

Local Program Development Guide

Section 6 – Fundraising & Partnerships

Fundraising

Fans and funds are the fuel that service the mission of Special Olympics. How funds are managed are important responsibilities of the Local and State Program. A few examples of some of the established Special Olympics fundraising events that Local Programs could take part in are the Law Enforcement Torch Run®, Polar Plunge®, Plane Pull®, and Over the Edge.

Local Programs fundraise in order to create sustainable programs and encourage quality growth. The very first thing to do prior to engaging in fundraising is to contact the Special Olympics professional support staff through your Accredited Program's office. They will guide you through the fundraising policies and procedures, as well as provide ideas and strategies to ensure success.

There are many ways to raise funds. Deciding what is in the Local Program's best interest should be examined closely with your Accredited Program office. Some common ways to raise funds include:

- Sponsorships
- Grants
- Employee match programs
- Letter writing campaigns
- Memorial gifts
- Special events (i.e. - raffles, auctions, concessions, dinners, garage sales, walk-a-thons, etc.)

General Fundraising Guidance

The following information applies to all forms of fundraising:

- All volunteers who handle large sums of money are required to register as Class A Volunteers.
- Be aware of fundraising restrictions. Collaborate with the Accredited Program's Development Director before soliciting, especially when seeking corporate support. Making multiple asks may aggravate or confuse donors, whether prospects or current donors.

- Fundraising is done to support Local Program teams. Fundraising for a particular athlete – unless approved by the Accredited Program’s office – is strictly prohibited.
- All contractual agreements that address liability require approval by the Accredited Program’s office for them to be considered binding.
- All funds raised by a Local Program must be deposited into the authorized Special Olympics Accredited Program account within five (5) business days of the donation.
- Funds should be sent by check or money order. **Do not mail cash.** Cash may be hand-delivered to the Accredited Program office. Always request a receipt for cash.
- Value-in-kind donations should be documented with a receipt to the donor. Your Accredited Program office will have forms that can be utilized.
- Consider participating in fundraisers already established by your Accredited Program office. Leveraging established Accredited Program fundraisers tend to be more cost-effective and successful than conducting a new event.
- Fundraisers may serve several purposes. Identify the purpose and match the amount of effort that will go into it based on its purpose. For example:
 - o A car wash can bring in great awareness; however, the amount of money it raises may be limited.
 - o Likewise, make sure costs are considered. A common fundraising standard is that any fundraising effort return at least 3-4 times the investment – in other words, if you invest \$100 on a fundraiser, it should raise \$300-400.

Fundraising Event Guidance

When organizing a fundraising event, the following steps are advised:

- **Fundraising events are not allowed to have any direct affiliation with tobacco or alcohol products. ***
- **Complete and submit a fundraising approval form.**
Before you can begin organizing a fundraising event, it may be required by your Accredited Program to complete a fundraising approval form. Any such form will ask for basic information about the event, and might require a simple expense and revenue budget.
- **Build a fundraising event plan.**
Identify the overall fundraising objective – including setting a goal for how much you want to raise (gross and net after expenses) – and develop a timeline for tasks to be completed (what and when).

- **Recruit, train, and manage volunteers.**
Successful fundraising – particularly special event fundraisers – require a group of volunteers assigned to specific tasks. Assign manageable duties to others, train as necessary, monitor progress frequently, make timely adjustments, and have fun!
- **Keep detailed records.**
Make sure that all expenditures reconcile with bills and receipts, and that all revenue reconciles with items sold (such as auction items, raffle tickets, etc.) Use forms provided by the Accredited Program’s office to track expenses and revenue.
- **Thank supporters and sponsors.**
Following a fundraiser, be sure that all supporters and sponsors have been thanked for their contributions. Thank you letter templates and stationery may be available from your Accredited Program’s office. Certificates or plaques may be appropriate depending on the circumstances.
- **Complete post-event documentation and evaluations.**
In order to repeat a successful fundraising event, take time to conduct a post event evaluation. In addition, maintain records that will be helpful for future events such as donor/participant contact info, items and amounts donated, and files that outline your previous tasks and communication.

*For more information, see <https://resources.specialolympics.org/governance-and-leadership-excellence/special-olympics-general-rules/article-5>

Partnerships

The Power of Partnerships

Local Programs forge partnerships in their communities in creative and exciting ways. The following information is provided to help you get started with creating your own partnerships with sponsors, volunteers, clubs and organizations, athletes, and others in your community.

Prospecting and Networking

A partner begins as a prospect, a person or business that you want to have a deeper relationship with your Local Program. There are many prospects in your community, and many are closer at hand than you might think. These prospects become part of your Local Program’s network of community contacts, to share future opportunities and general communication.

Potential prospects

Prospects generally come from two tiers of contacts: those who are already aligned with your Local Program or with Special Olympics, and those who “should be”. In either case, here are but a few suggestions of who to find, and where to find them.

- Start internally with your leadership, your athletes, and their families. Where do they work? What clubs, organizations, service clubs, or places of worship do they belong? Who are the most influential people they know?
- What are the most prominent companies in your community? Many focus on areas that align with Special Olympics such as health and wellness, or supporters of youth and school sports. Others might be frequent community donors during special occasions such as festivals or holidays.
- Confirm if a prospect is the decision maker for their organization. Often you will encounter a “gatekeeper” that stands between you and the decision maker. Develop your relationship with the decision maker whenever possible!
- Special Olympics’ Resource Toolkit for Research and Facts might also be helpful in finding prospects, and later in how you speak with them:
<https://resources.specialolympics.org/research>

Successful Approaches to Partner Development

Developing a partnership can seem like a daunting task. The following guidance might be helpful in overcoming barriers to building partnerships.

Starting a Strong Partnership

1. Always listen for opportunities. All interactions provide an opportunity to share the Special Olympics mission.
2. Learn about what matters most to the partner. You already know the partner is valuable to your efforts. If you can take the time to find out how you can also meet their needs, a true partnership can develop. Research when possible, so you understand their priorities before you meet.
 - a. If this is your first time meeting a potential partner, a common approach to the initial conversation is to talk 20% of the time, and listen 80% of the time. Be alert to any information they share that aligns with your needs.
3. Be willing to start small. You may have a grand vision for a partnership, but it may take time to develop. A large partnership might start with a “NO” or with a donation of time rather than their resources. Stay persistent, and keep the door open whenever possible!

Making the Ask

1. Get personal! After brief introductions, be willing to share why Special Olympics matters so much to you, and support your “Special Olympics story” with facts about the movement. Passion can be contagious. Use that passion to help them understand why this ask or event is so important.
2. Take a Unified approach! Our athletes are our greatest success stories, and can often make the most compelling and convincing asks for support.
3. Stay positive! Regardless of the outcome, you are representing Special Olympics and making them more aware of our work. Even if the answer is “NO” initially, a positive impression will set a positive tone for your next interaction.
4. Be brave in the attempt! Not every ask will end in “YES”. Follow the example of our athletes and do your best, and stay confident that a “NO” will get you one step closer to the outcome you want.
5. Have options! Be prepared to pivot the conversation to any number of opportunities to support your Local Program, thinking of the various gifts they could provide:
 - a. Time – Can this partner become a volunteer, as a coach, Unified partner, committee member, or otherwise support with the gift of their time?
 - b. Talent – Does this person (or group) have skills that can help your Local Program? Can they help to make asks or introductions to others? Think about what makes this person successful, and how that could benefit your Local Program.
 - c. Treasure – In addition to their money, what else can they offer that is valuable? Products, gift cards, discounts, proceeds of sales – there can be many options to contribute, and most will be very useful.

When you confirm a new supporter, be prepared to deliver (and when possible, over-deliver) on your end of the deal.

- A Memorandum of Understanding/Agreement can outline roles and responsibilities that are clear and easy to follow. Check with the Accredited Program for a sample.
- Provide information about how they can easily send or submit their contribution.
- Thank the donor early and often. Consider sharing the impact of their gift (example: how much equipment your team can purchase from their support, or how many more athletes can now complete at an event). Also, involve your athletes in the thank you strategy. They are your greatest ambassadors!

Maintaining the Relationship

Regardless of whether or not you get the support you’re seeking, this meeting has now started a relationship. A true partnership goes beyond a single pledge or donation. Consider how you might keep them informed – and potentially more involved – in your Local Program for years to come.

1. Invite the donor to a team practice, an event, or other opportunity to see your athletes in action – and to see what their contribution has made (or could make) possible.
2. Include them in your regular communication with your Local Program, and (if applicable) invite them to follow your Program on social media. Keep your Program on their mind often!
 - a. Remember to brag about the most exciting news happening in your Local Program. Are you headed to a State/National Games? Has an athlete been trained in Athlete Leadership?
3. Beyond mass communication, set up a regular schedule for a meeting, coffee, lunch, or other one-on-one opportunity to connect with your new partner. If an athlete is available to join you, bring him or her along!
4. Think about your next invitation to support. Is it a similar opportunity to donate or volunteer as they've done before, or are you ready to take the relationship to the next level?
5. Remember to talk about the impact that Special Olympics is having in your community, and what they have made possible. Your success will become their very own Special Olympics story, and might compel them to bring another partner to the table.

The difference between success and failure of one-time support versus ongoing support hinges on making the supporter/sponsor a true partner in your Local Program's success.

Learn, practice, and improve. Partnerships propel the Program.
