



Service Animals on AMC Volunteer-Led Activities Guidelines for Volunteer Trip Leaders

The participation of Service Animals in AMC events falls under the expectation that the Appalachian Mountain Club—including volunteer trip leaders—complies with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The following overview outlines ADA requirements regarding service animals, how these requirements apply to volunteer-led activities, which questions can and cannot be asked of the owner of a service animal, and which expectations may be set. These guidelines were established to minimize the risk of litigation to AMC and its volunteer leaders.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Overview: Under the ADA, organizations that are open to members of the public are prohibited from discriminating against individuals with disabilities. The ADA requires these organizations to allow people with disabilities to bring their service animals on activities it sponsors except in specific circumstances (see below). Volunteer trip leaders must comply with ADA requirements for the duration of their AMC activity, including any transportation that is an integral part of the activity, such as car-spotting.

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. Service animals perform some of the functions and tasks that the individual with a disability cannot perform for himself or herself.

Some, but not all, service animals wear special collars and harnesses or are licensed or certified and have identification papers. However, such documentation may not be required as a condition for including an individual accompanied by a service animal on an AMC-sponsored activity. Although a number of states have programs to certify service animals, *the AMC leader may not insist on proof of state certification before permitting the service animal to accompany the person with a disability on a club sponsored activity.*

Questions that AMC leaders may ask: In instances where the participant's disability is not apparent to the activity leader, the leader is permitted to ask *only* the following two questions regarding the animal:

- (1) Is the animal required because of a disability?
- (2) What work or task has the animal been trained to perform? *The leader may not require that the service animal demonstrate the task(s) they are trained to perform.*

Setting expectations: Leaders may ask the service animal and its owner to abide by the following expectations:

- (1) That the service animal remains on-leash for the duration of the activity
- (2) That they abide by Leave No Trace principles for the duration of the activity

Leaders **may not** screen a service animal off an AMC activity due to a suspicion that the animal is not a "real" service animal.

The leader may screen off a participant with a service animal only if their participation would fundamentally alter the nature of the activity (for example, if the objective of the activity would not be achievable due to the physical ability of the animal) **or impact the safety of other participants.** Leaders are encouraged to use their judgment and screen participants for higher risk activities as well as share details with potential participants about participation requirements for club-sponsored activities ([Essential Eligibility Criteria](#)).

Further questions regarding service animals or screening participants can be directed to the Leadership Training-Risk Management Department at leadership@outdoors.org.