

Coach and Site Coordinator's Quick Reference Guide

Special Olympics Pennsylvania, Montgomery County

MONTGOMERY
COUNTY

SPECIAL OLYMPICS
PENNSYLVANIA



2023

6/19/2023

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COUNTY

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PENNSYLVANIA



Mission

The Special Olympics mission is to provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for all 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

Special Olympics-Pennsylvania, Montgomery County
980 Harvest Drive Suite 203
Blue Bell, PA 19422
Phone 215-542-1140 // Fax 215-542-1144
Email: specialOlympicsmontco@verizon.net
Website: www.specialolympicsmontco.org

Like us on Facebook:  // Twitter: SpecOlyMontcoPA

Hello Coaches. This set of quick reference guides are being made available in response to your requests for guidance. They are user-friendly, and in a checklist format. Please share with your volunteers and give us feedback. Thank you for all you do for the 1,450 Special Olympics athletes of Montgomery County.

Your all-volunteer management team:

Scott A. Otterbein

Scott Otterbein, County Manager scottotterbein@gmail.com 215-264-8075

Jim Malcolm, Treasurer jcmalcolm02@yahoo.com 610-506-1591
Office Volunteers specialOlympicsmontco@verizon.net. 215-542-1140: Scott Otterbein, Ann Salomon (215-901-2640), Karen Schulte, MaryEllen Donohue

Pat Egan, Competition Coordinator: Pat@EganRE.com

Transportation: Donna Johnson (donnagjohnson@comcast.net)

Fundraising:

Golf Committee: Scott Otterbein, Geoff Kalman, Beth Holmes
Other management team members: Denise Herr, Dan Gemmill, Ashley White, Athlete Trevor Ciampoli.


We post news and tools on Instagram (SpecOlyMontcoPA), on our website at <http://www.specialolympicsmontco.org/> and on our Facebook page 

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Athlete registration

1. No fees of any kind are to be charged for Special Olympics athlete participation. Anyone who has been identified by an agency or professional as having an intellectual disability or closely related developmental disability is eligible to participate in Special Olympics training and competition. ✓
2. Athletes must be 7 years of age to train and 8 years of age to compete. ✓
3. We have a [Young Athletes program](#) for ages 2 ½ -7. Contact the County Manager. ✓
4. There is an athlete and coach Code of Conduct of Special Olympics, Inc., which can be found on the SOMC website under the Athletes tab:
<https://www.specialolympicsmontco.org/be-an-athlete/> ✓
5. All athletes must have a current Application for Participation on file with the County. An office date stamped copy must be available during training sessions and tournaments regardless of location. Due to the confidentiality of these forms they should be kept in a safe place. Access to these forms should be limited to those coaches who are registered Class A Volunteers and emergency services personnel. ✓
6. The Application for Participation requires the signature of a Physician (or Nurse Practitioner/Physician Assistant), and the signature of a Parent or Guardian as appropriate. Remind all to fill in **every single line and entry** on **both** sides of the form with the exception of the **Social Security number – we don't need or want it**. There are places for two signatures on the front page and two on the reverse. The Application must be renewed every 3 years and the form can be found at this link to the County website: <http://www.specialolympicsmontco.org/be-an-athlete/> ✓
7. SOPA emails a notice and we also send a post-card reminder in advance notifying the athlete contact that the participation will be expiring. Coaches - please do not accept or keep original athlete participation forms from caregivers. They are only valid after the County office has uploaded and updated the athlete information. Have them mail the form (email is preferred) to the office. We will contact the athlete/family/agency by email or phone to confirm completed the athlete registration to close the loop.

IMPORTANT: If you are provided a medical form by a parent or guardian at practice and it does not have an entered/date stamp at the top it is likely to not have been entered into the SOPA database. Send all participation forms to the SOMC office for entry.

We can provide official copies of all your athlete medicals for your upcoming season if you give us some time. Send a complete list to the SOMC email address before the season start.

8. *Participants must register for each sport site at the beginning of each season. Share your sport registration link is shared with all your athletes and volunteers. More information can be [found here](#) at the SOPA signup page.*

Coach certification

Prior to becoming a coach, you must meet the minimum volunteer requirements. See page 8, [Volunteers](#).

1. Sites are encouraged to have more than one Special Olympics sport specific certified coach to allow flexibility and backup alternates for area/sectional and state tournaments. Practice sites should have one certified coach at practice. **One certified coach is required for every 25 athletes** at practices of individual sports (track, bowling, swimming, etc.)

- **At least one certified coach is required** for each team participating in sectional and state-wide Special Olympics tournaments. The coach **must not have any other role** (head of delegation, Unified Partner, etc.) during the competition. You cannot be a Unified Partner player on a Unified team and coach at the same time. Partners do not count as part of the 4:1 athlete volunteer ratio ✓ □

- When assembling your coach roster for competitions, do check the 4:1 ratio math carefully and check with the Head of Delegation (HOD) well ahead of time to verify you have the right ratios for teams and Unified Sports teams. Have a back-up coach or two (listed as alternates) as it often happens that illness strikes, or some emergency prevents a coach from attending. ✓ □

2. First time Coach Certification: Attend an approved training, either a Special Olympics Sports Specific Coach Training School or an application on previous experience in the sport as outlined in the two tracks below. Work with the County Manager if you want to conduct a program in the County. A state office approved Clinician has to teach the session. ✓ □

- Track One: Individuals with no prior coaching or playing background in the sport in which they want to become certified. Attend an approved Special Olympics Sports Specific Coach Training course. Click here: [View Training Schools](#) for currently approved and offered courses. ✓ □
- Track Two: **New Coaches with Sport Experience** – If you are a new coach with sport experience you are encouraged to complete a [Track 2 Application](#) and submit it for Approval. Once approved by the SOPA Training department you will be directed to take the basic course – Coaching Special Olympics Athletes and complete 10 hours of practicum. Coaching Special Olympics Athletes is an overview of four components: athlete, coach, training and competition. ✓ □
- Complete a 10 hour practicum at an approved local training site in the sport in which you are applying for certification. Up to 5 hours training athletes during the current sports season, but prior to attending the training school, may be counted toward the 10-hour practicum requirement as long as the training was conducted in conjunction with a certified head coach. ✓ □
- Complete your log of hours online in your SOPA Vsys portal account link as explained at the training school. Note it is for the sport you took and does not qualify you for another sport. ✓ □
- Individuals have 1 year from the date of their attendance at a training to complete the steps above and earn their certification. **If a coach needs to become certified for a program for state-level competitions, they must complete** all the above requirements prior to the start of the state-level competition. ✓ □

3. Continuing Education. Certified Coaches **must take approved continuing education every three years** to maintain their Special Olympics Sports Certification. A listing of approved continuing education courses can be found at the end of the page under: [Training Schools](#). One

new way to receive credit is to attend or view at a later date a [SOPA Lunch and Learn Webinar](#) that offers continuing ed credit.

Coaches are not required to complete a 10 hour practicum for continuing education. Submit a signed Sports Training Application to SOPA for approval of their continuing education. ✓

Competitions

How do I get information about local tournaments, Sectional and State Games?

Designate a communication point of contact (if not yourself) and share the name/email/phone number with the SOMC email address so the County Manager can send tournament information to the right people. Your contact should reply in a timely manner to email requests and should be reading emails often during event registration time frames.

1. Local Competitions

- SOMC website has the current county tournament schedule at the homepage: <https://www.specialolympicsmontco.org/> Send corrections to SOMC. There are athletes unable to travel to SOPA or other away tournaments. Athlete competition at the local level is cost efficient while also giving families better opportunity to watch their athlete compete.
- Consult with SOMC regarding setting dates, speak with head coaches at other Montgomery sites in your sport, review the dates already published on the home page tournament schedule to avoid conflicting tournament dates.
- Consider mini-scrimmage events, county tournaments and partnering with other county programs for regional competitions. Keep all athletes in mind so that everyone gets a fair chance to play. Awards are to be given to all participants with medals (gold, silver and bronze) and ribbons (4th, 5th, 6th, 7th place – depending on how deep your divisioning.) Keep the County Manager informed of dates, volunteer needs and anticipated costs as soon as possible so the event can be shared with other local programs and athletes in our county. Do not obligate for costs prior to speaking with the County Manager. ✓
- If you receive an invitation from another county, please send it to the County Manager before accepting. Once the dates, costs and transportation questions are discussed with you the County Manager or the head coach will work the host county.

2. Sectional and State Competitions

1. It is critical to read and reply to email messages from SOMC and SOPA regarding due dates for letters of intent, rosters, and athlete entries, housing, etc. Our management team will work with you to answer questions and help you meet the requirements.
2. Work with coaches so they too have valid credentials and training and confirm that once they have agreed to attend, they do not back out. It is critical to anticipate your coach roster well before the due date. It is best practice to have alternate coach names on the submitted roster to cover for unexpected family emergencies. Once we submit the roster it is very difficult to add more coaches who were not on the roster.
3. **Do not inform athletes they are going to state games until after the final allocations are received. Simply winning a gold medal does not guarantee attendance.**
4. Plan to meet the 4:1 volunteer ratio with alternates identified and ready to go on short notice as back up. ✓
5. Maintain the required number of SOPA certified coaches (varies between individual sports, team sports and Unified) ✓
6. Coaches and volunteers accompanying athletes as part of the 4:1 delegation must be at least 18 years of age. Coaches for single-day competitions must be at least 16 years of age. ✓
7. Tournament Coaches Handbooks have detailed information including venue locations, schedules, activities and maps. They are forwarded to your designated contact. ✓
8. Select athletes and coaches who will stay for the entire competition, can handle the stress, will travel with the delegation and will stay at the housing provided. ✓
9. If transportation is provided by SOMC only rostered athletes and coaches are allowed on the bus. No parents or friends or other coaches can ride. ✓

Fundraising and Marketing

1. If you are requested to make a presentation about Special Olympics, please contact the County Manager
2. The County must rely on local sources of funding to carry out its budget. With an all-volunteer management and coaching team we devote our resources to the needs of athletes averaging about \$115 per athlete per year. Please encourage family, friends and donors to contribute to the County. **Note that we do not receive financial support from Special Olympics Pennsylvania.** Because we happen to be located in the same county as the state offices some donors have sent their check made out to “Special Olympics” and mailed it to the STATE SPECIAL OLYMPICS Norristown address thinking it will go to our Special Olympics Montgomery County program. ✓ ***Please remind donors to make checks payable to Special Olympics Montgomery County and mail to our county office at 980 Harvest Drive, Suite 203, Blue Bell, PA 19422 to ensure proper receipt.*** ✓ □
3. All grant applications must be submitted by the County Manager. Online applications and paper applications may also require Special Olympics Pennsylvania review and signature. ✓ □
4. The Annual Golf Tournament is our most significant source of income. The 2021 tournament will be held September 18, 2023 at the Old York Road Country Club. More information can be found at the County website – click [here](#). ✓ □

There are other opportunities for fundraising. . Some bowling and swimming programs have raised large amounts through pledges and sponsors during “bowl-a-thon and swim-a-thons” which could be copied by just about any sport. The track and LDRW programs participate in the Annual Polar Plunge. All sites are expected to make an effort to generate a donation to SOMC no matter how small. ✓ □

Operating a practice site.

Head coaches or site coordinators register your training site before the upcoming season [here](#).

1. Maintain communication with the County Manager while exploring any new venues and share the practice days/times/location so the website listing can be up to date. We have free access to several Y sites. ✓ SOMC must have your preferred point of contact information. Please promptly respond to inquiries about your site or to referrals we send from the SOMC office. □
2. Check your training site and equipment before each practice for safety. Contact the County Manager if equipment or uniforms need replacement. Check for trash or potholes on the field, broken glass, broken exit doors, worn or outdated equipment, etc. Have an evacuation plan prepared and periodically review the plan with the athletes. Inform the County Manager as soon as possible when there is an injury and be available to complete incident forms for the insurance carrier (American Specialty Insurance,) Follow the concussion treatment guidelines you received in the concussion training so that athletes are cleared for return to play by their health care provider. ✓ □
3. Some sites require facility agreements or insurance certificates for practice or tournament play. All our practice sites and competition programs are covered by an umbrella insurance policy. Coaches and volunteers and the County Manager ***cannot sign*** any agreements. Scan and email the documents to the County Manager. All material is reviewed by American Specialty Insurance and the State office before an insurance certificate is provided and the agreement is signed by the CEO of SOPA. Send it in at least two weeks in advance and do not begin practices until you have received the signed insurance certificate and facility agreement. ✓ □
4. Review your site's Google attendance sheet as shared by SOPA at the beginning of the season. In addition to attendance, there are tabs showing the eligibility status of athletes and volunteers. Followup up with those who have expired credentials. ✓ □
5. At the beginning of your season verify that the County has your site listing correct on the website. It is found at <https://www.specialolympicsmontco.org/>

Volunteer registration

How many volunteers will I need? Can I get help recruiting volunteers?

Volunteer Registration

1. All practice sites must maintain a volunteer to athlete ratio of 1 registered volunteer or coach for every 4 athletes. The same is true for travel to SOPA and local tournaments. Keep the county office informed ahead of time of your volunteer needs. ✓
2. In 2015 Pennsylvania state law changed the background check requirements for volunteers working with minors. **As the head coach you and your site coordinator are responsible for having all your volunteers registered with SOMC.** ✓
3. Because we work with vulnerable children and adults all **Class A** volunteers (someone who is or may be in immediate contact with athletes) must:
 - **New volunteers** find instructions here: <http://www.specialolympicspa.org/ways-to-help/volunteer/volunteer> ✓
 - **Current volunteers** find instructions at the same location: <https://specialolympicspa.org/become-a-volunteer> ✓
 - **Volunteers 17 and under** should also visit the links above They will have to register but will not have to complete the background clearances. Look ahead during the season and anticipate if they will be turning age 18 and if so have them start the clearance at that time. ✓
 - **All current volunteers and coaches complete these three trainings here:** <http://www.specialolympicspa.org/ways-to-help/volunteer/volunteer-center>
 - Special Olympics Pennsylvania General Orientation. This is a one-time requirement that must be completed by **all volunteers** and coaches, regardless if they are new or not. ✓
 - Special Olympics Protective Behaviors Training: This training is required every three years. ✓
 - Concussion Awareness Training: This training is required every three years.
 - You actually take the trainings by logging in at the online volunteer portal at this link: <https://vsys.specialolympicspa.org/>