

MAESSR POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR INTERVIEWING APPLICANTS

Getting Started

You will be assigned an Interview Coach, Nancy Hale or Pat Alberta, who will contact you to go over the interviewing process and to answer any questions you might have. If you are interviewing for the northern states, PA, NY, NJ or DE, that would be Nancy Hale, nthale@embarqmail.com. If you are interviewing for the southern states, MD, VA, WV, DC or NC, that would be Pat Alberta, palberta207@aol.com. The Interview Coach will provide you with the latest forms including the applicant questionnaire and personal reference form. We ask that you review the forms and the Adoptions FAQ (frequently asked questions) page on the MAESSR website (<http://www.maessr.org/learn/faq.php>) before speaking with your coach. This way, you will be able to familiarize yourself with our policies before you speak to your coach. Your coach will go into more detail with you about the Application/Interview Process and Adoption Policies.

Your relationship with your coach should not end after your training. You should continue to stay in touch with your coach as you conduct your first couple of interviews so that she may assist you with any questions or issues that may arise.

To clarify whom to contact with questions and/or issues, here is a brief overview:

- a) Interviewing Coach (Pat Alberta or Nancy Hale)- questions regarding process
- b) Application Coordinator (Pat Alberta or Nancy Hale) - questions regarding contents of a specific application or applicant non-response and recommendations for home visits.
- c) Adoption Coordinator (Pat Race, pat.race@comcast.net)- questions regarding red flags, wait times or special requests from applicants.

Current Applications and Adoptions Teams

Application Coordinators: Pat Alberta (palberta207@aol.com) for applicants in MD, VA, WV, DC, NC

Nancy Hale (nthale@embarqmail.com) for applicants in PA, NY, NJ, DE

Adoption Coordinator: Pat Race (pat.race@comcast.net) for all states

The Application and Interview Process

I. Receiving an Adoption Application

Once you are trained and are ready to begin doing interviews, you will be added to the MAESSR Interviewers e-mail list to receive group messages from the Application Coordinators. When an application is ready to be assigned after Pat or Nancy has received a satisfactory vet reference, you receive an e-mail from them asking if you would like to do an interview. You then can respond if you have time to do the interview. If you aren't available to do the interview, Pat or Nancy will contact another interviewer. If you are able to help, you should respond to the e-mail saying you can do an interview, and an application will be sent to you from one of the coordinators. For the first application you can ask to be sent an uncomplicated, easy application. The Applications Coordinator will include comments and/or specific questions that you should be sure to cover with the applicant. An e-mail message will be sent to the applicant advising them that their application has been assigned to an interviewer and between the two of you, decide on an agreeable time to do the interview. The interviewer should then make the initial contact with the applicant for the purpose of deciding on a mutually convenient time to conduct the interview.

II. Vet References and Landlord Approval

Veterinary References: MAESSR requires adopting families to provide a reference from their veterinarian. The Application Coordinator, Pat or Nancy, will obtain the vet reference prior to the application being assigned. Applicants that do not get a favorable vet reference are declined at that point and would not be interviewed. Any pertinent information from the vet reference will be noted with the application when it is assigned.

Landlord Approval/Condominium Codes/Trailer Park Restrictions: If an applicant rents his/her home, or lives in a condominium (owns the house on a contractual basis) or in a mobile home that s/he owns but does not own the land, MAESSR requires written approval from their landlord or a copy of the rental/leasing agreement and/or pet policy that states s/he is permitted to adopt a dog of up to 60 lbs.

The Application Coordinator, Pat or Nancy, is responsible for obtaining the approval from the applicant in a timely manner. If this is the case with the application you are assigned, the Landlord Approval was already received or it would not have been assigned. The interviewer does not have to secure this documentation.

III. Personal References

Personal References: If an applicant does not have a current or former veterinarian that can provide a reference, or if the former vet has not been used within the last 2 years, MAESSR requires two (2) personal references to be provided. These references should not be from anyone related to the applicant or each other. If an applicant has a cat, and thus a vet, but has never owned a dog, a vet reference plus one personal reference is required.

IV. Arranging & Conducting the Interview

Upon receipt of a favorable vet and/or personal reference(s), you should contact the applicant as soon as possible to arrange an interview. We ask that you attempt contact at least three (3) times, twice by e-mail, and at least once by phone if they do not respond to e-mail. **If the applicant does not respond within two weeks**, let the appropriate Application Coordinator know so the applicant can be removed from the active applicant list.

In order to help manage our volunteers' phone bills, we encourage our volunteers to arrange for the applicant to call them if the interviewer doesn't have unlimited phone calling. Messages to the applicant should state clearly that s/he needs to call you at the specific time arranged for the interview. If s/he ignores that instruction, please repeat it. Please do not feel obligated to make long-distance calls if you choose not to.

Once you have arranged a convenient time for the applicant to call you or for you to call them, it's time to conduct the interview. Be sure you have reviewed the application and have all the necessary forms with you when doing the interview. Please be sure to obtain the first and last names of ALL adults who live in the household. This includes spouses, parents, roommates, etc.

As you begin the interview process, we encourage volunteers to start with some small talk to "break the ice" and make the applicant feel comfortable. For example, you can start by asking "*so tell me why your family has been considering a Springer Spaniel*" or "*what do like about Springers?*" This will give you some insight into the applicant's personality and interest in adopting a Springer.

You should then proceed to ask the applicant all of the questions listed, paying particular attention to any potential problems or reasons why the applicant may not make a good adoptive home. For instance:

- If the applicant plans to have children within the next 10 years, is s/he prepared to keep a dog knowing that there will be an infant child in the home?
- Does s/he have any idea how to introduce a new child into a home with a dog?
- If there are any pets in the household of any kind, what kind of experience does s/he have with dogs? If cats, do they have a safe place to be away from the dog? If the applicant has small animals such as birds, guinea pigs, hamsters, etc., does the applicant have a good understanding how to keep them safe from the dog? If the applicant has horses, is s/he aware that not all dogs are horse smart and not all horses are dog smart? Dogs should be kept physically restrained (on lead or on the other side of a fence) until their reaction can be safely gauged.
- If the applicant does not have a fenced-in yard, is s/he prepared to take the dog for daily walks in all kinds of weather?
- Do they have a safely contained area where the dog can run off lead? How often will they go there? Will the dog always be supervised when running off lead in an uncontained area?
- Has the applicant ever given up a dog before? If so, investigate further and ask what happened and why. This subject in particular can bring up painful memories, but it is important to get specific information in order to reach an appropriate decision about the applicant.

These are just a few of the red flags that you may encounter when doing interviews. Please keep in mind that, when an answer is not what we would consider ideal or even appropriate, we will need further, specific information why that is. Asking additional questions to clarify issues at the time of the interview saves everyone time by not having to re-contact the applicant about them later. It is very important to make sure that all members of the household agree on the adoption.

You must speak with **all** the adults in the home, at least briefly, to make sure there is a consensus. It is not necessary to speak with children under the age of 21 years old. If one spouse travels a lot out of town or is in the military, it is fine to accept a voicemail that they are in agreement with wanting to adopt a Springer at this time or if one is in the military, they now have access to a computer to send you an e-mail stating that they are in agreement with wanting to adopt a Springer at this time. You can then in those few circumstances, interview the other spouse.

Sometimes it is easy to get caught up in the conversation, so try to stay focused on the answers people are giving you, and listen and ask other questions to make sure you are getting the information you need. This is the best time to get as much information as possible from the applicant; do not be afraid to ask!

In addition, you may hang up and then think about another question or may need additional information. Be sure to communicate to the applicant that this may occur, and then send them an e-mail or call. Do not hesitate; go with your hunches, ASK, LISTEN and ASK again if needed.

When you come to the section on the questionnaire entitled “Springer Preferences and Adoption”, it is important to try to get the applicant to be as open as possible about his/her preferences. The more flexible an applicant is about age, color, and sex, the easier it will be to place a dog with the family. We want to place the right dog with the right family. To this end, you should get a good idea of their home conditions, what activities they want the dog to join in with them, what energy level they want in a dog, what type of temperament/personality they are looking for, etc. These factors are more important in a successful placement than are color, sex and type. We count on our interviewers to talk to the applicant about considering a broad range of options and to encourage them not to be hung up on issues like sex, appearance, or even age, if possible.

Many people think they want a puppy, but when they talk about it to an experienced Springer owner, they often realize that they are not prepared for the responsibilities and become open to considering an older dog. The same thing goes for applicants who are stuck on the color or sex or a dog. Females do not make better pets, and black and white dogs are not “cooler” just because they are less common or go better with the furniture. However, if the preference is strong, do not insist on talking them out of it. If the applicant REALLY does not want a male, or insists on a docked tail, we need to know that. It would also be helpful to know if the applicant would consider a Springer mix.

As a side note, since we always have adult and senior dogs looking for homes, we also encourage applicants to consider the advantages of adopting one of them over a very young dog. Adult dogs are often housebroken, are often obedience trained, and are usually better socialized. The older dogs are less energetic and require less time and energy than younger dogs.

Often, an applicant will ask about a specific dog s/he saw on our website. It has been a long-held MAESSR policy that we will **NOT** discuss any dog with an applicant until s/he is approved for adoption. You should make it clear to applicants that they should not contact MAESSR about a

specific dog until they are approved. This will help to save us time in responding to applicants who are not yet approved to adopt.

Once an applicant is approved, s/he is welcome to let us know if s/he is interested in a particular dog. Applicant preferences should be forwarded to the Adoptions Coordinator. However, each dog will be offered first to the most appropriate applicant who has been waiting the longest, so there is no guarantee that applicants will get a specifically requested dog. While it does happen that dogs that are listed as “offered” do sometimes become available again, approved applicants should not be encouraged to consider them.

V. Adoption Policies

There are some important adoption policies that you should be aware of when interviewing applicants:

Adoption Fee: MAESSR charges an adoption fee based on the age of the dog being placed. Fees as of July 1, 2018 : All dogs 8 years old and under adoption fee is \$350.00

Dogs 9 years old and older adoption fee is \$150.00

SENIORS for SENIORS –Adopters older than 64 adopting a senior dog (age 9 or older) the adoption fee will be \$75.00.

Adoption fees are payable at the time the adopting family picks up the dog, and fees are non-refundable.

Adoption Contract: All families that adopt a MAESSR dog are required to sign an adoption contract. If for any reason a family cannot keep their dog, they must contact MAESSR to arrange for return of the dog. The second document that the family must sign is that they will keep the dog on heartworm preventive year round.

Obedience Classes: Any family that adopts a dog under 1 year of age will be required to enroll the dog in obedience classes within 6 months of the adoption. In cases of very young puppies (under 6 months old), we may also require the applicant to enroll the puppy in a “socialization” or “puppy kindergarten” class.

Dog Collar, Leash, and ID Tag: Adopting families are required to have a dog collar, leash, and ID tag for their new dog when they go to pick up him or her. The tag does not have to have the dog’s name on it; however it should have a phone number so they can be easily reached if their dog becomes lost.

Temperament Testing/Biting: All MAESSR dogs are temperament tested before placement. MAESSR has a strict policy of not placing any dog that has a known bite history or that we believe would be a threat to bite.

Homes with Toddlers: MAESSR will only place a dog in a home with toddlers if we know the dog’s history and know that the dog is good around toddlers. We will not place a dog into a toddler home that was rescued as a stray from a shelter since we do not know their history.

Homes with Cats: We will only place cat-temperament-tested dogs in homes with cats.

Homes with New Dogs: We encourage families to wait at least three (3) months to adopt a dog from MAESSR after obtaining another dog, whether or not the dog is adopted from MAESSR or

another source. Specific decisions to adopt from MAESSR in less time will be made on a case-by-case basis.

No outside Dogs: All dogs adopted from MAESSR are considered inside dogs. MAESSR will not place a dog with a family that intends to keep the dog outside unattended for hours at a time or when no one is home. Doggie doors are permissible as long as the outside area is safely enclosed by a fence and the dog has ready access to the house or an approved shelter. An electric/invisible fence is generally not considered a safely fenced area. Although doggie doors are permissible they should be closed off when no one is home. The shelter must be climate controlled, safe, and comfortable for the animal. If it is NOT a part of the house, it will probably require a home visit for approval. A garage does NOT qualify as “part of the house.” MAESSR requires that dogs have house access at night, though they may be crated or gated into a specific area.

Transportation: MAESSR assists with transportation whenever possible, but the adopting family must commit to drive at least two hours to pick up its new dog. MAESSR does not provide transportation for the sole purpose of meeting a dog. Applicants who want to meet a potential dog before deciding whether or not to adopt them must make arrangements on their own, we will not coordinate a transport for a family to meet a dog.

VI. Writing the Interview Summary

Prior to training, included in the packet of forms sent to you by the Volunteer Coordinator is a sample of an interview summary. After the applicant interview is complete, you are responsible for e-mailing a summary to the appropriate Application Coordinator. Currently, interview summaries for applicants in the states of Maryland, the District of Columbia, Virginia, West Virginia or North Carolina should be emailed to Pat Alberta, palberta207@aol.com with a CC to Pat Race, pat.race@comcast.net. Interview summaries for applicants in the states of New Jersey, Delaware, New York or Pennsylvania should be emailed to Nancy Hale, nthale@embarqmail.com, with a CC to Pat Race, pat.race@comcast.net.

Please note clearly in your interview summary if the references were acceptable; you do not need to email or send copies of the references. Your Interview Summary should include a brief summary of each section of the questionnaire: family/lifestyle, home environment, other pets, caring for your new Springer, and preferences. The Summary can be in the body of the email or attached as a Word Document. Pat Alberta or Nancy Hale will send you examples of interview summaries so you will know how they should be submitted.

You are also asked to give your personal opinion about the applicant’s suitability to adopt a dog from us. If you are not sure about a particular applicant, you should indicate any misgivings to the appropriate Application Coordinator. They may require additional references or a suggestion to do a home check in order to approve an applicant for adoption.

If you do not feel comfortable recommending an applicant for adoption or you feel that a home visit is advisable, you MUST make that clear in your report. You don’t have to tell the family that you are not going to recommend them for approval or not- tell them that the final decision is made by the Application Coordinator. Quite often, your gut instinct will guide you in recommending a family for adoption; ask yourself if you would place your own dog in their home...

Once an interview is complete, please tell the applicant that our Application Coordinator will be in touch regarding her/his approval. The decision can take anywhere from a week to two weeks. You should not promise an applicant approval or inform her/him that you are not recommending her/him for adoption.

VII. Application Approval/Denial and Offering a Dog

Approval/Denial: Once the appropriate Application Coordinator receives your report, she will send the applicant and the interviewer an e-mail regarding the decision that has been made about her/his application. Most often this is “Good news from MAESSR with a note congratulating them on their approval.” However, if an applicant is rejected, the Application Coordinator will notify the applicant and send a blind copy of the message to the interviewer. Your name will not appear on the rejection letter or the e-mail message. If an applicant tries to contact you after being rejected, please refer them to the appropriate Application Coordinator.

Offering a Dog: Once an applicant is approved for adoption, s/he will be added to our list of approved applicants. The Adoption Coordinator will match approved families with dogs awaiting homes. Dogs are offered to one family at a time, and matches are made with suitable families in the order that families were approved. However, exceptions are made depending on various circumstances, including an applicant’s willingness to adopt a senior or special needs Springer, or a dog’s suitability for a toddler or cat home (these homes are given priority when appropriate dogs become available because generally their wait is longer for an appropriate dog). If an applicant accepts an offer to adopt a specific dog, MAESSR will then assist with transportation. If the Adoption Coordinator is unavailable to make an offer, both of the Application Coordinators are back-ups so that offers still go out in a timely fashion.

All adopting families will have to sign an agreement to keep the dog on heartworm preventative before the final adoption date.

VIII. Miscellaneous Items

When e-mailing the Application or Adoption Coordinators for any reason about a particular applicant, please be sure to include the applicant’s last name in the subject line. This will save them a great deal of time and effort when responding to messages.

Please keep the appropriate Application Coordinator apprised of your progress with each application. Let the appropriate Coordinator know if the applicant does not respond to your request for an interview within two weeks, so we do not waste valuable time with applicants who may no longer be interested in adopting a MAESSR dog. It should take a maximum of two weeks from the date assigned to the date your report is submitted to the appropriate Application Coordinator. Once you complete the summary and send it in, you should let the Application Coordinator know you are done with that one and if you would like to take another and when.

It is imperative to remember that any personal information obtained from an applicant must remain confidential. This includes, but is not limited to, the applicant’s contact information, family and lifestyle, and information obtained from references. Such information must not be shared with

anyone other than a MAESSR officer. Please shred any documents that contain personal information after the application has been either approved or denied.

Additional helpful hints:

- a) Complete as much of the interview form as possible using the information on the application before conducting the interview. Still ask the questions, but this will give the interviewer a chance to evaluate the consistency of responses and allows time for the interviewer to continue writing down responses while keeping the interview moving.
- b) If the proximity of the applicant's home to a major road is of concern, or if you are curious about the yard size and/or neighborhood- you can usually get an aerial view of the applicant's property by using on-line tools such as www.bing.com.
- c) Check personal references before scheduling the interview. Personal references are only needed if the applicant does not have a pet that is currently, or has recently been seen by a vet. Vet references will be obtained by the Application Coordinators.
- d) A copy of the Adoption Contract is included with these guidelines so that you can familiarize yourselves with the content.

Thank you for your support of MAESSR and for contributing to our success!

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