



Overview:

The USEF Para-Equestrian Dressage Centers of Excellence (COE), founded in 2015, are designed to grow the sport of para-dressage throughout the United States, playing a critical role in pipeline development - from grassroots all the way through to elite levels of athlete and coach education and support. By providing multiple centers of instruction and technical dressage training throughout the United States, the COE initiative provides athletes with disabilities the opportunity to discover competitive para-dressage at both the national and eventually CPEDI level, at locations convenient to them.

The Centers of Excellence are also essential instruments in the continuous effort to make equestrian sport more equitable, inclusive, and available to disabled competitive riders in the United States. As other nations around the world have shown, and as the FEI has emphasized, the inclusion of disabled equestrians in our often-exclusive sport is inspiring to the general public, many of whom may not otherwise find themselves captivated by equestrian sport. Horses have the unique ability to level the field of play for athletes across traditional age, gender, and ability divides— something that is unparalleled in other Olympic and Paralympic sports.

Lastly, the Centers of Excellence provide a physical bridge and a regional hub to the other robust initiatives inside this sport, such as the USEF Para-Dressage Coach Certificate Program, USPEA's and USEF's Virtual Judging Competition Series, and an expanding list of qualifying competitions to help get athletes to the podium. Creating networks and outlets for these interconnected activities allows the collective vision, mutual passion, and critical mass found at COEs to bring these resources to bear.

Guiding Principles:

Below are Guiding Principles that shape the evolving landscape of the Centers of Excellence initiative:

1. USEF will utilize a strategic plan using a Field-Building Approach to develop the USA Para-Dressage pipeline and work collaboratively with each COE to identify unique center strengths and mutual goals. Centers will be supported by USEF through marketing, outreach, program support and other resources available.
2. Centers of Excellence are in a differentiated position to play a significant role in the promotion of horse sports as a unique public service. As people seek out more ways to preserve natural environments and connect again with the outdoors for social and physical health, the role of horses should be promoted by those of us fortunate enough to witness the positive impact horses can have on human life.
3. Centers of Excellence are uniquely advantaged to promote para-dressage across the country, not only in expanding disability awareness and inclusion efforts, but also in sport pipeline development - growing the participant base, both amateur and professional, and from therapy into sport.
4. Centers of Excellence function within a teamwork perspective, and collaboration among centers is an essential ingredient for long-term success. Those more established centers can offer support, guidance, and expertise to new members of the COE family. USEF may help to facilitate collaboration among centers.
5. Centers of Excellence are supported by USEF leadership providing clear criteria of both mission deliverables and program requisites with annual performance assessments. If funds are

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available, USEF may provide COEs with funding to achieve their program goals based on their annual performance assessment. Additional details on potential funding can be found in the COE funding principles document.

USEF Deliverables: USEF commits to supporting the COEs annually through marketing, outreach, program support, and possible access to USEF funding (budget permitting). The annual assessment fee will be used to support the four Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and listed deliverables.

COE Deliverables: Below is a framework for the role of COEs in the para-dressage pipeline development. It is divided into two main categories: a) EDUCATION COE and b) PERFORMANCE COE. Both types have program and facility requirements with examples of KPIs and deliverables to guide the COEs. Educational goals remain foundational to all plans. Through annual assessments, COEs will indicate program plans that fit the abilities of their centers. *Additional details can be found on the COE annual assessment document.*

EDUCATIONAL COE	PERFORMANCE COE
Awareness/Outreach	Development & Performance
Clinics using Bronze & Silver Level or higher coaches for Introductory & Emerging Athletes: Grassroots Education/Therapy into Sport; Introduction to Pipeline (links to USPC, IHSA, PATH)	Clinics using Silver to Master Level coaches for Development & Elite Athletes. (Links to USDF, AB Dressage Barns, FEI competitions)
Talent ID – early stage of pipeline	Talent ID, further along pipeline
Coach Development – early stage mentoring & education (Apprentice, Bronze)	Coach Development – later stage mentoring & education (Bronze, Silver)
Ongoing Athlete Training & Support – Introductory/Emerging - early stage	Ongoing Athlete Training & Support- Development/Elite - later stage
Access to National Classification	Access to Classification – National or FEI
Competition – Center-based, local level	Competition – Regional, National, FEI (1*)
Human & Equine SSM/Library of Resources	Human & Equine SSM/Library of Resources
Facility Requirements for early-stage development	Facility Requirements for later-stage development
Annual Assessment Fee	Annual Assessment Fee

COE Program Requirements: COEs must submit an annual assessment each calendar year. The assessment will cover the below KPIs and be followed by a meeting between the COE and USEF, to declare realistic goals, an anticipated events calendar, and a commensurate budget to support activities. USEF and each center must agree upon attainable goals in a minimum of one KPI category below.

KPI 1: Athlete Development: Athlete development is at the heart of pathway expansion. COEs play a vital role in creating opportunities for athletes to enter and grow in the sport. Para-dressage riders should avail themselves of the built-in, onsite training resources at all COEs. Riders can also access virtual training tools such as Pixem, connecting with a supportive network of para-coaches to troubleshoot training challenges and gain valuable insights. Beyond ongoing training and support, *COEs are required to host a minimum of two of the following events annually.* The same event may not be used to fulfil the two-event minimum for more than three

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consecutive years. COEs are encouraged to host more than two of these events annually. Funding from USEF may be available to support these events per the COE funding principles document.

Clinics:

- a. Hosting COE-Level Introductory Para-Dressage Athlete Clinics to athletes at the beginning stages of their sport journey. Some athletes may choose to stay at the COE level, while others will progress through the pathway. Representatives from USPEA or USEF may be present (virtually or in-person) to provide grassroots tips, and Bronze-Level USEF Para-Dressage Coach (or higher) can be tapped as clinician. Pre-packaged educational material can be used at COE level for instruction and awareness.
 - b. Hosting USEF-Sanctioned Para-Dressage Athlete Clinics with sponsorship and chosen clinician to athletes further along the pipeline, already competing at recognized shows. (Emerging through to Elite)
 - c. Offering center facilities to respected local professionals or hosting an able-bodied dressage, or other discipline clinician can bring new clients and new awareness to equestrians in the community that may only associate the COE with therapy rather than sport. In turn, these equestrians can promote COEs on their social media pages, provide COEs with mentoring and support, and potentially help COEs source suitable horses for para dressage from amongst their show clientele.
 - d. Fitness, nutrition, and sport psychology programs for riders with disabilities can be folded into a clinic setting or offered as separate virtual or in-person learning modules.
- B. Talent Identification:** Talent identification and recruitment events can be scheduled 1-2 times per year to help USEF identify emerging athletes at COEs and the surrounding region. USEF officials can patch in remotely (Zoom) or be available in person to answer questions.
- C. Human & Equine Sports Science & Medicine (SSM):** COEs should plan to host one or two human and equine sports science and medicine clinics each year to educate their client base and greater community.
- D. Awareness Events:** COEs can host *Awareness Days* inviting members of their local communities to their centers for riding exhibitions, presentations, and social events. Public awareness campaigns are critical to the future of para equestrian dressage, and by extension, equestrian sport in general. Regional sportswriters, social media influencers, elected officials, and community social pages and newspapers could be tapped to push out promotional materials, including video productions and other promotional content, featuring para-dressage athletes both local, national, and worldwide. A universal library of educational material, using an open source sharing of ideas and know-how, ensures that information is streamlined and that COEs can offer best practices and tried and true techniques.



KPI 2: Competition Development: The essence of para-dressage is competition. COEs should define this as the central tenet of the sport when presenting it to newcomers, both participants, and supporters. Centers must be clear in defining para dressage as the sport of dressage made accessible to riders with permanent, measurable physical disability who have the desire to compete in this discipline. The following are relatively simple ways in which centers can establish entry to competition for their participants:

- A. Onsite schooling shows and an organized mini championship (for as few as five riders!)
- B. Bringing riders who have successfully participated in onsite schooling shows to local shows on their own or school horses.
- C. Hosting and providing equipment/space for virtual shows (recording riders on school horses and submitting to USPEA and USEF for virtual judging).
- D. Sharing with interested riders the criteria for participating in national championships and assisting them with obtaining scores at USEF/NAYC qualifying competitions.
- E. Maintaining close working relationships with local USDF affiliates, so that show secretaries and staff get to know and support, center-based para-equestrian athletes when they go to shows.
- F. Inviting local USDF affiliates to all Awareness Days and asking local USDF affiliates to push out center promotional info when centers are hosting dressage clinics.
- G. Co-hosting schooling shows with local dressage affiliates on-site or at local showgrounds.
- H. Exhibiting at local USEF licensed dressage shows that provide vendor booths and donating center-branded items for inclusion in prize bundles.

KPI 3: Coach Development: COEs can play a critical role in the further development of USEF Certified Para-Dressage Coaches. The following are ways in which centers can help in coach development efforts.

- A. With over 30 coaches already USEF certified and more on their way, COEs present a great training opportunity for those coaches to become clinicians for COE-hosted clinics and increase their professional depth and breadth, while supporting new athletes coming into the sport.
- B. COEs are a perfect mentoring site for Para-Coach candidates to prepare for their final practicum or gain additional teaching hours.
- C. Apprentice and Bronze Level Coaches can gain valuable shadow coaching time with an onsite Silver-Level Coach (often at the COEs) to gain more proficiency to move up in the coach levels.
- D. COEs can offer a USEF Coach Practicum as well as continuing education units (CEU) for coaches needing to maintain their USEF certificate.
- E. COEs can provide a USEF-approved training track for Apprentice Level USEF Para-Dressage Coaches, as revenue builder for center as well as necessary coach pipeline preparation for the entry level coach certificate program.
- F. COEs can host an onsite initial practicum for the USEF Coach Program.

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KPI 4: Licensed Officials Development/Classification: It is imperative that grassroots and emerging level athletes have access to affordable, regional classification at the national level to build the rider base. It's equally important that classifiers and other USEF licensed officials in the sport have access to trainings that help attain and maintain their certificate.

- A. Centers could host USEF classifier certificate clinics for interested classifier candidates in their regions, thus boosting the available classifiers nationally.
- B. Centers of Excellence could host one-day national classifications for athletes, funded by the COE or USEF, in conjunction with a clinic, providing access to athletes throughout the US.

COE Facility: The following are examples of facility amenities that will be reviewed of each COE, additional amenities may be listed on a facilities application.

- 1) Fully accessible facilities (bathrooms, parking lots, mounting ramps.)
- 2) An affiliated coach who has completed the USEF Para Dressage Coach Certificate Program (exception may be granted for a coach that has applied for the certificate program)
- 3) Covered or indoor Arena (depending on local climate) of a minimum of 40 x 20m
- 4) Horse wash down area
- 5) Access to safe, sound, and healthy horses that are suitable for Para Dressage at the introductory / emerging level
- 6) Arena seating for approximately 20 or more auditors
- 7) Private room for Human SSM / Classifier personnel
- 8) Equine SSM assessments utilizing a USEF-approved Veterinarian
- 9) Catering facilities on site, or ability to bring in caterers
- 10) Knowledge of local USEF/NAYC Dressage Qualifying Competitions and USEF Para Dressage National Championship qualifying requirements
- 11) Parking; car and horse trailer
- 12) PA system for Clinicians/Announcers
- 13) Meeting space to accommodate up to 20 individuals with Power Point capabilities
- 14) 60m x 20m all-weather arena with quality footing that would meet FEI competition standard
- 15) Access to safe, sound, and healthy horses that are suitable for Para Dressage at the emerging-elite levels
- 16) An ability to host competitions in a 60m x 20m (i.e. warm up facilities and Judging Box options)
- 17) Stables that meet FEI standards and additional stables for visiting athletes/horses
- 18) Horse Inspection area where horses may be accessed, including an area for a veterinary jog
- 19) Access to an FEI Official Veterinarian or a FEI Permitted Treating Veterinarian, as needed

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USEF Policies Requirements

- 20) Adherence to horse and human safety and welfare practices
- 21) Adherence to the USEF Safe Sport Policy, USEF Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policies and USEF Non-Discrimination Policy
- 22) Required USEF Safe Sport Training – if applicable, Executive Director, Board President, and all instructors
 - A. Required training must be completed within one month of notification that the organization has been accepted to the Program
 - B. Encouraged for all board members and volunteers interacting with participants
 - C. All interactions between minors and adults must occur in an observable and interruptible environment
- 23) Required USEF Safe Sport Background Check – if applicable, Executive Director, all instructors
 - A. Required USEF Safe Sport Background checks must be completed within one month of notification that the organization has been accepted to the program and be completed annually while the organization is part of the Program
 - B. Required USEF Safe Sport Background checks on new staff must be completed prior to employment

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