



Sport Partnership Toolkit

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Special Olympics





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Introduction

Welcome to the Special Olympics Sport Partnership Toolkit! Sport Partnerships are an integral part of sport in Special Olympics. The goal of sport partnership development is to engage sports communities in a collaborative effort to deliver high impact sports programming that promotes the physical, social, and emotional wellbeing of people with and without intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). By fostering these partnerships, programs can obtain resources and exposure needed to increase capacity and offer high impact sport training and competition opportunities.

This Toolkit focuses on partnership development with International, Regional, National, and Local sport and multi-sport governing bodies. These organizations play a critical role in establishing rules & regulations, organizing competitions, promoting and developing sport infrastructure, and ensuring fair play and athlete welfare. This Toolkit is **not** designed to provide guidance on sport partnerships with professional sports leagues and/or teams (NBA, Premier League, etc.).

The purpose of this toolkit is to assist Special Olympics programs in establishing new relationships with national sport federations while supporting programs in enhancing existing national sport partnerships to maximize their impact.

The Sport Partnership toolkit is a step-by-step guide, providing resources to help programs evaluate their needs for support, how to initiate a partnership, how to successfully maintain and grow a partnership, and evaluate a partnership's impact. Included in the toolkit are tools (located in [Appendix](#)) to effectively complete the various steps outlined and best position your program to develop a highly engaged partnership.



Why are Sport Partnerships important?

Sport Partnerships are an integral part of sport implementation.

One of Special Olympics' goals is to improve local sports participation and well-being for people with IDD to strengthen communities around the world. To do this, Special Olympics is focused on improving quality and reach of local programming, and fostering inclusive practices and settings. Strong partnerships with other sport organizations help to achieve this goal and strategic enablers.



Working alongside sport federation partners, Special Olympics can receive critical support in several areas, including (but not limited to):

- **Access to Competition & Training Venues:** Facilitating access to facilities allows Special Olympics athletes to train and compete in safe, professional environments, enhancing their experience and performance.
- **Coach Education & Training Support:** Providing resources and training programs for coaches ensures that they are equipped with the skills needed to effectively coach and develop athletes with intellectual disabilities.
- **Direct Financial Support (Grants, Donations, Fundraisers, Sponsorship):** Securing financial resources helps fund programs, events, and operational costs, enabling Special Olympics to expand its reach and impact.
- **International Competition Support (Special Olympics World Games and/or Single-Sport International Competitions):** Assisting with organization and logistics for international events showcases athletes on a global stage and promotes the spirit of inclusion.
- **Sport Officials Training & Competition Support:** Training officials to recognize and enforce inclusive practices ensures fair and equitable competition for all athletes.
- **Promotional Support (Marketing & Communications):** Collaborative marketing efforts can raise awareness about the importance of inclusion in sports and attract more participants and supporters.



- **Sport Equipment:** Providing essential sports equipment allows athletes to train effectively and participate in competitions, enhancing their experience.
- **Research & Evaluation Support:** Supporting studies and evaluations can help measure the impact of sports on individuals with intellectual disabilities, informing future initiatives and practices.
- **Transportation Support:** Offering transportation assistance helps athletes reach training sessions and competitions, removing barriers to participation.
- **Uniforms Support:** Providing uniforms fosters a sense of belonging and team spirit among athletes, enhancing their pride and representation in competitions.

As a partner, Special Olympics can support Federation partners in several areas, such as:

- **Inclusion Programming:** Promoting inclusive practices that allow athletes with intellectual disabilities and developmental disabilities to participate alongside their peers without IDD.
- **Athlete Retention:** Special Olympics Unified Sports offers alternative sport experience for individuals without IDD who may be interested in participating in a sport for broader social impact rather than an elite competitive pathway
- **Awareness Campaigns:** Raising awareness about the importance of inclusion in sports, which can enhance the federation's reputation and outreach.
- **Coach Development:** Providing specialized training for coaches to better support athletes with diverse abilities, aligning with the federation's goals for coach education.
- **Athlete Development:** Offering development programs that help athletes improve their skills, which can contribute to a larger talent pool for the sport.
- **Event/Competition Collaboration:** Partnering on events to showcase inclusive sports initiatives, attracting more participants and spectators.
- **Research and Data Sharing:** Contributing research on the benefits of sports for individuals with intellectual disabilities, supporting the federation's advocacy efforts.
- **Community Engagement:** Encouraging local communities to participate in sports, which can help the federation grow its grassroots support.
- **Volunteer Programs:** Mobilizing volunteers to assist with events and initiatives, enhancing the federation's operational capacity.
- **Inclusive Unified Sports:** Promoting Unified Sports programs where athletes with and without intellectual disabilities train and compete together.
- **Policy Advocacy:** Working together to advocate for policies that promote inclusivity and equal opportunities in sports at all levels.



The Toolkit

The Sport Partnership Toolkit contains a five-step guide for partnership development, management and evaluation with supplementary documents found in the Appendix at the end of this document.

Toolkit Video – An overview and summary of all the steps and tools in the toolkit.

Step 1 – Needs Analysis. The Needs Analysis step is used to identify specific programmatic needs desired from a partner and what a Special Olympics program can offer the partner in return.

Step 2 – Partner Assessment & Outreach. The Partner Assessment & Outreach step is used to review how to identify, approach, and engage possible partners based on the targeted partner's resources and priorities.

Step 3 – Partnership Agreement. The Partnership Agreement step aims to help some structure to a partnership with a Proclamation, MOU, or other formal partnership agreement.

Step 4 – Partnership Management. The Partnership Management step details how to create a strategic plan with measurable goals and to further develop and sustain partnership agreements. This phase is broken down into 4 phases.

Step 5 – Evaluating Impact. The Evaluating Impact step details how to assess a partnership's success through determined metrics and targets and how to continue/increase this impact. Case Studies are also an important part of this step.

Getting Started

Click the image below to get started!





Step 1 – Needs Analysis

The first step in the Sport Partnership Toolkit is the Needs Analysis, which helps Special Olympics programs identify their strengths, areas for improvement, and potential partner support. It allows programs to assess their sports and determine where a federation's partnership could help, targeting the right partner for needed resources. It helps programs identify their strengths in what they bring to a potential partner, creating a strong two-way partnership.

There are two tools available in the toolkit to support the Needs Analysis:

1. Needs Analysis Workbook

The Needs Analysis Workbook assists in evaluating your program's needs and what you can offer a partner. It helps identify key areas in need of support, such as Coach Education, Sport Equipment or Access to Competition & Training venues, while also identifying areas you can support a partner in return, such as creating higher awareness, supporting their efforts to make their sport more inclusive, or inclusive coaching practices.

To use the workbook, begin by selecting the sport you're evaluating. Then, classify the sport based on its popularity within your program—minimally, somewhat, or highly popular. For new sports, select "New Sport." Next, list the Areas of Need in that sport, such as coach education, equipment, or financial support. Finally, identify what your program can offer partners. Repeat these steps for as many sports as you are looking to analyze.

2. SWOT Analysis Template

The SWOT Analysis is a tool used to help identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. This tool should be used to analyze your program's current abilities and understand your needs better. It considers both internal and external factors that have an impact on your organization.

You can find a link to both resources in the [Appendix of this document](#).



Step 2 - Partner Assessment

The second step in the Sport Partnership toolkit is the Partner Assessment.

After identifying what the needs of your Program are, you can move onto Partner Assessment. The Partner Assessment is used as a starting point for how to identify and approach a potential partnership with different organizations. This step is also when you should decide what type of partnership you would like to foster.

Step 2 is designed to raise appropriate questions - not to provide definitive 'screening'. This step is to vet the organization – do they align with the movement? Can they provide support in the areas your program needs? The Partner Assessment form can aid in this conversation, using a checklist style questionnaire to evaluate the potential partner.

After using the previously mentioned assessment tools, use all the positive outcomes to collate them into messaging that can be used to open initial communications with the partner organization. Look through the strategic objectives/mission/vision of the partner organization. Merge both above to create an introduction email.

When approaching partners, it is important to portray your program needs accurately, while also emphasizing the benefits of partnering with Special Olympics and the quality programming you provide. A mutually beneficial partnership will have the best impact for both the Special Olympics program & the sport partner organization. Examples of things to consider are in the Needs Analysis Workbook from Step 1, but every program is unique, and it is important to assess what value you bring to a partnership.

Once you have a better understanding of the organization(s) you are interested in approaching, you can consider what this approach might be. Examples could include email or phone outreach, meeting in person through a mutual event or connection, or creating a more extensive proposal. In this step, we have included a template to put together a partnership proposal or pitch. This can be used to highlight your programs strengths and how the partnership can be mutually beneficial.



Step 3 – Partnership Agreement

The third step in the Sport Partnership Toolkit is the Partnership Agreement, where you formalize the partnership with your targeted organization. This can be done through a formal agreement (e.g., MOU, Memorandum of Agreement, or Proclamation) or an informal agreement. For this step, clearly define your programs and the partner's goals, which will guide you in creating your strategic action plan in Step 4.

Inside the Toolkit, you can find many examples of partnership agreements from Special Olympics Inc.'s International & Regional partnerships, which can serve as references for creating your own.

The Toolkit also contains the following templates:

- Memorandum of Understanding
- Memorandum of Agreement
- Proclamation

In Step 4, you will advance this work through the creation of a Strategic Action Plan.



Step 4 – Partnership Management

This step provides information on how to effectively steward partnerships, ensuring execution and renewal at the end of the agreement. This step is best executed in four phases: announcing the partnership, structuring the partnership, creating and executing a strategic plan, and renewing the MoU/agreement. These phases are described below but are explained in detail in the Step 4 document.

In Phase 1, you will announce and communicate your partnership. This announcement could take many forms but ultimately highlights the key features of the partnership across different avenues such as articles, social media, newsletters, websites, and/or an in-person event. We have included a template of an example announcement letter in the appendix to help guide what communication could look like.

Phase 2 is centered around structuring the communication and collaboration of the partnership. Relationships are maintained by effective communication and involvement. This should include ongoing intentional communication, key touch points, such as a monthly or quarterly meeting. A meeting schedule should be set with your partner to guarantee a steady and open line of communication. In this phase, you should also establish how communication is best received. Some partners may prefer a more direct line, such as a call or text, but others may lean towards email. Agendas that outline what will be discussed in meetings should be made and distributed prior to the start of meetings to ensure that meetings are productive, and reporting dates are met. A mutual workspace for the partnership should also be created in this phase. A mutual workspace would be where key documents can be shared and worked on together. With the basis of your partnership outlined, an evaluation system should be established. This should detail what qualifies your partnership as successful.

Phase 3 is centered around the creation and execution of your strategic plan. A strategic action plan outlines the partnership's goals and is highly recommended. Strategic plans give partnerships structure, allowing your program and your partner to both agree on the desired goals and outcomes from the partnership, and when it should be completed. Your strategic plan should include a list of the set goals within the MOU, strategic objectives to accomplish said goals, progress tracking, and evaluation of the partnership.

Phase 4 is based on renewing your agreement. When a partnership is up for renewal, both parties should reflect on the objectives set out in the MoU and gauge the success of the partnership and where they would like to see the partnership moving forward.



Step 5 – Evaluating Impact

The final step of the Partnership Toolkit is assessing your partnership's success, measuring metrics and targets, formulating a new agreement, and evaluating impact. This ongoing process ensures the partnership achieves its intended outcomes. A successful partnership would be based on the completion of the strategic plan or execution/completion of other responsibilities outlined in the agreement. In this step, an evaluation of the partnership should be conducted near the end of the agreement. During the evaluation, you should use the evaluation metrics laid out in the agreement and reports that you have collected to determine the success of the partnership. The new agreement should include new goals and objectives built around the success and learnings of the previous agreement and plan. After evaluating your success and establishing a new agreement, you may want to highlight what the agreement achieved.

The toolkit provides Case Studies, which help evaluate and showcase the impact of your partnership. You'll find examples of Case Studies between Special Olympics programs and their Federation Partners. A Case Study can be used to document the steps taken while recognizing the achievements of your partnership and the transfer of knowledge for others interested in replicating your success.



Conclusion

Partnerships are key to advancing the mission of Special Olympics. This toolkit is designed to help programs forge meaningful, impactful partnerships with sports organizations, strengthening the sport opportunities we offer to athletes and communities. When people with IDD are provided with the opportunity to have access to high-quality inclusive sport training and competition, the impact is incredible—improved physical and mental health, increased employment opportunities, longer lifespans, are just a few of these impact areas. Every partnership is unique, together we can create a more inclusive world, harnessing the transformative power of sport!



Frequently Asked Questions

What is the difference between a formal and informal partnership?

Formal partnerships are usually in writing, with some type of signed agreement or document to formalize it. An informal partnership is any other type of agreement, verbal or otherwise.

How do I increase my partner's involvement with my Program?

Increasing partner involvement is done in a few ways. By reaching out more and focusing on relationship building, partners may be more inclined to help. When communicating with partners, also emphasize how much value that the partnership gives to their organization. You can also emphasize how their help can affect the quality of sport offered by your program.

What if a partner does not want to work with my Program/Special Olympics?

If a partner does not want to work with your Program/Special Olympics, it's okay! Some partners may not be aligned with our movement's motivations, and that is fine. Similar to Special Olympics programs, not all national federations have the resources and capacity to dedicate to additional work. Some organizations also may not understand how a partnership with Special Olympics would positively impact their organization, so be sure to emphasize all the benefits!

Can I only seek partnerships with existing sports, or can I start a sport through partnerships?

Sports can be started through partnerships! Identifying what sport (or sports!) you would like to start and initiating a partnership can be a surefire way of starting a new sport with a robust supporting sport infrastructure.



Glossary

A Sport Partnership is an established relationship between two sport organizations for mutual benefit.

Areas of Engagement are the instances in which partners interact with Programs.

Proclamation is a public or official announcement recognizing the credibility and good work of each other's organization and a pledge to collaborate. A proclamation does not include specific commitments of support without a time limit. This is not a legal contractual requirement.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU or MoU) is a formal agreement between two or more parties. Companies and organizations can use MOUs to establish official partnerships. MOUs are not legally binding, but they carry a degree of seriousness and mutual respect, stronger than a Proclamation. Often, MOUs are the first steps towards a legal contract. MoU's typically include some specificity regarding the intended areas of collaboration and support without a legal obligation.

A National Federation is a sport federation that governs a sport at the national level.

An International Federation is a sport federation that governs a sport at the international level.

A Regional Federation is a sport federation that governs a sport at the regional level.

Partnership Agreement is a formal legally binding contract that may include required transactional obligations (financial, services, etc.) and term limits.

An **alliance** reflects an engaged relationship between two organizations that includes consistent ongoing practices of collaboration and support without any official proclamation, MoU or partnership agreement.

A **strategic action plan** is a document that outlines what a partnership's goals are.



Appendix

Sport Partnership Toolkit Video

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= KDIsA47zxw>

Step 1 – Needs Analysis

- [Needs Analysis Template](#)
- [SWOT Analysis](#)

Step 2 – Partner Assessment

- [Partner Assessment Form](#)
- [Guides for Partnering Conversations](#)
- [Partnership Proposal Template](#)

Step 3 – Partnership Agreement

- [Agreement Examples](#)
 - Contains SOI's Memorandum's of Agreement, Memorandum's of Understanding, Proclamations, Strategic Plans and Sustainability Reports
- [Templates](#)
 - Contains basic, empty templates for use

Step 4 – Partnership Management

- [Sample Announcement Letter](#)
- [Partnership Management Presentation](#)

Step 5 – Evaluating Impact

- [Sample Case Studies](#)
- [Case Study Templates](#)
- [Renewing your partnership slide](#)

[Link to the entire Sport Partnership Toolkit on Dropbox](#)