

# Starting a Program for Individuals with Disabilities

## *Things to Consider for Success*



Are you thinking about starting a golf program to help individuals with disabilities learn to play golf? Perhaps you are a therapeutic specialist and want to incorporate golf into your treatment plan for your patients. You could also be a family member or a friend of an individual with a disability and a program such as this does not exist in your area and you are looking to facilitate that very effort? Whatever the reasons, it can be a fantastic journey for you, the instructors, the volunteers and most importantly, the golfers. But, there are some things you need to know to maximize your chances of success.

If you are reading this and thinking about putting your foot in the water, read on and know this.

Beyond being bigger than most people would believe, the community of folks and programs around the country looking to help individuals with disabilities participate in the game of golf is a community of cooperation, mutual support and an unabashed desire to contribute to the health and wellness of others. We're glad you are curious!

Below is a departure point and no "starting point" can ever capture it all, but this I can assure you ... if you start here and can work through these program elements and are able to answer most of them, your chances of having long term success are greater. If you can't answer them all, or need help, there are plenty of folks willing to advise you as best as possible, or steer you in the right direction, including our Alliance and others around the country.

You will see a mention of both golf and the involvement of therapeutic specialists in these types of programs. Working with individuals with disabilities will involve different styles of teaching, techniques, or communications a golf professional may not have experienced in the past. Therapeutic specialists and organizations work with individuals with a range of disabilities every day, so drawing them into your program, or perhaps it is them drawing you into theirs can lead to great benefit for the participant and is typically an element of high functioning and successful programs.

It is very important to have a clear vision of "who" you will be serving with your program as the instructional and/or therapeutic requirements vary across disabilities with regards to not only "how you coach" your participants but also "how you train" your program coaches and volunteers to work with these participants. Working with intellectual, neurological, sensory or mobility disabilities each require unique approaches to help the golfer succeed.

Programs can succeed if they work with a specific disability or audience but can also succeed if the program caters to a broader set. Understanding that golf instruction for an individual with a

prosthetic leg will involve different instructional techniques than working with an individual with Autism is but one example. Either approach positively impacts the lives of others.

The bottom line? Be clear from the beginning with your purpose and the audience you want to reach. Where does your program go from there? Time will tell.

As many of us know who have either started, or been involved in these types of programs in our careers, golf provides a path to the inclusion of individuals with disabilities not only on the golf course, but back into life in general, often from the isolation individuals with disabilities personally feel, or that still exists due to lack of access those without disabilities never have to think twice about.

So first, a big thanks if you are thinking about starting a program! Here's a few things you should know to get started.

Let's start with "why" are you considering starting a program, or have you already made a decision to do so?

There is likely a very strong personal reason you or others along with you want to start this kind of program. Whatever the reasons may be, that internal **desire** is a great start and can take you a long way towards a successful program, but let there be no doubt, you are about to be running a small business.

Are you starting a program that is already under a larger state, regional, national or organization's program expansion efforts? If so, you should be receiving ample guidance and instruction regarding program elements, program descriptions, lesson plans, budget examples and more. However, your program success will still depend on many of the things listed below and what you should fully understand for your program to succeed.

If you are starting a new business under which your programs will fall, city, county and state requirements regarding the establishment of a business will vary as will the fees to set the business up. You'll want to research this all on the front end through the appropriate agency website, or take a trip to city hall.

In the end, a program is going to come down to who, what, where, when, and how. Take a quick look at the list below and we'll dig deeper into each of these as we progress.

- Mission, goals and objectives
- Target audience
- Area demographics and population
- Willing location with golf instructors
- Fundraising plans
- Nearby schools and/or therapeutic organizations with interested clinical staff and/or participants

- Facilities to be used are in compliance with the ADA
- Instructor qualifications and experience
- Training your program staff
- Equipment requirements
- Transportation requirements
- Volunteer resources and training
- Lesson plans
- Refreshments, awards, recognition
- Inclusive activities
- Marketing
- Budget
- Business plan

Let's begin with some general program identification elements.

Who is the **target audience** of your program? What is the demographic? What types of disabilities will you be focused on?

- Adults? Children? Vets? Non-Vets? Some of these? All of these?
- Mobility, sensory, neurological, or intellectual disabilities?

Do you have a **willing location with golf instructors** who want to contribute?

**Do you have a plan to raise money** to support your program? Whether a grassroots program initiated by like-minded individuals or an intention to be part of a larger national program under the umbrella of a large golf industry association, you are going to need to generate your own revenue from donors, sponsors, partners, etc., to have long term success. The demand on national programs is high which is a good thing but also leads to the requirement to share available funds across programs around the country. If you want to own your success, plan from the beginning to achieve self-sustainability.

Are you near any **therapeutic organizations** with a clinical staff or patients that are interested in participating? We see golf as a therapeutic option (physical and emotional) in our travels, but the organization providing therapeutic/clinical services must ensure your golf program elements align and are established as part of their treatment programs. Being associated with a therapeutic organization is not always possible nor is it required. However, these relationships are encouraged if logistically possible in your area as they strengthen the value of golf and its contributions to physical health and emotional well being.

Is there a **demographic and population** in your area that can support a program with participants, volunteers and fundraising support?

Will your program help lead to the **inclusion** of your participants in the game of golf?

If you can get through those questions with definitive YES answers, you are off to a good start and a **Business Plan** is in your future, so continue on!

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Framed as questions below, these program elements are designed to not simply ask you questions but to prompt and advise you to start your program establishment and development process by answering them and putting them down on paper as your first steps towards success.

1. What is your program **mission** or purpose and have you established **goals and objectives** to succeed?
  - 1.1. What will your organizational structure be? Non-profit, for profit, charitable, etc.?
  - 1.2. A clear mission statement is a key element for those within your organization as well as external to your organization regarding your “identity” and who you serve. This is one of the primary ways many people will first understand what you are trying to accomplish.
2. What is your **fundraising plan** to generate revenue to not only help cover costs, but to also grow your program and contribute to its long term sustainability? Thinking about your fundraising opportunities before you start your program is time well spent. Even if part of a larger organizational effort, state, regional, national, etc, local support is extremely important. As national programs grow, they may even be limited with how much they can distribute across programs. Prepare for this and work to control your own destiny!
  - 2.1. Identifying and capturing a strong corporate strategic partner that shares your vision is a plus, so work to develop relationships with organizations that are seeking ways to give back to their communities.
  - 2.2. Are you familiar with **grant programs** that may be available to you? A couple in the golf industry include grant programs from the National Alliance for Accessible Golf and Make Golf Your Thing.
3. **Where** will you conduct your program?
  - 3.1. Have you researched the available golf facilities in the area to include public and private golf courses? Do these courses have a driving range, practice green and what types of restrictions to their use could be in place, such as days, time of day, part of the facility, etc?
  - 3.2. Are there stand-alone driving ranges in the area that could be used, or larger national chains such as Top Golf, Drive Shack and more?
  - 3.3. What about indoor entertainment centers such as Big Shots, Swing Suites, X-Golf and others that could possibly be a part of your programs and or fundraising efforts?
  - 3.4. What will your **fees** be to use these facilities?

4. Are any **therapeutic organizations and/or their clinical staff** involved with your program? Are they seeking “golf as therapy options” for their patients? Who is driving the establishment of the program?
  - 4.1. It's entirely possible your program is being started by a therapeutic organization and involves program instruction at their facility, a golf course, or both.
  - 4.2. Working with individuals in the game of golf with a range of disabilities requires different types of knowledge, whether you are a therapeutic specialist or a golf instructor. Working together, you will present a formidable presence that can lead to success.
5. Are the facilities you intend to use in compliance with the **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** regarding buildings, golf course and driving range access for individuals with disabilities to include, mobility, sensory (sight and hearing), neurological and intellectual?
  - 5.1. Do the facilities you are working with have ADA compliant websites that will help potential participants find and learn more about your program?
  - 5.2. Whether a public, or a private club, the ADA specifies compliance requirements. Even in the case of private clubs, they can be subject to Title III ADA compliance requirements if they conduct or support public events at a level during the year as part of their normal business practices.
  - 5.3. Ensuring you are working with organizations that understand and embrace these access necessities is extremely important for program success.
6. What are your **golf instructor and therapeutic/clinical specialist's qualifications**?
  - 6.1. Knowledge of communication styles, whether verbal or physical, are essential and vary between disabilities, so **training your program staff**, or ensuring they are trained is critical.
    - 6.1.1. There are disabilities wherein loud noises, or physical contact are not-encouraged, conversely, there are disabilities where physical contact may be required.
    - 6.1.2. If working with sight or hearing impaired individuals, how will you communicate what you can easily see or hear, but they can't?
  - 6.2. Have your golf instructors and therapeutic specialists worked with adaptive athletes in the past? Some leading golf associations have developed qualifications and certifications to teach individuals with disabilities, but quite honestly, this is an area that is ripe for improvement in the golf industry in many areas for all types of disabilities. Often, instructors are left to their own devices to “get qualified” in these areas versus receiving initial training as part of their professional education requirements.
7. What **equipment requirements** will you have?
  - 7.1. Will you be providing golf clubs, golf bags, tees and range balls?
  - 7.2. Will you be using other golf equipment such as SNAG golf or others that have been used as entry points for golfers of all ages and abilities.
  - 7.3. Will you be using adaptive equipment that helps students hold golf clubs? Will there be a need for adaptive vehicles for golfers who play from a seated position, or have the ability to be raised from a seated to a standing position by the device?

8. Will there be **transportation requirements** to assist with getting participants to and from the program beyond family or friends, such as transport from a school or therapeutic organization?
9. Will you be utilizing **volunteers**? If so, how many and what are their roles?
  - 9.1. **Volunteers should also receive applicable training** related to working with individuals with disabilities to further enhance your program effectiveness.
10. What will your **lesson plans** look like for your program sessions? Lesson plans can be wide and varied depending on your program, but within the adaptive instructor community, there is no shortage of a willingness to share and help others get started.
  - 10.1. How often will you meet, how long is each session and for how many days/weeks will you meet for each program cycle?
  - 10.2. What do you intend to accomplish and improve upon at each session as your participants progress through the program?
  - 10.3. Will you be working with family and friends of the individuals with disabilities as well so they can keep the golfer playing in between program sessions?
  - 10.4. What is the student:teacher ratio? These can vary depending on the nature of the disabilities, ages of the participants and more.
11. Will you be providing **refreshments** during the program and/or **awards and recognition** to participants?
12. What types of **inclusive activities** can be incorporated in the program so participants not only learn some golf, they are interacting with others, such as family and friends.
  - 12.1. Will family and friends be invited to participate periodically, or as participants in the program? This can be very helpful for them to understand how to help during the “in between” program times, whether week to week, or between program seasons. Keeping participants engaged as they learn is tremendously helpful.
  - 12.2. Are you intending to have any non-golf activities outside of the program, maybe a pizza party, perhaps a trip to the ballpark?
  - 12.3. Whether during the specific program activities related to golf, or even not involving golf, it's never a bad idea to consider other fun activities that have the individuals with disabilities participating side by side with family and friends who may not be disabled.
13. What are your **marketing plans** for program attraction and growth?
  - 13.1. Where will you market and to whom?
  - 13.2. Will you have your own website?
  - 13.3. What tools will you use besides social media?
    - 13.3.1. Local papers, news stations, radio spots, podcasts, magazines?
  - 13.4. What kind of community outreach and where will you market your program?
    - 13.4.1. Schools? Hospitals? Therapeutic Organizations? Other?
14. Now, it's time for a **budget**. Gather your projected expenses and revenues down on paper and develop a **business plan** to go along with it. The business plan does not have to be complicated, but a clear plan that shows who you are and your mission, initial goals and objectives to get there, your budget and any other elements of importance to your success will get it done.

Starting a program like this is not as simple as, “If you build it they will come”, but if you approach it in the right way with a definitive plan and support from individuals in your area that would benefit from the program, including their family and friends, your chances of success are greatly increased.

Thank you for what you are doing to increase the participation of individuals in the game of golf.