



Animal Assisted Interventions International Frequently Asked Questions

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About AAIL

Animal Assisted Intervention International (AAIL) grew out of many discussions within Assistance Dogs International (ADI) about how best to support the growing number of organizations working within the field of Animal Assisted Therapy, Education and Activities (together referred to as Animal Assisted Intervention or AAI). Many organizations that were training assistance dogs, were also seeing an increase in requests to place dogs with healthcare, human service, and educational providers. After years of international meetings to create purpose, mission, terminology, types of membership, and standards, Animal Assisted Intervention International (AAIL) was formally registered in the Netherlands on the 7th of February, 2013, and an interim board was established.

Soon, AAIL realized that there were other areas of animal assisted interventions that did not fit into the member categories that were initially created. In 2020 we added new member categories to capture professional programs and collaborations that did needed standards, competencies and accreditation guidelines.

AAIL's goal is to create an international community of practitioners and animal trainers who share interest in human-animal interactions, animal health, welfare and well-being, professional standards, competencies and accreditation for all members. AAIL will provide conferences and facilitate member communications to meet this end.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Q: Why should organizations and individual healthcare/human service/education providers join AAIL?

A: AAIL is a member driven organization that realized in 2010 that while there were many organizations that offered registration for volunteer visiting teams, there was little guidance on standards, competencies or an accreditation process available for the professional member categories - healthcare, human service, education providers and dog training organizations - that train and provide dogs specifically for this kind of work. AAIL began meeting an unmet need for developing detailed standards, competencies and accreditation for professionals. In addition, AAIL recognized that many of the volunteer visiting organizations did not accommodate teams to work with professionals in formal AAI work. The preparation, education, evaluation, practice and accreditation can be very different than volunteer visiting.

Q: What is the difference between registration, certification and accreditation?

A: In the case of AAIL's, many organizations use the following terminology as an industry standard. It may vary in some parts of the world.

- **Registration** implies that the handler, the dog, and the team working together has been screened against some set of internal organizational criteria.
- **Certification** typically implies evaluation of formal education/training. In the case of AAILs, a certification would require that one organization offered formal education to both human and dog in the category for which the human carries credentials. For example, in AAT, a therapist and dog would train together at a professional level – by someone who has up to date knowledge/experience in both therapy and animal training/behavior/communication for that professional level of work. Certification is typically achieved by having an independent third party evaluate the education given by a separate organization. For example, an occupational therapist attends university for several years and then achieves certification by taking their board exam by the National Board of Certification of Occupational Therapy, NOT the university in which they received their training. In professional level healthcare, human service provider and education fields, it may be considered unethical for an organization to offer the education and then offer the

final certification exam. The exception is university programs that have an internal structure for this kind of program.

- **Accreditation** is a process of validation of an applicant's (organization or individual) education, experience, and credibility to meet a set of standards, competencies and quality assurances set by an outside third party peer reviewed board (AAll). Potentially, the accreditation process allows the accredited organization to offer education, evaluation and certification. For example, an organization that achieves accreditation from AAll has proven that their practices are acceptable and ethical, and demonstrated quality assurance, and are competent to teach, test and offer certification to third parties. AAll is currently reviewing this possibility in regions around the world to determine if allowing accredited parties to offer certification to others is in our best interest and scope. AAll has no final decision at the time this Q & A was written.

Q: Who joins AAll?

A: Organizations and individual degreed/licensed healthcare, human service, and educational providers who offer animal assisted therapy (AAT), education (AAE), other professional programs (AASP) and organizations that offer volunteer visiting or animal assisted activities (AAA), and for any of the aforementioned that offer collaborative work in AAI. AAll also has membership for organizations and individuals that prepare, train and place dogs with those who offer any kind of AAI work.

Q: Why should my organization apply for AAll membership?

A: Reputable organizations are developed based on formal literature and well-defined best practices. By joining AAll you will be able to influence the future direction of how practitioners develop AAls across the world and you will have access to like-minded people who want to work towards achieving high standards, clear competencies and have objectively evaluated checks and balances in all areas of AAls. This ensures that staff, clients and dogs are supported in the best possible way, thereby building a reputation for excellent professional outcomes.

Q: Are there different kinds of membership?

A: AAll currently offers 9 fields of membership, 7 of which can be accredited:

- **Animal Assisted Activities (AAA):** AAA incorporates specially selected and trained animals into impromptu or planned activities and interactions that may be offered by volunteer, paraprofessional or professional human-animal teams. AAA may be unstructured or goal oriented in areas such as motivational, recreational, social and general well-being. AAA teams have participated in a minimum of introductory preparation and training for the populations they visit and the dog they are handling. With additional preparation and training, AAA teams can work directly with a licensed, degreed or equivalent healthcare, human service or educational professional in AAE, AAT and AASP. AAAs promote mutual wellbeing and benefits for the humans and animals involved. AAls may directly or indirectly involve the animal.
- **Animal Assisted Education (AAE):** AAE incorporates specially selected and trained animals into goal directed, educationally relevant teaching plans that are designed to promote development of general or special education skills in areas such as cognition, social functioning, personal growth, responsible pet carers, etc. AAE is developed, directed and/or delivered by a person who is licensed, degreed or equivalent education professional specialized expertise in teaching/education. The process is evaluated and documented. AAE providers who handle their own dogs have additional intermediate to advanced training in dog advocacy, handling, communication, behavior, husbandry, health, welfare and well-being in both living and working situations. Alternatively, teaching/education providers may choose to work in conjunction with an AAA team, a professional dog handler or an AASP who have additional training for the scope of AAE. AAE may be provided in a variety of settings, with a variety

of ages, may be individual or group in nature. AAE promotes mutual wellbeing and benefits for the humans and animals involved. AAEs may directly or indirectly involve the animal.

- **Animal Assisted Placement Program (AAPP):** Formerly based on Animal Support (AS). An AAPP involves a professional program or individual who provides specially selected and/or trained animals to professionals in AAA, AAE, AAT or AASP. AAPPs instruct animal recipients/handlers about animal advocacy, handling, training, communication, behavior, husbandry, health, welfare and well-being in both living and working situations. Some examples of AAPPs are Assistance Dogs International (ADI) (or similar) dog training organizations or similar that raise, train and place “facility dogs” or train dogs for programs or placement with healthcare, human service, education, crisis response, clinics. AAPPs also includes individuals or organizations that offer owner-self-training classes for healthcare, education or human service providers, etc. AAPP promotes positive, safe relationships between the handler and the animal.
- **Animal Assisted Special Program (AASP):** AASPs offer goal-oriented programs that incorporate specially selected and trained animals to work in professional fields outside of animal assisted education and therapy or in conjunction with these licensed professionals. AASP personnel may or may not have a license, degree, or equivalent, but are delivering a professional level service or program. Examples of these programs: Prison dog training classes that teach inmates life/job skills, community programs for people with disabilities, job training, etc., formal crisis intervention department work (e.g. victim advocates), at-risk populations, camps/vocational programs/after school classes for people with disabilities that develop specific skills, a person who teaches veterans with PTSD how to train animals as part other their life skills goals, dogs that work with paramedics/fire stations and that comfort of victims, ministry dogs (dogs that work with priests, etc.). AASPs promote wellbeing and benefits for humans and provide a positive experience for the animals without force, coercion or exploitation. AASPs may directly or indirectly involve the animal.
- **Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT):** AAT incorporates specially selected and trained animals into goal directed therapeutic/intervention plans that are designed to promote improvement in physical, cognitive, psychosocial, behavioral, and/or emotional functioning. AAT is developed, directed and/or delivered by a professional who is educated, licensed, degreed or equivalent in healthcare/human service and has specialized expertise within the scope of practice of his/her profession; the AAT process is evaluated and documented. AAT providers have additional intermediate to advanced continuing education for AAT theory and practice. AAT providers who handle their own animals have additional intermediate to advanced training in dog advocacy, handling, communication, behavior, husbandry, health, welfare and well-being in both living and working situations. Alternatively, healthcare and human service providers may choose to work in conjunction with an AAA team, a professional dog handler or an AASP who have additional training for the scope of AAT. AAT may be provided in a variety of settings, with a variety of ages, may be individual or group in nature. AAT promotes mutual wellbeing and benefits for the humans and animals involved. AAT may directly or indirectly involve the animal.
- **Collaborative-Animal Assisted Education (C-AAE):** Where an organization contributes to AAE, for example by training dogs and acting as the dog handler, but does not have a licensed human healthcare practitioner or human services provider on their staff or working with them as a consultant, the collaborative work is recognised by AAI and this element can be accredited.
- **Collaborative-Animal Assisted Therapy (C-AAT):** Where an organization contributes to AAT, for example by training dogs and acting as the dog handler, but does not have a licensed human

healthcare practitioner or human services provider on their staff or working with them as a consultant, the collaborative work is recognised by AAll and this element can be accredited.

- **Educational Institution (EI)** members teach coursework that supports AAls (AAA, AAT, AAE or AS). EI's offer teaching curriculum that supports the standards, competencies, and accreditation components that are required for AAI best practices. EI's are not eligible for AAll accreditation.
- **Affiliate Organizations (AO)** support the AAll mission and standards, but the organization does not quite fit the membership fields or is not active in practicing or training people or animals for AAls. AO's do work that supports or is related to AAI. AO's are not eligible for AAll accreditation.

Q: What is the difference between full membership, associate membership, affiliate membership and educational institution membership?

A: Full members are those who have the majority of their staff operating at the advanced and expert Level competencies. Full members have the capacity to serve in Board of Directors and Development capacities. Those eligible for full membership include categories include AAA, CAAT, CAAE, AAE, AAT, AASP and AAPP.

Associate members are those who have the majority for their staff operating at entry level and Intermediate level competencies. Those eligible for associate membership include AAA, CAAT, CAAE, AAE, AAT, AASP and AAPP.

Affiliate organizations support the AAll mission and standards, people may be in working groups to develop areas or support projects, but the organization does not quite fit the membership fields or are not active in practicing AAls, or training people or dogs for AAls. Affiliate organizations are not eligible for AAll accreditation and have no voting rights. Assistance Dogs International is an example of an affiliate organization, however, ADI member organizations might actually fit into AAA, CAAE, CAAT, AAE, AAT, AASP, or AAPP fields. **Affiliate membership is by invitation only.**

Educational Institutions (EI) that teach AAI course work (AAA, CAAT, CAAE, AAE, AAT, AASP) and are not organizations that train and place dogs for AAls or register handlers and dogs to participate in AAA, AAE, AAT or AS, would be eligible for affiliate membership. For example: A University that teaches AAI course work on-line, in-class, via workshops/conferences, etc. may ensure that the AAll standards/competencies are included in curriculum as best practices. Educational institutions are not eligible for AAll accreditation.

Q: What is accreditation?

A: Accreditation is a process by which a professional association (e.g. AAll) sets standards/ competencies and grants recognition to member organizations/individuals that have met predetermined criteria. The member demonstrates knowledge and fulfillment of predetermined standards and competencies for their active AAI member categories (AAT, CAAT, CAAE, AAE, AAT, AASP and AAPP) Many times, this results in the member developing or modifying policies and procedures which ensure the quality of the member.

AAll is a member driven organization. Our members, along with our board of directors have developed a series of minimum standards and competencies leading to AAI best practices to reflect the way we believe AAI should be operated to ensure the best outcomes for all involved.

The AAll accreditation process has been designed to enable programs to show that they are meeting these minimum standards in daily practice. We do not regard the accreditation assessment as merely a 'test' but rather an opportunity to check how your program is working with the support of, and in discussion with, peers who have been through a similar process. The accreditation process will give you a great opportunity to benchmark your work against the standards and the work of your peers.

We aim for it to be a collaborative and educational experience for everyone taking part. The accreditation process is a way to demonstrate that you have professional level policies, procedures, and practice as foundations in your work.

Q: What is the difference between becoming a member and becoming accredited?

A: For the foreseeable future, you will be able to be a member of AAll if you meet the membership criteria. In the longer-term, we anticipate that membership will only be open to programs that have been accredited, ensuring that best practices are in place throughout your facility or organization.

Q: Who is eligible for becoming accredited?

A: The following lists eligibility for AAll accreditation:

- Active Full Members of AAll (Full member status, for a minimum of 1 year, must be continuously maintained for accreditation to be effective, with no more than a 3 month lapse).
- Individual licensed/degreed or equivalent healthcare/human service/educational providers and dog training programs.
- Organizations with healthcare/human service providers (for example: hospitals, clinics, residential facilities, schools, etc.) and other professional AAI programs.
- Organizations that provide training and/or placement of dogs in the categories of AAA, AAE, or AAT.

AAll does not currently offer accreditation to the following:

- Affiliate members
- Educational organizations that teach Animal Assisted Interventions (AAA, CAAT, CAAE, AAE, AAT, AASP or AAPP)

Q: Why aren't Affiliate Members and Educational Institutions that teach AAI's eligible for accreditation?

A: AAll has set standards for active practice in AAA, CAAT, CAAE, AAE, AAT, AASP and AAPP. Our standards are set for practitioners, dogs, participants and the people who handle, train, and place them for work in these areas. They are the people and dogs 'in the field'. AAll standards and competencies may be adopted and included in Educational Institutions that have curriculum for AAls and part of the final outcome of the students will be that they practice AAA, CAAT, CAAE, AAE, AAT, AASP and AAPP. Affiliate members are organizations that support our mission and AAls, but are not directly involved in the active practice, or do not have members who are active in AAA, CAAT, CAAE, AAE, AAT, AASP and AAPP.

Q: What is involved in completing the accreditation process?

A: Those who have been full members for at least one year are eligible for accreditation. Accreditation involves a formal process of creating a portfolio of information and in-person interviews/observation to show that your work meets what our members and board have determined to be important educational preparation, standards of practice, competencies, policies, and procedures.

Q: How do I know which parts of the accreditation manual to complete?

A: Once you become a member, you will have access to the Standards, Competencies and Accreditation Process for any member categories that you are active in. The process is laid out in each member booklet.

Q: How long does it take to become accredited?

A: The length of time to complete the process depends upon the individual practitioner/educator or organization. AAll recognizes that every practice and facility is different, and this makes it critical that we respect the range of skills of our members, to ensure that we maintain strong ethics, morals, and standards to ensure that our clients and animals are cared for and cared about, and that we are adhering to our individual discipline's scope of practice.

Q: What are the costs involved with becoming accredited?

A: There will be internal costs in preparation for the accreditation process (continuing education, staff development, administration time, etc.), and the actual accreditation fee which will cover AAll administration fee, AAll evaluator travel, hotel, and related expenses, etc. The Board of AAll has yet to assess the fee. It is anticipated that the fee will be in the region of \$1000-\$1500 USD. This fee is payable regardless of the outcome (unsuccessful or successful) of the accreditation assessment. Your membership fee is included in the accreditation processing fees for the year of accreditation or reaccreditation.

Q: How often do organizations renew accreditation?

A: The accreditation process is valid for a period of five (5) years. *Membership* is renewed each year and continuous full membership is required to maintain accreditation status (with no more than a 3-month lapse). At the 5-year mark, re-accreditation takes place.

Q: Is there support available to go through the accreditation process?

A: AAll mentors are available to guide you through the process. The number of mentors available to each region will grow over time. Once accredited, members are eligible to become a mentor to others. Mentor sessions, discussions, or round tables will also take place at conferences.

Q: Is a mentor the same person as an assessor?

A: In some cases a mentor and assessor may be the same person. Any willing accredited member (individual healthcare/human service provider or educator; or a representative of an already accredited organization) can become a mentor for the accreditation process. However, there are only a limited number of assessors, so that we may ensure reliability in the process.

Q: How do I identify who our assessor is?

A: Currently, there are limited assessors available as it is a new process. We do expect it to grow at a reasonable rate as more and more people become accredited, we will have more mentors and more assessors. You may go to the website or contact us at administration@aai-int.org for a list of assessors and their country of origin to locate the closest assessor.