

considering partnership **WITH A SERVICE DOG**

Frequently Asked Questions

Federal legislation in the United States gives individuals with disabilities the right to be accompanied by a trained service dog in areas where the public is allowed, in airports and on domestic flights, and in certain types of housing. In addition to being well-behaved in public, a service dog is trained to do one or more tasks that are specifically tailored to helping a person with aspects of that person's disability. If you are considering partnership with a service dog, it's important to carefully research the process and the organization or trainer you're considering working with.

Are you able to care for a service dog?

Service dogs, like any animal, require health care, grooming, exercise, food, training, and regular toileting opportunities. Are you prepared to take on these tasks as part of your routine? Are you able to take on the financial commitment that will be required?

Will you work with an organization or an individual trainer?

There are many organizations that train and place service dogs with people who have disabilities. Look for an organization that operates as a not-for-profit or as a licensed LLC/corporation. The organization should carry insurance and operate in a safe, accessible environment for both dogs and people. The organization should have transparent policies around confidentiality, non-discrimination, and a grievance resolution process, and should maintain confidential records relating to both clients and canines.

On the other hand, individual dog trainers or veterinarians in your area may also be able to assist in the partnership process. They may be able to assess a pet dog you already own who may or may not be appropriate for a working role, or help you identify an appropriate dog from a reliable source. The trainer you would work with should be credentialed and have experience working with individuals having disabilities and with selection, assessment and training of service dogs.

How old should the dog be?

The working relationship with a service dog is necessarily limited by the dog's age at the time of pairing. It can take up to two years for canine screening and training to be complete. For the maximum duration of benefit to the individual, ideally the dog is no older than three years of age at the time of pairing.

What is the role of a veterinarian in the canine selection process?

It is crucial that you or the organization you are working with enlists a licensed veterinarian to screen any potential dogs for common and foreseeable medical issues including allergies, heart conditions, orthopedic problems, eye problems, digestive problems, and any conditions common to the breed of the dog.

What type of temperamental evaluation is required?

Any potential service dog should be evaluated temperamentally by a credentialed trainer over a significant period of time (no fewer than three months) and in the settings in which they will be expected to perform their work. Dogs persistently demonstrating issues such as anxiety, fear, aggression, prey drive, inappropriate toileting, inappropriate vocalization, or high management should be excluded from consideration.



What type of public socialization should the dog receive?

Due to the public nature of a service dog's work, it is crucial for your dog to be comfortable and well-behaved in a wide range of public settings. To accomplish this, training for a potential service dogs should include socialization and practice in a variety of public settings, with exposure to a variety of different people. Ultimately, a service dog needs to be able to maintain focus on their handler and reliably perform tasks even in the presence of distractions such as unusual noises, people, dogs, toys, or food.

What type of training should the dog receive?

To become a service dog, a dog needs training in both basic obedience and in performing specific tasks to help a given person who is living with a disability. The specific tasks the dog is trained to do should explicitly relate to and reduce difficulties related to a person's disability. A dog who is ready to work as a service dog will reliably perform both basic obedience and specific helping tasks for a person with a disability; the dog will perform obedience and helping tasks across a variety of environments and in the presence of distractions. It's important to note that under the Americans with Disabilities Act, providing emotional support is not considered a qualifying task. Additionally, protection work is not appropriate.

What type of application process should I expect from an organization?

If you are working with an organization, you should expect that they will gather information about your lifestyle, home environment, activity level, disability, treatment history and goals, and your goals for partnership with a service dog. As noted above, this information should be kept confidential.

What type of matching process should I expect from an organization?

The organization should have a specified process for matching people with service dogs. You should expect to receive on-site, hands-on team training for a minimum of 30 hours over the course of 10 days as part of this process. This training should be provided by experienced professionals with direct knowledge of both you and the dog you are being matched with, and, be individualized based on your disability and needs. At the conclusion of the training process, you should feel competent in handling your dog independently and able to integrate him or her into your day-to-day routine.

What type of support should I receive after partnership?

Whether you are working with an organization or an individual trainer, you should be offered follow-up services for the duration of your partnership with your dog, including support with any health, behavioral, training, and safety concerns. The organization or individual trainer should be willing to work with in partnership with your veterinarian, health care provider, or other relevant professional.

Is there a registry for service dogs?

There is NO central registry for service dogs; you do not need to register your service dog anywhere. There are many online sites that claim to be an official registry site and offer to register your dog for a fee. These are not necessary or legitimate.

Does my service dog need a vest?

While a vest is helpful in identifying your dog as a working service dog, a vest is not legally required for service dogs.

Visit [avma.org/AssistanceAnimals](https://www.avma.org/AssistanceAnimals) for more resources.

