

“Becoming a Health Messenger” In-Person Training Guide

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# Overview

The aims of Health Messenger training include:

* providing athletes with a technical skill set that enhances their ability to be a leader and advocate for themselves and others in all aspects of health (e.g., health, fitness, with healthcare providers),
* empowering athletes to advocate for the health needs of people with intellectual disabilities, and
* promoting athlete knowledge of health and change in health behaviors.

# Training Objectives

The objectives of the training are to:

1. Educate Health Messengers about the health status of people with ID and the Special Olympics Health Program;
2. Review how to build positive health behaviors and be a peer role model;
3. Teach the skills and activities Health Messenger can use to help their local communities or teams become healthier;
4. Empower Health Messengers to advocate for the health of people with ID;
5. Create individual Health Messenger activation plans;
6. Develop a network of Health Messengers who can share ideas, discuss challenges and celebrate successes with each other.

As a result of attending this training, Health Messengers will:

1. Have increased confidence in their ability to act as peer leaders and role models within their Special Olympics communities for fitness and preventative health programs.
2. Understand the steps involved to lead activation and advocacy within their broader communities and with their peers to raise awareness and influence other community members to be more inclusive of people with intellectual disabilities.
3. Have knowledge on how to catalyze and support external organizations to work toward making their services, programming, or policies more inclusive.

# New Health Messenger Minimum Training Standards

**Athletes trained and reported as new Health Messengers on or after October 1, 2022 must complete a training that meets the New Health Messenger Minimum Training Standards.** To distinguish this training from other trainings that Programs may be providing to Health Messengers, this can also be called the “Becoming a Health Messenger” training.

## Requirement 1 – Time

The training must include at least 8 active training hours.

* These hours can be in-person or virtual but should not include times allocated to breaks or lunch, unless there is also work occurring during those sessions
* The training hours do not need to be held consecutively – they may be divided over a number of days or weeks

## Requirement 2 – Topics

The following topics must be covered for at least the period of time listed:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Topic** | **Minimum time** |
| Introduction to Special Olympics Health and the role of the Health Messenger | 1 hour |
| Health disparities of people with intellectual disabilities | 1 hour |
| Physical activity | 1 hour |
| Nutrition | 1 hour |
| Emotional health | 1 hour |
| Communications | 1 hour |
| Advocacy | 1 hour |

You will notice that these minimum times add up to 7 hours of active training. That leaves a minimum of 1 hour for Programs to add additional time or topics that are tailored to their athletes’ needs.

## Requirement 3 – Registration

All newly trained Health Messengers must be registered in SOI’s Health Messenger Database (using the Health Messenger Information Form) in order for a Program to count them as newly trained. Programs will continue to report the number of new Health Messengers trained on the Single Health Evaluation (SHE). SOI will cross-check the numbers reported in the SHE with the numbers registered in the Health Messenger Database for the corresponding period. Programs may be asked to revise the ****information reported through the SHE number or ensure the registration of their athletes in the Database.

**Currently, the Health Messenger Information Form exists in** [**English**](https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/0e1be8a1b99d41b0b43530771e890c1c) **and** [**Spanish**](https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/dc76b41833774271a02ce27021844508)**.**

## Requirement 4 – Activation Planning

Activation Planning is to plan a Health Messenger activation (Requirement 5). An activation may be less elaborate/involved than the previous practicum requirement, which many athletes and Programs found intimidating or overwhelming.

Activation Planning may be part of the training or may occur as separate calls/meetings. A staff member from the Health Messenger’s SO Program should participate in this planning session along with the Health Messenger and their mentor. For Health Messengers who don’t have in mind a specific way they would like to be activated, the SO staff member can help provide ideas and opportunities for activation within the Program’s planned activities and/or aligned with priority or strategic areas.

The idea behind shifting from a practicum to an activation is to recognize that some Health Messengers may not yet feel ready to “organize the dance” and may prefer to practice their skills with more guidance and structure.

****The ***Health Messenger Activation Guide*** was developed with athletes’ needs in mind to give ideas about the types of activities they may be interested in carrying out. The ***Health Messengers in Action*** section of the Health Messenger Resources page is another location where Programs may get ideas—or have their Health Messengers’ activities featured!

**Programs must be very careful to avoid tokenism in activation planning. If an athlete is ready to plan their own activation, please follow their lead. If an athlete would still like more support, please be prepared to speak about different options so that the athlete still has the opportunity to choose how they’d like to be activated.**

## Requirement 5 – Activation

****All newly trained Health Messengers must be activated at least once within the first year after completing the didactic training. This activation must be reported to SOI using the [Health Messenger Activation Tracker](https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/793040a8ee0d450d8b912939494ee9d8).

Within one year of being trained, each Health Messenger must be activated. They will work closely with their Special Olympics Program to do so. Activation gives Health Messenger the chance to practice what they learned in training and to show their leadership skills. Some examples of Health Messenger activation are:

* Leading a fitness or wellness challenge
* Hosting health activities, such as a cooking demonstration for healthy and simple recipes
* Participating in a meeting with health decision-makers
* Participate in health-related media interviews discussing a new health initiative

## Requirement 6 – Evaluation

Programs must ensure that new Health Messengers complete the three evaluation forms for the training. These evaluation forms are:

* ****[pre-test](https://specialolympics.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_eJUs03e5lSIk3VI),
* [post-test for immediately after the training](https://specialolympics.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_06tmoK3nMZxKMVo), and
* [post-post-test for 3 months after the training](https://specialolympics.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_ePXcjlINGTRzWom).

These evaluations should be completed electronically (via the links above and on the Health Messenger Resource page). Programs may consider costs for engaging a consultant for entering this data in their Health Impact Grant.

In very limited circumstances and for compelling reasons, SOI will consider assisting Programs/Regions with data entry for scanned paper evaluation forms. Please contact the Pillar 4 team to discuss: healthmessenger@specialolympics.org.

# Data Management

## Registration of Health Messengers

The New Health Messenger Minimum Training Standards require that all newly trained Health Messengers be registered in SOI’s Health Messenger Database (using the Health Messenger Information Form) in order for a Program to count them as newly trained. SOI will cross-check the numbers reported in the SHE with the numbers registered in the Health Messenger Database for the corresponding period. Programs may be asked to revise the information reported through the SHE number or ensure the registration of their athletes in the Database.

Health Messengers who are not activated within 1 year after training will be marked in SOI’s Health Messenger Database as inactive.

**Currently, the Health Messenger Information Form exists in** [**English**](https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/0e1be8a1b99d41b0b43530771e890c1c) **and** [**Spanish**](https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/dc76b41833774271a02ce27021844508)**.**

## Activation of Health Messengers

****The New Health Messenger Minimum Training Standards require that all newly trained Health Messengers be activated at least once within the first year after completing the didactic training. This activation must be reported to SOI using the [Health Messenger Activation Tracker](https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/793040a8ee0d450d8b912939494ee9d8).

After the first activation, Programs/Health Messengers are welcome continue to report their activations using the form. Alternatively, Programs may (and are encouraged to!) share stories of Health Messenger activations in their Health Impact Grant monthly reports. SOI will review these and select stories to highlight on the ***Health Messengers In Action*** section of the Health Messenger Resources page.

Health Messenger Reach

In order to keep track of the reach of your Program’s Health Messengers—for example, how many people they have provided with peer education, mentorship, engagement in wellness opportunities—you may want to consider creating some sort of form that you collect periodically. This form could be filled out by the coach, school, or Health Messengers themselves.

The structure of the reporting form and the type of information collected depends on the activities of your Health Messengers. If they are giving presentations, they could record the number of athletes in attendance. If they are engaging athletes in conversation outside of a Healthy Athletes screening, they could record the number of athletes with whom they spoke. Make an effort to also capture qualitative data, including inspirational stories and feedback/suggestions from the Health Messengers and those with whom they interact.

Arm yourself and/or your team members with a camera and digital video recorder. This content can be used for a later pitch to media and to share the best stories with your internal network and with the wider Special Olympics Movement.

# Training Resources

****You can access all Health Messenger training resources [here](https://resources.specialolympics.org/health/health-messenger).

The symbol on the left appears throughout this document when a training resource is referenced. Some training resources are linked directly in this document.

****

The symbol appears in red when the training resource must be accessed/downloaded separately.

# Icon  Description automatically generatedStep 1: Plan Your Training

## Assemble your Health Messenger training planning team

Athletes have keen insight into the health problems they face as well as ways these problems can be addressed, so include them in every stage of the planning process. In addition to athlete(s), you may also want to include Clinical Directors or other groups as you plan your training.

## Determine the health needs of your Special Olympics athletes

Think about the health issues and barriers to health facing people with ID in your Program, country, state, or community. Talk to athletes, coaches, caregivers, Clinical Directors, and others. Each of these groups can provide you with valuable insight about what health knowledge and behaviors you should tailor your training to address.

## Select Health Messengers

****There are a few different options for selecting your Health Messengers. You might have existing athlete leaders who would be natural fits for the program. Alternatively, you might ask coaches, teachers or volunteers to nominate athletes who they consider leaders and would be strong leading in health and fitness. You could also invite interested athletes to complete a short application.

See the ***Sample Training Application.***

Please ensure that you create leadership opportunities for athletes of different interests, ability levels, and strengths. It is useful for your Program to train some Health Messengers who are interested in and strong with public speaking or media, but there should be a number of other ways that Health Messengers can be active in your Program and community.

## Identify and train Mentors

Health Messengers benefit from the support of a mentor. A mentor works with and supports the Health Messenger to exercise their leadership. Mentors can be coaches, family members, Special Olympics staff members or friends (including Unified Partners!).

****To equip mentors—especially new mentors—to work with Health Messengers, please have them complete the ***Athlete Leader Mentor course*** on learn.specialolympics.org before attending the Health Messenger training along with the Health Messengers.

## Design your training agenda

Athletes trained and reported as new Health Messengers on or after October 1, 2022 must complete a training that meets the New Health Messenger Minimum Training Standards (see above).

Please ensure that your agenda meets these minimum requirements while also taking into account other factors, including your Program’s Health Messenger needs, athlete communication styles, and available training facilities. The agenda should include several opportunities for peer-to-peer athlete discussions on a variety of health topics, led by an athlete leader.

Aim for a training agenda that includes a combination of:

* Classroom style lecture (10%)
* Group discussion (25%)
* Hands-on activities (40%)
* Individual work time (25%)

You can access all Health Messenger training resources [here](https://resources.specialolympics.org/health/health-messenger).

You should also provide your athletes with ample breaks, refreshments, and opportunities for fun.

Consider the health knowledge and literacy levels of your Health Messengers. SOI provides template training materials for the “Becoming a Health Messenger” training. You may work with Clinical Directors, health partners or others with expertise in developing training materials to customize or develop materials that are appropriate for your advocates, provided these meet (or exceed) the New Health Messenger Minimum Training Standards.

****You will need to determine how is best for you to structure your training. For some that could mean a 1 day, 8-hour training, for some it could be a 10-hour training divided over 2 days, and for some it could mean 12 one-hour sessions given once a week for 12 weeks. See the ***Sample Agenda*** (Appendix A below, as well as Appendices A and B of the “Becoming a Health Messenger” Virtual Training Guide) for more ideas.

You will also need to determine if it is better for you to host your Health Messenger training as part of a larger Athlete Leadership University, or Athlete Congress or sporting event, or if it will be better for you to host a stand-alone event.

If you have current Health Messengers in your Program, consider how they can participate in training new Health Messengers. For example, you may ask them to share what they have done for their practicums/activations, ask them to be a co-facilitator, or invite them to “audit” some sessions to refresh their learning.

****Finally, trainings can also be held virtually or in a hybrid format. See the ***Virtual Health Messenger Training Guide*** for ideas about training new Health Messengers in a virtual environment.

## Determine logistics and meeting materials

****It is important to secure meeting space that allows for an interactive training experience. You should also have meeting materials available that fully support participant learning.

See ***Appendices B and C*** for more information.

## Share examples of Health Messenger activation

The New Health Messenger Minimum Training Standards require that you ensure athletes dedicate time to plan their activation and that newly trained Health Messengers are activated at least once within the first year after completing the didactic training. This will help the Health Messenger to put into practice what they learned at the training and help them think about what leadership skills they have and can use as Health Messengers.

****Before the training starts, send the ***Health Messenger Activation Guide*** to each participating athlete and mentor attending, so they have time to start thinking about how the Health Messenger might want to be activated.

# Step 2: Implement Your Training

## Distribute the pre-training survey

Collecting information before training will help SOI and SO Programs to understand the baseline health knowledge, behaviors, and empowerment levels. When compared with Post-Training Survey responses, we can better understand the impact of health messenger trainings on improving these aspects.

****Whenever possible, this survey should be taken electronically, through this [link](https://specialolympics.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_eJUs03e5lSIk3VI). Programs who must use the paper version of the survey must input the data electronically. Programs may budget in their Health Impact Grant for costs to engage a consultant to do this data entry.

In very limited circumstances and for compelling reasons, SOI will consider assisting Programs/Regions with data entry for scanned paper evaluation forms. Please contact healthmessenger@specialolympics.org with such requests.

## Use existing training resources…or share your own

SOI has provided template training materials, including PowerPoint presentations and activity guides.

You may wish to tailor these or work with subject-matter experts to create your own, as well! If you create a new activity, please share the activity with healthmessenger@specialolympics.org so it can be shared with other trainings and SO Programs.

## Don’t forget the New Health Messenger Minimum Training Standards!

****Athletes trained and reported as new Health Messengers on or after October 1, 2022 must complete a training that meets the New Health Messenger Minimum Training Standards.You can find these above and in the ***Health Messenger Overview*** document.

## Recognize Health Messengers

****It is important to recognize your Health Messengers for their hard work at the training. We supply a ***Certificate Template*** that you may want to use.

Additional ways to recognize Health Messengers include:

* Distribute a press release with photos of participants
* Post the story on your website and social media channels
* Submit their success story to Special Olympics International for posting on social media channels

(specialolympics.org/Stories/Share\_Your\_Stories\_about\_Special\_Olympics.aspx)

* Submit information about their activities in your monthly Health Impact Grant report or to healthmessenger@specialolympics.org. SOI will review these and select stories to highlight on the ***Health Messengers In Action*** section of the Health Messenger Resources page.

## Gears outlineGather participant feedback

Please administer [the Post-Test](https://specialolympics.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_06tmoK3nMZxKMVo) immediately after completing the didactic training and [the Post-Post Test](https://specialolympics.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_ePXcjlINGTRzWom) three months later. When compared with Pre-Training Survey responses, we can better understand the impact of health messenger trainings on improving these aspects.

Whenever possible, these surveys should be taken electronically. Programs who must use the paper version of the survey must input the data electronically. Programs may budget in their Health Impact Grant for costs to engage a consultant to do this data entry.

****In very limited circumstances and for compelling reasons, SOI will consider assisting Programs/Regions with data entry for scanned paper evaluation forms. Please contact healthmessenger@specialolympics.org with such requests.

The mentors can also provide their feedback on the Health Messenger training by completing the mentor post-training survey using this [link](https://specialolympics.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6rkbqSCcDDiok5v).

You may also want to meet with your Health Messengers and mentors to discuss the training and lessons learned. You might choose to debrief with the Health Messengers following events, quarterly, or at the end of the grant period. Take their opinions seriously and use the feedback to shape future health education programming or training.



# Step 3: Support Your Health Messengers

After the training, check in with your Health Messengers regularly to monitor their work and provide any necessary support. The Health Messengers should have a specific person in your Program to go to if they need more materials, are asked a question they can’t answer, or need any additional support.

**If you have questions or would like support putting together your Health Messenger training, we’re here to help! Please send an email to:** **healthmessenger@specialolympics.org**

# Appendix A, Sample Agenda

Day 1:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Time** | **Session Topic and Objectives** | **Presenters**  | **Notes** |
| 9:00-9:30am(30 mins)  | Breakfast, networking, completion of [pre-test](https://specialolympics.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_eJUs03e5lSIk3VI)  | SO Health Staff and athlete leader | If not realistic (device access, etc) for electronic completion of the pre-test on-site, consider circulating in advance or using paper surveys (will need to input data after-the-fact) |
| 9:30-9:45am(15 mins) | Introduction and Review of Meeting Objectives | Facilitator and athlete leader | Review the agenda, expectations and goals for the training (7 mins) Ask a local athlete to provide some inspiration and encourage them to be health advocates (4 mins) **Gears outline**PPT: Overview (slides 1-4) |
| 9:45-10:30am(45 mins) | Overview of Special Olympics Health and the health disparities of people with ID | SO Health Staff | Should be interactive to include table discussions and an interactive presentation on healthy lifestyles to set the tone. Activity idea: athletes who feel comfortable may talk about their health experiences.**Gears outline**PPT: Overview (slides 5-9)Play [Inclusive Health: Bridging the Gap](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X4DZXVHNYUY&t=11s) video (3:20 mins) |
| 10:30-10:45am(15 mins) | Fitness/health Break and bathroom break | Athlete to lead activity | Activity: Get attendees out of their chairs and moving. |
| 10:45-11:15am(30 mins) | The role of the Health Messenger  | SO Health Staff | Group discussion focused on talking about solutions and how Health Messengers can activate.**Gears outline**PPT: Overview (slides 10-41) |
| 11:15am-12:15pm (60 minutes) | Fitness | Facilitator and/or experienced Health Messenger | **Gears outline**PPT: FitnessActivity: slide 22 or Create Your Own Workout Hands-On Learning Activity Guide |
| 12:15-1:15pm | Working Lunch: Activation Planning | Health Messenger-Mentor pairs | Give participants time to take a break and get their lunch. (30 mins)While they are eating, Health Messenger-Mentor pairs should discuss activation ideas. (30 mins)**Gears outline**Health Messenger Activation Guide |
| 1:15-2:15pm | Nutrition | Facilitator and/or experienced Health Messenger | **Gears outline**PPT: Nutrition and hydrationActivity: Healthy Infused Water Station |
| 2:15-2:30pm(15 mins) | Fitness/health Break and bathroom break | Athlete to lead activity | Activity: Get attendees out of their chairs and moving. |
| 2:30-3pm (30 minutes) | Building Positive Healthy Habits | Facilitator and/or experienced Health Messenger | Gears outlineBuilding Positive Healthy Habits Hands-On Learning Activity Guide |
| 3-3:45pm (45 minutes) | The Role of the Health Messenger and Setting Personal Health Goals | Facilitator and/or experienced Health Messenger | Ask Health Messengers work with mentors to write down their personal health goalsGroup discussion: how to support fellow athletes to reach their personal health goals**Gears outline**Health Messenger Activation GuideMy Personal Health Goal Worksheet |
| 3:45-4:00pm(15 mins) | Fitness/health/snack break and bathroom break | Athlete to lead activity | Activity: Get attendees out of their chairs and moving. |
| 4-4:45pm (45 minutes) | How to use social media to share healthy lifestyles messages | Facilitator and/or experienced Health Messenger | **Gears outline**PPT: Health Messenger Social MediaActivity: slide 19 |
| 4:45-5:00pm(15 mins) | Wrap Up | SO Health Staff and athlete leader | Participants should be invited to share one thing they learned.Review the Day 2 agenda. |

**Day 2:**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Time** | **Session Topic and Objectives** | **Presenters**  | **Notes** |
| 9:00-9:30am(30 mins) | Breakfast, networking | SO Health Staff |  |
| 9:30-10am(30 mins) | Group discussion: What are challenges you face to achieving good health? What challenges do other athletes face to achieving good health? | Athlete leader and SO Health Staff | This should be a peer-to-peer discussion lead by an athlete leader. Meeting the challenges should be lead by an SO Health staff person.Objective: Athletes should talk about the barriers and challenges to achieving good health and are prepared to go into health influencer meetings conveying the issues.Make sure to read out challenges faced. How can we prepare the Health Messengers to help address these challenges?Supplies: Suggest using flip charts to document the discussions and read out from the group**Gears outline**PPT: Overview (slide 42)Worksheet: The Importance of Being Healthy |
| 10-10:45 am(45 mins) | Effective Communication and Storytelling | Facilitator and/or experienced Health Messenger | **Gears outline**PPT: Tips for Effective Communication and Storytelling |
| 10:45-11am(15 mins) | Fitness/health Break and bathroom break | Athlete to lead activity | Activity: Get attendees out of their chairs and moving. |
| 11am-12pm (60 minutes) | Emotional health | Facilitator | **Gears outline**PPT: Emotional health |
| 12-12:45pm (45 minutes) | Lunch and networking |
| 12:45-1:45pm (60 minutes) | Advocacy | Facilitator and/or experienced Health Messenger | **Gears outline**PPT: AdvocacyPlay [Talk to Me](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nc9aAY6-ujQ&t=15s) video (3:36 min) |
| 1:45-2:15pm (30 minutes) | Activation Planning | Health Messenger-Mentor pairs | **Gears outline**Health Messenger Activation Guide |
| 2:15-3:15pm (60 minutes) | Activation Plan Presentations | Health Messengers | Invite each participant to present their activation idea plan. Allow 3 minutes for each presentation and 2-3 minutes of comments and feedback from the group on what was presented. *The time needed for this session will vary with the number of trained Health Messengers. If you have a large group, you can break up attendees into group to do their presentation.* *Option to issue certificates after each presentation* |
| 3:15-4pm(45 mins) | Wrap Up, Certificates, and Completion of Post-Test([Health Messengers](https://specialolympics.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_06tmoK3nMZxKMVo), [Mentors](https://specialolympics.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6rkbqSCcDDiok5v)) | SO Health Staff and athlete leader | Invite each individual participant to receive their certificate, take individual photos of each participant with their certificate.If not realistic (device access, etc) for electronic completion of the post-test on-site, consider using paper surveys (will need to input data after-the-fact) or assigning as homework |

# Appendix B, Recommended In-Person Training Logistics

Room set up:

* Round tables to allow for group discussion
* Open space for fitness breaks and hands on learning activities

Audio/visual:

* Microphones (2: 1 podium; 1 floor)
* Podium
* Laptop
* Projector

Food/beverage:

* Provide healthy meals and snacks
	+ Morning and afternoon, if a day-long session
* Have water available the entire day
	+ Bring reusable water bottles for the Athletes to keep, if available.

Other materials:

* Flip charts
* Markers
* Pens
* Name tags
* Folders
	+ Training agenda
	+ Education modules
	+ Activity examples
	+ Activation planning worksheet.
	+ Link to Smartsheet HM activation tracker.
* Lifestyles pre- and post- survey.
* Health Messenger certificates.
* Sun screen, chap-stick, sun safety bracelets or other health related giveaways.

Attendee Attire:

* Attendees should plan to be active and work up a sweat during this event! Comfortable workout attire (t-shirt and shorts/yoga pants/sweat pants), socks and tennis shoes/sneakers should be worn. Attendees should also plan to bring a sweatshirt or jacket in case they get cold.
* Participants should be provided with a Health Messenger t-shirt or uniform, if available, to wear at the training and as they are active.

# Appendix C, Materials for Hands-On Activity Stations (Organizer’s Choice)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Create Your Own Workout*** Fitness cards
* Fit 5 Guide
 | **Emotional Well-Being*** Index cards
* Print-out of an outline of a person
* Stickers
* Stress balls
* Pinwheels
 |
| **Building Positive Healthy Habits*** Jar
* Rocks
* Pebbles
* Sand
* Ten blocks of different sizes, shapes, and colors
* Container where you can put the blocks
 | **Healthy Infused Water*** 3 gallons / 11 liters of water
* Buy more or less depending on the number of participants
* Assorted sliced fruit, vegetables, and herbs in individual bags/containers
* Popular options include lemons, limes, oranges, strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, cucumbers, mint, and basil.
* Small cups
* Large spoons or tongs
* 1 per fruit, vegetable, or herb offered
* Table
* Tablecloth
* Cooler
* Signs that indicate what each fruit, vegetable, or herb is
 |
| **Various sessions*** Flipchart
* Markers for use on the flipcharts (1-2 per group)
* Pens
* Sticky notes
 |