



Memo: Guidelines for Inclusion of Transgender Participants in Special Olympics

Introduction:

Special Olympics promotes a more inclusive world, respecting and celebrating diversity and the unique gifts of all individuals.

The health and safety of everyone participating in Special Olympics is of paramount importance to the organization. Athletes, Unified partners, volunteers and others, should feel that Special Olympics is a safe, positive and inclusive environment.

Policy:

No participant should ever have to fear negative, threatening, discriminatory or adverse reactions or treatment by other athletes, coaches, or volunteers because of a participant's differences, including gender expression or identity.

All eligible participants should have the opportunity to participate in Special Olympics athletics/activities in a manner that is consistent with their gender identity, irrespective of the gender listed on the participants' medical or registration records and without subsequent medical or mental health care consultation.

Gender Identity-Based Participation Guidelines

These guidelines have been developed to help ensure the inclusion of transgender participants in all activities. These best practices are derived from NGB's, IOC, NCAA, NFHS and other sport organizations.

For the purposes of this guidance, the following definitions apply:

- Transgender Person: A person whose gender identity does not match the sex assigned to the person at birth.
- Gender Identity: A person's deeply-felt internal sense of being male and/or female.
- Gender Expression: A person's external characteristics and behaviors that are socially defined as either masculine or feminine, such as dress, mannerisms, speech patterns and social interactions.
- Participant: Special Olympics athletes, Unified partners, coaches, volunteers, or any other official delegates of a Program

Special Olympics recognizes that there are many different forms of sexual and gender identity. In application in Special Olympics, gender identity factors in specifically and most prominently with respect to 1) sport divisioning, 2) housing, and 3) changing/shower/restroom facilities, which follow current societal norms of "male" and "female" nomenclature.

For those individuals who identify as bigender, gender non-conforming, intersex individuals, or other gender identities, for the purposes of the above 3 primary applications of gender identity in Special Olympics, it is advised that the Program speak with the individual and/or their parent or legal guardian to verify the gender they will identify with during their involvement in Special Olympics so as to not cause confusion or situations that may affect other athletes or volunteers (example: team sports competition/categorization).

1. **Eligibility to Participate** – Eligible participants, those that meet all other registration requirements, are permitted to participate in a manner consistent with their gender identity in accordance with the position outlined below.
2. **Notice to Special Olympics** – The participant and/or legal guardian shall contact their Program’s Chief Executive Officer, or other individual as identified by Chief Executive Officer, indicating that the participant has a gender identity different than the sex listed on the participant’s athlete medical and/or registration records and that the participant desires to participate in a manner consistent with his/her gender identity.
3. **Confidentiality** – With the exception of the notices required in subpart 2 and Subpart 4 (housing) of this document, participants affected by this policy have the right to and should expect confidentiality and discretion in all matters relating to this issue.
4. **Changing Areas, Restrooms and Showers** – Transgender participants shall be permitted to use the locker room, shower, and restroom facilities in accordance with federal, New Jersey and local law and the student’s gender identity. Whenever possible, locker rooms should have some private, enclosed changing areas, showers, and toilets for use by any participant who desires them. When requested by a transgender participant, SONJ will provide private, separate changing, showering, and toilet facilities for the participant’s use, but transgender participants should not be required to use separate facilities.
 - **Housing** – Transgender participants will be provided housing accommodations based on their gender identity, with a recognition that any athlete who requires extra privacy/supervision will be accommodated whenever possible and on the condition and understanding that (1) the non-transgender roommate(s) and their parents/guardians are notified and given the opportunity to request alternate accommodations, and (2) as with any athlete, bed sharing is not permitted.
 - If shared housing is not an option, the transgender participant will be accommodated with a room to him/herself or with his/her family/support system in compliance with the SONJ’s housing and volunteer screening policies.
5. **Sports Participation** –SONJ will adhere to the athlete divisioning protocol as outlined in the Special Olympics Sports Rules, which does not rely heavily on gender. In the event that divisioning requires separation by gender, athlete divisioning will be based on the participant’s gender identity.
 - a. All sports-related protests/appeals shall be handled in accordance with the Special Olympics Sports Rules.
 - b. Please see Appendix A for additional guidance regarding team sports.
6. **Language: Preferred names and pronouns** – A transgender participant may have a preferred name and/or gender pronoun that is different from what may be indicated by the participant’s registration records. Coaches, volunteers, and officials shall make every reasonable effort to honor the participant’s preferred name and/or pronoun and to ensure that the participant’s name and pronoun preferences are respected by others including teammates, opponents, fans, etc.
7. **Dress code and team uniforms** – All participants should have uniforms as outlined in the Special Olympics Sports Rules. No participant should be required to wear a gendered uniform that conflicts with the participant’s gender identity. With respect to gymnastics and aquatics, transgender athletes should be permitted to wear whatever uniform is most comfortable for them so long as the suit does not extend below the knee or past the shoulders and provides coverage over usually accepted areas of the body.
8. **Compliance with Applicable Law** –SONJ shall review and update their guidelines periodically to stay current with federal, state and local laws and best practices.

Appendix A: Team Sports -

With respect to team sports, it is important that teams are divisioned in the appropriate category at the initial level of competition in the advancement progression.

Per Special Olympics Sports Rules, Article 1, section 10.4.1.1: “mixed gender teams shall be divisioned with male teams unless there are sufficient mixed gender teams of similar ability to make a separate division.”

As such, if there were to be an individual who gender identifies as female on an all-female team, they should be placed in a female division and not inappropriately placed in a mixed division.

Special Olympics divisions in the following order: 1) by gender, 2) by age, 3) by ability. However, once divisioned, gender is the last reason for modifying the division that a team will compete in. Teams should be re-divisioned based on ability first, then age grouping and finally, gender.

So while gender is considered in placing a team initially, it has the last priority on where a team/individual is actually placed to compete, as ability matching levels and ages are generally more important.

Additionally, in the Special Olympics Sports Rules it states that in team sports “when athletes or teams are divisioned with athletes or teams of the opposite gender, they shall receive awards in order of placement within that division.” [SR Article 1: 12.5.2]

| Adopted: 11/2018