

Careers in Animal Handling

Adapted from the University of Tennessee extension service. [Animal Handler Job Description, Career as a Animal Handler, Salary, Employment - Definition and Nature of the Work, Education and Training Requirements, Getting the Job - StateUniversity.com](#)

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Training/Educational Requirements: High school diploma and training

Salary: \$11 to 19 per hour and varies by experience

Job Description

Animal handlers will work in a variety of different environments to care for dogs being developed, trained, and worked as part of a canine detection team. Animal handlers are critical team members to develop and maintain the animals to achieve the purpose they are selected, developed, and intended for. Handlers needs to attend to animals in the capacity for daily care, training, and during deployments.

The canine or canines will be housed in the Handler's living facility that needs to have a kennel indoors for feeding and separation from other animals in the facility. The interaction and comfort of the canines will be assessed is an essential element in the selection and retention of a handler. This is a 24x7 obligation that during vacations or time away from the primary living accommodations must have a care plan subject to review by the contracting official as well as the canine owner.

A safe and secure fenced yard where free range exercise and toilet activities can be accommodated. Canines will not be left overnight or for extended periods of time (NMT 45min periods and will have water, shelter from wind, rain, and sun.

Animal handlers will work to keep the animals under their care healthy in every way possible. At the most basic level, animal handlers provide all necessary care for their animals. They will prepare the animals for immunization or blood work at a veterinary office. They will observe and record data on animals that our trainers and scientists require. They will have to deal with some difficult circumstances if the animals are resistant to care or sick, so handlers must be prepared for these situations. Animal handlers must know how to deal with the animals under their care from young puppies to experienced working dogs.

Animal handlers must keep the environment that the animals live in clean and fit for them. Handlers will clean kennels, training areas, experiments, or other environment that the animals will serve within. Animal handlers must be nurturing to animals and must work to keep them calm and happy, often in stressful environments. The animal handler is expected to work closely with the canine trainers, management, and other handlers as part of team to develop these highly trained and specialized teams working on complex situations.

Training/Educational Requirements

Though an animal handler will have a bachelor's degree, the minimum requirement is usually a high school diploma or GED as an entry-level type of role within the world of animal care within our team. Background experience in a role of caring for and training animals is strongly desired. The best training for animal handlers comes on the job. This is a role that an employee can stay with and perfect throughout an entire career, or one that will be used as a stepping stone to another role in our organization. The handler is expected to keep up with best practices and trends from their on-the-job training and from learning from more experienced colleagues.

How to Get Hired

An animal handler is considered an entry level, yet critical, employee. Animal handlers that have worked with a variety of different dog breeds in a variety of environments are preferred. Animal handlers start off by working in a general handling capacity and then develop a specialty. Going into this role with an open mind and an ability to learn fast is the best way to get hired and to advance.

Working Environment

The working environment will vary based on specific assignments pertaining to clients needs. Most of the time, handlers work with animals in the organization's kennels and training areas, and during deployments these locations can vary greatly. However, animal handlers attend their dogs in veterinary offices, breeders, animal shelters, in laboratories, office and industrial locations, on farms, in public settings, or for any one of a wide array of locations based on client needs. Animal handlers usually work in a rather casual environment that is conducive to animal care and deployment in a wide variety of environmental conditions (e.g. outside, business, farms, etc.). Though casual, the handler is expected to be dressed in accordance with the environment and conditions of the situation. In rare instances, the handler will be required to wear protective equipment in accordance with potential hazards (e.g. sun protection, steel-toed boots, waders/personal floatation devices). Due to the nature of the work with animals and often in natural environments, the job can sometimes be messy or require work such as cleaning and caring for animals.

It's important that animal handlers put the needs of the animals first and have the ability and desire to keep the animals calm, healthy, and focused at any cost. This requires a close connection with the animals that is developed with long hours of care, training, and bonding. The animal handler is a crucial member of this organization and the individual canine detection teams.

Salary and Benefits

The average salary for an animal handler can vary significantly based on the level of experience, the number of dogs under their care, proficiency with developing adaptable, professional dogs, and their level of responsibility in the organization. The scope of responsibilities, the environment in which animal handlers work, as well as the geographical location can all dictate the specific salary. Benefits are dependent on the part-time or full time status with the organization.

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