

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is the best way to describe Guide Dogs for the Blind (GDB)?

A: Since 1942, GDB has empowered lives by creating exceptional partnerships between people, dogs and communities. GDB is the largest Guide Dog school in the country and is dedicated to providing high quality student training services and extensive follow-up support for graduates. Our programs are made possible through the teamwork of staff, volunteers and generous donors. Services are provided to students from the United States and Canada at no cost to them.

Q: Where is GDB located?

A: GDB has two campuses: one is headquartered in San Rafael, California — 20 miles north of San Francisco, another in Boring, Oregon — 25 miles east of Portland.

Q: Who does GDB serve?

A: Any person who is blind or visually impaired living in the United States or Canada desiring enhanced mobility and independence. The person must be legally blind, able to travel independently (good orientation and mobility skills), and well-suited to work with a dog. All of our services are provided completely free of charge to our clients.

Q: Where does GDB receive its funding?

A: GDB is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization supported entirely by private donations. We receive no government funding. Donors contribute through general contributions, bequests, grants, memorial and honor donations, charitable remainder trusts and other planned giving options.

Q: Do you have to be totally blind to use a guide dog?

A: No. Many of our graduates do have some vision; you do, however, need to be legally blind. Good orientation and mobility skills are also essential prior to getting a guide dog.

Q: How old do you have to be to train with a guide dog?

A: Because it takes a level of maturity, discipline, and commitment to work with a guide dog, the majority of our students are 18 and older, but there is no age requirement.

Q: How long is GDB's training program?

A: Our classes are two weeks long, minimizing disruption to your personal and professional commitments. We provide highly customized instruction; classes generally have 4-6 students and the ratio of students to instructors is 2:1. GDB also provides graduates with a lifetime of support.

Q: Are guide dogs allowed to go everywhere a person can go?

A: Yes. According to the Americans with Disabilities Act, a guide dog is allowed any place a person can go.

Q: How many guide dog teams have graduated from GDB?

A: More than 14,000 teams have graduated since our founding in 1942, and there are approximately 2,200 active guide dog teams currently in the field across North America.

Q: What does Guide Dogs for the Blind do differently than other schools?

A: Guide Dogs for the Blind is recognized worldwide as a model for innovative training, unprecedented support of guide dog partnerships after graduation, and the success rate of its graduates via a world-class alumni association and veterinary financial assistance, as needed. There is no other guide dog school in the country that offers the level of training and the degree of hands-on support for the partnership after graduation.

Q: Do the guide dogs ever get to play?

A: Yes! When a guide dog is not working and out of harness, playing and relaxing is definitely encouraged. It's also a great way for a handler and guide to bond and strengthen their partnership.

Q: Is it okay to pet a working guide dog?

A: It's important for a working dog to stay focused for the safety of the team and maintenance of training standards. It's an essential courtesy to first ask for permission from the handler before petting a guide dog.

Q: Is it okay for a pet dog to greet a guide dog?

A: Before you consider allowing your dog to greet a working guide dog, please understand the importance of asking permission first, so the handler can be prepared. Your dog should also be on leash and under control. Guide dogs are also not trained to be protection dogs - they are busy safely guiding their partners when out in public.

Q: What should drivers do when they see a guide dog in training or a blind person using a dog?

A: We encourage drivers to be attentive, as you would with any other pedestrians, especially when turning right-on-red. GDB trains its guide dogs in real-world situations, so it's helpful that you continue going on about your business. Please don't stop and honk, yell out your window, or otherwise distract someone using a guide dog. The person is listening for traffic flow to determine when it is safe to give the command to go forward and cross the street.

Q. What unique skills does a guide dog have?

A: Leading a person in a straight line from point A to point B, stopping for all changes in elevation (including curbs and stairs), stopping for overhead obstacles (such as tree limbs), and avoiding obstacles in their path.

Q. What are some things guide dogs cannot do?

A. Read traffic signals and determine the route to a new destination.

Q: How does GDB's Puppy Raising program work?

A: Our Puppy Raising program is made up of more than 2,000 puppy raising volunteer families in the following states: Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Texas, Utah and Washington.

Puppy raisers receive their guide dog puppy at approximately eight weeks old, and he/she will return for formal training between 15 and 17 months old. Puppy raisers are responsible for teaching their puppies good manners and basic obedience. You can have other pets in your home and if you are not able to commit to raising a puppy fulltime, there are still other ways to get involved with your local puppy club, such as puppy sitting. And, GDB's puppy raising program complements many FFA, 4H, home schooling, high school, and college programs.

Q: What costs are covered for GDB's Puppy Raising program?

A: GDB provides equipment, dog transportation, training, support and basic veterinary care.

Q: What is GDB's volunteer community like?

GDB has one of the nation's largest most diverse volunteer networks with thousands of volunteers assisting in the success of our mission.

Q: How can I support GDB?

A: There are a lot of ways to support Guide Dogs for the Blind. You can volunteer on a GDB campus, help raise guide dog puppies, become a breeding stock custodian, provide a home to a retired dog, donate funds and services, or fundraise in your community. You can also introduce us to your friends, follow us on our social media channels, and if you know someone who is blind, please be sure to tell them about our program and free services.

Q: Do you train other types of service dogs?

A: We only provide highly trained guide dogs and are focused exclusively on working with people with vision loss. We do consult with, and donate selected career change dogs to a number of other service organizations.

Q: What is GDB's position on fraudulent service dogs?

A: Guide Dogs for the Blind does not agree with, nor does it support the training or use of fraudulent service dogs. Personal testimonies from many of our clients demonstrate that fraudulent service dogs pose a variety of challenges for people with disabilities who travel with properly trained service dogs. Some of these challenges include safety, health, and dog attack risks, as well as the erosion of the positive image of a formally trained service dog in the eyes of business owners and the public. Fraudulent service dogs pose a fundamental threat to the access, independence, and mobility that service dogs enable.

Guide Dogs for the Blind is aware of the hazards and complications fraudulent service dogs pose to an officially designated working dog. A "fraudulent service dog," is any dog that is not formally trained to perform a specific service to assist a person with a disability. The three major laws that give access to a service dog and a person with a disability are the Americans with Disabilities Act; Fair Housing Act; and The Air Carrier Access Act. There is a lack of consistency between these major pieces of legislation, which provide incentives for people to train and use fraudulent service dogs. Apart from the California State Board of Guide Dog Schools, there is no established federal or state administration to set and enforce rules pertaining to service dog regulations.

Q. Why does GDB breed their own dogs and why don't they use shelter dogs?

A. In the past, GDB attempted to source dogs from local shelter and animal rescue organizations. We did this for several years and it was met with very minimal success. Many dogs did not qualify from the get go because they must be free from orthopedic and eye disease. It also took an enormous amount of manpower resources for our staff to find them. Many of the few dogs who did pass the basic health screen did not have the level of confidence for work in the environments that a guide travels. The temperamental traits that cause a guide to be suitable (high confidence, high manageability, low distraction, biddable, adaptable, friendly) are not always found in dogs at a shelter or rescue organization (especially given the unknown factor of their background and what they might have been exposed to). We also rely greatly on our puppy raisers' time and dedication they put in to create the best possible guide dogs that are socialized early on in life.

Q. What breeds does GDB use?

A. GDB currently only uses LABs, GLDs, and LAB x GLD crosses (as is common throughout the world). In the past GDB used other breeds but found these the most suitable due to health, temperament, size, coat type and adaptability.

Q. Why doesn't GDB actively breed for chocolate Labs?

A. While most Labradors from GDB are either black or yellow, GDB does have dogs in our breeding colony that carry the gene for chocolate, and occasionally chocolate puppies are born. Chocolate puppies follow the same raising and training process as all other puppies and have the same opportunity to become successful working guides. To put it simply, the genes that determine if a puppy will be chocolate are recessive, which means both parents must have the gene to have a chance to produce chocolate offspring. Because GDB focuses primarily on choosing parents who will have puppies with the highest temperament and health qualities to succeed as working guides, GDB does not deliberately match up parents who carry the chocolate gene. On occasions where mate selection factors indicate that an ideal match would be between two parents carrying for the chocolate color there is still no guarantee that any puppies born will be chocolate, which is why it is so rare in the GDB population. For anyone wanting more information about coat color genetics you can visit the breeding department's favorite and informative website <http://doggenetics.co.uk/>