

# 10, 15, 25 Actions Your AKC Club Can Begin TOMORROW



**1. Keep your club's officer list and contact info up-to-date with AKC.** AKC registers dogs, not people! Much of the contact info AKC Government Relations (GR) uses is based on club-submitted officer lists. If this data is not current, your club may miss information and alerts.

**2. Tell us if you're not getting AKC GR alerts.** If you're a club officer and you've fallen off our contact list or you aren't getting alerts, let us know. View AKC legislative and informational alerts at [www.akcgr.org](http://www.akcgr.org).

**3. Quickly advise AKC GR when canine legislation is discussed in your area, particularly at the county and city levels.** AKC GR's tracking programs don't provide this local info, and we rely on YOU to contact us when you hear of local discussions on canine policy, animal control regulations, and proposed legislation.

**4. Empower, equip, and backup your club's AKC Legislative Liaison (LL).** Legislation can move in hours. Your LL must be able to receive and quickly pass along information and alerts. Be sure your club secretary or membership chair provides up-to-date member contact lists to your LL. Consider forming a Legislative Committee to share responsibilities during busy legislative sessions or when hot local issues are in play. It's not always a one-person job, especially when our rights to own, breed, and exhibit dogs are at risk.

**5. Identify your allies.** Successful grassroots advocates form strategic alliances with like-minded groups (owners/breeders of other pet species, sportsmen, agricultural groups, groomers, pet industry professionals, veterinarians, animal owners, etc.), and those who face similar challenges and who share common ideologies.

**6. Share mutually relevant communication with allies. Include them in your grassroots outreach.** When appropriate, reciprocate and support your allies regarding their issues. There is strength in numbers.

**7. Establish a quick-response team for phone, text, and email communications.** Legislation can move fast, sometimes in a matter of hours or days. Putting it in a newsletter won't help when a measure is moving quickly. Getting the word out and having members take immediate action is crucial to success. Prioritize reaching your most informed and active club members and allies.

**8. Compile contact info for your elected officials.** When you need to send a fast message to a legislator, how long would it take to locate contact info? Contact information for federal and state officials is available at [www.akcgr.org](http://www.akcgr.org), but email addresses and direct phone numbers for your local officials can be elusive. Set up a committee to annually research contact information for county and city commissioners where your members reside. Maintain the info on your club website and Facebook page.

**9. Get to know your elected officials.** You've heard it before and you're reading it today. Make appointments. Go. Bring photos of your dogs. Just do it. And the next time you go, take an inexperienced or shy club member with you. Hold hands if necessary, because there *must* be a next time if we want our voices to be heard.

**10. Practice your comments.** Empower yourself and your club members to speak at a public meeting or testify at a hearing BEFORE legislation is introduced. Time is usually limited, so practice delivering concise and meaningful messages. Look in the AKC GR Toolbox for information and talking points. Practice what you might say in response to different proposals. Divide talking points among your speakers to minimize duplication.

**11. Practice your responses to questions and challenges.** We've all heard about elevator speeches—those 3-minute sales pitches. Can you also do it in 30 seconds? Challenge your club members to practice polite, positive responses to factually incorrect, inflammatory, or impolite questions and statements, such as: "Why do you breed dogs when dogs in shelters are dying?" and, "Why do you have purebreds, are you some kind of elitist?"

**12. Eliminate "animal rights extremist" language.** Here's another topic for your club meeting: *Are we lending credence to animal rights extremists by using their language?* Let's change the dialogue:

**Puppy mill.** This derogatory term is frequently applied to all dog breeders. When referring to a neglectful breeder or abusive pet owner, call them what they are, a "substandard breeder" or "abusive owner".

**Guardian, Fur Mommy, Pet Parent.** Don't use these terms unless you personally have given birth to a puppy. Further, the word "guardian" has legal ramifications that could empower a third party to remove a dog from your

care and control. Protect your property rights and proudly use the correct legal term: dog owner.

**Rescued.** This term is overused to refer to a dog that has been placed under new ownership for a variety of reasons. In most cases, the correct term is “rehomed”.

**Adopt.** When consideration is received in exchange for a dog, under the law this is a sale. Consideration includes payments, fees (including adoption fees and required donations), or value received. Call it what it is—a sale.

**13. Seek seats on animal advisory boards.** These opportunities may exist at state and local levels. Find out the criteria, and ask your governmental officials to consider you for these roles. Along with your professional résumé, provide details about your experience with dogs.

**14. Quantify your expertise.** If your club has 20 or 50 or 500 members, how many years of experience with dogs does that represent? A person who trained their first dog in 1967 has more than 50 years’ experience. Make it a club project to quantify and total the expertise of your members. *The numbers will impress.*

**15. Enumerate and list your club’s and members’ Good Works.** You know how hard your club works. Does anyone else? Take a look at the AKC “Above and Beyond” flyer in the AKC GR Toolbox at [www.akcgr.org](http://www.akcgr.org) for ideas, then compile your own club’s list to share.

**16. Include on your list things you do on behalf of dogs.** Examples include training classes; canine health and microchip clinics; participation in veterinary research such as DNA sample collection and donations, health studies and surveys; and breeder mentoring and education.

**17. List what you do for your community.** Your list may include public education events, RDO Day, CGC tests, seminars at club meetings, mentoring of prospective and current dog owners, pet therapy visits, and much more.

**18. List donations by your club and members.** Big ticket items, such as contributing to an AKC Reunite Pet Disaster Relief trailer or supporting a study through the AKC Canine Health Foundation are easy to remember. But what about all those fundraising baskets, trophies, bags of food for pet pantries, etc.? Include donations from the club treasury and individual member contributions.

**19. Include dog retention and rehoming activities.** When enumerating your Good Works, emphasize how you work to keep dogs in homes through careful placement, follow-up, training, and mentoring. Include dog rehoming activities, educational outreach, and the time devoted by your members to ensure that dogs in the community have life-long homes.

**20. Describe your Good Works using action/benefit statements.** For example: *“Dog training classes. Our volunteer trainers have offered affordable public dog training classes four times a year since 1965. We’ve taught thousands of dog owners how to train their dogs to be well-behaved members of the community. A trained dog is less likely to be relinquished to a shelter or be a nuisance in the neighborhood.”* Use evergreen language: “since 1965” rather than “for 53 years”.

**21. Share, share, share.** Now that you’ve created your Good Works list, share it with your members, your lawmakers, the media, your allies, schools, colleges, churches, community groups, pet professionals, and vets in your area. Periodically update your list and re-share it.

**22. Use this positive messaging to raise your club’s profile.** Some clubs are great at public relations and others are far too modest. Get the word out about your club, its members’, and your dogs’ accomplishments. The AKC Communications Department can help. Area colleges may have PR and creative writing students who want to build a portfolio. Start now with the AKC Invitational—who is participating in this prestigious international event?

**23. Always discourage breeder bashing.** How can we form alliances with other groups when we too often point fingers at each other? It hurts us all when a fancier denigrates another fancier or breeder or refers to a regulated, fully-compliant commercial breeder as a “puppy mill.”

**24. When communicating with lawmakers, the public, and the media, facts are essential—but stories are memorable.** Verifiable facts are important, but a good personal story can be very compelling.

**25. Always be respectful when making a point.** For example, “I have the greatest respect for people who acquire dogs from shelters. However, I personally want every assurance that the dog sitting next to my children comes from a known source and is free from diseases and parasites. So, for me, that means I will acquire my next dog from a knowledgeable breeder of purebred dogs.”

**Bonus: Demonstrate your talking points.** How big is the minimum 240 square foot enclosure size that would be mandated under a proposed law? Illustrate this by bringing two 6-foot and two 40-foot lengths of rope. Ask four people to be corners and stretch out the ropes—hand the rope ends to lawmakers if you can. Place a stuffed dog in a corner of the space outlined by the ropes. While you demonstrate the dimensions, describe several ways that good owners can provide excellent exercise for dogs that are not based on arbitrary enclosure requirements.