

Unified Champion Schools®

**Special
Olympics**
New Jersey



Special Olympics
**Unified Champion
Schools**

2026-27 SONJ UCS Grant Application Guide

General UCS Funding Info

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- SONJ receives funding from a variety of sources, all of which have their own criteria and restrictions
- We are expecting to receive level funding from 2025-26 to 2025-27
- The SONJ UCS grant operates on a reimbursement model, meaning schools initially pay for all eligible expenses and stipends and then submit a request to SONJ for reimbursement.

2026-27 Application

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- Applications will open by May 26
- Our goal is to issue award letters within 10 days of receiving a completed application
 - If you don't hear from us, please follow up!
 - Please keep in mind that we'll be mostly out of the office June 3-9 for Summer Games and response times will be longer than usual
- Application questions are largely unchanged from the past two years
 - You can access a PDF of the questions on our website so you can prepare
- Applications are accepted and reviewed on a rolling basis, so there's no deadline to apply. However, funding is limited.

General Application Info

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- Please submit a separate application for each school
- We know that plans and prices can change, so you aren't strictly bound to what you submit in your application
- If your application doesn't make it clear what you're offering and what you plan to spend grant funds on, we cannot award funding
 - Please share who, what, where, and when
 - We already know why 😊
- Self-funded schools should complete the application and indicate where asked that you are not requesting funding. You'll be offered an abridged application.

Application Consideration

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- Returning schools must be in good standing
 - All reports have been completed as well as the UMass survey
 - If your school isn't in good standing, we'll hold your application until the required items have been completed
 - Schools not in good standing with monthly reports received an email the week of May 11
- Application must be complete and thorough, but please don't make it fluffy
- Expenses must be in line with UCS strategy and funding guidelines
- Review this packet and enter the password: Choose to Include

Implementation Plans



Please share concrete implementation plans for Unified Sports and IYL

Example A (good!):

- Offering Unified Soccer and Unified Basketball. Both teams will participate twice a week for an hour after school for at least 8 weeks. We plan to have at least 7 games each and participate in Unified Cup for each sport.

• Example B (not so good):

- Unified Sports bring together our students with intellectual disabilities and our students who don't have disabilities to play on the same team and foster inclusion and friendship. Our students love how Unified Sports make everyone feel welcome.

Itemized Budgets



Please share concrete numbers and an itemized budget

- **Example A (good!):**

- Unified Sports supplies itemized budget:
 - 6 soccer balls x \$20 = \$120
 - 12 basketball uniforms because this is our first year x \$50 = \$600
- Unified Sports supplies total budget: \$720

- **Example B (not so good):**

- Unified Sports supplies itemized budget: Supplies \$1000
- Unified Sports supplies total budget: \$1000

Please be sure your numbers match and that your math is correct. If there's a discrepancy, we'll default to the lower amount.

Reasonable Requests



- Many factors are taken into consideration when determining your grant award
- These ranges are generally considered reasonable:

School Level	Year	Request	Year	Request	Year	Request
Pre-School	1	\$500-750	2-4	Up to \$900	5+	\$500-750
Elementary	1	\$1,000-\$1,500	2-4	Up to \$2,000	5+	\$1,000-\$1,500
Middle	1	\$1500-\$2,500	2-4	Up to \$4,500	5+	\$1500-\$2,500
High	1	\$2500-\$3,500	2-4	Up to \$8,000	5+	\$2500-\$3,500

Reimbursable Expenses



- Stipends for Unified Sports coaches
 - Coach certificate must be on file with SONJ
- Transportation for interscholastic competitions
- Facility rental fees for interscholastic competitions or practices (e.g. bowling alley)
- Officials' fees (up to 3 competitions per interscholastic sport)
- Supplies not reasonably available at your school
- Uniforms (both the purchase and the design must be pre-approved)
- Club advisor stipends

Non-Reimbursable Expenses

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- Food, drink, snacks of any kind
- Prizes, gifts, awards, trophies
- Swag to accompany sports uniforms (e.g. jackets, pants, hoodies)
- Expenses for events or activities that don't have similar numbers of athletes and Unified partners
- Expenses which are considered superfluous
- Items that we think are reasonably available (e.g. extension cords, chairs)
- Permanent items, storage
- Field trips
- This is not an exhaustive list. Please email the UCS team if you're unsure.

Non-Reimbursable Expenses

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Just because the UCS grant can't reimburse certain expenses doesn't mean you can't use them for your Unified Sports or Unified Clubs! There are no restrictions on items supported by school, district, or fundraised dollars.

- For example, if you'd like to host a pizza party at the end of your Unified Soccer season, those expenses are not reimbursable through the UCS grant. However, you may cover them using funds from your school, district, fundraiser, or participation fees.

Award Letters

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- We aim to send award letters within 10 business days of receiving your application
- The award letter will consist of an email notification sent to the individual who completed the application
- To accept the award, please complete the attachment included in the email notification and return to us within 60 days
 - Pretty much the same as last year
 - Signatures are required from school liaison, chief school administrator, and the business administrator

Remember...

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- The goal of the UCS strategy is to create sustained, repeated opportunities for meaningful inclusion.
- Unified events and activities should all have similar numbers of athletes (students with IDD) and Unified partners (without IDD).
- The UCS team is here to help! Please don't hesitate to reach out!

2026-27 Deadlines

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- December 15, 2026 – T-Shirt Orders due
 - Note: this amount is deducted from your grant award.
 - You can request this amount by emailing UCS@SONJ.org
- January 20, 2027 – Submission deadline for reimbursement requests for all expenses incurred and paid between August and December 2026
- April 20, 2027 – Last day to purchase physical supplies
 - Expectation is that all physical supplies will be delivered by April 20 to allow ample time for use during the school year
 - Items delivered far after this date may not qualify for reimbursement
- July 3, 2027 – Last day to request reimbursement for 2026-27
 - Please plan your stipend payouts accordingly!
- July 31, 2027 – Our books close
 - Please let us know far before this date if there's an issue so we can address it before our books close