

## **Request for Proposals**

Special Olympics Athletes and the World Games Experience:  
The Influence of Coaching, Training, and Competing on a World Stage

### **Background:**

Special Olympics has provided year-round sports training and competition to athletes with intellectual disabilities since its founding in 1968 and has become the largest provider of services to people with intellectual disabilities in the world. Special Olympics now serves 3.2 million athletes in over 170 countries with more than 235 local, accredited Programs (e.g. Special Olympics Spain, Special Olympics Malawi), including a Program in each of the 50 United States. Almost 33,000 local Special Olympics sporting events occur annually with approximately 260,000 coaches supporting athletes during these competitions. Programs conduct competitions at the local and Program (state or national) levels, and in recent years Special Olympics Regions (Africa, Asia Pacific, East Asia, Europe/Eurasia, Latin America, Middle East/North Africa, and North America) have begun holding Regional-level events.

Special Olympics World Games also occur every two years, alternating between Summer and Winter Games, giving athletes from all Regions the opportunity to compete against each other. For many, World Games are a culmination of the Special Olympics experience as athletes have the opportunity to travel to represent their countries and compete against other athletes from countries all over the world. The next World Games will take place from June 25 to July 4, 2011 in Athens, Greece, and it is expected that 7,200 Special Olympics athletes with 2,500 coaches from 185 countries will compete in 22 sports at this event. These athletes will include Special Olympics athletes of all ability levels. For all Special Olympics competitions, including World Games, athletes and teams are assigned a competition division based primarily on their ability level, and selections for advancement to World Games are made within each division with priority given to top finishers from previous events within that division. For the advancement of coaches to World Games, Programs are encouraged to develop selection criteria based on certification, technical background, and practical experience that will enhance the competitive experience for Special Olympics athletes. More information on rules for divisions and athlete and coach selection for World Games can be found within Article 1 of the Special Olympics Sports Rules Book ([http://www.specialolympics.org/uploadedFiles/09\\_article\\_1.pdf](http://www.specialolympics.org/uploadedFiles/09_article_1.pdf)).

A number of research studies have been conducted involving Special Olympics and its athletes. Existing literature includes examinations of athlete demographics and characteristics (Siperstein, Hardman, Harada, Parker, & McGuire, 2005), athletes' motivations for participation (Harada & Siperstein, 2009), and Special Olympics' impact on athletes, families, and communities (Dykens & Cohen, 1996; Shapiro 2003; Farrell et al. 2004; Widaman & Siperstein, 2005). Studies have found that Special Olympics athletes tend to be motivated by factors similar to other athletes; factors include personal enjoyment, opportunities for social interaction, building confidence, achievement, health,

and competition. Meanwhile, studies examining the impact of participating in Special Olympics on athletes found positive effects. For example, research shows that approximately 94% of Special Olympics athletes experience an improvement in sports skills, and more than 90% of Special Olympics athletes benefited from increased self-esteem and self confidence after participating (*Serving Athletes, Families and the Community. The Universal Impact of Special Olympics: Challenging the Barriers for People with Intellectual Disability*<sup>1</sup>). These research studies also found that Special Olympics has a positive impact on both families and communities. For example, parents reported that Special Olympics had a positive impact on their perceptions of their child, as well as of people with intellectual disabilities in general. There is very limited data from these studies, however, that speaks to the role of the coach in the Special Olympics experience. For instance, there is limited data on how coaching philosophy, background, or training techniques may enhance the experience for athletes.

Despite this gap in the literature on the role of the coach for athletes with disabilities, significant literature exists on coaching for athletes without disabilities. The field has explored coach characteristics and behaviors, as well as athlete and team outcomes. Examples of coaching characteristics/behaviors examined in the literature are leadership style (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980; Gilbert and Trudel, 2004), autonomy-supportive strategies (Conroy & Coatsworth, 2007), and sense of efficacy (Feltz, Chase, Moritz, & Sullivan, 1999). Researchers also have worked to understand how coaches learn to coach, as well as what experiences are the most important to have in order to gain coaching expertise (Trudel & Gilbert, 2006; Werthner & Trudel, 2006). The literature also includes examples of both athlete and team outcomes, such as self-esteem (Coatsworth & Conroy, 2009), team cohesion (Shields & Gardner, 1997), and fun (Smoll, Smith, Barnett, & Everett, 1993).

While there is some existing literature on Special Olympics and significant literature on coaching for athletes without disabilities, there is a noticeable gap when looking at the crucial role of coaches of sports for athletes with disabilities, including in Special Olympics. This project, therefore, will study the role and impact of the coach in the Special Olympics World Games experience.

### **Goals of this Project:**

To better understand the role and impact of the coach in the Special Olympics World Games experience, this project aims to:

- a. Gain an understanding of the World Games experience for Special Olympics athletes.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.specialolympics.org/research\\_studies.aspx](http://www.specialolympics.org/research_studies.aspx)

- b. Elucidate the role of coaches in athletes' World Games experience, including their role during selection, training, and competition.
- c. Expand the knowledgebase in the field of sports and coaching to include research with athletes with disabilities.

### **Research Questions:**

The proposed research should examine the impact of coaching on athletes by focusing on one or more of the following questions:

- a. What is the World Games experience for Special Olympics athletes, from selection to competition? What sort of relationships develop between coach and player and/or among teammates?
- b. How, and to what extent, does participation in the World Games impact an athlete, not only involving sports skills but also social, motivational, health, and/or behavioral outcomes? What do athletes gain from the World Games? Are there certain characteristics (e.g. skill level, functioning level, etc.) of the athletes or teams that play a role in the breadth and depth of impact?
- c. What is it about the World Games experience (e.g. being away from home, representing one's country, media exposure, cultural awareness, etc) that can lead to a discernable impact on athletes and/or teams?
- d. What is the role of the coach in moderating the influence of the World Games? Do certain characteristics of coaching behavior and leadership style influence athletes' experiences? How does a coach's approach to training and competition affect the World Games experience for an athlete?

### **Project Design:**

Selection of Delegations<sup>2</sup> to attend World Games will start in May 2010 and go through December 2010; timing will depend on the delegation. This study will follow select delegations from the point of selection for World Games through training for and competition in Athens. It is suggested that 3-6 delegations be selected, but this number may vary depending on the study design. **As the host of the World Games, Greece must be one of the delegations selected.** Factors, such as type of sport, different competition divisions, and delegation size, should be considered when selecting delegations.

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<sup>2</sup> Delegations represent athletes competing on behalf of a single country, for example Team USA or the Greek Delegation. Within a delegation, there may be several teams, e.g. SO Kenya may have a gymnastics team, a football team, and an Aquatics team at the Games. Applicants are not required to follow all teams within a delegation.

It is likely that additional data on coaches will be intramurally collected by SOI at 2010 Regional events while this RFP is out to bid. These data will be shared with the awarded researcher(s) and hopefully will help inform the study.

**Design considerations:**

There are several places where variability will be introduced, such as -

- Cultural differences
- Type of sport (team or individual; timed or judged)
- Division / skill level
- Coaches' past experiences
- Athletes' past experiences
- Size of delegation
- Gender and Age

**Grant Amount:** One grant award will be made for no more than \$175,000. The duration of the project will be 18 months and the grant will be a one-time award that may be used for all federally allowable and reasonable costs directly related to the project. The PI on this project will be asked to present preliminary findings one year into the project at the 2011 World Games in Athens. A final report will not be due until after the Games, at the conclusion of the project, when all data have been collected and analyzed. As per Special Olympics International's longstanding policy, no indirect costs may be covered by this grant. Monies can be used to sub-contract or partner with local universities to help with data collection efforts.

**Eligibility for Grant:** Applicants must have a faculty appointment at an accredited U.S. or international University, or serve in a senior research position within a nonprofit/NGO. Ideal applicants will have expertise in issues related to sports and/or disability and the skills, knowledge, and resources to carry out this multi-national project.

**Deadline:** Those applicants interested in submitting a proposal should send it in by April 2, 2010 to:

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**Criteria for Award:** Interested applicants will be required to submit a proposal responsive to the above RFP. This proposal must include the following:

- I. Cover letter
- II. Cover page which contains the following:
  - a. Title of Project

- b. Name, address, telephone number, and email address of the applicant
- c. Total funding amount request
- III. Detailed Project Description
  - a. Description of overall project objectives
  - b. Description of design, approach, and timeline for project
  - c. Plan for data analysis
  - d. Management plan (including project staffing and roles, plan for coordinating with Special Olympics or other stakeholders)
  - e. Description of available resources (such as support from applicant organization and demonstrated commitment of prospective partners)
- IV. Qualifications of the PI (include CV)
- V. Budget Narrative
- VI. Budget Sheet

The proposals will be reviewed by a team of external faculty peer reviewers with relevant expertise for this project. Proposals should be no more than 20 pages (CV not included in page count), 1.5 spaced.

Criteria in selection grantee will be the soundness of the project design and implementation plan, responsiveness of the proposal to the goals and research questions stated in this RFP, the qualifications of the PI, and the reliability of its outcomes assessment protocol. Strong proposals will provide a literature review and a conceptual model relevant to the research questions, will build on previous related work by the PI, will reflect an awareness of Special Olympics, and will contain a sufficient and realistic management plan. Maximizing geographic diversity in selected delegations is desirable, within the constraints posed by the budget, timeline and design. The awarded Project will require review by the applicants' Institutional Review Board and will be subject to their approval.

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**For further information or questions:**

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