



Special Olympics
Unified Champion
Schools®

Special Olympics and NAIA Teaming Up for Character™ Event Guide

OVERVIEW

About Special Olympics and NAIA Collaboration

The purpose of this collaboration is to create engagement opportunities between programs accredited by Special Olympics, Inc. ("Special Olympics") within North America ("SO Programs") and the member institutions of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA). This collaboration connects SO Programs with the student-athletes/athletic departments on campus. This partnership is utilized for events, fundraising, volunteers, and leadership. This partnership may open doors to develop Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® at the college and university level. See the full [Collaboration Summary here](#).

Teaming Up for Character™ Event Guidelines

Teaming up for Character events and NAIA Championships are designed to promote the five-core values of the Champions of Character program: Integrity, Respect, Responsibility, Sportsmanship and Servant Leadership to local youth and/or community organizations. NAIA student-athletes will interact with schools or community organizations through school visits or sports clinics to deliver the Champions of Character message.

Objectives

- Make meaningful connections with area community members
- Raise awareness of Champions of Character® values
- Increase attendance at each National Championship
- And... Have fun!

Why – Impact Statements

"The fact that my cheerleaders could come and experience this was just overwhelming." - Shelley Mitchell, Cheer Coach with Champion Force MCE Elite and SOMI employee.

"I believe the college athletes were able to connect a real person with the concept of 'disability' which helps break down barriers. For the SOMI athletes, it was a great for them to see and emulate the positive energy of their college cheer peers." -Tony Linzmeier, Father to a Special Olympic athlete.

[Champions of Character: College & SOMI Athletes Come Together to Cheer | Special Olympics Michigan](#)

"This is an outstanding way for the NAIA and student-athletes from nationwide schools to give back to the community who looks up to them. Providing a beacon for these young athletes to look for and up to is exactly what we stand for and are proud to represent. This is a great way to kick off the 2024 NAIA Outdoor National Track and Field Championships!" -Dr. Jeffrey Reyes, Associate Athletic Director, Indiana Wesleyan.

[Track & Field Announces NAIA Teaming Up for Character Event with Special Olympics](#)

"It's just a small way to make a big impact on the lives of the Special Olympians we get to interact with at the event. It's just a really neat experience for everyone involved." -Megan Williams, Women's Volleyball, Missouri Baptist University

[Spartans Participate in Special Olympics Volleyball Clinic](#)

"It's a lot of fun, every year when we come down here, you meet like, a lot of new people... and make a lot of new friends." -Christina Rasmussen, Special Olympic athlete for the Sioux City Knights.

"They just love to be here. They love to do all the stuff. They don't care what it is, and they're all talkative and they just want to get out and play." -Jazlin De Haan, Women's Volleyball, Northwestern College

[Special Olympics Athletes Team Up With NAIA's Best Volleyball Athletes](#)

LANGUAGE

- Champions of Character®
 - A cornerstone program of the NAIA that was built to instill the five core values: integrity, respect, responsibility, sportsmanship, and servant leadership
- Teaming Up for Character™
 - Events that promote the Champions of Character five core values by engaging with the community. These may be done at the institutional level all the way up to National Championships.
- Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools®
 - Strategy aimed at promoting social inclusion through intentionally planned and implemented activities, leading to more inclusive school environments. The three core components are: Special Olympics Unified Sports®, inclusive youth leadership, and whole school engagement.
- Special Olympics Unified Sports®
 - Sports that bring together people with and without intellectual disabilities on the same team. There are three models of Special Olympics Unified Sports: recreational, developmental, and competitive.

- Special Olympics athletes
 - Individuals with intellectual disability
- Unified partners
 - Individuals without intellectual disability

TYPES OF EVENTS

- **Sport clinics** promote sports instruction from experienced clinicians (either players or coaches) in a series of stations and drills. Clinics are a great way to engage the college's student-athletes as leaders of the stations. Clinics can be done for any sport.
- **Unified Sports clinics** are the same as above, but this brings Unified partners, those without intellectual disability, to participate in the clinic alongside Special Olympics athletes. This offers opportunity for people with and without intellectual disabilities to learn and develop sport skills alongside one another.
- **Unified Sports Field Days** bring together athletes and Unified partners to participate in a series of activity stations or informal team games. Field Days can be focused on one sport or cover a variety of sports and physical activities. This activity can be a great introductory event and can be useful if you have an uneven ratio of athletes to partners.
- **Unified Sports Exhibitions or Tournaments** are when Unified teams are formed the day of the game or tournament, and two or more teams compete against one another. It is a good idea to create Unified teams so that the games may be competitive. A short assessment may be done at the beginning of the event before teams are made.
- **Special Olympics Young Athletes** is a sport and play program for children with and without intellectual disabilities ages 2-7 years old. Young Athletes programs introduce basic sports skills like running, kicking, and throwing. The program also offers leadership opportunities to those who want to share the joy of sports with all children. Young Athletes is designed to easily be implemented in any community, including college campuses
- **Unified Fitness** brings together individuals with and without intellectual disabilities for non-competitive physical activity. Unified fitness can take the form of a club, where members challenge themselves, set goals, establish friendships and earn rewards. Fitness activities could include walking, hiking, yoga, dancing, group fitness, cycling, strength training and more.
- **Field trip to local Unified Champion School:** Any of the above ideas may still apply, the only difference here is the choice of venue. The NAIA and Special Olympics Program contacts should work with the school contact to see what would work best for the anticipated number of participating student-athletes and students at the school. Other ideas for a field trip: pep rally, mentoring, inclusion tiles, activities with the schools Unified club, etc.

INCORPORATION OF FIVE CORE VALUES

- Name each station or drill after one of the NAIA Five Core Values.
 - If the NAIA student-athletes are leading a station, have them begin each station with a small discussion of that Core Value and how they practice it daily.
- Share the NAIA Five Core Value speech found in the resources section below.
 - This is best received if done by an NAIA coach or student-athlete. Giveaways to those that answer questions during the speech are a fun option.
- NAIA Five Core Value(s) Award
 - Present a NAIA Five Core Values award to a Special Olympics athlete who embodied all of the NAIA Five Core Values throughout the event.
 - Present five total NAIA Five Core Value awards to five Special Olympic athletes that embodied one of the Core Values throughout the event. This would be one award per Core Value.
 - Consider presenting an award to NAIA student-athlete(s) as well from the Special Olympic athletes.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

Who are the main points of contact?

- Teaming Up for Character contact will serve as the liaison between the Special Olympics Program, participating NAIA teams/student-athletes, and NAIA. This person will be identified in the initial host meetings and relayed to the respective Special Olympics program.
- Special Olympics Program point of contact will serve as the liaison between the Teaming Up for Character point of contact and local participating Special Olympics delegations. This person could be a Unified Champion Schools staff, sport and competition staff, area staff, or another role at the Special Olympics Program.

How many student-athletes and Special Olympics athletes are estimated to attend?

- Discuss this early on. This may help determine what kind of event is best. Remember, to play Unified Sports it is recommended that an even, or very close to even, number of Special Olympics athletes and Unified partners are present.
- If your event will be Unified, will student-athletes participate as Unified partners or will others, such as students at a local high school be participating as Unified partners?

What is the date and time of the event?

- Planning should start at least 2 months in advance to the event.
- Consider if there are any conflicts with the Special Olympics Program schedule.

Where will the event be hosted?

- Will this event be at a school, community center, or championship location?
- Consider transportation early on. If the event is during the school day and you are targeting school-aged participants, work with your Special Olympics Program and school contacts early on.

Who is your target audience?

- Different clinics may be more appropriate for different age ranges. Work with your Special Olympics Program to identify delegations of athletes who may be interested in the event you are interested in hosting.
- Special Olympics Young Athletes events have pre-made resources with education, drills, and skills you may incorporate at your event. See the resources [here](#).

How are participants being recruited?

- Determine early on who will be recruiting local Special Olympics athletes. Someone must be responsible for ongoing communication to all registrants with event information including venue, time, transportation, parking, and other logistics.

Are you promoting the event to outside spectators or media?

- If you're hosting a Unified exhibition game, consider inviting people from the community to attend. If there are many more student-athletes than Special Olympics athletes, have some student-athletes be **Fans in the Stands** and cheer on the game.
- Consider if you would like to invite local media. Both the Teaming Up for Character and Special Olympics Program contacts should be informed of any plans to reach out to media. Participants may need photo releases on file. Many Special Olympics athletes and student-athletes may already have these. Both parties should clarify what releases are needed.

What are other day-of-event things that are helpful to consider?

- Make sure someone is appointed to announce instructions, where the restrooms are, and other important information that participants and spectators should know about the event.
- The Special Olympics athlete oath is a common way that events are kicked off. In most cases, a Special Olympics staff or delegation manager can appoint an athlete to lead the oath to start the event.

- Special Olympics athlete oath: "Let me win, but if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt."
- Some event locations have found it helpful to have a sensory room. A sensory room is a quiet space that allows participants to take a break or recharge from any over-stimulation.
- If you are providing lunch or snacks, be sure to communicate what will be provided early on. Providing lunch can sometimes make it easier for school groups to make the trip to your venue if it is off school-property.

POST EVENT ACTION

Report your event

The Teaming Up for Character liaison is responsible for reporting this event. Special Olympics and NAIA would like to track the growth and milestones in this collaboration to be able to celebrate and amplify the great work that's being done between our organizations. The report form is [here](#).

Stay connected

Every school can collaborate with local Special Olympics athletes and programs with the right connections. Each state has a Special Olympics Program they can be connected with to continue local-level involvement.

The connection between student-athletes and Special Olympics athletes creates a unique opportunity to connect through shared interest – sport. The NAIA and Special Olympics Collaboration Summary shares many ideas and considerations on how to stay connected throughout the school year.

QUESTIONS?

If you have additional questions or need support in establishing a connection, please reach out to your respective national point of contact.

Special Olympics	NAIA
Lexxi O'Brien	Coordinator of Student Athlete Experience
Lobrien@specialolympics.org	SAED@naia.org



Special Olympics
**Unified Champion
Schools®**

National Championship:

Location:

Date of TUFC:

Time:

Venue:

Championship Sport Manager:

TUFC Director:

Special Olympics Contact:

Notes:





Special Olympics
**Unified Champion
Schools®**

Event type:

Estimated S/O athlete count:

NAIA athlete count/ ask:

Champions of Character incorporation:

AV needs:

Notes:

