



Guide Dogs for the Blind

Puppy Raising Guidebook Beyond Puppy Raising

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Recall

The Puppy Raising Field Manager (PFM) determines when each dog is “recalled” to a GDB campus for breeding, guide dog training, or K9 Buddy evaluation based on a variety of factors including the dog's temperament and behavior, the age of other dogs being recalled, transportation logistics, and more. Generally, this happens when the dog is between 13-18 months old and meets the recall ready measures listed in [Ready for Recall](#). On rare occasions, a dog still working through one or more behavioral goals may be brought to campus for a [Puppy Raising Training Evaluation](#) to give them an opportunity to work in a professional training environment prior to being formally recalled.

Recalls generally occur monthly on both the California and Oregon campuses. Puppy raisers will receive communication regarding their puppy's recall from their puppy raising support team (puppy club leader, PFM, or other), along with a detailed email. Puppies may be recalled to either the California or Oregon campus regardless of where they were raised. Those who live within driving distance from the dog's recall campus are asked to transport dogs to campus. If further away, GDB staff may arrange for a ride on the GDB puppy truck or for a flight. If a puppy raiser is having any issues with arranging transportation, they should alert their support team as soon as possible.

Occasionally, a dog will have a behavioral or medical issue (e.g., fear of traffic, breed-specific cataracts, etc.) that will rule them out of formal guide work or breeding. After evaluation by the PFM, some dogs may be recalled to the K9 Buddy program directly from puppy raising. See the K9 Buddy section later in this document for more information about the program and evaluation process.

Upon notification of recall, follow the instructions in the email letter to ensure that all veterinary records for the dogs, including Rabies and Alter certificates, and vaccination records are submitted to the GDB Puppy Raising team via email (jpuppy@guidedogs.com). This streamlines the process for the preliminary medical screenings and prevents unnecessary vaccines.

On Campus

Once on campus, GDB staff helps each dog settle into the kennel routine. Canine Welfare Training Technicians (CWTTs) care for and provide kennel enrichment for the dogs.

Activities on Campus

- Walks on campus and playtime in an enclosed grass paddock
- Matching dogs together as “roommates”
- Daily grooming
- Medication administration, as needed
- Human and dog interactive play and cuddle sessions
- Introduction to community run playtime
- Kennel enrichment activities such as:
 - Bones and chewable toys; food stuffed Kongs and ice cubes
 - Hanging toys with or without food in them
 - Interactive toys
 - Baby pools filled with water or toys and/or playground equipment
 - Bubbles, mirrors, wind catchers, sound machines, music
 - T-Touch, Pilates, massage, and Reiki

- Cuddle time
- And more! Our CWTTs are always looking for more ways to provide enrichment and fun!

Medical Examinations

During the first week on campus, all dogs will have their initial health screenings that include:

- A physical exam by a GDB veterinarian
- Orthopedic x-rays and exams
- An eye exam by a veterinary ophthalmology specialist
- An accurate weight
- Any vaccinations needed

Sometimes health concerns are identified that impact a dog's eligibility for a career as a breeder, guide dog, or K9 Buddy. See [Common Medical Career Change Conditions](#) for more information.

Pupdates

Pupdates is [a purpose-built, fully accessible website](#) that offers puppy raisers a way to receive regular, personalized information of how the puppies they raise are progressing through their GDB journeys while on campus.

Pupdates give puppy raisers (and others) an easy way to share updates about the dogs in our program, helping to raise awareness of our work and volunteer opportunities. Each Pupdate has the built-in ability to be shared to a variety of social media accounts and will be archived and available on the site forever!

Pupdates also provide others (clients, breeder custodians, adopters, donors, and others) the opportunity to see the Pupdates of any/all dogs, including the dog they have been partnered with, have adopted, or sponsored.

Each dog has its own profile page, complete with a profile picture. New Pupdates are available on the third Thursday of every month at Noon Pacific time. Note: if a dog arrives on campus too close to that month's "publish" date for GDB to gather Pupdate info, a note is added to their profile page indicating that the first full Pupdate will be added the following month.

The Pupdates site is the only one of its kind in the world. No other guide dog school is offering this sort of peek into the journeys of their dogs, and this undertaking is a massive, ongoing coordinated effort between GDB staff across multiple departments.

Important Things to Note

- Phase reports are updated each week and used to follow the weekly progress of each dog in training, breeding and K9 Buddy evaluation.
- Changes in a dog's status during their time on campus will be communicated by your GDB support team. Status updates may be delayed in the Pupdate system to ensure all parties have been notified before the updates are shared publicly on the website.
- Once a dog graduates as a guide or buddy, becomes a breeder, or a strategic or community partner client, or is career changed, their final disposition will be indicated in the "Path" section of their profile page.
- 90 days after a dog's final disposition, their profile will be moved to the "Archive" section, where their profile can always be visited. Each dog's profile can also be found using the search tool on the top right of the page.

Breeding Evaluation

Upon recall to a GDB campus, all dogs that have not yet been altered will be evaluated for breeding. The breeding evaluation process can take up to two months (or longer, depending on how quickly test results are received).

GDB has an excellent breeding colony of dogs especially suited to the program. Approximately 95 percent of all dogs produced for the GDB program are bred from our own breeding stock. The other 5 percent consist of dogs

that are the result of co-breeding with other guide and service dog organizations, as well as an occasional dog from an outside breeder. These external collaborations enable GDB to diversify its gene pool and to continue to improve its colony.

Phases of Breeder Evaluation

Breeding stock selection is based on the results of estimated breeding value calculations, behavior assessments, health screenings, and the needs of the colony in terms of pedigree and temperament type. The dogs that have met the highest physical and temperamental standards are considered for inclusion in the colony. A thorough review of the individual dog's health and temperament history and those of its littermates, as well as its sire and dam's previous production complete the selection process.

Every raiser of a new breeding stock dog is invited to attend a graduation ceremony at the San Rafael campus to formally present the dog they raised and be recognized by GDB for their hard work and tremendous contribution. If unable to attend, raisers will have the option to participate in a ceremony virtually. Raisers of male and female breeders are notified via email each time the breeder sires or whelps a litter and are invited to submit names for the puppies. Raisers also have the opportunity to schedule puppy visits with each new litter.

Phase A: Arrival Period

Dogs are introduced to the GDB kennels, campus walks and begin breeder assessment. Each dog is assigned to an individual Canine Welfare Training Technician (CWTT) for specialized attention and training during the breeder evaluation process. CWTTs report weekly directly to the breeding department staff on the health and wellbeing of each breeder evaluation dog.

Phase B: Initial Health Screening and Kennel Socialization

Following the Medical Examinations from week one, the Breeding Manager carefully reviews the results from initial health screens and begins making decisions to alter during this phase. Because breeder dogs affect many future generations of potential guide dogs, health criteria for breeding stock dogs can be stricter than the criteria for a dog to enter formal guide dog training. Some dogs may not meet the criteria for breeding but still qualify to enter training.

Phase C: Cardiology, Temperament and Pedigree Analysis

Dogs under breeder evaluation receive an echocardiogram performed by a board-certified canine cardiologist. This typically takes place the second week after recall. Dogs with minor heart abnormalities may be excluded from breeding due to the potential to produce more severe defects in their offspring. Minor abnormalities which do not affect the individual dog's health and ability to work will not prevent that dog from entering formal training.

An in-town temperament assessment walk is performed during this phase and staff provide a recommendation to the Breeding Manager based on manageability, confidence, temperament, willingness, and kennel adjustment. Preliminary decisions to include dogs in the breeding colony take place during this phase. Dogs may be "pulled" as a permanent member of the breeding colony, or as a "charter stock" dog. See the next section about Charter Stock for more information.

Phase D: Final Health Screening

Dogs selected for breeding undergo a final round of health clearances. An additional set of x-rays are taken to evaluate the dog's hips for risk of passing on degenerative joint disease

Depending on the dog's pedigree, DNA tests may also be conducted for heritable traits and diseases. Once all test results are received and evaluated the final decision is made for breeding selection and dogs are ready for placement into a custodial home.

Phase E: Placement

The Breeding team matches breeder dogs to custodian families in a similar way to instructors matching guide dogs with clients who are visually impaired. Staff get to know potential custodians during the application process and their goal is to create a lifelong placement. The ultimate goal is to obtain the best possible home for each individual dog being placed.

Puppy raisers of breeders are given special consideration to serve as the breeder custodian if they live within a 75-mile radius of the San Rafael campus. All other custodians must reside within a 50-mile radius of the campus. Raisers must complete the same application process as all potential custodians due to differences in volunteer responsibilities and commitments from the puppy raising program.

GDB carefully reviews and thoroughly screens each potential custodial family's application and home environment in order to ensure comfortable, safe, and secure homes. Applicants are required to complete an on-campus dog management class that covers behavior, health care, grooming, and dog handling. Once placed, breeding stock dogs are required to be kept in peak physical condition. This includes daily exercise, grooming, flea control, and cued behaviors. The dogs must sleep indoors and be treated as beloved members of the family. To ensure their safety, breeder dogs are always kept on leash when outdoors and only allowed to run freely in a securely fenced area.

Phase T: Waiting for Training

A decision to alter a dog can occur at any time during the breeder evaluation process. The Veterinary staff will schedule the alter surgery as soon as time is available. The Training team will schedule the dog for the next available training string and the dog will begin receiving training phase numbers.

Charter Stock

Charter Stock dogs are chosen to temporarily join the breeding colony before entering guide dog training. As outlined below, multiple benefits can be achieved by obtaining a litter from young female dog or a few litters from a young stud.

Benefits:

- Obtain offspring from nice-type dogs and also place them as guides.
- Benefit from potency of youth by allowing young broods to have a litter and thus relieving an older brood from having to deliver one at a later age.
- Enables GDB to produce enough puppies for future clients while simultaneously creating the most guide dog partnerships possible.

Program guidelines:

- A distinction will be made between Charter Stock dogs and those selected for inclusion in the traditional colony. The Breeding team notifies the PFM when individual dogs are selected. Selection as a Charter Stock does not preclude a dog from inclusion in the traditional colony on an as-needed basis.
- Females selected as Charter Stock will enter the guide dog training program until they begin their breeding cycle. Training staff will continue to care for the dog until breeding is concluded.
 - Once bred, a Foster Care placement will be arranged for the female who will be assumed to be pregnant until confirmation via ultrasound ~30 days post breeding. The Foster Care provider will house the female until she checks into the Puppy Center to whelp.
 - Puppy raisers of selected females may be eligible to provide Foster Care if they are within the 75-mile Breeder Custodian radius.
 - Following the birth and rearing of the litter, breeding and training staff will determine the female's date to return to training.
 - Breeding staff will coordinate foster care after weaning and schedule spay surgery.
- Males selected as Charter Stock are placed in Foster Care homes. They are bred several times before being neutered and entering training.
 - Puppy raisers of selected male dogs may be eligible to provide Foster Care if they are within the 75-mile Breeder Custodian radius.
- Puppy raisers of Charter Stock dogs will have an opportunity to participate in any graduation opportunities that are available, provide puppy name suggestions for the litter(s), and visit puppies at the San Rafael campus if available.

Please do not hesitate to contact your support team if you have additional questions about the Charter Stock program.

Guide Dog Training

Dogs that have been altered (spayed or neutered) and pass all the initial health exams are assigned to an instructor. Each dog receives evaluations as they progress through the eight training phases.

Each dog's most recent phase number is accessible through the Forms and Resources area of the [online Puppy Raiser Community](#) available to all active puppy raising volunteers. Phase information is updated once each week on Thursday.

Throughout training each dog is continually evaluated by training and veterinary staff. If a problem (physical, temperament, or behavior) arises that is evaluated as being ongoing, reoccurring, or not suitable for the program, the dog will be released from the guide dog program. GDB's high standards are necessary to ensure the safety of a partner who is blind or visually impaired, and the long-term health and well-being of the dog.

The GDB training program is designed to maximize a dog's potential for success. There are eight phases of training. A comprehensive description of the training phases along with a video playlist can be found here: [Training Phase Descriptions](#).

Dogs that complete the training phases are assigned to a class. Class assignment occurs when the instructor feels that a dog has the qualities needed by a particular person in class.

K9 Buddies

The K9 Buddy program matches specially selected dogs to become companions to people who are blind or visually impaired, including children ages 5 and above and adults of all ages. For children, a dog can contribute to sensory development, motivate learning, and enhance self-esteem. Children may also learn dog handling skills that can be helpful in pursuing a guide dog later in life. Adults may benefit from companionship and increased confidence by having a dog by their side.

The K9 Buddy program connects clients with our larger GDB community of volunteers and supporters, including agencies and organizations for the blind. K9 Buddy clients receive a similar menu of services available to our guide dog clients. This includes access to our Veterinary Financial Assistance (VFA) Program, Support Center, and annual follow up support. K9 Buddy dogs are not qualified to work as mobility assistance dogs; K9 Buddies are not trained to perform a service and are not considered service dogs as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). K9 Buddy dogs are not granted access to public places (restaurants, shopping malls, grocery stores, hotels, public transportation, etc.). As with all our client services, K9 Buddies are provided free of charge.

If it is determined a dog is not suited to continue in guide work training, they may be recommended to the K9 Buddy Program by Puppy Raising, Breeding, or Training. Below is a detailed overview of the phases of the K9 Buddy evaluation and partnership process.

Initial Evaluation

Dogs are evaluated by a K9 Buddy Team staff member to assess manageability, temperament, foundational responses to cued behaviors, and desire to engage in human interaction.

In Home Observation

K9 Buddy evaluation dogs spend a minimum of two weeks in a trained volunteer observation home, typically with children. Volunteers submit photos and videos of various behaviors and scenarios and complete a questionnaire form to provide insight into the dog's current tendencies in a home environment.

Partnership Preparation

GDB staff work to build upon foundational behaviors developed in the puppy raiser home. This phase includes additional behavior training and exposure to equipment/environmental situations specific to candidates on the wait list (i.e., farm animals, mobility equipment, etc.). In alignment with the guide dog program, we share similar standards regarding training obedience and behavioral expectations in preparation for partnership.

Final Medical Clearance

In addition to initial recall medical screenings when they arrive on campus and routine health checks, dogs receive a full nose to tail physical exam and review of medical history prior to confirming any K9 Buddy match. A plan is created for any current medical needs.

Ready to Partner

Dogs move into BUDR or "Bud-Ready" status when medically clear and proficient in basic foundational cued behaviors.

K9 Buddy Match & Partnership

K9 Buddy matches are carefully selected based on many of the same criteria used for our guide dog teams, including manageability, environment, and lifestyle. Partnerships are conducted with clients in their homes unless the team is local to San Rafael or Boring and wishes to receive training on campus. Prior to partnership, the recipient is sent a digital manual with comprehensive information about the K9 Buddy program, dog care and management, health, and safety, and GDB's policies and expectations of our teams. Following self-study, this information is reviewed with the client during their pre-partnership preparation meeting with a K9 Buddy staff member. The partnership training provides hands on practice in dog care, management, and play. It is typically scheduled as a half day, however there is room for flexibility and customization of the schedule to allow for individual needs.

Throughout all phases

K9 buddy dogs may spend additional time in foster care after the initial in-home observation based on their needs and adjustment to the kennel environment or if further evaluations are necessary. Dogs that are housed on campus are cared for by Training staff and are provided regular exercise, socialization, training exercises, outings, toys, and other enrichment activities, and inclusion in GDB programs or events such as GDB Experience days, interactions with Orientation and Mobility Immersion students, and Camp GDB.

Guide Dog Class Experience

By the time the dogs finish their final exams in Phase 8, clients have already been scheduled to arrive for the next class. Instructors conduct pre-class phone meetings to begin the matching process between client and dog. Matches are finalized once students arrive at campus and class training has begun. To make the best matches possible, GDB has more class ready dogs than clients. This means that there are dogs remaining for placement in a future class; these dogs continue in the training program until they find their match.

Clients begin training with their prospective guide dogs in nearby residential areas and transition to routes in a more urban environment (such as San Francisco or Portland). The new teams encounter many different situations together: public transportation (cars, city buses, subway systems, and ferries), heavy traffic, construction, escalators, areas with no sidewalks, etc. For more information, visit [The Guide Dog Class Experience](#) on the GDB website.

There are different training program options available to clients. GDB offers two-week classes for in-residence client training on both campuses. GDB also offers an in-home training program. In-home clients train with a guide dog instructor in their home area.

Graduation

The accomplishments of GDB's clients and dogs are celebrated at graduation ceremonies on both campuses. These ceremonies are the culmination of years of love, time, dedication, and effort. Puppy raising volunteers may have the opportunity to meet the client paired with the dog they have raised and see the client & dog team start their future adventures together. Dogs selected for breeding, as well as recent K9 Buddy teams are also recognized at graduation ceremonies. When a dog graduates as a breeder, guide, or K9 Buddy, raisers of that dog are invited to the graduation ceremony to help celebrate their life-changing impact. If raisers plan to fly to attend a graduation ceremony, GDB recommends purchasing refundable airfare as there could be class changes due to unforeseen circumstances. Puppy raising volunteers unable to attend the graduation ceremony of the dog they raised are invited to participate by submitting photos and virtual messages that will be shared during the live stream of the ceremony.

In-home training and K9 Buddy clients may not be available to participate in person in the graduation ceremony. For these clients, the GDB staff leading the placement will take photos of the team. The client and puppy raisers may have the opportunity to meet online via Zoom or a similar format. These clients and the puppy raisers of their dogs are invited to participate by submitting photos and virtual messages that will be shared during the live stream of the ceremony. The puppy raiser may also choose to attend in person and will have an opportunity to speak.

On graduation day, puppy raisers of guide dogs graduating arrive and receive a staff presentation, an overview of what to expect during the ceremony and other activities taking place that morning. During the ceremony, the raiser(s) has an opportunity to share a few words about their experience raising the dog. Graduations are livestreamed and available for future viewing. [Watch a past graduation](#) to see what you can expect!

After Graduation

During a dog's career

While encouraged by GDB, after graduation ongoing communication between the client or breeder custodian and puppy raisers is a mutual decision. For raisers of dogs that become breeders, ongoing communications about each litter will be shared by the Breeding team.

Guide Dog or K9 Buddy Evaluations or End of Partnership

Occasionally a guide dog or K9 Buddy partnership is not ideal, and the dog may return to campus for an evaluation or a potential new partnership. Puppy raisers will be notified once a final decision has been made for a dog regarding retirement or if the dog will be considered for a new partnership. Should the dog be retired, see below for next steps.

Retirement

When a dog is retired and adopted or placed as a pet by the client or breeder custodians, GDB sends a notification to the puppy raisers. The following guidelines and order of placement are used in determining the adoption or placement of retired guides, breeders, and K9 Buddy dogs.

Dogs retiring with *less than one year* of service:

Breeders	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Training as a guide dog 2) K9 Buddy 3) GDB Strategic and Community Placement 4) Breeder Custodian (personal adoption) 5) Puppy Raiser(s) (most recent first); personal adoptions, then placements with close friends or family members
Guide Dogs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) K9 Buddy 2) GDB Strategic and Community Placement 3) Puppy Raiser(s) (most recent first); personal adoptions, then placements with close friends or family members
K9 Buddies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) GDB Strategic and Community Placement 2) Puppy Raiser(s) (most recent first); personal adoptions, then placements with close friends or family members

Dogs retiring with *one year of service or more*:

Breeders	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Breeder Custodian (personal adoption) 2) K9 Buddy 3) GDB Strategic and Community Placement 4) Puppy Raiser(s) (most recent first); personal adoption, then placement with close friends or family members
Guide Dogs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Client adoption or placement with a close friend or family member 2) K9 Buddy

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) GDB Strategic and Community Placement 4) Puppy Raiser(s) (most recent first); personal adoption, then placement with close friends or family members
K9 Buddies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Client adoption or placement with a close friend or family member 2) GDB Strategic and Community Placement 3) Puppy Raiser(s) (most recent first); personal adoption, then placement with close friends or family members

GDB has the discretion to make exceptions to all dog placement guidelines in the best interest of the dog.

Health Check & Transportation Costs for Retiring Guides Returning to their Puppy Raisers

When a graduate and puppy raiser are in contact at the time of the guide dog’s retirement and arranging the adoption themselves (and assuming the dog will not be coming to either campus), GDB will pay for a comprehensive veterinary exam at a vet clinic local to the graduate, so the puppy raiser has up-to-date information on the dog’s health. Transportation will then be arranged by the adopting puppy raiser and the graduate, at their own expense. If additional logistical help is necessary, GDB will assist with these arrangements to the greatest extent possible.

If the puppy raiser and the graduate are not in contact and the dog is returned to a GDB campus for placement, the dog will receive a thorough veterinary examination by one of the GDB veterinarians. Upon notification of retirement, if the puppy raiser wishes to adopt the dog, staff will assist in making transportation arrangements for the dog. While staff will make every effort to find the most cost- and time-efficient way home (e.g., puppy truck), it is the puppy raiser’s responsibility to pay for the cost of transportation, if necessary.

For information on the Career Change Process, Strategic and Community Placements, Raiser Adoption or Placement, and GDB’s Dog Placement team, review [Career Change, Adoption, and Placement](#).