



Pets for Life

# PROGRAM SUSTAINABILITY



## Introduction

When Pets for Life (PFL) first began, there was a clear understanding that people living in underserved communities were faced with daily, extreme barriers to accessing services for their pets. We also realized the immense need to not only inform ourselves on the history and current state of systemic and institutional issues but **become an active participant** in dismantling structural inequity, starting with our own industry.

**This understanding is crucial** to effectively messaging and fundraising for the work of increasing equity in access to pet resources. We are confident you will find success for your organization and community if you trust these steps to creating and following a holistic sustainability plan.



## Take Action

Evolving our narrative to address systemic poverty and inequity in access to resources is not easy work. There is a great deal of information to digest, and it requires taking serious action. However, **we believe in the compassion and capability of our movement** and in everyone who is willing and ready to invest time in the process.

Companion animals present a strong point of connection and have the potential to bring people together. If we embrace the position animal welfare provides in building trust and relationships, our field can contribute to achieving a more just and fair world for people and pets in a meaningful way. We encourage you to **challenge the status quo and be a social justice leader**.



## Philosophy of Sustainability

In the nonprofit world, organizations have to be resourceful because there never seems to be enough funding to do the great work they are doing. Understandably, many organizations begin the sustainability conversation asking this question: How can I access more money to support my program?

Our perspective is that in order to gain access to funding for PFL work, you must take a step back and first consider a few additional questions: Has your organization adopted the PFL approach not only conceptually but also practically? Is the PFL philosophy consistently integrated into other programs and services of the organization, **grounded by an understanding of how animal welfare is connected to larger systemic challenges for people and pets?** And if you can answer yes to those questions, the next question is just as important: Has the leadership of the organization taken responsibility for upholding the PFL approach in its operations and programming? For example, is community support work as important to the leadership of the organization as it is to the staff who are managing the actual outreach efforts?

While the amount of money we raise or reallocate clearly matters a great deal, **equally important is why and how we fundraise** for pet owner support services. Being able to answer these questions in the context of how PFL addresses systemic poverty and inequity in access to pet resources exudes authenticity and illustrates a deeper connection to the work with existing and potential donors. When organizations are intentional in their support of the PFL program as a whole, and are committed to the approach, funding will more easily flow from that vision and commitment. **There are no shortcuts when standing up to historical and deep-rooted injustices.**

**PFL believes that a complete sustainability plan should include the following three key elements :**

### SOCIAL JUSTICE

Rigorously pursue an understanding of how people and pets are impacted by larger systemic barriers - like poverty, segregation, mass incarceration and housing insecurity - and embrace animal welfare's responsibility and unique opportunity to advocate and lead towards racial and economic justice.

### ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT

Make sure everyone in your organization, from leadership on down, is committed to integrating and upholding the PFL approach - one that creates equity in access to pet resources in underserved communities. Embed community-based work into your mission.

### ONGOING DEVELOPMENT

Create and stick to a communications and development plan that advocates for all communities and engages supporters around the philosophy and strategy of PFL. Give regular, adequate attention to marketing and fundraising activities that build long-term program sustainability.



## Designing for Success

Your mission statement focuses and guides the work of your organization, and it is important to consider how PFL aligns with that mission. Being fully committed to adopting the PFL approach is essential to integrating community-based work into the positive change your organization intends to make. And remember, the success of any organization hinges not only on the effectiveness and commitment of a single individual,

but rather the collective efforts of multiple individuals consistently delivering on their part of advancing the mission. So while considering the part you play in your PFL work is important, it is also vital for you to think about other key internal stakeholders beyond those directly involved in the program and the specific roles they can play in strengthening your programmatic impact.

**Consider why PFL is central to your mission. If PFL does not seem to be central to your mission, consider the following:**

- **What elements of the PFL program enhance the other services your organization provides?**
- **What are the potential drawbacks to your organization and the community if you do not have a program like PFL?**

### Keep In Mind

Every organization is different. Depending on the type of organization for which you work, your experience in receiving and processing the information on program sustainability will vary. Regardless of where in the journey of PFL your organization currently is, there is progress to be made and benefits to be gained by taking the time to absorb these strategies.



## Deepening the Connection

We all make assumptions and have biases. It's impossible not to, because our unique environments and experiences shape the way we view things. However, we need to reflect the full community in order to be responsive to all audiences of pet owners and make the most meaningful change. Understanding the connections between social, racial and economic justice and animal welfare is essential in building programs that are inclusive and not created in

a bubble. This can be difficult, particularly for people with varying levels of privilege. Practicing objectivity, uncovering and overcoming biases and showing empathy are all important ways to ready yourself and your organization for racial and economic equity work and, as a result, positively impacting the lives of more people and pets.

**Think about a time when your attitude and response to someone changed when you put yourself in the other person's shoes.**

- **What did you feel when you showed empathy?**
- **How did those feelings inform your response to that person?**
- **How can you continue to put this into practice daily?**

### Keep In Mind

Statistics show that economic outcomes are significantly impacted by race, as well as social dynamics for those who are most marginalized (based on non-dominant religion, sexual orientation, gender identities, ability status, etc.). It is impossible therefore to address poverty and inequality without talking explicitly about race and socio-economic status in the United States.



## Effective Marketing and Communications

There's genuine influence in, and repercussions to, the narratives we create. As such, your organization has a powerful role in responsibly and thoughtfully promoting your work. There are concrete, effective ways to tell the story about the people and communities you serve in ways that avoid perpetuating harmful stereotypes. Use these stories to invite your supporters to learn more about the nuance of creating equity and long-term access

to resources in underserved communities. Outline a detailed, manageable marketing and communications strategy that confidently articulates issues surrounding inequity, paired with program metrics and anecdotal stories about your work. This effective formula will ignite passion in your audience and advocate for the pet owners you serve.

**Review your organization's marketing messages, as well as messages from a few other organizations you know.**

- **How many include a human element? A person of color?**
- **How many are specific to pet ownership in underserved communities? Are the messages positive or negative?**

### Keep In Mind

Consider how stereotypes work to paint entire communities with a broad brush. How can your messages isolate people or bring them together? Even when done inadvertently, messages can perpetuate myths that have staying power. Over time, the individual stories we tell become our organization's identity and can dictate how people direct their support.



## Effective Fundraising

The moment you've been waiting for! You can't run a program if you don't have money for it. However, the real driver of success is having a strong program. Because you have considered the logic, messaging and philosophy around PFL, it will be easier for people to grasp what they are giving toward and the impact of their donations. A major part of the fundraising discussion is how to gain access to new or existing sources of funds so that your

organization is not overly reliant on a few grants or individuals. These efforts all require clarity, intention and some imagination in order to be successful. Fundraising is about two things: building relationships and asking for support. Therefore, to be better at fundraising, we must build stronger relationships and ask more, ask better and ask smarter.

**Gather information about your current funding sources and consider the following questions:**

- **What sources are you most reliant on?**
- **Where are there opportunities to grow more support?**
- **What new sources of funding should you explore? Be creative!**

### Keep In Mind

Effective fundraising is an art and a science. The ability to craft a compelling story and identify untapped opportunities is as critical as managing a robust donor database or planning an annual fundraiser. While we recognize your type of organization can dictate your funding sources, there are general strategies on which you can focus to diversify your donor base.

Visit [PFLequity.org](https://PFLequity.org) to download the complete PFL Sustainability Guide and start nurturing your program today.

