

## some thoughts on

### **Inclusion**

*A guide for meet referees, officials, and others*

Inclusion is defined as “the practice or policy of **providing equal** access to **opportunities** and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized, such as those who have physical or intellectual disabilities and members of other minority groups.” USA Swimming values and promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion in all their programs and services. This document contains some suggestions for how this can be done. **Article 105** of the current USA Swimming rulebook provides some guidance but little specific direction as each athlete is unique, and each situation varies with the type of event. Meet referees are given the authority, in consultation with the coach, to decide what accommodations and modifications may be appropriate. Two things should be kept in mind, are you providing an equal opportunity for competition within the rules, and is the need based on a permanent impairment and not due to injury or lack of training that is temporary.

Inclusion of athletes with a disability begins with the **meet information**. It should include a statement making it clear that swimmers with disabilities are welcome to enter, use the parallel time standards if required, and if they are eligible for finals in a prelim/final meet. Additionally, it should clearly be stated that the coach is required to declare, with the entry, any accommodations or modifications requested and that the meet referee must be copied. Some accommodations may require several days to arrange and waiting until the morning of the meet may prevent the request being met. A form, included at the end of this paper, may be used for this purpose as well as some sample meet statements. The official doing entries should notify the meet referee of any entries of swimmers with disabilities to ensure that no one is missed. Not all swimmers with disabilities may need accommodations or modifications under ordinary circumstances but the referee should be informed of their participation in case of unforeseen situations.

**Seeding** sessions that include swimmers with disabilities offer several options. These options should be discussed with the athletes’ coach to create the best opportunity for competition for the athlete as well as the impact it may have on the timeline. They can be placed manually into heats where their time is the most appropriate. This might be placing them in a heat for a different age or for a race that is a longer distance. Care should be taken to point out where those options are in the event schedule as it may move that event to another session or too close to another event. Some athletes may be uncomfortable swimming with younger swimmers than their peers or would prefer to be placed where they are not always finishing well after the other swimmers in the heat. In competitions where a time standard is used for entry, and bonus swims are offered, swimmers entered with a parallel time standard will automatically be seeded as a conforming time ahead of the bonus times. They should be manually placed where the time best fits. In prelim/finals competitions, the meet information should clearly specify if swimmers with disabilities will be separated into their own events and how they will be seeded and/or scored. The athlete and coach should be made aware of how they will be notified if they will be in finals and what options may be available.

A **list of all swimmers with a disability** entered in the meet should be prepared. It should specify their accommodations and modifications for each event, their coach contact information during the meet and any other relevant information. A copy should be given to all necessary officials. This would include deck referees, starters, admin officials, chief judges (if used), and facility staff if equipment needs to be positioned. I recommend that one person be designated to disseminate this information for each session. The meet referee has many other responsibilities and should delegate this task to another official. If possible, highlight the deck referee and starter sheets where the swimmers will be and add notes about their requests. Officials do not need to know any specific medical information, only the rule modifications and any accommodations needed. No medical documentation is required. The coach is the designated and certified expert on

what the athlete needs to be included. The referee is responsible for following the rulebook and providing a fair competition for all participants. Together they have the flexibility to deal with any situation that may arise. Decisions made are for that competition only and do not set precedent for any future competitions.

**During the competition**, it is recommended that the same procedure be used for both swimmers with a disability and all the other participants. Stroke and turn officials report any observed infractions to the referee (through the chief judge if used), and using the additional information provided, the referee determines if a disqualification should be made. A written record should be used to document all potential infractions and the final decision made by the referee. It has been requested that a copy of this record, when Article 105 is applied, be sent to the LSC and Zone disability chairs. The national disability subgroup of the DEI committee would like to create a database of the use of Article 105. The original paperwork should be kept with the rest of the meet file.

Each meet and LSC is unique. The key to successful inclusion is clear and transparent communication. Coaches and meet referees should have adequate pre-meet conversations as well as discussions about any issues that occur during the competition. Inclusion may include non-athletes as well. Coaches, officials, and spectators with disabilities may also require accommodations to participate in a competition. Additional resources are available through the LSC disability or DEI chair, the zone disability and DEI coordinators and the national DEI committee.

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*Attachment 1*

### **Necessary Accommodation Form – Athlete**

**Coaches, please state all requested accommodations/modifications.**

**Include with team entry and email copy to meet referee**

Swimmer's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ P1\_\_ P2\_\_ P3\_\_ Meet: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Parallel Time Standard Used: \_\_\_\_\_

Club \_\_\_\_\_ LSC \_\_\_\_\_ Coach: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell # (at meet) \_\_\_\_\_

Accommodations needed; please describe.


Modifications needed; please describe.

Session	Event	Heat	Lane	Modification(s) Per Rule 105

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*Attachment 2*

Below are the suggested statements drafted by the USA Swimming Disability Subgroup of the National DEI Committee for use in Meet Information Letters. There are different statements for different types of meets being held.

**Club Meets, sanctioned by an LSC (no time standard)**

Club meets without a time standard required for entry, whether timed final or prelim/final format, should include the following statement.

“Coaches entering swimmers with disabilities that require any accommodations or modifications, including the need for personal assistants and/or registered service animals must provide advance notice in writing, accompanying their meet entry file, to the meet referee by the entry deadline. Failure to provide advance notice may limit the host’s ability to accommodate all requests.”

Coaches may use the Necessary Accommodation Form to satisfy this requirement.

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**LSC Meets** (time standard required for entry, i.e., LSC Championships or Large Invitationals)

LSC governed meets such as senior championships, age group championships, or closed invitational meets with time standards should include the following statement.

“All swimmers with a disability must meet the LSC Parallel Time Standards according to their performance group (P1, P2, P3) in every event they wish to participate in the meet.

Coaches with swimmers with a disability competing must notify the Entry Chair with their entry and the Meet Referee prior to the meet.”

Coaches may use the Necessary Accommodation Form to satisfy this requirement.  
LSC Parallel Time Standards should be included in the meet information.

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**Zone Meets** (with or without time standards, i.e., Sectionals, AG Sectionals, Sr. Zone)

Zone governed meets such as sectionals, short course and long course, and senior zones all have time standards for entry. Age group zones, long course, does not. Those meets with time standards should include the following statement.

“All swimmers with a disability must meet the Sectional or Zone Parallel Time Standards and/or Bonus Parallel Time Standards if applicable (attached) according to their performance group (P1, P2, P3) in every event they wish to participate in the meet.

Coaches with swimmers with a disability competing must notify the Entry Chair with their entry and the Meet Referee prior to the meet.”

Coaches may use the Necessary Accommodation Form to satisfy this requirement.

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Attachment 3

**Summary of Swimmers with a Disability**

*A tool for meet officials*

Meet \_\_\_\_\_ Session \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Please give a copy to admin official to include with meet information



Accommodations needed; please describe.


Any additional information needed.
