

## Local Program Questions and concerns

### Sports

- Rules
  - Could you put up the sports rules online before we have the coaches zoom meeting? Most times we start practices before those meetings. We appreciate the feedback on this. This should not be a problem to do. Our goal is to get Rules, Competition Dates, and Registration Forms on the website prior to teams practicing. Sometimes, this is delayed based on when rule changes are available from Special Olympics North America/SOI, but that is in very rare cases.
  
- State Games/Regional – Dates & Locations
  - If we are a truly inclusive community, why do we hold state events on Thursdays and Fridays? We are asking our athletes who are inclusively employed to take off from their part time employment and not get paid? This may have worked in years past when athletes were not employed but as this changes it is unfair and sometimes detrimental to these athletes especially as most of them make minimum wage working part-time.
  - Historically, Summer Games has been offered Thursday-Saturday based on a way to include school programs, based on their request. We can resurvey to identify if that is still a need for those programs and make any necessary adjustments.

For Spring Games, we are actively working on possible solutions to allow for competition to be on Saturday and Sunday and not include Friday competition. This will depend on venue availability.

- If we are truly inclusive, why are we holding state events in the Dells? This is the most expensive place to stay and we are asking our athletes (most of whom cannot have assets) to have to travel and pay to stay in this expensive area. As we announced, Fall Games will be moving to DeForest Sports Complex in 2026. Feedback that we heard about the cost to attend the event in the Dells was a driving force to make this change.
- Will Regional softball for region 5, in Appleton be pushed back because fall games will be later. Our team doesn't like softball taking over the whole summer. We will look into facility availability at a later date for future events if Fall Games is consistently scheduled in mid- September but at this time the 2026 date has been approved for August 1<sup>st</sup>.
- Could Cornhole regionals facility be re-visited? It's too small, w/c bathrooms locked, and unified should not compete first. The District Cornhole facilities are set for 2026 but can be reconsidered for 2027.
- Our biggest challenge for state is location. Buses and hotels are so expensive. We will try harder next year because it is not fair to my athletes. For Summer Games, one of the major benefits of UW-Whitewater is the availability for dorm housing, which is significantly cheaper than hotels. Since our other State Games are during the school year, we don't have that availability. We are currently working with hotels for our Spring Games and Fall Games cities to try to provide better pricing for hotels for those games.

We also recommend the use of the Local Program Travel Grant to help offset some costs associated with travel to State Games.

- Bowling
  - Please don't change bowling, that is the only sport that is close to us. A lot less travel time for my athletes. Why can't bowling be in two places because State bowling was in Weston Wisconsin and it would be hard for us to travel further. Travel was a consideration for the changes to the bowling season starting in 2026. The competitions are held at the Regional Bowling locations, Weston being the Region 2 host, and are our State Bowling competitions, so athletes will be awarded medals for places 1-3.
  - Show of hands how many like bowling quota for state vs determine numbers another way. With the changes in the bowling season, all athletes attend the State competition. Bowling general rules state 12 games for average, entry form says 15 games for average. Which is it? 12 games average
  - (2) Is the no denim rule for bowling apply to unified bowling? Would it just be athletes that need to follow the no denim rule? Special Olympics Wisconsin and Special Olympics Inc bowling rules state no denim for competitors (Athletes and Unified Partners).
  
- Swimming
  - Many programs were hurt by swimming season moved to same as basketball. Whenever a sport moves from one sports season to another, there will be some overlapping athletes as well as some new opportunities for athletes. When the change for swimming was made in 2023, we looked at the number of multisport athletes who participated in both sports. That number was less than 30% of swim athletes who also participated in basketball.
  
  - There were also requests prior to 2023 for swimming and track to be in different sports seasons to provide opportunities for athletes to do both of those sports and have had programs take advantage of that opportunity.
  - Could you please think about moving swimming out of Oshkosh...trying not to complain.. but it's not good overall.... Our contract is signed for 2026. We are exploring our options for facilities that could accommodate Spring Games in 2027 and beyond.
  
- Do you have a company that you recommend for ordering uniforms from?
  - Yes. SOWI can provide contact information. The local program can also utilize local vendors if they meet the needs.
  - SOWI works with Fox Cities Embroidery (<https://www.foxcitiesembroidery.com/>), Promotional Design (<https://www.promotionaldesigns.com/>), Will Customized Products (<https://www.willproducts.com/>), and Master Printwear (<https://www.masterprintwear.com/>). All of these companies have uniform options. Any designs using the Special Olympics logo does need approval from SOWI.
  
- Divisioning
  - Currently you division by girl/boy. What happens on divisioning when an athlete fills out registration form with "prefer not to answer" How does divisioning happen then? SOWI

divisions by gender in events where there are enough participants to have enough competitors in the divisions, so they are competitive.

When gender is used for divisioning in an event, Special Olympics Wisconsin would include this athlete in an open division, which would take account their qualifying score, rather than separate by gender. When a coach or Local Program registers an athlete for a gender specific event, the coach/Local Program would be verifying that the athlete is entitled to participate in that event. This is based on guidance from Special Olympics Inc. SOWI monitors any updates in guidance as it comes out.

- If a team has been winning or losing at state, Level the team should be moved up or down a division. Always the same teams seem to be placed In the same division **When divisioning team sports, SOWI uses qualifying scores submitted, results at Regional/Sectional Competition, and previous year's results to determine divisions. When teams advance to state, depending on how the lottery draw goes, the range of ability from top to bottom in a division may increase based on the teams that advance. All of these things are considered when creating final divisions.**
  
- Registration Forms
  - (4) Can registration forms be a Google doc instead of Word? It will help create it, if needed!!! I think that would make it more accessible and eliminate the barrier of being able to read handwriting. In order to fill out current forms you have to have Microsoft, which is not free. A Google form however is free! It also goes straight to a spreadsheet! **We are always looking for ways to make the forms easier to fill out and more accessible. In 2026 we can provide both fillable word doc and fillable pdf registration forms on the website.**
  - Updating registration form to be able to add more athletes has only 38 spaces and I have 60 bowlers **The bowling registration form has now been updated to provide up to 90 bowlers. If you need more, please reach out to your Athletic Director and we can provide the unlocked version of the document to edit.**
  - 
  
  - Before rolling out sport Registration Forms, please get feedback from agencies from a select number of programs to ensure that the information that is being requested is provided and in a format that is easy for those pulling information from the forms. Also, review for typos and formatting. Thank you! **We are working on a process to get better feedback on registration forms from Local Programs.**  
**The current process has our staff Sports Resource Teams review and edit the rules and registration forms for each sport prior to being released. They are working to correct typo and formatting issues.**
  - When it comes to the "score" sheets or the information with the scoring and description for each sport. It was mentioned that sheets are sent in via pictures on a phone or the writing is not legible. Wouldn't putting this form online eliminate any issues? **These registration forms are already provided online as part of the competition registrations.**

- When you put soccer and softball together, it left athletes to choose which sport. Many agencies don't have enough to run both sports. Can you separate the sports and see how it goes? Very sad seems like you're watering down so many sports. You were concerned about agencies who don't compete. At the end of the meeting, you're taking away competition! Eunice would not be happy. Our athletes will not be happy when we tell them. We are here for the athletes not the adults!

In 2018 and 2019, SOWI surveyed Local Programs at Fall Meetings and Athlete Leaders about the current likes and dislikes for the sports seasons. The overwhelming feedback we received from athletes is that the single sport State Games did not provide the full State Game experience (Opening Ceremony, Healthy Athletes, Athlete Dance) and their preference would be for larger, multi-sport State Games. This also addressed one concern from Local Programs where single sport State Games took up too many dates for their volunteers.

From the sport evaluation process, this is something that was modeled off of what Special Olympics Inc and Special Olympics North America does. The idea that Special Olympics should offer sports where there is the most interest from the athletes and Local Programs. This does mean sunsetting sports that were previously popular in order to provide sports where athletes and Local Programs find greater interest in. This has been an important process for the success of Special Olympics up to this point and will continue to be important to provide sustainability for Special Olympics moving forward.

- Are you going to come up with an aging athlete program ? Some of our athletes are having trouble getting the basketball up to the net, maybe they could use the shorter net? When the current Sport Seasons were put together, it was important that each season had a low impact sport. That would be Basketball Skills in Spring, Cornhole and Race Walk in Summer, Bocce in the Fall, and Ramp Bowling and Developmental Bowling.

The current Basketball Skills rules have the 8 ft hoop available for Junior Divisions. This is something we could follow up with the Sports Resource Team to see if that could be an option for aging athletes.

- I had an athlete ask if SOWI has looked into E-sports? Apparently a few states host tournaments. SOWI has offered E-Sports opportunities through annual competitions offered by Special Olympics North America. There has been minimal registrations for

these events from SOWI athletes. If there were enough known interest, SOWI would support E-Sports competitions.

### **Outreach – Athlete/Coaches/General Volunteers**

- Can we get better communication around new athletes? We seem to be caught off guard on this.
  - SOWI is putting together a process on handling new potential athletes, coaches, volunteers. What to gather and how to share the information with local programs. The goal is to have a defined process by the end of 2025 to share with the local programs.

- As there was a pretty long conversation about a grant that Wisconsin received. A lot of talk about some support in getting community awareness and how to get some new athletes and younger athletes. It is a challenge in the school district to get visibility ... How do we get submit ourselves for consideration in the future or who could we work with for some support. We have a lot of athletes aging out . Mukwonago school district from what I understand a pretty good special needs program so I think there is some opportunity to try and get some engagement.
  - It is understanding the needs and communicating with the Regional AD and the Sr. Director of Field Services on needs. SOWI is working with SONA (Special Olympics North America) on volunteer recruitment ideas in addition to plans that are in place. It is a key component in the Strategic Plan for growth in all phases.

## **Volunteers**

- Could there be a way to communicate to programs that maybe other agencies may have extra volunteers to help chaperone state competitions...for example I would be willing to help a group by being a chaperone for state games....
  - This is a great idea and SOWI will discuss ways to gather interest and process for implementation. Thanks for the heads up.
- Is there a plan to work closely with schools to grow programs? All other students have the opportunity to be coached/trained by a PAID coach...they are not volunteers. To be equitable, schools should be offering the same to students with intellectual disabilities. Volunteers are difficult to come by in any community, but why is that the expectation? Our athletes should be offered the same as their peers who do not have an intellectual disability.
  - Our Unified Champion School team is now regionalized across the state to help recruitment more local volunteers. We will continue raising awareness around coaches training equitability so that students with and without intellectual disabilities are offered the same opportunity. We also host an Athletes as Coaches class for athletes that want to be trained in that format.
- Can a class A volunteer drive an athlete to practice/competitions?
  - If acting at the direction of SOWI (at any level of the org.), anyone driving on behalf of SOWI must be a properly registered, current Class A Volunteer with a

valid driver's license, insurance that meets state minimums, has none of the automatic disqualifiers with respect to driving offenses, and had a motor vehicle record check if they must have one per III B on page 2 of the Volunteer Screening Policy.

If it's a family member/guardian/support system individual transporting only their athlete(s) to SO events and activities or an athlete who self-transport and is not giving other athletes rides to SO events at the request of SOWI, then that's different and not subject to the above. The general agreement is "realized that if they have a valid driver's license they should be treated like any other volunteer, parent or friend who might give someone a lift. It is up to the athlete and/or the guardian to decide who they feel comfortable riding with – no matter where they are going."

- Is there a QR code for getting class A volunteers signed up?
  - Yes SOWI could create a QR code and also help get it on materials the local program is hoping to use it on.

## Voluntaro

- (3) Just a note that we get comments from volunteers on how voluntary is not straight forward and seems to fail regularly. Can you please give me step by step instructions on how I can get to the site and get logged in? Is it possible to get some sort of orientation to Voluntaro and the ins and outs of it - for example when it says we have volunteer applicants with incomplete consent or orientation what does that mean and how do we help them complete that?
  - Training documents for new volunteers and returning volunteers can be found on our website here: <https://specialolympicswisconsin.org/get-involved/volunteer/class-a-volunteer/>
  - Consent Incomplete means the background check is due
    - The background check consent can be found on the Home page, under Messages
  - All other requirements, Protective Behaviors, Communicable Diseases Waiver, Coaches Orientation (Coaches Orientation is only if they have the Coach Volunteer Type) can be found on the Training menu
- I have never received an email on renewal for my coaches or volunteers.
  - The volunteer will receive an email 2 weeks before a training course is due. The background check email does not go out until the current background check expires.
  - You can log in at any time to see inactive or active volunteers here: <https://app.voluntaro.com/VolunteerList/Index>
    - Toggle between active and inactive using the Status filter
  - Volunteers expire 3 years from their last completed Protective Behaviors or background check date (whichever was older)

- 
- Is there a way to see class A volunteer expiration dates in voluntaro? I cannot find it.
    - Volunteers expire 3 years from their last completed Protective Behaviors or background check date (whichever was older)
      - You can find these dates on each volunteer record or by clicking on **Export Training**

Local Volunteer Maint Background Activation

- Why does volunteer/coach data base show active status when many times they are actually expired?
  - If you suspect a volunteer is expired, please contact your Athletic Director and/or [volunteer@specialolympicswisconsin.org](mailto:volunteer@specialolympicswisconsin.org) for further research. There may be a glitch in the system, for example, a background check date is incorrect or a piece of training shows as complete when it is not.
- Setup work station at regional for coach renewal

- The Regional Athletic Directors will work to make that available when and where able.

### **LP Min. Standards**

- Need clarification on Local Program Minimum Standards. Class A volunteer ratio of 4 volunteers per athlete seems very high.
  - The 4:1 ratio is dictated by SOI/SONA as outlined by American Specialty Insurance. It has been requested by SOWI on several occasions to increase the ratio to 5/6/7:1 but liability is the reason for the 4:1 ratio. This ratio is a global requirement.
- Local programs minimum standards- we compete in bowling, baseball skills, and track and field. For each event we have 3 or 4 athletes that participate. How will this new standard affect us? Will we be no longer able to compete? Do the athletes need to transfer to a larger district that is nearby? If so how do they go about this?
  - The new standard states "Provide training and register to compete at a Regional, District, or State in 3 sports throughout the year in at least 2 sports seasons". Based on the description of the question, this standard is met as you have participation in 3 separate events in two or more sport seasons. We understand the athlete number. If you have the more athletes that train but do not compete, you are offering them the opportunity. As mentioned during the Fall Meeting, we encourage that you communicate with SOWI to discuss.
- Adding additional requirements to small agencies will increase the stress of lone LPMs that are volunteers.
  - Communication with SOWI to discuss status of your volunteers, need for recruitment and at what level. Lets discuss so we can work together.
- My immediate family consists of 75% of our agency's volunteers. With the new requirement of having 3 sports across 2 seasons, would/could the State be able to provide volunteers if none of us are able to make it for a regional or state competition? Or, could we partner with a neighboring agency to utilize some of their volunteers.
  - SOWI will look and discuss these options and follow-up with the local programs.

### **Athlete Registration/Paperwork**

- Athletes medicals: do coaches still need to have access to these at practice and tournaments? If so how can they access online? tournaments? If so how can they access online? The local program manager may contact the State Office to grant a Class A coach access to the SharePoint file containing the program's medical records.
- New athletes form: can you change the new athletes form to be due every 13 months so that athletes fill the form out on the same month each year. Programs may choose when their athletes need to complete the form; however, the form will expire one year from the date it is signed. This is a rule set by Special Olympics, Inc., not by Special Olympics Wisconsin.
- May my local program still require my own medical for a particular sport? I would like to still require it for Powerlifting. Local programs may request medical documentation from athletes only under specific circumstances, such as to lift an existing sports restriction or in response to how the concussion question was answered on the new Athlete Registration Form.
- If athletes are "flagged" and need a dr sign off-is that medical good for only a year? We will review the medical information submitted if an Athlete Registration Form contains details that contradict the most recent medical records provided. Each case will be evaluated individually.

- Where are the action plan forms? Will we get a copy emailed to us? **The action plan will be available on the website closer to January 1st. They can also be emailed upon request.**
- The power point was not clear and there are questions at my table. Please make **VERY CLEAR** that no athlete (new or otherwise) can participate in any practice or competition ever without having filled out the athlete paperwork first. **It has always been the policy that no athlete may attend practice or competitions without valid paperwork on file with the State Office.**
- If athletes don't want to put their medication on the new registration forms is that okay? **It would be significantly more helpful to coaches if athletes provided a complete and detailed list of all the medications they are currently taking on the form. This includes not only prescription drugs but also over-the-counter medications, and supplements. Having this comprehensive information allows coaches to better**
- 

**understand any potential health risks, manage emergencies more effectively, and tailor training or medical advice appropriately. Additionally, it ensures that coaches can**

**communicate accurately with medical professionals if needed and helps create a safer environment for the athlete during practices and competitions.**

### **Coaches Training**

- Do athletes coaches need to take the in person course again when renewing their coaching certification?
  - **No, this is a one-time training. They will need to take the re-certification online every 3 years**
- Does SO ever do first aid and CPR training.
  - **No, we are not qualified to train people on this. But we can post the link to the Red Cross page so you can see local offerings. CPR training is an allowable local program expense.**

### **Finance**

- Could petty cash amount be raised 250\$ isn't always enough Travel grant form discusses meals but our meal cost was refused??
  - **Yes, for special events, like State Tournaments, up to \$750 can be requested. Please return excess funds the following business day after the event.**
  - **Your meal cost may have been declined as it did not meet all the guidelines:**
    - **SOWI in-house accounts are the only programs eligible for the "Travel Grant".**
      - **They may apply for up to four grants per sport year.**
    - **Distance is equal or greater than 75 miles to the competition locations.**
    - **Grant applications, along with the bus invoice if applying for transportation, are to be submitted by a representative of a registered (current) SOWI Local Program.**
    - **A grant application must be received at your SOWI Regional Office within thirty (30) days of the event date.**
    - **Grants, up to \$40/individual – athlete, coach, chaperone, driver - may be awarded based on merit and in order of receipt.**

- Will the LP be able to see both the Team financial account and the National (travel ) account for the team online? This would be very helpful in tracking fund.
  - The Operations Team will explore this option. It will require some account/report set-up and maintenance.

### **Families**

- Can program managers be on family leadership also?
  - Sorry no. The goal is to bring in inactive families to become key members within the local program. To assist in fundraising, coaching, outreach, etc.

### **AAL/Unified Leadership**

- Will the Athlete as Coach class ever be offered online? It's really hard to get athletes interested all the way to Madison.
  - Currently, the only format of Athletes as Coaches is in person. Since the class is more hands on than others, it is not conducive to a virtual setting. As we continue to grow out the class, we may look into holding satellite opportunities.
- Can something be put in place that notifies the local program manger when an athlete signs up for athlete leadership? We've had athletes sign up for this program and we are unaware, we'd like to include them in more things locally but did not know and the athletes assumed we were informed by the state.
  - Embedded in class registrations, athletes are reminded & encouraged to let their coaches and Local Program Managers know that they are signing up to become an athlete leader. We will continue exploring more effective communication practices.

### **LP Budgets**

- District and state basketball isn't something I can budget for, it's unpredictable whether we will compete, it's expensive because it's a multi-day event and requires a hotel stay, and while I'm thrilled to have our athletes go on to these competitions, it really stresses the budget even for a program that is otherwise pretty financially stable.
  - The role of the budget is to provide vision and plan. It also assists in determining if and how much the local program needs to fundraise. It is best to budget for the expenses than to not include and not have the funds to participate. This also provides vision to SOWI in areas of needs within the LP so that we can work together in meeting the needs for participation plus provide an understanding where we can work on for overall cost reductions.
- Agency budget: it will be our first time filling one out. What's included in one and can we get a copy of last year's?
  - Yes, SOWI can Provide a copy of previously submitted budgets. The key is understanding where funds are coming in, sources of fundraising and then how those funds are utilized. Within the budget breakdown, we look for estimated spend in the coming year based on basic needs of the local program. Money in and then how spent based on sports participation and event attendance.

## LP Succession Plans

- As we talk about succession plans, meaning we have change in leadership, some agencies may have to change email addresses. Would SOWI consider opportunity for agency to create an email address on SOWI database? We may have to get new business cards and yard signs with new email address. Being a school type agency ran by parents, we change leadership every 2 to 3 years.
  - SOWI will look and discuss these options and follow-up with the local programs.
  - SOWI also suggests creating a generic email address such as example: [wsd832@gmail.com](mailto:wsd832@gmail.com)

## USA Games and National Invationals

- Who gives the okay for State Athletes to compete at the National level?
  - For USA Games, athletes are nominated for spots based on if they meet qualifying standards for the sport. These standards include placement at a SOWI competition and meeting minimum time/score standards set by USA Games and World Games. Since the nomination process is done online, SOWI verifies with Local Program Managers that the athlete would be appropriate to attend the event. Once the athlete is verified from the Local Program Manager, SOWI moves forward for our evaluation process and then a random draw to select athletes to attend these events. If a Local Program Manager does not respond to the request by the deadline, SOWI assumes they are approved and uses the evaluation process at selection camp to verify their appropriateness.

For National Invitational Tournaments, Local Programs are the ones requesting quota for the event. Since they are requesting quota, they are verifying anyone they would send is appropriate for the event. SOWI will do a check for any behavior issues on record and advise if needed.

## UCS/YA

- Do you still offer the program for children under 5 where we work on physical skills. I used to do it in the summer at certain schools.
  - Yes! Our Young Athletes program is for children with and without intellectual disabilities from ages 2-10. Reach out to Bobby Tearney at [btearney@specialolympicswisconsin.org](mailto:btearney@specialolympicswisconsin.org) for more information on how to get started.

## General

- Will this mandatory meeting be annual event? If so could a later October date be considered? Today's date is a hardship for me. I know a later date would probably be a hardship for someone else. Can't please everyone and you have to pick date. Just had to ask.
  - The 2025 Fall Meeting was the final in-person meeting. Starting in Jan. of 2026 quarterly topic driven virtual meeting will be held. This will range from 1 hour to 1.5 hours in length. These topics will vary and based on feedback and ideas from the local program level.
- Since last road show I have been trying to access our program page to build that out, and I have gotten no response ...can I get access, link or any other information to get this going, so people can come to our program if they come to the site....

- This currently is not a function but is part of our strategic plan discussion.
- There was a lot of energy in the room today. I hope you take it as an expression of engagement and advocacy for our athletes. I want to be a voice for central WI and rural communities and advocate for them. Many supports and services are more limited, making the ones we have even more special. Transportation is a huge barrier. As a parent with a significant commute to work, my child can attend Special Olympics because it is right here. He's able to go from school to practice while I work. We also appreciate having the polar plunge right here in town. It helps us spread the word, raise awareness and allows our athletes and former athletes to give back. I'd like to ask that you keep access and local communities in mind as you plan our future. Thank you for all you do,
  - SOWI looks at facility accessibility, availability, facility availability, housing availability at all levels and regions. The goal is to balance all regions for all local program sizes. After each calendar year we assess our events
- The LPM portal is confusing to navigate. Is there a tutorial or information somewhere?
  - SOWI will work to create an informational guide on how to navigate the LPM Portal.
- Is there any way you can help advocate for reducing county transportation restrictions for athletes who need rides to practices?
  - SOWI continues to monitor and work with various transportation agencies throughout the state. As information is received, it will be shared with the Regional AD for disbursement to the local programs.

### **Communication**

- Could SOWI consider sending a form quarterly out to local program managers to ask what questions we might have or issues we might be facing??
  - Yes. A form can be created and shared. In addition, the local program can email their Regional Athletic Director with any updates, questions, or topics of discussion.
- Monthly communications to our members seem a lot as many of our athletes have to be mailed the information. This really adds to expenses. Did you consider quarterly to cover the different sport seasons?
  - Yes. SOWI will create a calendar to share for notice of meetings.
- Can families attend quarterly meetings that are coming up if topic pertains to them?
  - Yes.
- I am a new co-local program manager and I feel like I have to go to the website to search for new information, like I am not "in the loop". Am I not looking in the right place or not on an email list?
  - At any time, please reach out to either your Regional Athletic Director or the Sr. Director of Field Services to set up a time for an orientation or discuss any questions you may have. You can also email questions for help or clarification at any time. The goal of SOWI is to make sure you feel comfortable is what you are doing and seeing.
- Can we get a full list of General LP rules? Not all rules are listed on website. Examples: can't rent a 15+ passenger vehicle. Minors must be on a different floor in the dorm.
  - SOWI and the Sr. Director of Field Services will work to create and share with the local programs. We will look to host the document on the SOWI website under Local Program Management. If the Local Programs can share LP General Rules would be helpful as well. Some answers are covered in the Local Program Guide.

