



Special Olympics builds community across the globe with enhanced visibility and collaboration through Smartsheet

With Smartsheet, Special Olympics can gain better visibility into its global portfolio of projects, save hundreds of hours of staff time per year, and improve communication with regional and local teams, volunteers, and external partners.

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Next year, I should have about 90% of the organization on project management. Our phased implementation eased people into it and, because we are a sports organization, created a lot of healthy competition between our regions trying to build out their processes and projects.

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Laura Jones, Director of Project Management,
Special Olympics International

Customer:

Special Olympics Inc. (SOI)

Industry:

Nonprofit

Organization Size:

Enterprise (10,000+ employees)

Region:

Global

Website:

specialolympics.org

Special Olympics is a global movement of people creating a new world of inclusion and community, where every single person is accepted and welcomed, regardless of ability or disability. We are helping to make the world a better, healthier, and more joyful place — one athlete, one volunteer, one family member at a time.

Background:

Jones says Special Olympics structures all its work as projects, from public events to collaborative programs and internal operations. Her role is to define the project management organization (PMO) process and tools for the entire organization, in line with a strategic initiative that began a few years ago.

“When I came on board, I realized we also needed to make sure we’re transparent,” Jones says. “There was no visibility. One region had no idea what the other region was doing unless the staff were talking to one another; there wasn’t a centralized place for people to look and say, ‘Oh, this is what this team is working on.’”

The leadership team had already decided to use Smartsheet when Jones was hired, and she was excited to build a program foundation with a tool she was already familiar with. Working with the Organizational Excellence team and the support of leadership, she began a phased approach, rolling out the solution team by team to develop familiarity and confidence.

Solution:

In the first year of implementation, Jones and her colleagues got 20 projects into their Smartsheet solution. Today they have more than 150, and the use of Smartsheet is accelerating as users see how visibility and automation can make their work much easier.

One of the major uses for Smartsheet is in managing events. Jones says the staff who organize the World Games use Smartsheet for every step from the bidding process through test games and actual live events. While the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the competition program, Smartsheet is providing a structure for planning and execution that’s ready to act on as events become safer to produce again.

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We are saving time, money, and manpower. Smartsheet is a tool that helps us save on manpower by giving us the ability to look at how we collaborate. We’re able to stop duplicate processes and start to collaborate on the same process better.

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“One of our former athletes who is on the Sports and Competition team is putting on our Unified Beach Games in the Caribbean,” Jones says. “He’s done this before; it’s been really successful. Why not? It’s Beach Games, and of course, you want to get in on that in the Caribbean. I’m excited because now we’re going to be able to track that in Smartsheet by having him document everything he’s doing. He’s already put together the design and the project schedule; now it’s just making sure that COVID stays at bay (for the Games next year) so that we can see this process go on.”

A platform that connects people across the globe

During the pandemic, Special Olympics has been using Smartsheet to keep in communication with athletes, helping to replace some of the sense of community and connection that’s been lost with the pause in in-person competitions. Smartsheet helps local and regional organizations track communication, outreach programs like health screenings, and provision of resources such as glasses and mobility devices. The Smartsheet platform provides a communication channel that brings teams together even when they can’t meet.

“There’s a Local Organizing Committee that works with our teams to deliver the USA Games,” Jones says. “They started to utilize Smartsheet, and we’ve been able to share a lot of information to work closely with one another utilizing the communication functionality within Smartsheet to leave notes. It can automatically notify people, somebody’s talking about you in this sheet. That has been a crucial component.”

The organization also uses Smartsheet to manage company and internal process, from HR benefits cycles to training and IT resource tracking. Software licenses can be requested via a Smartsheet form and tracked for renewal or upgrade. Automated alerts help teams meet deadlines and keep current with conversations.

In a Nutshell:

Automations and templates save time, both by speeding the setup of new projects and by creating standardized approaches that make it easier to track progress and measure success.

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Our leaders love the dashboards,” Jones says. “I meet with the CEO every month and before we even get on the call, she’s already looked at the data and seen it come to life. I can tell a story, but a busy executive doesn’t always have the luxury of that time, so it’s nice to be able to see that story, to know exactly what’s going on, without me having to be there.

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Saving time and sharing better ideas

Special Olympics is saving time and money by using Smartsheet to enable clear cross-team collaboration and giving people visibility into what their colleagues are doing. Before Smartsheet, different teams across the globe might be working on the same kind of project, not realizing that their colleagues had found a quick solution to a problem or a faster way to set up an initiative. Jones knows of one case where three different teams were able to share tips and solutions for a common project and save more than 45 staff hours a month per team.

The data generated across programs and initiatives feeds into dashboards that keep leaders informed of progress in real-time. Jones and her colleagues can view and share information, without having to compile reports and take time for briefings.

"I'm really excited to get Control Center implemented," Jones says. "We have a very robust initiation process with our projects so that we can capture that and be transparent across the organization. It's really important for us, but it's going to take a lot of work if I'm managing every portfolio myself. Control Center is an easy streamline; people don't have to wait for me to upload a template for them. It's all right there for them to grab, to go, and to act upon."

Special Olympics was able to use its staged rollout to build excitement and buy-in across the organization. As it spread, the people who were resistant at the outset have been able to see what Smartsheet offers.

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We've done the basic training phase with project management. Then we get into the advanced tools in Smartsheet and how to enhance your project work. Now the challenge is, how do we sustain it and make sure anybody who comes into this organization is utilizing project management and Smartsheet? I was really excited to launch our online course on the Special Olympics International processes and direct people toward the Smartsheet Center of Excellence videos to learn more.”

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