



# Inspiring a New Way to Lead

## Evaluation of the Special Olympics LEADERSHIP ACADEMY: 2014 - 2016

May 2017

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### The Leadership Academy in the words of participants...

*"I feel the organization values the upward progression of the staff. I also can't tell you how much it means to me that our organization put funding to help develop me as a leader."*

*"It was transformative. It changed the way I see the project in my country and in the region. Changes in SO have been falling here like little drops of small rain; the overall vision has not been so clear. Since the Academy, I have a better view of the work done globally and within my region. Now I am more engaged in the changes, including the strategic plan. Our national program is now working to clarify what we can do as an organization."*

*"The Leadership Academy has more inspired me to get devoted to the movement. I feel that I have become more engaged in the activities and I am more eager to learn about the achievements that athletes have gained."*

*"Before the Academy, I felt honored to be part of Special Olympics. But now I feel it is my responsibility."*

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### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Leadership Academy Evaluation resulted from the collaboration and support of a number of people whose logistical and substantive assistance greatly contributed to this report. First, we thank the evaluation team members, Meg Kinghorn, Independent Evaluation Lead, Olga Yakimakho, Internal Manager and Champion, and internal supporters Svetlana Fenichel and Denis Doolan. Most importantly, the Evaluation Team would like to extend warm thanks to the Leadership Academy participants who shared their stories and accomplishments through the online survey, in conversation during in-depth interviews, and via email.

# Contents

I.	<b>Executive Summary .....</b>	1
II.	<b>Introduction.....</b>	3
	Evaluation Methodology.....	3
	Evaluation Team.....	3
III.	<b>Academy Overview: 2014 - 2016.....</b>	4
	Curriculum .....	4
	Participant Reaction .....	5
	Post-Workshop Engagement.....	6
	Participant Reaction to Post-Workshop Follow-Up.....	7
IV.	<b>Academy Results.....</b>	9
	A New Mindset Among Leaders.....	9
	Enhanced Teamwork and Program Performance .....	10
	Expanded National and State Programs.....	10
	New Opportunities for Athletes, Families and Communities .....	11
V.	<b>Conclusions.....</b>	13
	Continued Relevance of the Leadership Academy Goals.....	13
	Effectiveness of Academy Modules and Pedagogy .....	13
	Impact of the Leadership Academy .....	13
VI.	<b>Recommendations .....</b>	14
	Enhance the Existing Curriculum for Greater Participant Absorption.....	14
	Better Support On-going Learning .....	15
	New Directions for Leader III Module .....	16
	Increase Integration of Leadership Academy Benefits and Influence into Special the Olympics Movement .....	17
VII.	<b>Annexes.....</b>	18
	A. Evaluation Scope of Work and Questions .....	18
	B. List Documents Reviewed.....	18
	C. Online Survey Questionnaire.....	18
	D. Results of the Online Survey.....	18
	E. In-Depth Interview Guide .....	18
	F. List of Participants in Focus In-Depth Interviews .....	18
	G. Table of Leadership Academy Participants by Country.....	18

## Executive Summary

The Special Olympics (SO) Leadership Academy is in its third year of operation since it began in December of 2014. The Academy was developed to support the organization's strategic plans (2011-2015 and 2016-2020) by enhancing the capacity and skills of SO leaders and thus ensure that SO programs reach their maximum quality, reach and impact. Since then, 237 participants (including 16 athlete leaders) from 85 countries have gone through one of nine Academy workshops.

As the momentum and demand for the Academy continues to grow, the Organizational Excellence team, which organizes the Academy, took time to pause and reflect on the continued relevance of the Academy, its methodology, and initial results to determine how it can be improved for even greater impact. It is important to acknowledge that many internal and external stakeholders contribute to the success of the Academy. The team undertook this evaluation to engage Leadership Academy participants to learn of their experiences, challenges and successes in implementing the leadership content, and their suggested changes for making it stronger. This report outlines the findings of this evaluation and recommendations for taking the Leadership Academy forward.

The evaluation team found overwhelming support for the Academy from the participants. They expressed strong appreciation of the curriculum and participatory, adult learning approach taken in the workshops. Participants had not only retained their new knowledge and skills, but described the Academy as significant to their personal and professional development. In order to practice the workshop learning, participants have the opportunity to apply the curriculum through their one-year individual action plans, which they develop at the end of each workshop. While the majority of Academy participants are still implementing their plans, a review of the participants' periodic reports and descriptions from the participants themselves revealed a substantial level of new effort that they are applying to SO operations and programs. The effects can be seen through better staff supervision and strategy formulation, increased outreach to donors and community supporters, and greater effort to expand and improve SO programs for athletes and their families.

The evaluation highlights the impact of the Leadership Academy in the following four themes:

- *A new mindset among leaders* – The Leadership Academy has had a significant influence on the mindset and attitudes of participants.
- *Enhanced teamwork and program performance* – Because of the knowledge and skills gained in the Academy, participants say that they are better able to understand and work with the diversity within their staff. As better supervisors and leaders, they are creating more harmonious and empowered teams and boards, thus allowing the participants to confidently engage in more strategic development. They also report that it has helped their interpersonal relationships and ability to focus and organize work priorities.
- *Expanded national/state programs* – Within the context of their action plans, Leadership Academy participants launched new national or sub-regional initiatives, attracted corporate partnerships and corporate volunteers, increased publicity and brand awareness, and established new funding mechanisms and strategies. All a significant advancement of their efforts for the organization.
- *New opportunities for athletes, families and communities* – New initiatives are providing greater opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities (ID). Beyond that, participants of the Academy are also expanding leadership roles for athletes by changing the way they engage athletes. They are also broadening their engagement with families and communities to support people with ID beyond sporting events alone.

Based on the findings of the evaluation, it is clear that 1) the Leadership Academy's relevance continues and grows in support of the Special Olympics strategic plan, 2) the Academy's modules and

**pedagogical approach are effective, and 3) that as a result, there is a tangible and positive impact on the global organization due to the Academy and the efforts of its participants.**

This report makes the following **recommendations** so that Special Olympics may to continue to support and reap the benefits from the Leadership Academy:

- *Enhance the Existing Curriculum for Greater Participant Absorption*
    - Move towards a Competency-Based Model for each Module
    - Give More Space within modules for Personal Reflection and Application
    - Increase Participant Contribution, and Self-Directed and Peer Learning
    - Make the Academy More Inclusive by...
    - Include More Sports and Outdoor Activity in Workshops
  - *Better Support On-going Learning*
    - Improve Uptake in Online Learning through the Academy
    - Revise the Action Plan Format
    - Decentralize Review and Feedback to Engage More of the Organization
    - Establish Ongoing Peer and Mentor Support
    - Strengthen Alumni Engagement
  - *Establish New Directions for Leader III Module*
    - Utilize Technology and Blended Learning Formats
    - Facilitate Independent, Experiential and Peer Learning
    - Introduce Group Projects After Modules
    - Keep Alumni Network Connected
  - *Increase Integration of Leadership Academy Benefits and Influence into Special Olympics Movement*
    - Engage the Whole of SO to Share Impact of the Academy
    - Offer Lunch & Learn Sessions
    - Spread the Principles of Participatory Adult Education
    - Integrate the Academy into Special Olympics by Incorporating it into Funding Proposals and Projects.



## Introduction

In early 2017, the Special Olympics (SO) Organizational Excellence team undertook an internal evaluation of its Leadership Academy for the purpose of demonstrating its efficacy and providing recommendations for its further growth and development (*See Annex A for the evaluation scope of work*). The period of the review covered workshops offered from December 2014 to December 2016, providing a perspective on Academy influences over time. Users of this evaluation include Leadership Academy organizers, SO senior leadership, and current and potential donors.

Evaluation questions ranged from relevance of Academy goals and approaches, analysis of curriculum content and methodology, to the impact of learning on the participants' behaviors and SO program results.

### Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation strategy, based upon Kirkpatrick's model of training evaluation (Kirkpatrick 2006), focused on four distinct levels: 1) participant reaction to Academy activities; 2) their retention of the knowledge and skills developed; 3) application of their learning within their organizations; and 4) the change in SO programming as a result of the Academy.

Evaluation activities combined quantitative and qualitative methods to engage Academy participants. These included document review, an electronic survey of participants, and semi-qualitative in-depth interviews (*See Annex B for the list of documents reviewed and Annex C for the survey questionnaire*). Documents reviewed included participant evaluations from each of the nine Leadership Academy workshops (*see Box 1 below*), a synthesis of all participants' action plans, and a sampling of both 4-6 month and 12 month participant reports. The online survey invitation was sent to 237 Academy participants in 85 countries, returning 141 responses including 8 responses from athlete leaders. A representative sample of participants from every Academy group was collected in the survey, with Philadelphia and Mexico groups returning more responses than average (*For the full results of the survey, see Annex D*). To deepen and contextualize the findings of the survey, the team held in-depth interviews with 16 randomly-selected Academy participants to gain perspectives on the impact of the Leadership Academy on their life and work (*Refer to Annex E for the list of participants and Annex F for the interview protocols*).

60% of all Academy participants completed the evaluation survey (141 out of 237)

All the above information was synthesized and distilled to develop the evaluation findings included in this report. The recommendations for the future were crafted after analyzing the data for themes and trends, in consultation with Leadership Academy organizers.

### Evaluation Team

The evaluation team involved both internal and external participation:

- Meg Kinghorn, independent consultant: lead on data analysis, preparation of recommendations and writing of this report;
- Olga Yakimakho, Senior Manager for Organizational Excellence: internal evaluation champion and manager;
- Svetlana Fenichel, Manager for Organizational Excellence and Program Growth and Denis Doolan, Chief for Organizational Excellence: conducted interviews with participants and report review.

## Academy Overview: 2014 - 2016

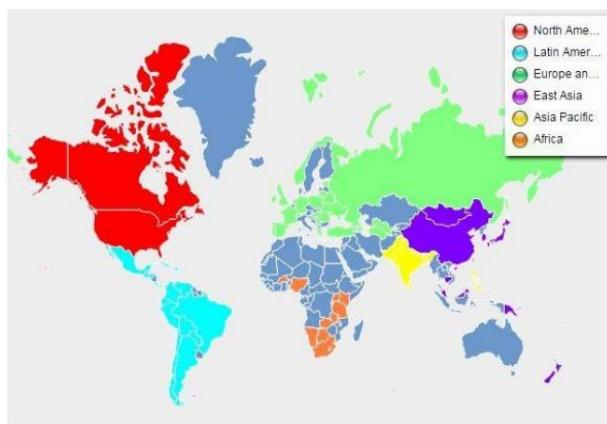
The purpose of the Leadership Academy is two-fold: 1) To improve the overall capacity and skills of Special Olympics leaders, and 2) To ensure SO programs improve quality, reach and impact to drive global Special Olympics Strategic Goals. The emphasis is on providing useful, practical techniques and tools that can help leaders be more authentic, strategic and effective in making big changes and accelerating the Movement towards our global vision.

**The first Academy was held in Delhi, India in December 2014 (See box 1 for the list of Leadership Academy workshops held to date). Since then, 237 participants (including 16 athlete leaders) from 85 countries have gone through Academy by participating in one of the 9 workshops (See box 2 for the countries represented by Leadership Academy participants).**

**Leader I and Leader II** are the Leadership Academy modules which include a face-to-face workshop, action planning and implementation of the plans over the course of one year after the workshop, as well as interim and final reports.

The Leadership Academy offers Special Olympics leaders an opportunity to think about their role, and provides them with tools for performance improvement. It gives a unique chance to step back from day-to-day work, collaborate with other Special Olympics leaders, and identify how to further enhance positive impacts on the lives of athletes, their families and the wider community.

Box 2 Countries Represented at Leadership Academies to Date



Academy workshops are delivered in an interactive manner in line with adult learning principles. Participants are given an opportunity to engage with high-profile presenters and facilitators from external partners and Special Olympics. Every participant develops an Action Plan during the workshop to guide their development after the workshop. They also engage in e-learning and receive on-going support for implementation of professional goals. Leaders who have participated in Academy workshops can stay engaged and share best practices through Facebook, LinkedIn and WhatsApp groups.

## Curriculum

### Leader I, "Strengthening Foundations"

Leader I focuses on the leader as an individual, looks at the job of setting direction and influencing and including others, finishing with leading a team, being inclusive and executing successfully. The preferred approach is for participants to complete Leader I before moving to Leader II. Those participants who are new to the Academy and for logistical reasons start with Leader II, attend a half-day orientation to Leader I content.



East Asia and Asia Pacific Leader I Participants in Shanghai

## Leader II, "Advancing Skills and Programs"

Leader II builds on the content of the Leader I Academy workshop by deepening participants' self-awareness of personal leadership and connecting it to the mastery of leading organizational change management initiatives and communicating for maximum impact.

### Participant Reaction

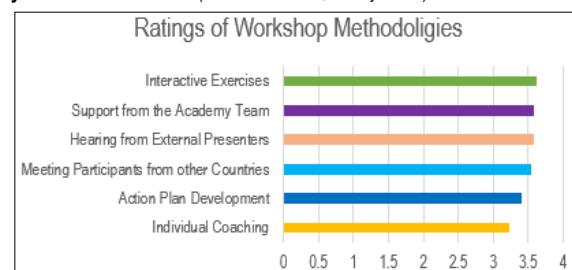
A review of the evaluations of the nine Leadership Academy workshops shows that participants found they were well organized and executed. Many people stated that the Academy has a curriculum which participants are unlikely to obtain elsewhere due to a unique combination of content relevance and quality of the learning experience. Not only is it informative, but also helps them to grow in a short time span. Specifically, they liked the participatory approach to the event, which was interactive and engaging. The Academy aims to build on participants' individual strengths and participants appreciate that it is not trying to change the core of who they are or stifle their personality. For many, the Academy was their first exposure to adult learning methodology and they were quite taken with it. Respondents also noted the valuable experience of interacting with SO staff and athletes from around the world.

Comments reflected that the content was relevant, easy to comprehend, and something they could use in future. It was not textual or concept oriented but instead emphasized authentic leadership and practical tools. The Academy gave them a chance to share information and ideas, self-reflect and plan for changes they need to lead.

One frequent comment was that the organizers did put a lot into each day. Some interviewees noted that the volume was a bit overwhelming with little time to reflect on and absorb the implications of the material. At times, the pace was rushed. However, there was approval for the short duration of the workshop with only a few participants recommending its extension.

In response to specific survey questions, the majority of respondents indicated that they found all of the offered topics to be *very useful*. Those with the highest value included influencing others; leading teams; leadership roles; effective communications; and leadership preferences (See box 3 for a synthesis of their responses and Annex D for the full survey results).

Box 4: Q6 – Which aspects of the workshop delivery method did you find most useful? (1=not at all useful; 4=very useful)



involvement of athlete leaders as participants. A number of participants remarked how important and powerful it was to have them participate. This does require some changes to the preparation of athlete leader participants, as some of them found the pace of the workshops challenging. Some athlete leaders noted that they had contact with

Box 3: Q5 – How useful do you find the information you gained from these topics in your current work? (1=not at all useful; 4=very useful)



Survey respondents also scored the workshop methodologies quite high, with the majority ranking them very useful as well, particularly the interactive exercises, hearing from outside panelists, and the support received from the workshop organizers. The individual coaching, while still high, rated the lowest in the approaches, 3.22 out of 4 (See box 4).

One theme emerging throughout related to the

*"I was very proud to be treated as an equal at the Leadership Academy. Now I know what that feels like. This has given me confidence in interacting with others."*

- Athlete Leader

organizers in advance of the event, which helped tremendously in helping them to know what to expect. Another suggestion given by athlete leaders was to provide material in advance, as much as possible.

## Post-Workshop Engagement

Recognizing that a workshop alone will rarely instill new skills and behaviors, the Leadership Academy has included year-long follow-up engagement as part of the experience. This includes implementing an action plan for direct application of learning to their environment, and a complementary online learning platform for finding additional resources. When asked about the relative usefulness of this engagement, survey participants indicated that they found all of them useful. The action plan implementation and the opportunity to put their learning into practice were rated the most effective of them all.

### Action Plan Implementation

Before leaving the Leadership Academy workshop, participants draft a detailed personal action plan with goals for putting their new skills and learning into practice. These plans cover one year and are monitored through participant reports at four-six and twelve months after the event.

A review of the action plans for the Leader I module showed that participants focused most commonly (in order of frequency) on:

1. Self-improvement (time management, self-awareness, relationship management),
2. Developing new projects,
3. Teambuilding,
4. Recruiting and supporting athletes, and
5. Enhancing SO Boards.

Action Plan submission to Academy organizers after the workshop ranges between 65-97% of participants from each cohort.

The self-improvement goals involved communicating with staff more frequently or differently, setting aside time for personal planning, reflection, managing emails, and 'learning to say no'. Program development included creating health and wellness programs, organizing camps and exchanges, and connecting with other programs and community leaders. As participants are frequently in senior programming or management positions within SO national offices, many focused on finding ways to clarify and align team goals with plans, as well as to find ways to communicate directions and delineate roles. They set goals to not only recruit and engage more athletes and their families in programs, but to also find opportunities beyond sports for athletes to exercise their leadership. Lastly, some participants

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set goals to strengthen their national boards by offering workshops and recruiting new members.

*"I have been balancing positive feedback with 'suggestions' and 'development areas'. As a result, some staff are feeling defeated. I need to ensure the positive feedback outweighs the other."*

- Leader I Action Plan Goal

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Participants in the Leader II module set similar goals, however, they included a greater emphasis on introducing change into program processes, supervision,

staff recruitment and development, and making effective presentations. In addition to the five listed above, goals also looked at program expansion into new countries, reaching more stakeholders, fundraising and even legally registering the organization. These goals reflected a greater level of strategic leadership for program growth compared to Leader I. Ideas for accomplishing this also looked more broadly at relying on personal networks and consulting with other regions.

## Periodic Reports

Participants are expected to submit reports to the Academy organizers at the 4-6 and 12 month mark to give an update of their learning and action plan implementation.

These reports are full of accounts of achievements all reflecting the intentions laid out in their action plans:

- increased media exposure (traditional and social)
- better staff and office management
- new programs
- new funds for programs
- new opportunities for athletes
- internal leadership learning
- building a stronger and more focused team
- staff and volunteers with new job descriptions, clear targets and goals
- more opportunities to meet and discuss their work
- increased exposure for athletes and more athletes in leadership programs,

New projects, more localized competitions, and greater numbers of athletes, coaches and mentors were also reported, helping Special Olympics expand its reach. Many reports told stories of lives that were changed because of the increased programming and support given to athletes and their families.

Interim and Final Reports submission to Academy organizers ranges between 70-100% of workshop participants

Over 80% of workshop participants complete the Academy workshop follow-up requirements and receive a graduation certificate

## Online Learning

SkillSoft is an online platform which provides a large library of very useful short and long videos (6000+) on multiple topics including leadership. SkillSoft generously donated 500 licenses to Special Olympics. All Academy participants get access to this resource after their first workshop. The Academy organizers curate learning materials for the participants and they can also access all videos and courses independently.

Philadelphia cohort uptake of SkillSoft  
36%

Average uptake of SkillSoft for all enrolled users  
13%

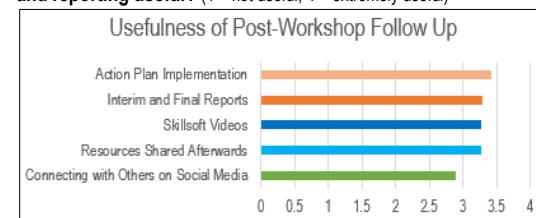
The uptake and usage of the SkillSoft platform has been varied between different groups. Participants in North America and Europe tend to use the resource more frequently than their colleagues from other groups. Challenges with using SkillSoft vary between time and other priorities, availability of languages (most videos are in English), speed of Internet connection, and technical savviness of the participants.

## Participant Reaction to Post-Workshop Follow-Up

While survey respondents scored the action planning relatively low among the workshop methodologies (although still quite high at 3.4 out of 4), they

indicated that it was the most valuable form of follow-up, followed by periodic progress reporting (See box 5 for a synthesis of their responses and Annex D for the full survey results). Most found the effort involved in implementing their Action Plans as expected, or easier than expected (68%), while 32% found it to be more challenging. The primary reasons cited for the plans being more challenging than expected were other competing work priorities (56%) and the lack of adequate time (28%). Several survey respondents noted that priorities at work had shifted, or that others upon whom their plans were dependent (colleagues, athletes, volunteers) did not share their interest in the initiatives.

Box 5: Q7 – To what extent were workshop follow-up support and reporting useful? (1 = not useful; 4 = extremely useful)



When asked if the action plans were the best way to apply their new learning, 78% of survey respondents said yes, while only 2% said no (The remaining 20% gave only narrative comments and did not indicate yes or no). Interviewees affirmed this sentiment, describing the action plans and the opportunity to learn about leadership by practicing it directly. Several said it was a way to keep focused, learn new things, and talk to other people. As one respondent put it, action planning "makes you reflect on what you learned, keeps you accountable, puts what you learned into action, and helps you to continue applying what you learned."

Suggestions offered as complements to the action plans included:

- A capstone project;
- Interactive coaching sessions with academy organizers;
- Pairing participants with a successful program leader as a mentor or 'buddy'; and
- Using social media and other means of communicating among participants periodically.

A number of people indicated that it might also be **beneficial to involve the participants' supervisor or board in both finalizing the action plans after returning home** and for giving feedback on the changes taking place in the participant's style and performance.

People similarly thought the periodic reporting was valuable. The majority (79%) found the level of effort involved in preparing the reports to be as expected, or easier than expected. Another 20% found it harder than expected, with similar reasons of conflicting work priorities and not enough time cited as obstacles. One of the in-depth interviewees who completed the workshop 18 months prior noted that he is just now making full use of the material. He thought expanding the reporting period until the second year would make the reporting a more accurate reflection of the effects of the course. A long-term approach to both the action plans and periodic reports might be beneficial for some people as assimilation of the leadership concepts and skills practice takes time.

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*"This [time constraint] is a significant challenge to the success of the Leadership Academy and requires a strong organizational culture that prioritizes learning and leadership in order for the follow-up to be supported and truly effective"*

*- Leader I Participant*

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When probed further through in-depth interviews on what could be done to overcome the challenge of work priorities and time in the follow-up engagement, several suggested involving the whole organization, particularly participants' supervisors. A firm commitment from the whole organization and not just the individual participant, would help the whole organization reap returns from the training investment.

#### Involvement of Partners and Contributors

Partners play a major role in the ability of Special Olympics to offer high quality professional development with limited funds. We have partnered with CEB and Goldman Sachs who provide the Academy with pro bono materials and facilitators. Over 30 other partners around the globe have contributed as guest facilitators, moderators and speakers. This evaluation did not interview any of the partners; however, informally the organizers have received positive comments from these partners concerning the partnership experience and the quality of the Leadership Academy.

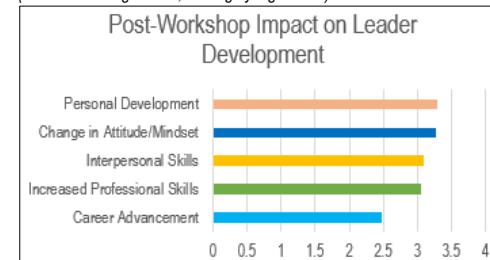


CEB Facilitator Adriana Duque Hughes with Athlete Leader Adriana Lopez in Mexico during Leader I Workshop

## Academy Results

It is clear from the above discussion that participants of the Leadership Academy consider the experience valuable and have retained and put a significant amount of the learning into practice. Now we turn to whether the Leadership Academy is achieving its purpose of improving the capacity and skills of SO leaders, and enhancing the quality, reach and impact of Special Olympics programs. We must first recognize that six of the nine Academy workshops took place within the past year, meaning the majority of participants are still in their first year of action plan implementation. Regardless, the evaluation team found evidence that the Leadership Academy is showing results in four areas: 1) developing a new mindset among leaders, 2) enhancing teamwork and program performance, 3) expanding the reach and size of national and state programs, and 4) offering new opportunities to SO athletes, their families and communities.

**Box 6 Q14: How significant has the Leadership Academy been to Your Development since the Workshop?**  
(1 = not at all significant; 4 = highly significant)



### A New Mindset Among Leaders

Participants responding to the survey and in-depth interviews very clearly indicated that the Leadership Academy has been a significant growth experience for them. Indeed the high majority of survey respondents indicated that the Academy has been highly significant or significant to their development since the workshop (See box 6). The Change in mindset and attitudes was noted to be 'highly significant' and 'significant' by 83% of the participants, and 86% noted 'highly significant' and 'significant' changes in personal development. One survey respondent wrote that it has been "extremely significant for his/her time, workflow, and people management."

This finding matches with the primary motivation of participants to enroll in the Academy: personal development and better ability to work with others (See survey results for Q4 "What was your strongest motivation to participate in the Academy?" in Annex D). One disconnect is that participants were also motivated by career advancement, while this has been the area of least significant influence since the workshop. This could be due to the short period of time or to other organizational factors outside the control of the Academy.

*"It has transformed me from being a procrastinator to a person who prioritizes between urgent and not urgent. It has helped me understand my behavioral style so that I can easily switch to suit my target group."*  
*(Johannesburg)*

*"Even though I was there with an objective of attaining better program results, my personal development as a leader has been the biggest outcome. I can change my styles to adapt to the situation to get results rather than be inflexible and frustrated with failure, as I did earlier."* (Delhi I and II)

*"I have been reaching out to others more, thinking about the work of the whole organization not just my personal responsibilities. If I meet someone, I know the outcomes I want to achieve in advance. I also think where else my contacts can contribute with a bigger picture in mind."* (Philadelphia)

- Survey respondents

#### British Success: Raising Awareness One Group at a Time

Kiera Byland, athlete leader, was so taken with the information in the Academy that she has started giving presentations using workshop materials. She has presented the *Big Rocks* priority setting technique to mentors at Bank of America working with other athletes and inspired them to use the technique in their work. She has also been giving presentations on *Fit 5* for college students, and has been in primary schools to inspire the children to do sports.

She has also achieved SO recognition by British Cycling, the national governing body for cycling in the United Kingdom, using the tools given in the Academy. She helped to write the easy-to-read guide on their website explaining the organization and is hoping to start a cycling club for cyclists with ID.

## Enhanced Teamwork and Program Performance

A very strong theme emerging from the final reports, the online survey, and the in-depth interviews has been the changes that participants have initiated within their offices. One-year reports described accomplishments such as everyone having a clear job description, and clear targets and goals that motivate the team.

A better understanding of people and how to build and support a team has translated into more harmonious, empowered, and effective teams. Participants are taking more time to talk to staff directly or facilitate more office dialogue. One interviewee said that her natural style is to go straight to work after arriving in the morning. But now she realizes the people that report to her need more interaction so she stretches herself to incorporate this more. Others are taking a more proactive role in resolving conflict and helping departments overcome persistent challenges to enhance their performance. One participant wrote in his one-year report that his staff were more creative, confident and independent in doing their work because of his effort at being a better supervisor and leader.

The National or State SO Board was also a focus of improvement. Participants succeeded in making this body more effective, either through clarifying roles and visibility, forming special working groups to engage members in their areas of expertise, recruiting new members, or in one case, lowering the number of board members.

With both their team and the board working better and more independently, the participants were able to delegate many of the routine things to others and begin to focus on more strategic issues. Several participants wrote in their reports about starting to build a new strategy, creating stronger external relationships with influential leaders and fundraising.

### Ecuador Success: Raising Funds from Unconventional Donors

It is not part of the culture in Ecuador to fundraise on a small scale. We usually focus on large contract, governmental grants. But because of the difficult economic situation in the country, we decided to be creative and try working with smaller caliber clients. We partnered with Confiteca company that donated their product - chewing gum. Planned in collaboration with the Quito administration, the proceeds go to a) construction of a kindergarten for people with ID, b) support the Young Athletes program.

SO Ecuador National Director, Leader I Participant, Mexico



Headquarters Leader I Participants in Washington, DC

## Expanded National and State Programs

While the majority of one-year reports on the results of the action plans are still under implementation, there are numerous impressive results that can be noted from just two Academy groups (*See box 7*). It is evident that through completing their action plans, participants are contributing significantly to the growth of their national or state programs. Participants launched numerous new national or sub-regional initiatives, attracted corporate partnerships and corporate volunteers, increased publicity and brand awareness, and established new funding mechanisms and strategies.

## New Opportunities for Athletes, Families and Communities

The final result of expanded programming should, of course, be to empower athletes through their participation in sports and leadership work. The Leadership Academy is certainly contributing toward that end. For example:

- New projects are being established and mainstreamed into schools to provide greater opportunities for sports for people with and without ID;
- Participants of the Academy also recognize that athletes should be active participants in the program and their communities and have a vital part to play in its advancement;
- Many voiced their work to change the way they engaged athletes and others stakeholders;
- One interviewee said she is now making an effort to engage athletes in the program leadership and in negotiation with donors;
- Another interviewee – an athlete leader - encouraged Special Olympics to do more to develop athletes as leaders beyond sports alone.

**Box 7. Examples of Results from Individual Participant Reports (each result is specific to a particular country or state in Asia Pacific or Europe/Eurasia Region)**

- ✓ Registered 1376 new athletes, 624 new family members and 173 new coaches.
- ✓ Estimated 20% more income over previous year
- ✓ Recruited 500 new members (athletes, families, volunteers) in a single day
- ✓ New Young Athlete Program model established that is completely inclusive (35 children with and without ID, 3 parents)
- ✓ 25% Increase of sponsors, 35% Increase of Volunteers, 20% Increase of donations
- ✓ # volunteers increased by 70% from last year
- ✓ More than 200 employees from leading corporations helped during National Games
- ✓ Recruited 12 new high profile ambassadors, volunteer receptionist, and volunteer project coordinator
- ✓ 55% increase in website visits; Brand awareness increased 2 points (external survey)
- ✓ New funding to expand Health Promotion program, new clubs & volunteers engaging to deliver Health Promotion
- ✓ New funding of 5000 Euro to increase training to 3 session a week
- ✓ Created a licensed product to be purchased in all Duty Free Shops, with profits going to Program
- ✓ Secured new sponsor for Coaches Training for more than 40 coaches.

### Special Olympics Georgia Success: Encouraging Everyone to Lead

Before the Academy, I used to tell coaches who to train and how to do it. Now I give them freedom to organize the process as they think best. This year, coaches wanted to train smaller children. As a result, we had a great innovation in peer coaching. For example, George, a 38 year old athlete that did not walk until he was 9 now wants to be an assistant coach. In looking for money to prepare athletes for the Austria games, George found contacts at the Mayor's office. George and the team went to the officials and they asked for a proposal. We got funding for 7 days of training (about \$2,083). This all came from letting others – especially athletes - take initiative, not just me.

SO Georgia National Director, Leader II Participant, Baku

Others are finding that the Academy also points to the need for broader engagement of families and whole communities. They have found that they really need to build communities, not just athletes and sporting events, by engaging partners as volunteers, and volunteers and partners. This new direction will take time and require more involvement of Program boards. Another participant approached influential government officials, who had no awareness of how many athletes with ID were in their country. After providing them

with the data, the officials were persuaded that SO is important and that both athletes and their families need support to be empowered. They received government funds to send the entire team to the Winter Games in Austria.

#### Spain Success: Connecting Donors with Athletes

As a result of the Academy, SO Spain changed the way they do fundraising from sending printed reports to also scheduling personal visits and taking athletes with them to meet the donors. Since they began this, they have learned quickly that this is most effective when they do not try to structure the engagement too much, but instead allow for an unscripted conversation in which the donor can ask questions directly and the athletes can tell their stories in their own way.



North America Leader I Participants with the Philadelphia Eagles CEO Don Smolenski in the Eagles Locker Rooms



Asia Pacific Leader II Participants in Gurgaon, India

## Conclusions

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The previous sections outlined the Leadership Academy components, participants' reactions to the components, and the effects their participation had on themselves, their organizations, and ultimately, people with ID. This section returns to consider the evaluation questions and draw conclusions in response.

### Continued Relevance of the Leadership Academy Goals

The workshop evaluations, online survey, and in-depth interviews have shown that the participants of the Leadership Academy find it valuable and effective. It provides the skills, knowledge, and insights they need to be influential leaders. Participants are able to better lead staff, manage programs, promote the Special Olympics movement, and create the foundation for its continuation through community support and resources.

These outcomes directly support the current Special Olympics strategic plan (2016-2020), where building capacity by improving resources and leadership is highlighted as one of its strategic goals. Giving focused support to leaders within country programs to help them develop their skills and contribute to the global movement is relevant now more than ever. They are not only well placed to improve the efficiency and resource base of national and state programs, but are also developing the programmatic and leadership skills of others. Thus, the Leadership Academy has not only a direct impact on participants, but also has the potential for a ripple effect on Special Olympics globally and for the long term.

### Effectiveness of Academy Modules and Pedagogy

The participatory learning methodology used at Academy workshops is highly effective and appreciated for transmitting the content information. The personal action plans and periodic reports help bridge the learning experience back to the working environment, providing real opportunities for application and experimentation with ideas. The combination creates a powerful learning experience.

One strong theme that emerged was that it was a lot of information in a very short period of time during the workshops. This created an intense experience that required a while to take in and digest. The pace of learning was particularly challenging for participants with ID. Therefore, organizers need to consider ways to address this concern.

The greatest obstacle to follow-up to the post-workshop phase was other work priorities and time. This points to a gap in embedding the learning in the plans and commitments of the individual national or state program. Leadership Academy can be perceived as benefiting the individual participant rather than a strategic investment on behalf of the program. In reality, the action plans are actions that directly benefit the program, if they are successfully implemented. Therefore, steps can be taken to strengthen this linkage so that the critical follow-up can be completed in congruence with work expectations.

### Impact of the Leadership Academy

From the evaluation review, it is clear that the Leadership Academy is having an impact in developing a new mindset among Special Olympics leaders in many ways. While the fruits of the Academy are still to be fully realized, as the time since its inception is relatively short, there are things happening already with indications of more to come.

The most striking ones are participants' feeling inspired by the movement's investment in them and clarity in their role as catalytic leaders of the movement. One of the greatest impacts is on the confidence of participants who now are better able think of themselves as a leader and have a deeper understanding of their role in the movement.

Secondly, the workshop material has left an imprint on the mindsets of the participants. Most frequently mentioned topics of impact related to creating a motivating work environment for their teammates and relieving pressure caused by multiple priorities and heavy workload. They claim to have gained a greater sense of responsibility for time management, priority setting, and developing the skills and talents of others.

Finally, this understanding and these insights are influencing the participants' behaviors. Through the action plans and with their new perspective on their work, participants are changing the way they do their work and manage their teams. They are not only applying direct ideas, but also ways of working in areas such as planning, programming, networking, publicity, recruitment, and fundraising. This has led to the list of accomplishments attained above, as well as many more under way and with more to come.

## Recommendations

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Having established the results of the Leadership Academy to date, based on the responses of participants and the changes they have introduced as a result, the evaluation team has concluded that the Academy is both relevant and effective. This final section will propose recommendations to strengthen and develop the Academy and enhance its contribution to the SO movement globally.

### Enhance the Existing Curriculum for Greater Participant Absorption

The majority of leaders participating in the evaluation expressed their high regard and gratitude for the Academy as it is. As the same time, they also offered their perspective and suggestions for how to enhance it. The following are in response to those suggestions:

#### Move towards a Competency-Based Model to Each Leader Workshop

The volume of information and ideas presented in the workshops was both inspiring and overwhelming. Given the need to maintain the short duration of the workshop, organizers could articulate three to four competencies for each Leader workshop and organize the materials around this focus. This would help participants to grasp and internalize the messages, tools and behaviors the workshop presents. This will be particularly beneficial when increasing the involvement of participants with ID. The action plans and periodic reports can then be organized to be more specific and focused on these key ideas to further reinforce and instill the new behaviors in doing their daily jobs.

#### Give Space within the Workshops for Personal Reflection and Application

Ways to manage the intensity of the workshop could be to provide more detailed information upon arrival and each morning, and schedule periodic check-ins with participants to ensure the material is understood and meeting their needs. Reorganizing the workshop format with the main learning presented in the morning, and organizing coaching, personal reflection, and group networking in the afternoon would also help participants absorb and apply the main ideas to their personal situation. This will also allow more time for participants to engage their mentors or peers in discussing their action plans.

#### Increase Participant Contribution, and Self-Directed and Peer Learning

As a workshop on leadership, the organizers have a great opportunity to let participants take initiative in their own learning. This will increase ownership, application, and interaction between participants. For example, ask each participant to prepare a 15-20 minute presentation of their program and how they will approach implementation of key learning. This would facilitate peer learning as well as have participants practice their presentation skills. Similarly, forming affinity groups for participants from similar contexts (e.g., developing country, etc.) and giving them time to work through the material in the afternoons of face-to-face workshops would allow more practical time and depth on topics and also facilitate peer learning.

### Make the Academy More Inclusive

The online survey received a remarkably high number of comments (almost 80) noting the significance of having athletes leaders as participants of the Academy. It gives participants direct interaction with athletes, and also gives SO a unique perspective on inclusive leadership compared to other organizations.

### Include More Sports and Outdoor Activity

Given that the Academy supports a sports movement, it is appropriate to include more outdoor activity. This could be in the form of an integrated game of some sort with local athletes. Also modifying some small group thinking simulations into physical, experiential exercises would provide a more kinesthetic experience for discussion.

Refining this unique approach would benefit participants, programs, and the movement overall. Many of the recommendations above related to increasing the material absorption would particularly benefit athlete leaders. Other specific steps are needed to better accommodate these participants, such as revising the handbooks to be more easy-read, providing the handbook in advance to all participants, and making implementation ideas as practical and specific as possible.

### Better Support On-going Learning

The post-workshop application period is recognized as both essential and where the main benefit to the organization is realized. Participants take the ideas back and apply them to create better programs, expanded funding and support, and more efficient teams. There are currently two people within the Organizational Excellence department who review and comment on each action plan and periodic report. This not only puts a lot of pressure on a few people, but silos the post-workshop engagement exclusively between the participant and the organizers. Given the critical importance of this phase and the parallel need to expand the sense of commitment to the Academy throughout SO, these two needs can be addressed simultaneously in the following ways.

### Revise the Action Plan Format

The current action plan template is organized around the workshop themes of the participants' choosing. A great deal of flexibility is allowed to support participants to pursue their own interest. This has been supportive, yet also overwhelming. By reorganizing the workshop around key competencies, this means the action plans can also be reorganized similarly, focusing on actions more tangible, such as a mixture of performance goals and operating plans.

### Decentralize Review and Feedback to Engage More of the Organization

If the support and benefits for leadership development are to be broadened within SO, supervisors have an important role to play to ensure the application of skills and ideas is relevant to the organization, duly completed and has organizational endorsement. Organizers can engage the supervisors of participants through a short PowerPoint or video presentation to explaining the Academy, the expected benefits, and the role they can play within it. Then these organization supervisors (or regional staff, as appropriate) can be more directly involved in supporting and enabling the action plan implementation. Since the Academy is designed to be a safe space where participants can share and discuss sensitive issues and personal struggles, they should share action plans (or selected portions) with supervisors only insofar as they are comfortable doing so.

In addition to increasing the commitment to these action plans, the reporting process can be revised to include more opportunities to cross-pollinate and mobilize/strengthen the movement's network. In addition to review by the Organizational Excellence team, which provides important independent feedback, the Academy may try peer-to-peer or cross-supervisor tracking or totally independent review through an external partner like CEB. Traditional reporting can be complemented by face-to-face meetings or Skype conversation, PowerPoint presentations, which could provide more information about the participant's performance and be more comfortable for the participants.

### **Establish Ongoing Peer and Mentor Support**

Direct human connection is important for feedback and growth. Participants need this input, but it cannot be provided by the organizers alone. Other participants could have a more involved role in supporting one another by instituting a buddy system. Here, groups of two or three participants would form, based on similar contexts and goals. The formal action plans and periodic updates could be shared among these groups for both feedback, support, and cross-learning.

Mentors are another way to strengthen continuous learning. Mentors could be found in a variety of places throughout the organization. Initially, mentors could be individuals in the participant's board, program or region. As Leader III is implemented, participants could become invaluable Academy alumni mentors to other participants starting their journey in the Academy, fortifying the movement's internal networks and strengthening its fabric. Lastly, SO could establish local partnerships with companies that partner with the Academy. Many multinational organizations have local offices or branches, (e.g. CEB or Board Source in Chile) and individuals on their staff might service as willing mentors or even simply organize meetings, webinars or other follow-up activities to enhance their experience and support their ongoing development.

### **Strengthen Alumni Engagement**

The Leadership Academy now has almost 250 participants who are in or have completed one phase of the Academy. Both the demand and the opportunity for continued engagement was heard through the evaluation. Participants want to continue their learning and connection with the Academy they found so inspirational. They also want to learn from the lessons and innovations of others who also attended. Organizing more face-to-face meeting is expensive, but technology can facilitate a vibrant exchange. Discussion groups through Facebook or Google can be a place for alumni to meet periodically to share lessons or find help with problem-solving. The Academy organizers, working with sponsors, partners and senior SO staff, might offer occasional webinars on leadership issues within or outside of SO.

### **New Directions for Leader III Module**

The academy organizers have drafted a vision for Leader III module, to be the final step for the existing participants. This module will emphasize independent, experiential learning of the participants, utilizing more peer-to-peer and self-guided instructional methodologies. This approach will provide the participants with tools and confidence that they will continue to grow successfully.

Blended learning techniques will support delivery of Leader III curriculum and ensure that online learning really takes root in Special Olympics programs. Internet technology will allow the organizers to introduce main content to the participants, and provide multiple venues for Leader III participants and Academy alumni to keep connected and access new knowledge and tools after graduation from the Academy. Face-to-face workshops will continue to be used to apply content in practice.

In the course of a Leader III workshop, the participants will form Action Learning groups and develop ideas to test back in their programs and learn through group work.

The following topics that surfaced in a lot of participant feedback forms will be at the core of the Leader III module:

- Inclusive leadership
- Accountability, board development and financial governance
- Effective supervision
- Fundraising (including how to give a great pitch to donors)
- Conflict management

## Increase Integration of Leadership Academy Benefits and Influence into Special the Olympics Movement

While the above is a list of how SO can help strengthen the Leadership Academy to be successful, it must be noted that the Academy has untapped potential to benefit SO globally. The new ideas, behaviors and initiatives that participants have and will continue to have offer a direct benefit to the organization. If seen as a stand-alone initiative, its potential could be underutilized.

Using this report and other materials that have been developed, organizers could engage SO departments, regions and national programs to share the impact the Academy is having. Organizers and returning participants could offer *Lunch & Learn* sessions in their offices to share the learning and new culture that the Academy is promoting with others.

The principles of participatory, adult education that are at the core of the Academy, could be spread throughout the movement to ensure that there is a creative exchange among participants at all events. Having the organizers and participants get word out on the effectiveness of Leadership Academy content and methodology will help others take notice and want to adopt some of these approaches. All of these recommendations would be facilitated through integrating Special Olympics Leadership Academy into donor proposals and implementation of other projects.

*"This is a great Academy. I also have enjoyed helping other countries on occasion. Maybe you could use social media to connect all classes and leverage our specific areas of expertise. Even though I am based in North America, I speak French and have experience working in sport for development in Europe and East/Southern Africa. I would love to work with my colleagues in those regions if given the opportunity to connect."*

- Evaluation Respondent



Europe and Eurasia Leader II Participants at the Heydar Aliyev Museum in Baku, Azerbaijan

## Annexes

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- A. Evaluation Scope of Work and Questions**
- B. List of Documents Reviewed**
- C. Online Survey Questionnaire**
- D. Results of the Online Survey**
- E. In-Depth Interview Guide**
- F. List of Participants in Focus In-Depth Interviews**
- G. Table of Leadership Academy Participants by Country**