

WELCOME TO THE 2025-2026 SEASON

Southern Maryland Youth Organization (SMYO)

CHEER ELITE

Season 8

Information Handbook

Handbook Overview

The purpose of the 2025-2026 Information Handbook is to outline the expectations and requirements for the upcoming season. The handbook will provide you with brief information regarding SMYO, team placements, cost and registration, and in-season expectations.

A Message from SMYO Cheer Elite

Welcome to SMYO Cheer Elite!

As we kick off season 8, we lead with an understanding and will continue to be GREAT! Passion, hard work, and determination has built our amazing program led by a courageous, strong-willed, and dedicated coaching staff. Here at SMYO, not only do we focus on the athlete and training them about the sport, but we aim to cultivate a culture of mentorship and family!

As one of the few performance recreation organizations in Charles County, MD, we are making our name known in the cheerleading world! A few highlights from our cheer history include:

- *3x National The One Champions*
- *Awarded 17 paid bids*
- *Awarded Best of Level 12x*
- *Awarded 6 Most Spirited Fans Awards*
- *Awarded 2 Best Sportsmanship Awards*
- *Received the Best Basket Tosses in Season 7 (2024-2025)*
- *Received the Best Pyramid Award in Season 1 (2018-2019)*
- *The program has captured 4 Grand Champions, 119 1st place finishes and a plethora of 2nd and 3rd place finishes.*

We offer a year-round competitive Performance Recreation Cheerleading program for athletes ages 4 to 18 with or without cheerleading experience. Our program has a place for everyone, regardless of skill level. SMYO Cheer Elite differs from traditional school/recreational cheer programs largely because of our focus on competing. We strive to keep our costs as low as possible while delivering the best cheer experience for our athletes.

Our mission is providing a fun, safe, encouraging cheerleading atmosphere; while teaching the skills to develop strong character, positive attitudes, responsibility, and sportsmanship as well as instilling positive goals, dreams, and values in cheerleading.

We warmly welcome all new and returning athletes to our program! We hope it will be a great season!

Sincerely, SMYO Cheer Elite Staff!

Contact Information

SMYO Cheer Commissioner

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Instagram: Smyocheerelite

Facebook: Southern Maryland Youth Organization

Website: www.smyo.org



Address

*SMYO Clubhouse

8210 Marshall Corner Rd.

Pomfret, MD 20675

*Charles County Fairgrounds

8440 Fairgrounds Rd,

La Plata, MD 20646

WE OWN THE CROWN!

What to Expect In Season 8

SMYO TAKES ON SEASON 8 - WHERE GREATNESS IS MADE!

As a program, we like to pride ourselves on not only our talent, but also on the class and dignity of our members. Here at SMYO everyone makes a team and will receive the same attention, dedication and love— no matter what team or which coach they have!

Full Year Program

Our full year program is an amazing program for ages 6-18. The Full Year Program is intended to offer competitive cheerleading to athletes. The season runs from August through May with practices occurring three times a week. During practice they will focus on gaining several different skill sets, including tumbling, stunting, and dancing. They will learn a choreographed routine to be performed at competitions. Full Year Program athletes will attend approximately 9 to 12 competitions and compete in the performance recreation division for the entire season.

Half Year Program

Our half year program is an amazing preparatory program for ages 4-6. The Prep Program is intended to offer cheerleading to athletes that are NEW to the sport. It is a perfect steppingstone for an athlete that wishes to become part of SMYO Cheer Elite full year program. Focus will be on teaching athletes the fundamental skills of cheerleading. The season runs from October through April with practices occurring twice a week. During practice they will focus on gaining several different skill sets, including tumbling, stunting, and dancing. They will learn a choreographed routine to be performed at competitions. Half Year Prep athletes will attend approximately 5 to 6 competitions and compete in the exhibition division for the entire season. This program will move at a pace to ensure that the athletes are gaining the skills needed to be successful. One of the main focuses will be to build confidence so that athletes feel comfortable performing in front of a crowd.

High School Program

Note: Cheerleaders must be in high school to register for this program.

Our high school senior team program is our new program for high school students ages 14-18 years old. This program allows students to still participate in their high school sports, while still being able to actively participate in competitive cheerleading. The season runs from October through April/May with practices occurring between two to three times a week, and possible weekends. During practice they will focus on gaining several different skill sets, including tumbling, stunting, and dancing. They will learn a choreographed routine to be performed at competitions.

Registration and Tuition

Half Season Prep Teams

Half season prep teams finances include the following:

- Nonrefundable Registration Fee: \$50

- Cheer Package Fee: \$375
 - Competition Uniform (That you keep)
 - Practice Wear
 - Competition Hair Accessories
 - Competition Shoes

- SMYO Fees (Insurance)
- Tuition Fee: \$125 for 7 months (October to April), totaling \$875.
 - Competition Fees (5-6 in-person competitions)
 - Competition music
 - Practice Space Rental
 - Monthly Tumbling (Starting in October)

Payment Options	Price
Upfront	\$875
7 Month Payment Plan (October-April)	\$125

Full Year Season Teams

Full year season teams finances include the following:

- Nonrefundable Registration Fee: \$50
- Cheer Package Fee: \$600
 - Competition Uniform (That you keep)
 - Practice Wear
 - Competition Hair Accessories
 - Competition Shoes
 - SMYO Fees (Insurance)
- Tuition Fee: \$160 for 4 months (August to November), totaling \$640.
 - Competition Fees (9-12 In-person/virtual competitions)
 - Competition music
 - Practice Space Rental
 - Monthly Tumbling (Starting in August)
- Tuition Fee: \$150 for 6 months (December-May), totaling \$900.
 - Competition Fees (9-12 In-person/virtual competitions)
 - Practice Space Rental

Payment Options	Price
Upfront	\$1,500
10Month Payment Plan (August- May)	\$160/\$150

High School Teams

High School teams finances include the following:

- Nonrefundable Registration Fee: \$50
- Cheer Package Fee: \$600

- Competition Uniform (That you keep)
 - Practice Wear
 - Competition Hair Accessories
 - Competition Shoes
 - SMYO Fees (Insurance)
- Tuition Fee: \$150 for 7 months (October to April/May), totaling \$1,050.
 - Competition Fees (6-9 in-person/virtual competitions)
 - Competition music
 - Practice Space Rental
 - Monthly Tumbling (Starting in October)

Payment Options	Price
Upfront	\$1,050
7 Month Payment Plan (October-April/May)	\$150

Payment Options

There are two different payment plan options to pay off your tuition. The payment options are UPFRONT or MONTHLY payments.

Upfront payment allows you to make a one-time payment. Please note if this fee is paid via card, you will be assessed the 4% credit card fee.

Monthly payment plan allows you to make monthly tuition payments. Please note if this fee is paid via card, you will be assessed the 4% credit card fee.

Payments forms include Credit/Debit Card OR Cash only.

We will not accept checks or payment via Venmo or Cash App (UNLESS approved by the Cheer Commissioner).

NOTE: You may pay ahead or a lump sum at any time. Please note if you pay ahead, you will still be required to make your next monthly payment. Paying ahead or a lump sum at any time, simply decreases your total amount, it doesn't give you a free month of no payment.

Tuition Late Fees

Monthly payments **MUST BE** made by the date specified by the Cheer Commissioner each month, if it is not paid then you will incur a late fee.

Please note SMYO Cheer Elite has the discretion to change a tuition due date. If the date is changed, we will ensure all teams are aware and it will not be due earlier than the original date. There may be an occurrence where tuition payments can be made during weekly practice, if this occurs payments should be made at the beginning of practice.

There are two types of late fees: Fixed Late Fee (\$20) or Tiered Late Fee (\$30).

Fixed Late Fee

Late Charge Fee: \$20

If the tuition fee is due on Saturday and you miss the payment, you will receive 1 grace day (which is your cheerleader's first day of practice for the week) and not incur the late fee. The \$20 late fee is applied on the next practice day if you still haven't made the payment.

EXAMPLE:

Saturday: Tuition payment due but missed the payment.

Monday (1st day of practice): Missed Tuition Payment

Tuesday (2nd day of practice): \$20 late fee applied.

Tiered Late Fee

Late Charge Fee: \$30

ANY payment made after 7 days from the scheduled due date, WILL pay a \$30 late fee.

Additional Financial Information

- All monthly payments made electronically will incur a 4% fee per transaction.
- Monthly payments are non-refundable.
- If your card declines, there will be a \$35 late fee added onto your monthly payment.
- Invoices will be given out on a quarterly basis that includes a running balance and payment history.
- Please note fundraising totals may be delayed on invoices, as assessment of fees may take longer to process.

Quitters Fee

If an athlete quits or leaves a team, there will be a \$350 fee per team. This fee covers the cost to fix choreography and cover any competition fees lost.

Please note that at the beginning of the season, you will be required to commit to all competitions, regardless of the location and price. Please understand that if you refuse to attend any competition, you will be assessed the quitter's fee.

For example, at the beginning of the season all teams will discuss their attendance to The One competition, if you decide that you cannot attend the event after you have agreed to attend; you will be charged a quitter's fee.

Team Evaluations, Placement, and Team Reveal

Evaluations

Cheer evaluations are required for all **FULL YEAR PROGRAM** athletes. To participate in evaluations, the athlete must be registered and the registration fee of \$50 must be paid.

All athletes will be required to stretch as a group and then asked to perform a host of skills to assess their abilities. Cheerleaders will be asked to perform any/all tumbling skills they possess, body positions for potential flyers, and a toe touch and pike jump. Per each group, stunting may be performed as well. We will have a model to demonstrate each task to ensure that cheerleaders understand what is being asked.

Team Placements

It's not always the easiest to create a cheer team and sometimes we may not get it right, but our goal is to place athletes on a team where they can learn, be an asset to their team, and continue to grow.

Our teams are built based on score sheet requirements for each USASF/CDE level, behavior, maturity, and coachability. We take into account the tumbling skills your athlete has at assessments, along with the feedback from our tumbling instructor, we assess and review their previous stunting skills and positions, and their maturity and additional abilities that we observed at assessments as we create teams.

Furthermore, at the beginning of the season we receive guidelines for required skills by USASF/CDE and we take this information into account when building teams to ensure that everyone can always score in the high range. For example, if we create a team of 16 athletes, we will try our best to ensure that the team has the max number of 9 athletes to score in the high range regarding specific skills.

Cheerleading has changed immensely and it's not only about tumbling. Stunting, jumping, sportsmanship, technique, and performance have key roles in a routine and the scoresheet. To score in the high range of all these categories and to remain competitive, your athletes must strive to achieve every skill required at that level.

We want to remind you that cheer is not like school. Please do not assume your child will move up every year. We want to offer our athletes the chance to master his/ her level prior to moving up so they are better prepared to transition to that next level. If an athlete does not keep up with their skills, there is no guarantee they will make the same level team as previous years.

We ask parents to be supportive of your athlete regardless of what level team they make.

Crossovers

Your cheerleader may be asked to cross up or down a level to assist another team with their skills. This is a huge commitment but ultimately shows the trust and belief that we have in your athlete to contribute to another team. Crossovers are selected based on your preference at assessments. If you have any issues with your athlete being a crossover, you must notify the SMYO Cheer Elite Commissioner immediately after team reveal.

Team Reveal

Team reveal is the day all athletes find out what team they made and who their coach will be. This is a fun day to celebrate your athlete's placement. Team reveal is normally held at the end of July/Early August.

Competition Details

The full year teams will attend a variety of local and a few out of state competitions, whereas the high school and prep teams will attend several pre-selected competitions. All athletes are expected to attend every competition. Travel cost is not included in tuition and each family is responsible for getting their athlete to and from competitions.

The final competition schedule will be available by the third week in August. We will provide a draft competition list to ensure that you mark your calendars for all the anticipated competition dates. Please note that the competition schedule is subject to change at the discretion of SMYO Cheer Elite.

Competition Expectations

Awards

All athletes are expected to be at awards. They should show positive sportsmanship and cheer on all SMYO teams as well as their competitors.

Attire

Athletes should be dressed appropriately in their SMYO uniform per the guidelines provided by their coach. Uniforms and competition shoes should always be clean and represented in a professional manner.

Timeliness

Athletes should arrive on time to competition, per the guidelines provided by their coach.

Sportsmanship and Behavior

Athletes should demonstrate positive sportsmanship and behavior at competitions. They should refrain from speaking negatively about competition.

Competition Hosts

SMYO Cheer Elite tries to offer their athletes a variety of different competition hosts, to challenge our athletes and showcase our talent. We tend to compete at the following companies' competitions:

- Cheer and Dance Extreme
- F&T Championships and Cheer
- Varsity Events

Please note that the companies above offer different registration packages, rules, scoring rubrics, and guidelines; therefore, we will provide additional information regarding each host's rules once the official competition schedule is released.

Bids to The Finale, The One (and any other awarded event)

A bid is an offer or invitation to compete at an elite cheer event, usually at the end of the season. Most of these events serve as a grand finale to your teams' season, but you have to be invited via "a bid" to compete in any of these events typically.

There are several types of bids for many different events. There are two types of bids that teams can win at specific competitions regarding Cheer and Dance Extreme Competitions.

Partial Bid: This means you have placed 1st-3rd in your division, but there is still a cost per athlete associated with a partial bid, the registration fee is discounted.

Paid in Full Bid: The most prestigious type of bid, and the most difficult to earn, the Paid Bid means that your team's registration fees will be covered by the host organization. Please note some companies still require a team combined registration fee of \$100 or more per team (not athlete).

Teams can compete at multiple bid events and can earn a paid or partial bid to an event.

Teams can earn a partial bid by placing 1st-3rd place at an event. Teams can earn a full bid by placing 1st in their division and having the highest overall score in their division or competition. The guidelines are determined by the company.

Specialty Awards

Often companies will award specialty awards for teams or organizations. These awards vary often at each event and sometimes can be defined differently by companies too.

Best of Level: Awarded to the team who has the highest score in their division level. Please note a team can win this award multiple times.

Grand Champion: Awarded to the team who has the highest score in the performance recreation division. Please note a team can win this award multiple times.

Most Spirited Fans: Awarded to the organization with the fans that show the most spirit and excitement throughout the competition.

Best Sportsmanship: Awarded to the organization with the best sportsmanship amongst the athletes, coaches, and parents.

Cheer Practices

Practice Times, Dates, and Locations

Practice times and days are provided to the parent at the time of team reveal. Please understand changes may be made and will be told in a timely manner (when possible). We kindly ask that you keep a very flexible schedule as practices may run over slightly 5 to 10 minutes or need to start early some days.

Beginning with the first day of school all practices are **mandatory**.

Athletes must be at practice in proper clothing and on time. You are considered tardy to practice if you are not ready to practice when your practice begins. This means appropriate practice wear on, shoes on and tied, hair up, and ready to go. See attendance policies and procedures for additional information.

Weekend Practices

During the competition season for choreography or extra practice purposes, teams may have to practice on a Saturday or Sunday. We kindly ask that you keep your schedules flexible during the cheer season. It is critical that ALL team members are at every practice, especially weekend practices as this allows teams maximum time to practice.

Locations

Most practices are held at the Charles County Fairgrounds, 8440 Fairground Rd, La Plata, MD 20646. During September and December, we ask that you keep a flexible schedule as practice locations change to accommodate the Charles County Fair and Kris Kringle Event. Practice locations can vary from La Plata or Waldorf areas, and practice days are subject to change during these transitional times.

Summer Practices

During the summer months, vacation schedules must be provided to the Coach in writing by the first week of practice. If a vacation schedule is not provided in writing and an athlete misses practices this will be considered an unexcused absence. Each athlete will be given 1 unexcused absence during the summer in addition to their scheduled vacations. Summer is our skills development time, and athletes should be utilizing this time to improve not only as individuals but also as a team.

All SMYO Cheer Elite coaches choreograph their own cheer competition routines. Choreography dates will be set in August and September for each individual team. We will provide dates via Band. Each athlete must be present to maximize benefits of each choreography session. If an athlete must miss choreography, they MUST notify their coach as soon as the choreography dates are announced so the coach can create an alternate plan. Please note that choreography may extend for an entire weekend on average 6-8 hours daily.

All routines/choreography including dances, stunts, and transitions should be highly protected. Our

choreography should never be copied or taught to anyone. This also includes all portions of music selections and editing. No videos of routines/choreography should ever be uploaded to any online site such as YouTube, Instagram, or Facebook. Violation of this rule or the theft of music is grounds for immediate dismissal.

Please note as teams receive feedback from the judges, choreography of the routine will slightly change to enhance the overall routine.

Uniforms, Practice Wear, and Competition Shoes

All cheerleaders will receive the following items:

- Competition Uniform
- Practice Gear
- Competition Shoes
- Competition Hair Accessories

You are responsible for keeping these items clean and nice looking for every competition. SMYO Cheer Elite is not responsible to replace any lost items. You are more than welcome to purchase duplicates of items if needed. We will provide guidance on how to wash your uniforms once received.

Sizing for all gear will take place in August. Parents are responsible for concurring with all sizes for each item. We ask that you confirm the sizing and spelling of all items to avoid any confusion or issues.

Competition gear is normally handed out at one time. During this time, we do not showcase any competition uniforms. Expected timeline for receiving these items is October/November timeframe. Please note if we do not receive our competition uniforms before our first competition, teams will perform in their practice wear (which is not abnormal).

Fundraising

Fundraising is very important for our cheer program, as it allows us to purchase cheerleading performance mats, tumbling mats, future building space, team/organization parties and team bonding events, specialty attire, and additional equipment to benefit the participants.

ALL ATHLETES, regardless of the payment plan option, have a mandatory fundraising requirement of \$250. This fee must be met/paid by the end of March for all cheerleaders. SMYO will hold several fundraisers to allow each cheerleader to meet their mandatory requirement.

Summer Fundraising

All registered cheerleaders will have the opportunity to participate in one summer fundraiser to offset the \$600 package fee and August tuition.

Sponsor My Season (Bow To Toe): Post a copy of the provided Bow to Toe document on social media, etc. and allow family and friends to purchase pieces of your cheerleader's uniform package. To get full credit, you must turn in the calendar and cash only at the first day of practice.

NOTE: This document can be obtained through the SMYO Season 8 Newcomer BAND. You will receive access to this BAND upon registration of your cheerleader.

Attendance and Team Commitment Policy

Committing to a position on a team with SMYO Cheer Elite requires commitment and dedication. Your cheerleader is on a team and is needed at practice for the team to be successful. Excessive absences will affect your child's role on a team. Examples include changing stunt position, tumbling position, or removal from the program. Please note changes to positions is at the coach's discretion. Removal from a team due to excess absences will be brought to the Cheer Commissioner and determination of removal is at the discretion of the Cheer Commissioner.

A monthly attendance log is kept throughout the season to record all absences and the nature of the absence. Your coach will keep you informed of your absences (excused and unexcused).

You may not be absent during mandatory camps and events.

High School Cheer Athletes: Coaches need your full cheer schedule immediately. We encourage balance between your SMYO Cheer and high school commitments. Please continue to communicate with your coaches.

Absolutely **NO ABSENCES ALLOWED THE WEEK BEFORE A COMPETITION (unless approved by the Cheer Commissioner)!** Coaches reserve the right to replace an athlete who misses practice the week before a competition. Repeated absences are grounds for dismissal from the program.

Lateness to practice: Each athlete is permitted to be 10 minutes late up to three practices a month. Practice officially starts at 6:10pm, we allow cheerleaders into the building at 5:45pm. Take traffic, long distance drive into account: If you are driving two hours to tryouts, you will be driving two hours to practice at least twice a week. Traffic in our area is always a problem. Take that into consideration and plan accordingly.

Excused absences will ONLY be granted for the following:

- Graded Academic School function (coach must be notified prior to function)
- Contagious illness
- Death in the immediate family.

Please communicate with your Coach. Communication is key!

Notification of Missed Practice: We kindly ask that you inform your coach ASAP if you know your cheerleader will not attend practice. We ask that you give us 3-4 or more hours of a notice if possible, so we can better plan our practice. Along with this notification, we ask that you be as forthcoming with information as you can. If we receive a message that says, John will not attend practice today, it will be marked as unexcused. If we receive a message that says, John isn't feeling well and will not attend practice, it will be marked as unexcused due to the lack of information. If your cheerleader isn't feeling well it is important to inform us of the illness, so we can protect/prepare the team if necessary.

PRACTICES FROM the first day of School THRU END OF SEASON: Three unexcused absences during the season will result in disciplinary action at the discretion of the coach and commissioner, up to and including termination from the team. Practices are much more effective with everyone present; please make every effort to be at every practice and on time.

SCHOOL WORK: School work will not be considered reasonable grounds for an excused absence. One of the attributes of competitive cheer is the ability to schedule time productively and effectively. Attendance at a graded school function will be excused.

OTHER SPORTS / EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES: Our team's schedule is firm as of August. At the time of registering for this program you do so with the knowledge that you may have to make sacrifices or changes to your anticipated schedule to accommodate various commitments to the team. No one wants to become second or third priority. Please be cautious of additional sports, activities, or jobs that you choose to add to your schedule. **Absences due to these types of activities WILL NOT be excused by your coaches.**

ILLNESS: If mildly ill, and not contagious, all athletes are to still attend regular practice, even if the coach decides the athlete will sit and watch from the sidelines. There is much to be learned by listening through practice as well as physically participating. Showing up during these circumstances also shows dedication, respect, and commitment to both coaches and teammates. (However your athlete is running a high fever due to an illness or vomiting, please contact your coach ASAP).

INJURY: Most injuries still permit team members to attend practices and events. Athletes should participate to the best of their abilities with consideration to the injury- example: if a wrist or arm injury, the athlete may still do things such as stretch, jump, mark through stunts, and formation changes etc. Showing support by attending, even if unable to participate physically, is expected for all team functions.

In the event of serious contagious illness or injury we ask to be informed ASAP of an extended absence and given the estimated timeline for recovery and return, this will enable coaches to adjust practices and routines accordingly. Coaches are to receive sufficient communication and a doctor's note regarding an athlete's ability or inability to perform specific requirements associated with their normal tasks. Recognize that the coach may need to make adjustments to the team's choreography if any athlete is unable to follow through with a performance element or competition, perhaps even indefinitely. Although this is never enjoyable, there are some things beyond an athlete as well as the coach's control. All team members must be prepared to make changes should a situation such as this arise.

