

CUSTOMER SPOTLIGHT

## Special Olympics New York



“We needed to do better if we wanted to grow the entire organization. So we looked at a number of opportunities and ended on Blackbaud.”

”

—Raymond Polikoski, Vice President of Finance and Administration

Ready to step up its game, Special Olympics New York teamed up with a trusted technology partner to better serve stakeholders, increase its fundraising potential, encourage innovation, and offer even more opportunities to athletes across the state.

### Special Olympics New York resolves to reach greater heights with digital transformation.

Special Olympics New York (SONY) involves as many as 67,000 athletes, 35,000 volunteers, and a \$10 million budget each year, making it the largest U.S. program of its kind and one of the largest in the world. Yet SONY saw an opportunity to overhaul its technology to make an even greater impact.

Incorporated in 1970 soon after the Special Olympics movement began to provide athletic opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities, SONY came to rely on several different data systems to work with volunteers, athletes, employees, and donors—until staff members made a case to their CEO and board for a digital transformation.

Special Olympics New York is powered by Blackbaud solutions for:

- ✓ Fundraising and relationship management
- ✓ Analytics
- ✓ Fund accounting
- ✓ Marketing and engagement
- ✓ Merchant services
- ✓ Peer-to-peer fundraising

“We realized that all of these disparate data systems made it difficult to impossible to communicate effectively with all of our constituents,” said Vice President of Finance and Administration Raymond Polikoski. “We needed to do better if we wanted to grow the entire organization. So we looked at a number of opportunities and ended on Blackbaud.”

## Pole Vaulting Over Old Technology

SONY’s decision to choose Blackbaud as its all-in-one technology provider was influenced by return on investment projections, buy-in from staff members who already considered Blackbaud a trusted partner, and guidance from Blackbaud that ensured SONY was investing in needed solutions designed for resilience. After all, it had been nearly a decade and a half since the organization had adopted any major upgrades. As Polikoski explained, “We’re pole vaulting over old technology.”

Working with a Blackbaud consultant, SONY engaged in an in-depth audit that looked at where the organization wanted to head with technology and how Blackbaud’s cloud-based solutions could get them there. “We realized how much better we could be,” Polikoski said.

SONY already used Blackbaud technology for some fundraising and fund accounting needs but saw the value of upgrading to Blackbaud Raiser’s Edge NXT®, Blackbaud Financial Edge NXT®, and an updated version of Blackbaud TeamRaiser® for peer-to-peer events, while adding integrated solutions for wealth analytics and marketing.



“Even in beta, we’re seeing what the tools can do and the impact in what staff can do every day.”

—Raymond Polikoski,  
Vice President of Finance  
and Administration

With Blackbaud Luminate Online® email capabilities, SONY would have a “one-stop shop” for communicating with stakeholders with the ability to tailor personal messages and experiences to segments and subsegments. For example, staff could easily group athletes by summer or winter games and even send targeted emails to those involved in a specific competition, such as bocce.

They knew that effectively engaging diverse groups of volunteers, from coaches to board members, would also be critical to furthering their mission. “The people were really at a center focus for us, in addition to the efficiency that we would gain,” Polikoski said.

## Immediate Advantages of Wealth Analytics

With COVID-19, SONY’s adoption of Blackbaud Advanced Wealth Analytics took on increased significance. Traditional event-based fundraising “went out the window,” and individual giving and targeted asks became “all the more important” to the organization’s survival, Polikoski said.

Wealth Analytics will help SONY's development team ensure they ask the right people, for the right amount of money, at the right time, he added. "During discovery, we learned how powerful our own database had the potential to be if mined properly and combined with a process that sets expectations for solicitations by each of our development staff," he said. Despite the difficulties brought by the pandemic, Polikoski explained, "we have an opportunity to grow this segment of our portfolio, and the analysis that comes out of the process will get us going in the right direction."

## Connected Office Payoff

The shift to a connected office came with an immediate payoff. "Even in beta, we're seeing what the tools can do and the impact in what staff can do every day," Polikoski said. That includes the ability to easily share information between the financial, marketing, and philanthropy teams and get real-time updates to those working in the field with the ease of a mobile device.

SONY expects an enhanced focus on individual giving to cover the upgrade costs, possibly within three years, even after foregoing technology improvements for so long.

When an organization undergoes digital transformation, it can include everything from collaboration in remote working environments to reducing manual processes through workflow automation. And for SONY, transformation doesn't necessarily have an endpoint.

"What does done look like? I don't know. That changes every day," Polikoski said, acknowledging the window this opens to further innovation. While he can easily envision where the organization will be at the end of the current implementation, he expects SONY will take a more proactive approach to adding new technology in future years. "We need to keep regularly investing in this and not get so far behind."

**Connect, empower, and drive more impact with Blackbaud solutions for nonprofits.**

[Learn more](#)

"We're pole vaulting over old technology."

—Raymond Polikoski,  
Vice President of Finance  
and Administration



---

### About Blackbaud

Leading uniquely at the intersection point of technology and social good, Blackbaud connects and empowers organizations to increase their impact through cloud software, services, expertise, and data intelligence. We serve the entire social good community, which includes nonprofits, foundations, companies, education institutions, healthcare organizations, and the individual change agents who support them.