



Pet Partners™

# PET <sup>OF THE</sup> YEAR

## Candidate Fundraising Guide

March 2 - April 13, 2026

This is our 5th annual *Pet of the Year* event. Pet candidates and their parents from around the world will compete in a six-week fundraising competition promoting human health and well-being through the human-animal bond, all with the ultimate goal of their pet being crowned Pet Partners *Pet of the Year*.



# Event Overview



Pet Partners *Pet of the Year* is an exciting six-week fundraising competition for pets, with help from the people who love them most. Funds raised by pet candidates will support the Pet Partners Therapy Animal Program. This program brings unconditional love, happiness, and healing to millions of seniors, patients, veterans, and children in need around the world each year.

The national title of Pet Partners *Pet of the Year* is awarded to the pet whose fundraising team raises the most funds during the six-week competition. The winner will be crowned at the close of the competition and awarded exciting prizes for their efforts. Second and third place pets will also receive recognition.



## Important Dates

### March 2

This will officially mark the beginning of the six-week fundraising competition and the donations buttons will be activated.

### April 12

Leaderboards will be removed from the website for the remaining 48 hours of the competition, keeping the winner a surprise.

### April 13

Fundraising deadline is at 11:59 p.m. CT.

### April 14

Pet Partners will crown the 2026 Pet Partners *Pet of the Year* during a virtual awards ceremony.

# About Us

Pet Partners' mission is to improve human health and well-being through the human-animal bond. We prepare and support thousands of volunteers and their pets in making millions of meaningful visits annually in hospitals, schools, nursing homes, and anywhere vulnerable or underserved individuals would benefit from spending time with a comforting animal.



## When you support Pet Partners, you:



### INSPIRE HOPE

Our Animal-Assisted Crisis Response teams are trained and credentialed to provide emotional comfort and support in the wake of crisis events such as natural disasters and community tragedies.



### CARE FOR SENIORS

Pet Partners therapy animal teams make life-changing visits to thousands of seniors each year at retirement and assisted living facilities.



### NURTURE LEARNING

Pet Partners teams promote literacy through our Read With Me™ initiative. Research shows that when reading to a therapy animal, children feel at ease because animals just listen and don't judge.



### ENCOURAGE CHILDREN

A recent pediatric cancer study shows that therapy animals help motivate patients to participate in their treatment so they can “get better” and stay optimistic over time.



### IMPROVE HEALTH

Our Walk With Me™ initiative is a popular option for people of all ages. A stroll with an adorable therapy dog or mini horse is sometimes the perfect motivation to keep folks active and healthy.



### HONOR HEROES

Our teams visit thousands of veterans, service members, and children of deployed military parents each year at VA facilities, summer camps, and senior care communities for veterans.



**Pet  
Partners™**

# Candidate Basics



## What is a Pet Candidate?

A pet candidate is a pet that has been nominated to participate in Pet Partners *Pet of the Year*. Pet candidates can be your own pet or someone else's. They are the face of the fundraising efforts. The love and joy they bring to all will help drive donations to your fundraiser!



## What is a Proud Pet Parent?

A proud pet parent is the pet candidate's owner who is excited to share their pet with the world and compete for the national title of Pet Partners *Pet of the Year*. As a proud pet parent, you are agreeing to help your pet raise the most funds possible during the six-week fundraising competition by organizing fundraisers or establishing a fundraising committee to support your pet through joint efforts.



## What is a Candidate Committee?

A candidate committee is made up of a few key people who are excited to support your pet candidate in raising the most funds possible. Ideally, many of your fundraising committee members will already be familiar with your pet and how special they are. Committee members may include family members, friends, colleagues, or members of your community who share the love for your pet and are passionate to reach out to their own contacts to raise money on behalf of your pet. Together, you and your committee will compete to earn your pet the national title of Pet Partners *Pet of the Year* and celebrate the impactful and inspiring work of Pet Partners.



# Sample Committee Ask



Dear Friends and Colleagues,

I'm sure you know how much I love [insert pet name]! [Insert pet name] and I will be teaming up to compete in the Pet Partners *Pet of the Year* fundraising competition, and I would love to have you support us by joining our fundraising committee. This six-week fundraising competition starts on March 2nd and ends on April 13th at 11:59 p.m. CT. The funds we raise together will support Pet Partners and their Therapy Animal Program, which provides loving therapy animal visits to millions of people each year.

We will be scheduling a Yappy Hour to create our fundraising plan with a Pet Partners staff person, so we will be set up for success from the start. I'd be delighted to have you on our team to support [insert pet name] in being crowned Pet Partners *Pet of the Year*!

Thank you for your consideration!

Proud Pet Parent,

[insert contact information]

## Questions & Yappy Hour

Please email your confirmed committee list to Erin Maennle at [erinm@petpartners.org](mailto:erinm@petpartners.org) to schedule your Yappy Hour.

Please feel free to call Erin at **425-679-5535** with any questions or for additional materials. Again, thank you for supporting your pet candidate in their competition. Your contributions directly support millions of patients, seniors, children, and veterans who receive healing visits from Pet Partners therapy animal teams.



*Pet of the Year Candidate!*

# Steps to Success

## 1. Set a fundraising goal

Set your goal, share it with others, and celebrate milestones and achievements along the way. Remember, if you reach your goal, you can always increase it. The more you raise, the more prizes you will earn, and the closer your pet will be to becoming crowned Pet Partners *Pet of the Year*!

## 2. Form a fundraising committee

Recruit 3-8 friends, family, and colleagues to help your pet become Pet Partners *Pet of the Year*. They can help you recruit other committee members and donors, and celebrate successes achieved together.

## 3. Customize your pet's page

After your pet has been nominated, a fundraising web page will be set up by Pet Partners staff. You can customize your pet's fundraising page in less than 10 minutes!

Use this page to invite others to support you and your pet. Encourage committee members to join your team online. They can customize their own personal pages too! You can share fun group photos and specific goals on your timeline.

Monitor your fundraising during the first month of the competition by checking your goal thermometer on your fundraising page (until the four-week mark).

## 4. Create a donor list

Encourage your committee to schedule a Yappy Hour to create a list of potential donors to approach once fundraising opens on March 3. Your friends, family, neighbors, colleagues, fellow pet lovers, and Facebook friends are all potential donors who could help your pet succeed. But don't stop there!

The larger your list of prospective donors, the larger your results! You can ask for donations from your place of work, other local businesses, the contacts in your email list, holiday card contacts, church/club directories, alumni groups, roommates, and much more. Consider any person you meet to be a potential donor. You never know who has been affected by your pet or their own!



# Steps to Success

## 5. Spread the word

Use email, texts, and social media to let everyone know your pet is competing in the Pet Partners *Pet of the Year* fundraising competition. Our new text-to-donate option will allow you to ask supporters to text "POTY26" to 512-920-5521. Tons of additional resources can be found at [petpartners.org/petoftheyear](https://petpartners.org/petoftheyear), including graphics, media tools, and event flyers. Be sure to use #PPPetOfTheYear and #PetPartners when posting photos on social media.

## 6. Create a letter/email campaign

Make it personal when asking for donations. The more heartfelt you are when sharing your reason for participating in *Pet of the Year*, the more responsive your donors will be. Don't forget to ask for donations from those who provide you with services throughout the year and are grateful for your business, such as pet groomers, pet boarding/daycare, or your veterinarian.



## 7. Utilize social media

Did you know 88% of donors worldwide said they would give through Facebook fundraising? This is one of the most effective fundraising strategies.

Our new Facebook and Instagram integration has made giving so easy because it automatically connects to your pet's fundraising page, so every dollar counts towards the competition! Explain why your pet is competing and why it's important to bring more awareness about the benefits of the human-animal bond.

- Share your fundraising goal, request a specific donation amount, and provide a deadline to turn in money. This is a competition, so deadlines are important.
- Provide facts about the human-animal bond, *Pet of the Year*, and Pet Partners.
- Mention that donations are tax-deductible and that checks should be made out to Pet Partners.
- Don't forget to post on your social media feed and stories frequently to remind your network to consider making a donation.

## 8. Give thanks

Announce your pet's total while recognizing and thanking committee members and donors for their generous support. Make sure to invite them to join the virtual celebration on April 14th!

# Grand Prize Package

Pet Partners  
**PET OF THE YEAR**

Pet  
Jogging  
Stroller

2026 winner will receive prizes valued at \$3,000+:

- Round-trip airline tickets to the destination of their choice, courtesy of RetrievalAir.
- National Interview on Oh Behave! Show on Pet Life Radio and Four Legged Life Podcast with America's Pet Edu-Tainer, Arden Moore.
- Professional pet photoshoot.
- A Petique Trailblazer Pet Jogger Stroller in Atlas Blue.
- One month of daycare at a participating Dogtopia location.
- Pet-themed items from Wellness Pet Company, Nutramax Laboratories, Earth Rated, Spleash, Gooby, 2 Hounds Design, The Foggy Dog, KONG, Nylabone, and more.
- Have your pet's likeness incorporated into the artwork for Pet Partners' 2026 signature t-shirt campaign, header banner for the 2027 event, be featured on the Pet Partners Holiday cards, and more.
- Official customized Pet Partners vest.
- Custom Pet Partners therapy animal trading cards.
- Official winner's sash and trophy.

*\*Prizes offered are subject to change. This is not a complete list of prizes, please check the website for the most up-to-date information.*



# Runner-Up Packages

## 2026 runner-up will receive prizes valued at \$1,500+:

- Pet-themed items from Wellness Pet Company, Nutramax Laboratories, Earth Rated, Splash, Gooby, Earthbath, 2 Hounds Design, and more.
- One-month subscription to BarkBox.
- Custom Pet Partners therapy animal bookmarks.
- Opportunity for pet to be featured in a Pet Partners direct mail campaign.
- Official runner-up sash and trophy.



## 2026 third place will receive prizes valued at \$500+:

- Pet-themed items from Wellness Pet Company, Nutramax Laboratories, Earth Rated, Splash, Gooby, and Tito's Handmade Vodka.
- Custom Pet Partners therapy animal bookmarks.
- Opportunity for pet to be featured in a Pet Partners direct mail campaign.
- Official third-place sash and trophy.

*\*Prizes offered are subject to change. This is not a complete list of prizes, please check the website for the most up-to-date information.*



# Incentives



To show our gratitude for your participation, we have included some thank you items for pet candidates, their supportive pet parents, and fundraising committee members.

Once your pet completes their nomination process and raises at least \$75, they will be sent their official pet candidate bandana. Don't forget to snap a picture of your pet in their bandana and upload it to their personal fundraising page!

For pet candidates who raise \$250 or more, the pet parent will receive an official pet parent polo for their incredible fundraising efforts and support. There are additional upgraded incentives when you raise \$250 or more.

Visit [petpartners.org/petoftheyear](https://petpartners.org/petoftheyear) for more information on these incentive choices.



*\*Please note: individual incentives will be awarded based on fundraising totals on personal pages, not on team totals. Non-registered donors do not qualify for items. Pet Partners reserves the right to substitute an item of equal or greater value or to change the recognition item program at any time.*



# Turning in Donations

You may submit funds raised online through your pet's personal fundraising page.

## Turning in cash donations

Do not mail cash. Here are two options for turning in any cash donations you receive:

- Deposit all cash donations to your personal banking account and then make an online donation to your fundraising page via credit or debit card.
- Convert cash donations to a check or money order, then enter the total as an offline donation through your pet's personal fundraising page before mailing it to Pet Partners with the deposit form.



## Entering offline donations

Ensure all offline donations (checks and money orders) are entered into your pet's online fundraising page to contribute to your pet's total. Follow these steps to enter offline donations:

- Log into your pet's fundraising page and select **Ask for Donations** and **Thank Donors** in the bottom left dashboard panel.
- Click **Enter Cash/Checks** in the middle of the page.
- Fill out the requested information and click **Submit**.

Be sure to check if your company or your donors' companies have a matching gift program so you can double your donations!

## Sending checks & money orders

Please send checks and money orders to:

**Pet Partners, Attn: POTY, 345 118th Ave SE, Suite 100, Bellevue, WA 98005**

When sending checks and money orders, please include the donation deposit form, which can be found at [petpartners.org/petoftheyear](https://petpartners.org/petoftheyear). This is to ensure your pet is properly credited for donations.

All mailed money and pledged donations must be received in office by April 13 at 11:59 p.m. CT.





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[petpartners.org/petoftheyear](https://petpartners.org/petoftheyear)

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