



Policy: Athlete Housing

Date: June 2013

INTRODUCTION:

Special Olympics is an athlete-centered movement that welcomes athletes with intellectual disabilities of all abilities to participate in sports training and competition. Special Olympics is open to persons with intellectual disabilities age eight and older and offers a Young Athletes program for individuals with intellectual disabilities under the age of eight.

The health and safety of all Special Olympics participants is of paramount importance to Special Olympics. Participants should feel that every Special Olympics event is a safe and positive experience and should not be fearful of other athletes, coaches or volunteers.

Arranging housing for overnight events involves the consideration of a variety of factors, including the varying abilities, ages and behaviors of athletes, the availability of housing and the costs associated with overnight accommodations. The Risk Management & Insurance Task Force (RMITF) has developed the following policy whereby each U.S. Program is required to create a written housing policy that meets its unique housing needs, but also includes the minimum policy requirements outlined below. In addition to the policy requirements, the RMITF has provided best practices for each U.S. Program's consideration when developing its written housing policy, but appreciates that each U.S. Program may not be able to incorporate such practices, given the broad range of potential housing accommodations.

POLICY

Every U.S. Program must establish a written athlete housing policy by January 1, 2014. Such policy must include the requirements outlined in the "Policy Requirements" section below.

POLICY REQUIREMENTS – Must be included in each U.S. Program's athlete housing policy.

- 1.) **Gender** – Athletes and volunteers may not share a room with an athlete or volunteer of the opposite sex. U.S. Programs may allow the following exceptions as long as the U.S. Program's written policy clearly allows for such exception.



- a. Married athletes who are both attending the event as members of a registered delegation. This exception does not apply to the spouse of an athlete who is not participating in the event, but attending solely as a spectator.
 - b. Married volunteers who are both attending the event as members of a registered delegation. This exception does not apply if one of the volunteers is required to share a room with an athlete (other than the married couple's child), if this scenario will create a situation whereby an athlete is housed with a volunteer of the opposite sex.
 - c. Family members of the opposite sex who serve as a one-to-one chaperone for the related athlete.
 - d. Housing in a facility that has multiple private rooms in addition to living space (such as a condominium or dormitory). Both males and females may be assigned to one condominium, if necessary, but private rooms may not be shared by individuals of the opposite sex. Chaperones must also be housed in the condominium and the chaperone/athlete ratio (as outlined in the supervision section of the policy) must be maintained.
 - e. Use of barracks or other facility (such as a gym) where a large number of individuals are assigned to one room. Athletes and volunteers must be separated as much as possible by gender (for example, females on one side of the gym and males on the other side).
- 2.) **Supervision** - The chaperone/athlete ratio of at least one properly registered chaperone to every four athletes must be maintained during overnight events. Proper supervision can be maintained without having a chaperone present in the room at all times. All chaperones must be screened in accordance with the Special Olympics U.S. Volunteer Screening Policy.
 - 3.) **Young Athletes** – Young Athletes events that involve overnight activities require increased supervision and therefore, Young Athletes participants must be accompanied by a properly registered and screened parent, guardian or an individual designated by a parent or guardian at all overnight activities. Rooming assignments for Young Athletes should be separate from the remainder of the delegation, whenever possible (for example, separate hotel rooms).
 - 4.) **Acknowledgment** - Each U.S. Program must secure a parent's/guardian's signature acknowledging the possibility for overnight activities and that additional information about the rooming assignments or the Program's housing policy should be directed to the U.S. Program. Athletes who are legally responsible for themselves are permitted to provide acknowledgment on their own behalf.



This requirement provides confirmation that the parents/guardians are aware that the Program has a policy relative to housing arrangements, empowers the parents/guardians to learn more about the housing practices, and also provides them an opportunity to notify the U.S. Program if there are any concerns with the housing arrangements or information about which the U.S. Program should be aware. Notification may be provided and signature secured via the athlete registration form or any other method that the U.S. Program deems appropriate.

- New athletes (athletes registering for the first time on or after January 1, 2014 must acknowledge (as outlined above) the possibility of overnight stays at the time of their initial registration with the U.S. Program.
- Existing athletes (athletes registered prior to January 1, 2014 must acknowledge (as outlined above) the possibility of overnight stays no later than three years or the due date of each athlete's next athlete medical (whichever comes first) regardless of whether or not such notification is provided via the athlete medical.

- 5.) **Policy Implementation** – The U.S. Program's policy must include a plan for identifying who is responsible for implementing the policy at events (for example, State office or local Program) and ensuring that the individuals responsible for implementing the policy are familiar with the policy.

BEST PRACTICES – Each U.S. Program is encouraged to consider incorporating the following best practices into its athlete housing policy.

- 1.) **Rooming Assignments** – If athletes will be sharing a room, following is a list of other items to consider when making room assignments:

- a. Consider matching athletes based on size, level of maturity, ability and age.
- b. Assign connecting rooms to those athletes who require additional assistance or supervision if the chaperone will not be in the same room.

- 2.) **Sleeping Arrangements** – Whenever possible, each member of the delegation should be assigned his/her own bed. If bed sharing is required, an athlete may not share a bed with a chaperone unless the chaperone is a parent or sibling of the athlete and has been screened in compliance with the Special Olympics U.S. Volunteer Screening Policy. The following techniques should be considered to help reduce the number of athletes required to share beds:

- a. Request cots from the facility to increase the number of beds available.



- b. Use air mattresses to increase the number of beds available (check with facility to ensure there is not a policy against the use of air mattresses).

If bed sharing is required, Programs may consider having athletes pack sleeping bags and require athletes to sleep in his/her sleeping bag on top of the linens that are provided.

3.) **Supervision** - The following includes suggestions for providing athlete housing supervision:

- a. **Hotels** – Whenever possible, reserve connecting rooms so that chaperones have direct access to the athletes’ room(s). If connecting rooms are not available and the chaperone is in a room separate from the athletes for which he/she is responsible:
 - i. Ensure that the chaperone has a key to the athletes’ room(s)
 - ii. Ensure that the athletes know how to reach the chaperone at all times
 - iii. Consider using hall monitors
- b. **Condo/Dorm (or other facility with multiple private rooms)** – Whenever possible, leave the doors to private rooms open so that chaperones can monitor each room.
- c. **Barracks (or other facility with a large number of beds in one room)** – Whenever possible, chaperones should be assigned to a location in close proximity to the athletes he/she is supervising.

4.) **Family Members** – Prohibit family members from staying in athlete housing unless the family member is an official member of the registered delegation and is screened in compliance with the Special Olympics U.S. Volunteer Screening Policy.

5) Case by case exceptions – ED discretion (Jim will write this statement)



ATHLETE HOUSING POLICY/GUIDELINES

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- 1.) Is each U.S. Program required to submit its written athlete housing policy to SOI for approval?
 - No. SOI will seek confirmation from each U.S. Program that it has a written policy that is in compliance with the Athlete Housing Policy/Guidelines distributed by SOI, but such policies will not be approved by SOI.
- 2.) Are U.S. Programs permitted to make changes to the “Policy Requirements” as outlined in the Athlete Housing Policy distributed by SOI?
 - Yes. The Athlete Housing Policy distributed by SOI is a minimum requirement. U.S. Programs may expand the policy to include additional requirements, but the minimum requirements must be met.
- 3.) If a U.S. Program already has a written athlete housing policy in place, will it satisfy the requirement to have a written policy in place by January 1, 2014?
 - Yes, as long as it meets the minimum requirements outlined in the “Policy Requirements” section of the Athlete Housing Policy distributed by SOI. If, however, an existing policy does not meet the minimum requirements, a revision will be necessary.
- 4.) Are athletes who are married to each other permitted to share a room if one athlete is competing and the other is volunteering?
 - Yes, as long as both athletes are official members of a registered delegation and the Program’s policy includes an exception for married couples. The married athletes would not be permitted to share a room if one of the athletes were not a member of a registered delegation (for example, a spectator at the event).
- 5.) If an athlete is required to have one-to-one supervision at an overnight event due to an incident/action that generally falls under the U.S. Program’s Athletes with Criminal Histories and/or Violent and Abusive Behaviors policy, can he or she and the chaperone stay in the same housing accommodations with other members of the delegation?
 - No. The purpose of the one-to-one supervision is to separate the athlete requiring the one-to-one supervision from the delegation for his/her safety and/or the safety of other athletes. Athletes requiring one-to-one supervision will require a separate room. Also, as a reminder, a



family member who provides one-to-one supervision for an athlete is considered a volunteer and must be registered and screened in accordance with the Volunteer Screening Policy.

- 6.) Can the chaperone/athlete ratio be maintained during sleeping hours without having a chaperone present at all times?
 - Yes, examples include, but are not limited to, the following: 1) Chaperones having access to the rooms they are supervising at all times and having a plan to ensure that athletes are in their assigned rooms; 2) Chaperones staying in connecting rooms; and 3) Chaperones checking on athletes on a regular basis throughout the night and ensuring the athletes know how to reach the chaperone if needed.
- 7.) How can U.S. Programs meet the acknowledgment requirement?
 - Acknowledgment by parents/guardians that they are aware of the possibility for overnight activities and that the U.S. Program has a policy relative to housing assignments can be secured via any signed form such as athlete registration materials, the athlete medical form, or an alternative process deemed appropriate by the U.S. Program.
- 8.) Is there specific language that must be used to satisfy the acknowledgment requirement?
 - U.S. Programs should work with local legal counsel to finalize a general housing statement. However, the following statement may be used as a starting point for consideration by the U.S. Program and local legal counsel: I acknowledge that Special Olympics events may involve overnight activities and that the housing arrangements for each event may differ. I understand that I should contact my local Program office if I have any questions about housing arrangements for a specific event or the housing policy in general.
- 9.) Is it necessary to provide parents and guardians with a copy of the complete housing policy?
 - No, it is not required under this policy. U.S. Programs should consider their practices with respect to other similar policies to determine when and how to make such policy available to parents/guardians upon request.
- 10.) Are U.S. Programs required to secure written confirmation from parents/guardians regarding housing practices prior to each event?
 - No, the policy only requires a one-time written confirmation from parents/guardians.
- 11.) How does the housing policy apply to gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender athletes?
 - The Program's housing policy should be rooted in respect and common sense and therefore, each Program will handle gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender housing issues accordingly.



ATHLETE HOUSING POLICY/GUIDELINES

CHECKLIST

Following is a checklist that can be used by individuals responsible for making the housing arrangements for overnight events. The checklist is a tool to help ensure compliance with the U.S. Program's written housing policy. U.S. Programs may amend the checklist to make it consistent with their own athlete housing policies.

GENDER

Are individuals separated by gender? Yes No

- *If no, one of the following must apply. Check the box or boxes representing the permissible exceptions that apply:*

- Married athletes each attending the event in an official capacity are sharing a room
- Married volunteers each attending the event in an official capacity are sharing a room (note: this exception is not permissible if either volunteer is required to share a room with an athlete other than the married couple's child)
- Athlete is sharing a room with a family member who is serving as a one-to-one chaperone for the related athlete (note: housing accommodations for these individuals must be separate from the standard athlete housing arrangements)
- Facility has multiple private rooms (condominium or dormitory) and the procedures as outlined in the U.S. Program's housing policy are being followed
- Housing involves barracks or other facility where a large number of individuals are assigned to one room (note: individuals should be separated by gender to the extent possible)

SUPERVISION

Housing plan ensures chaperone/athlete ratio of at least one properly registered chaperone to every four athletes is maintained? Yes No

- *If no, housing plan must be revised accordingly*



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Parents/guardians have acknowledged they are aware that Special Olympics activities may involve overnight housing accommodations and have been told how to obtain additional information?

Yes No

- *If no, the U.S. Program must secure written confirmation from parents/guardians that they are aware of the potential for overnight events and how to obtain additional information. Please see the athlete housing policy distributed by SOI in June 2013 for the policy implementation timeline and frequency requirements.*

OTHER (to be personalized by each U.S. Program based on its written policy)