

Local Program Development Guide

Section 3 – Volunteers, Coaches, and Families

In order to run efficiently, all Local Programs rely on several functions for success. Volunteers, coaches, and families all play a very important role in the health of your Local Program.

Volunteers

Volunteers are the backbone of Special Olympics. Your Local Program will thrive due to your ability to recruit and meaningfully involve volunteers. This process includes identifying your volunteer needs, locating and recruiting volunteers in your service area, proper registration and training for volunteers, and acknowledging their contributions.

Your Accredited Program has staff responsible for volunteer management, and can be a helpful resource in growing and maintaining your volunteer base.

Determining Volunteer Needs

- Develop a list of volunteer roles needed by your Local Program in all categories (Management Team, Sports, Communications, Fundraising, etc.). Be mindful of the skills and time required to do these roles effectively.
- Maintain job/position descriptions for volunteer roles, including training duties
- Set firm but reasonable expectations for your volunteers. A sample list of expectations might include:
 - o Complete the required volunteer registrations forms and trainings
 - o Fulfill the responsibilities of your assignment
 - o Set a good example for the athletes
 - o Model good sportsmanship and behavior
 - o Be continually vigilant and aware of the safety of the athletes
 - o Fulfill your commitment to the role, and consider additional training that can increase your involvement with Special Olympics

Volunteer Recruitment & Engagement

There are a number of steps Local Programs can take in order to increase your volunteer force. Below are suggestions that might enhance your recruitment efforts:

- Appoint a volunteer committee to assist with recruiting and training

- Ensure that all recruitment efforts have a clear message, demonstrate need, and have a follow-up plan. Aim to answer the following questions for volunteers when recruiting them:
 - What is the time commitment?
 - What skills are required?
 - How does the volunteer follow-up if interested?
- Utilize your communication channels (website, social media, local news outlets) to share your needs with the community
- Create and maintain a list or database with volunteers, both prospective and current
- Meet with volunteers directly to better understand their interests, and to pair them with the best opportunity in your Local Program
- Follow up promptly with new recruits, to provide outstanding customer service and to confirm their involvement
- Upon arrival at a Local Program activity, provide training and mentorship to ensure the best possible experience
- Ensure that thank you letters and acknowledgement opportunities are part of your Local Program efforts, as part of existing activities or by creating a dedicated volunteer appreciation event or campaign
- Gather feedback from volunteers about their experience, to keep a consistent focus on improvement

Recruiting volunteers can be done in a variety of ways, and can target many groups in your community. Below is a partial list of target recruitment areas for volunteers:

- Local sports organizations and leagues
- Community volunteer centers
- Sponsors and local businesses, paying special attention to those that offer volunteer hours to employees and/or donations to charities based on hours served by employees
- High schools / colleges
- Families of athletes
- Service groups

Volunteer Registration

All volunteers must register and receive approval by the Special Olympics Accredited Program. The registration procedure and forms are important tools for ensuring the safety and well-being of all athletes and volunteers. In compliance with Special Olympics, Inc. policy, all U.S. Programs must register and classify volunteers.

Class A Volunteers

All volunteers must complete a Class A Volunteer Process if they meet any of the following criteria:

- Has regular close, physical contact with athletes
- Is in positions of authority, trust, or supervision with athletes
- Handles cash or other assets of the Local Program
- Chaperones athletes and may stay overnight or transport athletes

The Class A Volunteer Process can be located at the following site:

<https://www.specialolympicswisconsin.org/get-involved/volunteer/class-a-volunteers/>. The Class A Volunteer Process consists of:

1. The Protective Behaviors Training and Test
2. Class A Volunteer Application Form, which includes uploading acceptable photo identification (driver's license, passport, school ID or state issued ID; driver's license must be provided if volunteer is driving in their volunteer capacity)
3. A background check
4. Completion of the Special Olympics Wisconsin Communicable Disease Waiver.

All volunteers must be approved by Special Olympics Wisconsin prior to commencing any Class A Volunteer duties. All volunteers listed as coaches or chaperones, or listed on a housing form for competition must be a current, approved Class A Volunteer prior to athlete training and competition. *

** If serving as a coach, Concussion Training must also be completed.*

****Volunteers under the age of 18 must complete the class A minor form, the Protective Behaviors Training and Test if age 16 and over, and the Special Olympics Wisconsin Communicable Disease Waiver.**

All volunteer information must be renewed every three years.

Class B Volunteers

Class B Volunteers include volunteers who participate in one-day, day-of events, walk-on volunteers, or Healthy Athletes volunteers. Class B Volunteers have more limited contact with athletes, and do not have any contact with a Program's cash or assets.

While Class B Volunteers have limited contact with athletes, a strict registration protocol must still be followed, in accordance with your Accredited Program's procedure.

- Class B Volunteers must sign in and produce a valid photo ID on the day of the event for which they volunteer.

- When checking in as a Class B Volunteer, the volunteer must provide the following information:
 - Name
 - Complete Address
 - Phone Number
 - Group Affiliation (if any)

Disqualifiers

In order to ensure the safety of Special Olympics athletes, Unified Sports partners, and other participants, Special Olympics is selective with its volunteers. While Special Olympics is committed to a culture of teamwork and inclusion for all, there are disqualifiers for potential volunteers.

Disqualifiers for Being a Volunteer Include, but are not limited to:

- A felony arrest / prosecution
- Child abuse, or any role in causing a child's death
- Kidnapping
- Sexual abuse or misconduct
- Neglect of a child or any other individual for whom the potential volunteer has held responsibility
- Arson
- Driving while intoxicated (DWI), driving under the influence (DUI), or comparable offenses; or three or more moving violations within the past three years, disqualifies the volunteer from driving on behalf of Special Olympics for seven years

Coaches

Having a well-trained team of coaches is critical to the success of Special Olympics and Local Programs, as well as ensuring the happiness and development of athletes.

There are a number of targeting sources for Special Olympics coaches:

- Sports organizations
- Sports leagues
- Colleges and universities – including athletic departments, sororities and fraternities, academic departments, and/or residential halls
- Service groups
- Local officials' associations
- Adaptive Physical Education and Physical Education teachers
- Special Education and General Education teachers
- Coaches (current or former) at the elementary or secondary school level

- College students in Special Education programs

Types of Special Olympics Volunteer Coach Roles

Special Olympics Wisconsin is continually evolving and enhancing its coach education system to meet the needs of volunteer coaches and the athletes they coach. The Coach Education System identifies basic minimum requirements for all coaches and recommendations for continuing education. In order to maintain certification, a coach must update the Certified Coach requirements every three years.

Certified Coach (Entry Level Requirements)

- Class A Form / Complete Background Check / Protective Behaviors Training
- Special Olympics Wisconsin General Coaches Certification

Continuing Education* (optional)

- Coaching Special Olympics Athletes – online course via Human Kinetics Coach Education (formerly ASEP) or in person training conducted by a Program approved trainer
- Coaching Unified Sports (for Unified Sports coaches) – online course via NFHS or in person training conducted by a Program approved trainer
- Sports Specific Course – online for those sports where online courses have been developed or in-person sport specific training

** NOTE: Level required of Head Coaches attending Special Olympics USA Games in the specific sport being coached, including all Certified Coach requirements.*

Advanced Education** (optional)

- Principles of Coaching Course – online, or in-person training conducted by a Program approved trainer

*** NOTE: Level required of Head Coaches attending World Games, including all Certified Coach and Continuing Education trainings.*

Continuing Education

Additional coach education is encouraged, and is available in a variety of locations. A non-comprehensive list of courses of continuing education include:

- Special Olympics Resources:
<https://resources.specialolympics.org/sports-essentials>
- Special Olympics Learning Portal: <https://learn.specialolympics.org/>
- National Federation of State High School Associations:
<https://nfhslearn.com/>

Retaining Coaches

Retaining coaches is critical for maintaining trust and relationships with athletes, Unified partners, volunteers, and families. There are a number of ways to retain coaches and build a stronger Special Olympics Wisconsin community.

- Provide an initial meeting to review coaching role.
- Empower the coach to be the leader of their team.
- Ensure effective communication prior to and throughout the season.
- Offer opportunities for input, including the opportunity to debrief after the season in preparation for the next year.
- Encourage continued education, and provide recognition at every new training.
- Establish your own Coach of the Year Award; submit entry to Special Olympics North America Coach of the Year Program.
- Promote advancement in the movement, such as selection to coach at a National, Regional, or World Games.
- Invite coaches to participate in other events throughout the year.

Families and Caregivers

Families and caregivers – parents, siblings, and others who play a key role in direct support for athletes – are a vital component of the Special Olympics movement. These individuals engage at various levels of activity and participation within the Local Program, but all can prove valuable to its success.

Communication with, and outreach to, families and caregivers is a key role within the Local Program. When possible, the Local Program should maintain a position on its Management Team with specific goals of providing opportunities for family involvement. Duties of this role may include:

- Keep regular contact with families directly, and coordinate with communications team for additional outreach through their channels. A family newsletter could be a consideration as part of the communications strategy.
- Create a welcome letter for new athletes and their families, which includes opportunities for families and caregivers to volunteer with the Local Program.
- Host meetings and events dedicated to families and caregivers, such as:
 - A new family orientation session
 - Hospitality events for family networking, and to gather contact information from participants
 - An annual picnic highlighting the sports season
 - Regular meetings to get feedback

Working with Agency/Provider Staff & Volunteers

Older athletes who participate in Special Olympics may live in group homes or other supported living environments, and may be assisted by trained caregivers. Turnover of group homes staff members is quite high for a variety of reasons, and you may find challenges communicating with staff. Local Programs need to establish the most effective means for communicating with direct care staff, articulating expectations and needs for their support. Some staff may have interest in joining your Local Program as a coach, volunteer, or Unified Sports partner.

Engaging families in any of the diverse roles in Special Olympics will strengthen your Local Program. Visit the Special Olympics Resources page on families to explore ways to actively engage athletes' families and caregivers:

<https://www.specialolympics.org/our-work/families>

Codes of Conduct

Special Olympics Wisconsin Code of Conducts can be found in the Appendix of this document.

- Athlete
- Coach/Volunteer
- Spectator
- Family member