

## Admissions & Training Program

Guide Dogs of America looks forward to working with blind and visually impaired individuals who are willing to work hard, and who have demonstrated they can physically control and benefit from the use of a guide dog. Our assessment goal is to ensure that each accepted applicant will have a strong understanding of the leadership role necessary for the continued development of the human/guide dog relationship.

Prior to beginning training, an application must be submitted, along with reports from a physician, eye doctor, and mobility specialist. Applicants should be at least eighteen years of age, but there is no upper age limit. The application includes questions regarding previous guide dog experience. Applicants are asked to describe the general conditions under which the dog will be working. An applicant must also show that they are able to cover the costs associated with having a working guide dog including all necessary food and medical care, as well as demonstrate that they are able to provide an appropriate home environment.

A completed application takes approximately four weeks to process. Even with the demand for our highly-specialized services, those accepted for training usually wait only two to six months before the start of training. However, if there are special training needs, the waiting period may be as long as one year. About 80% of the completed applications received each year are accepted for training.

Guide Dogs of America is one of only three California guide dog schools and as such, our instructors are licensed by the state of California. Students who live outside of Southern California are provided complimentary transportation so they will all arrive on the Sunday before class starts. The time between arrival and meeting their future guide dog partners on Wednesday is devoted to teaching preliminary guide work skills and fine tuning the dog match by learning the students' lifestyle and mobility needs. When the guide dog match is made, the student is provided with the dog's name, breed, and information about the dog's unique personality. To promote the rapid establishment of a close bond between human and dog, each student is given a private room.

Guide Dogs of America is committed to providing a training program designed for the abilities and the needs of the individual. The customized training course is designed to progress at an appropriate pace and to accomplish the goals established by our licensed instructors in an organized manner. Students work one-on-one with their instructors to facilitate the groundwork necessary to make an exceptional team match. The first week consists of dormitory orientation, issuing equipment, theory and practice in basic commands and guide work, and individual instruction.

During the second week, students learn how to cross streets safely and effectively. The third week emphasizes working pre-selected routes with minimal assistance from the instructor. These routes include public buildings, shopping malls, various obstacles, both urban and rural areas, public transportation, and additional practice with traffic. The fourth and final week consists of independent instruction and working routes that are similar to the home environment of the student in addition to addressing the individual needs of each student. Upon successful completion of the required training program, the student is given full ownership of their guide dog.

Training concludes with a heart-warming graduation ceremony, but our commitment to our graduates continues long after. Each team is provided individualized care on an as-needed basis for the life of the team.

To learn more or receive an application, please contact our Admissions Department at **818-362-5834 x6428** or visit our website at [www.guidedogsofamerica.org](http://www.guidedogsofamerica.org).