



Toronto Pearson Dog Guide Training Program

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Guidance

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance and best practice examples for stakeholders intending to introduce similar initiatives related to accessibility and assistance to persons with disabilities in an airport environment.

The case study is not intended to endorse any technology or provider, but rather provide details of the key considerations as well as various implementation models which could be adopted.

The intended audiences may include but are not limited to: Airports, Airlines, Technology Providers, and Regulatory Bodies.

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Scope of this Guidance

This guidance is provided as a source of information to help and support industry players to implement initiatives related to accessibility and assistance to persons with disabilities in and airport environment.

The Case Study Template

In some situations or jurisdictions, a prescribed case study template may be necessary that meets the local requirements of a particular business, organization, or regulatory body. For this guidance document, the following sections provide the general steps involved in developing a business case and/or case studies, including a brief explanation of their purpose, benefits, and considerations.

CASE STUDY

BACKGROUND/BUSINESS NEEDS

Accessibility at Toronto Pearson is about creating an experience of air travel that enables everyone to participate fully in the exhilaration of exploration, as well as the enjoyment of reuniting with friends and family. Toronto Pearson and the Lions Foundation of Canada Dog Guides are proud to partner with WestJet to provide a training facility for new Dog Guides. The goal of the partnership is to improve independent travel and customer service for travellers of all abilities.

The mission of Lions Foundation of Canada Dog Guides is to empower Canadians with disabilities to navigate their world with confidence and independence by providing Dog Guides at no cost to them and supporting each pair in their journey together.

Lions Foundation of Canada was founded in 1983 by Lions Clubs across Canada. The vision was to provide Dog Guides at no cost to Canadians with visual disabilities, helping them to achieve greater safety and independence. Since then, the Lions Foundation has discovered new ways for Dog Guides to change lives, helping a growing number of Canadians from coast to coast each year. Today, they are the only school that breeds, trains, and matches Dog Guides in seven distinct and unique programs: vision, hearing, service, seizure response, autism assistance, diabetic alert, and facility support.

As part of an intensive training program, the dogs and their clients must pass a public access test before graduating from team training. This enables them to exercise their public access rights, essentially allowing the assistance dog to go anywhere their handler goes. This means their clients can fully rely on the support of their assistance dog in every aspect of their daily living.

Training a Dog Guide to understand how to navigate an airport is incredibly important for several reasons:

- All clients must come to Oakville, Ontario for hands-on training with their new Dog Guide. Lions Foundation of Canada is a national charity with clients living in each province, which means many clients travel through Pearson, arriving for training, and then flying home with their new Dog Guide for the first time together.
- One of the biggest impacts a Dog Guide can make is that it empowers Canadians living with disabilities to navigate their world with increased independence and confidence. For many, this could mean travelling by plane, often for the first time, opening up their world to new places, experiences and opportunities.

At Pearson, this partnership is an important part of our commitment to accessibility and inclusivity. We have worked hard to identify, remove, and prevent barriers for persons with disabilities, and we continue to engage with our community to bring further improvements to the airport. This partnership is just one way we are working to make the airport experience smooth and enjoyable for all.

Through a two-hour training session, the trainers and their dogs move through all areas of the airport departures experience. Starting at check-in, the trainer will navigate the kiosk to receive their boarding pass before proceeding to security screening. Security screening is an important step for trainers and their dogs to familiarize themselves with the requirements and process. Following the screening process, the trainer and their dog will navigate to the airport's pet relief areas to understand the layout and experience the artificial turf. On the way to the board gate, the trainers will practice a number of different techniques with the dog, including asking the dog to open the washroom with a push button, press an elevator call button, or navigate a congested area. During this time, other amenities and services are identified to the trainer to share with their clients. After boarding the aircraft, each dog is tested to validate how the dog enters the aircraft, its positioning through the aisle, and its placement on or by the seat. These are important factors for the trainer to ensure the dog will be comfortable through a new experience.

BENEFITS

We all know that practice makes perfect. Being able to train the Dog Guides in real life settings is essential to their success, and therefore the success of their eventual handler.

Training at the airport allows the instructors to take future Dog Guides through real-life scenarios that they would experience when travelling with their handler. In-airport training exposes the dogs to large crowds, big and small spaces, and many types of distractions which the dogs must learn to avoid and ignore. Even the simple experience of boarding and settling inside a plane can make the difference between a safe and calm flight, and one where a dog is unable to relax.

For handlers, air travel can be an incredibly stressful and worrisome experience. Travelling anywhere with a medical or physical disability can be complicated – adding a dog to the situation may compound their anxiety. By inviting handlers to join these training sessions, they are not only learning how to navigate the airport with a dog – they are building confidence, so that when they eventually do travel, they are better-prepared for the journey ahead.

For airport employees, there is an opportunity to learn directly from the trainers, familiarizing themselves with the requirements of the handler and their Dog Guide. At the same time, there is an avenue to communicate different airport amenities that are available to help travellers with all abilities navigate the airport seamlessly.

The more comfortable the experience can be from start to finish, the better for everyone, from airline employees to fellow travellers and passengers, to the handler, their family, and the Dog Guide.

CONSTRAINTS

Navigating to the secure side of an airport can be challenging, and prior preparation is required with all partners to ensure a successful training experience. For access to government agency space, such as security, customs or immigration, additional authorization is required.

TECHNOLOGY, PROCESS, AND INFRASTRUCTURE REQUIRED

The program does not require technology.

LESSONS LEARNED

This training program is beneficial for the airport, organizations operating at the airport, and the Lions Foundation of Canada Dog Guides. The program generates a lot of exposure and interest for passengers and employees, and an opportunity for everyone involved to learn from the experience.

- Communicate often and leverage all available channels when sharing the training experience and learnings.
- Plan early and get buy-in from all players in the experience, i.e., airlines, government agencies, retail, and restaurants.
- While many are familiar with service dogs for people who are visually impaired, they are not as familiar with the other six programs for which Dog Guides are trained by Lions Foundation of Canada Dog Guides. Some disabilities are invisible. Their clients with Diabetic Alert, Hearing and Seizure Response Dog Guides, for example, may not look like they need a service dog. That's why it is important to remember that you don't have to see a disability for someone to be affected by one.

PICTURES





