

# Special Olympics Massachusetts General Orientation (updated in April of 2020)

For Volunteers and Supporters

***Special Olympics***  
*Massachusetts*





# Welcome to General Orientation

## **The goals of this orientation are to provide:**

- The basic overview of Special Olympics and Special Olympics Massachusetts.
- The history and organizational structure of Special Olympics
- The initiatives, sports offerings and opportunities available to join and support the mission of Special Olympics.

Special Olympics unleashes the transformative power and joy of sports to reveal the full potential of athletes with intellectual disabilities, creating more inclusive communities, everyday around the world.

*-- Preamble to the Special Olympics General Rules*



# General Orientation

**Part I** – Mission, History, Philosophy & Organizational Structure of Special Olympics

**Part II** – Special Olympic Athlete, Sports and Initiatives

**Part III** – Opportunities to Join, Volunteer and Support Special Olympics

**Please be sure to take the test at the end of the slideshow to receive your certification!!**

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# PART I – THE MISSION, HISTORY, PHILOSOPHY AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF SPECIAL OLYMPICS

“Let me win;  
but if I cannot win,  
let me be brave in the attempt.”

The Special Olympics Athlete Oath

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# Mission Statement



To provide year-round sports training and competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, prepare for entry into school and community programs, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in the sharing of gifts, skills and friendships with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community.



# Components & Outcomes

Components	Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Year-round</li><li>Training and Competition</li><li>Olympic-type Sports</li><li>Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Physical Fitness</li><li>Courage and Joy</li><li>Sharing of Gifts and Skills</li><li>Inclusion</li><li>Friendship<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Families</li><li>Athletes</li><li>Community</li></ul></li></ul>

# Founding Principles of Special Olympics



The principles on which Special Olympics was founded, and which must continue to guide the operation and expansion of the global Special Olympics Movement, include the following:

- People with intellectual disabilities can, with proper instruction and encouragement, enjoy, learn and benefit from participation in individual and team sports, adapted as necessary to meet the needs of those with special mental and physical limitations.
- Consistent training under the guidance of qualified coaches, with emphasis on physical conditioning, is essential to the development of sports skills, and competition among those of equal abilities is the most appropriate means of testing these skills, measuring progress and providing incentives for personal growth.
- Through sports training and competition: people with intellectual disabilities benefit physically, mentally and socially and spiritually; families are strengthened; and the community at large, both through participation and observation, is united with people with intellectual disabilities in an environment of equality, respect and acceptance.





## Founding Principles (cont.)

- Every person with an intellectual disability who meets the eligibility requirements set out in the General Rules should have the opportunity to participate in and benefit from the sports training and athletic competition programs offered by Special Olympics.
- Special Olympics must transcend all boundaries of race, gender, religion, national origin, geography, and political philosophy, and offer sports training and competition opportunities to all eligible persons with intellectual disabilities in accordance with uniform worldwide standards.
- Special Olympics celebrates and strives to promote the spirit of sportsmanship and a love of participation in sports for its own sake. To that end, Special Olympics aims to provide every athlete with an opportunity to participate in training and competition events which challenge that athlete to his or her fullest potential, regardless of the athlete's level of ability. Special Olympics therefore requires that Special Olympics Games and Tournaments offer sports and events which are appropriate for athletes of all levels of ability, and in the case of team sports, provide every athlete with an opportunity to play in every game.
- Special Olympics encourages sports training and competition opportunities at the local, area and community level (including schools) as a means of reaching the greatest number of eligible athletes.



# Special Olympics is unique from other sports organizations

## **Special Olympics**

- Sports for all ability levels
- Awards for all participants
- “Divisioning” for equitable competition
- Random drawing to national and international competitions

Special Olympics’ philosophy does not emphasize “winning at all costs,” but emphasizes the importance of participation, inclusion, effort and personal achievement.

# Special Olympics History



## **June 1962**

Eunice Kennedy Shriver begins a summer day camp at her home in Maryland for children with intellectual disabilities to realize their capabilities in sports and physical activities.

## **July 1968**

The first International Special Olympics Summer Games are held at Soldier Field in Chicago, Illinois, USA. 1000 individuals with intellectual disabilities from 26 states and Canada compete in track and field and swimming.

## **December 1971**

The U.S. Olympic Committee gives Special Olympics official approval to use the name 'Olympics' in the United States.

## **June 1981**

The Law Enforcement Torch Run for Special Olympics is launched in Wichita, Kansas, USA, after Police Chief Richard LaMunyon saw an urgent need to raise awareness for Special Olympics. The Torch Run is now Special Olympics' largest grassroots fundraiser, raising nearly \$40 million annually.

## **July 1988**

Special Olympics Unified Sports® is launched at the annual Special Olympics Conference in Reno, Nevada, and Lake Tahoe, California. Athletes with and without intellectual disabilities compete side-by-side in bowling, volleyball and softball.

# History (cont.)



## **July 1997**

Healthy Athletes® becomes an official Special Olympics initiative, providing health care services to Special Olympics athletes worldwide. The program includes free vision, hearing and dental screenings; injury prevention clinics and nutrition education.

## **October 2007**

The city of Shanghai, China, hosts the 12th Special Olympics World Summer Games, which are broadcast internationally on an unprecedented scale. These Games, with more than 7,500 athletes from 164 countries participating, are a major milestone in Special Olympics' history.

## **August 2009**

Special Olympics mourns the loss of founder Eunice Kennedy Shriver who died surrounded by her family in Massachusetts. Letters and messages celebrating her contribution to humanity pour in from world leaders and everyday people around the world.

## **January 2011**

Special Olympics mourns the death of Sargent Shriver, husband of late founder Eunice Kennedy Shriver and Chairman of the Board Emeritus. Shriver served as president of the Movement from 1984 through 1996 and served as Chairman of the Board of Directors from 1990 to 2003.



# History (cont.)

## **June-July 2011**

The 2011 Special Olympics World Summer Games are held in Athens, Greece. 7,000 athletes from around the world gather to compete in the birthplace of the Olympics—demonstrating to the world just how far Special Olympics has come.

## **2018**

Special Olympics celebrates our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This milestone was celebrated around the world with events and initiatives to celebrate our past and launch the movement into a new era of inclusion. A new permanent, 30-foot monument for Special Olympics at Soldier Field. The flame was initially lit at a ceremony in Hyannis, MA and carried to Chicago by Massachusetts Law Enforcement officers.

## **2018 World-Wide Report:**

5,468,333 Athletes Served

291 Competitions a Day

1,151,088 Volunteers

244 Accredited Programs

193 Countries

## RELATIONSHIP WITH THE INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEE



Through a Protocol of Agreement signed on February 15, 1988, the International Olympic Committee (the "IOC") officially recognized SOI and agreed to cooperate with SOI as a representative of the interests of athletes with intellectual disabilities. The IOC's formal recognition of SOI carries with it a solemn duty and responsibility, which must be discharged by SOI and all of its Accredited Programs, to conduct Special Olympics training and competition in accordance with the highest ideals of the international Olympic movement, to guard and protect the use of the term "Special Olympics," and to protect the word "Olympics" from unauthorized use or exploitation. The IOC's Protocol of Agreement with SOI prohibits SOI, Programs and GOCs from using the 5 ring Olympic logo, the Olympic anthem, or the Olympics motto. Each Accredited Program agrees to fulfill these responsibilities by accepting accreditation from SOI, as provided in its Accreditation License and Article 5 of the General Rules.



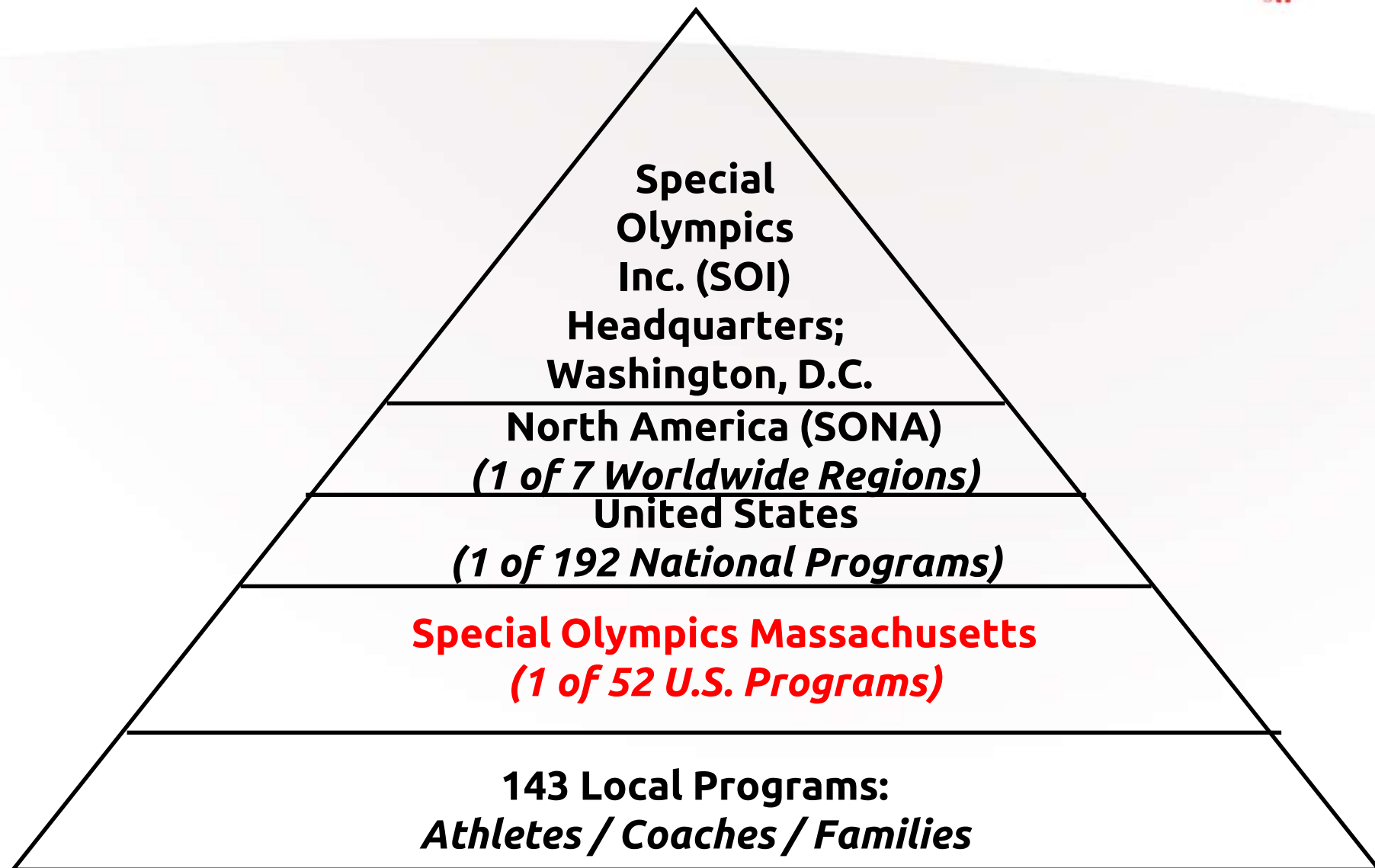
# SOI - Special Olympics Inc.

SOI is the international governing body of the Special Olympics Movement, founded by Eunice Kennedy Shriver.

In discharging its responsibilities as the world governing body of Special Olympics, SOI establishes and enforces all official policies and requirements of Special Olympics, oversees the conduct and expansion of Special Olympics accredited programs throughout the world, and provides training, technical assistance and other support to Accredited Programs and GOCs.

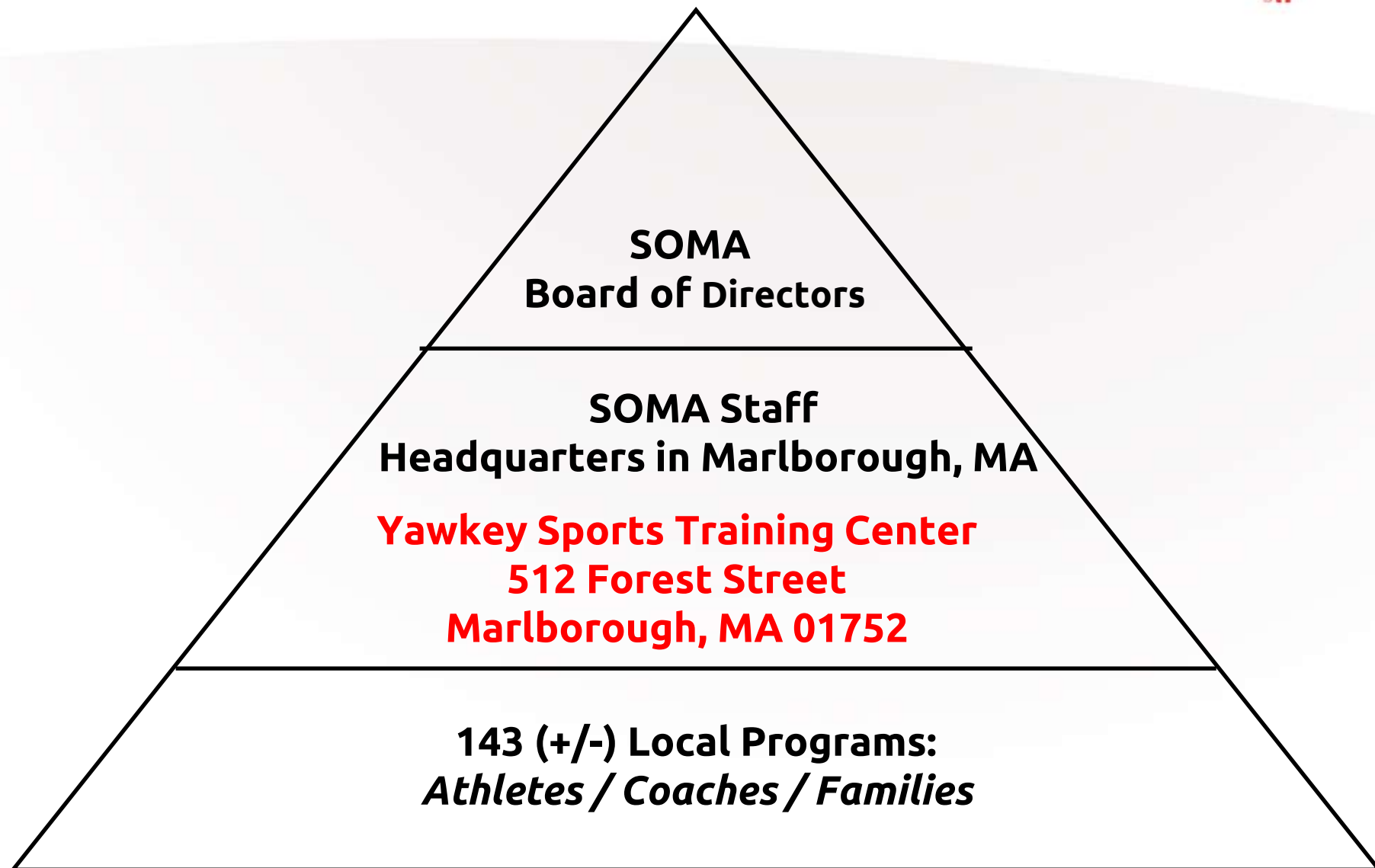
SOI is a not-for-profit corporation organized under the laws of the District of Columbia, USA, with its principal office in Washington, D.C., USA.

# Organizational Structure – Worldwide





# Organizational Structure - Statewide





# Local Programs

Special Olympics Massachusetts accredits qualified local programs throughout the state to operate Special Olympics training and competition programs. Local programs register their athletes with SOMA, provide coaches and training and bring athletes and teams to competitions.

SOMA Local Programs may be run through a community parks and rec – such as Shrewsbury Parks and Rec Dept.; through an agency – such as Center of Hope; as a public or private school – such as Latham Schools; or may be a group of one or more athletes and coaches that have organized together under the policies and procedures of SOMA to participate in Special Olympics programming. Local Programs work closely with the SOMA staff in their section.



# Facts & Figures (2019 #s)

- Sport seasons: 4
- Sports offered: 23
- **Competitions: 553**
- **Athletes: 14,359**
- **Unified partners: 5,317**
- **Volunteers: 15,173**
- **Coaches: 1,377**
- **Staff: 32**



# Part II – Special Olympics

## Athletes, Sports & Programs

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# Eligibility for Participation in Special Olympics

Every person with an intellectual disability who is at least eight years of age is eligible to compete in Special Olympics. There is no maximum age limitation for participation in Special Olympics. The minimum age requirement for participation in Special Olympics competition is eight years of age.

The **Young Athletes** program introduces children, two to seven years old to the world of sports, with the goal of preparing them for Special Olympics sports training and competition. Children who are at least six years old may participate in age-appropriate training programs. No child may participate in a Special Olympics competition before his or her eighth birthday.

# Identifying Persons with Intellectual disabilities



A person is considered to have an intellectual disability for purposes of determining his or her eligibility to participate in Special Olympics if that person satisfies any one of the following requirements:

- The person has been identified by an agency or professional as having an intellectual disability as determined by their localities;
- or the person has a cognitive delay, as determined by standardized measures such as intelligent quotient or "IQ" testing;
- or the person has a closely related developmental disability. A "closely related developmental disability" means having functional limitations in both general learning (such as IQ) and in adaptive skills (such as in recreation, work, independent living, self-direction, or self-care).

However, persons whose functional limitations are based solely on a physical, behavioral, or emotional disability, or a specific learning or sensory disability, are not eligible to participate as Special Olympics athletes, but may be eligible to be a Unified Sports® Partner or to volunteer for Special Olympics.

# Athlete-centered Coaching Guide



Matt Millett

In 2013, SOMA athlete and board of directors member, Matt Millett, with SOMA coaches Rebecca Shangraw and John Ford, along with other coaches from around the U.S. participated in a Special Olympics coaching fellowship sponsored by the U.S. State Department.

Their fellowship included developing a guide (released in 2014) to coaching Special Olympics athletes from the athletes' perspective. The guide begins with the following requests to coaches...



# Athlete-centered Coaching Guide (cont.)



As athletes we hope that coaches will be dedicated to the team and committed to learning about each athlete's strengths, weaknesses and different personalities. We want coaches to:

- Put athletes in a position to be successful, while at the same time challenging us to improve by showing us what we need to develop.
- Teach us teamwork and unselfish play, but remember "safety first".
- Be open to change, because a drill may work for some of the team, but not for all of the team.
- Know the rules of the sport with regard to both the sport-specific governing body and the Special Olympics standards.
- And, lastly, we want coaches to remember our Special Olympics athlete oath:

**"Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me brave in the attempt."**

# Real Sport Experience

SOMA offers training and competition opportunities in 23 sports. Each sport season requires a minimum of eight weeks of training prior to competing in a season ending tournament.

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# Sports and Seasons



## Spring

Swimming  
Athletics (Track & Field)  
Gymnastics  
Roller skating  
Tennis  
Volleyball  
Powerlifting

## Summer

Bocce  
Cycling  
Golf  
Sailing  
Softball

## Fall

Equestrian  
Flag Football  
Soccer  
Senior Sports\*

## Winter

Alpine Ski  
Nordic Ski  
Basketball  
Bowling  
Figure & Speed  
Skating  
Floor Hockey

\*Senior Sports is an event for athletes 40 years of age and older. Participants compete in the sports of athletics, bocce, golf, and corn hole

# Sports for all ability levels



## Motor Activities Training Program (MATP)

Designed for individuals with severe disabilities that cannot benefit from standard Special Olympics training and competition programs.

### Range of Events in Track & Field

- Wheelchair Events
- Assisted Walking
- Walking
- Developmental Runs
- Sprints and Runs – 100m thru Marathon
- Throwing events – Tennis ball, softball, shot put, mini jav
- Pentathlon

### Range of Events in Basketball

- Basketball Skills
- Unified Sports® Recreational
- Unified Sports® Player Development
- Unified Sports® Competitive
- Traditional

# Sports Rules



Special Olympics Sports rules are:

- Outlined in [Article 1](#)
- Based on National Governing Body or International Federation official rules.
- The rules contain few modifications for Special Olympics and are approved by the Special Olympics Sports Rules Committee
- The same rules govern all Special Olympics competitions throughout Massachusetts, the United States and throughout the world – from local competitions to S.O. World Games

**Coaches, officials and volunteers show respect to and help the athletes to do their best, improve their sport skill and honor their efforts by calling the rules of the sport and violations as written.**

# Divisioning for Athletes



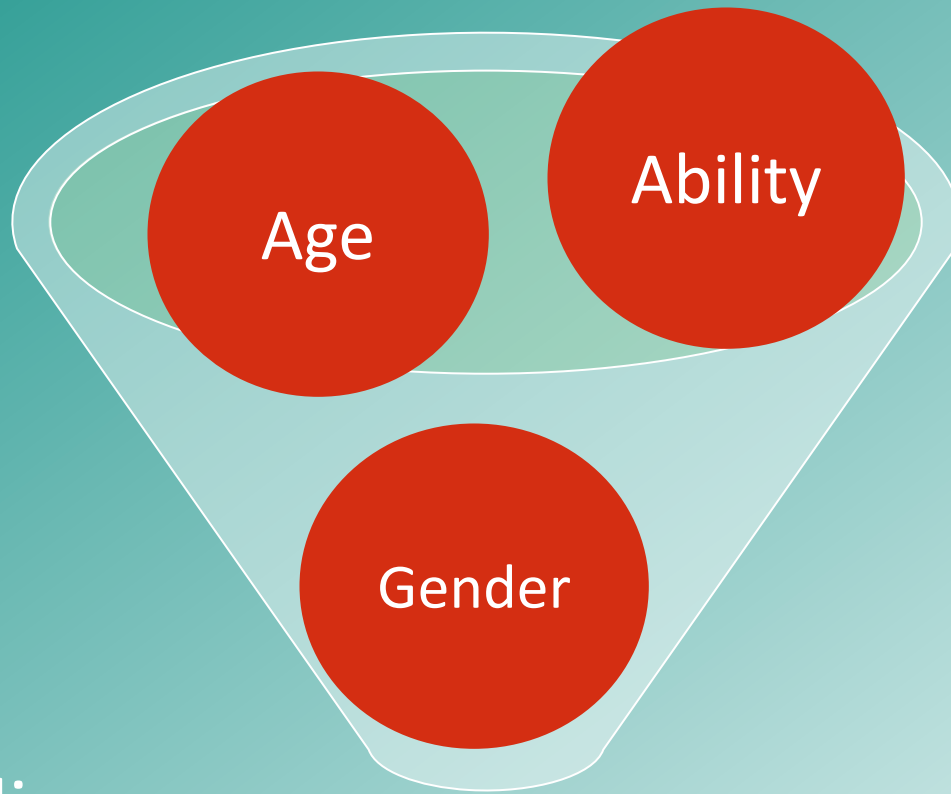
To ensure fair and equitable competition, to provide each athlete an opportunity to excel, and as a tool for motivating each athlete to do their personal best, Special Olympics uses a unique process called “divisioning”. **Divisioning places athletes of similar gender, age and ability together** to compete against one and other.

Divisions are ideally comprised of 3 – 8 athletes; are of the same gender and within the same age range. **An athlete’s ability is the primary factor in divisioning for competitions. A 15% guideline is used to determine similar ability.** The variance between the fastest and the slowest competitors in a division should be no more than 15%; thereby giving all competitors a reasonable opportunity to compete with one and other.

**For example:** an athlete that runs the 100m dash consistently in 20 seconds would run in a division that the fastest competitor would run no faster than 17 seconds motivating each athlete to do their best. (If an athlete that consistently ran a 30 second 100m and they were lined up to race a competitor that ran a 12 second 100m – they probably wouldn’t feel motivated to do their best for the entire race.

**The “Honest Effort” rule states that an athlete may be sanctioned for obtaining a time/distant greater than 15% at a State Tournament.**

# Divisioning Review



15% Guideline

Division

# Divisioning for Teams



Similar to divisioning for individual athletes, **divisioning for teams helps to ensure fair and equitable competition**, provide each team an opportunity to excel and is a tool for motivating each team to do their best.

Team divisions are ideally comprised of 3 – 8 teams; are of the same gender and within the same age range. **The teams ability level is also the primary factor in divisioning for competitions.**

To determine a Team's ability level, teams are required to submit team and player assessment forms. **Teams are also required to attend an Assessment Round tournament** prior to the State Tournament.

The information from the assessment forms, the results and observations from the Assessment Round, along with past results and input from coaches and officials are all taken into account to place teams of similar ability together for state tournaments.



# Unified Sports®



Special Olympics Unified Sports® began in Massachusetts in the early 1980's. It is recognized globally as an iconic program for social inclusion which activates attitude change and community building through an inclusive sport experience between individuals with and without intellectual disabilities, while broadening the relevance and impact of the Special Olympics movement.



# Unified Sports (cont.)



- An inclusive model sport program
- Approximately equal numbers of S.O. athletes and partners without intellectual disabilities as teammates for training and competition
- Athletes & partners: similar age
- 3 Models
  - ▶ Unified Sports® Competitive – Athletes and Partners of similar age and ability are teammates in competitive play
  - ▶ Unified Sports® Player Development – Teammates of lower ability not ready for competitive play are mentored by teammates of higher ability
  - ▶ Unified Sports® Recreation – An introduction to Unified Sports®



# Transformative Education



Special Olympics provides a platform through sports to help change the attitudes and perceptions of youth and young adults towards peers with intellectual disabilities. Through our programs Special Olympics is helping to solve the problem of isolation and misunderstanding in the classroom.

**Unified Champion Schools** – The Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools initiative activates youth with and without intellectual disabilities to come together as student leaders, athletes, and agents for inclusion within their school communities. Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools motivates all students to create environments full of respect, dignity, and advocacy for students with intellectual disabilities. Here in Massachusetts we partner with the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association to provide Unified Track & Field and Basketball. Additionally the Massachusetts Association of Student Councils has chosen Special Olympics as it's charity partner and participates in a Polar Plunge each year.

**Unified Game Days & School Day Games** - Our School –based competition days are the perfect way for class rooms, school systems and surrounding communities to come together for a fun and inclusive day of activities featuring all of the elements of a traditional Special Olympics event.

**Colleges & Universities** - College campuses were some of the first places to let Special Olympics host games and training. Today, the role of colleges and universities has grown to Special Olympics clubs offered on campuses, where students help run events, along with year-round training and fundraising. Many colleges have clubs that include students and others with and without intellectual disabilities taking part in Special Olympics sports and initiatives including local programming, intramurals, and fitness clubs.

**Students with intellectual disabilities are two to three times more likely to be bullied than peers without intellectual disabilities. Researchers found that the bullying in this context was chronic in nature and was likely to be directly related to their disability. (*Walk a Mile in Their Shoes; AbilityPath.org, 2011*)**

# Sustaining Athlete Health



## The Healthy Athletes Initiative

Since officially launching in 1997 as a Special Olympics program started by Dr. Steve Perlman, a pediatric dentist from Lynn, Massachusetts, Healthy Athletes has grown to provide seven different health screenings — Fit Feet, FUNfitness, Healthy Hearing, Health Promotion, Opening Eyes®, MedFest and Special Smiles® — with the goal to improve athletes' ability to train and compete. These free health screenings have been implemented globally in more than 90 countries, and nearly 500,000 screenings have been completed since its inception.

## Improving Athlete Wellness

Special Olympics Massachusetts recognizes that to be an athlete competing at the highest level throughout your entire life, you need to focus on living a healthy lifestyle. In partnership with the Boston Bruins B-Fit program, local fitness centers, colleges and universities, Special Olympics Massachusetts works to provide fitness, nutrition, and general wellness programs to as many athletes as possible. The Yawkey Sports Training Facility has added fitness equipment that is available for all Special Olympics athletes in the state\*.

\*The gym is available for use during normal business hours. Please contact our office to schedule an appointment before stopping by.



# Athlete Leadership

**Athlete Leadership** is an initiative that allows athletes to explore opportunities for Special Olympics participation in roles previously considered “non-traditional.” Such participation might come in the form of an athlete serving on the Board of Directors or local organizing committee; or it might find an athlete as a spokesperson, member of an Athlete Input Council, a team captain, coach or official.

## **Special Olympics Massachusetts offers the following Athlete Leadership Programs:**

- Public Speaking (Global Messengers)
- Athletes on Boards, Committees or Input Councils
- Athletes as Volunteers (games or events)
- Athletes as Coaches or Assistant Coaches
- Athletes as Sport Officials
- Assisting with Fund Raising
- Assisting with technology or other office work
- Serving as peer mentors or team captains

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# Part III – Opportunities to Join, Volunteer and Support Special Olympics

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# What can volunteers do?

- Coach or assist with a team during training.
- Become a Unified partner and participate in team practices and competitions.
- Serve on an event planning committee (event management team) for sporting or fundraising events.
- Volunteer during a tournament or fundraising event.
- Participate in one of our fundraising events.



# As a Coach



- Work with a team or individuals during their 8 week training period for approximately 2 hours per week
- Attend tournaments, either one day or overnight, and support the athletes both during competition and throughout the event.
- SOMA offers both sports specific training and training on working with Special Olympics athletes
- All coaches must submit a Class A Volunteer Registration form. A CORI and national background check are run on all coaches and assistant coaches over 18 years old. They must also complete three other trainings included on our [Coaches Resource page](#)



## As a Unified Partner

- Unified Partners are individuals without an intellectual disability who participate in team sports with Special Olympics athletes of similar ability
- Regularly participate in practices. Attend tournaments, either one day or overnight, as a member of a team.
- All Unified Partners must submit a Class A Volunteer Registration form. A CORI and national background check are run on all adult Unified Partners 18 years or older.



# On Event Management Team

- Participate in the planning of sports tournaments or fundraising events.
- Attend 3 or 4 meetings during the 6 month planning period prior to the event.
- Assist SOMA staff in procuring venues, volunteers, and needed supplies
- During the event, manage other volunteers assigned to venue. Answer general questions regarding event.
- All Event Management Team members must submit a Class A Volunteer Registration form. A CORI and national background check are run on all Event Management Team members.



# Event Volunteer

- Attend a sports or fund raising event and volunteer for 4 – 8 hours, depending on the venue.
- Assist with registration, timing and scorekeeping, meals distribution, first aid (medical license required), and special events.
- Recruit other volunteers from company/school/civic organization.
- First aid volunteers must submit a Class A Volunteer Registration form. A CORI and national background check are run on all medical volunteers.



# Participate in Fundraising Events

- Sign up and fundraise for events such as:
  - **Polar Plunge** (January through March, Nantasket and Revere Beaches host the two major ones, along with other smaller ones throughout in the state)
  - **Over the Edge** (July, Boston)
  - **The Xtra Mile running platform** (Boston Marathon, Jolly Jaunt 5Ks, etc.)
  - **And More...**

Go to [www.SpecialOlympicsMA.org](http://www.SpecialOlympicsMA.org) to learn about more fundraising opportunities.

Create a team of co-workers, friends, classmates, or family members. The more the merrier!

The Special Olympics Movement unlocks the joy of sport to inspire people throughout the world - to open their minds to human giftedness, to accept, include and value people with intellectual disabilities in all aspects of life, and thereby unite people in a shared belief of a more just and welcoming world.

To receive your General Orientation certification, [click here to take the test](#)

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