



Athlete Leadership University Courses & Roles

Overview:

Since 1989, Special Olympics Pennsylvania 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.

Prior to attending Athlete Leadership University, all athletes have the opportunity to serve in any of these capacities through their [Local Program](#) and/or with support from Special Olympics Pennsylvania staff:

- Volunteering at a local competition, fundraiser or other special event.
 - Handing out awards, serving food, keeping score, signing people in, etc.
- Serving on an Athlete Leadership Team.
 - Providing feedback on local Special Olympics experience and assisting Management Team with other projects.
- Attending an Athlete Input Council at any of Special Olympics Pennsylvania's 4 State Competitions (Winter Games, Indoor Winter Games, Summer Games and Fall Festival).
 - Share feedback on different areas of the event such as competition, meals, Opening Ceremonies, Olympic Village and more!
- Conduct Athlete Input Surveys at any local/invitational competition, any of Special Olympics Pennsylvania's Spring/Fall Sectionals and/or any of Special Olympics Pennsylvania's State Competitions.
 - Interview competing athletes on their event experiences through a series of multiple choice and open ended questions.
 - Contact Manager of Athlete Leadership & Young Athletes, Jordan Schubert at jschubert@specialolympicspa.org if interested in conducting surveys at a Sectional/State Competition.
- Attend Special Olympics Pennsylvania's annual Leadership Conference.
 - Receive updates from Athlete Leaders, Staff and Volunteers on the continuous improvements being made throughout the organization.
 - Registration for Leadership Conference requires approval from Local Program Manager/Director.

Athlete Leadership University Courses & Potential Roles:

Special Olympics Pennsylvania offers 4 different majors for its Athlete Leadership University curriculum. Starting in 2021, all majors will also require the completion of the Introduction to Athlete Leadership and Understanding Leadership Courses. 3 of the 4 courses require athlete to be at least 18 years of age or older (Global Messengers must be at least 16). Local Programs 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.

- 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 introductory training include, but are not limited to:
 - Serving on Local Program Management Team:
 - Group of volunteers responsible for overseeing all sports and non-sports activities within Local Program.
 - Chair of Athlete Leadership Team:
 - The main athlete liaison between the Management Team and local program athletes, more info on Athlete Leadership Teams can be found on page 1.
 - Games Organizing Committee Member:
 - Serve alongside Special Olympics Pennsylvania staff and volunteers to plan an event and provide feedback from personal experience. If not competing, volunteer at the event with the other committee members.

- Athlete Congress Attendee:
 - Athlete Congress is hosted every 2 years where Athlete Representatives discuss and vote on important athlete centered topics.
 - Local/Regional/State Advisory Committees
 - Formed on an as needed basis based on the sports, fundraising, recruitment and other goals of the organization.
 - Regional Input Council
 - A group of Athlete Representatives responsible for communicating with and supporting Athlete Leadership Team Chairs within their assigned geographic territory. The Regional Input Council also assists with the organization of Athlete Congress and provides support for all other athlete centered initiatives. Currently, elections take place every two years at Athlete Congress, however, following re-organization, they will be conducted internally within the region.
 - Board of Directors
 - Special Olympics Pennsylvania has two Athlete Representatives on their Board of Directors. One is elected by the Board like any other member. The other is elected by their peers at Athlete Congress and is the Chair of the Regional Input Council.
- Global Messenger: A Global Messenger is someone who of course enjoys to talk! It should also be someone passionate who can easily sell Special Olympics to others!
 - Global Messengers can speak with any types of audiences that include, but are not limited to:
 - Opening Ceremonies at a Competition
 - Fundraisers
 - Media Interviews
 - Honored Guests at President’s Reception at a Competition
 - Corporate Partners
 - Schools
 - Group Homes
 - Professional Sports Teams
- Health and Fitness Coordinator: A Health and Fitness Coordinator is an athlete committed to promoting healthier lifestyles for athletes, unified partners, coaches and families. They need to effectively communicate both face-to-face and electronically (e-mail and social media) and have a positive attitude.
 - Health and Fitness Coordinators must complete the Healthy Lifestyles and complete the following projects to fulfil their responsibilities:
 - Offer year round [Health and Fitness Clubs](#) to athletes, unified partners, coaches and families of all ages and abilities.
 - Provide input on healthy menu options for local events.
 - Offer [Healthy Habits](#) at a Local/Invitational Competition and/or serve as a Healthy Habits volunteer at the Sectional/State level with support from the Director of Program Initiatives.
 - While not a requirement, Health and Fitness Coordinators are also highly encouraged to:
 - Support Local Program in partnering with nearby Health and Fitness organizations.
 - Serve as a Healthy Athletes assistant during a State Competition.
- Athletes as Coaches: An Athlete as Coach is interested in sharing their sports knowledge and skills with other athletes. It should be someone that’s patient and comfortable working with athletes of all ages and ability levels.
 - This is a non-sport specific training that teaches athletes that currently are/wish to become certified coaches how to better understand their role and transition from a competitor to a coach.
 - Following completion of the training, Athletes as Coaches must do one of two things:
 - Serve as an assistant coach in a sport for a full season (minimum of 8 weeks).
 - Present a copy of skills certificate from a Special Olympics Pennsylvania training school that took place prior to attending Athletes as Coaches.

If interested in being trained in any of these roles, please complete this [interest form](#). There is no limit to the number of roles an Athlete Leader can serve in, however it’s recommended that they focus on one at a time.

Steps Towards Graduation:

Athlete Representatives and Global Messengers:

- Following completion of Introduction to Athlete Leadership and Understanding Leadership, an Athlete Representative and Global Messenger must do the following in order to graduate:
 - Complete the introductory course at Athlete Leadership University (Athlete Representative I/Global Messenger I).
 - Complete an Introductory Practicum.
 - At least 3+ speeches for Global Messenger I and 3+ capstone projects for Athlete Representative I.
 - Complete the advanced course at Athlete Leadership University (Athlete Representative II/Global Messenger II)
 - Complete an Advanced Practicum.
 - At least 3+ capstone projects for Athlete Representative II/Global Messenger II.

Health and Fitness Coordinators:

- Following completion of Introduction to Athlete Leadership and Understanding Leadership, a Health and Fitness Coordinator must do the following in order to graduate:
 - Complete the Healthy Lifestyles Course at Athlete Leadership University.
 - Complete the three required items outlined on page 2.

Athletes as Coaches:

- Following completion of Introduction to Athlete Leadership and Understanding Leadership, an Athlete as Coach must do the following in order to graduate:
 - Complete the Athletes as Coaches course at Athlete Leadership University.
 - Complete one of the two items outlined on page 2.

Following completion of all courses and practicums required within a major, an athlete then becomes eligible to earn a degree for their respective course during a graduation ceremony. This ceremony traditionally takes place during the annual awards banquet at Special Olympics Pennsylvania's annual Leadership Conference. Athletes receive a diploma signed by the Manager of Athlete Leadership & Young Athletes, President & CEO and Board Chair. Each graduate also receives a gift specific to how many degrees they have earned for this ceremony or from previous ones.

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-person or online 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:

- jschubert@specialolympicspa.org
- 610-630-9450 ext. 236