

SPECIAL OLYMPICS
COLLEGE CLUB
SUPPORT GUIDE

Special Olympics
Unified Champion Schools®

UPDATED 2026

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IDEAs that Work
U.S. Office of Special Education Programs

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Special Olympics
Unified Champion Schools®

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SECTION 1:
Introduction to Special Olympics

Special Olympics Overview

Special Olympics is an international organization, structured into 7 regions: Africa, Asia Pacific, East Asia, Europe/Eurasia, Latin America, Middle East/North Africa, and North America. Most of the programming happens at the local level. This includes schools, communities, and local organizations that carry out the mission of Special Olympics.

Mission

The mission of Special Olympics is to provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy, and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills, and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes, and the community.

What is Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools?

Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® (SOUCS) is a program, kindergarten through university, that promotes social inclusion through intentionally planned activities between people with and without intellectual disabilities. This is accomplished by implementing the three following components into school structures, norms, and culture.

The 3 Components:

1. **Special Olympics Unified Sports®** unites people with and without intellectual disabilities on the same team. It was inspired by a simple principle: training together and playing together is a quick path to friendship and inclusion. There are 3 Unified Sports models: competitive, player development, and recreation. Read more about Unified Sports here.
    - Examples: Unified intramural sports, Unified fitness, sports clubs, Unified Sports experiences, participation in off-campus tournaments, participation in community Unified Sports, and other non-competitive recreational activities.
2. **Inclusive Leadership** invites people with and without intellectual disabilities to develop their leadership skills and fulfill meaningful roles together.
    - Examples: Special Olympics College Club, Student Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) or Association of Student Athletes (ASA), any other club that is Unified and promotes inclusive programming on campus (ex: Best Buddies, Greek organizations, sport clubs).
3. **Whole Campus Engagement** invites new people to the inclusion revolution through advocacy, awareness, and amplification.
    - Examples: Spread the Word campaigns, inclusion pledge, fundraisers (Polar Plunge, etc.), Unified Sports days, clinics, fun runs, homecoming week engagement, and Unified exhibitions or experiences.

Special Olympics Unified Sports®



Inclusive Leadership

Whole Campus Engagement



Terms & Language

College: the term used in this resource for all postsecondary education institutions. Includes colleges, universities, junior colleges, and community colleges, amongst others.

Inclusive Postsecondary Education (IPSE): IPSE programs are programs designed for students with intellectual or developmental disabilities to attend college, participate in campus life, and build career and independent living skills. Check the Think College map to see if you have an IPSE program near you.

Intellectual disability (ID): Intellectual disability is a condition characterized by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior that originates before the age of 22 (American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities).

Special Olympics athlete: An individual who is a student or from the community with intellectual disability. Refer to participants in Special Olympics as "Special Olympics athletes" rather than "Special Olympians" or "Special Olympic athletes". At the college level, it is recommended that athletes should be within the ideal age range of 18-34 years old.

Special Olympics Program: A Special Olympics Program is the state, province, or area responsible for Special Olympics programming within its local areas.

Unified pair: A pair of one Special Olympics athlete and one Unified partner. This term may be used in sports or leadership opportunities.

Unified partner: College student without intellectual disability that is a member of the college club and/or participates in Unified Sports.

Unified Sports: Joins people of similar ages and abilities, with and without intellectual disabilities on the same team.



SECTION 2:
Growing Your Special Olympics College Club

What is a Special Olympics College Club?

A Special Olympics College Club is a registered student organization on campus that carries out the 3 components of Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools.

Fast Facts:

- The executive board (e-board) is the group that leads the club.
- Club advisors are usually staff or faculty at the school who support the club.
- Clubs plan and execute their own activities within their campus environment. Clubs may also participate in state, regional, national, or international competitions with the support of their Special Olympics Program.

Getting Started Checklist

Getting started is simple. This checklist is a great place to start.
More information about each step in this checklist are in the sections below.



☐ **1** **Connect with your Special Olympics Program**
How to contact and what to discuss

☐ **2** **Contact Student Activities Office**
How they can spport and help you get started

☐ **3** **Assemble a Team**
Build your executive board, find an advisor, and recruit participants

☐ **4** **Build Executive Board Foundations**
Norms and goals, education, planning, first event

☐ **5** **Plan to Sustain (Section 3)**
Transitioning leadership, national recognition, and best practices

Step 1: Connect with your Special Olympics Program

The first step in starting a college club at your school is getting in contact with your Special Olympics Program (your state, provincial, local, or area office). The Program will serve as the club's main contact regarding up-to-date information and resources. The Special Olympics Program must approve the club in order to use the Special Olympics name and branding.

Contact us at Special Olympics North America to get connected.



Example topics to discuss with your Program

- Your interests or questions
- What is Unified Champion Schools and the 3 components?
- What are the local needs of the Special Olympics Program?
- Who to collaborate with on campus?

Step 2: Contact Student Activities Office

The next step to establish a club is to reach out to the college to find the necessary steps to become a registered student organization. The steps for each college may be different, but overall, the process is similar.

The department may be named “Student Activities Office”, “Student Government Association”, “Office for Student Organizations, Leadership & Involvement” or something similar.

When registering a club, most colleges will require the following:

- Constitution
- Club Name & Logo
- Contact Information

Here are our recommendations:

Constitution
A college will likely require the club to have a constitution. A constitution provides the foundation and guidelines for how the club will function. Your school may have a template they want you to use. If not, refer to this sample constitution.

Club Name & Logo
To help ensure clubs are in alignment with Special Olympics branding guidelines and to avoid possible trademark issues, please follow these guidelines

Correct Club Names:

- ✓ Special Olympics College Club at [College/University Name]
- ✓ Special Olympics Club at [College/University Name]
- ✓ Special Olympics [College/University Name] College Club

Incorrect Club Names:

- ✗ SO College at [College/University Name]
- ✗ [College/University Name] Special Olympics Club
- ✗ [College/University Name] Special Olympics

Contact Information
Include your club President, and any students who will be involved in getting the club started. Consider having contacts across multiple graduating years. Many clubs find it useful to create a club email account that all members have access to and can be passed down through leadership transitions.

Helpful Tips:

• When registering a club, a college may ask for proof of permission to use the name Special Olympics and any associated logos. If a college does require permission, contact your local Special Olympics Program. They can provide permission and all guidelines associated with logo usage.

• For proper use of the logo, please refer to the Special Olympics College Clubs Branding Guidelines.



Step 3: Assemble a Team

Colleges are full of students looking to get involved, and staff and faculty willing to support their goals. This section gives suggestions for executive board (e-board) positions, recruiting an advisor, and how to recruit members. In this section, it is helpful to note that there is a difference between the e-board and general members/participants.

- **Executive board or e-board:** this is the core leadership team that plans, executes, and participates in events and activities.
- **General members or participants:** this is the body of participants who show up to events and activities. Many general members are great prospects for future e-board leaders.
- **Advisor:** this is the staff or faculty support for the club. They can help connect to different departments on campus and navigate challenges.

Note: The time commitment for each position can change drastically depending on the club. Each position may spend 2-3 hours per week, some may spend 10+ hours per week. Find what works best for your leadership team.

Helpful Tips:

Leadership roles can be filled by athletes, partners, or Unified pairs. Many clubs choose to have elections, which is explained in section 3. When you get started, you may not have a pool of people yet to do an election.

Core Positions

These are oftentimes required positions:

President	• Oversees chapter logistics and all executive board positions • Organizes, plans, and runs meetings • Point of contact with Special Olympics Program, college, and advisor • Submits all paperwork to the school and local/national Special Olympics offices when necessary • Maintains club email
Vice President	• Supports the President as needed to keep the club running smoothly • Meet with committee chairs/liaison
Secretary	• Keeps detailed notes from meetings and records member attendance • Emails notes after each meeting • Distributes club announcements & reminders
Treasurer	• Establishes and maintains club's bank account • Keeps records of all expenses and deposits • Prepares budgets • Communicates budgetary necessities to college and Program



Additional Positions

Optional leadership positions as your club grows:

Fundraising Chair	• Plans and leads fundraising events • Partners with clubs and organizations to support fundraising efforts
Social Media and Marketing Chair	• Manages social media • Markets events • Connects with campus/local media • Works with SO Program and college on brand approvals
Partnerships Chair	• Builds partnerships with Greek life, clubs, athletes, schools, and community organizations to promote inclusion and collaboration • Coordinates collaborations with other clubs/groups/organizations
Unified Sports Chair	• Coordinates with Campus Recreation and/or athletics • Helps develop new Unified Sports opportunities • Teach and enforce Unified Sports rules when appropriate
Recruitment Chair	• Recruits athletes and partners • Works with SO Program and college to share about the club and upcoming meetings or events
Awareness Chair	• Plans awareness initiatives (ex: Spread the Word campaign, homecoming parade, etc.) • Integrates inclusion education and messaging into club activities • Seek training and education from the SO Program and college
Volunteer Chair	• Recruits volunteers through campus organizations • Tracks attendance • Ensures events are adequately staffed, educated, and trained

Advisor

Most schools require a faculty or staff member to serve as an advisor for the club. Find an advisor that will show an interest in and work productively with the club.

What do they do? The advisor should help the club with challenges, make connections with different departments, and be invited to meetings and/or events. Some advisors are heavily involved; others are there to sign the paperwork. Find an advisor that suits the level of support you need.

How do I find one? While finding an advisor, look for staff and faculty in sport management, intramural and recreation, and education. They are not required to be in these fields, but that is often a successful starting point.

- See the club advisor invitation template for an example letter inviting an advisor to be part of your club.

General Members

General members are the people involved in your club, not on your e-board. Many general members will make great future e-board leaders. General memberships can range from 5 to 100+. It will change as you grow! Both partners and athletes make up your general membership.

The strategies below can be effective for recruiting both athletes and partners. For more tailored recruitment, clubs have found success with the following strategies:

How do I recruit partners to join?

- Recruitment table during involvement or volunteer fairs
- Speak in classrooms
- Reach out to faculty members (Sports Management, Special Education, Health Studies, etc.)
- Meet with Campus Recreation
- Meet with Athletics
- Connect with Greek organizations
- Volunteer in the community and/or with other clubs

How do I recruit athletes to join?

- Connect with your Special Olympics Program
- Check to see if your college offers an inclusive post-secondary education program. Visit Think College for a list of schools and program contacts.
- See if there are any other clubs or education programs on campus that focus on promoting inclusion and acceptance of individuals with intellectual disabilities
    - Example: Best Buddies
- Meet with Office of Disability Services on campus

Connect with Special Olympics Partner Organizations

These organizations are committed to the inclusion movement of Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools through national partnerships. These organizations have established relationships and shared goals at the national level.

Campus Recreation

NIRSA: Leaders in Collegiate Recreation - In 2015, Special Olympics and the National Intramural and Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA) formed a partnership to bring Unified Sports to more college campuses. On your school's campus recreation staff webpage, look for the coordinator, assistant director, or the director of intramural or club sports.



Great connection for:

- Unified intramural sports leagues
- Unified Sports tournaments off campus
- Unified partner recruitment
- Facilities, equipment, and officiating

Athletics

NCAA DIII and NAIA are two collegiate athletic associations in partnership with Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools.

Find a NCAA DIII institution near you

Find a NAIA institution near you

When contacting athletics, ask to meet with the student athlete leadership council. The council names are:

- NCAA DIII – Student Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC)
- NAIA – Association of Student Athletes (ASA)

Great connection for:

- Unified Sports partners
- Whole campus engagement events
- Facilities and equipment
- Training student-athletes as Special Olympics coaches

Note: You may work with athletics outside of these associations and divisions! Many DI, DII, and community colleges in other associations are great supporters of Special Olympics.

Fraternity and Sorority

Sigma Tau Gamma and Alpha Phi Omega have chosen Special Olympics as their national philanthropy.

Find a Sigma Tau Gamma chapter near you

Find an Alpha Phi Omega chapter near you

Many fraternities and sororities across the country donate their time, resources, and money to the Special Olympics movement. They are great connections for:

- Unified Sports partners
- Whole campus engagement events
- Fundraising

Note: You may work with Greek organizations outside of these! Many sororities and fraternities may choose Special Olympics as their philanthropy on their own. Check your school's Greek life website or with the Student Affairs office to see if you have any on your campus.

Inclusive Postsecondary Education

Think College is a national partner of Special Olympics. Think College is the national coordinating center for inclusive postsecondary education programs who serve students with intellectual disabilities.

IPSE (IPSE) programs are educational programs for students with intellectual disabilities.

Find if your school has an IPSE program here.





Step 4: Build E-Board Foundations

This section overviews norms and goals, education, and planning for your first meeting and first semester.

Establish Norms and Goals

The e-board should come prepared with a general direction and structure for the club. The e-board should get together and decide:

- How often does the e-board need to get together?
- How often should all members get together?
- What Unified Sports do we want to offer? Should we leave this up to the membership to vote?
- How many activities do we aim to have each week, month, or semester? This helps everyone get an idea of how much time they should commit.

Helpful Tips:

Leaders from successful clubs report getting together with their e-board every other week. They use this time to plan, discuss ideas, and organize themselves so all participants can have a good experience.

Fast Fact:

The most common Unified Sports on campus are basketball, flag football, and soccer. However, any sport can be Unified!

E-Board Goal Examples:
People are significantly more likely to achieve their goals when they write them down, make a specific plan, and regularly share progress with a support partner or system. Here are some examples of goals your e-board should think through:

E-board goal: Build a strong and effective e-board who can successfully lead the club.

Action 1: Hold monthly e-board meetings with agendas and action items
Action 2: Ensure each e-board member has defined responsibilities and leadership opportunities
Action 3: Complete at least 1 leadership development activity or training as a board this academic year
Action 4: Do an end-of-semester reflection to celebrate our successes and identify areas for growth

Membership engagement goal: Create meaningful opportunities for members to connect, learn, and participate in club activities.

Action 1: Host 2-3 member events during the first semester
Action 2: Offer a variety of event types (ex: Unified Sports, social gathering, volunteer activity, awareness campaign)
Action 3: Gather member feedback after events

Member recruitment goal: Test multiple recruitment strategies to increase club awareness, attract new members, and identify the most effective outreach methods.

Action 1: Try at least 3 recruitment tactics during the first semester (ex: involvement fairs, classroom presentations, social media, residential hall outreach)
Action 2: Create a welcoming onboarding experience to encourage new members to stay involved.





Education: Inclusion Starts with Understanding

Staying informed is a best practice! There are trainings, videos, and documents that will help your e-board and members feel more prepared to host and execute activities that are engaging, intentional, and safe. Always ask your Special Olympics Program if there are new or recommended trainings or information you can have. Here are some places to get started:

- Learning Management System: offers online trainings on topics such as protective behaviors, coaches training, and implementing UCS. Create an account to access the trainings.
- What are Special Olympics Unified Sports?
- About Intellectual Disabilities
- 10 Tips for Working with People with Intellectual Disabilities

Helpful Tip:

Leave resources like these available for your members to access any time. When they join, make sure they know they exist, and tell them where they can find them if they need them.

Person-First Language

Person-first language is what we use at Special Olympics, though some individuals with disabilities prefer identity-first language.

- Person-first language states the person before their disability (i.e. person with a disability) and considers the disability as only one part of the individual's identity; whereas, identity-first language states the disability before the person (i.e. disabled person) and considers the disability to be a central part of the person's identity.
- Person-first language tends to be more common in the intellectual disability community. You can always listen to how someone refers to themselves or ask how someone prefers to be referred to if you are unsure if they prefer person-first or identity-first language.

Understanding the "For" Versus "With" Mindset

Understanding the "for" versus "with" mindset is a foundation that helps build positive perceptions of people with intellectual disabilities (ID).

- The "with" mindset helps build positive perceptions of people with intellectual disabilities (ID) by encouraging us to see them as partners rather than recipients. It does not diminish the importance of needed services and supports. Instead, it challenges people without ID to create space for everyone to contribute, lead, and reach their full potential.
- While doing things for people with ID often comes from good intentions, doing things with people with ID recognizes their perspectives, talents, and leadership as essential to stronger programs and communities.
- This concept closely aligns with the phrase "Nothing about us without us."

"For"	**"With"**
Approach: You organize events, coach, or volunteer ***for*** people with ID. You provide the experience for them to participate in.	**Approach:** You train, compete, and lead ***alongside*** people with ID. You experience what they experience.
Dynamic: It views people with ID as people to be ***helped.*** It focuses on providing charity driven by sympathy.	**Dynamic:** It treats people with ID as ***equals***. It values their voice, choices, and skills. It focuses on empathy.
Outcome: People with ID remain ***dependent*** on others. They are ***passive recipients*** of services rather than active leaders.	**Outcome:** It builds ***genuine friendships*** on ***mutual understanding and respect.*** This can empower people with ID to take on leadership roles on and off the field.

Adopting the "with" versus "for" mindset sets us up for a world where people with ID take lead, make decisions, and build lives they want to lead.





Sport Rules & Training

Work with your Special Olympics Program to get the most up-to-date rules and trainings. Your Program might offer in-person training, online training, or informational guides.

Ask your Program for:

• Sport rules

• Coaches training

• Officials training

Meaningful Involvement

The principle of meaningful involvement ensures that every player is given an opportunity to contribute to the success of their team through their unique skills and qualities.

This means that every teammate:

1. Demonstrates sufficient sport-specific skills and game understanding.
2. Plays a valued role on the team that emphasizes their personal talents.
3. Has an opportunity to play without a heightened risk of injury.

When creating Unified Sports teams, it is important that both athletes and partners are assessed as to their abilities and game play. While there could be noticeable differences in their skills, the coach will be able to observe their overall performance to determine if they have the skills and understanding to safely participate on the team.

The goal is that every teammate should play a meaningful role and have the opportunity to contribute their strengths to their team.

Plan Your Semester

Having an idea of what's ahead of you will help you be prepared. Many Unified teams host weekly or monthly events or activities. Some teams choose to participate in seasonal sports such as flag football, basketball, or soccer, while others may focus on different types of activities like bowling nights, kickball, cornhole, or social events.

1. Consider how often you want to get together and who should be involved.

Frequency

- Weekly
- Monthly
- By semester or term
- Annual

Possible Support Systems

- Special Olympics College Club
- Special Olympics Program
- Campus Recreation
- Athletics
- Office of Student Activities
- Inclusive Postsecondary Education (IPSE) program
- Office of Accessibility
- Schools or programs of study: Campus Media or School of Communications, Sport Management, School of Education, Therapeutic Recreation or Adaptive Recreation, Occupational Therapy



2. Plan it out

Activity	Frequency	Involvement & Roles
Tabling event	• Fall semester • Campus volunteer fair	• College Club (gather materials, staff table) • Office of Student Activities (help sign up) • Special Olympics Program (lend tablecloth, signage, promo and informational materials, swag)
Unified flag football intramural league	• Weekly for 8 weeks • Fall semester	• College Club (recruit participants, coordinate between campus rec & SO Program) • Campus Recreation department (scheduling, facilities, officials) • Special Olympics Program (help with athlete recruitment, support campus rec with rules & recommendations)
Homecoming parade	• Fall semester	• College Club (recruit participants, coordinate float/banner, work with school to sign up) • Office of Student Activities & Involvement (help us sign up and get approved)
Unified kickball tournament	• Fall semester • One day	• College Club (recruit participants, coordinate event) • Campus Recreation (facilities)
Unified basketball intramural league	• Weekly for 8 weeks • Spring semester	• College Club (recruit participants, coordinate between campus rec & SO Program) • Campus Recreation department (scheduling, facilities, officials) • Special Olympics Program (help with athlete recruitment, support campus rec with rules & recommendations)

2. Plan it out (continued)

Activity	Frequency	Involvement & Roles
Unified College Championship Week	• Spring semester	• College Club (register in the fall, start planning activities, host activities, recruit participants, post on social media) • Special Olympics North America (receive registration and activity menu from SONA) • Special Olympics Program (help with athlete recruitment, amplify our events/ activities, connect with local media) • Campus Recreation department (facilities, officials) • IPSE program (recruit students with IDD on campus to participate, amplify our events/ activities)
NIRSA regional or national tournament	• Spring semester	• College Club (register, train, fundraise, organize travel) • Special Olympics Program (funding support, approve our team to compete, coach and player education/training) • NIRSA (rules, tournament information, lodging recommendations)
End of Year Celebration	• During Unified College Championship Week	• College Club (organize gathering, recruit participants, host event)

3. Make it Happen! Real Schedule from a College Club

Colorado State University Fall Schedule

E-Board Meetings
Every other Thursday
6:00 p.m.-7:00 p.m.

Flag Football Practice
Every Wednesday 6:00 p.m.-7:30 p.m starting the second week of classes going until the state flag football tournament

Regional Flag Football Tournament
Mid-October

State Flag Football Tournament
Early November

Basketball Practice
Every Wednesday 6:00 p.m.-7:30 p.m. starting after flag football state tournament going until finals week, taking off Thanksgiving break

Halloween Party!
Everyone dresses in costumes and makes toilet paper mummies, last Thursday of October

Bowling Party!
End of the semester

You can find some other sample schedules here!

Helpful Tip:

Schedule your weekly events on the same day and at the same time whenever possible. Consistency makes it easier for participants to remember when events take place and helps build stronger attendance throughout the semester.

Your First All-Member Event

The e-board has worked hard laying the foundations. This is an exciting milestone! The first impression is important, so think of how you can make everyone eager to come back. Here are some example first-member meetings/events.



Example 1:

Unified Kickball at the Campus Recreation & Wellness Center

- Welcome! Introduce the e-board and have members do an icebreaker.
- Warm-ups: Before we get into teams we'll have an athlete-led warm up.
- Game time! We will split into teams and play a game or two of Unified kickball.
- Cool down: before departing, we will share about our upcoming events.

Example 2:

Get to Know you, Bingo!

- Make a "get to know you" bingo card or find one online and print them off. Make sure you have markers or something to check bingos off with.
- Have people walk around and get to know everyone while also marking their bingo cards off.
- First one to get a bingo wins!
- Share your goals for the first year, ask for member input. Share the date of the next all-member event.

Step 5: Plan to Sustain

Planning to sustain is important because it prevents a drop-off in activities or engagement once students graduate or people transition out of the club.

See section 3 for ideas on how to make sure your club lasts beyond your involvement.



SECTION 3:
Sustaining Your Club

This section shares best practices reported from other Special Olympics College Clubs on how to create a club that lasts. National School Recognition Program, roles and responsibilities, transitioning leadership, establishing finances, risk management, communication best practices, and social media are broken down.

National School Recognition

Many Unified Champion Schools find it helpful to use the National School Recognition Program as a roadmap. This gives schools goals to work toward and milestones look forward to.

The National School Recognition Program recognizes schools who demonstrate commitment to inclusion, meeting all national standards of excellence. The core areas of the application are in Unified Sports, inclusive youth leadership, whole school engagement, and sustainability. To apply, talk with your Special Olympics Program.

Learn more about the national recognition program here.

Roles and Responsibilities

Establishing clear roles and responsibilities with the groups you work with allows everyone to work better together. This chart breaks down general responsibilities of a student club, the university or departments at the university, and the Special Olympics Program.

Special Olympics College Club E-board	College/University	Special Olympics Program
Recruits partners and athletes Partner with other departments, clubs, and groups on campus Communicates with campus recreation or athletics to reserve fields, get officials, select league nights, etc. Includes membership opportunities and leadership roles to people with and without ID Meets at least once a month Actively planning and responding to events, needs, and requests for engagement Plan, organize, and execute events and activities	Campus recreation delivers intramural league (schedule games, officials, awards) Verifies partner eli-gibility to participate (current, enrolled students) Informs of ad-vancement oppor-tunities with NIRSA or athletics Student Affairs of-fice may provide funding opportuni-ties available to student organizations Guides clubs to ap-propriate designa-tion (sport club v. general club) Encourages stu-dents with ID to-wards involvement on campus Provides facili-ty/venue and staff for event support Promotes and re-ports on events	Provides club with contacts to reach local athletes Advises on administration of Unified Sports (rules, partner education, etc.) Verifies Special Olympics athlete eligibility Informs of advancement opportunities with state events Advises club on inclusive leadership practices & how to meaningfully engage all members Informs of Special Olympics leadership opportunities Provides guidance regarding Program-led campaigns that schools can join Attends and supports events Can sometimes provide financial support



Transitioning Leadership

Developing a plan for leadership changes should begin at least the semester before the leadership change will take place. While this may be early, it is important to give new club leaders time to learn their role from their predecessor and learn how the club works.

Preparing

- Find a time that works well for the e-board to transition leadership. Some do this at the end of fall, some do this at the end of spring.

Recruiting

- Athletes and partners in your current membership are great prospects. Who consistently shows up to meetings and events? Who offers help during practices and meetings? Anyone who stands out should be kept in mind and encouraged to continue the good work.
- Create an application. List out the key responsibilities of the open roles and ask interested members tell you why they would be a good fit.

Selecting

There are a few ways this can happen. Discuss among the e-board which you think is the best fit. Many clubs call these “elections”.

- The current e-board reviews applications, votes, and decides. The outgoing e-board members select who will replace them.
- The membership votes. Everyone has the opportunity to apply, the e-board recommends the top candidates and the membership votes for their incoming leaders.

Training

It is a good idea to hold elections before your current leaders transition out.

- Include incoming e-board members in meetings and assign tasks for events to encourage hands-on learning. Some clubs do this for a semester or for the whole year.
- Create a guide. A guide of positions, typical events, contacts, logins and goals are a great resource to pass down to future generations of leadership. Each e-board can update it for the next. Check out our example here!

The final handoff

- Communicate leadership changes and new contacts to your members, the Special Olympics Program, and anyone at the school who needs to know.

Risk Management

Work with your school and your Special Olympics Program.

Every school and SO Program has different expectations when it comes to risk management and liability. It is important to establish what those expectations are so you know what forms are required of your members, what to do in the event of an injury, or any other areas around risk.

Here are some questions we suggest asking:

- Are there registrations, waivers, trainings, or certifications required by either the college or the SO Program for student members/participants with or without ID? For non-student members/participants with or without ID?
- Does the college or SO Program have any additional requirements for club officers, coaches, advisors, staff, or other positions that supervise/lead participants with ID?
- What types of situations, incidents, or injuries/medical events should we report if they happen during a club activity? What are the reporting procedures and to whom should we report? What should we be doing in the event of an emergency at a club activity?
- Are there additional risk management requirements if we participate in a Special Olympics event outside of our campus activities? What about a third-party events (such as a NIRSA tournament)?
- Who is responsible/liable if there is any harm or loss to person, property, or finances in connection with club activity? Are there certain insurance expectations or requirements?

Other topics to ask that may deal with risk:

• Use of Special Olympics and school brand
• Transportation
• Minors on campus (if offering youth programming)

Establishing Finances

Follow college and Special Olympics policies when setting up club finances. Stay transparent with your Special Olympics Program and Student Activities Office, and follow your school's financial procedures.

Here are questions we suggest asking:

- Ask your school if an annual budget is required. This budget template can be used to track revenues, expenses, and profits.
- Ask your school how to start and maintain your club bank account. Many schools offer trainings for students managing these accounts. In the future when you transition leadership, make sure incoming leaders meet school requirements.
- Ask your school how to access your funds. Some schools have specific requirements on how to access and use funds.
- Ask your Special Olympics Program about revenue sharing. For example, if your club raises money at a Special Olympics Polar Plunge ran by the SO Program, you may be eligible to get a percentage of those funds back to your club. Ask your Program how this is managed and what you need to know.

Communication Best Practices

Create a club email address that can be passed down from leader to leader, year after year. Personal emails may be preferred for contact between club leaders, advisors, college administration, and Special Olympics. Many clubs find a shared email more useful once leadership changes happen. This is usually managed by the club President, Vice President, Communications Chair, or a combination of a few.

Plan out your communications. Have a season of Unified flag football coming up? Make sure you start communicating to your participants well in advance. Your Special Olympics Program can help you connect with local athletes.

Create a group chat for your e-board and/or membership. Many students prefer a group chat over checking their email. Ask your e-board and members what they prefer.

Share your successes and challenges with your Special Olympics Program and your school. The Office of Student Affairs or a similar department may be able to help with common student organization challenges or questions. Your Special Olympics Program may be able to help troubleshoot with event challenges or questions. Above all, the school and the SO Program want to see you succeed! Use them as a support system and have transparent communication.

Social Media

Use social media as a communication and connection tool. Work with your Special Olympics Program to make sure you are following all brand guidelines.

- Share your meeting and event schedule
- Update your membership with timely news (ex: date changes, applications, etc.)
- Share impact stories about your club members and activities
- Connect with other Special Olympics College Clubs
- Tag and interact with your Special Olympics Program social media and Special Olympics North America

Share stories with local and national outlets

- Your Special Olympics Program likely has connections with local media outlets who may want to feature your club
- Your college may have their own media or communications program. Local campus media is a great way to share your story and recruit new members.



Helpful Tip:

Work with your Special Olympics Program to make sure you are following branding guidelines.

See this press release template for an example of how to reach out to your local media outlets.

Connect with Special Olympics

X:
@SpecialOlympics
@SONorthAmerica

Instagram:
@SpecialOlympics
@SONorthAmerica

Facebook:
@SpecialOlympics
@SONorthAmerica

TikTok:
@UnifiedGeneration



SECTION 4
Resources & Links

Special Olympics Resources

- Special Olympics Regions
- Inclusive language
- Learning Management System
- About Intellectual Disabilities
- 10 Tips for Working With People With Intellectual Disabilities

Unified Champion Schools

- Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools
- National Recognition Program
- Special Olympics Unified Sports

Getting a College Club Started

- Contact us at Special Olympics North America to get connected
- Press Release Template
- Club Advisor Invitation Template
- Sample Constitution
- Special Olympics College Clubs Branding Guidelines
- Budget Template

Partnerships

- National Intramural and Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA)
- Find a NCAA DIII institution near you
- Find a NAIA institution near you
- Find a Sigma Tau Gamma chapter near you
- Find an Alpha Phi Omega chapter near you
- Find if your school has an Inclusive Postsecondary Education (IPSE) program here

Social Media

- X: @SpecialOlympics and @SONorthAmerica
- Instagram: @SpecialOlympics and @SONorthAmerica
- Facebook: @SpecialOlympics and @SONorthAmerica
- Tiktok: @UnifiedGeneration

Thank you for reading through the Special Olympics College Club Support Guide! Best of luck in your future endeavors.

Should you have any questions, reach out to your local Special Olympics office.

For additional help, email socollege@specialolympics.org

Special Olympics
Unified Champion Schools®