



2018 and 2019 will contain two unprecedented occurrences in the Special Olympics movement. A Special Olympics USA Games was held on the west coast for the first time in July of 2018 and the Special Olympics World Games in Abu Dhabi will mark the first time a World Games has been held in the Middle East in March of 2019. These will be extraordinary opportunities to leverage these high-visibility events to shine a light on the ability of people with intellectual disabilities and to connect people to our movement.

Whether talking to media, the general public, or families, we have the opportunity to help clarify some of the frequently asked questions we receive, particularly: how athletes are selected for these Games, and how the two events fit into the bigger Special Olympics picture.

While many within the movement understand these nuances, the public and media may make assumptions and/or inquiries. As such, we wish to provide you with the following information to help your Program inform and educate. We also encourage all Program staff speaking to the public on this topic to be knowledgeable of their Program's USA Games selection process in order to compliment the talking points below.

#### **About Special Olympics USA Games Seattle 2018**

Special Olympics USA Games were held in Seattle, Washington July 1-6, 2018. More than 3,500 athletes and coaches from across the United States and the District of Columbia, along with the support of tens of thousands of volunteers and spectators, competed in 14 Olympic-type team and individual sports. The 2018 USA Games celebrated the Special Olympics movement and its 50th anniversary; promoted the ideals of acceptance and inclusion through sport; and showcased athletes from throughout the U.S. and the abilities of people with intellectual disabilities. The 2018 Games also highlighted Special Olympics' work in sport, education, health and community-building across the country. For more information on the 2018 Special Olympics USA Games, please visit [www.SpecialOlympicsUSAGames.org](http://www.SpecialOlympicsUSAGames.org) and follow on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) (@SpecialOlympicsUSAGames), [Twitter](#) (@2018USAGames) and [YouTube](#) (subscribe to the Special Olympics USA Games channel).

#### **About Special Olympics World Games Abu Dhabi 2019**

Special Olympics World Games in Abu Dhabi, scheduled for March 14-21, 2019, will be the largest sports and humanitarian event anywhere in the world, with 7,000 athletes and 3,000 coaches representing more than 170 countries. The World Games will be an unprecedented display of the spirit, joy, courage and skill that are hallmarks of the Special Olympics movement. The largest single event ever held in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the first Special Olympics World Games in the Middle East, the World Games will feature 24 officially sanctioned Olympic-style sports in venues throughout Abu Dhabi. The spectacular Opening Ceremony on March 14 is expected to attract 45,000 spectators while being viewed by millions worldwide via global broadcast partners ESPN and Abu Dhabi Media.

For more information on the Special Olympics World Games Abu Dhabi 2019, including volunteer and sponsorship opportunities, visit [AbuDhabi2019.org](http://AbuDhabi2019.org) and follow along on social media on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#) (@WorldGamesAD).

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

*How are athletes selected to attend Special Olympics USA Games and World Games?*

Special Olympics Programs select their delegates based on the Advancement Criteria outlined in [Article 1 of the Special Olympics Official Sports Rules](#), which articulates a process to ensure that athletes of all ability levels have an equal opportunity to advance to the next higher level competition provided the sport and event are offered at the next highest level of competition.

Special Olympics Programs request quota (slots for athletes) from Special Olympics North America (SONA), then requests are reviewed by SONA and the Local Organizing Committee. Quotas are allotted based on venue capacity, to ensure a quality

Games/competitive experience. The athlete must meet the eligibility criteria set forth in the quota with respect to age, gender, and that they currently compete in the sport they've requested a quota for, and at the division/ability level dictated by the quota.



Additionally, athletes must be able to commit to the large amount of time the Games themselves require, as well as all requisite training camps and training sessions preceding the Games. Parental consent and athlete behavior are also factors.

*Do athletes have to attend or win at USA Games in 2018 in order to compete at World Games in 2019?*

No, currently the USA Games are not a requisite qualifier for advancement to a World Games. However, Special Olympics Programs in the United States currently have the option to use the USA Games as a qualifying opportunity for World Games eligibility, should they so choose, but they also have the option to use their own State Games as a/the qualifying event.

*Why?* For example...3,000 U.S. athletes will compete in the 2018 USA Games. 7,000 athletes from 220 Programs in 177 nations will compete in Special Olympics World Games Abu Dhabi in 2019. So as to provide athletes from around the world the opportunity to compete, the 2019 Local Organizing Committee distributes quotas amongst all interested Programs. This means the number of U.S. athletes who will compete at a World Games is much smaller than at a USA Games. In 2019, the delegation from the United States will be comprised of approximately 250 athletes.

As such, the number and kinds of quotas a U.S. Special Olympics Program can apply for and receive may not only be different in number, but also in sport type and sport level. For example, a State Program may receive a quota for a higher ability level men's basketball team for a USA Games, but because of the overall world demand for slots at a World Games and the need to offer proper brackets, that same State Program may instead receive a quota for a Unified team, women's team, or no basketball team at all, but rather, other sports, for World Games.

Because both the type and number of quotas allotted to a U.S. Special Olympics Program for a USA Games and World Games typically varies, this provides the Program the ability to fill their quotas with eligible athletes who meet all the necessary criteria.

As you can see, many factors influence an athlete's chances of competing at USA Games and World Games.

*What was the High Performance category offered at 2018 USA Games?*

Five sports offered a High Performance category, of which the gold medal winner automatically qualified for potential advancement to 2019 World Games. High Performance was offered in the following sports: Athletics – 100m dash and shot put, Bowling – singles, Golf – level 5, Swimming – 100m individual medley and 100m freestyle, and Tennis – singles. Those athletes will still have to be able to commit to the large amount of time the Games themselves require, as well as all requisite training camps and training sessions preceding the Games. Parental consent and athlete behavior are also factors. After participating in Training Camp in September 2018, the delegation representing Special Olympics USA at World Games Abu Dhabi 2019 will be announced.

*Why can't everyone go to USA Games and/or World Games?*

It is in keeping with the sports philosophy of Special Olympics that regardless of ability level, competition progression is key to acknowledging and rewarding every athlete's hard work, improvement and athletic excellence. This practice is consistent with many of the world's sports organizations.

Other factors such as venue capacity, funding, volunteer workforce, and more, dictate realistic parameters regarding the size and duration of Games. This inherently necessitates constraints on how many participants can be accommodated and how many competitions can be contested during a set time.

*Why do USA and World Games exist?*

National and international competitions exist in Special Olympics for the same reasons as they do for any other athlete: to provide athletes of all ability levels the opportunity to compete at an advanced level; to test those abilities against the best in the world in their sport of choice; and to showcase and celebrate the universal power and joy of sport. Special Olympics has the added objective of using such high-visibility events to raise awareness about the abilities of people with intellectual disabilities and leave a legacy of increased inclusion, understanding, and opportunity in communities throughout the world. Additionally, Special Olympics has a protocol agreement with the International Olympic Committee (IOC), and as such, Special Olympics follows the IOC philosophy of offering global Games every two years, alternating between winter and summer.

*How are athlete's sports training, outfitting and transportation to the USA Games funded?*

In keeping with the founding principles of Special Olympics, it is never required that the athletes themselves incur a fee in order to participate – thus, Special Olympics Programs are ultimately responsible for raising the funds necessary to send their

delegates to USA Games. However, as leaders of the Special Olympics movement themselves, athletes and families are welcome to and are often eager to, participate in the fundraising efforts associated with their USA Games experience.



*How are athlete trips to the World Games funded?*

As World Games are a part of the official Special Olympics competition progression, Special Olympics Programs are responsible for raising all funds necessary to send their delegates to World Games.

*Who conducts USA and World Games?*

All Games are authorized by Special Olympics, Inc. and conducted in accordance with the rules of Special Olympics. However, because hosting Games of such magnitude is an extraordinary undertaking, a Local Organizing Committee, comprised of individuals from the host state, city and/or nation, is assembled and authorized by Special Olympics to host and carry out the business of the Games.

*How are the host sites selected?*

Much like other large-scale sporting events, a competitive bid process is conducted to select a host site with all of the necessary support, capacity and resources needed to conduct successful Games.

*How many USA Games have been held to date?*

The 2018 Special Olympics USA Games in Seattle marked the fourth USA Games. The first USA Games was held in Ames, Iowa in 2006, the second USA Games was held in Lincoln, Nebraska in 2010, and the third Games were held in Mercer County, New Jersey.

*Where will the next USA Games be held?*

The next USA Games will be held in Orlando, Florida June 5-10, 2022.

*How many World Games competitions have there been?*

Special Olympics World Games Abu Dhabi 2019 will mark the 15th summer Games in the history of the Special Olympics movement. There have also been 11 World Winter Games held. The very first Games were held in 1968 at Soldier Field in Chicago, Illinois (USA). For a complete listing of all World Games to date, please visit [www.specialolympics.org](http://www.specialolympics.org)

*Where will the next World Games be held?*

The next Special Olympics World Games will be held in 2019 in Abu Dhabi, UAE. The host country of World Winter Games 2021 has not yet been announced.

*Are these Games affiliated with the Olympics or Paralympics?*

No. Special Olympics, the Olympics and Paralympics are three separate entities, all recognized by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). They are all run by international non-profit organizations. Apart from that, the Olympics, Special Olympics and Paralympics differ in three main areas: 1) the presence or absence of a disability, and if present, the disability categories of the athletes involved, 2) the criteria and philosophy under which athletes participate, and 3) the structure of their respective organizations.