



Athlete Leadership University Athlete Requirements:

Athlete must be 18 years of age or older to be trained as an Athlete Representative or 16 or older to be trained as a Global Messenger. Athletes must also be actively involved in their local program, have good communication skills, be attentive during training sessions and be able to represent SOPA in a professional manner.

Athlete Leadership University Mentor Requirements:

Mentor must be 18 years of age or older and is a registered Class A Volunteer with valid background checks and completion of General Orientation and Protective Behaviors training. Mentors are chaperones, and therefore cannot be a current or former athlete. Mentors must be good role models that are patient and supportive of their Athlete Leader, provide transportation, phone and internet access if athlete is unable to provide those to themselves and be able to represent SOPA in a professional manner.

Introductory Athlete Leadership University Courses:

- PLEDGE: Introduction to Athlete Leadership, required for all athletes and mentors attending Athlete Leadership University for the first time.
- Mentor Training: Training on the role of a mentor and how to gradually decrease support as Athlete Leader gains more experience. Required for all mentors attending Athlete Leadership University for the first time.
- Athlete Representative I: Introduction to governance, teaches athletes how to serve on committees and work with others.
- Global Messenger I: Introduction to communications, teaches athletes how to research target audiences, practice and deliver a speech.
- Athletes as Coaches: A non-sports specific course teaching athletes the requirements and responsibilities of coaching within Special Olympics.
 - This course is not a requirement to receive skills certification. Athletes wishing to become certified coaches are required to attend a SOPA Coaches' Training School like other coaches.
 - Athletes already certified as coaches may take this course if they are struggling with their transition from a competitor to coach, or if they want to receive an Athlete Leadership University degree.
 - Athletes as coaches cannot chaperone other athletes and are included within what is called the 4:2 ratio. This allows the 4:1 ratio to still be met without local programs having to send additional volunteers.
 - Athletes cannot coach and compete in the same sport or sports season.
 - Ex: If an athlete coaches volleyball, they cannot compete in volleyball or any other fall sports. However, they can still compete in Winter and Summer Sports.
 - If athlete chooses, they may compete in the sport or sports season they coach in the following year.
 - Additional Athletes as Coaches information can be found via this link:
http://specialolympicspa.org/images/Athlete_Leadership/Athletes_as_Coaches_Frequently_Asked_Questions_and_Answers_UPDATED.pdf
- Healthy Lifestyles: Teaches athletes the role of a Health and Fitness Coordinator and how to promote better health, nutrition and fitness in their local program.
 - Responsibilities of a Health and Fitness Coordinator include, but are not limited to:
 - Organize year round health and fitness clubs for athletes, coaches, volunteers and family members of all ages and ability levels.
 - Promote health and fitness clubs via social media, e-mail blasts, newsletters or other methods of mass communication.
 - Provide menu input at local events.
 - Volunteer/offer Healthy Habits.
 - And more!
 - Additional Healthy Lifestyles information can be found via this link:
http://specialolympicspa.org/images/Athlete_Leadership/Healthy_Lifestyles_-_Frequently_Asked_Questions.pdf

Advanced Athlete Leadership University Courses:

- Athlete Representative II: Advanced governance, uses real life hands on scenarios on how to start and run an Athlete Leadership Team and solve problems with the help of others.
- Global Messenger II: Advanced communications, expands a Global Messenger's knowledge of Special Olympics programs, different types of speeches, elements to enhance speeches, proper attire and dining, verbal and non-verbal etiquette.

Certification, Practicum and Graduation:

Following each course, each athlete receives a certificate of course completion. Each introductory and advanced course requires a practicum to be completed within a full calendar year. Practicum requirements and report forms can be downloaded and printed via this link: <http://specialolympicspa.org/special-programs/initiatives/athlete-leadership> Following the completion of each practicum, athletes receive a certificate of practicum completion. Once an athlete has completed their Athlete Representative II, Global Messenger II, Athletes as Coaches and/or Healthy Lifestyles practicum, they are eligible to receive a degree in their respective major(s) in a graduation ceremony.

Athlete Leadership Teams (ALTs):

ALTs are a direct link between local program athletes and the local program management team. Chaired by the Athlete Representative on the Management Team, each ALT provides their local program input on sports and non-sports issues and volunteers at events inside and outside of Special Olympics. More information regarding ALTs can be found in the ALT Guide via this link: http://specialolympicspa.org/images/Athlete_Leadership/ALT_Guide.pdf

Regional Input Council (RIC):

The RIC is a direct link between local program athletes and the SOPA Board of Directors. The RIC consists of representatives in each of the six regions in PA (Northeast, Southeast, North Central, South Central, Northwest and Southwest). The RIC is chaired by the Athlete Representative on the SOPA Board of Directors elected onto the Board during Athlete Congress. Each RIC member communicates with Athlete Representatives in their region to collect input on high level issues from Athlete Congress. The RIC works with the Athlete Congress Chair to organize and execute the bi-ennial Athlete Congress.

Leadership Conference:

Leadership Conference is SOPA's largest non-competitive event. It's an opportunity for athletes, coaches, local program management team members, staff and board to connect and learn about the direction SOPA is heading. During odd numbered years, SOPA offers athlete led and athlete centered sessions at Leadership Conference for current and prospective Athlete Leaders and Mentors.

Athlete Congress:

Athlete Congress is hosted every two years in conjunction with Leadership Conference. Each program may send one Athlete Representative and Athlete Representative Mentor to vote on athlete selected topics to be brought to the attention of the SOPA Board of Directors. During Strategic Planning years, it is also an opportunity for Athlete Representatives to provide input on what direction SOPA should move forward with during its next strategic plan.

Athlete Input Council/Athlete Input Survey:

Athlete Input Councils are hosted during each state competition. This is an opportunity for all competing athletes to share their input on the event and learn important information regarding Athlete Leadership. Athlete Input Surveys are conducted at all state and sectional competitions. Just like an Athlete Input Council, Athlete Input Surveys are designed to allow athletes to provide their event experience. Athlete Input Surveys are conducted by Athlete Leaders and Mentors not competing at the event and are conducted on tablets electronically or on paper.

Questions About Athlete Leadership:

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