

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS GUIDE FOR DAP TEAM MEMBERS

About This Document

DAP has an [External Communications Team](#), which is part of Core C. **This group is here to support YOU!** The **External Communications Guide for DAP Researchers** is your one-stop shop for how to leverage what the External Comms Team can offer.

We can be reached on Slack at [#team_news_and_calendar](#), via email at outreach@dogagingproject.org, or directly through Amber Keyser & Jocelin Villarreal.

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What the External Comms Team Can Do for You!

Publicity

If you win an award, get a promotion, receive a grant, speak at an event, or have a paper coming out, we can share your awesome news through our many external communications channels. We will work with the publicity and marketing team at your home institution to do media outreach as well. ([See more below](#)).

Project Planning Support

If you are developing an area of research that involves survey questions and need to collect preliminary information, the External Comms team can help you create and deploy planning surveys to our participant base using Survey Monkey and/or Qualtrics.

Example: For the Morphometrics & Mobility Assessment, the Project 1 Team surveyed participants about their access to stairs.

Pilot Testing and/or Focus Groups

If you need to convene a focus group, pilot test an activity, or validate a survey instrument, the External Comms team can help you identify the appropriate group of participants, set up events, send invitations, and/or host Zoom calls that introduce the activity.

Example: For the first set of Cognitive Assessments, the MacLean Lab hosted an introductory session on Zoom and then conducted pilot testing with a self-selecting group of participants.

Connect with Participants

If you need to identify participants in your area to speak with the media or to participate in any local and/or cohort based events, the External Comms team can help.

Example: For the recent CBS Sunday Morning show, we identified (and consented) a TRIAD member who welcomed the TV crew into their home and along on their TRIAD eligibility visit to the VTH.

Outreach to Partner Groups

The External Comms team is constantly building relationships with breed clubs, shelter groups, and other organizations with a goal toward productive, collaborative relationships. If you need to make a specific type of outreach, we are here to help.

Example: During DAPs second recruitment push, we did extensive outreach to breed clubs for underrepresented breed groups and increased the numbers of these target breeds in the Pack.

Retention & Participant Support

If you notice retention challenges in your specific area of DAP research, the External Comms team works closely with the Retention Working Group to help you develop and implement retention strategies. Participant support efforts could include additions to our online help desk ([Zendesk FAQs](#)), webinars, blog posts, video instructions, and/or virtual “office hours.”

Example: The Retention WG identified a need for a short [“Welcome to DAP” video](#) that would play immediately after completion of the nomination survey. The External Comms team supported the creation and implementation of this video.

Photo, Video, and Graphical Assets

If you need images and/or photos of participants, DAP processes, events, team members, or any other kind of graphical materials, the External Comms is your go-to source. If we don’t already have what you need, we can get it!

Example: The External Comms group maintains an extensive library of visual assets. We made breed-specific outreach flyers and social media posts as part of our second recruitment push.



DAP External Communication Channels

The External Comms Team disseminates content on multiple channels:

- Social media
- DAP website and blog
- DAP newsletter
- Monthly Community Appreciation Events on YouTube Live
- The Dog Park forum
- News media (print, TV, radio, podcast, etc.)

This team likes to try to coordinate content across these outlets (as appropriate) so we appreciate as much lead time as possible for communications planning.

Got Good News? Next Steps

We want to know when you hit important milestones in your research and/or professional development. When you've got good news, please post in the Slack channel **#team_news_and_calendar** ([click here](#)). If you feel shy about sharing there or if you're not sure whether or not your news is newsworthy, send a Slack to Jocelin Villarreal and/or email outreach@dogagingproject.org.

The Expert is YOU!

You are the expert on your research, and we need your help creating robust, scientifically informative content to share on our communication channels. As part of the P&P manuscript submission process, you are asked to prepare a 200-word plain language summary of the work and its importance. The External Comms team will draw on this as well as any other information you can provide to us such as:

- Social media handles we should tag (e.g. for your home institution)
- Relevant hashtags for your speciality area
- Figures, graphics, or images that support your news
- Links to material we might want to share/repurpose (e.g. a post about your from your home institution or a link to an interview with you)

Press Releases & News Media

Sometimes your news merits a press release and outreach to the news media. In cases like this, the Marketing & Publicity team at your home institution will be involved as well as the University of Washington Medicine Marketing team. The External Comms Team is available to provide support.

As you are working with your home institution, please include outreach@dogagingproject.org in all communications.

What to Do if You Get an Interview Request

The External Comms team tracks all media contacts and appearances so we can post on our website and other channels. **We'd like you to keep us in the loop.** In your response, please cc the Marketing & Publicity team at your home institution as well as outreach@dogagingproject.org.

We recommend sharing background materials (as appropriate) with the journalist including:

- [Project Executive Summary](#)
- [Key Facts about the Dog Aging Project](#)
- [Key Facts about TRIAD](#)
- [Calling All Dogs](#) (Recruitment Flyer)
- [Logo with tagline](#)

If the request is outside of your scope or you are too busy or you aren't comfortable, the External Comms team will find someone else to do the appearance.

Best Practices for Media Appearances

The External Comms team can offer coaching prior to media appearances if that would make you feel more comfortable. You can also refer to our one-page guide called [Tips for Interacting with Media](#).

In general, our goal is to communicate accurate scientific information with a level of kindness and engagement that demonstrates authentic care for the well-being of the

people and dogs in the study. Inclusivity is a core value of the Dog Aging Project. We want our language and content to reflect this value.

Being Mindful of Media Pitfalls

Journalists will often try to put a spin on your discoveries that suggests a conclusion different from yours. For example, with cross-sectional studies, we often observe a correlation between x and y , but in terms of cause and effect, we don't know if $x \rightarrow y$, if $y \rightarrow x$, or if $z \rightarrow x$ and $z \rightarrow y$. For example, a recent DAP paper noted the very interesting correlation between feeding frequency and health in dogs. But we don't know if feeding once a day improves health, or if unhealthy dogs need to eat more often. Either will lead to the observed correlation, but the media picked up only the former, not the latter. So in writing your papers and preparing to speak to journalists, keep this in mind. For this project, in particular, we need to be very careful, given that millions of dog owners will assume that how a journalist reports our findings is an accurate reflection of what we found, and moreover, what we are suggesting in terms of suggested actions.

Common Interview Questions

The following table is intended to help you prepare for media appearances. It lists common questions and then suggests some of the key points you may want to make in response. Also, sometimes an interviewer will ask you what you want to be asked. If this is the case, you can share this.

Question	General Topic Area in Response
How did the Dog Aging Project get started?	Dr. Promislow and Dr. Creevy began collaborating in 2007 at University of Georgia, investigating the causes of death in companion dogs. At the time Dr. Kaeberlein was advancing the understanding of the basic biology of aging using biochemical, genetic, and molecular approaches at the University of Washington. In 2013, Dr. Promislow moved to Seattle. All three were involved in forming the Canine Longevity Consortium and they founded DAP in 2014. We received our U19 Grant from NIA in 2018.
What are you hoping to accomplish	We will follow tens of thousands of companion

at the Dog Aging Project?	dogs through their entire lives in order to identify the biological and environmental factors that maximize health and longevity.
What do you mean by healthy aging?	Introduce the idea of healthspan: the duration of life spent free from disease
Why dogs instead of studying aging in mice or rabbits or humans?	Dogs share our environment and get the same age-related diseases as humans; because their lifespans are shorter, we can collect data relevant to human health in a shorter amount of time; like humans, dogs have a sophisticated healthcare system. interesting scientifically but also our dogs are important to us, we want them to live longer, healthier lives alongside us. Across species of mammals, in general larger species live longer than smaller ones. Within dogs, the pattern is reversed, with larger breeds being shorter lived than smaller ones
Why not cats?	Hopefully someone will start a Cat Aging Project! <i>A slightly more detailed answer:</i> Cats don't appear to show the striking variation from breed to breed, and owner to owner, that we see in dogs regarding size, shape, or lifestyle.
Is this only for puppies?	We are enrolling dogs of all ages, from all around the US, including purebred and mixed breed dogs.
What can studying dogs tell us about human health?	Dogs really are science's best friends. Just like in humans, as dogs get older, the risk of many diseases increases. And for the most part, they get the same age-related diseases as humans and share our environment, sometimes even our food! We anticipate that many of the findings from this study will be directly transferable to human health. <i>Slightly more nuanced:</i> Interestingly, there are some age-related diseases that dogs <i>don't</i> get (like heart attacks). Maybe studying dogs can help us learn how we might avoid those too.
This is a huge undertaking and obviously will take a pretty big	Culture of collaboration, Size of team, breadth of expertise on the team, geographic locations,

team. Who is involved and how are you working together?	primary academic affiliations, AND the community of dog owners and their dog companions.
Why is this important to you personally?	
Why should someone sign their dog up?	It's an opportunity to be part of important scientific research and to be a part of a community of people who care about dogs' health and happiness, and to know you're making a difference for the future generations of dogs
How does the study work? How is it structured to answer your research questions?	Looking to enroll 100K dogs, all ages, mixed breed and purebred, all sexes, dogs with chronic illnesses, from all parts of the US, working dogs, companion dogs, etc; we will follow these dogs for throughout their lifetimes
Are you doing experiments? What are you doing to these dogs?	Emphasize the importance of longitudinal, observational research. We gain critical knowledge by collecting data about the health and life experiences of our dogs. We do, however, conduct clinical trials as well, working with those owners who specifically volunteer for that dimension of our work. All of our canine participants live and play at home with their families.
Who is paying for this?	A five-year grant from the National Institute on Aging, a part of the National Institutes of Health, and private donations.
Does it cost anything to be part of the project?	Work is funded by NIA; We provide DNA test kits and other sample collection kits and cover all costs of sample processing; Samples can be collected during annual vet visit; we don't want participation to be cost prohibitive or to prevent someone from participating who wants to participate.

How will participants benefit?	Because this is a complex, long term project, our research will take time. Most likely, significant findings will occur after participant dogs' lifetimes are over, but there will be a huge benefit to society and future generations of dogs.
What should participants expect after they nominate their dog?	After viewing a welcome video from our Chief Veterinary Officer, participants are invited to complete the Health and Life Experience Survey -- a detailed survey about many aspects of their dog's health, behavior, and lifestyle. After completing the survey, they'll be asked to share their dog's veterinary medical records and may be invited into additional studies that involve activities such as collecting a DNA sample from their dog's saliva, doing specific exercises with their dogs, and working with their primary care veterinarian to collect other samples. Emphasize that once HLES is complete, the dog is a lifetime member of the Pack. The info in medical records helps us, but they can be a full participant even if they can't access VEMRs.
Can a participant pick which study they are a part of?	Everyone who completes the Health and Life Experience Survey becomes a member of the Dog Aging Project Pack. From this group, dogs that fit specific eligibility criteria will be invited to participate in different aspects of the study. The owner can decide whether or not to participate. Either way they remain valuable members of the Pack..
When do you start doing science?	We're doing it now!
Who gets to look at the data?	The DAP is part of the NIH Open Data initiative. Our data will be made available to other researchers through Terra, a data platform at the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard.
Can I get rapamycin for my dog?	We do not recommend this. Rapamycin is an experimental drug in dogs. We are studying its efficacy and safety for future use.

Using Social Media

As the Dog Aging Project gains traction, team members with an active social media presence may be under more scrutiny. It's important to have privacy settings optimized to allow interactions with the public but also protect our personal privacy. You may want to avoid posting information that could make you easier to find and contact in real life or that would reflect negatively on the DAP.

If you post on social media about the DAP, tag us **@dogagingproject** and consider using some of our common hashtags:

#citizenscience #doghealth #dogscience #happydogs #healthydogs #genetics
#healthspan #lifespan #together #longevity #opendata #community #aging
#health #science #longevity #longevityscience #healthspan

Please refer to our [Social Media Practices SOP](#). For additional support on social media, reach out to outreach@dogagingproject.org.