

Team River Runner

Safety Protocol

and

Staff Guidelines

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Welcome to Team River Runner

Team River Runner (TRR), established in August 2004 in the Washington, DC area, is a volunteer organization run by kayakers and overseen by a Board of Directors. TRR, working in partnership with Disabled Sports USA, gives active duty service members, veterans and their family members an opportunity to find health, healing, and new challenges through whitewater boating and other paddling sports. The benefits of TRR have as much to do with social support, finding emotional strength and re-creating personal identity as they do with athletics.

TRR was initially established to help active duty military personnel wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan who were recovering at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. With the success of the program obvious and the opportunity elsewhere apparent, TRR expanded to other Department of Defense (DoD) and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) sites in 2007. There are now over 40 operating TRR sites across the country. In 2012 we served over 1000 vets and active duty soldiers. TRR has become a team of available resources for our vets.

You and your local team will be joining a national organization that will support you, provide guidelines for initial stand up and also how to operate. We are a lifestyle based organization that strives for near weekly paddle sessions for our vets.

Your team will be giving retired and active duty military personnel an opportunity to heal from profound psychological and physical wounds by exploring the challenges of kayaking and other paddle sports. For those recently injured, kayaking might be the first NEW skill they have a chance to learn – as opposed to re-learning a previously expert skill. Our paddlers, by choosing a positive life in the face of great disadvantages, will subtly and quietly change the lives of those they come in contact with, on and off the water, for the rest of their lives. This includes the Staff/Volunteer of your site.

TRR Safety Protocol

As TRR Staff/Volunteer, you take on the rewarding and challenging role of meeting and familiarizing participants and their family members to boating who have never paddled before, and who may only boat occasionally. In addition, participants may be recovering from substantial physical injury. Beyond simply incurring no danger, harm or injury on trips, minding the following guidelines will help you encourage, support and inspire Staff/Volunteer and participants so they'll recall their experience(s) with us fondly.

TRR has a working relationship with the ACA and DS/USA. TRR sites promote ACA and DS/USA safety and instruction guidelines.

Trip/Event Planning Roles and Responsibilities

Trip Leader

Creates, coordinates, advertises and executes a trip as designated by the local site coordinator. The Trip Leader also assigns other Staff/Volunteer and their responsibilities.

1. Determines place, date and time, volunteer and gear needs.
2. Clears trips out of state, if listed as a TRR event, through the National Program Coordinator.
3. Finalizes plans two (2) weeks before a distance trip or before key reservation deadlines.
4. Advertises trip and coordinates transportation of participants, parking and trip shuttle, as necessary.
5. Assigns Staff/Volunteer roles prior to trip
6. Is available for calls or emails from interested Staff/Volunteer as to coordinate trip details.
7. Assesses paddler capabilities with water levels, hazards, and weather.
8. Exercises authority to postpone, cancel or terminate a trip for the safety of the participants when warranted.
9. Makes sure administrative forms are provided, filled out and submitted.
10. Submits a post trip report to the National Program Coordinator, including names and information for all paddlers and Staff/Volunteers on the trip.

Leading one trip does not automatically designate a Staff/Volunteer as a Trip Leader for subsequent trips.

Gear Lead/Wrangler - Locates gear and outfitting for a session or trip. Gets it to and from the water outfits special needs boats before the session begins. The Gear Wrangler contacts past participants with adaptive needs to prepare gear.

Volunteer Lead/Coordinator – Recruits volunteers and facilitates assignments and trip schedule by the Trip Leader to insure the desired Staff/Volunteer-to-participant ratio (site/trip dependent).

Hospitality Lead – Arranges for water and snack, and meals during or after the trip; sets shuttle and arranges participant transportation.

Safety Lead/Officer – Keeps protocol in mind beginning with pre-event planning. Supports the trip leader and suggests improvement. Can step in to conduct the pre-trip Safety Talk and has emergency/evacuation information, and emergency personnel and insurance information. Makes sure Staff/Volunteer has throw bags, break down paddles and first aid kits on water.

Launch Lead - 'Approves' launches after making sure each paddler is outfitted properly, has a Staff/Volunteer buddy, and is clear about any special instructions. This role may be filled by the Safety Officer or Trip Leader. The Launch Lead can be a shore-based volunteer.

All Staff/Volunteer members must follow the [TRR Staff/Volunteer Guidelines](#).

Standard of Care for any Event

Screening Participants – Unique to each site, but contains a number of essential points:

1. Ideally the paddler is referred to TRR by a VA or DoD clinician who has participated in a pool session with us and understands what the patient will experience.
2. The paddler has received a medical clearance from a doctor to come kayaking.
3. The Trip Leader asks:
 - a. “Is there anything your doctor or physio therapist does or does not want you to do?” (Covers physical constraints)
 - b. “Do you have TBI or PTSD, because we want to avoid any situations that trigger you” (Covers emotional/cognitive constraints)
The patient then gives the answer voluntarily (and most likely, truthfully), so there is no transfer of information from the VA to an outside organization (thus no HIPAA issue).
 - c. If the patient says yes, the instructor asks if claustrophobia is an issue and explains that an instructor may be holding onto them and their gear and that they may be fully upside down in the boat, just so they know.

It is a basic safety necessity to know what you're dealing with in terms of mental and physical health in your paddlers before you place them on the water. These questions must be asked. Paddlers with impulse control and aggression issues need to be monitored closely for everybody's well-being. Paddlers with physical constraints need to be kept from paddling situations that will injure them.

Before the Event - Potential participants and those who sign up should know the following and where/how to ask questions about the session:

- **Who's in Charge?** Roles & responsibilities before, during and after the session should be posted or readily available.
- **Where will the event take place?** Directions, car-pool information, and parking specifics should be easy to find.
- **When will it occur?** Instructions regarding pick up, start and return time to the VA,

hospital or other veterans' facility should be provided.

- **How?** Special passes, approvals, transportation, and payment / reimbursement should be explained in advance.

Participant Arrival – Participants should be greeted immediately when they arrive at the venue with a friendly, upbeat, cheerful and respectful welcome. The Trip Leader and returning Staff/Volunteer should identify participants' general capabilities and special medical needs, adaptive or other, using the [Essential Eligibility Criteria](#) for their site.

- New paddlers should fill out and return to the Secretary, Safety Officer or Trip Leader
 - A Staff/Volunteer/Paddler Info Sheet and medical information release form
 - A TRR DS/USA liability and media waiver.
- They should be assigned a Staff/Volunteer who can assist with the paperwork, outfitting, gear fitting and instruction, although other Staff/Volunteers will be helping, too.

Before Launch

- Be sure gear is appropriate and outfitted, notably to meet special needs.
IT IS UNSAFE FOR A PADDLER TO WEAR LEG PROSTHETICS IN A WHITEWATER OR SEA KAYAK! It is against ACA and TRR guidelines to do so, since the inability to articulate knee or ankle joints represents a huge entrapment hazard both in the boat and in the water. The prosthetic is also a very expensive item to lose. Many amputees wear just the socket to protect the limb (with neoprene shorts/pants to keep it on in case of a swim) and secure the remainder of the prosthetic in the back or front of the boat, so it can be reattached at the end of the paddle. A “stubby” or round terminal device makes it easy to fit into the boat.
- Team Staff/Volunteer up with participants.
- Review the itinerary, importance of buddies, on-water signals.
- Carry first aid kits; know how and whom to call in case of emergency and identify evacuation routes or options along the planned route.
- Set shuttle, if necessary.
- Check that water and snacks are packed.
- Ask the paddler you are working with if they have a non-visible injury that limits their mobility or activity level in any way so you can outfit them properly and have them paddle safely.
- Be aware and sensitive to participants' learning capabilities. All of us have diminished learning capability when we are scared – keep instructions simple.
- Some vets with TBI have trouble concentrating. Some literally cannot listen to more than one person at a time, or more than 1 or 2 steps of instruction at a time

On Water – The Trip Leader should assign a lead and sweep, and confirm buddies.

Getting Off the Water

- Check for gear before departing the water.
- Facilitate process for getting out of wet gear.
- Collect and pack gear.
- Offer water and snacks.

Heading Home

- Create closure by thank participants and volunteers.
- Solicit feedback.
- Mention upcoming events.

Essential Eligibility Criteria for Paddlers

(additional specific requirements may be required for coastal and whitewater outings)

Participants must:

- 1) Be 18 years or older or accompanied by an adult
- 2) Be able to follow and execute 3 part instructions
- 3) Be able to manage all personal care and mobility independently or with the assistance of a companion who accompanies the participant
- 4) Be comfortable in the water including: floating on back independently with a properly fitted PFD, turning from face down to face up independently while wearing a properly fitted PFD, and holding breath while under water for at least 15 seconds.
- 5) Be able to maintain a balanced, upright position while seated in a kayak, with adaptations if needed. ****NOTE**** No adaptations providing head or neck support will be accepted
- 6) Be able to get in and out of a kayak independently or with the assistance of a companion, who accompanies the participant, following instruction.
- 7) Be able to wet exit a kayak independently following instruction
- 8) Be able to re-enter a sea-kayak or sit on-top kayak following a capsize with the assistance of one other boat. Any additional assistance, if required must come from a companion who accompanies the participant.

TRR Staff/Volunteer Guidelines

1. Staff/Volunteers must follow directions of the Trip/Event Leader. When there are two instructors one should be the designated lead,
2. Staff/Volunteers must be in good health so if they think they're getting sick, any type of infection or open wound, they should skip the next session.
3. Non-paddlers are welcome to assist with trip administration, photo/videography, gear wrangling, and hospitality.
4. On - water Staff/Volunteer
 - Must possess the paddling skills required for the class of whitewater to be paddled.
 - Be familiar with the river, or have the skills necessary to self-guide and guide others on that river.
 - Should bring gear to sessions ready to use for instruction, demo or rescue purposes.
 - Should bring and wear their own boating gear
 - Should have or be willing to grow their skills:
 - Teaching the roll and other on-water skills
 - First Aid and CPR
 - TBI, PTSD, and suicide prevention training
 - ACA Certification
 - Adaptive Certificate
5. Trip Leader
 - Has attended a minimum number of pool sessions and TRR volunteer training **.
 - Is ACA or BCE certified equal or above the level of the trip they are offering, or possesses an equivalent level of experience.
6. New Staff/Volunteer should fill out and be familiar with standard forms on the TRR Reporting Site:
 - Staff/Volunteer/Paddler Information Sheet Form
 - VA/DOD New Volunteer Application
 - Other as required, such a VHA Privacy Policy Form
 - We are not "TRR" while at a government event, so if the event is NOT a government event, the new Staff/Volunteer should also sign the TRR's DS/USA and Media Release form.]

** Determined by the Program Coordinator

GEAR:

- 1) All Staff/Volunteer must bring and wear their own boating gear for trips
- 2) Staff/Volunteer with gear are asked to bring it to pool sessions so you can either instruct, demo or be a safety boater as needed.

PLEASE PRINT THE NEXT TWO PAGES AND HAVE EACH VOLUNTEER SIGN AND HAND IN THE SIGNATURE PAGE.

TEAM RIVER RUNNER STAFF/VOLUNTEER CONDUCT POLICY

We have access to recovering patients in a way that most people do not; this access is both an opportunity and a responsibility. We are viewed as peers and as leaders and as such must set a good example both on and off the river. We are also representing TRR as an organization; everything we do has the potential to reflect positively or negatively on TRR.

Participants will come and go. If someone came and dangled a foot in the pool and left with a smile, you have succeeded with them. We are just here to give the participants an opportunity to build emotional and physical strength, not to rate ourselves on how fast “our guy” learned to roll.

- 1) TRR does not conduct, condone or participate in any illegal activity. Any TRR Staff/Volunteer in violation of this rule will be asked to stop working with TRR immediately.
- 2) Always be clear about the physical and emotional condition of the paddler you are working with. Ask if there is anything their physical therapist does or does not want them to do (covers physical constraints). Ask them if they have TBI or PTSD, because we want to avoid any triggering situations (covers mental/emotional constraints).
- 3) It is a basic safety necessity to know what you’re dealing with in terms of mental and physical health in your paddlers before you place them on the water. These questions must be asked. Paddlers with impulse control and aggression issues need to be monitored closely for everybody’s well-being. Paddlers with physical constraints need to be kept from paddling situations that will injure them.
- 4) Vets may be taking medication that does not mix well with alcohol. Our activities must support their recovery, not put it at risk. Please keep personal events or social activities within acceptable boundaries.
- 5) TRR doesn’t pay for alcohol. Personally providing alcohol to anyone under the age of 21 is illegal. See rule 1.
- 6) Be aware of your language and comments. Off-color or suggestive jokes can be misinterpreted. Vets often have a dark sense of humor, especially those who have returned recently from combat zones, or who have sustained permanent injuries and limb loss. Feel free to smile and laugh along with them, but don’t try to join in or ‘one-up’ them in their jokes. We are not part of their club and we should not try to be.
- 7) Keep your politics to yourself. TRR is there to kayak, not to discuss the war or the motives behind it. Be supportive and sensitive to the fact that the vets have sustained injuries in service to our country, no matter what you think about the war itself.

- 8) Disabled vets know their bodies very well. They will tell you if they need help. Simply say: “Let me know what I can do for you,” and leave it at that.
- 9) Do not ask them how they were injured, or what brought them to this program. They will tell you if they want to. If they do, and all you can say is, “Thank you for telling me that,” then leave it at that.
- 10) TRR encourages friendships between Staff/Volunteer and vets. We do not encourage dating between Staff/Volunteer and vets but we do not prohibit it. Please remember our participants are at a highly vulnerable point in their lives and our interactions with them will be influential. Forming close relationships puts both sides of that relationship at risk in unique ways. Be mindful and respectful of that potential.
- 11) Promote a safe and fun learning environment. Be aware that while “horseplay” between Staff/Volunteer and vets who already know each other is fun to those involved, but it can appear to be chaotic and upsetting to brand new vets who are attending our program for the first time.
- 12) TRR DOES NOT GIVE OUT FULL NAMES or any other information about TRR participants without written permission of the participant, for security, privacy and exploitation reasons.
- 13) Do not speak to the media on behalf of TRR without clearing it through your site secretary.
- 14) Do not ask for personal discounts from retailers because of your TRR affiliation.
- 15) You may deduct personal vehicle mileage to and from TRR events as a charitable deduction. “The standard mileage rate for the use of a car, van, pickup or panel truck is 14 cents per mile driven in service of charitable organizations (check www.irs.gov for any changes).”

TEAM RIVER RUNNER STAFF/VOLUNTEER CONDUCT POLICY

I, _____, have read the Team River Runner Staff/Volunteer Conduct Policy dated October 2015 and agree to follow those guidelines as I perform my volunteer activities at any Team River Runner event or whenever I represent Team River Runner.

(signature)

__/__/____