



How to Develop and Implement a Volunteer Canine Behavior Program

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About Us

Humane Society of Pinellas
Clearwater, FL

Founded in 1949, the Humane Society of Pinellas is Pinellas County's largest no-kill animal welfare organization. We strive to be a progressive shelter and ensure we are providing individualized care to all of our animals.

Our Behavior & Training team members are certified by the Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers (CCPDT) and adhere to the **ethical obligation of using science-based, humane, and minimally aversive/invasive methods.**



Why create a volunteer-based behavior program?

As shelters eliminate euthanasia for space and its animal residents' length of stay increases, it is imperative that organizations ensure the emotional stability of sheltered dogs; however, limited time and resources often prevent many progressive shelters from feeling capable of implementing advanced training and enrichment programs.

Getting Your Volunteers On Board

Your volunteers are your biggest assets... when they believe in you.

"We cannot afford to waste the time of any volunteer. And, if we permit old ways of doing things to continue through inertia, that's exactly what we are doing: cheating the organization from the most needed service and allowing volunteers to misdirect their talents."

- **Be a "no surprises" leader.** Get volunteer buy-in by making them a part of the process.
- **Focus on the mission.** Address concerns, but only spend time on the ones that are mission and organization-focused.
- **Have a buddy.** Select a well-respected and/or senior volunteer to serve as a liaison.
- **Hold a seminar (or two!).** Before you implement the program, set up several meetings with staff and volunteers to share not only what the program is, but more importantly *why* you are implementing it.



Volunteer Retention

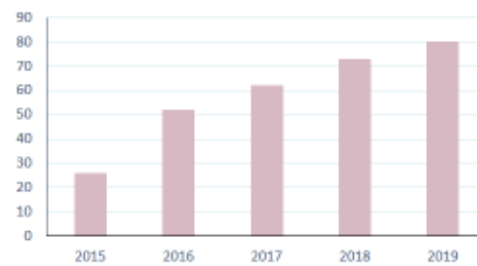
Since its inception in February 2015, volunteer acquisition and retention doubled in less than one year and has steadily improved over the last four years.

Volunteers by Level

	Beginner	Intermediate	Advanced*	Total
2015	8	8	10	26
2016	27	13	12	52
2017	30	20	12	62
2018	38	23	12	73
2019	42	25	13	80

*All advanced volunteers active in 2015 are still active.

Total Volunteers in Program



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The Program

Overview

Today we will review our shelter's Volunteer Canine Behavior Program, developed in 2015. While we will outline the details of how our program operates within our shelter guidelines, keep in mind you may alter the guidelines of our program to suit your shelter's needs and to keep within the scope of your resources.

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More Than Just an Assessment...

When "assessing" behavior, teams must account for behavioral history, staff and volunteer observations, foster home notes, in conjunction with a temperament evaluation.



Gather Detailed History

Behavioral history is the most important part of your evaluation process. If the dog was a stray, ask the finder about their interaction with the dog. If transferred from another facility, get their input on the pet's behavior.



Assess Immediately but Gently

Don't waste time "waiting" to do an evaluation. Our evaluation is performed at intake (or sometimes before!) and doesn't put the dog into a situation it wouldn't encounter in a home or the shelter.

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Common Behavior Problems

There are a variety of behavioral patterns that are more commonly observed in shelter dogs, often being exacerbated by the shelter environment or originating there as a result of stress and length of stay.

Barrier Frustration

Barrier frustration or barrier aggression is a behavior dogs exhibit when behind a barrier: fence, crate, car window.

Leash Reactivity

Leash reactivity is a term used to describe how dogs react when on a leash, specifically when they behave aggressively toward other dogs and/or people while leashed.

Hyperarousal

Arousal involves a very complex interaction between the brain (specifically an area called the reticular activating system) and other areas (for example, those involved in hormone production). This affects how likely your dog is to respond to you and its environment, but, in addition to this, arousal affects how positive and negative events are processed and the resulting emotion.

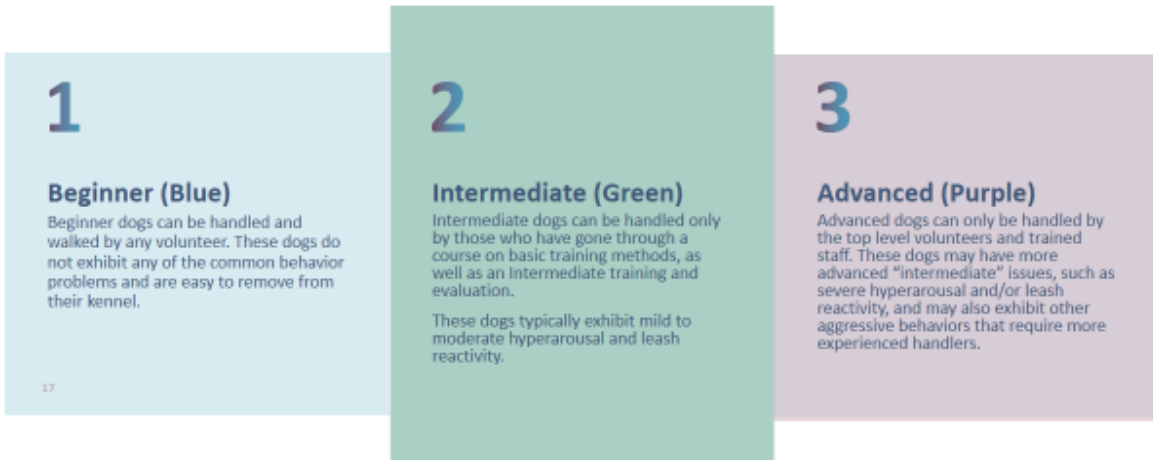
Inter-dog Aggression

Inter-dog aggression occurs when a dog is overly aggressive towards dogs in the same household or unfamiliar dogs. This behavior is often considered normal, but some dogs can become excessively aggressive due to learning, environment and genetic factors.

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Categorizing Dogs

Dogs are categorized by the Behavior and Training team based on behavioral history, observations during the Shelter D.O.G.G. Assessment and staff/volunteers observations. Just like behavior, categories are fluid and a dog may start off beginner and become intermediate, or vice versa.



Categorizing Volunteers

Volunteers are categorized by hours worked, training and passing evaluation(s).





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Training Methods

- **Positive Reinforcement.** Employ approaches that contingently deliver a consequence to increase the probability that the desired behavior will occur.
- **Least Intrusive, Minimally Aversive.**
- **Humane Hierarchy.**
- **Functional Behavior Assessments.** Ensure learner success through a consistent, systematic approach that identifies **antecedent** conditions, a **specific target** behavior, the **purpose** (or function) of that behavior, and the **consequences** that maintain the behavior.
- **Choice.** Always offer the learner as much control and choice as possible.
- **HAVE FUN!** Training should be fun for you, the volunteers and the dogs.

Enrichment and Training



Enrichment

Beginner Level

Enrichment is a basic and easy way for beginner volunteers to understand the power of being able to exhibit normal behavior.

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Life Skills

Beginner II Level

After they attend a training seminar on basic commands and training methods, beginner volunteers can teach basic obedience and lure behaviors needed in the home!

Impulse Control

Intermediate Level

Our intermediate volunteers help our dogs learn impulse control through tethering and flirt pole exercises.