**Program Quality Standards:**

**Family Engagement Guidance**

**STRATEGIC PLAN GUIDANCE: E4.4**

This resource provides step-by-step guidance and best practices for building and maintaining quality family engagement initiatives. The information in this resource is aligned with the family engagement stages found in the Special Olympics Program Quality Standards and will support Programs in advancing their family engagement strategy from one stage to the next.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **1. Understanding the Program Quality Standards (PQS)** |
|  |  |
|  |  |  | **What are the Program Quality Standards?**The Program Quality Standards (PQS) are a tool to help Programs develop and increase quality of programmatic areas and overall operations. They help Programs identify what to focus on to keep moving forward. |
|  |  |  | **Who should use them?**The PQS help Program Leaders understand, manage, and support Special Olympics programmatic areas and deliver them at high standards. National Directors, CEOs and Program Boards should use the PQS for planning and developing their Programs. The PQS are also useful for working with sub-Programs, athletes, family, and youth committees. Each set of standards has 3 stages so they can be relevant for all types of Programs from small to large, new to mature, and from Programs lacking resources to those that are well- resourced. |
|  |  |  | **Are they required?** PQS is now an accreditation requirement. |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  | **Link to PQS**https://resources.specialolympics.org/governance/Program-quality-standards | QR code for Program Quality Standards |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  | **FAMILY ENGAGEMENT** |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  | **STAGE 1**Program collects basic information on families and provides at least one education opportunity for families annually. |  |  |  |
|  | **STAGE 2**Program communicates with families regularly and has a formal family engagement structure to get input. At least three education or networking opportunities are provided for families each year. | **STAGE 3**Family members serve in leadership roles at all levels within the Program. Program provides a year-round schedule of educational and networking opportunities for families. |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **2. Family Engagement Guidance: Moving to the Next Stage** |
|  |  |
|  | **How to use this guide** |
|  |  |
|  |  |  | **Step 1**Review each stage and determine what stage your Program is currently in. |  |
|  |  |  | **Step 2** Once you have determined what stage you are in, follow the steps provided to successfully move from your current stage to the next stage of family engagement. Refer to sections 3-8 of this guide to find additional guidance and ideas on how you can progress through each stage.  |  |
|  |  |  | **Step 3**As your Program progresses from stage to stage, be sure to continually assess your ability to sustain the stage you are in and your readiness to progress to the next stage. |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  | **TIP** |  |
|  |  | Implement family engagement activities into programmatic areas where your Program is already seeing success. Family engagement is most effective when initiatives are implemented into current programming.**Example:** If your Program has strong school engagement, brainstorm strategies to add family engagement into school programming. |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  | **STAGE 0** |  |
|  |  |  | Program does not currently have a family engagement structure, strategy, or goals and does not host family events or collect family contact information. |  |
|  |  |  | **Steps to Stage 1:*** Determine how and where your Program will collect family contact information.
* Begin collecting family contact information at events and competitions.
* Identify one educational opportunity on your calendar and include families in this opportunity. (example: athlete leadership training or coaches training). If no current educational opportunity is available, plan and host a family workshop or other educational opportunity (see section 6 for more ideas).
* Use your family contact list to recruit families to attend the event.
 |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  | **Stage 1 accomplished! Congratulations! You have moved from stage 0 to stage 1.** |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  | **STAGE 1** |  |
|  |  |  | Program collects basic information on families and provides at least one education opportunity for families annually. |  |
|  |  |  | **Steps to Stage 2:*** Maintain stage 1 progress.
* Create a formal family structure for your Program. Detailed guidance on this can be found in section 3.
* Establish regular updates, newsletters, emails, or WhatsApp communication to inform families about upcoming events, progress, and opportunities for involvement.
* Update your Program’s website or social media account to include family information. Be sure to include the contact information for the person overseeing family engagement in your Program.
* Identify three educational or networking opportunities on your calendar and include families in these opportunities. (example: Athlete Leadership training, coaches training, Unified Schools event). If no current opportunities are available, plan and host a family or sibling workshop, family outing, or family support groups (see section 4 for more ideas).
 |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  | **Stage 2 accomplished! Congratulations! You have moved from stage 1 to stage 2.** |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  | **STAGE 2** |  |
|  |  |  | Program communicates with families regularly, has a formal family engagement structure get input. At least 3 education or networking opportunities are provided for families each year. |  |
|  |  |  | **Steps to Stage 3:*** Maintain stage 2 progress.
* Identify leadership roles for family members within your Program (examples: Event leader, staff, council member).
* Create a schedule for year-round programming for Family Engagement. Refer to section 6 for family engagement ideas. Be sure to think strategically and incorporate family engagement into areas of work that your Program is successful in already. This will increase sustainability and effectiveness.
 |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  | **Stage 3 accomplished! Congratulations! You have moved from stage 2 to stage 3.** |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  | **STAGE 3** |  |
|  |  |  | Family members serve in leadership roles at all levels within the Program. Program provides a year-round schedule of education and networking opportunities for families. |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **3. How to Create a Family Engagement Structure** |
|  |  |  |
|  | A family engagement structure is the intentional framework and strategies used to involve or collaborate with Special Olympics families. |
|  |  |
|  | Here is a 4-step process to help your Program create a family engagement structure: |
|  |  |
|  |  | 1 | **IDENTIFY** a Family Coordinator to oversee family engagement for your Program. This should be the role of a staff member, Family Leader, or dedicated volunteer. |  |
|  |  | 2 | **ESTABLISH** a local Family Leadership Council to support family engagement strategies and events. |  |
|  |  | 3 | **TRAIN** Family Leaders. |  |
|  |  | 4 | **IMPLEMENT** your family engagement strategy. |  |
|  |  |  |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **4. Training and Engaging Family Leaders** |
|  |  |
|  |  | **Goal of a Family Leader** |
|  |  | The primary goal of a Family Leader is to work with local Programs to foster a supportive and inclusive community for Special Olympics families by creating a network where families can share experiences, access resources, and actively contribute to the success of Special Olympics Programs. Family Leaders play a crucial role in enhancing communication, collaboration, and engagement among Special Olympics families.  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  | **Benefit of Having Family Leaders in Local Programs** |
|  |  | Family Leaders increase family engagement in their local Special Olympics Program, which supports the growth of local Programs and an increase in athlete participation. |
|  |  |  |
|  |  | **Core Roles and Responsibilities of a Family Leader** |
|  |  |  |
|  |  | **Understand Local Program Structure and Goals** | Family Leaders should work closely with their local Program to understand the goals and structure of the Program. This ensures everyone is in alignment and supporting the same strategy and mission. |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  | **Family Support** | Offer support to families by providing information, resources, and guidance on Special Olympics involvement and other community services. |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  | **Program Support** | As a trained Family Leader, work with your Program to determine if there is a need that you have the time and expertise to fill. |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  | **Feedback Collection** | Collect feedback from families and ensure their voices are represented in discussions and decision-making processes. Depending on your Program’s family engagement structure, this information can be given to your Program’s Family Coordinator or Family Leadership Council. |
|  |  |  |
|  |  | **Note:** Family Leader Training curriculum will be available on the Special Olympics family resources page in 2024. |
|  |  |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **5. Creating a Family Leadership Council** |
|  |  |
|  | The purpose of a Special Olympics Family Leadership Council (FLC) is to: |
|  |  |
|  |  | 1 | Be the voice of Special Olympics family members in your Program. |  |
|  |  | 2 | Serve Special Olympics family members. |  |
|  |  | 3 | Develop family engagement strategies. |  |
|  |  | 4 | Provide feedback on family engagement initiatives. |  |
|  |  | 5 | Promote family engagement. |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  | **TIPS TO CONSIDER** |  |
|  | * Recruit a diverse group of 5-10 dedicated family members to be on this council.
* Try to include at least 1 sibling representative on the council.
* Create an in-person or virtual meeting schedule.
* Create a term limit for the council members. We suggest a 2-year term limit.
* Create goals and objectives for the council.
* Appoint a paid or volunteer staff to oversee the council.
 |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  | **Potential Committee Member Roles and Role Descriptions:** |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  | **Chairperson** | * Leads all FLC meetings.
* Communicates regularly with the Vice Chairperson on issues related to the FLC.
* Creates meeting agendas based on collected feedback from other members.
* Helps ensure FLC actions are in line with Program strategies.
* Performs other responsibilities as assigned by the FLC.
 |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  | **Vice Chairperson** | * Performs Chairpersons responsibilities when Chairperson is not available.
* Communicates regularly with the Chairperson.
* Assists in the creation of meeting agendas.
* Performs other responsibilities as assigned by the FLC.
 |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  | **Council Member** | * Regularly attends committee meetings.
* Propose ideas to improve family engagement efforts.
* Be proactively involved locally to promote family engagement initiatives.
* Makes commitment to participate actively in committee work.
* Gathers feedback from peers and communicates this to the council.
* Provides feedback and suggestions on meeting agenda.
* Accepts assignments set by the FLC and completes them on time.
* Reviews and comments on minutes and reports.
* Performs other responsibilities as assigned by the FLC
 |
|  |  |
|  |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **6. Family Engagement Ideas** |
|  |  |
|  | * **Family Health**
 |
|  |  |
|  | * Host a Family Health Forum.
* Train family members as Young Athletes Coaches.
* Organize Family Fitness Challenges that can be done at home.
 |
|  |  |
|  | * **Sport**
 |
|  |  |
|  | * Host Family Sports Days specifically designed for families to participate alongside their athletes. This could include modified sports activities suitable for all abilities. Emphasize the importance of physical activity for the whole family.
* Provide keepsake items to families at competitions (buttons, family ribbons, magnets).
* Educate coaches on how to properly engage families at practices and competitions.
* Plan a family meeting (in-person, phone, or virtual) at the beginning of sports seasons to answer any frequently asked questions.
 |
|  |  |
|  | * **School**
 |
|  |  |
|  | * Organize school-wide events that celebrate inclusion and diversity, where Special Olympics families are invited and feel welcome.
* Host inclusive sports days, cultural festivals, or talent shows that involve all students and families, including those with intellectual disabilities (ID).
* Encourage regular communication between teachers and Special Olympics families. This can include regular parent-teacher conferences, emails, or a communication platform where updates and progress can be shared.
* Offer workshops to teachers and coaches on effective communication and collaboration with Special Olympics families.
* Establish a family resource center within the school where Special Olympics families can access information, resources, and support. Include materials on educational strategies, community services, and upcoming Special Olympics events.
* Work with schools to conduct workshops for families of students with ID on topics such as navigating the education system, advocating for their child, and accessing support services. Collaborate with local organizations and professionals to provide valuable information.
* Feature Special Olympics athlete success stories in school newsletters, on bulletin boards, or during school assemblies to inspire and motivate new and existing families.
 |
|  |  |
|  | * **General**
 |
|  |  |
|  | * **Recognition and Celebrations:** Celebrate not only the achievements of the athletes but also the efforts of the families. Host recognition events to honor their commitment and support. Acknowledge milestones and progress made by athletes and their families.
* **Buddy System:** Implement a buddy system where experienced Special Olympics families mentor and support newer families. This can create a sense of community and provide a valuable support network.
* **Host workshops for siblings:** Conduct workshops specifically for siblings of athletes, addressing their unique experiences and providing tools to navigate challenges. Create a space where siblings can connect with others who share similar experiences.
* **Family Volunteer Opportunities:** Encourage families to volunteer together at Special Olympics events or in the community. This not only strengthens the bond among family members but also contributes to the larger Special Olympics community.
* **Storytelling and Media:** Share success stories of Special Olympics families through newsletters, blogs, or local media. Highlighting diverse stories can inspire and connect families who may be facing similar challenges.
* **Family Events:** Organize regular family events where families can come together in a relaxed and fun setting. This could be a picnic, a sports day, or a themed party. Include activities that cater to various abilities and interests to ensure everyone feels included.
* **Parent Support Groups:** Establish a support group for parents and caregivers. This can provide a platform for sharing experiences, advice, and resources. Invite guest speakers, such as professionals in the field of special education or sports, to share insights.
* **Online Communities:** Create an online platform or social media group where families can connect, share stories, and offer support to one another. Facilitate discussions around specific topics, such as training tips, managing stress, or celebrating achievements.
* Establish a family registration form to collect family information.
* Establish a local Family Leadership Council:

**Recommended Responsibilities of Council Members (to be approved by Program leadership):*** + Support Program family engagement goals and objectives.
	+ Encourage families to be more involved in Special Olympics
	+ Create and disseminate family resources.
	+ Work with athlete leaders to recruit more families and athletes.
	+ Develop a Family Recognition Program.
	+ Disseminate local competition information to families.
	+ Arrange a registration/hospitality area for families at local competitions.
	+ Offer special activities for family members attending area competitions.
	+ Support planning of Family Health Forums.
	+ Establish a calendar of events for family members.
	+ Create and run family-focused events.
* Host a yearly New Family Orientation meeting or webinar to welcome new families to the Movement.
* Create an E-library: Staff, volunteers and families can access this library and share Special Olympics photos, best practices, and success stories.
* Create a group for families on a messaging platform such as WhatsApp to connect with one another.
* Have a “frequently asked questions” section on your website or social media.
* Train families as leaders.
* Family representation on advisory boards or committees.
* Create a family engagement structure in your local Program.
* Host Parent and Caregiver Workshops.

**Topic Ideas:*** + Estate Planning
	+ Creating a will
	+ Athlete rights
	+ Education
	+ CRPD
	+ Sibling engagement
 |
|  |  |
|  | * **Resources**
 |
|  |  |
|  | * <https://resources.specialolympics.org/community-building/families>
 |
|  |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **7. Volunteer Pathways** |
|  |  |
|  | **Parents, Caregivers & Siblings** |
|  | Special Olympics offers the perfect platform to become an engaged sibling, parent or caregiver! Explore some options below. |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  | **Parent and Caregiver Pathway** |  |
|  |  | Parent and Caregiver Pathway |  |
|  |  | **Support:** |  |
|  |  | * Cheer on your athlete at practices and competitions.
* Take time to meet your athlete's coach, ask questions, and learn about Special Olympics.
 |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  | a | **Volunteer:** |  |
|  |  | * Volunteer at local Special Olympics events.
* Assist with health screenings and education at Healthy Athletes® events.
* Officiate at Special Olympics sporting events.
 |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  | **Participate:** |  |
|  |  | * Participate in or lead a Young Athletes Program for children ages 2-7.
* Be a Unified Sports® partner with your athlete.
* Become a Special Olympics coach.
* Use your expertise to support your local Special Olympics office (ex: media, IT, graphic design, fundraising, etc.).
* Attend or support the planning of a Family Health Forum.
* Become a Healthy Athletes® Clinical Director.
 |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  | **Get Fit:** |  |
|  |  | * Join a Unified Fitness Club to get fit with athletes and supporters.
* Compete in the 6-week Fit Families challenge.
* Join SOfit, an 8-week Unified Program that teaches fitness and holistic wellness.
 |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  | **Connect:** |  |
|  |  | * Join or initiate a Special Olympics Family Support Networks to share ideas and experiences with other siblings and family members.
 |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  | **Advocate:** |  |
|  |  | * Spread inclusion in your community as a trained Family Leader.
* Become a Special Olympics Program leader.
* Work with your Special Olympics Program leadership to advocate to governments for inclusive education.
 |  |
|  |  |  |  |

**Sibling Pathway**

Sibling Pathway

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | **Support:** |  |
|  |  | * Cheer on your sibling at practices and competitions.
 |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  | a | **Volunteer:** |  |
|  |  | * Volunteer at local Special Olympics events.
* Assist with health screenings and education at Healthy Athletes® events.
* Officiate at Special Olympics sporting events.
 |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  | **Participate:** |  |
|  |  | * Participate in or lead a Young Athletes Program for children ages 2-7.
* Be a Unified Sports® partner with your sibling or other athlete with disabilities.
* Join the Special Olympics club/society/student group at your university.
* Become a Special Olympics coach.
* Attend or support the planning of a Family Health Forum.
 |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  | **Get Fit:** |  |
|  |  | * Join a Unified Fitness Club to get fit with athletes and supporters.
* Compete in the 6-week Fit Families challenge.
* Join SOfit, an 8-week Unified Program that teaches fitness and holistic wellness.
 |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  | **Connect:** |  |
|  |  | * Join or initiate a Special Olympics Family Support Networks to share ideas and experiences with other siblings and family members.
 |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  | **Advocate:** |  |
|  |  | * Spread inclusion in your community as a trained Family Leader.
* Become a Special Olympics Program leader.
 |  |
|  |  |  |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **8. Family Retention Strategies** |
|  |  |
|  | **1** | **Regular Communication**Keep families informed about upcoming events, Program updates, and success stories. Regular communication can be through newsletters, emails, social media, and phone calls. Make sure families feel connected and involved. |
|  |  |
| **2** | **Personalized Engagement**Tailor your interactions to the individual needs and interests of each family. Acknowledge birthdays, achievements, and milestones. A personalized approach demonstrates that you value each family member as a unique contributor to the Special Olympics community. |
|  |  |
| **3** | **Family Feedback and Input**Actively seek input from families regarding their experiences, suggestions, and concerns. Conduct surveys, focus groups, or one-on-one meetings to gather valuable feedback that can help improve Programs and services. |
|  |  |
| **4** | **Recognition and Appreciation**Show gratitude for families' contributions with regular expressions of appreciation. Recognize their efforts through certificates, awards, and public acknowledgments. Highlight their positive impact on athletes and the organization. |

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **5** | **Education and Training**Offer ongoing education and training opportunities for families. These can include workshops on topics like advocacy, understanding intellectual disabilities, communication techniques, and inclusive practices. Empowering families with knowledge enhances their engagement and confidence. |  | **6** | **Social Events**Organize inclusive social events that bring families, athletes, and volunteers together in a relaxed and enjoyable setting. These events foster a sense of belonging and camaraderie among families, promoting lasting relationships. |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **7** | **Clear Roles and Expectations**Provide families with clear expectations of their roles as volunteers or supporters. Transparent communication about their contributions helps them understand their impact and the organization's needs. Local Programs can create a formal family engagement structure to support this concept. |  | **8** | **Flexible Engagement Options**Recognize that families have diverse schedules and commitments. Offer flexible engagement options, allowing them to volunteer in ways that align with their availability and preferences. |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **9** | **Continuous Engagement**Design Programs and events that provide ongoing opportunities for engagement throughout the year. This prevents families from feeling disconnected during off-seasons. Local Programs can create a formal family engagement structure to support this concept. |  | **10** | **Impact Sharing**Regularly share stories and testimonials from athletes and families about the positive impact of Special Olympics on their lives. Hearing about the meaningful changes they experience can motivate families to remain involved. |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **11** | **Empowerment and Leadership**Offer pathways for families to take on leadership roles within the organization. This involvement not only provides them with a sense of ownership but also contributes to the organization's growth. |  | **12** | **Participatory Decision-Making**Involve families in decision-making processes when relevant. Their input can guide the development of Programs, events, and policies, leading to a more inclusive and family-centered approach. |