



SERVICE AND COMFORT ANIMALS POLICY

Russell Sage College complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in allowing use of service animals for students, staff, and visitors. Service animals are animals specifically trained to assist people with disabilities in the activities of normal living. The ADA, as amended, defines a service animal as: “any dog that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability.” Other species of animals, whether wild or domestic, trained or untrained, are generally not service animals for the purposes of this definition.

The work or tasks performed by a service animal must be directly related to the handler's disability. Examples of work or tasks include, but are not limited to: assisting individuals who are blind or have low vision with navigation and other tasks, alerting individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing to the presence of people or sounds, providing non-violent protection or rescue work, pulling a wheelchair, assisting an individual during a seizure, retrieving items such as medicine or the telephone, providing physical support and assistance with balance and stability to individuals with mobility disabilities, and helping persons with psychiatric and neurological disabilities by preventing or interrupting impulsive or destructive behaviors. The crime deterrent effects of an animal's presence and the provision of emotional support, well-being, comfort, or companionship do not constitute work or tasks as a service animal.

Definitions

- **Service Animal:** Usually a guide dog or signal dog. The animal must be individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, as defined earlier in this document. A service animal meeting this definition is not required to be licensed or certified by a state or local government or animal training program.
- **Comfort Animal:** An animal that provides comfort, reassurance, social interaction and other emotional benefits. The animal does not have to be trained to provide comforting. A comfort animal is not considered a service animal. The use of a comfort animal may be allowed as a reasonable accommodation through established Accessibility Services procedures.
- **Pets:** Per Russell Sage College Residence Hall Agreement document, students are not permitted to have non-fish pets in the residence halls. A student may make a request to the Director of Residence Life to keep small fish in a small fish tank in his/her residence hall room with the approval of all roommates.

Request for Service Animal or Comfort Animal

1. Service Animal

For an individual to qualify for having a service animal on campus:

- (i) The student must have a disability as defined by the ADA; and
- (ii) The accompanying animal must be trained to do specific tasks for the qualified individual.

In situations where it is not obvious that the dog is a service animal, staff may ask only two specific questions: (1) is the dog a service animal required because of a disability? and (2) what work or task(s) has the dog been trained to perform? Staff are not allowed to request any documentation for the dog, require that the dog demonstrate its task, or inquire about the nature of the student's disability.

Students who require the use of a service animal on campus are encouraged to contact the Office of Disabilities Services. The Accessibility Services Office will provide assistance in navigating the campus, including the selection of housing if the student plans to live on campus and arranging for mobility training. Information provided to the Accessibility Services Office is confidential. Disability information will not be released without the signed consent of the student.

2. Comfort Animal

If the definition of a service animal is not met, then the use of the animal as a comfort animal may be allowed as a reasonable accommodation through established Accessibility Services procedures by providing documentation from an appropriate and qualified licensed professional. If a comfort animal is required as a housing accommodation, the student and treating health care provider must complete the Russell Sage College Request Form for Accessibility Housing Accommodations.

Sage reserves the right to reject documentation from any provider associated with an internet-based service whereby the availability of documentation for an emotional support animal or other housing accommodations is advertised and such documentation can be purchased on-line.

Responsibilities of Handler:

- Is responsible to attend and be in full control of the service or comfort animal at all times. A service or comfort animal shall have a harness, lease, or other tether unless a) the handler is unable to use a harness, leash or tether, or b) using a harness, leash, or tether will interfere with the animal's ability to safely and effectively perform its duties.
- Is responsible for ensuring that the service or comfort animal is wearing a leash, harness or cape that identifies the animal is a service or comfort animal when on duty anywhere on campus.
- Is responsible for the costs of care necessary for a service or comfort animal's well-being. The arrangements and responsibilities with the care of a service or comfort animal is the sole responsibility of the owner at all times, including regular bathing and grooming, as needed.
- Is responsible for independently removing or arranging for the removal of the service or comfort animal's waste.
- Is responsible for complying with the dog control and licensing laws for animal rights and owner responsibilities. Service or comfort animals must be current with immunizations and wear a rabies vaccination tag. Documentation may be required.
- The student who requires the assistance of a service or comfort animal is also personally and solely responsible for any harm or damage that the service or comfort animal causes to a person or property.

College Community:

- Must allow service or comfort animals to accompany their handlers at all times and everywhere on campus where the general public (if accompanying a visitor) or other students (if accompanying a student) are allowed, except for places where there is a health, environmental, or safety hazard. The appropriate way to ascertain that an animal is a service or comfort animal is to ask (only if it is not apparent) if the animal is required because of a disability and what tasks it has been trained to perform. Specific questions about the individual's disability may not be asked.
- Contact the Office of Accessibility Services if any questions or concerns arise relating to service or comfort animals.

- Contact the Accessibility Services Office if faculty/staff have any additional questions regarding visitors to campus who have service or comfort animals.
- Report any service or comfort animals who misbehave or any handlers (or other individuals) who mistreat their service or comfort animals to the Office of Public Safety.

Helpful Information:

What are some basic etiquette rules when around service or comfort animals and their handlers?

- Do NOT pet, touch or otherwise distract a service or comfort animal when it is working. Doing so may interfere with its ability to perform its duties.
- Do NOT feed a service or comfort animal. Their work depends on a regular and consistent feeding regimen that the handler is responsible to maintain.
- Do NOT attempt to separate the handler from the service or comfort animal.
- Do NOT harass or deliberately startle a service or comfort animal.
- Avoid initiating conversations about the student's disability. Some people do not wish to discuss their disability.

Under what circumstances can a service or comfort animal be asked to leave or not allowed participation on campus?

- If a service or comfort animal is found by the College to be out of control and the animal's handler does not take immediate and effective action to control it.
- If the service or comfort animal is not housebroken.
- If a service or comfort animal is physically ill.
- If the service or comfort animal is unreasonably dirty.
- If a service or comfort animal attempts to enter a place on campus where the presence of a service or comfort animal causes danger to the safety of the handler or other students/member of campus.
- If a service or comfort animal attempts to enter any place on campus where a service or comfort animal's safety is compromised.

What needs to happen if a service or comfort animal is behaving aggressively towards their handler or others, or if a handler or other students is behaving aggressively towards a service or comfort animal?

- Report any service or comfort animals who misbehave or any handlers (or others) who mistreat their service or comfort animals to Campus Security.

What if another student or a faculty or staff member has severe allergies around animal dander?

- The final determination of how circumstances will rule out will be determined on a case by-case basis. Please notify the Accessibility Services Office for further information if a situation of this nature occurs.

What should a handler do if he/she has concerns about his or her ability to use a service or comfort animal to access campus facilities and programs?

- Handlers who have concerns about any matter affecting their use of a service or comfort animal should contact Accessibility Services and review the disability accommodation process described and grievance procedure.