

Association of Service Dog Providers for Military Veterans

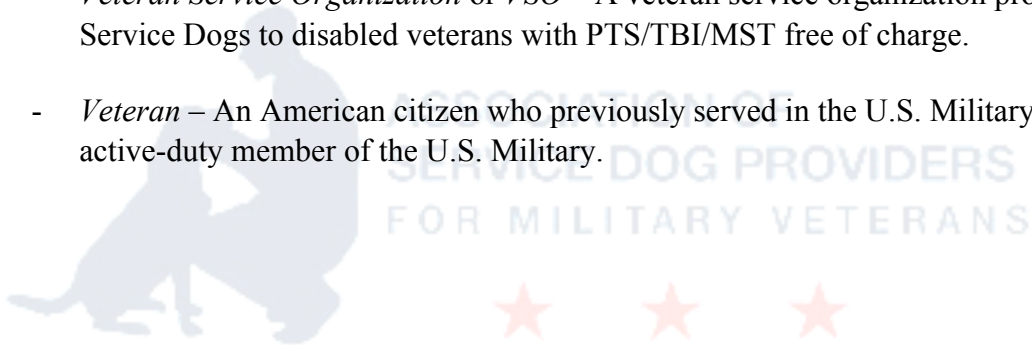
SERVICE DOG AGENCY STANDARDS

PURPOSE: The purpose of the Service Dog Agency Standards is to provide guidelines and requirements sufficient to ensure that accredited agencies are providing high quality Service Dogs and associated services for American veterans with Post-traumatic Stress, traumatic brain injury, and/or military sexual trauma. Adherence to these Standards is governed by the companion Service Dog Agency Accreditation Procedures.

DEFINITIONS: The following definitions apply for the Service Dog Agency Standards.

- *Applicant* – A disabled Veteran with Post-traumatic Stress (“PTS”), traumatic brain injury (“TBI”) and/or military sexual trauma (“MST”) applying to a Service Dog program for a Service Dog.
- *Community Model* – A mode of programming whereby a Veteran Service Organizations (VSO) offers both pre-trained Service Dogs or the option for a Veteran to train the Service Dog themselves.
- *Graduate* – A Veteran who has completed a VSO’s program, passed the VSO’s requirements, and received a Service Dog and returned home.
- *Graduation* – A point in time by which the VSO certifies that a Team consists of an adequately trained Veteran and an assistance canine that qualifies as a Service Dog.
- *Military Sexual Trauma* or *MST* – Psychological trauma resulting from experiences of sexual assault or repeated, threatening sexual harassment that a Veteran experienced during his or her military service. *See, U.S. Dept. of Vet. Affair website, <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/types/violence/military-sexual-trauma-general.asp>.*
- *Post-traumatic Stress* – A mental health disorder that some people develop after experiencing or witnessing a life-threatening event, like combat, a natural disaster, a car accident, or sexual assault. *See, U.S. Dept. of Vet. Affair website, <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/PTSD-overview/basics/what-is-ptsd.asp>*
- *National Model* – A mode of programming whereby a VSO provides a pre-trained Service Dog to a Veteran and houses the Veteran with the VSO during a Veteran’s training with their new Service Dog.
- *Service Dog* or *SD* – A canine trained to assist a Veteran with PTS satisfying the legal requirements for a service animal pursuant to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 and associated regulations.

- *Standards* – The Service Dog Agency Standards created by the member organizations of the Association of Service Dog Providers.
- *Team* – A Veteran and his/her Service Dog.
- *Trainer* – A member of the VSO staff that works with Veteran teaching them how to use their Service Dog.
- *Training Program* – the VSO’s core program teaching Veteran how to use their Service Dog.
- *Traumatic Brain Injury* or *TBI* – A TBI is caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or a penetrating head injury that disrupts the normal function of the brain. Not all blows or jolts to the head result in a TBI *See, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website, https://www.cdc.gov/traumaticbraininjury/get_the_facts.*
- *Veteran Service Organization* or *VSO* – A veteran service organization providing Service Dogs to disabled veterans with PTS/TBI/MST free of charge.
- *Veteran* – An American citizen who previously served in the U.S. Military or an active-duty member of the U.S. Military.



I. DOG SELECTION

GOAL: In selecting a potential Service Dog, a VSO should attempt to find the highest quality canine in regards to both health and temperament. Ultimately, a potential Service Dog must be selected with the expectation that it will meet all of the requirements for service animals as defined by American with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, and, in addition, be able to cater to the unique needs of Veteran with PTS, TBI, and/or MST.

- A. General Requirements: The following requirements should be met for all potential Service Dogs.
1. Spay and Neuter: It is recommended that a Service Dog be spayed/neutered by Graduation based upon a decision made by the VSO—ensuring that the Veterans’ well-being is prioritized. The appropriate age to spay/neuter a Service Dog will vary on the dog’s breed. Spay/neuter should not be done or not done to meet criteria outside of a VSO’s mission of serving Veterans (i.e. a Veteran’s personal preference for an intact male Service Dog should not determine when or if a Service Dog is neutered). Failure to spay/neuter a Service Dog may give rise to canine aggression and/or canine sexual behavior that may undermine the service the Service Dog is providing and/or exacerbate the Veteran’s PTS symptoms.
 2. Age: Potential Service Dogs should not begin public access training until at least seventeen (17) weeks of age or such time as: (1) the puppy is house-broken; and (2) all required vaccinations have been administered pursuant to best veterinary practices and as governed by state law in which the VSO practices. A potential Service Dog should not enter training after its third birthday. If a VSO has a prior existing relationship with the potential Service Dog, the VSO may, on a case-by-case basis, commence training prior to a potential Service Dog’s fourth birthday.
 - i. *Community Model Exception: In the event a Veteran would like to train a pre-existing dog (i.e. a family pet) to be a Service Dog, the VSO may make an appropriate age determination on a case-by-case basis.*
 3. Temperament: The VSO must conduct a temperament test for all potential Service Dogs. A temperament test should ascertain whether or not a potential Service Dog: (1) shows aggression toward people, children, other animals, or other dogs; (2) has low to medium reactivity and/or arousal to sounds, animals, and other stimuli; (3) displays sufficient levels of

neotony; and (4) otherwise displays the friendly and servicing nature of a high quality Service Dog.

4. Health: The VSO must conduct a health test for all potential Service Dogs. A health test should ascertain whether or not a potential Service Dog is: (1) heartworm negative; (2) free of obvious physical infirmities (limps, missing or short limbs, open wounds); (3) alert and visually healthy with working vision and hearing; (4) up-to-date on Rabies, DHLPP (Distemper and Lepto), and Bordatella vaccinations; (5) not displaying signs of hip dysplasia; and (6) free of obvious dental diseases or infirmities.
5. Size: Ideally, a Service Dog will be twenty-four (24) inches at the shoulder and at least sixty (60) pounds and no taller than thirty-four (34) inches at the shoulder and not heavier than ninety-nine (99) pounds. However, a VSO may make case-by-case exceptions to these ranges as long as the potential Service Dog is of sufficient size or reasonably expected to grow to sufficient size to perform the tasks it will ultimately be trained to perform and/or the potential Service Dog is not so large or will grow to be so large that its use as a service animal would be impractical.
6. Vocality: A VSO should assess a potential Service Dog's predilection to bark and/or whine excessively.
7. Trainability: A VSO should assess a potential Service Dog's ability to be trained to serve as a Service Dog.

B. Breeds: These Standards proscribe no specific breed restrictions. However, a VSO should be cautious in pairing a Veteran with a Service Dog that would inhibit the benefit of social lubrication (for example, a very large, aggressive looking dog may frighten members of the public away from engaging a Veteran and, thus, further isolating that Veteran).

C. Uniformity and Documentation: A VSO should conduct uniform and consistent potential Service Dog assessments and keep appropriate records related thereto. These records must be stored in a manner that allows easy access for audits and reviews.

II. SERVICE DOG TRAINING

GOAL: A VSO should train a Service Dog to be a high quality service animal that satisfies the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and be able to cater to the unique needs of Veteran with PTS/TBI/MST.

A. General: These Standards are primarily focused upon the quality of the Service Dog and associated training at the time of Graduation. Each Team will be trained to meet the standards for a service animal established by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and each Service Dog will be trained to pass the AKC+ Test mentioned below. Service Dogs will be taught at least (3) tasks to assist the Veteran with his/her disability.

B. Testing:

1. Puppies: For VSO's utilizing puppies, the VSO will train the puppy to pass the American Kennel Club ("AKC") S.T.A.R. Puppy Certification and, ultimately, conduct and ensure the passage of that test for each puppy before Graduation.
2. Prior to Graduation, a Team will pass: (1) the AKC Canine Good Citizen Test ("CGC"), (2) the AKC CGC Canine Test; and (3) AKC Urban CGC Test. In addition, each Team must demonstrate proficiency in the specific tasks the Service Dog has been trained to perform to assist the Veteran. These three (3) AKC CGC tests and task proficiency tests are collectively referred to as "AKC+ Test."

C. Training Hours:

1. Prior to Graduation, a Service Dog will receive a minimum of two hundred and forty (240) hours of training with an additional minimum of sixty (60) hours of public exposure and a minimum of sixty (60) hours of training in public places (venues, retail stores, restaurants).
 - i. *Community Model: The time between the pairing of a Service Dog with a Veteran in the Community Model and Graduation shall be no more than six (6) months. Prior to Graduation, a Team will train together for a minimum of fifty (50) hours.*
2. Uniformity and Records: A VSO should conduct uniform and consistent training and keep appropriate records related thereto. These records must be stored in a manner that allows easy access for audits and reviews.

III. VETERAN SELECTION

GOAL: Service Dogs should only be paired with Veterans who will both benefit from the use of a Service Dog and have demonstrated that they can financially, physically, and emotionally care for the Service Dog.

- A. Application Process: The VSO should have a uniform, clear, and objective application process that commences with a paper or online application and supporting documents that is reviewed by VSO staff. Following a favorable review of written materials, at the very least, a phone interview should be conducted to complete the VSO's understanding of the Applicant. Any application should require sufficient information of the Applicant to provide the VSO a strong sense of the Applicant's life, lifestyle, disability(ies), family, home environment, work environment, and physical condition/routines.
- B. Minimum Requirements: In order to qualify for a Service Dog, an Applicant must meet some initial, threshold requirements, including: (1) U.S. military service; (2) a service-related or service-connected (i.e caused by service in the military) diagnosis of PTS/TBI/MST verified by a letter from a licensed professional (at a minimum, Licensed Clinical Social Worker ("LCSW")); (3) a physical address and stable living environment; (4) the ability to financially care for a Service Dog; and (5) be free of substance abuse. Should an Applicant satisfy these threshold requirements, a thorough vetting of each applicant should be made.
 1. Waiver: A VSO may choose to waive one (1) of the minimum requirements based upon a uniform application of the VSO's case-by-case analysis of each Applicant's eligibility for a Service Dog. However, a VSO should never compromise or risk the safety of the Service Dog in making an exception to the above minimum standards.
- C. Supporting Documentation: The following supporting documentation should accompany any successful application to a VSO.
 1. A Letter from the Department of Veteran's Affairs ("VA"), a VA award letter, or physician/licensed counselor stating diagnosis of service-related and/or service-connected PTS, TBI, and/or MST.
 2. A letter from a physician or licensed counselor stating an Applicant is medically, physically and mentally able to take care for a Service Dog.
 - i. *Community Model Exception: Under the Community Model, a physician or licensed counselor should also confirm that an Applicant has the ability to train a dog.*
- D. Physical Ability: Each Veteran should have enough physical strength to train and care for a Service Dog. A Veteran should either (a) have the physical capability to exercise a Service Dog every day; or (b) have a plan/capability to ensure his/her

Service Dog is properly exercised every day. Under no circumstances should a VSO pair a Service Dog with a Veteran when it is highly likely the Service Dog will not be used and/or will be kept confined in small areas for the majority of the Service Dog's life.

E. Prior Existing Pets: An Applicant should not have a home environment with pets that will compromise the work and/or safety of the Service Dog.

1. A Veteran must have sufficient room and finances in order to care for his/her Service Dog and any pre-existing pets.
2. If an aggression issue arises between a prior existing pet and a Service Dog, the following should occur:
 - i. The VSO will attempt to resolve the aggression issues via training advice and/or training;
 - ii. The VSO will reclaim the Service Dog and, if appropriate, pair the Service Dog with a new Veteran; and/or
 - iii. Provide the Veteran with the option of rehoming their other pet(s).
 - iv. *Community Model Exception: A Community Model VSO may review each individual case of Prior Existing Pets and/or pet aggression and determine, on a case-by-case basis, whether to allow the Veteran to continue in their program, but at no point should the welfare and/or safety of the Service Dog be compromised.*

F. Financial Ability:

1. An Applicant must be able to financially care for a Service Dog. The VSO should assess the Applicant's financial/home situation prior to accepting an Applicant. For example, a homeless Applicant should not be accepted. Rather, the VSO should endeavor to assist the Applicant with stabilizing his/her home environment and encourage re-applying. The VSO should maintain sufficient reserve funds to assist Graduates with emergency Service Dog health issues.

G. Military Records:

1. Each Applicant should have an Honorable Discharge from the U.S. Military. This should be verified through the DD-214 (Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty). VSO staff having responsibilities in the acceptance process of an Applicant should have sufficient training on the DD-214 format to know what areas to look at and find the proper information within that form. Exceptions, though rare, may be made for general or other than honorable discharge as determined by the VSO on a case-by-case basis (i.e. a military sexual assault victim may have a general discharge until such time as the veracity of his/her claims can be adjudicated by the military).

2. When an active duty service member applies for a Service Dog, they should be made aware as soon as possible, that it will be up to the discretion of their current command if they will be permitted to utilize their Service Dog at their unit's location (i.e. taking the Service Dog to work with them).
 - i. Given that an active duty service member will not have DD-214 for reference and verification (Honorable Discharge) purposes, a VSO may look to alternate documentation such as a letter from current command, a copy of a recent DA Form 4856 Developmental Counseling, DA Form 2166-8 NCO Evaluation Report, DA Form 67-9 Officer Evaluation Report.

H. Criminal background:

1. VSO's should conduct criminal background checks of every Applicant prior to acceptance into a program. Applicants with felony convictions should be denied acceptance. If an Applicant has an open court case, they should be kept in a "Pending" status until the court case is finished and the outcome can be verified. If any Applicant is denied acceptance, they should be provided other resources that may be able to assist them.
 - i. On a case-by-case basis, a VSO may accept an Applicant with a criminal background given facts leading the VSO to believe the Applicant could appropriately care for the Service Dog (i.e. old, non-violent, and/or PTS-related convictions).

I. No History of Abuse of Animals:

1. Under no circumstances should an Applicant be accepted into a VSO program if that Applicant has a history of animal abuse including, but not limited to, arrests, charges and/or convictions for animal cruelty, abuse and/or neglect.

J. Anger Management:

1. During the application process, the VSO should inquire as to an Applicant's prior anger management issues and anger coping mechanisms.

IV. VETERAN TRAINING

GOAL: Veterans receiving Service Dogs should be thoroughly trained in the use of their Service Dog. In addition, the VSO should spend sufficient time with the Veteran to ensure a proper match has been made and that the Veteran can both benefit from the use of the Service Dog and is physically and emotionally capable of taking care of the Service Dog. The VSO should spend sufficient time with the Veteran and have sufficient skill/experience in training Veterans such that when the Veteran leaves the VSO's program, he/she feels comfortable utilizing his/her Service Dog in daily activities.

- A. Pairing: The pairing of a Team should be made based upon a review of the Veteran's application and the Service Dogs that are available. The review is to determine the best fit for each Team, based upon the mental and physical ability of the Veteran that would match with each dog's temperament. Family, work/school life, lifestyle and other responsibilities of the Veteran should also be taken into account to make the final match (i.e. a Veteran who is fit and runs every morning and is outside the house everyday should not be paired with a relatively lethargic Service Dog). This standard does not preclude a VSO from specifically training a dog for a particular Veteran or otherwise involving the Veteran in the selection/pairing process.
- B. Training Program: The VSO should have a regimented Training Program that is replicable class-by-class and/or Veteran-by-Veteran. The Training Program must be written down, the VSO staff must implement the Training Program generally as written, and the Training Program should include, at a minimum the following:
1. Live-In Program/Minimum Training: The Training Program should be at least eight (8) days at a "live in" facility including at least fifty (50) hours of live training, at least forty (40) hours of obedience, public access, and task training, and at least ten (10) ten hours of classroom training. If a VSO does not have the capacity to provide an eight (8) day "live-in" Training Program, the VSO should be within less than one (1) hour's drive for the Veteran and the same training requirements completed within a sixty (60) day window.
 2. Service Dog Training: Veterans must be trained in basic dog obedience. Veterans should be trained sufficiently to not only understand the basic commands, but also the theory behind the dog training. The Veteran should be able to master basic commands (sit, stay, heal, down, come when called), the Service Dog should be fully responsive to those commands, and the Veteran should feel comfortable teaching the Service Dog new commands.

3. **Specific Task Training:** The Veteran must be trained on the specific tasks the Service Dog has been trained to do to assist the Veteran with his/her disability. The Veteran should be taught how to utilize these specific tasks in a controlled environment and in public.
 4. **Public Access:** The Veteran must be shown how to use his/her Service Dog in public. In particular, the Training Program should include taking the Team into public and partaking in normal daily life activities including, but not limited to: visiting stores, sitting down at restaurants, making purchases, visiting parks, and walking in busy shopping areas. Upon the completion of the Training Program, the Veteran should feel comfortable utilizing his/her Service Dog in public.
 5. **Exercise:** The Training Program must include exercise including walking at least several miles a day. A strong exercise component ensures that the Veteran has sufficient physical ability to utilize a Service Dog. Mobility limited Veterans must be able to properly utilize the Service Dog and the VSO must tailor their program accordingly to ensure the Service Dog is properly utilized.
 6. **Classroom:** The Training Program should include a classroom component covering the following areas: (1) basic Service Dog and public access laws, including the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and associated regulations; (2) intro to dog behavior, training philosophy, and training techniques; (3) First Aid and health care for dogs; (4) having a Service Dog in home and work environments; and (5) dog grooming.
 7. **Physical Tools:** The Veteran should be provided with the physical tools needed to utilize their Service Dog (i.e. leash, vest, starter dog food; identification card).
 8. **Progress:** If a Veteran is falling behind or having trouble, he/she cannot move forward until the training issue is resolved. If there is a problem with a dog and not the Veteran, it may be necessary to replace the Service Dog. The Veteran should be required to take written and/or oral tests on the lecture material to ensure information retention.
- C. The Training Program must be tailored to Veteran with PTS. Ensuring that the Training Program is responsive to a Veteran with PTS is critical. In particular, the following must be kept in mind:

1. PTS is a medical disability caused by extreme trauma.
 2. A Service Dog alone is insufficient to help a Veteran recover from the invisible wounds of war. Rather, the Training Program must include a holistic approach to assisting the Veteran including Trainers who are sensitive and trained to understand PTS, TBI, MST, severe anxiety, nightmares/night terrors, flashbacks, depression, loss of concentrating, fear, isolation, suicidal ideation and are able to react sensitively if these issues arise.
 3. Trust must be established between the Veteran and the VSO and in particular the Trainers. Without the Veteran having trust in the Trainers and a belief that the VSO has their best interests in mind, a pairing may not be successful.
 4. Each VSO takes on a special responsibility to craft a Training Program that will maximize a Veteran's chance of success.
 5. The goal of any Training Program should be to get a Veteran back into civilian life with dignity and independence.
- D. Trainers: Trainers should be sufficiently sensitive to issues related to PTS, TBI, and MST and should otherwise adapt their training methods to meet the individual needs of a particular Veteran. Trainers must guide Veteran through what can be a stressful and frightening experience. Trainers should exhibit qualities such as professionalism, confidence and patience. Every Veteran should be treated with respect. Trainers should be knowledgeable about dog training and veterans' health issues. Trainers must have experience dealing with individuals that may be suicidal, quick to anger, and/or prone to violent eruptions. Trainers must have access to emergency services while training.
- E. Weapons/Alcohol/Controlled Substances: The Veteran should be trained in an environment where: (1) the presence of weapons is controlled and known to the VSO; (2) the Veteran cannot access alcohol; and (3) the Veteran cannot access controlled substances other than those prescribed to the Veteran. It is recommended that the VSO search the Veteran for weapons and/or controlled substances and retain sufficient control over the training area so as to be aware of the presences of any weapons and/or controlled substances.
- F. Graduation: The Veteran must be able to prove that the Team is working sufficiently. In particular, the Veteran should be required to pass the AKC+ Test, including, but not limited to:

1. Obedience: The Team will be able to heel on a loose leash, sit, down and recall on command.
 2. Tasks: The Team will be able to demonstrate proficiency in at least three (3) tasks that have been taught according to the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and associated regulations. These tasks may include “my lap,” “cover,” “block” and/or “brace.” If the Service Dog has been taught to retrieve or any other task to mitigate a disability, they must proficiently demonstrate those tasks.
 3. Public Access: The Team will demonstrate that they can work in multiple environments without distraction and also not be a distraction during public access. The Service Dog should not bark, growl, lunge, or be disruptive.
 4. Once the team has demonstrated that they can perform all phases of training proficiently and have completed their mandatory hours of training, they can then be given the AKC+ Test. The team must make 90% or better on the test which will be graded by the trainer administering the test.
- G. Prepare to return home: The VSO should adequately prepare the Veteran and his/her family for his/her return home. At a minimum, a Trainer should meet with the Veteran and discuss: (1) ensuring that the Service Dog is immediately connected with appropriate veterinary care; (2) the challenges associated with bringing a new Service Dog home and integrating the Service Dog into the Veteran’s daily life and his/her family’s life; (3) the fact that the Veteran can and should reach out to the VSO for assistance with the new Service Dog, and (4) inform the veteran what their rights are with regard to their Service Dog and educate them on how to respond when questioned or denied access to accommodations, employment, housing and the like.
1. Contract: The passing of ownership for the Service Dog to the Veteran is a contractual issue to be resolved between the VSO and the Veteran. The VSO should have a standard legal contract that it utilizes with each Veteran. It is advised that the VSO retain sufficient rights over the Service Dog such that the VSO can reclaim the Service Dog should sufficient evidence arise that the Veteran is mistreating or neglecting the Service Dog.
 - i. Death: In the event a Veteran passes away, the VSO should apply a uniform, fact-based analysis focused on the well-being of the Service Dog as to the Service Dog will remain with the Veteran’s family, reassigned, or otherwise retired.

VI. FOLLOW-UP SERVICES

GOAL: A Graduate should always be able to reach out for and receive adequate help with his/her Service Dog. In addition to ensuring that a Graduate is getting the benefit of his/her Service Dog, proper follow-up services assures that the VSO's Service Dogs are, in fact, being appropriately cared for and still qualify for public access.

- A. Communication: Communicating with a recent Graduate is critical. Returning home after receiving a Service Dog is often times a stressful experience for a Graduate and his/her family must also acclimate to the new Service Dog. A VSO should communicate with a Graduate within five (5) days after a Graduate returns home. Thereafter, the VSO should have a protocol for follow-up communications. Each Graduate will be different with some requiring more attention. The VSO should be sensitive to the fact that the Graduate's Service Dog may not respond to the Graduate the same as it did in the training environment. Thus, training/acclimation advice is crucial to early success.
- B. Required Information: At a minimum, before a Veteran returns home or once a Graduate has returned home, the VSO should have the following information: (1) contact information for the Graduate; (2) the name and contact information for the Service Dogs veterinarian; (3) information for a secondary/emergency contact; and (4) the VSO's contact information on the Service Dog's microchip.
- C. Resolving Issues: Each Graduate will have different types and different levels of acclimation issues related to their Service Dog. Likewise, each Graduate will improve/recover with the assistance of a Service Dog at different rates and in different ways. To ensure proper follow-up services, a VSO should have:
 - 1. A clear and responsive line of communication with each Graduate. A 24-hour, toll-free number is recommended.
 - 2. Staff tasked with answering communications from Graduates must have sufficient training/experience to answer questions and/or connect the Graduate with appropriate resources. It is strongly recommended that they have ample training in suicide prevention.
 - 3. A contact plan with regard to each Graduate. Some Graduates will need repeated contacts while other Graduates will need little attention. In no event should a new Graduate go more than seven (7) days in the

first month and sixty (60) days in the first six (6) months without contact from the VSO. After a Graduate has passed the six (6) month mark with little difficulty, the VSO should tailor a contact plan. A Graduate should not go more than six (6) months without some form of contact from the VSO.

4. Should a Graduate encounter problems after returning home with his/her new Service Dog, the VSO should have an escalating collection of resources for the Graduate including: (1) spot training for minor dog obedience issues; (2) recommendations to local trainers for more serious obedience issues; (3) staff to provide practical advice for common problems associated with integrating a new Service Dog into a Graduate's daily life; (4) the availability for the Graduate to return to the VSO for supplemental training; and (5) for serious obedience issues related to the training of the Service Dog (and not the handling by the Graduate) the option for the Service Dog to be replaced.

D. Recertification: The VSO should have a standardized recertification plan for their Graduates. Recertification after the first year is recommended and then every two (2) years after that. Under no circumstances should the VSO allow more than two (2) years to pass without (1) physically seeing the Service Dog (either personally or via live video); (2) ensuring that the Service Dog is being properly cared for; and (3) ensuring the Service Dog is still appropriately trained for public access. The VSO should have a recertification process that is comparable to the testing the VSO utilizes prior to graduating a Team.

VII. MISCELLANEOUS

- A. Dog Welfare: VSO's hold a great responsibility to ensure the safety and welfare of their Service Dogs. Under no circumstances, should a VSO allow a Service Dog to be placed in a dangerous situation including, but not limited to, a kill shelter.
- a. A VSO should ensure that all Service Dogs are properly identified with, at the very least, a dog identification tag with current contact information. A Service Dog should have an ID micro-chip.
 - b. A VSO staff should be well-trained in dog First Aid and, if the following emergencies occur, ensure that an immediate veterinary consultation occurs:
 - i. Severe bleeding or bleeding that doesn't stop within 5 minutes
 - ii. Choking, difficulty breathing or nonstop coughing and gagging
 - iii. Bleeding from nose, mouth, rectum, coughing up blood, or blood in urine
 - iv. Inability to urinate or pass feces (stool), or obvious pain associated with urinating or passing stool
 - v. Injuries to the dog's eye(s)
 - vi. Staff suspect or know the dog has eaten something poisonous (such as antifreeze, xylitol, chocolate, rodent poison, etc.)
 - vii. Seizures and/or staggering
 - viii. Fractured bones, severe lameness or inability to move leg(s)
 - ix. Obvious signs of pain or extreme anxiety
 - x. Heat stress or heatstroke
 - xi. Severe vomiting or diarrhea – more than 2 episodes in a 24-hour period, or either of these combined with obvious illness or any of the other problems listed here
 - xii. Refusal to eat or drink for 24 hours or more
 - xiii. Unconsciousness
 - c. The VSO should provide routine veterinary care for all dogs in training and otherwise ensure the health and safety of the dogs in their care.
- B. Veteran Welfare: VSO's hold great responsibilities to ensure the health safety of their Veteran participants.
- a. At least one (1) person on the VSO staff should be trained in suicide prevention.
 - b. The VSO should have access to emergency healthcare.
- C. Financial Transparency:
- a. A VSO should spend no fewer than seventy-five (75) cents of every dollar spent on programming as generally defined by GAAP.
 - b. A VSO should make all of their financial statements, including current IRS Form 990 available to the general public.
 - c. No VSO should charge a Veteran for a Service Dog or for associated services.

D. These Standards are intended to assist VSO's in providing the highest quality services to American veterans and to ensure the health and safety of Service Dogs. They do not provide a "standard of care" for purposes of proving negligence and/or for matters outside of the stated purpose of these Standards.

