



2026 USA Games

Team Indiana Handbook

June 20 – 26, 2026

Minneapolis, MN

Special Olympics





Overview of 2026 USA Games

General

The 2026 Special Olympics USA Games will bring 3,000 athletes to Minneapolis to compete in a variety of sports. Hosted at some of the region's top athletic facilities including the University of Minnesota and the National Sports Center in Blaine, the USA Games will offer athletes, their coaches, and families a week of national competition against the backdrop of the beautiful Twin Cities.

Team Indiana

For the 2026 Special Olympics USA Games, Team Indiana will be sending athletes and partners to compete in 10 sports (Basketball, Bocce, Bowling, Cornhole, Flag Football, Golf, Powerlifting, Soccer, Swimming, and Track & Field). The selection process begins with the 2024 EKS Games and concludes with the 2025 Summer Games. No selections will be based on 2026 state championships.

Team Indiana will focus on the team – 10 sports, but only one Team Indiana. We will be prepared physically and mentally for competition. Our success is not determined by medals. Our success is determined by becoming the best we can be – striving for maximum potential.

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Management Team Role Options

Equipment Manager; Family Coordinator; Medical Coordinator; Training Coordinator; Public Relations & Media Coordinator.



Team Composition

Below, Team Indiana's composition is outlined based on female athletes, male athletes, partners, and coaches. Secondly, in Golf, Swimming, Powerlifting, and Track & Field, competitors may be placed in categories/levels which then list the events in those categories/levels. When nominating athletes and partners, be sure those competitors have the ability to compete in the events and/or distances listed for each sport.

In team sports (Basketball, Flag Football, and Soccer), athletes and partners are limited to 1 event. In individual sports, athletes and partners are limited to 3 events – with the following exceptions: Golf (1) and Powerlifting (4).

TENTATIVE

SPORT	TEAM MAKEUP	EVENTS	
Basketball	1 Team 5 athletes (male or female) 5 Unified Partners (male or female) 2 coaches Athletes & coaches will be from same County Program	Unified 5 on 5 Team: Male Division	
Bocce	2 Unified pairs (1 athlete & 1 partner per pair) 1 coach	Singles (<i>athletes only</i>) Unified Doubles Unified 4-Person Team	
Bowling	4 Unified pairs (2 male & 2 female) (1 athlete & 1 partner per pair) 1 coach	Singles (<i>athletes only</i>) Unified Doubles Unified 4-Person Team	
Cornhole	4 Unified pairs (2 male & 2 female) (1 athlete & 1 partner per pair) 1 coach	Singles Unified Doubles	
Flag Football	1 Team 10 athletes 3 coaches	Traditional 5 on 5 Team: Male Division	
Golf	1 Unified pair (female) (1 athlete & 1 partner) 2 Individual Golfers (<i>male & Female</i>) 1 coach 2 caddies	Level 2: Unified 9-Hole Alternate Shot (<i>1 pair</i>) Level 4: Individual Stroke Play – 9- Hole	
Powerlifting	2 female athletes 2 male athletes 1 coach	Combination (Bench, Deadlift & Squat)	
Soccer	1 Team 6 athletes (male or female) 6 Unified Partners (male or female) 2 coaches Athletes & coaches will be from same County Program	Unified 7 on 7 Team: Male Division	
Swimming	2 female athletes 2 male athletes 2 coaches (1 male & 1 female) <i>NOTE: athletes may be chosen on a "DIVISION 1" based selection</i>	Category 2 (1 female & 1 male athletes) 25m Backstroke 50m Backstroke 50m Breaststroke 50m Butterfly 50m Freestyle 100m Freestyle Relays (4x25m & 4x50m Free; 4x50m Medley)	Category 3 (1 female & 1 male athlete) 100m Backstroke 100m Breaststroke 100m Butterfly 100m Freestyle 100m Individual Medley 200m Freestyle 200m Individual Medley 400m Freestyle Relays (4x25m & 4x50m Free; 4x50m Medley)



<p>Track & Field</p>	<p>4 female athletes 4 male athletes 3 coaches <i>(at least 1 female & 1 male)</i></p> <p><i>NOTE: athletes may be chosen on a "DIVISION 1" based selection</i></p>	<p>Category 2 (2 female & 2 male athletes) 100m Dash 200m Dash 400m Dash Relays (4x100m; 4x400m) Running Long Jump Shot Put Mini Jav</p>	<p>Category 3 (2 female & 2 male athletes) 400m Dash 800m Run 1500m Run Relays (4x100m; 4x400m) Running Long Jump Shot Put Mini Jav</p>
<p>Youth Leadership Experience</p>	<p>1 male or female athlete 1 male or female Unified Partner 1 mentor</p> <p><i>Note: the athlete and Unified Partner must be the same gender</i></p>		

Team Member Requirements – for all athletes, partners, coaches, and support staff

- Must be involved in the SOIN local county program or UCS program.
- Must be nominated by your County Coordinator (excluding support staff) or UCS educator.
- Must be in good standing with SOIN.
- Read, sign, and submit the Code of Conduct form.
- Complete, sign, and submit all required registration forms, medical forms, and other forms as needed.
- Must have the ability to function and be away from home for ten days or more.
- Must possess the skills to be able to function as a part of the delegation (e.g. cooperation, sharing, group living, following directions, basic social skills, good behavior, etc.).
- Must be able to travel long distance and stand for long periods of time on a daily basis (excludes applicants in wheelchairs, but still have the stamina for such activities).
- Must be able to lift 25 pounds.
- Must agree to refrain from the use of alcohol and tobacco products during training camps and USA Games.
- Participate in all training camps and attend all portions of those camps.
- Participate in all Team Indiana promotional and fundraising events.
- Must agree to the Team Indiana finance arrangement as outlined later.
- Participate in fitness training program and Healthy Athletes screenings at training camps and at USA Games – athletes and partners required; coaches and support staff are encouraged to participate.

Coach, Unified Partner & Support Staff Requirements

- Must be a Class A volunteer with SOIN, according to its Volunteer Management System, which includes:
 - Completed & signed Coach/Volunteer Application,
 - Completed (and passed) criminal background check,
 - Completed Coach/Volunteer Orientation,
 - Completed Online Protective Behaviors training, and
 - Completed Concussion Awareness training.
- FOR COACHES: Achieve Level 1 & 2 coaching certifications of the SOIN Coach Education Program.
 - **Level 1: Coaching Special Olympics Athletes and Coaching Unified Sports online courses.**



- **Level 2: Sports-Specific Course (online or in-person)**
- FOR COACHES: Develop a training plan for athletes and partners (from October 2025 through the Games), utilizing the SOIN Training program and Unified Fitness Club programs.
 - Training plans will be distributed to athletes and partners at the end of Training Camp 1.
 - Coaches will have time during the training camp to adjust plans based on performance during fitness assessments, Healthy Athletes screenings, and camp practices.
 - But coaches must come to the first training camp with a training plan developed with only minor modifications needed at camp.
- FOR COACHES: Communicate weekly with athletes and partners on training progress and daily nutrition journals.
- FOR COACHES: Report monthly to the HOD and Training Coordinator on athlete and partner training progress.
 - Provide success stories (i.e. weight loss, personal bests achieved) for promotion.
 - Identify issues and barriers.
 - Work with the HOD and Training Coordinator to address issues and overcome barriers.

Selection Process

The selection process is outlined in SOI's *General Sports Rules* and will be followed by SOIN. Our quota is described earlier in this handbook.

- If the number of eligible (nominated) athletes or teams does not exceed the quota, all athletes and teams shall advance, provided the athletes and teams compete in the state championship for that sport and meet the team member requirements as listed above.
- If the number of eligible (nominated) athletes or teams exceeds the quota, athletes or teams that advance shall be selected as follows:
 - Priority is given to first-place finishers from all divisions of the sport/event in the state championship. If the number of first place finishers exceeds the quota, select athletes or teams to advance by random draw.
 - If there are not enough first-place finishers to fill the quota, all first-place finishers shall advance. The remaining quota shall be filled by a random draw of second place finishers from all divisions of the sport/event in the state championship.
 - If the quota is large enough for all second-place finishers to advance, the remaining quota shall be filled by a random draw of third-place finishers from all divisions of the sport/event in the state championship.
 - Repeat this process, adding each place of finish as necessary, until the quota is filled.
- These procedures apply to both individual and team sports.
- Exceptions apply for quota positions given to athletes achieving the Division 1 performance standard in a particular event automatically places the athlete at the top of the selection process. "Division 1" has replaced what was previously known as high performance standards. Those event standards are:

○ Swimming – 50yd Freestyle	Males 31.01	Females 39.15
○ Track & Field – 100m Dash	Males 14.25	Females 17.46

Priority

Over the course of the 2025-26 (July 2025 to June 2026) training period leading up to USA Games, conflicts may arise between an athlete's, partner's, or coach's local participation and Team Indiana commitments. Upon being named to Team Indiana, no matter athlete, partner or coach, the team member's first Special Olympics priority is to Team Indiana. Scheduling decisions will favor Team Indiana in all instances.



Alternates

During the selection process for athletes, partners and coaches, alternates will be included. These alternates will replace Team Indiana members when members are no longer able to attend USA Games or no longer comply with team requirements. In cases where the alternate is not needed to replace a team member, the alternate will not attend USA Games.

Youth Leadership Experience

The purpose of the youth leadership experience is to prepare youth leaders to take on meaningful roles in Special Olympics by giving them formal training and hands-on experience. The individuals selected for the Youth Leadership Experience will be apart of Team Indiana and will be expected to meet all the requirements listed above as well as the following additional criteria:

- Individuals must be between 15 – 20 years of age at the time of the Games and the pair should be similar ages to one another if possible.
- Individuals must be involved with SO programming in their community or school.
- Passionate and well prepared to grow SO programming at their school or within their local SO program.
- Must be committed to activities outlined throughout the entire Youth Leadership Experience (all training camps, fundraising opportunities, and educational webinars provided by Local Organizing Committee)
- Should be able to travel and complete these activities without the support of a family member or other caregiver.
- Mentors must be available for all activities for the Youth Leadership Experience.
- The mentors will be the first line of support for youth leaders and should know the youth leaders well before traveling to USA Games.
- The mentor can be a program staff member, educator, or other involved community member. No family member or guardian can be the mentor.
- As part of the pre-event preparations, the youth leaders will develop a person action plan on how they will apply what they learn in their communities or schools. This will be presented at the Games and then executed after the games.

Nominations for the Youth Leadership Experience due April 14th and Selections will be made by May 2nd.

Training Plan

The official training season for USA Games begins July 1, 2025 for all athletes and partners. The training season concludes with the Closing Ceremonies of USA Games. Training will be approximately 11 ½ months.

During this time, athletes and partners may participate in other sports at the local, area or state level. However, their #1 focus must be their USA Games sport. At all times, they should be in training in that sport; complemented by secondary sports.

The Special Olympics fitness program tests athletes at various physical fitness stations and educates them at nutritional stations. In the end, each coach will work with athletes and partners identifying areas of excellence and areas for improvement. In addition, SO Indiana has developed a generalized sports training program to strengthen the “core” area of the body. An athlete, if properly trained in this program, will improve physical fitness and athletic performance.

TRAINING EXPECTATIONS

- At Training Camp 1, athletes and partners will be introduced to their fitness plan as outlined by the Training Coordinator. Athletes and partners will be expected to train in accordance to the fitness plan starting in July 2025.
- From Training Camp 1 through USA Games, athletes and partners are expected to train in accordance to the fitness plan and to the sport-specific training plan as outlined by the coach.
- Throughout the training season, athletes and partners are expected to keep a daily nutritional journal.



- Athletes and partners are expected to communicate weekly to the coach their training progress and nutritional journal entries.
- The “Training Plan General Guidelines” section (below) outlines the training plan progression from beginning to the Games. Specific plans will be provided upon selection and upon dismissal from training camps. “Sport-Specific” refers to the athlete’s or partner’s USA Games sport. Secondary sports (the sport in which the athlete or partner is participating for their County) should not be included in the training guidelines below.
- NOTE: Training Camp 1 will include 4 fitness workouts and 1 team practice. Athletes and partners are to arrive to the first training camp in shape.

FITNESS ASSESSMENTS / HEALTHY ATHLETES SCREENINGS

• Training Camp 1:	July 25-27, 2025,	Mandatory
• Training Camp 2:	August 26, 2025	Mandatory
• Training Camp 3:	November 1, 2025	Mandatory
• Training Camp 4:	Jan-Feb 2025	Mandatory
• Training Camp 5:	April 2025	Mandatory
• USA Games:	As schedule allows	Mandatory

Training Camps

At designated times during the training period, Team Indiana’s athletes, partners, coaches and support staff will meet for team building, review important materials, receive updates, practice, and better prepare the individual and team for Seattle.

TRAINING CAMP 1

- MANDATORY for all athletes, partners, coaches & support staff.
- Site: Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology
- July 25 – 27, 2025
- Meals & lodging are provided.
- Objectives:
 - Participate in team building exercises.
 - Practice.
 - Select events, qualifying scores, relay order.
 - Finalize entries, registration forms & medicals.
 - Take photos for credentials & Team Indiana promotional materials.
 - Host mock interview for athletes, partners & coaches to identify the “hidden media gems”.
 - Take measurements for uniforms & team clothing.
 - Update on fundraising goals.
 - Host fitness training program and/or Healthy Athletes screenings.
- Participants: Team Indiana only.
- Family members may transport Team Indiana members to and from the training camp but will not stay – other than an information meeting on Sunday morning.

TRAINING CAMP 2

- MANDATORY for all athletes, partners, coaches & support staff.
- Site: Plane Pull, Indianapolis International Airport
- Saturday, August 26, 2025
- Lunch is provided.
- Objectives:
 - Participate in team building exercises.
 - Practice
 - Review & track progress towards training plans.
 - Host fitness training program and/or Healthy Athletes screenings.
 - Update on fundraising goals.



- Update family & friends on USA Games news.

Participants: Team Indiana & family members; though family members are on their own for lunch and will not participate in all sessions or activities

TRAINING CAMP 3

- MANDATORY for all athletes, partners, coaches & support staff.
- Site: Indian Creek High School, Trafalgar, IN.
- Saturday, November 1, 2025
- Lunch is provided.
- Objectives:
 - Participate in team building exercises.
 - Practice
 - Review & track progress towards training plans.
 - Host fitness training program and/or Healthy Athletes screenings.
 - Update on fundraising goals.
 - Update family & friends on USA Games news.
 - Take re-measurements for team uniforms (if needed).
- Participants: Team Indiana & family members; though family members are on their own for lunch and will not participate in all sessions or activities.

TRAINING CAMP 4

- MANDATORY for all athletes, partners, coaches & support staff.
- Site TBD.
- Saturday, January-February 2026
- Lunch is provided.
- Objectives:
 - Participate in team building exercises.
 - Review & track progress towards training plans.
 - Hold final opportunity for team practices before the Games.
 - Host fitness training program and/or Healthy Athletes screenings.
 - Update on fundraising goals.
 - Update family & friends on USA Games news.
- Participants: Team Indiana & family members; though family members are on their own for lunch and will not participate in all sessions or activities.

TRAINING CAMP 5

- MANDATORY for all athletes, partners, coaches & support staff.
- Site TBD.
- Saturday, April 2026
- Lunch is provided.
- Objectives:
 - Participate in team building exercises.
 - Review & track progress towards training plans.
 - Hold final opportunity for team practices before the Games.
 - Host fitness training program and/or Healthy Athletes screenings.
 - Update on fundraising goals.
 - Update family & friends on USA Games news.
- Participants: Team Indiana & family members; though family members are on their own for lunch and will not participate in all sessions or activities.



Finance Arrangement

As we have done the past three USA Games, Team Indiana fundraises as a team. In Minneapolis, we compete as a team; and, we fundraise as one team – one unit – one program. As the Musketeers once said, “All for one; and one for all”.

If this arrangement does not work for your County Program, then you should not nominate an athlete, partner, or coach for Team Indiana. The arrangement also creates fundraising opportunities not always used by County Programs. As a result, County Programs will not use their current fundraising events and strategies towards Team Indiana.

County Programs are responsible for \$150 per person only – that is when Team Indiana reaches its fundraising goal of \$118,400. With the projected surplus, portions of the surplus will be directed back to the County Programs (see below).

Fundraising events and promotions are requirements, just as attendance at training camps. If athletes, partners, coaches, or support staff do not support the fundraising efforts of Team Indiana, then the HOD and AHOD reserve the right to replace those individuals with the designated alternates.

The commitments are outlined below, including the SOIN’s commitment to Team Indiana (25% of the overall budget).

COMMITMENT FEE

- All County Programs with selected athletes, partners, coaches & support staff agree to a \$150 “commitment” fee per person.
- Commitment fees are due within one month of being selected.
- Commitment fees are non-refundable.
- For athletes, partners, and coaches, commitment fees are the responsibility of your County Program, and fees will be transferred from your County’s account.
- Support staff not affiliated with a county program will be responsible for the balance of reaching the fundraising minimum.

PLANE PULL (August 2025)

- All athletes, partners, coaches, and management team will be part of Team Indiana’s 2025 Plane Pull teams.
- Participation is a requirement.
- Plane Pullers will raise a minimum of \$1,100 each.

CORPORATE SPONSORS

- SOIN guarantees at least 25% of Team Indiana’s budget will be covered by corporate sponsorships.
- Coaches, athletes, and partners may secure additional corporate sponsors, which will count towards their fundraising goals.
- Team Indiana members must coordinate corporate sponsorship efforts with the AHOD, prior to asking and meeting with potential corporate sponsors.

ACCOUNTING

- All contributions for Team Indiana, whether Plane Pull, corporate sponsorships, etc., will be deposited directly into the Team Indiana account, utilizing the SOIN consolidated accounting system.
- Team Indiana donations will NOT be deposited into the County Program’s account.
- Online donations will be received using Team Indiana’s FirstGiving pages, created by SOIN.
- FirstGiving individual giving pages will be created and maintained by SOIN, specifically the AHOD. No other online fundraising websites will be allowed.
- Any other financial arrangements must receive prior authorization from Team Indiana’s HOD or AHOD.



FINANCIAL SURPLUS

If fundraising revenue exceeds expenses, the surplus will be divided between County Programs with selected Team Indiana members and SO Indiana as follows:

- 5% of the surplus will be directed to the County Program of the athlete, partner, or coach raising the most funds from the 2025 Plane Pull.
- The remaining surplus will be divided between the County Programs with selected Team Indiana members and SO Indiana, proportionate to each team member's fundraising efforts. For example, if your County Program's team members collectively raise 10% of the overall fundraising revenue, your County Program will receive 10% of the remaining surplus (after 5% each awarded to top Plane Pull fundraiser).
- Any team member failing to fundraise the minimum amount is subject to team dismissal and is ineligible for the share of the surplus for their County Program.

FINANCIAL SHORTFALL

- If fundraising revenue does not exceed expenses, the shortfall will be the responsibility of SOIN (50%) and the County Programs (50%).
- The County Programs' portion of the shortfall will be distributed proportionally to the number of athletes, partners, coaches, and support staff on Team Indiana.
- Support staff not affiliated with a county program will be responsible for the balance of reaching the fundraising minimum.





TIMELINE

August 2024	USA Games sessions at Via Zoom Distribution of FLAG FOOTBALL, CORNHOLE, GOLF (MALE) nomination forms.
September 2024	FLAG FOOTBALL, CORNHOLE, GOLF nominations due – Athletes, Unified pairs, & coaches.
November 2024 November 25, 2024	Distribution of BOWLING nomination forms BOWLING nominations due (Fall bowling season) – Unified pairs & coach
December 2024	State Unified Bowling Tournament – Indianapolis
January 2025	Distribution of BASKETBALL team nomination forms.
February 2025	BASKETBALL nominations due – team & coaches.
March 24, 2025 March 2025	Men’s, Women’s, & Unified State Basketball Tournament – Westfield Distribution of FEMALE GOLF nomination forms.
April 2025 April 6, 2025 April 14, 2025 April 28, 2025	Distribution of BOCCE, BOWLING, POWERLIFTING, SWIMMING and TRACK & FIELD nomination forms. Announcement of athlete and coaches for Flag Football, Cornhole, Male Golf, and Basketball Youth Leadership Experience Nominations Due FEMALE GOLF nominations due – Athlete & Unified Pair
May 2, 2025 May 26 2025	Selections made for Youth Leadership Experience BOCCE, BOWLING, POWERLIFTING, SWIMMING and TRACK & FIELD nominations due – athletes, Unified pairs (Bocce & Bowling), & coaches.
June 2025	Summer Games – Terre Haute Announcement of Team Indiana
July 2025	Training season begins for Team Indiana athletes and partners selected to date. TRAINING CAMP 1 – Rose-Hulman Technical Institute – Terre Haute
August 2025	TRAINING CAMP 2 - Plane Pull – Indianapolis Team Indiana entry deadline with USA Games Organizing Committee
October 2025 January 2026 April 2026	TRAINING CAMP 3 – November 1, Indian Creek H.S. TRAINING CAMP 4 – January, February (Site TBD) TRAINING CAMP 5 – April (SITE TBD)
June 2026	June 18 – Team Indiana arrives to team hotel for departure. June 19 – Departure for USA Games June 20 – Opening Ceremonies & Games begin! June 26 – Closing Ceremonies June 27 – Return home