



**PROSPECTIVE AND ACTIVE
MEMBER GUIDES**



PROSPECTIVE MEMBER GUIDE

We are so pleased you are interested in becoming a therapy dog team with Invisible Paw Prints Inc. (IPP)!

IPP is an American Kennel Club (AKC) recognized therapy dog non-profit organization led by compassionate volunteers who use their canine companions to provide heartwarming visits in support of local community organizations. We are a 100% volunteer organization; no one is paid a penny!

Please find below information about IPP's testing and membership requirements and how to get started!

Canine Requirements

- Minimum of one (1) year old
- Up-to-date on all vaccines, healthy, and free of injury
- Possess basic obedience skills
 - Sit calmly and be touched
 - Listen and obey commands from handler
 - Walk on a leash without excessive pulling
- Well-groomed, free of matting and odor
- Fully house trained
- Enjoy meeting and interacting with people
- Must **NOT**:
 - Excessively lick or jump on people
 - Growl or excessively bark
 - Have history of aggression or biting (if there is a history, please explain)

Handler Requirements

- Minimum of 18 years of age
 - IPP permits junior handlers ages 16 -17, if accompanied by an approved IPP adult
- Maintain control of canine at all times (the evaluation is as much about the handler as the canine)
- No felony records
- Be the primary owner or handler of the canine companion
 - The handler/owner who tests with the canine is the only person permitted to conduct visits on behalf of IPP
 - Exceptions may apply on a case-by-case basis with written IPP Board approval
- Must provide canine's vaccination records by a licensed veterinarian
- Must pass the IPP handlers' written [\(open book\) exam](#)

Other

- Electronic collars, prong collars, and retractable leashes are NOT permitted.
- While treats may be permitted while conducting visits as an active IPP member, treats are NOT allowed during the team evaluation or during group events



Application/Evaluation Process

If you meet the foregoing requirements and are ready to get started, please fill out the application on our website, invisiblepawprints.org, and select a date for the evaluation. To reserve your evaluation spot, you will be asked to submit a \$45 deposit via PayPal that will be used towards your new member dues upon passing your evaluation. If you are not successful in passing on your evaluation day, your payment will be refunded upon request. If you need to reschedule, please notify us as soon as possible – at least 72 hours in advance, so we can add your payment to your new evaluation date or refund your deposit. Failure to notify IPP within 72 hours of your evaluation date that you are unable to make your selected evaluation date will result in the \$45 being converted to a non-refundable donation.

Several weeks prior to the evaluation date you selected on your application, you will be advised of your specific timeslot and the evaluation location in the Charlotte, NC area. You will also be sent the link to complete the open book quiz.

The team evaluation is a pass or fail exam and typically takes less than one hour. If you and your canine companion do not pass, the evaluator will advise you of the specific areas to work on prior to testing again. Once you are ready to test again, you may reach out to schedule a new team evaluation date. You can find out more information about what the evaluator will be looking for in the Evaluator's Guide on our website.

Upon successful completion of all of the IPP membership requirements set forth above, you will become a "registered" IPP therapy dog team¹ and are ready to begin! Plan to attend (remotely) the New Member Orientation, which will be held within a couple of weeks following the evaluation.

¹ Please keep in mind that therapy dogs are different from service dogs and emotional support animals (ESAs). A therapy dog offers emotional support and comfort *to others*. A service dog is an assistance animal specially trained to support a specific individual. Not only is it a violation of IPP for you to present your dog as a certified service animal but it is against federal law. An ESA is a companion animal that provides therapeutic benefits to its owner, who has mental or emotional disabilities.



ACTIVE MEMBER GUIDE

Getting Started

Once you become a registered IPP therapy dog team, your first step will be to purchase an IPP-approved canine vest from the link provided following the evaluation. You will also receive a certificate of registration and ID badges for both you and your canine companion.

The next step will be to decide where you and your canine will start spreading joy! Register on Track It Forward and check there for a list of potential locations (only current members in good standing will have access to this application). If an organization you would like to volunteer with is not listed, please fill out the New Organization form, which can be found on our website on the Volunteer page. IPP will let you know when the organization has been added to Track-it-Forward.

We encourage you to join our private Facebook Members Only page to stay up to date on important information and exciting opportunities. We also invite you to join our public Facebook and Instagram social media pages.

Keep in mind many organizations and facilities have their own volunteer guidelines and policies and procedures. Some may require a separate volunteer application and/or orientation process. Please make sure you understand and comply with the guidelines, policies, and procedures of your selected organization.



Membership Requirements and Coverage

To maintain your membership with IPP, the following is required:

- 1) Conduct a *minimum* of 8 hours (over at least 4 visits, preferably at least one per quarter) during the membership year
 - a. The recommended length of a therapy dog visit is 1-1.5 hours
- 2) Properly log all volunteer hours in Track It Forward
- 3) Keep your canine well-groomed and free of matting and odor during events and visits
- 4) Keep your canine up-to-date on all vaccinations (this is on the honor system; you do not have to submit records for renewal unless requested)
- 5) Act in a professional and courteous manner during all events and visits and maintain control of canine at all times
- 6) Pay annual membership dues (\$45/year)
- 7) Update IPP on any changes to your contact information (email, physical address, phone number) or any other information that may impact your ability to volunteer
- 8) Review IPP's current membership guide as a refresher prior to renewal
- 9) Failure to meet any requirement set forth herein by your renewal date will require, at a minimum, retesting or attending a new member orientation or both
- 10) Failure to pay the renewal fee within 30 days after the membership expiration date will require, at a minimum, retesting or attending a new member orientation or both

Although IPP may send a renewal reminder as a courtesy, it is the responsibility of the member to keep track of his/her renewal date.

IPP reserves the right to terminate the membership of any therapy dog team at any time.

Vest and Identification Requirements

The IPP vest and ID badges must be worn at all times during IPP visits, with the exception of the following:

- *Organization-specific attire/identification:* If the organization where you are volunteering requires specific attire or identification that cannot be worn with the IPP vest/badge, those requirements should be followed but please notify IPP in advance.
- *Rare special occasions* (i.e. Halloween): Costumes may be worn instead of the vest. ID badges must still be worn.
- *Members grandfathered in:* Those with previous vest styles or bandanas may continue to use them, but these will not be replaced or provided to new members.

Wearing the vest and ID badges outside of IPP visits or events is strictly prohibited.

Becoming a registered therapy dog does not provide any legal protections or privileges of emotional support animals or service dogs. Using your vest or credentials to gain these privileges outside of the scope of volunteer therapy dog visits is prohibited and may be a violation of federal laws.

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Incident Response

IPP maintains liability insurance coverage for incidents involving injuries to others and property damage in connection with your canine's visit. It does not cover incidents occurring outside of valid IPP therapy volunteer dog visits/events.

Failure to comply with any of the membership guidelines set forth above negates liability coverage.

If an incident occurs, you must notify IPP immediately by email at invisiblepawprints2016@gmail.com with the following information:

- Handler and Canine Name
- Handler's contact phone number
- Name and address of organization
- Organization contact
- Organization contact's phone number
- Description of incident (do not provide HIPAA-protected information)

Failure to report any incident in a timely manner may result in removal of IPP membership and may jeopardize insurance coverage for the organization.

Our insurance only covers volunteer visits, not paid employment time. If you seek to use your dog's certification in connection with your employment (e.g., therapist, social worker, teacher, etc.), you must secure separate personal insurance. Even if you secure your own insurance coverage or it is covered by your place of employment, workplace hours are still not counted toward volunteer hours required for renewal.

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IPP Visit Checklists

DOs

- 1) Carry the following items with you to each visit:
 - a. Vest*
 - b. ID badges – handler and canine*
 - c. Poop bags*
 - d. Water bowl
 - e. Towels/paper towels for cleanup if needed
 - f. Vaccination records (if not already on file with the organization)*must be carried with you; the remainder can be left in your vehicle
- 2) Arrive with sufficient time to give your canine the opportunity to potty prior to entering into any facility. Keep in mind your therapy dog visit begins when you park your vehicle and ends when you leave the parking lot.
- 3) We recommend handlers keep their dogs at least 5 feet away from unfamiliar dogs. Under certain circumstances, the distance may be reduced such as in a small elevator or other confined space; in those circumstances, use good common sense.
- 4) Stay with your canine at all times and keep your canine harnessed and on a leash. The only time your canine can be off-leash is during a trick routine, but the handler must be in control at all times and there should be no other dogs present.
- 5) At all times, you need to stay focused on your dog and avoid being distracted by your interactions with others.
- 6) Anyone not registered as the canine's IPP handler, including family members, is prohibited from tending the leash during IPP visits as they are not covered by our liability insurance.
- 7) Towels, blankets or lap pillows are to be used whenever an animal is placed in someone's lap or on any furniture. These items should be provided by the facility or patient. Small dogs (14 pounds or less) should be able to lie quietly in someone's lap without wiggling. Other dogs may be permitted on a chair or bed only if the facility permits. You should always first ask for permission for your dog to be on the bed or chair.
- 8) Be on time. If you are tardy, it is a reflection on IPP in the eyes of the staff and people you visit. If you know you will be late, notify your point of contact as soon as possible.
- 9) Adhere to the requirements of the facility/organization you are visiting, including training requirements, visitor policies, and mask requirements.
- 10) Have fun!

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DON'Ts

- 1) A handler is not permitted to bring more than one therapy dog to an organization at the same time.
- 2) Never enter a room that has posted “contact precautions” or similar language indicating that the patient is at risk of contracting sickness from others and may require additional preventative attire to be worn to enter. If you are unsure, ask the facility staff.
- 3) Do not take photos without consent (verbal consent is okay if the individual is over the age of 18; if under 18, you should seek consent from the parent or guardian). Please be mindful of your surroundings and what is being captured in the background of your photo.
- 4) Do not go to an organization if you or your pet is ill.
- 5) Talking on the phone or texting during visits should only be done in emergency circumstances.
- 6) Treats or toys are not permitted during group events.

If you have any questions after reviewing this document, please contact us at invisiblepawprints2016@gmail.com.