

WELLNESS WAGS ASSISTANCE DOGS

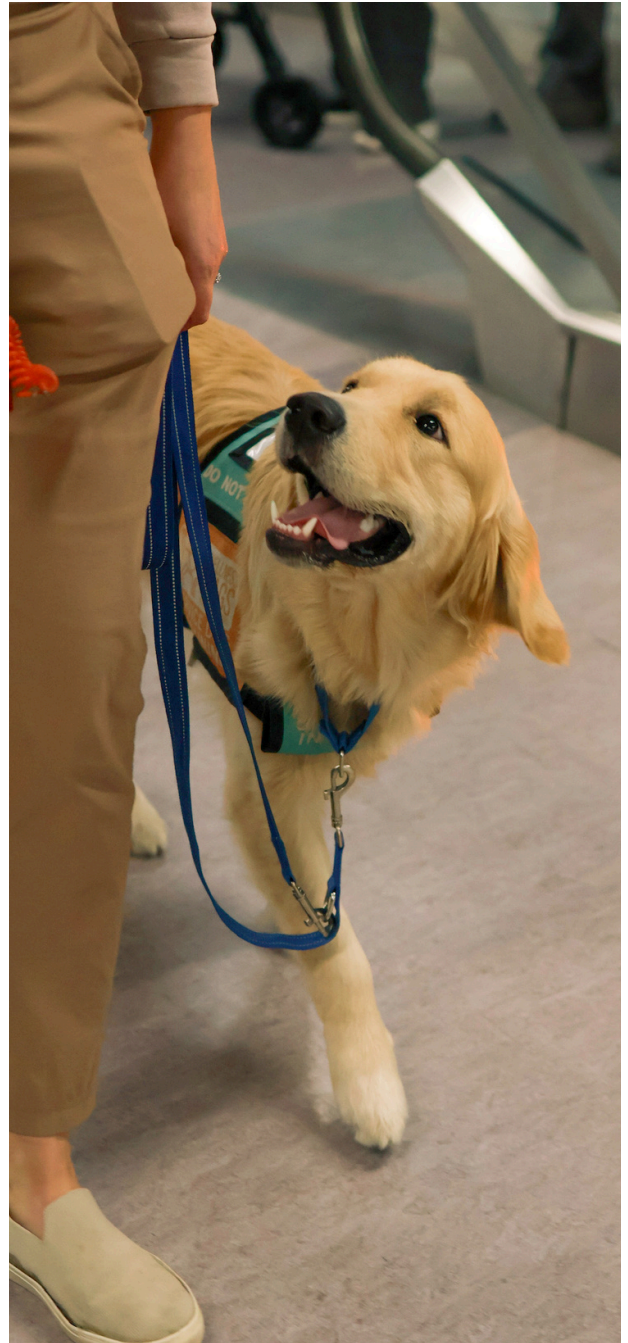
FACILITY DOG PROGRAM GUIDE

JANUARY 2026



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About Wellness Wags

Wellness Wags Assistance Dogs is a Nova Scotia–based nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting individuals and communities through the life-changing partnership of professionally trained service dogs. We are one of only two organizations in Canada serving Nova Scotia, and the only one based in Nova Scotia, providing fully trained Facility Dogs to local organizations. Our programs fill a critical service gap, ensuring that Nova Scotians have access to highly trained assistance dogs that enhance safety, independence, well-being, and inclusion for people with disabilities and vulnerable populations.



Our mission is dedicated to fostering independence, cultivating confidence, and enhancing overall well-being through the transformative companionship and essential assistance of highly trained service dogs. We enable individuals to regain autonomy, strengthen their sense of purpose, reintegrate themselves into society, and elevate their quality of life. We imagine a world where each wagging tail represents a thriving and genuine human-canine connection. We achieve this by providing comprehensive client education and prioritizing fear-free, positive reinforcement training methods, ensuring a relationship that benefits both ends of the leash.

We carefully plan breeding and whelping to give each puppy the best start, focusing on health, temperament, and early socialization for future job success. Early socialization is critical for rearing confident puppies, so from birth, they experience gentle handling and positive exposure to everyday real world sights, sounds, and experiences to prepare them adequately for their future roles. We proudly operate with a diverse volunteer base who are passionate about raising and supporting our future assistance dogs. Puppy raisers play a vital role, providing loving homes and real-world exposure starting at 8 weeks old for approximately 18 months. Rigorous training continues through puppyhood, with dogs typically graduating around 18–24 months of age, fully ready to transform lives.

Every dog that graduates from our program has been raised using positive reinforcement and fear-free training methods, with extensive socialization and exposure to a wide variety of real-world settings, ensuring they are fully prepared for their important roles. Graduates also complete a series of comprehensive veterinary procedures to ensure they are healthy, sound, and cleared for service work, meeting all veterinary requirements for service dogs set out by the province of Nova Scotia. This includes orthopedic X-rays of the hips and elbows, spay or neuter surgery, a cardiac evaluation, and a thorough "head-to-toe" veterinary wellness exam confirming each dog is up to date on vaccinations and parasite prevention. Dogs who are found unsuitable for graduation due to medical or behavioural reasons are adopted into carefully selected pet homes, where they live out their lives as cherished and deeply loved companions.

About Wellness Wags

Wellness Wags currently offers three distinct programs:

Autism Service Dogs:

These dogs support families in Nova Scotia with a child aged 3-10 on the autism spectrum. These purpose-bred and expertly trained dogs perform key tasks to assist with safety, routines, sleep, and outings, while delivering life-changing benefits that support both the child and the entire family.

Mobility Service Dogs:

Mobility service dogs support individuals with physical disabilities by performing practical tasks that restore independence, such as retrieving dropped or named items, opening/closing doors and cabinets, carrying objects, operating alert systems, and assisting with clothing removal like socks or sleeves. These dogs also bark to summon help during emergencies. While not formal tasks, recipients gain substantial emotional benefits including increased motivation, happiness, reduced stress, and less loneliness. These service dogs can lighten the load on caregivers; cutting paid caregiving hours by about 2 hours per week¹ and reducing reliance on family assistance². Applicants for this program often desire greater independence from family and caregivers. The service dog bridges this gap by reliably handling essential tasks, reassuring loved ones while enabling the user's newfound self-reliance. Our program serves as that vital catalyst for families seeking balance between support and autonomy.

Facility Dogs:

Wellness Wags Facility Dogs are carefully matched and trained to work alongside professionals in settings like courthouses, hospitals, advocacy centres, and other qualifying organizations in Nova Scotia. Distinct from volunteer therapy dogs, Facility dogs are integrated into an organization to support in a full time, life-long capacity. Like service dogs, facility dogs receive task-specific training for their work environment, providing targeted support that fosters engagement, promotes participation in challenging situations, minimizes distress, reduces stress, improves mood, and boosts motivation and focus³⁻⁵. They offer consistent, integrated assistance that enhances well-being and complements organizational programs. Our goal is to ensure each placement allows the dog to thrive in its role, supports the well-being of staff and the community, and enhances the effectiveness of the programs and services they assist.



Facility Dog Program

Facility dogs are highly trained to meet assistance dog standards and work with organizations that serve vulnerable populations. They provide support to individuals in environments where people are stressed, anxious, or recovering from traumatic experiences. These dogs are not therapy pets or casual companions; they are carefully trained working animals that bring calm, reassurance, motivation, and a sense of safety to those they serve, while enhancing the effectiveness of the programs and services in which they are integrated.

Facility Dogs can be found in spaces like child advocacy centers, courthouses, police stations, hospitals, physical rehabilitation centres, and other community outreach programs. They are trusted to support children and adults during some of life's hardest moments, whether that's sitting with a child during a forensic interview, providing comfort to a victim giving testimony in court, or assisting in occupational therapy sessions by motivating patients recovering from injuries or traumatic brain injuries to participate in exercises and activities that rebuild strength and independence.



How to Receive a Facility Dog:

1. Program Guide Book ← YOU ARE HERE!
2. Expression of Interest (EOI)
3. Formal application
4. Consultation
5. Acceptance & Matching
6. Team Training

More details on the Application Process on page 14

What a Wellness Wags Facility Dog Can Offer:

- Calming therapeutic presence by providing comfort and grounding during emotional or traumatic experiences like statements, medical exams, investigations, counseling, or general support.
- Support for staff and professionals by easing stress and tension during challenging or emotionally demanding work.
- Increased trust and connection with clients who may feel anxious, overwhelmed, or reluctant to engage.
- Enhanced motivation and engagement during physical rehabilitation, as activities that involve the dog can increase willingness to participate and improve overall experience.
- Positive connection through tailored cues and behaviours. Facility Dogs learn population-specific cues such as fetching, tugging, or interactive play to help build engagement, trust, and positive interactions with the people they serve.

Facility Dog Program

Evidence of Impact: How Facility Dogs Make a Difference

The impact of Facility Dogs has been well-documented in research on animal-assisted interventions in professional and therapeutic settings. Studies demonstrate that these dogs can meaningfully reduce stress and anxiety, support emotional regulation, and enhance engagement and participation for both clients and staff. Facility Dogs not only provide immediate comfort but also contribute to longer-term improvements in psychological well-being, motivation, and responsiveness during therapeutic, rehabilitative, and high-stress interactions.

The statistics below summarize key outcomes documented in peer-reviewed studies, demonstrating the tangible impact Facility Dogs have in high-stress, therapeutic, and rehabilitation settings. These numbers highlight the ways Facility Dogs support emotional comfort, professional staff, client engagement, and successful participation.

- 19% average stress drop after interacting with a facility dog in hospital settings⁶
- Staff with facility dogs report higher accomplishment, positive job views, fewer quit thoughts, and better mental health⁷.
- In pediatric patients, Facility dogs cut restraint use by 71%, medication needs by 37%, and shaved 18.5 minutes off average restraint time for agitated patients⁸.
- Full-time facility dogs buffer stress hormones in high-pressure workplaces, providing relief comparable to scheduled quiet breaks⁹.
- Patients with major depression saw their anxiety drop by 37% after just 15 minutes with a facility dog before stressful procedures like blood draws¹⁰.
- Facility dogs boost play, developmental support, and patient/staff interactions, especially for kids and teens in mental health and oncology care¹¹.
- Providers spending time with facility dogs show greater job enthusiasm, greater shift enthusiasm, less burnout, and overall happiness gains¹².
- In pediatric rehab for traumatic brain injuries, kids stayed 100% engaged during animal-assisted sessions and showed significantly higher activity scores overall¹³.



These findings illustrate that Facility Dogs are more than a source of comfort; they're active contributors to the effectiveness of programs and services, enhancing emotional well-being, participation, and overall outcomes.

How our Facility Dogs are Trained

At Wellness Wags, we have our own breeding program for our service dogs. We collaborate with other service dog organizations around the globe, to expand and strengthen our genetic lines, only using proven service dog lines with comprehensive breed-specific health clearances including full genetic panels. This ensures our dogs are not only healthy and confident but also possess the friendly, kind demeanor essential for their work. Each dog is carefully selected for an innate ability to love and engage with many people without becoming stressed or overwhelmed. Our dogs thrive in busy environments, enjoy interacting with a variety of individuals, and approach their work with joy, patience, and enthusiasm, making them ideal partners for the specialized support they provide. Our accredited trainers ensure that every Wellness Wags dog is trained to the same international standards that each of our service dogs is trained to. Not every dog is suitable for this line of work, and it is pivotal to ensure that our dogs are exceeding expectations throughout their working career.

Our dogs begin their journey as puppies raised by volunteer foster families. These families, with our guidance and support, provide the dogs with foundational skills, socialization in real-world settings, and early experiences that prepare them for a future career as an assistance dog. We use evidence-based, reward-driven training techniques that create a relationship of trust, confidence, and joy between each dog and their handler.

When the dogs return from their volunteer puppy raisers to Wellness Wags for advanced training, we assess their temperament, strengths, and interests to determine their ideal track for training. In the Facility Dog Track, dogs undergo specialized training that includes:

- Learning cues that can assist in connection between the dog and the population the facility serves, like deep pressure, fetching, tugging, nudging or play.
- Practicing scenario specific settling behaviours, such as quietly resting under a table or chair during interviews or court proceedings or calmly cuddling up to a person on a couch or hospital bed.
- Learning how to provide deep pressure therapy on cue, by resting their head or body weight on the persons chest, shoulders, lap or feet to help individuals regulate their emotions.
- Icebreaker behaviours like “wave” or “spin” to help ease tension and provide lighthearted moments during stressful interactions.
- Maintaining composure in high-traffic environments, remaining calm and focused despite crowds, noise, or frequent movement.
- Remaining responsive and effective in high-stress situations, such as during emotionally intense court cases, hospital procedures, or other challenging settings.



Every dog is carefully matched with an organization that fits their personality and skill set. We prioritize placements that will allow our dogs to thrive and make the greatest impact.

Who Can Apply for a Facility Dog?

Wellness Wags Assistance Dogs raises, trains and places facility dogs (valued at \$40,000) with qualifying professional organizations in Nova Scotia supporting vulnerable populations. This includes but is not limited to:

- Child advocacy and victim services organizations
- Police services, fire services, and courthouse facilities
- Healthcare environments such as hospitals, mental health clinics, and rehabilitation centers
- Outreach or community service organizations that work with individuals experiencing trauma or hardship

If your organization falls into a different category of service but can meet the below criteria, you are encouraged to apply. Your organization must demonstrate a clear, documented ability to integrate a professionally trained facility dog into its programs in a structured and consistent way that enhances client and/or staff well-being.

Please review the following key sections to see if our Facility Dog program is the right fit for your organization:

- Organizational Eligibility Criteria
- Leadership Commitment of Support
- Handler and Care Requirements
- Ongoing Responsibilities and Expectations
- Partner Donation Guidelines



Organizational Eligibility Criteria

- **Type of Organization:** Must be a professional, registered organization in Nova Scotia.
- **Financial Capacity:** Minimum annual operating budget of \$500,000, verified through submission of recent financial statements or audited reports. This threshold ensures the organization possesses adequate resources to sustain ongoing care and program requirements for the facility dog.
- **Demonstrated Need and Service Enhancement:** Organizations must clearly demonstrate a need for a professionally trained facility dog that supplements and enhances existing services, or could reduce existing operational stress faced by employees. They must be able to explain why task-trained facility dog is required and a therapy or pet dog could not meet the needs of the organization. In Step 3, Applicants must submit a detailed plan outlining how the dog will be used for 20–30 hours per week in a structured manner, including the types of client or staff interactions anticipated and expected benefits.
- **Impact Benchmarks**
 - **For client-facing programs** supporting vulnerable populations, organizations must involve the facility dog in at least 20 hours of structured weekly programming, engaging a minimum of 20 impacted individuals through individual or group sessions that meaningfully support emotional and functional outcomes.
 - **For employee wellness programs** in workplaces where staff face elevated occupational stress, compassion fatigue, or secondary trauma, organizations must involve the facility dog in at least 20 hours of structured weekly programming, engaging a minimum of 20 staff members per week through one-on-one or group interactions that meaningfully support mental health, stress reduction, and workplace well-being (requires 50+ full-time employees).
 - **For a blended model** where staff face elevated occupational stress while supporting vulnerable populations, organizations must involve the facility dog in at least 20 hours of structured weekly programming, engaging a combined minimum of 20 impacted individuals (clients and/or staff) through therapeutic or wellness-focused activities that meaningfully support emotional, functional, and workplace well-being outcomes.
- **Capacity for Ongoing Care:** Organizations must demonstrate the ability to meet the facility dog's physical, emotional, and financial needs, including veterinary care, food, exercise, enrichment, rest, and appropriate downtime.
- **Designated Handler:** The organization must identify a designated primary handler who will be responsible for the dog's daily care, handling, and training maintenance. This individual must house the dog, pass our home inspection, serve as the main point of contact with Wellness Wags, and participate fully in required training, onboarding, and ongoing check-ins. (See Handler Requirements on page 11)

Leadership Commitment of Support Letter

If your organization is invited to complete a formal application in Step 4, the organization must provide strong documented support from leadership in a formal letter demonstrating commitment to meet all operational, financial, and cultural requirements for successful facility dog implementation which include the following:

- **Commitment to Dog Welfare and Safety:** Organizations must be committed to maintaining the dog's training, well-being, and safety across all working environments, ensuring that the dog's role remains appropriate, ethical, and sustainable.
- **Financial Commitments:** The employer is responsible for all employment-related costs (salary, travel, overtime, etc.) associated with having the handler trained and travel costs for team training, as well as the ongoing costs of integrating the dog's care into their job duties. Additionally, the partner organization is responsible for all ongoing care of the Facility Dog, including food, treats, veterinary expenses, grooming, and any other services and supplies needed to maintain the dog's well-being. No exemptions are available for these mandatory costs, and all organizations must be able to demonstrate the ability to provide these costs in Step 3 of the application process. We recognize these costs as a key consideration and encourage facilities to pursue funding opportunities, grants, sponsorships, or community partnerships to support the placement and long-term care of the Facility Dog. Wellness Wags is able to partner with your organization to apply for grants and funding opportunities, written by your organization, to support the project of a facility dog placement at your facility.
- **Implementation of Facility Dog Policy:** The organization must commit to implementing a Wellness Wags-approved Facility Dog Policy (draft provided during Step 4 Consultations; organizations may adopt as-is or customize with additions), covering topics including but not limited to: Primary Handler Job Description and Commitment, Handler Requirements and Management, Standards of Care & Housing, Safety/Emergency Protocols & Incident Reporting, Workplace Operations (staff/client integration, cultural sensitivity), Reporting & Auditing, Financial Obligations (including handler reimbursement), Legal/Insurance/Liability Requirements, and Program Oversight (approvals, team training/recertification, dog removal, policy review).
- **Primary Handler Job Description and Commitment:** The employer must create an updated job description that primary handler must sign that fully incorporates all facility dog conditions of the role, including a 2-year return of service commitment beginning post-placement and completion of Wellness Wags team training. This ensures stability and protects the significant investment in dog training and handler preparation.
- **Lifetime Training Support Limitation:** Free primary handler training for new handlers is limited to once every 2 years as part of Wellness Wags' lifetime support for the facility dog, recognizing that organizations may experience natural staff transitions like retirement or relocation during the dog's 8-10 year working life. The organization understands and agrees that early handler departure (before completing the 2-year commitment) triggers a flat \$3,000 employer-paid retraining fee to cover team training costs for the new primary handler, helping maintain program sustainability and minimize repeated resource drain.

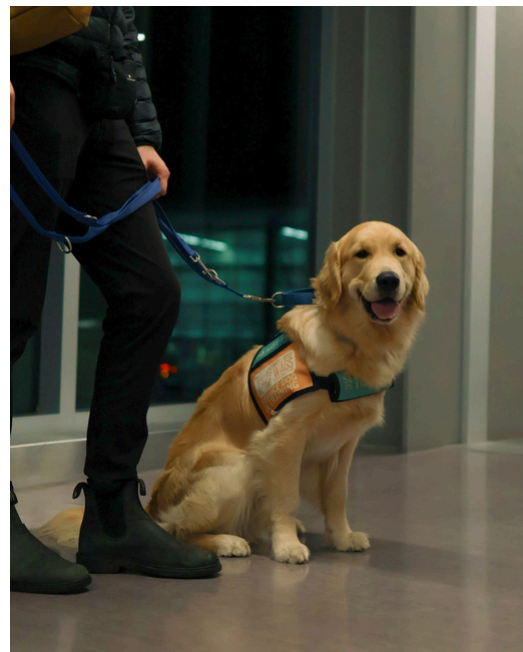
Handler and Care Requirements

- **Primary Handler:** One full-time employee must serve as the primary handler, with at least 2 years of employment at the organization and willing to sign a 23-year return-of-service commitment if accepted. This individual is responsible for housing the dog in a smoke-free and safe home environment (including their vehicle) as well as meeting all the dog's emotional, physical, and medical needs inside and outside of work hours.
 - Primary Handlers may have other pets in the home provided they are dog-friendly and non-aggressive, which will be assessed at the time of the home inspection. No restrictions apply to family composition, children, backyard access, or dwelling type (apartment, trailer, townhome, detached home), provided the environment is safe, secure, and suitable for the facility dog.
 - Must be residing in Nova Scotia
 - Have not been convicted of violence towards, or cruelty, abuse, or neglect of animals or humans.
- **Additional On-Duty Handlers:** Up to three on-duty staff members may share utilization of the Facility Dog within the duties of their role, during working hours to maximize the dog's benefit to the organization, however, to ensure consistent care, only one handler will be considered the primary handler, who would be responsible for housing the dog after hours in their personal residence.
- **Backup Handlers:** At least two backup handlers must be identified, trained, and willing to house the dog in the event the primary handler is unavailable due to emergencies, vacation, retirement, or job changes until a new primary handler is hired or decided upon. Organizations without a concrete backup plan and backup handlers are not eligible for placement.
- **Succession Planning:** Organizations must have a succession plan in place, to be initiated at least six months prior to any anticipated handler transition, ensuring continuity of care and minimal disruption to the dog's role in the organization.
- **Ownership and Responsibilities:** Wellness Wags maintains ownership of all of our service dogs and facility dogs through to the date of the dog's retirement. Facility Dogs are placed with the facility/organization, not individual handlers. Handlers have no ownership rights over the dog in the event of employment termination or departure. The organization is responsible for covering all care requirements for the dog during the transition, with Wellness Wags approving all housing and care decisions, and requiring new handlers to complete the full approval, home inspection, and training process.
- **Compliance and Oversight:** Wellness Wags must be satisfied that every handler and back up handler is of a suitable character and background to care for the Facility Dog. Criminal background check and 2-character references are required for each handler. Handlers must have no history of, or convictions related to cruelty, neglect, or violence against animals or humans. The organization must have senior management support and demonstrate appropriate facilities and program capacity to support the dog's care and activities.

Ongoing Responsibilities & Expectations

Once a Facility Dog is placed, Wellness Wags remains actively involved to support the partner organization throughout the Facility Dog's entire working career, approximately 8-10 years. Partner organizations should understand they are entering into a long-term partnership with Wellness Wags and agree to the following ongoing responsibilities to ensure the success, welfare, and sustainability of the placement:

- Follow all of Wellness Wag's requirements to maintain a safe environment for the dog at all times, including at the workplace, while in a vehicle, in the primary handlers home environment and while outdoors.
- Maintain all training, veterinary care, grooming care, and exercise needs for the Facility dog for its entire working career. Ensure the dog's physical and emotional well-being is always prioritized.
- Ensure the dog's workload remains appropriate and sustainable, including adequate rest, enrichment, and downtime, recognizing that facility work can be emotionally demanding. Facility dogs can experience burnout and Wellness Wags will provide you with training on how to avoid, identify, and rectify burnout as quickly as possible throughout the dogs career.
- Collaborate with Wellness Wags trainers and staff through regular follow-up, check-ins, refresher training sessions, and problem-solving support as needed.
- Submit required bi-annual reports detailing the dog's health, behaviour, workload, and role within the organization, and participate in scheduled check-in visits.
- Obtain Wellness Wags approval for all handler assignments, transitions, or reassignments; no changes can be made without our prior consent from Wellness Wags.
- At placement, sign a detailed job description with the handler and employer outlining agreed-upon duties (specifying work time vs. personal time responsibilities) and salary terms.
- Notify Wellness Wags promptly of any unforeseen changes that may impact the dog's placement, including handler transitions, organizational changes, or concerns related to the dog's welfare or performance.



Consistent with service dog industry standards, Wellness Wags maintains ownership of all service and facility dogs throughout their careers to guarantee consistent oversight and adherence to impact, behavioural, health, and ethical standards. Although exceptionally rare, this authority safeguards our dogs and the significant investment of time, training, and resources, allowing us to intervene or conclude any placement when necessary. Given the hundreds of families awaiting placement, we responsibly reassign dogs to partners who can utilize transformative 8–10 year impact of the dog's full potential.

Facility Dog Program Guide

Partnership Donation Guidelines & Financial Commitments

Wellness Wags provides all of our assistance dogs, including Facility Dogs, at no mandatory upfront cost to qualified recipients. Organizations applying for a Facility Dog must evaluate two key budgetary areas and financial commitments to address in Step 3 - Formal Application:

- **Voluntary:** A one-time donation at the time of placement toward the \$40,000 value of the Facility Dog.
- **Mandatory:** Ongoing financial commitments for all aspects of care for the dog and employment costs to support any requirements of Facility Dog placement throughout the entire career of the dog until the date of retirement.

Partnership Donation Guidelines

Wellness Wags encourages all recipients of a Facility Dog to make a recommended financial contribution, in the form of a donation, towards the \$40,000 value of the facility dog and placement to sustain our training programs and lifetime support that each organization receives for the dog. Financial contributions are not mandatory, and all organizations are given the opportunity to demonstrate financial hardship in Step 3 - Formal Application.

- **Smaller Organizations (less than \$2.5M annual operating budget)** are encouraged to contribute a recommended minimum donation of \$5,000 toward the \$40,000 value of the Facility Dog.
- **Larger Organizations (greater than \$2.5M annual operating budget)** are strongly encouraged to make a recommended donation equivalent to 1% of their annual operating budget, to a maximum of the \$40,000 value of the Facility Dog.
- Donation recommendations can be waived for any organization who can demonstrate financial hardship, and reviewed by Wellness Wags Acceptance and Matching Committee on an individual basis.
- All contributions—regardless of amount—directly support the sustainability of Wellness Wags Assistance Dog programs and enable us to continue providing highly trained assistance dogs to individuals and organizations throughout Nova Scotia.

Financial Commitments

Each organization placed with a Wellness Wags facility dog is responsible for **all employment-related costs** for all primary and back up handlers as well as the ongoing costs of integrating the dog's care into the handler's daily job duties. (i.e. salary, travel, mileage, time, overtime to support any needs of the Facility Dog placement or ongoing requirements). Additionally, the organization is responsible for **all ongoing care** of the Facility Dog, including **all supplies, food, treats, routine or emergency veterinary expenses, grooming, and any other services needed to maintain the dog's well-being**. These costs are mandatory for ALL recipients, no exceptions, regardless of demonstrated financial hardship. In Step 3 of the application process, All organizations must be able to generously demonstrate the ability to provide adequate care and support for both the dog, the handlers, and the placement as a whole.

We recognize these costs as a key consideration and encourage facilities to pursue funding opportunities, grants, sponsorships, or community partnerships to support the placement and long-term care of the Facility Dog. Wellness Wags is able to partner with your organization to apply for grants and funding opportunities, written by your organization, to support the project of a facility dog placement at your facility.

The Application Process

The journey to receiving a facility dog involves several steps to ensure the placement will be successful:

Step 1: Learn About the Program

This guide is the first step in understanding everything you need to know about applying for a Wellness Wags Facility Dog, and whether our program aligns with your organization's needs. Please read this guide thoroughly before moving on to Step 2.

Step 2: Expression of Interest

The official process begins with an Expression of Interest (EOI), which is accepted year-round as part of our rolling admissions model. The EOI helps us learn more about your organization, your needs, and whether a Facility Dog may be a good fit, before inviting you to complete a full application. Please take your time answering each question with as much detail as possible, as this information is essential in helping us understand your environment and how a Facility Dog could make a meaningful impact.

Due to the high level of interest in our program, not all applicants will be invited to move forward to Step 3. A limited number of organizations will be selected to continue in the process based on alignment with the dogs currently in our program and our capacity to support a successful placement. Applicants will receive either a letter of regret or an invitation to complete the Formal Application.

As our program operates on a rolling basis, there is no set timeline for application review or placement. Timelines can vary significantly, and finding the right match may take anywhere from several months to a few years. We appreciate your patience as our small team carefully reviews each submission.

Organizations are welcome to follow up on their application status at any time by contacting us at info@wellnesswags.ca

When submitting an EOI, organizations will be asked to provide basic information about the organization, the applicant and primary handler, and confirm a number of commitments and understandings about the program, as outlined throughout this guide. Applicants must also complete pre-eligibility questions before proceeding to the main Expression of Interest section.

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Expression of Interest

To ensure you take the appropriate time to craft your response, We encourage you to carefully prepare and edit your written response to this question in a separate document rather than in the question field on this form. When you are ready to submit your application, beginning the application process and paste in your written response when you complete the rest of the information gathering.

The main body of the **Expression of Interest** is the following:

“To help us determine if a Facility Dog could be the right fit for your organization, please prepare a detailed, honest, written Expression of Interest for the Facility Dog Program in the form of a letter, narrative, or proposal. Your response should be thoughtful and detailed — not brief, point form, or a rough draft. (2000-5000 characters or 1-2 pages).

Please address these key questions in your response:

- **WHAT:** What is your organization's mission and vision? What is the primary population/client group you serve?
- **WHY:** Why is this work important? How do your programs or services support clients (or employees)? How could a Facility Dog benefit your clients, staff, or services?
- **WHO:** Who is the proposed primary handler, and what are their role and duties at your workplace? How do they intend to incorporate the dog into your workplace, programs and services?
- **WHERE:** What are the typical settings where the dog would be involved (for example, classrooms, clinics, therapy rooms, or community-based/outreach programs)?
- **WHEN:** When would the dog participate in your programs (frequency and duration)? What would a typical day or week look like for the dog in your organization?
- **HOW:** How will the Facility Dog create meaningful change at your organization?

Include any additional information about your facility, team structure, or how a Facility Dog might strengthen your organization's goals.

Although not required, at the end of the form, you will be asked if you would like to submit any photos or a video in support of your EOI. Videos can be informal point-and-shoot clips, no professional editing required. There's no set format, but footage highlighting the team, workspace, and dog's intended tasks can help your application stand out, adds personality, and helps us visualize the possibilities of a placement at your organization.

Submit an Expression of Interest for our Facility Dog Program here: wellnesswags.ca/apply



Limit to 5 photos and 1 video (no longer than 5 minutes).

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The Application Process

Step 3: Formal Application

If your organization is not selected to proceed after submitting an Expression of Interest, you will receive a letter of regret. If the Expression of Interest indicates a potential fit, selected organizations will then be invited via email to complete Step 3 - Formal Application.

As part of this application, organizations must provide documentation to verify eligibility and readiness. This includes:

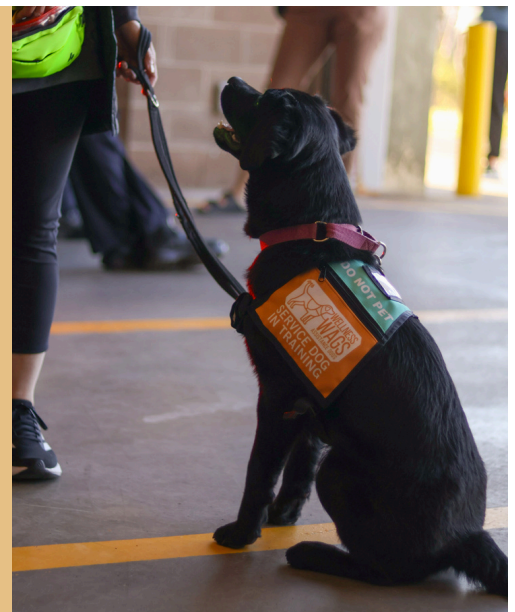
- Recent financial statements or audited reports to verify operating budget.
- Detailed program rosters and schedules demonstrating planned utilization and handler availability.
- Documentation of succession plans and handler backup arrangements.
- Written letter of support signed by leadership in support of the facility dog placement, including financial commitments, scheduling, and handler job descriptions/workload.

Wellness Wags will review the application and determine if your organization advances to the next step: consultation.

Step 4: Consultation

If Wellness Wags determines your application demonstrates strong readiness, and we may have a dog match for your organization, we will schedule a site visit (or virtual assessment) to verify facility suitability, observe operations, and ensure program alignment.

During this stage, Wellness Wags will also meet with the primary handler to assess baseline dog-handling skills. No prior experience is required, but understanding the handler's starting point helps ensure an appropriate dog match. Before proceeding, A home inspection will also be scheduled to confirm that the handler's residence is safe, suitable, and supportive of the dog's well-being.



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The Application Process

Step 5: Approval & Matching

After a successful consultation and home inspection, your application goes to our Acceptance and Matching Committee for review to determine if we have a suitable dog match for your facility. Unfortunately, an organization may be a wonderful fit for a Facility Dog, but potentially not a Facility Dog that we are currently looking for placement for.

At this stage, your organization will receive one of three outcomes:

- **Letter of Regret:** Criteria for placement not met.
- **Reserve Letter (Pre-Approved EOI):** You met all criteria, but no current dog match available. We've added you to our pre-approved reserve list. Simply notify us when the next EOI opens—no full re-application needed. Pre-approved organizations remain in consideration for up to three cycles to secure optimal match.
- **Approval Letter:** Confirmed intent to match a dog during this class of dogs, placed on the waitlist and will be contacted with an invitation to team training to begin the placement.

Most dogs will progress through advanced training and **placement with an organization within the same calendar year as the application**, however, All applicants should approach the process with flexibility, understanding the unpredictable nature of working with sentient animals. The Acceptance and Matching Committee carefully aligns each dog with the handler's skills and home, your organization's environment, goals, and workflows—maximizing impact and success by prioritizing perfect matches over speed.

Step 6: Team Training

The primary handler will be invited to complete mandatory team training, where handler and Facility Dog learn to work together. The handler must pass competency-based training—meeting specific criteria and goals rather than fixed hours (approx. 50 hours expected). This blended program includes on-demand modules, class-style lessons, in-person classes, 1:1 sessions, and practical hands-on training with our trainers during real-world practice in public places, your facility, and the handler's home to establish foundational rules and maintenance standards. Organizations may send up to three people (those using the dog in work), but only one primary handler is designated as responsible for reporting, care, and housing in a consistent, stable home.

Team Training sessions may be scheduled any time or day of the week—including weekdays, evenings, and weekends—depending on class sizes, team schedules, and workload. Applicants should anticipate needing time off work to attend and prioritize placement with a service or facility dog. Declining a scheduled Team Training invitation counts as declining the proposed dog match, returning you to the waitlist for the next match. Up to two declines are permitted; a third terminates pre-approval, requiring reapplication from the Expression of Interest (EOI) process.

On-Going Support

Wellness Wags stays connected with each partner organization throughout the working life of each dog. We maintain ownership of the dog for its career, ensuring that it continues to receive the support and oversight needed to perform its role effectively. We offer ongoing guidance, training refreshers, and problem-solving for any challenges that may arise. Bi-annual reports, audits, and check-in visits are required through the career of the dog to ensure the dog is working to its full capacity as a Facility Dog. Our priority is the well-being of both the dog and the people they serve, as well as ensuring that each dog is actively engaged and contributing meaningfully, making the most of this valuable resource.

At Wellness Wags, we believe that the presence of a highly trained Facility Dog can transform how individuals experience care and support. These dogs bring a consistent sense of calm, trust, and comfort during some of life's most difficult moments helping to reduce harm, minimize the impact of stressful situations, support staff in managing burnout during high-demand periods, and increase the overall effectiveness of organizational programs and services.

By partnering with organizations like yours, our Facility Dogs enhance the effectiveness of programs and services, acting as a bridge of connection, reassurance, and emotional support when words alone are not enough. Their presence promotes engagement, participation, and resilience, enabling both staff and clients to manage challenging circumstances more effectively and with greater confidence.

We look forward to exploring how a Wellness Wags Facility Dog could become a valued member of your team and community!

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Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the difference between a Facility Dog and a Therapy Dog?

A Facility Dog is a highly task-trained dog that is matched to a facility to work alongside a professional employed within a facility, which supports a vulnerable population. The facility dog works a minimum of 20 hours per week at that facility, enhancing the work that the employee is already doing in a specific environment, providing motivation, emotional regulation, and support to clients in challenging or traumatic situations. Therapy dogs, while valuable, are not task-trained or trained to the same standards. Therapy dogs are pets who are invited into various facilities to visit occasionally with volunteer handler, rather than being placed full-time with a staff member to work consistently with one organization.

2. How much does it cost to receive a Facility Dog?

All organizations are required to cover all maintenance costs associated with taking on a facility dog placement, including all handler salary/training/time/travel plus all ongoing expenses to care for the dog for its entire career (8-10 years), including but not limited to supplies, food, grooming, and routine and emergency vet care. Wellness Wags provides Facility Dogs at no mandatory upfront cost to qualified organizations, however we encourage recommended donations toward the \$40,000 value of the facility dog: \$5,000 minimum for smaller orgs (<\$2.5M annual operating budget) or 1% of annual budget up to \$40,000 maximum for larger orgs (>\$2.5M annual operating budget) waivable upon demonstrating financial hardship in Step 3. Wellness Wags can support organizations fundraising efforts with dedicated fundraising pages and partnerships in applying for grants for your facility dog project; full details in Partnership Donation Guidelines (page 13).

3. Will our staff receive training?

Yes, comprehensive training is provided for primary handlers, backup handlers, and a general information session for all staff. The primary handler must complete mandatory "team training" (handler and dog learning to work as a team), which is competency-based—meeting specific criteria and goals together rather than a set number of hours, though approximately 50 hours can be expected. This blended training includes on-demand modules, class-style lessons, in-person classes, 1:1 sessions, and real-world practice with the dog in public places, at your facility, and in the handler's home to establish foundational rules and maintenance standards. An organization may send up to three people to complete team training (those who will use the dog in their work), but there must be only one primary handler responsible for reporting, care, and housing the dog in a consistent, stable home environment. This training ensures consistent dog responses across environments, builds handler confidence, and meets program standards for public access and facility integration; additional backup-handler training occurs at your facility to ensure coverage if the primary handler is unavailable, and post-placement support continues through refreshers, audits, and ongoing guidance for the entire career of the Facility Dog.

Frequently Asked Questions

4. How long does the process take, and when will we get a Dog?

Our programs are very popular, and we expect to get hundreds of applications for each cohort of dogs, (between 5-15 dogs). When application cycles are open for EOIs, this means we are planning for the matches for the dogs in our graduating class of each given year (e.g., Class of 2026). Most dogs will progress through advanced training and placement within an applicant within 6 - 12 months of the EOI/Application. While same-year placement is our goal, timelines are approximate and may not align perfectly with calendar years. Our 6-step application process prioritizes finding the optimal match for each of our unique dog over anything else. Most dogs graduate around age 2, with planning for their applicants and matches beginning around 1 year old.

5. Why is the process so unpredictable?

Most dogs graduate around age 2, with planning for their applicants and matches beginning the year before that, around 1 year old. Just like a Grade 12 high school student starting the year has no idea if they'll graduate, get into university, thrive in their major, or land their first "adult job," our dogs go through a similar (condensed) decision-making track during that one-year period between your application and their placement readiness. Asking for an exact timeline is like asking the Grade 12 student what their first big job will be—there are a lot of unknowns and a lot can change! During the last 6-12 months of our dogs training, we determine if they'll qualify for the Autism, Mobility, or Facility Dog track and which "major" best suits their skills. They complete advanced training, developing specific niche abilities for their future placement. After "theory" learning, they apply skills in real scenarios to prove readiness for particular facility environments and identify the best "culture fit" where they'll thrive long-term. On top of that, variables like illness, injury, behavioural growth, or disqualification can disrupt intended matches. As soon as we confirm a dog match for a specific placement, we communicate transparently with accepted applicants about matches and timelines—flexibility required for optimal outcomes. All applicants should approach the process with flexibility, understanding the unpredictable nature of service dog placement with sentient beings. Our ultimate goal is to ensure the best fit for the dog and the organization—we will ultimately prefer you wait longer for the perfect match rather than experiencing the disappointment of not having it work out with a match that was not quite right for the role.

6. How do you select which dog goes to which person/organization? Can I pick our dog?

Wellness Wags will determine eligibility for the program based on each of our unique and individual class of dogs in the program in that given year. Each Wellness Wags dog has distinct personality, strengths, skills, training, and behavioural needs that each require a specific organizational environment to thrive. Some dogs would be capable of doing any work, anywhere; others may thrive in a very specific setting. Our 6-step application process allows us to narrow down the pool of applicants to find the best placements to set each current dog and recipient up for success. Statistically speaking, most applicants will not be matched the first time they apply, but we do encourage applications in future years as notably, the pool of dogs and their personalities changes year to year, and therefore so does what we are looking for in our applicants. We carefully match each dog to an organization equipped to provide them the ideal setting and support to thrive, ensuring the best possible outcome for both the dog and the program. Recipients are matched with the dog based on the quality of match, not the preference of the organizations breed, sex, or colour. If you have had a negative experience with a certain type of dog in the past that would impact your ability to bond with and trust a new dog, please include that information on your EOI.



July 30th, 2025

Dear [Name/Organization Name],

I hope this message finds you well! I'm reaching out on behalf of Wellness Wags Assistance Dogs, a Nova Scotia-based nonprofit that raises and trains highly skilled assistance dogs to support individuals and communities, at no cost to those we serve.

We believe that your organization's work aligns beautifully with our Facility Dog Program, which places professionally trained dogs in settings that serve vulnerable or trauma-impacted individuals. These dogs work alongside professionals in places like advocacy centres, courthouses, hospitals, police services, and community outreach programs, providing comfort, emotional regulation, and calm during some of life's most challenging moments.



Our Facility Dogs are trained using only positive reinforcement (R+) methods, and each dog is thoughtfully matched with an organization based on environment, services, and client needs. While it costs approximately \$40,000 to breed, raise, and train a Facility Dog, Wellness Wags places these dogs at no cost to the recipient organization.

To help make this sustainable, we invite potential partner organizations to collaborate with us on securing funding, such as co-applying for relevant grants or leveraging internal fundraising departments to support the placement. Should funding be secured, the organization would then contribute those funds directly to Wellness Wags to support the dog's training and placement. We're happy to support this process by providing project details, budgets, and language for applications.

We'd love the chance to explore whether a Facility Dog might be a fit for your team. If you're curious to learn more, we'd be happy to send along our Facility Dog Program Guide or set up a time to chat. There's no commitment at this stage, just a conversation to explore what's possible.

Thank you for the important work you do. We look forward to the opportunity to support it in a new and meaningful way!

Sincerely,
Sydney Bolak
Executive Director and Service Dog Instructor
Wellness Wags Assistance Dogs

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Scan me to learn more!

Wellness Wags Facility Dog Placement Requirements

Wellness Wags Assistance Dogs places facility dogs (valued at \$40,000) free to qualifying professional organizations in Nova Scotia supporting vulnerable populations affected by trauma. Eligible organizations include (to name a few) victim service agencies, child advocacy centres, courtrooms, hospitals, and physical rehabilitation centres. If your organization falls into a different category of service but can meet all criteria, you are encouraged to apply. These organizations must demonstrate a clear and documented capacity to integrate a professionally trained facility dog into their programs, enhancing client and/or staff wellbeing through structured, consistent use.

Organizational Eligibility Criteria

- **Type of Organization:** Must be a professional, registered organization in Nova Scotia supporting trauma-impacted individuals.
- **Financial Capacity:** Minimum annual operating budget of \$250,000, verified through submission of recent financial statements or audited reports. This threshold ensures the organization possesses adequate resources to sustain ongoing care and program requirements for the facility dog.
- **Demonstrated Need and Service Enhancement:** Organizations must clearly demonstrate a need for a professionally trained facility dog that supplements and enhances existing services. The dog cannot be replaced by a therapy or pet dog due to the specialized training required. Applicants must submit a detailed plan outlining how the dog will be used for 20–30 hours per week in a structured manner, including the types of client or staff interactions anticipated and expected benefits.
- **Utilization Metrics:** For client-facing programs, the organization must serve a minimum of 20 unique clients per week. For staff wellness programs, organizations must employ a minimum of 50 full-time staff to support meaningful utilization and access to the dog across shifts.

Handler and Care Requirements

- **Primary Handler:** One full-time employee must serve as the primary handler, with at least 3 years of employment at the organization and willing to sign a 3-year return-of-service commitment if accepted. Responsible for housing the dog in a smoke-free and safe home environment and meeting all the dog's emotional, physical, and medical needs outside of work hours.
- **Additional On-Duty Handlers:** Up to three on-duty staff members may share responsibility for using the dog during working hours to ensure consistent care and maximize the dog's benefit to the organization.
- **Backup Handlers:** At least two backup handlers must be identified, trained, and willing to house the dog if the primary handler is unavailable due to emergencies, vacation, retirement, or job changes. Organizations without a concrete backup plan and backup handlers are not eligible for placement.
- **Succession Planning:** Organizations must have a succession plan in place, to be initiated at least six months prior to any anticipated handler transition, ensuring continuity of care and minimal disruption to the dog's role in the organization.
- **Ownership and Responsibilities:** Dogs are owned by Wellness Wags until retirement. Dogs are placed with the facility/organization, not individual handlers. Handlers have no ownership rights over the dog in the event of employment termination or departure.
- **Compliance and Oversight:** Handlers must have no history of convictions related to cruelty, neglect, or violence against animals or humans. The organization must have senior management support and demonstrate appropriate facilities and program capacity to support the dog's care and activities.

Partnership Donation Guidelines

While placement of the facility dog is provided free of charge, organizations are strongly encouraged to donate a minimum of \$5,000 toward the program to support ongoing training and care efforts, unless they can demonstrate undue financial hardship to qualify for a waiver. Organizations with operating budgets greater than \$500,000 will be subject to a mandatory 2% donation of their annual operating budget (minimum \$2,000, maximum \$40,000) unless undue hardship is proven. Larger organizations are encouraged to contribute the full value of the dog (\$40,000) to support placement and lifetime support from Wellness Wags. Organizations may seek external funding or fundraise for their dog, with Wellness Wags providing dedicated fundraising pages to facilitate donations directly supporting the placement and care of the facility dog.

Application Verification Process

Applicants must provide:

- Recent financial statements or audited reports to verify operating budget.
- Detailed program rosters and schedules demonstrating planned utilization and handler availability.
- Documentation of succession plans and handler backup arrangements.
- Confirmation of senior management support and program appropriateness.
- Site visits or virtual assessments by Wellness Wags staff to verify suitability.

Utilization Benchmarks

Program Type	Usage Minimum	Description
Client-Facing	20 unique/week	(in single or group sessions) Approximately 20 client sessions per week, lasting 1–2 hours each, suitable for trauma support programs and therapeutic interventions
Staff Wellness	Minimum of 50 Full Time Employees	3 hour minimum daily use of dog. (1:1 or group, impacting at least 10 staff per day. fostering staff mental health and wellbeing suited to medium to large workplaces such as hospitals or rehab centres