

Local Program Development Guide

Section 1 – Starting & Structuring Your Local Program

What is Special Olympics?

Special Olympics is a global movement that unleashes the human spirit every day around the world through the transformative power and joy of sport. Here is how it works:

- 1. Inclusive Sports:** Special Olympics Wisconsin provides year-round training and activities for over 7,000 children and adults with intellectual disabilities. These programs include sports training, competitions, and events. Athletes with intellectual disabilities have the opportunity to compete in 19 different sports within 4 separate sport seasons participate in Olympic-style individual and team sports, from swimming, track and field to basketball and soccer.
- 2. Special Olympics Unified Sports:** One of the unique aspects of Special Olympics is Unified Sports. In **Unified Sports**, people with and without intellectual disabilities play on the same teams. This inclusive approach fosters social connections, breaks down barriers, and promotes understanding among participants. Unified Sports connects people with intellectual disabilities (athletes) and without intellectual disabilities (Unified partners) together. It was inspired by a simple principle: training together and playing together is a quick path to friendship, understanding, and inclusion. Special Olympics Wisconsin offers unified sports competitions in 11 sports throughout the year.
- 3. Health and Wellness:** Special Olympics recognizes the importance of overall health and well-being. Special Olympics Wisconsin offers health programs and screenings to athletes, ensuring they have access to quality healthcare. This focus on health extends beyond the sports field. Special Olympics Wisconsin's health program improves access to health care for athletes through free event-based screenings and educational initiatives in 8 disciplines. With nearly

1,800 free health screenings provided annually, Special Olympics Wisconsin has emerged as a leading public health organization for people with I.D.

4. **Education and Community Building:** Special Olympics goes beyond sports events. They work to create an inclusive world by promoting social change. Through education and community-building initiatives, they combat stigma, isolation, and injustice faced by people with intellectual disabilities. The Unified Champion Schools® strategy is creating a Unified Generation who are leading the charge to reimagine and create communities in which all people are included and accepted. The three Components model offers a unique combination of effective activities that equip schools with the tools and training to create a climate of acceptance. These three components can be implemented differently within each school and are encouraged to be student-led.

5. **Young Athletes:** Special Olympics starts early! Their **Young Athletes** program introduces basic sports skills to children as young as 2 years old. This early engagement helps develop physical abilities and social connections. Special Olympics Wisconsin's Young Athletes is a sport and play program for children ages 2 – 10 years old with and without intellectual disabilities (ID). Young Athletes introduce basic sport skills, like running, throwing and catching. This fun and inclusive program offers families, teachers, caregivers, and people from the community the chance to share the joy of sports with all children and abilities.

6. **Leadership and Advocacy:** Special Olympics encourages leadership and advocacy among athletes, coaches, and volunteers. Special Olympics empowers individuals to become advocates for inclusion and equality. Athletes are an important part of Special Olympics and it is the commitment of Special Olympics Wisconsin to have Athlete Leadership an integrated part of the Local Program Management team and included in all that we do.

In summary, Special Olympics is about more than just sports. It's a movement that aims to create a world where every person, regardless of ability or disability, is accepted and welcomed. Through sports, health

programs, education, and community-building efforts, Special Olympics promotes social participation and celebrates the human spirit.

What is a Local Program and what purpose does it serve?

Local Programs are crucial to the success of Special Olympics Wisconsin (SOWI), serving as vital hubs for community engagement and athlete empowerment. These programs provide athletes with intellectual disabilities opportunities to train, compete, and build confidence in a supportive environment. Ultimately, Local Programs are central to the transformative impact of Special Olympics Wisconsin, enriching the lives of our athletes and communities statewide.

The Local Program serves athletes and their family members at the grassroots level on behalf of its Accredited Special Olympics Program (Special Olympics Wisconsin), through sports training, competition opportunities, and related activities. The Local Program brings our mission and vision to life.

The mission of Special Olympics is to provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy, and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills, and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes, and the community.

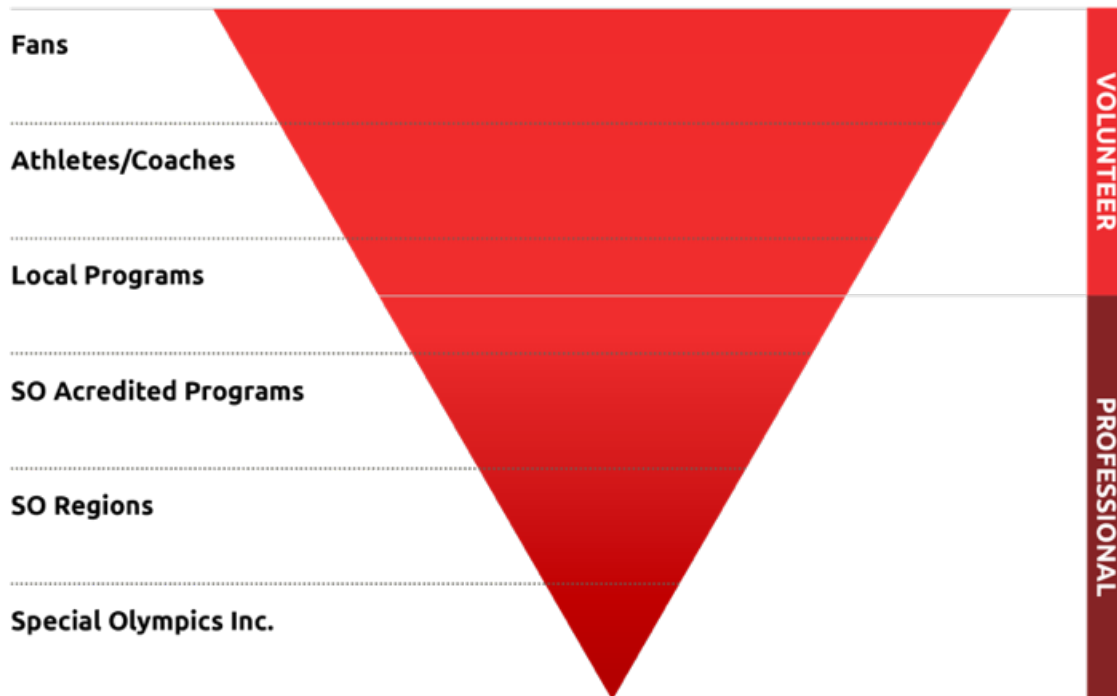
The **vision** of Special Olympics is to help bring all persons with intellectual disabilities into the larger society under conditions whereby they are accepted, respected, and given the chance to become productive citizens.

How do Local Programs fit into the overall structure of Special Olympics?

Each Local Program offers official Special Olympics sports training and competition opportunities for athletes (individuals with intellectual disabilities) and Special Olympics Unified Sports® partners (individuals without intellectual disabilities). A Local Program may originate from a variety of places:

- Geographic areas – Communities, counties, or other land boundaries
- Independent community Special Olympics clubs or teams
- Schools – Public or specialized schools, colleges or universities
- Sports organizations, such as Parks and Recreation Departments
- Organizations serving people with intellectual disabilities, such as independent living facilities or adult service providers

Special Olympics Local Programs' "inverted pyramid" approach (below) shows the importance of Local Programs and those who take part. The Local Program makes the first – and often, the strongest – impression about the Special Olympics movement. A strong Local Program is necessary to our success.



Who and what are the parts of this pyramid, and what is their role in the Local Program?

The Local Program begins with our athletes, and includes several important people

Athletes

Individuals of all ages and ability levels are welcome to participate in Special Olympics. Athlete Eligibility information can be found on the [Athlete Eligibility Page](#).

Each athlete must have the required release and medical form on file. Athlete forms and information about the forms can be found on the [Medical Info & Forms page](#).

Unified Sports Partners

Unified Sports partners are individuals without an intellectual disability who participate in Special Olympics Unified Sports®. Special Olympics Wisconsin Unified

Partners need to be Class A Volunteers. More information about becoming a Class A Volunteer can be found on the [Class A Volunteer Page](#).

Families – Parents, Siblings, and Caregivers

Families are encouraged to participate at every level of Special Olympics, and are an essential component of most Local Programs. All family members of Special Olympics athletes are encouraged to participate in Special Olympics as volunteers, coaches, and Unified Sports partners.

Volunteers

Volunteers are the lifeblood of Special Olympics and serve as the primary source of support for athletes. There are a Volunteer opportunities include serving as a coach, Unified Sports partner, sports official, chaperone, committee member, fundraising volunteer, and more! Local Programs and services could not be provided without the support and commitment provided to the athletes by volunteers. Additional information on volunteering can be found on the [Volunteer page](#).

Special Olympics Professional Structure

The following levels of Special Olympics provide leadership and management for our movement, and exist to support our Local Programs in delivering the mission of Special Olympics.

- **Special Olympics Inc. (SOI)** is responsible for the overall leadership and management of all Special Olympics Programs across the globe — which supports more than 6 million athletes and Unified Sports partners in over 190 countries. With the support of more than 1 million coaches and volunteers, Special Olympics delivers 32 Olympic-type sports and over 100,000 games and competitions throughout the year.
- **Special Olympics North America (SONA)** is one of SOI's seven regions, and is responsible for implementing the policies and initiatives of SOI. SONA also supports and guides each of the Accredited Programs within North America (Canada, the United States, and the Caribbean).
- **Accredited Programs** - Each Special Olympics Accredited Program is a charitable organization that exists to provide sports training and athletic competition for persons with intellectual disabilities. It is accredited by SOI and is responsible for following the policies and rules established by SOI in its delivery of services. It is known as a "Program" (with a capital "P") of Special Olympics.
- **Sub-Programs** - Many Accredited Programs are divided into smaller geographic regions, called sub-Programs. Sub-Programs provide support, assistance, and competitive opportunities to Local Programs.

How do I build a quality Local Program?

Take pride in your Local Program by building a team of leaders who share the Special Olympics Wisconsin vision of excellence.

A Local Program Manager will lead and oversee essential programming, including building a Management Team of volunteers who will help manage crucial areas. It is important to know that the Local Program Manager is **never alone!** In addition to the Management Team you create, Special Olympics Wisconsin will provide relevant and appropriate guidance, information, resources, policies, and procedures.

Who can I recruit as Management Team members?

Local Program management will come from a variety of backgrounds. The most likely candidates are those already connected to Special Olympics in some fashion:

- Current coaches, volunteers, and Unified Sports partners
- Parents and other family members
- Athletes

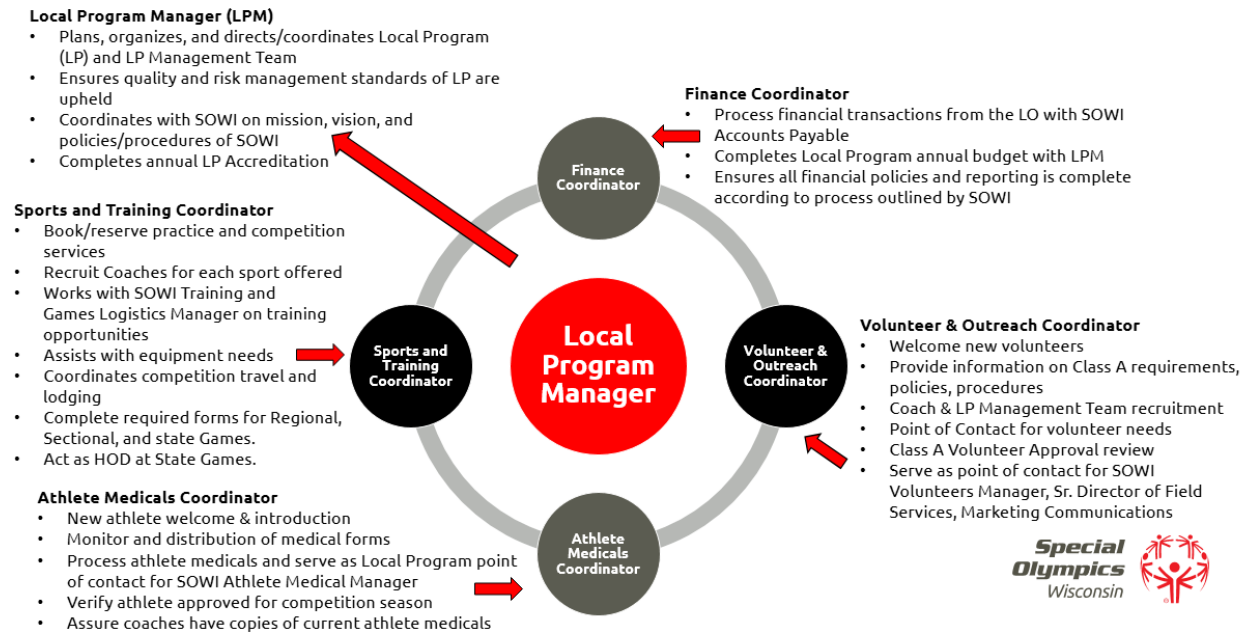
As your Local Program grows, you may find additional members within your community such as:

- Professionals with experience in key functional areas such as finance, public relations, fundraising, sports, etc.
- Community sports programs, civic groups, and fraternal organizations
- Military and police organizations
- Teachers, professionals, and paraprofessionals in school settings – from elementary through high school, as well as colleges and universities
- Professionals and young professionals in partnering agencies (chamber of commerce) and businesses

How is the Management Team structured, and what are the roles?

The Management Team provides leadership, administration, and oversight of the Local Program. At its core, the Management Team performs the necessary functions to allow sports training and competition to exist at the local level.

To efficiently manage the needs of the Local Program, Special Olympics Wisconsin Local Program Management Teams should include four members serving in role supporting Sports and Competition, Finance, Volunteers and Outreach, and Athlete Medicals:



Local Program Management Team Position Descriptions

Local Program Manager (LPM)

- Plans, organizes, and directs/coordinates Local Program (LP) and LP Management Team
- Ensure quality and risk management standards of LP are upheld.
- Coordinates with SOWI Sr. Director of Field Services on mission, vision and policies/procedures of Special Olympics Wisconsin
- Complete annual LP accreditation

Athlete Medicals Coordinator

- New athlete welcome/introduction
- Monitor and distribution of medical forms
- Process athlete medicals & interaction with SOWI Athlete Medical Manager
- Verify athlete approved for competition season
- Assure coaches have copy of current athlete medicals

Sports & Training Coordinator

- Book/reserve practice and competition services
- Recruit Coaches for each LP sport (works with LP volunteer/outreach Coordinator)
- Works with SOWI Training and Logistics Manager on training opportunities for LP coaches
- Assists in equipment needs
- Coordinates competition travel and lodging

- Complete required competition forms for regional, sectional, and state games. Acts as Head of Delegation (HOD) for State Games

Finance Coordinator

- Process financial transactions from the LP with SOWI Accounts Payable
- Complete with LPM, the local program budget
- Work with SOWI and LP Fundraising Coordinator

Volunteers and Outreach Coordinator

- Welcome new volunteers
- Provide information about Class A requirements, policies and procedures
- Coach and LP GMT recruitment
- Point of contact for volunteer needs and questions within the LP
- Interacts with SOWI Sr. Director of Field Services, Marketing and Communications

As Local Programs grow, Local Program Management Teams may add roles to support the key functions of the Local Programs.

Health and Fitness Coordinator

- Assist in training with Sports Coordinator
- Assist with Nutrition
- Interacts with SOWI Healthy Athletes initiative

Equipment and Uniform Coordinator

- Assist with general maintenance of equipment
- Tracks need for equipment utilized for training within the LP
- Maintain needs and distribution of LP uniforms
- Works with SOWI Marketing and Communications on proper uniform compliance (logos, etc.)

Unified Champion School Coordinator

- Coordinate Unified Sports including liaising with Unified Champion Schools, Park & Rec, and transition plans for 11+ year olds into community programs

LETR Coordinator

- Coordinate Law Enforcement Torch Run activities with the LP Mgmt. team including Torch Run, Cops on the Roof Top, awards, local picnic/community interactions
- Works with SOWI LETR team

Fundraising Coordinator

- Work with community to support the LP on fundraising efforts
- Plan and implement fundraising efforts
- Donor acknowledgement
- Work with SOWI Development and Special Events on state fundraising efforts such as Polar Plunge, LETR Torch Run, Run with the Cops, etc.
- Interact with LP Treasurer on the handling and processing of funds from fundraising efforts

Marketing/Communications Coordinator

- Updates webpage and social media
- Verifies compliance to policies of social media guidelines within SOWI
- Assists with community outreach
- Assists with LP appreciation cards, letters for donors and volunteers
- Assist with internal communication via emails, texts, newsletter
- Provide content to SOWI Marketing and Communications regarding LP stories and LP content

Special Olympics Athlete Leaders are able to provide key input to Local Program decisions and processes based on their experience, perspective, and individual skills. It is important to consider Athlete Leaders when creating your Local Program Management Team as supports or leads for any of the above areas.

Local Program Expectations

What are the expectations of a Local Program?

- Creation of an LP Management team. The roles will vary based on the size of the team, the Local Program and the team needed to manage it effectively.
- Forms are to be completed using the manner provided. An example is fillable forms. Forms not received as directed may not be easily read and could affect your athletes' registration in Special Olympics or certain events.
- Completion of the required accreditation and local program budgets within the required time limit is a requirement for all Local Programs.
- Participation in fundraising at both the local program level and SOWI state level where able.
- Follow all guidelines, policies, and rules for Local Programs, and of SOWI and SOI. This includes all accreditation requirements such as budgeting information and reporting on leadership structure.
- Provide proper training for all athletes, safe training conditions and the ability to compete at regional, sectional, and state competitions.
- Continued evaluate process, facilities, events, and procedures to create a safe environment and mitigate risks.
- Effectively communicate with Athletes, Families, Coaches, and volunteers.

What do Local Program Managers need to know?

The **Local Program Manager** is expected to **engage** key volunteers to assist with the following:

- Compliance with all Special Olympics, Inc. (SOI) and Special Olympics Wisconsin policies, rules, and practices
- Ensure that only athletes with valid medical forms and volunteers with valid Class A forms are allowed to participate and be in direct contact with the athletes
- Athlete training, including ensuring that there are enough trained coaches
- Safe, secure, and appropriate training facilities
- Ensure that proper procedures are followed for insurance and signing contracts
- Develop partnerships to effectively run the program
- Ensure athletes have access to proper sports equipment
- Registration and arranging participation in higher-level competitions including:
 - Ensuring there are enough chaperones
 - Coordinating Transportation
 - Arranging Lodging

Local Program Minimum Standards

Special Olympics Wisconsin has developed minimum standards for Local Programs in order to provide consistent experiences for all SOWI athletes. These standards have in mind that athletes will have the choice to participate in multiple sports throughout the year, can advance beyond local competitions if they meet advancement criteria, participate at no cost, and have the resources available to successfully train.

SOWI has developed the following minimum standards to operate as a Local Program:

- Maintain a minimum of 15 athletes in the Local Program per year.
- Maintain a Class A volunteer ratio of 4 volunteers per athlete with a minimum of 4 registered Class A volunteers in the Local Program per year.
- Local Programs are to have a Local Program Committee consisting of a minimum of 4 key roles:
 - Local Program Manager/Finance Coordinator
 - Volunteers and Outreach Coordinator
 - Athlete Medicals Coordinator
 - Sports & Training Coordinator
- Provide training and register to compete at a Regional, District, or State competition in at least 3 sports throughout the year in 2 Sports Seasons.
- Attend 1 State Games per year, if their athletes meet qualifying standards.
- It is encouraged to participate in at least one Health or Fitness program a year. These include:
 - SOfit
 - Attending Healthy Athletes Screening at Local or State Games
 - Attending a Family Health Forum
 - Participation in SOI Health Study
- Local Programs must participate in 1 Special Olympics Wisconsin fundraising activity or initiative which includes:
 - Polar Plunge
 - Run With the Cops
 - Truck Convoy
 - Submitting and receiving a grant
 - Running a Local Program fundraising event
 - Securing a financial partner
 - Coordinating a Major Gift (\$5,000 donor)
- **Athlete Leadership:** Local Program places athletes in positions of leadership at the Local Level and connects them to SOWI Athlete Leadership programs, when appropriate.
 - Ensure Athlete Leaders remain engaged in SOWI/Local Program Leadership
 - Local Program specific training/opportunities

- **Communication Standards:** Provide monthly updates to Coaches, Volunteers, Athletes and Families about Local Program and SOWI events, policies, and updates.
- Fill out annual Accreditation
 - Submit Local Program Budget
 - Submit Local Program Succession Plan

Local Program Growth and Sustainability

As a Local Program grows, it will have to evolve in order to serve athletes in a quality manner. As more athletes join a Local Program, more sport opportunities will need to be added, practice facilities will need to be larger, the budget will have to increase, and the coach and volunteer base will need to grow. It is wise to plan ahead for growth so you are best prepared for your Local Program to reach its full potential.

Enhancing Existing Sports

Consider adding fitness training to the existing Local Program schedule. This approach can improve the fitness and conditioning of your athletes, and creates healthy habits that extend beyond your sports season.

Adding Unified Sports Options to Already Existing Sports

The Local Program can grow by giving volunteers the option of becoming Unified Sports partners to train and compete alongside Special Olympics athletes.

Adding New Sports

Athletes, coaches, and families may have interest in new sports beyond what is currently offered. In order to make effective decisions in adding a new sport or Program, consider the following:

Interest

- Aside from surveying athletes, a sports clinic or demonstration would allow you to introduce basic skills for a new sport, and determine the true interest.

Facilities

- Discuss training and competition options with local recreation centers, schools, and sports organizations to determine available facilities for your Local Program

Coaches

- Survey your coaches' interests and skills in a new sport, and determine if there are additional volunteers or coaches in your community that are capable of a) effectively training in a new sport, and b) helping to avoid overloading your existing coaches and volunteers

Budget

- Include information in your budget about how much revenue the Local Program will need to sustain and/or grow. Plan out how much fundraising will be required to grow, either through fundraising or donations
 - Consult your Accredited Program to confirm the Local Program's budget and that the Program is staying within the parameters of the organization
- SOWI Core Values

INTEGRITY

Be passionate about the mission and work of Special Olympics.

Be honest.

Ingrain values in the way we think and act.

Be reliable.

Lead by example.

TEAMWORK

All members are part of one team that is SOWI.

Seek common ground and listen respectfully.

Be supportive of new ideas.

Be willing to collaborate for organizational success.

Elevate each other in the execution of core values.

INCLUSION

Empower the whole athlete.

All abilities are valued.

We value, celebrate and respect all differences.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion are at the heart of all that we do.

EXCELLENCE

Project optimism.

Recognize and celebrate our successes.

Strive for quality in everyday work.

Evaluate processes, learn and practice continuous improvement.

Be brave in the attempt.