

## Official Special Olympics Washington Sports Classification and Sports Advancement Criteria

In keeping with the Special Olympics International (SOI) General rules and with Olympic tradition, Special Olympics Washington (SOWA) uses a criteria-based sports classification system for sport advancement. The system reflects the guidelines illustrated in SOI Article 1 and made applicable to the composition of Washington.

Special Olympics Washington distinguishes each sport as existing in a defined category or classification and can also determine the level of competition from Local to State Games utilizing these sport classifications. SOWA sports will be recognized by category and advanced to the highest level of participation, competition, and Games when certain basic participation requirements are met. Sports are categorized as SOWA Official Sports, SOWA Emerging Sports and SOWA Locally Popular Sports and are defined below. *Please note: Participation percentages below are based on the total numbers of participants, both athletes and Unified partners, within the sport.*

### SOWA Sports Classification and Sports Advancement Criteria

All SOWA sports are categorized as Official Sports, Emerging Sports and Locally Popular Sports. The Sports and those participating athletes would only advance to the highest level of participation, competition, and Games when certain basic participation requirements are met. These requirements are listed below:

- **Official Sports:** These sports categories may have opportunities available at the Region and State Games, determined annually based on the census or seasonal registration numbers.
  - **Geographic Participation:** A sport would require participation (training & competition) from all regions and/or at least 9 Areas. Each SOWA Region must have this sport present in the year prior to qualify as an Official SOWA Sport for advancement.
  - **Minimum Percentile:** A sport would require a minimum percentile of participation to be included as an Official SOWA Sport. 2% or more of SOWA's athletes and Unified partners must participate to qualify as an Official SOWA Sport. For example, if less than 2% of our total number of athletes and Unified partners participate in a sport the year prior, the sport may be considered a Locally Popular Sport and may not be recognized as an Official SOWA Sport the following year.
- **Emerging Sports:** These Sports are considered "Emerging" when they hit more than 2% or 200 participants. Sport will be placed in a two-year probation period where they will need to sustain 2% participation or 200 participants to be considered an official sport. If the sports participation numbers sustain and stay above 200 in their two-year probation period, the sport will be added as an official sport. If the sports participation numbers drop below 200 or do not sustain in their two-year probation period, the sport will be considered a Locally Popular Sport only.
- **Locally Popular Sports:** A sport having 2% or less of the total SOWA participants. Sport is eligible for a special waiver and may or may not be eligible for competition locally and beyond.

## Additional Considerations

- **Special circumstances waiver.** Prior to each season SOWA may provide a waiver to those sports that do not meet the Official SOWA Sport criteria but are recognized as having a growing base of active athletes or alternatively recognized as having active interest and avid participation. This Waiver is issued at SOWA's discretion and contingent upon cost and feasibility and these sports will be eligible for the State Games.
- **Combative sports and other ineligible sports:** SOI has presently classified combative sports, martial arts (other than Judo), sledding sports, motor sports, aerial sports, shooting and archery as ineligible. These are sports or sports categories pose an unreasonable risk to the health or safety of our athletes. No Accredited Program may offer training or competition without approval.

Official Sports	Emerging Sports	Locally Popular Sports
Sport is approved by SOI, Article 1	Sport is approved by SOI, Article 1	Sport is approved by SOI, Article 1
Eligible for competition at both Region and State levels. More information to be released in summer 2025 on advancement numbers by sport.	Training at local level, local competition encouraged. Eligible for special circumstances waiver.	Training at the local level, local competition encouraged. Eligible for special circumstances waiver.
Participation in all 3 regions and/or 9 Areas.	Participation in at least 7 or more Areas.	Participation in 4 or less Areas
Participation is more than 2% (or 200) of total athletes.	Participation reaches 200 and sustains that number over a 2-year probation period. If sport sustains 200 or more, it will be promoted to Official Sport. If sport does not sustain or drops below 200 over 2-year probation, it will be moved to Locally Popular.	Participation is 2% or less of total athletes (less than 200).
Athletics, Basketball, Bocce*, Bowling, Golf*, Flag Football, Soccer, Softball*, Swimming	e.g. Cheerleading	Alpine, Cross-Country Skiing, Cycling, Figure Skating, Gymnastics, Powerlifting, Speed Skating, Snowboarding, Snowshoeing, Volleyball.

*\*Sports will remain as recognized sports at this time due to the impact of the Three Season Model. Placement of Sports is being evaluated.*



## Guidelines for Adding a Sport

Local Programs may choose to add new sports to their program. Sport growth will be grassroots driven and based on athlete interest. There are a few simple guidelines to follow when adding a sports:

1. The sport must be an [approved sport](#) by Special Olympics Inc. (SOI) and Article 1.
2. Local Program must budget for any expenses associated with participating in the sport during the annual budget cycle, and ensure a fundraising plan is in place to cover expenses.
3. Local Program must register with Special Olympics Washington when participating in sport.
4. Attend training provided by Special Olympics Washington training that reviews policies and procedures when operating a program.

Growth: Once a sport is added, it will adhere to the criteria referenced above. Once interest is above 200, the sport will be considered an 'Emerging Sport' and follow included criteria.

## More Information on Emerging Sports

Once the sport reaches over 200 participants, the sport will have a two-year exhibition period and will be considered an Emerging Sport. Sports Resource Teams will be developed to help promote and grow the sport.

After the two-year exhibition period the Emerging Sport will be evaluated to assess its potential for meaningful competition:

- A minimum of 7 Areas must have competed in the exhibition period.
- In a team sport meaningful competition means at least 20 teams to make at least 5 divisions. \*
- In an individual sport meaningful competition means at least 200 athletes to ensure enough competitive divisions for all ability levels. \*

*\*This is a guideline and will be reviewed by Special Olympics Washington Sports Staff for assessment of equitable competition.*

If meaningful competition requirements are not met, it will be determined if another year of exhibition status will allow the sport to reach the required numbers. If yes, then the sport will be granted another year, if no then the sport will remain a locally popular sport.

If meaningful competition requirements are met, then Sports Staff will determine the continued growth potential of the sport, if adding the sport is financially feasible and if the sport fits into the current sports structure without causing significant hardship on the schedule. A timeline will be put in place to determine and communicate these factors to constituents.

The Chief Executive Officer makes the final decision about adding or not adding the sport to the official offerings.

## Guidelines for Declining Sports

An official sport will be considered at risk of removal from sport offerings as a continual decline in participation is noted and divisioning can no longer be appropriately done or when fewer than 15 teams or 200 athletes are competing in the sport.



Before moving forward to determine if the sport can be revived, programs will be surveyed to determine if enough interest exists that will result in an increase in participation numbers. If survey responses indicate interest will not meet the numbers required to add a new sport, then the sport may be eliminated immediately or after the current season if the season is not yet over. If survey responses indicate enough interest to reach the numbers required to add a new sport, then the Declining Interest Guidelines below will be implemented.

Declining Questions to be answered:

- Are there enough athletes in the sport to have meaningful competition?
- Are there adequate numbers of qualified coaches to safely train athletes?
- Are there safe and appropriate facilities for both training and competition?
- Are there at least 7 Areas participating in the sport?
- Is the sport cost effective?

Once a sport is determined to have “Declining Interest” it will enter a two-year probationary period. During the probationary period, the Sports Resource Team will attempt to revive interest in the sport with support from Special Olympics Washington Staff. The following action needs to be taken at the conclusion of the sports most recent season:

- Internal and external communication informing constituents and staff that the sport is at risk and needs to be revived or it will be eliminated.
- If a Sports Resource Team exists for the sport, one will be formed, and they will develop and implement reasonable strategies to grow and promote the sport.
- Key players involved with the sport will be engaged to assist staff in developing and implementing reasonable strategies to grow and promote the sport.
- High emphasis on offering training schools and opportunities.

At the end of the probationary period, if meaningful competition requirements are not met then the Chief Executive Officer will make the decision on final placement of sport.

No program can offer, organize or conduct training or competition opportunities in any sport that is not recognized by Special Olympics Washington.

### **Immediate Elimination of a Sport**

Below are circumstances in which Special Olympics Washington would move to immediate eliminate sports from offerings:

- If SOI and/or SONA eliminate a sport currently offered by Special Olympics Washington, the sport will be allowed to finish the current sport season and then it will be eliminated.
- If unforeseen circumstances arise that override the *Declining Interest Guidelines*, the sport will be allowed to finish the current sport season and then it will be eliminated.