# Helping Programs Improve and Grow

➢ **What are Program Quality Standards and why do we need them?**
The Program Quality Standards (PQS) are a tool to help Programs develop and grow. They allow Programs to identify what to focus on or change to keep moving forward. As a movement, we recognize the need to be clear about what is important. PQS are intended to spark honest conversations about what can be improved in your Program.

➢ **How was it created?**
The PQS was a "ground-up" initiative. The initial set of standards was developed in 2012-13 with the input from all Programs in all Regions. It was finalized and approved by the International Advisory Council (IAC) Committee in 2013.

The PQS revision process was initiated in 2016 with the input from the SOI Departments, Region and Program staff. The final version of revised Program Quality Standards was signed off in January 2017 by Special Olympic CEO, Mary Davis.

➢ **What's new in PQS Version II?**
Instead of being organized around the 10 core "building blocks," the Standards are now aligned with the Global Strategic Plan initiatives. For each strategy in the global plan, there is 1 page of standard. Overall the number of standards has been reduced by approximately 40%

**TIPS**

➢ Don't tackle all sections at once. Select the most urgent and important for your Program to focus on

➢ Read them from left to right – starting with Stage 1 and moving to Stage 3

➢ Use self-assessment tools in addition to the PQS

➢ Don't use them in isolation or "on top of" the work your Program is doing.

➢ **Who are they for?**
The Standards enable Program Leaders to understand, manage and support activities and deliver them at a high standard[1]. National Directors, CEOs and Program Boards should "own" the Standards within Programs.

The Standards will also be useful for working with sub-Programs, athlete, family, and youth committees and Founding Committees.

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[1] Note: Program Quality Standard do not take the place of detailed technical standards in other areas to help coaches, event managers or other managers.

➢ **How are they structured?**

The Program Quality Standards are grouped into 8 sections, each corresponding with a specific strategic initiative of our 2016-2020 Strategic Plan.



Within each section the standards are set out in logical steps, or stages, that build on each other. Most standards have 3 stages which allows them to be relevant for all types of Programs from small to large, new to mature, and from Programs lacking resources to those that are well-resourced.

All Programs are at different levels of development – even within same section. For this reason, we don't use the stages as overall labels for Programs (i.e. so we would never say "My Program is a Stage 2 Program"). The stages are just descriptions of a developmental level for a particular standard and Programs will always have a mix of stages across each section.

➢ **How should quality standards be used?**

**Review how you are doing**: the primary use of the Standards is to self-assess and find ways to improve. Self-assessment may be done within your Program or jointly with your Region.

**Use them like a Roadmap**: use them as you develop your annual operational plans and longer term strategic plans. If you are starting a new plan, use them to identify what should be included. If you're in the middle of a strategic plan, focus on improvements that fit with and support your current strategy.

**Track your progress and celebrate success**: achieving new standards means your Program is growing and improving! These are measurable results. Recognize and celebrate growth.

➢ **What are the benefits of Program Quality Standards?**

| For Programs | For Athletes | For Program Leaders | For the Movement |
|---|---|---|---|
| Help your Program grow and improve. Provide assessment, planning, and tracking tool. Allow engagement with constituents, spark honest conversations about your priorities. Remain relevant as Program evolves | A better Program = improvements to the lives of athletes. It's a communication tool to get athletes involved, provide them with a reference point to input on what they think a Program should focus on | Help NDs, CEOs, Boards of Directors focus on quality, set realistic plans and help answer the question "what's next?" Useful in transferring knowledge to new or inexperienced leaders, staff, key volunteers | A consistent reference tool which drive us towards Program Excellence. Moves us away from subjective 'judgements' of progress. Support our focus on quality internally and externally (donors, governments, & corporate partners. |

# Helping Special Olympics Accredited Programs to improve and grow

## Quality Standards for Accredited Programs

*Version 2 Approved.  Note that:*

- *The Standards are now aligned with the global strategic plan*
- *For each strategy in the global plan, there is 1 page of standards*
- *Overall the number of standards has been reduced by approx. 40%*

**Special Olympics**

| A. Sports Quality | Stage 1 | Stage 2 | Stage 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Frequency of Participation** | 75% of athletes/partners have at least 1 sports training session with coach each week of sport training season (session = 30-60 minutes at moderate intensity) | 50% of athletes/partners have at least 1 sports training session with a coach and a second training session with or prescribed by a certified coach each week of training season | 25% of athletes/partners have at least 1 sports training session and 2 additional sports or fitness training sessions with or prescribed by a coach each week of training season (minimum 2.5 hours total) |
| **Athlete Development** | Program communicates the importance of health, fitness and nutrition, development of sports skills and competition readiness to all athletes, partners, coaches and families | Program is building a multi-stage, holistic athlete development model, including options for athletes to engage in sport at different levels of intensity (recreational, competitive or high performing) | Program has fully implemented an athlete development model |
| **Emphasis on Improvement** | Athletes/partners have a sports improvement goal (related to fitness, skills or play/competition) set with coach | Athlete/partner goals are tracked and updated every year, accompanied by a documented training plan set with coach | Program promotes athlete/partner ownership of goal-setting and training, supported by their coach |
| | 15% of athletes/partners have a yearly sports improvement goal | 30% of athletes/partners have a yearly sports improvement goal | 50% of athletes/partners have a yearly sports improvement goal |
| **Coach Preparation and Coaching** | Program successfully recruits new coaches and improves its coaches to athletes/ partners ratio as part of its annual plan | Program has multi-year coach recruitment and retention targets and retains 90% of coaches year on year | Program has identified successors for all key coaching roles |
| | Program maintains basic data on coaches, e.g. name and contact details | Program maintains an active database of coach information including Special Olympics certification | Program database records include coach certifications from other agencies |
| | Program offers certified coach training (including Unified Sports, Fitness and Young Athletes ) | Program provides or facilitates certified sport-specific coach training and opportunities to gain higher certification (incl. Motor Activities Training Program) | Program has a fully developed coach education system with 80% coaches certified and regular recertification |
| **Equipment and Facilities** | Sport conducted using basic sports equipment, attire and safe facilities/environment | Sport conducted using sports equipment, attire and facilities/ environment similar to mainstream sports | Sport conducted using national/ international standard sports equipment, attire and facilities/environment |
| **Fitness and Wellbeing** | Training includes general warm-up and fitness elements (e.g. nutrition) prescribed by coach per his/her knowledge | Training activities include warm-up/fitness elements specific to the athlete / sport, prescribed by coach | Program promotes athlete/partner fitness tracking (e.g. heart rate, daily activity levels, fitness/nutrition logs) |
| **Sport Partnerships** | Program builds relationships with Sport Governing Bodies or other sport-related organizations who can further Program objectives | Program has a partnership with a Sport Governing Body or a recognized sport-related organization for at least 25% of their official sports offered. | Program has a formal partnership with a Sport Governing Body or a recognized sport- related organization for at least 50% of their official sports offered. |

| B. Inclusive Sports | Stage 1 | Stage 2 | Stage 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Unified Sports** | Program offers one Unified Sports model (recreational, player development or competitive) | Program offers two Unified Sports models (recreational, player development or competitive) | Program offers all three Unified Sports models (recreational, player development and competitive) |
| | Program offers Unified Sports in one sport | Program offers Unified Sports in two sports | Program offers Unified Sports in three sports |
| | Program conducts Unified Sports through 1 of 3 delivery channels (Community, School, University) | Program conducts Unified Sports through 2 of 3 delivery channels (Community, School, University) | Program conducts Unified Sports through all 3 delivery channels (Community, School, University) |
| | 10% of athletes participate in Unified Sports | 20% of athletes participate in Unified Sports | 30% of athletes participate in Unified Sports |
| | 10% of coaches are certified as Unified Sports coaches | 20% of coaches are certified as Unified Sports coaches | 30% of coaches are certified as Unified Sports coaches |
| **Young Athletes** | Program offers Young Athletes program on a year-round basis | Program offers two of three Young Athletes Models (school, community or home) and registers all Young Athletes in GMS or Connect | Program offers sustained, expanding Young Athletes activities and transitions children to other Special Olympics opportunities after Young Athletes |
| **Expansion** | Program actively recruits new athletes and partners everywhere that opportunities are available | Program actively recruits athletes in low presence/remote areas as part of its annual plan | Program successfully recruits and retains athletes as part of its multi-year strategic plan |
| | Program offers at least three official Special Olympics sports, one of which is a team sport | Program offers five official Special Olympics sports and the Motor Activities Training Program | Program offers more than seven official Special Olympics sports |
| | Program actively recruits youth (with and without ID) for sports and raising awareness | Program successfully increases numbers of youth (with or without ID) as part of its annual plan | Program successfully retains youth (with or without ID) as they go beyond school age as part of its multi-year strategic plan |
| | Program builds relationships with educational institutions that cater to ID and non-ID students (e.g. schools, universities) | Program partners with educational institutions to conduct inclusive sport and education activities (e.g. Unified Sports, youth summit) | Program increases its number of Unified Schools year on year (including universities) |

| C. Health | Stage 1 | Stage 2 | Stage 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Healthy Athletes** | Program offers at least one Healthy Athletes® disciplines per year | Program offers at least two Healthy Athletes® disciplines per year | Program offers at least three Healthy Athletes® disciplines per year |
| | SO Program meets all Healthy Athletes® grant requirements and locally funds at least 15% of overall costs for Healthy Athletes events within the Program | Program locally funds at least 30% of overall costs for Healthy Athletes events within the Program | Program locally funds at least 75% of overall costs for Healthy Athletes events within the Program |
| **Follow Up Care** | Program ensures athletes, families and/or caregivers receive results of Healthy Athletes® screenings | 70% of athletes who receive referrals at Healthy Athletes® within selected geographic area(s) have a place to go (for example, local hospital or clinic) for follow-up care following a Healthy Athletes examination for at least one discipline | 70% of athletes who receive referrals at Healthy Athletes® within selected geographic area(s) have a place to go (for example, local hospital or clinic) for follow-up care following a Healthy Athletes examination for at least two disciplines |
| **Wellness (Fitness) Programs** | Program communicates the importance and impact of health and wellness (fitness) to all athletes, partners, coaches and/or families by incorporating information into orientation, online and other materials | Program offers health and wellness programming outside of Healthy Athletes events for athletes, partners, coaches and/or families, with a minimum of 10% of athletes and families attending within selected geographic area(s) | SO Program offers health and wellness programming outside of Healthy Athletes events for athletes involving partners, coaches and/or families as appropriate with a minimum of 20% of athletes and families within selected geographic area(s) enrolled in an ongoing wellness program |
| **Athlete Leadership Engagement** | Program provides health and wellness/fitness training as part of the Athlete Leadership curriculum | Program has 2 Athlete Leaders who give speeches on athlete health and wellness/fitness, provide input on health/wellness/fitness programming and/or offer peer-leadership to fellow athletes on health and wellness/fitness | Program has at least 3 Athlete Health Leaders and/or an active athlete and family health advocacy group |

Note: The above standards are aligned with criteria for Healthy Community recognition. Programs that meet stage 3 standards are also meeting the Healthy Community recognition criteria.

| D. Awareness | Stage 1 | Stage 2 | Stage 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Branding** | Program implements SOI brand guidelines for basic materials (e.g. banners, t-shirts) | Program consistently implements brand guidelines on all tools and materials at Program level (e.g. website, uniforms) | Program consistently implements brand guidelines on all materials at Sub- Program level and promotes the brand externally |
| **Marketing Communications** | Program has at least 1 known, influential public figure or Athlete Leader active as a Program Ambassador or spokesperson at least twice a year | Program has at least 2 active Program Ambassadors or spokespersons, one of whom is an athlete leader spokesperson | Program has 3 or more influential spokespersons, including at least two athlete leaders spokespersons, and implements annual activation plans for each one |
|  | Program involves a national/state level celebrity in its activities at least once a year | Program involves two or more national/state level celebrities in its activities at least once a year each | Program has ongoing active involvement from at least three celebrities each year |
|  | Program secures media coverage for one major event annually | Program secures media coverage for one major event quarterly | Program secures year-round media coverage |
|  | Program has an established, managed social media presence | Program strategically integrates social media to support marketing activities | Program uses social media analytics to guide marketing strategy |
|  | Program successfully promotes at least 1 major annual event,  competition or campaign as part of its annual plan | Program successfully conducts multiple activities that raise awareness as part of its annual plan | Program takes a strategic approach to marketing as part of its multi-year plan |
| **Marketing Relationships** | Program has relationships with marketing, communications and/or media professionals for guidance and support | Program has a value in-kind arrangement with one or more marketing agencies and/or media outlets | Program has a formal sponsorship arrangement with at least one marketing agency and/or media outlet |
| **Marketing Resources** | Program uses basic marketing materials (e.g. fact sheets, press release, brochure, t-shirt, poster, event flyer, presentation) | Program uses advanced marketing materials (e.g. videos, infographic, advertising, media kit) | Program uses customized marketing materials for specific audiences (e.g. for government, corporate) |
|  | Program has up to date contact information, news, stories, events and sports on www.specialolympics.org | Program website is professionally designed with up to date news, stories, events, etc. and usage is tracked | Program website has interactive features designed to attract and engage the public (e.g. online giving) |
| **Government and Political Relations** | Program analyzes political landscape to understand opportunities for growth and developing appropriate political contacts | Program develops strong relationships with political leaders who understand Special Olympics and use their influence to advance the rights of people with ID | Relevant political leaders involve Special Olympics in policy setting related to inclusion and disability |
|  | Relevant political stakeholders attend Special Olympics events | Program gets support from political stakeholders for one activity as part of its annual plan | Program collaborates with political stakeholders on multiple activities as part of its multi-year strategy |

| E. Connect Movement | Stage 1 | Stage 2 | Stage 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Technology** | Program has access to basic phone, computer, dedicated Special Olympics email and internet connectivity and improves technology as part of its annual plan | Program has consistent connectivity and improves its technology every year as part of its multi-year strategy | Program intentionally leverages technology to reach strategic objectives and improve programming |
| | Program has basic back-up system and uses virus protection software | Program has a secure data storage and off-site back-up system | Program implements comprehensive information security measures and policies and runs regular technology audits |
| **Applications and Data** | Program uses basic computer applications for office and program administration | Program has a shared electronic file storage system for documents, photos, presentations, etc. | Program has systems that enable online information sharing for staff and volunteers, fundraising, marketing, social media, etc. |
| | Program uses spreadsheets or databases to manage data for competitions and internal groups (athletes, partners and coaches, families and volunteers) | Program uses GMS or Connect (new system which will replace GMS) or a similar databases to manage data for competitions, athletes, partners and coaches, families and volunteers | Program uses GMS or Connect to manage data for competitions, athletes, partners and coaches, families and volunteers |
| | Program has a spreadsheet to track donors, partners, celebrities and fans | Program has a database to track and follow up with donors, partners, celebrities and fans | Program has a Constituent Relationship Management (CRM) system |
| **Internal Communications** | Program provides regular updates to key stakeholders such as athletes, staff, key volunteers, Sub-Programs, local Programs and Board | Program has a formal channel for internal stakeholders to share, communicate and/or have feedback mechanism | Program has a platform that allows for collaboration and exchange of ideas (e.g. private social media or intranet) |
| **External Messaging** | Program spokespeople, including athletes and families, use information from global communication platforms, e.g. resources.specialolympics.org | Program spokespeople, including athletes and families, use global messaging and terminology when talking about Special Olympics and their involvement | Program integrates global messaging and terminology throughout its communications, activities and materials |

| F. Games | Stage 1 | Stage 2 | Stage 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Athlete/Partner Preparation | Athletes/partners are prepared to compete according to the relevant sport rules | | |
| Number of Competition Opportunities | Athletes/partners have more than one competition opportunity per year per traditional/Unified sports | Athletes/partners have 3 or more competition opportunities per year in their chosen traditional/Unified sports | Athletes/partners have the opportunity to participate in league-style play or other competitions throughout the year |
| Coach Preparation | Coaches have basic knowledge of the rules of their sport and know how to apply tactics, and have basic knowledge in fitness and nutrition | Coaches have up-to-date knowledge of the rules and moderate technical/tactical understanding of their sport, along with moderate knowledge in fitness and nutrition | Coaches have advanced knowledge of the rules of their sport, advanced technical/ tactical understanding and advanced knowledge in fitness and nutrition |
| Athlete/Partner Information | Athlete/partner information, including data from one local/regional/state/ national competition, is registered in database/GMS | Athlete/partner data from 2-3 competitions is in GMS and used for competition management, and delegations meet registration deadlines | Competition results are available almost immediately and athlete/partner data can be viewed by local Programs |
| Competition Management | Special Olympics sport rules, including Article 1 (Divisioning, Advancement, etc.), are consistently applied by a competition manager, with coach meetings held and competition schedules provided in advance | All head technical officials meet minimum Sport Governing Body certifications, GMS is used and competition schedules are revised each year to meet athlete needs for more challenging competition opportunities | Technical Delegates and sport-specific juries are in place and work well, and all technical officials meet minimum Sport Governing Body certification requirements for the level of competition |
| Highlighting Athlete Talents | Program actively promotes competitions and seeks coverage locally, and in places where participants have travelled from | Program executes a plan to achieve an average of 2 spectators per athlete attending competitions, and promptly distributes event stories and results | Program executes a plan to achieve an average of 4 spectators per athlete attending competitions |
| | Program promotes achievements of athletes at competitions on social media | Program promotes achievements of athletes in live event updates online | Program offers live event coverage online and/or on national TV/radio |
| Event Management | Events are run by trained, uniformed volunteer teams with clear roles and an event management structure to oversee competition and non-sports activities | Events run on time and within budget, with volunteer training, assignments and scheduling all done in advance, and evaluation takes place | Events are run by experienced volunteer teams who train new people into key roles, seek feedback and continuously improve how events are run |
| Event Protocol | Ceremonies and Awards are athlete-focused and comply with protocol | Ceremonies and Awards include influential leaders or celebrities | Ceremonies and Awards are produced at a high quality |
| Event Safety | Venue is set up according to local safety standards and Sports Rules (Art 1), first aid and emergency action plan in place | Access to sensitive areas such as changing rooms and field of play is controlled, and certified medical volunteers are present | Licensed medics, law enforcement, fire and security services are available at National / State and sub-Program level events |
| Health | Facilities and competition venues have healthy food and drink options available | At least one Healthy Athlete discipline is offered at Competition locations at least at Program level | At least three Healthy Athlete disciplines are offered at Competition locations at least at Program level |

| Resources | Stage 1 | Stage 2 | Stage 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Planning and Tracking** | Program sets written fundraising targets (cash and in-kind) as part of its annual plan, and reviews them at least quarterly | Program has a multi-year, diversified fundraising strategy | Program engages external organizations and partners to improve its fundraising |
| **Capacity** | Program has basic fundraising materials and capacity to prepare/ present basic proposals to prospects | Program has identified what it can sell to sponsors, assigned a value and created a sponsorship package for each one | Program has capacity to prepare customized, professional proposals, including sponsor rights packages |
| | Board understands the importance of its role in supporting fundraising | Board actively pursues donations/gifts, and has a committee | Board has written goals with respect to securing regular, significant resources and/or giving personal gifts/resources |
| | Program has ability to submit, implement and support small grants | Program has ability to submit, implement and support large grants | Program works with other organizations to pursue, submit, implement and support mutually beneficial funding |
| **Sustainability** | Program has at least 1 source of budget-relieving cash funding, excluding SOI | Program has three or more sources of cash funding, including government | Program has five or more sources of cash funding from diverse donors |
| | Program receives two or more budget-relieving in-kind donations of goods and services | Program receives three or more in-kind donations of goods and services | Program receives five or more in-kind donations of goods and services |
| | | Program helps SOI to implement global or regional partnerships and campaigns | Program collaborates on fundraising to benefit both the Program and SOI |
| | Program has a pipeline of potential funders, with solid rationale for each one | Program secures at least one new source of funds each year | Program secures at least one multi-year source of funding |
| **Donor Management** | Program implements basic donor recognition, such as thank you letters | Program formally recognizes donors based on various levels of giving | Program has written strategies for advancing top donor relationships |
| | Program maintains good reputation of Special Olympics in its fundraising efforts, including fundraising by an outside party | Written agreements are executed with donors as necessary | Program conducts risk analysis on sources of funding |
| **Non-Governmental or Service Organizations** | Program has at least one partnership with a non-governmental or service organizations (e.g. Peace Corps, Lions Clubs International, UNICEF) | Program is partnered with at least two non-governmental or service organizations whose work is complementary and beneficial to Special Olympics | Non-governmental and/or service organization partnerships are delivering support and resources that are making a significant difference to the Program |
| **Government and Other Stakeholder Support** | Program collaborates with a government ministry or agency to obtain resources that support Special Olympics | Program collaborates with two or more government ministries and agencies to obtain resources | Program has formal commitments from all major political stakeholders and parties to provide ongoing resources |

**Special Olympics Accredited Program quality standards**

| Leadership | Stage 1 | Stage 2 | Stage 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Athlete Leadership** | Program has athletes serving in leadership roles (e.g. Spokesperson, Coach, Health Advocate) | Program has an Athlete Input Council actively providing input to Program leaders and involved in decisions | An athlete leader is responsible for an important programmatic area or an office function |
| **Youth Leadership** | Program has youth serving in leadership roles (e.g. as Board members, officials, coaches, interns, committee members) | Program has a Youth Activation Committee actively providing input to Program leaders | A youth leader is responsible for an important programmatic area or an office function |
| **Family Leadership** | Program engages families and collects families data | Family members serve in leadership roles in Special Olympics programming | Program communicates regularly with families and has a formal families structure |
| **Program Leadership** | Program communicates regularly with Special Olympics regions/International and seeks to grow or improve the Program | Program leaders engage with Special Olympics regional/International activities to share and implement best practices | Program analyses key metrics and gets feedback from athletes, families, etc. to help guide Program strategies |
| | Board has an active membership, with at least two active members who are influential leaders in business/politics | Board has clearly outlined roles and responsibilities and works to improve its engagement with the Program | Program has a fully engaged and productive Board that guides the program and brings in resources |
| | Board has a Finance Committee and has identified other required committees | Board has an active committee structure with written deliverables for each one | Board performance is evaluated each year and Board has its own succession plan |
| | Progress against annual plan and budget is reported twice a year | Board evaluates Program and CEO/ Program Director performance annually | Board has a CEO/Program Director succession plan |
| | Program agrees and tracks goals for each staff member each year | Program agrees and documents goals for volunteers in key leadership roles each year | Program has a formal staff performance management and development process |
| **Recruitment and Training** | Program has regular training opportunities for volunteers | Program has regular training opportunities for paid and unpaid staff | Program has training opportunities for Board at least once every three years |
| | Program proactively seeks new volunteers (e.g. online or at events) | Program has a volunteer retention strategy | Program increases volunteer numbers through different sources as part of its multi-year strategy |
| | Program provides basic recognition for staff/volunteers, e.g. thank you letters | Program has formal recognition for staff and volunteers, e.g. awards, special events | |
| **Risk Management** | Program conducts a formal risk assessment and implements a plan to address risks | Key staff/volunteers are trained in risk management, and the Program has a crisis management plan | Program embraces risk management and implements it at all Program levels |
| **Planning** | Program has an annual operational plan with goals, actions, metrics, timelines, budget, aligned with SOI strategic plan | Program has a multi-year strategic plan with goals, actions, metrics, timelines, budget, aligned with SOI strategic plan | Program conducts an annual review of its strategic plan and adapts it according to lessons learned |
| **Finances** | Program operates within Board approved budget | Program has 1 month operating financial reserves and a long-term financial plan | Program has 3 months operating financial reserves |
| | Program has a policy requiring more than one signatory for approval of transactions and cash handling over specific thresholds | Program follows written financial policies and procedures that comply with applicable accounting standards | Financial policies and procedures are reviewed and updated annually |
| | Program has assigned responsibility for each set of funds and for cross checks and uses business accounts in Program name | Program is able to trace funds in financial systems and operating and grant funds are properly segregated in accounting system | Program uses a centralized accounting software system to manage all income and expenditures and analyze key trends |