



Since the pilot of the Special Olympics North America National Recognition Program, all stakeholders, including school administrators and educators, students, SO state Program staff, SONA/SOI staff, partners and sponsors, have recognized the powerful value of the program with its ability to connect all constituencies with one another and create media-worthy stories of excellence in inclusion. It is the job of SONA UCS staff to ensure that the value of the program is supported and enhanced to fulfill the objectives of OSEP funding.

SOUCS ULTIMATE GOAL: To incentivize Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools quality programming and to collect data at scale.

SOUCS COMMUNICATIONS GOAL: To bring awareness to the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools program and create value behind the brand.

In order to achieve these goals, SONA UCS is announcing two new updates to the NRP;

1. A National Certifying Body (CB).

The Certifying Body will be comprised of members from a variety of organizations and institutions that are leading inclusive practices across the country. Once a school has made it past stage one of the review process – which is to receive approval by their state Special Olympics Program – representatives on the CB will be responsible for further reviewing the applications as stage two.

Structure of the Certifying Body

1. Members
 - a. There will be one Chair and nine members
 - b. Members will sign on with a two year commitment with an option to renew
2. School Applications
 - a. Each member will be responsible for 10% of the applications submitted.
 - i. I.e. if there are 200 applications, each member will be responsible to review 20 applications (last year there were 173 schools approved by their state Special Olympics Program)
 - b. Members will review their applications between July 1 – July 30, 2020
 - c. Approvals/denials must be made by July 31, 2020
 - d. Selection will be announced with media support by August 15, 2020

**This date is subject to change*

Timeline

1. State SO Programs notify schools of the new system – February – March 2020
2. Application system opens to schools – April 2020
3. Application system closes – June 2020
4. State SO Programs approve/deny applications – June 2020
 - a. All applications should be approved/denied – June 30, 2020
 - b. Please note that schools will **not** be notified at this time. All schools are not notified until the full process, including the review by the Certifying Body, is complete
5. CB reviews applications – July 2020
6. In-person meeting and announcement of new banner schools – August 2020



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National Recognition Program Updates

2. Renewal of Schools

In order to give schools the opportunity for continued recognition, as well as ensure quality programming, there will be a four-year renewal process for all national banner schools. Schools will submit their applications in the same platform, Submittable, as first time schools. All of the schools from the 2016 pilot are now eligible to renew their banner status this 2020 cycle!

One question we received during our UCS Workshops in Baltimore, Las Vegas, and Atlanta was, “how does this affect the physical banners?” We will be working with the Certifying Body to consider all options suggested during these great Workshop discussions. SONA UCS will continue to purchase the banners for all new schools and now, in addition, renewing schools.

Please direct all questions to SONA UCS Marketing and Communications Manager, Leigha Bannon
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[National Recognition Program homepage](#)

[How to Apply for Banner Status](#)