is far greater than our individual parts. In my opinion, we cannot achieve the greatest levels of participation and skill and fun unless we work together. As an example, fielding an Age Group Team Minnesota of over 300 athletes cannot happen without enormous collective effort and resources. I think the “club communities” are fabulous – but I also think that every one of our clubs is a part of something bigger and powerful. I am very proud to be a part of the MNswim culture.

POOL FACILITIES Maintain awareness of future programming and development of local competitive pool facilities

I believe this past year has shown some really impressive success stories on this issue. Hopefully many of you have had a chance to see the renovated Eden Prairie Community Center pools which hosted a successful winter MAC meet. The renovated and expanded Olmsted Rec Center has returned to operation and continues to move toward completion. The affiliated booster organization, RSI, continues to work hard at additional improvements and recently facilitated further discussions with city leadership regarding the long-standing need for more seating. Both of these projects were supported in a variety of ways, including financial, by MNswim as a way to encourage quality competition venues that will serve the entire membership for years to come. There are a number of other projects, including long course competition pools, in various stages of development and for which MNswim is actively engaged.

COMPLEMENTARY RELATIONSHIPS Develop and improve relationships with complementary swimming organizations locally and regionally.

The “story” behind this strategic objective is to make MNswim the “go to” organization in Minnesota when there are discussions occurring relative to competitive swimming. This is happening in a variety of ways. The YMCA organization has had a number of contacts with MNswim over the past year. MNswim continues to be a high profile sponsor of the High School “True Team” Championships as a way to foster better relations with the high school swimming community. For the first time ever in the summer of 2016, there will be multiple Open Water competitions jointly sanctioned by MNswim and Minnesota Masters. The Minnesota Amateur Sports Commission has contacted MNswim on a number of occasions. And, in what is believed to be a first ever in the country, MNswim was asked to participate in a task force initiated by the Minnesota Legislature in large part to address the tragedy of drowning particularly among African-Americans. NOTE: I also want to point out here what I believe to be a missed opportunity – the national Make-A-Splash program. MNswim clubs have a low participation level in this program. I encourage you to think about this and discuss with MNswim staff. There may be some funding and publicity opportunities that will make this a win-win-win.

POLICY AND PROCEDURE Address the management, sustainability, and mission focus of policies and administrative procedures for our MSI community.

One of the sub-goals here was achievement of the national LEAP2 certification. That was achieved and MNswim was recognized and rewarded (financially) by USA Swimming. This is another of those areas where I hear the occasional comment – “why do we do this”? I think the answer is very similar to how any club or swimmer would answer that same basic question – namely, to improve and be as good as we can be. I am pretty confident that I can say the MNswim Board of Directors is not (and probably never will be) the “best” that it can be. And I suspect that Bob Crunstedt might say the same about MNswim staff. BUT, I can also say that I believe the Board and Staff are always open to thinking about and trying ways to get better. Programs like LEAP serve, I think, a useful purpose of forcing the organization to critique itself. In essence, it is very much like a Quality Improvement System that is very common in the business world. Not every business idea, not every coaching strategy works. But then you go back to the drawing board. And that is a large part of how I see efforts like LEAP. I believe it was for that reason that this objective was part of the 2013 Strategic Plan. It may also be worth noting that USA Swimming is engaged in a comparable review of the entire governance structure from national to zones to LSCs. We need to plan an organization that can succeed not just for the next 12 months but for the next 12 years...

BUSINESS AND MARKETING PLANS

This is, I think, an area where we all need to pay close attention. Four or five years ago, MNswim had accrued somewhat unprecedented financial reserves. This created some great opportunities and I think MNswim did very well in finding ways to “invest” monies back into the swimming community. But one of the objectives at that time was to start looking critically at our finances and over a multi-year period. The Finance Chair and Executive Director created some rather extraordinary budgeting tools to help “crunch the numbers”. [NOTE: here again, MNswim has been asked to share those tools across the country because very few LSCs are as financially sophisticated as MNswim]. MNswim is seeing some numbers that need to be addressed. Athlete membership has declined in 2014 and 2015 after going up every year since 2008. There is a confidence that there will be an upsurge due to the upcoming Olympics. But ask yourself – is your club proactively doing anything to recruit in those new families? Does your club need any help from MNswim to achieve those recruiting objectives? As I noted earlier, the success of the clubs in recruiting and growing will help the LSC which in turn will allow the LSC to help the clubs and athletes. It is a very symbiotic relationship. There are trends both nationally and at MNswim that need more attention. Younger swimmers are not joining as often; younger swimmers are not being retained as well; younger swimmers are not competing as often. Meets are getting increasingly expensive. The increased prevalence of additional fees and surcharges may be unavoidable – or maybe not. And in several cases, meet revenues are being restructured in such a way that funds are not shared with MNswim – which in turn means that MNswim cannot do as much to support LSC-wide programming.

In some ways, volunteerism within the sport continues to grow. But in other ways such as the regular participation of volunteer officials at meets, there has been a decline. This is also a trend of concern. MNswim, as a business/financial entity, is extremely solid. But we cannot become complacent. We cannot continue to support enormously successful TeamMinnesota’s or coach mentoring or facility development or a number of other efforts without financial resources. The Finance Committee is now pushing to explore new revenue streams that can support MNswim programming. It is likely that a number of ideas will be trialed and piloted. One of the first is a 2016 House of Delegates sponsorship by Pure Spring Pools and its CETA filtration system. Pure Spring Pools has signed a financial sponsorship with MNswim in return for which they will have an opportunity to present to our HoD. This is a trial for both parties. It may or may not happen again in the future. But it is important for the MNswim “business” to look at a variety of new ideas going forward.

I am going to close with a comment I made earlier – I am very proud to be a member of MNswim. I haven’t had a club swimmer in years. This gives me a great advantage – I think of myself as a part of every club and I take pride in the accomplishments, big and small, of every club and every swimmer. I told a coach not long ago, I think of every swimmer as “my” swimmer regardless of what club. I hope each of also takes pride in every athlete regardless of what swim cap he or she is wearing.

I also want to point out that I am entering my final year and will be stepping down at the 2017 House of Delegates. But I am very much looking for many of you to step forward and help take this great organization forward. It’s a pleasure and a privilege to serve these athletes – I encourage you to give me a call and ask how you can help.

Jim Hanton
General Chair