



Special Olympics

Rhode Island

Be a fan™

Dear Volunteer,

Special Olympics Rhode Island is a volunteer-run organization and without the help of volunteers like you, we would not be able to provide year-round sports training and competition for more than 2,700 athletes across the state of Rhode Island. Thank you for volunteering!

Every year, Special Olympics athletes and coaches train hard in their local program competitions to qualify to compete in SORI state-level events.

This volunteer handbook will give you some basic information about Special Olympics Rhode Island as well as information about volunteering and working with athletes. You will be trained in your specific job during your orientation. Please do not hesitate to ask questions or call the SORI office if you have comments or concerns.

Again, we thank you for giving your time to Special Olympics. Enjoy the experience!

Sincerely,

Dennis DeJesus

Dennis DeJesus
Executive Director
Special Olympics Rhode Island

What is Special Olympics Rhode Island?

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

When did Special Olympics begin?

The concept of Special Olympics began in the early 1960s when Eunice Kennedy Shriver started a day camp for 100 local children with intellectual disabilities at her home in Rockville, Maryland. From that experience, it was clear that these individuals were far more capable in sports and physical activities than many experts believed. In the summer of 1968, Mrs. Shriver organized the first International Special Olympics Games at Soldier Field in Chicago, Illinois. One thousand athletes from the United States and Canada competed. Today there are currently 180 countries and nearly 3 million athletes participating in Special Olympics.

Special Olympics Rhode Island is a private non-profit organization. SORI receives no direct funding from state or federal government agencies, the United Way or the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation, which provided initial funding for Special Olympics in the organization's formative years. SORI relies totally on individual, corporate and foundation contributions to assist in programming needs.

What sports are offered?

Special Olympics Rhode Island offers 25 sports: alpine skiing, aquatics, athletics, ballroom dancing, basketball, bowling, cross country running club, cycling, duck-pin bowling, flag football, golf, nordic skiing, powerlifting, Project Unify – basketball, Project Unify – volleyball, sailing, soccer, softball, tennis, unified bowling, unified soccer, unified volleyball, snowboarding and snowshoeing, SORI also offers a motor activities training program (MATP) for athletes with multiple handicaps and a Young Athletes Program for children ages 2-7.

Who is eligible to participate?

To be eligible to participate in Special Olympics, athletes must be at least 8 years old and identified by an agency or professional as having one of the following conditions: intellectual disabilities, cognitive delays as measured by formal assessment, or significant learning or vocational problems due to cognitive delay that require or have required specially designed instruction. There is no cost to participate in Special Olympics.

What is the definition of intellectual disability?

According to the World Health Organization:

- Intellectual disability is a condition of arrested or incomplete development of the mind characterized by impairment of skills and overall intelligence in areas such as cognition, language, and motor and social abilities.
- Intellectual disability can occur with or without any other physical or mental disorders.
- Although reduced level of intellectual functioning is the characteristic feature of this disorder, the diagnosis is made only if it is associated with a diminished ability to adapt to the daily demands of the normal social environment.

Working with Athletes

- You represent Special Olympics Rhode Island while you perform your assignment as a volunteer. You will be asked to show photo identification upon registration at the event; wear your credential visibly at all times and conduct yourself in a professional manner relating to athletes, other volunteers, families, the general public and the media.
- Remember that people with visible and non-visible disabilities are more alike than different. If you are unsure of how to respond to a person with a disability, ask yourself how you would want someone to treat you. If you follow through, you can't go wrong.
- Please do not try to "train" or "coach" the athletes. They have been training for many weeks for this event and any new terminology could contradict or confuse the coach's instructions. Some well-meaning volunteers could put an athlete at risk of disqualification by providing inappropriate assistance or direction.
- Both children and adults train and compete in Special Olympics. Use the term "athletes" rather than "kids".

- Talk with the athletes in the same way you would to any other person. Use conversational tone, give individual eye contact, and let the person know that you are interested in them. Always assume that the person understands what you are saying.
- Some athletes will be very outgoing, others are shy and reserved. Have patience and respect for them as individuals. All athletes enjoy being congratulated after an event with a “high-five”, handshake, a pat on the back or a hug if initiated by the athlete.
- Volunteers being used as Athlete Event Escorts should take guidance from the athlete’s coach. **Please note that a volunteer is NOT to accompany an athlete away from the competition area, to the locker room or rest room or to another venue unless accompanied by the athlete’s coach.**

You will find that most athletes whom you will meet will be very friendly and will enjoy your attention. Along with fun, we try to encourage behavior that is appropriate to sports events. If you have questions, just remember that behavior that is not appropriate among non-disabled persons is not appropriate among persons with disabilities either. Enjoy the warm interactions that are part of the Special Olympics experience but don’t be afraid to establish limits. As a volunteer, you will want to do everything you can to respect the dignity of the athletes you will meet. Above all, relax and enjoy yourself.

Language Guidelines

Words can open doors to enable persons with intellectual disabilities to lead fuller, more independent lives. Words can also create barriers or stereotypes that are not only demeaning to persons with disabilities, but which also rob them of their individuality. Experts in the field of intellectual disabilities have developed the following language guidelines for use by anyone writing or speaking about persons with intellectual disabilities or closely related developmental disabilities, to ensure that all people are portrayed with individuality and dignity.

Use the following correct terminology:

- A person *has intellectual disabilities*, rather than *is suffering from*, *afflicted with*, or *a victim* of intellectual disabilities. It is preferred terminology not to write or say that a person is “intellectually disabled”. Use “people-first language.” The important point to remember when writing or speaking is to refer to the person first to avoid labeling them by their disability.
- Down Syndrome has replaced “Down’s Syndrome” and Mongoloid.
- A person is “physically challenged or disabled” rather than crippled.
- Someone who is partially sighted is “visually impaired” rather than blind.
- A person is “hearing impaired” rather than deaf or deaf mute.
- A person has a “seizure” rather than a fit.
- A person has a “seizure disorder or epilepsy”, rather than is epileptic.
- Distinguish between adults and children with intellectual disabilities, as older or younger athletes.
- Refer to participants in Special Olympics as *athletes*, not Special Olympians.
- A person “uses a wheelchair” rather than is confined or restricted to a wheelchair.
- Do not use the label “kids” when referring to Special Olympics athletes. Adult athletes are an integral part of the program.
- Do not use the adjective “unfortunate” when talking about people with intellectual disabilities. Disabling conditions do not have to be life defining in a negative way.
- Do not sensationalize the accomplishments of people with intellectual disabilities. While these accomplishments should be recognized and applauded, people in the disability rights movement have tried to make the public aware of the negative impact of referring to the achievements of physically or intellectually challenged people with excessive hyperbole.
- Do not overuse the word “special” when referring to persons with intellectual disabilities. Their accomplishments should not be trivialized by using cute words to describe their efforts.

Policies on Alcohol & Smoking

No alcoholic beverages are allowed at any Special Olympics training or competition events

On behalf of our athletes, coaches and volunteers, we thank you for your cooperation with these important health and safety requirements.

It is the intent of SORI that all people associated with any SORI (local, area or state) event, which involves athletes in training or competition, observe a strict alcohol prohibition.

The policy takes effect the morning of the day athletes are scheduled to arrive at a training or competition and will remain in force until the last athlete departs and/or travel arrangements have been completed.

Since it is impossible to describe every circumstance that might arise, it is expected that each individual, where necessary, will exercise responsible and prudent judgment, keeping in mind the basic intent of this policy.

Athlete Dating Policy

Special Olympics prohibits any volunteer from dating or having a sexual relationship with any Special Olympics athlete. In the event that a Special Olympics organization learns of any dating or sexual relationship, the organization immediately shall require either:

- a. that the staff member or volunteer end his or her association with Special Olympics; or
- b. the association between the volunteer and Special Olympics will be terminated.

Special Olympics respects the rights of athletes to have the full range of human relationships available to other human beings. This policy shall not be interpreted as a limitation on the rights of athletes, but only as a restriction on Special Olympics staff and volunteers.

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SPIRIT **Be a fan of** UNITY
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