

Pet Partners

Animal-Assisted Crisis Response (AACR) Program

Welcome & Purpose

Thank you for your interest in the Pet Partners Animal-Assisted Crisis Response (AACR) Program. This document outlines the Program's requirements, deployment protocols, and general policies. Throughout this guide, the term "facility" is used to refer to any entity—from a school to a church to a fire department—who is requesting that AACR teams visit. Crisis event coordinators and facilities are invited to email aacr@petpartners.org for more information about deploying Pet Partners AACR teams.

About Pet Partners

Founded in 1977, Pet Partners is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization with the mission to improve human health and well-being through the human-animal bond. The organization is widely recognized as the industry leader in animal-assisted interventions and registers nine species of therapy animals. Our registered therapy animal handlers are volunteers who have completed therapy animal coursework and passed a team evaluation with their animal, which assesses the team's skills and aptitude for animal-assisted activities.

All therapy animal teams are covered by general liability insurance and are limited to 2-hour visits per day. Therapy animal teams are volunteers, and as such, payment for therapy animal visits is not required. Visit opportunities vary by geographic market and availability of teams.

AACR Definitions & Required Training

Animal-Assisted Crisis Response (AACR) is a type of animal-assisted activity (AAA) that brings comfort to people during times of crisis. These crises can be natural (like wildfires or hurricanes), human-caused (like a mass shooting), or technological disasters (like transportation accidents). AACR works because animals can help people feel safe, calm, and supported. The presence of a therapy animal creates a sense of comfort and helps build trust with people affected by a crisis. AACR does not replace professional counselors or medical staff. Instead, therapy animals offer support in the early stages after a crisis by listening, showing empathy, and sharing the unconditional love that therapy dogs and other therapy animals can offer.

Partners AACR handlers must complete online training, which includes psychological first aid concepts, sometimes also referred to as mental health first aid. This training has been designed with input from subject matter experts in the field. The AACR coursework is in addition to the Therapy Animal Handler Course, our foundational coursework for all

registered handlers. Handlers who apply for the AACR credential must maintain an active therapy animal team registration with Pet Partners, have at least six months of visiting experience, and pass an in-person evaluation every two years.

AACR does not take the place of professional interventions. Rather, it provides support in the immediate wake of a crisis through listening, empathy, and sharing the unconditional love of a therapy animal. AACR can be effective for everyone affected by the impact of a crisis, including first responders and crisis management staff.

AACR Deployments

The Pet Partners AACR program is based on a simple idea: neighbors helping neighbors. We believe that people who live in the community are best able to help their own community after a crisis or disaster. Teams focus on local crisis events, while Pet Partners staff help organize their visits, so the teams can focus on giving support where it's needed most.

All nine registered Pet Partners species are eligible for AACR and deployment. While most AACR teams include only dogs, other species of therapy animals can be great at this work. Pet Partners wants to make them available to assist their communities in times of crisis. If you are open to other species, please let us know at the time of request.

Currently registered Pet Partners teams are eligible for AACR training and credentialing when they have at least six months of active visiting experience. Pet Partners AACR teams receive training that includes psychological first aid concepts, sometimes referred to as mental health first aid, as well as an introduction to the FEMA Incident Command System.

Depending on the location of the event and availability, AACR teams can typically respond to deployments with as little as 24 hours' notice, or in the case of anniversaries, be invited to events as far out as six months from the determined date.

Examples of Pet Partners Deployments

Since the launch of the AACR Program in October 2019, credentialed therapy animal teams have assisted in the following types of situations:

- ▶ Visiting healthcare workers and first responders impacted by COVID-19
- ▶ Mobile relief units in areas impacted by floods, tornadoes, and wildfires
- ▶ Reopening of schools/universities following mass casualty events
- ▶ Classrooms following the untimely death of a young student
- ▶ Memorials marking the anniversary of a coworker's death
- ▶ Visiting soldiers in National Guard chaplain's offices
- ▶ Supporting victims of domestic violence

Fees and Payment

Pet Partners does not charge for crisis response visits.

However, as a nonprofit, we kindly ask for donations to help cover the costs of training and supporting these specialized teams. Donations allow us to offer continuing education, scholarships, dedicated AACR equipment, and other resources that make this program even stronger for the people we help.

If you would like to donate, you can request an invoice or make a donation online at <https://action.petpartners.org/page/143248/donate/>.

Requesting Teams for a Deployment

Please contact AACR through a designated email address at aacr@petpartners.org. You will be provided with a scheduling form to provide details for the visits. This form contains information such as:

- ▶ Desired deployment date and time; if more than one date is desired, please specify
- ▶ Exact location of therapy visits
- ▶ Desired number of teams
- ▶ Approximate number of clients
- ▶ Nature of the event
- ▶ Parking information
- ▶ On-site contact for day of visit
- ▶ Security screening or precautions (if necessary)

An AACR coordinator will follow up directly to review the request and gather any outstanding logistical information for the deployment. Required documentation, such as directions for obtaining parking passes or maps of the location, must be provided to the AACR Coordinator at least 24 hours in advance of the deployment.

Once the logistics are confirmed, the AACR coordinator will contact suitable teams within the community and confirm their availability. When the teams' availability is confirmed, the on-site contact will receive a confirmation email with the handlers' contact information. Please keep in mind that all Pet Partners therapy teams are volunteers, and visits cannot be guaranteed.

The on-site contact should plan to meet the teams at the designated parking area 15 minutes prior to the deployment start time.

Policies and Procedures

Below are some of the important policies and procedures our registered therapy animal teams must abide by during therapy animal visits. For more information, please visit our website, www.petpartners.org.

- ▶ Therapy animal handlers must only wear Pet Partners branded gear during visits.

- ▶ Therapy animal teams must not wear clothing, badges, patches, and other gear naming other therapy animal groups or AACR organizations.
- ▶ Therapy animal visits must be under two hours in length per day.
- ▶ Therapy animal handlers may only visit with one animal at a time.
- ▶ Therapy animal handlers must always be in control of their animal.
- ▶ Therapy animals must always be leashed, and handlers must always be in primary control of their animal's leash.
- ▶ Therapy animal handlers must wear closed-toe shoes and setting-appropriate clothing.
- ▶ Therapy animal teams must visit in settings appropriate for their qualification rating.
- ▶ Therapy animals must be groomed no more than 24 hours before a visit.
- ▶ Therapy animal teams must represent the program in a professional manner.
- ▶ Therapy animal handlers must uphold the Code of Ethics.

We hope the information contained in this guide is helpful. To share comments or suggestions, please email the Strategic Partnerships Manager, Angela Ying, at aacr@petpartners.org.