



Professional Standard 15 – Community Engagement and Advocacy (Summary)

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1. Purpose

To foster strong, respectful, and responsive partnerships with communities, clients, and stakeholders in order to promote inclusion, raise awareness, and advance the rights and welfare of working animals and their handlers across all sectors of society.

2. Scope

This Standard applies to all WAFA members who engage in training, service delivery, advocacy, education, or public interaction involving assistance animals. It includes interactions with the general public, media, government, industry bodies, and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) or disability communities.

3. Standard Statement

WAFA members must actively contribute to community education, inclusion, and advocacy initiatives that advance public understanding, reduce discrimination, and influence systemic change in support of working animal partnerships. All engagement must be respectful, inclusive, and culturally appropriate, and include mechanisms for community feedback and participation.

4. Definitions

- **Community Engagement:** A process of working collaboratively with groups of people connected by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting their wellbeing.
- **Advocacy:** Actions taken to influence decision-makers, policies, or public attitudes in support of a cause—in this case, the rights and welfare of assistance animal teams.
- **Inclusive Communication:** Information-sharing practices that consider varying literacy levels, cultural backgrounds, language needs, sensory and cognitive access needs.
- **Stakeholder:** Any person, group, or organisation that has an interest in, or is affected by, the activities of a WAFA member.
- **Feedback Mechanism:** A formal or informal process through which community members or clients can provide input, complaints, or suggestions to improve services or systems.

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. Stakeholder Collaboration

Members must actively seek and maintain collaborative relationships with key community stakeholders, including:

- People with disability and lived experience
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- CALD communities
- LGBTQIA+ organisations
- Disability service providers
- Local government and emergency services
- Advocacy and legal groups
- Relevant professional and industry associations

Engagement must be ongoing, not tokenistic, and reflect mutual respect, listening, and co-design where possible.

7. Public Education

WAFA members must contribute to public awareness efforts that:

- Promote accurate understanding of assistance animal roles and legal rights
- Address myths, stigma, and barriers faced by handlers
- Emphasise humane treatment and ethical training of working animals
- Are tailored to different audiences (e.g., schools, businesses, first responders) using inclusive, accessible formats

This may include hosting or participating in community events, publishing materials, media engagement, or providing expert advice to third parties.

8. Advocacy

Members are encouraged to participate in advocacy that promotes systemic change and legal reform, particularly in areas such as:

- Public access rights
- Anti-discrimination protections
- Handler and animal safety
- Recognition of non-traditional and owner-trained teams
- Equitable funding and credentialing systems

All advocacy must align with WAFA values and be conducted with professionalism and integrity.

9. Inclusive Communication

All external communication must be:

- Accessible (e.g., plain language, Easy Read, captioned, screen-reader friendly)
- Culturally safe and respectful
- Responsive to language and communication needs (e.g., AUSLAN, interpreters, translated materials)
- Designed to reduce stigma and promote inclusion

Members must assess communication materials and strategies regularly for equity of access.

10. Feedback Mechanisms

WAFA members must implement transparent and accessible processes for collecting, documenting, and responding to community and client feedback. This includes:

- Anonymous and named feedback options
- Complaint and compliment processes
- Regular opportunities for stakeholder consultation
- Mechanisms for feedback to inform service improvements and advocacy priorities

Feedback processes must be well-publicised, easy to access, and responsive to diverse needs and communication preferences.

11. Representation and Co-Design

Members must actively include individuals with lived experience in the design, delivery, and evaluation of community engagement and advocacy activities. This includes, but is not limited to, people with disability, First Nations peoples, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and young people. Engagement must be culturally safe, accessible, and trauma-informed. Participation should be appropriately supported through remuneration, access needs, and recognition of expertise. Tokenistic consultation must be avoided in favour of genuine co-design and shared decision-making processes.

12. Ethical Media and Storytelling

Members must uphold high ethical standards when sharing personal stories, images, or case studies involving handlers, clients, or working animals. Informed consent must be obtained in advance, with clear communication about how the material will be used and the right to withdraw at any time. Privacy, safety, and wellbeing must be prioritised. Working animals must not be used in media or public campaigns in ways that cause distress, fatigue, or overexposure. All communications must reflect diversity, dignity, and authenticity, and avoid sensationalism or exploitation.

13. Community Capacity-Building

Members are encouraged to support the development of local leadership, knowledge-sharing, and skill-building within communities, particularly among marginalised or under-resourced groups. This includes partnering with peer-led or grassroots organisations, providing training and mentoring, and sharing educational or advocacy tools. Capacity-building efforts should be sustainable, inclusive, and aligned with WAFA's principles of equity, empowerment, and community-led change.

14. Evaluation and Impact Reporting

Members should evaluate the reach, quality, and outcomes of their community engagement and advocacy activities. This may include collecting feedback from stakeholders, tracking participation metrics, or documenting changes in awareness, policy, or practice. Key findings, insights, or case studies should be shared with WAFA where appropriate to support collective learning and sector-wide improvement. Evaluation must be ethical, respectful, and accessible to participants.

15. Support for WAFA Initiatives

WAFA members must actively support and participate in Federation-led initiatives that promote national consistency, community education, and policy reform. This includes:

- Sharing WAFA resources, campaigns, and public statements through member networks and platforms
- Participating in national days of awareness and education campaigns
- Contributing to WAFA consultation processes, working groups, and advisory panels
- Promoting WAFA's values and standards in all advocacy and engagement activities
- Reporting relevant trends, issues, or community feedback that may inform collective action

Support should be proactive, collaborative, and in alignment with WAFA's mission to elevate best practice, equity, and inclusion across the working animal sector.

16. 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.

17. 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.

18. 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.

19. 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