



# Special Olympics Unified Sports Experience Quick Start Guide

**Special Olympics**





## Introduction

This guide provides ideas and steps to implement a successful Special Olympics Unified Sports® Experiences. This is a starting point for groups to understand what goes into planning an event and how to provide a meaningful experience for all participants.

**NOTE:** Always remember to work with the state or local Special Olympics Program representatives when planning events. They can share what events have been successful in the past and provide you with valuable guidance and resources!

## Table of Contents

Special Olympics Unified Sports® Overview	3
Getting Started - Steps to a Successful Unified Sports Experience	4
Event Tips!	6
Additional Resources	7



# Special Olympics Unified Sports® Overview

## What is Unified Sports?

Special Olympics Unified Sports brings together people with intellectual disabilities (Special Olympics athletes) and people without intellectual disabilities (Unified Partners) to participate on sports teams together. Teams practice and compete together over the course of a full season, just like any other school team, college intramural or community recreation program. Unified Sports was inspired by a simple principle: training together and playing together is a quick path to friendship and understanding.

## What is a Unified Sports Experience?

A Unified Sports Experience (USE) is like Unified Sports, except that it's a one-day recreational event. The goals of a Unified Sports Experience are:

- Provide an opportunity for people of different backgrounds to play together and learn from one-another
- Showcase the skills and talents of people with disabilities in the community
- Inspire participants to become more involved with Special Olympics
- Increase local awareness for Unified Sports
- Create a fun opportunity for exercise and friendly competition



## Getting Started – Steps to a Successful Unified Sports Experience

### Step 1: Gain initial support & approval

- ✓ Work with school administrators, student leaders or community members to ensure that this type of event will be appropriate and supported
- ✓ Ask what permissions might need to be granted or if any paperwork will need to be submitted
- ✓ Create a working group or committee to help plan and manage the event

### Step 2: Contact your local or state Special Olympics Program

- ✓ Special Olympics representatives may be able to provide help and resources along the way
  - Find state contact information here!  
[http://www.specialolympics.org/program\\_locator.aspx](http://www.specialolympics.org/program_locator.aspx)

### Step 3: Create an event plan with the committee

- ✓ Identify a few goals for what this event will achieve
- ✓ Identify the activity (or activities) that will be offered
- ✓ Divide team member responsibilities
- ✓ Create schedule of activities that will be offered
- ✓ Create checklist of equipment and supplies for the activities
- ✓ Determine if food or beverages should be available
- ✓ Create budget (if applicable)

### Step 4: Set a date & location

- ✓ Determine amount of time needed to plan event
- ✓ Identify the best time and location for the intended participants
- ✓ Determine facilities needed for the activities to take place
- ✓ Confirm location, date, and time



**Step 5: Recruit & promote event**

- ✓ Recruit people with and without disabilities to participate
- ✓ Recruit volunteers to assist with running and/or supervising the activities (i.e.; coaches, medical personnel, student athletes)
- ✓ Invite dignitaries to attend or participate such as a school principal or town mayor
- ✓ Promote event throughout your community and social media

**Step 6: Execute event**

- ✓ Arrive at the venue early to set up
- ✓ Meet with committee members and volunteers to confirm event details & tasks
- ✓ Monitor participation to ensure that all participants are safe and included
- ✓ Follow the event plan and have fun!

**Step 7: Post Event Follow-Up**

- ✓ Meet with committee to debrief and discuss the event
  - Were initial goals and objectives accomplished?
  - Determine what worked well and what could be improved
- ✓ Send thank-you notes to those who contributed to the event
- ✓ Share the pictures from the event on social media - #PlayUnified



## Event Tips!

### Activity Ideas

A wide variety of sport or fitness activities can be offered for a Unified Sports Experience. Here is a list of some of the most common options:

Bowling	Flag Football	Field day/relays
Baggo/cornhole	Kickball	Bocce
Zumba	Basketball	Mile walk/run

### Ensuring Meaningful Involvement

It's critical to the success of the event that ALL participants have a safe, meaningful and fun experience. Here are a few important questions to consider when planning the activities:

- What are the ages and ability levels of the intended participants?
- What instructions will be required for the participants?
- Will any of the participants be in a wheelchair?
- Who will help monitor, coach or referee the activities?

Note: Some of these activities that are less physically interactive and allow for people of a wider range of abilities to participate, these include such things as bowling, bocce, baggo/cornhole, walking/running, and individual fitness activities.

### Recruiting Participants

Ideas for recruiting Special Olympics athletes:

- School: Special Education or Life Skills Department (try to connect with a lead Special Education teacher first)
- Community: Work with a local Special Olympics team (Special Olympics staff or representatives can help make a connection to these local teams)



Ideas for recruiting Unified partners:

- School: Student clubs, student council, athletic teams
- Community: Local businesses, college campuses

Note: The ideal Unified Sports participant ration is 1:1, meaning there is one Unified partner for every one Special Olympics athlete. However, for Unified Sports Experiences, there could be as many as 3 partners for every athlete. If the Special Olympics athletes are recruited first, then that would give an idea of how many partners could participate.

## Social Media

Be sure to share your event on social media! The following tags can be used:

- #PlayUnified
- @SpecialOlympics
- Include the State Special Olympics Program social media tags

## Additional Resources

Special Olympics Unified Sports: <http://www.specialolympics.org/unified-sports.aspx>

Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools: <http://www.specialolympics.org/unified-champion-schools/>

NFHS Coaching Unified Sports Course: [www.nfhslearn.com](http://www.nfhslearn.com)

Student's Guide to Unified Sports: <http://media.specialolympics.org/resources/community-building/youth-and-school/unified-champion-schools/Unified-Sports-A-Student-Guide.pdf>