



## Paratriathlete Handler Operations Manual

**Introduction:** A handler is a volunteer position whose role is to assist an athlete with a physical disability (aka paratriathlete) complete the multisport event (i.e. triathlon, duathlon, etc). This role is hard work and requires both physical strength and a sensitivity of working with people with a disability (PWOD). However, the reward is significant from a personal gratification standpoint; simply put, the athlete would not be able to cross the finish line without this assistance. Handlers are not personal assistants retrieving meals or arranging travel for the athletes. Their role is strictly limited to race-day specific needs. There are currently two different types of handlers. Swim exit handlers and personal handlers. The difference between these, along with their specific duties and responsibilities, are outlined in the rest of this document. It should be highly noted that swim exit handlers and personal handlers can be the same person but have two different roles on race day. When a race has a large number of athlete's with physical disabilities, it is recommended to separate these two positions as not to clog the swim exit and make the transition from swim to T1 easier to manage. It should also be highly noted that a handler is not a guide or someone who will complete the triathlon along-side the PWOD. This is not permissible in paratriathlon or PC open rules.

### Swim Exit Handler

Who are they?: A swim exit handler is a volunteer position that the race director has to recruit as part of their overall event volunteer plan. A swim exit handler is someone who assists athletes with the swim exit portion of the race. This position requires physical strength (especially for wheelchair athletes who may need to be physically lifted out of the water. This job is not recommended for youth aged children or those with any lifting precautions.

Attire: This volunteer position is sure to get the handler wet so it is recommended they wear clothing that is older and not in pristine condition. If the water is cold, wetsuit bottoms or a full wetsuit could be necessary. Rubber-soled footwear is also appropriate so that the handler does not slip on algae or any other slippery material that may be in the shallow water or at the actual swim exit. Type of footwear may also vary if the swim exit is sand.

Handler Allowance: There is no set number of swim exit handlers that are required by USAT rules, but a general rule of thumb is that you need 2 swim exit handlers for every four Paratriathletes that are competing. For example, if you have 8 athletes signed up for the paratriathlon or PC open division, you would need a minimum of 4 swim exit handlers. This is the optimal number needed so that no athlete is left in the water waiting on a volunteer to help them out of the water to get to their transition space.



Specific Duties: Generally, swim exit handlers work in teams of two (pairs) to assist the athletes. Once the team is done helping one athlete, they move back to the swim exit to assist the next athlete coming out of the water. The type of duty will require the type of athlete who is coming out of the water that needs assistance. Such as:

- Wheelchair athletes will need to be lifted out of the water and placed in their everyday wheelchair in order to wheel themselves to transition and meet up with their personal handlers who will help them get to the transition area.
- Leg amputees will need a shoulder or two to lean on so they can hop to their leg or crutches that are typically placed next to chairs near the waters exit.
- Arm amputees might need help steadying themselves as they get out of the water and prepare to go into transition.
- All athletes (except visually impaired) will likely need assistance getting their wetsuits off so the swim exit or the personal handler can assist with this duty.

## **Personal Handler**

Who are they?: A personal handler is a volunteer position that the race director has to recruit as part of their overall event volunteer plan. A personal handler should be someone who is able to move around freely and help the paratriathlete with anything they might need before, after, and in transition during the race and at the finish line. Physical strength is required and generally not suitable for young children to act as a personal handler. A personal handler can also serve as a swim exit handler if swim exit specific handlers are not also recruited.

Attire: All race directors should be prepared to give each personal handler a credential along with a volunteer t-shirt so that the handler is allowed to access any part of the race venue as the athletes such as swim start, swim exit, finish line, and the transition area. Running sneakers and workout type clothing is preferred as you will be moving around quite a bit and possibly running at times or being on your knees to assist the athletes. If volunteers wish to bring any personal belongings to have with them (i.e. wallet, cell phone, water, snack, etc) it is recommended that they place them all in a drawstring backpack to wear during the race. There is generally nowhere for handlers to leave a bag or purse.

Handler Allowance: Depending on the athlete's disability, they are allowed to have a specific number of personal handlers to assist them. Wheelchair athletes are allowed two (2) personal handlers, visually impaired athletes are allowed zero (0) handlers as their guide acts as their handler. All other athletes are allowed to have one (1) personal handler.



Specific Duties: Depending on the athlete's disability, handlers are allowed to:

- Assist, carry, or even act as a crutch to help the athlete get from the water to the transition area
- Assist in getting the athlete to the water and taking any wheelchairs, crutches or legs to the swim exit (if a point-to-point swim)
- Removing wetsuit
- Carry the wetsuit, goggles, swim cap, or any prosthetics they did not wind up using/need from swim exit to the transition area
- Assist the athlete in putting on prosthetics
- Assist the athlete in buckling and unbuckling their helmet
- Assist in transferring the wheelchair athletes in and out of handcycles and racing wheelchairs
- Repair flats and other mechanical issues while the athlete is still in transition.
- If it is a point-to-point swim, carry the athletes prosthetics, chairs, etc to swim exit
- Carry any equipment or prosthetics an athlete may need to the finish line (i.e. everyday wheelchair or walking leg).
- Remove or rack bike from bike rack

Rules: USA Triathlon has specific competitive rule modifications for paratriathletes including rules for their personal handlers. In P.1.4 Handlers, it states the following; Paratriathletes shall be permitted the following in regard to handlers/aides:

a) Handlers should be allotted as follows:

- 1) One handler for each paratriathlete in categories TRI 2, TRI 3, TRI 4, TRI 5;
- 2) A maximum of two handlers for TRI 1;
- 3) No handlers for categories TRI 6a and TRI 6b.

b) Each paratriathlete is required to identify all handlers and describe their duties to the appropriate race official prior to the start of competition.

c) Handlers shall be subject to all USAT Competitive Rules and must sign the USA Triathlon waiver.

d) Handlers are specifically allowed to assist competitors by:

- 1) Assisting/carrying athletes from the water to transition area;
- 2) Helping with prosthetic or other assistive devices;
- 3) Lifting participants in and out of handcycles and wheelchairs;
- 4) Removing wetsuits or clothing;
- 5) Repairing flats and other equipment (in transition only).



e) A handler may not take action to propel a competitor forward except in extraordinary circumstances as determined by the Head Referee.

*Race Briefing:* It is highly recommend that the personal and swim exit handlers attend the paratriathlete race briefing (if there is one specifically for this category) or at a minimum a race briefing to understand the timeline and flow of the transition.

*Handler/Athlete Meet-n-Greet:* When possible, it is best for the race director to pair the paratriathlete with their personal handler(s) the day before the race so that the athlete and their handler can discuss exactly what the athlete is needing on race day. This allows for the athlete to focus on their mental preparation on race morning and not having to worry about training their handler. When possible, this should be a facilitated discussion led by the race director and/or the paratriathlon race coordinator.

Here are the important things to talk about/ask the day before the race:

- Does the athlete need help checking in their bike and equipment the day before the race?
- Decide on a time to meet in transition on race morning.
- What is needed at swim start and swim exit? (wheelchair, legs, crutches, leg liners, towels, etc)
- If a wetsuit legal race, when and where will the wetsuit removal occur (place is race director discretion)?
- What type of help is needed in T1? T2?
- What does the athlete need at the finish line (wheelchair, walking leg, crutches, etc)?
- Does the athlete need help getting their equipment and gear back to their car after the race?

One important note for volunteers. As every athlete is different, the volunteer needs to be able to quickly adapt to the needs of each athlete. Even if a volunteer has been a handler for 10 different athletes with a disability each one of those is likely very different in what they need in terms of assistance. An amputee is different from a wheelchair athlete which is different from an athlete with cerebral palsy.

**Conclusion:** Saying Thank you. It is important to thank your handlers. Many of these PWOD cannot even complete a multisport event without the help of a handler(s). After the race, they will have helped the paratriathlete complete a multisport race whether it is their first or their 100<sup>th</sup>.

Questions? If you have any questions in regards to being a handler or handler duties, please direct these to the Paratriathlon Program Manager at USA Triathlon, Amanda Duke Boulet  
[Amanda.duke@usatriathlon.org](mailto:Amanda.duke@usatriathlon.org).