

Owner-Trainer Milestone Tracker

The honest path from candidate to working team — one phase at a time.

Service dogs aren't trained in a weekend. Work these milestones in order, and move to the next phase only when the current one is genuinely solid. Check each one as your dog owns it — calmly and reliably, not just once.

Dog's name _____

Handler _____

Start date _____

Phase 1 — Candidate & foundation

- ☐ Veterinary & orthopedic soundness check passed
- ☐ Genuinely calm, confident, people- and dog-neutral
- ☐ Recovers quickly from surprises
- ☐ Settles on cue for a long stretch
- ☐ Walks on a loose leash
- ☐ Reliable attention / name response
- ☐ Neutral around food, people, and other dogs

Phase 2 — Public-access manners

- ☐ Toilets on cue and on a schedule
- ☐ Lies quietly and out of the way
- ☐ Ignores dropped food and merchandise
- ☐ Unbothered by carts, doors, elevators, and noise
- ☐ Holds together in growing distraction
- ☐ Quiet in public — no vocalizing

Phase 3 — Task training

- ☐ The disability-related task is defined in plain words
- ☐ Task shaped and reliably offered on cue
- ☐ Task holds up at home under mild distraction
- ☐ Task proofed in real public settings
- ☐ Honest limits understood — alerting is never guaranteed

Phase 4 — Working readiness

- ☐ Can answer the two ADA questions in one calm sentence
- ☐ Dog is under control on every outing
- ☐ You know your wash criteria — and that washing is okay

Owner-training is measured in months, not weeks — rushing a young or under-prepared dog into public access usually backfires. And retiring ('washing') a dog that isn't suited is a responsible, kind outcome, not a failure.