

Unified Sports® Recreation Guidelines



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Special Olympics Unified Sports® promotes social inclusion through shared sport training and competition experiences for individuals with and without intellectual disabilities. Unified Sports Recreation consists of inclusive recreational sports opportunities for Special Olympics athletes and partners without disabilities. What differentiates this model from the competitive Unified Sports and Unified Sports Player Development is that this model does not follow any prescribed training, competition and/or team composition requirements established by Special Olympics as set forth in Article 1, Section M of the Official Special Olympics Sports Rules. These recreational opportunities may take place in partnership with schools, sport clubs, the community and other private or public organizations as introductory one-day events, exhibitions, demonstrations (including Unified Sports Experiences) or ongoing activities such as physical education classes and intramurals.

Unified Sports Recreation ...

- Does not require teams to be composed of athletes and partners of similar age and ability.
- May include training (like physical education class) or competition (like intramural sports) opportunities in which athletes and partners take part together over the course of a season or a semester.
- Includes sports and other physical activities ranging from basketball to yoga. Activities must be physical.
- After a single-day exposure event, these activities should take place over a period of time.

- Is currently not an official competition opportunity, but is an approved exhibition or demonstration at
- Special Olympics events. In schools, it fulfills the Project UNIFY criteria of inclusive sports.
- Is only offered at and below the Program level; it is not offered at Regional and World Games.
- No awards are provided; however, recognition can be provided on a Program-by-Program basis.



Criteria for Success

1. Partners and athletes must meaningfully participate, that is, athletes must be engaged in the sport or activity as a participant, not as a mascot or manager.
2. The selected activity must be a physical activity involving movement, coordination and basic athleticism.
3. Unified Sports Recreation must be supervised by a coach or leader who understands the Special Olympics and Unified Sports philosophy as set forth in Article 1 of the Official Special Olympics Sports Rules.
4. Participants may be of varying ability levels; however, they must be engaged together on the same team in the activity and in a meaningful and appropriate manner. While the social inclusion objective of Unified Sports is best met when athletes and partners are of similar ability, similar ability is not required in the Unified Sports Recreation model.
5. The composition of teams need not conform to standard Unified Sports guidelines/ratios; however, the social inclusion objective of Unified Sports Recreation is met when at least 25% of the team members are athletes or partners. Thus, in Unified Sports Recreation, Special Olympics Programs may adjust percentages to meet their needs as long as every participant is meaningfully involved.
6. Unified Sports Recreation should occur in a consistent framework where participation is regularly scheduled. Even though the activity is less structured, the opportunities should still be of high quality.

Examples

Physical Education Class: A high school physical education class includes students with and without intellectual disabilities who play basketball every class period for a season.

Partner's Club: A group of basketball club members with and without intellectual disabilities decide to go bowling on Saturday afternoons as a regular part of their club activities.

Intramural Team or Community Free/Open Play: A group of university students invite local Special Olympics athletes to play volleyball on Sunday evenings.

Exhibitions/Demonstrations: One-day events, including Unified Sports Experiences, are held with a school, community sports club or community sports organization that feature individuals with and without intellectual disabilities as teammates for the purpose of awareness, exposure and/or fundraising.

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