



# Atlas Assistance Dogs® Team Facilitator Program

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## Contents

Introduction.....	1
Our Values and Training Methods.....	1
Position Description.....	1
Application and Program Description.....	2
Benefits.....	3
Prerequisites.....	4
Requirements.....	4
Atlas Team Facilitator Leads.....	5
Conclusion.....	5

## Introduction

Thank you for your interest in becoming an Atlas Team Facilitator. Becoming an Atlas Team Facilitator is an investment in yourself that will allow you to expand your knowledge and skills to improve the quality of life for countless individuals. As we are working with vulnerable people as well as dogs, it is critical we approach our work with the utmost of integrity and expertise. Atlas Team Facilitators are who connect our clients to Atlas. They are how we ensure our clients are well supported and properly prepared for certification. Atlas is committed to expanding the resources available to ensure that anyone who would benefit from a qualified assistance dog can have one. Before applying for the position of Atlas Team Facilitator, please read through this Program Description as well as our [FAQs](#) found on our website. Thank you for being part of our mission. Should you have any questions at all, please contact [info@atlasdog.org](mailto:info@atlasdog.org)

## Our Values and Training Methods

All people and dogs deserve to be treated ethically, compassionately, and as individuals. This is core to Atlas' values. We partner with trainers, doctors, patients, and researchers to ensure that the most ethical, scientific, and effective training approaches are available to each person and each dog we work with.

We believe training is about forming trusting relationships with dogs and people. All Atlas Certified Trainers and Atlas Team Facilitators must commit to maximizing positive training methods.

## Position Description

Atlas Team Facilitators are volunteers who work one-on-one with clients prior to their Atlas certification, helping them introduce and refine their dog's disability-mitigating tasks, develop the necessary skills for public access, practice self-advocacy, enhance their knowledge about service dog and general disability



laws, and work through any challenges the team may encounter. Facilitators are experienced handling and training dogs but are not necessarily Atlas Certified Trainers. Facilitators are supported by an Atlas Team Facilitator Lead. Atlas Team Facilitator Leads are Atlas Certified Trainers who are also experienced as Atlas Team Facilitators.

Before a client is ready to work with a facilitator, they will have trained their dog – either with a trainer or on their own – to the point where they can pass Atlas’ Team Readiness Assessment. The dog will need to be at least 14 months old, have behavioral issues resolved, and be mature enough to start working in public. The client will have already gone through an initial phone interview and submitted all paperwork attesting to the health of their dog and their need for a service dog.

The role of the facilitator is to help guide the client/dog team through the final six months leading up to the Public Access Test and certification. The facilitator takes the team through the specialized stages of service dog training, including disability skills and navigating the environments the team experiences day to day.

The facilitator’s first meeting with the team will be at the team evaluation which will also include the regional Atlas Team Facilitator Lead. If the team has already been working with a trainer, that trainer is welcome to attend. The team facilitator lead will oversee the team assessment and help form the training plan the facilitator and team will follow. They will provide ongoing support to the facilitator as needed.

The team facilitator meets then with the team for an hour-long session approximately every two weeks during a six-month period. Some meetings can be done through video conferencing tools such as Facetime or Skype as long as at least one meeting a month is in person. After the six-month period, and when the team is ready, the facilitator conducts and records the team’s Public Access Test which will be reviewed by the Atlas Certification Committee. Please note, some teams may need more than six months to complete the process and input from the facilitator is critical in determining the necessary length of training.

## **Application and Program Description**

There are several steps in applying for the Atlas Team Facilitator position.

1. Download our Atlas Team Facilitator Application package from our [website](#) if you haven’t already and review all materials, starting with the Atlas Team Facilitator – READ ME FIRST document, which is a Getting Started Guide.
2. Submit your completed application to [info@atlasdog.org](mailto:info@atlasdog.org).
3. Request your reference letters using our provided forms. Once we have your reference letters and have reviewed your application, we will schedule an interview with you. We will tell you of your acceptance or any concerns within 48 hours of this interview.
4. We will then conduct a background check. Please note: Convictions do not necessarily prevent eligibility.
5. Confirm your commitment to following Atlas’ Trainer Policies and the expectations of an Atlas Team Facilitator.



6. You will then be granted access to our online program.

In order to become an Atlas Team Facilitator, you will first take a series of online courses. These courses will focus on several areas including ethics; communication and teaching skills; working with people with disabilities; dog health; dog body language; and foundational disability training skills. These classes are a subset of our full trainer course and are provided to you without charge.

Upon successful completion of these classes, you will be invited to come to one of our intensive workshops. Workshops are three days long and offered at least twice a year, typically once in the western part of the US and once in the eastern part. These workshops are required to become a team facilitator and will be an opportunity for you to build relations with other team facilitators and Atlas staff, receive hands on practice working with dogs and their handlers/clients in different public settings, run through different training scenarios, and ask all your questions. All workshops are taught by experts in our field and are an amazing opportunity to expand your knowledge and skills. There is no fee to attend the workshop. Travel and housing expenses are the responsibility of the participant.

Once you have successfully completed our online courses and workshop, you will be sent an Atlas Team Facilitator Agreement to sign and submit. That's it; you are now an Atlas Team Facilitator and are ready to start working with clients. We will assign a facilitator lead to help mentor you and help address any program and training needs and concerns.

We will always contact you before assigning you a new client.

Once you are active as a team facilitator, you are welcome to attend any future workshops or continuing education opportunities Atlas offers to our facilitators.

## **Benefits**

There are many reasons why you might want to become an Atlas Team Facilitator and plenty of benefits.

Team facilitators are all people experienced working with and training dogs. They are not necessarily professional dog trainers, although they can be. Team facilitators might be people who:

- » Have a service dog themselves and want to help other people in need of a service dog benefit from one just like they do
- » Want to work with service dogs and people with disabilities but are not sure where to start or do not make it their full-time profession
- » Have experience training service dogs and have some time to spare from their professional business
- » Want to dip their toes into the world of service dogs and disability and get hands-on experience

By becoming a team facilitator, you get to work with a wide variety of people and dogs and learn first-hand what working with this unique population is like. You get free access to our Atlas Team Facilitator training program which is geared towards helping you develop your skills in communication, teaching, comprehension of disability and service dogs, as well as many aspects of dog training in general. You are a part of the network of other Atlas trainers and facilitators. Most importantly, you get to make a significant difference in the lives of many individuals.



## Prerequisites

- » A minimum of 18 years of age.
- » Ability to pass a background check that determines you do not have a history of abuse toward vulnerable populations such as children, elderly, people with disabilities or animals. Criminal background does not preclude suitability as an Atlas Team Facilitator and is considered on a case-by-case basis.
- » At least two years as the primary handler of a service dog or at least two years of experience in dog training where you are the primary trainer.
- » Commitment to using only ethical, positive reinforcement, force-free methods and tools with all dogs and people, consistent with Atlas' Trainer Policy.
- » At least an intermediate level of knowledge and skills with positive reinforcement training techniques such as clicker/marker training, target training, shaping, capturing, and forming behavior chains.
- » Comfort with technology that will be used in our online program – email, Internet, web browsing, online forms, online chat, web and video conferencing, opening and closing PDFs, reading PowerPoint presentations, recording and sharing videos, reading and editing simple Excel or other spreadsheets.

## Requirements

This section describes the requirements to be an Atlas Team Facilitator. The basic requirements are:

- » Sign a pledge of ethics addressing how dogs and people will be treated.
- » Agree to Atlas' standards regarding professional conduct.
- » Agree to the requirements and policies in the Atlas Team Facilitator Program document (this document) and the Atlas Training Policies document.
- » Commit to be an Atlas Team Facilitator for at least one year during which time you will agree to work with a minimum of two clients (you can choose to work with more).
- » Complete Atlas' online and in-person training program and establish through a combination of certifications, experience, Atlas course work, recommendations, and observations that you have mastered the material in our program.
- » Provide two letters of recommendation that reflect how you interact with people and dogs and can speak to your ethics and values.
- » Be responsive to inquiries from Atlas staff and volunteers regarding the status of your clients and submit regular status logs on the progress of your client.
- » Travel requirements:



- We expect our team facilitators to be able to travel a reasonable distance to clients.
- Travel time to clients may be up to an hour each way (with option for travel reimbursement at \$0.14/mile per federal regulations)
- Some clients may be accepted at a further distance, depending on the client's needs and the availability of the facilitator. These will be looked at on a case-by-case basis and will not be assigned to the facilitator without prior consultation and agreement. If longer distance travel is required, condensed, more intensive training sessions can be considered, and we will offer reimbursement for flights and housing.

## Atlas Team Facilitator Leads

Atlas Team Facilitator Leads are Atlas Certified Trainers or other qualified individuals who have hands-on experience with temperament testing, assessing team readiness, advanced disability skill training, and taking teams through the training and certification process from beginning to end. They are more advanced Atlas Team Facilitators who have experience bringing other teams successfully through the process. They conduct initial client assessments and are there to support the team facilitator and client as needed.

Like Atlas Team Facilitators, Atlas Team Facilitator Leads provide a crucial service in helping people with disabilities learn how to effectively work with their dogs to mitigate their disability and to prepare for Atlas certification. Because team facilitator leads are experienced service dog trainers, they have additional experience and knowledge that enable them to mentor both facilitators and their clients.

Atlas Team Facilitator Leads participate in initial assessments for any new Atlas client and help the client and the Atlas Team Facilitator put the team's training plan in place. Facilitator leads are then available as needed, primarily by email or phone, to support the facilitator and client. In some cases, it may be necessary for the team facilitator lead to be present at a training session or remote training video call to help the client through trickier training situations.

In many cases, Atlas will contact an Atlas Team Facilitator to see if they are interested in being a lead. Current Atlas Team Facilitators who are interested in becoming an Atlas Team Facilitator Lead may also contact [info@atlasdog.org](mailto:info@atlasdog.org). We will schedule an interview to discuss further and will ask for the name and contact information of a former service dog client they wish to use as a reference.

## Conclusion

Thank you for spending the time going through this document and learning about our program. If you would like to apply for the opportunity to become an Atlas Team Facilitator, please go to our [website](#) and download our application package. Feel free to contact us with any questions you might have about our program or organization at [info@atlasdog.org](mailto:info@atlasdog.org). We hope to hear from you soon.