

## AKC Detection Dog Task Force



### **Q & A from *Getting Puppies Started Right for Detection: Experts Compare and Contrast Successful Approaches* - Jan. 6, 2021 Webinar**

- 1. *What do you feed? Do you feed any supplements?*** Feeding should include a high-quality performance diet. Not all foods will successfully feed 100% of the dogs being trained for working/sporting endeavors. However, most of the higher quality diets that were built using ongoing research should have a formula that meets your everyday dog food needs.
- 2. *Do you prefer to start puppies on primary or target odor?*** As noted in the webinar, the DDTF Patriotic Puppy Program (PPP) helps puppy trainers/raisers provide puppies with a sound foundation for future explosives detection work. Detection work should focus on *searching for and finding toys*. Many agencies prefer to start with a “green” (untrained) dog that has good search effort, is environmentally stable and has a high level of desire to find and obtain their toy. Some do not want dogs trained on odor.
- 3. *When do you reward with food vs toys?*** I (Stacey) often use food rewards early on for shaping behaviors with puppies while I build desire for the toy separately. Once the toy becomes the highest level of motivation for the pup I save food for shaping behaviors as needed. This process is a very gradual switch from food and toy, to mostly (if not completely) toys.
- 4. *Would your approach change between professional and sport/recreational detection?*** I think the only thing that would change or influence our approaches to training detection dogs, would simply be reduced numbers. Professional trainers need a scalable solution to consistently produce higher numbers of canines that will go on to become successful certified detection dogs.
- 5. *Will you provide online classes or presentations?*** (For Patriotic Puppy Program). When you have filled out the [application for the Patriotic Puppy Program](#) you will be contacted by the subject matter expert and Program Manager and invited to monthly recurring meetings with the possibility of in person trainings.
- 6. *Are there guidelines for different types of detection dog requirements?*** There aren't published guidelines for what agencies are looking for in their detection dogs, except when

## AKC Detection Dog Task Force



contract bids are put out by an agency. Some agencies demand a high level of possession of the toy, others care a lot less. Some use food rewards and others use only toys. Some have stated they like a dog with less training, while others need a dog prepared for advanced work prior to evaluation.

- 7. What area of detection dogs are currently in demand and how long do you feel this demand will last?** Every type of detection dog seems to be in demand and demand hasn't gone down over the last several years. COVID-19 has impacted the ability to hold courses for handlers so things slowed down for a few months. This seems to be changing as of January 2021, with several agencies beginning to look for new dogs from vendors.
- 8. How many puppies can one person have in the program at a time?** If an individual is comfortable and able to have more than one puppy in the program at a time, they are welcome to do so.
- 9. Is it possible to keep and raise pups in kennel environment with proper socializing and early training experiences be successful?** It is possible to raise pups in a kennel environment that can go on to becoming successful detector dogs.
- 10. What is the earliest age a dog will be accepted into a detection program? At what age do you feel it is appropriate to start training a puppy/young dog?** Training starts early in a pup's career, at or around 7 weeks. Many agencies want dogs between 12 and 36 months, but some will look at them earlier, as early as 8-10 months. It depends entirely on the agency and their training programs.
- 11. Do the parents have to be in some sort of pre-approved database before pups will be considered?** No, but careful thought about the genetics you are starting with is an important part of being successful as a breeder/trainer. This includes the medical history of parents/grandparents, etc.
- 12. Is the government sending buyers to purchase dogs or will breeders have to deal with middlemen? Will the government come to your location?** AKC is working to improve the process of having dogs who participate in the PPP evaluated by federal/state/local government or agency purchasers of "green" detector dogs. At this point, federal

## AKC Detection Dog Task Force



contractors who have an awarded contract are necessary in order to sell dogs to the federal government.

**13. How much are you offering for dogs?** The AKC does not purchase or broker dogs. The Patriotic Puppy Program is providing breeder with breeders or puppy raisers with the opportunity to learn how to raise green dogs that would be suitable for future advanced training as detection dogs, and to help them prepare them for evaluation by various agencies or entities seeking to purchase such dogs. Third party companies that are bidding contracts have different processes and different prices for dogs. Prices are often established by contract prices and requirements.

**14. Describe some critical activities that must be done with the puppies from birth to eight weeks old.** Exposure to noises, people, novel objects, etc. There isn't one right way to raise a litter, but experience tells us that a more involved approach often lays the groundwork for successfully producing a social, bold puppy.

**15. Are German Shepherd puppies available or part of the puppy raising/Patriotic Puppy program?** The focus has been on Labrador Retrievers and German Shorthaired Pointers, as this is where the greatest demand lies. However, we are willing to discuss other breeds and assist breeders of other breeds.

**16. What approaches do you not use and why?** Too much emphasis on Obedience (some is encouraged, but not to the detriment of search behavior). Control or dominance that takes away from a bold, inquisitive behavior. Successful pups are confident and must have a high level of desire to find their reward regardless of their surroundings.

**17. Have you seen any benefits with canines engaging in physical play immediately after a detection session?** As pups develop, I have been known to use physical play (tugging on toy, or multiple retrieves of the toy) to encourage or reinforce the value of the toy. Pups need to learn to go back to work between finds as well. It's important to find a balance that keeps your pup motivated.

**18. Any suggestions on getting the canine in the proper mindset to perform detection work?**

Different techniques are used by trainers throughout the industry. Consistency is key. Some

## AKC Detection Dog Task Force



have used play with the toy (tugging or retrieves). Others will try to excite the pup with loud excited noise from a helper as they pretend to hide a toy. Develop the pup's work ethic over time and encourage effort where possible.

**19. Does it matter the odor you start with to begin a canine's detection career?** For green dogs, I don't imprint on any odor as this isn't necessary to sell dogs to local/state/federal law enforcement agencies.

**20. Use a remote feeder such as treat and train, by hand feeding only or is only a ball/toy acceptable?** Any of these techniques are acceptable. Consistency and being able to read what your dog needs to continue to develop their skills as a detector are key. Don't be afraid to learn new techniques that you may need for future pups or different breeds.

**21. Can you provide contact information for the speakers?** Stacey West,  
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