

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

NO SHOW LESSONS LEARNED & CONSIDERATIONS

A Compilation for Enhancing Adaptive
Sports Programs for Disabled Veterans
& Disabled Servicemembers



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OVERVIEW

- This briefing contains listings of considerations to reduce occurrences of “No Shows” both prior to and during adaptive sport activities.
- There is no correct solution for all situations; every adaptive sport program must understand its purpose, resources, capabilities, limitations, the needs of the participants it serves, and the many factors related to each of these.
- The slides are broken into different elements of consideration to aid this assessment.
- Each adaptive sport entity and its partners need to analyze these factors and design programs that best meet goals and objectives effectively and efficiently.
- “No Shows” reduce both effectiveness and efficiency.
- The items presenting in this briefing are not directive nor prescriptive, but should be considered in order to reduce “No Shows” in adaptive sport programs.
- This presentation is meant to be a “living” document; if you have any inputs to improve the considerations, VA would appreciate your inputs.



BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

- The issue of “No Shows” was a recognized problem among adaptive sport organizations, but no centralized approach existed to mitigate the problem.
- The Government Accountability Office (GAO) conducted an assessment of VA’s Adaptive Sport Grant Program (GAO-15-791) as required by law.
- The ensuing report, published Sept.28, 2015, www.gao.gov/products/GAO-15-791 recommended VA gather and disseminate to all grantees best practices on ways to reduce incidents of no-shows at grant-funded events.
- VA sought feedback from all FY2014 grantees and identified best practices associated with events requiring attendee travel as well as community-based programming.
- VA conducted a second request for inputs from its network of over 3,200 on the adaptive sport grant distribution list.
- The summary of these best practices are detailed on the following slides.
- The listing of No Show lessons learned and considerations is provided on the VA Adaptive Sports Webpage, <http://www.va.gov/adaptivesports/> and will be periodically reviewed for updating lessons learned.



NO SHOWS AND CANCELLATION POLICIES

- Clear “No Show” and cancellation policies should be advertised, accessible, and user friendly; email and phone info for cancellations should be evident on website and printed material.
- If an activity allows for repeat participation, set performance/fitness goals for participants to achieve prior to attending subsequent events; establishing goals may enhance participation.
- Instead of one standard, individual adaptive sport programs/teams may have policies tailored to its activities and participants’ circumstances, such as coaches linking team players’ tournament eligibility and game playing time to participation.
- “No Show” and cancellation policies should clearly state effects of a “No Show” and timely cancellation, such as financial effects and possible loss of future assistance or participation.
- Conduct after action analysis to identify means to further improve the overall program and better design to mitigate the probability and effects of “No Shows”.
- Include “No Show” of volunteers and other staff needed for activity and apply communication, transportation, and other techniques to promote attendance.



PROGRAM DESIGN I

- Use pre-event survey to determine skill, fitness and interest levels to align participant with appropriate activities; understanding an organization is trying to meet a participant's needs and interests enhances buy-in to participation.
- Anticipate issues before they arise by using a thorough registration process and following up on any unusual statements to address concerns or issues directly.
- Design event as a catalyst for participants to continue doing sports independently and emphasize importance of remaining active year-round; it aids the goal of adaptive sports and contributes to a reputation that enhances future participation.
- Registering athletes at event may increase total participants even with "No Shows".
- Design realistic participation progression plan that doesn't create undue stress.
- Structure multi-activity events so athletes stay on-site to aid participation in all activities until end of day; plan a quiet space to allow those that need solitary place.
- Design event for therapeutic value; have a physically challenging component that will compel a participant to push themselves, focus mentally and test the limits of their physical stamina.



PROGRAM DESIGN (CONT.)

- Conduct introductory adaptive sport activities in conjunction with regular activities to increase participation and reduce uncertainty in participant's decision-making on initial attendance.
- Regularly scheduled programming on multiple days helps set a regimented weekly schedule and thus coming back; the goal is to become an important part of individual's routine, including familiarity with time, site, and transportation factors.
- For training, develop flexible curriculum to allow students who miss one or more classes to be able to participate in a meaningful way and get back involved; a lowered bar to reentry can aid comfort level to get back involved.
- If feasible, include complementary educational and interactive workshops about issues relevant to participants, such as information to learn more about relevant medical conditions to aid understand in a biological sense; sessions may reflect on organization's concern for participants and enhance participation.
- Evaluate all programs to determine effectiveness and conduct *after action reports (analysis)* that aid program effectiveness and reduce negative issues.



INDIVIDUAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Instead of a first come, first served basis for registration, use a method that allows analysis of applicants to identify those best suited for the activity and with more likely to participate.
- Considering some individuals require more time for preparation and transportation to participate in events, arrange timing to not press too early or too late.
- If feasible, be flexible in when participants can participate; instead of one time slot, one day a week, offer multiple times or schedule around participants needs.
- Where possible, include family and/or friends in the adaptive sports learning experience (particularly where it is a first time participant)
- Providing activities that enable participant to be involved as an individual aids initial and ongoing participation by those that have difficulty with team activities or who are in situations where other individuals with disabilities are not available.
- Train staff, adaptive instructors, and volunteers to ensure high quality, safe and effective experiences for participants and recognize individual needs that will enhance both initial and subsequent participation.



GROUP CONSIDERATIONS

- Groups that aren't able to pull a large enough pool of participants together to support the logistics, expenses, or critical mass for an event have higher probability of cancellation; plan and coordinate to understand a group's dynamics.
- For many athletes, it is very important to practice with a diverse group of opponents; design activities to offer the opportunity to engage with a variety of ages, sites, and skills levels, but also be sensitive to mixes that might cause problems, such as gender where trauma may be a factor.
- Due to fewer individuals with disabilities in some areas, for activities that need regular number of participants for viability, using able-bodied athletes alongside disabled participants may work.
- Designate a peer mentor for each participant to encourage their participation in the program/event and provide encouragement and support.
- Use current or past Paralympians or other renowned individuals as adaptive sport clinic instructors, which may increase the likelihood of participation.
- Athletes attend due to others' recommendations; holding a quality event that vets love and recommend to buddies is key. Work with battle buddies to get vets out.



GENERAL PARTNERSHIP CONSIDERATIONS

- In establish partnerships, ensure there are compatible goals and objectives
- Use special events to arrange complementary activities to coincide with adaptive sports; for example, February is Recreational Therapy Month and an adaptive sport event could be linked with an information section with recreational therapists.
- Involve any caregivers, therapists and case managers in activity arrangements.
- Collaborate with lodging facilities for more flexible rates, cancelation, and sign in options to enhance participation and reduce negative “No Show” effects.
- Create partnership agreements to clarify in roles and responsibilities, fiscal responsibility, and avoidance of duplication of effort.
- Be responsive to partner’s needs including providing training in sports skills and collaborating with local community support groups that can assist with services
- Partners may have their own system for distributing information, which requires multiple systems for addressing recruiting needs.
- Ensure partners providing participants give accurate information to aid participation



PARTNERSHIPS WITH VA, DOD, VSOS

- Coordinate schedules to avoid important meetings and events such as support groups, trips, and other sport activities; include all units that may schedule events.
- Coordinate activities with disabled Veteran support entities such as VA Amputee Peer Mentorship Program conducted through VA-Amputee Coalition partnership
- Hold initial sit down with therapists, administrators, and others to explain adaptive sport programs to establish clarity and rapport to aid recruiting and assistance.
- Try to arrange a "warm handoff" from VA therapists to sports coordinators to build relationships with Veterans and enhance accountability on attendance.
- Host activities at partners' facilities to improve access to participants and may include therapeutic treatment programs.
- Partnering at unit level such as National Center for PTSD, Blind Rehabilitation Services, Mental Health Intensive Case Management, can help tailor activities to participants' needs and capabilities.
- Coordinate to avoid conflicts with medical appointments, aid medical referrals and medical clearances, accessing peer support programs, and possibly aid alternative pain management regimens to reduce drug-centered treatment.



ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

- For activities at a river, lake, swamp, or coastline, use a site that enhances access both for individuals with disabilities and for geographic areas served.
- For sites such as resorts, schedule outside of peak use times to allow greater availability of lodging and lower competition for facilities to enhance participation.
- For events with larger geographic outreach, using venues near major airports increases access to ADA-compliant hotels enhancing accommodation options.
- Avoid major holidays, school events, and cultural events that occur annually.
- Consider seasonal temperature and weather factors to avoid extremes that could deter participation.
- Hosting at a centralized site may decrease "no shows" due to consistent location with no confusion of site, providing a sense of security and familiarity.
- Hosting events at multiple locations may provide excitement and newness for those vets comfortable with the organization.
- Using same instructors and space to host events aids familiarity and comfort.



COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS

- Staff communicate with participants to establish rapport and help accountability.
- Contact regularly by many means: email, phone, Facebook, IM, texts. Contact may be monthly, weekly, daily, or tailored to capability, event, and athlete profile.
- Make caregiver the POC where needed; get them involved and part of healing.
- Answer emails and phone calls promptly and be truthful, open and direct.
- Including family members or caregivers in correspondence and activities, helps remind participants of upcoming events.
- Remind participants that others may participate if they cancel in advance
- Create group emails and send reminders of events with details.
- If an athlete misses a session, tailor follow-up message to aid ease of return.
- Talk to each athlete to understand the situation and ensure they plan to attend.
- Get participants to provide full contact information for follow up for activities.



GENERAL OUTREACH CONSIDERATIONS

- Conduct multi-point outreach regularly, clearly communicating the type of activity; use newsletters, e-mails, calls, website, Facebook, social media and mailings.
- For scheduled events, notices and event calendars on social media, TV and cable networks, and other sites, plus emailed to participants help attendance.
- Be truthful, but make individuals want to attend; promote positive aspects of activity, site, ...
- Train personnel in effective communication with individuals with PTS, TBI, and other disabilities that affect communicative skills and retention of information
- Use techniques to identify those with higher risk factors, such as not really motivated to attend, incapable of effectively participating, and “working” the system for maximum assistance.
- Train personnel in Veterans and military cultural issues to enhance effectiveness.
- Provide all event info such as date, start time, end time, equipment necessary to participate, food availability, transportation availability and event parking details.



FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- An initial fee to register, even if nominal, may enhance commitment to attend.
- Include no-shows in budget calculations and expectations.
- Subsidies, such as fees, transport, lodging, and per diem, may aid participation.
- Upfront expenses, even if reimbursed, may deter participation.
- If reimbursement used, have process to allow prompt reimbursement (preferably before end of activity) and ensure participants understand the process.
- Host introductory events with free or reduced costs to lower barrier to participate.
- Use of credit card info or charge deposits may deter participation or result in other negative effects due to confusion, incorrect charges, data vulnerability, etc.
- Experienced participants may help newer ones to solidify knowledge, confidence, comfort, and rapport, thus reinforcing commitment and participation rates.
- A signed financial agreement/cancellation policy may reduce “no shows” and last minute cancellations; this may include financial penalties IF they cancel late.



TRANSPORT TO ACTIVITY CONSIDERATIONS

- If using airports with seasonal conditions, bringing athletes in early may ensure they and their luggage are there to participate fully in all scheduled activities.
- Transport provided by VA hospital aided odds of participation due to decreased cost to individual and transport may be more convenient such as home pick up.
- Assistance with planning and arranging transport may be provided without covering expenses.
- Free transport may or may not decrease commitment to an adaptive sport event.
- If providing a ticket, flight protection in case of cancelation may reduce risk.
- Aid participant-generated transportation option, such as car pools for activities.
- When transport support is not provided, having activities at several sites may allow individuals to participate who might not live near one central facility.
- For transport support, collaborate with DOD and VA facilities, local governments, public transportation districts, VSOs, and other entities; these may result in either direct transportation support or reduced rates for participants.



EVENT SITE TRANSPORT CONSIDERATIONS

- Allowing participants to use their own transportation may aid those that need to feel in control of the situation and appreciate freedom to come and go.
- Monitor the last leg of journey; many potential participants need physical or emotional support to get from the parking lot to the adaptive sport activity and the “No Show” occurs when they do not cover the last stretch at the activity.
- Conduct transportation check-in during events and between sites to ensure participants make it to adaptive sport and other activities such as meals.
- Requiring athletes to use the transportation provided by event keeps folks from wondering off.
- Provide easily understandable directions for arriving at the adaptive sport activity for each mode of transportation applicable: air, vehicle, bus, rail, etc.
- Where applicable, arrange for sufficient, accessible, and affordable parking.
- If another organization is providing transportation, coordinate to prevent late arrivals and early departures that can undermine scheduled activities



ANCILLARY INCENTIVES

- Participants who attend scheduled activities may receive additional access to facilities or participation in subsequent events such as competitions.
- Offering food or a special activity may decrease “No Show” due to convenience, no cost of a meal, and social benefits; also it may result in bringing another participant to the event.
- Providing access to equipment upon completion of an adaptive sport activity
- If space is limited, athletes should be aware that priority will be given to those that made the effort to participate and “No Shows” move an individual down the priority list.
- If incentives based on participation rates, provide opportunities to make up for missed sessions
- When resources for subsidies are limited, a drawing may help attendance.



MISCELLANEOUS CONSIDERATIONS

- Include a feedback on activities, use it and provide feedback to athletes; demonstrating sincere receptiveness to inputs enhances future participation.
- Effective communication can reduce fear, a significant barrier to participation.
- Provide clear and continuous communication.
- Provide an online portal for sign up and registration for activities; this aids participant registration and provides an electronic database to help manage event and outreach activities.
- Over recruit for each event and maintain a waitlist
- There are valid reasons for some “No Shows” (last minute illnesses, accidents, doctor's orders, ...); incorporate these factors in planning.
- Conduct mandatory wake up calls that help athletes to wake up, eat, get to transportation, and get to adaptive sport sites on time.
- Participants that feel a personal relationship with event personnel are more likely to show up.



SUMMARY & POINT OF CONTACT

- There is no correct solution for all situations; every adaptive sport program must understand its purpose, resources, capabilities, limitations, the needs of the participants it serves, and the many factors related to each of these.
- Each adaptive sport entity and its partners need to analyze these factors and design programs that best meet goals and objectives effectively and efficiently.
- “No Shows” reduce both effectiveness and efficiency.
- The items presenting in this briefing are not directive nor prescriptive, but should be considered in order to reduce “No Shows” in adaptive sport programs.
- If you have any inputs to enhance considerations to reduce “No Shows”, please contact the following:
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