2026 USMS RELAY/NCC, September 25-27, Denver CO
Ozark LMSC Delegate Report – submitted by Ashley Turpin

I had a great time attending Relay this year on behalf of Ozark and SLAM. While the educational sessions were informative, one of the biggest benefits was connecting with volunteers, coaches, and leaders from LMSCs and clubs across the country. It was interesting to learn how organizations of all sizes operate and compare their challenges, successes, and ideas with our own. The experience gave me a better understanding of where Ozark and SLAM fit within the larger USMS community and provided several ideas that could help us continue to grow and better serve our members.

A major theme throughout the conference was community building. Many successful LMSCs focus just as much on creating connections and engagement opportunities as they do on competition. There were several examples of clubs hosting social swims, holiday events, virtual competitions, annual celebrations, and recognition programs to keep members involved and connected. One of my biggest takeaways was the importance of helping members feel like they are part of something larger than their individual workout group. I think there are opportunities for SLAM and Ozark to strengthen connections between swimmers, workout groups, coaches, and the broader Masters Swimming community.

I also spent a lot of time thinking about volunteerism and member engagement. Several presenters emphasized that successful organizations are built on volunteers who feel appreciated and understand the impact they make. Discussions around awards, recognition, and clearly defined volunteer roles gave me several ideas for increasing involvement within SLAM. I was especially interested in how recognition programs can improve volunteer retention and foster a stronger sense of community.

The event-planning sessions were also extremely valuable. Whether discussing local meets or large regional competitions, many presenters emphasized that successful events depend on strong planning, volunteer coordination, safety measures, and communication. One lesson that stood out to me was that participants are often looking for more than just a race. The most successful events create a memorable experience through themes, merchandise, photo opportunities, social activities, and creative event formats that make participation fun and welcoming. People are more likely to return when they feel appreciated and connected to the community.

Another topic I found valuable was the discussion around relationships between College Club Swimming and Masters Swimming. The session highlighted opportunities to build stronger connections between college club teams and local Masters organizations through shared events and partnerships. This aligned well with ideas I have been considering around strengthening relationships between SLAM, Ozark, local universities, and the broader swimming community.

Finally, I left Relay with a greater appreciation for the importance of supporting coaches and workout groups. Coaches are often the primary connection swimmers have to Masters Swimming, and many discussions reinforced the importance of recognizing their contributions, giving them the tools they need to succeed, and involving them in efforts to grow participation and engagement. Strong coaches and workout groups ultimately lead to stronger clubs and LMSCs.

Overall, I learned a great deal during Relay and came away with several ideas related to volunteer development, community building, event planning, coach support, and member engagement. I am grateful for the opportunity to attend and represent Ozark and SLAM, and I look forward to applying what I learned to help strengthen and grow our Masters Swimming community.

Link for 2026 Relay info: https://www.usms.org/volunteer-central/lmscs/lmsc-leadership-summit/relay-2026