



***Special
Olympics***

2026 ACCREDITATION GUIDE

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PURPOSE AND BENEFITS OF ACCREDITATION

Purpose. Special Olympics, Inc. (“SOI”) accredits Programs to ensure the worldwide quality, and ultimately the growth, of the Special Olympics movement. Accreditation is a method of assuring that every Program meets the essential core requirements of the Special Olympics mission and certain minimum management and financial requirements. The accreditation requirements are designed to enable Programs to demonstrate compliance by completing a short accreditation application with information that is easily verifiable by SOI regional and legal staff.

Rights and Benefits. When a Program satisfies the accreditation requirements, SOI signs that Program’s Accreditation License Agreement, which grants the Program the legal right to use the Special Olympics name, logo, and other trademarks within its jurisdiction, to conduct Special Olympics sports and related activities, and to raise funds under the Special Olympics name. In addition, Programs gain access to numerous accreditation benefits, including:

- Shared strategy and vision
- General Rules, Program Quality Standards, Sports Rules, and other resources
- Regional and World Games
- Flagship Programming: Unified Sports, Young Athletes, Unified Champion Schools, Healthy Athletes, Law Enforcement Torch Run, Polar Plunge, Unified Leadership, and more
- Research in sports, health, and disability
- Global brand marketing and sponsorships
- Partnerships with International Sport Federations
- Athlete empowerment and leadership opportunities
- Regional leadership conferences and leadership development opportunities
- Technical assistance in sport and coach training, games management, software, governance, fundraising and marketing
- Access to financial resources through grants, partnerships with international corporations and organizations, revenue sharing, and major fundraising initiatives
- Risk management guidance and support

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: 31 MARCH 2026/31 JANUARY 2026

Special Olympics Programs are accredited in two-year cycles.

- **International Programs* must submit all accreditation materials by: 31 March 2026**
- **U.S. Programs must submit all accreditation materials by: 31 January 2026**

** All Programs outside of the United States*

Programs are recommended to remember that proposed revisions to the General Rules may affect future accreditation requirements. SOI shall provide sufficient and significant notice to allow Programs time to comply with any changes to future requirements.

Programs Applying for 2026 – 2027 Accreditation

Programs that **were accredited for calendar years 2024 – 2025** will now have their accreditation expire on 31 March 2026, if an International Program, or on 31 January 2026 if a U.S. Program, rather than 31 December 2025 as previously stated. To continue operating as a Special Olympics Program, each of these Programs are **required to apply for 2026 – 2027 accreditation** through the online accreditation system **by 31 March 2026, if an International Program, and 31 January 2026, if a U.S. Program**. If a Program's application is fully completed and submitted by the deadline, SOI will be able to renew the Program's accreditation before it expires.

Please note that accreditation applications will not be approved until properly and fully completed, including submission of accompanying documents and payment of fees through 2025. **Pursuant to the General Rules Section 6.08(b), accreditation automatically expires if not renewed by the expiration date.** Programs without active accreditation, conditional accreditation, or founding committee status are ineligible to receive grants from SOI. An outstanding balance of previous accreditation fees also prohibits a Program from receiving grants from SOI.

Programs Accredited for 2025 – 2026

Programs that are **accredited for calendar years 2025 – 2026 (status should state: accredited through 03/31/2027 OR 01/31/2027)** are required to **submit the 2026 Mid – Cycle report by 31 March 2026, if an International Program, and 31 January 2026, if a U.S. Program**. Documents and updated contact information should be submitted on the Mid – Cycle Update Page accessible through the "2026" tab of the Program's 2025 – 2026 application in the online accreditation system.

ONLINE ACCREDITATION SYSTEM INSTRUCTIONS

All Programs are expected to use the online accreditation system for submission of applications and other materials. The online system has been updated to improve user experience, and training sessions will be provided. If you have difficulty with the system, please contact your Regional Organizational Development representative and/or SOI's Legal Department at accreditation@specialolympics.org.

Logging In. Log in at <http://services.specialolympics.org/Login>. If you are already registered in the system, your username is your email address. If you have forgotten your password, you can reset it by clicking on the "Reset Password" tab on the login screen. If you would like to be registered, please contact your Regional Organizational Development representative, who can request a new profile be created for you.

Submitting Applications and Materials. Once you log in, you will see links to current and past applications for your Program.

- Click to view the current application:
 - If you are applying for 2026 – 2027 accreditation, follow the instructions and complete all questions on the "2026" tab.
 - If you are accredited for 2025 – 2026, click on the "2026" tab at the top of the application and follow the instructions on the "2026" tab.
- If you are unable to answer "yes" to any of the required application questions, please make an explanatory note in the comment box below the question AND follow up with your Regional Organizational Development representative to determine if a waiver is needed.
- If you are unable to answer "yes" to any of the required application questions, and it is determined that you need to submit a waiver request to waive the Program from completing the requirement for a stated period, then please submit your waiver request according to the following procedure:
 - Accredited Program shall submit a written request (specifying the request, reason for request, duration of the request) to their Regional Organizational Development representative, who shall forward the request together with the Regional President and Managing Director's recommendation to the SOI Legal Department. SOI Legal will review the request and determine if it is appropriate. If deemed appropriate, SOI Legal will forward the request to the SOI Chief of Regional and Program Operations, who shall consider the request. The Chief of Regional and Program Operations will determine whether a request should be granted. The Program will be formally notified of the decision, rejection or approval, via email and post in the Program's application portal.

- Each question response is saved when answered, allowing you to leave and return if not completing the application in a single session. When you have answered all questions and inserted documents and notes where requested, please click the “submit” button. By clicking the “submit” button, you will notify SOI that your application is ready to be reviewed. You will receive an email notification when your application is approved or if a comment was made indicating that information is needed. You will continue to have access to your application in the event you need to update your information.

APPLICATION REVIEW AND APPROVAL

If the Program is unable to answer “yes” to all required application questions, or if the materials are otherwise incomplete, SOI may request further information to complete the application. Based on the review, SOI will take one or more of the following actions:

- **Full Accreditation.** Granted if the Program meets all accreditation requirements or meets all but certain requirements and receives a waiver from SOI for those requirements.
- **Conditional Accreditation.** SOI may provide conditional accreditation to a Program that cannot, for good cause, satisfy certain accreditation requirements and submits a plan approved by SOI, that details how, and by what date, the Program will comply with the unmet requirements. To request conditional accreditation, a Program should include an explanation and plan in the comment box under each required application question to which the Program is unable to answer “yes.” The plan should include a date by which compliance will be completed. SOI grants conditional accreditation on a case-by-case basis. SOI regional staff will work with the Program to develop and complete the compliance plan by the specified date. **Conditional accreditation provides the same benefits as full accreditation but typically comes with a shorter term.**
- **Compliance Waiver.** If it is impossible for a Program to fulfill an accreditation requirement or compliance would cause a Program undue burden, SOI may grant a compliance waiver (under General Rules Section 6.22) if SOI determines that such a waiver is clearly in the best interest of Special Olympics athletes and the movement. SOI grants waivers on a case-by-case basis and may specify time limits and other parameters for the waiver. To request a waiver, the Program should select “waiver” for the relevant application question and submit a formal written waiver request through the appropriate procedure (*as stated above under “Online Accreditation System Instructions”*). A Program requesting a waiver **must** show that the accreditation requirement:
 - Violates specific national laws applicable to the Program.
 - Causes significant hardship for the Program.
 - Cannot be strictly met, but the Program is compliant with the requirement’s intent.
 - Indicate the duration of the waiver the Program is seeking.

- **Denial of Accreditation.** A Program that does not submit properly completed accreditation documents demonstrating compliance with the accreditation requirements, and that has not received a waiver or conditional accreditation, may be denied accreditation.

ONGOING COMPLIANCE

Accreditation is conditioned on the Program's continued compliance with ALL accreditation requirements, the Accreditation License Agreement, and the General Rules. If SOI becomes aware of a Program's noncompliance, the SOI Regional Organizational Development representative will work with the Program to help it comply with the relevant accreditation or General Rules requirements. In the event of a Program's material mismanagement or non-compliance with the accreditation requirements or the General Rules, SOI reserves the right to take corrective measures. This may include, without limitation, denying eligibility for grant funding, adjusting the Program's status to Founding Committee or conditional accreditation, adjusting allocation of Games quotas, approving management, and personnel decisions, and/or revoking accreditation.

ACCREDITATION TIMELINE

After the 2023 accreditation cycle, the Legal Department gathered key stakeholders in the accreditation process to provide feedback on the existing timeline and 15th November deadline. Based on the learnings from the discussions, the following timeline was developed and approved:

Training Period: October – November

- This time will be used to train Programs and regional staff on the new platform for the accreditation application and Program Quality Standard tool requirement and host the accreditation webinar (a variety of times will be available to accommodate all time zones).

Materials Ready By: Mid – October

Application Opens: 1 December

Application Due:

- U.S. Deadline: 31 January
- International Deadline: 31 March

Please note: The accreditation portal will not "close" in the same way that the Census application does. Programs still have access to submit materials after the deadline, but the application will be considered "late," and the Program will not have the opportunity to take advantage of the 3% discount on their accreditation fee, unless a request for a deadline extension was received and approved by the required dates.

Invoice 3% Discount Deadline

U.S. Programs:

U.S. Programs will receive invoices monthly starting in February and the opportunity to pay in full to receive the **3% discount will still be available and can be taken advantage of until 31 March**. Only Programs whose applications were submitted AND fully completed on time will be offered a discount.

International Programs:

International applications submitted AND fully completed on time will have **30 days from the date of receiving their invoice to take advantage of the 3% discount**.

Application Extension Request Deadline

Pursuant to General Rules Section 6.08(b), if a Program is unable to comply with the deadline, a written request must be submitted to SOI at least thirty (30) days before the date of the Program's accreditation expiration (31 March 2026/31 January 2026). All deadline extension requests must be submitted to the Program's Regional Organizational Development representative no later than:

- U.S. Programs: 01 January 2026
- International Programs: 01 March 2026

Requests must include the reason for extension and duration of extension requested. If the request is granted and the application was submitted by the approved date, the Program will not be penalized and will still have the opportunity to receive a 3% discount on their accreditation fee.

2026 – 2027 ACCREDITATION APPLICATION – INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS

[Note: Programs are expected to complete applications through the online accreditation system. To assist Programs reading translations of this guide in different languages, this application is the same as it appears online for Programs].

Welcome to your Special Olympics accreditation application. **This application page is due 31 March 2026.** Please complete all the following questions, uploading documents and insert notes where requested. Each question's response is saved when answered, allowing you to leave and return if you are not completing the application in a single session. If you have questions or comments for SOI, please insert a note or contact your SOI regional Organizational Development representative. For the current Accreditation Guide, Accreditation License Agreement, Forms, and other accreditation materials, click [here](#).

Thank you!

1. Bylaws/Governing Documents.

- 1.1 Do the Program's bylaws/governing documents include the SO Mission Statement? Please upload the document and highlight the relevant portion or indicate where in the document the requirement can be found.
- 1.2 Do the Program's bylaws/governing documents limit the terms of the members of the Board to a maximum of 9 consecutive years? If not, please reference the local law or prior SOI decision which exempts the Program from this requirement. Please highlight the relevant portion or indicate where in the document the requirement can be found in same document uploaded in question 1.1.

2. Governing Board.

- 2.1. Does the Program have 7 or more members on the Board of Directors? Please upload a list of all the Program's current Board members. The list must include the years of service for each member, Board position, and role requirement they fulfill (*ex: expert in intellectual disabilities, sports expert, business or finance expert, close family relation of a Special Olympics athlete, or athlete*). Click [here](#) for the Board list template.
- 2.2. Does the Program's Board include at least 1 Special Olympics athlete? If not, please reference the local law or SOI decision which exempts the Program from this requirement.
- 2.3. Does the Program's Board meet at least twice each calendar year? Please upload minutes from 1 meeting during 2024 and minutes from 1 meeting during 2025.

3. **Executive/National Director and Sports Director.** Are the positions of (1) Board Chair, (2) Executive/National Director, and (3) Sports Director held by different people?

4. **Registered Athletes.** Does the Program certify that it registers athletes? Please upload or provide URL link to sample athlete registration forms. Click [here](#) for form templates.
5. **Name and Logo.** Does the Program use the Special Olympics name and logo correctly? Please upload one of the following, samples of the Program's current letterhead and/or business cards, marketing collateral, screenshot of webpage, apparel or banners. Click [here](#) for letterhead template.
6. **Finances and Planning.**
 - 6.1 Is your Program's annual revenue less than USD 100,000? If "yes", please upload the unaudited 2024 financial statements.
 - 6.2 Is your Program's annual revenue more than USD 100,000? If "yes", you must upload a copy of the 2024 financial statements audited by an independent auditor. If unable to acquire audited financial statements, please submit a waiver request along with a copy of your unaudited financial statements. Click [here](#) for waiver request templates.
 - 6.3 Please upload the Program's 2024 Adjusted Gross Revenue ("AGR") Form. Click [here](#) to find the AGR form.
 - 6.4 Please upload the Program's 2026 budget. Click [here](#) for the budget template.
 - 6.5 Please upload Program's 2026 operational plan. Click [here](#) for the operational plan template.
7. **Accreditation Fees.** Has the Program paid all accreditation fees currently due? If the answer is "no," please contact SOI Finance to arrange payment or discuss a payment plan. If a payment plan is currently in place, please upload documentation of the plan's terms.
8. **SOI's Authority.** Does the Program acknowledge that SOI has the utmost authority over Special Olympics activity and programming?
9. **License Agreement.** Please upload the completed and signed 2026 – 2027 Accreditation License Agreement. Please click [here](#) to download the agreement.
10. **Contact Information.** Has the Program provided updated contact information for its office, Board Chair, Executive/National Director, and Sports Director on the Program Profile Page? Please click [here](#) to update contact information.
11. **Program Quality Standards.** Has the Program conducted a self-assessment and identified areas for improvement using the Program Quality Standards? Please upload the completed Program Quality Standards tool. Please click [here](#) to download the tool.
12. **Safeguard Policy.** Has the Program adopted and implemented a safeguard policy? If yes, please upload a copy.
13. **Safeguard Training.** Has the Program's staff and volunteers completed a safeguard training module (e.g., Protective Behaviors or Operation Safeguard)?

14. Voluntary Questions. The following questions are voluntary, and your answer, or lack thereof, will not determine the approval of your application.

14.1 Board Training. During the last 2 years, have the Board Chair and majority of the Board members undergone training relevant to the governance roles?

14.2 Medical Advisor. Does the Program have a point of contact who can provide knowledgeable advice regarding medical issues faced by the intellectual disability community? If yes, please provide their name.

When you have answered all questions and uploaded documents and notes where requested, please click the “submit” button. By clicking the “submit” button, you will notify SOI that your application is ready to be reviewed. You will receive email notification when your application is approved or if further information is needed. You will continue to have access to your application if you need to update your information.

2026 – 2027 ACCREDITATION APPLICATION – U.S. PROGRAMS

[**Note:** Programs are expected to complete applications through the online accreditation system. To assist Programs reading translations of this guide in different languages, this application is the same as it appears online for Programs].

Welcome to your Special Olympics accreditation application. **This application page is due 31 January 2026.** Please complete all the following questions, upload documents and insert notes where requested. Each question's response is saved when answered, allowing you to leave and return if you are not completing the application in a single session. If you have questions or comments for SOI, please insert a note or contact your SOI regional Organizational Development representative. For the current Accreditation Guide, Accreditation License Agreement, forms, and other accreditation materials, click [here](#).

Thank you!

1. Bylaws/Governing Documents.

- 1.1 Do the Program's bylaws/governing documents include the SO Mission Statement? Please upload the document and highlight the relevant portion or indicate where in the document the requirement can be found.
- 1.2 Do the Program's bylaws/governing documents limit the terms of the members of the Board to a maximum of 9 consecutive years? If not, please reference the local law or prior SOI decision which exempts the Program from this requirement. Please highlight the relevant portion or indicate where in the document the requirement can be found in same document uploaded in question 1.1.

2. Governing Board.

- 2.1 Does the Program have 7 or more members on the Board of Directors? Please upload a list of all the Program's current Board members. The list must include the years of service for each member, Board position, and role requirement they fulfill (*ex: expert in intellectual disabilities, sports expert, business or finance expert, close family relation of a Special Olympics athlete, or athlete*). Click [here](#) for the Board list template.
- 2.2 Does the Program's Board include at least 1 Special Olympics athlete? If not, please reference the local law or SOI decision which exempts the Program from this requirement.
- 2.3 Does the Program's Board meet at least twice each calendar year? Please upload minutes from 1 meeting during 2024 and minutes from 1 meeting during 2025.

3. Executive/National Director and Sports Director. Are the positions of (1) Board Chair, (2) Executive/National Director, and (3) Sports Director held by different people?

4. Diversity Equity and Inclusion. Has the Program submitted its Diversity and Inclusion report? Please click [here](#) to complete the report and then upload a copy.

- 5. Registered Athletes.** Does the Program certify that it registers athletes? Please upload or provide URL link to sample athlete registration forms. Click [here](#) for form templates.
- 6. Name and Logo.** Does the Program use the Special Olympics name and logo correctly? Please upload one of the following, samples of the Program's current letterhead and/or business cards, marketing collateral, screenshot of webpage, apparel or banners. Click [here](#) for letterhead template.
- 7. Finances and Planning.**
 - 7.1 Please upload a copy of the 2024 financial statements audited by an independent auditor. If unable to acquire audited financial statements, please submit a waiver request along with a copy of your unaudited financial statements. Click [here](#) for waiver request templates.
 - 7.2 Please upload the Program's 2024 IRS Form 990.
 - 7.3 As provided in your 990, please enter the 2024 In-Kind Goods (Part VIII, Line 1g) amount:
 - 7.4 As provided in your 990, please enter the 2024 Total Revenue (Part VIII, Line 12, Column A) amount:
 - 7.5 As provided in your 990, please enter the 2024 Program Services Expense (Part IX, Line 25, Column B) amount:
 - 7.6 As provided in your 990, please enter the 2024 In-Kind Services (Schedule D, Part XI, Line 2b) amount:
 - 7.7 Please upload the Program's 2026 budget. Click [here](#) for the budget template.
 - 7.8 Please upload Program's 2026 operational plan. Click [here](#) for the operational plan template.
- 8. Accreditation Fees.** Has the Program paid all accreditation fees currently due? If the answer is "no," please contact SOI Finance to arrange payment or discuss a payment plan. If a payment plan is currently in place, please upload documentation of the plan's terms.
- 9. SOI's Authority.** Does the Program acknowledge that SOI has the utmost authority over Special Olympics activity and programming?
- 10. License Agreement.** Please upload the completed and signed 2026 – 2027 Accreditation License Agreement. Please click [here](#) to download the agreement.
- 11. Contact Information.** Has the Program provided updated contact information for its office, Board Chair, Executive/National Director, and Sports Director on the Program Profile Page? Please click [here](#) to update contact information.
- 12. Program Quality Standards.** Has the Program conducted a self-assessment and identified areas for improvement using the Program Quality Standards? Please upload the completed Program Quality Standards tool. Please click [here](#) to download the tool.

13. Safeguard Policy. Has the Program adopted and implemented a safeguard policy? If yes, please upload a copy.

14. Safeguard Training. Has the Program's staff and volunteers completed a safeguard training module (e.g., Protective Behaviors or Operation Safeguard)?

15. Voluntary Questions. The following questions are voluntary, and your answer, or lack thereof, will not determine the approval of your application.

15.1 **Board Training.** During the last 2 years, have the Board Chair and the majority of the Board members undergone training relevant to the governance roles?

15.2 **Medical Advisor.** Does the Program have a point of contact who can provide knowledgeable advice regarding medical issues faced by the intellectual disability community? If yes, please provide their name.

When you have answered all questions and uploaded documents and notes where requested, please click the "submit" button. By clicking the "submit" button, you will notify SOI that your application is ready to be reviewed. You will receive email notification when your application is approved or if further information is needed. You will continue to have access to your application if you need to update your information.

2026 MID – CYCLE UPDATE PAGE FOR INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS ACCREDITED FOR 2025 – 2026

[Note: Programs are expected to submit materials through the online accreditation system. To assist Programs reading translations of this guide in different languages, this page is the same as the “2026” tab online for Programs accredited for 2025 – 2026].

2026

Welcome to your Special Olympics accreditation mid – cycle update page.

Please complete all the following questions, upload documents and insert notes where requested. Each question response is saved when answered, allowing you to leave and return if not completing the application in a single session. If you have questions or comments for SOI, please insert a note in the comment section on the right panel of the application page or contact your SOI regional Organizational Development representative. **This application is due 31 March 2026.**

Thank you!

1. Finance and Planning.

- 1.1. Is your Program’s annual revenue less than USD 100,000? If “yes”, please upload the unaudited 2024 financial statements.
- 1.2. Is your Program’s annual revenue more than USD 100,000? If “yes”, you must upload a copy of the 2024 financial statements audited by an independent auditor. If unable to acquire audited financial statements, please submit a waiver request along with a copy of your unaudited financial statements. Click [here](#) for waiver request templates.
- 1.3. Please upload the Program’s 2024 Adjusted Gross Revenue (“AGR”) Form. Click [here](#) to find the AGR form.
- 1.2. Please upload the Program’s 2026 budget. Click [here](#) for the budget template.
- 1.3. Please upload the Program’s 2026 operational plan. Click [here](#) for the operational plan template.

2. Contact Information. Has the Program provided updated contact information for its office, Board Chair, Executive/National Director, and Sports Director on the Program Profile Page? Please click [here](#) to update contact information.

When you have answered all questions, uploaded documents, and notes where requested, please click the “submit” button. By clicking the “submit” button, you will automatically notify SOI that your mid-cycle update is ready to be reviewed. You will receive an email notification if further information is needed. You will continue to have access to your application and mid – cycle update page if you need to update your information.

Thank you for your leadership in the Special Olympics movement!

2026 MID – CYCLE UPDATE PAGE FOR U.S. PROGRAMS ACCREDITED FOR 2025 – 2026

[Note: Programs are expected to submit materials through the online accreditation system. To assist Programs reading translations of this guide in different languages, this page is the same as the “2026” tab online for Programs accredited for 2025 – 2026].

2026

Welcome to your Special Olympics accreditation mid – cycle update page.

Please complete all the following questions, upload documents and insert notes where requested. Each question’s response is saved when answered, allowing you to leave and return if not completing the application in a single session. If you have questions or comments for SOI, please insert a note in the comment section on the right panel of the application page or contact your SOI regional Organizational Development representative. **This application is due on 31 January 2026.**

Thank you!

1. Finance and Planning.

- 1.1 Please upload a copy of the 2024 financial statements audited by an independent auditor. If unable to acquire audited financial statements, please submit a waiver request along with a copy of your unaudited financial statements. Click [here](#) for waiver request templates.
- 1.2 *(U.S. Programs Only)* Please upload the Program’s 2024 IRS Form 990.
- 1.3 As provided in your 990, please enter the 2024 In-Kind Goods (Part VIII, Line 1g) amount:
- 1.4 As provided in your 990, please enter the 2024 Total Revenue (Part VIII, Line 12, Column A) amount:
- 1.5 As provided in your 990, please enter the 2024 Program Services Expense (Part IX, Line 25, Column B) amount:
- 1.6 As provided in your 990, please enter the 2024 In-Kind Services (Schedule D, Part XI, Line 2b) amount:
- 1.7 Please upload the Program’s 2026 budget. Click [here](#) for the budget template.
- 1.8 Please upload the Program’s 2026 operational plan. Click [here](#) for the operational plan template.

2. Diversity Equity and Inclusion. Has the Program submitted its Diversity and Inclusion report? Please click [here](#) to complete the report and then upload a copy.

3. Contact Information. Has the Program provided updated contact information for its office, Board Chair, Executive/National Director, and Sports Director on the Program Profile Page? Please click [here](#) to update contact information.

When you have answered all questions, uploaded documents, and notes where requested, please click the “submit” button. By clicking the “submit” button, you will automatically notify SOI that your mid – cycle update is ready to be reviewed. You will receive an email notification if further information is needed. You will continue to have access to your application and mid – cycle update page if you need to update your information.

Thank you for your leadership in the Special Olympics movement!

GUIDE TO ACCREDITATION REQUIREMENTS

Bylaws/Governing Documents

Mission Statement. The Program's bylaws/governing documents include the Special Olympics Mission Statement in accordance with General Rules Section 1.01: "The mission of Special Olympics is to provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community."

Purpose. A Program's governing documents establish the Program's legal existence, describe its legal powers, and set forth its operating procedures. Depending on the Program's legal form and national laws, its governing documents could consist of one or more of the following: Articles of Incorporation, Articles of Association, Constitution, and Trust Deed, Bylaws or a similar document that outlines the legal structure, purpose, and governance of the Program. The inclusion of the Special Olympics Mission Statement in the governing documents ensures that the Program will be legally obligated to dedicate its assets and operations to Special Olympics activities.

Compliance. Each Program must upload a copy of its current governing document(s) containing the Mission Statement in the same or substantially the same wording.

- The wording of a Program's governing documents is considered "substantially the same" as the Special Olympics Mission Statement if (1) the Mission Statement is accurately translated into a language other than English or (2) there are minor wording changes that do not materially change the meaning of the Mission Statement.
- Programs that wish to use alternative terminology to the term "intellectual disability" due to legal requirements must address their request to SOI's Legal Department.

Board Rotation. Pursuant to General Rules Section 5.02(d), the governing documents of each Program are required to limit the terms of Board members to a maximum of 9 consecutive years. Following is an example of such a provision: *"Term of Office. Directors who are elected by the Board shall serve three-year terms or until their earlier resignation, removal, or death. A director shall serve no more than nine consecutive years."* For verification, SOI will review the Program's bylaws or governing documents uploaded to the first application question to ensure a Board rotation provision is included.

Board Rotation Waiver. Pursuant to General Rules Section 5.02(d), Programs requesting an exception to the nine-year limitation, for a member of that Accredited Program's Board of Directors/Program Committee with an exemplary service record, should submit a written request (specifying the person for whom the exception is requested, describing that person's service to the Board of Directors/Program Committee, the justification for the extension, and the length of the requested extension, provided that in no event may any person serve more than eighteen consecutive years on a Board of Directors/Program Committee) to the SOI Managing Director for the Accredited Program's Region, who shall forward the request together with the Managing

Director's recommendation to the SOI's Legal Department. The SOI Legal Department will compile the requests received during a given period. The Legal Department will review the requests and determine whether they are appropriate. If appropriate, the Legal Department will forward the requests to the Chief of Regional and Program Operations, who shall consider the request. The Chief of Regional and Program Operations shall provide their guidance on whether a request should be granted. The Chief of Regional and Program Operations will inform the following parties: the Legal Department, Accredited Program, and the Managing Director for the Accredited Program's Region. Before seeking a Board rotation waiver, Programs are encouraged to consider having exemplary long-term Board members support the Program in other ways or step off the Board for a one-year period before returning to the Board. No more than twenty percent of any Board of Directors/Program Committee members shall be granted such exceptions.

Governing Board

Purpose. To be successful, a Special Olympics Program needs a strong Board of Directors with effective leadership, meeting frequently enough to exercise meaningful management and including appropriate expertise and a range of perspectives for quality decisions. Regular rotation of Board membership facilitates fresh energy and ideas, supports fundraising through connections of new Board members, and signals openness and transparency.

Board of Directors. The Program has a Board of Directors with management oversight and financial responsibility for the Program and at least seven members. The accreditation requirements refer to the governing body with ultimate decision-making authority for each Program as the "Board of Directors." Governing bodies under different names, such as "Boards of Trustees," "Boards of Governors," and "Program Committees" (as defined by General Rules Section 10.01) also satisfy General Rules and accreditation requirements related to board governance. Special Olympics athletes, experts, and family members serving on Board or Program committees do not satisfy board composition requirements unless they are full voting members of the governing body with ultimate decision-making authority for the Program.

Athlete Leadership. Each Board of Directors must include at least one current or former Special Olympics athlete in accordance with General Rules Section 5.02(c). The Board should use the same criteria for choosing an athlete member as it would for choosing any other member, seeking candidates with motivation, commitment, skills, and ability to contribute meaningfully, with appropriate support and training. Athlete members must have the same rights and privileges as other voting Board members, including full voting rights and the same terms as other members. Athletes should play a meaningful and integral role and should not be chosen only to satisfy this accreditation requirement. Programs are encouraged to make use of materials provided through the Special Olympics Athlete Leadership Program to make the most of athlete leadership. If any national law(s) prohibits Board membership by a person with intellectual disabilities, the Program may request a compliance waiver. In such situations, the Program must find another way, with SOI's approval, to comply with the intent of the requirement.

Expert in Intellectual Disabilities. An expert in intellectual disabilities should have an advanced degree or substantial professional experience in a field related to intellectual disabilities, such as special education or developmental psychology.

Sports Expert. A sports expert should have an advanced degree or substantial professional experience in a field related to sports.

Finance or Business Expert. A finance or business expert should have an advanced degree, certification, or substantial professional experience in a field related to financial or business management.

Close Family Relation. A close family relation includes a parent, sibling, caregiver, or child of a current or former Special Olympics athlete.

Staff Members on the Board of Directors. The accreditation requirements and General Rules do not prohibit Program staff from serving as voting members on the Program's Board of Directors. As a best practice, however, Programs are encouraged to have Board and staff roles filled by different people. Having staff and board roles filled by different people decreases the likelihood and appearance of conflicts of interest. It also spreads opportunities, improves diversity, and decreases turnover risk if the roles are held by different people. For Programs that wish to have people in dual roles, it is good to have guidelines to clarify expectations. For example, Board members should abstain from being involved in decisions that would impact them personally as staff members, such as impacting their salary, benefits, or oversight. It should also be clarified that Board and staff roles currently held by one person may be held by two people when the current person leaves one or both roles.

Board Meetings and Minutes. A Program's Board of Directors is required to meet at least twice each calendar year, but the application only requests minutes from one meeting during the current year and one meeting during the previous year.

Executive/National Director and Sports Director

Requirement. The Program has an Executive/National Director and a Sports Director in accordance with General Rules Section 5.02(e), who may be part-time or full-time, volunteer or paid, but who are not the same person and neither of whom is the Chair of the Board of Directors.

Purpose. Division of the roles of Executive/National Director, Sports Director, and Board Chair among three different people (1) promotes accountability, (2) prevents overburdening one person, and (3) leads to a wider breadth of experience, skills, and ideas in the Program's leadership. This in turn leads to more effective governance and growth.

Executive/National Director. The Executive/National Director reports to the Board of Directors and is responsible for the Program's day-to-day operations and executes daily functions, such as: planning and executing Program goals, managing the Program's budget, hiring, and supervising support staff, planning administrative functions, developing relationships with affiliated sports organizations, and ensuring that all goals are met.

Sports Director. The Sports Director reports to the Executive/National Director and plans and runs the Program's sports program, including creating and implementing the Program's sports training plan, developing new sports initiatives, managing, and coordinating the Program's regional and world teams, and planning the Program's Summer and/or Winter Games.

Registered Athletes

Requirement. The Program registers Special Olympics athletes in accordance with General Rules Section 2.02 and submits athlete census data to SOI as required in accordance with General Rules Section 2.06.

Purpose. Athlete registration is necessary for health, legal and data collection purposes. Census information is important for program evaluation, planning, and marketing.

Forms. As part of registration, Programs are required to collect forms for each athlete pursuant to General Rules Section 2.02. For accreditation, Programs are required to upload their current registration forms. Instructions are available at: [Athlete Registration Forms \(specialolympics.org\)](https://specialolympics.org/Athlete-Registration-Forms)

Name and Logo

Requirement. The Program's name is "Special Olympics [name of jurisdiction]," and the Program's logo is the Special Olympics logo plus name of jurisdiction in accordance with General Rules Sections 5.03 and 5.07.

Purpose. Uniformity in Program names and logo usage consistent with the Special Olympics Brand Guidelines is important for public awareness.

Name. A Program may translate the Special Olympics name into its national language for use within its jurisdiction. Outside of that jurisdiction, the Program name shall be stated in English.

Logo. A Program may use the Special Olympics logo only when it is displayed in conjunction with or juxtaposed with the name of the Program. Programs and Sub-Programs may not:

- Modify or add to the official logo.
- Use any logo not authorized by SOI; or
- Register any Special Olympics names or trademarks.

Materials. Programs are required to upload one of the following: samples of the Program's current letterhead and/or business cards, marketing collateral, screenshot of webpage, apparel or banners. If a Program does not use business cards, it is not required to create them solely for the accreditation application. If your Program needs assistance creating or updating branded materials, please contact your Regional Organizational Development representative.

Finances and Planning

Requirements.

Purpose. Proper financial controls are essential for every Special Olympics Program to ensure that Program assets are used solely to support the Special Olympics mission.

Financial Statements. Annual financial statements should include:

- Statement of all revenue from the most recently completed fiscal year,
- Statement of all expenses from the most recently completed fiscal year, and
- Balance Sheet showing the Program's assets and liabilities as of the last day of the most recently completed fiscal year.

Financial Audit. Pursuant to General Rules Section 8.05(a), each Accredited Program's annual financial statement shall be audited by an independent certified public accountant, or by an independent accounting professional in the Program's jurisdiction with recognition in the profession. Please see the Accreditation Fees Policy for guidelines and instructions regarding waivers from the audit requirement.

Fiscal Year. Pursuant to General Rules Section 8.02, the fiscal year recognized by all Accredited Programs and Sub-Programs shall be the calendar year, unless otherwise approved in advance by SOI. If your Program has a different fiscal year that affects the submission of budgets and financial statements, please contact your regional Organizational Development representative to determine an appropriate plan for submission.

IRS Form 990. Programs in the United States are required annually to submit a copy of their filed IRS Form 990. The 2024 Form 990 is due to SOI 31 January 2026 and will be used to calculate the Program's 2026 accreditation fee.

Adjusted Gross Revenue Form. International Programs (all Programs outside the United States) are required to submit an AGR Form annually. The 2024 AGR Form will be used to calculate the Program's 2026 accreditation fee.

Financial Records. Programs should maintain records supporting all financial information submitted to SOI. Upon request, SOI may inspect the Program's financial records or request an independent audit to confirm the information reported.

Annual Budget. An annual budget is a statement of planned revenue and expenses for an entire fiscal year and is a planning tool that every Program must have to effectively manage its finances and assets. If needed, please contact your regional Organizational Development representative for a budget template. If your Program's budget is not yet complete or approved at the time you submit your accreditation application, please note when it will be submitted. If the budget will be completed and approved after the deadline, 31 March 2026,

the Program needs to submit a deadline extension request to ensure they will not be penalized for a late application submission.

Operational Plan. In accordance with General Rules Section 8.03(a), Programs are required to develop a written operational plan for each fiscal year, setting forth comprehensive goals for the Program's sports, programmatic, administrative, and fundraising goals, and its plans for growth. If needed, please contact your regional Organizational Development representative for an operational plan template. If your Program's operational plan is not yet complete or approved at the time you submit your accreditation application, please note when it will be submitted. If the operational plan will be completed and approved after the deadline, 31 March 2026/31 January 2026, the Program needs to submit a deadline extension request at least 30 days before the deadline to ensure they will not be penalized for a late application.

Accreditation Fees

Requirement. The Program pays its accreditation fees when due or makes other arrangements agreed to by SOI in accordance with General Rules Section 8.08.

Policy. Please see the Accreditation Fees Policy, which includes fee formulas, the invoicing and payment schedule, payment instructions, and other details. Click [here](#) to view the policy.

SOI's Authority

Requirement. The Program must acknowledge that SOI has the utmost authority over Special Olympics activity and programming in accordance with General Rules Section 4.01.

Policy. SOI has the right and the responsibility to ensure that all sports training and competition offered to persons with intellectual disabilities under the name or auspices of "Special Olympics" are organized, financed, and conducted in accordance with uniform international standards, and in a manner that preserves the quality and reputation of Special Olympics and best serves the interests of persons with intellectual disabilities worldwide.

License Agreement

Requirement. The Program has executed a current Special Olympics Accreditation License Agreement in accordance with General Rules Section 6.09.

Purpose. The Special Olympics Accreditation License Agreement gives a Program the legal authority to operate as a Special Olympics Program and to use the Special Olympics name and logo for specified purposes, all of which is conditioned on the Program's compliance with the accreditation requirements and General Rules.

Program Quality Standards

Requirement. Program's Board of Directors and/or staff have each done a self-assessment, identified areas for improvement using the Program Quality Standards, and discussed their identified areas with a designated regional staff member. For more information on how to do an assessment, please contact your regional Organizational Development representative. Reach out to Svetlana Fenichel, sfenichel@specialolympics.org if you have any questions about Program Quality Standards.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding Policy. Has the Program adopted and implemented a safeguarding policy? If yes, please upload a copy.

Safeguarding Training. Has the Program's staff and volunteers completed a Safeguarding training module (e.g., Protective Behaviors or Operation Safeguard)?

Safeguarding Training. Safeguarding of Athletes from Sexual Abuse, bullying and other harmful, offensive, or unwanted contact. In accordance with General Rules section 5.16 SOI has written and adopted policies concerning the protection of Special Olympics athletes and other Special Olympics stakeholders, such as volunteers and staff, from sexual abuse, bullying, and other harmful, unwanted, or offensive contact. All Special Olympics Programs are required to implement policies and procedures and reporting requirements consistent with the legal requirements of their jurisdiction and consistent with best practices, as a requirement of accreditation to ensure Special Olympics athletes, staff, volunteers, and stakeholders are protected during Special Olympics events and activities at all times.

Voluntary Questions

Voluntary Questions. The following questions are voluntary, and your answer will not determine the approval of your application:

Board Training. During the last 2 years, have the Board Chair and the majority of the board members undergone training relevant to the governance roles?

Medical Advisor. Does the Program have a point of contact who can provide knowledgeable advice regarding medical issues faced by the intellectual disability community? If yes, please provide their name.

Purpose. Voluntary questions are included to collect information and emphasize importance of certain non-required opportunities.

Board Training. Board training opportunities will continue to be offered by SOI, and Programs may also seek other training opportunities locally. To answer "yes" to this question, training can be done as a group or separately with training(s) tailored to specific members' training needs (for example, finance training for the Board's treasurer, athlete leadership training for athletes on the Board). For assistance in identifying Board training opportunities and resources, please contact your Regional Organizational Development representative.

ACCREDITATION RESOURCES AVAILABLE

The following resources have been made available to support Programs with the accreditation process. We encourage all Programs to utilize the available templates. Materials with an asterisk will be provided in the following languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish. Click [here](#) to find the resource page.

- 2026 Accreditation Guide*
- 2026 – 2027 Accreditation License Agreement*
- Accreditation Fees Policy*
- Accreditation Training Presentation (English and Spanish)
- Accreditation Training Webinar Recording (English and Spanish)
- Adjusted Gross Revenue Form 2024*
- Athlete Registration Forms*
- Bank Information Forms
- Board of Director list template
- Board Rotation Waiver Request Template
- Budget template
- Founding Committee Application
- Financial Audit Waiver Request Template
- General Waiver Request Template
- Letterhead Template
- Timeline Memo
- Operational Plan template (multi and single year)*
- Payment Instructions
- Program Quality Standard tool (and corresponding training)*
- “What Accreditation Offers” one-pager*

ACCREDITATION CONTACTS

**Primary accreditation contacts*

Dr. John Dow, Chief of Regional and
Program Operations

SOI Legal Department

Brandon Fitzgerald, Chief Legal Officer &
Secretary

***Corinn Davis**, Paralegal

Africa

Charles Nyambe, Regional President &
Managing Director

Charles Takouet, Senior Manager,
Organizational Development

***Joe Mutua**, Manager, Program Development

Asia Pacific

Dipak Natali, Regional President & Managing
Director

***Yee Sangswang**, Specialist, Program
Development

***Bradley Few**, Director, Organizational
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SOI Finance Department

Jim Barbee, Chief Financial Officer

***Sara Egloff**, Director, Grants, Revenue, and
Accounting Operations

***John McLellan**, Senior Manager, AR &
Revenue Accounting

Anna Hardie, SOI Finance Assistant

Pamela Johnson, Senior Manager, Grants
Management

East Asia

Freda Fung, Regional President &
Managing Director

Daisy Cao, Vice President, Organizational
Development

***Tracy Li**, Director, Organizational
Development

Rebecca Liu, Senior Director, Administration

Europe Eurasia

David Evangelista, Regional President & Managing Director

***Krzysztof Krukowski**, Senior Director, Organizational Development

Miroslaw Krogulec, Vice President, Sports

Christo Velkov, Senior Vice President, Strategic Development

Colin Kenny, Senior Manager, Projects and Grants

Jenni Hakkinen, Youth Schools University Manager

Sabine Menke, Senior Director, Youth, Unified Sports & Research

Gonzalo Ramos, Manager, Organizational Development & Regional Support

Pamela Hereera, Regional Manager, Young Athletes, Athlete Leadership, Family Engagement and MATP

Bjoern Koehler, Senior Director, Health Programming, SOEE and Opening Eyes, Global

Matteo Secchi, Senior Director, Health Programming, SOEE Opening Eyes, Global

Ilse Hemmelay, Senior Manager, Health Programs

Latin America

Claudia Echeverry, Regional President & Managing Director

***Johamy Alabi**, Director, Organizational Development

***Juan Espinoza**, Senior Manager, Organizational Development

Middle East/ North Africa

Ayman Wahab, Regional President & Managing Director

***Raghda Mostafa**, Senior Manager, Grants and Accreditation

Maha Yacoub, Director, Budget and Human Resources

North America

Greg Epperson, Regional President & Managing Director

Amie Dugan, Senior Vice President, Organizational Development

***Lorna Bell**, Executive Director, Caribbean Initiative (Caribbean Programs only)

***AJ Winters**, Director, Organizational Development (U.S. and Canadian Programs)