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Here is a list of “Frequently Asked Questions” regarding applying for a guide dog from GDD:

Guide Dog versus a Service Dog: *What is the difference between a Guide Dog for the blind and a service dog?*

Although a Guide Dog for the blind is a type of service dog, it has been trained and accredited to specifically compliment the Orientation and Mobility skills of someone who is legally blind. There are many other types of service dogs that address a variety of needs (e.g., diabetic alert, hearing loss, physical impairment, PTSD, etc.). At this time, Guide Dogs of the Desert only provides training for Guide Dogs for the blind. A Guide Dog is not a guard dog and is not trained to provide protection services.

Eligibility: *Who is eligible for guide dog instruction at your school?*

An applicant must:

1. Be legally blind: This means having 20/200 acuity or less than 20° field of vision in the better eye.
2. Be at least 18 years of age and reside in the United States.
3. Have various established travel routines to provide a Guide Dog with adequate work.
4. Possess sufficient Orientation & Mobility skills to be able to direct a Guide Dog to known destinations in their home area.
5. Have attained the ability to judge traffic audibly to determine all clear and “safe to cross”.
6. Arrive for class in good physical and mental health, and be able to walk 1-1 ½ miles daily.
7. Be capable of independently providing for the care and financial support of a Guide Dog in sickness and in health.
8. Be in a settled, stable, long term home environment.
9. You must have no felony convictions, history/charges of violent crime, or protection orders against you and provide a truthful, accurate representation of yourself in your application.

Vision: *Do I have to be totally blind to apply for a Guide Dog?*

To be eligible for a Guide Dog you must be legally blind, but you do not have to be totally blind. Your remaining vision will be assessed to determine if you are an appropriate candidate. People with some remaining vision need to resist guiding the dog and trust it to lead the team safely around obstacles to arrive at intended destinations.

Long Cane Mobility: *Is long cane training a prerequisite?*

Guide Dogs of the Desert requires that each applicant have completed formal Orientation and Mobility training. If you have never had this training, please contact your local blind rehab facility to inquire and sign up for training. If one is a confident and successful cane traveler with at least one year of active experience, the chances for success with a Guide Dog will be greatly increased.

Physical Stamina: *What sort of physical stamina is expected of your trainees?*

The applicant will undergo rigorous instruction, both physical and mental. They will spend 28 days training and will be expected to walk a minimum of ½ hour twice daily in all types of terrain, with their Guide Dog, regardless of weather conditions.

Walking Distance: *What is the average distance traveled on lessons during Guide Dog instruction? The maximum?*

The average distance traveled in one lesson is approximately 1 – 1 ½ miles. The maximum distance is dependent upon the student's capabilities and amount of time available. Routes can be modified according to the student's abilities. Also, there are a couple of days during the instruction period that are longer working days but optional for students with limited capabilities.

Transportation: *Does your organization pay for round trip airfare and incidental travel expenses to and from your school?*

Travel to and from our school is the only cost that we ask our students to assume.

Home Training: *Is there an option for home-based as well as center-based instruction?*

In the event someone desires in-home instruction, the possibility is dependent on a number of factors including location, circumstances, and trainer availability. Determination of in-home instruction is

considered on a case-by-case basis. As we are a small school, we are not able to fund in-home instruction and therefore request the student cover the cost necessary for this endeavor which would include hotel, car rental, airfare, and other associated costs and needs.

Breeds: *What dog breeds are typically available? How old are they at the time of graduation?*

We offer the Labrador Retriever and the Standard Poodle. The Standard Poodle are for applicants with canine allergies or applicants with immediate family members with this type of allergy. Our dogs are approximately two years old at the time of graduation.

Cost of the Dog: *Is there a charge for the Guide Dog and the onsite instruction? What is the ongoing cost of maintaining a Guide Dog?*

The cost of the dog, the dog's training, the student's onsite instruction, the harness, the leash, the collar, and accommodation at our school are free of charge and are funded by private donations.

Once they return home, the student is financially responsible to cover the expenses associated with the maintenance and care of the Guide Dog. This includes providing the Guide Dog high quality food, monthly preventatives, vaccinations and an annual veterinary wellness visit. A fund is available to Alumni to obtain their yearly vet exam. The reimbursement covers up to \$100 for Guide Dogs 7 years or younger and up to \$150 for dogs 8 years and older. Alumni must also cover the Guide Dog's other veterinary and general expenses such as treats, toys, crate, dog bed, etc.

The approximate yearly maintenance cost to the handler for their Guide Dog is for a Labrador Retriever - \$3,000 to \$7,000 and for a Standard Poodle - \$4,000 to \$8,000.

Ownership: *Do graduates of Guide Dogs of the Desert own their Guide Dog, or does the school retain ownership?*

After one year of graduation and the student's good standing with GDD, they may apply for ownership title and assume full responsibility for the obligations and risks associated with owning a Guide Dog.

Wait Time: *How long is my application valid for? How long do I have to wait for a class date?*

An application is valid for up to 1 1/2 years. Acceptance for a Guide Dog is first dependent upon identifying the most compatible dog companion for your needs among the next available dogs in their final phase of training. Once a compatible partnership is identified, class slots are filled for the next scheduled class term. At present, the wait time for class placement can range from 6 to 18 months. This time can increase based on added individual factors and needs.

Escalators: *Are your Guide Dogs trained to manage escalator travel?*

Yes. Although it is up to the student whether they want to learn this method of mobility based on their comfort level.

Mass Transit Training: *Are your Guide Dogs trained for airplane, train, streetcar, subway, and bus travel?*

Yes. During training the students learn how to travel with a Guide Dog on various mass transit. There will also be a trip to the Palm Springs International Airport to walk through and experience the TSA screening process.

Initiated Crossings: *Do your Guide Dogs require a command to cross at an intersection or do they step off when safe to do so?*

Our dogs require a command to cross an intersection. It is the *student's responsibility* to decide if it's all clear and "safe to cross".

Relieving: *What procedures for relieving the Guide Dogs are taught at your school?*

We teach our students to recognize what the dog is doing during relieving time (urinating or defecating) and how to mark the spot so that they can clean up after the dog.

Follow-up Training Services: *Will an instructor help the Guide Dog user with their new dog in their home community?*

In instruction we will address any unique situations a team will encounter on a regular basis when they return home. We provide follow-up assistance in the form of phone calls, emails, and if necessary, in-home visits to all of our graduates for the life of the team.

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