HOW TO ORGANIZE A SWIM MEET
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So, you’re thinking about getting out of the pool, onto dry land, and hosting your own swim meet. A local swim meet is exciting. It can be a morale booster to your community, your team and their families; it may even be financially beneficial.

Even for experienced hosts, a swim meet is a big project, as well as a personal growth and leadership opportunity. But if you don’t know what you’re doing, it can be a full time job just trying to keep your head above water.

We’re here to help! In this guide, you’ll find everything you need to successfully host your next swim meet, whether it’s your first, or your one-hundredth.

Getting Started
It’s important to get the big details in place first.

Find a Location
This is kind of a big one - no pool, no meet. The pool you use regularly for swim practice would typically be where you would host your meet, as well. Otherwise, you’ll need to scout a new location to hold your meet.

Whether you’re hosting on your home turf or at another pool, make sure to submit your request well ahead of time. Pools can book up months in advance, and you don’t want to be floundering around trying to find a location at the last minute. You also want to make sure you can reserve the entire facility, not just the pool; things probably won’t go over as smoothly as you hope if your athletes aren’t allowed to park in the parking lots or change in the locker room.

Pick a Date
Ideally, you’ll pick a date anywhere between 6 months to a year in advance. That’s how much notice your Local Swimming Committee (LSC) typically needs to approve an event. When choosing a date, make sure you play to your audience. If you’re organizing a swim meet for children, don’t schedule it right before, during or right after Spring Break. If you’re organizing a Masters, don’t schedule it in the middle of a day on a Wednesday when swimmers and their families are likely to be at work. The more convenient the date and time you choose, the more swimmers you can expect to compete.

Make Your Meet Checklist
Your checklist will keep your organized and ensure no detail is missed. Make a list of every task you need to complete between now and meet day. Then, assign realistic timelines for each task as well as who in your organization will be responsible for making sure each specific task gets completed on time.

Having this kind of list will help you make sure you’re on track as your meet gets closer and will keep you from drowning in your to-dos every step of the way.

Set Up Online Meet Entry
Allowing swimmers to process their meet entry online is super convenient for you and will save you from drowning in piles of registration paperwork.
Equipment You’ll Need
Ideally, when you reserve the facility where you’ll be holding your meet, most (if not all) of the equipment will be part of the deal. Make sure you have all the following on hand to keep your swim meet afloat:
+ Tables
+ Chairs
+ Umbrellas (if hosting an outdoor meet)
+ A sound system to announce swimmers and events
+ An electronic timing system (optional)
+ Bleachers for spectators
+ Starting blocks
+ Lane lines
+ Backstroke flags
+ Extra gear, like swim caps and goggles
+ Pace clocks
+ First aid kits
+ Towels
+ Stopwatchs
+ Pace clocks
+ Clipboards
+ Pencils
+ Extra batteries
+ Time boards
+ Event boards
+ Seed card boards
+ Safety signs

Spreading the Word
Once you have the logistics taken care of, it’s time to start spreading the word and getting swimmers excited to dive in and compete. These days, you can’t depend on one little fishy telling another about your event, so you need to promote, and you need to promote hard.

Create a Meet Website
Having a website dedicated to your meet makes it simple for swimmers to find you and get all the meet information they need in one easy-to-access place.

Get Social
Social media is swimming with potential athletes for your race, and if you want to engage them, you need to get social. Create a Facebook page for your meet, tweet leading up to the event, or run a social media advertising campaign to drive registration. Becoming visible on social media will dramatically increase your reach in the swim community.

Partner With Local Swim Groups
If there’s a group that’s targeting swimmers in your local area, partner with them to get the word out. Ask if they would consider including your meet in an upcoming email or if they’d allow you to speak at their next meeting.

Add Sponsors
There are two ways to approach potential sponsors – you can ask for money or for giveaways. If you are learning how to organize your first swim meet, it might be unrealistic to go after huge sponsors and ask for big wads of cash. Start by asking sponsors to chip in for meet supplies. For example, a local business could fund meet t-shirts and get logo placement on the shirts. Or, a grocery store could donate after-meet refreshments like sports drinks and power bars and get their banners hung across the serving table. If you do ask for cash, make sure it’s small to begin with unless you are confident you have a generous benefactor. You can also:
+ Post a sponsorship page on your website with details for companies
+ Attend networking events to make connections
+ Send out emails to your contact list
+ Visit local businesses
Staffing and Managing Volunteers
Volunteers are key to a successful meet. Other than timing malfunctions or technical snafus, one of the biggest challenges in hosting a meet is finding enough volunteers, timers, and officials.

If you’re a coach for a swim club with a large base of swimmers, you have the obvious advantage. Because you have more swimmers, that means you also have more swim parents and family members that will potentially volunteer - a bigger “talent pool,” if you will. If you’re a smaller club, you’ll need to get creative and reach out to the community for extra support.

When it comes to volunteers, you’ll find there’s never a shortage of things for them to do. Leading up to race day, you can have your volunteers manage your social media, apply for LSC sanctions, source locations, or answer questions that come in from your website.

On race day, it’s even more important to have volunteers on hand. Volunteers can help make sure that everything on race day runs smoothly and on time. Volunteers can act as timers, announcers, runners, or manage meet-day entries.

It’s important to be crystal clear in your communications with volunteers and staff. There are lots of moving parts at a swim meet, and it’s essential that every single one of your volunteers knows what they’re responsible for and what you expect from them.

Pros and Cons of Deck-Entered Meets
Deck-entered meets are a somewhat divided issue in the world of swim meets. Some meet organizers swear by them while others insist they’re nothing but a hassle.

On the plus side, deck-entered meets do create the opportunity for swimmers who are on the fence to register for the meet at the last minute, which means additional race day revenue.

On the other hand, last-minute entries create a significant amount of work for you as the organizer. When you allow same-day meet entry, you have to seed the events, reassign lanes, and reprint all the relevant materials for your meet, like heat sheets, when you’re at your busiest.

Ultimately, the decision is yours, but if you decide to allow deck entries, make sure you have plenty of volunteers on hand to help facilitate the process and make sure that your event starts on schedule.
Potential Revenue Streams
While hosting a swim meet is not necessarily going to rake in a lot of money, there are a few ways to mitigate costs, including:
+ Using your own pool
+ Selling team-branded merchandise
+ Selling heat sheets
+ Selling concessions
+ Pricing strategies that discount early birds and charge more for deck entries

Don’t expect huge profit margins from these methods, but every little bit helps. Increase sales of merchandise by having volunteers decked in branded swim gear and encourage swimmers’ families to do the same; you can increase your revenue AND team spirit at the same time.

Safety
It goes without saying that there’s nothing more important than the safety of your swimmers, volunteers, coaches, and spectators. It must be the top priority at all times. In order to make sure your meet is safe for everyone in attendance, inspect the facilities early on to allow time for changes, and on meet day:
+ Make sure that there are no openly unsafe or hazardous areas prior to the meet, such as blocked exits, broken diving boards, or holes in the ground. If you encounter a hazard that can’t be repaired prior to the meet, it should be marked clearly.
+ Make sure that pertinent safety information, like emergency evacuation routes, are posted in plain view.
+ Make sure to have first aid kits on hand to deal with any injuries or accidents.
+ Make sure that all smoke detectors are in working order and there are fire extinguishers on hand in case of fire.
+ Make sure that all children are under constant supervision.

Hosting at an Off-Site Pool
If you’re hosting your meet at an off-site pool, there’s a certain etiquette you need to follow. Think of it like staying in someone’s home; you want to respect their space and leave things in the same condition you found them.

When hosting at an off-site pool, make sure to speak with the pool owners about guidelines for your swimmers, volunteers and spectators to follow. If there are areas that are off-limits, make sure to clearly mark them and have volunteers stationed to be sure no one wanders where they’re not supposed to. Respect all the facility’s equipment and, if they don’t have a cleaning crew on staff for your event, be sure you hire a team or plan for volunteers to clean up the locker room, concession area, and pool area after your event.
Event Day Considerations

With all the details there are to manage, you’ll want to be the first one to show up. You don’t want people to park or set things up where they’re not supposed to. Before you leave the house the day of the meet, make sure you have everything you need, especially your meet checklist.

Think about meet day in three simple sections:

+ **Before** - This is where you welcome everyone, get latecomers registered, sort out any issues with heat schedules, and make sure volunteers are in the right place and that all swimmers know what to do. Preparation is key because once the meet starts, it has a life of its own. There are bound to be unexpected bumps, so stay flexible.

+ **During** - Focus on your swimmers!

+ **After** - Hopefully, you’ve planned volunteers for any needed clean-up and break-down. That way, you can focus on celebrating your team’s accomplishments.

Post-Event Considerations

After the meet, you’ll probably be exhausted. Still, though, your duties as a meet host are not over. If you have any plans to pursue the “second annual” version of your meet, you need to know what worked well for your event and what didn’t. Make notes the day after the meet on what was successful and what needed improvement, while it’s fresh in your mind. Email surveys or feedback forms to your participants and volunteers as soon as possible to collect their input. (Some online registration systems have this functionality built in. Otherwise, you can find free, simple survey tools online.)

If your registration system is able, run registration reports: What age group/gender was most represented at your meet? What was the distribution of early bird, regular or deck entries? With all this information, you’ll be able to better plan and promote next year’s meet.

Send thank you emails and after that, make sure to post results and photos as quickly as you promised. This will create some buzz around your meet, encouraging people to interact and remember how much fun it was. Then, make sure to keep your Facebook page and website active. You’re shooting for the second annual at this point, so keep in touch with your attendees!
Meet Management Technology

The registration process makes a big difference in how much work you’ll have to do for your meet – and how many registrants you’ll have. Think about all the emails and messages the average person receives. If something catches their eye but it’s too hard to register for, they’ll put it on the back burner and eventually forget about it.

From the first email you send out about your meet up until meet day, registration should be easy for both you and your registrants. In today’s world, you definitely need to offer a user-friendly way to sign up online. Whatever software provider you choose, make sure they can deliver these three things:

+ Your users should be able to access the registration directly from your website or from an email with the click of a button.
+ You should be able to customize the form to collect exactly the information you need.
+ The information and payments should be automatically processed and guaranteed secure.

You also want to make sure to have a proper timing system to time your swimmers as well as meet management software that integrates with the Meet Mobile app to publish your results in real time at the pool. Spectators and even those who can’t make it to the meet love being able to access swim times via Meet Mobile, the most used swimming app that provides real-time meet results and standings from anywhere, at any time.

Look for software that lets you manage multiple types of swim meets - age groups, championship meets, Masters meets, Y meets, college dual, and more - quickly and easily.

Finally, make sure that all your technology is running smoothly before your first swimmer gets into the pool. The key to successfully leveraging technology at a meet is to test everything out beforehand - ideally, 2 to 3 days prior to the meet. If you wait until an hour before the meet to test your technology, you’re significantly more likely to find yourself faced with technical snags you can’t fix in time for your first swimmer.

Learn more about Meet Manager and Meet Mobile, and how they can help you swim to success.

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