



SPECIAL OLYMPICS
**WORLD
GAMES**
SANTIAGO 2027

Selection Criteria for the 2027 World Games in Santiago, Chile

The 2026 Summer Games will be a qualifier for two athletes to advance to the 2027 World Games in Santiago, Chile. Athletes must meet the criteria described below to qualify for the draw for the two athlete spots allocated to Special Olympics Virginia for these games.

The 2027 Special Olympics World Summer Games will be held in Santiago, Chile, from October 16 to October 24, 2027. This event marks a historic milestone as the first-ever World Games to be hosted in the Southern Hemisphere and Latin America in the organization's 57-year history.

2027 Special Olympics World Games:

Key Event Details

- **Host City:** Santiago, Chile.
- **Dates:** October 16–24, 2027.
- **Participants:** Over **6,000 athletes** and Unified Partners from more than **170 countries** are expected to compete.
- **Venues:** Most sporting events will be hosted at **El Parque del Estadio Nacional**, a 158-acre athletic site in Santiago. The Opening Ceremony is specifically planned for the **National Stadium Park Coliseum**.

Special Olympics Virginia was awarded two athlete spots for the 2027 World Games. These sports and events include the following:

Athletics (Track and Field) Category 2 Male Athlete

Events include: 400 Meter Run
 800 Meter Run
 1500 Meter Run

Swimming, Category 1 Female Athlete

Events include: 25 Meter Freestyle
 25 Meter Backstroke
 25 Meter Breaststroke
 50 Meter Freestyle
 50 Meter Backstroke
 50 Meter Breaststroke
 50 Meter Butterfly

SOVA and Special Olympics USA Eligibility Requirements

Athletes who win a gold medal at the 2026 Special Olympics Virginia Summer Games, that match the available spots (sport and event) described above, will be eligible to be placed in the lottery to attend the World Games training camp in the fall of 2026. One athlete for each sport (Athletics and Swimming) will be selected by draw from a lottery. Athletes who win gold must also meet all criteria described below to be considered for the draw. Each athlete will be vetted thoroughly. This vetting process will include but not be limited to interviews with Area leadership, discussions with local coaches and a potential interview of the athlete and their guardian.

Length of Games – The World Games experience can include anywhere from 14-21 days. The length of time required depends on the location of the Games and the pre-Games experience. For many Special Olympics athletes and Unified partners, this length of time away from home can prove to be unsettling. Athletes must be able to do this without parent or guardian supervision.

Each delegation member's health, safety, and overall experience are factored into the selection process. All SO USA delegation members will be expected to be able to meet not just the athletic, but behavioral expectations and standards of SO USA, and everyone will be required to review and agree to the team Code of Conduct as part of their application for consideration.

Time Away from Parents/Family –SO USA athletes and Unified partners chosen to represent the National Team can expect to be away from their families for extended periods of time without seeing them, and at times with very limited contact during World Games.

Adjusting to New Coaches – Coaches selected for the SO USA National Team come from across the country and it is rare for a World Games athlete/Unified partner to already know one of these coaches. Consider how well the athlete/Unified partner will adapt to a new coach, which may have a different coaching approach from their local coach.

Importance of Local Support – Local coach and parent/guardian must be committed to ensuring the athlete/Unified partner is trained/prepared appropriately, as well as being proactive and responsive in communicating with SO USA coaches and staff, to include securing passports as soon as they are selected and meeting deadlines.

Conform to the Group/Adaptability – In order for the SO USA National Team to function well, all members must adhere to team rules and the team schedules. Often this means that a sport/team may need to adhere to a schedule as a group – meaning an athlete or Unified partner cannot dictate his/her own schedule. There will be times when schedules change with little or no notice and athletes/Unified partners must be able to adapt accordingly.

Disruptive Family Members/Advocates – It is important that guardians/caregivers/family members are comfortable being away from their athlete/Unified partner for extended periods of time and with limited contact. There should not be an expectation of “special” considerations for their athlete/Unified partner, or for a particular situation. Family members and caregivers need to embrace and respect the SO USA National Team policies and understand that their potential insistence to be involved with the team and/or their athlete/Unified partner could be very disruptive.

Daily Living Skills – While coaches can provide daily reminders, athletes must be able to independently handle all toileting, showering and daily hygiene needs in an efficient manner. Athletes/Unified partners must be comfortable sharing living space with other team members of the same gender.

NOTE: Coach to Athlete Ratio – The coach to athlete ratio for SO USA is set for each World Games by SOI and the Local Organizing Committee. In most instances, the ratio is one (1) coach per four (4) athletes. This established ratio means that if an athlete requires a significant level of assistance, there will be three other athletes receiving less supervision, which could lead to additional health and safety issues. Athletes and Unified partners are expected to assume daily responsibility for their medications, with reminders from their coaches.

Food/Diet – While accommodations are made for dietary restrictions such as diabetes, gluten-free, etc. special considerations should not be expected for “picky” eaters. Athletes/Unified partners will dine in settings which involve planned meals served to the group and while there will often be choices, it will be limited. There should be no expectations that special efforts will be made to provide certain types of food.

The athlete must have two-years of experience (not necessarily the two years immediately prior to World Games) in Special Olympics Virginia in the sport in which they want to advance to World Games. Athletes who have competed in another state and are now competing in Virginia may be eligible if they have competed in the sport for two consecutive years. The SOVA staff will verify this to the best of their ability with the state office where the athlete competed prior to moving to Virginia. Part of the verification process will be done through checking our GMS records for Application for Participation dates and competition records at State Championship level games.

Travel and Long Days – The distance required to travel to World Games destinations will be long and could require several days. Many times, this travel will involve differing modes of transportation, such as airplane, bus, and train. In addition to the travel days being long, the actual days during Games will be long. It is realistic to expect multiple 12–15-hour days (sometimes consecutively). The athlete must have a reasonable general fitness level and be willing to work on fitness and endurance during the preparation for the games.

The Area and/or parent/guardian must be able to assist the athlete in attending training sessions prior to the games and any financial obligations to the SOVA program that are not covered by the SOVA World Games fundraising efforts. Although Areas have not been charged for any amounts for the past several games due to successful fund-raising efforts, Areas may be assessed a per athlete assessment fee upon selection of the athletes and must agree to meet this obligation should fund raising efforts by SOVA not meet the demand of the games.

The athlete must be 15 years old prior to the Opening Ceremony of the World Games.

There will be a mandatory assessment camp held September 17-20, 2026. Athletes are required to attend the training camp. Athletes are not officially members of the team until the assessment camp is completed and Special Olympics USA officially names the athlete to the team.

Athletes must, at their own expense, be able to obtain a valid passport.

Athletes must, at their own expense, be able to obtain a physical/physician’s signature on a World Games medical form.

The SO USA staff, SOVA Staff, or the SOVA Board of Directors may dismiss an athlete after selections if any of the above athlete requirements are not met.

Non-Delegation members such as family members, group home counselors, Special Olympics staff or program representatives, or other athletes will not be allowed to travel with the Special Olympics USA Delegation unless they are an official member of the delegation as a coach or chaperone. Coaches and chaperones will be selected by Special Olympics USA through an application and interview process prior to the games.