**Special Olympics Strategic Plan 2021-2024**

**Implementation Guidance for Programs**

This document provides further guidance for Programs about how to implement the strategies and enablers outlined in the 2021-2024 global Strategic Plan. It includes suggested activities and areas of focus for Programs based on the input and shared experiences of Program, Regional and SOI representatives.

There is no expectation that Programs will implement all actions in this document. We recommend that each Program work towards some progress in each of the strategies and enablers, taking into account your unique situation and capacity. This will help ensure you embrace and own your plan and do your best to achieve it.

The column “Priority” marks each action with ‘high’ or ‘medium’ priority. The purpose of this suggested prioritization is to help you decide which activities might be more urgent to address compared to others. We recommend that each Program plan take into account Program capacity, resources and other factors in order to create a feasible and relevant to your situation plan.

2021 is the Recovery phase of the new strategic cycle (Phase 1) as we all take stock of the damage inflicted by COVID-19 and the global economic downturn. As you assess the loss and disruption to your Program, we encourage you to also look for opportunities to do things differently, for example using digital technologies to increase impact. There may also be potential new partners and donors who “survived” or grew through the crisis. Every country and state will be in its unique situation and there is no solution to fit all needs.

A wise person once said: “Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend four hours sharpening my axe”. We hope this guidance will help Special Olympics Programs to create solid plans for growth and improvement to benefit millions of people with intellectual disabilities and their communities.

**Strategy 1 (S1): Improve Quality and Reach of Local Programming**

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| **PROPOSED INITIATIVES**  | **PRIORITY** | **PHASE** |
| **S1 – 1 (Local operations, structures and outreach)** |
| * Develop baseline data on the current level of local capacity and presence in urban and rural areas, and assess opportunities to grow and strengthen at a local level
 | High | 1 |
| * Develop structures and resources for sustainable, expanded local Program sports and other activities (e.g. family-run clubs, partnering with existing external facilities, etc.)
 | High | 1 |
| * Train, mentor and develop athlete leaders to become coaches, officials, health messengers and general volunteers at the local level
 | High | 1 |
| * Address gaps in retaining athletes after school by involving organizations in the community - such as sports clubs, health providers, universities, private clubs, businesses
 | High | 2 |
| * Roll out the ‘Sport Family Education’ course from SO Learning Portal to align Special Olympics programming across the athlete’s lifecycle (may vary regionally/by Program)
 | High | 2 |
| **S1 – 2 (Coach education)** |
| * Target and recruit sport coaches through sport federations, associations and foundations
 | High | 1 |
| * Ensure all coaches, including school teachers, youth leaders, volunteers, or certified coaches, are learning through the SO Global Coach Education System and SO Learn
 | High | 2 |
| * Educate and certify coaches from schools and sports programs of municipalities, governments and other community organizations to increase knowledge about coaching athletes with ID and ensure they are incorporated into other organization programming
 | High | 2 |
| * Seek additional training and opportunities through partnerships with local NGBs, sport organizations and Universities offering physical education programs
 | Medium | 1 |
| * Develop a coach appreciation and acknowledgement process through either an award, an event or another format to thank individuals for their service
 | Medium | 2 |
| **S1 – 3 (Frequency and quality of sport)** |
| * Incorporate fitness programming and weekly training within each sports training season (SOI fitness models, Fit 5, local fitness/wellness organizations)
 | High | 1 |
| * Connect with local mainstream sport organizations to offer demonstrations/clinics, as well as training and competition opportunities for athletes
 | High | 1 & 2 |
| * Create promotional components to engage family members and the community and ensure their support for continuous athlete training, wellbeing and leadership activities
 | Medium | 1 & 2 |
| * Develop and promote league play or bi-weekly competitions so athletes have more opportunities to compete on a regular ongoing basis, increasing their performance
 | Medium | 2 |
| * Offer Special Olympics Unified leagues to complement existing mainstream sport leagues
 | Medium | 2 |
| **S1 – 4 (Local partnerships)** |
| * Recruit and develop event and general volunteers, health and education experts through federations, governments, educational institutions, businesses, sport and health organizations; leverage national networks to increase local partnerships
 | High | 1 |
| * Partner with targeted local groups/organizations that can move the needle on the priorities of the local program, such as targeted recruitment of local influencers
 | High | 1 & 2 |
| * Educate local sports organizations, health providers and physical education/health universities on how to understand and support people with ID; recruit their experts and students to support improve programming, access expertise for research, education, etc.
 | Medium | 1 & 2 |
| * Find opportunities for participation in local sports and community gatherings by Special Olympics leaders to expand community involvement and gain practical experience (e.g. speaking, establishing new relationships, joining education sessions, etc.
 | Medium | 1 & 2 |
| * Identify mentors, leadership coaches and other trainers locally who can support growth and development of Special Olympics athlete leaders
 | Medium | 2 |
| **S1 – 5 (Health and well-being integration)** |
| * Increase health messenger and athlete leadership activities locally to help inspire participants to take responsibility for personal health, fitness and growth
 | High | 1 & 2 |
| * Ensure coach development contains topics that strengthen their coaching role through training on physical health, hydration & nutrition, leadership
 | High | 2 |
| * Incorporate fitness components (proper warm up/cool down, healthy nutrition and hydration) at competitions to increase participant performance and wellbeing
 | High | 2 |
| * Develop or use SOI materials (guides and pocket cards) that are easy to use for athletes who do not have access to technological platforms or who are not literate
 | Medium | 1 |
| * Offer virtual or at-home fitness programming to boost physical activity during the “off days” when not doing in-person sports training
 | Medium | 1 & 2 |

**Strategy 2 (S2): Empower Athlete Leaders and Other Change-Makers**

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| **PROPOSED ACTIVITIES**  | **PRIORITY** | **PHASE** |
| **S2 – 1 (Skills & knowledge)** |
| * Improve integration of school, athlete and youth leadership programming through increased investment in Program staff or volunteer roles
 | High | 1 |
| * Analyze the needs of your key national level change-makers, in particular how they access technology and how education will be delivered to or by them
 | High | 1 |
| * Identify the “level” of readiness for certain training/engagement (e.g. through a SWOT analysis) to develop a specific plan for what to offer and how to provide it
 | High | 1 |
| * Organize education of and engagement with change-makers, paying particular attention to offline resources to reach those who are lacking technology and connection
 | High | 2 |
| * Engage athletes as trainers for external groups, sharing their experiences and ideas
 | Medium | 2 |
| **S2 – 2 (Unified Schools)** |
| * Engage educators, families, and youth in order to grow Unified Champion Schools (UCS)
 | High | 1 |
| * Adapt school-based programming to include digital elements such as virtual training or virtual gatherings and connect athlete/youth leaders digitally
 | Medium | 1 |
| * With SOI support, track new measures such as sustainability and digital expansion
 | High | 2 |
| * Ensure UCS resources are translated and adapted to local needs and culture
 | High | 2 |
| * Identify and utilize resources outside of the organization to support UCS work
 | High | 2 |
| **S2 – 3 (Internal Athlete jobs/roles)** |
| * Identify how to incorporate youth and athlete leaders into the Program structure, by aligning their interests and skills with existing initiatives and activities and clarifying roles
 | High | 1 |
| * Involve athlete and youth leaders in Program decision-making and fundraising
 | High | 1 |
| * Identify and provide training in knowledge and skills that youth and athlete leaders need to have to increase their meaningful involvement in decision making processes
 | Medium | 1 |
| * Implement the new Athlete Leadership Skills Training Curriculum as a preparation for taking on jobs/roles
 | High | 2 |
| * Build capacity of non-athlete staff and volunteers, focusing on training and using the Unified Leadership approach to assess and improve inclusive practices
 | High | 2 |
| * Identify partners to provide local training/resources in leadership and other skills
 | Medium | 2 |
| **S2 – 4 (Athletes and youth teaching inclusion)** |
| * Educate staff and volunteer leaders on the importance and value of athlete and youth leaders so they understand and commit to shifting from a traditional ‘helping’ approach to empowering athlete and youth leaders by facilitating meaningful opportunities for them
 | High | 1 |
| * Whenever possible, bring youth and athletes leaders together through events, training
 | High | 1 |
| * Explore paths for youth leadership (beyond youth summits) with partnerships and skill-building virtual training
 | Medium | 1 |
| * Identify athletes and youth who dropped out of the Program and find ways to reengage them (e.g. as general volunteers rather than ‘participants’)
 | Medium | 1 |
| * Develop pathways for youth and athlete leaders, making clear “what’s next” to strive for
 | High | 2 |
| * Engage youth and athlete leaders as experts in educating different parts of the Program, stressing the value of an inter-generational approach
 | High | 2 |
| * Define, develop a structure for and implement youth advisory groups
 | Medium | 2 |
| * Train youth and athlete leaders on how to build relationships with government officials
 | Medium | 2 |

**Strategy 3 (S3): Foster Inclusive Practices and Settings**

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| **PROPOSED ACTIONS**  | **PRIORITY** | **PHASE** |
| **S3 – 1 (High level systems change)** |
| Target specific organizations and government entities for system-wide change: | High | 1 & 2 |
| * Select and assess a government ministry, department or organization (national or state level) that is a key stakeholder to your SO Program to determine how inclusion might be positioned to be mutually beneficial (e.g. SO might help achieve an element of the CRPD)
 | High | 1 & 2 |
| * With an athlete, list the barriers that individuals with ID experience in accessing the services or resources of that organization; and the benefits of including individuals with ID
 | High | 1 & 2 |
| * As a Program, determine how you might work with the organization to remove barriers to make their services more inclusive. This should be in an area that is strongly linked to your existing work or programming e.g. advocating for Unified teams at schools or club leagues
 | High | 1 & 2 |
| * Led by an athlete, approach the organization and offer to support them to be more inclusive of those with ID, offering data and practical solutions such as Unified Leadership. Use data, case studies and athletes’ experiences to advocate for system-wide change
 | High | 1 & 2 |
| Develop staff and Program capacity to work with government and national organizations that provide services related to people with ID and their families: | High | 1 & 2 |
| * Identify tools, skills and resources needed to foster more inclusive services and practices
 | High | 1 & 2 |
| * Develop appropriate tools and training modules, as well as associated translation
 | High | 1 & 2 |
| * Ensure that relevant staff, athletes and volunteers undertake the training
 | High | 1 & 2 |
| * Monitor continuous need to develop additional tools and training as capacity improves
 | High | 2 |
| **S3 – 2 (Inclusive organizations)** |
| Engage and leverage new and existing strategic partnerships to accelerate inclusive policies and practices within external organizations: | High | 1 & 2 |
| * Assess which existing or new partners would be most beneficial and feasible to influence, and find out whether or how that partner currently includes individuals with ID
 | High | 1 & 2 |
| * With an athlete, list the ways in which you think they might expand/ enhance their inclusion of individuals with ID by working more closely with SO
 | High | 1 & 2 |
| * In the case of a new partner, list the ways in which SO can partner with them, the barriers that individuals with ID might experience and the benefits of including our athletes
 | High | 1 & 2 |
| * Led by an athlete, approach the organization and offer to work with them to be more inclusive of those with ID, offering Unified Leadership education, evidence and practical solutions, use data, case studies and athletes’ experiences to prepare a win-win proposal
 | High | 1 & 2 |
| **S3 – 3 (External recognition)** |
| * With SOI and athlete input, create a set of inclusive criteria to help guide and recognize organizations that are inclusive of individuals with ID
 | Medium | 1 |
| * Provide tools and resources to help external organizations become more inclusive (SOI will also be preparing tools and resources to help with this)
 | Medium | 1 |
| * Recognize organizations that are consistently meeting the inclusion criteria – this might be simple like a social media post or something large like an awards ceremony
 | Medium | 2 |
| * Track organizations and partners that meet the criteria to ensure that inclusion is sustained and is meaningful to those with ID
 | Medium | 2 |

**Enabler 1 (E1): Digitize the Movement**

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| **PROPOSED ACTIVITIES**  | **PRIORITY** | **PHASE** |
| **E1 – 1,4,5 (Use of digital tools)** |
| * Identify opportunities to use technology in new or different ways by consulting with key stakeholder groups such as athletes, families, volunteers and donors
 | High | 1 |
| * Based on the consultations develop a simple technology plan that outlines what changes will be worked towards in the short, medium and long-term
 | High | 1 |
| * Seek pro bono or low-cost partnerships that enable new uses of technology that address current barriers to access, digital safety and connectivity facing athletes, families and volunteers
 | Medium | 1 |
| * Implement digital tools made available by SOI where possible
 | High | 2 |
| **E1 – 2 (Digital content)** |
| * Review efforts to provide sport, health, youth and leadership content virtually during the Covid19 pandemic to identify which digital initiatives could be continued and developed further and which ones will cease when activities have returned to normal
 | High | 1 |
| * Assess opportunities for coaches, athletes, families and volunteers to generate content that can be shared with others in the Program
 | Medium | 2 |
| **E1 – 3 (Data management)** |
| * Audit current technology used to capture and store data to ensure the data is secure and managed in keeping with relevant data protection legislation
 | High | 1 |
| * Identify ways of enabling local programs to input and self-manage data to help keep it up-to-date as the Program grows
 | High | 2 |

**Enabler 2 (E2): Diversify Revenue**

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| **PROPOSED ACTIVITIES**  | **PRIORITY** | **PHASE** |
| **E2 – 1,2,3 (Target strategic partners)** |
| * Identify opportunities for public-private partnerships where partners gain through Special Olympics programmatic impact and the Program gains through funds from the partner or partner support to raise new funds
 | High | 1 |
| * Conduct annual partner/donor analysis and review to determine partnerships that bring in most value to Special Olympics and the partner, and grow and expand effective relationships
 | High | 2 |
| **E2 – 4,5 (Invest in fundraising capacity)** |
| * Seek new Board members or other individuals that have strong connections and ability to open doors to fundraising opportunities
 | High | 1 |
| * Participate in fundraising training opportunities provided by SOI, through SOI and also available locally through external providers. Focus on building knowledge of fundraising, virtual graduated marketing and brand building with a strong focus on digital techniques and channels, funding diversification, ways to localize global campaigns, conducting and understanding donor analytics, donor stewardship, grant writing, building a sustainable revenue plan for your Program
 | Medium | 1 |
| * Review an annual summary of strategies, tactics, research, resources and outcomes shared by SOI, customize and apply lessons learned to your Program
 | Medium | 2 |
| **E2 – 6,7 (Diversity funding channels)** |
| * Assess current fundraising activities and channels to identify potential new approaches, in particular potential revenue from digital or other innovative new fundraising techniques
 | High | 1 |
| * Make fundraising and channel investments that are backed by data that demonstrates reasonable potential for Return on Investment
 | High | 1 & 2 |

**Enabler 3 (E3): Build the Brand**

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| **PROPOSED ACTIVITIES**  | **PRIORITY** | **PHASE** |
| **E3 – 1 (Brand reach)** |
| * Seek partnerships with specialist agencies (e.g. advertising, PR, marketing) that can help improve awareness and understanding of Special Olympics at national/state and local levels, and identify profiles of our primary and secondary audiences – their attitudes, behaviors, and tendencies
 | High | 2 |
| * Assess whether there are existing and/or new channels such as mainstream media, social media, partnerships, government that could be used more than they are currently, or in a different way, to reach new external audiences:
* Insert Special Olympics’ brand promise into the discussion and content available in these channels and outlets;
* Encourage people to introduce themselves to someone with ID, share their experiences through digital and social media channels, socialize Special Olympics’ messages with their personal networks, or volunteer at a grassroots level;
* Inspire young consumers to ‘practice what they preach,’ by challenging them to be more inclusive starting with making a significant difference for our athletes and people with ID.
 | High | 1 |
| * Identify and approach influential personalities, including subject matter experts, that could potentially create brand awareness in collaboration with athlete leader spokespeople to demonstrate a Unified approach
 | High | 2 |
| * Implement an objective way to measure results of marketing and communications activities and use the results to inform future messaging and audience strategies
 | Medium | 2 |
| **E3 – 2 (Build on global SO events locally)** |
| * Work with SOI to capitalize on flagship events (e.g. World Games, Unified Cup, etc.) and other SOI global or regional events and campaigns to drive curiosity, engagement (public and influencers/talent) and funding
 | High | 1 & 2 |
| * Build communications templates, in alignment with Special Olympics’ overall strategy, that are customizable for growing engagement, loyalty, and participation (e.g. volunteerism, donations) at the grassroots level
 | Medium | 1 |
| * Use data and insights to frame Special Olympics events for more powerful grassroots storytelling through media interest and willingness to engage beyond a story or interview
 | High | 1 |
| **E3 – 3 (Build on external events)** |
| * Seek opportunities to collaborate with or participate in events organized by Government or other organizations as a means of promoting Special Olympics to new and more diverse audiences. These may include non-Special Olympics sports milestones, conventions, festivals, and other consumer gatherings that draw media and influencer attention. Further, identify media-worthy times of the year to position your Program as an attractive story for media coverage. This includes holiday season, national and local celebrations, commemorative days, etc.
 | High | 1 & 2 |
| * Get greater value out of our celebrity Ambassadors and supporters to reach a wider audience by capitalizing on their availability to speak with media and digital-first influencers that attend or are relevant to specific cultural and lifestyle events at the grassroots level
 | Medium | 2 |
| **E3 – 4 (Athlete Leader spokespeople)** |
| * Use the new Athlete Leadership curriculum, and external training opportunities, to prepare a number of athletes for involvement in marketing & communications activities
 | High | 1 |
| * Develop grassroots athlete responsibilities for Communications, Marketing and Development support so it can be locally illustrated that Special Olympics athletes are established and productive leaders
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| * Train select Athlete Leaders to represent the Special Olympics movement during select media and digital-first influencer interviews. Provide media/message training, if needed.
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| * Develop a pool of Athlete Leaders and coaches to be available for speaking opportunities on panels, conferences, and policy events (i.e. United Nations activities), including with consumer lifestyle digital outlets and events
 | High | 1 |
| * Consider creating a digital “channel,” such as a Special Olympics, athlete-driven podcast to discuss accomplishments, victories, tribulations, etc., including through Unified interviews
 | Medium | 2 |
| * Engage with Youth Leader cohorts to support local marketing, communications and awareness building
 | Medium | 2 |
| **E3 – 5, 6 (Capacity building and tools)** |
| * Conduct a needs assessment of capacity to do marketing and communications about Special Olympics at a local level
 | High | 2 |
| * Provide content, tools and training that enable local volunteers to implement basic marketing and communications activities that promote Special Olympics in their community and align with national or state marketing and communications activities
 | High | 2 |
| **E3 – 7 (Engage pro bono experts locally)** |
| * Work with SOI to identify pro bono international agencies or universities for grassroots support in marketing and communications capacity building
 | Medium | 2 |

**Enabler 4 (E4): Drive Excellence**

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| **PROPOSED INITIATIVES**  | **Priority** | **Phase** |
| **E4 – 1 (Unified Leadership)** |
| * Ensure that staff and leaders with and without ID (Board, volunteer leaders, coaches, athlete and youth leaders, LETR) are trained in Unified Leadership
 | High | 1 |
| * Work with athlete leaders to jointly identify and implement ways to make new roles meaningful for athlete leaders and the Program, including adaptation of current practices
 | Medium | 2 |
| **E4 – 2 (Leadership development)** |
| * Ensure that self-led leadership development opportunities from SOI (e.g. Skillsoft) or local partners are made available to leaders in the Program
 | High | 1 |
| * Regularly seek or host virtual or in-person learning and development opportunities for targeted emerging and experienced leaders
 | High | 1 |
| * Offer training in finance, project management, easy language, etc. via SOI or local partners
 | High | 1 |
| * Provide opportunities to put learning into practice and share best practices
 | High | 1 |
| **E4 – 3 (Board of Directors)** |
| * Put in place a plan for ongoing, annual Board Governance education and improvement
 | High | 1 |
| * Regularly assess Board composition, succession and recruitment, with diversity as a priority
 | Medium | 2 |
| * Improve integration between the Board of Directors and Athlete Input or Leadership Councils, Youth Input or Leadership Councils and sibling groups
 | Medium | 2 |
| **E4 – 4 (Volunteers and staff)** |
| * Develop or update a volunteer database that enables matching of skills and tasks/roles
 | Medium | 2 |
| * Develop or update volunteer recruitment plans, including promotional materials that target diverse audiences (including athletes and youth) and highlight the benefits of volunteering
 | Medium | 2 |
| * Provide virtual and in-person on-boarding and ongoing training of volunteers, either via SOI or local partners, including training on ID and working with people with ID
 | Medium | 2 |
| * Create informational materials that highlight the variety of year-round volunteering opportunities, and use a certification program to recognize volunteers for their work
 | Medium | 2 |
| * Provide consistent staff orientation and learning experiences (e.g. working at a local sports event), including training on ID and working with people with ID
 | Medium | 1 |
| * Encourage career and role growth and create succession plans for key staff and volunteers
 | Medium | 1 |
| **E4 – 5 (Quality Improvement)** |
| * Regularly use Special Olympics Program Quality Standards as an ongoing improvement and self-assessment tool to develop the Program and align with the global strategic plan
 | High | 1 |
| * Educate staff and key volunteers on how to use Program Quality Standards
 | High | 1 |
| **E4 – 6 (Evaluation and data use)** |
| * Partner with local experts (e.g. Universities) and/or SOI on research to highlight outcomes
 | Medium | 2 |
| * Improve how SOI and locally commissioned data is used and presented (e.g. easy-to-read infographics) so that it provides clear insights to Program donors and other stakeholders
 | Medium | 2 |
| * Introduce a process for using data to make decisions and adapt to changing circumstances
 | Medium | 2 |
| **E4 – 7 (Tools and practices)** |
| * Provide important information/materials in 'easy language' to present information in a short, simple way for better understanding by people of all abilities. Engage athlete leaders to support easy read creation, train people to use it
 | Medium | 1 |
| **E4 – 8 (Internal collaboration)** |
| * Train Program staff and/or key volunteers on communication structures, protocols and resources to improve collaboration within the Program and with the Regional team
 | High | 1 |