



Special Olympics College Club Event Guide





This guide provides ideas and steps for successful events on campus. This is a starting point for clubs to understand what goes into planning and will spark some new ideas moving forward.

Remember: Always work with the state Special Olympics Program when planning events. Program leaders must sign off on everything the club does on campus and in the community. They can also share what events have been successful in the past. The state Special Olympics Program will be your best resource moving forward!

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Getting Started - Types of Events

Now that Special Olympics is an official club on campus, it's time to start planning events to engage students and local Special Olympics athletes! Planning events can be a daunting task, but it is vital in order to spread awareness and get other students involved with Special Olympics.

The biggest question is where to begin?

When planning events, it is important to keep in mind the amount of time required and also the amount of interest from Special Olympics athletes and college students. Large-scale events require more time to plan and promote.

Here are some event ideas along with the amount of planning time needed.

EVENTS THAT REQUIRE 1-3 WEEKS OF PLANNING

- **Volunteer at a local Special Olympics event** – All Special Olympics state Programs need volunteers to assist at various times throughout the year. What better way to introduce students to Special Olympics than to volunteer at a local event? Check with the local Special Olympics Program to see if they need volunteers for upcoming events. Get in contact with the state Program [here!](#)

Example: A Special Olympics College Club in the north wanted to have the club participate in something every year. Knowing that the local state Special Olympics Winter Games were held near campus, the club organized a team of students to volunteer. The students assisted with check-in, ensured competitions ran smoothly, and some even volunteered to escort the athletes to each event. After the competitions ended for the day, the students had the chance to hang out with the Special Olympics athletes and form new friendships.

- **Be Fans in the Stands** – Nobody wants to play or compete in front of empty bleachers! Being a Fan in the Stands is simple! Get a group of students together, design some cool posters, attend a local Special Olympics event or Unified Sports® game, and cheer!

Example: Members of a Special Olympics College Club knew a few of their friends had an upcoming Special Olympics tournament. The students gathered a team to cheer on the players. As Fans in the Stands, the students made each player a poster to encourage the team. The players were excited to see their friends had shown up to cheer them on and encourage them to do their best. After the game, the students and athletes celebrated the game by going to get ice cream together.



- **Host a Unified Sports field day** – Special Olympics Unified Sports join people with and without intellectual disabilities on the same team. It was inspired by a simple principle: training together and playing together is a quick path to friendship and understanding. Find an open field on campus and invite Special Olympics athletes and students to hang out and play sports. This is a great way to get people involved and doesn't require a lot of planning.

Example: Members of a club wanted to spend more time with their friends but knew that at the moment, they did not have enough time or people to organize a full Unified Sports league. The students came up with the idea to have a Unified Sports field day every two weeks. The club provided a variety of sports equipment for everyone to play pick-up games in the gym and on the field. The students found that this was a great way to form friendships while playing sports in a more laid back setting.

EVENTS THAT REQUIRE 4-8 WEEKS OF PLANNING

- **Restaurant fundraiser night** – Support the Special Olympics College Club by eating great food at a local restaurant who will donate a portion of their sales to the club.
Example: Students wanted to raise money for their local Special Olympics Program, so they reached out to their local, popular burger restaurant to set up a fundraising night. The restaurant agreed to donate 15% of the total sales from the night to Special Olympics. After spreading the word on campus and having a successful fundraising night, the restaurant wrote a check for over \$500 that was used to grow Special Olympics opportunities in their community.
- **Spread the Word to End the Word campaign** – Started in 2009, the Spread the Word to End the Word campaign is an on-going effort to raise awareness about the dehumanizing and hurtful effects of the word “retard(ed)” and to encourage people to take the pledge to end the use of the r-word. Find out more [here](#).

Example: A Special Olympics club at a large state university realized that a lot of students used the r-word around campus, and they knew something had to change. So, the club hosted a series of events leading up to the official Spread the Word to End the Word Day, which occurs every year on the first Wednesday in March. In terms of the week's events, on Monday, the club set up an informational table in their college union to begin raising awareness for their campaign. On Tuesday, members of the club went out into their community and asked businesses to help spread the word. On Wednesday, the club held a Unified Sports event on their quad and were able to engage over 1000 students to take the pledge to end the r-word.



- **Co-sponsor an event with another student organization and/or Greek organization –** Not only does this build awareness for the club, but it offers an opportunity to connect with other clubs or organizations that have similar goals or missions on campus. Special Olympics have national partnerships with the NCAA D.III, Phi Sigma Kappa, Alpha Sigma Alpha, Sigma Tau Gamma, and Alpha Phi Omega. If one of these organizations is on your campus, make sure to connect with them!

Example: A Special Olympics College Club at a Division III school wanted to do a collaborative event with their school's student athletes. The club worked with the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) to create a Unified Sports Basketball Clinic. Athletes from the men's and women's college basketball team created and ran a practice with the club's Special Olympics athletes and Unified Partners. The clinic ran for two hours and included drills and fun mini-games. The club invited the local media outlets to cover the event and the school included an article in the school newspaper. The Special Olympics athletes and Unified Partners enjoyed playing with the student-athletes on campus.

- **Host a dance party –** Who doesn't like to dance? Invite Special Olympics athletes and students to a dance party. This is a great way to celebrate the end of a successful Special Olympics season or tournament.

Example: After a successful year, the club wanted to find a way to celebrate their athletes' achievements. The club came up with the idea to organize an annual Unified Prom. The club invited all Special Olympics athletes and students to join in on the fun. They also invited a local DJ and asked a local prom dress store if they could donate dresses for the Special Olympics athletes. This event was a huge hit for the students and athletes.



EVENTS THAT REQUIRE 3 OR MORE MONTHS OF PLANNING

- **Unified Sports Intramural League** – Intramural Sports are popular among students on most college campuses. Unified Sports Intramurals function just like any other intramural on campus, and provide ongoing Unified Sports opportunities on campus. Contact the recreation department on campus to get information on how to host a Unified Sports Intramural League. For more resources on how to start a Unified Sports Intramural League, download the NIRSA/Special Olympics Unified Sports [Resource](#). This tool will provide a step-by-step guide on how to get Unified Sports Intramurals on campus!

Example: A Special Olympics College Club wanted to increase the number of Unified Sports opportunities. To do so, they worked directly with the recreation department on campus to establish a Unified Sports Intramural League. After having an assessment day to equally divide teams, they were able to organize 4 teams to compete against one another. The teams competed once a week for a month. At the end of the season, the winner of the intramural league competed against other Unified Sports intramural champions from surrounding universities in a statewide tournament.

- **Host/compete in a local or state-level Special Olympics event or tournament** – Talk with the local Special Olympics Program to see if the club can host a Special Olympics event or have your Unified Sports team participate in a local tournament.

Example: After organizing a Unified soccer team on campus, the club wanted to compete against other teams nearby at a Unified Soccer Invitational. The team raised enough money to travel to the tournament and stay for the weekend. The team found that this was an effective way to strengthen their playing skills and build team unity. The club really enjoyed being able to meet other Special Olympics athletes and Unified Partners from various cities across the state.

- **3k walk/5k run** – For a large fundraiser, host a 3k walk/5k run on campus and invite Special Olympics athletes, college students, and members in the community to participate.

Example: To help bring together the entire campus and members of their community, a Special Olympics College Club organized a 3k walk/5k run on campus. The club held the event during the week of their Spread the Word to End the Word campaign to help raise awareness for the “r-word”. Not only did the club have people take the pledge to end the r-word, they were also able to raise enough money to help the state Special Olympics Program reach their fundraising goals for the month!



- **Unified Sports Rivalry Series** – Elevate a college sports rivalry by putting together a Unified Sports game against a rival opponent. For more information, visit the Special Olympics Unified Sports Rivalry Series [website](#). For additional resources on how to plan and execute a game, download the [Toolkit](#).

Example: Two rival colleges with Special Olympics College Clubs wanted to compete against each other in a Unified Sports Rivalry Series Game. During the months leading up to the big game, the teams practiced and promoted the Game on campus. In order to boost attendance, the clubs scheduled the Game the day before the actual rivalry game. The host team recruited their college marching band, cheerleaders, and school mascot to perform. The clubs found that this was a great way to promote Special Olympics and bring the campus together.

Sample Resources

After deciding what type of event to host, it is important to create a few planning documents to get moving in the right direction. Below are some sample resources that can help with the planning process.

Sample Event Timeline:

Leaving enough time to plan is key to hosting a successful event. By creating a timeline of events, it provides a checklist of tasks that need to be completed prior to the event. Below is a sample timeline of events that can be adjusted depending on the scale of the event.

Hosting a Unified Basketball Game

To be completed 4 months before the game

- Contact the local Special Olympics Program office
- Assign executive board to manage different parts of the game
- Create an initial plan of action
 - Create a timeline of events and preliminary budget
 - Work with local Special Olympics office to create a communications and logistics plan
 - Collaborate with both the college and local Special Olympics office to create a weather contingency plan



3 months before the game

- Connect with Recreation Department on campus
- Schedule first meeting with state Program and opposing team
- Confirm date and location
- Begin communication efforts around promoting the game and start to recruit athletes and Unified Partners

2 months before the game

- Schedule an assessment day to select the Unified team
- Begin promoting the event on campus and on social media
- Communicate with local Special Olympics office to ensure all necessary forms are completed for all participants including Special Olympics athletes, Unified Partners, volunteers, coaches, and officials
 - These include but are not limited to Athlete Release Form, Athlete Medical Form, Class A Volunteer Form, Special Olympics Unified Sports Partner Application Form, and Protective Behaviors Training
 - Your college may require additional releases and waivers to be completed prior to the event
- Review equipment needs; specifically competition-specific needs (scoreboards, game balls, etc.)
- Hold the 2nd meeting with host and visiting school, student leaders, and Program staff
- Work with local Special Olympics office to obtain Special Olympics Unified Sports awards (medals/ribbons)

6 weeks before the game

- Start advertising on campus and in local businesses
 - Be sure to follow Special Olympics Branding Guidelines found [here](#)
- Establish potential game day extras to enhance the experience
 - Ask if the college cheerleaders and/or band will perform at the event
 - Contact local mayor to see if he/she will sign a proclamation for the game
- Collaborate with the college recreation department and local Special Olympics office to schedule officials for the game



1 month before the game

- Schedule 3rd meeting with host and visiting school, student leaders, Program staff
- Continue to promote game on campus by hanging flyers, publishing an article in the school newspaper, and through social media
- Recruit volunteers and spectators for game and identify roles and responsibilities for all volunteers

3 weeks before the game

- Confirm game “extras”
- Train officials on Special Olympics Unified Sports and specific sport rules
 - Rules can be found on Special Olympics Resource page [here](#)
 - Confirm all rules with local Special Olympics office

2 weeks before the game

- Final meeting with host and visiting school, student leaders, Program staff
- Print any promotion materials being used and distribute where needed

1 week before the game

- Create and email volunteer duties and “day of” logistics (i.e. where to park, what time to be there, location of volunteer assignment)
- Finalize “day of” timeline

EVENT DAY!

- Make sure to arrive at the venue early
- Bring all game materials
- Set up check-in table for players, officials, media, photographer, and volunteers
- Open the event by introducing teams, officials, sponsors, and any other notable attendees
- During the game, continue to ensure that all teams, volunteers, and staff are in the correct location and have all necessary items to do their job
- After the game, distribute the awards to both teams
- Once the event has concluded and the fans and teams have left, be sure to pick up all equipment used



Post-Event Follow-Up

- Send a thank-you to everyone who contributed to the game
- Hold evaluation meeting to determine what worked and what could be improved
- Return all borrowed/rented equipment

Sample Equipment Checklist:

The day of the event can be overwhelming and it can be easy to forget things. Creating a checklist of items prior to the event will help ensure that nothing is left behind. Create a list that includes every necessity, the quantity, and who is responsible for the item.

*This is just a sample equipment checklist. Depending on the number of people and type of event, the items and quantity will change.

Special Olympics Unified Sports Field Day

Item	QTY	Responsibility	Notes
Air Pump	1	Club	
Football	2	Club	
Flagbelts	10	Club	5 flag belts per team
Soccer Ball	2	Club	
Cones	20	Club	Use to set up soccer & football field
Field	1	College	
Round Water Cooler	1	Club	
Cups - Mini	50	Club	

Spread the Word to End the Word Campaign

Item	QTY	Responsibility	Notes
Table	1	College	Set-up on campus
Chairs	2	College	
STW Banner	2	Club	Place on table
Markers	8	Club	Used to sign banner
Stickers	200	Club	Handed out to students who take the pledge
Large posters	20	Club	To be placed in buildings on campus
Info Handout	125	Club	To be handed out to students



Hosting a Special Olympics Basketball Game

Item	QTY	Responsibility	Notes
Air Pump	1	Club	
Volunteer Shirts	30	Club	
Banner	2	Club	Display at entrance
Banner Welcome	1	Club	Place inside gym
Basketball	2	Club	
Bench	2	College	Placed on sideline 1 for each team
Water Cooler	2	Club	Placed near each team's bench
Cups	50	Club	Split between benches
Medals	25	State Program	
Medals Tray	1	State Program	
PA System	1	College / State Program	
Tables	3	College	Check-in & mid-court announcers table
Emcee Script	2	Club	
Waivers/Releases	30	College / State Program	To be completed prior to competition
Pens	10	Club	



Sample Budget:

It is important to create a budget prior to hosting an event. Knowing how much funding is available and having all costs planned out helps ensure there will be enough funding to make the event happen. Be sure to track all your expenses and follow the state Special Olympics Program's accounting guidelines.

*This is just a sample budget and does not reflect the actual costs. Actual costs will vary.

Special Olympics Unified Sports Field Day

Item	Cost	Allocation and Notes
Supplies		
Air Pump	\$5.00	
Football (2)	\$20.00	
Flag Football Flag belts (10)	\$50.00	
Soccer Ball (2)	\$30.00	
Cones (20)	\$30.00	Used to set-up field(s)
Set-up		
Field	\$-	Donated by University

Grand Total \$135.00

Once equipment is purchased, it can be reused for future events. This will help reduce expenses for other events.

Spread the Word to End the Word Campaign

Item	Cost	Allocation and Notes
Supplies		
STW Banner	\$50.00	
Sharpies	\$10.00	
Stickers	\$30.00	
Promotional Materials	\$125.00	
Set-up		
Table	\$-	Donated by University
Chairs	\$-	Donated by University

Grand Total \$215.00



Checklist: 7 Steps to a Successful Event

Once the type of event has been determined, it is time to start planning! This checklist is a quick summary of all the necessary steps to hosting a successful event as discussed in this event guide. Use this checklist as helpful reminder when planning and executing an event.

- Step 1: Contact the Local Special Olympics Program & your school**
 - ✓ Contact the Special Olympics Program before any plans are made.
 - ✓ Contact the school to determine if there are additional applications and documents that the club needs to complete to host an event on campus (i.e. grounds permit, waivers)
- Step 2: Set a Date**
 - ✓ Determine amount of time needed to plan event
 - ✓ Confirm location, date, and time
- Step 3: Create an Event Plan**
 - ✓ Timeline of Events
 - ✓ Equipment Checklist
 - ✓ Budget
- Step 4: Recruit & Promote Event**
 - ✓ Promote event on campus and social media
 - ✓ Recruit Special Olympics athletes, Unified partners and volunteers
 - ✓ Promote in community
 - ✓ Collaborate with other organizations
- Step 5: Execute Event**
 - ✓ Arrive at the venue early to set up
 - ✓ Meet with committee members and volunteers to confirm event logistics and tasks
 - ✓ Follow the event plan and have fun!
- Step 6: Post Event Follow-Up**
 - ✓ Were initial goals and objectives accomplished?
 - ✓ Determine what worked best and what could be improved
 - ✓ Send thank-you notes to those who contributed to the event
 - ✓ Share the pictures from your event on social media