



San Francisco Public Library

## **Service Animals in SFPL Facilities Questions and Answers for Staff**

(5/2006)

### **What do I do if someone brings an animal into the library?**

Determine whether the animal is a pet or a service animal. Pets are not allowed in the library. Service animals must be permitted to enter. SFPL *Guidelines for Library Use* states: "Animals, other than service animals assisting persons with disabilities, are not permitted inside Library facilities or within 10 feet of any door."

The director of the San Francisco SPCA Hearing Dog Program advises us to say something like, "We don't normally allow dogs in the library." You also might ask, "Is this your pet?" This gives the person a chance to explain the role of an animal without feeding them the "service animal" terminology. If a person says an animal is a service animal, let them bring the animal in with them.

### **What is a service animal?**

The ADA defines a service animal as any guide dog, signal dog, or other animal individually trained to provide assistance to an individual with a disability. If they meet this definition, animals are considered service animals under the ADA regardless of whether they have been licensed or certified by a state or local government.

### **Is it possible to identify a "service animal" without asking?**

Some service animals are easy to recognize. "Dog guides" or "Seeing Eye" dogs (assisting people who are blind or vision impaired) wear distinctive leather harnesses. Many "signal dogs" or "hearing dogs" (assisting people who are deaf or hard of hearing) wear bright orange collars, leashes or vests. Dogs trained by Canine Companions for Independence wear blue and yellow backpacks. Some dogs may have a special tag issued by San Francisco Animal Care and Control or a similar agency.

Even if an animal is not wearing a distinctive leash, harness, vest, backpack or tag, it may still be a legitimate service animal. Take the person at their word.

### **Don't service animals have to have a special license or tag?**

No. The Americans with Disabilities Act specifically states that service animals do not have to have a special license or tag.

**OVER**

Residents of San Francisco can get tags identifying their dogs as assistance animals if: they have a regular dog license; and, a letter from their physician stating that they need the dog. We can refer people to Animal Care & Control (phone 554-6364) to ask questions about this process. It is important to remember that people cannot be forced to get such a tag. These tags are given only to dogs.

**What should I do if a service animal barks or growls at other people, bothers other people, or acts out of control?**

Ask a person to remove from the library any animal, including a service animal, when that animal's behavior poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others. For example, any animal that displays vicious behavior towards other users may be excluded. You also may ask a person to remove their dog if it is barking uncontrollably or if its behavior is disturbing other users. Do not make assumptions about how a particular animal is likely to behave based on your past experience with other animals. Each situation must be considered individually.

Staff may call San Francisco Animal Care & Control to pick up dogs tied outside the library if they display vicious or threatening behavior that frightens people entering or leaving the building.

Staff also may call to have dogs that are tied up outside the library for an excessive amount of time picked up.

**What should I do if someone says they are afraid of an animal or allergic to the animal?**

Allergies and fear of animals are generally not valid reasons for denying access or refusing service to people with service animals. Suggest that the person who is afraid or has allergies move away from the animal.

**Do service dogs have to be on a leash?**

Yes. San Francisco has a leash law for dogs. San Francisco Animal Care & Control has confirmed that we can tell users that their dog must be on a leash in the library. All animals must be under control at all times.

Sources consulted:

*COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT SERVICE ANIMALS IN PLACES OF BUSINESS.*  
U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, Disability Rights Section, 7/96.

*ADA Business BRIEF: Services Animals.*

U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, Disability Rights Section, April 2002.

San Francisco Animal Care & Control: 554-6364