

Local Program Development Guide

Section 4 – Sports Management

Training and competition takes place at all levels. The primary goal of Special Olympics is to provide year-round training and competition opportunities, which are directed by qualified coaches. Individuals and teams compete in divisions according to age, gender, and ability.

As a Local Program Manager, it is important to understand the basics of sports training and competition. There are factors involved in getting athletes ready for competition and then taking them to competition.

Please note that prior to the beginning of training and attending competition, the following elements should be in place:

- Registration of the Local Program with Special Olympics Wisconsin
- Selection of sport(s) for competition
- Athlete medical forms and release forms completed and submitted
- Partner application and Class A Volunteer form certification completed
- Volunteer/coach recruitment and Class A Volunteer certification completed
- Head coach and assistant coaches trained and certified

Foundational details regarding Special Olympics sports training and competition can be found in Article 3 of the Special Olympics General Rules:

<https://resources.specialolympics.org/governance-and-leadership-excellence/special-olympics-general-rules/article-3>

Structuring Local Program Sports Training

The following opportunities may be added based on your Local Program's capacity and specific needs, along with endorsement from the Accredited Program.

Official and Recognized Sports

Special Olympics Inc. rules allow programs to offer 42 official sports. Currently, Special Olympics Wisconsin offers competition in 20 sports.

The Official Special Olympics Sports Rules govern all Special Olympics competitions. Special Olympics has developed these rules based upon International Federation and National Governing Body Rules for each sport.

- Winter Season: Alpine Skiing & Snowboarding, Cross Country Skiing, Snowshoe Racing
- Spring Season: 3v3 Basketball, Basketball Skills, Basketball Team, Swimming

- Summer: Athletics (Track & Field), Cornhole, Gymnastics, Powerlifting, Soccer, Tennis
- Fall: Bocce, Bowling, Flag Football, Golf, Softball, Tee Ball, Volleyball

Locally Popular Sports

In addition to the available Official and Recognized Sports, Special Olympics allows the opportunity for athletes to engage in locally popular sports. Accredited Programs may offer sports that are locally popular, although not currently considered Official or Recognized Sports.

PLEASE NOTE:

- Locally Popular Sports may require pre-approval from SOI if they have been determined by SOI to be sports that might expose Special Olympics athletes to unreasonable risks to their health or safety.
- No Accredited Program may offer any training or competition in any sport which SOI has classified as a prohibited sport.
- Requests for permission to offer one of these sports must be accompanied by proposed rules and safety standards. SOI has classified the following sports as Locally Popular Sports that require pre-approval:
 - Combative sports
 - Martial arts (other than Judo)
 - Sledding sports
 - Motor sports
 - Aerial sports
 - Shooting
 - Archery

Special Olympics Unified Sports®

Special Olympics Unified Sports® is an inclusive sports program that includes Special Olympics athletes (individuals with intellectual disabilities) and Unified Partners (individuals without intellectual disabilities). Through shared sport training and competition, Unified Sports promotes inclusion for individuals with and without intellectual disabilities.

Unified Sports is identified in Article 1 of the Sports Rules as three inclusive models – Competitive, Player Development, and Recreational. Each of these models reflects a certain style of play and teammate composition, but all must be fully inclusive for participants.

Coaches should consult with SOWI regarding what Unified Sports models are offered and at which events. It is also important to know that some Programs may use different terms in naming the three models or styles of play.

Unified Sports Competitive Style

- All athletes and partners must have sport-specific skills and tactics to complete without modification of rules.
- Teams may be eligible for advancement to Regional and World Games.
- Athletes and Unified partners in team sports must be of similar age and ability.
- Athletes and Unified partners in sports, such as golf, may have a greater variance in age and ability.

Unified Sports Player Development Style

- Athletes and Unified partners are not required to be of similar abilities, but must be of similar ages.
- Teammates of greater abilities serve as mentors to assist teammates of lower abilities in developing sport-specific skills and tactics.
- In certain sports, such as bocce, more age variation is allowed.
- Competition is available at this level.

Unified Sports Recreation Style

- Consists of inclusive recreational sports opportunities for athletes and Unified partners, or other organizations as introductory one-day events, exhibitions, or demonstrations.
- There is no prescribed training, competition, and/or team composition requirements.
- Opportunities may take place in partnership with schools, sports clubs, and/or community programs.
- Physical education class activities and intramural sports may also fall into this category.

Competition Standards and Leading Practices

The minimum standards for athletes desiring to compete in Special Olympics are based on Special Olympics Inc. Sports Rules. All athletes must be trained in the sport for a minimum of eight consecutive weeks before competing. Part of this training may include nutrition education and physical conditioning. For Regional or World Games, training is recommended twice a week for ten weeks. All athletes must have opportunities to compete during that time.

Levels of Competition

Athletes of all ability levels have an opportunity to advance to the next higher-level competition provided the sport and event are offered at the next level, from sub-Program Games to World Games.



Sports and Competition Safety

Ensure the safety of athletes, Unified Sports partners, coaches, volunteers, and those cheering on the athletes by promoting safety during sports training and competition.

During Practice Sessions and at Competitions

- Walk through the facility before each training session or competition.
- Always have a basic first aid kit available at every practice and competition.
- Always have athletes' medicals available at practices and competition. Be sure to protect the privacy of this information and note where these forms go at the end of the season.
- Establish a simple protocol in case of an accident or other incident. Provide all coaches with the most up-to-date and accurate emergency contact information for athletes, Unified Sports partners, and volunteers.
- Create a simple crisis communication plan for your Local Program that includes who to contact, and in what order. Always notify the appropriate staff contact at your Accredited Program of this plan.
- Ensure that there is at least a 4:1 ratio of athletes to coach in order to provide proper supervision.
- Be sure to establish that a coach can contact the Local Program Coordinator in case of an incident.
- Provide coaches with the number and location of the nearest emergency services.

Special Olympics Wisconsin Competition Policies

Special Olympics Wisconsin, Inc. (SOWI) is the sole accrediting and sports governing body for Special Olympics in the State of Wisconsin. As the accrediting and sports governing body, SOWI has the right and responsibility to manage and enforce all rules of sport, establish policies and procedures governing sports competition, and manage

the involvement of athletes and volunteers within the program. In addition, SOWI may suspend or impose other sanctions upon individual volunteers or Local Programs that violate the organization's policies and/or procedures, and may develop and impose penalties for the violation of sports rules not specifically covered by the National Governing Body for each specific sport.

General Sports Policies

Appropriate Event Selection for Athletes

One of the most important factors that influence an athlete's motivation in sports is having a choice in selecting the sport in which he/she wants to take part. A Special Olympics athlete is no different. It is important for coaches to recognize the obstacles in the sport selection process and do everything possible to allow their athletes to compete in sports in which they will learn and develop skills, and most importantly, have fun.

Variables That Influence the Selection of Sports:

1. AGE APPROPRIATENESS – While physical developmental needs may be a primary concern, athletes may need some guidance in selecting a sport appropriate for their age.
2. READINESS LEVEL – A Special Olympics athlete needs to be ready for competition both mentally and physically.
 - a. MENTAL READINESS – Athletes must want to play and understand the rules. There should be a desire to participate and level of confidence to experience success.
 - b. PHYSICAL READINESS – Athletes must be physically fit and develop fitness levels required for successful participation in the sport selected.
3. ABILITY LEVEL – There is a minimal skill level required for participation for each sport offered in Special Olympics. Athletes must demonstrate these skill levels and understand the rules to ensure safe participation. Athletes may also develop strong enough skills that they are no longer appropriate for an event; such as, the softball throw or the 25m walk.
4. ATHLETE PREFERENCE – An athlete should be offered every opportunity to select the sport in which he/she will participate (with coach supervision, as necessary).
5. PEER INFLUENCE – The element of socialization can be a goal of athletes who train and compete in Special Olympics. Guidance should be provided to athletes who are participating for socialization, but may not meet the physical requirements demanded by a sport.

Divisioning

The fundamental difference which sets Special Olympics competitions apart from those of other sports organizations is that athletes of all ability levels are encouraged to participate and every athlete is recognized for his or her performance.

Competitions are structured so that athletes compete with other athletes of similar ability in equitable divisions.

Special Olympics recommends the variance between the highest and lowest scores within a division does not differ by more than 15 percent. This is not a rule, but should be used as guidance for establishing equitable divisions when the number of athletes competing is appropriate. Ideally, between three to eight athletes will compete in a division.

Individual Divisioning Procedure:

An athlete's ability is the primary factor in divisioning Special Olympics competition. The ability of an athlete or team is determined by an entry score from a preliminary trial or prior competition. If there are more than 75 athletes registered in an event, age and/or gender should also be considered to create competitive and equitable divisions.

1. Rank athletes from high to low performances from qualifying scores. Group as many possible together per division (based on 3-8 athletes per division and a starting point of 15% score differential).
2. If there is more than 75 athletes registered in an event, athletes should be grouped into competitive divisions according to three criteria: age, gender and ability level.

Team Divisioning Procedure:

Teams will be divisioned based on ability level. Teams are required to participate in two scrimmage games prior to registering for competition. At least one scrimmage game has to be played against a team from a different Local Program. Scrimmage games can be schedule between teams or played at invitationals coordinated by Local Programs or SOWI.

In order to help facilitate participation in the various sport invitationals offered throughout the sport season and state, SOWI provides the local program the ability to apply for the Sport Competition Event Grant. The Sports Competition Event Grant was created to support registered Local Programs of Special Olympics Wisconsin in their efforts to organize, promote, and implement multi-Local Program team competitions in sports offered by Special Olympics Wisconsin. Local Programs can request up to \$1500 per tournament request, and a maximum of \$1,500 per calendar year. Grants will be issued on a "first-come, first-served" basis. Local Programs will be notified when the grant money is no longer available. The Sport Competition Event Grant can be found in the appendix portion of the Local Program Guide or

<https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.specialolympicswisconsin.org%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2020%2F08%2FSports-Competition-Event-Grant-Application.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>. This grant is to be used for invitational only.

The Divisioning Committee for each tournament will consider scrimmage games scores, scores from previous competitions, coach commentary, and historical data to create divisions.

Multi-Sport Participation

Athletes may train in as many sports as they wish. Athletes may compete in more than one sport per season at the Regional or State level, with restrictions. Athletes cannot compete in sports that have competition scheduled for the same day at a Regional/District or State Games competition.

- A. Winter Season: Athletes can only compete in one sport.
- B. Spring Season: Athletes must choose one Basketball sport for competition.
 - 3v3 Basketball May also compete in Swimming
 - Basketball Skills May also compete in Swimming
 - Team Basketball Cannot compete in any other sport
 - Swimming May also compete in 3v3 OR Basketball Skills
- C. Summer Season:
 - Cornhole May also compete in Powerlifting OR Tennis
 - Gymnastics May also compete in Powerlifting OR Tennis
 - Powerlifting May also compete in Cornhole OR Gymnastics
 - Soccer Cannot compete in any other sport
 - Track & Field Cannot compete in any other sport
 - Tennis May also compete in Cornhole OR Gymnastics
- D. Fall Season:
 - Bocce May also compete in Bowling, Golf, OR Volleyball
 - Bowling May also compete in any other sport
 - Flag Football May also compete in Bowling or Golf or Tee Ball or Volleyball
 - Golf May also compete in any other sport
 - Softball May also compete in Bowling or Golf or Volleyball
 - Tee Ball May also compete in Bowling or Golf or Volleyball
 - Volleyball May also compete in any other sport

When participating at any sanction Special Olympics Wisconsin event either, regional, district, sectional or state, the local program can also apply for the "Sport Competition Travel Grant". The Sports Competition Travel Grant was created to support registered SOWI in-house Local Programs in due to additional travel to attend Regional/District/Sectional/State Games only. With the modifications of competition venue sites/locations and constraints of facility usage, SOWI has been forced to move multiple competition locations. The change in sites both current and future may

require additional travel distance for local programs. This increase may result in additional costs for transportation and meals/lodging. The local program will be able to request grant funds up to four times within the sport season. The **“Sport Competition Travel Grant”** can be found in the Local Program Guide Appendix.

Proposed Rule Changes

Proposals for any rules changes for SOWI events may be submitted using the Rules Change Proposal Form located in the Forms for Duplication section of the Local Program Resource Page. Proposals for rules changes must be submitted to the State office no later than November 1st annually for inclusion in the following year’s Competition Guide.

The “Proposed Rule Change Form” can be found on the Special Olympics Website at <https://www.specialolympicswisconsin.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/13-Proposed-Rule-Change-Form.pdf>

SOWI Uniform Requirements at a Glance

This section includes highlights of the rules for uniforms. Specific uniform rules can be found in the sports rules for each sport.

SOWI uniform rules have been modified for commonality so Local Programs can use the same uniform shirts for multiple team sports. The following numbering guidelines should be used for all team sports that require a numbered jersey:

- Numbers should be a minimum of 4 inches in height on the front and 6 inches in height on the back
- The stripe forming the numbers must be a minimum of 3/4 inch (2cm) in width
- Legal numbers are: 0 or 00, 1-5, 10-15, 20-25, 30-35, 40-45, 50-55

Alpine Skiing/Snowboarding:

- All competitors on the race course must wear a helmet. Helmets must cover the head and ears. Helmets must have a conformity label affixed by the manufacturer in a non-removable way that contains the text “Conform to FIS Specifications RH 2013”.
- Helmet mounted cameras are not allowed.

Athletics (Track & Field)

- Competitors must wear athletic clothing including an athletic shirt, shorts or sweatpants and athletic shoes.
- No denim or dress clothes are allowed.
- No hats may be worn.
- All relay team members must wear identical singlets or shirts.
- Athletes may compete in shoes with spikes provided the host facility allows spikes.

- No jewelry may be worn during competition.

Basketball Skills

- Athlete must wear athletic attire.
- No denim is allowed.
- Appropriate athletic shoes are required.
- No number is required.

Basketball Team (3v3 and 5v5)

- All uniforms must match in color, trim, cut and style.
- Numbers should be a minimum of 4 inches in height on the front and 6 inches in height on the back.
- The stripe forming the numbers must be a minimum of 3/4 inch (2cm) in width
- Legal numbers are: 0 or 00, 1-5, 10-15, 20-25, 30-35, 40-45, 50-55
- Arm sleeves, knee sleeves, or leggings must be black, white, beige, or the predominant color of the jersey. They may be worn by some or all of the players, but must be identical if worn.

Bocce

- Teams must wear uniform tops that match in color, trim, cut and style.
- Uniform bottoms do not need to match. No denim or cut-off shorts are allowed.
- Shoes must cover the athletes' toes. No sandals or flip flops are allowed.
- Numbers are not required.

Bowling

- Athletes must be neat in appearance
- Athletes in Teams and Doubles must wear matching shirts
- No numbers required

Cornhole

- Teams must wear uniform tops that are identical in color, trim and style.
- Players may wear shorts, warm-up pants, or pants and must be identical in color. No jeans or cut-offs.
- Shoes must cover the athletes' toes. No sandals or flip flops are allowed.

Flag Football

- Players must wear uniforms that are identical in color, trim, cut, style and material. All uniform shirts must be tucked in.
- Numbers must be a minimum of 4 inches in height in front and 6 inches in height in back. Taped numbers on pinnies are not legal.
- Receiver's gloves may be worn.

- No hats or jewelry is allowed.
- A protective mouth piece must be worn at all times.
- Players must wear rubber-cleated or flat-soled athletic shoes. Metal cleats, spikes or hiking boots will not be allowed.
- A one-piece, three-flag belt must be worn during the game at all times.

Golf

- Appropriate golf attire is required.

Gymnastics

- Male gymnasts shall wear tank tops (leotards) or t-shirts that are tucked in.
- Male gymnasts must wear long gymnastics pants or white gymnastics shorts.
- Gymnasts may compete in white socks, gymnastics slippers or bare feet.
- Female gymnasts shall wear a long sleeve leotard with bare legs. Flesh colored tights are permitted, but not recommended.
- No jewelry is allowed.

Powerlifting

- Plain shorts and t-shirts should be worn and can only include the Special Olympics Logo and team name.
- No long pants, bike shorts, tank tops or sweatshirts may be worn. T-shirts must be tucked in at all times. A lifting suit may be worn – see powerlifting rules for specific details on lifting suits.
- All competitors must wear a shirt with sleeves during the squat and bench press. Women must also wear a shirt with sleeves during the deadlift.
- Long socks up to the knee must be worn for the dead-lift. Duct or athletic tape is allowed.
- Athletic shoes for training, powerlifting or weightlifting must be worn. The heel height cannot exceed 5cm.
- A belt made of leather, vinyl, nylon, or other similar non-stretch or non-metal material may be worn on the outside of the suit. The belt may not encircle the body more than once and may not have additional padding.
- Wrist wraps of 8cm wide and 1m length may be worn.

Snowshoe Racing:

- Snowshoes must be a minimum of 17.78 x 50.8 cm (7in x 20in) as measured by the frame. Snowshoes must be made of a frame with decking material (no plastic shoes allowed).
- Youth athletes that weigh under 100lbs may wear a smaller snowshoe that is a minimum of 16 inches in length (7in x 16in)
- The attachment of any additional “spikes” is not permitted.

- The foot must be secured through a direct mount binding system to the snowshoe.
- The use of poles is optional.

Soccer

- All uniforms must be identical in color, trim and style.
- Numbers should be a minimum of 4 inches in height on the front and 6 inches in height on the back
- The stripe forming the numbers must be a minimum of 3/4 inch (2cm) in width
- Legal numbers are: 0 or 00, 1-5, 10-15, 20-25, 30-35, 40-45, 50-55
- An individual may wear leg tights, leotards or sweat pants that are the same color as the uniform shorts.
- Shin guards are required and must be covered completely by the stockings.
- Tennis shoes or soccer shoes are required. No metal cleats are allowed. Baseball or football cleats are not allowed.
- Undershirts and undershorts, if worn, must match the color of the uniform top or shorts, respectively.
- The goalkeeper shall wear colors which distinguish him or her from the other players and the referee. The goalkeeper jersey does not require a number.

Softball/Tee Ball

- Players must wear uniforms that are identical in color, trim, cut and style.
- Team pants can be long or short, but must be identical for all players.
- Ball caps, visors and headbands are all optional. If worn, they can be mixed but must be worn properly. Player socks need not match.
- Numbers must be 6in in height and are required on the back only.
- Legal numbers: 1-99
- The catcher is required to wear a face mask, a batter's or catcher's helmet, and a chest protector. Shin guards are strongly suggested, but not required.
- Fielder's masks are mandatory for defensive players at 1st base, 3rd base, and Pitchers during the duration of defensive play.
- Steel spikes, street shoes, and jewelry are not allowed.
- Gloves are required. A first baseman's trapping style mitt may be worn only by 1st basemen or catchers.
- Batting helmets with two ear flaps and chin straps are required for all offensive players while batting and base running.
- Only bats marked by the manufacturer as "Official Softball" may be used. Any bat that is not on the [approved bat list](#) will be considered illegal and may not be used for competition.

Swimming

- Athletes must wear proper swimming attire as outlined by USA Swimming Rules and Regulations.
- No competitor shall be permitted to use or wear any device that may aid his/her speed, buoyancy or endurance during a competition. Only those athletes in assisted events may use flotation devices.

Tennis

- Athletes must be neat in their dress and wear proper tennis clothing.
- Soft-soled athletic shoes are required.
- No blue jeans, cut-off shorts, loud sports shirts or street shoes are allowed.

Volleyball

- All jerseys must be of identical color, trim, cut and style except for the libero player where the top is opposite color of the team
- Numbers should be a minimum of 4 inches in height on the front and 6 inches in height on the back
- The stripe forming the numbers must be a minimum of 3/4 inch (2cm) in width
- Legal numbers 1-99

Commercial Messages on Uniforms

No uniforms, bibs, or other signs bearing competition numbers that are worn by Special Olympics Athletes during any competition, Opening Ceremonies, or Closing Ceremonies of any games may be emblazoned with commercial names or messages. The only commercial markings that may be displayed on athletes' uniforms during official competitions or ceremonies are the normal commercial markings of the manufacturer. For purposes of this subsection, "normal commercial markings" are limited to the following:

- A. On larger clothing items, such as shirts, jackets, pants, jerseys and sweatshirts, one logo or commercial name per clothing item is permissible, if that name or logo does not exceed an area of six square inches or about 39 square centimeters (ex: 2" x 3" or 5.08cm x 7.62cm).
- B. On small clothing items, such as caps, socks, hats, gloves and belts, one logo or commercial name per clothing item is permissible, if that name or logo does not exceed an area of three square inches or 19.35 square centimeters.
- C. One athletic shoes, no logos or commercial names are permissible except for name and logos that are included by the manufacturer on athletic shoes that are sold to the general public.

Special Olympics athletes who are not engaged in official competition or ceremonies may wear, carry, or use at games venues other than the sites of competition (such as

training or practices sessions) clothing and/or non-apparel items that are not part of their sports equipment that contain small and attractively designed identifications of corporate or organizational sponsors.