Service Animal Tips and Frequently Asked Questions

Portland Community College has a service animal policy and supporting page with links to brochures, concept maps, and external links. We also offer training sessions. In this document, we want to answer some common questions about service dogs, and provide some tips on appropriate interactions.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is a service animal?

A service animal is typically defined as a dog that is individually trained to do work or perform a task for a person with a disability. A service animal is not a pet. Federal law allows any service animal access to areas open to the public. A service animal is specifically trained to perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability.

Tasks may include pulling a wheelchair, assisting a person who is blind or has low vision with navigation, retrieving items, and performing tasks for people with non-apparent disabilities.

Q: Can I bring my emotional support, therapy, comfort, or companion animals to PCC?

No, support animals are not allowed on campus. Emotional support animals, comfort animals, and therapy dogs are not service animals under Title II and Title III of the ADA.

Other species of animals, whether wild or domestic, trained or untrained, are not considered service animals either, although in some cases, a miniature horse may be used instead of a dog. The work or tasks performed by a service animal must be directly related to the individual's disability. It does not matter if a person has a note from a doctor that states that the person has a disability and needs to have the animal for emotional support. A doctor's letter does not turn an animal into a service animal.

Q: What are my responsibilities as a service animal handler while at PCC?

The handler is responsible for the care and supervision of their service animal. For example, the animal should be housebroken and should be vaccinated in accordance with state and local laws. If a service animal behaves in an unacceptable way, i.e. barking, growling, acting aggressive toward people or other service animals, or disrupting classroom activity, and the handler does not control the animal, PCC can exclude the dog from PCC properties.

Uncontrolled barking, jumping on other people, or running away from the handler, are more examples of unacceptable behavior for a service animal. PCC and the ADA require the animal to be under the control of the handler at all times.

Q: How do I know if I need to intervene?

The animal's behavior should dictate the course of action. A service animal is first a dog; sometimes sniffing, relieving accidents, or excitement may happen on occasion. Contact Public Safety if these behaviors are consistently happening and/or the handler does not have control of the service dog.

Q: Does a service animal have to be "registered?" Or wear a vest and/or other indicator?

The ADA does not require that service animals "register" or wear a vest and/or other identifying badges. However, service animals must generally be under control and have a harness or leash and demonstrate "working dog behaviors" such as following verbal and/or hand commands and staying at attention.

Q: What if someone doesn't believe a dog is actually a service dog?

It is important to question assumptions. Disability shows up in many ways, and it is not always obvious to the casual observer. Often, disability isn't apparent, but just because a person doesn't "look disabled" doesn't mean

their dog isn't trained to perform specific tasks to assist with disability related needs. If the reason a person is questioning whether or not a dog is actually a service dog is related to a question about the type and nature of disability experienced by the handler, stop. It is not appropriate to question an individual on this basis. If a dog is under the control of the handler, and demonstrating "working dog" behavior, there is typically no need to intervene. However, if a dog is not under control, or is demonstrating problematic behavior, then designated college personnel may ask for a conversation to get clarification on the dog's status as an animal trained specifically to assist a person with a disability.

Q: What should someone do if they experience harassment or discrimination related to use of a service animal?

Portland Community College has a page set up for reporting incidents that can be used. Disability Services is also available to assist. Please contact us at any of our campus locations.

Q: What about people who are allergic to dogs?

Some people are allergic to dogs. Of those who experience allergic reactions, some have reactions that are more severe, and some that are less severe. When a service animal and their handler are navigating campus, attending classes, and participating in other college offerings, they need to be able to do so with the same degree of freedom experienced by peers. Thus, there is no requirement to register ahead of time, or notify in advance. If a person is experiencing allergic reactions, or other barriers related to exposure to service animals on campus, they are encouraged to connect with Disability Services or the College ADA Coordinator in HR as outlined in our Service Animal Policy.

Q: What if I have a specific question?

Please email us at serviceanimals@pcc.edu or contact us at any of our campus locations.

Service Animal Etiquette

Below are some tips for how to behave around service animals.

- Please don't make eye contact with, touch, talk, feed, or otherwise distract the service dog. Doing so could put the handler at risk.
- Speak to the handler, not the dog. Some handlers will allow petting, but be sure to ask before interacting with a service dog.
- Never give someone else's dog commands or grab their leash or harness. Allow the handler to communicate with their dog.
- Never feed a service dog. You should respect the handler's need to give the dog a balanced diet, and to maintain its good habits.
- Don't tease the dog, allow it to rest undisturbed. Service dogs get plenty of play time when not on duty. When they are at work, it is important that they remain focused on their person.
- Make sure not to allow your own animals to greet, challenge, or intimidate a service dog. A distracted service dog could result in harm to the person it is trained to assist. Negative encounters from other animals can traumatize the working dog, making the dog unable to continue performing its job.

Tips for Start of Term

Please remember that the start of a new term is stressful for everyone, including the service dogs. Please practice patience while people adjust to new schedules and respect the handler's space while they resolve transitional concerns.