**UNIFIED CHAMPION SCHOOLS**

**ORGANIZING MEETINGS AND CONDUCTING SESSIONS WITH THE NATIONAL EDUCATOR ADVISORY COMMITTEES.**

# Introduction

## 1.1 What is a National Educator Advisory Committee?

A National Educator Advisory Committee (NEAC) is a group of diverse teachers, coaches, and education professionals in a Special Olympics Program that meets regularly to discuss notable Special Olympics topics.

National Educator Advisory Committees can vary from Program to Program and cover topics most relevant to their respective communities. For instance, in one place, a NEAC may serve as a liaison with local partners and community members, while in another Program, a NEAC's focus could be to provide guidance and recommendations regarding the Program’s work with schools.

Above all, National Educator Advisory Committees should ensure that educators' voices are considered in your Program and that their voices are heard. Below are five examples of functions that a NEAC can carry out. Please note that these are not the only functions of A NEAC, and you can customize them to suit your unique needs:

1. Provide advice and recommendations to the Program related to their work with schools.
2. Discuss critical issues, such as how to reach and engage more schools.
3. Share feedback about Special Olympics projects and events in their local communities.
4. Serve as a liaison with relevant stakeholders.
5. Support the development of resources, for example, proposals.

Finally, note that the NEAC lacks the formal authority to govern the Program. This means that the NEAC cannot issue directives that must be followed. Instead, the NEAC provides recommendations and essential information.

## 1.2 To whom is this document intended?

To all staff members of Special Olympics Programs collaborating with schools— especially those who have a National Educator Advisory Committee or want to start one.

## 1.3 How to use this document?

Please use this document at your convenience. This document highlights common practices of National Educator Advisory Committees, but you are welcome to take the material that is most relevant to the culture and context within your Program. Please read it and take the time to analyze it. The document is divided into four main parts: the introduction, tips on establishing a NEAC in your Program, suggestions for running successful meetings with the NEAC, and final thoughts to consider. We hope that you find this information helpful and wish you all the best in your work!

# Advice on Creating a National Educator Advisory Committee

## **2.1** Find the right **people**

The NEAC members must be willing to participate and support Unified Champion Schools programming. They can provide valuable experience, perspectives, and expertise that enrich a Program’s work.

When recruiting NEAC members, doing so strategically and equitably is essential. This involves considering their experience, knowledge of the field/topic, and any specific expertise necessary for advancing the project. Additionally, the NEAC members are recommended to represent the project's target audience, in this case, educators.

## 2.2 Establish a time of participation

Please keep in mind that NEAC members follow a term of service, where they are appointed for a specific period, which may also have term limits. Determining the most suitable term length for your Program is essential - one year, two years, three years, four years, five years, six years, etc.

## Define the mandate, purpose, and objectives

The Program usually determines these aspects. This will guide the NEAC's work and ensure that every meeting is purposeful. Furthermore, it is recommended to have a written mandate (the Committee’s reason for being) and discuss it thoroughly within the NEAC once it is established. Also, a good practice is to have an initial document that can include:

* The Name of the NEAC
* The mandate, purpose, and objectives
* The responsibilities of the NEAC
* The NEAC’s recruitment process and time of participation
* The NEAC’s ideal composition
* The NEAC’s ways of working— including meeting frequency, roles, responsibilities, and expectations.
* Any necessary resources

## 2.4 Identify roles and expectations

NEAC members, for example, can participate in meetings, share their opinions and specialized knowledge, review materials if needed, and seek feedback from their respective communities. The Program can handle the meetings' logistics, such as organizing the agenda, taking minutes, and overseeing the sessions.

## 2.5 Volunteer work

If NEAC’s members' time is unpaid, it is essential to be clear that their participation in the committee is *ad honorem[[1]](#footnote-1).* Also, there are meaningful ways to recognize the NEAC members' support. For example, have them on your Program’s webpage, provide them with certificates, and have refreshments and materials in every meeting.

# Ideas on how to organize NEAC meetings

Establishing a clear definition of the NEAC work process right from the start is vital. This includes clarifying how the Committee will conduct meetings, make recommendations, and evaluate their work.

## 3.1 First meeting

* You might want to consider sending out invitation letters.
* Define if your meeting will be in person or virtual. If possible, and because this is the first meeting, it is highly recommended to do it in person.
* Plan the agenda. Use this meeting to discuss the NEAC mandate, objectives, responsibilities, expectations, and working methods. Remember to introduce Special Olympics and the Unified Champion School model.
* Gather the relevant background materials. If possible, send a copy of these documents to all the NEAC members at least one week in advance, along with a copy of the meeting agenda.
* If feasible, consider providing refreshments such as coffee, tea, water, juices, and healthy snacks. This thoughtful gesture is always well received in any session.
* Take a deep breath and appreciate the fantastic opportunity to receive support from a larger group of individuals who can contribute to the success of your Program.

## 3.2 Topic ideas for following meetings

Imagine that the NEAC in your Program provides project recommendations, event suggestions, and support for any issues you wish to discuss. They have decided to meet in person every three months. **What kind of topics could you present? The correct answer is the ones your Program needs!** Let’s see the following example:

Special Olympics Naboo established a NEAC and had its first meeting. Their primary function is to provide project recommendations, event suggestions, and support for any issues the Program wishes to discuss. According to their most urgent needs, these are the topics the Program wants to cover during the meetings in 2024:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **MONTH** | **TOPIC** |
| January | Recommendations to continue Unified Champion Schools (UCS) programming in times of political crisis. |
| April | How to approach school leaders within the Naboo Educative System. |
| July | Recommendations to promote sports as a powerful tool to promote inclusion |
| October | Expansion of UCS programming to rural areas. |

Please note that the Program looks forward to having the NEAC members’ expertise and recommendations on these topics. Something great about the NEAC is that they are an opportunity to learn from educators.

## Agenda Template Example

Feel free to customize this template according to your needs:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| [Insert the name of the event.] | | | | | |
| [Insert day and date of the event]  [Insert time of the event]  [Insert location or venue for the event] | | | | | |
| [Insert the facilitator name]  [Insert the co-facilitator name] | | | | | |
| Contact [insert the name and number of whom to contact in case of emergency, for example, technological problems] | | | | | |
| **Start time** | **Finish time** | **Duration** | **Actions [Insert description of what needs to be done]** | **Facilitator** | **Materials needed** |
| 6:00 pm | 6:05 pm | 5 min | Welcoming and introduction | Ana | - |
| 6:05 pm | 6:20 pm | 15 min | Ice breaker activity | Ralph | - |
| 6:20 pm | 6:25 pm | 5 min | A brief review of the topics discussed in the previous meeting | Ralph | PowerPoint presentation |
| 6:25 pm | 6:40 pm | 15 min | A presentation about the session topic. Why this topic? Concerns? What does the Program expect from the NEAC? | Ana | PowerPoint presentation |
| 6:40 pm | 7:10 pm | 30 min | NEAC members roundtable.  In pairs, you invite the members to reflect on the topic using flipcharts. | NEAC members | Flipcharts, markers |
| 7:10 | 7:25 pm | 15 min | Each pair present their reflection to the group. | NEAC members | Flipcharts |
| 7:25 pm | 7:30 pm | 5 pm | Wrap up and meeting conclusion | Ana | - |

## NEAC meeting checklist form

As the lead for these NEAC meetings, what actions will you take?

What to do **before** each meeting?

If necessary, develop your meeting run of show.

Identify the facilitator and cofacilitator.

Know your group in advance: how many participants will you have? What type of educators are they?

Prepare the materials. For example, agendas, pens, nametags, group activities materials, list templates, flipcharts, pilots, masking tape, and evaluations.

Share the agendas and session materials at least one week in advance. In this way, they can read and be prepared before the meeting.

Tech check (charger, adapter, screen, projector)

Room check (chairs, temperature, wall space)

Determine a seating plan for the participants.

If possible, plan refreshments for the participants.

What to do **during** each meeting?

Be yourself 😊

Follow your plan but be flexible if necessary. Don’t hesitate to add or remove an activity if required.

Ask the co-facilitator to take notes.

Jointly with the group, create the ground rules from the beginning. For example:

* Keep an open mind!
* During discussions, value other participants’ contributions.
* Be brief when sharing ideas.
* Avoid side conversations or being on your phone.
* Be curious.
* Be inclusive.

Identify the group energy. For example, if people look like they are going to fall asleep, stop for a second and do an activity or give them a 5-minute break.

If participants agree, remember to take some lovely photos and videos of the meeting.

Be mindful of the time.

What to do **after** the meeting?

Every now and then, get the NEAC members’ feedback.

Gratitude, thank everyone for their contributions.

Clean and pack up (leave the room better than you found it).

Systematize the meeting. Notice that this is a way to improve your performance, but it also communicates and disseminates lessons learned and knowledge produced.

Design strategies to follow- up with the NEAC. How will you keep them active? Are you considering using a WhatsApp group or sending regular emails? Would you also organize team-building sessions periodically?

## Other promising actions to consider

**Member recognition:** If it is not feasible to compensate volunteers, explore alternative methods to demonstrate gratitude for their efforts. This could involve providing refreshments at meetings, reimbursing travel expenses, offering training sessions, or presenting plaques or certificates of recognition.

**Orientation/team-building sessions:** It would benefit new NEAC members to participate in an orientation session covering the project and their roles and responsibilities. This will not only increase their knowledge but also allow them to enhance their engagement and participation skills.

**Rotate meeting location:** To promote increased participation and engagement from NEAC members, it is advantageous to alternate the location of committee meetings among those who can host them. This way, everyone can have a chance to both host and attend meetings.

# Final thoughts

It's important to keep in mind that for a successful NEAC, you must:

1) Have the Committee mandate, purpose, and objectives clearly defined.

2) Do the recruitment of the members in a strategic and equitable way.

3) The roles and expectations of the members are clearly defined.

4) The members' contributions are appreciated and valued.

5) The Committee conducts regular evaluations of its work.

Thank you, and good luck!

**References**

HC Link. [Governing for Partnership Success](https://en.healthnexus.ca/sites/en.healthnexus.ca/files/resources/governing_partnership_success.pdf). Toronto, ON. 2010.

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1. “For the honor of,” that is not seeking any material reward. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)