



USA TRIATHLON
RACE DIRECTOR RESOURCE GUIDE:

PARA & ADAPTIVE TRIATHLON



INTRODUCTION:

USA Triathlon is committed to creating a culture of inclusion that welcomes athletes of all abilities to the sport. Race Directors play a large role in making this goal a reality by operating events that break down barriers to entry and provide a safe, accessible athlete experience.

Paratriathlon has come a long way since its official adoption into the sport in 2010 when it was declared a Paralympic sport that would be part of the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Paralympic Games. The process of developing this class of fiercely competitive athletes illuminated an opportunity to engage a larger pool of athletes with impairments that compete at any and all ability levels. This gave root to Adaptive Triathlon, which has seen a continuous evolution of competition rules, classes, and categories to encourage participation and better support the needs of all athletes.

In this section, we'll explore the steps for making your race more inclusive and the primary considerations for introducing Paratriathlon and Adaptive Triathlon divisions within your events*:

- Categories & Classifications
- Race Operations
- Marketing, Promotion & Partnerships
- Scalability & Management

**Note: While this Guide does provide direction on the competition rules, it is not a replacement for the competition rules with regard to both Paratriathlon and Adaptive Multisport. For questions about the rules and their application at your event, please reach out to rulesandofficials@usatriathlon.org.*



CATEGORIES & CLASSIFICATIONS:

Athletes with impairments competing in the sport of triathlon align with one of two groups:

1. **Paratriathlon:** These athletes have actively undergone the evidence-based classification system of [World Triathlon Paratriathlon](#) and have been classified within one of the [nine recognized sport classes](#). Paratriathlon, as per the World Triathlon Constitution, is governed by the World Triathlon Competition Rules.
2. **Adaptive Triathlon:** Adaptive Triathlon has recently replaced the category formerly referred to as PC Open. Not all athletes with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defined impairments fit into the Paratriathlon medical classification or can follow the strict equipment usage rules of Paratriathlon. These athletes are considered adaptive athletes and follow the rules of Adaptive Triathlon which are a bit more flexible in terms of allowable accommodations for accessibility.

Most athletes with disabilities participate in the Adaptive category and the majority of races deal exclusively with Adaptive Triathlon. The only exceptions in the United States are the Paratriathlon National Qualifier Series and Paratriathlon National Championships. On the international stage, World Triathlon produces a series of Events, Cups, and Championships for Paratriathlon each year.

Download a copy of the [Official Multisport Competition Rules](#). Reference Paratriathlon (pg 27) and Adaptive Triathlon (pg 55).

Paratriathlon:

The Paratriathlon division is the pipeline for competing at the international level and at the Paralympic Games. Once classified, paratriathletes become eligible for Elite Paratriathlon races and training opportunities that help them prepare to take on the best of the best worldwide.

Classification Process: Classification provides a structure for Paralympic competition. The Paralympic Committee has adopted a universal classification code. The classification process determines who is eligible to compete in Paratriathlon and it groups eligible athletes in sport classes according to their activity limitation.

All athletes who are interested in racing in Paratriathlon at the Elite national and/or international level need to attend an event where classification is being offered. A qualifying time is needed to attend one of these events (i.e. USA Triathlon Paratriathlon National Championship). Upon registration, USA Triathlon will assign a specific classification appointment to conduct a medical examination in the days leading up to the event. Classifiers will then assign the athlete a sport class for the race and then proceed to observe the athlete in competition during the race to finalize the classification status.

Classifications: There are three (3) primary competition categories with a total of nine (9) classifications. For the acronyms, the letters indicate the type of impairment and the numbers indicate the level of impairment. The lower the number, the more severe the impairment.



PARATRIATHLON CLASSIFICATIONS:			
CATEGORY	ACRONYM	IMPAIRMENT LEVEL	REQUIREMENTS
Wheelchair	PTWC1	Most impaired wheelchair users	Must use handcycle on the bike course and a racing wheelchair on the run
	PTWC2	Least impaired wheelchair users	
Ambulatory	PTS2	Severe impairments	In both bike and run, athletes may use approved prosthesis or other supportive devices
	PTS3	Significant impairments	
	PTS4	Moderate impairments	
	PTS5	Mild impairments	
Visually Impaired	PTVI1	From totally blind with no light perception to some light perception	One guide is mandatory throughout the competition. Must ride a tandem during the bike segment.
	PTVI2	Severe partially sighted	All PTV1 athletes must wear blackout goggles throughout the entire competition
	PTVI3	Less severe partially sighted	

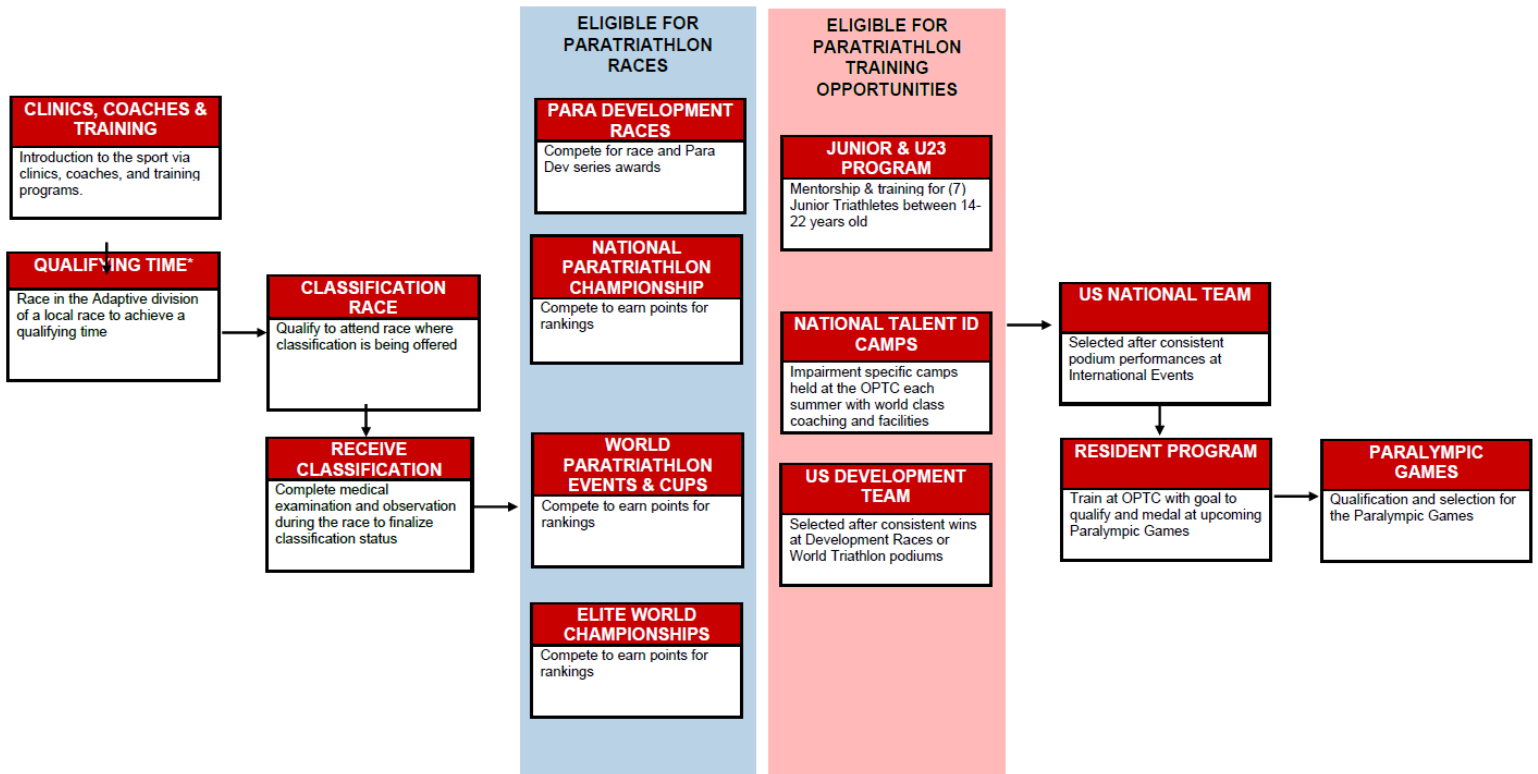
Official Paratriathlon Events: Each year, there are only a handful of U.S. events recognized as official Paratriathlon races, including those deemed part of the USAT Paratriathlon Nationals Qualifier Series as well as the USAT Paratriathlon National Championships. At these races, Race Directors work closely with USA Triathlon Officials leading up to and on-site at the event to ensure all Paratriathlon rules are strictly adhered to. In turn, the results for these races count toward a Paratriathlete’s national and international rankings, which are a primary consideration for invitation to the U.S. Paralympic Triathlon Team.

It’s possible you may have classified paratriathletes participating in your local event that race in accordance with the Paratriathlon rules. However, this does not make your race an officially recognized Paratriathlon event because your race has not been subject to the same stringent rule enforcement as the nationally recognized races. Without the official designation as a USAT Paratriathlon Nationals Qualifier Series race or a Paratriathlon National Championship, athlete results will not count toward any points/rankings. Therefore, at local races, all athletes with impairments are competing as part of the Adaptive Triathlon as opposed to Paratriathlon, regardless of whether the athletes have been officially classified.

If you are interested in applying for your race to be considered to become a Paratriathlon Nationals Qualifier Series race or to host the USAT Paratriathlon National Championships, please reach out to service@usatriathlon.org.



The Paratriathlete's Journey to the Paralympics:



**Qualifying Time: Each year, there is a set of qualifying times and criteria determined for adaptive athletes to qualify to attend the USAT Paratriathlon National Championships. Download the [2023 USAT Paratriathlon National Championship Qualification Procedures](#).*

Adaptive Triathlon:

Participation in Adaptive Triathlon is available to all athletes with a physical, visual, neurological, or intellectual impairment that limits one or more major life activities. Formal Paratriathlon classification into approved categories is not required for participation in the Adaptive Triathlon nor does such classification status prohibit an athlete from participating in the Adaptive Triathlon.

In most cases, the rules referenced and the equipment used in Adaptive Triathlon should conform to the standards referenced in the USA Triathlon and/or World Triathlon Competition rules. However, there are times when athletes require unique equipment adaptations and accessibility accommodations. In these instances, there can be flexibility in the rules. Athlete safety must always remain the first priority. For any questions about requested modifications, please reach out to USA Triathlon at rulesandofficials@usatriathlon.org at least 14 days prior to the event.



Divisions: There are five (5) primary Adaptive Triathlon Divisions:

ADAPTIVE TRIATHLON DIVISIONS:		
DIVISION	ACRONYM	DESCRIPTION
Adaptive Triathlon Division 1	ATD1	Consists of three main subdivisions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ATD1 Ambulatory • ATD1 Wheelchair • ATD1 Visually Impaired
Adaptive Triathlon Division 2	ATD2	Athletes who require adaptations and/or accommodations but can race with limited assistance or equipment adaptations. Examples include those with medically verified intellectual impairments including but not limited to Down Syndrome, Autism, etc.
Adaptive Triathlon Division 3	ATD3	Athletes who require adaptations and/or accommodations but can race with limited assistance or equipment adaptations. Examples include TBI/PTSD, chronic diseases, congenital conditions, neurological conditions, etc.
Adaptive Triathlon Division 4	ATD4	Division for athletes who race with another athlete who pulls, pushes, or propels the athlete through the race course. For reasons of athlete safety, these are teams that must start in their own wave behind all other athlete waves.
Adaptive Triathlon Temporary Mobility Impairment	ATTMI	A participatory category that allows athletes with a medically verified, significant, and temporary injury that results in the need for more substantial accommodations, which can be granted at the discretion of Race Management. The athlete's results are not eligible for rankings or awards.

Assistance Groups:

Offentimes, Paratriathletes and Adaptive Triathletes race with assistance. Here are the official definitions of the allowable assistance categories:

- **Handler:** A person who provides assistance to a paratriathlete who requires physical assistance during the transition points within the race.
- **Guide:** The term Guide is strictly used for those guiding a visually impaired (VI) athlete. The Guide and athlete will be tethered together during the swim and run portions and will use a



tandem bicycle for the bike portion of the event. For Paratriathlon, athletes and guides must be of the same gender.. For Adaptive Triathlon, the gender of athletes and guides for VI athletes does not have to be the same.

- **Race Partner** (Adaptive Triathlon ONLY): Someone who provides more limited assistance in the form of guidance and support for ATD2 athletes with intellectual impairment who with such assistance can complete the portions of the multi-sport event without the accompaniment of a co-athlete.
- **Co-Athlete** (Adaptive Triathlon ONLY): Someone who races alongside ATD1 and ATD2 athletes with intellectual impairment to ensure a safe event for the athlete and fellow competitors. For Adaptive Triathlon, the gender of athletes and Co-Athletes does not have to be the same.

RACE OPERATIONS:

As with the adoption of any new race elements, adding and/or increasing the size of a Adaptive Triathlon division means auditing your event experience from start to finish to understand the operational implications. Here are some recommendations and considerations for hosting Adaptive Triathletes within your events.

Registration:

Your first official touchpoint with adaptive athletes occurs at the time of registration. It is customary that all parties out on the race course with the athlete will need to complete the athlete registration process. This includes Adaptive athlete, Guides, Race Partners, and Co-Athletes. The registration process ensures all personal and emergency contact information is collected and liability waivers are signed. Handlers will typically be directed to complete the Volunteer registration process, as opposed to the athlete registration process.

Registration Fees: Although it is not a requirement, if you're looking to encourage participation of adaptive athletes within your races, consider providing discounted entries as a way to lower the barriers to entry. If your race is a sell-out event, also consider holding back a number of guaranteed entries, which will allow adaptive athletes to be able to register up to and until closer to the event date.

Note that it is best practice to waive the registration fee for Guides, Race Partners, and Co-Athletes. USAT also waives the USAT 1-Day Membership fee for these groups, although they are still required to sign a waiver.

Registration Flow: Within your registration flow, add a few supplemental questions to gather preliminary information about adaptive athletes and their assistance groups. Without these questions, you may not be able to identify adaptive athletes that have registered for the event. This interferes with your ability to communicate and coordinate logistics with adaptive athletes in advance of the race. This hurts the relationship with the athlete from a customer service perspective and can also have dangerous consequences if the race is not adequately prepared to support the athlete's needs.



RACE DIVISION

Please select your Race Division:

- a. Age Group
- b. Clydesdale & Athena
- c. Adaptive Triathlon
- d. Adaptive Triathlon Guide
- e. Adaptive Triathlon Race Partner
- f. Adaptive Triathlon Co-Athlete

USAT CLASSIFICATION

Have you been USAT Classified:

- a. Yes
- b. No

ATHLETE NAME

Please list the name of the athlete you will be Guiding/Partnering with:

CLASSIFICATION TYPE

Please select your USAT Paratriathlon Certification:

- a. PTWC1
- b. PTWC2
- c. PTS2
- d. PTS3
- e. PTS4
- f. PTS5
- g. PTVI1
- h. PTVI2
- i. PTVI3

IMPAIRMENT TYPE

Please provide more information about your impairment:

- a. Visually Impaired
- b. Wheelchair
- c. Ambulatory
- d. Other

HANDLER NEEDS

Will you be providing your own Handler(s) or would you like the race to provide:

- a. Yes, I will provide my own
- b. No, I would like the race to provide
- c. N/A – I will not need a handler

GUIDE NAME

Please list the name of your Guide:

HANDLER NAME

Please list the name(s) of the handlers you will be providing:

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Please provide any additional information you would like the race to be aware of:

ADAPTIVE TRIATHLON

GUIDE, RACE PARTNER, CO-ATHLETE

YES

NO

AMBULATORY, WHEELCHAIR, OTHER

VISUALLY IMPAIRED





Follow Up Communication:

Collecting the above information during the registration process is the first step in starting the dialogue with athletes, but the communication doesn't end here! After the athlete has registered, reach out via phone/email to have a conversation regarding capabilities, equipment, and support that may be needed.

Pro Tip:

- ★ *Outreach to the athlete should happen at least (6) weeks prior to the event. The earlier the better so everyone involved is on the same page.*

- ★ *(For new athletes) Ask if the athlete has a coach or if they've been working with an organization like Dare2Tri, Challenged Athletes Foundation (CAF), Achilles, Catapult, Para Endurance Coaching, etc. that might also be able to join the call. Oftentimes, these groups have been working with the athlete on a daily basis for an extended period of time and have ample race experience. They can help shed light on the athlete's needs and also the operational implications these needs may have on the race. In addition to the questions you'll be asking them, they'll know what questions to ask YOU.*

A few key topics to discuss during this communication:

- **Previous Race Results:** It's important to understand an athlete's racing resume, their past race results, and how these results compare to the historical first/last finisher timelines of your able-bodied athletes.
 - **Front of the Pack:** Particularly with wheelchair athletes, it's possible they may navigate the course faster with their handcycles/racing wheelchairs than able-bodied athletes on upright bikes/on foot. Make sure the police assets executing road closures as well as your course and aid station teams are prepared with the projected arrival times of athletes at their respective locations.
 - **Back of the Pack:** It's possible that adaptive athletes may require a bit more time than other participants. In these instances, you will need to evaluate how the time needed for their swim, bike and run portions of the event align with access timelines for the water/roadways and on-site schedules for race assets, personnel/staff, and amenities.
 - **Contingency Planning:** Prior to the event, outline contingency plans for scenarios where athletes take longer than the projected timeline. Thinking through all the factors in advance can help you to understand your available resources. This exercise will inform the extent to which you are operationally able to accommodate athletes and where you may need to institute hard cut-offs. Communicating clear direction and expectations to all stakeholders (athletes,



contingency plans more seamless during the race.

- **Roadways** - Are adaptive athletes able to safely move from closed roads to sidewalks to be able to continue the race? Are the sidewalks well-maintained or are there potential tripping hazards?
- **SAG plan** - Do you have the types of vehicles and personnel to be able to pick up an adaptive athlete and move them ahead in the course and/or transport them directly to the Finish area if needed?
- **Assets** - Are the medical/safety assets still in place to be able to service the course? Do you have staff/volunteers on-hand to continue to provide race amenities (i.e. water/electrolyte)? If these services will not be available to athletes after a certain time, athletes should not be permitted to continue after this point.

Pro Tip:

Take a look at the equipment lists of your neutral support along the course. Will they have tires and tubes sized for handcycles and racing wheelchairs? Will they have replacement chains for tandem bikes?

Since these equipment needs may be very individualized, it is OK if the race is not able to provide the equipment, but this should be communicated to athletes during these pre-race conversations. Consider providing adaptive athletes the opportunity to provide you with equipment prior to the race that is incorporated in your neutral support supplies. This way if adaptive athletes have mechanical issues during the race, the course teams are better equipped to support them. If the equipment is not used, it is returned to the athletes after the race.

- **Capabilities & Support Needs:** First and foremost, **don't make any assumptions** about adaptive athletes and their capabilities. Provide adaptive athletes with all the event information and course details and allow them to communicate the race elements that they feel comfortable tackling and the elements that may require additional attention or support.

Take the time to understand the goals of the adaptive athlete. Are they participating to get a qualifying time/abide by official Paratriathlon rules or are they looking to participate and finish the race? If it's the latter, depending on the athlete and the circumstances, some additional support can be provided at your discretion.



Athlete Spotlight:

[Minda Dentler](#), the first female wheelchair athlete to complete the Ironman World Championship, tells the story of completing Challenge Roth, which had 18 miles of gravel along the run course and Ironman Louisville which had a set of stairs exiting Transition. Certainly not ideal conditions for a racing wheelchair!

In both of these instances, Minda's main goal was to be able to participate and finish the race. She was not aiming for a qualifying time or to set world records. After engaging in conversations with both races, they were able to overcome the challenges by implementing the following measures:

- ★ **Challenge Roth:** *Provided a cyclist to ride out in front of Minda along the gravel stretches of the run course. This provided additional visibility for age group athletes to see her on the course to help prevent collisions. The cyclist was also able to provide assistance dislodging the chair from the gravel if necessary.*
- ★ **Ironman Louisville** - *Allowed her handlers to be present at the staircase to help lift her and her chair down the stairs.*

In the grand scheme, these are very small adjustments but can make a BIG difference to athletes.

- **Equipment:** As you discuss the course details with the adaptive athlete, talk through the logistics of how they move through the event from the time they arrive on-site until the time they check out their bike. Understand the equipment being used during each portion of the race by answering the Who, What, When, Where, and Why:
 - What equipment is being used?
 - Why does the athlete need the equipment?
 - What process does the athlete go through to get outfitted in the equipment? (i.e. requires being lifted into a wheelchair, sitting down to attach a prosthetic leg, etc.)
 - Where does the equipment need to be?
 - When does the equipment need to be there?
 - How does the equipment get there?
 - Who is responsible for moving the equipment?

Gathering this information can help to inform the Handler support needed during the race as well as the equipment staging areas that may be needed at different points throughout the event.

Assembling the Handler Team:

After gathering all the information about your adaptive athletes, you're prepared to begin assembling your handler team. A Handler is defined as a person who provides assistance to a



Determine Your Handler Policies: Prior to hosting adaptive athletes in the race, set your handler policies and proactively publicize the option(s) available in marketing and promotions so adaptive athletes are aware prior to registration. Determine which of the three scenarios best suits your event:

1. The race provides all handlers. No outside handlers can be used by athletes
2. The race will provide handlers if requested by the athlete
3. The athlete is solely responsible for providing their own handlers. The race will not provide any handlers.

Determine the Number of Handlers Needed: Handler numbers will be informed by the discussions with the athletes about their needs, but here are the general rules of thumb for each category:

- Wheelchair Athletes: According to official Paratriathlon rules, (1) handler is permitted for Wheelchair athletes. For Adaptive Triathlon, (2) handlers are permitted if needed.
- Ambulatory Athletes: (1) handler is permitted
- Visually Impaired Athletes: No handlers are permitted. VI athletes have a Guide that is tethered to them for the swim/run portions of the event and ride the front of a tandem bike during the cycling portion of the event.
- Other Athletes: Discretionary based on the needs of the athlete (Adaptive Triathlon only)

Handler Recruitment: Below are recommendations for the recruitment and management of race-provided and athlete-provided handlers:

- Athletes provide their own handlers for the event
 - a. Collect the handler's contact information from the athlete and request that they complete your volunteer registration process to be able to sign your volunteer waiver and input the rest of their personal information (i.e. t-shirt size, emergency contact, etc.).
- Athletes request that the race provides handlers for the event
 - a. Handlers are usually a ***dedicated*** group of volunteers with the responsibilities to help athletes throughout the event. Ideally, these volunteers do not have any other duties on event day other than their Handler responsibilities. This should be a separate group from your Transition and Swim Start/Exit volunteers.
 - b. Handlers should know what they've signed up for! Consider making this a dedicated volunteer position listed on your volunteer registration platform with the description of duties and capacities required, where people are able to opt in to volunteer for this specific role. For example, if handlers need to be capable of lifting athletes or if they will be expected to get wet helping athletes out of the water, these details should be outlined. This helps to recruit volunteers best suited to carry out the core competencies



There are two schools of thought when it comes to handlers and their relationships with the athlete. Ultimately, it's up to the athlete to decide what works best for them depending on their needs and select races whose handler policies align with their preferences.

HANDLER RELATIONSHIPS		
	Friends / Family Members	Volunteers (no pre-existing relationship)
PROS	Familiar with the needs of the athlete and have experience assisting the athlete. There's a level of comfort, less hesitation, and oftentimes, more of an unspoken communication between athlete and handler.	They bring an objectivity to performing the tasks at hand. There's a formality in the relationship between athlete and handler that keeps the focus on the mechanics and logistics of the race.
CONS	The emotional connection and vested interest in the athlete can divert focus from performing the required duties and abiding by the rules. As with any family situation, when emotions are high there's an increased risk of arguments and bickering!	Handlers are like a box of chocolates - you never know what you're going to get! This introduces an element of risk into the athlete's race experience. Volunteer handlers are not as familiar with the athlete's needs. This is why a pre-race touchpoint between athlete and handler is important to talk through the logistics - especially for very competitive athletes where every second counts.

Handler Training: Race management needs to actively take steps to ensure handlers understand their role in the event, the needs of the athlete they will be supporting, and the rules that dictate what they can and cannot do.

- **Communication of Responsibilities:** Consider putting together a one-sheeter that can be sent to handlers in advance with the logistical information for their shift (i.e. report time, report location, on-site staff contact) as well as the breakdown of handler Responsibilities

HANDLER RESPONSIBILITIES	
Handlers ARE.....	Handlers ARE NOT....
<input type="checkbox"/> Volunteers who are instrumental in assisting athletes to compete and complete a race <input type="checkbox"/> Allowed to help with prosthetic devices or other assistive devices	<input type="checkbox"/> Personal assistants...They are not responsible for arranging travel, picking up athletes, and coordinating logistics. <input type="checkbox"/> Allowed to complete any portion of the race with an athlete (including the run)



<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Allowed to lift paratriathletes in and out of handcycles and wheelchairs<input type="checkbox"/> Allowed to remove wetsuits or clothing<input type="checkbox"/> Allowed to repair bikes and help paratriathletes with other equipment at the Transition Area<input type="checkbox"/> Allowed to rack bikes in transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Allowed to take any action which propels the athlete forward.<input type="checkbox"/> Allowed to run ahead into Transition with the timing chip<input type="checkbox"/> Allowed to repair flats outside of Transition<input type="checkbox"/> Allowed to pace an athlete
--	--

- **Touchpoint with the Athlete:** It's important that the adaptive athlete and their assigned handler(s) have a chance to have a conversation prior to the event to talk through the support the athlete will need at each point throughout the race. In a lot of ways, the movements in and out of prosthetics and wheelchairs can be a bit of a dance and it's important that the choreography is reviewed in advance of the race!
 - **Adaptive Athlete & Handler Briefing:** For races with a large adaptive athlete field and handler program, it's best practice to host a joint athlete and handler briefing the day prior to the event. This provides an opportunity for all parties to meet each other (if they haven't done so already) and talk through the race day plans face-to-face.
 - **Pre-Race Meeting:** If the adaptive race is too small to warrant a dedicated briefing or if a briefing is not possible in the day(s) leading up to the race, plan to coordinate a time for the athlete to meet with their handler race morning, prior to the swim start.

Handler Access:

Handlers need to be easily recognizable to volunteers, staff, and event security to ensure they are granted access to the areas where their adaptive athletes will be. Brief these personnel groups about the presence of the handlers in these areas so they're aware of the handlers' roles and the assistance they'll be providing.

There should be a way to differentiate handlers from standard volunteers. Here are some suggestions:

- A t-shirt that is a different color from the standard volunteer shirts
- A unique HANDLER credential and/or lanyard
- A designated wristband or bracelet specific to the handler group

Pro Tip:
Introduce the group of handlers to your Transition and Swim Start/Exit Managers. Open the lines of communication so handlers know who they can flag down if there are questions or issues that arise during the race.



The approach for opening up your event to adaptive athletes is similar to how you'd prepare your house to host company. Take one room at a time and think through the setup and how to create the best possible experience for your guests. Later in this section we'll delve into specific details for each area of the race, but here are a few overarching considerations that should be taken into account for all event components and venues:

- **ADA Toilets:** All race venues, including Packet Pick-Up, Swim Start, Transition, and the Finish should have ADA toilets that are wheelchair accessible. ADA toilets are likely not needed along the race course because adaptive athletes will not have handlers at Aid Stations to be able to help them in/out of their handcycles or racing wheelchairs. Wheelchair athletes will often have catheters for these portions of the race.
- **Parking:** Is there accessible parking available at your venues? Is there a place where adaptive athletes are able to pull up close to the site to be able to unload/load equipment? If you make arrangements with athletes in advance to carve out a drop-off location, ensure on-site traffic management, security, and staff are aware of these plans.
- **ADA Shuttles:** In circumstances where athlete shuttling is part of your race operation, work with your transportation vendor to coordinate wheelchair accessible buses/vans so adaptive athletes are able to be included in this race service.
- **Packet Pick-Up:** Evaluate the accessibility of your Packet Pick-Up location. If the setup is outdoors, is the surface paved or is it located on grass/sand? If the setup is at an indoor venue, are there elevators to move between levels if necessary?
- **Local Hotel Recommendations:** If you have a Host Hotel for your event or if you publicize recommended local hotel options, understand their availability of accessible rooms and their specific accommodations. For example, some rooms may have roll-in showers, others may have accommodations for blind or deaf guests.
- **Table Height:** Keep table height in mind as you place equipment orders for your different venues. For packet pick-up, registration counters provided by drayage vendors are often on the taller side and may make the process difficult for wheelchair athletes. Tables along the course and at the start/finish that have food and drink might be a bit more challenging for wheelchair athletes to access. Prep volunteers in these areas to be on the lookout for athletes that may need assistance.

Transition:

Transition Area Terrain: Able-bodied athletes spend all their time in Transition on-foot and cannot ride their bikes within the space as the mount/dismount lines are located outside of Transition. On the other hand, adaptive athletes in the wheelchair category will mount their handcycles (for the bike course) and racing wheelchairs (for the run course) at their assigned rack. The ground surface of the Transition area



and the areas surrounding the entrances/exits will be a factor here as grass, gravel, dirt can present potential challenges.

Adaptive Athlete Racks: It's best practice to provide adaptive athletes a separate and distinct racking area within Transition. This helps ensure both adaptive athletes and age group athletes have ample space for their equipment and the transition process. A few additional considerations:

- **Rack Location:** Adaptive athlete racks should be as close as possible to the entrance/exits of Transition. This will be especially important in instances when the surface of Transition is unpaved. Also, when mapping out the location of the toilets within the Transition area, plan to position a designated ADA restroom near these adaptive athlete racks.
- **Rack Positioning:** When it comes to the order in which the categories of adaptive athletes should be racked within Transition, the official rules dictate that Visually Impaired athletes should be positioned closest to the mount line, followed by Ambulatory athletes, and Wheelchair athletes.
- **Rack Space:** All mobility equipment should remain within each adaptive athlete's assigned space in the Transition Area. All used swim caps, goggles, wetsuits, tethers and helmets must be placed in their area at the rack. As a result, adaptive athletes typically need more space than able-bodied athletes to accommodate all their equipment and to allow room to maneuver during the event. A few callouts:
 - Visually Impaired Athletes: Plan for double the rack space, as you'll need to accommodate both the athlete's equipment as well as the Guide's equipment. Also account for extra aisle width in the areas with VI athletes as a racked tandem bike will extend further in the aisle than an upright bike. Athletes will need enough space to pass behind the bike(s) once racked.
 - Ambulatory Athletes: Leave enough space around the rack to be able to position a folding chair that can be used when affixing and adjusting prosthetic equipment.
 - Wheelchair Athletes: Wheelchair athletes will have to rack both their handcycle and their racing wheelchair. Account for at least 6 feet of rack space for these athletes.

Pro Tip:

- ★ *Rack Location: If possible, look to position adaptive athlete racks against a wall. Having a wall on one side, provides them with a bit more room to maneuver without having to keep an eye on the traffic coming/going in the aisle.*
- ★ *ADA Toilets: Consider adding an "ADAPTIVE ATHLETES ONLY" sign affixed to the door can help ensure that these toilets are not inadvertently overtaken by Age Group athletes and are available only to those athletes who truly need them.*



Swim:

Start Schedule: Regardless of the type of race start - mass start, time trial start or wave start, adaptive athletes should begin the race approximately 5-10 minutes prior to age group athletes.

(Note: The exception here is ATD4 athletes who are pushed/pulled in a flotation device. For the safety of all athletes, it is best these athletes start last)

- **Wave Starts:** Adaptive athletes can either be started in a single wave or broken into multiple waves, but all waves should be separate and distinct from age group athletes
- **Time Trial Start:** Adaptive athletes should be started as part of the Time Trial with a time gap prior to the age group athlete's time trial start



Pro Tip:

*For Wave Start/Time Trial Starts at races with Elite athletes, it's common for the sequence to be as follows: **Elites** → **6-8 minute gap** → **Adaptive Athletes** → **5-10 minute gap** → **Age Groups***

Oftentimes, races plan to start adaptive athletes last to help create more separation from the age groupers. While well-intentioned, here are a few reasons that best practices dictate starting at the front of the pack is preferable to starting at the back of the pack:

- **Safety:** The time gap between the adaptive athletes and age group athletes creates enough separation between the two groups, providing "clean water" for the adaptive athletes which helps to prevent collisions.
- **Timing:** Starting adaptive athletes earlier in the race provides more time along the course before they might be affected by course cutoff times / road closure times.
- **Weather:** For warm weather races, starting adaptive athletes early in the day might allow them to move through the course before wet bulb temperatures reach their apex.
- **PR / Media:** If media outlets are going to be on-site for the event, they will likely be at the beginning of the Swim Start to see the gun go off. The media loves to highlight adaptive athlete participation and capture human interest stories, which can result in more quality coverage of the event and increase impressions. This becomes a great promotional opportunity for the race.
- **Spirit of Inclusivity:** When adaptive athletes start at the front of the pack, Age Groupers are a captive audience watching the start as the athletes line up for their own entrance to the water. They're able to watch and cheer on adaptive athletes which helps kick off the event with an "all-in-this-together" spirit. This creates an inspirational moment for all participating athletes, and also spectators, both able-bodied and disabled who may be encouraged to get involved in the

Swim Equipment: For an Adaptive Triathlon swim, there are a few specific pieces of adaptive equipment you may encounter:

SWIM EQUIPMENT	
TETHER	SLING
<p>Visually Impaired Athletes + Guides</p>  <p>Tethers must be an elastic rope with a bright or reflective color with a maximum length of 80 centimeters long measured with no tension. It can be fixed at any point of the athlete's body. Most athletes will attach at the hip or at the waist.</p>	<p>Wheelchair Athletes & Ambulatory Athletes</p>  <p>Slings can be used by handlers to help with carrying athletes out of the water. There is one handler on each side of the sling, holding it by the handle. The athlete is positioned between them with their butt sitting on the center section of the sling. The sling helps to absorb the weight of the athlete as the handlers carry them from the water</p>

- Propulsive Devices:** Artificial propulsive devices including (but not limited to) fins, paddles, or floating devices of any kind are not allowed. All prosthetic and/or orthosis devices are considered propulsion devices except for approved knee braces. This means all athletes with prosthetics will need to remove these items prior to the swim and they can be reattached after exiting the water.

It's important to understand how hosting adaptive athletes within your event may also have implications for equipment you may be providing and/or enforcing on-site:

- Swim Caps:** For safety purposes, it's best practice to have a unique, neon color swim cap(s) that are reserved solely for the adaptive athletes. This allows staff, lifeguards, and other swim safety personnel to more easily identify adaptive athletes in the water. Also consider adding a note in your Start Area PA script for the race announcer to communicate this cap color to all participants. This heads up allows athletes to be a bit more aware of their surroundings and mindful of the competitors around them.

Official Paratriathlon rules have specific color designations as outlined below. For local races with adaptive triathlon, these cap requirements aren't required. One cap color can be used for all adaptive athletes. The brighter the color the better!



SWIM CAP OFFICIAL RULES	
SWIM CAP COLOR	SWIM EXIT ASSISTANCE
Red	Paratriathlete needs to be lifted from the swim exit to the pre-transition area
Yellow	Paratriathlete needs to be supported to walk/run from the swim exit to the pre-transition area
Green, Orange, or White	Paratriathlete does not need any assistance at the swim exit. White caps will be used for Guides.

- **Wetsuits:** The wetsuit thresholds and rules are slightly different for paratriathletes / adaptive athletes compared to age group athletes. Note: The use of wetsuit bottoms is always permitted.

OFFICIAL WETSUIT THRESHOLDS		
WETSUIT STATUS	PARATRIATHLETES	AGE GROUP ATHLETES*
MANDATORY	64.4F and below	60.6 F and below
PERMITTED (Eligible for Awards)	Up to 76.2F	Up to 78F
ALLOWED (Not Eligible for Awards)	76.3F - 83.9F	78.1F - 83.9F
FORBIDDEN	84F and above	84F and above



**USA Triathlon National Championships and World Triathlon Qualifying Age Group Races have different thresholds.*

Getting In/Out of the Water: When evaluating whether your swim is Para-friendly, there are a few factors to consider when it comes to the start/exit area(s) and the process by which athletes are able to get in and out of the water.

- **Swim Entrance:** Official Paratriathlon rules dictate athletes must have an in-water start. With this in mind, evaluate your swim entrance and consider the best way to help facilitate the athletes getting in the water via the beach, dock, stairs, etc. that make up your current setup. Talk through these logistics with the athlete in your conversations prior to the event and devise a plan for handlers to assist the athlete if necessary.
 - **Swim Entrance Staging Area:** It's likely that athletes will use their prosthetics/wheelchairs to navigate their way to the Swim Entrance. Since these items are not used during the swim portion, athletes will need an area close to the Entrance

where they're able to make this transfer out of their wheelchairs / remove their prosthetics. Consider adding a few barricades around the area to ensure the space is unimpeded by other athletes and spectators. Plan to have folding chairs here for the athletes to help this process to be as seamless as possible.

- **Athlete Baggage:** In point-to-point races where the Swim Start and Finish Line venues are not the same, the race may have an Athlete Baggage program with trucks that transport athletes' personal items from the Start to the Finish to be picked up post-race. It's possible that adaptive athletes may have equipment to transport but are not necessarily able to drop items at the Baggage Drop area because they need it up until the moments just prior to entering the water. If this is the case, handlers/volunteers can help with moving equipment from the Swim Entrance Staging Area to the baggage trucks. Ensure your Athlete Baggage staff is aware these items may be coming separately. Items should be tagged as adaptive athlete items prior to loading. Depending on the athlete's needs, items may need to be available closer to the Finish Line than the standard baggage retrieval area.

SWIM ENTRANCE EXAMPLES	
PHOTO GALLERY	DESCRIPTION
	<p>Wheelchair Access for Beach Start</p> <p>Plywood ramp, Mobi Mats, or Access Trax built to accommodate wheelchairs entering/exiting the water without having to traverse the sand.</p>
	<p>In-Water Start</p> <p>For swim starts where able-bodied athletes jump/dive from a dock or barge, different accommodations will need to be made for adaptive athletes.</p> <p>Handlers can help athletes get in and get situated in the water. Athletes are required to keep one hand on the dock or barge until the official "GO" has been given by race management.</p> <p>Coordinate these logistics with your race timer. Since the timing mats are located on the dock and there will be a delay between when they cross the mat and when their race officially starts, their mat time should not be used. The time of day when the "GO" time is given should be noted and used as the start time.</p>



Dock or Barge Start

Official Paratriathlon rules dictate that athletes must have an in-water start. However, for adaptive triathlon, this can be modified at the discretion of the Race Director if warranted by the circumstances.

For example, in bodies of water where currents are very strong it may not be safe for athletes to hold onto the dock/barge as pictured above. In these circumstances, adaptive athletes can be instructed to sit on the ledge and scoot off into the water when the official “GO” is given.

The same timing considerations noted above will likely pertain to this scenario as well. Coordinate with your race timer.

- **Swim Exit:** Evaluate your Swim Exit in the same way that you did the Swim Start. Take a look at the surface of your Exit (i.e. sand, grass, stairs) and devise a plan with the athlete for the best way that handlers can assist with getting them out of the water.
 - **Swim Exit Staging Area:** Once athletes exit the water those with wheelchairs/prosthetics will likely need to be reunited with their equipment immediately upon getting out of the water. The equipment will be needed for them to make their way to T1.

For swim courses that share an entrance and exit, the equipment can live in the one staging area while the athletes are in the water. For swims that are point-to-point, the handlers may need to move the equipment from the start staging area to another staging area at the Swim Exit (often called the Pre-Transition Area). Plan to have folding chairs here as well for athletes to be able to outfit themselves in their equipment. Note that oftentimes, athletes will opt to strip their wetsuit here in this area. Handlers are able to assist with this process upon request from the athlete.

Another important area to consider is the stretch between the Pre-Transition Area and the entrance to T1. Look closely at the distance, incline, turns, and surface. For wheelchairs specifically, keep in mind that their racing equipment lives in Transition. For this area between the Exit and T1, they will be using their day chairs, which are not as versatile when it comes to navigating difficult terrain.







OFFICIAL PRE-TRANSITION RULES:	
CATEGORY	RULE
ALL	Bicycles, tandems, or handcycles are not allowed from the Pre-Transition Area to Transition.
ALL	No athlete equipment can be left in the pre-transition area once the athlete exits the area. The personal handler is allowed to carry the athlete's equipment
ALL	Adapted cleats and bike shoes with non-exposed cleats (that are mounted on prosthetic legs) are allowed in the pre-transition area, provided that the cleats are enclosed by anti-slip materials
WHEELCHAIR	Athletes must use a day chair to go from Pre-Transition to Transition. The wheelchairs must have functional brakes.
AMBULATORY	Paratriathletes with an absent lower limb must use prosthesis or crutches between pre-transition and T1. Hopping on one leg is not permitted.

Swim Course: If the swim takes place in a body of water that is affected by tides and currents, chances are these flow timelines and knots projections are already top of mind for you. Don't forget to consider this information in the context of your adaptive athletes and their start/end times in the water. While it's standard practice to start these athletes about 5-10 minutes prior to the age groups if there are other factors specific to your water conditions these should be taken into account before finalizing any timelines.

- **Multiple Loop Courses:** For multiple loop courses, adaptive athletes are not required to exit the water prior to beginning their second loop. The athlete (and guide/partner if needed) will stay in the water for the entire swim. If the rest of the racers are running on and off the beach in between loops, there will have to be an exception made for adaptive athletes (especially Wheelchair athletes and ambulatory athletes with leg Impairment athletes). Arm impairment athletes and VI/Guides can certainly run on and off the beach in between loops if discussed beforehand.
 - Engage your timer to talk through the best ways to be able to accurately capture the athlete's swim times given potential deviations from the route of age group athletes.

Bike:

Bike Equipment: Along a triathlon bike course you may see athletes using a few different types of equipment. To compete in accordance with the Official Paratriathlon rules, there are strict equipment specifications for each of the groups listed below. Adaptive Triathlon allows for a bit more flexibility in the equipment measurements and also allows athletes to use equipment in combinations that are not

BIKE EQUIPMENT:			
UPRIGHT BIKES	HANDCYCLES	TANDEM BIKES	RECUMBENT TRIKES**
Age Group Athletes & Ambulatory Athletes	Wheelchair Athletes	Visually Impaired Athletes + Guides	Adaptive Athletes ONLY*
			 <i>*Not officially recognized in Paratriathlon, but allowed in Adaptive Triathlon</i>

****Recumbent bikes (2 wheels) are not allowed on the course in either Paratriathlon or Adaptive Triathlon.**

Bike Course: Evaluate the bike course taking into consideration the elements below:

- Closed vs. Open Course:** For open courses where vehicles will share roads with cyclists, a robust plan for delineation between athletes and vehicles is the number one safety priority. This can be accomplished with a variety of different equipment (i.e. delineators, barricades, construction barriers) depending on the distance, road width, and traffic speed/density. This affects all participants, not just adaptive athletes, but keep in mind that hand cyclists will be lower to the ground and may be more difficult for vehicles to see along the course.
- Elevation:** The official Paratriathlon Rules dictate that no bike course shall have a maximum gradient over 12% at the steepest section. Athletes utilizing handcycles push their full body weight using their arms. Navigating steep inclines is considered to be much more challenging for these athletes as compared to able-bodied athletes riding upright bikes, propelled by the force of their legs.
- Course Width:** The minimum width needed for your bike course should be determined based on the total number of athletes and anticipated flow rates (# of athletes passing a given point per minute). As a general rule of thumb, all sections of the course should have at least enough space for two handcycles to be riding side-by-side (approx 3 feet each) with space alongside for an upright bike to be able to pass (approx 3 feet). This totals about 10-12 feet in width. For races with a large athlete field, that number may need to increase to accommodate the athlete flow.



- **Sharp Turns:** Evaluate sharp turns along the route. Turns can be especially tricky for handcycles when they are located at the bottom of a downhill. At locations with sharp turns, it's best practice to set up hay bales at the base of the turn. Should any athletes overshoot the turn, the hay bales help to slow them down and create a softer landing.

Turnaround points that involve a 180-degree swing can also be difficult to maneuver as handcycles require a wider turning radius than an upright bike. Evaluate the width of turnaround points. Any measures you might be able to take to widen the lanes at these locations will make this a safer athlete experience.






- **Curbs, Ledges & Bumps:** Identify any curbs or ledges that exist on the bike course as these may need to be ramped to help provide a safer experience. Railroad tracks and dramatic speed bumps can also present potential hazards for hand cyclists as the sudden terrain change can cause their legs to dislodge from the handcycle which poses a threat to steering and maintaining control or bottoming out.

Pro Tip:

When you create your course directional signage plan for the Bike & Run portions of the event, take a closer look at the height of your signs. Handcycles and racing wheelchairs are lower to the ground so tall signs (i.e. L-poles, T-poles) aren't always in their immediate field of vision and might be missed. Consider adding signage options at lower heights (i.e. A-Frames) and/or position volunteers at key turns along the course to supplement signage and help communicate instructions.

Run:

Run Equipment: To compete in accordance with the Official Paratriathlon rules, there are strict equipment specifications for each of the groups listed below. Adaptive Triathlon rules allow for a bit more flexibility in the equipment measurements and also allow athletes to use equipment in combinations that are not permitted in Paratriathlon.

RUN EQUIPMENT		
WHEELCHAIRS	PROSTHETIC BLADES	TETHER
<p>Racing Wheelchairs</p>  <p>Sports Wheelchairs Everyday Wheelchairs</p>  	<p>Ambulatory Athletes</p> 	<p>Visually Impaired Athletes + Guides</p>  <p>The tether must be non-elastic material and the paratriathlete and Guide must not be more than 0.5m in distance apart.</p>

Run Course: There is a lot of overlap in the considerations for the bike and run course, since both involve the evaluation of the roadways along your route:

- **Surface:** Is the run course entirely on paved roads or are there portions of the run that are on the sidewalk and/or include stretches of sand, gravel, dirt, or other unpaved surfaces? If there are any deviations from paved roadway, this is something that should be discussed with adaptive athletes in advance to confirm they are comfortable navigating these surfaces with their equipment.
- **Closed vs. Open Route:** Similar to the open routes along the bike course, safety measures to separate vehicle traffic from athlete traffic along the run course is a top priority.
- **Elevation:** The official Paratriathlon Rules dictate that no run course shall have a maximum gradient over 5% at the steepest section.
- **Course Width:** The minimum width needed for your run course should be determined based on the total number of athletes and anticipated flow rates (# of athletes passing a given point per minute). If you have Visually Impaired athletes in your race, keep in mind that they will be tethered together and will be running side-by-side for the entirety of the race. Enough width is needed along the course for other runners to be able to pass alongside these teams.
- **Sharp Turns:** For 90-degree turns, adaptive athletes using racing wheelchairs may need a bit more notice of an upcoming turn than athletes running the course on foot to allow time to turn



the chair. Take this into account when positioning signage along the route. It's best practice to have 1-2 warning arrows leading up to the turn, along with the arrow at the turn itself.

For 180-degree turnarounds, racing wheelchairs require a much wider radius than upright runners. Plan for a minimum of 10-12 feet of width at the turnaround point to allow the space for adaptive athletes to fully rotate the chair.

- **Curbs, Ledges & Bumps:** Similar to the bike course, evaluate your run course for any curbs, ledges, speed bumps, or railroad tracks. Identify the placements of curb cuts and consider the addition of ramps if applicable.

Pro Tip:

For the run course, consider providing wheelchair athletes with a volunteer/staff cyclist to ride out in front of them to help with visibility. Racing wheelchairs are oftentimes moving at a faster clip than athletes running on-foot. An accompanying cyclist with a whistle can help to make other athletes along the route aware of the wheelchair athlete's presence to help keep everyone safe.

Finish:

Finish Break Tape: If your race uses a break tape to welcome in the first finishers, consider implementing the same protocol for the first finishers in the primary adaptive athlete sub-divisions: Wheelchair, Ambulatory, and Visually Impaired. Since you may not necessarily have lead cyclists assigned to all these athletes in the same way you might for the overall race leaders, plan to position a spotter at the entrance to the Finish Chute to be on the lookout for these adaptive athletes. These spotters can radio to the team at the Finish Line to get in position with the break tape.

Pro Tip:

When the overall race leaders cross the Finish Line, they're ahead of the masses, so there is ample space for the quintessential break tape moment. This may not necessarily be the case when the first adaptive athletes are finishing. Depending on the timing, it's possible the masses may have already started to finish. If so, consider setting out cones to delineate a small lane for these lead adaptive athlete finishers. This will help to ensure an unimpeded break tape experience and will help preserve the photo op. A-Frame signage communicating the split between adaptive athletes and age group athletes can be added to help reinforce the lanes.

Post-Finish Area: Adaptive athletes crossing the finish line in racing wheelchairs will likely be moving forward at a greater speed than able-bodied athletes crossing the finish on-foot. This means that they'll need a longer distance post-finish to be able to slow down and come to a complete stop. Leave ample space between the finish line and where the amenity distribution area begins to ensure safety of athletes and volunteers. As a general rule of thumb, there should be a 50-foot minimum distance of



open space immediately following the finish line. The larger the athlete field, the longer this distance should extend.

Medal, Food & Drink Distribution: Evaluate the accessibility of your athlete recovery areas where medals and food and drink are being distributed. If there is an extremely long walk-off prior to reaching these amenities and/or these items are being distributed on unpaved surfaces, consider creating a break in the barricade/fencing after the Finish Line to create a small area where adaptive athletes can pull off to the side. Within this area, volunteers/staff can assist adaptive athletes with collecting these amenities more easily.

Athlete Baggage Pickup: For races with an Athlete Baggage operation that transports athlete items from the Swim Start to the Finish Line, take a look at the proximity of the post-race baggage retrieval area and the Finish Line. It's possible that adaptive athletes may need access to the items/equipment immediately upon crossing the Finish Line. If this is the case, consider staging the items in an area closer to the Finish Line (perhaps along with the amenities outlined above!) to help provide a more seamless reunion with their belongings.

Awards:

Everyone likes to be recognized for their accomplishments. Adaptive athletes should be included in the awards ceremony the same as all other participants.. Here are the standard awards offerings:

AWARDS CATEGORIES		
CATEGORY	MALE	FEMALE
Wheelchair	1st Place	1st Place
Ambulatory	1st Place	1st Place
Visually Impaired	1st Place	1st Place
Other	1st Place	1st Place

For races with large adaptive fields, consider adding 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place for each category to be able to recognize the achievements of more athletes.

Ceremony Stage: Race awards ceremonies are typically held on a stage as part of the Finish Festival experience. For temporary stages that are constructed specifically for the event, work with the equipment vendor to provide a ramp instead of or in addition to stairs to allow adaptive athletes to also be able to get up on stage. If there are factors that prevent a ramp from being installed (inadequate space, financial implications) or if you plan to use an existing stage at the venue that does not have a ramp, adjust your run of show accordingly. Plan for the adaptive athlete awards to be distributed on ground level in front of the stage. Ensure your emcee, audio vendor, and support staff are prepared for



Ceremony Podiums: Some races have 1st Place, 2nd Place, and 3rd Place branded podiums to recognize the winners and help identify who's who in the photos. Depending on their disabilities, adaptive athletes may not be able to climb up and/or stand on podiums. If applicable, consider ordering small A-Frames with the 1st Place, 2nd Place, and 3rd Place designations that can be placed out on the ground alongside the athletes to allow for meaningful photo ops.

Pro Tip:

When creating your awards ceremony Run of Show, consider the timing of when the adaptive athlete awards will be presented. Oftentimes, this category is presented after the age group awards and by this point, a lot of the athletes and spectators have left the site. If it's possible with the time of day of the ceremony as well as the projected adaptive athlete finish times, consider moving this category toward the beginning of the ceremony. Having more eyes on this part of the awards ceremony may help to foster a spirit of inclusion, inspire others, and generate more media attention.

Follow Up & Feedback:

The work doesn't stop once the athletes cross the Finish Line! The post-event follow up with adaptive athletes is just as important as the outreach prior to the event. Share a survey, send a personal thank you email and/or call the athlete in the days after the race to hear about their race experience. This feedback can provide valuable insight in how to improve the adaptive athlete processes, communication, and logistics for future years.

MARKETING, PROMOTION & PARTNERSHIPS

Participation of adaptive athletes in your race can help to highlight your event in a positive light, showcasing a spirit of inclusion and helping to inspire a focus on accessibility. In this section, we'll review how to promote your event as an Adaptive-Friendly race to athletes and beyond, partnerships with organizations focused on supporting disabled athletes, and potential sponsorship opportunities.

Marketing & Promotion: Use your existing marketing channels to highlight that the race is Adaptive-Friendly to help spread the word. The race website, social media channels, and email communications are all vehicles that can help to deliver and spread the message. Early and frequent promotion of Adaptive-Friendly opportunities helps to foster confidence in adaptive athletes that intentional care and thought has been applied to creating an inclusive race environment.

Adaptive Sports Organizations: There are a variety of organizations dedicated to helping adaptive athletes to participate in sports. The [Challenged Athletes Foundation \(CAF\)](#), [Dare2Tri](#), [Achilles International](#), [Team Catapult](#), and [Para Endurance Coaching](#) are a few of the most prevalent organizations in the triathlon space. These groups help to break down the barriers to entry for athletes with disabilities to get involved in triathlon by providing the following resources:



- Grants for adaptive sports equipment, coaching, and competition expenses
- Camps and clinics that provide specialized coaching to adaptive athletes
- Education and training opportunities
- Recommendations on Para-Friendly races and activities
- Community participation in races and assistance facilitating athlete logistics

These organizations can be a great resource to help to grow Adaptive Triathlon at your event. They have relationships with athletes nation-wide and can help bridge the gap between athletes and races by promoting events to their community base. Oftentimes, they're ready, willing, and able to work with Race Directors to help coordinate the logistical considerations outlined in the previous section. These groups are ready, willing, and able to partner with races to ensure their athletes have a positive experience at your event. It's a win-win for everyone involved when Adaptive Triathlon is successful!

Interested in reaching out? Introduce yourself today!

Challenged Athletes Foundation (CAF) | marketing@challengedathletes.org

Dare2Tri | info@dare2tri.org

Achilles International | info@achillesinternational.org

Team Catapult | hello@teamcatapult.org

Para Endurance Coaching | scott@paraendurance.com

PR Opportunities: When reaching out to the adaptive athletes in your race to coordinate the logistical considerations, take the time to learn about the athlete's specific needs for assistance and their athletic journey to get to this point. Most adaptive athletes are excited to share their story in an effort to inspire and encourage others to get involved in the sport. Ask the athlete(s) if they are comfortable being featured in promotional opportunities/news stories associated with the event. If so, there are a few ways to help share the athlete's story which can help promote participation in Adaptive Triathlon and increase exposure for the event itself:

- Feature story on social media channels
- Feature story in email marketing
- Engage media outlets with the story. Local networks and newspapers are always looking for human interest stories
- On-site at the race, capture race photos/video content of the athlete participating which can be used in future promotional materials for Adaptive Triathlon



Pro Tip:

Gathering inspiring stories from all athletes, not just adaptive athletes, can be a great way to generate content for your event to use on your own internal channels and/or pitch to local media. There are a lot of inspiring stories out there about how athletes might be using your event to tackle health and wellness issues, overcome tragedy and loss, and build meaningful relationships. Consider adding an open-ended question to your registration process where people can tell their story. After reviewing the submissions, follow up with any athletes you'd like to feature to learn more and gain their permission to share their stories publicly. Handle personal stories with care and promote, but don't exploit!

Sponsorship Opportunities: In this day and age, a lot of companies are looking for ways to demonstrate their commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. Preaching about these values is no longer enough. Corporate groups are looking for ways to actively engage their employees with experiences that embody these values and foster an inclusive spirit of teamwork. This makes Adaptive Triathlon a very sellable piece of inventory when it comes to developing sponsorship packages.

By selling an official sponsor of Adaptive Triathlon in your race, this can create opportunities for additional financial investment in the growth of the division and can allow for experiential enhancements for the adaptive athletes that help to encourage participation and retention year over year.

Race Spotlight:

In the mid-2000s, Accenture was the Official Sponsor of the New York City Triathlon's Paratriathlon Championship. This was a long-standing partnership which helped to boost the notoriety of both the New York City Triathlon and highlighted the importance of adaptive sports in large-scale sporting events.

At its peak, the program had 50-75 registered athletes with disabilities who were attracted to the Big Apple to compete for a prize purse (one of the first of its kind) along with white glove service throughout race weekend. A few highlights of the program:

- ★ *Dedicated Program Manager to serve as liaison with athletes to coordinate all logistical needs*
- ★ *Accenture employees served as the Volunteer Handlers as a team-building activity*
- ★ *Paratriathlete Breakfast at a local NYC restaurant welcoming athletes to the race*
- ★ *A dedicated Paratriathlete & Handler Briefing and exclusive Packet Pick-Up area at the pre-event Sports & Fitness Expo*
- ★ *Assistance with equipment staging and guided Transition tour during the Mandatory Bike Check-In period the day prior to the race*
- ★ *Paratriathlete hospitality area at the Swim Start to serve as a one-stop shop for athlete equipment, ADA toilets, hydration, and baggage drop*

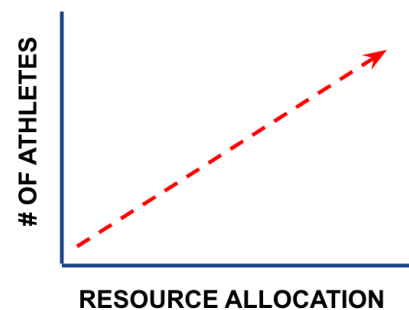


Co-branded Accenture and New York City Triathlon branded break tape photo ops for the lead finishers

- ★ *Paratriathlete hospitality area at the immediate Finish line to serve as a one-stop shop for athlete equipment, ADA toilets, recovery hydration and food, and baggage retrieval*
- ★ *An Accenture VIP tent within the Finish Festival open to Handlers and athletes to celebrate with a gourmet lunch spread*
- ★ *Winners recognized alongside the Elite Athletes at a joint dedicated Pro + Paratriathlete Awards Ceremony. Lead athletes recognized with custom awards and prize purse winnings*

SCALABILITY & MANAGEMENT:

As you read through the previous sections, you probably found yourself wondering how the implementation of Adaptive Triathlon affects your current staffing operation and your bottom line. Who is going to be responsible for overseeing the logistical considerations and communications and how are we going to pay for it? This largely depends on the number of Adaptive athletes competing in your event. This can be a gradual evolution where the resource allocation increases with the growth of the athlete field.



Pro Tip:

When Adaptive athletes were asked about their favorite races and what sets these events apart from the rest, the common theme was the personal outreach from the race management team. The genuine effort from the race to understand their needs and a receptiveness to work through solutions together goes a long way. Building these personal relationships is a driving factor in retention of adaptive athletes year-over-year.

- **One or two Adaptive Athletes:** In scenarios where there are one or two adaptive athletes in the race, the relationship between the race and the athlete is typically owned by the Race Director. The Race Director has the operational knowledge of the event logistics and the authority to make decisions regarding accommodations that may be needed for the athlete. In the first couple years of adaptive athlete participation, the Race Director's direct involvement helps to establish a precedent and build a solid framework for the program.

In these scenarios where an adaptive athlete program is in its infancy, athletes are generally understanding that the resources an event is able to provide might be more limited. In most cases, the athletes are just happy to have an opportunity to race and are willing to work with the Race Director to devise solutions that are operationally and financially realistic.



- **Up to 10 Adaptive Athletes:** As participation numbers increase between two and 10 Adaptive athletes, it's possible this might become too much for the Race Director to handle in addition to their many other responsibilities. In this case, appoint another member of the team (i.e. Athlete Services Manager/Volunteer Manager/Operations Manager) to help support the adaptive athlete logistics. With the increased number of athletes, it will be important to have another person in addition to the Race Director with eyes on the adaptive athlete program, leading up to an on-site race weekend.

- **10+ Adaptive Athletes:** Once participation numbers climb above ten adaptive athletes, consider contracting a dedicated Adaptive Triathlon Program Manager, whose primary responsibility for the event is to handle all things concerning Adaptive athletes. This Manager's role can be two-fold:
 1. Continue to grow participation by developing and strengthening relationships with adaptive sports organizations, local coaches, and athletes

 2. Focus on the creation of a seamless event experience for Adaptive athletes by buttoning up all the race weekend logistics:
 - a. Personal touchpoint established with pre-event communication
 - b. Enthusiastic and well-trained Volunteer Handlers
 - c. Race weekend accessibility and safety
 - d. As the program continues to increase in size, explore the possibility of investing in some experiential elements for the division to help set your race apart from others

Race Spotlight:

Over the past 10 years, the Pleasant Prairie Triathlon in Wisconsin has grown from hosting a couple of adaptive athletes to welcoming about 30-40 athletes annually. In 2017 and 2018, the race was selected by USA Triathlon to host the Paratriathlon National Championships. In 2021, the race was the home of the PATCO Americas Triathlon Para Championships, where over 60 paratriathletes competed, and 10+ paratriathletes qualified for the 2021 Paralympic Games in Tokyo.

Race Director, Ryan Griessmeyer, of Race Day Events provided the following tips for growing your adaptive athlete participation:

- ★ *Ask a LOT of questions! Work closely with coaches and adaptive sport organizations to help guide you.*

- ★ *Start small with a couple of adaptive athletes and use it as a learning experience. It's difficult to plan for something you haven't seen with your own eyes. Carve out time race weekend to observe the equipment being used and watch how adaptive athletes experience the sites and the course.*



- ★ *As the number of adaptive athletes grows, consider creating an Adaptive Athlete Guide and distribute to athletes 7-10 days prior to the event. Schedule a call with the athletes to provide them with an opportunity to ask questions and/or express concerns. This still provides you with enough time to make adjustments to race logistics plans if necessary.*
- ★ *If there are areas of the course that might be a bit tricky, do a dry-run with the athlete on-site the day before. For example, if there's a narrow turnaround point or an area of rough terrain, allow the athletes to test it out with their equipment. This allows you to make any necessary equipment / staffing adjustments and it provides the athlete with peace of mind.*
- ★ *The most valuable information often comes in the form of post-race feedback. The best time to collect feedback is while it's fresh! Assign a staff member to engage with the first 4-5 adaptive athletes (and able-bodied athletes!) that cross the finish line to ask about their race experience. Jot down notes that can be re-visited during the post-event debrief.*

Youth Adaptive Triathlon: Another way to increase the sustainability of Adaptive Triathlon in your event is to engage the next generation of athletes. If you have existing Youth Triathlon or Splash & Dash events, consider opening these events to adaptive athletes to create a participation pipeline. Reach out to local coaches and adaptive sport organizations to help recruit youth athletes to take part in your events.

CONCLUSION:

Dispelling Common Adaptive Triathlon Myths: Below are some comments we've all heard from Race Directors hesitant to add an Adaptive Triathlon division to their events and a summary of what we've learned throughout this section to refute these myths:

"Allowing an adaptive athlete to race creates too much extra work..."

The last thing adaptive athletes want is to be considered a burden or an afterthought. Unfortunately, this is often what happens and how they're made to feel. As the Race Director, during the event planning there are many groups you take the time to accommodate - volunteers, city agency contacts, staff members, etc. Oftentimes, you don't think twice about honoring their requests because of strong personal relationships with these groups. Take the time to get to know the Adaptive athletes competing in your race. Once they're more than a name or an email on a computer screen, it'll help put the work in perspective.



“It’s too expensive to add all these extra components for only 1-2 adaptive athletes...”

Many of the considerations discussed in the preceding sections do not involve additional hard cost. That said, items like ADA toilets and additional awards may come with a price tag. For races with only 1-2 adaptive athletes, these athletes are likely not expecting all the bells and whistles. Be open and transparent with the athletes about what elements you are able to provide and those that might not fit in the budget. Investment in an adaptive division often results in increased media impressions and news coverage for the event. Perhaps there’s a way to get creative with your budgeting that these incremental costs incurred for the adaptive division hit the marketing side of your budget.

“Adaptive athletes on the course will impede the experience of our Age Group athletes...”

In general, Age Group athletes are receptive to Adaptive athlete involvement in the race. There’s a level of respect and camaraderie that comes from all athletes, both able-bodied and impaired, competing alongside one another to accomplish a goal. Creating a positive race experience for both these athlete groups is not mutually exclusive. With the proper operational planning, able-bodied and adaptive athletes can both have safe, enjoyable races.

“I’m worried adaptive athletes won’t be prepared to take on my race...”

The barriers to entry for an adaptive athlete to participate in a race are typically great. Adaptive athletes tend to have more invested in the bigger picture. They conduct research to find events that will meet their needs. They take on the logistics of lining up schedules of Guides, Handlers, and other members of their support crew. Considering the expense of the racing equipment, coupled with the complexities of schlepping it to/from race sites makes the sheer act of attending events a tremendous undertaking. That’s not to mention all of the time invested with clinics, coaches, and camps to not only learn to use their adaptive equipment, but fine tune their abilities to tackle three different disciplines in the swim, the bike, and the run. It’s likely you’ll have athletes in your race who have gone from the couch to the start line without much training, but chances are slim they are part of your Adaptive division...

Over the past 20-plus years, there has been great work done in the development and growth of Paratriathlon and Adaptive Triathlon. Commitment from Race Directors nationwide to introduce these divisions in their events will go a long way to create opportunities for both the everyday adaptive athlete and paratriathletes with their sights on the Paralympics.



The information in this Guide is for general information purposes and should be used as a general guide only. The information in this Guide is not intended to be legal advice or consultant advice and you should consult with appropriate experts before making any decisions or taking any actions. USA Triathlon does not assume any responsibility for the accuracy of the information contained in this Guide nor its suitability for any purpose. USA Triathlon makes no representation or warranty, express or implied, regarding the information in this Guide. The information is subject to change without notice. Your use of the information in this Guide is solely at your own risk. The Guide may also contain links to third-party content, which USA Triathlon does not warrant, endorse, or assume liability for the third-party content.