



**Special
Olympics**
Pennsylvania



Special Olympics Pennsylvania

Strategic Plan

2026-2030

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Our Mission

The mission of Special Olympics is to provide year-round sports training and competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy, and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills, and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes, and the community.

Goal of Special Olympics

The ultimate goal of Special Olympics is to help persons with intellectual disabilities participate as productive and respected members of society at large, by offering them a fair opportunity to develop and demonstrate their skills and talents through sports training and competition, and by increasing the public's awareness of their capabilities and needs.

Vision

Our vision is an inclusive world for all, driven by the power of sport, through which people with intellectual disabilities live active, healthy, and fulfilling lives.





Overview

Special Olympics is a global Movement that has flourished for more than 50 years due to the passion and the commitment of its dedicated staff and volunteers. The vision statement above is drawn from the global strategic plan, and it relates directly to achieving the overall goal of Special Olympics.

Here in the Commonwealth, Special Olympics Pennsylvania (SOPA) provides training in more than 20 sports and offers more than 1,000 competition opportunities each year through its 9 regions. It takes a team of dedicated staff and thousands of incredible volunteers to make this happen. This strategic plan has been created to help guide the efforts of these joint volunteer/staff teams for the next five years, and it outlines and aligns the most important activities to provide overall direction for our collective efforts in pursuit of our global shared vision.

Our 2026–2030 Strategic Plan builds on the same strategic framework used for the 2022–25 strategic plan. The framework remains centered on six core goals—three mission-focused and three foundational—which have been reaffirmed by the SOPA Board of Directors as the pillars for our next phase of growth.

This plan is shaped by the voices of our athletes, coaches, families, staff, and board members.

Reach & Impact

Nearly

10,000

Special Olympics PA athletes compete across



9

local regions at

1,000+

annual competitions in



20

Olympic-Type Sports with the help of over



30K

volunteers





Their input has guided us to focus on several key principles:

-  • **Expanding Impact:** We are committed to changing more lives, aiming to double the number of individuals with intellectual disabilities served in Pennsylvania.
-  • **Unified Opportunities:** Growth will be driven by prioritizing the expansion of Unified programs in both communities and schools, while continuing to offer traditional choices.
-  • **Quality Programming:** Through ongoing evaluation and biennial reviews, we will diversify our sports offerings and participation opportunities to better meet athletes' needs. We refer to this as our Future of Sport model.
-  • **Health & Wellness:** Building on our Healthy Athletes initiative, we will shape programming to address health disparities and support athletes in achieving better health outcomes.

Our ambitious goal is to double the number of athletes we serve:

from
9,915 to 20,000+
by 2030

This growth is about more than numbers; it's about providing greater choice, empowering athletes as leaders, and fostering healthier lives.



Achieving these goals will require recruiting and training a new generation of coaches and volunteers, launching new training sites, and securing additional resources. We are committed to seamless integration between school and community programs, enabling lifelong participation for athletes.

Every region has developed its own growth and sports development plans, ensuring that our strategy is both comprehensive and locally relevant. As we move forward, we remain committed to integration and seamless experiences for athletes throughout their lifetime with Special Olympics.



Plan Development

Work on this strategic plan was initiated in late 2024 when a proposed planning process with key milestones and a timeline was reviewed and approved by the SOPA Board of Directors. An offsite planning retreat was conducted in January 2025 and included all regional executive directors and senior staff leaders. This retreat helped align the entire team around the vision and priorities for the future and launched the “bottoms up” approach to creating the specific content details that form the heart of the plan.

From there, each region was tasked with creating their own regional plan for 2026–2030. Our teams utilized data to help guide their planning – examining current athlete numbers, Unified Champion School and training site locations, and census data to compare existing programming with gaps and opportunities for future growth. Planning was also informed by the work of the “Future of Sport” team.

The future of sports model provides a bold shift in how Special Olympics Pennsylvania delivers value to athletes, volunteers, and communities—focusing on customer experience, choice, and long-term engagement. By identifying participation options with defined experiences, tools, and technology, SOPA is building a scalable, inclusive model that empowers individuals to choose their journey, grow with purpose, and stay connected for life.

The desired outcome of this work is to provide more choices for our athletes regarding how they can participate in Special Olympics in the future – from introductory experiences to recreational sports to competitive experiences that challenge athletes to reach their full potential. As part of the Future of Sport work, a sport evaluation was conducted in 2024 that categorized sports into 3 different tiers. These tiers were then used to create an implementation plan and schedule which helped the regions create their detailed plans and objectives for each year of the 2026–2030 strategic plan.





Each Regional Director was given the flexibility to develop their plans based on what worked best for their region. Feedback from key stakeholders—including athletes, staff, volunteers, and family members—was incorporated throughout the process. Periodic reviews were conducted, senior leadership held multiple discussions with regional leaders, and the Board of Directors received updates at each of its meetings during the first three quarters of 2025.

In addition to contributing to their respective regional plans, stakeholders also provided input on the overall organizational plan. More than 300 individuals—including SOPA athletes, family members, coaches, Unified Partners, staff, and other volunteers—participated in a survey to share their perspectives on SOPA’s overall direction. Dedicated sessions with individual stakeholders were also conducted to allow for deeper conversation and more detailed feedback. The final draft of the plan was then reviewed by the State Athlete Leadership Council and a group of key volunteer leaders.

Finally, the 2026–2030 strategic plan was reviewed and approved by the Board of Directors at their November 2025 meeting during SOPA’s annual Fall Festival.

The approved strategic plan is outlined on the following pages. Each region will continue to use their regional plan as a guide during implementation each year.



2026-2030 Strategic Plan Framework

The strategic plan contains 3 mission-focused (programmatic) goals and three supporting or foundational goals. The mission-focused goals are shown in red in the diagram below, and the foundational goals are shown in gray.



The first goal is about both growth and quality. We want to ensure that individuals with an intellectual disability who live anywhere in Pennsylvania have an opportunity to participate in Special Olympics. We believe that our work changes lives, so we want to impact as many individuals with ID as possible. We also believe our athletes deserve our very best, so we want their interactions with SOPA to be meaningful, quality experiences.



Create a more inclusive world through Unified Sports, Unified Champion Schools (UCS), and Unified Leadership

The second goal uses Unified programs and experiences to help achieve the vision of a more inclusive world. We know that when people interact in meaningful ways with our athletes, powerful changes in attitudes and perceptions can take place. So, while we will always offer traditional programming designed for individuals with ID, as we add new programs and training sites, we will emphasize Unified opportunities.

The third mission-focused goal is about improving the health of our athletes. SOPA has been a leader in the Special Olympics Movement in implementing Healthy Athlete screenings. The more than 15,000 screenings we've conducted have helped build a database of information showing the health disparities and challenges faced by our athletes. With this plan, we now want to "move the needle" on changing some of these statistics. Specifically, we want to address the 20-year gap in life expectancy people with ID face compared to the rest of the population. We will use research-informed information to incorporate health and fitness into existing programs and add new activities designed to help our athletes who want to lead longer, healthier lives.



Improve the overall health, fitness and well-being of athletes



These 3 goals are not separate, independent goals but rather will work in concert. For example, we will look at Unified opportunities and emphasize sports and activities that promote good health as we seek to grow in underserved areas.



Foundational Goals

There are also 3 foundational goals. By focusing on these, we will ensure our ability to deliver on the 3 mission-focused goals.

1

First, we must continue to generate annual revenues that not only sustain our operations but allow us to grow. We have been growing annual revenues successfully since we initiated our regionalization process, approximately doubling our annual revenue during that time. To be successful with this new strategic plan, we will need to continue that growth.



2

We also need to leverage the strength of the Special Olympics brand. We know Special Olympics is one of the most trusted and recognized nonprofits, and we need to use the power of our brand as we grow and attract new athletes and volunteers to our Movement.



3

Finally, we have to work together – staff and volunteers – to run the organization as one team. The more efficiently and effectively we can run our operations, the more we can do for our athletes.





Defining Success

We have identified specific metrics for each goal that we intend to achieve by 2030. The organizational-level metrics are outlined in the diagram below. As described earlier, each region also has its own plan, and each of these plans outline similar region-specific metrics for success.



Provide better quality experiences for more athletes and volunteers

- Add more than 2,700 UCS athletes (total = 6,000+ by 2030)
- Add 8,000 athletes in community programs (total = 14,000+)
- Add 750 certified coaches (total = 1,600)
- Add 2,400 Class A volunteers (total = 5,500)
- Add 70 new Volunteer Leadership Teams (total = 120+)
- Grow From 516 to 1,000+ Community Training Sites



Create a more inclusive world through Unified Sports, Unified Sports, Unified Champion Schools (UCS), and Unified Leadership

- Grow from 539 to more than 1,000+ UCS Schools
- Add 500+ new sports/programs in existing UCS schools
- Improve athlete transition rate from school-to-community (from 9% in 2025 to 25% by 2030)
- Add 150+ community Unified Sports training sites serving athletes age 2-15
- Add 200+ Unified Sports training sites for athletes age 16-35
- Build 40+ College/University partnerships



Improve the overall health, fitness and well-being of athletes

- 6,000+ athletes involved in a fitness activity
- At least 32% of participating athletes show cardiovascular endurance improvement
- At least 26% of high-risk athletes show BMI improvement
- At least 380 UCS schools offer Unified strength & conditioning, track & field, or other fitness-oriented sports options.
- Conduct at least 20 Healthy Athlete screening events by 2030 (with 9,600+ individual screenings)



Generate more resources to build organizational capacity

- Raise \$20MM in annual revenue by 2030
- Grow annual Polar Plunge revenue to \$5MM+
- Grow direct annual LETR revenue from \$400K to \$1.5MM
- Increase foundation & corporate support from \$3.2MM to \$5MM



Build and strengthen the SOPA Brand

- Communication Performance Index improves by 10% by 2030
- Brand Health Survey shows 5% annual increase in 'strong understanding' ratings and 'low awareness' drops by 30% by 2030
- Engagement increases by 5% annually per channel (with portal activations as key metric)



Excel at managing all operational and administrative elements of our business

- Consistent operational guidelines and clear workflows improve efficiency, alignment and collaboration
- Digital dashboards provide real-time visibility into performance
- Annual employee engagement scores increase from "Good" (54%) to "High Performing" (at least 75%)
- Annual employee turnover rate of 10% or less



Implementation & Monitoring

The Special Olympics Pennsylvania Board of Directors sets the strategic goals for the organization and is therefore the “owner” of this plan. The President and CEO is responsible for executing the strategic plan and achieving the goals it establishes. But, to be successful in achieving the goals set forth in this plan, the collective efforts of ALL stakeholders will be required. In particular, good collaboration between the headquarters, regional staff and local teams will be necessary in order to fully and accurately understand needs, develop action steps, and secure the resources necessary to address those needs in order to collectively reach our goals.

We will develop scorecards and other tools to help us track and report progress. We will share this information with the Board of Directors at their periodic meetings and will use it internally to help us monitor progress toward our goals.

