





Special Olympics Fitness Implementation Guide Overview



Overview: This document provides a summarized overview of the [Special Olympics Fitness Implementation Guide](#). It includes key information on what fitness programming is, how to implement it, how to create a culture of fitness across multiple settings, key fitness resources, tracking guidance, and evaluation support. Together, by following these guidelines and resources, we will create a culture of fitness!

Fitness Definition: Fitness is defined as “optimal health and performance through adequate **physical activity, nutrition, and hydration**” based on each athlete’s goals. Fitness is very important to help athletes improve their health and sport performance.






Strategic Areas: Special Olympics Fitness focuses on 4 strategic areas. For more examples, please see the Fitness Implementation Guide:

Strategic Area	Goal	Examples
 Ongoing Programming	Provide high-quality programming that supports Special Olympics athletes in achieving higher levels of fitness	Unified Fitness Clubs, SOfit, Fit Families and Friends
 Education	Train Special Olympic leaders to promote adoption of healthy lifestyle behaviors among athletes	Training key leaders including Fitness Captains, educators, sport coaches, fitness professionals through in person or E-learning
 Technology	Utilize technology to build awareness of fitness and health behaviors to facilitate health behavior change	Use of the Special Olympics Fitness App to conduct Program-led fitness challenges
 Advocacy	Increase accessible fitness opportunities for all	Developing local-level partnerships and involving Athlete Leaders in the process to grow local fitness opportunities




Building a Culture of Fitness: A culture of fitness means that fitness is valued as a part of every Special Olympics experience and is promoted at the individual, family, and community levels. Each athlete has ongoing opportunities to live a healthy life. Programs are encouraged to engage multiple audiences and settings to promote messaging, programming, activities, and use role models to promote fitness.


Fitness Guidelines: Programs should focus on offering a variety of fitness programs throughout the year, with a focus on ongoing programming of 6 weeks or longer. For examples, see the Fitness Implementation Guide.


Component	Definition and Guidance
<p>Structured</p> 	<p>Structured fitness programming is “any organized activity that specifically aims to improve athlete wellbeing and sport performance by intentionally promoting healthy behaviors in physical activity, nutrition, and hydration.” Structured fitness is generally referred to as “fitness” because all programming that is planned with goals, resources, training, and a focus on improving fitness is structured.</p>
<p>Promotes WHO Physical Activity Guidelines for people with disabilities</p> 	<p>Youth and Adolescents Living with Disability (aged 5-17)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 60 minutes or more of daily moderate-to vigorous-intensity, mostly aerobic, physical activity. • Muscle and bone strengthening activities, as well as vigorous aerobic activities, at least 3 days per week. <p>Adults Living with Disability (aged 18-64)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least 150-300 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity, or at least 75-150 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity or an equivalent combination throughout the week. • Muscle-strengthening activities at moderate or greater intensity that involve all major muscle groups on 2 or more days a week. <p>Older Adults Living with Disability (aged 65 and older)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In addition to adult guidelines, include balance and strength training at moderate or greater intensity at least 3 days per week.
<p>Promotes healthy nutrition and hydration behaviors</p> 	<p>Fitness programming integrates health education with topics covering physical activity, nutrition, and hydration. Other health topics, such as sleep or mental health, can also be covered.</p>
<p>Integrates behavior change</p> 	<p>In addition to knowledge, behavior is influenced by motivation, confidence, social norms, and the environment. Refer to the appendix in the Fitness Implementation Guide for behavior change strategies.</p>
<p>If ongoing, meets at least <u>once per week</u> for a <u>minimum</u> of 6 weeks</p> 	<p>Programming that lasts 6 or more weeks offers athletes an opportunity to establish their physical activity, nutrition, and hydration habits through repetition. This greater exposure to fitness can lead to long-term behavior changes and skill building. This type of programming is often referred to as “ongoing fitness” and is different from structured fitness only in the length of time programming lasts.</p>

Implementation Settings: Fitness can be implemented in many settings in an in-person or virtual manner. Below are strategies to consider:


 **Sports:** [Fitness through Sport](#) supports athletes' sports performance and health. Refer to the guidelines for implementation below.

Minimum "Fit" Practice Standards	Fitness Programming in Sports Settings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5-minute warm-up with dynamic stretches • 5-minute cool-down with static stretches • Conditioning integrated into practice • Encouragement to be active and healthy outside of practice • Focus on active practice • Water breaks every 15-20 minutes • Healthy foods encouraged at team functions, including field of play 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programming should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Take place before or after sports practice ○ Be at least 15 minutes long for 6 or more weeks ○ Integrate physical activity, nutrition, and hydration • Following Minimum "Fit" Practice Standards does not count as fitness programming • Some components can be virtual, such as an additional Zoom session and/or fitness challenge

 **Schools:** Engaging youth through school-based fitness can help them form lifelong healthy habits, improve school attendance, and classroom behaviors.

 **Community:** Community centers and before or after school clubs can provide space and volunteers to support fitness programming.

 **Residential, Day, or Employment Programs:** Partnering with and training service provider staff to lead programming can support sustainability.

 **Universities:** These partnerships may be able to offer space and/or volunteers to support fitness and/or evaluation activities.





Inclusive Practices: Allow for changes to exercise such as modifications and progressions so that all ages and abilities can join. This can include seated options or making exercises easier and harder. This can be done by changing the intensity of sets. Choose locations easy to get to for people using wheelchairs or mobility devices.

Evaluation: Evaluation helps to understand the impact of programming. The [Lifestyle Survey](#) is a pre and post-programming tool to assess fitness status, improvements in physical activity and nutrition knowledge, confidence, social support, and satisfaction. Complete the [Fitness Evaluation Request Form](#) to have your results analyzed or to receive other assistance. [Fitness assessments](#) can be used to measure improvements.

Tracking: Communicate across school, sport, and health staff for accurate Census and Single Health Evaluation (SHE) reporting. An [attendance tracker](#) captures reach. Separately track attendance by programming less than and greater than 6 weeks to ensure total reach across these lengths. The SHE captures 3 additional fitness metrics beyond reach: school-based fitness programming, coaches trained to implement health and fitness, and gym-based collaborations.

Special Olympics Fitness Resources

For more resources, visit the [Special Olympics Fitness Resources page](#). Please contact fitness@specialolympics.org or your Regional Health Manager for questions and support with fitness implementation.

Strategic Area	Key Resources by Audience
 Ongoing Programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Olympics Fitness Models: Provides instructions on starting Unified fitness with various audiences and settings. • High 5 for Fitness: A set of resources for youth ages 8 – 21 to help take control of their own fitness by making healthy choices. • Fit 5: A set of resources for adults to help them increase their fitness through activity, nutrition, and hydration. • Fitness through Sport: Includes Fitness Captain, Fitness Assessment, Coach Education, and more, including the Fitness through Sport Playbook, which features 12 lesson plans and 12 Homeplay activities covering 4 topic areas.
 Education	<p>Coaches:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Practice tools and the Fitness through Sport Playbook can help maximize athletes’ physical activity minutes. ○ E-learnings: The Fitness for Sport Coach, Physical Activity for Sports Coaches, and Sports Nutrition for Coaches provide strategies to support fitness in sports settings. <p>• Educators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ E-learning: Unified Fitness for Educators supports fitness in schools implementation. <p>• Athletes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Athlete Leaders can be trained as Fitness Captains, to ensure fitness is a key component of the sports experience. <p>• Fitness Professionals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ E-learning: Inclusive Fitness Online Training instructs on how to support people with ID in fitness.
 Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Olympics Fitness App: Can be used to implement 6-8 week (or longer) challenges to grow ongoing fitness programming! <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Free via the Apple and Google Play store. ○ Athletes and their supporters can use outside of fitness challenges to track goals, fitness behaviors, sleep, Healthy Minds activities, and more! ○ Contact fitness@specialolympics.org for app training to start a fitness challenge with your athletes.
 Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Physical Activity Leader course: Free course from American Council on Exercise (ACE) to equip athletes, community volunteers, caregivers, Unified Partners, and other supporters in leading community-based fitness in effort to expand access to ongoing fitness opportunities.