



Athlete Leadership University Courses & Roles

Overview:

Since 1989, Special Olympics Pennsylvania (SOPA) has offered athletes of all abilities the opportunity to be trained and actively serve in meaningful leadership capacities at the local and state level. While training is a very important part in an Athlete Leader's experience, the opportunities they can pursue beyond the training is what makes their role considered meaningful.

Athlete Leadership University Courses & Potential Roles:

Special Olympics Pennsylvania offers 3 different trainings for its Athlete Leadership University curriculum. All new Athlete Leaders, as well as ones beginning a new role that were trained prior to 2022, will also require the completion of the Introduction to Athlete Leadership and Understanding Leadership Courses. These are virtual trainings that take place in the weeks leading into a session. All three roles require athletes to be at least 16 years of age or older. Local Programs/Teams should also identify individuals that can read, write and speak at minimum, a 5th grade level, have no recent history of misbehavior and actively participate in at least one sport each year. In addition to individual community based athletes, this is also open to athlete/partner pairs that participate in one of SOPA's Unified Champion Schools (UCS) and/or community based Unified Sports!

- **Introduction to Athlete Leadership:** A broad introduction to what both Special Olympics and Athlete Leadership are all about.
 - Focuses on the three guiding principles of Athlete Leadership:
 - Education and Awareness
 - Training
 - Leadership Positions
- **Understanding Leadership:** A continuation of Introduction to Athlete Leadership, focusing on different behaviors and skills commonly associated with Leadership.
 - Athlete Leaders are also asked to identify what they wish to accomplish post Athlete Leadership University, whose help they may need and how they plan on overcoming obstacles they may face.
- **Athlete Representative:** An Athlete Representative is someone that wants to not only lead a conversation, but also is willing to take action and speak on behalf of all athletes.
 - Potential roles an Athlete Representative can serve in following their training include, but are not limited to:
 - Starting an Athlete Leadership Team within their Local Program/Team or becoming Chair if one already exists.
 - Host welcoming events for new athletes and volunteers with support of Local Leadership Team.
 - Work with Local Leadership Team and/or SOPA staff to recognize athletes and volunteers for outstanding achievements.
 - Serve on other committees at the local, regional and/or state level (Games Organizing, Law Enforcement Torch Run, Polar Plunge, etc.)
 - Volunteer at local, regional and/or state competitions when not competing.
 - Create newsletters highlighting athletes and volunteers as well as sharing important announcements.
 - Support SOPA staff with their projects.
 - And More!
- **Global Messenger:** A Global Messenger is responsible for delivering speeches to various groups within their community. Each speech should be written around at least one of three purposes:
 - Recruitment of Athletes
 - Recruitment of Volunteers
 - Fundraising
 - Global Messengers that regularly give two or more speeches on each of these three purposes will be given priority consideration to speak at Opening Ceremonies of state events!

- **Healthy Lifestyles:** Healthy Lifestyles is the training to become a Health and Fitness Coordinator. A Health and Fitness Coordinator is an athlete that's not only passionate about living a healthy lifestyle for themselves, but also motivates others to do the same. Each Health and Fitness Coordinator is responsible for leading year round health and fitness clubs on a monthly basis that all athletes, volunteers and family members can participate in!
 - Health and Fitness Coordinators are encouraged to start offering walking as part of their health and fitness clubs.
 - As Health and Fitness Coordinators gain more experience, they may offer other activities based on what's available locally.
 - Health and Fitness Coordinators are asked to share their club activity every 6 months.

Leadership Opportunities:

- Unlike other universities, Athlete Leadership University has no graduation. Instead, SOPA will provide continual recognition to Athlete Leaders that complete the required amount of Leadership opportunities for their role(s) and provide special recognition for every five times they complete the required amount of Leadership Opportunities!
- Information on required Leadership Opportunities and how to submit/track them can be found in [this document](#).

Mentors:

All Athlete Leaders, regardless of age and ability, must have a Mentor to support them before, during and after Athlete Leadership University training. In order to be a Mentor, an individual must be:

- A Class A Volunteer through Special Olympics Pennsylvania with completion of:
 - Pennsylvania State Background Checks (Good for 5 Years)
 - General Orientation Training (Good for Life)
 - Protective Behaviors Training (Good for 3 Years)
 - Concussion Training (Good for 3 Years)
 - All current volunteers can update their trainings right by logging into their profile in the [online portal](#).
 - All new volunteers can register right [here](#).
- Mentor must be 18 years of age or older and, just like Athlete Leader, be able to represent Special Olympics Pennsylvania professionally in manner and appearance.
- Mentor is a chaperone and cannot be a current or former athlete.
- Mentor must also complete a Mentor Training course in the online portal to understand how they can appropriately support their Athlete Leader and gradually decrease support when Athlete Leader is able to think and act independently.

Additional Information:

For all questions related to Athlete Leadership, please contact Manager of Athlete Leadership & Young Athletes, Jordan Schubert at:

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