

Service Dog Pre-Application Considerations

Is a service dog the right solution?

Working with an assistance dog can be one of the most rewarding and liberating experiences of your life; however, it can also be challenging and frustrating. An assistance dog is not the ideal solution for every person with a disability. Before you apply for a service dog from Canine Partners of the Rockies (CaPR), we ask that you carefully weigh all the potential benefits against the responsibilities and burdens of having an assistance dog. We prepared this document to assist you in this process.

Assistance dog or companion dog?

Since there is considerable confusion over what a service or assistance dog actually *is*, let's start with some definitions.

An **assistance dog** is individually trained to assist a person with a disability. The dog performs one or more specially trained tasks which mitigate the effects of the person's disability. Examples are **guide dogs** assisting visually impaired persons; **hearing dogs** alerting their partners to sounds; and **service dogs** assisting persons with disabilities other than visual or hearing impairment. There are many types of service dogs. CaPR only trains **service dogs** for the specific purpose of assisting persons with limited mobility.

A **companion dog** provides mainly companionship, love, and affection. The companion dog might also be trained to perform some assistance dog tasks to assist his human partner in the home.

A key difference between an assistance dog and a companion dog is that trained assistance dogs are allowed to accompany their partners to public places such as malls, supermarkets, and restaurants, where pet dogs are not allowed. Assistance dogs are not considered pets. When working in public they are usually identified by a special cape or harness.

It's a two-way street

You have probably heard heartwarming stories of incredible feats service dogs perform for their partners. While there is truth to these stories, there is another dimension to the service dog relationship: With the benefits come responsibilities.

- **It takes time.** CaPR staff and volunteers spend hundreds of hours carefully raising and training each service dog. Once you get a service dog, you must be prepared to spend time, every day, practicing and reinforcing that training.
- **It takes work.** The service dog relationship is not mechanical or automatic. As with any relationship between two living creatures, it takes work. You are responsible for creating and sustaining the bond with your service dog. This requires that you be sensitive to your dog's needs and aware of his limits.

- **It costs money.** CaPR's incurs considerable expense in raising, training, and placing a service dog. Service dog candidates are required to pay a \$3,500 placement fee which only covers a small portion of the expenses incurred by CaPR. The placement fee must be paid **before** the dog is placed with you. Although you are responsible for payment of the placement fee, Canine Partners will provide you with some information about funding sources and strategies. Once you receive a dog, you become responsible for all costs of caring for the dog, including food, medical care, and other expenses.
- **It requires dedication.** Service dog partners undergo intensive "partnership training" to learn how to work with and handle a service dog. During training sessions you must be fully focused on the dog, the trainer, and the material being studied; and you are expected to practice skills between sessions. Partnership training is usually conducted in the Denver metropolitan area. If you are unable to commute to the training site, you will be required to find and pay for accommodations and transportation. All partnership training participants will incur some expenses for meals, public transportation and other expenses related to training in public places.
- **It is a responsibility.** Akin to adopting a toddler, you must set guidelines and provide constant supervision when you first bring the dog home. If you cannot devote a considerable amount of your time and attention to your new service dog, if you just moved or started college or a new job, you should take that into consideration.
- **It truly is a two-way street.** Just as the service dog meets some of your needs, you must meet the dog's needs. Dogs need to be fed and toileted on a regular schedule and require medical care. And even if you have a fenced yard, the dog will not exercise himself. You will have to find a way to provide the stimulation and exercise your dog requires.

Some additional considerations

- **Not a quick fix.** CaPR believes that the correct match of personalities and lifestyles is essential to the success of a service dog partnership; therefore it takes time for us to find the right dog for you. **It can take as long as two to three years from the time you apply until you actually get a service dog.**
- **Do you love dogs?** If you've never had a pet dog, your adjustment to a service dog will include learning about the joys — and trials — of dog ownership. Dogs shed, they can be messy, get sick, or even damage property. Daily grooming is an important element in cementing your bond with your dog, but it can also be a chore. Those of us who love dogs find all of this a small price to pay for the love, joy, and companionship we get from our dogs. However, not everyone agrees, and if you do not, then a service dog is not for you.

- **What about the other people in your life?** If you live with others or are dependent on PCAs, their feelings must be considered. A dog in the house affects everyone. How do they feel about it? Will the dog mean more or less responsibility for them? An additional question to consider is, “How will people in your life react to the increased independence and other changes a dog will cause in you?” While applying for a service dog should be your decision, it is wise to carefully consider these questions and talk the idea over with significant people in your life who will be affected directly or indirectly by your partnership with a service dog.
- **Can you stand up for your rights?** While access laws are in place to ensure that you and your service dog can enter public places, not everyone is aware of these laws. Are you prepared to deal with challenges to your rights and with the frustration of sometimes being denied access to places because of your service dog?
- **Hidden disability?** If your disability is not easily seen or noticed, and you cherish that anonymity, a service dog is probably not for you. Going places with your service dog in his cape or harness is like waving a flag identifying you as a person with a disability.
- **Public attention — benefit or burden?** Dogs in unexpected places are a magnet for attention. Every dog owner, dog lover, and child in the mall or in your workplace will be drawn to you and your dog. Especially for shy or introverted persons, this can become burdensome or annoying. Since your service dog will accompany you everywhere you go for the next 8 or 10 years, think this aspect of service dog ownership through carefully before you apply for a dog.

What’s next?

Please take some time to carefully think about the pre-application considerations. If you decide that the benefit of having a CaPR service dog outweighs any burden, the next step is to complete and return the [Pre-Application for a CaPR Service Dog](#). Within two weeks of receipt of your completed, signed Pre-Application, you will be contacted.

Information about the remainder of the application process is on our website. All applicants have the right to be considered for a service dog without regard to race, color, creed, gender, religion, age and any other category protected by federal law, Colorado state law or local laws; however, for other reasons, CaPR is not able to accept all people who apply for a service dog. Additionally, applicants who initially qualify may not complete the entire application process for a variety of reasons. An applicant must qualify at each stage of the application process to be accepted as a service dog candidate.