

SO College Starter Guide



The SO College network unites college students and people with intellectual disabilities to enhance their lives through sport, friendship, advocacy and other activities.

An Introduction to SO College

SO College is a nationwide network of highly engaged and motivated college students that are working to bring inclusion and acceptance to their college campuses. Created by college students for college students, SO College connects higher education students and individuals with intellectual disabilities in their school or surrounding community. Through sports and leadership opportunities, students build friendships, develop leadership skills and help lead Special Olympics' movement for acceptance and respect. Similar to the overall Special Olympics Project UNIFY® model, SO College activates young leaders in three areas that mirror Project UNIFY's core components: youth leadership and advocacy, inclusive sports and whole school engagement.

Within SO College, these components can best be defined as the following:

- **Youth Leadership & Advocacy**
SO College does not merely allow young people to take leadership roles in promoting SO College in their schools and communities it insists that they do so. For students both with and without intellectual disabilities, those are leadership lessons that last a lifetime and youth are the pioneers of an inclusive movement.
- **Inclusive Sports**
This means two things in SO College. 1) Individuals with intellectual disabilities from the university or community are given the opportunity to participate in sports training and competitions. 2) Students with and without intellectual disabilities participate in sports alongside each other – inclusively.
- **Campus Involvement**
When an entire school accepts and includes students and others with intellectual disabilities, it is a powerful community of change. By giving all students (faculty and staff, too) opportunities to participate in such a movement, SO College helps achieve that goal.



Where to Start?

1. Fill out a SO College application by visiting the resource section of our website:
www.specialolympics.org/socollege
2. Connect with Special Olympics Headquarters in DC and your local state Special Olympics office to formalize your club relationship. To contact Special Olympics Headquarters, email *socollege@specialolympics.org* and you will be connected with your local program as well.
3. Begin building a SO College chapter at your school by getting in contact with:
 - Students at your school (to find a core group of interested members);
 - Other clubs and organizations at your school that may be interested in a partnership (like Best Buddies, community service clubs, Greek life, etc.);
 - School administrators (president, Dean, etc.) – discuss your plans and how you wish to involve as many students as possible;
 - Academic departments (School of Education, Exercise Science, etc.) to determine a faculty advisor (if needed at your school) and how the department can help support your club;
 - Others student leaders involved in SO College chapters around the country to find out best practices for getting started. Email *socollege@specialolympics.org* to get in contact with other SO College chapters.
4. Get others involved and raise awareness on campus:
 - Set up a table on campus to raise awareness for the new club;
 - Print flyers and post them in different buildings and areas on campus;
 - Give presentations to relevant classes to inspire others to join (a good place to start would be classes focused on Education, Sports Management, etc.);
 - Create a Facebook page - invite all of your friends and encourage them to invite others on campus; leave the page “public” so anyone can join (Note: Monitor the site to remove any unwanted comments/content);
 - Showcase the club at other events (i.e. school sporting events, activities fair, etc.);
 - Talk with your local Special Olympics program and ask if students from your campus have volunteered – these individuals may be interested in SO College.
5. Determine what activities the club wants to do as part of SO College (see next page for details):
 - Decide what kind of event(s) you want to host (Spread the Word, Inclusive Sports, etc.);
 - Use others as resources – don’t be afraid to email *socollege@specialolympics.org* for help! Or model your chapter after other SO College clubs detailed in this starter guide;
 - Use your school network to spread the message (multimedia, flyers, class presentations, school newspaper, etc.).

The SO College “Menu”

Using Special Olympics Project UNIFY’s model, SO College activates young people with and without intellectual disabilities in three core areas: Inclusive Sports, Youth Leadership & Advocacy, and Whole-School Engagement. All three of these components are vital to enhancing the SO College experience for all students. Below you will find a detailed explanation of how each component can be executed at the college level.

NOTE – to be a SO College chapter, you do not need to incorporate each of these three components; however, chapters should strive to eventually include elements of Inclusive Sports, Youth Leadership & Advocacy, and Whole-School Engagement.

Youth Leadership

Student-Led Club:
SO College can function as a club, meeting regularly to plan events and generate ideas for promoting SO College. This type of club works best, and achieves the most, when the students invite Special Olympics athletes to become members.

Games Organizing Committee:
Students can help their local or state Special Olympics by helping to organize competitions and events. This gives the students the opportunity to use and build their leadership skills as they help plan and execute the event.

Sports

Inclusive Sports Teams:
Invite students and Special Olympics athletes to participate together in scrimmage-type sporting events. Some of the more advanced teams can have tournaments with other local SO College chapters.

Host a Local or State-Level Special Olympics Competition:
Many colleges have various indoor and outdoor venues that would be perfect for hosting! Students can participate in these Games by coaching, competing on a Unified Team, or promoting the event.

Campus Involvement

Awareness Campaigns:
These can bring campus communities together. Pledge drives – such as Spread the Word to End the Word® - and rallies for respect can engage the whole student body, faculty, administration and college staff.

Fans in the Stands:
All students can participate at local or state Special Olympics Games - cheering on the athletes in their competitions. This is a great way for active members of SO College to introduce more students to Special Olympics.

The SO College “Specials”

These “specials” have already been created by past SO College chapters at universities around the country. See how they’ve developed the ideal SO College chapter for their school.

The College of Holy Cross:

Youth Leadership		Sports		Campus Involvement	
Club	Committee	Inclusive Sports	Host a Games	Campaign	Fans

Youth Leadership: Holy Cross SO College became a recognized school club. Because they were an official school club, they were able to rent out the campus facilities to host events and hold meetings.

Sports: Holy Cross created an inclusive sporting event every weekend. In the fall semester they play soccer and in the spring they play basketball. To make the inclusive team the SO College members got in contact with their local Special Olympics Program to include athletes that were interested in playing at a college.

Campus Involvement: Every March the SO College members host a Spread the Word to End the Word day where they invite students to sign the pledge to stop using the R-word. The SO College members also put out a weekly memo asking all students to come to the inclusive sporting event that weekend and be fans in the stands.

The University of Notre Dame:

Youth Leadership		Sports		Campus Involvement	
Club	Committee	Inclusive Sports	Host a Games	Campaign	Fans

Youth Leadership: Norte Dame SO College became a recognized school club by applying to the student council board. This allows the members to use the campus facilities for SO College activities.

Sports: Notre Dame created an inclusive team that trains for eight weeks and at the end of those weeks they invite all the other local SO College chapters to compete in a tournament. This is a creative way to network between the colleges and is a long-term goal for all SO College chapters to participate in these types of tournaments across the country.

Campus Involvement: Every year, Norte Dame SO College hosts multiple rallies to build awareness for their chapter. They invite speakers and Special Olympic athletes to speak at these rallies about the movement. They also invite all students at the University to come cheer for the inclusive team at their yearly inclusive sports tournament.

University of Utah:

Youth Leadership		Sports		Campus Involvement	
Club	Committee	Inclusive Sports	Host a Games	Campaign	Fans

Youth Leadership: Students at the University of Utah followed the university's steps to make their chapter an official school club. The students also formed a committee to help oversee and plan the Area Games, which were hosted on campus. Each student had a leadership role within the committee and was in charge of a different aspect of the Games (i.e. athletes, volunteers, facilities, etc.).

Sports: The SO College members contacted their state Special Olympics office to get in touch with athletes and register to become an official Unified Sports team, which was comprised of students and Special Olympics athletes. University of Utah had enough students and Special Olympics athletes to form multiple Unified Sports teams. After weeks of practicing, the University of Utah Unified teams invited other local Unified teams to compete at the event organized on campus.

Campus Involvement: Each year students at The University of Utah plan a Spread the Word to End the Word® day to bring awareness to all members of the school community. Throughout the week they plan different events to engage all students. For example, they bring in Special Olympics athletes to speak about how the use of the R-word has affected them in a negative way. The SO College members also invite the whole student body to be Fans in the Stands at the Area Games hosted on campus.



Recipes for Success

Want to test out our “menu” at your own school? Follow these easy “recipes” to create your own!

Creating an Official School Club

Action Steps:

1. Get in contact with your school’s Student Activities Center (or equivalent) to find out the exact steps they require to form a student-led club. Most likely they will require the following:
 - Have a certain number of students sign a petition stating that a club of this type is needed on campus.
 - Determine a faculty advisor to help oversee the club’s activities.
 - Develop a mission statement for the club.
 - Identify an executive board (club president, vice president, treasurer, secretary, etc.)
2. Contact other students who are interested in participating in the club:
 - Set up a table at an Activities Fair to build interest in the club.
 - Post flyers around campus informing students of the new club.
 - Send out emails through the campus email system, or take out an ad in the school newspaper.
3. Plan your first meeting:
 - Introduce all the new members to SO College and the mission of the club.
 - Ask for ideas relating to potential actions and events.
 - Set up a weekly/bi-weekly meeting time.

** Contact socollege@specialolympics.org for more information **

Games Organizing Committee/Hosting a Special Olympics Event

Action Steps:

1. Contact your local or state Special Olympics program to ask if there is an upcoming event that you can host at your school or ask if you can host a competition specifically for your school’s inclusive sports team.
2. Invite students from the SO College club to take leadership roles on the Games Organizing Committee.
3. Ask local or state Special Olympics program employees to join the committee and help plan the event.
4. Give each member of the committee a specific area to plan:
 - Volunteers
 - Athletes
 - Coaches

** Contact your state program to find out more about hosting a competition**

Inclusive Sports Opportunities (monthly, weekly, large tournament, etc.)

Action Steps:

1. Contact your local Special Olympics program to express your interest in starting an inclusive team and ask if you can contact local Special Olympics athletes interested in participating in the new team.
2. Set up a meeting time with all students and Special Olympics athletes to discuss the upcoming season.
 - Set up practice time (weekly, bi-weekly, etc.).
 - Determine how the practices will run (scrimmage-type practice vs. skill-building practice).
 - Determine the length of a season.
3. Compete against other college-level inclusive teams:
 - If the other college is close enough, plan to play against them once a month.
 - Plan an end-of-season tournament with other SO College chapters in your region – this is a great way to showcase your team’s skills.

If your club is not ready to have an inclusive team, try the following:

- Team up with local Special Olympics teams and volunteer during weekly practices, competitions or events (soccer, basketball, bocce, etc.).
- Schedule days where you invite individuals with and without intellectual disabilities to play sports together in an informal setting.
- Plan training sessions for athletes to learn new skills that correspond with a sport:
 - Invite varsity athletes from your school to help run sessions – these athletes are sometimes local heroes to your athletes. Schools who are involved in NCAA Division III sports have a national partnership with Special Olympics. Contact your local Special Olympics program to find out if your school is already involved.
 - Invite club-level athletes or intramural athletes to be a part of the training as well.

Refer to the Unified Sports Handbook for more information

Spread the Word to End the Word® Event

Action steps to host a “Spirit Week” that corresponds with the annual Spread the Word to End the Word Day of awareness:

1. **Monday:** Create posters and post them around campus.
2. **Tuesday:** Demonstrate the skills of your SO College sports team and have them play an exhibition game.
3. **Wednesday:** With permission from professors, have students give a short presentation in their classes to inform students about the hurtfulness of the R-word.
4. **Thursday:** Schedule a presentation in an on-campus facility with a guest speaker – in past events, many successful speakers have been Special Olympics athletes. Make sure to advertise well to ensure ample attendance.
5. **Friday:** Have tables set up around campus with computers allowing students to pledge online. You can have a large banner for them to sign as well. Have giveaways, like STW bracelets, t-shirts and stickers to help encourage people to sign the pledge.

For more information visit the R-word website

Fans in the Stands

Action Steps:

1. Advertise the event on-campus and invite everyone to cheer on the athletes!
 - Set up posters around campus making sure everyone is aware of the upcoming event.
 - Send out reminders in school emails or take out an ad in the school newspaper.
 - Ask all the SO College members to invite their friends.
 - Create a Facebook event and invite students to join.
2. On the day of the event set up a station for the fans to create posters.
 - Make example posters for the students to copy.
3. Tell all the fans how important their support is to the athletes, coaches and volunteers.
4. After the event pass out flyers to the fans with more ways to get involved.
 - Invite all the fans to your next SO College meeting (this is a great way to generate more interest for your club).
 - Mention upcoming events where they can continue their support in the stands.

Contact your state program for more information on Fans in the Stands and local events

