

SECTION 2

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Eligibility for Participation in Special Olympics

Special Olympics training and competition is open to every person with intellectual disabilities who is at least eight years of age and who registers to participate in Special Olympics as required by the Special Olympics General Rules.

There is no maximum age limitation for participation in Special Olympics. Children who are at least six years old may participate in age-appropriate Special Olympics training programs offered by SOMI or in specific (and age-appropriate) cultural or social activities offered during the course of a Special Olympics event. Such children may be recognized for their participation, or through other types of recognition approved by SOI, which are not associated with participation in Special Olympics competition. However, no child may participate in a Special Olympics competition (or be awarded medals or ribbons associated with competition) before his or her eighth birthday. Young athlete program is for 2 – 7 year olds see [page 168](#) for description.

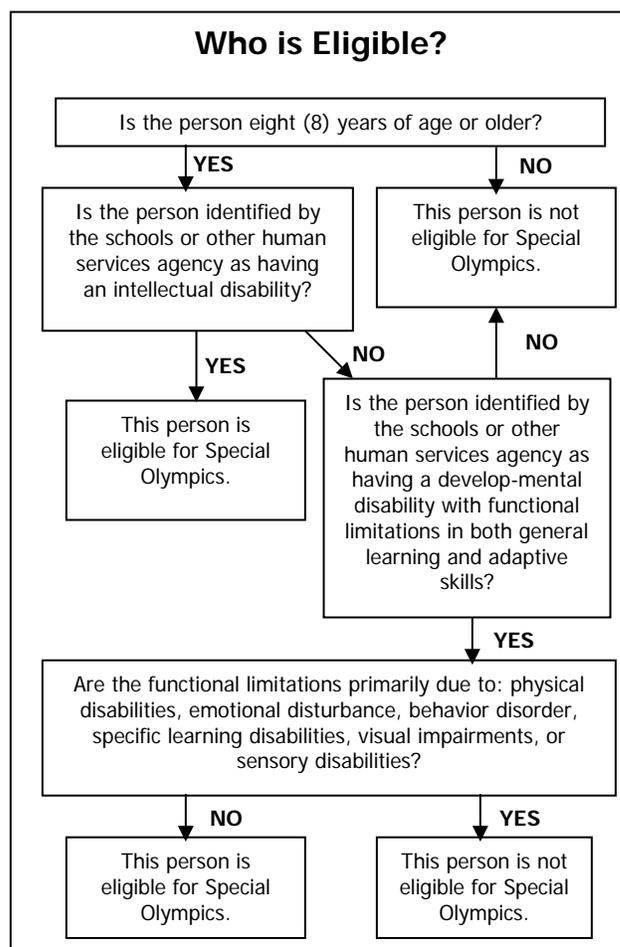
Participation in Special Olympics is open to all persons with intellectual disabilities regardless of the level or degree of that person's disability, and whether or not that person also has other mental or physical disabilities.

A person is considered to have intellectual disabilities (for the purposes of determining eligibility for Special Olympics participation) if that person meets any **one** of the following requirements:

- The person has been identified by an agency or professional as having intellectual disabilities as determined by their localities;
- The person has a cognitive delay, as determined by standardized measures such as intelligent quotient or "IQ" testing or other measures, which are generally accepted within the professional community in the U.S. as being a reliable measurement of the existence of a cognitive delay.

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.

One of Special Olympics' founding principles is that "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 in accordance with uniform worldwide standards."



A person who does not meet the eligibility standards may participate as a Unified Partner during competition.

Athlete Enrollment Kit

This kit describes the steps that one would take to be involved in Special Olympics. Specific answers to questions that parents or guardians may have are included. Information on the proper forms and who to contact are also part of the package. Areas should include an area fact sheet and/or a calendar when sending the enrollment kit.

Young Athletes™

Young Athletes™ is an early childhood sports play program for children ages 2-7 with intellectual disabilities and their peers, which includes games, songs and other fun activities. The benefits to this program have been proven worldwide. First and foremost, these activities help children improve physically, cognitively and socially. This program also raises awareness of the Special Olympics program and serves as an introduction to the resources and support available within Special Olympics Michigan.

This program is designed to address two specific levels of play. Level 1 includes physical activities focused on developing fundamental motor tracking and eye-hand coordination. Level 2 concentrates on the application of these physical activities through a sports skills activity program and developing skills consistent with Special Olympics sports play. The activities will consist of foundational skills, walking & running, balance & jumping, trapping & catching, throwing, striking, kicking and advanced skills. See pg. 170 for more information.

Athlete Code of Conduct

The Athlete Code of Conduct is outlined as follows. This Code of Conduct is available from the state office as a form for athletes to sign. Each athlete signs the Code of Conduct along with a parent/guardian or witness. It is required that athletes are instructed by their coaches before each season on the code of conduct and the coach has them sign the form. Coaches should turn all forms into the Area Director after each season.

Special Olympics Michigan adheres to the highest ideals of sport in the tradition of the Olympic movement. The Special Olympics Oath, "Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt," represents the ideal of competition that every Special Olympics athlete tries to achieve.

I understand that my participation in Special Olympics is a call to excellence for me to train and compete in ways that bring honor to me, my family and to Special Olympics. I pledge to uphold the spirit of this Code of Conduct, which is only a general guide for my conduct and does not describe all types of good behavior and bad behavior. If I do not obey this Code of Conduct, my Program or a Games Organizing Committee may suspend me from Special Olympics either temporarily or permanently. If I am suspended from Special Olympics, I can appeal the decision in accordance with the Special Olympics athlete's appeal process.

I pledge that: Sportsmanship

- I will practice good sportsmanship and act in ways that will bring respect to my coaches, my team, Special Olympics, and me.
- I will not use bad language, such as swearing or insulting other persons, and will not fight with other athletes, coaches, volunteers or staff.
- I will show respect towards my fellow athletes, coaches, and volunteers at all times. I will not make fun of other people or criticize them, but will give them praise and positive recognition.

Training and Competition

- I will train regularly and attend scheduled practices and meet training criteria set by my coaches and area program. I will try my best during training/practices and competitions.

- I will learn and follow the rules of my sport, and I will ask questions when I do not understand.
- I will not hold back in divisioning preliminaries in order to get into an easier heat in the finals.

Personal Responsibility

- I will not make unwanted physical, verbal, or sexual advances on others.
- I will not drink alcohol, smoke in non-smoking areas, or use illegal drugs at Special Olympics' venue sites, and I will not take drugs for the purpose of improving my performance.
- I will obey all facility and venue rules.
- I will obey all federal, state and local laws and Special Olympics rules.
- I will not bully or harass any other person. Harassment or bullying is any gesture or written, verbal, graphic, or physical act (including electronically transmitted acts via internet, cell phone, or electronic communication device) that is reasonably perceived as being motivated either by any sexual or perceived characteristic, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression; or a mental, physical, or sensory disability or impairment; or by any other distinguishing characteristic. Such behavior is considered harassment or bullying whether it takes place on or off the field, at any Special Olympics event, or in a vehicle.
- I will obey and adhere to the guideline of "no swimming" during all SOMI Events. The health and safety of athletes is all-important.

Refer to coach's code of conduct and parent/spectator code of conduct.

Disciplinary Steps for Violating the Athlete Code of Conduct

The progressive disciplinary steps outlined as follows may be taken when an athlete violates the Code of Conduct. A sanctioned area representative may begin the disciplinary process at whichever step is appropriate to the circumstances. The area representative must notify the Area Director of any action that is taken.

Step 1: Verbal warning is given to the athlete and to parent/guardian or caseworker with a written copy of the Incident Form to the Area Director.

Step 2: A written Incident Form must be completed which gives warning to the athlete with a copy to the Area Director and parent/guardian or caseworker.

Step 3: The Area Director conducts a personal meeting with the athlete to review the unacceptable behavior and to agree on a plan for improvement. If the athlete is under 18, or over age 18 and has a guardian, he/ she will be accompanied by a parent/guardian or caseworker. If the athlete is over 18 and has a guardian, he/she may choose to have another adult present. The meeting will be documented in writing and copies distributed to the athlete, Area Director, state office, and parent/guardian or caseworker.

Step 4: The athlete is suspended from practices or competitions for a specific time period (such as fall sports season). The Area Director must be contacted before an athlete is suspended. The Area Director will discuss the circumstances and must approve/ disapprove the action. The action will be documented in writing and distributed to the athlete, parent/guardian or caseworker, and the state office.

Any further action must be referred to the Area Director. The Area Director and program staff responsible for area management will approve any further action to be taken. Further action could be, but is not limited to, suspension for a longer period and permanent expulsion.

Athlete Appeal Process

The athlete has the right to appeal any disciplinary action to the Area Director. The athlete or the athlete's representative must submit a written notice of appeal with a copy to the Area Director and to the President/CEO of Special Olympics Michigan. This notice should include a request for a meeting and should be made within 30 days of being notified of the disciplinary action.

The appeal will be heard by the Area Director, the Director of Field Service or the Chief Program Officer, and the chair from the Program Committee or designee not involved with the situation. A decision must be rendered in writing within 21 days following the meeting and may reverse, amend, or affirm the disciplinary action. The decision shall be submitted to the athlete and the area program. The decision should include, if applicable, a plan of action for the athlete to correct the unacceptable behavior that led to the disciplinary action.

Participation of Athletes with Criminal Records or a History of Violent or Abusive Behavior Procedures

Because of our inclusive philosophy, the issue of how to treat athletes who have been convicted of violent crimes or who engage in violent, abusive or disruptive behavior is particularly sensitive.

Special Olympics Michigan balances the principles of inclusiveness and of providing a safe environment for all athletes, volunteers, and staff members.

It is incompatible with Special Olympics principles to exclude athletes from participation based solely on a criminal conviction or a sexual abuse incident. Special Olympics accepts individuals with intellectual disabilities as they are: Special Olympics Michigan will understand their mental handicap, should applaud and nurture their abilities, and must evaluate each athlete with a criminal record or behavioral problem individually.

No Mandatory Criminal Background Checks of Athletes

Consistent with the above principles, and after consulting with outside risk management experts, SOI is not recommending that programs

conduct criminal background checks of Special Olympics athletes upon entry to Special Olympics. Such checks are not justified by our experience to date and would therefore place an undue financial burden on programs and subject athletes to a review that is not in keeping with the philosophy of Special Olympics. Athletes attending World or National games will be subject to a background check.

An Area Director can request a background check if they suspect an athlete has an issue.

Athletes who apply to volunteer for Special Olympics Michigan, however, will be treated the same as all other volunteer applicants. Therefore, SOMI does a background check on all Class A volunteers

If an individual with intellectual disabilities is rejected as a volunteer, that individual may apply to be an athlete, in which case we will evaluate the individual using the criteria outlined below. Unified Partners will have a background check conducted in order to participate.

A background check will be conducted on an adult Unified Partner to participate.

SOMI will use the criteria or options below to review each case.

When dealing with athletes with violent criminal records or with a history of violent, abusive, or disruptive behavior, Michigan will take into account several factors when determining the severity of an incident and what, if any, action needs to be taken. The criteria established must be applied on a case-by-case basis. At a minimum, the criteria will include the following:

1. **Type of Offense/Incident** - Violent behavior that damages property, while not to be ignored, and will not be accorded to the level of seriousness as behavior that injures or is intended to injure a person, such as a physical assault or sexual assault.
2. **Time of the Offense/Incident Occurred** - A recent offense or incident is of greater concern than one that took place many years ago (assuming no further incidents). SOMI will recognize that an individual can change and merit re-evaluation.
3. **Number of Offenses** - Has the athlete committed multiple offences or incidences of a similar nature, or are there a few isolated incidences?

4. **Athlete Capacity** - Is the athlete high or low functioning? We will determine if the athlete understood his/her conduct at the time of the offence/incident.
5. **Medication** - Was medication a cause of the behavior, either through its omission or its effect on the athlete? Adjustments in medications or protocols could reduce the risk or potential for adverse behaviors.

Options

Depending on the facts, SOMI may immediately move to suspend an athlete or take other action it deems necessary to protect all of its athletes, volunteers, and staff.

1. Allow the Athlete to Participate on a Probationary Basis. This gives the program, the athlete, and the family a chance to review conduct on a systematic basis and to make any changes the program deems necessary. The athlete and the parent/guardian will be informed from the outset that participation is conditional upon continued satisfactory behavior, what the probationary period is, and the system for review.
2. Ensure there is a One-on-One Volunteer to Chaperone the Athlete. In the case of a non-violent athlete, the program may ensure that there is a one-on-one volunteer to chaperone the athlete with a history of sexual abuse. The volunteer must be informed of the athlete's past behavior (without violating any privacy laws) and should be capable of helping the athlete avoid situations that may trigger unacceptable behavior. If the athlete participates as part of a group home or other type of facility, the program may require that home or facility to provide the volunteer.
3. Require the Athlete Attend Counseling or Anger Management Courses. Athletes exhibiting certain types of behavior may respond well to counseling services including anger management, stress reduction, or psychotherapy. Special Olympics Michigan cannot provide these services; however, we can require that the athlete attend such meetings or sessions as a condition of participation.
4. Require the Athlete Attend Counseling or Prohibit Athletes With Histories of Sexual Abuse or Violent Behavior From Overnight Trips. This option is less desirable than assigning a one-on-one volunteer to an

athlete who has previously engaged in inappropriate sexual behavior or violent behavior, but would be appropriate when the risk to others cannot be sufficiently eliminated by a volunteer. When an athlete is found to be listed on the criminal sexual assault registry, a mandatory review of his/her participation will automatically be conducted following the SOMI guidelines already established in paragraph two of the appeals process.

5. Restrict the Sports in Which an Athlete May Compete. Some sports, such as polo hockey and basketball, involve physical contact and emotion that can agitate an athlete to the point that he/she has a violent reaction. One option is to steer the athlete into sports such as track or aquatics with a lower likelihood of physical contact.
6. Suspend the Athlete Temporarily. A temporary suspension for a defined period of time may be the best solution depending on the seriousness of the behavior. The program will make clear to the athlete and parent/guardian what steps must be taken for reinstatement, including when the review will take place, by whom, and what factors will be considered.
7. Expel the Athlete From or Deny Participation in Special Olympics. This is the last, and least desirable option, in as much as it is the harshest for an athlete and is the most likely to lead to litigation. Thus, expulsion or denial of participation must be subject to due process safeguards, including a hearing and right to appeal, in order to protect the athlete and the program.

Liability

Special Olympics Michigan will take reasonable precautions to protect the health, safety, and rights of all who participate in Special Olympics.

Special Olympics Michigan is not obligated by law to permit a potential athlete with a criminal record or a history of violent or abusive behavior to participate. However, if we conclude that the athlete should not participate, the program will be acting prudently within its rights as a Special Olympics Program.

Appeal

An appeal is allowable for athletes who are not allowed to participate based on the findings of Special Olympics Michigan. The athlete or the athlete's representative must submit a written

notice of appeal with a copy to the Area Director and to the President/CEO of Special Olympics Michigan. This notice should request for a meeting and should be made within 30 days of being notified of non-participation of the program.

The appeal will be heard by the Area Director, the Field Service Staff or the Chief Program Officer, and the Chair from the Program Committee or their designee not involved with the situation. A decision must be rendered in writing within 21 days following the meeting and may reverse, amend, or affirm the decision. The decision shall be submitted to the athlete and the area program. The decision should include, if applicable, a plan of action for the athlete to participate in the program without causing harm to others involved in the program.

Application for Participation

Every athlete must submit a valid Application for Participation prior to participation in any Special Olympics activity (including sport practice).

(Sport Season is 8 to 12 weeks prior to the state competition for that sport) Refer to Board policy.

The Application for Participation must be completed by the athlete's parent or legal guardian. (The form can be completed by the applicant if he/she is over 18 years old and is acting as his/her own legal guardian.)

- The Application for Participation must be signed and dated by a licensed physician (M.D. or D.O.), a licensed physician's assistant, or a certified nurse practitioner acting under the supervision and authority of a physician (M.D. or D.O.).
- Of particular importance on the Application for Participation are: the athlete's medical history, the athlete's current physical condition, and the signature with date of the medical personnel who has evaluated the athlete. All questions in the health history section must be filled out completely with explanations given for all "yes" answers. The form will be invalid without this information.
- In addition, if the parent or legal guardian signs the Application for Participation in section C and indicates any restrictions as to medical treatment, media release, use of likeness, etc., then the form is considered invalid. No institution, group home, or individual may sign on behalf of the parent or legal guardian. You must also review the concussion awareness page and sign that you understand.
- The correct form to use is an Application for Participation available on the web site www.somi.org under SOMI center login. A form is valid for three years from the exam date if the forms are properly completed, signed, and dated. If submitting a MHSAA-Michigan High School Athletic Association form, it is only good for one year from the doctor signature date.
- It is highly recommended that an area reviewing authority be used within the area to monitor the completeness and accuracy of the Applications for Participation. For SOMI Culminating Events, the application will be reviewed for completeness and accuracy by a SOMI sports department representative.
- **Note to coaches, families, and caregivers:** Please make sure that the Application for Participation form is completed properly, signed, and dated prior to your

athlete's first training session or practice, otherwise, he/she will not be allowed to participate. This rule is very clearly stated in the Special Olympics General Rules, Section 6.02. Properly-completed forms ensure the safety and wellbeing of your athlete and also protect you.

- All athletes will be treated with dignity and respect regardless of sexual orientation or gender identification or modification. This will be handled on a case by case basis.

Registration of Unified Partners

All unified partners must complete the unified partners and code of conduct form. This form includes elements of the A Volunteer Form, and SOMI will initiate a background check on applicants.

A unified partner is a peer without an intellectual disability. Unified Partner forms will expire every three years.

Unified Partners under the age of 18 need to be included in the 4 to 1 ratio.

Participation by Individuals with Down syndrome who have Atlantoaxial Instability

In light of medical research indicating that up 15% -21% of individuals with Down Syndrome have a mal-alignment of the cervical vertebrae C-1 and C-2 in the neck known as Atlantoaxial instability. The condition may expose athletes to possible injury if they participate in activities that hyper-extend or radically flex the neck or upper spine, SOMI takes the following precautions before permitting athletes with Down syndrome to participate in certain physical activities:

1. Athletes with Down Syndrome may participate in most Special Olympics sports training and competition, but shall not be permitted to participate in any activities which, by their nature, result in hyper-extension, radical flexion, or direct pressure on the neck or upper spine unless the requirements of the following (2) below and (3) are satisfied. Such activities include: butterfly stroke and diving starts in swimming, pentathlon, high jump, squat lifts, equestrian sports, artistic gymnastics, soccer, alpine skiing, snowboarding, and any warm-up exercise placing undue stress on the head and neck.

2. An athlete with Down Syndrome may be permitted to participate in the activities described in (1) above if that athlete is examined (including x-ray views of full extension and flexion of neck) by a physician who has been briefed on the nature of the Atlantoaxial instability condition and who determines that the athlete does not have an Atlantoaxial instability condition.
3. An athlete with Down Syndrome who has been diagnosed by a physician as having an Atlantoaxial instability condition may be permitted to participate in the activities described in (section 1) to the left, if the athlete, or the parent or guardian of a minor athlete, confirms in writing his or her decision to proceed with these activities notwithstanding the risks created by the Atlantoaxial instability. Two licensed medical professionals must certify in writing that they have explained these risks to the athlete and his/her parent or guardian, and that the athlete's condition does not, in their judgment, preclude the athlete from participating in Special Olympics.

These statements and certifications shall be documented and provided to SOMI using the standardized form developed by Special Olympics, Inc. entitled "Special Release for Athletes with Atlantoaxial Instability."

Religious Objection

Special Olympics respects the religious beliefs of all its athletes. Our standard application form normally requires each athlete (or his/her parent, if the athlete is a minor) to give Special Olympics permission to arrange for emergency medical treatment, including hospitalization, for any athlete if a medical emergency arises during his/her participation in Special Olympics under circumstances in which neither the athlete nor his/her parent is available to consent to that emergency treatment. If there are religious objections to approving that provision a religious objection form needs to be completed and put on file at the state office. The Emergency Medical Care Refusal Form can be found in the SOMI website.

NO RECREATIONAL SWIM RULE

Recreational swim is not allowed at any event for Special Olympic Athletes and Unified Partners. The health and safety of athletes is all-important.

Athlete Leaders (AL)

Through sports training and competitions, Special Olympics helps people with intellectual disabilities (ID) achieve joy, acceptance and success. They gain the confidence that comes with achievement. They feel empowered. Athletes lead the way as the voices of the movement, educating the world about the potential of people with ID and driving the Special Olympics movement forward with their insights and contributions.

As Special Olympics athletes gain in confidence and feel empowered, they often seek new challenges. They want to build on their successes, including their social skills.

They can become mentors for other athletes. They can train to become coaches and officials. They can also move toward a more public role as a speaker or spokesperson, tell audiences and journalists about the remarkable changes that Special Olympics helped bring to their lives. Special Olympics Athlete Leadership allows athletes to explore opportunities for greater participation in our movement beyond sports training and competition: as coaches, officials, spokespeople and Board and committee members.

These roles give athletes a voice in shaping the Special Olympics movement, and a chance to spread the work about the transformations Special Olympics can bring to individuals and families. Athlete Leadership also provides a way for athletes to showcase talents and interests that may have gone unnoticed, such as public speaking.

Inclusion Starts with Athlete Leaders

Athlete Leaders empowers people with intellectual disabilities to develop their skills and undertake meaningful roles in their communities.

Roles for Athletes

Input Council Member

You can improve your local program by making suggestions and discussing problems. Find out if your local program or area has an Input Council and become a participating member! YOUR INPUT IS VALUABLE AND IS NEEDED!

Athletes as Global Messengers

Do you like to talk? You can be trained by Special Olympics Michigan in presentation skills to become an expert speaker. We'll even teach you to use PowerPoint to give presentations to

schools, community groups, parents, churches. GIVE A TALK & GET NEW PEOPLE INVOLVED IN SPECIAL OLYMPICS!

Athletes as Coaches

You can become a coach or assistant coach if that is your dream! You will need to make a commitment to attend certification training by the Program office then apply your training. There are many Special Olympics athletes who have become coaches. BECOME A COACH IF THAT IS YOUR DREAM!

Athletes as Officials

You can become an official if that is your dream! Special Olympics will provide athletes information so they can participate in sport National Governing Body certification programs as an official or other skilled sport personnel. Athletes who have become certified officials have served in that capacity at Local, State, Provincial, National, Regional and World Games. BECOME AN OFFICIAL IF THAT IS YOUR DREAM!

Athletes on Subprogram and Program Committees or Boards of Directors

You can become a representative of athletes on these very important groups. Training is provided to prepare athletes to participate in Special Olympics programming and policy meetings. Training focuses on awareness and listening skills and reading financial reports. Many Programs have had several athletes on its Board of Directors and others have held key leadership positions in the state. BECOME A COMMITTEE MEMBER; MAKE IMPORTANT DECISIONS!

Handbook for Athlete Leaders

For complete details on Athlete Leaders procedures and policies, see the Handbook for Athlete Leaders found on the somi.org website under Resources, Athlete Leaders Handbook.

For more information on the Athlete Leaders, contact the Director of Field Services at b.laughlin@cmich.edu

