



# Keys to Working with Athletes as Regional Council Members

- Follow the same procedures used to recruit and select other Regional Council members. Base your selection on an individual's qualifications, abilities and commitment.
- Don't screen out athletes because you are uncomfortable with them. Figure out how to get to know them. Invite them to a couple of Regional Council meetings and, if requested, let them bring a friend, advocate or support person.
- Respect the athletes' rights to make their own decisions, to speak for themselves, to disagree, to do things on their own and in their own ways, etc.
- Treat the athletes like adults and equal to everyone else.
- Listen to athletes and what they have to say, no matter what their communication styles: for example, sign language, communication board, eye contact, interpreter/ translator, etc.
- Give athletes a chance to explain things, even if it takes time.
- Don't try to guess what individuals are going to say. Let them finish their own sentences and stories, even if you think you know them or can say it faster!
- If necessary, simplify written information. A simple summary can help. Highlight critical information before you send out materials. Think about other creative ways to format information. Use easy-to-understand language when you are speaking. Avoid using acronyms such as SOI, SOALPS, or SONZ.
- Don't refer to people by their labels. Use their names, like you would do with any other person. If you feel like you need to use their labels, use "People First Language". Refer to the person first, and the disability second.
- Be prepared to help others socialise with athletes at break time.
- Greet athletes as you would greet any Regional Council member.

- Regular introductions help everybody learn people's names and roles. Provide nametags or place-cards, if necessary.
- If you have a question for a person, ask! Open the lines of communication from the beginning. Also consider alternative and creative ways of communication besides printed materials, for example, regular phone calls, personal visits, tapes, through support person, E-mail, etc.
- Be specific and honest when talking to athlete Regional Council members. What role(s) will they take on this Regional Council? What will be their responsibilities? You may need to ask yourself why you want them on your Regional Council and what your general expectations are for all Regional Council members.
- During the meeting, point out issues of confidentiality that should not be discussed outside the meeting.

## Ideas for the Chairperson

- Find out what individuals need before they join your Regional Council, such as a support person, transportation, materials in alternative formats, etc. Designate a contact person or mentor for the new member.
- Arrange seating so athletes can sit with their support persons, if desired.
- Prompt each Regional Council member to actively participate in discussions. Be sure everyone has an opportunity to speak, including the athlete(s).
- Send agenda information well in advance of each meeting. This allows time for preparation. If necessary make materials available in alternative formats such as tapes, LARGE PRINT or on disk. Also make sure the materials are organized, for example, by using colored paper, numbers, pictures, or highlighting main points.
- If necessary, help new Regional Council members learn how meetings are run, such as when to vote, when to discuss issues or ask questions, how to get items on the agenda, etc.
- Help athletes and everybody else by doing introductions at the beginning of each meeting. For some people it takes time to learn all the names of the other members and their roles on the Regional Council.
- Give regular feedback to the athletes as to how they are doing and ask if they need assistance with anything.
- If there is something you want to discuss with an athlete, don't hesitate to ask openly.

- Be open to working with a diverse group of people. It is the greatest asset your Special Olympics Programme can have.
- Have fun working together!