

The Way Forward For Special Olympics PA

Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future. -John F. Kennedy

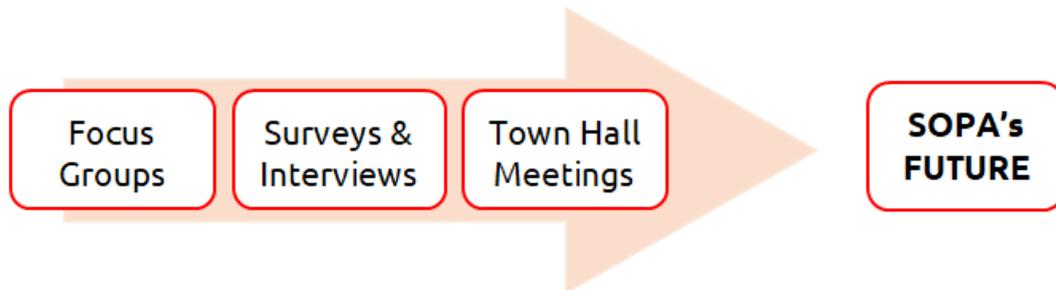
As a result of the 2016 Solutions Team and Town Hall meeting outcomes, our Board of Directors created a Reorganization Team to address concerns expressed around the future sustainability of Special Olympics PA. This group of local program leaders, an athlete, staff and a Board member were tasked to find a positive “Way Forward”.

This Reorganization Team’s research included, meeting with Special Olympics North America (SONA) leadership, meeting with leadership from other state programs (SONY, SOMA, SONJ) and gathering examples of various successful models from additional states.

The Reorganization Team is charged with making recommendations for how Special Olympics PA’s programming and systems must change to address the opportunities and challenges of the future. The overarching principles for this group are that all recommendations must:

1. Serve more athletes; and
2. Provide better quality services and experiences for **all** our athletes.

The Team’s work is future-focused and builds on input gathered from athletes, programs, volunteers and staff from across the state.



Several strengths were identified through the process including:

- SOPA’s mission continues to be athlete-focused and relevant after 50 years by adding new opportunities and strengthening existing programs.
- SOPA has a great base of truly committed and dedicated individuals who value their involvement with SOPA.

Additionally, there are challenges at all levels:

- As shown in the 2016 outcomes and reinforced since then, the volunteer work has become more and more complex and burdensome, with many speaking of being overworked, and new volunteers hard to find.

- The athlete experiences and opportunities are not consistent in all areas of Pennsylvania.

These challenges cannot be ignored. One clear determination is that the “status quo” will not allow SOPA to optimally grow and serve athletes. Therefore, we know we must change.

What’s next?? How do we determine the steps that are necessary to do **MORE** and **BETTER** for our current and future athletes?

The Reorg Team has been meeting every two weeks for the past 7 months to determine what a successful model will look like to meet the current and future needs of our athletes and volunteers. The Team has developed a model that would group counties into nine regions across the state. Factors that were considered for each region include athlete population, colleges, media markets, and geography. Some important tenets of the regions are:

1. Athletes will not have to travel more than 30 minutes to access a training site.
2. Local competitions will not require more than 1 hour of travel.
3. Regional competitions will not require more than 2 hours’ travel.
4. All athletes will be registered with SOPA, not local programs. Athletes can participate anywhere that is convenient for them.
5. All regions and athletes will have the same high-quality SOPA experience, regardless of where they train and compete.
6. Volunteers will once again be able to focus on our athletes instead of administrative tasks.

A general session at Leadership Conference in August is planned to introduce the Regionalization Model that has been developed. There will be 2 Fireside Chats on the agenda (one for manager’s and the second open to all) to allow more opportunities for questions and discussion. All work is focused on how SOPA can be structured to serve **MORE** athletes with **BETTER** programming.

Please use this link to submit any questions or comments you have in advance of the Leadership Conference so that we can address them at that time.

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Ry3Hc2yoVmwQHtto0xJeYIibLahAsuxvYb-5GMoQHAA/edit>

Thank you for your dedication to SOPA and our athletes,
The SOPA Reorganization Team

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