



Professional Standard 14 - Innovation and Research (Summary)

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1. Purpose

The purpose of this standard is to foster a culture of continuous improvement among WAFA members through the proactive adoption, development, evaluation, and dissemination of evidence-based innovations. These innovations aim to enhance the welfare of working animals, improve the effectiveness and efficiency of training methods, and provide better support to handlers. This standard ensures that innovation occurs within a framework that prioritizes safety, ethics, and transparency.

2. Scope

This standard applies to all WAFA members engaged in the training, handling, assessment, management, and care of working animals. It includes the integration of new technologies, methodologies, scientific research, and best practices into day-to-day operations and program development. The scope encompasses innovation at all levels, from small-scale pilot projects to full organisational adoption, and extends to knowledge sharing within the WAFA community and the wider sector.

3. Standard Statement

All WAFA members must proactively seek out, evaluate, and responsibly implement innovative practices and technologies that are supported by credible scientific evidence or empirical data. They must ensure that all innovations undergo comprehensive risk assessments and ethical reviews prior to trial or adoption, maintaining animal welfare, handler wellbeing, and ethical integrity as the highest priorities throughout the innovation lifecycle. Members are required to promote transparency and knowledge sharing by documenting outcomes and disseminating lessons learned within WAFA and relevant professional communities. Additionally, sufficient resources, including funding and staff time, must be allocated to support research, development, and evaluation activities. Any innovations that compromise animal welfare, ethical standards, or the safety of handlers must be rejected regardless of operational or financial benefits.

11.4 Definitions

- **Innovation:** The introduction or application of new ideas, methods, tools, technologies, or processes that aim to improve outcomes for animals, handlers, or the organisation.
- **Evidence-Based Practice:** Approaches or innovations grounded in current, credible scientific research, validated empirical data, or well-documented best practices.
- **Pilot Testing:** A small-scale, controlled trial of a new practice or technology designed to evaluate its safety, effectiveness, and feasibility.
- **Risk Assessment:** A systematic process to identify potential hazards or negative impacts related to an innovation, evaluate their likelihood and severity, and determine mitigation strategies.

- **Ethical Review:** A formal consideration of the moral implications of an innovation, including its effects on animal welfare, human wellbeing, and compliance with legal and organisational standards.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

- **Board:** Responsible for governance, setting strategic direction, risk management, financial oversight, and compliance with WAFA standards.
- **Senior Leadership:** Implements board policies and manages day-to-day operations.
- **Staff and Volunteers:** Support organisational objectives under leadership direction and adhere to governance policies.

6. Detailed Requirements

6.1 Encouragement of Innovation

WAFA members are required to proactively identify, evaluate, and integrate cutting-edge technologies, evidence-based practices, and research-driven methodologies to continually enhance the quality, effectiveness, and welfare outcomes of their assistance animal services. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- The use of positive reinforcement training tools such as clicker training applications, video recording and analysis software for behaviour monitoring, and wearable animal sensors that track physiological indicators (e.g., heart rate variability, activity levels, stress markers) to better understand and support animal wellbeing and training progress.
- The design and implementation of species-specific and individual-tailored enrichment programs that cater comprehensively to the cognitive stimulation, physical exercise, and emotional wellbeing of assistance animals, drawing on the most recent ethological studies and welfare science.
- The adoption and continual updating of husbandry and welfare protocols guided by contemporary scientific findings, welfare assessment frameworks, and ethical standards. This includes nutrition, housing, socialisation, health monitoring, and stress mitigation strategies that optimize animal comfort and performance.

Members should establish formal processes to ensure ongoing professional development and sector engagement, which involves:

- Systematic and regular review of peer-reviewed scientific literature, professional journals, and industry publications related to animal behaviour, welfare science, training methodologies, and handler support.
- Active participation in professional development opportunities, including workshops, conferences, seminars, and accredited training courses that focus on innovation and best practices in the field of assistance animal training and welfare.

- Engagement in collaborative forums, working groups, and networks within the WAFA community and broader animal welfare and assistance sector to share knowledge, exchange ideas, and contribute to the collective advancement of innovative practices.

Members must document the sources, processes, and outcomes related to the identification and adoption of innovations, enabling transparency, accountability, and ongoing evaluation of their impact on animal welfare and service quality.

6.2 Staff Involvement and Empowerment

Members have a responsibility to cultivate an environment where innovation is actively encouraged at every level, from executive leadership through to frontline trainers, handlers, and care staff. This culture should empower all personnel to openly propose, discuss, and explore new ideas, methodologies, or technologies that could improve animal welfare, training effectiveness, or operational efficiency.

To support this, formal systems and processes must be established to systematically capture and document innovative ideas, observations, and suggestions from staff across all roles. These mechanisms ensure that valuable insights—whether arising from daily interactions with animals, client feedback, or new research findings—are recognized, assessed, and given due consideration in the organization's continuous improvement efforts.

Regularly scheduled team meetings, brainstorming sessions, or innovation workshops should be embedded into the organizational calendar to facilitate collaborative dialogue, cross-disciplinary problem-solving, and collective decision-making. Through these structured interactions, teams can share experiences, evaluate pilot projects, identify barriers, and generate creative solutions that drive forward evidence-based advancements in assistance animal services.

Ultimately, fostering such an inclusive and dynamic innovation culture is essential for sustaining high standards of animal welfare and client support while adapting to evolving sector challenges.

6.3 Innovation Review Process and Risk Management

6.3.1. Innovation Management Process

A formal, structured, and documented innovation management process must be established by each organisation and clearly communicated to all relevant personnel. This process should outline each step required for the responsible evaluation and implementation of new ideas and technologies.

The process begins with the submission of innovation proposals, where members provide detailed descriptions of the innovation's objectives, scientific rationale, expected benefits for animal welfare or training effectiveness, and a preliminary identification of potential risks or challenges. This ensures that innovations are grounded in evidence or theory and aligned with organisational values.

Next, comprehensive risk assessments must be conducted to evaluate potential impacts on both animals and humans. These assessments should consider animal welfare implications including physical and psychological wellbeing, risks to handlers, staff, volunteers, and the public, as well as ethical and legal compliance aspects. This step ensures innovations do not introduce unforeseen harm or violate ethical standards.

Pilot testing must be carefully designed with clear metrics related to welfare, safety, and performance outcomes. These pilots should be controlled and monitored to gather objective data on the innovation's effectiveness and any unintended consequences.

Throughout the pilot phase, members must monitor, document, and review all outcomes, both positive and negative, maintaining transparency and accountability. This data forms the basis for making informed decisions regarding whether to scale the innovation for wider use, modify it to address identified issues, or discontinue it if risks outweigh benefits.

Risk assessments should also address both short-term and long-term impacts, incorporating contingency plans that specify how adverse events or unexpected outcomes will be managed promptly and effectively to protect all stakeholders.

6.3.2 Open Communication and Knowledge Sharing

Members have an obligation to document all innovation trials and outcomes with transparency. This includes publishing findings, both successful and unsuccessful, to contribute to collective learning and avoid duplication of effort or preventable mistakes.

WAFA strongly encourages the dissemination of innovation results through multiple channels such as community forums, newsletters, conferences, webinars, and peer-reviewed research publications. This fosters a collaborative environment where best practices can spread rapidly and continuously improve standards across the working animal sector.

Members must handle confidential or sensitive information with strict adherence to privacy laws, intellectual property rights, and ethical considerations. This includes respecting data ownership, obtaining appropriate permissions before sharing, and safeguarding proprietary or personal data.

6.3.3 Funding and Resource Allocation

Members should proactively pursue external funding opportunities including government grants, philanthropic sponsorships, and industry partnerships to ensure adequate financial support for innovation activities. Diversifying funding sources helps sustain research and development initiatives over the long term.

Internally, budgets must strategically allocate sufficient resources to cover necessary expenses such as staff training, purchase or leasing of new equipment, software licenses, and costs associated with pilot testing and ongoing evaluation. Investing in human capital is equally critical, ensuring personnel are equipped with up-to-date knowledge and skills to effectively implement innovations.

Resource allocation should balance innovation efforts with core service delivery responsibilities to maintain organisational stability and client satisfaction while fostering growth and improvement.

11.6.6 Risk Management

Before any innovation is implemented, it must undergo a rigorous risk assessment to identify and mitigate potential harms. Key considerations include:

- The welfare of animals, ensuring that innovations do not cause physical injury, chronic stress, fear, or behavioural dysfunction.
- The safety of handlers, staff, volunteers, and the public, preventing accidents, injuries, or adverse reactions.
- Ethical concerns, such as respect for animal dignity and adherence to welfare legislation, as well as compliance with occupational health and safety regulations and other relevant laws.

Mitigation strategies should be thoroughly developed, clearly documented, and integrated into standard operating procedures to proactively manage identified risks. These strategies may include additional training, use of protective equipment, enhanced monitoring, or stepwise implementation.

Continuous monitoring during pilot phases is mandatory, with an obligation to respond swiftly to any signs of distress, adverse effects, or ethical breaches. If necessary, innovations must be paused or halted immediately to prevent harm.

6.3.4 Welfare and Wellbeing Focus

Animal welfare must always be the foremost priority when evaluating any new practice or technology. Innovations that cause undue stress, pain, fear, or any form of long-term harm to animals are strictly prohibited, regardless of potential operational or financial benefits.

Similarly, innovations must not negatively impact the mental or physical wellbeing of handlers, trainers, staff, or volunteers. Considerations should include workload, emotional strain, and occupational hazards.

Where innovations involve invasive procedures, experimental methods, or practices with uncertain outcomes, organisations must seek ethical approval or expert guidance from appropriate review bodies before proceeding. This ensures accountability and protects all involved from unintended consequences

7. Review, Revision and Approvals

This policy will be reviewed annually by the steering committee to ensure its effectiveness and relevance. Any revisions will require approval from the steering committee.

8. Implementation

WAFA members must integrate these standards into governance frameworks, operational policies, financial management, human resources, and client service delivery to maintain high standards of accountability and organisational integrity.

9. Enforcement

WAFA enforces these standards through its accreditation and audit processes. Non-compliance will lead to remedial actions and may impact ongoing WAFA membership and certification status.

10. Contact Information

For further information or assistance related to this standard, please contact the steering committee at the following email address: admin@workinganimals.com.au

Document Control

Version	Date	Author	Change Description	Approved By
V1.0	17/05/2025	V. Solomon	Initial	C.Williams