

How to Become a Pet Partner®

Pet Partners Program

Delta Society's Pet Partners Program trains and screens volunteers and their pets for visiting animal programs in hospitals, nursing homes, rehabilitation centers, schools and other facilities.

Pet Partners Program was established in 1990 to ensure that "both ends of the leash," people as well as animals, were well-prepared to participate in [animal-assisted activity and animal-assisted therapy](#) programs. Pet Partners is the only national registry that requires volunteer training and screening of animal/handler teams.

Delta's national network links volunteers with facilities in their own communities that request visiting pets and helps Pet Partners contact facilities to begin visits in new locations.

Over 6,400 Pet Partners teams now operate in all 50 states and 4 other countries, helping more than 900,000 people each year.

The Difference between Service Animals, Therapy Animals, Companion Animals and "Social/therapy" Animals

According to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA, 1990), a dog is considered a "*service dog*" if it has been "individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of a person with a disability."

Also according to the ADA, a "*disability*" is a "mental or physical condition which substantially limits a major life activity" such as:

- caring for one's self / performing manual tasks / walking / seeing / hearing / speaking
- breathing / learning / working

Some disabilities may not be visible, such as deafness / epilepsy / psychiatric conditions.

To be considered a service dog, the dog must be trained to perform tasks directly related to the person's disability.

Service animals are legally defined (Americans With Disabilities Act, 1990) and are trained to meet the disability-related needs of their handlers who have disabilities. Federal laws protect the rights of individuals with disabilities to be accompanied by their service animals in public places. Service animals are not considered "pets."

Therapy animals are not legally defined by federal law, but some states have laws defining therapy animals. They provide people with contact to animals, but are not limited to working with people who have disabilities. They are usually the personal pets of their handlers, and work with their handlers to provide services to others. Federal laws have no provisions for people to be accompanied by therapy animals in places of public accommodation that have "no pets" policies. Therapy animals usually are not service animals.

Companion animal is not legally defined, but is accepted as another term for pet.

"Social/therapy" animals likewise have no legal definition. They often are animals that did not complete service animal or service dog training due to health, disposition, trainability, or other factors, and are made available as pets for people who have disabilities. These animals might or might not meet the definition of service animals.

STEP 1: Prerequisites for becoming a Pet Partner:

- The person handling the animal (handlers) must be at least 10 years old. Handlers younger than 16 must be accompanied by a parent or guardian and must have written permission to participate from a parent or guardian.
- People who do not have an animal may also register as Pet Partners

Prerequisites for the Animal

- All animals except birds must have lived in the owner's home for at least 6 months. Birds must have lived in the owner's home for at least 1 year.
- All animals except "pocket pets" must be at least 1 year at the time the animal is evaluated. Pocket pets (e.g., guinea pigs, rabbits, rats, etc.) must be at least 6 months at the time the animal is evaluated.
- Dogs trained to aggressively protect and/or encouraged to actively bite, even as a component of a dog sport (e.g., bite work that is part of Schutzhund) *may not* be Pet Partners.

What Kind of Animals can Work as Pet Partners?

There are a great many species that make wonderful visiting animals and can form a strong human-animal bond. Only domesticated animals may become Pet Partners. Examples of registered pets include:

- Dogs / Cats / Guinea pigs / Rabbits / Domesticated rats / Horses / Goats / Llamas / Donkeys
- Potbellied pigs / Miniature pigs / Cockatoos / African Gray Parrots / Chickens
- Wild or exotic animals (e.g., snakes, ferrets, lizards) may NOT be Pet Partners

Completing the Team Training Course

Learn the skills needed to visit safely with your animal in hospitals, nursing homes, classrooms, and other facilities. Successful completion of this course, in instructor-facilitated or home-study format, is required for registration as a Pet Partner.

Topics include:

- Selecting and preparing animals for visits.
- Identifying and decreasing stress in animals.
- Animal health and safety.
- Special needs of client groups.
- Interacting with special people.
- Facility health and safety codes.

- Patient confidentiality.

1. Attend a Workshop

The Pet Partners Team Training Course is usually presented as a fast-paced day-long (8 hours), hands-on course. Some instructors present the course over more than one day, an hour or so each day. Students receive a copy of the popular *Pet Partners Team Training Course Manual* and practice visiting skills. All workshops are taught by Delta-licensed instructors.

2. Complete the Home Study Course

For handlers who prefer to study on their own or cannot attend a workshop, Delta offers a [home study version of the Pet Partners Team Training Course](#). The course includes a student guide with suggestions for activities that will help handlers learn the necessary skills, and registration materials. Costs and ordering: www.deltasociety.org.

STEP 2: Health Screening for Your Pet

All animals who participate in the program must be healthy and free from parasites, disease, infections, and illnesses. Your animal's regular veterinarian completes the health screening. To participate in Pet Partners, the animal must meet the following health requirements:

- Pass a general physical exam.
- Received rabies immunization, as prescribed by state law.
- In compliance with other immunization requirements, as prescribed by your veterinarian.
- Free from internal and external parasites.

Diagnostic Testing and Immunization Requirements

Thanks to the input of our Pet Partners in the field, and expert advice from veterinarians, Delta Society has revised the Animal Health Screening Form. The new form leaves testing and immunization decisions (with the exception of state rabies vaccination requirements) to your animal's veterinarian. Delta Society believes that your animal's veterinarian is in the best position to decide what diagnostic tests and immunizations are appropriate.

Rabies immunizations are required for all animals, as prescribed by state law, in the Pet Partners Program.

We hope that this new process will simplify Animal Health Screening for Delta Pet Partners.

As you well know, there is often not a consensus of opinion among those in the veterinarian community about immunizations, and State laws with respect to rabies vaccinations vary.

Rather than attempting to prescribe immunizations schedules for dogs and cats (other than compliance with State laws with respect to rabies vaccination), Delta Society will rely on your veterinarian's medical judgment and knowledge of your animal's health history and status.

The new Animal Health Screening Form is in the Pet Partner's Registration and Renewal Packets along with instructions for your veterinarian. Make sure your veterinarian completes **all** sections of the Animal Health Screening Form or the entire Registration Packet will be returned.

STEP 3: Overview of the Team Evaluation Process

The Team Evaluation process evaluates the animal/handler team, how well the handler interprets and manages the animal's behavior, and how well the animal responds to the handler.

Team evaluations are performed by [Licensed Delta Team Evaluators](#). There are 2 parts:

1. [Pet Partners Skills Test \(PPST\)](#) – shows whether the animal can be controlled by you and follow basic commands. During the PPST, you will be assessed on how you interact with the evaluator, the evaluator's assistants, the animal, and the environment around you.

To test basic good behavior skills, animals and their handlers complete the PPST. This test was modeled, with permission, after the American Kennel Club's Canine Good Citizen (CGC) Test. Health care equipment, such as wheelchairs and walkers, has been added to the test. Skills are evaluated for how well the team can manage in an unfamiliar setting, such as a nursing home, hospital, school, etc. There are 12 items in the PPST.

The PPST is also used for screening cats and other animals. These animals and very small dogs do not perform all of the test items in the same way. For example, instead of walking on a leash, rabbits and cats must show that they can be carried in a basket or in the handler's arms.

PPST Requirements

- As in the CGC, food treats cannot be used during the test.
 - The team may be given up to 3 attempts to successfully complete skills of the PPST, but only if the mistake is due to handler error.
2. [Pet Partners Aptitude Test \(PPAT\)](#) – designed to simulate conditions that may be encountered on a visit. This screening helps determine the most appropriate environment for you and your animal. Many people compare this to a temperament test. During the PPAT, you will be assessed on how well you interact with the evaluator and evaluator's assistants as you simulate being on a visit. They will be acting as though they are in a facility. Your interactions may be in the form of questions, responses to the evaluator and evaluator's comments, eye contact, smiling, head nodding, directing the animal to interact, or other verbal and nonverbal methods of communicating.

The Delta Society® Pet Partners Aptitude Test (PPAT) determines if you and your animal have the ability, capacity, desire, and potential for participating in animal-assisted activities (AAA) and animal-assisted therapy (AAT) programs (see [information about AAA/T](#)). This part of the evaluation is similar to what many people would call a temperament test. Delta did not use the word "temperament" because so many people think that animals are born with a certain temperament and it can never be changed. We know that with training, many animals can learn to be reliable. For this reason, we use the word "aptitude" to suggest that the test applies to the animal's ability or potential for AAA/AAT. The PPAT also evaluates the aptitude of the animal/handler team.

The PPAT is based on research. To develop the test, over 600 qualified evaluators of visiting animals were surveyed. The people surveyed received a list of the 35 most frequently used items on temperament tests from all over the country. Many of those who responded to the survey stressed that the aptitude test should be functional and resemble a visit. There are 10 parts to the PPAT.

The PPAT is a combination of scenarios in which the individual exercises flow from one to another. The order of the exercises allows for escalation of stressors during testing.

During the PPAT, the handler and animal should interact (i.e., role play) with the evaluator and assistants as though they are people being visited at a facility. The handler should be able to work with the animal while at the same time interacting socially with the "client" (evaluator and assistants) as if on a visit.

Unlike obedience competitions, you and your animal do not have to perform the exercises with precision to pass the evaluation. You are also encouraged to talk to your animal during the entire evaluation. The main emphasis is that the animal is under control.

One of the goals of the Pet Partners Program is to ensure that we can all be proud of the visiting teams because they are safe and reliable. The evaluation process gives a complete picture of each handler/animal team. This process is the safest way to identify acceptable visiting teams.

After you have passed the PPST and PPAT, the Team Evaluator will give you a signed and dated copy of your test forms for you to include when you [submit your completed Registration Packet](#) to Delta Society.

The [Pet Partners Team Training Course](#) provides complete and more detailed information.

Please Note: At no time will your animal be put in a situation that is dangerous to the animal's welfare. The Delta-licensed Team Evaluators who conduct the PPST and PPAT are trained and learn that the well-being of animals comes first, no matter what. At no point during the evaluation will animals be hurt or intentionally frightened. The PPAT is designed to resemble an animal-assisted activities/animal-assisted therapy (AAA/AAT) visit with situations that might occur when the animal goes on a visit. If you are uncomfortable with or unsure of what is going on during the evaluation, please let the evaluator know. You are encouraged to be your animal's advocate.

Team Evaluation Requirements

Please refer to the *Pet Partners Team Training Course* for the complete list of requirements and more detailed information.

General

- Both the animal and the handler should be groomed and/or dressed appropriately as if they were going on a volunteer visit.
- The handler must show the animal's current rabies certificate.
- All animals must be wearing a collar/harness and be on lead at all times in the test area.
- Animals such as cats, rabbits, and guinea pigs are encouraged to be carried in a basket and/or on a towel and birds in cages. These animals should be carried such that their urine or droppings will not fall on the floor or the person being visited.
- Dogs trained to aggressively protect and/or encouraged to actively bite, even as a component of a dog sport (e.g., bite work that is part of Schutzhund) will not be evaluated.

Equipment

- Acceptable equipment:
 - Well-fitted buckle, quick-release connection, or snap closure collars or harnesses made of leather or fabric.
 - Martingales (i.e., limited slip) and halters (e.g., Gentle Leader, Promise, Snoot Loop, Halti, Easy-Walk, Freedom).
 - Metal buckles, slip rings, and D-rings are acceptable.
 - All leather or fabric leashes, no more than 6 feet in length.
- Unacceptable equipment:
 - Metal collars and harnesses, including martingales with metal links.
 - Slip collars of any type.
 - Special training collars such as "pinch," "spike," electric, or spray collars.
 - Metal chain and retractable leashes (e.g., Flexi-leash).

Animals with Disabilities

There are several Pet Partner animals that have physical disabilities. If your animal has a disability that may require accommodations during the evaluation, please discuss these with the evaluator before the evaluation.

- The team will complete all required exercises in the PPST and PPAT.
- The animal's veterinarian, in consultation with the handler, will determine if the animal is physically able to participate in the evaluation and AAA/AAT as part of the health examination to be a Pet Partner.
- The evaluator will assess the team as he or she would any other team.

When to Wait until Another Day to Be Evaluated

- Your animal is in season. At the Team Evaluator's discretion, the animal *may* be tested at the end of the day.
- Your animal has an infection, open sores, wounds, or stitches. Wait until the animal is healed.
- Your animal is on antibiotics and/or anti-fungal medications.

STEP 4: Registration Packet and Fees:

The following forms are included in the Registration Packet:

1. Photo ID Form – we use this information on your identification badge. Be sure to print or type the information to avoid any errors on your ID badge. If you belong to a group and wish to have the name of the group on the badge, please include it. If you do not want your full name and city/state on the badge, please let us know. Make sure to send the required photos, too.
2. Application Form – we use this information for our records and processing.
3. Volunteer Policies and Procedures Agreement Form – review your Pet Partners team responsibilities as outlined in the *Pet Partners Team Training Course Manual*. Sign and date this form. If you are under 18 a parent or legal guardian must also sign this form.
4. Volunteer Review – the questions review the important material covered in the Pet Partners Team Training Course. Take your time and work at your own pace. Use the review as a way to assure yourself that you are well prepared to visit with your pet.
5. Handler's Questionnaire – complete this form **before** the animal is screened for skills and aptitude. Make a copy for the Team Evaluator and bring it to the evaluation. This form helps the evaluator understand your pet's responses.
6. Animal Health Screening Forms – It is a good idea to make a copy of the introduction letter and forms and send them to your veterinarian before you schedule the appointment for screening. This will help your veterinarian plan the right amount of time for the procedure. Make sure your veterinarian completes all sections of the health screening forms or the entire packet will be returned. *You must have a current rabies vaccination and a fecal exam done within the last 6 months with a negative result or your packet will be returned.*
 1. Note: You may attach a signed health form from your veterinarian, which indicates that it meets or exceeds the Pet Partners health requirements.
7. Volunteer Contact Form – this form lets us know more about you and your animal.

Submitting the Registration Packet

When you submit your Registration Packet, **you must also include a copy of the completed Team Evaluation Forms**. Delta-licensed Team Evaluators have the forms. After you and your animal have passed the Team Evaluation, the Team Evaluator will give you a signed and dated copy of the form for you to include with your Registration Packet.

Be sure to:

- Complete all sections of each form.
- Provide your signature where needed.
- Include the photos and appropriate registration fee.

Note: Your Registration Packet must be sent to Delta Society within 90 days of successfully completing your Pet Partners Team Evaluation. When this 90-day time period expires, you are required to retake the Pet Partners Team Evaluation before submitting your registration papers. Your Health Screening (Step 6) must be complete. You must have current Rabies vaccination and a current fecal exam within the last 6 months. Please be sure you have a current registration packet and complete all 7 Steps including your evaluation paperwork. If your packet is missing any of the required paperwork it will be returned.

Make a copy of your completed Registration Packet for your records. If you want a receipt that your materials have been received, please mail it "Return Receipt Requested."

The Pet Partners Registration Packet is available to download at www.deltasociety.org.

After you Submit your Registration Packet:

Once Delta receives your completed Registration Packet, we start processing it for your acceptance into the Pet Partners Program. Within 2 weeks, you will be issued a temporary ID badge, which allows you to begin visiting. About 3 to 4 weeks later, you will receive your permanent ID badge and your animal's tag.

Pet Partner Benefits

As a Pet Partner, you will receive:

- Delta Society membership and [Interaction Magazine](#), which includes a section for Pet Partners.
- 1\$ million primary liability insurance.
- Identification badge for handler and collar tag for animal.
- Referral to facilities searching for Pet Partners teams.
- Exclusive offers on Pet Partners accessories.
- Opportunity to network with other Pet Partners teams.
- Access to licensed Evaluators and Instructors as local resources.
- Support from the Delta Society office.

As a registered Pet Partner, you will also have the satisfaction of knowing you are helping people in need in your own community.

Any other information, including ordering the Pet Partner Team Training Manual (currently priced at \$37.50) can be found at www.deltasociety.org.