



SOPA will host seasonal Athletes as Coaches training webinars to review this document and answer any questions that Athletes as Coaches and/or other local volunteers may have that aren't addressed here. In 2024, SOPA will host Athletes as Coaches webinars the following dates:

- [Tuesday, January 23rd at 6:00 PM \(Spring\)](#)
- [Tuesday, July 9th at 6:00 PM \(Fall\)](#)
- [Tuesday, November 12th at 6:00 PM \(Winter\)](#)

Please note that while these trainings are 100% optional, it is highly recommended that all athletes considering becoming certified coaches attend these trainings prior to the start of their sports season. Recordings of all trainings will be available to be shared with anyone that registered wasn't able to attend.

Q: Does an athlete need to attend a SOPA training school to become certified?

A: Yes, an athlete wishing to become a certified coach will need to attend a coaches training school and complete a practicum as any other coach. Once their initial certification expires, Athletes as Coaches will be expected to complete "Continuing Education" courses to retain their certification.

SOPA requires athletes to attend a SOPA training school to help better ensure they are appropriate to take on the same responsibilities as any other certified coach. SOPA does not encourage athletes to serve in a coaching capacity without being certified because they may not know how to properly help one of their peers develop their skills.

Before attending a SOPA training school, an athlete wishing to become a certified coach must receive approval from their Regional Sport Director with feedback from their head coach and other volunteers as appropriate. This form can be found here:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1WZC14Ssl1IsilbBO_93WDmsaQg9-wmK3/view?usp=sharing

Q: What does an athlete need to do if they want to attend a SOPA training school?

A: If an athlete is interested in becoming a certified coach, they must be approved by their Regional Sports Director with additional feedback from the head coach they would be working under along with other volunteers as appropriate.

If approved, the Regional Sport Director will manage registering the athlete and a support person for a Coaches Training School as athletes cannot do that themselves.

Like any other coach, Athletes as Coaches can attend a training school as young as 14 years old. However, also like any other coach, they must be at least 16 to attend one day events and 18 to attend overnight events.

Volunteers/Regional Staff should NOT be changing athlete's "person type" field in VSys from athlete to volunteer. Volunteer should be placed in the "additional person types" field in the already established database record.

Athletes should NOT be filling out the volunteer application form to create an additional profile.

Q: What are the overall responsibilities of an Athlete as Coach?

A: Responsibilities may include, but are not limited to:

- Follow the general guidelines and the coach/volunteer guidelines of the [SOPA Code of Conduct](#).
- Follow the instructions of the head coach.
- Carry out instructions to the athletes during training and if applicable, competition.
- Demonstrate good sportsmanship to all athletes, coaches and officials.
- Pay attention to the athletes at all times to ensure safety.
- Give and take praise and constructive criticism where appropriate.
- Assist with set-up and clean-up of training venues.

Q: What is the difference between coaching vs. competing?

A: Athletes serving as coaches may compete in one sport and coach in another sport in the same season. However, similarly to if they compete in multiple sports in one season, they will have to decide what sport they wish to compete/coach in at Sectionals/State prior to the start of the season. That way, the local program can plan accordingly.

Athlete as Coach may return as a competitor for the sport they're coaching in the following year if they determine coaching is not for them.

Q: Can Athletes as Coaches play the sport they are coaching with athletes during training and competition?

A: Yes and no.

Yes, if it's for demonstration purposes only during training.

No, for competition, any delegate must be registered as an athlete **or** volunteer and cannot serve in multiple roles.

Q: Are Athletes as Coaches permitted to chaperone other athletes?

A: No, Athletes as Coaches cannot assume a chaperone role. As a result, Athletes as Coaches do **NOT** need background clearances.

Q: Are Athletes as Coaches a part of the 4:1 ratio?

A: No, Athletes as Coaches are a part of the 4:2 ratio.

Athletes as Coaches **cannot** chaperone other athletes. They are expected to manage themselves independently the same as any other coach.

Q: Are Athletes as Coaches required to have an Application for Participation (Medical)?

A: Yes, Athletes as Coaches are required to have an Application for Participation on file for training as well as competition that is to be renewed every three years.

Q: Do Athletes as Coaches need to complete General Orientation, Protective Behaviors or Concussion training?

A: Prior to attending a Coaches Training School, Athletes as Coaches will also be expected to complete the General Orientation (good for life), Protective Behaviors (good for three years) and Concussion Trainings (good for three years) in their [online portal profile](#). Any athlete that does not know how to access their online portal profile may contact vsyshelp@specialolympicspa.org for assistance.

Q: How does the SOPA Housing Policy affect Athletes as Coaches?

A: Any Athlete as Coach must:

- Be housed with other athletes according to SOPA's Housing Policy BUT not within their coaching sport. This will keep any conflicts of authority out of play. If HOD does not believe this is appropriate, they will explore alternative (exception) solution (see below).
 - When housing with another sports athlete is not an option (i.e., only one sport attending) they will be permitted to be housed with another Class A (non-ID) volunteer coach with written consent provided by the adult athlete and witnessed by a local program leader or their family. These notes of consent are to be shared with the Regional Executive Director.
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Q: Are Athletes as Coaches allowed to serve on an Athlete Leadership Team (ALT) and/or serve as an Athlete Representative, Global Messenger or Health and Fitness Coordinator?

A: Yes, under the condition that they compete in at least one sport. If an Athlete as Coach transitions completely into a coach, their local program will be asked to identify another athlete to be trained and serve in the vacant Athlete Leadership role(s) within a year to allow a current athlete the opportunity to serve in a leadership capacity.

In addition to coaching, Athletes as Coaches that fully transition into coaches may also pursue other volunteer opportunities at the local, regional and/or state level if they are interested in the opportunity and the staff/volunteers supporting them agree they are appropriate.

Q: How are Athletes as Coaches impacted by the SOPA Dating Policy?

A: Athletes as Coaches may date other athletes, provided that there is no conflict of authority between the Athlete as Coach and their significant other. If the Athlete as Coach and their significant other both take part in the same sport, they must be at separate training sites. Otherwise, the same policy for general coaches also applies to Athletes as Coaches.

Any other scenarios regarding Athletes as Coaches and the SOPA Dating Policy are to be reviewed and addressed by SOPA's VP of Mission Integration which can be reached directly at chammell@specialolympicspa.org.

If you have any questions that are not on this list, please contact Jordan Schubert at 610-630-9450 ext. 236 or jschubert@specialolympicspa.org.