



**Assessment for
“IN FOR TRAINING” Readiness
of Leader Dog Puppies**

Leader Dogs for the Blind’s strategic plan identified the need for “In-for-Training” (IFT) standards that all puppies should attempt to meet before entering formal training. The assessments for each of the required standards were designed to give every puppy the optimal chance to succeed as a Leader Dog.



Leader Dogs for the Blind’s mission

“Empowering people who are blind or visually impaired with lifelong skills for independent travel through quality Leader Dogs, highly effective client instruction, and innovative services.”

ASSESSMENT PROCEDURE

Assessments must be completed in the following manner:

- 1. Conducted by a trained assessor that can be chosen by the puppy raiser.**
- 2. Conducted either during puppy class or at a location mutually agreed upon by the assessor and the puppy raiser.**
 - a. Location must be an environment that a Leader Dog would be expected to work in successfully.**
 - b. Location must be an environment that is considered “normal” for a puppy or Leader Dog**
- 3. Ideally, the puppy is assessed in the month prior to returning to Leader Dog for training but may be assessed at 10 months of age and up until the date it returns for training.**
- 4. To be mindful of people’s time, the puppy will be assessed in one session with only one retake per testing period.**
- 5. Assessor will email the assessment form directly to Leader Dog when complete.**
- 6. Assessors cannot evaluate their own puppy.**
- 7. Treats are not to be given to dog during entire assessment.**
- 8. Dog should have some time to settle and/or focus prior to meeting assessor at meeting place for assessment.**
- 9. Dog must go through assessment wearing a buckle, martingale or slip collar only. No additional training tools are to be used during the assessment such as gentle leaders.**

All standards are rated using a 4 point scale. This scale supplies feedback to the puppy raiser and Leader Dog about the dogs’ baseline readiness to begin training. The rating of 1 signifies the dog has achieved an ideal baseline in accordance to the standard. Ratings beyond that serve to give a snapshot in time of how the dog performs to each standard.

STANDARD 1A: SELF-CONTROL (GREET PERSON)



Purpose: A Leader Dog must work in a variety of environments and around a variety of people. To maintain safe and effective work it must exhibit self-control around many people.

We will evaluate this standard by having the dog sit or stand quietly while a stranger approaches.

Assessment

- Raiser will be the handler
- No treats will be used
- Verbal praise is acceptable
- Stranger will be the assessor unless the dog is familiar with the assessor
 - Familiar is defined as knowing and being in contact with the dog more than just scheduled outings or casual meetings
- Handler should remain stationary and bring the dog into a heel position and decide on a sit or stand-no-stay command
- Stranger will approach from an angle at a normal pace without any exaggerated movements
 - Spoken words are directed to the handler
 - Stranger is not to stare at the dog
- Stranger should be close enough to introduce themselves by means of handshake and verbal exchange of names

Ideal Baseline

- Maintains sit or stand position on loose leash
- Makes small movements (wiggles but does not tighten leash)

Baseline 2

- Moves from sit to stand or stand to sit
- Extra command (verbal or leash)
- Gentle touch or pressure on leash
- Moves out of heel position but all four feet remain on the floor
- Sniffs stranger
- No more than 2 licks toward stranger

Baseline 3

- Shows signs of shyness or fear (backing away)
- Barks at stranger
- Continual attempts to lick
- Strongly pulls toward stranger

Baseline 4

- Needs to be restrained or held
- Strongly pulls or lunges at stranger and/or jumps on
- Mouthing stranger including nibbling

STANDARD 1B: SELF-CONTROL (GREET DOG)



Purpose: A Leader Dog has many opportunities to be petted in public which can be unexpected and/or go unnoticed by a blind or visually impaired handler.

We will evaluate this standard by having the dog sit politely for petting without getting overly excited or backing away while maintaining self-control.

Assessment

- Continuance of stranger meeting (Standard 1a)
- After greeting exchange, handler will instruct the dog, still in heel position, to sit or stand
- Stay command will be given
- Stranger will show open palm of hand
- Stranger will slowly stroke the dog's head (top to back area) then around ending on the cheek

Ideal Baseline

- Maintains sit or stand position on loose leash
- Makes small movements (wiggles but does not tighten leash)

Baseline 2

- Moves from sit to stand or stand to sit
- Extra command (verbal or leash)
- Gentle touch or pressure on leash
- Moves out of heel position but all four feet remain on the floor
- Sniffs stranger
- No more than 2 licks toward stranger

Baseline 3

- Shows signs of shyness or fear (backing away)
- Barks at stranger
- Continual attempts to lick
- Strongly pulls toward stranger

Baseline 4

- Needs to be restrained or held
- Strongly pulls or lunges at stranger and/or jumps on
- Mouthing stranger including nibbling

STANDARD 2: HANDLERS EXAMINATION / GROOMING



Purpose: Grooming is part of every dog's life but is especially important to a dog that is in the public eye. Grooming also helps maintain the dog's willingness to be examined and touched.

We will evaluate this standard by having the assessor examine the dog in a manner similar to a veterinarian or groomer.

Assessment

- Dog is in a sit, down or standing position
- Allows grooming and examination from a stranger while handler is present
- Remains calm and relaxed during the examination
- Puppy raiser calmly holds dog on leash and/or one hand in the collar
- While sitting in a chair or kneeling, assessor gently picks up each foot and briefly examines
- Assessor lifts up the dog's lips to examine teeth
- Assessor uses a slicker brush to gently stroke the dog from back of neck to hip area twice
- Handler can give calm, gentle reminders to allow exam.

Ideal Baseline

- Calm through the examination in any position but doesn't struggle

Baseline 2

- Struggles but will allow assessor to examine teeth

Baseline 3

- Cannot stay relaxed or still during exam even after gentle reminders from handler

Baseline 4

- Does not allow exam to take place
- Does not allow examination of teeth

STANDARD 3: LOOSE LEASH WALKING



Purpose: A large portion of a Leader Dog's work is to guide their handler through varied environments. To ensure the comfort and safety of the visually impaired handler the dog must be able to walk on a loose leash in varied situations.

We will evaluate this standard by having the dog walk on a loose leash over various surfaces and among people.

Assessment

- Raiser walks at a normal pace
- Raiser is not holding a bag, purse, etc.
- Puppy has a properly fit martingale or buckle collar
- Leash is held in the left hand and hangs freely with no tension
- Leash length prevents the puppy from walking across the front or back of the raiser
- Puppy is at the raisers left side with hip/waistline in line with the raisers leg
- Must walk over two different surfaces (concrete, tile, grass, carpet, etc.)
- Must walk through a door
 - Door will open away from the raiser
 - Hinges will be on the right side so there is no need to go "around"
 - Puppy must not lag behind or lunge through
- Must go up and down stairs together
 - Assessment begins 5 steps before and after stairs
 - Stairs would be closed and not carpeted
 - Puppy may sit before going up and down or have continual movement to complete stairs on a loose leash
 - Puppy should not lunge, charge or jump off
- Must walk randomly through a crowd of people (minimum of three plus the assessor) (outing/meeting, mall, raisers and/or dogs)
 - Raiser will make a right turn, a left turn and one about turn
 - Puppy will not seek attention by lunging or pulling
 - Puppy should be quiet
 - One person in the crowd may carry treats in their pocket
- Raiser does not carry treats
- Raiser may encourage or praise the puppy

Standard 3a Walking through a door

Ideal Baseline

- Maintains normal pace and heel position on a loose leash
- Verbal reminders to "heel" are okay (right turn, left turn, about turn)

Baseline 2

- Tight leash
- Hesitates or needs minimal coaxing through door

Baseline 3

- Consistently tight leash

Baseline 4

- Lunges or rushes through door
- Refuses to cross through door
- Relieves on doorway

<p>Standard 3b Loose leash on stairs</p> <p>Ideal Baseline</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintains normal or slow pace with no fear or hesitation from dog and heel position on a loose leash • Verbal reminders to heel are okay <p>Baseline 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tight leash • Occasionally sniffs but easily redirected • Hesitates or needs verbal coaxing but no fear on stairs <p>Baseline 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistently tight leash • Pulls, lunges or jumps but can continue <p>Baseline 4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not go up/down stairs • Continually lunges and can't perform on loose leash 	<p>Standard 3c Walking randomly through a crowd of people</p> <p>Ideal Baseline</p> <p>Maintains normal pace and heel position on a loose leash</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is not intimidated or aroused by the crowd • Verbal reminders to “heel” are okay <p>Baseline 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raiser backs up to remind the puppy to heel • Tight leash • Single bark or sniff • May lunge, pull or jump once • Verbal command of “leave it,” using name recognition or slight touch to get puppy’s attention <p>Baseline 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistently tight leash • Multiple barking or sniffing • May lunge, pull or jump 2-3 times <p>Baseline 4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple pulls, lunges or jumps • Continually barks and/or sniffs
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STANDARD 4: TRAFFIC



Purpose: A Leader Dog must work in all types of traffic. It is important they show no adverse reactions in traffic as well as waiting patiently to cross the street.

We will evaluate this standard by having the dog walk near traffic and sit at an intersection.

Assessment

- Raiser will be the handler
- Treats are not allowed, only verbal praise
- If possible should be assessed on a sidewalk
- Setting is an area with moderate to heavy traffic
 - Minimum of two lane paved road with flow of traffic averaging one passing car every two seconds
- Approach from the rear would necessitate handler and dog walking with flow of traffic

Maintains normal pace on loose leash regardless of traffic volume or type of vehicles
- Stands or sits through a cycle of traffic at an intersection
 - Reaction is monitored to see if it is different than when walking

Standard 4 Traffic

Ideal Baseline

- Steady pace is maintained on a loose leash
- Is relaxed and confident and doesn't move out of position

Baseline 2

- Needs extra commands to sit or stand during cycle of traffic
- Does not maintain loose leash heeling or steady pace

Baseline 3

- Needs coaxing to continue (patting leg, calling name)
- Speeds up near traffic
- Startles but is able to recover somewhat
- Requires more than 3 commands to maintain position

Baseline 4

- Pulls away from traffic
- Startles with no recovery
- Shows signs of fear or desire to chase traffic
- Crosses in front of handler while heeling
- Barks near presence of traffic
- Cannot stay in position

STANDARD 5A-F: OBEDIENCE (Sit, Down, Stand, Stay, Name Recognition, Recall)



Purpose: A Leader Dog must show a thorough understanding of basic obedience.

We will evaluate this standard by assessing the dogs ability to follow basic obedience commands.

Assessment

- Conducted in a public place with moderate distraction levels
- Strangers may be walking, sitting or talking within fifteen feet but should not interfere with the assessment
- Food must not be present on floor, counters or tables, handler must not have reward treats
- Other dogs may be present but must be under control, quiet and no closer than fifteen feet
- Dog should maintain behavior asked for until the release word of “okay” is given which should be approximately 30-60 seconds
- Handler may give hand signal with verbal cue.
- When performing “Stand”, handler may take a step to help the dog move into a stand.
- Assessor will instruct handler to give command for each behavior to be performed while dog is in heel position on handlers left side with the exception of the recall.
- For name recognition the assessor will distract the dog using a noise or hand movement to get dog to look away.
- For recall handler puts dog into a sit stay on a 4-6 foot leash. (If dog can’t do a stay, assessor may gently hold collar.) Handler calls the dog using their name and “come”. Handler may coax and encourage the puppy by clapping hands, slapping leg and praise but must not repeat the command “come”. Dog must return to handler and allow handler to take hold of the collar.
- For stay – handler may choose sit, stand or down. Command “stay” is given and handler goes to end of 4-6 foot leash for 30-60 seconds. Handler returns to heel position.

Standard 5a Obedience Sit

Ideal Baseline

- Sits from a stand-in-heel position on the first command and stays in position

Baseline 2

- Second or third command needed
- Moves out of position of where asked to sit (eg. Sits in front of handler when sit was asked in a heel position)
- Requires no more than finger tip pressure to obtain the position or behavior

Baseline 3

- Requires more than three commands
- Requires to be placed or lured into position or behavior
- Requires a tight leash to accomplish behavior

Baseline 4

- Does not obtain or hold position
- Requires to be forced into position
- Second or third command needed
- Moves out of position of where asked to down (eg. Sits in front of handler when sit was asked in a heel position)

<p>Standard 5b Obedience Down</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Down from a stand or sit-in-heel position on the first command and stays in position <p>Baseline 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Second or third command needed • Moves out of position of where asked to down (eg. Downs in front of handler when down was asked in a heel position) <p>Baseline 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires more than three commands • Requires to be placed or lured into position or behavior • Requires a tight leash to accomplish behavior <p>Baseline 4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not obtain or hold position • Requires to be forced into position <p>Standard 5c Obedience Stand</p> <p>Ideal Baseline</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stands from a sit or down-in-heel position on the first command and stays in position <p>Baseline 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Second or third command needed • Moves out of position as asked to stand (eg. Stands in front of handler when stand was asked in a heel position) • Requires no more than finger tip pressure to obtain the position or behavior <p>Baseline 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires more than three commands to stand or stay • Requires to be placed or lured into position or behavior • Requires a tight leash to accomplish <p>Baseline 4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not obtain or hold position without constant movement • Requires to be forced into position <p>Standard 5d Obedience Stay</p> <p>Ideal Baseline</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stays on the first command and stays in position <p>Baseline 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Second or third command needed • Moves out of position where asked to stay • Requires no more than fingertip pressure to obtain the position or behavior <p>Baseline 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires more than three commands • Requires to be placed or lured into position or behavior • Requires a tight leash to accomplish 	<p>Baseline 4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not obtain or hold position • Requires to be forced into position <p>Standard 5e Obedience Name Recognition</p> <p>Ideal Baseline</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looks at handler when its name is called on first cue <p>Baseline 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Second or third command needed • Requires no more than finger tip pressure to obtain behavior <p>Baseline 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires more than three commands <p>Baseline 4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cannot get focus back to handler <p>Standard 5f Obedience Recall</p> <p>Ideal Baseline</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Returns directly to handler on first command • Handler can take hold of collar • Dog maintains position until called <p>Baseline 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Second or third command needed • Requires no more than finger tip pressure to obtain behavior • Dog needs to be held by assessor • Dog jumps on handler <p>Baseline 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires more than three commands • Handler has to struggle to grasp collar <p>Baseline 4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires a tight leash to accomplish • Handler cannot get a hold of collar
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STANDARD 6A: DISTRACTION- NOISE STANDARD 6B DISTRACTION-MOVEMENT



Purpose: A Leader Dog must be confident in environments with many distractions and be able to control their impulses. It must work in many environments without reacting to outside distractions.

We will evaluate this standard by presenting the dog with a variety of distractions.

Assessment:

- Conducted in a public place with moderate distraction levels
- Strangers may be walking, sitting or talking within fifteen feet but should not interfere with the assessment
- Food must not be present on floor, counters or tables, handler must not have reward treats
- Other dogs may be present but must be under control, quiet and no closer than fifteen feet
- Assessor must add two distractions during evaluation while dog walks in heel position.
 - Noise distraction such as dropping a chair, clipboard or other object that could cause the dog to react; should simulate an everyday life event
 - Movement distraction such as a stuffed animal being pulled on a line, a ball being rolled no closer than five feet to the dog, etc.

Standard 6a and b Distraction Noise & Movement

Ideal Baseline

- Maintains focus on work with only verbal cues given by handler in the presence of distractions
- Steady pace is maintained on a loose leash
- May startle on noise distractions but immediately recovers to normal work

Baseline 2

- Requires an occasional leash correction or tight leash but quickly complies with handler request
- Startles but recovers quickly
- Does not maintain loose leash walking
- Single bark

Baseline 3

- Requires continued reminders for loose leash walking in the presence of distractions
- Startles to end of leash
- Will recover with coaxing

Baseline 4

- More than occasionally distracted or bothered by distractions; cannot recover or focus
- Hits end of leash
- Bolts
- Doesn't recover
- Constant tight leash needed to maintain control
- Continual barking

STANDARD 6C: DISTRACTION - DOGS



Purpose: A Leader Dog must be able to maintain safe and effective work in the presence of other dogs. This evaluation is to test the dogs' ability to continue working in the presence of a strange dog.

We will evaluate this standard by introducing a strange dog into the dog's environment.

Assessment:

- Conducted in a public place with moderate distraction levels
- Strangers may be walking, sitting or talking within fifteen feet but should not interfere with the assessment
- Food must not be present on floor, counters or tables, handler must not have reward treats
- Other dogs may be present but must be under control, quiet and no closer than five feet
- A strange dog is walked 2-4 feet in front of the dog while the handler has the dog in a sit or down-stay position. Handler praises and releases dog.
- Next dog freely wanders on leash as a strange dog comes into view from 5-8 feet away
 - Puppy should be allowed to see strange dog
 - Handler calls dog to him/her and maintains focus while strange dog moves to 3-4 feet away before moving out of sight

Standard 6c Distraction (Dogs)

Ideal Baseline

- Maintains focus on work with only verbal cues given by handler in the presence of strange dog

Baseline 2

- Requires occasional leash correction or tight leash but is able to quickly comply with handler requests
- Shows interest in the strange dog without lunging and immediately recovers to normal work on a verbal command. Name and command can be used.
- Single bark

Baseline 3

- Multiple barks
- Lunges but can recover
- Requires continued reminders to stay in position while strange dog is present

Baseline 4

- Lunges toward dog and cannot recover or focus
- Must be physically placed or pulled away
- Continually barks

STANDARD 7: SEPARATION



Purpose: A Leader Dog is occasionally left alone or with someone other than their visually impaired handler. It must be capable of being relaxed when its handler is out of sight.

We will evaluate this standard by having the raiser leave the puppy alone in the presence of the assessor.

Assessment:

- Raiser hands the leash to the puppy counselor or assessor
- Raiser does not give any obedience commands (but can say “I’ll be right back,” etc.)
- Person holding the dog does not give any obedience commands; they may talk to them briefly and quietly. Should not try to console or excite the dog during the separation. If any touching of the dog from the assessor, should be calm and brief.
- Raiser goes out of sight for one minute
- Dog can slowly walk around, sit, stand, lay down, etc.
- Raiser is called back after one minute
- Raiser quietly walks to the dog who must remain calm (no jumping, lunging, whining, barking, etc.)

Standard 7 Separation

Ideal Baseline

- May look for the raiser but does not whine, bark or pull

Baseline 2

- Raiser gave a command to the puppy upon return
- Does not immediately settle, but does eventually settle

Baseline 3

- Moderately pulls, paces, barks, whines, lunges, or jumps but has periods of time that settles

Baseline 4

- Excessively pulls, paces, barks, whines, lunges, or jumps

STANDARD 8A & B: THE DOG SHOULD HAVE AN ESTABLISHED PARK ROUTINE WHICH DOES NOT INVOLVE PARKING ON ROUTE.



Assessment:

- Has an established park routine which does not include parking while working
- Will not park with bandanna or jacket on
- Parks on gravel and pavement in addition to grass
- Has an established house breaking schedule.

Some of the questions that will be asked:

How does the puppy let you know it needs to park?

When was the last time it had an accident?

Does the puppy have an established daily park routine?

Purpose: A Leader Dog needs to be housebroken and must not park while working in harness. The bandana or jacket is the cue to the Future Leader Dog that it is working.

We will evaluate this standard through a series of questions posed to the raiser and the counselor.

Standard 8a Park routine (Inside)

Ideal Baseline

- Has a physical, verbal or persistent way to let handler know it needs to park
- Has had no accidents in the home since puppy was 9 months old

Baseline 2

- Has had only very infrequent accidents (1-3) in the home since puppy was 9 months old

Baseline 3

- Has had frequent accidents in the home (4-7) since the puppy was 9 months old

Baseline 4

- Is not housebroken

Standard 8b Park routine (Outside)

Ideal Baseline

- Has a physical, verbal or persistent way to let handler know it needs to park but usually does not need to park while working

Baseline 2

- Will typically need to park while walking but gives raiser ample notice

Baseline 3

- May park while walking with little warning that it needs to park

Baseline 4

- Will not park away from home on any surface
- Does not let raiser know the need to park

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Biting – Dog grips handler with full mouth with pressure enough to bruise or wound.

Bolting – A sudden or unexpected movement away from object.

Coaxing – Persuading dog to do something by verbal and/or physical prompt.

Finger tip pressure – Using finger tips to get dog to perform with pressure similar to typing on a key board.

Focus – The ability to stay on task.

Heel position – The middle of dog's back to hip even with handler left leg, facing same direction as handler with dog straight at handler's side.

Lunge – A sudden forward thrust by dog typically toward object.

Lure – Dog is enticed to perform with handler hand gesture.

Mouthing – Dog grips handler with full mouth with light pressure.

Nibbling – Dog uses front teeth only to grab skin or clothing which is typically repetitive.

Tight leash – Tension on leash between collar and handlers hands while maintaining position.

Verbal Cue – A (verbal) signal to get a dog to perform an action.