

## What is the Vest-a-Dog program?

The Vest-a-Dog program was developed to help people support and protect law enforcement K-9's. Through this program, any group or individual can get a bullet proof vest for a police K9. The information that follows will tell you how you, your troop or any group could get involved with this worthwhile program.

However, you may also check to see if the police K-9's of your state have their own organization. Often these organizations will help with the purchase of the vest for a K-9 in that state. This allows you to get a better quality vest like the K-9 Storm vest.



## Where to start

The first step is to get registered with the Vest-a-Dog program. Simply go to: <http://www.vestadog.com> and click on "how to help". There you will find a few different downloads that will help you and provide the form or contact that you need to get your group registered (this is done by mail.) Or, contact your state's Police K-9 organization (if available.)

## Fundraiser preparations

While you are getting the group registered, you can start preparing for the fundraiser itself. You will need to decide on what type of event you want to hold to raise the funds.

Some options include:

- Setting up at a busy location and having the troop dogs/handlers collect donations
- Setting up a walk-a-thon
- Getting permission from an existing event to raise funds while at their event
- Corporate sponsorships
- Selling items such as dog cookies, bake sale items, crafts, etc.
- Hold a dog wash or even a car wash if you like

You are only limited by your imagination and the willingness of your troop members to help. Even if you don't have a troop, some of the above options would work for an individual.

## Who gets the vest?

While you are working on some of the next steps, you can also be working on trying to find a local police department that has a K9 unit that needs a bullet proof vest for their dog(s). In my area, most of the dogs already had vests so I expanded our fundraiser to also include a "Hot-n-Pop Pro" system needed by a local drug dog that worked in a small under-budget department. For more information on these systems go to: [http://www.acek9.com/hot-n-pop\\_pro/k9\\_hot\\_n\\_pop\\_pro.htm](http://www.acek9.com/hot-n-pop_pro/k9_hot_n_pop_pro.htm). You can also Google "Hot n Pop pro" to check for better prices. The officers I spoke with said this one was the best, even though there are a few different versions of this type of equipment. Many police dogs get cooked in their patrol cars during the summer when the officer is stuck taking a report or on a call where the dog is not needed and has to stay in the car. Anyone that has sat in traffic for a long time with the air conditioning running knows that it doesn't always continue to blow cold air. This system alerts the officer if the inside of the car gets too hot. It also has a remote door opener that allows the officer to release the dog in the event that the officer gets attacked and needs help from the dog

If no local departments need the equipment or you don't want to bother with doing the searching, you can submit to vest-a-dog any funds that are raised and they will use them to provide a vest to one of the K9's on their nationwide waiting list.

You could also do a fundraiser to vest or better equip the military k9s, but to be honest; I have not attempted this so I don't know who to contact to find out where the equipment would need to be sent.

## Selecting a date and time

The next step is picking a date and time. You will want to choose a date when the most people are able to help. For my troop, while in the planning stages for an event, I select three or four dates that work for me (since mine seems to be one of the busier schedules and I often need to attend the event). I then ask any troop member that wants to attend the event to select the dates that work best for them (from my list) and to note any dates that won't work. I use that information to pick the top two dates. These are the two dates (first

choice and second choice) that I submit in my request to the owner of the location I would like to use for the event. There are times when the process of date selection has to be repeated due to conflicts with the availability of the chosen location.

### Finding a location

Once you have determined what type of event you would like to hold and when you want to hold it, you will need a location that can accommodate the activity. If you are simply “panhandling” in front of a store, keep in mind that most stores that are even willing to give you permission will require you to be outside with the dogs. If this is the case, you’ll want to pick a date that is not likely to be too hot or too cold for the dogs and handlers. Getting a “pop up” type shade tent can be very helpful to provide shade or shelter from rain.

When asking for permission from stores, keep in mind that it may not be a fast process. Nationwide chains tend to take longer for the approval process than the “mom and pop” places, but not always. Wal-Mart tends to be very supportive of local not-for-profit groups and in most cases, each store can approve a one day event without corporate approval. If you are lucky enough to have a Bass Pro Shop in your area, you might even be able to hold an indoor fundraiser when the weather is bad and people are more likely to spend their time shopping.

Holding a fundraiser during another event may be the easiest, but it is less likely to generate as much money as standing outside a busy store. When at another event, people tend to be more careful with their money and if the main event is a fundraiser most of their money goes to that cause. This can, however, be a good way to get a few extra funds in addition to other methods. Especially if it’s something you would be set up for anyway (such as a booth at a pet fair where you would have a booth even if you weren’t doing the fundraiser). Just be sure you get permission to be collecting funds for your cause.



Organizing a walk-a-thon is the most work and takes lots of helpers and requires really good advertising (so that people know to show up!) But walk-a-thons tend to be big money makers as long as the weather is good and the advertising has brought out lots of people. The location can also play a big part. If it will be warm be sure there is plenty of shade along the route and that water stations are provided. A paved trail will make the walk more pleasant if it decides to rain for a week just prior to the event and is usually handicapped accessible. It may help to mention that the shade and water and pavement are available when advertising the event.

### Advertising

For most events advertising is the key to success. If you are simply standing in front of a busy store, you may not need to do much advertising. But for most other events, where success depends on the attendance of the general public, proper advertising can make it or break it. As with most forms of advertising, there are some key points to include:

- What is the reason for the event?
- What kind of event is it?
- What do people need to do?
- Where is it? Be complete, people need to be able to find it!
- When is it (date and times)?
- Who can participate?
- What is available? For example: shade, water, games, dogs that do tricks, etc.
- Who can people contact for more info?

Specific to fundraisers:

- What is the money used for?
- How much of it goes to the charity/cause?
- Where can people mail-in donations? Be sure to include final acceptance date.

For the last item, a P.O. Box or business address is suggested. For safety reasons, never use a home address on a public flyer or business cards. Giving people the option to support the event even when they can't attend helps increase fundraising potential.

### Creating Flyers

If you have any photos that would be relevant, be sure to use them! A photo will help catch people's eye and make it more likely for them to read the flyer. Clip art has the same effect to a lesser degree and should be used if photos are not available. The flyers don't need to be fancy or created/printed by a professional company. Anyone with a Word program can create a suitable flyer and print them at home. Check with the members of your troop to see if they or someone they know has experience with creating advertising flyers. If you have some troop members that can help with printing, it will help defray the ink and paper costs.

### So where do you put the flyers?

There are many locations where you can ask to put up a flyer including: shelters, vets offices, pet supply stores, dog training facilities, groomers, doggie daycares, kennels, grocery stores, gas stations, hardware stores, generally anywhere people frequent and where you can get permission to hang one.

Other advertising, such as creating the flyer in a .pdf or posting the flyer to a webpage will allow you to advertise the event on-line through talk lists and blogs. This is where the address to mail-in donations is critical because you never know how far from you the information could reach. You can also request that owners of related websites put a link to your flyer or webpage from their website or blog.

Some communities have small newspapers in which you can advertise a not-for-profit event for free or just a small fee. In most cases, getting an ad or even a few lines in the main newspaper is expensive. It doesn't hurt to ask though. Just keep in mind that the main newspapers in a large city can be getting as many as 100 or more requests for free or low cost event submissions per day! If you do try to get your event printed, be sure you submit the request early and often.

Another possibility is a "city beat" magazine or publication that focuses on the events and activities available in the city. I have never tried to get an ad in one of these so I don't know anything about the cost or deadlines for submissions.

The best way to get the word out is to contact as many "dog people" as you can and tell them to tell their friends (who are usually more "dog people.")

### How can your dog help?

Having dogs at the fundraiser really helps draw in the crowds. It also helps you spot the "dog lovers" that are most likely to contribute. Even if the dogs in your troop are not trained to take donations and drop them into buckets, there are many behaviors that are helpful and easily taught that help increase donations. These include:

- Tricks (Wave, sit up, take a bow, give paw, etc.)
- Give kisses and accept hugs
- Ring a bell (either with a foot or shaking the bell(s) in mouth) Other troops have created bell 'rigs' to make it easy for the dogs to ring the hanging bells.
- Hand out flyers -deliver paper brochures to people (in dog's mouth or stuck in costume)
- Deliver trinkets to people such as balloons, key chains, buttons, etc.
- Hold a basket that people can drop money into
- Hold a banner or flag that says "Please donate" or something to that effect
- Wear a costume
- Simply look cute and accept or give cuddling
- Wear a cape with pockets that people can put money into
- and of course -put donations into a basket or bucket



Any dog that attends the fundraiser should be good with both adults and kids. It sometimes gets very crowded and kids can come out of nowhere and be hugging your dog before you know it. There is also a possibility of rattling shopping carts, crinkling plastic bags that could contain food, other pets, little room to move and general chaos. It is a good policy to request that any dogs/handlers attending the event and representing DSA have shown they can pass the Dog Scout certification requirements (even if it's done unofficially.) If the dog has fear, aggression or other behavior issues be sure that the owner has excellent awareness and the ability to control the dog and the environment that surrounds the dog or encourage them to leave that dog home (for the sanity of the dog.) Everyone bringing a dog needs to be able and ready to leave if the dog is not handling the situation well. The Dog Scout certification can be found on the Dog Scout website.

### Before the day of the event

Be sure to confirm your arrival and be sure all is set before the event date. As you plan the event, be creating a list of what is needed and who is bringing it. Helpful items include: Table, table cloth, information board or display and signs, water for the dogs, water bowl, paper towels and other clean-up supplies including a broom for hair if indoors, troop or DSA flyers for potential members, container or bag to hold the piles of cash and coins you will be collecting, a container for donations/coins that can be set out (it should always have at least a few dollars in it even when you first start), chairs, water or drinks for your helpers and pads for the dogs. Any dog that holds a basket or puts money in a bucket should bring their own bucket or basket. Costumes on the dogs are also the responsibility of the dog owner. Having the handlers all dress alike can give a sense of organization, for example all red shirts and jeans or using aprons that have pockets for the brochures and/or trinkets.



In 2006, Troop 107 gave a very nice patch to anyone donating \$20 or more for our K9 fundraiser. Finding something that could be donated to you that you could hand out to the people that donate a certain amount (or any amount) can also help raise more funds.

### The day of the event

Be sure to verbally let people know why you are there. Yell loudly so several people can hear at the same time. Most people don't read signs and many will speed up and not look at you if they think you are trying to get them to donate (or adopt.) However, once they hear what the money is being collected for, they often turn around and donate. At our first fundraiser, I saw a guy hustling out of the store and obviously avoiding eye contact. I said loudly, to his back, what we were doing (collecting to get a police dog a bullet proof vest) and he stopped, came back and dropped a \$20 bill in the bucket!

Be sure to smile at everyone! Thank them even if they don't want to give you anything. Fundraising is active and should be fun. If you draw a crowd, be sure to announce where the funds are going and also what the dogs in attendance can do for a donation. If someone has a dog that does tricks, they could announce: "My dog will do some tricks for your donations that help get a police K9 a bullet proof vest." I often have a sore throat by the end of the day but also a bag full of donations!



If you have several shy people in the group along with one or two outgoing people, assign the announcements to the ones that are willing to do all the verbal advertisements for the group. Trust me, letting people know what you are doing WILL generate more funds than sitting there quietly. But after about an hour you may wish you had a tape recorder to keep replaying the message. :-) Don't forget to get lots of pictures of the dogs working the crowds. These photos are great for advertising other fundraisers and could even be submitted for the DSA calendar!

### After the event

So now you have collected the donations, what do you do? If you don't have enough to get a vest or other equipment, you may need to repeat the above process until you do. Or you could submit the funds to Vest-

a-Dog and let them apply it toward a vest for a dog on their list. Or you could submit a check to the police department to help them with the purchase of the desired equipment.

If you do have enough to get a vest, let Vest-a-Dog know that you will be sending a check for xyz department's K9. They do verify that the department received the vest, so you will need the contact info of the police department or K9 officer. Once you send them the check, the vest can be shipped to you (so you can prepare a formal presentation) or directly to the department. Same process for the Hot-n-Pop, although they don't verify that the officer received it. They will ship the equipment to you or to the department. The Hot-n-Pop arrives in a box as a bunch of electrical equipment, so it's not as good for a presentation. However, a "display check" or other presentation board can be used for the presentation instead.

### The presentation

I have had very little luck convincing the press that such a "feel good" story is newsworthy. However, the police department that is getting the vest probably has more "pull" with the press and letting them (encouraging them) to handle the press notification for the presentation is strongly suggested. This means that they will be the ones setting the date, but it is possible that you can make suggestions for dates that would work for you. Regardless of whether or not the press is expected, be sure to have your own camera person there to snap a few pictures that you can use next year and also include in the DSA newsletter. If you have a "Proud Parent of a Dog Scout" shirt to wear for the presentation, it helps make people more aware of the organization.

If the press asks questions, just answer them to the best of your ability. It may be helpful to have some DSA and troop brochures to give to the press so that they can hopefully get the basic info correct. You can also include a printed sheet of facts about the fundraiser including when and where it was held, how much was raised, how many people/dogs helped, what the dogs did to help, where excess funds (if any) are going to be used (held for next year's fundraiser is acceptable). Also include troop facts like how many people/dogs in the troop, how long the troop has been in existence, what areas it covers, and contact info for anyone interested in learning more.



The photo above that appeared in the paper was captioned to say that the two police dogs would need to learn to share the vest :-). These two dogs worked separate shifts and didn't like each other, but would share the vest presented by Troop Leader Chris Puls of Troop 107.

Before allowing troop dogs to attend the presentation, check with the K9 officer to see if that is acceptable. My preference is to only have the K9 dog(s) at the presentation because they are the focus of the day.

Now that you have held a successful fundraiser, you will be better prepared to do it again to help another worthy organization, like Dog Scouts of America!

If you have questions about fundraising with your troop, feel free to contact me.

Chris Puls –Troop Leader of Troop 107