

## National Officials Certification FAQ's

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**1. Q: I've been evaluated and have filled out the on-line application to advance (or recertify) in the National program. It shows that I have deficiencies in meet attendance and teaching and learning activities. I've done plenty of that stuff; what do I do?**

**A:** If your LSC doesn't use the OTS to track LSC meets or clinics and meetings, or you've been to meets outside of your LSC and they don't use the OTS, you can add those meets and activities into your own OTS file as "other" meets or activities. Instructions on how to do this are included in the "Officials User Guide" on the OTS area of the officials section of the USA Swimming website. (A link to the guides is included at the end of the answers to question 19, below.) Or, since you've already been to the application page, you can go to the "my history" link and then click on the "meet/evaluation history" or "activity history" tab. On the right side at the just below the "Other Meets" or "Other Activities" sub heading is a "add other meets" or "add other activities" link. Click on the link and you can add the meets or activities that are missing. Entries in this area apply only to your file and stay with it. If the meets or activities you enter are later entered at the LSC level, you can go back and delete them from the "other" areas. Meets and activities entered in this area will count in your application.

Please note that the "teaching" or "learning" activities are required. Not necessarily both. The form will be changed to correct the implied "and" in the near future.

Also - You don't need to be absolutely precise with meet names, dates or sessions in the "other" areas for National Certification purposes. It is assumed that all USA Swimming Officials are honorable, but not that they are great record keepers or have an total recall! However there should be sufficient detail for reviewers, and you, to identify duplicate entries in the event the LSC enters the details later.

**2. Q: How do I get to be evaluated at a meet?**

**A:** Evaluations for advancement to, and re-certification in, any N2 and N3 position must be done by approved National Evaluators at Officials Qualifying Meets (OQMs). Host LSCs of meets that are approved as Officials Qualifying Meets are obliged to announce that they are approved, or have applied for approval, in the Meet Information letter or on a Zone website and include details if there is a requirement to apply to be evaluated. Many OQM's don't require an advance application, but you should check to be sure you can be accommodated.

**3. Q: What is an Officials Qualifying Meet and how is it approved?**

**A:** Officials Qualifying Meets are similar to the National Certification Meets under the previous program. These meets are approved for the evaluation of officials seeking advancement and re-certification at the N2 and N3 levels. They may include Regional, Zone, Sectional, Grand Prix, and other meets which satisfy the criteria outlined on the 2<sup>nd</sup> page of the Officials Qualifying Meet application form.

National Championship Meets are also approved as "Officials Qualifying Meets". However, only one (1) National Championship Meet may be used to satisfy part of the participation requirements for re-certification or advancement. Time trials at National Championship meets may be available for evaluation of candidate N3 Starters. See "Guidelines for Evaluation of N3 Starters at Time Trials of National Championship Level Meets."

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Go to “**Applications for Approval of Officials Qualifying Meets**” for requirements and standards for approval of a meet as an Officials Qualifying Meet.

Applications for approval as an Officials Qualifying Meet (OQM) are submitted to the Officials Committee c/o the staff liaison at USA Swimming Headquarters 2 to 3 months prior to the start date of the meet. Meet Information documents must contain a notice that the meet has been approved, or application has been made for approval, as an Officials Qualifying Meet and outlining how officials will be considered for evaluation.

### 4. Q: Who are the National Evaluators? How are they appointed?

**A:** There are two types of National Evaluator:

- Those qualified to evaluate candidates for certification and re-certification in all positions at the N2 level and Stroke & Turn Judges at the N3 level. These officials are very experienced with at least N2 Referee and N3 Stroke and Turn Judge certifications AND preferably with experience at National Championship meets over the last two or three years. They have a thorough understanding of the expectation for officials at National Championship meets. LSC Officials Chairs may write to the National Officials Chair and nominate officials meeting this description for consideration. Nominations may also be made by LSC Officials Chairs on the application for a meet to be approved as an “Officials Qualifying Meet.”
- Second - those qualified as above and further to make “Initial” or “FINAL” Evaluation of candidates for N3 Chief Judge, N3 Starter, N3 Deck Referee and N3 Administrative Referee. “Initial” Evaluators have N3 certification in the position and, usually, have been assigned at least once in the position at a National Championship meet in the last 5, or so, years. Those approved to make “FINAL” evaluations have relevant National Championship Meet experience in several National Championship Meets. The Officials Committee will appoint these evaluators and will review the list a couple of times per year.

Officials nominated for appointment as National Evaluators should be capable and willing to objectively and honestly evaluate officials, if they are approved. They should also be strong and sensitive mentors who are willing to give guidance and assistance to those who wish to participate in the National Certification program.

### 5. Q: How often can I upgrade my certification?

**A:** You may upgrade whenever you have completed the requirements. For example, you could upgrade to N2 Chief Judge in April, upgrade from N2 Stroke & Turn Judge to an N3 Stroke & Turn judge in August and then upgrade to N2 Referee in November. The important thing is to make sure all the requirements for each step and position are satisfied before applying for a new certification level. Participation and education activities and evaluations can be used for multiple advancement or re-certification application, provided they fall within the 24 month time frame window required for the application.

### 6. Q: Should I wait until the expiration of my current certifications to re-certify?

**A:** That is not necessary. If you have completed all of your requirements for re-certification you can submit your application.

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Please note that Initial N3 evaluations for advancement to N3 in a position, if satisfactory or not noted as unacceptable for re-certification at the N2 level, may be used as part of the re-certification evaluation requirement for a position.

### 7. Q: Does it cost anything to re-certify or upgrade my certification?

**A:** With the introduction of the online "Officials Tracking System" (OTS), which allows for applications for re-certification and advancement in the N2 and N3 levels, the application fee is waived. However, please make sure your applications are complete and valid before submitting them to reduce the level of activity required by staff and the Officials Committee volunteers to review and process the applications.

### 8. Q: Will I get a new patch or pin when I upgrade?

**A:** With the implementation of this program, the officials committee has retired the patches and pins that had previously designated either National or National Championship certification. A new card with the highest level achieved for each position will be issued.

### 9. Q: Can I use sessions at the same meet to satisfy multiple re-certification requirements?

**A:** Yes! For example, if you are certified as N3 Starter, N2 Deck Referee, N2 Chief Judge and N3 Stroke and Turn Judge, working an Officials Qualifying Meet with two sessions as a deck referee and two sessions as a starter, with satisfactory evaluations for all positions, you would satisfy all of the evaluation requirements for re-certification in those 4 positions. You still have to work at another Officials Qualifying Meet (whether you were evaluated or not) and meet all of the other participation and education requirements in the 24 months for your re-certification/advancement application to be complete.

### 10. Q: Can I use sessions at the same meet to get more than one advancement evaluation?

**A:** Yes! If the meet host and National Evaluators are willing to accommodate and you do the following:

- Work the required number of session for each evaluation.
- Only one position can be evaluated for advancement in any session, eg, even if you are working in a rotation, say moving from Deck Referee and then to Starter and then to a break, you can only be evaluated for advancement in one of those positions in that session.
- You can be evaluated for re-certification in more than one position in a session.
- Work at least 4 sessions in the meet, the minimum sessions you have to work in the meet before any evaluation done at the meet, whether it is over two, three or four sessions, is valid. This is the commitment from you to the meet in exchange for accommodating you as an evaluation candidate.
- Meet the *prerequisites* to be evaluated for each position. (See the "*Advancement Summary*" and "*Recertification Requirements*" on the web site.)

It is also possible to be evaluated at the N3 level in one position and N2 in another; e.g. for N3 S&T Judge – 4 sessions, and N2 Starter – 3 sessions.

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### 11. Q: How frequently can I be evaluated for advancement in the same position?

**A:** It is strongly recommended that officials not “rush to advancement,” and absorb and put into practice, feedback from any N3 or N2 evaluation, whether satisfactory or not, before proceeding to another evaluation for the same position. Much of the knowledge and approach to officiating that good officials use in their duties is the result of experience on the deck and feedback from National Evaluators, other experienced officials, coaches, swimmers, meet administrators, and even parents and spectators. It is suggested that working the position in at least 3 meets over, say, a minimum of 4 months would be appropriate, before requesting another evaluation for the same position.

### 12. Q: Is a satisfactory N2 advancement evaluation also an Initial N3 Evaluation for a position?

**A:** No! Evaluations to advance to N2 in a position can only be used for satisfying N2 requirements, and for re-certification if the evaluation is less than 2 years old when application to recertify is made.

Before any N3 evaluations can be made in a position the candidate must already be certified at N2 (amongst other things). It should also be noted that N3 advancement evaluations (N3 Stroke and Turn or N3 Initial and N3 Final for other positions) must be done over 4 sessions at an Officials Qualifying Meet by an appropriately approved National Evaluator. N2 advancement evaluations need only be over 3 sessions at an OQM, by appropriately approved National Evaluators.

### 13. Q: What happens if my evaluation for re-certification or advancement in a position does not recommend re-certification or is not acceptable for advancement?

**A:** The evaluation cannot be used to support re-certification or advancement applications. However, the meet will count for the Qualifying Meet attendance, if you worked at least 4 sessions at the meet.

Comments and suggestions from the evaluation should be used as a guide for improvement so that future evaluation may be successful. The goal is to make sure that N2 and N3 certification levels are meaningful, representing accurately an official's National skill level. Under the previous system very little, if any, assessment of ability and skills was undertaken, so it is possible that some officials with transitioned N2 certifications and, possibly, some N3 Stroke and Turn Judges, may need to upgrade their skills a little to meet the required standards for the this program.

Re-certification evaluations may be taken again. If they continue to be unsatisfactory, or are not completed before expiration of the certification, the certification level for the position will be reduced by one level, e.g. N3 S&T to N2 S&T, N2 Starter to no national Starter certification, etc., and the advancement process for that position will need to start again.

If “unsatisfactory” N3 advancement evaluations for a position are not noted as unacceptable for N2 re-certification, they can be used for re-certification.

### 14. Q: Can I be evaluated at time trials of a Sectional Meet?

**A:** No! Evaluations at Sectional Meets (approved as Officials Qualifying Meets), or any other Officials Qualifying Meet, including National Championship level meets (see exception for N3

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Starter evaluations), are to be done at the regular meet sessions and not during time trials. However, the National Officials Chair has the leeway to accommodate individual officials from remote locations, or with other special circumstances, and may, on request, allow time trials at a specific meet to be used for part of the evaluation sessions for those officials.

**15. Q: If I'm already an N3 Deck Referee (Starter, Chief Judge, Administrative Referee) do I have to be evaluated in the Stroke and Turn Judge position to recertify as a Deck Referee (Starter, Chief Judge, Administrative Referee)?**

**A:** The simple answer is "No!" However, it is recommended that N2 and N3 Chief Judges, Starters, Deck Referees and Administrative Referees periodically request evaluation in the Stroke and Turn Judge position over a couple of sessions so that:

- Experienced officials can be seen actively participating as S&T Judges.
- They can keep their skills at a high level and refresh their awareness of current rules, their interpretation and the deck protocol expected at National and high level meets.
- They can emphasize the importance of the Stroke and Turn Judge.

**16. Q: Will I be provided with a written copy of my evaluation?**

**A:** Yes. At the very least a brief summary of the evaluation and the result will be emailed to you as soon as it is entered in to the Officials Tracking System (OTS) by the evaluator. The evaluator may also give you a more detailed copy of the evaluation at the meet or email it to you afterwards.

A large component of the Evaluator's responsibility is to interact with and, if necessary, mentor those being evaluated for both advancement and re-certification. All Evaluators must provide feedback on an evaluation and, possibly, things that may need to improve or change before an official can advance, or maintain certification, in a position.

All Evaluators are obliged to give a verbal indication of the result and, if they wish, a checklist of accomplishments or deficiencies.

**17. Q: Why did my expiry date stay the same (or only advance one year) when I received my new card after advancing to N2 or N3 in a position?**

**A:** The expiration date on your card applies to certifications in all positions. If your application for advancement also included all requirements to re-certify in the other positions your new expiry date would have advanced 2 to 2.5 years.

On many applications for advancement, the applicant has not had a satisfactory re-certification evaluation for the other positions. In that case the expiry is advanced no more than 1 to 1.5 years. In some cases the expiry date does not change if there is more than one year remaining on the original certification. Typically, an N2/N3 Starter re-certification evaluation has not been completed.

If the missing re-certification requirements are completed before the expiry date on the new card, an application for re-certification may be submitted and then the expiry date will be advanced 2 years from the application date. Satisfactory evaluations for certification advancement or re-certification can be included in any re-certification application if they are less than 2 years old (based on the date the evaluation was performed and the date the application is received).

The intent is to ensure that all certifications imply that the official has been evaluated in the positions indicated within the last 4 years! If certifications were advanced two years every

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time an official obtained a new certification it would be possible to carry some un-evaluated position certifications for many years. That is not in the best interest of our swimmers.

In the event a satisfactory evaluation for a position is not completed before the certification expires, the next card will show that position at a lower level – e.g. N3 will drop to N2; N2 will drop to ---. Advancement requirements will then have to be met to re-obtain the certification.

Please review the "*Advancement Summary*" and the "*Re-Certification Requirements*" posted on the website.

### 18. Q: I've been an evaluator at a number of Officials Qualifying Meets over the last couple of years; how do I get to be evaluated for re-certification if I'm always evaluating?

- A:** National Evaluators approved to give Initial or FINAL N3 evaluations may earn position re-certification evaluation, OQM participation, education and mentoring credit for their own re-certification by accomplishing the following:
- Full-time National Evaluator (including prompt submission of reports) at 2 OQMs in the 24 months before expiration will satisfy (personal) requirements at all positions.
  - Full-time National Evaluator at one OQM will satisfy the evaluation, education and mentoring requirements, but full credit still requires working at the second OQM.
  - Up to 50% of the LSC meet participation requirement may be relieved for re-certification if National Evaluators provide the service at 3, or more, OQMs. However, all N2 and N3 officials and Evaluators are still required to meet their own LSC's re-certification requirements to maintain their status, regardless of any relief given by the National Officials Committee.
  - It is suggested that National Evaluators request periodic evaluation by a National Evaluator:
    - in the S&T Judge position to demonstrate maintenance of skill and the importance of the position, and
    - in the Starter position, if N2 or N3 certified.

### 19. Q: I've been evaluated! Now what do I do?

- A:** You have a number of options, **but action is required by you** to utilize the evaluation!
- If you have all of the evaluations necessary to advance or re-certify you can go online in the OTS and apply for advancement and, or, re-certification. You may need to supplement the data in the OTS with LSC meets and mentoring and learning activities, if your LSC does not use the OTS to track those things. See after last bullet in this answer for a link to user guides.
  - If you don't have everything done to meet the requirements to advance or recertify you can wait. The evaluations are in the data base and can be used until they are 24 month old (we look at them up until they are 27 months old – sort of an application of the "benefit of the doubt" principal).  
You can enter "other activities" and "other meets" that you participate in to keep that part of your record up to date (if your LSC doesn't do it, or you want to log meets and activities outside the limits that they do enter eg masters or high school meets, meets outside your LSC, when you mentor individuals at meets, etc.) You may not get advancement or recert credit for some of those meets and activities, but it is a convenient place to keep your personal swimming record in case you need it for your tax return or want to write your memoirs.

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- You can apply for advancement or recertification in positions for which you have fulfilled the evaluation requirements. You'll only get between zero and one and a half years extension on your expiry date, which gives you at least one year to complete the missing evaluation(s). At that time you can apply again and the extension on your expiry date will then be extended between two and two and a half years from that time, provided the older evaluations have not lapsed (more than 27 months old). This is a bit complicated, but it may change in the future.
- Do nothing, and consider the evaluation a useful learning experience to apply to your LSC duties.

Link to OTS user guides (they are in the box on the right side of the page) -

<http://www.usaswimming.org/USASWeb/DesktopDefault.aspx?TabId=1005&Alias=Rainbow&Lang=en>

### 20. Q: The OTS looks pretty fancy. Does my LSC have to use it?

**A:** The simple answer is: No!

The initial priority for the system was to track attendance and evaluations at OQMs, however there are a number of features built into the system that LSCs can use if they choose. LSC meets can be set up by the LSC Officials chair (or their designees), they can include a meet referee who, along with those who have set-up authority, can enter officials into the meet and the number of sessions worked in each position. They can also load teaching and learning activities such as large clinics, meetings, briefings, etc into the system to track participation. Individual officials can also record their own activities, such as one-on-one mentoring, or participation in meets not tracked by their own or other LSCs. These are referred to as "Other Activities" and "Other Meets" in the OTS guides on the USA Swimming Website.

It is anticipated that many additional LSC friendly enhancements will be included in the next version of the OTS which is about to go into development. These may include LSC certification and evaluation tracking for active and new officials, the ability to print certificates, enhanced participation tracking and reporting features.

### 21. Q: Can I be "evaluated for education"?

**A:** With the introduction of the OTS an "Evaluation for Education" option was added to the online evaluation report form. It allows an official to request an evaluation over a short period, say one session or even at time trials, to get feedback on their performance. These evaluations do not get counted and are "unofficial."

Evaluators can also use the "Evaluation for Education" if, after discussing it with the candidate, during a requested N2 or N3 evaluation, it is apparent that there are obvious shortcomings or lack of sufficient experience and there is no point in continuing with the full evaluation. This use allows the evaluator to record the improvements needed and to give the candidate a copy for reference.