



**ORIENTATION**  
**Evaluation**  
**Assistant**



**Pet Partners**  
*Touching Lives, Improving Health*

# Overview

Thank you for volunteering to help with a Pet Partners Team Evaluation!

The team evaluator running the event will meet with the volunteers before evaluations are scheduled to start. Bring any questions you have about the information presented here or the evaluation exercises.

The evaluation process is important to make sure that animals have the training necessary to ensure that they are controllable and have the aptitude necessary to remain predictable and reliable in a variety of situations and settings. The handler must also demonstrate an aptitude for reading their animal's body language and supporting them, as well as the ability to guide interactions with a variety of people in a socially appropriate manner. It is important to note that the handler's skill is weighted equally with the animal's. The Pet Partners Therapy Animal Program has an emphasis on the way a team works together to ensure everyone's safety.

Because we want to see these skills and aptitudes in context, the team evaluation is conducted as a role play. As evaluation assistants, you will be pretending to be clients in a facility setting. Stop to consider who many of our clients are in visiting situations. This could be individuals who are frail, medically fragile, or with limited previous exposure to animals. When you enthusiastically hold up your end of the role play, you make it easier for the handler to do so as well.

## Policy and Procedure

All licensed Pet Partners team evaluators are required to follow standardized policies and procedures to ensure consistency nationally. As an evaluation assistant, there will be specific procedures that you will be asked to follow. Your adherence to these guidelines is essential in maintaining a programmatic integrity.

To familiarize yourself with the evaluation exercises, you are encouraged to visit the Resource Library within the Volunteer Center and view the Evaluation Overviews, Species Materials as well as videos and supporting material. You may also find completing the online Canine Body Language course helps you in observing the behavior of the animals you help to evaluate.

## Your Observations

The team evaluator is responsible for the scoring of team for the Pet Partners Therapy Animal Program, but your observations during the exercises may provide important information to inform the final score. If you observe what you feel to be inappropriate or questionable behavior by that handler and/or animal, share that information with the evaluator as soon as possible.

During some exercises, your team evaluator may specifically ask you to share observations if their line of sight is compromised. Additionally if you are involved in an exercise which includes petting, you will be able to feel if the animal's body is tense or relaxed, which can provide additional insight.

## Safety for People and Animals

The policies and procedures followed during the team evaluation provide a high level of protection for everyone involved in the test.

Team evaluators are trained and licensed by Pet Partners. They recognize signs of aggression and potential problems which will allow them to prevent most problems.

- ▶ If an animal appears aggressive, out of control, or excessively fearful, the animal will not be forced to continue the test.
- ▶ If a handler acts in an unprofessional or inhumane way toward animals or people, this can also end the evaluation early.

There are steps you can take to ensure your own safety as well.

- 1.** Use best practices when approaching an animal.
  - Use a natural posture.
  - Talk using a friendly, natural tone of voice
  - Don't walk straight towards the animal. Come in at a slight angle to the side.
  - Do not use any quick movements or stiff gestures.
  - Do not wear dangling items. Wear neutral clothing and a minimum of jewelry.
- 2.** Err on the side of caution. If at any time an animal is making you uncomfortable, stop the interaction.
- 3.** Increase your knowledge of animal body language through experience, reading and online study.

# Exercise Descriptions

The following section details how evaluation assistants participate in specific team evaluation exercises.

## Exercise 6: Walk Through a Crowd

### **Assistants needed: 3**

- ▶ Three assistants act as crowd, each walking a different path. At least one passes in front of the team, and at least one passes behind the team. The assistants make no noise or distractions.
- ▶ You cross the room and wait. Some assistants will be needed for the next exercise.

### **Things you should know:**

You should not attempt to gain the animal's attention or create unnecessary noise or distraction as you cross the room. The team is being assessed to see if the animal stays with the handler in a crowd, rather than attempting to initiate an interaction, in addition to watching for stress in the animal.

## Exercise 7: Reaction to Distractions

### **Assistants needed: 2**

- ▶ One assistant produces a visual distraction, and one produces an auditory distraction. The same assistant can't produce both distractions.
- ▶ All distractions are produced no less than 10 feet away from the team.
- ▶ The visual distraction is produced in front of the team, and the auditory distraction is produced behind the team.

### **Things you should know:**

The same distractions must be used for every evaluation that's conducted that day. Distractions should mirror what could reasonably occur during a visit and aren't designed to be intentionally excessive. A list of approved distractions to choose from can be found in the Team Evaluator Policy and Procedure Manual.

## Exercise 8/9: Passed Between Three Strangers (Carried Animals Only)

### **Volunteers needed:** 3

- ▶ Three assistants are seated in chairs within an arm's length of each other, facing the team.
- ▶ The handler gives one of the assistants a towel or blanket to place on his or her lap, and then places the animal on the assistant's lap.
- ▶ After holding and petting the animal for 5 seconds, the assistant passes the animal back to the handler.
- ▶ The first assistant passes the towel/blanket to the second assistant, and the handler places the animal on the second assistant's lap for about 5 seconds.
- ▶ The animal is returned to the handler, the second assistant passes the towel/blanket to the third assistant, and the handler places the animal on the third assistant's lap for about 5 seconds.

### **Things you should know:**

During this exercise, you'll be gently petting the animal on your lap. During this exercise the handler may reassure their animal verbally, but not pet. If you find yourself holding the animal to prevent it from leaving your lap, let the team evaluator know.

We are also looking for the handler to guide the interaction and give you, the 'client,' instruction on how to handle their animal. This might include things like, "Rover really loves ear rubs" or "Fluffy prefers it if you don't pat her head." If you're unsure how to pet the species being evaluated, you can always ask the handler for guidance, as a client might.

## Exercise 10: Stay in Place (Carried Animals Only)

### **Volunteers needed:** varies

- ▶ The handler places the animal either on a towel or blanket on the table, or on a towel on the team evaluator's lap or an assistant's lap.
- ▶ The handler cues it to stay.
- ▶ The animal stays for 30 seconds without being petted.
- ▶ Standing next to the animal, the handler continues to hold the animal's lead and may reassure the animal but not pet it.

**Things you should know:**

This exercise doesn't necessarily involve an assistant. Handlers have the option of placing their animal on a table or on a lap. If they select a lap, the evaluator might do this exercise themselves.

However, if you are providing the lap for this exercise, you should know that you are not petting or restricting the animal as it sits with you. You should place your hands and arms in a natural position, for example, on either side of the animal as a client might. For a particularly large animal, they may rest upon your arm or your hand might be gently supporting their back end so the animal doesn't slide off your lap. The key is that you're not holding the animal in place and that it could move, if it wished. Some animals may try to initiate petting by nudging your hand, which is fine. That shows that they are seeking interactions and are not stressed by the experience.

## Exercise 12: Reaction to a Neutral Dog

**Assistants needed:** 1 neutral dog team, 2 assistants

- ▶ The testing team is standing with an evaluation assistant.
- ▶ The neutral dog team enters the room and makes a short (10-15 second) visit with another seated assistant.
- ▶ As the neutral dog team ends their visit, the two teams approach each other and pass approximately an arm's length apart.
- ▶ The testing team approaches the seated evaluation assistant for a visit as the neutral dog team leaves the room.

**Things you should know:**

At the start of the exercise when the testing team is standing with an assistant, the assistant is not petting the animal but may speak with the team as part of the role play. If you are the seated evaluation assistant, you may briefly pet the neutral dog team. When the testing team approaches you, use common sense in determining whether you want to pet the testing animal. If the animal is behaving excited or anxious about the presence of the neutral dog, rather than ask to pet the animal you can ask questions of the handler about their animal such as "what is his name?" or "what breed is she?". If you ever feel uncomfortable about interacting with an animal, always err on the side of caution.

## Exercise D: Staggering, Gesturing Individual

### Assistants needed: 1

- ▶ One assistant, wearing a robe and hat, begins the exercise 20 feet away, facing the team.
- ▶ The assistant approaches the team, using a piece of healthcare equipment while staggering, weaving, waving the arms and moaning as if he or she is in pain.
- ▶ The assistant stops 6 feet from the team and ceases all gesturing and vocalization.
- ▶ The assistant calls the animal to approach but must not pet the animal if it doesn't approach willingly.

### Things you should know:

As the assistant in this exercise, do not use an angry voice or body language. Additionally when using the healthcare equipment, typically a walker or crutches, do so in a normal manner, without shaking, rattling or dragging it.

Play close attention to distances if you are part of this exercise. In order to keep the exercise consistent, it's important that you stop 6 feet from the team at which time your body language and voice become neutral. Then invite the team over with a pleasant voice.

It is appropriate for the team to pause before approaching you. The handler should be supporting their animal and the animal should approach you willingly. When it does, you may pet the animal if you are comfortable doing so.

## Exercise E: Angry Yelling

### Assistants needed: 2

- ▶ While the team is interacting with the staggering and gesturing individual from Exercise D, two more assistants walk toward the team in a neutral posture, stopping 6 feet away.
- ▶ The assistants begin angrily yelling at each other and waving their arms. They should start at a lower level of yelling and increase for a total of no more than 10 seconds.
- ▶ When the team evaluator cues the assistants to stop, one of them calls the animal to see whether it will approach.

**Things you should know:**

As the assistants in this exercise, your approach should not feel threatening to the team in any way. Approach with neutral body language. When cued by the team evaluator, you'll raise your voices and become animated. You should not move towards the animal during this time, but you may push or shove one another as part of the role play.

When cued to stop fighting, neutralize your body language and voices and invite the team over. As with the previous exercise, it is appropriate for the team to pause before approaching you. The handler should be supporting their animal and the animal should approach you willingly. When it does, you may pet the animal if you are comfortable doing so.

## Exercise G: Crowded and Petted by Several People

**Assistants needed: 3**

- ▶ Three assistants begin 20 feet away, facing the team. One assistant uses healthcare equipment in a normal manner.
- ▶ One at a time, the assistants approach the team and begin to touch the animal, until all three are gathered closely around the animal.
- ▶ All three assistants talk to the animal and try to attract its attention.

**Things you should know:**

In this exercise each assistant will approach individually. When you have all gathered, each assistant should be at a different level: one standing, one kneeling and one sitting next to the animal. The assistant with the healthcare equipment continues to use it in a normal manner.

During this exercise, your observations can be very important since the evaluator may be unable to see how the animal is responding at all times. The expectation is that the handler is advocating for their animal, so they may instruct you on how to pet or ask for people to take turns petting, as they would on a crowded visit.