



**Humane
World for
Animals.**

Formerly called the
Humane Society of the United States
and Humane Society International



Peer-to-peer shelter mentorship



Partnering for success

The animal welfare field has made tremendous progress in recent decades, but there are shelters and communities that haven't had the same access to funding, personnel or training. As a result, many struggle to provide needed services to their community. These shelters could benefit from the support of peer organizations that have been more fortunate.

Thankfully, many organizations dedicate staff and resources to shelters in need to improve equity in the animal sheltering field.

Why partner with another shelter?

Creating a relationship with an under-resourced organization is one of the best ways to increase your organization's impact. By sharing expertise, information and other types of support, you can help a shelter that is struggling with the volume of pets in need—both in the shelter and in the community—and improve animal welfare beyond your own facility.

Building a successful relationship with another shelter takes thought and time. The most successful partnerships are between organizations that are in it for the long haul. Mentor shelters can have a significant impact even when the mentee organization is many miles away, has fewer resources and less infrastructure, and faces obstacles that are outside the mentor's experience.

For shelters and rescues that are leading the way in humane care and lifesaving, a peer-to-peer mentorship is an opportunity to share their expertise and help create a more humane world.

What are the goals of shelter partnerships?

Peer-to-peer mentorships can take many forms. Here are some examples:

- Using existing vendor relationships or creating new ones as a coalition to share discounts for basic medical and pet care supplies.
- Training veterinary professionals in high-quality, high-volume spay/neuter skills.
- Hosting a training on trap-neuter-return for shelter staff, volunteers and community members.
- Providing a nonjudgmental shelter assessment based on the Association of Shelter Veterinarians' *Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters* and helping an organization prioritize improvements in animal care.
- Training shelter staff on how to collect data, upload statistics to Shelter Animals Count and use data to guide decisions. This may require funding the software or other technology needed to collect accurate shelter data.
- Helping an organization implement an Adopters Welcome approach to remove barriers to adoption and reduce length of stay for shelter pets.
- Helping to build a community outreach program, such as the Pets for Life model, to provide free resources to pet owners in the community.



- Sending a behavior team to teach Fear Free handling techniques and provide enrichment ideas.
- Developing a transport program for animals with complex medical and behavioral needs until the mentee organization can provide more comprehensive care.
- Covering the costs for mentee staff to attend professional development trainings and sending staff to cover their shifts while they're at a workshop or conference.
- Helping to update local ordinances and state laws, such as pet-inclusive housing policies, shelter funding and humane management of community cats.

Is mentorship right for my organization?

The keys to a successful partnership are thorough planning, allocation of resources, clear agreements and long-term commitment to the project. Before signing up to serve as a mentor, organizations should ask themselves:

- **Do we have full commitment from our leadership?** Mentorship can't be the work of just one or two people; it must be a program with full support and dedication from your leadership team and integrated into strategic planning, budgeting, staffing, etc. You must be able to continue the mentorship even if key people involved leave your organization.
- **Do we have staff buy-in?** Shelter work is difficult; asking your staff members to mentor another organization and experience their challenges and heartbreaks can be overwhelming and may lead to burnout. But when given the right support, your staff can find the mentorship process to be incredibly rewarding.

- **Do we have the resources required?** As a mentor, you will need to devote staff time and expertise to another organization and possibly incur travel costs and other expenses. Having a process to balance the needs of your organization with those of the mentee can help make difficult decisions easier.
- **Do we have support from our donors and community?** A mentorship can entail diverting staff time and resources to elevating another organization. It can be difficult for people outside our field to see the critical importance of improving animal welfare beyond their backyards. Mentors need to help their supporters and community members understand the importance of equity in animal welfare and communicate how their local support is being magnified to help more animals in need.
- **Do we have the expertise?** Mentor groups should be realistic about their strengths and abilities and look for a mentee whose needs generally align with their areas of expertise.
- **Do we share the same philosophies and, if not, is there an openness to learn?** Organizations may have different approaches to serving their local communities or the animals in their care. Having transparent and respectful conversations before forming a partnership can help ensure a successful match.
- **Do we have our own house in order?** Every group has unique operating needs and philosophies, and mentor groups should be meeting the Association of Shelter Veterinarians' *Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters* before they help others. Working to elevate your own standards also provides valuable perspective on how to be successful.





Which organizations are good candidates for mentorship?

While most shelters and rescues are happy to accept offers of resources or animal transport, not every organization is a good candidate for a long-term mentorship. To truly embrace a mentorship relationship, participants need to be open to other perspectives and have strong listening skills.

This doesn't mean that an organization must be 100% ready to change all its policies before becoming a mentee. After all, even the most successful organizations may have once resisted current best practices and evolved their protocols and philosophies over time. The ingredients for a successful mentor-mentee partnership include participants who take the time to listen to one another, set clear guidelines for the program and are willing learn.

When selecting a mentee group, you want to gauge their openness to new ideas and willingness to have conversations about ideas that currently seem foreign to them. For example, a group that insists its transfer partners use strict adoption screening may be evidence that a group hasn't yet recognized the value of open and conversation-based adoptions.

Creating an action plan for more humane communities

Transport can be an obvious first step in a new shelter partnership. After all, it's a proven way to relieve the burden of overcrowding. But a true partnership is designed to provide more than temporary relief to the mentee shelter; it's intended to give them strategies to help more pets while operating within their humane capacity for care and meeting the pressing needs of their community. To build a long-term plan, regular visits to the

mentee shelter to gain a better understanding of the facility, the community, and the challenges and opportunities before them can be critical to success.

With the incredible advancements in our field, it's hard to imagine that any animal shelter could be completely left behind, but that's what has happened in some areas. Keep in mind that solutions will likely require a multipronged approach and a dedication to learning from community wisdom. What's worked for one organization may need to be tweaked to work in another. Staff, volunteer and community feedback will help guide you to sustainable solutions and build trust.

Planning for difficult conversations

Working with another organization and embracing a culture of change are long-term commitments. Relationships take time to build, and trust comes with transparent and open conversations. Both the mentor and mentee organizations should discuss how disagreements or concerns will be handled.

Putting it all together

You've done the work to determine what you can provide to another organization, and you've selected a partner organization that matches your ability to help. You've had open conversations, determined a strategic plan and discussed how disagreements will be worked through. Start with small projects and goals and regularly assess whether you're having the outcome you hoped for (using data!). As you build a stronger foundation, expand into the next level of programming.

By working together, we can elevate the welfare of pets and people in every community.

Our mission

Together, we tackle the root causes
of animal cruelty and suffering to
create permanent change.



humaneworld.org

©2025 HUMANE WORLD FOR ANIMALS, ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

COVER PAGE: MICHELLE RILEY/HUMANE WORLD FOR ANIMALS ; PAGE 1: JEFF BOTTARI/AP IMAGES FOR HUMANE WORLD FOR ANIMALS; PAGE 2, FROM TOP: MEREDITH LEE/
HUMANE WORLD FOR ANIMALS; ERIC KAYNE/AP IMAGES FOR HUMANE WORLD FOR ANIMALS; PAGE 3: NASHVILLE HUMANE ASSOCIATION