

2020 Athlete Congress Priority:
Improve Quality of Athlete Experience

All outcomes in this document were created based on responses from Special Olympics Pennsylvania staff that oversee areas within the organization, in which relate to the feedback provided at Athlete Congress.

Any outcome with an asterisk* next to it indicates that at this time, there are no plans to address the feedback mentioned.

Group 1/Question 1: When an athlete hears “quality sports practice”, what are realistic actions SOPA and/or the Local Program should consider?

During coaches’ training, improve education on:

- Maintaining proper health, nutrition and fitness habits.
 - Outcome: During coach certification trainings and pre-season coach webinars, Athlete Performance Training is discussed.
- Improved implementation of warm up and cool down exercises within training plan.
 - Outcome: During coach certification trainings, coaches will be educated on Athlete Performance Training, which includes sport-specific examples of warmup and cool down exercises.
- Motivating athletes to succeed.
 - Outcome: During coach certification trainings and pre-season coach webinars, appropriate sport/event selection and goal setting is discussed.
- Stressing importance of CPR Certification. and having a first aid kit available.
 - Outcome: CPR certification is not mandatory as there is a cost associated with it, but coaches are encouraged through coach certification trainings and pre-season coach webinars to get certificated. CPR certification can be used as continuing education credit.
- Splitting athletes by abilities.
 - Outcome: During coach certification trainings, splitting athletes by abilities is discussed.

For a Local Program/Region:

- Ensure appropriate amount of equipment at all training sites.
- Equipment at practice is consistent with what is used during competition.
- Making sure facility offers restrooms/locker rooms and budgeting if it is an additional expense for a training site.
 - Outcome: Amount and consistency of equipment and use of restrooms/locker rooms at facilities is difficult to assess in the current Local Program structure. Once regionalized, a Sport Director can utilize site assessments and do site visits.
- Hosting pre-season coaches’ meetings to remind coaches:
 - Have all certifications up to date.
 - Properly splitting athletes by ability.
 - Provide water if training site does not provide free access to a drinking fountain or other sources of drinkable water.
 - Setting up competition skills training in as close a format as possible to actual competition.
 - Having a first aid kit at all practices.
 - Outcome: Hosting pre-season coaches’ meetings are difficult to enforce in the current Local Program structure. Once regionalized, these meetings will be hosted by paid staff. In addition to the meetings, there will also be training site evaluations.

- Stressing the importance of having a first aid kit.
 - Outcome: The Regional Playbook contains a checklist of items needed at a training site, which includes a first aid kit.

Group 1/Question 2: When an athlete hears “quality local competition”, what are realistic actions that should be considered?

Information to include within Regional Playbook:

- Host at least 2 competitions in each sport prior to Sectionals to keep athletes engaged.
 - Outcome: As included within the Regional Playbook as an expectation, Sports Leaders are to identify and plan for League Play, Invitationals and Regional Play to meet the Strategic Plan goal of at least one regional event in every sport by year 3 of region’s formation.
- Invite at least one other Local Program from within/outside the region to participate in competitions.
 - Outcome: As included within the Regional Playbook, with each training site being registered in advance, it will allow Local Teams to know which sports are being offered in which counties and create more invitational opportunities.
- Work with coaches to identify dates and locations for competitions.
 - Outcome: As included within the Regional Playbook, pre-season registration will allow Team Sport Liaisons to share information with their coaches to allow their athletes to participate in more invitationals, as well as league play and/or pick-up games.
- Recruitment of volunteers from within the community.
 - Outcome: As included within the Regional Playbook, Games Organizing Committees will list each volunteer job needed. SOPA will also create flyers to share with local businesses, schools and community groups and send emails to local community partners. After the event, all volunteers will receive a thank you note encouraging them to get more involved.

During Regional/Local Program Competitions:

- Having hand sanitizer at each venue.
 - Outcome: Hand sanitizer should be readily available at all venues at Regional/Local Program competitions.*
- Provide more shaded areas for outdoor events.
 - Outcome: Shaded areas have a cost component that needs to be budgeted for Regional/Local Program competitions.*
- Have an appropriate amount of medical volunteers at all competition venues.
 - Outcome: There is a current expectation that there always is medical staff on site for any Regional/Local Program competitions.
- Providing healthier food and beverage options.
 - Outcome: Starting in 2021, Regions/Local Programs are to offer healthier food and beverages for all events. Training has and will be provided to Regions/Local Programs on healthier food and beverage options, as well as how to budget for these changes.
- Less waiting around between competitions. Ways to address this could include, but are not limited to:
 - Omitting Opening Ceremonies to allow for an earlier start
 - Outcome: SOPA has a resource guide for hosting competitions that does not allow omitting Opening Ceremonies at Regional/Local Program competitions.

- Not always including meals and/or entertainment at an event
 - Outcome: SOPA has a resource guide for hosting competitions that includes how to include meals and entertainment at Regional/Local Program competitions.
- Provide training for officials to best enforce Special Olympics International/National Governing Body rules at all local/regional competitions.
 - Outcome: SOPA has a resource guide for hosting competitions that includes mention of obtaining certified officials (i.e. PIAA) for sports with a national governing body. For sports without a national governing body (i.e. bocce), training is led by a local sport expert.
- Identify appropriate venues for single and multi-sport competitions.
 - Outcome: SOPA has a resource guide for completion that asks Regions/Local Programs planning competitions to consider venues that are accessible and allow for opportunities for event growth.
- How to appropriately division for both individual and team sports.
 - Outcome: SOPA has a resource guide for hosting competitions that explains how to properly division for Regional/Local Program competitions.
- Inviting local organizations (current/potential corporate partners, sports teams, fraternities/sororities, etc.) to help organize the event.
- Mass advertise to recruit volunteers from within the community.
- Grow community partnerships to allow for more facilities to utilize.
 - Outcome: The Marketing Department has created a tactic within the Strategic Plan of implementing a state-wide marketing strategy to increase awareness of SOPA in recruiting volunteers and athletes. This tactic contains a measurable that focuses on increasing games and programmatic promotion of state and regional events that will be assessed and altered annually.

Group 1/Question 3: On a scale of 1-3, 1 being the least favorable and 3 being the most favorable, how would you rate your support of Unified Sports and give your reasoning why?

- Response rating 1: During Coaches' Training, remind coaches the importance of providing equal support to all athletes and unified partners.
 - Outcome: Coaches are currently encouraged to take the SOI Coaching Unified Sports course, however further discussion is needed before making it mandatory.*
- Response rating 1: Prior to the start of the season, the Head Coach and/or an experienced unified partner should speak with all new unified partners in explaining how to properly work with their teammates without dominating competitions.
 - Outcome: Coaches are currently encouraged to take the SOI Coaching Unified Sports course. SOPA believes everything in Unified Sports starts with Coaches education because it is up to them to teach Unified Partners how they would train and compete.*
- Response rating 2: Training sites should take into consideration how many athletes wish to participate before adding in unified partners.
 - Outcome: Each Local Program is expected to have an Athlete Leadership Team, however it is not a requirement for Athlete Representatives to speak with their teams specifically about sport offerings.*

- Response rating 3:
 - Unified Partners provide me feedback in real time.
 - They help build a team if there are not enough athletes.
 - I enjoy hanging out with my unified partners. Some of them are also coaches in other sports.
 - Outcome: SOPA's Marketing Department has created a tactic within the Strategic Plan of increasing viability of Unified Sports and Unified Leadership experiences. There is also an increased emphasis on recruiting Unified Partners through current community "Club" sports, colleges and universities.

Group 2/Question 1: How can SOPA improve its communication in which they can provide high level sports updates such as allocations and competition schedules?

- Making the Monthly Update and high level updates on social media more athlete friendly.
- Including a section on the website and app for athlete specific content.
 - Outcome: SOPA plans on developing a resource page on the website to present information in an athlete friendly fashion.
- Including Athlete Representatives in all major communication updates as any other Local/Regional Volunteer.
 - Outcome: At the state level, Athlete Representatives are invited to attend monthly Hot Topics Calls. At the regional level, Athlete Representatives will also be included within meetings and communications for all Regional Leader Teams.
- Sharing high level updates outside of just Athlete Leadership on a regularly scheduled basis in:
 - The Athlete Leadership Facebook Group.
 - SOAR Newsletter.
 - Quarterly webinars.
 - Outcome: SOPA continually informs all Athlete Leaders through its website, social media pages, the Monthly Update and quarterly webinars.

Group 2/Question 2: How can Athlete Representatives better educate their fellow athletes with information available from the state?

- Write and distribute newsletter to all athletes electronically or in the mail.
 - Outcome: Several Local Programs already have newsletters both electronic and paper. Regions are also prepared to email newsletters and make PDF copies available on website.*
- Create flyers to distribute at competitions.
 - Outcome: Marketing Team is working on updating templates that Local Programs can use at any event. This template will become available in a dropbox folder that will also become available on the SOPA website.

- At least one Local Program volunteer besides from ALT Chair and Mentor are a part of all local ALT Meetings.
 - Outcome: The requirement is that the 4:1 ratio must be met. As long as there are more than 4 athletes on an Athlete Leadership Team, there has to be at least one additional volunteer.
- Share video with major updates.
 - Outcome: SOPA created a new athlete led talk show, SOPA Tonight, as a way to convey updates through interviews, games, commercials and more. Athlete Representatives can promote SOPA Tonight by doing things that may include, but are not limited to: sharing in their Athlete Leadership Team Agendas, Local Program Facebook groups, etc.

Group 2/Question 3: How can neighboring Local Programs (i.e. Crawford and Erie, Centre and Blair, Chester and Montgomery, etc.) share information on training sites with each other so athletes know what sports they can participate in if their home program doesn't offer them?

Incorporate within Regional Playbook:

- Counties share training site information with each other before the start of each season on their websites and social media.
 - Outcome: As included within the Regional Playbook, preseason registration will address training site information and the regional website will contain a full listing of sports offered.
- Have full listing of sports each program offers to allow time to connect with neighboring county if home county doesn't offer desired sport.
 - Outcome: As included within the Regional Playbook, preseason registration will address sports offerings as well as information shared on regional Facebook page and Local Team Facebook pages.
- Have information on each training site and local/regional competitions available on SOPA website.
 - Outcome: Each region will have its own website to help better facilitate the flow of training site content among neighboring counties.
- New Medical to include section to write multiple Local Programs to allow athlete and family to receive more updates from throughout their region and/or neighboring regions.
 - Outcome: Within the new online Athlete Registration Form, users can select which Local Program they want to participate in, allowing them to receive updates from throughout their region and/or neighboring regions.