

**TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PAPER**  
**ON**  
**YMCA COMPETITIVE SWIMMING PROGRAMS**  
**YMCA OF THE USA**  
**June, 2004**

This technical assistance paper describes sound practices and principles to help YMCAs effectively manage their competitive swimming and diving programs. In addition to this document, YMCAs should also review the “Rules That Govern YMCA Competitive Sports” and the manual, *Principles of YMCA Competitive Swimming and Diving*. (See resources listed on the last page).

**YMCA Mission**

It is extremely important that competitive swimming and diving programs are consistent with the YMCA mission of building an individual’s spirit, mind, and body and the Y’s goal of building strong kids, strong families, and strong communities. To ensure programs conform to this mission and goal, Ys frequently should use participant and parent surveys with questions related to Y values, appropriate workouts, competency of the coaches, etc.

If a program does not adhere to the YMCA philosophy, it should not be a YMCA program. A program that focuses primarily on winning and training elite swimmers rather than on developing character in individuals at all skill levels is not consistent with the YMCA philosophy.

**YMCA Identification and Control**

Teams representing local YMCAs in both YMCA competition and open competition should be identified with and remain under the complete control of the sponsoring YMCAs. Joint sponsorship of teams by a YMCA and an outside organization is not recommended. When a team is sponsored by two or more organizations, it is difficult to determine which organization is primarily responsible for the administration of the program. In addition, there are often conflicting philosophies as to the purpose and goals of the program.

If a YMCA team must obtain a charter from a National Governing Body for a specific sport in order to participate in open competition in that sport, the charter should include the **official name** of the sponsoring YMCA.

When YMCA teams participate in Closed Competition (competition among YMCAs), they are governed by the “Rules That Govern YMCA Competitive Sports” and any rules established by the YMCA committee responsible for that competition.

To be eligible for various YMCA championships, swimmers must participate in a certain number of closed YMCA inter-association meets. A closed formal YMCA meet consists of: at least two teams from different YMCAs; a minimum of six swimmers from each

team; six events or more with one being a four person relay (four boys or four girls, not mixed); the presence of certified coaches for each team; and the presence of two certified YMCA officials. The meet shall be limited only to YMCAs. If a team from another organization participates in the meet, it is no longer a closed YMCA meet.

When YMCA teams participate in Open Competition (competition sponsored by National Governing Bodies involving teams from various organizations), they are governed by the rules and regulations set forth by those NGBs except where the rules and regulations of the NGBs are in conflict with YMCA safety and insurance standards.

## **Risk Management**

When there is a difference in rules related to safety in competition, the YMCA should first follow the YMCA regulations, and then the most conservative rules. Particular attention should be given to the YMCA's 5' depth requirement for the use of starting blocks and the requirement related to having lifeguards on the deck of the pool for all practices and meets.

YMCA teams should never practice or compete in pools with less than 5' of water beneath the starting blocks. Certified YMCA lifeguards should be on the deck of the pool during all practices and meets. **The lifeguard's only responsibility should be guarding the pool.** In the past, some YMCAs have used coaches who have their lifeguard certifications to satisfy this requirement. This is a dangerous practice in that the coach might be distracted by other responsibilities and may not see a swimmer in trouble. Coaches should not serve as lifeguards during meets or practices.

YMCA staff should instruct coaches attending away meets that they should remove their teams from competition in other YMCA facilities if the appropriate safety standards are not met.

Additional information regarding risk management can be found in the manuals, *Principles of YMCA Aquatics* and *Principles of YMCA Competitive Swimming and Diving*.

## **Membership Requirements**

All YMCA athletes must be full privilege members of the local YMCA as determined by the "Rules That Govern YMCA Competitive Sports". According to the rules, a YMCA member is a person, who, after due application, is enrolled by the association, entitled to **full** privileges, activities, and services of that association. This means that the members of YMCA competitive teams must have annual full-privilege memberships that entitle them to the same activities and services as all other annual full-privilege members.

If a YMCA has established a **special membership category** for the participants on its competitive teams that is **different from** the full privilege memberships provided for other youth and adults, **those individuals are in violation of the "Rules That Govern YMCA Competitive Sports" and are ineligible for YMCA competition.**

YMCA teams and members of YMCA teams that desire to participate in open competition sponsored by a National Governing Body (NGB) must register with that NGB, pay the appropriate registration fees, and adhere to the rules and regulations established by the NGB for the competition.

Members of YMCA teams who do not participate in open competition sponsored by a National Governing Body should not be required to register with that organization. **Only those athletes who compete in the open competition should register with the NGBs.**

Occasionally, YMCAs want to merge their competitive teams. In order for this to occur, one of the merging YMCAs must be designated as the official YMCA and all athletes (if they are planning to represent that YMCA in inter-association competition) must have full privilege memberships in that YMCA. It is not permissible for some of the athletes to have memberships in one of the merging YMCAs and the remaining members of the team to have memberships in the other merging YMCA(s).

### **Service Areas**

Although individuals are free to become members and/or participate in the programs of any YMCA of their choosing, each YMCA is chartered by the YMCA of the USA to operate in a designated service area. YMCAs cannot operate programs within the service area of another YMCA without that YMCA's permission. Therefore, a swim team that is affiliated with one YMCA cannot practice or conduct meets in the service area of another YMCA without that YMCA's permission.

### **Personnel**

Coaches of YMCA inter-association teams and in-house teams should be employees or volunteers of the YMCA and hired and supervised by a member of the YMCA staff, not a parent's organization or an independent club. The coaches are subject to either the personnel policies or volunteer policies of the YMCA. When attending meets at sites other than his/her own YMCA, the head coach is the official representative of that YMCA and is ultimately responsible for the conduct and behavior of the swimmers, coaches, parents, and spectators accompanying the team.

YMCAs should screen coaches thoroughly and follow the "YMCA Child Abuse Prevention Guidelines" in the employment process. YMCAs should research the coach's credentials, conduct in-depth interviews with prospective hires and speak to former employers, swimmers, parents, and peers.

A clear line of communication should be established between the coaches, the parent's organization and the YMCA staff to be certain that all parties are aware of the team's accomplishments, progress and requirements.

Coaches should be encouraged to attend the coaches training courses offered by the YMCA of the USA. These courses are available at YMCA Program Schools and/or at regional trainings. For further information regarding the courses, YMCAs should consult the *YMCA Training Course Catalog* or visit [www.ymcaexchange.org](http://www.ymcaexchange.org); user:ymca; password:9622.

All coaches wishing to be on the deck at the National YMCA Swimming and Diving Championships will be required to have the Principles of YMCA Competitive Swimming and Diving course. Many district, state, and regional competitive swimming committees are establishing similar requirements for the coaches participating in their championships.

Once YMCAs hire effective coaches, they must retain them. The biggest complaint from coaches is how YMCA professional staff treat them. The best coaches are intelligent, educated individuals, yet may not even be consulted on issues that could affect their programs. Y directors should communicate directly with coaches, obtain their input on issues influencing their programs and, most importantly, treat them with respect.

### **Parents' Organizations**

Participants in parents' organizations are program volunteers responsible for assisting YMCA staff in conducting the competitive program. In developing organizational charts for the YMCA's aquatic program, the swim parents' organization should be placed on the staff side of the chart. They should be accountable to the YMCA staff and should not be viewed as a policy making committee for the association.

All policy decisions affecting the competitive sports program and teams should be made by the Program Committee, Aquatic Committee or other committee assigned that responsibility by the YMCA Board of Directors. The parents' organizations can have a voice by having representation on the appropriate committee.

From time to time, local YMCAs discover that a parents' group for a YMCA competitive sport, a support group for a particular Y program, or a contributors' group to a Y event make the false assumption that, because they are a committed group of volunteers, they can describe themselves as a "Board," raise funds for their preferred project, make decisions for the project, hire or fire staff, and control a separate bank account for their preferred Y program. This is NOT the case.

All programs operated in the Y name or out of Y facilities must be under staff supervision and under the control of the Corporate Chartered Board of Directors for the local YMCA. Advisory groups such as parent groups can get many more people involved as volunteers for the Y, but those advisory groups must be informed early, and often, that they are not legally responsible and cannot make any decisions to bind or obligate the YMCA. Essentially, they are program volunteers whose primary responsibility is to assist the YMCA staff in conducting the programs. What follows is a sample breakdown of the proper roles of the participants in such a scenario:

Corporate Board: The legally responsible, governing body for the Y sets broad policy for the entire YMCA, hires the executive director, controls/approves all local Y budgets, sets guiding philosophies for the Y, has all legal responsibility for the local Y and has ultimate control of all bank accounts, income, and expense, and conducts fund-raising.

Staff: Implements policies set by the Board, supports the day-to-day administration of the activities, oversees all finances and all bank accounts of the Y, proposes the budget to

corporate boards, supports fund-raising efforts on behalf of the Y, makes programmatic plans and decisions, supervises all staff and program volunteers, oversees fundraising efforts, to assure that they are consistent with the Y's fundraising policies.

Advisory Committee or Parents' Group: Supports the programs of the local Y, highlights accomplishments of local Y programs as selected by corporate board and implemented by staff; raises funds as directed by YMCA staff or the Corporate Board and sees that all funds raised, from whatever source, are given to Y staff for deposit in Y corporate bank account; they do not hire or supervise staff, coaches, etc.; they do not make policy, although their opinions are always welcomed by the corporate board.

### **Advice on Control of Local YMCA Money and Programs**

PLEASE NOTE: It is critical for the YMCA's maintenance of its nonprofit status and for other tax purposes that all funds raised or used for Y programs are channeled through the YMCA accounting system and are under the direct control of YMCA staff and the Corporate Board. Only in this way can all funds collected and used for Y purposes be reported on IRS form 990, as required by federal law. It is illegal to raise funds in the name of the Y and not have these funds in a Y bank account under the sole control of Y staff and the corporate board. Funds earmarked as "custody" accounts should become the property of the YMCA if a group disbands or leaves the sponsorship of the association.

Additionally, any equipment purchased in the name of, or on behalf of, the YMCA is property of the YMCA.

### **Financial Management**

All funds for competitive teams should be channeled through the YMCA accounting system where they are under the direct control of the YMCA. This will enable the YMCAs to report these funds on their IRS 990 tax return forms as required by law and will help to prevent the misuse or inappropriate use of the funds and the YMCA's federal tax exemption. It is illegal for organizations to have funds in outside accounts using the YMCA's tax ID number.

Fund raising by competitive teams should be under the direct control of the YMCA to ensure that these efforts are consistent with the association's fund raising policies and do not interfere with other solicitations being made by the YMCA in the community. Funds raised "in the name of" or "utilizing the name of the YMCA" are legally YMCA funds. A careful understanding should be established with the groups affected concerning how they might access funds for approved use.

Funds earmarked as "custody" accounts should become the property of the YMCA if a group disbands or leaves the sponsorship of the association.

Equipment purchased in the name of the YMCA (especially when the YMCA's tax exemption is used or discounts are obtained through use of the YMCA's name) is the

property of the YMCA. It is unlawful to purchase equipment in the name of the YMCA if it is not to be the property of the YMCA.

## **Insurance**

YMCAs should check with their insurance carriers to ensure that staff and volunteers involved in their competitive swimming programs are covered by liability insurance. Particular attention should be given to the coverage provided for away meets and meets not held within the YMCA facility. Consideration should also be given to coverage for those individuals (coaches, parents, swimmers) who provide transportation for swimmers to and from away meets. All coaches and volunteers should be provided with an orientation to the local YMCA's child abuse prevention policies.

## **Swim Officials Certification**

The Swim Officials Certification has been incorporated into the YMCA of the USA program training certification system. Each YMCA is encouraged to have at least one person certified as a swim official trainer. These people can now obtain their trainer level certification at YMCA Program Schools and/or regional trainings. Trainers can conduct the Swim Official course.

YMCAs are encouraged to have certified YMCA Swim Officials on the deck at all meets. YMCA Swim Officials certifications are valid for three years and individual proof of current certification must be available at all meets. Individuals may be re-certified by taking the YMCA Swim Official course.

The YMCA Swim Official Level 1 and 2 certification courses have been merged into one course, namely, YMCA Swim Official which in essence is a Level II course. Current Level I officials seeking Level II certification, Level II officials seeking re-certification, collegiate, high school, USA Swim officials and other individuals now must attend this one course in order to be either certified or re-certified as a YMCA Swim Official at the former Level II certification level. Level I officials, though encouraged to do so, no longer have to officiate or verify having officiated five meets before attending the new certification course. The Level I emblem (with 1 star) has been discontinued, however, the Level II emblem (with 2 stars) will be continued to be used for certified YMCA Swim Officials.

YMCA Swim Officials who want to become trainers must complete the following to achieve this level of certification. Trainers must be 21 years of age, have at least 2 years of experience as a swim official, have officiated at ten meets (five of which must have been within one year of the trainer course) as verified by the Meet Verification Form (reference next paragraph), and have the appropriate YMCA course application form completed for submittal prior to attending the trainer course.

A Meet Verification Form and Card have been developed for YMCA Swim Official to use to verify that they have officiated at ten meets between their YMCA Swim Official certification and Trainer Level course. These forms or cards must be signed by the meet referee. Often an individual applying for the trainer level certification is a meet referee.

This individual should sign the form or card as the meet referee and then obtain the YMCA executive director's signature or initials on the form or card as well.

Having met the above prerequisites, trainer candidates must take a Program Trainer Orientation course and the Swim Official's Trainer Level course that are offered at YMCA of the USA program schools and/or regional trainings. These course are generally offered on weekends. Trainers certifications are valid for one year. Individuals can renew their certifications by teaching the Swim Officials course each year.

**The YMCA of the USA will no longer notify officials that their certifications are expiring. It will be each official's responsibility to initiate the recertification process. YMCAs should check the cards of the individuals who are officiating at their meets and remind the officials to renew their certifications as needed.**

## Resources

The resources listed below are available from the YMCA Program Store, P.O. Box 5076, Champaign, IL 61825-5076 (Telephone 1-800-747-0089) to assist YMCAs with the administration of their competitive swimming and diving programs. The "Rules That Govern YMCA Competitive Sports" can be obtained from the YMCA of the USA sports office.

- YMCA Child Abuse Prevention Guidelines.
- *Principles of YMCA Aquatics.*
- *Principles of YMCA Competitive Swimming & Diving.*

The following training courses are available for YMCA swimming coaches and officials.

- Principles of YMCA Competitive Swimming and Diving
- Swim Coaches
- Swim Coaches Trainer
- Advanced Swim Coaches
- Advanced Swim Coaches Trainer
- Swim Officials
- Swim Officials Trainer