

Law Enforcement Torch Run-History

The Law Enforcement Torch Run[®] for Special Olympics began in 1981 when Wichita, Kansas Police Chief Richard LaMunyon saw an urgent need to raise funds for and increase awareness of Special Olympics. The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), now recognized as the founding law enforcement organization of the Law Enforcement Torch Run for Special Olympics, quickly adopted the Torch Run. The IACP's enthusiastic support enabled the Torch Run to expand into nine states.

At its most basic level, the Torch Run is an actual running event in which officers and athletes run the Flame of Hope to the Opening Ceremonies of Local Special Olympics competitions, state/provincial Games, and National Summer or Winter Games. At its most fully developed, the Torch Run initiative encompasses a variety of fundraising vehicles in addition to the Torch Run itself.

Law enforcement personnel organize the Torch Run within their own state or country, running the torch along pre-determined routes to the site of their state or national Summer Games. As part of the Opening Ceremonies, a law enforcement participant passes the Torch to a Special Olympics athlete to light the flame that signals the opening of the Games.

In addition, every two years, law enforcement officers from around the world gather to carry the Flame of Hope in a Law Enforcement Torch Run Final Leg in honor of the Special Olympics World Summer or World Winter Games. The Torch Run Final Leg is not only a salute to the athletes who compete in the Special Olympics World Games, but also an honor for the participating law enforcement officers who make up the Torch Run Final Leg Team.

As of the end of 2018, there are 93 LETR programs in 26 countries:

- United States – 52 programs
- Canada – 12 programs
- Europe – 12 programs
- Caribbean – 9 programs
- Oceania – 6 programs
- East Asia – 2 programs

In Florida

The Torch Run began its existence in 1984 with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) as the S.O.M.E. (Special Olympics Mileage Event) Run, when a handful of officers ran the Flame of Hope throughout the state in an exhausting, non-stop run. Soon, the S.O.M.E. Run gained momentum, and law enforcement agencies throughout Florida became involved. The S.O.M.E. Run would go on to become the “Florida Law Enforcement Torch Run.”

Law enforcement officers from more than 300 Florida agencies (police departments, sheriff’s offices, Department of Corrections, FDLE, FBI DEA, US Customs, Military Police and Marine Patrol) all participate in the state-wide torch run to benefit the athletes of Special Olympics Florida. Each year, thousands of officers carry the torch on a 1500-mile relay through 67 counties in Florida. The interstate relay starts at the end of March and culminates at the Opening Ceremony of our Special Olympics Florida State Summer Games in May.

Funds are generated through the sale of Torch Run t-shirts and hats, as well as fundraisers held at the local level by agencies throughout the state.

Now under the leadership of Chief Deputy Dave Sklarek of the Osceola County Sheriff’s Office (retired), the Law Enforcement Torch Run for Special Olympics Florida has grown tremendously over the years. Your commitment to this project will make you part of Special Olympics Florida’s largest annual public awareness and fundraising event; one that benefits some of the most talented athletes Florida has ever produced. You are truly making a difference!

Special Olympics International

Special Olympics is an international nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering individuals with intellectual disabilities to become physically fit, productive and respected members of society through sports training and competition. Special Olympics offers children and adults with intellectual disabilities year-round training and competition in 30 Olympic-type Summer and Winter sports.

Today, Special Olympics stands as a leader in the field of intellectual disability. It is truly a global movement, with more than 6 million athletes and unified partners participating in 193 countries. The goal of Special Olympics is to reach out to the nearly 200 million people in the world with ID. Most importantly, Special Olympics sharpened the focus on its mission as not just "nice," but critical, not just as a sports organization for people with intellectual disabilities, but also as an effective catalyst for social change.

Children and adults with intellectual disabilities who participate in Special Olympics develop improved physical fitness and motor skills, greater self-confidence and a more positive self-image. They grow mentally, socially and spiritually and, through their activities, exhibit boundless courage and enthusiasm, enjoy the rewards of friendship and ultimately discover not only new abilities and talents but "their voices" as well.

The global Special Olympics movement got its start on 20 July 1968, when the First International Special Olympics Games were held at Soldier Field, Chicago, Illinois, USA. However, the concept of Special Olympics was born much earlier, when Eunice Kennedy Shriver started a day camp for people with intellectual disabilities at her home in 1962. Shriver believed that people with intellectual disabilities were far more capable than commonly believed and deserving of the same opportunities and experiences as others. .

What are intellectual disabilities (ID)?

Intellectual disability (ID) is a term used when a person has certain limitations in cognitive functioning and skills, including communication, social and self-care skills. These limitations can cause a child to develop and learn more slowly or differently than a typically developing child.

Intellectual disability is the most common developmental disability.

According to the American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, an individual has intellectual disability if he or she meet three criteria:

1. Intellectual function level (IQ) is below 70-75
2. Significant limitations exist in two or more adaptive skill areas (skills needed to live, work, and play in the community)
3. The condition manifests itself before the age of 18

How does an intellectual disability happen?

Intellectual disability – formerly known as mental retardation – can be caused by injury, disease, or a problem in the brain. For many children, the cause of their intellectual disability is unknown.

Some causes of intellectual disability – such as Down syndrome, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, Fragile X syndrome, birth defects, and infections – can happen before birth. Some happen while a baby is being born or soon after birth.

What are the most common causes?

Genetic conditions. Sometimes an intellectual disability is caused by abnormal genes inherited from parents, errors when genes combine, or other reasons. Examples of genetic conditions are Down syndrome, Fragile X syndrome, and phenylketonuria (PKU).

Complications during pregnancy. An intellectual disability can result when the baby does not develop inside the mother properly. For example, there may be a problem with the way the baby's

cells divide. A woman who drinks alcohol or gets an infection like rubella during pregnancy may also have a baby with an intellectual disability.

Problems during birth. If there are complications during labor and birth, such as a baby not getting enough oxygen, he or she may have an intellectual disability.

Diseases or toxic exposure. Diseases like whooping cough, the measles, or meningitis can cause intellectual disabilities. They can also be caused by extreme malnutrition, not getting appropriate medical care, or by being exposed to poisons like lead or mercury.

We know that intellectual disability is not contagious: you can't catch an intellectual disability from anyone else. We also know it's not a type of mental illness, like depression. There are no cures for intellectual disability. However, children with intellectual disabilities can learn to do many things. They may just need take more time or learn differently than other children.

How common are intellectual disabilities?

Approximately 6.5 million people in the United States have an intellectual disability. Approximately 1-3 percent of the global population has an intellectual disability -- as many as 200 million people.

Intellectual disability is significantly more common in low-income countries – 16.41 in every 1,000 people. Disabilities overall are more common in low-income countries.

The United Nations Development Program estimates that 80 percent of all people with disabilities live in low-income countries. While people with disabilities represent approximately one in 10 people worldwide, they are one in every five of the world's poorest people.

Appropriate Language

- Refer to participants in Special Olympics as “Special Olympics Athletes” rather than “Special Olympians” or “Special athletes”. In no case should the word *athlete* appear in quotation marks.
- Refer to individuals, persons, or people with intellectual disabilities, rather than “intellectually disabled people” or “the intellectually disabled”.
- A person *has* an intellectual disability, rather than is “suffering from”, is “afflicted with” or is “a victim of” intellectual disabilities.
- A person *uses* a wheelchair, rather than is “confined” or “restricted” to a wheelchair
- Do not use the adjective “unfortunate” when speaking about persons with intellectual disabilities. Disabling conditions need not be life defining in a negative way.
- “Down syndrome” has replaced “Down’s Syndrome” and “mongoloid”
- Do not use the word “the” in front of Special Olympics unless describing a specific Special Olympics event or official. For example, “The Special Olympics State Summer Games”, but “Special Olympics Florida”
- Distinguish between adults and children when referring to Special Olympics athletes. Use adults or children, or older or younger athletes.
- Do not sensationalize the accomplishments of people with disabilities. While these accomplishments should be recognized and applauded, people in the disability rights movement have tried to make the public aware of the negative impact of referring to the achievements of physically or mentally challenged people with excessive hyperbole.
- Use the word “special” with extreme care when talking about persons with intellectual disabilities. The term, if used excessively in references to Special Olympics athletes and activities, can become a cliché.

Torch Run Leadership

All Torch Run activities around the world are governed by the Law Enforcement Torch Run[®] Executive Council.

The Executive Council is authorized by Special Olympics and supported by the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP). The council's purpose is to encourage, promote, support and provide technical guidance to accredited Program Torch Run volunteers in planning and coordinating Torch Run events and activities on a worldwide basis, thereby facilitating the expansion of existing Torch Run activities and planning for the development of new Torch Run activities and events.

The Executive Council is made up of 13 Regional Coordinators elected by Torch Run participants, law enforcement representatives appointed by IACP and Special Olympics representatives appointed by Special Olympics headquarters.

In Florida, Torch Run Leadership is provided by:

- A State Torch Run Director-
 - Law enforcement volunteer leader of the Torch Run efforts and development for the state.
- A Torch Run Liaison
 - Special Olympics staff member responsible for working with Torch Run volunteers and supporting development in the state.
- Thirteen Regional Directors (responsible for a multi-county region)
 - Individual responsible for advising and overseeing the development of Torch Run programs in the counties within their region.
- a County Coordinator for each county, and
- an Agency Coordinator for each participating agency

Regional Director

The Regional Director is responsible for coordinating the Law Enforcement Torch Run in a multi-county area. The Regional Director is also responsible for assisting the County Coordinators and agency representatives with the development and successful operation of fundraising projects. New members are invited to join the committee by the state LETR Torch Run Director as necessary.

Responsibilities:

- Prior to the annual Torch Run Kick-Off Conference, coordinate a regional luncheon, inviting agencies within the region to discuss and prepare for the forthcoming Kick-Off Conference and the Torch Run campaign (cost of the luncheon will be underwritten by SOFL).
- Attend the Kick-Off Conference and meet with the Agency and County Coordinators within your respective region. Establish a fundraising goal.
- After the conference, ensure the County Coordinators in the region establish and conduct a county meeting to plan for the Torch Run and fundraising events within their respective counties.
- After the conference, make periodic telephone or email contacts with the County Coordinators to ensure the Torch Run and Fundraising events are on track.
- During the Torch Run, ensure the County Coordinators are working together to get the torch and flag/banner moved along the route.
- Attend the Final Leg and Opening Ceremony (SOFL provides lodging for Regional Directors).
- After the Torch Run, ensure the agency and County Coordinators return all funds raised and unsold t-shirts to SOFL.
- Attend the summer meeting in the Orlando area (SOFL provides lodging for Regional Directors).

Organize the Torch Run in your county

The county coordinator is responsible for coordinating LETR on the county level.

- The County Coordinators should create active committees with a cross-sectional representation to delegate individual tasks and to guarantee effective operations.

An active committee should:

- Be comprised of representatives from each agency in the county
- Meet on a regular basis during the Torch Run campaign
- Clarify specific jobs and job descriptions for each member
- Act as a steering group for sanctioned subcommittees
- Communicate with all members about plans and projects

The following positions should be included on the steering committee to address required tasks and to ensure the detailed attention demanded by the event.

- Logistics (of the Torch Run)
- Public Relations
- T-Shirt Sales
- Fundraising

Based upon the need of familiarity within these areas, a committee should consist of the following.

- Law enforcement representatives
- Local Special Olympics representatives
- Agency Public Information Officer

When the committee first meets, the following should be accomplished.

- Calendar of meeting dates for the committee
- Establish the Torch Run route and plan Torch Run events
- Establish fund-raising goals
- Designate job tasks and assignments

Organize the Torch Run at your agency

The agency coordinator is a law enforcement or correctional officer who is responsible for coordinating the Torch Run efforts of his or her agency.

- Assist the County Committee to plan Torch Run operations, related special events, and fundraising projects.
- Assist with pre-planning the logistics of the Torch Run route to ensure the safety of the runners and participants.
- Initiate agency recruitment efforts to solicit torch runners.
- Coordinate the distribution and sale of Torch Run t-shirts.
- Coordinate fundraising events with local Special Olympics representatives and the Torch Run Liaison.
- Communicate regularly with the County Coordinator and Regional Director concerning Torch Run activities.
- On the day of the Torch Run, coordinate the agency's responsibilities, to include briefing of runners prior to the event; providing escorts and traffic control to ensure a safe run; and supplying refreshments and liquids for runners.
- Assist the agency Public Information Officer with media releases concerning the Torch Run and related events.
- After the Torch Run, communicate with the Torch Run Liaison to ensure the return all funds raised and unsold t-shirts to SOFL.

Sample Letter

Dear Chief/Sheriff/SAC:

During April, law enforcement officers from all over the State will be running to raise money for and awareness of Special Olympics in the Law Enforcement Torch Run. Through this effort, we hope to raise over \$300,000 in t-shirt and hat sales, which will support athletic training and competition for 40,000 children and adults with intellectual disabilities.

The Torch Run route will pass through _____ County on _____, between the projected times of ___ and ___ hours.

_____, of our agency, has been named as the Agency Coordinator for _____. In order to effectively plan and staff the Torch Run for our area, it is requested that you designate someone from your department as a contact person to assist in the coordination of various aspects of the run. This person will serve as a point of contact of your department and will assist in recruiting runners, coordinating the logistics of the run, and related fundraising projects.

On _____ from ___ to ___ hours, _____ will hold a planning meeting at the _____. I respectfully request that you have your department designee attend this meeting.

If you have any questions or need additional information concerning the Torch Run or this request, please contact _____ at telephone number _____.

I look forward to our agencies working together towards this very worthwhile event and I am confident our collective efforts will ensure a successful Torch Run.

Sincerely,

(Your Agency Chief, Sheriff, Director)

Fundraising

The Law Enforcement Torch Run[®] for Special Olympics, the movement's largest grass-roots fundraiser and public awareness vehicle, raised US\$60.6 million in 2018 for Special Olympics Programs around the world. Since its inception in 1981, \$794,338,526 has been raised!

T-shirt and hat sales

For years, the foundation of fundraising for the Law Enforcement Torch Run has been the sale of the LETR T-Shirt and Hat. The design of the shirt and hat is different each year, which makes each uniquely designed shirt or hat more attractive to the individuals who buy them each year.

While the T-shirt and Hats are popular, they do not sell themselves.

- Advertise the t-shirts and hats on a central bulletin board and at satellite offices and buildings. Utilize provided poster.
- The most success is achieved by showing them to groups and individuals. You can do this at daily briefings, roll call, meetings with merchants, other groups, or any other daily contacts that you make.
- Do not forget your friends, family and anyone else you can think of. Show the shirt and/or hat and explain what the Law Enforcement Torch Run is, and how the funds raised go to benefit Special Olympics athletes in their area. Everyone wears T-shirts and hats!
- Many communities have street fairs, festivals or other gatherings that bring a large number of people to one area. This is a great opportunity to set up a booth and sell T-shirts and hats, as well as display other law enforcement literature.

Event Ideas

Fire Truck Pull

The Fire Truck Pull is a one-day event with teams competing to pull a fully loaded fire truck 12 feet in the fastest time. This event also can feature a full line of family targeted attractions.

Tip a Cop[®]

Tip-a-Cop[®] is a Law Enforcement Torch Run fundraising event in which law enforcement officers assist with waiting tables at a restaurant and collect “tip” donations for Special Olympics. It’s easy, and requires few resources—just a willing restaurant and volunteers. See the Tip a Cop[®] Logistics Manual for details.

Golf Tournament

Golf tournaments are always a popular fundraiser and can raise thousands of dollars for Special Olympics through major sponsors, players, donated auction items, and raffle tickets. It requires more planning time and resources, but with a good team it can be done. Special Olympics Florida conducts several large tournaments, so we are a good resource for you.

Cops on Doughnut Shops[®]

During a “Cops on Doughnut Shops[®]” event, law enforcement officers collect donations from customers and the public as they “live” on the rooftop of a donut store. Many events find local community officials, sports figures and media personalities challenged to join the law enforcement personnel on the roof to contribute to the fundraising efforts, and Special Olympics Athletes are usually on hand to help greet customers and create awareness of the Special Olympics programs in the area.

Special Olympics Florida

State headquarters produced events to join

Polar Plunge[®]

Polar Plunge[®] is a fundraising challenge made to an individual or group challenging them to jump, wade, or “plunge” into a cold body of water in order to raise money for Special Olympics. Each participant collects pledges from family, friends and businesses, then on the selected day, they “take the Plunge” into the cold water.

There are three plunges to join

- Jacksonville- Adventure Landing
- Orlando-at Aquatica, Sea World’s Water Park
- Tampa Bay- Adventure Island

Visit www.plungefl.org for a complete description, dates, fundraising tool kit, and registration.

Plane Pull[®]

Special Olympics Florida Plane Pull[®] is a tug of war between a 50 ton jet and a team of up to 15 people. Teams compete to see who can pull the plane 15 feet the fastest.

There are three Plane Pull locations:

- Orlando
- Pensacola
- Fort Lauderdale

Visit www.PullFL.org for complete descriptions, dates, fundraising tool kit, and registration.

Route Logistics

Route Selection

Route selection for the Torch Run is very important for the success of the event. The length of the route is not as important as the location. Choose your route with the following in mind.

- Safety
- Consider a high visibility route, that maximizes exposure for the runners, Special Olympics, and sponsors
- Run from a significant location (sponsor location, government building, historic site) that allows for a ceremonial kick-off
- Choose a route that involves more communities
- Creates more publicity

Security and Safety

- Decide on a standard procedure and make sure everyone knows it.
- Provide your schedule to all emergency service agencies in the area through which you will run.
- Gather and maintain all necessary phone numbers or frequencies of emergency service agencies along your route. Have cell phones and radios available for use.
- Make sure all runners have registered and have signed the waiver prior to running in the Torch Run.
- Make sure your route itinerary is the one provided to the local Torch Run Coordinator.
- Immediately report any incident or injury to the command vehicle or ambulance.
- When dealing with the media after an emergency, do not comment on names of any person involved in an accident, illness, injury, etc. until the correct relative is notified and approves.

- Do not release details of any emergency until appropriate personnel (Torch Run Director, local law enforcement, Special Olympics representative, etc.) have been advised.
- A trained Public Information Officer should make any statements to the media.
- Be aware of potential medical problems common to running and watch out for those symptoms.
- Be prepared to deal with weather (heat, rain, lightening, sun, etc.)
- Have sunscreen available
- Follow the established emergency procedure. Make sure everyone is advised of the procedure.
- Have water and sports drinks available at all times. Consider having high-energy food (bananas, Power Bars, etc.) available for long runs. Don't forget your drivers.
- Watch for and know how to treat heat stroke or exhaustion

Escorts and Support Vehicles

- All start and stop areas for the run should be off the side of the road in a secure area away from traffic.
- Make sure all vehicles are clear of the Torch exchange area.
- Make sure media coverage of the event does not interfere with the run or exchange area.
- Try to cover large intersections in advance.
- Include one or two support vehicles in the entourage. Identify the vehicles with Torch Run banners, or other signage.
- An escort vehicle should follow with emergency lights operating.
- Each support or escort vehicle should be equipped with a two-way radio and at least a basic first aid kit.

Maximize Your Efforts

- Keep all runners in tight formation and utilize flags and banners. Remember, the purpose of the Torch Run is to create awareness of Special Olympics and to highlight law enforcement's involvement. You want the public to know who you are and what you are doing.
- Once the route and times are established, contact the media with the information. **See the Media Relations section for detailed information.**
- If you would like to include athletes, contact the Special Olympics office for assistance.
- Be creative! The Torch Run can include any means of transportation available to you: boat, bicycle, horseback, helicopter, etc. All make excellent photo opportunities.
- Plan at least one stop along the way for a photo shoot, even if it is for your own runners. Several photos put together nicely can make a great wall poster for the station.
- Be flexible. Experience from previous runs helps a lot in planning, but things occur that often speed up or delay the hand-offs.
- Be in place and ready to go at least one half hour before your scheduled time. It is very disappointing if nobody is there to greet a team of runners because they arrived late.

Final Leg and Opening Ceremony

The involvement of Law Enforcement at the Opening Ceremony is vital to the continuation of the project and is an important addition to the pageantry of the Opening Ceremony. Your role as Guardian of the Flame is apparent as officers from around the state join together to carry the Flame of Hope into the stadium.

The runners in the “Final Leg” enter the stadium and hand off the torch to an athlete who then lights the cauldron to indicate the start of the Games. Your role in protecting the symbolism and integrity of this ceremony greatly enhances the experience of the athletes participating in the games.

The Final Leg includes a dinner for the participants, a run, and then the actual entrance into the stadium to deliver the Flame of Hope. There are several ways to participate.

- Take part in the procession with a marked car, SUV, or other police vehicle
- Motor escort
- Run the entire 5.5 miles, or any part of the route, including joining the group in the parking lot of the venue to run the short portion inside the stadium
- Participate in the “Guardian Escort” of Honor Guard inside the stadium in the stands
- Simply join the crowd of athletes, volunteers and families for the entire Opening Ceremony.

All Torch Run volunteers are invited to take part in the Final Leg. **Announcement of the Final Leg details is generally distributed by late March. Registration** will be available online.

The mission of the Final Leg, like the rest of the Torch run, is to create awareness and excitement for the Special Olympics Games and to encourage support and attendance of the Games. The Final Leg also inspires and motivates runners to increase their level of commitment to Special Olympics when they return to their local programs.

Media Relations

Hints to get your Torch Run covered

It's a great story! It's visual, local, inspiring, and ties Law Enforcement to a great cause.

TV loves a Torch Run. There are people cheering, lights flashing, different settings, and lots of people to interview. It also allows stations to show off their mobile technology—a key point of competition among stations is to show the local viewer who gets the new faster

- **Talk to Media early.** Give them time to plan their coverage and to promote the Run in the days before it begins.
- **Talk to the news people, not public affairs.** The public affairs director may be sympathetic, but the news people decide what gets on the air. Sell them early.
- **Send detailed information.** Give them the Torch Run route street by street. This will help their vans to keep up.
- **Set up interviews before the run with coaches, runners and families.** The way to get pre-run publicity is to suggest profiles of interesting athletes or officers.
- **No surprises.** Do not change the route or schedule without telling the TV stations.
- **Work with the Promotions Department.** Sit down early with the station's Promotions Director. You may end up with volunteers from the station, personal appearances along the run by anchor people, perhaps even a new sponsor.
- **Leave room on the truck for camera crews.** TV cannot cover a Torch Run if there is no way for them to follow the runners with their cameras.
- **Leave someone in charge at home.** During the Run, have someone at a main contact number where TV Producers/Assignment Directors can call with questions. Cell phone numbers are normally the most ideal to leave

Who should you contact to get coverage?

Daily Newspapers

Managing Editors
 Sports Editors
 Features Editors

Weekly Newspapers

Editors
 Sports Editors
 Features Editors

Television

News Directors
 Assignment Directors

Radio

Public Affairs Directors
 News Directors

Press Kit

Remember, on first meeting you judge a person by how he/she presents himself. Reporters judge you by your Press Kit.

Your kit should be mailed to your entire media list no later than two weeks prior to the run and should include:

1. **Folder/Cover.** If you have the money or support from a printer or agency, it is worth the effort to design and produce an attractive folder for your kit. Reporters get Press Kits thrown on their desks every day. If your folder is drab or cheap looking, the odds are great it will be thrown out. If it is attractive and intriguing, it will get more attention.
2. **News Release.** There is a standard format reporters expect to see when they look at a release. Always include:
 - A contact name and phone number.
 - Your chapter's name, address and phone number.
 - The name and number of the contact for the day(s) of the Torch Run.

Your releases should include:

- An overall release on the Torch Run.
- A Torch Run Fact Sheet (copy attached)

Of course, you can and should include other materials in your packet. Items that can really help are:

- Photos
- Maps
- Special Olympics Brochure

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