



**Pet Partners**  
Touching Lives, Improving Health

# The State of Animal-Assisted Interventions in Professionalized Settings

WHITE PAPER





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# Introduction

Throughout Pet Partners' long history as a leader in the field of human-animal interaction (HAI), our focus has primarily been on empowering individuals who wish to share the love of their pets through volunteerism. In this way, handlers around the world have partnered with their pets through animal-assisted activities (AAA) to provide opportunities for motivational, educational, and/or recreational benefits that enhance the quality of life for those with whom the teams visit.

While therapy animal programming that is offered by volunteer handlers provides an invaluable service to communities across the globe, there is also a growing body of practitioners who aim to incorporate the healing benefits of animals into their professionalized settings. A wide range of vocational domains are represented in this space, spanning professions such as mental health, allied health, education, and medicine.

At Pet Partners, we are deeply committed to helping these professionals best integrate therapy animals into their practice as a safe and ethical treatment modality capable of benefitting all who are involved in the intervention.

However, before we can meaningfully meet this need, it is essential that we accurately understand it.

- ✓ *What is the journey like for these professionals who aim to work with therapy animals?*
- ✓ *What barriers do they face at each point along this career path?*
- ✓ *What are the overarching goals that these professionals have for animal-assisted interventions in the future?*



Motivated by a desire to comprehend the state of animal-assisted interventions (AAI) in professionalized settings so that we can best support the professionalization and standardization of the intervention, we set out on a series of research projects to answer these questions. Through this research, major gaps in services were identified, and future directions for the field were made clear. This information empowers us to come together and elevate the impact of therapy animals to greater heights than before.



# About the Authors



## Taylor Chastain Griffin, PhD

National Director of AAI Advancement, Pet Partners

**Dr. Taylor Chastain Griffin** is National Director of AAI Advancement for Pet Partners. In this role, she focuses on supporting research and professional development within the therapy animal arena. Having witnessed hundreds of interactions between her own therapy animals and the people with whom they've visited, Taylor is passionate about bolstering the intervention with empirical investigation. Taylor obtained her doctorate in research psychology in 2018, with her studies focusing on the human-animal bond as it is experienced in contexts of shared traumatic experiences. Through her undergraduate education in psychology and animal behavior to her graduate work to become a mental health counselor, Taylor has always strived to shape her educational and professional endeavors with the foundational goal of promoting AAI. Taylor is also a dog trainer and Pet Partners team evaluator and has been a registered handler with Pet Partners since 2015. Taylor has been secretary for the American Psychological Association's Section on Human Animal Interaction and serves as a mental health expert on the Georgia Veterinary Medical Association Resilience & Well-Being Committee. Taylor is based in Georgia, where she lives with her nine dogs and three cats.





**Annie Kate Hudson**

**Annie Kate Hudson** is an occupational therapy doctoral student at Belmont University in Nashville, TN, who completed her capstone project at Pet Partners. Annie Kate was practically raised in her mom's dog grooming van and has seen the positive effects of the human-animal bond from an early age. She plans to combine her love for occupational therapy and dogs by utilizing animal-assisted therapy (AAT) in her practice. Her future plans include furthering the research available to support AAT and occupational therapy so more professionals and clients can benefit from the intervention.



**Erin Trella**

**Erin Trella** completed her capstone project with Pet Partners for her doctoral degree in occupational therapy from Belmont University. She became passionate about involving animals in practice through her volunteer work at an outpatient occupational therapy clinic that incorporated AAI with a wide variety of animals. Erin was formerly registered as a therapy team with her dog Sam through St. Hubert's Animal Welfare Center and would volunteer at hospitals, bringing the joy of therapy animals to the patients. She looks forward to one day incorporating animal-assisted therapy into her own practice.

# Overview of Organizational Research

## Foundational Research Projects

It is an interaction that takes place more often with each passing month: Pet Partners staff receive inquiries from professionals who are looking for help in their goal of bringing a therapy animal into their practice.

*“Where do I even get started?”*

*“Do you have any courses available that would be helpful to me?”*

*“How can I connect with other professionals who have already figured out the best way to do this work?”*

The increase in inquiries of this type encouraged us to learn more about the needs of professionals in this area. We have now completed a series of research projects to inform our understanding and ensure that it is based solely on the real experiences of the professionals who need our support.

## Professional Summit Data

We began our formal investigation into this topic in 2019 by hosting a Professional Summit. This event brought together 25 professionals representing various vocational fields in which AAI are commonly applied.



Prior to the Professional Summit, a survey was sent out to attendees, members of the Pet Partners Human-Animal Bond Advisory Board, and any other professional whose testimony could help shape our activities at the event. The preliminary survey asked participants to identify areas of need related to AAI, ultimately yielding the topics that we focused on at the summit.

The data from the preliminary survey was broken down into five essential topics that shaped the summit's data-collection activities:

- ✓ Continued education.
- ✓ Essential services for professionals.
- ✓ Barriers in implementing AAI.
- ✓ Challenges with liability insurance.
- ✓ The need to come together as a larger field.



A facilitator led the group through activities focused on the topic areas. Through this work, 545 unique data points were realized, confirming the most pressing needs of AAI professionals, and setting the stage for continued investigation on this topic.





## Organizational Research

After the Professional Summit data had been reviewed, Pet Partners began a project to survey professionals about key areas that were primary barriers for those who aimed to partner with therapy animals.

In 2020, we partnered with Dr. Kerri Rodriguez and Purdue University to create an in-depth survey about the intersection of AAI and liability insurance (n=34). Through this effort, we learned that even though AAI professionals very rarely have incidents, they have difficulty obtaining and understanding liability coverage that does not specifically exclude interventions involving a therapy animal.

This was a topic that we also investigated in a subsequent research project made possible by our partnership with the Human-Animal Bond Research Institute and the Animal Policy Group. During this two-stage research project, 96 AAI professionals completed a 20-minute online survey, which was then followed by 90-minute qualitative interviews with five practitioners with varying levels of expertise in AAI. Through these combined efforts, a number of themes were identified:

- ✓ Professionals are attracted to AAI for a variety of reasons, most of which relate to their existing love for animals and their belief that AAI can help them achieve their treatment goals more quickly.
- ✓ While many AAI practitioners are aware of empirical research that supports the intervention, they would like more assistance translating these findings into best practices and guidelines.

- ✓ AAI practitioners are seeking more educational opportunities to advance their knowledge related to key topics such as animal welfare in AAI, partnering with appropriate animals, AAI terminology, and practical strategies for implementing therapy animals in their work.
- ✓ AAI practitioners have a strong desire to network with others who share their passion for the intervention. By coming together, practitioners can stop re-inventing the wheel and utilize knowledge and resources that already exist within the field.

In the final portion of our research process, we conducted two focus groups to specifically consider these findings as they relate to professionals at different points of their journey towards working with therapy animals. One of these focus groups was for self-identified experts in the field, while the other group was for those who felt that they were at more of a beginner stage in working with therapy animals. In reviewing potential lists of services to be offered to AAI professionals, it was confirmed across both groups that opportunities for education, community, best practices, and other AAI resources are highly desired.

## **Call for Standardization in Existing AAI Literature**

The need for increased standardization and professionalization in AAI is not just reflected in anecdotal experiences and Pet Partners' organizational data. This is also a need that is commonly referenced within the empirical literature on therapy animal interventions. Even the way in which we communicate about therapy animal interventions is often unclear, with terminology varying both in applied practice and in empirical publications.<sup>2,5</sup>



Unfortunately, a lack of clarity about high-quality AAI exists even among the therapy animal organizations through which a handler becomes prepared for their work in this space. Standards of practice differ greatly among the existing therapy animal organizations, with only some of the organizations adhering to the industry's best standards of practice.<sup>4,8,9</sup> In studies that have compared the policies associated with various therapy animal groups, there is a pressing call being made for organizational best practices to be widely adopted and for the facilities that have therapy animal programming to become educated and aware of the need for best practices in this space.<sup>1,9</sup>



All people who are engaged in AAI benefit from increased professionalization of the intervention. When a professional is partnering with an animal, a set of specialized skills and competencies are called for so the intervention is ethical and effective.<sup>10,11</sup> Professionals should be trained to protect the well-being of therapy animals, not just for the animals' sake, but also to protect their clients and to minimize any risks associated with the intervention.<sup>4</sup> Through the development of AAI protocols, professionals will best be able to select clients, plan treatment options, and evaluate the efficacy of their work with therapy animals.<sup>3,6</sup>

Even professionals who do not intend to directly partner with a therapy animal can benefit by becoming aware of the ways in which AAI might aid their clients.<sup>7</sup> As this intervention grows in notoriety, popularity, and empirical support, further steps should be taken to promote accurate understanding of the intervention, matched by the highest possible standards. This makes our work with therapy animals safer, more effective, and ultimately more widely available to those who could be supported by the human-animal bond.

# A Deep Dive into the Journey of an AAI Practitioner

At Pet Partners, we realize that research is a never-ending process, as there is always room to dive deeper and learn more. As we made meaning from our foundational data, we realized that there was a call to more thoroughly map out some of the most compelling themes that can be found in an AAI practitioner's journey. The final portion of this series of investigations allowed for these considerations into some of the more complex experiences that mark the journey of an AAI professional.

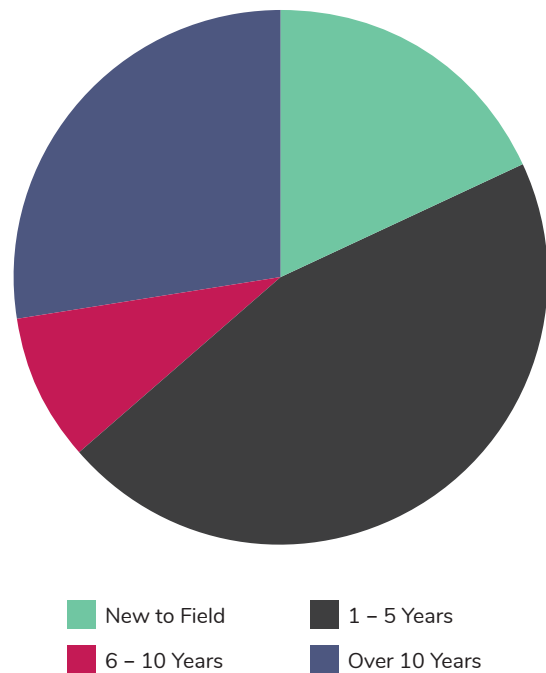
## Methodology and Participant Information

To best appreciate these experiences, we interviewed nine professionals who could uniquely speak to questions such as these:

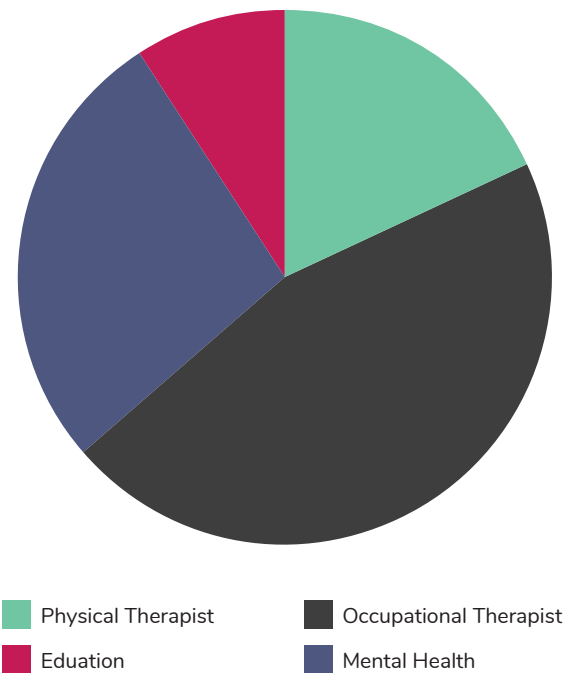
- ✓ How did you come to learn about AAI?
- ✓ What training has prepared you to work with therapy animals?
- ✓ What obstacles have you overcome to make AAI possible in your vocational practice?
- ✓ How can we make this path clearer for other professionals who desire to partner with therapy animals?



The professionals who were included in this project had diverse experience with AAI. As you can see in Figure 1, there was a representative distribution of levels of expertise involved in this phase of the project. Given our desire to serve professionals at all stages of their career path, it was essential for us to understand the experiences of seasoned AAI professionals as well as those who are just getting started in this space.



**Figure 1:** Years of Practice in AAI



**Figure 2:** Professional Identity of Participants

We also aimed to include practitioners who had experience working with diverse species in their vocational practice. While all nine practitioners had experience working with dogs, one of the practitioners also had experience working with guinea pigs and cats, and one had experience working with llamas. These statistics are generally representative of the larger body of professionals we aim to serve, as canines are significantly more represented within the therapy animal field as compared to other species of therapy animals.

Because AAI in professionalized settings occurs across so many professional arenas, we also aimed to include a wide range of professionals in our final qualitative inquiries. As depicted in Figure 2, participants in this portion of the study included physical therapists, occupational therapists, mental health professionals, and educators.

Given the scope of this organizational research, participants were individually recruited and invited to share their insights with us through phone or video calls. These interviews took place during the first quarter of 2021. After each interview was completed, our research team conducted thematic analysis of each interview's transcription, ultimately yielding a variety of themes that shed light on the journey of an AAI practitioner.

## **Key Findings**

After reviewing the hundreds of pages of data that resulted from this portion of the investigation, we were stunned by the similarities in testimony that each of these practitioners had. Regardless of the species with which a practitioner desired to partner and irrespective of the amount of time an individual had spent cultivating their craft, each practitioner mentioned many of the same experiences, barriers, needs, and desires for the field of AAI.

### **Theme One: Blazing Your Own Trail**

What inspires a person to want to utilize the power of the human-animal bond within their vocational practice? For many professionals, AAI is described as a dream come true: an opportunity to blend a deep passion and love for both people and animals into the work they do.

However, the inspiring call to be involved in this field is often met by a long and arduous effort in which so many professionals are left to blaze their own trail. Responses gathered from both novice and experienced professionals show that developing tools and resources to get started in this field makes up the bulk of the



journey. The front end of this process encompasses finding and discerning the legitimacy of any educational materials available including research, online courses, webinars, case studies, workshops, and educational conferences. Due to the lack of guidelines and difficulty in navigating the information available, some professionals feel as though the inclusion of AAI is elusive, with several participants describing the intervention as “unattainable.”


In order to excel in this field, the willingness to innovate and take initiative seems to be a prerequisite.



*“I didn’t even know really the words to type in...”*

These are the words of one professional who described her early days of attempting to research how to get started. While there is this baseline awareness of the fact that animals can be helpful in promoting wellness, every professional who was interviewed for this project shared that there was no clear path forward for them on their journey towards becoming an AAI practitioner.

The complications of this process are amplified depending on how a professional aims to incorporate their animal into their work. Depending on the goal of the professional’s intervention, they often must create their own policies, procedures, and materials. Professionals reported having to create their own consent forms and other legal documents individualized to their field, and they are required to build their therapy animal programming from the ground up. This task often begins by first needing to generate buy-in at an organizational or employer level. Practitioners must find a way to effectively share information that supports AAI as an appropriate and effective asset to be introduced into the office.



*“I just had to kind of pull it together myself...whatever resources I could think of. I wrote my own policies and procedures, I just did it myself.”*

## Theme Two: Developing an Expertise Related to Animals

Professionals who aim to work with therapy animals take on the challenging task of developing expertise across two different domains that, to date, have not formally come together in a way that allows for easy learning and best practices. No matter which fields these professionals worked in, they had to first develop their core competencies within their vocational focus. From there, they could then shift focus and seek knowledge about the animals with whom they would partner.

Across each interview, practitioners talked about the importance of spending time with and learning about their animal and the animal's behaviors and temperament, as well as building a solid and trusting relationship outside of working together with clients. This process was described as an essential beginning step in the journey towards implementing AAI into practice.

Acquiring education on animal welfare and behavior was reported to be a foundational step for AAI practitioners. This knowledge base sets the stage for professionals to be able to recognize cues for when an animal is comfortable as compared to when they are stressed, which is an extremely important ability in AAI. Throughout this project, participants also discussed the need for understanding time limits for a working animal as well as safety protocols to protect both the animal and the client.

Throughout the interviews, many practitioners expressed the belief that it is important to volunteer with a therapy animal in multiple settings prior to bringing the animal to work. Volunteerism was described as an opportunity to explore the contexts and populations with which the animal is most likely to thrive. This step



also allows the practitioner the opportunity to determine the animal's affinity for these kinds of interactions, respecting the core principle in AAI that therapy animals should enjoy and not simply tolerate their jobs.

An additional commonality expressed among participants is that a professional must be highly committed to the animal training process if they desire to work with their own animal in AAI. The training that these professionals completed with their animals was extensive and often included both individual and group training formats. AAI professionals described taking part in a range of classes from those that hone basic obedience skills to more specific hands-on classes focusing on incorporating your animal into practice. These training courses were described as essential in developing well-rounded skills.

It was also recommended by these professionals that animal training be appreciated as a lifelong process rather than a destination to be achieved once. Working together through training skills and classes was ultimately reported to be a great way for a person to stay in tune with their animal as both the human and the therapy animal change over the course of time.



*“What people don’t see is all the behind the scenes work of it. It’s every single day working on skills.”*

### **Theme Three: Firsthand Accounts of the Benefits of AAI**

It is not surprising that those who are engaged in AAI believe in the intervention's ability to positively impact their clients, as many of them have their own firsthand accounts of how their lives have been influenced by



their connection with animals. With that in mind, participants in this study unanimously expressed their belief in the idea that animals have a healing presence, which serves as the primary reason most choose to embark on the AAI journey in the first place.

*“Dogs are able to connect in a way humans can’t.”*

*“There’s something innate in them. I didn’t teach him to go lay at their feet when they’re crying. I didn’t teach him to put his head on their legs or on their hands when they’re out of control. You can’t teach that. I’ve just seen such a big change in the positivity of how my sessions go.”*

Stories like these were told by all our participants. These professionals served people of various ages and stages of life, and each had a testimony to share about how therapy animals helped to facilitate healing within their scope of practice.

Professionals explained that animals can change the energy and atmosphere in a room, decreasing a person’s stress and anxiety. They also talked about how therapy animals can provide a healthy distraction, allowing the client to shift their attention away from challenging circumstances or mental anguish, and even provide them with something to look forward to in connecting with the animal.

The professionals that we talked to also described the innate way in which clients are attracted to AAI. It was reportedly rare that a client would opt out of an opportunity to include a therapy animal in their work with a practitioner.



Highlighting some of the theoretical rationales for AAI, professionals talked about how therapy animals help to build therapeutic rapport between the practitioner and the client, motivating clients toward reaching their goals. Professionals in this project even reported that, at times, their clients may prefer speaking with the therapy animal over the professional.

*“It gives patients something to talk about besides, ‘I’m sick, I’m in the hospital.’ It’s something to look forward to.”*

*“There is just a really cool emotional connection with animals that I have seen in working with kids. I have seen nonverbal kids who aren’t necessarily talking to him, but I can see their excitement and joy when he’s there. And the way they’re looking at him...using their own gestures to communicate with him. It is heart opening. It just opens their little minds, and they just feel almost like he’s one of them. He becomes our teammate.”*

*“I’m the therapist, and I have all the training. But sometimes I feel like she does more for the group than I do.”*

In the occupational therapy discipline in particular, therapy animals were reported to help clients develop fundamental life skills. A pediatric occupational therapist who utilizes AAI explained how the animal helps her clients develop coping skills, foster a sense of belonging, and understand personal space and perspective-taking. Clients can help groom and feed the animal, working on fine and gross motor tasks during these activities. Physical and occupational therapists often partner with animals to work on physical deficits such as standing tolerance and balance, creating a more engaging and motivating environment for the client.

*“If I can bring these types of situations into my practice to help motivate children – to help them engage and to do all of these wonderful things...What a gift, you know... what a gift for everyone involved.”*


*“These animals do things we can’t do.”*

Our participants also spoke about how therapy animals can provide a ‘mental break’ for the client during physically or cognitively taxing sessions. Even in the most stressful settings such as the emergency department of a hospital, therapy animals were said to have helped clients cope. One professional specializing in treating clients with neurological conditions explained that the brain heals better when there is decreased stress in the environment, which is where the animal comes into play.

Not only are the animals helpful for clients, but professionals in our study explained they also play an important role with staff. In an inpatient rehabilitation facility where the environment for staff is emotionally taxing, the animals are vital to reducing stress and anxiety levels for professionals. They provide a positive outlet, with some professionals even reporting that the presence of therapy animals can help to bring the staff team together.







*“Our staff had been crumbling under the weight of the emotional trauma we deal with day in and day out.”*

*“Just his presence here is very healing for the patients and for the employees.”*

## **Theme Four: Barriers to AAI**

Though the intervention is deeply meaningful to both the professionals and their clients, the participants in this project talked about a wide variety of barriers that they encountered on their path to incorporating AAI into their work.

**Inspiring Buy-In from Colleagues:** As these individuals dove deeper into the idea of partnering with animals, one of the most frequently reported barriers related to the reactions of the people around them. Many of the professional’s coworkers or supervisors expressed resistance to bringing a therapy animal into the practice, commonly citing concerns about infection control. In hospital settings, participants reported that often the client’s doctor would have to approve a visit by a therapy animal.



*“Getting therapy dogs into hospitals can be a nightmare, because there’s so much red tape.”*

Practitioners are required to gather research and materials that educate other professionals on the level of risk associated with the intervention, and they must also communicate the standards of practice that they follow to mitigate these concerns.

A few of our interview participants also reported that they occasionally had difficulty getting their coworkers to understand appropriate boundaries for their therapy animals. At times, coworkers mistakenly believe that they can work with their colleague’s therapy animal without understanding the need for proper training and an advanced relationship between the handler and the animal.

**Help with Practical Considerations Regarding AAI:** Navigating the legal considerations relevant to AAI can also be extremely difficult for professionals looking to get involved in the field. There is tremendous confusion about laws related to incorporating an animal into practice. Professionals reported that the laws currently in place are very vague, which causes them to feel a lack of clarity and security and might even prevent others from implementing AAI due to the fear of inadvertently breaking a law. Public health codes further complicate professionals' decision-making surrounding therapy animals; these issues have been elevated recently due to COVID-19 restrictions.

*"I think there's just not enough awareness about animal-assisted therapy."*

*"It's been such a gray area, there hasn't been a lot of support."*

#### **Lack of Information to Protect Animal Welfare:**

A major barrier within AAI that many professionals communicated relates to a sense of confusion about how to best protect animal welfare within the intervention. Many professionals stated that when starting out in AAI, they wished there were better guidelines on what type of animal would suit their practice, even desiring information about specific breeds of canines that might be the best fit for the job at hand.

Practitioners were also commonly unsure about how to get their animals registered as therapy animals. They were not always sure of the best ways to find a qualified organization who would have guidelines to help promote the well-being of their therapy animals.



Therapy animal fatigue is also a concern amongst professionals. Due to the lack of resources available, practitioners say that they do not always have a clear understanding of how long is appropriate for their animals to work and how to best implement rest breaks.

**Insurance:** Participants in this study frequently reported having issues understanding and accessing liability insurance that does not exclude their work with therapy animals. Professionals talked about the struggles they went through to get their animals covered while in practice, as most therapy animal organization programs only have insurance to cover visits that are conducted on a volunteer basis.

**Lack of Resources:** Of all the hurdles that were discussed during these interviews, the lack of resources available for AAI professionals was unanimously reported to be the most significant barrier within the field of AAI. According to this study's participants, there are very few articles that provide information on how to start implementing AAI. Professionals cannot find guidelines on best practices, or easy-to-access research to validate the intervention's usefulness. Practitioners reported that the information that is available is often outdated, and there are very few resources that describe AAI in professionalized settings beyond the basic level of intervention.

In addition, the terminology can be extremely confusing for an individual starting out in the field. Professionals reported feeling confused when trying to figure out the differences between therapy animals, facility animals, service animals, and emotional support animals. There is also conflation within the field related to terminology such as registration versus certification, as well as acronyms such as AAI, AAT, AAE, and AAA.

## **Theme Five: Need for Information and Education**

A significant gap in the field of AAI can be noted in the lack of education, research, and services that are available to professionals who are seeking to learn about the field. As we spoke to participants in this project, many noted that a roadmap or flowchart would be extremely helpful when it comes to getting started in implementing AAI.



Other specific written educational materials that participants said would be advantageous to them were papers on how to create buy-in for AAI with employees and bosses, insurance guidelines, and field-specific recommendations. A handful of participants reported that they had begun to create their own templates for documentation such as consent forms and hospital protocol, but that it might be more useful to have ready-to-use templates for a variety of paperwork that is needed when beginning to incorporate AAI in the workplace.

*“We need to know how to promote AAI in a way that will help the facility see its potential for monetary benefit.”*

*“We need structure.”*

The participants were also interested in furthering their knowledge about the field and expressed their desire for educational courses. Some of the courses they cited that would be most useful included the following:

- ✓ Professional development trainings.
- ✓ Higher level educational courses for more advanced animal handling techniques.
- ✓ Access to formal CEUs.

Participants expressed that they frequently found themselves lacking information in the area of new interventions, and that material such as pictures and videos that provide discipline-specific information on how to incorporate their animals into practice would be helpful.

As we seek to expand the field of AAI, an important part of the process is to offer more detailed information

for professionals to use. The participants in this study expressed a need for job-specific policies and procedures, explaining, for example, that a social worker might not partner with a therapy animal in the same way that a physical therapist would. For professionals to thrive and for AAI to be a clear asset to their discipline, it is vital to provide these job-specific procedures.

In addition to various practical guidelines, it was noted by the participants that it can be a difficult transition when first bringing an animal into the workplace. Professionals cited a need for information on how to advocate for an animal in a multitude of settings and how to handle the dynamics of a busy office. Participants also wanted information on how to determine if a client is appropriate to work with an animal, tips for selecting therapy animal species and breed, and information on working with a variety of therapy animal species.



## **Theme Six: Hopes for the Field**

Throughout all the interviews that were conducted for this project, a major theme touches on the participants' inspirations and ideas to encourage growth within the field of AAI. Largely, professionals are seeking to connect and share ideas with each other. Calls for networking, mentorship opportunities, and a dedicated place for like-minded individuals to gather were noted as ways to increase exposure and a sense of community for AAI practitioners.

In addition to coming together as professionals, participants in this study talked about their desire to further connect with therapy animal handlers who mainly engage in volunteer-based animal-assisted activities. Not

every professional can work with their own pet, and it is sometimes more appropriate for a professional to partner with a therapy animal team so that they can focus on the needs of their client in session. In these cases, professionals would benefit from the provision of education and best practices to help them partner with therapy animal volunteers. Professionals would also like to be able to share resources on the best ways to train volunteer teams to step into these professionalized settings so that the intervention is ultimately more accessible to clients across a wide variety of workplaces.



Another key topic that was frequently discussed across interviews touches on the participants' desire for more diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within the world of AAI. Professionals hope to not only see more training made available about the intersection of culture and HAI, but they would also like to see recruitment strategies, scholarship funds, and outreach programs that allow more diverse populations to become aware of the benefits of therapy animal interventions. As the field of AAI grows, partnerships with existing DEI agencies and committees within vocational professional associations is expected to be helpful in achieving this critical outcome.

Across all interviews, it was clear that AAI professionals are passionate about helping to further the field in any way they can, expressing their desire to contribute to educational content along with a sincere willingness to share the expertise they have developed across their career journeys. All in all, these professionals expressed a clear desire to come together to meet the needs of individual practitioners while simultaneously elevating the field as a whole.



# Meeting the Call to Action: Association for Animal-Assisted Intervention Professionals



## AAAIP

Association of Animal-Assisted  
Intervention Professionals

Deeply moved by the call for services that has been further recognized through these combined research efforts, we are delighted to announce that Pet Partners is creating an affiliated organization, the **Association for Animal-Assisted Intervention Professionals (AAAIP)**.

This new organization (coming in January 2022) has been specifically created to serve the needs of AAI professionals. AAAIP will be a place for any professional who aims to incorporate the power of the human-animal bond into their work. Leaders in the field will connect with emerging AAI practitioners to share education, research, and a professional community so that together, we can standardize protocols, professionalize practices, and protect human and animal welfare within the industry.

Inspired by this gap in services and fueled by thousands of pieces of data, AAAIP is being built upon our foundational commitment to meet the field where it is while also enabling essential developments and advancements as we grow.



## Services

AAAIP will offer the following categories of services:

- **Education:** online courses, webinars, conferences, and additional resources.
- **Connection:** pathways for emerging AAI professionals to get started and opportunities for field leaders to share their knowledge.
- **Resources:** publications, handouts, template documents, and more.
- **Community:** robust online community and additional opportunities for special networking initiatives.
- **Research:** means for staying up to date on empirical advancements and invitations to contribute to continued investigation.

## Certification Exam



As a portion of these efforts, a certification exam will also be launched in 2022. This exam will assess professional knowledge in integrating AAI as a complementary treatment modality within an existing scope of practice. The Animal-Assisted Intervention Specialist (AAIS) certification will examine topics deemed essential by a team of subject matter experts and will help professionals demonstrate an awareness of best practices in AAI that protect client safety and animal welfare.

## Learn More

We are so eager to embark upon this journey of serving AAI professionals. To learn more, please see our [Frequently Asked Questions](#) related to AAAIP and the AAIS certification.

All future announcements about this organization will be shared through our [AAI for Professionals newsletter](#), so be sure to stay connected and share our newsletter with others who will benefit from these efforts.

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