

# PERFORMANCE STATIONS MANUAL



Special Olympics  
**Health**

MADE  
POSSIBLE BY **Golisano** FOUNDATION



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# Acknowledgements

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## PERFORMANCE STATIONS PILOT PROGRAMS

Special Olympics Botswana

Special Olympics Belize

Special Olympics Connecticut

Special Olympics Florida

Special Olympics Louisiana

Special Olympics Minnesota

Special Olympics Mississippi

Special Olympics New Jersey

Special Olympics New York

Special Olympics South Carolina

Special Olympics Texas

Special Olympics Washington

Special Olympics Wisconsin

Special Olympics Zimbabwe

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# Special Olympics Overview

# Special Olympics and Fitness

## DEFINING FITNESS

Fitness is the state of optimal health and performance through adequate physical activity, nutrition, and hydration. For our athletes to be fit, they must practice healthy habits year-round and across the lifespan. Special Olympics fitness programming and resources empower athletes and their supporters to take charge of their own health and fitness by providing education, social support, opportunities and tools to track progress.


## FITNESS WITHIN SPECIAL OLYMPICS

Physical fitness is a key part of the Special Olympics mission. Good health and physical fitness are essential to sports participation and for overall quality of life. Special Olympics has been working to integrate health and fitness into sports programming as we recognize that individuals with intellectual disabilities are in comparatively poorer health than the general population. As an example, Special Olympics Healthy Athletes data support that our adult athletes are twice as likely to be obese than adults without an intellectual disability. Because of disparities such as this, Special Olympics is directing its attention on health and fitness programming, with the aim of reducing the prevalence of non-communicable diseases in this population.

Fitness creates a renewed focus on athlete performance and inclusion by linking sport and health, providing fitness opportunities and resources, setting higher expectations, enhancing coach education, and activating athlete leaders and fitness expert.

## FITNESS AND IMPROVED HEALTH

Special Olympics is making strides to reduce health disparities. Special Olympics offers several models of year-round fitness programs. Data that we have collected



indicate that fitness programming results in improved health outcomes for SO athletes, ultimately contributing to the reduction of non-communicable diseases. For example, blood pressure screening data indicated that more than 60% of participants had readings that were elevated. After completing fitness programming, 30% of those people had improved blood pressure, including 12% whose readings fell into the range of normal blood pressure. Similarly, participants that experienced improvements were more likely to set a fitness goal, are 10 times more likely to perceive that their health improved, and take an average of 7,000 more steps per week, which is equivalent to approximately 70 minutes of physical activity.

Taken together, this suggests that the improvements in blood pressure represent meaningful changes in health that occur as a result of fitness programming. Beyond demonstrating the impact of our direct programming, we can further our impact on health outcomes as fitness is further ingrained into all touchpoints of our movement, including the competition experience.

## **CONNECTING FITNESS TO SPORT PERFORMANCE**

In addition to the improved health outcomes from engagement in fitness, the connection between fitness and sports performance is clear. The fitness components of endurance, strength, flexibility and balance transcend into all sports. Athletes who have higher levels of fitness may outperform their peers by running faster, throwing farther, and jumping higher. Fitter athletes are also at lower risk of illness and injury which could limit their participation in practices, competitions or entire sports seasons. Healthy lifestyle choices in nutrition and hydration also optimize a player's performance. Special Olympics is committed to providing sports opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities that span from early youth to late adulthood. Fitness can help our athletes to reach their personal best each season and continue their journey in Special Olympics sports for their entire lives.

# Introduction To Performance Stations

## DEFINITION

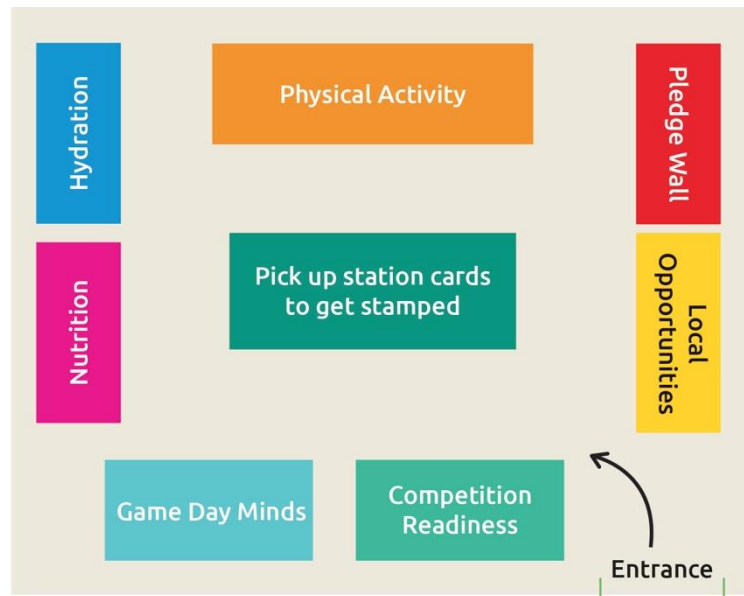
Performance Stations are events held at, or near, the field of play at tournaments/competitions or Games that are designed to educate and activate athletes and their supporters in the tenets of fitness: nutrition, hydration and physical activity. These stations directly connect fitness to sport performance, and show how incorporating these tenets can enhance training, performance at competition, and health.

## GOAL OF PERFORMANCE STATIONS

Performance Station events will remind participants and volunteers that physical fitness is an important part of the mission of Special Olympics. Emphasis should be placed on the athlete and Unified Partner experience, but coaches and parents/caregivers may also gain knowledge and ideas from this event. In addition, Performance Stations will open doors for future fitness opportunities for Special Olympics athletes and their supporters by encouraging volunteers to seek ways of engaging with Special Olympics through fitness (i.e. starting an inclusive fitness class, advocating for inclusive gym and health/wellness centers and facilities, becoming a wellness coach, etc.).

In Performance Stations, participants will engage in the following activities:

- Prepare for their competition at the Competition Readiness Station and Game Day Minds stations.
- Visit the interactive and informative Nutrition, Hydration and Physical Activity stations.
- Write a pledge to make healthier choices through a self-selected fitness goal.



- Receive giveaways that promote fitness (i.e. water bottles, activity trackers, training cards, fruit, etc.).
- Learn about opportunities in their local area to participate in fitness.

Performance Stations also provide an excellent opportunity for volunteer activation, giving more people a chance to be involved with Special Olympics. To administer the Performance Stations well, we suggest that volunteers be assigned to the following positions depending on their interests and experience. Volunteers could involve a wide range of people including professionals in fitness-related fields, students, special guests, athletes, and the general population.

- **Station Captains:** Fitness professionals (i.e. dietitians, exercise professionals, University professors) who help to execute each station on the day of the event. Using their training, the Station Captains will oversee the general volunteers at each station to ensure that they are providing proper education and the appropriate level of support to all participants.



- **General Volunteers:** Individuals with less fitness education/knowledge and/or students can also support the Performance Stations as a General Volunteer. They can guide participants through the Performance Stations, hand out the giveaways, assist with the pledge and take pictures.
- **Athlete Leaders or Health Messengers:** Depending on their training, Athlete Leaders may be able to assist with any of the volunteer roles. Athlete Leaders trained in health and fitness may be able to assist Station Captains or act as a General Volunteer.
- **Sports Star, Local Celebrity, Mascot:** While optional, these special guests may provide encouragement to participants and reinforce fitness messages.

# About Manual

This manual is designed to help Programs and volunteers think through and execute the various components of Performance Stations. Performance Stations were designed with flexibility in mind. Organizers of this event are encouraged to consider the characteristics of their athletes, coaches, supporters and setting, and tailor this event, as needed, so to best spread the culture of fitness.



# Performance Station Logistics

# Special Olympics Program Role

Special Olympics Programs know how to navigate the challenges of running Special Olympics competitions and often have established relationships with organizations that provide space, volunteers, equipment and funding to support high quality events. The Performance Stations model capitalizes on the experience of the Programs by being flexible and enabling the lead organizer to modify the stations to meet the needs of their community. Special Olympics Programs may choose to identify a staff member to plan Performance Stations or recruit a volunteer. Either way, the ideal candidate should have a background in fitness and experience working with Special Olympics athletes.

# Layout

## **TIMING AND SPACE**

On average, it takes about 15-20 minutes for participants to experience all of the Performance Stations. Therefore, try to hold stations at times that will allow participants to properly prepare for and recover from their events. Timing, however, is affected by a number of variables such as number of participants, activities chosen, space constraints and number of volunteers, amongst others. It is important to note that the Competition Readiness Station typically takes the longest, and may cause some congestion as a result. For larger events, it may be beneficial to have additional volunteers and/or multiple Competition Readiness Stations in order to effectively and efficiently manage the flow of participants.

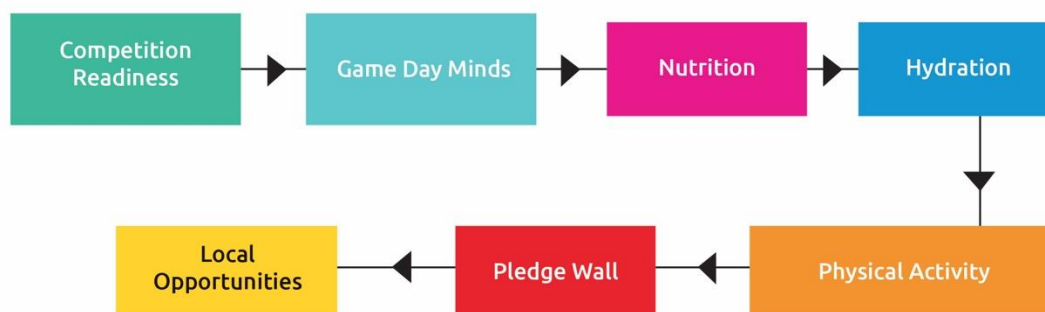
With the exception of the Physical Activity Station, most stations will require at least two standard tables. The Physical Activity Station will likely require an area of at least 25m<sup>2</sup> (270ft<sup>2</sup>). It is important to ensure that you have enough space for all stations, especially Physical Activity. Some participants may be apprehensive about small spaces and/or larger crowds.

As you plan out the number of volunteers you have, expected number of participants, and types of activities, you may decide that you need more room than suggested.

## **SEQUENCE OF STATIONS**

Factors such as space, time, volunteers and event programming may affect how you arrange your stations. Performance Stations are designed to be arranged in a variety of ways. For example, your Program may choose to keep them all at one central location. On the other hand, you may decide that it is best to spread them out throughout your venue in a way that flows with your competition.

While there is flexibility in the model, it is suggested that Performance Stations follow this sequence:




A common adaptation in sequence occurs with the Physical Activity Station. Programs may choose to conduct the Physical Activity Station as a warm-up, cool-down and/or standalone physical activity opportunity, therefore, affecting the sequence of stations for athletes. Additionally, some Programs have found success in combining the Nutrition and Hydration Stations.

## CONNECTING WITHIN YOUR PROGRAM

Performance Stations should feel like a seamless part of the competition, therefore all Program staff and volunteers involved in the competition should understand the goal of the stations and encourage athletes to participate. In addition to the Sports Competition, there may be other events going on at the same time as your Performance Stations (e.g. Healthy Athlete Screenings) that require early planning and preparation.

**Sports Competition:** Performance Stations should be set up near the field of play, thus encouraging the connection between fitness and sport. The Sports Competition team can help identify the location that best flows with each sport. Additionally, Sports Competition can add sport-specific idea to your plan. For large events with multiple sports, it may be beneficial to have multiple Performance Stations in order to ensure all athletes can participate. As such, this team can help coordinate logistics such as space and timing. Finally, the sports team may be in



communication with coaches about what to expect at the competition. Information about Performance Stations should be included to increase interest and enthusiasm of coaches to encourage athletes to spend adequate time at the stations.

**Healthy Athletes:** You may hold Healthy Athletes screenings at your competition as well. As such, additional planning and collaboration will be needed with your Healthy Athletes team in order to ensure that there is appropriate space, volunteers and scheduling for these events, in conjunction with Performance Stations. It is recommended that this collaboration be initiated early, especially if the same team members are responsible for overseeing Performance Stations and Healthy Athletes. Furthermore, holding Performance Stations and Healthy Athletes at a competition offers a unique chance to cross-promote both health focus opportunities. Consider how you might encourage participation in both areas through signage and volunteer training.

**Communications:** It is beneficial to collaborate with your Communications team, as needed, to advertise the Performance Stations prior to the event. Target audiences should not only be the athletes, but coaches and families/caregivers as well. Effective outreach will strengthen buy-in from these stakeholders, particularly if fitness and/or Performance Stations are new to your Program. Similarly, consider developing an external communication plan to current or future donors. While Performance Stations are relatively inexpensive, it may be beneficial for your Program to work with partners to mitigate expenses and recruit volunteers. In developing this relationship, it will be important to share the impact of Performance Stations, and how their contributions will help.

# Volunteers

## VOLUNTEER TYPES

**Station Captains:** The Station Captains help to execute each station on the day of the event. Their commitment may only last the day(s) of the event, but could also involve advance planning, as needed. Using their expertise, the Station Captains will oversee the general volunteers at each station to ensure that they are providing proper education and the appropriate level of support for all participants. Station Captains should be professionals who are knowledgeable in their station domain:

- **Qualifications:** University professor, certified fitness professional with at least B.S. in Exercise Science or another related degree (Exercise Physiology, Kinesiology, Adaptive Physical Education, Health Education, Sports Science, Physiotherapy, Nutrition, etc.).

**General Volunteer:** When possible, volunteers should have knowledge related to the station, and overall health and fitness.

Individuals without fitness education/knowledge, however, can also support the Performance Stations as a General Volunteer.

Responsibilities of the General Volunteer might be to guide

participants through the Performance Stations, distribute giveaways, share information on local opportunities, assist with pledge writing and take photos on the day of the event. These may be students, family members or other community members that are interested in supporting Special





Olympics and are interested in fitness. College and University students are often eager to be a part of these events and they contribute knowledge, support, as well as lots of enthusiasm!

### **Sports Star, Local Celebrity,**

**Mascot:** While optional, these special guests may provide encouragement to participants and have their picture taken at the Pledge Wall.




### **Athlete Leaders or Health**

**Messengers:** Depending on their training, Athlete Leaders or Health Messengers may be able to assist with any of the volunteer roles. Athlete Leaders trained in health and fitness can assist as a Supporting Volunteer, and in some instances may be a Station Captain. Additionally, Athlete Leaders or Health Messengers can help promote and recruit athletes, coaches, families and other supporters to come to Performance Stations. Programs have found success in providing these individuals a role at the Local Opportunities Station, as they are able to share their experiences with fitness and motivate others to join the local fitness programming.

## **VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING**


It is important to have volunteers, particularly Station Captains, in place well in advance of the event. Not only will Station Captains help to organize their station(s) and oversee the General Volunteers, but they might also be helpful in connecting your Special Olympics Program with other fitness professionals that might be willing to join the network of local opportunities. Performance Stations offer a unique opportunity for engagement that is perfect for first time volunteers. Many Special



Olympics Programs have found success working with local universities with students in fitness-focused fields of study like Kinesiology, Exercise Science, or even Health Education. Some professors have even embedded training into their coursework and made volunteering a requirement. This helps prepare our future fitness professionals to be more inclusive in their careers. Fitness professionals can also be recruited from local gyms, recreation centers, YMCAs. Local dietitians should also be part of your volunteer pool and can sometimes be recruited from local grocery stores. Finally, if you're struggling, you may want to reach out to your Clinical Directors in Health Promotion and Fun Fitness. They may have some ideas since they are used to recruiting similar volunteers.

Some of your volunteers may not have experience working with individuals with intellectual disabilities. To ensure success of the event, plan time to provide some training ahead of your Performance Station event. Ensure that volunteers feel comfortable interacting with our athletes in a respectful way. Your Program likely has resources and training material on this topic that you can share in advance. If not, the [Talk to Me: Treating People With Intellectual Disabilities With Respect](#) video is often a great starting place. Volunteers should also understand the overall goal of the Performance Stations as well as the specific activity they will be conducting within the station series. Please ensure that each volunteer understands that they will need to provide education as they conduct their station activity.

Your volunteer profile will affect how you provide training. In-person trainings done days or weeks in advance are often the most effective but can also be hard to schedule and challenging to ensure all volunteers can attend. This strategy often works best when you have all or most volunteers coming from a university or a single company/organization. Consider holding a conference call or webinar that offers multiple options for joining. These calls ensure that volunteers are prepped and have time to ask questions so they can get started as soon as they arrive at the competition. Trainings conducted on the day of the event provide the easiest solution for ensuring all volunteers receive training. Consider asking volunteers to arrive 60-90 minutes before the event so that they can be trained on the essential elements. Don't



forget to build in time for a second training if there is a shift change throughout the day. Finally, even with the best training, a volunteer might forget key elements. Consider creating a simple volunteer cheat sheet for reference throughout the day.

# Equipment and Supplies

*This Equipment & Supplies List was created based on reports and feedback from 2018 Performance Station Grantees. On average, Programs recorded about 100 participants visiting their Stations and typically their first Performance Stations was more expensive given start-up costs. Contact [fitness@specialolympics.org](mailto:fitness@specialolympics.org) as you begin to think through the logistics of your event.*

Item	Purpose/Recommendations	Quantity Advised	Cost Estimate	Possible Donor
Signage	Vinyl will allow repeat usage; contact SOI for files	7* (One per station)	\$700	Printing Company
Tables	About two tables per station	10-12	\$500	Venue/Rental company
Pens/Markers	Competition Readiness, Pledge Wall, Local Opp.	40	\$15	Local Office Supply Store
Healthy Snacks for Volunteers	Varies depending on amount of volunteers	25	\$480	Local Restaurant
Tents	Use for outdoor events	Up to 7*	\$400	Tent Company
Surveys	Visit Performance Stations Resources webpage	About 10/stakeholder type	\$3	Printing Company
Socks	For athletes in the incorrect socks for sport – sizes	40	\$50	Local Sports Goods Store
Competition Readiness Checklist	Visit Performance Stations Resources webpage	125	\$8	Printing Company
Eyeglass Kit	Quickly repair any issues athletes have with glasses	2	\$21	Local Superstore
Performance Stations Passport	To guide athletes through Stations	125	\$8	Printing Company
Sunscreen	Outdoor Sports	2	\$18	Local Superstore
Hair Elastics	Tie back loose hair – 90 pack	1	\$10	Local Superstore
Shoelaces	Tie shoes – 15 pack	2	\$15	Local Running Store
Game Day Minds Script	Visit Performance Stations Resources webpage	5	\$0.25	Printing Company

Sports Bag Tags	"Strong Messages" – reminder on sports bag	125	\$113	Printing Company; Local Superstore
Plates	May want to have "My Plate" Diagram on them	150	\$15	Walmart, Target, etc.
Healthy Snacks	Fruits, vegetables, yogurt, cheese, trail mix	300	\$180	Local Grocery Store
Coolers	To keep food cool	2	\$80	Venue
Ice	To keep food cool and use in water	4	\$25	Local Grocery Store
Portion Size Comparison Set	Sports balls, diagrams, measuring cups	1	\$6	Local Superstore
Water Dispensers	Infuse water	2-4	\$80	Venue
Infusions	Mixed berries, lemons, limes, cucumber	2-4 Cases	\$15	Local Grocery Store
Paper Cups	Option to use water bottles instead	125	\$20	Local Grocery Store
Exercise Mats	Stretches, Yoga, Warm-Up/Cool-Down, Exercise Class	5-10	\$150	Fitness Centers; Local Sporting Goods Store
Foam Rollers	Massage, Muscle Recovery	3-5	\$20	Local Sporting Goods Store
Agility Ladders	Quick Challenges	3	\$30	Fitness Professionals
Resistance Bands	Warm-Up/Cool-Down	15	\$20	Fitness Professionals
Tape	To post goals on Pledge Wall	4	\$10	Local Office Supply Store
Goal Cards	Index cards, Post-It Notes	150	\$25	Local Office Supply Store
Camera	Take photo of athletes with Wall	1	\$75	SO Program
Pledge Wall Banner	For athletes to sign after making a fitness pledge	1	\$100	Printing Company
Local Opportunities Map	State Map - Contact SOI for Template	1	\$100	Printing Company
Fit 5 Resources	Fit 5 Guides, Fit 5 Exercise Cards - Contact SOI	125	\$900	Printing Company; SOI
Incentive Items	Water Bottles, Tote Bags, Pins	125	\$500	Printing Company
Opportunities Summary Sheet	Distribute to Coaches, Families/Caregivers	125	\$8	Printing Company

## INCENTIVES AND GIVEAWAYS

One of the bigger costs of Performance Stations are incentive items. While not necessary, Programs have found that incentives motivate participants to visit the Stations, get them excited, and leave an impression regarding fitness. Incentive items should relate back to the tenets of fitness, such as the suggestions below:



- Water Bottles
- Tote Bags
- T-Shirts
- Socks
- Shoelaces
- Lapel Pins
- Sunglasses
- Resistance Bands
- Headphones
- Hats

Programs often distribute incentives at the end of Performance Stations, at the Local Opportunities Station. Many Programs encourage participants to visit all the stations, and “check-off” their visit to each one using a Performance Stations Passport. Upon completion of the Stations, athletes are given an incentive and encouraged to make healthy, fit choices after the day’s event.

There are other opportunities, however, to distribute incentive items throughout the event. For example, Programs have found success doing the following:

- Providing water bottles at the Hydration Station.
- Rewarding top performers from a Quick Challenge at the Physical Activity Station.
- Giving athletes a tote bag at the Competition Readiness Station to hold the other items that they may collect as they go through the stations.



## PARTNERSHIPS

Many Programs have found success capitalizing on current or building new partnerships to provide Performance Stations with minimal costs. One of the most budget reducing partnerships is collaborating with a grocery store chain or food vendor to provide the healthy snacks at the nutrition and hydration stations for free or discounted rates. Fitness professionals volunteering at the stations may be willing to bring some the equipment from their gym, limiting the amount you need to purchase. Finally, your fitness-related partners might have their own merchandise that you could use as incentives or they may consider helping with the cost if the incentives also include their logo. For other ideas on how partnerships can help you extend your budget, please see the “Possible Donor” column on the [\*Equipment and Supplies\*](#) chart.

# Communication About Your Event

Communication about Performance Stations should be distributed to participants, coaches and parents/caregivers well in advance of your event. This is important in order to gain buy-in for your Performance Stations, especially if the event is new to your Program. There may be stakeholders that are apprehensive about the Stations and worry that they may take time away from competition. Communication should briefly outline what Performance Stations are, their purpose, and event details such as location and time. Highlight that Performance Stations, and fitness overall, can enhance sports performance. Get participants excited and encourage coaches to take an active role in the event!

Programs have also found success introducing Performance Stations to their stakeholders at a smaller competition (e.g. regional competition) where everyone will have an opportunity to visit all the stations and be exposed to fitness. This will also give you, the Program, a chance to learn your own best practices prior to introducing the event to a larger audience. It will also prepare the athletes for participating in the stations at larger events.

## PERFORMANCE STATIONS



Special Olympics Wisconsin will be hosting a Performance Station at this year's State Volleyball Tournament!

**What:** Performance Stations are events held near the field of play at tournaments that prepare athletes to compete to their personal best and make the connection between fitness and athletic performance.

**How:** The performance station will educate and activate members of the movement in competition readiness and the tenets of fitness: nutrition, hydration and physical activity. Giveaways will be given to all participants, which may include: water bottles, healthy snacks, exercise tip sheets. In addition, coaches will receive an exercise guide called Fit5 to use for future practices and trainings.

**Who:** Special Olympics Wisconsin volleyball athletes, coaches, and caretakers are welcome to join the fun! Given the importance of fitness and social support, everyone connected to the athlete can participate in the station to improve their performance, fitness and ability to be active and healthy.

**When:** Saturday, November 3<sup>rd</sup> from 10:00am-2:00pm (during competition – please make a plan to get your athletes through the station).

**Where:** In the center of the action at the Milwaukee Sting Volleyball facility. You can't miss us!

**Why:** With improved fitness, everyone can improve their performance in both sport and health, leading to a better quality of life.







# Station Guidance

# Overview of Stations

Athletes will engage in the tenets of fitness as they visit these seven\* stations throughout the day:

- Competition Readiness
- Game Day Minds\*
- Nutrition
- Hydration
- Physical Activity
- Pledge Wall
- Local Opportunities

Signage for these stations can be found on the Performance Stations Resources [webpage](#).

\*While not required at this time, some Programs may choose to include the optional [Game Day Minds Stations](#) at their event. Game Day Minds aims to prepare their mind for competition by visualizing a performance reminder.

# Competition Readiness Station

## GOAL

Having a great competition starts with having the right equipment, attire, and supplies for the day. This station combines the necessary equipment for the sport as well as health-related elements that should be considered prior to competition. A volunteer will lead participants through a checklist to ensure they have everything they need for the day. The station includes commonly forgotten or overlooked items so participants leave the station with everything they need. Additionally, the station teaches participants to think through what is needed for future practices and competitions.

## TIME

3-5 minutes per participant; up to 10-15 minutes if a warm-up is included in this station.

## TOTAL NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS

1-2 Volunteers



## MATERIALS

- ☐ Competition Readiness
- ☐ Checklists
- ☐ Eyeglass kits
- ☐ Hair elastics
- ☐ Socks
- ☐ Shoelaces
- ☐ Sunscreen
- ☐ Water (optional)
- ☐ Small snacks like a piece of fruit (optional)

## ACTIVITY IDEAS

At the Competition Readiness Station, volunteers go through the “Competition Readiness Checklist” to ensure that participants are ready to perform. Prior to introducing this checklist, volunteers may want to encourage the participants to think



through their own checklist and what they think they may need to prepare. This has been more effective when checklists are sport-specific, rather than general. Once the volunteer and participant have gone through the items together, the volunteer gives the participant their checklist, reminding the participant of the work they did together (i.e. pulled hair out of face and into pony tail, tucked in shirt, secured eyeglasses, tied shoe laces, put on sunscreen, etc.). Participants should be educated on why this checklist is important to their performance today, and that they can use this checklist in the future to make sure they are ready for practice and competitions.

The volunteer then instructs participants to visit the rest of the stations so they can continue to learn how to improve their performance. If not included within the Competition Readiness Station, is beneficial to consider a plan to ensure that all participants receive a proper warm-up, that includes dynamic stretches, and have access to water and a snack. Warm-up exercises may include more universal stretches and activities, as well as sport-specific exercises. For example, a golfer’s warm up may be differ from that of track & field.

The Competition Readiness Station can be organized in different ways, and might even be combined with other stations to ensure that athletes are fully ready for their competition. Warm-up, water and a small healthy snack should be offered before any competition, but some variations include:

- Participants could be directed to the Hydration and Nutrition Stations if they have not had anything to eat or drink prior to competition. Dynamic warm-ups (led by a fitness professional) can be done on the field with all competitors prior to each heat, match, game, session etc.
- Healthy snacks (i.e. apple slices, bananas, etc.) and water are included in the Competition Readiness Checklist. A fitness professional is stationed at each Competition Readiness area and leads a proper warm-up with the teams prior to their competition.

Groups of volunteers circulate the event and check to ensure participants have had water and a healthy snack. A warm-up with proper elements, including dynamic stretching, is conducted by a fitness professional that is part of the volunteers circulating to each team.

# Game Day Minds Station

## GOAL

Volunteers assist participants to prepare their mind for competition by visualizing a performance reminder. Visualization is not only about picturing in your mind what you want but is conceptually experiencing it: See it! Feel it! Hear it! Do it! As such, this station is best located in a quiet space. Competition readiness and performance can increase with increased concentration, motivation and confidence. This station is optional, but Programs who have piloted it have shared positive feedback from their volunteers, athletes and coaches about it.



### TIME

5 Minutes

### TOTAL NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS

3-5 Volunteers

### MATERIALS

- ☐ Game Day Minds Scripts\*
- ☐ Sports Bag Tags
- ☐ Markers

## ACTIVITY IDEAS

### Step 1: Performance Reminders

Encourage the participant to identify 1 performance reminder that he/she would like to focus on in the upcoming competition.

Script: “What is one thing you want to do well in competition today?”

*Examples: pace yourself, strong start, keep my form, keep my eye on the ball, communicate with my teammates, make good passes*

## Step 2: Picture It Positive

If possible, ask the participant to picture successfully completing that performance reminder.

Script: Let's take a moment, and try to picture what you want to do well today. It's like a movie in your mind. Imagine you are really in the movie scene. You see it, feel it and hear it."

**See It:** What would you see or want to see?

*Examples: the field of play, the expressions on teammate's faces, the bounce of the tennis ball, the placement of the bowling pins*

**Feel It:** What would it feel like?

*Examples: the way your body feels when you strike the soccer ball, the feel of the bocce ball in your hand, or the emotions you feel when the shot goes in*

**Hear It:** What sounds would you hear?

*Examples: Cheers from fans, teammates, a coach, the sound of a ball being kicked, the sound ball going through the net*

## Step 3: Strong Messages

Ask the participant to finish the station with one positive message using self-talk. A statement that will encourage them to commit to their performance reminder and try their best. Participants can write this on a tag to put on their sports bag if they would like.

Script: "Now, let's think of a positive message or self-talk statement you can use today for motivation and confidence."

*Examples: I will be brave in the attempt, I am ready to compete today, I am a great athlete, I know I can do this*

## Step 4: Reminder

If Strong Minds is being offered at Healthy Athletes, please encourage the athlete to attend!

*\*Created with assistance from Strong Minds Clinical Director, Tara Costello, M.A., C.S.P.A.*

# Nutrition Station

## GOAL

Diet provides the fuel for athletes and Unified Partners to participate in sports and live a healthy lifestyle. Making healthy food choices prior to and after sports training and competition enhances performance and optimizes recovery. This station teaches athletes about the importance of selecting healthy options while providing an opportunity for a healthy pre- or post-competition snack.

## TIME

5-7 minutes per participant

## TOTAL NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS

About 3-6. May vary based on activity chosen, size of event, number of participants, etc.

## MATERIALS

- ☐ Plates
- ☐ 2-4 fruit/vegetable choices – enough for all participants
- ☐ 2-4 healthy snack choices (e.g. yogurt, hummus) – enough for all participants
- ☐ *Gluten Free, Nut Free and Lactose Free options should be available and clearly labeled*
- ☐ 2-4 measuring cup sets
- ☐ Everyday items (i.e. sports balls) that can help demonstrate the relative size of portions
- ☐ Serving spoons





## ACTIVITY IDEAS

The Nutrition Station will be fun and interactive, allowing participants to build their own healthy snack as they learn about healthy choices and correct portion sizes. Set up the Nutrition Station as an assembly line, with 1-2 volunteers at each of the three parts of the station. Each volunteer provides support and education for their portion of the station. Healthy snacks may be one of your bigger costs, so consider partnering with local grocery stores, farmer's markets and other food companies for healthy snacks.

1. Volunteers hand participant a plate and tells the participant they will use this plate for building a healthy snack. Volunteers then talk through the importance of having healthy snacks, especially before and after a practice and competition.
2. Volunteers provide participants at least four choices of fruit and vegetables (local, potentially in season, easy to find).
  - Volunteers should talk about the benefits of eating fruits and vegetables
    - Always mention they provide energy, vitamins and minerals that help you perform at your best.
    - Consider educating participants on certain benefits from each fruit or vegetable (i.e. bananas have potassium which helps you have less cramps or pain when you're moving/running).
  - Volunteer asks participant which fruit or vegetable they want to try
    - Volunteers then talk quickly about portion size and work with athletes to measure out appropriate portions. Some fruits and vegetables might already be in appropriate size (i.e. apple, banana).
    - Use measuring cup and everyday items to help demonstrate appropriate portion sizes.

3. Offer participants at least four choices of other healthy snack items. These items could be dips or spreads for fruits/vegetables, or could be totally separate items such as yogurt, hummus, almonds and cottage cheese. Similar to above, volunteers give participant a choice of what other snack item they want and then talks about the health benefits of the item of their choosing. Volunteers, again, help to measure out appropriate portions.



Some Programs have also found success doing a “Build-Your-Own Trail Mix” Activity

- Possible Ingredients:
  - Nuts (almonds, walnuts, etc.)
  - *Consider nut allergies, as needed*
  - Seeds (sunflower, pumpkin)
  - Dried Fruit (raisins, dried cranberries, dried cherries, etc.)
  - Low-Sugar Cereal (Cheerios, granola)
- Additional Materials:
  - Food containers
  - Ziploc bags
  - Spoons to scoop ingredients
  - Instruction sheet
- Instructions:
  - Invite the athletes to make their own trail mix for a snack.
  - Discuss with the athletes the different ingredients and the benefits of eating these different foods.
  - Volunteers then talk quickly about portion size and work with athletes to measure out appropriate portions.

- Engage Parents/Caregivers:
  - Distribute copies of the directions for “Build-Your-Own Trail Mix.” Encourage them to make trail mix with their athletes at home.

# Hydration Station

## GOAL

Proper hydration before, during, and after a sports competition requires appropriate attention to beverage type and quantity. Dehydration can become a major health concern causing lethargy, dizziness and even fainting, however, even mild dehydration can impair participants' focus and decrease athletic performance. Furthermore, participants need education on the proper beverage selection for their sport. Many athletes prefer sugar sweetened beverages even though water is usually the best choice. This station educates participants on the importance of proper hydration while teaching them about a tasty alternative to sugar sweetened beverages.

## TIME

3-5 minutes per athlete

## TOTAL NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS

About 3-6. May vary based on activity chosen, size of event, number of participants, etc.

## MATERIALS

- ☐ Cups or water bottles
- ☐ At least 3 options of flavor infusions (berries, lemon, cucumber, mint, etc.)
- ☐ Water

## ACTIVITY IDEAS

Participants will learn about the importance of drinking water as they build their own infused water. Set up three miniature stations with 1-2 volunteers per station.

1. Volunteers provide participants with a cup or water bottle and tell participants about the activity.
  - “Your body needs a lot of water to perform at its best. Water is the best choice, but sometimes it’s fun to add some flavor. These choices can also help you to eat more fruits and vegetables.”
2. Volunteers give participants options of flavor infusions they would like to add to their water. Volunteers can talk about health benefits of adding fruit or vegetables instead of drinking something sugary.
3. Volunteers help participants to fill their water bottles and cups with water. They should talk to participants about how much water they should be drinking before, during and after competition, as well as recommended amounts for every day.



# Physical Activity Station

## GOAL

Physical activity is a vital component to a healthy lifestyle. While sports are a great avenue for physical activity, specific exercises performed before, during, and after practices and competition, as well as outside of practice can help prevent injuries as well as enhance performance. This station is a platform to teach proper warm-up and/or cool-down activities, conditioning exercises, or even cross training activities to encourage athletes to prepare appropriately for their sport and to be physically active year-round.

## TIME

5-10 minutes – will vary based on the option(s) chosen for activity

## TOTAL NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS

About 3-6. May vary based on activity chosen, size of event, number of participants, etc.

## MATERIALS

Materials needed for this station will vary based on the option(s) chosen for activity. Suggested items are listed below, but please note that that many of these items could possibly be donated by a fitness professional leading the activity and/or another station at the event:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yoga/Gym Mats   | <input type="checkbox"/> Resistance Bands |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agility Ladders | <input type="checkbox"/> Foam Rollers     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cones           | <input type="checkbox"/> Speakers         |

## ACTIVITY IDEAS

### Quick Challenges:

Participants learn about the importance of exercising by learning three exercises that they can do at home or at practice to improve their sport. Participants then test themselves in these exercises and learn how they can improve as they practice on their own.

Due to the time it takes to teach participants the correct form for each exercise, you may want to set up multiple stations for each activity. Provide 3-4 activities.

1. Volunteers ask participants what sport they play (or coach). Volunteers explain how the station relates to their sport and their daily life. If participant is not an athlete or coach, explain how this activity relates to their daily life.
2. Volunteers talk through what the participant should do for the station, then demonstrates the station, then has participant quickly try a few before the challenge.
3. Volunteers start the challenge. Cheer on participant, but also try to make sure form is correct throughout challenge.
4. Volunteers talk through what athlete could do at home (how often, how long, what materials to use).



*Tip: consider having volunteers keep leaderboards and rewarding top performers*

## Sample Challenges:

- Fit 5 Fitness Card Exercises: number of jumping jacks in one minute, number of wall push-ups (or knee/full for more advanced participants) to fatigue, number of curl ups to fatigue, etc. Keep the activities lower level so it is more appropriate to ALL participants
- Endurance: timed 200m walk or run (or roll), distance of 1 minute of rowing
- Strength/Muscular Endurance: number of chair squats to fatigue
- Flexibility: distance to ankle on hurdle stretch (measure after 30 seconds, instruct participant to keep breathing deep breaths and reach farther if possible)
- Agility: number of squares (cones in squares about 5 m apart) run in 30 sec, number of times going side to side (cones 5 m apart) in 30 seconds, number of times touching ladder in simple ladder drills
- Balance: number of steps on the line in a row (best of 3)—heel to toe for advanced
- Power: broad jump distance

## Group Exercise Class:

Volunteers teach a 5-10 minute quick exercise class based on their expertise. You may provide a few options at a time or different options throughout the day. Try to keep number of participants joining the activity at one time to a minimum (<10) to ensure each participant is doing activities with correct form. Volunteers should relate their activity to the sports being performed at the event/tournament. Volunteers can also share where participants can find their activity in the community. Examples of activities include:



- |           |                    |
|-----------|--------------------|
| • Pilates | • Circuit Training |
| • Dance   | • Boot Camp        |
| • Yoga    | • Rowing           |



## Dynamic Warm-Ups & Cool-Downs:

Another approach to the Physical Activity Station is organizing group warm-ups and cool-downs for participants. Warm-ups should include aerobic activity and dynamic stretching. Some Programs have found success putting a choreographed warm-up to music.

Cool-downs have often included low intensity aerobic components and stretching, sometimes demonstrating mobility activities like foam rolling, stretching with straps or even a short yoga class.



Many warm-up and cool-down techniques supported by sports science are often new to many of our coaches. This provides an excellent opportunity for your Program to showcase warm-up and cool-down activities coaches can do with their teams. Some coaches might be concerned about deviating from their standard routine at a

competition. It may be helpful to communicate this opportunity out in advance of the competition so coaches know what to expect. Encourage them to visit the station with their participants with plenty of time before their game time so they can still continue with their regular warm-up, if desired.

# Pledge Wall Station

## GOAL

Stations leading up to the Pledge Wall encourage our participants to consider the elements of fitness that are necessary for optimal sports performance and a healthy lifestyle. The Pledge Wall station helps our athletes to reflect on these components and develop a fitness-focused SMART goal to guide positive lifestyle changes after their visit to the Performance Stations.

## TIME

3-5 minutes per athlete

## TOTAL NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS

At least 4. May vary based on the size of the event, number of participants, etc.



## MATERIALS

- ☐ Wall or a large board to make a wall
- ☐ Pens/markers
- ☐ Pledge banner
- ☐ Post-It Notes (optional)
- ☐ Tablets (optional)

## ACTIVITY IDEAS

Now that participants have learned the importance of fitness to performance, they are ready to commit to a fitness goal. The Pledge Wall is a place for them to develop a goal, post it for others to see and take a picture to celebrate!

**Pledge Table:** Volunteers will provide support for participants that are coming up with a goal. Goal should be related to performance in the area of sports training, physical activity, nutrition or hydration. Volunteers should start by asking participants if they already have a goal. If not, they can ask what area of fitness they would like to start working on and suggest goals (i.e. Fit 5 Goals). If they have a goal in mind, the volunteer can work with them to make sure it is SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time Bound). Please see the [training document](#) for guidance on how you can train your volunteers to best guide an athlete in setting a realistic and appropriate goal.

Once they have developed their goal, they should record it on the Pledge Wall, whether that be writing directly on the wall or a Post-It Note. Participants may also be interested in writing their goals on a tablet or other electronic device. Volunteers should ask each participant for an email address or phone number so they can send the goal to them (and/or a caregiver or coach). This allows Programs to keep a record of the goals of all the individuals who have visited the Pledge Station. If tablets are not available, record the goals of each individual on a paper form.

Participants then take their pledge paper to the wall for the photo opportunity.

**Photo Opportunity:** Participants share their goal on the Pledge Wall. This should be used as an opportunity to build excitement. Teams and/or families can put their pledges up together and then pose with a special guest to take a photo. Participants will be encouraged to share their photo and their pledge via social media.

A simple Pledge Wall banner is available on the Performance Stations Resources [webpage](#).

Alternatively, Programs can create their own banners.



# Local Opportunities Station

## GOAL

Your participants are starting to see and understand the connection between fitness, health and sport, but will still need support and encouragement in order to make lasting lifestyle changes. The Local Opportunities Station is a chance for your Program to share programming information and resources that can help athletes (as well as coaches and families) to stay committed to improving their fitness. This station is a great place for your Special Olympics Program to recruit more participants in fitness programs, as well as share inclusive opportunities that exist in local communities.

## TIME

5-7 minutes

## TOTAL NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS

At least 4. May vary based on the size of the event, number of participants, etc.



## MATERIALS

- ☐ Fit 5 and Fitness Cards
- ☐ Pin, bracelet, or other memento to remember pledge
- ☐ Sheet with local opportunities and/or “fitness at home” suggestions
- ☐ Tip sheet for families\*
- ☐ Tip sheet for coaches\*

\*When local opportunities are not robust and/or are unavailable, Programs should offer tip sheets that suggests other things that can be done (start a walking group, do Fit 5 Fitness Card exercises with teammates, challenge family members to a fitness competition, etc.). You may choose to have specific resources for various types of stakeholders (i.e. athletes, family members, coaches, Unified Partners). Make sure you have appropriate volunteers ready to answer questions from these specific groups.

## ACTIVITY IDEAS

Volunteers should share programming information and resources that can help athletes (as well as coaches and families) to stay committed to improving their fitness. For example:


- Encourage Athlete Leaders and Health Messengers to talk about their participation in fitness programming.
- Allow local fitness professionals to share information about their organization and inclusive fitness opportunities.
- Provide information regarding Parks & Recreation resources, such as local walking trails, hikes and recreation centers.

**Fit 5:** Volunteers should be able to explain the Fit 5 guide and Fitness Cards, and encourage their use when developing healthy habits. As such, it is recommended and helpful to have volunteers with health/fitness education sharing these local opportunities. This allows participants to ask questions to the volunteers and gain more ideas on how they can improve their fitness.

**Local Opportunities Map:** Many Programs and their athletes enjoy using a [Local Opportunities Map](#) to share how they stay fit! Using a simple colored dot system for each type of local opportunity, participants share where they go to get fit:



- Special Olympics Fitness Program
- Gym/Fitness Center
- Recreation or Community Center
- Local Park
- Cooking/Nutrition Class
- Local non-Special Olympics Club (e.g. Run Club, November Project, etc.)
- Other



Participants enjoy posting their dot(s) and taking photos with the map! This is a great way for both participants and you, the Program, to learn about other fitness opportunities in the area.

Additional information can be collected by using the [Local Opportunities Tracking Sheet](#), in conjunction with this map.



**Evaluating Impact**



# Purpose and Findings

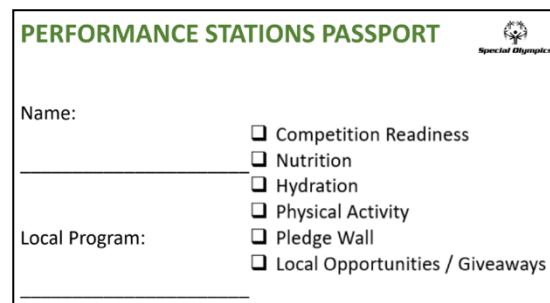
Evaluation is an important component to all initiatives offered by your Special Olympics Program. You want to ensure that all your hard work on new and different initiatives is worth your while and making a true impact on the lives of our Special Olympics athletes. As you offer Performance Stations, you'll want to know if your athletes and other stakeholders value their experiences at the stations. Additionally, you'll want to understand how the stations are driving change in fitness behaviors for the long-term. Not only can you utilize this information to make your Performance Stations better each time you run them, it can also be utilized to showcase how your Program is helping to create a healthier life for people with ID.

# Short Term Evaluation

Performance Stations are still a new concept for many Programs and stakeholders. As you start to offer your Performance Stations events, you'll want to understand the number of people that attended the stations, stakeholder satisfaction, as well as immediate on the health and performance of your athletes.

There are multiple ways to count your attendees. Due to the flexible nature of the stations, SO Programs are encouraged to choose the method that works best for them. Here are some tips:

- Provide participants with a [Performance Stations Passport](#) to be “checked-off” at each station they visit. At the last station, collect the passports from each participant prior to distributing giveaway items.




The image shows a 'PERFORMANCE STATIONS PASSPORT' form. It has a title at the top right with a small logo. Below the title, there are two main sections. The first section is labeled 'Name:' and has a line for writing. The second section is labeled 'Local Program:' and also has a line for writing. To the right of these sections, there is a list of five items, each with a checkbox: 'Competition Readiness', 'Nutrition', 'Hydration', 'Physical Activity', and 'Pledge Wall'. Below this list, there is a final checkbox labeled 'Local Opportunities / Giveaways'.

- Focus on one station to do all counting (e.g. count how many pledges athletes made at the Pledge Wall Station).
- Ask all participants to complete their survey – use this number to determine the number of participants that went through the stations.

Surveys of various stakeholders (athletes, coaches, parents/caregivers, and volunteers) can help your Program understand the successes of your event, and where adjustments can be made at future events. Additionally, surveys can help you check to see if the goals of Performance Stations were met.

SOI is also interested in the feedback from your event. As such, Programs can submit a brief Program report, as well a selection the surveys from various stakeholders. These



documents will allow SOI to continue to understand the impact and importance of these Stations, as well as any additional challenges, benefits and modifications that may be needed for this model to be successful.


Survey tools and the Program Report can be found on the Performance Stations Resources webpage.

# Long Term Evaluation

Performance Stations also provide multiple opportunities for your Program to evaluate the long-term impact on both health and sports performance of your athletes. One potential outcome of Performance Stations is a reduction in injuries and illness related to the competition. Dehydration, dizziness, cramping, and acute musculoskeletal injuries (i.e. sprains and strains) are common injuries at Special Olympics competitions, and can all be reduced by a proper warm-up and cool-down routines, coupled with appropriate nutrition and hydration strategies. Tracking the number and type of injuries at each of your competitions (with and without Performance Stations) can guide you to tweak the stations to provide the appropriate level of support in each area of fitness, minimizing as many injuries as possible.

Participants are asked to take their learnings and make a commitment to improve their fitness in the Pledge Wall and Local Opportunities Stations. These two stations provide an opportunity for you to track how your athletes continue their fitness journey after competition. If your Program has the capacity, it is valuable to ask participants to share their email address or phone number so you can follow up after the event. This provides your Program with the opportunity to understand whether they are sticking to their goal or if they have tested out any of their local fitness programs. Additionally, this provides your Program with a channel to continue to reinforce the learnings from the Performance Stations and encourage the healthy behaviors they learned.

Similarly, you might also consider staying in touch with local providers that were highlighted at the event to determine if athletes have accessed their facilities



Special Olympics International wants to learn from your long-term evaluation ideas, plans and tools. If you would like to share information about a recent Performance Stations event and/or you are taking the steps to further evaluate Performance Stations, please connect with the fitness team at [fitness@specialolympics.org](mailto:fitness@specialolympics.org).

