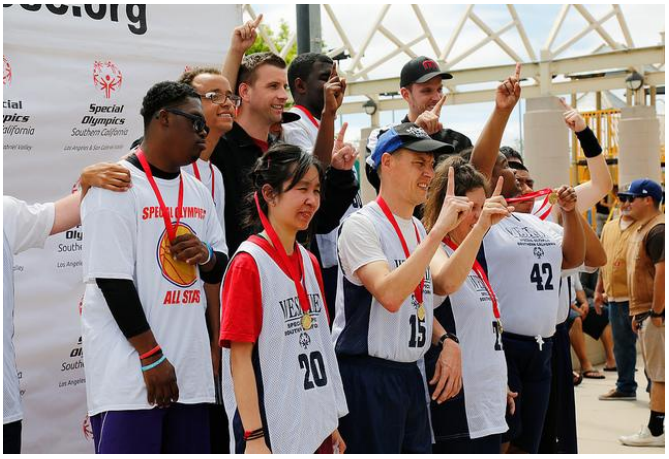

Special Olympics Southern California

Local Program Guide

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ABOUT SPECIAL OLYMPICS

Special Olympics is a global movement that unleashes the human spirit every day worldwide through the transformative power and joy of sport. Through programming in sports, health, education, and community building, Special Olympics is tackling the inactivity, stigma, isolation, and injustice that people with intellectual disabilities (ID) face. Our work goes far beyond sports events, driving social change that enables full social participation for people with ID.

Through the power of sports, people with intellectual disabilities discover new strengths, abilities, skills, and success. Our athletes find joy, confidence, and fulfillment on the playing field and in life. They also inspire people in their communities to open their hearts to a wider world of human talents and potential.

Special Olympics Southern California (SOSC)
Special Olympics Southern California is its own incorporated 501(c)3 nonprofit charitable organization, accredited by Special Olympics, Inc. as one of 52 Special Olympics Chapter Programs in the United States. SOSC was founded in 1969 and serves over 10,000 athletes through the support of 8,000 volunteers in five regions from San Luis Obispo County to San Diego County. The SOSC Chapter office provides strategic direction, resources, training, technical support, and policy & procedure to ensure all standards and protocols are being implemented.

Mission
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 the sharing of gifts, skills, and friendships with their families, other Special Olympics athletes, and the community.

Philosophy
Special Olympics is founded on the belief that people with intellectual disabilities can, with proper instruction and encouragement, learn, enjoy, and benefit from participation in individual and team sports. Special Olympics believes that consistent training is essential to developing sports skills and that competition among those of equal abilities is the most appropriate means of testing these skills, measuring progress, and providing incentives for personal growth.

Special Olympics has demonstrated that, through sports training and competition, people with intellectual disabilities can benefit physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually. Additionally, families are strengthened, and the community at large, both through participation and observation, comes to better understand people with intellectual disabilities in an environment of equality, respect, and acceptance.

SOSC Regions

REGION 1: San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Ventura Counties

REGION 2: Los Angeles, Kern & Inyo Counties

REGION 3: Riverside & San Bernardino Counties

REGION 4: Orange County

REGION 5: San Diego & Imperial Counties

LOCAL PROGRAMS

A Local Program is led by a team of volunteers who deliver the mission of Special Olympics Southern California through sports, programs, and related activities at the community level with support from a local city, service group, non-profit organization, or community members. Local Programs are crucial to the success and growth of providing opportunities for more athletes, Unified Partners, families, and volunteers to become involved. Our ability to provide high-quality, consistent, and sustainable programming is dependent on the impact Local Programs make in local communities.

Accredited Local Programs must achieve the following requirements and complete the Local Program Accreditation & Registration form within 6 months of startup. The Accreditation form is then completed on an annual basis.

Local Program Requirements

- Must have a Local Program Coordinator
- Athletes and Unified partners practice weekly during the sports season and attend competitions.
- Offer more than one sport per year. This may include Young Athletes, health programming (Fit 5), or MATP.
- Encourage athletes, Unified partners and families to participate in SOSC fundraising events.
- Finds meaningful ways for athletes to participate in leadership roles.
- Complete Local Program Accreditation & Registration from within 6 months of startup.
- Create and maintain a leadership volunteer team which includes a Local Program Coordinator, Local Program Sports Coordinator, and Local Program Volunteer Coordinator.
- Working with SOSC staff, strengthen community relationships, including Regional Centers, athletes, Unified partners, volunteer recruitment, brand awareness speakers, and potential facilities.

Accreditation aims to ensure that each program provides consistent, high-quality programming and meets the core requirements of the Special Olympics mission. The online Local Program Accreditation Form should be completed annually and can be accessed through this link here: Local Program Accreditation Form

Why a Local Program Leadership Team?

The Local Program Leadership Team is necessary to administer high-quality and efficient programming designed to meet the needs of the Local Program. Each Local Program varies in size and culture. A Local Program Leadership Team structure supports opportunities for athletes, Unified partners, families, and additional volunteers as the program grows. A person may have multiple responsibilities depending on the size of the Local Program, and these responsibilities may shift from person to person as the Local Program evolves and grows. Local Programs are responsible for evaluating and identifying opportunities to expand program delivery, with support from SOSC.

Local Program Leadership Team - Key Positions and Responsibilities

Local Program Coordinator

- Act as a liaison between SOSC staff and the Local Program.
- Work with SOSC regional staff to engage the community and increase awareness of SOSC.
- Through community relationships, potential athletes, Unified partners, coaches, and volunteers can be identified.
- Help identify a volunteer Local Program Leadership Team for the Local Program Sports Coordinator, Local Program Fundraising Coordinator, or Local Program Volunteer Coordinator.
- Lead, support, and encourage the Local Program Leadership Team.
- Engage community members to assist with securing practice and competition facilities, as needed.

Local Program Sports Coordinator

- Oversee the implementation of sports programs in their particular community.
- In collaboration with Local Program coaches, create a seasonal sports calendar and work with the regional sports manager to secure facilities and transportation for competitions.
- Provide training and support for coaches.
- Ensure compliance for all athletes, Unified partners, coaches, and volunteers, and ensure teams have sports equipment and uniforms.

Local Program Volunteer & Engagement Coordinator

- Collaborate with the regional volunteer manager to cover the community's SOSC engagement and recruitment events.
- Oversee recruitment of volunteers through outreach in the community.
- Work with the volunteer manager and Local Program Coordinator to create an annual plan for volunteer recruitment.
- Find opportunities in the community to recruit athletes, Unified partners, and volunteers and raise awareness of Special Olympics.

SPORTS MANAGEMENT

Sports Offered

Spring Season	March – June	Athletics, Basketball, Bocce*, Flag Football*, Swimming
Summer Season	June – August	Bowling*
Fall Season	August – November	Golf*, Soccer, Softball, Tennis, Volleyball
Winter Season	December – February	Floorball*
Year-Round		Motor Activities Training Program (MATP), Fit 5, Power up for Fitness, Young Athletes

*Indicates sport is also offered as Unified

Sports Season Prep

ACTION	TIMELINE
Use the Local Program Annual Plan to create a sports season calendar.	Annually
Confirm reservations and insurance for each facility. All contracts are submitted to the Region office for completion. Region staff secure insurance certificates.	SOSC season timeline provided by regional staff.
Communicate dates for coach training opportunities.	
Promote the upcoming season to all athletes, Unified partners, coaches, volunteers, families, caregivers, and the community.	
Review uniform and equipment conditions/needs for each team.	
Host a "Registration Night" or establish a process for athlete & Unified partners registration to inform your needs for coaches, volunteers, equipment, and facilities, etc.	
Determine competition opportunities and inform all coaches.	

Athlete & Unified Partner Training

- Training is once a week in their sport before the local competition and Championships.
- Encourage participation in training regularly to maximize their experience and eligibility for competition.
- Records of training attendance must be kept and submitted to the Local Program's Sports Coordinator or appropriate SOSC staff to create the season sports roster.
- Athletes and Unified Partners may elect to train only during a season and not compete, but this must be determined and communicated to the head coach at the start of the season.
- A well-organized, productive training session led by a certified, sports-knowledgeable coach in a safe, quality facility.
- Sports rules and sportsmanship must be part of the training plan.

Individual/Team Assessments

The coaching staff assesses athletes and Unified Partners at practice sessions to provide accurate information (times, distances, scores, levels) for divisioning at competitions. This is a very important detail in providing the best possible competition experience for all athletes. Team sports require the use of skill assessment forms. Individual sports utilize actual time, distance, etc. for divisioning.

Unified Sports®

Unified Sports joins people with and without intellectual disabilities on the same team. It was inspired by a simple principle: training together and playing together is a quick path to friendship and understanding. Teams are made up of people of similar age and ability, with the goal that every player is given the opportunity to contribute to their team's success. SOSC currently offers Unified Sports in the following: Bocce, Flag Football, Bowling, Golf, and Floorball.

ATHLETE REGISTRATION PROCESS

Policies and processes have been established to provide the highest-quality program while safeguarding all participants—athletes, volunteers, sponsors, and families. Adherence to these policies and processes will ensure that Special Olympics can continue to provide programs for people with intellectual disabilities.

Athletes

- **Special Olympics athletes** - ages 8 and up with a diagnosed intellectual disability.
- **Special Olympics Unified Partners** - ages 8 and up without an intellectual disability.
- **Special Olympics Young Athletes and Young Athletes Unified Partners*** - ages 2-7.

Athlete Registration Process - Online Only

1. Complete and submit the **Athlete Registration Form,** annually.
2. Athletes will be contacted by SOSC staff to discuss sports available in their community and sports season registration.
3. Athletes connect with their coaches and start to train!

To be eligible for competition, athletes must submit their Athlete Registration Forms by the designated deadline. Athletes who submit the required forms after the deadline may still be able to participate in practices.

*Young Athletes are only required to submit the Young Athletes application.

VOLUNTEER CLEARANCE PROCESS

The Local Program is a group of volunteers who deliver sports and programs to athletes and Unified partners in a geographical area. Volunteers are classified into four categories: Event Volunteers, Leadership Volunteers, Coaches, and Team Volunteers.

Event Volunteers

- Event volunteers get clearance to work at an event for one day and in proximity to athletes (for example: regional or championship competitions, fundraising events, etc.)
- Registration is through the volunteer event website.

Leadership Volunteers (including coaches)

- Volunteers who work one-on-one with athletes regularly.
- Volunteers serving in a leadership capacity (i.e., Local Program Leadership Team).

Coaches

A well-trained team of coaches is critical to athlete development. Special Olympics teams must maintain a ratio of 1 coach to 4 athletes.

- **Team Volunteer – Level 1**
  A Team Volunteer assists the Head Coach and Coach with activities as assigned. This position requires volunteer clearance.
- **Certified Coach – Level 2**
  A Coach assists the Head Coach with all aspects of sports training and competition. A Coach has limited leadership responsibilities but is vital in communicating the head coach's practice plans to athletes and Team Volunteers. This position requires volunteer clearance and sports certification.
- **Certified Head Coach – Level 3** (must be at least 18 years of age)
  Head Coaches are responsible for organizing and conducting a comprehensive sports training and competition program. A head coach assists with recruiting athletes and coaches at all levels. This position requires volunteer clearance and sports certification.

Level 1, 2, and Level 3 Certified Coach Application Process

Volunteers wishing to coach for Special Olympics must complete the Certified Coach Application Process. Coaching requires the following documentation to be processed by Special Olympics:

- ☐ Background Check (Sterling Volunteers) for over 18*
- ☐ Copy of driver's license or photo identification
- ☐ Special Olympics General Orientation
- ☐ Protective Behaviors Training
- ☐ Concussion Training
- ☐ Mandated Reporter
- ☐ Training Special Olympics Athletes (TSOA)
- ☐ Sport Specific Training
- ☐ Level 3 Certified Coach only: Principles of Coaching

SOSC Staff will notify the Local Program Coordinator that the applicant has completed and approved to start volunteering.

RENEWAL: The Certified Coach Application must be renewed every 3 years and includes a background check.

COMPETITION

Special Olympics provides competition opportunities for all ability levels and in multiple venues.

- Special Olympics and National Governing Body rules are followed for each sport.
- Competition opportunities are offered at the Region, Chapter, USA Games and World Game level. Allotments are given for participation in Chapter, USA Games and World Games. Allotments are minimal for USA Games and World Games.
- It is expected for athletes & Unified partners to compete on a designated team during the season.

Competition Levels

- **Scrimmages** are events that may be conducted to include two or more teams. These events alone do not qualify athletes for advancement in their sport but serve as another competitive opportunity. Examples: scrimmages, dual meets, pick-up games, invitational. Medals are not awarded at scrimmages. Organizers are the Local Sports Coordinator or the head coach.

- **Regional Competitions** are hosted by the Region. These events serve as qualifiers to advance to Chapter-level competition. Organizers are a Games Management Team and Regional staff.

- **SOSC Chapter Games** showcase the skills and accomplishments of Special Olympics athletes & Unified partners, and therefore, must be well-trained. SOSC offers competition in 12 sports. SOSC conducts four major chapter championships annually, including Summer Games, Bowling Championships, Fall Games, and Floorball Championships.

- **Special Olympics USA Games** are held every four years. Each chapter in Special Olympics North America (SONA) receives an allotment per sport. Athletes and Unified partners who have received gold medals in their sport are randomly selected to participate. All must then meet additional criteria to accept the selection to the SOSC delegation.

- **Special Olympics World Games** are held every two years, alternating between Winter and Summer Games. Athletes & Unified Partners from State / Chapters in the United States represent the Special Olympics USA team. SOSC sends a delegation based on an allotment from Special Olympics North America (SONA), who are randomly selected based on SOI's criteria outlined in Article 1: Sport Rules.

Requirements for individual/team participation:

- ☐ Athletes & Unified partners must be training in a specific sport before they can compete.
- ☐ Competition divisioning is based on gender, age, and ability.
- ☐ The regional staff will communicate competition opportunities at the beginning of each sports season.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

Annual Plan

Utilizing the Local Program Annual Plan, each Local Program Leadership Team will develop an annual plan for the calendar year in collaboration with head coaches and SOSC Staff. Dates should be determined for:

- Participant registration deadlines
- Training schedules for coaches and volunteers
- Training schedules by season
- Local Program Leadership Team meetings
- Athlete Leadership opportunities

Local Program Leadership Team

- Utilize a committee structure to efficiently provide the best quality sports training and participation in other programs, and competition,
- Identify key areas of responsibility that will meet the current needs of the Local Program.
- Engage community members to support the needs of the local program.
- Plan appropriate training for the development of the team.

Communication

- Communication with SOSC, athletes & Unified partners, coaches, volunteers, caregivers, and families will be the key to success.
- Get a jump on the season preparation by hosting a "Registration Night" for athletes, Unified partners and coaches well before the season starts.
- Preparing an annual calendar with training and competition information for early distribution helps everyone.
- Take steps to inform all participants of upcoming clearance expiration well before the expiration date so as not to disrupt their participation.

Fundraising

- Financial hardship should never be a barrier to participation in SOSC programming. Fundraising enables SOSC to provide our programs free of charge to athletes, Unified partners and their families.
- SOSC staff must approve ALL fundraising activities to ensure no conflicts with ongoing fundraising efforts.
- Funding sources and in-kind donations may include but are not limited to individuals, local businesses, local community groups, and SOSC special events.

Training

- Include training for all local program team members in the annual plan.
- Collaborate with the region staff to schedule opportunities for coaches to attend Coaches Trainings and Officials Trainings annually and include dates in the annual plan.
- Determine training needs and the best method of delivery of the training.

Special Olympics Branding

- Special Olympics has 95% brand recognition in the United States, which is essential for continued growth, success, and continuity.
- Use of the Special Olympics logo **must** be pre-approved by SOSC Staff.
- All uniforms must be purchased in accordance with the SOSC Uniform Policy.
- Additional SOSC marketing materials and resources maybe available to Local Programs upon request.

RISK MANAGEMENT: HEALTH & SAFETY

Safety in Special Olympics activities is vital to providing our athletes, Unified partners and volunteers with a positive atmosphere. Prudent and proactive risk management practices help ensure the safety and well-being of all participants. Ensure you become familiar with our **SOSC Crisis and Emergency Plan** and know who to contact in an emergency.

Sports Training & Competition
Ensure the safety of all participants and those cheering on the athletes by promoting safety during sports training and competitions.

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' registration forms available at practices and competitions. Protect the privacy of this information and return to the regional office 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 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 SOSC staff contact at Chapter ASAP.
- Ensure that there is at least a 4:1 ratio of athletes to coach to meet minimum standards and provide proper supervision.

Incident Reporting
An Incident Report Form must be completed following all bodily injuries or incidents. Other incidents may include property damage, abuse, theft, or incidents requiring law enforcement. This helps document injuries and incidents, which, in some cases, may speed up the activation of applicable insurance.

Forms must be reported to the region office within 24 hours of an injury or incident. The regional staff will provide you additional copies of these forms.

Insurance
The Special Olympics General Liability policy protects insured Special Olympics organizations, athletes, Unified partners and registered volunteers from third-party claims of bodily injury, property damage, and personal injury due to alleged negligence arising from the conduct by Special Olympics during a Special Olympics activity. The general liability policy has been endorsed to provide coverage for losses resulting from damage to property in the care, custody, or control of Special Olympics.

15 Passenger Vans
Special Olympics Southern California Programs are prohibited from using 15-passenger vans to transport athletes or other individuals to and from Special Olympics events, and SOSC strongly discourages other organizations from using 15-passenger vans to transport people to or from Special Olympics events.

IMPORTANT: Individuals who have not been cleared for participation are not allowed on the field of play as stated in insurance guidelines. This applies to all participants and volunteers.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Athlete: A person identified as having an intellectual disability who is at least eight years of age and registers to participate following the SOI General Rules. Individuals train in an Official Sport for a minimum of six weeks during the calendar year and may compete in local or Regional Special Olympics competitions. Children between the ages of 2 and 7 can participate in Young Athletes.

Athlete Leadership: Athlete Leaders are trained in various topics to develop their leadership skills and use their voices and abilities to inspire others, influence change, and create inclusive communities. Some Athlete Leadership roles include Global Messenger, Health Messenger, Athlete Leadership Council member, and sports coach.

Ongoing Volunteer: Any person who volunteers for a Special Olympics Program as a coach, team volunteer, chaperone, driver, overnight host, Unified partner, or otherwise in a manner that results in regular close contact with Special Olympics athletes. Ongoing volunteers also include those who may assume administrative or financial duties.

Event Volunteer: Any person who volunteers at an event who does not have direct responsibility or ongoing contact with athletes.

Coach/Assistant Coach/Team Volunteer: Individuals charged with training athletes in a specific sport for a season.

Division (when referring to sports competition): The competitive grouping of three to eight athletes in a particular sport based on age, gender, and ability level for competitions.

Global Messenger: Athlete ambassadors who foster awareness and advocacy for the Special Olympics movement. Athletes must complete a training program in communication, speech writing, and presentations with their local speech coach.

GMS is Games Management Software that Special Olympics uses to capture information about athletes, coaches, teams, and competitions, including clearance.

Healthy Athletes: The Healthy Athletes Program provides health services and education to Special Olympics athletes and offers valuable training for health professionals on interacting with people with intellectual disabilities.

Unified Sports®: An inclusive sports program that combines teammates with and without intellectual disabilities on sports teams for training and competition. Age and ability-matching of athletes and Unified partners are defined on a sport-by-sport basis.

Unified Champion Schools: A three-component strategy that includes Unified Sports, Inclusive Youth Leadership, and Whole School Engagement. Unified Champion Schools aims to activate youth, engage educators, and promote school communities of acceptance and inclusion where all young people are agents of change.

Unified Partner: A person without an intellectual disability who trains and competes in a Special Olympics sport with Special Olympics athletes.

Volunteers: Volunteers are the organization's lifeblood and serve as the primary source of support for athletes. Volunteer opportunities include serving as a coach, Unified partner, sports official, chaperone, committee member, fundraising volunteer, and more! Local Programs and services are provided with the support and commitment of volunteers willing to give their time and talent.

Young Athletes is a sports and play program for children with and without intellectual disabilities, ages 2 to 7. Young Athletes develop motor, social, and cognitive skills through foundational sports play.