

ATHLETE LEADERSHIP

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OVERVIEW

Goal of Special Olympics

The ultimate goal of Special Olympics is to help persons with intellectual disabilities participate as productive and respected members of society at large, by offering them a fair opportunity to develop and demonstrate their skills and talents through sports training and competition, and by increasing the public's awareness of their capabilities and needs.

Value Statement – Athlete Leadership

Special Olympics empowers athletes to be contributing and respected members of Special Olympics and society. We support athlete-leaders on and off the playing field.

Purpose of Athlete Leadership

The purpose of ALPs is empowering athletes to develop leadership skills and utilize their voices and abilities to undertake meaningful leadership roles, influence change in the Special Olympics movement and create inclusive communities around the world.

Definition of Athlete Leadership

Through organized training and practical experiences it helps prepare athletes to undertake meaningful positions of influence and leadership throughout the Special Olympics organization, both on and off the playing field.

Basic Concepts of Athlete Leadership

- 1) Athlete leadership is fundamental to Special Olympics being an athlete-centered organization.
- 2) Every Special Olympics athlete has leadership abilities that can contribute to the movement.
- 3) Athlete leadership starts with an athlete making an informed choice of leadership role(s).
- 4) Athlete leadership has a powerful effect on athletes' self-esteem and self-confidence.
- 5) Athletes require education in leadership skills before being placed in positions of responsibility.
- 6) ALPs include classes that guide athletes toward a variety of roles, including: board/committee membership, games management, public speaking, coaching, officiating, and youth leadership.
- 7) After attending classes, athletes need both immediate and real opportunities to practice newly-learned leadership skills.
- 8) Most athletes benefit from the support of a committed athlete-centered mentor whose role evolves as the athlete leader becomes more capable in their leadership role.
- 9) Special Olympics staff, volunteers and families must be educated to ensure they value and support the involvement of athletes in meaningful roles.
- 10) Skills learned enrich athletes' abilities to become more involved and respected in the community.

Opportunities

- Athletes on the Program's Board of Directors
- Athlete Congress or Input Councils
- Athletes as coaches and officials
- Athletes as donors
- Athletes employed by Special Olympics
- Athletes as newsletter/ website contributors
- Athletes as Global Messengers (speakers bureau)
- Athletes on local, Regional, or State committees and management teams
- Athletes as mentors to other athletes
- Athletes as fundraisers

TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

As athletes assume new leadership roles within Special Olympics Wisconsin (SOWI), there is a need for education and training for everyone involved. SOWI uses the Agency accreditation responses, as well as athlete surveys and feedback, to determine interest in specific training.

Currently, SOWI is providing the following trainings on a regular basis:

- 1) Introduction to Athlete Leadership
- 2) Global Messenger Workshop (beginner, refresher or graduate) – public speaking and interviewing skills
- 3) Athlete Governance or Leadership Training Workshop – general leadership skills such as how to express opinions, listen to other's ideas, and work together to solve problems
- 4) Athletes as Coaches Training – general coaching skills and sports-specific training
- 5) Other workshops such as Assisting with Fundraising, Working with the Media, Reading Financial Reports and Technology, and general Life Skills are offered periodically as needed

AT THE AGENCY LEVEL

Agencies have been creative in their implementation of Athlete Leadership. Involvement ranges from simply enlisting veteran athletes as peer mentors to a more formal approach of developing structured Athlete Councils, and many things in between. SOWI supports each Agency's right to choose the level of involvement, but encourages all Agencies to be more intentional about offering leadership roles to athletes within their Agency.

As we continue to grow through Athlete Leadership, it has become clear that this type of program bottlenecks with staff or key volunteers because it is viewed as more work. On the contrary, we have found if expectations are clear, athletes are a huge resource to the program, and can relieve workloads from staff and key volunteers. In order to do this, athletes must be given clear expectations and be held accountable.

ATHLETE INPUT COUNCILS

SOWI has Athlete Input Councils (AIC) at the Headquarters, Regional and local levels. The statewide council has representatives from each Region and meets periodically to discuss statewide topics such as leadership training, athlete health, inclusion and youth programming, and more. Regional and local councils operate in much the same way, but address Regional or local Agency issues. See page 4 for a Sample Athlete Council Agreement.

State Athlete Input Council

Cole Cleworth	South Wood County	2-13
Danny Cox	Menomonie Red Cedar	3-25
David Epping	Waushara County	4-19
Zachary Reetz	Waushara County	4-19
Christiana Coakley	SOAR Fox Cities	4-25
Martha Hill	Sheboygan Co. Adults	5-07
David Thompson	Oregon Area	6-05
Jonathon Baker	Cuba City	6-18
Jonathon Stemper	Adams-Friendship	6-31
Eresi Yarney	Ozaukee County	8-28
Debra J. Moore-Gruenloh	Facilitator	
Tom Pezzi	Facilitator	
Jeanne Hrovat	SOWI Staff Liaison	

ATHLETE VOLUNTEERS

Athlete Leadership trains athletes to serve in meaningful leadership roles in addition to that of competitor. As a result, SOWI now has dozens of athletes who also serve as volunteers for our program. However, there are differences in how SOWI processes their information and manages their service compared to other volunteers.

- 1) Athletes are registered in the SOWI Games Management System (GMS) and all volunteers are registered in the Blackbaud database system
- 2) Of all the ALPs athlete volunteers, only athlete-coaches and athletes who serve on Regional and State committees will be screened because of their direct contact with athletes and because they are in a position of authority and trust of other athletes. Athlete coaches cannot serve as chaperones at State competitions
- 3) Athlete volunteers cannot drive on behalf of SOWI.

At this time, athletes who are also Class A Volunteers are not eligible for Years of Service (YOS) awards. Typically, athletes are already receiving recognition from SOWI through their sports involvement and specific athlete service awards. In addition, there are many athletes who also volunteer their service for SOWI and aren't officially registered as Class A volunteers. We maintain this YOS policy to be fair to all athletes and to ensure we continue to recognize our non-athlete volunteers. The athletes are the heart of our organization and the volunteers make it beat.



**Special Olympics Wisconsin – Athlete Council (SOWI-AIC)
Member Contract**

“The Mission of the SOWI Athlete Input Council is to work together to respect and support SOWI athletes, coaches, family, friends, volunteers, Agency managers, Staff, and Board members by gathering information, ideas and opinions of SOWI athletes and sharing that information with SOWI by putting it in writing so that we all understand and communicating to all involved in SOWI.”

I _____ have read and understand that I will abide by the following rules of conduct as a member of SOWI-AIC.

I will attend all regular scheduled meetings of the council. I promise I will call another council member or the state office in Madison if there is an emergency and I am not able to attend. I understand it is my responsibility to call another council member after the meeting to learn what I missed.

I understand that I am responsible for my own transportation to and from the meetings and extra activities.

If I don't attend four of the five meetings a year, I understand a letter will be sent to me from the facilitator/staff followed by a private meeting to discuss my member status.

I will be an active participant in events and activities requested of council members to help support Special Olympics Wisconsin.

The SOWI-AIC agreed to the following etiquette:

1. Stick to topic
2. Don't spread rumors
3. Use common sense
4. Respect everyone's ideas
5. Finish your work
6. Do your work
7. If you're not sure, ask questions
8. Be prepared
9. Use words athletes understand
10. Have eye contact
11. Be respectful
12. Be a good leader
13. Be punctual/prompt
14. Do your fair share
15. Have fun
16. Use appropriate language
17. Help other council members when needed
18. Set a positive example at all SOWI functions
19. Confidentiality on topics that are not to be shared outside the AIC

(Athlete Council Member Name)

(Date signed)

ATHLETES AS COACHES (AAC) PROGRAM

Special Olympics Wisconsin (SOWI) welcomes and encourages athletes to assume leadership positions such as athlete-coach. To be successful, athletes wishing to coach in the SOWI system should first and foremost communicate their wishes to their Agency Manager. This provides an opportunity to determine the best plan for the Agency and athlete, as well as a time to discuss the criteria for involvement (below) and understand important SOWI policies such as the Policy Regarding Volunteers and Staff Dating Athletes, found in the *Volunteer Policy* section of this handbook.

Criteria for Involvement

- 1) Athletes wishing to coach in the SOWI system must be registered and screened as a participant in the AAC program. This is done by completing a *Class A volunteer Registration Form* which includes taking the online Protective Behaviors training, view the online General Orientation, and Concussion Training plus complete the on-line test. (Athlete coaches must be 18 years old or older.)
- 2) Athletes must have a mentor in the AAC process, and have the ability to meet the requirements of being a coach (attendance at practices and competitions, etc.). Agency managers may assist the athlete, but the athlete will be responsible for finding a mentor as well as transportation to and from practices and/or trainings as part of this program.
- 3) The athlete, with the help of their mentor, must adhere to all current coaching certification policies.
- 4) In addition, athletes must complete a one-time ACC face-to-face workshop (a 4-hour training offered periodically throughout the state).

State Games/Tournament Registration Policy

Athletes, including athlete-coaches, are not eligible to act as chaperones or to drive on behalf of SOWI. In order for an athlete-coach to be registered as a coach for a State Games/tournament they must meet all of the criteria for involvement in the AAC program. Because an athlete-coach cannot serve as a chaperone, they must be certified in order to attend State Games.

Teams with an athlete-coach will be allowed extra quota slots to accommodate athlete-coaches. The State Games/tournament ratio of athlete-coaches to competing athletes shall be as follows: Team sports (excluding bocce, team or doubles bowling, and relay teams) – one athlete-coach per team; Individual sports (including bocce, team or doubles bowling and relay teams) – one athlete-coach for every 12 athletes. Even though extra quote is allowed for an athlete-coach to attend state competitions, the specific rules of a sport are still intact. For example, in team basketball, three coaches are allowed on the bench. The athlete-coach serves as one of the three, no a fourth coach.

An athlete-coach may serve as the only certified coach for a team. However, if an athlete is the only coach, please contact SOWI staff to assess if any accommodations are necessary. No athlete-coach will be allowed to register in a coach's role with any of the Unified Sports® offered by SOWI.

To preserve the integrity of the AAC position, SOWI does not allow athletes to participate and coach within the same sports season (i.e. an athlete will not be allowed to attend State competition as a coach if you have competed in that sports season as an athlete). Athlete coaches who no longer participate as an "athlete" do not have to renew their *Athlete Participation and Release Forms*, but must keep their Class A volunteer registrations current. If the AAC maintains a current Athlete Participation form, then can attend all Healthy Athletes screenings.

Advanced Competition Opportunities

SOWI encourages registered athlete coaches to consider applying for coach positions at USA and World Games when applicable. Please contact the VP of Program Services for more information.

SARGENT SHRIVER SPECIAL OLYMPICS GLOBAL MESSENGERS PROGRAM

History

In 1987, Special Olympics launched an important athlete recruitment campaign called “Join the World of Winners” aimed at providing Special Olympics sports training and competition to more individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Early in 1988, a Special Olympics Colorado athlete named Greg Mark decided he should be part of the athlete recruitment campaign. He recruited 30 of his friends—adults who had stopped competing in Special Olympics—to become involved again. Mark’s action inspired a program called **Athletes for Outreach**, through which Special Olympics athletes are trained to give presentations to families, to peers and potential athletes, civic, sports, and church groups, as well as school and community administrators. The purpose of each presentation was to recruit new Special Olympics athletes and volunteers needed to expand programs.

Since its inception, the Athletes for Outreach program has been an unprecedented success. Today, thousands of athletes are educating individuals in their communities about Special Olympics. While Athletes for Outreach were busy making presentations, Special Olympics International Chairman Sargent Shriver was working tirelessly to advance the mission and philosophy of Special Olympics to people around the world.

In 1996, Sargent Shriver was presented with an award in recognition of his work as a “Global Messenger” for the Special Olympics Movement. Additionally, in his honor, the Athletes for Outreach program was renamed the Sargent Shriver Special Olympics Global Messengers program—Global Messengers for short. The program name change became effective on January 1, 1997.

Training

Global Messengers are trained at workshops conducted by Special Olympics staff and experts in public speaking. The workshop requires each athlete to give a presentation, after which he/she is critiqued by peers and trainers.

Goals

Each Global Messenger is asked to give presentations throughout the year to recruit new athletes and volunteers or assist in fundraising, while telling the Special Olympics story.

Results

Special Olympics Wisconsin has conducted numerous Regional and Headquarters state-level workshops attended by athletes from all over the state. Since then, each Global Messenger has made a significant contribution to public awareness of Special Olympics in their communities and statewide.

Global Messengers have:

- Shared their message at Opening and Closing Ceremonies of State competitions
- Spoken at Special Olympics Wisconsin Leadership Conferences, Law Enforcement Torch Run® conferences and Special Olympics International conferences
- Given presentations to numerous corporations and civic organizations
- Appeared on Special Olympics posters and in public service announcements or media interviews
- Given presentations to college and university classes

“Special Olympics Global Messengers are once again proving that there are no limits to what people with cognitive disabilities can do, and challenging the world to accept them as active participants in society. They are speaking for themselves to tell their own story—and telling it far better than any of us could.”

Eunice Kennedy Shriver
Founder, Special Olympics Incorporated